

Memories on Reclaimed Land: The Defamiliarization of Weld Quay in George Town

How does the memory of place correlate with the transformation of Weld Quay over time and defamiliarizing the experience and perception of place?

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Abstract

Penang was once an important port along the Straits of Melaka, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, serving as a major stop point for ships sailing between Asia, Europe and the Middle East. In the 19th century, the British colonial authorities decided to undertake a massive land reclamation project to expand harbour and trade activities, resulting in the creation of Weld Quay. As a reclaimed land, Weld Quay had undergone a series of political changes imposed by different governmental administrations, including the British settlement, Japanese occupation, formation of the Malayan Union, Malaya independence and the qualification of George Town as a UNESCO heritage site. Through the notion of time, Penang's significant shift in the political landscape has resulted in the gradual transformation of Weld Quay's urban redevelopment within the physical and sociocultural realm. Evidently, the progressive transition over time erased and reconstructed the history of Weld Quay, providing opportunities for creating new memories. However, at the same time, it erodes the memories of the local community that the original land accommodates. With the concept of defamiliarization, this study seeks to trace stories that occurred on the reclamation ground through the historical perspectives of everyday life by examining the public and private memories of Penangites. Despite the change in Weld Quay's urban landscape caused by several major historical events, the recollection and retention of an individual's past experiences will eventually continue to influence one's perception of the present condition. Thus, this study intends to reflect on the gains and losses of urban redevelopment through the sense of defamiliarization by unveiling the overlapping history of Weld Quay in relation to the individual, social, collective and public memory of place.

Keywords: Memories, Defamiliarization, Urban Landscape Transformation, Gain and Loss

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Figure i: 1948 survey map of Malaya. Penang Island is sitting off the North-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, commonly known as West Malaya, along the Straits of Malacca. (Source: Survey Department, Federation of Malaya, 1948)



Figure ii: Aerial View of today's Weld Quay
(Google, 2023)

Preface & Introduction

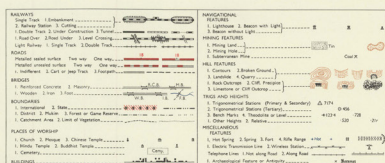
George Town is the bustling capital city on the northeastern tip of Penang Island (*Fig. 1*). It was once an important port connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, serving as a major stop point for ships sailing between Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Becoming part of a UNESCO-protected heritage site in 2008, George Town was described as one of the most well-preserved historic island port settlements with a rich multicultural living heritage dating back to the mercantile period along the Straits of Melaka (State Government of Penang, 2008). In the 19th century, the British colonial authorities decided to undertake a massive land reclamation project shifting the original shoreline of George Town (*Fig. 2*) to expand the intensified harbour trade activities, resulting in – the creation of Weld Quay. As a reclaimed land, Weld Quay, too, had undergone several sociocultural transitions due to foreign colonisation and the attainment of UNESCO status in 2008. The diverse culture and architecture attributed to Penang's history of colonisation withstood the test of time and successfully blended itself into the streetscape of Weld Quay, forming a common ground for generational memory collection and identity construction.

Amos Rapoport (1984) described cities as physical artefacts that must be experienced through bodily expression and sensory perception. When experiencing a place or a space, the body will unconsciously remember the events in meaningful narrative sequences and “generate a remembering through the use of present triggers” (Connerton, 1989:24). In the case of Weld Quay, the progressive urban transformation



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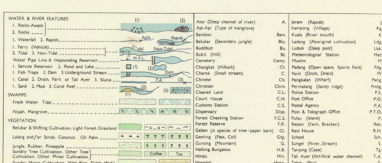
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Figure 2: demonstrating the original shoreline before the reclamation of Weld Quay
(Source: Google, 2023; Reproduced by author)

has persistently erased and reconstructed the personal, social, collective and public memories of the locals. Consequently, it evokes a sense of alienation and unfamiliarity when a person's bodily experience of a place no longer aligns with his or her memories. Hence, using the idea of defamiliarization, this research intends to unveil Weld Quay's gains and losses through the notion of time concerning the everyday life of residents with the memory of place.

Studies associated with the memory of place have a long history through disparate lenses such as architecture, psychology and sociology. There is a heated debate in academia and industry concerning the relationship between memory and place-making. Edward Soja (1989), an urban theorist, argued that place-making is a process of overlapping spatialization as collective memories deconstruct and reconstruct in parallel with time; Conversely, Pierre Nora (1989: 7), a French historian, believed that memories "crystallised and secretes itself... at a particular historical moment," deteriorates over time as the real environments of memory no longer exist. On the other hand, a feminist geographer, Doreen Massey (1994), asserts that place memory often relates itself to divergent political ideologies yet reflects on social inequalities. Regardless of the extensive discussions, studies showcasing Penang's memories over time are, indeed, limited. They are primarily visual books that tell stories by recollecting old photographs and archival materials. Moreover, throughout the previous decades, most research mentioning Weld Quay concentrated on analysing it as part of George Town's urban evolution, preservation and visualisation of its rich physical and cultural history. Only a few studies have investigated Penang and George Town's gradually changing social phenomena, with the majority being restricted explicitly to a specific site and time. Needless to say, studies about Weld Quay concerning the distortion of memory perception and the unfamiliarity across time.

Methodology

The research is based on literature reviews, including publications of theoretical, historical and critical writings related to Penang's history, the memory of place and the idea of defamiliarization. Weld Quay, a formerly reclaimed land currently under the UNESCO-protected heritage site, will be used as the case study to comprehend the defamiliarization of urban memory through the recollection of formal and informal captured moments.

This study will adopt a qualitative research methodology to reveal Weld Quay's sense of place. In the research article, 'Architectural Forms of Collective Memory', Pascal Moliner and Inna Bovina (2019) suggested two dimensions for gathering data on past commemorated events: the historical and human dimensions. This study will investigate the historical dimension through official maps, old newspaper articles and official governmental reports to represent the official memories of Weld Quay's transformation. On the other hand, due to the coverage of different historical periods, examining the human dimension will require a diverse array of primary sources, as the documentation methods have been limited and varied throughout time, including historical paintings, photos of different times, early postcards, interviews in the documentaries and video footage of Weld Quay. Investigating visual and oral data of everyday life provides an immersive opportunity for me, as a researcher, to delve into the sequential framework of time through the change in narratives and perceptual experiences of Penangites.

As Anna Green (2004:43), a professor of history at the University of Waikato, suggested: "Oral history allows us to access the range of 'expressive possibilities' in a given history within a given society of time", reasserting the value of individual remembering. Thus, I conducted an in-depth online interview with one of the former residents that grew up on the reclaimed land in the late 1900s to reveal his remembered memories and get insights into his thoughts on Weld Quay's transformation. In addition, with the help of my brother, Yi Kai Neoh, a survey was conducted on my behalf with the residents to understand if there is any discrepancy in memories comparing the remembered past and the present condition. As the final step, I will conclude all the memory and data gathered from each relevant period through 'remapping memories' and reflect on the findings of defamiliarization and the gains and losses caused by the urban and sociocultural transformation.

The layout of this study

Chapter One begins by looking at the historical background of Weld Quay from the British Settlement to its present condition. The chapter examines the history related to the form and development of Weld Quay's urban morphology, providing a complete historical summary as a starting point to analyse the environmental, social and cultural unfamiliarity.

Chapter Two lays out the theoretical framework, outlining the main themes of the study, describing both the concept of 'the memory of place' and 'the idea of defamiliarization.' At the same time, it highlights the contribution of individual memories in the collective sphere and emphasises the impact of memories on present spatial experience.

Chapter Three examines Weld Quay in four different periods: representing British settlement as memories of the bustling port; Japanese occupation as memories of terror and destruction; Post-war and before UNESCO as memories of disorder and recession; and lastly, receiving UNESCO status as the watershed in Penang's history, leading to memories of progression and achievement. Based on the concept of defamiliarization, I will present the research findings focusing on the gains and losses of urban or sociocultural redevelopment caused by the alienation of bodily experience while exploring the once-familiar landscape of Weld Quay.

Chapter four, the final chapter, conclude the findings of defamiliarization across time by comparing the gains and losses. Yet, suggesting why it is significant to understand the impact of memories on the built environment for better reconstruction of Weld Quay's socio-cultural identity.

It is hoped that the study will provide a better insight into understanding the relationship between people and the place. The case study will be presented parallel to the literature review, reflecting on the polarity of urban defamiliarization and perceptual distortion corresponding to the evolution of Weld Quay, George Town.

Chapter One:

Weld Quay

Weld Quay is located on the eastern coast of George Town, Penang, stretching from Swettenham Pier to Prangin River, linking ghauts that provide a jetty at each end. There are eight ghauts in total and each ghaut has an individual extended street perpendicular to Weld Quay, where most warehouses and godowns (*derived from the Malay word 'Gudang', which means warehouses for goods storage*) are located. When Penang Harbour reached the pinnacle in its heyday, it attracted a multitude of diverse cultures to reside, therefore, establishing a plethora of ethnic urban communities up to the present day (State Government of Penang, 2008; Jenkins, 2019).

Viewing Chulia Street Ghaut as the line of division (*Fig. 1.1*), Weld Quay is being separated into two segments in the sociocultural realm: Northern Weld Quay and Southern Weld Quay. Historically, Northern Weld Quay is referred to by the locals as grounds for the upper classes due to its primary function of catering buildings such as banks, post offices and European merchandise companies. In contrast, Southern Weld Quay housed the clan jetties, which were perceived as the Chinese coolies (*low-wage contract labourer*) slums and were connected to the street ghauts where the lower middle working class performs their daily tasks and routines. The disparity in the demographic distribution has led to an apparent social segregation and the formation of two distinctive sociocultural identities along Weld Quay. It is discussed in the book, 'Social-spatial Segregation: concepts, processes and outcomes,' that residential segregation generates a different process of socialisation and mobilisation that



Figure 1.1: Chulia Street Ghaut as the social division of Weld Quay.
(Source: Google Map, 2023; Reproduced by author)

influences the behavioural pattern and ways of living (Lloyd et al., 2014). This implies a possible divergent perception of the two sections in Weld Quay that will eventually affect the individual, social, collective and public memory of place.

History of Weld Quay

British archaeologists discovered traces of Penang dating back five to six thousand years before any of the Malay sultanate was founded, as evidenced by the discovery of 41 skeletons in Guar Kepah on mainland Penang (Hilmy, 2023). Penang Island was first documented in the Mao Kun map (*Fig. 1.2*) for Zheng He's naval expeditions during the Ming Dynasty in the 15th century. However, Penang's modern history was shaped by British colonisation when the Sultan of Kedah traded the island to the British trader Francis Light in exchange for military protection (State Government of Penang, 2008; Penang Port Commission, n.d.).

Following Light's arrival in 1786, he eliminated the mangrove swamp at the eastern shore, shaping George Town's early urban settlement, which later, in 1872, became a fully developed free trading regional entrepot along the Straits of Malacca (Winstedt, 1988). However, due to George Town's geographical condition facing the strong currents of the Straits, there is a continuous accumulation of sediment that prevented the docking of vessels and the loading and unloading of goods upon intended arrival and departure. Hence, the merchants of Beach Street (*the original coastal street*) were forced to carry out illegal seaward expansion to deal with the siltation. Local legislators acknowledged the problem of illicit mass expansion in 1877, in return, issuing grants for all illegally reclaimed land for a nominal fee per square foot (Hockton and Langdon, 2019). Aiming to tackle further unauthorized expansion and satisfy the demand of the booming market of tin, tobacco, copra and other products, the Strait Settlement Government had agreed to fund the seafront reclamation project – Weld Quay in 1883. Once the reclamation was settled, the construction of godowns in Anglo-Indian style began, dominating the new waterfront and becoming the key to Penang entering the 'golden age' as a port city (Cheah, 2012; State Government of Penang, 2008). Penang Port, in its heyday, housed many jetties to support the blossoming port activities, including Victoria Pier (1885-1955), Church Street Wharf (1898 – 2007), Federal Malay States Railway (FMSR) jetty (1901-1960), and Swettenham Pier (1903 to present), along the artificial shoreline. The outcome of the rapidly transformed coastal landscape

