

Defining Poetics: A dialogue between Western theories and the Asian philosophies in the intimate spaces of George Town, Penang through visual interpretations and cultural analysis

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The great shift from intimate scale to mega projects has raised questions on the future of architecture in both Western and Eastern context. The research focuses on George Town, Penang – a city with a history dating back to 1800s which reflects the British's presence on the island and the coalescence with the local cultures to create an integral piece of urban texture; now an architectural gem of the Southeast Asia. The research sets forward the concept of poetics in intimate spaces as a passion towards understanding the relationship between the intimacy of space and people. Its principle objective is to articulate theories and philosophies, in relation to the spatial experiences and the in-betweenness within the city. With the support of literatures, the discourse acknowledges the cognitive mapping of George Town as a way to depict the author's perception of a place whilst expressing experience and personal impressions through affective illustrations. Upon the expression of experiences, the author decodes the spirit of place and reinterprets architectural expressions of voids through typical elements of a shophouse dwelling: the window, the courtyard and the walkways. For the author, these are the elements that form the mental image of George Town hence expressing the personal perception of place.

Keywords: Cultures, Intimacy, Poetics, Experience, Dwelling

1. INTRODUCTION

The poetics in architecture is layered within the depth of personal appreciation or rejection of an architectural space. However, the subjectivity of the poetics ultimately varies from one individual to another due to the uniqueness of each person. Nevertheless, there are architectural subtleties, which trigger almost similar effects to people of different sensibilities. With that being said, it is infuriating to realise that monotonous and mediocre megastructures are replacing the poetic spaces that were once the soul of a masterpiece.

This scenario is unsurprisingly reflected in the current scenes of George Town. The poetic quality spaces have been drowned by the relentless phenomenon of generic Cartesian-grid-produced architecture. However, the recognition of UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 as a heritage protected zone has brought this typology into the limelight and repositioned our thoughts on shophouse dwellings which introduced a new life to the dying heritage. Over the years, many shophouse dwellings have undergone adaptive reuse processes which redefined the original function of the typology however the intangible memories and the spirit of place remains in the atmosphere. The experience of place is built upon fragments of engagement with a place and is

formed by the spaces that contain hidden meanings. Hence the study aims to reveal these poetically intimate spaces through memories and the experience of place.

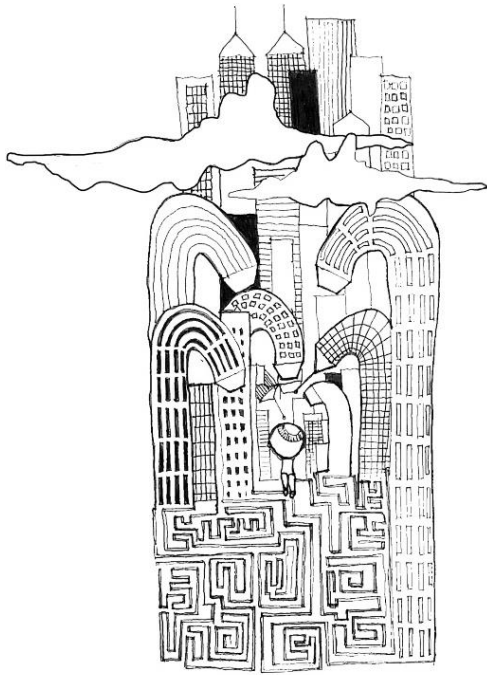


Figure 1: The illustration depicts the current chaos that crept into the city with inhuman-scaled urban structures, distorting the harmony and hierarchy which contributes to the sense of alienation in a city. (Author's own)

The poetics in George Town, Penang emerges from the intimate spaces within the context which constitutes of the Asian philosophies that have been imported from Southern China through migration with a blend of Western architectural qualities as a result of the colonisation. The interesting juxtaposition of cultures created an identity for George Town itself. Through the cultural-psychological analysis, the research dives from a macro into a micro scale by understanding the dwelling (intimate space) through the reinterpretations and perception of place. The window, the courtyard and the walkways convey different spatial qualities which are mental images decoded by the author is often associated with the elements of the typical heritage dwelling. The quote by Le Corbusier, "*The beauty of poetic is when it reaches the realm of thinking process.*", suggests that these spaces are being identified and examined are owing the fact that these spaces have portrayed the beauty of poetics as it

subconsciously stimulates the mind to evaluate and appreciate.

There has been a critical study on theories and philosophies that justifies the demise of the poetics in architecture in the modern age however this research does not aim to criticise the works done by the architects and their acolytes. The discussion will aim to decode the poetically intimate spaces that have been fostered by the Western theories and the Asian philosophies in the context of George Town. Through the synthesis of methodologies, the research hopes to offer a reflective and contemplative response towards how we experience poetic spaces in context.

2. LITERATURE: MIXED METAPHORS

The chapters from the literatures of Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci*, Y.F. Tuan's *Space and Place* and Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* are being analysed as the literatures express intimate spaces (dwellings) poetically which has a close connection to the experience of the dweller. The connecting theories and concepts explain that the poetics of space has the power to affect one's perception towards a space-place condition. Architecture is not merely about the function and construction but to consider the experience of the people, the perception and the consciousness. Only when an abstract space becomes a human-sensitive place, architecture is then truly born.

