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## **Architectural and Cultural through Islamic Social Values in the Spatial Practices of Traditional Melayu Dwellings: Case Study- Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani in Merlimau, Melaka**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates how the cultural and Islamic social values of the Melayu Melaka community shape, regulate, and sustain the spatial, material, and symbolic dimensions of residential architecture in Malacca. Rooted in centuries of historical stratification, processes of Islamisation, mercantile cosmopolitanism, and locally embedded adat, the Melayu Melaka worldview is articulated through the organisation of domestic space, dwelling practices, material culture, and architectural ornamentation. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive research methodology informed by architectural anthropology, vernacular architecture studies, and cultural history, the study argues that core cultural and Islamic social values—such as propriety, religiosity, communal cooperation, and social harmony—are materially and spatially inscribed within house typologies, spatial sequencing, construction techniques, threshold rituals, and the aesthetic language of domestic ornamentation. Through an analysis of classical kampung houses, the paper demonstrates that these values not only inform architectural form-making but also operate as cultural drivers that mediate social relations, reinforce collective identity, and regulate everyday life. The study concludes by positioning the Melayu Melaka house as a form of living moral architecture, continuously negotiated across generations, and emphasises that the safeguarding of this moral–architectural heritage is essential for sustaining cultural resilience amid modernisation and the pressures of global tourism.



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**Keywords:**

Islamic ethos, Melaka Malays, Vernacular architecture

**Abstrak**

Makalah ini menyelidiki bagaimana nilai-nilai sosial budaya dan Islam masyarakat Melayu Melaka membentuk, mengatur, dan mempertahankan dimensi spasial, material, dan simbolis arsitektur perumahan di Malaka. Berakar pada stratifikasi sejarah berabad-abad, proses Islamisasi, kosmopolitanisme mercantile, dan adat yang tertanam secara lokal, pandangan dunia Melayu Melaka diartikulasikan melalui pengorganisasian ruang domestik, praktik tempat tinggal, budaya material, dan ornamen arsitektur. Mengadopsi metodologi penelitian kualitatif dan interpretatif yang diinformasikan oleh antropologi arsitektur, studi arsitektur vernakular, dan sejarah budaya, studi ini berpendapat bahwa nilai-nilai budaya dan sosial inti Islam—seperti adab, religiusitas, kerja sama komunal, dan harmoni sosial—secara material dan spasial tertulis dalam tipologi rumah, pengurutan spasial, teknik konstruksi, ritual ambang batas, dan bahasa estetika ornamen rumah tangga. Melalui analisis rumah kampung klasik, makalah ini menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai ini tidak hanya menginformasikan pembuatan bentuk arsitektur tetapi juga beroperasi sebagai penggerak budaya yang memediasi hubungan sosial, memperkuat identitas kolektif, dan mengatur kehidupan sehari-hari. Studi ini diakhiri dengan memposisikan rumah Melayu Melaka sebagai bentuk arsitektur moral yang hidup, terus dinegosiasikan lintas generasi, dan menekankan bahwa perlindungan warisan moral-arsitektur ini sangat penting untuk mempertahankan ketahanan budaya di tengah modernisasi dan tekanan pariwisata global.

**Kata Kunci:**

Etos Islam, Melayu Melaka, Arsitektur vernakular

**Introduction**

The traditional architecture of Malacca stands as one of the most culturally layered and symbolically rich vernacular landscapes in the Malay world (Yaman et al., 2018). As a former imperial entrepôt and a long-standing seat of Malay polity, Malacca has been shaped by the convergence of trade, socio-political development, and interethnic encounters for more than six centuries. Within this historic milieu, the built environment of the Melayu Melaka community reflects not merely aesthetic preferences or climatic adaptations, but a deeper constellation of moral values, communal norms, and

spatial ethics that have guided everyday life. Traditional Malay houses in Malacca—ranging from the rumah Melayu Melaka to hybridised forms influenced by Islamic, Javanese, and regional Malay idioms—embody a sophisticated moral geography, one in which architecture becomes a medium for expressing social hierarchy, gendered propriety, religiosity, hospitality, and communal solidarity (Rahman et al., 2015; Yaman et al., 2018).

The relationship between community morality and spatial practice has gained increasing attention among scholars concerned with the entanglements between culture, behaviour, and the built environment. For the Melayu Melaka, morality (akhlak, budi pekerti), social etiquette (tata susila), and religious conviction are not abstract ideals. Rather, they are enacted, legitimised, and reinforced through spatial organisation, construction techniques, and the symbolic placement of architectural elements (Rahman et al., 2015). The spatial arrangement of the house—from the serambi and anjung to the rumah ibu and dapur—is structured according to ethical logics related to hospitality, privacy, gender boundaries, and respect for elders. Similarly, open communal spaces and village layouts reflect collective values of neighbourliness (jiran tetangga), mutual assistance (gotong-royong), and shared moral responsibility. These spatial traditions operate as repositories of intangible cultural heritage, functioning both as a pedagogical system and as a moral archive that continues to influence contemporary Malay identity in Malacca (Rahman et al., 2015).

Despite extensive studies on the climatic, structural, and typological aspects of Malay vernacular architecture (Jee Yuan, 1987; Nasir & Teh, 2011), the moral, ethical, and socio-religious underpinnings of its spatial practice remain insufficiently articulated within mainstream Malaysian architectural scholarship (Chen et al., 2008; Rasdi, 2005). Much of the existing literature focuses on typology (Yaman et al., 2023), climatic response (Kamal et al., 2004), craftsmanship (Ismail et al., 2020), or historical chronology (Endut, 1994; Mohd Nor et al., 2020), leaving a gap in understanding how socio-moral constructs shape built form. This article addresses that gap by examining how the lived moral values of the Melayu Melaka community—rooted in Islam, custom, and localized norms of communal conduct—are materialised in the spatial logic of traditional architecture. Through this approach, architecture is read not solely as a physical artefact but as an active agent in sustaining moral order and social cohesion.

In situating the study within broader debates on vernacularity, moral anthropology, and spatial sociology, this article contributes to an enriched interpretation of Malacca's architectural heritage. It proposes that understanding the moral-spatial nexus of Melayu Melaka is essential not only for heritage conservation but also for contemporary community development,

as these values continue to frame perceptions of appropriate behaviour, domestic order, and communal belonging. By foregrounding the interplay between morality and spatiality, this research offers a nuanced lens through which traditional Malay architecture in Malacca can be reinterpreted as an enduring expression of social ethics, cultural continuity, and collective identity.

