

The Development of Residential Segregation among Ethnic Chinese and the Factors Sustaining their Presence in Palembang's Historic Chinatown

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Abstract

The segregation of Chinese ethnic settlements in various Indonesian cities has become a persistent phenomenon despite the abolition of colonial spatial separation policies since 1910. Research on the persistence of this segregation remains limited, particularly in revealing the socio-cultural dynamics that cause Chinese communities to remain in colonial heritage areas. This study examines the formation process of Chinese ethnic settlement segregation in Kampung Kapitan Palembang from the pre-colonial era to the present, as well as the factors that cause this community to maintain cross-generational settlements. The approach used in this research is a qualitative approach with a case study research type. The selection of informants using purposive technique, totaling 16 informants consists of Chinese ethnic residents and Chinese ethnic leaders. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and literature study. This research was analyzed using the Settlement Development Theory by Griffith Taylor and the concept of settlement development factors according to Sumaatmadja. The research results show that the Chinese settlement in Kampung Kapitan was formed since the fall of the Sriwijaya Kingdom (1478) when the Ming Dynasty of China established a trading office in Palembang, then developed through four stages to the contemporary era. The persistence of this segregation is caused by collective inherited house ownership that is difficult to sell due to potential intergenerational conflicts, proximity of location to markets where they trade, strong kinship relations, daily use of Mandarin language, preservation of Chinese cultural traditions, and the designation of Kampung Kapitan as a Cultural Heritage Site.

Keywords: Chinese People; Cultural Persistenc; Ethnic Settlement Segregation; Kampung Kapitan.

How to Cite: Rifanka, T. & Izzudin, M. (2026). The Development of Residential Segregation among Ethnic Chinese and the Factors Sustaining their Presence in Palembang's Historic Chinatown. *Jurnal Socius: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 13(1), 1-19.



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Introduction

Urban areas are characterized by greater population density and demographic diversity than rural regions (Izzudin & Taqwa, 2022). One prominent aspect of this diversity is the presence of various ethnic communities. The dynamic nature of urban life, coupled with rapid economic development and access to a wide range of public facilities, has attracted people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to settle in cities (Marta et al., 2020; Nasir, 2018). However, ethnic diversity in urban settings often contributes to the emergence of residential segregation based on ethnicity. Ethnic residential segregation is a common phenomenon in many cities, particularly among migrant and minority ethnic groups (Frasisca, 2020; Paturusi, 2016).

Residential segregation in Indonesia has historical roots that extend back to the pre-colonial kingdom era (Paturusi, 2016). During this period, settlements were spatially organized according to social hierarchy, with separate residential zones designated for commoners, royal relatives, and princes. This pattern of spatial differentiation was further institutionalized during the Dutch colonial period, when residential areas were explicitly segregated according to ethnicity. Urban settlements across the Dutch East Indies were divided into distinct quarters for Indigenous populations, Chinese communities (*Pecinan* or Chinatown), Muslim communities (*Kauman*), and Europeans (Mayshurah & Sair, 2023). Many of these colonial-era settlement

patterns have persisted into the present day, particularly historic Chinese residential enclaves such as Petak Sembilan Glodok in Jakarta, Semarang Chinatown, Kampung Sudiroprajan in Surakarta, Surabaya Chinatown, Kesawan Square in Medan, Kampung Pecinan Ketandan in Yogyakarta, and Kampung Kapitan in Palembang. The continued existence of these historic Chinese settlements has attracted scholarly interest in understanding the contemporary dynamics of ethnic residential segregation in Indonesia.

Among the numerous surviving Chinese settlements established during the Dutch colonial period, this study focuses on Kampung Kapitan in Palembang. The selection of this site is based on the premise that the emergence of ethnic residential segregation in urban areas cannot be separated from the historical development of the city itself (Heldayani, Idris, & Sukardi, 2017). Palembang is widely recognized as the oldest city in Indonesia, with its historical origins evidenced by the seventh-century Kedukan Bukit Inscription discovered at Bukit Siguntang, dating back to 685 CE. Beyond its historical significance, Palembang has long been recognized as a multiethnic city (Abdullah et al., 1984). Throughout its history, Palembang served as the political and commercial center of the Srivijaya Empire, later became the capital of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, functioned as an important hub of international maritime trade, and eventually came under Dutch colonial administration (Husin & Marihandono, 2020). These historical roles attracted migrants from various ethnic backgrounds, many of whom permanently settled in the city. Consequently, Palembang preserves a rich historical record of migrant settlement development, including the formation of Chinese residential enclaves.

The Chinese residential segregation observed in Palembang today originated from two major colonial policies implemented by the Dutch administration: the *wijkenstelsel* (residential quarter system) and the *passenstelsel* (pass system). The *wijkenstelsel* required Chinese residents to live in designated urban quarters, whereas the *passenstelsel* restricted their mobility by requiring travel permits within the Dutch East Indies (Shanti & Rusyanti, 2021). These policies were introduced to facilitate colonial surveillance and control over the growing Chinese population, which the Dutch regarded as both economically influential and potentially threatening because of its increasing size and perceived resilience (Yudha, 2020). At the same time, the policies sought to limit interaction between Indigenous and Chinese communities while concentrating Chinese commercial activities within designated urban districts (Khasanah, 2018). This arrangement reflected the colonial government's reliance on Chinese communities to play a central role in sustaining the economy of the Dutch East Indies (Fikri, 2018).

Beyond establishing designated Chinese residential quarters, the Dutch colonial government also institutionalized a rigid social hierarchy in which Europeans occupied the highest social stratum, ethnic Chinese were placed in the intermediate stratum, and Indigenous populations, together with other ethnic groups, constituted the lowest social stratum (Fikri, 2018). The privileged status granted to the Chinese community widened the social distance between ethnic Chinese and Indigenous populations, fostering a sense of ethnic exclusivity and encouraging Chinese communities to maintain social separation from the broader society (Ariefyanto, 2012). This institutionalized separation further reinforced patterns of ethnic residential segregation.

Although the *wijkenstelsel* and *passenstelsel* policies were officially abolished in 1910, thereby removing formal legal restrictions governing Chinese residential segregation in the Dutch East Indies (Frasisca, 2020), many Chinese settlements established during the colonial period have continued to exist in Indonesian cities. Kampung Kapitan in Palembang is one such example, illustrating the enduring spatial legacy of colonial urban planning. The persistence of Kampung Kapitan as a historic Chinese residential enclave may also reflect the continued influence of ethnic exclusivity, although its survival is shaped by multiple and overlapping social, cultural, and economic factors. Previous studies suggest that Chinese communities often prefer to reside near co-ethnic residents because close proximity strengthens mutual support and social cohesion (Arif et al., 2020; Frasca, 2020). Residential concentration may also be encouraged by kinship networks, in which relatives invite family members to settle nearby, as well as by employment opportunities and economic considerations (Izzudin & Risyanto, 2013). Additional contributing factors include perceptions of safety and residential comfort (Sihotang, 2017), the continued social construction of ethnic Chinese as outsiders or migrants despite their long-standing presence in Indonesia (Tan, 2008), experiences of discrimination associated with socioeconomic inequality (Juditha, 2015), and persistent negative stereotypes and prejudice directed toward Chinese communities (Shanti & Rusyanti, 2021).

Previous studies have also identified several spatial characteristics commonly associated with Chinese settlements in Indonesia. First, these neighborhoods are typically located adjacent to traditional markets or commercial districts, reflecting the historical involvement of many Chinese residents in trade and commerce. Second, residential areas are generally situated near places of worship, enabling the maintenance of religious and cultural practices. Third, neighborhoods with relatively affluent residents often display distinctive ethnic architectural features and decorative elements, including statues, bright red color schemes, and traditional Chinese ornaments. Finally, houses and commercial establishments are commonly built in close proximity,

creating dense neighborhoods in which adjacent shop owners frequently share longstanding social and business relationships (Arif et al., 2020). These characteristics suggest that the spatial organization of Chinese settlements is closely intertwined with the economic success and social organization of the community.

The economic achievements of many Chinese communities have frequently been associated with cultural values rooted in Chinese business traditions. One of the most influential philosophical concepts is *Feng Shui*, often summarized by the principle "*With Harmony Comes Prosperity*," which emphasizes that harmony and balance are essential for achieving prosperity, particularly in commercial activities. This philosophy reflects the long-term orientation that characterizes Chinese business culture. Beyond its commercial significance, *Feng Shui* also guides the orientation and spatial arrangement of settlements, houses, and other buildings. By aligning built environments with natural elements—including water, earth, fire, and wind—as well as celestial elements such as the sky and the sun, *Feng Shui* seeks to channel *Qi* (life energy) into buildings as a means of harmonizing human life with nature (Adhiwignyo & Handoko, 2015). Within this philosophical framework, harmony is regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for prosperity.

