BETWEEN MONUMENTALITY AND DOMESTICITY:

A Study of The Blue Mansion

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to re-examine the notion of domesticity in the context of the Chinese house with the dominance of the patriarch as the head of the family and to recast theories of domesticity within a Chinese urban context. It draws parallel arguments with Rachel Whiteread's site-specific sculpture, *House*, which deals succinctly with the general concerns of monumentality and domesticity. This concretized iconic volume embodies familiarity of notions associated with home, familial living, ritual, nostalgia and gender roles.

My dissertation examines the domesticity of Cheong Fatt Tze's mansion, or better known as the Blue Mansion, through various periods, users and elements of the monument. The contestation for space between the monument and the domestic resulted in highly unanticipated and unimaginable means. The gendered reading of the patriarch, associated with ideals of rationality and order, is mirrored on the monument, built to survive beyond his own demise. Conversely, the domestic is gendered feminine due to traditional associations of women's role in the patriarchal family. Built on narratives from biographical and historical accounts, this paper develops its own voice into the search for the transgression of boundaries between the domestic and the monumental. This dissertation seeks to challenge the notion of a gender-scripted space by looking at the connections between women and inside spaces. Also, it looks at how architecture is continually reproduced through changing users and daily activities.

My conviction is that these two polarities do not exist independent of each other. The divide between private and public, domestic and monumental, is often balanced between banal objects of home décor and methods of spatial planning, coupled with bodily transgressions. Through these, I aim to deconstruct the Blue Mansion, tearing it apart to reveal fractures that persistently weaken the position of the patriarchal monument. These fractures represent the voices of the domestic, those who intend to reclaim their space at home.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Lilian Chee

Title: Assistant Professor

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> *'The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind'-Khalil Gibran*

Grandpa

You showered me with unconditional love, kept me in your prayers every night and will always be my inspiration.

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You nurtured me, cared for me and supported me all the way. Most importantly, you believed in me.

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You provided me with sustenance and shelter, shared my burden and made sure that I am comfortable. Your unspoken love speaks more than words.

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Messengers of God, you manifest in so many ways that it is hard not to miss. You consistently remind me that I will never walk alone in any journey. Thank you.

CONTENTS

(11, 378 words)

The façade was Chinese in character with massively carved wooden doors as the main entrance. The porch was inlaid with the whitest marble floor… flowed into the sitting room and contrasted dramatically with the hand-carved black ebony furniture decked with mother-of-pearl motifs. These were specially imported from China and visitors to the house never failed to comment on their exquisiteness and beauty. The banquet hall… was solely used for the wining and dining of dignitaries. The décor…was European, with a long dining table and chandeliers overhead. The best chinaware and glassware were displayed in carved wooden sideboards with glass doors and mirrored backs. The brilliance of the reflection was something to hold one's breath for…his father kept an office and a library, which overlooked the front courtyard. Popular plants of the day were everywhere growing out of Chinese pots.

The middle portion of the house consisted of another sitting room, though less austere than the front one, and utility rooms like sewing room, prayer room, study room, sick room, games room, wash rooms, and the family dining room. Whereas the front portion of the house was deserted, the middle hummed with life. Here, his mother and sister, and their slaves practiced the art of gentility, and here he persisted with his education. An inner courtyard separated it from the back portion of the house… Forming a cluster at the far end of the inner courtyard were the kitchen, laundry area, and servants' quarters. Beyond it, out of sight, lay the stables and later, the garages. The upper floor consisted entirely of bedrooms, bathrooms, and balconies. A high wall with glass splinters embedded along the top surrounded and secured the house and its occupants…

~Yeap Joo Kim, The Patriarch, pp.33-4 ~


仁壽
智樂

ENTERING THE MONUMENT

Cheong Fatt Tze

> *It was hard to say where he was domiciled; he was so incessantly on the move. But the lovely island of Penang… it was there that he built himself his most splendid residence, a mansion large enough, it was thought, to house nine generations of future descendants.*[1]

Like most wealthy Chinese families of the late 19th century, Cheong Fatt Tze was the epitome of a patriarchal figure. He built a grand mansion at no. 14, Leith Street in Georgetown, Penang, which acted as a base for his commercial enterprises, housed the Chinese Vice-Consulate and was the home of his favoured seventh wife. His residences were designed to reflect his stature as a capitalist and rising Chinese official. The Penang mansion, commonly known as the Blue Mansion, was decorated with appropriately auspicious motifs, and the four red pillars of the house façade were symbolic of his high office.[2] It housed Cheong and two generations of heirs before it was bought over.

The introductory excerpt from Lynn Pan's *Sons of the Yellow Emperor* contains connotations of monumentality and domesticity. 'A mansion large enough' signifies the existence of a house of pomp and grandeur. Cheong had wished to house nine generations of descendants but his empire

[1] Lynn Pan wrote about the Diasporic Chinese in a blend of history, biography and travel. Her accounts of Cheong Fatt Tze (Thio Thiaw Siat) and her visit to his mansion in the late 1980s are reflected under the chapter 'Jews of the East'. Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990), p.145.

[2] Khoo Su Nin, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', *Pulau Pinang: A Guide to the Local Way of Life & Culture of Penang*, v.1 n.3 (1989), p.20.

declined after his death. A popular Chinese belief states that the wealth of a family cannot be sustained beyond the third generation.[3] Only the Mansion remained unsold as Cheong had protected it in his will. The Mansion, a home and monument, contained domestic details that are interwoven into the tapestry of architecture and occupancy.

Home

According to David Morley, the notion of home is inscribed in the particular physical structure of a house.[4] The home is a place where tangible and intangible forms of memory and identity are placed, shaped and created. This is manifested in personal belongings, religious paraphernalia, acts of domesticity and bodily relationships through space. As Karen For-Olwig observed, we must recognize that often the home is 'a contested domain: an arena where differing interests struggle to define their own spaces within which to localize and cultivate their identity'.

In *The Patriarch,* Yeap Joo Kim recalls how the young Khoo Sian-Ewe (KSE) was indoctrinated to have obedience to one's elders and all other essential virtues in life. Children were taught the axiom that a well-brought-up child should be seen and not heard.

> *Here, his mother and sister, and their slaves practiced the art of gentility, and here he persisted with his education.*[5]

Hence, he confined himself to the back portion of the house together with the women of the household. The education of a patriarch-to-be started within the care of the domestic. Evidence of such childhood instruction would materialize in the way he would head the household as he took on the role of the patriarch.

[3] The 3rd Generation (Blackbox Pictures Sdn. Bhd., dir. CL Hor, 2005)
[4] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.19.
[5] Yeap Joo Kim, *The Patriarch* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1984), p.34.

Monumentality

> *Architecture retains of man only what death has no hold on.*[6]

Georges Bataille, known as a theorist 'against' architecture, wrote about architecture as the embodiment of social values and behaviour.[7] However, Bataille warned that beyond architecture's neutral image, there is often a predominant presence of authority. He claimed that architecture is the only ideal soul of society that has the authority to command and prohibit. Formerly a symbol of social order, it now guarantees and imposes this authoritative order. Monumental architecture in particular risks becoming hegemonic. Monuments inspire socially acceptable behaviour but they can also instill fear. The church as an analogy of the monument, opposes the logic and majesty of authority, using its form to speak and impose silence on multitudes. Monuments create an imagery understood as dictatorial. Hence, Dennis Hollier concluded that architecture does not express the soul of societies but rather smothers it.

> *The monument and the pyramid are where they are to cover up a place, to fill in a void: the one left by death.*[8]

Phillip Fehl described monuments as 'demonstrations of authority or of the possession of property, that are intended to last in time and to signify the importance of whatever memory they wish to pass on to the future'.[9] Monuments are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. They also have the ability to engage,

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[6] Dennis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (London: MIT Press, 1992), p.55.
[7] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.47.
[8] Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.36.
[9] Phillip Fehl, *The Classical Monument: Reflections on the Connection between Morality and Art in Greek and Roman Sculpture* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p.2, cited in Simon Watney, 'On House, Iconoclasm & Iconophobia', James Lingwood (ed.), *House/Rachel Whiteread* (London: Phaidon, 1995), p.98.

symbolize, invoke memories and provoke issues.[10] The monument, perceived as a symbolic order of authority, is usually gendered masculine for its associations with size, scale and stature.

2 Artist Rachel Whiteread's *House* at 193, Grove Road, East End of London.

3 The imprints on *House* showing the placement of stairs, windows, fireplaces and walls.

[10] Watney, 'On House, Iconoclasm & Iconophobia', pp.98-100.

4

A cast of the switch, a familiar everyday object.

Artist Rachel Whiteread's *House* provides a suitable starting point to study the relationship between monumentality and domesticity. *House* was a sculptural piece, an inverted concrete cast of a derelict Victorian terrace house, intended to provoke British ideas on domesticity, housing and heritage. It was made by filling a house with liquid concrete and then stripping the mould-that is the house itself, roof tiles, bricks and mortar, doors and windows.[11] The interior volume became smooth solid white blocks of megalith stones, piled atop each other. Like a punch machine for a house façade, windows bulged out, doors became solid panels, architraves became chiselled lines and doorknobs were rounded hollows. One can identify with the imprint of the house's original textures such as wallpaper and familiar outlines of fireplace and bathtub through our visual understanding of the form of everyday objects. Our notion of the domestic expresses itself through this verification of objects with spaces.

House is an art piece that monumentalizes the home. It contained traces of domesticity that were left on the cast itself, or more accurately, it portrayed the notion of a locked-out domestic. Merging the domestic within the monumental, both which were once separate entities but have

[11] Andrew Graham-Dixon, 'This is the House that Rachel Built', *The Independent II* (2 November 1993), in 'Compendium of Press and Cartoons', James Lingwood (ed.), *House/Rachel Whiteread* (London: Phaidon, 1995), p.134.

now become encased as one. The sculpture blurred the boundaries of the domestic and monument. It dispelled the notion of home as a familiar space. Instead, *House* is a home that one cannot return to.

It is this blurring between the monument and the domestic that provokes one to wonder if a clear distinction between the polarities actually exists. The tension that navigates between these two terms becomes vital in revealing where the mansion, the monument gendered as masculine, is constantly being invaded by the domestic, governed by the feminine. The gendering of spaces is associated with the different kinds of activities which occur within them and are not necessarily determined by biological sex of the occupants alone.[12] They are socially, culturally and historically produced differences which change over time and place, for space is integral and a changing part of daily life, intermingled with social and personal rituals and activities.[13]

The search for evidences of the domestic within the monument will be conducted through a study of particular objects, personal narratives and the architectural typology itself. It is in the banal objects of home décor and methods of spatial planning, coupled with bodily transgressions, which seepages between the private and the public, the domestic and the monument, that may be detected. A walk through the Mansion will reveal familiar objects and architectural layout within the Chinese domestic setting: screens, lanterns, chairs, altar tables, religious paraphernalia, spatial hierarchies and subtle responses to geomancy. In this paper, the studied objects and spatial structures are broadly categorized under colour, taboo and the uncanny. In the act of deconstructing the Mansion, tearing it apart and analyzing its pieces, I hope to expose micro domestic elements that weaken the position of the patriarchal monolithic monument.

[12] Jane Rendell, 'Introduction: "Gender, Space"', in Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.101.
[13] Rendell, 'Introduction: "Gender, Space"', pp.101-2.

5 The side courtyard.

Just then KSE appeared at the doorway. He wore a linen jacket over his shirt and trousers. His tie was the usual navy blue with white dots and he wore a felt hat. It was his usual attire even if it was only for a visit to the country. Without saying a word, he made his way to the car, followed by Jade, the child, and other members of the family to wave them off. As soon as the car turned the curb, someone dashed to the telephone and dialled the number at Hazelwood… KSE did not allow social chatter over the telephone. Whenever he was in residence, the phone was for his exclusive use…When the ten minute conversation between the two houses was over, and the phone replaced in its cradle, there were shouts of 'Air raid! Air raid!'. It meant that KSE was on his way and that the place should be double checked for cleanliness and tidiness. Those who took siestas quickly woke up to be on hand to greet the car. The children, in the midst of their homework, dropped their pens in readiness to rush out and say hello to Ah Kong and Ah Mah. An important part of the telephone conversation was also to forewarn the country folks of what sort of mood KSE was in, so that they could plan their own strategy. If he were in a good mood they would linger around him, otherwise they would all scurry away like mice into their holes.

~Yeap, The Patriarch, pp.156-7~

6 Cheong Fatt Tze, the patriarch of the Blue Mansion in his Mandarin (above) and Western (below) outfits.

The Patriarch

> *I exhausted the land's resources and observed the changing times: what others sold off I stored up and what they desired to buy I supplied, looking for the expensive place to sell something that was cheap. I knew how to handle the unexpected and win: I practiced diligence and frugality and I selected the proper man on the proper occasion.*[14]

Cheong Fatt Tze was a man of humble beginnings. Of Hakka origin, Cheong was born into a poor family in 1840 in Tai'pu, eastern Kwantung. He left home at the age of seventeen in 1858 to seek his fortune in the Southeast Asian region called 'Nanyang' ('South Seas' in Chinese).[15] He worked as a water carrier in Batavia and married the daughter of a shop-owner there. He started with a business in foodstuff trading but soon ventured into investing, planting and developing whilst spearheading modern tin-mining methods and operating steamships. Through contacts with the Dutch capital, he profited from opium, tobacco and spirits.

Cheong was also known in Mandarin as Chang Pi-shih and in Hokkien as Thio Tiauw Siat. His Chinese heritage and upbringing were of significant importance to him, second to his gift for making money. To the Chinese, wealth without recognition is worthless. In China, academic degrees hold enormous cachet, and the desirability for such prestige resulted in a thriving trade for degrees and brevet ranks. Many rich overseas Chinese employed such methods to raise their social standing, evident in photographs of the time, where they looked solemn in their mandarin robes, adorned with symbols of imperial honours, won by their donations to their motherland.

[14] Ambassador Kung Chao-yuan recorded Cheong's reply when asked the secret of his wealth. Cited in Khoo, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', p.16.
[15] Nanyang was a land of opportunity for many Chinese immigrants, who by dint of sheer hard work could rise from rags to riches. Khoo, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', p.16.

