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Rationale for Selecting Taiping, Perak as a Study Location for Ageing: A Conceptual Framework for Age-Friendly Cities

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Abstract: This conceptual paper explores the rationale for selecting Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, as a study location for ageing research within the framework of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (AFCC). Taiping's rich historical and demographic context and designation as the pilot site for Malaysia's Age-Friendly City initiative in 2019 highlight its potential as a model for studying ageing in place. This research aims to analyse Taiping's unique characteristics, such as its ageing population, urban design, and social structures, to evaluate its readiness to meet the needs of older adults. The study highlights key factors influencing Taiping's selection, including community support systems, social participation opportunities, accessible infrastructure, and alignment with WHO's eight AFCC domains. Preliminary findings suggest that while Taiping exhibits promising features, such as strong community engagement and a well-preserved historical environment, gaps remain in integrating age-friendly practices and policies. This paper addresses these gaps by proposing a conceptual framework tailored to Taiping's context, aiming to enhance urban planning and policy development for ageing populations. By doing so, it contributes to the global discourse on age-friendly urban environments and offers practical implications for policymakers in Malaysia and beyond.

Keywords: *Ageing, Age-friendly city, Ageing in place, Taiping*

1. Introduction

The global population is ageing at an unprecedented pace, presenting significant challenges and opportunities for urban planning and community development. According to the United Nations (2020), the number of individuals aged 60 years and older is expected to double from 1 billion in 2019 to 2.1 billion by 2050. This demographic shift highlights the urgent need for age-friendly cities that promote the well-being of older adults, allowing them to age in place while maintaining their independence and quality of life (World Health Organization, 2020). The Global Age-Friendly Cities guidelines defined ageing in place as a home located close to services and facilities (World Health Organization, 2007), such that an affordable service is provided for older people to enable them to remain at home. As cities worldwide address these issues, establishing effective frameworks that can adapt to local contexts is crucial for enhancing the lives of older adults.

In Malaysia, Perak has the highest proportion of older adults among the states, with 14.9% of its population aged 60 and above (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Malaysia's elderly population is projected to reach 15% by 2030, marking its transition into an ageing society. Within Perak, Larut dan Matang, where Taiping is situated, stands out, with 11.2% of its population aged 65 and above, surpassing the state average of 9.9% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Additionally, a recent survey revealed that over 60% of Taiping's elderly residents rely on community services for their daily needs (Taiping Municipal Council, 2023). These statistics underscore the pressing need to develop targeted frameworks to enhance their well-being. This demographic trend also raises important questions about how the unique characteristics of Taiping can contribute to the development of effective age-friendly initiatives.

This increase also raises critical questions regarding how the unique characteristics of Taiping can inform age-friendly initiatives. However, despite the growing body of literature on ageing in place, there is limited research that specifically investigates the rationale for selecting Taiping as a study location for ageing. Understanding these reasons is essential for developing context-specific frameworks that address the needs and challenges of Taiping's ageing population.

The primary objective of this research is to identify the reasons behind the selection of Taiping as a location for ageing studies. This investigation will explore the historical, cultural, and social factors that contribute to Taiping's suitability as a focal point for research on ageing. By addressing this objective, the study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform future ageing-related research and policy decisions, ultimately supporting the development of age-friendly initiatives tailored to local needs.

Despite the increased attention to age-friendly cities, a significant research gap exists concerning the justification for choosing specific locations, such as Taiping, for ageing studies. Much of the existing literature focuses on age-friendly practices and policies in urban areas without thoroughly examining the unique contextual factors that make particular locations ideal for such studies. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a focused exploration of Taiping's characteristics, resources, and community dynamics that contribute to its selection as a relevant site for ageing research.

