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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROOF DECORATIVE ARCHITECTURAL COMPONENTS OF RUMAH LIMAS BUMBUNG PERAK (RLBP) TOWARDS HERITAGE INTERPRETATION OF PERAK TENGAH

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Abstract

Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak (RLBP) is one of the traditional Malay houses of Perak that can be seen in Perak Tengah. Perak Tengah is one of the regions in Perak with a rich collection of historical remnants such as traditional houses, tombs, and arts and crafts. The cultural heritage value it has is highly potential to be highlighted that can help boost the area's rural tourism. However, the lack of heritage interpretation due to limited research has disabled the effort to promote the rural heritage of Perak Tengah. Therefore, this research aims to understand and interpret the roof decorative architectural components of one of the traditional Malay houses of Perak, which is the RLBP, as part of the tangible heritage of Perak Tengah. Data collection was conducted using multiple case studies. A total of 20 roof decorative architectural components of RLBP have been analysed in the data analysis. The findings of this research contribute toward establishing the character and identity of the decorative architectural components of the RLBP as one of the tangible heritage values of Perak Tengah, thus enhancing the heritage interpretation of the area.

Keywords: decorative architectural components, roof, *Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak*, characteristic, heritage interpretation

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INTRODUCTION

In all of the arts and technologies created by humans, architecture is the most visible form that manifests the cultural articulation of the people through the built form embedded with local identity and spirit (Nangkula Utaberta & Rasdi, 2014). The recent government policy of *Dasar Kebudayaan Negara* (DAKEN) 2021 has also outlined one of the important thrusts that strategized to encourage the research management, development and documentation pertaining the cultural treasure, discovery of old knowledge and the importance of protection and conservation effort of cultural heritage in architecture and built heritage towards shaping Malaysia as a developed and united nation that displays national identity and personality. The historical display of cultural assets such as language, literature, music, food, clothes, landscape and architecture may contribute to a region's heritage values and characteristics. Cultural heritage can be promoted through heritage interpretation to strengthen national, regional, and communal identities. Heritage interpretation is an inspirational and informational process that aims to expose the meanings of our cultural and natural resources (Harun & Mat Zin, 2018). Many tourists want to learn about the places they visit, and heritage interpretation can include factual information, such as building history, architectural styles, and construction techniques (Aplin, 2002 & Timothy, 2011). Interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage aspects should be promoted and shared with communities and tourists to raise heritage awareness (Lenzerini, 2011).

Rashid, Alauddin, Baharuddin, & Choo (2019) highlighted that Perak Tengah has various collections of historical remnants such as traditional houses, tombs, and traditional arts and crafts. There are 2 types of traditional Malay house in Perak, which is *Rumah Kutai* and *Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak (RLBP)* that contributes to the tangible heritage of Perak (Rashid, 2017). Tangible heritage assets should be preserved and promoted as part of the rural heritage of Perak, thus enhancing the economy and development of the rural settlements of the area (Harun, 2018). More than 20 cultural heritage resources are found along the riverbanks of Perak, including historic buildings with their own identity and characteristic (Harun & Mat Zin, 2018). However, it is not being promoted wisely, mainly via presentation and heritage interpretation. Among the many reasons for this issue is the lack of information on heritage resources (Harun & Mat Zin, 2018). Therefore, this research aims to understand and interpret the roof decorative architectural components of one of the traditional Malay houses of Perak, the RLBP, as part of the tangible heritage of Perak Tengah. The finding of this research is expected to enhance the heritage interpretation of Perak Tengah.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Decorative Architectural Components of RLBP

