

Identity Formation of the Traditional Courtyard Shop houses Interiors: Case Study in George Town, Penang

Pembentukan Identiti halaman tradisional pada Dalamannya Rumah Kedai: Kajian Kes di George Town Pulau Pinang

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ABSTRACT

The traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop house is the basic building typology of George Town Heritage City for hundreds of years. The shop house is harmonised in its architectural design identity formation. Many studies have shown that the identity formation of traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop houses underwent a series of transformation throughout the passage of time. Therefore the interiors formation of shop houses buildings have become a threat by losing the authentic identity in George Town Heritage City. Thus, this paper aims to identify the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop houses interiors. A qualitative research approach was employed to obtain data from primary and secondary sources. The reason is to understand the design identity of the traditional courtyard architectural components. Thematic analysis was adopted, and five themes were used to present and discussed the results. This study found that the main multi-cultural (Malay, Chinese, and European) has influenced the identity formation of the traditional courtyard shop house interiors. The outcome is a combination of built cultural heritage. Findings also show that focusing on promoting the traditional courtyard identity formation ensures a strong appreciation of its existence. As part of the practical implications, this paper contributes to reawaken policymakers and other stakeholders. This will stir-up the drive for the sustainability of the traditional courtyard shop houses in George Town, Malaysia.

Keywords: Place identity; traditional courtyard shop house; cultural identity; identity formation; Strait Chinese

ABSTRAK

Halaman rumah kedai tradisional Selat Cina merupakan bangunan tipologi asas di Bandar Warisan George Town untuk beratus tahun. Rumah kedai ini diharmonikan pembentukan identitinya melalui rekabentuk seni bina. Banyak kajian menunjukkan pembentukan identiti halaman rumah kedai tradisional Selat Cina telah melalui beberapa siri transformasi seiring perubahan masa. Oleh itu pembentukan dalamannya menjadi ancaman dengan kehilangan keaslian pada identiti bangunan rumah kedai di Bandar Warisan George Town. Justeru, makalah ini ditulis bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti pembentukan identiti pada senibina dalamannya rumah kedai tradisional. Pendekatan kajian kualitatif telah digunakan bagi mendapatkan data dari sumber utama dan sekunder. Hal ini adalah untuk memahami rekabentuk identiti pada komponen senibina yang melibatkan halaman tradisional. Analisis tematik telah digunapakai dan lima tema diadaptasi untuk membentangkan dan membincangkan dapatan kajian ini. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa kepelbagaian budaya (Melayu, Cina dan Eropah) telah mempengaruhi pembentukan identiti pada senibina dalamannya halaman rumah kedai tradisional. Ini membawa kepada penggabungan warisan budaya. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan tumpuan terhadap promosi pembentukan identiti halaman tradisional telah mengukuhkan nilai penghargaan yang kuat terhadap kewujudannya. Sebagai sebahagian daripada implikasi praktikal, makalah ini memberi sumbangan berbentuk kesedaran kepada pembuat dasar dan pihak-pihak berkepentingan. Ini akan mendorong kerja berterusan terhadap usaha pemuliharaan halaman rumah kedai tradisional di George Town, Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Identiti tempat; halaman rumah kedai tradisional; identiti budaya; pembentukan identiti; Cina Selat

INTRODUCTION

Human, as the creator of cultural diversity, is the main force in shaping environments. Every culture has patterns of living habits, attitudes and beliefs that shape understanding of the world around us.

Culture can be defined as “a way of being, relating, behaving, believing and acting, which people live out in their lives and which is in a constant process of change and exchange with other cultures” (Nur 2012: 470). That means culture is at the centre of interrelations between the environment and human.

Also, culture is an effective factor that shapes how people behave in a certain environment. This affects how one perceives the environment.

