

The Cham Boat Habitat

Mohamad Zain Musa¹ and Abdul Latif Hj Samian²

¹) Set Muhammadsis, PhD Candidate
Royal Academy of Cambodia
mhdset@gmail.com
mzenbm@gmail.com

²) Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA)
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM),
abdlatif@ukm.my, pghatma@ukm.my

ABSTRACT

The Cham people now living in Cambodia are descendants of the once famous kingdom of Champa (192-1835). Champa is part of the present day Vietnam. In Cambodia the Cham dwell in many types of houses which are called the "One, two or three ... roof houses". The largest is the "Seven roof houses" usually built by and for the well to do families. Other types of the Cham houses are known as *Sang Pet*, *Sang Ketang* and *Gaiy Sang*. The objective of this paper, which is a series of my research writing on the Cham houses in Cambodia, is to give a brief description of the types of the houses mentioned above and the description of the Habitat of the so called "boat people", people living in "*gaiy sang*, house boat" which differs from the "boat house" meant for housing racing boats. The focus will be on the living habitat of the families living all their lives on *gaiy sang* raising up their children and what will hold for the future of their offspring.

Key words: Cham, Cambodia, Cham House, Cham family

INTRODUCTION

The Malay-Cham of Cambodia is the combination of two people from the same linguistic origin, the Austronesian, earlier on known as the Malayo-Polynesian. The Malay are the descendants of the people from Malay Kingdoms of the Malay Archipelago, whereas the Cham are descendants of the Champa people who as earlier as the 15th century migrated to the welcoming land of Cambodia; a few more migrations in big number of them continued to come and made Cambodia their home since.

Due to their Austronesian linguistic family they could easily get together and form a community known as Cham-Chvea and later Khmer Islam. As we all know the Cham were one of the earliest people who had built their dwellings. The first dwellings were probably for protection against the weather and animals in a generally hostile environment. These can be said to be natural shelters, and later they were more developed and sophisticated. To build them, the Malay-Cham of the present day Cambodia had know-how which is passed on to the younger

117

Jointly Organised by

Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik & Fakultas Perikanan dan Ilmu Kelautan
Universitas Riau, Indonesia
Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA) The National University of Malaysia

generations. Looking into these traditional houses some of the techniques is rudimentary. To many of them, these houses, no matter how modern or sophisticated, are considered “pabung”, that is “roof above their head”, meaning in another word, “shelter or protection” to the family.

Statement of Purpose

In view of reducing number of wooden traditional houses, as the country is becoming more developed and scarcity of wood for construction, these old traditional wooden houses rediscovered have become not only heritage for the Malay-Cham people but more importantly for Cambodian national architectural heritage, which need to be conserved and preserved, as many of them are facing with wear and tear, old age and in some places, demolition and redevelopment.

Scope of the Project/Presentation

It is our aim to record and document the historically and architecturally important Malay-Cham houses in Cambodia. The methodology is collecting imagery of those historical buildings, no matter how small or big in size. This heritage registry it is necessary to develop a methodology for undertaking of the recording and documentation, to categorize their types, ages to see if we can study and group them depending on the periods and styles. This study is conceived as a product that will be expanded upon as more information is collected.

Types of Houses

There are mainly three types houses namely *Sang Gongdol* (Kh. Rong daul), *Sang Pett* (Kh. pett) and *Sang Tanglab*, *Sang Kontang* (Kh. kantang), *Gaiy Sang* and *Sang Rakik*. The following are brief descriptions of these houses.

Sang Gongdol (Kh. rongdaul):

The many types of houses built and owned by the Malay-Cham of Cambodia differ only with the shapes of their roofs. The Sang Gongdol has only one roof compared with other like the *Sang Pett* or *Sang Ketang* (see infra). Mr. Sulaiman who has built many *Sang Gongdol* (*Gongdol* house) in his career said it is the easiest house to build. Though in terms of size, they usually measure between 6m to 8m large and up to 15m long. They consist of four rows of hard wood columns. Those *Gongdol* houses found are mostly some 100 years old. The respondent, Mr. Sulaiman and his family stay in his *Sang Gondol* built by his grandparents. The house said to more than 100 years old, and it measures 6m x 15m. We have found two *Sang Gongdol* houses, one is in Svay Khleang, Krauch Chmar and the other one is in Angkor Ban, both in the province of Kompong Cham.



