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Research paper

The Morphology of Early Towns in Malay Peninsula

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Abstract

Malay Peninsula has a very compelling socio geographical, cultural history and town setting comprises historical sites, fortress and early towns that has formed an evolution of the urban sprawl. The history of the early towns on the Malay Peninsula goes as far back as the beginning of the ancient Malay kingdom of Lembah Bujang and Langkasuka; and maybe far before that period. Early Malay towns in Malay Peninsula (currently known as Peninsular Malaysia) have unique characteristics in terms of architecture urban form and history. The morphology study of towns in Malay Peninsula have found characteristics of urban form and setting dating from 5000 BC maybe earlier to 19th century may be classified into four phases of pre-modern settlements cycles. This research employs qualitative approach that encompasses of literature review of scholarly articles and reports, in-depth interview and structured observation. Based on the historical and physical evidences that are still exist, thirteen (13) early town will be selected as a study area. This paper present the finding of urban morphology and characteristic in a chronicle of urban form and setting in the Malay Peninsula dating from 5000 BC up to the 19th century.

Keywords*: Early town, morphology, physical characteristics*

1. Introduction

The attestation of town setting and planning evoked in Kedah around 1st or before the earlier century. Early research on Lembah Bujang, Kedah has been made extensively by [19, 15, 21, 6] that had define Kedah as an early entrepot with the name 'the seats of all facilities'. Amid at this century, Kedah was a prosperous port of international exchange. During those days, early settlements commenced from the foot of Gunung Jerai, reverie and towards to coastal routes. Having a wide frontage of the Straits of Melaka, Kedah was well-known as a coastal city. After the downfall of the kingdom of Langkasuka and Kedah Tua, Melaka emerged as the thriving port of international exchange in the early 15th century and developed its own town planning systems. For instance, township like Melaka, Kuala Terengganu, Kota Bahru and Pekan had been early founded by the Malay Sultane and demonstrate a similar morphology whereby a palace, related government workplaces and other facilities, mosque, the honorability, private quarters, business complex and the bazaars are inside closeness. In the 18th century, more systematic town planning was introduced by the British colonialists. Major towns and state capitals in the Malay States were implemented with the physical planning concepts with regards in the context of colonial urban organization from Britain. They adopted the ideas of physical planning concept fresh from Britain to the Malay Peninsula specifically on the Straits Settlements states. Georgetown was the earliest town that adopted the colonial town planning base on the historical records. During the British colonisation, they have categorised Malay Peninsula to three (3) groups and by implication turned into an additional factor towards the urban settings and structures of early towns during this period.

2. Methodology

Early town in Malay Peninsula such as Kota Seputih, Kota Langkasuka, Kota Sungai Mas, Melaka town, Georgetown and others eight (8) early towns was chosen as the contextual analysis zone since it has the qualities of both recorded and social essentialness that may help in recognizing from others early towns in Malay Peninsula. The selection is very much related to their significant qualities mainly due to the fact that they have acted as the former administrative center of the early towns in Malay Peninsula [11]. Historical map overlay, non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews were employed in data accumulation to identify the history and characteristics of early towns in Malay Peninsula. The urban form and setting of the early towns were studied based on the physical and social attributes comprising the origin of the town, geographical landscape, architectural and historical significances. The pattern and form of the development of the townscape were also derived from the accumulation of structures from various periods, from the underlying improvement of the town until the present time [16]. All the accumulated data using the above methods were then screened, transcribed, examined and analysed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the findings of this research.

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3. Ancient Malay Settlements

In a descriptive review of several theories and researches on state in early maritime Southeast Asia was produced by [5], attempts were made to come to grip with the issues of how and when the ancient Malay settlements or kingdom of Southeast Asia first developed. Base on the evidence and review on the origin of Malay in the continent of Sunda (also known as Southeast Asia) or Sundaland, the term early Malay settlements or kingdom is the same term used as early maritime Southeast Asia. Christie has confined and proposed five phase pre-modern settlements cycles of historical evolution in the Malay Peninsula. After done a review of several theories and researches that had done on early settlements in maritime Southeast Asia, only four phases pre-modern settlements cycles had been identify compare to five phases pre-modern settlements that had proposed [5]. The strong border period of the ancient Malay settlements was around 14000-6000 years ago because the date was the beginning separation of the sundaland into a group of Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Java and Sumatra and spreading the Malay ethnic group to Philippines, Champa, Mon Phy Burma, Siamese, Pacific Island and Madagascar. They set up colonies and their respective settlements, outlining the settlement boundaries on the ground explored but still tying the ties of the nation through the language, cultures, trade networks and affiliation of the tribes showed them a cohesion [18].

