

# The Architectural Concept of Malay Royal Town

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For the king or sultan-ruled states category, the Malay Royal towns are portrayed to be the most prominent town in the sultanate of Malay's administration structures. Apart from that, the Malay Royal Town has also been categorised as a historic town, representing the position and significance of the Malay sultanate hierarchy, dating back to the 16th century. This study's objective focuses on describing the idea of Malaysia's Malay Royal Town, which has founded the identity and image along with the elements in the tangible and intangible category that substantiates sustainability following the rapid urban development in operation where nearly all the Royal Towns of Malaysia are involved. Multiple case studies have been conducted in Malay Royal towns throughout Malaysia are Arau, Alor Setar, Kuala Kangsar, Klang, Seri Menanti, Muar, Pekan, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu. In order to understand and define the concept and structure of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, the research method adopted includes site observation, historical map overlay and semi-structured interviews. Results obtained from the research indicated that the Royal Towns of Malay had taken a major role in influencing the history and growth of the towns as they are replete with identity and cultural values. Therefore, there is a need for the Malay Royal towns' concept to be explored and appreciated by the nation so that all the distinctive elements and culture present within the Malay Royal towns can be retained for the knowledge of generations to come.

**Keywords:** *Architectural Concept, Malay Cosmology, Malay Royal Town, Characteristics*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current state of physical and the capacity to survive since it exists is a clear sign of the civilisation development within the Royal Towns of Malay and its inhabitants. The embodiment of struggles and human civilisation triumphs contained by the town makes it an ultimate destination (Heryanto, 2011, p. 3). The Royal Towns of Malay is a symbol of culture in the physical environment and morphological form of tangibility and an interconnected mechanism between people and cultural norms to suit their needs. More complex issues are being explored throughout developing the Malay Royal Towns from the range of theories of urban design within the scope of the local context of human culture. Characteristics of physical environments serve as the elements to provide a rationale for the formation of Royal Towns of Malay instead of activities carried out by humans, meanings and activities related to culture.

Identifying the concept of Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, which additionally shapes the identity and image, taking into account the tangible and intangible elements, has become the main objective of this research. Consequently, there are two (2) objectives that this study has specified. The first (1) objective is to determine the elements framing the Malay Royal towns' concept. Besides that, comprehending the function of the Malay Royal towns as the primary rendezvous of both administration and social activities related to the local people has been specified as the second (2) objective of the study. The major aims and objectives are attained by employing the methods comprising of site observation, interview in the form of semi-structured, and historical map overlay. Data gained from the usage of the said methods are then being fit into respective categories: Malay Royal Towns' physical activities and cultural significance in the Malay Royal towns. Furthermore, with relation to the technique of multiple case studies being applied, it would be fitting to disseminate the research findings to an overall inference of the Malay Royal Towns. Last but not least, it is highly

expected for this research to spark greater interest in unearthing more knowledge on Malay Royal Towns as well as to appreciate what is known to be a national heritage.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

