Negeri Sembilan Traditional House and Western Sumatera Minangkabau House:  
A Comparison of the Interior Space in the Architecture Aspect

Setiawan Hardono * and Nurul Balqis Ahmad Zakaria **
*Department of Civil Engineering  
Politeknik Port Dickson, 71050 Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia  
E-mail: setiawan@polipd.edu.my

*Department of General Studies  
Politeknik Port Dickson, 71050 Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia  
Email: nurulbalqis@polipd.edu.my

Abstract
This study examines the cultural and architectural aspects of Minangkabau heritage house in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia and Sumatra, Indonesia. Cultural and community relations in both the Minangkabau regions have begun since the 16th century. The Minangkabau house architecture has unique characteristics as it is influenced by the elements of nature and matrilineal culture. Its curved and horn-like roof structure, interior space layout exhibiting traits of traditional matrilineal system, and the nature-inspired decorations are some of the basic architectural characteristics of the existing Minangkabau house. However, the Minangkabau heritage house in Negeri Sembilan is different from those found in Western Sumatera. These differences have affected the Design authenticity of the existing Minangkabau house. Efforts to preserve the cultural traditions and Minangkabau architecture is a big challenge that must be faced by both of these regional areas. The objective of this study is to identify the characteristics of the house and analyze the factors influencing the differences and changes in the design of the Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Western Sumatera Minangkabau house interior. If there are no efforts made to continuously study the Minangkabau house, it is feared that the house will lose its unique design and traditional functions. The methodology used in this study is the review method. The research data is collected through observation, interview and visual data of architecture photos, all being carried out simultaneously during the fieldwork. Architecture photos taken will be analyzed and interpreted through the interview data obtained. The results of this study can confirm the interior layout and matrilineal influences on the design and architecture aspects.

Key words: Culture, Negeri Sembilan traditional house, Minangkabau House, Architecture, Interior space

1. Introduction

Homes are not only built to serve as a refuge for humans but also as a space for a community to conduct social relations, interact and perform rituals in their cultural beliefs (Ozaki, 2002). According to Fox (1993), traditional house is the only great creation in architecture that symbolizes the culture of a particular society. For the Minangkabau community, their traditional house is known as a “house of custom” because traditional ceremonies such as the coronation of the village chief, celebrating guests and the chief’s stopover to wait for the guests, funerals and others are held in the house (Widya, 2001). Therefore, the interior of the Minangkabau house is designed and arranged with a variety of functions to meet the needs of its residents who strongly adheres to the tradition (Is, 2000).

The specialty and uniqueness of Minangkabau culture compared to other cultures in the region of the archipelago is that the Minangkabau community practices the customs of maternal lineage inheritance or otherwise known as matrilineal (Nasroen, 1957; Selat,1975; Ibrahim, 1993; Edison & Nasron, 2010). This customary practice ensures that
all inheritance such as land, farms, fields including architectural heritage such as the Minangkabau house will be bequeathed to the mother and the daughter (Nasroen, 1957). According to Azwar (2001) and Ng (1980), the function and space layout in Minangkabau house is built and designed to fulfill the needs and comfort of its inhabitants which is matrilineal dominated.

Matrilineal tradition, philosophy, rituals, religious beliefs, social activities and economy are among the characteristics of Minangkabau culture translated in the beauty of the Minangkabau house architectural elements (Soeroto, 2005). However, previous researchers (Hanafi, 1985; Idrus, 1996) have a different view regarding the relations between the Minangkabau house in Negeri Sembilan and the ones in Western Sumatera, although both regions were inhabited by communities of the same Minangkabau culture. The difference is especially seen in the design and layout of the interior space (Idrus, 1996). To confirm the view of the two researchers, a study on Minangkabau houses in both regions of Southeast Asia that form a community of Minangkabau culture has to be conducted (Figure 1). The origin of the Minangkabau people from West Sumatra (Figure 2) and migrated to Kuala Pilah, Rembau and Tampin, Negeri Sembilan (Figure 3).
2. Objective and Research Methodology

