

"*Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*" Philosophy in Minang-Malay Vernacular Ornamentation Wisdom

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Abstract

This study explores the traditional wisdom of the *Minang-Malay* community in the vernacular architecture of the *Selemak* tribe, focusing on the *Lanjong* House in Negeri Sembilan. Built 153 years ago, this house showcases unique architectural features and carvings, reflecting the cultural heritage of the *Seri Lemak* tribe, who migrated from West Sumatra to Malaysia 500 years ago. The research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to highlight the "*Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*" philosophy, where nature teaches humans to think creatively and integrate natural elements into architecture. The *Lanjong* House is a significant cultural artifact in Malay Nusantara.

Keywords: Alam Takambang Jadi Guru; philosophy; Minang-Malay; vernacular ornamentation

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1.0 Introduction

The Minangkabau tribe in Peninsular Malaysia originates from West Sumatra, known as the Minangkabau World. They believe that all of God's creations in the universe are sources of life. Nature educates humans about ever-changing natural phenomena, a concept embodied in their philosophy '*Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*' (ATJG)—Nature as a Teacher. According to (Abdul Wahab and Bahaudin, 2016), nature guides their quest for knowledge through the experience of '*merantau*' (migration), starting from the center (*darek*) to the coast, crossing the Strait of Malacca, and forming Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia.

The primary goal of building design in all cultures is the well-being of its inhabitants. Minangkabau architecture evolved under religious influences, from Animism to Hinduism and Islam. The '*merantau*' process also brought changes in building design, adapted to local conditions despite shared cultural roots (Abdul Wahab and Bahaudin, 2016). Traditional knowledge is crucial for cultural identity, which can be lost to global cultural currents without strong roots. Hashim et al., (2017) emphasize that understanding *Adat Perpatih* and ATJG requires high accuracy due to conflicts with Islamic practices. Their study shows the complexity of architectural elements in these houses. It is time to rediscover traditional knowledge, once known only to the master builders of Negeri Sembilan's traditional houses.

2.0 Literature Review

The Minangkabau community in Indonesia is renowned for its unique customs and culture, passed down through generations as daily guidelines and laws. The ATJG philosophy, rooted in ancient traditions and Islamic teachings, emphasizes learning from nature's four elements—Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. This is encapsulated in the saying: "*Kalau indak tahu nan siampek inyo bukan urang Minang*" (if you don't know all four, you are not Minang). This philosophy is reflected in their vernacular architecture, incorporating natural metaphors and harmonious designs. The Minangkabau view nature as a teacher, offering practical guidance for living and reducing disaster risks. This perspective influences many aspects of life, including architecture, and emphasizes that nature is a lifelong teacher and divine gift. The Minangkabau aesthetic concept is supported by four elements: learning from nature, reasoning methods, adherence to customary and Islamic law, and the use of materials and tools. These elements guide the creative process in traditional carving art, emphasizing form and function over personal expression.

The Minangkabau people have unique expressions to describe the appeal of their traditional architecture. Usman, (1985) citing Abu Naim, 1984 considers these phrases as expressions of beauty (aesthetics). The expression, representation, and corresponding four Malay metaphysical cosmic (Merican, 2017) and four nature elements (Akkach, 2005). The metaphysical approach links the Universe and Earth through an electromagnetic field and other forces, aiming for sustainability in human-designed buildings (Awang Lah and Saruwono, 2017). Their relationships are as follows:

No.	Building Attraction Expression (Daya Tarik)	Representation	Correspond to Nature's Element
1	<i>Alua jo patuik</i> (alur dan patut)	Flow and Appropriateness: Refers to placement and prominence, where "alur" can also mean rules or laws, and "patut" signifies something deemed appropriate.	Budi (Water) – intelligence, reasoning and emotion
2	<i>Raso jo pareso</i> (rasa dan periksa)	Taste and Check: representing sensory experiences, grounding, and the importance of examination.	Rasa (Air) – intangible and pervasive
3	<i>Barih balabeh</i> (baris dan pengaturannya)	Lines and Arrangement: indicating structure, order, and the invisible lines or currents that air follows.	Rupa (Earth) – physicality & structure
4	<i>Ukua jo jangko</i> (ukuran dan jangka).	Measure and Proportion: Indicates size and proportion. reflecting measurement, expansion, and the varying energy intensity	Jiwa (Fire) – dynamic and transformative

The Minangkabau worldview is deeply intertwined with nature, as reflected in their traditional proverbs. These sayings emphasize that the principles and characteristics of nature are a source of wisdom for shaping Minangkabau customs (Ismael, 2007). One such proverb is: '*Panakiak pisau saruik, ambiak galah batang lintabuang, saladang ambiak kanyiru. Nan satitiak jadikan lauik, nan sakapa jadikan gunung, alam takambang jadikan guru*' (Sharpening the knife on a whetstone, taking a pole from the lintabuang tree, catching fish using keniru. What is tiny becomes an ocean, and what is a handful becomes a mountain, consider nature as your teacher). This means humans should study and understand nature's laws and use them to guide life. It emphasizes two points: 1) Utilizing nature according to its function and drawing inspiration from it, and 2) Recognizing nature's laws as a source of knowledge for life management. The detailed continuation of the proverbs is as follows:

Proverbs	Meaning
<i>Panakiak pisau saruik, ambiak galah batang lintabuang, saladang ambiak kanyiru.</i>	It implies that when humans wisely utilize nature according to its functions, they will achieve optimal results.
<i>Nan satitiak jadikan lauik, nan sakapa jadikan gunung, alam takambang jadikan guru</i>	It encourages humans to be grateful and creative in developing ideas to benefit life. "ATJG" is the key phrase for the entire philosophy of these customs.

The Quran encourages studying nature's laws, as highlighted in Surah Ali Imran 3:9 and Surah Ya-Sin 36:38-40. Before Islam, Minangkabau customs emphasized rationality and truth through proverbs. With Islam's arrival, these customs aligned with Islamic teachings, integrating the Quran's guidance. The phrase "*Adat basandi sarak, sarak*

basandi kitabullah” reflects this harmony (Rahmi and Gunawan, 2020). The Minangkabau worldview, which focuses on nature, complements Islamic teachings, balancing matrilineal customs with Islam’s patrilineal system (Ismael, 2007). The concept of harmony in contradiction and the dual nature of constancy and change in nature inspire Minangkabau customs. Consequently, Minangkabau traditions are divided into two parts: those that remain constant and those that change, as expressed in the following proverb.