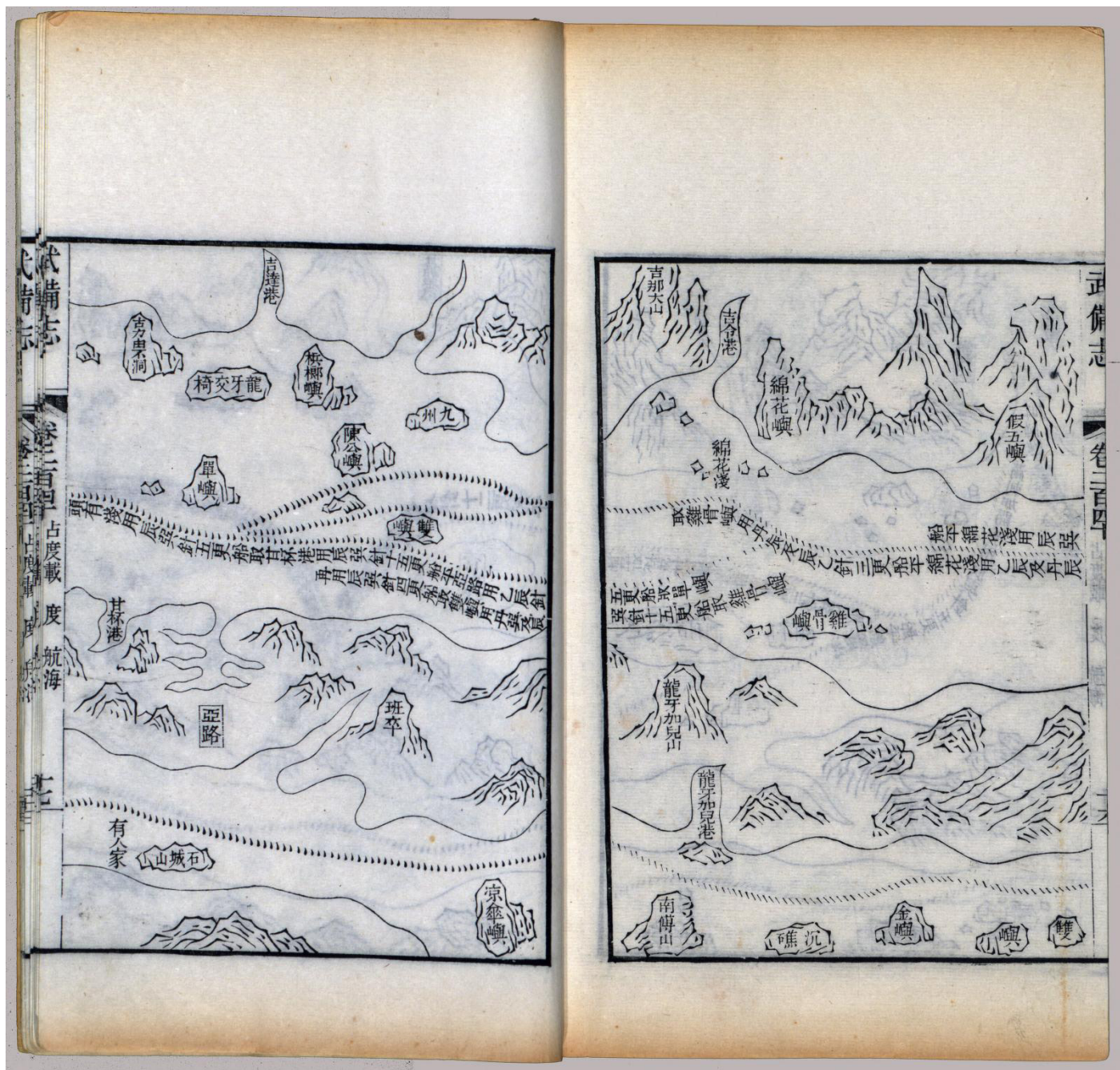


Figure 1.2: Mao Kun map. Penang is located at the top left, named as 檳榔嶼, which means Penang Island in chinese. (Source: Mao, 1644)

and dominant structures contributed to constantly repositioning coastal impressions during the British rule.

The port trading opportunities have attracted an influx of merchants and migrant workers, contributing to the notable increment in Penang's population (Cheah, 2012). Despite the expansion of George Town's inland settlement, Chinese clan members working as contract coolies at the port started to build a settlement on the water in 1918 at the southern end of Weld Quay. The expansion of the living bridges spread over decades, occupied by wooden houses on stilts and clan members of the same surname inhabited each jetty. By 1969, there were approximately 249 premises spreading over 16.8 acres above water. During the peak of the port's success, eight clan jetties were erected along the seaward facade of Weld Quay, but only six survived till today (*Fig. 1.3*). Koay Jetty and Peng Aun Jetty were demolished in 2006 due to a massive fire outbreak and are now replaced by high-rise residential (State Government of Penang, 2008; Liang and Yeoh, n.d.). The creation of clan jetties has played a vital role in shaping the cultural identity of southern Weld Quay since the 1900s and also largely impacted the overall social construct and trajectorial pattern of everyday life.

Historically, George Town's significance was not limited to its role as a global trading port but also as a stronghold to protect against hostile forces. By 1940, the British army had turned Penang into an impregnable fortress by reinforcing naval fortification. However, they overlooked the risk of being attacked from above, foreshadowing the Japanese air raid in December 1941. During the eight days bombardment, British armies had secretly retreated from the island, causing widespread panic and chaos among the civilians stranded to

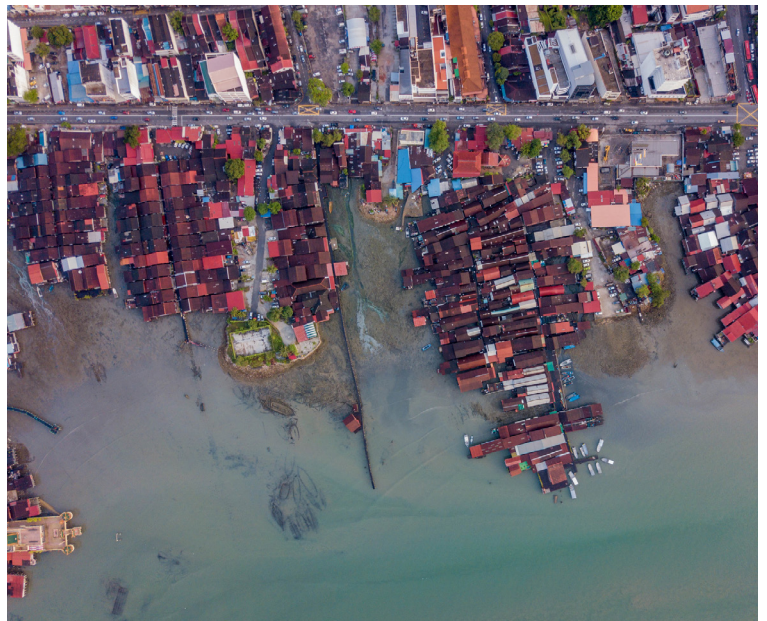


Figure 1.3: Drone footage showing the surviving settlement of clan jetties, located at the southern section of Weld Quay. (Source: Ch'ng, 2017)

defend themselves. Many buildings were destroyed in the bombing events, including parts of clan jetties, Victoria and Railway Pier (Fall of Penang, 2013; State Government of Penang, 2008). The days of the Japanese Kempeitai were described as days in dire straits, full of horror, torture and execution (Penang Port Commission, n.d.). The Japanese surrendered after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (History, 2022). Penangites crowded the piers of Weld Quay to welcome British troops' return, celebrating the end of Japanese torture and terrorism (Kratoska, 1998).

Two years after the war had ended, the local council introduced the Control of Rent Ordinance to attenuate post-war implications restricting the increment of rentals for all properties before 1948, anticipating the imminent economic rebound (Jenkins, 2019). Although the purpose of overcoming the housing shortage was attained, the controlled act has led to a notable deterioration of building conditions, especially residential buildings along Weld Quay and within George Town. There is no surplus private capital for restoration and preservation. The buildings are left to decay. Nearly half a century later, in 1999, the exacerbated urban degradation alerted a local council member of Penang Heritage Trust, who organised a seminar entitled 'Repeal of Control Act – The Aftermath' stressing the importance of George Town's heritage value. The seminar has successfully led to the abolishment of the Rent Control Act, followed by detrimental consequences, which is the abandonment of housing due to unaffordable rocketing rentals (Jenkins, 2019). The act of involuntary replacement has remarkably affected the streetscape and social structure of the formerly reclaimed land, causing a strong sense of alienation in the socio-cultural context. After the original inhabitants departed without replacing new incomers, the sense of belonging faded over time. The question arises, is the current Weld Quay still the Weld Quay that existed with the memories of the previous generation?

In 1998, George Town commenced drafting the UNESCO nomination dossier and landed itself on the tentative list in 2001. However, the document was rejected on its first submission in 2005 and later resubmitted to the World Heritage Centre for revaluation. Commemoratory, George Town, in July 2008, was officially declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (State Government of Penang et al., 2022). Obtaining UNESCO status has revived and restored the deteriorating urban condition, attracting local and global attention for the conservation and preservation regarding the resurfacing of the multicultural tangible and intangible heritage assets. New departments such as George Town World Heritage Inc. (GTWHI) and the Municipal Council Heritage Department

were established in 2009 to provide monitoring and measures to resuscitate the ailing urban quality. The regeneration of George Town has brought back the competitive trading characteristic of the maritime zenith through tourism proliferation (Jenkins, 2019). Since George Town, including Weld Quay, is now part of the UNESCO-protected areas, major physical urban transformation is limited (Sekaran, 2019). Hence, the defamiliarization of Weld Quay in the later stage would focus on the shift in social pattern, where there is considerable growth in tourist numbers and outlander with a substantial decline in native inhabitants.

To conclude this chapter, as defined by Daniel Kahneman (TED, 2010), the winner of the 2002 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, a story should consist of changes, significant moments and endings. Contingent upon Weld Quay, the ending of the story is left open-ended because it is still yet to be explored and continues to unfold. *Figure 1.4* adopts Kahneman's concept to demonstrate the experiential narratives of George Town's eastern coast, including Weld Quay, from 1786 to its present condition in 2023. The graph presents Weld Quay's golden age during the British heyday; showing a rapid decline in the quality of life during World War II; indicating a slight improvement post-war, but still filled with uncertainty as depicted by the linear fluctuation. In the last section of the graph, the recognition of UNESCO was a successful turnaround, resulting in a steadily rising standards of living around Weld Quay up to the current moment.

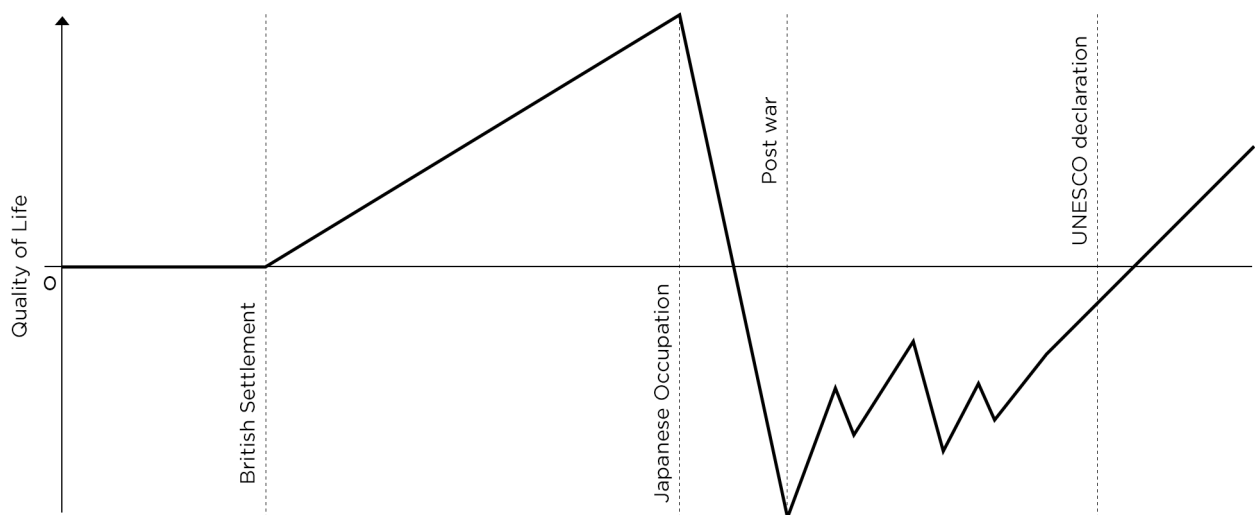


Figure 1.4: Plot development of Weld Quay from 1786 to 2023. (Source: Author)

Chapter Two:

Memories | Defamiliarization

"Memory's unreliable... Facts, not memories; that's how you investigate... Look, memory can change the shape of a room, it can change the colour of car, and memories can be distorted. They're just an interpretation, they're not a record and irrelevant if you have the facts... He took away my memory. He destroyed my ability to live."

– Christopher Nolan (2000), Memento.

