

## Woodcarving Motifs at Melaka Traditional Houses: Kampung Morten

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### Abstract

Woodcarving is an important component for the traditional Malay houses. Malay traditional houses becomes a symbol of ancient craftsmanship skills which having beautiful architecture and richness of ornamentation. This paper intends to focus on detail about woodcarving motifs at Melaka traditional houses of Kampung Morten. The houses have been selecting are Rumah Villa Sentosa Ibrahim, Rumah Maniam Othman, Rumah Joret Ali and Rumah Hajah Kamarbee. In 1988, the Melaka state government has gazette Kampung Morten as a traditional Malay village of heritage significance and turned it into a tourist attraction. This research will be using qualitative method as a way to understand motif of woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses. Data collection of motifs will be depending at field studies at houses through photography and sketches on site. This research also will use theory Zakaria Ali to interpret and analyzing woodcarvings motifs. In design perspective, the findings would serve in understanding the visual attributes of woodcarving such as motifs and design forms. The paper would fill in the gap of new knowledge regarding the motif woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses. The documentation of knowledge about woodcarving motifs should be made and exposed to younger generations as well as a valuable collection of traditional Malay heritage.

**Keywords:** Traditional melaka houses; Woodcarving motifs; Kampung morten.



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### 1. Introduction

Woodcarving is a traditional significant art in the Malay architecture. Malay traditional houses becomes a symbol of ancient craftsmanship skills which having richness of ornamentation. This paper focusing on detail about woodcarving motifs at Melaka traditional houses of Kampung Morten. The houses have been selecting are Rumah Villa Sentosa Ibrahim, Rumah Maniam Othman, Rumah Joret Ali and Rumah Hajah Kamarbee.

Kampung Morten was opened in 1992 with an area of 5.02 hectares. It is located next to the Malacca River which very popular with Malacca River Cruise. There are 100 houses including 52 Malacca traditional dwellings and a mosque with 600 residents in this village (Rahman *et al.*, 2015). This village was open by Datuk Othman Md. Nor as the village chief of the village. Kampung Morten was given its name in memory of J. F. Morten, the Land Commissioner in the 1920s, who helping the residents to collect and secure enough money to purchase a piece of land that had been identified as their future settlement. In 1988, the Melaka state government has gazette Kampung Morten as a traditional Malay village of heritage under Malacca's Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Enactment and the area turned it into a tourist attraction in Malacca.

### 2. Problem Statement

Nowadays, traditional houses at Melaka become hard to find. The documentation of knowledge about woodcarving motifs should be made and exposes to younger generations as well as a valuable collection of traditional Malay heritage. "It is important for us to gazette the areas as heritage villages before they disappear in the future due to development," said the former Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam to reporters (The Star, 2009). Besides, the motifs are hand drawn and only the owner will know how to pattern it. Knowledge about woodcarving motifs should be documentation and has to preserve and sustain especially in this urbanization era.

### 3. Research Aim and Objective

This research aims to provide a historical background of woodcarving motifs at Melaka traditional houses of Kampung Morten. This study will document the woodcarving motifs from interior and exterior of the houses. The component of the house including wall, door and window, ventilation panels as well as roof. In design perspective, the findings would serve in understanding the visual attributes of woodcarving such as motifs and design forms. The research attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the motifs of woodcarving.

2. To categories the motif and pattern of woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses.

#### 4. Significance

The research would fill in the gap of new knowledge regarding the motifs of woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses. Furthermore, this knowledge can be gives better appreciation of Melaka traditional houses by the present and future generation as well as a valuable collection of traditional Malay heritage.

#### 5. Literature Review

The main features of woodcarving are composition of motifs, pattern, principles, carving techniques and several of value of the carver such as patience, technical skills and creativity. Noordin (2005), states woodcarving is an art work formed according to a specific composition of motif coordinated by specified organizational principles and usually produced for beauty. Motif can be carving in two or three dimensions and arranged by pattern. Malay woodcarving has three basic patterns namely, the single pattern, the frame pattern and the complete pattern (Rahmah and Azlin, 2002). Malay carving usually comprises various piercing techniques called 'tebuk timbus, tebuk separuh, and 'tebuk timbul' which literally means direct piercing, semi-piercing and emboss piercing respectively (Farish and Eddin, 2012). Five basic elements in woodcarving is the leaves, stems, flowers, fruits and vines. The characteristics of Malay woodcarving mainly comprises of design attributes such as types of flower, types of leaves, design elements and manifestation into carving (Nursuriani and Ismail, 2013).

