

'Sense of Place' on Sacred Cultural and Architectural Heritage: St. Peter's Church of Melaka

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Abstract

The 'sense of place' of a religious building can be sacred for the community that frequents the architecture. It is deeply embedded with cultural attributes that made the architecture more meaningful and became a structure that ties the community. This article examines the St. Peter's Church in Melaka which is seen as the epitome of the Portuguese community as a place for them to congregate. This study is influenced by Lefebvre's space triad theory on the production of social space based on the 'perceived,' 'conceived,' and 'lived' space to form the interiority through sense of place. This qualitative research delves into ethnography to understand the Portuguese culture followed by the phenomenological analysis on the architecture. The church embodies the spirit of the Portuguese community as they struggle in the mixed cultures of Melaka. It stands tall to remind the people of the monumental historical past, a culture that refused to be put aside.

Keywords: sense of place, sacred place, space triad, St. Peter's Church, cultural heritage

Introduction

A community historical background has always been the factual backbone of community cultural understanding. All conservation efforts being taken mean much more than preserving the past inheritance. It is a statement about the present, which aims at shaping the future. Architectural heritage can be the epitome of society. Social institutions and cultural values mediate the relationships between forms and meanings of any built heritage (Mezzino, 2017). As such, the latter is at the same time subject to, and product of, the dynamics of continuity and change that characterise social and cultural transformations. Cultural heritage has always been a part of a community's history. This includes the tangible artefacts, intangible attributes and natural heritage that are unique and irreplaceable once lost. The legacy of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage inherited from the previous generations are well-kept in the present, and lastly, it will be bestowed for future generations. In consequence, a responsible act for preservation is required (Lawless, 2015).

A similar scenario happens to the Portuguese community in Melaka, Malaysia. The Portuguese settlement has long been a part of Melaka's rich history. It is known for its cultural heritage which is linked to Portugal despite being away from the motherland. Nevertheless, this community has to struggle to maintain its identity in a country that is a melting pot of different cultures. Some of the only remnants of this community's tangible cultural heritage are in the architectural heritage forms that can be observed by exploring its remaining historical architecture and intangible cultural heritage, mainly its language, food and cultural performances. Throughout this paper, the terms 'Portuguese descendants,' 'Portuguese community,' and 'Eurasians' are synonyms.

To the Portuguese descendants, St. Peter's Church is not merely a sacred place, but it has become their cultural identity. It is also the icon of the Catholicism beliefs in Melaka. The meaningful lived experience based on the religious rituals of the Portuguese community that developed over the centuries has created an intimate emotional bond with the church. This people-place relationship contributes to the construction of the 'sense of place' and it is the fundamental element for developing the sense of interiority of a sacred place. Unlike interior, interiority is an intangible, unstable, and abstract matter that defines the space's identity based on the habits and thoughts occurring in the everyday experience produced by their environment. Because of its fluidity, it is always transforming (McCarthy, 2005; Perolini, 2013). To gain a deeper understanding of the sense of place, this study is influenced by Lefebvre's theory of social space production through the presence of the 'perceived,' 'conceived,' and 'lived' space in sacred place context.

This paper is structured by describing the history of the Portuguese community in Melaka, followed by the definition of the church as a sacred place and the sense of place of a culturally sacred place. Next sections describe the methodology and the case study, the discussion of the St. Peter's Church as a cultural sacred place, and the sense of place of St. Peter's Church. The conclusions are highlighted in the final section.

The Portuguese in Melaka

The historic city of Melaka is located in the south of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia (Figure 1, left). Together with George Town, Melaka was listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2008 because of the fulfilment of the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV). According to UNESCO (2021), OUV can be defined as "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity" (p. 24). In total, there are ten criteria and a site must fulfil at least one out of those ten criteria to be listed as a World Heritage. Melaka has a unique cultural amalgamation of Portuguese, Dutch, British, Malay, Indian, and Chinese; hence, Melaka has exceptional diversities in culture, religions, and architecture that fulfil the OUV criteria (ii), (iii), and (iv) (Jabatan Warisan Negara, 2007). The multiple cultural influences from the same native origins have increased both international tourism and research attention on the architecture and urban landscapes of Melaka.