The study concerned the environment within the interior space dimension. It discusses the interior space style through image formation stage. Also, the method of place identity formation and cultural identity is outlined in relation with one another. From this point of view, reflecting true cultural identity as an image is the basic principle in designing interior environments. Interior architectural profession aims to develop environments that satisfy the functionality needs, aesthetics, and cultural identity. Majority of the traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop houses are available in the historic cities of Penang and Melaka and were added to the UNESCO’s world heritage list on 2008. The traditional shop house is one of the unique architectures found in South East Asia, including Malaysia, built from 17th to early 20th Century (Wan Hashimah 2005). Penang has a tremendous architectural history with approximately 7,000 units of traditional courtyard shop houses in George Town Heritage City (Tan 2015). The author affirmed that the city was built 200 years ago during different periods. However, most historical structures including the traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop houses have shown dramatic changes to fit modern lifestyle. Due to the change in the use of space and new owner’s preference renovation, some of the buildings have gone through modification. This modification has

negatively affected the original content of the design. Recently, more consideration has been paid to the traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop houses type to solve some of the inherent problems of dense inner-city housing. As cities face a renovation due to the global trend, it is harder to define the identity of place or distinctiveness in developing a city like George Town. This is because the design and use of domestic space is increasingly influenced by global standards, especially, in the interior as manifested in changes of designers’ and users’ taste toward modern living with international product design and manufacture (Akram & Bahauddin 2019). This issue has become a challenge.

In George Town Heritage City and within the general straits eclectic style, several building periods can be identified by (Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) 1990). PHT is one of the non-governmental organisations which helps in preserving the existing heritage. The traditional shop house buildings in George Town are classified into six main historical styles as follows: early “Penang” Style (1790s-1850s), “Southern Chinese” Eclectic Style (1840s-1900s), Early “Straits” Eclectic Style (1890s-1910s), Late “Straits” Eclectic Style (1910s-1940s), Art Deco Style (1930s-1960s), and Early Modernism Style (1950s -1970s) as presented in Figure. 1. The unique architectural and decorative features in each style represent the history of George Town at different periods.







Early Penang Style 1790s-1850s	Southern Chinese Eclectic Style 1840s-1900s	Early Straits Eclectic Style 1890s-1910s	Late Straits Eclectic Style 1910s-1940s	Art Deco Style 1930s-1960s	Early Modern Style 1950s-1970s
					
1790s	1840s	1890s	1910s	1930s	1950s

FIGURE 1. Six Main Eclectic Styles of Traditional Courtyard Shop houses
 Source: <http://penangshophouse.com.my>, 2015

The Traditional Courtyard Shop houses are repeated to create streets and town squares found in many urban areas in Malaysia. Sometimes, the tenants use both the ground and upper floors for residential. This type of shop house is normally referred to as terrace house. In such a case, the building has a big entrance with a timber bar locked

into the door head, metal-bar and louvered-panel windows on the ground floor and a few openings at upper floors. Azizi et al (2010) opined that the very first building knowledge and skills were borrowed from hometown of the Straits Chinese, that is, China. Moreover, cultural and political influences during the Colonial age were imperishable and strongly

dictated the traditional courtyard shop houses physical form. Therefore, the unique Straits Chinese form of shop houses resulted from local influences and colonial's modification is an attempt to adapt to cultural identity. The Straits Chinese is also known as *Peranakan Chinese* as they were usually born in British Straits Settlements of Penang. Therefore, shop houses follow Chinese rules of thumb in architecture which are symmetrical (Ghaffar 1994), narrow layout, with air well in between spaces (Wan Hashimah 2005). In this paper, cultural identity and place identity formation is discussed based on the typical interior elements of traditional courtyard Straits Chinese Shop houses Eclectic Style. Shop houses formation were built side by side with a common party wall; built out of bricks and plastered. One of the typical interior features is the courtyard (air well) located inside the centre of shop houses. Long internal spaces with no openings at the side of the shop houses require the use of several courtyards (air wells).

