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AN INVESTIGATION ON THE INTERIOR TRADITIONAL COURTYARD SHOPHOUSES BASED ON THE IDENTITY FORMATION: CASE STUDY OF LOT NOS. 3, 5, AND 7 LORANG IKAN, GEORGE TOWN, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The interior design formation of a typical Traditional courtyard shophouse is the basic housing typology of George Town Heritage City for many years and is harmonized in its architectural design identity formation. This type of construction clearly shows the influences of the Chinese, Malay, European styles; matured and merged together in response to the local environment. Thus, birthed the UNESCO history and recognition in 2008 Heritage City. Recent renovation on some shophouses has failed to sustain and preserve some of the components that gave birth to the Heritage City and possibly fading away from the architectural identity of the traditional courtyard shophouses. Therefore, the study investigated the interior traditional courtyard shophouses, with the concept of identity formation via case studies of Lot Nos. 3, 5, and 7 Lorang Ikan, built-in 1926 and also in the category of Late Straits Eclectic Style in George Town. A qualitative research approach was adopted to collate data via observation and secondary sources. The findings reveal that the identity of the components in Lot 3, 5 and 7 buildings still reflect the cultural and place identity of the traditional courtyard shophouses and thus, the need to be used as a guideline to remedial others.

Disciplinary: Architectural Sciences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study is to investigate the significance of the interior Traditional Courtyard Shophouses based on Identity Formation. Humanitarian, as the creator of cultural diversity, is the main force in shaping environments. Each culture consists of the patterns of living habits, attitudes, and beliefs that form our manner of understanding the globe around us. Culture may be outlined as “a method of being, relating, behaving, believing and acting which people live out in their lives and which is in a constant process of modification and exchange with different cultures

(Ayalp, 2012). That means the culture is additionally within the centre of interrelations among the environment and the human. In different words, culture is an effective factor that shapes how people behave in a certain environment. As well as, it affects how one perceives the environment. This study discussed the environment within the interior space dimension and the interior space style through image formation stage. Additionally, the method of place identity formation and cultural identity is outlined in relation to one another. Also, from this point of view, reflecting true cultural identity as an image is the basic principle in designing interior environments. The interior architectural profession aims to make environments that satisfy the functionality needs, aesthetics, and cultural identity.

However, all these architectural and cultural values, recent modern shophouses in Malaysia do not share a similar concern and the importance of maintaining the architectural opening values. The shophouses case studies (No. 3, 5, and 7) and have been chosen for this research because through an interview with Penang City Council Heritage Department representative Mr. Mohd Azmi Fazil in 2016; he stated that the buildings No. 3, 5, and 7 are the most valuable and authentic artefacts and one of the most important identities of George Town Heritage City. The buildings are townhouse or dwelling houses were built in the late 19th Century (GTWHI). Furthermore, the buildings hold many tales of the past in its architecture and design. Many rooms within the building even retain some of their original furnishings. Hence, there is a need to investigate and document the identity formation of the interior Traditional courtyard shophouses. The subsequently reviewed literature for this paper will embrace the interior identity formation Traditional Courtyard Shophouse, zoning plan, circulation and bedrooms of Traditional courtyard shophouses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed the literature relevant to the subject matter. They are space and place identity, cultural environment of the image formation model, and Image Formation of Typical Traditional Courtyard Shophouse Interior.

2.1 SPACE AND PLACE IDENTITY

When the interaction is considered from this perspective, the concept of place rather than space emerges. Altman and Low (2012) confirmed that when the human component comes into space, space becomes more of a place than space. The authors Law and Altman have defined the place concept as 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 into 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; space defines the person; the person gives meaning to space, space gives meaning to the person. This relation has cultural, psychological, economic and physical dimensions. This transforms the space into its 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. Table 1 presents the three factors that affect the formation of the place concept as described by Anderson (2013).

