

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SHOP HOUSES FAÇADE AND THE SPECIAL AREA PLAN OF TAIPING HERITAGE TOWN

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ABSTRACT

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Heritage towns in many countries are facing the pressure of redevelopment due to economic needs and also in the name of tourism. It is unfortunate that many a times, the conservation process is separated from development planning cum redevelopment thus destroying the urban fabric. Taiping is one such town that has been identified to be developed for heritage tourism under the Special Area Plan development plan upon its declaration as a Heritage Town in 1999. The Taiping Special Area Plan (TSAP 2010) was launched in 2010 with seven development plans set within the Taiping Town and the Lake Gardens Conservation Zone. The objective of this study is to explore the level and type of change to the façade characteristics of buildings located within Taiping Town Conservation Zone (TTCZ) since the implementation of TSAP 2010 and the conformance of these buildings with change to the TSAP 2010 guidelines. The research adopted a case study strategy with a field survey of the entire building units located within TTCZ followed by a document review of the TSAP 2010 guideline. The TTCZ photo inventory was cross-analysed with archival data to firstly identify the level of change based on a numerical rating scale. The data for building units with change were then analysed further to identify the type of change followed by its adherence to the TSAP 2010 guidelines. The findings revealed that there were changes to the building's façade characteristics even though the overall magnitude of change was low. The changes were found to be mainly on the shop house typology as opposed to other typologies and the shop houses with changes did not adhere to the TSAP 2010 guidelines. The study concluded that the façade characteristics of building units has changed prior to 2010 and the TSAP 2010 guidelines may have not been implemented fully though this may need to be studied further.

Keywords: Special Area Plan (SAP), shop houses, façade characteristics, Taiping, conservation,

INTRODUCTION

Heritage cities and towns are experiencing alteration and change that affects not only its physical fabric but also the genius loci of the place. In studies carried out by Harun, Mansor, and Said (2015) they have found that historic places were losing their identity due to the changes caused by development pressure. This concurs with Shamsuddin (2011) study on twelve towns namely Kangar, Alor Setar, Taiping, George Town, Kota Bahru, Kuala Terengganu, Kuantan, Melaka, Johor Bahru, Batu Pahat, Kuala Lumpur and Kuching that these towns were all experiencing varying degree of change since 1989. Lim through CORE (2010) has drawn on the destruction and demolition example of ancient river frontage shop houses in Kampung Cina, Kuala Terengganu and the oldest market along Jalan Gambier in Kuching waterfront that have been wiped out in the name of development and upgrading of the respected areas. However, destruction can also take place through inappropriate conservation method as highlighted by Zubir, Hao, Hussain, and Isip (2018).

Heritage towns are more commonly now being developed in the name of heritage tourism where the values placed on these heritage more often than not be that of an outsider (Orbasli, 2008) Heritage tourism results in overzealous rebuilding marring the panoramic view of the urban fabric as observed by Sharma (2015) in Katra Town, India. An unbalanced development may see the local community being driven out where its traditional values are taken over by tourist commercialization ideals such as

observed in Ipoh, Malaysia (Hew, Tong, & Toh, 2014), Ping Yao, China (Wang, 2011), Chinatown and Little India, Singapore (Chang, 2000; Sim, 1997). The typologies of these towns that are mainly shop houses are no longer conducive to live in as Shamsuddin (2011) identified it to a 'tourist zoo' or 'museumification' Lim (2011) thus rendering these places soulless. Places like this are in dire need of a comprehensive and integrated planning with the concept of conservation and sustainability of historic places and not limited to conservation and protection of monuments. This paper introduces the background of the study including the methods used to explore the changes in heritage towns and the development guidelines safeguarding the cultural heritage focusing on building façade characteristics in this study. The findings and some of the implications to the buildings are discussed with suggestions as conclusion to the paper.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Heritage and Conservation

The idea of a more holistic approach to conservation was first raised in Europe during the late 19th century's French Revolution (Mateo, 2014). The conservation of the whole environment is important as it contributes to the context and meaning of individual monuments and separate sites. The Washington Charter recognized the issue of conserving singular listed monuments and stressed on the importance of contemporary elements in preserving the character of historical area as any destruction to these elements would significantly affect the authenticity of the historic town or urban area (ICOMOS, 1994). The contemporary elements that the Charter recognized which required preservation include its urban patterns as defined by lots and streets; relationships between buildings and green and open spaces; the formal interior and exterior appearances of buildings as defined by scale, size, style, construction, materials, colour and decoration; the relationship between the town or urban area and its surround settings, both natural and man-made and the various functions that the town or urban area has acquired over time.