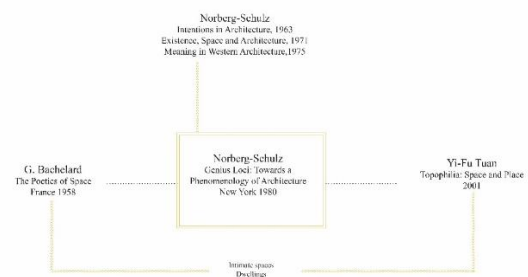


Figure 2: The diagram shows the relationship between the literatures. (Author's own)

All-too-often the literatures seek to make references to the architectural trends in the West but rarely to the Asian context. Although there are some relevant scholarships on Asian architecture, it is produced mainly outside the architectural disciplinary boundaries as there is little to no basis

on the ancient disciplines of architecture itself. Therefore, it is difficult to pose a stand to say that there is a theory on the Asian architecture. The Asian philosophies such as *Feng Shui* and *Chi* are studied instead to grasp the concept of space in the Asian context and further provide the definition of poetic spaces through metaphoric and cultural aspects.

The Chinese ideologies are informal yet its complexity of thoughts and rationales are practical as it come terms with the daily life practices of the human. In the Chinese architecture, what is presumably produced is what we would term it as an aesthetic and cognitive experience which are dependent on beliefs and values. Similar to the previous literatures that explain poetics through experiential qualities, the beauty of the poetics in the Feng Shui however, takes it further into the intangible depth of a cultural layering that has been assimilated as a way of life. The understanding of these metaphoric philosophies will unravel the cultural aspect in the architecture of George Town as it is heavily influenced by the Southern Chinese culture.

The purpose of the literature review is to understand the meaning of poetics in both contexts and the theories behind concepts of space. The literatures are being analysed through a cultural-psychological analysis to examine the cross-cultural impacts on the research context. Majority might view the existence of both Western and Asian as two different bodies but it is not the case in Penang; they are of the same body which is dwelled by two different souls. Hence, the significance of understanding both theories and philosophies does not aim to categorise the spatial perceptions into West and East but to present two strands of thoughts which coexist and therefore offer a fresh lens of reinterpreting the poetics of the Asian architecture through the Western theories.

3. EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN RESEARCH

The root of an experience-driven research is from the basis of a human-centered perspective which seeks to testify how people dwell in space.

From this approach, the research is structured around a personal experience of a place that has these experiential qualities which triggers the stream of perception of place and emotions. Hence the research will attempt to provide a narrative to express the personal experience in George Town through the application of relevant methodologies.

Psychogeography

It is significant to note psychogeography with applied critical reflection as a research methodology. The research will take on a similar approach to understand the experiential qualities and explore the urban environments as a way to delve into the soul of the city to decode 'patterns' that are marginalised, hidden and forgotten. Penang, being a place with strong Western and Asian influences has created intimate spaces that reflect the rich character in the context. In this research, the cognitive mapping method will establish an image of the city hence linking the cognitive experience of the people that dwells within it. This method is used to paint a mental framework which coincides with the experience and memory of place. In effect, such spatial information is collected through the emotions which are dynamic processes that mediate the individual's relation to an environment. This is a psychological phenomenon that is occurred as a result of repeated interactions with the space over time.

Visual ethnographic methodology

Through architectural representations, series of affective drawings are used to depict what the Mind's Eye could perceive through a creative visualisation. A cognitive process of consciously generating a visual mental imagery, simulating and recreating visual perceptions. As such, the gist of the affective drawings is not bounded by the realistic viewpoint rather a juxtaposition of both realistic and imaginative cues. The images of thought thus have a quality that distinguishes them from the exact physical properties. The basis of this perspective is both visual and analogical. Not on some priori symbolism but as if a visual prediction or perception that can be made at a personal level. The ability to build this perception allows the space to construct abstractions. The affective drawings therefore are used as a method to convey the story of spatiality and experience as an urban dweller.

The goal of the approach is to represent the imageries in the author's metaphysical space which targets to share the experience of an urban dweller in George Town. However, the illustrations do not represent the perception of another person experiencing the space as it is of a personal experience. This method may be disputable due to the inconsistency of documenting an experience however it would also justify that perception is tailored through individual experiences and possibly be projected similarly with the others.

Cultural-Psychological Analysis

Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn proposed that culture is not simply behaviours, but a product of psychological, social, biological, and material factors (Beldo, 2010). In this research, the author defines culture as an experiential concept whereby people experience a particular environment through social practices and beliefs that would influence their thoughts and emotions. Both cultural and cross-cultural psychology methodologies have been used in the research. In cultural psychology, both contexts, the West and the East are studied to understand how local cultural practices shape psychological processes. Cross-cultural psychology is used to look at both universal and unique behaviours through cultural aspects in which influences the social experiences and the emotional experiences in a space.

However in both cultural and cross-cultural psychology, the approach undertaken here aims to avoid taking ethnocentric point of views which may lead to biases and a tendency to view the differences in a negative light. This would affect the judgement and critical reflection on how the cultural background influences our behaviour. This method may arguably be a form of cultural stereotype that seems to generalise the people across nations through their cultural establishment as a homogenous product of culture. However, the research aims to dissolve this stereotype and introduce a perspective whereby through the comparisons, a model can be built upon these differences to elevate the experiences of people universally.

The mixed qualitative methodologies and the methods are used to support the experience-driven research. The qualitative approach is less controlled and more interpretable which requires

a meticulous way of explicating. The 3 primary methodologies (psychogeography, visual ethnographic methodology and cultural-psychological analysis) are used to develop the narrative and discourse methods of analysis which are applied within storytelling structures and interpreting non-verbal interactions in relation to the environment.

