

The Presence of Social Space

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Abstract

Kampung Keling, once a residential area in Medan, has advanced significantly into an elite commercial area over the last century. Initially, this region was a residential district of Tamil community, but since the 1960s was turned into the commercial area which then was dominated by the Chinese community. Accordingly, the use-value of daily life in Kampung Keling of Tamil community has changed into the exchange-value of the abstract space of the Chinese community that oriented to material advantage. The result of the research shows that the cultural heterogeneity of Tamil and Chinese communities in Kampung Keling are potential to build a harmonious social relationship. The social relationship which is occurred between the two communities then creates a new social space. The Tamils run their non-permanent firework stalls along the pedestrian pathways in front of Chinese's shop houses.

Keywords: Kampung Keling, Social-space

Introduction

Kampung Keling (Figure 1), an old residential area in Medan City, has undergone significant changes during the development. Started as a settlement area of the initial community of Tamil ethnic, Kampung Keling currently is filled with shop houses belonged to the Chinese community. In the 2000s, Kampung Keling was enlivened by the mega project buildings such as malls and hotels.

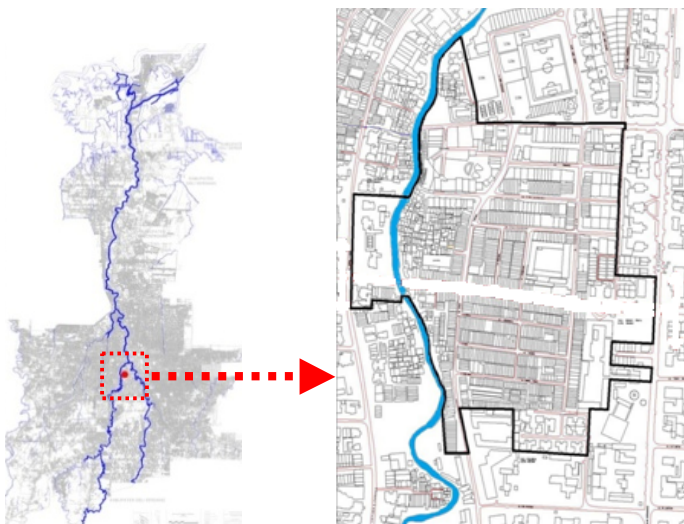


Figure 1. Map of Kampung Keling

Adjusting to the changes, the remaining of Tamil community who lived in the periphery area of Kampung Keling brings their daily life into the public space. They present in the areas around the Chinese's shop houses, open small scale non-permanent sales stalls.

The harmonious social relation between the Chinese community which dominates the centre of the area and the Tamil community on the periphery creates a new space called social-space. This space which is generated by a social relationship of the two communities describes the struggle of Tamil community in maintaining their existence toward the social changes that occurred in Kampung Keling and to protect the business activity of Chinese. For both communities, the social space is also a way to achieve economic interests respectively.

This paper intends to discover and elaborates the presence of social space occurred in Kampung Keling, which connects the periphery and centre spaces, the use value brought by Tamil community in daily life space and the exchange value brought by the Chinese community in the abstract space.

Social Space

Henri Lefebvre (2004) stated that the city space can be analyzed by understanding their social relationships. The emergence of space cannot be separated from social life. Space is not only an output produced but also the means of production.

The concept of *Production of Space* stated by Lefebvre is a dialectic of space that includes three spaces (*triad space*), namely: the space of daily life with the use value (*perceived space*), abstract space with exchange-value (*conceived space*) and space-social (*lived -space*) that occurs as a result of the social relationships.

Method

A qualitative method was used in the study of the presence of social space in Kampung Keling. The only technique used is the direct site observation by a researcher in the whole area and the interpretation of the interviews with the informants. The primary data from direct observation of the spaces that are predicted as a new space along the pedestrian pathways in Kampung Keling are recorded and mapped.

Discussion

a. The History of Tamil Community and Kampung Keling

Initially, Tamil community is an immigrant who was brought to Indonesia as workers. The unveiling cooperation of tobacco fields in Tanah Deli between the Malays and the Dutch colonial government required a lot of manpower. So that in 1873 for the first time this tobacco fields received 25 Indian Tamil labours from the island of Penang and Singapore.

