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## CONSERVATION APPROACHES ON HISTORIC GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

*At present, all conservation and preservation programs in Malaysia are subject to various policies and guidelines; and evaluation of planning applications before the developers, owners and agencies involvement in the conservation works are advised. This study is aimed to investigate current conservation approaches on historic government buildings, focusing on the guidelines imposed, issues and problems in conservation projects at every stage from preliminary study and planning, dilapidation study, tender document preparation, building conservation works until the last stage of handover and management of building. Methods taken during the study are unstructured interviews with related professionals, and site investigation on each case study which represents three states; Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang. Based on current conservation approach issued by the Department of National Heritage and Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture, the study also included related organizations such as Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Malacca Historic City Council, Penang Municipal Council, appointed contractors and conservators. Findings are expected to produce standardization on the conservation approach and guidelines for conservation works done on historic government buildings, solutions for issues and problems in the conservation projects, and a common understanding for every organization to work collaboratively towards better conservation practice.*

**Keywords:** Conservation approach, Historic government building, Conservation guideline.

### 1. Introduction

The historic building is one that gives us a sense of wonder and makes us want to know more about the people and culture that produced it. It has architectural, aesthetic, history, documentary, archaeological, economic, social and even political and spiritual or symbolic values. The first impact is always emotional, for it is a symbol of our cultural identity and continuity (Feilden, 1994). The historic buildings in Malaysia are unique and valuable assets to this country for their historical values and tourism potential. Historic buildings in Malaysia may possibly classified into six categories, namely shop houses, commercial buildings, religious buildings, private houses, palaces, and institutional buildings (Kuala Lumpur City Council, 1996). The term conservation has become familiar to almost everybody. People often raise issues of conservation in regard historic buildings. The term of conservation defined as guardianship providing for maintenance, preservation or protection of what presently exists, from being destroyed or changed in an inappropriate manner. It is a process which leads to the prolongation of the life of cultural property and for its utilization now and in the future (Ahmad, 2008). All elements of historic buildings tend to deteriorate at a lesser or greater rate depending upon various factors such as aging, location and function. Buildings that were built in the early period of British occupation, for instance, often face problems in building materials. Therefore, proper treatment of building repair and maintenance should be given full consideration. The conservation must preserve and if possible enhance the messages and values of cultural property.

Our country has many architectural landmarks built over the last 200 years (The Star, 2009). For instance, Kuala Lumpur has many interesting historic government buildings such as Merdeka Square, Sultan Abdul Samad Building, Kuala Lumpur Memorial Library, National Museum of History, Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, and also Masjid Jamek. Meanwhile Malacca which is also well known as historical city, situated many historic government building, some of it has been transformed into museum such as Muzium Yang Di Pertua Negeri, Museum of History in Stadhuys, Museum of Arts, Cultural Museum and many more. On the other hand, Penang also contributes a lot to the list of Malaysia's historic government building. Georgetown City in Penang and Malacca City in Malacca has been recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage sites. Parts of historical building renowned in Penang are Cheong Fatt Tze mansion and Eastern and Oriental Hotel (E&O).

Like many other countries in which building conservation seem a fairly new practice, Malaysia also faces several problems in dealing with the issues of historic buildings. At present, the preservation and conservation program in Malaysia going through the formulation of policies and guidelines, evaluation of planning applications and advice to developers, owners and agencies involved in conservation works. The first issue is insufficient guidelines to guide the conservation works. At this moment, the guidelines regarding the conservation are not sufficient enough. The existing guidelines are too general and not comprehensive. The issues and problems arises to contractor are determining the material, and also right method and technique to be used. The second issue is, even though the program has been successful in preserving and conserving important buildings, the maintenance of the character of building area has been less successful. No specific standard provided for the preservation and maintenance of historic government building. The third issue is financial constraint for conservation project. The financial funding for conservation is one of the issues in conservation of historic government building (Farizah, 2009).

