



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***IDENTITY COMPOSITION OF TRADITIONAL MALAY HOUSE  
COMPOUNDS IN RURAL MELAKA, MALAYSIA***

**ANISA BINTI ANI**

**FRSB 2011 6**

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COMPOUNDS IN RURAL MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

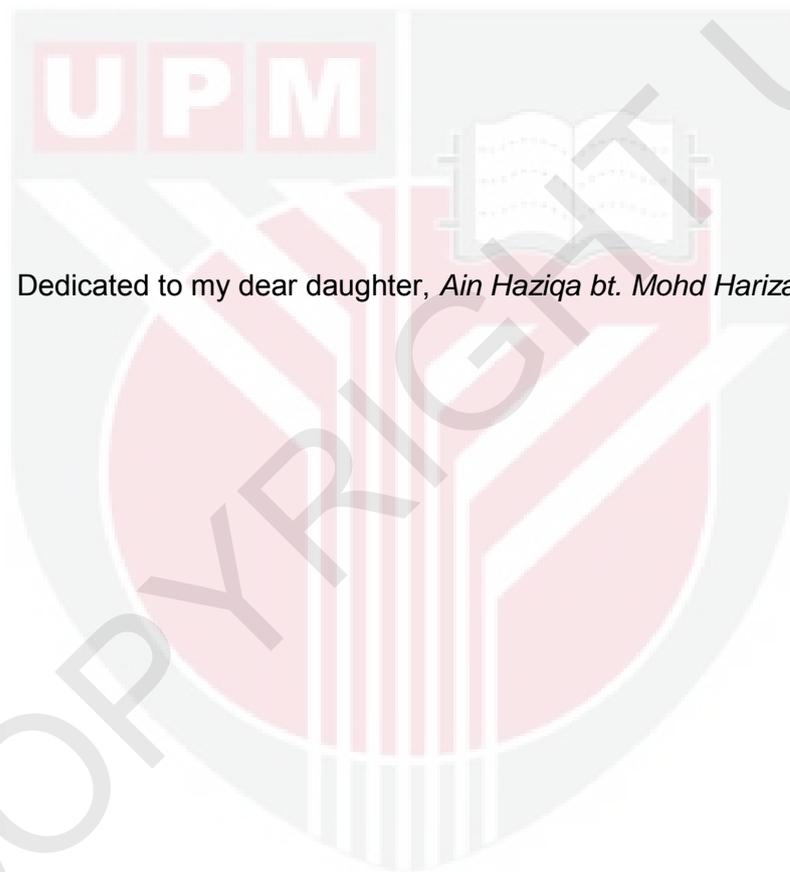


**By**

**ANISA BINTI ANI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti  
Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Science**

**April 2011**



Dedicated to my dear daughter, *Ain Haziqa bt. Mohd Harizal.*

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of University Putra Malaysia  
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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COMPOUNDS IN RURAL MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

**By**

**ANISA ANI**

**April 2011**

**Chairman : Associate Professor Noorizan Mohamed, PhD**

**Faculty : Design and Architecture**

The Malay landscape is a complex and unique architectural concept, relying on its own identity formation characteristics. It is created from a harmonious interaction between man, nature and culture. Rapid urbanization and industrialization, especially in the 1960's, caused massive migration, turning many traditional villages into sub-urban areas and industrial cities. Sadly, insufficient amount of efforts by the government are unable to preserve the cultural landscape of these places. Cultural landscape identification such as the Malay landscapes requires full observation and understanding of the interrelationship foundation between the social and cultural influences. Hence, the aim of the study is to investigate the physical composition of Malay landscape

characteristics within rural traditional residential gardens, by understanding the influence of social and cultural factors.

Literatures on social and cultural landscapes of the Malays and their background done along with the available exploration assessment methods. This study employs multiple case studies as tools and the modified Layer Cake Relationships helps to relate and analyze on-site data collection variables. Macro and micro analysis inspired from the method has resulted significant characteristics that represented the essences of the Malay identity in traditional residential compound. At the end of the research, the important highlights presented are the social and cultural identity values and threats identified at studies case which is the landscape composition and also cultural customs.

