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The Malay Settlement: A vanishing world?

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Abstract

Questions have been raised regarding urbanisation, in which the Malay culture is forgotten. This paper uses a mixed-method by way of a case study on the eight Malay settlements in Kota Bharu. Three hundred fifty questionnaires were distributed, while random interviews provided a more precise explanation of the Malay community in the real world. Traditionally, this settlement is inhabited by Malays and is well known for its high culture and architectural values. This study found that urbanisation has critically influenced the culture and identity of Malay communities in their settlements. The loss of the Malay settlements in Kota Bharu led to the loss of the Malay culture and identity in the community.

Keywords: Malay community, Malay settlement, Malay culture, urbanisation

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1.0 Introduction: The Challenge of Urbanisation in Malaysia

Since the beginning of British rule in Malaya, the growth of the state economy has been divided into two sectors: modern and traditional industries. The Western-founded modern sector integrated the global economy and an advanced business system, which should customise to the current global situation. On the other hand, the agricultural economy was further classified by its enclave, existed independently, and was only inadvertently linked to the outside world. The city's tin mining and farm sectors were expanding in its commercial and industrial sectors. While traditional industries were stagnant and gradually deteriorated due to population expansion, the revenue contrast between the two industries grew unbalanced, which consequently contaminated the social and cultural differences. In fact, according to Faaland (2005), Malay agriculture provided continuous support to urban society, but the British government's policy was unfair to the agricultural sector compared to other industries.

Social discrimination and racism against Malays by non-Malay-controlled business and industry groups have existed. The majority of the Malays lived in rural areas with no electricity, roads, clean water supply, etc., thus exposing them to various diseases. According to Abdul Rahman (1971), Europeans, Chinese, and Indians were mainly involved in the modern economic sectors, working as entrepreneurs, managers, and employees in industries, farms, and trading companies. Since the Malays worked in the traditional agricultural sector and as fishermen, their incomes were relatively low. Following the jobs reserved by the British for the police and military, the Malays began to engage in ready-income occupations. Non-Malays, on the other hand, were turned off by the low pay compared to private sector earnings controlled by their ethnicity. The British and Chinese bankers refused to serve the Malays in the marketplace as they were deemed

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incompetent. They were not allowed to participate in business associations in wholesale, retail sales, exports, and imports. Even if Malays acquired jobs in the private sector, they would still face discrimination based on race, language, and culture. Many Chinese enterprises also refused to hire Malays. Only low-wage jobs in the city were available to them, such as becoming gardeners, drivers, or security guards (Mahathir & Jamaludin, 2004). One of the causes of Malay poverty was colonialism. Moreover, upon shifting political power from Malay to British colonists, the Malays' fate became bleak, unknown, and depressing. Nevertheless, the British had unconsciously implemented policies that undermined the Malays, where the foreign community was encouraged to locate Malays to work in rubber fields and mining areas. Gradually, immigrants from China and India dominated small businesses under British rule. The Malays were strictly prohibited from being involved in any form of business. As a result, Malay development lagged far behind the Chinese (Abdul Rahman, 1971). Overall, non-Malays were able to capitalise on the opportunities available in the country. Since the economic disparity has widened over time, such a system must be changed so that Malays can participate in and benefit from the country's rapid economic development.

1.1 The Malay Settlement and New Economic Policy

Since implementing the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.), the settlement's expansion has been exponential. Efforts to compensate for urban and rural imbalances continue—the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty among Malays has rapidly grown. Socio-economic development and physical facilities have been gradually spread across the nation, either in new industrial cities, within cities, or in areas specifically developed for rural and suburban communities. Major megacities had emerged until the early 1990s, including Klang Valley, Penang-Seberang Prai, Kulim-Sungai Petani, and Johor-Pasir Gudang. Meanwhile, suburban sprawl has expanded far beyond the agricultural fields. Most agricultural land has been converted into residential areas, industrial areas, and even new cities. Md. Jahi et al. (2016) stated that urbanisation has spread to rural and agricultural areas.