According to SUIT (2004), conservation has to focus on preserving the other intrinsic characteristics of a place and not looked upon as a supporting element. Communities will not be able to identify themselves and would lose their sense of belonging (Harun et al., 2015; UNESCO, 1975) and understanding of their heritage (Andrade, 1968). As without these other elements that are commonly overlooked, the imagery of the past is incomplete. The importance of key sites are compromised with the lonely survival of isolated monuments and sites (Idid and Shamsuddin and Sulaiman through Said, Aksah, and Ismail (2013). Wang (2011) stressed that these urban elements are like spines intertwined together and are difficult to separate; which is similar to the function of a theatre backdrop and the removal of this 'backdrop' as purported by Fairclough (2008) is akin to removing history from its context.

Cultural Heritage – Places (Heritage Cities and Towns)

Heritage cities and towns are authentic places of memory to preserve the identity of communities. Each of these towns has its own peculiar characteristics that needs to be identified to be maintained, conserved and preserved as stressed by the Burra Charter (A. ICOMOS, 2013).

Urban designers Camillo Sitte and Daniel Burnham were one of the earlier individuals who were interested in studying the character of towns focusing on the aesthetics as a design consideration (Aryal, 2010; McBrien, 2010). According to Kropf (1996), character is the thing that makes a town different from others and it is the combination of these features that gives the town its identity.

Lynch (1960) who used the mind mapping technique in identifying the character of a city attributed the identity to path, nodes, districts, edges and landmarks. Both Kropf (1996) and Moughtin (2000) further elaborated on these elements attributing the character of a town to light, material, colour, texture, shape, size, climate and so forth. Hence undeniably the character of a town is identifiable through these elements as a town is fundamentally a physical entity with a framework for things to happen and take place.

The Case Study Area

The case study was chosen based on its historical background and its current position as a heritage town that is currently going through rapid development in the name of heritage tourism. Taiping was declared a Heritage Town on 8 September 1999 by the Perak State Government (Mohamed, 2015) with intentions to have Taiping enlisted together with four other heritage places in Perak namely Royal Belum, Gua Tempurung, Kinta and Ipoh City under the UNESCO Heritage list similar to Malacca and Georgetown (Ika, 2010; Wong, 2010).

Taiping began and flourished as a tin mining town until it rose to be the capital of Perak. The economic boom saw an influx of settlers from China, Southern India and also the Celonese, Punjabi and Panthian community making the then Malaya as their home (Khoo, 1981). This settlers brought development and cultural diversity to Taiping and today Taiping is recognized to be rich in cultural heritage locally and internationally (Price, 2007; Yeap, 2016).

Taiping was selected to be developed under the Special Area Plan together with thirty-four other towns in Malaysia (Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia : Kementerian Kesejahteraan Bandar, 2016). The Taiping Special Area Plan 2010 (TSAP 2010) was gazetted on 20 July 2010 identifying two zones; Taiping Town Conservation Zone (TTCZ) and Taiping Lake Gardens (Taiping Municipal Council, 2008). The focus of this study is limited to TTCZ on the development guidelines to buildings located within the designated conservation zone. Figure 1 illustrates the TTCZ in dotted lines and the twenty-two roads studied in grey colour adjacent to Taiping Lake Gardens Conservation Zone