Cheong garnered many honours from the Manchu court till 1905; he was given the button of the first rank and became a supreme mandarin.[16]

Cheong's investments extended throughout Java, Sumatra, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Penang. Penang was his base of commercial operations in Nanyang during his late career, and the Mansion became his principle home where he raised his eight sons. As a traditional patriarch, Cheong would have his children, relatives, staff and servants all living under one roof.[17]

Throughout his life, Cheong was protective of his riches and ruled his home in the traditional patriarchal manner. He educated his sons in the Western tradition so that they could represent him in Western businesses and partnerships. At ease in both Asian and Western worlds, Cheong surrounded himself with manifestations of success by building mansions around Asia and collecting concubines. He collected artisan works, indulged in fine wines and food, and donned fine silk Mandarin outfits and Western coats and tails with top-hat and gloves. He tried to protect his favourite Mansion by stating in his will that his estates were not to be sold till the death of his last son, Kam Loong, born to his seventh wife. However, monies left to maintain the house were not adequately disbursed and the Mansion fell to ruin.

Cheong died of pneumonia at his home in Batavia. His coffin was sent by ship to his homes in Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and China; before it was buried in his native village. Cheong was a 'jet-setter in a pre-airplane age', crossing cities within weeks, even in his death.[18] Although it is difficult to say where he was domiciled, his mansion in Penang seems to claim most of his affection.

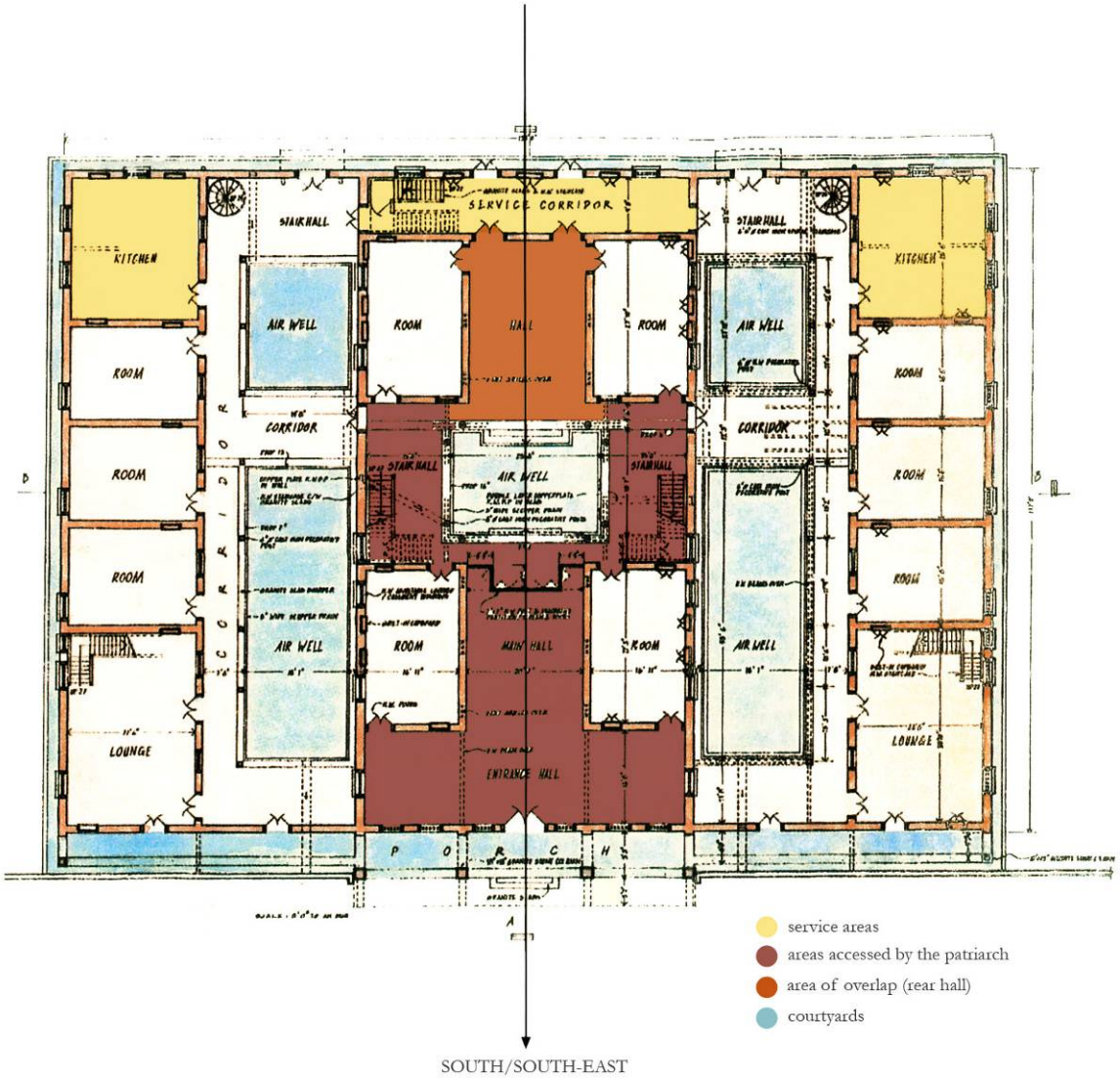
[16] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.141.
[17] Khoo, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', p.20.
[18] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.145.

The Blue Mansion

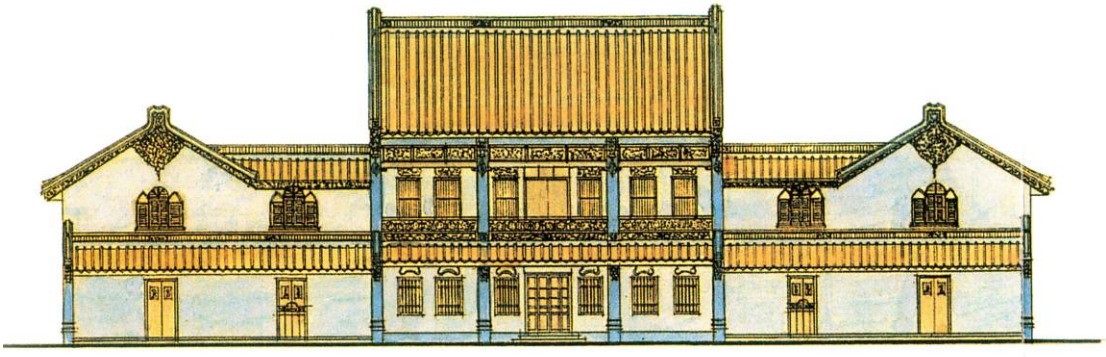
Constructed in the late 19th century, the Mansion demonstrated Cheong's fascination with Western artisanship and his rising status as a Chinese official. Elaborate and lavish, the artisanal detailing was said to be more refined than those in his native home. Laurence Loh calls it an uncanny cosmopolitan fusion of ideas that resulted in eclectic architecture which exemplified the times at the end of the 19th Century.[19] There were cast-iron balusters, Cantonese timber lattices, English Art Nouveau stained glass, Hokkien c*hien nien* (porcelain cut and past shard works), Chinese calligraphy, *trompe l'oeil* beams, European decorative timber ceilings, Gothic timber louvered shutters, Chinese-styled timber pivot doors, English encaustic floor tiles, Hokkien painted '*chai hui*' (wall frescoes), indigo blue lime-wash and hexagonal terracotta floor tiles.

The Mansion was the paradigm of a two-storey Chinese courtyard house. The building is recognized as Hakka-Teochew style, distinguished by the gables of the main roof which are decorated with basic *feng shui* (Chinese geomancy) elements. In a traditional Chinese house, the structure and layout reveal common and consistent 'design principles' which included attention to siting, enclosure, open/closed spaces, and hierarchical delineations of generation, age and gender. Movements through large houses transversed from public to private space, and was separated and denoted by a series of gates and halls. This spatial hierarchy ensured that the dirty or lowly are kept well hidden from public eye and visiting guests.

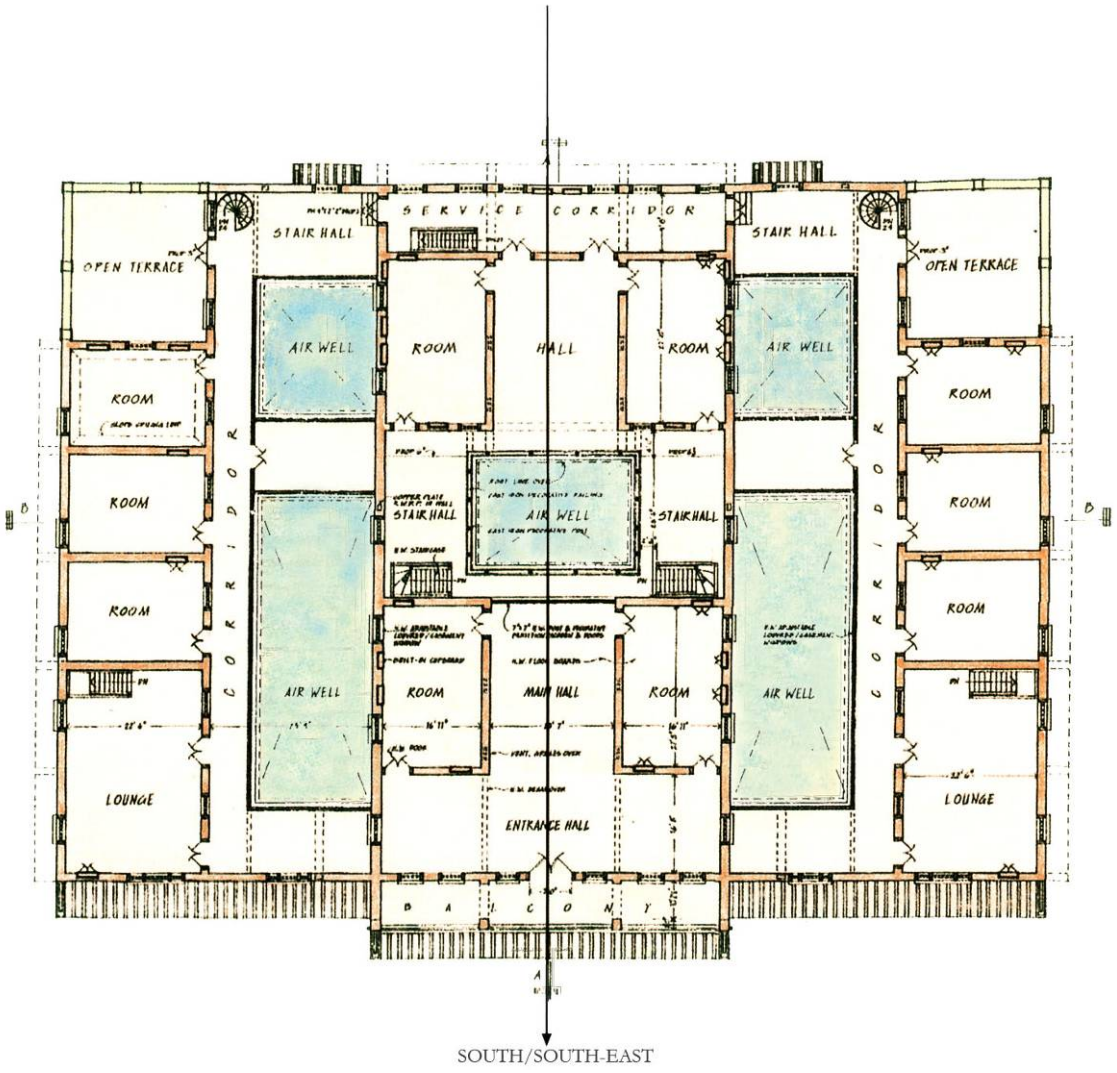
[19] Lin Lee Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion: The Story of Mandarin Splendour Reborn* (Penang, Malaysia: L'Plan Sdn. Bhd., 2007), p.18.



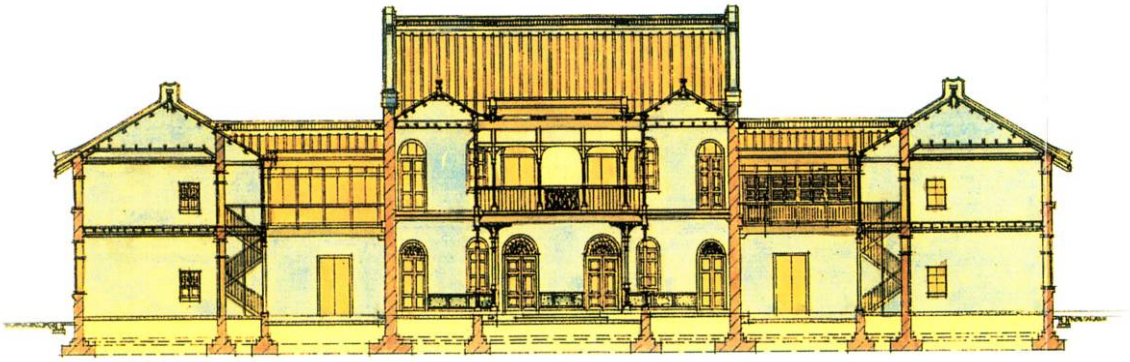
7 Ground floor plan.



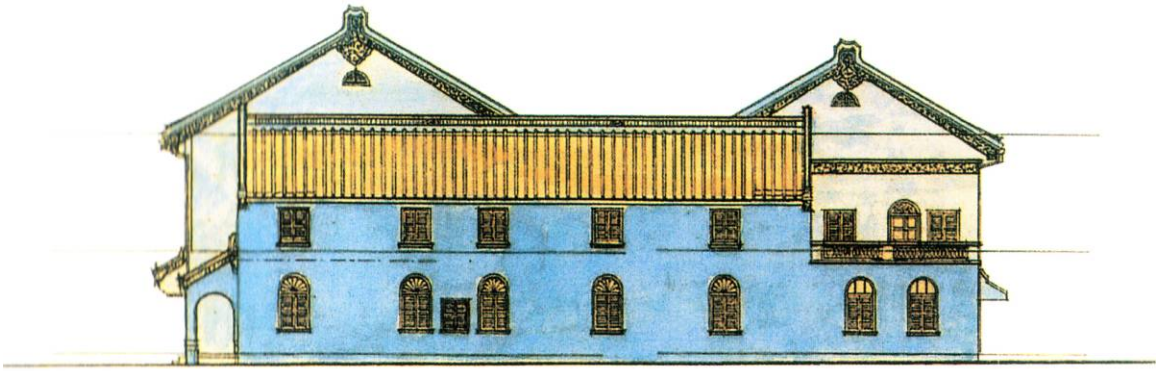
8 Front Elevation.