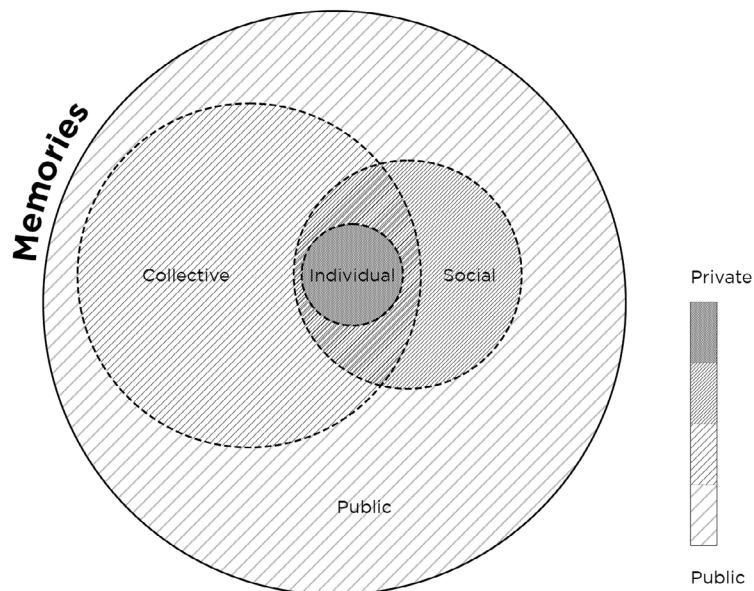


Figure 2.1: Diagram depicting the relationship between individual memory, social, memory, collective memory and public memory. (Source: Author)

Memory alters the Perception of Place

Edward Cassey, an American philosopher's memory theory, will be employed to analyse Weld Quay's defamiliarization over time. As depicted in *Figure 2.1*, human memory concerning body and place can be grouped into four interconnective and interdependent categories, including individual memory, social memory, collective memory, and public memory – forming the crucial factors of narration and history. According to Cassey (2004), individual memory is explicated as the unique remembrance of the 'remembering-how' and the 'remembering-as' at the idiosyncratic level; Social memory intensifies personal recall, denoting shared recollections beyond individuals within the constituted group, such as families and friends; Collective memories, on the contrary, represent the overlapping remembering of conjoint events that disperses over a given population or a set of sites; Lastly, public memories signify temporal reminiscent that articulates within the public dimension with "notable exceptions of recognition (*focused on the ingression of the past onto its immediate present*) and reminding (*which often projects us into a future event of which we wish to be reminded*)" (Cassey, 2004:17).

To discern the interplay between memory and present experience, Colin Ellard, a research psychologist at the University of Waterloo, studied the influence of place on pedestrians' moods. One of the experiments was conducted through the streets of New York with 134 volunteers, and their moods were measured through phone polling and a skin conductivity bracelet device. The result of the experiment validated the intertwined relationship between sensing and remembrance. Volunteers tend to provide positive accounts for the places they are familiar with, especially places they grew up as a child. Conversely, volunteers with no memory's association demonstrated genuine introspection of the current place condition (Badger, 2013). In light of the experiment, it provides reassurance to infer that the remembered memories of the past are potent enough to alter a person's perception of the present.

David Morris's (2009) phenomenology study also supported the cruciality of place-memory association from a historical perspective. He stressed the value of place-history continuation and the role of habit and inhabitation in forming memories. Cities and homes, explained by Morris, are comparable to human bodily expression, where each movement is unique and irreplaceable. The progress of inhabitation will eventually develop a sense of belonging, leading to a meaningful connection of retaining

memories within the social and cultural sphere. In reference to Weld Quay, throughout the progression of history since the British Settlement, the repeatedly sociocultural and environmental reconstruction undoubtedly left indelible overlapping traces to curate the formation of distinctive intergenerational cultural and urban identity.

The idea of defamiliarization

"And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." – Viktor Shklovsky (1917:12)

The crux passage introduces the notion of defamiliarization coined by Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian literary theoretician. The idea was initially addressed to literature as a function of poetry, in which common concepts are transposed to create new meanings (Guitart, 2022). However, Shklovsky's theory can also be interpreted architecturally as an instrument to view the result of changes in the urban environment (Nesbitt, 1996). On both ends of the spectrum, rapid urbanisation and the destruction of war gives impetus to the evolution of urban development, forging a new spatiotemporal experience for each individual. For example, the origination of Weld Quay as the result of port trading expansion demand completely changed the perception and experience of the place from a harbour for pirates prior to the English conquest (Penang Port Commission, n.d.). Whereas the destruction during the Japanese Occupation buries fear and uncertainty into the collective memories.

In the same vein, Paul Connerton (1989:2), a British social anthropologist, argued that:

"We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects... we will experience

our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present... Past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present."

It is crucial to note that the defamiliarizing process is dynamic and will transcend through time, heavily relying on an individual's experience of the space, which might contain a degree of implicit and explicit memory falsification. Hence, in the cause of transformation, the pre-injected expectation of how the space should be turned into might also influence a person's sensory impression of the reconstruction.

His view is complemented by Graham Cairns (2017), the founder and director of the Architecture Media Politics Society, suggesting defamiliarization as an extended dialogue between the subject and the object. He believed that defamiliarizing a place provides opportunities for new encounters, owing to the fact that when the previous spatial condition is experienced so habitually, it will eventually disappear from a person's view. Weld Quay's consistent deconstruction and reconstruction of spatial identity might cause various anomalous experiences that potentially provoke intense physiological and psychological arousal of unfamiliarity. Moreover, the required architecture and landscape alteration will also replace the developing area's competing value and recognition claims by translating identity discourse into the cultural and social context (Jones, 2011). Nevertheless, positively, the redevelopment of the coastal area can establish a robust connection with one's memory. The unconscious reflex of body awareness will encourage the re-examination of place through sensory perception, yet adopting bodily consciousness to seek familiarity within the unfamiliar. Consequently, the nostalgic memories might invoke a re-appreciation of the place's beauty that might otherwise have gone unnoticed in its earlier state.

Chapter Three:

Memories of ...

3.1 Memories of the Bustling Port

1786 - 1941: British Settlement

Public memories will be employed to study the everyday life of Weld Quay in its exponential growth rate during the British colonisation. Being described as “the great transshipment centre of the northern part of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra” (Wright 1908:27), its development from rudimental villages with piracy issues into a thriving port city along the Straits of Malacca was exhibited in public archives such as paintings, postcards and official maps.

Contrasting the 1814 historical painting (*Fig. 3.1.1*) and the 1920 postcard (*Fig.3.1.2*) portraying George Town’s coastal condition, there was an immense landscape, architectural and infrastructure alteration in just over a century. In 1814, the coastline was conspicuous, with sections of the mangrove forest remaining partially uncleared behind the clustered building zone. This denotes a lower level of activities or traffic, representing the initial state of the bustling commercial port activities. Contrarily, the wooded area was entirely decimated by 1920. The harbour was then crowded with steamships, merchant vessels, sampans and tongkangs, with European-styled buildings as the backdrop to embellish the entry façade of the reclaimed Weld Quay for traders all around the world. Besides, the middle left of the postcard illustrates a



Figure 3.1.1 (top): Historical painting of George Town's eastern coast before Weld Quay reclamation.
(Source: Sutton, 1814)

Figure 3.1.2 (bottom): Postcard represent the 1920 Penang Harbour after Weld Quay reclamation.
(Source: Anon, ca 1920a)

protruded jetty that provides mooring services to cope with the rising port demand for increased passengers and goods, which was not required and did not exist in 1814. Prior to the British Settlement, the indigenous lifestyle, such as fishing and agriculture, along with pirates around the island carved the former character of George Town (Hill, 1955). However, after the British landed, the development of port activities entirely altered the sense of belonging and place identity. The genius loci of the area had progressed into a competitive landscape shaped by maritime-based trade. As depicted in the postcard of 1920 (*Fig. 3.1.3*), seaward-facing orientated structures are dominated by piers and buildings that functioned as godowns and European merchants' companies, consecutively determining the atmospheric condition and sensorial experience. According to Nordin Hussin (2002), professor of social and economic history at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, only 54 English ships visited Penang Harbour in 1786, but the numbers increased to 1097 ships by the year 1794.



*Figure 3.1.3: Postcard demonstrating the business sea front of Penang harbour during its golden age.
(Source: Anon, ca 1920b)*

The tendency of the collected data depicts an upward trajectory over the years, suggesting the sequential build-up of Weld Quay's strong work ethic, diligence and dynamic characteristic.

The transformation of George Town's urban morphology is illustrated in the archival maps of the 1799 early settlement (Fig. 3.1.4), 1877 'defacto' seafront extension (Fig. 3.1.5) and 1890 Weld Quay reclamation (Fig. 3.1.6). By making a comparison between the three maps; they reveal the urban metamorphosis in terms of land-water boundaries. Each period adds a new temporal layer onto the existing fabric, creating a perceptual distortion to the person who experiences the place physically or through different media representations across the aforementioned historical timeframe. As shown in Figure 3.1.4, the early settlement of 1799 presents itself in a systematic square or rectangular grid with Beach Street as the coastal frontage. The grid system aims to deploy powerful

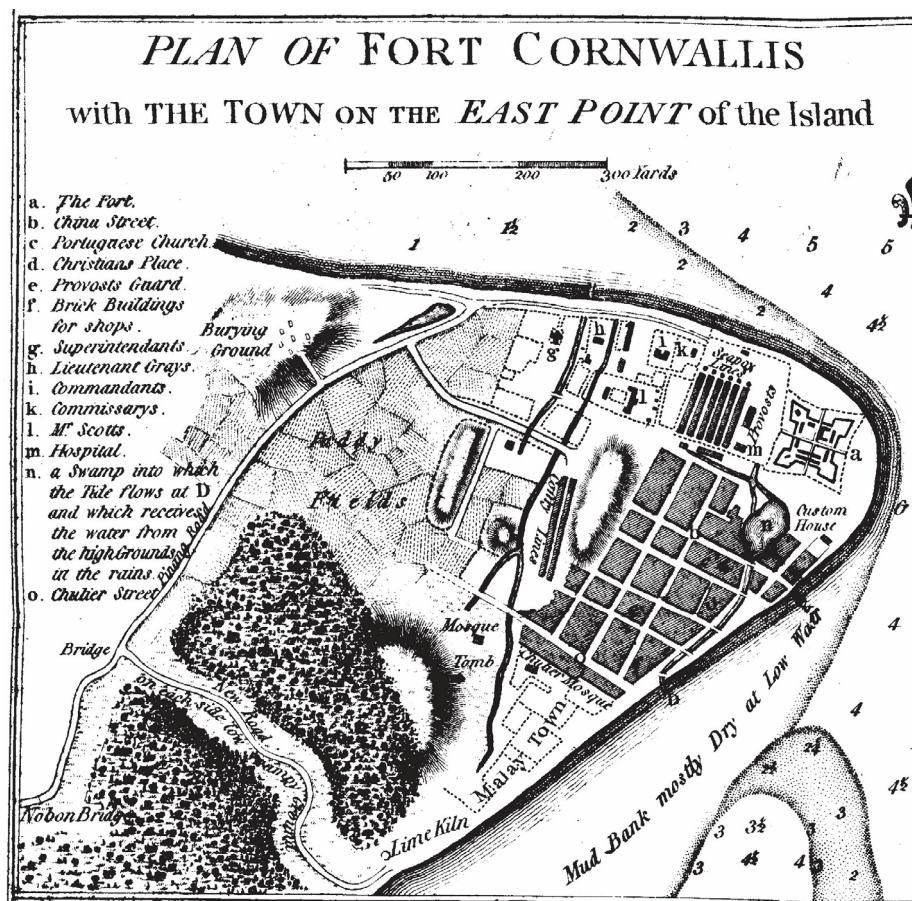
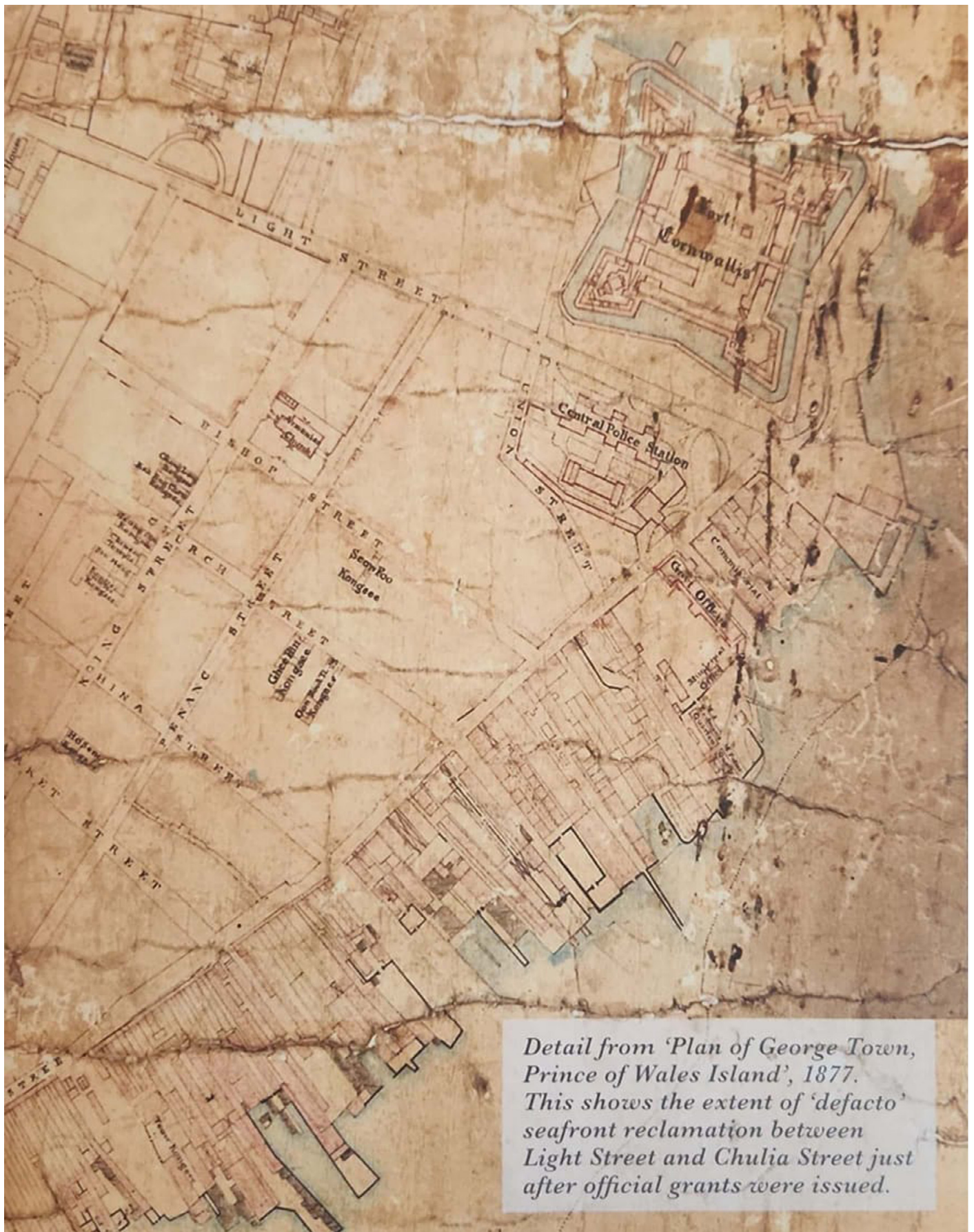


Figure 3.1.4: Popham map of the 1798 showing the early settlement at the eastern coast of George Town, where Beach Street is still the seafront. (Source: Popham, 1799)



Detail from 'Plan of George Town, Prince of Wales Island', 1877. This shows the extent of 'defacto' seafront reclamation between Light Street and Chulia Street just after official grants were issued.

