

Kejawen-Inspired Javanese Traditional House in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 January 2026

Revised 15 March 2026

Accepted 15 March 2026

Online first

Published 23 April 2026

Keywords:

Cultural assimilation

Javanese traditional architecture

Kejawen philosophy

Vernacular architecture

DOI:

10.24191/ijad.v10i1.4k658m18

ABSTRACT

Kejawen denotes an ethical worldview and way of life rooted in Javanese thought, characterised by outward-looking, community-centred orientations expressed through ritual practices in Central and East Java. Historical migrations of Javanese communities to Malaysia from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries—driven by trade and maritime networks—enabled the transmission and gradual assimilation of kejawen values into the local cultural landscape, influencing language, customs, and aspects of the built environment. Although kejawen is not prominently visible in Malaysia due to its syncretic origins in Hindu-Buddhist traditions and the predominance of a Malay-Muslim identity, its underlying ethical and symbolic values continue to shape Javanese Malaysian cultural expressions, particularly in ceremonies, arts, and traditional practices. This study aims to identify the defining characteristics of kejawen, with specific attention to architectural attributes, and to examine the extent to which kejawen values are embedded in Javanese traditional houses in Johor after their assimilation into the local Malay context. Johor was selected as the study site due to its substantial Javanese population that continues to practise kejawen-influenced cultural traditions. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach within the interpretivist paradigm, the study integrates semiotic and hermeneutic methods to interpret the symbolic meanings embodied in the architectural elements of selected houses. The findings reveal a dynamic process of assimilation between core kejawen belief values and local Malay architectural expressions. This synthesis is manifested in spatial organisation, form-making, and symbolic ornamentation of traditional houses, demonstrating both continuity and adaptation of Javanese cultural identity. Ultimately, the traditional Javanese house in Malaysia emerges as a living repository of kejawen values, whether preserved in original form or transformed through cultural integration. The study highlights the transnational significance of kejawen ethics in enriching social, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of communal life within contemporary multicultural society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Javanese are among the largest ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, with the majority professing Islam. In Malaysia, the Javanese community traces its origins to the island of Java in Indonesia. Historical ties between Java and the Malay Peninsula date back to the 14th and 15th centuries, when Javanese merchants played a dominant role

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in maritime trade between Malacca and the Malay Archipelago, including the Spice Islands (Geertz, 1976). These early connections are documented in the Malay Annals and Hidayat Hang Tuah (Sunarti & Fadel, 2018). Renowned for their skills in carpentry and metalwork, the Javanese were actively engaged in shipping and commerce, leading to early waves of migration to the Malay Peninsula. Portuguese records from the Malacca Sultanate era mention Javanese settlements such as Kampung Jawa and Parit Jawa. By the early 17th century, additional communities had formed in Upeh—northwest of the Malacca River—home to merchants from the Central Coast, Tuban, Japara, and Sundanese traders, and in Hilir, which hosted traders from Gresik and East Java. These settlements highlight the Javanese contribution not only to trade but also to Malacca's cultural development, particularly in literature and the arts (Robson, 1981).

However, in 1512, tensions arose between the Portuguese and the Javanese merchant community in Malacca, prompting many to relocate for security reasons. By 1525, the once-thriving settlements in Upeh and Hilir were largely abandoned (Winstedt, 1948). Although some Javanese remained in the Straits and Malay states as small-scale traders, sailors, or wage labourers, their numbers were limited (Lockard, 1971; Meilink-Roelofs, 1962). Large-scale migration occurred much later, from the 18th to the early 20th centuries, driven by two main factors (Sekimoto, 1994). The first was political instability in Java and Dutch colonial policies, including forced labour systems, heavy taxation, and land scarcity, which burdened rural farming communities.

The second was Dutch resettlement policies, which relocated Javanese to other islands and encouraged them to work as indentured labourers under a special Labour Law (Bahrin, 1967). Nevertheless, during the 19th century, the influx of mass Javanese people in the Malay states thrived due to the British agricultural development strategy when they opened new areas in the countryside, particularly in the rubber, paddy and palm oil plantations to carry out their economic plans. This brought assimilation in terms of socio-cultural values to the local context until now with the local Malay community. However, this factor occurs through a simple process of voluntary adoption where the acceptance of the Javanese cultural elements by local people finds them useful, attractive, or beneficial, like intermarriage (Jandra, et. al., 2016).