4. FINDINGS: THE DICHROMATIC NARRATIVE

The presentation of findings takes on the vignette approach to provide a holistic representation of data in which relationships across the themes of interest and lived experiences are foreground in the narrative. The raw data is not being extracted however re-constructed by the author that elicits the readers' engagement to the scene that is culled from the mind of the author. These could be in the form of dialogues, interactions or a composite that are meshed up to formulate a single scene. These are presented together with contextual descriptions to provide a better view of the background story. These techniques facilitate the presentation of findings into in-depth story, rich in contextual details and directs the development of manuscript that in a way engages the reader at almost an experiential level.

Western Influences and Adaptation

Since the 15th century, Malaya experienced the colonisation of the Portuguese, Dutch and British however Penang was very much influenced by the British in the 17th century. The birth of Penang is strongly associated to Francis Light however it did not flourish until the British East Indian Company established the Straits Settlement which consists of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. As the ruling power, the British built many administrative buildings that possessed expressions of grandeur and power which psychologically symbolised the authority and their status. However, there are some elements from these design principles that were adapted into smaller-scaled buildings to possibly imitate a sense of familiarity from their place of origin. The presence of western architectural elements such as arches, tall windows and ornamentations from the Palladian concepts have converged with the oriental architectural style and further adapted to the local climate to create an architectural identity for the architecture of George Town.

The Oriental Migration

The migration of the Southern Chinese from Fujian and Canton begun as early as the 15th century, with a similar timeline to the Western influences in Malaya due to the spark of the international trading. However in the second half of the 19th century, the political instability and over-population in Southern China prompted the mass migration to the South-East Asia and Penang, the potential entrepot for trading became a relatively suitable location for traders. When Penang was made capital of the Straits Settlement by the British in 1800s, the Chinese settlements had emerged and escalated the immigration of the Southern Chinese to Malaya. The influx of Chinese traders to the Straits Settlement has led to their settlement which brought in the Chinese architectural tradition to the Nanyang. In the process of their migration, they brought their beliefs (*Feng Shui*, the five elements and *Chi*), philosophy of living and ethnic customs which are reflected in their architecture. Malaya was in the process of becoming a plural society and in a very short period of time, Penang was heavily populated by the Chinese hence the strong Southern Chinese cultural influence in George Town as compared to the other states in Malaysia. There were not many written literatures on the architectural documentation of the Southern Chinese however it was passed on through memory, beliefs and crafts which they attempt to recreate based on the architectural values of their place of origin (Fig. 3). The buildings built were the embodiment of this sense of place.

As discussed in the literature review, the philosophy of *Feng Shui* is one of the most important ancient Chinese principles for examining the relationship between the people with their environment. This belief is versatile to be adopted to the buildings to create a harmonised relationship. It is being applied not merely to the spatial form but also through architectural symbolism which together created spaces that embodied the ideal *Feng Shui* habitat. Demonstrating a physical integration and manifestation of *Feng Shui* models and principles in the architecture of Southern China, the imitation of such architecture in Malaya shows that traditional beliefs hold great significance and power in the design of the dwellings because they reflect cultural character that fits the social and historical background and provide symbolism shared by its dwellers.

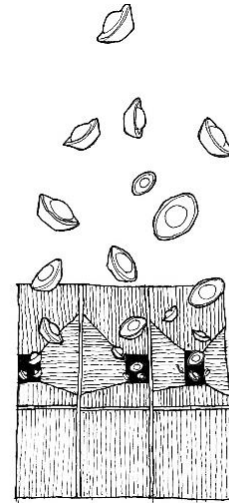


Figure 3: The Chinese believed that water represents wealth in which the airwell is functioned to collect the rain water from the roof to the sunken well. (Author's own)

The Ballad of East and West

As Kipling's poem (1889) recites "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", this clearly is not the case in the architecture of Penang. The architecture of George Town is the unique manifestation of both

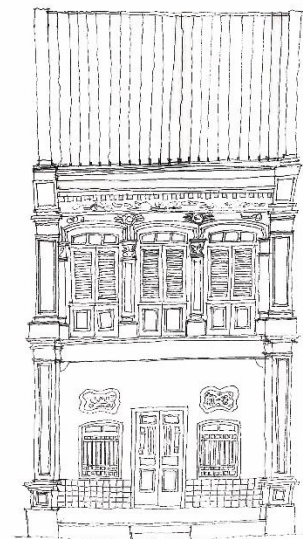


Figure 4: A typical Penang shophouse illustrating the juxtaposition of Western and Asian influences on the façade. The ground floor possesses an Asian trait yet on the first floor there is the introduction of Western elements. (Author's own)

Western and Southern Chinese influence (Fig. 4) which created a form and urban texture to the fabric itself. The Western influences did not only bring in the architecture elements but also the regulations and theories that altered the streets and urban planning of the George Town in that century. The Chinese influence has introduced a dwelling typology that is suited to the context which culturally responds to the social factors of Penang. As a result, the clash of cultures has fabricated an intricate connection which is being celebrated and appreciated in the present day.

5. DISCUSSION: REINTERPRETING VOIDS

A Dialogue: Voids

The void is a space that is sporadically activated however never truly being defined as a place of memory. Bachelard (1969) claimed the understanding of places could only be perceived completely through the senses, memory, deep understanding and imagination. Could the decoding of voids possibly unwind the deeper meanings of the place and therefore dictate one's experience of a place?