Customs	Proverb	Meaning
Permanent (Constant)	<i>‘Ramo-ramo sikumbang janti, katik endah pulang bakudo. Patah tumbuhan hilang baganti, pusako lamo baitu juo’</i> (Butterflies flutter gracefully, the small horse returns gallantly. What is broken regrows, what is lost is replaced, and so it is with old heritage)	Emphasizes the resilience and continuity of traditions and heritage, suggesting that even when things change or are lost, they are renewed and preserved over time.
Evolving (Change)	<i>‘Adat dipakai baru, kain dipakai using, using dibarui, lapuak dikajangi’</i> (Customs are renewed, just as old cloth is worn. When it becomes worn out, it can be refreshed; when it becomes decayed, it can be repaired)	Customs, as a heritage from the past, can change with the progress of time and societal changes

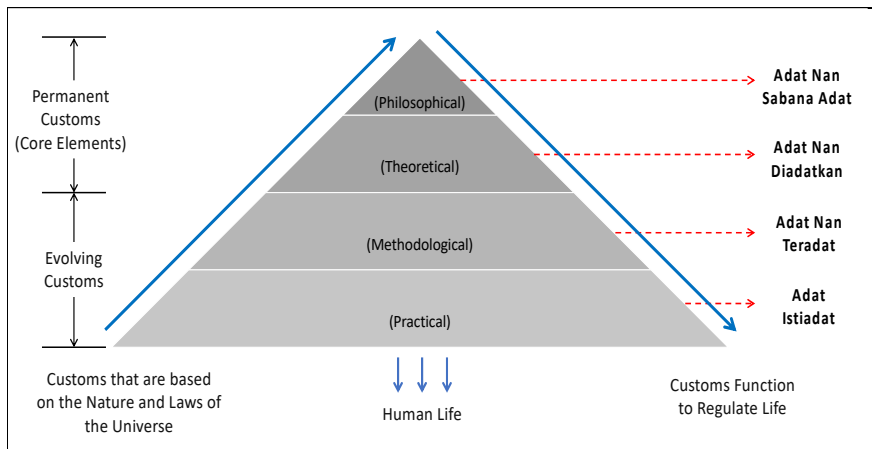


Figure 1: “ATJG” is the key phrase for the entire philosophy of Minangkabau Customs Structure (Source: Ismael, 2007)

The Minangkabau customs hierarchy has four levels: *Adat Nan Sabana Adat* (True Customs), *Adat Nan Diadatkan* (Instituted Customs), *Adat Nan Teradat* (Customary Customs), and *Adat Istiadat* (Traditional Ceremonies). The first two are core, unchanging elements based on natural laws and theoretical norms. The latter two adapt to maintain family ties and heritage, with practical rules and habits. Lower levels must align with higher

ones, ensuring a clear hierarchy. The ATJG philosophy, rooted in Minangkabau culture, incorporates vernacular practices and broader cultural principles. Core customs are immutable, reflecting eternal natural laws, from which humans learn knowledge and technology.

This philosophy is integral to both formal and informal education, preserved through cultural experiences and knowledge. Minangkabau traditional knowledge is seen as a "source of wealth," requiring self-awareness and understanding of nature for true wisdom (Efrizon *et al.*, 2024). This interconnected wisdom is expressed in the saying: "*ka pai tampek batanyo kapulang bakeh babarito*," meaning true wisdom comes from understanding oneself and nature. The concept of 'tambo' in Minangkabau culture integrates scientific understanding with Qur'anic teachings, representing a cosmology guiding their life and culture (Efrizal and Couto, 2018). Tambo uses oral language, like proverbs, and visual language, like carvings on Rumah Gadang, to convey traditional teachings.

3.0 Methodology

Philosophy, like a nurturing mother, guides our understanding of the world by feeding curiosity and offering insights into existence, morality, and purpose (Bakar, 2023b). Design philosophy significantly influences architecture by providing a guiding framework that shapes goals, aesthetics, functionality, and ethical values, ensuring coherence, consistency, and contextual sensitivity (Massu, 2020). It promotes innovative thinking and emphasizes human experience and social responsibility, leading to meaningful, practical, and sustainable architecture.

This study analyzes the philosophy of ATJG in the oldest Minangkabau vernacular architecture in Peninsular Malaysia, using the traditional *Lanjong* house in *Selemak, Rembau* as a case study. The main objective is to examine the composition and decorative patterns related to its symbolism or philosophy using a qualitative approach. The research process involves observation techniques for data collection, including visiting and studying the selected case study building and observing its physical features and decorative ornamentation. Finally, the study aims to conclude the characteristics and influences.

4.0 Results

The *Lanjong* house belongs to the Malay Minangkabau ethnic group from the *Seri Lemak* tribe, who migrated from *Nagari Sarilemak, West Sumatra, Indonesia* to *Rembau, Negeri Sembilan*, about 500 years ago (Kadir, 1983). *Kampung Selemak*, formerly *Kampung Lubuk Rusa-Selemak*, was founded by Datuk Putih and three other customary chiefs from various tribes (Ibrahim, 2000). One unique feature of the house is its rich floral carving motifs on both the interior and exterior walls. These carvings adorn the exterior walls, '*anjung*' or porch walls, and various structural elements such as '*selak (tetupai)*,' '*kayu geta*,' '*guntung*' pillars, lattice openings, and even door leaves. The distinctiveness of these

carvings and their dynamic patterns is evident from the 'serambi' or verandah space to the central pillar ('*tiang seri*') of the house. The placement of these decorative carvings is illustrated in the layout floor plan, elevations A, B, and section Y-Y shown in Figure 2.