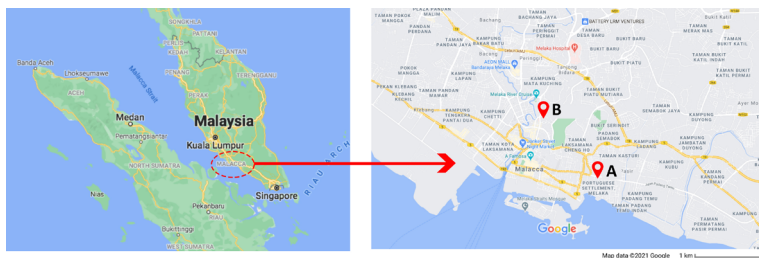


Figure 1
The Portuguese Settlement (A) and St. Peter's Church (B) in Melaka (Image taken from Google Maps, annotation by authors)

After the Dutch conquered Melaka, most of the Portuguese descendants remained in the various parts of the city. During the British rule in Malaya (currently Malaysia) in 1926, a 28-acre plot of land was allocated by the British High Commissioner for the Malacca-Portuguese community aiming to preserve their cultural heritage identity. As illustrated in Figure 1, the settlement (A) is located at the outskirts of the city and became known as The Portuguese Settlement (Kampung Portugis or Kampung Serani in Malay). The toponyms of the streets were using Portuguese names to honour their ancestors as a seafarer and a *regedor* (headman) responsible for the residents'

welfare. To date, there are hundred and ten houses in the Portuguese settlement. Apart from the residential area, the Portuguese settlement also becomes the centre of Kristang culture and activities. Some of the most fluent and oldest Cristão or Kristang creole speakers lived in the settlement and were often visited by researchers studying Kristang matters (Sarkissian, 2013; Soh, 2015).

Although located outside the Melaka UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Portuguese settlement has been gazetted under the Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Enactment No.6 1988 (Figure 2, right). To strengthen the identity of the Christian belief, the statue replica of *Christ the Redeemer* is erected as a landmark at the Portuguese Square (Figure 2, left). In line with their belief, the Portuguese community has also referring St. Peter's Church, as illustrated in Figure 1 (B), as a sacred cultural heritage architecture that symbolises their identity. This study focuses on St. Peter's Church as the case study because of this symbolic relationship.

Figure 2
Christ the Redeemer
statue (left);
Portuguese
Settlement marker
(right) (Photographs
by Azizi Bahauddin)



St. Peter's Church has been viewed as one of the iconic heritage architectures of the Portuguese people (Figure 3). It is believed that there is a strong cognitive-emotional bond between the Portuguese community with the St. Peter's Church as a manifestation of their tangible cultural heritage. According to Scannell and Gifford (2014), attachment to a place is developed by the emotional connections between person, place, and the process of attachment. In this context, the Portuguese descendants, or the Eurasians, are attached based on the collective-based meaning through their culture and religion that has designated St. Peter's Church as a sacred place. The beliefs, knowledge, and memories embedded had made St. Peter's Church a meaningful place for them. The cultural and religious experiences of the community are known to contribute to the formation of the

emotional bond between the building and the individuals which merged in a variety of activities in their hearts and minds. The existence of religious structures in a foreign environment has become a vital home of cultural safety and spiritual solace for the community to survive (Gordon, 2019).



Figure 3
St. Peter's Church in 1910 (left) and now (right) (Photograph by Asian Historical Architecture (left); photograph by Azizi Bahaudin (right))

As mentioned by Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004), the religion and religious values born by the community affected the overall urban plan. This also implies to the Portuguese descendants that Christianity strongly affects the urban setting of Melaka. In 1712, freedom of worship was given by the Dutch. The number of Melaka's Catholics had exceeded the Protestants by six to one; consequently, Melaka continued to be a diocesan town until 1818 (Schumann, 2011). This setting has created an attachment towards the St. Peter's Church which was forged through the rituals, stories, visits, and artefacts as a sacred building based on a Roman Catholic belief. Hence, it establishes a collective bond and citizenship among the diverse and dispersed believers.

The church symbolises the victory of the Melaka Portuguese community surviving religious persecution and a ban on Catholicism practices after Melaka fell to the Dutch in 1641. However, lack of documented information coupled with the difficult access to investigate the church has made the task of recording the building architecturally a daunting effort. Any preservation and conservation work for safeguarding the cultural heritage from the present condition for the future generation is a deliberate act. In addition, preserving the church can be seen as an effort to bring together this small Portuguese community through place attachment to rebuild the sense of place of this sacred cultural heritage.

