A Study of Ethnic Influence on the Facades of Colonial Shophouses in Singapore: A Case Study of Telok Ayer in Chinatown

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Abstract
Regionalism in Asia has so far been debated within the discourse of post colonial struggles to exert a cultural identity in the face of globalization. This paper however adopts the perspective that strands of regionalist thinking were already evident during the colonial period. Colonial shophouses in a selected case study area in Singapore's Chinatown are used to illustrate the constant interaction and negotiation of the different strands of influence within the specificities of time and place. Through a quantitative analysis of the facades of these shophouses, the study attempts to illustrate the rich tapestry of a hybrid architectural landscape woven by strands of "influence" including ethnic identity, colonial imposition and tropical living in the search for identity by the local community.

Keywords: Asian regionalism, ethnic influence; shophouse; façade; hybrid architecture

1. Introduction
Discourse about regionalism and identity in Singapore has to start from accepting its lack of a consistent or coherent identity. To Yeo (2005), the city's constant perpetuation of change makes the prospect of attaining a settled sense of identity over time unrealistic. Rem Koolhaas (1995) describes Singapore as the ultimate tabula rasa (or blank slate), a razed plane for a genuinely new beginning.

Yet Singapore is not quite what it seems to the Eurocentric eye. Comparisons between a globalized and homogeneous present and a supposedly purer Asian past misrepresent the essentially complex nature of Asian culture. Even prior to colonization, Singapore, and the Asian region in general, had been exposed to layer upon layer of imported cultures which had been localized over time, and adapted to regional conditions. Walter (1989) asserts that hybridization was not so much the exception as the norm.

When colonization arrived in Asia, it brought along a new whole set of cultural imports, both Western and non-Western to be absorbed. Singapore, for example, developed in the typical dualistic pattern of a colonial city, with a European half and a native half, the latter, already virtually a separate Chinatown, populated by immigrant Chinese who migrated to seek their fortunes in Raffles' new trading post. These ethnic Chinese numbering 5,3700 in less than 10 years of the founding of the new trading post, was by 1828 the largest ethnic group in Singapore.

A new architectural typology was thus necessary to solve the housing and commercial needs of these new immigrants. With ancestral roots in Southern China, these immigrant Chinese brought along with them the "blueprints" of the Southern Chinese urban shop dwellings (Fig.1.) that eventually evolved into a distinctive Singapore shophouse typology. With facades of Chinese, Malay and European classical details, the Singapore shophouse was a manifestation of the eclectic and cosmopolitan nature of colonial Singapore.

Façades are outward expressions of a community's ideals and aspirations. Thus the façade of the Singapore shophouse, a crystallization of the tripartite influences of British colonial, ethnic Chinese and indigenous Malay, forms the subject of study for this paper.

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2. Context
Telok Ayer in the north-eastern corner of Chinatown fringing the modern Central Business district of Singapore is chosen as the study site. The case study area is firstly chosen for its rich historical context as the cradle of the ethnic Chinese community in colonial Singapore. Secondly, gazetted as part of the Chinatown conservation district, shophouses in Telok Ayer are well conserved and architectural façade elements from the colonial period are well documented and form the basis for an empirical study of the Singapore shophouse.

The concept of a "Chinatown" originated with Sir Stamford Raffles' vision for a well laid out colonial city with distinct ethnic enclaves. A "Chinese Town" first appeared in a map drawn in 1822 depicting "The Town of Singapore and Environs" (Fig.2.). This "Chinese Town" is shown south of the Singapore River, effectively separated from the British Cantonment and the other ethnic enclaves to the north of the Singapore River. Such an arrangement achieved two purposes. First, relative autonomy was given to the immigrant Chinese in their day-to-day activities which was in line with the British Colonial policy of non-interference. Secondly, the area south of "Chinese Town" served as a contingency to accommodate the anticipated growth of the Chinese population.