Against this historical and socio-cultural background, this study examines the persistence of the Chinese residential enclave in Palembang, a settlement that originated during the Dutch colonial period and continues to exist today. Located on KH. Azhari Street, 7 Ulu, Seberang Ulu I District, Palembang, the neighborhood is widely known as Kampung Kapitan. In recent years, the significance of Kampung Kapitan has increased following its designation by the Palembang municipal government as a protected cultural heritage site under Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage (Registration No. PO201510700005). This official recognition has strengthened its status not only as a historical landmark but also as a living representation of the city's multicultural and colonial urban heritage.

Although numerous studies have examined ethnic Chinese residential segregation in various Indonesian cities, research on the persistence of these residential enclaves remains limited. In particular, few studies have explored the historical dynamics and socio-cultural factors that have enabled Chinese communities to remain in colonial-era settlements across generations. Existing scholarship has primarily emphasized economic and managerial dimensions, while paying comparatively less attention to social processes such as kinship relations, everyday cultural practices, and intergenerational dynamics that contribute to residential continuity. Furthermore, no previous study has systematically traced the evolution of Chinese residential segregation from the pre-colonial period to the contemporary era using a settlement development perspective. Kampung Kapitan in Palembang provides a particularly valuable case for addressing this gap, as it is one of Indonesia's oldest Chinese settlements and has experienced four distinct political eras: the Srivijaya Kingdom, the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, Dutch colonial rule, and independent Indonesia. Given the continued existence of Chinese residential enclaves despite the abolition of colonial regulations governing ethnic residential segregation in Indonesia, this study seeks to examine two central questions: (1) How has the Chinese residential enclave in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang, evolved over time? (2) What factors explain the continued decision of ethnic Chinese residents to remain in Kampung Kapitan across generations?

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the historical development of ethnic Chinese residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang, and to explore the factors that have enabled this community to maintain its settlement across generations. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of complex social and historical processes, as well as the meanings and lived experiences associated with residential persistence within a particular community. As argued by Creswell (2009), qualitative research is particularly well suited to examining socially constructed and context-dependent phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. A case study design was adopted because the research focuses on a single setting with distinctive historical and cultural characteristics. Kampung Kapitan represents the oldest surviving ethnic Chinese settlement in Palembang and constitutes an important site for examining the long-term evolution of ethnic residential segregation. The study was conducted in Kampung Kapitan, located on KH. Azhari Street, 7 Ulu, Seberang Ulu I District, Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. According to information provided by the Hulu Balang (local heritage guide) of Kampung Kapitan, the settlement currently comprises approximately 61 registered households, of which between 25 and 35 are ethnic Chinese households. Although a considerable proportion of the current residents are Indigenous Indonesians, most of the properties remain under the ownership of ethnic Chinese families. Many of the Indigenous residents are descendants of employees who had worked for Chinese families in Kampung Kapitan since the period of Tjoa Kie Tjuan, the first recognized leader of the Chinese community in Palembang.

Data were collected from 16 purposely selected participants. Informants were recruited based on three criteria: (1) they were ethnic Chinese or descendants of Tjoa Kie Tjuan, the first leader of the Chinese community in Kampung Kapitan; (2) they had resided in Kampung Kapitan for at least 30 years; and (3) they were permanent residents of Kampung Kapitan at the time of the study. The unit of analysis was the individual resident. Data collection was undertaken over a four-month period, from February to May 2023, through in-depth semi-structured interviews complemented by field observations of the neighborhood and documentary analysis.

The data were analyzed using a narrative descriptive approach supported by NVivo software for data coding, categorization, and thematic organization. Interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documentary materials were interpreted using two complementary theoretical frameworks. First, [Taylor's \(2013\)](#) settlement development theory, which conceptualizes settlement evolution through four stages infantile, juvenile, mature, and senile was employed to reconstruct the historical development of Kampung Kapitan from the pre-colonial period to the contemporary era. Second, [Sumaatmadja's \(1988\)](#) framework on settlement development factors, comprising physical-environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions, was used to identify the factors that have contributed to the long-term persistence of the ethnic Chinese community and the continuity of residential occupation across generations.

Results and Discussion

Historical Development of Kampung Kapitan

The formation of Kampung Kapitan was a gradual historical process that spanned several political periods, reflecting the long-term development of the earliest Chinese settlement in Palembang. Findings from interviews with community informants indicate that the origins of the settlement can be traced to the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom in 1478, coinciding with the rise of the Ming Dynasty in China. At that time, however, the settlement had not yet become known as Kampung Kapitan but was simply recognized as a Chinese residential community. Informants explained that its establishment was closely associated with commercial relations between China and Palembang. During this period, the Chinese imperial government established overseas trading institutions, one of whose regional offices was located in Palembang. The establishment of this trading post attracted Chinese merchants and migrants, leading to the emergence of the city's first Chinese settlement.

Following the decline of the Srivijaya Kingdom, Palembang experienced approximately two centuries of political instability. Historical sources indicate that this period witnessed successive waves of migration from China, including pirates accompanied by their families and merchants fleeing political oppression under the Ming Dynasty, many of whom ultimately settled in Palembang ([Febrian et al., 2015](#)). Combined with the interview findings, the historical evidence suggests that the political vacuum created favorable conditions for sustained Chinese migration, laying the demographic foundation for the subsequent development of a permanent Chinese settlement. The establishment of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate in 1659 marked a significant turning point in the spatial organization of ethnic communities within the city. According to [Heldayani et al. \(2017\)](#), the Sultanate introduced regulations requiring foreign residents, including ethnic Chinese, to reside in floating houses (*rumah rakit*) along the Musi River rather than on land. This policy functioned primarily as a defensive strategy, allowing the Sultanate to monitor foreign populations and, if necessary, remove potential threats by dismantling or drifting away the floating settlements.

Under these regulations, ethnic Chinese residents were prohibited from owning or occupying land-based property and were required to comply with the Sultanate's residential policies if they wished to remain in Palembang. Historical records estimate that approximately 800 Chinese residents lived in these floating settlements, making them the largest foreign ethnic community in the city ([Febrian et al., 2015](#)). Economic activities within the floating settlements were largely concentrated on river-based trade, with Chinese merchants specializing in imported ceramics, linen textiles, silk, gold thread, and traditional medicines ([Febrian et al., 2015](#); [Shanti & Rusyanti, 2021](#)).

Spatially, these floating settlements formed a linear pattern following the Musi River and were concentrated on the Seberang Ulu side, directly opposite the Sultan's palace located on Seberang Ilir ([Febrian et al., 2015](#)). This arrangement represents one of the earliest forms of ethnic residential segregation in Palembang, where Chinese settlements became spatially concentrated along the river and were commonly referred to as *Kampung Cina* (Chinese Village).

A more fundamental transformation occurred after the Dutch colonial administration formally assumed control of Palembang in 1823. The colonial government introduced the *wijkenstelsel* (residential quarter system), which allowed Chinese residents previously confined to floating houses to establish permanent settlements on land. The construction of the residence of the first Chinese community leader in

the 7 Ulu area marked the beginning of what is now known as Kampung Kapitan (Febrian et al., 2015). Subsequent waves of Chinese migration, driven by economic hardship and political unrest under the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty, substantially increased the Chinese population in the Dutch East Indies. As a result, the Chinese settlement expanded beyond its original location in 7 Ulu into neighboring areas, including 9 Ulu and 10 Ulu (Febrian et al., 2015; Husin & Marihandono, 2020). During this period, the 7 Ulu settlement evolved into the administrative and cultural center of the Chinese community in Palembang. Historical records describe the area as consisting of fifteen traditional Chinese stilt houses together with three principal buildings: the residence of the Chinese community leader, a place of worship, and an administrative office (Febrian et al., 2015).

To facilitate indirect colonial governance, the Dutch administration appointed the leader of the Chinese community as Kapitan Cina, granting him authority to administer local affairs, maintain order within the settlement, and collect tribute from residents (Febrian et al., 2015). Interview data identify Tjoa Kie Tjuan as the first Kapitan of the Chinese community in Palembang. The name Kampung Kapitan itself derives from the honorary title *Kapitan* conferred by the Dutch colonial government upon the leader of the Chinese settlement. The establishment of Kampung Kapitan during the Dutch colonial period represents the earliest generation of permanent Chinese settlement in Palembang (Febrian et al., 2015). For this reason, the neighborhood is widely regarded as the city's oldest Chinese residential enclave. Although the Dutch initially imposed strict supervision over the Chinese population, colonial policies gradually became more permissive. The formal abolition of the *wijkenstelsel* in 1910 eliminated legal requirements for residential segregation (Febrian et al., 2015; Frasisca, 2020). Nevertheless, the removal of these regulations did not result in the dispersal of the Chinese community from Kampung Kapitan, indicating that the settlement had become socially and culturally embedded rather than merely administratively imposed.