To improve the performance of workers, the Dutch colonial government ran a social concept that consigned the area of Kampung Keling as a settlement for Tamil community. The determination of this location was the part of the design concept of Medan city called 'quarter system' developed by the Netherlands in 1917 to divide the settlement zones based on ethnicity (Buiskol, 2004).

This concept gave the freedom to build houses of worship respectively. So that in 1884, Hinduism Tamil community built the Shri Mariamman Temple, which nowadays becoming the oldest Hindu temple in Medan city, followed by the Shri Subramaniam Temple in 1892 and Sri Kaliamman Temple in 1905.

At the beginning of placement, the residential area in Kampung Keling was a village with houses that were separated from each other with a large yard. There were shady trees everywhere, and the paths were made of soil. Tamil community was gardening and feeding cows, children were playing in the yard, mothers and fathers interacted in an open space. Every day they bathed and washed in the river. In every custom events and cultural and religious celebrations, they worked together in kindness. Tamil community ran their daily life in the space they produced themselves.

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 the bituminous road and their name were changed as well to the name of Indonesian characters or heroes, such as 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.

b. Kampung Keling Nowadays

Physically, the strategic location of Kampung Keling led this area to thrive from time to time. Since the 1960s, most of Tamil community sold their lands and buildings to the Chinese community, and they moved out to outside area.

The remaining of Tamil community lived in the dense and irregular periphery area in four villages along the Barbara River in the west side area which namely: Dayak Village, Mayor Village, Kubur Village, and Madras Hulu Village (Figure 2). These villages are located behind the houses and shop houses adjacent to the river. Most of the houses are small and with insufficient drainage. The circulation system is only a narrow passage, which is only accessible by motorbike. Their houses are not directly visible from the road but hid behind the shop houses belonged to Chinese ethnic.

In social point of view, the Tamil community has a low education so that the chance of getting a job becomes very limited. Most of them work in service jobs with inadequate salary. They work in Chinese families as housekeepers, night watchmen, and parking attendants.

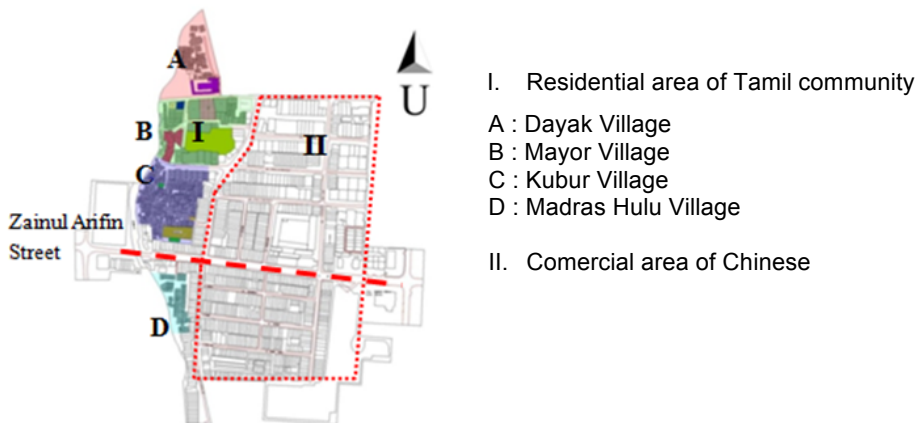


Figure 2. Situation of Residential of Tamil Community at the Suburb Area

In the other hand, since 1970s, Kampung Keling was developed into the most elite commercial district in Medan city. Even in the era of 2000s, Kampung Keling enlivened mega projects such as malls and hotels. Until now, 85% of Kampung Keling areas are occupied by the Chinese community

The appearances of the buildings in the area are dominated by commercial buildings that used as commercial buildings with modern looks, colourful and glass-made windows to attract people. All these modern buildings are located at Zainul Arifin Street, the longest and primary roads in the region which divide Kampung Keling from the East edge to the West edge of the region. It becomes the busiest and most crowded streets in Medan which representing the development of Kampung Keling area (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Commercial Building and House of Worship at Zainul Arifin Street

The bustling abstract spaces with business activity belong to Chinese community dominates the central area of Kampung Keling. Chinese community continuously advances their business, so that their life is much better than the Tamil community.

The dense and unplanned residential area inhabited by the Tamil community and the commercial space as well as the mega projects owned by Chinese communities present together in Kampung Keling.

c. Socialization between Tamil – Chinese Communities

Although the Tamil community lives in very less amount and marginalized space, they do not feel neglected. They mingle harmoniously with Chinese community since many years ago and continue up to now.

