

The Origin of Malay Royal Town Concept of Urban Form

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Abstract

Malay Royal towns is the most important town in the Malay sultanate administration systems for states ruled by the king or sultan and is also a historic town that reflects the role and importance of the Malay sultanate hierarchy that has been existence since the 16th century. This paper aims to identify the concept of Malay Royal town in Malaysia that formed the identity and image including the tangible and intangible elements to ensure its preservation due to the rapid urbanisation that is taking place in almost all Royal towns in Malaysia. A multiple case study was carried out in Malaysian Malay Royal town which is in Arau, Alor Setar, Kuala Kangsar, Klang, Seri Menanti, Muar, Pekan, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu. Site observation, historic map overlay and semi-structured interviews was used as a research method in order to identify and understand the concept and structure of Malay Royal town in Malaysia. The finding shown that the Malay Royal towns have played an important role in shaping the history and development of the towns as it is rich with the identity and cultural values. Therefore, the concept of Malay Royal towns should be studied and understood by the community so that all the unique elements and cultural that found within the Malay Royal towns can be conserved for the next generation's gaze.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The development of civilization of a Malay Royal town and inhabitants can be clearly seen from the physical form that still exists nowadays. The town is the ultimate destination and memory of the struggle and glory of human civilization (Heryanto, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, the Malay Royal town is an embodiment of culture, not only in the physical environment and morphological

form of tangibility, but also an interactive process between the inhabitants and the social values in fulfilling their needs. Further the development process of a Malay Royal towns from a variety of urban design theories within the local context of human civilization is moving toward to the complex issues. Understandings and studies on the formation concept of the traditional Malay towns, especially in the Malay Royal city,

are rarely accommodates the diversity of structures socio-cultural that have been formed in the area (N. Z. Harun, Fairuz, & Nordin, 2015). The physical environment and characteristics often used to justify the formation of Malay Royal towns rather than the human activities, meanings and cultural.

The primary aims of this paper is to identify the concept of Malay Royal town in Malaysia that formed the identity and image including the tangible and intangible elements. Hence, in this study, two (2) objectives have been set, which is the first (1) is to identify the elements that's formed the concept of the Malay Royal town. The second (2) objectives is to understand the role of the Malay Royal towns as a main nodes of administration and social activity among the local people. Site observation, semi-structured interview and historical map overlay are used as the research method in order to archive the main aims and objective. The findings on the concept of Malay Royal town are categorized accordingly to their physical, activities and cultural significance in the Malay royal town. As the research focuses on a multiple case study technique in Malay Royal town, an overall picture of the concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia can be generalized. Finally, it is anticipated that the findings from this research will prompt greater interest in the knowledge and understanding of the Malay Royal towns in Malaysia especially for the national heritage.

2 METHODOLOGY

In order to identify the concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, site observation, semi-structured interviews and historical map overlay were employed as a method of data collection. Nine (9) Malay Royal town which is Arau, AlorSetar, Kuala Kangsar, Klang, Seri Menanti, Muar, Pekan,

Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu have been selected as a preliminary case study and only four (4) Malay Royal towns have been identified to have similarities in term of physical characteristic of Royal towns with significant difference of royal genealogy in this country which is AlorSetar, Seri Menanti, Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu have been selected as a detail case study. All the existing tangible and intangible elements will be determine and mapped base on the site observation method. Meanwhile the historic tangible elements such as physical layout, urban contexts, forms and settings will be mapped in order to understand and supported the linked between the existing elements. Finally the semi structured interview method were employed to achieve the secondary data in order to support the findings in the research areas. Malaysian historian from the Malaysian historical society, historical researcher from multiple local university, Officer from state Museum, Officer at Department of National Heritage and a few local people with has a knowledge on the history of the particular study areas were chosen as a respondents. All the data were then qualitatively analysed to determine the results in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the findings. Finally the concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia can be identify and used for the future heritage study in Malaysia.