Figure 1 shows that traditional courtyard shop houses in the Straits settlements began to adopt the western architectural style with an emphasis on full-length French windows and a pair of full-length timber shutters, an arched or rectangular transom over the window opening, pilasters of classical orders and plaster renderings. The evolution of the traditional courtyard shop houses eclectic style reflects a fusion of cultural identities' influences from many parts of the globe, including Malay archipelago, Chinese and European influences (Tan 2015; Nazri & Umar 2017; Akram & Bahauddin 2019). This combination of components created a unique place identity of architecture and culture in Penang. Regarding the cultural and environmental sustainability concerns, the significance contribution of this study's findings

would fill in the gap to understand the identity formation of traditional courtyard shop house interior buildings practices that sustain both culture and the environment for millennia. Thus, this paper intends to identify the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop house interiors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PLACE IDENTITY, ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION AND COGNITION

Identity is delineated as a biological organisation that develops through adjustment (settlement), assimilation and assessing the social world; and moves over time. Whilst collective identity could be the reflection of traditions, beliefs, and attitudes (Nur 2012). They consists of all value systems of a unique culture. Each cultural value gains a form within the interior environment. Also, cultural identity offers form to the interior environment. Before, discussing the correlation between perception and cognition, it is vital to outline them to understand the image formation in interior environments. A cultural place is an environment where people construct their collective identity via perceiving the environment basically. There are two main sources of information that can be used to perceive the environment accurately. They are first-current available information and relevant past knowledge and experience stored in the brain (Robert 2007). According to Irwin & Low (2012), relevant past information and experience is directly affected by cultural identity (Nur 2012). In a way, they shape the perception as presented in the model (Figure 2).

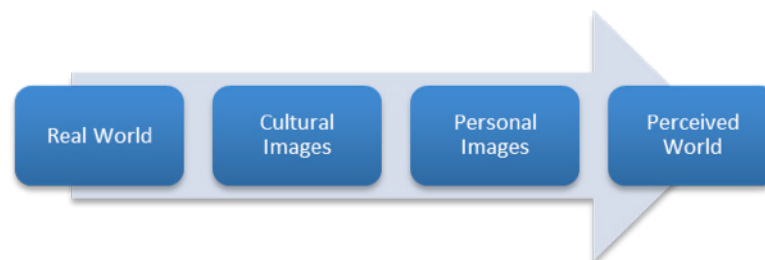


FIGURE 2. Rapoport's perception model

Source: Adopted from (Nur 2012)

According to this model, the perception of real-world is filtered by the cultural and personal images in our brain. In other words, people perceive the world with their cultural and personal images. People not

only perceive these images, but they also store and organise them. This process is named as cognition. Cognition is to create a knowledge structure by: taking external data, interpreting it, transforming

it, and recognising it. Winfried (1995) confirmed that the environmental cognition in three levels as: perceptive, qualifier and symbolic. Perceptive level constitutes object and environmental cognition. In the qualifier level, the object is cognised with its context. The symbolic level of cognition consists of abstract and conceptual parts of the environment. The first and second levels create a base for the third level (the symbolic level). The symbolic level can also be defined as “the cognition of conceptual and abstract phase of environment” (Winfried 1995). In this respect, cultural identity could be considered as the base for this symbolic level of environmental cognition. Nur (2012) stated that the formation of new cognition of environmental images in the brain is partially affected by these cultural symbols. Nur (2012) identified the environmental cognition as a system of classification. In the author classification system, meaningful relations are created with the relation between meaningful parts. In case of meaningless connections between new images and stored images in the brain, the image is stored in short term memory and cannot be recalled again. Also, the author explained the process as a continuous chain of perception, knowing and considering. In this context, the cultural identity (as an affective factor in environmental perception) influences the cognition process as well. Jean (2000) explained the cognition process as the adaption of organism to the environment. This is not the recognition of the exact copy, but the creation of unique knowledge of the environment. In this creation, the consideration of existing knowledge is essential. It is obvious that formation of this existing knowledge is shaped with the collective cultural identity of the self. Humans perceive and cognate the environment through their cultural identity. Nur (2012) affirmed that cultural identity and environment are strongly related to each other. Human, as the designer of the environment is influencing the reformation of cultural identity. In fact, this renovated cultural identity gives way to new designs.