The transition from Dutch colonial rule to Japanese occupation in 1942 likewise had little effect on the continuity of Kampung Kapitan. Interview findings suggest that the persistence of the settlement was primarily attributable to the Chinese community's strong preference for residing near relatives and fellow community members rather than to colonial regulations. Unlike the Dutch administration, the Japanese authorities did not introduce policies governing residential segregation. Instead, they restructured local administrative leadership by replacing the *Kapitan* system with the *Ku-Mi-Co* neighborhood administration, in which each neighborhood leader supervised approximately ten households (Febrian et al., 2015). Administrative restructuring reduced the territorial extent of Kampung Kapitan to the present-day 7 Ulu area, a spatial configuration that has remained largely unchanged.

Since Indonesian independence in 1945, Kampung Kapitan has continued to evolve while preserving its historical identity. Colonial-era buildings are currently maintained by descendants of the Tjoa family, the lineage of the first Chinese community leader in Palembang. The settlement has gained increasing recognition following its designation as a protected cultural heritage site by the Palembang municipal government. In addition to functioning as a residential neighborhood, Kampung Kapitan now serves as an important venue for the preservation of Chinese cultural heritage. Annual celebrations of traditional Chinese festivals are organized collaboratively by local residents and the municipal government, reinforcing the neighborhood's dual role as both a living residential community and a cultural heritage landscape that embodies the historical development of Palembang's Chinese population.

Evolution of Ethnic Chinese Residential Segregation

To examine the historical evolution of ethnic Chinese residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan, this study draws upon Taylor's (2013) settlement development theory, which conceptualizes settlement evolution through four sequential stages: the infantile, juvenile, mature, and senile stages. Data obtained from in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis were interpreted within this theoretical framework to reconstruct the historical trajectory of Kampung Kapitan.

Infantile Stage

According to Taylor (2013), the infantile stage represents the initial emergence of a settlement prior to its subsequent spatial and social expansion. In the context of Kampung Kapitan, this stage corresponds to the pre-colonial period encompassing the final years of the Srivijaya Kingdom and the later establishment of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate.

The findings indicate that the earliest Chinese settlement in Palembang emerged following the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom in 1478, coinciding with the expansion of overseas commercial activities during the Ming Dynasty. Historical evidence suggests that the Ming government established trading institutions in several strategic maritime locations, one of which was Palembang. A Chinese trading office was established in the area now known as 7 Ulu, the present-day location of Kampung Kapitan, attracting increasing numbers of Chinese merchants and migrants to the city (Kristian et al., 2022). The concentration of these commercial activities subsequently gave rise to the first permanent Chinese settlement in Palembang.

This historical account is supported by an interview with Informant N, who explained:

"Based on what I know, this settlement first emerged after the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom. At that time, the Ming Dynasty established trading institutions in several regions, one of which was centered in Palembang, here in this neighborhood. A branch of the Chinese trading office was built here. As a result, many Chinese merchants came to Palembang, married local Palembang women, and eventually settled here. Their descendants have continued to live in this community until today." (Interview, 1 May 2023)

The interview illustrates that the establishment of Kampung Kapitan was fundamentally driven by commercial activities rather than by political intervention or residential regulation. The presence of the Chinese trading office functioned as an economic anchor that attracted merchants from China and facilitated the formation of a stable migrant community. Equally significant was the process of social integration through intermarriage between Chinese migrants and local Palembang women, which produced successive generations of Peranakan Chinese families. These findings suggest that, from its earliest stage, the settlement was not merely a temporary commercial outpost but evolved into a permanent residential community sustained by both economic opportunities and enduring social relationships with the local population.

Figure 1, which depicts the emergence of the Chinese settlement following the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom.

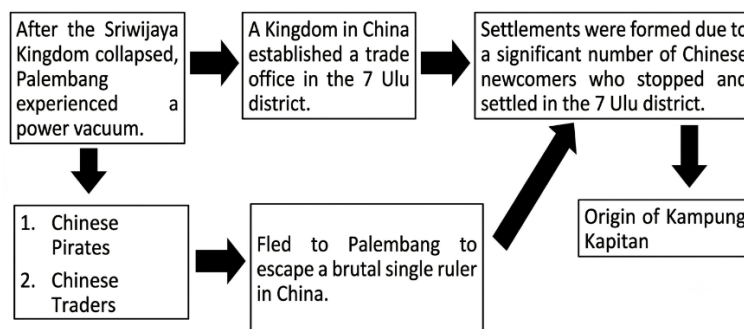


Figure 1. Chinese settlement following the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom

Source: Processed by the researcher (2023)

The initial formation of the settlement is illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the chronological sequence beginning with the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom and the resulting political vacuum. This situation created an opportunity for the Ming Dynasty to establish a trading office in the 7 Ulu area of Palembang. The presence of this commercial center attracted increasing numbers of migrants from China who initially arrived as traders and subsequently settled permanently, giving rise to the earliest Chinese residential community that later became known as Kampung Kapitan. As illustrated in the figure, the emergence of the settlement was shaped by the interaction of three interrelated factors: a political opportunity created by the absence of centralized authority, economic interests associated with regional trade, and population mobility through migration from China.

Following approximately two centuries of political transition after the collapse of the Srivijaya Kingdom (Febrian et al., 2015), Palembang came under the rule of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate in 1659. The establishment of the Sultanate fundamentally altered the spatial organization of the existing Chinese settlement through a policy requiring all foreign residents, including ethnic Chinese, to reside in floating houses (*rumah rakit*) constructed along the Musi River if they wished to remain in the city. Historical records estimate that approximately 800 Chinese residents occupied these floating settlements, making them the largest foreign ethnic community in Palembang during this period (Febrian et al., 2015).

The policy served primarily as a defensive strategy adopted by the Sultanate. By concentrating foreign residents in floating settlements, the authorities could more easily monitor their activities and, if necessary, remove potential threats by dismantling or allowing the floating houses to drift away (Heldayani et al., 2017). Furthermore, the Sultanate prohibited ethnic Chinese residents from acquiring or occupying land-based property, thereby restricting their residential space to the river environment (Febrian et al., 2015).

The floating settlements developed a distinct linear spatial pattern following the course of the Musi River. They were strategically located on the Seberang Ulu side of the river, directly opposite the royal palace of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate situated on Seberang Ilir (Febrian et al., 2015). This spatial arrangement represents the earliest institutionalized form of ethnic residential segregation in Palembang. During this period, the Chinese settlement became widely recognized as *Kampung Cina* (Chinese Village), a

concentrated riverside enclave that reflected both the Sultanate's political control over foreign populations and the community's continued reliance on river-based commercial activities.

The emergence of this riverside Chinese enclave during the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate is illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts the spatial concentration of Chinese floating settlements along the Musi River and the early configuration of ethnic residential segregation in Palembang.

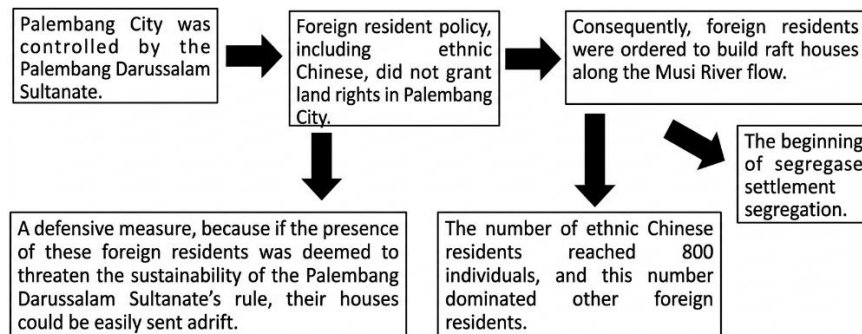


Figure 2. Early stages during the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate

Source: Compiled by the authors (2023).

