

The Realization of Malay Community's Dependence on the Traditional House Landscape Based on the Autobiographical Comic of Anak-anak Sidek

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Abstract

This study examines the elements of Malay cultural landscapes, which are deeply rooted in functionality, customs, and traditions. The traditional Malay house landscape consists of three main components: the front yard, side yard, and backyard, each carrying unique values, symbolism, and cultural significance. Through an analysis of the autobiographical comic Anak-anak Sidek, this study explores the Malay community's dependence on these landscapes, which are increasingly threatened by modernity. A literature review and textual analysis are employed to assess the role of traditional house landscapes in preserving Malay identity. Findings highlight the functional and symbolic importance of these landscapes in shaping the daily lives of the Malay community. The study also emphasizes the strong relationship between Malay cultural practices and the natural environment, forming the foundation of a sustainable Malay cosmology. This research contributes to the understanding of Malay cultural landscapes and serves as a reference for landscape planning in culturally similar regions of Malaysia. By reaffirming the significance of these traditional landscapes, the study underscores their role in maintaining cultural heritage and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Malay house landscape, cultural landscape, customs, beliefs, Malaysia.

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Introduction

According to Hussain et al. (2015), the landscape is an environment that is shaped and interpreted through human perception. As stated by Mahmud (1970), the landscape is not synonymous with the natural environment; rather, nature is a perception formed through human visual interpretation of their surroundings. Abdul Rahman (2003) describes the landscape as a reflection of a nation's way of life. In this regard, landscapes are shaped based on their function, customs, and culture. Ahmad et al. (2006) further define the landscape as an active cultural practice of a particular place, which can be understood as a process of mutual recognition between different communities. A well-designed landscape also plays a crucial role in shaping social structures and subjective identity formation for various nations worldwide (Kiddcruz, 2017).

Based on these perspectives, it can be concluded that the Malay community is highly responsive to their surrounding landscape, which is uniquely understood not only through literature and architecture but also through the cultural imprints of society, as depicted in the Malay-language autobiographical comic *Anak-anak Sidek*. This comic is a graphic autobiography about the family life of Malaysia's national badminton players, the family of Haji Sidek, created by Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd. It is based on a true story and was published in 1995, three years after Malaysia won the Thomas Cup. The comic is set in a traditional Malay village, illustrating a lifestyle deeply rooted in familial customs and the traditional Malay cultural landscape. It portrays the village of Kanchong Darat, Banting, Selangor, during the 1960s and early 1970s (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995).

The realization of the Malay community's dependence on the traditional house landscape, as depicted in the autobiographical comic *Anak-anak Sidek*, encompasses cultural, belief, and religious factors that significantly influence the structure of the traditional Malay home landscape. These influences are evident in the spatial arrangement, the use of flora, and the selection of outdoor furniture within each landscape component surrounding the house (Ismail & Mohd Ariffin, 2015). Each landscape component around the traditional Malay house possesses its own distinctive character, shaping the sense of place and setting it apart from the cultural landscapes of other communities in Malaysia (Hussain M. A., Mohd Yunus, Ismail, Mohd Ariffin, & Ismail, 2020). These components are established to define spatial divisions with different functions based on the needs and practices of the traditional Malay community (Hussain et al., 2015).

According to a study by Ismail et al. (2015), the key components of the traditional Malay house landscape can be categorized into three main sections: the front yard, the side yard, and the backyard. Hussain et al. (2020) further explain that these landscape components serve not only as aesthetic elements but also reflect harmonious relationships between humans and nature. They function as social spaces, therapeutic areas, sources of food, and representations of cultural identity. This interdependence between the Malay community and the traditional house landscape is illustrated in *Anak-anak Sidek*, which is set against a backdrop of customs, traditions, cultural practices, and long-standing beliefs inherent in the traditional Malay cultural landscape (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995).

Customs and traditions within the context of the traditional Malay cultural landscape encompass daily behavioral norms and taboos. For example, *Anak-anak Sidek* illustrates such customs and taboos in the episode *Alan Kena Sampuk*, where children are warned not to play in the front yard at dusk, as it is believed to bring misfortune to the household. In this episode, Wak Sakawi, commonly known as Wak, advises his grandson not to play in the irrigation channel in front of the house at dusk, fearing that he might be possessed by a *jembalang air* (water spirit). According to Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd. (1995), the Malay community adheres strictly to their customs and traditions. In this context, prohibitions serve as subtle advice intended for the well-being of individuals.

Al-Ahmadi (2016) explains that these customs and taboos stem from the traditional Malay community's understanding and acceptance of the existence of an unseen realm, imperceptible to the naked eye. He further elaborates that the relationship between humans and the supernatural is a complex subject filled with interpretations of belief systems, cultural expressions, reverence, and adaptation to the unseen forces that influence daily life. Traditional beliefs, faith, and mutual respect between humans and the supernatural have been ingrained in the Malay community as a means of adapting to their environment, ultimately forming the foundation of their customary practices (Arifin, 2018).