3 THE CONCEPT OF MALAY ROYAL TOWN

The Malay Royal town in Malaysia is an excellent example of the evolution of the early Malay towns dating back from the 16th century. The towns serves as a royal administrative centre as well as a centre for the expansion and spread of Islam for the states of the Malay Peninsula. All Malay

kingdoms at that time practiced Islam-based teachings, but Hindu-Buddha and animism influences were still influential especially in the cultural belief among the local people (Adeng, Kuswiah, Wiryono, & Erwantoro, 1998). Based on the understanding of Malay Royal town planning, Malay cosmology concepts are applied in urban structure, form and settings where three basic principles of humanity, guidance and place (nature) are applied. With the use of this concept in the planning of Malay Royal towns, it is believed that harmony and balance between man and the universe with the creator will be maintained. The Malay cosmology concept is one of the philosophical fields that study the origins, processes, and structures of the universe that influence the life of Malay society which play a role in shaping Malay civilization (Perret, 1999b). Malpas (2018) and Purwanto. (2005) argue that cosmology means order, balance and harmony as manifestations from the system of the universe. This concept is used in regulating human relationships with society, which is created in the form of rules and procedures, as well as with physical objects (buildings and environments in which they live).

In terms of Malay cosmology that influence from the Islam-based teachings, this definition of cosmology can be categorized into 3 basic components of which macrocosm is the universe, microcosm is human and metacosm is God or the Creator of macrocosm and microcosm (Hady, 2006). The Malay cosmology concept is based on the mandala cosmology concept in which spiritual symbols and rituals represent the universe in the connection of obedience to the king. Centralized government and the palace where the king resides located at the center

of this hierarchy concept. Whereas outer layer of this hierarchy, which is a relatively independent province under central government oversight. This cosmological concept of mandala also has to do with the teachings of Hindu cosmology, where Mount Meru, the sacred mountain of religion, is located in the middle and surrounded by the ocean (Tambiah, 1985; Wolters, 1999)

This concept was renewed when Islam became the official religion of every Malay sultanate at that time (Perret, 1999a). The influence of Hindu-Buddha suppressed the concept of the *dewaraja* in the royal institutions of the Malay world but the influence of Islam, which was said to have begun in the 7th century and later expanded on the 11th century (Fatimi, 1963, pp. 69-70) continued to elevate the sultan's dignity by giving recognition as the caliph of the god or the representative of the god in carrying out the government of the earth. However, the advent of Islam as a new religion in place of the Hindu-Buddha religion in the Malay world could not completely eradicate the influence of Hindu-Buddha in monetary institutions and any aspect that was compatible with the local community's culture was compromised by existing traditional values (Fatimi, 1963). Figure 1 explain the Malay cosmological concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia.

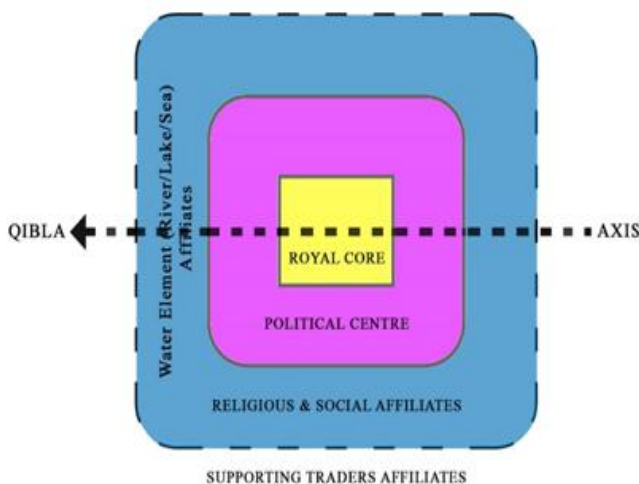


Figure 1. Malay Cosmological Concept of Malay Royal towns.