Hence, People do not only create their spaces, the geography of their lives, but also the

time-space (place) of their lives (Ayalp, 2012). In short, the concept of place is fundamental to the individual and his space interaction. The 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 (Knez, 2014). Moreover, the place identity and the "extended self" concepts are related to each other in the relevant literature. The author 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, it is clear that experiencing typical features in a certain place is an effective factor in the perception of place. Norberg-Schulz (2013) explained that people perceive the world through types (structured by our cognitive schemes).

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 mean, place and occasion tell more.

Source: Adopted from Anderson (2013).

At this point, 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 fatal in forming an 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 these having universal value 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). The next part of the study focuses on the typical feature of the Traditional Courtyard Shophouse interior as an example of image formation of a cultural identity that has a heritage value.

2.2 THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE IMAGE FORMATION MODEL

The image creation having a cultural value is an example of Traditional Courtyard Shophouse Interior formation. All these physical features in the interior create an overall interior image having a cultural identity. These features are used continuously throughout history. Therefore, they became typical features (Aylap, 2012). The author stated that these images are a reflection of living habits, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs. They are also a reflection of cultural identity. In another saying, they are cultural heritage. Image formation of a specific cultural environment is a complex phenomenon. There are many factors affecting the process of image formation (San-Martín & Del-Bosque, 2008). In Figure 1, Aylap (2012) proposed a model that the first phase became a place with human participation. Space is considered 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 author argued that space became 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 features of the image, place, place identity, and cultural identity are considered as interrelated factors

affecting each other. Besides, cultural identity and the place identity are the factors that are interrelated with each other. Ayalp (2012) argued that with a two-way interaction, place identity shapes the cultural identity and the cultural identity shapes the place identity. Moreover, they are effective factors in image formation of a typical environment that has a cultural value. Image of cultural heritage is considered as an environment that has a cultural identity (in a way place identity). Cultural heritage has to have a cultural value. In the proposed model, this cultural value is derived from interrelations between cultural identity, place identity and the typical image of the environment.

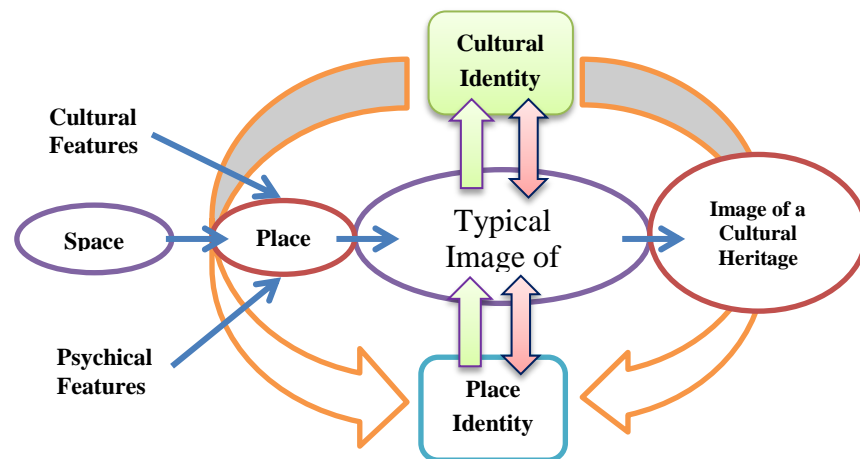


Figure 1: Image Formation Model (Source: Adopted from Ayalp (2012)).

The author stated that the proposed model aims 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.

2.3 IMAGE FORMATION OF TYPICAL TRADITIONAL COURTYARD SHOPHOUSE INTERIOR

Interior space components shape the image of a place, in the design process; these components give identity to space. Especially, living environments (like houses) directly reflect the cultural identity of the society. “Vernacular-traditional houses are the physical appearances of the society’s cultural heritage, beliefs, lifestyle and values since these are the outcomes of the people’s life and cultural continuity” (Altman & Low, 2012, P.472).