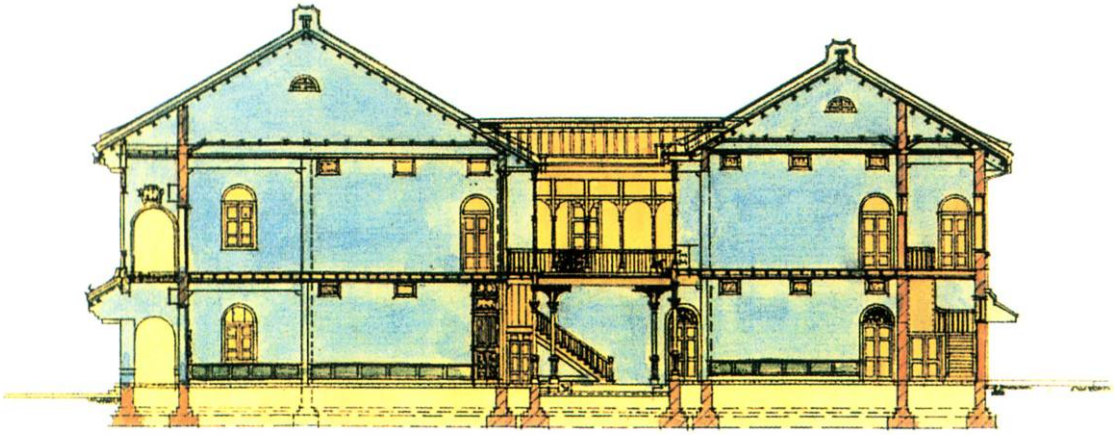
9 First floor plan.



10 Section BB.



11 Side Elevation.



12 Section AA.

The spatial layout of the Mansion was divided into two parts; the main house and the two side wings. The main hall, twin side halls and back section of the mansion were connected by two corridors, known as '*Kor Sui*' (bridges of the mansion) in Cantonese.[20] The main hall was where business meetings, formal gatherings and the administration of the Vice-Consul Generalship were conducted. This space constituted the public area, where secular activities were carried out. Beyond the gilded screens were the rear hall and private areas for religious activities like ancestral prayers, dining and family. Rooms on the side wings of the first floor housed

[20] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion*, pp.20-1.

significant family members while preferred family members lived in the centre bay. The lesser relatives and unfavoured family members were moved to the wings. Behind the Mansion, stables, outhouses and bathrooms were situated so that the activities of the servants and stable boys were hidden from the public altogether. In short, different members of the household were assigned their own space according to hierarchy.

Domestic areas were pushed to the back to the house; located in independent sheds behind or within the domestic annexe across the road. These spaces were segregated and distinct. Work areas such as the kitchen and service corridors were hidden. The patriarch remained in areas that were clean and orderly. I am, however, interested in areas of overlap such as the main hall, where the domestic and authority clashed. This ambiguous space served both the patriarch and his family. It is here that the patriarch crossed the boundary between the monumental and the domestic. Likewise, here, the womenfolk and the domestic crossed the threshold of the monument.

Robert Harbison stressed that monuments are more or less monstrous exaggerations of the requirement that architecture be permanent; its lasting power depends on other things besides sturdiness. However, he cautioned that strength can also be an incitement to wreck.[21] In the study of the Blue Mansion, the parallel drawn between the mansion and the monument is beyond the imagery of a large house. It displayed his wealth and rising status as a Mandarin officer, indicated his local power and influence and most importantly, housed his favourite seventh wife. Like a Trojan horse, it was outwardly grand but inwardly clandestine. Reclaiming Harbison's statement, it is at this junction that I seek the fractures beneath its sturdy frame which appear under the broad term called 'domestic'. Collectively, these fractures potentially weaken the

[21] Robert Harbison, *The Built, The Unbuilt and The Unbuildable: In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p.37.

symbolic strength of the building, ultimately crippling the reading of the Mansion, as a perceived monument. These fractures reach deeper when the structure is read as a patriarchal domain, for the patriarch fortifies the position of the monument; seen as consistently rational, in control, clean and orderly.

Patriarchal Domestic Structure

> *As far back as I can remember, I was taught that females are inferior, that our duty in life is to be a good wife and a good mother. We were put on this earth to be objects of adornment and domesticity. Indeed, the first rhyme I learned was:*
>
> *'Cheeh how sehn, eang lau peh,*
> *Cheeh how wah, hor lung meh.'*
> *Raise a son to carry the father,*
> *Raise a daughter to let others scold her.*
>
> *Everyone applauded me when I chanted these words…the men in their male chauvinism, the women in unquestioning submission. The ditty was my heritage by virtue of my sex.*[22]

In *About Chinese Women*, Julia Kristeva identified two types of family models in China. One is of matrilinear descent, which is peculiar to peasantry, while the other is a patrilinear family, found among the wealthy classes and nobility.[23] Confucianism, founded on the cult of ancestor worship, formed a solid foundation for the construction of a rationalist morality with strong paternal authority and complex hierarchy. The family established itself under the stronghold of the ancestors, father and eldest son. In wealthy families, one marries a 'principle wife', but is

[22] Yeap Joo Kim, *Of Comb, Powder & Rouge* (Singapore: Times Books International 1992), p.2.
[23] Evolution took place to produce the second model, due to increasing importance of the father/son relationship, dictated by economic and political reasons. See, Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, translated from the French by Anita Barrows (London: M. Boyars, 1977), pp.66-79.

allowed concubines. Women form the nomadic entity of society; they are homeless even among their own family for they are destined to leave them. A Chinese woman is submitted throughout her life to a whole series of authorities: her parents, husband's parents, husband and finally, her son.[24]

This act of submission is characterized through performances within the domestic realm. Submissive acts are discerned chiefly by sexed identities. Notions of masculinity and femininity govern the roles within the traditional household. In the patriarchal family system, the man is the law; he is the symbol of dominance, control, order and surveillance.[25] Sexuality is assigned in socially acceptable roles that are supported by the architecture of the house.[26] Traditionally, men occupied places of leisure, dining and study whilst women worked unseen spaces such as the kitchen and the laundry area. Alice Friedman emphasized that the 'home' and 'family' have been traditionally defined by patriarchal gender relations that structures and connects them to the larger society.[27] Elsewhere, John Ruskin and Walter Benjamin interpreted the separation of work and home spheres as belonging to male and female accordingly, the male as the breadwinner and female as caretaker. This 'consequence of their different natures' placed the men in the public sphere of work and power while women remained at home, ensuring the comforts of men.[28]

However, the limitation of the traditional patriarchal structure is that it excludes the other household members and activities as producers of space. Mark Wigley, Morley and Rendell

[24] Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, pp.66-71.
[25] For more concepts on the traditional constructs of home and patriarchy, see, Gulsum Baydar, 'Figures of Wo/man in Contemporary Architectural Discourse', in Gulsum Baydar and Hilde Heynen (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.30-41.
[26] Baydar, 'Figures of Wo/man in Contemporary Architectural Discourse', pp.30-4.
[27] Alice T. Friedman, 'Not a Muse: The Client's Role at the Rietveld Schroder House', in Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (eds.), *The Sex of Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p.218.
[28] Hilde Heynen, 'Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions', in Gulsum Baydar and Hilde Heynen (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.7.

looked at how gender relations shape the function of spaces and architecture that are constantly reproduced through use and everyday life, in particular, how gender is housed and the role of gender in housing.[29] Gulsum Baydar, Hilde Heynen, and Lilian Chee have studied how sexuality, particularly the feminine, figures in domestic practices through social construct of sexed bodies, discursive materials and bodily relations to space. Architecture beyond its disciplinary limits is a complex constellation of practices, relationships, objects, habits and spaces.[30] Delving deeper, we realize that these relations potentially rupture and alter our perceived construction of domestic spaces and practices. The recognition of women as active subjects in spatial production challenges the historical model of the home.

Occupational Domestic Structure

Christopher Reed identified the dilemma faced by women associated with the domestic sphere as it excluded them from the masculine realms of creativity (work and politics); they were instead assigned the role of consumer, commonly as decorators of their own homes. [31] This situation is explored further in essays by Friedman and Lisa Tiersten, who studied women at home and their influences in interior and exterior home design.[32] Wigley argued that these women influenced the visual spectatorship of interior space by becoming space itself and masking it.[33] French feminist, Luce Irigaray, identified the effect of such masquerading as the result of woman not having her own house. Hence, she becomes the house for the man, one that she constructs with her own

[29] See, for example, Mark Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality & Space*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp.327-389; Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.15-20, 101-8, 225-36; Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, pp.56-85.
[30] Lilian Chee, 'Pillow Talk', book review on Frances Stark, The Architect and the Housewife, published in 'Book Reviews', *The Journal of Architecture*, v.12 n.3 (London: Routledge, 2007), p.333.
[31] Christopher Reed (ed.), *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p.16.
[32] See Lisa Tiersten, 'The Chic Interior and the Feminine Modern: Home Decorating as High Art in Turn-of-the-Century Paris' and Alice T. Friedman, 'Domestic Differences: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe, and the Gendered Body', in Reed, *Not at Home.*
[33] Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', pp.381-9.

decoration. Being domesticated, their confined spaces at home become their playground; their resistance to the patriarchal positioning can only be established through the counter-ruses of masquerade which destabilize gender.[34]

Notably, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud postulated the concept of the uncanny to strong associations with the female figure.[35] The home is likened to 'intrauterine architecture', which may be associated with the sheltering images of the mother's womb.[36] Home carries strong identification with maternal presence; but the absence of home, sex and safety conjures a lack in the female role. Homelessness and dislocation displaced the feminine presence from the house. Psychoanalytically, the unhomely represented repression caused by the male fear of the mother's body, her genitals.[37] Repetition of domestic acts does not immediately connote the uncanny, but when functions change within a fixed architecture, we immediately reconsider the feelings of unease that disrupts our familiarity.

> *She was a creature of decorum, and her domesticity revealed itself as a fine art practised mostly over the kitchen stove, preparing delectable cakes and dishes. Though she still embroidered and threaded garlands, she had dispensed with the story-telling sessions and instead indulged in colourful gossip with friends and relatives.*[38]

[34] Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', pp.385-7.
[35] See, Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 123-160.
[36] Tristan Tzara, 'D'un certain automatisme du Gout', *Minotaure*, v.3.n.4 (December 1933), p.84, cited in Anthony Vidler, 'Home for Cyborgs', Reed, *Not at Home*, p.162.
[37] Jon Bird, 'Dolce Domum', in James Lingwood (ed.), *House / Rachel Whiteread* (London: Phaidon, 1995), p.115.
[38] Yeap, *The Patriarch*, p.30.

Daily acts of domestication manifested in activities carried out by the womenfolk of the house. In the past, women who sat at home sew upholstery, curtains and bed sheets; and crafted slippers and accessories to fine detail. Embroidery was a delicate art of patience and creativity that only women were purported to have. When translated onto the walls of the Mansion, the celebration of women's craft is exploded and epitomized in fine semblance. The Mansion's myriad ornaments take on the role of the feminine, identified by women's craftwork. This way, women reclaim the space within the house as their own since they do not own a title deed by name.

Likewise, domestic acts are propelled through religious and cultural beliefs. The Blue Mansion, with its highly ornate façade depicting Chinese motifs, vivid blue colour and its odd position on site, gives away details of Cheong's background, cultural origins and social status. On closer inspection, symbols and signs reveal Cheong's domestic practices and religious conformity. The iconography of the Mansion in its larger context was known to the local community as belonging to a patriarch, a man of great wealth. The uncanny manifested in various forms of domestic occupants when the building housed different kinds of occupants, from the patriarch, to squatters and finally transitory dwellers. Domesticity is found beyond the traditional model of the patriarchal family; its manifestations take on many forms and identity.

As put forth earlier on, monumentality and domesticity cannot just be seen as oppositional. Many hidden layers, either buried in symbols, social and cultural practices or personal intentions, emerge in the complicity that arises between monumentality and domesticity. Bearing in mind that the monument may be gendered masculine and the domestic feminine, a deeper exploration into the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion will enable us to see that this relationship is not acutely defined and often blurred. A deconstructed reading of the monument which follows, hopes to destabilize the perceived polarities between these two terms.

13 Israhel van Meckenem, *Amorous Couple*, c.1480.

As Wigley noted, in new spaces of sexuality, the wife literally holds all the keys.[39] The keys that she holds on to, sits loosely at her genitalia, seducing her man to enter. It suggests that she is actually in control, as he lays his sword down, completely defenceless.

[39] Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', p.326.

A well-brought up child should be seen and not heard, and any infringement on the axiom would render his parents eternal disgrace. He would be the last person to want this to happen to his parents, especially his mother, so he allowed himself to be confined to the back portion of the house together with his nanny, sister and some other women. He saw his mother occasionally during the day, if she were not embroidering, listening to tales of olden times told by the older women, or threading little garlands for her hair... She was slender and beautiful and he loved the fragrance about her. Her movements were of ease, and grace, unlike the rest of the ladies in the house.

... She was a creature of decorum, and her domesticity revealed itself as a fine art practised mostly over the kitchen stove, preparing delectable cakes and dishes. Though she still embroidered and threaded garlands, she had dispensed with the story-telling sessions, and instead indulged in colourful gossip with friends and relatives.

KSE was also interested in the humdrum of everyday life centred around his mother. After lunch, her serai tray would be brought to her by one of the slaves... She would chew this concoction, and now and again spit into a tiny spittoon which was always within her reach. After awhile, her mouth was stained with red juice. As a finale, she would push some tobacco up her upper lip, and ever so often she would glean the ball of tobacco over her upper teeth as if to extract the full flavour and then return it to its original position.