Norhaiza (2005), states woodcarving is an art work formed according to a specific composition of motif coordinated by specified organizational principles and usually produced for beauty. In woodcarving, motif is decorative elements and a basic pattern or motif is repeated and adjusted according to the position until the carving is done. The origin of motif in Malay woodcarving in Malay Archipelago start from the pre-Islamic era when the Malays practicing Hindu-Buddhism. In the Malay Peninsula, the source of influence on the motif of woodcarving was religion beginning from animism and reached its peak with the coming of Islam in the 14 and 15 centuries (Rosnawati, 2005). Therefore, motif in Malaysia having early influences by Hindu-Buddhism, Malay Langkasuka, Dong-Son and the arrival of Islam. After the arrival of Islam, fauna motif becoming obsolete and the form of animals were highly stylized. Motif of living things which had previously been important began to change to plant motifs in stylized forms and also carving on Islamic calligraphy (Nasir, 1986). The transformations were also influenced by the craftsman's skill, natural elements, and religious belief and thought (Abdul Halim and Wan, 1996). Later, the influence of religion, beliefs and socio-cultural development of the Malay community significantly influenced the motif development. Hanafi (2000), define the major motifs used by Malay woodcarvers include the floral motif, the geometric motif and calligraphy. Motif of flora, geometry, Arabic calligraphy and cosmic features are depicted on panels of doors, walls, railing and ventilation components in different shapes and sizes (Ismail, 2001).

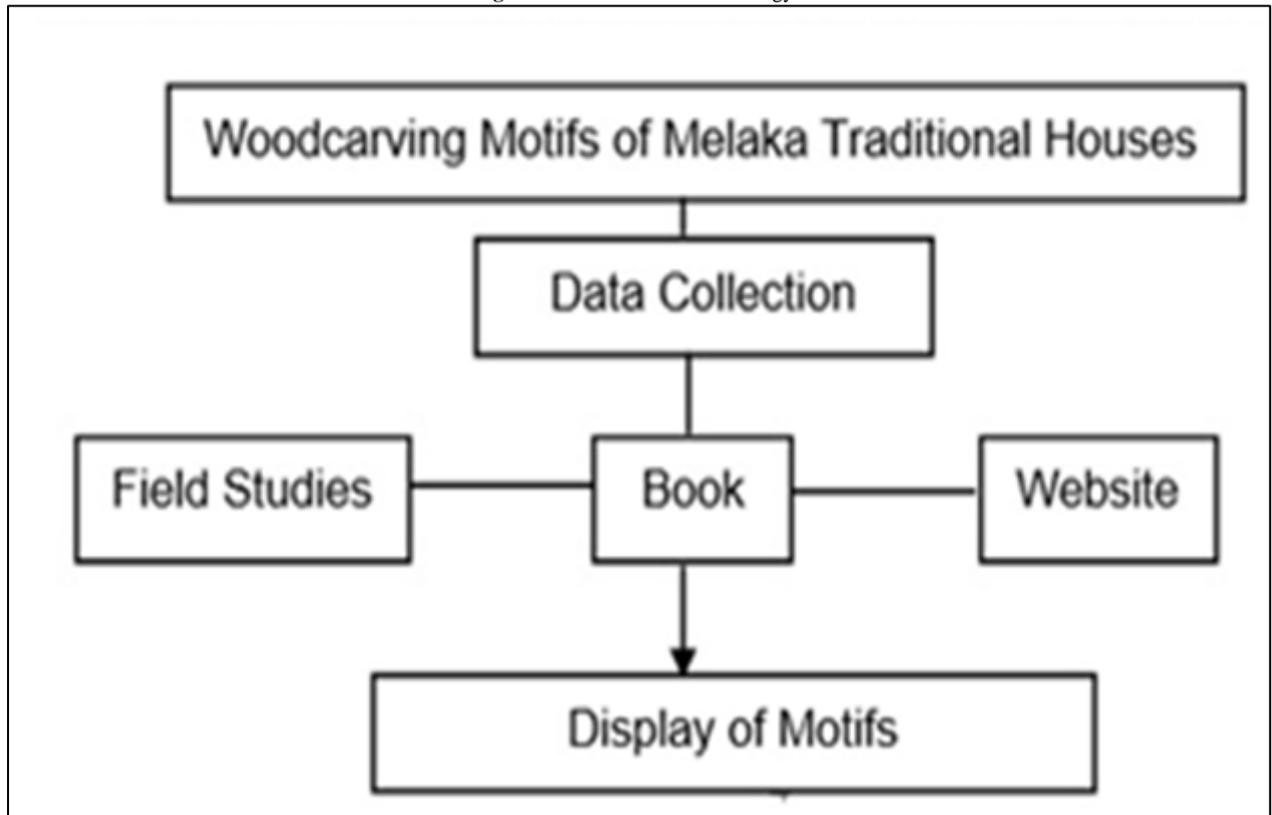
History of Malacca begin in the late 14th century, Malacca was a fishing village turned into favored port at the strategic Straits of Malacca. Malacca came to monopolize the trading routes due its strategic location between China and India. After Malacca was attacked by Portuguese in 1511, Dutch 1641 and British 1824, Malacca having many cultural influences. On 15 April 1989, Malacca was declared a historical city and also listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site since 7 July 2008. One of the heritages is Kampung Morten which was opened in 1992 with an area of 5.02 hectares. It is located next to the Malacca River which very popular with Malacca River Cruise. This village was open by Datuk Othman Md. Nor as the village chief of the village. Kampung Morten was given its name in memory of J. F. Morten, the Land Commissioner in the 1920s, who helping the residents to collect and secure enough money to purchase a piece of land that had been identified as their future settlement.