The influence of customs, traditions, and beliefs has contributed to the balance and interdependence of traditional Malay life, encompassing spiritual beliefs, social relations, legal systems, and interactions with the supernatural (Haji Salleh & Robson, 2010). This interdependence has strongly shaped the symbolism, meaning, and environmental harmony in the spatial arrangement of traditional Malay landscape architecture. The formation of these symbolic meanings and environmental integration within the layout of the traditional Malay house landscape is vividly portrayed in *Anak-anak Sidek*, which reflects cycles of life, customs, traditions, and beliefs, as well as the synchronization of physical elements and landscape spaces with the natural surroundings. These practices are passed down from one generation to the next, either through written documentation or oral transmission (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995). This statement is further supported by Hussin et al. (2009) and Ismail et al. (2015), who emphasize that human life progresses through different stages from birth to death, forming a balance with nature.

Each stage of life in the traditional Malay community is accompanied by various ceremonies and customary rituals (Abdullah, 2018). The realization of the Malay community's dependence on their surrounding landscape is often intertwined with customary practices, historical cultural influences, religious ceremonies, and other traditions. For instance, the front yard of a house is commonly used for wedding ceremonies and important celebrations such as *adat mandi bunga* (flower bath ritual), *melenggang perut* (prenatal blessing ritual for expectant mothers), as well as religious rituals like *berkhatan* (circumcision ceremonies) and *kenduri kesyukuran* (thanksgiving feasts) (Abdul Rahman, 2003). In the context of wedding ceremonies, various customary stages reflect the harmonious relationship between the traditional Malay community and their environment. These include *adat merisik* (preliminary inquiry), *adat meminang* (formal proposal), *adat berinai* (henna ceremony), *adat berendam* (bridal grooming ritual), *adat berbesan* (in-law acknowledgment), *adat mandi berhias* (ritual bathing of the bride), *adat bertandang* (groom's visit to the bride's home), *adat menyalang* (gift exchange), and *adat berkampung* (communal wedding celebration). These retrospective elements are vividly illustrated in *Anak-anak Sidek*, particularly in the episode *Mulanya di Sini*, where traditional Malay wedding customs are portrayed in sequential order. This is exemplified in a scene where the host's representative welcomes the groom's entourage, clearly depicting the execution of these customary wedding practices:

"Wait a moment... before all of you enter the house, you must pay door tax... it does not matter whether you are late or not... the door tax must be settled first... pay the door tax... only then can you enter" (*Anak-anak Sidek*, 1995, p. 14).

Logically, the "door tax" mentioned in the excerpt refers to the tradition of *berbalas pantun* (exchange of rhymed verses) between the representatives of the bride and groom. This poetic exchange has long been practiced in traditional Malay society to strengthen familial bonds while enhancing the joyous atmosphere of the wedding ceremony. This statement is supported by Aini (2021), who asserts that *berbalas pantun* is a significant tradition in Malay culture, emphasizing etiquette and eloquence in speech and communication. Customary rituals within the traditional Malay community play a crucial role in reinforcing their beliefs, ensuring protection from misfortune, providing spiritual security, and maintaining harmony between humans and their surrounding environment to create peace and well-being in daily life (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995).

In creating a balanced way of life, the traditional Malay community also emphasizes the functional aspects of every element within their residential surroundings. For instance, natural resources such as *daun sirih* (betel leaf), *daun inai* (henna leaf), and various fragrant and colorful flowers are used as symbols of joy and festivity during wedding ceremonies. In the context of traditional Malay weddings,

ceremonies are meticulously organized to celebrate the bridal couple, who are regarded as *Raja Sehari* (King and Queen for a Day) on their wedding day (Sallehuddin, 2022). Additionally, fragrant and colorful flowers from the home garden are often used in *mandi bunga* (ritual floral baths) for the bride and groom. This *mandi bunga* practice is believed to offer several benefits, such as enhancing the couple's radiance, reducing stress, refreshing the body and mind, and warding off misfortune. The planting of *pokok sirih* (betel plant) and various flowers around the traditional Malay house is not only for wedding rituals but also serves as a natural hedge to obscure unsightly views and mask unpleasant odors in the surroundings (Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Mohd Yunos, 2015).

Furthermore, the cultivation of these plants helps minimize waste and reduce household expenses. Typically, every material and resource needed in daily life is sourced from the immediate environment. Therefore, the layout and landscape design of traditional Malay homes are adapted to meet functional needs and ensure resource accessibility. For example, *pokok sirih*, banana trees, and fragrant flowers, which are essential for traditional ceremonies, are strategically planted in easily accessible areas around the house. This concept aligns with the landscape depiction in the comic *Anak-anak Sidek*, particularly in the episode *Petir Selamatkan Adul*. In this context, the space around Haji Sidek's house is filled with ornamental plants, whether for food, aesthetics, or medicinal purposes. The presence of banana trees, for instance, is clearly illustrated in this episode, as shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Food-Producing Plants Such as Banana Trees and Aesthetic Vegetation are Clearly Depicted within the Traditional Malay House Landscape Setting.

