

THE ROLES OF CULTURAL SPACES CHARACTERISING THE IDENTITY OF
HISTORIC TOWNS IN MALAYSIA

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To my beloved father, mother, twin sister and siblings.

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ABSTRACT

Culture is the widespread substances to delineate people's thinking, performing, and the practice of way of life, custom, event and festival inherit from one generation to another. Consequently, people interactions within the spatial entity by accomplish cultural activity to establish the cultural space. Cultural spaces are constituted by the physical and social attributes to amalgamate with individual perceptual in perceiving the cultural phenomenon and the place's meanings to express the identity of a place. However, the alteration of space significant, function, and the physical transformation in the historic town ultimately caused to the lost of identity or 'placelessness'. Thus, this research examined and assessed the roles of cultural spaces that characterising the identity of historic towns in Malaysia. Case study method is selected by the supporting of literature reviews, site inventory, site observation and the questionnaire survey (n=60) to investigate the main physical and social attributes and peoples' viewpoints of the cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping. Both historic towns are selected accordance to the rich historical backgrounds, significance of socio cultural and economic vitalities. The main findings revealed the cultural spaces are depend on site historical background, socio-cultural activity, spatial pattern, legibility on visual and accessibility, the architectural form and historical structures to create the varieties of cultural spaces in historic towns. Subsequently, the study has identified interpreted of cultural spaces with the prominent socio-cultural and socio economic factors impetus to the placemaking for trading, social interactions, recreational and workplace which to enliven communal lifestyles and fulfil people needs. Eventually, the indication of the most significant cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping embraced the marketplaces, waterfronts, and Lake Gardens are imposed by the sense of place, space characters and activity experiences in assigning the identity to each historic town. In sum, the cultural spaces are important for people to conduct the way of life as well as to strengthen the urban fabrics, heritage and cultural identities of historic towns.

ABSTRAK

Budaya merupakan asas yang luas bagi menggambarkan pemikiran manusia, pelaksanaan, amalan cara hidup, adat, upacara, dan perayaan yang diwarisi dari satu generasi ke generasi seterusnya. Sehubungannya itu, orang yang berinteraksi dalam entiti ruangan dan aktiviti kebudayaan telah mewujudkan ruangan budaya. Ruangan ini terbentuk hasil daripada atribut-atribut fizikal dan sosial serta gabungan persepsi individu yang mengamati fenomena budaya dan makna setempat bagi mengekspresi identiti setempat. Walau bagaimanapun, perubahan kepentingan ruang yang ketara, fungsi, dan transformasi fizikal bandar bersejarah telah menyebabkan kehilangan identiti setempat atau *placelessness*. Oleh itu, kajian ini meneliti dan menilai peranan ruangan budaya yang mencirikan identiti bandar-bandar bersejarah di Malaysia. Kaedah kajian kes yang dipilih disokong oleh ulasan kepustakaan, inventori, pemerhatian tapak dan tinjauan soal selidik (n=60) untuk mengkaji atribut-atribut utama fizikal dan sosial pandangan orang ramai mengenai ruangan budaya di Kuala Dungun dan Taiping. Kedua-dua bandar bersejarah ini dipilih berdasarkan latar belakang yang kaya dengan sejarah, kepentingan sosio-kebudayaan, dan vitaliti ekonomi. Penemuan utama menunjukkan ruangan budaya adalah bergantung kepada latar belakang sejarah, aktiviti sosio-budaya, corak ruang, kebolehbacaan pada visual dan akses, bentuk senibina dan struktur sejarah untuk membentuk kepelbagaian ruangan budaya di bandar-bandar bersejarah. Seterusnya, kajian ini telah mengenal pasti penafsiran faktor-faktor sosio-budaya dan sosio-ekonomi yang ketara mendorong *placemaking* untuk aktiviti perdagangan, interaksi sosial, rekreasi, dan tempat kerja yang memeriahkan gaya hidup masyarakat dan memenuhi keperluan orang ramai. Sesudahnya, petunjuk ruangan budaya yang signifikan di tempat kajian merangkumi pasar, persisiran air, dan Taman Tasik yang diperkukuhkan oleh *sense of place*, ciri-ciri ruangan, dan pengalaman aktiviti yang memberi identiti kepada setiap bandar bersejarah. Ringkasnya, ruangan budaya adalah penting bagi orang ramai untuk mengendali cara hidup dan mengukuhkan fabrik bandar, warisan, serta identiti budaya bandar-bandar bersejarah.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | TITLE | PAGE |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| | DECLARATION | ii |
| | DEDICATION | iii |
| | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| | ABSTRACT | v |
| | ABSTRAK | vi |
| | TABLE OF CONTENTS | vii |
| | LIST OF TABLES | x |
| | LIST OF FIGURES | xi |
| | LIST OF APPENDIX | xvi |
| | | |
| 1 | INTROCUCTION | |
| | 1.1 Background of study | 1 |
| | 1.2 Problem Statement | 3 |
| | 1.3 Research Gap | 5 |
| | 1.4 Research Aims | 5 |
| | 1.5 Research Objectives | 6 |
| | 1.6 Research Questions | 6 |
| | 1.7 Scope of the Research | 6 |
| | 1.8 Limitation on the Research | 7 |
| | 1.9 Methodology of the Study | 7 |
| | 1.10 Organisation of the Dissertation | 8 |
| | | |
| 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW | |
| | 2.1 Introduction | 11 |

