

# **CARVING MOTIFS IN TIMBER HOUSES OF KELANTAN AND TEREENGGANU: SUSTAINING MALAY ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY**



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# Introduction

- Malay traditional timber houses are normally decorated with excellent carvings with distinctive feature such as on external walls, over doors and windows and fascia board of gable end to provide ventilation as well as decoration,.



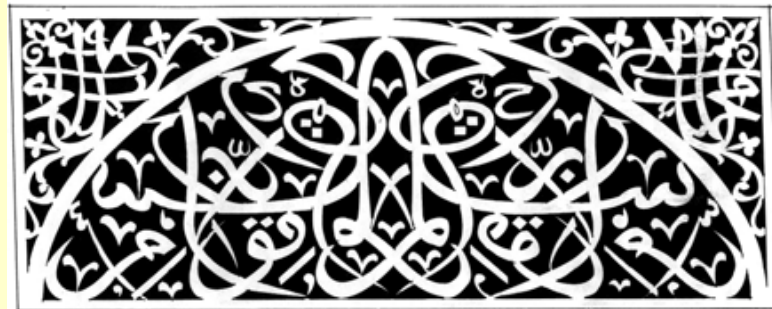
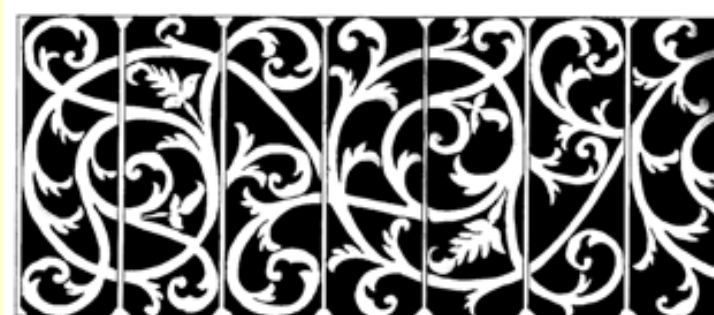
- Woodcarving is considered as an integral component to the vernacular Malay houses in the northeastern states of Peninsular Malaysia, namely Kelantan and Terengganu.
- Carving motifs of flora, geometry, Arabic calligraphy and cosmic features are depicted on carved panels of doors, walls, railings and ventilation components in different shapes and sizes.

# Aims of the Study

- **To highlight the visual interpretation of the carving motifs which were applied in the house components. This study provides a significant pattern of carving motif and its application in the carved components of the timber houses of Kelantan and Terengganu which were built in the years of 1850s to late 1940s. Its configuration and distribution in the building fabric were also examined.**
- **The pattern of architectural embellishment could serve as a framework which could be considered as part of invaluable Malay heritage and they were indeed of historical and cultural importance. The woodcarving was a traditional art that reflected the local traditions and customs.**

# Research Questions

1. What are the types of carving motif and contents of carved elements found in the traditional timber houses?
1. What are the uses, styles and pattern of regularity of carving motifs that signify the regional identity?



# Methods of Research

The required data was gathered from the following three research methods:

- (1) Measured drawings and reports of timber houses from the Centre for the Study of Built Environment in the Malay World (KALAM) at the Department of Architecture in the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). House plans, black and white plan view drawings, elevations of the houses and detail drawings were referred for visual descriptive and interpretive analysis. A total of 100 carved components from the thirteen houses (9 from Kelantan and 4 from Terengganu) were reviewed and analyzed which served as pictorial data.**
- (2) Personal interviews with two prominent woodcarvers for purpose of obtaining their verification on the installation of carvings in the traditional Malay architecture in general and application of motifs in particular including reasons of selecting the motifs.**
- (3) Reviews of literature.**

# Location of the timber houses



Mohamad Dobah's, Nik Salleh's, Hasan's, Hasan Yusuf's, Wan Hussain's, and Wan Sulong's houses

