

An evaluation of the alleys of Glodok and its market culture

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received July 25, 2023 Received in revised form Oct. 26, 2023 Accepted Oct. 30, 2023 Available online December 01, 2023</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Chinatown Chinese-Indonesian Glodok Interiority Market culture</p> <p>*Corresponding author: Agus Suharjono Ekomadyo Architecture Department, School of Architecture, Planning, and Policy Development, Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia Email: ekomadyo@itb.ac.id ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6124-6886</p>	<p><i>Glodok is considered one of the largest Chinese urban areas in Indonesia, featuring shops, dwellings, temples, alleyways, and various other elements of Chinese culture. Several local urban practices can also be identified, including selling and buying, as well as the house-shop relations that are accomplished through the spaces between the buildings or the alleys. The people act as active agents of spatial production in everyday life in this location, supporting their economic, social, and cultural activities. To investigate the interrelationship between Chinese-Indonesian market culture and its influence on interiority, literature studies, and ethnography methods were practiced. The results of the study showed three main aspects affecting the interiority of Glodok, namely the 3-dimensional space of the alleys, the cultural identity, and the activity of the people, as well as experiences. Furthermore, the interiority is manifested in the activity of each individual and experiences within the alley, which exists due to market culture. Through an architectural approach that focuses on accommodating the local tradition, culture, and beliefs, the ambience present in Glodok causes both the people and visitors to unintentionally think about nostalgic experiences and memories, thereby creating an emotional, cultural, and historical engagement.</i></p>

Introduction

Glodok is one of the biggest Chinese urban places in Indonesia, and it consists of shops, dwellings, temples, alleyways, and other Chinese-related urban elements. Examining the historical timeline of the district, this place was initially formed to accommodate only Hokkien descent, who are Chinese from Fujian or Zhang Tian area. In 1740, the area evolved to be a shelter against the Chinese massacre by Dutch colonists in Batavia (Fatimah 2014). Consequently, Chinese immigrants from all regions lived side by side, creating a strong, resilient, and potent community that could seize opportunities to transform Glodok into an urban place. This was characterized by the uniqueness of its local spatial practices, thereby

creating a distinction from global urban settings (Atmodiwirjo and Yatmo 2021).

These specific practices performed by urban actors could lead to narratives on the uses and meanings of urban settings (Atmodiwirjo, Johaness, and Yatmo 2019). In Glodok, these local urban practices are identified as the action of selling and buying, as well as house-shop relations accomplished through the spaces between the buildings, namely the alleys. In most cases, alleys have the characteristic of a monotonous continuity of house façades or rows of trees, creating interminable and boring corridors (Hénard 1972). On the other hand, Glodok has a unique attribute, also known as the street front, that captures the social vocation and mediation between house and street. In these in-between spaces, the life of the residence and work



is projected and represented in the urban function (Martinelli 2019). Humans act as active entities within the interior and architectural space (Atmodiwirjo and Yatmo 2018; Paramita and Schneider 2018), thereby influencing spatial quality (Yatmo and Atmodiwirjo 2013). In this manner, individuals provide active responses toward their environment and also function as active agents of spatial production in everyday life, supporting their economic, social, and cultural activities. The physical characteristics of buildings are for differentiating places and also an effect resulting from the people perception and the remaining memory (Altman and Low 1992; Scannell and Gifford 2014). Therefore, this study documents the alley of Petak Sembilan and Gloria in Glodok to examine the interrelationship between Chinese-Indonesian market culture.

Market culture in Chinese-Indonesian

The Chinese in Indonesia have long been known for their ability to trade goods. Previous studies have identified two key determinants for this skill, namely *xinyong* and *guanxi*, which means trust and personal connections, respectively (Suyama 1976; Barton 1983; Limlingan 1987; Harrell 1985; Redding 1991). The Chinese-Indonesian business mainly depends on the networks spanning Southeast Asia, since they are uncomfortable with both anonymous and institutionalized arrangements (Hefner 2019). Nevertheless, the Chinese approach to business was based on personal trust relationships and word-of-mouth agreements that reduced transaction costs and gained more profit in the long run (Barton 1983 and Landa 1983).

