

An Overview on the Typology of Shophouses' Façade at the Heritage Area in Ipoh City

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Abstract

Ipoh is the capital of Perak and is located in the Northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. Ipoh was well-known for being the largest tin producing region in the world during the early 1900s. The tin-mining activity led the Chinese from Mainland China to migrate to this region. The presence of this community, which has a close relationship with the British, influenced the trading activity and the architectural development of Ipoh which is now referred to as the heritage area of Ipoh. The heritage area of Ipoh City consists of the core zone and buffer zone and has been gazetted on the 18th of December 2014 due to provision of Town and Country Planning Act (Act 172). The architectural asset of the heritage area of Ipoh is the uniqueness of shophouses that reflects the variety of colonial styles and the glory of the tin mining industry during that era. Therefore, this research is carried out to identify the typology of the building façade at the heritage area of Ipoh City. A pilot survey had been conducted to collect the primary data and supported by reports, government publications, textbooks, journals, interview sessions and others. The finding shows that there are six architectural styles of heritage building façade that were categorized by referring to the characteristics and elements identified. As a conclusion, this research may create awareness among the public and relevant parties on the significance of preserving the heritage building for future generation.

Keywords: Heritage buildings, shophouses, façade, styles, typology

1.0 Introduction

The word Ipoh means dart poisons – the Orang Asli used the poisonous latex of ‘pokok Ipoh’ to smear their blowpipe darts for hunting. The town is situated at the heart of what was once the richest tin ore field in the world, the Kinta Valley. The Kinta Valley had seen small-scale Malay mining in about 1880 before the influx of Chinese immigrants that transformed the industry. The Mandailing Malays came from earlier settlement in Selangor after the civil war there between 1867 and 1873. The earlier Chinese in Kinta Valley were financed and directed by backers in Penang. The increased population of Chinese in Ipoh was the result primarily of direct immigrant from China. It was said that Ipoh was founded by a Malay chief, TokKeluang who travelled down the Perak River after losing his territory and entered the Kinta River. Early settlements of Ipoh consist of many kampongs and villages that was setup at the Kinta riverbank (Hin, 2013). The first bridge to span across the Kinta River was Hugh Low Bridge completed in 1890 which facilitated road traffic between the western and eastern Kinta riverbank.

Ipoh initially grew on the west bank of the river. Regarding to Hin (2013) and Sinnadurai (2006), a great fire broke out and destroying 123 houses at 1892. The town was rebuilt then and known as ‘New Town’. The reconstruction of the new town also made way to deliberate town planning resulting in a more systematic grid system for roads and shophouses and proper development. When the other side of the river (eastern bank) was developed from 1900s to 1930s, this area became the ‘Old Town’ as it is known today. The ‘New Town’ was started to develop with modern urban planning concept in 1905 by a local Chinese Hakka millionaire YauTet Shin. He eventually built 216 houses, a Chinese theatre and new market as anchor attractions. To cope with additional traffic between the two towns, the Birch Bridge was built on 1907. Architecturally, the city centre is characterized by colonial era Chinese shophouses and several impressive historical buildings from the British Colonial era. Between 1906 and 1917, there were monuments and buildings that had been built such as FMS Bar, Birch Memorial Tower, Anglo Chinese School, Townhall, Ipoh Railway Station and etc. that today had been gazette as historical monuments and buildings.

Ipoh reached its glory peaked in the 1950s during the British colonial era. At the 1970s the economical of tin-mining industry of pricing collapse and the city's growth stagnated tin mines were closed. The booming tin mining industry of Ipoh story was thus brought to a close (1970s). On 27 May 1988, it was granted city status by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Azlan Shah. It is divided naturally by the Kinta River into two main townships - Ipoh Old Town and Ipoh New Town.

