

## Comparison of Sino-Portuguese Building in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket in the Malayan Peninsula

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### *Abstract*

*This article aims to study the comparison traditional building of commonly referred “Sino-Portuguese” style in Malaka, Penang ,and Phuket by studying the sample buildings in each places, and use the comparative analysis in 3 issues, which are: 1) Name of building; 2) Origin of building; 3) Characteristic of building facade*

*The study found that the term “Sino-Portuguese” was normally used in referral to the colonial buildings in Thailand, but in Malaysia especially in Malaka and Penang These buildings would called by other names. In term of the origin of buildings, it was found that western arts had influenced to the building in both of Malaka Penang as well as Phuket. Malaka was the first place to adopt western arts which then spread to spread to Penang and Phuket respectively. In Malaka, most of the buildings were of Baroque, Rococo, and Islamic styles. In Penang, most of the buildings were of the Neo-classic. future more, during the nineteenth century, due to the spread of Eclecticism in Penang, the arts of the western, Chinese, India and Local Malayu peoples in Penang were blended into a new style, identical to that in Phuket. The characteristic of the buildings in Phuket was that of row buildings or “shop houses” with narrow width front. The early period building had a door in the middle of building, and braced with window.*

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*The later period building would have open-spaced lower floor for conducting business. The component of building had been set divisibly, and there were footpaths underneath the buildings. In Malaka, the Chinese influence was strong, but dwindled in Penang and Phuket.*

**Keywords:** Comparison      Sino-Portuguese      Malayan Peninsula

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### Introduction

The term “Sino-Portuguese building” refer to those with an architectural pattern that combines Chinese and Western styles. This combined styles has proliferated in Southeast Asian countries that were once colonized by Western empires and was also settled by the Chinese, and also in Southern in cities such as Macau and Guang Zhou. The outstanding, values of the Chinese arts have been found in Malayan peninsula, from peninsula Malaysia up to Southern Thailand.

The reason of for numerous presence of these “Sino-Portuguese” in the Malayan peninsula was because the area is located in the strait of Malacca, a

shipping route between the western world and the China. The arrival of foreign countries to the Strait of Malacca since the early centuries CE to the thirteenth century resulted in Hindu and Buddhist influence from India. Local people traded most commonly with the Indians and the Chinese. In late thirteenth century, the Arabs came to the land with the Islamic religion. Afterwards, the Chinese came to establish their communities. In the early sixteenth century, then the Western came to the Malayu region (Widodo, 1996: 2-3). There were many large communities on the coast such as Malaka, and Penang, in Malaysia, and Phuket, in Thailand. These places were the centers of commerce, and there were various ethnic groups in area.

The western people came to the region as the merchants and the missionaries, and the Chinese people migrated to the region as laborers to work with the local people<sup>2</sup> (Wee Hock Chye, 2003: 25-30) The uniqueness of the blend cultures in Malay peninsula result in the Sino-Portuguese building in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket. (Thanarach tawarogn, 2004: 442) summarized his research that the old buildings located in the central business district was not only referred to as the commercial architecture, but also referred to as the living culture which showed the combination of cultures and also could described the history and time which were the important factors of the development of the pattern



**Figure 1** Port of Penang : show traders among colonial building style.

Photograph : Malaysia nation museum

#### ***Research Objective***

This article aims to study the comparison traditional building of commonly referred "Sino-Portuguese" style in Malaka, Penang ,and Phuket by studying the sample buildings in each places, and use the comparative analysis in 3 issues, which are:

- 1) Name of building
- 2) Origin of building
- 3) Characteristic of building facade

#### ***Research Methodology***

As follows: Researcher used methodology from the primary document, secondary document, and field survey by observation, recording video tape, and interview in those 3 areas. After that, analyze the data to find the difference and the similarity of the Sino-Portuguese Building in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket city. This study has set the scope of the comparison into 4 categories which are names of building, origin of building, characteristics of building façade, and ornaments on building facade. In the characteristic and decoration of Sino-Portuguese building facade issues, the research has studies 31 of buildings in

Malaka, 41 of buildings in Penang, and 50 of buildings in Phuket by selecting the sample which is significant and outstanding in each area.

