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# Malaysian Shophouses: Creating Cities of Character

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Malaysian Shophouses: Creating Cities of Character

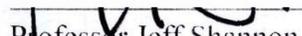
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## **MALAYSIAN SHOPHOUSES: CREATING CITIES OF CHARACTER**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Honors Program of the Department of Architecture in the School of Architecture + Design.

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1790

1840

1890

1910

1930

1960

2016

## ABSTRACT

As a developing country, the urban landscape of Malaysia faces the same trends as many other cities worldwide: modernization at a rapid and unchecked pace. Due to the demand for new infrastructure and buildings, many vernacular building types are rapidly disappearing from the urban fabric, among them the Malaysian Shophouse. The shophouse was a common building style for over a century from 1840-1960s and is perhaps a typology of a previous era. Yet it offers many lessons on creating a city that embodies the character of the culture, the antithesis of the anonymous modern city. At its most basic program the shophouse is a multi-purpose building which is increasingly recognized as a more feasible and sustainable model than designating blocks of buildings zoned for a single program. This study proposes the shophouse as an advantageous model for future development in Malaysia by creating livable, human scale, socially sustainable cities. Examining how the shophouse developed historically, what factors lead towards its decline, and the current prevalent strategy towards shophouses is invaluable in charting the future of the Malaysian Shophouse.

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## MALAYSIAN SHOPHOUSES: CREATING CITIES OF CHARACTER

*"Architecture is not the axis around which all human life rotates, but it has the power to suggest and even direct human activity. In that sense, settlement identity and social integration are all the producer and product of effective urbanism." Marwa Al-Sabouni*

One might be able to say that my very existence can be drawn back to the Malaysian shophouse. My grandfather sold the family shophouse in order to pay for my mother's college tuition which was the reason she came to the United States where I was born and raised. Several members of my mother's family grew up in a shophouse and it is a lifestyle that is still very much relevant to the Malaysian cultural identity. Coming from a family with no architectural background, I became interested in the topic of the Malaysian Shophouse as a way of connecting my own family history with my chosen profession of study.

The traditional shophouse of Southeast Asia is a long standing architectural tradition of combining housing and business that was developed in Malaysia during the late 18th century until the 1960s. The practice of having the family residence on the upper stories with the family business on the ground floor is certainly not a novel concept or one particular only to this region. However, the Chinese Malay Shophouse became a symbol of the culture and way of life of Malaysia during an especially formative point of their development. Chinese immigrants brought the building style of their homeland to the peninsula, but mixed with the environmental particulars, local culture, and the European colonial presence it morphed to create a truly unique vernacular. A vernacular that is quickly disappearing in the forest of towering high rises that have taken over the cityscape of Malaysia's urban fabric. This represents a great loss of cultural identity and contributes to the perception of the decay of societal values in an increasingly fast paced developing country. In a world where 70% of the world's population is predicted to live in cities in a few short decades, having diverse, culturally relevant cities are a compelling concern.

As such, the examination of how the architectural elements and urban implications of this building type developed and how they offer a counterpoint to the the anonymous and often homogenous perception of the modern city is of particular interest. In a climate of rapid urbanization and globalization, whether or not the shophouse is a viable model for revitalization and future development is a question that must be asked before the shophouse is dismissed completely as merely a historical relic.

Perhaps the most alluring aspect of the Shophouse is the ever changing appearance of its form. It does not have a rigid facade over the years but flows with the influence of the current culture and style. With its popularity over so much of the twentieth century, the variety of shophouses that have developed offer a unique look at the fashion and taste over time. It becomes a visual history of the cultural and architectural trends in Malaysia.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the Shophouse as a template adds much to the lively nature of the street life in Malaysia while the scale and sense of the community it creates is also undeniable. In a world where sustainability has become a buzzword, perhaps the most underrated facets of the movement is the concept of *social sustainability*. The idea that there is worth in creating places that people will continuously inhabit, reuse and adapt to the changes of society. Despite a long history of practical building engendered by the vernacular, the current trend towards inefficient non-contextual development is a backwards projection. With this in mind, the question becomes how the shophouse can be integrated into a modern context to become more than simply a historical object but instead a vernacular for use in the modern city.

In order to suggest the future use of this typology, it becomes necessary to understand its history as well as the current attitude towards the shophouse. A typological examination of the architectural elements creates a basis of understanding while a timeline of stylistic development establishes the character of what makes the shophouse districts so rich in variety and history. By

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Tusa Fels, "Conserving the Shophouse City," (paper presented at The Penang Story: International Conference, Georgetown, Malaysia, April 18-21, 2002): 9.

investing in a historic type Malaysia has the opportunity to keep in touch with their past as a means for renewing their present.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008 the historic core of two Malaysian cities Malacca and George Town were inducted into the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage List. According to this status these areas are protected by the United Nations and governed by strict preservation rules. As a result, Georgetown in particular has led the way for methods and treatment of shophouse districts in Malaysia and serves as a basis for treatment of historic shophouse districts.

In comparison, Singapore has charted its own path in incorporating conservation and adaptive re-use of historic shophouses into the modern projection of their city planning. This makes it a particularly relevant precedent for the future of Malaysia's capital city Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia has been endeavoring to establish itself in the global market with Kuala Lumpur serving as the center of trade and progress in Malaysia. The rapid development of Kuala Lumpur has had the unfortunate side effect of the destruction of a large number of shophouses. Without the regulations induced by UNESCO, how Kuala Lumpur addresses the future of the remaining shophouses becomes imperative to their survival.

Currently, the dominant housing strategies in Kuala Lumpur are high rise apartment buildings and row house suburban developments. The urban and social implications of these approaches are wildly disparate with their own unique advantages as well as complications. How the shophouse might be re-introduced to work in tangent with and supplement these urban schemes would be advantageous to fill the deficit of social identity and lack of community that plagues the high rise areas and suburbs of Malaysia. More than preserving shophouses as a type of Disneyland of history through preservation alone, the shophouse offers lessons in how to make good space, and thus good cities.

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<sup>2</sup> Maarten den Teuling, "Rebirth of the Malacca Shophouse" (Master's thesis, Delft University of Technology, 2009.), 12.

## METHODOLOGY

A typological study conducted for the purpose of general understanding of the Malaysian shophouse is necessary to draw conclusions about the adaptability and use of the shophouse. This is primarily observed through changes in facade. Examination of a selection of plans and sections revealed no significant changes except in the ability to build taller as building technology advanced.<sup>3</sup> Instead the majority of development occurred through stylistic changes that can be observed on the frontage. A sample of buildings taken from Georgetown and Malacca in Malaysia as well as Singapore revealed general consistencies across style periods with a few local variations. The Georgetown World Heritage Resource Center has delineated six general style periods into which the Malaysian shophouse can be categorized that holds true for shophouses throughout Malaysia.<sup>4</sup>

Comparative analysis between the treatment and attitude towards shophouses in Georgetown and Singapore reveals some insight as to the best approach for Kuala Lumpur. Review of the policy and procedure between these two cities reveals a great deal of similarities in the attitude towards conservation and adaptive reuse. General procedure and guidelines were established which shop owners and entrepreneurs can operate freely within. Literature written on policy and case studies in Georgetown and Singapore has proven invaluable in drawing conclusions about the environment that shophouse districts foster and require.

Subjects such as family dynamics, urban planning and real estate policies, needs and desires of house owners and the economic factors involved in small and medium business enterprises in Malaysia form a fraction of the factors involved in creating a thriving shophouse neighborhood. By creating an overview of the issues, benefits and conflicts that characterize shophouse districts, this typology can then be evaluated in terms of the necessary environment for future development.

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<sup>3</sup> "Building Plans / Plans," Visions of Penang Archive, 2010, , accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.visionsofpenang.com.my/search.php?method=category&category=2>.

<sup>4</sup> "Shophouse Styles | PENANG SHOPHOUSE," Penang Shophouse Guide, , accessed December 16, 2016, <http://penangshophouse.com.my/>

## VERNACULAR

"Vernacular architecture is architecture that is pervasive. And why are certain buildings numerically common? The answer centers on the fact that they are the ones most closely satisfy people's needs. No building solution meets every demand placed on it; but some cover the essentials more than others, and these are the ones chosen consistently enough by builders and users to show up in great numbers."<sup>5</sup>

The definition of vernacular architecture can cover a broad range of building types and strategies. Acclaimed design theorist Christopher Alexander introduced the conception of "unselfconscious design" to describe the process of vernacular building.<sup>6</sup> Unselfconscious design is not driven through artistic or societal motives. Instead the primary driver is necessity; the built form responds directly to the stimulus applied to it through the environment, the occupant, the needs of the community. In this process the builder is merely an agent that works within the system, they bear no responsibility to make progress or improvement. The ego of the Architect is totally absent.

The Malaysian shophouse cannot claim to be above some demonstration of ambition. The initial design of the shophouse was formed as a sensible building solution that addressed the need for housing as well as livelihood. The narrow footprint directly responded to the limits of the timber beams that supported its structure. The rhythm of sloping roofs and open airwells allowed for access to light, air and water. Clustering of buildings closely together created a community of commercial activity for ease of access. As the basic building principles were established they remained virtually unchanged for nearly a century except for tweaks in material and size. Instead the evolution of the shophouse typology beginning in the early 1800s was through aesthetic developments of the facade.

Architectural historian Eric Mercer gives a looser definition of the vernacular as "the common building of a given place and time."<sup>7</sup> As opposed to the exacting terms of Alexander's theory, this characterization of the vernacular is widely accessible. Rather than speaking in terms of quality

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Carter and Elizabeth C. Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005). 9.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). 33.

<sup>7</sup> Carter and Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture*. 8

however, "common" in this sense refers to quantity. Not considering the faddish effects of popular style that may make a building style prevalent for subjective cultural reasons, vernacular architecture is a building type that flourishes through a usefulness that promotes its own propagation.

The shophouse dominated the Malaysian urban landscape for decades in part due to its ease of construction. Vernacular architecture, as opposed to formal or polite architecture, is not necessarily the product of a formally trained architect. Architecture as a profession has become such that licensure is necessary to call oneself an "Architect". However, it was informal builders and common workers that charted the course of the shophouse. Through the imitation and bastardization of techniques and styles each shophouse was allowed to be individually unique while still conforming to the general popular trends. Broader theoretical or stylistic intentions were abandoned in favor of whatever fit the whims of the owner or skills of the builder. Dissemination of new ideas came through replication rather than invention. Even as European Neoclassical, Art Deco and Modernist style made their mark on the shophouse facade, elements were copied from pattern books largely without regard for the rhetoric that accompanied these movements.

The formal concept of an architect or designer was not popularized in Malaysia until the 1930s. The freedom from rules or expectations allowed for a seamless blend of cultures and history. Malaysia has a long tradition of the dichotomy between the mixture of cultures and the proud upholding of personal ethnic heritage. The shophouse simultaneously allows for expression of self while thematic architectural elements pay homage to the history of the occupants' heritage.

## SHOP + HOUSE

"So that people will be able to make innovations and modifications as required, ideas about how and why things get their shape must be introduced."<sup>8</sup>

The shophouse can be defined as a row house with the basic program of having a shop on the ground level with living quarters above. Typically, the width of each shop is between 13' - 25' along the front facing the street while the depth of the shophouse spans two to four times that dimension. The narrow but very deep plots necessitate a rather specific layout that can be traced across the majority of shophouses. The front of the shop is always dedicated to the business aspects, sometimes spanning the entire depth of the first floor. Oftentimes the rear half of the ground floor is designated for storage, office or kitchen space for the shop. The back of the shophouse opens up into a back alley passage that is the domain of the shop owners and residents sometimes including an open air kitchen or garden space.

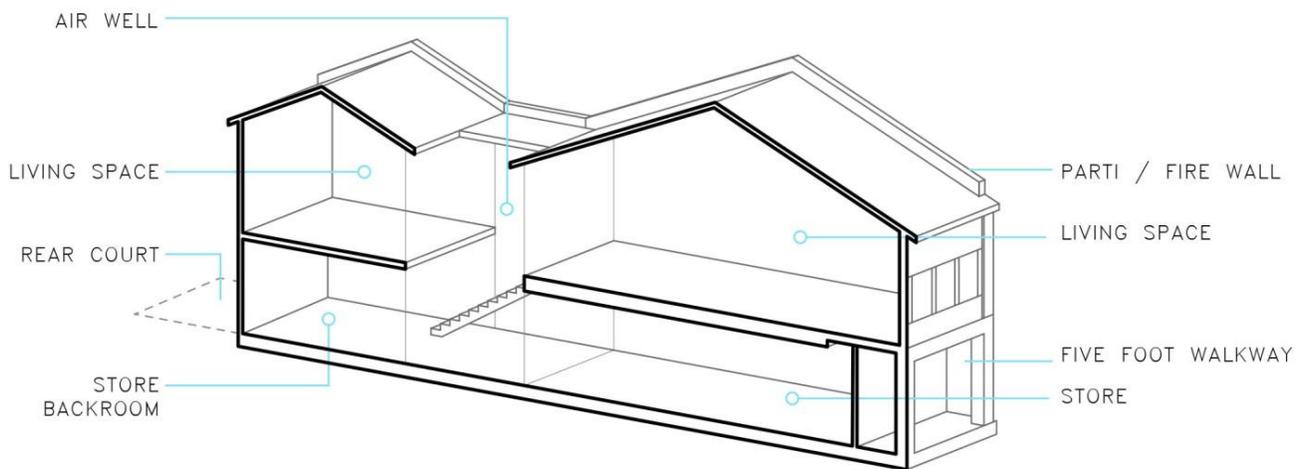


FIGURE 1. Shophouse elements.  
Image by author.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, *Synthesis of Form*, 36.

