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A morphological study of traditional shophouse in China and Southeast Asia

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Abstract

From the rise of Maritime Silk Road to nowadays, with the globalizational impacts from economic, cultural, political, technological and other aspects, the evolutionary process of urban housing in China and Southeast Asia has been presenting a diversified and hybrid tendency. While at the same time, it is difficult to recognize the commonness and individuality between local and foreign culture during the process of cultural fusion. To awaken regional identities and assimilate foreign advanced civilizations, this paper traces to the ancient time - Maritime Silk Road. Based on the influence of the “Road”, through morphology and culturology analysis, traditional shophouses in different Chinese and Southeast Asian areas are studied. Focusing on three different levels including “urban”, “street” and “building”, some basic “prototypes” are summed up and analyzed in macro-perspective. Furthermore, three typical types of shophouse in different commercial cities are selected to do comparative study. All of the cities have been profoundly influenced by Maritime Silk Road in the past time, including Quanzhou, Guangzhou, and Malacca. By describing the spatial forms and tectonic modes of these cases, the regional, epochal and cultural characters expressed by shophouse are expounded. Meanwhile the cultural exchange and interaction on Maritime Silk Road reflected by traditional shophouse is demonstrated in this paper.

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1. Introduction

With the development of global trade and cultural communication, both China and Southeast Asia reserve relatively abundant and diversified civilizations. Urban or architectural forms in these two regions, which are considered as the cultural physical or material carrier, can manifest cultural change through historical periods. They should, at the same time, possess the dual functions of both regional inheritance and epochal characters.

In remote antiquity, communication among different regions in the world was slow, even stagnant, because of the technical restriction. After the advent of Silk Road through Asian regions, as well as the Age of Discovery which was a historical period of European exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries, global movement was expanded significantly (O'Rourke and Williamson, 2002). However, from the early 19th century, with the development of industrialization and informatization, modern transportation and electronic communication weaken the cultural boundary of regions and times all over the world, along with a gradual loss of urban or architectural characteristics. The questions of how to choose between local identity and international interference and how to mediate between regional diversity and globalization become very urgent in 21st century (Tzonis, 2003). In reaction to the crisis, it is necessary to rethink architecture from the past era of the initial globalization - "Silk Road" which also brought Asian countries commercial and cultural exchange, but with more moderate and ecological architectural influence. To inherit regional traditions, while at the same time assimilate foreign advanced experience, can be viewed as the further processes of both Chinese and Southeast Asian Architecture.

"Silk Road", deriving its name from the lucrative Chinese silk trade, is a series of trade and cultural transmission routes through regions of Asian continent connecting the West and East during various periods of time (Elisseeff, 2001). By and large, the routes can be divided into two types which are Overland Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road. Overland Silk Road originated in the 1st century BC around the Chinese Han Dynasty. In the middle of the Tang Dynasty, with the main emphasis of Silk Road gradually turning from the land to the sea, Maritime Silk Road, especially the part of South China Sea Silk Road experienced accelerated growth (Chen, 1996). The maritime routes were changing all the time throughout historical periods. In the Chinese Tang Dynasty, the route from China to Arabia started in Guangzhou, via Vietnamese waters, Strait of Malacca, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to Basra. With the thriving overseas trade in the Song and Yuan Dynasty, the sailing scope was expanded and many other routes were developed. One representative line was from Quanzhou to Persia, via Java, Bay of Bengal and South Asian Subcontinent (Wen, 1987). Because of Zheng He's seven voyages to the Western Seas, Maritime Silk Road peaked in the Ming Dynasty. The Southeast Asian countries that had been visited by Zheng He include Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, etc. Besides official navigation, private trading on sea was also very flourishing in this period. In 16th to 19th century, with the colonial rule of European countries and the impact of modern civilization, the maritime rights were gradually turned over to European Countries. Although affected by colonization, the coastal trade among Asian countries was not interrupted, which can be regarded as "Modern Maritime Silk Road" (Chen, 1996). In a broad sense, Maritime Silk Road persists even today, and has become a symbol that is central to commercial and cultural interaction among Asian Continents.

