

Legacy in Social Space

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ABSTRACT

This study shows how a civilization built by a Tamil migrant community can defend their existences in Kampung Keling in the middle of changes happening around them. How the original name of the area that came from the migrants can be maintained as the amount of this community's member decreasing over time. How this migrant community brings the legacy of their daily life into public space that is still going on until today and how this community can bring up Kampung Keling area be the landmark of Medan city.

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INTRODUCTION

Kampung Keling, once an old residential area in Medan city, has been being developed over time and becomes the most elite commercial area during the last century. Behind its famous name, this area has so many histories came from the civilization of this Tamil migrant community, who had settled in this area since long time ago before Indonesia's independence. The culture life of this community that exists until today has become the characteristic of this area and has made Kampung Keling be the landmark of Medan city. Eventhough the amount of Tamil community is decreasing because of the extreme development in their surrounding, this community still can withstand with their own living. This community can maintain their daily life as a culture and the legacy that they bring to the public space in the middle of modernity that comes in to Kampung Keling area. Zainul Arifin Street as the main street in this area becomes the 'performance stage' of Tamil community in exposing their daily life into public space.

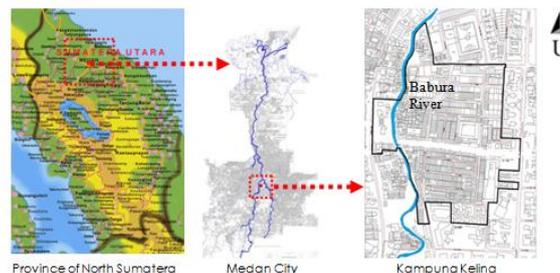


Fig. 1: Map of Kampung Keling.

History of tamil community in kampung keling:

Tamil community was migrants who came to Indonesia from South India in 1873 as the workers of tobacco field, run by the Dutch colonial government in Tanah Deli, East Sumatera (old name of North Sumatera).

Around 25 Tamils came at that time and occupied the area near Babura River. After the settlement, in 1884, this community built a Shri Mariamman Temple as the tradition everytime they settled a new place, then followed by Shri Subramaniam Temple in 1892 and Shri Kaliamman Temple in 1905.

In 1917, as the regulation from the Dutch colonial government, this settlement area was set as a residential area for Tamil community according to the 'quarter system', a concept that divided residential area based on the ethnicity [Buiskool]. Since that, this area had been so popular as Tamil settlement and then was named Kampung Keling.

The appellation Kampung Keling was derived from the name of *Kalingga* Kingdom, which usually referred to the origin of South India. Kalingga was called *Kalingen* by the Dutch and local people call it *Keling*.

Within the Dutch colonial government, Kampung Keling area was very identic with Tamils. The walkways were named with the place or character related to India, such as Calcutta Straat (the main street), Colombo Straat, Madras Straat, Nagaphatnam Straat, Ceylon Straat and Bombay Straat.

At first, Kampung Keling was originally a village with houses separated from the other. Every house has a large yard where they farmed and bred oxen. The shady trees and the soil walkways were the most popular common spaces for the people to run their daily life in kindness and harmony.

In 1941, Kampung Keling had been developed step by step, the electricity had already been provided to this area. There was not only houses erected in this area but also an entertainment place like theatre was built. Kampung Keling area has been developed following by the development of Medan city (Figure 2). This made Kampung Keling as the centre and the vocal point of Medan. It became the part of this city because its history since the city was existed.

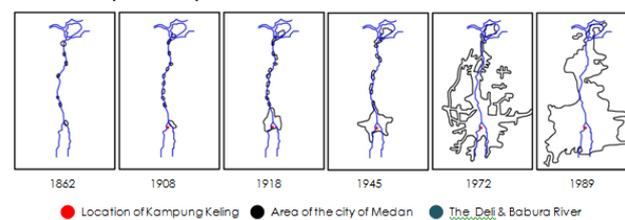


Figure 2: Development of the City of Medan from 1862-1989

Fig. 2: Development of the City of Medan from 1862-1989

After Indonesia's independence, in 1945, many of the capital cities were developed included Medan city. At that time, the walkways were reconstructed to be bituminous road and their names were changed as well to the names of Indonesian character. Calcutta Straat became Zainul Arifin Street, Colombo Straat became Cik di Tiro Street, Madras Straat became Jenggala Street, Nagaphatnam Straat became Kediri Street, Ceylon Straat became Muara Takus Street and Bombay Straat became Teuku Umar Street.

