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## Towards the Future of the Malay Community in Kelantan

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### Abstract

The Malay settlement at Kota Bharu is on the brink of disappearance. This paper employs a mixed-method to indulge in the subject of the study. The finding illustrates that the Malay community withers with the cultural transformation due to development. This paper also reveals the life, essence, hopes, and aspirations of the Malays in the process of urbanisation. The process also presumably tests the survival of the Malays, who may be the subject of "museumification" in their own country in the future.

Keywords: Kota Bharu; Malay settlement; Malay identity; urbanization

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### 1.0 Introduction: The Evolution of the Human Settlement

Throughout the years, men explored the earth to create various settlements, from simple shelters of temporary shade to more permanent residences of different characters and sizes. It expresses a range of trivial to complex habitual accommodations that mankind has created. It shows the determination and effort to shape the earth's surface to fulfil their dreams. Disparately, understanding the universal situation facing human settlements is crucial. After the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, human settlements evolved dramatically. The birth of new technologies brought these changes. The foundation of changes brought by the Stockton and Darlington railway track in the North of England on 27 September 1825 widened the landscape of human settlement and became the breakthrough of technology for opening the new frontier for more lands everywhere (Doxiadis, 1974). Technology in transportation and other inventions benefits mankind and helps change the settlement pattern. It is also noteworthy that the pattern also changed due to the population increment that aligned with the territorial growth and the expansion that entered the Third Era. The nomadic settlers (First Era) sought appropriate settlements for thousands of years. While in the Second Era, it was proven that people started to build permanent settlements 10,000 years later (Doxiadis, 1974). Therefore, the global dimension and shape are unchanged, although the environmental conditions are affected. Thus, this led to a conflict between the land, sea, and air, causing an unbalanced flora and fauna. These changes have become an eerie scene in some parts of the world. Changes brought by modernisation supposedly improve the lives of people significantly. Throughout this process, the implications for the earth's future were not realised and were unknown to the early struggle for survival.

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The new settlement is becoming more and more dynamic. Doxiadis (1974) explained that humans began to change from a static city to a "dynapolis", where towns or cities grew in a vibrant process. The industrial revolution also ushered in the modern era of human settlement, which Levi Strauss (1961) coined as a complex organism, referring to a city of a particular size and scale. Nowadays, the city is becoming more dynamic and continues to grow. This process will constantly evolve as it advances according to technological changes. It transforms rural and agrarian societies into urban communities through industrialised activities. Now and then, the impact of modernisation and progress in the developing world resulting from industrialisation threatens to overwhelm present capacities that have evolved through capitalism and democracy inherited from the West. Closer to home, per capita production and the gross domestic product measure the advancement in a particular country. Undeniably, traditional activities are no longer considered competent, and the loss of traditional identity is profound.

## 2.0 Literature

### 2.1 Urban Attributes

Currently, the world faces tremendous changes in population, area of the earth covered, energy usage, communication, and income confusion. Income confusion exists due to a failure to understand the complexity of the city, affecting all processes related to the economy. It was a lot easier to identify a city a couple of centuries ago. However, a city's growth is currently being pressured by industrialisation, internationalisation, and globalisation. There are two leading causes: the population, which has spread far beyond the old city limits, and the revolutionising function of a city. It has driven human settlement to flourish and reformed the current setting following the millennium. The latter is due to the physical and digital accessibility of people living in rural areas, with no boundary for constraining products or opportunities as in the past.

As the city centre expanded, the village transformed into an informal, densely populated area within the periphery and created an informal settlement. Inhabitants in this area provide labour and a market for businesses within. Urban life still attracts people due to the amenities and entertainment that exist. For example, big cities in Malaysia are growing to cater to the increasing population with advanced transportation and high-rise accommodation. They also provide opportunities for investors, attracting urban tourists. The different levels and types of opportunities in the city exemplify various social and personal profiles that make this weird environment inexplicable in a single word.

#### 2.1.1 The Growth of City

Since the dawn of the century, achieving a population of one million in any city settlement has been possible. History showed that Rome, Constantinople, Teotihuacan in Mexico, Chang-An and Peking in China, and Angkor Wat in Cambodia had reached a million people in a short period. By 1880, London and Tokyo had each surpassed one million inhabitants. Today, that number is not something to behold but is considered an excellent achievement for a city. This achievement makes it a unique political and organisational challenge for the city. It is essential to understand that the concept of "big city" is very different at every age. For example, in 486 BC, the Pindar poet named a city of 50,000 inhabitants "The Megalopolis of Athens" (Pindar, 1935).