As anticipated, the local Chinese population increased exponentially from 1,159 in 1821 (25% of the total population) to 13,749 in 1836 (46% of the total population) (Turnbull, 1977). Evident in the 1836 "Map of the Town and Environ of Singapore" by G.D. Coleman (Fig.3.), the extent of "Chinese Town" has increased and was demarcated by Telok Ayer Road to the East and South Bridge Road to the west. This demarcation of the first formal morphology of Chinatown thus forms the primary boundary for this study.

3. Objective and Methodology
The study will examine the evolution of the façade of the shophouse typology, the different ethnic influences during the different stages of the evolution and the interaction and negotiation of these ethnic elements within the social and political context of colonial Singapore.

a) Site Investigation
Extensive site investigation was first carried out to establish the visual streetscape of the study area. Site measurements were taken of individual shophouse lots as well as architectural components of each shophouse. Photographs of shophouses were taken individually from across the street to create as accurate as possible a street elevation composite image.

b) Cross-referencing
Empirical data collected from the site investigation is then cross-referenced with cartographic records from the National Archive of Singapore as well as site drawings from the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore (URA) to ascertain the dimensions of the individual shophouses. Photographs taken on site were also compared with conservation guidelines and photos archived in the URA to ensure accurate dimensions of individual façade element as well as the accuracy of the overall façade composition.

c) Extrapolation and Digitizing
This cross-referenced data is then extrapolated and digitized using a CAD programme. The digitized drawings of individual shophouses within the Telok Ayer district then form the empirical basis for the quantitative study of ethnic elements on the Singapore shophouse.
4. Analysis

a) Contextual Study

The surveyed area is approximately 19 hectares and is bounded by Cross Street to the north, Maxwell Street to the south, South Bridge Road to the west and Cecil Street to the east. Within this district there is a total of 336 shophouses built in various colonial periods (Fig.4.).

Table 1. illustrates that the surveyed area has a well distributed stock of colonial shophouses from different periods. Corresponding with the economic boom with soaring tin and rubber prices starting from the mid-1920s, more shophouses were being constructed and rebuilt in the 1930s. In particular, along Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Streets, where the first Chinese immigrants settled, shophouses were predominantly built in the 1930s, indicating a period of intensive demolition and reconstruction of the area, replacing early shophouse typologies.

b) Façade Elemental Study

Data collected from site investigation is extrapolated into a series of digitized street elevations of the study area. The shophouses were built contiguously in blocks separated by party walls. The width of shophouse façades vary from 4m at the apex of the tapering shophouse block at Ann Siang Hill to 6m at Amoy Street. They are predominantly two to three storey structures reflecting the constraints of non-mechanized methods of construction and the materials available at that time. The scale is further broken into a recessed first storey fronted by a continuous colonnade walkway.

A rhythmic "urban wall" is achieved with the juxtaposition of shophouses built in different periods within the same street block. This rhythm is also attributed by the visual and tactile texture created by wall openings, columns, pilasters, window shutters, balconies and ornamentation. Upon closer examination, ethnic roots of these different architectural elements on the shophouse façades can be easily discerned. These ethnic-inspired architectural elements formed a kit-of-parts architectural palette that could be creatively combined to suit different aspirations, ideals and pragmatic concerns during the different colonial periods (Fig.6.).

A total of 300 elevations are drawn up, of which three main ethnic influences can be identified from the shophouses across different colonial periods; namely: European Classical, Chinese and indigenous Malay. Also present are ornamentations inspired by the Straits Chinese (descendants of cross marriages between Chinese and indigenous Malays), Indians and Arabs.
For the purposes of this study, the façade elements are categorized into "European classical", "Chinese", "Malay", "Others" and "Neutral". The European classical category for example included elements like columns in both Tuscan and Corinthian orders. The "Neutral" category contained façade elements that are devoid of any ethnic inferences, e.g. horizontal concrete fins and year plates which were instead inspired by modern technology like ocean liners and airplanes. Within each category, the elements were further arranged in a "top-down" order, starting from roof elements and ending with ground floor elements.