4. Ancient Malay Port Cities

The existence of an ancient Malay port cities based on the history studied since 200 BC. They have a trade relations that carried out between the population of the lowlands with the highlands and coastal populations with the inland community [7]. This settlements is then developed into a trading center or entrepot when the community's communication and social systems are progressing. Four ancient Malay kingdom empires which have the largest and major port city in the earliest Malay world are the Malay empire of Funan with Oc-Eo Pre-Angkor port cities, Malay empire of Champa, Malay empire of Srivijaya and the empire of Langkasuka and Kedah Tua. A Greece resource that more than 2000 years mentioned that at the beginning of the century, when he at the port of India there was the presence of ships from the Malay Archipelago carrying many cargoes to trade.

At that period was clearly identify of Malay kingdom based on the maritime economy that had been developed and organized political and socio-cultural systems with the international trade networks. The early ancient Malay port cities that existed in Malay Peninsular were like Chih-tu (Kelantan), Kedah, Fo-lo-an (Pahang) and Fo-shin-pu (Terengganu). Malay trading ports started with the arrivals of traders from Persia, Arabian Peninsula, Europe, India, Siam and China to trade in the region about 2000 to 4000 years ago [17]. The arrivals of these foreign traders helped to develop these early traditional Malay settlement into port cities and centers of exchange [17]. At the beginning time, the palace complex was just an agglomeration neighborhood of honorable blends and encompassed by subordinate houses. The city strongholds worked to secure the royal complex by leaving other settlers outside of the walls. After a certain period the location of native settlements also had been protect by coastal fortress. That means at this period, the ancient Malay port cities had start construct and used the concept of town planning.

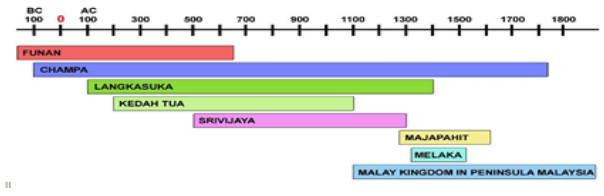


Fig. 1: Ancient Malay kingdom Empires timeline

Figure 2 illustrate a model of typical ancient Malay port cities that is dominated by a large palace complex, which is separated from the traders segment and the warehouse by the harbour market. The settlements outside the stronghold formed close to the waterway and the market were mostly meant for with the non-natives [20] meanwhile the dweller live in the city or fort and do not slaughter the animals that they eaten [19]. Town planning systems during the ancient Malay port cities time resembled on the concept of Mandala which uses a hierarchical layer system. Planning must start from where the king lives, the king palace to the 'Balairung Seri', the whole complex of palace 'Kota Raja', the surrounding walls and other military walls to ensure nothing can be penetrated from outside attack. At this period Kings was known as the center of nature and universe.

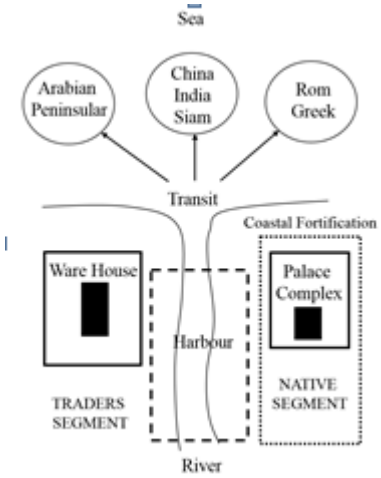


Fig. 2: Model of Ancient Malay Port Cities

5. Early Malay Town

In the states of Malay Peninsula, there were a few urban focuses and towns with a high convergence of Malays settlements [3]. Most of the early Malay towns were built by the Sultans or Malay Kings [3] since the era of the Malay Sultanate. The first Malay town had been recorded at Bukit Meriam Kedah in 12th AD can be described as a center of administration consisted culture centers and trading hubs along the river and sea. The development of these towns was dictated by their area at the estuaries of waterways and the town shape extended from the town center which was normally in view of three fundamental components; the royal complex, religious building and open space 'padang' [3]. Figure 3 below shows the model of an early Malay town and the plan of Seputeh town which had become the one of the basic features of early Malay town.

