

**‘SENSE OF PLACE’ AND HAPTIC HERITAGE OF
PENANG CHINESE PERANAKAN DOMESTIC
SPACES: FROM KITCHEN TO TABLE**

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**‘SENSE OF PLACE’ AND HAPTIC HERITAGE OF
PENANG CHINESE PERANAKAN DOMESTIC
SPACES: FROM KITCHEN TO TABLE**

by

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GLOSSARY

Acar awak ³	Burmese-influenced Nyonya pickled vegetables
Agak; agak-agak ³	Guesstimate
Ah mah ¹	Grandma
Aide-mémoire ⁴	An aid to the memory
Ang Kong tok ¹	Altar, praying table
Batu giling ³	Grind stone
Berkemban ³	Wearing camisole
Bubur Cha-cha ³	Malaysian sweet potato and coconut milk dessert
Bunga Telang ³	Blue pea flower (<i>Clitoria ternatea</i>)
Cha bor kan ¹	Young female orphan or slaves as adopted daughters (Cha bor ¹ = female/girl)
Chap chye ¹	Stir fry vegetables
Chap Go Meh ¹	Celebration on the 15 th day after Lunar New Year
Che it ¹	First day of every Lunar month / Chūyī ² (初一)
Cheng Beng ¹	All soul's day celebration; tomb sweeping day; Qīng Míng ² festival (清明节)
Cheng k'u ¹ /batu lesung ³	Mortar and pestle
Cherki ¹	Card game commonly played by the Nyonyas in the past
Chiak ¹	Eat
Chim cheh ¹	Air well
Chong por ¹	Hainanese chef
Cukok/Cekur ³	Sand ginger (<i>Kaempferia galanga</i>)
Cutaneous	Skin-based; pertaining to the skin itself or the skin as a sense organ. Includes sensation of pressure, temperature and pain
Dapur ³	Kitchen; stove
Daun kaduk ³	Wild betel leaf (<i>Piper sarmentosum</i>)
Ee poh ¹	Grandmother's sister; grand aunt
Genre de vie ⁴	Way of life
Goh kaki ¹ /kaki lima ³	Five-foot walkway
Gustemology	Combination of 'gustatory' and 'acoustemology'; cultural issues around taste and other sensory aspects of food
Jamban ³	Toilet

Haptic	Related to the sense of touch in all its forms
Huat kuih ¹	Fermented steam cake
Kamcheng ¹	Porcelain covered jar with a tub-like body
Keropok ³	Crackers
Kiam chye ¹	Salted vegetable
Kiam chye ark ¹ /itik tim ³	Salted vegetable duck soup
Kiam chye boey ¹	Soup made from salted vegetable and leftover meats
Kim chua ¹	Gold joss paper for offerings
Kim poh ¹	Wife of a maternal uncle; aunt
Kinaesthesia	The sensation of movement of body and limbs. Relating to sensations originating in muscles, tendons, and joints.
Kopitiam ¹	Local coffee shop
Kuih/kueh ³	Cake; delicacy
Kueh ee ¹ /tang yuan ²	Glutinous rice dumpling in sweet soup
Kuih bahulu ³	Malay sponge cake; Asian-style Madeline
Kuih bangkit ³	Cookies made from tapioca/sago starch and coconut cream
Kuih kapit ³	Love letter biscuit
Kuih lapis ³	Traditional layer cake
La/lah/lor	A meaningless word used to add emphasis after an expression after a statement in Manglish, Singlish or Penang Baba Hokkien language
Lam mee ¹	Birthday noodle
Limau kasturi ³	Calamansi lime (<i>Citrus microcarpa</i>)
Mā jie ²	Female helper dressed in black and white
Makcik ³	Aunty; Older women
Manek ey ¹ /kasut manek ³	Nyonya beaded shoes
Masak ³	Cook
Ngor seng ¹	Five lives sacrificial meats (pork, chicken, duck, fish and crab) provided for religious offering
Ong lai ¹	Pineapple
Pai ¹ /bài ² (拜)	Worship
Pai Ti Kong ¹ / Bái Tiān Gōng ² (拜天公)	Ti Kong's birthday festival that falls on the 8 th day of the first Lunar month, also known as Hokkien New Year
Pekasam ³	Fermented fish using salt, rice grain and other spices
Pengat ³	Warm sweet coconut soup
Phor Thor ¹	Hungry Ghost festival

Piak tu ¹	Recessed wall cupboard
Pinang ³	Fruit of Areca palm (<i>Areca catechu</i>)
(ayam/babi) Pongteh ¹	Chicken or pork meat braised in fermented bean sauce
Proprioception	Perception of the position, state and movement of the body and limbs in space that includes cutaneous, kinaesthetic, and vestibular sensations.
Pulut ³	Glutinous rice
Pulut taitai ³	Nyonya delicacy made from glutinous rice and coconut jam
Rempah ³	Spices
Sam Kai tok ¹	Altar for the Three Realms/Sam Kai/三界
Sam seng ¹	Three sacrificial meats (chicken, duck and roast pork) provided for religious offering
Serai ³	Lemongrass (<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>)
Sinkeh ¹	Newcomer
Sirih ³	Betel leaf (<i>Piper betle</i>)
Somatic	Corporeal; bodily
Sotong sambal ³	Cuttlefish cooked in chili paste
Tactile	Pertaining to the cutaneous sense, but more specifically the sensation of pressure (from mechanoreceptors) rather than temperature (thermoreceptors) or pain (nociceptors).
Tang ¹	Copper/brass
Tang Chek ¹ / Dong Zi ² (冬節)	Winter Solstice festival
Tang tia ¹	Big metal wok
Tau eu ¹	Soy sauce
Tau eu bak ¹	Braised pork in soy sauce
Tey snah ¹ /baju pendek ³	White blouse; inner of <i>th'ng snah</i>
Thee kuih ¹ /nian gao ² /kuih bakul ³	Chinese steamed cake made from glutinous rice serves during the Lunar New Year
Thia besar/tua thia ¹	Reception hall
Thia gelap ¹	Secondary hall
Th'ng snah ¹ /baju panjang ³	Long tunic
Th'ng tok ¹ /tok panjang ³	Long table banquet
Ti Kong ¹ /Tiān Gōng ² (天公)	Jade Emperor, Taoist Emperor of Heaven; the God of the 'Heaven, Earth and Man (Three Realms/Sam Kai/三界)
Timun sui ¹	Stir fried cucumber in vinegar
Tok ¹	Table

Tumbok ³	Grind
Vestibular	Pertaining the perception of balance, head position, acceleration and deceleration. Information obtained from semi-circular canals in the inner ear.
Zao Jun ² (灶君)	Kitchen God; Stove God

Word origin:

¹ Penang Baba Hokkien

² Mandarin

³ Bahasa Malaysia

⁴ French

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNY	Chinese New Year
DAKEN	Dasar Kebudayaan Negara
GT	George Town
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
HEP	Haptic Exploratory Procedure
HUL	Heritage Urban Landscape
MCO	Movement Control Order
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
RO	Research Objective
SAP	Special Area Plan
SCPA	State Chinese (Penang) Association / Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang
TCH	Tangible Cultural Heritage
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHS	World Heritage Site
y.o.	Year(s) old