Over the generations, Javanese Malaysians have integrated with the larger Malay population through intermarriage and shared religious and cultural practices. While Javanese-Malay identity is now considered part of the broader Malay identity, many families still retain certain cultural practices unique to their Javanese heritage. Showing the importance of the Javanese community as the second-largest ethnic Malay in Malaysia, this article will focus on two main objectives. First, to identify the meaning of the Javanese living culture which is traditionally practised, namely *kejawan* and second, to examine how and to what extent aspects of the value of this Javanese community are applied in the context of the living culture of the Javanese community in Malaysia towards strengthening community development through the symbolism of building their traditional houses (Fajfrliková, 2018; Olthof, 2014).

While *kejawan* is specific to Javanese culture in the land of origin, as written in the Babad Tanah Jawi (Olthof, 2014) the Javanese people have a complex history, which is a hybrid between Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic traditions; some of its values, particularly those rooted in pre-Islamic Austronesian spirituality and traditions, can be seen as having influenced broader Southeast Asian cultural practices, including those in Malaysia (Santoso et. al., 2024). Even though these influences are not directly widespread, given Malaysia's distinct Malay-Muslim identity in Malaysia, *kejawan* still influences their cultural practices, particularly in traditional ceremonies, art, and local customs.

This Javanese cultural practice can be justified according to Islamic mysticism, so the typology of the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture is not contradictory but dialectical (Soenjoto, 2022). This writing is very significant because most of the past studies on the Javanese community in Malaysia have only focused on the historical aspects of migration (Tirtosudarmo, 2005), the factors of arrival and the manner and process of the

opening of the early settlement and its development (Mohd, 1980), including the change in the living standards of the Javanese people in terms of economic achievement (Mohd, 1980). In addition, there are also scholarly studies that focus on writing on the relationship between Javanese literature and Malay literature, the documentation of figures of Javanese descent (Mohd, 1980) and intangible culture, including art and tradition (Awang & Ismail, 2016).

Therefore, a gap in scientific research needs to be explored and highlighted because this paper will contribute to the development of the Javanese diaspora in Malaysia in terms of kejawen ideological belief and value system in their culture, especially in the states of Johor and Selangor, due to historical migration patterns. In summary, while kejawen itself may not be recognized as a formal belief system in Malaysia, the Javanese cultural values, many of which are influenced by kejawen, contribute to communal development through cultural preservation, community cooperation, and interfaith harmony. These values and practices help promote social cohesion and local development in areas where the Javanese community is significant. To understand this matter in more detail, the following section will discuss the origin, definition, and necessity of kejawen in forming Javanese society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Origin of Kejawen and Its Influence in Javanese Society

Kejawen is a syncretic Javanese spiritual tradition that integrates indigenous animistic beliefs with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. While not a formal religion, it functions as a cultural worldview and ethical system centred on harmony, spiritual balance, and inner peace (Geertz, 2017b). Geertz (2017b) characterises kejawen as the Jawi religion, a fusion of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology with Islamic mysticism, shaped over centuries through successive cultural interactions. Its earliest roots predate the arrival of world religions, emerging around the 1st century CE from pre-Hindu Javanese spirituality, which revered spirits (hyangs) in nature, ancestors, and sacred sites (Geertz, 1976a; Burhani, 2017). Hyang represents a spiritual force accessed through rituals, meditation, and offerings. Ancestor worship was central, with the spirits believed to influence the living and ensure communal well-being. Between the 8th and 14th centuries, Hindu and Buddhist influences entered Java via Indian traders and missionaries, coinciding with the rise of kingdoms such as Sailendra, Mataram, and Majapahit. This period saw the assimilation of Hindu-Buddhist philosophical and cosmological concepts into the indigenous framework (Rofiqoh et al., 2021). Notions such as Dharma (cosmic law), karma (moral causality), reincarnation, manunggaling kawula gusti (mystical unity of self and divine), Sangkan Paraning Dumadi (origin and purpose of life), and Tri Hita Karana (harmony among God, humanity, and nature) were integrated (Yogiswari, 2020). Hindu-Buddhist ideas of divine kingship also redefined political authority, with rulers perceived as *devaraja*—mediators between gods and people—reinforcing their spiritual and ceremonial roles (Fajfrlíková, 2018; Santoso et al., 2024).