Church as A Sacred Place

As a sacred place, a church's architectural form and design emphasises the different aspects of theology and is based on the theological

meaning (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019b). Sacred structure, according to Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004), is a place for praying, meditating, venerating, and educating the believers. A person's spirituality will be drawn closer to the Supreme Being by the aesthetic features in a sacred place. This is also agreed by Smith (2006) that the church's architectural design will bring the believers to another place and reality. Moreover, it will enable humans to experientially seek heaven on earth. Religious architectures are commonly built as an "earthly reproduction of a transcendent model" (Eliade, 1959, p. 58). In other words, it is purposely built to replicate the universe, not only *imago mundi* or the image or microcosmos of the world. This is reflected in the spatial arrangement of the tabernacle, altar and seating which illustrates the "body of Christ" or the "people of God" (Eliade, 1959, p. 58). The sacramental nature of a church connects the history of the church, the cultural influence, and the need to consider the environment where the churches are built. In some circumstances, the existence of religious structures in a foreign environment become a vital home of cultural safety and spiritual solace for the community to survive (Bess, 2003; Gordon, 2019).

Christian churches are commonly built in a longitudinal Latin cross form (cruciform shape) with the altar at the eastern end. This East-West longitudinal form is the basic typology of Christian architecture. Christianity adopted the typology from the Roman basilica towards its eschatological goal, where the spaces in the church are divided according to specific functions (Booth, n.d.). The architectural space and its sacred elements in a church contribute to the process of experiencing faith. The way to engage the fundamental value of God Himself is through the harmony, proportion, and order of the architecture based on the theological meaning (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019b). The proximity to God, according to Counted and Watts (2017), can be obtained through the closeness to a place with religious significance. In other words, there is a close association between God and a place. The congregational activities as well as becoming a member of a religious community could also increase the proximity to God. Thus, it could be concluded that one's religious life is affected by attachment to that designated place.

Sense of Place of the Cultural Sacred Place

The sense of place is a person's subjective perception based on the particular experience in a designated environment. It is an essential element to maintain the person-environment attachment quality based on the conscious feeling that has been built over time. Tuan (1977) argues that people's experience is affected by the spatial

structures (or place) and routine experiences. Space will become a 'place' if infused with meaning through the presence of lived experience. This statement is also supported by Punter (1991) who claims that there are three main dimensions for constructing the sense of place: physical setting, activity, and meaning (Figure 4). These dimensions are the fundamental elements for seeing and perceiving a place holistically.

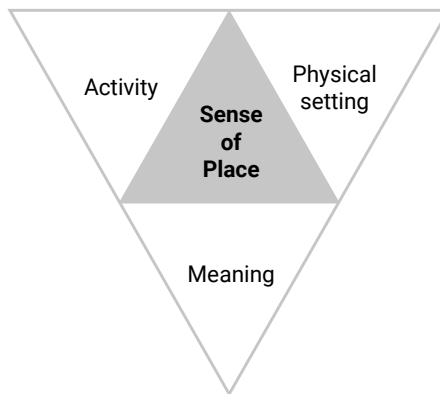


Figure 4
The sense of place
concept based on
Punter (1991) (Image
by Rani Prihatmanti)

In short, sense of place is based on the people's experience towards both physical and psychological concepts of a place that develops over time. The physical characteristics embedded in the building are not for differentiating places per se, but also an effect resulting from the people's perception and the memory that remains (Altman & Low, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Furthermore, Gordon (2019) defined that the religious and cultural signifiers, or the 'soft' attributes, are as important as the 'hard' features from the architecture structural form in forming both the sense of place and sacred space.