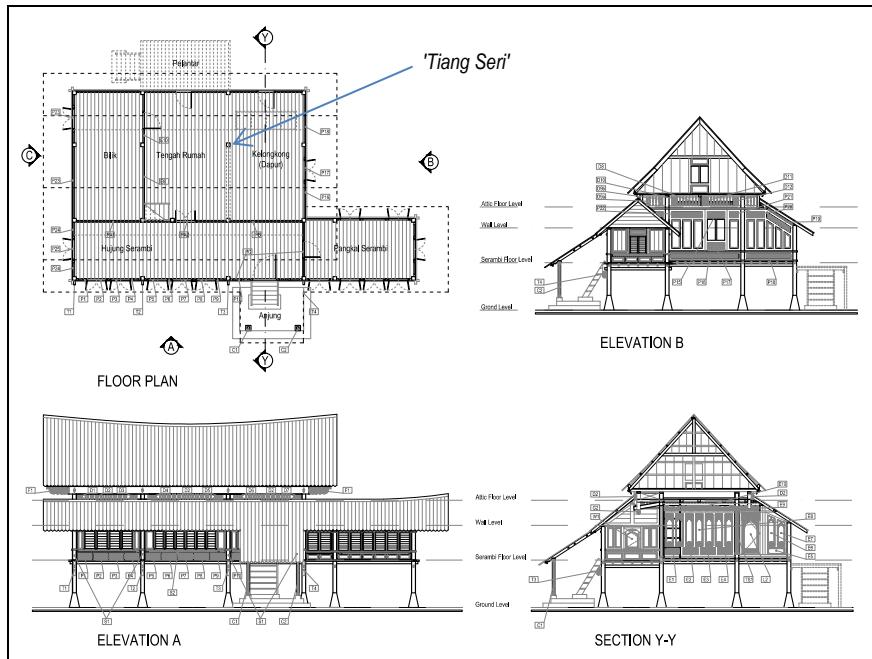
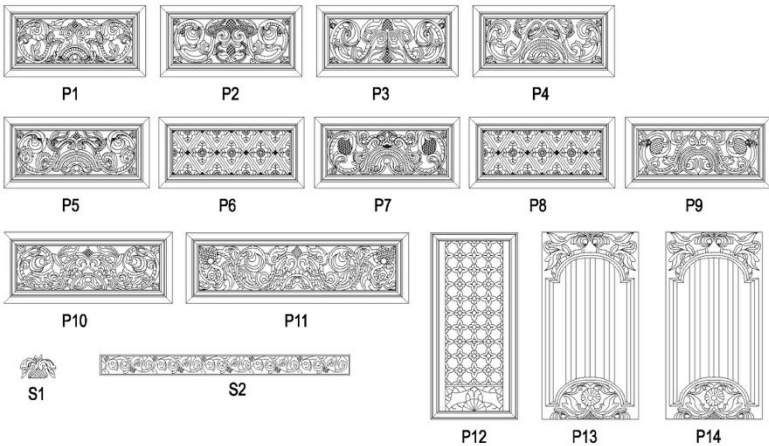


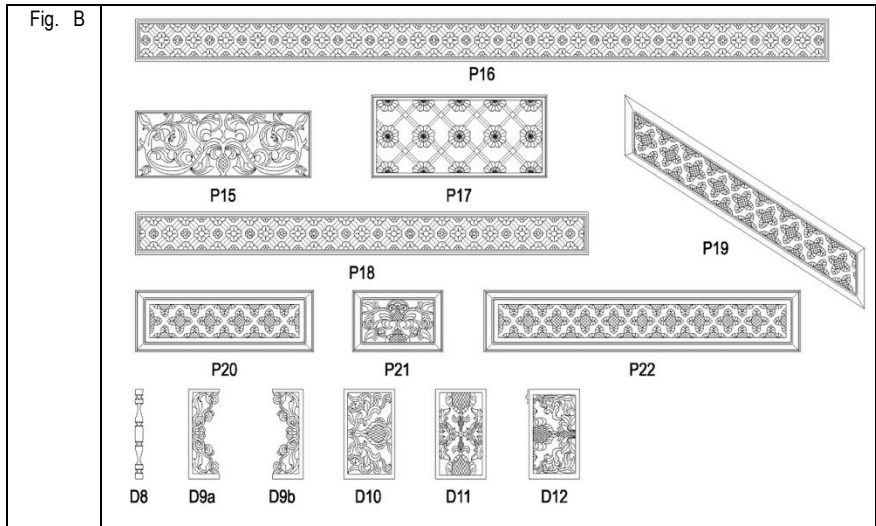
Figure 2: Decorative Ornament Carving Placement in Layout Floor Plan, Elevation A, B and Section Y-Y of *Lanjong* House.
(Source: Authors, 2024)

There are three basic patterns in Malay woodcarving (single pattern, the frame pattern, and the complete pattern) and three basic types of carving techniques for perforation and incision used in woodcarving—direct-piercing, semi-piercing, and embossed-relief piercing (Kamarudin and Said, 2010). Five main areas were identified during observation on the case study building that is filled with decorative ornaments: front facade of the house (A view), the right side of the house (B view), the left side of the house (C view), the left side of veranda space area (*hujung serambi*) and middle house area (*rumah tengah*). The analysis of the decorative ornaments consists of patterns [P]compositions [C]and meanings [M] as the following tables:

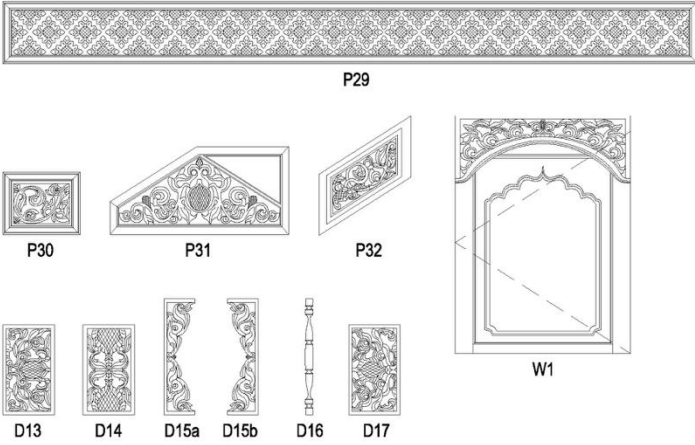
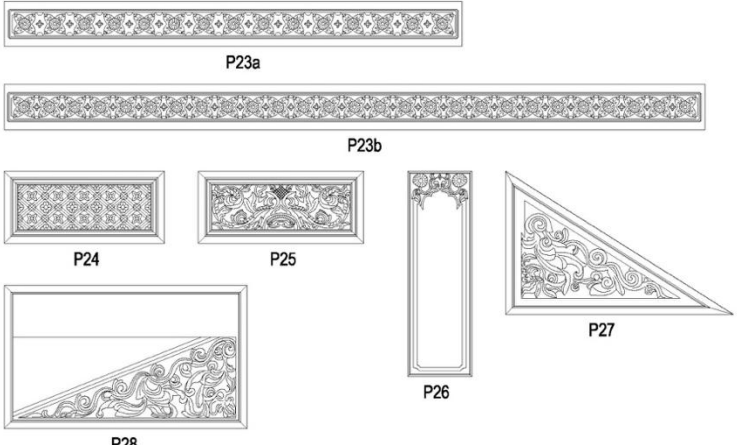
No.A1	Front Facade (A View)_1	
Fig. A1		
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
A1.1	[P]: Frame pattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (Kupang-kupang) [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> , people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i> Influences)	Outdoor Wall Panel: P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P7,P9 ,P10,P11
A1.2	[P]: Frame pattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga dan Burung</i> Motif [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)	Outdoor Window Panel: P13, P14
A1.3	[P]: Frame pattern [C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic)+ <i>Roda Bunga & Burung</i> Motif: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau</i> Influences)	Outdoor Window Panel: P6, P8, P12
A1.4	[P]: Single pattern [C]: <i>Birds Suck Honey</i> Motif [M]: Symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)	Outdoor Wall Panel: S1
A1.5	[P]: Frame pattern [C]: <i>Aka Cino</i> + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif [M]: symbolizes dynamism that is persistent and tenacious in meeting the need of life. Because living abroad requires the mind to achieved the goal, and struggling to survive (<i>Minangkabau</i> Influences)	Above the Outdoor Carving Panel: S2
No.A2	Front Facade (A View)_2	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
A2.1	[P]: Single pattern [C]: <i>Birds Suck Honey</i> Motif + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif	Roof Ventilation Panel: D1,D3,D4, D5,D6, D7