~Yeap, The Patriarch, pp.24-34, p.38~

14 Cheong's favourite seventh wife cum concubine, Tan Tay Po, dressed in modern style

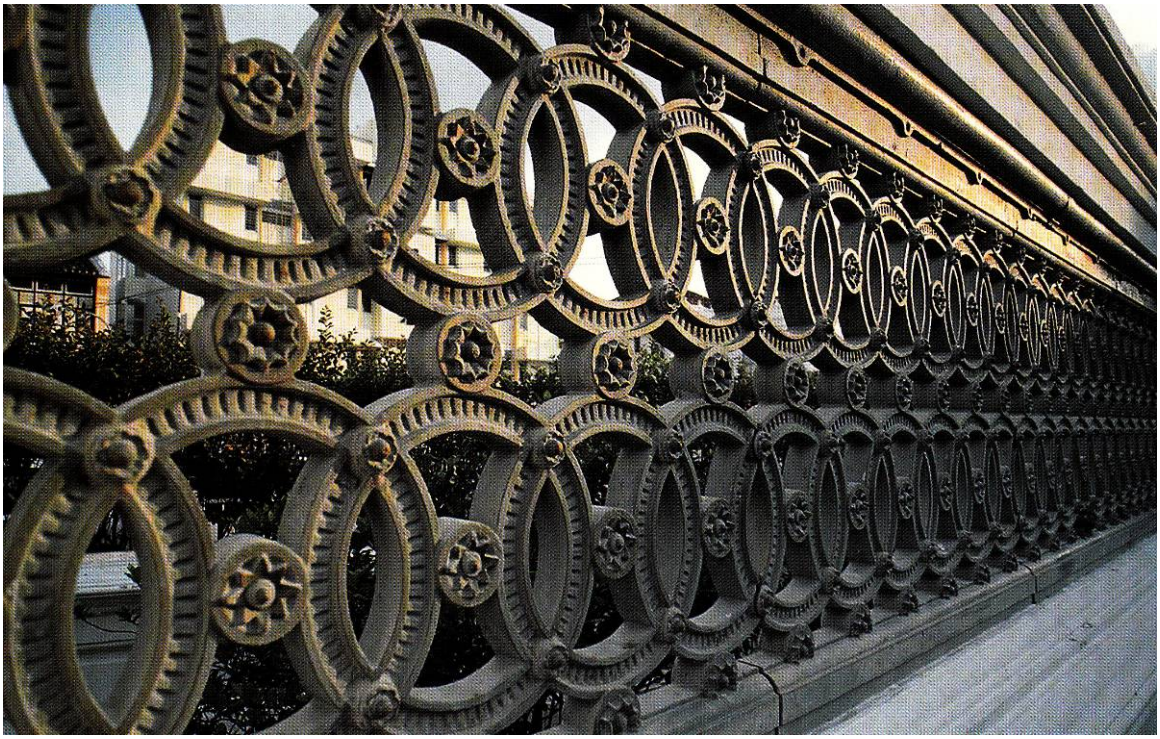
The Chinese Colour

> *It was a house in the Chinese style, built on two floors, roofed with glazed tiles imported from China... The verandahs were screened with ornamental iron-grille work, the sort one found in Chinese- Portuguese houses of the same period in Macao, and pillared with cast-iron columns ornamented with flutes and Corinthian scrolls and topped by carved wooden birds and flowers. For all its foreign influence, though, the house was a cultural statement in its Chineseness. It is said to be an exact replica of a family mansion in China, and squads of master craftsmen were brought to Penang from China to build it.*[40]

An immigrant from China, Cheong was deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Adhering strictly to the advice of geomancers, he painted his mansion blue to achieve perfect *feng shui* in his home. The external walls, lined with lavish ornaments, were coloured in indigo lime-wash as a symbol of harmony. The foreign influence described by Pan in her account demonstrated how Cheong seamlessly fused Eastern artisanship with Western style. It is interesting to note that the Western ornaments used in the Mansion such as the iron-grille staircases and Corinthian pillars acted as structural supports. However, the Chinese ornaments were mainly pasted, painted, carved or embedded on. This subtle relationship which makes the foreign artwork a necessity and the Chinese ones frivolous starts as an important junction into the inquiry of colour in the Mansion. Cheong's mishmash ornamental style may seem confusing at first but the deconstructed readings of the house will reveal how the heterogeneous embellishments and the blue walls are unified through an understanding of colour.

[40] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.146.

15 Delicate cast-iron woven onto columns and balusters.



16 Decorative fence works at the front entrance. Here is an example of Western use of materials and Eastern influence in the form of coin motifs. Coins show the importance of wealth to the family.

The basis of Chinese culture is practical wisdom which is an ancient Chinese practice of worshipping nature by closely observing seasons, catastrophes and objects of nature.[41] These observations were extended into the practice of daily life by attaching meanings to objects, animals, plants and colours. In the *feng shui* doctrine, colours are connected with the elements, the seasons, heavenly bodies and internal organs. The Chinese have extensively defined meaning and usage of colours, assigning them value, representation and folklore.[42] These systems of beliefs are applied in birth, marriages, architecture, political powers and cultural practices. Many of these practices have been ingrained into a child's upbringing and have been abided even as the Chinese undergo social displacement or diaspora.[43]

In Latin, *colorem*, is related to *celare*, meaning to hide or conceal; in Middle English, 'to colour' is to embellish or adorn, to disguise or render.[44] Colour also means to paint, dye, or tint, to misrepresent reality and to distinguish quality. David Batchelor wrote that colour has always figuratively meant the not-quite-real and that if colour is arbitrary and unreal, it is mere make-up.[45] Hence if colour is cosmetic, it is then coded as feminine. Cosmetic on the feminine has powers of seduction, it enhances and appeals.[46]

Colour's ability to embellish and adorn is akin to the effects of costume. Costume reveals the most fundamental feelings; through it we show our dignity, distinction, frivolity, or our basic

[41] Lee Siow Meng, *Spectrum of Chinese Culture* (Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications Sdn. Bhd, 2006), p.5.
[42] See, Sarah Rossbach, *Living Color: Master Lin Yun's Guide to Feng Shui and the Art of Color* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994), p.20.
[43] The Chinese Diaspora started with mass migration of Chinese since the time of the Ming dynasty. Lynn Pan discussed in detail the diaspora with regards to the history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. It also deals with various patterns of Chinese migration: trade diaspora, labour migration, the Coolie trade, sojourning and chain migration, student migration, return migration and re-migration, and clandestine migration. Lynn Pan, *Encyclopaedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006).
[44] David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002), p.52.
[45] Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, p.52.
[46] Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, p.52.

ambitions.[47] Mark Wigley studied the connections between modern architecture and fashion, and claimed that the house is akin to the body, in which they are both clothed.[48] The surface (rendered secondary and therefore feminine) outshines the structure (understood as primary and therefore masculine). The architecture, enveloped in the feminine, then becomes the subject of gaze. This gaze becomes the model for design and experience of architecture, for the potentiality of the surface to mislead the viewer is symptomatically identified with femininity. [49]

Just as colour has the ability to act as a cover-up, it can also corrupt. Art critic, Charles Blanc, identified colour with the feminine, of which colours need to be subordinated to design or drawing, which are, in turn, gendered masculine.[50] Batchelor summed up colour to be disorder and liberty; he likened it to a poisonous or curing drug- colour being feminine, oriental, cosmetic, infantile, vulgar and narcotic.[51] Colour is the supplementary layer uniquely capable of subverting the structure meant to govern it. With that, it recreates another perspective of the structure by disrupting the relationship between the surface of painting and the volume wrapped by the surface.[52] Colour has the ability to disorganize form because its sensuous quality 'strikes the eye' creating an illusion to space and reshaping it.

In 'Woman's Domestic Body', Beverly Gordon discussed the metaphoric relationship between house and body and the impact of female character on a room. The home and the body inscribe each other such that space becomes an extension of the female inhabitant and an embodiment of

[47] Le Corbusier, *Quands les cathédrales étaient blanches*. Voyage au pays de timids (Paris: Plon, 1937), translated by Francis E. Hyslop, *When the Cathedrals Were White* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p.108, cited in Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The fashioning of modern architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), p.286.
[48] Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, pp.314-15.
[49] Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, p.360-1.
[50] Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, p.23.
[51] Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, p.70.
[52] Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, p.213.

home.[53] The outward appearance of the house and body mattered because it reflected the deeper self or inner character; they were both meant to be looked at.[54] With the onset of industrialization, men discarded the dresses and ruffles of the French Revolution period and opted for practical suits worn for physical labour. Those excesses and irrationalities of the aristocracy were associated as being 'unmanly'. Although men became more involved in work away from home, he still 'owned' the body and the dwelling; both were testimonies of his success.[55]

Traditional patriarchal system is governed by the 'Law of the Father'; the man rules over the woman. Kristeva mentioned that Chinese women have been reduced to muted objects or slaves to the patriarchal order by foot-binding and all other practices of family oppression such as submission to the mother-in-law.[56] However, the man, who apparently holds the power, does not suspect the hidden feminine face beneath its own oppression. Women who sit at home take charge of the domestic, as she becomes one with the space. Excesses, linked to frivolity and the feminine, become identified with the woman and her domestic domain. Colour contains multiple meanings and uses, but why is it so prevalent in the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion? Cheong 'owned' two bodies, the woman (his wives) and the house, but as Gordon claims, it is the woman who becomes the house. The ambivalence in paternal/maternal and masculine/feminine roles persists here. Has the domestic breached the boundaries of the monument that it weakens the reading of the monument? Traces of colour are peeled off from the walls of the monument to unveil the transgressive female layer in between.

[53] Beverly Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age', *Winterthur Portfolio*, v.13, n. 4, 1994 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.281-301.
[54] Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p.285.
[55] Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p.285.
[56] Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, p.84.

Blue(print)

No visitors to the Mansion can miss the vividness of the blue washed walls that creates a strong visual pull. The Chinese geomancers selected the colour blue because it represented harmony, peace and tranquillity, and was believed to ward off evil spirits. The use of indigo paint was wide-spread in Asia, in historic towns, such as Jodhpur in Rajasthan, Hué and Hoi An in Vietnam.[57] Blue may be the fashion statement of the day, but as a costume, it has the ability to cover-up, to dress and to deceive.

The paint which is applied onto the skin is essentially paper-thin. Batchelor reminds that it can be rubbed-off. The layer of paint is an act of concealment, misrepresentation, and it is unreal. It has the ability to mask, manipulate and confuse. Being cosmetic, colour is connected with the feminine. It has seductive powers and strong feminine allure. It hides the true beauty, the structure, weathered lines and imperfections. Colour, a femininized quality, has emasculated the architecture. The bulging veins of brick and mortar, concealed by the purity and whiteness of plaster and whitewash, are further contaminated by colour. From construction to restoration, blue never once left the walls of this Mansion. It impregnated the walls so deep that it was never scrubbed off by the rain. An inspection into this perennial layer of paint hopes to reveal its permanent qualities.

[57] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion*, p.52.

17 The indigo blue paint dresses the Mansion, providing it with a stark contrast to its surroundings.

18 An artisan giving the Mansion a fresh coat of paint.

The original dye from the plant, *Indigofera arrecta* or *Indigofera tinctoria*, was produced on a commercial scale in India in the 19th century; the colour was extracted and mixed with lime-wash. The original plasterworks in the Mansion utilized various combinations of lime, shell plaster and fine river sand. Sometimes additives of paper maché were included for enhanced smoothness; at other times, horse hair or other fibres were mixed into the mortar for reinforcement.[58] In restoration, the blue dye was acquired from the *Clitoria ternatea* flower, a local source of blue dye.[59] Traditional '*tung* oil' from China was mixed into the indigo blue lime-wash together with a liquid extract from cooked cartilage to afford some fixative qualities.[60]

The blue dye, common in South-East Asian kitchens, is used as a natural colouring agent for confectionaries, particularly in the savoury Nyonya *bak chang* (rice dumplings) and to colour the glutinous rice for *kuih tekan* (a Malay dessert). In India, the plant is associated with Lord Krishna and is also believed to be an incarnation of the Goddess Durga.[61] The vivid blue flower is planted at homes for ornamental purposes. In all, the flower is used primarily for domestic purposes, be it in the kitchen, garden or as a symbolic tribute to the divine female goddess.

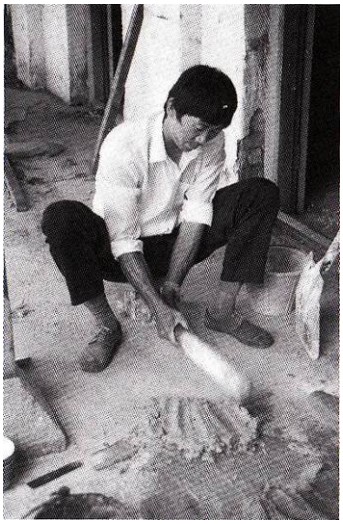
Its form, as its name, *Clitoria ternatea*, suggests, is shaped like the clitoris. The clitoris is essentially sexually responsive tissue that is located just above the vaginal entrance. The seat of much sexual pleasure in the female, the clitoris may be hidden under a hood of flesh called the clitoral prepuce. The clitoris is analogous to the penis. *Kleitoris* in ancient Greek means literally

[58] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion*, p.50.
[59] Commonly known as Butterfly Pea, *Clitoria ternatea* hails from the island of Ternate, one of the Kolucca Islands in Indonesia. The word *Clitorea*, which refers to the genus of the flower, is derived from the Greek word *kleitoris*, or clitoris as it is known in English. It refers to the form of the flower which is shaped like the clitoris.
[60] *Tung* oil was also applied over the external decorative tempera paintings to help secure them from fading in the rain and sun.
[61] The plant also has medicinal uses, of which the juice is used to relieve migraine and cardiovascular symptoms, while the root is used to cure piles. 'Sacred Plants Of India', http://www.ecoheritage.cpreec.org/04_01_Sacred%20trees%5C07_04_01_sacred_trees_Butterfly%20pea%20plant.htm (accessed 6 July 2008)

the man with the key or the gatekeeper.[62] The blue dye, milked from the clitoria, is processed and painted onto the monument. Like the gatekeeper into a woman's body, the paint acts as the layer of protection on the Mansion. The dye penetrates the pores of the walls, impregnating the plaster, the layer between the structure and paint. The parasitic attack of the paint, with its metaphoric attachments to the female genitalia, onto the architectural structure pollutes the reading of the monument as clean and orderly.

19

Butterfly pea (*Clitoria ternatea*) flower.



20

Traditional method of preparing lime plaster by beating for smoothness required in shape forming for the porcelain works.

