Rebuilding sustainable place through the embodied image of the peranakan chinese house: Study of Kidang Mas in Lasem, Indonesia through Juhani Pallasmaa's perspective

T E Darmayanti¹,²*, A Bahauddin¹

¹School of Housing, Building and Planning, University Sains Malaysia, Malaysia.
²Faculty of Art and Design, Maranatha Christian University, Bandung, Indonesia.

*Email: tessaeka82@gmail.com

Abstract. This article is grown from a dialogue between Mr. Rudi’s childhood story as the sixth generation of Kidang Mas and the phenomenological perspective of Juhani Pallasmaa. Phenomenology by Pallasmaa is a powerful research strategy that is well suited for exploring the image within the Peranakan house of Kidang Mas. The strategy is expected to build a better understanding of the value of the Peranakan house. Pallasmaa’s perspective also proposes the “hands” to grasp the experiences through verbal sources turning into a concrete image. Verbal sources obtained from flowing and in-depth interviews supported by sensory activation, which engendered various fascinating and memorable childhood stories and activated all human senses. While the concrete images are conveyed through pictures based on the three most favorite childhood memory activities. The drawings were done using a pencil on paper. It is expected to elevate the sense of attachment of homeowners, local people, and visitors to the place which caused appreciation to the embodiment of Peranakan houses in Lasem as heritage buildings. This article gives another understanding of “rebuilding” sustainable place through the embodied image of Peranakan house in Lasem. The article also serves as a medium for disseminating knowledge about one of the Indonesian cultures to the wider audience.

1. Introduction
The definition of rebuilding is to bring back or return to a previous state. Therefore, in general, rebuilding place means reshaping or reconstructing the place. Place created due to space gives meaning to people and people can transform spaces into places over a period, and rebuilding place is possible to construct through the images. Based on previous explanation, Darmayanti and Bahauddin within their article in 2019 stated that the place is not limited to massive boundaries, but is also created from memories and life experiences that are formed from continuous daily activities that are inherited by the residents of the house [1].

The image is a picture or sketch of someone or something, or in another definition is a poetic description of something, such as a metaphor, an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which is the same in a particular way. In 2011, Gordon S. Grice an author, editor as well as an architect reviewed a book of Pallasmaa with title The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imaginary said that the image it’s the roots of imaginations [2]. For example: as architects, designers or visual artists often automatically assume that the word “image” means visual image. This is evidence
that the dominance of the visual senses in our appreciation of the world so that we consciously and unconsciously archive our impressions as visual images; in our sketchbooks and in our mind’s eye. Through images knowledge and feeling may be elicited from the human experience that has been stored away in the mind to be applied with new life in a new situation – example: present time [3]. “Creating the images” through phenomenological approach, in the current pandemic situation, it is hoped that people can get close and share in the traditions and culture without having to travel to Lasem. This can support social distancing to reduce infection. Phenomenology through embodied image indirectly rebuilds a place, both tangible and intangible. It can be “read” over a distance, understood and felt through the senses.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain rebuilding sustainable place through the image of Peranakan houses in Lasem, Central Java, Indonesia known as Kidang Mas Batik House in Babagan. It is also to convey another way about culture through oral stories that are “rebuilt” through sketch drawings that involve the memory and the senses of the informant and writers. The Peranakan House in Lasem was chosen because Lasem has many amazing historical backgrounds. In the 14th to 15th centuries, Lasem was known as the most prominent place for Chinese immigrants in Java (Figure 1). This is the cause of the strong influence of Chinese culture on local culture in Java. In the same century, Lasem was one of the powers of the Majapahit Kingdom. This kingdom has existed in Indonesia from the 13th century until the 15th century [4]. Lasem’s status as an important port city persisted from the Majapahit era until the Dutch colonial period, and was the center of the 19th century opium trade which was legally traded at the time. In addition, Lasem is also known as home to the prominent Chinese immigrant Cheng Ho from the Ming Dynasty in China. Many Chinese communities were formed in Lasem [5]-[6].

In Indonesia, it is known that there are two types of Peranakan houses, namely shophouses and bungalows. Most of the Peranakan houses in Lasem are bungalows that are intended as residences. However, the political conditions in the Dutch era influenced the change function of the house into a place or warehouse for opium storage [1].

![Figure 1. District of Lasem, Central Java.](image-url)
Although the Peranakan Kidang Mas house is not well known, most of its generations have run the batik business for generations while other batik houses are not. The study focuses on the recent issue of globalization, and how the flood of information by the media often obscures cultural heritage values which are the foundation of the national identity. Furthermore, the information from the media is often trusted and considered reliable without validation by listening to the narrative from the information source. This could minimize misunderstandings and obtain data that is not in the media so that it has novelty in the information.