From the 15th century, Islam spread across Java through trade networks and the missionary work of the Wali Songo, introducing new theological perspectives, Sharia law, and ethical norms (Soenjoto, 2022). Kejawen adapted by incorporating Islamic mysticism, particularly Sufi teachings, resulting in a uniquely Javanese Islam where Sharia coexists with animistic traditions and symbolic rituals. The fusion preserved kejawen's core principles of harmony and spiritual equilibrium while aligning them with Islamic morality. In contemporary Javanese society, kejawen remains influential as a moral, ethical, and cultural framework that operates across social levels—from individuals and families to communities. It provides a unifying belief system capable of reconciling diverse perspectives on human conduct. Its enduring principles also extend to the built environment, influencing spatial concepts and architectural traditions, a theme further explored in the evolution of traditional Javanese houses within the Malaysian context in the following section.

2.2 Architectural Expression of Kejawen Ethical Values

Architecture is not merely a physical construct but a cultural medium through which ethical values can be expressed, preserved, and communicated. In the kejawen worldview, ethics in the built environment reflects a moral responsibility to harmonise human intervention with nature. Musman (2017b) observes that “humans explore the universe and within the framework rendered by revelation try to make their existence as convenient, comfortable and meaningful as possible.” Within kejawen, humans are regarded as caliphs—entrusted guardians of the natural order—making the built form an expression of respect for both environment and community ethos (Musman, 2017b; Pugin et al., 1995). The integration of ethical values in architecture has deep historical roots. Seventeenth-century reformers such as Pugin and Viollet-le-Duc challenged the superficiality of 18th-century eclecticism, advocating instead for authenticity and “fitness for purpose” (Pugin et al., 1995).

This moral stance was advanced by Morris, Ruskin, Wright, and Le Corbusier. Wright’s organic architecture, for example, embodied humility and spiritual closeness to God, illustrating how moral and religious values can be encoded in architectural form (Wright, 2010). As Al-Bar et al. (2015) highlight, such principles have shaped architectural practice from antiquity to the modern era. Architecture’s influence extends beyond aesthetics—it frames social life, shapes behaviour, and affects emotions (Afkham, 2014). By engaging users’ senses, it creates a dialogue between human and built form, enabling architecture to operate as a “sign system” through spatial organisation, circulation, function, scale, façade, and structure. Collier (2007) Fajfrlíková notes that architecture also embodies theological and ideological beliefs, shaping collective experiences and fostering social cohesion. In the Javanese context, built forms often encode kejawen principles both explicitly and implicitly (Afkham, 2014). Traditional typologies—such as the *omah* (house), *kraton* (royal palace), *candi* (temple), and *masjid* (mosque)—are designed with symbolic references, cosmic alignment, and integration with the natural environment. These architectural forms are not only functional but also vehicles for transmitting cultural memory and ethical values.

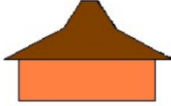
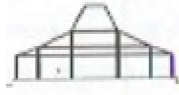
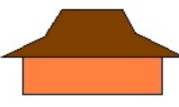
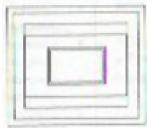
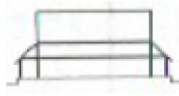
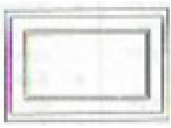
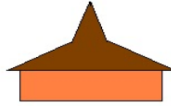
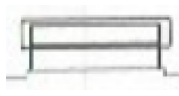
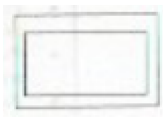
This study focuses on the Javanese traditional house as a primary medium for representing kejawen ethics, specifically the values of *rukun* and *selaras* (accommodation and openness), *hormat* (respect), *adab* (etiquette), and *welas asih* (responsibility). These principles are embedded within its spatial arrangement, structural hierarchy, and aesthetic expression, reinforcing both individual moral conduct and collective social harmony. Before analysing how these values are translated into design, it is essential to examine the architectural elements and evolution of the Javanese traditional house within the Malaysian context.