Malay traditional houses becomes a symbol of ancient craftsmanship skills. The beauty of this architecture also a reflection design of Melaka Sultanate palace in the 15th century. The Melaka traditional Malay houses, also called long-roofed Melaka house can be found in all districts in Melaka, which were built with special architectural styles (Ismail *et al.*, 2013). The house component consists of the main house, middle house and kitchen. There are two types of traditional houses in Melaka which 'rumah serambi' or 'rumah bumbung melayu' dan 'rumah bumbung limas'. The house component consists of the main house, middle house and kitchen (Malaysia National Heritage Malaysia, 2016). A typical traditional Melaka house stands on 12 to 16 main pillars. Many of the traditional homes in Melaka were built using the best timber and often they stood on pillars, have high floor and gable roof, and a front staircase adorned with colorful titles (Abidin, 1981). The houses also display a mixture of architectural influences such as Bugis, Jambi, Riau and Minangkabau and China. Most of the Melaka houses welcomed visitors with a very elegant brick stairway or staircase made from multi colored decorated tiles imported from China and India (Melaka Museum Corporation, 2008). The influence come from the arrival of European, China and India trader during 14th century affecting the architecture, local motives and carving.

#### 6. Research Methodology

This research uses qualitative method as a way to understand motif of woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses. The houses will be selecting by the beauty and aesthetical value of woodcarving motifs. Data collection of motifs will be depending at field studies at houses through photography and sketches on site. This research also will use theory Zakaria Ali to interpret and analyzing woodcarvings motifs. This paper will follow the flow chart as illustrated in figure 1. The flowchart below explains the workflow of the process which involved observation and categorizing motifs.

Figure-1. Flowchart of Methodology



This method emphasizes in order to answer the research objectives;

1. To identify the motifs of woodcarving.
2. To categories the motif and pattern of woodcarving at Melaka traditional houses.

## 7. Analysis and Finding

In design perspective, the findings serve in understanding the visual attributes of woodcarving such as motifs, pattern and design forms. Categories of woodcarving motifs can be found at 4 houses in this paper is flora, geometry, still life and fauna.

Figure-2. Classification of Woodcarving Motifs

Analysis -Classification of Woodcarving Motifs	
Flora	Clove (Bunga Cengkih)  Broken Flower Four (Bunga Pecah Empat)  Frangipani (Bunga Kemboja)  Star Flower (Bunga Bintang)  Spanish Cherry (Bunga Tanjung) 
Geometry	Circle  Oval  Diamond  Heart  Triangle 
Still Life	Kris (Keris-Malay Weapon)  Fretwork(Kerawang)  Sarung Knife (Sarung Parang) 
Fauna	Bat Dome (Kubah Kelawar)  Bee Hanging (Lebah Bergayut) 

### 7.1. Rumah Villa Sentosa Ibrahim (1920)

Villa Sentosa located on the edge of the Melaka River was built by Othman when he opened the village in 1920. The house was renovated into a private museum and was launched on 11 December 1991. It is known as The Malay Living Museum. Villa Sentosa is now managed by the generation's heirs, Abdul Rahim Hashim, 58 years old. This house is a limas house where there are several divisions such as porch, mother's house, kitchen house and kitchen. There are various carvings that can be seen in this traditional house and the main motifs are Flora and Geometry-based.