## Results

### 1. Name of building

In Malaysia, it is rarely to fine the word "Sino-Portuguese", though there are lots of Sino-Portuguese building. Moreover, the building has been found in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Taiping, Yaho Baru. Malay people usually use other word to refer to that building. By the way, in Thailand widely use this word especially in Phuket city. From the document review in Malaysia, there are many aliases of the building, but it is rarely to find the name "Sino-Portuguese" to use formally. There are other words such as (Khoo Joo Ee, 1998: 25) ( The content is extended by writer)

#### - Sino - Malay - Colonial Style

This name originates from the combination of three styles which are Chinese (Sino), Malay, and Western (Colony).

#### - Sino - Malay - Palladian Style

This name originates from the characteristic of building of the Chinese millionaire. The house has been designed based on the symmetric style. The entrance (Portico) is on the middle of the house. There are wings of building as same as the European house. The name "Palladian" comes from the Italian architecture in Renaissance era (the last sixteenth century.). His name is "Andrea Palladio". He is the first one who built this style. In addition, this style had been restored in Neo-Classicism era (the last eighteenth century) by the English architecturer, and then adapted with the Malay style.

#### - Towkay Italianate Style

"Towkay" means the Chinese millionaire or "Taukae" in Thai word, and "Italianate" means Italy. This name is called because of the design which similar to the Classic architecture in Italy. Fro instant, the mansion of Lim Lean Teng on the Sultan Ahmed Shah street in Penang. The house has a renaissance dome, stained glass which was used in Venice. Moreover, many types of design had been taken from Italy.

#### - Chinese Palladian Style

The meaning of this word is similar to the Towkay Italianate. The house is the Palladian style, and mix with the Chinese art.

**- Chinese Baroque**

This name referred to the European era (the seventeenth century). This era usually decorated the building extravagantly. It was the era of the extravagant ornamentation of art based on High-society taste, so the style like this was called "Baroque". The Chinese building which decorated extravagantly had been called "Chinese Baroque" as well.

**- Tropical Renaissance**

This word means the renaissance style in Europe which appeared in the tropical zone such as the arch, the pillar head decoration, rustic wall, the capital of column, the pilaster, festoon. These techniques had been adapted with the local taste in the tropical zone and the evacuated Chinese in Malayan peninsula.

**- Straits Eclectic Style**

This word means the combination of various designs which appeared in the Malaka channel. This word covers to all in Malaka channel, so it is widely used in

Malayan peninsula and Phuket city also.

From the names above, name of Sino is used to refer to the Chinese style, and the Colonial, the Palladian, the Baroque, the Italianate are used to refer to the Western style. By the way, there is no a word "Portuguese" in the said names.

## **2. Origin of building**

The beautiful Sino-Portuguese buildings in Malaka which survive in the present, mostly built in the late nineteenth century – the early twenties century. The year of build had appeared on the building facade. From the English era which is the booming era of mining industry and rubber tree, the era helped the evacuated Chinese upgraded themselves to be the millionaires. They had the beautiful and modern houses to live. By the way, the arts in Malaka was influenced by the Baroque and Rococo styles which are broadened by the Dutch (Knapp, 2010: 20-22). Western style buildings in Malaka had established in the Dutch era in the seventeenth – the early eighteenth century. The building components usually form

fantastic plane, meandering concave, artistic grace. This style then had settled down in Malaka for long time, and later got the influences of Neo-Classic or Victorian from Penang and Singapore. The origin of Sino-Portuguese building in Malaka then caused from the promulgation of the Western people to the evacuated Chinese society since the seventeenth century – the early twenties century. (the Dutch era to the English era).

The Sino-Portuguese building in Penang, had long history since the late eighteenth century, but most of buildings were constructed in the late nineteenth century – the early twenties century. due to the booming of economic on mining industry and rubber tree. Penang had been established as the permanent British post, so this caused the British style influenced to the area. By the way, the British style building in Malaka had been adapted with the Indian taste because India was the British post before Malaka, and later adapted with the Malay style (The Encyclopedia of Malaysia : volume 5, 1998: 94). The art from Victorian era had influenced in Malaka also. This was an era

which usually restored the old arts such as the Neo-Classic. In other word, the Neo-Classic was very popular in Penang, and the Greek and Roman arts also had restored to use in the Penang construction. In addition, the Victorian era also expanded the restoration of the middle age art, the Baroque and Rococo arts, and the exotic art. So the origin of Sino-Portuguese building in Penang came from the propagation by the British people to the Chinese Society. The arts in Penang then were mixed and matched since the late eighteenth century. in Neo-classic style to the late nineteenth century. in Victorian style which combined many types of art in the past with localism art. This pattern of the art was called “Eclecticism” (Chareomput, 2538: 110) and “Art Nouveau” style which was the modern style at that time, and Art Deco in the early twenties century.

