UTAR NEW VILLAGE COMMUNITY PROJECT REPORT

NAME OF THE NEW VILLAGE:
KAMPUNG PARIT EMPAT (四條港)
PERAK

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ABSTRACT

Bagan Parit Empat, a small village in the Hilir Perak District, has a population which consists of a majority of Chinese Villagers, particularly from TeoChew dialect group. Until today, most villagers are involved in fisheries. Other economic activities in this village include shrimp paste processing as well as Bird’s Nest farming. There is no education institution found in this village. The village children complete their primary and secondary school education in a nearby town, Sungai Sumun. Attractions of this village would include its religious heritage. Though Kampung Parit Empat is just a small village, there are three main Taoist temples found in this village, which are the Wang Lao Xian Shi (王老仙师) temple, Fa shi Gong (法师公), and Na Du Gong (拿督公). Every lunar month of February, April and September, each of these temples will celebrate the birthday of their respective temples deities. Though the villagers experience a peaceful and contented life, they nonetheless face a few problems that need to be addressed. These are problems related to transportation and environmental pollution issues.
HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE

Bagan Parit Empat (四條港), means Four River Harbor. Dating back to around a hundred years ago, the immigrants from China arrived to this village by boat. These early settlers cleared the surrounding mangrove forests to merge the mouth of four small rivers into a bigger size harbor. This was done in an attempt to carry out more fishing activities. Bagan Parit Empat is a fishing village belongs to Hilir Perak District of Perak State. It has a latitude of 3.8500° and a longitude of 100.8500°. It is 3.8km to the nearest town, Sungai Sumun and 30.5km to the city of Teluk Intan. This village covers an area of about 20 hectares. It has a population of around 300 people, of whom 96% are Chinese from the Teochew dialect group. Fishing, shrimp paste production and swiftlet/birds’ nest farming are the main source of income for the villagers.
POPULATION, HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION

The current population in Bagan Parit Empat is about 300 people. There are 28 households in the village in contrast to the 70 households in its heyday. The decrease in number of households in the village is due to the migration of young adults to the city for work. Being surrounded by sea, it is no surprise that fishing is a major source of income here.

The settlement pattern of Bagan Parit Empat is linear. Villagers use the logging trails as the main access routes. The nearest urban centre from Bagan Parit Empat is Teluk Intan. It is this place that the villagers would usually go to for banking services and grocery shopping. Public transportation such as buses are not readily available in Bagan Parit Empat. The villagers would have to go through the hassle of travelling by cars motorcycles all the way to the nearby bus station at Sungai Sumun before heading to other places by bus.

In Bagan Parit Empat, clean water is supplied by the Lembaga Air Perak whereas household electricity is supplied by the Tenaga National Berhad (TNB). There are two main sewage disposal methods, one of which would be the direct disposal of sewage into the sea, whereas the other would be via the piped sewage disposal system.

As the majority of villagers are Taoists, this village has three main Taoist temples: Wang Lao Xian Shi Temple (王老仙师), Fa Shi Gong Temple (法师公), and Na Du Gong Temple (拿督公). The “Fa Shi Gong Temple” was the earliest temple built in the village. There are a total two community halls, called the Fa Shi Gong and the Wang Lao Xian Shi Community Hall. Both are located opposite of the Wang Lao Xian Shi Temple. In addition to that, there is an old coffee shop operating inside one of the houses. This particular coffee shop is the only shop in the village selling food, beverages and some groceries and it has been in operation since the old days.
While the road system in the village is satisfactory, yet there is still room for improvement. The drainage system is satisfactory and flooding is unlikely as excess water will be directed back into the sea. It is said that there is zero crime rate in Bagan Parit Empat as villagers know each other very well and they live a peaceful life there.
ECONOMICS ACTIVITIES

The main source of income in Bagan Parit Empat is fishing which has provided a livelihood for villagers for more than half a century. Although local fishermen used to catch substantial amount of jellyfish in the past, they no longer do so because jellyfish are now rarely found in this region. Currently, local fisherman catch fish, prawns and other seafood.

As the number of young adults from the village who work in major cities continue to increase, the rate of fishing activities and the total fish caught within the last two decades has shown a significant decline. Also, another reason for this significant decrease could be the competition from other fishing village such as Hutan Melintang. Moreover, the transportation of seafood caught from Bagan Parit Empat to the urban areas is problematic. Narrow roads which connect this village to the town make it very difficult for lorries to access the village. Currently, the workers employed in the fishing industry are mostly of Siamese (泰国人) and Burmese (缅 甸 人) origin.

The amount of seafood caught each day varies considerably, depending on weather conditions and the time of year. As a result, the income of fishermen in Bagan Parit Empat is relatively unstable.