Based on the issues above, its warrants a study on conservation approaches of historic government building in Malaysia in order to investigate the standard conservation approach or guidelines for the conservation activities done and at the same time identify the issues or problems in conservation projects of historic government buildings. This research will also determine the approach that should take into consideration in order to conserve the historic government buildings which will create a common understanding to be achieved so that the organizations could work collaboratively towards improve a common conservation approach or practice and also to reduce the problems during the conservation activities done.

## 2. Literature Review

The term of conservation is defined as guardianship providing for maintenance, preservation or protection of what presently exists, from being destroyed or changed in an inappropriate manner (Ahmad, 2008). It embraces all acts that prolong the life our cultural and natural heritage, the object being to present to those who use and look at historic buildings with wonder the artistic and human messages that such buildings possess. On the other hand conservation approach conservation approach is defined as the method used in dealing that keeping that property in as close to its original condition as possible for as long as possible. There are seven types of conservation such as prevention of deterioration, preservation of the existing state, consolidation of the fabric, restoration, rehabilitation, reproduction, and reconstruction.

### 2.1 Conservation Bodies in Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang

Official Conservation Committees consist of representatives from the establishment of specific bodies or departments enforcing the guidelines for conservation works. In other meaning, official conservation committees are authorities departments formed at Federal and State levels. The examples of official conservation committees are Urban Design and Heritage Unit of Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Penang Conservation Unit, Malacca Conservation Unit and Malacca Museums Corporation (PERZIM). Private societies are formed specially to ensure proper maintenance of gazette or conserved buildings be properly maintained which ensures the building ages can be prolonged. The private societies are voluntary and self-funded by the established private organizations and activities to generate income, particularly for ensuring continuous maintenance works are being carried out are designed and implemented by the organizations. It is prominent in publicity and intervenes in local and regional developments proposal. The examples of private societies are Penang Heritage Trust, Acheh Mosque Heritage Group, Charitable Trust and Malaysia Heritage Trust.

Malaysia Heritage Trust began officially in 1983 as a charity trust and until now it is the only the charitable trust established in Malaysia. It was set up by a group of volunteers who were keen to preserve Malaysia's built heritage and areas architectural interest in all parts of country. The objectives of the Malaysia Heritage Trust include to promote the permanent preservation for the benefit and education of the people of Malaysia of all historic buildings, to preserve the setting of historic buildings and where appropriate their historic content, to preserve the character of groups of attractive buildings which enhance a street, a town or a village; and to preserve sites of archaeological or pre-historic interest. The trust also organizes talks, exhibitions, visits and competitions.

### 2.2 Historic Government Buildings at Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Penang

Kuala Lumpur was founded in 1857 at the confluence of the Gombak and Klang rivers. In Malay, the name literally means "muddy confluence". The settlement started when a member of the Selangor royal family, Raja Abdullah, opened up the Klang Valley for tin prospectors. With the arrival of British settlers, buildings were built with a blend of Moorish (Mughal) and Edwardian architectural styles. Until today, many of Kuala

Lumpur's historical landmarks still remain and it gives the city a touch of history amidst its more contemporary structures. Some of the oldest buildings around town include the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, Masjid Jamek, the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station and the Malayan Railway Administration Building. These landmarks were built during the early 1900's and still retain its original structure. The responsible bodies involved in conservation of these historical building are Ministry of Information, Communication and Cultural through Department of National Heritage, Kuala Lumpur City Hall – Urban Design and Heritage Unit and Malaysia Heritage Trust.

Meanwhile, Historic City of Malacca has developed over 500 years of trading and cultural exchanges between East and West in the Straits of Malacca. The influences of Asia and Europe have endowed the towns with a specific multicultural heritage that is both tangible and intangible. With its government buildings, churches, squares and fortifications, Malacca demonstrates the early stages of this history originating in the 15th-century Malay sultanate and the Portuguese and Dutch periods beginning in the early 16th century. The buildings are remarkable examples of historic colonial towns on the Straits of Malacca that demonstrate a succession of historical and cultural influences arising from their former function as trading ports linking East and West. Its represent exceptional examples of multi-cultural trading towns in East and Southeast Asia, forged from the mercantile and exchanges of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures and three successive European colonial powers for almost 500 years. Malacca buildings are living testimony to the multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, and European colonial influences.