Therefore, it is clear that the larger a city is, the more territorial it becomes. However, it did not happen in a short time. The impact of the expansion on this territory depends on the boundary where it winds up from a central settlement. Segments play a significant role in the formation of the city and affect the amount of territory, technological production, and economic and energy requirements of the central settlement. It will also increase complexity due to the network of financial, cultural, religious, political, and other interests. Subsequently, the complexity is convoluted while the pattern of the territorial organisation hierarchy changes with the original condition.

#### 2.1.2 A Change in Population

Doxiadis (1974) theorised that a typical town has a tentative population of approximately 7,000 in seven villages, with an average of 700 inhabitants each, whereas the population is 3,000 in the central town. Therefore, one area, which previously had a population of 4,900 (7 communities of 700 people), will increase by 2100, making it 7,000 people. A 43 % increase in the population contributes to its central functions. It is worth mentioning that this is a rough estimation for some locations. A good example is in Minoan Crete, where only a few lived in the central settlement while others lived in villages. However, McGee (1975) stated that three reasons contributed to the rise of a town or a city. The first is due to past population growth and settlements that have shifted from rural to urban. The second is due to the increasing birth rate compared to death; thus, a natural increase is inevitable. Then the third is due to human migration from rural to urban areas. These factors significantly impact the urbanisation and expansion of cities.

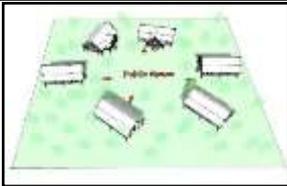
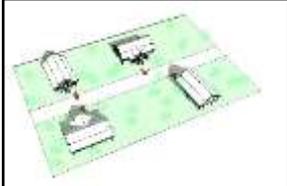
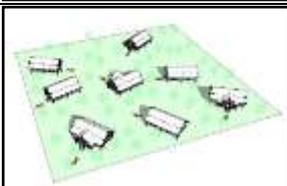
## 3.0 The Malay Settlement

According to the Department of Local Government (2011), "traditional village" is defined as the placement of the Malays inherited through generations. Eyuca (2012) claimed that "traditional solutions" are environmentally friendly since they are never physically challenging, specifically through climate and topography. In ancient times, the secure connection between man and nature created a balance in society. The village formation in rural areas is a unique living environment. Idid and S. Salim (2011) argued that villages could adapt to the surrounding situation and provide a comfortable life without any modern foreign influence. Hamzah (2001) stated that "*kampung*" and "*desa*" are different, distinguished by location. The term "*kampung*" usually refers to a residence near a city. Meanwhile, the term "*desa*"

refers to a residence in rural areas. The term "kampung" may be used in the vicinity of a city, but "desa" does not appropriately refer to a suburb (Hamzah, 2001).

Three settlement patterns in the village area are cluster form, linear form and scattered form (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2010). Cluster forms focus more on open space through settlements. Usually, this open space has a mosque, prayer room, or place for the community to perform (Figure 1). It also serves as the village's activities and community centre. Linear forms are often found near roads or along rivers. It is formed through the transportation system, which plays a vital role for villagers (Figure 2). Meanwhile, a settlement area without a clear physical boundary produced a scattered or unclear form (Figure 3). It is also the basis of village existence and is located far away from roads and rivers, hence not affected by geographical factors. This pattern is primarily found in the foothills.

Table 1: The Malay settlement pattern (Source: Edited from Pelan Induk Kampung Tradisional dan Penempatan di dalam Kawasan Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan Semenanjung Malaysia, Local Government Department 2010.

Figure	Image	Pattern
Figure 1		Cluster pattern
Figure 2		Linear pattern
Figure 3		Scattered or unclear pattern

(Drawing by: Azli Abdullah, 2020)

The origin of Malay settlements relied on the loyal followers of the Sultan, who mostly lived around the palace. Today, it has become an urban area. This factor has led them to establish a settlement. It initially started as a small settlement and later grew following the population increment. The area around the palace was eventually active with various activities by the villagers. The palace was built near the rivers in cities such as Kota Bharu, which is an ideal location. The river is convenient for communication and access to the city. According to Aziz & Hadi (2017), the settlement size symbolises the government's power and wealth possessed by the Sultans. Initially, the settlement utilised a cluster pattern based on the number of family members and relatives, such as Atas Paloh Village, Kubang Pasu Village, and surrounding areas. This approach ultimately combines a harmonious atmosphere with its surroundings, including humans and nature.