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PERASAAN SETEMPAT DAN WARISAN HAPTİK DARI RUANG DOMESTİK CINA PERANAKAN PULAU PINANG: DARI DAPUR KE MEJA

ABSTRAK

Makanan merupakan salah satu elemen asas dalam kehidupan seharian dalam rumahtangga Cina Peranakan. Bagi mereka, makanan bukan sahaja untuk kegunaan harian, tetapi juga untuk perayaan dan persembahan keagamaan. Proses transformasi bahan dengan memanipulasi alatan dapur dilakukan mengikut pengetahuan haptik dan pengalaman yang diwarisi dari satu generasi ke satu generasi. Oleh itu, terdapat hubungan yang kuat antara ingatan dan deria di sebalik penghasilan makanan Nyonya. Ini terutamanya organ deria haptik yang digunakan untuk melihat ruang dan tempat melalui pergerakan dan pemindahan. Malangnya, generasi muda kini telah dimodenkan dan sedikit daripada mereka yang mengamalkan kepercayaan budaya ini. Oleh kerana pemodenan dan pembaratan yang pesat, menjaga unsur budaya budaya Peranakan Cina adalah penting. Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini melihat warisan haptik di sebalik pembuatan makanan Nyonya dalam rumah Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang. Pengalaman haptik yang ditanam dari semasa ke semasa akan membangunkan 'perasaan setempat' kepada keturunan Peranakan Cina terhadap ruang domestik mereka. Oleh itu, objektif utama penyelidikan ini adalah untuk menyiasat hubungan antara warisan haptik dan 'perasaan setempat' dalam ruang domestik isi rumah Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang. Kajian ini mengguna pakai teori '*Space Triad*' Lefebvre untuk mengkaji ruang domestik dan mengalaminya berdasarkan pengalaman hidup keturunan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang. Kajian ini berbentuk kualitatif dengan pendekatan induktif yang mendalami etnografi, fenomenologi dan kajian kes. Tujuh keturunan Cina Peranakan Pulau Pinang berumur antara 60 hingga 90 tahun turut

ditemu bual. Pemerhatian tapak dan analisis dokumen juga digunakan. Penemuan itu mendedahkan bahawa ruang domestik adalah lebih daripada *aide-mémoire*, namun ia juga merupakan 'teater kenangan' bagi keturunan Cina Peranakan Pulau Pinang. Dapur, sebagai perut rumah, dan halaman adalah hab komunikasi di kalangan wanita. Di sinilah juga resipi dan teknik memasak dihantar secara lisan. Warisan haptik yang mendasari proses pembuatan makanan Nyonya ialah kesinambungan pengetahuan dan kemahiran tidak ketara yang diterjemahkan ke dalam pengalaman haptik mengikut tradisi. Untuk menyimpulkan, mental dan fizikal haptik telah membuktikan bahawa pengalaman haptik berdasarkan ingatan boleh dihantar melangkaui tetapan fizikal dan masa, termasuk pelaku dan/atau proksinya. Oleh itu, 'perasaan setempat' boleh dipindahkan tanpa mengira masa dan tempat dengan merujuk kepada memori haptik sebagai alat pengalaman haptik.

**‘SENSE OF PLACE’ AND HAPTIC HERITAGE OF PENANG CHINESE
PERANAKAN DOMESTIC SPACES: FROM KITCHEN TO TABLE**

ABSTRACT

Food is one of the quintessential elements in the everyday life in the Chinese Peranakan household. To them, food is not only for daily consumption, but it is also for celebration and religious offerings. The transformation process of ingredients by manipulating the kitchen tools are performed according on the haptic knowledge and experience were inherited from one generation to another. Hence, there is a strong connection between the memory and the senses behind the production of Nyonya foods. This particularly the haptic sensuous organs which are used to perceive the space and place through movement and locomotion. Unfortunately, the young generations are now modernised and little of them are practicing these cultural beliefs. Because of the rapid modernisation and westernisation, safeguarding the cultural elements of Chinese Peranakan culture is imperative. In related to that, this research looks on the haptic heritage behind the production of Nyonya foods in Penang Chinese Peranakan household. Haptic experience which implanted over the time will develop the ‘Sense of Place’ to the Chinese Peranakan descendants towards their domestic spaces. Thus, the main objective of this research is to investigate the correlation between haptic heritage and ‘Sense of Place’ in the domestic spaces of Penang Chinese Peranakan household. This study adopts Lefebvre’s Space Triad to examine the domestic spaces and to experienced it on the lived experience of the Penang Chinese Peranakan descendants. This research is qualitative with inductive approach that delves into ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. Seven Penang Chinese Peranakan descendants aged between 60 to 90 years were also interviewed. Site

observation and document analysis were also employed. The findings revealed that domestic space is more than *aide-mémoire*, however it is also a ‘theatre of memory’ for the Penang Chinese Peranakan descendants. Kitchen, as the stomach of the house, and courtyard are communication hubs among the women figure. It is also where the recipes and cooking techniques were transmitted orally. The haptic heritage that underlies the Nyonya food production process is the continuity of the intangible knowledge and skill that translated into haptic experience by tradition. To conclude, the haptic mental and haptic physical have proven that the haptic experience based on the memory can be transmitted beyond the physical setting and time, including the actor and/or its proxy. Therefore, ‘Sense of Place’ is transferable regardless time and place by referring to the haptic memory as the vehicle of the haptic experience.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the outline of this study as well as the cultural anthropology of the Chinese Peranakan culture in Penang. The conceptual understanding of ‘Sense of Place’, ‘haptic heritage’, and ‘domestic space’ is also highlighted in this section. In detail, Chapter 1 discusses the background of this study, research questions as well as the objectives, significance of the study, scope of this research, definition of the key terms, limitation of the study, and the structure of this thesis. The description of Penang as the case study in this research also discussed in this chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

In Malaysia, the Chinese Peranakan community is the biggest ‘Peranakan’ compare to other Peranakans, such as Jawi Peranakan, Portuguese-Eurasian (Kristang), and Peranakan Hindu (Chitty). It is one of the widely known and studied among the Peranakan communities in Malaysia (Pue, 2016). Chinese Peranakan is included as a national identity and culture in this multi ethnic Malaysia, particularly in George Town (the capital city of Penang) and Melaka as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In this rapidly changing society, the cultural values and beliefs will be diluted and disappeared when the young generations are not practicing it. Thus, the culture will extinct slowly (Ong, 2021). Continuity of this endangered culture is urgently required for the present and future generations. In general, there are other terms to classify the Chinese Peranakan community, i.e., the ‘Straits Chinese’, ‘Straits-born

Chinese or the 'Baba-Nyonya'. However, throughout this study, the 'Chinese Peranakan' term is used consistently.

