

# Rethinking Conservation the Notion of Managing Change

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## Rethinking Conservation: the Notion of Manage Change in Conservation Theory and Practice in Singapore

Timoticin Kwanda<sup>1st</sup>

**Abstract**— Conservation always involves a certain degree of change or intervention that inevitably results in some form of change to the historic buildings and sites. In this sense, this paper deals with the notion of manage change in conservation theory and practice in the case of Singapore. In conservation theory, the notion of manage change is seen since the emerge of contemporary conservation theory as shown in many charters and conventions. In practice, the notion of manage change is shown in the case of Singapore. In Singapore, change or intervention in the conservation areas in term of new uses and new buildings is to ensure that every protected building remains in use and that most buildings, remain economically sustainable that relevant in a new economic environment. Therefore, the notion of manage change was the establishment of the Preservation of Monuments Board in 1971, the 1987 Central Area Structure Plan such as Chinatown, and the URA conservation guidelines. The selection of new uses and activities to regenerate the conservation areas, very often emphasis is placed on economic viability and appropriateness for the new context with particular attention is devoted to the role of tourism. The addition of new buildings has been set to complement the historic area, to limit the new buildings to the same height as that of the historic buildings, and the new should be of a modern language so as to allow the historic building to retain its uniqueness. In short, the notion of manage change in today practice of conservation in many cities of the world including the city of Semarang is a must to conserve historic buildings and sites remains in use.

**Keywords :** redefine, conservation, change, Singapore

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Background

In Asia, conservation of architectural heritage is a recent issue as response to the pressure of rapid growth of urban development. In Asian countries, conservation is also a new concept, notably in recent years a number of Asian country has charters or principles to underpin approaches in conserving cultural heritage, such as the Principle for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (2000), the Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia, and the Charter for Conservation of Unprotected Architectural Heritage and Sites of India (2004). In 1990s, the opening of the economy to market forces and development

opportunities causes an increase risk with architectural heritage as new buildings and infrastructures have been constructed altering the character of the old district in Asia. These phenomena the so-called 'disappearing Asian city' have happened in many Asian cities, such as the destruction of architectural heritage in Intramuros of Manila, the old district of Pudong in Shanghai, and George Town (Logan 2002).

On the other hand, the 'disappearing Asian city' phenomena is not fully true as more and more architectural heritages in Asia have been conserved which well documented by UNESCO in Asia Conserved (Engelhardt & Unakul 2007). This recent conservation consciousness by the experts is interesting issue of whether it is because of the fear of loss that gives rise to conserving (Peckham 2003: 4-5) or the other agenda such as social status of dominant groups, economic agenda such as tourism industry, and political ends for nationalism (Hobsbawm & Ranger eds. 1983; Bendix 2007: 256). For these reasons, cultural heritage is always contested by nature as dissonance is 'intrinsic to the nature of heritage' where selection is unavoidable related to heritage ownership, conflicting uses and misuses, multi consumed on different markets, and the duality of heritage of being a resource of both economic and cultural capital (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996).

For whatever of the above reasons, conservation always involves a certain degree of change or intervention that inevitably results in some form of change to the historic buildings and sites. While there is general agreement on the need for conservation and the benefits it confers on the city, there are also disagreements over how much change is permitted in conservation. Therefore, this paper first examines the notion of manage change in conservation theory. In conservation theory, overtime the notion of manage change is reviewed from the classical to the contemporary conservation theory. It then explores, the notion of manage change in conservation practice in the case of Singapore.

The case is examined mainly to provide insight into the issue, and to revise a generalization of conservation in an attempt to extend the discussion and permit conclusions to be derived. Singapore is selected as the case for the city state has experiences of manage change in conservation actively over time, as response to rapid redevelopment that many heritage buildings were demolished to make way for new developments. Data for the study come from sources such as observations, relevant literature, reports and documents of various organisations and agencies on conservation works in Singapore.

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## II. THE NOTION OF MANAGE CHANGE IN CONSERVATION THEORY

In the Western sphere, the notion of conservation has long been developed since the eighteenth century (Rodwell 2007). In conservation practice throughout Europe and the international sphere, this materialistic notion of conservation is found in various international charters and conventions. These charters and conventions have shaped two academic streams in conservation. At present in conservation, two different academic streams existed that totally conflict on the notion of the primacy of the heritage object. These two notions of heritage approach are also termed as classical conservation theory and contemporary conservation theory.