2.3 General Design Features of Traditional Javanese Houses

Traditional houses are a tangible manifestation of cultural identity, serving as physical expressions of a community’s values, beliefs, and social norms. In the Javanese context, each component of the traditional house—whether spatial or structural—is imbued with philosophical meaning, reflecting the cultural identity and ethical principles of the community (Prakoso & Wilianto, 2020). These elements are closely connected to religious beliefs, customary practices, and the kejawen worldview. Historically, the design of Javanese traditional houses can be traced to the ancient *punden berundak*—a sacred, terraced structure with progressively smaller upper levels. Its form bears a notable resemblance to Hindu temple architecture, indicating an adaptation of religious and ceremonial design principles into domestic architecture (Musman, 2017b). In terms of typology, three main styles dominate traditional Javanese house design: *kampung*, *limasan*, and *joglo*. While the *kampung* type is common among the general population, the *limasan* and *joglo* types are often associated with higher social status, particularly for village heads (*lurah*) or community leaders. Other forms, such as *tajug* and *panggang pe*, are typically reserved for communal structures like religious buildings and marketplaces.

Table 1. Variants of Javanese Architectural Tradition

Source: Idham, N. C. 2018

No	Architectural Forms of Java	Role	Roof Typology	Ownership	Shape of built form	Sectional built form	Spatial layout
1	Joglo	Residential House /palace	Four-sided sides	Higher class society			
2	Limasan	House	Four-sided sides	Common society			
3	Kampung	House	Two-sided sides	Common society			
4	Tajug	Public	Four-sided sides	Community			
5	Panggang Pe	Public	One sided	Community			

2.4 The Traditional Javanese House and Its Evolution in the Malaysian Context

The evolution of the traditional Javanese house in Malaysia reflects a dynamic balance between cultural preservation, adaptation to local conditions, and responses to contemporary functional needs. Javanese migration to Malaysia, particularly to Johor, Selangor, and Perak during the 18th to early 20th centuries, brought distinctive architectural traditions rooted in their homeland. Key heritage elements—such as the *limasan*-type central roof form and spatial hierarchy (*pendapa*, *dalem*, and *senhong* spaces)—were retained, though often adapted to suit the new context. Over time, many Javanese houses in Malaysia evolved away from the original *joglo* and the *joglo* is integrated with the *limasan* forms, forming a unique expression of architectural elements of Malay vernacular architecture (Tarigan, Antariksa, & Salura, 2022). For example, the original fill-in flooring method was replaced with stilted construction, a common feature of Malay houses, to address flooding risks, improve ventilation, and protect against pests. Roof forms were also adapted, incorporating the Malay *rumah limas* five-sloped design to represent the hierarchy shown in the original *joglo* Javanese house found in Java. Likewise, while the traditional rectangular or square floor plan with open spatial hierarchy remained influential, layouts were modified to reflect Malay social structures and contemporary living requirements. Despite modifications, core functional zones have persisted. The veranda (*pendapa*), central hall (*dalem*), and inner rooms (*senhong kiwa*, *senhong tengen*, and *senhong tengah*) remain integral, albeit with some hierarchical repositioning. New spaces, such as guest rooms (*ruang tamu*), dining areas (*ruang makan*), and side porches (*anjung*), have been incorporated to enhance privacy and accommodate modern lifestyles. Material usage has also shifted, with timber and woven bamboo increasingly replaced by cement walls and corrugated iron roofs for durability and cost efficiency, though timber remains valued for its cultural and aesthetic significance. Many symbolic features remain intact as markers of identity. Central pillars, distinctive roof structures, and intricate wood carvings—often blending Javanese motifs with Malay-Islamic geometric or floral patterns—demonstrate cultural continuity and fusion. These decorative and structural elements not only preserve aesthetic traditions but also embody *kejawen* ethical values embedded in Malay Javanese customs.

and daily life. For this study, a Malay Javanese house in Malaysia is assessed in terms of the persistence and adaptation of *kejawen* values within its architectural form and spatial layout. This documentation serves as both cultural preservation and design reference, ensuring the distinct Javanese identity endures within the broader context of Malay heritage. The subsequent section outlines the methodology used to examine the prominent case study of the Malay Javanese house in Malaysia before presenting the findings on how *kejawen* ethical values are symbolically expressed in this Malay Javanese house architecture.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using case studies as the main strategy. Given its focus on how *kejawen* values are embedded in architectural form and spatial organisation, the interpretivism paradigm is applied, to seek the symbolic meanings shaped by individuals within their cultural context. The interpretivist paradigm is also essential because *Kejawen* architecture cannot be fully understood through technical or positivist analysis alone. It requires an approach that respects the cultural context, deciphers symbolic meanings, and recognises the lived experiences of the Javanese diaspora in Malaysia. In other words, the interpretivist paradigm helps explain in overview why certain design elements were preserved, altered, or reinterpreted since it considers historical migration patterns, local influences, and cultural assimilation as part of the meaning-making process. To elucidate further, the research examines the traditional Malay Javanese house by employing a semiotic approach to uncover symbolic meanings within their construction.

