

# The Change of Social Life of the China Community in Pekan Labuhan, Medan, Indonesia

Morida Siagian<sup>1</sup>, Samsul Bahri<sup>1</sup>, and Rudolf Sitorus<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Keywords: China Architecture, China Community

Abstract: Pekan Labuhan is the old area of Medan where has the change of social life and settlement. Since the end 18<sup>th</sup> century until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the China community has undergone a process of social life in a row of shophouses at this area. The destruction of social life of the China community was influenced by the emergence of a political incident in Medan. The atmosphere and the dynamics of social life in the area also has changed. Today, the physical aspects are still dominated by China architecture, but the social lives are dominated by Malay community.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The early development of Medan began from Pekan Labuhan. The access to the port from the Deli River makes newcomers interested to explore this area. The progression of Deli Tobacco Plantations Company managed by the Dutch company. Started from this area since in 1886 Pekan Labuhan were accessible for river transportation through the port of Deli, bus transportation, and rail transportation access. Shophouses, business centers, houses of worship and office plantations grow in Jl. Syahudin Yatim, the main streets of the area. In 1990, Pekan Labuhan had grown to be commercial center of trade for the local people and abroad.

The presence of commercial center in Pekan Labuhan are not separated from the role of China community. China settlement in this area emerged since the beginning of the development and the civilization form is extent until this day. The building form row of shophouses and 2 viharas still exists until today, but the activities of China community is not found again. That contrast situation make this discussion is so important. Why is this area been maintained and developed by a China community since now it is dominated by indigenous activities?

## 2 THE PRESENCE OF CHINA ARCHITECTURE SHOPHOUSES

The area of Pekan Labuhan is a residential of China community since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They live in row of China architecture style shophouses. The buildings form has a regular grid pattern linear following Jl. Syahbudin Yatim, the main street at the area. Total area of shophouses were 20,520 m<sup>2</sup>. The whole building has two floors, the first floor is used for shop area and the second floor is used for living.

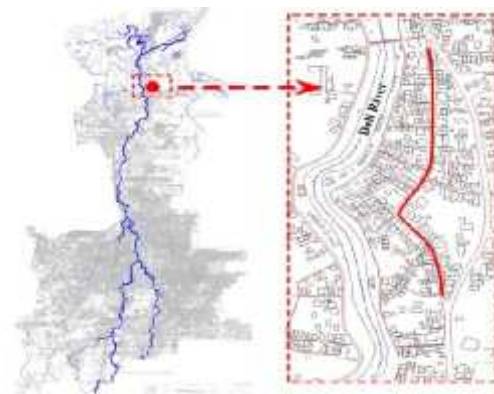


Figure 1: Left: Medan, Right: Pekan Labuhan

The settlement of the China community in the area face to the Deli River and also overlooks the main street. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the area had a port and the commercial center who trade centers who crowded visitors from various locations.

In the same time, there are two China's worship houses. Vihara Siu San Keng which is located at the entrance of Jl. Syahbudin Yatim and Liat Sim Kong inside of the area. The access to the vihara from Jl. Syahbudin Yatim. Liat Sim Kong first was built in 1872, subsequently followed by Siu San Keng, built in 1890.

### **3 THE EXISTENCE OF SOCIAL LIFE OF CHINA COMMUNITY BEFORE 1965**

The settlement of Pekan Labuhan at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the China community. The civilization of this settlement has been formed since the beginning development process of Pekan Labuhan. Social lifes, trading activities on the row of shophouses, religious activities in both viharas, public spaces and economic activities on the dock of China's fishermen called Toamang dock are coloring everyday life of this area.

Everyday life activities of the China community were divided into two zoning. Early to the middle zone of Jl Syahbudin Yatim was dominated by commercial and religious activities. While the central zone until the end of this main street was dominated by social life, on public spaces, such as China's wine market, China's coffee shop, entertainment stage and movie theater.

The social life of China community exists on the Vihara Siu San Keng and Liat Sim Kong, they are always crowded by the presence of religious activities of China communities. In a row of shophouses, China families sold goods, daily necessities, gold shops, wholesalers, restaurants and photo studio. Meanwhile around Toamang dock, from the afternoon to the evening, there are many China who recently finished their activities drank China's wine on the wine market. The crowd scattered took place from wine market to the main street. On this street there were three coffee shops located nearby. Also behind the wine market complex there were public space in the form of stage entertainment. In the same place with it there were also Mutiara Movie Theatre building. The

atmosphere of everyday life of China community were able to revived the social life area Pekan Labuhan in a long time.

### **4 THE EXISTENCE OF SOCIAL LIFE OF CHINA COMMUNITY AFTER 1965 UNTIL NOW**

In 1965 the political incident disrupted Pekan Labuhan. At the time the issue of the Communist Party of Indonesia grew in some areas of Medan. The Communist Party are considered by Government Indonesia as rebel groups so that the state ordered the group must be destroyed. The China community in Pekan Labuhan was regarded as pro-communist group so that indigenious youth gangs in the area did criminalization to them.

