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TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL AND CONTRIBUTION OF PHYSICAL FEATURES TOWARDS THE CHARACTER OF IPOH OLD TOWN

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Abstract

Urban character refers to the combination of elements that constitute a town. Ipoh is one of the colonial towns that portrays the character of an old town, where physical heritage elements within its historic area remain intact. However, Ipoh is now developed with many new modern developments and this impacted the physical features of the old city. This paper explores the character of the historic buildings in the old part of Ipoh through townscape appraisal and urban morphology focusing on the building plot. Besides, the study aimed to evaluate the changes in urban fabric following the changes that occurred to the old and historic buildings in Ipoh. The study revealed that rapid urbanisation and changes in urban form resulted in the diverse change of urban characters of Ipoh Old Town. An important contribution can be made to the conservation and management of urban built heritage in Ipoh Old Town, on the one hand, explaining the typologies and evolution of heritage buildings as part of important urban elements could improve the understanding about the building issues so that best conservation practices are suggested.

Keyword: urbanisation, morphological studies, physical features, physical elements

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INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in Malaysia has taken place since the British colonial era, when the first local authority was established in Georgetown. Since then, urbanisation had proliferated in towns of Malay States, where the building of shophouses contributed to population increase in town areas. Besides, several administration buildings, service facilities, as well as transportation infrastructure, such as train stations were built (Harun & Jalil, 2012). Ipoh is one of the towns considered as an old town, where many of the physical elements still exist today. Nonetheless, being the state capital of Perak, the development of the town has been ongoing. Numerous events have changed the landscape, which has been affected by modernisation. However, many old shophouses which carry significant historical values, have managed to survive through intense urban development, and have contributed to the continuation of local activities, such as retailing within the old town circle. There is an increased variety of activity patterns within the old town area, as the physical elements in the urban space have been improvised and diversified to cater to current needs. This paper is commissioned to identify how those physical features in Ipoh had contributed to the changes in the character of the town itself. Besides, the urban character is also determined based on the urban morphology of the town from the pre-colonial era until the present.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The elements within a town have often brought people together to create a collective of enjoyment. When the elements are related to each other, they offer an aesthetic pleasure that attracts people to experience the diversity of visual and aesthetic elements through time. Consequently, a town has a specific visual impact on the people who live in it or on those who visited the town. In this context, the visual effect is represented by the changes in the landscape and appearance due to physical development (James Hutton Institute, 2014).

Under those circumstances, the physical forms of a town and its related activities contribute to urban quality. It is known as an urban character when the combination of available elements creates a lively and vibrant urban setting that typifies a living town. For the recognition of a town's existence, it is necessary to give a positive impact that is crucial to the urban environment. However, the urbanisation pattern nowadays can affect the former identity or character of an old town, which might endanger the cultural heritage value of the nation.

The morphological study of towns in the Malay Peninsula showed that urban form characteristics date from 5000 BCE to the early 19th Century. The evolution can be classified into four phases of timeline, namely the ancient Malay Settlements, ancient Malay port cities, early Malay towns, and old towns which can be divided into 2 groups: Malay Royal Towns and Colonial Towns (Mohmad Shukri et al., 2018).

Old towns that are still standing today are evidence of the evolutionary phases of Malaysian history, besides showing different and various identities of urban forms through the history of their morphology (Harun & Jalil, 2012). Most city centres in Malaysia were initially developed as colonial towns with pre-war buildings, such as Georgetown, Kuala Lumpur, and Ipoh (Omar et al., 2016). Today, Kuala Lumpur is well known as the capital city of Malaysia, whereas Georgetown is well-recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008 (Georgetown World Heritage Incorporated, 2018).

Ipoh maintains historical significance that represents its identity as an old town. In fact, it is a historic area that remains intact with heritage elements built within it. Ipoh Local Plan 2020 and the National Heritage Act acknowledged 14 buildings and monuments out of 1,540 in total as significant heritage buildings (Majlis Bandaraya Ipoh, 2012). Ipoh is one of the early towns opened by the British, with a unique character in terms of urban form through building architectural styles and urban morphology with colonial characteristics (Harun & Jalil, 2014).