Another income source in this village is the production of shrimp paste (Belacan). The name of the local Belacan factory is Wan Shun Yuan (万顺原). It is owned by a middle age man in this village. In this factory, the shrimp is first dried and then ground, mixed, fermented and packed before being marketed. The third source of income for this village is via swiftlet/birds’ nest farming (养燕/引燕). This is done in a big building where swiftlets nest and “birds nest” (a chinese delicacy obtained from the birds’) is collected.
In addition to that, this village has only one old coffee shop which sells mostly drinks and some snacks. The villagers have to travel to nearby towns such as Sungai Sunun and Simpang Empat to replenish their household supplies, as there are no sundry shops, convenience stores or market to cater to the daily needs of the villagers. Moreover, the villagers also pay their electricity, water and or phone bills in the nearby town of Sungai Sunun. The nearest city from Bagan Parit Empat is Teluk Intan. Therefore, most villagers would occasionally visit this city for leisure and entertainment purpose.
EDUCATION

There are no education institutions in Bagan Parit Empat. There was once a primary school called Sekolah Rendah Pei Meng (培蒙小学) in the village. After operating for approximately 50 years as a private school, this institution was shut down about 20 years ago. Its closure was due to the poor enrolment and the lack of teachers. In view of the absence of education institutions in the village, both the primary and secondary school students from Bagan Parit Empat have to travel to Sungai Sumun and Hutan Melintang to attend classes. Most primary school students enrol in SJK (C) Pei Ying (培英国民型小学). The secondary students, on the other hand, have to go to a nearby town, Hutan Melintang, to pursue their secondary education.

It takes about 15 minutes and 30 minutes by car/motorbike to reach the nearest towns of Sungai Sumun and Hutan Melintang respectively. This situation is far from ideal for the village children. Problems with transport are exacerbated when it rains and students may miss classes and extracurricular activities. The monsoon season from September to January each year is especially challenging as the village experiences frequent and heavy rain during this period. In the absence of school buses or other public transport, parents have to send their children to school and to drive through the narrow access roads to neighbouring towns.

Most villagers believe that education is very important for the younger generation. Even though it is tough for them to travel back and forth to send their children to school, they believe it is a worthwhile effort.
SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Bagan Parit Empat has a population of approximately 300 people in 28 households, comprising of an estimated 96% Chinese and 4% Malays. The Majority of villagers are adults. All the villagers are known to communicate mostly in Teochew. This is because their ancestors originally came from the Chaoyang district (where Teochew serves as the main spoken language) in the municipality of Shantou, Guangdong Province, People’s Republic of China. However, villagers also speak in Hokkien and Mandarin.

Due to the composition of its population, the most common religion being practiced in this village is Taoism. The three main Taoist temples in this village are the Wang Lao Xian Shi (王老仙师) temple, Fa Shi Gong (法师公) temple, and Na Du Gong (拿督公) temple. The Fa Shi Gong (法师公) temple is brought into the village by Xie Fu Zhi (谢福芝) in the year 1926. This village was the first in Malaysia of where the deity Fa Shi Gong (法师公) is brought in. Taoist fishermen believe that Fa Shi Gong (法师公) is placed in most fishing villages due to the efficaciousness of this god for people out at sea. This Fa Shi Gong (法师公) was first worshipped in the house of a villager, Xie Fu Zhi (谢福芝). Since the year 1946, this god was placed and worshipped in the current temple. Fishermen strongly believe that the Fa Shi Gong (法师公) can bless them with safety and wellbeing when they are out fishing.

The main festivals in this village include the Fa Shi Gong celebration (lunar calendar April 11), the Na Du Gong celebration (lunar calendar September 18), and the Wang Lao Xian Shi celebration (lunar calendar February 25).

In the past, due to the lack of proper access roads neighbouring towns, every family in the village used to rear poultry in their house compound. The villagers
would collect eggs from the chickens and ducks, and they would also slaughter chickens or swine for daily consumption. However, this is no longer practiced due to the dramatic decline in the village population.

During the Chinese New Year festival, the village will be more lively as the young adults working in major cities will be returning to their hometown for the family reunion dinner and to catch up with family and friends. During this season, all the temples in the village will be much livelier and crowded as all the villagers will be visiting the temples to pay their respect, pray and worship the gods in the temples mentioned above.