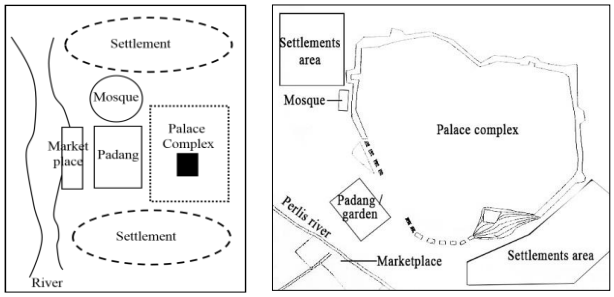


Fig. 3: Model of early Malay town (left) and plan of Seputeh town (right).

Early Malay towns were established in the middle of 12th century namely Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu, Pekan, Johor Lama, Klang and Kota Setar [14]. These towns were known as an estuary towns and were located at the estuaries of rivers [2]. The dominant physical characteristics of these towns that have been observed and study is mostly having a village appearance (settlements). The urbanization then slowly took place making the place into a core

trading activities under the political power vested with the Sultan [3]. As compared to ancient Malay port cities whereby their urban structures and forms were more enclose with stronghold attributes and estuary towns resembled a good arrangement qualities in the urban structures and morphology. The urban growth of early Malay towns started to spread out to the inland and create a new settlement 'kampung' along the river and land roads. The Malay Sultanate might be viewed as a pioneer of developed urban setting and this was demonstrated with the new structures and settlements around the palace complex as the government center, which was built overlooking wide open spaces 'padang' with close proximity with mosque and other administrative buildings like courthouses, district offices, marketplace and public dwellings. During the colonization period, early Malay towns went through major transformation into two categories which can be identified as the Malay royal town for the Unfederated Malay States and Colonial town for Federated Malay States.

6. Malay Royal Town

Malay royal town can be described as a town where the old palaces and the royal administrative district are located [9], which may also be referred to towns or cities that were founded by the Malay rulers [8]. Malay royal town can be define as a town that has a strong relationship between the community, defense fortress and the king fort 'istana berkota' where by the royal administrative district are located. As compared to early Malay town whereby their urban structures and forms were almost the same but has a different which is it contained a settlements between defense fortress and the king fort. The defense fortress is a military stronghold, especially a strongly fortified town. Therefore, these fortifications are usually made of soil, wood or bamboo. The 'fort' term was more similar with 'kota' in Malay words that had been utilized by numerous Malay researcher. Base from old Malay historiographic texts of the king fort will be attributed to or intended with the royal administrative or the royal palace. As a king fort, it will be completed with strong defense systems such as control towers 'sentung' and kota duduk', 'katelum', watery or mined trenches, guards and also cannons and Lela to defend it against enemy attacks. All this is for the purpose of defense when dealing with attacks or warfare. Figure 4 below shows the model of a Malay royal town that based on the historical map overlay that had been conducted.

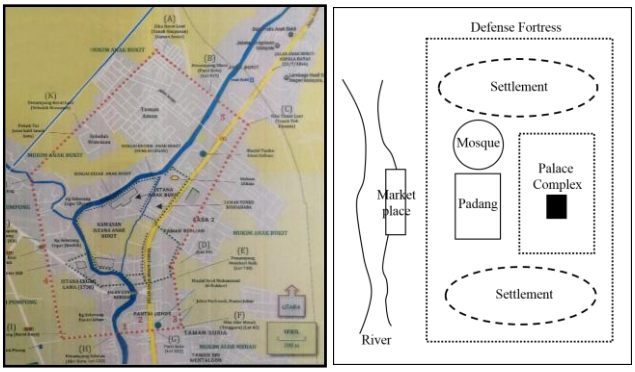


Fig. 4: Location of defense fortress (kota tanah) of Anak Bukit Palace, Kedah (left) and model of Malay Royal town (right).

A king fort complete with 'Balai Penghadapan', 'Balai Besar', 'Balairung Seri' and other buildings belonging to the Sultanate and must be located within a fenced area. As a center of government, inside the castle is equipped with buildings used as a gathering place for the dweller, trial, warehouse of weapons and food [13].