However, nowadays Ipoh old town is affected by the construction of new buildings to fulfil development needs and to meet people's current demands. With more modern buildings erected around the old colonial town, a sort of competition is generated between the old and new town, which endangers the existence of the old town (Omar et al., 2016). The study attempted to identify and understand Ipoh old town, in terms of morphological and physical features that form a unique urban character. Physical features of a town are often considered as living evidence that characterises its historical attributes and strengthen its 'sense of place'. Hence, the character of an old town and the physical features can be seen and felt through the environmental significance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The first objective is to study the urban morphology of the Ipoh old town from the pre-colonisation period until the present, while the second objective is to identify and compare the changes of the urban character based on its physical features seen in the town.

Townscape as the combination of physical properties and environmental aspects in urban area

The concept of townscape can be defined as a part of a city that has significance in setting the character of a city. Cities with a clearer image, identity, and sense of place, tend to have townscapes that can strongly express certain visual qualities and enhance the sense of belonging. Therefore, the success of a city lies in the creation of its identity and sense of place, determined by the critical role of townscape that reflects the relationship among the elements which compose the urban fabric. Townscape is the primary key to a symbiotic interaction, various

interchanges of economic activities, architectural ideas, and socio-cultural diversities (Shamsuddin, 2011). The concept of townscape should be implemented in a city to ensure the creation of a strong character that can potentially contribute to a lively sense of place. Most importantly, this can be beneficial to people in their daily activity patterns and routines. Indeed, it is essential to realise that a pleasant townscape is determined by the quality and attractive attributes of the components.

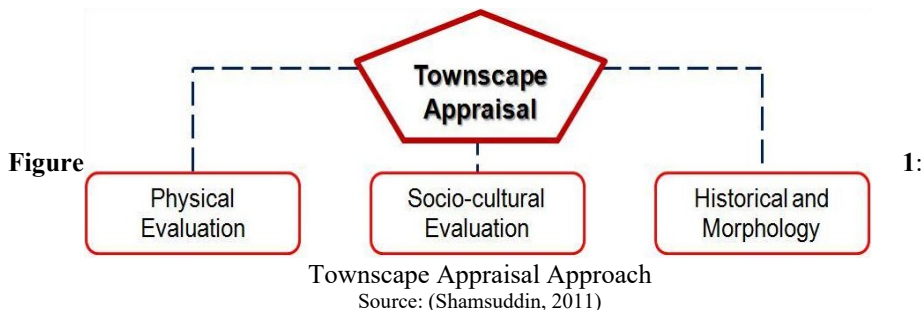
The process of strengthening townscape requires the combination of physical properties and environmental aspects, such as nature, social life circle, economy, and cultural environment. Townscape integrates economic, socio-cultural, and environmental concepts into a city (Shamsuddin, 2011). It can symbolise a social life with a harmonious relationship and bring character to the culture. Historic old towns rely on physical attributes so its nature can be resilient as it should be.

The main elements in urban spaces play a role in providing significant meanings to a location or a place, which contribute towards the character of the case study. These elements include streets, squares, buildings, and activities that can be classified as the urban fabric. The activities and physical characteristics of the physical features within the case study were concluded to have created a unique identity for the historic urban space; hence, in the context of this present study, it is referred to as the character of the historic old town.

In general, old towns in Malaysia have many significant attributes that preserve various unique heritage values. Urbanisation is essential, but at the same time, old towns must be conserved to emphasise their unique characters, so that they can be appreciated as an identity.

Townscape Appraisal

The best approach to evaluate the extent of the components' usefulness in representing the townscape is by applying townscape appraisal, a vital tool to assess and evaluate the relationship among elements that form the urban fabric and the generation of movements and activities. Such evaluation is necessary to identify the effects of a townscape to the city, which creates the city's character.



Said et al., (2014) explained that studies by Solomon and Johnston in the late 1960s emphasised the importance of townscape analysis to study the relationship of buildings and their occupants (Solomon, 1966). The authors explained that to understand the character of a townscape, a detailed analysis of the structures and their historical context could provide guidelines for the townscape characteristics. Townscape can be overviewed by using three approaches that involve physical evaluation, socio-cultural evaluation, and historical and morphology (Figure 1). These mixed-method approaches are carried out at the stage where field study and secondary data research were being conducted (Shamsuddin, 2011).

