

A Morphological Study of Kampung Arab, Singapore in A Century

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ABSTRACT

Singapore is a country with diverse cultures, histories, and traditions. One of the cultural highlights of Singapore is the Arab Village, located in the Kampong Glam district. The region is known for its rich Malay and Arabic cultural values and has been an integral part of Singapore's cultural richness for more than a century. Over the past century, the Arab Village has undergone many transformations, both physically and socially. The area, which was once a traditional settlement, has now developed into a bustling commercial and tourist hub. These changes bring their challenges in maintaining existing heritage values. This research uses a qualitative method with a historical *research* approach. The historical research approach is an approach that looks at events that occurred in the past to produce an accurate interpretation and description. The study of the morphology of the Arab Village area aims to reveal the changes that have happened in the area over the past century. Through a morphological analysis approach, this study will examine various aspects including road networks, building typologies, and allergic use.

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Keywords: Kampung Arab; Kampung Glam; Morphology; Singapore

1. Introduction

Singapore is a country with diverse cultures, histories, and traditions that come together in a harmonious unity. One of the heritage areas that is a silent witness to the historical and cultural development in Singapore is the Arab Village, located in the Kampong Glam district. The region is known for its rich Malay and Arabic cultural values and has been an integral part of Singapore's cultural richness for more than a century.

Over the past century, the Arab Village has undergone significant transformations, both in terms of its physical aspects and social dynamics, serving as a way to understand the principles and theories of morphology. The area, which was once a traditional settlement, has now developed into a bustling commercial and tourist hub. These changes bring their challenges in maintaining existing heritage

values. Therefore, this study will not only focus on historical and architectural aspects but will also consider the importance of conservation and preservation of heritage areas amid modernization and urbanization.

The study of the morphology of the Arab Village area aims to reveal the changes that have occurred in the area over the past century. Through a morphological analysis approach, this study will examine various aspects, including road networks, building typologies, and land use. The problems that have arisen from socio-economic changes over the past century can be understood by understanding the principles and theories of morphology of the Arab Village Area, Singapore. The purpose of this study is to examine changes in the Arab Village area over the past century.

Morphology, which comes from the Greek word "morphos," which in English means "shape" or "shape," is the origin of the word "morphology." In addition, the term can be defined as "the science of form" or as the study of form, outer structure, or arrangement, especially as an object of research or classification (Oxford, 1970) [1].

In this case, humans determine how the environment and artifacts change. According to Moudon (1997)[2], urban morphology can be defined as the structure of the city center or urban space that can play a role in the physical development of the city. The city is constantly evolving. According to Yunus (1999)[3], this development will include physical, technological, economic, social, and political fields. Zaidulfar (2002)[4] states that the morphology approach provides an opportunity to see the physical city from a broader perspective as a place that humans have transformed. Alvarez (2002)[5] describes morphology as the study of diachronic and synchronic elements. Synchrony is the relationship between parts in a specific time that is related to other physical aspects, such as the structure and physical typology of urban space. At the same time, diachrony is a change in concepts in history. Identifying the characteristics of an area contextually pays attention to its synchronous aspects—current conditions. When people talk about historical value and its characteristics, they consider diachronic aspects such as historical, socio-cultural, political development, and economic growth of the region.

The morphological approach is not only helpful in explaining urban changes, particularly in terms of land use, but is also directly related to the spatial expression of the city. This approach shows the existence of urban spaces, which can be seen from the physical appearance of the city. Because of the differences, the city is described as an intricate order, collage, and dialectic.

According to Herbert (1974) in Yunus (1999)[3], morphology reveals that urban space comprises 17 distinct city characteristics, as evident in the city's physical appearance, which is reflected in its existing street and building block system. In the context of urban scale (Urban Morphology), it is a comprehensive study of the form, plan, structure, and function of the arrangement of buildings in a city, according to Clark 1985 in Ali (1996)[6].

In his book *The City Shaped* [7], Spiro Kostof said that there are two types of cities: planned and unplanned. Regularity and geometric shapes such as grids, circles, radials, and others distinguish "planned" shapes. Cities that grow without a plan and develop spontaneously are called "unplanned" or "organic". They are growing, developing irregular, geomorphic, non-geometric, and organic. Unplanned settlements are formed due to the mass configuration and social activities of their inhabitants spread along the circulation route or dynamic space. It does not have a specific open space (Kustianingrum, 2021)[8].

