



Living Heritage: Architectural Expressions of Jawi Peranakan Values in Public Buildings

(Warisan Hidup: Ekspresi Seni Bina Nilai Jawi Peranakan dalam Bangunan Awam)

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ABSTRACT

The Jawi Peranakan community, descended from intermarriages between Malays and South Asian Muslims—primarily from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Gujarat, and in some cases from Yemen or other parts of the Arab world—represents a unique cultural hybrid whose heritage is vividly expressed through its architecture and communal spaces. Despite their significant role in shaping Malaysia’s urban and architectural history, scholarly inquiry into the integration of Jawi Peranakan intangible values within the built environment remains scarce. Existing heritage conservation frameworks tend to prioritise the preservation of physical structures, often overlooking the socio-cultural systems and values that sustain these spaces as living heritage. This oversight risks eroding the cultural meanings embedded in architectural forms, particularly under the pressures of rapid urban development and socio-economic change. This study addresses this gap by examining how Jawi Peranakan values are materialised in the built environment, framing their architecture as a dynamic form of living heritage. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach within the interpretive anthropology paradigm and employing semiotic and hermeneutic methods, the research explores the symbolic meanings embedded within key communal structures, such as mosques and houses, which are historically associated with the community. The findings reveal that their architectural expressions integrate Malay vernacular typologies with Indo-Islamic decorative motifs, while spatial configurations embody core communal values: kinship, religious devotion, reciprocity, and economic solidarity. Multi-functional halls, open courtyards, and transitional spaces in mosques and houses that facilitate both ritual and social interaction, reinforcing extended family networks and collective identity. By interpreting these architectural features as physical embodiments of intangible cultural values, the paper underscores the resilience of Jawi Peranakan heritage amidst modernisation. The study contributes to a wider discourse on multicultural heritage preservation, identity construction, and sustainable urbanism in Southeast Asia, advocating for design frameworks on cultural values that embrace both tangible and intangible dimensions of Jawi Peranakan architecture heritage.



Keywords: Jawi Peranakan heritage; Living heritage architecture; mosque buildings; Intangible cultural values; religious community spaces

ABSTRAK

Komuniti Jawi Peranakan, berketurunan daripada perkahwinan campur antara orang Melayu dan Muslim Asia Selatan—terutamanya dari Tamil Nadu, Kerala, dan Gujarat, dan dalam beberapa kes dari Yaman atau bahagian lain di dunia Arab—mewakili kacukan budaya unik yang warisannya dinyatakan dengan jelas melalui seni bina dan ruang komunalnya. Walaupun peranan penting mereka dalam membentuk sejarah bandar dan seni bina Malaysia, siasatan ilmiah ke dalam penyepaduan nilai-nilai tidak ketara Jawi Peranakan dalam persekitaran binaan masih terhad. Rangka kerja pemuliharaan warisan sedia ada cenderung untuk mengutamakan pemeliharaan struktur fizikal, selalunya mengabaikan sistem dan nilai sosio-budaya yang mengekalkan ruang ini sebagai warisan hidup. Pengawasan ini berisiko menghakis makna budaya yang tertanam dalam bentuk seni bina, terutamanya di bawah tekanan pembangunan bandar yang pesat dan perubahan sosio-ekonomi. Kajian ini menangani jurang ini dengan mengkaji bagaimana nilai-nilai Jawi Peranakan diwujudkan dalam persekitaran binaan, merangka seni bina mereka sebagai bentuk warisan hidup yang dinamik. Menggunakan pakai pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dalam paradigma antropologi tafsiran dan menggunakan kaedah semiotik dan hermeneutik, penyelidikan ini meneroka makna simbolik yang tertanam dalam struktur komunal utama, seperti masjid dan rumah, yang secara sejarah dikaitkan dengan masyarakat. Penemuan mendedahkan bahawa ungkapan seni bina mereka mengintegrasikan tipologi vernakular Melayu dengan motif hiasan Indo-Islam, manakala konfigurasi spatial merangkumi nilai komunal teras: persaudaraan, pengabdian agama, timbal balik, dan perpaduan ekonomi. Dewan pelbagai fungsi, halaman terbuka dan ruang peralihan di masjid dan rumah yang memudahkan kedua-dua interaksi ritual dan sosial, mengukuhkan rangkaian keluarga besar dan identiti kolektif. Dengan mentafsirkan ciri-ciri seni bina ini sebagai penjelmaan fizikal nilai budaya tidak ketara, kertas kerja ini menggariskan daya tahan warisan Jawi Peranakan di tengah-tengah pemodenan. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada wacana yang lebih luas mengenai pemeliharaan warisan pelbagai budaya, pembinaan identiti dan urbanisme mampan di Asia Tenggara, menyokong rangka kerja reka bentuk mengenai nilai budaya yang merangkumi dimensi ketara dan tidak ketara warisan seni bina Jawi Peranakan.

Kata kunci: warisan Jawi Peranakan; Seni bina warisan hidup; bangunan masjid; Nilai budaya tidak ketara; Ruang Komuniti Keagamaan



INTRODUCTION

The Jawi Peranakan community, descended from intermarriages between Malays and South Asian Muslims—primarily from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Gujarat, and in certain cases from Yemen and other parts of the Arab world—represents a distinctive cultural hybrid within the Malay Peninsula (Ismail & Daud, 2013). Emerging as a socio-cultural group in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the height of maritime trade and colonial expansion, the Jawi Peranakan adopted the Malay language, Islamic faith, and local customs while preserving selective elements of South Asian material culture, cuisine, and aesthetics (Jalani et al., 2021). This fusion of influences left a distinctive architectural and urban imprint, particularly in port cities such as Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, where the community flourished as merchants, religious scholars, educators, and civil servants. Historically, the term ‘Jawi’ was used in the Islamic world by Arabs, Persians, and other Muslim traders to denote Muslims from the Malay Archipelago (covering present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Southern Thailand, Brunei, and parts of the Philippines) (Yusoff & Aziz, 2010). The trajectory of the Jawi Peranakan community illustrates a legacy of cultural hybridity, maritime connectivity, and adaptive resilience. Despite their historical contributions, the Jawi Peranakan face several pressing issues today, including identity loss and heritage erosion. One of the central issues concerns identity and assimilation. After Malaysian independence, the constitutional definition of “Malay” subsumed communities such as the Jawi Peranakan under a broader Malay-Muslim category (Yusoff & Aziz, 2010). While this offered political and social advantages, it diluted their distinct hybrid identity. Today, many younger generations no longer identify as Jawi Peranakan but simply as Malay. This has led to the gradual disappearance of their unique cultural markers.

Closely linked is the problem of cultural dilution and heritage loss. Once celebrated for their hybrid customs that combined Malay traditions with South Asian influences in cuisine, attire, and religious practice, much of this heritage has faded (Pue, 2016). Community-owned architecture—mosques, madrasahs, waqf houses, and guild halls—remains as testimony to their presence, yet many of these buildings face neglect or redevelopment pressures, particularly in rapidly urbanising areas such as George Town and Malacca (Pue, 2016). Without systematic conservation, the architectural and cultural footprint of the Jawi Peranakan risks being erased. Another challenge lies in historical marginalisation within scholarship. Compared to the Baba-Nyonya or Chitty communities, the Jawi Peranakan have attracted limited academic and public attention (Mohamed, 2016). Their role in maritime trade, Islamic scholarship, and colonial administration remains under-documented, leaving gaps in Malaysia’s multicultural narrative. This lack of visibility reinforces the perception that they have been absorbed entirely into the Malay mainstream, rather than recognised as a community with its own layered history. Finally, the community struggles with socio-political repositioning (Yusoff, 2005). Traditionally influential in Islamic education and waqf endowments, their authority has declined with the centralisation of Islamic institutions under the state. Politically, their hybrid identity holds little resonance in a system that emphasises



rigid ethnic categories. In conclusion, the issues confronting the Jawi Peranakan society revolve around identity loss, cultural erosion, and historical invisibility. Preserving their heritage requires deliberate efforts in documentation, heritage conservation, and cultural recognition. Only through such measures can Malaysia ensure that the legacy of the Jawi Peranakan continues to enrich its plural society.