To the Chinese Peranakan communities, foods have been acknowledged as a quintessential symbol of identity. The food from the Chinese Peranakan culture is termed as Nyonya cuisine or Nyonya food (Figure 1.1). Factually, Nyonya cuisine and Chinese symbolism are strongly connected from three aspects: the colour, linguistic association (name of the cuisine), and its physical association (appearance of the cuisine) (Lee, 2009). The rich cultural lived experience behind the production of Nyonya food that developed over the years had created memories to the Chinese Peranakan descendants. The ingredients used in Nyonya foods, together with the equipment and utensils, are embedded with personal and collective memories (Choo, 2004). The movement and locomotion within the spaces inside the house are essential factors in contributing the formation of the haptic experience in preparing and cooking Nyonya food over time. The physical handling of these foods determines the authenticity in terms of the taste, colour, and texture. Not only that, the cooking skill which is based on the experience that become memory also contributes significantly in producing authentic food. Based on the previous study regarding the authenticity of food, the concept of 'haptic heritage' is established through the methods on how the ingredients are handled in such ways for producing authentic products (Woods & Donaldson, 2021). Nonetheless, there is no specific definition of 'haptic heritage' and it is not widely recognised. According to the terminology, 'haptic heritage' consists of two words 'haptic' and 'heritage' and it can be simply interpreted as how haptic contributes to the preservation of any form of cultural heritage.



Figure 1.1 Assorted Penang Nyonya *kuihs*

Source: Personal documentation (2022)

Haptic derives from the Greek word '*haptikos*' meaning 'able to touch' and '*haptesthai*' or 'to lay hold of'. It is a non-visual sense which uses touchable experiences for perceiving objects as well as the environment. Haptic experience, which relies on the haptic sense, is the foundation for cognitive spatial representation. In other words, a space is haptically explored through the movement (Herssens & Heylighen, 2010) and determined by haptic sensations (Pallasmaa, 2012). The spatial and material characteristics on a space are perceived from the haptic sense organ: skin, joints, and muscles. Rodaway (1994) points out that the locomotion of the body and its parts are useful for exploring and evaluating the surroundings, as well as for shifting location based on the needs.

This research discusses on the haptic heritage of Nyonya foods that is produced from the haptic experience in the domestic spaces of the Chinese Peranakan homes. Hence, in this study, haptic heritage can be interpreted as the touch-related element for preserving the authenticity of Nyonya foods that includes the tactile experience. The haptic experience occurred over time will construct the 'Sense of Place' in the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces in a house. However, the concept of authenticity needs to

be understood with reference to the cultural values (Jokilehto, 2006; Taylor & Lennon, 2012). Because of this importance, there is an urgency to maintain the authenticity of the Chinese Peranakan culture as a part of the cultural heritage of George Town as the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) in its tangible and intangible forms for the future generations. This is also aligned with the definition of ‘heritage’ by UNESCO, (1972):

“Heritage is the cultural legacy which we receive from the past, which we live in the present and which we will pass on to future generations.”

From the statement above, continuing the cultural legacy for the next generations is a deliberate act, however it must be conducted without compromising the authenticity. After the inscription of the UNESCO WHS in 2008, the Chinese Peranakan community in Penang is struggling to maintain their authenticity and identity in spite of the modernisation and globalisation (Omar, Muhibudin, Yussof, Sukiman, & Mohamed, 2013; Ong, 2021). Besides, preserving the cultural values is considered as an act of safeguarding and conserving the multi-layered culture based on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) criteria (ii), (iii), and (iv). Those OUVs are:

Criterion (ii) Melaka and George Town represent exceptional examples of multi-cultural trading towns in East and Southeast Asia, forged from the mercantile and exchanges of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European cultures, each with its imprints on the architecture and urban form, technology and monumental art;

Criterion (iii) Melaka and George Town are living testimony to the multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, and European colonial influences. This multi-cultural tangible and intangible heritage is expressed in the great variety of religious buildings of different faiths, ethnic quarters, the many languages, worship and religious festival, dances, costumes, art and music, food, and daily life; and

Criterion (iv) Melaka and George Town reflect the coming together of cultural elements from elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago, India, China, and Europe to create a unique architecture, culture, and townscape without parallel anywhere in the East and South East Asia, in particular, a range and exceptional architecture of shophouses and townhouses.

The Chinese Peranakan community showcases the complexity and multi-layering of the rich cultural heritage of George Town. The intertwining tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Chinese Peranakan creates the value of the OUVs of the WHS. However, any acts that causing loss of authenticity due to mismanagement, misinterpretation and any attempts to create a marketable ‘commodity’ will create an eventual loss to George Town. Consequently, it could jeopardise the UNESCO WHS status (Penang State Government, 2016). As mentioned in the Special Area Plan (SAP), George Town aims to become a ‘Dynamic Historic Living City’. It is projected that George Town will become:

“...a city that safeguards and protects both its cultural and built environment, maintains and strengthens the integrity of its components and builds its value on heritage” (Penang State Government, 2016).

Figure 1.2 illustrates the conservation practice in George Town covers both tangible (built heritage) and intangible (living heritage) aspects. Hence, by conducting appropriate conservation practice, it is expected to retain the authenticity and integrity of the heritage by staying grounded in their cultural traditions without compromising the OUVs. This is also emphasised by Orbasli, (2007) and Lim, (2011). They agreed that socio-cultural practices of the local inhabitants contribute to the intangible cultural heritage. This generational living practices create the uniqueness and identity of a city.

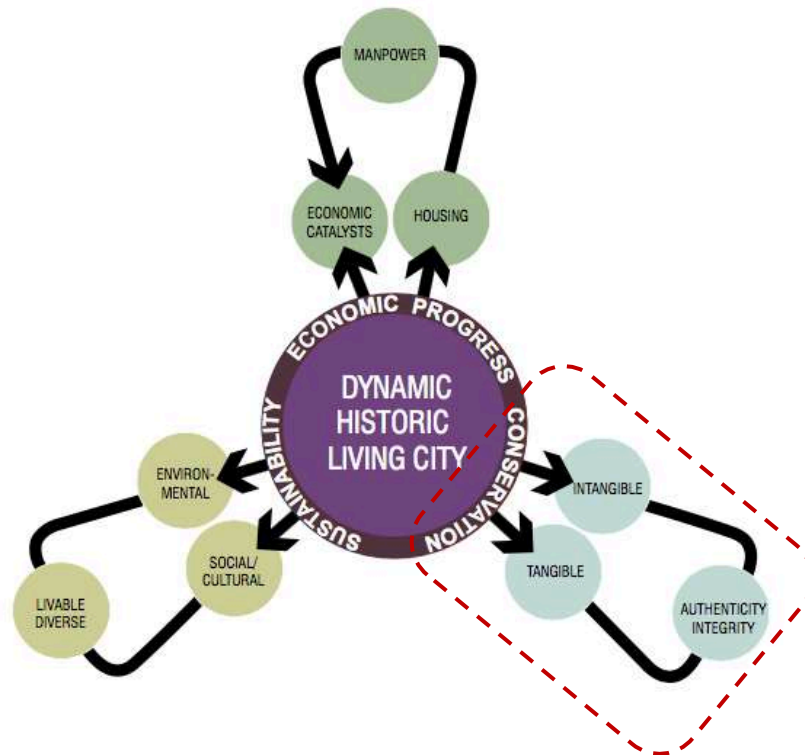


Figure 1.2 George Town as Dynamic Historic Living City diagram

Source: George Town SAP (2016, p. B1-1)

In Malaysian cultural heritage landscape, acts of cultural heritage preservation and conservation are stipulated in the ‘Dasar Kebudayaan Negara’ (DAKEN) in order to achieve the nation’s cultural development based on the 7 main core (*teras*) as illustrated in Figure 1.3. Generally, DAKEN aims to highlight the direction of art, culture and heritage by considering the current condition as well as the future challenges which in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) particularly Target 11.4 “Protect the world’s cultural and natural heritage”. Through these 7 cores, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be preserved and conserved for the future generations of Malaysia (MOTAC, 2021).