A terraced or terrace house (UK) or townhouse (US) is a term in architecture and city planning referring to a style of medium-density housing that originated in Europe in the 16th century, where a row of identical or mirror-image houses share side walls. They are also known in some areas as row houses or linked houses.<sup>9</sup>

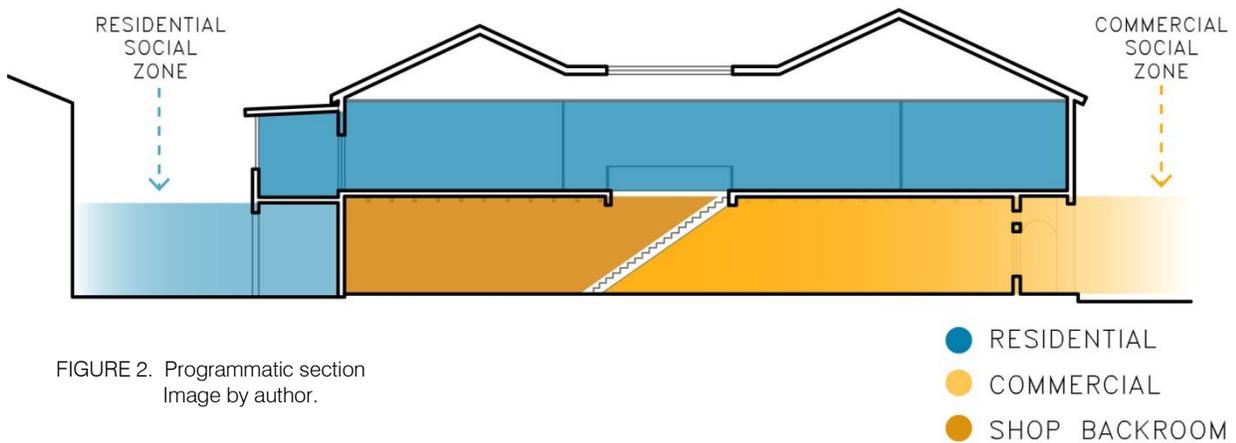


FIGURE 2. Programmatic section  
Image by author.

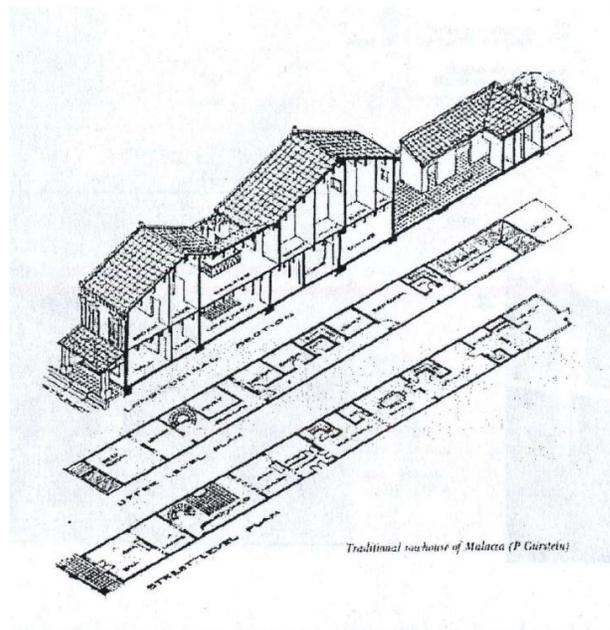


FIGURE 3. Axonometric plan and section of Malacca shophouse.  
"Evolution of the Chinese Shophouse on the Malay Peninsula (Is It Sustainable in a Contemporary World?)," 68.

<sup>9</sup> "Terraced House." Wikipedia. November 1, 2016, accessed November 7, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terraced\\_house](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terraced_house)

## Shophouse Airwell

To facilitate ventilation through the narrow and often cramped interior, full height walls rarely separate the interior rooms and it is quite common for the full span of the ground level to be completely open. A single narrow staircase is oftentimes wedged into the limited space and sometimes resembles more of a ladder than a grand stair. Because the ground floor is a place of business, the stair always faces toward the back of the shop to give some sense of privacy to the entrance into the residential quarters above.

*Tianjin*, or airwells, are introduced to facilitate airflow between levels as well and brings natural light into the center of the shophouse.<sup>10</sup> Because the shophouse grew in popularity, and their owners in economic prosperity, the depth of the shophouse has been known to reach over 150', causing the need for two to four airwells to maintain livable conditions.<sup>11</sup>

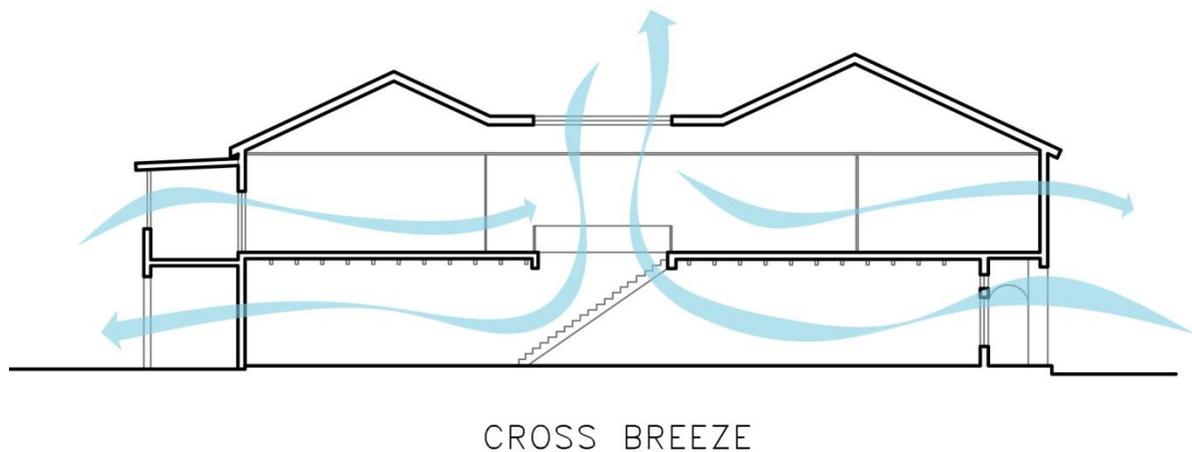


FIGURE 4. Cross ventilation.  
Image by author.

<sup>10</sup> Knapp, and Ong. *Chinese Houses of Southeast Asia*: , 42.

<sup>11</sup> Widya Sujana. "The Sustainability of Chinese Shophouses Asia and Southeast Asia in the Contemporary World." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (2002): 15.

The longest recorded depth of a shophouse is in Malacca where shophouses grew to reach depths between 100' - 200'. This was a primary physical attribute that effected the occupation of the shophouse. With the increase in prosperity the family also expanded. With the longstanding tradition of polygamy in both Chinese and Malay cultures, sometimes this meant that there were several wives and their children occupying a single house. Because the shophouse was so long and narrow the various family units within a single household would occupy different sectors laterally along the length of the building. The airwells, which often contained stairs, served as vertical connectors between floors as well as central hubs around which the family would circulate. Just as the traditional Chinese courtyard houses, or *siheyuan*, revolved around the center court as a space for access to light and nature and had significant symbolic meaning, the airwell can be seen as the hinge upon which the shophouse orbits.<sup>12</sup>

The upper floors of the shophouse are typically simply organized. The narrow space means that rooms were arranged sequentially taking up the full width of the building. The modern inventions of air conditioning, thermal and noise insulation were not introduced until much later in the shophouses' development. Thus the arrangement of rooms was intended to take full advantage of access to natural light and ventilation. Bedrooms were typically placed both at the front of the building and the far back in order to offer some privacy through distance. Because the row house shares a party wall to either side, the front and back are the only points for windows, and thus the best light and air. Washrooms are added on in the rear to prevent water damage to the structure and allow for maximum ventilation to prevent mold which is a major concern in tropical climates.

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, *Architecture and heritage buildings in George Town, Penang*, (Pulau: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2012): 119.

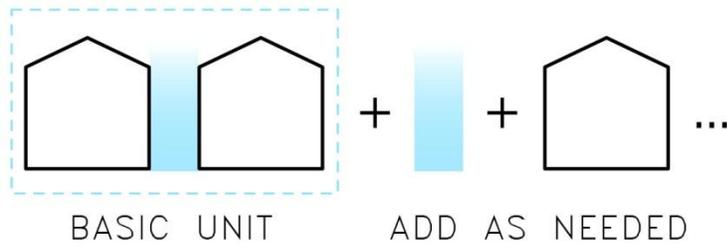


FIGURE 5. Additive building components.  
Image by author.

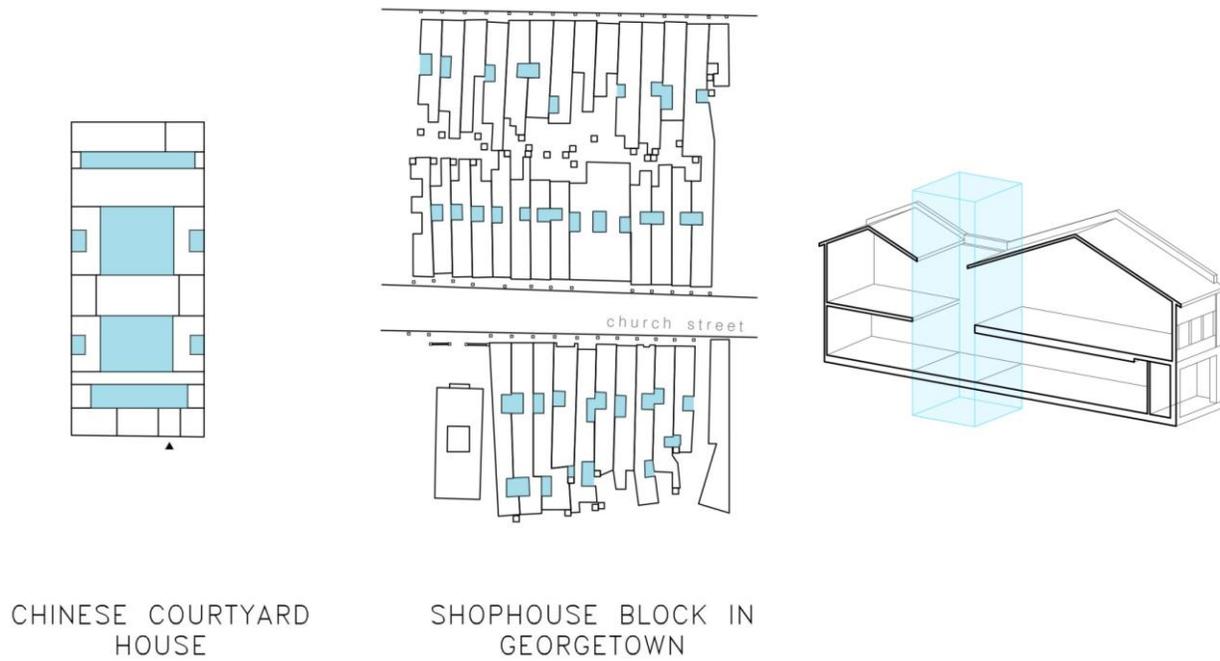


FIGURE 6. Chinese courtyard and the shophouse airwell.  
Image by author.