From the perspective of the *Feng Shui*, the spatial concept of *Yin* and *Yang* is a vivid illustration of the solid and void theory in practice. (Zhang, 2019) For example, the classical Chinese courtyard houses with solid buildings are the *Yang* and the surrounding and the courtyard are the voids which is the *Yin*. According to *Yin-yang* school, *Yin* and *Yang* are interdependent, for there is no *Yang* without *Yin* and no *Yin* without *Yang*. Hence to achieve a balance, the building units have equal sized open space to enclosed space. (Lee, 1989) Conceptually, voids are elements that are complimentary to the solids as one would not be present without the other to form the perception of space and place. The presence of the physical organisation of a solid (fragmented pieces in the urban fabric) hence had given the meaning to the presence of such voids in which have intangible and poetic qualities to choreograph one's perception and experience in space. Its introverted nature creates a dialogue that mediates between the inhabitant and environment. Voids are the in-between spaces that leave room for the manifestation between intimate spaces and people. This enriches the depth of intimate spaces that was discussed in the literature review as voids are interpreted as the in-

betweenness that connects intimate spaces and the people.

If the fragmented pieces are the nexus between the mental and the physical aspects of the urban fabric, these voids become the medium that is choreographed to represent this unified whole of the *genius loci*, where the metaphors tell stories about the memories and experience of a place. This contends that the intangibles exist in the realms of emptiness and blank spaces that are hidden in the city where they are at play in coordination with the intimate relationship with the people and environment. Thus, evoking an experiential character in which possesses the quality of *genius loci* or spirit of place.

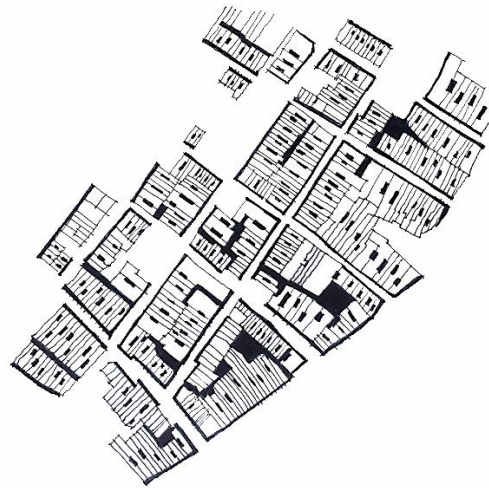


Figure 5: The illustration resembles the void spaces (in black) in the urban context of George Town. (Author's own)

However, the 'void' (Fig. 5) discussed here is not to be confused with the term 'urban voids' which suggests the places in a city that are not conclusively defined in terms of their function and design. The 'void' in this context offers a different interpretation of spaces and details within the architecture of the dwellings. The voids formed by the enclosures contain life and play a role in the lives of the urban dwellers. The void spaces are not at static but it experiences a fluctuation of activities throughout the day. Similar to the solid spaces, these spaces are functional spaces however the temporal qualities give a different meaning to the dwellers as the versatility of the space is not confined and interactions happen at every level.

Thus, to fully understand a place, we will need to look at it from a holistic perspective – the intangibles and the tangibles. Hence there is a need to this understanding and to dive into an intimate scale – the shophouse dwelling.

Dwelling: A Typology

The urban fabric of George Town has a tremendous 200-year-old architectural history of approximately 7,000 units of shophouses. The shophouse dwelling typology has been built and matured in different time periods however flourished under the influence of both Western and Asian cultures in the mid-19th century. As such, walking along the street of George Town offers a glimpse of the Chinese culture and Western colonial history. The typology has a clear purpose and structure that delineates the ground floor for commercial activities, as a shop and the floor above for residences, as a house – hence the terminology of shophouse was established. The shophouse dwelling is in itself an architectural form that suits the social needs and the commercial requirements of the Chinese traders hence it became a substantial dwelling typology within the urban fabric of George Town. This dwelling typology presents itself as a space that is significant in the lives of the urban dwellers of George Town up till today as it contains life within it.

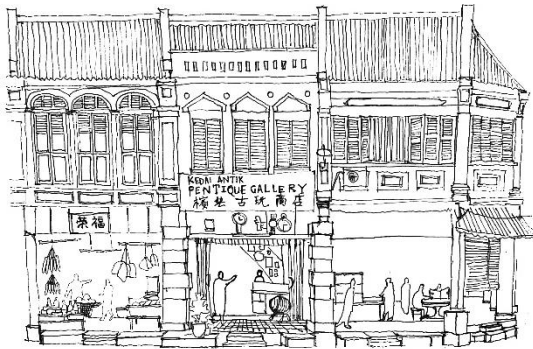


Figure 6: Illustrated to show the use of ground floor as a commercial space. It is a social engagement spot where interaction takes place. The life within the building also shows the dynamic fluctuation throughout the day of a space. (Author's own)