2. Methods
A lot of questions came from the author’s curiosity regarding other values of the house besides it being a heritage building. These questions were answered by Mr. Rudi from Kidang Mas who gave a narrative of his childhood as part of the early memories of his life. In this article, the author presents the experiences of Mr. Rudi which were expressed in creative artwork. The experiences were told based on various questions about childhood through in-depth interviews, start with a single simple question "How do you remember your childhood in this house?". His narrative flows like a river and answers all the author's curiosity. Childhood stories become significant because it is seen whether an experience that has passed long ago can be reconstructed in the present (at the time of the interview), how and what effects or sensations on the narrator and listener. The importance of childhood stories also supported by the phenomenology thought of Pallasmaa who states that early memories retain the personal identity and emotional strength throughout life, and that provides convincing evidence of the importance and authenticity of these experiences [12]. In the 20th century, Edmund Hüsserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, et al. started a philosophical tradition known as phenomenology. Since then, the method of phenomenology has been valued as a worthy foundation of all philosophy. Phenomenology deals with the meaning that resides in our experience, especially the meaning of objects, the flow of time, the self, and other people, as these things emerge and are experienced in our life world [7]. On the other hand, phenomenology was also tainted for architecture which is closely related to space. The architect and theorist who has a phenomenological approach to space and place is Juhani Pallasmaa (1936-). His texts will be used to explore and describe the essence of the Peranakan house, Kidang Mas. Why Pallasmaa’s phenomenology? Because he introduced the phenomenological aspects using the human senses to experience and to explore the value and identity of a house. Pallasmaa give an important idea to exploring architectural world through philosophy, ideas and human sciences – the senses, then drawing them into the realm of architectural theory. Pallasmaa believes that any kind of experience which relates to architecture can be documented through hand-drawings. Sketching, doodling, and drawing is crucial spatial and haptic practices used to aid architectural design. Through this method, architecture can arise as the ‘material’ presence of the human embodied ‘immaterial’ emotion, feelings, and wisdom.

Regarding the elements of the study to be discussed, namely narrative and artwork, Pallasmaa’s statements could shed us some light here: “The narrative possible to touch the feeling through the ear, thus the essence be able to grasp by our memory that link into imagination” [8]. Memories and imaginations are expressed through creative work which involves the hand. In 2017, Pallasmaa states that: “Creative work requires double viewpoints; people need to concentrate concurrently on the world and themselves and the knowledge to nurture and espouse the human abilities of imagination and empathy.” [9]. The essence of artistic works is that they are experientially and emotionally real. Artwork is not just a symbol of something else, but a reality of authentic experiences themselves. He also adds: “every act of sketching or drawing results in neurological connections between the hand and eyes,” meaning it is possible to create an attachment between the object and the observer. Through art, we experience the world directly in their existential dimension. The principal message of art is eternally this is how it feels to be a human being in this world [10].

The purpose of phenomenology is to enlighten how people understand and comprehend certain phenomena. The aim also to encourage us to study from the experiences of others [11]. Experience can
be described through acts of reflection, consciousness turning reflection that makes experience significant. It can either be spoken, written and drawn. The main objective of this study is to give other perspectives to the readers’ mind so they get better understanding in the values of the Peranakan house in Lasem derived from Mr. Rudi’s childhood experiences that is simple and yet gives the meaning to the house. Through his narrative, not only will the spatial manifestations surrounding the house be explored, but also the attached background information of his memories and imaginations of the house. The main question addressed within this study is - how was the essence of the Peranakan Chinese House of Kidang Mas built? The study will also show the embodiment of the house through its essence, which can create a bond between the homeowner and the visitors to the house by activating the human senses. When the sense of attachment is created, it will result in an appreciation for the embodiment of the house and spread a positive influence to the surroundings. To achieve the study purpose, an in-depth interview was conducted with Mr. Rudi to collect data on the Peranakan house of Kidang Mas. This involved several field trips to the Chinatown of Lasem from September 2018 and continued to June 2019. The house is located in Babagan Village, alley 5, number 1 (Figure 2). It is hoped that this study will be able to shed light into the tradition and culture of the Peranakan Chinese family in Lasem and give a better understanding of their cultural heritage as a unique identity.