## Commercial Component

Because of the economic incentives through trade, the commercial nature of the shophouse caused it to become the primary housing type introduced in Malaysia by the Chinese immigrants. The origins of the shophouse can be traced directly to those seen in South China and were often located along major trade routes. Sometimes the shophouses were built directly out over water routes, which enabled *junks* to offload their cargo directly into the shops themselves. In landlocked situations, the shophouses were located along major commercial axis within the city center with broader commercial streets to conduct business in the front and narrow back alleys that allowed for movement of goods in the back.<sup>13</sup> According to standard practice of both the Chinese and Malay the kitchen was situated in these back alleys and was often open air to prevent heat buildup and offer some protection from fire. Thus, the character that is created along the busy commercial street-front is vastly different from the more private back alleys. All of this worked to create a specific impact on the urban fabric that in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was largely a transplanting of Chinese building into Malaysia. However, the type was quickly adapted to local environment that caused some specific alterations.

Though the southernmost region of China can be quite warm, Malaysia is located directly over the equator and experiences the full effect of the tropical climate. Chinese and local builders were quick to learn that it was much better for business if there was some form of shelter offered over the entrance of the shop to protect from frequent and often torrential rains.<sup>14</sup> The combination of the traditional Malay porch and Chinese arcade eventually became one long interconnected walkway between shops that spanned the length of the street. This is a classic example of a vernacular addition which was built to specific climate conditions and subsequently "copied and pasted" until it existed in some fashion on all shophouses. It was not until the British intervened however that the arcade walkway became regulated. Sir Stamford Raffles is notable for having founded the

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<sup>13</sup> Mui Ho, "The Chinese Shop-house: An Architectural and Social Model for New Cities." *Assessing Value in Tradition* 76 (1994): 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ho, "Model for New Cities," 32.

colonial outpost in Singapore, but upon his absence for a few years he was dismayed to return to the haphazard and undisciplined development of the city. As a result, the Town Plan of 1822 was drafted which systematically laid out the future development of Singapore and served as an example for many cities throughout Malaysia. Under this plan, the covered walkways were to be a minimum of five feet wide, thus known as the Raffles five-foot ways.<sup>15</sup>

Every person who shall erect a building which abut on any street or road shall provide a verandah-way or an uncovered footway of the width of at least seven feet measuring from the boundary of the road or from the street drain...and the footway within any verandah-way must be at least five feet in the clear.

Though the ordinances of the British government regulated the construction of more regular walkways, the widespread misuse of the footways tested the limits of governmental control. Shop owners would display goods along the footways to the point of blocking pedestrians and in Kuala Lumpur it was "found necessary to prohibit the use of five-footways as a cattle or horse stall".<sup>16</sup> In a bid to appease both the users as well as the shop owners, the walkways were declared both "public thoroughfares for foot passengers" as well as subject to "all rights of property of owners of houses" which summarily solved neither problem. Eventually, the regulation of the walkways was left to Municipal Councils to control the limits of the use and accessibility of the walkways.

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<sup>15</sup> Jon S. H. Lim "The Shophouse Rafflesia: An Outline of its Malaysian Pedigree and its Subsequent Diffusion in Asia." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (1993): 49.

<sup>16</sup> Lim, "Shophouse Rafflesia", 50.



FIGURE 7. Five foot ways, George Town.  
Images by author.

This setting back of the shop interior is key to the arrangement of Malaysian commercial activity. To this day, it is standard practice to set up goods that spill out across the walkways, sometimes all the way out onto the street, leaving pedestrians to strategically dodge overflowing racks and goods hanging from above. Because the space within the shophouse is so limited in width it made sense for the owners and customers to appropriate space in any way they could. The dimly lit and cramped space within meant that the primary goods or seating for restaurants was actually located outside the physical bounds of the shop itself.

In the rear of the shop, the terrace area leading into the back alley was similarly adapted to whatever extra living space was needed and could often be seen festooned with laundry lines and used as storage space for bikes or equipment. In contrast to the modern day Chinese city of Singapore with its proliferation of futuristic skyscrapers, Malaysian cities can appear quite shabby by comparison. This is in part due to the insistent trait of the Malaysian people of taking over the space they use and fully populating it with their everyday lives.<sup>17</sup> Though some would despair of ever having a sleek modern city, when you look to the shophouse districts it manifests the charm and comfort of a human-scaled neighborhood that people have taken full ownership of.

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<sup>17</sup> Fels, "Conserving the Shophouse City," 4.



FIGURE 8. Back alleys in Singapore, George Town and Malacca. Images by author.

Though it may be a distinctly Malaysian trait to resist a perfectly ordered world, the British certainly did their best in directing the systematic development of the region. Just as the Romans once did, the British implemented a standard grid layout that they used throughout their colonies to create new towns. Standardization of the walkways was not the only element that came under purview of British urban planning. The square footage of the shophouse plots became much more regular, the rhythm of buildings can be owed to much stricter oversight of property. Shop owners were taxed according to the width of their shop along the street front, which motivated the locals to make their shops as narrow as possible while still being functional.<sup>18</sup> These widths were also restricted by the standard length of timber beams which were the primary structure. Building materials however were mandated in order to promote fire protection. Due to the fact that there was little to no separation between buildings in the most densely populated areas of the townships, preventing the spread of fire once it started was nearly impossible. Though wood was still a very popular local material due to its availability as well as a strong local tradition in woodwork, use of masonry construction and terra cotta tiles were implemented to protect the interior structure. This style of building became so engrained in the urban fabric of Malaysia that even as the shophouse is threatened as an endangered species due to modernization, the most common housing type is still the row house, which bears all the same principles and basic tenants that went into developing the shophouse.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Abdul Mohit and Mohd Bashir Sulaiman, "Repeal of the Rent Control Act and its Impacts on the Pre-War Shophouses in Georgetown, Malaysia." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Asiatic Society* 290 (2006): 108.

<sup>19</sup> Seo-Ryeng Ju and Bin Omar Saari, "A Typology of Modern Housing in Malaysia," *International Journal of Human Ecology* 11, no. 1 (2010): 6.

## The Grand Shop Front

It is immediately obvious when seeing the shophouse that the magic that makes this typology particularly beloved to the region is what happens on the façade.<sup>20</sup> The nature of every aspect of life in Malaysia is a dichotomy between the fusion of various cultures and the proud upholding of individual ethnic backgrounds. Examining the shophouse as a national architectural archetype reveals both streams of influence in the façade arrangement. Southeast Asia can be characterized as a crossroads in maritime trade that made it a hub of cultural exchange. Picking up ideas from the traditions of China to the latest trends of Europe, and yet far removed from the rules that dictated these styles, Malaysia became a petri dish for any mixture of elements that struck the builders fancy.<sup>21</sup>

From the beginning of its Chinese roots, the shophouse façade has had a particular role in self-expression. In Confucian worldview, merchants and business people were viewed as the most untrustworthy and lowest of classes in society. As people who made profit off of the labor of others rather than producing goods with their own hands, they were viewed with suspicion. Because of this the shophouse was not restricted by Confucian code of conduct and restraint which allowed it to be a vehicle of expression and creativity in a world that was otherwise governed by very strict rules of decorum.<sup>22</sup> This freedom was taken to the furthest limits of application throughout the extensive change in architectural styles from the 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century. The change in style has been categorized into six loose categories based on a study of the shophouses of Georgetown in Penang conducted by GTWH Inc. Resource Centre, however many localized styles exist that fall between these definitions.<sup>23</sup> Due to the reality of remodeled shophouses in any given district and the liberal application of traits that may not fall within a single style, it becomes necessary to do a chronological study to understand the pastiche of styles you may find in a single street.

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<sup>20</sup> Ronald G. Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings: Traditions Resilience and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 128.

<sup>21</sup> Fels, "Conserving the Shophouse City," 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ho, "Model for New Cities," 28.

<sup>23</sup> "Penang Shophouse Styles," Georgetown World Heritage Inc.

## STYLISTIC TIMELINE

"Being human, human beings are what interest us most. In architecture as in literature and the drama, it is the richness of human variation that gives vitality and color to the human setting."<sup>24</sup>

The Early Shophouse Style was the first variation of the typology that was introduced to Malaysia beginning in 1790. As the most basic of examples of the shophouse it remained a standard of construction well into the 1850s. These shophouses were largely a direct transplant of the housing type from South China. During the growth of European colonial power, western colonists needed workers to man the rubber plantations and tin mines that were the primary exports of Malaysia. This spurred an influx of Chinese immigrants to fill the demand for labor. This was a particularly momentous combination of circumstances for the development of the shophouse.<sup>25</sup> The narrow but long footprint was characteristic of port cities where the shophouse was transplanted from while the tropical climate of Southern China made it also excellently suitable for the environment of Malaysia. The entire concept of the layout of the shophouse was developed to regulate tropical sun, rain and wind. With this focus on functionalism, the shophouse was only one to two stories with a very squat upper floor if it existed at all. Timber construction made use of local material that was easy to obtain, a key concern for new immigrants focused on getting on their feet as fast as possible. Masonry dividing walls were typically the only deviation from the use of wood and structural members were left exposed. Wood shingles covered deeply angled roofs meant to shed water in the monsoon season. The lower height of each level meant that there was no room for the decorative friezes that became popular later on, instead Chinese butterfly vent windows were typically the only overtly stylistic addition to the façade and were meant for ventilation of the hottest air that gathered at the ceiling of each level. Wood shutters or jalousies that provide shelter from sun and rain but could also be completely open for the purpose of catching cool breezes were also used to keep the air flowing as much as possible.

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<sup>24</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961): 229.

<sup>25</sup> Sujana. "Sustainability in the Contemporary World," 52.

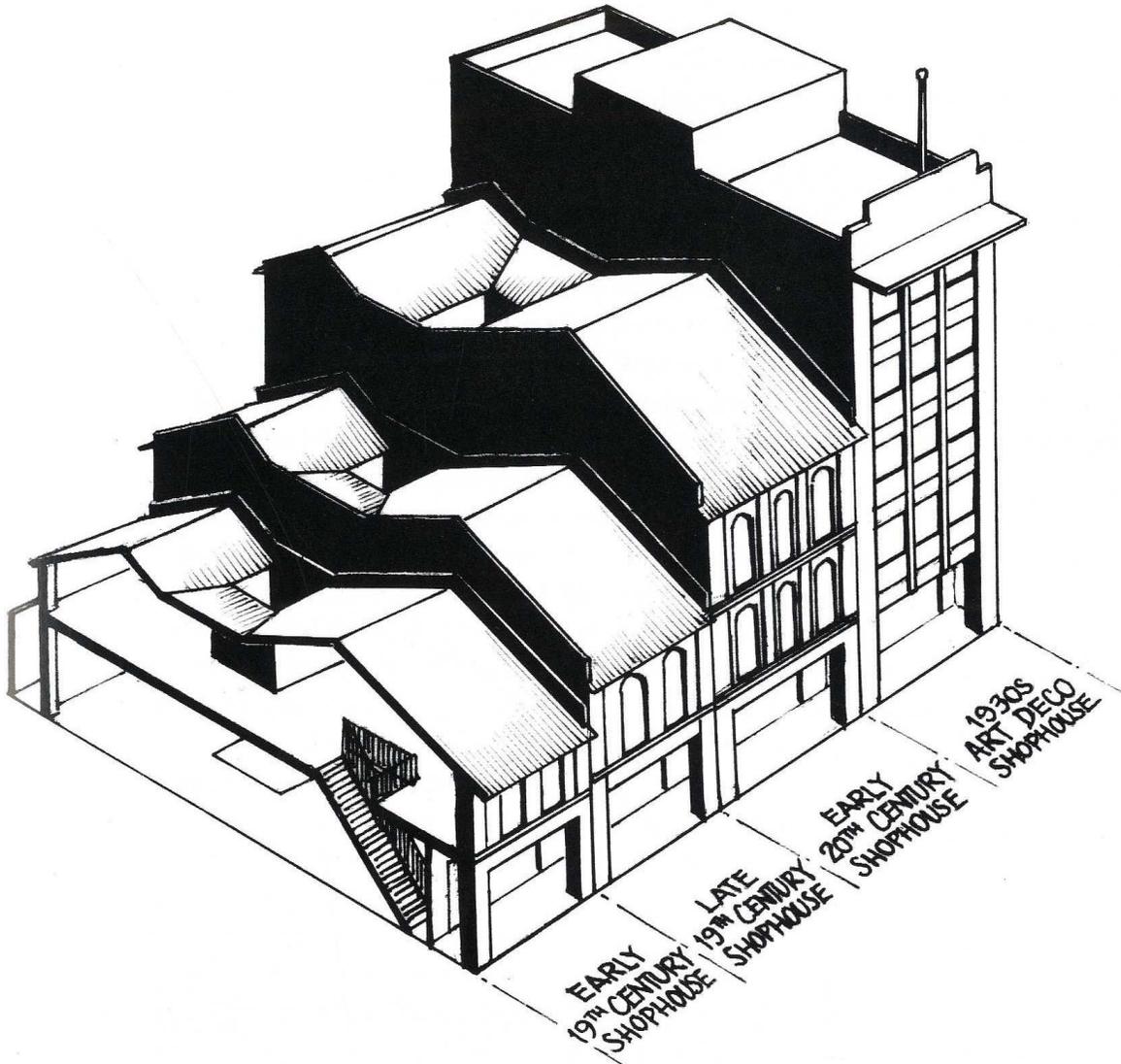


FIGURE 9. Height progression.