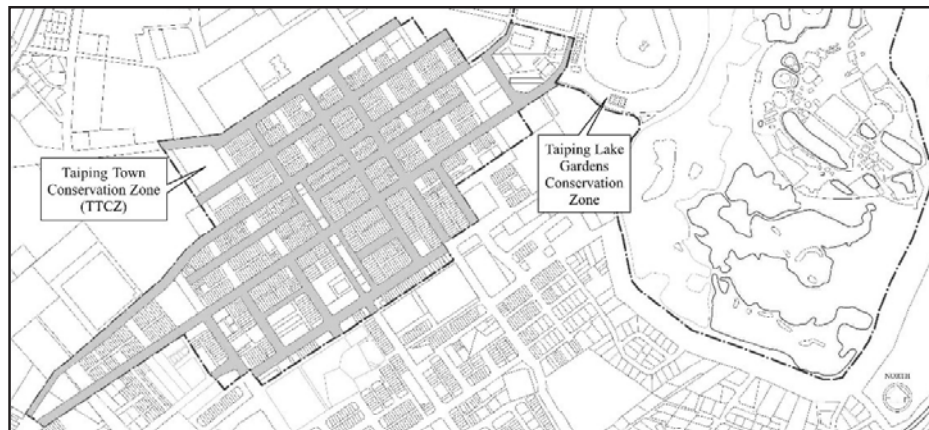


Figure 1: Location map demarcating conservation zones in Taiping Heritage Town

THE METHOD

This study is exploratory in nature with a case study strategy. Case study strategy according to Yin (2009) is a holistic and in-depth investigation and analysis involving single or multiple cases to further understand complex social condition.

This study involved creating an inventory for the designated Taiping Town Conservation Zone (TTCZ) to explore the changes from 2010 to 2015 and revealing the TSAP 2010 development guidelines for conformance of developments to these guidelines. According to Logan and Mackay (2013), inventory is a basic tool to providing information of cultural and natural assets of a place and is a basis for many legislation and policy makers as it provides guidance in decision making for permissible and desirable future development proposals.

The data for the inventory was gathered during the field study that was conducted on site from January 2015 to February 2015. It recorded photographic images for all the 1132 units located within TTCZ. The 1132 units comprised not only shop houses but government offices, religious buildings, clan associations, schools and markets. The units were photographed in two's or three's where possible and stitched together forming panoramic views as seen on site. The units were catalogued first by road, by block, by lot number and lastly by unit number.

The study was divided into three phases. The first phase was to analyse the level of change to the building's façade. A visual comparative analysis was carried out between two sets of photographs; the pre and post of TSAP 2010. The pre photos refers to the data of TSAP 2010 while the post TSAP 2010 was the field study carried out between January 2015 to February 2015. The comparative analysis was divided into four main components of BC - walling and cladding (external), BW windows and doors, BR roofs and balconies and BX ancillary fixtures (including canopies, awnings, air condition outdoor unit, television aerial, permanent signage and lightings). The analysis on these components was carried out based on a numerical rating scale. Scale 1 – represents no change whereby the component observed is similar in 2010 and 2015. This includes the material and colour of a component, scale 2 – represents non-critical changes whereby the change can be reverted or reinstated to its original state. These are minor alteration for example a change in the type of window from casement to louvers. However, the opening size and position has to be the same as observed in 2010. Scale 3 – represents critical or total change whereby the change involved cannot be reverted or reinstated. These critical changes for example are a structural change that changes the form of the whole or a part of the structure such as the roof. A change in the size, position or creation of new openings is also considered a scale 3 change. This critical change also includes total demolition or removal of the existing structures. Scale 4 – represents non relevant information as there is no data for comparison.

The second phase was to analyse the type of change to the building façade. Units falling within scale 4 – no data for comparison and scale 1- no change has been disregarded for this phase of study as it was not relevant to this inquiry. Analysis was focused on units with scale 2 - non critical change and scale 3 – critical change.

The third phase was to analyse the conformance of building units to the TSAP 2010 guidelines. Analysis was carried out only for building units that have recorded a scale 3 – critical change in all four components in the first phase of analysis. The analysis was also limited to shop houses only as the TSAP 2010 guidelines indicated that the guidelines were only for shop houses. A matrix table consisted of nine main components was created for the analysis based on the guidelines revealed.