In Malacca, a conservation area was first identified in 1979 and upgraded in 1985. In 1988 an international seminar was organized and the area of St Paul's Hill designated as a heritage zone. The same year, the State of Melaka established the Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage Act, and in 1993 this was placed under the newly established Malacca Museums Corporation. From this the Conservation Trust Fund was formed, and from 2001 this has been used to finance selected building conservation projects in Malacca. On the other hand, heritage buildings in Penang can be found all over George Town. Naturally, the English heritage buildings are the most imposing. Penang was part of the British Empire for almost two hundred years. The style of architecture is neo-classical which stays true to the order of architecture. A lot of fine examples can be found at the banking district at buildings that house lawyers and decision-makers are perfect examples of British-style heritage buildings. These buildings have massive Doric columns modeled after the Parthenon of the ancient Greek. They become fine examples of heritage buildings in Penang. Amongst the conservation bodies responsible in conserving heritage building in Penang are Jabatan Perancang Bandar dan Pemajuan, Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang, KOMTAR, Georgetown, Penang, Penang Heritage Trust and Acheh Mosque Heritage Group.

### **3. Methodology**

The literature review is based on the books, articles, journals and internet that revolve on the building conservation. This is as sources to judge the whole idea of building conservation. The semi-structured interview have been administrated to the respective organizations of Ministry of Information, Communication and Cultural, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, PERZIM, Malacca Municipal Council, Penang Municipal Council, Public Work Department, appointed contractors and appointed conservators. The site investigation on case studies has also been carried out to collect the data and to find out the situation of conservation approach undertaken on the selected historic government buildings. The data obtained from the reading materials and data collected from the semi-structured interviews and site investigation are analyzed, and re-interview are done to the respondent for the confirmation of information.

The finding and recommendation are made based on the analysis of the data. This research is limited to the conservation approach that undertaken towards two historic government buildings for each state, that built up or has survived over 100 years of usefulness. The historic government building were selected to find the issue or problem during each stage of conservation works which involved the processes in conservation namely preliminary study or planning, dilapidation survey, procurement of tender, conservation works and also handover and management of building. The selected historical government buildings are Kuala Lumpur Textile Museum and Sultan Abdul Samad Building in Kuala Lumpur, Old Building of Hongkong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC) and Muzium Yang Dipertuan Negeri in Malacca and No. 57, Macalister Road and House No. 138, Hutton Road, Georgetown in Penang. This research is focused on the conservation approach being implemented by the Department of National Heritage, Ministry of Information, Communication and Cultural. The other related organizations such as Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Malacca Municipal Council, Penang Municipal Council, PERZIM, Public Work Department, appointed contractors and appointed conservator will be also mull over too. The concentration is given on issues and problems in conservation projects of historic government buildings.

### **4. Result and Analysis**

Problems and issues have been identified and analyzed during each stage of conservation process; preliminary study and planning, dilapidation study, procurement of tender, building conservation work, and handover and management.

#### *4.1 Stage 1: Preliminary Study and Planning*

During this stage, common issues arose are improper documentation, financial, unsuitable contract document used, local authority requirement, planning in aspect of end user, time constraint, lack of experience, and intervention to the historic fabrics. Generally, the document and report of the conservation done is not proper kept and updated. This will effect the next conservator by not having references about the conservation done on the building. It takes time to gather and collect the information from various related parties or agencies. Meanwhile, the financial funding for conservation works is allocated by Ministry of Information, Communication, and Cultural through allocation obtained from Ninth Malaysia Plan: 2006 – 2010. Malaysia Plan is a five-year development plan the government Malaysia. The other sources is through Heritage Fund that obtained by Department of National Heritage. The allocation of fund on conservation works is one of the major issue due to the conservation work involved the high cost.