In terms of culture, the Chinese and the indigenous people in Indonesia have certainly undergone some assimilation (Skinner 1957; Mackie 1988). This results in the non-homogeneous Chinese-Indonesian, characterized by significant differences between first-generation immigrants or 'totok' and those who have settled abroad for several generations or 'peranakan' (Hefner 2019; Landa 1983). The Southeast Asian Chinese continue to value their elements of ethnic and cultural heritage, and the historical interaction with indigenous neighbours has influenced their ethnic and cultural identity in complex ways (Gungwu 1988 and Mackie 1988).

The Chinese-Indonesian prosperity faced challenges due to exclusion from land ownership, government service, and armed forces, compelling them to maximize available

opportunities for wealth accumulation (Hefner 2019). This was made possible by the Chinese because of their legendary qualities of enterprise, hard work, frugality, family solidarity, education, and other "neo-Confucian" or "entrepreneurial" virtues (Bastin 2015 and Wu 1983). Moreover, almost all Chinese businessmen had strong motivations to succeed from the earliest years, when poverty was the greatest spur, down to contemporary times with high discrimination. Trading is a cultural heritage that is passed down from generations by including children and grandchildren early in the business. This knowledge is carried out by family members informally through in-store buying and selling (Soewarno and Wardhani 2023).

Chinese-Indonesian also showed an intense dependence on their family, but low levels of social trust. The habits of diligence, persistence, and determination to enhance the family patrimony characteristic are emblematic of Chinese entrepreneurial behaviour. These market practices, characterized by high degrees of leadership turnover and social mobility, are cultural forms that developed in China and were adapted to colonial and immigrant situations (Omohundro 1981). In all regards, they have a significant advantage over the majority of indigenous rivals who possess more relaxed social structures and cognatic (bilateral) descent systems (Hefner 2019). This situation eventually leads to a phenomenon where the majority of Chinese in Indonesia choose business over other careers, due to their values and experience, as well as the potential for greater rewards (Hefner 2019). Consequently, Chinese cultural features relating to business success are most likely to be preserved, such as in the case of Glodok, Jakarta.

Method

This study used literature and ethnography methods to identify the characteristics of settlements and explore the impact of market and trade culture on the livelihood of the Chinese community in Glodok. The primary reference was regarding the market culture of the Chinese community in Southeast Asia (Hefner 2019) and current studies of those in Glodok. The literature also includes other fields, such as the morphology of the city, mixed-use architecture, housing, and segmented land use. By incorporating this literature, observations and interview transcripts

were used as a reference in conducting an immersive ethnography study within 14 days of the Chinese community of Glodok, particularly at Petak Sembilan and Gloria Alley. This approach allowed for close observation of their behaviour and interactions, as shown in [figure 1](#).

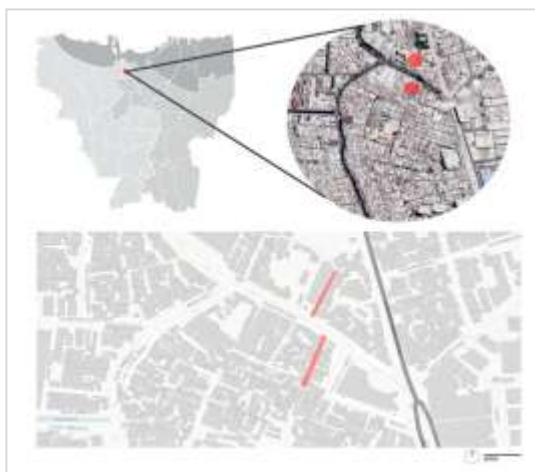


Figure 1. Locus of the research

Results and discussion

According to the local Chinese community in Glodok, the first culture introduced by their ancestors was trade and market. These Chinese immigrants came from the land of Fujian in Southeastern Chinese province, due to the economic crisis and poverty at that time. During their arrival, Glodok was an area used by the Dutch colonists for place and commodity transit. As specified by the Chinese immigrants, this area was considered a potential place for economic growth and newly established businesses. Driven by a commitment to improve their economic conditions, the Chinese community was not discouraged by existing market competition, despite being a newcomer with limited capital. During these years, the Chinese ethnicity mainly adapted and assimilated their way of living and ideals to the new environment rather than spreading their hometown cultures, as shown in [figure 2](#).