Nasir (1986) indicates that the decorative architectural components of the traditional Malay house of Perak can be commonly identified from the traditional houses located in the Perak Tengah and Kuala Kangsar. The carvings of the decorative architectural components still retained the authentic Perak style carving. The decorative architectural components are commonly located in the roof eaves, door, window panel and internal room partition. Meanwhile, Saleh et al. (2018) claimed that there are 9 decorative architectural components in the RLBP with 4 decorative architectural components on the roof, comprised of *Tunjuk Langit*, *Kepala Cicak*, *Papan Layang*, and *Papan Meleleh*. Whilst from the research particularly conducted on the decorative architectural components of RLBP, Rashid, Choo, Ramele, Baharuddin, & Alauddin (2018) concluded that the decorative architectural components of RLBP contribute to the exquisite characteristic of RLBP house architecture. The research found 9 decorative architectural components of RLBP that is comprised of *Tunjuk Langit*, *Kepala Cicak*, *Ande-Ande*, *Kayu Pemeleh*, *Kekisi*, *Gerbang*, *Kepala Pintu*, *Kepala Tingkap* and *Pagar Musang*. In the recent measured drawing research works conducted by Yaa'cob, Yusof, & Nordin (2021), the research found that the decorative architectural components of RLBP can be identified at the half wall of the *serambi*, the wall, the internal partition wall, on top of the interior door, on top of the entrance door, on top of the window, at the roof eaves and the bottom end of the wall. From the review conducted on the decorative architectural components of RLBP, it can be understood that the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP are comprised of *Tunjuk Langit*, *Kepala Cicak type I*, *Kepala Cicak type L* and *Papan Cantik* (fascia board). Although there has been little research highlighting the decorative architectural components of the RLBP, most of this research focuses on identifying the decorative architectural components of RLBP.

The Attributes of Decorative Architectural Components

According to Nasir (1986), the decorative architectural components in the traditional Malay house comprise woodcarving elements. The attributes of woodcarving elements are commonly comprised of carving category, carving element, pattern, motif, placement, carving technique and function. Meanwhile, Said (2002) stated that the physical form of carved components could be regulated by types of incision and perforation, principal form and arrangement, design principles and motifs that regulate the carving composition. Hanafi (2000) discusses the woodcarving characteristic that comprises the types of woodcarving element, decorative function, motif and pattern of woodcarving in the traditional Malay house of both the east coast house and the west coast house. In the other

research, Rashid (2007) proposed an inventory checklist for studying carved components that outlined the types of carving, composition, design, pattern, motif, flower code, leaf code and carving component. Whilst from the master carver himself, Nordin (2009) explained in his book that the character of the carved components comprised of the form of the carving that exists either in the 3-dimensional or 2-dimensional carving, carving motif, pattern, style and the various type of incision and perforation used in the carving. On the material of the carved woodcarving components, Said (2005) & Leigh (2000) indicate that the carved woodcarving components are commonly made of *cengal* wood.

On the physical attributes of decorative architectural components of RLBP, Abdul Wahab et al. (2014) stated that *the gerbang* is one of the essential decorative architectural components found at the entrance porch of the RLBP. It functions to shade the *serambi* area from direct sunlight, where its attribute is comprised of various colours, patterns and motifs. The most commonly found motif is flora, geometry, lattice and spider web motif and the lattice motif. According to Saleh et al. (2018) that, decorative architectural components of RLBP are made of wood of the *meranti* and *chengal* types. He added that the attractive pattern and colourfully decorated gate at the *serambi* entrance equipped with the head of the newel post of the stairs heading to the *scramble*. This newel post's head was found carved with various motifs and shapes with the stairs' attractive, smoothed and carved railings. Yaa'cob, Yusof, & Nordin (2021) discussed the placement, perforation and incision types and the motif types of the decorative architectural components of RLBP. 3 types of perforation were found in the decorative architectural components, which are; direct piercing (*tebuk terus*), embossed carving (*tebuk timbul*) and low piercing carving (*tebuk layang*). Carving with direct piercing is found from the decorative architectural components located at roof eaves, the top of the door, window, wall and the internal wall. Apart from this, the motif of flora, fauna, calligraphy and geometry is among the most commonly found motif in the study. The calligraphy motif is commonly found in the carving on top of the door, the flora motif is found in the carving that is located on top of the door and window, whilst the geometry motif is commonly made from the combination of motifs that produced a unique geometrical motif.

