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Research paper

Definition and Physical Attributes that Characterise Settings of Malay Royal Towns in Malaysia

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Abstract

Malay Royal towns in Malaysia are the finest examples evolution of early Malay towns dating from the 16th century. However the identity and characteristic of Malay Royal towns is still unclear and continuously been threatened from tremendous changes due to rapid industrialisation, economic development and urbanisation. The extensive urbanisation and rapid development occurring in most of historical towns have significantly eroded the identity, sense of place and physical attributes of the Malay Royal Town. Besides monuments and sites, the scope of this research also covers all properties which are of historic and cultural significance. 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, 9 historical town that gazated as Malay Royal town will be selected as a preliminary study and 5 historical towns will be selected as study area namely; Anak Bukit, Kota Bharu, Seri Menanti, Klang and Kuala Terengganu. The findings gathered from this research too is deemed a comprehensive understanding of attributes of the royal Malay town and further may help in strengthening the Malaysia history.

Keywords*: Definition, physical attributes, malay royal town*

1. Introduction

Malay Royal towns in Malaysia have a great influence from the early Malay towns and the Malay Sultanate sets the early establishment for the urban setting that shapes the historic Malay Royal town in Malaysia. This is clear in the morphology where a royal palace complex, government buildings, public building, religions building, settlement areas, marketplace and the river as a transportation route are within close adjacency. The primary aim of this paper to identified and defined the definition and significant attributes that can be inferred as the identity of the Royal towns in Malaysia. Therefore, in this study, elements of the physical attributes that structure the image and identity of the Malay Royal towns has been conduct using observation, mapping and semi-structured interviews method. From this study, eight (8) prominent physical attributes had been identify that shaped the image and identity of Malay Royal towns. These attributes are known as the Royal palace complex, fortress, gateway, mosque, public open space known as padang, marketplace, river and lastly the settlements that known as kampung. The definition to identify Malay Royal towns additionally has a sameness with the term that be used for the early Malay town and it unclear to legitimize the meaning of Malay Royal towns. As the research focuses on a few Malay royal town that still stand until today, an overall image of the Malay Royal town physical attributes can be establish.

2. Methodology

In order to identify the physical characteristics of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, observation, mapping and semi-structured interviews were employed in data collection. The data were then analysed to decide outcomes from all source of data collection and in order to accomplish a thorough comprehension understanding of the findings. Field visits were conducted at Anak Bukit (Alor Setar), Kuala Terengganu, Seri Menanti, Klang and Kota Bahru because it was the gazetted as a Malay Royal town and has a clear Royal town attributes that might help in differentiating from others early Malay towns in Malaysia. Base on the fieldwork, the researchers mapped the existing attributes which include the physical layout, adjacent contexts and urban setting in order to develop a deep understanding and relationship of existing physical attributes between the Malay Royal towns that had been choose. Semi-structured interview method was also used for data collection in order to develop a deep understanding between physical and social attributes. Respondents were Malaysia Historian and also the Chairman of Malaysian Historical Society, Officer at National Museum, Officer at Department of National Heritage and a few local people with has a knowledge on the history of the particular study area. Then the information that has been gathered from the interviews were later screened, transcribed and analysed.

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3. Definition of Malay Royal Town

Royal town has been describe as a historic town that has a good quality of cultural, historical significance and have a good relation between the community and the development of the urban setting [14]. Malay royal town also been describe as a Malay historic town where the royal complex and the administrative building are located [7]. Malay royal town also been refer to towns that were founded by the Sultan and was located at the estuaries of river [6]. The definition that be used to identify Malay royal town has a similarity with the definition of an early Malay town and unclear to justify the definition of Malay royal town itself. Therefore after doing a review on old manuscript, document and conducting a study on historical early Malay royal town, 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.

Malay Royal town 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 defence fortress and the king fort. Base on the evident of written materials and historical records, very little can be gathered about the early Malay Royal town physical attributes and the king fort. The term 'fort' was more synonymous with 'kota' in Malay words that had been utilized by numerous Malay researcher. However the definition of fort has different meanings depending on the context of usage [13]. Base on Oxford English dictionary, meaning of defence fortress is a military stronghold, especially a strongly fortified town. Since the beginning of the Malay civilization in Southeast Asia, early Malay kingdom has proficiently used fortifications as their defense systems. The construction of the fortress, stronghold and trenches are also included in the form of defensive and not as assault. Figure 1 shows the model of a Malay royal town that base on the historical map overlay that had been conducted

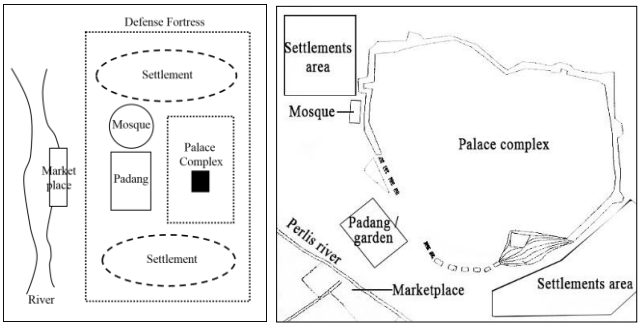

Fig. 1: Model of Malay royal town (left) and model of Siputeh royal town (right).