China and Southeast Asia were closely connected by Maritime Silk Road in different historical periods. The navigation brought them not only material wealth but also cultural fusion. Along the Road, these two regions realized cultural exchange with each other, and in the meantime absorbing outstanding civilizations from ancient Indian and Arab regions. In the following colonial period, both China and Southeast Asia experienced struggle, emulate and integration between vernacular and foreign cultures in varying degrees, thus forming their own specific hybrid and symbiotic cultural characteristics. From a perspective of structuralist, the changing process rather than products, can be viewed as a laying of various cultural influxes into the local culture by the evolution of transplantation, adaptation, accommodation and hybridization or fusion (Widodo, 2004).

In the previous study of Asian architecture on Maritime Silk Road, most scholars paid attention to public architecture, thereby neglecting the evolution of housing in this context. Houses, which are different from large public buildings such as monuments, temples or palaces, play a more important role in people's daily life and usually contain their spirit or 'soul'. As cultural carriers which can express the symbols, values and principles of human civilizations, the large number and variety of houses provide not only residential areas but also social space (Waterson, 1990). In other words, traditional houses have more potential to reflect cultural phenomenon on the

Road. Therefore, this article tries to connect housing forms on Maritime Silk Road to their cultural identities and social implications. Furthermore, most previous research used countries as research units to identify Asian traditional houses, while the relationship between different regions was ignored. Just as there is no border for culture, the changes of lifestyle and aesthetic caused by transmission make housing in different regions inherently related. This paper uses “Maritime Silk Road” as a main line to concatenate China and Southeast Asia, hence, the impact of global interaction on Architecture will be analyzed more clearly. This can provide a new angle for the explanation of Asian dwellings, as well as a more comprehensive approach towards the research of traditional culture in these regions.

2. Morphological analysis of typical shophouse in China and Southeast Asia

2.1. The Selection of Research Object – Shophouse

The generation or development of housing forms depends on two kinds of driving factors - natural factors and cultural factors. These factors, both cultural and natural, which are the motivation of architectural forming, play a decisive role in this whole process (Rapoport, 1969)). Natural factors, which can be viewed as the physical basis of form generation, are easy to be perceived and utilized, such as geographical and climatic conditions, materials, etc. On the contrary, cultural factors are the main reasons of housing forms’ development. They are always imperceptible and invisible, like national customs, religions and lifestyles. The interaction and synergy of these two kinds of driving factors brings us myriad forms of houses.

In time immemorial, people depended on the self-sufficient pattern of simple production and exchanges, thus the construction of their residence had to be confined to local conditions. Through a long time of accumulation and inheritance, a wide variety of distinctive houses in Asian continent were given birth, which can be perceived as of the products with local cultural identities. In this condition, the driving factors of house forms, no matter natural or cultural factors can be totally regarded as local ones. However, in the transformation process from obeying nature to conquering nature, people gradually explored the world and changed their production patterns and lifestyles. After the rise of “Silk Road”, especially “Maritime Silk Road”, the former sealed condition of the Asian continent was broken. The navigation brought China and Southeast Asia not only material wealth but also cultural fusion. A series of commercial and cultural phenomenon, which was affecting and promoting the development of architecture in these regions, was continuously produced by the “Road”, including trade exchange, communication of religions and culture, immigration, colonial occupation, etc. While among all kinds of traditional houses, the initial carrier that can reflect the trade and cultural exchanges on Maritime Silk Road should be one kind of traditional houses with commercial function, which are called “shophouse” in Asia.