The objective of this study is to identify the characteristics of the design and layout of the interior space of Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Western Sumatera Minangkabau house. The interior of Minangkabau houses in both regions are studied to find the similarities and differences. According to Mat (2000), the interior of the house consists of two types of components; architectural components such as floors, walls and interior roofs as well as decorative components that adorn the interior space such as furniture and other decorations. In addition, this study will identify and analyze the factors influencing the differences and changes that occur in the interior design of heritage house in Negeri Sembilan and Western Sumatera. The methodology of this study utilizes and makes references to previous researches that were carried out such as the ones by (Is, 2000; Asri, 2004; Widya, 2001; Ng, 1980; Jayatri, 2001). The study will further be reinforced with field study on the traditional houses found in the villages of Negeri Sembilan. A number of individuals, residents and the surrounding community are interviewed to obtain background information about the social relations and local culture in their daily activities which are associated to the physical aspects of the house. Visual data such as photos and measurements of the house were documented. Interviews and drawing documentation of the traditional houses are carried out simultaneously. This study will present a comparison of the design and layout of the interior space of Negeri Sembilan traditional houses and Minangkabau houses in Western Sumatera.

3. Minangkabau Custom

The Minangkabau custom controls the entire life system of its community through its philosophy, rituals, politics, economy, social, religious beliefs and others (Nasroen, 1957). Although the Minangkabau custom does not exist in written form, and only recorded through oral proverbs, the community believes that custom is a rule that must be observed (Asri, 2004; Soeroto, 2005). According to the custom, people should be educated with good values so as to follow the examples from natural phenomena that serve to bring happiness and sustenance to creatures on the Earth especially human beings (Manggis, 1971). These events are in line with Islamic religious beliefs. The Minangkabau custom practices maternal kinship system known by the term matrilineal (Amir, 1997). Amir (1997) further states that there are three elements in a matrilineal kinship system. Firstly, the descent is by the genealogy of the maternal line. Secondly, a marriage is according to matrilineal exogamy, where an individual must marry a person from another Minangkabau ethnic. Thirdly, the mother holds the principal authority over the economy and household peace.

According to Hakimy (1978), the Minangkabau custom is divided into four stages and these stages fall into two categories, namely customs that can be changed and those that cannot be changed. Customs that cannot be changed are the rules enshrined in the Qur’an and Hadith. On the other hand, customs that can be changed are those rules that apply to the current situation and are subject to change according to the agreement by all the chiefs during the council. Ceremonial customs appertain to rules such as weddings, births and other ceremonies. In Western Sumatera, the Minangkabau custom which follows the concept of matrilineal system has been practiced for 500 or 600 years ago (Hamka, 2006). Nevertheless, in Negeri Sembilan the matrilineal system began in the sixteenth century after the arrival of the Minangkabau people of Western Sumatera (Adil, 1981). In Western Sumatera, there are two laws which are Koto Piliang (autocracy) led by Datuk Ketemenggungan and Bodi Caniago (democracy) led by Datuk Perpath (Is, 2000; Widya, 2001). Both of these leadership types have resulted in some impact on the design and architecture of Minangkabau house.

4. Heritage House Of Minangkabau

The heritage house of Minangkabau is one of the traditional architectural beauties materialized by its society and is a proud symbol of the existence of a particular culture and race (Soeroto, 2005; Yovita, 2012). In the archipelago region, the architecture of a Minangkabau house is more easily recognizable compared to the architecture of other cultures because the exterior design consists of a roof structure that is curved or horn-like (Idrus, 1996). The unique architectural features of the Minangkabau house interior are a reflection of the habitual matrilineal Minangkabau culture.
4.1 Negeri Sembilan Traditional House

An element of the physical exterior of Negeri Sembilan traditional houses is the curved roof but they do not possess the horn-like roof as seen in Western Sumatera (Figure 4 and 5). According to Idrus (1996), the size of a Minangkabau house in Negeri Sembilan is differentiated by the number of pillars; 12 pillars, 16 pillars and 20 pillars. The basic characteristics and forms of a Minangkabau house consists of elements such as pillared floor, high roof, steep and multi-level, construction that does not use nails and which utilizes the building system of punch and bolt (Figure 6, 7 and 8).