The traditional shophouse (Malay: *Rumah Kedai*) is one of the unique architecture found in South East Asia particularly in Malaysia and many Southeast Asia countries built from 17th to early 20th Century (Chen, 2007; Ismail, 2005). The unique Straits-Chinese form of shophouses resulted from local influences and colonial’s modification in an attempt to adapt to tropical climates. The Straits-Chinese was also known as *Peranakan Chinese* as they were usually born in British Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka (Ahmed, 1994). Therefore, the author stated that shophouses follow Chinese rules of thumb in architecture which are symmetrical (Ahmad, 1994), narrow layout, and air-well in-between spaces (Ismail, 2005). However, in this paper, cultural identity and place identity formation are discussed based on the typical interior elements of the traditional courtyard Straits-Chinese shophouse’s eclectic style. Shophouse’s identity formation was built side by side with a common party wall. The walls were built out of bricks and were plastered. One of the typical interior features is the courtyard (Air-Well) located inside the center of shophouses. Long internal spaces with no openings at the side of the shophouses require the use of several courtyards (air-

wells). This paper aims to understand the typical values set of identities formed through the design of the traditional courtyard of shophouses architectural components.

The traditional shophouses' interior formation has been derived mostly and influenced by Straits Chinese, merged and matured in response to the local environment (Zwain & Bahauddin, 2015; Soon and Bahauddin, 2017). Figure 2 shows a typical Traditional Courtyard Shophouse architecture that was first developed in Malacca and later spread to Penang and other Malay states. Moreover, Shophouses 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 shophouse is very narrow around 13 to 20 feet, the depth is around four times the width of the shophouse, between 100 and 120 feet as shown in Figure 2. The walls and partitions have a role in the forming of the shophouse, which divided the shophouse into square areas. The walls divided the shophouse into square rooms. The interior design of the shophouse has special open space components, designed based on the Chinese Traditional Courtyard style. However, the size of the open space is smaller than the original one because of the small size of the shophouse width (Ahmad, 1994).