The Ipoh Old Town and New Town today known as heritage area which had been identified in Rancangan Kawasan Khas Bandar Warisan Bijih Timah Pekan Ipoh 2020 (RKK Pekan Ipoh 2020, 2014) to be zoned as a heritage area and had been gazette on 18th December 2014 due to provision of Town and Country Planning Act (Act 172). According to RKK Pekan Ipoh 2020 (2014), the heritage zone of Ipoh City is divided into two zones; core zone and buffer zone. The illustration of the zones is as follow:

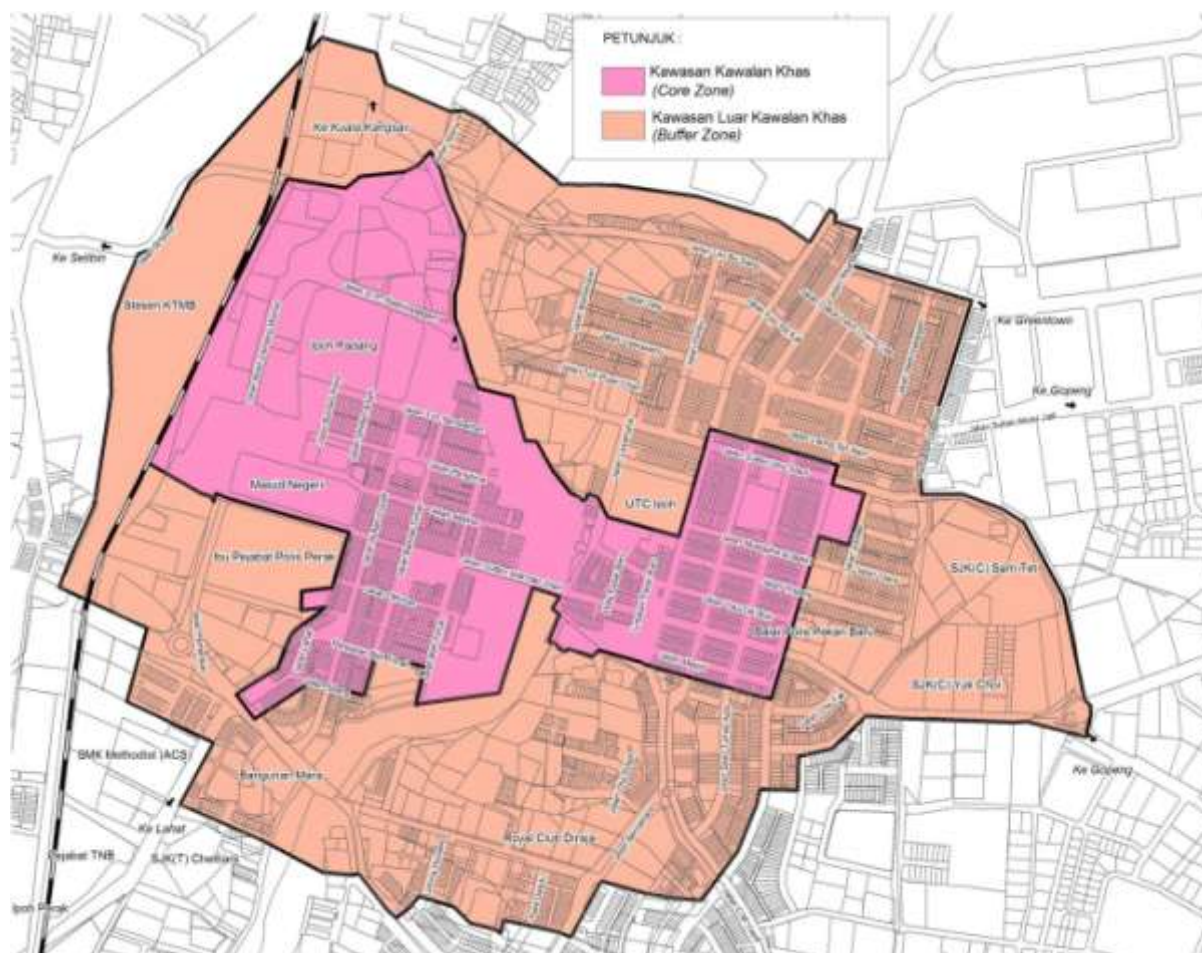


Figure 1: The area of heritage zone of Ipoh City. (Source: RKK Ipoh 2020)