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2.** Peranakan House – Kidang Mas, Babagan, Lasem. (a) Surrounding the house; (b) The house gate; (c) Inside the house complex.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Features extracted

At the time of field research in 2017 and continued in the end of 2019, the author accidentally got a story about Mr. Rudi’s childhood. Indeed, a variety of ways for participants to tell their stories in the interview session and Mr. Rudi, has his own enthusiasm in sharing his experiences in a manner that had the listeners participating within the story. The tone of his voice, his facial expressions, and expressive gestures transmitted all his feeling. The main point from this interview was the power of the human senses, how it expands one’s vision from the present to the past. The narrative of Mr Rudi’s childhood extended his vision to the author and readers by activating the senses to merge with his imagination and memories, thereby diving into his childhood. Mr. Rudi transferred his excitement about his childhood to us and the author could feel and see what happened to him in that timeframe. Mr. Rudi was born on January 27, 1982, but left home when he went to college and graduated in 2005. He then worked in Jakarta until 2014 when he returned to Lasem. In the nine years he left home, there is the possibility of him losing some experiences. However, his childhood memories remained. The atmosphere of the Peranakan house touched the memories of the past, brought him back and made him grateful to experience home again.

Mr. Rudi’s childhood seems very fun because it was filled with togetherness, challenging activities, and typical activities favoured by boys. The “adventure begins when he returning from the school, he
usually keeps the bag at home and went to Meidi’s house which was next door. After that, he returned home for an afternoon shower, have a snack, and watch television programs in family room or listen to the radio in the front terrace with his brothers (Figure 3). Furthermore, Mr. Rudi not only remember his childhood activities, he also recaptured the prior materials used in the house, he said “in the beginning, this floor (pointing the terrace floor) covered with the authentic terrazzo before this off-white ceramic tiles. Regrettably, it was inadequately preserved so that the colour was dull and had faded. Therefore, it decided to exchange it for a clean look. The original materials in this area are the wall (pointing to the main building wall) which made of teak wood, and the ceiling (pointing to the ceiling that coloured in white paint)” [13].

By activating his imagination and memory through his narratives it was possible to transmit his past experience supporting by the senses. In this case, Pallasmma suggests the use of our hands to help to connect or reconnect with the study object by means of hand-drawn sketch [8]. This way actually allows a deeper cognitive connection to be developed through the medium of the body. The relationship of a hand with a pencil or pen composes direct haptic reciprocity between objects and possible to enhances the feeling of attachment to the study objects. After listening to Mr. Rudi’s childhood story the author was moved to draw. The observation of the story was carried out by listening carefully, not only by ear but also by hands to make sketches of Mr. Rudi’s activities.

Figure 3. Drawing “Listen to the Radio with Brothers” in front terrace.

He often played away from home in search of grasshoppers in the rice fields or around river Bagan. At that time, Mr. Rudi played with not only his Chinese friends, but his Javanese friends as well. They usually played football or hide and seek known as dolan Delian as they waited for their favourite tukang bakso or meatball seller named Pak Budiman in front of the house (figure 4). Waiting for tukang bakso to pass in front of the house is still being carried out until now. Although Pak Budiman’s meatballs are no longer, it has become a family tradition that is simple and fun. “It was not just about eating but about togetherness. We could talk about anything while eating bakso. It could create the atmosphere more fun and relaxed” (Rudi, Personal communication in 2019). Figure 4 clearly shows the activities of buying bakso, this is proof that simple activity has become a family tradition that rebuilding in the present time from the past. It is also proof that activities are related to attachment or familiarity with the environment, and anyone who is involved in it can succeed across various spaces and times. The attachment will create through all senses. When the senses have stimulated, it will automatically activate the memory that is linked to imagination. That statement would be clear with Mr. Rudi’s narrative “When I see (senses – eyes) the gate (pointing to the house’s gate), suddenly I smell (senses – nose) the aroma of
bakso soup, I could hear (senses – ear) the excitement noises while playing with my friends at the time. All that takes my memory back to the past. It is feels good to be nostalgic.” Through that statement, it could see that he indirectly has rebuilt the sustainable space from the past into the present.

Figure 4. Drawing “Waiting Pak Budiman” in front of house gate.

Figure 5. Drawing “Family Tradition: Buying Bakso”.

Another form of rebuilding place was happened in the backyard. Mr. Rudi clearly remembered the memory when he played kites or layangan at the backyard, in the middle of the chicken coop. He was happy when he could control the kite more freely. However, the backyard had many trees getting in the way, and the only way he used to do it was to climb up a pyramid-shaped pile of dry chicken manure. (figure 5). “I didn’t care about the heat on my bare feet and don’t ask about the smelly chicken manure. As long as my kite freely dances in the sky and I could beat another kite. Playing kites made me forget about everything. Back then, I enjoyed flying a kite” (Rudi, 2019). As he told this scene, the author unconsciously imitated Mr. Rudi's expression. The hands unexpectedly covered the nose to elude odors, and the legs were lifted to stay away from the heat of the chicken manure. Based on these circumstances,
Pallasmaa’s statement in 1994 became comprehensible to our mind: “through memory, imagination and sensory, we could ‘see’ through the nose and ‘feel’ through the ear, we possible to ‘see’ even their odor.”