Religion is known to influence one's attachment to a place (Counted & Watts, 2017). The sacredness of a place and its characteristics are essential components in religious place attachment, and it can be in the form of macro spaces (e.g. urban scale, remote rural site, and nature) and micro spaces (e.g. shrines, home altars, and gravesites). The sacredness of a place evolves over time and is closely related to the sense of authenticity of a particular location (Birch & Sinclair, 2013; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). The place itself is acknowledged as an essential factor in constructing 'sense of place' beside the cognitive and perceptual factors (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004; Scannell & Gifford, 2014). This is also agreed by Relph (1976), that "to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places" (p. 1). These 'significant places' are associated with a deep emotional meaning which could act as an anchor and symbolic lifeline, providing stability

and security, and become fields of care (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Embarking from Lefebvre’s space triad, sacred place is not only emphasising on the physical aspects of a place (the perceived space/spatial practices/structure), but it is also the conceptual characteristics or values embedded in the place (the conceived space/representation of space/form) and the emotional aspects of the community (the lived space/representational space/function) (Lefebvre, 1991). The physical characteristics of a building are essential for constructing a ‘sense of place,’ which focused on historical forms, cultural materials, and functional settings (Ali, 2019). Similarly, Punter (1991) sees the perceived space as the physical setting (Figure 5). In the sacred place context, the architecture, design of symbols, and artefacts are essential elements to be considered. In detail, the design features of sacred structures can promote tranquillity and peace by considering the location, vegetations, water bodies, space designs, and furnishings (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Moreover, the social roles and conventions that are based on religious beliefs will determine and produce the sense of interiority of the sacred place (McCarthy, 2005). Gojnik and Gojnik (2019b) also argue that space has the task of keeping the basic concept of religions and being a mediator of the experience of faith.

Heritage buildings are embedded with rich cultural values and meanings that bring the community to form the place identity (Ali, 2019). These cultural values are related to the conceptual characteristics which is the conceived space. In the sacred architecture context, the religious beliefs affect the spatial practice of the worshippers, which is also categorised as the conceived space. Adopting from Punter, (1991), the conceived space has a similar understanding with ‘meaning.’ Meanwhile, the ‘activity’ could be translated as the lived space in Lefebvre’s notion (Figure 5). The religious values of the physical characteristics of a place (perceived space) will create a meaningful memory through the repetitive corporeal experience which triggers the emotional response and hence, a sense of place is formed. Therefore, this is the essence of a lived space.

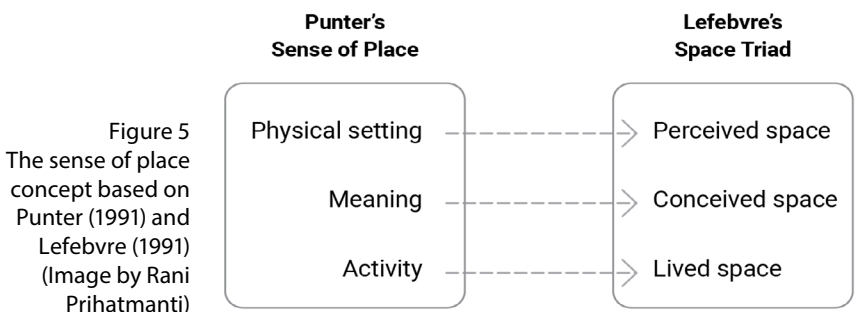


Figure 5
The sense of place concept based on Punter (1991) and Lefebvre (1991) (Image by Rani Prihatmanti)

The place experience in a sacred place is included as one of the most intense learning experiences. By learning from the ritual, text and storytelling, the experiential sense is heightened (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Chidester and Linenthal (1995) also emphasised that:

the human body plays a crucial role in the ritual production of sacred space. Ritual action manipulates basic spatial distinctions between up and down, right and left, inside and outside, and so on, that necessarily revolve around the axis of the living body. (p. 10)

Interiority, according to McCarthy (2005), touches beyond the three-dimensionality of space through the corporeal experience. The repetitive activities performed produce interiority from the familiarity and the building enclosure as the perceived space. Lastly, the familiarity and spatial intimacy will become a nostalgia, thus it gives a sense of reassurance and safeness (Pimlott, 2018). The way the worshippers unconsciously thought on the experiences, memories and understand the space, represents the lived space, and it is engaged emotionally, culturally, and historically. Lived space will only live when the spiritual and unconscious associations emerged with the worshippers, contributing to the “emotional, spiritual, historical, cultural or genealogical” (Middleton, 2016, p. 414) meanings of conceived spaces. In the end, this will transform them into a lived experience. The repetitive congregational activities performed produces interiority through the ‘sense of place.’

