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HISTORICAL NOTES, CONCEPTS, AND EVOLUTION OF URBANISM IN THE MALAY WORLD

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Abstract

Urbanism in the Malay world is not comprehensible without understanding its history, local concepts, and evolution throughout the various regimes and eras. This study is an attempt to unfold and dismantle the historical traces and local ideas that evolve from the early century to the present in the Malay Peninsula. The focus of the study is to build a theoretical knowledge on what is a *bandar*as an urban settlement. Historical and critical analysis is applied for connecting the dots, traces, and facts of urban form, domain, lifestyle, and society that constitute urbanism in the Malay world. This study argues that urbanism in the Malay World is characterized by the local phenomena of sitting and gathering, *duduk* & *kumpul*, that signifies the necessity for stay in proximity based on harmony, solidarity, and prosperity. Besides historical data of bibliographical study, the material of the study was carried out from the author's fieldworks in the urban settlements from 2010 to 2012.

Keywords: Malay World, bandar, urbanism, society, history, culture

Historical Notes

Linguistically and culturally, the early Malay ethnic groups belong to the Austronesian family. The early agricultural populations across Southeast Asia share the same ancient traces of dwelling culture (Bellwood 2004: 21-40). These include living on the house on stilts, growing rice and millet, domesticating animals, betel chewing, sailing with outrigger vessels, tattooing their adult skin with ink, weaving their clothes, moulding and burning their pottery. The form of dwelling tradition of Austronesian family was an autonomous village organization. The village polity consisted of two main groups, the elites and the commoners. Both social groups managed and sustained their subsistence economy mostly with dry rice cultivation and animal husbandry. In many cases, the elites were the property owners of agricultural lands, whilst the commoners were the workers on

share basis. Their social and spiritual life was based on customary laws known as *adat*.

In the Malay Peninsula, the Austronesian communities came from Formosa to the mainland and Southeast Asia archipelago in two groups of migration. The first group is known as the Proto-Austonesian, and the second is called as the Deutro-Austronesian. The communities belong to Proto-Austronesian in Malaysia are the Temuans, Semelais, Seletars, Kualas, Kanaqs, and Jakuns. The second is distinguished from the first by their agricultural technique. The second group cultivates wet rice whilst the first practices swidden rice cultivation. Both groups of Austronesians lived for generations side-by-side with the aboriginal people, *orang asli* or *orang rimba*, but without any further cultural interaction and assimilation. Most of aboriginal groups such as *negrito/semang* and *Senoi* live until today in their way of life in the forests as hunters and gatherers. They do barters resin, rattan, features, and incense woods with other people for salt, tools, and clothes. On the origin of *Orang Asli* archaeological findings presume that they were the descendants of Hoabinhian hunter-gatherers (Bulback in Glover & Bellwood eds. 2004: 315).

Archeological evidences show that the ruling groups in many parts of Southeast Asia adopted Hindu Buddhist ideologies, rituals, statecrafts, and economics as shown by many artifacts, inscriptions, and images (Belina& Glover in Glover &Belwood 2004: 68-88). Trades for exotic spices most likely triggered the spread of Indian civilization to Southeast Asia. The relation of India to the Malay Peninsula between the 4th and the 4th AD was probably inseparable from the network of commerce between India and the west. Roman coinages of copper, silver, and gold were found in many parts of India. During those times, the demand for exotic and prestigious items from Roman civilization, such as aromatic spices, tortoiseshell, ivory, pearl, silk, dyes, rhinoceros horn, and muslin, was high, though Southeast Asian products and commodities were mostly raw materials. Indian trades must have played an important role to fill the gap between the source of raw materials from Southeast Asia and the Roman consumption for luxurious raw materials.

Maritime silk route has been indispensable for the history of the civilization in the Malay Peninsula from the first to the 13th century. Jacq-Hergoualc'h et al. (2002) describes intensively the formative periods of civilization in the Malay Peninsula. The study concludes that the city-states in the region have been influenced by Indian civilization. The contribution of Hinduism in the Malay Peninsula was obvious; the Indic culture taught the native elites literacy and statecraft that transformed the local dwelling culture from agricultural village to feudal state polity of *negara*.

The acculturation process of Indian statecraft by the native chiefs of village must have been part of the adoption of Hinduism and Buddhism. During the fourth and sixth century, Gupta dynasties in India were in power that brought about the golden age of Hindu Buddhist civilization (Adler &Pouwels 2007: 203); this included the development of bureaucratic society, militarily organized state polity, and market economy based on the use of coinage as currency. The spread of

Hindu Buddhist culture and civilization, from the South Asia continent to the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian Archipelago, was possibly to occur during the Gupta's reigns.