Cultural practice in this village, personal milestones such as focuses on marriage and death. In this case, boats actually play an extremely important cultural role. In the past, the bridgegroom would have to travel to village of the bride by boat due to the inconvenience of land transport. However, travel by boat is challenging because it depends on weather conditions. Fortunately, weddings in recent years no longer use boats as the wedding party now uses the road. The past, deceased members of the village were transported by boat to Hutan Melintang for burial. However, in recent times, the bodies of the deceased are all transported using vans.
PROBLEMS AND NEEDS OF PEOPLE

The infrastructure and facilities in Bagan Parit Empat are deplorable and need improvement. The first and most important problem is the absence of a Fire Brigade. Most of the houses in this village are made up of wood and are therefore susceptible to fire. The nearest fire brigade, located at Hutan Melintang, would take around 30 minutes to reach the village. Also, there are a total of three temples in this village and the frequent burning of incense and prayer paraphernalia could lead to a fire. It will be too late for the firefighters to put off the fire if there is indeed a fire in this village. However, according to the villagers, this village is blessed and protected by the deity, Fa Shi Gong. So, there is not even one case of fire reported over the decades.

Secondly, there is no police station in the village. Although there is hardly any crime in the village, villagers need the police in cases of injury, death or other police reports. Also, transportation is another unsolved problem for decades. It takes the villagers approximately 15-20 minutes to travel to the nearest town, Sungai Sumun, before they can board a bus. Furthermore, villagers would have to travel to Teluk Intan for banking services.

The villagers are facing a very serious environmental problem due to the pollution in the village. There is no scheduled garbage collection or a proper disposal method in the village. Some villagers would resort to burning their garbage while some would even discard their garbage into the sea. It can be observed that loads and heaps of garbage are floating on the sea near the village. This creates serious pollution to the surroundings of the village. Nevertheless, there are a few villagers who are aware of recycling reusable item.

Villagers have a poor access to health facilities and centres. The nearest healthcare centre from Bagan Parit Empat is the Klinik Kesihatan Sungai Sumun, which is about 20 minutes away by car. Other than that, some villagers seek medical care at Hospital Teluk Intan which is a 45-minute drive away from the village. This
poses a major drawback for the villagers in terms of seeking medical care from healthcare professionals. The lack of healthcare facilities like clinics and hospitals in the village would undoubtedly present a distinct level of risk to the health and wellbeing of villagers in Bagan Parit Empat.

Another challenge for the villagers is the telecommunication service. The best service provider in this village is the DIGI network, which uses number 016-xxxxxxxx. However, villagers face problems when using the Maxis and Celcom networks where transmission is weak.

Next is the problem with narrow access roads. The current road width limits the entry of large-sized vehicles. As a result, buses and other wide-bodies vehicles have no access to the village. This brings about inconveniences to the villagers, as it takes them approximately 20 minutes to travel to the nearby town, Sungai Sumun, just board a bus. Villagers have to travel to nearby towns like Sungai Sumun in order to access various important services and facilities. These would include post offices, fire brigade, police station and bus stations.

Moreover, Bagan Parit Empat is also facing the problem of an aging work force. Most of the villagers are middle aged or even older. In fact, Bagan Parit Empat does not have sufficient local people to work in the fishing industry and foreign workers are employed. In the long term, the profitability and survival of the fishing industry may be affected.

Currently, villagers are worried about the proposal to cancel the licenses for Type-B ships which are moderate size boats used by local fishermen. This cancellation is deliberated the authorities because it is believed that this type of boats is not eco-friendly and pollutes the mangrove forests and the ecosystem in general.

Lastly, villagers complain that the subsidies received from government is insufficient. This is because there is very limited docking space for boats in the
village and fishermen have no choice but to park their boats at a nearby village, Hutan Melintang consequently, the cost of fuel increases because fishermen have to buy more fuel for the travel back and forth from Hutan Melintang.
RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a few recommendations for the growth and development of this village. Firstly, there is a need to increase job opportunities on this village. The lack of job opportunities beyond fishing in the village has made many young adults move out to urban areas. Therefore, the introduction of new investment and related employment opportunities are crucial for the long term survival of Bagan Parit Empat. As this is a village which relies heavily on fisheries, new industries may focus on the processing of seafood. Besides, investor may be encouraged to develop the tourism potential of Bagan Parit Empat. In short, appropriate new investments may kill two birds with one stone: increase job opportunities and bring income to the villagers.

Furthermore, the Head of village should approach the local authorities to request that access roads are widened thereby enabling heavy vehicles such as buses to reach the village. Perhaps the Head of village could approach the Head of a neighbouring Malay village to discuss and collaborate in their efforts to get accessed roads widened. Besides bringing public transport to the village, the wider roads would allow garbage trucks to access the village. If garbage trucks are scheduled at regular intervals, current problems with open burning and throwing garbage into the sea could be resolved.