Case Study Outline

The Roman Catholic church in Malaysia has been established since the arrival of the Portuguese to Melaka in 1511. It had survived and grown despite the political changes in the country. From the late 18th century, the Catholic church was led by French priests and sisters. Starting in the 19th century, the priests were locally trained, proving a distinct advantage. Since the 1970s, the Catholic had been fully led by the Malaysians (Roxborough, 1992). However, there are very limited scholarly articles that discuss church architecture in Malaysia, including the St. Peter’s Church as the case study.

Study on heritage architecture requires the understanding of its history embedded in its ethnography. This research is qualitative and uses the case study of the St. Peter’s Church of Melaka, Malaysia, while looking at the Portuguese culture to validate its existence. Architectural documentation and visual data are the two major processes that document the data required for this research. The visual data sets the

architectural language that can be derived from the understanding of the Portuguese culture which governs the functions of the spaces in the church. The method also applies the ethnography process to understand the culture that governs the architectural language of St. Peter's Church and strengthened by architectural documentation for the spaces' functions. Ethnography is considered the most suitable method in this study for describing and interpreting an entire culture-sharing group. Another method employed is phenomenology, which is used for understanding the essence of the experience by investigating the experience of the Portuguese community members towards St. Peter's Church. Therefore, it needs to describe the essence of the lived phenomenon by conducting informal interviews and observations on documents and the architecture.

This research delves from the perspective of Lefebvre's theory on the production of space as a social experience. Lefebvre's concept of the production of space explores the relationships that exists within the space triad: the perceived, the conceived, and the lived space. These trialectic relationships were translated into spatial terms: spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representations (Lefebvre, 1991). In this research, perceived space is the physical attributes of St. Peter's Church, that includes the physical, functional, and contextual characteristics of the building and its surroundings. The conceived space of St. Peter's Church is the religious beliefs and the cultural values embedded in the place, including the meanings and symbols created by the Portuguese community. Lastly, the lived space is the emotional responses of the Portuguese community members as well as the place meanings and values practised by them that manifested in the congregational activities. To summarise, the notion on Lefebvre's Space Triad in this research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Lefebvre's notion
on space triad
in this research

Space Triad	Meaning	Application in this research
Perceived space	Spatial practice; physical; structure; tangible	St. Peter's Church as the physical, functional, and contextual characteristics of a sacred place and its surroundings
Conceived space	Representations of space; mental; form; intangible	The Catholicism beliefs and Portuguese-influenced culture
Lived space	Spaces of representations; social; function; tangible and intangible	The function of the spaces should be assembled and used based on the Catholicism beliefs and Portuguese-influenced culture

St. Peter's Church as a Cultural Sacred Place

The most apparent way of looking at a community's tangible heritage is by looking at its architecture especially when heritage is in play. Melaka City, in this case, and the Portuguese community are responsible for conserving the heritage buildings for future generations. These buildings are the evidence of the past historical colonies with rich cultural influences that indicate the plurality of the cultural heritage traditions in this city (Hasbollah, 2014). As part of human creations, the cultural values and background reflected in heritage buildings represent a source of memory and historical events. This creates a local identity of a place and an icon for a country. Furthermore, it will also contribute to the growth of the tourism industry. At this juncture, the St. Peter's Church epitomises the cultural heritage of the Portuguese people in Melaka (ARCADE, 2008; Feather, 2006; Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Woon & Mui, L., 2010).



Figure 6
The front and rear
façades of St. Peter's
Church show an
artistic splendour of
the mixed culture
(Photographs by
Lionel Thomas)

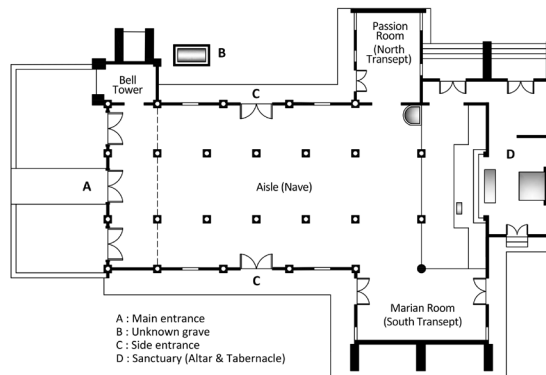
As mentioned previously, the Dutch conquered Melaka in 1641 and this marked the end of the Portuguese occupation together with the persecutions of the Catholics. Unfortunately, the churches were destroyed by the Dutch and Catholics were forced to pray at their homes. Not only that, they were also prohibited from having their own cemeteries and the priests were not permitted to administer their congregations. The Spanish Succession war had resulted in forming an alliance between the Dutch and the Portuguese. After years of persecutions, the Dutch soften their stance towards the Portuguese Catholics by donating a piece of land from a Catholic Dutchman Maryber Franz Amboer. In 1710, St. Peter's Church was built and became the oldest operational Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia. The architectural style of the church displayed a similar design with the church in Portugal and Goa, India (Figure 6 and Figure 7). One of the bells on the bell tower was casted in Goa in 1608 and according