Figure-3. Rumah Villa Sentosa Ibrahim



Figure-4. Woodcarving motifs at Villa Sentosa Ibrahim

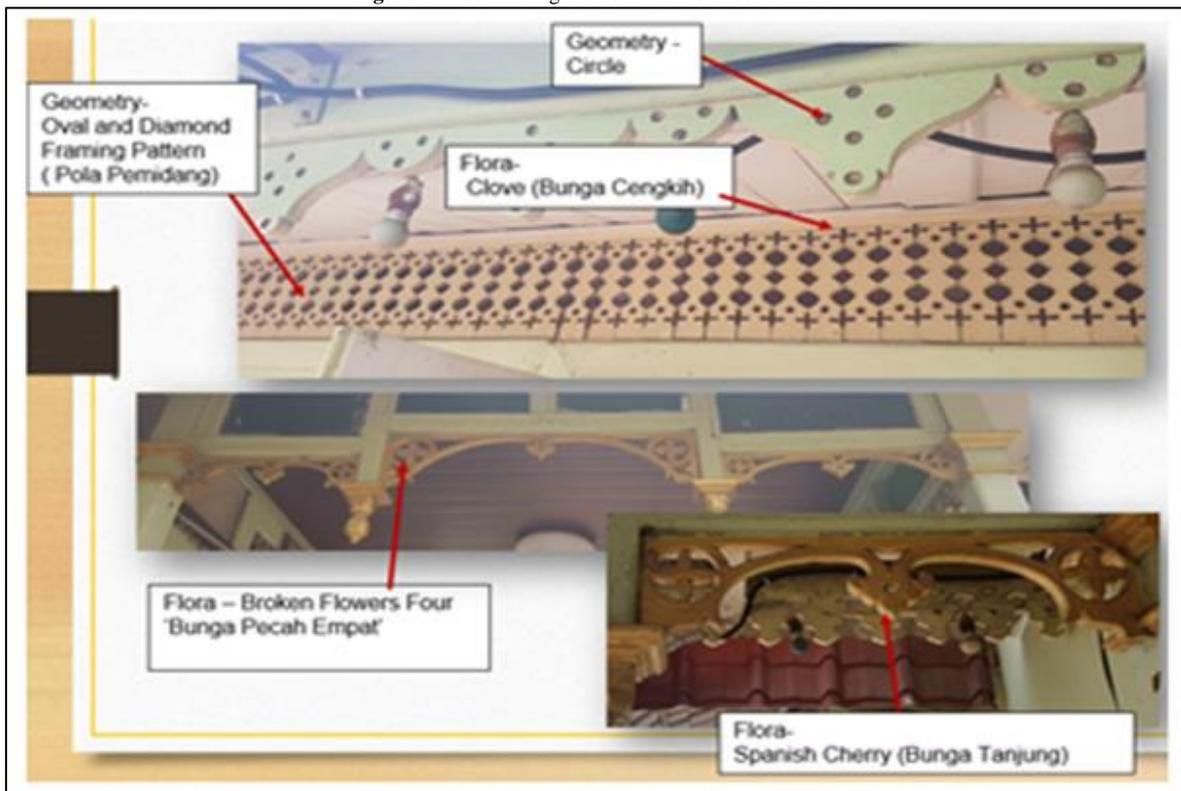
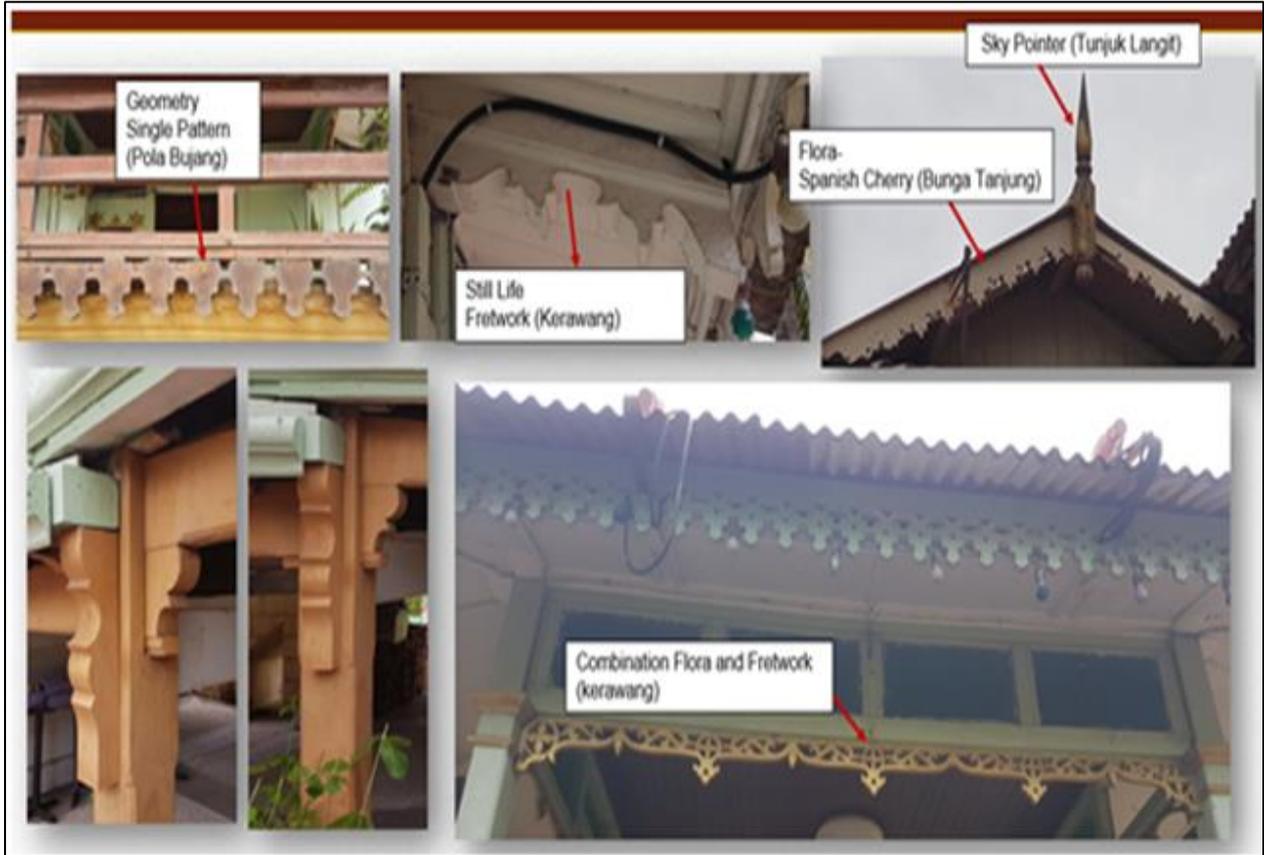