A city is a complex entity that consists of a group of cities, land uses, populations, forms, resources, networks, and systems. Kostof [7] defines the elements that affect the formation of organic patterns, and they include:

- **Topography (topographic function)**

The construction pattern follows the topography without changing it. Different geographical conditions in a region cause irregular urban patterns. As a result, this city pattern shows an organic city pattern.

- **Land division,**

Land division, also known as land division, is a land division that is often adjusted to the needs of the community.

- **Synoeicism (road network)**

Synoeicism (road network) shows an organic pattern consisting of the will and agreement of the community as well as the establishment of community activity centers.

The shape of the city can be analogous to the human body, according to Kostof (1991)[7]. In other words, gardens and open spaces serve as lungs; highways in the city center serve as the heart that flows blood; The economy of the city serves as the center of the mind; banks, ports, and industrial estates serve as special networks; and capital elements, such as space and buildings, serve as special networks.

2. Material and Methods

According to Sjamsuddin [9], the historical qualitative method is a process of studying, explaining, and critically analyzing the records and relics of the past. This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically a historical research method. Historical research is the process of critically investigating past events to produce an accurate and correct description and interpretation of those events (Wiersman in Djamal, 2015:103)[10]. To understand the developments in Kampong Glam, we conduct direct observations at the location, observing, paying attention, and documenting the actual situation. Then, from the data obtained, we narrate what we have observed during direct observation.

Historical research is a type of research that involves collecting and evaluating data related to past events with the aim of testing hypotheses related to the causes, influences, or developments of those events. This research can provide information about current events and predict future events (Sukardi, 2003: 203)[11].

According to another opinion, "The method of historical research is a set of systematic principles and rules that are intended to

provide effective assistance in gathering materials for history, critically assessing, and then synthesizing the results" [12]. In this case, historical research methods rely heavily on past data.

Historical research aims to find out what happened in the past and try to understand what is happening in the present based on what happened in the past [13]. According to expert opinions, "Data collection techniques are a necessary data procedure" [11]. Researchers use this technique to collect data in the form of documents and archives relevant to the issue under investigation to answer the questions that arise.

Some of the data we obtained came from 2 sources, namely:

1. *Primary Data*

The sources of primary data are obtained from direct observation of the location, then observing the phenomena, activities, and circumstances that exist in the environment.

2. *Secondary Data*

The sources obtained come from journals, articles, books, and the internet, by the titles of previous discussions and research. Literature techniques are techniques for collecting data and information with the help of various materials in the library, such as newspapers, manuscripts, notes, historical stories, documents, and so on that are relevant to research materials" [14]. Literature engineering can be defined as a research study that is carried out by obtaining data sources from the library through literature books related to the research subject" (Hadari Nawawi, 1993: 133)[15].

Margono [16] said that documentation can be interpreted as a way of collecting data obtained from existing documents or stored records, be it in the form of transcript records, books, newspapers, and others. The effort made is the way to work with data, organize the data, sort it into manageable units,

synthesize it, search and find patterns, find what is essential and what is learned, and decide what can be told to others.

3. Results and Discussions

The History of Kampung Arab

The story of Kampong Glam begins in 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) agreed between the British East India Company, Temenggong Abdul Rahman (d. 1825), and Sultan Hussein (1776-1835) to establish a trading post in Singapore. After the signing of the agreement, the Sultan brought his family and entourage from Riau using hundreds of boats. They settled in Kampung Glam, where the Sultan built a walled complex. The area quickly became the center of the Malay community and Muslim communities, and immigrants from other regions, such as Sulawesi (now Sulawesi), Java, Banjar, Sumatra, and Malaya, came to trade and work, settling in and around Kampung Glam.