There are many examples of strong interaction between the environment and cognition process. Especially, these examples demonstrate that, different people living in different cultures have different space perceptions. The environment and individual constitute a whole and cannot be discussed independent of each other. The outcome is an interaction that constitutes a social system

together (Nur 2012). One example to this interaction can be the environmental perception of the Mbuti-Pygmes who live in the rainforests. Since the living environment is pervaded with a dense layer of vegetation, they scarcely perceive the sun, moon and stars. Therefore, the environment for those who live in this culture is more inclined to a horizontal perception rather than vertical. Furthermore, the sky, stars, and the sun (having a religious meaning in several cultures) express no unique meaning in this culture. In this culture, the formations of cultural meanings (affecting the environmental perception) have caused the horizontal space perception to develop more than the vertical one (Pollyanna & Martins 2015). Looking from this perspective, the traditional courtyard shop houses, which has been continuously used in George Town Heritage City, Penang, for more than 200 years, could be an image reflecting the culture identity.

SPACE AND PLACE IDENTITY

When interaction is considered from this perspective, the concept of place rather than space emerges. Irwin & Low (2012) confirmed that when the human component comes into space, space becomes more of a place than a space. The authors defined the place concept as the space which is given meaning through individual, group or cultural processes. Thus, over the usage process, people create their own place identities. However, space is a three dimensional volume. Interior designers start designing this empty volume and turn it to an environment that contains human existence. Every designed environmental image contains features from its user. There is a two way correlation between space and its user. The person defines the space, the space defines the person; the person gives meaning to the space, the space gives meaning to the person. This relation has cultural, psychological, economic and physical dimensions. This transforms the space into their own place. This process is defined in the relevant literature as “place identity”. However, place formation can be defined as the attitude the individual forms towards a certain environment. The concept of place involves not just a physical element, but also emotional factors. Alison (2013) described the three factors which affect the formation of the place concept as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Summary of the Three Factors That Affect the Formation of the Place Concept

1. Residence status in the place	place (superficial, partial, personal, a sense of place coming from the past)
2. Age status;	as a developing cycle of life
3. Connections that develop in adulthood;	Generally marriage no matter what space and time means, place and occasion tells more.

Source: Adopted from (Nur 2012)

Temporality is an important phenomenon in the place concept. People do not only create their spaces, the geography of their lives, but also the time-space (place) of their lives (Nur 2012). Briefly, the concept of place is fundamental to the individual and his space interaction. Place should be perceived as a dimension of space which comes by the individual's use of the space. Moreover, place identity is an effective factor in both environmental perception and cognition processes. Most of the findings in previous studies demonstrate that the process is affected by the personal and global identity of the self (Igor & Ingegärd 2017). The place identity and the "extended self" concepts are related with each other in the relevant literature. Igor & Ingegärd (2017) defined the extended self-concept as "the idea that places are experienced cognitively as 'a part of the self'". The author's mentioned that "The people and places that we encounter, and these identities affect our responses to new events". From this point of view, experiencing typical features in a certain place is an affective factor in perception of place. Christian (2013) explained that people perceive the world through types (structured by our cognitive schemes).

The typical features of a specific environment become important. Environment (that has a cultural value) is considered as a cultural heritage because of its typical features. These are vital in forming the image that has a certain value in people's environmental cognition. Cultural heritage captures the environmental images of the architectural structures, monuments, or the artworks formed together by having these universal values in terms of history, art; or structure groups, natural protected areas or landscape having universal values in terms of history, art or shape (Orhan 2017). Nur (2012) explained that the images gain importance in demonstration of cultural identity as a heritage in tourism.