There is no jealousy between the two communities. A tight social relationship between two communities exists not only because they know each other, but also because they keep the feeling and mutual respect. In spite of having different religious, people in Kampung Keling still feel like family.

The individual and introvert character of Chinese community can be lost because of social relationships with the Tamil community in Kampung Keling. If Chinese get in trouble, they do not hesitate to ask help from the Tamils, even they also use Shri Mariamman temple as a place for praying.

Despite having differences in economic level, Tamil community becomes precious need for the Chinese community in Kampung Keling. Chinese community who has a higher economic level than Tamil community feels greatly helped and safe with Tamil community works with them either as drivers, guards, or housekeepers.

In the other hand, for Tamil community, being accepted by the Chinese community might help them in carrying out their daily life. With the lower education levels, Tamil community can get the opportunity to earn revenue from the Chinese community.

d. The Presence of Social Space in Kampung Keling

Modernity brought by the new comer Chinese immigrants and the locality by Tamil community as the initial people, present the different values and spaces in Kampung Keling. Chinese community brings the exchange value in abstract space (*conceived space*), while Tamil community brings the use value in their daily life space (*perceived space*). However, the social relation between the two communities unifies both the different values and spaces into one new space called social space. In this social space, the existence of the Tamil community as part of Medan city can be seen clearly.

The economic interest of both communities becomes the main aspect of using the public space as the new social space. Economic considerations of the pedestrian pathways in front of Chinese's shop houses brings on Zainul Arifin Street a new social space for the two communities. In this case, social space becomes a way to achieve their respective goals.

For Chinese community, their commercial business in Kampung Keling can be more secure from the threat of racism and gangster by allowing Tamil community has the fireworks stalls in front of their shops. Fireworks stalls become an attraction for buyers. At the time a lot of people choose fireworks, they are also indirectly attracted to come and visit the shops belonged to the Chinese community. This social space also is reviving business activities belonged to Chinese community that weakened by the construction of the mega project in Kampung Keling. In this context, both Tamil and Chinese communities mutually benefit.

As for the Tamils, their selling activities in front of shop houses at Zainul Arifin Street had been going on for three generations. It is a routine activity that occurred three times a year, respectively during a month before the celebration of Eid Fitri, Chinese New Year and Christmas / New Year. They open their stalls along the pedestrian pathways in Kampung Keling from 11 am until midnight. For them, the profit from this activity can cover their needs for a whole year.

The firework stalls long the pedestrian pathways show the social space where the various spaces (*daily life space/ perceived space* and *abstract space/ conceived space*), values (*use value* and *exchange value*), styles and way of life (*locality* and *globalism*) and communities blend together (Figure 4).

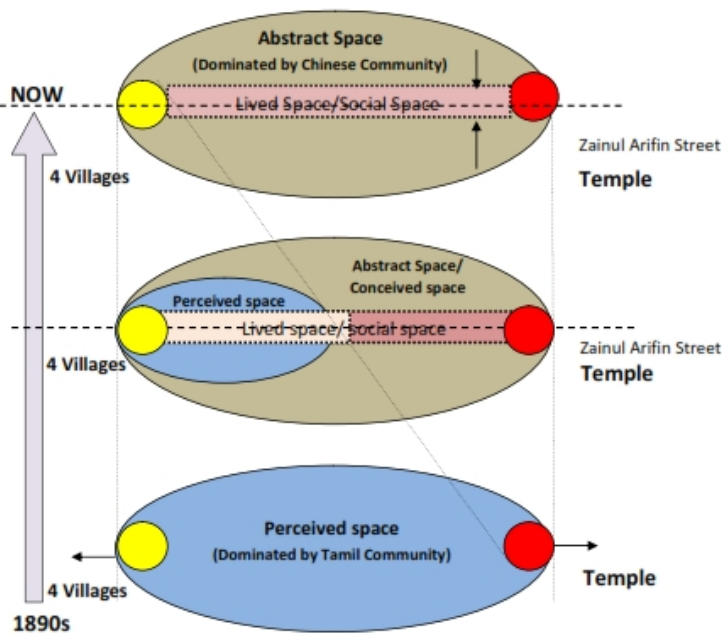


Figure 4. Diagram of The Presence of Social-space in Kampung Keling

In adjusting to globalization, Tamil community is trying to adapt to the time changed. Selling fireworks in the pedestrian pathways along Zainul Arifin Street have become the routine activity of Tamil community since a long time. The non-permanent firework stalls in the pedestrian pathways become the space of their daily life that was taken to the public space. And all this time, the fireworks stalls do not disturb pedestrians.