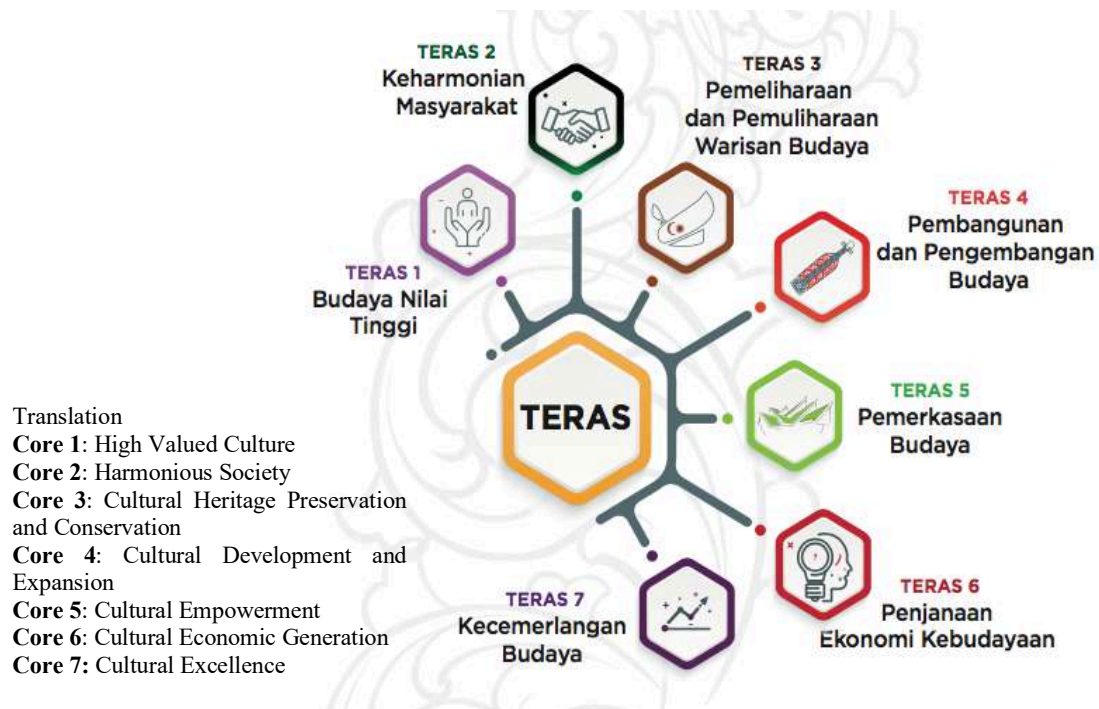


Figure 1.3 Seven main core of 'Dasar Kebudayaan Negara'

Source: MOTAC (2021 p. 18)

Because of the social amalgamation between the two cultures, the Chinese Peranakan community has enriched the cultural heritage of Malaysia. However, in reality, this community are currently struggling to maintain their identity and sense of belonging in this globalised era. Thus, the Chinese Peranakan culture could be pluralised ethnically. Their existence in the community also needs to be acknowledged in this multi-racial nation (Lee, 2008; Mahadi, 2021; Pue, 2016).

Embarking from the Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the five-tiered pictorial diagram in Figure 1.4. represents the Chinese Peranakan as an ideological construct. This self-actualisation theory explains that a person is always 'becoming' and dynamic. The five tiers can also be a tool that will stimulate and motivate people to find their meaning in life by realizing one own's maximum potential (Tripathi & Moakumla, 2018).

The first tier, ‘physiological needs’ can be defined as the biological requirements for human survival that must be fulfilled. According to Zahari, Tumin, Hanafiah, & Majid (2019), the foods eaten by the Chinese Peranakan, which includes Nyonya food, are produced to accommodate the human basic needs. However, the food itself could fulfil all five tiers of Maslow’s hierarchy because of its importance in the Chinese Peranakan culture. To them, food not only as a physiological need but also symbolizes their cultural identity as a Chinese Peranakan.

On the next tier, it is where the safety needs are fulfilled. This tier aims to provide protection from elements, security, order, law, stability and freedom from fear. Dwelling is a vital element that could provide safety for the Chinese Peranakans. This is where the lived experience occurred based on the activities conducted which includes the domestic spaces. According to Tripathi & Moakumla (2018), feeling safe will contribute for achieving one’s full potential. Because of this significance, domestic space is studied in this research.

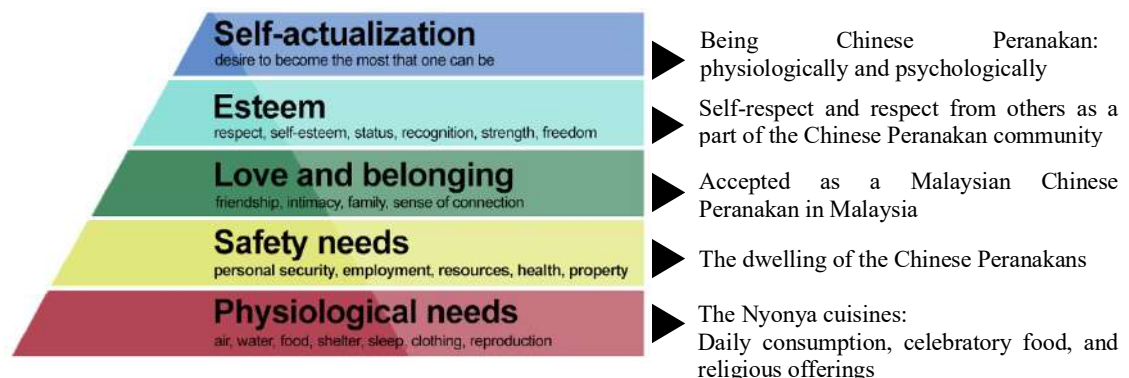


Figure 1.4 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Chinese Peranakan context

Source: Author’s analysis (2021) (Image adopted from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html#gsc.tab=0>)

Although the Chinese Peranakan community is considered as one of the prominent minority groups in Malaysia (Zahari et al., 2019), being a Chinese Peranakan represents the ‘sense of love and belonging’ as a Malaysian in Malaysia. This positive value will esteem through their self-respect being in the community and therefore, they will obtain respect from others as a part of the Chinese Peranakan community (Mahadi, 2021). Lastly, after the first four tiers are fulfilled, the ‘self-actualization’ as the Chinese Peranakan can be achieved. Quoting from Maslow (1999 p. xiv):

“A self-actualization person does not need to prove anything by being deliberately eccentric or conventional”

From the statement above, being a Chinese Peranakan is a manifestation of self-actualisation whereby they have the recognition and acceptance as a ‘full functioning’ figure in this multi racial nation. Regardless being accepted in the society, it is still important for the Chinese Peranakan to maintain their cultural identity in the form of customs, beliefs, language, symbols, histories, labels, including the physical features (Mahadi, 2021; Pue, 2016). In short, loss of authenticity will result a loss of cultural identity (Lee, 2008; Penang State Government, 2016; Pue, 2016).