| | | |
|----------|--|----|
| 2.2 | Culture and Cultural Spaces | 11 |
| 2.3 | Cultural Values | 14 |
| 2.4 | Urban Spaces analogues as Cultural Spaces | 15 |
| 2.5 | People Activities in Cultural Urban Space | 18 |
| 2.6 | Components of Cultural Spaces | 21 |
| 2.6.1 | Physical and Social Attributes | 21 |
| 2.6.2.1 | Perceptual components | 22 |
| 2.6.2.2 | Sense of Place | 23 |
| 2.6.2.3 | Memory | 25 |
| 2.6.2.4 | Orientation | 25 |
| 2.6.2.5 | Perception and Cognition | 25 |
| 2.6.2.6 | Identification and imageability | 26 |
| 2.7 | Historic Town versus New Town | 27 |
| 2.8 | The Characteristics of Historic Town in Malaysia | 31 |
| 2.8.1 | Cultural attributes | 32 |
| 2.8.2 | Behaviour attributes | 33 |
| 2.8.3 | Physical attributes | 35 |
| 2.9 | The Identity of Place | 37 |
| 2.10 | Summary of Attributes Place and Cultural Spaces | 39 |
| 2.11 | Conclusion | 41 |
| 3 | CASE STUDY | |
| 3.1 | Introduction | 43 |
| 3.2 | Case Study Method | 44 |
| 3.2.1 | Review of the Literature and Past Studies | 45 |
| 3.2.2 | Site Survey and Site Observation | 45 |
| 3.2.3 | Questionnaire Survey | 46 |
| 3.2.4 | Research Variables | 47 |
| 3.3 | Criteria of selecting case study areas | 49 |
| 3.4 | Case study 1: Kuala Dungun, Terengganu | 50 |
| 3.4.1 | History background | 50 |
| 3.4.2 | Socio cultural activity | 55 |
| 3.4.3 | Spatial attributes | 57 |

| | | |
|----------|---|---------|
| 3.4.4 | Legibility: accessibility and visual characters | 61 |
| 3.4.5 | Architecture form and physical structures | 62 |
| 3.5 | Case study 2: Taiping, Perak | 64 |
| 3.5.1 | History background | 64 |
| 3.5.2 | Socio cultural activity | 69 |
| 3.5.3 | Spatial attributes | 72 |
| 3.5.4 | Legibility: accessibility and visual characters | 76 |
| 3.5.5 | Architecture form and physical structures | 78 |
| 3.6 | Conclusion | 81 |
| 4 | ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION | |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 83 |
| 4.2 | Analysis, Findings and Discussions | 84 |
| 4.2.1 | History background | 84 |
| 4.2.2 | Socio cultural activity | 89 |
| 4.2.3 | Spatial attributes | 93 |
| 4.2.4 | Legibility: accessibility and visual characters | 97 |
| 4.2.5 | Architecture form and physical structures | 98 |
| 4.2.6 | Summary of Findings | 101 |
| 4.3 | Conclusion | 104 |
| | REFERENCES | 107 |
| | Appendix A – B | 114-117 |

LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE NO. | TITLE | PAGE |
|------------------|---|-------------|
| 2.1 | Definitions of culture | 12 |
| 2.2 | Types of urban spaces similarity to cultural spaces | 15 |
| 2.3 | Categories of urban spaces | 17 |
| 2.4 | Diagram illustrates the attributes for a sense of place | 24 |
| 2.5 | Summary of the methodological approach by different authors | 40 |
| 3.1 | Types of cultural spaces and activities in Kuala Dungun | 57 |
| 3.2 | Types of cultural spaces and activities in Taiping | 71 |
| 4.1 | Types of favourable cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun | 90 |
| 4.2 | Types of favourable cultural spaces in Taiping | 91 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE NO. | TITLE | PAGE |
|------------|--|------|
| 1.1 | Research methodology flow chart | 10 |
| 2.1 | Correlation of man, space and culture indicates formation of cultural space | 13 |
| 2.2 | Diagram for Sense of Place by Steele (1981) | 24 |
| 2.3 | Diagram for Sense of Place by Jon Punter (1991) | 24 |
| 2.4 | Diagram for Place by Montgomery (1998) | 24 |
| 2.5 | The conservation zones in Georgetown, Penang (left) and Dutch Square in Melaka (right) | 29 |
| 2.6 | The scene of Buluh Kubu Market with majorities of female traders (left) and traditional kite or <i>Wau</i> handicraft making in Kelantan | 29 |
| 2.7 | The new buildings skyline (Left) and the reclaimed land at the seaside (right) are parts of new development in the Melaka historic city | 30 |
| 2.8 | The religious buildings at Jalan Tokong Melaka are clustered by Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorti Hindu Temple, Masjid Kampung Kling (left), and Cheng Hoong Teng Temple (right) | 32 |
| 2.9 | Street vendors (left and middle) and Boon Leong food hawker stall (right) at Jalan Bunga Raya, Melaka Buffer zone served as a favourable place for local foods and desserts | 34 |
| 2.10 | Petaling Street known as ‘Chinatown’ is one of the famous shopping attraction for street trading and night | 34 |

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| | market activities | |
| 2.11 | Narrow street frontages at Jalan Jawa (left) and direct view towards Masjid Kampung Hulu (right). | 36 |
| 2.12 | The place identity and its components composed from Relph (1976) | 38 |
| 3.1 | Case study and other supportive research method | 43 |
| 3.2 | Kuala Dungun is situated in between the states of Kelantan on the north, and Pahang at south of Terengganu state in Malaysia. | 50 |
| 3.3 | Aerial view towards Kuala Dungun old town from Pantai Teluk Lipat and Sungai Dungun (left). The morphological initially extended from two waterways and fishermen jetty to the interior part of old town areas (right) | 51 |
| 3.4 | The mining activities had turned Dungun district became an important port of exporting iron ore during 1940s | 52 |
| 3.5 | The scenes of railways station (left) and the mining activity at Bukit Besi (right) | 52 |
| 3.6 | The fishermen boats scenes berthed at Teluk Bidara (Seberang Pintasan) opposite to Kuala Dungun fishing jetty | 53 |
| 3.7 | The outlooks of historical street at Jalan Tambun during the past and present | 53 |
| 3.8 | Sura Jetty or 'Tiang Opal' Jetty (left) and the leftover patch of old structure jetty (right) | 54 |
| 3.9 | The land use pattern in Kuala Dungun | 55 |
| 3.10 | Fisherman is repaired a resting hut nearby the riverfront (left) and children playing during low tide at Sungai Dungun | 56 |
| 3.11 | Vendors are selling foods at Dungun wet market (left) and coffee shop at the old shophouses neighbourhood was a meeting place during leisure time | 56 |
| 3.12 | The cultural spaces allocation in Kuala Dungun historic town | 58 |