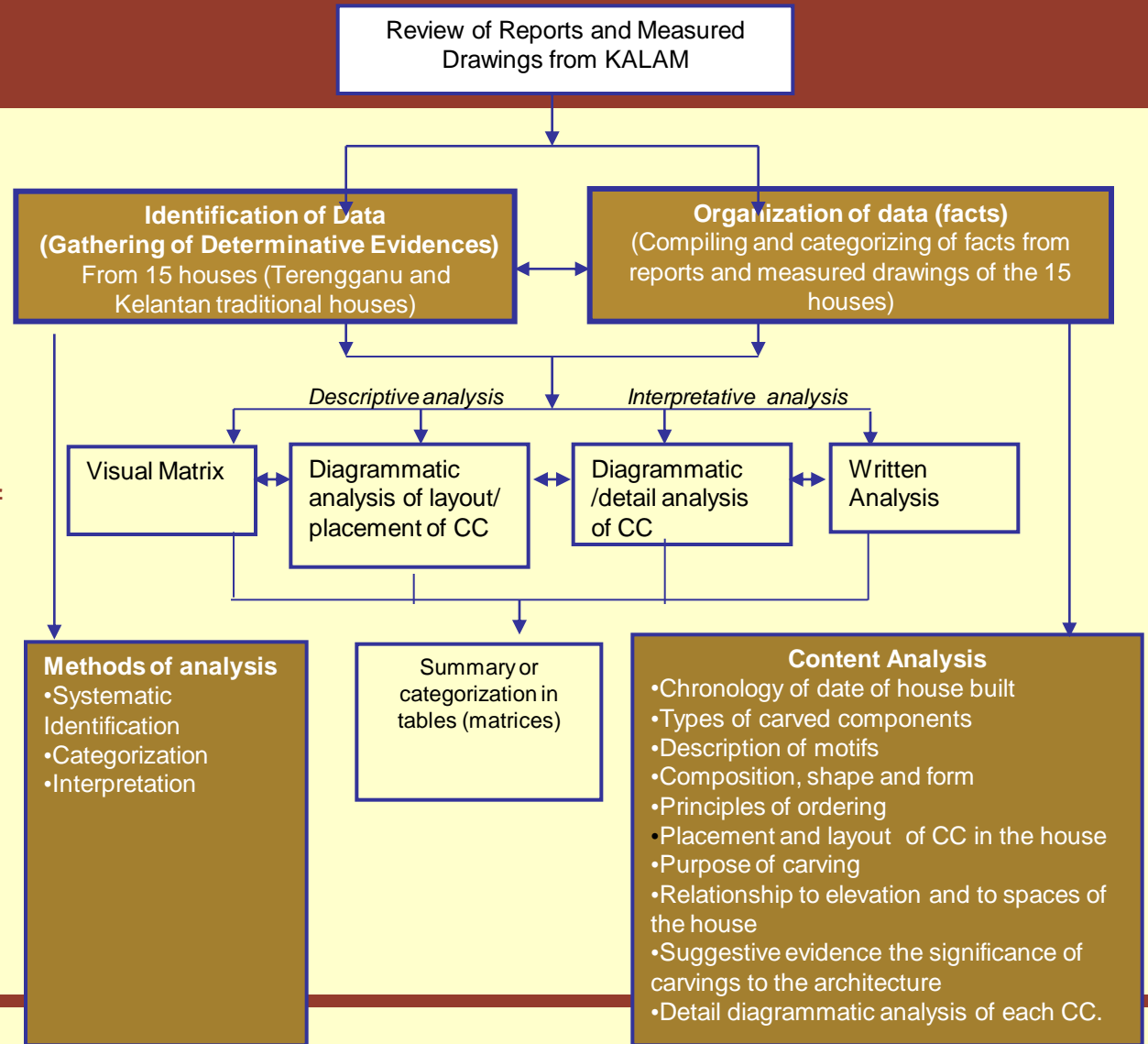
Lebai Ali's and Tok Yakub's houses

Mariam's, Abdul Rahim's, Biji sura's and Wan Embong's houses

**Figure 1:** Location of the traditional houses in Peninsular Malaysia

# The Analysis

- The measured drawings were analyzed in four attributes of carving: (1) Motifs and patterns, (2) perforation and incision, (3) Shapes of panels and (4) Size and layout.
- The method of visual analysis matrix was used to provide information on the pattern of distribution of carved components for each house in relation to the attributes of carving.