The remnants of Gupta architectural style have been found in the northwestern state of Kedah; it might be the site of the ancient Hindu kingdom in the Malay Peninsula. Paul Wheatley and several leading archaeologists have worked tirelessly in the area of Yarang village near Patanni, between Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia; the early location of Langkasuka kingdom has not been found conclusively. Even though trades and exchanges were important through the watercourse, the early kingdom on the Malay Peninsula was likely not a maritime city-state, *bandar*, but a feudal agricultural monarchy, *negara*. Accordingly, town or city in terms of *negara* is not an international hub of commercial activities, but a symbolic centre of the cosmos; cosmological *mandala* is the most important model for this centre (Miksic in Glover & Bellwood eds. 2004: 239). The location of such a centre must have been located in the hinterland and surrounded by productive lands. In doing so, centre could find its ample geographical setting, either for the symmetrical order of the Hindu cosmological ideals or simply for visual orientation. In this respect plain areas between great valleys and river confluences are favourable sites for such a capital of *negara*. Since early urbanism in Southeast Asia was under the influence of Hindu-Buddhist civilization, the centre of *negara* was likely more about the ceremonial core of agricultural society, rather than the hub of economic exchanges with easy access to other centres.

At the beginning, the development of city-state in the Malay Peninsula such as *Gangga Negara* was most likely provided and supported with wet-rice (*sawah*) cultivation; most of them were located in hinterland and far away from international line of trades. The traces of hydraulic technique for high concentration of settlement should have been part of their capital cities. Such possibility is until recently not available due to the lack of archaeological excavations on the presumably ancient city-state.

Canalization in the ancient sites must have been found though they are not necessarily for communication, but functionally important for the management of run-off water and drainage in densely populated areas. Such indication is remarkably apparent in the Yarang area (Jacq-Hergoualc'h 2002: 169). Nevertheless, hydraulic knowledge and technique of *sawah* cultivation was likely insufficient to organize and mobilize people and other resources for an urbanized settlement. Diversity of expertise and concentration of political authority play an important role for urban development. In other words, the influence and doctrine of Hindu Buddhist statecraft was indispensably important to consider as part of proto urbanism in Southeast Asia.

Hindu-Buddhist civilization began to spread in Southeast Asia since the first century with its culmination between the fourth and sixth century. The early Hindu Kingdom was probably Langkasuka of Kedah from circa the third century. The other names of Langkasuka are Lang-ya-shu (Chinese), Langgasyuka (Arabic), and Ilanggasoka (Tangore). Local narratives confirm the existence of those states.

However, archaeological evidences are still in need to substantiate the findings within a historical framework of the region. The other kingdoms were Pan Pan somewhere in Kelantan or Trengganu and GanggaNagara from Perak (Verma 2009: 205-8).

Archaeological findings in Perak and Beruas area provide an indication of the existence of *Gangga Negara* as one of the earliest Hindu kingdoms in the Malay Peninsula. Even though the exact location of the capital city has not been found yet, *Gangga Negara* supposed to function as urban centre in inland of the Malay Peninsula. However, the relationship between the *negara*s and the coastal areas was unclear, though Indian and Chinese traders have visited them to trade the silks, gold, and beads with rice and spices.

The other early Hindu-Buddhist state is found in Kedah area, at the Bujang Valley. Local narratives tell the story of Merong Mahawangsa who was the King of the area known as Kedah today. There is no further information on the capital of the state and its cultural artefacts. Even though Kuala Perlis is one important port in the today state of Kedah, the region is mostly dominated by historic urban settlements in the inland rather than at the waterfront areas. The historic urban centre of Kedah is Alor Setar (established in 1735) whilst Kuala Perlis was never the royal capital of Perlis, but a small village port. The royal capital for the state of Perlis was Arau. Urban centres in Kedah and Perlis area mostly located in the inland area. This fact indicates the continuity of Hindu-Buddhist urbanism that the royal capital is the centre of the cosmic system within the framework of *mandala.* The adoption of Islam by the state in circa 12th century seemingly did not change the urban life style from agricultural community to commercial waterfront society.

The other important contribution of Hindu-Buddhist civilization to the development of urban settlement in the Malay Peninsula was about the building technology of brick-layer system or masonry construction. Prior to the Hindu-Buddhist civilization, the native Malays and other people in the archipelago did not construct their traditional buildings with masonry construction system; they developed craftsmanship and carpentry using bamboo and timbers. Masonry or brick-layer had been a longstanding tradition in Indus civilization of Buhen, Mahenjo-daro, and Harrapa, dated back to circa 3000 B.C. The Brahmins or the Buddhist scholars must have taught the native people such building construction technology that enabled them to build their temples, roads, canals, walls, and foundations of their palace. As a matter of fact, early urban settlements in the Malay world were not always characterized with excessive use of masonry construction; the main reason was probably because of the climate. Traditionally inhabitable buildings with wooden structure and materials are most adaptive to the wet and warm tropical climate; only monuments, temples, gates, and public baths used to be built with masonry construction.