### Classical Conservation Theory

For the classical theory, the object has a value existing independently of people that should not be threatened to any change. Since the nineteenth century, the desire to preserve as much of the original fabric as possible has been key to conservation practice, which has viewed the original material as the ultimate testimony to the history and origin of the building, and thus to its authenticity as a cultural and historical artefact. This practice of the concept of material authenticity has served as one of the major philosophical underpinnings of conservation for the last hundred years and continues to be the focus of discussion in the larger conservation discourse. Since the onset of the restoration debate in the nineteenth-century England, numerous charters, conventions, and declarations have increasingly recognized. These documents are indicative of the development of the discipline and reflect both the steadfast debates and the continual re-evaluation, and found in the various international charters and conventions, such as the Athens Charter (1931), the Venice Charter (1964), UNESCO World Heritage Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2005a), and the ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (1987).

### Contemporary Conservation Theory

On the other hand, the people-centred approach views that heritage is inevitably rooted more about people of the present as creators of heritage, who attribute meaning, value, and functions and select what is to become heritage from the infinity of the past (Loulanski 2006). Along with the widening scope of heritage, the contemporary conservation theory primary interest is no longer on the objects, but rather on the subjects based on the basic question that why, for whom, the conservation is done. The answers to these questions are closely to the reason that objects are conserved because it has meaning for some or a certain group of people in which these meanings are neither fixed, nor are they universal: the same object can have a strong significance for some people, while being irrelevant to other, and some other reasons such as (1) heritage belong to us, refers to larger group of people, to a similar extent as we are both ancestors and descendents of other people, and thus we have no more or fewer rights than other had; (2) the responsibility for conservation of an object fall on the affected people, thus it is their duty to conserve, and it is for

them that conservation is performed; (3) a conservator is not only a mediator between an object and scientists who examines scientifically or 'listen' to the 'request' of an object for treatment, and interpret the symptoms of the physical object, but also as a decision maker; (4) conservation objects is not an experts-only zone whereas conservation decisions are beyond the reach of most people (Munoz-Vinas 2005).

In this contemporary conservation theory, two major points that emerged are the idea of significance and the notion of inclusive in conservation process. Throughout the 1980s it became apparent that not everything from the past could and should be saved that heritage had to pay its own way; with dwindling financial resource coupled with the actual cost of conservation. People realized that historic buildings or sites had a significance or value because they had been developed, modified, used for many years. Therefore it is unrealistic to take a purist line to conservation work to seek the historic and aesthetic truth of the object. The notion of inclusive stress heritage as something created and produced in, as a resource for the present, thus becomes more about meanings and values than material artefacts thus the focus on object: material artefacts have shifted to the subject that attempt to prioritise public interest as stated in Burra Charter article 5.1:

... conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for the participation of people for whom the place has special associations and meanings, or who have social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place.

In short, the conservation of cultural heritage or the action taken to prevent decay and manage change is shifted from "not for the sake of the objects" but to "the sake of the people for whom they have a meaningful life." In line with this, the study tries to explore conservation as part of the community who have special associations, social and spiritual meanings for the place.

### The Notion of Manage Change in Conservation

Within these two theories, subsequently definition of conservation has also changed as see from various charters, literature and the interest bodies. In conservation discourse, the term conservation was firstly mentioned in the Venice Charter (1964), however, no description for the term. Afterwards, the term is described in many Charters, such as in the Burra Charter (1999) an internationally known for its comprehensive and detailed contents. In this Charter article 1.4, conservation means 'all the process of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance'.

For Feilden (2003), conservation is defined as 'the action taken to prevent decay and manage change dynamically', and all of these acts are to 'prolong the life of our cultural and natural heritage ...' Lastly, to revise the outdated existing principles with the new approach of notion of values advocated by the Burra Charter, the English Heritage recently produced the Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment (2006), and conservation is defined as 'the process of managing change in ways that will best sustain the values of a place in its contexts, and which recognises opportunities to reveal and reinforce those values'.

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Substantially, these definitions can be categorized into (1) activities such as action taken, the process of looking after, and manage change; and (2) objectives such as retain cultural significant, sustain the values, and prevent decay of a place (Table 1).

In short, the three above definitions are all alike that have come to see conservation as the management of change, seeking to retain what people value about places extending the concept of conservation from mere preservation to embrace enhancement or positive change. Thus, conservation can be defined as managing change in which actions taken or process of looking after a place is to prevent decay and retain or sustain cultural significance or values, whereas:

- 1 managing change is about making the optimum conservation decision of proposed changes in case of form, materials, construction techniques, and usage of a building, based on careful assessment of the relative importance of each value. In this sense, conservation has to be a conscious behavior of actions that apply scientific method as opposed to arbitrary intervention (Jokileto 2006; Munoz 2005).
- 2 action taken or conservation process may include a combination one or more of the ascending degrees of intervention: (1) prevention of deterioration or maintenance, preferred as the best representing the minimum intervention principle, (2) preservation of the existing state, (3) consolidation of the fabric, (4) restoration, (5) rehabilitation, (6) reproduction, (7) reconstruction, (8) adaptation.