In this regard, this paper addresses two objectives: first, to identify the cultural values of the Jawi Peranakan as expressed in the architecture of their community-owned buildings; and second, to examine how design features and spatial arrangements embody these values, sustaining them as living heritage. While most previous studies on the Jawi Peranakan have focused on economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects, systematic research on their built environment remains limited. This study aims to fill that gap by highlighting the architectural expressions of a community shaped by a hybrid culture, blending Islamic traditions with Malay customs. Furthermore, the Jawi Peranakan experience contributes to Malaysia's multicultural development, promoting shared values, cross-cultural understanding, and cooperation. Their emphasis on waqf, communal solidarity, and respect for elders underscores cultural principles that can inspire modern support systems, fostering unity and harmony within Malaysia's plural society. The following section examines the origins and influence of the Jawi Peranakan in shaping community-owned architecture as a form of living heritage in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE JAWI PERANAKAN COMMUNITY

The Jawi Peranakan community's hybrid culture blends Islamic traditions with local Malay customs, evident in ceremonies, language, and built forms. Their evolution can be divided into three major phases spanning the 13th to the 21st century (Yusoff, 2005). The first phase (13th to late 17th century) reflected early Muslim contact driven by maritime trade and cultural exchange. By the 13th century, the Indian Ocean had become a vibrant commercial and cultural corridor linking East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Muslim traders from Tamil Nadu (Chulia), Kerala (Malabar/Moplahs), Gujarat, and Hadhrami Arabs from Yemen sailed regularly to the Malay Peninsula's thriving ports, such as Kedah, Pattani, and later Malacca (Pue, 2015). They exchanged textiles, spices, and beads for tin, gold, camphor, and forest products, while also introducing Islam, the Jawi script (Arabic adapted to Malay), and elements of South Asian material culture. These traders acted as cultural intermediaries, transmitting religion, architecture, education, and courtly etiquette. While many returned home, some settled permanently, forming marital alliances with local Malay women. Their descendants, early precursors of the Jawi Peranakan, were fully acculturated into Malay society—speaking the Malay language, practising local customs, and dressing in Malay style—while retaining South Asian influences in cuisine, architecture, and religious practice (Kashiwa, 2025).



The second phase (late 17th to late 18th century) unfolded within shifting political contexts marked by the decline of Dutch dominance and the gradual expansion of British influence. With the establishment of Penang as a free port in 1786 by Francis Light, the Jawi Peranakan community's commercial role expanded. Their multilingualism, Islamic identity, and cross-cultural heritage positioned them as intermediaries between colonial authorities, Malay rulers, and regional traders (Kashiwa, 2025). They rose as merchants, religious leaders, and administrators, consolidating their hybrid identity that combined Malay customs, Islamic scholarship, and South Asian cultural elements. This period reinforced their socio-economic niche as a prosperous, educated, and cosmopolitan community that bridged traditional Malay society with the colonial economy.

The third phase (19th century onwards) marked the Jawi Peranakan's deepening role in Islamic education, charitable endowments (waqf), and community institutions, such as mosques and madrasahs (Chew, 2013). Their participation in Western-style education and colonial administration further integrated them into the broader Malay-Muslim identity, accelerating cultural assimilation. Yet, after Malaysian independence, the distinct Jawi Peranakan identity gradually declined, absorbed into state definitions of Malay identity. Nonetheless, their hybrid heritage remains visible in community-owned buildings—mosques, madrasahs, waqf houses, and guild halls—that serve as cultural anchors, reflecting values of religiosity and respect for heritage (Chew, 2013). Today, however, many of these buildings face challenges from urban redevelopment, neglect, and a loss of identity. Recognising them as living heritage underscores the need not only for preservation but also for sustained communal use, ensuring that the Jawi Peranakan legacy remains woven into Malaysia's multicultural fabric. To understand the Jawi Peranakan values and the role of these values in how they influence their community-owned architectures, the next section will elaborate on this in detail.

VALUES OF THE JAWI PERANAKAN COMMUNITY

The Jawi Peranakan society, formed through the intermarriage between South Asian Muslims and the local Malay community, embodies a unique cultural hybridity that is reflected not only in their identity and customs but also in their architectural expressions. Their values—rooted in Islam, kinship, mutual aid, education, and cultural pride—offer profound inspiration for shaping the built environment. Translating these values into architecture and urban spaces allows their heritage to be celebrated while providing functionality for contemporary community life. In understanding this community, four enduring values shaped and influenced their societal life, including its built environment, namely communal solidarity (gotong-royong), religious devotion and moral guidance, as well as hospitality (keramahan) and generosity (kedermawanan) (Mohamed, 2016). These four values will be explained in turn to show that they are not optional virtues but an integral part of their faith and cultural identity, offering profound inspiration for shaping the built environment.

In the aspect of communal solidarity, this value is often expressed through gotong-royong, which can be defined as the value of collective responsibility, cooperation, and mutual



assistance within a community (Pue, 2016). For the Jawi Peranakan, who lived as a distinct yet blended cultural group within Malay society, this value meant more than simply working together—it was a way to maintain harmony, strengthen identity, and ensure survival in a shared environment. Gotong-royong covers a wide range of activities like helping neighbours build or repair houses, organising weddings and funerals, preparing feasts during religious festivals, and supporting one another in times of crisis. The Jawi Peranakan practiced communal solidarity in both daily life and special occasions including in their domestic and social life in which they had religious gatherings, communal events like kenduri (religious feasts), marriages, or circumcision ceremonies as well as through economic activities where they often relied on kinship and neighborhood networks to support their businesses through trust and cooperative exchanges since many Jawi Peranakan were traders and small-scale entrepreneurs. Communal solidarity plays a vital role and values in the Jawi Peranakan community, as it is the key factor which ensures cultural survival and integration (Yusoff, 2005). This is crucial as being a hybrid community of South Asian Muslim and Malay descent, communal solidarity helped the Jawi Peranakan maintain their distinct identity while integrating into the wider Malay-Muslim society, hence allowing them to gain acceptance and respect through participation in collective life. In the long run, this can enhance social cohesion and establish one's own identity as living in tightly knit neighbourhoods, where solidarity was essential for building trust and unity. It created a sense of belonging and reinforced the shared values that bound the community together across generations. In the Jawi Peranakan community, communal solidarity (gotong-royong) was not merely a social custom but a foundational value that shaped their way of life. It defined what it meant to live as a community, how they engaged in collective activities, and why their cohesion remained strong across cultural and historical transitions (Abdullah, 2025).

The value of religious devotion and moral guidance, on the other hand, refers to the commitment of the Jawi Peranakan community to Islamic faith and values as the foundation of their way of life. Rooted in Islam, this devotion emphasised prayer, adherence to Sharia principles, ethical conduct, and community responsibility (Yusoff & Mohamed, 2010). For the Jawi Peranakan, who emerged from the blending of South Asian Muslim and Malay heritage, religion was not only a personal practice but also a unifying identity marker. Moral guidance, drawn from the Qur'an, Hadith, and community elders, shaped everyday behaviour, family structure, and cultural customs. These values are widely practised collectively in mosques and suraus, which serve as hubs for prayer, Quranic recitation, and community meetings (Yusoff & Aziz, 2010). Domestic spaces, such as homes, are also utilised, where prayer corners or small areas are designated for religious rituals, reflecting the integration of spirituality into daily domestic life. These spaces not only served for religious devotion but also indirectly symbolised both spiritual and social unity. Apart from this, moral guidance was reinforced through madrasahs and home-based teachings, where children learned Quranic studies, Arabic, and Islamic ethics. This ensured the transmission of faith across generations. For the Jawi Peranakan, the values of religious devotion and moral guidance were more than rituals—they were the cornerstone of identity, cohesion, and resilience (Pue, 2015). What they represented



