

Furniture in Negeri Sembilan Traditional House Kitchen

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the furniture in the Negeri Sembilan traditional house kitchen. The furniture is essential to determine the lifestyle, environment and social activities. Studies on the origins of the Malays enable us to understand the background and social life of traditional Malays, which eventually led to their civilization. Data analysis is focused on kitchen area in Negeri Sembilan traditional houses, since it is the most active area in the house. The definition of furniture through an interview with experts plays an important role in defining furniture categories, types and usage. The significant activities in the kitchen are analyzed to define the furniture function. In conclusion, Malay furniture which exists in the kitchen of traditional Negeri Sembilan houses is categorized into three functions - body-supporting unit, storage/utility and tool. The furniture is designed into two types - loose item and built-in with house structure. The furniture was basically simple, but the design is direct to the basic needs of user and kitchen function.

Keywords: Malay, Negeri Sembilan, Traditional, House, Kitchen, Furniture, Activity.

1. Introduction

Furniture plays an important element in human life. However, it is not a must-have items for some people. Built-in furniture which is often thought as 'modern' is, in fact, the earliest we know - a neolithic house at Skara Brae in the Orkneys incorporates built-in seats and sleeping-place (Lucie-Smith, 1993).

The social background indeed provides the key of the story, for furniture is above all, functional. It is an essential part of the home, and its specific purpose is to the many activities – meals, entertainments, recreation, study and so on - and the inactivities-sleep and rest-of domestic life (Joy, 1972). In addition, architecture and the decorative background are intimately related to furniture, and any integral study of furniture must always be judged in relation to its architectural environment (Boger, 1969).

2. Issues and Objective

The character of the furniture in Italy, France, Spain, England, America, Japan, Korea and Chinese's furniture of the Ming dynasty are clearly defined. It is essential to determine the background aspects such as the temperament of the people, wars, alliances and trade.

The Malays are well known of their carpentry skill and knowledgeable on build their houses with functional spaces. Even though the Malay kingdom was established as early as 1397 in Melaka, and the Malay had grown in the Malay world since 40,000 years ago, there was no proof of furniture's existence in their houses. What is the Malay furniture? How it is functioned?

To answer these questions, we need to analyze data from a case study – Negeri Sembilan traditional house. We limit our scope of study to kitchen area – the most active area in the house. Since the kitchen representing human activities and furnace, we describe the cooking, preparation food and storing items, as kitchen activities.

3. Furniture Definition

There are various definitions of furniture. Formally, furniture is defined as something that can be moved, for example, tables, chairs, beds in a room or office (Steel, 2004). According to Mohamad Awang, a professor in Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara, who has

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conducted an extensive study on design preferences and consumers' selection principles of household furniture in Malaysia, elaborates the definition based on the usage, functions and types. Mohamad's explanation shows that furniture is not limited to a movable thing only but expanded through its usage – body supporting, storage and tool. It is categorized into two types: built-in and loose. In addition, a Malay traditional house researcher from Universiti Teknologi Mara, Associate Professor Dr. Anuar Talib said the Malay house is equipped with utility furniture. For example, the *Peran* (attic) is storage for larger tools and utensils for seasonal occasions such as a wedding and *Para* (shelve) is a place to keep and dry the regularly used utensils. By considering both experts opinions, furniture definition can be defined as shown in *Table 1* below:

Table 1: Furniture Definition

Categories		
<i>Usage</i>	<i>Functions</i>	<i>Types</i>
Body-supporting unit	Sitting, Sleeping, and Leaning.	Built-in and Loose
Storage/Utility	Storing, Keeping.	
Tool	Working.	

Source: Based on personal interviews with Professor Dr. Mohamad Awang, UiTM, Malaysia (Awang: 2011, Shah Alam).

4. Literature Review

4.1. The Malay Origin and the Migration within the Mainland

According to emeritus professor Dr. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi (2012),

“The Malays are the dwellers of the Malay world spread from Madagascar to the Pacific Ocean and to Taiwan. DNA studies show Malay, aborigines and Bumiputera natives are similar ancestry. They have grown in the Malay world since 40,000 years before or more. They separated more than 8,000 years and reconnect around 2,000 years before through the availability of sea faring effectiveness”.

He also believed that the civilization of Malay heritage exists in the mainland of the Malay people around the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and Borneo.

Migration to the Malay Peninsula happened in several waves. The main reason is trading, which resulted in development and local settlement. One of them was in the 13th century, involving the migration of Minangkabau community of Sumatera, to the district of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan (Fave, 1849). They entered Negeri Sembilan through four rivers in Eastern Sumatra namely Sungai Siak, Sungai Kampar, Sungai Indragiri and Sungai Batanghari. Those who used Kuala Sungai Linggi, resided in Rembau, Sungai Ujong and Seri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan (Noor Shalida, 2004).

Rembau is one of the nine districts in Negeri Sembilan. According to Khoo Kay Kim, emeritus professor in the History Department in Universiti Malaya, Negeri Sembilan should be named as Rembau (Yassin, 1999). Rembau rule system establishes from the marriage between Datuk Batin Sekudai's daughter from the Jakun aborigine and Datuk Lela Balang from Minangkabau. Two clans were formed who inherited the rule, with the rank of Datuk Undang Rembau (Buyong, 1981).

