Sense of Place: Chew Jetty In George Town Historical City, Penang

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is to identify the elements of sense of place at Chew Jetty and to identify which is the most important element of sense of place that creating the uniqueness of Jetty. Sense of place is a primary concern in urban design, as it determines whether a place is sensitive towards its context. This, assessment was done through perceptual survey, behavioral observation techniques survey are the main technique that we used to do our survey and to collect data. The collected data being analyzed, compared and discussed in order to have a correct conclusion of ‘Sense of Place’ on our studied area. These may include, among others, analyzing the character, continuity and enclosure, quality of the public realm, ease of movement, legibility, adaptability, and diversity by using suitable assessment methods.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Penang Clan Jetties have always been given heritage recognition, especially when it was listed by Unesco as a World Heritage Site in 2008. Being a tourism destination, gradual deterioration of the jetties was noticed and therefore this research is focusing to study the elements of ‘sense of place’ at Chew Jetty and relationship to the inhabitants there and the surrounding locals. There is a need to study the physical setting and cultural influences that brought about the existence and transformation of the Clan Jetties, in hope to understand the uniqueness of the Chew Jetty.

Many of these sites are also settlements of resilient immigrants that have adapted their varied social-cultural forms of organization and practices to help them thrive, while contributing to the growth of early Penang. Indeed, the stories of these cultural communities have unearthed their significant contributions to the vibrant social-cultural formation and historical development of Penang as a global multi-cultural city.

**Definition of ‘Sense of Place’:**

Following is a list of five definitions from five different fields. They address most of the aspects commonly associated with the concept sense of place, also referred to as place attachment, topopilia, insidedness, and community sentiment [2].

A. From the perspective of Anthropology: Setha Low, “Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place Attachments in the Plaza” [3] “Place attachment is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space of piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s and group’s understanding of and relation to the environment.... Thus, place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place.” Hence there is a need to study the formation of the Chew Jetty.

B. From the perspective of Environmental Psychology: Fritz Steele, the Sense of Place [3]

“Sense of Place: the particular experience of a person in a particular setting.”

“Spirit of Place: the combination of characteristics that gives some locations a special ‘feel’ or personality (such as a spirit of mystery or of identity with a person or group).”

“Setting: a person’s immediate surroundings, including both physical and social elements.”

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C. From the perspective of Geography: Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia [4], “Topophilia is the affective bond between people and place or setting.” Such ties vary in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. Responses to the environment may be aesthetic, tactile, or emotional. Hence it is about the clan activities and lifestyle of Chew Jetty.

D. From the perspective of Landscape Architecture/History: John Brinckerhoff Jackson, A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time [5] “A sense of place is something that we ourselves create in the course of time. It is the result of habit or custom.... A sense of place is reinforced by what might be called a sense of recurring events.” It is talking about the need to study the historical development of Chew Jetty.

Behavioral Observation:
Observation is either an activity of a living being (such as a human), consisting of receiving knowledge of the outside world through the senses, or the recording of data using scientific instruments. The term may also refer to any datum collected during this activity. (retrieved from the wiki: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observation). Holmes, Dahan, Ashari, have said that ‘When you carry out observations you will have to produce detailed fieldwork descriptions of your subjects’ behaviour in their naturalistic surrounding.’ During our description we have to include our actions, interpersonal interactions and aspects of the activities that we observed.

Perception Survey:
The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say and to understand their perception of a certain place. There are 2 techniques that applied for this perception survey.

General interview guide approach - the guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee. Informal, conversational interview - no predetermined questions are asked, in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities; during the interview, the interviewer "goes with the flow".

Case Study Area: Chew Jetty, Penang:
The Weld Quay clan jetties area located on the coastal side of Weld Quay, stretching from opposite Chulia St.Ghaut to Malay St.Ghaut, which each jetty situated directly opposite each ghaut (Cluster A). Lying south of this group of clan jetties area four other Chinese jetties whose settlement history and time of establishment differ with those of the earlier mentioned group (Cluster B). These residents of these houses constitute Penang’s ‘foreshore floating population’. Though the 2 clusters look physically alike, they can in fact be grouped into three sections differentiated by their origin, historical development and occupational activities. The Chew Clan is by far the largest among the Weld Quay family of clans. This communal site is a waterfront settlement created over a century ago by Chinese immigrants sharing common historical, geographical and lineage origin. Currently there are eight surviving clusters of residential jetties and seven clans, each jetty used to be exclusively inhabited by its respective clansmen.