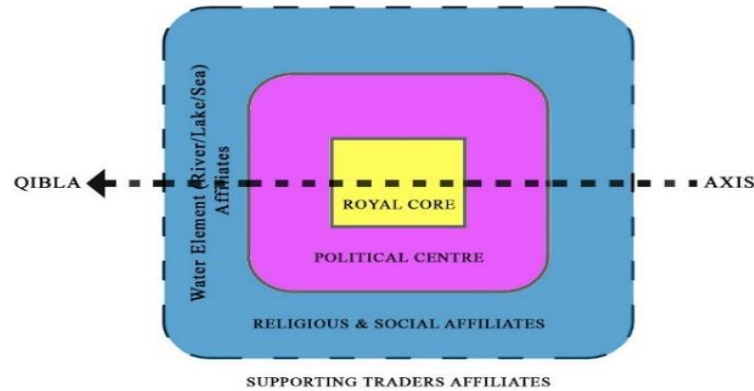
Several methods of data collecting were being employed to identify the concept related to Malay Royal Towns. These methods include observations of the sites, semi-structured interviews and also overlay of the historical map. A total number of nine (9) Malay Royal towns were selected for the preliminary study case, including Arau, Alor Setar, Kuala Kangsar, Klang, Seri Menanti, Muar, Pekan, Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu. However, only four (4) have been recognised to be made up of comparable physical characteristics of Royal Towns but with pronounce dissimilarity of royal genealogy within this country, which is Alor Setar, Seri Menanti Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu. Therefore, these towns were being designated for a detailed case study. First, existing elements of tangible and intangibility will be defined and plotted via the method of site observation. Then, to further comprehend and support the link of existing elements, tangible historic elements, namely physical layout, urban contexts, forms and settings, are to be mapped. The final method applied in achieving secondary data, the semi-structured interview, was used to endorse the outcomes gained from research areas. A variety yet similar respondents were selected for this research, including historians from the Malaysian historical society, multiple local universities' historical researchers, state museum officers, and officers at the Department of National Heritage, along with a few local people who are familiar and possess knowledge on the history of the specific areas of study to validate the data that have been collected. A qualitative analysis was then carried out to conclude the research findings in achieving a comprehensive understanding. With that, it has been possible for the concept of Malay Royal Towns in Malaysia to be identified and made the most of Malaysia's heritage study in the future.

### 3. THE CONCEPT OF MALAY ROYAL TOWN

An outstanding exemplar of the early Malay towns which has gone through development and growth backdating to the 16th century is the Malay Royal town in Malaysia. The towns accommodated as a royal administrative hub and a base for the growth of Islam and dissemination of the religion in the Malay Peninsula states. All the kingdoms of Malay embraced the teaching of Islam at that era; however, Hindu Buddhas and animistic influences still played a major role in the spiritual faith of locals (Adeng, Kuswiah, Wiryono, & Erwantoro, 1998). Malay's cosmological concepts are adapted to urban structure, shape and ecosystems based on the acknowledgement of Malay's Royal Town planning, with three basic principles of humanity, guidance and place (nature). Using this idea in the planning of Malay Royal Towns, peace and equilibrium between the human and the world and the creator is assumed to be maintained. The definition of Malay cosmology is one of the fields of philosophy that research the origins, processes and mechanisms of the universe that affect the life of a Malay society that is essential for shaping a Malay community (Perret, 1999b). Malpas (2018) and Purwanto. (2005) argue that cosmology implies order, harmony, and harmony as embodiments of the universe system. This definition is used to govern interactions between humans and society catalysed in the structure of regulations and procedures and physical objects. (buildings and surroundings environments). For the Malay Cosmology, which is derived from Islamic teachings, this concept of cosmology can be divided into three fundamental parts of which

the universe is a macrocosm, microcosm as human and metacosm to be God or the macrocosm and microcosm's Creator altogether (Hady, 2006). The Malay cosmology philosophical is based on the concept of the cosmological mandala, in which the world is described by divine symbols and rituals when they are obedient to their sovereign. At the heart of this hierarchical concept is the central government and the palace that the king resides, while the external layer of this hierarchy under Central Government control is a fairly independent province. This cosmological idea is also related to the Hindu cosmological teachings, whereby Mount Meru, regarded as the sacred mountain of faith and is located in the centre and surrounded by the ocean. (Tambiah, 1985; Wolters, 1999)

However, this idea was reiterated when Islam was at that point the official religion of every Malay sultanate. (Perret, 1999a). The dominance of Hindu-Buddha compromised the notion of *Dewaraja* in the Malay royal institutions, and Islam was then said to have started in the 7th century and then spread to the 11th century (Fatimi, 1963, pp. 69-70) and proceeded to enhance the prestige of the Sultan by giving distinction as God's caliph or the representant of God in performing the duties as the government on earth. Yet Islam could not eliminate the influence of the Hindu-Buddha faith in monetary institutions by taking its place in the Malay world. In addition to that, any element compatible with the local community culture was greatly influenced by traditional established values. (Fatimi, 1963). The cosmological Malay definition of the Malay Royal towns in Malaysia is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Malay Cosmological Concept of Malay Royal towns.