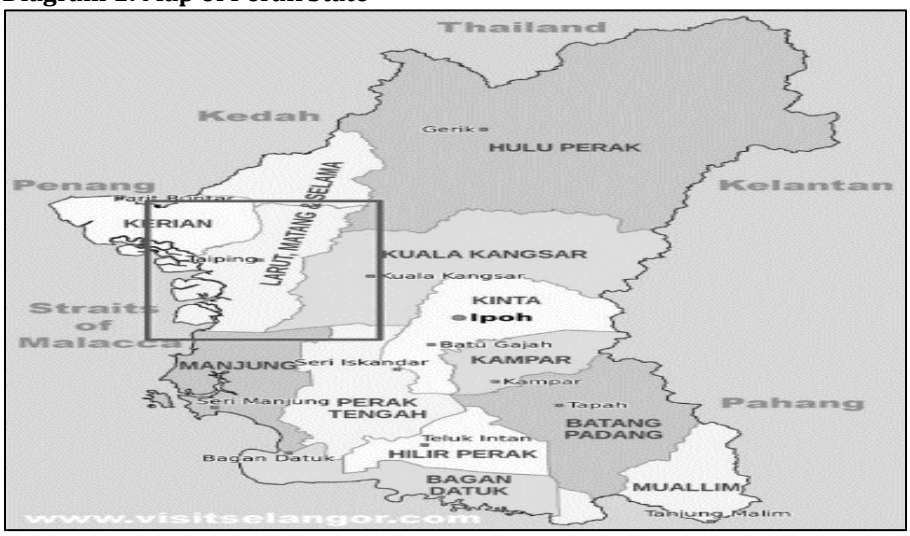
2. Research Methodology

This conceptual paper employs a qualitative approach, focusing on secondary data analysis to explore the rationale for selecting Taiping as a study location for ageing research. The study draws on existing literature, official reports, and demographic statistics, particularly those from the Department of Statistics Malaysia and the Taiping Municipal Council. By examining historical, cultural, and social factors, the research aligns Taiping's characteristics with the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities and Communities framework. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors contributing to Taiping's relevance in ageing research and policy development.

3. Literature Review

Taiping Background: Taiping, a historical town located in Perak, Malaysia, has long been recognized for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. Established during the tin mining boom in the 19th century, Taiping is home to a variety of colonial-era architecture and lush landscapes, including one of the country's oldest public parks, Taiping Lake Gardens. The town's strategic location and unique climatic conditions have contributed to its development, making it a significant cultural and economic hub in the region.

Diagram 1: Map of Perak State



Sources: Google images

By referring to Diagram 1, Perak is divided into twelve districts, and Taiping is a city located in the Larut, Matang, and Selama districts of Perak, Malaysia. The district of Larut, Matang, and Selama is the largest in the state of Perak, covering a land area of 151,104.03 hectares or 170 square kilometres, comprising three sub-districts: Larut, Matang, and Selama. The district borders the district of Kerian to the northwest, Kuala Kangsar

to the east, Manjung to the south, and Hulu Perak to the northeast. The administrative centre of this district is located in Taiping, which is among the earliest towns in Malaysia and the second-largest city in Perak after Ipoh, the state capital (Taiping Municipal Council, 2021).

Table 1: Population of Perak, 2024

Administrative District	Total Population ('000)	Population aged 65 years and over
Perak	2,569.6	9.9%
Batang Padang	126.7	10.3%
Manjung	255.0	7.8%
Kinta	923.3	10.4%
Kerian	169.6	9.6%
Kuala Kangsar	180.0	9.7%
Larut dan Matang	278.2	11.2%
Hilir Perak	141.9	11.4%
Hulu Perak	98.3	8.3%
Perak Tengah	98.7	7.8

Sources: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024

Additionally, Taiping's population has shown a consistent growth trend, particularly among older adults, positioning it as an important site for examining ageing-related issues. Table 2 presents the population data of Perak in 2024, highlighting the percentage of individuals aged 65 years and over across various districts. With a total population of approximately 2.57 million, 9.9% of the population in Perak falls into the ageing category. This makes Perak an "ageing society," where 7% or more of the population is aged 65 or older (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Other than Hilir Perak (11.4%), Larut dan Matang, where Taiping is located, has 11.2% of its population aged 65 years and over, which is higher than the state average. This indicates that Larut dan Matang, and consequently Taiping, has a significant ageing population.

