

## Challenges in Conserving Heritage Buildings in Terengganu, Malaysia

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### Abstract

Conservation of heritage buildings is a new phenomenon in architecture in Malaysia. The state of Terengganu is especially famous for its wealth of traditional cultural heritage and heritage treasures left behind, especially old buildings that have high cultural value and symbolize the identity of a nation. Its existence greatly benefits the community, nation and even the country. Efforts to preserve historical heritage buildings from the threat of destruction are carried out comprehensively and committed by all parties including the government, NGOs and even the local community. This study aims to discuss the challenges faced in conserving heritage buildings in detail. In this study, three historical heritage buildings in Terengganu were chosen as the study location, namely the Tengku Long Palace, the Chinese Village Building, and the Bukit Besi Museum. This study uses qualitative research methods and the data is analyzed using NVIVO software. A total of 30 respondents consisting of the local community and also experts in the heritage department were interviewed in depth about the challenges in conserving heritage products in Terengganu. The results of the study found that some of the problems and challenges encountered in the conservation carried out on the heritage tourism products involved are definitional confusion, difficulties in the matter of announcing a heritage building, new building projects around the construction site, vandalism activities, high land value to be developed, difficulty in obtaining spare materials, lack of experts, documentation, lack of some additional provisions and lack of cooperation of privately owned building owners.

**Keywords:** Heritage Buildings, Conservation, Challenges

### Introduction

Heritage buildings in Malaysia are different in terms of architectural style, function and building structure. The level of damage and defects of heritage buildings depends on factors such as age, location, environmental threats, and periodic maintenance that directly affects the lifespan and structure of the building. Therefore, the conservation of heritage buildings requires a comprehensive and systematic approach to ensure that the level of authenticity

and importance of a heritage building will continue to be preserved for future generations to see (Ghafar, 2010).

Conservation activities are an effective step to continue the existence of historical heritage buildings so that they remain preserved, especially in the State of Terengganu. It should be implemented because cultural heritage buildings in Malaysia are generally increasingly threatened by destruction, not only due to traditional damage, but also due to changes in social and economic conditions (Zaki et al., 2014). The destruction or loss of culture will result in the extinction of heritage for all nations in the world. Therefore, community management and involvement is very important to prevent the destruction and extinction of historical heritage resources from continuing. The persistent effort to conserve all the heritage that exists today includes the conservation of sites and buildings, cities and villages that are rich in heritage value, monuments, culture, socio-economic aspects of the community as well as other valuable aspects of historical heritage.

According to Yuszaidy (2018), strict heritage legislation is able to provide appropriate protection for cultural heritage in Malaysia. The conservation can provide social, economic and political stability and have a good impact on the community to be inherited by the next generation as the strength of the community's identity.

Although many heritage building conservation works are carried out on colonial buildings, traditional Malay houses, mosques, shops and public buildings, there are still a few people who are not aware of the importance of this field. In fact, there are those who think that the practice of preserving heritage buildings is difficult to practice and does not promise a good economic return. There are conservation works that do not follow the correct conservation work principles and procedures. This causes the aesthetic and architectural value of heritage buildings to be affected as well as reduce the interest of the community, tourists and investors towards heritage. However, based on the experience of foreign countries such as England, Italy, Australia, Japan and South Korea, heritage conservation can improve the economic status of local communities through the development of value-added heritage tourism. In line with that, Malaysian society should be educated to appreciate and preserve the country's cultural heritage (Ghafar, 2010).

Therefore, this study focuses on the conservation of historic heritage buildings in several study locations conducted to see the challenges in conserving heritage products in Terengganu in detail in this study.

## **Literature Review**

### *Heritage*

Warisan refers to the World Heritage Committee (1996) (WHC), stating that heritage is the legacy of the past that is still practiced in the present and passed down from the present generation to future generations. While the National Heritage Department (2009) defines heritage as a national treasure that is inherited from previous generations, whether it is currently or has been owned by a community group where it is a shared responsibility to preserve and preserve.

Heritage includes customs, culture, areas, buildings, archival materials and prints including the writing of related books and papers. Heritage can also be understood as the remains of history, customs and quality in a society or country and is recognized to play an important role. Heritage buildings are objects that evoke a sense of awe and curiosity about society and related culture. A heritage building has architectural, aesthetic, historical, documentary, archeological, economic, social and political, spiritual and symbolic values. However, the most significant impact is emotional because a heritage building has a cultural identity and continuity that forms part of the historical heritage. A heritage building, from its construction to the present, has its own message that can only be known through the uncovering of authentic historical records.