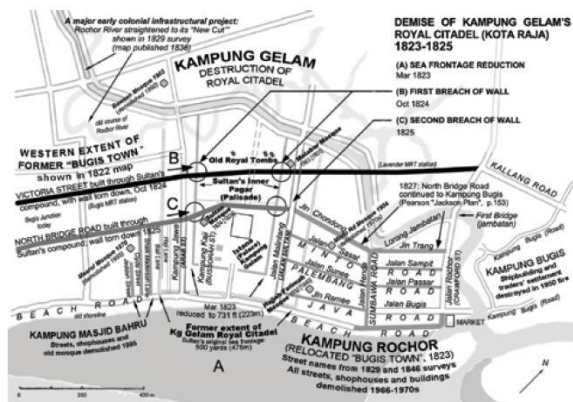
In 1822, a plan drawn up by Lieutenant Jackson (1802-1879) divided the town into sections for specific settlements and purposes, further shaping the development of Kampong Glam. The Bugis traders were relocated near the Kallang River. The land adjacent to the Sultan's land was given to the Arabs. The streets are bustling with different types of specialized trade, and even the Indian, Arab, and Chinese Communities have a significant presence in the area. In 1989, the core area of Kampong Glam, bounded by Ophir Road, Victoria Street, Sultan Street, and Beach Road, was designated as a conservation area by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Today, the area has become a commercial area while maintaining a significant Malay and Muslim identity.



Source: kampongglammtrail, accessed in 2025

Figure 1. Map Kampong Arab / Glam

A common explanation is that "Kampong Glam" comes from the Malay word gelam, the name for the gelam tree (*Melaleuca leucadendron*). Another explanation states that it originated from the Gelam people, who had a settlement near the Singapore River. The Gelam people, who know Kampong Glam as "Seduyong", provide several services to Singapore's temenggong, such as being boatmen—skilled navigators, whose lives revolved around the sea, built and repaired ships. In the mid-1800s, the Gelam people had moved to some places, such as Brani Island. Most of them assimilated with the Malays in the 20th century.



Source: Imran Bin Tajudeen, 2012

Figure 2. Map of Kampong Glam former province and the destruction of the Raja city in the 1820s and the destruction of buildings in the 20th century

In the glam village area, the majority of the buildings are colorful, featuring a colonial design that remains very thick. The Sultan Mosque is the central point in the area, with a golden dome and many pillars, painted in cream. The Sultan Mosque is the central point

in the area, with a golden dome and many pillars, painted in cream colours.

In the area, there are also buildings full of murals, which depict culture, society, and nature. Each store sells various kinds of food and souvenirs, ranging from traditional regional, Turkish, Arabic, Malay, and even modern food. Finishing is used for pedestrians, using paving in areas within the area, and asphalt in the area of the area's main roads.



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 3. Documentation of Rows of Buildings in Kampung Glam



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 4. The Sultan Mosque building as an icon in Kampung Glam



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 5. Documentation of Rows of Buildings in Kampung Glam



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 6. Documentation of Rows of Buildings in Glam Village with special characters such as shop house buildings with ethnic Chinese architecture



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 7. Materials used on the footpaths in Kampung Glam

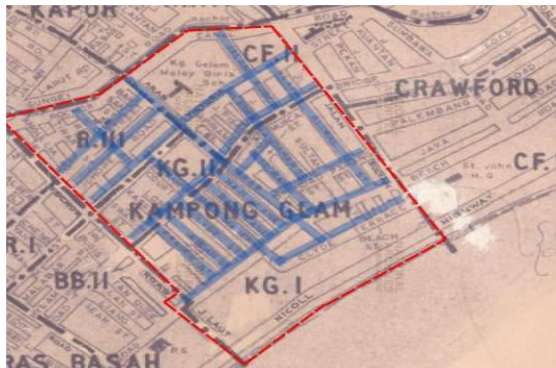
Area Analysis (Road Network):

In 1944, the Kampong Arab area was divided into several blocks with the Sultan Mosque as the centre of the area. The road network is regulated based on the existing buildings at that time.



