

## Adaptation of Migrating Betawi People: Existences, Forms, and Developments

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### ABSTRACT

Adaptation of migrating Betawi people as the ethnic migrant in urban areas is an interesting social phenomena related to urbanism. This study aims to analyze the urbanism or the way of life of the Betawi people in Palembang city. This study used the social definition paradigm, an ethnography research method. The data were the Ethnic Betawi group in the Kebon Sirih and the Lorong Jambu areas. The data were obtained from the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data was obtained through participatory field observations, and in-depth interviews, meanwhile the secondary data was obtained from articles or journals. In analyzing the data, codes system and coding were used. Field observations were carried out in Kampung Betawi, Kebon Sirih and Talang Betawi Villages, Lorong Jambu. Interviews were conducted to participants, the Betawi people, used purposive sampling or based on certain characteristics. The results of the study indicated that the urbanism or a way of life of the people in Palembang was to adjust to the environment in terms of work to meet their daily needs. In addition, it adopted the Palembang wedding tradition when the Betawi people are married. The results showed that the people acculturate with the Palembang culture, specifically in wedding tradition.

**Keywords:** Acculturation; Betawi; Ethnography; Palembang; Urbanism

### Introduction

The city presents different situations and conditions in the village, referring to *tangible* characteristic that can be seen from the appearance and the function and

intangible characteristic. The tangible characteristic appears from the functions such as political functions characterized by the central office of the government. Meanwhile, the intangible

characteristic is defined as the way of life with the peculiarities of each region. Borrowing the term from Bardo (in Kartono, 2010), it is referred to as a feature of social organization. It is related to how to manage the place of residence, how to manage the social interactions, and how to regulate the lifestyle. In the view of sociologist, L. Wirth (in Kartono, 2010) the city is seen as a way of life (Urban as Way of Life).

It is widely known that there are two indigenous ethnicities who inhabit Palembang city, they are *Wong Jero* and *Wong Jabo*. *Wong Jero* is noble descent or highborn, while *Wong Jabo* is common people. However, the ethnic communities around Palembang are various such as Malay, Komerling, Pasemah, Gumai, Semendo, Lematang, and Ogan. There are also some immigrant ethnic groups namely Arabs, Chinese, and others from Europe. Palembang city also has one of Indonesia ethnic communities, the Betawi Ethnic which is originating from Jakarta and its surrounding areas. The uneven composition of the population and unequal development outcomes became one of the main causes for the people making dislocation. Then, it causes the targeted city having the further development that makes the appearance of new social level, the changes in attitudes and lifestyle, and the changes in livelihoods. The urbanism carried out by the Betawi ethnic group encouraged them to adjust to the new environment, especially the environment of Palembang city. In different circumstances, the other ethnics have come to Jakarta causing that the Betawi Ethnic is no longer dominating Jakarta.

One technique that has been used as a tool for urban development in recent years is cultural regeneration. This is seen as a means to restore and improve the quality of urban life through increasing and developing unique characteristics of a place and its people. Human living space is not

only limited by the place where he was raised and born but also in other places and times where by means of him all needs can be fulfilled (Jelamu, 2006). It is as the Betawi people do which not limited by space and time to fulfill their needs. Their presence in Palembang city forced them to adjust to the surrounding environment. Ethnic Betawi is closely related as carpenters. At first they worked as carpenters but over time the adjustments were made. Along with the progress of the industry that was built in urban areas, most of Betawi people switched their work as sellers, such as local food sellers (tekwan, pempek, bakso), greengrocers, livestock sellers (cattle and goats), stall business men, and rattan handicraft businesses men. It is interested to study the Betawi people in Palembang on account of their existence, form, and development in Palembang city as well as their cultural adaptation to local culture.

### **Theoretical Basis**

This study referred to the theory of Louis Wirth "how to live in the city (*Urban Way of Life*)". Wirth defines the city as "Relative Large, Dense, and Permanent Settlement of Socially Heterogeneous Individuals", which is a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement with a population of heterogeneous social position. According to Wirth (in Kartono, 2010) the typical lifestyle of city is called urbanism, and this is determined by spatial characteristics, secularization, voluntary associations, integral social roles, and vague norms. To see how the process of urbanism takes place, how the local people live in that city must be seen. Furthermore, how to live in urban areas can be seen from the way people use facilities in the city.