In Phuket, the Sino-Potuguese mostly constructed in the nineteenth century – the early twenties century. as same as in Penang. Phuket and Penang both were the center of mining industry and mining trade market at that time. There was

a big mining market located in Singapore. The Chinese-Penang people and Phuket People often visited each other. Phuket received the culture from the Chinese people in Penang to use a lot because Penang at that time was the most modern city in the region and not far from Phuket. Phuket people also hired Penang people to construct and decorate their house. By the way, the Sino-Portuguese building in Phuket originated from the relationship between people of both cities, the copying of various architecture styles from Penang.

### 3. Characteristics of the Building facade

There are some interesting points in the designation of the Sino-Portuguese building facade in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket. From the analysis of the top floor found that the component on the top of building has the same characteristic that is; the constructor would lay the brick out of the building as the ornamental glass. It looks like the pilaster which appears on the window side and the corner of room wall. This component uses for dividing the space and window. By the way, it is rarely

to see the pilaster in Malaka, but there are a lot in Penang and Phuket. In addition, the façade usually had constructed by putting two windows on the wall. There is wide space between the windows for the decoration. The designer would not mold the cornice out of the wall too much. They mostly mold the cornice shallowly around the window. The top arch is not chunky, so it is not necessary to build the pilaster to support the arch. The molding of the arch cannot be done too much chunky because of the weight problem. To make the pilaster to divide the windows usually have been found in case that the top arch is chunky as the semicircle or the crescent shape. But in some cases, the pilaster does not support any weight. Due to the Malaka preferred the Baroque and Rococo design, a space between windows then had been left for decoration. The arch which has a balance shape based on the Neo-classic style usually had been seen in Penang and Phuket. The façade must attach the great importance of the luxurious with the arch. The pilaster would elaborate the arch more outstanding, and become the window frame implicitly. Consequently, the space,

which uses for decoration between the windows, had to use the technique of decoration on the pilaster to decorate as well.

In addition, the Sino-Portuguese row building in Penang would outstanding than other place. The house had been drilled the circle over the window on the top floor. This pattern had been rarely found in Malaka, but none in Phuket. This characteristic affirmed to the Neo-classic style that Penang received. In other words, this was the influence of Palladian style which usually drilled the circle on the gable of the house. The Chinese designer thought it was a good thing for the ventilation, and matched with the flower design perfectly.

On the ground floor, there was same characteristic in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket that was position of the door. The door would put in the middle, and braced with the windows. This was similar to the house in the rural area in Southern China. By the way, this pattern in Malaka was tidier than in China. The window frame had the simple square shape or the window was bended a little. The iron bar

was flat to refer to the previous window style that the evacuated Chinese created. They did not like the perforated design in Penang, but the perforated design had been found mostly in Penang and Phuket. In addition, buildings in Malaka did not like to drill the loophole over the window. They preferred to decorate the window with picture or the alphabet.

The drilling of loophole over the window on the ground floor had not found in China. This can assume that there were two reasons why this style was popular in Penang by the Chinese designer.

First, the building in Penang was higher than the old building in Malaka from the influence of Anglo-Indian architecture style they received, so there was the space over the window a lot. Chinese designer then drilled the wall to add the loophole, and to ventilate the air. Chinese designer usually drilled the loophole to receive the sunlight through the inside of the building. Second, Chinese usually drilled the loophole over the window because of the luck. Mostly the Chinese usually drilled the Bat-shape because they believed that the

bat was the lucky animal (Sung, 2002: 34). Thus to drill the bat-shape loophole means to bring the luck to the house. This bat-shape loophole had been found in Penang and Phuket.

The door in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket always built with two layers. When opened the front door, we would see the back door. The front door was opened by pulling, but the back door would be opened by pushing to avoid the clashing of two door panel when opened the same time. The decoration would appear on the front door panel most. By the way the front door panel in Malaka would be opened only half, as well as Penang and Phuket. This referred to the influence of Malay house style, however, it now was found a full panel more than half panel. the front door panel would be decorated on the front and back sides of the front door. The perforated design was drilled on the front door panel at the same position, but the design on the front and back of the front door were different impressively. In addition, in Malaka, the characteristic of main pillar on the ground floor of the row building was simple, but more complicated

