



**6th UNDERGRADUATE  
SEMINAR ON BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT  
AND TECHNOLOGY  
(USBET) 2023**

**SUSTAINABLE BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT**

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# e-Proceeding

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# STYLE IN ARCHITECTURE: THE COMBINATION OF DIVERSE ELEMENTS IN CHEONG FATT TZE MANSION IN PENANG

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## ABSTRACT

*The Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion or so-called Blue Mansion is a prominent landmark in Penang and an example to embrace the beauty of the Straits eclectic style. However, the future architectural development in Penang does not share the same concern on maintaining and preserving the values because of their lack of understanding. The paper investigates the elements, characteristics of the architectural style and the architectural layout of a mansion in George Town, Penang, as well as the architectural style of the mansion. The structure of Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion combines Chinese architectural and cultural ideas with local Malay ethnicity and European colonial influences. This research is produced by using systematic data which is primary data and secondary data. The primary data will be collected through a site visit, recording the data from personal interviews with the expert and owner of the mansion. The secondary data will be gathered using diverse online sources, such as official publications, non-governmental organization (NGO) websites, and archived news. The findings of this research point toward a better understanding of the Straits Eclectic style and the elements in the Cheong Fatt Tze itself. Lastly, this gem needs to be preserved in order to portray the Late Straits Eclectic style for future reference.*

**Keywords:** *Straits Eclectic, Architecture Style, Penang, Cheong Fatt Tze.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Among other heritage buildings, this mansion took the attention on preservation and to be taken care of because of its captivating historical and architectural values which was certified by UNESCO as one of the most unique heritage buildings and was awarded with an Award for Culture Heritage Conservation. (Nas.C, 2003). When heritage buildings have been demolished or are no longer properly maintained, future generations will be unable to see them, let alone learn about their history. The problems are conservation and preservation dilemmas that happened due to the lack of knowledge and reference in preservation also affected the goal to preserve and retained the architectural values. Lack of skills and materials also could be one of the obstacles to preserving heritage buildings, especially the Cheong Fatt Tze mansion as the origin and the diverse elements used. Most of the heritage buildings built back then were using not only local labor but mostly the workers and craftsmen were imported from other countries such as China. So preserving and retaining the architecture and its construction would cost large amounts. Hence it is necessary to create awareness of the heritage buildings conservation issues. To preserve and retain the architecture it would cost large amounts. Therefore, the aim and objectives of this research paper are to examine the architectural characteristics and elements of the eclectic style of Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang.

- To identify the meaning and the mixed elements in straits eclectic architectural style.
- Identify, as far as possible, the characteristics of the mansion such as architectural style, exterior and interior features.
- To study and outline the application of Straits eclectic style in the building for future development in Penang.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Background & History of Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion**

The Blue Mansion or Cheong Fatt Tze is located at 14 Leith Street, 10200 George Town, Penang, Malaysia George Town, Penang or well known as World Heritage Site (WHS) by UNESCO on 27 July 2008 (Shida Ir, 2013). George Town was given this classification because of the town's distinct and unique architectural styles and cultural landscapes. This distinguishes them from other sites in the world and makes them extremely astounding (Nas. C, 2003). The mansion was originally built by a man named Cheong Fatt Tze. Cheong Fatt Tze is a Hakka from a district named Teochew, he migrated to different countries from a water carrier in Java Indonesia to an influential businessman in South East Asia (Adrian Cheah, 2022). Early in the 1890s,

because the Dutch East Indies outlawed any diplomatic representation, he relocated his base to Penang where he started to design and build the magnificent mansion (Khoo. S. N., 1993). The Blue Mansion (Figure 1) consists of 38 rooms but only 18 rooms were available for occupancy, a hall, a lounge bar, an Indigo restaurant that once was a family living room, a Chi point called a courtyard and 4 other courtyards on both wings of the mansion. The Blue Mansion was conserved and retained in the most recommended conservation fashion which is called Reversible Intervention so that it can be removed or added or returned to its original state and vice versa.