Figure 2 illustrates the transformation of the Chinese settlement during the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. Following the establishment of the Sultanate, foreign residents, including the Chinese community, were prohibited from occupying land-based property and were instead required to reside in floating houses (*rumah rakit*) along the Musi River. This policy resulted in the spatial concentration of approximately 800 Chinese residents, making them the largest foreign ethnic community in Palembang during this period (Febrian et al., 2015). As depicted in the figure, the emergence of this riverside settlement represents the earliest stage of ethnic residential segregation in the city. The figure further demonstrates that this pattern of segregation was primarily shaped by state policy rather than by the voluntary residential preferences of the Chinese community. The Sultanate's residential regulations served a strategic defensive function by concentrating foreign populations in floating settlements that could be more easily monitored and, if deemed necessary, removed in response to perceived security threats (Heldayani et al., 2017). Consequently, the spatial organization of the Chinese settlement reflected the Sultanate's broader approach to governing foreign populations through territorial regulation. The early development of ethnic residential segregation in Palembang can therefore be understood as a historically contingent outcome of political governance, in which residential space was deliberately organized to regulate mobility, reinforce administrative control, and distinguish foreign communities from the Indigenous population.

Juvenile Stage

According to Taylor's (2013) settlement development theory, the juvenile stage is characterized by the institutional organization of settlements under formal political authority. In the case of Kampung Kapitan, this stage corresponds to the Dutch colonial period, during which government policies fundamentally reshaped the spatial organization of the Chinese community in Palembang.

Following the collapse of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate and the establishment of Dutch colonial rule, the residential pattern of the Chinese community underwent a major transformation. The colonial administration introduced the *wijkenstelsel* (residential quarter system), a policy that required ethnic Chinese residents to relocate from their floating houses along the Musi River to designated land-based settlements within urban areas (Shanti & Rusyanti, 2021). The implementation of this policy marked the formal institutionalization of Chinese residential segregation in Palembang. The construction of the residence of the first Chinese community leader in the 7 Ulu district symbolized the establishment of Kampung Kapitan as the administrative and residential center of the Chinese community (Febrian et al., 2015).

As Chinese migration to the Dutch East Indies increased due to economic hardship and political instability under the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty, the designated settlement in 7 Ulu gradually reached its capacity. Consequently, Chinese residential areas expanded into the neighboring districts of 9 Ulu and 10 Ulu (Febrian et al., 2015; Husin & Marihandono, 2020). Despite this spatial expansion, the 7 Ulu area remained the administrative, social, and cultural center of the Chinese community in Palembang (Febrian et al., 2015). Interview data further illustrate the organizational structure of the settlement during the colonial period. Informant N described the remaining historical buildings as follows:

"Of the original buildings, only two of the three main buildings remain and continue to be preserved. One is the Kapitan House, where the Chinese Kapitan once lived, and the other is the ancestral hall used for worship. Originally there were three principal buildings, the third being the administrative office, but that building no longer exists." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

The interview reveals that Kampung Kapitan was organized around three principal institutions: the Kapitan House, which functioned as the residence of the community leader; the ancestral hall, which served religious and ceremonial purposes; and the administrative office, which coordinated community governance. Together, these buildings reflected a highly organized communal structure in which political leadership, religious life, and administrative functions were spatially integrated within the settlement. Although the administrative office has disappeared, the continued preservation of the Kapitan House and the ancestral hall demonstrates the community's commitment to safeguarding its historical heritage and collective identity. At the same time, the loss of one of the three principal buildings illustrates the pressures of urban change and modernization that have affected the settlement over time.

The establishment of Kampung Kapitan during the Dutch colonial period represented the earliest permanent generation of Chinese settlement in Palembang (Tan, 2008). Consequently, the neighborhood is widely recognized as the city's oldest Chinese residential enclave. To facilitate indirect colonial governance, the Dutch administration appointed a Chinese community leader with the title Kapitan Cina, granting authority over local administration, dispute resolution, and community affairs, while maintaining accountability to the colonial government (Febrian et al., 2015). Historical records and interview findings identify Tjoa Kie Tjuan as the first Chinese leader in Palembang. The name *Kampung Kapitan* itself originates from the honorary title *Kapitan*, which was bestowed by the Dutch colonial administration upon his descendants.

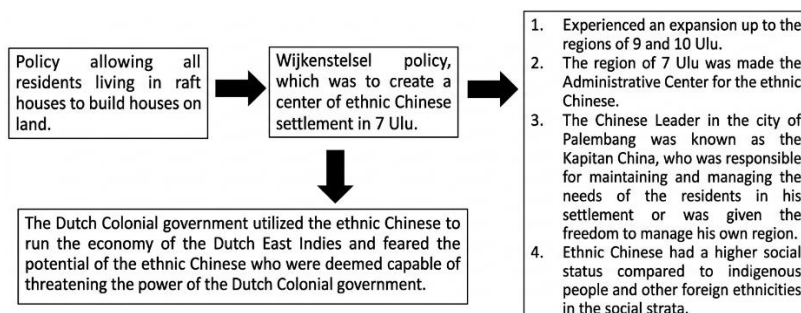
Informant N further explained the evolution of this leadership system:

"They always adapted to whoever governed Indonesia at the time. During the Dutch period, the Chinese community was given a designated settlement and official titles. The name 'Kapitan' came from the title given by the Dutch to Tjoa Kie Tjuan's son, while Tjoa Kie Tjuan himself held the higher title of Major because he was the first leader of the Chinese community in Palembang. During the Dutch period, the Chinese community was given a special place to live here." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This testimony highlights the Chinese community's ability to adapt to changing political regimes through institutional accommodation. The distinction between the titles Major and Kapitan indicates a hierarchical leadership structure formally recognized by the colonial administration, with the position of Major occupying a higher rank. The conferral of official titles, together with the allocation of a designated residential area, served a dual function. On the one hand, it acknowledged the Chinese community's important economic and administrative role within the colonial system. On the other hand, it constituted a mechanism of colonial governance by concentrating the community within a clearly defined spatial boundary and assigning local leaders who mediated between colonial authorities and Chinese residents. The naming of the settlement after the title *Kapitan* further illustrates the central role of community leadership in shaping both the spatial identity and historical memory of Kampung Kapitan.

Although the Chinese community was initially subject to strict colonial supervision, Dutch policies gradually became more accommodating over time. The formal abolition of the *wijkenstelsel* in 1910 eliminated the legal basis for ethnic residential segregation in Palembang (Febrian et al., 2015; Frasisca, 2020). However, the removal of this policy did not alter the existence of Kampung Kapitan as a Chinese residential enclave. Instead, the settlement continued to function as a cohesive community, suggesting that by the early twentieth century its persistence was sustained not only by colonial regulations but also by the social, cultural, and historical ties that had developed among its residents.

The spatial evolution of Kampung Kapitan during the juvenile stage is summarized in Figure 3.



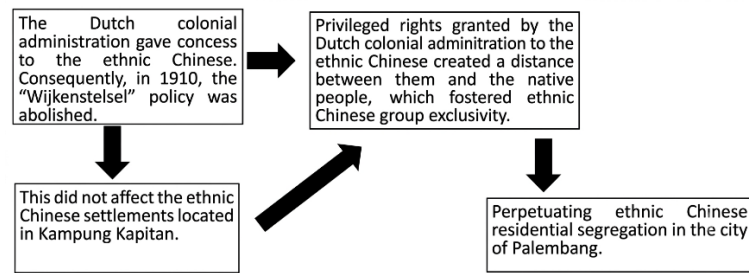


Figure 3. Development of Chinese settlements: Early stage.

Source: Processed by the researcher (2023)

Figure 3 illustrates the evolution of Kampung Kapitan during the juvenile stage. Following the Dutch colonial takeover of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, the implementation of the *wijkenstelsel* relocated the Chinese community from floating houses along the Musi River to designated land-based settlements in the 7 Ulu area. This policy established a more formalized residential structure centered on three principal institutions: the Kapitan House, the ancestral hall, and the administrative office, and introduced a hierarchical leadership system through the appointment of a *Kapitan Cina*. The figure also depicts the subsequent expansion of the settlement into the neighboring areas of 9 Ulu and 10 Ulu as a consequence of large-scale migration from China. Notably, the diagram demonstrates that although the *wijkenstelsel* was abolished in 1910, the Chinese community remained in the same location. This continuity suggests that a settlement initially created through colonial spatial regulation gradually evolved into a residential enclave sustained by the community's own social, cultural, and historical attachments. Figure 4 therefore highlights the dynamic interaction between colonial governance, migration, and community agency in shaping the ethnic urban landscape of Palembang.

Mature Stage

According to Taylor's (2013) settlement development theory, the mature stage represents a period in which ethnic settlements continue to evolve after the removal of formal state regulations governing their spatial organization. During this stage, the expansion, contraction, or persistence of a settlement is determined primarily by the needs and decisions of its residents rather than by government intervention.