Overall, this data highlights a prominent trend of ageing within Perak, with Larut and Matang demonstrating a particularly high concentration of older adults. Understanding Taiping's historical context and demographic shifts is crucial for addressing the needs of its ageing population and creating effective age-friendly initiatives.

Selection of Taiping as the First Phase of the Age-Friendly City Pilot Project in 2019: The state of Perak has shown its commitment to fostering age-friendly environments, with two of its cities, Taiping and Ipoh, taking the initiative by submitting commitment letters to the WHO in 2019 and actively preparing their communities to be age-friendly. As a matter of fact, in Taiping, several local initiatives such as age-friendly neighborhoods, community voluntary projects, and age-friendly buses have been developed to enhance urban living conditions in line with age-friendly principles (World Health Organization, n.d.).

In 2019, Taiping was chosen to implement the first phase of Malaysia's Age-Friendly Cities pilot project (The Star, 31 October 2019), and Taiping City was selected after the Taiping Municipal Council fulfilled various World Health Organization's criteria to achieve the status within five years. Furthermore, the UNDP drafted a pilot project to establish Age- age-friendly city status (World Health Organization, n.d.). In the same year, the government also received an injection of funds from the UNDP to start a comprehensive study on Taiping's current status as an age-friendly city by the international guidelines issued by the World Health Organization (The Star, 31 October 2019).

The pilot project aims to create environments that enable older adults to live independently and actively participate in their communities. Taiping's selection reflects its commitment to improving the quality of life for seniors, addressing key factors such as accessibility, mobility, and social engagement. The project is aligned with global initiatives, including the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities framework, which emphasizes the importance of local adaptations to meet the unique needs of older populations. The successful implementation of this pilot project in Taiping could provide valuable insights and frameworks that can be replicated in other Malaysian towns facing similar challenges.

Ageing in Place in Taiping: In Malaysia, the percentage of the ageing population in Perak is the highest at 14.9% compared to the other states (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Ageing in place is a crucial aspect of creating supportive environments for older adults in Taiping. Many retirees choose to reside in Perak because it does not appear to be overcrowded, despite being a large state (The Star, 4 November 2018).

Several factors contribute to the suitability of Taiping as a location for ageing in place, including its strong sense of community, existing social networks, and availability of essential services. Research indicates that older adults who can remain in their communities experience better mental health and overall well-being, emphasizing the importance of supportive environments. The role of the state government and local authorities in prioritizing a variety of initiatives should, therefore, include the construction of new structures and facilities as well as upgrading and repairing existing ones (The Star, 17 February 2022). Furthermore, Taiping's rich cultural heritage and natural resources offer opportunities for older adults to engage in recreational activities, fostering social connections that are vital for their quality of life.

Previous studies on ageing in Taiping

Table 2: Previous studies on ageing

Author(s)	Year	Title	Methodology	Key Findings
Ismail, S., Abdulkaareem Salih, S., Zainal Abidin, I., et al.	2022	Observing the factors affecting the development of age-friendly cities in Malaysia	Mixed methods: surveys and interviews with stakeholders in urban planning	Identified key factors such as accessibility, healthcare, and social inclusion crucial for the success of age-friendly cities.
Rashid, K., Mohamed, T., Azyze, S. N. A. E., & Ismail, H.	2022	Determining elderly-friendly features based on an age-friendly city approach: Empirical analysis	Survey and empirical analysis in Taiping and Ipoh, Malaysia	Identified essential features like public transportation and healthcare services that need enhancement for elderly residents.
Ali, W. N. A. W., Hussain, N. H. M., Nayan, N. M., et al.	2022	The Preferences and Requirements of Green Garden Retirement Care of the Elderly: Case Study at RSK Taiping	A case study focusing on the retirement care facility at RSK Taiping	Highlighted preferences for green space and community interaction in elderly care facilities.
Marzuki, A. A., Nor, N. N. F. M., & Rashid, S. M. R. A.	2021	Aging Population Trend in the State of Perak, Malaysia	Quantitative analysis of demographic data from Perak, focusing on ageing population trends	Taiping is a significant location for ageing studies due to its growing elderly population, which requires better planning.
Armugam, T. C., & Vellymalay, S. K. N.	2017	Dorongan penempatan dan keselesaan diri warga tua di Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK), Taiping, Perak	Qualitative interviews with residents of Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK)	Elderly residents felt comfortable in RSK due to the support system, but improvements in facilities were necessary.