The environmental pollution problem can also be overcome by drawing up and enforcing rules which prohibit open burning and throwing any garbage to the sea. Village committees could be set up to enforce and ensure the villagers do not violate the rules. “Gotong-royong” could also be held from time to time to enhance the cleanliness of the village.

Furthermore, mobile clinics or healthcare centres could also be set up in the village. Normally, the villagers would have to travel to Sungai Sumun to seek medical attention from private clinics and hospitals as there are not medical facilities in the village. The availability of medical services will help in improving the standard
of living of the villagers, if the small population does not warrant the establishment of a clinic, perhaps the services of a mobile clinic once or twice a week would be good start.

A few fire hydrants should be installed in the village. It might sound a bit ridiculous to set up fire station in the village, as there is one on Hutan Melintang. However, fire Hydrants in the village would help during emergencies as villagers can use these to put out the fire.

The head of village could also request for policemen to patrol the village and to assist in official reports.
TOURISM VALUE

Bagan Parit Empat has many selling point as a tourist destination. First, the *Fa Shi Gong* (法师公) temple should publicised. This is because this temple is located near the seaside and it provides a beautiful setting for photographers during sunrise and sunset. Perhaps a photography competition could be held to attract more people to visit the village. In addition, this efficaciousness of this deity in granting wished of devotees can be used to promote this temple and to attract more believers to come and worship this deity. The temple committee may want o consider new constructions such as a wishing pond to attract not only the believers, but also the tourists.

Besides that, a fishing village museum could also be built in the village. For example, both traditional and modern fishing methods could be exhibited in the museum. Exhibits which show the history of the village could also be set up so that tourists understand the background of this village. This will definitely provide a good learning experience for the younger generations who may want know more about the development of fisheries in Malaysia. Also, parents could spend a day of relaxation and bonding with their children in this peaceful village.

Some abandoned houses in Bagan Parit Empat could be renovated into beach resort/bungalows such as those in Pulau Kukup, Johor. Tourist can enjoy the ocean view and have fun by the sea. Villagers could also start homestay programmes which not only provide lodging for visitors but also the opportunity to savour local food and culture.

The villager can also provide boat service from their own village to nearby village, such as Hutan Melintang. This will provide the tourist a whole new experience as they observe how the fish is caught, learn about the variety of fish and how they are finally packed for transport to the market. This experience may enhance visitors’ appreciation of the work of fishermen and the important of protecting the environment.
ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

There are a few entrepreneurship opportunities in the village. Firstly, a medium-size restaurant could be set up. As in the section on Tourism Value, one or more restaurants are needed to cater to the tourists. Since Bagan Parit Empat is a fishing village, the restaurant may serve a variety of seafood such as fish, crabs, prawns, and other shellfish. This can create more job opportunities not only for the villagers, but also for people from nearby villages. Vacancies for many different jobs such as cashiers, dish washers, chefs and waiters would be available. This could encourage the younger generations to remain in their own village.

Besides, fish ball processing factories could be set up. Villagers can produce fish balls with a variety of special flavours and market these as a specialty of the village. Such products are less affected by price fluctuations than fresh seafood and this could help to stabilize the income of some local families. Bagan Parit Empat is current famous for its fresh belacan (shrimp paste). The bulk of this produced at a small processing factory call Wan Shun Yuan. The factory owner should be encouraged to expand his business so that more of the belacan can be sold widely throughout the country.

The establishment of a boat maintenance and repair workshop could attract business not only from locals but also form fishermen in neighbouring villages. These involved in this business would introduce new job opportunities as well as new skills.

Given the absence of entertainment centres in Bagan Parit Empat, there may be opportunities for local families to convert extra rooms in their houses into karaoke rooms. Villagers could sing karaoke with their friends or family members weekly or even monthly and enjoy the comraderie.

Bagan Parit Empat is surrounded by mangrove forest. The government could develop the village into a recreational park. A walkway could be built through the mangrove forest to the sea, nearby mangrove forest. This would be an awesome path
for nature lovers. They get a chance to observe and take photographs of the flora and fauna that can be found in the mangrove forest, for example, crabs, fish, or even monkeys. This could be a golden opportunity for investors to tap on the tourism potential of the village.
APPENDICES

Figure 1: Fishing is a major source of income in Bagan Parit Empat.

Figure 2: Fishing as the main economic activity in the village.
Figure 3: The linear settlement pattern of housing in Bagan Parit Empat

Figure 4: The Na Du Gong Temple
Figure 5: The Wang Lao Xian Shi Temple under renovation

Figure 6: The Wang Lao Xian Shi Community Hall
Figure 7: The Fa Shi Gong Temple

Figure 8: Fa Shi Gong Community Hall
Figure 9: Environmental pollution caused by improper garbage disposal.

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