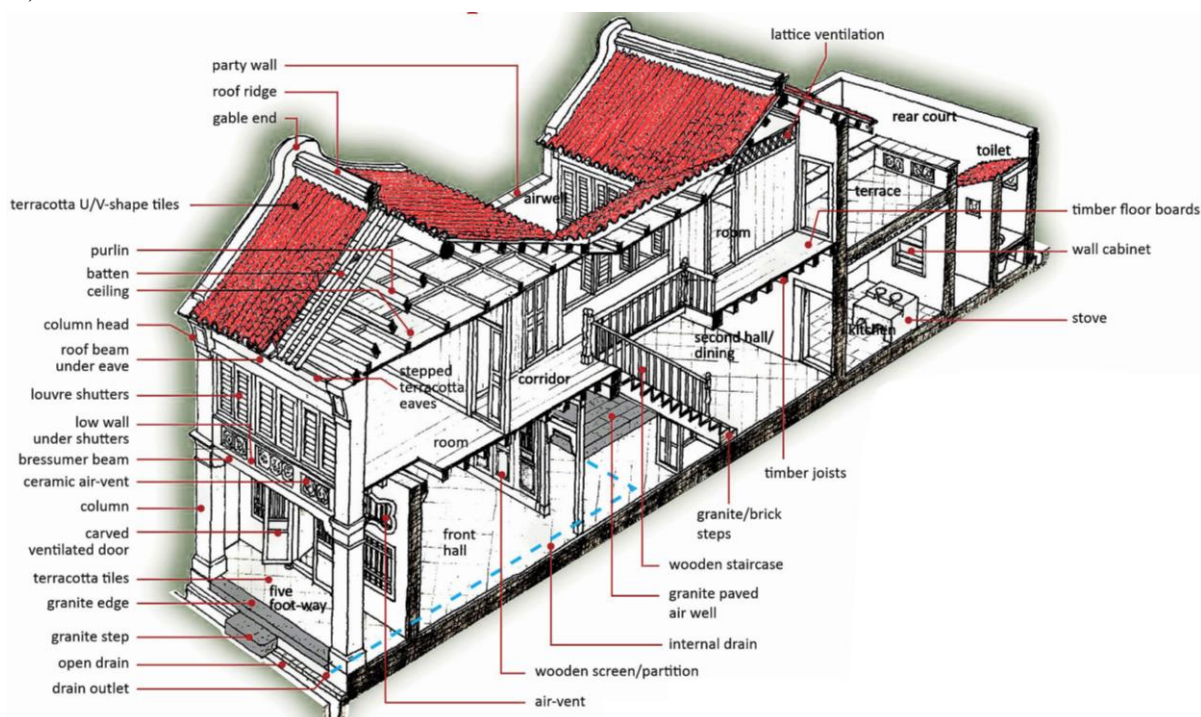


Figure 2: Axonometric views of a typical Traditional Courtyard Shophouses (Source: Penang-shophouses-a-handbook-of-features-and-materials (2015))

Bahauddin and Abdullah (2012) noted that the shophouse formation type is the basic component of the urban fabric of all Malaysian towns and cities. The interior design of Traditional courtyard shophouses receives dominant from Chinese and Malay cultural background than in succession import from European influence cultures.

Dixon (1991) said 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. There were many different civilizations' culture identities on it throughout history. In different regions of Malaysia, different types of shophouses could be seen. However, the George Town Heritage City, Penang at the northeast tip of the island presently boasts approximately seven

thousand shophouses (Tan, 2015).

Historically, Straits-Chinese immigrants settled in George Town, Penang after they adopted local culture. As well as, deriving from Chinese culture, adapting to Malaysia architecture and the environmental characteristics of Straits-Chinese become the main factors affecting the formation of traditional courtyard shophouses (Shamsuddin, Sulaiman, & Amat, 2012). The eclectic style shophouses' interior space is mainly categorised into three types of zoning plans (Figure, 3). 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 (Ahmed, 1994). These are the spaces only the owner can enter. A shophouse is a place for all family members. After marriage, the children of the family kept going on to leave with their parents. Each family had a single room as their private living area. In other words, there was a patriarchal family structure.



Figure 3: Public, Semi-Public and Private Areas of Shophouse
 Source: Sun Yat Sen Penang Museum Measured Drawing (2016).

The courtyard is the main zone that all the rooms are arranged around. It is the space between the rooms. Also, it is a circulation area between rooms. Moreover, it is used as a social area that contains furniture units. The circulation of the Traditional Courtyard Shophouse eclectic style is very linear; straight paths are the primary organizing elements for a series of spaces as seen in floor plans (Figure, 4).

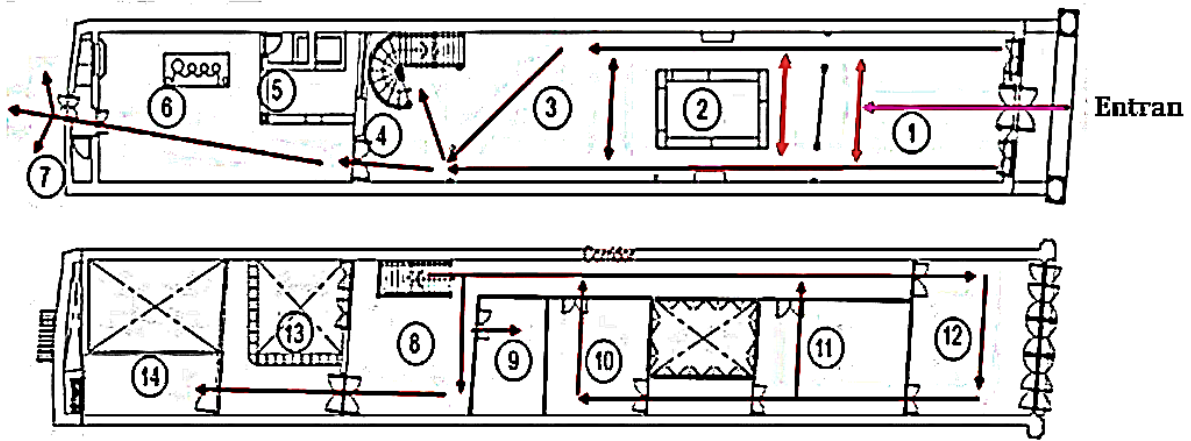


Figure 4: Circulation of Traditional Courtyard Shophouse eclectic style
Source: Sun Yat Sen Penang Museum Measured Drawing (2016)