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 3.13 | The merchandises activities at Dungun wet market (left) and fishermen boat berthed at the jetty of Sungai Dungun (right) | 59 |
| 3.14 | The extension of informal market at the nearby open spaces are utilised the shaded trees and open space to operate their business | 59 |
| 3.15 | The open view at Padang Astaka is permeable for people to access Kuala Dungun old town | 60 |
| 3.16 | The pocket spaces are located near to shophouses used as parking lot at Jalan Tambun (left) and the back lanes or alley of shophouses is only for private uses (right) | 60 |
| 3.17 | The pedestrian walkway and landscape elements in Jalan Tambun are provided to support pedestrian uses (left) and scenic drive with lookouts at Pantai Teluk Lipat (right) | 62 |
| 3.18 | The old shophouses have characterised the urban fabrics of Kuala Dungun (left) and the dilapidated shophouses was one of the factor that due to inactive frontages | 63 |
| 3.19 | Dungun Museum and Traditional Malay house at Kampung Tanah Lot | 63 |
| 3.20 | Taiping located at the north of Perak State | 64 |
| 3.21 | Tin mining activity located near to Kamunting at 1870 | 65 |
| 3.22 | The first railway line was built to connect Taiping and Port Weld for transport tin | 65 |
| 3.23 | Morphology patterns in Taiping in 1840 to present | 66 |
| 3.24 | The overall view of dwelling in Taiping in 1878 | 67 |
| 3.25 | The scene of crowded visitor at Taiping Lake Gardens in 1960 | 68 |
| 3.26 | The land use distributions in Taiping | 68 |
| 3.27 | The merchandise activities at fish stalls of Central Market (left) activities and street vendors selling newspapers at Jalan Chong Thye Phin (right). | 70 |
| 3.28 | Chi Kong practitioners and water activities at Taiping | 71 |

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| | Lake Gardens | |
| 3.29 | Cultural spaces indication in Taiping Town centre | 72 |
| 3.30 | The rain trees, streetscape, and landscape amenities had provided visitor a natural, shading and relaxation environment in Lake Gardens | 73 |
| 3.31 | Padang Esplanade used for soccer training during afternoon | 73 |
| 3.32 | The outdoor eating place at ' <i>siang malam</i> ' or 'day night' of Central Market. | 74 |
| 3.33 | The pocket gardens located in front of Central Market (left) and in opposition, the pocket space in between old shophouses had converted into car parking (right). | 75 |
| 3.34 | The wide street at Jalan Pasar is safe for pedestrian to walk or stroll during their shopping (left) and the matured trees at Jalan Lim Tee Hoi (right). | 75 |
| 3.35 | Aerial view of gridiron town planning, Taiping | 76 |
| 3.36 | Green open space at District office | 77 |
| 3.37 | Most of the Taiping jewellery shops are located at Jalan Pasar (left) and Taiping old Markets are fronting Jalan Kota (right). | 77 |
| 3.38 | The unique Straits Electic architectural styles (1890s-1940s) of old shophouses in Taiping | 79 |
| 3.39 | The Old Clock Tower and Taiping Government Office at Jalan Kota. | 79 |
| 3.40 | Perak Museum and Taiping prison | 79 |
| 3.41 | Central Market (left) and the adjacent Bazaar (right) | 80 |
| 4.1 | The memory spaces in Kuala Dungun | 85 |
| 4.2 | The identification of landmark place in Kuala Dungun | 86 |
| 4.3 | The memory cultural spaces in Taiping | 87 |
| 4.4 | The identification of landmark place in Taiping | 87 |
| 4.5 | The types of activities in cultural spaces of Kuala Dungun | 90 |
| 4.6 | The types of activities in cultural spaces of Taiping | 91 |

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 4.7 | Types of cultural spaces perform as identity of Kuala Dungun | 94 |
| 4.8 | Types of cultural spaces perform as identity of Taiping | 95 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| APPENDIX | TITLE | PAGE |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| A | Survey Questionnaire: the Roles of Cultural Spaces in Kuala Dungun | 114 |
| B | Survey Questionnaire: the Roles of Cultural Spaces in Taiping | 116 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