7. Colonial Town

The colonial town in the Malay Peninsula started with the fall of the Malay fort of Melaka which was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511. The invasion was for purpose of taking control on the spice trade in the region of which Melaka town was their most important commercial entrepot in South-East Asia [10]. During Portuguese times, the space inside the original Melaka fort was entirely taken up by buildings in which the administration of the city, housed, churches, convents, hospitals and government buildings. Among buildings that was erected include the Castle, the Governor's Palace, the Bishop's Palace, the Hall of the Brotherhood of Mercy, the Church of our Lady of Assumption, the Cathedral, the Church of our Lady of Visitation and Mercy, the Church of our Lady of Assumption, the Church of St. Dominic [12]. When the Dutch took over Melaka in 1641 from the Portuguese they reconstructed the fort and town to their own requirements. The fort was used for government purposes, slave quarters, prison, storage and guard house [4]. Eventually, the Dutch introduced a systematic urban structure plan for the city of Melaka, which included building settings, roads and access to public areas. By 1824, British and Dutch accorded the Anglo Dutch Treaty. By doing so, "they irrevocably divided the Riau-Johor kingdom and arbitrarily severed the cultural unity of east coast Sumatra and the peninsula. The Treaty of 1824 provided the rationale for the later colonial division down the Melaka Straits and is thus the basis for the contemporary boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia" [1]. During the British period, physical town settings and urban forms expend specifically in the Penang states which were then known as the Straits Settlement. They instilled more systematic urban planning on towns to engage with the locals and the colonist's needs. Early physical urban planning have commenced since 1801 with the setting up of a Committee of Assessors in Penang and George Town which was the first city to have proper planning including the construction of roads and drains throughout the city; and having well planned administrative institutional buildings [8]. The British had also divided the Malay Peninsula into three administrative divisions: as known as the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Unfederated Malay States. The urban setting and form for all this three administrative divisions possess a lot of similarities despite being located at different locations. There were three main zones in the city area namely the administrative area, the public open space (padang) and the commercial area. The road systems and urban patterns were in grid iron forms with the shophouses located at the roads lining. Towns and cities during the British period were planned with beautiful buildings such as administrative offices, courthouses, mosques, schools, railway stations, police stations and commercial stores.

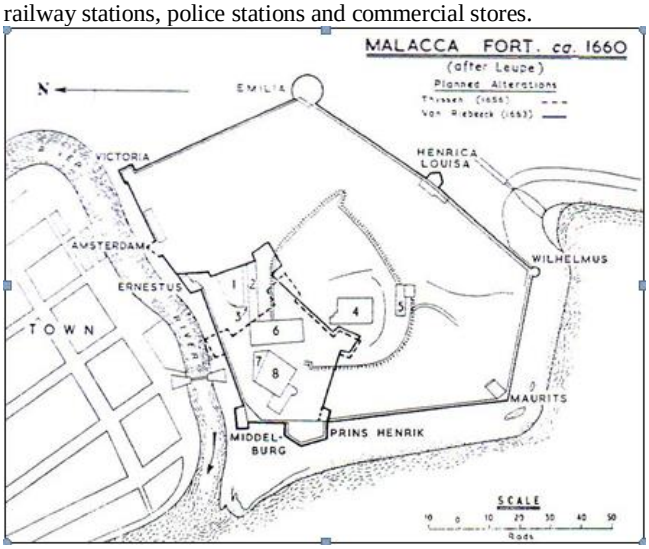


Fig. 5: Plan of the Fort of Melaka ca. 1660
Source: Weebers & Ahmad, 2009.

8. Conclusion

The morphological study of towns in Malay Peninsula have found that urban form characteristics dating from 5000 BC maybe earlier to 19th century may be classified into four phases of timeline namely the ancient Malay Settlements, ancient Malay port cities, early Malay towns and the final phases can be divided by 2 group which is Malay Royal Town and Colonial Towns. The ancient Malay port cities were dominated with a large palace complex with proper town planning that use harbour market to separate traders segment and native segment. The Mandala concept was implemented to create a hierarchical system whereby the whole complex of palace known as 'Kota Raja' was surrounded by walls to protect the king's palace. The early Malay town sprawled away from the palace complex in the forms of mosque, open space and marketplace which are surrounded by the settlement of the natives. Such arrangement has created the palace remained as the main focal point in the urban setting. The Colonial towns which was introduced in the 16th century by the Portuguese, which later followed by the Dutch and British have a major significant impacts in the urban planning. The structures of the early Malay towns have been broken into pieces of native settlements controlled by the colonial masters. The only thriving remnants of the early Malay town that still exist today are known as the Malay Royal towns. This research has concluded that each classification of urban forms throughout the centuries have significant connection and relationship between physical, social and economic characteristics, and the most outstanding discoveries is the differences of setting of each town in the Malay Peninsula.

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