This study hopefully is able to seek a better understanding of traditional Malay house gardens identity composition in Melaka, through the perspective of the house owner's strengths and preferences. By doing so, in aids in lengthening the character's life span so that it can be inherited and appreciated by our future generation.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**PEMBENTUKAN IDENTITI BAGI LAMAN RUMAH MELAYU  
TRADISIONAL DI KAWASAN PENDALAMAN MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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**April 2011**

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Landskap Melayu adalah satu konsep seni bina yang kompleks serta unik, ianya bergantung kepada ciri-ciri pembentukan identiti tersendiri. Ia tercipta hasil dari interaksi yang harmoni antara alam dengan manusia, serta budaya. Proses pembandaran dan perindustrian yang pesat, terutamanya dalam tahun 1960-an, yang menyebabkan penghijrahan besar-besaran, telah menukar landskap banyak kampung tradisional ke sub-urban dan juga menjadi kawasan-kawasan bandar-bandar perindustrian. Walau terdapat usaha pihak kerajaan, jumlahnya yang tidak mencukupi untuk mengekalkan landskap budaya tempat-tempat yang terbabit. Pemahaman menyeluruh akan landskap budaya seperti landskap Melayu memerlukan komitmen penuh dan pemahaman terhadap asas hubungan antara pengaruh sosial dan budaya. Oleh itu,

matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji komposisi fizikal ciri-ciri landskap Melayu dalam taman-taman perumahan tradisional luar bandar, dengan memahami pengaruh faktor-faktor sosial dan budaya.

Kajian ilmiah tentang landskap sosial dan budaya orang Melayu dan latar belakang mereka dilakukan bersama-sama berserta kaedah penilaian yang disarankan. Kajian ini menggunakan “kajian kes pelbagai” sebagai instrument kajian dan kaedah “Layer-Cake Relationship” yang diubahsuai bagi membantu untuk menghubungkan dan menganalisa data yang diperoleh di tapak. Analisis makro dan mikro yang diilhamkan daripada kaedah tersebut telah menghasilkan ciri-ciri penting yang mewakili pati identiti Melayu di dalam kawasan kediaman kampung tradisional di Melaka. Pada akhir penyelidikan, penemuan penting yang dibentangkan adalah nilai-nilai identiti sosial dan budaya serta ancaman yang dikenal pasti pada kajian kes iaitu komposisi landskap dan juga adat budaya.

Kajian ini diharapkan dapat mencari pemahaman yang lebih baik daripada halaman rumah Melayu tradisional menerusi komposisi identiti taman di Melaka, menerusi perspektif and pemahaman pemilik rumah itu. Dengan ini diharapkan kajian ini dapat membantu memanjangkan jangka hayat karektor landskap budaya Melayu supaya ia boleh diwarisi dan dihargai oleh generasi akan datang

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Your unconditional love and support makes me stronger and wiser in making decisions every single day.

Finally, I would like to thank everybody who was important to the successful realization of thesis, as well as expressing my apology that I could not mention personally one by one.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on **5<sup>th</sup> April 2011** to conduct the final examination of **Anisa binti Ani** on her thesis entitled "**Identity Composition Of Traditional Malay House Compounds In Rural Melaka, Malaysia**" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the **Master of Science**. Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledge. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at University Putra Malaysia or at any other institutions.



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**ANISA BINTI ANI**

Date: 5 April 201

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background to the research

Cultural landscapes are special places that reveal aspects of our origin and development through their forms, features, and history of use. This may range from the largest scale, such as a thousand acre garden, park, or rural land, to the smallest scale of a traditional home with a small front and yard (Fitch, 1992).

The cultural landscape of the Malays originated from the surrounding regions of the Malay Archipelago, such as Indonesia, who were one of the earliest settlers of the Malay Peninsula. Along with this migration, Malays brought with them their traditional cultural values, lifestyles, and wisdom, as they settled on the coasts and hinterland, whilst embedding their cultural landscapes.

During the arrival of Islam in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Malays were still strongly animistic in their beliefs (Ibrahim, 1991). Deep spiritual beliefs and spirit dependent decision making, became the foundation in their daily

routines. To them, illness and disease were caused by the offended spirits that dwelt in the forest, rivers, and mountains.

With a mutual respect for each other, traditional Malays held the environment in high esteem and respect, if not fear (Ahmad, 1998). The choice of location for a home is very important to ensure the continuous mutual understanding between man and nature. Careful rituals will be performed by a shaman or elder, in order to get the permission to co-exist in the same space, since it will be permanently occupied for generations to come.