Oknha Baurtes Osman's house.

Sang Pett (Kh. bett)

The *Sang Pett* is sturdier than *Sang Gongdol* because more wooden beams, intersecting one another, are used. Besides *khneap* (from Khmer) which are meant to firmly hold the whole structure. For comparison purposes, a *Sang Gongdol* does not need so many beams, especially the *khneap* to hold the structure. Thus in terms of cost, one needs to spend more to build a *Sang Pett*. The picture shows a *Sang Pett* with two pabung (Kh. khnaung) or roofs. It is rather small and measures around 5-6m large by 6-8m long.



Sang Tang and Tang Laap (Kh. kontang slaab)



A *Sang Kontang* or *Kontang Laap* is similar to a *Sang Pett* in terms of number of roofs, which can be two or as many as seven *pabung* (Kh. khnaung) roofs. But the design of the roofs is slightly different as we can see in the two photos. A seven *pabung* Malay-Cham house is rarely seen now. A seven *pabung* house is huge and needed for a big family. It is usually built and owned by well to do people. Usually a seven *pabung* house was built in stages; the additional *pabung* were built when the need arises. This need arises when the number of children becomes bigger or the owner needs a bigger space when the daughters get married. According to their normal practices, the parents would look after their daughter families until they have their own house, which normally take three to five years. Thus the house space is extended. During our research, we came across, though rare, *sang Kontang* of only five *pabung* houses. Three *pabung* houses are of common sight.

Mr. Sulaiman who is a carpenter in his 60s has said that the techniques of construction of the old house as compared with the new one are the same, including the design of the interior partitions. If an old house used wooden nails, the new one uses iron nails and *blong* (terms borrowed from the French *boulons*, bolts, and nuts)

Pillar Liners

As all the types of houses described above are on stilt, the pillar liners are of another important part of the construction. If the pillar liners are not solid enough, the pillars will sink into the ground. In old houses wooden pillar liners are made of stones chiseled from rock; the fairly new liners are made of concrete molded and decorated with beautiful design. The latest pillar liners are simpler and usually taller than the other two types and rest on another liner made of a stack of bricks. These taller liners are now needed as the long tree trunks for the columns has become rare, and when one need a "under the house" (see infra) spacious and higher, one need to extend the length of the column by building taller concrete liners.



Gaiy Sang

Another type of Malay-Cham dweller is a *Gaiy Sang*. The term is a combination of two words, *gaiy* (boat) and *sang* (house). The *Gaiy Sang* is a house on a boat, a dwelling for a fisherman and his family. The reverse of the position of the two-words, that is *sang gaiy*, is another type of construction, which is a house (hut) where a *gaiy* (boat) is kept, especially a pricey racing boat. Many of those families, who live on *Gaiy Sang* own no piece of land or any other landed dwelling. Many are found in the village of Svay Roloum, near Takhmao. This picture of a *Gaiy Sang* tells it all. The front portion under the roof is the sleeping space followed by a small space for cooking. When the couple has small children, they share the same space. But when the children grow bigger, and if they can afford, they usually dispose of their small *gaiy sang* to buy a fairly bigger *gaiy* and build a new *sang*.



Sang Rakik (Mal. Rakit)

This is another type of dwelling owned by fish farmers. A *Sang Rakik* are built on the fish cages. The fish farmer, owner of this house live there and at the same time they can keep an eye on their farms round the clock. Unlike the owners of a

gaiy sang, most of the owners of the *rakik* own other properties including landed properties.



To those who own only *Gaiy Sang* or *Sang Rakik*, the whole of their family members are born and grow up there till they get married. One respondent has told us that some parents save some money to buy another *gaiy sang* and offer it to their son when he gets married in order for him to be able to take care of his new family. As for a daughter, she will be taken care of by her husband, when she gets married.



