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**Designing Movable Kitchen Cart
through the Elements of Traditional Baba Nyonya House**

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Abstract

Malaysia is known for its multicultural diversity, which is heavily influenced by the ancient Malay culture, indigenous peoples and the cultures of Malaysia's second main ethnics groups - the Chinese and Indian. For centuries, our cultures have blended to create Malaysia's diverse heritage. Sadly, Malaysians are slowly losing their ancient culture due to modernisation. One particular culture of Malaysia that is close to extinction is the Peranakan culture. The researcher found it vital to implement our cultural motif into product design, so she has come out with a freestanding kitchen with an influence of the Peranakan motif.

Keywords: Free-standing Cabinets, Kitchen, Peranakan.

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1.0 Introduction

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, descendants of immigrants from China and India came to the Malay Archipelago due to colonial rule and trading, which resulted in the urban complexes of Malacca and Penang. It has become an extraordinarily diverse place, with no dominant community until the mid-19th Century. (Reid, Anthony, July 2010. "Malaysia/Singapore as Immigrant Societies"). The Chinese immigrants have settled down and expanded their living culture for many centuries and form the second-largest ethnics group in the city near to the port, where trading is their primary activity. This is how the evolution of Baba and Nyonya or Peranakan evolved. (Raghavan, 1977. "Ethno-racial marginality in West Malaysia").

The Peranakan, also called the Baba Nyonya, became part of the prosperous Straits Chinese elite, with a distinctive language, houses, customs, food and dress. This is because most of them were businessmen and traders, which helped them become wealthy and influential people in the straits. They worked in the business field since they were also the middleman of the British and the Chinese, or the Chinese and Malays, or vice versa because they were primarily English educated. This can be verified through their bejewelled attire (sarung kebaya), shoes and embroidery pieces, where details of the items were from refined workmanship and highly sought after by art and antique collectors.

1.1 Rational

Based on an article in The Malaysian Times (Feb 2017), the Baba Nyonya community in Melaka faces pressures and various challenges due to 21st-century modernisation. The community worries that their culture will become extinct. What is more worrying is that the young

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descendants do not practice the customs any longer and have very little knowledge of the culture since they were influenced mainly by the western and K-Pop cultures through the media. Although the Baba and Nyonya culture is only practised by people in certain parts of our country, Malaysia's history certainly has value. It is crucial to create awareness in bringing back the Baba and Nyonya culture, which can be done in many ways.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Materials

2.1.1 Subject Matter

The Baba Nyonya motif has been getting its popularity in the design world for the past two years. Throughout design magazines and articles, many designers have started to retrieve the culture through design, especially in interior design and architecture. Numerous studies and efforts can be found in preserving the colonial shophouses in Malacca and Penang. An example of this is a paper presented by Dr A. Ghafar Ahmad, 'The Architectural Style of the Peranakan Cina' at 'Minggu Warisan Baba dan Nyonya' in Universiti Sains Malaysia, on December 3, 1994. He explained how significant it is to examine and preserve these houses not just on an architectural basis but also in the context of cultural aspects and social customs.

This guided the researcher to look into architecture for the product motifs and focus on choosing the shop houses facade as it has a beautiful character, such as the window with ventilation. Not only the design looks attractive, but it comes with an important function. To keep the house cool. It is the most affordable and most accessible way to obtain sustainable wind power, according to Vermont, based on his research paper 'Developing Sarawak Motif Elements of Ventilation Pattern Through Ceramic Stoneware Materials'. This concept is also used in kitchen doors, especially if the unit is used to store appliances or hold cooking items. The paper also mentioned that implementing a particular ventilation design can keep the heritage element for the future generation. Another aspect to taken seriously on the subject matter, referring to a paper by Legino, R. Malaysia needs to highlight and use heritages preservation approach to cooperate with the economic improvement through the creative output.



Fig. 1. Colonial shophouses in Georgetown, Penang.
(Source: babanyonyaculture.wordpress.com)

2.1.2 Background Study

Since the researcher is keen on designing a product, she focuses on an area inside the Peranakan house related to the chosen motif. By choosing an area, she referred to a research survey conducted in 2009 by Yazıcıoğlu and Kanoglu (Istanbul Technical University), that on average, 30% of the works done in the house consist of food preparation and actions related to its which referred to the kitchen.

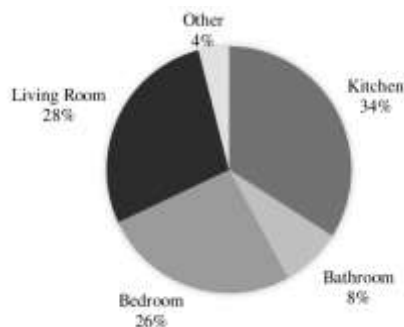


Fig. 2. Result on the most frequently used area (Yazıcıoğlu and Kanoglu, 2009)
(Source: Academic Research International)

In addition to this, there is also a saying that if a Peranakan friend invites you over but never shows you the kitchen, they do not like us. It shows that in the Peranakan home, the kitchen reigns as the soul of the house. This strengthens the researcher's decision on choosing a kitchen as the product to be designed.



Fig. 3. Traditional Nyonya Kitchen
(Source: Peranakan Mansion Museum, Penang)

Beneath the traditional Nyonya kitchen design based on Figure 3, there is not much difference compared to the 21st-century modern kitchen. The kitchen has separate space for cooking, washing and storing, similar to modern times. However, the only noticeable difference is that the cabinets are a freestanding type. At this moment, freestanding cabinets are not as popular in Malaysia as in Europe and in the United States, yet interestingly all kitchen cabinets from all over the world start from a freestanding unit and later become modular and fitted type.