Generally, a rural Malay house is a model for a high humidity, warm throughout the year, tropical climate. Constructed traditionally using timber and thatched roofs of splitting *nipah* or *rumbia* palm leaves, and reinforced with timber or bamboo battens (Ahmad, 1998). It is beautifully made to ventilate naturally allowing natural air circulation throughout the house. Usually, the house is erected on stilts so that it is passively responsive to harsh weather conditions, such as the floods, plus improving the indoor temperature. Malays adapted and responded well to their environment, subtly, without causing harmful effects to the landscape resources. This integration developed cultural landscape into a modified cultural landscape (Appleton, 1975).

Kaplan (1975) discovered that people often prefer settings that include nature, due to the landscape natural characteristic of changing through time and seasons, resulting in an interesting and adventurous background in their daily lives. This discovery explains the preference of humans in modifying their natural resources to fulfil both physical and spiritual needs of an individual community, as a whole. This interaction is performed with full respect, whilst maintaining the habitat's ecosystem.

Issues on cultural and natural integration have been recognized as internationally significant, where people have expressed their concerns on the degradation of cultural landscapes. Platcher and Rossler (1995) assumed that every natural region of the world loses most of its intrinsic value under human influence. Agenda 21; an environmental convention stressed on the cultural, economic, and social causes of environmental conditions, raised the awareness of this matter, and many approaches have been developed to improve how we could manage the environment. It is a holistic approach to landscape values; naturally and culturally.

On the other hand, a Malay landscape is a complex yet unique landscape architectural concept, which relies on its own characteristics, for its identity formation. Its creation, in the Malay living environment, results from harmonious interaction between man, nature, and the

surroundings. Therefore, studies are essential in order to understand the relationship of Malays toward their natural landscape. The lessons learned will inspire designers and architects to create a more conducive living environment.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Rapid urbanization and industrialization, especially during the early 1960's, have caused massive migration processes from East Coast states to the West Coast states of the Peninsular (Kojima et al., 1996). Heritage rich states, such as Penang and Melaka, have also become industrially motivated due to this phenomenon. During this period, many traditional villages turned into sub-urban areas and industrial cities.

A manual on the conservation of Malaysia's renewable natural resources since 1969, has documented the efforts of sustaining these natural resources (Wycherley, 1969). This includes the flora and fauna, and beautiful, historical, cultural, or scientific landscapes. The World Wildlife Fund was also reported as being involved in this effort. However, their scope of scientific findings were on the threatened elements of nature, such as the soil, climate, agriculture, biological communities, animal

species, national parks, and reserves; rather than looking into the comprehensive integration between the elements in the making of a more conducive environment to live in. Less effort was put into cultural landscape values and the influence of human beings towards the changes of natural resources, and vice versa.

These findings show that there are continuous efforts being made by the government to preserve and conserve the existing historic buildings and monuments, and yet, the cultural landscape values of these places are still being put under consideration.

According to Worden (2001), the identity loss phenomenon has already happened to Singaporean Malays, where the native values of these Malays have dissolved through rapid urbanization. This phenomenon is already in Malaysia and is creating threats towards the identity loss of our heritage; especially within the cultural landscapes of West Coast areas. The Town and Country Act (Act 172), has mentioned the need for the conservation of archaeological sites, monuments, and buildings, but it does not mention the protection of the cultural landscape heritage itself; especially that of the native Malays.

This has caused a massive transformation to the native and original elements in rural areas, where most cultural landscape values are situated. It is a fearful scene, to see that many traditional Malay settings are rapidly disappearing and that the identity of the villages themselves are equally depleting.

Rural area re-development projects, such as the tourism industry, have caused the transformation of traditional residential landscape settings through renovation and modification works of new houses into these tourist attraction sites. This phenomenon was highlighted by Worden (2003), where he listed several states in Malaysia (including Melaka), where threats to the loss of 'Malayness' are happening due to its recognition as a tourism state. Measures of Malay identity preservation, specifically in traditional Malay residential gardens, are needed in order to control future developments in rural areas.

Development of facilities, amenities, village layouts, and architecture, to cater for the tourism industry, has been seen as a contributing factor to the diminishing elements and cultural identities. Cultural entities, such as garden furniture itself, disappear one by one during this time. This is probably because their functions no longer catered for a modernized way of life.