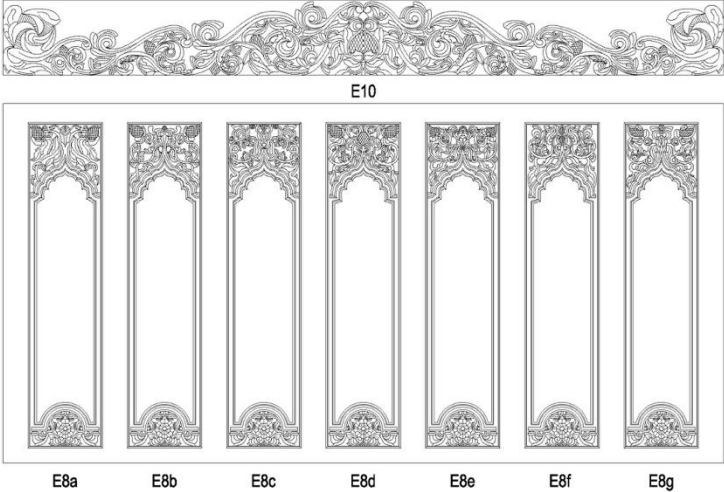
A2.2	<p>[M]: symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner + <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	<p>'Guntung' Pillars at the Below Veranda Floor: T1, T2, T3, T4 'Sayap Layang-layang, Above the Attic Floor: F1 Outdoor Porch Pillars: C1, C2</p> <p>Under Windows: D2</p>
A2.3	<p>[P]: Singlepattern [C]: <i>Kaluk Pakis Bunga Setaman + Tupai Managun (Kupang-kupang)</i></p> <p>[M]: symbolizes Malay eternal ages and get blessing of this world and the hereafter, while <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau+ Riau Influences</i>)</p>	
A2.4	<p>[P]: Singlepattern [C]: <i>Burung-burung(Birds)Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes happiness& prosperity for the homeowner (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p> <p>[P]: Singlepattern [C]: <i>Pinang-pinang + larik bersusun Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes institutional customs are upheld and becomes as ventilator and reflections of natural light (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	
Fig. A2		

No.B	Right Side of the House (B View) _1	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
B.1	<p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic) + FlowersMotif [M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau Influences</i>)</p>	<p>Outdoor Wall Panel: P16,P19, P20, P22</p> <p>Outdoor Ventilation Panel at Attic Floor: D9a, D9b, D10, D11, D12</p>
B.2	<p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: Birds Suck HoneyMotif + <i>Tupai Managun Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner + <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	
B.3	<p>[P]: SinglePattern [C]: <i>Pinang-pinang + larik bersabungMotif</i> [M]: symbolizes institutional customs are upheld and becomes as ventilator and reflections of natural light (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	<p>At Attic Floor Openings: D8</p>



No.C	Left Side of the House (C View)_1	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
C.1	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic) + Flowers Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau Influences</i>)</p>	Outdoor Wall Panel: P29
C.2	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Birds Suck Honey</i>Motif + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner + semenda, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	Outdoor Ventilation Panel at Attic Floor: D13, D14, D15a, D15b, D17
C.3	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)</p>	Ourdoor Wall panel Above Windows: D8
C.4	<p>[P]: SinglePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Pinang-pinang + larik bersabung</i> Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes institutional customs are upheld and becomes as ventilator and reflections of natural light (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	At Attic Floor Openings: D16

<p>Fig. C</p>		
<p>No.C2</p>	<p>Left Side of the House (C View) _2</p>	
<p>Fig. C2</p>		
<p>Types</p>	<p>Analysis:</p>	<p>Carving Location</p>
<p>C2.1</p>	<p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic) + FlowersMotif [M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (Riau Influences)</p>	<p>Outdoor Wall Panel: P23a, P23b, P24</p>
<p>C2.2</p>	<p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (Minangkabau Influences)</p>	<p>Outdoor Wall panel Above Windows: P25, P27, P28</p>
<p>C2.3</p>	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p>	<p>Outdoor Wall Panel at Veranda: P26</p>

	[C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga dan Burung Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau Influences</i>)	
No.D1	Middle House Area (<i>Rumah Tengah</i>)_1	
Fig. D1	 <p style="text-align: center;">E10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E8a E8b E8c E8d E8e E8f E8g</p>	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
D1.1	[P]: CompletePattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (Kupang-kupang) [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> , people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House): E10
D1.2	[P]: Frame Pattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga dan Burung Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau Influences</i>)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House): E8a, E8b, E8c, E8d, E8e, E8f, E8g
No.D2	Middle House Area (<i>Rumah Tengah</i>)_2	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
D2.1	[P]: FramePattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (Kupang-kupang) [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> , people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House): E1, E2, E3, E4, E9
D2.2	[P]: Frame Pattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga dan Burung Motif</i> [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau Influences</i>)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House): E6, E7