Hindu Buddhist city-state concept pays special attention to the treatment of its core and transitory areas such as borderlines and gates. The core of the city is the seat of cosmological power; it is the navel of the world. Regarding its symbolic importance, the seat of the ruler represents the source of cosmological order and spiritual power. The manifestation of this importance in the Malay Peninsula and

archipelago is architecturally articulated with the most sacred place of the whole area of *negara*. The seat of the ruler, *istana* or palace is not always represented by the most monumental and elaborated building in the state, but by the most sacred and mysterious domain of the city. The other important parts of the city are the gates. The gateway and the city wall play an important role in defining the transition between the in and outside of *negara*. Architecturally speaking, the gate, *gerbang*, denotes the point of entry with specific treatment for practical and symbolic purpose.

Although until recently archaeological findings in the Malay world have not yet found significant traces of buildings of the ancient Hindu or Buddhist temple, it does not mean that formative urban settlement did not happen in the Malay Peninsula prior to circa 700 AD. The most probable form and structure of such buildings is supposedly to be similar with Candi Muara Takus, in Jambi Sumatra Island. The Peninsula land does not have resourceful volcanic stones, but it does have abundant limestone for lime bricks. Regarding building construction, terracotta was the potential material for Hindu-Buddhist temples in the Malay world.

As a matter of fact, urban settlement in the Malay world is geographically featured by two settings; *kota* and *bandar. Kota* is located mostly in inland area surrounded by agricultural communities whilst *bandar* is a waterfront town or city with its core activities of international trade. Both *bandar* and *kota* are politically designated as the seat of state, *kedudukan negara* or *kerajaan.* Even though administratively *kota* and *bandar* are more or less equal in their status as urban settlement, the common concept for urbanized area is not *perkotaan*, but *perbandaran*. To certain extent, the word *perbandaran* means municipality, urban affairs, urbanism, urban authority, and something related to urban matter.

From *Kampung* to *Bandar*

The traditional unit of settlement in the Malay world is *kampung* or indigenous village. The root of *kampung* is probably from the prehistoric Austronesian *wanua*. The most vivid example of ordinary *kampung* in Malaysia is found among the Temuan communities. Baharon Azhar (in Sandhu & Wheatley eds.1983: 3-29), describes in ethnographic details on the life, customs and traditions of *kampung orang asli* (village of native people) in Bukit Payung, the State of Melaka. In Sumatra, *orang asli* live in Jambi hinterlands, Lampung hinterlands, and Siak Riau. The Temuans share similar customs, beliefs, and life-styles with the Sakais and the Kubus in Sumatra; their origin is probably the same, which is known as Proto-Malay or Aboriginal-Malay ethnic group. In these communities, *kampung* in its original form is a politically autonomous community led by a paternalistic leader, *batin*. Religiously speaking, they practice animist beliefs and rituals, whilst socially, their tradition, *adat*, is strictly hierarchical based on hereditary status and seniority. Each household lives in a house, *rumah*. They live close to each other in a loosely organized compound consisting of several houses from four to forty units.

Even though on daily basis the interpersonal interactions among them are likely egalitarian, for serious matters related to *adat*, they hold firmly a hierarchical authority. At the peak of *kampung* polity is the chief, *batin*. His power is traditionally hereditary, but in some cases, a prominent elder in his kin can succeed his position. At village authority, several officers assist the chief of *kampung asli* with specific responsibility, duty, and assignment. This includes the second rank elders, *jenang* and *jekerah*, the third rank, *mangku* and *menteri*, and the forth rank, *pelima*. The rest is the commoners, *rakyat*. Today, as any other *kampung* in Malaysia, traditional village is an integrated part of local state, *kerajaan tempatan*, the village chief can be installed by the state as the royal representative for political authority of the smallest unit of settlement. Such chief is known as *batin baharu*. However, the hereditary chief, *batin pesaka*, does not disappear; he is still in power mostly for customary laws and ancient rituals, *adat*. Beyond the *kampung*s of *Orang Asli*, village chief is called *ketua kampung*.

Typically, *kampung* is an agricultural community consisting of at least eight households. However, modernisation has changed the structure and lifestyle of *kampung* from swidden cultivation, hunting, and gathering to working in industrial productions. The largest populations of *kampung* can reach over one hundred households or 500 people. In many cases, rural settlement is administered by the state, *kerajaan* with a political status as the smallest settlement organization. Despite its various perceptions on *kampung*, one important aspect of its characteristics stands out that it is not simply a unit of settlement, but a home. The Malay people call their *kampung* home. It is not because of idealistic reason, but simply because *kampung* is the place where they feel at home. The concept of home is incorporated by the socially constructed reality of *kampung* as the place where the Malay cultural identity, solidarity, and kinship are. Indeed, one important tradition for *kampung*'s community is *tolong menolong* meaning literally helping each other on voluntarily basis. All this signifies the notion of settlement in terms of sitting and gathering with mutual respect, social solidarity, and politically harmony.