## Research Method

This study was about the Betawi people urbanism in Palembang city. It aimed to analyze and explain the history of their existence in Palembang city, the form of urbanism, the development of Betawi culture, and the defense strategy to live in Palembang city. Therefore, the research method used was ethnographic research method with the social definition paradigm. The Ethnographic research method is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Cresswell, 1998). This research was to figure out the Betawi people history, form, and development and understand the real meaning of life experience to those under study from participants' perspectives. As Ethnographic research method, data were collected in great quantities of material to describe what people believe and how they behave in everyday situations; therefore, data analysis and interpretation can be challenging (Roper & Shapira, 2000). The data were obtained from the Betawi people live in Kampung Betawi, Kebon Sirih and Talang Betawi Villages, Lorong Jambu. Thus, this research was intended to understand social situations in depth based on reality or phenomena nearby. To generate the answers, the research steps are needed such as formulating research questions such as history of the Betawi people existence, the form of urbanism, and their development in Palembang city. To have research objectives, determining the benefits of the research, making a framework of thinking, and determining the technical analysis of the data and the validity of the data. The data collection method used in this study was the combination of library research, field observations, and in-depth interviews with the people using notes, logs, and diaries. Additional data may also be found in items such as published and unpublished documents, papers, books, public records,

letters, photographs, videos and assorted artefacts.

## Research Results and Discussion

### A. The History of the Existence of the Ethnic Betawi

An Australian historian, Lance Casle, in Erwanto (2014) describes that Betawi is as a newly born ethnicity. This statement is based on demographic studies of the residents of Batavia. The census of 1815-1853 showed that Ethnic Betawi had not been recorded. Betawi was categorized as ethnic in 1930. Lance concluded that the Betawi Ethnic group was an assortment of Sundanese, Javanese, Arabic, Bali, Sumbawa, Ambon, and Malay. The source of the website of the local government, <https://bappeda.jakarta.go.id> provides the information that records the ethnic formation of those who were used as slaves, where in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a majority (49 percent) of the population of Batavia. The same thing was stated by Erwantoro (2014) Ethnic Betawi emerged as a new category in the population census data in 1930. In the 1930 census, there were 778,953 Ethnic Betawi people and became the majority of Batavia at that time.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the Betawi people in Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu, the first generation moved to Palembang city due to economic factors. Instead of just escaping from colonialism, the Ethnic Betawi nomads thought that Palembang city had a better chance of living with the availability of jobs, the extent of vacant land, and the small number of people in Palembang. But in reality, the funds and the skills are the main requirements because at that time the Betawi people migrants had low education so they had to work as

entrepreneurship like running their own business. The Betawi people were known as "clever wood" in the first generation, many of them undertook this business to make a living in a foreign land. A participant explained that their ancestors were carpenters (UP, 52 years old):

*"... Who doesn't know the Betawi people, from the time of the ancestors, the Betawi people have been good at timber business, timber trade, and making furniture from lumber. That is why many have the expertise to be carpenters nowadays. But only a few who can be business holder while the rests are collies. The Betawi people had a lot of land there, but they sold it all because they didn't know whether they were displaced causing them being destitute people now."*

The arrival of the Betawi people in Palembang city from the beginning had been involved in the timber business, the location was in the regions 10.13 and 14 ilir (SA, an participant, 72 years). After trying to work as a carpenter, the Ethnic Betawi migrants spread out to other areas in Palembang city, such as Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu. At that time, Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu were shrubs, the areas then were built by the Betawi migrants. Over time, the place has become the largest Betawi settlement in Palembang city. According to the head of the local RT, the Betawi people are still widespread in various places such as Boom Baru, Kuto Market, Tegal Binangun, Plaju, 22 ilir, Talang Kerikil, Lebung Gajah and so on. But their spreading is not a lot and forms a settlement, if people want to know their existence through personal means. Their migration to Palembang city was intended to improve the economic condition. During Jakarta was filled by various people from all over regions to work and live. The Betawi people lost

their chance since they had low education. Whereas, the construction of the structure and infrastructure of Jakarta forced them to sell their land and house causing them being displaced. This condition forced them to migrate to other place. Since the Betawi people believe that their ancestors are from Palembang, this city had been their destination to start a new living. A participant (YA, 60 years old) described: *"... Our oral story always talk about Palembang as our great grandfathers, our ancestor. This story has been time to time telling to their posterity. This oral story has built emotional connection between this city and us. It is the main reason why we choose Palembang as our destination to immigrate."*

Factors of migrated destination is not only caused by the situation but also oral story, Palembang city has been their destination seems as "reunion" for the people.