RKK Pekan Ipoh 2020 (2014) has listed that there are about 1,540 of heritage buildings or shophouses in the heritage zone an amount of 14 buildings and monuments had been gazette under Akta Warisan Kebangsaan (2005) dan Rancangan Tempatan Ipoh 2020.

2. Shophouses

Shophouses are characteristic of the urban architecture of towns in Asia from the 18th – 20th century. Shophouses are terraced buildings, one to three storeys high, which incorporate a space for business on the ground floor, and a residence for the trader or workers on the upper floors. This arrangement provides convenience for the tradesman and security for the shop (Georgetown World Heritage Site Inc., n.d.).

Basically shophouses are laid out in rows or blocks. Each block is bounded by a main street (at the front), side lanes and a back lane. Each block is also joined by a continuous sheltered five-foot walkway (*kaki lima*) in front to provide shelter from tropical weather conditions (Georgetown World Heritage Site Inc., n.d). Regarding to Gurstein (1990), shophouse is a shop with a dwelling above. Shophouses were usually built as part of a terrace, often with their upper floor overhanging the first storey to form a pedestrian covered arcade. A typical shophouse characteristics are as follows (Georgetown World Heritage Site Inc., n.d):

- i. Facing a street
- ii. Built in a row, next to one another along a street, with no gaps or spaces in between
- iii. Contains a single party wall separating shophouses on either side

- iv. Low rise, 2-3 storey
- v. Narrow and long, sectioned by air-well
- vi. 5 foot way
- vii. Multi-functional, combining residential and commercial use
- viii. The ground floor of shophouses were typically used for business and trading
- ix. Proprietors on the upper floor

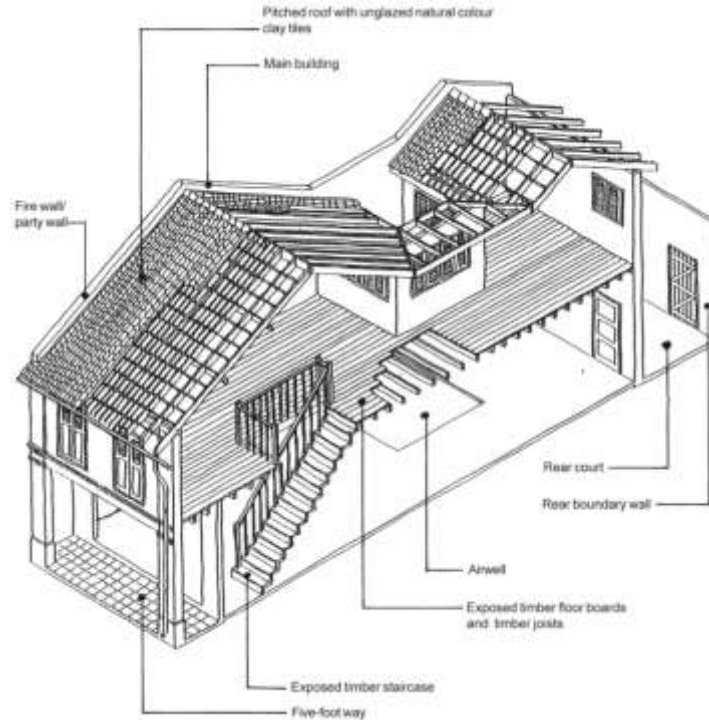


Figure 2: The shophouse. (Source: Standard Singapore, 2015)

3. 0Facade

Façade according to Hornby (2008) is defined as ‘the front of a building’. Façade is a wall that is exposed to the weather; it is often the main item that defines an interior space which it shelters (Comerma, 2008). Ching (2012) described that, façade is the front of a building or any of its sides facing a public way or space especially one distinguished by its architectural treatment. By referring to Burden (2003), façade is the exterior face of a building, particularly one of its main elevations, almost always containing an entrance and characterized by an elaborations of stylistic details.