The central issue underpinning this study is the threat of modernization to the traditional Malay house landscape, which has led to the erosion of cultural values, identity, and the younger generation's understanding of the functions and symbolism embedded in such landscapes. The widespread degradation and replacement of traditional elements with modern ones have disrupted cultural continuity and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Therefore, there is a need to document and reappraise the traditional Malay house landscape as a cultural heritage that must be preserved. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify and highlight the characteristics of traditional Malay landscapes, which are gradually disappearing over time. A landscape is an environment that is shaped and interpreted through human perception. The surrounding environment is a perception observed through human vision and represents a way of life based on cultural practices, human activities, and social environments that shape a subjective identity. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to analyze specific sources from the autobiographical comic *Anak-anak Sidek* and their relevance to sustainability in traditional Malay landscape architecture, demonstrating the ingenuity of the Malay community in shaping their natural surroundings.

Research Methodology

This study employs a literature review and textual analysis as its primary research methods. Furthermore, the content analysis of the comic was conducted using a thematic approach involving manual coding. Each landscape element and related behavior depicted in the *Anak-anak Sidek* comic was examined and categorized according to predetermined themes based on the three main components of the traditional landscape (front yard, side yard, and backyard). This process involved the identification of key terms, dialogues, visuals, and contextual references in each episode that highlight aspects of landscape, customs, beliefs, and the community's interaction with the natural environment. Additionally, this method emphasizes the interpretation of visual narratives as a form of informal cultural documentation that reflects the values and norms of traditional Malay society. The literature review involves gathering information from various sources regarding the dependency of the Malay community on traditional Malay house landscapes. Meanwhile, the textual analysis method entails critical reading, consideration, and evaluation of the traditional Malay house landscape as depicted in the autobiographical comic of the national badminton champions, *Anak-anak Sidek*.

This study is grounded in the principles of Cultural Landscape Theory through the approach proposed by Paine and Taylor (1995). According to Paine and Taylor (1995), cultural landscapes, with their distinctive characteristics unique to each community, are crucial aspects that must be considered in cultural landscape development to ensure that individuals can optimize their aesthetic appreciation of their inhabited environment. Additionally, the principles of cultural landscape theory emphasize the use of space and the functional arrangement of residential environments, highlighting the ability of space to convey meaning independently, without the excessive incorporation of built structures. This notion underscores that individuals can derive aesthetic satisfaction from a natural landscape or environment without the need for excessive artificial structures that may potentially disrupt the visual harmony of the surroundings.

Through this approach, Paine and Taylor (1995) introduced a straightforward and clear technical framework for illustrating the relationship between landscape characteristics and influencing factors, such as spatial arrangements and environmental settings. This technical approach is further supported by Ismail N. A. (2010), who asserts that to assess and understand the characteristics of the landscape development of traditional Malay houses, researchers must examine the spatial arrangement surrounding these residences. The same author also argues that traditional Malay houses are generally divided into three distinct spatial zones:

laman hadapan (the front yard), *laman sisi* (the side yard), and *laman belakang* (the backyard). Each of these spaces possesses unique characteristics and varies according to regional and ethnic differences.

Search Strategy

The search process was conducted using Malay-language keywords, including *landskap budaya, persekitaran dan landskap rumah Melayu tradisional, kepentingan landskap budaya Melayu, ruang, landskap rumah Anak-anak Sidek*, and other relevant keywords to enrich the sources of information. These keyword combinations were applied without restrictions on the year of publication. The databases used for the search included Science Direct, Google Scholar, and the public university database network across Malaysia. Titles and abstracts were examined to identify articles related to functional landscape elements, which helped clarify the importance of traditional Malay house landscapes and demonstrated the relationship between Malay cultural life and the natural environment. This relationship forms the foundation of a sustainable Malay cosmology, particularly using the Google Search Engine by inputting article titles and acronyms of identified articles.

This method began with the selection of three main components of the Malay cultural landscape, namely the spatial arrangement of the front yard, side yard, and backyard. The selection of yard layouts was based on key criteria representing physical structures, spatial arrangements, plantings, and garden furniture, all of which are interconnected with the behavioral patterns of the Malay people. Therefore, the author also gathered all relevant documents from Anak-anak Sidek, the National Archives of Malaysia, Malay manuscripts, and journals related to Malay cultural landscapes. A textual analysis of Anak-anak Sidek was conducted using content analysis methodology. Consequently, both textual content analysis and scholarly research on Anak-anak Sidek demonstrate that the Malay world reflects a balanced relationship between humans and their natural surroundings in terms of their overall system of life.