Figure-5. Woodcarving motifs at Villa Sentosa Ibrahim



## 7.2. Rumah Hajah Kamarbee (1945)

This house was built in 1945 by the owner of the house, Mohd bin Daud. This home comes from a grocery store that operates for 10 years. Mohd bin Daud is an imam or priest in the village of Morten. Therefore, he used this house as a place to teach his students to study. In 1975, Mrs. Hajah Kamarbee renovated this house as a traditional home complete with foyer, central house, 4 rooms, kitchen and a bathroom. This house having translucent carvings called Direct Piercing 'Tebuk Timbus'. In addition to ornamental purposes, a variety of hollow carvings also promote the air and light in the house.

Figure-6. Rumah Hajah Kamarbee



Figure-7. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Hajah Kamarbee

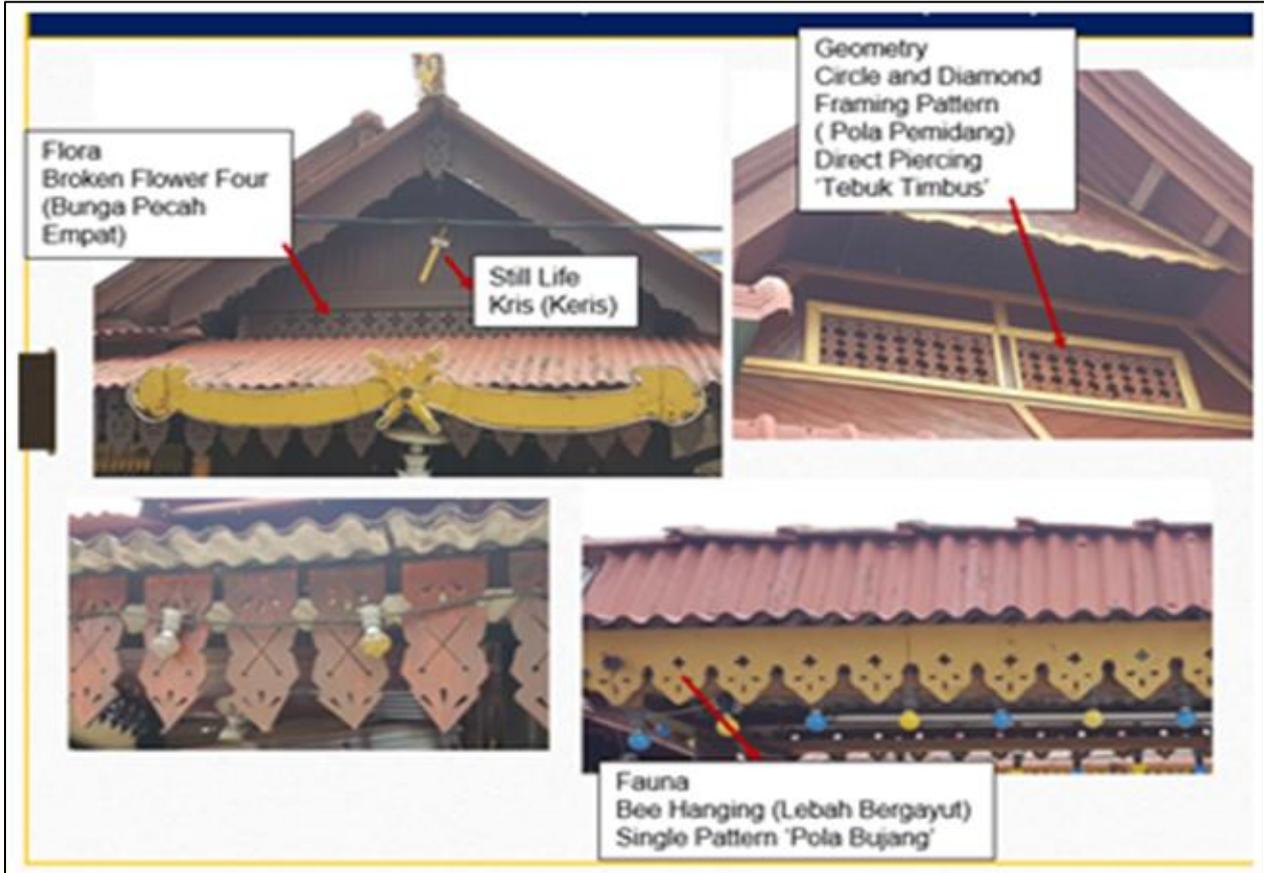
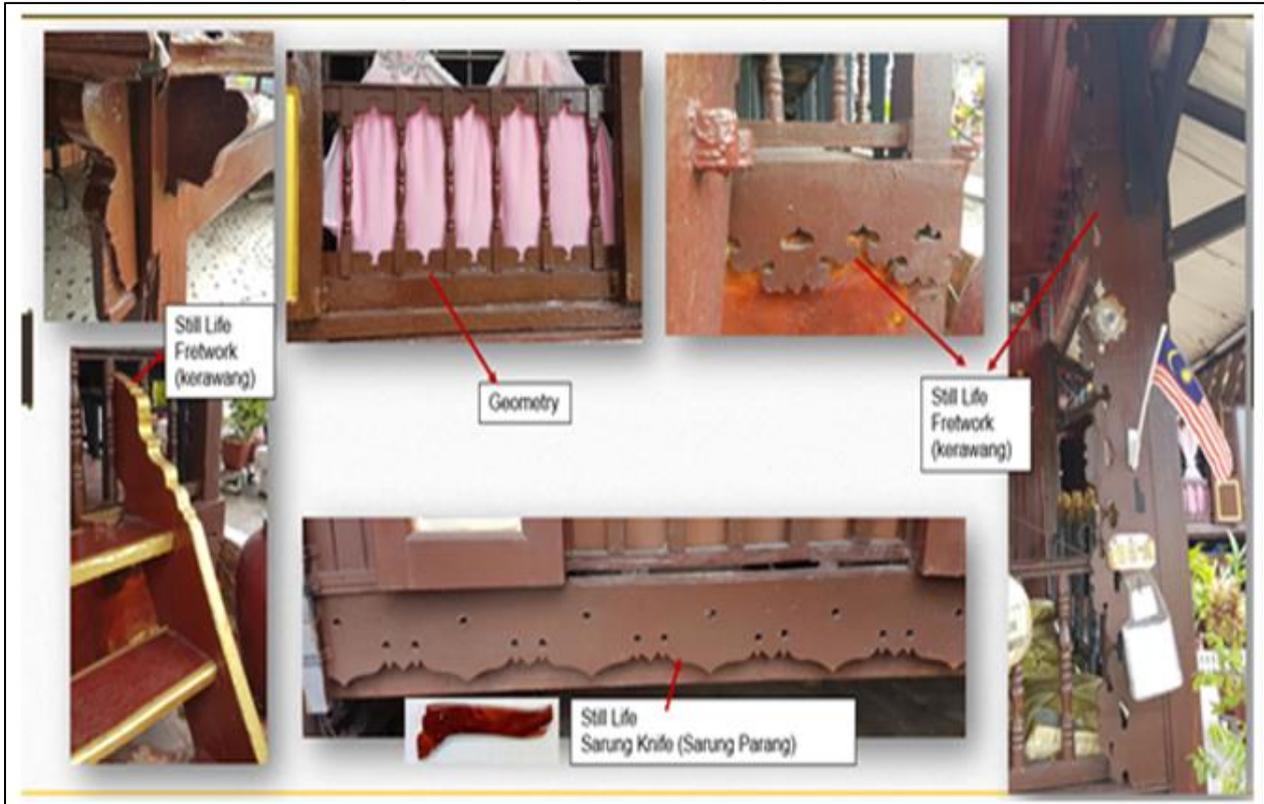