Table 2 summarizes past studies on ageing in Taiping, Malaysia, highlighting various aspects of the elderly's needs and the development of age-friendly cities. Ismail et al. (2022) conducted mixed-methods research, combining surveys and interviews with urban planning stakeholders, to reveal that accessibility, healthcare, and social inclusion are crucial factors in creating successful age-friendly cities. Similarly, Rashid, Mohamed, Azyze, and Ismail (2022) performed surveys and empirical analyses in Taiping and Ipoh, identifying essential

features such as public transportation and healthcare services that require improvement to better serve the elderly population. Ali et al. (2022) focused on the preferences and requirements of green garden retirement care at the RSK Taiping facility through a case study, emphasizing the importance of green spaces and fostering community interaction for elderly well-being.

Marzuki, Nor, and Rashid (2021) provided a quantitative analysis of Perak's demographic data, showcasing Taiping as a critical location for ageing studies due to its increasing elderly population, which necessitates comprehensive urban and social planning. Lastly, Armugam and Vellymalay (2017) conducted qualitative interviews with residents of Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK) in Taiping, discovering that while the residents appreciated the supportive environment, there was a need for enhanced facilities to improve their quality of life. These studies collectively highlight the importance of tailored strategies to foster age-friendly and supportive environments for the elderly in Taiping (Ismail et al., 2022; Rashid et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2022; Marzuki et al., 2021; Armugam & Vellymalay, 2017).

Linking WHO's age-friendly city framework to the selection of Taiping as an ageing study location: The concept of age-friendly cities and communities, as championed by the World Health Organization, underscores the importance of creating environments that cater to the well-being, active participation, and dignity of older adults (World Health Organization, 2007). These environments are designed based on eight key domains—such as transportation, housing, and community support—that collectively work to promote inclusivity and support the ability of older individuals to age in place (Buffel et al., 2022).

The selection of Taiping as a study location for ageing is deeply connected to these principles due to its distinct demographic profile and historical significance. Taiping's relatively high proportion of older residents and its involvement in age-friendly pilot projects make it an ideal case study for assessing the implementation of age-friendly strategies (Awang et al., 2024). Furthermore, Taiping's cultural and historical landscape provides a valuable context for exploring how traditional elements can coexist with modern urban planning to meet the needs of ageing populations. This blend of old and new highlights the town's capacity to serve as a practical model for localizing the WHO's age-friendly city framework (Yusof & Yasin, 2023).

Research in Taiping can provide insight into the effectiveness of age-friendly measures by evaluating which of the WHO's domains have been successfully integrated and which require further development. For instance, studies can examine how accessible public spaces and healthcare services are for older adults, as well as the adequacy of community programs that encourage social participation (Rashid et al., 2022). The practical assessments and outcomes in Taiping can inform broader regional and national strategies for developing age-friendly environments in other cities, especially in similar middle-income contexts (Chang et al., 2022).

Therefore, Taiping's relevance as a study location highlights how WHO's guidelines can be adapted and tested at a local level, illustrating the successes and challenges in building age-friendly cities. This localized approach offers valuable lessons for shaping policies, improving elder support services, and fostering inclusive practices aimed at enhancing the quality of life for older adults (Ismail et al., 2022).