*Asia's old dwellings: tradition, resilience, and change.* 133.



FIGURE 10. Early Shophouse Style, Malacca.

(top image) *Chinese houses of Southeast Asia: the eclectic architecture of sojourners and settlers*. 42.

## Southern Chinese Eclectic Style

During the economic boom of the height of the colonial period in Malaysia the shophouse only became more popular. It accommodated both the growing commerce of the country and the influx of immigrants drawn by business opportunities. The densely packed nature of the shophouse meant that the commercial areas were saturated with both people and goods, a mutually beneficial relationship. 1840 - 1890 can be marked by the Southern Chinese Eclectic Style or what some call the Early Transitional Style.<sup>26</sup> As suggested by the latter description, the changes introduced of this period were largely due to the Chinese style being adapted to the Malay region. It was during this style period that the walkways became much more common. Though the Building Plan of 1822 had been introduced in Singapore, it took time for the specific building standards to disseminate to the rest of Malaysia. Ornamentation remained rather restrained; however European Classical elements began to make an appearance with simplified Tuscan or Doric pilasters and cornice moldings. Symmetry was a key aspect of Chinese design which remains a strong influence. A commonly seen composition is centered double doors flanked by paired windows with bat shaped vents above as a vivid token of their Chinese legacy.

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<sup>26</sup> Kamarul Syahril Kamal, "Categories and Styles of Shophouses and Townhouses in Malacca and George Town, Malaysia."



FIGURE 11. Southern Chinese Style, George Town, Penang.  
 (bottom right image) *Penang: Through Gilded Doors*. 100.

## Early Straits Eclectic Style

From the beginnings of change introduced during the transitional period rose the Early Straits Eclectic Style from 1890-1920 which was the beginnings of a truly unique stylistic variation.<sup>27</sup> It was characterized by a growth in height, though the shophouse was typically still two stories, three story shophouses were not uncommon. The proportion of the Eclectic Style façade was elongated vertically and though the ground floor was still taller than the upper floors the relationship between the two became more streamlined as influenced by Classical proportions. Terracotta roof tiles replace wood shingles due to better water and fire resistance and to this day dominate the roof plane of the Malaysian cities. Similarly, masonry and eventually concrete construction replaced wood structures though wood was still prevalently used as trim and decorative carved elements. European immigrants brought classical designs into the mix in earnest which were implemented through arched windows and transoms, classical pilasters, pediments, keystones and decorative friezes. The liberal application of Classical fragments that are thrown together in a mix-and-match spirit is enough to throw any die-hard Classicist into conniptions. Because there were no rules for how the façade should look beyond the owner's preferences, it was largely the builders themselves who curated the development of the style. Quite often a prospective shop owner would simply request a certain look from the builders and it was up to the craftsmen as to how exactly they wanted to create that style. Transitional workers would take whatever construction skills they learned on previous jobs and apply them to their current projects.<sup>28</sup> Because of this the dissemination of techniques and styles of building happened very organically.

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<sup>27</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 124.

<sup>28</sup> Seo-Ryeng Ju, Bo Mi Kim and Syed Iskandar Ariffin, "Continuation and Transformation of Traditional Elements in Colonial Vernacular Houses in Kampong Bharu, Malaysia." *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering JJABE* 14, no. 2 (2015): 345.



FIGURE 12. Early Straits Eclectic Style, George Town and Malacca.  
Images by author.

## Late Straits Eclectic Style

During the Early Straits Eclectic Style, the façade of the shophouse had become quite elaborate. Neoclassical elements such as acanthus leaves, sashes and Doric or Corinthian pilasters became more prevalent and embellished. Traditional Chinese carved timber doors, vents and gable ends were equally balanced by Classical details. By the time the Late Straits Eclectic Style was designated from 1910-1940 the application of ornamentation grew to fill the entire canvas of the facade. Intricately arranged configurations of many different details, colors and patterns were thrown together for maximum visual effect. The shophouse became so “encrusted with Chinese as well as Classical-style floral plasterwork and other ornate details that they have sometimes been referred to as ‘Chinese Baroque’.”<sup>29</sup> Glass fanlights above windows were introduced to allow natural light inside however the majority of windows were typically still not fitted with glass in order to allow for greater access and ventilation. Full length shuttered windows also increased openness. Brackets, plaster reliefs and geometric patterned tile were used to gild the facade further. As a Muslim country, Malaysia has a strong tradition in geometric and floral pattern work. This can be seen in the application of Malay designs in ceramic tiles that were laid down on the ground of the walkway immediately in front of each shop. To maintain flexibility on the interior, certain spaces are zoned though change in tile motifs. Instead of erecting a physical wall the space is defined through a change in pattern and color.<sup>30</sup> On the exterior, tiling was used both decoratively and practically. In such a wet climate tile is easily cleaned and replaceable. Its use sometimes even stretched up from the floor onto the walls in dado panels below the windows of the exterior to add to the façade decoration. This was also the period during which bright pastel colors became popular to attract customers and encourage tourism.

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<sup>29</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> Afrah Al Balushi et al., *Methods of Documentation and Measured Drawing*, January 2016, Report, Taylor's University, Selangor, Malaysia. 28.



FIGURE 13. Koon Seng Road, Singapore.  
Images by author.



FIGURE 14. Late Eclectic Style, George Town and Singapore.  
Images by author.

## Art Deco Style

Increased regulation controlling the standards of building was the inception of the role of the architect in Malaysia.<sup>31</sup> This coincided with the emergence of the new international style of Art Deco which was popularized by the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industrielles Moderne held in 1925. By 1930 Art Deco was quick to become the latest trend on the Malaysian streets. A period of economic recession from 1931 – 1932 made the much simpler style more appealing than the excess of the previous era.

The highly stylized Art Deco period was characterized by vertical emphasis on the façade. Pilaster elements were applied that stretched through the entire height of the building instead of the traditional practice of breaking up the building horizontally by displaying the break of each floor on the exterior. Stepped parapet walls with decorative antenna crowning the center of the façade along with thin horizontal fins for shading mimicked the futuristic lines of automobile or aircraft design.

There was still some hybridization between stylistic elements in the early 1930s, however by the late 30s there was a considerable jump from the previous compounding of styles towards streamlining the facade style, drawing quite the contrast from the busy jumble of ornamentation popular in the Late Straits Eclectic Style.<sup>32</sup> The shophouse retained the typical symmetrical arrangement of the exterior however the particulars of the articulation draws more on the principles of Art Deco rather than past styles. With the gradual introduction of air conditioning, having operable apertures became less imperative and wood shutters and jalousies were less prominent. This opened up the opportunity for geometric stained glass designs to be optimized on the front façade. Color use became subtler and was often relegated to the trim to compliment a more neutral white or grey façade which reflected the gloomier economic climate of the period.

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<sup>31</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.



FIGURE 15. Art Deco, George Town, Penang. Images by author.

### Early Modern Style

This toning down of color only became starker during the Early Modern period popular from 1950 - 1960. As with the Modernist movement everywhere, ornamentation was stripped down to the bare minimum and ribbon windows were introduced to the façade. Raised parapets disguised the need for pitched roofs to shed water and created a clean, horizontal top edge. With the withdrawal of British power after World War II, the restriction on shophouse height to a maximum of three stories was relaxed. Four to five storey shophouses became possible, however five stories represented the maximum that such a narrow building footprint could feasibly reach. As the swansong of the shophouse development, the Modernist style was the last period during which shophouses were actively built. By the 1970s Malaysia had been completely taken over by the separation of housing and shopping rendering the shophouse as obsolete.<sup>33</sup>

The Shophouse was in use for over a century before going out of fashion in the 1940s, eventually ceasing to be actively produced by the 1960s except on at the whim of the occasional eccentric. Obviously there was a specific reason or combination of circumstances that made such a well-loved and pervasive typology to suddenly become irrelevant. Perhaps it was the introduction of modernity through the international style which is so antithesis to everything that the vernacular shophouse represents. It very well might have been the disruptive and destructive influence of World War II and the eventual independence of Malaysia in 1957 as a sovereign state that put Malaysia on a totally different track for the future. The shophouse is distinctive for continuously adapting to the current culture, but the latter decades of the 20th century marked an unprecedented rate of continuous transition with the introduction of the technology age and changing social movements and standards. It is conceivable that it was simply not possible for the shophouse to adopt any new ideology before the preferences of society had already moved on to the next trend.<sup>34</sup> The challenge of today is to put the shophouse back on the track of being relevant to society. A model in which the physical world we live in

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<sup>33</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 133.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, 56.

can flow to the needs of its inhabitants and context is both sustainable and desirable, a role that the shophouse could quite feasibly fulfill.



FIGURE 16. George Town, Penang.  
Image by author.



FIGURE 17. Early Modern, George Town, Penang.  
Images by author.

## SHIFTS IN HISTORY + CULTURE

"The shophouse, small in scale and charming in character, ceased to exist as the roles of 'shop' and 'house' were pulled apart and placed separately in mega sized impersonal buildings. With that, the evolution of the shophouse came to an end."<sup>35</sup>

The initial social organization of the shophouse was very much tied to traditional Chinese family structure. As a deeply patriarchal society, the husband and father represented the head of both family and business.<sup>36</sup> In the shophouse organization, both realms physically overlapped creating a very tight knit family unit. The eldest son was subsequently groomed to take over management of the business with the expectation that he would honor his mother and father by caring for them in their old age. If a Chinese businessman became successful enough to expand his influence, he would often choose to diversify his interests by opening new shops with different services that would be given over to other male family members.<sup>37</sup> Thus a range of shops would often be owned by a single family spreading the familial network across neighborhoods.

As the economy has changed since the early days of the shophouse the original structure to the occupation of the shophouse has been significantly undermined. The threshold of the introduction of the shophouse to Malaysia was marked by vigorous trade within Southeast Asia as well as the onset of European dominance. During this time the occupants of the shophouse were primarily still direct immigrants from China. The subsequent period of colonial rule by the Dutch and British during the early to mid 1800s defined the golden age of the shophouse and the propagation of the shophouse. Although emphasis was put on the export of raw goods because of colonial interests, the localized economy still functioned largely the same as it had for decades or even centuries previous. The shophouse was no longer considered strictly Chinese however the family and business structure of the shophouse was still largely unchanged. It wasn't until the dawn of globalization that the lifestyle of the

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<sup>35</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Murray Weidenbaum, The Chinese Family Business Enterprise, "*California Management Review* 38, no. 4 (1996): 141.

<sup>37</sup> Mui Ho, "The Chinese Shop-house: An Architectural and Social Model for New Cities." *Assessing Value in Tradition* 76 (1994): 56.

shophouse was thrown into disarray. As traditional family businesses transitioned into large scale operations or were overtaken by corporations the intimate scale and discreet operation of the shophouse has largely fallen out of practice.

### World War II and Malaysian Independence

The influence of World War II on the path of the Malaysian city was substantial. The Japanese invaded Malaysia beginning in 1941 and the British withdrew to Singapore completely by 1942. As a colony that produced primarily tin, palm oil and rubber, Malaysia was highly reliant on the British export market. Although the Japanese appealed to the Malays by propagating their liberation from the foreign European powers, by undercutting their economy they ultimately failed to gain local support. Racial tensions reached an all time high as the Japanese shored up Malay nationalism by painting the Chinese as enemy aliens and enacted harsh genocidal policies. Because of the perception that the British would soon retake the country and trade would recommence, the market stagnated to the point of complete shutdown. Food shortages quickly plunged the country into the worst famine that it has ever experienced. The Japanese did not decamp until the secession of World War II in 1945. Within a span of four years the social and political mindset of Malaysia changed irrevocably.

The abandonment of British support during a period of extreme difficulty sparked the fires of independence. Coupled with European post war policy of colonial self rule and independence the plans for a Malayan Union were drawn up by the British themselves. The Malayan Union, soon to be replaced by the Federation of Malaya in 1948, only reinforced the racial strife however as the large population of Indian and Chinese settlers were considered second class citizens under the ruling Malay. This unrest is what lead to irrevocable differences between the Chinese and Malays and the secession of Singapore in 1965. As Malaysia went through a period of upheaval, in many ways the trappings of the old ways of life were consciously abandoned.