Some straight paths have branches and form a loop to enhance the overall circulation of the building. Circulation element that connects the two floors is the staircase located at the ground floor family area (Tan, 2015). Another typical element of the traditional courtyard shophouse interiors is the bedrooms. In most examples, the room is in square shape. In addition, the bedroom shape is independent of the function of the space. Each room contains basic living requirements such as; sleeping, eating, sitting, working and resting (Knapp, 2013). However, the spaces on the first floor of Straits-Chinese traditional courtyard shophouses are usually occupied by three or more bedrooms (Ahmed, 1994). 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 the Straits-Chinese family. A bridal chamber (Figure 5), which is also a master bedroom has the most lavish set of furniture as it symbolizes the Straits-Chinese (*Peranakan*) family's status. The furniture set is usually made of namwood, varnished in auspicious red colour. Namwood (*Machilus nanmu*) is similar to a large evergreen and it grows in the *Yunan* part of *Sichuan* province.



Figure 5: A Master Bedroom of the Straits-Chinese Family Penang Peranakan Mansion (Source: Taken by Author).

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted more than one approach as followed: case studies, observation and secondary sources combined. Architectural documentation data and visualising materials were also used

(Creswell, 2013). Two knowledge-based experts were engaged during the study's oral interview one officer from Municipal Council of Penang, Malaysia (Heritage Conservation Department) and one previous occupant of Lot, 7 shophouse building. Hence, this was supported by the architectural detail studies on the Late Straits Eclectic Style Heritage Shophouse. This study attempts to review cultural identity and place identity study that reflects the traditional architecture of George Town Heritage City, Penang. Therefore, the researchers conducted this research on three combined shophouses buildings (3, 5, and 7) built-in 1926 respectively. This study contributed to the cultural study that reflects the traditional architecture of George Town Heritage City, Penang.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this paper are presented in this section. This comprises of traditional courtyard shophouses zoning plan, circulation, and bedrooms, the concept in George Town Heritage City. These new approaches are far from reflecting the cultural identity of Straits Chinese. Besides, it is far from reflecting the typical place identity of Traditional Courtyard Shophouse.

4.1 CASES STUDIES: (NOS. 3, 5 AND 7)

The Nos. 3, 5, and 7 shophouses buildings are hidden gems located in Lorong Ikan, represent the true architectural identity of a part of George Town Heritage City that is not often even frequented by locals. However, upon first glance, it is easy to tell that the building is more than what it seems Nos. 3, 5, and 7. Figure 6 presents the architecture style of the shophouses No.3, 5, and 7 and could be categorized as Late Straits Eclectic Style based on the design of the façade and their year of build, 1926. They are the typical shophouses along Lorong Ikan in local language which mean Fish Lane, is a small lane off the Lower Beach Street in George Town. During the mid-19th century, the street served as the drying yard for salted fish and also, the case studies' locations and Penang's UNESCO WHS zones. Today it is a small and quiet lane, lined with old colonial Traditional courtyard shophouses. In 2012, the three lots were sold and were earmarked for conversion to boutique hotels. Tye (2016) affirmed that the style was popular in George Town's traditional courtyard shophouses in the early 20th century when the city was experiencing its prosperous era. However, it is easily confused with the Early straits eclectic style as they share a similar appearance.



Figure 6: The Façade of the Traditional courtyard shophouses No.3, 5, 7.
Source: Field Survey.

4.2 ZONING PLAN OF THE BUILDINGS: NOS. 3, 5, AND 7 SHOPHOUSES

After Nos. 3, 5, and 7 shophouses buildings were sold to new owners, they were under renovation and currently use as a boutique hotel. As a result, some functions of the zoning spaces have changed, as discovered during an interview with Ms. Teh, the previous occupant of Lot. 7. From the observation as presented in Figure 7 the Nos: 3, 5, and 7 buildings zoning plan is divided into three main zonings which are the public area, semi-public area, and private area. According to Knapp (2013), the straits eclectic terrace houses in George Town can also be categorised into two types, the traditional shophouse, and the townhouse. In traditional shophouses, the ground floor is usually used as business area while the level above is used for living purposes. On the other hand, the whole unit of townhouse is used for residential purposes. This finding agrees with Ahmed (1994). The author confirmed that the eclectic style shophouses' interior space is mainly categorised into three types of zoning plans. Those are the public area, the semi-public area, and the private area.