### ***Translating Social and Moral Values into Spatial Practices***

The built environment functions as fundamentally more than a pragmatic shelter; it operates as a complex, non-verbal communicative medium wherein social values are codified and physically manifested. To understand how abstract cultural paradigms—such as kinship, hierarchy, and ethical conduct (like *adab*)—are translated into tangible spatial practices, it is necessary to examine architecture through the lens of semiotics and symbolism. Within this theoretical framework, the physical configurations of space act as signifiers, while the underlying social and cultural values constitute the signified (Eco, 2009). Consequently, spatial practices are not merely functional routines but performative acts of meaning-making, where inhabitants continuously read, interpret, and reinforce the symbolic order of their environment. The translation of social values into spatial reality occurs through several specific semiotic mechanisms:

- **Thresholds and Boundary Symbolism:** The demarcation between public, semi-public, and private zones serves as a spatial manifestation of social etiquette and intimacy. Transitional spaces—such as verandas, courtyards, or entry porches—act as symbolic mediators. They negotiate the tension between communal hospitality and domestic sanctity, establishing a physical boundary where social protocols of entry, greeting, and exclusion are enacted.
- **Spatial Syntax and Social Hierarchy:** The arrangement, depth, and accessibility of rooms within a built environment symbolize the structural hierarchies of the society it houses. For instance, placing the most formally adorned spaces at the forefront of a dwelling signifies the paramount importance of guest reception and communal standing, while deeply embedded, highly segregated inner rooms symbolize the sacredness of familial privacy and gendered spatial norms.
- **Material and Ornamental Semiotics:** The selection of building materials, proportional systems, and ornamental motifs carries profound symbolic weight. Architectural embellishments often transcend mere decoration to function as semiotic indices of cosmological beliefs, spiritual devotion, or socio-economic status, embedding collective memory directly into the tectonic fabric of the building.

Within the context of the Melayu Melaka community, these structural symbols ensure that spatial practices operate as the lived enactment of core social values, most notably the ethical discipline of *adab* (propriety) and the customary tenets of *adat* (tradition). When inhabitants and guests navigate the highly coded environment of the traditional Melaka Malay house (Rumah Melayu Melaka), they are actively participating in a distinctly spatialized discourse. This discourse is physicalized through specific, culturally mandated bodily movements. For instance, the act of pausing at the iconic *tangga batu* (elaborately tiled stone steps) to remove footwear functions as a semiotic boundary, delineating the public, profane exterior from the socially and spiritually purified interior. As individuals move deeper into the dwelling, spatial syntax dictates social interaction: the *serambi* (front veranda) serves as a semi-public threshold for receiving guests and negotiating community affairs, while the elevated *rumah ibu* (core house) is reserved for familial intimacy, the veneration of elders, and the observance of Islamic gender modesty. By recognizing and adhering to these spatial delineations, users perform the values of *adab* through their very mobility. The built environment of Melaka, therefore, exerts a profound dialectical influence. It is meticulously shaped by the ideological and symbolic mandates of a cosmopolitan yet deeply Malay-Islamic society; in turn, its unique spatial grammar continuously dictates bodily protocols, mediates social interactions, and perpetually reinforces the cultural and historical identity of the Melayu Melaka.

### ***Background, Origin, and Development of the Melayu Melaka Community***

The Melayu Melaka community constitutes one of the most historically salient ethnic and cultural assemblages within the Malay Peninsula, serving as a vital nexus for both modern Malaysia and the broader Malay world (*Dunia Melayu or Nusantara*). The genesis of their distinct identity is inextricably linked to the zenith of the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century. Positioned strategically along the arterial Indian Ocean and Straits of Malacca trade networks, Malacca transcended its origins as a coastal settlement to emerge as a preeminent maritime entrepôt (Othman et al., 2019). This geographic primacy fostered a profound demographic and cultural cosmopolitanism. While rooted in indigenous coastal Malay populations, the demographic topography rapidly diversified through the assimilation of mercantile diasporas, scholars, and settlers from Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi, the Indian subcontinent, China, Arabia, and Persia (Bideau & Kilani, 2012).

The resultant socio-cultural matrix was not merely a confluence of disparate groups, but a highly synergistic assimilation into a prevailing Malay-Islamic framework. The consolidation of the Malacca Sultanate functioned as a centralizing mechanism for political, economic, and religious authority,

thereby accelerating the crystallization of a cohesive Melayu Melaka identity (Rouffaer & Winstedt, 1922). Within this paradigm, Islam emerged as the principal organizing force for social hierarchy, jurisprudence, and cultural epistemology, seamlessly synthesizing with adat Melayu (customary law). Thus, the community's socio-cultural scaffolding was continuously enriched by global intellectual currents while remaining resolutely moored to indigenous tenets of kinship, reciprocal communalism, and hierarchical fidelity (Wiryomartono, 2019). This historical cosmopolitanism profoundly shaped the spatial and material culture of Melaka, a phenomenon extensively theorized by scholars of Malayan architecture. The built environment of the Melayu Melaka serves as a tangible repository of this cultural convergence, manifesting a distinct architectural hybridity. Vernacular dwellings and urban morphologies illustrate a complex, ongoing dialogue between indigenous Austronesian building traditions and imported typologies—incorporating structural and ornamental vocabularies from Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and later European traditions. This architectural syncretism not only reflects pragmatic adaptations to a tropical climate and local topographies but also stands as a spatial testament to the cosmopolitan ethos of a society that routinely navigated, and synthesized, cross-cultural exchanges.

Despite the traumatic socio-political rupture caused by the Portuguese conquest in 1511, and the subsequent epochs of Dutch and British colonial hegemonies, the Melayu Melaka community demonstrated remarkable cultural resilience (Goh, 2014). Their enduring settlements (*kampungs*), customary practices, and hybridised architectural heritage continued to safeguard the epistemological legacy of the pre-colonial Malay-Islamic realm.

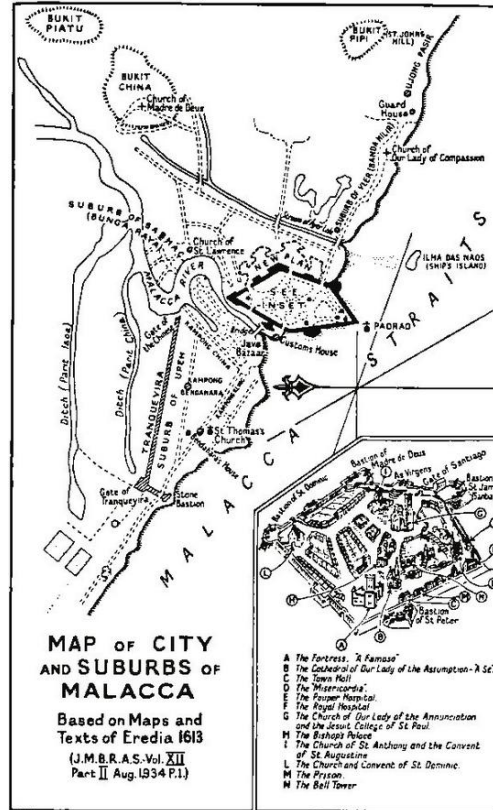


Figure 1: Malacca under the Portuguese (Source: Kohl ,1984)

The global significance of this sustained cosmopolitan legacy and architectural evolution was formally codified in 2008, when Melaka city was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today, the Melayu Melaka function as the custodial vanguard of the Malacca Sultanate's historical memory. Their cultural expressions—spanning linguistic nuances, ritual practices, spatial organisation, and vernacular architecture—constitute a vital living heritage, embodying centuries of adaptation, continuity, and identity formation within Malaysia's complex multicultural tapestry (Bideau & Kilani, 2012).

