

The Architectural Adaptation of Javanese Ethnic Houses to the Architectural Influence of Arab Ethnic Houses in Gresik

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ABSTRACT

This piece of research aims to show how the architectural acculturation has occurred between the Arab ethnic architecture of the immigrants and the typically Javanese architecture of the local community inhabiting the region of Gresik on the Northern coast of East Java. The steps taken in this research study include an accurate analysis of the residential architecture to be found in two case studies by way of the typological approach, followed by establishing the dominant aspects that form the background of the formation of this architecture by employing the acculturation approach. The outcome of the analysis indicates that architectural acculturation has indeed taken place in the architecture of the Javanese community that emerged all by itself in the immediate vicinity of the dwellings inhabited by these newcomers. The relationship between these two architectural styles is reflected in the integration of the impact that Arab-style ethnic architecture has made on the architectural building designs of the Javanese community.

Keywords: architectural adaptation, meaning, type.

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, the Northern coastal region of East Java has exposed itself to the influx of new arrivals from outside of Java. These newcomers from China, Arabia and the Netherlands initially entered the Northern coast of East Java to trade [1]. In the course of time these outsiders left their mark on the indigenous culture, including its architecture. It is this very mixture of cultures that brought forth the typical coastal culture and architectural style to be found there. Up to now, research into all of the various designs to be encountered in this particular region has rarely been conducted, if at all. This state of affairs has turned coastal architecture into an important field to explore. Historical records indicate that the Northern coastal region of Java has always welcomed the arrival of foreign settlers with open arms.[2][3] Apart from their trading activities, these settlers also contributed both directly and indirectly to spreading their native culture and civilization to the locals. It may come as no surprise that in an evolutionary sense, the architectural development of Javanese ethnic houses has always been affected by the residential architecture of these foreign newcomers. The first ethnic group of Arab traders arrived in Surabaya around 1850. They went on to settle in the region of Gresik. The kampongs and houses built in Arab ethnic style of that particular era were designed according to the cultural patterns they adhered to as well as to the technical capability they mastered. In the process of its development, this Arab ethnic style of architectural design for dwellings played a role in making an impact on the architecture employed by the inhabitants around them. This mixture of styles and techniques was interpreted to shape the architectural character of houses built in the coastal Javanese ethnic style prevalent around the Arab quarter of Gapuro Sukolilo in Gresik [4]

It is well-known that these Javanese ethnic houses in the hinterland [5][6] have been created as a result of cultural patterns adhered to from one generation to the next. Initially, the inhabitants of the coastal region that had moved from the countryside still held on to the cultural patterns and architecture typical of their region of origin by way of reference. Determining the extent of the cultural influence of the Arab ethnic residential style on that of their Javanese neighbors constitutes the starting-point of this research study. By analyzing this impact, important issues dealing with the resilience of coastal Javanese ethnic architecture to the architectural influence of the Arab ethnic style can thus be revealed.[7]

This research study aims to shed light on the entire potential of the influence mentioned between the architecture of Javanese ethnic houses and their Arab counterparts. Both physical and non-physical aspects will be taken into account in great detail in the ensuing discussion about their impact on the actual realization of residential architecture of the Javanese and Arab ethnic dwellings. Through this analysis, the important issue of

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how the resilience of Javanese ethnic architecture to the impact of Arab ethnic architecture can be explored in depth and the particular aspects that deserve our attention may be investigated.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case studies

This research study forms one of a series of research projects conducted along the Northern coastal region of East Java. The historical record shows that a group of ethnic Arabs set foot in this part of Java and the place where they dropped their anchors and settled can be identified as the Gapuro Sukolilo kampong in Gresik.[8] Keeping in mind that the artifacts of Arab ethnic architecture in this area has been preserved relatively intact, the choice for the case study of Arab ethnic architecture fell on this specific location.

As regards the Javanese kampong, the case study selected was conducted in the kampong that emerged by itself, situated in the peripheral area around the Arab quarter, namely the Javanese kampong named Telogobendung, situated approximately 500m from the Arab ethnic dwellings. The oldest residential area on the periphery of this Arab ethnic area first sprouted up and grew in the framework of accommodating the workers and traders in that part of town. Based on observations made at a glance, several points of resemblance can be detected in the architectural elements found in the houses selected for the two case studies mentioned above. However, the differences that stand out can be discerned in the size of the parcel of land (*kavling*) and the actual residential space. In fact, both the parcels of land and residential dwellings in the Arab quarter happen to be considerably larger than those situated in the Javanese kampong.