The downfall of the shophouse is closely related to the post-war mindset. Eager to put aside the stigma of destitution and poverty that the Malaysian cities had fallen into, large swathes of shophouses were torn down to make room for new urban schemes.<sup>38</sup> Specific programmatic uses were consciously separated through zoning leaving no place for the hybrid idiosyncrasies of the shophouse. Instead, large shopping districts and mega malls populated by chain brands popped up to service the growth of high rise condos and row house developments.

Today the occupation of the shophouse is much different from what it once was. It is very rare to find that the proprietor of a business still lives above the shop. Instead the apartments above a shop are rented out to families or as offices. In the larger properties sometimes many unrelated families will occupy the upper levels.<sup>39</sup> Often an elaborate web of leasing and subleasing means that each occupant answers to a different party who ultimately rents from the property owner. Shophouses are viewed as property investments by owners who are typically not involved in the day to day running of the premise. The original occupation of the shophouse however was not designed to accommodate several independent entities. Once the building is divided into different apartment sections many parties become cut off from access to adequate light, air or washroom facilities. Strategic use of the space is quite possible; however, this often requires more extensive renovation than many property owners are willing to invest in.

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<sup>38</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 134.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

## GEORGETOWN : CONSERVATION + ADAPTIVE REUSE

"The places of our forefathers are the repositories of citizen's stories, reflecting generations of tastes, needs, lives, hopes, and dreams."<sup>40</sup>

In an effort to create stability during the shaky post war economy and establishment of Malaysia as a sovereign state, the Rent Control Act of 1948 was drafted in order to prevent the hike in housing costs. This policy played a huge effect on shophouse districts throughout Malaysia.

It was only through this act that the historic core of George Town located on the island of Penang was able to remain virtually untouched during a period when historic buildings were actively sacrificed to the race towards modernization in Malaysia. The fixed, and relatively low, rent price range meant that there was little incentive to build new infrastructure in the historic core. Because of this generations of an eclectic mix of artisans, hawkers, astrologers and medicinal practitioners were able to survive and create a unique enclave of old world customs and lifestyles. George Town could almost be called a more authentic remnant of Chinese customs and building than could be found in China which was subjected to the sweeping changes in the landscape due to cultural revolution and the communist regime.<sup>41</sup>

By the late 1980s however the Rent Control Act was being reconsidered as Malaysia's economy experienced an upswing in growth and prosperity. The fixed profit margin of the shophouse district may have stunted inclination to build new projects in George Town, but it also caused there to be little incentive to keep up building standards in the area. In tropical climates a constant cycle of upkeep and renovation is necessary to combat the deterioration wrought by the environment, for older buildings the amount of maintenance necessary is easily tripled. Shophouse districts began to be regarded as a

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<sup>40</sup> Fels, "Conserving the Shophouse City," 2.

<sup>41</sup> "Malaysia: Shophouses of Georgetown, Where East Meets West," Minor Sights, December 2015, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.minorsights.com/2014/12/malaysia-shophouses-of-georgetown.html>.

blight as they fell into disrepair with little to no prospects for renewal. By 1997 the Rent Control Act was repealed in order to open up opportunities for growth.

The repeal of rent control had several unintended consequences however. Tenants of the old shophouse district were given the choice to either accept a hike in rent rates or to find new accommodations. Low cost housing was constructed primarily on the outskirts of George Town to receive those affected by the change in rental rates. The timing of this undertaking happened at a particularly unfavorable period however. The Asian Financial Crisis hit Malaysia in July 1997 which caused a sharp downswing in the housing market. Not only was the construction of new housing delayed leaving many evicted citizens without adequate housing but property owners in the historic shophouse district had great difficulty in finding new tenants to occupy the now mostly vacant historic core. Without tenants to perform basic upkeep, many shophouses fell into complete disrepair due to abandonment. By 2000 it was found that 569 premises had been vacated on 123 streets in downtown George Town.<sup>42</sup>

Instead of the injection of new business interests and capital that had been hoped for with the repeal of the Rent Control Act, the shophouse district was in direr straits than ever. In an effort to encourage improvement the Penang State Government prepared a fund of RM100 million (US\$ 27,027,027) in loan grants to be made available to property owners. The effectiveness of this initiative was ultimately a failure however. In the year 2000 only 6 applications were submitted to the government.<sup>43</sup> Lack of public knowledge and strict limits and conditions on how these funds could be used caused this loan program to be hugely underutilized.

Penang managed to avoid giving over their historic district over to new commercial development, however the economic situation made it so that some new tactic was necessary to recover the downtown area. The proposal for application to the UNESCO World Heritage Site List was

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<sup>42</sup> Saeko Atsumi, "The Repeal of Rent Control in Malaysia," *Cornell Real Estate Review* 2, no. 5 (2003): 34.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

used as a strategy for both conservation as well as revival. Having a tangible goal to reach toward aided in creating interest in conservation efforts in property owners and residents. The prestige of such affiliation was appealing of course, however the growth in George Town's tourist industry opened a new avenue to pursue urban renewal while also cultivating economic interests. In 2008 George Town and Malacca were inducted as the only UNESCO sites in Malaysia to receive recognition for "Outstanding Universal Value."

Criterion (iv): Melaka and George Town reflect a mixture of influences which have created a unique architecture, culture and townscape without parallel anywhere in East and South Asia. In particular, they demonstrate an exceptional range of shophouses and townhouses. These buildings show many different types and stages of development of the building type, some originating in the Dutch or Portuguese periods.

<sup>44</sup>

The Penang State Government established George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) in 2010 to manage the newly protected historic zone. The general preservation practice for shophouses was to restore the facade, leaving the interior space open to be fully renovated which was often considered necessary due to structural concerns. Two zones were delineated with concern to preservation interests. The Core Zone is the area which is considered World Heritage property where no changes may be made except in adherence to preservation efforts. The Buffer Zone is established to protect the historic core; this zone is intended to carefully consider or inhibit any new construction that may impact the integrity of the Core Zone.

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<sup>44</sup> "Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>;



FIGURE 18. UNESCO zones in George Town  
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>.

The GTWHI created a clear process for projects within the Heritage zone, making the procedure more efficient as well as accessible. The previous confusion and ambiguity involved in applying directly to the state government for building permits and loans were circumvented by the creation of an organization dedicated solely to the planning of the historic core. Larger objectives for improvement were also drafted which included improved pedestrian connectivity, increase in green space, restoration and reconnection of the waterfront to the inner city, revitalization of back lanes as important and safe pedestrian access ways, reduction of vehicle dependency and alternative transportation systems.

The success of the initiative in creating improvement is evident. There were aspects of the process however which were grossly mishandled to the point of culpable injustice. The mismanagement in re-housing the former occupants of the historic core created an increase in the squatter population not only in George Town, but in cities across Malaysia. Citizens who formerly worked and inhabited the historic core and were regarded as respected members of that community were suddenly relegated to the fringes of society. By evicting a large portion of the community of artisans and small businesses there has also been accusations of gentrifying the historic core at the expense of the locals and the authenticity of their culture.

The alternative to the strategies taken in George Town however is that its historic core would in all likelihood no longer exist. The rate of deterioration, if left unaddressed, would have escalated to create a neighborhood of derelict slums. Similarly, the steady decline in property value made the historic downtown vulnerable to the possibility of insertion of dissonant modern buildings into the shophouse district purely for economic reasons. Preservation efforts always embody a certain level of nostalgia; however, it is impossible to return to a past way of life which precludes the ability of buildings to exist in a truly "authentic" state of their original existence. At the same time, to abandon all remnants of traditional architecture would be to dishonor the history of Malaysia's people. Instead, focus should

be given as to how the historic shophouses can be integrated into modern life while still acknowledging the centuries of history that brought it to be such a well loved vernacular.

## SINGAPORE: MODERN INTEGRATION

Singapore offers a precedent for Malaysia in its approach to shophouses in more urban conditions. While the historic fabric in Malacca and George Town in Malaysia were given recognition and protection through UNESCO in 2008, Singapore was thinking of conservation of historical areas as early as the 1980s. As an island state, Singapore has little to no natural resources that it can rely on. Its economy is largely driven through international trade and tourism. Singapore has long held a very ambitious vision for their urban development and by launching themselves as a global trade center they were able to modernize at a very fast rate. Because of the limitations in territory which discourages outward sprawl, many older buildings were torn down in order to make room for larger modern projects. As a historic style of modest scale the shophouse was a primary victim of these practices.



FIGURE 19. Replacing shophouses with tower blocks in Singapore  
"Evolution of the Chinese Shophouse on the Malay Peninsula," 70.

As Singapore's cityscape began to change into a city dominated by futuristic skyscrapers and large shopping centers however it began to have an impact on their national image and tourism industry. One unforeseen result of modernization lead to a dip in the number of tourists that visited their

country due to the impression that Singapore had less “local” culture to offer.<sup>45</sup> By creating a city full of intensely efficient and sterile modern buildings, there was less incentive for international travelers to visit Singapore as opposed to any other large international city that might have an interesting skyline. Singapore’s response was to immediately halt destruction of their historic fabric in order to create a plan for preservation and adaptation of what remained. One of the first projects that was undertaken as a pilot study was a street of shophouses.

The dominant ethnicity of Singapore is without question Chinese. The primary reason Singapore separated from Malaysia was because of racial tension between Malays and Chinese that was exacerbated by World War II. As the state with the largest concentration of Chinese citizens the conflict was resolved by the expulsion, or independence depending which side you ask, of Singapore from the Malaysian state. Because of this strong Chinese heritage, the shophouse was a huge part of the development of Singapore. Due to this the initiative to preserve what shophouses remained was met with favor by the locals as a preservation of their cultural history.

The initial study conducted in 1987 by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in Singapore was focused on Tanjong Pagar road. Thirty-two shophouses were restored for commercial adaptive reuse as offices, hotels, restaurants and retail stores. The purpose of this project was to test the technical and economic feasibility of conservation efforts. The project was qualified as a success however it was discovered that it was difficult to sustain commercial activity without the support of the residential aspect. In other words, "the function of the 'shop' had to be united with the role of 'house', which was what the shophouse was meant to be in first place."<sup>46</sup> By uniting commercial venues directly to a steady and reliable customer base the sustainability of the entire district was improved.

The project was then expanded into the Tanjong Pagar Conservation Area which includes a cluster of over 200 shophouses. By 1989 a comprehensive conservation plan was drafted which built

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<sup>45</sup> Sze-cheong, Max. Ho, *Conflict of Conservation and Development in Singapore: A Case Study of Tanjong Pagar District*, Master's thesis, (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1993): 46.

<sup>46</sup> Knapp, *Asia's Old Dwellings*, 134.

on the knowledge gathered through the successes and failures of conservation efforts in the shophouse studies. Responsibility and participation is shared by the URA through both public and private sectors to integrate the work and knowledge of preservation efforts in the community. By the year 2000, forty-four conservation areas had been delineated that included 5,595 buildings, the majority of which are shophouses.

While George Town was able to put limits on building height and type in the Buffer Zone that surrounds the shophouse district, Singapore has not always had this luxury. Towering modern buildings quite often juxtapose the more modest shophouse streets. To mitigate the disparity in scale, considerable design was put into the streetscape between these areas. Creating a pleasant pedestrian experience smoothed over the abrupt transitions between style and context.

These efforts had the desired effect of boosting Singapore's vigorous tourist industry. Over 15.2 million tourists were reported to have visited the island nation in 2015, almost three times the population of 5.54 million. More than simply a device for growing their economy however, the revival of shophouse districts has been a powerful tool in inspiring "National Value" in Singaporeans to have pride for their city and past.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sze-cheong, *Conflict of Conservation*, 28.



FIGURE 20. Chinatown food street, Singapore.  
Image by author.

## CURRENT HOUSING SCHEMES IN MALAYSIA

For the purposes of this study, the shophouse will be considered alongside with the two most commonly seen housing types in Malaysia: high rise apartment complexes and suburban row house developments. In terms of current and future development in Malaysia these are the most prominent strategies utilized. The terms of evaluation are the urban context they create and the social communities they generate. As the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur is the center of growth both in terms of economic prosperity and population and will set the course for future development in Malaysia. The current population of Kuala Lumpur city proper is 1.7 million with over 7.2 million residing in the greater Kuala Lumpur region. If growth continues at the current rate it is predicted that the population of the region could reach 10 million by 2025.<sup>48</sup> As the largest growing urban conglomerate in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur is strategically positioned to craft the image and character of what life in Malaysia could be.



FIGURE 21. High rise and row house developments in Kuala Lumpur.  
"The Evolving Urban Form: Kuala Lumpur." Newgeography.com.

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<sup>48</sup> Wendall Cox, "The Evolving Urban Form: Kuala Lumpur." Newgeography.com. December 01, 2013.  
<http://www.newgeography.com/content/003395-the-evolving-urban-form-kuala-lumpur>.