***Islamic Cultural Values and Their Architectural Articulation within the Social Structure of the Melayu Melaka Community***

The social structure of the Melayu Melaka community reflects a deeply rooted tradition shaped by Islamic teachings, adat Melayu, and the historical legacy

of the Malacca Sultanate (Lawless, 2015). Social organisation is typically kin-based, with extended families forming the core of village life. Elders hold an esteemed position as custodians of moral guidance, historical knowledge, and religious instruction. Leadership within the community emerges through both formal and informal structures: the *penghulu* or village head represents administrative authority, while respected elders, imams, and community advisors reinforce moral order. A balance between leadership, kinship, and religious authority, therefore, characterises social hierarchy. Roles within the household are also governed by traditional gender norms, where men historically manage external affairs and communal responsibilities. In contrast, women assume central roles in domestic management, childcare, and preservation of familial values (Ani et al., 2012).

Cultural values underpinning Melayu Melaka life are anchored in the principles of Islamic values like *adab* (proper conduct), religiosity, communal cooperation, and social harmony. Respect for elders, modesty in behaviour and dress, and adherence to Islamic practices form the moral core of daily life. The values of *gotong-royong* and *tolong-menolong* strengthen communal bonds, encouraging cooperation during ceremonies, agricultural activities, and crises. Hospitality is another defining cultural trait, reflected in the warm reception of guests and the emphasis on communal feasts such as *kenduri*. These values are transmitted across generations through rituals, storytelling, educational practices, and the spatial organisation of communal life (Ani et al., 2012).

Architecturally, the traditional Malay house in Malacca represents a material embodiment of these social norms and cultural values. The *Rumah Melayu Melaka* is typically elevated on stilts, featuring steeply pitched roofs, intricate carvings, and a tripartite spatial hierarchy (Rahil et al., 2020). The layout reflects a continuum from public to private zones: the *anjung* serves as a reception area for acquaintances; the *serambi* accommodates closer guests and semi-private interactions; and the *rumah ibu*, the inner core of the house, is reserved for family activities, women's domains, and intimate gatherings (Rahil et al., 2020). This spatial gradation mirrors Malay moral expectations concerning hospitality, privacy, and gender boundaries. Decorative elements such as floral carved panels and Islamic geometric motifs are not merely aesthetic but symbolise purity, balance, and moral order. The raised floor improves ventilation while metaphorically elevating the family's dignity and purity. The kitchen (*dapur*), often located at the rear, functions as a sociocultural hub where women transmit culinary knowledge, household values, and moral teachings. In *kampung* settings, houses are typically arranged in loose clusters with open yards, communal pathways, and shared facilities. These settlement patterns reflect the cultural emphasis on neighbourliness, interdependence, and visual connectivity (Hidayat, 2011).

The permeability of kampung spaces reinforces the Malay communal ethic, allowing for continuous social interaction while respecting individual household privacy (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Together, the social structure, cultural values, and architectural characteristics of the Melayu Melaka community illustrate a coherent moral-spatial system. Their built environment is not merely functional but an expression of identity, memory, and communal ethics that continue to shape daily life and heritage preservation efforts in contemporary Malacca (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Pepinsky, 2019). For the benefit of this paper, the next section will firstly elucidate in detail on the aspects of these cultural values of proper etiquette (*adab*), religiosity, communal cooperation and harmony and their significance in shaping the Melayu Melaka society since the olden days till the present context.

### ***The Principles of propriety (adab) and Their Role in Shaping the Melayu Melaka Society***

Propriety (*adab*) occupies a central and enduring position in the moral, cultural, and intellectual foundation of Melayu Melaka society. Broadly defined, *adab* refers to proper conduct, refined manners, disciplined behaviour, and the ethical orientation that shapes how a person relates to God, family, society, and the environment (Pepinsky, 2019). In the Malay-Islamic worldview, propriety (*adab*) is not merely social etiquette; it is a comprehensive moral philosophy rooted in Islamic teachings and local adat. It encompasses respect, humility, wisdom, moderation, and an awareness of one's place within the social hierarchy (Ali, 2022). To practise propriety (*adab*) is to embody moral excellence (*akhlak mulia*) in every aspect of life, from speech and bodily comportment to hospitality, authority, and communal interaction.

The characteristics of propriety (*adab*) can be understood across several interrelated domains. First, propriety (*adab*) towards God emphasises obedience to Islamic teachings, sincerity in worship, and recognition of divine authority. This theological dimension shapes the religious discipline evident in Melayu Melaka communities—daily prayers, community religious gatherings, and the prioritisation of spiritual instruction in family life. Second, proper propriety (*adab*) towards humans underscores interpersonal relations based on respect for elders, kindness to neighbours, deference to community leaders, and modesty in gender interaction. This form of propriety (*adab*) manifests in linguistic politeness, ritualised greetings, orderly seating arrangements during gatherings, and the cultural expectation of avoiding confrontation or public shame. Third, propriety (*adab*) towards oneself stresses self-discipline, cleanliness, responsibility, and the cultivation of inner virtues. These characteristics form the ethical backbone of personal behaviour, shaping

individual integrity and social reputation (*maruah diri*). Finally, propriety (*adab*) towards environment reflects the Malay worldview that emphasises harmony with nature, reflected in traditional practices concerning the use of land, water sources, and communal spaces. The significance of propriety (*adab*) in the development of Melayu Melaka society is profound. Historically, *adab* functioned as both a moral compass and a social regulatory system. It guided governance during the Malacca Sultanate, where rulers and court officials adhered to principles of justice, humility, and wisdom as outlined in classical Malay moral texts (Jamian & Radzi, 2013). In village life, proper etiquette or propriety (*adab*) structured communal relations through systems of cooperation (*gotong-royong*), conflict resolution, and ritual obligations. It shaped a cohesive social order in which respect for hierarchy ensured stability, while hospitality and neighbourliness strengthened communal bonds. Propriety (*adab*) also plays a crucial role in identity formation. It distinguishes the Melayu Melaka community as culturally refined, spiritually grounded, and socially cohesive. The transmission of *adab* from one generation to the next ensures continuity of cultural values, reinforcing the community's resilience amid colonial changes and modernisation.

In sum, the principles of propriety (*adab*) are foundational to the moral worldview, social harmony, and cultural continuity of Melayu Melaka society. Through propriety (*adab*), ethical ideals are translated into lived practices that shape behaviour, governance, community organisation, and architectural expression.

### ***The Value of Religiosity in the Melayu Melaka Community and Societal Significance***

Religiosity, within the context of Melayu Melaka society, refers to the depth of religious conviction, the embodiment of Islamic principles in daily conduct, and the integration of spiritual values into social and cultural life (Ishak & Abdullah, 2012). It is not limited to ritual adherence; rather, it encompasses a holistic orientation where faith (*iman*), practice (*amal*), and moral consciousness (*taqwa*) guide personal behaviour and communal ethics. Religiosity is expressed as a lived experience in which Islamic teachings shape identity, worldview, and social norms. In the Melayu Melaka tradition, religiosity is understood as a continuous effort to align life with divine guidance, drawing from Quranic teachings, prophetic traditions (*Sunnah*), and centuries of Malay-Islamic intellectual heritage.