**Figure 1: The Blue Mansion (Source: VFM Leonardo, 2022)**

## **Architectural Style & Concept**

The architectural style of Cheong Fatt Tze is the Straits Eclectic style. A single work combines a few elements from several works. There are diverse elements in the Straits Eclectic style in the mansion such as Chinese elements, European elements and local architectural elements. The Chinese elements in the mansion are influenced by the Peranakan culture born from the history of the Baba- Nyonya community (*Azizi Bahauddin & Teh Boon Soon*). The Chinese elements that can be seen in the mansion and some other heritage buildings are from the form or the layout of the buildings. For example, the courtyard placement in the Blue Mansion and other buildings in George Town. The external and interior facades included many Chinese architectural features and *details* (*Liu & Awotona, 1996*). The Europeans introduced Western features into the Straits Eclectic style, such as windows and ornate plasterwork, as well as Kaki-Lima (Five-Foot). The arts and skills that could be seen throughout George Town were shown using wood, stone, tiles, and plaster (*Fels, 1994*). Other than the English Art Nouveau stained glass, other Western elements that can be seen in the mansion are the exit gate and the central courtyard balcony.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is produced using systematic data collection which is the primary and the secondary data such as visual data collection, research design which is a case study and interviews to help learn more about the elements and characteristics of the mansion. In addition, interviews with the mansion's owner, Mr. Laurence Loh, were undertaken to improve the visual data collected. This has assisted in the collecting of the majority of important information on eclectic-style architecture.

### **Research Techniques: Primary Data Collection**

An observation and a semi-structured interview have been made by performing a site visit to obtain information about the Blue Mansion and to identify the many types of Eclectic styles that are located in the area of Georgetown. All of the data gathered on-site is collected and recorded. The difference between every Straits Eclectic style in terms of their structures (physical appearance), European & Indian influence and Chinese influence are all observed and documented. An interview with the mansion's owner, Mr. Laurence Loh, has been set to collect data regarding the history, background, the detail of the elements in the architectural style of the mansion. However, due to some personal reasons from the owner of the mansion itself, the interview has been done via online (Google Meet) and the owner also provided the prerecorded interview to help with data collection. Although there are limitations, site visits have been conducted to facilitate the process of data collection with the help of the Cheong Fatt Tze mansion.

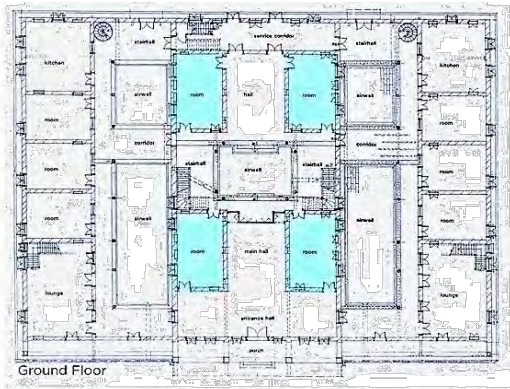
### **Research Techniques: Secondary Data Collection**

For the secondary data, the information was collected using the literature review and case study. The data were collected from readings, magazines, books, journals, articles and websites, etc. This method will explain more about the origin of the Straits Eclectic Style and the mansion, the architectural values and the detail of the elements.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

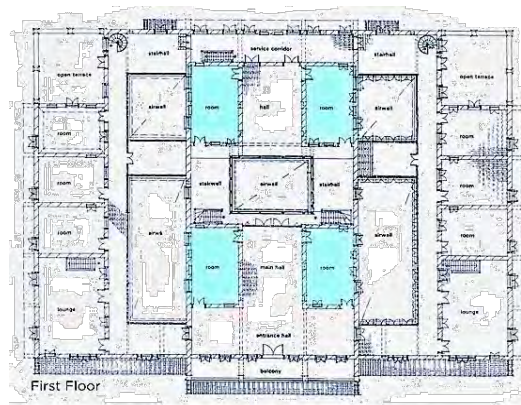
The finding highlights the various types of Straits eclectic style throughout the year from the 1700s to the late 1900s. and the analysis detail of elements and characteristics of the Straits eclectic style in the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion itself. The layout of this mansion is inspired by Chinese architecture brought by the Chinese craftsmen and there are only two buildings with the same layout used outside China, Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion and the other building in Jakarta, Indonesia. Other than the layout, the physical appearance of the Late Straits Eclectic style in the mansion





is 2-3 storeys. The type of Straits Eclectic style data is collected and tabulated in Table 1, consisting of the year, the name of Straits Eclectic style, physical appearance, the traditional building material and the elements from the European or Chinese influence. This finding is one of the factors that need to be considered before preserving and retaining any historical building that have the same architectural style,

Straits Eclectic Style. Other than that, the Blue Mansion's architectural detail consists of roof, timberwork, ironwork, decorative elements, floor, windows and their finishing has been observed and simplified in Table 2.