Various Research Steps

In keeping with the research aim sketched above, recordings were made in two houses situated in the Arab quarter and the Javanese kampong. The two houses that had been determined on purpose may represent the types of houses under scrutiny in the two case studies. The recording of physical features was made based on the philosophy about the relationship between buildings and land (soil), with the sky and the interrelatedness of these two. Subsequently, the result of the recording was redrawn and analyzed based on the following elements: the scope (both structural ones and so-called fillers/fill-in patterns), the space as well as the ornaments found. [9] The result of this analysis was then subjected to a thorough investigation followed by an exploration of the way the architectural elements had been used. The latter was carried out by keeping a record of the daily activities of the occupants as well as conducting interviews with them.

The reference used to arrange the questions for the interviews consisted of a study of the various concepts that played a dominant role in making an impact on the creation of this typical architecture from the existing background literature. These concepts ranged from their attitude toward God, Nature, the society of the local community as well as their view of themselves as individuals and the influence of all these factors on the ultimate realization of their architecture. [10][11]

The following steps comprised presenting the building elements arranged according to the various concepts that take the upper hand in affecting their daily activities, especially those concepts related to the use of space. The steps mentioned above reveal the relationship between each architectural element and the particular concept behind them. This concept may well be based on the Javanese cultural tradition or its Arab counterpart. In this manner, the level of architectural acculturation that has taken place can be determined. This level may assume the shape of adoption, adaptation, marginalization or a kind of synergy between architectural concepts and elements. The steps described above basically consist of an exploration of the relationship created between the functional aspect and architectural form, as well as the way these are interpreted. [12] Thus, this research study tends to be more qualitative in nature by making a scientific interpretation of the empirical data available, in addition to that of the outcome of the interviews held with the actual users of the buildings in question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Function – Form – Meaning in the two Case Studies

Based on the result of the analysis, the movement of activities in the Javanese ethnic houses and the Arab ones are completely different, as a matter of principle. In the latter, the activities of females are strictly separated from those of the males, starting from making one's entrance to the house, moving around inside as well as the service facilities (bathrooms), so everything is separated, whereas in the Javanese ethnic houses there is no such strict separation at all. Nevertheless, the entrance in these houses is made to be separate, but this is merely used as a service entrance bearing no intricate relationship with the intention of separating activities of males from those of females. [13]

The program for spatial division in the two case studies can be said to be the same. This stands to reason because the basic needs of these two ethnic groups are similar, that is to say following the routine of large, growing families. A marked difference can be found in the zoning of space in the buildings. In the Arab ethnic

houses the expression of being closed off from the general public is very prominent. The main entrance to the parcel of land for male guests and occupants can be made through a massive door in the fence of the front gate. Apart from this entrance, a special one has been provided for female guests and occupants, situated next to the front gate, covered by a bamboo screen or partition. [14]

On the other hand, the boundary between the public road and the parcel of land belonging to the Javanese ethnic houses hardly exists, that is relatively transparent. The entrance door to the house can be discerned from the public road, which is always placed in front of the space taken up by a small terrace or porch. Another side entrance is provided that is generally used as an entrance way for those occupants who happen to carry shopping goods.

Aspects of Form

To give a broad outline, the outward shapes of Arab ethnic houses to be found in Indonesia happen to be very different from the ones to be encountered in their country of origin, namely the Arabian peninsula. Unlike the ethnic group of the Chinese, that arrived bringing with them their typical architectural style, consistently used in their buildings on foreign soil in accordance with the original stylistic characteristics, the Arab community that arrived in the Indonesian archipelago (then known as *Nusantara*) did not do so. Based on the historical record of the builders involved in constructing the Arab ethnic homes in this Arab quarter, these workers were actually ethnic Chinese in origin, who had worked with Dutch designers. As a result, their architectural style points more toward a synthesis between regional forms and local icons and the technology derived from Holland. [15]

It can be seen from the result of the discussion dealing with the formal aspect that the Javanese ethnic residential architecture features an outward form (three-dimensional shape) that refers to the Arab style of residential architecture. Nevertheless, in the Arab ethnic houses the dimensions of site and building are much larger compared to the Javanese ones. As regards the element of roofs is concerned, the shape found in Arab and Javanese houses is practically the same, even though the dimensions, materials, and system of construction used for the roofs differ markedly. As far as the fill-in elements (walls) are concerned, the spatial partition appears to be different out of principle. In the Arab ethnic houses, there are more screens partitioning off spaces, while in the Javanese ones more space is left open.