Based on what was told by Mr. Rudi, it can be deduced that he feels strongly about the house of Kidang Mas because of the integration of experiences. Mr. Rudi exists in the house of Kidang mas, and Kidang Mas exists within him. His childhood story is interpreted into sketches that have an “images” of each and of course its value. The significance of the image is that its sensory data can be composed to bring about a consciousness of experiences from other places and other times [3].

The Peranakan house of Kidang Mas is the art form that provides lived experiences. Lived experiences create lived space. This experience includes imagination and memory which frames through the narratives that cause Mr. Rudi to recall past feelings and experience that indirectly create rebuilding a “lived place” in the house.

4. Conclusions
Each house has appearances, scenes, and scenarios. When everything works well together, it produces an image thus giving the building a breath that causes it to live. But a good image cannot be seen if there is no “dialogue” between the inhabitant and himself, and the inhabitant with surroundings, either past or present time. This view is expressed most notably by Pallasmaa (2018) “The house intercedes between the surrounding, the inner realm, and the outer world of the self…” [14]. Through Mr. Rudi’s childhood story, the author was able to learn the inner language to generate the perception of the house. His body, memory, and imagination were the media used to provide an in-depth understanding of spatial experiences. Therefore, the image of the Peranakan house in Kidang Mas was embodied and rebuilding the space due to the existence of an intense bond between the house and its inhabitants through various activities that occurred continuously. It created memories so deep that even though these activities happened a long time ago. Apart from the story, the addition of hand drawings of Mr. Rudi’s childhood
activities created lasting embodied memories of the place. Drawings can be used as a medium to collect or recollect, and also retain long-lasting memory that strengthens the identity of the house. The three images of Mr. Rudi's childhood memories only a very small part of “artistic image” invite the senses sensor to lengthen the memory. Through this Peranakan house, it is hoped that people will no longer judge by vision only, but understand its bigger picture, its value, so that it could foster a sense of belonging and give a good appreciation to the house as a cultural heritage.

Rebuilding place in line with rebuilding memory and imagination, recall the history and refine the present for sustain the cultural identity in the future. Rebuilding occurs because of rethinking which results from circumstances that encourage a change in the way a message is conveyed in the Peranakan house. This can be a way to keep the stories and images of traditions and culture sustainable.

References
[1] Darmayanti T E and Bahauddin A 2019 Rebuilding Space in Peranakan House in Lasem, Indonesia: Perceived Space Concept. The European Proc. of Multidisciplinary Sciences: 4th Int. Conf. on Rebuilding Place, 6-7 November 2019, Penang, Malaysia.
[2] Grice G S 2011 The Book Review of Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture. New York Journal of Books. https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/embodied-image-imagination-and-imagery-architecture accessed on 3 march 2020, 12.58 PM
[3] Greene Herb 1976 Mind and Image: An Essay on Art and Architecture. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.
[4] Jayusman W and Suyahmo 2020 Chinese in Lasem: The Struggle for Identity and Living Space. IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 485: 012056.
[5] Pratiwo 1990 The Architecture of Lasem: A Typo-Morphological approach for redefining architecture in Lasem. Unpublished Master Thesis: Volume II. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
[6] Suroyo A M 1994 Sejarah dan Budaya Maritim di Lasem: Laporan Penelitian. Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Diponegoro.
[7] Smith D W 2013 Phenomenology. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/#WhatPhen accessed on 3 march 2020, 9.58 AM
[8] Pallasmaa J 2009 The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
[9] Pallasmaa J 2017 Embodied and Existential Wisdom in Architecture: The Thinking Hand. Body & Society, 23 (1), 96-111.
[10] Pallasmaa J, Mallgrave H F, Robinson S and Gallese V 2015 Architecture and Empathy. Finland: Tapio Wirkkala-Rut Bryk Foundation.
[11] Neubauer, Brian E; Witkop, Catherine T & Varpio, Lara. (2019). How Phenomenology can Help us Learn from the Experiences of Others. Perspective on Medical Education, Vol. 8, 90-97.
[12] Pallasmaa J 1986 The Geometry of Feeling: A Look at the Phenomenology of Architecture. Skala: Nordic Journal of Architecture and Art, 4(June 1986), 22-25.
[13] Darmayanti T E and Bahauddin A 2020 Understanding vernacularity through spatial experience in the Peranakan House Kidang Mas, Chinatown, Lasem, Indonesia. ISVS EJournal, 7(3), 1–13.
[14] Pallasmaa J 2018 Architecture as Experience: The Fusion of the World and the Self. Architectural Research in Finland, 2(1), 9-17.