The semiotic approach is important for understanding *Kejawen*-inspired Javanese traditional houses in Malaysia because these houses are not merely functional spaces—they are symbolic artefacts that communicate cultural, spiritual, and social meanings through their architectural forms. While interpretivism focuses on understanding meanings from the perspectives of cultural actors, semiotics provides a structured analytical method to read architecture as a text. Together, they enable a deeper, evidence-based interpretation of how *Kejawen* values are manifested in form-making and space-making. While semiotics decodes symbolic signs and interpretivism focuses on meaning-making from a cultural perspective, hermeneutics provides a method for interpreting and contextualising those meanings within a broader philosophical and historical narrative. The hermeneutic approach is vital because *Kejawen*-inspired Javanese traditional houses are products of deep cultural symbolism and lived tradition. Hermeneutics allows researchers to interpret the intentions, values, and philosophies behind architectural expressions, linking tangible design features to intangible worldviews—especially in the context of their preservation and adaptation in the Malaysian diaspora. This supports the study to identify *kejawen* principles influencing Javanese ideological thinking and assess their relevance in shaping traditional houses for communal living.

The justification selection for the case study refers to local traditional Malay Javanese houses in Malaysia, built since the 19th century, which reflect local adaptation while maintaining cultural traditions as cultural references. The purposive sampling method is used to select a prominent house that strongly expresses *kejawen* values, viewing the house not only as a structure but as a metaphor for identity, social relations, and well-being. The selection of this house as a case study is based on three key considerations. First, the house represents an authentic example of Javanese architecture in the diaspora. Built by Javanese descendants in Malaysia, it retains original features such as the *Joglo* and *Limas*-style roofs, intricately carved wooden panels, and open-air spaces designed for social interaction. As a rare and direct transplantation of the Javanese architectural language beyond Java, it offers valuable insight for comparative studies, illustrating how traditional values are preserved, adapted, or reinterpreted in a different cultural and geographical setting.

Second, its architectural characteristics integrate cultural, religious, and environmental values. The orientation, spatial arrangement, and use of natural materials reflect core Javanese principles such as *Rwa Bhineda* (balance and

harmony), *gotong royong* (communal spirit), and reverence for ancestors and nature. This demonstrates how spirituality, cosmology, and ecology remain inseparable in Javanese design, even within the Malaysian context. Third, the house continues to serve as a living expression of tradition, functioning as a multi-generational and communal space. It remains actively used for ceremonies, family gatherings, and cultural performances, thereby sustaining its original social and cultural purpose.

Data collection methods consist of direct observation of a selected house to document built form and spatial organisation using space syntax mapping for the first phase, followed by focus group discussion with experts using the Socratic method to validate the symbolic meaning and functional intent of design elements for the second phase. Direct observation is employed as the primary data collection method for studying the selected case study of *Embah Kraton Anang*, a Javanese-style house in Malaysia. The analysis focuses on architectural elements related to form-making and space-making, guided by the principle that “form follows function.” Form-making determinants include setting and location, scale and size, façade and structure, and ornamentation, while space-making encompasses access and circulation, hierarchy, and function. Form-making is examined using a layering technique, and spatial organization is mapped through space syntax analysis.

The architectural form is analysed semiotically, where layered abstraction and cumulative complexity reveal meaning. In this framework, the traditional house form is treated as a ‘sign’, which can be systematically interpreted to convey symbolic meanings to its audience. Semiotic analysis considers:

- Paradigmatic axes – the design motifs of the traditional house.
- Syntagmatic axes – the arrangement and relationship of elements such as house scale, setting, access, spatial organisation, façade design, and structural form.