D2.3	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic) + Flowers Motif+ <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i></p> <p>[M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau</i> Influences) and symbolizes <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (Minangkabau Influences)</p>	<p>Bedroom Entrance</p> <p>Door Panel and Frame: L2</p>
D2.3	<p>[P]: Framepattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Kaluk Pakis Bunga Setaman</i> + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (<i>Kupang-kupang</i>)</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes Malay eternal ages and get blessing of this world and the hereafter, while <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i>+ <i>Riau</i> Influences)</p>	<p><i>Tiang Seri</i> at <i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House): TS1</p>
Fig. D2		

No.E1	Left Side Veranda Space Area (<i>Hujung Serambi</i>)_1	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
E1.1	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (<i>Kupang-kupang</i>)</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i> Influences)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): A1q, A1o
E1.2	<p>[P]: Frame Pattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga</i> dan <i>Burung</i>Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): A1d, A1e, A1f, A1g, A1h, A1i, A1j, A1k,
E1.3	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: Geometric + <i>Bintang-bintang</i> (cosmic) + FlowersMotif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau</i> Influences)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): A1p
E1.4	<p>[P]: Framepattern</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda):

E1.5	<p>[C]: <i>Kaluk Pakis Bunga Setaman + Tupai Managun (Kupang-kupang)</i></p> <p>[M]: symbolizes Malay eternal ages and get blessing of this world and the hereafter, while <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau+ Riau Influences</i>)</p> <p>[P]: Framepattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>TantaduManyasok Bungo</i> (Leaf Caterpillar Sucking Flowers)</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes fertility and ambitions (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)</p>	<p>A1a, A1b</p> <p>Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): A1c</p>
Fig. E1		
No.E2	Left Side Veranda Space Area (<i>Hujung Serambi</i>)_2	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
E2.1	<p>[P]: CompletePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Aia Bapesong + Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (Kupang-kupang)</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes a thought of finding a way out for problem solving and a life that is dynamic and hopeless +<i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): A2g
E2.2	<p>[P]: Frame Pattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga dan Burung</i>Motif</p> <p>[M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity (<i>Minangkabau + Riau Influences</i>)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): A2a, A2h
E2.3	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: Geometric + Bintang-bintang (cosmic) + <i>Flowers</i>Motif+ <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandring Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i></p> <p>[M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau Influences</i>) and symbolizes <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau Influences</i>)</p>	<i>Rumah Tengah</i> (Middle House) Entrance Frame: A2e
E2.4	<p>[P]: FramePattern</p> <p>[C]: <i>Kaluk Pakis Bunga Setaman + Tupai Managun (Kupang-kupang)</i></p>	Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): A2d

	<p>[M]: symbolizes <i>Malay</i> eternal ages and get blessing of this world and the hereafter, while <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i>+ <i>Riau</i> Influences)</p>	
E2.5	<p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: <i>Tantadu Manyasok Bungo</i> (Leaf Caterpillar Sucking Flowers)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): A2b, A2i
E2.6	<p>[M]: symbolizes fertility and ambitions (<i>Minangkabau</i> Influences)</p> <p>[P]: FramePattern [C]: Birds Suck Honey Motif + <i>Tupai Managun</i> Motif [M]: symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner + <i>semenda</i>, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)</p>	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): A2b, A2c
Fig. E2		

No.E3	Left Side Veranda Space Area (<i>Hujung Serambi</i>)_3	
Types	Analysis:	Carving Location
E3.1	[P]: FramePattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> (Kupang-kupang) [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> , people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (<i>Minangkabau</i> Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): Bi, Bk
E3.2	[P]: Frame Pattern [C]: <i>Awan Larat</i> (Meandering Cloud) + <i>Tupai Managun</i> + <i>Roda Bunga</i> dan Burung Motif [M]: symbolizes <i>semenda</i> & prosperity(<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): Bc, Bd, Be, Bd, Be, Bf, Bg
E3.3	[P]: FramePattern [C]: Geometric + Bintang-bintang (cosmic) + Flowers Motif [M]: symbolizes authenticity, the power of God, bright life (<i>Riau</i> Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): Bj
E3.4	[P]: Singlepattern [C]: Birds Suck Honey Motif [M]: Symbolizes happiness & prosperity for the homeowner (<i>Minangkabau</i> + <i>Riau</i> Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at <i>Serambi</i> (Veranda): Bh

E3.5	[P]: Framepattern [C]: <i>Kaluk Pakis Bunga Setaman + Tupai Managun (Kupang-kupang)</i> [M]: symbolizes Malay eternal ages and get blessing of this world and the hereafter, while semenda, people who comes from outside to strengthen the girl's position (Minangkabau+ Riau Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): Ba
E3.6	[P]: Framepattern [C]: <i>Tantadu Manyasok Bungo (Leaf Caterpillar Sucking Flowers)</i> [M]: symbolizes fertility and ambitions (Minangkabau Influences)	Interior Wall Panel at Serambi (Veranda): Bb
Fig. E3		

The tables list 15 types of *Lanjong* house ornaments in *Selemak, Negeri Sembilan*. The majority are of *Minangkabau* origin, including *Aia Bapesong* (1 piece), *Aka Cino* (1 piece), *Tupai Managun* (29 pieces), *Kaluak Pakis* (6 pieces), and *Tatandu Menyasok Bungo* (4 pieces), making up 32% (41 elements). *Riau* influences include *awan larat* (27 pieces, 21%) and geometric motifs (9 pieces, 7%). The geometric motifs are neutral but may have specific meanings. Bird motifs (17 pieces, 13%) likely stem from ancient archipelago art traditions adapted by Malays with Islamic influences. Arabic/Islamic shapes, depicted as domes and curves, total 34 pieces (27%). The cultural influence of *Minang* ornaments from *Pariangan* to *Sarilemak in Paya Kumbuh* may be weak. Consequently, when they migrated to *Rembau, Negeri Sembilan*, the craftsmen in *Selemak* were significantly influenced by *Riau* and other external sources in their work on buildings and ornaments.

5.0 Discussion

The core of traditional Malay-Islamic civilization centers on cosmological beliefs that emphasize divine immanence over transcendence (Bakar, 2023a). Immanence represents presence and continuity, symbolized by water, as in the Malay proverb “*Air dicincang tidak*

akan putus" (water cannot be severed). In contrast, transcendence signifies absence and discontinuity, symbolized by desert sands. The intertwined philosophy of water and the spirit of paddy reflect Malay culture's maritime heritage and agricultural roots.