Analysis and Discussion

The landscape of traditional Malay houses represents a comprehensive environmental network, encompassing both the surrounding outdoor area and the interior spaces of the house. This interrelationship plays a crucial role in defining the function of each spatial connection and its associated components. According to Abdul Rahman (2003), the concept of spatial relationships in traditional Malay houses influences the external environment of their dwellings. This spatial arrangement aligns with the approach of Paine and Taylor (1995), who state that residential space and environmental factors shape the activities and elements that exist within a given setting. Salleh and Md Sakip (2016) emphasize that specific spatial divisions are embedded within the philosophy of traditional Malay landscape architecture, with each space serving a distinct function. This assertion is further supported by Ismail and Mohd Ariffin (2015), who state that the spatial arrangement of traditional Malay house landscapes can be categorized into three main areas: the front yard, side yard, and backyard.

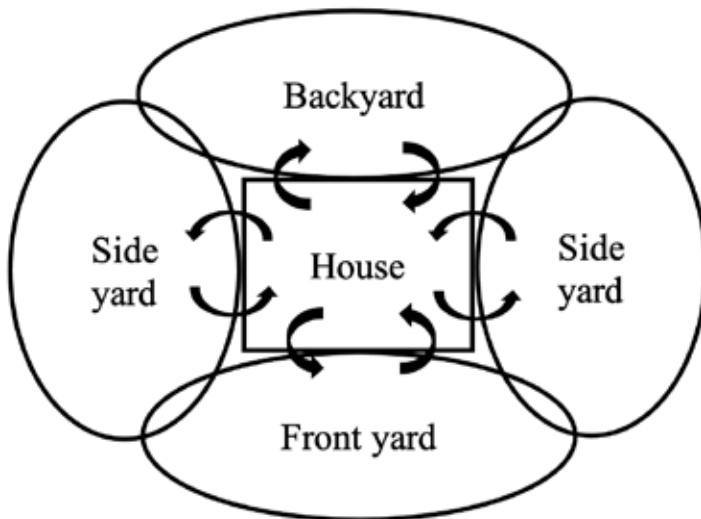


Figure 2: The Influence of Spatial Environment on the Context of Landscape Components and Elements in Traditional Malay Houses.

Figure 2 illustrates the concept of environmental spatial influence within the context of the traditional Malay house compound, as well as the landscape conditions and activities conducted in the surrounding areas, such as the front yard, side yard, and backyard. The front yard typically faces the main pathway or entrance and serves as a multifunctional space used for communal activities such as feasts (*kenduri-kendara*) and as a play area (Hussain M. A., Mohd Yunos, Ismail, Mohd Ariffin, & Ismail, 2020). This concept is clearly depicted in *Anak-anak Sidek*, where the front yard or house compound is presented as an open space, suitable for recreational activities such as playing badminton, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995).



Figure 3: The Landscape Environment of Haji Sidek's Residence Based on *Anak-anak Sidek*, Episode *Gelanggang Baru Sidek*.

Referring to Figure 3, the components within each yard are influenced by the functional use of space by the household members and their environmental context. For instance, open spaces serve as areas for recreational and sports activities, such as playing badminton and conducting social events. The spacious and open front yard acts as an intermediary space between the main house entrance and the surrounding landscape, ensuring continuity between indoor and outdoor functions. Additionally, ornamental plants in the front yard play a significant role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of Malay homes (Hussein, Mohamed & Mohd Shariff, 2008).

Besides serving as decorative elements and spaces for community activities, the front yard also accommodates various functional plants, whether for food sources, medicinal purposes, or ornamentation.

From a medicinal perspective, Jones (2013) supports the idea that the Malay community traditionally utilizes natural materials, particularly fragrant plants, as the foundation of traditional medicine. The medical practices of the Malay people encompass the influence of natural forces, as seen in the historical belief systems of the Malay community (Lokman, 2011). According to Kiddcruz (2017), while the evolution of beliefs has significantly transformed and diminished over time, certain traditions remain deeply embedded within Malay culture. This is evident in the narrative of Anak-anak Sidek, particularly in the episode *Alan kena Sampuk*. In this episode, fragrant flowering plants from the front yard, such as *bunga melur* (jasmine) and *cempaka* (champaca), are used by a *pawang* (shaman) to treat Alan, who is believed to be possessed by a water spirit. Ismail N. A. (2010) further emphasizes that plants commonly found in the front yards of Malay homes serve multiple purposes, including decoration, medicine, and cultural rituals. These plants are also adaptable, allowing their arrangement to be modified based on the spatial needs of activities such as communal feasts or other social events.