Example in Greece, the construction of a town and city requires space and planning. The Greek concept of a city, the term '*polis*', is similar to the Indian mandala, where a town or city is called '*pura*'. While in the Malay sultanate kingdom, a town or city was called a '*kota*' where the concept of Malay cosmology was applied (Sulaiman, Wan Teh, & Rahman, 2017). This hierarchical layer system in Malay cosmological concepts is the basis of mandala cosmological system. The protection planning systems need to be set up before the city planning systems can be established. As a new town established, the king or sultan needs to ensure his position is protected.

"... a royal complex should be strong. It should be protected by walls and drains and contain treasury, administrators and areas dedicated to various economic activities" (Higham, 2002, p. 97).

To ensure that such a situation occurs, the defense system within the town must be perfect. Planning must start from the sultan's palace, to the *balairungseri*, then the

entire palace complex, the surrounding walls and finally other military walls to ensure that nothing can be penetrated by external attacks (Perret, 1999b).

4 UNDERSTANDING OF TRADITIONAL MALAY ROYAL TOWN

Based on the understanding of Malay cosmological concept, the simple design planning of a traditional Malay Royal towns is based on three basic principles that contain humanity, guidance and place (nature). Explanation of this paradigm is as follows.

4.1 Malay Kingdom

A nation or kingdom is usually formed by the administration. The administrations in this archipelago have given birth to a nation or kingdom called Malays. The Malays are meant to be Muslims, practice Malay customs and speak Malay language and the leader for them is the Malay sultanate (Bahasan, 2010). The nation, language and sultanate (administration) of the Malays can be said to be born during the arrival of Islam on the archipelago. Human ecology can be seen in the relationships and structure of the layers of society where their lives are bloated and interdependent with each other and living a community. The Sultan is placed in the highest hierarchy in the system of society, followed by the leaders or aristocratic of the State and the people. However it is not a huge gulf, as leaders and people can still meet, discuss and voice their concerns. This happened because the Malay Kingdom administration used the open concept means people can meet the rules or sultan if they had any issues or problems. There is an old Malay proverb which reads '*sultan dan rakyat berpisah tiada*' is used to illustrate this concept (Razali & Idris, 2018).

4.2 Malay Customs and Culture

The Malay customs and culture are important elements in the design planning of the Malay Royal town. There is an old Malay proverb which reads "*adatbersendisarak, syarakbersendikitabullah*". The meaning of social interaction should be in accordance with the custom and the religion of Islam (Darussamin, 2017). This explains that Malay customs and culture are based on the Quran and become the support of the Malays people in their lives. In addition, the economic system, politics, social and military in the Malay Royal town is also in accordance with the law that has been enacted by Islam which emulate the model of Islamic city government in Madinah which was introduced by Muhammad Rasulullah (Yang, 2017). This customs and culture have been introduced by the group of the Islamic scholars that become the adviser and minister to the Sultane and spread to the local people. Ideology culture here also forms when the Malay custom and culture are inherited from generation to generation through oral and practice. For example, there is pre engaged custom, engaged custom, and mutual cooperation in making and celebrating the wedding day of the Malay peoples.

4.3 Malay Territory

The concept of the township (place) in the Malay kingdom perspective is a result of the development that exists from a settlement group and has its own leader and administration. The development of this settlement to a township is dependent on the strategic location of the settlements and the natural resources available and able to accommodate the activities in the settlement (Jacq-Hergoualc'h, 2018). An Old

Malay Town can be said to be a State of Islamic rule and has a boundary that indicates the area of its domination. This delimitation can be measured where the Malay Royal town is estimated the size of its territory by knowing the distance between the jetty area or with a cemetery area. This is because the entry point for Malay Royal towns is located in the jetty area on the lower bank of the river while the cemetery will be placed at the end of the town at the head of the river bank. This approach is based on the understanding of the entry lanes of the merchant ships from the sea to the territory of the Malay Royal town from downstream to the river (Roque, 2018). Based on the research, it was said that the Malay Royal town was not the same character or identity as the western royal cities that wanted to build its influence to shape the empire and glory. The Malay Royal towns is modest but still has an effective administrative system that has become a popular port and often visited by traders from around the world. Based on historical understanding, the ecological of the place where there is a expansion of form and space within the territory of government when the transitional power of the sultanate (occurrence of death) occurs. Being a tradition when the newly-seated Sultan, he will build the administration palace complex in a new place and indirectly expand the territory of his town.