IMAGE FORMATION MODEL OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY ENVIRONMENT

The Traditional Strait Chinese Courtyard Shop house interior formation is an example of image creation having a cultural value. Nur (2012) affirmed that physical features in the interior create a holistic interior image having a cultural identity. These features are used continuously throughout history and became typical features. These images are reflection of living habits, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs. Also, they are reflection of cultural identity and cultural heritage. Image formation of a specific cultural environment is a complex phenomenon. There are many factors affecting the process of image formation. In the proposed model, the first phase became a place with human participation. Space is considered as an empty volume containing physical features. In other words, it acts as a base for the image formation. In the second phase, with human participation, the space becomes a place. Cultural and personal features are considered as an effective factor in the process of place formation. In other words, space turns into place with the integration of both cultural and personal features. In the formation of typical feature of the image, place, place identity, and cultural identity are considered as interrelated factors affecting each other. Cultural identity and place identity are the factors that are interrelated with each other. With a two way interaction, place identity shapes the cultural identity and the cultural identity shapes the place identity. Besides, they are affective factors in image formation of a typical environment that has a cultural value. Image of a cultural heritage is considered as an environment that has a cultural identity. A cultural heritage requires cultural value. In the proposed model as presented in Figure 3, cultural value is derived from the relationships among cultural identity, place identity, and typical image of the environment (Nur 2012).

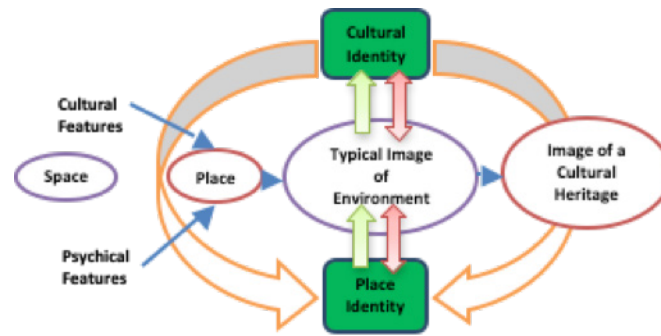


FIGURE 3: Image Formation Model
Source: Adopted from Nur (2012)

The proposed model targets to set the environmental, personal and physical features as an effective factor in the dimension of cultural identity formation. Cultural identity formation is considered in the dimension of image formation. The next part of the study focuses on the typical feature of a traditional courtyard shop house interior as an example to image formation of a cultural identity that has a heritage value.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted case studies type of qualitative research to obtain the findings. For the qualitative data collection technique, the study adopted a combination of the following; case studies, observation, secondary sources, architectural documentation data, and visualising materials, in line with John (2013) & Tutuk (2020). A case study approach has been adopted for this research because it is the most valuable and authentic artefacts and one of the most important identities of George Town Heritage City. This was supported by the architectural detail studies on the Straits Chinese Eclectic Style Heritage and observation of layout and architectural components. This was followed by validation of data through secondary sources, such as published journals and websites, in line with Uma & Roger (2013). Photographs were subsequently analysed in detail, which have been missing in past literature regarding the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop houses interiors buildings. The research adopted a thematic analysis because it is a mechanism for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within research data (Matgorzata 2014). Image formation of typical Traditional Courtyard Shop houses, Influences of the Chinese, Malay and European Components, Public, Semi-Public and Private Areas of Shop house, Ornately Carved

Wooden Screen, and Master Bedroom the Straits Chinese (*Peranakan*) Family were the five themes that emerged from the analysed data.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper focuses on the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop houses interiors buildings built in 1910s – 1930s in George Town Heritage City, Penang. Hence, the shop house building is recognised as one of the main contributors for the conservation and documentation of the heritage mechanisms identity. However, very few written records or documentation on the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop houses interiors have been produced so far. This paper attempts to fill this gap. It is hard to identify the origin of the cultural identity influences on Straits Chinese shop houses. New generations of Straits Chinese (*Peranakan*) have largely abandoned these traditional lifestyle and culture practices. Without any documentation as reference, it will be difficult to trace its roots. Therefore, this section will present the findings in five themes as identified in the previous section.