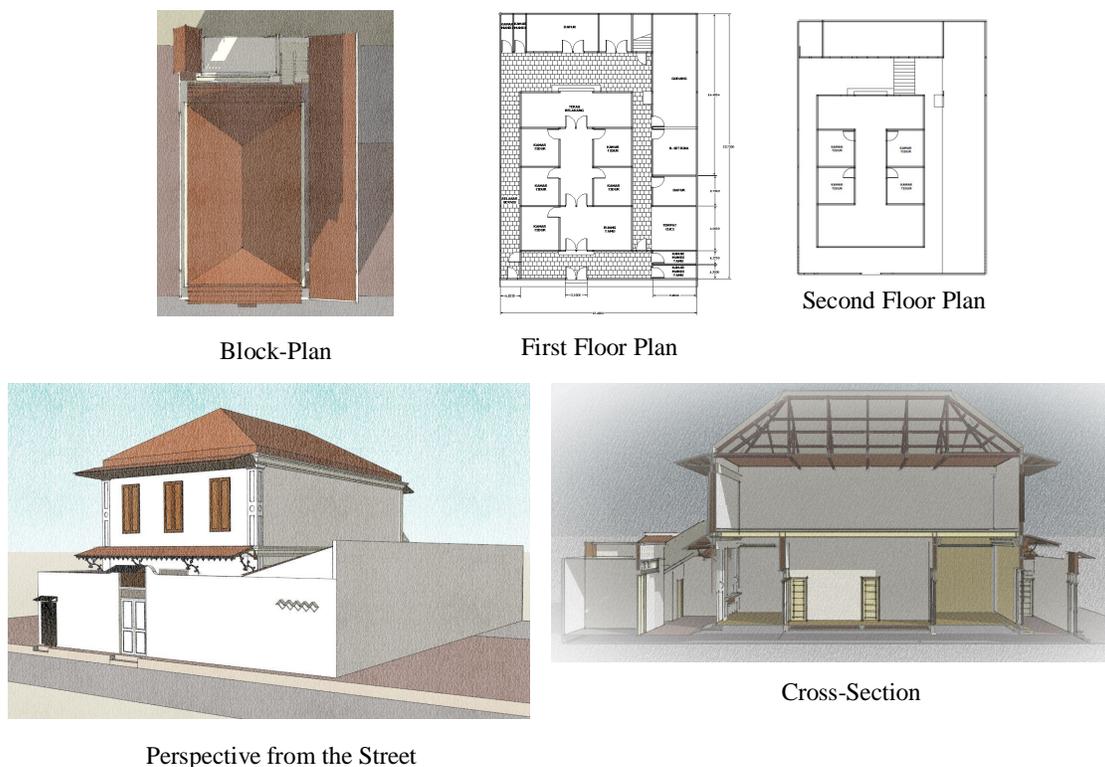


Figure 1: Drawings of Arab Ethnic House

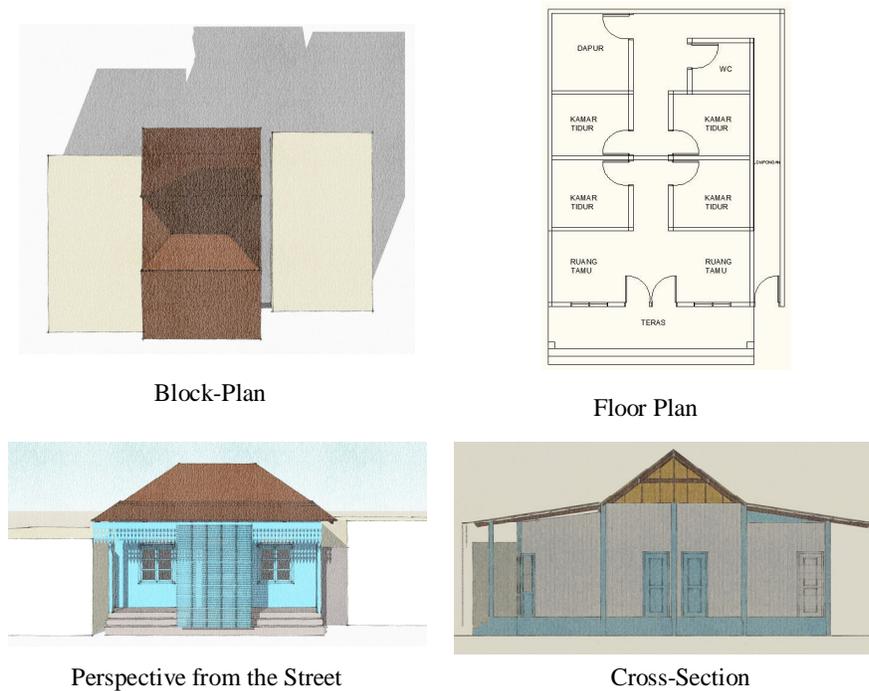


Figure 2: Drawings of Java Ethnic House

Aspects of Meaning

Although the outward shape of Javanese and Arab ethnic architecture can on the whole be said to share the same type, their interpretation is very different indeed. The Arab ethnic houses of the case study have a social inner structure that falls under Classification Two, which is remarkably strict (based on the difference between males and females) so that the arrangement or lay-out of the houses is bound to follow suit in terms of inner structure. Gaining entrance, movement of activities as well as spatial division show this classification, whereas in the building shape, the elements of wall and roof and ornament do not refer to Classification Two mentioned above. In the case studies, these elements are realized pragmatically, in accordance with the craftsmanship of the available skilled laborers as well as the technological expertise of the era. Houses are interpreted as places of shelter that are very private in nature, so that the relationship between houses within their community sphere hardly exists at all. [16]

The ethnic Javanese observed in the case study still hold on firmly to the basic social structure that refers to Classification Five called “mancapat”. This significant influence of Classification Five finds its expression in the basic shape of the houses that tend to divide their space starting from the middle section (under the *soko-guru* pillars) to develop its four sides. As a consequence, the structural type of roof support (rafters) has never been subject to change, like the Javanese architecture of the hinterland. The difference to be found between the latter and the types observed in the case study (hinterland versus coastal style) consists of the two separate entrances in the front area forming a boundary with the public road.

The Relationship between Architectural Influence Observed in the Two Case Studies

Based on the discussion, the arrangement of spatial placement (lay-out) in the Javanese ethnic houses of the case study can be said to be relatively consistent in referring to the concept of arranging Javanese houses in the hinterland, whereas the shapes of roofs and their ornaments can be said to refer to Arab ethnic architecture. The same applies to the addition of side entrances in the area forming a boundary with the public roads; while the system of building construction in Javanese ethnic houses has not undergone any change whatsoever.