The assessment of these criteria is made through observation, structured interviews with the residents, and property managers. Nevertheless, cultural and religious values are often subjective, and thus, difficult to be quantified. However, a fractal analysis extended by Cooper et al., (2013) to include Taiwanese evidence suggested that culture has a deep-seated influence on the formation of a townscape attitude. The study on the layout of historical cities in Malaysia reflected the importance of religious and cultural aspects in the society. This supports the need for assessing both values to learn how regeneration can affect a diverse, multi-ethnic society, such as the one in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted mixed methods that involve old documents and old map review, visual survey through direct observation of physical elements in the heritage of old town and questionnaire to obtain respondents' perception. Most parts of this paper are based on primary data that applied a qualitative descriptive method as the core. A quantitative method was also adopted, so the analysis would be sufficiently valid to support the findings from the qualitative method. Thus, this research conducted both data collection methods simultaneously to ensure the data interpretation was more reliable.

The main criteria that oversee the changes can be defined by the dependent variables, i.e. character changes. In contrast, the independent variables are physical features of the old town, activity patterns, and the urban morphology of the town. Hence, two (2) methods, i.e. using inventory and distributing questionnaires, were undertaken as tools to measure the variables in the data collection process (Table 1).

Table 1: Variables and Data Collection Process

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Data Collection Method	Data Collection Tools
Changes of the urban character	Physical features of the old town	Observation/ photography analysis	Inventory / photographic evidence / old photographs analysis
	Activity patterns	Observation / survey	Inventory / questionnaire
	Urban morphology	History analysis / sources review	Old maps / history reports

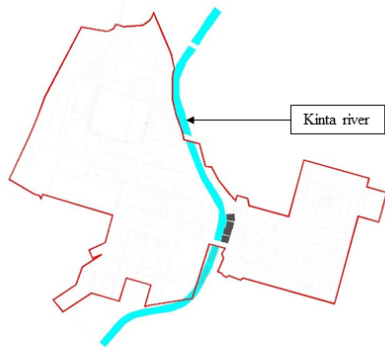
Source: Author, 2019

Photographic analysis is essential to identify and compare the changes of the urban character based on physical features in the historical elements. It involves the collection of old photographs and current photographs. Additionally, inventory is prepared to record the outcome of the visual survey which based on intuitive feelings that describe how the researcher observed and experienced the place, in terms of the buildings' appearance, people's activities, public seating areas, public facilities, and street furniture within the old town area. A supporting medium, such as photographs, were attached to the observation inventory. This direct observation approach was applied to understand the relationship between physical features and its effects on the urban character. It was conducted at Jalan Dato Maharajalela – Tun Sambanthan, Jalan Dato Sagor, Jalan Sultan Yusuff, Jalan Bandar Timah, Jalan Market, Jalan Panglima, Tingkat Pasar, Hala Pasar Baru and Lintasan Pasar Baru.

Questionnaires are outlined into three (3) sections, which consist of the background profile to identify the characteristics of visitors that tend to be in the area, activities that were carried out in the study area to identify the purpose of visiting the area, and perceptions of respondents to acknowledge the opinions on the changes and current condition of the area. The respondents were randomly selected among the visitors within the study area, to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysed outcome for the research. As for the urban morphology analysis, it was carried out to understand how Ipoh Town had initially started and developed rapidly until the present. The scope of the analysis involves the year 1870 until the present day.

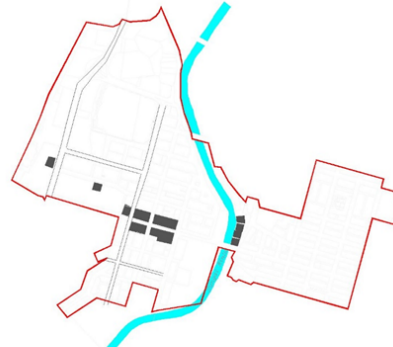
FINDINGS

Figure 2 shows the findings on the evolution of urban form based on the development of streets layout and building plot from the 1870 to 1991.