Features of a Shophouse “Southern Chinese” Eclectic Style

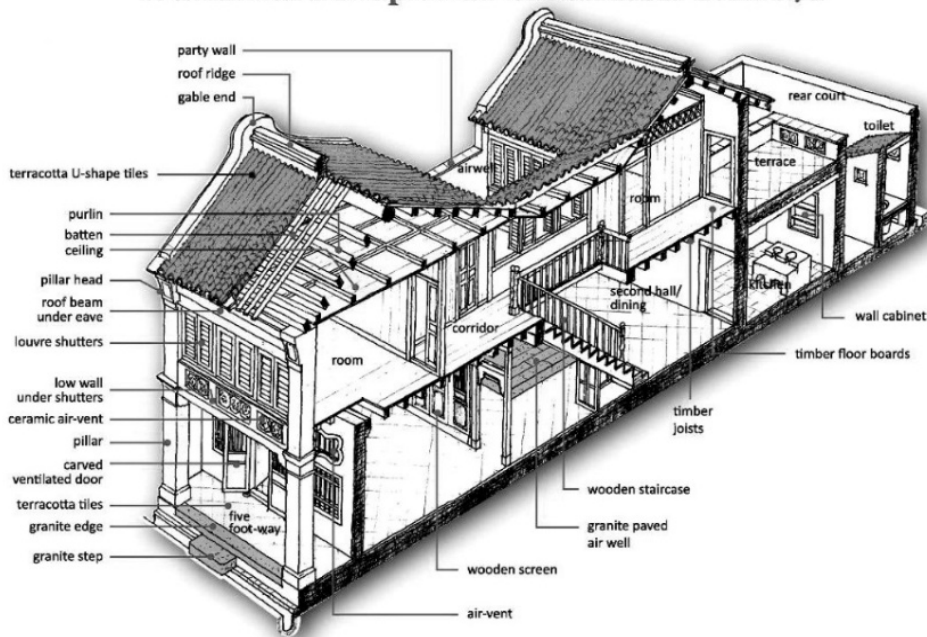


Fig. 1. A typical shophouse in Penang, Malaysia. Source: <http://penangshophouse.blogspot.hk/>

This kind of buildings can be found in most Chinese and Southeast Asian areas, especially in those commercial cities with hybrid culture. Both shop space and dwellings are contained in this “mixed-use” structure, and both commerce on streets and living style in houses are well arranged here. Shophouses can be viewed as the interactional product of economic and building relationships (Davis, 2012). The economy of China under the Song Dynasty (960–1279) was marked by commercial expansion and flourishing maritime trade. The earliest Chinese shophouses appeared during this period, because of the emergence of new commercial pattern and the breakage of Li-fang unit system (Tan, 2008). These buildings, in which the families that ran the shop lived upstairs or in the back, were originally variations of local dwelling houses, with the rooms along streets transformed into stores (Chen, 2000).

Therefore, these houses, possessing the function of shops at the same time, can be regarded as the result of transformation of people’s lifestyles and specialization of social division. Because of the significant cultural and commercial impact taken by navigation movement, this building type has more potential to demonstrate the process of transplantation, adaptation and hybridization on the “Road”. Shophouse, in this paper, refers to the Asian historic “mixed-use” building consisting of dwellings and retail space in one structure. It is actually one kind of traditional house, which originates from local dwelling and still keeps most of architectural vocabularies of a normal house. In other words, there is no qualitative change between a normal house and a shophouse. While the main distinction between the two, is reflected in the moderate adjustment of space, form or components, according to the functional and behavioral requirements. By these appropriate changes, the contradiction between the new trade mode and the original living pattern can be relieved.

To awaken regional identities and explore better modes of cultural fusion, this paper traces to the ancient time of Maritime Silk Road. Traditional shophouses in different Chinese and Southeast Asian areas are studies through morphology and culturology analysis. Focusing on three different levels including “urban settlement”, “street” and “building”, some basic “prototypes” are found out. Furthermore, by comparative analysis of shophouse in the three commercial cities which have been profoundly influenced by the “Road”, including Quanzhou, Guangzhou and Malacca, the spatial forms and tectonic modes of these shophouses can be expounded.

2.2. Basic Prototypes of Shophouse in China and Southeast Asia

In macro-perspective, from three different levels including “urban”, “street” and “building”, some basic “prototypes” of shophouse are summed up and analyzed. Just as mentioned above, the formational causes of the prototypes are also decided by both natural factors, such as geographical or climatic conditions, and cultural factors including politics, legislations, religions, customs, etc.

Urban Prototypes:

In China and Southeast Asia, according to pattern of streets and repetitive position of shophouses, the prototypes from the urban level can be divided into the following categories:

a. Banded Type

In this kind of urban settlements, buildings are lined up, with their shop areas facing the street. Shophouses are neatly organized in one row or some parallel rows. This arrangement is usually a result of the restriction of original environment or planning requirement, with strong spatial sequences and convenient traffic condition. In this kind of settlements, streets can be either straight or curved.