METHOD

Sampling procedure

This research was approached using the exploratory research approach. In exploring the physical attributes of the decorative architectural components of the RLBP, the method used in collecting the research data is using multiple case studies. The data was collected through fieldwork observation and measured drawing of details method. There is an overall of 6 RLBP houses chosen from the

area along *Sungai Perak* as the samples gained from the RLBP houses inventory list published by Choo, Rashid, & Nazrul Helmy (2020). The selection of the 6 RLBP houses was based on the parameter set in this research in ensuring only the early type of RLBP house was chosen as the sample, which is; 1) The age of the house to be more than 80 years old, 2) The house is decorated with decorative architectural components, 3) The house roof is comprised of the *Limas Potong Perak* roof, 4) The window of the house is comprised of full-height window (*tingkap labuh*), 5) The house is located in Perak Tengah area, 6) Ease of accessibility to the house for the researcher to conduct the research. The sample parameter was developed from reviewing past research from previous scholars on the architectural character of RLBP. Since this study involves the tangible heritage of the traditional Malay house of Perak, the sample selection is limited only to the early type of RLBP rather than the overall RLBP that also includes the modern version of RLBP.

Fieldwork Observation & Detailed Measured Drawing

The fieldwork has been conducted on all 6 samples of RLBP houses chosen. The data on decorative architectural components were collected via observation. Throughout the observation, the researcher took field notes on the background information of the house. Besides, sketches on the house plan and placement of the decorative architectural components were taken and recorded. The researcher took the pictures using a digital camera, whilst a Mavic DGi Drone camera was used to take a picture of the highly inaccessible area. The researcher conducted measured drawings of details to gain further data on measuring the decorative architectural components. The measurement was collected using the manual measuring tools and the digital measuring tools recording the measurement data. The data gained from the fieldwork have been sorted and analysed accordingly by the researcher according to the attributes of the form type, form configuration, placement, shape, Malay principal form, motif, pattern and composition as identified earlier in the literature in analysing the physical attributes of the decorative architectural components of RLBP. The findings are discussed in the following section.

FINDINGS

This research finding will discuss the physical attributes of the roof decorative architectural components of the RLBP. From the analysis conducted on the overall 20 decorative architectural components found in the 6 RLBP sample houses of the research, it can be found that the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP is comprised of 2 types of form, which is panel form type and the pole form type. The panel form type is found in the roof decorative architectural components such as *Kepala Cicak Type i(KCi)*, *Kepala Cicak type*

L(KCL) and *Papan Cantik (PC)*. The form type of *Tunjuk Langit (TL)* is found to be in the pole form type. This finding is in parallel to the previous research by Othman (2019), Utaberta et al. (2012) & Nordin (2009) that stated the form of decorative architectural components exists in the form type of either panel of the pole form type. In terms of the form configuration, the panel form type of the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP – KCi, KCL and PC is comprised of the single form configuration, whilst the pole form of TL is comprised of the single-piece pole form.