The Nodes of Chew Jetty:
The Chew Jetty consists of three significant areas that appear to be important communal spaces of the community living there. These Nodes are places where resident activities are at its peak.
A. Jetty Front:
The Jetty Front, known as ‘keo-tau’ in local Hokkien dialect refers to the branching point of the jetty from the main road of Weld Quay, where a large Bayan tree stood at the east of the passageway marking the entry point of the jetty while providing shades for the community. As the jetty dwellers cater its traditional sampan ferry service, there is a workstation shed located at the Jetty Front for sampan rowers to commence, rest and await their passengers. Two fleets of Trishaws can too be found waiting on either sides of the Jetty Front throughout the day for passengers from the sampans who are mainly crews of trawlers anchored away from shore.

B. Clan Temple:
Just after the Jetty Front workstation, there’s the Chew Clan Temple which guards the entrance to rest of the jetty and housed the clan deity. The Clan Temple oversees annual worshipping of the clan deity, where every clansmen commune for the event and bonds are renewed between clansmen through this clan-related activity.

C. Jetty End:
As the Chew jetty settlement elongates perpendicularly seawards into the northern part of the South Channel where the port anchorage is directly opposite, the advantageous location enables the Chew clansmen to retain its traditional sampan ferry service. In the late sixties, a roughly ten feet extension was constructed at the end of the main jetty due to the arising demand of the sampan-ferry service and so The Jetty Ends provide another workstation shed for sampan rowers to rest and await their passengers while there are also water closets as basic amenity.

The Roles of Chew Jetty Walkway to the Community:
A. Traditional Functions:
Loading and unloading of cargo- Even in the earliest stages, the prime function of the jetty walkway was to enable the cargo handling service to be provided by clansmen and for the sampan transportation service to work. These activities were the main economic source of clansmen while they were also vital to the port’s service and economy, since cargo ships can only be anchored further offshore.

Fishing Activities - Although not a main source of income, fishing activities were carried out among clansmen along the jetty walkway for the purpose of generating additional income or as a mean of supplementing daily diet, especially during the time of Japanese Occupation. The clansmen fished through ‘pang koon’ method of baiting fish where a main line with a large number of baited hooks attached to at the end of snoods and sank into a required depth. The jetty occupants also cast fishing net directly from the walkway itself.

Sampans Moors- On sea, sampan was the sole transportation for clan members to carry out their income generating services, and so when at rest, spaces will be needed for clansmen to moors their sampans. It was known that the Chew ‘sampan men’ aid in the ferrying passengers and goods during the ferry lounge service breakdown that disrupts the linking of Penang Island and mainland. During the increase in coastal barter trade in the 1930s, the demand for transportation of goods soon exceeds the transportation of passengers.

B. During The Year of 1940:
During the year of 1940s, the Japanese authorities ordered the residents of the bridges to collect the dead bodies and recruited all the sampans to collect the corpses. Each sampan was to fetch at least one body. ‘The reward for our work was $5 a day in addition to a bowl of white rice and one black olive. However, facing the rotten bodies, none of us could eat. We merely took one mouthful of our rice and threw it away.’ (Source: Interview of jetty occupants. Chan Lean Hen, PhD. [7])

C. After the year of 1960:
House as a work base - Traditional core occupation of clansmen offered a minimum income and so made it necessary for the jetty occupants to multiply their sources of income simultaneously and an adaptive mean of survival. Therefore, the lives of Chew clansmen revolved day and night around the Jetty and its walkway since they functions as the work base for the clansmen to earn their various types of living.

A place of residence- Apart from being a work base, the jetty remains a place of residence for the Chew clan settlement. It witnessed the increase in clan population and undergone transformation in its size and numbers of houses.

Sampan ferry service- Majority jetty residents still held on to their traditional sampan rowing and ferrying service as an irregular source of. When cargo handling completely ceased, together with the ending of trade reliance with the Indonesians and the decreasing numbers of smaller vessels anchoring in front of Chew Jetty,
the sampan ferry service was adapted to become like an individually operated private taxi service for people in need of the service.