The transfer of political authority from the Dutch colonial administration to the Japanese occupation government in 1942 did not substantially alter the spatial organization of Kampung Kapitan. Unlike the Dutch administration, the Japanese authorities introduced no policies regulating Chinese residential patterns and instead focused on restructuring local administrative leadership (Febrian et al., 2015). Consequently, the transition of political regimes did not generate significant social disruption within the settlement. This contrasts with experiences in several other regions of the former Dutch East Indies, where Japanese occupation brought profound social and economic upheaval. The continuity observed in Kampung Kapitan suggests that by this period the settlement had developed a sufficiently resilient social structure to withstand external political change. This resilience is reflected in the testimony of Informant RS:

"As far as I know, there has never really been any serious conflict. Perhaps during my mother's or grandmother's generation there were ordinary misunderstandings between neighbors, but during my lifetime nothing significant has happened. Even during 1998, everything here remained peaceful." (Interview, 8 May 2023).

The interview provides important insights into the long-term social cohesion of the community. While the informant acknowledged that minor neighborhood disputes may have occurred in earlier generations, these were described as ordinary aspects of communal life rather than persistent ethnic tensions. Particularly noteworthy is the reference to the events of 1998, a period marked by widespread anti-Chinese violence in several major Indonesian cities. The informant's description of Kampung Kapitan as remaining "peaceful" during this period suggests that the settlement possessed strong social resilience and had established harmonious relationships with neighboring non-Chinese communities. These findings indicate that residential concentration in Kampung Kapitan did not produce social isolation or antagonistic interethnic relations. Instead, the enclave functioned as a space in which ethnic identity could be maintained while fostering positive interactions with surrounding communities.

Institutionally, the Japanese administration replaced the colonial *Kapitan* system with the *Ku-Mi-Co* neighborhood administration, under which each neighborhood leader was responsible for approximately ten households (Febrian et al., 2015). This administrative restructuring reduced the territorial extent of Kampung

Kapitan to the present-day 7 Ulu area, a spatial configuration that has remained largely unchanged. The continuity of community leadership and heritage preservation is reflected in the testimony of Informant N:

"The two remaining historical houses are now occupied and maintained by descendants of the Tjoa family, the lineage of the first Chinese leader in Palembang and in this settlement." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

Following Indonesian independence in 1945, Kampung Kapitan continued to evolve while retaining its historical identity. The surviving colonial-era buildings have been preserved by descendants of the Tjoa family, reinforcing intergenerational continuity in the stewardship of the settlement's cultural heritage (Aziz et al., 2020). The neighborhood's significance has further increased since its designation as a protected cultural heritage site by the Palembang municipal government.

Today, Kampung Kapitan functions not only as a residential neighborhood but also as an important center for the preservation of Chinese cultural traditions. Annual events such as *Sedekah Kampung*, Chinese New Year (Imlek), and the Cap Go Meh Festival are organized collaboratively by local residents and the municipal government, reflecting the integration of heritage conservation with community participation. Informant N explained the contemporary practice of these cultural traditions as follows:

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, most communal traditions have not been held, although we hope to restart them this year. In May there will be the *Sedekah Kampung* celebration. Chinese New Year was not celebrated this year, and events such as the Sriwijaya Cultural Parade and Cap Go Meh have also stopped for a while. Large public celebrations are organized with support from both local residents and the municipal government, whereas private rituals, such as ancestral offerings and midnight prayers, remain the responsibility of individual Chinese families." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This testimony highlights several important dimensions of cultural continuity within Kampung Kapitan. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted communal cultural practices, illustrating the vulnerability of collective rituals to external crises. Nevertheless, the community's intention to revive these traditions demonstrates considerable cultural resilience and a sustained commitment to preserving its intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, the coexistence of publicly organized festivals and privately maintained family rituals reflects the complementary roles of community institutions and kinship networks in ensuring the intergenerational transmission of Chinese cultural traditions. The spatial and social evolution of Kampung Kapitan during the mature stage is presented in Figure 4.

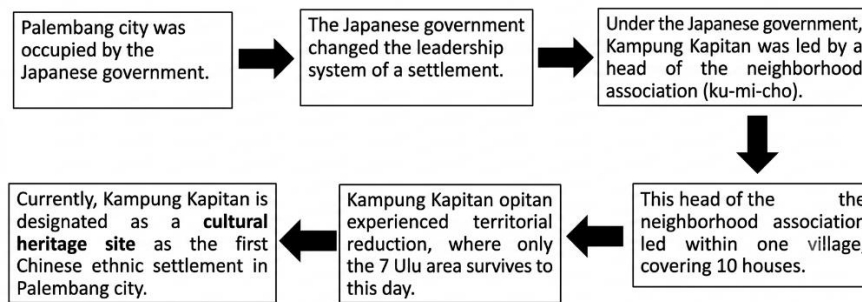


Figure 4. Development of Chinese settlements: Mature stage
Source: Processed by the researcher (2023)

Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of Kampung Kapitan during the mature stage of settlement development. The diagram shows that following the end of Dutch colonial rule and the beginning of the Japanese occupation in 1942, the settlement experienced an institutional transition in local governance. The colonial *Kapitan* system was replaced by the *Ku-Mi-Neighborhood* administration, resulting in the administrative contraction of Kampung Kapitan to its present-day boundaries within the 7 Ulu area. Despite this territorial reduction, the figure demonstrates that Kampung Kapitan continued to develop and consolidate following Indonesian independence. The settlement gradually acquired new functions beyond its original residential role, most notably after its designation as a protected cultural heritage site. As illustrated in the diagram, Kampung Kapitan has evolved into an important center for the preservation and promotion of Chinese cultural heritage in Palembang.

A notable feature highlighted in Figure 5 is the transformation of Kampung Kapitan from a predominantly residential enclave into a heritage landscape that performs dual functions as both a living neighborhood and a public cultural space. The continued stewardship of the remaining historic buildings by

descendants of the Tjoa family further illustrates the intergenerational continuity of community leadership and cultural responsibility. Rather than functioning solely as a historically segregated settlement, Kampung Kapitan has undergone a process of revitalization through formal heritage recognition, community participation, and the preservation of cultural traditions. Collectively, these developments demonstrate that, during the mature stage, the settlement has evolved into a significant symbol of Chinese cultural identity and historical continuity within the urban landscape of Palembang.

Senile Stage

In Taylor's (2013) settlement development theory, the senile stage is characterized by stagnation or decline resulting from economic, political, or demographic pressures. However, the empirical findings indicate that Kampung Kapitan has not entered this stage. Rather than experiencing decline, the settlement has continued to develop, particularly following its designation as a protected cultural heritage site by the Palembang Municipal Government under Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage (Registration No. PO201510700005).

This finding suggests that Taylor's settlement development model is only partially applicable to the case of Kampung Kapitan. Instead of undergoing the expected process of settlement decline, Kampung Kapitan has experienced a process of heritage-led rejuvenation, whereby heritage conservation policies have altered its developmental trajectory. The formal recognition of the settlement as cultural heritage represents a critical turning point, transforming what might otherwise have become a declining historic neighborhood into a revitalized cultural landscape. This case demonstrates that, within historic settlements, political and cultural recognition can counterbalance the economic pressures that frequently contribute to the decline of traditional neighborhoods under conditions of rapid urbanization. Community aspirations regarding the future of Kampung Kapitan further illustrate this process of revitalization. Informant HY stated:

"We hope more people will pay attention to this neighborhood, preserve its history, and improve its condition. Most importantly, we want to continue preserving the Chinese community here so that it will always remain." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This statement reflects three interconnected community aspirations. First, residents seek greater recognition and support from government institutions, researchers, and the broader public, indicating that they view external acknowledgment as essential to the long-term sustainability of the settlement. Second, the emphasis on documenting and preserving local history demonstrates a strong awareness of the importance of safeguarding collective memory for future generations. Third, the desire for improvements to the physical environment highlights the community's recognition that heritage conservation must also address the maintenance of the settlement's built environment. Perhaps most significant is the informant's emphasis on ensuring that "the Chinese community will always remain." This statement suggests that residents perceive the continuity of the community itself as the central objective of heritage preservation. Their concern extends beyond conserving historic buildings to maintaining Kampung Kapitan as a living heritage in which cultural practices, social relationships, and community identity continue to be reproduced across generations. A similar perspective was expressed by Informant R:

"Now that Kampung Kapitan has become a cultural heritage site, many more people know about it. We hope it will continue to develop as a tourist destination in Palembang and receive greater attention." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

The designation of Kampung Kapitan as cultural heritage has increased the public visibility and legitimacy of the settlement. Community members perceive this recognition positively because it strengthens public appreciation and institutional support for heritage conservation. At the same time, they envision Kampung Kapitan as a heritage tourism destination capable of generating broader economic and cultural benefits. Nevertheless, their call for "greater attention" indicates that formal legal recognition alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by sustained governmental support through conservation programs, infrastructure investment, and community empowerment initiatives.

