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**Rethinking Conservation - “TOWARDS OLD TOWN SEMARANG, THE WORLD HERITAGE CITY 2020”**

**Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation,**

A. Rudyanto Soesilo

*Abstract—*

Semarang is a very old city and has many episodes of history, every episode had left architectural artifacts on this old city. These architectural artifacts now become architectural heritages and potential assets for this city which can be developed as tourism destinations. So far we’ve heard about the effort to developed the “Kota-lama” district, there are many events, many foundations and government’s efforts and campaigns. So with “the Old China-town” has successfully developed “the Semawis Night-bazar”. But besides those two heritages of Semarang, there are many-many other significant and historical heritages, say the Kampong-Melayu, the ex Kanjengan and many others historical building with the nuance of the struggle of the Indonesian people to grasp their independence towards the Proclamation day, a kind of Heroic conservation. This Heroic conservation is being needed hardly in an ex Colonized country like Indonesia, a country that faced the dilemma of its historical conservation. The Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation, can be a useful development, useful for the Semarang’s resident, for the historical conservation and solve the dilemma of historical conservation in an ex Colonized country like Indonesia and Semarang.

Key-words: *Multi Ethnic Semarang’s city conservation, Heroic conservation, conservation in an ex Colonized country*

By: A. Rudyanto Soesilo

**I. Introduction:**

A city is an artifact as a product of the long history of the city. Semarang as an old city had travel a long history too, and the whole architecture of Semarang’s city and its districts and regions reflects the path of that history. So every parts of Semarang city has its own value and share to the whole Semarang’s history. That’s why the paradigm and policy of the Semarang’s conservation has to cover all historical district and regions in Semarang. So far nearly everybody and every effort and energy - from the government, the art community, the press, universities, many foundations and many others - have been poured to lift up and promote “Kota-Lama” as an ex- Colonial district. While Pecinan’s community as the inhabitants of the Chinese district, by their community-based self-supporting effort has successfully arranged the Semawis bazaar on each Friday till Sunday nights.

As history record, the Dutch Colonial applied the “*Divide et impera*” colonial politic strategy in separating the many ethnics into each closed districts merely to easily have control on them , so in Semarang emerged the “Pelandan”, “Pecinan”, “Kauman”, Pekojan, Kanjengan” (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts etc. Now in

21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to adopt the paradigm and the policy of our City conservation - that is “the multi ethnics Semarang’s city conservation”- to show the world that after our Independence Day 1945, now we are together and not

being separated again. The Heritage with multi ethnics district becomes a monument of Unity with diversity in harmony, over the Semarang’s citizen and need to be conserve for the sake of history and on behalf of the mutual benefit for the Semarang’s citizen this time-being. For example, the Semarang city with the Multi-ethnic conservation area can be a favorite tourism destination with multi-ethnic attraction, culinary, culture, architecture and everyday-life atmosphere, which can generate and improve all **every aspects of the life of the city**. Depart from this point of view, we can firmly and strongly propose and campaign this “ multi ethnics Semarang’s city conservation” as a public awareness and movement.

**II. Problems of Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country in Semarang<sup>1</sup>.**

Architectural conservation in Indonesia as an ex Colonized Country, faced special problems instead of common problems such as the decline of an old historic urban. 'Kota- lama' at Jl. Raden Patah , Semarang, which is popular as 'The Little Netherland' is an example of the problem. Another problem is that some old historic urban areas located in old Downtown areas are currently becoming more and more interesting areas for business, capital investments and for living. The land-value become financially so high, that stimulates the Owners to arrange 'tricks' to remove the Old buildings, we called

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<sup>1</sup> Soesilo Rudyanto, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management, PMI P Unika seputiharanan, Semarang 2006

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"Pembusukan" (Indonesia : spoiling, intentionally decaying strategy)

Instead of ordinary problems of Architectural Conservation in such countries, in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the Architectural Conservation of Colonial-buildings. That have to be done because in an ex Colonized country, the Colonial-building had given a traumatic feeling to the indigenous people and if treated wrong, can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

Usually, in many countries the decline of an old historic urban area is a problem often found on many countries. Owners of old buildings are reluctant to maintain their old-historical building because of the decline of the economic, social and even the political roles of that area. In that case, it will be very difficult to restore the declined area to be a bright and promising area again. When people started to abandon that area, the area will become a Bronx-like area. Almost no one will be interested to work - invest - or even live on that area. 'Kota-lama' at Jl. Raden Patah , Semarang, which is popular as 'The Little Netherland' is an example of the problem. Many NGOs in collaboration with the Government have made many efforts to restore that 'sleeping' area, but until now, the result has not been significant yet.

On the other hand, another problem arouses. This problem is contrary to the problem discussed above; that some old historic urban areas located in old Downtown areas is currently becoming more and more interesting areas for business, capital investments and for living. Unlike the decline of old historic urban areas, this condition raised many threats to the old historic urban areas as well. The land-value of that - historic and at the same time an actual Downtown - is getting higher & higher, so it is understandable that owners of old historic buildings will undoubtedly always try to develop the site of the old historic buildings to a more profitable site. The land-value become financially so high, it even stimulates the Owners to arrange 'tricks' to remove the Old buildings so that the owner can develop the site to an all new great gigantic buildings, with an incredible business prospect. One of the tricks that is very popular nowadays is what we called "Pembusukan" (Indonesia : spoiling), means a clandestine effort to despoil protected old buildings until there are nothing left but ruins from the protected old building, so anyone can do anything on that ruins and nothing wrong with that.