Even though the sense of community among *kampung* dwellers is deeply rooted in their kinship and familiarity for generations, gatherings and occasions play an important role to validate and rectify the solidarity and friendship among them. In ancient time, such occasions had something to do with the feasts of rice harvest, *masatuai*, or thanksgiving, and the feasts of rice planting season, *masatanam*. In Sabah Malaysia, such a feast is still alive (Http://www.darikampung.org/pesta-keaamatan-tadau-keaamatan-di-sabah/). All villagers celebrate the feast of harvest, *tadau keaamatan*, with various competitions of dancing (*sumazau*), singing (*sugadoi*), body strength and beauty (*unduk ngadau*), hitting *gong*, and other sport (*sukan*). Since most populations of *kampung*s in today's Malaysia are Muslim, Islamic values and teachings have been adopted as an integrated part of indigenous customs and traditions. The tradition of *balek kampung* is one important occasion for most Malays that they go back to their village or place of origin during the end of the month of *Ramadhan* every year.

In some cases, *kampung* is seemingly the place for refuge from the daily routines in urban area. However, the very idea of *balek kampung* is more about a

refreshing occasion for validating their tie in kinship (See also Ismail, Shaw &Ooi 2009: 30). Sometimes, the concept of *kampung* has nothing to do with a rural area or a remotely safe haven on earth. The concept is often to signify the place where all member of families and relatives can get together to celebrate the *RayaIed* and the days of early month of Syawal. The Raya celebration for the Malay Muslims is a month long event. During the month of Syawal, state officers, business, religious and political leaders do open house for people.

Colloquially speaking, *balek kampung* is to go away from the hectic and routine business in urban areas. The significance of *kampung* lies in its emotionally and socially refreshing and rectifying capacity for families and kinships. In the Malay mind, it is unimaginable a person without having a *kampung*. *Kampung* for the Malay people is identical with the original world from which people come from and go back to where they belong. To certain extent, *kampung* offers the emotional and spiritual atmosphere and environment of being socially human.

Architecturally speaking, *kampung* is an indigenous settlement in a linear or clustering structure consisting of several single houses; the layout of houses is juxtaposed along the path that leads to other places such as main road, other village, rice field, plantation, forest, river, etc. In many cases, houses are owned and occupied by single family or household. They usually live close to each other without fence and surrounded by fruit trees.

The first impression of the house is characterized by a building on stilts with a simple gable roof made of bamboo and timber with palm leaves roof cover. Although the form of the house, *rumah*, has been evolving for centuries, ancient traces of tropical adaptation are obvious. The house is provided with windows and walls that allow air cross-ventilation; building materials are mostly air permissible for the breeze. Overhangs of the roof system become shade for exterior walls and protect building from rain and turbulent wind.

In many cases, *rumah kampung* is provided with a porch on the ground, *anjung*; it is the place where guests are greeted. They lead and receive their guests, families, and friends in a long veranda, *serambi* by stepping up wooden stair. The main floor of the house is mostly on stilts at 100 – 120 cm high from the ground; the space under the floor remains mostly empty. The main area of the house is basically divided into two main rooms; *rumahibu* (mother`s house) and *dapur* (hearth). The notion of *ibu* in the Malay culture has a significant function as the core of home while the hearth is the source of sustainability; back home is coming back to mother. Unsurprisingly, the capital city in this culture is the enlargement of core of *negara* while the seat of the ruler is the source of state's existence.

The transformation of *kampung* to urban settlement in the Malay world has been a gradual process of the development on the system of polity, social structure, and architectural form. The most important things of the change are recognized with their institutions. The village polity of *kampung* is, as a matter of fact, not provided with institutions of court of justice, treasury and taxation, police, security and defence. Most likely, Pre-Islamic urban centres were conceptually developed from Hindu Buddhist city-state concept of *negara*.

Economically, people in *kampung* and in *bandar* are not different because they usually move between both places. Even though the quality of infrastructure in both places is not the same, the living cost for family basic need. Thompson intensively observed the life and socioeconomic condition of *kampung* based on his fieldwork in Kulim and SeberangPerai areas, North Malaysia in the mid 1990s (Thompson 2007 et al). He concludes that *kampung* is not a socially and culturally marginalized community. Nevertheless, in contrast to urban society, *kampung* shows a social quality of intimacy and familiarity of what home for the most Malaysian people. Indeed, people in *kampung* and *bandar* share the same cultural values because most villagers work and live in urban areas; they go back to their *kampung* only for holidays or vacations.