The Chinese Peranakan community, which is dominantly influenced by the Chinese culture, believed that eating and sharing good food acts as a bonding tool for generating intimacy and harmony among the family members. To them, Nyonya food plays an important role in reflection of perception of oneself and others (Almerico, 2014; Zahari et al., 2019). Chien & Ab. Karim, (2016) also emphasised that food is a powerful symbol of cultural identity. Apparently, the cooking process and the foods itself also act as a mediator for the social support among the older generations in working-class communities. Not only that, the eating decorum of the Chinese

Peranakan which is acculturated from both Malay and Chinese symbolises the cultural manner on how the food is eaten and the things are used (Zahari et al., 2019).

Food, memory, and narrative are the quintessential elements in everyday as well as the ceremonial and ritual practices (Abarca & Colby, 2016). According to Choo (2004), there is a strong connection between the memory and the senses brought by the Nyonya food in providing identity, time, imagination of place, and community. This is emphasised by Seremetakis (1994) as cited in Choo (2004) where sensory responses to food become a site through which notions of tradition, authenticities and histories can be contested. In other words, sensory experience from food contains memories, places, histories, feelings, and moments in time. It is embedded with a set of collective memories, encoded by shared experience and points of identification. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a symbiotic relationship between senses and memories. Abarca & Colby (2016) and Rodaway (1994) stressed that the five senses (haptic/touch, gustatory/taste, olfactory/smell, auditory/hear, and visual/sight) are highly important part of the everyday experiences. These senses mediate the experience by providing information in order to establish 'food-based memories' or 'food memories' in producing personal and collective narratives in cultural as well as the social identity context (Figure 1.5).

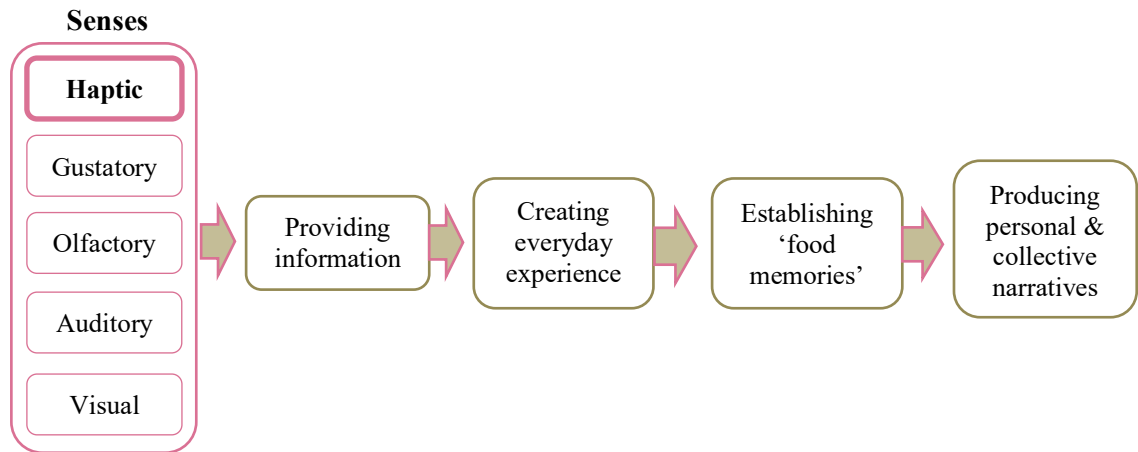


Figure 1.5 Multiple senses for establishing ‘food memories’

Source: Author’s analysis based on Abarca & Colby (2016); Rodaway (1994)

In many communities, Perry (2017) stated that women play an important role in transmitting the culinary legacy. They are the gatekeepers of the culture and responsible in passing down their knowledge to the next generation, aiming to ensure the legacy continues as well as to tie the generations together. This culture is also applied in the Chinese Peranakan household. In the olden days, where the young Nyonyas had no opportunity to pursue their formal education, their cooking capabilities were considered as the utmost achievement to be recognised as a well-brought Nyonya. Their speed in crushing the spices (*rempah*) manually with mortar and pestle (*batu lesung*) is the most important criteria for selecting the potential daughter-in-law. This demonstrates the effort of the young Nyonyas in enhancing her culinary skills for preparing food, which is highly important in the Chinese Peranakan culture (Kuake & Kuake, 2017; Lee & Chen, 2012; Lee, 2008). In fact, cooking process requires practical embodied knowledge which reflected on the activities occurred, such as the rhythm when pounding and grinding the spices. These labour-intensive and time-consuming physical activities require repetitive movements and locomotion in producing good quality yet authentic Nyonya foods. Through ‘touching

and feeling' the ingredients during the preparation process which inculcated over the time, authentic food products could be reproduced, which is known as the 'haptic heritage' (Woods & Donaldson, 2021).

The preparation and cooking activities articulate the spatial planning as well as the characteristics of the space. Therefore, to perceive the cognitive spatial representation of the interior, it requires the haptic senses based on the repetitive movement and locomotion that conducted over the time. Consequently, this creates the lived experience from the activities and supports the formation of haptic experience of a place (Herssens & Heylighen, 2008). Rapoport (1998) also mentioned that how food is transformed is associated with other activities and loaded with the meaning of cooking based on specific social or ritual. These social or ritual activities play a significant role in defining the cooking equipment arrangements as well as the design of the place which is called 'kitchen'.

Referring back to the production of Nyonya foods, the transformation process from raw ingredients into cooked food is rich in haptic knowledge that creates the haptic experience, and lastly it will construct the haptic memory that signifies the identity of the Chinese Peranakan culture. Moreover, the Nyonyas commonly used the '*agak*' or '*agak-agak*' method which literally translated as 'guess-guess' or 'guesstimation' (Choo, 2004; Lee, 1996; Ong, 2016). It is a way of measuring the ingredients based on the tactile memory, learned by watching and practicing. Factually, this cooking method is strongly related with the haptic memory in physically handling the tools as well as using the space. Furthermore, McCarter (2017) clearly stated that experiencing by inhabiting is the only appropriate way to evaluate the interior space, examine the construction method and materials, as well as understand the interrelationship.

Because of this importance, this study focuses on the sensory experience which directly involves the haptic sensory organs to touch, feel and move for perceiving the spaces used for preparing and cooking Nyonya foods. The connection of sensory-based everyday experiences has created an emotional attachment that formed the ‘Sense of Place’ along with the presence of the physical environment particularly in the kitchen as the ‘stomach of the house’ (Lee & Chen, 2012) as well as the other areas where the preparation takes place. This statement also inline with Escobar (2001, p. 143) that

“....recognizing that place, body, and environment integrate with each other; places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations”.

Therefore, the place where the activities conducted over the time significantly contributes to the formation of ‘Sense of Place’ which Smith & Relph (1978) defined as “an interaction of physical characteristics, activities, and meanings linked to a locale”. ‘Sense of Place’ *per se* is not only emphasising on the physical characteristics but also the narratives and emotional ties linked to the experience created over the time. However, the functional spaces for conducting the activities are not static. It is dynamic and humanly constructed (Hepburn, 2016).