2.0 Research Background

This study focuses on Malay settlement areas in Kota Bharu as a case study. A total of eight settlements were selected to identify the impact of urbanisation on the Malay community. The study's objective is to examine and explore the effects of rapid urbanisation on a Malay settlement. Besides, the idea of community conservation is still new in Malaysia. There is still a lack of research to preserve the existing Malay settlements based on the Ekistics theory introduced by Doxiadis (1972). Most studies of the built environment in Malaysia are focused on inventory research (Wahid, 2020), which revolves around building conservation, wood carving motifs, space in traditional houses and traditional building materials (Khairuddin et al., 2018), to name a few. On the other hand, this current study proposes new research directions in Malay community conservation.

3.0 Research Methodology

This paper employed a mixed-method approach in this study. Since this study encapsulates both socio-cultural and physical aspects, the focus of the research was classified as an exploratory technique. The researcher rallied random interviews, participant observation, and direct observation techniques to support the findings. Eight Malay settlements were selected for a case study in Kota Bharu to strengthen the data. Furthermore, limited research has been carried out on the impact of urbanisation on Malay culture and settlement. The visual analysis and observation techniques applied by Lynch (1960) are remarkably effective in determining the physical characteristics of the study area. They were compounded with pictorial documentation and were simplified to record the existing settlement. M.J.I. drones were deployed, while informal interviews with the local community were carried out to gather fruitful information concerning issues related to the Malay community. Since this study focuses on a Malay settlement, other races were not included. In addition, 350 local respondents from various backgrounds were chosen for a random questionnaire survey in the case study area. The data finally implemented the IBM SPSS V26 programme to analyse the descriptive and cross-tabulation analysis.

4.0 Analysis and Findings: Urbanisation, Destruction and the Future of the Malay Culture

Humanity began to seek contact with the environment during the early phases of human settlement, intending to reduce human energy and movement in daily life, starting with household activities such as cooking, washing, and working. In the early Malay culture, after experiencing the lifestyle of riverside settlements, carpentry skills were eventually developed, allowing a settlement to be built using craftsmanship. This settlement underwent gradual growth due to the *gotong-royong* spirit among the community. Over time, these skills have evolved and formed a daily life culture. The community has also begun to generate income by utilising their skills by becoming carpenters, traders, and traditional artists. Previously, this settlement area was well-known for its skilful community members in traditional arts such as wood carving, copper work, *songket*, and carpentry. Bott (2003) claimed that the unification of physical and cultural elements occurs when all individual and human needs are perceived to be fulfilled in terms of life functions and purposes. As a result, a location's physical, social, and cultural characteristics influence its own identity. The existence of Malay art and culture has made this area acknowledged in the past. However, after three generations, observations have demonstrated a decline in Malay cultural activity.

" I feel traditional Malay artwork is incapable of guaranteeing the future. There used to be a *batik* workshop before, but eventually, it had to be closed due to competition from Indonesian *batik*. "(R-1)

According to the respondent above, *batik* products from Indonesia have penetrated the local industry. Most *batik* factories have decided to shut down due to their inability to compete with the demand. Most buyers choose to purchase *batik* from Indonesia since it is less expensive. Consequently, the manufacturing of local *batik* has been put on hold for the time being. As a result, youngsters do not

have the opportunity or platform to develop their talents in this field. Rapoport (1977) and Altman (1975) describe how a place is depicted and the cultural influences and experiences that exist in society. This idea provides meaning to a place and its connection, giving it an identity. It also shapes the social and cultural values of the area, particularly for the residents. Moreover, this identity supports the existing culture while enhancing the long-term survivability of the area. However, young people are forced to move to the city searching for job opportunities due to these factors.

These statements demonstrate that a small number of people still practise traditional art for a living or as a hobby. Observation discovered that the creation of both artworks necessitates a large amount of raw material storage space. An informal interview found that a respondent's as a quail trap maker was set up her equipment in front of his settlement for nearly 30 years. According to him, some young people came to learn the process, but the majority could not stay for a long time. This situation is due to the young people are more interested in finding salary-ready jobs. Most respondents in this study live in Kampung Pengkalan Pasir and Kampung Jalan Atas Paloh.

