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**Unleashing Potentials  
Shaping the Future**

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# STYLISTIC CHARACTERS OF SHOPHOUSE IN BENTONG, PAHANG

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## INTRODUCTION

Shophouse is a common urban building typology found in Southeast Asia and China, consists of commercial use on the ground floor and residential on the top floor. It is a fundamental unit of urban structure in Malaysian cities and towns. Malaysia's vernacular shophouse has a unique stylistic elements that differs itself from the rest of shophouse design around the world due to the design revolves around its multi-cultural background. The syncretic nature of Malaysian culture and history in colonialism has created a unique identity for its shophouse with the amalgamation of different architectural elements, result of intertwining both vernacular and foreign technologies. Consequently, across various regions of Malaysia, the shophouse styles has also developed into variations with each region having its own distinctive stylistic characters that represents the region. George Town, Penang and Malacca City were successfully listed on the UNESCO World Heritage, due to its unique heritage identity. From this, there's no doubt that the stylistic elements of shophouse poses significance to the identity of a place (Han, J. Beisi, 2015).

## ISSUES

Rapid urbanization on developing towns has led to many demolitions on shophouses without concerning its potential heritage value. An article stated that 70% buyers of George Town, Penang heritage properties are reported to be Singaporean (Ives, 2018). This proves a clear gap between Malaysia and Singapore regarding public awareness on the heritage value of shophouse. Hence, the lack of comprehension on the importance of retaining shophouses culture as well as the absence of appreciation in its cultural significance among Malaysian has caused difficulty in identifying stylistic characters of shophouse in towns like Bentong, Pahang. This will affect the architectural identity of the shophouse and will simultaneously decrease its architectural value and Bentong's heritage value.

Heritage Properties Buyers in George Town, Penang are

**70% SINGAPOREAN**



## FINDINGS

### Case studies

The main location of the case study is set in Bentong, Pahang, Malaysia. Various selection of shophouse along three parallel streets, including Jalan Loke Yew, Jalan An Peng and Jalan Chui Yin is taken as the subject for this case study. However, the selection only include shophouse that were built from 1890s, when Bentong was form, until 1970s. Newly constructed shophouse, that of Modern style, are not included in this study as they do not reflect an appropriate style because of drastic development in technology. The selected study area has a various diversity of styles.



### Classifications of Shophouse Stylistic Timeline in Bentong

Nine essential architectural components of the shophouse facade were recognized, namely beam, column, roof, external wall, door, window, air vents, fenestration and ornamentation. All of these components were further divided into 41 visual elements.

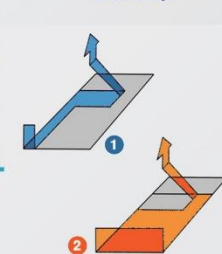


The above demonstrate the stylistic timeline classification of shophouse in Bentong, further proving Ali et al., 2015 studies on the matter. It starts from a simple form with no ornamentation to grandeur facade with fine plaster works mimicking the colonial influences the British brought in. Due to its booming tin mining industry, shophouse 4 until 6 portrays Bentong's economic growth and prosperity with metal awnings and metal fretwork fascia, along with golden finished Greco-Roman capitals and architrave, adorning the facade of its shophouse.

### Comparative Analysis

The right shows the stylistic timeline classification of shophouse 1 from Bentong and shophouse 2 from Penang. Both shares the same styles as they have the similar features of full width timber shutter windows on a parapet wall with indented panels. Solid timber shutters are commonly seen on an Early Penang styles shophouse. Therefore, the solid timber shutters with glass infills on shophouse 1 is different from the conventional louvered timber shutters of shophouse 2. It portrays a hybrid of styles between Early Penang style and Southern Chinese Eclectic style which are unique to Bentong. The upper floor entrance on ground floor for both shophouse are quite different. Based on figure below shophouse 1 provide entrance through a separated passageway straight to the courtyard with an access of staircase to upper floor while on shophouse 2, the entry is through the single main entrance though the commercial or residential block to the courtyard. Both shophouse 1 and 2 have its differences even though sharing the same styles. This proves Bentong's shophouse features to have its own distinctive features than others. The distinctions between shophouses 1 and 2 exist despite having similar styles. The findings demonstrated that Bentong's shophouse characteristics set them apart from others. Most facades contain streamlined, utilitarian linear features like fins and canopies for shading. The facade design and the structure are kept well-integrated with a flat plaster finish made of lime or cement over reinforced concrete (RC) construction of beams and pillars with cement or clay brick infill. The differences are mainly in the posts and beam design, which are de-emphasised and incorporated into the facade. The elements of decorations such as keystones, architraves and motifs are the stylistic components that help define the shophouses' typology. Plenty of shophouses from Eclectic styles until Neo-Classical styles, like shown in Fig. 3, have architrave covering only the transom light or lintel part of the window. This unique feature of Bentong being the most architrave on shophouse from other regions covers the whole window, as shown below on window 3 until 7.