Table 1. The Notion of Manage Change of Conservation Definition

Year	Charters/ Interest Bodies	Activities	Objectives
1964	Venice	No definition	Work of art as historical evidence (article 3)
1999	Burra	all the process of looking after place (article 1.4)	to retain its cultural significance (article 2)
1982, 1989	Feilden (p. 3)	the action taken	to prevent decay
2003	Feilden (p. 3)	the action taken; and manage change dynamically	to prevent decay
2006	English Heritage Principles	process of managing change	to sustain the values

Notes: 1 the year indicates the date of the charters, interest bodies, and the book of the writer are issued or published. Source: Kwanda, 2012

To comprehend conservation as the management of change with various degrees of intervention, in practice it can be seen in conservation works in Singapore, in the following discussion.

### III. SINGAPORE: THE NOTION OF MANAGE CHANGE IN CONSERVATION

Singapore underwent rapid redevelopment during 1960s and 70s, and many heritage buildings were demolished, such as familiar landmarks, Amber Mansions, the Adelphi Hotel, China Building, the Law Courts and Raffles Institution, along with numerous mansions and shophouses were demolished. As a result, in 1971, the Preservation of Monuments Board was established to protect historic buildings. In Singapore, given the land scarce situation, the retained buildings have to remain relevant in the new time and also to ensure a delicate balance between the protected buildings and the new development. Thus conservation has been an integral part of urban planning. The first effort was demonstrated in the 1987 Central Area Structure Plan, which proposed the conservation of several historic districts in the midst of redeveloping the surrounding areas (Figure 1). The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) completed the Tanjong Pagar pilot scheme and had restored 32 shophouses by 1988 while government purchased dilapidated and poorly maintained buildings and sites, and to put out to tender for private conservation. Existing owners were also encouraged to conserve their properties, again supervised by the URA.

In the Civic and Cultural District Plan, the historic buildings in the central area have been recommended for conservation and adapted to culture-related uses. The Concept Plan 2001 aimed "to create a distinctive city alive with rich heritage, character diversity and identity. This effort of strengthening the identity continued and led to the formulation of the 2002 Identity Plan which aimed to conserve districts. To date, Singapore has assigned 54 monuments and 71 conservation areas comprising 6,500 buildings of which many are shophouses and townhouses.

#### Intensification

Due to the prime location of most heritage buildings, they are often subject to the pressure for development and intensification despite the fact that they are gazetted. In particular, functional, location obsolescence and economic obsolescence are typically the more pressing issues. While very strict control is imposed on listed monuments, it is less stringent in the case of historic buildings, to still remain relevant in a new economic environment, the idea of intensification has been permitted. Under the URA conservation guidelines, the guidelines allow new extension to meet contemporary needs, and even reconfiguration of interior spaces. In details, the new building elements may be introduced such as a new jackroof, skylight at the roof, new windows on the rear façade walls and the gable end wall, and a cover over the airwell and the rear court (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2006).

Some examples of intensification to historic buildings that the extension have enhanced the old, for examples:

- 1 **Two new identical pavilions.** Istana Kampong Glam (1840s), the Palladian-influenced Istana building was restored and adapted as the Malay Heritage Centre. The historic building was faithfully restored with special emphasis on its setting. The compound, its walled enclosure and the road leading to the building have been retained, and two identical pavilions were added due to functional requirements. The scale of the new pavilions was well-handled to maintain the

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dominance of the conserved building, while the identical form and placement of the two pavilions are considered to respond very well to the main axis of the building.

