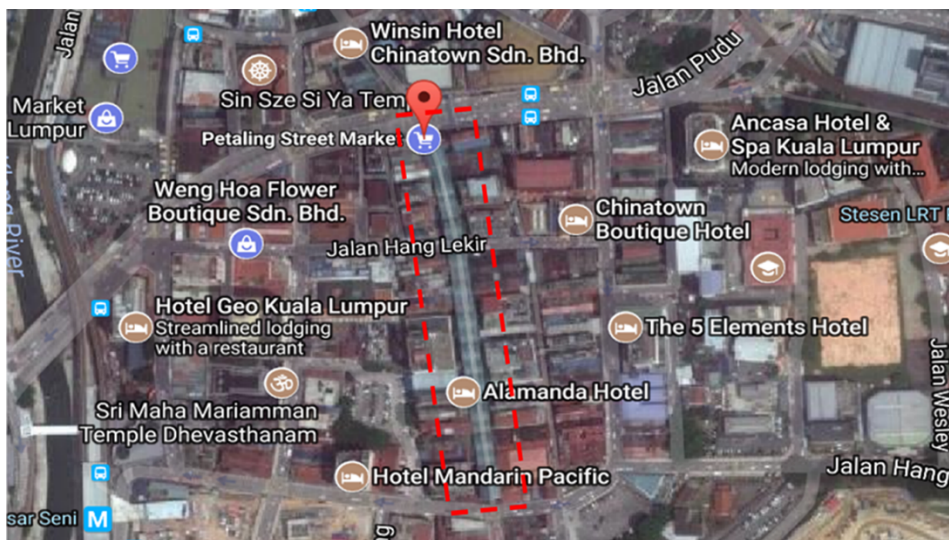


Asian Architecture: Historic Street Essay

Petaling Street Market



GROUP MEMBERS:

YEN WEI ZHENG	0320266
YONG MAN KIT	0319778
FOONG WING HOE	0320085
NG KHENG SOON	0318946
IGNATIUS JEE SHAO IANG	0320069
TOH KEAN HOU	0319575
KHOO MING SEN	0319659

TUTOR:

MR. NICHOLAS NG KHOON WU

History



figure 1: Petaling Street view in 1950s

Today, Kuala Lumpur's prominent Petaling Street, also known as 'Chee Cheong Kai' in Cantonese is recognized as a popular destination for the trading of counterfeit goods, a description that hardly justifies its vibrant past.

Chinatown's origins centered on market square and along Jalan Tun H.S Lee, formerly known as High Street due to its higher grounds. This street became a popular place for settlements because it was less prone to floods.

Petaling Street is now Malaysia's Chinatown, because of the up growth from the tin mining industry in the 1800s, it brought in early settlers who are in pursuit of wealth. Most of the settlers were Hakka and Cantonese, and led a steady migration of Chinese communities into the city. These communities were governed by Kapitan or headman. Malaysia's famous Kapitan Yap Ah Loy was from the Hakka Community and played a central role in developing Kuala Lumpur.

In 1870, civil war erupted within the Chinese community. The rivalry between the Hokkien Ghee Hin and the Hakka Hai San secret societies fought over the control of tin and related trade. The war interrupted the British's economy and chain of supply, forcing British administration to intervene. As repercussions from the war, many homes were damaged, building destroyed, and abandonment of several mines.

When the war was over, miners couldn't work because the tin mines were neglect during the war which caused them to become flooded, but Yap Ah Loy convinced them to stay in Kuala Lumpur, to refocus their skills in agriculture sector. Yap also set up a tapioca mill in this area to ground tubers from his farms, giving it its name, Chee Cheong Kai, which means starch factory street.

Sociocultural conditions



figure 2: European Tourist



figure 2.1: Local tourists



figure 2.2: Mainland China tourist

Petaling Street Market is not only a hotspot among locals to get counterfeit goods but also loved by many tourist. Along Petaling Street you can see different race of local community, and you could also find tourist who comes from different continent trying to make a deal at a good price. Apart from being a shopping destination, Petaling Street also has a deep history and culture, particularly of the Chinese community in Malaysia. This makes it a must-see place for tourists interested in experiencing the various cultures Malaysia has to offer.



figure 2.3: foreign workers



figure 2.4: Bangladeshis worker

But in times, the Chinese community in Petaling Street is slowly being overtaken by foreign workers, almost half of the vendors are now run by Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Pakistanis and so on. The essence of Petaling's Asian street is slowly fading away, due to younger Chinese generations are no longer having interest in this sort of business industry. This in turn forces some of the business owner to sell their stall or employ foreign workers. The shortage of tenant causes the authority having no choice but to rent the stall to foreigners who are willing to conduct their business there.