Following six-stage semiotic layering analysis process, the study examines the building’s form in progressive layers:

- Layer 1 – Basic Structure: Outlining the architectural composition and fundamental form-generating structure.
- Layer 2 – Volumetric Articulation: Highlighting major modifications to the building mass, including additions or subtractions from the basic form.
- Layer 3 – Piercings and Attributes: Identifying openings such as windows and doors, along with associated elements like false screens or attached structures, and analysing their relational system.
- Layer 4 – Geometric Detailing: Organising the geometric description of openings and their contextual relationships with surrounding wall surfaces.
- Layer 5 – Constructive and Decorative Details: Documenting elements such as stone finishes, columns, cornices, and roofing to produce the final, detailed façade representation.
- Layer 6 – Stylistic Features: Isolating and categorising optional decorative or stylistic components (example window and door shapes) that are independent of the basic form, enabling further stylistic classification.

This structured process enables a comprehensive reading of the *Embah Kraton Anang* house, allowing the architectural form to be interpreted not only as a physical structure but as a layered cultural and symbolic artefact. For the analysis of spatial organisation, this study applies space syntax mapping following the method developed by Hillier and Hanson (1984). This approach examines how the arrangement of spaces influences patterns of movement and control, based on the positioning of spatial segments within the overall layout. The interior spaces of the case study house are mapped into a cellular structure, which Hillier and Hanson refer to as *genotypes*—clusters of spatial segments arranged in sequential configurations. This analysis is used to explore the relationship between the spatial organisation of the house’s floor plan and the underlying principles of *kejawen* philosophy. The second phase, representing the data validation process, employs the Socratic method with selected experts—comprising an

architect, an academician, and a conservator—who specialise in Javanese culture and the built environment. Their role is to validate the first-phase findings, specifically the relationship between architectural elements and the influence of *kejawen* values. Expert selection is justified based on their academic qualifications, years of professional experience, cultural background, and relevant expertise.

The Socratic method was also applied in a face-to-face dialogue with the house owner, who has resided in the house for over a decade, providing in-depth contextual insights. The data obtained from these focus group discussions were validated through a four-step coding process, combining open, axial, and selective coding techniques:

- Open Coding – Involves an open reading of the documents to identify general ideas, concepts, and meanings. This step establishes a broad understanding of the content before deeper analysis.
- Axial Coding – Entails detailed, line-by-line analysis of each paragraph to explore phenomena reflected in the data. This process generates concepts and sub-concepts based on their properties (attributes) and dimensions (ranges or continuums). Data is broken down, examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Documents were coded in their original Malay language to preserve meaning.
- Grouping of Concepts – Concepts and sub-concepts sharing similar meanings, properties, or dimensions, or overlapping in content, are grouped to form broader categories.
- Selective Coding – Focuses on identifying and refining the core concept emerging from grouped categories. The selection criterion prioritises concepts most frequently mentioned or emphasised in the data.

In the final stage, these core concepts of *kejawen* values—*rukun* and *selaras* (accommodation and openness), *hormat* (respect), *adab* (etiquette), and *welas asih* (responsibility)—were linked to the architectural indicators established in the first phase relating to form-making and space-making. This systematic process ensures that the findings from the documents and focus group discussions are meaningfully situated within the *kejawen* philosophical framework. The data analysis follows Yin's (2012) explanation-building technique, linking observed phenomena to obtain underlying causes. Two phases are conducted based on individual case analysis – direct observation of a selected house to document-built form and spatial organisation using space syntax mapping, and focus group discussion on *kejawen* values, for validation to identify similarities and differences for highlighting recurring architectural elements. Findings from validation are synthesised to determine the extent of *kejawen* influence on house design and its role in sustaining communal living (Refer to Diagram 1).

