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IMAGE AND IDENTITY OF MALAY ROYAL TOWN IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The Malay Royal towns in Malaysia are typically the location for the royal administrative district. The history for these royal town's ties back to the Malay Royal Institution. Unfortunately, some towns are slowly threatened. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the town's unique character that shapes its image and identity intending to identify the attributes and how the people perceived them. The study adopts the case study research approach with the use of multiple sources of evidence which involved the convenience sampling method of the local people in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, and Pekan. The finding shows that the royal town's preservation should include both tangible and intangible characters such as historical buildings, historical stories, and cultural events to support the identity of the place.

Keywords: Urban heritage, Malay Royal town, image and identity, preservation

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INTRODUCTION

Malay dynasties in the Peninsular inherited their status, directly or indirectly, from the Sultanate of Malacca, which was the dominant power in the Strait of Malacca in the 14th century. Members of the Malacca's ruling dynasty fled to Perak and Johor after and re-established themselves around the Peninsular and these results in the formation of Malay towns called the Royal towns. There are several royal towns exist in Malaysia, namely; Arau in Perlis, Klang in Selangor, Seri Menanti in Negeri Sembilan, Anak Bukit in Kedah and Muar in Johor (Harun et al., 2015). The Royal towns in Malaysia had significant influence from the early Malay Sultanate that sets the old establishment for the urban setting in Peninsular Malaysia. The development of civilization of a Malay Royal town and inhabitants can be 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).

Furthermore, the Royal town is an embodiment of culture, not only in the physical environment and morphological are rarely accommodates the diversity of structures socio-cultural that have been formed in the area (Harun et al., 2015). Each of these Royal towns has its own historical and cultural characteristics that help to distinguish between these towns through the alignment of minor or significant building fabrics, forming the area into valuable urban masterpieces (Vernières & Kluijver, 2012). These towns are known as Malaysia's heritage that needs to be preserved.

However, its identity is slowly eroding due to its characteristics are being threatened with improper planning and modernisation (Samsudin et al., 2018). The physical environment and characteristics often used to justify the formation of the Royal towns rather than the human activities, meanings and cultural. The overall aim of this paper is to investigate the unique character of the Malay royal town. The unique character will include tangible and intangible elements that form the town's image and identity. Hence, in this study, two (2) objectives have been set, which is the first (1) is to identify the attributes that form the image and identity of the Royal town. The second (2) objective is to understand how the local people perceive the current royal town. A questionnaire survey, semi-structured interview, site observation and archival research had been applied in this study to achieve the main aim and objectives. As the research focuses on two (2) case study areas of Royal town, an overall picture of the concept of Malay Royal town in Malaysia can be generalized. Ideally, the findings from this research can help to trigger significant interest in the knowledge and understanding of the Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, especially for the national heritage.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

A royal town is defined as a town that has a high value in terms of historical and cultural significance and shows a strong relationship between the growth of the community and the development of the urban landscape, especially in terms of the built elements (Royal City Comprehensive Plan, 2009). Formally, it is believed that the concept of the Royal town was introduced in the late 18th century to segregate the authority between a local ruler and colonial dictatorship (Samsudin et al., 2018). Syed Zainol Abidin (1995) stated that a historical and old town or a city needs to integrate the existing intangible and tangible values in its local planning and development. The place must portray its outstanding local identities such as diversity of cultural and local activities, customs and local heritage and be able to highlight its distinctive urban form features. The Malay royal town is an excellent example of a Malay traditional town which is based on the presence of all eight components of a Malay traditional town (Fig.1), namely; the palaces, field, marketplace, mosque, village, river, gateway and fortress elements (Mohmad Shukri et al., 2018).

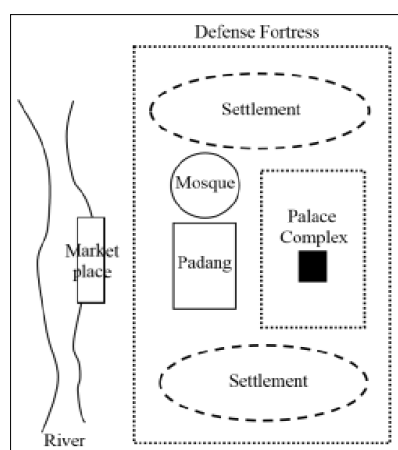


Figure 1: The physical components of Malay Royal Town
Source: Mohmad Shukri et al. (2018)

Image and identity attributes of an urban heritage area

Conservation of heritage values through identifying, recording, analysing and protecting heritage and cultural resources is critical because it provides a sense of identity and continuity of a place (The Importance of Heritage Conservation, 2020). The place identity theory, according to Twigger-Ross & Uzzel (1996), is guided by four (4) principles, namely; distinctiveness: the values that make a place one of a kind and unique, continuity: the values of historical and nostalgic, self-esteem: the values like pride, sense of belonging and attachment and self-

efficacy: the need to feel safe and comfortable. These four aspects of place identity must be equivalent to support place identity (Breakwell, 1993). Ginting (2016) had further developed the theory and came out with the attributes that help to shape the image and identity of an urban heritage district (Table 1). Hence, those attributes were adopted in this study based on the local context. Her findings also suggested that two (2) of the main characteristics that shape the identity of a heritage district are the nostalgia elements and historical buildings.

