



***The Simplicity In The Generating Of Peranakan Interior Space Shophouse in Georgetown, Penang.  
(paper)***

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***Abstract***

The influences of the culture on the interior space could generate unique interior styles. However, The combining process between the architectural and cultural identity in the exits building in the ignition point to generate a creative place. Georgetown-Penang as a heritage city, created by the harmonize mixture of cultures. The Colonial style in Georgetown adapted with the cultural influences to meet the users' needs. Therefore, each culture modifies and add their skins to the interior or exterior design elements to the place, in order to meet the physiological, psychological, and emotional needs. Baba-Nyonya, Strait Chinese, Peranakan as they locally named them Baba is generated from intermarriages between Chinese and local people the straits of Malacca - Malaysia. Moreover, shophouse is the type of building that used by this culture. The Simplicity of interior space of the shophouse that used by Peranakan culture included multiple ideas, philosophy, and meanings. Under those circumstances, the interior space of the shophouse included items and elements of design represent the culture identity through the complexity system. The study is an investigation research for the effects of adaptation process of culture with buildings. As well as, to identify the simplicity value of the interior space of Peranakan shophouse. Therefore, the methodology of study used the qualitative mode. While the research methods used Visual observation of the shophouse that included a Peranakan interior theme. The results showed that the system of colour, pattern, layout, and wooden interior element are the most effective elements in the simplicity value of space. in conclusion, the random arranging of the interior design elements in Peranakan shophouse reflects the identity of culture and generate a harmonious interior style.

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## **The Simplicity In The Generating Of Peranakan Interior Space Shophouse in Georgetown, Penang**

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### **Introduction**

The combination of the interior design elements, cultural value, and identity is significant of the generating unique interior space influenced by the cultural symbols and lifestyle. The unique mixed culture In George Town – Penang in Malaysia encapsulated and enfolded the Colonial architecture style by the skin of the culture in the city. The George Town heritage area in Malaysia was listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2008 [1] [2]. Most of the heritage building in George Town perfectly adapted and reused for a new function to meet the needs of the visitors and residents to be a liveable city. It generated by the harmonious mix-culture, which taken different types of buildings to occupied and run their life in George Town. One of these buildings is shophouse, is a unique architectural style in George Town, Malacca, and Singapore. Built before 200 years and more [3]. One to three floors of narrow and long dimensions building. However, it has a double function as original style. The ground floor is a small business, while the First is for residential function. The shophouse has main six architectural styles, which classified according to the periods that generated or developed in [4] (see figure 1). Another complexity in the culture, which Peranakan, Strait Chinese, or locally as they named them Baba-Nyonya is generated from intermarriages between Chinese and local people in Penang-Malaysia. Shophouses are used by Peranakan community. Therefore, they reflect their elegant lifestyle in the interior space (see figure 2). However, the current study conducted to investigate the phenomena of the attractive interior design of the shophouse, and identify the simplicity level of the Peranakan effects on the generating of that space. The investigation was done through two stages, which is reviewing previous studies about these types of shophouse as a first stage. Visual observation as a second.







	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 Modernism Style 1950s-1970s
Description	Physical Appearance - 1 storey - simple facade - colour in facade: light indigo blue, ochre, white  Building Materials - Timber - Clay bricks - Lime	Physical Appearance - 1-2 storey - simple facade - colour in facade: light indigo blue, ochre, white  Building Materials - Timber - Clay bricks - Lime	Physical Appearance - 2-3 storey - decorative facade mixture of Malay, Chinese & European ornaments - colour in facade: light indigo blue, ochre, white  Building Materials - Timber - Clay bricks - Lime	Physical Appearance - 2-3 storey - decorative facade mixture of Malay, Chinese & European ornaments - colour in facade: light indigo blue, ochre, white, opal green  Building Materials - Timber - Clay bricks - Lime	Physical Appearance - 2-3 storey - decorative facade geometrical designs - colour in facade: grey of Singapore plaster wall  Building Materials - Singapore plaster - clay bricks - reinforced concrete - glass	Physical Appearance - 2-3 storey - simple and clean facade designs - colour in facade: white  Building Materials - clay bricks - reinforced concrete - glass
Shophouse Typology						
Timeline	Early "Penang" Style (1790s-1850s)	"Southern Chinese" Eclectic Style (1840s - 1900s)	Early "Straits" Eclectic Style (1890s - 1910)	Late "Straits" Eclectic Style (1910s - 1940s)	Art Deco Style (1930s - 1960s)	Early Modernism Style (1950s - 1970s)

Figure 1. The six architectural styles of shophouse [4, p. A21]



Figure 2. The interior of the shophouse of Peranakan reused as a coffee shop.

## 1. Shophouse and Peranakan Authentic Qualities

A lot of literature conducted to study the Peranakan culture and their building fashion, but few studies illustrate the interior style of the shophouse that used by Peranakan. The current part of this study included some of the studies that related to Peranakan to observe the necessary features of the interior design that generated by the cultural value and identity.