Analysis of Data:
Behavioral Observation:

3 nodes of the jetties walkway were observed about 4 times a day, morning, noon, evening and night for their daily living lifestyle to compare with the activities that described in the written reference [7]. Based on the observation, we can see that most of the communal lifestyle still happening at the jetties walkway. Comparative daily activities based on literature [7] with the fieldwork observation:

A. ‘Children, especially roam freely in between one houses to another.’

Fig. 2: Children are playing at the space of jetties walkway
Left photo (Photo retrieved from Chan Lean Heng, Phd, 1980)
Right photo (Photo retrieved from http://www.re-cap.org/site/page1.aspx)
Center photo (Photo retrieved from http://www.re-cap.org/site/page1.aspx)

B. ‘On hot day’s people tend to remain indoors more, but comes out in the evenings to sit on their front porches to talk and cool off.’

Fig. 3: Location: Node of the jetties walkway
(Photo taken 1.30pm 11th of May 2012)

Fig. 4: Location: house front porch
(Photo taken 1.10pm 11th of May 2012)

Fig. 5: Location: Node of the jetties walkway
(Photo taken 7.40pm 13th of May 2012)

Fig. 6: Location: house front porch
(Photo taken 10.15pm 13th May 2012)

C. ‘People do not live in the fear of neighbors, and their doors are always open.’
5.2 Perceptual Survey:
For the 30 respondents, about 70 percent were residents of ‘Chew Jetty’ while 20 percent were local tourist (Malaysian) and 10 percent were foreign tourist. Majority of respondents were adults aged between 30 to 70 years old.

Finding and Discussion:
After the 3 days of observation on the ‘Chew Jetties’ communal lifestyle, all the photos taken are exactly same as what had described from the literature of Clan Communal daily lifestyle:
1. Children, especially roam freely in between one houses to another.
2. On hot day’s people tend to remain indoors more, but comes out in the evenings to sit on their front porches to talk and cool off.
3. People do not live in the fear of neighbors, and their doors are always open.[7]

However, take in consideration the date of the literature from Chan Lean Heng, Phd, the written reference is published during the year of 1980 hence, most of the sense, ambience and lifestyle cannot be traced back entirely, but from the photos most of the clan communal lifestyles are still practicing until today. The only differences are the number of people involving has been reducing if was to compare to literature of Chan Lean Heng, Phd [7] this is due to the research issue.

As a summary from this data elicitation method, the validity of the observation is again confirmed with the cross-sectional survey that using life history theory with the literature from written reference of Chan Lean Heng, Phd, [7] hence, the objectives of this study which are the function of jetties walkway and clan communal lifestyle have been founded out.

Observation based on particular experience of a person in a particular setting...
A. Building Usage:
Main Religious building that located at front jetty is made from concrete and masonry. However there is another made from timber and zinc roof. All buildings excluded the front jetty religious buildings are timber raised up silt houses due to it extended out to the sea.

B. Jetty Skyline & Pattern:
Buildings are all within one storey height except for those illegal renovations with raised foundation that keeps that housing align with the raised jetty walkway. Besides, layout of timber houses locates along the sea, providing an open view to the adjacent clan’s jetties through the gap between houses. These results in a horizontal suburban skyline
C. **Colours:**

Chinese and religious features paint the whole Chew Jetty with a strong cultural essence. Again, it witnesses the development of the jetty from 1881s till present.

D. **Local Activities:**

Today, Chew Jetty still serves its function as a public jetty in instances of ferrying goods to the bigger boats that anchored further away from the harbor and also private water taxi that carry passenger from landside to their bigger boats that anchored further away from the harbor.

E. **Public Realm:**

Expose the vary type of immediate space of the timber houses front porches, it lead to an understanding to the whole of their living such as how they interact and communicate with each other.

**Perception Survey:**

As a summary from this data elicitation method, the objective of this study is achieved. Based on the observation results together with cross-check of the written reference of Chan Lean Heng, Phd, 1980, the results are again proof to us that the clan communal lifestyle is affecting the physical transformation of the design feature of the jetties walkway.
are cross implication of data elicitation method. All only dominate inside the heart of each clan’s dwellers but also part of their daily living activities. which represent almost the entire structure of the jetty. However, the diversity of the lifestyle can be seen not