## **B. The Form of Urbanism**

According to Wirth (in Kartono, 2010) the typical lifestyle of city is called urbanism, and this is determined by spatial characteristics, secularization, voluntary associations, integral social roles, and vague norms. To see how the process of urbanism takes place, how the local people live in that city must be seen. Furthermore, how to live in urban areas can be seen from the way people use facilities in the city.

1. Job Preferences, such as:
  - a) The Wood Processing of Household Furniture

The Betawi people are known for their expertise in the field of wood processing, ranging from merely refining wood, making household appliances from wood, and making

wood carvings. In other words, Betawi people are able and willing to process wood into finished goods or semi-finished goods. At first, many Ethnic Betawi people worked in the timber business when they were migrating to Palembang city. The 13 ilir area was the center of the first settlement of ethnic Betawi. There, the timber business was also firstly started by Ethnic Betawi. IL, an participant (45 years) said that many relatives did not have permanent jobs so he hired them.

*"...The timber business is developing quite well, right! It is because the employees are still a few so the relatives are involved. Moreover, many of them who come here as migrants having no job, so I do a favor for them."*

#### b) The Daily Work

The other work done is a day laborer, a conventional motorcycle driver, and a household assistant. These works are carried out based on their last educational average levels: elementary, middle and high school graduates. Women who are as household assistants work in other environments, such as Ibu Sumiyah (50 years old). She works for a Javanese ethnic family whose house is across an alley. The head of the local RT stated:

*"...The Betawi people had a lot of land there, but they sold it all because they didn't know whether they were displaced causing them being destitute people now. There are various jobs of the people here such as a civil servant, an entrepreneur, a laborer, and even a household assistant who is cleaning the house, or only washing and ironing."*

#### c) The Flowers and Ornamental Plants Selling Business

Since a migration to Palembang city, the first and second generations have not had a permanent job. All was based on expertise and works as a laborer, at that time the economy was classified as middle to lower level. Not a few of the Betawi people tried other jobs to fulfill their daily needs, such as being a flower seller. It is another alternative job realizing that it did not require large funds. Even though it required more patience and thoroughness, but for the Betawi people, any business could be done as long as the funds used was not too large. Considering the driving factor for migration is to help the family economy by finding sources of sustenance elsewhere. One of the participants, AT (51 years) revealed: *"...Because I am working under people's business, there is a feeling of wanting to have an own business. In that era, there were still a few people who sold the flowers but I saw that the development had been started, so I thought the flower selling business was just a trial and error which did not need lots of funds. Open the business at the front, just need to walk then arrive! It is economical. That is why I am still selling flowers until now. The important thing is that family's need is fulfilled."*

#### d) The Food Seller

Selling food is another alternative for getting the money. This work is done by women as a job in public scope. Some of them sell Palembang traditional food like *tekwan* and *pempek*, while others sell vegetables, *soto betawi*, and their own Betawi foods, namely *roti buaya*

and *uli tape*. For Betawi people, this work can add to daily spending, give pocket money to children, and help in paying electricity bills. This job is enough to help the women, because they sell in front of the house, this is to minimize the cost of funds that must be spent if they rent a place or shop. AI, an participant, (46 years) whose wife opened a business selling food stated:

*"...Looking for money is difficult, frankly I didn't have much money for the funds at that time, so I sold ice first then my wife helped me to sell the model, and thank God it becomes a pempek shop now".*

#### e) The Cattle Raising

One other finding is cattle raising, this is the only ones left. But it provides many benefits, because it can employ other Betawi people. Besides that, it is developed into meatballs selling business. Then more and more, Betawi people are employed. IL, an participant (45 years) revealed that Bang Ilham explained that currently it is difficult to find grass for his livestock:

*"...My cows fed their own selves freely, but it's no longer. There is barely grass, so running the cattle raising becomes my business here."*

Individually, the economic conditions of the Betawi people are middle to lower. Considering the first and second generation as they migrated to Palembang city, they did not have enough funds for there is uncertain income and the highest education mostly completed is high school. The Betawi people, socially, can adapt well. It is proven through the works adjusted to the

surroundings and expertise as well as various activities carried out to cultivate the kinship. One of Louis Wirth's researches on urbanism is job preference; these jobs depict that the Betawi people labors based on their expertise such as carpenters and traders.