Plotted against genealogical periods, characteristics of the elements' evolution can be examined (Table 2.). It is observed that some façade elements persist throughout the colonial period. They include the Chinese styled party walls used both as a fire wall for the prevention of fire spread as well as an effective structural wall which allowed column-free spaces within the shophouse. Façade signage indicative of the occupant's trade or ancestry were present in the majority of the shophouses surveyed. Classical elements such as string courses and cornices were adopted throughout all the shophouses built prior to the 1940s. However, more ornate classical elements like Corinthian columns and plaster relief panels only appeared between 1900 to 1940. This period also witnessed the transition from Malay timber shutters to French windows. The Chinese gable roof was the predominant roof type until the 1940s when the flat roof became more popular. It is also from the 1940s that most ethnic elements were replaced by ethnically neutral façade elements.

Table 2. is also an important tool in determining the historicity of a shophouse. For example a shophouse built in the 1880s would have classical cornices and string courses under a Chinese gable roof with party walls. On the ground floor, its entrance would consist of timber board shutters of southern Chinese descent, while its upper floors would have Malay styled louvered shutters for windows. Additional vents with stylized ceramic blocks like those in southern Chinese cities would also be present. The columns used would be of the Tuscan order and façade signage in the Chinese style would be utilized.

Table 2. Evolution of Ethnic Influenced Façade Elements

| Façade Elements | 1820 | 1840 | 1860 | 1880 | 1900 | 1920 | 1940 | 1960 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| European Classical |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Cornice & dentils | ●   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Keystone |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Fanlight |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Architrave |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Plaster (Corinthian) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Secondary plaster |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Transom window |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Plaster relief panel |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Pediment |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| String course |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Balcony balustrade |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| French window |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Carved |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Column (Tuscan) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Column (Corinthian) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Chinese |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Gable roof |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Party wall |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Vent (perforation) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Vent (butt wing shape) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Vent (ceramic blocks) |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Facade signage |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Glazed tile canopy |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Bracket & ornament |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Facade fresco |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Timber board shutters |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Malay |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Jackfruit |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Fretwork fascia |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Lattice fretwork grille |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Louvered shutters |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Security grilles |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Double leaf timber door |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Single leaf timber door |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Pluripag |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Others |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Plaster relief panel |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Tiled ornamentation |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Carved ornamentation |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Column ornaments |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Neutral |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Mast |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Flat roof |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Stepped parapet |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Glazed windows |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Iron railings |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Completion date plate |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Horizontal fins |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Unadorned columns |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
c) Façade Compositional Study

Fig. 7. Sample of Surface Area Calculations of Ethnic Façade Elements on Five Shophouse Typologies

Fig. 8. Relative % Surface Area Comparison between Ethnic Façade Elements

Table 3. Comparative Surface Area Analysis of Ethnic Influenced Shophouse Façade Elements in Telok Ayer, Chinatown

| Traditional | Classical | Chinese | Malay | Others | Neutral | Total Façade Area |
|-------------|-----------|---------|-------|--------|---------|------------------|
|             | (sqm)     | %       | (sqm) | %      | (sqm)   | %                |
| Early       | 5.13      | 9.6%    | 27.54 | 51.7%  | 0.00    | 0.0%            | 15.15 | 28.5% | 53.23 | 100% |
| Median      | 8.15      | 9.7%    | 44.14 | 49.6%  | 11.84   | 14.1%           | 22.32 | 26.0% | 83.91 | 100% |
| 1st Transition | 4.92 | 5.2%   | 26.78 | 39.1%  | 20.57   | 28.1%           | 15.86 | 21.7% | 73.25 | 100% |
| Median      | 14.11     | 9.7%    | 34.57 | 35.4%  | 13.73   | 13.8%           | 18.85 | 19.4% | 96.95 | 100% |
| 2nd Transition | 25.03 | 35.4% | 11.44 | 16.2%  | 19.24   | 27.2%           | 4.49  | 6.3%  | 70.78 | 100% |
| Median      | 32.32     | 35.4%   | 22.75 | 23.1%  | 25.96   | 26.4%           | 3.31  | 3.4%  | 98.30 | 100% |
| Art Deco    | 37.2%     | 35.4%   | 22.75 | 23.1%  | 25.96   | 26.4%           | 3.31  | 3.4%  | 98.30 | 100% |
In Singapore where there is multiracial migration from many non-Western countries, the balance between Colonial ideals and ethnic cultural expression becomes particularly complex. Politically, the varied cultures, beliefs and values of these migrant communities, reinforced through a network of institutional and kinship support, were a major resource of resistance against colonial imposition. Architecturally however, the consideration for tropical living and the social pressure to stay "in vogue" and to express one's individuality prompted many in the ethnic community to adopt the colonial and indigenous vocabulary to varying degrees. This system of antagonism and supplement thus forms an important conceptual framework for reviewing the cause and effect of different shophouse typologies during the colonial period.