4. Physical Attributes of Malay Royal Town

Malay royal towns has its own historical in term of physical and social attributes, and that help to characterize these towns into a historic masterpiece through the setting of urban form and pattern [15]. It is critical to identified and protect these Malay royal towns, as they are proof to the strength and greatness of the Royal Institution systems in Malaysia [13]. However, in order to protect a Malay Royal town identity, it is important to identify the physical attributes of Malay Royal town through the comparative studies of existing Malay Royal towns in Malaysia.

There are several physical attributes influencing the Malay Royal town settings. These element were investigated and analyzed to understand their link and contribution to create Malay Royal town character and identity. Table 1 summarizes the physical attributes of the selected Malay royal town that still exist in Malaysia.

Table 1: Comparison of physical attributes between Kota Setar, Klang, Seri Menanti, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu.

Physical Attributes	Alor Setar	Klang	Seri Menanti	Kuala Tereng-ganu	Kota Bahru
Royal Palace Complex	Istana Pelamin	Istana Alam Shah	Seri Menanti Complex	Istana Maziah	Istana Balai Besar
Fortress	Kuala Bahang Fortress	Raja Mahdi Fortress	Natural Hill and Palace Fortress	Bukit Puteri Fortress	Along Kelan-tan River
Mosque	Zahir Mosque	Sultan Sulaim-an Mosque	Tanjung Sembel-ing Mosque	Zainal Abidin Mosque	Muham madia Mosque
Public Open Space	Medan Bandar	Padang Sultan Sulaim-an	Padang Diraja Seri Menanti	Padang Maziah	Padang Merdek a
Market-place	Pekan Rabu	Pasar Besar	Pasar Seri Menanti	Pasar Payang	Pasar Siti Khadi-jah
River & jetty	Raja River	Klang River	Sri Me-nanti River	Terengga-nu River	Kelan-tan River
Settlement	Kam-pung Melayu & Cina	Kam-pung Sungai Udang	Kam-pung Buyau	Kampung Keling	Buluh Kubu
Gateway	Istana Kota Tengah Gate-way	Raja Mahdi Gate-way	Seri Menanti Gateway	Istana Maziah Gateway	Istana Balai Inner Gate-way
All components are within walking distance					

4.1. Royal Palace Complex: Administrative District

The Royal palace complex were the centers of sovereign power and administrative of Malay Royal town. Dating from 16th century, the Malay administrative center was always related to the Grand Palace, where the Sultan had full power over the administration and development of the town. Palace complex present an identities of the local royal families, architecture symbols and the local culture of that area [6]. Considering to the characters of the Malay culture as a very nature related communities, the identity and attributes of the Royals was also a reflection of the philosophy and beliefs of the traditional Malays [12]. The gender segregations of the families members also one of the main factor that been taken into serious consideration of the palace design [13]. Palace complex in the Malay Royal towns normally were surrounded by villages and located at the centered of the activities areas [5]. There are also have a palace complex were located on top of hills and where surrounded by village settlements at the lower hills. This palace setting is for the advantage of the view and defensive factors [5]. The Malay royal towns attributes must include a palace complex for the royal residents and administration center [1, 9].



Fig. 2: The Old Palace of Sri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan (left) and Pelamin Complex in Kedah (right).

4.2. Fortress: Defensive Wall

The design of the fortress in the Malay Royal town usually has an open section that used as a defense system against enemy attacks. The open side of the fort is usually faced with parts of the forest, marshes or hills where it is difficult for the enemy to break through [15]. These fortifications are usually made of soil, wood or bamboo. It will be left unnecessary and a new fortress will be built in the other areas. Base from old Malay historiographic texts of the king fort will be attributed to or intended with the royal administrative or the royal palace. The forts were built to protect the royal complex only, leaving the rest of urban sprawl outside them [3]. The Malay Sultanate use the king fort as the center of defense, government, detention of people and their administration [15].

4.3. Mosque: Religious Center

The mosque is a symbol of greatness for the Malay Kingdom all over the Malay Peninsula. As Islam is the main religion dating from 16th century in Malay Peninsula, the role of the mosque is clear in influencing the social and intellectual developments of the Malay peoples. The role of Sultan as the head of the Islamic religion, therefore all the most in the Malay Royal towns is usually located closed to the palace complex and the villages. The important of mosque during those days is to educate and also as the center of Islamic educations. Architecture of the mosque mostly influence by the Islamic architecture that been brought by the traders from the Arab. Then the architecture of the mosque blend with the local culture and become their own identity that still exist until today such as the minaret and mosque dome.