RESULTS

Level of Change to the Physical Characteristics of the Building Façade

From the inventory carried out by the researcher, data showed that there were 1132 buildings within TTCZ as identified by the local authority. However, from these 1132 units, 404 (35.69 %) units were not recorded in the TSAP 2010. The TSAP 2010 which is the most complete inventory to date - was used as a basis to explore the façade level of change since the implementation of the TSAP 2010 from 2010 to 2015. As there were no archival data available for the said 404 units, only 728 (64.31%) of the building units can be analysed.

From the data gathered, building units that have shown some sort of change for component BC was low (below 10 %). There were only 41 units (5.63 %) recording a scale 2 – non critical change and 43 units (5.91 %) recording a scale of 3 – critical change as compared to 644 units (88.46 %) that have not changed between 2010 and 2015.

For the second component BW – windows and doors, data has shown that a total of 667 (91.62 %) units have not changed (scale 1) since the implementation of the TSAP 2010. However, 61 units (8.38 %) have shown some rate of change as 14 units (1.92 %) has a scale 2 – non critical change while 47 (6.46 %) units have shown a scale 3 – critical change.

For the third component, BR - roof and balconies has the lowest level of change between the four components as 682 building lots units (93.68 %) has not shown any changes (scale 1 – no change) since the implementation of the TSAP 2010. 3 units (0.41 %) have shown a scale 2 – non critical change while 43 building lots units (5.91 %) have shown a scale of 3 – critical change.

For the fourth and final component, BX – ancillary fixtures has the highest level of change with 239 units (32.83 %) in comparison to the other three categories namely BC - walling and cladding,

BW – windows and doors and BR – roofs and balconies. From these 239 units, 203 (27.88 %) have shown scale of 2 – non critical change while the other 36 units (4.95 %) have shown scale of 3 – critical change. To note, data analysis has recorded that 489 units (67.17 %) have not changed (scale 1 – no change) between 2010 and 2015.

The findings have confirmed that all four components showed some level of change between 2010 and 2015. The rate of change has been measured in two scales namely non-critical and critical change. There were more units falling within the critical change scale for three components (BC, BW and BR) except for one component (BX). However, on the overall, the level of change was low as compared to the total number of units located within the TTCZ.

A microanalysis on the magnitude of change was also carried out to get a clearer perspective on the level of change. This microanalysis was based on the rate of change by road. From data gathered during the field study, the number of units differed from road to road. Hence the inquiry into how much has changed by road would give a deeper understanding into the level of change. Similarly, to the overall rate of change, only units with a scale of 1, 2 and 3 were included in the analysis. The highest number of units per road was 178 units while the lowest was 1 unit.

The microanalysis on the rate of change by road revealed Jalan Toh Kay Beng (Jalan Toh Kay Seng) as the road that have transformed critically between 2010 and 2015. Findings revealed it had the highest percentage of critical change for all four components. The microanalysis also revealed that roads with a higher number of transformations per unit did not necessary have a higher degree of change. This magnitude of change was relative to the number of units located along the road.

From the twenty-two roads analysed, some of these roads showed a higher rate of change than others. An example for this was Jalan Toh Kay Beng (Jalan Toh Kay Seng) while some roads have not changed at all since the TSAP 2010 implementation in the TTCZ.

Type of Change to the Physical Characteristics of the Building Façade

The phase two analysis was expanded upon the same unit of analysis (BC, BW, BR and BX) on building façade characteristics of phase one. The findings revealed six categories of change from form, proportion, rhythm, material and colour and reduction or new addition of ancillary fixtures. The new addition is particular only to component BX. In comparison between the components, some components had more types of change than the other components.

The findings on the type of change also revealed four common scenarios where a change to the building unit facade occurred though this need to be confirmed with further studies. The first scenario is when the typology of the unit is readapted from house to shop in particular the ground level. The second scenario is when a new entity takes over an existing business entity while the third scenario is when the unit is demolished and redevelops into a new unit. The fourth scenario is when a vacant land is redeveloped erecting a new building in its place. The last two scenarios in general result in a change to the component BC – walling and cladding proportion. The change was limited to shop houses with the exception of a publicly owned standalone unit that was readapted to a gallery. There was a change in total height with new additional floor levels from two levels to three, four or five levels for most of the shop houses that were redeveloped. The new additional floors had also a higher floor-to-floor height from the original unit floor-to-floor height.