Petaling Street is like a mini portrait of Malaysian Chinese history. "There should be more resources invested to beautify this iconic place", said Deputy Education Minister Datuk Chong Sin Woon. He also stated that the support of the people is needed to preserve the heritage of

Petaling Street and its status as a shopping heaven. It has centuries-old temples and associations there, not to mention the rich history behind, it has even attracted a PhD student from Austria to write a thesis on it.



figure 2.5 and figure 2.6: workers setting up stalls

figure 2.7: man selling canned water

Aside from the struggle to maintain Petaling Street's Asian culture, the local and foreigners are very hardworking, setting up their stalls early just to make sure they don't miss any customers, working tirelessly day and night. If you have ever been there, you would notice their bustling business life. Always on a rush during open and closing time. These days it's really hard to make a living from selling counterfeit goods but they still persevere through all that hardship without complaining each day.

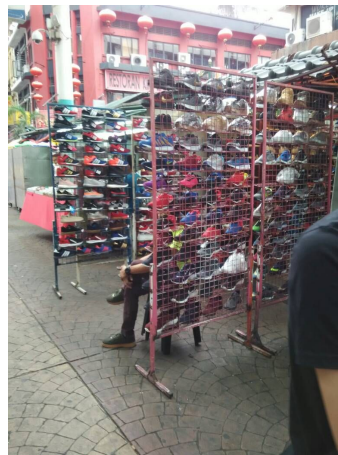


figure 2.8: E-cigarette stall

figure 2.9: shoe stall

figure 2.10: counterfeit handbags

Most of the business trade follows the current trend, importing in products that are popular now. They keep themselves up to date in order to make their business booming by selling imitated products which has high demand in a lower price range. For examples, quality imitated branded shoes, branded hand bags, e-cigarette, and currently the product that is widely advertised is the plastic toy known as 'fidget spinner'.

Apart from tourism, increasing foreign workers, fading Chinese essence, and business trend pattern, the most valuable experience here is 'the art of bargaining'. The businessman here usually sell their items in a cheap price but will hustle inexperience consumer, setting their price high at first, and if you don't know the market price for fake items, there's a pretty good chance you're going to be conned, even though they know better that those particular items aren't worth that much and could be sold at a lower price. When purchasing goods at a flea market like Petaling Street, it's essential to bargain with the salesperson for a good deal. Try to go for as low as you can, and later on you would realize how cheap the item really is, if assuming the cost of that item was half or less than the price you pay. Remember, there are many other stall that sells that exact same item you wanted if you did not get to bargain to the lowest.

Traditional trades



figure 3.1: fabric trading



figure 3.2: chinese medicine hall

Each street has its own unique history and culture, this aspect are correlated with local community activities. Local traditional trades such as wet market and Chinese medicine can be found in Petaling Street. The Chinese culture of Petaling Street can be seen through these trades because the trading will take place for a long time, and it must be preserved to help define Petaling Street as Chinatown.

The Chinese medicine hall on Petaling Street have refurbished to keep up with the modernity of other pharmacies like Eu Yan Sang. 'Kien Fatt' pharmacy has been around for 70 years, and still remain as the best medicine hall in that area as they still have physician administering treatments. One's health can be diagnosed through a check of wrist pulse and the physician will write you a prescription. He'll then rummage through jars of cordyceps, wolfberries, dang gui and atractylodes to whip up a health booster to replenish chi, combat colds or improve stamina. The tiny drawers behind the counter resemble private vaults, which store away precious tonics like century-old ginseng, bird's nest and of course, pearl dust.

Some other traditional trades like clothing and fabric still survive till this day. Founded in 1955, Ban Wah is a pioneering fabric and textile distributor in Malaysia. Steven Lee, who currently manages the brand, is the second generation owner of the family business. Established for more than 60 years, Ban Wah is still providing customers with only the best products with a wide range of fabric and textiles from all around the world. Being one of the oldest in Malaysia textile industry.

Significant architecture



figure 4.1: Highrise hotel



figure 4.2: Swiss Inn

In Petaling Street, significant architecture can be seen through the historical trails of shop houses. Most of the buildings are mainly double storey shop houses, whereas taller buildings in the area do not go beyond 5-storey and mostly serve as hotels and dormitories.



figure 4.3: Chinese Style



figure 4.4: Baba Nyonya style



figure 4.5: Art Deco architecture

The entrance gate of Petaling Street is a work of Traditional Architecture Style, in which the roof apex is topped with a ridge of tiles and statues for both decorative purposes as well as to weigh down the layers of roofing tiles for stability. Traditional Chinese roof top decorations can be seen on the entrance gate. Next, the widely evident Baba and Nyonya style architecture can be widely seen on the rows of shop houses in Petaling Streets. The shop houses consist of elongated rectangular floor plan and a significant 5-foot-walkway as initiated by the British in the 1800s. The front façade consists of 3 window panes intricately designed with ceramic renderings. The windows are of louvered timber shutters. Next, Art Deco style architecture can also be seen in Petaling Street. Rich colors, bold geometric shapes and lavish ornamentation is implemented on the buildings within the site.