Specification and guidelines regarding conservation items in Design and Build contract document PWD Form is identified not enough. There was a conflict to comply the contract document. The issues arise when there are conflicts between the contract documents with the undertaken conservation works. For example the material used in conserving building which must be same in type, size and colour. And the local requirement such as fire fighting system in building can not be fulfilled by contractor. This is due to several factors such as the requirement which differ with the design, method of installation, and also material used in the original building.

There are also several requirements of end user such as the room arrangement, space and usage can not be achieved due to the limitation of area and additional of building capacity. Others, there are certain demand of end user can not be fulfilled due to limitation of space and to keep the original characteristics of building. Next issue occurred when the architect is not familiar with the conservation works (in terms of the structure and design of historical building) and still using the old method such as plaster. Unfortunately, this works consequences to intervention towards its original material or design. Any unnecessary replacement should be avoided even though the work is carefully carried out. This is to prevent any adverse effect on the appearance of a building which then significantly reduces its historical or architectural value. For achievement of organization's goals and objectives, the management needs to carry out refurbishment or alteration works as to keep the building function and change management. Any refurbishment or alteration works should be completed with the minimum intervention to the historic fabric. Unfortunately, this works consequences to intervention towards its original material or design. Any unnecessary replacement of historic fabric should be avoided even though the work is carefully carried out. This is to prevent any adverse effect on the appearance of a building which then significantly reduces its historical or architectural value.

#### *4.2 Stage 2: Dilapidation Study*

Finding identified issues of time constraint, unforeseen defect or damage at the building, and insufficient information required. It takes times in preparation of Dilapidation Report. The observation need to be done with laboratory testing to test and identify for example its strength, durability etc. After that, it involved the study about the remedial action need to be carried out, the right method and technique involved and also need to obtain the consent and approval from the related parties. The contractor usually having difficulty in following the time schedule in conservation works. In the same time, unforeseen defect or damage at building can not be detected during the preparation of tender. It involved the aspect of performance of building services, and also the performance of building integrity. There is discrepancy between the information obtained with the real situation of building. Dilapidation Survey involved the reference materials such as the as built drawing. The issue arises is the as built drawing not updated when there is any works done on this building.

#### *4.3 Stage 3: Procurement of Tender*

Difficulty in appointing the right contractors, lack of experience in tendering process, and issues of conservation training are often arose during this stage. The selection of contractor must be considered in aspect of level of competency and experience in carrying the conservation works. The client and related parties were having the difficulty at this stage to determine the level of competency and experience of each contractor. The criteria selection of contractor that are using now is based on the contractor's experience in doing conservation job or at

least attended any conservation courses organized by Department of National Heritage or other approved agencies.

Meanwhile, the person prepares the contract document usually does not have the sufficient experience in preparing the contract document. For example, in aspect of defect or damage level occurred at the building. It is important to measure the defect and damage level to estimate the percentage of conservation works undertaken. Some of the organization management officer which related to conservation approach only have intermediate knowledge and experienced with regard to any conservation works. For this reason, it will affect the efficiency of the officers in managing the task related to the planning the conservation of this building.

The last issue arose in Malacca where all contractors involved in conservation works have to attend the conservation training held by PERZIM in order to achieve conservation license. Not all contractors are interested to join the training because of the high fees in certain times. Therefore, numbers of contractors that can be allocated for tender are limited.

