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.
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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 Merdekan 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, 2009Norsidah, 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.
The Roles of Cultural Spaces Characterising the Identity of Historic Towns in Malaysia

**Problem statement**

**Aims and objectives of research**

**Research questions**
- To identify the roles cultural spaces in historic district.
- Verify the significant cultural spaces that characterising identity of place.

**Scope of Research**

**Limitation of Research**

**Stage 1**
- Problem statement
- Aims and objectives of research
- Research questions
- Scope of Research
- Limitation of Research

**Stage 2**
- Literature Review
  - Culture and cultural spaces
  - Historic Town and characteristics
  - Identity of place

**Stage 3**
- Data Collection
  - Primary Data
    - Conduct site inventory, site observation and survey questionnaire
  - Secondary Data
    - Journal, book, report, article map, pamphlet magazine and website.

**Stage 4**
- Data Analysis
  - (Comparative Analysis)
  - Interpret Findings and Discussions
- Conclusion

Figure 1.1: Research methodology flow chart
REFERENCES


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