4. Conceptual Framework

Figure 2: A Conceptual Framework of Selecting Taiping as a Study Location for Ageing

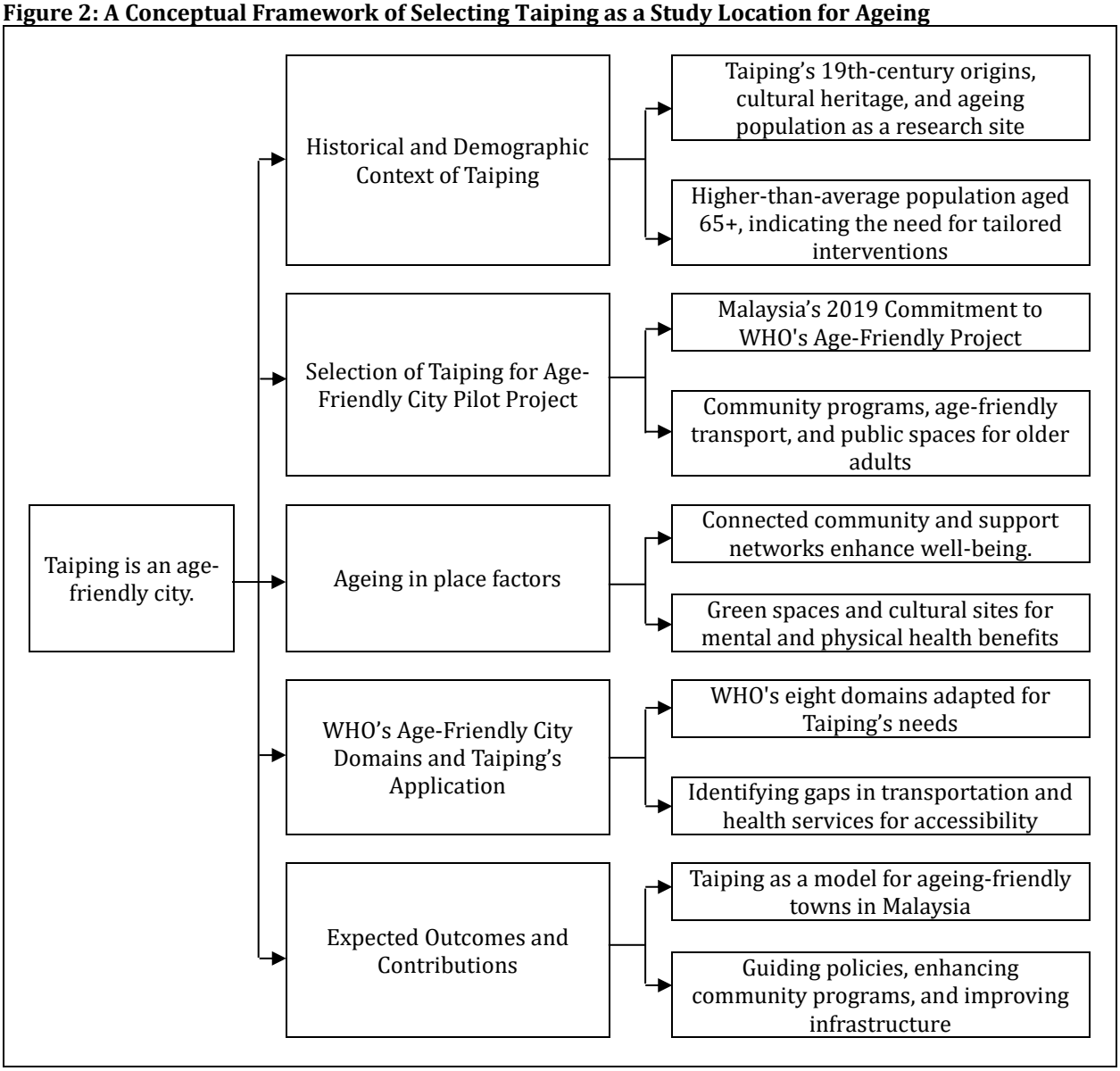


Figure 4 highlights several interconnected components that align the city's unique historical and demographic context with age-friendly principles. Taiping's origins in the 19th century and its rich cultural heritage establish it as an influential research site, particularly as the town now has a significantly high proportion of residents aged 65 and older (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This demographic shift calls for tailored ageing interventions to address older adults' unique needs and challenges. Recognizing this, Malaysia joined the WHO's Age-Friendly City initiative in 2019, designating Taiping as a pilot city where age-friendly infrastructure and services, such as community programs, accessible transport, and public spaces, have been progressively implemented.

The concept of ageing in place in Taiping is strongly supported by robust community networks that promote well-being and provide access to essential social structures. These networks, combined with Taiping's abundant green spaces and cultural heritage, offer significant mental and physical health benefits, underscoring the importance of accessible environments in fostering effective community-based care. Ismail et al. (2020)

highlight that social engagement plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of life for older adults. Regular interactions within the community help reduce social isolation, improve overall well-being, and reinforce the ageing-in-place approach.

The age-friendly framework in Taiping incorporates WHO's eight domains, including housing, transportation, and health services, which have been tailored to address the town's specific needs. While some domains, such as housing and community engagement, are well-developed, challenges remain in areas like public transportation and healthcare accessibility. According to Ismail et al. (2020), limited facilities, long waiting times, and affordability issues pose significant barriers for older adults seeking healthcare services in Malaysia. Additionally, universal design concepts, such as accessible housing and environments, have gained traction in Malaysia, offering promising strategies to meet the needs of the ageing population. Tobi et al. (2017) suggest that integrating these concepts into urban planning has yielded positive outcomes, although further improvements are needed. Taiping's age-friendly initiatives present a scalable model for other towns in Malaysia with ageing populations, providing valuable insights for policymakers. These insights can inform the development of community programs, infrastructure improvements, and inclusive urban environments that better support the well-being of older adults.

5. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the critical role of Taiping's historical and demographic context, its selection for the Age-Friendly City Pilot Project, ageing-in-place factors, WHO's age-friendly city domains, and Taiping's application and expected contributions in shaping the well-being of its ageing population. Key findings reveal that Taiping is highly relevant as a location for ageing studies in Malaysia, offering a unique landscape for exploring ageing-in-place dynamics as Malaysia's first age-friendly city. These insights contribute to the age-friendly model by providing a nuanced understanding of how environmental factors impact the quality of life for elderly individuals. Theoretically, this study enriches the existing framework by validating the implementation of WHO's age-friendly city domains within the local context of Taiping.

Practically, the findings suggest actionable strategies for policymakers, such as enhancing social infrastructure and designing community programs tailored to ageing populations, promoting healthier, more connected lives for elderly individuals and potentially reducing strain on healthcare systems. This alignment with WHO's domains not only demonstrates the adaptability of global frameworks but also reinforces the argument for integrating age-friendly concepts into nationwide urban planning. While these findings offer valuable guidance, further research is needed to examine the long-term impacts of these interventions on the elderly's wellbeing and to explore similar applications in other Malaysian regions, enhancing the robustness of the age-friendly city model within diverse socio-cultural landscapes.

This study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions by contextualising the WHO's Age-Friendly Cities framework within the Malaysian context, specifically in Taiping. It provides valuable insights for urban planners and policymakers to address gaps in infrastructure, healthcare, and social services. The findings support the development of sustainable, scalable age-friendly models that can guide national policies and future research. Policymakers are encouraged to leverage this study to design integrated, community-focused strategies that enhance the quality of life for older adults while ensuring the inclusivity and sustainability of urban environments.

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