Referring back to this research, the everyday life of the Penang Chinese Peranakan descents in cooking Nyonya food apparently has produced functional domestic spaces. These spaces can be produced and reproduced or actively shaped, created, and maintained across time by the human interaction during preparing and cooking. This statement is supported by Henri Lefebvre (1991) with his ‘production of space’ theory. He argued that a space can be produced socially and culturally from the physical attributes as well as the values and meanings that embedded in it, or known as the ‘Space Triad’. The trialectic of spatiality, as illustrated in Figure 1.6., consists of ‘perceived space’ (spatial practice), ‘conceived space’ (representations of space), and ‘lived space’ (spaces of representations). By looking at the production of

social space, the ‘Sense of Place’ could be constructed. Hence, this research refers to Lefebvre’s theoretical lens because of the relevancy of his theory that incorporates a deeper understanding of space based on the everyday life and its complexity. In the next chapter, the detailed explanation of the ‘Sense of Place’ and Lefebvre’s Space Triad will be elaborated in detail.

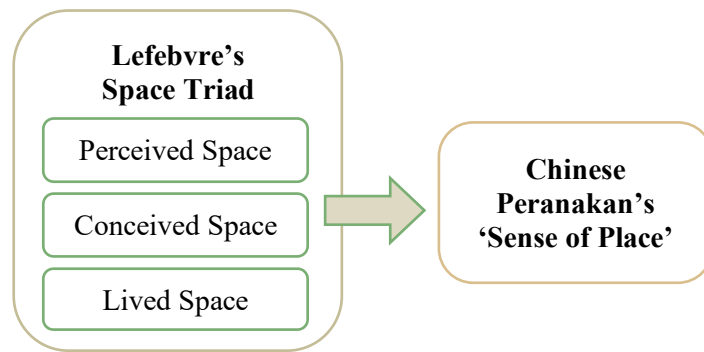


Figure 1.6 Construction of ‘Sense of Place’ based on Lefebvre’s Space Triad

1.3 Problem Statement

As described earlier, the authenticity and integrity of the Chinese Peranakan culture in Penang has to be maintained as a part of retaining the UNESCO WHS status. The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) of George Town WHS categorised the cultural heritage in two categories: Living Cultural Heritage and Built Cultural Heritage (Figure 1.7). In the Chinese Peranakan context, the foods as the ‘items for domestic and religious/cultural’ use are included as the Tangible Living Culture, while the ‘belief systems’ and ‘sense of identity’ are categorised as Intangible Living Culture. The house is listed under the ‘Tangible Built Culture’, and the ‘Sense of Place’ of the Chinese Peranakan culture is included in ‘Intangible Built Culture’. It could be concluded that the foods, house, ‘Sense of Place’, belief systems as well as the sense of identity of the Chinese Peranakan are highly significant cultural elements in George

Town WHS, therefore, these items are compulsory to be conserved for the future generations.

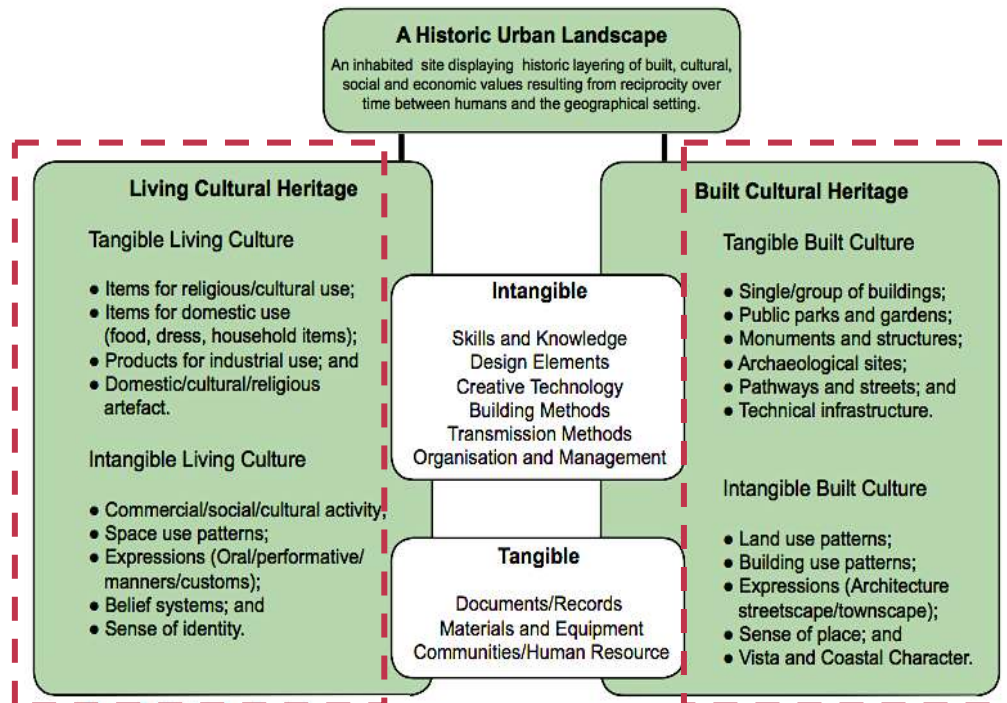


Figure 1.7 Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) of George Town

Source: George Town SAP (2016, p. B1-5)

In George Town’s scenario, ICH – or locally termed as ‘living heritage’ – has become a part of the city life and it is constantly created and recreated. Because of the human creativity and innovation, the authenticity has fallen beyond the scope of ICH. Safeguarding practice is now the key concept of the ICH which differs from the conservation practice for tangible cultural heritage. Built heritage, for example, it is easier to conserve as it has conservation guidelines and OUVs to comply with. Moreover, the tangible elements can be examined physically before and after the conservation practice, as mentioned in the excerpt below:

“If you asking about building, I think that would be much more easier to answer. Because it is tangible. I think that is the fundamental difference of ICH

and tangible heritage, like buildings. Because it is just like standard, you change it, sell it, renovate it... destroy it. But ICH basically it's about the community doing the celebration. Are they still doing it? Are they still celebrating the Awal Muharram before and after the inscription? I think they are still doing it. It is a part of their life..." (GTWHI cultural heritage officer, personal communication, 13 December 2023)

After being inscribed as a UNESCO WHS in 2008, maintaining the OUVs is a deliberate act. Our duty is to maintain the WHS status and hence, the presence of community support is essential. In the context of living heritage, George Town Heritage Celebrations which annually held every 7th of July acts as an effective 'promotional tool' for the local communities to showcase their cultural heritage to the public. This event is driven by the local communities and NGOs, supported by the state government. Although in majority the cultural heritage actors are the elderly, they showed enthusiasm in promoting their culture as stated in the following excerpt:

"If you compare with other minorities group in other states, I would say... without this 'World Heritage' or 'Heritage City', the aura or the umbrella, maybe have less chances to do the performance. Although all *makcik-makcik* already, but every time we have some function or whatever, they are invited to do the performance too... make it a part of the Penang heritage. To show their existence." (GTWHI cultural heritage officer, personal communication, 13 December 2023)