This indicates that the plants traditionally cultivated in Malay home gardens not only function as medicinal resources but also contribute to an aesthetically pleasing, refreshing, and harmonious living environment. Meanwhile, the side yard is typically designated for food-related necessities, including fruit-bearing plants and small livestock. This area often features resting spaces, such as a *pangkin* (raised wooden platform) placed beneath trees for shade. The backyard, on the other hand, is strategically used for culinary purposes, with common plantings including *serai* (lemongrass), *pandan* (screwpine leaf), kunyit (turmeric), and fruit trees such as *pisang* (banana) and *nangka* (jackfruit) (Mohamed, 2008; Hussain, et al., 2024). In addition, the side yard often contains dense, fruit-bearing plants that create a continuity between the vegetation in the front and backyard (Maliki, 2010). Apart from fruit trees, certain plants are specifically cultivated for medicinal use and ceremonial purposes (Wan Alias, 2016). In the episode *Kehilangan Buyut*, villagers construct a coffin and conduct Buyut's funeral ceremony in the side yard of Haji Sidek's house before transporting the body to the cemetery for burial. During this event, surrounding vegetation and household materials are utilized, including timber for the coffin and fragrant plants for the burial rites. This scene clearly demonstrates the significance of these landscape elements in traditional Malay homes, where multifunctional plants and materials ensure the community's preparedness for daily life needs (Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Mohd Yunos, 2015). Each of these components is considered an integral part of the cultural framework that defines the Malay residential landscape.

Front Yard

The front yard plays a significant role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of traditional Malay homes. It serves as the primary focal point (*ibu seri*) of a traditional Malay residence. This space functions both as a decorative area and as an essential venue for community activities (Harun, Mohd Ariffin, & Abdullah, 2017). According to Nasir (1985), some traditional Malay home front yards do not have grass lawns and are meticulously swept clean of fallen leaves and debris. These yards are typically unpaved and surrounded by flowering or fruit-bearing trees, which also act as natural boundaries for the house. The front yard serves as a communal space for social activities such as family and neighbour gatherings, *kenduri* (feasts), children's play areas, and as a place for drying or smoking fruits such as *pinang* (areca nuts), *kelapa* (coconuts), and *asam keping* (dried sour fruits) (Harun & Ibrahim, 2011).

This setting is depicted in the comic *Anak-anak Sidek*, specifically in the episode *Kasih Ibu*. In this episode, Haji Sidek's children practice the Malay martial art silat and badminton training in their front yard (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995). However, in contemporary times, landscaping trends have evolved, and grass lawns have become an integral part of residential decoration (Ahmad, Abu Bakar & Ibrahim, 2006). According to Hussain et al. (2015), plants commonly cultivated in this area primarily serve a decorative function and are adaptable, allowing for rearrangement to accommodate social activities such as feasts. Additionally, large trees usually fruit-bearing species such as rambutan and mango are often planted in front yards (Harun & Ibrahim, 2011). These trees are characterized by their wide canopy, providing shade for open spaces in front of the house while also serving as a food source for the residents (see Figure 4). Besides the spacious yard, this area is usually adorned with small flowering and fragrant plants, further enhancing its visual and sensory appeal.



Figure 4: Illustration of Recreational Activities Carried out in the Front Yard, Specifically Fruit Picking, Based on the Anak-Anak Sidek Comic, Episode *Alan Kena Sampuk*.

Side Yard

The side yard serves as a transitional space between the front and back yards. According to Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Mohd Yunos (2015), this area is structured and can be divided into two sections: the left and right-side yards. The division of these spaces functions as an intermediary phase between the front, side, and back yards (Aziz, Noor Faizah, Md. Jahi, A. Jamaluddin, & Ari, 2008). The side yard maintains continuity with the elements found in the front yard (Abdul Rahman, 2003).

As depicted in the comic *Anak-anak Sidek*, the types of plants in this space share similarities in function with those in the front yard, although their arrangement is less dense due to the incorporation of hardscape elements such as *pangkin*, *bangsal* (sheds), and *wakaf* (gazebo) (Hussein, Mohamed & Mohd Shariff, 2008).

This statement is further supported by Hussain et al. (2020), who explain that the presence of such hardscape elements aligns with the function of the side yard as a resting area. This space is typically furnished with garden furniture such as *pangkin*, *bangsal*, or *wakaf*. The same researchers suggest that these shaded resting areas are commonly used by homeowners for social activities such as net weaving and mending fishing nets. For example, in the Anak-anak Sidek episode *Baik Punya Minat*, the presence of hardscape elements like *bangsal* is explicitly illustrated as part of the traditional Malay residential landscape, as described in the following passage:

"After eating, Bun and Alan immediately headed to the sheds beside the house to search for something... Suddenly, they became anxious and puzzled, continuing their search intently. Unbeknownst to them, Rukinah was sweeping the area behind the house while observing her children's movements at the *bangsal*" (Anak-anak Sidek, episod *Baik Punya Minat*, p. 20).