Hassan and CheYahaya (2012) stated that, all buildings expressed images of cross-cultural correlations with diverse architectural characters such as façade decorations blended with motifs originated from other ethnic architectural elements. Parts of the building forms also integrated the local architectural settings such as roof overhangs for shades, maximum openings for cross-ventilation purpose, cantilever floor (verandah or anjung), and double roof construction (jack roof system) for cool and hot air internal circulation, that eventually produced a new hybrid architectural style.

By referring to RancanganKawasanKhasPekan Ipoh: Bandar WarisanBijihTimah 2020 (2014), Standard Chilliwack (1999), Standard Oregon (2008), Standard Malacca (n.d.) and Gurstein (1990), there are few elements of building façade such as parapet, balcony, canopy roof/awning, signage, roof, window, wall, column, door and walkway/five footway. The illustration of the building façade can be referred at figure 3:

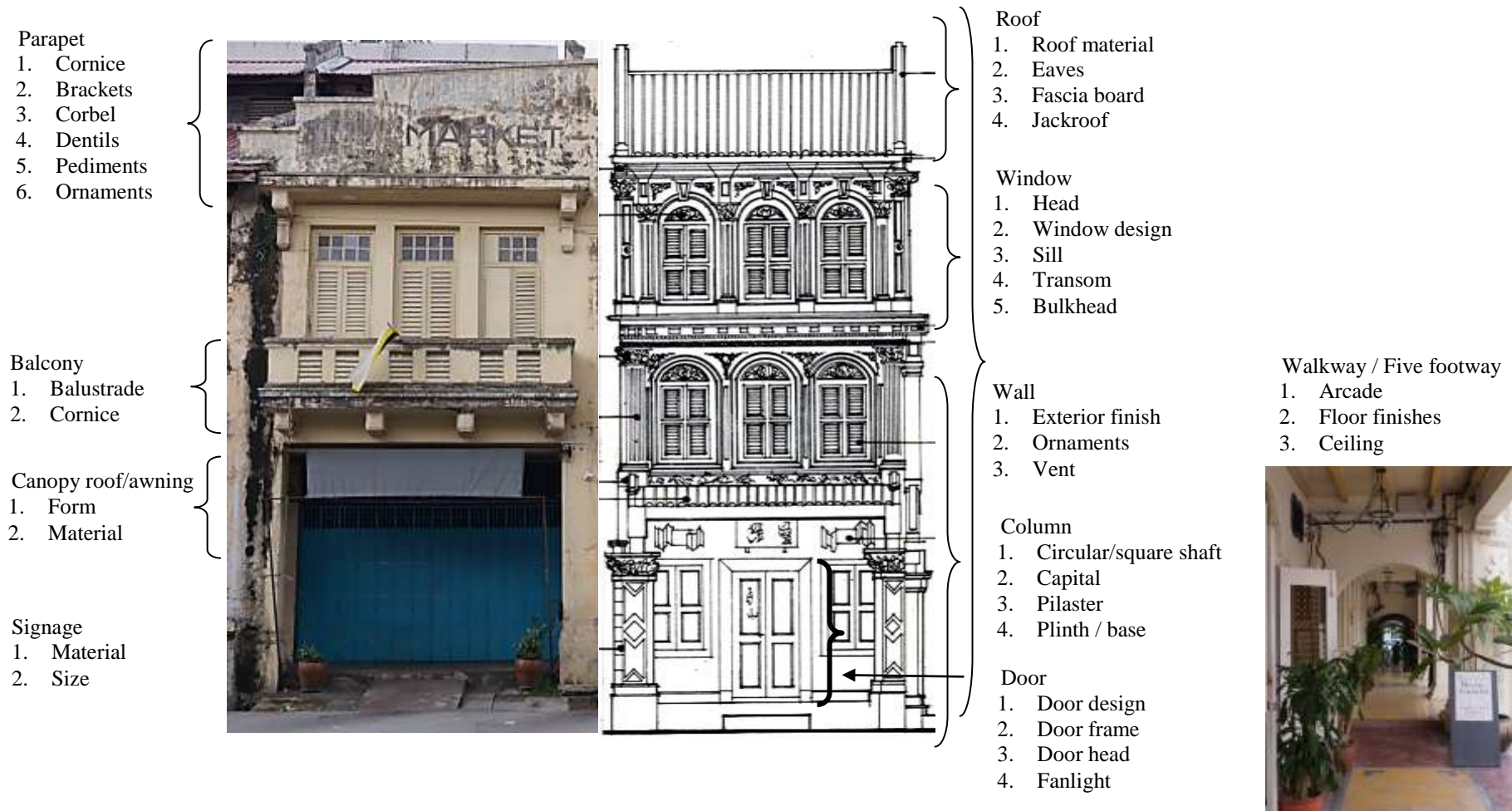


Figure 3: Terminology of the building façade.
(Source: RancanganTempatan Ipoh 2020, 2012)



Photo 1: Five footway.

By referring to Fee (1998), Penang World Heritage Site (n.d.), Noor Fadhilah&Shamzani (2012), RKK Pekan Ipoh 2020 (2014) and The Straits of Malacca George Town World Heritage Site Inc. (n.d.), the classification of architectural styles or the typology of the heritage shophouses building façade as identified in the core zone at the heritage area are as listed in the following table:

Table 1: Architectural styles of heritage shophouses building façade.

ZONE / SITE	CITY / AREA	ARCHITECTURAL STYLES OF HERITAGE SHOPHOUSES BUILDING FACADE