Figure 3.1.5: Plans of 1877 after the official grants were issued, showing the extent 'defacto' of seafront reclamation from Beach Street (Source: Anon, 1877, cited in Langdon, 2015:13)



Figure 3.1.6: Kelly map collection of 1890s showing the new reclamation of Weld Quay and expansion of port facilities. (Source: Kelly, ca 1890)

efficiency in the flow of goods and services from the port to the inland and to ensure a flexible military control during wartime (Zhao et al., 2019). However, the 1877 illegal sprawl of urban areas over the mud flat no longer followed the structured grids but was constructed in a tight and linear configuration. This arrangement restricted further activities besides transporting passengers and goods on illegally reclaimed land. Based on its dense figure ground, the building positioning is assumed to focus mainly on its commercial functionality and transport efficiency without considerations for fire and safety. Lastly, the illegal seaward construction was demolished to make way for Weld Quay reclamation as shown in the 1890 map, imitating the organised urban fabric of the inland. Additionally, the extended perpendicular layout provides a clear axis in wayfinding and directionality while giving transparency to all activities happening along the streets. The formation of Weld Quay not only encouraged ethnic coexistence and once again reshaped George Town's architectural identity, it also encouraged the exploration of new encounters socially, culturally and economically.

Despite the deconstruction and reconstruction of memories caused by physical environmental changes, the sense of defamiliarization occurs concurrently in the social and cultural dimensions. One of the early travellers, Sir George Leith (1804:25), commented in his travel journal:

"There is not, probably, any part of the world, where, in so small a space, so many different people are assembled together, or so great variety of language spoken."

The success of Penang Harbour attracted a high tide of immigration from various nations, forming diverse inhabitants in George Town, including British, Dutch, Chinese, Armenians, Siamese, Malays and Portuguese. Their preferred lodging was concentrated around the coastal region of Weld Quay in the late 1800s to engage in port activities (Leith, 1804). According to a research article in the World Psychiatry Journal, the migrated individuals will experience multiple psychological stresses, such as the loss of cultural norms, religious customs and social support systems, which require them to adapt to local culture and reconstruct the concept of self and identity (Bhugra and Becker, 2005). The vast number of cultural adaptations would eventually influence the aboriginal traditions, initiating the process of cultural integration and



Figure 3.1.7(top): Everyday life of Beach Street. (Source: Kaulfuss, 1899)
 Figure 3.1.8 (bottom): Postcard showing the hustle and bustle of Penang harbour
 (Source: Kleingrothe, 1910)

societal defamiliarization. Hence, it is reasonable to assert that new cultural injection and business opportunities have wholly transformed residents' daily trajectories and behavioural patterns. *Figures 3.1.7 and 3.1.8* are examples to visualise the social cohesion and the hustle and bustle of Weld Quay in the 1900s. Since Weld Quay is located close to Beach Street, less than five minutes walking distance, they share the same population distribution. Thus, the postcard (*Fig. 3.1.7*) representing Beach Street can be used to glimpse at the diversification of Weld Quay. For example, different attire types can be observed on the postcard, possibly symbolizing people of different ethnicities or social rankings. It also displays a range of daily undertakings, such as encounters between a resident and military officer (*bottom right*), individuals pulling rickshaws (*bottom left and middle*), transporting goods via bull carts (*bottom middle*) and performing work outside the shop lots (*middle left*). Similarly, the picture in *Figure 3.1.8* demonstrates the daily port-related activities. For instance, the transportation of goods, Chinese and Indian coolies loading or unloading goods from the tongkang, and possibly some trading activities in the distance along the street of Weld Quay.

Through the investigation of public memories and the individual memories of Sir George Leith, it can be concluded that the sense of defamiliarization progressed in tandem with the thriving port development. From my perspective, the remaking of the place's identity might go unnoticed by the residents of Weld Quay since the progression took more than a century for Penang Harbour to become a bustling entrepôt. Moreover, the overhaul of piers and land reclamation effort transitioned gradually and were observable in the day-to-day living, weakening bodily and perceptual misalignment. Overall, the historical deconstruction and reconstruction of urban morphology and social structure during the British Settlement contributed positively to Weld Quay, George Town and even Penang island's contemporary persona, leaving a long-lasting impact on its present-day ethnically diverse landscape.

3.2 Memories of the Terror and Destruction

1941 - 1945: Japanese Occupation

During the Japanese invasion, an eight-day bombardment was ordered on the Malaya peninsula. Thus, completely destroying Weld Quay's physical environment

and decimating its already well-developed socio-cultural identity. Reiterated by the Canberra Times, the inauguration of World War II signalled the abrupt fall of the port's prosperity in both public and interpersonal dimensions (Fig. 3.2.1). Due to the loss of nearly all photographic and video evidence caused by the violent attack on Penang Central Library and government buildings by the Japanese forces before the 1945 surrender (Fall of Penang, 2013), the analysis of terror and destruction will prioritise the personal accounts of war witnesses, based on interviews conducted by Fall of Penang (2013) with war survivors living around Weld Quay during the Japanese occupation. International newspapers, Japanese propaganda and the remains of historical footage will complement the inspection to reveal stories of the port city's everyday life in its darkest hours.

The destruction of war has led to the downfall of social order due to the weakening of civil societal cohesion and the fragility of political stability (Layton, 2006). In the video footage of the Japanese military aggression, as shown in Figure 3.2.2, the continuous bombing has resulted in a collapsing physical environment, depicting the beginning of social structure disintegration. The drastic change had disarrayed the preceding regularized interdependent trajectory of different actors, which broke down the established structure of Weld Quay into fragments. By scrutinizing the details of the captured scene, the bodily expression of the people in the immediate situation can be perceived. To provide a relatively accurate description of the scene: People scrambled to flee when the air raid alarm sounded. An explosion



Figure 3.2.1: Newspaper reporting the fall of Penang.
(Source: The Canberra Times, 1941)



Figure 3.2.2 (top): Bombing during Japanese air raid. (Source: Fall of Penang, 2013)
 Figure 3.2.3 (bottom): Workers transporting dead bodies onto lorries after the bombing event.
 (Source: Fall of Penang, 2013)

erupted instantly, causing them to freeze in place before turning their heads towards the direction they came from and continuing their frantic escape. That immediate situation conveys a deep sense of estrangement and alienation in connection with emotional complexity due to losing the sense of belonging. Promptly, defamiliarization occurred under psychological turmoil and spatial disorientation. Out of fear and terror, streets around George Town, including Weld Quay, were mostly vacated but scattered with dead bodies (*Fig. 3.2.3*). Commented by Khoo Poh Gin (2013, 4mins 51), the witness of war, in the documentary interview:

"My mother and I were on our way to my grandmother's home. My grandmother lives at Prangin Lane (a street perpendicular to Weld Quay). When we were about to reach, the air raid sirens sounded... So we hid at the corner of the shop. We had to hide when the siren sounded. We had to face the ground like this (heads down on the ground) ... In a split of seconds, there was a loud boom."

Norlizar (2013, 7mins 05), also witnessed the explosion when she was eleven years old:

"All of us, the whole family hid in the ditches to shelter ourselves... My mother was so terrified that she almost soiled herself... Boom! Boom! Boom! The explosions were so loud!... We trembled in fear from the sound of explosion."

Collectively, the intimate memories of war survivors signified a rigorous relational change between behavioural patterns and the destruction of the urban environment. Although most streetscape remains unchanged under Japanese rule, terror and fear will eventually change one's perception of the surrounding environment, which can be explained through the duality of 'openness' and 'enclosure.' Since the priority of the residents' movement has shifted, 'openness' can be utilized to represent the daily trajectory of the bustling port where transparency is embraced to seek business opportunities while developing a strong sense of community. In contrast, detection for 'extreme enclosure' is required during wartime to find the ideal hiding spot. Hence,

the sense of defamiliarization arises from visual and auditory perceptual reformation.

Additionally, the cause of bodily misalignment strongly correlates with the ruination of the physical environment. Together with the destruction of Weld Quay's cultural identity and socioeconomic status through threats and intimidation upon the arrival of the Kobayashi Battalion of the Imperial Japanese Division. The former personality developed through port trading over the last century was harshly uprooted. This phenomenon can also be viewed with the concept of openness and enclosure as the invasion modified the nature of George Town from a welcoming free trading port into an isolated land. Moreover, the deliberate efforts to promote Japanese culture and to obliterate all icons of British Imperialism have revamped the spatial context, including the buildings' façade around Weld Quay, which is now filled with posters and propaganda



Figure 3.2.4 (left): Poster promoting Japanese education. (Source: Anon, ca 1940)



Figure 3.2.5 (right): Japanese propaganda poster promoting cooperation between Chinese and Japanese. (Source: Anon, 1932-1945)

as exhibited in *Figures 3.2.4 and 3.2.5* (Malaysia Design Archive, n.d.). An individual's interpretation of a building's main feature is no longer its architectural aesthetics and functionality but the forceful imposition of another's culture. Nevertheless, the arrival of the Japanese Army has resulted in residents' feigning behaviour in cultural perceptions and daily trajectories that reconstructed the individual, social and collective memories, often with torture and punishment. In the documentary interview, Chik bt Zakaria (2013, 1min23), Foo Vin Lim (2013, 1min32) and Loh Cheng Hoe (3mins30) evidenced the forceful alteration of habits and behaviours:

"From afar, if a Japanese sees you, you have to quickly bow your head... Keep bowing until he comes near. If you did not bow, they'll still notice you from a far, as if they have a telescope. And when he gets near you, he'll kick you. He will kick you as if you are a ball."

"I cycled past the Japanese Sergeant. He told me to come here and stand under the sun as punishment."

"We dressed ourselves as boys when the Japanese passed by. If you were spotted as a girl, you could have been raped."

To conclude this subchapter, it is believed that traumatic memories of an individual can be socially institutionalised and gradually infiltrate into the personal and collective identity. As a result, developing the concept of a traumatised society (Goryushina, 2020). To a certain extent, the destruction of war erodes the former ethical values in the social and cultural dimension, which might result in a slight possibility for war victims, especially children, to devalue life since blood and unattended dead bodies are being normalised in everyday life. For example, an interviewee in the documentary 'Fall of Penang' (2013) mentioned that there were holes here and there filled with flies and dead bodies, and children sometimes used detached heads as football. From my point of view, the cause of defamiliarization throughout the Japanese Occupation, in all senses, was deleterious. The destruction of war has caused the deterioration of the surrounding environment and the collapse of place identity. At the same time, it leaves persistent scars on the people with memories associated with this traumatic event.

3.3 Memories of the Disorder and Recession

1945 - 2008: Before UNESCO

*"Once
I had admired the old, disappearing trades
The unfamiliar call of the hawkers
Taste your wonderful food
And felt the vibrancy of your pulse
Absolutely entranced*

*Once
I had admired your colourful people
Amused by their confusing speeches
Appreciated your unique architecture
And loves the strains of 'Keronchong' music
Totally enraptured*

*Now
Only memories remain
One by one, like fallen pearls
Upon the ground
They slowly fade away and die
Vanished overnight before our very eyes
Totally disappointed."*

Through the poem, Raymond Kwok (2003), a Penang Heritage Trust member and antique collector, expressed his feelings about Weld Quay in the post-war recession and lamented the area's decaying state compared to its golden age of British trading. Although the quality of life of inhabitants has improved slightly after the surrender of Japan, it is no longer as glorious as it once was. The condition of George Town's economy and physical environment was already on the brink of collapse, and continued to suffer due to ineffective policies not yielding the desired results, as mentioned in *Chapter 2*. For instance, introducing the 1948 Rent Control Act accelerated the building's rate of deterioration due to insufficient funds for preservation. The loss of free port status in

1969 resulted in widespread unemployment, especially among the Chinese coolies living on the clan jetties. Lastly, repealing the Rent Control Act in 2000 without proper planning and transition caused an outflux of local migration from the George Town area, indicating a consequential loss of population and cultural diversity (Jenkins, 2019). Hence, employing these political decisions as the base of analysis, this subchapter will study the sense of defamiliarization in two sections: Tangible memories of collective and public remembrance and intangible memories of individual and social reminiscence.