5 FORM AND SETTINGS OF TRADITIONAL MALAY ROYAL TOWN

Malay Royal towns has been portray as a traditional historic town that has a great influences of cultural and physical attributes with the community and urban scape settings (Muslim, Hassan, & Umar, 2013). Malay

Royal town also have been explain as a traditional towns where by the palace building are located (S. N. Harun & Jalil, 2012). The latest iteration of Malay Royal town definition which is a town that has a strong relationship between the community, defense fortress and the king fort 'istanaberkota' where by the royal administrative district are located(Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018). Figure 2shown the model of the early traditional Malay Royal towns in Malaysia.

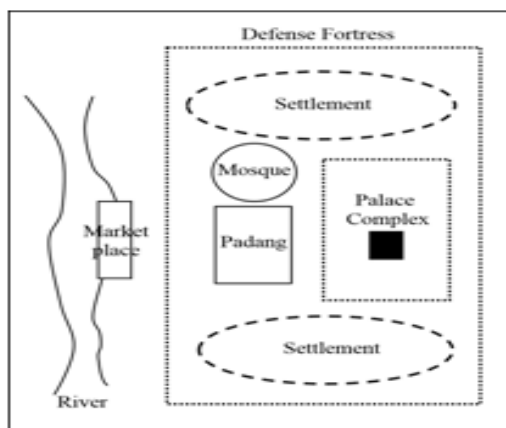


Figure 2. Model of Early Traditional Malay Royal towns in Malaysia
Source: (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018)

According to Hanafi (2005), the concept of palace design in the Malay Royal town is a manifestation of Malay cosmology by incorporating elements of human, natural and even the religious. By examining all the Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, it turns out that the settings of buildings including palaces, gardens or fields and even mosques leads to the Qiblah where water elements are located near the palace grounds. The royal palace complex is an important element of a Malay Royal town as a center and a landmark. The orientation and settings of the palace complex are followed the direction of Qibla (figure 3).