Heritage Core Zone.	Ipoh.	1) Neoclassical [1880s-1920s], 2) Transition [1880s-1900s], 3) Eclectic [1890s-1930s], 4) Art Deco [1925s-1950s], 5) Early Modern [1940s-1970s], 6) Modern [1970s-1980s].
UNESCO World Heritage Site.	Malacca.	1) Dutch [1700s-1800s], 2) Southern China [1800s-early 1900s], 3) Early [1800s-1850s], 4) Early Transitional [1840s-1900s], 5) Early Strait Eclectic [1890s-1920s], 6) Late Strait Eclectic [1920s-1940s], 7) Neo-Classical [1900s-2000s], 8) Art Deco [1930s-1950s], 9) Early Modern [1960].
	Georgetown.	1) Early Penang [1790s-1850s], 2) Southern Chinese Eclectic [1840s-1910s], 3) Late Straits Eclectic [1910s-1930s], 4) Art Deco [1930s-1960s], 5) Early Modern [1950s-1970s].







4.0 Typology of Heritage Shophouses in Ipoh

Shophouses were popular urban fabric during the 19th century to the early of the 20th century because of socio-economical advantages. Since the 17th century, shophouses went into a series of evolution that represented the Chinese and hybrid cultural influence. The evolution or transitional changes are part of the process of adaptation of climates, local cultural, economic demands and fashion influence. The stylistic of shophouses have hybrid characteristic incorporating architectural vocabulary from the West, Chinese and Malay. Regarding to Elnokaly (2014), mass developed shophouses after 1960's are perceived as non-cultural importance and categorized as contemporary shophouses with advent of International Modernism and the move away from excessive ornamentation, thus, the façades of shophouses were no longer embellished in revivalist styles. However, the adaptation to the Western design was only popular after local exposure to the culture in late 19th century.