Figures 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 compare the photographs taken during British rule and in 1970, validating the economic hardship of Weld Quay port after losing its free port status to the newly built Butterworth port. By investigating both photographs, there has been a noticeable extension of port facilities over time, but the amount of merchant vessels has decreased significantly. The sea horizon became visible in the latter as there were barely any shipping carriers along the shoreline, unlike during the British heyday when ships of different shapes and sizes built up the ever-changing seaward façade of Weld Quay. One can also observe that in 1970, no pedestrian was present in the captured scene, subduing the once lively and dynamic coastal character. Moreover, the deterioration of buildings and landscapes has distorted the fondly remembered memories and alienated the bodily experience of people that have memories associated with Weld Quay and the streets of George Town. Khoo Salma Nasution (1995), the Honorary Secretary of Penang Heritage Trust, wrote a letter to the Penang Island City Council criticizing and urging the State Government to prioritize the relevance of heritage:

"It is amazing that the State has until now placed such a low priority on its heritage buildings, considering that tourism is Penang's second most important industry after manufacturing and that cultural tourism has become the most important form of tourism worldwide... In less than five years, Penang is likely to change from being the Pearl of the Orient to being just another muddy oyster."

Similarly, from a traveller's perspective, Gwynn Jenkins (2019), the author of *Contested Space Revisited*, stated that her sense of familiarity towards George Town arises from the place's memory of historical completeness. The sense of place and human scale



Figure 3.3.1 (top): Postcard reflects the busyness of Weld Quay port during the British rule.
(Source: Anon, ca1900)

Figure 3.3.2 (bottom): Archival photo presenting Weld Quay's silent atmosphere post war.
(Source: Harrison, ca1970)

was established and reconfirmed by the historical layering of architectural symbolism, cultural diversity and the inhabitation of space. Together with the letters of travellers Alan Flux and David Snell (*Fig. 3.3.3 and 3.3.4*), they voiced their concerns about the city council's nonfeasance in the urban development by neglecting the eroding conditions of historical buildings and urban infrastructure, including broken pavement and stinking drains. Overall, without even altering the urban morphology, the degradation of the physical urban environment has already detrimentally defamiliarized the overall sensorial expedition.

Despite the physical changes, social segregation between Northern and Southern Weld Quay was particularly prominent during this period. The social marginalisation was confirmed in the interview with Ooi Hye Khor, the former resident of Acheh Street Ghaut (*a street perpendicular to Weld Quay*). According to Khor, his former address was within a five minutes walking distance from Weld Quay, and he is well-connected to the community of the Chew Jetty, where many of his friends live. Hence, he spent most of his childhood around the area. An interactive plan mapping activity was conducted in the interview to study his weekday trajectory as a primary schooler from a working-class family in the 1970s. As shown in *Figure 3.3.5*, his mobilisation pattern revolved only around the southern section, drawing an invisible line separating Weld Quay into two social divisions. He stated:

"In my understanding, Weld Quay starts from Chulia Street Ghaut to Prangin Street Ghaut, including the area where the clan jetties are located. Beyond Chulia Street Ghaut, there are pretty big houses where upper-class people usually go. I have no impression at all, of the other side... We usually don't go there as a kid... It is a rich people area."

His statement suggested the redefinition of Weld Quay within the societal and cultural context by considering the perspectives of those living in the grassroots community, especially local business owners and coolies whose monetary standing were utterly dependent on the port trading activities.

In the British heyday, each clan jetty was responsible for various services and goods'

LETTER OF THE DAY

Stop before all that's interesting is wiped off

OVER the past five years I have been a frequent visitor to Penang, Ipoh, Kuching, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur and other historic Malaysian cities and towns which once featured a unique array of old Chinese, Malay, Anglo-Indian and colonial architecture and also superb trees planted to shade the wide roads along which these buildings stood.

You may notice that I use the past tense, as so many of these trees and structures have disappeared in the last few years — often to make way for, frankly, unprepossessing examples of modern development.

I hesitate to use the word "architecture", although there are, of course, interesting modern buildings arising — but these are sadly few and far between.

Malaysia was once rich in what are now known as "heritage" buildings. I don't mean just the few famous, preserved and illuminated

structures such as the Kuching Istana.

I'm referring to the fascinating mix of wooden trellised kampung houses, with their rows of fanlights and shutters — now so often amalgamated into run-down urban areas — streets of decoratively (and often symbolically) plastered Chinese shophouses, small town mosques, temples and shrines, large ostentatious eclectic bungalows, simpler Anglo-Indian homes, elegant banks and old administrative centres.

Many of these have been or are being demolished, or altered beyond recognition for reasons of commerce.

Maybe it is thought that the humbler species I have listed are not important enough to consider preserving — or that there are so many old shophouses around, for example, that losing the odd dozen here or there is of little import.

Not so, I live in a country

which has already made that mistake.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many 18th-century town squares, great mansions, workaday Victorian shops and terraces were bulldozed; old town centres were ripped apart in a way that would be inconceivable in England today.

We have lost so much that the comparatively little we have left is now carefully listed for preservation.

Singapore has also had too great a purge, and is now trying to re-create its past, as a rather plastic pastiche.

Don't let it happen in Malaysia — stop and assess before all that is interesting is swept away.

It is now not considered a problem — indeed, in many quarters it is now fashionable as well as necessary — to find sympathetic new uses for old buildings, which when restored would grace any townscape.

This is starting to happen in Malaysia and will, I hope, be a growing trend.

(Expensive over-restoration is not required — buildings should be allowed to show their age, and grow old gracefully, as opposed to being tarted up like wedding cakes).

Malaysia's history of multi-racial, multi-religious settling has resulted in a rich architectural legacy; and while modern-day Malaysians are to be congratulated, certainly, on the current economic success, it would be ironic if this very success were to lead to the disappearance of all but a few obvious examples of the glory which once was.

Local cultural issues aside, there is great tourist potential in the past; and I read that Malaysia is hoping to multiply its tourist industry.

It seems that Penang is already difficult to sell as a package destination be-

cause it is considered to have lost too much to be of interest to the discerning tourist — who increasingly demands more than just a beach and a bar.

The most photographed building in Kuala Lumpur is the old railway station — not any of the glittering high-rise banks, or garish blocks of condominiums teetering on raw red slopes gouged from some once-verdant hillside.

I was recently talking to a group of design students in the Federal capital, many of whom will eventually be designing for some segment of the tourist industry; and I asked them to consider whether as designers, their future could depend on how they treat their past... a question which needs attention in the present, before it's too late.

Alan Flux
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United Kingdom

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ing them to be d, extended or m if other mat- ublic interest are

ify a "heritage s as certain as ; a row of shops ouses". No

who simply or developers y whims") are r this process, Malaysia has nservation ex- know how to do sionally.

atement that e of the build- eritage value" ss assumption, enang's inven- not been com-

that most Pen- l have to learn Malaysia gov- ban develop- ording to my the previous eneral of the wn and Coun- g Department,

there is no provision for "freedom to build" or a "right for development", unless it is granted in line with formal development policies by the appropri-

are very crucial since direct funds are limited.

One should also not forget that lots of "extended families" in Penang. For them the existence of traditional shophouses is vital, even after the houses are restored and are

Heritage Market along the lines of many other successful heritage developments, e.g. in London (Covent Garden), Sydney (it was a Malaysian investor), Singapore (selling antiques) and last but not least Kuala Lumpur

gress". Actually it would be interesting to find out what makes Penangites hate their heritage so much.

A FAITHFUL GOVERNMENT OFFICER, Penang.

Keep Penang 'as it is'

MY wife and I have returned from a wonderful holiday in Penang — a city which has had the foresight to resist the modern development excesses of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

I am writing to say please keep it that way. The old areas have such a unique charm and so much history — a great attraction for visitors.

Penang's old streets were not designed for motor cars. Bicycles, pedestrians and trishas should have priority with expansion of existing public transport system. It would be tragic to see Penang grind to a halt as have so many other cities.

Congratulations on the way you have kept your magnificent trees and

not sacrificed them to new road systems; but we did notice that although some of the old merchants houses are being restored, many are being abandoned for new development.

Penang's hills form such a dramatic backdrop to the city and to allow further encroachment would be sad indeed. You have a magical island, wonderful cuisine, and friendly people.

We hope to return many times as I am sure will countless others because of your history, your variety of culture and, of course, for what you are. Please keep it that way.

DAVID SNELL,
Kent.

Figure 3.3.3 (top): Letter expressing the concern over devaluing George Town's heritage. (Source: Flux, 1996)

Figure 3.3.4 (bottom): Letter urging heritage preservation. (Source: Snell, 1996)

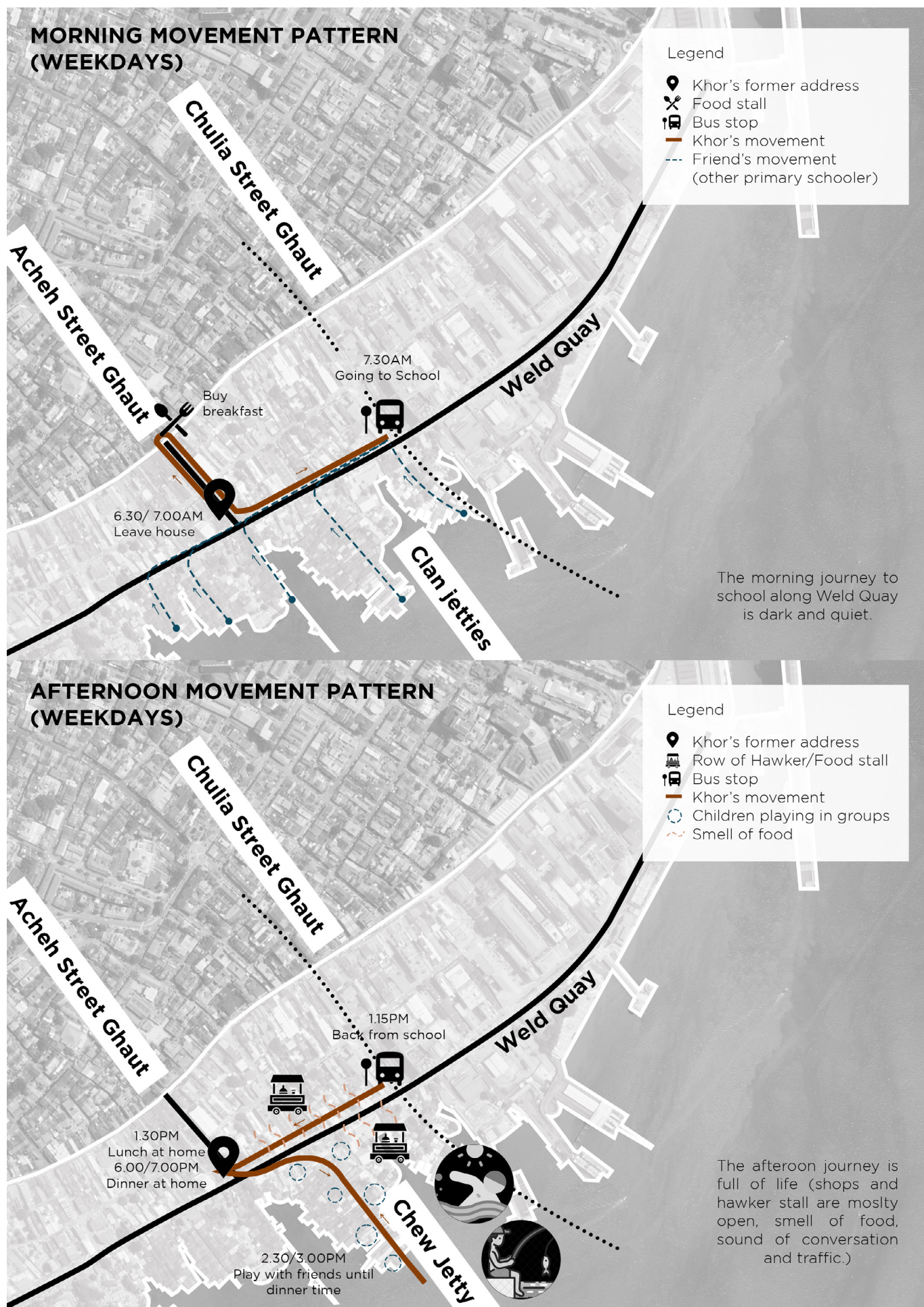


Figure 3.3.5: A day of a working class primary school kid in the 1970s.
(Source: Google Map, 2023; Reproduced by author)