- 2 **Three new wings.** The original single-family house at 733 Mountbatten Road (1927), the Early Style Bungalow, was restored with the main building retained and three new wings added to house an extended family. The new buildings occupy the former out house at the rear and the open spaces at the two sides. The new buildings adopted a contemporary language with new materials to achieve a concept of “complementary contrast” between the new and the old. Another successful point is the retention of its setting, a large garden space that is required to appreciate the grandeur of the conserved building.
- 3 **Addition of floor area.** In order to improve the tight floor area of a shophouse, owners are allowed to add an attic floor to the top most floor, such as second storey or third storey. This often increases the floor area by 10 to 20 %, and this flexibility was welcome by property owners in most of the conserved shophouses. In order to meet the ceiling height standard, a jackroof is sometimes introduced over originally double pitched roof that results in a minor alteration of the roof form. In another case, in the early 1990s, Raffles Hotel, the most valued icon of its colonial past, was subject to restoration which produced addition of floor area to 104 hotel suites, 13 restaurants and bars, over 60 shops, a museum, culinary academy and function rooms. On (re)opening it claimed to fill the three roles of ‘international landmark, grand historic hotel and exciting social venue’. In terms of authenticity, this stretched the relationship between conservation and redevelopment almost to breaking point.
- 4 **Rear extension.** To further increase the limited floor space, an extension of shophouses is allowed at the rear yard with the maximum height allowable varies from 4 to 10 storeys. The addition of the new block, however, requires great sensitivity in the design, firstly there should be a clear demarcation between new and the original. Secondly, the spatial quality of the back lane space should be respected, as the backlane was originally enclosed by a single storey wall, the taller extension be articulated to reduce the impact of the taller building.

#### Adaptation

Under the URA conservation guidelines, conservation involves two processes, to minimize intervention and to control the change with the conservation principles are maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration and careful Repair or the “3R”. Monuments and historic buildings are in need of adaptation due to their obsolescence in meeting contemporary needs that allow to accommodate new uses or adaptation, for examples:

- 1 **The new uses of CHIJMES.** The Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus now known as CHIJMES (1840 to 1903) is originally a convent comprising a school, an orphanage and a chapel, this is now adapted to shops, pubs and restaurants. The site was released to a private developer for restoration and adaptive re-use through the URA sale of sites programme in 1990. The additional floor spaces required for the new use were

accommodated in basement with a sunken courtyard. While the intervention to the fabric has been positive, the appropriateness of the new use has been a subject of heated debate. The main reservation is that the commercial use is a radical departure from the previous school use.

- 2 **The new uses in Chinatown.**<sup>1</sup> The shift in government policy towards conservation as a result of a sudden decline in visitor arrivals and its impact on hotel occupancy levels. Up until 1991, there was a fall of 4.5 per cent of inbound tourism. In response to this crisis, the government appointed a Tourism Task Force to prepare the Tourism Product Development Plan in 1986, using six themes to promote and develop Singapore as a tourist destination with the intention of attracting more visitors and spending.

The area was designated in 1988 as a conservation area, involved large-scale adaptation of the shophouses. A Conservation Plan was devised for Chinatown which had the following objectives: (a) To retain and restore buildings of historical and architectural significance; (b) To improve the general physical environment and to introduce appropriate new features to further enhance the identity of the area; (c) To retain and enhance ethnic-based activities while consolidating the area with new and compatible activities (Henderson 2000). As the plan progressed, changes became obvious with the restoration of rows of shophouses and the arrival of new businesses and private tenants. The area was pedestrianized and environmental improvements made such as tree planting and other forms of landscaping. It has transformed an area that used to be full of life and vibrancy into a clean and sanitised place.

The original uses was replaced by new uses of fashionable restaurants, offices, boutiques, souvenir shops and smart offices generating the new street activities. These developments were not without their critics who complained that the Chinatown being conserved and promoted lacked the character and authenticity of the original, the original spirit of the place as early travellers to Chinatown found street life and the roadside culture colourful and entertaining. High rents for business and residential properties were making it impossible for local people to live and work there, and genuine traditional trades were disappearing to be replaced by the new uses. Gentrification appeared to be taking place with local people gaining little benefit and actively at risk of disinheritance.

Attempts to restore street life and a sense of bustling community to Chinatown, the URA has laid down guidelines encouraging street level shops in the core area selling traditional Chinese products and services or food outlets rather than offices. The National Arts Council has acquired some units to be given to various literary and performing arts groups including those

<sup>1</sup> Chinatown was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Stamford Raffles who set a Town Committee to plan a new town which would accommodate the rapid expansion of the original settlement and wanted to impose order on its development. The Chinese were allocated a town south of the Singapore River, beyond that there was unexplored forest and jungle. Other races including the Chuliahs, Arabs and Bugis were located in kampongs, north of the river with the central district given over to the European Town, administration and business (Henders on 2000).

specialising in Beijing opera, Chinese classical music and Mandarin or bilingual theatre at a heavily subsidised rent under its Arts Housing Scheme. Today, the newly constructed food street is attracting both tourists and locals. Similarly there are also some shops that are patronised by locals.