Figure 7: Public, Semi-Public and Private Areas of Shophouse
Source: Field Survey

Also, findings from Figure 7 show that the ground floor entrance façade to be open at the street edge, recessed from the street by approximately five feet to create a covered verandah or five-foot way which is a public area. The semi-private area of buildings is the main ground floor area. This finding agrees with Ahmed (1994). The author stated that according to straits Chinese cultural 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. As well as, findings show that the private area is located on the first floor including the bedrooms thus only allowed under

the owner's permission. This finding agrees with Ahmed (1994). The author affirmed that 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 are the spaces only the owner can enter. The identity formation of the traditional courtyard shophouse is a place for all family members. After marriage, the children of the family kept going on to leave with their parents. Each family had a single room as their private living area. In other words, there was a patriarchal family structure.

4.3 CIRCULATION PLAN OF THE BUILDINGS: NOS. 3, 5, AND 7 SHOPHOUSES

From the observation as presented in Figure 8, the three-building has the main entrance that usually got in the Traditional courtyard shophouses which have a front entrance with centre placement of door opening at each of the shophouses. The entrances are recessed and sheltered by the five-foot-ways. Moreover, from the observation of these buildings the entrances could be seen decorated with Chinese ornamentation and embellishment, giving an oriental vibe to the buildings. Apart from that, Figure 8 shows that the buildings have linear circulation which is common in Malaysian traditional courtyard shophouses. However, there are some paths that branch out to the next unit as the No.3 and No.5 shophouses are connected on the ground floor.

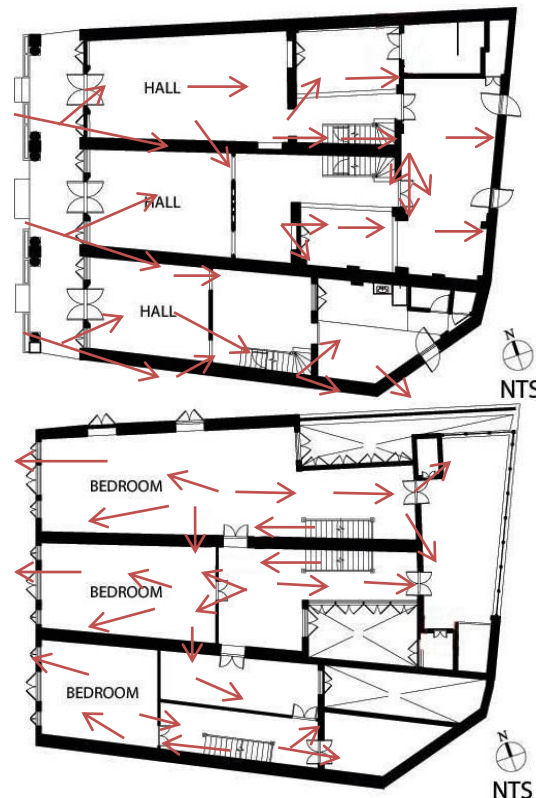


Figure 8: Circulation of the Nos: 3, 5 and 7 Traditional Shophouse Buildings
Source: Documentation and Measured Drawing (2016), Modified by the Author

Also, the lots are connected on the first floor. Besides, there is a vertical circulation through the staircases with their direction facing inwards, which appears unwelcome to the public as the staircases are leading to the private spaces. This agrees with Tan's (2015) findings. The author stated that some straight paths have branches and form a loop to enhance the overall circulation of the building. The circulation element that connects the two floors is the staircase located at the ground floor family area. However, the path is usually determined by the activity that is being carried out at the time and the user is always able to pause or re-orientate at his will in the buildings.