Greece is a model of town construction, and city space and planning is required. The word 'polis', considered a Greek city concept, is similar to that used in Indian mandala, where a city is called 'Pura'. In the Kingdom of Malay, the town was known as a 'Kota', which applies the Malay cosmology concept (Sulaiman, Wan Teh, & Rahman, 2017). The Malay cosmological principle adopted by the hierarchical layer structure is the basis of the cosmological mandala system. Before the town planning systems can be developed, security planning systems must be set up. Concerning that, the King or Sultan must be safe when a new town is built.

*"... a royal complex should be strong. It should be protected by walls and drains and contain treasury, administrators and areas dedicated to various economic activities"(Higham, 2002, p. 97).*

The defence system in the city must be adequate to guarantee such circumstances occur. Therefore, planning must begin with the Sultan's palace and then proceeded to the *balairungseri*, the whole palace complex, the walls used as a fortification, and finally the military walls, ensuring that nothing can be penetrated by external attacks(Perret, 1999b).

#### **4. UNDERSTANDING OF TRADITIONAL MALAY ROYAL TOWN**

The town is an important area to the government or a kingdom. In Arabic, the town is called the

word Madinah. Some Muslim scholars call these two differences with the words *al-badwi* or *ahlu-al-Badwi* and *al-hadhar*. The root of this word is *dana-yadinu*. In *Lisanu al-Arab* it can be concluded that this word has four meanings, namely: law, obedience, rebuke and belief. In English, this word is often matched with the word town or city. The word is taken from the ancient French *Citet*, while in Latin, the city is *Urbs*, and its inhabitants are called *Civis*. The choice of the name *Madinah* which comes from the word *dana-yadinu*, then becomes a new verb *madana-yamdanu* which can mean to build, to go to the city, to make civilisation, is a process from an ordinary place to a place where religion lives and is lived in the framework of Islamic worldview a civilisation. The characteristics of the city, according to Ibn Khaldun which is large and dominant buildings. The trade-in the town is so tight in competition. Meanwhile, the citizens need influence and self-protection. The towns have an existence of strong fanaticism, and finally, in every town, they used a different language to communicate among themselves.

The simple design during the planning stage of a traditional Malay royal town, which is based on three basic principles that involve humanity, guidance and place (nature), is decided based on the Malay cosmology concept derived from the Islamic belief. This concept is clarified in the following.

#### **4.1 The Kingdom of Malay**

The administration normally constitutes a country or kingdom. A nation called Malays has then emerged from the administration of this archipelago. The Malays are predestined to be Muslims, follow Malay rituals, converse in Malay and have a chief from the Malay sultanate (Bahasan, 2010). During the disembarkment of the Islam religion to this archipelago, it initiates the birth of the nation and the medium of communication and sultanate (administration) of the Malays. The ecology of humans is evident in the ties and organisation of strata of society where the inhabitants' lives are overwhelmed and interconnected and with the living in a community. The Sultan is positioned in the top hierarchy within the nation, preceded by the state leaders and afterwards the people. The archipelago does not have an overwhelming gap within it; meetings between the leaders and the people can still be held to discuss matters and voice out things about issues and concerns.

The way the administration of the Malay Kingdom operated made it possible as the use of the open concept was being applied, which also means that the people of the kingdom are free to have an audience with the rulers, including the Sultan, if they wish to enunciate matters. This closely relates to a famous old Malay saying, '*sultan dan rakyat berpisah tiada*' and still being practised to the present day to exemplify this particular concept (Razali & Idris, 2018).