### *Conservation of Heritage Buildings*

In the study of Fatimah et al (2011), the result of the study of the inventory of Malaysian heritage buildings carried out by the National Museum in 1992 was estimated to be approximately 35,000 pre-war buildings located in 265 cities that were studied throughout the country and accordingly they need to be restored (Zainol, 1995). According to Ghafar (2009), most of these heritage buildings are not well maintained and most of them are in a dilapidated state due to building damage factors. Even worse, when some of the heritage buildings are threatened with destruction because they were neglected by the original owners and demolished due to the pressure of development and lack of community concern in efforts to conserve heritage buildings (Hamilton & Zuraini, 2002). According to Zainol (1995), conservation is not only focused on the care of specific and specific buildings, but care includes all the qualities that make up the appearance of the city. The urban pattern that exists in cities throughout Malaysia is a very important cultural value and if it disappears it is unlikely to be able to be replaced again and it is important to ensure the continuity of the cultural value and tradition of the city itself.

In the study of Yusof (2018), an example of conservation of significant cultural heritage buildings that received attention from the National Heritage Department is the residence of Penghulu Abdul Ghani bin Abdul Majid located in Merlimau, Melaka. This house was previously managed and cared for by the Melaka Museum Corporation (PERZIM) before being handed over to the National Heritage Department for the purpose of conservation and preservation from severe damage. Penghulu Abdul Ghani's residence has been maintained and repaired many times by PERZIM with the help of expertise from the Department of Museums and Antiquities. This collaboration is to conserve and preserve historic and valuable traditional buildings from damage. Nevertheless, the lack of expertise and finance has affected the supervision and monitoring of traditional houses which began to suffer severe damage until it was completely taken over from the National Heritage Department in 2008.

Conservation is a method of protecting heritage monuments from extinction and further saving their cultural, aesthetic and functional values. Efforts to conserve heritage buildings in Malaysia started relatively late. Awareness of the conservation of heritage buildings only stood out around the 1980s, when the country actively planned economic development under the government of the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Historic buildings, historic sites are left abandoned without anyone trying to conserve them (Howard, 2003). The development of heritage building conservation in Malaysia started in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur and George Town. For example, the Kuala Lumpur wet market building

conservation project in 1986 has sparked a phenomenon in the practice of heritage building conservation in this country. The wet market was built in 1936 and is now known as Pasar Seni. Meanwhile in George Town, the Penang Municipal Council Structure Plan Report (1989) has presented Urban Conservation Guidelines to control development in its conservation zone (Ghafar, 2010).

In addition to protection, conservation aims to move quality and value, that is from an abandoned building to a usable space, from almost collapsing to a strong space (Bullen, 2007) and has prospects for various economic activities such as business, recreation and culture (Wood, 2005). From the aspect of heritage areas, it refers to a more holistic conservation process, because an area includes the community, cultural identity, physical structure and socio-economic activities, including tangible and intangible elements (Shuhana, 2005; Snyder, 2008).

The success and effectiveness of heritage conservation depends on two factors, the first of which is stakeholder awareness, involvement and appreciation of heritage values and economic opportunities. The second is public education for all stakeholders in a focused and continuous manner (Azman et. al., 2009). Innovative public education programs, promotional activities and capacity building initiatives need to be planned to achieve a balance between conservation and heritage tourism.

#### *The Role of Government Agencies in Conserving Heritage Products*

Malaysia needs a comprehensive act to preserve and conserve heritage and culture to overcome the problem of loss and develop heritage and culture in the future (Rofli & Khoo, 2009). The Treasures Act 1957 (Act 542) and the Antiquities Act 1976 (Act 168) are seen to still have weaknesses because they do not include all sections or regulations that can protect, conserve, preserve and maintain the heritage and culture (Yuszaidy et al., 2011). Weaknesses like this in the long term will harm the country and with the gazetting of the National Heritage Act in 2005, it has given breath in dignifying heritage and culture in this country (Yusof, 2006). The two types of heritage enshrined in the National Heritage Act (2005) are cultural heritage and natural heritage, Cultural heritage is a tangible form of cultural structure or artefact and can include things, objects, details, artefacts, formation structures that are important to the way of life of the people in Malaysia in historical or current terms, above or in the ground or underwater cultural heritage in tangible form but does not include natural heritage. Examples of cultural heritage are such as historical monuments, heritage sites, archaeological reserves, heritage objects and also include components of intangible heritage such as performing arts, customs and culture, language and literature and fine arts. While natural heritage refers to areas with natural characteristics consisting of physical or biological land formations or groups of such formations, geological or physiological features, mountains, rivers, creeks, rock formations, seashores or any natural site which have outstanding values from a natural point of view, science, historical conservation or natural beauty including Malaysian flora and fauna (Ramli et.al., 2015).