Fig. 2. Banded type of urban prototype, Singapore
Source: Firley and Stahl, 2009



Fig. 3. Shophouses, Singapore

b. Tree Type

This type of settlements is developed on the basis of Banded Type. A structure of tree means the trunk and branches are coexisting in one settlement. The trunk stands for the main commercial street that is always open and spacious. On the contrary, branches symbolize other subordinate commercial streets which are relatively narrow and varied. These subordinate streets are always perpendicular or angled to the main one. Unlike the banded one, the traffic here is more crowded, especially on the intersections of the trunk and branches.



Fig. 4. Tree type of urban prototype, Penang redrawn based on Fels, 1994



Fig. 5. Shophouses, Penang
Source:<http://hellotalalay.blogspot.hk/2011/11/shophouses-of-penang.html>

c. Enclosed Type

In accordance with the network of streets, shophouses are divided into different enclosed groups. In this kind of settlements, commercial and residential entries are located separately. The commercial entrance usually faces the main streets with shops ranged along the group outline. While the internal transportation of each group depends on the inside network of narrow lanes, which can be used as residential routes. This enclosed arrangement can provide wholeness for urban settlements.

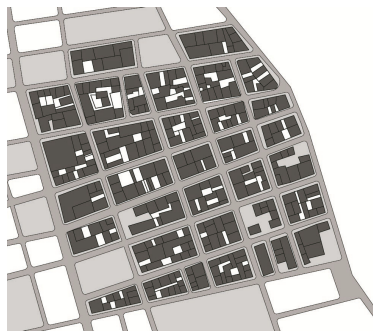


Fig. 6. Enclosed type of urban prototype, Phnom Penh



Fig. 7. Shophouses, Phnom Penh
Source:Weinberger, 2010

d. Compounded Type

Settlements in this category are more complicated than the upper ones. Sometimes, two or three of the upper types are contained in one settlement simultaneously. According to different surroundings and planning requirements, two or three types are combined organically to reflect their own spatial characteristics. Thus, the diversity of urban settlement can be fully embodied. Most of urban settlements with shophouses in Asia belong to this type.

Street Prototypes:

From the level of “street”, the prototypes can be classified into two types: double-sided streets and single-sided streets, according with the relative position of streets and building facade. A double-sided street refers to the street which owns commercial interface on both sides of it. On the contrary, a single-sided street only has commercial interface on one side. The other side has no commercial function. As an element which can connect streets with houses, or in other words, connect external commercial space to internal living space, this commercial interface plays an important role in the spatial construction of traditional shophouses. Besides, they can be viewed as the embodiment of cultural fusion. By and large, a commercial interface consists of three parts including roof, façade and ground.

Building Prototypes:

Although there are many different types of shophouse in Asia, their plans are usually determined by two main functions which are commercial function and living function. Here, the shop with commercial function is evolved from “a hall” in the front part of a house and can be changed according to different street conditions. In both China and Southeast Asia, the business model of early traditional shophouse was an independent operation, taking each household as one basic unit. The plan of this building type contains hall (shop), bedroom, kitchen, store room, courtyard, shrine or ancestral hall, etc. Because of the requirement of mixed function, shophouses finally formed their plan into narrow-long shape with their length several times their width. The most common unit plan is in single-bay or double-bay. In a smaller shophouse, there is usually no or only one courtyard inside. While a bigger shophouse which can have several courtyards possesses great internal space. Some shophouses are one-story buildings in which people live behind. Others are two-story or three-story buildings in which people live above.

3. Case study: three typical types of shophouse

From the Chinese Tang dynasty, Maritime Silk Road strengthened the contact between China and Southeast Asia and raised a series of commercial and cultural phenomenon accordingly. With South Chinese immigrants settling in the coastal areas of Southeast Asia throughout different historical periods, many Chinese building types, including vernacular shophouse in South China, were also brought to the new locations. Combining with local natural and cultural conditions, these buildings gradually evolved and formed their own characteristics. Around the 16th century, because of the arrival of western colonists, shophouses in coastal trading cities of Southeast Asia became unique buildings that can be regarded as a mixture with western, local and South Chinese styles. In the beginning of 20th century, with the original shophouses no longer adapt the new residential and commercial requirement in China, some building types were spread back to Chinese coastal cities from Southeast Asia by Overseas Chinese (Ling, 2001). From this process of transmission, it is clear that cultural exchange and interaction along Maritime Silk Road, no matter in ancient or modern periods, are always affecting the architectural evolution in these regions.