The characteristics of religiosity in Melayu Melaka society are multifaceted (Ishak & Abdullah, 2012). First, it is ritualistic and performative, involving the regular practice of obligatory acts such as prayer (*solat*), fasting, and Quranic recitation. These practices sustain spiritual discipline and

reinforce communal unity through shared religious rhythms. Second, religiosity is moral and behavioural, reflected in honesty, humility, restraint, and compassion. Moral virtues are cultivated through collective teaching in families, mosques, and traditional schools such as madrasah and surau. Third, religiosity is communal, expressed through participation in religious ceremonies, *kenduri doa selamat*, funeral rites, and religious festivals that reinforce social cohesion. Fourth, it is knowledge-oriented, with emphasis on acquiring religious understanding, whether through formal education or informal instruction by imams, elders, and religious scholars. Fifth, religiosity is integrative, shaping cultural practices, values, and customary behaviour (*adat*) in ways that align with Islamic principles, creating a synthesis known as *adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah* (custom grounded in religious law).

The significance of religiosity in the development of Melayu Melaka society is foundational (Husin, 2010). Historically, the Malacca Sultanate served as an influential centre of Islamic learning and propagation, where religious scholars imported ideas from Arabia, India, and the Malay Archipelago. This intellectual exchange produced a Malay-Islamic civilisation grounded in both political authority and spiritual legitimacy. As a result, religiosity became a defining component of community identity, strengthening loyalty, governance, and social order. In social life, religiosity plays a central role in shaping ethical conduct, interpersonal relationships, and communal responsibilities. Islamic teachings regulate marriage, inheritance, conflict resolution, and child-rearing practices (Reid, 2001). Virtues such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *sabar* (patience) are embedded in cultural expectations, ensuring harmony and social stability. The family unit is considered a sacred institution, and parents bear responsibility for transmitting religious knowledge and moral discipline.

Ultimately, religiosity shaped the resilience, identity, and moral fabric of the Melayu Melaka community. It provided a spiritual framework that guided governance, shaped cultural practices, and ensured continuity of values through generations. Through religiosity, the Melayu Melaka society developed as a culturally rich, morally grounded, and spiritually cohesive community whose legacy continues to inform contemporary Malay identity in Malacca.

### ***The Role of Communal Cooperation and Harmony in the Melayu Melaka Society***

The principles of communal cooperation (*gotong-royong*) and social harmony (*perpaduan sosial*) form the ethical backbone of Melayu Melaka society, deeply rooted in the region's historical evolution, sociocultural norms, and

Islamic moral framework (Zakaria et al., 2022). At their core, these principles refer to the collective responsibility shared by community members to uphold social well-being, maintain peaceful relations, and ensure the continuity of cultural practices that promote unity. Communal cooperation, defined as the voluntary contribution of labour, resources, and time for the benefit of the wider community, has long been central to Malay sociocultural life, particularly in settlements that depended on agriculture, maritime trade, and kin-based support systems. Social harmony, meanwhile, denotes the collective commitment to nurturing interpersonal respect, conflict avoidance, and moral conduct that prevents fragmentation within the community.

The characteristics of these principles manifest through several observable behaviours and structures within Melayu Melaka society (Zakaria et al., 2022). First, mutual assistance forms a key trait, evident in practices such as building houses, organising weddings, preparing communal feasts, and responding to crises through shared labour. This principle reinforces interdependence, allowing members of different families, clans (*suku*), and neighbourhoods to forge enduring bonds. Second, collective decision-making marks another characteristic, where matters affecting the village—such as dispute resolution, resource allocation, and customary regulations—are often mediated through traditional institutions, including the *penghulu*, village elders, and community councils. This participatory approach prevents authoritarianism and ensures inclusivity in governance. Third, respectful social conduct—expressed through greetings, etiquette (*adab*), and adherence to customary laws (*adat*)—sustains harmonious relationships and reduces the potential for conflict. Finally, integration of Islamic values, such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *ihsan* (benevolence), and *silaturahmi* (strengthening kinship ties), reinforces these cultural practices through spiritual and moral obligations.

The significance of communal cooperation and social harmony is evident in how they shaped the historical and contemporary development of Melayu Melaka society. Historically, Melaka's rise as a cosmopolitan port-polity required not only economic acumen but also a strong social fabric capable of integrating diverse ethnic groups while maintaining local cohesion. Principles of cooperation facilitated large-scale communal efforts such as the construction of mosques, market spaces, and shared infrastructure, which strengthened Melaka's reputation as an organised and prosperous trading hub. Moreover, social harmony played a pivotal role in sustaining Melaka's multicultural coexistence, allowing interactions between Melayu, Arab, Indian, Chinese, and Javanese communities to occur with minimal friction (Abd Razak & Husin, 2011).

In the domestic sphere, these principles contributed to stable family structures, where responsibilities were distributed evenly, and values such as respect for elders, intergenerational reciprocity, and neighbourliness shaped everyday life. In the contemporary context, communal cooperation continues to inform grassroots development programmes, disaster management, and local governance initiatives. Social harmony remains central to preserving cultural identity amid rapid urbanisation and modern social pressures. Together, these principles not only reinforce social resilience but also ensure that the Melayu Melaka community sustains its cultural continuity, moral integrity, and collective sense of belonging across generations.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the intertwined values of adab, religiosity, and communal cooperation and harmony constitute foundational forces in shaping the Melayu Melaka community, influencing not only its social organisation but also its spatial and architectural expressions. Before examining the translation of these moral and cultural principles into the built environment, it is necessary to first establish an understanding of the defining architectural elements of the Melayu Melaka tradition and their historical evolution within the broader Malaysian context in the following section.

### ***Evolutionary Trajectories and Characteristic Features of Melayu Melaka Architecture in Malaysia***

The evolution of Melayu Melaka architecture constitutes a significant chapter in the architectural history of Malaysia, reflecting the dynamic interplay between indigenous cultural values, environmental adaptation, and external influences shaped by trade, migration, and Islamisation (Raja Abdul Kadir et al., 2024). Rooted in the pre-Melakan Malay world yet crystallised during the height of the Melaka Sultanate (15th–16th centuries), Melayu Melaka architecture developed as both a manifestation of sociocultural identity and a sophisticated response to the geopolitical and climatic context of the region. Over time, this architectural tradition expanded, hybridised, and adapted to changing administrative, economic, and technological conditions, yet it retained a core set of design principles that continue to define its aesthetic and functional ethos.

Historically, the architecture of Melayu Melaka emerged from vernacular timber construction techniques typical of early Malay settlements, where buildings were elevated on stilts to mitigate flooding, promote ventilation, and provide protection from wildlife. As Melaka rose to prominence as a major entrepôt, increased contact with traders from the Middle East, India, China, and the Malay Archipelago introduced new ideas in craftsmanship, ornamentation, and spatial planning. The prolonged presence

of Arab merchants and religious scholars—particularly from the Hadhramaut region of Yemen—played a pivotal role in shaping both the socio-religious fabric and the built environment. As these Arab elites settled and intermarried with local populations, their cultural paradigms were spatialised. The assimilation of Islamic principles, particularly after the 15th century, further refined Melakan architectural forms by emphasising modesty, hierarchical order, and spatial segregation, aligning local vernacular pragmatism with moral and ritual considerations deeply rooted in Middle Eastern traditions of domestic privacy.