Figure-8. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Hajah Kamarbee



### 7.3. Rumah Maniam Othman (A Century)

Mariam Othman's heritage house is more than a hundred years old, the house originally owned by the Mahmood. This houses still retain the traditions and historical values contained in the State of Malacca. Mariam Othman House has 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and kitchen and renovated as homestay. There are various carvings that can be seen in this traditional house and the main motifs are Geometry-based.

Figure-9. Rumah Maniam Othman



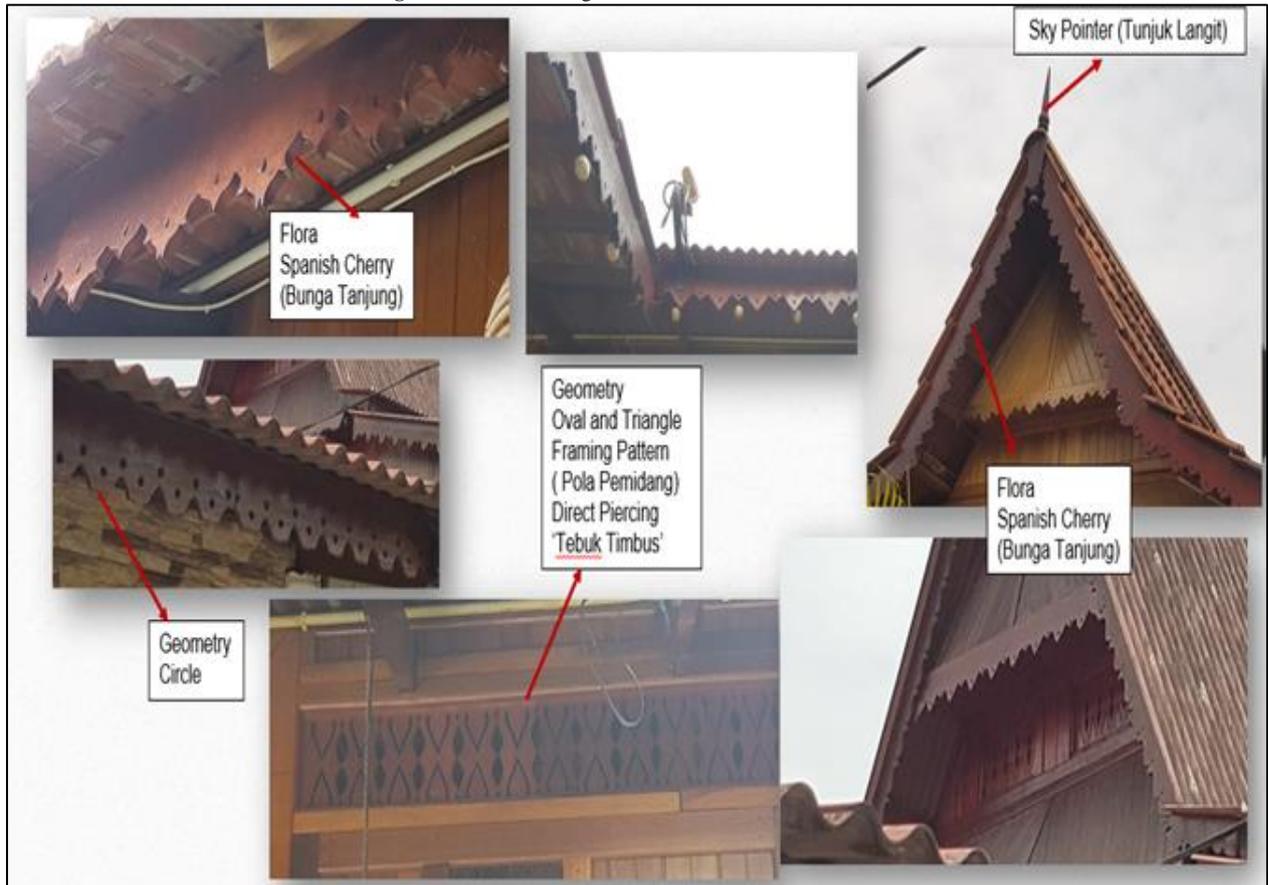
Figure-10. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Maniam Othman