The evolution of rural landscapes with native vegetation, cultural responsive plant species with functional values blooming in the living compound, and wildlife attracting species, are now being replaced by tremendous urban developments that have transformed the natural composition into an artificial arrangement (Ibrahim, 1991). This issue was discussed by many designers and architects who were concerned by the tendency of the Malaysian landscape, which seems to lose its identity through imitation of foreign landscape (Angela Hijjas, 1997). Recognition was given by authorities to use foreign species, such as the *Heliconia* spp, to be widely applied in local landscape design even though the species itself is not responsive to our local climate.

Identity loss and placelessness issues were also being raised by the local pioneer Kamariyah Kamsah (1997). According to her, the country has its own peculiarities of natural and cultural landscape resources that need to be focused on during the development of the nation. In this case, a lack of understanding on cultural landscape values in contemporary Malay's living, has led to the degradation of cultural heritage design of compounds, and has influenced them to adopt foreign concepts, such as Balinese and English, since plants are the dominant element of the garden itself (Angela Hijjas, 1997). Bringing back cultural values and the implementation of a responsive landscape method into our living space, is one of the suggested solutions.

The above arguments have encouraged this study to focus mainly on the sustainability of the Malay landscape in traditional residential rural villages that were, or will be, affected by this phenomenon. Clearly, there is a need to establish a richer base of resources to design. Nash (1972), pointed out that the documentation of landscape is important, as it is the common heritage that everyone in a locality shares. The physical landscape is as valuable as a historical landscape.

Therefore, this study will explore the physical characteristics that form a Malay Landscape, by identifying the social and cultural factors that strongly influence humans in sustaining their garden to be inherited by the next generation.

## 1.2 Research Question

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the physical composition of Malay landscape characteristics within rural traditional residential gardens, by understanding the influence of social and cultural factors. Generally, landscapes are influenced by the human domination that dwells in it. Humans manipulate the environment to cater for their needs. Saucer (1925) pointed out that cultural landscape is a situation that is manipulated by a cultural group. Based on his theory, it is believed that social and cultural factors correlate with each other in a landscape composition. The following questions have emerged in order to achieve the goal of the study;

Question 1:

**What is a Malay landscape?**

Question 2:

**What are the physical characteristics that form a Malay landscape?**

Question 3:

**How do social and cultural factors influence a Malay landscape composition?**

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the physical composition of Malay landscape characteristics within rural traditional residential gardens, by understanding the influence of social and cultural factors.

Therefore, this study will accomplish the following objectives;

- i. To identify the elements and characteristics of Malay residential gardens in Melaka.
- ii. To understand the social and cultural influences contributing to the design and composition of Malay residential gardens in Melaka.

#### 1.4 Scope of Study and Limitation

A Malay landscape study consists of multiple subjects in the Malay culture itself, such as thinking, beliefs, arts, morality, laws, and behaviour. Understanding of the Malay culture is a part of the process in identifying Malay landscape characteristics.

However, this study is limited to the study of environmental and socio-cultural factors.

Environmental factors observe surrounding activities and their influence on human behaviour and life's structure. Socio-cultural factors include the investigation of human daily activities and community involvement in life that may influence the choice of organizing and designing a living environment. In this context, the transformation of activities in a Malay community, to be responsive to their changing environment, will result in cultural characteristics that emerge as a cultural landscape.

Melaka was chosen as the location for this study, due to its historical significance as one of the oldest empires in the Malay Archipelago, and its richness in historical data on native Malays. Selected case studies were based on the typology of architecture, existence of aging

landscape elements, and the reliability of sources for in depth information.

Primarily, attention would be given to the house garden areas, such as the compositions, functions, cultural responsiveness, and sublime-ness of aesthetic qualities. Data on vegetation, man-made elements, and other physical characteristics, were collected and organized statistically. The qualitative method of the study was carried out through content analysis observation and open ended questionnaires, whilst a quantitative method was employed to quantify the survey analysis.

Eventually, this research will tabulate criteria into identifying Malay landscape composition that is characterized by the social and cultural factors of the resident.

