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## Malay Furniture: Design, function and meaning

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to present the furniture usage in Malay traditional house spatial organization. Data analysis is focused on *Anjung/Rumah Tangga*, *Serambi*, and *Rumah Ibu* area. Qualitative research is analyzed from the literature review and case study at Maliah Idin's Melaka traditional house at Jasin, Melaka. The study found that the structure of the Melaka house played a significant role in creating built-in and loose type furniture. A built-in furniture is a form and space that has a combination of furniture function and space structure. The furniture presents a manifestation of the Malay culture and the way of life.

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*Keywords:* Design; function; meaning.

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### 1. Introduction

Furniture plays an important role in explaining the way of life of an individual in the spatial. Furniture also reflects the characteristics of the interior space and cultural symbol in time (age) and place. The design of the furniture does not show the lifestyle and spatial users behavior pattern directly. Indirectly the function and needs of furniture designed able to describe the state of culture through activities such as working, socializing, entertaining, relaxing and dining (Kim, J., Choi, K.).

Architecture and the Decorative background is intimately related to furniture, and any integral study of furniture must always be judged by its architectural environment (Boger, 1959). Hence, not only physical elements (form, color, material and structure) but immaterial elements (value, custom, lifestyle and view of arts) should be

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considered in design process of furniture (Kim, J., Choi, K.). Furniture can produce result presents a manifestation of the unique culture and the way of life that fits every cultural pattern and situation. And it can lead to creating a user-centered design that competitive power of furniture design.

### 1.1. Physical form of Malay house

Ismail (1992) describes the physical of the Melaka house can be explained either by vertical or horizontal. The vertical design of Melaka house can be divided into three parts - pillar, body, and roof. According to Nasir (1982), pillar part starting from the base of the pillar to the floor. The house pillars are mounted on stone plinths. Important structural located at pillar part are wooden beams and joists. Above beams and joists, is where the floor boards are placed by arranged. On the floor, there is the Sill that is also function as a separator between space components or house units. It also functions as a floor cover. Pillar part also includes a stair.

Body part consists of the space between the roof and pillar (Omar, 1979). In the body part, spaces and the spatial components accommodate a variety of function. The body part is walled to protect space from various elements. Doors and windows are a part of the wall. Melaka house has several doors, the front door, the interval door and the rear door. Melaka house also has many windows that open toward the outside. If the windows are extending to the floor, balustrade will be fitted at the bottom.

Malay house form is shown on the roof part. Melaka houses are categorized in the long roof design. The ridge board is long straight and mounted horizontally elongated. The side walls are mounted roof gable. The house uses gable roof type. Under the gable roof located a hidden space known the *loteng* or loft.

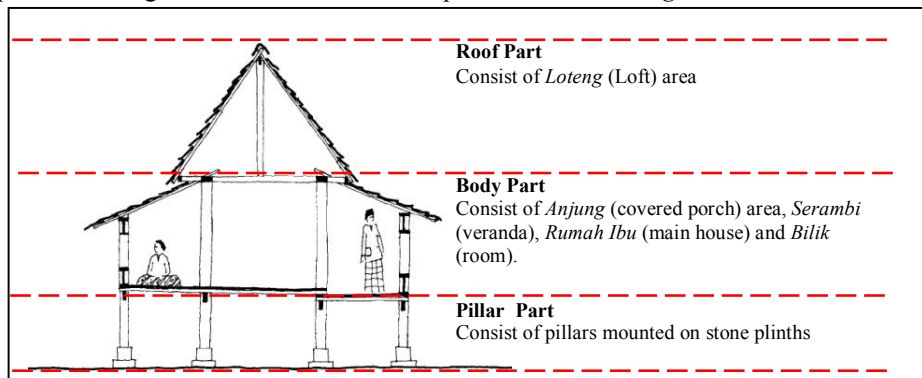


Fig. 1. Three vertical part of Melaka House.

Sources: L.J. Yuan, (1987)

### 1.2. Relationship of furniture and physical elements of Malay house

According to Abidin (1981), a physical element is the smallest whole component that recognized as the integral part of the house. In the Malay house, elements range from the structural frame to the household utensils. The frames are made up of plinths, columns, beams and roof. Plinths are made out of granite or concrete. Columns and beams are made out of timber, and so is the roof structure. Roofing materials are *atap* or tiles, although corrugated galvanized sheets, nowadays, are frequently replacing more traditional materials.

Floors are timber. Concrete floors are also used in the kitchen when the floor is not raised. Walls are of woven bamboo or vertical or horizontal timber weatherboarding. Timber screens, elaborately cured, are also used.

Furniture includes mats, mattresses, chests, stove and an *ambin* or platform. Utensils include those used for cooking and water collection. Table 1 shows the division of physical elements into six systems:

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