#### 7.4. Rumah Joret Ali (1922)

A unique and traditional Melaka house is owned by a former YB Haji Joret Ali in the village. This house was built around 1922 and the house has an area of about 50 feet wide, high and long furnished with furniture and accommodation facilities. The walls, pillars and floors of this house are constructed using wood. There are various carvings that can be seen in this traditional house and the motifs are Flora and Geometry-based.

Figure-11. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Maniam Othman



## 7.5. Other Houses

Figure-12. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Joret Ali



Figure-13. Woodcarving motifs at Rumah Joret Ali



## 8. Discussion

Categories of woodcarving motifs can be found at 4 houses at Kampung Morten in this paper is flora, geometry, still life and fauna. First categories of woodcarving are flora motif. The floral motif is very prominent motif in Malay woodcarving. The flower motifs are influenced by the daily plants for decoration is Frangipani ‘Bunga Kemboja’ and for medical purpose is Spanish Cherry ‘Bunga Tanjung’. Besides that, the plant of Clove ‘Bunga Cengkih’ is spice consumed in Malay society every day in some kind of cuisine. The environment surrounded by nature element is encourages inspiration of Malay woodcarver.

<b>Flora</b>	Clove (Bunga Cengkih)
	Broken Flower Four (Bunga Pecah Empat)
	Frangipani (Bunga Kemboja)
	Star Flower (Bunga Bintang)
	Spanish Cherry (Bunga Tanjung)

Second categories of woodcarving motifs can be found is geometry motif. The geometric motif contains line and shapes which usually symmetrical and being repeated in the frame pattern. Geometric carving is more likely easier to carve and be found at ventilation panel, wall panels, railing and partitions.

<b>Geometry</b>	<b>Circle Oval Diamond Heart Triangle</b>

Next categories of woodcarving motifs can be found is still life motif. For Malay society, the choice of the still life motif based on the purpose and has certain causes including the belief of the object can bring good benefit, profit and protection. One of them is Keris which Malay weapon and well-known symbol of power, status and spiritual guardian of its owner in Malay culture. The woodcarver using keris for decoration to express the power of the Malay people. Another of the symbol can be found is Sheath Knife ‘Sarung Parang’. This motif is highly stylized and using at fascia board ‘papan manis and suitable for sloping position (angled) or flat. Fretwork ‘Kerawang’ is another motif of still life which it is combination of plant growth elements such as the leaves, stems, flowers, fruits and vines.

<b>Still Life</b>	Kris (Keris-Malay Weapon)
	Fretwork (Kerawang)
	Sarung Knife (Sarung Parang)

Last categories of woodcarving motifs can be found is fauna motif. Fauna motifs are less using in Malay woodcarving after the arrival of Islam due the prohibition of Islamic teaching to portray figure motif. The forms of animal were highly stylized and the shape and forms barely visible. The motif Bee Hanging 'Lebah Bergayut' reflects the honey bee house that usually hangs on the tree branches. The motif of Bat Dome 'Kubah Kelawar' have been carving of woodcarver through their village lives because bat is one of the animals will be entered into home especially in wooded villages. Both of this motif are carving in repetitive manner.

<b>Fauna</b>	Bat Dome (Kubah Kelawar)
	Bee Hanging (Lebah Bergayut)

## 9. Conclusion

Based on this research of Melaka traditional houses at Kampung Morten, the most categories of woodcarving motifs are by flora, geometry, still life and fauna. Influence of woodcarving motifs many comes from the surroundings of flora, plant, nature element and belief, religious of Malay woodcarver itself. The motifs in woodcarving being produced by appreciation of the beauty and uniqueness of life. After the arrival of Islam, fauna motif becoming obsolete and the form of animals were highly stylized and also led to development of geometric motif in Malay woodcarving.

Woodcarving is a highest art in Malay architecture, the motifs is relating with the period of carving, status of ownership, skill of craftsmen with high level of artistry and technique. Each woodcarving in Kampung Morten represents the traditional and aesthetic values. This research fills a gap of new knowledge regarding woodcarving motif at Melaka traditional houses.

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