To sell fireworks, they use the non-permanent stalls made of wood and plywood which looks like ladders with plastic roofs (Figure 5). At night, the stalls get the lights from the shop houses owned by Chinese community. At the rainy day, fireworks stalls are not closed but only covered with plastic. After a month-long sell, Tamil community brings the stalls return to their homes.

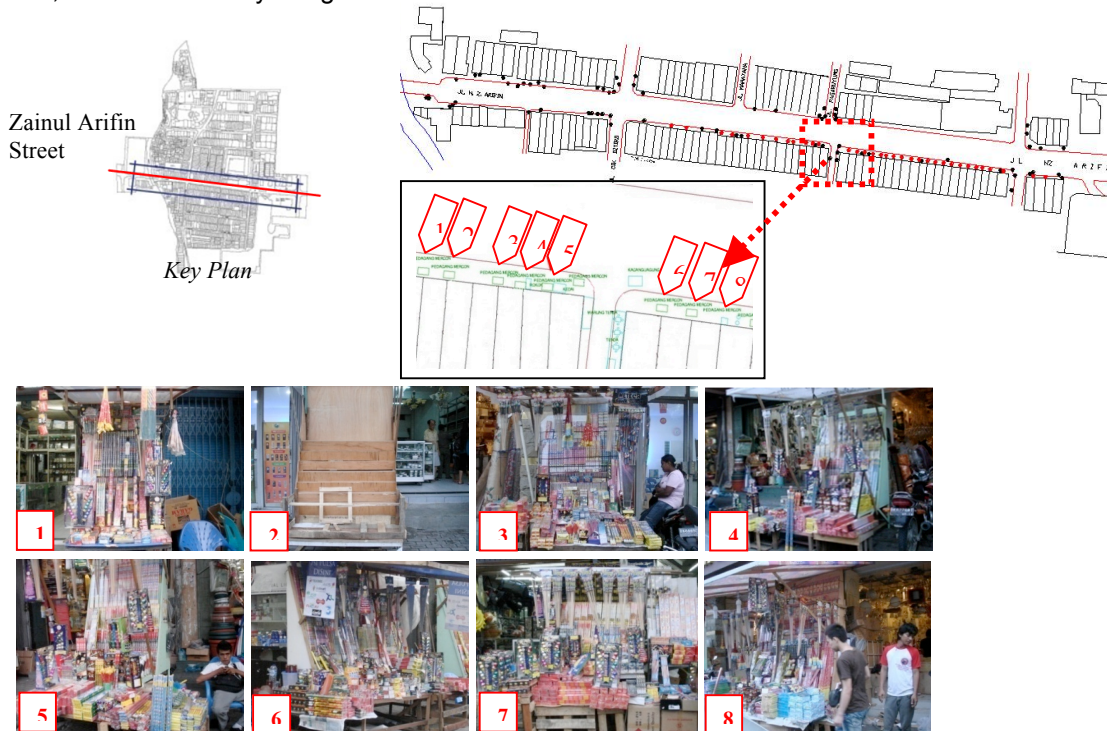


Figure 5. Placement of Fireworks Stalls at Zainul Arifin Street

Social space is the strength of the area and becomes the powerful magnet that attracts people of the city to come to Kampung Keling. The attraction comes from a purely social relationship between Tamil community and Chinese community in the area without any intervention of the government or other communities. Until

nowadays, Kampung Keling becomes a famous fireworks seller in Medan city and the centre of the fireworks festival even on New Year's Eve.

Conclusion

The outcome of this study indicates that the presence social space in Kampung Keling, a part of a modern city, can be real by the harmonious relationship between Tamils and Chinese who live together in this area.

This study also gives that the identity of a city is not only in the form of physical things, but also in the form of the activities undertaken by the local communities. The activity of selling fireworks by the Tamil community can maintain and even strengthen the identity of Kampung Keling as a landmark of Medan city and the existence of Tamil community. Without the presence of social spaces, the identity of this area might be lost.

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