## High Rise Housing

High rise apartment complexes represent the most efficient scheme in terms of cost and land use making it particularly attractive to developers. The typical tower construction in Kuala Lumpur, even in the low height zone, is able to fit dozens of families on one tiny plot of land standing between 10 - 20 stories high. As you progress towards the city center, social housing and mid-range apartment buildings give way to taller luxury condos.

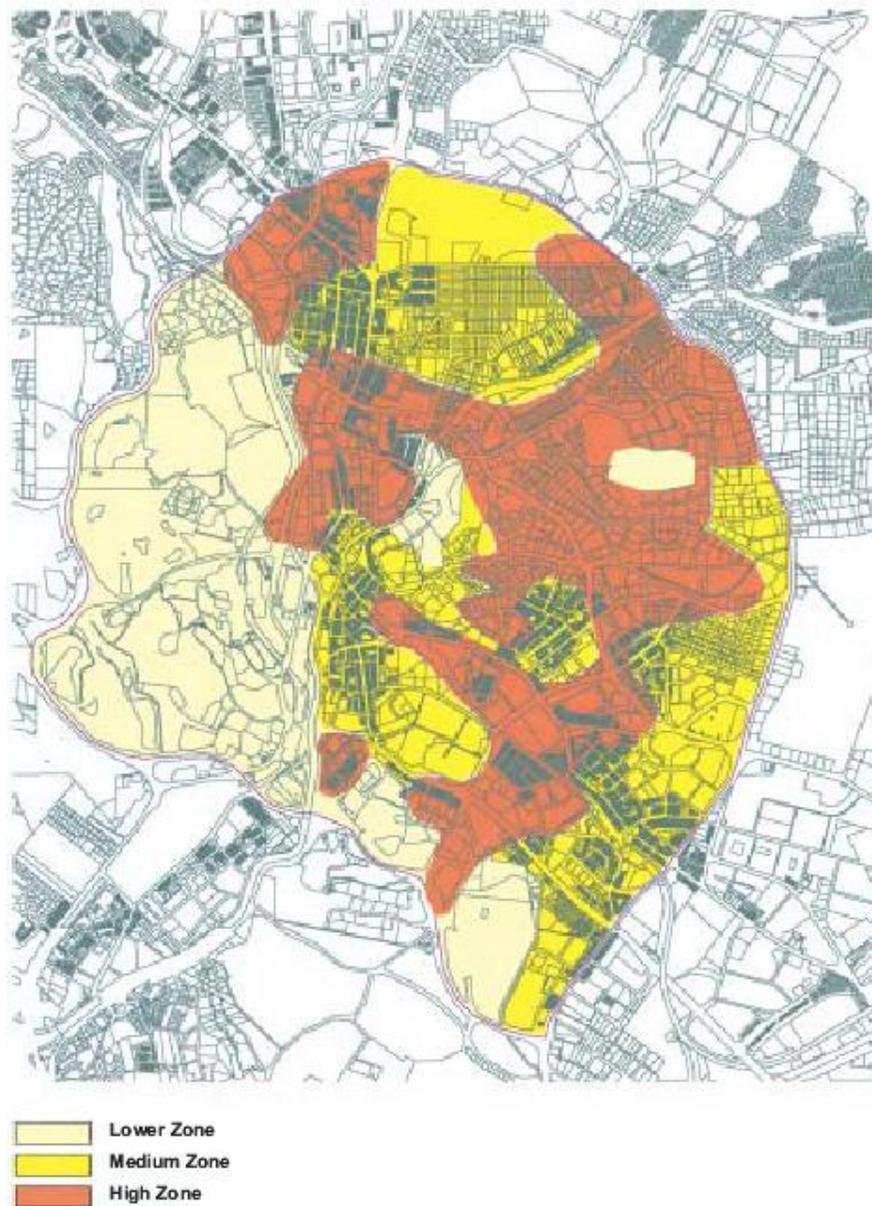


FIGURE 22. Height restriction in Kuala Lumpur  
Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 : Urban Design and Landscape. <http://www.dbkl.gov>

While vertical growth is seen as progress by Western standards of modernization, it is fraught with its own problems. High rise apartment buildings in Malaysia are typically poorly sited, with little to no relationship to the ground, and thus the rest of the city. The lower levels are often taken up by either parking or closed off from engagement by private lobby entries. The opportunity to approach on foot is usually prohibited by a web of surrounding road systems with little to no pedestrian crossways. These high rise developments become isolated "islands" floating in ambiguous and unresolved urban setting, offering little to the residents and the city at large in creating a sense of community or belonging.<sup>49</sup>

This has also contributed to a situation in which low income housing has become segregated from the rest of the city. In an effort to take care of the squatter settlements and homeless population, high rise housing has been quickly constructed on cheap land. However, this solution has taken the portion of the population least likely to own automotive transportation and put them in the position where a significant commute is necessary to reach job sites and amenities. Traditionally, due to ethnic clustering and rent control policies, the city center was the dwelling place of many small businesses and a diverse mix of socioeconomic levels. However today the core of the city is primarily devoted to commercial interests and office space. The only attractive housing opportunities in the city center are luxury condos that are the domain of the uber rich. This has caused large groups of people at lower socioeconomic level to be thrust into densely occupied high rises further from the city center with more limited resources readily available close at hand.

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<sup>49</sup> Voon Fee. Chen, *Architecture*, vol. 5, Encyclopedia of Malaysia (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1999), 91.

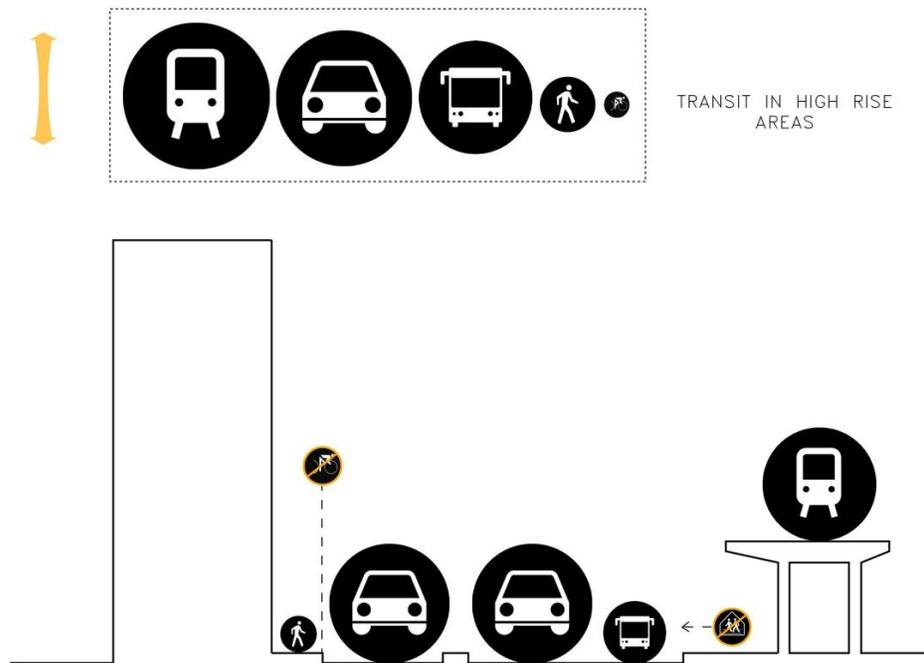


FIGURE 23. Urban section of high rise areas  
Image by author.

Because of the lack of urban community surrounding these high rise developments, the internal social space of these complexes becomes key to their success. The upscale end of high rise living is categorized as condominiums and are seen as highly desirable for their security, amenities and exclusivity. For the wealthy class, security is one of the top concerns, something that highly monitored condominium offer more than open neighborhood situations. Internal swimming pools, gyms, laundry services etc. only add to the appeal. The politics of belonging to this community are not always based in actual human interactions, instead the simple act of owning the property is invitation to an exclusive, and elite, social circle. This is in part due to the transient nature of many of these tenant's presence. Many of the professionals who are able to afford these types of properties do not live in Kuala Lumpur full time but often visit for business trips making it more convenient to own a property in the city. There is little social community created because oftentimes neighbors will not be in residence at the same time.

By contrast, Malaysia has given little regard to the social image presented in their low-cost housing schemes. The Hard-Core Poor Development Programme (Program Perumahan rakyat Termiskin) is the governmental body tasked with creating low cost housing in Kuala Lumpur. The primary concern in this department has been relocating the considerable squatter population in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>50</sup> This program has put a great deal of consideration in the community spirit within squatter settlements and how to transplant a community from informal shacks to towering modern high rise buildings. Multi-racial heritage and informality in social structure create a shared background that offers few social barriers toward inclusion in the squatter communities. In an effort to retain this structure some of the solutions employed have been clustering apartment units and creating shared breezeways to cultivate neighborhood spirit.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the most successful driver in creating shared experience presented by these schemes however is in how the architecture has failed to serve the residents. Larger window openings and glazed facades take advantage of the vistas offered by lofty heights but offer little in terms of shading from the relentless heat of the tropical sun. The lack of passive cooling systems means that the buildings are often retrofitted with additional air-conditioning units that ruin whatever facade composition might have been originally designed. The overall inefficiency of attempting to keep an artificially controlled environment in the tropics is an endless cycle of energy usage. Additionally, small balconies that cater to a Western idea of private exterior space are not sufficient for the Malaysian practice of hanging laundry and cooking outdoors.

### Row House Developments

On the flip side of urban development from the high rise buildings in Malaysia is the row house neighborhoods. Malaysia's version of suburban sprawl. While it is quite a bit more densely packed than can be seen in the U.S., it does offer up a neighborhood quality that is removed from the buzz of city

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<sup>50</sup> A.M.F. Aminuddin and G.K. Yong, "Study on Lowcost High Rise Urban Housing in Kuala Lumpur - Impact on Communities and Social Spaces," *International Journal for Housing Science* 33, no. 2 (2009): 121.

<sup>51</sup> Chen, *Architecture*, 121.

life. Row houses are fundamentally very similar architecturally to the shophouse. Although these suburban enclaves are at first glance capable of self sustaining themselves, including commercial strips as well as educational and religious facilities that serve the residents, because of the shift in employment structure rarely do residents work near their homes. By removing the workforce from the workplace an entire population of commuters is created by these communities.

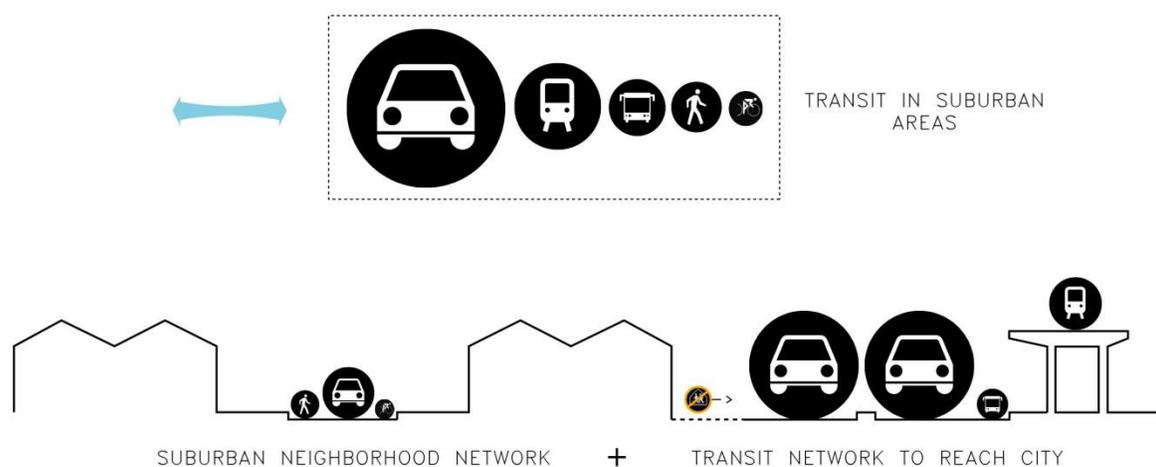


FIGURE 24. Urban section of row house suburbs  
Image by author.

Crime also plagues these suburban neighborhoods. Every household is closed off by a private gate and with bribes applied to the right sources many neighborhoods construct an additional neighborhood entrance gate. No matter how humble or affluent the area may be, practically all neighborhoods employ the service of guards that monitor the entries into the neighborhood around the clock. For the most part, these precautions have proven inadequate or completely obsolete in discouraging theft, property damage and kidnapping. The implementation of gated homes and hired guards is merely a band aid covering up a larger urban and societal problem. Today gated communities are seen as the most desirable living condition for new house owners however, indicating that this trend will only continue to become more prominent.<sup>52</sup> And yet as people attempt to shut

<sup>52</sup> Teck-Hong Tan. "Meeting First-time Buyers' Housing Needs and Preferences in Greater Kuala Lumpur." *Cities* 29, no. 6, (2012): 393.

themselves away from the rest of the city, a method that has proven largely ineffective, those with the means to effect positive change divorce themselves from their community instead of working to make it a safer more livable environment.