5.1 Philosophy of Water (Maritime Culture)

From a scientific evolutionary perspective, water is the origin of all earthly life (Reat, 1975). In Malay culture, water symbolizes life, sustenance, and connection. The Malay Archipelago's rich maritime history has influenced trade, transportation, fishing, and folklore. Ancient Malay woodworkers crafted dugout canoes, which evolved into large sailboats. By the first millennium B.C.E., Malays were pioneering long-distance navigation and trade (Shafer, 1996; Wan Ibrahim and Zahid, 2024). In maritime societies, house and shrine designs often reflect boat influences (Lewcock and Brans, 1975). Water has always been essential for productivity and valued for its accessibility. Both Malays and Arabs used the moon and stars for navigation, symbolizing divine guidance. The crescent moon, as Fig. 3(b), a common motif in Islamic iconography (Harrison *et al.*, 2019), represents femininity, motherhood, emotions, intuition, fertility, and the body, contrasting with the sun's representation of the soul.

The Malay people were influenced by monotheistic beliefs, particularly the spread of Prophet Abraham's religion around 1000 BC, and the Sanskrit language due to interactions with ancient civilizations like the Persian Empire and early Mesopotamia (Zaharah *et al.*, 2016). Before Hindu-Buddhist beliefs, they followed the 'Hyang' faith, worshipping '*Sang Hyang Widi*' or 'The One' (Surat, 2024). Hindu-Buddhist philosophy had limited impact, mainly on leaders. Ancient Malay beliefs centered around '*Sang Hyang Widi*', rejecting common Hindu-Buddhist practices. Vedic teachings shaped their customs, culture, and architecture. Malays transitioned smoothly to Islam, though some Vedic adherents relocated to Bali. Global philosophies about water have significantly influenced human thought. Thales of Miletus viewed water as the primary substance of all things (Jiang-guang, 2019). Buddhism identified earth, water, fire, and wind as fundamental elements in ancient India. Chinese Wu Xing philosophy also included water as a key element that is important in both physical and metaphysical contexts. In Malay culture, water symbolizes life, purity, and sustenance, playing a crucial role in rituals, agriculture, and literature, emphasizing sustainable management and harmony with nature.

In the Quran, mercy and water are intertwined, with rain symbolizing divine mercy. Ablution (*wudu*) represents purification and alignment with this mercy. Water embodies both knowledge and mercy (guidance), satisfying spiritual thirst (Lings, 2006). *Surah Ar-Rahman* emphasizes Allah's mercy and blessings starting with the greatest and most beneficial one: the teaching of the Quran, while the Golden Ratio (Fig. 2) in nature reflects divine signs (Dabbour, 2012; Fadzli, 2022). It emphasizes the immense value of this divine guidance and serves as a powerful reminder of the countless ways in which Allah's mercy manifests in the world. *Ar-Rahman*, therefore, encapsulates the essence of divine mercy, compassion, and generosity, forming a cornerstone of Islamic belief and practice. Across cultures, water is linked to feminine qualities, symbolizing life, nurturing, and emotional

depth. In Greek mythology, goddesses like Aphrodite and Naiads, in Hinduism, the goddess Ganga, and in Chinese philosophy, water's association with Yin highlights its passive and receptive nature (Jiang-guang, 2019). In Islam, water signifies nurturing, purification, and divine mercy, mirroring the dual role of a nurturing mother and fierce protector.

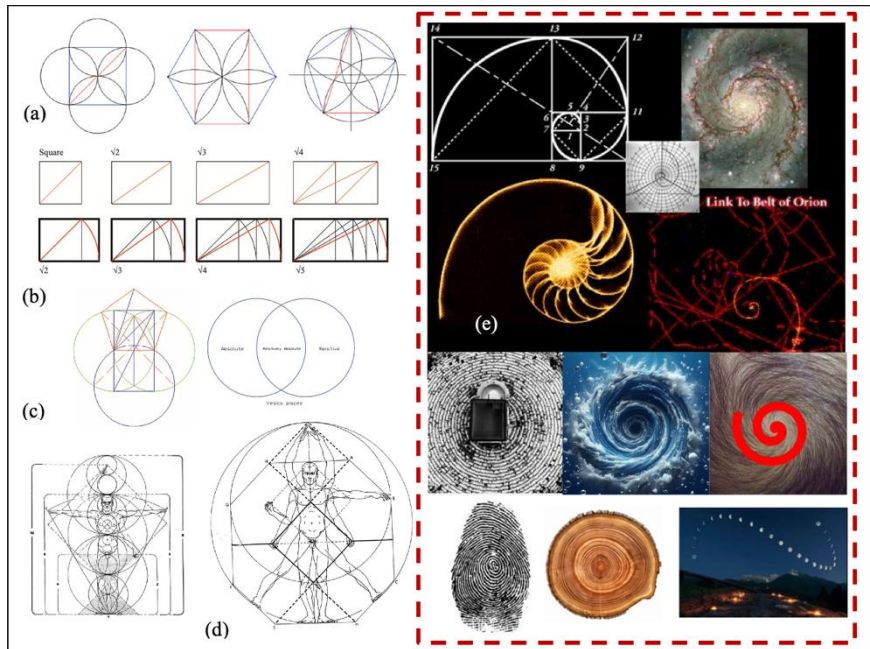


Figure 2: (a) The Golden Mean (Phi) Proportion; (b) Square Proportion; (c) Vesica Pieces; (d) Vitruvian Man; (e) Spiral "Fibonacci Sequence", Allah's Signature is Evident in All of Creation Through the Golden Ratio.

(Source: Dabbour, 2012)

5.2 Spirit of Paddy (Agricultural Roots)

Paddy cultivation is a key aspect of Malay culture, symbolizing the community's agricultural roots and involving communal effort, unity, and mutual support. Traditional practices and rituals in paddy farming reflect respect for nature and life's cycles. Proverbs like "*Baik membawa resmi padi*" emphasize humility, teaching that people should be humble like rice stalks that bow when full. Malay architectural philosophy, influenced by natural phenomena, views land as temporarily occupied, highlighting humility and local identity.