Table 1: Attributes of Place Identity in Urban Heritage Area

Distinctiveness	Continuity	Self-Esteem	Self-Efficacy
Accessibilities	Historic buildings	Historic buildings	Signage
Historic buildings	Historic stories		Public transport
Local product	Cultural activities		Parking
Cultural activity	Pedestrian		Pedestrian
	Nostalgia		Facilities

Source: Ginting (2016)

METHODOLOGY

The method for this study employed a case study approach to determine the local people's perception of the town's attributes that help to shape the town's place identity with the use of multi-sources of evidence. A case study approach is used to generate an understanding of a complicated issue in its real-life context (Robert, 1986). This research was conducted in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, Perak and Pekan, Pahang where both royal families are the direct descendant from the old kingdom of Malacca Sultanate (Ahmad Fawzi et. Al., 2002). This factor gives an exciting idea to conduct a study on the town's identity to see if there are any similarities in the ideologies behind the unique character of both towns. The selection of participants for this study was based on the convenience sampling, and according to the sample size method by Miles & Shevlin (2015), the sample size derived for this research stands 120 per case study. Thus, two hundred forty respondents (240) which include adult local people were involved with the questionnaire survey. The survey questions were adopted from the previous study by Ginting (2016) where the author managed to come out with the attributes that shape the identity of a heritage district based on the four aspects of place identity (Table 1). The survey also had been conducted using 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Other than that, site observation, semi-structured interview and archival research method had been conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the town's current condition and the historical and cultural background.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed through descriptive statistical measurements using SPSS. A comparative data analyses later were undertaken to identify the similarities between two case study in a way to generalize the overall picture of the unique character of Malay royal town in Malaysia. The results of the analysis show that several tangible and intangible elements defined the image and identity of the royal towns. The physical component comprises the aspects of the natural landscape, the urban structure and architectural features (Harun et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the intangible includes the social background and cultural significance of human activities in the study area.

Malay traditional town components

According to Mohmad Shukri et al. (2018), the royal town is an example of a Malay traditional town based on the presence of its eight (8) components; palaces, field, the marketplace, mosque, village, river, gateway and fortress elements (Fig.1). From the findings, the data shows that both study areas are consisting of the Malay traditional town components as follows;

Table 2: Malay traditional town components in study areas

Component	Kuala Kangsar	Pekan
1. Royal Palace	Iskandariah palace	Abu Bakar palace
2. Mosque	Royal mosque Ubudiah	Sultan Ahmad Shah Mosque
3. Public open space	Pavilion Square (Polo field)	Pekan Square
4. Marketplace	Kuala Kangsar Market	Pekan Market
5. River	Perak River	Pahang River
6. Village	Kampung Bukit Chandan	Kampung Padang Polo
7. Fortress element (Sense of demarcation)	Situated on top of the hill and surrounded by settlements. River and forest act as a clear boundary of separation between the royal administrative district and other areas.	Settlements surround the palace complex. River and forest act as a clear boundary between the royal administrative district and other areas.
8. Gateway	Kuala Kangsar gateway	Pekan gateway

Source: Author (2019)

The place identity aspects in the royal town

Table 3 shows the overall analyses between the two study areas. The highest mean score collected is under the element 'self-esteem' with rating 4.15. Followed by 4.12 for the 'continuity' aspect, 3.97 for distinctiveness and 3.87 for self-efficacy. The results also indicate that the royal town characteristics are affecting the local people by elevating their values of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness and self-efficacy.

Table 3: Overall Comparative analyses between two studied areas

<i>Place Identity Aspects</i>	<i>K.Kangsar</i>	<i>Pekan</i>	<i>Total</i>
	Mean	Mean	Mean
Distinctiveness	3.83	4.10	3.97
Continuity	4.08	4.16	4.12
Self-Esteem	4.11	4.19	4.15
Self-Efficacy	3.72	4.02	3.87

Source: Author (2019)

Table 4 shows the respondents' perception of self-esteem aspect in research areas. Three research elements are involved, namely; evaluation, pride, and attachment which are labelled as EV, PR and AT respectively. The highest mean score is 4.38, and the lowest is 3.54, and both are under EV element for *Pekan* research area. The complete tabulations of mean scores are as follow;

Table 4: Respondents' perception of Self Esteem Aspect in Research Areas

Statements		K.Kangsar	Pekan	Total
		Mean	Mean	Mean
EV	Good public amenities.	3.54	3.78	3.66
	Living cost is affordable.	3.73	3.68	3.70
	Enough public facilities.	3.99	4.38	4.18
PR	Ability to feel the Royal sovereignty when seeing Buildings with grandeur architectural.	4.10	4.19	4.15
	Malay traditional design, state's symbols, King's images & the use of yellow and golden colours.	3.88	4.12	4.00
	Formal landscape.	3.78	4.04	3.91
	The Royal customs ceremonies.	3.87	4.07	3.97
	Festive lighting arrangement.	3.78	3.88	3.83
	Feel part of this town & willing to contribute.	3.91	3.99	3.95
AT	Feel sad if this component demolished:			
	Palaces	4.56	4.34	4.45
	Royal Mosque	4.54	4.41	4.48
	Royal Mausoleum	4.48	4.37	4.43
	Historical buildings	4.46	4.43	4.45
	Jetty and River valley	4.31	4.35	4.33
	Public square/field	4.20	4.31	4.25
	Traditional Villages	4.43	4.40	4.42
	Market	4.11	4.28	4.19
	Royalty/Nobility Residence	4.37	4.34	4.35

EV = Evaluation PR = Pride AT = Attachment, Value Format: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

Source: Author (2019)

Based on data in Table 4, majority of the respondents feel that the overall quality of public amenities, facilities and the living cost are quite good, and this was supporting the elements of overall evaluation that shapes the self-esteem aspect