

VISUAL FORMS AND PLACEMENT OF CARVED COMPONENTS IN TRADITIONAL TIMBER HOUSES OF KELANTAN AND TERENGGANU

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analytical study of the visual forms and placement of carved components in the timber houses of Kelantan and Terengganu which reflects its significant attributes and uses. An analytical study on ten houses in Kelantan and five houses in Terengganu was conducted by visual descriptive and interpretative analyses on 15 sets of reports and carving measured drawings of the houses. Data from the drawings was triangulated and validated with interpretations from the prominent woodcarvers on art and crafts of woodcarving, and supported by literatures of Malay woodcarving. The analysis revealed that several types of carved components with distinctive features including wall, door and window ventilation panels, roof and gate panels, railings and stringers were fitted in harmonious relationship with the architectural components within the house fabrics. The placement of these components with specific carving motif, shape, size and layout in the houses reflects certain orders and regional identity of the Kelantan and Terengganu traditional houses.

Keywords: Woodcarving, traditional timber house, architectural elements, visual forms and carving motifs

INTRODUCTION

Woodcarving is ornamentation to the timber architecture and it is part and parcel to the vernacular Malay houses of Kelantan and Terengganu which are located in the north-eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia. Carved ornamentation with distinctive features contributes to the identity of this region which originated from the architecture of Langkasuka Empire dated as early as 14th century (Farish and Eddin, 2003). Carvings from Kelantan and Terengganu exhibit visual aesthetic which are the most refined and beautiful of all Malay woodworks and the shape and carving techniques comprise a degree of beautification not found elsewhere (Raja Bahrin, 1988; Syed Ahmad Jamal, 1994). Inasmuch, woodcarving was one type of ornamentation much-admired for its intricacy and complexity in design which embellished the timber houses of Kelantan and Terengganu existed in 1850s to late 1940s.

Carving composition including forms of motifs and patterns, types of perforation and incisions give distinct characteristics and features of carved components which are in parallel with the distribution of architectural elements and its designated use as

house components. Various components with different shapes, layouts and sizes including ventilation panels of doors, windows, and walls, railings, gates and roofs panels depict different types of motifs, namely flora, geometry, and Islamic calligraphy. Perforation in carving is a fully piercing technique done on a piece of wooden panel leaving a cut-through section (Norhaiza, 2008; Ismail, 2005)

This paper presents a finding of a descriptive and interpretive study of the various forms of carving components fitted on different types of house components found in the traditional timber houses of Kelantan and Terengganu. The major research questions pertaining to this study include: (1) What are the types of woodcarving forms and features produced as architectural components? and (2) What are the layout and pattern of distribution of woodcarvings in the timber houses?

METHODS: Analytical Review on Measured Drawings and Interview with Woodcarvers

The analytical review was conducted on fifteen prominent Malay timber houses. Ten houses were located in Kelantan and the other five houses were located in Terengganu. Table 1.0 shows the information of the houses including the types of architectural forms and year of construction, owners and locations of the houses as well as types of carved components.

A set of measured drawings which consists of plans and elevations of the 15 houses including crossed sectional and detail drawings was reviewed for detailed descriptive and interpretive analysis. The purpose of this analytical review was to identify the types of carved components and its orders of placement, determine its carving motifs and principles of composition. The measured drawings and the reports were obtained 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).

Table 1: Timber houses of Kelantan and Terengganu and carved components

Type of House	Year Built	Owner	Location of House	Carved Components
Rumah bumbung perabung lima	1920's	Hassan Mohd Amin	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of door and window, ventilation panel of wall, roof eave panels
Rumah Bujang Berserambi Dua Beradik	1850's	Tuan Mohamad Dobah (Tuan Mohamad Abdullah)	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of walls
Rumah Bujang	1800's	Wan Aisyah	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of walls, bracket panels
Rumah bumbung perabung lima	1920's	Wan Ahmad Abdullah	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors ventilation panel of wall
Rumah bumbung perabung lima	1930's	Yaakub Mohammad	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors, ventilation panel of wall, decorative panel of door
Rumah bumbung	1937	Wan Hussain Wan	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors, ventilation panel of wall,

perabung lima		Abdul Rahman		stringers
Rumah bumbung perabung lima	1933	Hassan Yusof	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors, ventilation panel of wall, stringers
Twelve-pillarded house/ Long-roofed house	1800's	Tok Yakub	Bachok, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors, ventilation panel of wall, wall panel
Rumah bujang berserambi dua beradik	1920's	Wan Sulong	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of doors and windows, ventilation panel of wall, wall panel, gable end panels
Rumah Bujang Berkembar Dua Beradik	188?	Mariam Mat	Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Ventilation panels of doors, ventilation panel of wall, railing panels, stringers, decorative carving of roof beam
Rumah bujang berselasar	1850's	Awang	Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Ventilation panel of wall,
Rumah bumbung limas	1914	Dato' Biji Sura (Nik Mohamad bin Hitam)	Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Ventilation panels of doors and windows, Railing panels, gate leaves, door leaves, wall panel
Rumah bujang berserambi dua beradik	1800's	Tok Ku Paloh 1	Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Ventilation panels of wall, stringers
Rumah bujang berserambi dua beradik	1800's	Tok Ku Paloh 2	Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Railing panels, panels of staircase, handrails
Rumah Bujang Berserambi Dua Beradik	1880's	Wan Mek	Tumpat, Kelantan	Ventilation panels of wall, gable end panels

Personal interviews were conducted with the two prominent woodcarvers, Norhaiza Nordin from Kampung Raja in Terengganu and Muhaimin Hasbullah from Temerloh in Pahang, to obtain their verifications on the attributes of carving components and its visual composition. Each interview was carried out in approximately two-hour period with the adoption of standardized open-ended interview questions. Narrative information from the woodcarvers was triangulated with the pictorial data gathered from the analytical review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that a collection of 13 types of architectural components were fitted with specific carvings: ventilation panels of window, door and wall, railings of verandah and staircase, wall panel, leaves of door and gate, stringer, gate, roof eave, bracket and gable end. The visual forms of the carved components were fabricated with specific attributes of carvings including types of motifs, types of perforation and incision, shapes and layouts and style of depictions. The distinctive forms of the various carved components are apparent with respect to its placement and layout in the interior as well as exterior fabrics of the Kelantan and Terenggan timber houses.

