

Research on the Overseas Chinese Shophouse Culture in Penang, Malaysia in Qing Dynasty

A Case Study of Penang Island

Mingjie Dai

School of Art and Design
Jilin University Zhuhai College
Zhuhai, China

Xiu Zhou

The Research Center for Arts Education
City University of Macau
Macau, China

Abstract—This paper focuses on the Shophouse Culture using the methodology of Chronicles, Bibliography and Typology applied into the time clue as the axial direction of the research as a whole. Through the case study of Shophouse in Penang Island, Malaysia, it combs the evolutionary process of the Shophouse in the way of listing the basic type style, function form and aesthetic orientation along the line of researching the Chinese southward migration history of Penang. It further expounds the historical significance and aesthetic value of blending Chinese and western and east and west and probes into the evolution, fusion and possibility of the culture in the overseas society.

Keywords—Shophouse; Chinese in Qing Dynasty; Penang; culture construction

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Malay Peninsula and Penang

Penang, one of Malaysia's 13 federal states, is located in the Straits of Malacca in northwestern Malaysia. Penang, also known as Pulau Pinang, includes Penang (Island of Penang) and Wesley Province (Province Wellesley) in the Malay Peninsula, where Georgetown is the capital city. The important role that Penang has played in the transformational process of Asia as a whole is self-evident and cannot be ignored. In 19th century the UK shifted its focus to Singapore and Hong Kong; however, it never gave up Penang as an outpost of British politics and marched into the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. The large number of Chinese to the South is also inseparable from the British strategy. [1] The small island of Penang is like a betel nut in shape, hence its name. [2] According to historical research, in the 100 years since the opening of Penang, the population of overseas Chinese by 1881 has reached more than 60,000 people due to the increasing number of overseas Chinese, accounting for more than half of the local population, thus gradually forming a large group of Chinese immigrants in the local area. [3]

B. Shophouse and Chinese Migration

Underclass business people locally open shops using their house, of which upstairs living comprised, are known as

Shop house (English Shophouse) Shop houses are integrated along the street, very similar to each other in a strict order. [4] 200 years after the beginning of the Colonial Era, Georgetown was accompanied by the breeding of Chinese immigrant groups and the social environment of colonial multiculturalism, which was the outcome of the influence of transplantation, adjustment, hybridisation and colonial policy regulation. The town has 2,900 shops within the World Heritage Site where experience architectural types, architectural styles and the evolution of the use of building materials to witness the vicissitudes and development of different social backgrounds. [5] Historically, Captain Francis Light (1740-1794) made his first visit to Penang in 1771 until that Britain realized the need to establish a front-line base in the Straits of Malacca in 1785. By 1786, Captain Light of England had defeated the Sultan to take possession of Penang which belonged to the East India Company. In 1800, Kedah Sudan then signed an agreement with the fourth successor, George Leith, to determine the inland part of the Wesley Province of Penang today. Over a long period of time, Penang has witnessed the migration of people and the formation and development of the Shophouse in history.

II. THE ORIGIN OF SHOPHOUSE

As a matter of fact, the formation of Shophouse in Penang has the directed connections with the migration, development and formation of Chinese society in Qing Dynasty. The overseas Chinese of Penang are basically from Fukien and Canton. [6] According to "Yinghuan Zhilue", a world geographic book written by Qing Dynasty's author Jiyu Xu in 1848, Fukienese and Cantonese accounts for one-fifth of the local population among 54,000 residents in Penang. [7] Commercialization and trade have stimulated the development of the town and created conditions for the emergence and evolution of Shophouse. [8] Based on the research in the past, the origin of the Shophouse in the Georgetown, Penang can be traced back to the Southern China where is the hometown of the early Chinese immigrants that have great majority in Southeast Asia when mentioning the original style of the Shophouse. Furthermore, it is important to understand that it is a group choice of migration in social groups that build. Essentially speaking, Shophouse is roughly as the same as the bamboo pole house

in southern China. The latter appeared in the late Ming Dynasty (1528-1644) in China with the development of commerce in the southern towns where it leads to a relative tension and population density of the land in the town blocks. [9] In order to adapt to local development and climatic conditions, overseas Chinese gradually develop the architectural style and the style of the ancestral land and integrate into the local neighborhood-based city landscape.

III. THE STYLE OF SHOPHOUSE

From the perspective of the evolution in Shophouse styles, the style of Penang Shophouse refers to the time from

1790 to 1910 in the Qing Dynasty, including Early Penang Style, Southern Chinese Eclectic Style, Early Strait Eclectic Style and Late Strait Eclectic Style. The all-embracing style of the Shophouse is from local simple to complex, from decoratively technical to be moderately enriched. The layout of the space is almost the same where front room is on the street side and the posterior chamber constitute the main structure of the Shophouse, the middle of the patio as light entrance, the kitchen is near the rear room in the backyard. The universal layout is like a narrow "Carriage" in style overall ("Fig. 1").