to the local history, it was possibly salvaged from a nearby church, São Lourenço (St. Lawrence) Church, which was built in 1549 (Asian Historical Architecture, 2005; MPHTJ, 2020).

Figure 7
The bell tower of
St. Peter's Church
(Photographs by
Lionel Thomas)



Figure 8
The Latin cross plan
of St. Peter's Church
(Image by Sophie
Asha Putri)



In the Portuguese community's case, the St. Peter's Church is viewed as an iconic structure that can bring the Portuguese community together. Therefore, the church building should respect the local culture that expressed the architectural styles, in art forms, and in some cases, in the celebration of liturgical rites adapted to suit the local knowledge (USCCB, 2000). As a perceived space, this church is a social space that symbolises the series of social practices that occurred based on the liturgical rites. The form, material, composition, and other physical properties, are the main components of the physical attributes of St. Peter's Church. The design of St. Peter's Church influenced the religious experience of the Portuguese community members that relate to the lived space which lead to establishing their inner self within the church that they inhabit.

The interior of St. Peter's Church depicts a simple outlook yet spiritual and bears the layout plan of a Latin cross (Figure 8). This Latin

cross typology is adopted from the Roman basilica towards their eschatological goal and to remind the Christians of the resurrection (Booth, n.d.; Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019b). However, this particular church inclines towards Catholicism although the church's history has a strong Protestant basis to it. The terrible past that happened to the Portuguese community in Melaka dealt a lot with European play of powers and supremacies. In the Portuguese case, it was against the Dutch, the succession coloniser power that overtook Melaka from the Portuguese. This fact was also highlighted by the key informant regarding the presence of the unknown grave in the church's vicinity:

It is an unknown grave. No one knows who is buried there. However it seems to have a Dutch design. The land was once owned by the Dutch (Protestant). It was used for vegetation and later as goodwill and as given to the Portuguese (Catholic) to build their church. The Dutch had destroyed many Catholic Churches earlier in Melaka. (Informant 1)



Figure 9
The interior of St. Peter's Church
(Photographs by Lionel Thomas)



Figure 10
Passion Room (left);
Marian Room (right)
(Photographs by Lionel Thomas)

A strong European influence was reflected on the wooden ceiling, gilded composite Roman columns, and the pointed arch windows with stained glass. The arrangement of the wooden pews allows the worshippers to immerse themselves in a spiritual state while praying (Figure 9). On the main altar, Marian altar, lecterns, and on the front side of each pedestal, 'IHS' is inscribed—a monogram symbolises Jesus Christ which is derived from the first three letters of Jesus' name in the Greek alphabet. The three sides of the pedestal are embellished with a four-leaved clover icon which represents faith, love, hope, and luck (Figure 10, left). As part of the liturgical activities, the 'Way of the Cross' station markings are also visible to commemorate the processional

route of Jesus to his crucifixion. Being a Roman Catholic church, the north and south transepts applied. The north transept housed the Passion Room (Figure 10, left) which functions as a meditation room to observe the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the south transept functions as the Marian Room (Figure 10, right), a praying room dedicated to Mother Mary.

The arch on the sanctuary is embellished with '*Tu Es Petrus*,' a Portuguese word meaning 'You Are Peter,' as this church is dedicated to St. Peter who is one of the Twelve Apostles and commonly known as a fisherman. This is in line with the cultural background of the local Portuguese community who were seafarers and fishermen as described by one of the key informants: "The Portuguese were seafarers and fishermen. And many in Melaka. Hence the patron Saint to these category of people" (Informant 2).