Since 1540, Rembau has developed drastically as the administrative centre. Migrations have increased its population that created settlements known as *kampong* or villages. Generally, the house compound in the *kampong* is meticulously well-kept, with the compound well swept and planted with vegetables and fruit trees, especially with coconut and banana and, to a lesser extent, with guava, pineapple, papaya and rambutan trees (Yuan, 1987).

4.2. Negeri Sembilan Traditional Malay House

The Malays are generally known as carpenters who built their own houses and boats. Thus, there are many boat analogies used in the house as described by Gibbs (1987), *“The word for the posts of the house is tiang, which is also the word for the mast of a boat. The word for flooring is lantai, which is also the word used for the flooring at the bottom of the boat. The word for the equilateral triangular gable-end is tibar layar. Tibar means ‘end’ and layar (‘the sail of a boat’). Sitting on the floor of Malay house is analogous to*

sitting in the breeze blowing off the sail of a boat". The most significant is the design of the roof of Negeri Sembilan traditional house which resembles the shape of the boat. Instead, it is a perpetual reminder of their maritime origin still remains in the wide-spread expression of boat symbolism in the resultant tribal culture (Mohamad Tajudin et al. 2005).



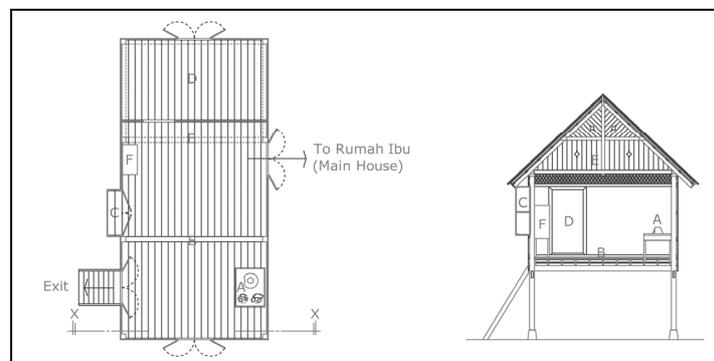
Fig. 1: Curved roof of Negeri Sembilan traditional house is adopted from the shape of a boat.

Yaakub (1996) divide Negeri Sembilan traditional house spaces into 3 zones – front, intermediate and rear. Front zone consists of *Serambi* area, a long rectangular hall. *Serambi* functions as meeting hall, and normally a place where a male guest was entertained. Intermediate zone consists of *Tengah Rumah*, *Bilik* and *Loteng*. *Tengah Rumah* is a main house function as a family area. *Bilik* is a small room located beside a *Tengah Rumah*. When interviewed on 4 June 2012, Malia Idin, owner of a traditional house in Jasin explained *Bilik* function as sleeping room for parents or daughter or the old folk of the family. *Loteng* is the upper space located above the *Tengah Rumah*. She also mention the *Loteng* is a place where daughter hiding and sleeping if insurgent situation. The rear zone consists of *Dapur* or kitchen. *Dapur* is a place where the female working in preparing a meal, cooking food and keeping utensils and other's kitchenware.

5. Methodology

5.1. Case Study - Negeri Sembilan Traditional Kitchen

Kitchen is one of the important areas in the traditional Malay houses. It is located at the rear most from the front entrance of the house. Kitchen considered as the most active area with multi activities. Norhalim (2007) explained kitchen is placed for cooking. It is also a family area where the family clan sitting and relaxing in this space: meet and chat, breakfast or lunch, and even lie down. Gather to eat regularly held in this kitchen. Female guests are greeted and treated here in an informal situation. To explore more about the furniture in kitchen, Haji Omar Ngah's residence, which is located in Kampung Paya Kumbuh, Rembau, has been selected as a case study. The reason is because Haji Omar Ngah is the existing owner since three generations while the age house is more than 100 years old. Data from existing owner is important to ensure a significant result. Since the kitchens representing human activities and furnance, the cooking, preparation food and storing activities are analyzed in defining the furniture category.



(A): *Dapur Kongkong* (Fireplace), (B): *Bendul* (Sill), (C): *Para* (Shelve), (D) *Pemidang Dinding dan Alang* (Wall Stud and Truss), (E) *Peran* (Attic), (F) *Almari* (Shelve Cabinet)

Fig. 2: Kitchen layout plan (left) and cross-section elevation (right) of Hj. Omar Ngah's kitchen.

5.2. Malay Traditional Kitchen Activities

Through an interview with Haji Omar Ngah, the following are the findings:

- Processing food ingredients

The cooking process starts by washing all ingredients and place them in the central kitchen area. The designated tools are used to grind chillies, rasp coconuts, pound spices and cooking rice. Some tool required person to sit-on working such as the coconut rasper (Fig. 3A). Rice and other dry ingredients are usually stored in the covered *Tempayan* or Jar (Fig. 3B) while wet ones are used instantly.