**Figure 2: The Blue Mansion Floorplan (Source: VFM Leonardo, 2022)**

**Table 1: Types of Straits Eclectic Style**

Year	Name of Straits Eclectic Style	Physical appearance	Traditional Building Materials	European & Indian influence	Chinese influence
1790s	Early Penang	1-2 storeys (Low)	Timber, clay, bricks, granite, Terracotta roof and floor tiles, lime plaster paint	-	-
1840s	Southern Chinese Style	2-3 storeys	Encaustic clay floor tiles	Timber louvered windows & U/V shaped terracotta roof tiles	Air vents, carved timber door, air well and gable etc.
1890s	“Early Straits” Style		Glass fanlights cement floor tiles, and ceramic wall tiles	Full length shuttered windows and geometric patterned coloured clay floor tiles	Carved timber door, air vent, gable and air well etc.
1910s	“Late Straits” Style		Terracotta roof tiles, reinforced concrete, metal and glass	Full length shuttered windows and clay floor tiles, projecting roof, plaster relief	Plaster wall finishing
1930s	Art Deco Style		Simplify form and design based on the availability of materials	geometric design and metal framed glass windows	
1950s	Early Modern Style				

**Table 2: The Blue Mansion's Architectural style detail**

	Physical Appearance	Architectural Elements	Description	Traditional Materials
 <p>The Late Straits Eclectic Style (Late 19<sup>th</sup>)</p>	2-3 storeys	Roof	-	Terracotta roof tiles
		Ironwork: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Balustrades</li> <li>● Columns</li> <li>● Spiral Stairs</li> </ul>	-	Victorian Scottish cast iron
		Decorative Elements	Decorative paintings on gables of the building, beams border at the main courtyard and internal walls Ceramic cut and paste with elaborate patterns of men, women, animals and sceneries depicting Chinese.	Porcelain/ Ceramic bowls
		Timberworks	Timber filigree carvings, timber louvered window and panelled doors also the eye deceiving beams	Blackwood timber
		Floor	Using the coloured tiles imported from England	Stoke-On-Trent tiles
		Windows	Using the Art Nouveau-stained glass window	Stained glass panels
		Plaster & Paint	Without causing structural wall damage, absorbed moisture, cooled and released moisture.	Lime plaster and Lime wash paint

## **CONCLUSION**

The research finding has brought the author to a significant understanding of the elements and characteristics of the Straits eclectic style especially concerning the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion. This research will help more of understanding factors such as the ornamentalations, the material, etc. to be looked on to help on preservations of the mansions and other heritage buildings with the same concerns. As a result of this research on The Blue Mansion's Late Straits Eclectic style building, the layout of the mansion was brought by the Chinese craftsmen that came from the southern China province. The Straits Eclectic style of the building in Georgetown is a representation, when there encounter between the Chinese, Malays, and British colonies (various origins) in terms of architecture, hence resulting in mixed elements in the style. The layout was symmetrical and well divided on each side of the mansion with a Chi point in the center and 2 courtyards placed on both sides. The built heritage in Penang's George Town Heritage City has unique qualities and significance in terms of architecture that are related to history, aesthetics, building techniques, design, material, and culture. Based on the above conclusions, the issues can be summarized, and some recommendations can be made to ensure the objective of this research to succeed. The Blue Mansion had been through a long process of conservation to preserve the heritage building. It is necessary to generate tourism that enhances than threatens the local heritage. Therefore, any other heritage building and most importantly The Blue Mansion needs to be taken care of and repaired periodically so that in the future people can still enjoy the architectural knowledge found in the local heritage building, especially the Blue Mansion. The uniqueness and beauty of the architecture make it important to maintain the building.

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