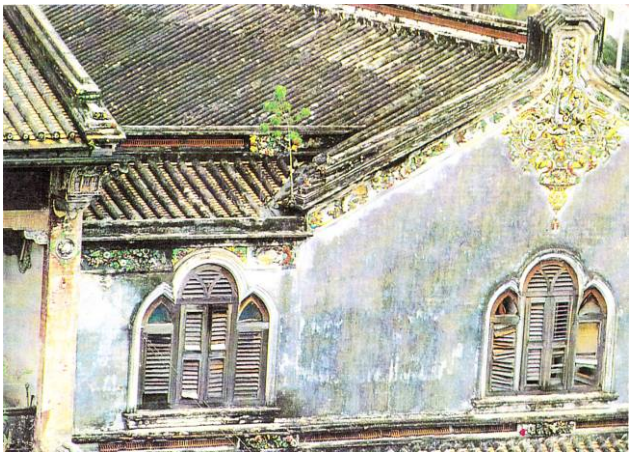
This corruption continues in its spread onto nearby surfaces. Amedee Ozenfant noted that colour cannot exist without light.[63] Blue, so deeply infused into the plaster of the walls, that when light

[62] William Casselman , Judith Dingwall, Ronald Casselman (eds.), A *Dictionary of Medical Derivations: The Real Meaning of Medical Terms* (London and New York: Parthenon Publishing Group, 1998), p.6.
[63] Amedee Ozenfant, 'Colour and Method', *Architectural Review*, v.81, (February 1937), pp.89-92, in Mark Taylor and Julieanna Preston (eds.), *Intimus: Interior Design Theory Reader* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2006), p.239.

shines, it permeates the room and bounces off objects and furniture. This fleeting quality of blue violates its own boundaries and spills onto others. No longer confined to the wall, it hops from pots and pans to bed posts, linings and available surfaces. Its immaterial quality has materialized onto objects and surfaces, like a virus, contaminating and infecting. Reiterating Gordon, the woman appears as part of her surroundings; the walls, wallpaper, decorations, tablecloth and curtains all become her as she becomes them. [64] The blue dye of this Mansion is like a phantasm, which permeates all spaces, regardless of master or servants' rooms. Like an apparition, it comes and goes with light. It can never be scrubbed off the reflected surfaces, unless the lights are turned off, and in darkness, colour is lost and the space becomes unified.

21 Blue reflecting off pots and pans.

[64] Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p.283.



22

Hints of blue on the derelict Mansion.

23

Blue seeping into the interior floors.

24

Blue colouring furniture and objects.

Arabesque: The Riot of Colours

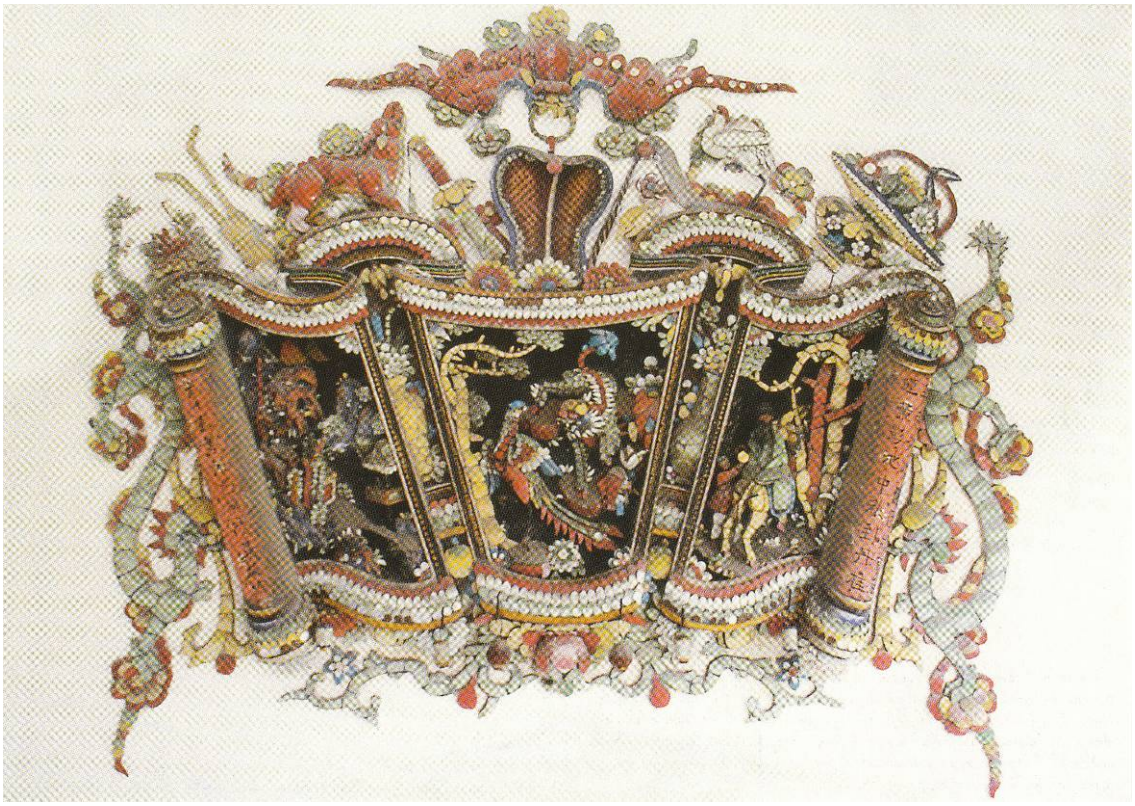
Naomi Schor regarded details as associated with the feminine and have been de-emphasized by men. In 'Gender: In the Academy', she discusses royal academician Sir Joseph Reynold's argument on deformity of the detail with regards to Aristotle's association of woman's sexual desire with her anatomical lack. He implicitly reinscribes the sexual stereotype in Western philosophy which linked maleness to form (permanence) and femaleness to formless matter (impermanence).[65] Clare Cardinal-Pett looked at issues of gender in architecture especially those that arise from practices suppressed by conventional history which privileges the product, gendered masculine, over its methods of production, gendered feminine. In her study of Louis Sullivan's National Farmers' Bank, full-sized construction details were found stored in a heap in the basement of the building. Full-sized details were not treated as sacred nor stored with care as over time; they occupy too much space and the detail would have gone out of fashion.[66]

In traditional Chinese temple architecture, full-sized drawings of details do not usually exist. Chinese craftsmanship is handed down from one generation to another, from master to apprentice, through detailed understanding of concepts and oral instructions, consistent training and repetition and precise study of methods. Documentation of detail is scarce because master builders want to protect their trade and gain dominance in the field. The lack of black and white documentation, the non-existing law, could be viewed as a feminine method of instruction. Constructed in Southern Chinese building typologies and materials, it is estimated that the Mansion's style dates back 3000 years to the Su Chow dynasty. The Mansion, built in traditional Chinese craftsmanship and feminine instructional methods, is feminine in origin.

[65] Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p.16.
[66] Clare Cardinal-Pett, 'Detailing', in Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary*, (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd, 1996), pp. 91-105.

25 Intricate c*hien nien* on the roof gable.

In the 19th Century, a vast majority of the middle- and upper-class Chinese women were housewives. They ensured order in the household. As the woman spent more time at home, the space eventually became an extension of her.[67] The outward appearance of the house and body mattered because it reflected a deeper self or inner character, for woman was seen as an embodiment of the home, just as the home was an embodiment of her.[68] The ornaments on the Blue Mansion façade worked like an internal dressing to the external, exposing intricate details of the feminine, telling of Cheong's personal aesthetics and taste. The intricate polychrome embellishments delicately laced onto the vast blue surface strikes an interesting relationship; they complement rather than overwhelm each other.



26 An arabesque of *chien nien* depicting Chinese mythology.

[67] Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', p.282.
[68] Gordon, 'Woman's Domestic Body', pp.282-5.

Chien nien, decorative mosaic porcelain works, is the most striking feature of the Mansion. It refers to the process whereby specially produced rice bowls, unglazed on the inside, are delicately cut with pliers to provide little shards of coloured porcelain which are then pasted with a lime putty to form elaborate patterns of men, women, animals and scenes depicting Chinese mythology, various Gods and scenes from an imagine heaven.[69] The subject matter of these decorations relate mainly to human aspirations for wealth, prosperity, peace, longevity and warding off evil. Such ornamentation serves as a passive didactic purpose for the inhabitants as they pass from one generation to another.[70] Here, colour plays an important role in establishing a harmonious relationship between nature and the works of man.

27 Artisans at work on *chien nien*.

The rice bowls were produced with limited colours. Artisans worked with the limited range and usually touched up by painting details such as faces and textures. This artwork requires patience and creativity, as there are no templates for images and motifs. Each bowl broken to be reassembled as a mosaic artwork results in high wastage of materials as not every shard will be utilised. Only one who has the excess can afford to shatter the rice bowl, a necessary domestic object, and reassemble it as arabesques for display. The shards, obtained from spherical shaped bowls, have concaved and shiny surfaces that reflect light, giving the fragments their three-dimensional visual effect. This time consuming method of ornamentation produces colourful

[69] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion*, p.44.
[70] Ho Puay-peng, 'China's Vernacular Architecture', in Ronald G. Knapp (ed.), *Asia's Old Dwellings: Tradition, Resilience, and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.330.

tableaux of stories and pictures. These polychrome mouldings, embellished onto the vast blue canvass, are like laces on a dress. The explosion of colours and feminine-like craft corrupts the monument's surface, allowing women to reclaim their space, the domestic, not only inside, but outside as well.

Colour, with its camouflaging abilities alters our perception of the domestic setting. The Blue Mansion stands out for its striking colour and intricate details. The monumental house was uplifted in status through the vastness of the blue and the complex composition of ornaments. However, the paint and explosion of colours onto the fabric of the Mansion prompts an inquiry into the method and choice of such delicate artwork, usually so time-consuming and fussy that only women would be involved. The dandyish nature of the Mansion confuses between the monumental and the domestic. Here, the monumental structure has been coloured by the domestic.

…I remembered you cried and cried during your month-long confinement when you had your first child. It was two weeks before Chinese New Year and all at home avoided you because childbirth was supposed to be dirty business, and they had already cleaned their body and soul in the temple, in preparation for the New Year... I am going to make you a patchwork blanket for the baby. The mix-and-match pattern is supposed to protect the baby and ward off evil spirits

What was once an effervescent, healthy woman of thirty-eight years suddenly became a wooden tablet placed on an altar. A badly blown-up portrait leaned precariously against the wall to perpetuate her face lest it faded too quickly from memory with the passage of time, one small but significant gesture which betrayed the family's seeming acceptance of her premature departure. Every evening at dusk, a single joss-stick burned before her altar and a single cup of tea was placed on it… she was a junior member of KSE's fold and not yet a mistress of her own house. Hence her tablet could not be placed on the family's shrine of ancestral worship at the town house, but occupied a remote corner at the rear hall at Hazelwood. Moreover, as a married woman, she belonged to the clan of her husband's family… after a long deliberation, Seng finally had her tablet installed at the hall of ancestral worship at the temple of his clansmen…but… to install it at the temple will give the impression that she is unwanted and homeless.

… I strongly believe in ancestral worship and I enforce it. I hope the same ardent filial piety I have for my parents will be accorded to me some day, otherwise I will be a hungry ghost.

~Yeap, The Patriarch, pp.168-9, pp.173-4~

28

Cheong's children standing in front of a pot of lotus flowers.

29

Cheong's grandson sitting on the female lion.

Of Chinese Rites, Superstitions and Rituals

> *The ancestral hall... feels dingy and derelict, but the blackwood altar, once overlooked by big Chinese lanterns with glass panels framed in gold, is still there, the wall behind it hung with the faded portraits of Thio and three of his consorts…Something extraordinary was that, as I took a closer look at the altar, I distinctly made out a finger of incense smoke: joss sticks were burning, proof that someone, somewhere, still cares to preserve Thio's memory.*[71]

Cheong showed little promise as a child, especially since his father was an educated man, a village teacher. He learnt to speak only at the age of seven. A contemptuous uncle made a bet that if Cheong did achieve fame and fortune one day, he would hang the lanterns in front of his house upside-down. He lost his bet, and had to invert his lanterns as promised.[72] Hanging lanterns upside-down is taboo in Chinese culture.

Cheong faithfully adhered to Chinese customs and superstitions. The Mansion was laden with symbolism, from pictograms of the three stellar gods to pineapple motifs and propitious sayings on the walls, doors, windows and screens. The stellar gods were carved on gilded screens, embroidered on a red cloth and painted over doorways. Pineapple, used as a pun in Hokkien, symbolizes prosperity. Even everyday objects such as lanterns, alter tables and doorways were constructed and placed with a purpose. Stone lions stood sentry at the main entrance to the Mansion. The main central door painted with golden calligraphy reads, 'the *feng* dances and the dragon flies'. *Feng* refers to the Red Bird, one of the four celestial animals and is symbolic of the

[71] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.146.
[72] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.139.

south. The dragon that flies is symbolic of the east. Placed together, these two animals symbolize the south-east, which is the facing direction of the front door and is the most auspicious facing direction for its owner.[73] To understand the meaning of these objects, I have loosely categorized them into two sections, taboo and totem. A search through the Mansion hopes to unveil layers of Chinese domestic beliefs and superstitions.

The origin of the word 'taboo' is from the Polynesian 'tabu', which means simply 'to forbid, forbidden' and can be applied to any sort of prohibition.[74] It also refers to a system or practice, whereby things are set apart as sacred, forbidden for general use, or placed under a prohibition.[75] Taboo is concerned with all the social mechanisms of obedience which have ritual significance, the protection of individuals who are in danger and the protection of society from those endangered.[76] The positive and negative nature of rites exists and persists because they are part of the mechanism by which an orderly society maintains itself in existence, serving as they do to establish certain fundamental social values.[77]

In its strictest definition, totems are objects that serve as an emblem or revered symbol.[78] They are believed to embody spirits or represent the spirit of the clan. Selected portions of nature serve as material objects by which societies express their unity and individuality through ritual attitudes, observances and myths. These material representations have symbolic significances and

[73] Stephen Skinner, *Feng Shui Style: The Asian Art of Gracious Living* (Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2004), p.19.
[74] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Taboo* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1939), pp.5-6.
[75] 'Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary', http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/taboo (accessed 18 July 2008)
[76] Jeremy Adler and Richard Fardon (eds.) *Selected Writings /Franz Bermann Steiner: Volume I Taboo, Truth and Religion* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp.107-8.
[77] Radcliffe-Brown, *Taboo*, p.46.
[78] 'Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary', http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/totem (accessed 18 July 2008)

associated taboos which reflect the 'creative acts' of ancestors.[79] However, I have used the term 'totem' here to convey the idea of symbolism in everyday objects that appear in Chinese culture.