4.4 BEDROOMS OF THE BUILDINGS: NOS. 3, 5, AND 7 SHOPHOUSES

The observation as presented in Figure 9 shows that each unit has one upper room and the rooms were handsomely fitted up. As well as the formation identity of interior spaces, the Straits Chinese' rooms are defined by solid walls which are common in most buildings. Besides, timber partitions are also used as dividers between spaces. This finding disagrees with Ahmed (1994). The authors confirmed that the spaces on the first floor of Straits Chinese traditional courtyard shophouses are usually occupied by three or more bedrooms. The findings show that antique furniture remains almost the same. As well as, the same beds for each room which can usually be found in Straits-Chinese shophouses but with less decoration and ornamentation. Therefore, this disagrees with Ahmed (1994). The author stated that a bridal chamber which is also a master bedroom has the most lavish set of furniture as it symbolizes the Straits-Chinese (*Peranakan*) family's status. The furniture set is usually made of Namwood, varnished in auspicious red colour. Namwood (*Machilus nanmu*) is similar to a large evergreen and it grows in the *Yunan* part of *Sichuan* province.

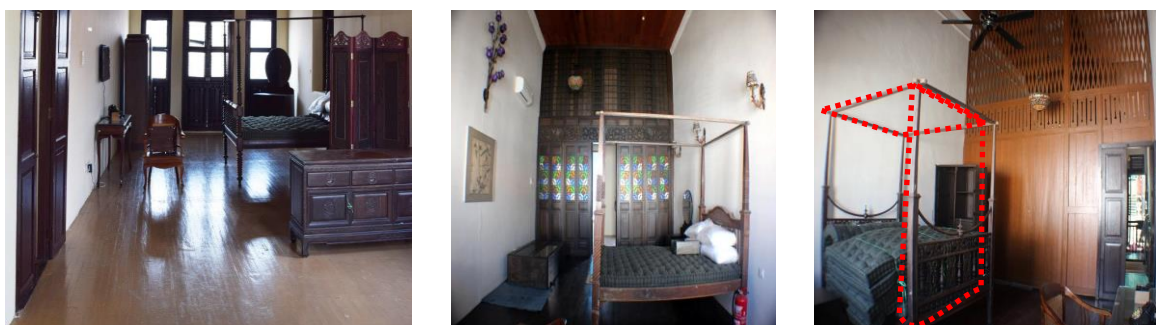


Figure 9: Bedrooms Nos 3, 5 and 7 on the Upper Floor

Source: Documentation and Measured Drawing (2016), Modified by the Author

The researcher observed that only building No.3 room got window openings which can look down into the Courtyard (Air-Well). This is because the No. 3 room is open widely from the front till the end of the upper building floor as shown in Figure 8. Finally, the culture has recently been 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 (Aylap, 2012). In some instances, this process of change turns into a process of rejecting the old and creates a unifying culture.

5. CONCLUSION

This study discusses the interior design formation of a typical traditional courtyard shophouse in George Town, Penang, created the built cultural heritage which is facing many challenges. These effects made the architectural and cultural heritage image continuously and gradually disappear. The shophouse has a huge impact on the authenticity of the urban heritage, which created the heritage identity. The image formation of traditional Straits Chinese shophouse is derived from these typical features. Thus, these typical features are shaped with cultural identity. Therefore, these typical elements 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. It is obvious that the formation of a true image of traditional Straits Chinese shophouse interior is created with these typical features. However, the traditional shophouses No.3, 5, 7 in Penang, which has been presented in this paper, were converted into a boutique hotel

shophouses in the heritage area of George Town, Penang. One can find the original components of interior identity formation circulation paths of the shophouse in this area. Also, this study discusses and proposed a guideline for the interrelations among the cultural identity, place identity and environmental design. This guideline aims to create a consciousness in designer's attitudes in environment that has a cultural value. This study has contributed to the identity formation in the cultural environment of the traditional courtyard shophouse interiors.

6. AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIAL

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding authors

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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