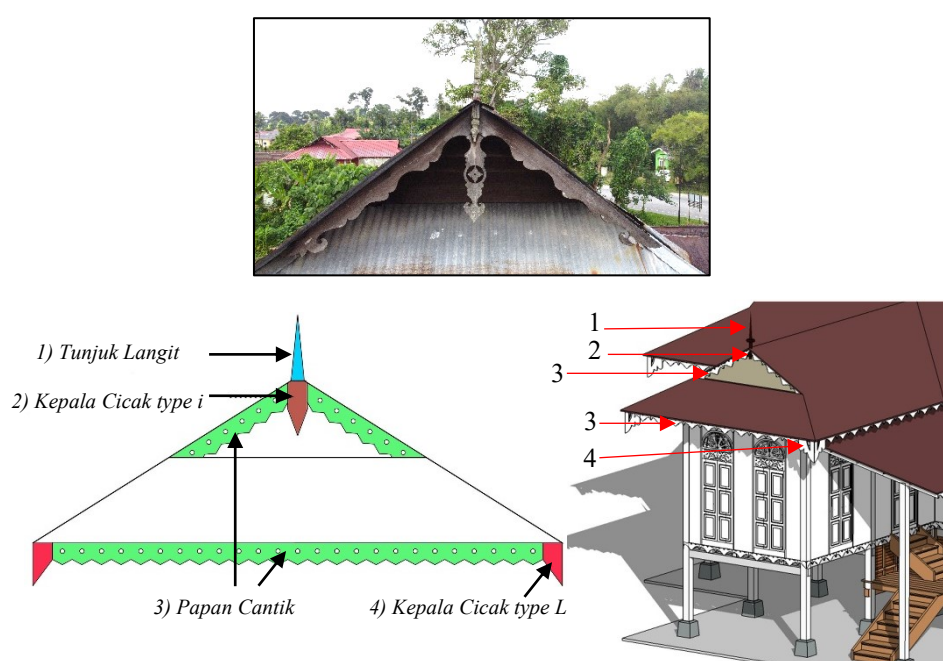


Figure 1. The placement of roof decorative architectural components at the roof of the *Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak (RLBP)*.

Source: Author

From the analysis of both the form type and the form configuration of the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP, it can be found that the panel form type in the single panel configuration is the most prevalent form typically found in the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP. The form and configuration of the panel are linked to fulfilling a variety of purposes on the roof of the RLBP house. The panel was found to function as a weathering board that sheds the seepage of rainwater from entering and damaging the roof components and also functions as a covering panel to cover and beautify the bare end of the RLBP roof structural components such as the roof ridge and rafters.

Meanwhile, the pole form of the *Tunjuk Langit* that is located at the end of the roof apex of the RLBP house functioned to connect the roof ridge and the *Papan Cantik* of the roof. Apart from this, the single-pole form of the *Tunjuk Langit* is attached to several symbolic meanings. Nakula (1985) explained that the single pole form of the *Tunjuk Langit* is symbolic to represent and remind the viewer of the core of the Islamic belief in the oneness of God, which is Allah. In some region, *Tunjuk Langit* is also known as the “*Nisan bumbung*”. The placement and form of *Tunjuk Langit*, similar to the form of the “*nisan*” (grave marker) that exist in pair, placed at the *Rumah Ibu* roof are embedded with a symbolic message in reminding the people of the impermanence of life, the inevitable death that awaits every single soul in their life.

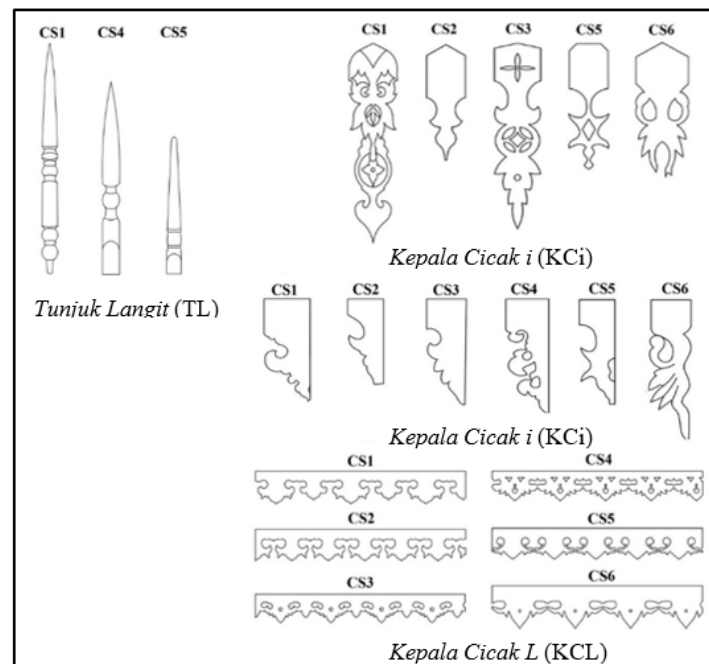


Figure 2. A total of 20 roof decorative architectural components of the *Rumah Limas Bumbung Perak* (RLBP) analysed in the research.