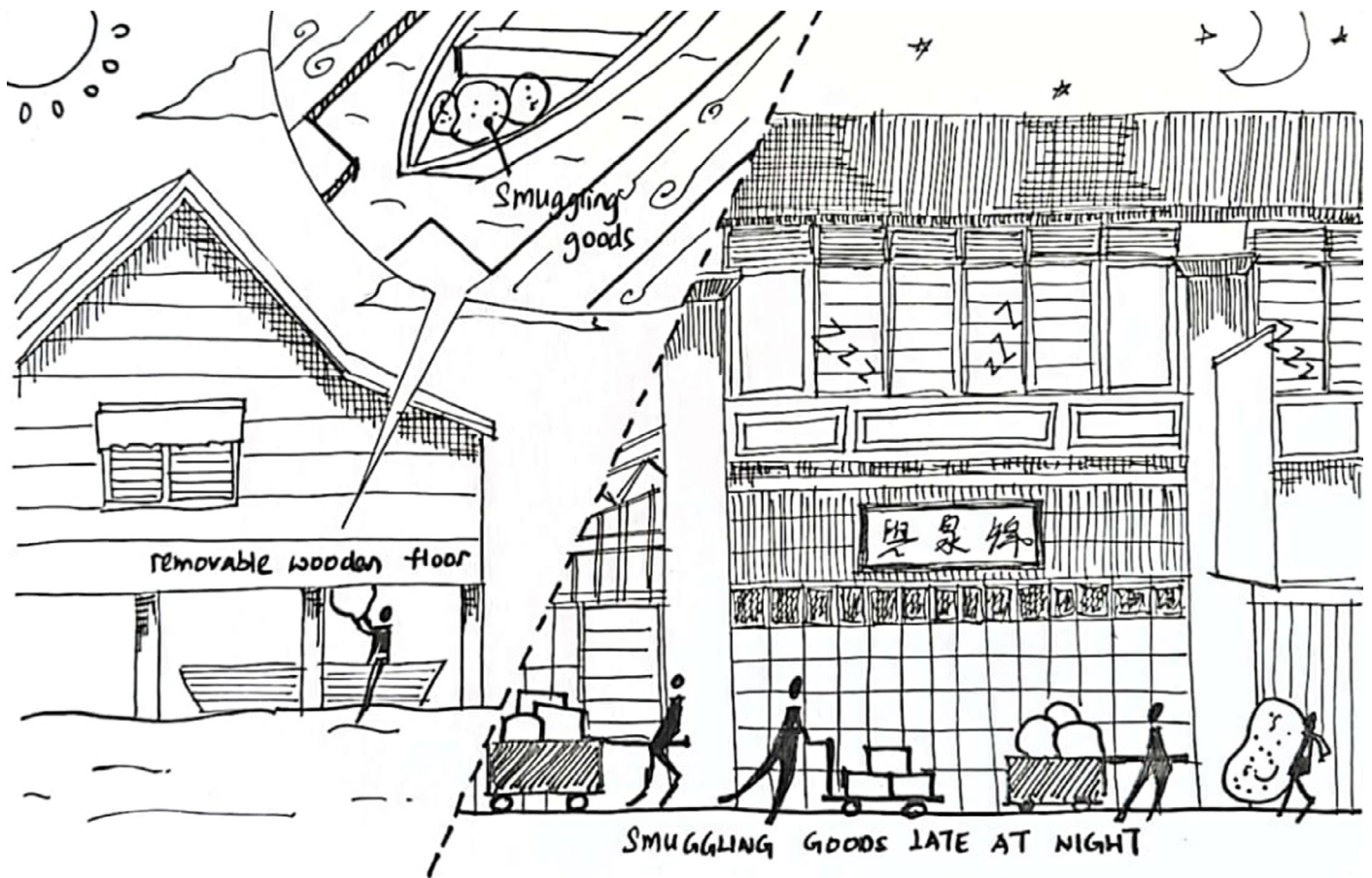


Figure 3.3.6: Sketches showing the trajectory of goods smuggling based on the interview findings with Khor.
(Source: Author)

delivery upon the arrival and departure of bigger ships. For instance, the Ongs were skilled boatmen that offered shuttle and cargo services; The Koays and Lims were involved in charcoal and firewood trading; The Chews dealt with spices, whereas the Tans engaged in dried seafood commerce (The Star, 2022; Liang and Yeoh, n.d.). However, the economic shrink post-war has subverted the customary practice, turning the previously organized business system into a tangled web of chaos and disorder. Witnessed by Khor from a very young age until days before the UNESCO declaration, there was often physical confrontation among the clan members to fight over businesses along Weld Quay. Each jetty's robust and independent social structure fosters a strong sense of community and territoriality, therefore, even a minor dispute can escalate into a large-scale tribal clash. Besides high-profile violent offences, smuggling usually begins late at night to avoid paying import taxes. Figure 3.3.6 illustrates the contrasting diurnal appearance and human trajectory of Weld



Figure 3.3.7: A photograph of the late 1900s clan jetties is mounted on the wall of the Chew Jetty Temple. (Source: Anon, ca1990)



Figure 3.3.8: Example Route taken for good smuggling from Tan jetty to a ware house at Victoria Street
(Source: Google Map, 2023; Reproduced by author)

Quay grounded on Khor's personal remembrance of goods trafficking. As shown in the sketch, the regular flow of everyday routine remains uninterrupted during the day, but illegal activities kick off after midnight. The clan jetties were the point of departure (Fig.3.3.7 and 3.3.8), where clansmen ran barefoot, using handcarts to transport various bootlegged items towards a warehouse on Victoria Street. The occurrence of these illegal events had transformed the dynamic visual backdrop of Weld Quay with the changing daylight, occasionally, it also defamiliarized the olfactory experience of the area. He recalled:

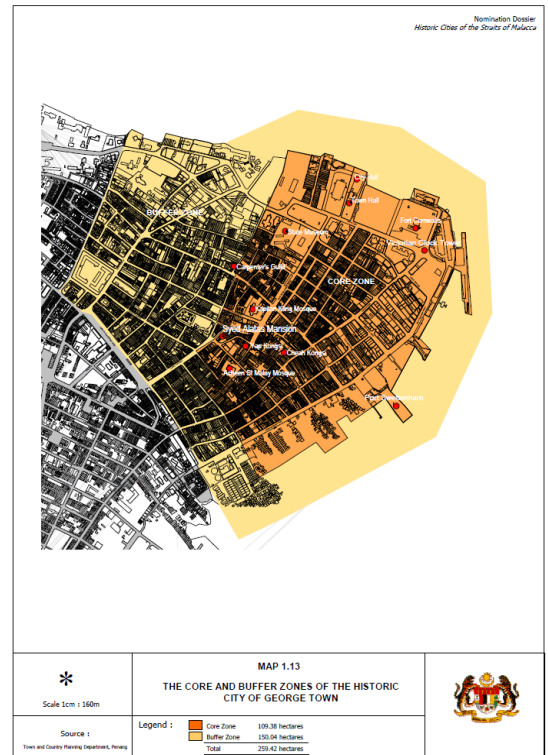
"The smuggling activity is an open secret. Everyone around the area knows about it... When I was young, I used to hide behind the curtains and saw clansmen run past my house. You will not be able to guess the goods they are transporting on the night itself, but the next day you can smell it, especially when they are transporting salted fish. The whole area is covered with a fishy odour."

Examining the tangible and intangible memories in both public and private spheres suggested that the sense of defamiliarization occurs through poorly managed urban spaces and the decline in economic performances. However, looking into the complexities of this phenomenon, the hardship fosters a tight-knit community with collective responsibilities and a strong sense of belonging. Gradually, it helps to revive the loss of place identity during the Japanese Occupation. Despite the challenges posed by gang fights, everyday life in Weld Quay remained largely unaffected. Children were allowed to play outside without any adult supervision; Doors were left open where neighbours knew each other and often gathered to chat and socialize; New business opportunities emerged from adversity. As stated by Rapoport (1984), behaviour is the essence of the built environment and defines the identity of a place. His view was supported by architectural anthropologist Nold Egenter, who believed that architecture results from constructive human behaviour (Roesler, 2014). Positively, it can be concluded that the interconnected relationship between conscious and unconscious acts, such as government policy decisions and residents' behavioural patterns, intervened and reconstructed Weld Quay's cultural and place identity, adding a new layer to the memories recollection.

3.4 Memories of the Progression and Achievement

2018 - Present: After UNESCO

It is about 15 years since the inscription of George Town on the World Heritage List in 2008. Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) have executed various strategies to conserve the fading maritime cultural inheritance and strive to rejuvenate George Town's economic productivity. A considerable amount of effort has been invested within the core heritage zone, including Weld Quay, as shown in *Figure 3.4.1*, to promote sustainable cultural tourism (State Government of Penang, 2008). For example, historical godowns and shophouses have been converted into cafes and tourism-related facilities, whereas Swettenham Pier, the former primary merchant wharf, is undergoing redevelopment to cater for larger cruise liners.



*Figure 3.4.1: Core and buffer zone of heritage protected site.
(Source: UNESCO, 2007:18)*

Various perspectives have been expressed on the measures taken for the urban heritage redevelopment, some supportive and others opposing, questioning the emphasis on tourism destroying the area's cultural identity and defamiliarized the genius loci of the older days. As stated by the Managing Director of Think City, Hamdan Abdul Majeed (cited in Hockton and Langdon, 2019), the UNESCO listing has undoubtedly created a surge in heritage building conversion and construction that resulted in detrimental physical and social changes due to an influx of tourists and migrant workers. Hence, this subchapter aims to reflect Weld Quay's present condition corresponding to the gains and losses derived from urban and economic improvement. The analysis will be complemented by the assisted site survey and the interview with people who had directly encountered the area's transformation over time to compare Weld Quay before and after the UNESCO recognition from their perspective.

Strolling along today's Weld Quay, the historical traces from the mercantile trading ports are still visible and is currently being integrated into the present urban fabric, becoming either a ruined monumental figure (*Fig.3.4.2*) or remaining as an operational structure (*Fig.3.4.3*) that represent the tangible recollection of the past. As for the favourable changes, using Swettenham Pier as an example, the physical condition of port facilities has improved significantly over time and defamiliarized the coastal landscape by expanding the land-water boundary. It grew from a simple wooden dock in the 1860s into an extensive harbour with all required provisions (*Fig. 3.4.4, 3.4.5 and 3.4.6*), simultaneously witnessing the gradual rise in significance of Weld Quay's ports and the transition from a commercial stop point into a tourism departure or destination. Undoubtedly, the growing structure has demonstrated a positive commitment to Penang's overall economic development, whether during its free port days or in present days where tourism is the emphasis.

Moreover, in collaboration with George Town World Heritage Inc (GTWHI), a department established in 2010 by the state government to manage the protected site, substantially higher funding and budget were allocated to preserve and maintain the heritage features. For instance, RM1mil was assigned for clan jetties upgrading



*Figure 3.4.2 (top) Abandoned warehouse.
(Source: Author)*

*Figure 3.4.3 (bottom): 1925 Newly build
Church Street Pier to replace the destroyed
structure during WWII bombing.
(Source: Author)*

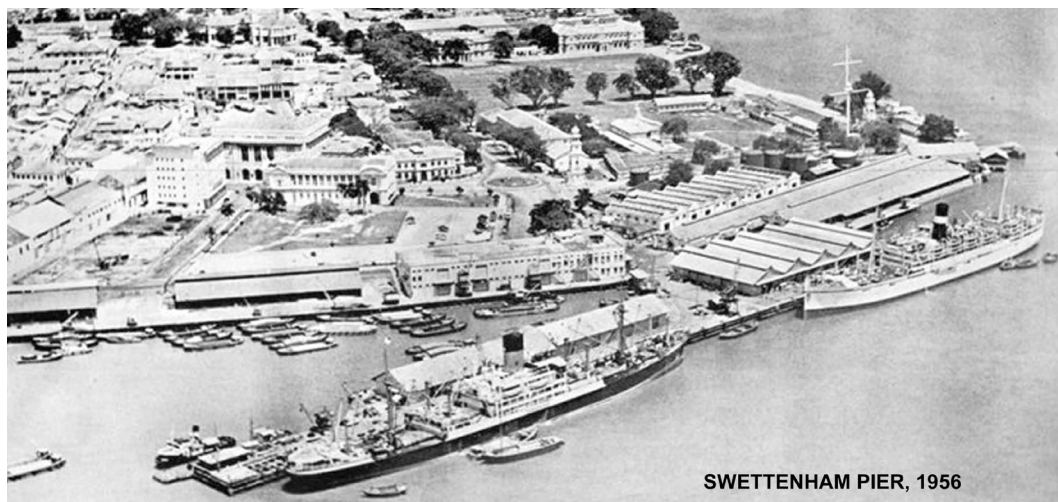


Figure 3.4.4 (top): Archival picture showing the 1860 Penang Harbour.
(Source: Penang Port Malaysia, 1860)

Figure 3.4.5 (middle): Aerial view of 1956 Swettenham Pier. (Source: Penang Port Malaysia, 1956)

Figure 3.3.6 (bottom): Aerial view of the upgraded Swettenham Pier in the present days.
(Source: Penang Port Malaysia, ca 2015)



Figure 3.4.7 (top): Northern Weld Quay with European style architecture
(Source: Author)



Figure 3.4.8 (bottom): Shophouses in Southern Weld Quay (Source: Author)

work in 2011, and RM3mil was designated to restore heritage shophouses in 2018. (UNESCO, 2019; Chin, 2011; The Star, 2023; Mok, 2018). In the interview with Khor, he mentioned that before UNESCO, buildings were dilapidated, and the pervasive smell of stinky drains spread across George Town as there was only one major drain that channels contaminated water from all households directly into the ocean. Fortunately, as evidenced by *Figures 3.4.7 and 3.4.8*, the broken pavement and stinky drains no longer exist. Buildings of former European trading companies along the northern section and shophouses dominating the southern area present themselves pleasantly and appealingly.