figure 4.6: Exterior of Lantern Hotel

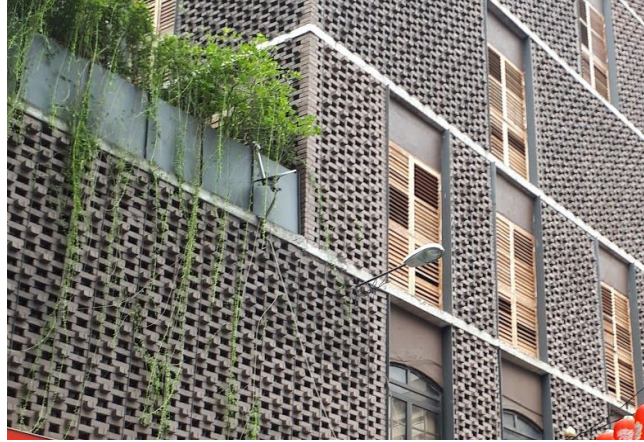


figure 4.7: building material (bricks)

Several existing shop houses at the Petaling Street were redeveloped into new commercial buildings. For instance, The Lantern Hotel significantly shows the development of Petaling Street. The existing shop house were demolished and replaced with a 5 levels building block, with no regards to the surrounding or the Malaysian heritage. In terms of sustainability, the public areas are natural ventilated. Skylights are implemented to ensure light ventilation. Different laying methods were implemented to allow sufficient openings. Locally available building materials such as dark burned clay brick, polished colored concrete and terrazzo tiles for the floor, white lime wash finish and natural plywood are used.



figure 4.8: roof cover view from entrance

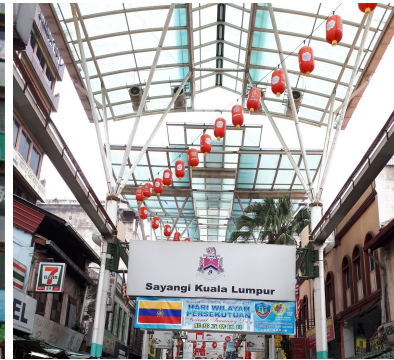


figure 4.9: view from below

Another modern architecture which can be seen in Petaling Street is the green roof cover constructed in 2003. Two large Chinese arches constructed at both ends of the street, transforming the street into a pedestrian shopping area. The Green roof cover sheltering the streets are known as 'Green Dragon', again significantly exhibits the influence of Chinese culture in Petaling Street.

Important past event



figure 5.1: Owner - Mr. Ng



figure 5.2: Customers queuing

Take a stroll down Petaling Street, it's hard to miss the sight of shops with decades of history, reflecting the culture of the nation's Chinese community. It is a Chinese mentality for us to keep the business running, passing it on for generations, making it into a family business. Preserving their family pride, fame, and memories. Among food and beverages, the one that stands out is a soya bean stall. Talking about past event, 'Kim Soya Bean' was the favourite of the nation's longest-serving former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Kim Soya Bean still proudly displays cut out articles from newspapers and magazines dated back years ago relaying how its *tau foo fah* (soya bean curd) was among the very few delicacies Dr Mahathir had requested for when he was awarded at the National Heart Institute (IJN) in 2007. This business has been running for more than half a century and has passed onto three generations. "Dr Mahathir used to get his men to come and pack my *tau foo fah* and soya bean; they were his favourite," Ng Lee Yam, second generation owner told *The Rakyat Post*.

Till this day, Mr. Ng can still be seen getting lots of customers daily, and they are not of any particular race. Chinese, Malays, Indians, and even foreigners, all standing under the same shading of in front of his stall, just to enjoy his soya bean curd, ignoring the differences amongst races and religions that some quarters have tried to use to pit Malaysians against one another. Mr. Ng also stated that his customers have been supporting his family business for so long that some of them came back and tells him their story about how they used to buy soya bean from his father.

Furthermore, lots of Chinese brands that are available today also started their business here at Petaling Street. For example, 34 years-old Melvin Chan is the third generation managing Fung Wong biscuits, a brand started by his great grandfather almost a century ago. They also sell local drinks at a stall opposite the shop, which holds years and years of history in Petaling Street. This is why Petaling Street is important to the tourism industry. It has always been a big tourist attraction as this is where you get to see the true Chinese culture.

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