From Table 2., three distinct shophouse typologies are observed with two transitional typologies. Simple and austere, the "Early" shophouse typology describes shophouses built before the 1900s. The second distinct typology describes shophouses built between 1900 and 1940. "Chinese Baroque" best describes this typology adorned with highly ornate classical elements as well as various ethnic elements. A "First Transitional" shophouse typology occurring in the early 1900s meanwhile bridges these two radically different typologies. The third distinct "Art Deco" typology occurred between 1940-1960 and featured shophouses with borrowed vocabulary from ocean liners and airplanes. Again, a "Second Transitional" typology bridges this distinctive typology from its predecessors.

Using Table 2., all 336 shophouse units surveyed could be placed within the five broad typologies. Eight representative elevations are identified within each typology for the next stage of the study. The façade elements of these 40 elevations are further categorized into European Classical, Chinese, Malay, Others or Neutral and are measured from their respective digital files (Fig.7.). The resultant surface area data is placed within a matrix to examine the relative two dimensional surface area ratios of the façade elements according to ethnicity (Table 3.). Using ethnicity as the main parameter, the statistical median of the percentage of surface area taken up by the respective façade elements are then extrapolated to compare the relative ratio of surface areas across the five typologies (Fig.8.).

**Early Shophouse Typology: 1820s-1900**

This period was characterized by unprecedented physical expansion of the colonial town and an increase in the local population. This was attributed firstly to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which shortened the sailing time between Europe and Asia, and attracted more traders from Europe. Secondly, the relative economic stability attracted Chinese immigrants to the shores of Singapore in search of economic and political stability in the last days of the Qing dynasty (Beamish and Ferguson 1985). By the end of the century, 164,000 Chinese immigrants had settled in colonial Singapore, making up 80% of the total population (Turnbull, 1977).

This typology represented Singapore's first generation shophouse. They were mostly two-storey (Fig.7a.). Executed by Chinese contractors, the architectural style, materials and methods of construction were thus more Chinese in character, attributing to 51.3% of the total façade area (Fig.8a.).

With Singapore's economy still in its infancy, the ethnic Chinese community consisted of mainly low income working class. Thus the shophouse design during this period reflected the contemporary socio-economic situation with an emphasis on functionality and economic efficiency as indicated by the high percentage of neutral surfaces (29.1%) devoid of ornamentation.

It is also observed that Classical elements took up 9.7% of the façade area. Colonial buildings in the civic centre provided a European Classical "pattern book" from which some elements were copied for use on shophouses. British in design with Chinese interpretation, modular and simplistic designs in the neo-Palladian style were repeatedly imitated and applied. Another major factor contributing to the formation of a hybrid façade was that architectural designs from native China or Europe were not totally suitable for the hot and humid climate of Singapore. This warranted a rethink and adaptation of these designs as well as the incorporation of architectural features of the indigenous Malay house (9.3% of the façade) more suited to the tropical climate.

**1st Transitional Shophouse Typology: Early 1900s**

As Singapore's economic prosperity continued, the increased affluence resulted in larger and taller shophouses. Compared with their predecessors, first transitional shophouses had a wider three bay façade and were usually three-storey with a higher floor-to-floor height (Fig.7b.).