was faith as a way of life; how they were practised included worship, education, and ethical conduct; and why they played such a vital role was to ensure unity, moral order, and continuity in a hybrid community navigating multiple cultural influences. These values anchored the Jawi Peranakan firmly within the wider Islamic world while preserving their own distinct heritage. The Jawi Peranakan community also places significant emphasis on the values of hospitality (*keramahan*) and generosity (*kedermawanan*) (Matondang, 2012). These values are deeply embedded in their social fabric, reflecting both Islamic teachings and local cultural traditions that prioritise communal harmony, respect, and social responsibility. Their values in hospitality and generosity is not limited to material giving, but also extend to kindness, openness, and the readiness to share resources, time, and care. In their worldview, welcoming guests, providing food, offering assistance, and sharing wealth or knowledge are seen as moral duties that strengthen social cohesion (Ayob & Queen, 2015). For the Jawi Peranakan, generosity is tied to the Islamic concept of *sadaqah* (charity) and *zakat* (almsgiving), which are central to maintaining spiritual purity and communal balance. Hospitality, on the other hand, symbolises respect and dignity, demonstrating their commitment to treating others with warmth regardless of social standing. These values that are practised can be observed in multiple aspects of Jawi Peranakan daily and communal life. Within households, families often extend hospitality by serving elaborate meals to guests and ensuring their comfort, reflecting pride and sincerity. In community gatherings such as weddings, religious festivals, and funerals, hospitality and generosity are expressed collectively through the sharing of food, open invitations, and collaborative contributions. Generosity is also evident in charitable acts—supporting orphans, funding religious schools, and assisting the poor. The values of hospitality and generosity are so important to the Jawi Peranakan as they can be traced to religious, cultural, and social foundations. Islam encourages believers to treat guests kindly and to give freely as a means of earning divine blessing (Abdullah, 2018). Culturally, these values ensured the community's acceptance within the broader Malay-Muslim society, strengthening bonds of trust and respect. Socially, practising generosity helped maintain networks of mutual aid, which were crucial for a diasporic community navigating colonial-era challenges. By giving freely and welcoming others, the Jawi Peranakan not only upheld their moral obligations but also reinforced harmony and cultural identity. In essence, hospitality and generosity functioned as ethical pillars of the Jawi Peranakan community, serving both spiritual devotion and practical survival. These values ensured harmony, elevated their social reputation, and safeguarded the continuity of their hybrid identity across generations. In sum, the values of the Jawi Peranakan—which are communal solidarity (*gotong-royong*), religious devotion and moral guidance, as well as hospitality (*keramahan*) and generosity (*kedermawanan*) shaped their institutions, built environment, and cultural practices. To understand how these values are transformed in their built environment, the next section will elucidate this in detail.



EMBODIMENT OF JAWI PERANAKAN VALUES IN COMMUNITY-OWNED ARCHITECTURE AS LIVING HERITAGE

The Jawi Peranakan community, formed through the intermarriage of South Indian Muslim migrants with local Malay women in the Malay Peninsula during the colonial period, developed a distinctive cultural identity that was expressed not only through language, attire, and customs but also in their architectural practices (Ng, 2023). Their buildings stand as living testimonies of hybrid identities, integrating Islamic, Malay, Indian, and colonial influences. These built forms represent more than functional spaces; they embody values of religion, kinship, social solidarity, and cultural continuity.

The influence of Jawi Peranakan values is well reflected in the various typologies of buildings owned by them, serving both domestic and communal needs. At the domestic scale, the Jawi Peranakan houses and mosques were the most prominent. In urban settings such as George Town and Penang, houses were constructed along shophouse rows, with narrow frontages and elongated floor plans or in a standalone building form. These houses were often used as both family residences and sites for commercial activity, reflecting the entrepreneurial spirit of the community. At the communal level, mosques, madrasahs, and wakaf buildings (religiously endowed structures) were central typologies (Abd Rashid & Amat, 2011). The Jawi Peranakan community, being devout Muslims, emphasised religious and educational structures. Mosques associated with Jawi Peranakan often adopted South Indian and Middle Eastern stylistic elements, such as onion domes, pointed arches, and intricate plasterwork, while still employing local building materials. Madrasahs served as both centres of religious learning and markers of cultural transmission, reinforcing the community's emphasis on education. In addition, wakaf (charitable endowment) structures—such as small prayer halls, community kitchens, or resting pavilions—were built to serve collective welfare. The elements of built form and space in the building typology of Jawi Peranakan society, including their roles, structures, and characteristics, embody the ethical values of principles grounded in Islamic teachings, Malay adat (customs), and hybrid Peranakan traditions. These elements act as codes that may explicitly or implicitly convey specific messages (Pampus, 2025). The built form serves as a rich and versatile symbol, capable of carrying multiple layers of meaning—whether representing physical safety, personal identity, or broader societal values. In this context, the Jawi Peranakan architecture becomes a medium for expressing these ethical values on two levels: to individuals and society. Scholars have noted that the typology of buildings within the Jawi Peranakan community reflects a diverse range of architectural forms, each designed for a specific purpose and embodying the people's cultural, spiritual, and social values (Pampus, 2025). This includes mosques, madrasahs, and wakaf buildings that are distinguished by their symbolic designs, harmony with nature, and alignment with Islamic teachings, Malay adat (customs), and hybrid Peranakan principles.

The value of communal solidarity in the Jawi Peranakan community in Malaysia embodies the Islamic value of ukhuwah (brotherhood) and jamaah (collective unity), which are central to their social and religious life. As a hybrid community of Indian Muslim and Malay heritage, the Jawi Peranakan viewed architecture not merely as shelter, but as a reflection of



communal bonds, social ethics, and spiritual belonging. Their built forms—mosques, homes, and waqf buildings—were consciously designed to encourage collective interaction and shared responsibility within the community (Mohamed, 2016). At the urban scale, Jawi Peranakan settlements were typically organised around a central mosque complex. These mosques served as the heart of religious, educational, and social life—reinforcing the role of architecture as a space for communal prayer, learning, and decision-making. Surrounding them were madrasahs, endowment shops, and residences built on waqf land, reflecting a shared investment in faith and welfare. This clustered arrangement translated the moral idea of jamaah into physical proximity and daily social interaction. At the domestic level, Jawi Peranakan houses revealed solidarity through spatial openness and multi-generational living. The serambi (verandah) acted as a semi-public space for neighbours and guests, fostering community exchange. The inner courtyard (laman or airwell) created a central communal area for family gatherings, religious recitations, and social events—symbolising the unity of household and faith (Mohamed, 2016). Rooms were arranged in interconnected sequences rather than rigid separations, allowing fluid movement and interaction among family members. The aesthetic expression of unity was also visible in architectural ornamentation. Geometric and floral arabesques, symmetrical layouts, and calligraphic inscriptions of Quranic verses reinforced notions of harmony, equality, and divine order—visual metaphors for social cohesion. Even the act of building, often carried out through gotong-royong (communal labor), embodied solidarity as a lived practice (Ismail & Daud, 2013). Ultimately, Jawi Peranakan architecture stands as a physical manifestation of communal values—where faith, kinship, and cooperation shape not only form and space but also the social fabric of everyday life. Through the integration of mosque-centered urban planning, inclusive domestic design, and collective endowment structures, their architecture transforms the principle of ukhuwah into a spatial and cultural identity rooted in togetherness.

In terms of the value of religious devotion and moral guidance, the architecture of the Jawi Peranakan community reflects a deep synthesis of Islamic faith, moral order, and cultural hybridity. As descendants of Indian Muslim traders and local Malays, the Jawi Peranakan embedded religious devotion (taqwa) and moral discipline (akhlak) into their built environment, transforming architecture into a tangible expression of spiritual values and ethical living (Yusoff & Aziz, 2010). Their buildings—ranging from mosques and madrasahs to homes and community spaces—served not merely functional purposes, but as instruments of moral guidance and spiritual reflection. At the urban and communal level, the Jawi Peranakan settlements were often structured around the mosque complex, which symbolized the heart of spiritual and social life. The mosques, were not only places of worship but also centres for religious education, dispute resolution, and moral instruction. The presence of adjoining madrasah buildings and waqf shops illustrated the integration of piety with social welfare—an architectural expression of the Quranic principle of ‘amar ma’ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Through such spaces, religious devotion was continuously reinforced within daily communal rhythms. At the domestic scale, the Jawi Peranakan house reflected Islamic moral values through spatial hierarchy and orientation. The main prayer area (surau



kecil) within homes often faced the qibla, emphasizing the household's alignment with divine order. Spaces were arranged to respect privacy and modesty (aurat)—with distinct zones separating male and female domains during gatherings. The serambi or front verandah functioned as a semi-public interface, where hospitality and moral conduct were displayed to the community, reflecting the Islamic ethic of adab (propriety). Architectural ornamentation further echoed devotion and moral symbolism (Yusoff, 2005). Calligraphic panels, Quranic inscriptions, and floral arabesques adorned walls, doors, and windows—acting as both spiritual reminders and aesthetic guidance toward piety. The symmetrical organization and balanced proportions of Jawi Peranakan buildings conveyed harmony and discipline, resonating with Islamic ideals of order and balance (mizan). Ultimately, Jawi Peranakan architecture embodied an ethical worldview where faith directed both design and daily life (Yusoff, 2005). Through the integration of prayer spaces, modest spatial organization, and religious symbolism, the built environment became a medium of spiritual cultivation—reminding its inhabitants that architecture, when guided by devotion, serves as both a shelter for the body and a sanctuary for the soul.

