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Overview of Maintenance Approaches of Historical Buildings in Kuala Lumpur – A Current Practice

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Abstract

The conservation of historic buildings is an established method to preserve a heritage structure through restoration and maintenance works. Maintenance has been identified as a key intervention in protecting historic structure by prolonging a building lifespan. The importance of carrying out a systematic and routine maintenance works as part of the conservation programme is often neglected due to misunderstanding on the needs of the works subsequent to the conservation works carried out. Noted, without systematic and proper maintenance approach, historic buildings will deteriorate and will not be able to function as it is. In a way, this will be such a financial waste considering the higher cost involved in the conservation works. This paper intends to highlight the current practice of maintenance approaches that are being implemented in historic buildings in Kuala Lumpur. Kuala Lumpur as a capital city of Malaysia, has uniquely contains a vast number of historic buildings. Each building has its own unique character and significant be it cultural, historical or architectural. The findings for this research are summarized from the responses obtained directly from the respondents employed for the management of the historical buildings. Case studies involving 20 numbers of historical buildings, of which some are already categorized under national heritage, were carried out. The methodology for this research is based on personal interviews and distribution of self-developed questionnaire directing to the current scenario on the approach taken for the implementation of maintenance works on these buildings. The outcome of this paper later would be used as a basis for formation of the best maintenance programme for historical buildings in Malaysia

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1. Introduction

The condition and the quality of a building are two main principles of having a quality life. This associated with the fact that 95% of our time is either spent inside a building or somewhere closer to a building. These two principles also portrays the image of the community, living standard and behavioral factors, be it in the past or at present, of which the possibility of integration may formed a distinguish unique character of the community [1]. During the formation of Society of Protected Ancient Buildings (SPAB), Morris [2] had highlighted the importance of the maintenance plays in protecting historic buildings.

Given that the nature of historical buildings, which are in some avoidable degree of degradation and decay, maintenance is the single most significant approach that can ensure the prolongation of the building's lifespan. Hamilton & Wan Salleh [3] stated that systematic management and continuous maintenance works are necessary for mitigating the decaying process that will lead to unsafe condition. Besides the benefit to the building's lifespan, the execution of the maintenance works on a building and its services system when continuously and progressively undertaken, in a long run will be profitable to the organization.

Referring to Malaysia's Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, billion of ringgit has been spent and wasted in repairing public buildings due to Malaysia's poor maintenance culture [4]. This is such a waste because if the defects were spotted earlier and rectified, it will not develop into big problems and cost more money.

Based on the List of Heritage Sites to be Gazetted Under National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) as compiled by the [5]; it was recorded that there were about 181 numbers of heritage sites in total, which consists of building, fort, stone, cave, well, cemetery and other pre-war structures sporadically located within 13 states in Malaysia. Out of this, only 91 is a buildings. Undoubtedly, these buildings are important in portraying the historical past of the nation but given the age of the buildings at present, these structures will not be standing for too long unless proper maintenance works are carried out. The lack of proper maintenance works and identification of historical buildings may contribute to decaying of buildings thus resulting to decrement in the number of historical buildings. Rapid urbanization process is the main threat for historical buildings (e.g.) Bok House which was demolished in 14th December 2006 [6].

Acknowledging the need of a systematic maintenance for historical buildings, this research therefore is seen as the vital approach to highlight and to assist the improvement on the maintenance for historical buildings within the local context. This research intents to integrate two key elements, namely, the importance and the needs of the maintenance, with the main purpose of developing a framework for a systematic maintenance programme for historical buildings in Malaysia. The main focus of this research will be concentrated on the historical buildings which have undergone the conservation works be it major or minor.

2. Literature Review

Fielden [7] stated that historical buildings are indeed valuable and should be appreciated for its cultural significance. The significance of these buildings presents in the forms of their aesthetical characteristics, historical value, social value, spiritual value and symbolical value. For their significances, these historical buildings should be preserved; purposely to be shared and cherished by all.

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