Everyday life of the area was confused as a consequence of that disruption. Due to the criminalization, many of China people was slain. The criminalization in 1965 destroyed the social life of China communities and also destroyed; China shophouses and houses, wine market, Toamang dock and coffee shops. The atmosphere of everyday life in the area was deserted, half of them survived from criminalization and begun a new life outside the area. Since that time their populations becomes minority. The function of the buildings and the space in the area changes. On the North part of the area then are filled with the Malay houses. Then the activity on stage entertainment complex and movie theater increasingly lose out. In 1970-80s this area was dismantled and replaced with the residential of Departement of transportation office.

The incident of political divisions happened again in 1998. At that time the State of Indonesia was through reform phase. The conflict between indigenious and non-indigenious occurred again in Labuhan. These incidents threaten the existence of China business and their trade. Community groups, youth gangs and indigenious people in the area provoked to reject China's presence in their neighborhoods. They did loot to the entire China community-owned shophouses in area Pekan Labuhan.

The looted process of these items made China be fear and traumatic. While time they took refuge in the vihara buildings to save themselves by carrying important files. The incident made the China community were afraid to live in the area Pekan Labuhan. They assumed that it was not safe anymore to stay afloat in the area.



Figure 2: The Changes of Use Building Usage

So in 1998 many of China sold their shophouses with low prices to indigenous families and they moved to other secure areas.

The current Pekan Labuhan atmosphere goes quietly as the "City of the Dead." The old port now has changed to be unplanned settlements. Business centers was dominated by the exchange value activities becomes neighbourhood which dominated by use value of living activities. A row of China shophouses that are scattered throughout the region has been inhabited and managed by new families who are most Malays, Batak and Java.

In 1970 (Figure 2, point 3), the China wine market changed to be an elementary school. In 1980 (Figure 2, point 2) the entertainment and movie theater complex changed to be Department of Transportation office. Since 1998 (Figure 2, points 3 and 4), row of China shophouses, nowadays became an indigenous settlement, from 2004 until nowadays at the row of shophouses were bought and owned by Malay people. Since 2004, the new owner of shophouses started rent the space and first floor to be morning market. Then this place is popular with Pekong Market. However, both of viharas (Figure 2, point 5 and 6) are actively used by China communities for their religious activities.

The China community who was local community, now is a minority. The political incident occurred in 1998 make more than 80% of them have decided to move out the area. Only some of them settled in both viharas complex. Even though most of them do not live in Pekan Labuhan anywhere, they still visit and worship at both viharas. For them this both buildings is are strong inner bond, they believe that hope and their life still depends on respecting those that space.

To keep religious need, they maintain and build good relations with the Malays. They maintain the relationship with the Malays community with a sense of passion and sympathy. They serve with mercy by share food staple rice, egg packet, edible oil, noodle packet, etc in special occasions. Also they are empathetic with doing a free treatment and health check-up for free. China always stand-by ambulance to assist any Malay people who need helps. They are always available for Idul Fitri parcels to give to Malay society with the rotation system.

As the research done by (Siagian, 2015) in Kampung Keling in 2014, China and Tamil groups interact each other in order to build an harmonious relationship. This relationship can keep both groups safe in doing their activities. The efforts have been able to keep the existence of both viharas. Since in 1998 until to the present the viharas are safe from various disruption currents. Both viharas exist and are able to become an icon and the identity of Pekan Labuhan. The viharas are growing. The buildings are renovated to be more magnificent.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The existence of old cities of Medan who dominated by China's business with their daily lives change from time to time. The political incident made disruption and changes of those which makes negative impacts towards the growth and development of communities in this old area of Medan. The challenge ahead is political expediency should not divisive and destructive existence and social life between the communities that live in it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors are wishing to acknowledge assistance and encouragement from some people and organization in the created and improved of this paper. Thank to Research Institution University of Sumatera Utara that has been providing opportunities and funding over the smooth running of this research. Thank also to all those who have helped us in the process of research and the completion of this paper.

## REFERENCES

- Edith Cristie, B., Ramelan W.D.S., 2013. Pemukiman Etnis Cina di Medan pada Akhir Abad ke-19 sampai Awal Abad ke-20. Studi Arkeologi, Universitas Indonesia.
- Jufrida, 2007. Masuknya Bangsa Cina ke Pantai Timur Sumatera, Historisme. *Universitas Sumatera Utara*, Edisi No.23, Tahun XI, January 2007.
- McGee, T.G. and Yeung, Y.M., 1977. *Hawkers in Southeast Asian cities: Planning for the bazaar economy*. IDRC, Ottawa, ON, CA.
- Miles, S. and Paddison, R., 1998. Urban consumption: an historiographical note. *Urban studies*, 35(5-6), pp.815-823.
- Moleong, L., J, 2000, Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif, PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, Bandung.
- Norberg-Schulz, C., 1988. Architecture, Meaning and Place Selected Essays. Shirvani, Hamid. 1986. *The Urban Design Process*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, Inc.
- Siagian, M., 2018, February. Pekong, the symbol identity of Chinese at Pekan Labuhan Medan Indonesia. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* (Vol. 309, No. 1, p. 012125). IOP Publishing.
- Siagian, M., 2016. Mutualistic Social Relationship between Tamil and Chinese Communities in the Formation of Social Space in Kampung Keling Medan. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 216, pp.552-560.
- Soja, Edward W 2004. *Postmodern Geographies : The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Prentice-Hall.