The term 'sanctuary' is derived from the Latin word '*sanctus*' or holy, where the altar and tabernacle are sited. As the focal point in the centre of a church, the altar symbolises the openness to transcendental reality. It represents heaven and earth, the symbol of Christ's sacrifice, as well as a reminder of the table when the Apostles shared the Last Supper which re-enacted every Holy Eucharist (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019b). A church's altar composition reflects the nobility, strength, beauty, and simplicity of the One. Thus, there should be only one that it "signifies to the assembly of the faithful one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church" (USCCB, 2000, p. 15).

In Christianity, light symbolises holiness, hope, creation, and positivity. It gives an emotive experience that evokes the spirituality of the worshipers. The presence of light plays an important role in a church to signify the presence of God as described in the Bible:

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
(Genesis 1:3)

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?
(Psalm 27:1)

In St. Peter's Church, light enters through various sources, from the stained glass windows and the skylight in the shape of the bottony cross that resembles Jesus and the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Figure 11). The sanctuary area is abundantly illuminated by the light

that penetrates from the stained glass above the tabernacle. Therefore, the light will enhance the spiritual essence of this sacred place, which is also emphasised as follows:

light is the symbol of Christ who transforms the human life in the Eucharist. That is why in Christian churches light accentuation is the strongest in presbytery, where the Eucharist takes place. The symbol of light is also associated with the area of baptistery in Christian sacred architecture. Through baptism, the believer joins the community of believers and is lightened by 'the light of Christ.' (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019a, p. 293)

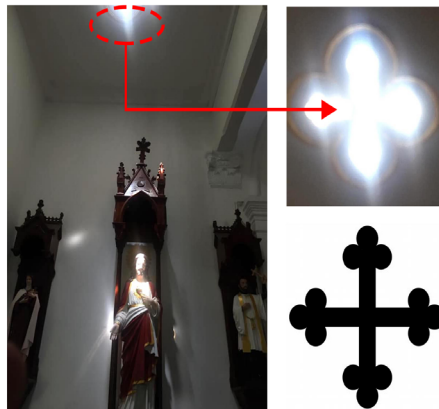


Figure 11
The bottony cross on the skylight symbolises Jesus and the Trinity (Photograph taken from the official Facebook page of St. Peter's Church, annotation by authors)

The architectural language of the church always symbolises something more divine meaningful. These fixtures and spaces play important roles in providing a space for the Portuguese descendant congregation to come together as a community while worshipping, including the Holy Mass that is conducted in the Kristang language. Apart from the regular mass, St. Peter's Church also housed other religious festivals such as Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas. These public festivals have been organised and conducted by the *Irmãos da Igreja* (Brothers of the Church) which has been established over the centuries. The membership comprises from father to son of the local Portuguese descendants. They are loyal to the Roman Catholic church to ensure the continuance of Catholicism in Melaka (De Witt, 2012).

As a sacred space, a church must be expressive to reflect the presence of God and suitable for celebrating the sacrifice of Christ. It is also to foster communal bonds and it has been purposely built with the congregation in mind as a 'place of assembly' (Sopher, 1967; USCCB, 2000). Moreover,

there is a conception from the Old Testament that the affection and attachment with His creation occurred in a special place. This implies that the place experience is not only biographical but also theological (Counted & Watts, 2017). In summary, the architectural form of St. Peter's Church does not only signify its function, but also the Portuguese descendants' experience gathered by God through the theological conventions and customs that constructed the interiority through the sense of place.

Sense of Place of St. Peter's Church

For the Portuguese descendants in Melaka, St. Peter's Church has become an important symbol and part of their community through the liturgical rites that shares the same eschatological values. The specific location within the neighbourhood environment will communicate the church's role within the environment. St. Peter's Church is also a physical entity of the cultural heritage that preserves the values of a place. This is also agreed by philosopher Michael Foucault and cultural theorist Frederic Jameson that space is defined and created by the architecture and buildings, and they influence to force certain behaviour as well as to strengthen the societal norms (Bess, 2003). The communal bonds between the religion, community members, and place are formed and transformed through the collective rituals, such as in a Holy Mass. This resulted in a transformative experience for the Portuguese communities, and it will lead to greater awareness as well as the clarity of their beliefs, practices, and the role they play in life. The sacredness will provide certain identification with a place that will persist across generations and will contribute to the "symbolic lifeline to a continuous sense of identity" (Hummon, 1989, p. 219).

