

Chapter 2.

Housing Scenario in Malaysia

Currently, most of the housing accommodations in Malaysia are in the form of houses. In the 1991 housing census, 90 per cent of the housing stock in the country was in this category, while flats or apartments accounted for only 7 per cent, and shop-houses accounted for 3 per cent.

The largest single sub-category of housing units was the detached houses, which accounted for 49 per cent of the total housing stock in the country in 1991 housing census. It should be noted that in government statistical definition, a detached house can range from an isolated timber and attap house in Kuala Kangsar to a concrete and marble mansion in Damansara Heights in Kuala Lumpur.

The next most popular type of housing in Malaysia was the terrace or link houses, which accounted for about 27 per cent of the housing stock in 1991. Unlike the detached houses, which are found both in rural and urban areas, terrace houses are mainly located in urban areas, especially the suburbs. They became popular in the 1960s and 1970s when housing developers first emerged on the housing scene. Terrace houses have become the backbone of the housing industry in Malaysia and are favoured by the growing middle-income groups who find them affordable. Normally, these are housing units with a built-up area of about 1,200 square feet with a small piece of land area in front which also serves as parking space for one or two cars. The finishing is comfortable but not overly luxurious. The houses normally have three to four bedrooms with two to three bathrooms.

Flats and apartments, which are currently emerging in major urban areas, accounted for only 7 per cent in the 1991 housing census. They are noticeable

largely because of their clusters and their height, which makes them visible even from far. The types of flats and apartments range from luxurious condominiums of between 3,000 to 6,000 square feet each to walk-up flats of 500 square feet each. The living conditions of each sub-category of apartments can differ greatly. Again, for the purpose of generalization, it is possible to sub-classify the apartments into three categories: condominiums, medium-cost apartments and flats.

Condominiums typically refer to apartments of more than 1,000 square feet each (usually more than 1,500 square feet each) with luxurious finishing. They usually come with facilities such as a swimming pool, sauna, tennis and squash courts, gymnasium, landscaped garden, and one or more covered parking bay for each unit. Medium-cost apartments are usually apartments of between 700 to 1,000 square feet each with semi-luxurious finishing, such as tiled flooring. Facilities normally include a small swimming pool and the provision of open-air unreserved parking bays. Flats generally refer to apartments of between 500 to 700 square feet each with two to three bedrooms. Recently, the government has approved the requirement of three bedrooms for low-cost apartments. These have bare finishing and no facilities except parking bays, the number of which may not be as many as the number of flats in any particular scheme. Unless the flats are above five stories, they are generally not equipped with lifts. (Goh, 1997).

There have been significant changes in the types of housing units in Malaysia. The number of terrace houses increased from about 456,700 units in 1980 to 1,074,000 units in 1991. Their contribution to the housing stock increased from 18 per cent to 27 per cent over the same period. As mentioned earlier, they are the backbone of the housing industry in Malaysia. In terms of percentage, the increase in the apartments was even more spectacular, from about four per cent or about 88,700 units in 1980 to about 283,700 units in 1991. Table 1 shows comparison of types and number of housing units, 1980 and 1991.

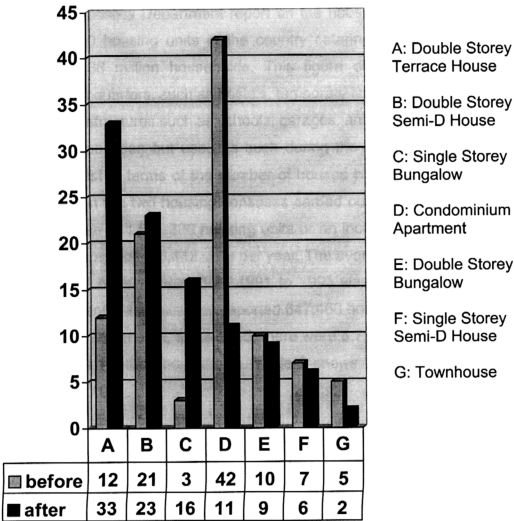
Table 1: Comparison of types and number of housing units, 1980 and 1991.

Type	No. of units in 1991 (thousands)	% of total unit in 1991	No. of units in 1980 (thousands)	% of total units in 1980	Average annual increase
Detached house	1,998.8	49	1,570.2	61	2.5
Semi-detached house	424.3	10	287.2	11	4.3
Terrace house	1,074.0	27	456.7	18	12.3
Long house	76.0	2	59.2	2	2.6
Apartment	283.7	7	88.7	4	20.0
Shop-houses	135.1	3	57.8	2	12.2
Others	68.9	3	39.8	2	6.6
Total	4,060.9	100	2559.6	100	5.3

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 1995. p. 12.

In major urban areas, for example the Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), the trend is toward high-rise as land becomes diminishing and scarce resources. But there is a shift in preference before and after the current economy downturn. Chart 1 shows the type of preferred residence before and after the 1991 crisis (Lim, 2000).

Chart 1: Type of Preferred Residence Before and After 1997 Crisis



Source: Research Inc. Asia, 2000.