In preserving cultural heritage and natural heritage in Malaysia, matters related to legislation have been found to complement each other between the legislation adopted by the federal government and the legislation adopted by the state government, the only question is whether there is coordination between the federal government and the state government.

This coordination is important so that there is no problem when a protected area is invaded by certain parties where each party will blame each other as happened when a proto-historical site in Lembah Bujang was destroyed to allow housing projects to be carried out. If this happens, in terms of history and heritage, the country will suffer a loss.

Apart from the legislation, the Peninsular Malaysia Town and Country Planning Department has issued KSAS Conservation and Development Planning Guidelines (environmentally sensitive areas) which are specific to the conservation and development of natural heritage and antiquities. These guidelines are read together with the law, Federal and State policies, as well as the GP for Development Planning in Hill and Highland Areas which was approved by the Council of Ministers Meeting on 12 August 2009 and the 62nd MNKT (National Council for Local Government) on 17 September 2009 as well as other requirements of various related technical agencies.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Data Collection Methods*

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative research method. Primary data and secondary data are used to obtain information regarding the study title and related issues. The researcher used observational data collection techniques and in-depth interviews. A total of 30 respondents from the local community who are directly or indirectly involved in the conservation of this heritage product were selected to be interviewed. In addition, NGOs, Museum Departments, Tourism Agencies, Heritage Departments and several stakeholders were also selected to be interviewed. These respondents are needed to get in-depth information about their involvement in conservation and tourism activities in the area and also to know the activities and challenges in conserving the heritage building. The conservation program provided for the local community is to help them get job opportunities and generate family income while maintaining the image of the heritage building so that it remains preserved for public viewing. The interview questions focused on issues related to conservation activities carried out on three study locations, namely Tengku Long Palace, Buildings in Kuala Terengganu Chinese Village and the Bukit Besi Museum which consists of different locations. These issues are important to see the impact of conservation carried out on the socio-economic and cultural transformation of the local community.

In order to ensure that this study is more realistic and obtains good results, unstructured interviews with the owners of the research buildings who have experience carrying out conservation work are also carried out. The interview needs to include all the desired aspects, especially regarding the conservation of damage to the study building, the method used to repair it, the cost spent and the management of the building concerned.

This study also used the observation method. The researcher made direct observations on the research objects in three locations, namely Tengku Long Palace, Kuala Terengganu Chinese Village Building and Dungun Bukit Besi Museum. Through this observation the researcher can see the conservation and reconstruction works of some traditional buildings and can see the tourism and conservation activities carried out by the government and NGOs as well as the involvement of the local community in the area.

### **Sample Study**

The sample was selected based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to a sampling procedure in which a group of subjects who have certain characteristics and are involved in heritage product conservation activities are selected as study respondents. Therefore, this research uses the local community living in several study areas, namely residents around the Tengku Long Palace, Chinese Village and Bukit Besi Museum as well as public and private officials involved in building conservation activities and heritage tourism as a study sample.

### **Result**

#### *Challenges in Conserving Heritage Products*

As is well known, the process of conserving heritage tourism products such as old buildings, monuments, and other artifacts is quite challenging. This is because this process takes a long time. Based on the research that has been conducted, it was found that the problems and challenges faced in the field of conservation in Terengganu are still insufficient. This coincides with what was once presented by (Saleh, 2000). There should be some improvements in the legal and business aspects if we want to see this field achieve a success that can be proud of. Several problems and challenges faced in the conservation project carried out on the heritage tourism products involved have been identified. One of the challenges is the confusion of definitions.

#### *i. Definitional Confusion*

There is confusion in the definition of a building as a heritage building. This is because in the existing legislation there is no definition of heritage buildings as if they do not exist in Malaysia. Historic buildings, old monuments, ancient monuments and some other terms that refer to the age of 100 years.