Unfortunately, their settlements were lost in the land acquisition process in March 2020. In November 2020, observation found that their settlements had been destroyed. As a result, the Malay culture that has been established is no longer active. This situation has led to the urbanisation of this area through new development. The residents of this area were initially unaware of the urbanisation process that had taken place. As a result, no changes occurred in their lifestyle, where activities and daily life are still carried out in a village lifestyle. Wahid (2020) compounded that urbanisation in developing countries occurs in various forms, either by absorbing the rural environment into the urban environment or incorporating urbanisation into the rural environment. From these facts, urbanisation has gradually destroyed their settlements and the sense of place. Serious consequences may follow in the future since the younger generation has had no choice in the cultural industry. Artisans will lose these skills in the local Malay community, which will result in the loss of their cultural identity. The concept of culture has shaped the Malays' minds and souls, influenced by religious interests, culture, and traditions. According to Kling (2000), these factors have shaped the Malays' character and identity. Urbanisation has destroyed the Malay community's cultural wealth. This scenario will have a direct impact on the Malay settlement as well. According to Rapoport (1977), cultural expressions constantly change, modifying the meaning of a building or a village.

Table 1: Why is the Malay art slowly forgotten? (n = 350)

Item	Frequency	Percent
The people are not interested	23	6.6
The young generation is not interested	6	1.7
Expensive raw materials	2	0.6
Raw materials are difficult to obtain	2	0.6
Not involved	316	90.3
Still active in this field	1	0.3
Total	350	100.0

(Source: Abdullah, 2021)

According to the questionnaire results in Table 1, n = 23 (6.6%) of the local community members are uninterested in participating in Malay art and culture. They noticed that most Malay artwork is extremely complex and difficult to produce. Furthermore, such products are difficult to sell due to competition from neighbouring countries, whose products are less expensive than local products. According to one respondent (R-2), most young people are uninterested in learning Malay traditional art. In addition, young people are more likely to work in cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, which have better job opportunities. Migration among the majority of young people will influence their peers to migrate. As a result, traditional art-making and carpentry skills no longer impress the younger generation. In addition, other factors such as difficulty obtaining raw materials and the increasingly high cost of raw materials received n = 2 (0.6%) feedback from the respondents. According to the interviews conducted, raw materials such as bamboo are currently difficult to obtain.

"There were many Malays traditional settlements here in the old days. In the past, most settlements were owned by courtiers and wealthy merchants. Unfortunately, the settlement has collapsed, and some houses have been burned. The landlord has taken good high-quality timbers, and some of it has been sold." (R-3)

The above statement demonstrates that most tourists and outsiders who visit this area are attracted to the beauty of the architecture and the traditional art activities of the time. However, only a few traditional settlements remain (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Remaining Malay settlements with unique characteristics

(Source: Abdullah, 2021)

"...this house is complicated to maintain. The cost of maintenance is very high. The house is experiencing roof leaks and an increasingly damaged roof structure. I have never received any help from the government to repair this heritage house ..." (R-4)

According to the report from the above respondent, the owner claimed that the government had never provided monetary assistance to repair the local traditional houses. This situation demonstrates that the government has never taken any serious initiative to protect and sustain the traditional settlements. This action will consequently contribute to the destruction of the Malay traditional settlements in this area (Fig. 2). It is challenging to preserve traditional arts in the study area without government assistance.



Fig. 2: The demise of traditional Malay architecture
(Source: Abdullah, 2021)

The government is likely to prioritise economic development over infrastructure development and heritage buildings (Zehra et al., 2019; Satterthwaite et al., 2020; Wahid, 2020; McGee, 1994). As a result, observations showed that these actions have directly affected traditional settlements, assuming that these settlements have no value to the government. A minority of people and institutions appreciate high architectural values minority of people and institutions only appreciate high architectural values. This situation has resulted in a lack of motivation among the owners to conserve their houses. Furthermore, they also lack the necessary knowledge to preserve traditional settlements in terms of construction techniques, building materials, conservation methods, and timber construction processes.