Several architectural features define this tradition. The spatial organisation typically follows a tripartite hierarchy comprising the *serambi* (veranda), *rumah ibu* (main core), and *dapur* (kitchen), each reflecting specific social functions and gendered interactions (Amat & Rashid, 2014). The *serambi* serves as a liminal space for receiving guests and facilitating communal interaction, embodying values of hospitality and moral etiquette. The *rumah ibu*, often the most elevated and ornamented section, functions as the ceremonial and familial centre, reflecting the household's status and adherence to cultural propriety. The stringent visual and physical separation between the public *serambi* and the private familial core was heavily reinforced by Arab-Islamic concepts of gendered privacy (guarding the *aurat* and the sanctity of the *mahram*), ensuring that female members of the household were shielded from the gaze of non-familial male guests. The *dapur* remains a private, functional space associated with domestic labour and kinship activities. This spatial hierarchy aligns with social norms of respect, privacy, and relational order within Melayu Melaka society (Amat & Rashid, 2014)

In terms of structural and material characteristics, Melayu Melaka houses utilise hardwoods such as *cengal* and *meranti* for durability, coupled with lightweight thatched or later terracotta roofs designed for tropical climatic resilience. The iconic *bumbung panjang* (long gable roof) and *bumbung limas* (pyramidal roof) demonstrate effective rainwater shedding and heat dissipation while providing a recognisable silhouette. Arab mercantile wealth and cosmopolitanism also precipitated the introduction of masonry elements into the timber vernacular, most notably the *tangga batu*—elaborately plastered and sometimes tiled masonry staircases that served as status symbols of high socio-economic standing and globalised lineage.

Furthermore, intricately carved panels, particularly on fascia boards, ventilation screens (*tebar layar*), and doorways, express both aesthetic refinement and symbolic meaning. Influenced directly by Arab-Islamic theological aesthetics, these carvings strictly adhered to aniconism (the avoidance of animate figures), replacing pre-Islamic motifs with stylised

Quranic calligraphy (*khat*) and complex geometric or vegetal arabesques (*awan larat*). Jointing systems based on sophisticated mortise-and-tenon techniques enable flexibility, expandability, and earthquake resilience without reliance on nails (Amat & Rashid, 2014).

Throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, Melayu Melaka architecture underwent further evolution as new materials such as brick, lime plaster, and corrugated roofing were incorporated into traditional forms. While modernisation and urbanisation have challenged the continuity of vernacular practices, contemporary conservation initiatives and cultural heritage discourse have revitalised interest in preserving Melaka's architectural legacy. Consequently, Melayu Melaka architecture remains a living testament to the community's cultural values, environmental knowledge, and historical resilience, embodying a built heritage that continues to inform Malaysian architectural identity today.

The following section outlines the methodological approach employed to conduct a detailed analysis of the residential house as a case study to represent the Melayu Melaka community's dominant built form. This is subsequently followed by the findings and discussion, which examine the ways in which the Melayu Melaka values are manifested within the architectural design and spatial organisation of this domestic building typology.

## **Methods**

This study adopts an interpretive research paradigm to investigate the integration of Melayu Melaka values within the architectural forms of their community. Situated within qualitative inquiry, this paradigm foregrounds the contextual and subjective dimensions of meaning, emphasising how individuals and communities attribute cultural significance to the built environment. It is grounded in the philosophical assumption that reality is socially constructed, and that understanding is best derived from the lived experiences and interpretive frameworks of community members rather than through hypothesis testing or predictive models of behaviour. The research specifically interrogates how Melayu Melaka values are encoded and expressed in the architectural forms of residential houses.

Given the focus on symbolic and philosophical meanings, semiotics is employed as the primary methodological lens to decode embedded architectural symbols. The cultural expressions of the Melayu Melaka community—including spatial organisation, behavioural practices, and material culture—are conceptualised as a "text" capable of being read, interpreted, and analysed to reveal deeper ideological and moral significances. Data collection comprises observational analysis using a layering technique complemented by semi-structured interviews with community experts and

residents. This multi-method approach enables the triangulation of individual and collective interpretations of architectural forms and their underlying cultural meanings.

### ***Justification for a Single Case Study Methodology***

This research employs a single in-depth case study methodology to investigate the intricate relationship between Islamic social values and the spatial practices of traditional Melayu dwellings. While multiple case studies are often utilized for comparative breadth, a single case study approach is highly appropriate for this research because it allows for a "thick description" of a complex socio-spatial phenomenon. Understanding how intangible Islamic social values—such as proper etiquette (*adab*), religiosity, communal cooperation and harmony dictate physical boundaries and daily usage requires an exhaustive, micro-level investigation. A single, exceptionally preserved archetype enables a profound analysis of the exact mechanisms through which religious philosophies translate into architectural language, providing a depth of insight that broad surveys often fail to capture. To ensure the selected dwelling effectively represents the spatial translation of these values, the selection of the Melayu Melaka house of Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani is guided by four principal criteria:

- i) **Historical and Cultural Authenticity:** The building must possess a direct, undeniable connection to the Melayu Melaka community. It should ideally have been constructed, funded, or managed by its members, originating from a period of high social and cultural activity (18th to early 20th century).
- ii) **Representation of Core Cultural Values:** The dwelling must clearly embody core socio-religious principles, including *adab* (etiquette), religiosity, and communal cooperation. This must be evident in spatial arrangements and functional zoning that naturally facilitate inclusivity, learning, and communal gatherings.
- iii) **Architectural Distinctiveness and Hybrid Identity:** The architecture should reflect the unique fusion of Malay, Islamic, Chinese, Indian, and colonial influences characteristic of Melaka. This hybridity—observable in façade ornamentation, typological elements (courtyards, porticos, verandas), symmetry, ventilation strategies, and materiality—illustrates how deeply held cultural values adapt to and are expressed through evolving architectural languages.
- iv) **Community and Functional Relevance:** The building must demonstrate historical or continued use as a communal hub, reinforcing its role as a living representation of civic responsibility, social hierarchy, and cultural ethos.

Guided by these criteria, the Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani in Merlimau, Melaka, was selected as the optimal single case study for this research. Ultimately, Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani acts as a physical vessel for the Malay philosophy of *Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah* (Custom is based on Islamic law, Islamic law is based on the Quran), making it the definitive case study to decode the intersection of Melayu spatial practices and Islamic social ethics. The architectural analysis of the house is framed through theories of form and spatial organisation. Form encompasses elements such as setting, scale, structure, façade, and ornamentation, while spatial considerations include access, circulation, hierarchy, and function. Form-making is examined through a layered semiotic framework, and space syntax mapping is employed to elucidate spatial organisation. The semiotic framework follows Malthis's (2004) six-layer model: (1) foundational structural form; (2) volumetric modifications through addition or subtraction; (3) piercings and associated attributes, including windows, doors, and screens; (4) spatial relationships between piercings and surrounding surfaces; (5) decorative and constructive details, such as columns, cornices, and finishes; and (6) optional stylistic features, including door and window forms, categorised for detailed analysis. This integrated methodological approach enables a rigorous, multi-dimensional understanding of how the Melayu Melaka values are materially and spatially articulated within the community's architecture.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the house owner's family members. This interview aimed to gain insights into both the practical and symbolic roles of architectural features. The interview protocol focused on the core of the Melayu Melaka values and their manifestation within architectural form and spatial organisation, thereby facilitating a direct linkage between observed architectural characteristics and underlying philosophical and cultural principles.