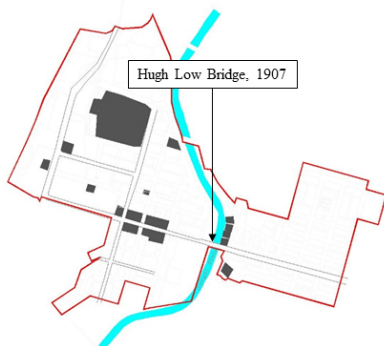
1870 - 1880

•According to the writing by McNair (1878), J.W.W Birch has stated on map, there were 2 neighbouring settlements at Ulu Kinta river bank, Epu and Palau. In 1879, Epu has been the main centre of the village in the district and a police post was built (Salleh, 2014).



1881 - 1890

•Panglima Kinta has planned layout for Ipoh town in 1886 and Ipoh Court House has built. Several roads were built such as Club Road, Station Road, Belfield Street and Hill Street. A hospital was built between Railway Station and Central Police Station (Salleh, 2014).



1901 - 1910

•Standard Chartered Bank and Straits Trading Company were built at Station Road. In 1907, a bridge to cross Kinta River at Brewster Road was opened. Convent School was also opened in the same year. An Indian Muslim Mosque was built at Clayton Road. Ipoh New Town was opened in 1908 and 216 houses were built. The 9th resident has launched People's Park and Birch Memorial Tower in 1909 (Salleh, 2014).



1911 - 1930

•Ipoh Town Hall was built and completed in 1916. A year after, Ipoh Railway Station and a hotel was built to replace the first railway. Ipoh's third court house has completed (Salleh, 2014). . The town is structured and shop houses is increasing.

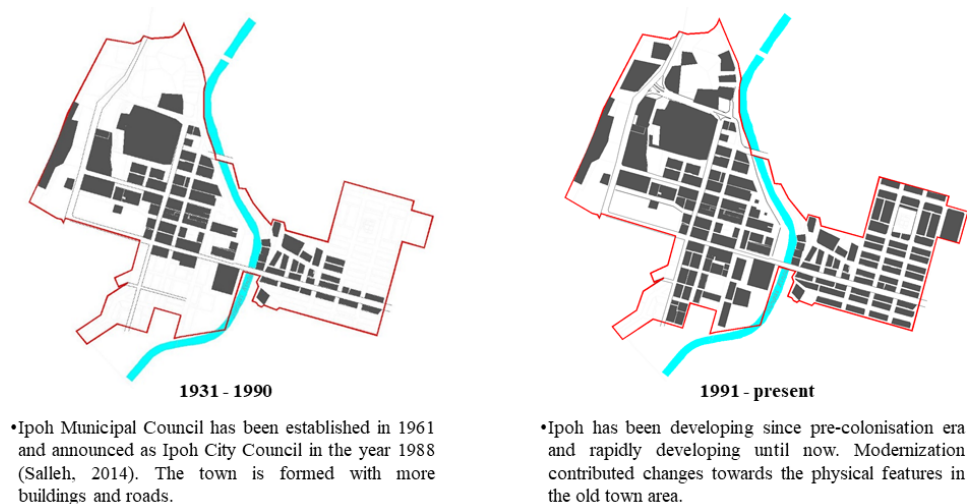


Figure 2: Urban Morphology of Ipoh Old Town

Source: Author, (2019)

The study has revealed that numbers of historical buildings play as the landmark and a typical historical urban element that shaped the character of Ipoh Old Town. Fortunately, in many cases much of the original form of the building has survived but the changes in uses and original character were continuously being changed. With changing of building and its surrounding physical conditions, the town is being adversely affected and losing some at least of its qualities (Rohayah et al., 2013). Despite the strength and architectural qualities possessed by these buildings, the buildings and their surrounding area are often subjected to threat and changes which resulted to placeless geography and possibly lead to the death of the main strength of the town as a historic place.