#### **4.2 Malay Customs and Culture**

Elements that are considered significant are the Malay customs and the culture, especially when it comes to the design planning stage of the Malay Royal Town. An old proverb from Malay stated, "*adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi kitabulla*", which carries the leaning that social interaction ought to adhere to Islam's practice and religion (Darussamin, 2017). That is also why Malay traditions and culture are rooted in the teachings of the Quran and has been sought out to assist in the Malays' way of life. Furthermore, the economic, political, social and military structures of the Malay Royal town also conform to the law passed by Islam which epitomises the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) model of Islamic city during

the times of his governance of the Madinah city. (Yang, 2017). The group of Islamic scholars established these customs and cultures, which became the consultant and minister of the Sultan and expanded it to local people. Ideology culture also evolved throughout the archipelago when Malay tradition and culture have been passed through verbal and practical experience from generation to generation. The customs taking place in the celebration of marriage among Malay people, including pre-engaged, engaged, and mutual collaboration, are examples of how the culture has evolved.

#### **4.3 Malay Territory**

The idea of the Malay Kingdom township is a result of establishing a settlement community with its leaders and governments. Its development depends on its strategic position, the availability of natural resources, and the ability to cater to the exercises in the township. (Jacq-Hergoualc'h, 2018). An Old Malay Town is seen to be equivalent to the rule of the Islamic State and has a frontier that specifies the region of its authority. The distance between the areas of the jetty and cemetery can be determined exactly to calculate the parameter of the Malay royal town. The access point to the Malay Royal towns is through the jetty area, situated by the river banks, while at the end of the town, the cemetery sits along with the head of the river. The measurement procedure is based on a clear understanding of the point of entry for the ships carrying goods that join the lane from the edge of the sea to the region of the Malay Royal Town downstream to the river (Roque, 2018).

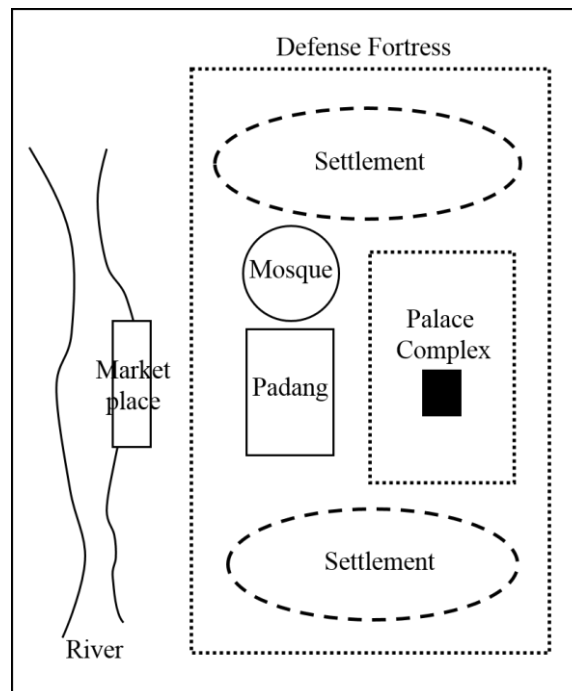
Research shows that the Malay Royal Town did not have the traits in terms of buildings of western royal towns, although the desire to influence the Malay kingdom and bring the prominence of western royalty to the Malay Royal Town was present. On the contrary of being a modest town, the Malay Royal Town's administrative is an efficient system which is now a renowned port, mostly visited by merchants worldwide. According to the historical understanding, expansion of the form and the government's territory space occurs when there is an episode of the sultanate's power transition (occurrence of

death). The newly-appointed Sultan would create the palace of administration in a new location and implicitly extend the territories of his town, which has become a tradition.

## 5. UNDERSTANDING OF TRADITIONAL MALAY ROYAL TOWN

The Royal Towns of Malay have been represented as traditional historical towns with great cultural and physical impacts on the community and the urban landscape settings. (Muslim, Hassan, &