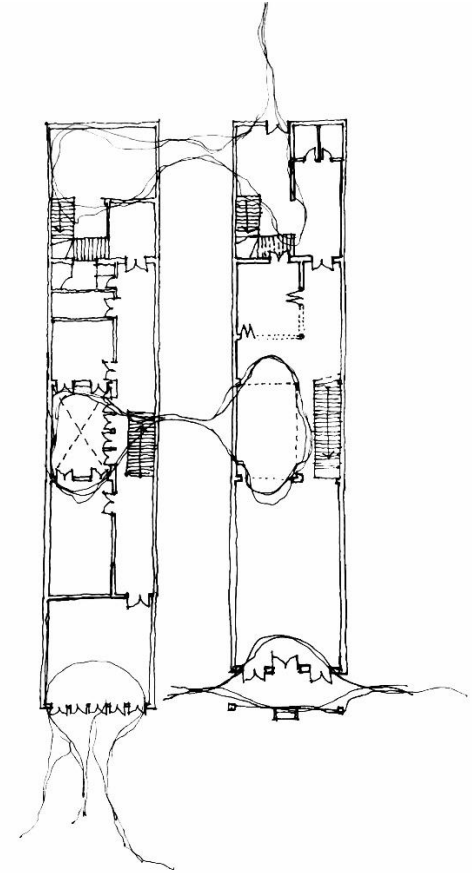


Figure 7: Illustrated to analyse the fluidity of poetic spaces within the intimate spaces of a dwelling typology. The spaces seemingly shape a rhythm that is carried throughout the building from a front-back to a top-bottom approach which ties the character of the place as a whole. (Author's own)

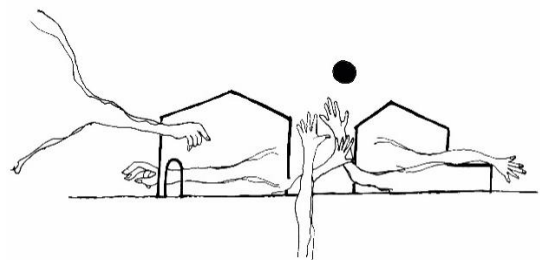


Figure 8: A typical section of the Penang Shophouse which echoes the connection of the walkways, the courtyard and the window to the environment.

The shophouse shows traces of the Western influence in the Asian context which suggests that

the cultural influences have governed the design of the dwellings. By dissecting the shophouse, one can define various spatial qualities in relation to the nature of the space. This in itself creates a series of moments within the dwelling when the inhabitants move within the spaces. When these moments are being absorbed into the context and meaning of places are formed, hence the *genius loci* is present.

Dwelling: Concept of Intimate Spaces

It all starts with a geometrical object which allows one to ponder how the rectilinearity welcomes human complexity idiosyncrasy. So, how will the user react to the play of light, the reflection of sound, light and wind, pattern of the floor tiles, the peripatetic view while traversing the walkways, the 'lightness' of the shadow, the rhythmic repetition of columns, and so forth? All point to the fact that architectural experience is a lived experience that expresses the symphonic interaction and make architecture a total work of art.

An inhabited space transcends a geometrical space. As the preceding examined the tangibles, there would be something that is layered within the dimension of personal appreciation towards the place and therefore to understand something that is abstract, it might be through the understanding of the intangibles within the gesture of space.

Architectural experiences depend on how the space is used, discovered, explored or engaged with (Knabe & Noennig 1999). Hence, the intimacy of the experience is 'caused' by the very personal 'experiencing' of the architecture. Intimacy in architecture is attained when a person becomes personally acquainted with the place-setting, that he 'endows it with value' (Tuan, 1977). Intimacy is normally experienced both in the temporal and spatial realms, with differing degrees of attraction (or rejection). It is the result of the "decoding" of the gestalt of interrelationships between the context, environment and emotional circumstance (Mothloch, 2001). Intimacy connotes the 'human-ness' of distance, of scale, of dimension, of proportion and of the kinaesthetic bodily movement (sense of orientation) as embodied even in small detail as in the tread-riser ratio, the

arc-turn of the wrist in operating the doorknob or the effort in pulling a closet drawer (Nerdinger, 1999).

Intimacy can be found in the interiority of everyday spaces. These intimate spaces are built structures of a small scale that do not overwhelm us however it can impact the everyday detail as it dwells within our lives as we dwell in it. Intimate experiences are personal and hard to define yet it leaves a lasting memory. The familiar senses capture the beauty of the moment, and cultivate intimate experiences and subsequently creates intimate places. As we 'claim' this as our own space, we have personalised it in our minds - it becomes part of us.

As Norberg-Schulz (1980) suggests that dwelling implies something more than "shelter" but spaces where life occurs are places with a distinct character (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.5). The architecture of dwellings is hence a very personal experience. The phenomenon of architecture in the shophouse dwelling has set forth the conceptual framework of experiential spaces that provides a memory of place through an intimate spatial quality that is so personal in the lives of the urban dweller. However, the intimate connection does not merely end within the dwelling but beyond it and to the surrounding environment which forms a 'genius loci' or the spirit of place that is enriched by cultural features while experiencing the place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p.5). Hence the shophouse dwelling typology in George Town has crafted a character and spirit of place through the embodiment of intimate spaces.

As the research question seeks to explore the intimate spaces that have been fostered by the Western theories and the Asian philosophies in the context of George Town, the discussion will examine elements in the dwellings that reflect both Western and Asian concepts. The focus is on 3 elements from the author's mental image of the city that the author feels attached to and reminded of; in which are interestingly typical elements of this shophouse dwelling typology. Each element depicts a form of relationship with the environment that, at different spatial scales, create a different sense of intimacy and poetic quality. These elements can be defined as void spaces within the dwelling itself.