These findings demonstrate that official heritage designation has strengthened residents' commitment to preserving Kampung Kapitan as the historic center of the Chinese community in Palembang. Heritage recognition has not only provided legal protection but has also enhanced the community's collective identity, sense of belonging, and pride in its historical legacy. In this sense, external recognition functions as a form of symbolic capital that reinforces local stewardship of cultural heritage. However, interview data also reveal concerns regarding the unintended consequences of heritage-based development. Informant HYO explained:

"We hope this neighborhood will become better, but it should continue to exist as our home. We do not want residents to feel displaced because it becomes a tourist destination." (Interview, 7 May 2023).

This statement highlights an important tension between heritage conservation and tourism development. While residents generally support the promotion of Kampung Kapitan as a cultural tourism destination, they also express concerns that increasing tourism may marginalize the local community. Such concerns reflect broader debates surrounding touristification, whereby historic neighborhoods are transformed to accommodate visitors, sometimes at the expense of long-term residents. In this context, the fear of being "displaced" extends beyond physical relocation to include symbolic displacement, whereby residents may gradually lose their sense of ownership, belonging, and agency as the neighborhood becomes increasingly oriented toward visitors rather than community life.

Overall, the findings indicate that Kampung Kapitan does not conform to Taylor's concept of the senile stage. Instead, the settlement has undergone a process of heritage-led rejuvenation, in which cultural heritage policies have stimulated social, cultural, and institutional revitalization rather than decline. Nevertheless, this revitalization remains accompanied by important challenges, particularly the need to balance heritage preservation with urban development, tourism promotion with community well-being, and economic opportunities with the protection of cultural authenticity. The long-term sustainability of Kampung Kapitan will therefore depend on governance approaches that position the Chinese community not merely as the object of heritage conservation but as its principal custodian and active stakeholder.

Factors Sustaining the Chinese Ethnic Residential Enclave

Drawing upon data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this study examines the factors that have enabled the Chinese community to remain in Kampung Kapitan and sustain the ethnic residential enclave across generations. The analysis adopts Sumaatmadja's (1988) framework of settlement development, which identifies four interrelated determinants of settlement persistence: physical-environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. These dimensions provide the analytical basis for explaining why Kampung Kapitan continues to function as a historically significant Chinese settlement despite the absence of formal segregation policies.

Physical-Environmental Factors

According to Sumaatmadja (1993), the physical environment constitutes one of the primary determinants influencing the establishment and long-term development of human settlements. Residential areas are closely shaped by their geographical setting, accessibility, and environmental conditions, all of which affect residents' decisions to remain in a particular location. The findings indicate that one of the principal reasons the Chinese community continues to reside in Kampung Kapitan is its highly strategic location. Situated on KH. Azhari Street, 7 Ulu, Seberang Ulu I District, Palembang, the settlement enjoys excellent accessibility to different parts of the city. As one participant explained:

"Yes, Kampung Kapitan is in a very strategic location. Everywhere is close, and we can travel either by road or by river, which makes it very convenient." (Interview, 1 May 2023)

This statement highlights the importance of spatial accessibility in sustaining residential attachment. The informant's emphasis that "everywhere is close" reflects residents' perception that Kampung Kapitan provides convenient access to commercial areas, public facilities, and other important urban destinations. The availability of both land and river transportation further enhances the settlement's locational advantages.

A similar perspective was expressed by Informant R:

"Of course. It's convenient because everything is nearby, and we can also travel by river. Living here is easy because there are many transportation options depending on where we want to go. If travelling along the riverside is faster, we simply take a *ketek* boat." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This testimony demonstrates the flexibility afforded by Kampung Kapitan's transportation network. Residents are able to select the most efficient mode of travel according to their destination, whether by road or by the Musi River. The continued use of the traditional *ketek* boat illustrates how historical forms of river transportation remain integrated into contemporary urban mobility. Such multimodal accessibility reduces travel time and transportation costs while reinforcing the settlement's functional integration within the wider urban system. Beyond its accessibility, Kampung Kapitan occupies a central urban location while maintaining direct access to the Musi River, a geographical feature that has historically shaped the development of Palembang. The coexistence of modern road infrastructure and traditional river transport provides residents with a unique locational advantage that continues to support daily mobility, commercial activities, and social interaction.

Environmental stability also contributes to the long-term persistence of the settlement. Interview findings indicate that Kampung Kapitan has experienced relatively few natural hazards throughout its history. Aside from occasional flooding which has become increasingly infrequent in recent years the

neighborhood has remained largely unaffected by major environmental disasters. This stable physical environment has reduced the risks associated with long-term residence and has reinforced the community's willingness to remain in the area across generations. Taken together, these findings suggest that the persistence of Kampung Kapitan cannot be explained solely by cultural attachment or historical continuity. Its favorable geographical location, multimodal accessibility, and relatively stable environmental conditions constitute important physical-environmental advantages that continue to make the settlement an attractive place to live. These characteristics have strengthened residents' place attachment and have significantly contributed to the long-term sustainability of Kampung Kapitan as the oldest Chinese residential enclave in Palembang.

Socio-Cultural Factors

According to [Sumaatmadja \(1993\)](#), socio-cultural factors refer to the social relationships and cultural practices that develop among residents within a settlement, fostering collective identity, social cohesion, and a shared sense of belonging. The findings indicate that these factors constitute one of the primary reasons why the Chinese community has continued to reside in Kampung Kapitan across generations. The Chinese residents of Kampung Kapitan maintain strong interpersonal relationships that have been cultivated through long-term co-residence over several generations. Most households occupy ancestral homes inherited within the family, resulting in stable neighborhood compositions and enduring kinship networks. This continuity has strengthened social cohesion, mutual trust, and a strong sense of collective responsibility among community members. As Informant HY explained:

"It has never been difficult to interact with fellow Chinese residents. In fact, it feels easier because we understand each other better. Sometimes we even speak Mandarin when we chat, which makes us feel much closer." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This statement illustrates that communication among Chinese residents extends beyond practical interaction and serves as an important mechanism for maintaining cultural identity. The continued use of Mandarin in everyday conversations functions not only as a means of communication but also as a cultural marker that reinforces shared identity and emotional attachment. The informant's remark that they "understand each other better" reflects the existence of shared cultural experiences and values, which foster trust, familiarity, and a strong sense of belonging within the community. Intergenerational continuity also plays a crucial role in sustaining the settlement. Many residents continue to occupy family properties that have been inherited over several generations, making residential continuity an expression of both family obligation and cultural preservation. Informant W described this process as follows:

"As I mentioned before, this house has been passed down through generations. Many of our relatives live here. I stayed here because my family wanted someone to continue living in this house." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

The interview demonstrates that residential decisions are not solely individual choices but are also shaped by extended family expectations. The informant's emphasis that they were "asked" to occupy the ancestral house reflects a strong sense of familial responsibility to preserve inherited property and maintain the family's historical presence within Kampung Kapitan. Such practices ensure the continuous occupation of ancestral homes and facilitate the intergenerational reproduction of the Chinese community within the settlement. Equally important is the harmonious relationship between Chinese and non-Chinese residents. Contrary to assumptions that ethnic residential concentration necessarily produces social exclusion, the findings reveal that interethnic relations in Kampung Kapitan are characterized by mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Residents reported no experiences of discrimination or persistent prejudice, contributing to a strong sense of security and residential satisfaction. As Informant NY explained:

"There are no problems here. Everyone lives peacefully and focuses on their own lives. People are busy earning a living, so there is hardly any time for conflict." (Interview, 8 May 2023).

This statement suggests that social harmony is maintained through everyday interactions grounded in mutual respect and shared economic activities. The informant's observation that residents are primarily occupied with their livelihoods reflects a community in which pragmatic coexistence minimizes opportunities for ethnic tension. Rather than producing social isolation, the ethnic concentration of Kampung Kapitan has evolved into a neighborhood characterized by stable interethnic relations and high levels of social trust. Beyond interpersonal relationships, broader kinship networks further reinforce the persistence of the settlement. Family members frequently choose to live near relatives, while some households encourage younger generations to occupy ancestral residences when older family members relocate or pass away. These kinship-based residential arrangements ensure that ancestral properties remain

occupied and contribute to the long-term demographic continuity of the Chinese community in Kampung Kapitan.