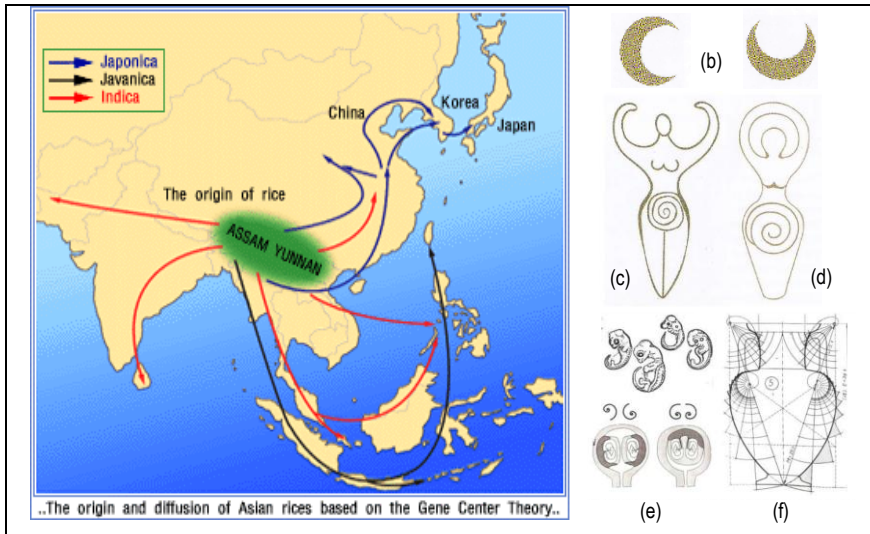


Figure 3: (a) The Origin of Rice According to Recent Discoveries (Wan Ibrahim and Zahid, 2024); (b) Crescent/ Moon; (c) Mother Earth Fertility Symbol, (d) The Mother Goddess; (e) Fetal Growth inside the Womb as a Complex form of Mushroom-head Development, (f) The Womb has Often Been Compared with a Vase.

(Source: Wan Ibrahim and Zahid, 2024; Shepsut, 2012)

Figure 3(a) illustrates the domestication of wild rice in *Assam Yunnan*, spreading north to China, Korea, and Japan, and south to Southeast Asia. The creation of mountain terraces in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Southeast Asia showcases Malay cultural ingenuity. The term “*padi*” is an Austronesian Malay word, with two types: *padi sawah* (irrigated) and *padi bukit* (non-irrigated). Paddy cultivation reflects the human life cycle, with seeds replacing those sown, akin to children replacing their mothers. Dewi Sri, a revered goddess in the Nusantara region, symbolizes rice and fertility, predating Hindu-Buddhist influences. She taught the first farmers about rice cultivation, and rituals were performed for abundant harvests. Depicted holding a sheaf of rice, she represents wealth and fertility, emphasizing harmony between humans and nature. Mother Earth’s fertility symbols Fig.3 (c) since the Stone Ages, such as the spiral, see Fig. 3(c) and 13(d), linked to the Moon’s cycles and other fertility symbols like the helical horn, represent the womb and creation, embodying nurturing and life-giving aspects of femininity (Harrison et al., 2019). The womb is often compared to a vase (Shepsut, 2012). The helical form mirrors natural patterns in shells, plants, and galaxies, reinforcing its connection to the natural world and feminine creation. These elements highlight the balance between maritime and agricultural aspects of Malay culture, enriching its unique identity.

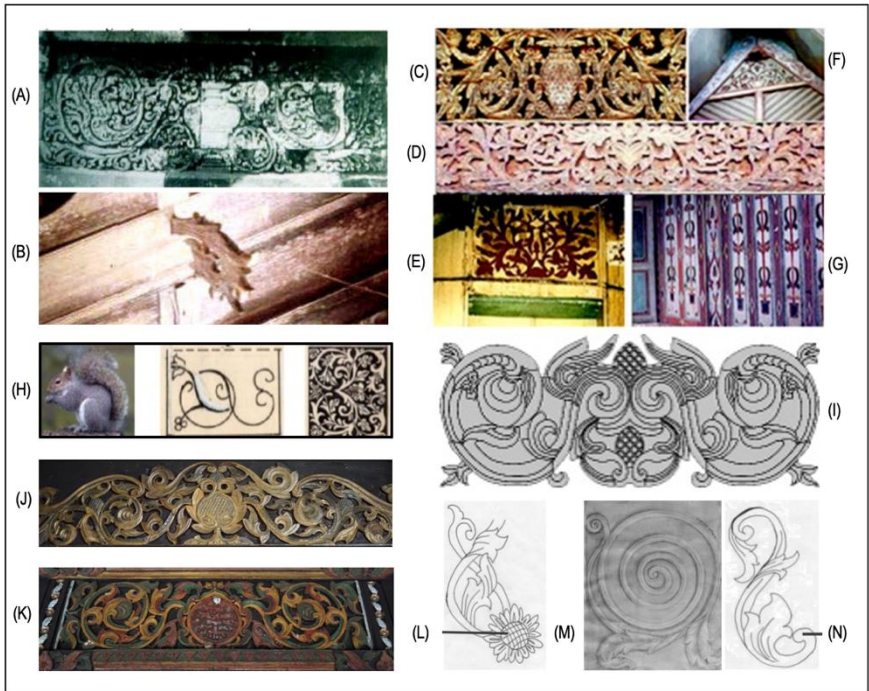


Figure 4: (A) Sculpture of a Jug and Water Gushing from It - Candi Kalasan in Jawa (Collection of Nasbahry Couto, 1996); (B) 'Kupang-kupang Si Awang Labiah', or 'Tatagun Squirrel' in Pariangan, West Sumatera (Couto, 2008); (C),(D),(E),(F),(G) Changes in Text and Syntax on the Ornament 'Bungo Padi', in Some Places in Minang, which Origin from Pariangan; (H) *Tupai Managun/Tatagun* in Vernacular Architecture of Minangkabau, West Sumatera, Indonesia; (I) *Tupai Managun/Tatagun* in Vernacular Architecture of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; (J),(K) Ornaments in Lanjong House in Negeri Sembilan, the Nomenclature is 'Awan Larat and *Tupai Managun*', the Syntax and Text Look Similar to 'Bungo Padi'; (L) The *Awan Larat Beribu*, the flower motif as ibu (mother); (M),(N) The Symbol of Kala (mostly appeared in Malay Carving of Nusantara Architecture) which Represent Time and Space, Look Similar to *Tupai Managun* Motif.