In this episode, the sheds refer to a space for resting, conversing, and carrying out daily activities for the homeowner. Additionally, the use of the bangsal in the side yard of the house also serves as a reception area for guests and as an extension of the living space outside the main house (Wan Alias, 2016). Besides providing a spacious and shaded area, decorative flowering plants are also used to enhance the aesthetic appeal for visitors (Mohd Sahabuddin, 2016). Furthermore, this space functions as a supplementary area for hosting events such as communal feasts, social gatherings, and association meetings. The suitability of this area as a resting place is due to its location at the side of the house, which is shielded from the view of outsiders by decorative and shade-providing plants found in the front yard (Zakaria, Salleh, & Abd Rashid, 2014).

Backyard

The backyard serves as a continuation of the side yard, incorporating various elements and components related to it (Haji Salleh & Robson, 2010). Typically, plants with lower aesthetic value are placed in the backyard. Due to this, landscape furniture such as chicken coops and animal pens are located in this area, as it is generally less visually appealing and somewhat dull. According to Harun and Ibrahim (2011), the backyard has a high density of vegetation with a scattered arrangement. This creates a semi-transparent and dense environment that helps filter odours from nearby swamp areas and conceals less attractive landscape elements, such as chicken coops and cattle pens.

The backyard environment is usually overgrown, dim, and somewhat mysterious, making it less appealing for household members to engage in recreational activities (Ahmad, Abu Bakar, & Ibrahim, 2006). This characteristic aligns with a passage from the Anak-anak Sidek comic, episode *Petir Selamatkan Adul*. In this episode, the children of Haji Sidek are instructed by their mother to clear the increasingly overgrown bushes behind the house, as described in the following excerpt:

Although the afternoon had progressed, the weather remained hot. Nevertheless, Misbun and his younger siblings continued working to clear the overgrown bushes behind the house, as instructed by their mother (Anak-anak Sidek, episode *Petir Selamatkan Adul*).

This description is further supported by an illustration in Anak-anak Sidek, which depicts the children of Haji Sidek engaged in clearing the overgrown bushes in the backyard, as shown in Figure 5:



Figure 5. Anak-anak Haji Sidek Clearing the Overgrown Bushes in the Backyard.

Based on the analysis conducted on the collected data, the backyard space not only serves as a functional planting area for food purposes but also influences the traditional Malay community's perception of this area. The influence of mystical elements and respect for the unseen world continues to be instilled as guidance and wisdom in the lives of the traditional Malay community, ensuring that they avoid misfortune and negative occurrences, particularly in social activities conducted in the backyard. This statement is supported by Aziz, Noor Faizah, Md. Jahi, A. Jamaluddin, and Ari (2008), who state that in the past, elders were reluctant to allow young children to play or engage in activities alone in the backyard, especially during midday and dusk. This belief stems from Malay traditions, which associate the area with spirits of an unfavorable nature, often linked to mystical folklore and the supernatural realm (Merah, 2019).

This notion is illustrated in *Anak-anak Sidek*, episode *Ghaib di Hutan dan Memulihkan Semangat*. In this episode, Haji Sidek's son, Misbun, disappears in the overgrown bushes at the backyard and is believed to have been taken by *bunian* (supernatural beings) while playing with his friends at midday (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995). During the search for Misbun in the thicket, Wak Sakawi recites incantations accompanied by Quranic verses while carrying blessed

water mixed with rice, betel nut, betel leaves, lime, and flowers collected from around Haji Sidek's yard to summon Misbun's spirit, which was believed to have been hidden by the *bunian*, as depicted in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The Ritual Conducted by Wak Sakawi, acting as a Shaman, to Locate and Restore Misbun's Weakened Spirit Through Incantations while he was Believed to be Hidden by the *Bunian*.

According to Ahmad, Abu Bakar, and Ibrahim (2006), shamans or healers play a significant role in performing these rituals through the practice of *menurun* (spiritual calling) and the recitation of spells and mantras. This holistic healing process requires natural elements, as mentioned earlier, to serve as intermediaries for communication with the supernatural realm (Hussain M. A., Mohd Yunos, Ismail, Mohd Ariffin, & Ismail, 2020). In addition to this holistic approach, traditional Malay society also practices physical healing methods (Nasir, 1985), which primarily involve the use of roots and herbal plants.

For instance, in the episode *Ajib Patah Tangan*, Wak Sakawi treats his grandson's broken arm, which resulted from a fall while playing in the backyard, using *tembaga suasah* leaves or known as spider lily, a type of medicinal herb commonly found around the Malay household landscape (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995). According to Ismail M. (2018) and Che Isahak (2009), in traditional Malay medicine, *tembaga suasah* leaves are effective in aiding the recovery of bone fractures and swelling caused by strenuous activities or sports. They further explain that in treating broken or swollen bones, the clean *tembaga suasah* leaves are first coated with coconut oil before being slightly heated over a flame. Once the leaves appear oily, they are then wrapped around the affected area, such as fractures, sprains, or dislocations. This traditional treatment requires regular application, with fresh leaves being replaced twice daily (Ahmad I. F., 2016). Additionally, Ahmad I. F. (2016) states that this traditional remedy is regarded as effective in treating ailments related to bones and joints. The necessity of such treatments has led to the presence of numerous herbal plants and medicinal vegetation around traditional Malay homes, ensuring easy access for the household.