Fee (1998) describe, physically the early masonry shophouses built in the 19th century were usually around 6-7 metres deep (sometimes extending to 60 metres), built in rows with uniform facades and a continuous covered five-foot way. The walls built of bricks and plastered, the roofs tiled included a jack-roof and low shuttered windows on the front of the first floor. The shop on the ground floor had no wall and goods were displayed along the full width facing the five-foot way. The front opening is fitted with timber panels and secured with horizontal bars. The decorative styles of Malaysian shophouses façade were built from memory or based on copy books of styles found in parts of southern China which influenced by European architecture. Stucco designs of flowers and birds decorate the walls below the windows, while wreaths, festoons and swags decorate the walls. The windows shapes are various such as square-topped openings with arched fanlights, full-length windows with balustrades, and square or segmented vents above.

Table 2 shows the classification and characteristics of architectural styles of heritage shophouses building façade that had been identified in the core zone of heritage area in Ipoh:

Table 2: Classifications of architectural style in core zone in heritage area of Ipoh City.

	Neo-Classical (1880s-1920s)	Transition (1880s-1900s)	Eclectic (1890s-1930s)	Art Deco (1925s-1950s)	Early Modern (1940s-1970s)	Modern (1970s)
Shophouse Typology						
Description	Widespread use of Greek and Roman orders and decorative motifs, strong emphasis on geometric forms and shallow relief in ornamental detail.	Elements of an older style blended with modern style in the same building, such as the evolution of Romanesque into Gothic	It is a mixselection of elements from diverse styles for architectural decorative designs from varied historic periods and styles thus produces the blend of Chinese, Malay, Indian and European architectural styles.	Inspired by Art Nouveau, Native American art, Cubism and the Bauhaus. The style was characterized by linear, hard edge, or angular composition with stylized decoration.	Focus on the aspect of efficiency, function and economic that reflects the utilitarian style. Reinforced concrete has fully adapted and influenced by contemporary practices without ornamentation but large flanks of overhang and shading design.	Characterized by the rounded corners or assymetrical composition, flat roofs and smooth wall finishes devoid of surface ornamentation. Primarily driven by technological and engineering developments.
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parapet on the top of the building and ornamate window frames. • A grecian pediment, columns and moulded plaster swag decorated the facade. • Pilasters and arches. • Painted in pastel or white finishing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs are simple. • Ornamentation minimal. • Incorporate many features of grand classical styles by reinterpreted and adopted to suit the shophouses. • Pediments, pilasters, keystones and arches. • Usually three windows on the upper storey facade for maximum ventilation and natural lighting. • Continous timber shutters. • Brick and lime plaster. • Unglazed roof tiles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually three windows full length shutters on the upper storey facade for maximum ventilation. • Top part has jalousie/ louveres, bottom part is a flat panel. • Ornately carved transoms are often combined such as glass window panels and simple wooden geometric balustrade/railing designs. • Transoms are flat arched or semicircular infilled with glass. • Wall surface is replaced by column or pilasters framing the windows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of straight lines (typically three parallel) arranged either vertically or horizontally in conjunction with other geometric elements. • Granulated render / Shanghai plaster. • Highlighting the date of construction on the facade. • Use of metal frame windows. • Flagpoles are common. • Curved corners and strong horizontal lines. • Windows are arranged in group. • High pediment or parapet wall. • Concrete shading devices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culminating in glass, concrete and steel module construction. • Simple and clean facade design. • Common used of steel frame casement windows and flat roof. • Simple geometric decorations. • Air vent on facade. • No ornamentation. • Clean cut opening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devoid of regional characteristics, typified by simple geometric forms, glass curtain walling, and steel or reinforced concrete construction. • Large windows, cubistic facades, an absence of mouldings and the use of structural steel skeletons. • No ornamentation, totally utilitarian. • Stark and simple modernist form.

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