In conjuncture with the purely residential neighborhoods of row houses, the office shop is the commercial option that has been introduced to service these areas. Office shops are fundamentally related to the shophouse with shops on the ground level creating a commercial activity zone while office space resides above. The urban planning post World War II ruled that for a certain concentration of newly built housing there must also be a center for commercial activity, a school district and religious center.<sup>53</sup> The downfall of the office shop blocks however is that is that they rarely functioning at full capacity.

Vacancies in use of the upper, or even ground floor shops create a patchwork of usage. Because the office shop relies solely on commercial success the overall prosperity of the strip is very interconnected. If one shop goes out of business leaving a prolonged vacancy the desirability of the whole strip as a shopping center decreases. This in turn hurts whatever businesses that remain. Often this creates a domino effect where the withdrawal of a few shops causes the collapse of the entire strip.<sup>54</sup>

Because these strips are intended to serve a local community rarely do they become completely derelict however. Eventually new businesses move into the neighborhood that may or may not revitalize the life of the commercial block. However due to the tropical climate the decay of empty buildings happens at a rapid rate. As certain properties remain empty for months or years they can

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<sup>53</sup> Seo Ryeong Ju, Saniah Ahmad Zaki, and Yun Kyung Choi. "Contextual Modernization; New Town Planning in Petaling Jaya, of Malaysia." *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering JJABE* 10, no. 1 (2011): 95

<sup>54</sup> Aida Idris, "Globalisation and Socio-economic Development in Malaysia: Wither Small Businesses?," *Asian Journal of Business and Accounting* 5 (2012): 116.

quickly take on a very derelict appearance driving down the desirability of the commercial block as a whole. It is not uncommon to see these strips with only a few store fronts showing actual use.

The key to what makes the shophouse uniquely qualified to create safer more resilient neighborhoods is the mixture of housing along with commercial activity. Whether it is retail, office space or restaurants, when put together with residential living space the neighborhood becomes activated on several fronts. The difference in schedule for the variety of programs keeps the neighborhood active at different times of day. The practice of separating program through zoning that suburban schemes have promoted creates areas where there are high levels of activity only during short bursts or specific times of day. For example, office buildings are quite busy during the work day but become ghost towns at night. Similarly, residential neighborhoods see high levels of traffic whenever the occupants are leaving or returning home but typically are quite deserted in the middle of the day. In Malaysia where burglaries and kidnappings run rampant in suburban neighborhoods the peak hours for crime are not in the middle of the night but rather during the middle of the day when there is little activity in residential neighborhoods. In the shophouse security is inherent, the business proprietor lives directly above the premise so the shop is never truly empty and vulnerable to break ins. While the entire front is often completely open during business hours, retractable steel security gates discourage break-ins after hours. Often the simple fact that there is always a human presence in shophouse neighborhoods is enough to discourage vandalism and theft.



FIGURE 25. Row house development in Kuala Lumpur.  
"Developers of Affordable Housing May Ride Downturn Better," Malaysia Property, <http://www.theedgeproperty.com>

## FUTURE OF THE SHOPHOUSE

### Architectural Innovation

Since the basic makeup of the plan and section are the constants that form the foundation of the typology, the opportunity to remake or revitalize the shophouse architecturally is primarily consigned to the facade. The variety and character of shop fronts are primarily what gives the shophouse such vibrancy and interest even today. While historic shophouse facades are beloved to the streets of Malaysia, the potential for creating new iterations of exterior design is a way of giving the typology new life.

Malaysia is defined by its diversity. To display that diversity through architectural expression is both appealing to the inclinations of current culture as well as exciting in its prospect for innovation. In Malaysia's obsession with creating a modern sleek city, there has been a lack of distinct local expression in new architectural development. Reintroducing neighborhoods that are customized by the inhabitants themselves creates a neighborhood that engages the locals and creates enclaves that would by nature attract outsiders and sightseers.

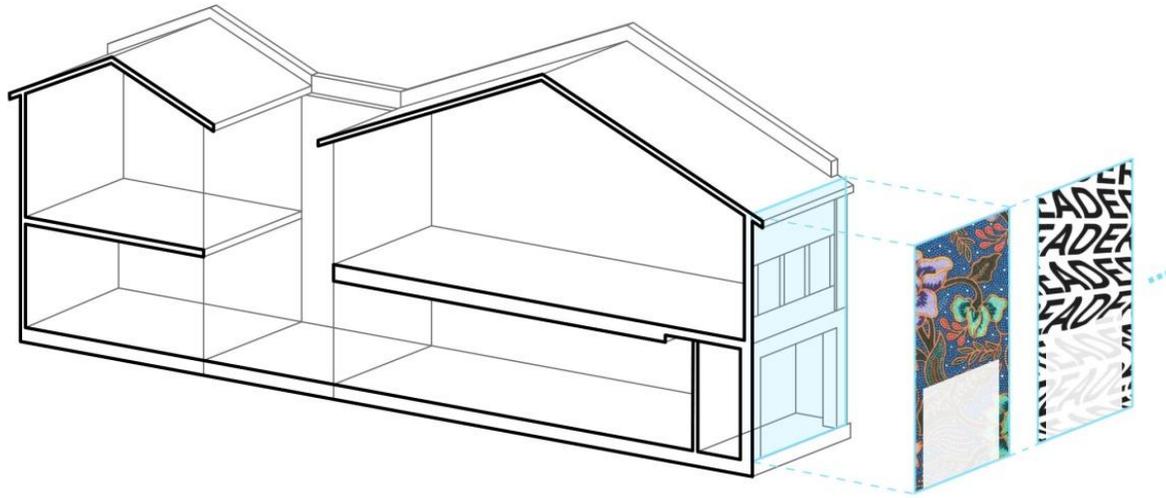


FIGURE 26. Adaptable facade application.  
Image by author.

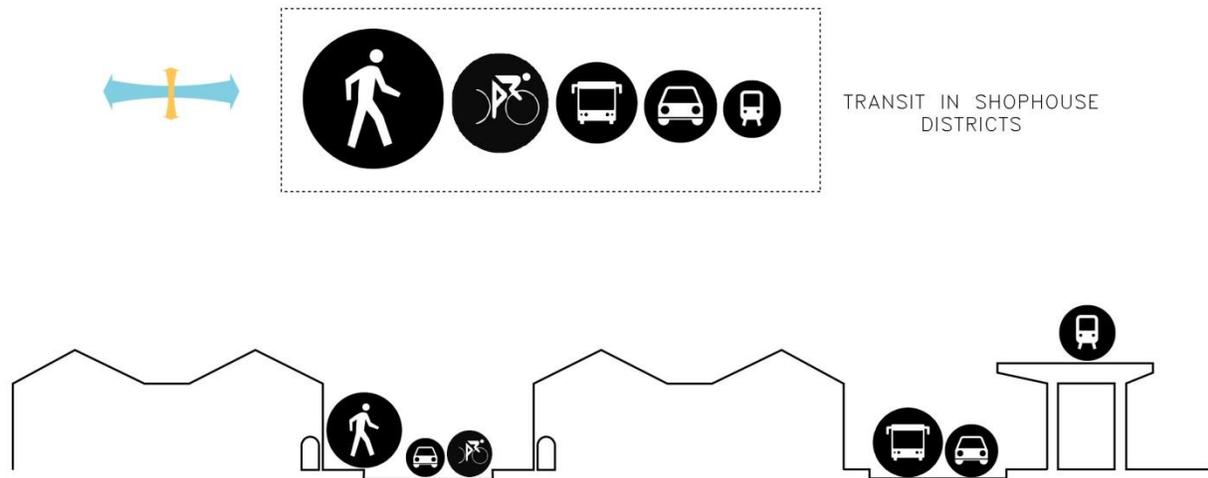


FIGURE 27. Urban section of shophouse district  
Image by author.

## Creating an Urban Brand

One of the primary drivers for developing the shophouse districts in Singapore and George Town is the appeal to international expatriates and visitors. Tourism encapsulates two types of attractions: the iconic landmarks and the local haunts. The famous mosques, tall buildings, public gardens etc. are among the first category. The local haunts for Malaysia include the more informal locations that make a place unique: the markets, unique foods and shophouses. Shoring up the local communities will inherently benefit the international interest that Malaysia is so determined to build.

Implementing Western style commodities makes the city more familiar and friendly to international and cosmopolitan professionals. However, innovative professionals are increasingly interested in more than accessible cities. Cities that have distinct creative energy and branding are more appealing to what urban theorist Richard Florida calls the "creative class."<sup>55</sup> The creative class can be described as a community of talented, trained professionals that drive contemporary urban development. Superior resources (schools, housing and transportation etc.) are important to attracting this socio-economic sector, however positive lifestyle factors are also primary drivers. The creative class both desires and creates "high-quality experiences, an openness to diversity of all kinds, and, above all else, the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people."<sup>56</sup> The benefits of the creative class can be seen as the concentration of a highly skilled workforce, higher tax base, and willingness to reinvestment in the built environment. This kind of community is the stimulus that could aid Kuala Lumpur in creating an urban brand of innovation and culture that would benefit Malaysia as a whole. Simply following a scripted path of modernization through more infrastructure and shinier mega-malls is not enough to establish Kuala Lumpur as an inspiring place to live and work.

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<sup>55</sup> Richard L. Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 358.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

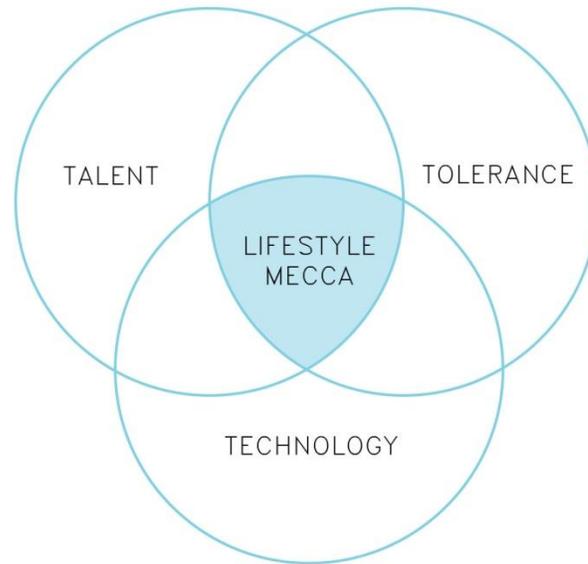


FIGURE 28. Components to "Lifestyle Mecca."  
Image by author.

### In Search of a Malaysian Style

Part of creating a unique urban brand is establishing a clear representation of a Malaysian identity. Before the Malaysian Independence of 1957, "it was accepted that there was no single recognizable style of 'Malayan' architecture."<sup>57</sup> This is in part due to lack of conscious study of Malaysian architecture, but can also be contributed to the fact that there is no obvious singular artifact that can be called solely Malaysian. Instead the beginnings of what would be labeled a uniquely Malaysian style of architecture came through the eclectic mixture of many different cultures and artistic expression. And nowhere else was this particular style more highly developed than the ubiquitous terraced shophouse and townhouse facade.<sup>58</sup> This establishes the shophouse as a particularly qualified typology for Malaysia to invest in to represent their heritage and culture.

<sup>57</sup> Chen, *Architecture*, 80.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

## Community Innovation

Tourist centers in shophouse districts such as that seen in Georgetown have been successful in attracting customers through extensive networking both in creating an online presence and the support offered through George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) resources. Although this system is aimed toward a specific social and economic situation, namely tourism, which differs significantly from normal everyday life in Malaysia, it can be used as a precedent for creating a support system for the shophouse. In what could be considered modern shophouse districts, a working network to establish new communities can be defined by three categories: the experts (those who create and run the support system), the proprietors (those who run shops), and the users (residents, locals and tourists).

Because the architecture of the shophouse is catered toward small business, the fate of the shophouse is directly tied to that of small business enterprise in Malaysia. In 2011 small to medium sized enterprises (SME) comprised 97.3% of total registered businesses in Malaysia with predictions of growth in this sector. This accounts for over half the total working population.<sup>59</sup> These statistics would suggest a very hopeful climate in which shophouse ventures might thrive. However, the overwhelming trend in Malaysia is that there is a general lack of legal protection and awareness of the rights and proceedings of small business ventures. In an effort to rectify injustices and protect small businesses the government has drafted various regulations that as a whole have only made the process of licensing, upkeep and protection of small firms more of a logistical nightmare. General opinion for SME entrepreneurs is that bureaucratic obstacles come second only to financial barriers as impediment to growth.<sup>60</sup> Typically, small business owners are less inclined or equipped to cut through the red tape that bogs down any potential problems that may arise. That is why it would be prudent to establish a separate body of experts to provide support for shophouse businesses that operates semi or wholly independent from the quagmire of bureaucratic procedure similar to the GTWHI in Penang.