Unfortunately, the young generation of the Chinese Peranakan in the modern urban areas are now modernised and little of them are practicing the cultural beliefs (Adnan & Othman, 2012; Lee, 2008; Yeoh, 2021). Moreover, Khor (2010) also agreed that the Peranakan culture is under a precarious threat because of the westernisation as well as consumerism. A culture will only exist as long as it is practiced and observed. As a result, this will lead to the disappearance of the culture and its true essence in the near future (Lee, 2008). Cultural associations such as State Chinese (Penang) Association/SCPA also lack of participation from the young generations due to insufficient time building their career and family commitment. Not only that, it is also

because cultural heritage is less preferred by the young people globally. Apparently, any type of cultural activities can be considered as a knowledge transmission from the older generation to the young ones as mentioned below:

“So, if you continue practicing, you might find the young blood, you might have the chances to transmit or do the transmission. But like you say, why the traditional art cannot attract young people, I think this happens globally, not just George Town.” (GTWHI cultural heritage officer, personal communication, 13 December 2023)

From the perspective of Tuan (1977), ‘Sense of Place’ could be retained to maintain the relationship’s significance between people with a place through culture. Hence, this clearly indicates that there is an urgency to retain back the ‘Sense of Place’ to maintain the cultural identity of the Chinese Peranakan, both in tangible and intangible forms. In a typical Chinese Peranakan house, the kitchen and courtyard are substantial area for preparing and cooking Nyonya foods. According to the Lefebvre’s Space Triad theory (Lefebvre, 1991), these physical entities of the Chinese Peranakan culture (i.e., dwelling) are related with the ‘perceived space’, whereas the series of activities occurred in the house contributes to the formation of the ‘lived space’ as it is engaged emotionally, culturally, and historically.

As the most influential cultural symbol, food brings people together, become a form of comfort in tough times, and considered as the most tangible connections with the birthplace of their parents. It is also undeniable that food also acts as a medium where the stories and histories are told and remembered, place described, identities formed, and the concept of imagined community is developed (Choo, Carrier, Choo, & Choo, 2004; Lee, 2009). However, Hussin (2014) emphasised that the authenticity of the Nyonya foods has to be maintained by incorporating traditional way of cooking as well as using the original ingredients. Failure to provide the original ingredients, the food will be less authentic and will not be recognised as a Nyonya cuisine in the future.

Another identified problem is the lack of awareness towards the presence of the Nyonya cuisines among the young generations. As much as 48.2% knew about the Nyonya cuisines but not too familiar with it and only 23.6% of the young generations are familiar with Nyonya foods. Sadly, they also cannot differentiate between the Chinese and Nyonya food. Hence in the near future, the Nyonya food culture will slowly eroding if the legacy is discontinued (Albattat, Asmara, Bakri, & Norzaman, 2017).

Referring to the previous research on local foods in Singapore, the sense of ‘touch and feel’ is a vital in inculcating foods with heritage value (Woods & Donaldson, 2021). They also agreed that authenticity of a food could be reproduced through the tactile process which applied over the generations of the family members. Thus, haptic senses are essential factors for handling the ingredients physically in ways to create an authentic end product. Through the embodied memories, a haptic sense of the heritage value could be reproduced in the future. In other words, this repeating process of cooking is a practice - a way for recording and storing social memory and meaning because memory lies in the actions performed (Smith, 2006). Based on the Space Triad theory of Lefebvre, the memories as well as the cultural beliefs that underlie the production of Nyonya cuisines are manifested in the ‘conceived space’.

In summary, the modernisation and globalisation that occurred in this rapid changing society has slowly diminish the tangible and intangible values of the Chinese Peranakan culture. The intangible elements of a culture are manifested in the tangible, therefore, there is an importance to preserve the intangible for the tangible. By bringing back the ‘Sense of Place’, it is expected that all the issues on the ‘perceived’ and ‘conceived’ space in creating ‘lived’ space could be established by using Lefebvre’s Space Triad. In the following sections, the research questions as well as the research

objectives are defined based on the haptic experience of Nyonya food for constructing the ‘Sense of Place’ in Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces.

1.4 Research Questions

This research aims to examine the construction of ‘Sense of Place’ based on the haptic experience of the production of Nyonya foods in a Chinese Peranakan domestic space. Lefebvre’s Space Triad is applied as the theoretical lens to construct the ‘Sense of Place’. The research questions developed from the problems stated on the previous sub-title are as follows:

- a. How does the **haptic experience** occurred in the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces based on the production of Nyonya cuisines?
- b. What are the **haptic elements** to construct the haptic heritage from kitchen to table in Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces?
- c. How does the **haptic heritage** contributes to the formation of ‘**Sense of Place**’ in the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces as an ideological construct?

1.5 Research Objectives

Hence, this research intends:

- a. To investigate the **haptic experience** in the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces.
- b. To examine the **haptic elements** to construct the haptic heritage from kitchen to table in the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces.
- c. To establish the correlation between **haptic heritage** and ‘**Sense of Place**’ in Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces as an ideological construct.

The summary of problem statement, research questions and research objectives of this research are illustrated in Figure 1.8 and the detailed description of the

methodology to answer the research questions is discussed in Chapter 3 – Research Methodology.

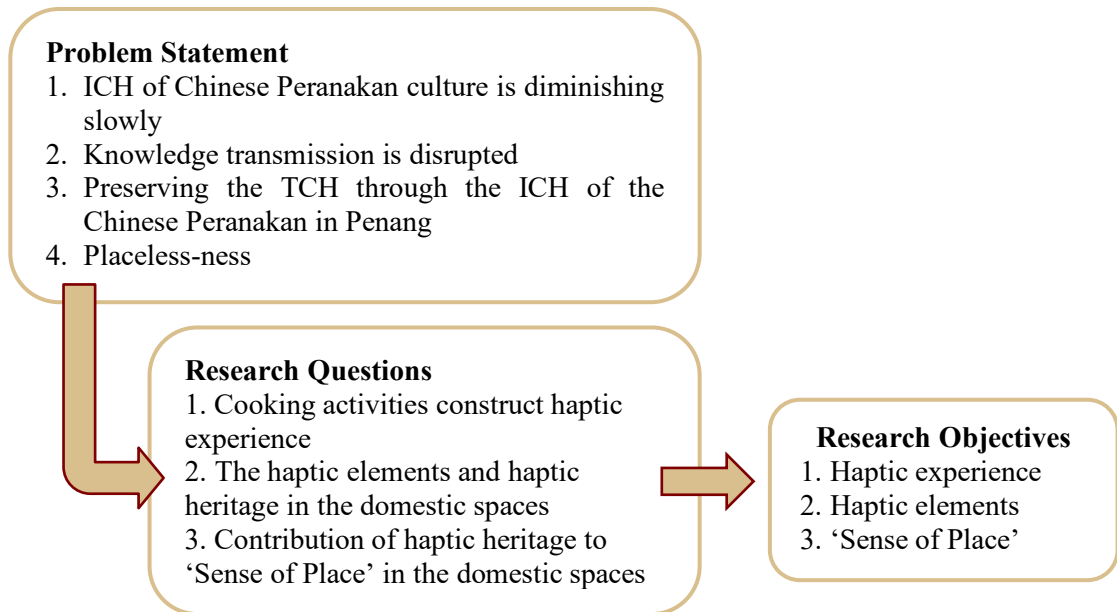


Figure 1.8 Problem Statement, Research Question and Research Objectives

1.6 Significance of the Study

Globally, the Chinese Peranakan culture is at risk of losing its cultural significance due to the modernity and westernisation that affecting the young generations. Another critical issue is the lacking of awareness from the young generations towards the Nyonya food as a culinary heritage as well as cultural foods. To the Chinese Peranakan community, Nyonya food plays a role in the mental, emotional, spiritual and social well-being of a person. It provides multisensorial pleasure that affects the moods and actions and hence, triggers their nostalgia and memories of people, places and events.