According to most sociological perceptions, culture is well known as extensive notions which includes entirely explicate about individuals sharing their “knowing, thoughts, perceiving, creating, evaluating, interacting, and doing” (Froster, 2011:19). In other words, culture is defined by a group of people way of life that encompasses deliberations and behaviour as well as values, beliefs, rules of conduct, political organisation, and economic activity which is transmitted from one descendant to another across learning (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Young, 1994; Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). The merging of nature and culture are apparently bringing the concept of place is known as settlement with being of human experiences (Lukermann, 1964; Relph 1976). Culture is one of the attributes devote to the significance of a place (Tuan, 1980) and the introducing culture within a framework is known as cultural space (Young, 1994). For instances, the majority of urban space as cultural space in Malaysia is expanded by trading and cultural activities which can be found at Petaling’s shopping street, market place at Kota Bharu, street in Melaka City and night market (Basri and Suhana, 2008).

Through the understanding of cultural space which attached to practices, representations, expression, knowledge, and skills is identified as intangible and tangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Wherein, the cultural heritage is an asset

persistently regenerated by group of people responsive to environment and history to provide the sense of identity. Burra Charter had described the conservation principle highlighted the purpose of conservation is to maintain the cultural significance of a place to evade abandoned and unprotected conditions (ICOMOS, 1999). The importance of conservation outlined by Tiesdell *et al.* (1996) was a succession to attain the materials of cultural memories and heritage, economic, and commercial value (Adeniran and Akinlabi, 2011). Hence, the endeavour to investigate cultural space constitutes to the preserving the significance identity in the historic town. Generally, historic cities establish in heritage conservation in Malaysia are depicted by those main elements such as: distinctive cultures, existing historical sites, and prominent heritage building (Mohamed *et al.*, 2001). They also inscribe those major heritage cities and towns in Malaysia are Melaka, Georgetown, Kota Bharu, Taiping and Ipoh.

Since late 1980s, culturally led urban development has emerged as a theory in urban planning (Boogarts, 1990; Griffiths, 1991 and Montgomery, 1990 and 2003). The concept used to pertain as cultural led generation and virtually apply early in UK (Wansborough and Mageean, 2000; Montgomery, 2003). Moreover, Fielden (1994) and Adenirah (2011) suggest the only approach to protect cultural significant is through conservation method. They agreed the conservation accomplishment is to evade deterioration by prolong the living cultural and local heritage. Hence, the historic cultural spaces and heritage inheritance are the decisive factors to affirm Melaka and George Town are awarded as World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Both historic cities are presence its own multi-cultural trading, distinctive architecture, intangible and tangible heritage such as religious building, worship, festival, food, and daily life to express the authenticity of traditional living city. The multi-cultural heritage and traditions entities are those criteria that constituted to achieve Outstanding Universal Value nomination (World Heritage Convention, 2008). This proclamation has shown that vitality of protecting physical and cultural attributes enable to preserve the identity of place by preventing impact of rapid developments and globalisation.

Thus, the implementation of Convention in 1972 stated the natural and cultural heritages of global community are important contributed and practiced on

sustainable development. Tweed and Sutherland (2007) elucidate the build of cultural heritage is to achieve a sustainable urban development and improve quality of life. It was essential to conserve cultural heritage mainly to define a place characteristic and protect the local cultural identity. Young (2006) emphasised that cultural features became essential and actual meaning for people to think and perceive in this modern society. As summary, through the study of cultural spaces had proven not only physical development but cultural aspects are able to flourish and characterise the identity of historic towns.

1.2 Problem Statement

Culture is essential in heritage conservation especially in urban historic area. Orbasli (2000) depicted culture is an indispensable part of people's life that incessantly developed by community since from past, present and towards future. It can be seen nowadays many countries gain to redevelopment in achieving cultural heritage tourism and increases local economic entrepreneurship (Wansborough and Mageean, 2000 and Yuen, 2006). Griffiths (1993) clarified the values of culture aspect not only disclosed to human lifestyle but it was partially to advocate economic regeneration and amplify new cultural facilities for society (embodied in Wansborough, 2000). In additionally, cultural spaces formed by social activities interactions which to define the local identity of a place (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008).