The values of generosity and hospitality are also deeply embedded in Jawi Peranakan culture and are distinctly expressed through their architectural form and spatial organization. The Jawi Peranakan community, descended from intermarriage between local Malays and Indian Muslim traders, embodies a hybrid cultural identity influenced by Malay adat, Islamic teachings, and colonial urban traditions. Their architecture, therefore, reflects both spiritual values and social ethics, where generosity (dermawan) and hospitality (keramahan) are translated into the design and use of space (Said & Majid, 2004). This is widely seen in the Jawi Peranakan domestic living in which the serambi or front veranda is the most visible expression of hospitality in their houses. Serving as a welcoming threshold between the public street and the private home, it provides a shaded, comfortable area for greeting visitors and neighbors. This openness reflects the owner's generosity and willingness to connect with the community. The serambi often features decorative columns, arches, and patterned tiles — aesthetic gestures that not only signify wealth and taste but also extend visual warmth and comfort to guests. Inside, the main hall (ruang tamu) is designed for communal gatherings, religious ceremonies, and festive meals. Its spaciousness symbolizes the ability and willingness to host others, a key measure of social prestige and moral duty in Jawi Peranakan society (Pue, 2015). The organization of the house ensures that guests are received respectfully, with designated spaces that balance hospitality and privacy, following Islamic principles of modesty. Generosity is also reflected through ornamental detailing and craftsmanship. Intricate wooden carvings, stained glass, and colorful ceramic tiles beautify the interiors, transforming the domestic space into an environment of visual delight for visitors. This aesthetic generosity demonstrates sincerity (ikhlas) in welcoming guests and reflects pride in cultural refinement. Beyond private residences, public architecture funded through wakaf (charitable endowment) — such as mosques, madrasahs, and community halls — extends these values to the wider society. Buildings like the mosque and madrasa also exemplify the community's commitment to collective welfare and inclusive hospitality. In essence, Jawi Peranakan architecture



translates generosity and hospitality from moral virtues into spatial experience (Merican, 2021). Through open verandas, grand halls, and ornamental richness, their built environment expresses an enduring ethos of welcoming others with grace, comfort, and sincerity, reflecting a harmonious blend of Malay, Islamic, and cosmopolitan influences. For the benefit of this writing, the study focuses on the architectural styles of Jawi Peranakan represented only in mosque as case study followed by an analysis of how the Jawi Peranakan ethical values comprise the concept of communal solidarity (gotong-royong), religious devotion and moral guidance, as well as hospitality (keramahan) and generosity (kedermawanan) are embedded and symbolized in these building typology as case study of its architectural design form and its spatial organization (Yusoff, 2005). This will be described in the findings and discussion section. Before understanding how these values are translated into architecture, it is best to understand the Jawi Peranakan architectural elements and their evolution in the Malaysian context.

EVOLUTION OF JAWI PERANAKAN ARCHITECTURE IN MALAYSIA AND DESIGN FEATURES

The evolution of Jawi Peranakan architecture in Malaysia encapsulates a journey from early diasporic adaptation to modern reinterpretation. Emerging from cross-cultural encounters in the 18th century, it matured into a sophisticated architectural expression that blended Indian, Malay, Islamic, and Western aesthetics. Its influence reached its zenith during the colonial and early modern Malaysian period, where it contributed significantly to defining the visual identity of Muslim urban elites.

The earliest Jawi Peranakan settlements appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries, following waves of migration from South India—especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala—where Muslim traders (often referred to as Chulias or Keling Muslims) arrived in Melaka, Penang, and later Singapore. These traders integrated into the Malay social structure, adopting Malay language and customs while maintaining Islamic faith and select South Asian traditions (Yusoff & Mohamed, 2010). During this 18th and 19th century period, British colonial urban planning introduced grid street layouts, shophouse typologies, and civic infrastructures that would frame much of the built environment in Penang and Melaka. Jawi Peranakan homes of this era adopted the Straits Eclectic architectural style—a synthesis of British colonial design, Chinese shophouse structure, and Malay-Islamic ornamentation. Their townhouses typically featured narrow frontages with deep floor plans, an internal airwell for ventilation, and decorative stucco façades that integrated motifs from multiple cultural sources. Architecturally, the façades often displayed Islamic geometric patterns, European pilasters and cornices, and Chinese porcelain tiles. This combination reflected the cosmopolitanism of the Straits Settlements, where the Jawi Peranakan community participated in both local and transoceanic networks. Interiors featured high timber ceilings, arched verandas, and marble flooring, symbolizing wealth and refinement. Notable early examples include residences in George Town's Acheen Street area, where Jawi Peranakan merchants lived near mosques and religious schools. The Acheen Street Mosque (Masjid Lebu Acheh), built in 1808, stands as a



cornerstone of early Jawi Peranakan architectural expression—merging Indian-Islamic domes, Malay timber craftsmanship, and colonial masonry detailing (Mei, 2015; Yusoff & Aziz, 2010). Architecturally, the Jawi Peranakan residences and public buildings in Melaka continued the Straits Eclectic style, but with a stronger Islamic and Indian character compared to Chinese Peranakan counterparts. Their homes were typically double-storey terrace houses or shophouses, constructed with brick and lime plaster, featuring internal courtyards for ventilation and light—an adaptation from both Malay rumah panggung and British shophouse typologies (Mei, 2015). Key features included: Arched verandahs with pointed or horseshoe arches inspired by Mughal and Middle Eastern forms; Stucco and plaster ornamentation combining Quranic calligraphy with floral arabesques; Coloured ceramic tiles arranged in geometric motifs, a legacy of Chinese artisanship adapted to Islamic aesthetics; Wooden doors and shutters intricately carved with vegetal patterns reminiscent of Malay craftsmanship. These hybrid buildings were not mere imitations of colonial or Chinese forms; they were creative reinterpretations shaped by Islamic values and cosmopolitan exposure. The Jawi Peranakan thus forged a distinctive architectural idiom that stood at the intersection of cultural hybridity and religious orthodoxy.

The propagation of the stronghold to Islamic belief among the Jawi Peranakan community which was strengthened during the mid-18th till the late 19th century, led to the open expression by devout Jawi Peranakan community to portray their religious identity prominently through architecture. Domestic spaces included prayer rooms (surau kecil), gender-segregated quarters, and the orientation of rooms in accordance with qibla. The facades and interior ornaments avoided figural imagery, instead using floral arabesques, calligraphic inscriptions, and lattice screens (jali) to achieve aesthetic refinement within Islamic bounds (Mei, 2015). The community also invested heavily in the construction of mosques, madrasahs, and waqf (endowment) buildings—public structures that embodied religious virtue and community solidarity. Many of these were funded by prominent Jawi Peranakan philanthropists such as Syed Mohamed Al-Attas and Syed Alwi Al-Sagoff, whose architectural legacies can still be traced in Johor, Penang, and Singapore. Architectural features such as multi-tiered domes, Moorish arches, and Indian-Malay minarets became recurring motifs, symbolizing both piety and cultural synthesis. The use of waqf properties—lands endowed for charitable or religious purposes—also contributed to the formation of urban Muslim enclaves that shaped the architectural landscape of Johor Bahru and Penang. This scenario can also be seen in Malacca. The Jawi Peranakan community in Melaka also invested heavily in religious and educational architecture. Mosques, madrasahs, and waqf (endowment) properties became central instruments for community cohesion and moral expression. Notable among these is the Masjid Kampung Hulu and Masjid Kampung Kling, both of which underwent expansions and refurbishments under the influence of Jawi Peranakan benefactors during the 19th century (Izahara et al., 2022). While these mosques predated their arrival, the renovations introduced new stylistic layers—such as plaster ornamentation, decorative arches, and tiled floors—that reflect Jawi Peranakan aesthetics. The use of waqf properties—endowed for religious and social purposes—enabled the community to sustain educational institutions and housing for



religious teachers. These endowments were both pious and architectural acts, creating enduring Islamic urban fabrics that continue to shape Melaka's heritage zones today (Nasution, 2002).