New statutory controls implemented after 1884 made submission of plans prior to construction mandatory. Chinese developers thus engaged Chinese architectural practitioners who received informal training as draughtsmen in the colonial government. European classicism was again emulated on these shophouses, forming 7.9% of the façade area (Fig.8b.). The typical Chinese shophouses from 1900-1920 bore trademark European stucco decorations and classical proportions on their façades, which were deemed "fashionable" then.

With increased affluence, the Chinese developers were partial towards more elaborate Chinese styled frescos and ornamentation. To further make allusion to their native homeland, shophouses built in this period included the name of provinces from which the traders originated. Chinese materials like green glazed roof tiles were imported and used on canopies. European
stucco decorations such as swags, floral designs and birds were often in accompaniment to Chinese motifs of crabs and deer, dragons and mythical animals (which were Chinese symbols of happiness, good fortune and longevity). They were applied to and accounted for 35.4% of the façades.

A sharp increase in the ratio of Malay styled façade elements (from 9.3% to 28.6%) indicated the increased priority given to building the tropics. Due to the increased depth and scale of shophouses, a more effective means of ventilation was necessary. Malay-styled fenestrations more suited to the local climate replaced the Chinese styled openings in the preceding typology. Fine wood carving in the Malay style also adorned the balustrades, fenestrations air vents and fascia boarding of the roof.

**Chinese Baroque Shophouse Typology: 1900-1940**

The continued affluence of the Chinese immigrants, increased sophistication in the skills of both the Chinese architectural practitioners as well as craftsmen were evident in the most flamboyant shophouse typology built between 1900 to 1940 (Fig. 7c.).

As evidenced in the sharp increase of European classical façade elements used from 7.9% to 31.2%, (Fig. 8c.) the extensive commercial engagement between the local Chinese business community and its European counterpart through the flourishing East-West maritime trade resulted in an increased acceptance of European aesthetics among wealthier Chinese. The shophouse became a requisite tool for flaunting wealth and "fashionable taste". Conversely, the extensive ornamentation employed on the façade resulted in a decrease in the amount of neutral wall space (from 26.5% in the preceding style to 15.6%).

Fig. 8c. also indicates a slight increase in the use of façade elements distinct from European, Chinese or Malay aesthetic traditions. They appeared in the form of glazed wall tiles with colourful designs from a hybrid Portuguese Malaccan and straits Chinese style. Such combinations of Malay, Chinese, Classical and Straits Chinese aesthetic traditions in shophouse design gave rise to a hybrid style that characterized shophouse designs of this period.

**2nd Transitional Shophouse Typology: 1930s**

The period 1920-1940 saw the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918). An economic recession, brought on by the world economic crash affected many Chinese businesses in Singapore.

Meanwhile intellectual discourse in Europe on modern architecture during the interwar years created its first resonance in Singapore. Socialist inspired utopianism informed the agenda of modernist urbanism. Its advocates intended an absolute and authentic break with the exploitative past. It was in this context that modernism was introduced into colonial Singapore in the 1930s (Lim, 2004).

The bleak economic climate and the emergence of a new global trend were the precursors to the abrupt end of decorative excesses that had characterized shophouses built during the boom years of the 1920s. This is indicated by a sharp decrease in the ratio of European Classical façade elements (19.7%) and a consequent return of the neutral façade areas to levels before the Chinese Baroque typology (24.9%) (Fig. 8d.).

Architecturally, a transitional style emerged (Fig. 7d.). Although such Classical elements as columns and pilasters were retained, they were of a "stripped Classical style", reverting to the Doric or Tuscan orders used in the pre-Chinese Baroque periods. Ornamentation if present, were simplified into plain geometric patterns.

**Art Deco Shophouse Typology: 1930s-1960**

This period in Singapore's colonial history was characterized by important historic events. The aftermath of World War II (1939-1945) and the Chinese Revolution (1946-1950) had repercussions throughout the international community. Colonial Singapore, at the crossroad between the East and West was no exception.