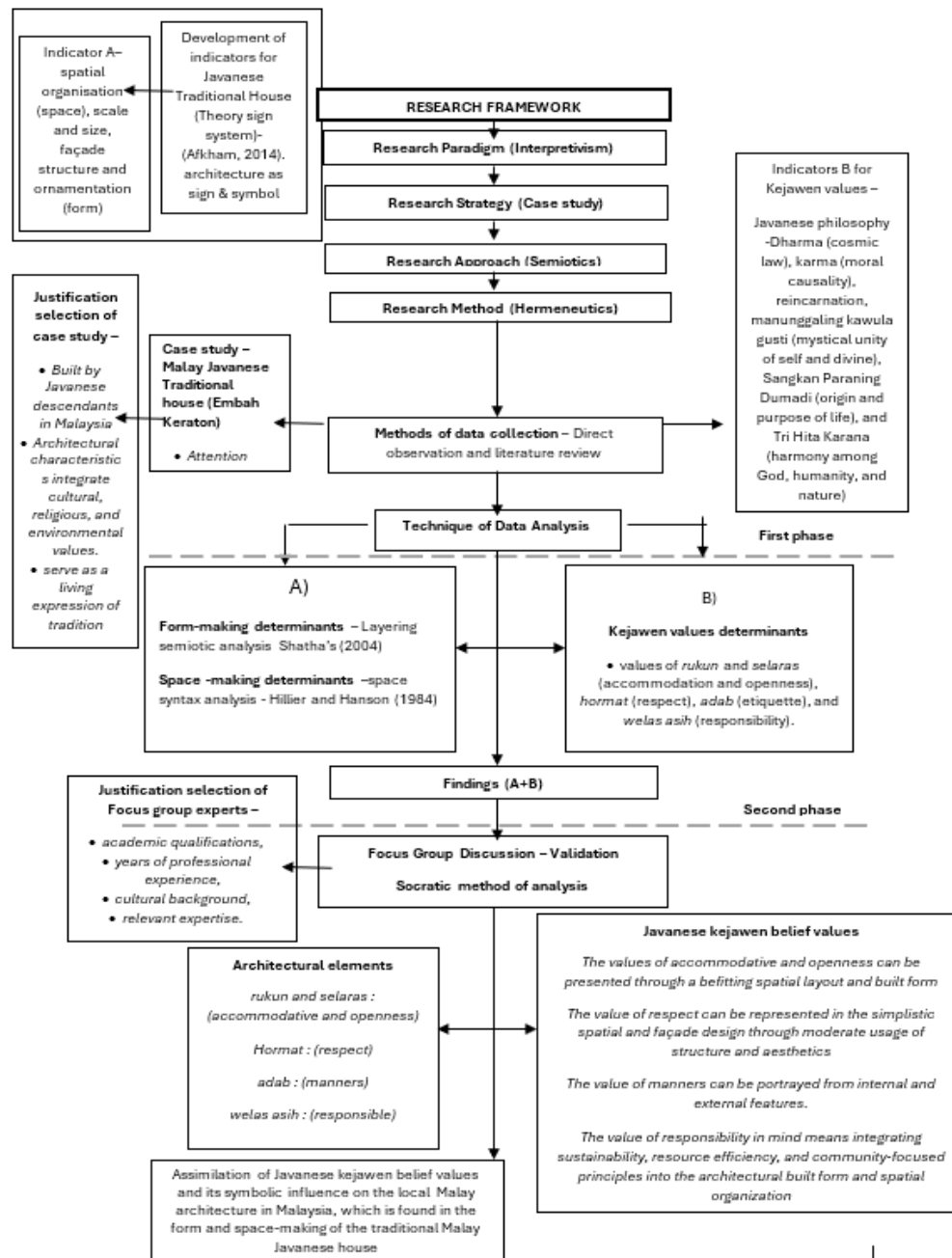


Fig. 1. Research framework
Source: Author, 2025

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Case Study: Malay Javanese Traditional House in Semerah, Johor, Malaysia

The Keraton Embah Anang is a Malay Javanese-style house in Malaysia, representing a unique blend of Javanese and Malay cultural influences. Its history is tied to the migration of Javanese people to Malaysia, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when many Javanese families relocated to what was then

British Malaya. The term "Keraton" refers to royal palaces in Java, but in the case of the Keraton Embah Anang, the name likely reflects the house's design, which follows the traditional Javanese architectural style. It has typical features such as a tiered roof (limasan or joglo style), carved wooden beams, and elevated foundations. This architecture reflects a cultural tie to the Javanese royal palaces but has been adapted to more modest rural living in Malaysia



Fig. 2. Keraton Embah Anang, Semerah, Malaysia
(Source: Author, 2025)

The house's name suggests it was built by or associated with a figure known as Embah Anang. In Javanese culture, "Embah" is a term of respect, often used to refer to elders or ancestors. Anang is likely the personal name of the house's original owner or a prominent figure in the community. This person may have been one of the Javanese immigrants or a descendant of the early settlers who preserved the traditional house style as a link to their Javanese heritage. The Keraton Embah Anang serves as a symbol of the Javanese-Malay community's identity in Malaysia. It reflects how the Javanese people retained and preserved their cultural heritage while adapting to their new home. The house also serves as a cultural centre or a site of historical significance, demonstrating the influence of Javanese architecture and traditions in Malaysia.