In 1960, the strategic location of Kampung Keling has led Chinese community came into this area. Chinese community realized that this area could be a best place to run their bussiness and then bought the houses and lands from Tamils who lived in the centre of this area with high prices. Selling land to Chinese made Tamils in the center area moved out from this Kampung Keling. Since that, Chinese community always brings in modernities from outside city into Kampung Keling and developes this area to be the most elite commercial area in Medan city.

Communities And Kampung Keling Nowadays:

- *Tamil Community:*

The remaining of Tamil community lives at the periphery area along Babura River in the west side of Kampung Keling which namely: Dayak Village, Mayor Village, Kubur Village and Madras Hulu Village (Figure 3).

Due to the low price lands, Tamil community has to survive while living in poor condition in the irregular area. Their houses are located behind the shop houses with narrow walkways inside the villages, which only can be passed by a motorcycle. The houses are very small without terraces in front of it and mostly made of wood.

They still live in their local daily life space with the use value. The low education and their inability to compete in the city forcing them to only rely on working as low paid workers to Chinese families such as housekeepers, nightwatchmen, drivers, etc.

- *Chinese Community:*

In the other hand, the good living and bussiness condition of Chinese community have changed the appearance of Kampung Keling drastically with the rows of shophouses which were erected along the main street of this area. Not only there, the growth of bussiness belonged to Chinese community has changed and developed this area to be the most elite commercial district in Medan city since 1970s and moreover can be

seen clearly from several mega projects erected at both end of Zainul Arifin Street during 2000s (Figure 4). Chinese community brings modernizations to the commercial space with the exchange value in the center area.

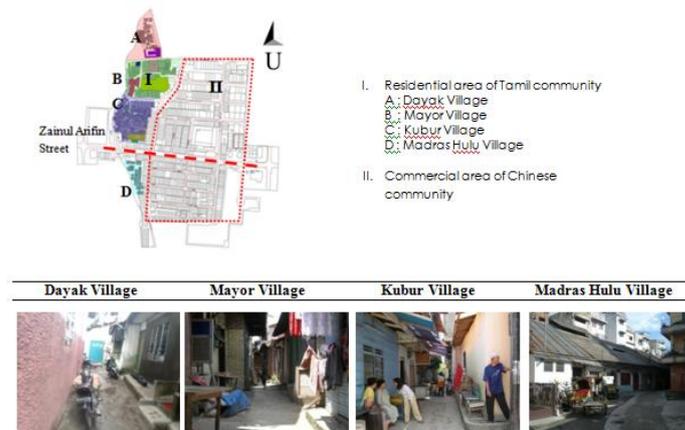


Fig. 3: Residential Area of Tamil Community Currently.



Fig. 4: Commercial Building and House of Worship at Zainul Arifin Street.

Social Relationship Between Tamil Community And Chinese Community:

The differences of income and education levels between Tamil community and Chinese community in Kampung Keling do not become the barrier for them to live in peace and harmony. Since generations ago, Tamil community and Chinese community knew each other. They mingled in every custom events and wedding celebrations. They use the temple together, not only Tamil community prays in the temple, but Chinese also uses it for praying place since they believe that temple is more quiet and solemn. In particular night, both communities are usually drinking coffee together in the pavement cafes on the roadside. They also help each other if any adversity happened, like the fire happened in 1991 and destroyed almost all houses in Kubur Village. At that time, Tamils lived in the Shri Mariamman Temple for a while and Chinese came to visit and supply foods. Not money or occupation but the cherish and deep feeling on Kampung Keling as the place where they live makes them feel like brothers.

Tamil community that lives in low income level, supports themselves by working in Chinese families although with low salary. The men work as drives, parking attendants or nightwatchmen; women work as housekeepers; and the youngsters help in Chinese shops lifting goods.