Based on document analysis, several types of plants have been identified in the landscape of traditional Malay houses, categorized by their functions: food, medicine, cosmetics, decoration, and shading. The spatial distribution of these plants, as observed through document analysis, reveals a strong relationship between their placement, functional purposes, and their connection to different parts of the house. Plants in the front yard are closely associated with decorative and ornamental functions, with species typically characterized by flowering attributes,

vibrant colors, pleasant fragrances, small sizes, and flexibility in placement. These characteristics influence the spatial arrangement of the front yard, where plants are systematically arranged larger trees are placed at the periphery to form a boundary or natural fence, while smaller plants are positioned towards the front and center to enhance the home's aesthetic appeal (Abdul Rahman, 2003). The flexibility of certain plants also reflects cultural influences on the front yard landscape (Hussain M. A., Mohd Yunos, Ismail, Mohd Ariffin, & Ismail, 2020). This space is often used for community cultural activities such as feasts and recreational gatherings, thus necessitating the use of potted plants to allow the area to be rearranged as needed.

The planting arrangement in the front yard extends seamlessly to the side yard, albeit with some differences in composition, function, and scale. As previously mentioned, the space is divided into three transitional areas connecting the front, side, and backyard. The vegetation in this area shares some similarities with both the front and backyards. The selection of plants corresponds to the function of this space as a family relaxation area (Ismail, Ariffin, Ismail, & Mohd Yunos, 2015). Typically, this area features large trees that provide ample shade and fruit-bearing species. The presence of additional elements in this space, such as wooden benches, further complements the selection of vegetation. For instance, a pangkin is often placed beneath a large fruit tree like a rambutan tree, providing a shaded resting spot in the afternoon and a space for communal village activities. The composition of plants within this transitional space gradually changes from the front to the backyard, becoming denser towards the rear. This increasing density creates a semi-private environment that offers seclusion. Additionally, the placement of landscape furniture, such as coops and sheds, is influenced by this vegetation arrangement, as the plants help to conceal these elements from the front view (Mohamed, 2008). Furthermore, this space serves as a transitional link between the main living areas and the kitchen.

Meanwhile, plants in the backyard are selected based on the functional needs of the kitchen area, primarily consisting of edible and medicinal herbs commonly used in cooking and traditional remedies (Aziz, Noor Faizah, Md. Jahi, A. Jamaluddin, & Ari, 2008). The backyard vegetation also plays a role in absorbing pollutants, neutralizing odors, and enhancing the visual landscape (Hazel Khamis, 2007). Common plants found in areas receiving wastewater runoff include *pandan*, yam, lemongrass, ginger, water celery, and betel, as these species have high water absorption capacities and emit pleasant fragrances. This functional relationship between plants and space can be observed in Anak-anak Sidek, where the storyline reflects the suitability of various plants in different areas of the yard based on their characteristics and intended purposes (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995).

Apart from plants, the selection and placement of landscape furniture are also influenced by the activities conducted in different yard spaces as summarized in Table 1 below. The components commonly found in traditional Malay house landscapes include *gerbang* (archways), *wakaf* (gazebos), *tempayan* (water jars), *guri* (earthenware pots), *kolah* (water basins), *pangkin* (wooden benches), flower pots, *titi* (footbridges), *telaga* (wells), *kolam* (ponds), *perun* (fireplaces), *reban* (coops), *bangsai* (sheds), and *rumah padi* (rice granaries) (Hussain M. A., et al., 2016). The presence of these components is influenced by geographical and environmental factors, such as proximity to water bodies or dry land. For example, coops and sheds are common elements frequently depicted in Anak-anak Sidek. Whenever Haji Sidek disciplines his children for misbehavior, he punishes them by locking them inside the chicken coop (Kumpulan Pelukis J.A.S Sdn. Bhd., 1995). The purpose of this punishment is to teach them discipline and good manners. The distribution of landscape furniture is directly correlated with the function of each space. For instance, water jars, dippers, water basins, and flowerpots are typically found in the front yard, serving decorative and hygiene-related purposes

for guests before entering the house. Meanwhile, benches, water jars, wells, and sheds are commonly found in the side yard, functioning as resting spots and for daily household needs. Finally, elements such as coops, fishponds, and platforms are located in the backyard, which serves as a private area used for cooking, drying laundry, carpentry, and other household activities. This analysis clearly demonstrates how environmental factors and spatial functionality influence the presence and placement of landscape furniture, ultimately contributing to the distinct characteristics of traditional Malay landscapes.