Multipurpose use of a *Gaiy Sang*, Home and Fishing



Gajay Sang are parked in a community



Old unused boats served as dwellings



Fish farming in Mekong River



Fish Farmers on *Rakik* dwellings



Fish Farmers on *Rakik* dwellings

Construction and Space Management of a Cham house

As for the structure and design of the inside of the house, it is of the same design for every house. They do not depend on the type of the Cham houses. The houses are on stilt, of course except for the *Gaiy Sang* and *Sang Rakik*. Thus each house has two levels which we call *Gah Ngok* (the upper [floor]) and *Gah La* (ground floor). The height of the floor is usually nine to eleven steps of a stair case, thus approximately 2.5 to 3m high.

Upper Floor

In any Malay-Cham house, the pattern of interior design is the same. As one goes in the house from the front door, one notice that the big hall as wide as the house waiting to welcome guests. The floor is made of high quality wooden plank. Some planks in old houses are, though rare, as wide as 30cm wide, otherwise they are 20cm wide. The present day trend now is that the planks are replaced with narrower wooden strips, always of high quality wood, of about 6cm wide. The dual purpose of this wooden strip is for easy keeping the house clean, and maintaining good ventilation.

The spacious hall is in fact a multipurpose hall. It is meant for receiving guests, especially male guests. Besides it is very convenient for some social or religious occasions, such as a marriage feast or religious event such as *tahlil*, where big group of people are invited. It also serves as sleeping space for male family members of guests.

As one crosses the hall and goes through the partition open door, one can see two bedrooms on either side of the walkway. The number of bedrooms rarely exceeds two, one of which is for the parents and the other one is for the daughters.

Further inside the house is the last part of the house. It is a spacious portion of the house where one finds stoves on one side where the family does the cooking and the remaining space is for family dining. The whole of this space for cooking and family dinning is called *kitchen*.

The big hall and the following section of the house is separated by a wall whose height is usually the same as the height of the house wall, 2.8m to 3.5m tall. This separating wall will never go up to the height of the roof except some old mandarins' houses.



The partition of Oknha Baurtes Osman's house goes up to the roof.



The partition here is of the house wall level.

Lower Floor

As for the lower floor, known as “under the house”, it is almost always an open space. It is a multipurpose space depending its owner's social position or what they do for a living. This “under the house” can be used to receive guests. Usually one find a *graiy* (Kh. *grè*, not an English word *bed*, but of course one can sleep on if needed). Five or six persons can squat on it and have discussion or a cup of tea; otherwise the place can be a small grocery store, or a small factory where the industrious owner produces something to be sold in the nearby market. In remote villages, this “under the house” is used mainly to keep their livestock, chickens, ducks or castles. Nowadays in almost “under the house” there is a room, locked at nights for safe keeping their motor bikes.

Space Management of a Cham *Gaiy Sang*

Those who live in a *gaiy sang* are generally poor. The living space is very limited. For example if the *gaiy* is 7m long, the roofed part is usually not more than 2m long. It serves as a sleeping space where every thing valuable, like their dresses, rice and any other food stuff are kept. Another section is used as kitchen. It is so hard to bear when looking at these types of dwelling. Through my interviews I have found out that

125

Jointly Organised by

Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik & Fakultas Perikanan dan Ilmu Kelautan
Universitas Riau, Indonesia
Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA) The National University of Malaysia

fortunately it does not take long for their offspring, male or female, to be able to swim; thus the parents could save time to protect them from drowning.

CONCLUSION

As it has been described above, we find that there are many types of dwellings of Malay-Cham people in Cambodia. We notice that most of the names of the dwellings are borrowed from Khmer terms. It means in another word the influence of the Khmer language and art in the daily life of the Malay-Cham in Cambodia. We do not dwell into the techniques of construction, which is a subject for another discussion. Nowadays *Sang Pett* is very popular as it is trendy to own this type of dwelling and from the technical point of view the *Sang Pett* is sturdier. Socially speaking, those who have been staying in *Gaiy Sang* need more attention as most of their offspring never set foot in a place called school.