Concerning its existential function as home, *kampung* and urban centre are complementary for the Malay world. Even though a black-and-white category is not the intention of this study, the pair of *kampung-bandar* seems to be spiritually necessary. Both realms are mutually working together for the Malaysian society. *Kampung* is spiritually functioning as the well and the upstream for *bandar*. On the other hand, *bandar* is economically the meeting place where *kampung*'s productions and resources are traded with foreigners.

Islamic urbanism is slightly different from the previous Hindu Buddhist civilization in the Malay Peninsula. They have different idea and experience concerning the concept of centre. In contrast to Hindu-Buddhist city and state, centre of Islamic sultanate is more about the hub and place of socioeconomic interactions, rather than spiritual symbol of authority and cosmological order. The transformation from Hindu-Buddhist to Islamic society has been not simply the convert of the beliefs system. Rather, it must have been a radical transformation in the whole populations from highly stratified classes to less bureaucratic and more egalitarian society. One important institution of settlement that signifies the transformation is the establishment of *mukim.*

*Mukim*and *Taman*

Administratively, nowadays *kampung* in Malaysia is organized under a *mukim* area. *Mukim* is the Arabic loan word meaning residential unit of settlement; it is more or less a subdivision or a sub-district that contains four or more villages under a sultanate administration. The origin of the concept of *mukim* is a state territorial and administrative area under sultanate authority. In doing so, the state is able to manage effectively its populations for tributes, taxes, and other resources. Similar concept is to be found in some other places in Southeast Asia such as Aceh, Brunei, and Singapore; today *mukim* as a concept of unit of neighbourhoods may have been transformed administratively, politically, and economically. In Javanese tradition, *mukim* is identical with *kawedanan* or today *kecamatan* a district concept of settlement. The head of *mukim* in Malaysia is a state officer who is usually a person with a strong affiliation with the ruling political party in the area. The head of sub-district settlement is called *penghulu* or *penggawa* in Kelantan. Literally, *penghulu*

means a boat captain, leader, or person at the upstream. The main duty and responsibility of *penghulu* is to coordinate the development programmes and projects in his/her area, this includes infrastructure, public health, and education. Regarding the nature of *penghulu*'s main work, the State Public Service Commission appoints the position.

In the Peninsular Malay, *mukim* is a quarter of urban area with specific designation of land use for residential with a support of mixed uses. The social centre of *mukim* is usually a mosque, *masjid jameek*. The head of *mukim* stands side by side with the *masjid* officers to serve their state and community. Historically, the first institution of *mukim* was probably established circa in 15th century in the Malay Peninsula. It was a territorial unit of settlement of Islamic state with its centre in Aceh. The centre was probably part of the Hindu Gangga Negara which has established its ancient seat of kingdom in the area between Kedah of Malaysia and today Satun of Thailand.

The spread of the concept of *mukim* to other regions in the Malay Peninsula, such as in Kedah, Perak, and Selangor, was probably by trade and bilateral friendship among them after they embraced Islam as state religion, such as in Melaka, Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, and Perak. Meanwhile in Aceh Sumatra, the concept of settlement district, *mukim*, is an important structure of city-state that is constituted by three functional leaders; the first is *imeum adapt* (traditional chief), the second is *imeum masjid* (religious/ Islamic leader), and third is *dewan tuhalapan*, board of elders (http://dewagumay.wordpress.com).

The importance of *mukim* for urbanism in the Malay world has come into essential part of state polity since the establishment of Islamic Kingdoms in the Peninsular Malaya in the early of the 15th century. The sultanate capital cities such as Kedah and Melaka have implemented and employed the concept of *mukim* in their capital cities. Melaka was a prominent sultanate in the Malay Peninsula in the Age of trade in Southeast Asia prior to the Western Colonial domination in the region. At the first time, the concept of *mukim* was probably to integrate its economic and territorial management system of Muslim communities into the kingdom's realm so that the state is able to control the populations of the residential area. One important duty of the head of *mukim*, *penghulu*, is a state apparatus for tax collections. He directly reports to the *penghulu bendahari negeri*, the treasurer of the sultanate. In territorial matter, *penghulu* is assisted by several *penggawa*s (in Kelantan) or *kepala kampung*s who is responsible for the safety and security of their sub-district. To make sure that the people in mukim properly pay taxes and tributes, the sultanate Melaka installed a high-ranking state officer called *temenggung*. The duty and responsibility of *temenggung* is more or less the same with the state chief of police. His institution will have access to all *penghulu* and *kepala kampung* for those who neglect and fail to pay taxes and tributes, *cukai dan hasil*.