Table 1: Summary of the Relationship between Landscape Elements and Cultural Functions Based on the Anak-anak Sidek Comic

Landscape Component	Elements/Examples in the Comic	Cultural and Social Functions	Related Episodes
Front Yard	Banana tree, ornamental flower, badminton activity	Recreation, healing, aesthetics, rituals	Alan Kena Sampuk, Gelanggang Baru Sidek
Side Yard	Pangkin, shed, fruit plants	Resting, socializing, ceremonial support	Baik Punya Minat, Kehilangan Buyut
Backyard	Shrubs, herbal plants, chicken coop	Healing, mystical beliefs, food supply	Petir Selamatkan Adul, Ajib Patah Tangan

Summary

The traditional Malay house landscape represents the cultural adaptation of Malay life within their natural environment. Malay culture embodies a complex way of life that encompasses practices, thoughts, and beliefs. It is deeply intertwined with nature, spanning both physical and spiritual functions. This connection can be observed and experienced through perception, emotions, and lived experiences, particularly within the environmental context of traditional Malay home gardens as depicted in the comic *Anak-anak Sidek*. The landscape, as portrayed in the comic, reflects various elements of nature, communal activities, spatial arrangements, and garden furniture.

Generally, the Malay landscape emphasizes function and its role in the surrounding environment. The plants and landscape furniture found around traditional Malay homes serve multiple purposes in daily life, categorized into two main aspects: physical and spiritual. The physical aspect pertains to the functional role of plants and landscape furniture within the residential space and for its inhabitants. These functions include sources of food, shade and protection, medicinal use, fencing, and cultural or ritual necessities. Meanwhile, the spiritual aspect involves the symbolic and ritualistic use of plants, particularly in traditional healing practices. Both aspects are closely linked to the metaphysical world, which forms a fundamental part of Malay beliefs. This is evidenced by the presence of traditional Malay healing elements in *Anak-anak Sidek*, which continue to be acknowledged today.

The cultural landscape of the Malays reflects a form of environmental adaptation, wherein natural elements are integrated into daily and communal activities. This integration is evident in agricultural, plantation, and fishing activities, which rely on natural elements as supporting components. Similarly, traditional Malay children's games demonstrate this connection, as seen in activities such as *tarik upih*, *sepak raga*, slingshot shooting, river bathing, and kite flying. However, the landscape of traditional Malay homes has undergone transformations over time due to modernization and development. These changes have led to the disappearance of certain cultural and traditional elements, resulting in the gradual loss of the Malay cultural landscape's distinct characteristics and the associated knowledge and values.

This study focuses on the components and elements of the Malay cultural landscape within the traditional Malay home environment, as represented in Anak-anak Sidek. It examines aspects such as vegetation, spatial arrangement, and key landscape components. The findings validate the existence of the Malay cultural landscape, which forms the central objective of this research. This study provides a deeper understanding of the Malay cultural landscape, particularly in relation to plant use, spatial organization, and, by extension, the traditional way of life of the Malay community. The unique lifestyle patterns of the past serve as valuable lessons for the present generation in fostering a harmonious relationship with nature and their surroundings. However, a notable limitation of this study lies in its reliance on a single primary source the autobiographical comic Anak-anak Sidek. While the comic presents a rich cultural narrative, it is ultimately framed through the perspective of its creators and may not fully represent the diverse variations of traditional Malay house landscapes across different states or socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, future research is encouraged to incorporate supplementary data from other sources such as interviews or fieldwork. This study, nevertheless, serves as a valuable reference and potential catalyst for further exploration in the fields of landscape studies and cultural heritage. Thus, this research is expected to inspire and serve as a catalyst for future studies in both landscape and cultural disciplines.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the traditional Malay house landscape reflects the close relationship between humans, nature, culture, customs, and beliefs. The key landscape components, such as the front yard, side yard, and backyard, along with the flora and landscape furniture surrounding the home, highlight the Malay community's deep reliance on their natural environment. The landscape is not merely an aesthetic element but also serves as a social space, a therapeutic environment, a food source, and a symbol of identity and culture. Additionally, this study affirms that tradition, customs, and the Malay community's beliefs in the metaphysical world play a crucial role in shaping both the physical and symbolic aspects of the landscape. Cultural elements such as *pantang larang* (taboos), *adat resam* (customs), and religious rituals influence the structure and spatial use of the home, reflecting the balance and harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the traditional Malay cultural landscape and emphasize the importance of preserving these elements in modern landscape planning. Furthermore, this research provides insight into how the Malay community adapts to their natural surroundings and how the landscape reflects their unique cultural identity. Overall, this study reinforces that the traditional Malay house landscape is a form of cultural and environmental adaptation that significantly influences identity, social life, and cultural sustainability within the Malay community. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for the preservation and planning of Malay cultural landscapes in the future.

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