(Source: Awang Lah et al., 2024; Inangda et al., 2012)

The Minangkabau and Malay aesthetics share similarities in imitative, metaphorical, and iconographic aesthetics. They are called imitative aesthetics because there is a drive to depict natural forms (fauna, flora, human-like shapes) as sources of beauty. However, due to Islamic prohibitions against depicting living beings, these forms are abstracted. They are metaphorical because they aim to tell stories, convey teachings, and impart lessons to observers, rooted in the philosophy of "nature as a teacher." They are iconographic because not everything is a symbol; symbols are social agreements. For example, in carvings shown in Fig.4 (A), (B), whether the ornament is read as a symbol from syntax or nomenclature depends on social conventions. This proves that symbols are social

conventions rooted in social cognition (changes in text and syntax on the ornament '*bungo padi*', in some places in *Minang*, which originate from *Pariangan*, see Fig. 4(C,D,E,F,G).

The ornament seems mixed with "*tupai tatagun*" (*tatagun* squirrel) carving, see Fig.4(C,D,E,F,G), in Minangkabau architecture, West Sumatra and Fig. 4(I,J,K) in Minang-Malay, Negeri Sembilan have similar nomenclature but very different forms in terms of text (elements) and syntax (arrangement of elements). The meanings also differ, as the meaning indicated by the Minang-Malay traditional carving is the "symbol of in-laws"(semenda). A squirrel is agile, jumping from tree to tree, but sometimes falls, as the proverb says: "As clever as a squirrel can jump, it will occasionally slip." Therefore, it always '*tatagun*' or pauses and steadies before leaping. The "*tupai tatagun*" ornament symbolizes agility and teaches the value of caution and thinking before acting in life's challenges. A boggling question arises when the S and the spiral symbol of *Tupai Managun*-Minangs and the symbol of Kala-Malays are similar in nomenclature, text, and syntax seem changed and need further exploration.

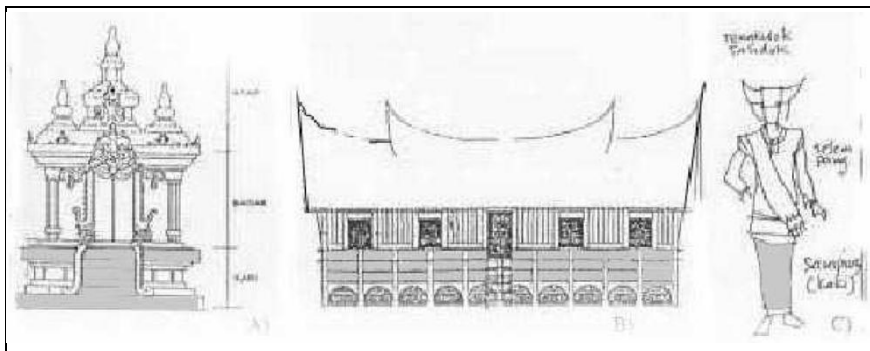


Figure 5: The expressions "head, body, and feet" refer to A) Temples (candi), B) *Rumah Gadang* (traditional Minangkabau houses), and C) Minangkabau attire with *tekuluk tanduk* (a head covering shaped like buffalo horns)

(Source: Nashbary Couto, 1998)

It's challenging to definitively state that Fig. 4(J) and 4(K) represent "*orang semenda*" (in-laws) in Negeri Sembilan traditional architecture. Minangkabau people might interpret these carvings as "*bungo padi*" (rice flower), symbolizing the ancient *Bungo Setangkai* kingdom. These carvings resemble ornaments from *Pariangan*, West Sumatra, and Riau, possibly linked to the origins of rice in *Assam Yunnan* or ancient civilizations like Persia or Mesopotamia. The "*bungo padi*" motif represents the myth of "*satampang baniah*" (a handful of rice seeds) brought by Minangkabau ancestors. During the Hindu era, *Dewi Sri*, the goddess of rice, emerged, symbolized by a jar used in rice planting ceremonies. This symbol, along with others like the crescent moon, represents femininity and the matrilineal system of Minangkabau, echoing *Surah Ar-Rahman* 55:14 (He created man from clay like [that of] pottery). Another version suggests the "*bunga setangkai*" (single flower) symbol

arose during the *Bungo Setangkai* kingdom. Today, many carvings in *Kapalo Koto, Pariangan*, are seen as mere decorations, with their meanings forgotten (Awang Lah *et al.*, 2024). These carvings may have spread to Riau and the Malay world, but their meanings have evolved. Minangkabau culture preserves much of its ancient heritage, including megalithic carvings, indicating these carvings likely originated from ancient Minangkabau culture.

In Minangkabau art and architecture, the traditional house (*rumah gadang*) features four spires (*gonjong*) and main pillars, symbolizing water, fire, wind, and earth. The structure's beauty lies in its proportional division: the roof (head), supports (feet), and body, reflecting the three-layered cosmos concept. Natural surroundings forms are used as analogies for building parts, such as buffalo horns, scorpion pincers, and eagles about to fly, etc. The analogy in traditional Minangkabau women's attire, shaped like buffalo horns, raises an intriguing question: does it symbolize Mother Earth's fertility, as suggested by Fig. 3(c)? Alternatively, could it represent the crescent moon, as seen in Fig. 3(b), or perhaps sailboat iconography? Each interpretation offers a unique perspective on the cultural and symbolic significance embedded in Minangkabau art and architecture. The principles of repetition and continuation explain the spread of Minangkabau architecture, making it a global tradition when consistently found across regions.

6.0 Conclusion

Negeri Sembilan's Malay vernacular architecture blends *Minang*, *Malay*, and Islamic elements, reflecting the AJTG philosophy. The *Lanjong* house, an icon of *Suku Selemak*, symbolizes the broader Malay world and is a valuable artifact worth preserving. Grasping the philosophy behind vernacular design is essential for reinforcing local architectural identity and preserving cultural heritage. The philosophy of *ATJG*, or Nature as Teacher, highlights the wisdom derived from nature's four elements—Earth, Water, Fire, and Air—*Rupa, Budi, Jiwa, and Rasa*—and the symbolism of feminine-masculine pairs in design. Minangkabau customs are inspired by the harmony found in contradictions and the dual nature of constancy and change in nature. This wisdom aligns with natural forces and is believed to promote health and harmony, in line with Islamic principles, showcasing a practical application of ancient *Minang-Malay* vernacular architecture wisdom worth further exploration for its functional benefits.

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Article Contribution to Related Field of Study

The study aims to document the *Minang-Malay* vernacular architecture of *Negeri Sembilan*.

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