#### *4.4 Stage 4: Building Conservation Works*

In the stage of conservation works, problems of unskilled workers in related technical works, time constraint, insufficient guidelines, and material constraint often arose. The conservation labours and contractors usually only have intermediate knowledge in conserving and maintaining this building. They need the advice and guidance during the conservation works done. The monitoring and supervision by the related parties need to be done frequently to make sure the conservation labours and contractors follow all specification and requirement as stated in contract document and keep the value of historic building. The time constraint also is one of the major issues during the conservation works undertaken. It came from any unforeseen defect during tendering find out in this stage. It takes time to get the decision and approval from the related party such as client and project directors regarding the necessary action need to be taken. This is due to any decision will also involved the cost. At this moment, the guidelines regarding the conservation are not sufficient enough. The existing guidelines are too general and not comprehensive. The issue and problem arises to contractor in determining the recognized material, and also right method and technique to be used.

As described before, the material used in conservation works must be similar in types, size and also colour. The issue arises when the contractor having the difficulty in obtaining the similar materials due to the material is not produced and manufactured anymore. If any, it takes time to plan, order and obtain the material. The issue also arises in aspect of the performance of tiles in aspect of its strength and aesthetic appearance. The strength and appearance of tiles is not same as the new tiles.

#### *4.5 Stage 5: Handover and Management*

During this last stage, difficulty in building control implementation, high cost of maintenance, no standardization for preservation and conservation guideline, damage after the handover process, refusal of contractors to repair damages and defects during DLP, gap in space management, and other issues related to maintenance and repair can be seen. Difficulty in implementing the building control arises when they identified the defects and accurate causes of building defects. The maintenance team should be set up to manage all maintenance requirements at the building. Without proper schedule, the building maintenance work is only done by emergency. The problem arises when the building management team did not have enough funds to conduct the maintenance work. This situation becomes worst when the building occupier can not determine and estimate the cost for the conservation purpose. As usually, the inspection has done without follow any inspection schedule.

There is no specific standard for maintenance works in effort of preserving the historic government building. At the other hand, there are also no specific reference sources that used in maintenance works. It will consequence to difficult in determining the quality and specification of works. The Building Management Team faced problems with appointed contractor which undertaken refurbishment works as they refused to repair any damages or defects under Defect Liability Period (DLP). It involves cost to maintain and repair the damages or defects. Most of the historical government buildings were built more than 100 years. As the time goes by, the building's functions change. There is gap in function of the space in building for example to change toilet to store or lock up to library (Mohd Ridzuan Othman, 2011). It needs a lot of work and involves high cost to change its function. Heritage buildings are susceptible to deterioration due to several factors including climatic conditions, dampness and structural failures. Both problems of salt attack and rising damp are closely associated. High salt concentrations in masonry walls cause extensive fretting and crumbling of the lower parts of walls (A Ghafar Ahmad et. al ;2010). These are formations gradually contribute to building dilapidation and reduce the building's aesthetic value. The refurbishment works need to be done frequently and this involve high cost.

## 5. Conclusion

The research has concluded that each organization in each state held the conservation works using its own approaches and guidelines that are slightly different from each other. Kuala Lumpur City Hall through its Kuala Lumpur Development Control Plan 2008 (KLDCP 2008) consist of several key planning measures that are used to regulate, control and manage physical development of land through development control process and procedures. Meanwhile, guideline used by Malacca Municipal Council comprises Economic guideline for planning and development at the Main Zone, Buffer Zone and Heritage Village. The guideline used by Penang Municipal Council contains Conservation area which The Municipal Council of Penang Island Structural Plan of 1987 imposes a duty on the MPPP to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architecture or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Based on the issues and problems arises from the case studies, it is recommended that the related conservation bodies should consolidated laws and guidelines of conservation. The guidelines should be uniform and comprehensive in guiding the conservation work. At the same time specific and standard contract document should be established for conservation project, this may lead to proper documentation of the conservation works. A specific standard provided for the maintenance works of historic government building also should be establish. Training is also an important element in enhancing conservation works, the building management staff and others related parties involved in conservation project should be sent for technical training. Meanwhile the awareness and perception of public towards the conservation works should be enhanced. The contractors are suggested to employ skilled labours in conservation work whilst at the same time the client should proposed a relevant project duration. The building occupiers should be advised to limit the usage of building.

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