In other hands, Chinese community who lives with high income in the centre area, runs their big scale bussiness from shophouses until the mega projects. Nowadays, 85% of the total area of Kampung Keling is occupied by Chinese community (Figure 5).

Legacy In Space:

Eventhough the remaining of Tamil community lives in the lower condition compared to Chinese community, they always find ways to maintain their existences in Kampung Keling. Tamil community comes with simple ways. They run their small bussiness of selling fireworks along the pedestrian walkways in front of shophouses belonged to Chinese community, and has been as a legacy from 3 generations ago.

Three times a year, for a month, before the celebration of Ied Fitri, Chinese New Year and Christmas New Year, Tamil community runs fireworks stalls from 11am to midnight every day for whole month.

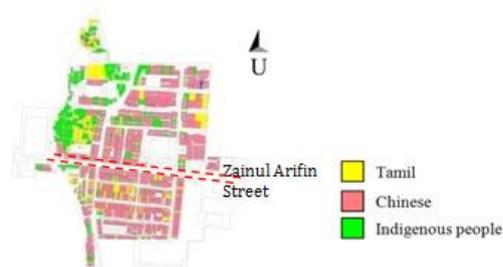


Fig. 5: Ethnic Map of Kampung Keling.

Tamil community brings the non-permanent wooden stalls from their homes to be put in front of the shophouses. Every family has their own location which never changed from generation to generation. The stalls are only covered with plastics if it is raining (Figure 6).

This daily activities do not bother Chinese community, otherwise it makes Chinese community feel secure. They believe that by allowing Tamils run their businesses in the front of the shops so it may attract people to come to their shops. Also with the attendance of Tamils around them, their own bigger businesses can be protected from outside obstructions.

For Tamil community's sake, this petty bussiness can cover their needs for a whole year. This also can be the way for them to appear and become part of this center area. Tamil community can still maintain their characteristic and the existence of their daily life from the periphery area into the space that they create on the public space. This space then can be seen as the social space [Lefebvre], where the contrast way of life, the daily life of Tamil community in the periphery area and the commercial life of Chinese community in the center area, can blend together in harmony.

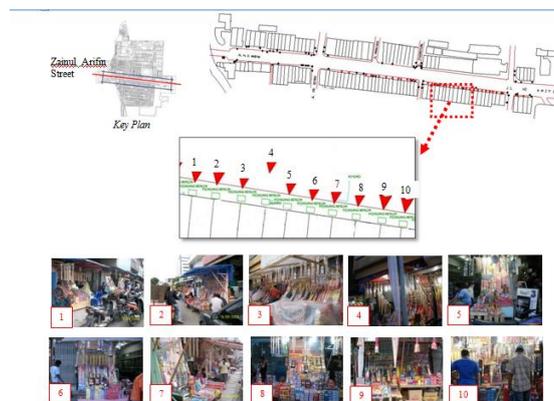


Fig. 6: Placement of Fireworks Stalls (partial) in Kampung Keling.

In this social space, Tamil community comes out bringing their families and children to join selling the fireworks. The activities that they usually conduct in the periphery area can be clearly seen in the public space. These people bring their own chairs; having a talk and gossiping with people from the neighbour stalls with the unique accent in their mother language by waving their head. They do activities taking breakfast, lunch and even dinner at the stalls, eat together with their family during keeping the stalls (Figure 7). Tamil community with their exotic skin colour and how they speak become an interest for people to take a look.



Fig. 7: Tamil Community in Social Space.

Activity conducted by Tamil community in selling fireworks in the pedestrian path in front of shop-houses of Chinese community has become the characteristic not only for this community but also for Kampung Keling area. Until now, this area is very popular as the firework sellers center in Medan city.

At the grand, every New Year Eve, Kampung Keling area at Zainul Arifin Street becomes the biggest point for fireworks festival (Figure 8).



Fig. 8: Firework Festival in Kampung Keling on New Year Eve.

Conclusion:

The initial people of Kampung Keling, Tamil community, bring their daily life into the social space along the pedestrian path in front of the shop houses of Chinese community. This social space becomes the performance stage for this community to carry on the legacy from their grandparents and to show public that they are exist as the part of Medan city.

The social space appears as the legacy of Tamil immigrants' history and also the legacy of the city's history.

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