Today, the concept of *mukim* is more or less the same as in the ancient time; it is a spatial unit of settlement comprising several neighbourhoods and villages. As a territorial unit of community, a *mukim* coordinate the common elements in its area for communication, accessibility, drainage, public safety, education, and

public health. In modern Malaysia, the geographical term for *mukim* is interchangeably with the concept of *taman*. The last is not an official term for a sub-district, but it is commonly used for the residential subdivision in terms of architecturally planned community. The population of a mukim vary from 4.000 to 200.000. However, one of the most populated *mukim* in 2010 is for instance Simpang Kanan in Batu Pahat, Johor with more than 200.000.

The idea of neighbourhood as *taman* is popular and widely implemented to underscore a modern planned community. Private developers introduced the notion of *taman* for their residential clusters evoking the idea of neighbourhood in the Garden City of Letchworth from 1899 and Clarence Perry's concept of Neighbourhood Unit (Perry 1929). Indeed, *taman* means literally garden or play ground. The elaboration of the word for a neighbourhood or sub-division is probably a Malaysian phenomenon; the private developers have successfully introduced a modern planned community to their market with a brand new residential complex in contrast to traditional settlement of *kampung* and *mukim*. Indeed, *taman* is provided with a well-designed infrastructure, commercial areas, and public amenities. Commonly, cafés and restaurants with traditional life style of dining outdoor support these commercial parts. Today, *taman* is widely used for the concept of sub-division in most of towns and cities in Malaysia See also 1994). Nevertheless, *taman* becomes part of Malaysian dwelling culture that accommodate and provide a multiethnic system of habitation.

Architecturally speaking, *taman* is mostly dominated by duplex, triplex and terrace houses. The dwelling unit for multi-families living is still a rare case. In many big urban areas, the land prices dictate the necessity for a compact high-rise dwelling with social and recreational amenities. Gated communities are common in many capital cities. Safety and security are important issues for housing development in Malaysia since 1970-s. House breaking and burglary belong to first rate of crime in residential areas, especially during the times of Iedul Fitr holidays familiarly known as the times for *balek kampung*. Unsurprisingly, most houses are never free from having railing or bars for their windows and glass openings. In Malaysia, it is common to find the police guarding and patrolling neighbourhood night and days on regular basis.

The concept of district as a spatial unit of urban settlement is actually a new and modern term. The original concept of such a unit is actually a *pekan*. Sometimes the unit is also called a *bandar*. The degree of administrative status of each municipality is indicated with certain status depending on the number of its population. An ordinary *pekan* or *bandar* has traditionally provided with a permanent market called *pekan*or *pasar*. The concept of *pekan* in Malay speaking world is identical with gathering, informal meeting, crowd, proximity, trade, exchange, and casualness. The other meaning of *pekan* is a week consisting of five days. Traditionally, each *pekan* had its own market day. On the day, market was not as usual; it was more than just a place of exchange for goods and foods. Market day for people was always a special day with casual interactions and folk festivals. Gradually, such tradition has vanished and disappeared for many reasons. One important thing is the change of people's lifestyle from agricultural to industrial

production. The change has been transforming urban form with more open for the hub and network of communication.

The form of market has been dispersed into commercial strips and shopping centres. Even though some towns and cities still keep traditional markets alive, its significance as a centre of urban economics has been transformed to be more diverse and sophisticated in its products, services, and environments. Albeit the reality of today urbanism lies in the phenomenon of *pekan*,-as a gathering place for exchanges and interactions-, its original meaning falls into oblivion.

The other place of gathering that builds and sustains the sense of urban community is *masjid* or mosque. Even though the Islamic Malay populations are not significantly dominant over the Chinese and Indian inhabitants, their socio-political role and function in the state and political parties are unquestionably predominant. Unsurprisingly, in Malaysian mosque and *surau* are state institutions. Then, the adoption of Islam by the Malay communities is part of the reality of their urbanism, mosque plays an important role in the state and community of *mukim*.

Figure 1: Masjid MutiaraIman, Taman MutiaraRini, Skudai Johor Bahru

Source: Filedwork

Unlike *surau* for *kampung* or neighbourhood, *taman*, a *mukim* community has to be provided with a mosque in their residential area. The local state installs the mosque as part of its sultanate institution. *Surau* is a community hall for daily pray according to Islamic teaching. Local neighbourhood establishes and maintains its function and operation on voluntarily basis. In many cases, it is an integrated part of neighbourhood development standard; the developer is due to build at least one *surau* for every residential unit of 20 to 100 families. *Surau* is closed on the Friday pray time. On this day, *masjid* becomes the centre of *mukim* community.