Source: Author (2022)

The link between the form and configuration of the roof’s decorative architectural components and the practical function demonstrates the usefulness of the decorative architectural components that do not only function for decorative purposes. This finding follows the suggestions made by Ismail (1997) & Jamal (1992) that the Malay arts and architectural object is not only beautiful and exquisite in their appearance but also relates to the functional aspects of the

objects. In terms of the shape and principal form found in the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP, there are a few principal forms found in the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP, namely, *Lebah Bergantung*, *Stupa* and also *Punca Kala*. The principal form of *Lebah Bergantung* was found to be comprised of the inverted triangle shape. *Stupa* form was found to be comprised of the upright triangle shape. However, *Punca Kala* was found in the carvings of the Kepala Cicak type I (KCi) panel as the source of "*Punca*" of the carving panel. The most common principal form found in the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP is the *Lebah Bergantung* form. The inverted triangle shape of the *Lebah Bergantung* is attached to a certain symbolic meaning. According to Said (2002), several forms are commonly carved by the traditional Malay carver in the carving of the decorative architectural components. All of this form is embedded in symbolic meaning. Titof (2018) & Affendy (1994) explained that the form of *Lebah Bergantung* is derived from the analogy of the hanging bees. The symbolic meaning in this form is extracted from the personification of the hanging bees, viewed as hardworking, beneficial creatures that produce nutritious honey for the people and characterized as peaceful but brave creatures. This good personification of the bees is intended to be delivered as a message to the community in shaping a good individual and societal characteristic. This philosophical message or advice is conveyed via the metaphorical form of the roof decorative architectural components of *Kepala Cicak Type i*, *Kepala Cicak Type L* and *Papan Cantik* of the RLBP as a means of being gentle in conveying advice to the community that reflects the culture of "*berkias*" – decorative expressions in the communication of the Malay people. In addition, the principal form of *Stupa* that was found in the *Tunjuk Langit* form of the RLBP also reflected a particular symbolic meaning. As stated by Noor & Khoo (2003), the form of *Stupa* is the other form of *Gunungan*, which is characterized as a mountain-peak form. The meaning attached to the form is similar to the meaning attached to the form of *Gunungan*. As explained by Choo et al. (2021); Rashid (2007); Yahya, 1995 & Nakula (1985), the pre-Islamic motif and form has undergone an evolutionary process in which the motifs' usage, meaning, and design have been syncretized, appropriated, and conform to Islamic principles. The meaning of *Gunungan* has been incorporated and adopted into the mystic (Sufism) Islamic belief of the Malay in the Malay-Islamic era. The form is attached to the meaning that symbolizes the evolution, enlightenment and ascension journey towards Allah (unity in and with the divine). Meanwhile, the *Punca Kala* form found in the *Kepala Cicak Type i* panel is symbolic of the meaning related to time, symbolizing the natural cycle and occurrences linked to the temporal existence of the world, except for Allah S.W.T. According to Wan Su Othman (1984), cited in Inangda, Keumala, Arbi, & Faisal (2012), the form of *Punca Kala*, that has

been used as the starting form in the carving panel symbolizes a tauhid concept that nothing in this world is eternal except for Allah S.W.T.

According to Nordin (2009) & Othman (2019), a carving panel is comprised of motifs where the flora motif is the most common type of motif used in a carving panel. This motif is carved in several patterns such as single pattern, frame pattern and complete pattern with frame. Meanwhile, the motif is commonly carved using carving compositions such as *Awan Larat*, geometry, calligraphy and combination composition. This carving composition is commonly found in a detailed carving panel. A few motifs are found in the roof decorative architectural components of the RLBP, namely; flora, cosmos, a combination of flora and cosmos and a combination of flora and geometry. These motifs were found to be in either the single pattern or the frame pattern. Meanwhile, there is no composition found in the roof decorative architectural components of RLBP since the panel is comprised of a simple carving. The motif and pattern were found in the *Kepala Cicak type i*, *Kepala Cicak type L* and *Papan Cantik*. There is no motif and pattern found in *Tunjuk Langit* since the pole is comprised of a simple *larik* pole without any carving on the surface of the pole. The motif of *Kepala Cicak Type i* of RLBP contains the flora, a combination of flora and geometry, and a combination of flora and cosmos that exist in the single pattern carving. Meanwhile, the motif found in *Kepala Cicak Type L* is comprised of either flora or cosmos motifs that exist in the single pattern carving. The motif in the carving of the *Papan Cantik* panel is comprised of the flora motif that is carved in the frame pattern carving.