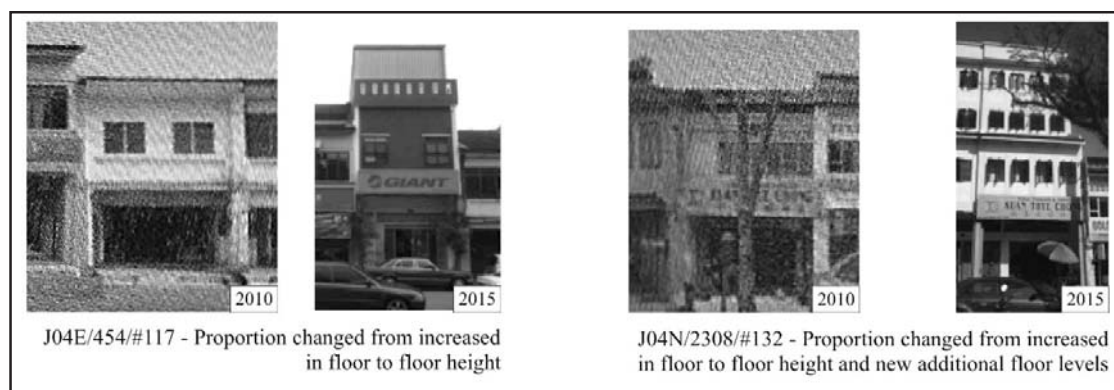


Figure 2: Graphic illustration on proportion changes for some of the units

Apart from the change in height, the colour of the building unit has also changed where the colour selection was leaning more towards brighter and bolder colours. It was found that colour change was either in the form of new paint wash for building unit lots with washout paint colour or when there was a change in the type of use. The colour shade change observed was from white wash or pastel shades to brighter colours or darker colour shades and vice versa. Some of the building units have several different shades on its façade to express its mouldings or carvings.

Component BW- doors and windows as shown had the most variation in the type of change. The most common within the five categories of change was the window material from timber frames to metal frames, timber shutters to glass louvers and glass panels. The change of colour here was relative to the material change as the metal frames and glass.

The component BR – roofs and balconies change in form is commonly the addition of parapet to the roof and an additional mono pitch roof. This additional pitch roof was to accommodate the change in form reflected in component BC. Apart from this there were also changes from pitch roofs to flat roofs design though the number was low. A material change in roofs reflects the more contemporary choice change from tile to metal roofs. There were no changes in the balconies for the building units. Balconies were only observed on some of the traditional shop houses corner units or individual stand-alone units.

Component BX revealed a change more commonly in its signage as opposed to other fixtures such as air-conditioning outdoor unit, lighting and television antenna or satellite dish. These other fixtures were more in relation to its placement, new additional or removal of existing units. The signage had changes in its design from the perspective of sizes ranging from larger to smaller or smaller to larger, shape from more elongated, to wider or narrower, type from metal, acrylic, lighted box to canvas printouts.

The findings also revealed that the number of change within a unit varies. For example, in a component with two categories of change, the change may happen in only one, two or more of the categories analysed.

Conformance to the TSAP 2010 development guidelines

From the data gathered in phase one, there were twenty-three units with critical change in all four units of analysis (BC – walling and cladding, BW – doors and windows, BR – roofs and balconies and BX – ancillary fixtures). These units were located along five roads comprising three major roads within TTCZ; Jalan Taming Sari (Main Road), Jalan Pasar (Market Road), Jalan Kota (Kota Road) – J05 and two other roads perpendicular to these three major roads; Jalan Toh Kay Beng (Jalan Toh Kay Seng) and Jalan Tupai (Tupai Road).

In phase three, the study was carried out on five main elements and fifteen components. The main elements and the components ‘in bracket’ as follows were planning parameters (building setback, building height, storey height), roof profile (roof form), proportion (colonnade, five-foot-way), façade treatment (plaster decorative ornaments, colour, air-conditioning and ancillary fixtures,

signage, windows and doors design) and materials (roof, door and window). These units were expanded from phase one and were categorised according to the TSAP 2010 development guidelines.