## 2. Betawi People Activities

Recitation, Social Gathering and Aerobics.

The points discussed by Louis Wirth (in Kartono, 2010) regarding urbanism include: (1) the lack of individual interaction, and (2) anomie or not knowing the norm. In this study, the Betawi people did not show a lack of individual interaction. The actual interactions are even high and active. Recitation, social gathering, and aerobics are carried out solely to cultivate kinship among fellows of Betawi ethnic groups while at the same time showing their existence as Betawi ethnic. In contrast, it encourages mothers and teenage girls to actively play a role in the neighborhood. The values of traditional Betawi traditions and norms are also still represented in everyday life such as *Lek-lekan* or gatherings which teach us to have a harmonious neighboring and to help each other. Other values and norms are not allowed to sit or stand by the door since it can block out people who want to pass and can hurt themselves. Next is that when we work on something, we have to surely finish it as it teaches a sense of responsibility for the work.

## 3. Spatial Space

According to Pranawita (2015) in a settlement, natives will create their own settlements with certain characteristics.

Pranawita further explained that, as in the coastal areas, the natives' settlements are for fisherman. The coastal area is inhabited by Javanese, Chinese and other migrants. Then the next area, hinterland (inside), is a settlement characterized by agriculture or plantations. This area is inhabited by Sundanese, Javanese, and Betawi ethnic groups. The Betawi town in Palembang is a manifestation of a settlement with a Betawi characteristic. Similar to Melayu town and Betawi town, they mark their respective ethnic backgrounds. The Betawi town in Palembang city is not characterized by agriculture and plantations, but demonstrates the process of shaping the Betawi group.

This study shows that Betawi ethnic settlements do not have obstacles in social relations in settlements. The naming of "Kampung Betawi" and "Kampung Talang Betawi" does not necessarily restrict their movement to interact. the Betawi people can interact directly with others freely by considering that they do trading, processing wood, selling food and running grocery stalls. Often stalls, places of sale, and wooden depots are merged with their homes. MM participant (66 years) stated:

*"...Here, in Kebon Sirih. My neighbor's sibling said it is better to settle in Kebon Sirih as there were many Betawis, so it would be good. When I arrived in Palembang, I immediately settled in Kebon Sirih, the children were born in a midwife clinic near here."*

#### 4. Secularization

The majority of the Betawi people is Muslim. For them, religion and culture has an equally significant portion. Harmonization of both lies in the function of each. Kuntowijoyo (in Edi, 2011) states that religion, in the

perspective of social sciences, is a system that does a number of conceptions regarding the construction of reality, which play a major role in explaining the structure of normative and social order and understanding and interpreting the world. Meanwhile, art and tradition are expressions of creativity, work, and human intention containing religious values and messages, philosophical insight and local wisdom. Whereas according to Azra (2011), religion and culture are two things that are equally beneficial. Religion will give spirit to culture, while culture provides wealth to religion.

The results of observations and interviews showed that the religion believed by the Betawi people in Kebon Sirih and in Lorong Jambu is predominantly Islam. The beliefs other than Islam such as rituals or traditional ceremonies that cannot be accepted by human rationality have long been abandoned by them since the first generation came to Palembang city; they no longer believed in the supernatural things. the Betawi people does not associate Islam with the myths or superstitions of ancestral heritage. In the current millennium, the Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu Betawi ethnic communities are aware of the world beyond the five human senses but not associating them with everyday life. They believe in one belief and the one Allah SWT. Currently, the religious activities carried out are routine recitation, as taught, so that they always beg and pray only to Allah SWT.