Table 2: Are young people interested in Malay art and culture? (n = 350)

Item	Frequency	Percent
Yes	134	38.3
No	216	61.7
Total	350	100.0

(Source: Abdullah, 2021)

According to the questionnaire results in Table 2, n = 216 (61.7%) mentioned that young people are no longer interested in Malay arts and culture. This situation has arisen due to many young people migrating to the city. This finding is supported by Wahid (2020) in his study, which stated that economic development factors are the most critical factors influencing the occurrence of migration. According to Lamry (2014), the income disparity between urban and rural areas and the disparity between major ethnic groups and regions began in 1991 and continued until 1997. Nevertheless, two factors do not contribute to forming a just society in Malaysia. First, despite the significant progress in reducing racial disparities, they still exist. The second factor is racial income disparities. Since the government is keen to encourage export-oriented industries, the agricultural sector, which Malays dominate, is neglected.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation between "Who has inherited the Malay artwork?" and "Is the Malay cultural industry growing?" (n = 350)

			Is the Malay cultural industry growing?		Total	
			Yes	No		
Who has inherited the Malay artwork?	Children	Count	2	0	2	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Wife	Count	0	2	2	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Husband	Count	1	0	1	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	Friend	Count	0	2	2	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Others	Count	16	7	23	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%	
	None	Count	186	134	320	
		% who has inherited the Malay artwork	58.1%	41.9%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	205	145	350

	% who has inherited the Malay artwork	58.6%	41.4%	100.0%
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(Source: Abdullah, 2021)

According to Table 3, n = 205 (58.1%) of the n = 350 respondents expected the arts and culture industry to grow. In the meantime, n = 134 (41.9%) of the respondents believed the opposite. These findings demonstrate that the Malay art sector remains a dream and a source of hope for the people. However, the questionnaire revealed that family members could not inherit the job. According to Table 3, n = 320 participants do not have family members who might inherit this skill and occupation. This result does not correlate with their expectations for the industry's development. Since the industry is slowly dying and the number of people involved is small, it cannot grow due to a lack of government support.

"...I expect Malay artwork will flourish in this area. Now many arts and cultural activities have disappeared ..." (R-5)

The loss of these arts and cultural activities is not due to a lack of customer demand or a lack of interest among industry players in bolstering their careers. This situation, however, is the result of urbanisation pressures and the failure to maintain cultural resilience in terms of activity, history, and culture. This failure is due to the motivational factors of individuals migrating to other cities and the government's failure to conserve Malay communities in the study area. Eventually, the specific meaning of the settlements that existed in the past will no longer be associated with the current situation, thus affecting the Malay settlements. Observation found that one respondent did not use technology in his work due to a lack of technological knowledge. Furthermore, he also received no assistance from any agency in the form of training courses to help him expand his source of income through technology. These findings show that technology in Industrial Revolution 4.0 does not significantly affect the Malay arts in this settlement. As a result, respondents' businesses struggled to thrive since they were incapable of adapting to the use of technology in their careers. The success of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has been unable to change their lives. The policy is more appropriate for developing the country's economy through more prominent industries.

5.0 Discussion

Following the destruction of the Malay human settlement, traditional art has been forgotten. Traditional art forms have influenced Malay settlements' culture and customs. The loss of a Malay community that produces art and culture results from the destruction of Malay settlements. The communities involved in this work have migrated and become isolated due to the rapid pace of urbanisation. As a result, Malay carpentry skills have declined in the Malay culture. The destruction of the Malay settlement will also result in the loss of the Malay identity and community, as the Malay settlement once produced talented artists who brought the glory of Malay traditional craftsmanship to the world. Consequently, locals have found it hard to learn these skills, which has led them to migrate to other cities, searching for better jobs.

6.0 Conclusion

As a result of urbanisation, Malay culture has become artificial and meaningless. The Malays' mindset has gradually changed as a result of the urbanisation process that has been absorbed into Malay settlements. Following that, cultural destruction has a massive impact. Today, the Malay artificial effect existed in almost all Malay cultures. Due to urbanisation, the loss of culture attempts to replace a new way of life based on current trends through technology. However, because the settlement has been destroyed, technology is no longer an option to save the culture. The loss of a settlement's "living museum" is a consequence of its destruction. Finally, Malay culture can be seen as exhibitions and the museumification of a culture. The success of the Malay settlement is inextricably linked to government support. Its demise is also looming, not only as a result of flooding and urbanisation but also as a result of the government's failure to preserve the Malay settlement—conservation of the Malay settlement is seen as having no economic benefits. Meanwhile, conservation in Malaysia focuses on buildings' architectural and physical aspects rather than the community and neighbourhood. There is no single department in a local government solely responsible for settlement conservation. Most local governments will focus on new development applications through One-Stop Centre 3.0 only if the new development is deemed more important because it contributes to the state's economic growth.

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