The study found that from the five elements analysed (planning parameters, proportion, roof profile, façade treatment and materials) only one element had more units conforming to the required guidelines which was the materials element. Two out of its three components studied namely window and door conformed to the guidelines while for the façade treatment element, it had equally three components which had more units conforming to the guidelines and another three which had more units not conforming to the guidelines. The three elements with more units not conforming to its required guidelines were the planning parameters, roof profile and proportion.

The findings have established that majority of building units did not conform to the TSAP 2010 guidelines. The building units reflected a multitude of design with limited cohesiveness between building units within its block on a micro level while on the macro level this has changed the setting of TTCZ. The uniqueness of a place according to Shamsuddin (2011); Trancik (1986) is through the characteristics provided by its' surroundings. Hence the change in the setting of TTCZ may have affected the value of Taiping as a heritage town.

Shop house units within TTCZ with critical change are new developments as building owners as Steinberg (1996) highlighted is constantly bounded by the myth of economics in new development versus conservation. The majority of these newly developed shop houses have increased in its overall building height. Units were built with new additional floors transiting from its original two levels to three, four and five levels. This happened even though the guidelines have explicitly mentioned that there was a maximum of four levels or plot ratio 1: 3.5 resulting in a skyline change. Skylines according to Moughtin, Oc, and Tiesdell (1995) are characteristics to a town which Chan (2005) stressed is to be respected. The newly built floors had also higher floor-to-floor height in comparison to its original unit floor height. The change in the floor-to-floor height has affected the alignment of units within a block. All units within a block were originally aligned creating a continuous fascia even though the units may have been built at a different period. The increase in the building height may no longer be adapted to the human scale and changed the sense of completeness and enclosure within the street (Moughtin, 1992). The statement of Khoo (1981) on one of the identity of Taiping is in its two storey shop houses which may no longer be relevant in the future.

On guidelines for the roof, the TSAP 2010 has mentioned jack roofs and pitch roofs design. However, there was non-conformance with hip roof and flat roofs design. The TSAP 2010 has not mentioned the pitch of the roof slope which has resulted in a varying degree of roof slopes with a multitude of differing roof heights and misalignment of roof ridges to the shop houses.

Apart from this newly built shop houses, some were built on higher ground level. The TSAP 2010 guideline has required units to have a dimensional consistency in its five-foot-way. However, these shop houses finish floor level has been raised higher than its neighbouring units thus creating steps or ramps along the five-foot-way and pathway or road shoulder; where a similar issue has happened to shop houses in Kuala Kubu Bahru in Selangor, Sungai Lembing in Pahang and Kampung Kepayang in Perak as highlighted by Azmi (2015). Apart from that, the soffit height for newly developed units was also inconsistent differing from one to the other.

The TSAP 2010 guideline did not provide a description on traditional windows except there was no allowance for square windows. Square windows may not be common but have been observed in traditional shop houses. Further to this, the TSAP 2010 has not specified the type of glass to be used resulting in variation of the type of glass used from dark coloured tints to reflective glass.

CONCLUSION

The building façade characteristics of units located within TTCZ has changed since the implementation of the TSAP 2010. However, the magnitude of change was low as compared to the total number of lots within the TTCZ. The outcome of the study may have been affected by the number of units with no information as a result of an incomplete inventory in the TSAP 2010. The low level of change may have also been attributed to a façade change in the units prior to 2010 as some of the building unit features observed were no longer traditional shop houses. But this assumption could not be confirmed at the level of this study.

The type of change to the facade were found to be mainly on loose fixtures attached to the facade, followed by planning parameters of building height and storey height and lastly the openings on the façade. However, the change was not attributed to the TSAP 2010 guideline as the guideline was found to have very limited influence to the changes experienced by the shop houses. This was because the conformance level to the TSAP 2010 guideline was low. The low level of conformance to the TSAP 2010 guideline may be attributed to a low level of implementation that needs further evaluation.

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