The 20th century brought significant transformations to the architectural landscape of Malaysia. With urbanization, the decline of traditional merchant classes, and the introduction of modern construction materials, Jawi Peranakan architecture adapted to changing times while retaining its symbolic essence. During the early to mid-20th century, buildings began incorporating Art Deco and Modernist elements, especially in urban areas such as Penang and Johor Bahru and Malacca (Pue, 2016). Yet even as architectural styles modernised, Jawi Peranakan homes retained certain hallmarks: the internal courtyard, the frontal verandah, and decorative motifs evoking Islamic and Indian heritage. Educational and religious institutions founded by the Jawi Peranakan continued to thrive, such as Madrasah Al-Attas and Wakaf Al-Attas buildings in Johor (Latiff, 2022). These structures combined modern concrete frames with ornamental detailing referencing traditional motifs, reflecting the continuity of cultural identity within modernisation. The transition of the Jawi Peranakan was not a mere geographical movement but an architectural and cultural transformation. In this southern context, they synthesised Malay, Indian, Islamic, and colonial elements into a built environment that reflected their dual heritage and religious commitment. This provided the intermediary stage through which the Jawi Peranakan refined their architectural language—bridging the Straits Eclectic style of the north and the Indo-Saracenic grandeur (Mei, 2015). Their legacy endures not only in walls and domes but also in the enduring dialogue between faith, identity, and modernity in Malaysia's architectural history. The methodological approach for analyzing the mosque and house as case study in detail will be presented in the following section, followed by a discussion of how the Jawi Peranakan values manifest in the architectural design of mosque and house building typology in the findings and discussion section.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretive paradigm to explore the integration of Jawi Peranakan values within the architectural forms of the Jawi Peranakan community. Rooted in qualitative research, this paradigm emphasises the contextual and subjective dimensions of meaning, focusing on how individuals and communities assign cultural significance to the built environment. It operates on the philosophical premise that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the lived experiences and interpretations of people rather than through hypothesis testing or behavioural prediction. The research investigates explicitly how the Jawi Peranakan values have shaped the architectural forms of their public buildings, like mosques and houses. Given the focus on uncovering symbolic and philosophical meaning, semiotics is employed as a methodological tool to decode embedded symbols within the architecture. The Jawi Peranakan community's cultural expressions—including their practices, behaviours, and spatial arrangements—are treated as a "text" that can be read, interpreted, and analysed to extract deeper ideological meanings. A single study approach underpins the research design,



enabling in-depth, qualitative exploration. Data collection methods include observational analysis using the layering technique and semi-structured interviews with experts and residents. This multi-method strategy supports the interpretation of personal and collective meanings attached to the architectural forms. The selection of the Jawi Peranakan community building, represented by the mosque, as four key criteria justifies the case study. First is the Historical and Cultural Authenticity aspect, in which the building should have a direct historical connection to the Jawi Peranakan community, ideally constructed, funded, or managed by Jawi Peranakan individuals or organisations. It should date from the period when the community was socially active (19th–early 20th century), reflecting genuine Jawi Peranakan socio-religious identity. Second is the representation of core cultural values, where the selected building must express Jawi Peranakan values such as generosity (*dermawan*), hospitality (*keramahan*), religious devotion, education, and community welfare. This can be seen in the function of the building or in spatial organization that encourages communal gathering, learning, and inclusivity. Third is the extensiveness level of architectural characteristics and hybrid identity. The selection of case study displays distinct hybrid architectural features that reflect the fusion of Malay, Islamic, Indian, and colonial influences. Criteria include façade ornamentation, form typology (courtyard, portico, veranda), symmetry, ventilation details, and use of materials. These hybrid forms are key evidence of how cultural values were translated into architectural language. Fourth is the, community and functional relevance. The building should have been or still be used as a community hub, such as a mosque and others. Continued community engagement strengthens its role as a living representation of Jawi Peranakan generosity and civic responsibility. The architectural analysis is framed by theories of form and space-making, where form includes elements such as setting, scale, façade, structure, and ornament, and space includes aspects like access, circulation, hierarchy, and function. Form-making is studied through layered semiotic analysis, while space syntax mapping is used to understand spatial organization. The semiotic framework follows Malhis, S. (2004) six-layer model:

Layer 1: Establishes the foundational structure of the building form.

Layer 2: Examines volumetric modifications through addition or subtraction.

Layer 3: Introduces piercings (windows, doors) and other attributes, such as screens and garages.

Layer 4: Examines the spatial relationships between piercings and their surrounding surfaces.

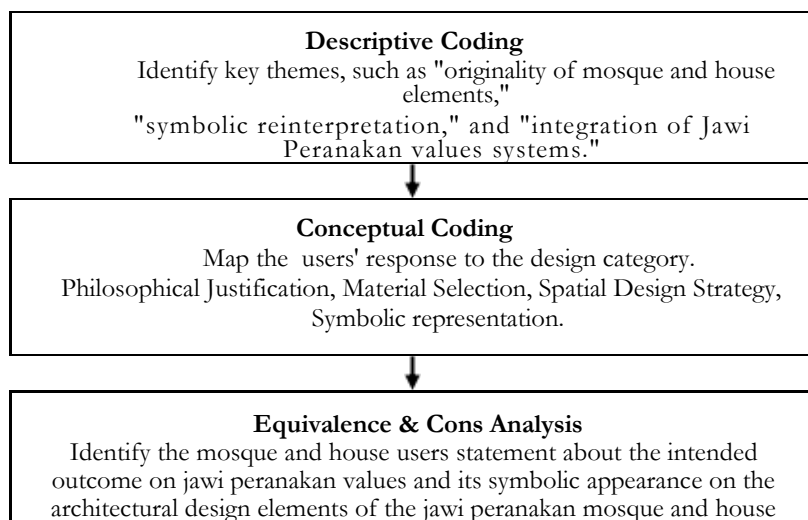
Layer 5: Focuses on decorative and constructive details, including columns, cornices, and finishes.

Layer 6: Isolates optional stylistic features (e.g., door/window shapes) and categorises them separately for detailed analysis.

Additionally, semi structured interviews were conducted with 5 people under the category of mosque management who manage the mosque for more than 10 years to gain insight into the practical and symbolic roles of architectural features. Interview content centred around the core concepts of Jawi Peranakan values—and their manifestation in architectural form and



space. This helped link observed architectural characteristics directly to philosophical and cultural values. To analyse the findings from interviews, the coding method is used because it is an important qualitative research technique that provides a structured approach to analyzing complex text data. By systematically categorizing and interpreting text data, theme-based coding allows for the identification of patterns, thematic relationships, and implicit discourse related to Jawi Peranakan values with the architectural formation of this Jawi Peranakan community mosque and houses. The use of this coding method ensures that the data from the interview transcript is successfully synthesized into meaningful insights that support the research objectives. The coding for this interview involves:



For the data validation of findings from the observation and semi structured interviews, focus group discussions with selected five experts— 1 architects, 2 academician, and 2 conservators—with backgrounds in Jawi Peranakan culture and architectural heritage, using the Socratic method, were adopted. The selection of these experts were based on their academic credentials, cultural expertise, and professional experience in the field of Indian tradition and cultural heritage. The Socratic method is seen as beneficial for conducting focus group discussions. First, it elevates a research-centred view, capturing the ideologies of experts according to their views on design, function, and spirituality. Second, the dialogical nature fosters knowledge sharing between experts and researchers, creating a collaborative environment for diverse perspectives to be brought out. Third, by challenging assumptions and encouraging more in-depth research, this Socratic method reveals hidden or unintentional design needs as a result of the researcher's findings. Finally, the expert's in-depth relationship with the research subject will provide critical insight into how design decisions align with the formation of Jawi Peranakan community identity and how it should work.



The study uses an explanatory research approach, aiming to explain the relationships between architectural features and cultural values. Analysis occurs in two phases:

Phase One: Observational and documentation-based analysis of built form and spatial organisation, supplemented by semi-structured interviews on Jawi Peranakan-related interpretations.

Phase Two: All findings from the three processes above are synthesised to assess how and to what extent Jawi Peranakan values have influenced architectural forms and to evaluate their potential role in supporting communal development.

Phase Three: Finally, data validation with experts is made to identify what, how and why the mosque's architectural expressions highlight the shared values of Jawi Peranakan in representing unique features, commonalities and differences in architectural expression.