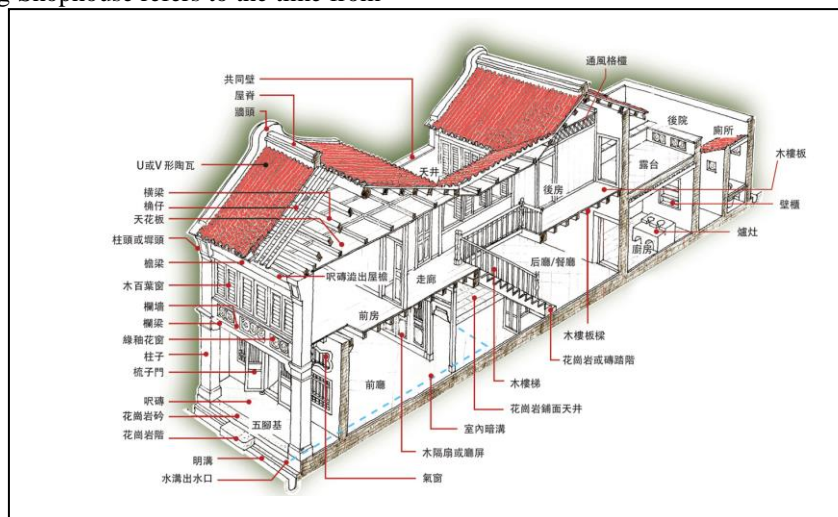


Fig. 1. Example of carriage-style shophouse.

A. Early Penang Style: 1790s-1850s

The general spatial scale of the early Penang Shophouse was small, mostly one to two floors, and short and rudimentary, with almost no decorations on the façade of the building's streets, where wood, red brick, white ash and granite were applied into traditional architecture materials. It is an improvement that the early Penang style building used bricks and tiles and hence its fireproof effect is better as opposed to the previous ancestors living in the "Straw House" leaves-topped. Either of a U or V shaped-order arrangement those red-brown terracotta tiles on the roof began to be applied in the construction of town shops and progressively replaced the palm leaves as the main roof material covered. The shop floor is always open on the street side (only with small baffles at night), with a relatively small floor terrace, and more intimate spaces are hidden in the two or rear halls. The low wall in the middle of the second floor and one layer will have the corresponding advertising font by the shop itself which mirrors the same kind of low wall form belonged to the riding building in Kiangmoon back to Canton. The appearance of the Early Penang Shophouse shows a cultural exchange and reference in connection with the southern part of China to some certain extent.

B. Southern Chinese Eclectic Style: 1840s-1910s

Although the Southern Chinese Eclectic Style retains the original "Carriage" style in terms of the building's structure,

it apparently has a clear optimization and promotion in the scale, decoration and structure of the building. In comparison with the Early Style, the overall style of the Shophouse turns into complexity from the simplicity, inclusively reflecting Chinese elements, Indian elements and European elements in harmony, such as comb doors and windows in Chinese elements, wooden shutters in European elements, etc. In addition, the introduction of the "five-legged base" structure is a bright spot worth noted. Considering the adverse weather effects caused by floods and typhoon in Southeast Asia, the authorities in the Colonial Times has introduced a five-foot (about 1.5m) walking channel with a top cover for pedestrians not only to prevent sun and rain also to open up for business in the five-legged building structure. As Scholar Jonas Kähler (1963) mentioned that although Penang has been influenced by Indian culture, Chinese culture, Islamic culture and European culture, it is one of the most traditional cities in China, with no back lane in the early years of Chinese buildings, and no so-called "five-legged base", under the policy of the authorities Colonial Times, the building is designed to have five feet and back alleys. [10]

C. Early Straits Eclectic Style: 1890s-1910s

In the 1826, the British East India Company officially merge Penang, Malacca and Singapore the "Straits Colony" (The Straits Settlements), becoming the fourth province outside the three provinces of India (the Fourth Presidency).