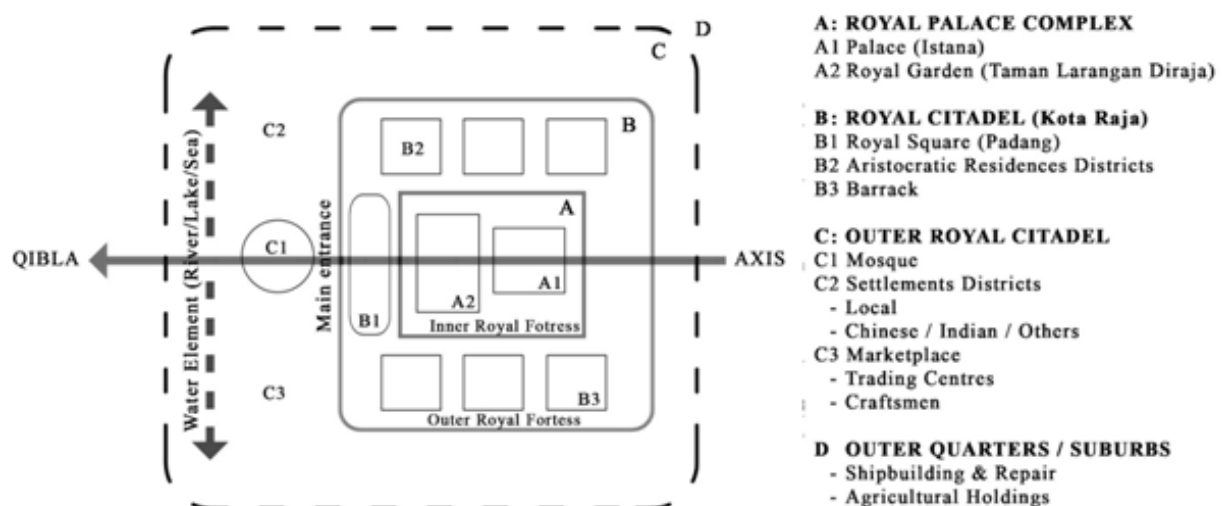


Figure 3. Model of Malay Royal towns

*"... The royal palace in the center,
surrounded by four squares fortress*

*with their respective roles and
function: elephant parks, traders'*

quarters, craftsmen, entertainers and residences. All of this is protected by walls, fortress and drains. Religious places can be built inside or outside the walls. Taking into considerations, the weather and seasonal rainfall, the pool or pond was built and connected to the drainage system and became a water source for the residents and agricultural area” (Higham, 2002, p. 62).

Water or river is also the importance elements in the Malay cosmology concept. The river serves as a stronghold of defense

and a means of transportation, but beyond that the river is also believed to be a blessing. The more rivers that surround the palace, the better. It is in accordance with Hindu-Buddhist cosmology, that water is a favorite place of Hyang and the Gods (Munandar, 2007; Oktikasari, 2008). Malay Royal town of AlorSetar, Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu are close to the river while in Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan there is a pond next to the palace. Water and the Malay culture are inseparable because according to Malay cosmology belief, water elements are elements that bring purity, hope and pleasure.