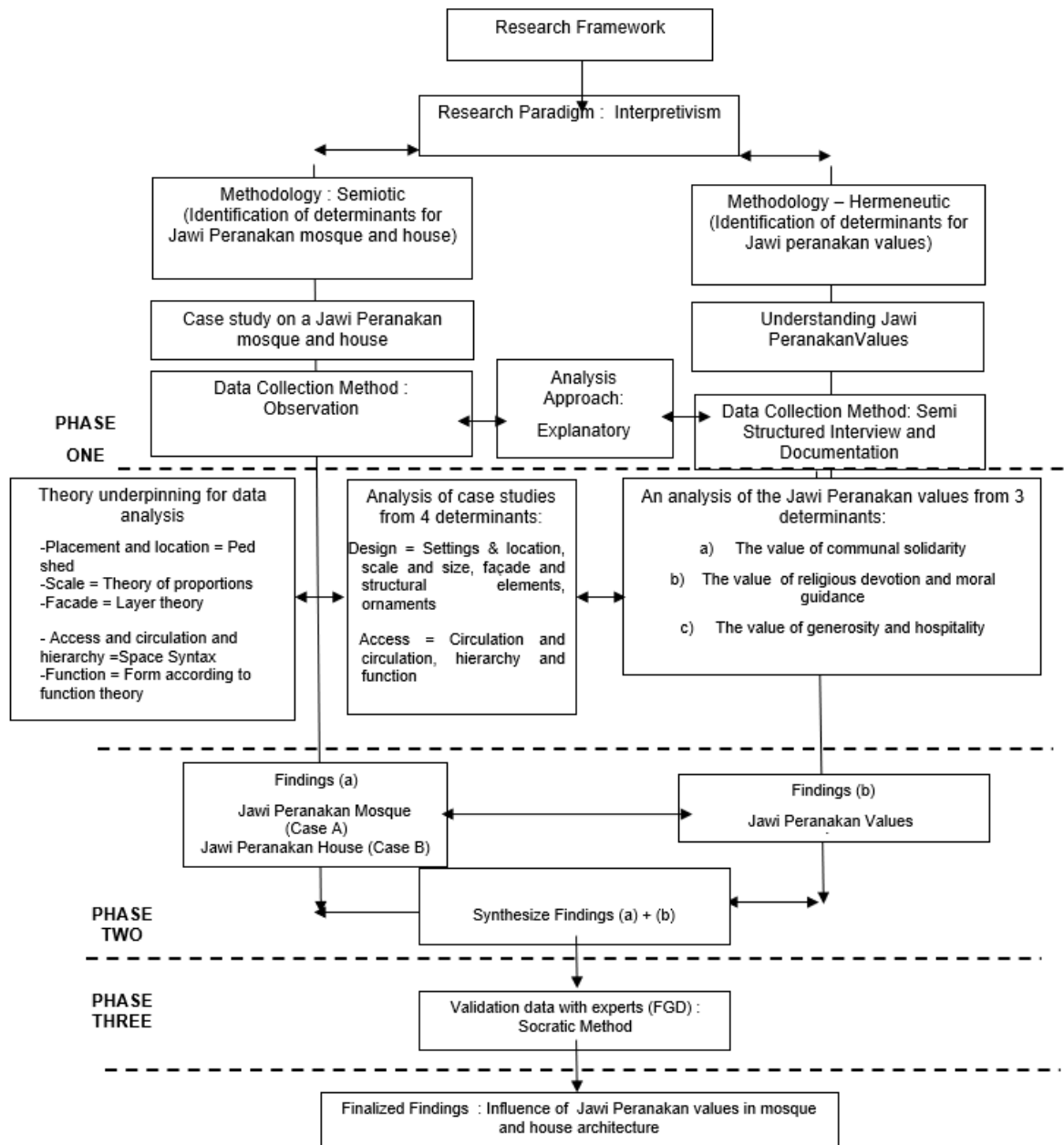


DIAGRAM 1.0 Research framework (source: author)



RESULT

This paper examines two case studies of buildings owned and patronised by the Jawi Peranakan community, which are the Kapitan Keling Mosque and Syed Al Attas Mansion. These two case study backgrounds will be explained in turn as in the following.

CASE STUDY A - THE KAPITAN KLING MOSQUE



FIGURE 1.0 View of Kapitan Kling Mosque (source: author)

This mosque was established in the late 18th century, is among the earliest Muslim institutions in George Town. The term “Keling” historically referred to people of South Indian origin, particularly Tamil Muslims who were among the first settlers brought to Penang at the invitation of the British East India Company. Their leader, Cauder Mohideen, was appointed as the Kapitan Keling—a system in which the colonial administration recognized a community head responsible for mediation, organization, and tax management (Jones, 1997). Upon his appointment around 1801, Cauder Mohideen donated land for the construction of a mosque that would serve as the religious and social center for the South Indian Muslim community. Initially, the mosque was a modest brick structure surrounded by a large Muslim settlement known as the Keling Kampung. Over time, as Penang became a thriving free port attracting Indian Ocean traders from Aceh, the Coromandel Coast, Gujarat, Yemen, and the Malay world, the mosque expanded to accommodate the growing population. The colonial authorities formalized land grants to the mosque trustees, reflecting both British administrative order and the community’s increasing institutional strength. By the mid-19th century, the original structure proved insufficient, leading to significant renovation under the leadership of succeeding Kapitan, notably Kapitan Kechil Abdul Rahman and Kapitan Kechil Lebai Tambusamy. The architectural evolution of the mosque displays the syncretic aesthetics of the period: Indo-



Islamic arches, Mughal domes, and colonial Neoclassical features incorporated by European architects and local artisans. The transformation reached a major phase in the early 20th century when the mosque underwent extensive reconstruction designed by Henry Alfred Neubronner of the PWD. This reconstruction introduced the striking ochre façade, imposing central dome, four smaller corner domes, and colonnaded verandahs that define the mosque today. The surrounding grounds historically functioned as a Muslim burial site, emphasizing the mosque's role as the religious heart of the Muslim quarter. Its placement in the urban grid of George Town reflects typical features of Islamic settlement patterns—close proximity to markets, residential clusters, waqf lands, and community schools. In this sense, the Kapitan Keling Mosque served not only as a place of worship but also as a locus of cultural continuity, legal authority, social welfare, and communal identity for generations of Indian Muslim settlers. By the late 20th century, as George Town modernized and expanded, the mosque became a symbol of historical preservation. Its conservation under UNESCO's designation of George Town as a World Heritage Site (2008) reaffirmed its importance as a living monument of Penang's multicultural past. Today, the Kapitan Keling Mosque stands as one of the oldest and most architecturally significant mosques in Malaysia, representing the layered histories of colonial administration, South Asian diaspora leadership, and Islamic architectural expression.

CASE STUDY B – SYED AL ATTAS MANSION

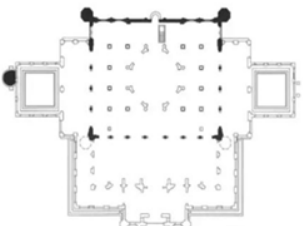




FIGURE 1.1 View of The Syed Al Attas Mansion (source: author)

The Syed Al Attas Mansion, constructed around the 1860s, embodies the influence of the Hadhrami Arab community—a group known for their trading networks spanning the Red Sea, Arabian Peninsula, India, and Southeast Asia. Syed Mohammad Al Attas, a prominent merchant from the distinguished Al Attas family of Hadhramaut, built the mansion. The Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay world became influential both economically and intellectually,



contributing to Islamic scholarship, trade, and later reformist movements. The mansion served multiple functions: it was a residence, trading office, and gathering place for the Arab elite in Penang. Its architectural style is emblematic of the Straits Eclectic tradition, blending European Neoclassical symmetry and ornamentation with Chinese craftsmanship and Islamic spatial principles. Features such as internal courtyards, large shuttered windows, and decorative plasterwork reflect this hybrid aesthetic that defined wealthy urban homes in 19th-century Penang. Historically, the Syed Al Attas Mansion is particularly important for its association with anti-colonial activism. It is widely regarded as a meeting place for leaders of the Acehnese resistance against Dutch colonial rule in Sumatra. Arab scholars, merchants, and Hadhrami leaders such as Syed Al Attas maintained close networks with Southeast Asian sultanates, and the mansion became a hub for intellectual debate, strategic planning, and cultural exchange. This political dimension elevates the mansion beyond its architectural value, situating it within a broader narrative of Indian Ocean solidarity and resistance. As Penang flourished as a commercial port, the mansion also reflected the prosperity of the Arab merchant class, who invested in real estate, waqf properties, spice exportation, and regional trade. Its location along Armenian Street placed it within a vibrant multicultural district inhabited by Chinese Peranakans, Tamil Muslims, Malay traders, and European institutions. This setting underscores the cosmopolitan nature of George Town's urban fabric. In the 20th century, shifting economic patterns, the decline of traditional trading houses, and changing urban demographics led to the mansion's gradual deterioration. However, its significance was revived through conservation initiatives tied to Penang's heritage revitalisation efforts. Today, the Syed Al Attas Mansion stands as a restored monument representing the intellectual, political, and economic contributions of the Hadhrami Arab diaspora. Its historical role as a centre of anti-colonial activity and intercultural exchange continues to anchor its legacy within Malaysian heritage studies.

