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THE URBAN VERNACULAR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

SETTLEMENT AS SERENDIPITY

Edited by
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7 The Public Realm of the Malay-Nusantara

Typological Variations of Urban Space and Diasporic Streetscapes

Shireen Jahn Kassim, Illyani Ibrahim, Kamariah Kamaruddin and Shamzani Affendy Mohd. Din

7.1 Introduction

Leaning on Hannah Arendt's seminal "*Space of Public Appearance*" (Marquez, 2012), the nature of the character of the public realm is of critical value in a post-Covid world, to the identity of plural communities in particular and human populations, in general, particularly to urban dwellers and with the inevitable rise of urbanisation. These encapsulate spaces that have evolved as centres of cities and settlements, which contain symbols of governance and politics and which are meant to be seen and experienced as public spaces. The lack of the recognition that the historic forms of such centres or cores of settlement and the crucial and critical role they play in the self-identity of cultures, communities and nations are of concern. In the context of Southeast Asia, the form of such spaces or realm within the "vernacular" field are rarely discussed as urban forms and those "urban" centres, which arise from colonial structures are recognised as historical landscape, yet these urban forms that have layered over the traditional (pre-colonial) centres of cities, and thus the original "indigenous layer" are often neglected in terms of mapping, definitions and discourses. Jahn Kassim and Kamaruddin (2023) observed the "ecomandalic" character of such pre-colonial cores, implying that they are "porous" at their boundaries or edges, lacking monumentality, formality and fortifications, and tended to be formed as part of topography and natural landmarks, rather than gridded, cardinal-oriented planning stamped upon pre-existing geo-morphologies. Particularly in the Malay-Nusantara and the Southeast Asian archipelago, many of these centres are marked by distinctive and culturally rich traditional structures, buildings and halls, as these cities and centres sit within the historic criss-crossing of trade and diasporic communities, and many of these public buildings, including secondary buildings and residences have all but disappeared, being made from more ephemeral construction, and thus more easily decimated by natural disasters, including flood and fire. Yet their reconstructions and urban articulation are crucial as indicators of the original public life and the public realm in the vernacular layer of urbanism which had existed long before the coming of colonisation. In the drive towards urban regeneration and renewal, such forms are needed to be recognised, rebuilt and even extended in association with current remnants of these urban structures, particularly due to the extensive socio-cultural change that took