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<sup>59</sup> Aida, "Globalisation and Socio-economic Development in Malaysia," 110.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 112.

The experts in this system encompass those who would provide information and basic services that span across all business types. Accessibility of knowledge involving the legalities and rights of SME owners would go great lengths in cutting down barriers to new start ups as well as increasing resilience. The upper hand that corporations hold in establishing new branches is that there is often a streamlined, field tested procedure in establishing a successful enterprise. Small independent businesses lack this advantage. Often business owners undertake operations without a clear idea of the technicalities of running a business venture. It is vital for individuals in this position to have access to mentors or information that will help them through the logistics of running a business. General assistance in good business practices, establishing an online presence and connections to resources and legal council would help create a system within which shophouse businesses might thrive.<sup>61</sup> Ideally, the support system would be able to react as locally as possible. Basic conventions of what information and responsibilities these networks should cover creates a template for smaller organizations that might work within a single district or even neighborhood within Kuala Lumpur.

The single most under-utilized tool for small business owners in Malaysia is leveraging the power of the internet. A sample of 368 SMEs in the area surrounding Kuala Lumpur revealed that only 41.3% of these companies integrated internet access in their business operations.<sup>62</sup> Web platforms have the ability to spread awareness, connect users, and create a network between the company and the customer. Many traditional corporate enterprises have been undermined through the rapidly growing trend of online marketplaces. Popular networks such as Airbnb or Uber are at the most basic level simply tools that connect individuals in need of a service with peers who are readily available to meet that need. The popularity of these methods is in large part due to the fact that by cutting out the middle-man prices for services are much cheaper than standard competitive market place values. But the perception that by using these services your money goes directly into the pocket of the individual

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<sup>61</sup> Aida, "Globalisation and Socio-economic Development in Malaysia," 123.

<sup>62</sup> Syed Shah Alam, "Adoption of Internet in Malaysian SMEs," *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 16, no. 2 (2009): 248.

that is providing the service rather than some nebulous corporate entity is a powerful selling point. This is exactly the attitude that comprises the majority of support by customers for small local businesses over large commercial entities. In such a fast paced and mercurial market, small businesses are uniquely positioned to instantaneously react and adapt to the changes in consumer behavior. And the internet is the method by which small businesses might take advantage of a whole new pool of potential customers.

One of the largest barriers in utilization of the internet in Malaysia the language barrier.<sup>63</sup> Although most Malaysians speak some level of English, Malay is still the predominant language. In spite of the international connectivity of the internet, English is still the primary gateway through which digital information is transferred. Even disregarding the huge expanse of technical expertise necessary to truly manage the digital world which is in itself a barrier to usage, the opportunity to learn how to navigate this terrain is totally out of reach when the vast majority of knowledge is in a foreign language. This is why having a body of experts to lend assistance to proprietors is vital to propelling shophouse businesses into the digital age.

### Opportunities for New Communities

There are two methods by which the shophouse can be utilized: through adaptive re-use of existing shophouse structures or through creation of totally new shophouse districts. For Kuala Lumpur there are a few obvious neighborhoods that would benefit from urban renewal that shophouse schemes might fulfill.

In the increasingly dense and towering fabric of central Kuala Lumpur, there remains a disparate plot of land named Kampung Baru ("The new village") which has remained virtually undeveloped for decades. The British delineated Kampung Baru as a Malay settlement in 1900, giving

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<sup>63</sup> Alam, "Adoption of Internet in Malaysian SMEs," 243.

over control of the land totally to be used as a traditional Malay agricultural settlement. This neighborhood has since grown to become a symbol of traditional Malay culture. The architectural make up of Kampung Baru is primarily a haphazard collection of traditional Malay bungalows and a few shophouse streets. Directly bordering Kampung Baru is the metropolis of Kuala Lumpur. The estate, which encompasses roughly 4 km<sup>2</sup>, is reportedly estimated to be worth US\$1.4 billion (RM6.1 billion) however the occupants have so far remained unmoving in their determination to preserve the land of their forefathers. By law, developers must obtain the permission of every landowner in the village to obtain the property. There are 1,355 lots within the village with over 5,300 owners however; on average each lot is owned by at least five landowners with the maximum reaching 208 owners for a single lot.<sup>64</sup>

The 2020 Plan for Kuala Lumpur projects an ambitious goal for reimagining Kampung Baru however. The rustic village would host 1,900 hotel rooms, 30 million square feet of office space, 17,500 residential units while preserving 12% of land for green space. A green sky bridge based on the New York High Line would connect Kampung Baru directly to the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC).<sup>65</sup>



FIGURE 29. Development of Kampung Baru.

(left image) "Beyond the Melting Pot," The New York Times, nytimes.com

(right image) "KUALA LUMPUR | Kampung Baru City Centre." Skyscraper City, skyscrapercity.com

<sup>64</sup> "KUALA LUMPUR | Kampung Baru City Centre," SkyscraperCity RSS, October 18, 2015, accessed November 22, 2016, <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1859626>.

<sup>65</sup> "KUALA LUMPUR | Kampung Baru City Centre."

Arguably, the scale and manner of this intervention pays homage only to the modern fabric surrounding Kampung Baru while completely ignoring the traditional values that have sustained this neighborhood for over a century. Perhaps in the center of Kuala Lumpur where real estate is increasingly scarce and expensive the perception is that the city cannot afford to be as historically sensitive to the traditional architecture under the pressures of economic value. However, the vision projected is so far out of the current context that it can be dismissed as speculation. A much more useful proposal for Kampung Baru would be revitalization on a smaller scale that will bridge the current total disconnect between the traditional and the modern.

Kampung Baru offers a distinct opportunity to rejuvenate the existing shophouse streets in the neighborhood to create a corridor of cultural and commercial activity that will reconnect the Malay village to the rest of the city center. Malaysia has already established a model of conservation through their work in George Town in dealing with debilitated shophouses such as those that currently exist in Kampung Baru. Similarly, lessons from Singapore can be taken in how to transition between the city center and the Malay village.

This represents one of the more obvious opportunities for adaptive reuse efforts in Kuala Lumpur, there are however plenty of neighborhoods that would benefit from activation of this style that do not have existing shophouse structures. Areas with clustering of high rise apartments that stand on the fringes of Kuala Lumpur in the interstitial areas between Petaling Jaya and Klang Valley could become more of a community through the addition of smaller human scaled interventions. This scenario creates the opportunity for new shophouse schemes to be introduced in Malaysia. Without the restrictions imposed by existing structures and conservation regulations the shophouse can be re-imagined as a relevant typology for the 21st century.

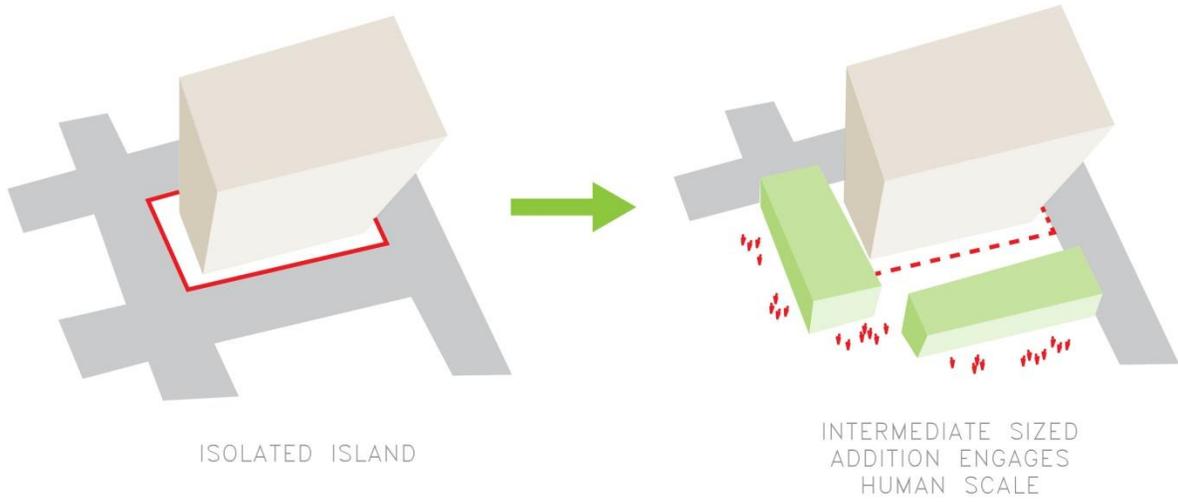


FIGURE 30. New shophouses in high rise context.  
Image by author.

## CONCLUSION

"[We must] move away from our late-nineteenth and early twentieth century view of the city in terms of production of goods to seeing cities as centers of experience, lifestyle, amenities, and entertainment."<sup>66</sup>

As development of Kuala Lumpur is considered, attention should be allotted to creating social space as well as infrastructure and the quality of life that is created. As urban centers accumulate more and more people, the need for high density is unavoidable. By 2050 it has been predicted that 70% of the population will live in cities.

The eclectic small scaled Malaysian shophouse would seem impractical in the face of these numbers. However, as a precedent for mixed-use development that has been cultivated within the context of Malaysia itself, the shophouse offers density on a human scale through horizontal compactness and creates a human core to the city. Shophouse corridors are a sustainable model for neighborhoods that thrive and adapt to social needs and create cultural centers. To counter balance, the impassive character of the sky scraper city and the isolationist effects of the suburbs, the benefits to creating cities where people enjoy living are not always obvious, but they have definitive social, economic and cultural impacts.

The shophouse developed as a vernacular that reflected practical as well as cultural changes from 1790 until the 1960s. The progression of this typology was abandoned in the wake of World War II and the sweeping changes brought through Independence, however as Malaysia searches for their own unique urban identity reviving the creative evolution of the shophouse is a compelling prospect. Rather than the grand aspirations of creating a national architecture through the careful manipulations of the Architect, the design offered by the shophouse is much more modest and organically driven. The average Malaysian will never effect the design of a multi-billion-dollar skyscraper, but the humble shophouse is both accessible and easy to adapt. Thus it creates communities that are both diverse

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<sup>66</sup> Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*, 359.

and flexible. With the pressure to create grandiose carefully composed design relieved, the shophouse character and occupation is limited only to the occupants' imagination.

The basic framework of the shophouse can be easily constructed, the physical architecture is so closely related to the row house that is so prominent in the urban fabric of Malaysia. What makes the shophouse particularly appealing in terms of cultural and artistic development is the freedom offered by how it may be occupied and the ability to personalize the facade. Through this, the development of Malaysia's architectural design can be organically driven by the occupants.

## IMAGE SOURCES

**Figure 3.** "Evolution of the Chinese Shophouse on the Malay Peninsula (Is It Sustainable in a Contemporary World?)," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements* 142 (2002): 68.

**Figure 9.** *Asia's old dwellings: tradition, resilience, and change*. 133.

**Figure 10.** (top image) *Chinese houses of Southeast Asia: the eclectic architecture of sojourners and settlers*. 42.

**Figure 11.** (bottom right image) *Penang: Through Gilded Doors*. 100.

**Figure 18.** "Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca." UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>.

**Figure 19.** "Evolution of the Chinese Shophouse on the Malay Peninsula (Is It Sustainable in a Contemporary World?)," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements* 142 (2002): 70.

**Figure 21.** "The Evolving Urban Form: Kuala Lumpur." Newgeography.com. December 01, 2013. <http://www.newgeography.com/content/003395-the-evolving-urban-form-kuala-lumpur>.

**Figure 22.** "Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 : Urban Design and Landscape." Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 : Urban Design and Landscape. [http://www.dbkl.gov.my/pskl2020/english/urban\\_design\\_and\\_landscape/index.htm](http://www.dbkl.gov.my/pskl2020/english/urban_design_and_landscape/index.htm).

**Figure 25.** "Developers of Affordable Housing May Ride Downturn Better," Malaysia Property, Find Properties for Sale and Rent, July 7, 2016, <http://www.theedgeproperty.com.my/my/content/772848/developers-affordable-housing-may-ride-downturn-better>.

**Figure 29.** (left image) "Beyond the Melting Pot," The New York Times, 2011, <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/16/beyond-the-melting-pot/>.

**Figure 29.** (right image) "KUALA LUMPUR | Kampung Baru City Centre." Skyscraper City RSS. October 18, 2015. <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1859626>.

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