Jawi Peranakan values	Values influence the architectural design	Diagram of Case Study A : The Kapitan Kling Mosque	Diagram of Case Study B : Syed Al Attas Mansion
<p>The value of communal solidarity</p> <p>Communal solidarity in the Jawi Peranakan community refers to the deeply rooted collective value that prioritises unity, mutual support, and the preservation of shared identity among members of this Malay–South Asian Muslim hybrid society. Grounded in Islamic teachings, extended kinship networks, and long-standing cultural practices, this solidarity manifests through cooperation in religious rituals, social gatherings, economic activities, and community decision-making.</p> <p>The value emphasises interdependence, where individuals are expected to contribute to communal welfare, uphold moral obligations, and assist one another in times of need.</p>	<p>Jawi Peranakan architecture expresses communal solidarity through designs that encourage collective gatherings, extended family structures, integrate religious life, and invest in shared community spaces. These features transform buildings into living embodiments of cooperation, shared faith, and cultural continuity—key values that define Jawi Peranakan heritage.</p>	<p>Spatial layout –</p>  <p>Image 1.0 Ground floor plan of mosque (source: author)</p> <p>Centralised Congregational Prayer Hall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The prayer hall is large, symmetrical, and unobstructed by internal partitions. • It brings the entire community together in <i>saff</i> (aligned rows), reinforcing equality and unity before God. • The mihrab is highly visible to allow a collective spiritual focus. <p>*Everyone—regardless of status or ethnicity—shares the same worship space, building social cohesion. Showing the equality & unity in worship.</p> <p>Multi-Entry Access that Welcomes Diverse Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mosque features several gates oriented toward surrounding Tamil Muslim neighbourhoods. • This spatial permeability reflects inclusivity toward 	<p>Spatial layout-</p>  <p>Image 1.6 Ground floor plan of the mansion (source:author)</p>  <p>Image 1.7 First floor plan of the mansion(source:author)</p> <p>Hierarchical but Connected Spatial Layout</p> <p>The mansion uses a traditional <i>introverted</i> design centered around internal circulation spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front reception halls (<i>serambi</i> or grand foyers) serve as public areas for receiving guests, traders, scholars, and community members. • Semi-private and private rooms are positioned deeper inside. <p>*Creates a welcoming place for communal interaction while still respecting Islamic norms of privacy and hospitality—fostering trust and social bonding.</p>



		<p>multi-ethnic Muslim communities (Indian, Malay, Arab).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear pathways guide the flow of people from outside to the prayer hall in groups. • Ritual movement during Friday prayers and festivals fosters synchronized collective behavior. <p>*Breaking hierarchical access patterns promotes a shared sense of belonging. Representing inclusivity across Muslim ethnic groups</p> <p>Ancillary Communal Facilities Integrated into the Complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ablution areas (wudu), madrasah classrooms, and meeting rooms are connected to the main hall. • Historically, charitable food distribution and religious administration took place onsite. <p>*The mosque becomes a community centre—not only a prayer space. Support for lifelong communal activities and reinforced identity through shared ritual.</p>	<p>Large Multi-Functional Reception Areas</p> <p>The expansive audience hall on the ground floor historically functioned for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business negotiations • Community meetings • Hosting travelling merchants and religious leaders <p>*Strengthens social and economic networks—solidifying communal ties through trade and religious fraternity.</p> <p>Spatial Separation for Community Inclusivity</p> <p>Separate pathways and access zones were provided for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male guests (public front) • Women and family members (private interior) • Servants and domestic helpers (discreet routes) <p>*This respectful zoning facilitates broader participation in communal activities—without violating Islamic social boundaries.</p> <p>Courtyard and Ventilation Spine as Social Node</p> <p>A central light court and surrounding verandahs link major rooms for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily communal gatherings • Family–community exchanges • Religious celebrations (e.g., communal meals during Ramadan) <p>* The courtyard acts as the heart of communal life—symbolically and practically reinforcing unity.</p>
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The value of religious devotion and moral guidance

In the Jawi Peranakan community this value reflects the central importance of Islamic faith as the foundation of identity, conduct, and social order. Rooted in Malay-Indian Muslim heritage, this value emphasizes commitment to worship, spiritual discipline, and ethical behavior guided by Shariah principles. Religious teachings influence family life, community relationships, and education, and leadership roles, ensuring that decisions and everyday actions uphold honesty, modesty, and compassion. Through mosques, religious scholars, and communal rituals, this value preserves cultural integrity, strengthens unity, and provides a moral compass for the wellbeing of the whole community.

The value of religious devotion and moral guidance in the Jawi Peranakan community strongly shapes their architecture by placing Islamic faith at the center of spatial design. Mosques, homes, and public buildings incorporate features such as prayer halls, mihrabs, and courtyards that facilitate worship and religious gatherings. Spatial hierarchy separates public and private zones to protect modesty and uphold Islamic etiquette. Decorative elements including calligraphy and geometric motifs promote spiritual reflection rather than worldly display. Buildings often include areas for Quranic learning and charitable activities, showing that architecture supports both moral education and the nurturing of a righteous, unified Muslim community.

Form-making



Image 1.1 Location of the mosque
(source:author)

Sacred Orientation and Centralized Worship Focus

- The entire building mass is oriented toward the **qibla**, guiding the congregation toward Mecca.
- The prominent **mihrab** niche and aligned prayer rows (*safl*) visually reinforce unity and equality before God.

*Spiritual direction becomes a physical and moral anchor.

Symbolic Verticality as Connection to the Divine



Image 1.2 The frontal façade of the mosque form (source: author)

- The **large onion-shaped dome** symbolizes the heavens and divine protection.
- The **minaret** stands tall to broadcast the adhan, calling the community to prayer and moral discipline.

Form-making



Image 1.8 Location of the mansion
(source:author)

Introverted Spatial Structure for Modesty and Privacy




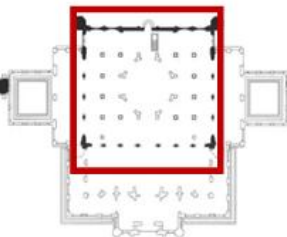

The mansion adopts an inward-looking layout where private spaces are positioned deeper within the building, separated from street-facing public areas. This zoning reflects Islamic principles of **haya'** (modesty) and controls social interaction between genders, ensuring behavior aligned with moral guidelines.

Symbolic Aesthetic Expression of Islamic Identity



Image 1.9 Calligraphic pattern at the façade mansion form (source: author)

Geometric motifs, arches, and calligraphic ornamentation celebrate Islamic artistic tradition without figurative imagery, upholding moral teachings against idolatry. The

		<p>*Architecture acts as a reminder of religious duty and constant devotion.</p> <p>Calligraphic and Geometric Ornamentation</p>  <p>Image 1.3 Calligraphic pattern in interior form (source: author)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quranic calligraphy and geometric patterns communicate sacred knowledge. • Repetition of patterns reflects divine order and Islamic moral cosmos. <p>*The mosque becomes a visual medium of religious teaching.</p>	<p>harmonious façade conveys dignity, humility, and moral order expected of community leaders.</p> <p>Purification and Cleanliness Embedded in Form</p>   <p>Image 1.10 Opening at the façade mansion (source: author)</p> <p>The well-ventilated verandahs highlights the importance of <i>tahara</i>' (cleanliness) as a spiritual and moral obligation, ensuring the home remains suitable for worship.</p>
<p>The value of generosity and hospitality is essential to the Jawi Peranakan community as it strengthens social relations, supports religious obligations, and sustains cultural identity. Grounded in Islamic teachings on charity and caring for guests, these values guide how the community welcomes travelers, hosts communal gatherings, and assists those in need. Generosity builds trust within trade networks and reinforces the</p>	<p>The value of generosity and hospitality is portrayed in the Jawi Peranakan built environment through architectural features that support communal gatherings, guest reception, and charitable practices. Residences such as those of prominent merchant families include large reception halls, verandahs, and courtyards designed to welcome visitors with comfort and respect. Mosques and community buildings provide expansive prayer spaces, social areas, and facilities for travelers, reflecting</p>	<p>Spatial layout-</p>  <p>Image 1.4 Large open prayer hall (source: author)</p> <p>Expansive Congregational Prayer Hall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, open interior accommodates significant numbers of worshippers, especially during Friday prayers and festivals. • Reflects generosity in providing communal access 	<p>Spatial layout-</p>  <p>Image 1.11 Large public reception space (source: author)</p> <p>Prominent Front Reception Halls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, accessible reception rooms placed at the building's front demonstrate readiness to receive merchants, scholars, and community visitors. • Reflects the owner's social obligation to host guests and provide communal support.

community's reputation for kindness and leadership. Hospitality also promotes unity among Muslims of diverse origins, especially in multiethnic settings like Penang. By practicing open-handedness and respectful hosting, the Jawi Peranakan preserve social harmony, spiritual merit, and communal resilience.