To analyse the interview data, a coding method was employed, a widely recognised qualitative research technique that provides a structured framework for interpreting complex textual data. Thematic coding enabled the identification of patterns, relationships, and implicit discourses concerning the expression of the Melayu Melaka values in the architectural configuration of the community mosque and associated residential houses. This approach ensured that insights derived from the interviews were systematically synthesised to support the research objectives. The coding process comprised the following components:

Descriptive Coding: Identification of key themes such as “originality of mosque and house elements,” “symbolic reinterpretation,” and “integration of the Melayu Melaka value systems.”

Conceptual Coding: Mapping respondents’ insights to design categories, including philosophical justification, material selection, spatial design strategy, and symbolic representation.

Equivalence and Cons Analysis: Evaluation of statements regarding the intended outcomes of the Melayu Melaka values and their symbolic manifestation within architectural elements of the houses.

To further validate the findings from observations and interviews, focus group discussions were conducted with five experts—comprising one architect, two academics, one heritage conservator and one prominent local historian—with extensive expertise in Melayu Melaka culture and architectural heritage. The Socratic method guided these discussions, fostering critical and reflective dialogue. This method was chosen for several reasons: it enabled the capture of ideologically informed perspectives on design, function, and spirituality; it promoted collaborative knowledge sharing; it facilitated the identification of hidden or unarticulated design considerations; and it provided critical insights into how architectural decisions reflect and reinforce the Melayu Melaka communal identity. Expert contributions were therefore instrumental in evaluating the alignment between design features and cultural expressions. The study employs an explanatory research approach to elucidate the relationship between architectural features and cultural values. The analysis was conducted in three phases:

Phase One: Observational and documentation-based analysis of built form and spatial organisation, supplemented by semi-structured interviews to interpret the Melayu Melaka cultural significance.

Phase Two: Synthesis of findings from observation, documentation, and interviews to assess the extent to which the Melayu Melaka values have influenced architectural forms and their potential role in fostering communal cohesion.

Phase Three: Data validation with experts to determine how, why, and to what extent the mosque’s architectural expressions communicate shared Melayu Melaka values, highlighting both unique features and commonalities in architectural articulation. The research methodology flow and framework can be referred to Figure 2 for detail understanding.

*Architectural and Cultural through Islamic Social Values in the Spatial Practices of Traditional Melayu Dwellings: Case Study- Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani in Merlimau, Melaka*

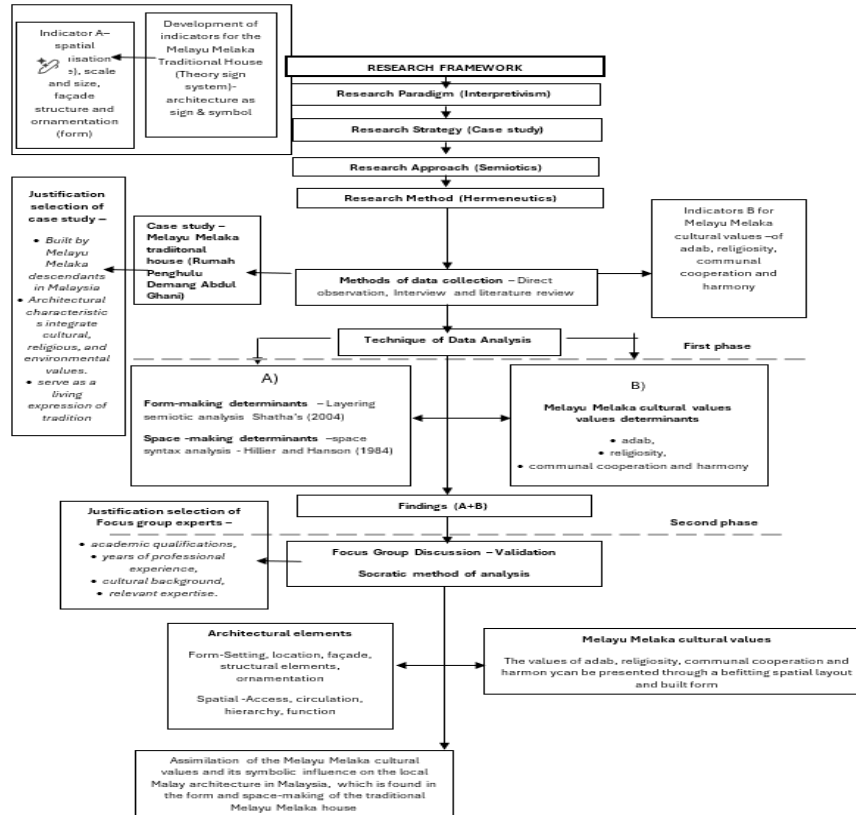


Figure 2: Research Methodology Framework (source: Author 2025)

## Result and Discussion

This paper examines the case study of a prominent example of traditional Melayu Melaka domestic architecture, namely Rumah Penghulu (Demang) Abdul Ghani in Merlimau, Melaka (refer Figure 3). The house occupies a significant position within Melaka’s vernacular and socio-historical landscape, functioning not only as a representative specimen of Melayu Melaka architectural heritage but also as a material expression of local governance and authority. Its origins are closely tied to the leadership lineage of the Merlimau hinterland: constructed on land developed by the Abdul Majid family—whose ancestry is frequently linked to Palembang—the residence subsequently became associated with the offices of demang (village head) and penghulu


(sub-district chief) held by its successive owners in the nineteenth century. Early documentary sources and local historiographies place the earliest construction activities in the early 1830s under the Abdul Majid family, with Demang (Penghulu) Abdul Ghani further consolidating the site's socio-political prominence during his tenure. Architecturally, the house reflects a cumulative process of evolution rather than a singular founding moment. Conservation studies and scholarly analyses identify multiple phases of construction and modification across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which gradually introduced increases in scale, ornamental refinement, and hybrid stylistic features that extend beyond the modest forms of early vernacular dwellings. These successive interventions produced an enlarged Malay timber residence that retains traditional spatial logics—such as a raised floor, verandah, and hierarchical sequencing of interior spaces—while simultaneously incorporating decorative motifs, roof forms, and material innovations influenced by wider regional interactions. A major construction phase, commonly dated to the late nineteenth century (particularly around 1894), followed by further alterations in the early 1900s, resulted in the architectural configuration observable today.

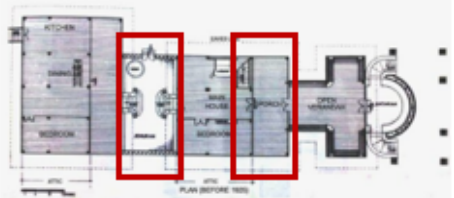

The building's materiality and detailing underscore its hybrid identity. Its structural framework employs durable hardwoods, including merbau, cengal, and teak, whereas its carved panels, perforated ventilation screens, and imported roof tiles demonstrate a fusion of local craftsmanship with external stylistic influences. Although the traditional tripartite spatial sequence—serambi, main living core, and service spaces—remains intact, the house's scale, ornamental elaboration, and refined façade elements reflect the elevated social status of its owners and their capacity to commission sophisticated architectural expression. Historically, the residence served as a communal centre, hosting meetings, dispute resolution sessions, and ceremonial hospitality, thereby reinforcing its architectural and civic importance. By the late twentieth century, the house experienced periods of neglect before undergoing state-initiated conservation and adaptive reuse. Restoration efforts in the 2000s stabilised its structural components and reinstated key decorative features. The site's subsequent redefinition as the Galeri Demang Abdul Ghani has rendered the house an accessible heritage resource and a tangible emblem of Merlimau's social history. Its transformation—from a private seat of local governance to a conserved cultural gallery—encapsulates broader themes