The symbols, stories and ritual practices are permeated with economic and material values and desires. [80] Most people who do not understand the Chinese religious culture would view their ritual practices and performances as irrational, excessive and profane.[81] As a family occupies its dwelling, the built form becomes their abode, a living house, and a theatre.[82] Personal belongings, everyday objects, patterns of daily life, periodic rituals and celebrations of individual families operate to transform the Chinese house into a home. Many hours would be spent in rituals and routines of domestic purification or in instilling a sense of order for their homes.[83] Such spaces are manifested in spatial layout, copious ornamentations and objects, governed by taboo, superstitions, rituals and beliefs.

The mechanisms of a traditional Chinese home persist because of reverence towards an order that imparts values on social behaviour, cultural practices and religious beliefs. The domestic cannot be separated from rituals and superstitions because it has been deeply ingrained in traditional Chinese mindset and culture. Being an immigrant from China, Cheong held on to such tabooed practices, using them as guidelines to govern his house, home and work. These practices enforce the position of the patriarch in the household as he is the one who performs and validates the rites

[79] Meyer Fortes, 'Totem and Taboo', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1966), p.7.
[80] Etnographer Jean DeBernadi studied the social order of Penang Chinese closely and concluded that Chinese popular religious symbols repeatedly and insistently celebrate the good things in life. See, Jean DeBernadi, *The Way That Lives in the Heart: Chinese Popular Religion and Spirit Mediums in Penang, Malaysia* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp.54-5.
[81] Jean DeBernadi, *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community* (California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.38.
[82] For more on the ideas of the house as an ideology of prevailing social orders, see, J.S. Duncan, 'Introduction', J.S. Duncan (ed.*), Housing and Identity: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.1, cited in Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards, 'Ordering the World: Perceptions of Architecture, Space and Time', in Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards (eds.), *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space* (London: New York: Routledge, 1993), p.6.
[83] Pearson and Richards, *Architecture and Order*, pp.7-9.

and rituals. Traces of domestic taboos within the monumental are subtle to the undiscerning eye since these objects of decorum and spatial planning are usually brushed-off as irrational and profane. These practices are domestic in nature, encompassing spatial planning and interior/exterior decorations. By exploring these practices in some detail, I hope to uncover the paradox of the patriarch receiving domestic instructions on how to run his household. The repressed feminine power in the Blue Mansion threatens to transgress the boundaries that distinguish the monumental from the domestic.

30

Pineapple motifs on the stained-glass windows.

31

The three stellar gods: *Fu, Lu, Shou* (Prosperity, Longevity and Wealth).

Taboo

Bound by the Lotus Field

The Blue Mansion was sited and constructed in strict adherence to *fengshui*. The Mansion does not follow the alignment of Leith Street that runs in North-East to South-West direction, resulting in a rhombus-shaped garden, with a triangular portion cut off by fencing. The entrance to the Mansion, an elegant Chinese gateway, was flanked on the right by a high wall and on the left by a large triangular lotus pond along the side of the road.[84] A typical traditional Chinese gentry mansion accompanied by a landscaped garden, fulfils the element of water in *fengshui*. The main gateway is positioned on the *yang* side of the mansion, to ensure dominance of the patriarch in the household. During the tour around the Mansion, I was told that the land on which the Mansion stands used to be a swampy area where lotus plants once bloomed. The guide narrated that houses built on a field of lotus will be well protected by the lotus flower spirits. This gave rise to the unofficial name of Leith Street as *Lean Hua Hor* (Lotus Flower River).

32 The triangular plot of land in front of the Mansion that was once a lotus pond.

[84] Khoo, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', pp.16-25.

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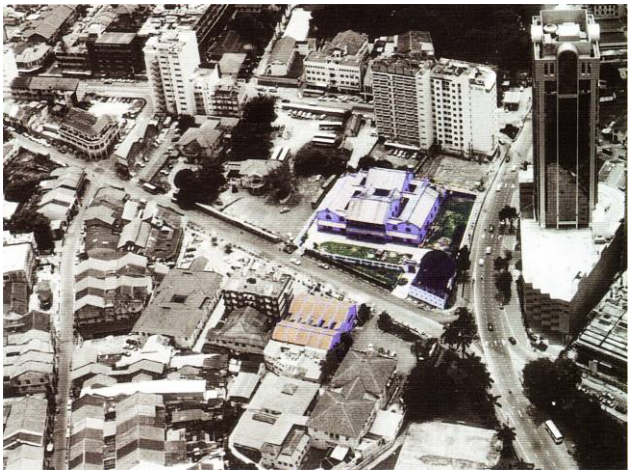

33

The alignment of the Mansion deviates from Leith Street.

34

A painting of lotus flowers found in the Mansion.

Although the lotus pond has since dried up, evidences of lotus flowers are still apparent in the Mansion. A painting of lotus plants sits quietly on the wall while old photographs show Cheong's children posing in front of a potted lotus plant. Lotus plants are significant elements in Chinese symbolism as well as for domestic use. Domestically, lotus plants are versatile since its flowers, seeds, young leaves and roots are edible. Its leaves are used to wrap Chinese rice dumplings. The seeds are harvested to be made as paste in buns or to be eaten in sweet desserts. Various parts are used to make traditional Asian herbal medicine. The lotus represents resilience, as it grows out of the muddy pond and rises up with dignified posture signifying uprightness,

beauty and purity.[85] The lotus seed-box with its many seeds symbolizes fertility. The lotus has its symbolism tied to bound feet in the Chinese culture, called 'three-inch golden lotuses'. Bound feet are supposedly sexually stimulating to men as they are concealed within tiny 'lotus shoes'. The erotic effect was a result of the lotus gait, the tiny steps and swaying walk of a woman whose feet had been bound. These lotus feet limit the mobility of the woman, forcing her to be dependant on her family. It became an alluring symbol of chastity for she could not venture beyond the home, ensuring her complete devotion to her husband.[86]

This created dependency on the man has its adverse effects, since it reinforces a woman's duty to care for the home. It binds her to the home, but yet it disables her, debilitating her effectiveness in running the household and ensuring order in the domestic. The mistress of the home, Cheong's favourite seventh wife did not have bound feet. Cheong's wife was fortunate not to be subjugated to such repressive self-mutilation, of which traditional Chinese women obligingly followed. The practice of foot-binding then was still prevalent among the Han Chinese but perhaps it was her Hakka descent that protected her from total subversion.

In reverse, the monument has its dependency on the lotus land, laden with its symbolism of fertility and uprightness. The spirits of the flower protect and ensure harmony and abundance in the monument, rendering it perfect in *fengshui*. The reading of the Mansion as a monument, built on domestic dependency and erotic fetishes, is further eroded with wastage in land, resulting in an excess irregular shaped and non-functional plot, in which the lotus pond has since dried up and is now a patch of grass. The patriarch, who rules with rationality and authority, has been subdued by forces that are governed beyond pragmatic reasoning.

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[85] Evelyn Lip, *Out of China: Culture and Traditions* (Singapore: Addison-Wesley Publishers Ltd., 1993), p.122.
[86] 'Painful Memories for China's Footbinding Survivors', http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=8966942 (accessed 21 July 2008).

At the Ancestral Table, the Man is Domesticated

A closer look at the spatial organization of the Blue Mansion reveals areas where master-servant spaces overlap, creating a space that exists beyond functional purposes, and governed by traditional rituals rather than household needs. One such space is the rear main hall, where domestic worship of ancestors and various gods were performed routinely.[87] In a typical Chinese courtyard house, the senior generation of parents occupies the innermost, south-facing structure, which also contains the main hall. Here, the ancestral altar and tablets are housed.[88] These ritual spaces serve as the locus for didactic and expository ornamentation relating to traditional values.[89]

35 The upstairs hall, used as a worship hall in 1989.

[87] Ronald G. Knapp, *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation* (Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2005), p.70.
[88] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.70.
[89] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.70.

Although the Mansion is symmetrically balanced and ritually centred, the emphasis is placed more on the dead than the living. The Chinese believe that the dead have invisible forces that could affect their daily bearings. In wealthy households, the ancestral shrine was the locus of somewhat perfunctory daily attention that was augmented by more formal bi-monthly wine and tea offerings. Special foods were offered up to six times a year with specific ancestral rites according to the four seasons and special attention on the anniversary of the death of a parent.[90] With these offerings, it is hoped that the ancestors will bestow prosperity many-folds and happiness to the household and safeguard the home from downfall, relieving the burden of the patriarch in many ways.

36 (left) The ancestral hall in 1989. Above the altar are the portraits of Cheong and three of his seven wives as well as a plaque commemorating a philanthropic deed of his.
37 (right) The ancestral hall today.

Pan's record revealed that despite the absence of the Cheong's family, their memory is still deeply respected by the local Chinese. It shows that the ancestors hold higher office than the

[90] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.76.

patriarch, for he can only provide for the family, but the ancestors stabilize and guard the home from invisible forces and evil spirits. More than spatial divisions and hierarchy separations, the altar holds higher importance than the monument for it 'houses' a long lineage of deceased ancestors. In the act of ancestral worship, the dead are domesticated; the monument can never be detached of its superstitions and rites, nor erased of its occupants. In many ways, it can never really be cleansed, ritually and spiritually, so long as the altar table stands in the home. Without domestic worship, this monument would cease to stand as a home, as it is one of the last evidences of Cheong and his family. After his death, the patriarch joined the table as a venerable ancestor of worship; it is in his death that he is domesticated.

Totem

Chinese Doorways

Chinese houses are layered with both visual and verbal messages communicating common values and aspirations, which are reinforced by similar themes embedded within performances of ritual, ceremony, and popular entertainment.[91] These rebuses are seemingly unrelated objects associated with meaningful phrases easily understood by all which are usually incorporated in ornament patterns dense with symbolic meanings or become part of the furniture in the home. [92] The absence of these artifactual and experiential elements would alter the context of the Mansion altogether for they are inseparable from the everyday objects and rituals of a Chinese household. Although these symbols seemed scattered all over the Mansion, one need not look beyond the doorway to uncover the concentration of symbolic pictorials and objects.

[91] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.84.
[92] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.84.

38 'The *feng* dances and the dragon flies.'

A Chinese doorway is more than a physical structure that defines passage from one space to another. It is a symbol of safety, hope, protection, sanctuary and resting station to the early Chinese immigrants and indentured workers.[93] On the main doors of the Mansion is a pair of lion-head door-knockers. These door-knockers in the growling image of a fierce animal offer protection to the house.[94] The other doors along the corridor facing the lawn have door-knockers in the shape of the *ba gua* (Eight Trigrams sign) which are believed to deflect negative energy and to attract positive ones in order to stabilize and defend the home from harm. Above the main door hangs a sole glass lantern with red painted motifs, hexagon in shape with wooden frames and clear glass panels. It is sometimes hung by childless couples who wish for a son as it is said that women who walk under the lantern believe that they would be fertile.[95]

[93] David Yeo, 'Chinese Doorways in Penang', *Colloquium on "History of the Chinese Communities in Penang"*, Unpublished Paper for *The Penang Story Project* (January 2002), p.1.
[94] Knapp, *Chinese Houses*, p.65.
[95] Yeo, 'Chinese Doorways in Penang', p.3.

39

Hexagonal lantern, known as *thean teng* (Heavenly Lamp), is hung in honour of the Jade Emperor in front of the main entrance.

40

All the doors and gateway on the exterior façade of the Mansion have Chinese calligraphy painted on and above. Couplets on this doorway read, ‘There is permanence in the rising sun and moon’.

The Lions Stand Guard

41

The male lion that used to stand sentry in front of the Mansion

Pan recalled witnessing a pair of grimacing stone lions guarding the massive front doors in 1989.[96] The lions, however, have since been removed to Australia by Cheong's grandson.[97] It is said that the 'owner of the lions' (the head of the household) must first be strong at heart in order to tame them or else the strength of the lions will overpower the master, causing his downfall. Although Cheong managed to 'domesticate' the lions, his heirs were not as resilient as he was. Could this have resulted in the mismanagement of Mansion funds and Cheong's trading empire, eventually leading to their decline?

In Chinese customs, a pair of lions stands sentry as guardians of official buildings, temples and sometimes private residences. The Lion is the Buddhist defender of law and protector of sacred buildings.[98] The right lion is male (placed on the *yang* side of the household), with an ornamental ball under its paw; and the left one female (placed on the *yin* side), with a cub under its right paw.

[96] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.146.
[97] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion,* p.15.
[98] Lee, *Spectrum of Chinese Culture*, p.206.

The ball represents the 'flower of life' while the cub represents the cycle of life. Together, they represent the Chinese *yin yang* concept. Symbolically, the male lion guards the structure of the house while the female guards the dwelling inside. The *yang* male lion is depicted with its mouth open, representing inhalation or life, while the *yin* female has its mouth closed, symbolizing exhalation or death.

The mutual dependency of both the male and female signifies that one cannot exist without the other. The complementary actions of the statues can be likened to the dance of life, celebrating the birth and death within the house. The expression 'the lion throws the embroidered ball' is a metaphor for sexual intercourse.[99] The corporeal connection with Chinese symbols is aplenty, and the doorway holds many blessings for the lady of the house who walks through it daily. A potent symbol of lions for fertility and the lantern for patrilineal descent, the doorway is seen as a boon for marital bliss. The entrance into the Mansion is decorated with domestic ornamentation that contains symbolic significance relating to the aspirations, fears and broader cosmological beliefs that were conscious implementations of the patriarch. Beneath the monument's masculine demeanour, Cheong depended on domestic elements to reinforce his position. His anxieties and fears have been subtly laid out right at the doorstep of the Mansion, in the form of domestic totem and taboos. The patriarch, a symbol of logic and control, resigns his authority in the face of domestic matters which inherently 'governs' the perpetuation of his wealth, status and empire.