#### *ii. Difficulty in the Matter of Gazetting a Heritage Building*

Under the Antiquities Act 1976, historic buildings or monuments must be at least 100 years old to be listed or gazetted by the government under the Museum Department to provide protection and encouragement to be maintained and restored. However, most of the historic buildings which are important elements in a heritage city still do not reach that age or even if they do, they are not protected and most of them are neglected and have been destroyed. Our society lacks awareness to appreciate and conserve heritage cities, where development has eliminated all existing heritage.

#### *iii. New Building Project Around Construction Site*

Heritage sites are often the focus of tourists to visit. Therefore, many new buildings are often developed around heritage sites to become hotels or shopping places. This is not recommended because it is feared that it will have a negative impact on the existing heritage. For example, piling work for high-rise development is feared to have a negative impact on existing heritage buildings because heritage buildings generally do not have a solid foundation.

#### *iv. Vandalism Activity*

Heritage sites are often visited by tourists. But it is very sad that vandalism often happens to heritage buildings such as scratching or damaging the fabric of the building. This is highly



discouraged because existing heritage buildings have their own aesthetic value and should not be destroyed by vandalism.

*v. High Land Value to Be Developed*

Heritage sites in the country are mostly located in urban areas that have high land values for development. The authorities often face confusion whether to develop a heritage building site or demolish it for new development. Heritage buildings that are demolished for new development should not happen so that heritage buildings can be maintained and not just for profit.

*vi. Difficulty Obtaining Replacement Materials*

Conservation work is often difficult to obtain replacement materials. This has often been a challenge for contractors to carry out conservation work as spare materials are hard to come by.

*vii. Lack of Experts*

Our country still lacks technical experts and skilled workers in carrying out heritage urban conservation works. In addition to that, we also lack professionals in the management of heritage cities or the tourism management of heritage cities themselves.

*viii. Documentation*

The documentation and recording system for heritage cities in Terengganu is particularly inappropriate and incomplete. This makes it difficult to identify the conservation methods that need to be carried out and determine the allocation funds for conservation work.

*x. Lack of Some Additional Provisions*

Such as the Preservation Order/ Preservation Order as well as some other provisions that should be included in the legal provisions in this field such as Transfer of Development Right, tax relief and others. The problem that is often faced is not having enough allocations to carry out these conservation works. The attitude of heritage building owners who only expect help from the government without any effort to conserve their buildings themselves also causes problems in efforts to implement the conservation of old buildings. This causes more and more historical monuments to be abandoned without any effort to restore them.

*xi. Lack of Cooperation from Owners of Privately Owned Buildings*

There are various types of problems and challenges that need to be faced in carrying out conservation work in Malaysia. The first is the lack of cooperation from the owners of privately owned heritage buildings as well as the lack of awareness of home owners on the importance of conserving heritage buildings. Although the Local Authority has absolute authority to give instructions regarding any conservation works, the lack of understanding from the owners of historical monuments will make this matter even more complicated.

The challenges faced in conserving these heritage products can be seen through table 2 as below

Table 2

*Challenges in Conserving Heritage Buildings in Terengganu*

	<b>CHALLENGES IN CONSERVING HERITAGE BUILDINGS</b>
1.	Definitional Confusion
2.	Difficulty in the matter of gazetting a heritage building.
4.	New Building Project Around Construction Site
5.	Vandalism activity
6.	High Land Value To Be Developed
7.	Difficulty Obtaining Replacement Materials
8.	Lack of Experts
9.	Documentation
10.	Lack of some additional provisions
11.	Lack of cooperation from owners of privately owned buildings

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, the challenge in conserving heritage products is a study that has the potential to be highlighted and heritage buildings should be conserved because of their historical value and importance, as well as the potential to generate economic resources for the local community and have a positive impact on the country. Seeing its importance especially to the local community, efforts to conserve heritage products from the threat of extinction must be taken into consideration and carried out continuously by all parties including the community itself. Conservation is meaningless without the active involvement of local communities in the heritage industry. With the existence of the National Heritage Department, the potential of this heritage-based tourism product should be enhanced and promoted at the national and international level. Among the challenges that need to be overcome either on behalf of the public sector or the private sector is how to provide educational services to the community or tourists in the aspect of heritage education. Close cooperation between various parties in creating sustainable heritage tourism development needs to be done, especially involving Non-Governmental Organizations and local universities. It is hoped that this study can provide useful information to the community and the institution can also be used as a reference for future researchers and provide new ideas according to the times as well as improvements while also improving the quality of the existing management.



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