Islamic obligations of charity and care for the needy. Spatial hierarchies maintain dignity by balancing openness with privacy. Collectively, these elements demonstrate that the built environment functions as a physical expression of social generosity and communal responsibility.

to sacred space for all Muslims.

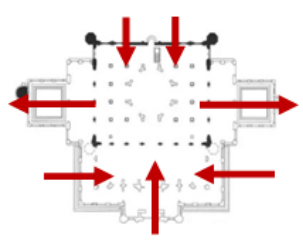


Image 1.5 Well segregation of zoning of public, semi and private
 (source: author)

Multiple Entry Points

- Several access routes allow diverse groups—from different ethnic and social backgrounds—to join the congregation easily.
- Communicates openness and inclusivity as Islamic social virtues.

Welcoming Transitional Spaces

- Verandahs, arcades, and shaded walkways function as social areas before and after prayers.
- Offer comfortable zones to gather, converse, and support community members.

Open Courtyard for Social Interaction

- The sahn accommodates community events, religious celebrations, and relief distribution.
- Enables acts of *sadaqah* (charity) and reinforces collective hospitality.

Mosque as a Social-Welfare Hub

- Layout supports Quranic classes, charitable collection, and community decision-making.

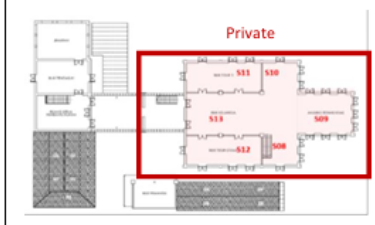
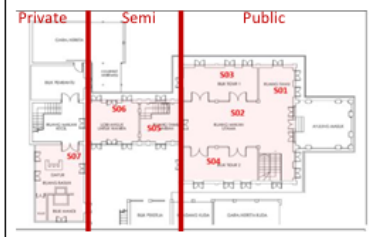


Image 1.12 Well segregation of zoning of public, semi and private
 (source : author)

Hierarchical Spatial Zoning


- Clear separation between public reception areas and private family quarters allows visitors to be hosted without compromising domestic privacy.
- Aligns with Islamic ethics of respectful and dignified hospitality (*adab al-ziyāfah*).



Image 1.13 Frontal mansion façade
 (source: author)

Symbolic Representation of Hospitality

- The mansion's grand entrance and ornamental façade signal openness, dignity, and

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospitality is embedded in both spiritual and socio-economic functions. <p>*Through accessible circulation, communal gathering areas, and facilities for worship and welfare, the Kapitan Keling Mosque turns generosity and hospitality into spatial practices—reinforcing the Islamic ideal of caring for all who enter its domain.</p>	<p>willingness to engage with the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Architecture communicates generosity as a cultural and moral value <p>Interconnected Verandahs and Circulation Routes</p>  <p>Image 1.14 Fluid circulation at the ground floor (source: author)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verandahs create fluid movement between public and semi-private areas, allowing guests to circulate comfortably. This ease of access expresses hospitality while maintaining respectful boundaries <p>*The mansion's spatial layout transforms the home into a place of social responsibility, reflecting generosity not only as a personal virtue but as a communal obligation embedded in Jawi Peranakan culture.</p>
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Based on the preceding case studies, it is evident that Jawi Peranakan architecture like the mosque and individual house in Malaysia continues to embody and safeguard fundamental communal values, particularly those associated with familial respect, hierarchical social structure, Islamic belief systems, and collective responsibility. Despite progressive adaptations to contemporary functional requirements, these cultural principles remain deeply embedded within spatial organisation, decorative expression, and architectural symbolism. The sustained emphasis on religious devotion, family loyalty, and social order reinforces the transmission of Jawi Peranakan identity across generations, thereby ensuring that these values remain integral to both the built environment and the broader socio-cultural fabric of the community in Malaysia.



ETHNIC STUDIES IMPLICATIONS

The study of cultural values embedded in Jawi Peranakan public buildings—such as communal solidarity, religious devotion and moral guidance, and generosity and hospitality—offers significant insights for ethnic studies by linking material culture to social identity, intergroup relations, and heritage preservation. Public architecture functions as a tangible expression of community norms, beliefs, and social ethics, making it a vital medium through which ethnic identity is both manifested and reinforced. For instance, spatial arrangements that prioritize communal gathering areas, inclusive prayer halls, and reception spaces reflect the value of communal solidarity, illustrating how physical space supports social cohesion and collective responsibility within a minority ethnic community.

Similarly, design elements emphasizing religious devotion and moral guidance, including spatial hierarchy, ceremonial circulation, and provision for religious learning, demonstrate the interplay between faith and daily life. These features provide evidence of the Jawi Peranakan community's integration of spiritual principles into social organization and collective behavior, offering scholars a framework to understand how religion shapes ethnic identity and moral governance. Meanwhile, architectural expressions of generosity and hospitality—through open courtyards, reception halls, and facilities for travelers or the needy—highlight the ethical and social responsibilities that underpin community relations, shedding light on the role of cultural norms in sustaining intra- and inter-ethnic networks.

By examining these values in the built environment, ethnic studies can move beyond abstract cultural theorization to observe the materialization of social norms, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and cultural resilience. It also enables a comparative understanding of how minority communities negotiate identity, social cohesion, and heritage preservation within multicultural societies. Thus, analyzing Jawi Peranakan public buildings contributes to ethnic studies by demonstrating the inextricable link between architecture, culture, and social identity, providing a holistic lens for exploring the dynamic processes that shape ethnic experience and community continuity.

CONCLUSION

The development of a design framework grounded in the Jawi Peranakan values of communal solidarity, religious devotion and moral guidance, and generosity and hospitality is vital in shaping a culturally meaningful Malaysian built environment. These values, historically embedded in the spatial and architectural character of settlements such as George Town, illustrate how architecture can function as a socio-cultural instrument rather than merely a physical construct. Designs informed by communal solidarity encourage spatial inclusivity by providing environments that support social interaction, collective engagement, and community resilience. Spaces such as courtyards, verandahs, and prayer halls facilitate communication and



cooperation, strengthening social cohesion in multicultural urban settings. Likewise, integrating religious devotion and moral guidance into architecture shapes environments that respect and reinforce Islamic principles, ethical conduct, and spiritual identity. In both domestic and institutional buildings, zoning for privacy, purification, and worship highlights architecture as a medium of spiritual continuity. Similarly, generosity and hospitality manifest through public accessibility, welcoming spatial gestures, and the incorporation of facilities intended to support communal welfare—demonstrating how the built environment can encourage compassion, care, and openness in daily life. The benefits of embedding these values are multifold. They promote cultural continuity, enhance community wellbeing, and preserve a unique architectural identity that contributes to Malaysia’s heritage narrative. Such values-driven frameworks also support social inclusivity by recognizing the historical contributions of diverse Muslim communities in nation-building. They offer design guidelines that prioritize human experience, ethical spatial organization, and social sustainability—principles that remain relevant in contemporary city-making.

However, challenges persist in maintaining and translating Jawi Peranakan values into modern architecture. Globalization, real estate commercialization, and rapid urban development often prioritize economic profit over cultural preservation. The decline of traditional community structures and changing social behaviours risks diminishing collective memory and weakening cultural linkages. Additionally, heritage buildings face deterioration, inadequate conservation funding, and pressure to be redeveloped, creating tensions between modern functionality and historical integrity. Despite these challenges, reinforcing Jawi Peranakan cultural values within Malaysia’s design discourse is essential. It ensures that the built environment continues to reflect plural identity, honour inherited wisdom, and support meaningful social relations. Moving forward, an adaptive, context-sensitive design framework rooted in these values can guide future development toward environments that are not only functional but also spiritually grounded, community-oriented, and culturally dignified—safeguarding heritage as a living and evolving legacy for generations to come.

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