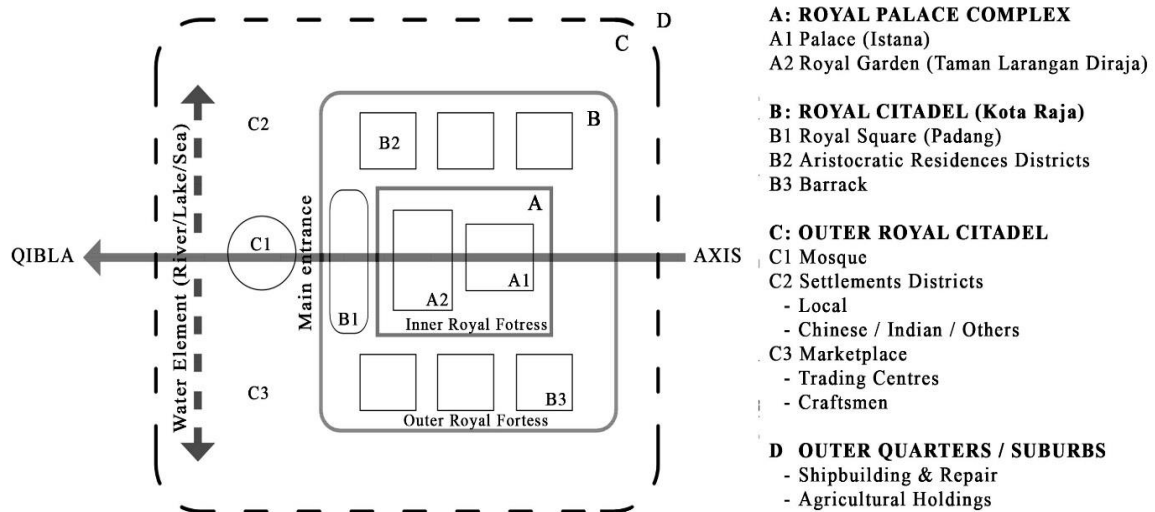
Umar, 2013). These towns have also been described as traditional towns with palace buildings in their vicinity (Harun & Jalil, 2012). A recent Malay description of the royal town indicates that the town has strong relations between the society, security fortress and the King Fort 'Istana Berkota', which is situated in the district of Royal administrative (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018). The layout of the early Malay royal towns of Malay is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Model of Early Traditional Malay Royal towns in Malaysia  
Source: (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018)

The idea of palace architecture in the Malay Royal town, according to Hanafi (2005), is a representation of the Malay cosmology through the incorporation of human elements, social and even religion. Looking at all of Malaysia's Royal town, it points out that the environments of buildings, palaces, gardens and fields, and even

Mosques are facing towards the Qibla, where water features are positioned within the grounds of the palace. Therefore, the Royal Palace complex is significant as a hub and a landmark for a Malay Royal town. Figure 3 illustrates the orientation and settings of the palace complex directing towards the direction of Qibla (figure 3).



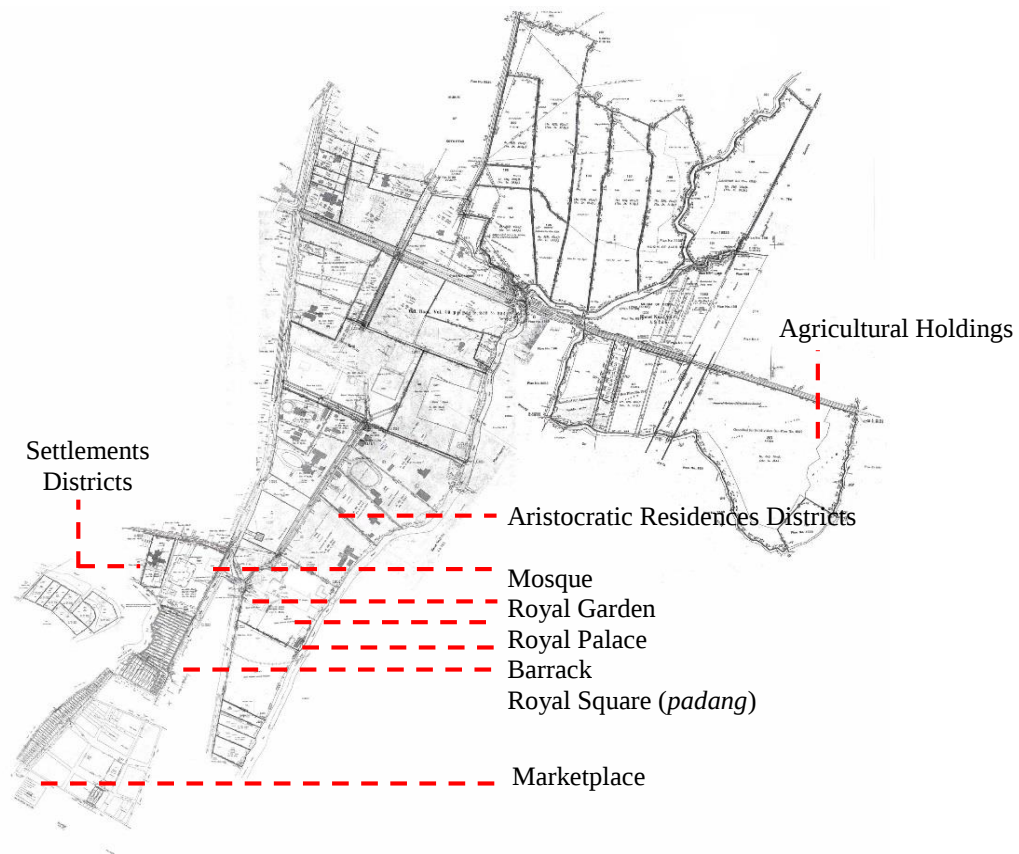
**Figure 3.** Model of Malay Royal towns