Figure 2. Petak Sembilan Alley; Gloria Alley

Ceria Uniq shop

The eye-catching red colour dominated the building, making Ceria Uniq shop a place to purchase *sangjit*, a traditional Chinese-Indonesian engagement ceremony. This shop is owned by a Chinese merchant who has been selling the same item for decades. The shop is nicely decorated with Chinese ornaments, such as *lampion* (Chinese lantern) and *fu* (福) character stickers, believed to bring luck to the success of the shop. According to the owner, it was once renovated around the 1970s, but the exact year when this building was built is unknown. However, it is certain that the building has never been demolished, as indicated by the thick wall and authentic Chinese shop house design. The shop also functions as a house, where the owner and family live on the upper floor, as shown in [figure 3](#).



Figure 3. Ceria Uniq shop

Tak Kie coffee and Kopitiam

Being one of the most popular destinations in Glodok, Tak Kie coffee has been serving kopitiam experience in the district since 1927. Accordingly, it is located in Gloria Alley, with the name Tak Kie derived from the Cantonese language meaning “simple” and “modest”. Tak Kie coffee and Kopitiam is a family business that has been running for 4 generations with the same menu

since it was founded, keeping the legacy of the kopitiam menu, as shown in figure 4.



Figure 4. Tak Kie coffee and Kopitiam

Referring to the old photos on the interior walls, Tak Kie coffee has undergone many changes. It previously had a very wide entrance, spaces for parking, and outdoor dine-in tables that allowed for large gatherings. However, since massive urbanization and uncontrolled development by the local settlements, Gloria Alley was transformed into a double-loaded street, only accessible for bikes and pedestrians. The façade of the shop also changed as it adjusted to the new situations and conditions. Steel gate was added in the early 1940s, with the renovation to create a better structure by substituting wood for concrete blocks. This shop has private dwellings on the upper floor like other houses in Glodok.

The shop has many small tenants in front of the building, selling various kinds of street food. Regardless of the small space, the kopitiam consistently attracts a full house and serves as the most awaited shop to open in the morning. According to the current owner, the shop never had an idea to relocate or modernize its ways to fit into the new generation or latest trends. Precisely, the family prefers to preserve the originality and the antiques, in terms of the menu or the building.

Persahabatan Shop

Persahabatan Shop has a typical Chinese storefront, with wide openings for doors and windows in all parts of its facade. The wall above the openings was covered with brown corrugated metal sheets with a wooden signage board having the former name of the shop, “诚友”. It also has a mirror and a talisman, also known as *patkua*, which is believed to ward off bad energy or unluckiness. The colour red that illuminates the

storefront mainly came from *denglongs* (灯笼), hio packets, candles, and other confucianism prayer equipment displayed, as shown in figure 5.



Figure 5. Persahabatan shop

It was first established in 1946 under the name Chéng yǒu (诚友), or in Konghu dialect called *yusheng*. The building of the shop was made of a wooden structure, with detachable wood for the door. Since its establishment, this store has not undergone a massive renovation, except for the conversion of its wooden structure into concrete, due to the short amount of money and the obscurity of the land and building ownership. Fortunately, the concrete structure that was added to the building saved the shop from the fire that broke out in Glodok during the 1998 riot.

This shop is also family-owned, as compared to other businesses in Glodok. It was built by the owner of the present parents who came from Foshan in the 1930s. According to the owner, the father worked at a pawnshop back in the hometown before deciding to migrate to Batavia in pursuit of a better life. Initially, this shop sold prayer equipment, canned food products, and spices. In 1992, when the store was passed to the second generation, all the products were changed to prayer equipment to avoid loss from expired food. Even though the products sold were changed, the owner stated that the regulars of the shop still make purchases even from cities outside Jakarta. According to the owner, those deals are only possible due to the mutual trust and good relationship maintained between the owner and the regulars.

Jaya Abadi trading company

Jaya Abadi trading company arguably has one of the most unique storefronts in Petak Sembilan. A 160-centimeters-wide folding door was placed in the middle and fixed windows with trellis on both sides of the door, all painted with the colour

of luck, red. Above the door were hung several red lanterns, also known as *denglong*, which symbolize prosperity, and a red signage board with the name “章長盛” painted gold. The main access to the shop is through a concrete bridge, built above a small canal. The arch-shaped railings of the bridge were also painted red, amplifying the Chinese vibe of the façade. Aside from the main access, this multi-storey building has a side entrance, opening towards a small alleyway where this shop and some other merchants display their live seafood products (figure 6).

