

Complex by Tradition: Shophouses of Southeast Asia

"Who could anticipate or provide for such a succession of hopes and schemes? Only an unimaginative man would think he could; only an arrogant man would want to." -Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

So argues Jacobs for the indispensability of aged buildings, asserting their economic and cultural value. As urbanization accelerates around the world, cities today are battling a crisis of livability. In the face of global commerce, development is in danger of losing regional specificity, history, and walkability. Particularly in developing countries, large swaths of significant, human-scale vernacular forms are being razed or slated for demolition at alarming rates. The shophouses of Southeast Asia exemplify this trend.

The shophouse is a particular instance of the age-old, universal mixed-use typology, with roots in the age of New Imperialism. Distinguished by narrow fronts, elongated rears, and adaptation to the local climate through features like internal courtyards, the shophouse migrated from China along with entrepreneurs as European trading posts were established in Indochina and the Malay archipelago. This hybrid building combined commercial with residential uses, private ownership with public corridor, and European ornamentation with Chinese form. Historically shophouses dominated the city centers of the region, weaving a vibrant urban fabric. Today, collections of shophouses are adapted and preserved around the region to varying degrees and meet the modern city landscape in different ways. With this research I seek to understand the contribution of shophouses to contemporary urban life. I propose visiting ten urban centers of varying sizes and characters to study and analyze the streetscape, with inspirational graphics such as Louis Kahn's traffic study in mind. I intend on applying my experience with various analog media in the field, and I envision hybridizing with the digital upon return. Previous month-long travel abroad, including to Taiwan in the summertime, have acclimated me to the rigor of study and the humid climate.

My interest in civic life has threaded through my studio work, and the enthusiasm for this specific topic developed during two architecture history classes. In a UNESCO class, I learned about the shophouses of Malaysia, and interrogated notions of conservation and authenticity à la the writings of Walter Benjamin. In a vernacular class, the very definition of vernacular was called into question, and I probed issues of identity and modernity in relation to traditional buildings. In the architectural community, research interest in shophouses is relatively recent, with a 2007 conference held by UNESCO marking a watershed moment. One year later, Melaka was listed as a World Heritage Site. Beyond a disparate collection of journal articles, publication on the topic is limited, so I am excited by the prospect of contributing a new perspective to the literature. I also would like to utilize skills gained from a design research class, to hypothesize about, collate, and synthesize the current state of knowledge.

From the microscale detailing to the macroscale patterns of movement, traditional shophouses in the modern city provide a perfect case study for contradiction adapted and contradiction juxtaposed, per the dichotomy presented by Robert Venturi. Study of architecture like the shophouse is increasingly relevant to contemporary urban life, as many cities combat an unprecedented lack of affordability and a growing gap between live and work space.



Estimated Budget

Accommodations	\$2700 @ \$60USD/night
Airfare	\$1000/RT US + \$700 local
Daily Transportation	\$675 @ \$15/day
Food	\$1350 @ \$25/day
Misc Daily Expenses	\$900 @ \$20/day
Sketchbooks and supplies	\$200
Post-travel production	\$700
Total	\$8225

Select Bibliography

Davis, Howard. *Living Over the Store : Architecture and Local Urban Life*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Ginting, Nurlisa; Wahid, Julaihi. "Exploring Identity's Aspect of Continuity of Urban Heritage Tourism." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 202. (22 August 2015): 234-241.

Ismail, Wan Hashimah Wan. "Contemporary Uses of Buildings on a Heritage Street." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 170. (27 January 2015): 633-641.

Wakita, Yoshihisa; Shiraishi, Hideo. "Spatial Recomposition of Shophouses in Phnom Penh, Cambodia." 9.1 (January 1, 2010): 207-214.

Yeoh, Brenda S. A. *Contesting Space In Colonial Singapore : Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment*.

Itinerary

sampling of neighborhoods and sights listed
6.5 weeks

- SFO >> CGK
- Day 01-05 **Jakarta, Indonesia**
Lapangan Banteng, Kota Tua Jakarta
CGK-KNO 2h 20m
- Day 06-08 **Medan, Indonesia**
Gatot Subroto Street
RuKo and RuKan - home with store/office
KNO-SIN 1h 25m
- Day 09-14 **Singapore**
NUS "Baba House" @ No. 157 Neil Road
Boat Quay, Bugis, Kampong Glam, Chinatown
Little India - "chophouse"
Blair Plain, Jalan Besar, Beach Road
Shuttle train (5m) or bus (45m) to Johor Bahru
- Day 15-16 **Johor Bahru, Malaysia**
Johor Bahru Kwong Siew Heritage Gallery
Jalan Harimau Tarum
Bus to Melaka 2h 30m
- Day 17-19 **Melaka, Malaysia**
City center/Heritage area
Jonker, Heeren and adjacent streets
Bus to Kuala Lumpur 2h
- Day 20-23 **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**
Old Town, Tuanku Abdul Rahman
KUL-PEN 1h
- Day 24-27 **Penang, Malaysia**
George Town UNESCO site, Armenian Street
PEN-BKK 1h50m
- Day 28-31 **Bangkok, Thailand**
Rattanakosin, Chinatown
BKK-PNH 1h 10m
- Day 32-36 **Phnom Penh, Cambodia**
French Quarter, Sisowath Quay, Wat Phnom
PNH-DAD 3h40m, Bus Danang to Hoi An 40m
- Day 37-40 **Hoi An, Vietnam**
Old Town UNESCO site
Bus to Danang 40m, DAD-HAN 1h15m
- Day 41-45 **Hanoi, Vietnam**
Ba Dinh, Hoan Kiem, French Quarter
HAN >> CHO