The persistence of the settlement is further strengthened through the preservation of cultural traditions. Kampung Kapitan has become an important venue for the celebration of Chinese cultural festivals, including Chinese New Year (Imlek), the Cap Go Meh Festival, and the Sedekah Kampung celebration. These events are organized annually by local residents with support from the Palembang Municipal Government. Beyond their ceremonial significance, these festivals reinforce collective identity, strengthen intergenerational cultural transmission, and sustain Kampung Kapitan as a living cultural landscape rather than merely a historic residential enclave. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the persistence of Kampung Kapitan cannot be understood solely through its physical or historical characteristics. Instead, it is sustained by dense kinship networks, intergenerational inheritance, shared language, strong community solidarity, harmonious interethnic relations, and the continued practice of cultural traditions. Together, these socio-cultural factors have enabled Kampung Kapitan to remain a vibrant and enduring Chinese settlement despite the disappearance of formal segregation policies decades ago.

Economic Factors

According to [Sumaatmadja \(1988\)](#), economic factors encompass residents' purchasing power, housing ownership, and sources of livelihood, all of which influence settlement development and residential decisions. The findings indicate that economic considerations play a significant role in explaining why the Chinese community continues to reside in Kampung Kapitan. Most Chinese residents are engaged in small-scale trading activities in markets located near the settlement, particularly Pasar Klinik 7 Ulu and Pasar 16 Ilir. Consequently, the proximity between their residences and workplaces provides an important economic advantage by reducing commuting time and transportation costs, thereby supporting their daily livelihoods. The importance of housing ownership and intergenerational inheritance was highlighted by Informant H:

"The house I live in belongs to my parents. I don't have my own house yet. I'm not even sure which generation of my family has lived here, but I know my grandparents' family has been here for a very long time." (Interview, 1 May 2023)

This testimony reveals that many Chinese residents continue to occupy family-owned or inherited houses because they have not yet acquired homes of their own. The informant's uncertainty regarding how many generations have lived in Kampung Kapitan suggests that the family's residence predates living memory and has become deeply embedded within the family's identity. In this context, inherited housing functions not only as a symbol of family continuity but also as an economically viable housing strategy, enabling younger generations to remain in the settlement without incurring the substantial financial burden of purchasing new property. Informant N further explained:

"The most obvious reason is inheritance, especially for those whose financial situation is average or who cannot yet afford another place to live. Besides that, many people simply feel comfortable here because they grew up in this neighborhood. Most Chinese residents also work as traders in the nearby markets." (Interview, 1 May 2023).

This statement identifies two closely related economic considerations. First, inherited housing provides an affordable residential option for households with limited financial resources. As the informant noted, many residents do not possess sufficient economic capital to purchase property elsewhere, making ancestral homes an economically rational alternative. Second, the settlement's proximity to local markets offers practical advantages for residents whose livelihoods depend on small-scale commerce. Living close to their workplaces minimizes transportation expenses and increases the efficiency of daily economic activities. Importantly, the interview also suggests that economic factors operate alongside social and emotional attachments. The informant's observation that many residents "grew up here" indicates that decisions to remain in Kampung Kapitan cannot be explained solely by financial considerations. Rather, economic practicality intersects with place attachment, family continuity, and community identity to reinforce long-term residential persistence.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the economic sustainability of Kampung Kapitan is closely linked to the availability of inherited housing and the strategic location of the settlement near traditional commercial centers. For many households, particularly those engaged in small-scale trading and possessing limited financial resources, remaining in Kampung Kapitan represents both an economically rational decision and a means of preserving intergenerational family assets. These economic advantages have therefore contributed significantly to the continued persistence of the Chinese residential enclave across successive generations.

Political Factors

According to [Sumaatmadja \(1993\)](#), political factors refer to government policies and regulations that influence the establishment, organization, and long-term development of human settlements. In the case of Kampung Kapitan, political intervention has shaped the settlement across different historical periods and continues to influence its persistence today.

Historically, Kampung Kapitan originated as a direct consequence of the Dutch colonial government's *wijkenstelsel*, a policy that required the spatial concentration of Chinese communities within designated urban areas. Although the *wijkenstelsel* was formally abolished in the early twentieth century, its spatial legacy has endured. The settlement established under colonial regulation gradually evolved into a self-sustaining community whose continued existence is now maintained through residents' social, cultural, and historical attachments rather than legal compulsion. Consequently, colonial policy constitutes an important historical-political factor underlying the persistence of Kampung Kapitan.

Contemporary political support has further strengthened the sustainability of the settlement through heritage conservation policies. Informant RS described the significance of Kampung Kapitan's designation as a protected cultural heritage site:

"It's a good thing that Kampung Kapitan has become a cultural heritage site. It guarantees that this place will continue to exist, so the history of the Chinese settlement here will not disappear. This is an important historical place because it marks where the Chinese community first arrived in Palembang. It should continue to be preserved so that its history is never lost." (Interview, 8 May 2023).

This statement demonstrates that residents perceive heritage designation as providing both legal protection and symbolic recognition. The informant's emphasis that the settlement's future is now "more secure" reflects confidence that official protection will safeguard Kampung Kapitan from redevelopment pressures and ensure the continuity of its historical identity. Equally important is the recognition of Kampung Kapitan as the earliest Chinese settlement in Palembang, which reinforces collective pride and strengthens the community's commitment to preserving its historical legacy. The concern that "its history should never be lost" also highlights residents' awareness of the importance of protecting collective memory alongside the physical environment.

Another significant political factor is the formal recognition of Kampung Kapitan as a protected cultural heritage site by the Palembang Municipal Government under Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage (Registration No. PO201510700005). This designation has enhanced residents' sense of legitimacy and institutional support, affirming Kampung Kapitan's historical significance as the oldest Chinese settlement in Palembang. More importantly, official recognition has encouraged the community to strengthen its efforts to preserve both the settlement and its cultural traditions, while promoting Kampung Kapitan as an important heritage tourism destination within the city.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that political factors influencing the persistence of Kampung Kapitan have evolved over time. Whereas colonial policies initially imposed ethnic residential concentration through spatial regulation, contemporary government policies have shifted toward heritage conservation and cultural recognition. This transformation illustrates how political intervention can move from functioning as an instrument of segregation to becoming a mechanism for cultural preservation. In doing so, public policy has contributed not only to safeguarding the settlement's physical fabric but also to reinforcing the historical identity, collective memory, and long-term sustainability of the Chinese community in Kampung Kapitan.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the ethnic Chinese residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang, represents a complex form of cultural persistence that has endured across generations despite the abolition of colonial residential segregation policies in 1910. This finding is consistent with [Paturusi \(2016\)](#), who argues that ethnic residential segregation in Indonesia extends beyond a purely spatial phenomenon and instead reflects deeper socio-cultural dynamics. Analysis using [Taylor's \(2013\)](#) Settlement Development Theory indicates that Kampung Kapitan has passed through the four developmental stages of settlement evolution. However, rather than entering the expected stage of decline (the senile stage), the settlement has experienced rejuvenation following its designation as a Cultural Heritage Site. This finding suggests that Taylor's theory, which was developed primarily within the context of Western settlements, is not entirely applicable to historically and culturally significant settlements in Indonesia, where heritage conservation policies can redirect settlement trajectories from potential decline toward revitalization.

The formation of residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan also demonstrates a fundamental transformation from imposed segregation to voluntary self-segregation. During the early period of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, Chinese residents were required to live in floating houses along the Musi

River, reflecting a form of spatial control exercised as a political instrument. This policy supports the findings of [Mayshurah and Sair \(2023\)](#), who argue that during both the royal and colonial periods, residential segregation in Indonesia functioned as a mechanism for controlling particular ethnic groups and minimizing perceived threats to political stability. The use of floating houses, which could easily be removed by allowing them to drift downstream, symbolized the marginal and vulnerable position of the Chinese population, who possessed no legal rights to land ownership and could be expelled whenever their presence was considered threatening.