### 3.1 Settlement Compounds and Boundaries

Malay settlements have different layout mechanisms and patterns with no physical boundary representing a village, usually defined by a small stream or a worn-out path. The houses are scattered, with intersecting street paths leading to the housing units where one faces the other or otherwise. Coconut trees become a dominant element sheltering the housing units, fruit trees on the horizon's second layer, and scrubs and vegetable plants in the undergrowth. The informal street creates social interaction between people. The area has become a medium for residents to interact and socialise, demonstrating their daily activities and problems to the community. The narrow lane triggers a neighbourhood connection that strengthens interaction in Malay settlements. According to Wahid (1996), the units of local social grouping formed in the Malay village are beneficial. It has its character that can help identify the village. The village concept is not only a spatial demarcation but also a sense of belonging through the place that exists in the term "berkampung".

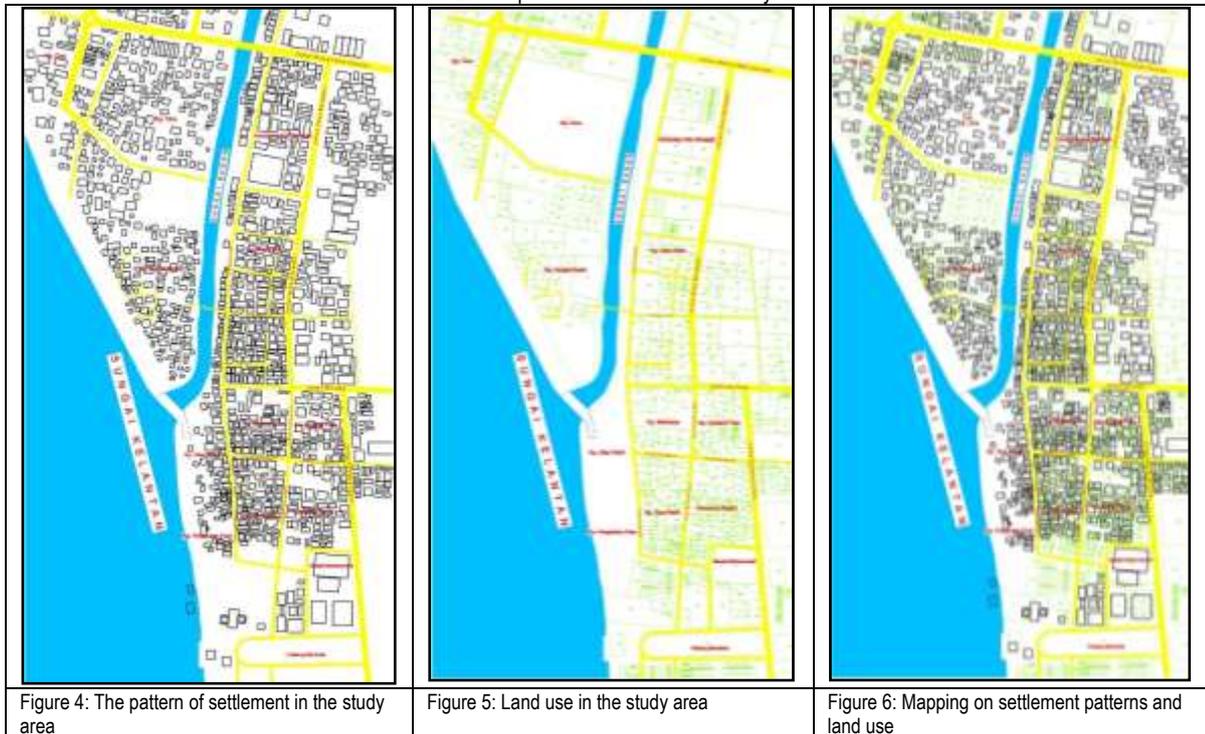
### 4.0 The Pattern of Malay Settlement

Most of the settlements built in Atas Paloh Village, Masjid Village, Pengkalan Pasir Village, and Atas Banggol Village are in a linear pattern. This pattern exists along the main roads of Old Post Office Road, Atas Paloh Road, and Atas Banggol Road (Table 2). None of the houses is fenced in, which defines the concept of a traditional Malay neighbourhood in the community. The formation of the compact settlement established close family ties, although it complicated building fences. However, there are still some fenced settlements, especially those near the main road, for safety reasons. In the past, fences were built using bamboo to mark the boundaries of the house. The leftover space became informal roads and pedestrian walkways between settlement areas. The traditional community lives close-knit; houses are

not secured with locks as in urban areas. The spaces cater to both visitors and owners, with mutually agreed rules based on the customs and culture of the people. The multi-function “serambi” is fully utilised, serving as a male guest zone and a space for social community. Residents can also greet neighbours walking in front of their house. While conducting visual analysis at Jalan Post Office Lama, there was no social interaction as the traditional settlement character. The roads separated the local community into two sectors. It became a highway and destroyed the spirit of the neighbourhood. Settlements were fenced to avoid intruders and strangers, becoming a hindrance that detached the social relations among neighbours.