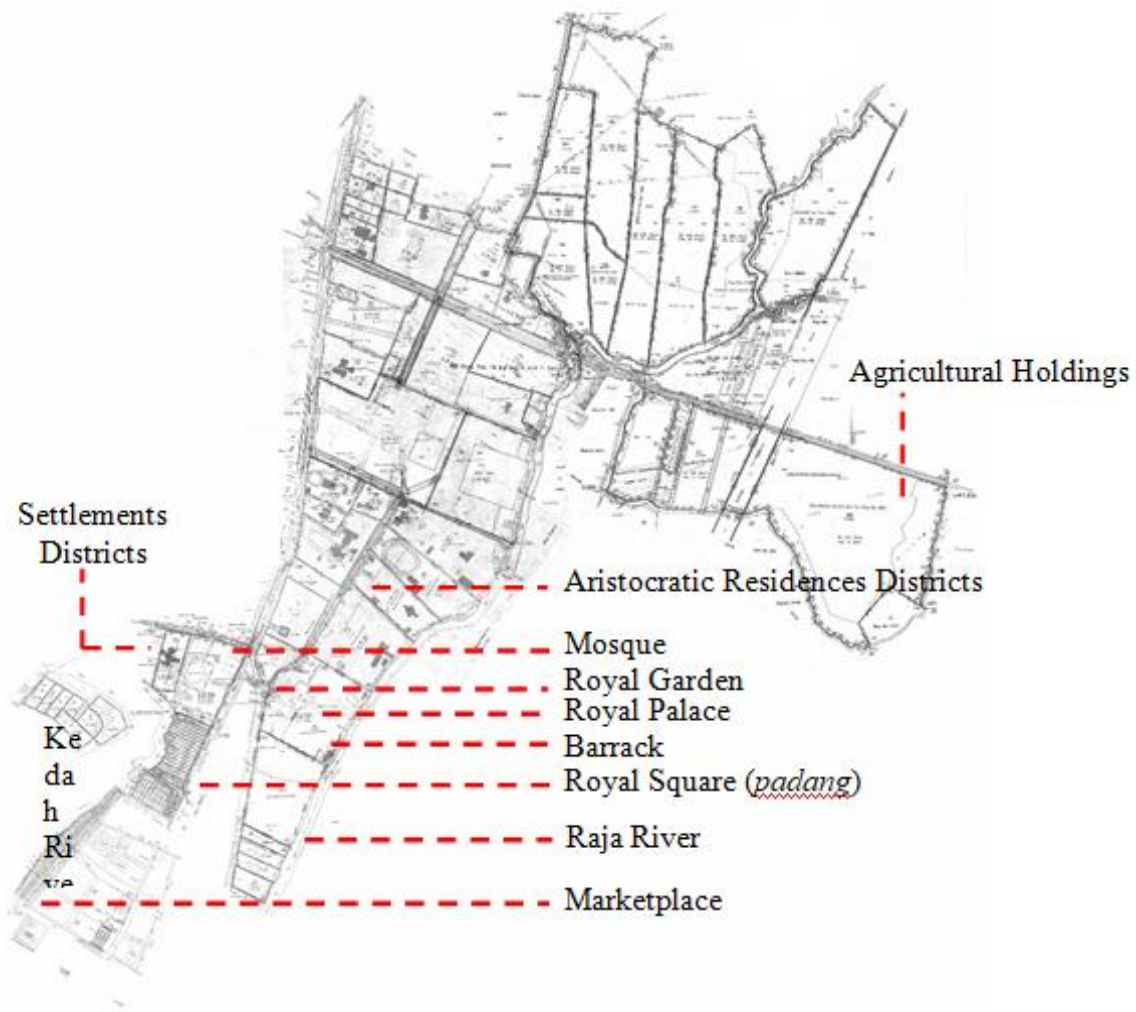


Figure 4. Settings of Malay Royal Town Elements in AlorSetar, Kedah.



Figure 5. Royal Square (Medan Bandar) setting in 1950 (left) and current image (right)

Source: Archive Kedah Royal Museum

Generally, there are fourteen (14) attributes that make up the Malay Royal town including the main and supporting attributes. These all elements can be define into two group which is the main and supportive elements (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018). The main elements of the Malay Royal town are places of worship (mosque), place of gathering (royal square), settlements (residence), governance (palace complex), place of coronation (palace complex), place of merchandise (marketplace), area of entry (river or land route), fortress and gateway. Meanwhile the supporting elements that contribute to the formation of the Malay Royal town are made up of art venues (cultural activities, folk sports), farming areas (gardening, farming), poultry, the carpentry and place of

meditation(Shukri, Manteghi, Wahab, Amat, & Wong, 2018).The layout of Malay Royal towns are divided into 3 layer of hierachi which is the center of this hierachi is the royal palace complex surrounding by 2 layer of the fortress which is called *kotadalam* and *kotaluar* (*kotatanah*) so the city is in the form of layers or fortress for safety and defense purposes(Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Ismail, 2018). The hierarchical structure in main core of the town which is the palace complex is the centralized. This due to the palace complex roles as a central of administration and the landmarks of the Malay Royal towns. The supporting elements of the Malay Royal towns are scattering. An established supporting building in this towns is naturally, unplanned, has irregular and non-geometric patterns.



Figure 6.Form and Settings of Malay Royal Town in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

6 CONCLUSION

The concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia can be illustrated by using the Malay cosmological concept in which the position of the king or sultan is Islamist or more precisely Islam assimilated to Malay culture. The islamization of Malay land has brought many changes to the old concept, especially to Malay sultanate kingdoms. The culture and beliefs that once existed in

indianization have now been successfully denounced. But there are still beliefs based on the Hindu-Buddha that cannot be separated because they have been hereditary. It is quite unique that even though the sultanate kingdom is of Islamic origin, the basic cosmological concept of the planning Malay Royal towns still tends to the concept of Hindu-Buddha cosmology in terms of town hierarchy. There is a concept that results from the unique unity of Hindu-Buddha and Islamic cosmology in the Malay Royal towns, so this understanding should be preserved. In addition this concept automatically maintain the harmony between humans and the universe, it also makes humans more intelligent in their behavior and use of their environment.

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