This grocery store was established in 1905 under the name of *Zhāngzhǎngshèng* (章長盛) and later changed to Jaya Abadi Trading Company. Accordingly, it was renovated several times for various reasons, including flood, conflagration during the 1998 riot, and weakened structures. The renovations included elevating the building level, changing its structures to steel, redesigning its interior layout, and many more. Although a number of renovations were done to this 5-generation shop, some Chinese cultural attributes persist, serving as a reflection of the values and beliefs held by the owners. Another decision made by the owners is not relocating to a new location, based on the belief that Glodok has good energy, yielding luck, commonly called *hoki*. Other determining factors that encourage the owners not to relocate are the regulars of the shop and their relationships. In the event of a relocation, some regulars would face difficulties in locating the new place and rearranging the delivery route for their order.



Figure 6. Jaya Abadi trading company

The Chinese decided to settle down and trade various commodities in Glodok due to its development. By this time of settlement, other Chinese activities, such as prayers and commemorative ceremonies were introduced, developing a new community that seeks internal agreement and exclusiveness. Due to the homogeneity of Chinese ethnicity in the newly built community area, Glodok was identified as a Chinatown. In the course of this study, three main aspects affecting interiority were found, namely the 3-dimensional space, the cultural identity, and the activity of the people, as well as experiences (Crysler 2003).

Three-Dimensional Space of Glodok's Alleys

The Alley of Petak Sembilan and Gloria is still inhabited by its merchants and family. The kind of architecture developed by the Chinese Diasporas in Southeast Asia was different from their original typologies in Mainland China (Widodo 2004). According to a previous study, the Chinese-Indonesian row houses dated back to 1761 with a distinguished roof style and deep verandahs when Dutch authorities granted permission to add those prominent characters into the design and construction of the houses (Greig 1987). In this instance, the verandahs act as the connecting space between the building and the alley, bringing people together, the goods for sale, and their interaction, and also creating a sense of attachment to the place.

Most of the family still preserve the original shophouse typology where the ground and upper floors function as shop and residential areas, respectively. This type of housing also demonstrates the relation between each house and the alley, which is present due to market culture. Having only 3 meters in width, the alley of Petak Sembilan and Gloria can only accommodate pedestrians and motorcycles, allowing the merchants to bring their goods to the street. Furthermore, some choose to keep the stuff inside

the shop, giving the space to street vendors that mainly sell snacks and drinks. The spatial integration between informal and formal sectors in these alleys sustains and catalyzes larger urban frameworks (Juwita and Dwisusanto 2022).

Unlike most street vendor cases, the merchant and the hawker maintain a relatively good relationship, making Petak Sembilan and Gloria a place where culture, social, and private life co-exist. It is known that this informal street space is the forerunner to the success of economic activity. This is because it attracts the emergence of businesses that take advantage of the crowd as a profitable economic opportunity (Dwisusanto and Nusaputra 2022). Furthermore, despite having a non-uniform building facade, both alleys still give a nostalgic feeling, especially for those who are Chinese-descent. This is also due to the blurred boundaries, the ornaments, the colour, and most importantly, the shophouse typology itself (Nusaputra and Dwisusanto 2022).

Cultural identity due to market culture

This study showed that cultural identity gave a strong sociocultural tradition and a unique ambience of interiority due to market culture. The first market culture is the participation of the whole family in the market and trading business. As the community implies, unilateral decision-making is considered an impolite gesture towards the entire family. Moreover, business is usually carried out together and run based on the trust of the family members, because they have their financial planning and the location of trading. Through this study, there is a consistency of location and personal sense of place occurring in Glodok. Many shops have not changed their initial location and design regardless of economic fluctuations and policy changes, while the majority preserve their original location and model to avoid any internal property rights disputes. The result of this study also showed the importance of an understanding among family members to use all kinds of potential spaces in the house for the benefit of the whole family (Harani, Murtini, and Wardhani 2022).

The second market tradition present is the reliance on *xinyong* (trust) and *guanxi* (connections). These two values are the determining factors that shop owners consider when making any business-related decisions. For instance, due to the regulars of shops and small merchants whom they have built mutual relationships with, shops were not relocated even

after years of operation. Consequently, it is wise to say that in doing business, the Chinese-Indonesians solely depend on their networks as they find this approach more comfortable. This method also allows for the reduction in transaction costs, thereby gaining more profit in the long run (Barton 1983 and Landa 1983).