However, the situation is different on the Budor River. The settlement patterns are mostly scattered (Table 2) due to T.O.L. land status. In addition, erosion of the Budor River fringe occurred before the Flood-Wall was built in 2005, which had a massive impact on the surrounding settlements. According to the respondents, the Flood-Wall prevented floods every year. This situation relieves settlements on the fringes, leading to more settlements built on the Budor River every year (Figure 4).

Table 2: The pattern and land use of study area



(Source: Wahid & Abdullah, 2020)

Most of the land in this area is agricultural (Fig. 5). As shown in Figure 6, a plot of land has more than one settlement. Close family ties and kinship bonds between relatives resulted in a piece of land shared by siblings (Figs. 7 and 8). It is common for siblings or relatives to live in the same area, establishing a social network for the Malay community. It started with a simple wooden house built on stilts to avoid flooding or wildlife threats.



Fig.7: View of settlement patterns in the study area  
(Source: Azli Abdullah, 2019)



Fig. 8: View of settlement patterns in the study area  
(Source: Azli Abdullah, 2019)

## 5.0 Evolution of the Settlement Pattern

Whether in rural or urban areas, each settlement changes depending on various factors. Human instincts always seek refuge and shelter as a basis of evolution—the same case happening in the study area.

### 2005

The settlement pattern began to take shape in the Masjid Village and Atas Paloh Village. Houses were built on stilts around Muhammadi Mosque and Atas Paloh Village. It is customary for local residents to build their houses near the Sultan's castle. The Flood-Wall at the Budor River was not ready yet (Figure 9). Due to floods that swept away the settlements along the Budor River, only a few settlements remained in Atas Paloh Village. The coast of the river fringe has been altered and moved inland.

### 2010

The construction of the Flood-Wall started in 2010 to prevent floods, where there have been a few new settlements (Figure 10). It gave residents hope, especially around the Budor River fringe. It is indeed a catastrophe that led to the loss of property, life, and the livelihood of local people. According to respondents, frequent flooding occurred before the completion of the Flood-Wall. However, years after the Flood-Wall was completed, the water level was relatively low. The property damage was also relatively small, indicating the government's successful efforts to help the villagers.

After the Flood-Wall was completed in 2014, a great flood occurred the following year in Kelantan. The “*Bah Kuning*” (yellow flood) paralysed Kota Bharu significantly, with the water level at almost 8 feet (2.4 metres). If the Flood-Wall had not been built, it is most likely that the whole settlements in this area would have been destroyed. According to the respondents during an informal interview, the water came upstream, not solely from the Kelantan River. The Flood-Wall prevented the Kelantan River from flowing into the settlement area.

### 2015-2019

In 2013, settlements in front of Muhammadi Mosque were destroyed, including several others in Masjid Village and Atas Paloh Village (Fig. 11). Later, in 2015, the site was converted into a 160-unit residential development, the S.K Condominium (Fig. 12). The condominium was not developed by the locals.



Fig. 12: View of S.K Condominium  
(Source: Azli Abdullah, 2019)

Significantly reduced flood risks have created many new settlements around the area. From 2015 to 2019, there has been a significant change along the Budor River fringe (Fig. 13). Residents have begun to build new settlements while others have renovated their homes to meet the needs of their growing families. The flood mitigation project not only defend against the high water level in the area but also provides a sense of security and an opportunity for residents to improve their lives. Residents are beginning to look for new economic resources, such as opening small premises for business, especially those living along the Budor River and Atas Paloh Village. It is said that this phenomenon did not occur before 2015. They create the opportunity to find a source of income through small businesses to support their lives. Areas considered flood-free are beginning to attract residents from the surrounding area.

### 2020

Regrettably, in March 2020, residents were ordered to vacate their settlements. The authorities started to demolish the units that had been renovated. Sixty-three families were living in the area, mostly Malays. The city life that continuously pressured them eventually made them confused. Settlements along the Budor River were demolished, including the Pengkalan Pasir Village and Atas Paloh Village (Figure 14). Villagers were compensated RM 1,000 (250 USD) by the State Government. The main reason is to build a new mixed development to meet the pace of urbanisation.