After decades and centuries of settlement, as the population grew and commercial activities flourished, *mukim*s, *pekan*s, and *mosque*s expanded as well, in

number and space. A township or *majlis perbandaran* has at least two *mukim* communities. Metropolitan municipalities, *majlis bandarraya*, such as Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru have more than 12 *mukim*s. Indeed, the amount of population is essential for the status of municipality. The formative traditional municipalities were probably established during the Islamic sultanate; this system was very important for the state because municipal institutions were effective resources for income tax from trade activities.

Urban Life-Style and Habitation

Dining out in outdoor and in public domains is the most favourable activity in leisure time for most populations in the Malay towns and cities; they do together with the whole family member in mild and clear evening. Various restaurants offer local foods and drinks with their own special menu. Interestingly, foods and drinks for the Malay populations have to be stately certified *halal* and free from pork and lard. With such certification, the Malay could go into Indian and Chinese restaurants or cafes. To certain extent, religious barriers and cultural differences do not make interracial interactions among them easier. Even though grouping of informal gathering in public domains is based on racial identity, they share something in common for peace and tolerance. On daily basis, the three ethnic groups live and work together for common good; they learn each other to develop a kind of interracial skills for their common interest: prosperity, growth, and peace.

The reality of ethnic relations and multicultural society in most Malaysian towns and cities is likely not without challenges. Even though their existence as a community in the Malay world has been since the Dutch colonial rule, the integration of their ethnic status and identity into the Malay political party and society is still the work in progress. Even today, the Christian community of *kampung serani* remain only the site that carries its name; the residents of the Eurasian village were not around in the area anymore. Market forces of the land for real estates and property business override historic and sentimental value of location. The relationship between ethnic identity and its cultural heritage in today Malaysia is crucial that is necessarily to be put in the context of power relation with the predominant Islamic populations.

The Malay populations in most towns and cities mostly occupy public sectors, while Chinese and Indians mostly run businesses and other private sectors. Migrant workers fill the gap of occupations, especially for labour in manufactures, utilities, commercial services, and domestic jobs. In urban development and construction, foreign workers fill most laborious positions; employment agencies arrange and manage rent flats and accommodations for such workers. As a whole, the image of the Malay towns and cities is multicultural and vibrant during the daily bright leisure evening.

Beside its diverse ethnicity, Islamic gender relation comes into play in public domains. Women and men suppose not do handshake when they meet. Malay, Indian, and Chinese populations share their value for not hugging each

other when they encounter each other in public places. Interpersonal interactions in public areas are strictly polite and quite formal. The common language for inter-racial communication is mostly Malay language. However, they know and speak English language to each other as well.

Figure 2: Urban Street Life in Malacca

(Source: Fieldwork)

Concerning their existence as a nation, the three major ethnic groups have been trying their best to live and grow together, given that their schools are ethnically segregated from early childhood on. One important platform for multiethnic interaction for nation building is at the higher education level such as internationally rank universities, state institutions, and public sectors. The other important public domain where all ethnic groups mingle together is the town market, *pasarawam*. Naturally and informally, people interact with each other with exchange of words and smiles. Unlike malls, all family members do not always visit market; most visitors are mostly the middle and working class. Nevertheless, the real and potential place and process of nation building is probably taking place in the market.

Urbanity is not perfect without taking manners and courtesies of its urban citizens in public domains. The way people drive give us the sense of urbanity in this country is. Tailgating and noncompliance against traffic light are common phenomena on some urban areas. In most urban areas, respect to pedestrians and bikers still needs miles to go with their development scheme. Significant efforts and developments for pedestrian friendly environment have been made in several towns and cities such as Melaka's Hang Tuah Mall and Kuala Lumpur's Bukit Bintang strip and Central Market passage. However, the integration of mass-rapid-transit and pedestrian path network is still the work in progress. Surprisingly, such

integration seems not apparent for the government's new towns development such as in Putrajaya, SyahAlam, and Iskandar. However, private car oriented life-style dominates mostly public spaces and commercial areas.

As anywhere on the globe, malls are the generators of traffic flow. Unlike in North America, malls in Malaysia are not only built in suburban areas, but also become an integrated part of urban centre, such as Petronas Twin Tower & KLCC in Kuala Lumpur, City Square in Johor Bahru, and Grand Market in Kota Bahru of Kelantan. In Malacca, Dataran Mega Mall is one important shopping venue in town. Culturally, traditional markets and retails on the old town street are more attractive as the stage of daily-life spectacle of Malaysian societies in Malacca rather than the malls. The Chinese populations are dominant in shaping and representing the urban life in old town Malacca today. However, several traditional shopping centres at Dataran Merdeka give more accents and characteristics of Malay tradition and culture. In Malaccan context, traditional shopping venues signify more obvious the colourful ethnicity with their unique symbols and attributes than the modern malls. To certain extent, the monstrous consumerism of capitalistic machinery seems to be concealed by the multicultural vibrancy of mall customers.