### Southern Chinese Eclectic Style



## OBJECTIVES

Thus, this study aims to investigate the many stylistic characters and its origin of shophouse in Bentong to find its architectural identity in order to elevate the heritage value of Bentong.

## METHODOLOGY

Throughout the research, the data were mainly collected through three methods, which are matrix taxonomy, case study observation, comparative analysis, and literature research. To increase the accuracy of the analysis, various data sources and evidence were collected using these methods to prove the data.

### Primary Data Sources

Case study observations were made to understand the subject better. Photographs will be taken from each shophouse that displays a unique SC. Inventory classifications on the shophouse style will be done to classify it further, enabling the categorization of its elements: structure, enclosure, openings, fenestration and ornamentation, as in Table 3. Then each of the features will be classified and analysed. After that, a comparative analysis is done by comparing Bentong shophouses with another region in Malaysia for its correspondence and uniqueness in the SC. Wan Ali (2022) specified 48 characters; however, this research there will only examine forty-one (41) characters of Transitional, Eclectic, Neo-Classical, Art Deco and Modern architectural styles had been listed from the analysis and drafted in a checklist to develop an inventory sheet which also known as matrix taxonomy. The matrix is a reference to formulate an inventory form to classify and grade the architectural styles of heritage shophouse facades.

### Matrix Taxonomy

The matrix taxonomy is an inventory form with a specific calculation method. Its purpose is to classify and grade the architectural styles of the heritage shophouse facade based on the characters and physical condition seen on the facade.

### Secondary Data Sources

Information is searched through architectural journal articles, books, magazine, research paper and internet. This section contains all the main topics and information that is related and relevant to the study, which can be obtained through both method above. Topics are divided into specific sub-topics to get more understanding on the matter. The topics are:

- History of shophouse in Malaysia and Bentong, Pahang
- Architectural identity and stylistic characters of a building
- Stylistic timeline of shophouse in Bentong

Main Elements	Sub-features	Characters	Traditional		Modern	
			Transitional	Eclectic	Neo-Classical	Art Deco
Structure	Beam	a. Clay brick b. Reinforce concrete				
	Column	a. Clay brick b. Reinforce concrete c. Free standing column d. Free floor rafters without column e. Engage column at the upper level				
	Roof	a. Brick roof b. Flat roof c. Green clay potteries d. High pediment e. Parapet wall				
Envelope	External wall	a. Paint in pastel colour b. Paint in bright colour c. Shambai plaster d. Wall tiles				
	Door	a. Timber door b. Removable or folding timber paneling c. Removable or folding metal paneling				
	Window	a. Timber shutter b. Cement shutter c. Glass shutter d. Concrete shading fin e. 2.5 bay full length shutters f. Concrete sill				
Openings	Air vents	a. Timber or metal lattice at the ground level b. Timber carved transomlight c. Timber carved fanlight d. Radiating bars fanlight e. Louvers above window f. Casement above window g. 2.5 bay full length shutters h. Large size i. Architrave surround in below j. Braced k. Plaster columns				
	Ornamentation	a. Keystones b. Geometric motifs c. Niches d. Finials e. Bases				

Table 1 - Stylistic timeline inventory sheet.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned typological research findings, it can be said that the principal facade and appearance are characterised by traditional, eclectic, and neo-classical architectural styles, which set apart how the structures' walls, beams, and columns are displayed. The details, architrave, and motifs of the facade allow one to observe the ornaments and aesthetic characteristics. Shophouses are crucial elements that influence how Bentong is shaped. By preserving it, the residents can better understand their town's history, promote it locally, and open up more prospects for improved tourism. The Gen Z and the elements that make a place unique must be embraced by the new generation. The tangible fundamental elements that express a building's heritage values must be preserved to create a sense of place. A heritage building's architectural features have a minor impact on future generations' ability to express not only memory and identity but also values and a sense of place. Heritage structures must be maintained, safeguarded, and conserved to address global concerns and local development.