Thus, when referring to the kind of acculturation or mixture of styles that exist, the architecture of Javanese ethnic houses enjoys a strong position in the lay-out or spatial arrangement due to the significant role that its tradition plays. The same goes for the construction system as well as the materials that can be said to cling to the Javanese tradition of construction and the significance of its tradition, although their shape refers to the architectural style of Arab ethnic houses. Thus it can be stated that the relationship of the existing influence between Javanese ethnic houses and Javanese ones falls under the classification of adaptation. The phenomenon of Javanese ethnic houses in the case studies consistently refers to the various changes in outward form of its architecture as well as the addition of side entrance paths.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted yields the following conclusions: First of all, the Javanese community observed in the case studies still holds on firmly to the concept of tradition (social inner structure) in giving shape to its houses (see lay-out or spatial arrangement). Nevertheless, not all of those concepts based on tradition are steadfastly adhered to and interpreted as they once were in the past. Observe for example the addition of side entrances in the front area of their houses, especially used for the circulation of service-related activities; Secondly, the Javanese community observed in the case studies has sufficiently adapted itself to the impact of the architecture of Arab ethnic houses. They have tried to apply elements considered to enrich the residential architecture of their houses, albeit given a different meaning attached to these elements; Thirdly, architectural change or adaptation only occurs in various architectural elements and does not affect their ultimate meaning. Thus it is safe to say that the Javanese ethnic residential architecture has still held on to its specific character that has show resilience to the impact of the architecture of the newcomers to their region.

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