THEME ONE: IMAGE FORMATION OF TYPICAL TRADITIONAL COURTYARD SHOP HOUSE INTERIOR

This theme is an attempt to identify the image formation of typical traditional courtyard shop house interior, which is perceived by the observation to create the image of the design identity. From observation, it shows that the main multi-cultural has influenced the identity formation of the traditional courtyard shop house interiors. Findings agree with Akram and Bahauddin (2017) and found that the traditional shop houses formation has been derived and influenced by Malay, Chinese

and European, merged and matured in response to the local environment. The Traditional Shop house architecture was first developed in Malacca and later spread to Penang and other Malay states refer to Figure 4 to view the axonometric of a typical Traditional Courtyard Shop Houses. Shop houses were first built by the Chinese for their use, or built

by contract for other merchants. They are normally two or three storeys high with a narrow front and deep rear, the width of the shop house is very narrow, around 13 to 20 feet, the depth is around four times the width of the shop house, between 100 and 120 feet. The walls and partitions have a role in the forming of the shop house, which divided the

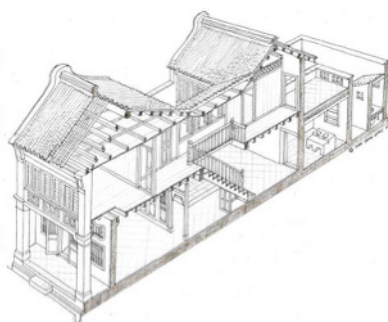


FIGURE 4. Axonometric views of a typical Traditional Courtyard Shop houses
 Source: penang-shop houses-a-handbook-of-features-and-materials/ (2015)

shop house to square areas.

From the observation, it shows that the walls divided the shop house into square rooms. Findings agree with Ghafar (1994) and found that the interior design of the shop house has a special open space components, which is designed based on the Chinese Traditional Courtyard Style. Also, findings show that the size of the open space is smaller than the original one because of the small size of the shop house width. Hence, Straits Chinese architecture depicts a statement of a new formation style of construction and the introduction of a hybrid architecture into the Malaysian scene.

THEME TWO: INFLUENCES OF THE CHINESE, MALAY AND EUROPEAN COMPONENTS

Theme two shows that the identity formation Straits Chinese interiors shop houses is a wonderful hybrid influences. Findings agree with (Azizi et al. 2010) and noted that the shop house formation type is the basic component of the urban fabric of all Malaysian towns and cities. The interior design of traditional Straits Chinese (*Peranakan*) courtyard shop houses receives dominant from Chinese and Malay cultural background, then in succession import from European influence cultures. Chris (1991) affirmed that the strategic importance of Malaysia is in its location along the Strait of Malacca, which is a major, sea-route connecting the Far East to Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Kamarul (2019) stated that Malaysia is a country of diverse cultures and many different civilizations culture identities on it

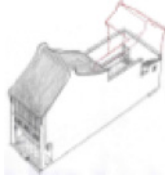




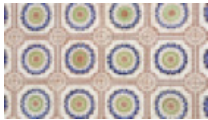


throughout history. In different regions of Malaysia, different types of shop houses could be seen. The Straits Chinese shop houses reached its richest phase with the addition of coloured tiles on either walls or floors (Azizi et al. 2010). Findings show that in traditional shop houses, the ceramic tiles are usually placed on walls below the front windows on the ground floor facing the street. Flowers and geometrical designs are usually painted on the tiles. This finding agrees with Tan (2015) and found that thin and glazed ceramic wall tiles were introduced as decoration and protection to the lower portion of the front façades and, in a few cases, also for the interiors, this area was known as a dado panel. The first wall tiles used were ceramic Majolica tiles from Europe and coloured floor tiles made of terra-cotta installed in the roof walkway and inside the Straits Chinese Eclectic Style shop houses.

From the Chinese came the courtyard plan, rounded gable ends and the fan-shaped air vents; while from the Malay came the carved timber panels and timber fretwork; from European came the French windows and decoration plasterwork as presented in Table 2. Findings show tropical weather condition with its heavy rain and hot sun led to the appearance of the *Kaki Lima* (literally “five-foot way”). It provides a shading area for pedestrian and a place for display goods, improvised workshop and even a place for resting in rattan chair. Findings agree with Andrew (2018) and affirmed that Sir Stamford Raffles in Singapore 1822, as the British colonial administration first regulated that all shop houses had to include a minimum five-

foot-wide verandah on the ground floor. Another typical attribute includes an air well located inside the central of shop houses. The air well functions as an internal courtyard, which is typical of residences all over China. It transform to air well when space

became smaller in shop houses typology buildings. From the observation, courtyard (air well) enhances ventilation of the shop houses and light up the rear section to ensure a good flow of life force or 'chi energy'.