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework

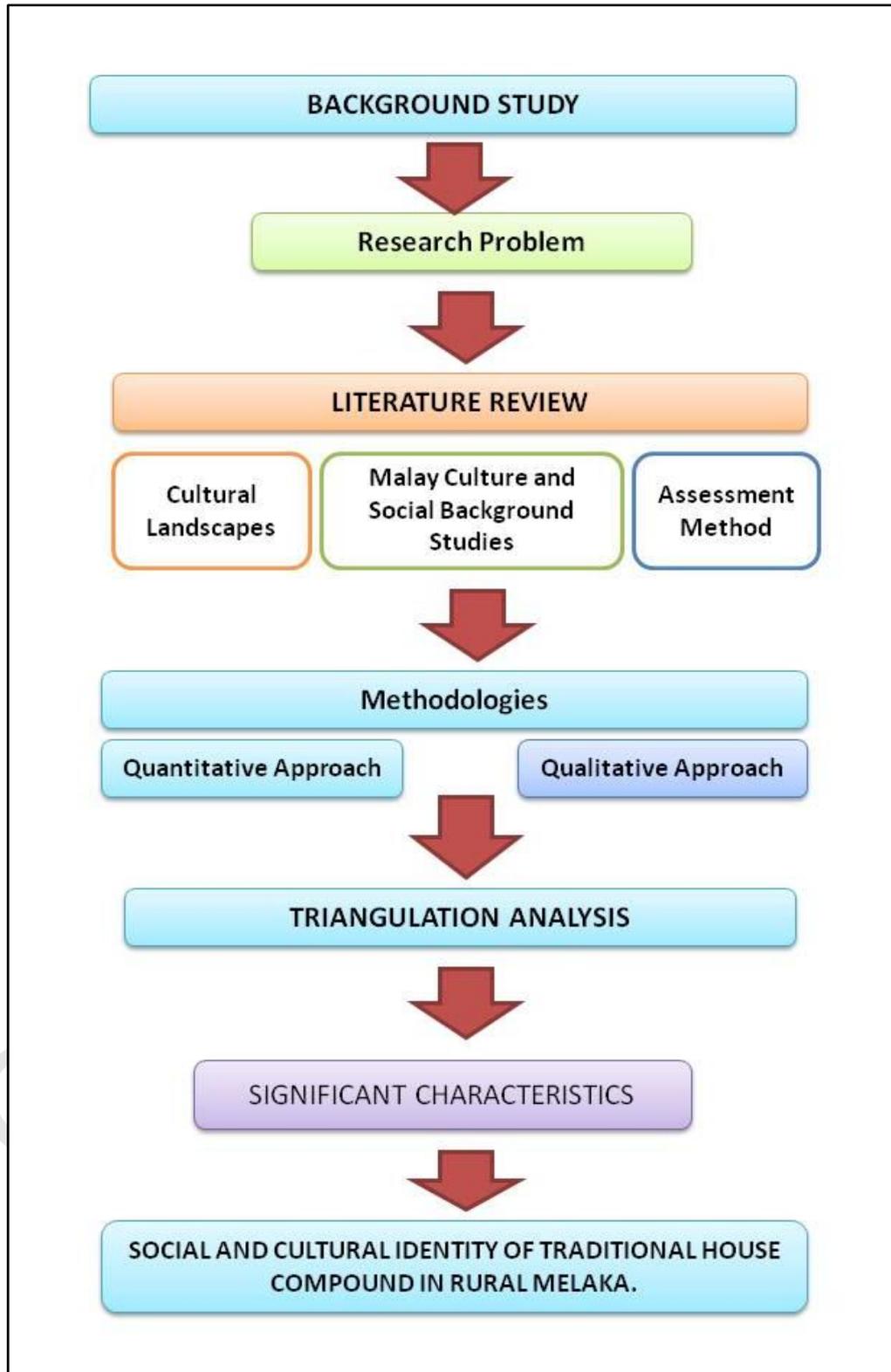


Figure 1.1 Preliminary Conceptual Framework for the study

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

This study uses a few important terms, such as:

- a) **Culture** - can be described as common value system, a learned behaviour built-up and transmitted within a group, consisting of assumptions, conventions, beliefs, rules, and manners that form the behavioural patterns of the people.
- b) **Landscape** - is a setting that is comprised of everything which surrounds us. This includes all physical elements, such as water, earth, atmosphere, buildings, and trees, as well as the entire social pattern of customs, laws, traditions, permissions, prohibitions, and attitudes, which anthropologists and sociologists call culture. (Eckbo, 1969).
- c) **Cultural Landscape** - is an expression of a symbiotic relationship between man and nature, creating identity to their living environment (Ismail et al., 2000). It can be denoted as a landscape of what people have made their environment. Thus, many features of the cultural landscape, which we regard as typical of a particular region, have derived their characteristics from the twin origins of cultural tradition and the physical

environment (Appleton, 1975). Basically, they are in a natural state or maintained in a manner that replicates and supports the natural ecological system as closely as possible. (Ismail et al., 2000).