However, a perspective of negativity defamiliarization arises when drawing a parallel between the activities flow of the present site and its past scenario, as depicted in *Figures 3.4.9 and 3.4.10*. The photos show that the godown in its present form is not utilized to its fullest potential compared to the circumstances in 1905. In the 1905 postcard, Indian workers transporting goods up and down the bullock carts contributed to the diligence of Weld Quay's maritime trading character. In contrast, today's godown stands vacant with no purpose or function. The present condition aligns itself with the criticism of a hydrologic technology scientist, George Hoermann (interviewed by Noordin, 2015:17), stating with disappointment:

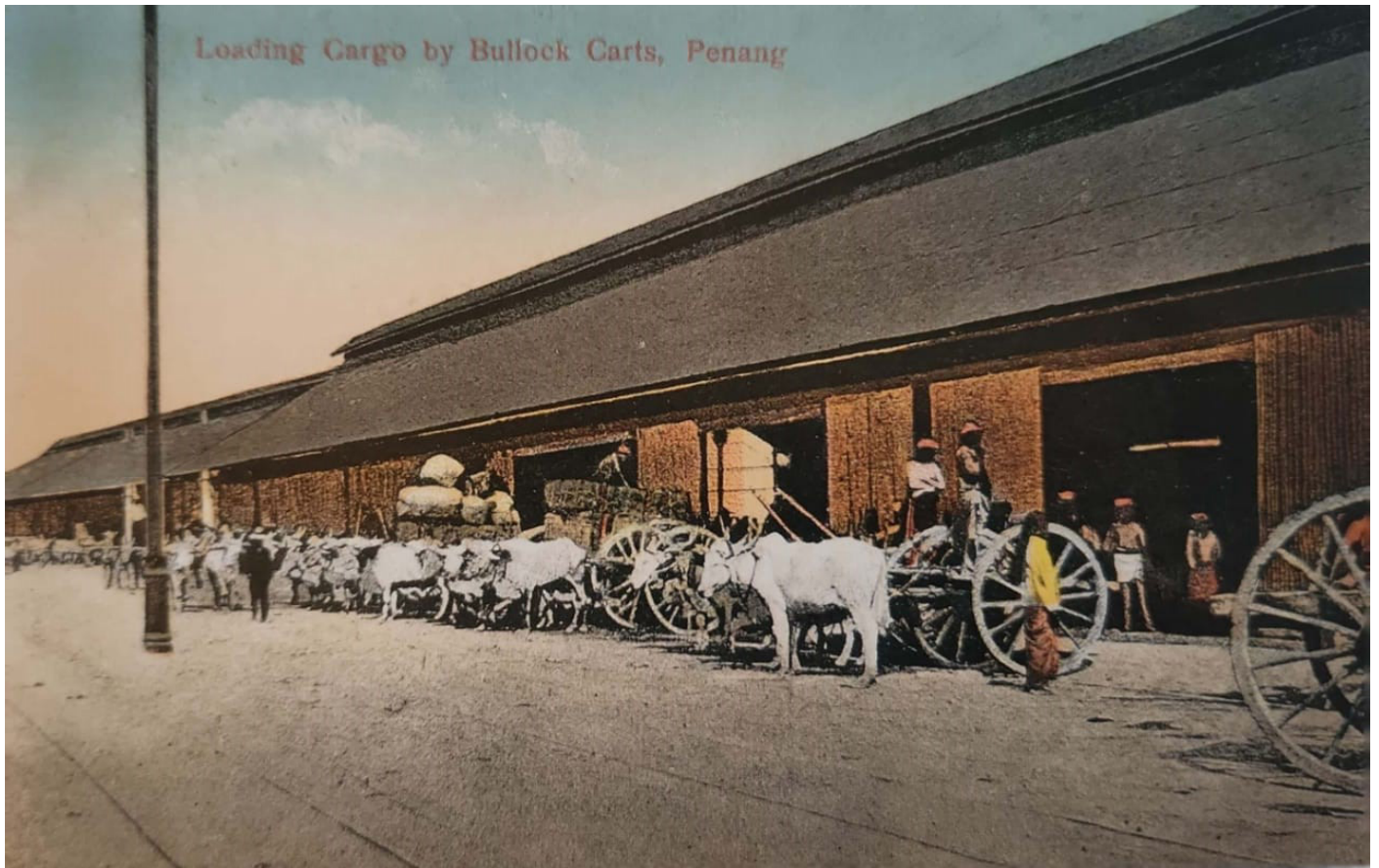


Figure 3.4.9 (top): Postcard depicting the function of godowns during British heyday.
(Source: Cheah, 2012:50)

Figure 3.4.10 (bottom): Abandoned warehouse along Weld Quay. (Source: Author)

"As I was walking through the streets of George Town, I noticed many nice buildings with beautiful architecture, but many are empty and in a sad state. There is no real life... Penang is nothing but just another Disneyland."

Echoed Jenkins (2008:28), commenting on the conversion of heritage shop lots, which was initially a mixed use of housing and local traditional stores related to the vigorous port activities, into boutique hotels and aesthetically pleasing cafes that were not at all site-specific:

"It is hard to believe that this is what UNESCO wanted, and yet this phenomenon has been observed before – the commodification of culture and the Disneyfication of the urban landscape, perhaps this reflect more of the management and interpretation of the sites, than UNESCO itself."

Has the new business opportunity aroused from UNESCO recognition resulted in the loss of cultural and place identity? A study conducted in 2015 showed that George Town is now occupied by only 9000 residents compared to the 50,000 population in the past (Noordin, 2015). Even though the UNESCO evaluation has stressed the importance of preserving living cultures, residents were forced to vacate their premises due to increasing rental rates in order to make ways for commercialised projects of higher profit and revenue (Bhatt, 2008, cited in Penang Heritage Trust Newsletter Archive, 2009, *as shown in Fig. 3.4.11*). Khor and his family were obliged to move as well. He remembered that the rental cost was originally fixed at RM80 per month and was raised by RM100 monthly until it reached the market price of RM2000 after abolishing the Rent Control Act in 2000. The change of policy has led to a notable population outflow. Since tourists became the majority population, in Khoo Salma's words: "... there are more tourists than locals, so tourists end up coming here to see more tourists." Oddly, the area has become a heritage site with a solid tangible historical shell but limited intangible contents as there is a finite continuation of cultural traditions and collective memories.

Sun 23.12.08

Longtime tenants told to move out

by Himanshu Bhatt
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GEORGE TOWN: George Town's cultural heritage faces a new threat as traditional communities across the inner city are forced to vacate their premises to make way for businesses like boutique hotels, pubs and restaurants.

It is learnt that age-old tenants in at least five neighbourhoods, who have been plying their trades since before the Second World War, have been told to move out by their landlords following Unesco's recognition of the city as a World Heritage Site.

Residents interviewed by *theSun* confirmed that they had been issued notices to vacate, some having to move out as early as the end of the month.

Affected areas include the historic Armenian Street, Carnavon Lane, Beach Street, Campbell Street and Stewart Lane.

A source said more evictions were in order following an escalating trend among property owners to jack up rentals and commercialise their premises.

Ironically, Unesco's evaluation of George Town and Malacca has emphasised the critical importance of preserving living cultures, while warning against the negative impact of commercial tourism on the sites.

When contacted, the representative of a terrace block owner on Armenian Street – where the movie *Anna and the King* was shot – said the property had been transferred to an Australian who plans to develop it into a boutique hotel.

"We would like to encourage the development of tourism in Penang to boost the economy," the representative, who declined to be named, said.



Narayanasamy has been operating his scrap business on Armenian Street for more than 60 years.



He stressed that the project, supported by a leading bank, would abide by heritage guidelines imposed by the Penang Island Municipal Council.

However, all residents have been told to vacate by the end of the year.

S. Narayanasamy, 58, who operates a traditional scrap business on Armenian Street that began more than 60 years ago, said he was looking for another shophouse on the same street but new rentals were too high.

"Our customers know we have been located here for years. If we move out, it will be very hard for us," he said, adding that his sons and daughter also work at the shop.

Traditional wine dealer Tan

Seok H'ng, whose business has existed on Carnavon Lane since 1940, has been asked to vacate by March.

Tan plans to either move to a new industrial area in Jelutong or shut down his business.

Housewife Chew Joon Long (right), 68, whose family has resided on Armenian Street for at least five generations, said they still prefer to stay in the inner city.

"I feel very sad. This house holds so many fond memories," she said.

Also affected are several iconic shops along the financial artery

of Beach Street. These include the Green Silk Store, founded in 1947, and EJ Motiwala, established in 1886.

A spokesman for Green Silk Store said the family business, once patronised by royalty and figures like Tunku Abdul Rahman, cannot sustain the surging rental.

Abuli Motiwala, a partner at Motiwala, said it was the most popular stationery shop in George Town before Merdeka.

Although told to move out, the company is trying to find alternative premises within the inner city, he said.



Over-commercialisation also happened along the clan jetties, which impacted the everyday life of the village inhabitants. By looking at the site photos in *Figures 3.4.12* and *3.4.13*, one can clearly see that the wooden house façade is wholly covered by ‘decorative elements.’ The authenticity of the housing frontage has been replaced by applied symbolism, losing the essence of cultural significance given the fact that the rapid expansion of tourism has left residents with no other options but to rely on it as their primary means of sustenance. According to the site survey findings, there is a nostalgic sentiment among the respondents reminiscing about the past. Weld Quay in their memories is safe, fun and inclusive. Back then, children could swim in the ocean, and neighbours could visit one another without prior notice, as no strangers were walking around the neighbourhood. In comparison to the present day, most houses along the clan jetties have their doors shut to retain privacy. An interview conducted by



Figure 3.4.12 (left): Photo taken along Chew Jetty. (Source: Author)
Figure 3.3.13 (right): Over commercialization of Chew Jetty. (Source: Author)

Balvin Kaur (2019), a journalist for the New Straits Times newspaper, with the residents of Chew Jetty reflects the position of the locals adapting to the new norms.

"It is too crowded in front. We do not mind the tourists as we know it helps our neighbours make money... But, it's a bit galling when the tourists gawk at us and take out pictures as if they have never seen two elderly people eating biscuits in the afternoon." – Chew Jetty resident, age 74

"Yes, there have been changes (acknowledging the drastic change of the village façade), but do you expect us to still be coolies and operators of sampan? ... Times have changed. People are finding new ways to earn an income. Why begrudge change?" – Chew Chean Chai, age 68, a fourth-generation resident of Chew Jetty.

In summary, the transformation of Weld Quay has led to a positive economic upswing and urban revitalization but defamiliarized itself within the sociocultural realm. Since the George Town UNESCO listing occurred relatively recently, many individuals had personally experienced the changes. Hence, the hidden traces of Weld Quay's remembered past habitually embedded themselves in the expectation of how the 'here and now' should unveil in the present time, familiarly and nostalgically. Consequently, this leads to contradicting opinions about George Town's future progression concerning the loss of former character and cultural identity associated with their memories. Indisputably, the genius loci of today's Weld Quay are no longer equivalent or comparable to the Weld Quay even in the near past. However, by adopting a different viewpoint, it can be argued that the process of place identity and memories reconstruction had repeated itself once more, mirroring the moment when Francis Light stepped on Penang's ground in 1786, which ultimately shifted the character of the place into a competitive business attribute. Similar to the British days, when Weld Quay's character was shaped by maritime zenith, the atmosphere in the present day is entirely dependent on the hospitality industry and cultural tourism. Thus, to a certain extent, it provides an alternative means of restoring Weld Quay's long-lost character tracing back to the British Mercantile era, where people were often in a state of flux, entering and leaving the harbour.

Chapter Four:

Synthesis & Conclusion

A port encompasses more than just a geographic area and spatial entity. It contributed to the evolution of economic, cultural, political and social diversification, aiding in the shaping of place identity over the course of time. In the case of Weld Quay, the emergence of port trading activities reconstructed the modern history of George Town from a pre-colonial insular island into a bustling free port (Zhao et al., 2019). Even though the Japanese invasion has led to severe physical and sociocultural destruction, after a period of chaos and confusion, Weld Quay regained its local and international popularity by promoting its diversification of heritage and cultural richness. The sense of defamiliarization and the distortion of memory perception continuously deconstructed and reconstructed itself throughout the historical timeline of Weld Quay within the physical and sociocultural realm, constantly developing an overlaying of place identity.

Examining individual, social, collective and public memories unveils the overlapping history associated with tangible memories of urban transformation and intangible memories of sociocultural defamiliarization. According to Kahneman (2010), we cannot choose between experience but between the memories of the experience. Things we gain from our experiences, including skills, knowledge and emotions, are a story that the memory delivers. The demographic changes and the daily trajectory of Weld Quay's inhabitants over time have caused both positive and negative influences on its *genius loci* and the collective memories of local inhabitants. According to the analysis

in Chapter 3, Figure 4.1 attempts to categorise and conclude the gains and losses of Weld Quay’s development based on the four periods of time, in both environmental (physical) and sociocultural aspects.