Because of its significance to the Portuguese community, St. Peter's Church can be categorised as a 'monument.' It is a signifier, a symbol, and a place's narrative. Birch and Sinclair (2013) agreed that monument acts as a significant reference to certain social and cultural phenomena. Hence, it contributes to the narrative of a place and adds richness to the language that the place speaks. The place features of the St. Peter's Church (physical, performance, and meaning) will increase the degree of place attachment and therefore, the formation of the sense of place will be stronger. This view is also supported by Scannell and Gifford (2014), who argued that the duration of the time spent in a specific place will strengthen the communication; thus, the emotional feeling towards that place will also increase.

Persistent and repetitive congregational activities which shaped the individual's inner life has influenced the formation of the interiority of the sacred place through the constructed narratives and imageries

(Pimlott, 2018). This also applies to the cultural heritage building since the architecture itself relates, mediates, and delivers meanings which are attached to a complex experience of the designated space (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019a). From the theoretical lens of Lefebvre (1991), the spaces constructed in St. Peter's Church has demonstrated that space does not exist as an entity. Space is produced, generated, and created through the perceived, the conceived, and the lived that affect the Portuguese community members and trigger their emotional response to achieve the sense of place.

As illustrated in Figure 12, the conceptual framework for constructing the sense of place begins with Punter's three main dimensions of sense of place—physical setting, meaning, and activity (Punter, 1991) and translated to Lefebvre's space triad—perceived, conceived, and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991). In conclusion, the construction of the sense of place of St. Peter's Church requires the presence of the church architecture as a sacred place, Catholicism beliefs embedded in the local culture, and the congregational activities conducted by the Portuguese descendant community.

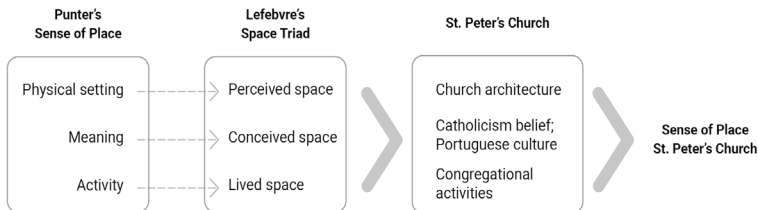


Figure 12
Conceptual
framework—Sense
of place of St. Peter's
Church (Image by
Rani Prihatmanti)

Conclusions

The Portuguese community in Melaka has long been struggling to upkeep their cultural identity in a multi-cultural country. Although they have been recognised as one of the minority groups in Malaysia, the struggle to keep their existence is plagued with many cultural and internal issues. Moreover, the St. Peter's Church embodies the cultural heritage of the Portuguese community. It represents the spirit of the Portuguese community as they struggle in the mixed cultures of Melaka to uphold their own identity. The church stands tall to remind the Portuguese people of the monumental historical past, a culture that refused to be put aside and the effort of keeping the Portuguese culture alive.

As far as those outside the Portuguese community can observe, the St. Peter's Church has been the pillar of strength for the Portuguese descendants to come together despite all the challenges. Even though

the nature of the Catholic church is deeply aware of the history and traditions, it still acquires its authority as a continuance from the past and its ability to encourage piety in all forms of manners. However, there is still awareness to a certain degree in history that expression of faith will change according to place, time, and the situation.

The physical entity of the church (perceived space) which is embedded with the Catholicism beliefs (conceived space) has constructed the lived experiences of the Portuguese community in Melaka based on the congregational activities that they have performed. This resulted in the formation of their emotional response towards St. Peter's Church (lived space). Drawing from Lefebvre's concepts of perceived, conceived and lived space, the space triad plays a role in understanding and analysing sacred spaces, in which the three elements must be present to construct the sense of place. The sense of interiority established through the sense of place of St. Peter's Church creates an intimate, reassurance and safeness of the constructed narrative and imageries towards the Portuguese descendants, despite changes in the modern society. In the end, looking back at history, there are many apparent changes, but their faith in their religion has sustained their strength as believers of the faith. The St. Peter's Church is the obvious iconic form that epitomises the Portuguese community of its existence in this country.

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