in Penang and Phuket. They preferred to reduce the size of the angle or corner to add the ornamental glass pillar, and decorated pillar by putting the cornice which was very popular in Victorian era. Especially in Penang, they would like to decorate the plant design or the Chinese lucky design at the pillar on the ground floor also. Moreover, people usually made the awning out of the building in Malaka. They decorated the awning with the traditional Chinese design on the circle-shape tile and the triangle-shape tile. The building thus looked like the joss house or the shrine of clan house. This referred to the influence of Chinese art to the House style in Malaka in the first period of evacuation, but there were some in Penang because the joss house in Penang usually constructed like the row house mixed with the living house. By the way, there was no this building style in Phuket because of Thai belief. They did not like using the religious symbol to use with the living house. In addition, there were many kinds of the decoration on the façade of Sino-Portuguese building in Phuket, but there was on Thai painting style on the facade

because they preferred using this painting in the temple or honor places.

### Conclusion

From the comparison on the name of Sino-Portuguese building in Malaysia and Thailand, found that Thai people in Phuket called this kind of building that the Sino-Portuguese building, but it was not popular in Malaysia. Even Malay people would understand in the name "Sino-Portuguese", but the building was called in other name in the official record such as Straits Eclectic Style. They called in other name because this building was the combination of the arts from various countries not only the Chinese and Portuguese. Considering from the origin of building, the age of building in Malaka was older than in Penang, and in Penang was older than in Phuket. Malaka was the first port city in Malayan peninsula. When the Westerner arrived to do business, the relationship had occurred with local people, Chinese people, and Indian people. Most of Chinese people did trading. They constructed the narrow row building (shop house) to do business, and

took the Western art to mix with the local art. The outstanding Western influences were the Baroque art and Rococo art in the seventeenth century. In Penang, the Sino-Portuguese building had been constructed because Penang was a new port city replaced Malaka city. Penang took the influence of the Neo-classic art in the late eighteenth century. By the way, when the trade in this region was more glorious in the late nineteenth – the early twentieth century, rich people then started constructing the luxurious house and the luxurious row building. Many building referred to the influence of the notion of combination which was popular in the Victorian era by combining the beauty of various arts. This pattern of building appeared in Malaka and Penang. For the building in Phuket, the Sino-Portuguese building in Phuket received the influence from Penang. Lots of Chinese people evacuated to live in Phuket after the opening of the tin mining. They had the relationship with Penang, and then they hired the designer from Penang to design and decorate the building in Phuket.

The aspect of Sino-Portuguese building façade, in overview, quite be similar that is; the combinations of Chinese, Western, and Localism, but different a little in the origin of building. The row building in three places were also similar. The wall in each block was higher than the roof. The door was in the middle, and braced with the windows. The arches had been constructed in a row, and were supported with the pilaster. The front was narrow, but opened the used-space inside. The building also opened some parts of the roof. About the singled-house, the similarity is; the house had the balance as the Palladian style. The difference was the details in the decoration. The arch in Malaka was designed in the curve-shape like the Islamic style and left a space for the decoration. In Penang, the outstanding point was the loophole over the window. By the way, there was none in Phuket. For the ground floor of the building, they preferred to spread the eaves, and decorated the building looked like the joss house. They did not put the cornice on the pillar too much comparing with in Penang and Phuket. Most of the designs were the

Chinese auspicious designs. The design was blended with the structure of building façade. In Penang and Phuket, the design in Penang was more natural then in Phuket. The design in Phuket was quite artificial. The Sino-Portuguese buildings in Malaka, Penang, and Phuket had been constructed due to the trend of modernity at that time. This modernity hid the desire to raise themselves compare with the powerful countries that time. In the same time, they still kept their culture closely and had the oriental aesthetics, but they were willing to receive new things from the west. This reflected to the way of life in the multicultural society through the Sino-Portuguese building.

The study also discuss that the difference of the design still related to many contexts. Thus this comparative study still lack of the other related contexts which are more important than the art history of the Sino-Portuguese building such as economic, politic, social, and belief. This problem should be studied on the next research to explore the knowledge continually.

In the future. The local leaders of the three towns (Penang Malaka Phuket) and the government of Thailand and Malaysia must cooperate to study management and develop arts of town history which focus on sustainable and negotiate with other national areas. In the present. Penang Malaka have the status of world heritage site, but phuket does not yet have this status. In my opinion, Penang, Malaka Phuket are historically

and socially similar although in difference countries. However Sino-Portuguese building is not highly regarded by Thai government in comparison with other ancient places. Whenever the three towns change to be world heritage sites, It will increase tourism and interest in Sino-Portuguese architecture in the peninsular, tourists could get a view of former times and appreciate its aesthetics

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