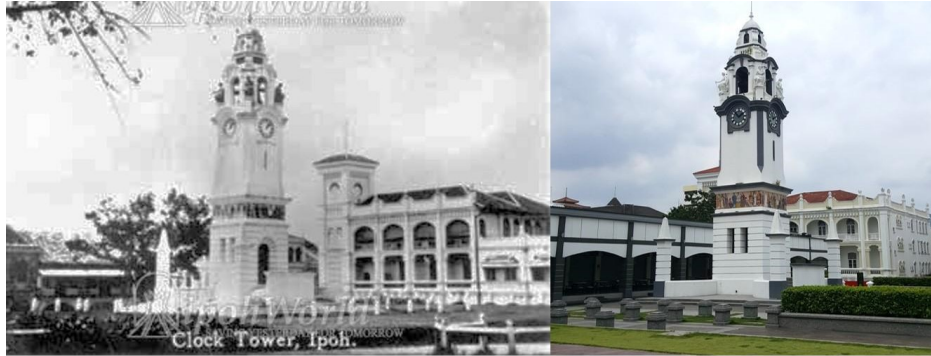


Figure 3: Memorial Clock Tower of J.W.W Birch Year 1920 (left) and Present (right)
Source: Anderson (2007) and Author, (2019)

The main elements that create the character of the place are streets, squares, buildings, and activities. In reference to Ipoh, users tend to walk around and involve in street activities, such as taking pictures, hanging out, retailing, and enjoying visual attractions featured by the old buildings. As for example, Concubine Lane, formerly known as Lorong Panglima, was an empty small lane of local houses. Now, the lane is occupied with retail activities and visitors (Figure 4). Moreover, questionnaire survey has found that most of the respondents are attracted to the physical features in the area, followed by visual and photography attractions, social activity at the area, and for self-enjoyment (Figure 5). This shows a current scenario that is influenced by surrounding elements has strengthen the ambience of the historic old town, which can be the pull factor to attract visitors.



Figure 4: Concubine Lane in 2010 (left) and in Present (right)
Source: Times of Malaya (2010) and Author, (2019)

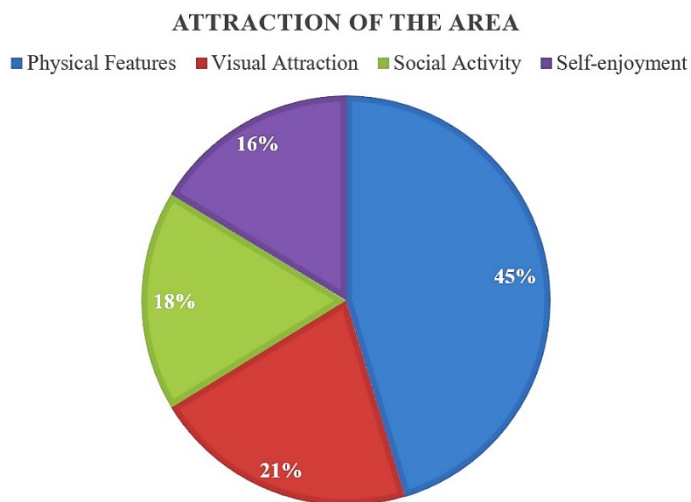


Figure 5: Responds on Questionnaire
Source: Author, (2019)

On the other hand, most of the remaining old features have been preserved to maintain their significant aesthetic values. Attention should be given to several old buildings because poor appearance can contribute to unpleasant feelings and unsightly visual impacts (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Decaying Old Shophouses at Jalan Market
Source: Author, (2019)

The study has revealed that typical historical urban form of Ipoh Old Town is the result of the evolution of buildings, landscape elements, and streets pattern around the cities. Result has confirmed that the attribution of these

physical features is intertwined between distinctiveness, diversity and heritage values which are of importance for their preservation.

CONCLUSION

Physical changes play a significant role in the morphology of a town, since the changes in townscape elements enrich the history of the place. Urban conservation is a way to maintain the character of a town. Nonetheless, additional modern development should complement the existing townscape. For Ipoh, the heritage buildings in the old town should be conserved and preserved as local assets and for the sake of the town's character. Successful old town preservation creates a diverse social activity among local users and visitors. This will ensure the socio-cultural value is not lost over time. Indeed, it is a norm for a town to undergo rapid changes as part of the urbanisation process. However, the aesthetic value of a town needs to be maintained, revitalised, preserved, and conserved as it will display diversity between old and new development.

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