In this section, three typical types of shophouse in three commercial cities are selected to do comparative study, including Shoujinliao (Zonary Bungalow) in Quanzhou, Rowhouse in Malacca and Qilou (Arcade-house) in Guangzhou. In the past time, all of these cities were profoundly influenced by Maritime Silk Road. To get a better understanding of the cultural fusion between these cities, first, it is necessary to give a brief introduction about their historical background.

3.1. Historical background of three cities

Quanzhou is currently the largest city of Fujian Province. In the history, the city played a very important role on Maritime Silk Road. It began to become a seaport in Wei Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties and peaked during the Yuan Dynasty as one of the largest ports in the world. The representative line from Quanzhou to

Persia, via Java, Bay of Bengal and South Asian Subcontinent closely connected these different Asian regions. After the most glorious time, the maritime status of Quanzhou began to be gradually taken place by other seaports in China. Because of its special reputation, Quanzhou was dubbed the starting point of Maritime Silk Road (Chen, 1996). Due to the maritime trade, this city can be regarded as a cultural melting pot which is filled with hybrid cultures during different historical periods. Besides, the phenomenon of immigration in Quanzhou was very obvious in history, which can be viewed as a result of the active maritime trade. The ancestral home of nearly 6 million overseas Chinese people in Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore or the Philippines, are Quanzhou.

Malacca city is a historical city in the southern part of Malay Peninsula, well known as its unique historical status. It is also the capital city of Malacca State – “The Historic State” of Malaysia. The city, which was a fishing village occupied by local Malays in the past, was founded as a port city by Parameswara who was a prince of Palembang in 1400s. After the establishment of this city, with its location next to the Malacca Straits, Malacca became a famous and wealthy trading seaport which can connect China to India and Arab regions, especially after the seven times’ visit by Zheng He in the 15th century. After the arrival of Portuguese in 1511, Dutch in 1641, and British in 1786, Malacca was colonized by western countries for more than 400 years (Winstedt, 1962). With a long urban history, this city has experienced the fusion process of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Arab and other western cultures.

Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong province. In different historical periods, this city was serving as an important trading port not only in China but all over the world. Guangzhou began to establish its status as an important port for the earliest Maritime Silk Road in the Chinese Han Dynasty, about a couple of thousand years ago. It is proved that this city, the ancient Panyu, is the birthplace of Maritime Silk Road. In the Chinese Tang Dynasty, among the six regular sea routes, the one starting from Guangzhou to the East Coast of Africa is the most important and famous one. From the Yuan Dynasty to Ming Dynasty, there were more and more new routes added, connecting Guangzhou to more coastal areas of Asia. In the year 1757, Guangzhou became the only Chinese port which was opened to foreign countries, because of the maritime embargo given by the Qing Dynasty government. Its prosperity of sea trading is continued until today (Chen, 1996). During the trading process of Maritime Silk Road, Guangzhou becomes the front line of cultural communication between China and other countries in the world.

3.2. Comparative Study of Three Typical Types of Shophouse

Shoujinliao (Zonary Bungalow), which is one kind of typical traditional dwelling in south Fujian, appeared during the late Chinese Ming Dynasty. It can be viewed as one prototype of shophouse in Asian countries. Buildings of this type, narrow in width and long in depth, are also very common in other areas of South China. For instance, the traditional dwellings named Zhugancuo in Zhangzhou and Bamboo Tube House in Guangzhou all belong to this category. Rowhouse in Malacca is one type of shophouse that usually lived by ordinary Chinese immigrants. The first Rowhouses in Malacca were developed by the Dutch in the 18th century, mainly on Heeren Street (Baroldin, 2012). The style of a Rowhouse is a mixture of western, local and South Chinese traditions. This typology of dwellings is very common in the old core of coastal areas of Southeast Asia (Widodo, 2004). In the city of Guangzhou, Qilou is a typical type of shophouse which appeared in the beginning of the 20th century. This kind of building, which can be seen as an import from Southeast Asia, combines the two types of both vernacular Chinese shophouse and western colonial verandah building.