The next market culture is their strong belief in energy or *fengshui*. Business owners who hold onto this belief believe that Glodok is an area with good energy that yields luck or *hoki*. Therefore, relocating their shop to another place was not really an option. Many still believe that selling the shop will give bad luck to the family and their businesses since the shop has been inherited from the previous generations and will also be handed down to future generations.

The work ethics and business idealism of the Chinese-Indonesian cannot be overemphasized. Accordingly, it is known that most of the first-generation shop owners came from Southern China, where people struggled with poverty. They eventually moved to Indonesia in search of better lives. The struggle is then believed to be the reason for their virtues, such as diligence, thriftiness, hardiness, and self-reliance. Therefore, the Chinese community in Glodok believes that the purpose and virtue of their culture are the essence of operating their business.

People's activities and experiences

The repetitive actions and unique ambiances from Glodok are made possible because of the existence of cultural identity within the 3-dimensional space of the alleys. According to (Aguspriyanti 2022), this kind of people-place bond is influenced by external dimensions, which include the physical characteristics of the place, and internal dimensions, such as social intercourse, cohesion, and symbol. Three main experiences were identified in this study, namely shophouse experiences, human-scaled spaces, and nostalgic occurrences.

Shophouse experiences

A change in trends in market demand became evident because industrialization became instrumental in economic development. Consequently, some shops replaced their local handicrafts and raw materials with reinforced and manufactured goods to adjust to the high market demand. In several cases, others merge local commodities and import high-quality products into their catalogue. Almost all shops in Glodok

followed similar trends and developments, each adapting to the market trend. Therefore, shop houses offer both physical experiences and an uncommon atmosphere generated by the turnover of goods. the public can also feel a sense of familiarity with the shop in their home because it functions as a dwelling. This result is consistent with the report of Benjamin (2002) that to dwell means to leave traces.

Human-scaled space

The owners of shops and the hawkers occupying the narrow alley maintain informal relations. Buyers have the option to purchase goods both from the shop and the hawkers simultaneously, and subsequently, enjoy leisure time in the area between the building and the alley. This exemplifies a mutual relationship between the two entities. This alley has become an everyday space that manifests what the inhabitants perceive, experience, and feel. Furthermore, it reflects how the inhabitants occupy, transform, and adapt to the space. Interiority is defined by the occupation and becomes the reflection of the identity, subjective experience, and personal responses of the inhabitants (Atmodiwirjo and Yatmo 2019). This interiority is produced by the experience of inhabitants on the condition of the interior regardless of spatial ownership. For example, both private and public spaces can have a public interior (Poot, Van Acker, and De Vos 2015).

Nostalgic occurrence

Nostalgic experience was present within the alleys due to the belief in *fengshui*, which is shown on most building facades. The majority of buildings are nicely decorated with *lampion* (Chinese lantern) and *fu* (福) character stickers, creating a nostalgic ambience, particularly for Chinese-descent. This is consistent with the report of (Pimlott 2018) that familiarity and spatial intimacy are nostalgic, giving a sense of attachment, reassurance, and safety. Mezzino (2017) also stated that social institutions and cultural values mediate the relationships between forms and meanings of any built heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interiority of the alley in Glodok, particularly in Petak Sembilan and Gloria, was manifested in the activities of each

individual and experiences within the 3-dimensional space of the alley. The legacy of market culture passed down from generation to generation taught the Chinese-Indonesian families a fair and sustainable exchange system, the importance of networking and maintaining a good relationship with partners, as well as the value of cultural identity assimilation. Through an architectural approach that focused on accommodating the traditional culture, and beliefs of the local community, the ambience present in Glodok caused the people and visitors to unintentionally think about nostalgic experiences and memories, creating an emotional, cultural, and historic engagement. Architectural designs that explicitly displayed cultural attributes through decorations and ornaments, as well as functional designs that implicitly reflect culture (Rapoport 2000), are not inherently superior or inferior to one another. Provided this place could accommodate the traditions of the Chinese community and showed their cultural identity, Glodok will naturally be preserved because of the local's sense of attachment and belonging. Preservation of culture should not be forced but presented in such a way that allowed coexistence with the life of the community that adheres to that culture.

Investigating businesses in Glodok and their values was undoubtedly a wonderful experience. Therefore, it was suggested that future investigations set up an interview with the local community officials, such as village heads, to enrich the results of this study.

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Author(s) contribution

Valary Budianto contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies,

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