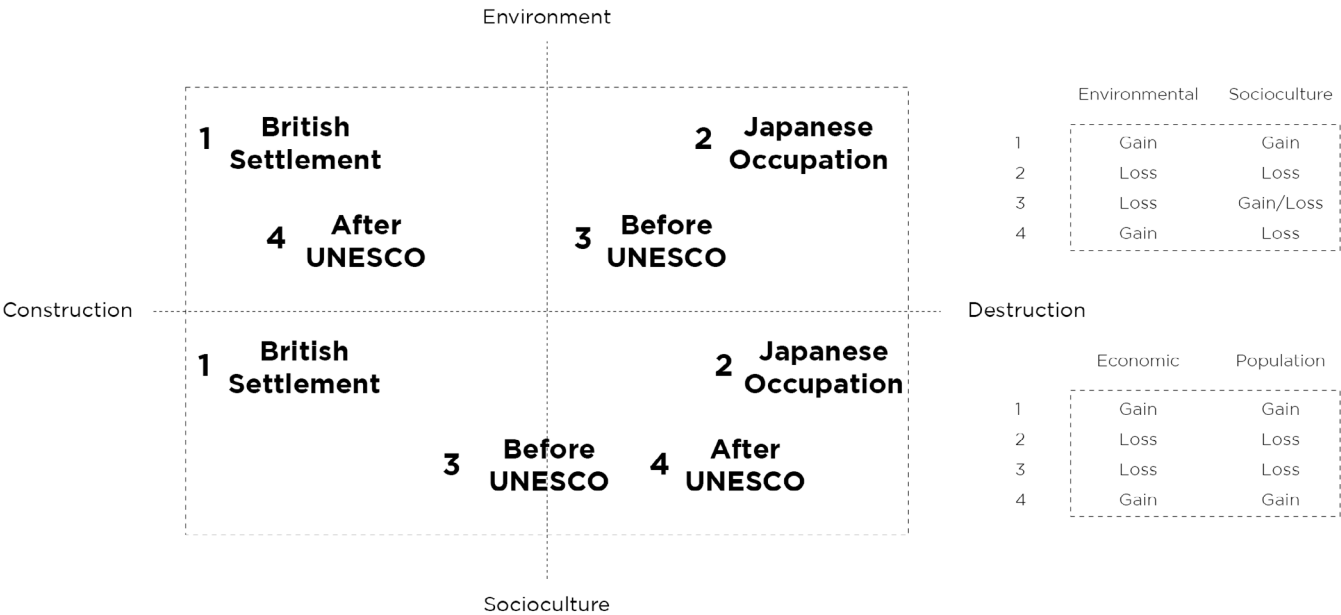


Figure 4.1: Gains and losses categorisation based on Chapter 3 analysis. (Source: Author)

While this research seeks to study the defamiliarization of place memory across time, several questions remain unanswered and require further exploration. Especially the ones concerning cultural identity loss and the future direction of Weld Quay and George Town’s development. For example, are there possible ways to revive the erosion of living traditions due to the outflux of indigenous inhabitants? Moreover, since George Town is not an area full of archaeological sites, its heritage integrates itself into the everyday life of residents. Thus, aligning with the government’s tourism initiative, how can we balance tourism with the continuation of sociocultural identity? If we reduce the number of tourists, can we uphold the current economic status and revenue generation? There is no denying that history is irreversible. We must learn to adapt to the new reality. Perhaps, defamiliarizing the place’s identity could create a new possibility to facilitate fresh perspectives concerning the future of Penang’s maritime heritage restoration and conservation. The shift towards cultural tourism might create an alternative means of appreciation and rediscovery of the ‘forgotten’ past and the ‘unseen’ historical value.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

The site survey was carried out with the help of my brother, Yi Kai Neoh. The survey aims to understand the Weld Quay residents' perspective, comparing the past and present.

Appendix 2

The online Zoom interview with Ooi Hye Khor lasted about four and a half hours. We had an in-depth conversation about life growing up as a kid in Weld Quay in the 1970s. Appendix 2 is a translated transcript of the original summary of the answer to the interview questionnaire written by Khor in Chinese.

Appendix - I: Site survey



"There are less kids compared to a few decades ago. A lot of them have moved to a different district to pursue a better life. There used to be kids jumping into the sea but nowadays it is a rare occurrence due to the fact that the water today is quite dirty."

- Resident at Chew Jetty, age 43



"Due to the area being a world heritage area, not much can be changed. Any changes to the structure of the houses and murals needs approval from the government. It takes about two months to apply for a repair and 10 years to apply for a change in anything."

- Kopitiam Uncle, age 61



"There used to be a lot of ships a few decades ago but nowadays there aren't many. A lot of people moved out to as different area such as Batu Maung to fish."

- Resident at Chew Jetty, age 52



"Nowadays, the jetty is much more commercialised. A lot of tourists compared to before. Back then, the area is just purely residential."

- Resident of Chew Jetty and owner of a commercial store, age 67



"These shop lot used to be very famous place for the creation of tombstones back in the day, but they had been out of business for quite some time now."

- Store owner along Weld Quay, age 56



"In recent memories, there are more hawker center than before, and also with much improved infrastructure, and much more modernised compared to a few decades ago."

- Resident and fisherman of Lee Jetty, age 42

Appendix - II: Interview Questionnaire and Summary

Khor Ooi Hye, age 60

Former residents at Acheh Street Ghaut, 1 min walk to Weld Quay.

Translated version of the summary written by interviewee

1) Describe Weld Quay in a short sentence (Past and present)

In the past, Weld Quay can be described as an area that brought great prosperity to our ancestors. In contrast, Weld Quay in the present day acts as a gold standard for tourist attractions.

2) How did you feel about Weld Quay of the past when you were a kid?

i. The lower and middle-class people engaged in labour works and entrepot trades. They will use sampan to commute the goods and crews from the merchant vessels that are parked in the middle of the ocean to the port or act as a transit area for resupplying. Each individual jetty has established a unique identity for itself. For instance, The Lim Jetty is known for hosting Japanese ships; Chew Jetty is notable for having ships from Myanmar; The Tan Jetty has always been correlated with boats carrying charcoal, whilst The Yeoh Jetty is renowned for being the main producer of wood in the area. (The crews of different nationalities often pass through my house carrying various goods. Usually, I would see the crews from Myanmar carrying second-hand products when it is time for their return.)

ii. The concept of brotherhood bounded by name in the past involved a mix of both ends of the spectrum (both good and bad influences), thus contributing to the creation and development of criminal organisations that produced a highly restricted area where entry is only permitted to those who bear the name of each jetty.

iii. Each Jetty also serves as a playground for me because I have friends living inside the jetties, allowing me to indulge myself in activities such as swimming and fishing.

iv. There are a lot of traditional delicacies to try (Wonton noodles, Ice jelly, and Char hor fun). Back in the day, the majority of my neighbours owned a hawker stall, so I got to try plenty of dishes, including fried rice cakes (Char Keow Kak), Wonton noodles, Keow Teow Th'ng, fried rice noodles (Char Bee Hoon), coconut rice, ice jelly, shaved ice (Ais

Kacang), soy milk, rojak, Char Keow Teow and Curry noodles.

v. There is an abundance of Asian water monitors at the shore. Some even grow to be as long as 2 meters long.

3) How do you feel about today's Weld Quay?

i. The area is definitely flourishing, with youths all over taking advantage to venture into various business opportunities. (but personally, I do not feel it will last long.)

ii. The Weld Quay of today has definitely given new life to the buildings of the past, helping them escape their fate of being destroyed or abandoned.

iii. It is a shame that the area nowadays is too commercialised, with prices of the foods to be skyrocketed, losing the cultural originality.

iv. I believe the Weld Quay of today has a weak cultural heritage compared to the past. Plus, the standards of creative works have deteriorated over time.

4) In general, why do you think there is a distortion/ difference in feel/ emotions when you experience Weld Quay today? (What are the biggest changes that make you feel different when you compare its present condition with your memories of what Weld Quay is like in the past?)

i. Today, Weld Quay is flooded with tourists from around the world, bringing prosperity to the people. However, it has also lost the charm that it originally possessed.

ii. Back in the day, Every household in the area would welcome anyone with open arms. On the contrary, the rapid rise of tourists visiting the area has created a restriction for the residents to be carefree in their own front yard due to the fear of any implications it will bring. Additionally, throughout the years, heritage has played a key role in our identity, but nothing lasts forever with the ever-progressing society. The commercialisation of the entire area, along with a significant number of tourists, has overshadowed what once was the beauty of Weld Quay, which was its heritage.

iii . Currently, excluding some ancestral shrines, the traces of the traditional industries have almost disappeared, with the majority already being out of business. The downfall started either during the abolishment of the rent control act, where the idea of controlling the rent was abandoned, causing the rent to go through the roof, or giving way to cafes and hawker stalls.

5) We can also talk about if you have any stories to tell about Weld Quay after UNESCO.

i. After being inscribed into the World Heritage List, There's no doubt that there was a significant change in the place. For example, the restriction of entry for each jetty was lifted. Therefore, it was open for everyone to visit. Not long after it was inscribed, I brought a few friends of mine visiting from Hong Kong and Taiwan to the Chew Jetty, and on both occasions, we were invited into the local residents' houses for a meal and to take a look around their house. I am sure that this experience has made a good impression on my friends by showing them the friendliness of us Penangites.

ii. In the beginning, there was an alarming amount of theft cases happening around the area. Therefore, the government demands suitable action to enforce security laws and increase patrols near the vicinity of Weld Quay.

iii. The inscription of Weld Quay into UNESCO created a thriving economy for us but also escalated conflict between multiple political parties that wished to intervene. Due to this, many traditional festivals were halted indefinitely. (In the present time, it has returned to normal.)

6) What has been your favourite and least favourite spot in Weld Quay in the past? And do you still feel the same way now?

i. Most favourite- swimming, fishing, catching seafood. These days, the place is full of tourists, and conducting any of these activities is almost impossible. Except during MCO (Movement Control Order), where there were no tourists, the locals were also restricted and unable to go out.

ii. Least favourite- one point would be the cleanliness of Weld Quay. Besides the appearance of the city not being a pretty sight, the drains, the shores and the area beneath the bridge are overflowing with rubbish. Nothing has changed, not in the past and not in the present. (In August of 2007, a mass cleaning was carried out, but the efforts were futile as rubbish continued to pile up over the years.)

7) What do you miss the most about Weld Quay that is no longer there? If you have any.

i. After the abolishment of the rent control act, due to the majority of the old houses being demolished or the sudden surge in rent, most of my neighbours have moved out to different parts of Penang. It really makes me feel nostalgic about all the times

when we would sit along the five-foot-way and talk our hearts out or play some games.

ii. The taste of the food compared to the past is easily distinguishable as the majority of the foods are no longer carefully prepared and freshly made. For example, the jelly of ice jelly was once carefully handmade, but nowadays, it just comes in a package. This is most probably due to the increase of tourists visiting the area, thus increasing its demand.

iii. In the good old days, when I ate in a coffee shop, I was able to observe the lifestyles of the locals. On the other hand, when I visit a coffee shop in the present day, all I am able to see are tourists.

iv. The roads there can be considered one of the largest in Penang. There were never any problems with traffic congestion. It's night and day compared to the Weld Quay of today. Every single day there will be a traffic jam. It's even worse during the holidays.

v. The old industries have almost completely disappeared over the years, either because of the incapability to find a successor or a direct consequence of social evolution. For instance, industries like incense, charcoal, or areca nut shops have all disappeared.

8) Talk about the transition of Weld Quay when George Town received UNESCO status. (In terms of people, activities, buildings, policies etc.)

i. Receiving UNESCO status is equivalent to receiving a golden opportunity, as the status provided Weld Quay with a purpose and another identity. It paved the way for repairs and renovations as entrepreneurs and residents looked to capitalise on a said opportunity.

ii. After receiving UNESCO status, Everyone, including the state government and the people, emphasised Penang's culture and food. This is all to create a so-called "food haven" in Weld Quay in order to boost our economy. Under the given name, the state government of Penang renovated a lot of the old houses and modified them into restaurants, pubs and hawker stalls.

iii. George Town receiving UNESCO status can be said as a golden opportunity for Weld Quay, but it can also be said as a curse as the changes caused by receiving the UNESCO status not only neglected the true essence of Penang, it also attracted a large number of foreign labourers as it can be a workplace for them.

9) We can also talk about stories from your elders about their life during the

Japanese Occupation, British Settlement or life before Malaya's independence, if there are any.

My grandfather came to Malaya in the year of 1947. He worked as a businessman that was in charge of helping Chinese citizens from China to get in contact with their relatives back home. In Chinese, we would call this extinct business 'ZhanHang.' The scope of business included applying for any documents related to visas, ship tickets, baggage, accommodation, etc. Our shop is located at the end of Acheen Street Ghaut, near the Tan Jetty and right across the street from my house. I was raised there for all of my youth until I left to pursue higher education overseas.