A significant transformation occurred during the Dutch colonial period through the implementation of the *wijkenstelsel*, which relocated Chinese settlements from floating houses to designated land areas in 7 Ulu. Although this policy remained a form of state-imposed segregation, the relocation represented an important shift in the socio-political status of the Chinese community, from a marginalized population occupying temporary river settlements to a formally recognized community with permanent residential territory. As noted by [Shanti & Rusyanti \(2021\)](#), the *wijkenstelsel* implemented across many Indonesian cities was intended to facilitate colonial administrative control and limit interaction between indigenous and Chinese populations. Nevertheless, it simultaneously provided the Chinese community with a degree of legal certainty over residential land that had previously been unavailable.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the abolition of the *wijkenstelsel* in 1910 did not lead to the dispersal of the Chinese community from Kampung Kapitan. Instead, the settlement remained intact, suggesting that during the colonial period strong social, economic, and cultural ties had already developed within the community. Consequently, Kampung Kapitan was transformed from a place of compulsory residence into a homeland imbued with collective identity, emotional attachment, and a strong sense of belonging. This finding is consistent with the concept of the ethnic enclave proposed by [Arif et al. \(2020\)](#), who argue that the persistence of Chinese residential concentration is not necessarily the result of discrimination by outsiders but rather of voluntary preferences to live among co-ethnics because of the social and economic advantages such arrangements provide. The transition from imposed segregation to voluntary self-segregation therefore demonstrates the agency of the Chinese community in shaping their own residential environment. Remaining in Kampung Kapitan represents a rational decision grounded in interconnected economic, social, and cultural considerations rather than merely the legacy of colonial spatial policies.

Furthermore, analysis using [Sumaatmadja's \(1988\)](#) settlement development framework reveals that the persistence of Kampung Kapitan cannot be explained by a single determinant. Instead, four interrelated dimensions physical, socio-cultural, economic, and political operate simultaneously to produce what may be described as layered cultural persistence. From a physical perspective, Kampung Kapitan occupies a strategically advantageous location in the urban center with dual accessibility through both road networks and the Musi River. Interview findings indicate that this transportation flexibility is highly valued by residents, particularly traders whose livelihoods depend on efficient mobility. Interestingly, however, this strategic location has not resulted in gentrification or the displacement of long-established Chinese residents by wealthier social groups, a process commonly observed in central urban areas, as reported by [Izzudin & Risyanto \(2013\)](#) in their study of urban settlements in Surabaya. This suggests the existence of strong socio-cultural mechanisms within the community that protect inherited properties and limit external acquisition, thereby reinforcing the long-term continuity of the settlement.

The economic dimension reveals one of the most distinctive findings of this study. Collective ownership of ancestral houses within extended families creates what may be described as a lock-in effect, whereby residents remain economically attached to Kampung Kapitan because selling inherited property requires the consent of multiple family members and often entails complex intergenerational negotiations. Interview findings indicate that ancestral houses are commonly owned jointly by members of the extended family, making any decision to sell a potential source of conflict. This collective ownership pattern differs substantially from the individual property ownership that predominates in contemporary society and reflects traditional Chinese cultural values that emphasize extended family ties and intergenerational responsibility. [Tan \(2008\)](#) similarly argues that property ownership within Chinese Indonesian communities frequently involves the extended family rather than the nuclear household, creating strong economic bonds that anchor individuals to their ancestral homes. Furthermore, the settlement's proximity to traditional markets, where most residents work as traders, has produced an embedded economy in which economic activities are closely integrated with the community's social and spatial organization. Unlike commuter settlements, where residential and workplace locations are geographically separated, Kampung Kapitan provides an economically efficient living environment that reinforces residents' decisions to remain in the settlement.

The socio-cultural dimension represents the most significant finding of this study and provides the principal explanation for the long-term persistence of residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan. The use of Mandarin in everyday communication functions not merely as a means of communication but also as an

important marker of ethnic identity that fosters bounded solidarity within the community. Interview participants consistently reported feeling a stronger sense of intimacy and familiarity when communicating in Mandarin, often describing interactions as comparable to conversations with close family members even when no kinship relationship existed. This finding is consistent with social identity theory, which recognizes language as one of the most powerful mechanisms through which collective identity and in-group solidarity are constructed. Similarly, [Frasisca \(2020\)](#), in her study of Chinese residential segregation in Jakarta, found that the continued use of Mandarin and Chinese dialects strengthens internal community cohesion while reinforcing ethnic identity.

Beyond language, strong kinship networks generate substantial social capital within the community. The findings show that many residents continue living in Kampung Kapitan because relatives encourage or even expect them to occupy inherited family houses to prevent them from being left vacant. This intergenerational pattern of residential succession ensures the continued presence of the Chinese community within the settlement and prevents demographic decline despite opportunities to relocate elsewhere.

One of the most noteworthy findings concerns the harmonious relationship between Chinese and non-Chinese residents in Kampung Kapitan. Interviews revealed that serious interethnic conflict has never occurred within the settlement. Most remarkably, Kampung Kapitan remained peaceful during the 1998 anti-Chinese riots that affected many major Indonesian cities. This finding challenges the common portrayal of Chinese communities as socially exclusive ([Ariefyanto, 2012](#); [Fikri, 2018](#)). Instead, it demonstrates that spatial segregation does not necessarily produce social exclusion or interethnic antagonism. In Kampung Kapitan, residential concentration has created a social environment in which ethnic identity can be maintained while positive relationships with neighbouring communities continue to flourish. Similar conclusions were reached by [Sihotang \(2017\)](#), who found that ethnic residential segregation in Pekanbaru did not inevitably generate conflict and, in some cases, contributed to social stability by providing mutually respected social spaces for different ethnic groups. The peaceful condition of Kampung Kapitan during the 1998 riots further illustrates the community's strong social resilience, suggesting that long-standing patterns of interaction, mutual respect, and economic interdependence were sufficient to mitigate the broader anti-Chinese sentiments that emerged at the national level.

Taken together, these four dimensions create what may be conceptualized as layered cultural persistence, in which each factor reinforces the others to produce a stable and resilient settlement system. The settlement's strategic location generates economic advantages through proximity to commercial centres, while collective ownership of ancestral houses reduces housing costs and provides strong material incentives for residents to remain. At the socio-cultural level, the continued use of Mandarin, dense kinship networks, and the regular practice of cultural traditions foster deep emotional attachment, collective identity, and a strong sense of belonging. These socio-cultural resources not only strengthen internal cohesion but also function as protective mechanisms against external pressures. At the political level, the designation of Kampung Kapitan as a protected Cultural Heritage Site provides legal recognition and institutional support that further enhances the settlement's long-term sustainability. Rather than operating independently, these four dimensions interact synergistically to sustain and revitalize Kampung Kapitan. This pattern of layered cultural persistence distinguishes Kampung Kapitan from many other cases of ethnic residential segregation, where persistence is typically driven by only one or two dominant factors, such as economic inequality in the United States or religious divisions in India.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the ethnic Chinese residential segregation in Kampung Kapitan, Palembang, emerged through a long historical process encompassing four developmental stages, spanning the eras of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, Dutch colonial rule, and contemporary Indonesia. Each historical period made a distinct contribution to shaping the settlement, which gradually transformed from imposed segregation into voluntary self-segregation. Although the *wijkenstelsel* policy was abolished in 1910, the Chinese community has continued to reside in Kampung Kapitan due to the interaction of four interrelated factors. These include physical factors, namely the settlement's strategic location and dual accessibility via road and river transport; socio-cultural factors, including the continued use of Mandarin, strong kinship networks, and the preservation of cultural traditions; economic factors, particularly collective ownership of ancestral houses and proximity to local markets where most residents earn their livelihoods; and political factors, especially the designation of Kampung Kapitan as a protected Cultural Heritage Site, which provides legal protection and formal recognition. The persistence of this settlement demonstrates that, within Indonesia's multiethnic context, residential segregation can function as a mechanism for preserving minority cultural identity while simultaneously fostering harmonious relations and social integration with the wider community, as evidenced by the settlement's peaceful

coexistence even during the nationwide anti-Chinese riots of 1998. This study also presents several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, it does not comprehensively examine intergenerational dynamics within the Chinese community, particularly the perspectives of younger generations regarding ethnic identity, residential segregation, and their willingness to continue living in Kampung Kapitan. Future studies should investigate how younger Chinese Indonesians, who generally possess greater educational attainment and social mobility, perceive the future of Kampung Kapitan and whether they intend to maintain the tradition of residing in this historic settlement. Second, this study does not provide a detailed analysis of the economic consequences of touristification or examine how the economic benefits generated by Cultural Heritage status are distributed among local residents. Further research is therefore needed to assess whether heritage tourism contributes equitably to community welfare or instead risks alienating residents from their own living environment. Finally, comparative studies involving other historic Chinese settlements in Indonesia, such as Petak Sembilan in Jakarta and Pecinan Semarang, would provide broader insights into the diverse factors that shape the persistence or transformation of ethnic residential segregation across different urban contexts in Indonesia.

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