The history of kitchen cabinet making comes from a very long way, and it was around 120 years ago by a German company named PoggenPohl, who produced freestanding cabinets with a top and bottom cabinet combined and in between comes a countertop for the food preparation as shown in Figure 4. The similar cabinets in the traditional Nyonya's kitchen.

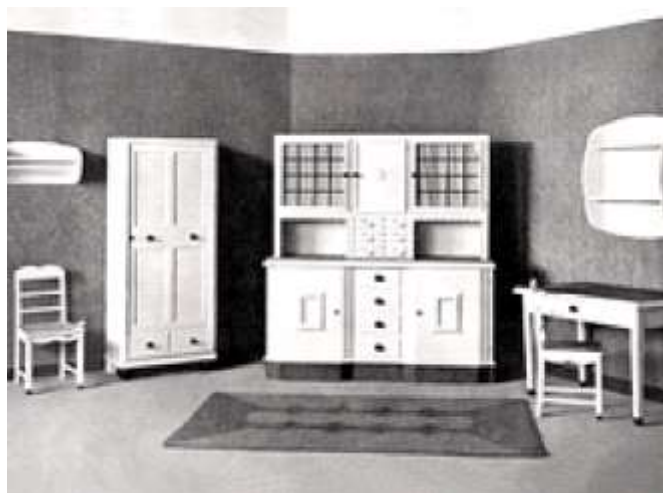


Fig. 4. Reform kitchen cabinets by PoggenPohl, a forerunner to the unit kitchen and fitted kitchens in 1928.
(Source: Poggenpohl.com)

After exploring the kitchen design trends for 2018, the researcher is keen on making a kitchen in freestanding type. This is because, at EuroCucina, an event held every year in Milan to showcase top-notch kitchen design around the globe, PoggenPohl, one of the biggest brands in the industry, exhibits their freestanding collection for that year which is called +VENOVO. PoggenPohl convinces with furniture that fits in every life and yet makes its presence felt unique. It stated that the freestanding kitchen explores more freedom for users who prefer to stay flexible and always on the move, which proves that freestanding kitchen cabinets are no longer outdated.



Fig. 5. VENOVO kitchen by PoggenPohl in 2018.
(Source: Poggenpohl.com)

3.0 Methodology

After collecting data on literature reviews and through some observation, the researcher started the design with a sketch based on the selected motif, which is the facade of the shophouses. Then, the researcher goes into the details of the product and produces a technical drawing.

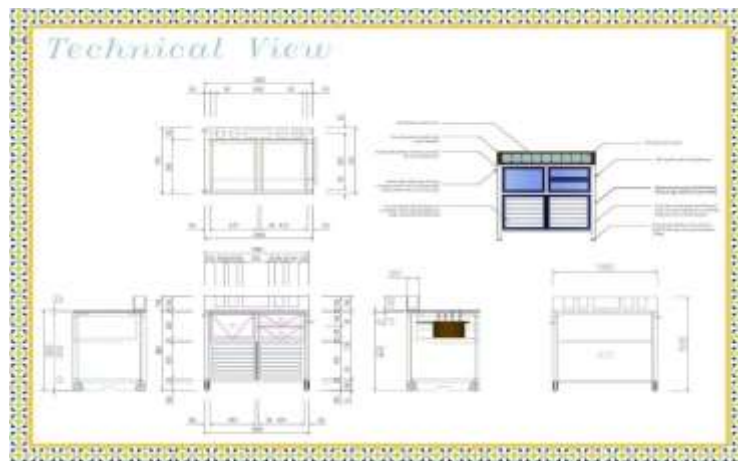


Fig. 6. Detail drawing of the proposed product.



Fig. 7. Detail of Dapoque

Next, she developed it into a 3D visualisation. Refer to Figures 6 and 7 for a closer understanding of the product—the cabinet forms into a movable kitchen cart with additional accessories for the convenience of cooking. The accessories consist of a knife box, an attached/detached box with containers to place spices, condiments and cooking utensils. The kitchen cart also comes with a castor wheel and a handle for the convenience of having it mobile.

4.0 Result & Conclusion

The researcher has named it Dapoque, which means kitchen in northern Malaysian slang. It is a freestanding kitchen cart with a mobile option that gives the user many flexibilities to clean their kitchen and reposition for their kitchen décor. It has Baba Nyonya motifs on the doors referring to the facade of the shophouses.

This louvres door design comes with a purpose: to give ventilation since the space of the bottom cabinet is suitable to place freestanding ovens or any other small appliances. That is why the louvres doors can be slot-in so that the user can have a good view of their oven while cooking or baking. Other Peranakan motifs can be found on its knob and the accessories box container.



Fig. 7. Perspective view of 'Dapoque.'

Baroque is to be used as a single piece and suitable to be used as a complete kitchen set. It can be a kitchen island or just another extra unit in our kitchen for preparation or serving for the single-use. The function of Dapoque is not limited to the kitchen area only, but also as a console table for the dining area or porch when the user needs extra space for food preparations while hosting a party. Besides residential uses, Dapoque is also suitable for commercial spaces like cafes or even offices as their go-to-pantry.

Having a piece that reminds us of the Baba Nyonya tradition in our home or workplace will spread awareness among the youngsters about their forgotten culture and create appreciation and love towards our unique culture. After all, our culture is our identity. It is who we are and what we are proud of. The food has shaped us as Malaysian, and performing in a kitchen with a local character brings a sense of patriotism to each of us.

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