#### 5. Voluntary Association

The voluntary association of the Betawi people is the Association of Silaturaahim Betawi South Sumatera (FORWABES) and the Betawi Sriwijaya community (KOMBETS). Both are

formed in order to accommodate Betawi ethnic people in South Sumatra. The establishment of FORWABES was started by Betawi ethnic people who met in Palembang city and then got to know each other and some were siblings. As the time flies, FORWABES was established in 2015. Other voluntary associations are KOMBETS and Kampung Betawi Youth. KOMBETS is only addressed to Betawi residents in Kebon Sirih which does not have a management structure and is not legal according to law. However, they call themselves KOMBETS; a naming of identity to introduce to the public. Giddens said that identity is very important for an ethnic group, "It can provide important threads of continuous with past and is optically kept alive through the practice of cultural traditions" (Giddens, 1991). Thus, almost all cultural identities have an opinion of whether an individual is understood in relation to the identity of kinship, race, and ethnicity. KOMBETS identifies themselves as "native" Betawi descendants.

The other voluntary association, *Pemuda Kampung Betawi*, is chaired by Anton. This association accommodates Betawi youth into a place. It was started from the concerns of Anton, Untung, Muklis, Toni and Kusdi (in 2018) who saw the children of Betawi town dropping out of school, just sitting around wasting time. By these five Betawi people, they formed a voluntary association consisting of youth of Betawi town. Their backgrounds range from junior high school graduates, high school graduates, to students, and university students. *Pemuda Kampung Betawi* was established before August 2018. Since it was just currently formed, there is no vision and mission for this association, yet. The activities of it only

deal with memorials such as the 17<sup>th</sup> of August state red-letter day, the commemoration of the Hijri New Year, and become the committee of *qurban* in Eid al-Adha. Betawi youth was deliberately involved in various activities so that they had activities which channel their thoughts and energy in a positive way and in addition, they also take a contribution to introduce the Betawi ethnic culture in Palembang city.

#### 6. Utilization of City Facilities

The city facilities around Kebon Sirih are Bukit Sangkal Health Center, Bukit Sangkal Village Office, Dapur Mutiara Shopping Center, JM Shopping Center, PTC Shopping Center, Giant Shopping Center, and Transmusi Bus Stop. The city center of Palembang has grown into a commercial city, so it's no wonder that there are many malls in which are located there. The Betawi ethnic of Kebon Sirih are not really fond of shopping centers, they choose to shop for the food needs in Megaria or Pasar 16. Cheap and negotiable prices are the main reason. The quality of goods in the market and in mall is almost equal. Public transportation access to get to Megaria market and Pasar 16 is quite difficult. If you have a private vehicle, it will be easy to reach, yet the observation shows that very few of Betawi ethnic people have four-wheeled vehicles or cars, most of whom have two-wheeled vehicles or motorbikes, instead. This can be seen from the houses that hardly have yard. Hence, they used to choose *angkot* as transportation.

The facilities around Talang Betawi Lorong Jambu are Kemuning police station, Transmusi bus stop, Sekip traditional market and PTC shopping center. The location of Talang Betawi Lorong Jambu is in distance with the



main road, there are no groceries sellers in the area, the Sekip traditional market is the main choice for the Talang Betawi group of Lorong Jambu to shop for groceries. As in Kebon Sirih, the Talang Betawi group is less interested in shopping for food needs at the mall, though PTC shopping centers are not so far from Lorong Jambu.

Public transportations used are *angkot*, *transmusi*, conventional *ojek* and online *ojek*, both motorbikes and cars. If you want to ride an *angkot* or *transmusi*, usually, you should be dropped off first by relatives using a motorbike to the highway. Then, you can use *angkot* or *transmusi*. Online *ojek* also becomes another alternative transportation, both motorbikes and cars. Often and most of the Betawi ethnic people who use public transportations are women, they generally use conventional *ojek* and *angkot* to travel. Both transportations are the main choice because they are quite convenient to find around the residence.

### C. Development of Betawi Ethnic Culture

This research concerns on the development of Betawi ethnic culture through cultural adaptation that views the way individuals or groups adjust to changes in the socio-cultural order. In this research, the Betawi ethnic and local and other social and cultural settings are different. While the people living together on RT 03 and RT 11 were Betawi ethnic, Palembang ethnic, and mixed ethnic groups. Changes in social order occurred in Betawi Ethnic group are in terms of language and livelihood. While changes in the cultural order of the Betawi people resulted in a balance of Betawi culture and Palembang culture.