The relative relationship between the solid and void spaces as discussed earlier could be reinterpreted into intimate scales. Beginning from a void in the façade, to a void in a dwelling and up to a void that shapes the dwelling. The levels of scale suggest that the experience is not limited to one particular element but a holistic point of view that evokes all the senses. The next few pages will introduce the elements that define void spaces through affective drawings to express the sensory reaction as an ethnographic practice: an active engagement with the environment.

Reinterpreting voids -

I. The Window

II. The Courtyard

III. The Walkways

The Window: A Void on a Façade

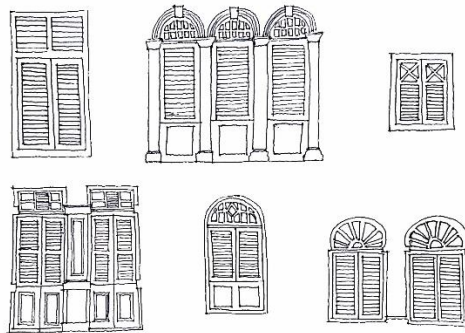


Figure 9: The illustration portrays the expression of windows in George Town, Penang throughout the centuries. The variety of windows depicts the different styles adopted from both Western and Asian cultures. (Author's own)

The window has always occupied a special place in buildings – functionally or philosophically. Windows are perceived as the eyes of the building as it is a medium that connects the outside world. As the Chinese philosophy describes, the eye is the window to the soul, similarly the windows are the soul of the building. Windows of the church, the hospital, the house, the prison are vastly different yet carry significant uses and meanings to the place. Each

possess a different empowerment – for example the hospital – the window could be the metaphor of healing and hope as the patient is longing to escape the four walls. This suggests the power of a single detail of the building has the ability to create unconscious meanings and messages of spaces, and the sensory and simulative content are natural to the therapeutic environment.

In 'A Timeless Way of Building', Alexander expresses the fundamental organic reason in both forces: 1) how we are phototropic, biologically, so that it is often that we have a tendency to go towards the light. 2) depending on the time dwelled in the space, you would drag your favourite chair next to the window as it allows you to see out easily (Alexander, 1979, p.111). In short, we will be comfortable in a space with the presence of a window. We will tend to give in to both forces and resolve the conflict within us. The French philosopher Bachelard (1969) also associates the window as a metaphysical space of existential reflection whereby 'in' and 'out' are dialectically made visible in a single glance—as if the window itself is a necessary place to ponder alienation. The cracks of the window absorb the ambience of the outdoors, allowing the street noise to infiltrate into the spaces and create an ambience in this shared space. It is a medium that regulates the ambience of its immediate surroundings. There is also the wandering beam of light through the cracks that penetrates into the spaces as the sun moves through the day. These are the series of moments in the space that creates snippets of life entering the intimate space within a day.

A window in the typical shophouse dwelling tells a century of stories through the character of the window as it is divinely immersed with the heritage values and the old charm of the city (Fig. 9). It is the richness, intricacy, and the juxtaposition of the Western and Asian cultures, one absorbing the other, in which reveal the idiosyncratic architecture of the century (Fig. 10). The windows do not represent or produce a meaning that you interpret, it is about producing a feeling. The glorious spirit of place ignites when the cultures blend and the living heritage continues to evolve, shaping our sense of identity, belonging and place, connecting past, present and future.

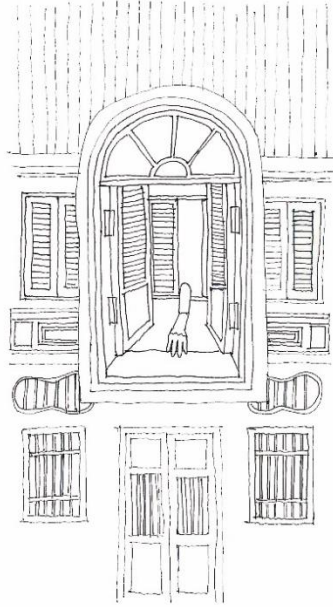


Figure 10: The illustration shows the metaphoric relationship between both cultures through the windows. Looking out to the Asian influenced window, it slowly attempts to creep into the Western influenced window. (Author's own)

The Courtyard: A Void within the Building

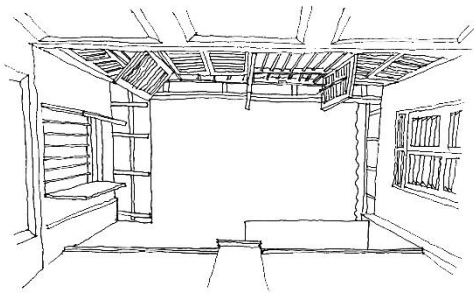


Figure 11: The illustration shows the view of the sky from the courtyard. The depth of the courtyard emphasises how small we are in this urban context. (Author's own)

The Chinese conception of space lies not in appreciating space within an enclosure and looking out into space beyond (Fig. 11), but properly experienced by means of the defined enclosure which is tensed towards impending departure or arrival, movements from a space to another.....Space is qualified through its

dynamism, its connectivity and its correspondence, while yet retaining its composure (Li & Yeo, 2007). The courtyards were the primary meeting places for play, exercise and gardening, that foster social and leisure aspects. It framed the scenes of a multigenerational interaction with the space - the elderly practiced taichi in the morning; a place to dry laundry under the scorching afternoon sun; as it functions as the children's play space in the evenings and a place for the family to play *mahjong* at night. The poetics that our senses register are the chatters and laughter that transcend through the space - horizontally and vertically between floors (Fig. 12). Within the walls of the dwelling, you feel protected in the enclosure which is seemingly a healing and breathing space in this clustered urban fabric. With the penetration of soft light, the plants and sometimes the soothing sounds of the raindrops, it is a quiet place for contemplation.