Baba-Nyonya, Peranakan Chinese, and Straits Chinese are connotation refer to the group of Chinese immigrated to the Malay Peninsula before six centuries, as well as, for those were born in George Town, Malacca, and Singapore from the same culture. The Baba-Nyonya culture is an eclectic culture mainly generated by Chinese and the locale in Georgetown-Penang, Malacca, and Singapore [2, 5]. Peranakan culture considered a high-class culture. Therefore, they create their one style in the buildings. Peranakan used Western architectural elements like French windows, square section column related to the classical order, and plaster and colour renderings. The interior design presented the same mix-culture, which related to the Baba-Nyonya communities [3]. Ting (2012) and Khoo and



Barbar (2009) described the architecture interior design of shophouse that related to the Straits Eclectic style. They included a unique architecture and symbol elements as a metaphor objects like Dragon, Phoenix, Peony, Lotus, flowers, fruits, and European or Chinese mythical shapes, to develop the interior space and the pattern [2]. Abdulqader, Ibrahim, and Bahauddin (2015) identified the wooden partition that used in eclectic shophouse are the effective wooden elements that can users recognize the Peranakan Chinese cultural influences in the interior space. As well as, the symbols that used in the interior design related to the combination of cultural and architectural identity [6].

The Straits Eclectic style is known by the Dutch or the Chinese colourful ceramic tiles, which used in the finishing of the interior elements like walls and the floor. By the twentieth century, the architecture style of Peranakan shophouse influenced by the art nouveau style, which came from England. Baba-Nyonya as a wealthy community in Georgetown, decorate the shophouses, bungalows, and townhouses with fine European chandeliers, mother-of-pearl Blackwood furniture, and teak cupboards, which filled by colourful porcelains [7, 8].

The interior space of the shophouse that related to Peranakan culture generated by the collection of the unique, elegant and simple elements. The deep and complex meanings of the interior space represented by the simplicity in the arrangement and the randomness of the decoration. Simply, they adapted the space to their needs which follows the cultural value. Most of these shophouses reused as hotels, coffee shops, galleries and other functions. It attracted the visitors of George Town, especially, the foreign visitors, to spend time with these public spaces (see figure 3).



Figure 3. The first floor of Shophouse functional works as a coffee shop for public

## 2. Visual Observation

The study is an investigation research of the effects of adaptation process of culture with buildings. As well as, to identify the simplicity value of the interior space of Peranakan shophouse. Therefore, the methodology of the study used the qualitative mode. While the research methods used Visual observation of the shophouse that included a Peranakan interior theme. The observation of the interior space of shophouses that used for public activities. Coffee shop function or cafe as locally known. The visual observation scope is the interior spaces that related to visitors. Therefore, the physical environment settings of the interior design elements. Specifically, layout, wooden elements, Peranakan tiles, and Colour theme. Cases were selected by the researcher according to heritage, style, and function criterion.

### 2.1 Layout

Observation template used to record the observed data in the interior space of the heritage shophouse. The layout of shophouse that used as Peranakan's coffee shop is simply arranged. The limitation of the shophouse proportion simply generated the continuity of the layout between the inside and outside. The tables and the arrangements of the tables

positions in the interior space perfectly address the Longitudinal and narrow space's limitations. The movement and circulation in the interior space generated by the cul-de-sac close end way in most of the coffee shop. There are maximum two paths to each table, which give the path movement tree shape. The layout in Peranakan coffee shop identified by movable and non-movable interior elements [1]. The movable element is related to the intangible Peranakan culture effects, such as furniture and another object that observed in the cases. Walls, the wooden screen "tiah", wooden object, openings. The relationship between interior space and exterior space linked by the "Kaki lima" five-foot-way, which is a semi-outdoor space. As well as, the vertical communication with the first floor, which is decorated staircase is one of the interior elements that generated the coffee shop layout. The location of the air-well in the centre of the second zone of the shophouse creates another attractive point and layout of the coffee shop affected by these elements [9, 2].

## 2.2 Wooden elements

The interior space of Peranakan shophouse included unique and elegant wooden elements. The wooden elements are developed by the culture to be used in the space where they live. It consists shapes and forms related to intangible culture. As well as, the purposes of using it have deep meanings and story [8, 5]. The wooden elements can categorize to four main themes;

- (a) Structural elements: the wooden screen (tiah), doors, and windows.
- (b) Furniture: most of the furniture were made from black wood and some marble and pearl such as tables and chairs,
- (c) Art elements : It mostly used for decorate the space and give the sprite of Peranakan to the interior space.
- (d) Add on details: some details over the windows, door, staircase, and ceiling used ornaments made of wood and plaster.

These wooden elements created by using a pattern, symbols, and metaphoric shapes, which reflect the identity of that style. The patterns are from different subjects, like animal or historical symbols, Dragon, Phoenix, Peony, Lotus, flowers, fruits, and European or Chinese mythical shapes, which depict some of religious and life science and often used type of plants, leaves, or geometrical elements in the implementation of these patterns [6, 3, 2].