The land clearing process is not only destroying the Malay urban settlers but also eliminating the social system and culture of the community. Few families lost their income because their businesses and traditional trades were located in this area. Losing their settlement

meant they could not perform daily activities and business. Although it is only a small business, it has become an earning opportunity for the locals.

Table 3: The pattern and land use of the study area

Figure	Map	Description
Figure 9		Settlements in 2005. There are settlements in front of Muhammad Mosque in Masjid Village and Atas Paloh Village (Drawing by Azli Abdullah, 2020).
Figure 10		Settlements in 2010. There are settlements in front of Muhammad Mosque in Masjid Village and Atas Paloh Village. The Flood-Wall is in the process of being built. (Drawing by Azli Abdullah, 2020)
Figure 11		The settlement pattern in 2015. Settlements in front of Muhammad Mosque in Masjid Village and Atas Paloh Village were demolished. (Drawing by Azli Abdullah, 2020)

<p>Figure 13</p>		<p>The settlement pattern in the year 2019. The existence of new settlements. (Drawing by Azli Abdullah, 2020)</p>
<p>Figure 14</p>		<p>Settlements pattern in 2020. The settlements in Pengkalan Pasir Village and Atas Paloh Village have been demolished (Drawing by Azli Abdullah, 2020).</p>

(Source: Wahid & Abdullah, 2020)

## 6.0 Conclusion

Over the years, the global era has brought some new relationships in image formation, as widely discussed in various forums (Lynch, 1960; Wahid & Harman Shah, 1981). What is the image of the Malay neighbourhood? In the past, local cultural features represented by the landscape would signify the settlement. The case study of Atas Paloh Village, Old Post Office Road, and a few villages along the river fringe was withered by flood, urbanisation encroachment, and settlement displacement due to land status. These are just a few examples representing the states affected by the demise of Malay settlements throughout Malaysia.

Rapid urbanisation and the modern living of an affluent society considerably impact the neighbourhood, breaking up the urban ethnicity. Consequently, the local culture can not represent the place. The lifestyle influences culture (Rapoport 1990), urban living, and mass media influence, especially the impact of globalisation, challenge local perceptions, which often succeed. Urban forms and the entire landscape in most traditional cultures have two critical elements, which depend on a sacred schema and meaning. Most cultural cities understand it. Rapoport (1990) argued there might be some cultures that emphasise the term “culture” through health, recreation, humanism, or material dwelling, which is referred to as “wellness” today. Over an extended period, from Plato to Botero to Utopian cities, they were distinguished in many forms in town and city for a particular complex meaning. It explains the urban formation through colonial power and various immigrant groups, which allows for an understanding of the different roles of cities. In various cultural constructs, the presence or absence of eccentric pride and the diversity of urban hierarchies help define the elements that are a prerequisite for a settlement before it exists in the city (Rapoport 1990). Visual and symbolic images are the actual resemblances that people can easily remember. The images of the settlements through the facades of the housing units are acceptable to the public. However, urban life dramatically changed the identity and culture of the Malays, which became increasingly fragile. Eventually, global culture has succeeded in capturing the local culture and providing images of places without any connection to the local community. As a result, both indoor and outdoor spaces are different from

the basic needs of the Malay community. Due to the divide and rule of colonial power, the Malays dominated the urban areas relatively late, before the 1970s. A little experience in city life challenged them to cope with the tangible. The Malays practise their culture in most actions and activities, even in everyday speech. Appropriate words were selected, especially when talking to the elderly. However, urban living with no contact with the elderly and their simple lifestyle distorted this image. Therefore, the city is seen as an unfamiliar stage for their experience. The urbanisation of Malaysia was historically dictated by colonial rule, with its socio-economic activities and urban population dominated by Chinese and Indians. Thus, urban space is already divided by ethnicity. Jahi et al. (2016) withheld this opinion and stated that the sustainability of a society should not depend solely on profit. It should rely on something beyond the functionality of the development. If such an event can sustain society's ethics and morals, it will be sustainable. Then, a development that enhances community dignity is socially sustainable. The purpose of seeking social sustainability is to make the event more humane or explore the soul that makes it more meaningful. The role of social aspects in architecture is essential for people within the community. An architectural approach that understands the urbanisation process should be able to develop settlements that enable people to develop themselves, their families, and the community itself. If these attributes disappear, the future of the ethnic groups relies heavily on the mercy of the dominant community controlling the economy and politics.

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