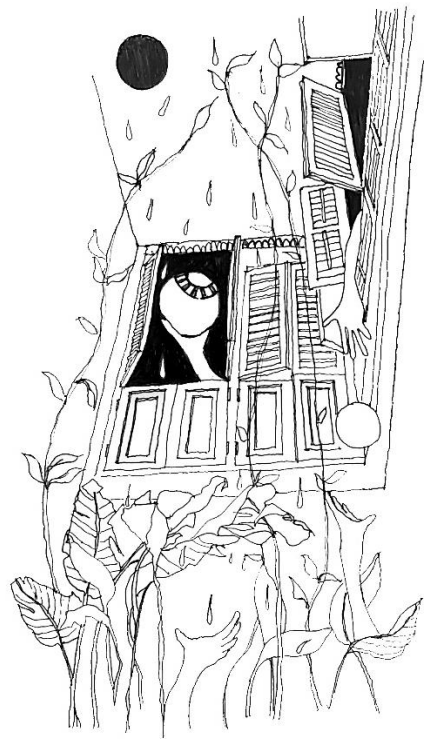


Figure 12: The illustration shows the life within a courtyard where a two-way engagement is observed - inside-out and outside-in. Inside the courtyard, plants grow, children play and we observe the outside world from within. However, the nature in return, enters the space through rain, light and shadow. (Author's own)

Philosophically, the Chinese believed that the courtyard is the soul of the dwelling; it acts as a link between Heaven and Earth (Fig. 13). During the Han dynasty (c.206 BCE-220 CE), the Chinese regarded Heaven and Earth as a macrocosm and the human body a microcosm to reflect the universe (Chang, 1986, p. 200); offering sacrifices to Heaven and Earth in the courtyard was considered crucial to bringing harmony and good fortune (Flath, 2005). Water is also regarded as wealth. Hence, the Chinese designed drain pipes in a way to force rainwater to flow around the house before being discharged into the drain outside. This design ensures that wealth (rainwater) will circulate within the house for a longer time. The metaphoric relationship between the beliefs and architectural solutions created an interaction between the built (man-made) and nature.

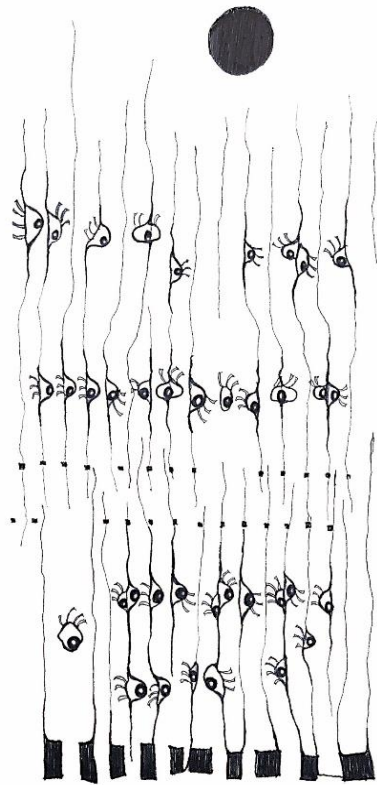


Figure 13: The illustration portrays the philosophical connection of the ground to the sky as how the Chinese perceived. The eyes symbolise the airwells on plan, looking up to the sky and the sun (or maybe the moon). (Author's own)

The Walkways: A Void within the Context

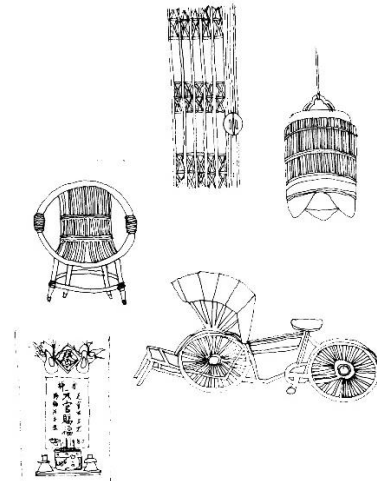


Figure 14: The illustration shows common daily items and crafts that are typically seen in the walkways of George Town. (Author's own)

1. Collapsible grille gate.
2. Bird cages.
3. Rattan-made arm chair.
4. A parked Rickshaw.
5. Basic altar on the columns.

The concept of space has been evolving since the introduction of five-foot ways by the European colonial authority. It adopted the function of a typical European arcade for pedestrians but when the Chinese community rapidly increased, the nature of the space was altered to accommodate cultural needs (Fig. 14). They begin to make temporary extensions to their small-scale businesses as they utilise and occupy the five-foot walks by displaying cigarettes, medicines, foods, beverages and miscellaneous goods during the day (Fig. 15). Chinese medical halls placed herbs out to dry on flat rattan baskets along the five-foot way as itinerant vendors frequently wandered along five-foot ways, which also served as a trading space for shophouses. It was the extension of life from the inside to the outside especially for the case when the interiors were packed.