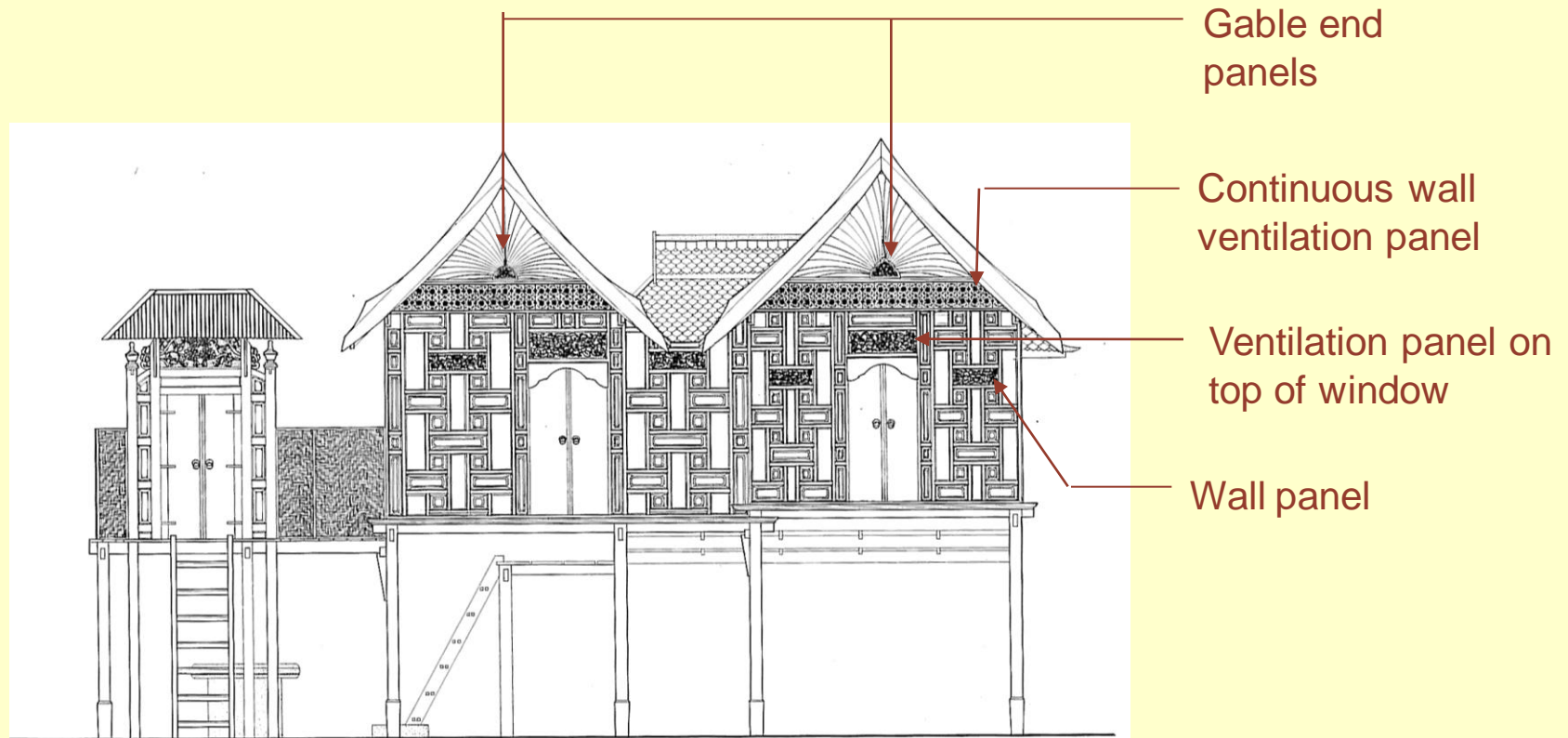
**Figure 2:** Research tactics involves in the review of documents from KALAM archives

# Results and Findings

- **The analysis revealed that there are 12 different types of architectural carved components with distinctive visual forms. They are ventilation panels of window, door and wall, railings of verandah and staircase, wall panels, leaves of door and gate, roof eaves, brackets and gable end panels.**
- **They were produced in relation to the architectural elements and the house forms. The carved components were fabricated with specific visual attributes: (1) carving motif and pattern, (2) types of perforation and incision, (3) shape of panel, and (4) size and layout.**
- **Compositions of the carving motifs on the specific panels were according to specific layouts and regulated by the specific ordering principles**