TABLE 2. Shows a Summary of the Influences of the Chinese, Malay and European Components

<i>Chinese Influence</i>		
		
courtyard	Gable End	Air Vents
<i>European Influence</i>		
		
Full-Length	Dado Panel Tiles	Coloured Clay Floor
<i>Malay Influence</i>		
		
Carved Timber Panels		

Source: Adopted from (Fels 1994)

The image formation of Traditional Straits Chinese Shop house is derived from these typical features. Thus, these typical features are shaped with the cultural identity. Therefore, these typical components are vital in users' experience in a way that these typical elements reflect an image in the users' cognition". As mentioned above, the cognitive process is formed by traditional types that are shaped by history. The formation of a true image of Traditional Straits Chinese Shop house Interior is created with these typical features.

THEME THREE: PUBLIC, SEMI-PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AREAS OF SHOP HOUSE

Theme three shows that the Straits Chinese immigrants settled in George Town, Penang after they have adopted local culture. The main factors affecting the formation of traditional courtyard shop houses were derived from Chinese culture, adapting

to Malaysian architecture and the environment (Shuhana et al. 2012). From the observation, the eclectic style shop houses interior space is mainly categorised into three types as presented in Figure 5. They are the public area, the semi-public area, and the private area. According to Straits Chinese culture beliefs, (the public areas) are generally the exterior of the building which is open and accessible to people. The roads, back land and the five-foot way are all considered as public areas. The semi-private areas are spaces throughout the whole building except the bedrooms. These are the area only accessible under the permission of the owner. (The private areas) are the bedrooms located on the upper floor of the building. These spaces can be accessed by the owners only. The shop house is a place for all family members. After marriage, the children of the family continue to live with their parents. Each family had a single room as their private living area. In other words, it is a patriarchal family structure.



FIGURE 5. Public, Semi-Public and Private Areas of Shop house

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/douglasloon/sun-yat-sen-museum-penang-measured-drawings>

THEME FOUR: ORNATELY CARVED WOODEN SCREEN

Theme four shows that the interior of the Straits Chinese shop house furnished with crafted Chinese Blackwood antique furniture inlaid with marble and mother-of pearl. The formation layout of typical Straits Chinese shop house usually has the first hall (*ruang tamu*), second hall (*tiah gelap*), one or two courtyards or air wells (*chim chae*), ancestral hall, bedrooms, bridal chamber and kitchen. In those days, visitors to the house were normally allowed to the first hall. Findings show that the second hall or *tiah gelap* was usually used by the unmarried Nyonyas (Females) to peep through small openings dividing the first and second halls.

Findings show that the front hall of the formation traditional courtyard shop house eclectic style is typically separated from the rest of the house by an ornately carved wooden screen. Also, the timber divider which is directly facing the main door acts as a 'spirit wall' to prevent evil spirits from entering by obstructing their straight paths as presented in Figure 6. Now, as the social life changes, the younger generation of *Nyonyas* (Females) no longer hide in the *tiah gelap* (Ghafar 1994). Findings agree with Akram & Bahauddin (2016) and confirmed that the formation interior of traditional courtyard shop house is fully decorated with the original black wood made of Straits Chinese furniture and ornately carved wooden screens.

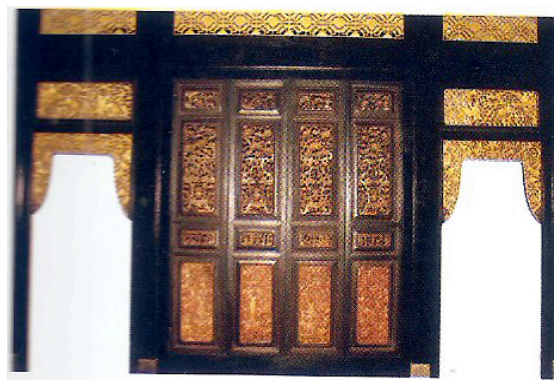


FIGURE 6. An Ornately Carved Wooden Screen

Source: Tan (2015)