On the other hand, the alteration of culture by globalisation; mass culture and loss of place attachment have disappearance to the meaning of a place (Relph, 1976 and Carmona *et al.*, 2003). Crang (1998) and Carmona, *et al.* (2003) stated inevitable 'mass culture' intervention has obliterated local cultural through the new commercial imposed to the local. Moreover, Schmidt and Nemeth (2010) explained the new culture influxes with trendy and new technology communications have confronted with the declining of public spaces function. Simultaneously, they also highlighted the present traditional open spaces are deficiency in attention and unconcern by the new generations. In this circumstance, these public spaces or

cultural spaces are gradually become unmanageable, marginal, dilapidated, and in vacant condition. The variation of place identity and function was conveying to loss of territory which caused such place is no more belong or relate to those local people (Crang, 1998 and Carmona *et al.*, 2003). In the same perspectives, the abating of place identity was considered as 'placelessness' or else the place had lost the significance of place meaning clarified by Relph (1976).

In the same perspective, Suhana and Norsidah (2008) indicated the issue of local identity in Malaysia persistently descending inasmuch as the incompatible developments due to the declining of place character in historic districts. In additional, the new development had impacted to the existing traditional shophouses through the replacing of new built commercial buildings and eventually has destroyed local traditional street and the significance of cultural open spaces (Suhana and Basri 2002 and Norsidah 2008). Besides, Zalina and Ismail (2009) denoted some open spaces in historic cities of Malaysia such as Padang Maziah in Kuala Terengganu, Padang Merdeka in Alor Setar and Padang Kalumpang in Kota Bharu had transformed into parking areas. As well as the most important historical public space of Padang Pahlawan in Melaka had turned into new modern commercial buildings and caused to the modification of the traditional urban form and space's functions in Melaka City (Zalina and Ismail, 2009). In other words, the change of people perceptions and the inharmonious in physical milieu between old and new developments slowly turn-down the genuine identity and local sense of place (JPBD, 2006; Suhana and Norsidah, 2008; Zalina and Ismail, 2009; Norsidah, 2010).

As summary, the globalisation, mass cultural, change of people perceptions, identity and place characteristic alteration are adversely caused to placelessness and intangible heritage deterioration. In consequence to imbalance new economic developments and ad-hoc built environments once again transform the virtual local identity and image of historic district. Therefore, world councils like ICOMOS, UNESCO and international charters are established to protect, conserve, and restore the authentic cultural heritage which is being deteriorated and transform the character of a place. Indeed, Yuen (2006) discloses community voices and perspectives are crucially to determine and implement place's identity conservation. The main idea of heritage conservation is to create a vibrant city. Yet, only place's identity is able

to remain and compose the culture, cultural spaces, livelihoods and human memories. In fact, the historical open spaces likewise street and Padang are the essential urban fabric to supplement and preserve the heritage inheritance, image, function, and the sense of history of a historic city.

1.3 Research Gap

There have been numbers of valuable studies on the importance of urban spaces, public spaces and cultural studies (e.g: Carmona *et al.*, 2003, Carmona, 2010; Golicnik, 2009). Due to the dissimilarities of the study context, cultural background, urban spaces interpretation and public space utilisations, this research endeavour to investigate and look into the cultural spaces of historic towns in Malaysia. Besides, there is also lack of designation on people feeling, preference, and identification cultural spaces of historic towns are influencing to the space and place identities. In sum, the imperative of this research on cultural space enables to support and designate the social space and physical structure setting in such historic town.

1.4 Research Aims

The aims of this study are to examine and assess the roles of cultural spaces in conveying the local characteristic and identity of historic towns in Malaysia. The examining of the role of cultural spaces denotes people associated with cultural activities and social spatial consumption in defining the space characters of historic town context. Furthermore, the assessing through types of people perceptions, physical, and social attributes to determine the cultural spaces formation that contributing to a place's identity.

1.5 Research Objectives

To achieve the research aims, the following objectives are formulated:

1. To examine types of physical and social attributes that shaped the cultural spaces in historic towns;
2. To identify the roles of cultural spaces as placemaking in the historic towns; and
3. To verify the significance of cultural spaces contribute to the identity of place.