[11] Due to the cultural influence of the Straits Colony, the Shophouse conducts the decorative performance of the gray brick wall, lime mortar and lime wipe surface. It usually has a structure of two to three layers, with chessboard-patterned glazed tiles laid on the bottom 5 feet of the porch. It is worth mentioning that the upper layer reflected in the Early Penang Shophouse and South China style shop of the low wall has disappeared, replaced by three sets of double-door windows instead. The original low wall has been integrated with the windows and windows for wooden shutters. The upper façade decoration reflects the European elements, the three groups of windows between the use of European-style cylindrical and semicircular arches. [12]

D. Late Strait Eclectic Style: 1910s-1930s

In the 1910, it has been to an end of exhaustion to the late Qing Dynasty at this time; however, Late Strait Eclectic Style Shophouse has been on a mature stage in the development of Penang Shophouse Culture. Cultural blending and collisions in architecture builders generate moderately gorgeous elements, colours and structures rather than few of architectural expressions in the early years. For instance, the two-storey façade has been composed of using a clear three-point method to segment the European window lintel, forming a wall column or voucher column type. The decorative skills of the column and the eaves are superb and chic, reflecting the aesthetic characteristics of the blend of Chinese and western. In terms of colours, the decoration performs brightly coloured tile veneer, gypsum die into bouquets and other beautiful decorative shapes showing in details as well. The level of building façade of the Shophouse is significantly higher than that of the Early Penang Style building with regard to the standard, the detail, the colour and the craftsmanship.

IV. CONCLUSION

Even though the intrinsic motivation of cultural change lies in the instinct that human beings strive to satisfy their desire to survive to the maximum extent, the actual process of cultural change will be impressed by many factors. [13]

- First of all, geographically speaking, the vast land in Southern China is facing an open marine environment showing openness across the ocean. It is an intelligent evolution that ancestors from Fukien and Canton of Qing Dynasty start new life with their home-land building forming into the local community.
- Secondly, regarding the internal contradictions of culture based on the influence and consideration of social complex factors such as livelihood, war and fled, the formation, development and maturity of Shophouse culture is the active integration of Chinese in the Malay Peninsula, the outcome of history and the "home-base" of Chinese.
- Thirdly, in the aspect of cultural communication, it is the dissemination, inheritance and development of the culture that Chinese ancestors in Qing Dynasty brought ancestral architectural style and style into the

Malay Peninsula to integrate into the Malay Peninsular.

- Last but not least, from the viewpoint of cultural inertia, as one of the factors affecting cultural change, it is a tendency of culture to maintain its own original nature. Even if Shophouse culture blends Chinese culture, European culture, Indian culture and Islamic culture, back to Malacca, the elements are balanced and consistent.

In a sum, Penang, as one of the UNESCO world heritage sites across the globe, Shophouse Culture in Penang Island is not just a tip of an iceberg in culture of Asian architecture but also is a case that culturally blends the East and the West in harmony.

REFERENCES

- [1] Shi Shijian (Malaysia). Penang Chinese 200 years. Journal of Studies on Fujianese Entrepreneurs Culture. 2015 (2).
- [2] Li Hanen. The Chinese in Southeast Asia. Wunan Book Publishing Co., Ltd. 2003.
- [3] Nie Dening. Penang Zhi and the Historical Materials of Overseas Chinese in Penang. Overseas Chinese History Studies. 2000 (3)
- [4] Li Na, Cao Shanshan. The Form Change and Cultural Construction of Penang Store Building in Malaysia. Art Education. 2018 (24).
- [5] Siang-tan, C & Kaori Fujita. Building Construction of the Pre-war Shophouses in George Town Observed through a Renovation Case Study. Journal of the Asian Architecture and Building Engineering. 2014,13 (1): 195-202.
- [6] Gao Weinong. The Qing Dynasty Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia: Transnational Migration, Economic Development, Community Along the Perfunctory and Cultural heritage of A New Exploration. Guangzhou: Jinan University Press. 2014.
- [7] Xu Ji she. Yinghuan Zhilue. Vol. 2. Nanyang Islands. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Press, 2001.
- [8] Yunn-chii,w. & Widodo, j. Ed. Shophouse/townhouse: Asian Perspectives. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2016.
- [9] Dai Zhijian. Fujian Residential Architecture. Beijing: China Architecture and Building Press, 2009.
- [10] Kuchler, J. Penang' s Chinese Population: A Preliminary Account of Its Origin and Social Geographic Pattern. Asian studies,1965 (3): 435-452.
- [11] Choi Kwai Keong. History of Southeast Asia. Singapore Affiliate Publishing Co., Ltd., 1965: 214.
- [12] Zhao Long. The Evolution of China Shophouse in George Town, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, Late 18 th Century-Late 20th Century. Journal of Jilin Jianzhu University. 2018 (35).
- [13] Liu Yunde. Collection of Social and Cultural Studies (1986-2014). Beijing: China Social Science Press. 2014:172