Koentjaraningrat (1990) explains that a culture often emits a particular characteristic seen by strangers,

character or ethos often appears in the style of behavior of its citizens, their interests, and various cultural objects of their work. Based on these thoughts, the typical character of Betawi is "*Lo-lo, Gue-gue*" means that the Betawi people have a character that they do not interest in other people problems for no apparent reason, ignorant. The Betawi people hold the principle that "*if I am not touched, so I will not touch you back*". This character still exists in the Betawi people of Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu. According to some participants, that distinctive character can avoid conflicts both with Betawi fellows (internal) and with other ethnic groups (external).

### D. The Defense Strategy

In the defense strategy in urban areas, some Betawi ethnic groups sell groceries in their homes. Therefore, the neighbors do not have to go all the way to the market and use public transportation. There are also some who open a small shop that sells daily necessities. Trading is the right choice of low economic conditions so you don't need lot of fund to run a business. Additionally, there are also food, such as *soto*, *pempek*, *bakso* and *ketoprak*. Betawi people admits that they find no obstacle in interacting with the surrounding area. The dominant number of Betawi people in Kebon Sirih and Lorong Jambu makes them easy to interact with each other. Although in its development there were residents who moved and came with different ethnicities, they did not cause problems in interaction.

The next strategy is from the cultural side. There is no new culture, no mixed culture, and no discarded culture. Betawi culture acculturates with the Palembang Culture, where Betawi

Culture is still used in certain events only, but the Betawi people still maintains it. While the Palembang culture continues to be used as a form of respect. For example, the culture of marriage. When an Ethnic Betawi married to another ethnic such as the Palembang ethnic, both families hold the events based on the ethnics in their home. The facts show that there is enthusiasism of Palembang people to see Betawi culture at the wedding.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the research of the Betawi people in Palembang city, the conclusions are as follows:

1. The migration carried out by the Betawi people to Palembang was not only intended to improve the economic condition of the family which at that time, Jakarta was filled with people from various regions to work, but also emotional connection. Moreover, the construction of the structure and infrastructure of Jakarta forced them to sell their land and house causing them being displaced. The lack of the funds and the skills made the Betawi people worked as a carpenter.
2. There is no superficiality of individual interactions and anomies. Spatially, Betawi settlements are formed due to ethnic cultural similarities, and secularization does not occur.
3. The Betawi people acculturates the tradition of marriage. As migrants, Betawi people use the Palembang wedding tradition, but they also maintain their own cultures such as enlivening the event with firecrackers, *tanjidor*, and doorstop. As a minority, these maintenance efforts can be interpreted as a symbolic form of strengthening Betawi ethnic identity in

the dominant non-Betawi cultural city space.

4. The defense strategy carried out by the Betawi people was to work in accordance with the new environment. This was done due to the lack of funds and limited skills. In addition, FORWABES participated in the Betawi cultural arts performance as an effort to introduce and maintain Betawi culture.

From the research done on the urbanism of the Betawi people in Palembang city, it can be suggested to several parties that:

1. This research is expected as an input and contribution to the development of sociology as well as a reference for subsequent research specifically regarding to environmental sociology. This is because many similar studies are carried out by other disciplines such as architecture, geography, and psychology. As already explained that research on ethnicity in a culture must continue to be carried out.
2. The acculturation that occurs in the Betawi people must be maintained, this is related to preserving the Betawi cultural tradition. Besides that, it can uphold tolerance and create a harmonious life between Ethnic Betawi and Ethnic Palembang. The young generation of Betawi Ethnic group needs to increase their care for the Betawi culture. The various efforts that have been made by FORWABES should be continued and improved.
3. This research can beinput for the government, especially the Palembang Tourism and Culture Officein taking over a policy, as well as help FORWABES in completing the requirements as a group organization in South Sumatra Province. If FORWABES is officially registered by the government and legally recognized by

the law, the Ethnic Betawi will be easy to be introduced to Palembang people. Betawi settlement can be developed into a cultural tourism village such as Arab Village in Plaju. So that it can enrich the culture in Palembang city.

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