a. Urban Spatial Layout

The urban spatial layout of Shoujinliao in Quanzhou inherits the organization mode of Chinese traditional courtyard. There is obvious regularity in the urban plan: Each building is symmetrically organized with an axis which goes across several internal courtyards. This mode can be viewed as a basic prototype unit of Shoujinliao building. The units are closely placed side by side, with their roofs and cornices linked together. The whole settlement which belongs to Compounded Type is developed horizontal, using the streets as boundaries. Because of local climatic conditions, there is no district requirement for building orientation. The very dense layout can avoid direct sunlight. Both the streets and courtyards inside can provide natural light and ventilation. In South China, this kind of low-rise high density dwelling has broad adaptability.



Fig. 8. Aerial view of shoujinliao settlements, Quanzhou
Source: <http://news.foryoo.cn/a/201308/gn262343.shtml>

Rowhouses in Malacca are deeply affected by western traditions, especially the Dutch and the Portuguese one. Compared with Chinese Shoujinliao, this shop kind of shophouse places more emphasis on vertical development. Most of the Rowhouses are two-story buildings with a small courtyard inside. Sometimes, the internal courtyard is omitted, making the building depth relative shorter. Different buildings are connected by party walls shared with their neighbouring units. The urban spatial layout of these buildings in Malacca is similar with Shoujinliao in Quanzhou which belongs to Compounded Type. The site is divided by both the main streets and subordinate streets, with buildings arranged on both sides of them.

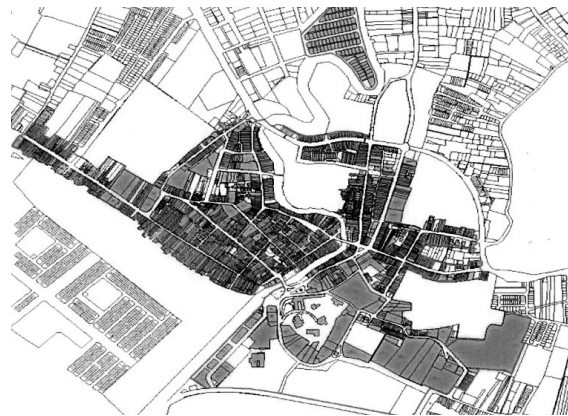


Fig. 9. The core and buffer zones with shophouses, Malacca
Source: Weebers, 2012

Because of the historical urban development, the urban spatial layout of Qilou in Guangzhou shows its clear characteristics. In the whole city, more Qilou buildings distribute in the western areas and less in the eastern part. Based on the East-west main streets, the spatial urban layout of Qilou is developed as banding forms.

b. Street Interface

According to different natural and cultural factors, the types of street interface in these three cities derive their own features in the evolutionary process. As an important element which can connect external commercial space to internal living space, commercial interface play an important role in the spatial construction of traditional shophouse. The differences of these three types are manifested in several aspects:

- Height of Street Interface

Shoujinliao buildings in Quanzhou can be viewed as a typological transformation of Siheyuan which is a

type of the most famous courtyard house in China. Therefore, most Shoujinliao are single-story, partially two-story buildings, emphasizing the horizontal development of spatial organization by Chinese traditional courtyards. While in Guangzhou, Malacca or other Southeast Asian cities, shophouses are developed vertically and become buildings with two or more stories.