Our research has brought us to our attention that many old houses are in great need of repair or renovate for their historical values, either for its own long history or for its architectural design. Now that many historical buildings are being threatened with demolition for redevelopment of the area, it has now become imperative that the old houses of historical and traditional architecture be documented and be conserved and preserved. The one that come to our immediate mind is the one which is now in dilapidated state, owned by one Oknha Baurtes Phuong Osman, in Phum Svay Khleang, Srok Krauch Chmar, and Khet Kompong Cham. We hope that an understanding and appreciation of a culture's past would help in the formulation of planning decisions that are compatible with a modern society's aspirations.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Halim Nasir 1987. *Traditional Malay Wood Carving*. Translated by Othman Mad Yeti. Kuala Lumpur: DBP. 145 p.
- Ahmad Sanusi Hassan & Ku Azhar Ku Hassan 2001. *Corak Perumahan Tradisional Berkepadatan Tinggi. Perkembangan Di Sepanjang Pantai Barat Semenanjung Malaysia*. Pulau Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia. Vii +126 p.
- Badan Warisan Malaysia 1990. *A Handbook Malaysian Architectural Heritage Survey*. Kuala Lumpur: Badan Warisan Malaysia/ Heritage of Malaysia Trust. iv + 91 p.
- Dumarçay, Jacques 1991. *The House in South-East Asia*. (Translated from French by Michael Smithies). Singapore: Oxford University Press. 74 p.
- Mohamad Zain Musa, Yusof Mohd, Ahmad Hafiz Osman & Arifin Musa. 2012. *Kamus Melayu-Cam (in Jawi)*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. 435 p.
- Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi, Kamaruddin Mohd Ali, Syed Ahmad Iskandar Syed Ariffin, Ra'alah Mohamad & Gurupiah Mursib 2005. *The Architectural*

Heritage of the Malay World. The Traditional Houses. Skudai: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Xi + 260 p.

Norhalim Hj Ibrahim (Ed.) 2007. *Rumah dan Peralatan Olek Serta Permainan Tradisional Negeri Sembilan.* Seremban: Lembaga Muzium Negeri Sembilan. vi + 34 p.

Raja Bahrin Shah bin Raja Ahmjad Shah 1988. *The Terengganu Timber Malay House.* Kuala Lumpur: Petronas. viii +83 p.

Wan Hashim & Abdul Haim Nasir 2011. *The Traditional Malay House.* Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia. xviii+175 p.

Vlatseas S Dr Ing (Padua) 1990. *A History of Malaysian Architecture.* Singapore: Longman. 138 p.

Zulkifli Hanafi 1996. *Alat-alat Pertukangan Traditional Melayu.* Kulim: Amber-Solara Publication. 126 p.

Zulkifli Hanafi 1996. *Pembinaan Bangunan Tradisional Melayu.* Kulim: Amber-Solara Publication. lii +222 p.

Respondents

- 1 Mr. Sulaiman Bin Abdullah
On: 07/05/2013
Place : Phum Rokarkhnor, Khum Rokarkhnor, Srok Krauch Chmar, Khet Kampong Cham.
- 2 Ustaz Muhamad Abdul Gani
On: 30/04/2013
At : Phum Svay Rolom, Srok Takamao, Khet Kondal.
- 3 Hasan bin Abdul Ghoni
On: 02/05/2013
At: Phum Prey Khcheay, Khum Barai, Srok Prea Chu, Khet Kampong Cham.
- 4 Abdul Rahman bin Abdulah
On: 03/05/2013
At: Phum g Khbob, Khum Svay Kleang, Srok Kroch Chmar, Khet Kampong Cham
- 5 Sulaiman bin Yusuf
On: 06/05/2013
At: Phum Andung Sor, Khum Peamjikong, Srok Kongmeas, Khet Kampong Cham
- 6 Mr. Zakarya bin Muhamad Soleh
On: 06/05/2013
At: Phum Weal Khmom, Khum Kor, Srok Tbaung Khmom, Khet Kampong Cham
- 7 Mr. Ibrahim
On: 08/05/2013
At: Phum Jumnik, Srok Krauch Chmar, Khet Kampong Cham.