| Identity of user | In order to ensure the validity of the data and answer that collected from this data elicitation method, the information and details of the respondents (local dwellers) are analyses. From the data collection of identity of user, we can ensure that the respondents are eligible to answer rest of the question from the sheet based on the life history theory. Majority people in ‘Chew Jetty’ have their surnames of Chew. 60 percent of them have stayed there for more than 15 years. Data collected from these respondents are valid and eligible for the survey. |
| Association to the Place | The jetties started in early 20th century as homes for Chinese fishermen in George Town. For the older generation, their level of association is higher and stronger compare to the younger generation in accordance to their participation and time spent at Clan Jetty. Not only as their home that they have grew up there, they work at there as fisherman and have lots of memories within the place. |
| Neighborhood relationship | Majority of the people in ‘Chew Jetty’ have the same surname. They were the closely knit clan communities, which shared a common lineage and settlement history, which stood out as an isolated and distinct ethnic enclave. By grouping them together, they actually get stronger with a great sense of community. 100% of local people are got well with their neighbors. They know each other well and the bonding between neighborhoods is strong, they can even name out their next house neighbor’s name. A majority is agreeing that relationship between neighbors is more important than the physical layout of the jetties walkway to form a good neighborship. |
| Places that have meaning | Front porch of the house is the most meaningful place for majority of dweller. In these settings, one can find the daily rhythms of life on the Jetty which always proceeds at a relaxed pace in the heat. On hot days people tend to remain indoors more, but come out in the evenings to sit on their front porches to gather, to talk and to cool off. During that time, a lot of activities can be seen happen along the front porches. Because of these community activities that happen almost every day, people in Chew Jetty mostly do not live in fear of their neighbours, and their doors are always open. People on the Jetty enjoy a relatively good quality of life, despite the incessant heat alleviated only by the sea breezes that rarely penetrate the center of the Jetty. |
| Things that unique in ‘Chew Jetty’, Penang | The most unique things in ‘Chew Jetty’ are their traditional lifestyles and cultures. During the Thee Kong Seh (Jade Emperor’s birthday), Phor Tor (Hungry Ghost Festival) and Kew Ong Yeah (Nine Emperor Gods) festivals, everyone comes home to dutifully embrace their religion, culture and life at the settlement. With its interesting blend of cultural and religious activities, life at the Chew Jetty settlements is never dull. A majority again agree that traditional religious ceremony is more important than the incoming new project which is the regeneration program. According to http://www.visitpenang.gov.my/attractions/chew-jetty.html ‘The hospitality is unendingly friendly and one can experience a sense of the clan kinship within this community that has existed centuries ago’. Based on the literature on above and results of survey, we can conclude that the local dwellers are more emphasis and appreciate the religious ceremonies that formed decades ago and these ceremonies have strengthen the bond between each dwellers in the ‘Chew Jetties’ |
| Problems and Dissatisfaction | A majority didn’t feel threaten from the physical design features of the jetties walkway even though some of the wood plank of the narrow walkway is decaying and rickety in several parts. Moreover, the design of the jetties walkway is without railing. However, people lived here for over a hundred years already. Most of the local dwellers are used to it the condition of the jetties walkway since they were small. Living in a condition like that, fire is their biggest enemy. There was also no proper sewerage system, even though the residents there get electricity and piped water. |
| Aspiration to the future | Today, the young ones, who no longer depend on the sea for a living, have moved out of the settlement while their elders continue to enjoy the wooden jetties’ laidback lifestyle. The elders are hoping that their settlement will not vanish due the decreasing population of younger generation. To avoid it, they are actively involved in the regeneration program held by local government. They encourage more tourism activities to promote their historical heritage settlement. |

**Conclusion:**

Within each data elicitation method shows a great diversity and proliferation of clan communal lifestyle which represent almost the entire structure of the jetty. However, the diversity of the lifestyle can be seen not only dominate inside the heart of each clan’s dwellers but also part of their daily living activities.

In terms of numeric description, basically, the goal and objectives of this study is achieved through the implication of data elicitation method. All the data and answer that collected from the data elicitation method are cross-check with the literature of written reference, observation, surveying and interview process to again
ensure its validity. Based on the results from the study, all the data that collected are inclining towards the important of clan communal lifestyle and also the communal lifestyle is affecting by physical layout of the jetty. Even more obvious is the elicitation process, all the answers are pointing on the important of clan communal lifestyle and emphasis on the relationship among the clan dwellers and housing layout of the jetty. Such prevalent features surely characterize as a main attractive point of the Clan Jetties.

Therefore, we can assure the answer of research question is even though Communal Lifestyle is the main element of the sense of place at Chew Jetty for local people but the physical layout & history of the Chew Jetty are the elements that generating & supporting the daily activities of the jetty.

REFERENCES