Fig. 4 Negeri Sembilan Traditional House (Hjh. Zainab House)  
Fig. 5 Western Sumatera Minangkabau House (Bundo Kanduang House)  
Fig. 6 Pillared floor  
Fig. 7 High and steep roof  
Fig. 8 Building system of punch and bolt

4.2 Western Sumatera Minangkabau House

The shape of a Minangkabau house in Western Sumatera is rectangular and elongated. The house is divided into two kinds of space; the front or middle space and space for rooms. The kitchen area will only be provided if necessary. In general, there are two types of Minangkabau house depending on the customary law system. Typically, the Koto Piliang Minangkabau house has a porch (Soeroto, 2005) and many of this kind can be found in the province of Tanah Datar, Batu Sangkar. In contrast, the Bodi Caniago Minangkabau house has no porch and can be found in the provinces of Agam, Bukit Tinggi and Kota Lima Pulu, Paya Kumbuh (Is, 2000; Jayatri, 2001; Widya, 2001; Asri, 2004; Soeroto, 2005). The porch refers to the height of the elevated floor at the side of the house (Figure 10).

The only visible difference is the presence of a porch. Other than that, the architecture and design of the two types of houses have a lot in common. The physical form of the roof is curved, similar to a buffalo horn, known as “bergonjong”. The size of a Minangkabau house depends on the number of space inside it. It is typically made up of
three, five, seven to nine spaces, and the biggest is twenty spaces (Soeroto, 2005). The walls are decorated with carvings of nature such as plants and greenery that symbolize the Minangkabau’s nature philosophy.

![Diagram of Koto Piliang and Bodi Caniago Minangkabau houses](image)

**Koto Piliang Minangkabau House**

**Bodi Caniago Minangkabau House**

Fig. 9 Floor plan and front view of Koto Piliang and Bodi Caniago Minangkabau house.

Source: Is (2000)

5. Discussion

The following are the results of the findings based on the analysis conducted on the houses. This analysis encompasses two parts; physical characteristics of the house and matrilineal influences on the interior space layout.

5.1 Comparison between the interior space of Negeri Sembilan Traditional House and Western Sumatera Minangkabau house

5.1.1 The design and interior layout in Negeri Sembilan Traditional House

The space plays an important role in the architecture of traditional houses because cultural activities, philosophy and the ideas of the community in the past are reflected in the functions of the interior space. The interior of a Negeri Sembilan traditional house is divided into three sections that have specific functions such as the verandah which is placed at the front of the house, main house which is at the center of the house and the kitchen which is at the back of the house (Figure 10). According to Idrus (1996), the architecture of the traditional house resembles the architectural styles in the region such as Minangkabau, Aceh, Bugis and Banjar in Indonesia as well as Thailand among others. Environmental influences also play a role in the design of the existing house.

The interior layout of the Negeri Sembilan traditional house can also be divided into front area, the center area and the back area. According to custom, the men will enter the house through the front door while the women will enter the house through the back door. During ceremonies or celebrations, the guests of honor or the male guests will be placed in the side verandah. This is so that they are not disturbed by the passage which the other guests use to enter and exit as the front entrance is located near the base of the verandah. Additionally, the sleeping arrangement for the unmarried children will be at the base of the serambi. The purpose is to create a distance from the bedrooms of the married children. According to taboos, the position of the unmarried children’s bed space must not be right next to the married children’s bedroom for fear of disturbing the comfort of the couple. Meanwhile, the main house area at the center is provided as the seating area for the female guests specifically the wives or the daughters to gather. According to custom and religion of Islam, men and women cannot mix freely. Thus, their seating arrangements are separated in such a way.