In the evenings, this space transforms to a place for social interaction between the neighbours. People sat along five-foot ways and engage in animated conversations about everything under the sun. Or they watched the world go by. The children would play hopscotch on the road while the adults watch over them from this semi-public space. The sense of community

is tangible in these interactions. Interestingly and gratefully, this cultural scene is still present in the streetscapes of George Town. There is the tension between cultures as the European and Asian values in terms of streetscape and urban life differed each other however beautifully left a heritage scene that belongs to everybody and nobody.

As the houses are compact, Chinese residents prayed along five-foot ways in front of small altars they had built – something still noticeable today. During festive seasons, praying activities were held in the walkway itself however diminishing as the residents have decreased. Today, these walkways are still bustling spaces during the day and credits must be given to the old City Fathers that value the importance of the pedestrians in an urban space. From a climatic perspective, the tropical weather that encourages torrential rain and blazing sunshine made five-foot ways a practical and unique architectural feature in George Town. The feeling of relief of a Penangite whom dashed across the street only to get sheltered from the rain or shine is a feeling that we all share in our hearts. It made reflections on the duality of the outside and the inside – but always reminding the author of the memory of home.

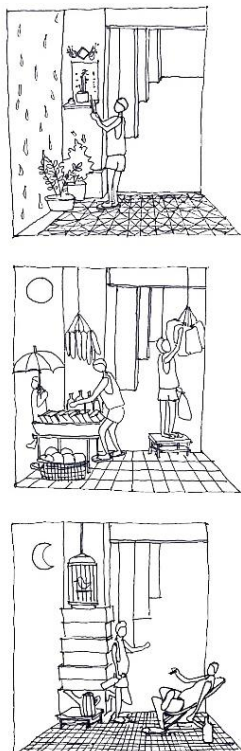


Figure 15: The illustration shows the life of a walkway and the dynamics of space as a spiritual, an extension of the interior space and a social interaction space. (Author's own)

6. CONCLUSION

Lying in the shape of a sailing turtle on the Straits of Malacca with miles of white sandy beaches lined with swaying palm trees, the author sought to decode the charm of George Town- the Pearl of the Orient. The author has been living on the island all her life, collecting moments and memories that are dear to her. This research benefits from personal and emotional attachment towards the poetic qualities in both Western and Eastern influences through the psychogeography and visual ethnographic methodologies, and highlighting the fusion of cultural manifestation in Penang.

The research is based on a personal and experienced-based approach which challenged the typical academic writing standards in the methods of demonstrating the topic. A series of cognitive mapping and affective drawings through cultural psychological analysis have been illustrated with a touch of personalisation to emphasize on the memory of place. It begins with a background story, to a macro scale and down to a micro scale, offering different layers of depth within a city. With the subtle insertion of poetry, the author attempts to set the mood for the reader to engage themselves with the narrative. It does not conclude or propose new norms however it is to be understood as a descriptive piece of work.

However, through the literature reviews that contextualise and support the idea of experience and emotions in spaces, the research offers a richness in the understanding of a place. The research starts off by introducing the theories on experience and philosophies of poetics in both Western and Asian contexts. As Tuan (1976) considers abstraction as a result of a process of cognition and as a regular way of knowing space: "The study of space, from the humanistic perspective, is thus the study of a people's spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience.", the author begins to reflect on the real-life situations and relating it to the spatial experiences and feelings of George Town. It is in a way to deconstruct a mental memory into elements that reminded the author of the feelings which are explicitly demonstrated through the

reinterpretation of the 3 elements: **the window**, **the courtyard** and **the walkway**.

In this day and age, the Asian countries still remain very foreign to the other parts of the world, what more an island in a place that has barely any recognition. The research aimed to share the experience from the lens of a Penangite with the people that are not exposed to the cultures of Penang, through a visual and philosophical perspective that celebrates the influences of both eastern and western cultures (Fig. 16). As for those who know the island, it is set for them to recall and reminisce these poetically intimate spaces in their memories. The narrative as expressed in the research will acknowledge the author's identity as she was once struggling to answer the question about her origin. At the same time, it offers the author a fresh perspective on how to view the city through architectural representations as she gains more appreciation towards the opportunity to experience the duality in cultures.

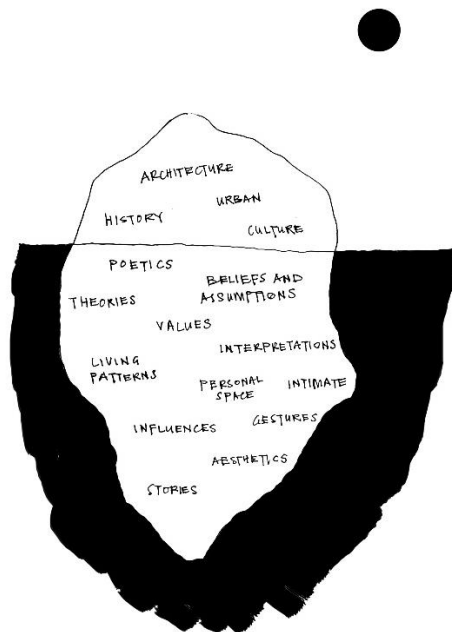


Figure 16: Illustrated as a concluding image to show the behind story that has been revealed through the research. The image subtly references the *Yin* and *Yang* symbol of balance which means two halves of a whole - where opposite forces are seen as interconnected and counterbalancing (the white with a spot of black and vice versa), hinting that one would not exist without the other, just like the juxtaposition of both Western and Asian cultures. (Author's own)

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