**d) Rural village (also known as *kampong*)** - is a human settlement where occupational activities are based on agricultural activities. It is an area of population with a small size and low density characterizing the rural environment. A village usually results from a transformation process of a natural area into a domesticated landscape that composes a settlement. This includes agricultural areas, such as paddy fields, rubber plantations, community gathering places, cemeteries, and orchards, shaped into their needs, tastes, and personal peculiarities (Ahmad, 1998).

**e) Compound** - is a plot of land used by the house owner themselves. It is usually used for the cultivation of flowers, vegetables, and fruits, organically or systematically composed according to the owner's preference, or otherwise known as a garden. The garden itself has become the most important element in the essence of garden composition in the Malay settlement (Ismail et al., 2000). The garden in a rural Malay house possesses an intimate relationship with the dweller, because it is treated as an extension of the house. It is usually shared with

others in the community and acts as a transitional space for residents to socialize with neighbours. (Ismail N.A. et al., 2003).

- f) Identity** of a place has very strong and significant relationship with the preservation and conservation theme. The General Conference of UNESCO in 1972 highlighted the importance of identity because of its capability in preserving the cultural heritage and aesthetics along with the natural vernacular settings of a country. According to Jimmy (2000), identity of a place is important in maintaining the symbiosis between human and their environment. Zainal (1994) defines identity as uniqueness that makes a place/culture/society is difference from one to another. It means that an identity itself will passively explain to the outsiders on the local context of the place/culture or society.

## 1.7 Significance of Study

Many issues have been raised on cultural identity within national landscape design. However, understanding the context of the Malay landscape is not complete and has resulted in arguments founded on concept and application. This study aims to synchronize with other previously studies on the subject, in order to create a complete database on Malay identity in the field of landscape design and architecture. More studies on the Malay landscape elements need to be performed to ensure the sustainability of Malay arts and heritage. Generally, this study will contribute the following:

- i. Exploration of the symbolical meaning of the Malay residential compound; to be identified as characteristics, essences, and identity, in the Malay garden creation.
- ii. Understanding the internal and external factors that might influence the preference of residents in their layout composition over time.
- iii. Knowledge contribution towards the whole concept of Malay landscape, in the landscape architectural practice.
- iv. Increase understanding of the importance of cultural influences in Malay landscapes.
- v. Enforcement guidelines on Malay landscape preservation.

- vi. Providing guidelines for future related development in culturally-sensitive areas.

### **1.8 Expected Outcomes**

Significant characteristics in the composition of traditional residential Malay garden are expected to emerge from the findings of this study. These characteristics will be recognized as the identity and preferences of Malays in their garden composition. However, there are assumptions that these findings might be derived from the owner's preference factors as well. Assuming that this might affect the findings, in-depth interviews with resident owners are necessary, in order to understand their design choices better.

## 1.9 Summary of Thesis

This thesis has been divided into five parts.

The Introduction (**Chapter 1**) begins with laying out the background from which the thesis was built upon. This part discusses the research issues, objectives, questions, methodologies, significance, assumptions, and limitations of the study.

The second part (**Chapter 2**) deals with a literature review on Cultural Landscape Assessment methods that are relevant for the study. It will also discuss the evolution of the Malay Cultural Landscape in the country based on two theories as basic guidelines in the review process. Then, this information will be revealed through an archival survey and multiple case studies method. The chapter will also review related methodologies.

The third part (**Chapter 3**) describes the method in detail. Techniques will be explained along with the logic behind the selections. Details on actual site samplings, surveys, and data collection methods, will be listed and discussed in the following chapter.

The fourth part of this thesis (**Chapter 4**) describes the findings and synthesizes them into a code that can be analysed and valued, in order

to find the significant descriptions of the Malay gardens themselves. This will be explained visually through mapping and tables of the findings. The final finding will assess the essences, in order to produce significant discoveries of the authentic features of traditional Malay gardens in Melaka.

The final chapter (**Chapter 5**) will summarize the findings and relate them to previous studies by other researchers. Recommendations to improve the study will also be elaborated in this final part of the thesis.

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