Table 1 The comparison between the interior space of Negeri Sembilan traditional house and Western Sumatera
Minangkabau house is summarized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Interior space</th>
<th>Negeri Sembilan traditional house</th>
<th>Western Sumatera Minangkabau house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.  | Interior flooring | i. The floor plan is four-sided but not rectangular (refer to Figure 9).  
  ii. Floor is made of wooden planks  
  iii. The floor heights are different and multi-level | i. The floor plan is rectangular and elongated (refer to Figure 10)  
  ii. Floor is made of layers of fronds.  
  iii. The floor is even, except for the porch of Koto Piliang house. |
| 2.  | Walls | i. Walls are made of wooden planks.  
  ii. Walls of the rooms have windows.  
  iii. Walls are vertically erected. | i. Walls are made of weaved bamboo.  
  ii. Walls of the rooms have no windows  
  iii. Walls are constructed to be 4 – 5 degrees inclined and expand at the top. |
| 3.  | Decoration | i. Flowers, plants, moon, stars and geometrical motifs.  
  ii. Carvings are found at specific parts. | i. Plants, animals, geometrical motifs.  
  ii. Carvings are found at all parts of the house especially on the walls, pillars and the exterior parts of the house. |
| 4.  | House concept | i. Has a verandah  
  ii. Has a porch at the end or base of the verandah.  
  iii. Has a minimum number of bedrooms and prepared for the newlyweds  
  iv. Has 3 types of fixed spaces which are the verandah, main house and the kitchen | i. No verandah  
  ii. Only the Koto Piliang Minangkabau house has a porch on the side of the house.  
  iii. Has a large number of rooms and all the married children will have a room while the newlyweds will get a special room.  
  iv. Has 2 types of fixed spaces which are the center space and a room at the rear space. |
| 5.  | Space layout | i. Moderate matrilineal influence.  
  ii. Has a verandah at the front, main house has 1 room at the center, and kitchen at the back.  
  iii. Has a porch at the verandah | i. Strong matrilineal influence.  
  ii. No verandah, rumah ibu has many rooms at the front or center and the kitchen is outside the house.  
  iii. Koto Piliang house has a verandah on the side of the house. |
| 6.  | House size | i. Depends on the number of pillars such as the 12 pillars, 16 pillars and 20 pillars type. | i. The number of spaces depends on the number of daughters living in the house such as 3, 5, 7, 9 up to 20 spaces. |
| 7.  | Interior pillars | i. In ritual, the main pillar that was mounted is known as “Tiang Tongah”, much like “Tiang Seri”. | i. In ritual, the main pillar that was mounted is known as “Tonggak Tuo”. |
5.1.2 The design and interior layout in Western Sumatera Minangkabau House

The matrilineal function in a Minangkabau house affects the design and layout of the interior spaces. The number of spaces inside a Minangkabau house depends on the number of daughters who are living in the house. According to Asri (2004) and Ng (1980), every married daughter qualifies to receive a bedroom and the newlyweds will be given the privilege of having the end room. Unmarried teenage daughters share a room while older women and children are given a room close to the kitchen with the understanding that they often use the kitchen (Asri, 2004). The matrilineal clan spends much of their time carrying out daily activities in the house. The space and movement in the house were designed and laid out in such a way to provide comfort and security to them (Ng, 1980; Azwar, 2001). The interior is divided into the front or center and bed spaces at the back.

Asri (2004) further states that in the interior plan of a Minangkabau house, the distance between the front area and the back area is known as lanja (Figure 11). Lanja that is furthest to the back is known as the room which is reserved for the married daughter. The next lanja which is the one heading forward is known as bandua and serves as the place of awaiting the arrival of the occupants of the room. The next front lanja is known as labuah and serves as the dining area for female guests who are not residents of the home. Lanja at the very front is known as the hall or balai and serves as the seating area of the male guests when celebrating rituals and ceremonies. It is also called the honorable area. If the house has a porch such as the Koto Piliang Minangkabau house, it will serve as the seating area for guests of honor and ranks such as the village chief, community leaders and others. In the second lanja, or the bandua, the floor is elevated by 20 cm. This is intended to show the honor of the matrilineal clan when receiving guests (Asri, 2004).
6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the architecture and layout of the interior space of traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan and Western Sumatera share common characteristics but they also have distinct differences. However, the communities are still driven by the idea, philosophy, rituals and custom that inspire the planning of the interior space based on the same elements of culture and custom. This is caused by the society’s changing perceptions due to the local cultural assimilation process. When a person’s outlook on life changes, all his rules, principles, and beliefs about life will also change. This in turn will change the design and architecture of the Minangkabau house interior which is a house of custom to them. This situation is also driven by the matrilineal influence that plays a role in the social and economic activities as well as the environment that breathes functions to the house interior. Nevertheless, one notion that holds strong inside the Minangkabau community is they regard themselves as people of matrilineal ancestry and all the inheritance including the house becomes a right of ownership. They also have the right to dominate the design of their traditional Minangkabau house. A challenge for Malaysia and Indonesia is to conserve and maintain the architecture of Minangkabau house in their own mould. This is so that the future generation will understand the Minangkabau culture and architecture that was once deemed glorious during its time.

REFERENCES