4.4. Public Open Space: Padang

The typology of padang in Malay Royal towns normally will be surround by palace complex, mosque and settlements. The role of padang is the public place for sultan meets the peoples, for royal events, as public gathering space and extend into pavilions, marketplace and bazaars center around the river. Padang Maziah in Kuala Terengganu and Padang Merdeka in Kota Bharu were among the public spaces complied the Malay Royal town physical attributes.



Fig. 3: Padang Merdeka in Kota Bahru (left) and Medan Bandar in Alor Setar (right).

The function of these padang act as distributing node serving the movement of the people to the major buildings around the area and as a connection to the neighboring paths [11, 10]. Daily public activities including formal and in formal activities also took place around the padang. Formal activities such as sultan's coronation and birthday celebrations that were purposely organized for the public also been held over here [18, 2]. In such instances, the true civic and town center is the padang [11].

4.5. Marketplace: Commercial Centre

People used to trade and other commercial activities in the Malay Royal town at the marketplace and become an important space for people. This space also been used as a place to interact and most importantly build a close relationship with other. Malay settlers, who are synonymous with trade and commerce in the past, built their settlement closed to the marketplace and close to the river as their main transportation. Pasar Payang and Pekan Rabu were located nearby to the riverbank that makes the accessibility of the area possible and create the space at the riverbank as a public space for trading activities.

4.6. River and Jetty: Main Transportation

Rivers and sea were the main sources of economy and provide transportation for the local community in the 18th and 19th century. During that time Malay traditional town centers were well-known Malay trading ports [4]. The concentration of trading and economic activities near rivers and sea shores contributed to the local Malays' preponderance for living close to the coast, usually near the mouth of rivers. Apart from being used for trading, the River provided important transportation links to districts in the remote hinterland areas. In addition to give source of food and water supply, the river was also a main transportation route in the Malay traditional towns because the river was the fastest and easiest way of travel by using boat. It was also a place for trading goods which had been carried from ports or village to town. Usually 2 types of jetties were built; one was the royal jetty and the other for the public.

4.7. Settlement: Traditional Malay Villages

Traditional Malay village is the residential area of the local people that surrounding the palace complex and other public building in Malay Royal town. People were the symbol of power for the sultan at those times, is the people. Therefore, more prosperous and powerful sultan, more bigger the settlement that they have. These settlements are located close to the town center where the palace complex, mosque and padang were located [3]. The location of the settlements also can be found near the river in order to get easy access to the mode of transport. The lifestyle and architecture of traditional Malay community had not changed much. They still practicing the traditional Malay and Muslim lifestyle similar to the older days. Most of the houses were built in clusters, with each cluster belonging to members of one family.

4.8. Gateway: Symbol and Landmarks

Since the beginning of the Malay civilization in Southeast Asia, early Malay kingdom has proficiently used a gateway as their symbol and landmarks. The construction of the gateway, fortress, stronghold and trenches are also included in the form of defensive and not as assault. Base from old Malay historiographic texts of the king gateway will be a main entrance to the town and always will be guard and protect.

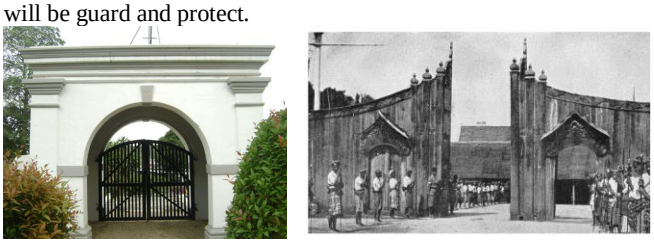

Fig. 4: Raja Mahdi Gateway in Klang (left) and The Old Balai Besar gateway in Kota Bahru (right). Source: Muzium Negara.

The gateway were built to create as a symbol and entrance for the villages and protect the royal complex while leaving the rest of urban sprawl outside them [3]. This gateway must be strong and is usually made of materials such as hardwood like cengal, meranti, teak and stones [15].

5. Conclusion

Malay Royal towns in Malaysia are the good examples evolution of early towns and have the strong physical attributes, identity and historic significance but it still unclear and continuously been

threatened from tremendous changes due to rapid industrialisation, economic development and urbanisation. The urban form and setting of these royal towns has played the important significant role in the history and morphology of royal towns in Malaysia. The new definition and term of Malay Royal town have been updated and hope will bring back the deep understanding of the existing Malay Royal towns in Malaysia. Therefore a new definition of 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. The site of the Malay Royal Town in Malaysia represents of the special physical attributes which are rich in cultural and historical significant as it has been introduced in the early of 16th century. The physicals attributes have been identified which are include the palace complex, fortress, mosque, public open space, marketplace, river and jetty, traditional settlements and gateway. The diversity in physical attributes of the royal town together with its urban form and setting variety make these town have their own unique identity and worthy of preservation. The research also concludes that the identifying the definition and physical attributes of Malay Royal towns will add the diversity to the urban identity while acting as the representation of the original identity of local culture in Malaysia.

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