In February 1942, the British surrendered and Singapore was occupied by the Japanese until the end of World War II in August 1945. In the immediate postwar period, the economy deteriorated and living conditions became increasingly difficult. There was growing discontentment among the ethnic communities towards the British colonizers, disillusioned by the inability of the British Empire in protecting the colony against the Japanese occupation until 1945.

On the social front, the postwar period of the 1950s, saw the first Singaporean architects return from architectural schools abroad. This represented a turning point in the architectural history of Singapore as the young returnees started to question the validity of the colonizing culture at the time of gradual disintegration of the British Empire after World War II. Their return coincided with the emergence of a new global trend in architectural design: Art Deco, formally introduced by the 1925 Paris Exposition. Unlike all of its predecessors, whose stylistic designs were anchored in the Classical past, the aesthetics of Art Deco architecture looked radically to the future by drawing design inspirations from modern technological idioms like the car, airplanes and ocean liners (Lee, 2003).

With the disintegration of British supremacy, the return of foreign-trained local architects, the rise in a new world order and the gloomy post war economic outlook, the taste of affluent Chinese changed and Art Deco was quickly adapted to shophouse designs. Classical motifs and ethnic elements were all removed or streamlined as indicated by their decreased façade area ratios (Fig. 8e.). Ornamentation, if present, was without any classical or ethnic references resulting in a surge of the neutral façade area to 53%.

Most importantly, the use of indigenous Malay fenestrations was greatly reduced to 4.7%. Designed solely for air-conditioning, these shophouses relegated the need for tropical living considerations which had
characterized shophouse designs up until this time. This first wave of modernist thinking marked the first instance of global Western ideology taking precedent over the rationale of tropical architecture.

5. Conclusion
The Singapore shophouse typology was mandated in the city centre where merchants and traders could live and trade in the same building while ensuring high levels of hygiene and ease of colonial control. Apart from the Malay communities, which still lived in traditional kampongs (villages) and the affluent elite who stayed in detached houses, the majority of Asians lived and worked in numerous variations of two to four storied shophouses or terrace houses. These compact buildings exhibited a strong urban character as well as qualities of high density and flexibility in usage. They provided accommodation for different income groups as well as housing various commercial activities and community facilities (Lim, 2004). Aplyt described by Liu (1984), "There is in fact, no type of building more associated with Singapore than these unique terraces and shophouses, with their ornate façades of Chinese, Malay and European Classical details. Built in a style called Straits Chinese, Palladian Chinese or Chinese Baroque architecture, they are as eclectic and cosmopolitan as the city itself". The façade of the shophouse is thus an important channel for the expression of an ethnic community's identity, aspirations and ideals. As evidenced in the evolution of shophouse typologies in the preceding study, these ideals changed over time out of changing social, political, cultural and economic conditions. The community's identity is thus ever-changing and evolving.

The analysis of façade elements outlined in this paper has revealed the constant tug-of-war between accepting the colonial regulations and European architectural styles while defending and differentiating from them. This phenomenon of simultaneous rejection and acceptance of both the colonial and ethnic vocabulary is sometimes antagonistic, sometimes supplementary and has emerged over time out of social, cultural and political circumstances within Colonial Singapore. Adding to this complex relationship between countering colonial influence and expressing ethnic identity is the consideration for building in the tropical climate of Singapore.

The constantly evolving façade composition of the Singapore shophouse is a testament to a nation that inherited a multi-racial and multi-cultural immigrant stock. Thus, there is more divergence than common ground to draw on in the task of creating a self-identity. Singapore's experience is not unique but parallels that of many newly independent nations. It is hoped that this study of ethnic influence on the façades of colonial Shophouses in Singapore will help inform the complex re-negotiations of identity boundaries of the Chinese community in colonial Singapore and that an understanding of Singapore's case may in some ways inform the processes of regionalism and self-identity in other Asian nations.

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