By using haptic senses, the past memories in related to Nyonya food production and the haptic spatial impression could be reconstructed. Whereas haptic senses obtained the information based on the context and past experience. Consequently, it

supports the formation of the haptic experience of a place. This is also agreed by Pallasmaa, (2012) that skin, as one of the haptic senses, is also able to trace the temperature of the place. The pleasure on the skin itself could capture the intimate warmth and the pleasure of sensation and turn into haptic experience of the designated space and place. From the theoretical point of view, this research contributes to fill the gap from the previous studies on ‘Sense of Place’ in architecture and based on the Space Triad, domestic space, and haptic heritage in Chinese Peranakan culture context. Lastly, the main finding of this research will be in a form of design criteria of domestic spaces based on the haptic memory as well as the haptic physical. These two essential elements are significant in determining the quality of the final product regardless the time and physical enclosure applied.

To sum up, Figure 1.9 revealed that there is an overlapping area from the three subject matters of this research: (i) ‘Sense of Place’, (ii) Domestic Space, and (iii) Haptic Experience. This overlapping area defines the research gap of this study that is the ‘Sense of Place’ of the Penang Chinese Peranakan culture domestic space by using the haptic experience during preparing and cooking Nyonya food. In the next chapter, the existing studies on these three subject matters are listed in Table 2.4 and followed by the schematic diagram of the theoretical and conceptual framework (Figure 2.28).

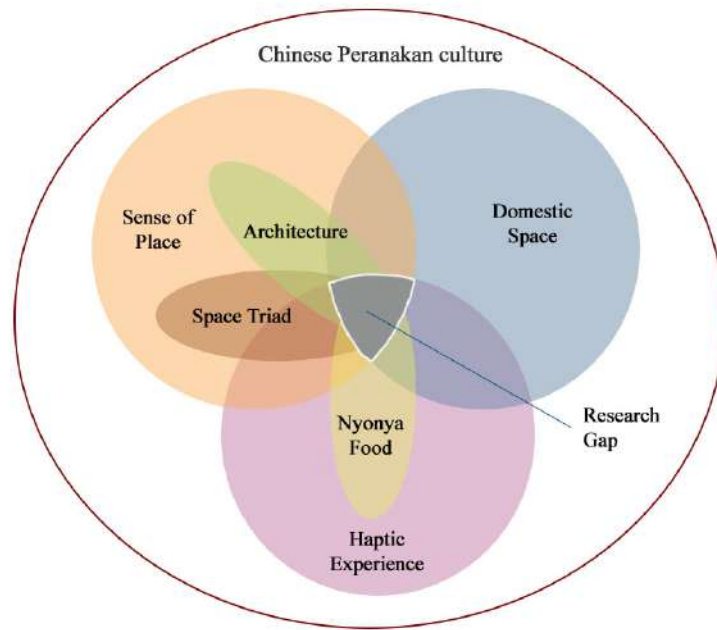


Figure 1.9 Research gap in this study

Source: Author's analysis (2022)

This research also attempts to archive the cultural values of the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces through the construction of 'Sense of Place'. It is expected that the findings of this research could contribute to the body of knowledge in the interior and architecture field, particularly in Chinese Peranakan cultural identity in Penang. Smith (2006) emphasises that architects, archaeologists, and historians act as the steward for the past. Whereas they are responsible to educate and inform the present and the future about its significance. From the viewpoint of Harrison (2013, p. 3), he argues that:

“Heritage is an active process of creative engagement with the past in the present in the production of our future. It is more than just preservation, but an active and informed process of assembling a series of objects, places, and practices that can be used as a mirror to the present, associated with a specific set of values that we wish to take with us into the future.”

It could be concluded that heritage values from the past have to be conserved which will be used in the present moment to create the future. This is also agreed by

Orbasli (2007) that heritage conservation it is not merely about recovering the original form, but also the management of change that includes the efforts to shape and control the future. Heritage, according to Smith (2006), is also acknowledged as a cultural tool for recreating the meaning through reminiscing and remembering. By keeping the authenticity of the cultural heritage values, it could maintain the OUVs of the UNESCO WHS status for the future generations. Moreover, it could also strengthen the cultural identity of the Chinese Peranakan as a cultural heritage in this multi-racial nation.

1.7 Research Scope

This research aims to examine the formation of ‘Sense of Place’ of Penang Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces through the haptic experience based on the Nyonya food production process. The domestic spaces in the Chinese Peranakan homes are categorised as the ‘public domain’ area, i.e., areas which the relationship among the family members are most visible and represented in the spatial and furniture configurations. This is also emphasised by Sankaran (2016 p. 8) that:

“Domestic space and furniture configurations are the identifiable cultural themes generated as a construct to analyse the detail understanding of the Chinese Peranakan culture”

In their daily life, the Nyonyas mainly perform their cooking activities in the kitchen as the domain of the family matriarch (Knapp & Ong, 2012; Lee & Chen, 2012). However, other areas such as the courtyard and dining area are presumed also used for preparation before cooking. These areas are categorised as the ‘lived space’. It is where the series of activities behind the production of Nyonya food are conducted. Those three areas are categorised as the primary features in a Chinese culture house (Kohl, 1984). Hence, this research concentrates on the domestic spaces as the ‘Lived

Space’ in producing Nyonya foods until the final product is served, be it is for daily consumption on a **dining table**, cultural festival such as in **long table banquet** (*th’ng tok* or *tok panjang*), or religious offering in the **altar table** (*sam kai tok* and *ang kong tok*). By analysing the haptic experience based on the embodied memories in producing Nyonya food, the ‘Sense of Place’ of the Chinese Peranakan domestic spaces can be constructed.

1.8 Background of the Study Area

Geographically, Penang is situated at the ‘Mediterranean of Asia’ which located at the crossroads of global maritime trading routes between Indian and Pacific oceans and two sub-continents i.e., India and China (Figure 1.10). The strategic location of Penang has brought various cultural invasion that shaped the cultural elements (language, religion, norms, values, and customs) through assimilation that nurtured locally. Similar like the other Straits Settlements (i.e., Melaka and Singapore), George Town is a cosmopolitan city which metaphorically illustrated like a vessel. It is loaded with activities, cultures, symbolisms, rituals of the people from the immigrants which characterise the cosmopolitan urban morphology (Pue, 2016; Widodo, 2004, 2016).