1.6 Research Questions

1. Why do the cultural spaces do available to protect the identity of place?
2. How does the cultural space constitute to the characteristics of historic town in Malaysia?
3. What are the tangible and intangible urban components or elements that constitute to the cultural spaces?
4. What are the importance cultural spaces that evolving human activities in historic town?
5. What are the relation of interactions in between people, space, and culture?
6. How does people behavior influence to recognition of cultural spaces?

1.7 Scope of the Research

The study is focuses on the roles of cultural spaces in characterising the identity of historic towns in Malaysia. Therefore, Taiping and Kuala Dungun are selected as

case studies because of the historical background as the prominent heritage towns, significant cultural activities, and well known spaces that create the place meaning to people. Subsequently, this research also examines on the salient cultural space attributes, and related people perceptions that influencing to the sense of place in studies area. The research attributes encompasses historical background, social cultural activity, spatial attributes, legibility on visual character and accessibility, physical and architectural form and historic structure are collectively to create sense of place and identity to the historic towns. The understanding of the relevance physical characteristics and socio attributes are virtually to verify the interrelationships between people and cultural activities experiences in the urban historic context.

1.8 Limitations on the Research

The limitation of this research is to analyse the study area in depth. Nevertheless, the deficiency of this problem will be elucidated through the comparative analysis of two case studies. These case studies are selected to generalize the importance substance of cultural spaces in protracting the identities of historic towns. In the same time, the survey questionnaires are constructed to specify people perspectives in cultural spaces socialisation, the influencing of momentous cultural spaces and characteristics of studies area.

1.9 Methodology of the Study

The research design is to investigate the roles of cultural space characterising the identity of historic towns in Malaysia. Case study method is selected to assist and accumulate the qualitative data for this cultural spaces research. The research methodology process are formulated via the related theoretical and literature review

studies whilst the primary data are collected from site inventory, observations, questionnaire survey. Ultimately, the analysis stage used to accentuate the research findings, discussions and conclusion. The overall research methodology procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.1: the methodology flow chart. Consequently, the detailed discussion of case study methodology is inscribed in Chapter 3.

1.10 Organisation of the Dissertation

The organization of report is divided into five chapters which are discussed as followings;

i. Chapter 1: Introduction

This introduction chapter is to highlight the background study of research topic. It is supported by the problem statement discussion, research gap, identify of research questions, research aims, research objectives, research scope and limitation of the research. As well as the brief research methodology descriptions and flow charts will be included in this introduction chapter.

ii. Chapter 2: Literature Review

The initiatives of this chapter is to review and describe the theoretical urban design studies through the past studies and refer to the secondary resources such as journal, book, report, article map, pamphlet, and websites. All of the literature studies will help to indicate the definition and conception of culture and cultural spaces; human activities in the cultural spaces; historic town and characteristics; and identity of place. Besides, the reviews of each research attributes in this chapter helps to determine and considerable of the research variables for case study method in the following chapter. Furthermore, the

substances of literature reviews are able to elucidate the case study, analysis, findings, discussions, and conclusion.

iii. Chapter 3: Case Study

The case study method will be discussed in this section. Two case studies are selected which are Kuala Dungun in Terengganu and Taiping town in Perak for the cultural spaces studies. Entirely, the information of case studies are collective from the secondary data (literature reviews) and site investigation (site inventory, site observation, and interview) are used to assist the further research analysis, findings and discussions at the next chapter.

iv. Chapter 4: Analysis, Findings, Discussions and Conclusion

In chapter four, the data analyses are used to discuss and formulate the research findings and discussions. The comparative analysis of the qualitative data obtained from both case studies in Kuala Dungun and Taiping to delineate the physical and social attributes of the cultural spaces in defining the identity of historic towns in Malaysia. Meantime, the interview data transcriptions from the questionnaires survey are complement to the research findings and discussions. This chapter will be included the conclusion part for the overall research outcomes. The essential implications of the literature theories, findings and discussions are interpreted into the conclusion to explicate the roles of cultural spaces, cultural spaces' attributes, and the significant of cultural spaces in defining the identity of historic towns in Malaysia.