Fig. 10. Street interface of shoujinliao, Quanzhou

Source: <http://www.yododo.com/photo/012d046856996e30ff8080812d003dfe>



Fig .11. Street interface of rowhouses, Malacca

Source: Firley and Stahl, 2009



Fig. 12. Street interface of qilou, Guangzhou

Source: http://dp.pconline.com.cn/dphoto/list_2081495.html

- **Decoration of Street Interface**

Shoujinliao buildings in Quanzhou have retained abundant of Chinese traditions in their interfacial decoration, from the parts of roof, façade and ground. Local characters can be reflected on the shape, material and pattern of the commercial interface. On the contrary, Qilou buildings in Guangzhou have been largely affected by early modern European Architecture. Focusing on the decoration of parapet, window, balcony, portico, etc., their facades along streets are filled with western elements. Different from other regional buildings, Qilou is a symbol of cultural transmission which has crossed several regionals. In other words, both Qilou building and Qilou cultural streets in Guangzhou can be viewed products of the cultural fusion. While most Rowhouses in Malacca balance the Chinese traditions with European Mediterranean styles by an eclecticism method. For instance, a Chinese roof is always combined with European façade, and a dome or a flat roof is sometimes used to connect a Chinese body.

- **Integrity and Diversity of Street Interface**

In the design of street interface, both individuality of each shophouse and the integrity of the whole street should be considered. In Quanzhou, the one-story buildings – Shoujinliao, are linked together by their roofs

side-by-side, with the continuous development along streets. For this kind of shophouse, the commercial interface usually has the characteristics of both ductility and directivity. However in Malacca, each Rowhouse along street always has its own building height and façade decoration. In this condition, the individuality of each building is emphasized and the continuity of street is weakened. To synthesize these two conditions, some Qilou buildings in Guangzhou use uniform colonnades on the first floor to reflect ductility and directivity of street commercial interface. At the same time, different decorations are adopted on the second or above floors and that can provide the whole street interface diversity and variability.

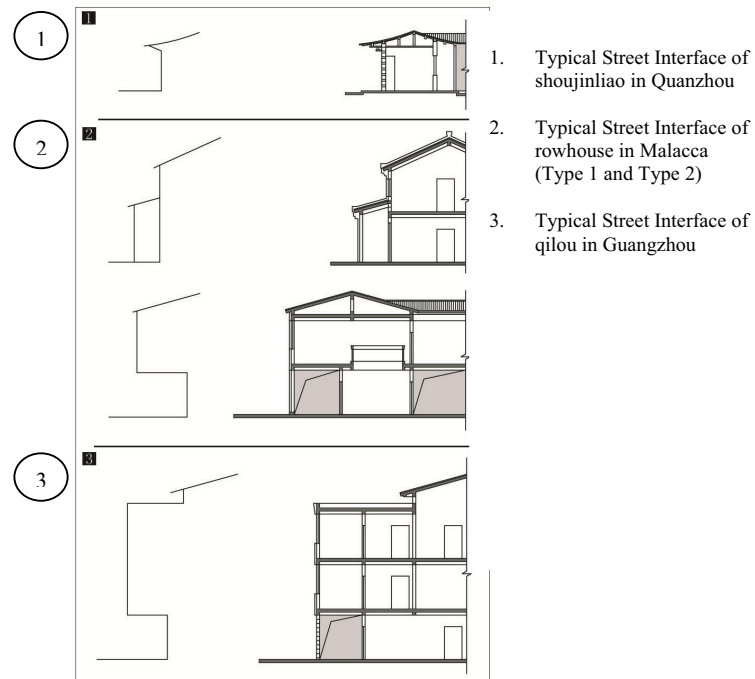


Fig. 13. Typical street interface of shophouses in the three cities

c. Building Spatial Organization

The spatial organization of a Shoujinliao building can be viewed one typical type in most Asian areas. In fact, the building is one kind of Chinese courtyard dwellings with its internal spatial organization following Chinese traditional ethical code. The plane shape, narrow in width and long in depth, is also very common in other areas of southern China, as well as some Southeast Asian countries. In each building, space is symmetrically organized with an axis which goes across an internal courtyard. All of rooms in Shoujinliao are connected by a straight corridor extending through the whole depth of the house. In early times, the corridor was designed into a linear shape in order to provide convenience for the goods' transportation. However, with sight unimpeded, the privacy of the whole family was always affected. To deal with this problem, the later type of Shoujinliao was improved by arranging the corridor in polylines. This change can enhance the privacy, as well as add some variations to the internal space.

