



The 2nd International Building Control Conference 2011

Built Heritage Maintenance: A Malaysian Perspectives

A.F. Mohd-Isa*, Z. Zainal-Abidin, A.E Hashim

*FSPU, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Perak Campus, Seri Iskandar 31750 Tronoh, Perak
FSPU, Universiti Teknologi Mara Shah Alam 41450 Shah Alam Selangor, Malaysia*

Abstract

Heritage building conservation in Malaysia is fairly new. Recent phenomenon witnesses its acceptance as an important national policy. Essentially in 2008 Melaka and Goergetown the historical cities were enrolled as UNESCO's World Heritage Site. However being internationally recognized World Heritage Site come with international accountability. This paper comprised critical review of existing literature and highlighting some fundamental principles in conservation of historic building in relation to the maintenance needs. It also reported the early stage of proposed ongoing research in Universiti Teknologi MARA which focuses on the maintenance practice of Malaysian conserved heritage building at UNESCO's World Heritage Site. Findings suggest that maintenance is most significant in order to conform with the conservation good practice. At least with the following key themes: clear maintenance policy, regular and plan maintenance, appropriate maintenance programme, regular condition survey and reports and providing maintenance manual and logbook help to support good maintenance practice. It is also found that in Asia's heritage is generally under-protected. The theory and practice of maintenance needs for historic building in Malaysian are still not duly addressed. Good maintenance practice is one of the important perspectives that still leave a gap in effective management strategies. This research finally aims to establish Malaysian conserved heritage building best maintenance practice guidelines.

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Selection and/ or peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak and Institution of Surveyors Malaysia (ISM)

Keywords: Heritage Building; Conservation Values; Maintenance

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: floppopia@yahoo.co.uk.

1. Introduction

Building conservation is the way to protect built heritage in retaining its physical authenticity that represents a society's history and root. It can be in the form of any structure, ruin of a building as proposed by ICOMOS Washington Charter 1987 [1]. Built heritage is universally recognised with a wealth of esthetical, archeological, architectural, cultural, historic, documentary, social and even political and spiritual or symbolic values [2].

Heritage building conservation in Malaysia is fairly new. It humbly began in the 70s [30] and flourished in the 80s [4][5]. Despite the positive efforts there are still major challenges and issues in dealing with the conservation of historic buildings in Malaysia [6][7][8].

Recent phenomenon however suggests an attractive popular support mainly from government agencies which witnesses their acceptance as an important national policy. It merely began with the introduction of the National Heritage Act 2005 which claimed to be a comprehensive legislation to govern heritage building issues in the country [9]. This was followed with the creation of a new portfolio that specifically dealt with all kinds of Malaysian heritage management at the federal level. It was reported that in total, one hundred million ringgit has been spent for the purpose of built heritage conservation under the 9th Malaysian Plan (2006-2010) [5]. The proclamation/declaration of Melaka and Georgetown as UNESCO's World Heritage Site in 2008 may also trigger this phenomenon. It is expected to stimulate the nation's income from the tourism perspective that worth more than forty billion ringgit as reported by Bank Negara Malaysia in 2008.

The elderly nature of the built heritage makes them constantly vulnerable to some degree of deprivation and decay which suggest that they should be systematically maintained. Though maintenance is recognised as the most significant conservation practice [10][11][12] concurrently among other challenging issues in Malaysian's built heritage conservation is the maintenance aspect [8][5]. Nevertheless the implications of being internationally recognized as a World Heritage Site also mean an international accountability [12] thus the outstanding universal value, the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of the declaration must be maintained and enhanced in future otherwise if there is any threat detected, it can be added to the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger and further the deleted from the World Heritage Site [13].

2. Heritage building conservation

The Burra Charter defines conservation as being all of the processes of looking after a place so as to retain cultural significance [1]. This suggests that it has to go through several procedures in order to retain the cultural significance of the places. Cultural significance of a place is defined as a complete range of social and cultural values that make every place has a unique identity and gave its significance to the society [10]. It is the perception of values on why the historic places matter and for whom as decided by diverse stakeholders including the community [14]. Obviously it is more than just architectural consideration but it involve economic and social issue which includes sustainable management of changes [15]. Furthermore it is also about what and how we protect a variety of values of the built cultural heritage in the most sustainable way.

3. Values in heritage building conservation

Something is put into a place as a heritage because it is valued to be worth protected or the understanding of why the place is important and what about it that contributes to that importance [10]. Thus these values should only be interpreted by the experts with the involvement of the local community. The interpretation must also be rest upon concise conservation objectives, deep understanding of built heritage character's exceptionality and the availability of data [15][17][15]. The physical fabric must also

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