Governance and Municipality

Urban development in the Malay world has been traditionally a top-down policy, meaning the Federation of States has the supreme power to envision, plan, develop, redevelop, and revitalize areas according their judgment and wisdom. Historically, the British Colonial Rule introduced formal planning system in 1921 with the establishment of Planning Department at the Kuala Lumpur municipality. However, the first implementation of the Planning Act for Town and Country was in 1923. This Planning Act laid the foundation for the establishment of General Planning Scheme. Nevertheless, an important milestone of planning for town and country in Malaysia was the dissemination of the Town and Country Planning Act 1967 (Sukuran & Ho Chin Siong 2008). The Act is identical with the Federal Planning Act 1982. The difference lies in its implementation; the Federal regulates the areas within the federal territory while the Town and Country Planning Act control the development in various states of Malaysia (Nolon 2005, pp. 97).

Malaysian planning is governed with a political process of parliamentary system. The chairperson of the National Planning Committee is the Prime Minister of Malaysia. The chief of State Planning Committee is Chief Minister of the state, while the head of Local Planning Committee is the local authority. In other words, planning committees at each level of authority,-from federal, state, to local-, are inseparable from the government policy on physical development. In case there are inconsistencies between plans and by-laws, the development plans shall prevail. The room for the improvement and rehabilitation of policies and plans is within the planning committee. The power of planning committee is politically strong, given that the Planning Act allows local authority to set up an Appeal Board. Accordingly, development applications from private sectors have to comply strictly

their plans: for land use, density, building, and infrastructure with the given structure plan and local plan.

In Malaysia, political pressures imposed dual need: for greater technical proficiency in planning and for enhanced political control over planning (Rudner 1994: 201). The hierarchy of decision making in the planning process is regulated from the federal, state, to local authority, from National Physical Plan, State Structure Plan, to Local Plan. The physical development at any level of planning is not only to comply with the Planning Act, but also to be in concert with the respective National Five Year Plan; the First Malaysia Plan was for the period between 1966 and 1970. According the Act 1976, all municipalities and regions have to establish councils, *majelis perbandaran*. Councillors are ordinary citizens and residents of their respective areas within the municipal territory. They are elected and represent local interests and aspirations. Indeed, public participation in the planning process in this country is culturally not comparable with community involvement in North America, given that Malaysian planning authority gives public participation in two stages: for the preparatory and finalize stage of structure plan. Community participation for critical positions and dispositions is beyond Malay custom and tradition. Instead of opposition and objection, the pressure for integration, cohesion, and uniformity between federal, state, and local policies comes to be the first priority. In many ways, the practice of courtesy, *sopan santun* and respect as well as loyal to authority is obvious at any level of bureaucracy and state office.

However,-as in any other part of the globe-, towns and cities in Malaysia are challenged with sustainable development and global issues. Indeed, efforts and responses have been made in this country since 2000-s, within the framework of the Five-Year-Development Plan from the eighth on. Interestingly, Malaysia envisions their sustainable development impartial from Islamic principle of *Hadhari* (Mustafa 2011: 41-2). Accordingly, development plans should not only comply with ecological and technical principles, -such as for energy conservation, manageably healthy production, and for sustainable resources-, but morally held accountable according Islamic teaching with open-minded outlook and manner. The most crucial part of the concept of *hadari* for sustainable development is not how to mastery knowledge, but it is about the establishment of civil society based on just and trustworthy governance. Of course, trust is not simple a moral concept, but a necessarily political practice. How is the establishment possible without open society and democracy?

Concluding Remarks

Urban settlements in the Malay Peninsula have evolved throughout historical influence of major world civilization from India, China, and Middle East. The formation of urban settlements is indispensable from the establishment of political body for social order and economic management in terms of state authority. The evolution of settlement system from *kampung* to state is made possible by the

economic surplus of agriculture and trade. However, political leadership of outstanding person, such as Prameswara of Malacca, is decisive in this establishment. Such persons must have been able to consolidate their political power through military supremacy that enables them to control resources with various ways such as bureaucracy and taxation.

Bandar as common concept of urban settlement in the Malay world was originally a trade-based economy that worked as an international hub between East and West. Unlike the agriculture-based centre of state, *kota*, *bandar* is a multicultural urban settlement with a dynamic growth because of the intensive socioeconomic communication and interaction of various groups people for trade and culture. Regarding its nature as a multicultural hub, *bandar* is necessarily open and tolerant for diversity. However, diversity needs a stable political system that ensures growth based on open competition and social justice. Then, the future of *bandar* lies in its democratic governance that provides its multicultural society with space for innovations, elaborations, and growths.

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