Table 2. Influence of kejawen ideology and values on the traditional Malay Javanese house element found in Keraton Embah Anang, Semerah, Johor, Malaysia

Source: Author, 2025

Kejawen values	Representation of <i>kejawen</i> values in traditional house-built form and spatial organization	Diagram of the Malay Javanese traditional house – keraton Embah Anang
<i>Rukun and selaras: (accommodative and openness)</i> Create an inviting and adaptable home atmosphere, allowing for social interaction and personal retreat while maintaining a solid connection to the outside world.	The values of <i>accommodative and openness</i> can be presented through a befitting spatial layout and built form as follows- • The spatial layout is designed freely, promoting fluidity between interior spaces and creating an environment where people can easily interact and move between rooms. • Interior spaces serving multiple purposes allow the home to accommodate changing family dynamics and social gatherings. • The space entryway to the house reflects openness and a sense of welcoming residents and guests into the home, encouraging interaction and inclusiveness.	Fig. 3. Depth layout mapping of spatial flow Source: Author (2025) The floor plan of Kraton Embah Anang resembles the traditional Malay house but does not reflect the

philosophical teachings of the Javanese that have profoundly shaped the culture, customs, and lifestyle of Javanese society. These values highlight the importance of balance, harmony, spirituality, and respect for nature and the community. When applied to architectural design, the integration of *Kejawen* values can have a substantial impact on societal development. By incorporating these spiritual and cultural principles into architectural practices, buildings and spaces are crafted to fulfil functional requirements and enhance the well-being of individuals and communities. Understanding the traditional architecture of Javanese houses clearly shows that architecture can symbolise ethical values, which act as a medium to convey meaning to users in daily life.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, *kejawen* values are essential for architectural design, particularly for societal development. It fosters harmony between humans and nature, in which *kejawen* emphasises living in harmony with nature, profoundly influences architectural design. Buildings designed with these values prioritise environmental sustainability and respect for the natural landscape. This promotes ecological balance by encouraging the use of natural, locally sourced materials and the integration of green spaces or natural elements into the built environment. By adhering to *Kejawen* respect for nature, architecture becomes more sustainable, reducing the environmental footprint and ensuring that resources are preserved for future generations. This approach contributes to societal development by promoting responsible environmental stewardship and fostering a healthier relationship between humans and their surroundings. *Kejawen*-aligned architecture contributes to a society's environmental resilience.

This approach ensures that societal development is sustainable and mindful of future generations, as it promotes living in harmony with the environment rather than exploiting it. While *Kejawen* values emphasise traditional practices, they also allow for adaptation to modern needs. Modern materials and technologies can be incorporated into architectural design without losing the essence of conventional wisdom. This creates a balanced approach to development where innovation and progress do not come at the expense of cultural heritage. This balance is essential for societal development, as it allows communities to progress and modernise while maintaining their cultural roots, ensuring that development is forward-looking and culturally grounded. Integrating these values of *kejawen*, encompassing *rukun* and *selaras* (accommodative and openness); *hormat* (respect); *adab* (etiquette); *welas asih* (responsible) ensures that architecture creates functional buildings and fosters a healthy, sustainable, and culturally rich society. By aligning built environments with these core values, communities are better equipped to face modern challenges while maintaining their cultural identity and environmental balance, leading to more holistic and sustainable societal development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank and acknowledge Universitas Negeri Malang for the International Grant 4B680, and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia for the Matching Grant 03M5I provided for this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Alice Sabrina Ismail: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation and writing- review and writing original draft; Mifdal Zusron Alfaqi: Data validation and draft- review; Sumarmi: Data validation and draft-review.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author used [Grammarly Pro] to [enhance writing quality for much clarity and refine the writing presentation]. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research did not involve human or animal subjects. All experimental procedures were performed following the institutional Safety, Health, and Environmental (HSE) protocols of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Universitas Negeri Malang

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