The ordering of the Chinese house based on cosmic patterns and esoteric principles seek to achieve equilibrium and harmony in the house. Patrilineal descent, ancestor worship, rites of passage, and the communal celebration of the events of the festive cycle, defined forms of

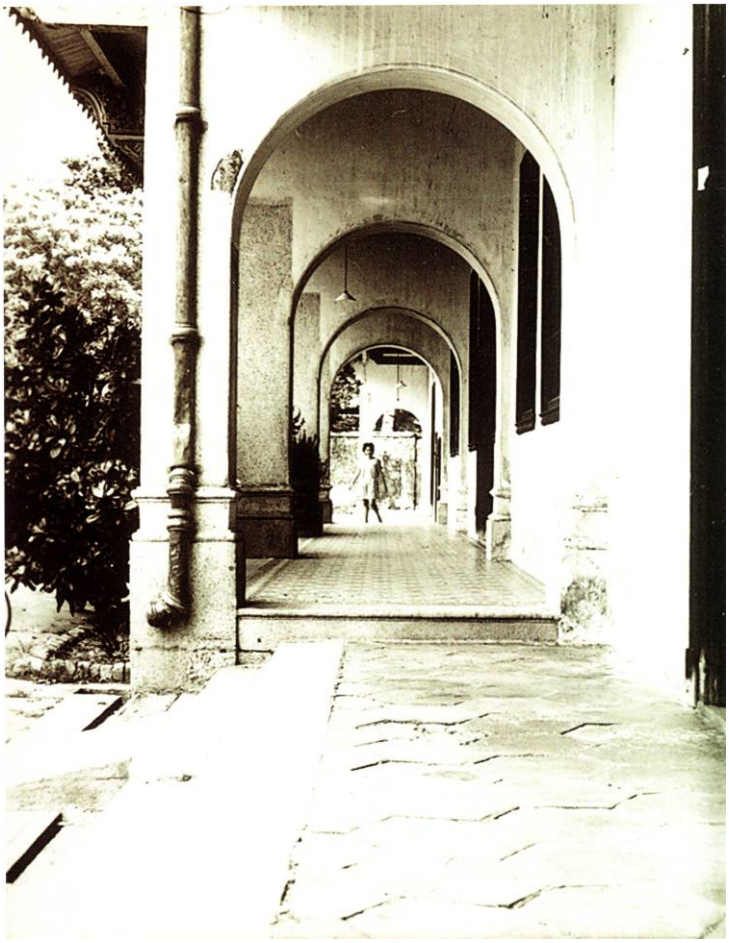
[99] Wolfram Eberhard, *Times Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: An Essential Guide to the Hidden Symbols in Chinese Art, Customs and Beliefs*, translated from the German by G.L. Campbell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p.164.

Chinese identity for many who had otherwise lost contact with China.[100] These rituals are a Chinese domestic practice. Such practices, viewed by many as profane and excessive, are complementary yet conflicting with the symbol of the patriarch, who is utilitarian. The Mansion, littered with symbolic artefacts found in and of the domestic, is ordered beyond the functional and rational. These excessive domesticated decorations and ornaments, domestic symbols, rituals and superstitions are part of a domestic system of taboo, which ultimately corrupt the perceived vision of the patriarch whose virtues include the rational and orderly. The persistence of the domestic taboo disrupts the monument again.

[100] DeBernadi, *Rites of Belonging*, p.37.

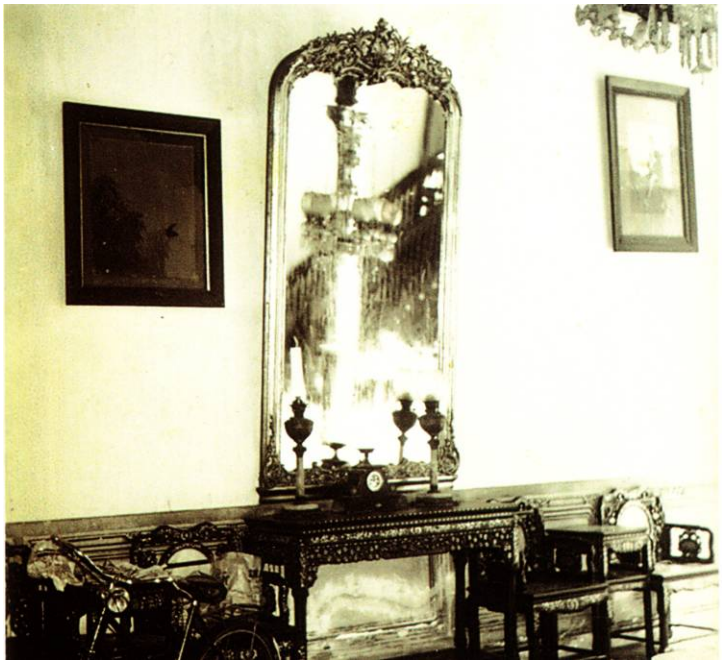
He erected life-sized portraits of her everywhere in the house to instil a little of her presence. Macabre as it might be, there lay stretched out on a twin bed beside his, an effigy of Jade, complete to the last detail in clothes and accessories. For the face, a black and white photo was enlarged to actual size, cut out, and then stuck on crudely. Indeed, KSE was still not satisfied with this creation. He wanted something more realistic. He thought of the famed waxworks in Europe. He would have gone ahead to put in an order had his children not dissuaded him from doing so. They reminded him that a wax figure would cost a lot of money, and that in the tropics, there was no guarantee that the wax would not melt. Hence the enormous charges would be wasted. That line of argument gave KSE second thoughts and in the end, he made do with the effigy in his room. Every member of his family, including the servants, was commanded to file by the twin bed and take a good look at the figure on it. It was a blood-chilling ordeal for everyone, except KSE. He was rather proud of his invention, and sometimes took to chatting to it.

~Yeap, The Patriarch, pp.198-9~



42

The Mansion in the 1960s. The person in the photograph is not identified.



43

One of the Baroque wall mirrors that was sold in an auction produces a ghastly image of the haunted in the Mansion.

The Uncanny

> *It still stands, looking as though nobody has been interested in it for generations, on Leith Street, crying out for a conservationist to save it from further dilapidation. I ventured inside, and managed to get as far as the corridors linking the central apartments to the side wings before a man stepped out of the shadows to tell me off for trespassing. Beyond, in the rear of one wing, I caught a glimpse of a beautiful cast-iron spiral staircase picked out by a sun shaft from above. The empire that Thio built withered with the death of its founder, and the house seems to have been allowed to go to seed, divided up among many down-at-heel families.*[101]

Architect and current owner of the Blue Mansion, Loh, noted that the gates of the Mansion were always permanently locked prior to its sales in 2000.[102] As curious passers-by rarely entered, those who entered uninvited would have been confronted with inhospitable looks of suspicion. A huge 'Private' sign kept the public at bay. The house took on an aura of sublime privacy after Cheong's death in 1916, 'shrouded by exaggerated tales of lost fortunes, mysterious wills and hidden treasures'.[103]

In this section, I will look into the stages of decline and revival that this monument underwent, hoping to reveal the uncanny aspects of it. The uncanny refers to the unhomely and the unfamiliar. I had previously explored the domestic aspects of the Mansion through the investigation of objects and practices pertaining to domestic usage and its relation to the spaces of

[101] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.146.
[102] Laurence Loh, 'Philosophical and Technical Review: Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang', *Architecture Malaysia*, v.16 n.1 (First Quarter 2004), p.41.
[103] Loh, 'Philosophical and Technical Review: Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang', p.41.

the Blue Mansion. However, beyond the objectified aspects of the domestic in the Mansion, there dwells an important component that completes the home: the occupants. Here, I will revisit Whiteread's *House* to explore the notion of the uncanny and then depart from it, moving towards on my own reading of the uncanny in the Mansion.

In *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud discussed the dichotomous relationship of the uncanny, that is, the relationship between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich***.** The *heimlich* refers to notions of the familiar, the homely, whereas the *unheimlich* expresses the unhomely and the uncanny. *Unheimlich* evokes feelings of fright and eeriness, unease, repulsion, distress and concealment.[104] The *heimlich* develops in the direction of ambivalence until it finally coincides the *unheimlich*.[105] This structural slippage from *heimlich* to *unheimlich* which supposedly lies outside the familiar comfort of the home turns out to be inhabiting it all along, surfacing only in a return of the repressed as a foreign element that strangely seems to belong in the very domain that renders it foreign.[106] The concept is firmly situated in the domestic and the homely, permitting the understanding of the *unheimlich* in individual experience as the unconscious product of nostalgia.[107] Anthony Vidler posited this as the possibility of the homely, secure and clear of superstition, to be reappropriated by something that should have remained secret but nevertheless had returned.[108]

In 'Dolce Domum', Jon Bird described Whiteread's sculpture, *House*, with reference to ideas of the uncanny that were expressed through notions of memory, space, house and the body. *House*,

[104] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.133.
[105] Bird, 'Dolce Domum', p.114.
[106] Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p.108.
[107] In Daniel Sander's *Wörterbuch*, the word *heimlich* was used to describe the familial activities in the house, like feeling happy being at home and enjoying the warmth and comfort of the domain. *Heimlich* is first defined as 'belonging to the house or family', as 'not strange, familiar.' For further concepts on the uncanny, see, for example, Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (London: The MIT Press, 1994), pp.17-44.
[108] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, pp.23-7.

built as a sculptural memorial tribute to the housing issues in Britain, was also a memorial to the home. The home is a place of constructed identities, where desires and longings are played out and it is a point of origin and return.[109] Freud's concept of nostalgia in the uncanny was tied to the impossible desire to return to the womb, the fear of dead things coming alive and the fragmentation of things that seemed all too like bodies for comfort.[110]

These ideas surfaced in E.T.A Hoffman and Victor Hugo's uncanny stories of boarded-up houses of untold secrets. The impossibility of penetrating Whiteread's *House* demonstrated the possibilities that its closed form held unaccounted horrors and secrets which arouse emotions of fear, subversion and the ghostly.[111] The possibility of the home suddenly becoming strange and foreign also alludes to the context of displacement and nomadic identities. Such memories, when enshrined, stages the past, reminding us of the certain painful memories, objectifying individual and collective experiences. As memorials, public monuments become representation of power in symbolic form and documents of a culture's historical experience.

Home and cultural heritage are inseparable for each culture imparts different social values that shape the behaviour of individuals, families or gender differentiation. The roles that we perform at home are often dictated by social norms. As discussed previously, the Chinese home is deeply embedded in social practices, gender segregation and religious beliefs. At home, each gender performs its role, according to their birth rights and social status. At large, such distinctions are apparent even among different Chinese dialect groups.

[109] Bird, 'Dolce Domum', pp.112-14.
[110] Anthony Vidler, 'Dark Space', James Lingwood (ed.), *House/ Rachel Whiteread* (London: Phaidon, 1995), p.71.
[111] Vidler, 'Dark Space', pp.70-1.

Cheong was a Hakka from Kwantung province. The Hakkas, a minority dialect group in southern China, have historically formed guest communities in the provinces of Fukien and Kwantung, where they are called '*khek*' meaning 'guests'. The Hakkas have been described as the gypsies of China, people who live side by side with speakers of different dialects in enclaves scattered across six southern provinces without a homeland of their own. Historically, Hakka men moved across unknown landscapes, assailed by the hostility of settlers who had preceded them, they banded together and became clannish. This act of self-defence was manifested in their round, multi-storied fortress-like dwellings with tiny holes. This form of communal housing and living was mainly inward looking, built to a circular plan that could house six to seven hundred inhabitants.[112]

The early immigrants to Nanyang had a reputation for being a close-knit community. Cheong had endeavoured to create a 'Hakka Street', inviting all his Hakka friends to build their homes near his, along Leith Street. It unofficially became known as the Hakka Millionaires' Row.[113] Somehow, be it his fate or curse, his *khek* baggage was not to be disposed of. Never really settled in one place, Cheong the *khek* was never really at home himself. Shuttling between his many mansions, his fleeting presence and guest appearances at different homes in Penang, Medan, Singapore, Hong Kong and China, was akin to apparition of the patriarch. To be fully domesticated, one had to be in the presence of the family, ruling with authority. After his death, Cheong's home became a squat for more than 30 families, and later on a boutique hotel. His home was never private enough to be claimed as a domestic realm. Reiterating Pan, the empire that Cheong built withered with his passing and was divided up among many down-at-heel families.[114] The secret rooms and out-of-bounds interiors beckoned the public.

[112] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.16.
[113] Khoo, 'The Mansion of an Empire Builder', p.20.
[114] Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, p.146.

The Blue Squatters

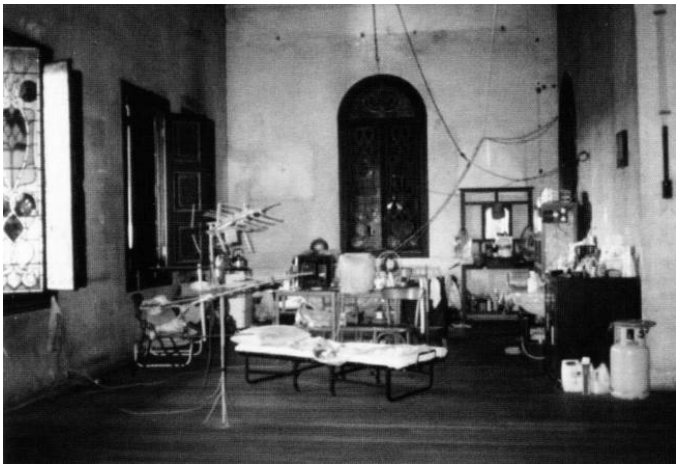
The patriarch protected his Mansion from being sold by stating in his will that his estates were not to be sold till the death of his last son, Kam Loong, who was born to his seventh wife. However, funds were mismanaged and his last daughter-in-law, Thoong Siew Mee, rented out rooms, corridor spaces, halls, stores and even outhouses, to squatters. Soon, the Mansion fell into ruins as gold gilded timber carved panels held washing lines and pigeon droppings filled ceiling spaces. Cats freely roamed the yard and house devoured resident birds, leaving their bones and feathers scattered all over.[115] When Kam Loong died in 1989, more than thirty illegal families inhabited the Mansion.

The boundaries of sacred and profane spaces were corrupted by the occupancy of the squatters. Crossing thresholds between the forbidden and the allowed, they made themselves at home, disregarding authority and position, no longer in the control of the patriarch. Spaces that were once segregated were homogenized. The lowly families were no longer cast aside to the outhouses and servant quarters; they became the extended families of Cheong's grandson, living in every available room in the Mansion. Each room had its own cooking stove, each a microcosm within a larger context. The Mansion served as a reminder of the Hakka dwelling complex, housing many families, outwardly hostile and inward-looking.

Photographs show the mansion in a once dilapidated state with peeling paint and dull-looking gilded screens. Before restoration, the grass was overgrown and signage forewarned trespassers. No longer was it homely and inviting as it was in its glorious days. Amidst this chaos, faded black and white pictures of Cheong's children running down the corridors, his grandson sitting on

[115] Loh-Lim, *The Blue Mansion*, pp.15-16.

the lions, and his daughter-in-law in a modern suit conjure vivid images of laughter and footsteps that once filled the hallways of the mansion.



44

Each room became a microcosm of a home within a home.