- Cooking

Cooking area is the most important area for food preparation. *Dapur Kongkong* or kitchen bark (Fig. 3C) act as a stove. It is similar to a desk, 1200mm length x 900mm width x 900mm high in dimension. The mixture of soil and salt is poured on the surface as the heat insulator and to prevent the occurrence of fungi/mold. It consists of three parts, a *Sabak* (furnace) and two *Tungku* (riser stone with double horizontal rod iron). Women would stand in front of *Dapur Kongkong*, or sit on *Bendul* or sill (Fig. 3D) while waiting.

- Food preparation

The central kitchen area will be cleaned and tidied-up once the cooking is done. *Tikar Mengkuang* or mat (Fig. 3F) will be laid while eating. The dishes and cups are taken out from the *Para* or shelves (Fig. 3G).

- Storing

After each meal, utensils and remaining food have to be kept or stored in *Para* or shelf. It has two-door leafs and built cantilever protruding through the kitchen wall. However, larger utensils such as pan, pot or kettle is kept at a store room where they are mounted on the *Pemidang Dinding* (wall stud) and *Alang* (truss) with nails (Fig. 3H). Others are stored in the *Peran* or Attic (Fig. 3I). *Peran* is a mezzanine floor between kitchen and a roof. The balance of the food is kept in *Almari* (Fig. 3E). *Almari* is a free-standing shelves cabinet which is supported by four posts and closed by two-door leaf, which is covered by micro hollow metal wire for air circulation. It is 900mm length x 450mm width x 1600mm high.

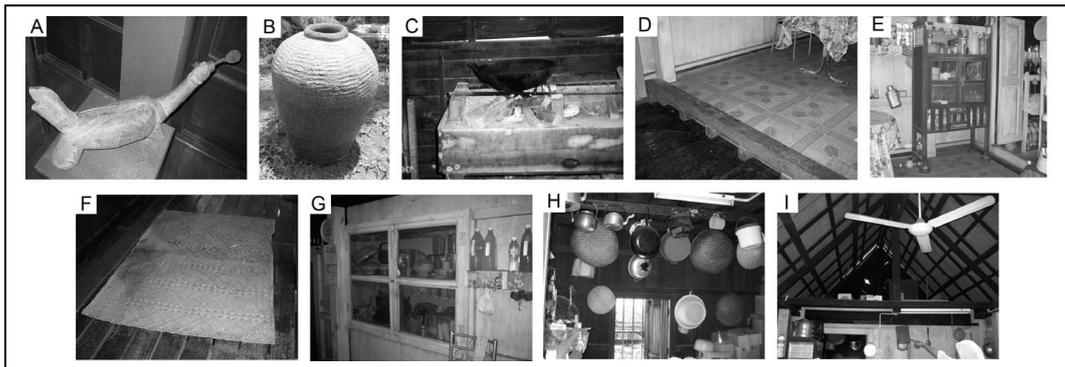


Fig. 3: (A): *Kukur Kelapa*, (B): *Tempayan*, (C): *Dapur Kongkong*, (D): *Bendul*, (E): *Almari*, (F): *Tikar Mengkuang*, (G): *Para*, (H): *Pemidang Dinding dan Alang*, (I): *Peran*.

6. Findings

In defining the features of furniture in Negeri Sembilan traditional house kitchen, the types of activities, furniture function and usage items are analyzed. As a result, a data can be viewed as below:

Table 2: Type of furniture and usage

Categories			
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Usage</i>	<i>Functions</i>	<i>Types</i>
Processing Food Ingredients	<i>Kukur kelapa</i> (Coconut rasper)	Working Tool and Body-supporting unit	Loose
	<i>Lesung batu</i> (Mortar and pestle)	Working Tool	Loose
	<i>Batu giling</i> (Metate)	Working Tool	Loose
	<i>Alas pemotong</i> (Cutting board)	Working Tool	Loose
	<i>Tempayan</i> (Jar)	Storage/Utility	Loose
Cooking Food Ingredients	<i>Dapur Kongkong</i> (Kitchen bark)	Equipment	Loose

Categories			
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Usage</i>	<i>Functions</i>	<i>Types</i>
	<i>Bendul</i> (Sill)	Body-supporting unit	Built-in
Preparation Food and Drink	<i>Tikar mengkuang</i> (Mat)	Body-supporting unit	Loose
Storing Food and Utensil / Tool / Equipment	<i>Para</i> (Shelve)	Storage/Utility	Built-in
	<i>Almari</i> (Shelve Cabinet)	Storage/Utility	Loose
	<i>Pemidang dinding</i> (Wall Studs)	Storage/Utility	Built-in
	<i>Alang</i> (beam)	Storage/Utility	Built-in
	<i>Peran</i> (Attic)	Storage/Utility	Built-in

7. Conclusion

Analysis on the function of a kitchen and its activities has highlighted the feature of furniture in Negeri Sembilan traditional house. It consists of three areas - the cooking area, central kitchen and storage area. It is used for body-supporting unit, working tool and storage/utility and categorized into two types - loose item and built-in with house structure. The furniture was basically simple, but the design is direct to the basic needs of user and kitchen function.

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