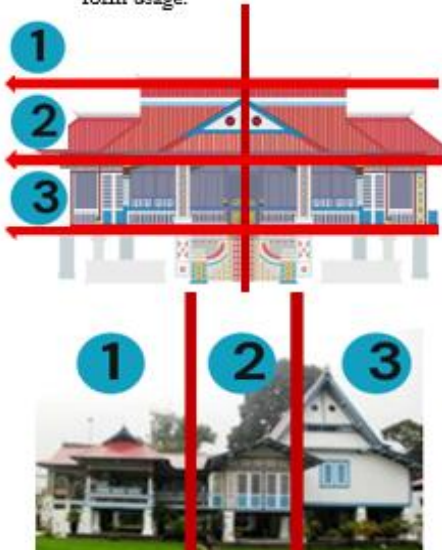

within Melayu Melaka architectural heritage, particularly the interplay of authority, cultural hybridity, and contemporary heritage management in sustaining vernacular identity amid rapid sociocultural change.






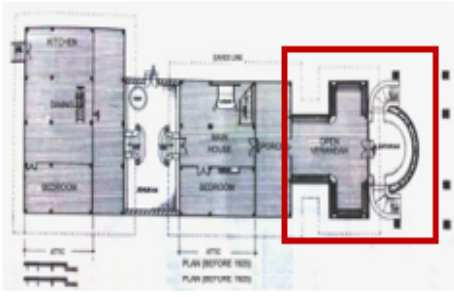

Figure 3: Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani, Merlimau, Melaka (1894) and its location at Jalan Masjid Jamek Merlimau (source: Author 2025)

<p>Melayu Melaka Islamic cultural values</p>	<p>Values influence the architectural design</p>	<p>Diagram of Case Study: Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani</p>
<p><b>The value of adab</b> In the Melayu Melaka community, adab refers to the moral and courteous behaviour shaped by Islamic teachings and Malay cultural norms. It includes respect, humility, modesty, and proper manners in speech and action. Adab plays a vital role in shaping family relationships, especially in fostering respect for elders and harmonious interactions. In the wider community, it promotes politeness, social order, and peaceful coexistence. Ultimately, adab reflects personal moral character and strengthens the cultural identity and unity of the Melayu Melaka community.</p>	<p>The value of adab—emphasising modesty, respect, and courteous interaction—shapes Melayu Melaka architecture through clear separation of public and private spaces. Features such as the <i>anjung</i> and <i>serambi</i> serve as controlled zones for receiving guests without exposing family areas. Interior layouts are arranged to protect modesty, especially for women, while maintaining respectful social hierarchy. Raised floors, partitions, and screened openings limit direct visibility. Overall, adab guides form and space-making to ensure dignity, harmony, and culturally appropriate behaviour within the home.</p>	<p><b>Spatial layout –</b></p>  <p><b>Image 1.0 Ground floor plan indicating hierarchy (source: author 2025)</b></p> <p><b>Hierarchy of Spaces Reflecting Respect and Order</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sequential arrangement from the <i>anjung</i> (veranda) to the <i>rumah ibu</i> (main house) and finally to the <i>rumah dapur</i> (kitchen) expresses social hierarchy, guiding visitors through spaces according to their social position and familiarity.</li> <li>• Restricted access to inner spaces embodies <i>adab</i> by protecting modesty (<i>awrat</i>) and safeguarding family privacy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Clear Distinction Between Public and Private Zones</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>anjung</i> serves as a semi-public reception area where guests are welcomed with proper etiquette, reinforcing hospitality while maintaining boundaries.</li> <li>• The inner chambers, accessible only to family members, show adherence to Islamic norms of gender segregation, privacy, and respectful conduct.</li> </ul> <p><b>Elevated Floor Levels Symbolizing Moral Order</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different floor heights—where the <i>rumah ibu</i> is higher than adjacent spaces—symbolize the honour of central familial activities such as teaching, consultation, and prayer.</li> <li>• This subtle spatial hierarchy reinforces <i>adab</i> by encouraging respectful movement and behaviour within the home.</li> </ul>

		 <p><b>Image 1.1</b> Ground floor plan indicating transition space from public to each private space (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Dedicated Spaces for Ritual and Devotion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision for prayer areas and Quranic teaching spaces demonstrates the integration of moral guidance, reinforcing <i>adab</i> as a practice rooted in religious discipline.</li> </ul> <p><b>Circulation Patterns That Promote Respectful Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate pathways for guests and family members <u>minimize unnecessary encounters</u> and uphold norms of modesty and decorum.</li> <li>• Transitional spaces encourage controlled entry, ensuring visitors proceed with proper behavioural etiquette.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The value of religiosity</b></p> <p>In the Melayu Melaka community, religiosity refers to the deep integration of Islamic faith into everyday life, shaping moral conduct, social norms, and communal identity. It encompasses devotion to religious teachings, observance of rituals, and adherence to ethical principles derived from the Qur'an and Malay-Islamic traditions. This value plays a central role in regulating interpersonal behaviour, reinforcing respect, modesty, and communal harmony. Religiosity also guides decision-making within family and community structures, informs cultural practices, and shapes spatial and architectural expressions. Through its pervasive influence, it sustains a cohesive moral order and preserves the community's cultural continuity and collective identity.</p>	<p>Religiosity in the Melayu Melaka community profoundly shapes their built environment by embedding Islamic moral order, ritual practices, and spatial etiquette into architectural form. Domestic and public buildings often incorporate features that support prayer, modest interaction, and gendered spatial separation, such as surau spaces, raised platforms, and hierarchical zoning between public and private realms. Architectural ornamentation features calligraphy, vegetal motifs, and symbolic geometries that reflect spiritual ideals while avoiding figural representation. Orientation, ventilation, and circulation patterns further reinforce <i>adab</i>, cleanliness, and communal harmony. Collectively, these features demonstrate how religious devotion structures both spatial organisation and cultural identity.</p>	<p><b>Form-making</b></p>  <p><b>Image 1.2</b> The floor is elevated from the ground on pilotis (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Elevated Floor Levels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main living and ceremonial areas are raised above peripheral spaces.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Symbolises honour, status, and moral propriety, requiring careful movement and conscious respect in form usage.</li></ul>  <p>Image 1.3 The frontal and side façade indicates balance and proportion in terms of vertical and horizontal division (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Proportions and Symmetry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Balanced and harmonious form conveys order, discipline, and respectfulness.</li><li>• Physical form embodies social and moral values through visual and spatial hierarchy.</li></ul>  <p>Image 1.4 The house with large open verandah (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Form Supporting Hospitality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expansive verandahs and reception halls accommodate guests with dignity and respect.</li></ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Form-making reflects the host's ethical obligation to provide comfort while upholding decorum.</li> </ul>   <p><b>Image 1.5 Ornament reflects respect for religious practice and moral order (source: author 2025)</b></p> <p><b>Symbolic Motifs Reflecting Spiritual Values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Floral or vegetal patterns symbolize growth, purity, and the divine creation.</li> <li>Reinforces the moral and spiritual dimension of the household environment.</li> </ul>  <p><b>Image 1.6 Repetitive element ornament avoids figurative representation, adhering to Islamic teachings against idolatry (source: author 2025)</b></p> <p><b>Integration with Functional Elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carved screens, window panels, and ventilation openings incorporate religious motifs while serving practical purposes.</li> <li>Demonstrates the seamless embedding of faith into everyday life.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Role of Communal Cooperation and Harmony</b> In the Melayu Melaka community, communal cooperation and harmony refer to the collective effort to maintain social cohesion, mutual support, and peaceful coexistence within the community. Rooted in</p>	<p>In the Melayu Melaka community, the values of communal cooperation and harmony shape the built environment by promoting spatial arrangements that facilitate social interaction, collective activities, and mutual support. Residential compounds, communal halls, and mosques are designed with open</p>	<p><b>Spatial layout –</b></p> <p><b>Open Verandahs and Connecting Walkways</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate movement and interaction among residents and visitors.</li> </ul>