Figure 4. Wooden elements in the Peranakan interior space (captured by the researchers)

## 2.3 Peranakan tiles

Art Nouveau's Majolica and pattern floor tiles were used in the late Victorian era in Peranakan houses and shophouses. The designs of these tiles based on botanic shapes, Animal shapes, and fruit shapes such as the peach, grape, and..etc. Today is known as "Peranakan Tiles". The original Peranakan tiles are made from ceramic and included carved, coloured and glazed. The patterns are generated by printing on the Blank ceramic tiles (see figure 5) [10].



Figure 5. The original Vs contemporary Peranakan tiles (captured by the researcher)

The tiles used on the floor and part of the walls. These tiles are a special characteristic of the Peranakan heritage shophouses in Georgetown, Malacca, and Singapore. The pattern generated by simple shapes and simple principles (see figure 6).

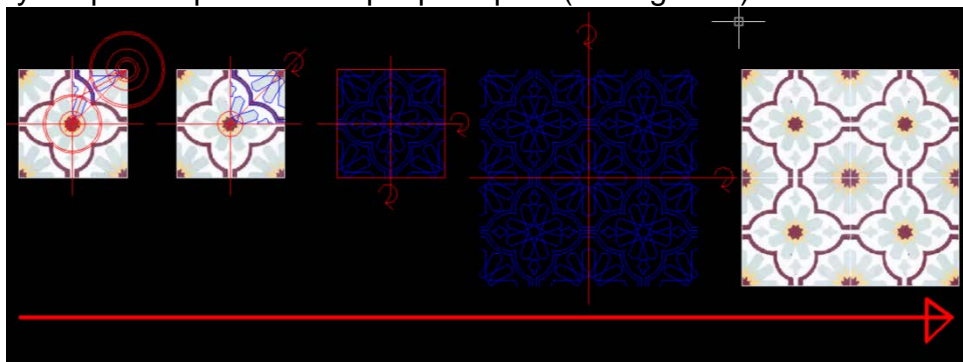


Figure 6. Stages of generating Peranakan tiles from simple elements using reflections and symmetry characteristics (source: the researchers)

### 2.3 Colour theme

The themes of colour that used in the interior space for the wooden, tiles and interior space elements existed in two main themes. The first theme used the dark with shiny part, which is found in the furniture, screens, and art objects. While the light theme (white, green, blue) used in the walls, ceilings, and tiles (see figure 7). The researchers observed that some colour and materials used in contrast to the main theme. Such as gold, silver, and maroon colour, and marble, pearl and metal materials.

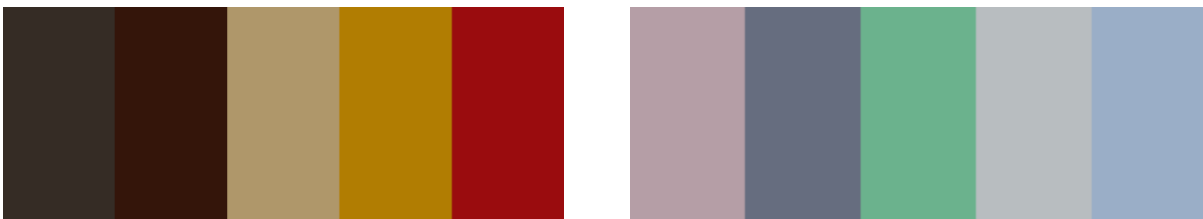


Figure 7. The two different themes of the interior space of Peranakan style (source: the researchers)



### 3. Findings and Discussion

The results of visual observation and analysis of the heritage shophouses that present the Peranakan culture showed that the system of colour, pattern, layout, and wooden interior elements are the most effective elements in the generating of interior space. The identity of Peranakan style in Georgetown represented by the simple interaction of interior design elements in the space. The simplicity of arranging and formative the layout of interior space related to the macro level of generating interior space, which is used the main interior space elements like structural and furniture. The complexity in the interior space represented by the micro level of interior design, which relates to the details of the interior space elements. Furniture detail, tiles, screens, and wooden objects. The complexity in the details is to represent the mixed culture of Peranakan [5]. The culture is a mixture of east and west culture. The results of this mixture generated complex interior space by formal simplicity. Meaning, purposes and hidden order of the interior space of the Peranakan style made is simply recognized as a unique and elegant style [2]. The nature of this culture is to present the high-class level of the society [8]. Therefore, collecting unique and valuable element of interior space, generated harmonic complexity of the space by simple and random arranging of the interior design elements.

### 4. Conclusion

The system of arranging the element of interior space in the Peranakan style, as well as, the colour, pattern, and wooden elements reflect the complexity of the culture through the formal simplicity of these elements. The simple furniture with complex details reflects the nature of the style, which is considered the details as important items that could attract the recipients to their high class live. The themes of colour reflect the relation of this culture as style with the natural made comfortable space, they used the colour theme that related to the human beings comfortability. Most of the heritage shophouses in Georgetown, Penang-Malaysia, are adaptive -used as coffee shops, hotels, galleries and other function. It is simply adapted for a different function, and users simply adapted to the interior space. Stepping into the Peranakan interior space it is to transport the visitor to another era entirely, the simplicity of the past is recognized and feelings of high-class space are the first impressions about the interior space if it has authentic qualities.

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