3 **The new uses in Far East Square.** Seeking to achieve the equilibrium between old and new previously referred to, the URA awarded a tender to develop one of the parcels of land in Chinatown into Far East Square. Six blocks have been conserved with 61 shophouses restored at the developer's expense and the seventh to be a modern glass building housing commercial premises to revitalise the area to suit contemporary lifestyle, such as the list of food and beverage international chains operators which includes names like Spinelli Canadian Mufin Co and Kentucky Fried Chicken. The old Chor Eng Institute is to become a restaurant and discotheque with others offering Mediterranean, French and Italian cuisine. Such activities and resultant atmosphere exclude traditional hawkers and street life. The spirit of the place is changed from the robust streets, for traffic in the past, are now delicate atriums for outdoor cafes, a transformation of the place from a place for residential and trading purposes to one for leisure and entertainment.

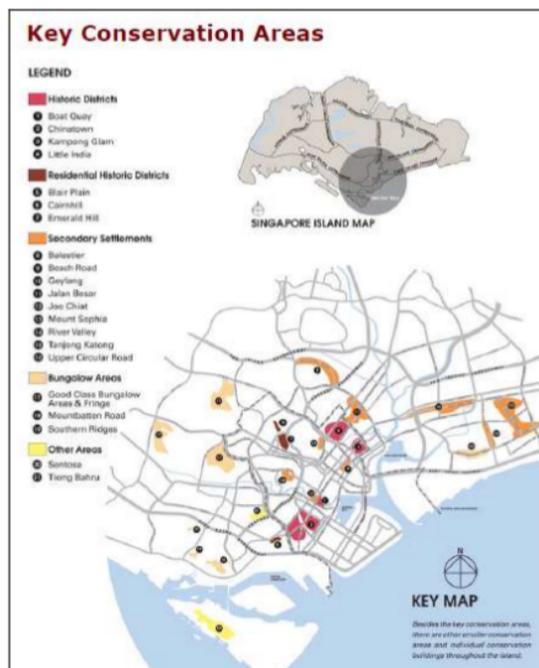


Figure 1. Conservation Areas in Singapore. Source: Urban Redevelopment Agency 2006.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Recognising the inherent values that the heritage buildings and sites possess, the purpose of conservation is to keep the buildings alive, retain and reveal their cultural significance. Yet conservation always involves a certain

degree of intervention. This intervention inevitably results in some form of change to the historic fabrics.

In conservation theory, especially in contemporary conservation theory as written in many charters and conservation principles that change in conservation is unavoidable, which has to be managed. Thus, the notion of managed change in conservation is needed to keep historic buildings and sites remain intact and sustain their cultural significances. In practice, the notion of managed change had been shown in Singapore that experienced rapid economic growth, historic districts with rich cultural heritage are often demolished and replaced by modern high-rise buildings.

This article shows the success of Singapore's urban conservation policy in preserving its historic districts. The former ethnic enclaves of Chinatown, and Little India, Kampong Glam have been conserved, in projects that combine redevelopment and adaptive reuse, and can be explored by tourists on foot with the help of published route maps. The use of shophouses shows that the policy has succeeded in retaining the activities which reflect the community life in the core conservation areas. This is because the policy by the Singapore Tourism Board allows for the operation of market forces which makes preservation and restoration of the old shophouses viable.

However, many see the conservation works as merely retaining the tangible aspects and less so in conserving its cultural significance of the place as the original use has been completely phased out. The approach in the adaptive reuse in such places is selected based on the retained fabric, the tangible only. It is argued that though the URA's guidelines promote rehabilitation and adaptive reuse, it was unsuccessful in revitalizing the traditional Chinese way of life in Chinatown. By refurbishing the architectural facades of Chinatown buildings and decontextualizing them from the social and cultural circumstances that produced the place, the URA only preserved the 'fabric' without the 'soul' of the place.

Singapore and Semarang share with many other Southeast Asian port cities the characteristics of rapid growth. It is hoped that the experience of conservation in Singapore has a wider applicability beyond Singapore, insights of the lessons learned that can be applied for conservation in the city of Semarang. Judging from the conservation theory and practice, the notion of managed change is a must. In the case of Semarang, due to the fact that many historic buildings are functionally obsolete, they need to be changed or adapted to new uses that should allow for new life and activities without much modification to the historic fabric. When introducing new buildings, they should be designed to be of their time while respecting the old, to achieve a constructive relationship where the new respects the old as following the conservation principle of discernible.

To manage change in conservation, it is critical to identify appropriate new uses and activities so as to minimise the need for change to the existing fabric. While adapting to new uses, it requires sensitivity in handling change and making modification to the historic fabric. Indeed, it is accepted that heritage buildings should continue to retain their cultural significance and be prominent.

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