<p>Malay cultural norms and Islamic ethics, this value emphasizes collaboration in daily life, shared responsibilities, and respect for hierarchical and social relationships. It manifests in collective activities such as neighborhood work, religious events, and dispute resolution, fostering trust and solidarity. By promoting unity and interdependence, communal cooperation and harmony strengthen social resilience, ensure the continuity of cultural traditions, and guide behaviour in both domestic and public spheres, sustaining the moral and social fabric of the Melayu Melaka community.</p>	<p>courtyards, verandahs, and multi-functional spaces that encourage gatherings, dialogue, and cooperation among family and neighbours. Pathways and entrances are organized to balance accessibility with privacy, supporting respectful engagement while maintaining social order. These spatial principles reflect the community's emphasis on unity, shared responsibility, and cohesion, ensuring that the physical environment actively reinforces cultural norms, ethical behaviour, and harmonious relationships within the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance inclusivity and support collaborative domestic and social functions.</li> </ul>  <p><b>Image 1.6</b> Ground floor plan indicating large veranda space for community function (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Central Courtyard as a Gathering Space</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acts as a focal point for family, neighbours, and visitors to gather for social, religious, and communal activities.</li> <li>Encourages interaction, dialogue, and collective participation.</li> </ul>  <p><b>Image 1.7</b> The house space show connectivity inside to outside space (source: author 2025)</p> <p><b>Integration of Indoor and Outdoor Spaces</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Courtyards, verandahs, and open areas allow simultaneous communal activities without conflict.</li> <li>Enhances collective participation while sustaining social cohesion.</li> </ul>
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Drawing from the preceding case study, it is clear that Melayu Melaka architecture—exemplified by the traditional house—continues to preserve and articulate core communal and Islamic values, particularly those grounded in *adab* (proper conduct), religiosity, communal harmony, and intergenerational responsibility. However, the spatial practices of the Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani (built in 1894) reveal that these foundational principles were not maintained through rigid isolation, but rather through a dynamic, highly deliberate engagement with architectural hybridity. Between the 18th and early 20th centuries, Melaka's position as a cosmopolitan trading hub under consecutive colonial administrations (Dutch and British) precipitated a significant shift in the local vernacular. The architecture of the Rumah Penghulu illustrates how foreign influences—Colonial, Chinese, and Indian—were systematically absorbed and subordinated to serve the Islamic social ethos of the Melayu Melaka community.

**Elevating *adab* (proper conduct), through Chinese and Colonial Elements:** The entrance and public reception areas (*Anjung* and *Serambi*) prominently feature imported, colorful Peranakan/Chinese glazed ceramic tiles on the masonry staircases, alongside imposing brick pillars indicative of European colonial aesthetics. Rather than secularizing the home, this hybridization was employed to elevate the Islamic value of hospitality and *adab*. By utilizing the finest imported materials and grand, globally-influenced aesthetics in the public zone, the Penghulu (headman) physically manifested respect and honor for his guests, fostering communal harmony and cooperation within a space clearly demarcated for public discourse.

**Safeguarding religiosity via Architectural Adaptation:** The integration of colonial-style timber louvers and Indian-influenced ornate fenestration demonstrates how foreign technologies were utilized to enforce strict Islamic spatial boundaries. These hybrid ventilation strategies allowed for optimal airflow and natural lighting in the *Rumah Ibu* (core family area) and *Rumah Dapur* (kitchen) while maintaining strict visual privacy. This allowed the female members of the household to see out without being seen, thereby using colonial and regional architectural advancements to perfectly execute the Islamic requirement of protecting the domestic sphere from the public gaze.

**Communal Harmony and intergenerational responsibility translated into Materiality:** The seamless fusion of traditional Malay interlocking timber frames, Chinese decorative motifs (such as stylized flora), and Indian carving techniques on the fascia boards and screens reflects a society comfortable with pluralism. However, these motifs were carefully curated to avoid animate figures, adhering strictly to Islamic aniconism. This synthesis physically represents an Islamic worldview of inclusivity and communal cooperation—

welcoming diverse craftsmanship while remaining firmly rooted in Tawhid (the oneness of God).

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the profound ways in which moral principles, religious ethics, and communal norms are deeply embedded within the architectural and spatial configurations of traditional Malay dwellings. As exemplified by the Rumah Penghulu Demang Abdul Ghani, the conventional house serves not only as a physical shelter but as a rich cultural text through which the values of *adab* (proper conduct), religiosity, communal harmony, and intergenerational responsibility are materially expressed, sustained, and transmitted. Although these built forms underwent profound adaptations to accommodate contemporary functional needs and globalized aesthetic influences during the 19th and early 20th centuries, their foundational religious principles remained uncompromisingly embedded within the spatial configuration, ornamental language, and architectural symbolism.

Crucially, the selective hybridization of Colonial, Chinese, and Indian elements did not dilute the Melayu identity. Instead, it provided a richer, more robust architectural vocabulary with which to enforce spatial zoning, visual privacy, and community etiquette. This interplay between material adaptation and immaterial culture advances ethnic studies by demonstrating how identity is physically constructed and lived. From this perspective, the analysis underscores the importance of understanding architecture as an active extension of social life. The spatial organization of the Melayu Melaka traditional house reveals how everyday ethics reinforce social hierarchies, gender roles, and religious norms. The house becomes a definitive site where intangible cultural values—such as respect, privacy, cooperation, and devotion—are translated into tangible spatial arrangements, reflecting the community's internal cultural logic.

Furthermore, this study contributes to broader discourses on cultural continuity and adaptation. As Malaysia grapples with rapid urbanization and modern lifestyle shifts, understanding how traditional spatial ethics operate provides vital insight into the challenges of cultural preservation. The enduring emphasis on religious adherence, familial loyalty, and social order facilitates the continual transmission of Melayu Melaka cultural identity across generations. The traditional dwelling thus exemplifies how communities successfully negotiate modern pressures while retaining core values, offering a resilient model for exploring cultural continuity among other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Ultimately, these values persist not only as defining elements of the built environment but as essential, adaptive components of the community's wider

socio-cultural fabric. The findings illuminate how traditional knowledge systems can inform contemporary architectural practices, particularly in community planning, domestic design, and heritage conservation. By articulating the cultural logic behind these built environments, this research enriches the understanding of Malay cultural frameworks within Malaysia's plural society, fostering greater intercultural dialogue and contributing to more informed, inclusive heritage policies and development frameworks.

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