THEME FIVE: MASTER BEDROOM THE STRAITS CHINESE (*PERANAKAN*) FAMILY

Theme five shows that the courtyard is the main zone where the rooms are arranged. It is the space

between the rooms. Findings from observation show that the courtyard (air well) is a circulation area between rooms. This is used as a social area that contains furniture units. Findings agree with Ahmad & Yahaya (2012) and mentioned that the courtyard

(air well) is the most important element form of the shop house. This is usually located in the middle part and used as a relaxation space and influences its whole shape as presented in Figure 5. Also, the courtyards may be landscaped spaces for quiet reflection, places to dry laundry, vents for cooking fumes or toilet odours or spaces for any number

of household activities. Findings from observation show that the room is one of the typical elements of the traditional courtyard shop house interiors. In many examples, the room is in square shape. In addition, the room's shape is independent of the function of the space.



FIGURE 7. A Master Bedroom the Straits Chinese (*Peranakan*) Family
Source: <http://www.pinangperanakanmansion.com.my/>

From the observation, it shows that each room contains basic living requirements such as; sleeping, eating, sitting, working and resting areas. However, the space on the first floor of Straits Chinese traditional courtyard shop houses is usually occupied by three or more bedrooms. Something worthwhile to mention is that the servant's room is at the rear end of the first floor, most probably because of their low rank in Straits Chinese family. One can appreciate the cultural identity of the Straits Chinese being through a bridal chamber as presented in Figure 7. Findings show that the master bedroom has the most lavish set of furniture as it symbolises the Straits Chinese (*Peranakan*) family's status. The furniture set is usually made of Namwood, varnished in auspicious red colour. Namwood (*Machilus nanmu*) is like a large evergreen timber and it grows in the *Yunan* part of *Sichuan* province.

In summary, the Traditional Shop house interior is a multifunctional area just like in the Malay house structure in Malaysia. Timber ceiling decoration, wooden chairs and built-in wardrobes are all common typical components in this interior. The image formation of Traditional Courtyard shop house is derived from these typical features. Thus, these typical features are shaped with cultural identities. "These typical elements are vital to the users' experience in a way that these typical elements

reflect an image in the users' cognition" (Nur 2012: p, 475). As mentioned above, the cognitive process is formed by traditional types that are shaped through history. The formation of a true image of Traditional Courtyard Straits Chinese Shop house Interior is created with these typical features.

CONCLUSION

Today, many traditional courtyard shop houses have undergone destructive renewal that modified its significant features. Some have been torn down for the needs of new building areas. This paper concentrates on the identity formation of the traditional courtyard of shop houses interiors. The original identity formation of shop houses has been changed to boutique hotel or retail activities. This study focuses on promoting the identity formation of traditional Straits Chinese courtyard shop houses eclectic style regarding interiors design identity. The goal is to ensure a strong appreciation of its existence. In the modification of the authenticity process, the true image of design identity cannot be reflected anymore. These commercial buildings deviate from the previous design concept identity and expression. Besides, it is far from reflecting the typical place identity of Traditional Straits Chinese

shop house. The findings of this study have guided the Architects and Interior Designers towards a significant understanding of the sustainable architectural values and cultural identities' influences that govern the design of the traditional courtyard shop house, which characterises the Strait Chinese (*Peranakan*) eclectic style architecture. As part of the practical implications, this paper contributes to reawaken planners and scholars to ensure that identity formation is not eliminated. This will stir-up the drive for working hard to sustain this important architectural component because the shop house is a cultural space in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. Also, this paper contributes to the cultural study that reflects the traditional architecture of George Town Heritage City, Penang, Malaysia. Implementation of some of the possible solutions that emerged from this paper would intend to strengthen the continuous recognition of George Town Heritage City as one of the famous world Heritage Sites by UNESCO. There is a need for future researchers to validate findings of this paper via a quantitative approach. This will allow for generalisation of findings.

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