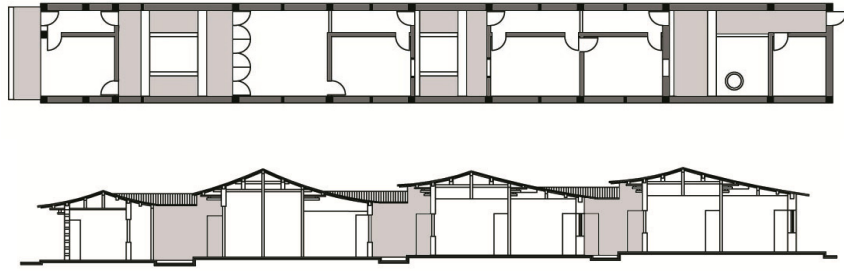


Fig. 14. The plan and section of shoujinliao building, Quanzhou

Rowhouses in Malacca are two-story or three-story buildings with a courtyard inside. It can be said that these buildings in Malacca is a mixture of South Chinese construction methods, Dutch tradition of efficient land division and local style. (Firley and Stahl, 2009) In the front part of the building, there is always a shop, living space and a storeroom. The functions of cooking, toilet and bathing are arranged in the courtyard. The back part behind the courtyard is usually used as service space. From the plane arrangement, both the features of Chinese courtyard dwelling and the styles of Dutch Bungalow can be found out (Widodo, 2004).

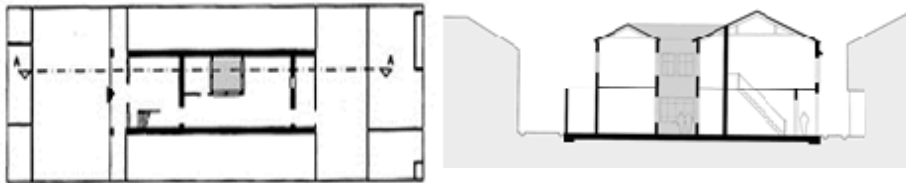


Fig. 15. The plan and section of rowhouses, Malacca
Source: Firley and Stahl, 2009

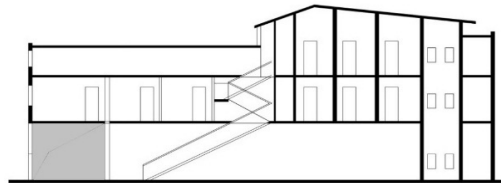


Fig. 16. The plan and section of oilou, Guangzhou
Source: Yang, 2011

4. Conclusion

From the morphology and culturology analysis of shophouse in China and Southeast Asia, some conclusions can be drawn as following:

Firstly, most of the Chinese vernacular shophouses are developed on the basis of traditional courtyard dwellings, following Chinese traditional ethical code. The urban form is always developed horizontally, with roofs and cornices of the houses linked together. The street interface usually emphasizes its ductility and directivity. The shophouses are one-story, partially two-story buildings, with their internal space connected by courtyards or

corridors. In the past time, Chinese immigrants gradually brought this building type to the coastal areas of Southeast Asia along Maritime Silk Road.

Secondly, Southeast Asia is deeply affected by western colonial culture. Early shophouses in this region have more European Mediterranean features. These shophouses which are buildings with two or more stories place more emphasis on vertical development. The street interface presents more diversity and variability. These unique buildings can be regarded as a mixture with western, local and South Chinese styles.

Thirdly, the immigration phenomenon along Maritime Silk Road, no matter in ancient or modern periods, realizes cultural exchange and interaction. With the increased population and rapid urban development after 18th century, it was hard for the original Chinese shophouse to adapt the new residential and commercial requirements. Therefore, some new building types were spread back to Chinese coastal cities from Southeast Asia, thus forming Qilou which is the shophouse with better adaptability.

Therefore, in the evolution process of Architecture, the basic cultural characteristics are always reflected from two aspects including regional identity and blending adaptability. The regional identity always provides respect and insistence for local culture. While at the same time, their blending adaptability can play important role when other cultures are brought into the local one, thereby making the cultural fusion more effective and appropriate. Nowadays, with the rapid development of globalization, a better understanding of the cultural phenomenon caused by Maritime Silk Road has profound significance to the Modern Architecture.

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