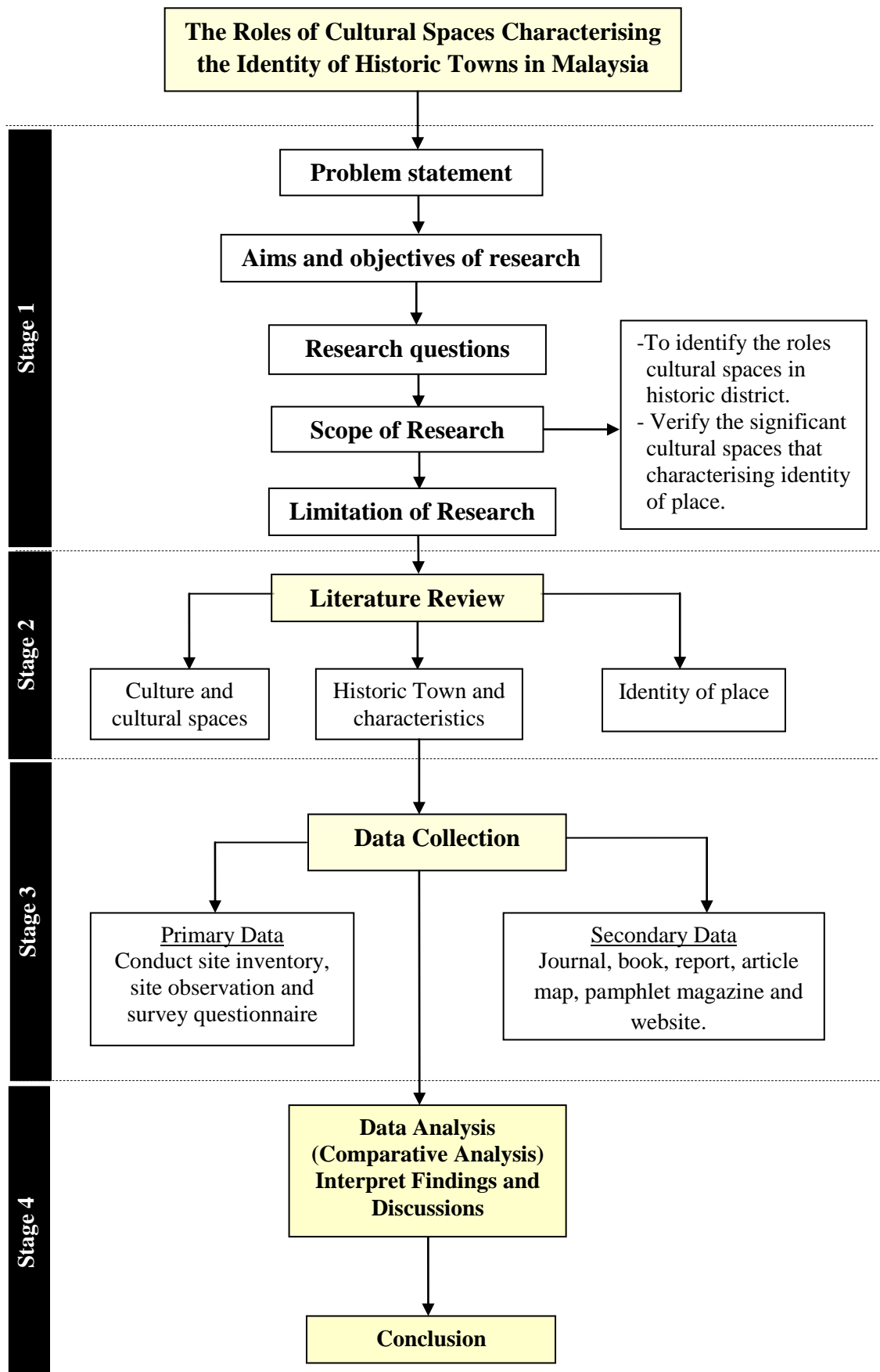


Figure 1.1: Research methodology flow chart

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