In terms of pattern of distribution of carved components in the houses, the ventilation panels fitted on top of walls that have various design forms were major carved components of the houses. These components were carved either in forms of perforated single rectangular or perforated continuous horizontal panels.

Most of carved components found in the selected timber houses represent floral motifs either in forms of naturalistic or stylized depiction with perforated or non-perforated carvings. This is suggestive indication that traditional craftsmen had strong preference for plant-based motifs. The Malay woodcarvers prefer to use creeping plants and flower producing plants because they were eye-catching and suitable for woodcarving. A possibility is that the motif of flora can be formed and composed in unrestricted fashion for various carved panels with unlimited types of pattern and carving layout according to the artistic and technical skill of craftsmen. Additionally, floral motif was acceptable in the Malay art because Islam permits the use of non-figurative elements in the artistic work (Othman, 1995). Apart from flora, motifs of geometry and combination of different elements were also apparent on different types of carved components including panels of ventilation, railing, door leaves, gate leaves and window bracket. Arabic calligraphy motif was only applied on ventilation panel above door and stringers of stairs were equipped with abstract representation. Relief carving with floral motif was mostly found on single ventilation panels fitted on top of windows, doors and walls either in vertical or horizontal rectangular layout. In short, the various carved components found on several architectural elements were fabricated with specific carving forms and motifs.

The analyses signified a certain pattern of distribution of carved components in each house and its compositional motifs in relation to the architectural elements and the house form. The placements of the carved components were fixed within the specific arrangement and significant functions and uses. It appears that the carved components in forms of ventilation panels were widely found on walls at *rumah ibu* (core house). It is the core area of the traditional house and usually located at the centre of the house. Muhammad Dobah' house from Kota Bharu, Kelantan is one of the examples of the traditional house that exhibits the placement of several carved panels as an integral part to the wall component as illustrated in Figure 1a. The carved panels were produced with distinctive features of carving attributes that gave the front façade of the house its defining character. For example, as appeared in the carved ventilation panel fitted on the upper left hand side of the wall shown in Figure 1b.

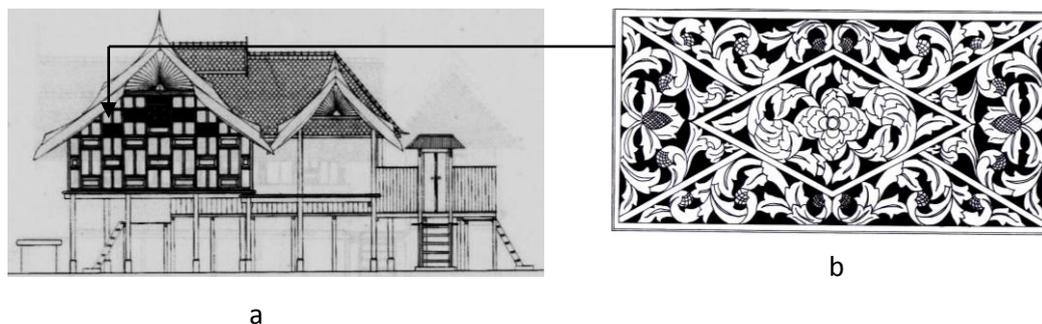


Figure 1: The layout of carved components at wall facade of *rumah ibu* at Mohamad Dobah's house (a) and one of carved ventilation panels (b) found on the wall

It is apparent that the placement of the carved panels on the main façade of the houses represents a certain mode of ornamentation for the earliest type of Kelantan and Terengganu dwelling architecture which had reached over a hundred years old. The design of the houses stands out clearly with the carved panels as complementary elements to the house overall form. It is apparent that the form of carvings was kept within certain dimensions and configuration in relation to the shapes of the wall facade and together they form the image of regional house architecture. The placement of carved panels on wall of rumah ibu probably denotes the importance of space utilization of this main area of the house.

From the various carved components found at the 15 houses located in Terengganu and Kelantan, it was found that various types of carved components were widely fixed across the external and internal walls of guest areas like rumah ibu and serambi. Carvings were also fitted to the architectural components found in the exterior fabrics of the house including staircase, gate and roof. These components which were fabricated as external features had become the central object for decoration as well. In short, most of carved components were fabricated with its appropriate carving forms and attributes for significant use in house setting as seen in many perforated wall ventilation panels which were found in almost all timber houses analysed thus far.

CONCLUSION

Carved components of Kelantan and Terengganu timber houses displayed distinctive visual forms with specific carving attributes. The visual forms of the components were skillfully crafted and formatted by the woodcarvers to be used primarily in domestic setting and synchronized with the pattern of its distribution. Consistency in the pattern of fabrication of the woodcarvings as carved ornamentation and its placement in the timber houses contribute to the regional identity of the houses.

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