Attributes/ Roof DAC	TL	KCI	KCL	PC
Form Type	Pole	Panel	Panel	Panel
Form Configuration	Individual Piece	Single panel	Single panel	Single panel
Placement	Exterior Roof AJ, RI	Exterior Roof AJ, RI	Exterior Roof AJ, RI	Exterior Roof AJ, RI, SB, SL, DP
Shape	Triangle, Vertical rectangle & Triangle	Vertical rectangle & triangle	Trapezium	Triangle
Malay Principal Form	Stupa	<i>Lebah bergantung, Punca Kala</i>	<i>Lebah bergantung, Punca Kala</i>	<i>Lebah bergantung</i>
Motif	n/a	Flora, Flora & Geometry, Flora & Cosmos	Cosmos, Flora	Flora
Pattern	n/a	Single pattern	Single pattern	Frame pattern
Composition	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Legend:				
CS - Case Study	SL - <i>Selang</i>	SB - <i>Serambi</i>	DE - Decorative architectural components	
AJ - <i>Anjung</i>	RI - <i>Rumah Ibu</i>	DP - <i>Dapur</i>	PC - <i>Papan Cantik</i>	
TI - <i>Tunjuk Langit</i>	KCI - <i>Kepala Cicak Type i</i>	KCL - <i>Kepala Cicak Type L</i>		

Figure 3. The attributes of roof decorative architectural components of RLBP.

Source: Author (2022)

Noor & Khoo (2003) stated that the surrounding environment – nature plays a huge role in the life of the traditional Malay people. The lush green rainforest provides the source of food, medicine, and material for the house building and inspires the craftsmen in the carving work. The close observation that the craftsmen had and learned from the surrounding nature is translated into the carving work. In addition, nature has contributed to forming part of the worldview of the Malay people. For that, the motif of flora, called “*bunga*” has had a special place in the traditional Malay community (Abdullah, 2012). The flora motif is commonly applied in the literature, culture, art and ritual practice for its beauty, smell and the benefits that the flower could bring. In the context of this research, the flora motif has been found as one of the most frequently used motifs in the roof decorative architectural components of the RLBP that reflects the worldview and culture of the Malay. Apart from this, the common usage of flora motifs also highlighted the influence of Islamic belief prohibiting figurative motifs in the arts. The application of the flora motif and the absence of the figurative motif application in the roof decorative architectural components of the RLBP reflect the importance of Islamic belief in the life of the traditional Malay people of Perak, where its values have been embedded in the meaning behind the motif and pattern of the carving.

CONCLUSION

The research findings have highlighted the attributes such as the form type, form configuration, placement, shape, Malay principal form, motif, pattern and composition of decorative architectural components comprise a variety of attributes that contribute to the decorative character of the RLBP roof. The Malay craftsman has not arbitrarily designed these attributes; rather it reflects a particular set of principles. This principle is comprised of the practical, decorative function of the roof decorative architectural components and, secondly, the symbolic, communicative function of the decorative architectural components in conveying the embedded philosophical message to the people. This set of principles reflects the culture of the Malay people that favoured humbleness in communication – “*berkias*” (decorative expressions), the close ties that the Malay people had with the surrounding environment and the importance of Islamic belief and values in the people’s life. The findings of this research highlighted the characteristic of decorative architectural components of RLBP as one of the tangible heritages of Perak Tengah. In addition, the findings from this research support the heritage interpretation of the area, particularly about the historic building and cultural heritage of the Perak Tengah that was found lacking as suggested by previous research. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers conduct future research on the other aspects of RLBP, such as its space planning and activities in enabling a comprehensive understanding of

RLBP, thus supporting the heritage interpretation of the tangible heritage of Perak Tengah.

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