# Distribution of the Components in the Timber houses



**Figure 3:** The layout of carved components at the front facade of Wan Sulong's house

# Distribution of the Components in the Timber houses



**Figure 4:** Railing at serambi and cared ventilation panels fitted above the interior wall of Abdul Rahim's house

# Types of Motifs used in the Carved Components

No.	Types of motif	Carved Components	Quantity (%)
1	Flora	Wall ventilation panel (PWVP) Railing at <i>serambi/Sorong</i> (RP), Window railing (WRP), Wall ventilation panel (PWVP) (S), window ventilation panel (WVP), Gable end (GEP), Door ventilation panel (DVP), wall panel (WP)	55 (55%)
2	Combination	Wall ventilation panel (PWVP) (S), Door and window ventilation panel (DVP), railing, gate and wall panels	27 (27%)
3	Geometry	Ventilation panels above walls (PWVP), railing panels	14 (14%)
4	Calligraphy	Door ventilation panel (DVP)	4 (4%)

# Types of Motifs used in the Carved Components



Flora



Geometry

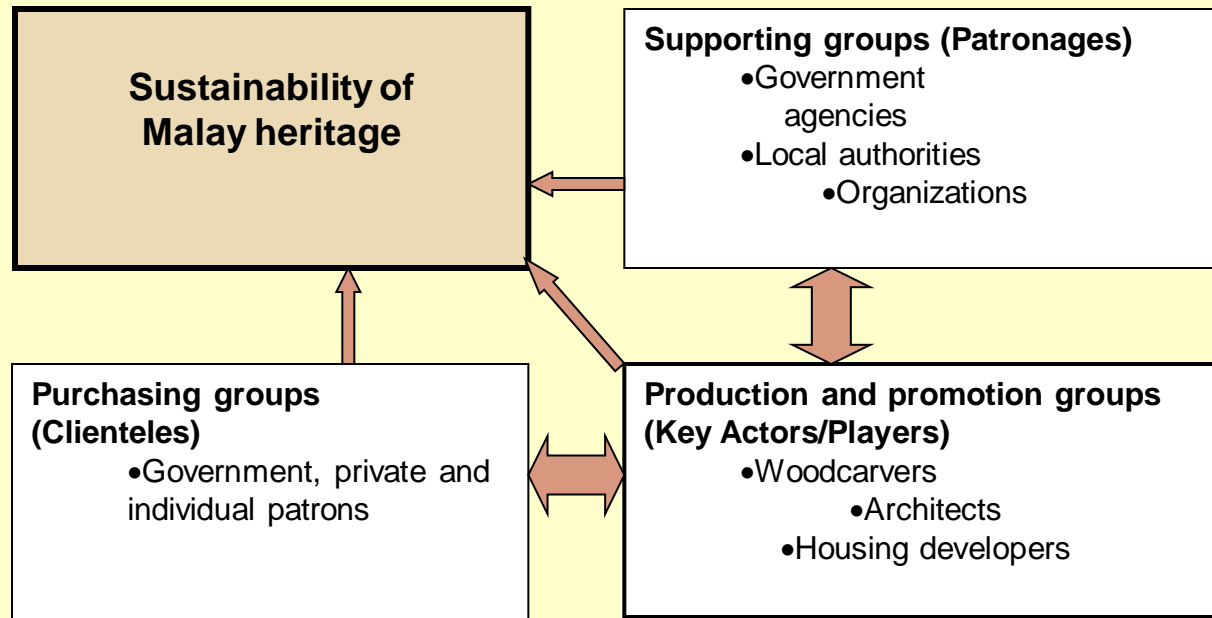


Combination

# Discussion

- **The specific arrangement of compositional elements in meandering or spiraling pattern, locally known as *awan larat* (meandering cloud) contributed to the individual character of the carved components found in the houses.**
- **Floral composition serves as one of carving archetypes originated from this region.**
- **Ability to apply the traditional concept in carving works is vital apart from having logical thinking and creativity.**
- **Understanding of the knowledge by the craftsmen is significant because their levels of artistry and technical skill could determine the distinct characteristics and features of woodcarving which are considered as regional identity.**

# Suggested Framework to Sustain Carving



**Figure 5:** Proposed framework on the sustainability of woodcarving as architectural heritage

# Conclusion

- The carved components were not objects crafted in a simple way but deeply anchored to the traditional principles which have been recognized from older traditions.
- These works are manifestation of artistic qualities and skillfulness possessed by the traditional craftsmen.
- Woodcarving is an item which is strong in definition of the character of the vernacular type which is in harmony with the regional identity. However the idea of work should evolve and develop instead of remaining as static and homogenous in character.
- The advancement and development of this product should be guided and kept within the prescribe framework. This has been practiced by the Malay craftsmen throughout the ages as evident in the woodcarvings produced during the middle nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.

**THANK YOU**