*“... The royal palace in the centre, surrounded by four squares fortress with their respective roles and function: elephant parks, traders' quarters, craftsmen, entertainers and residences. All of this is protected by walls, fortress and drains. Religious places can be built inside or outside the walls. Taking into consideration the weather and seasonal rainfall, the pool or pond was built and connected to the drainage system and became a water source for the residents and agricultural area” (Higham, 2002, p. 62).*

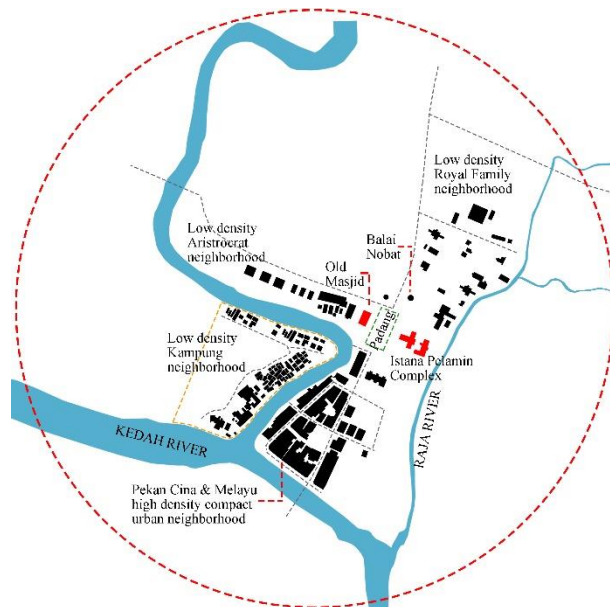
The element of water, which is the river, is deemed to be significant in the concept of Malay cosmology. The river not only acts as a defensive base and as a means of transport, but it is also claimed to be a divine gift. It is believed that the more water elements there are around the palace area, the better it is. According to the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology, water is a preferred place for Hyang and the Gods (Munandar, 2007; Oktikasari, 2008). Alor Setar, Kota Bharu, and Kuala Terengganu are the Royal towns of Malay

positioned in close proximity to water, while a pond is situated in the vicinity of the palace in Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan. It is almost impossible to separate water from the Malay culture. Based on the Malay cosmology belief, water elements symbolise purity and brings hope as well as pleasure.

Fourteen (14) attributes that fabricate the Malay Royal town constitute the main and supporting elements. The main element and supportive elements are the two groups of the category used to classify the elements (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Rozaly, 2018). The category of main elements found in the Malay Royal Towns comprises of places of worship (mosque), place of gathering (royal square), settlements (residence), governance (palace complex), place of coronation (palace complex), place of merchandise (marketplace), area of entry (river or land route), fortress and gateway. On the other hand, the supporting elements that established the Malay Royal town enclose the art venues (cultural activities, folk sports), farming areas (gardening, farming), poultry, the carpentry and place of meditation (Shukri, Manteghi, Wahab, Amat, & Wong, 2018).