45

Rooms within the Mansion were sublet to squatters.

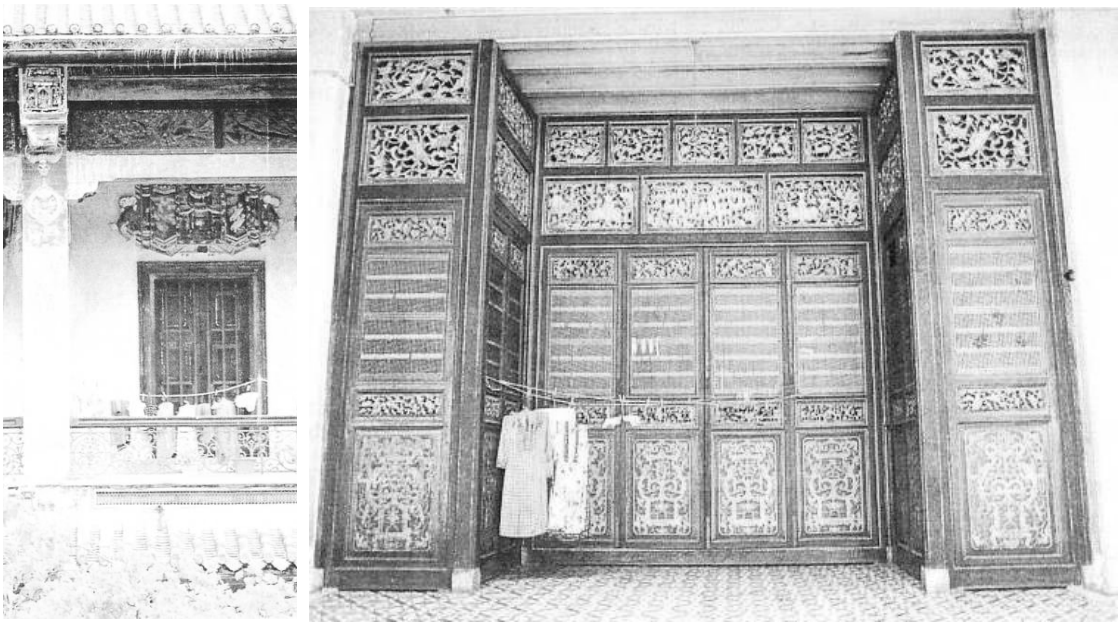
46

‘No trespassing’ sign at the side gate.

Such notions of the uncanny, ghostlike remnants and misappropriation of expensive furniture would have certainly angered the patriarch were he still alive. The Mansion fell into disrepair under the care of his own family. In its desperate hours, the monument was stripped of all excesses. It became the domestic in its most basic form, as shelter to families. No longer pompous, the peeling paint and hanging laundry signal to passer-bys that the Mansion has been domesticated once again. This uncanny return of the home, with once forbidden spaces and restricted domains, emerged from repression of the patriarch being reclaimed by the domestic. The exclusive monument became a house for guests.

The redevelopment of Georgetown brought about the gentrification of many of the residents, focusing on tourism and retail. Many of the buildings along Leith Street were sold, converted into backpackers' hostels, art galleries, food courts and offices. Cheong's stables that were once behind have been demolished to give way to a new high-rise hotel. In the familiar surroundings, many of the occupants in that area were now displaced and homeless. As Bird quotes, 'Here, the local is locked into the global, with homelessness as the social corollary to privatization'.[116] The commoditization of home has turned it into a cold and unfamiliar place, a once familiar domain converted into an unknown venue.

[116] Bird, 'Dolce Domum', p.118.



47 Clothes carelessly hung everywhere, contaminating the pristine walls and structure of the Mansion.

The Blue Hotel

After the house was sold, conservation works took place and ideas for readaptation were raised. Possible uses suggested included a corporate office, museum, cultural and crafts centre with antique shops, a restaurant and an entertainment centre. Loh had wanted to keep the Mansion's intrinsic value, which he defined as the legacy of privacy and pomp of Cheong. It was decided that the life cycle of the Mansion be kept by retaining the concept of residence alive through sixteen individually themed bedrooms for paying guests. Quoting Loh, 'any morning delicacy with the city at its doorstep can be arranged - any wish of a mandarin's guest is the Mansion's command'.[117]

[117] Loh, 'Philosophical and Technical Review: Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang', p.41.

48 The Chang Yu Room. Vintage bottles of Chang Yu Winery wine adorn the room, along with a range of other antique and colonial furniture.[118] The winery was owned by Cheong.

Uncannily, the living cycle that Loh stresses on, continues from the life cycle of the squatters. Its similarity lies essentially in the concept of temporary occupancy. The squatters paid their monthly dues; hotel dwellers pay a handsome daily sum. The squatters were very much at home like the paying guests; in fact they made themselves more at home by occupying every possible nook and cranny. The hotel, a guest house, extends the idea that the Mansion will never again be a private home, a single family house.

[118] 'Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion', www.cheongfatttzemansion.com (accessed 20 August 2008).

The hotel also functions as a museum display to past lives. The Blue Mansion is scattered with remnants of Cheong's belongings, and some donated furniture, since many of Cheong's belongings were auctioned off. Photos, marriage certificates, travel trunks, clothes, shoes, snuff bottles, paper, letters, and many more are displayed or framed up. Monochrome faded photos hauntingly project the image of Cheong and his family in his time. Efforts have been made to recreate Cheong's journey throughout his life, naming suites after significant districts and moments. The home, laden with multiple significances, is a symbolic container expressing identities of its inhabitants as well as conveying general assumptions about the world.[119] In the same vein, the Blue Hotel expresses Cheong's lifestyle whilst displaying the richness of the traditional Chinese culture.

The experience of hotel living is one that expresses the idea of impermanence, movement and change. A hotel is perceived as a neutral space, one without the separations of gender. In the Blue Mansion, the patriarch occupied the middle room on the upper floor, denoting his status as the man of the household. In the Blue Hotel, rooms are charged by size and can be rented by anyone so long as one can afford it. In many ways, the hotel occupants are treated as guests of the patriarch. They are restricted to their bedrooms and common areas. They do not see the back of house; where their food gets prepared, where laundry is washed and maids gather. The monument is now turned into a symbol of domesticity; it becomes a place for everyday experience, lived over and over again, repeated and unchanging. The only change comes from the turnover of hotel guests, the Mansion now at their beck and call, with multiple masters to please and attend to.

[119] Heynen, 'Modernity and domesticity', p.21.

American musician, Moby, likens the temporality of the hotel as a home for brief encounter of intimacy and comfort.

> *... [Hotels] are incredibly intimate spaces that are scoured every 24 hours and made to look completely anonymous. People sleep in hotel rooms… cry… bathe… have sex… start and end relationships…, but yet every time we check into a hotel room we feel as if we [a]re the first guest and we get very upset if there is any remnant of a previous guests stay... [T]hat we enter a hotel room and it becomes our biological home for a while and then we leave… wiped clean of our biological presence... so much effort is expended to maintain perfect neutrality.*[120]

49 Departing from conventional Chinese motifs, this deluxe double hotel suite shows the intrinsic eclectic nature of the Mansion.[121]

[120] 'Journal', http://www.moby.com/journal, (accessed 10 July 2008).
[121] Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion', www.cheongfatttzemansion.com (accessed 20 August 2008).

Remnants are uncanny objects of which we, as hotel guests, fear. These objects play up the imagination of the occupant as they show effects of weathering and time, yellowed and dulled by climate and humidity. The associations with antique objects, especially belonging to a deceased person, conjure ghastly images of the spirits of past owners. It is as though the man in the portrait would uncannily come to life or the mirror would reflect the apparition of the patriarch when looked at. Living in a hotel that was once a home, we know that it can never be wiped clean of biological remnants, for there will always be flakes of skin, strings of hair and fingerprints that would stain the monument forever. Such bodily presence, though insignificant, are signs that the monument is never as spotless and orderly as one would expect it to be.

Interior details, furnishings and usage of spaces offer a reassuring familiarity, as we identify with daily spaces that we routinely perform in. However, it becomes uncanny when the body is distanced from the tactility of the objects. In the hotel, occupants are confined only to their bedrooms and public areas. They cannot venture into the kitchen, laundry, servant spaces. The patriarch's personal belongings are framed up and displayed in glass cabinets. Our perception of the domestic is estranged by the obvious separation of everyday objects.

As we live in our homes, we build upon what we live on, we collect items of sentimental values, our rooms overflowing with souvenirs and memorabilia. The experience of the home in the hotel is a short-lived one, as one occupant moves out, the room is sanitized and cleared out of past occupants' traces in a mere two hours before the next one moves in. Home is a fiction, 'a concept that we carry with us, our narrative of identity and (be)longing'.[122] From a familiar domain, the hotel has become an unfamiliar domestic space, available for one's use, but at the same time distanced. Reiterating Cheong's Hakka descent, his Mansion will forever be a house of guests.

[122] Bird, 'Dolce Domum', p.119.

The uncanny recurs in the mansion by undergoing a process from the familiar to the strangely familiar and finally to the unfamiliar. The Mansion, once a proud home of the patriarch, declined with his death. Its conversion into the strangely familiar evolved from a single family home into a squatter for many. Finally, it ventured into the realm of the *unheimlich*, the unhomely, whereby all notions of home are dispelled, thereby becoming a theatrical domestic performance for transitory dwellers. Somehow, the domestic always manages to find its way back into this monument, albeit in different forms each time. At the Blue Mansion, the uncanny, an inversion of the *heimlich* into the *unheimlich*, disrupts the boundaries between the domestic and the monument. The components that formed the uncanny illustrate the difficulty in sustaining a clear divide between the domestic and the monument.

The ensuing months brought deterioration in his health. In truth, KSE had died a little each day since Jade had gone. The illness was only the final instrument. It had engulfed his whole being with the most torturous sufferings imaginable. Slowly, every functionable part of the man deteriorated. His voice which once boomed out terrifying orders in the house became weak and feeble. His hair took on a mousy shade of grey, though it could not be considered this for a man of seventy-eight. The good looks and suave manners of pre-war days were gone without a trace. He walked with a hunch, more from the excruciating pain than from old age… 'Drink this water, Father, it has been blessed by the Goddess of Mercy,' coaxed one of his daughters. He nodded and obeyed in silence. Another daughter slipped a talisman into his pocket. 'It's from the Prince God. Wear it for peace of mind and it will lessen the pain'. He looked at his daughters gratefully. These past years brought them closer to his side. He had always been partial to his daughters. Funny, he mused. How illness had a way of bringing a family together.

~Yeap, The Patriarch, pp.206-7~

After the guided tour, I found myself lost in the middle courtyard, trying to imagine Cheong walking down the hallway in his Mandarin attire, his children running and laughing, his well-heeled wife running household matters. The flow of human movements, the chatter of nannies and hand-maidens, the gossip of concubines and maids when honourable guests arrive seemed more alive in that moment of imagination, more vivid than the Mansion itself.

Loh bought the building together with investors in 1990. Fascinated by the monument, he laid out conservation plans to preserve the memory of Cheong and his house. Deciding to keep the concept of a residence alive, he created sixteen individually themed bedrooms 'for paying guests who enjoy the privacy of the mansion…are free to use the place as their own, enjoy personalized service by butlers and are on a first-name basis with the staff'.[123] He had hoped that guests would appreciate the historical and design value of the Mansion better by sleeping in thematic rooms such as 'the old kitchen' or lounging in a 'traditional bed'. For me, the irony is that the patriarch's private and public areas and the spatial segregation of the lowly from the public eye have been corrupted through Loh's intervention. Here, the guests may sleep in the kitchen, or peek into Cheong's framed private documents. They all become extended family members of the patriarch in his absence.

The absence of a recorded biographical account on Cheong Fatt Tze prompted me to draw upon Yeap Joo Kim's biographical account of her late great-grandfather, KSE. They had both ruled and lived as the patriarch, patriot and philanthropist, and resided in Penang towards the end of the

[123] Loh, 'Philosophical and Technical Review: Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang', p.41.

1800s. It was a time when wealthy patriarchal families flourished and owned regal mansions that dotted Georgetown. The vivid domestic details that stand out in her narratives provide clues to how Cheong's own lifestyle might have been, how his wife enjoyed her own space in the Mansion, how his children were treated, how servants worked in the house and how everyone feared the patriarch. Womenfolk and young children worked at the back of the house in order to not be seen. The kitchen and work areas, considered unclean and chaotic, were kept distinctly separated from the Mansion's public areas. The patriarch, who ruled with an iron fist, became humbled in his death bed, by his daughters who have provided care and nourishment in his ill health.

In this paper, I have categorized the elements of the domestic into colour, taboo and the uncanny. Each of these sections demonstrates in different ways how the domestic constantly returns to invade the monument. In colour, the domestic manifests as a parasitic layer, through paint or ornamentations, that constantly invades the structure and objects in its surroundings. It conceals its own true form in order to claim its own space. In taboo, I explored how everyday domestic practices and religious rituals are performed in the Mansion. These domesticated items and rites are viewed as excessive and profane by many who do not embrace its culture. However, they are inseparable from the Chinese home as they give meaning to familial living. They manifest in every part of the Mansion and subtly govern the ordering of the monument. Through the uncanny, the mansion encounters the evolving process of the familiar to the strangely familiar and finally, the unfamiliar. In each of these instances, the domestic haunts the monument. First occupied by the patriarch, the Mansion was then tenanted to squatters and finally, opened to hotel guests. Multiple domesticities alter the usage of spaces intended for the Mansion.

The gendered reading of the monument through the domestic reveals tensions between the patriarch and the home. These tensions, hidden beneath the epidermal layers are buried in

symbolisms, social and cultural practices or personal agendas. Philip Fehl observed that the monument's capacity to convey meaning '…is not only a source of power; it may also be their undoing, provoking their destruction by the enemies… If not destroyed, they may be "purified" and dedicated to a new cause; sometimes a simple change of name suffices to re-animate them and give them new dignity'.[124] This new form of dignity could sometimes further erode its meaning.

Relationships are often not as clear-cut as they seem to be. Bearing in mind that the monument is gendered masculine and the domestic feminine, the study of the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion enabled us to understand that this relationship was rarely so acutely defined. This research hopefully loosens the polemical between the monumental and the domestic as superficial, at least in the case of the Blue Mansion.

[124] Fehl, *The Classical Monument*, cited in Watney, 'On House, Iconoclasm & Iconophobia', p.98.

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