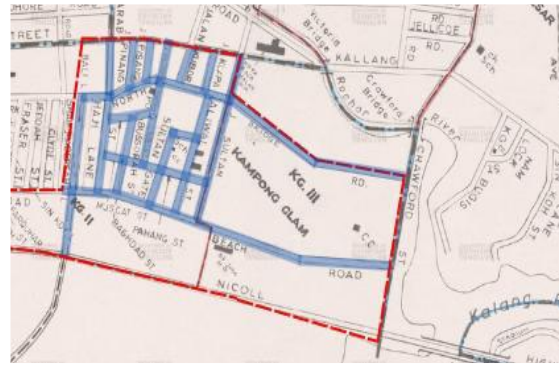
Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024
Figure 8. 1944 Map

In 1964, there were changes in the shape of the area, including a more efficient arrangement of the road network and blocks. The Sultan Mosque remains the center of the area.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024
Figure 9. Map of the Year 1964

The year 1984 marked the expansion of the Arab Village area to the Crawford St. boundary, with the same road circulation as in 1964.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 10. Year 1984

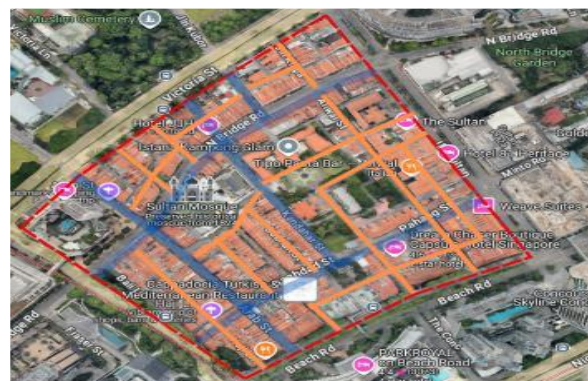
In 2003, commercial access to Arab villages became increasingly restricted, with motor vehicles allowed only on North Beach Road.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 11. Map of the Year 2003

In 2024, the distribution of circulation between motor vehicles and pedestrians is increasingly evident. Motor vehicle access is only through North Beach Rd, Pahang St, Arab St, and Victoria St. Tourists must walk to reach the area.



Source: Google Earth accessed in 2024

Figure 12. Map of the Year 2024

Area Analysis (Land Use)

In 1944, before the colonial period, Kampong Arab was divided into two areas: commercial and open areas.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 13. 1944 Map

In 1964, a reshuffle eliminated commercial areas, leaving only open areas.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 14. Map of the Year 1964

The condition of the Arab Village area in 1984 was still similar to 1964, without significant post-colonial development.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 15. Year 1984

In 2003, the development of the shops was again seen around Kampong Arab, which is marked with orange. The green color represents the plaza area or public space, while purple denotes buildings with social functions, such as mosques.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 16. Map of the Year 2003

In 2024, Kampong Arabs' land use is becoming increasingly evident, characterized by the dominance of commercial buildings with Middle Eastern nuances and areas that remain open and well-maintained. Sultan Mosque. The iconic remains an important part of the region.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 17. Map of the Year 2024

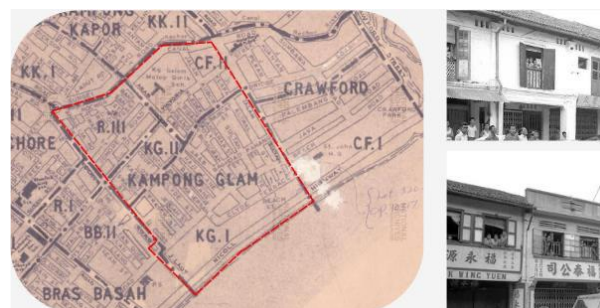
Area Analysis (Building Typology)

In this period, the Arab Village was heavily influenced by traditional Malay and Arabic architecture, featuring village houses, two-storey shophouses, and small commercial buildings that showcase traditional elements such as tiled roofs and windows.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 18. Map & buildings of the year 1944



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 19. Map & buildings Year 1964

In 1984, modernization began to be seen with the emergence of several modern buildings that were simpler and more functional, although traditional buildings were still dominant.



Source: www.nas.gov.sg, 2024

Figure 20. Map & buildings Year 1984

In 2024, the primary focus will be on conservation and sustainable development. The traditional buildings that still exist are used as part of cultural preservation efforts, while the new building was built considering traditional architecture. Development of environmentally friendly infrastructure is a priority.



Source: Authors, 2024

Figure 21. Map & buildings of the Year 2024

Conclusion

Based on the analysis that has been carried out, the Arab Village / Glam has undergone several changes over the past century, starting from changes in the colonial period, the post-colonial period, and the post-independence period.

The change can be seen from the adjustment of the road network, adjustment of land use, and changes in the typology of buildings around the Kampong Arab/Glam area at that time.

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