**Figure 4.** Settings of Malay Royal Town Elements in Alor Setar, Kedah



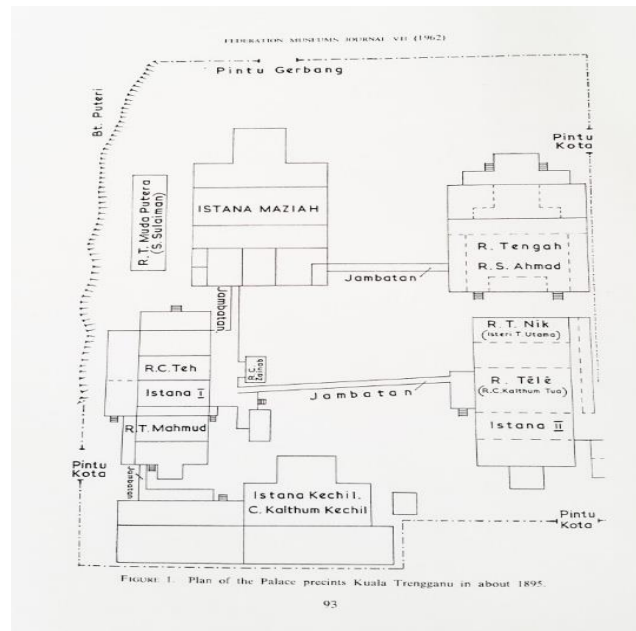
**Figure 5.** 19<sup>th</sup> century (1735-1908) projection of urban pattern configuration of Alor Setar – a reconstruction from historical sources

The structure of Malay Royal towns is split into three hierarchical tiers, the nucleus of the hierarchy being the royal palace complex circled by a 2-layer fortress *Kota Dalam* and *Kota Luar*. (*Kota Tanah*). The city is built for safety and protection purposes, hence the layers and fortresses (Shukri, Wahab, Amat, Taib, & Ismail, 2018). The hierarchical structure is placed in the heart of the town, where the palace complex is instituted. The reason for such placements and settings is to uphold the complex of the palace as

the focal point of administration and as a landmark defining the Malay Royal Town. This is due to the roles of the palace complex as a centre of administration and as landmarks of the Malay Royal towns. Thus, the main elements of Malay Royal Town are placed strategically. The supporting elements, on the other hand, are somewhat scattered. Therefore, an established building, with the role of a supporting element, is naturally erected and is irregular and shaped in a non-geometric manner.



**Figure 6.** Form and Settings of Malay Royal Town that characterise the town identity in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.



**Figure 7.** Kota Kuala Terengganu in 1888 shows all the buildings connected to each other's Source: Federation Museums Journal, Vol VII 1962, pg 93.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The concept of Malaysia's Malay Royal towns can be depicted by harnessing the Malay cosmological concept, whereby the orientation of the king or Sultan is Islamist, or to be more precise, the influence of Islam being absorbed into the Malay culture. The Islamisation of Malaysia led to many modifications to the old concept, particularly in the sultanate kingdoms in Malay. The culture and values that once prevailed through Indian culture were effectively deserted. But Hindu-Buddha values cannot be taken away from society because it has become a common way to do things and is deeply rooted within one's hereditary. Although the sultanate empire emerged from Islam, the fundamental cosmology of the planning of Malay Royal towns appears to adhere to the Hindu- Buddha cosmology idea in terms of city hierarchy, making it extraordinary. There is a concept that resulted from the unique unity of Hindu-Buddha and Islamic cosmology in the Malay Royal towns, and therefore such conceptualisation should be well-maintained. In addition, this concept automatically sustains the harmony between humans and the universe, educating humans to be more knowledgeable in the way they conduct themselves and when making use of the environment

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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