Instead of that ordinary problem of Architectural Conservation in such countries, in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, there must be a special approach, attention and attitude on the Architectural Conservation of Colonial-building. There must be a different approach and attitude between architectural conservation on a Colonial country than on an 'ex Colonized country'. In the first, Colonialism gives their people 'Heroes' as the 'Winner' of the war on their overseas colonies. That will be an opposite case in an ex Colonized country, the Colonial-building can give a traumatic feeling to the indigenous people.

Indonesia was colonized for more than 300 (three hundred) years. Colonialism nearly took all of what the colonized people have, agricultural-product : the Hongitochten, the

Culturtsel, many mining-products, and workers : Rodi, Jugun Ianfu, liberty and even their dignity. All those have made the colonized people physically and psychologically being hurt. They have felt such a great anguish and a Colonial building, if treated wrong, can bring back the feel of anguish in the present time.

A Colonial building was the setting and the place where all the Colonialism was done including the abuse, the torture and all the arrogance of Colonialism. A Colonial building was consciously and intentionally designed to show the superiority of the Colonials to the colonized people. At the time when an indigenous people had to come to a Colonial building, they had to be in a position of a looser, a servant, even an accused, so they had to come in a very careful, 'polite' and maybe in a frightened way. This had to be taken for granted and there had to be 'No-Question' to this 'Unwritten-law'. This 'Unwritten-law' had made a very deep trace or even scar into the feeling of indigenous people. The

Colonial-building than became a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary indigenous people until the Freedom-day came and a new hope arise.

After Indonesia's Independence-day on August the 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945, all the Colonial buildings were then occupied by the Indonesian Republic Government and the military had been given the authorities to manage them. The military buildings as well as other military properties were managed in a military way. This military management reached the strictest holding of the Colonial buildings after The New Order regime - which was a Military regime - took-over the rule of the politics on 1965. The Colonial buildings then had become more and more alienated from ordinary people. As other military buildings, the Colonial buildings were guarded with standby guns, and taking photos of them was prohibited. No one had the permission to even have a glance look at the buildings. Everyone had to soon go away from the Military-buildings without even had the chance to look at them. And so, the Colonial buildings had again become a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary people for about 32 years<sup>2</sup>.

The next problem was the "Divide et impera" colonial politic strategy in separating the many ethnics into each closed districts merely to easily have control on them , so in Semarang emerged the "Pelandan", "Pecinan", "Kauman", Pekojan, Kanjengan" (the Dutch, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Kojas) districts etc. Semarang old city as an artifact of the Colonial's segregated social policy have to be careful and to have a specific treatment to overcome the old traumatic phenomena.

### III. Unity in diversity

Until now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the remains of the "Divide et impera" policy is still live there although not so segregated as the colonial era. The indigenous people's descendant still be there as the resident with their traditional customs.

<sup>2</sup> Architectural Conservation in an ex Colonized Country like Indonesia, have had the First-rule, that it must guarantee that the coming use of the ex Colonial building will never awakened the trauma and the nightmare to the people - now - in the present time. (Altruism paradigm in Conservation). Soesilo Rudyanto, International Seminar on Environment & Urban Management, PMLP Unika soegijapranata, Semarang, 2006

From the discussion above, we have known the importance of the conservation strategy in Semarang as a city in an ex

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Colonized country, about the holistic multi ethnics conservation of Semarang old city. Departure from this point, the "Semarang's city conservation in the context of tourism and culture should be implemented with the Multi Ethnic spirit and nuance in holistic way and not to leave any part of the Old-city behind. The "Kota-lama" sector and the "Semawis" can be the locomotive to draw out all other sectors to go forward together to be a great district of holistic multi-ethnics conservation area.

The Kanjengan district<sup>3</sup>, Pasar Djohar and district of Kauman Mosque, Dibya Puri Hotel<sup>4</sup>, can not be separated and it is associated with the Old City - Little Nederland - with its mBerok Bridge, Tawang Station and its Polder, Kampong Melayu Region and the Chinatown, *nota bene* possible in a matter of distance. The Multi Ethnic spirit and nuance also includes the rules for the future development of the entire region, creating an integrated Old City of Semarang Tourism District, various specific ritual activities as an original Semarang's culture and tradition can be conserved (nguri - uri). Dug - Deran festival at the beginning of Ramadhan, Warak Ngendog, Barongsay Ritual dances, Parade of many kinds of traditional food stalls Semawis are already way ahead, as well as the creation of new agendas Semarang<sup>5</sup>, Cultural festivals and arts and last but not least, preparation and design of Semarangan home-stay to provide a "Semarangan live-in" to give a choice to enjoy the Semarang atmosphere in a holistic way. Instead of economical purposes, all of the agendas also in order to turn on the lives of Semarang's Culture. The effort is designed in order to negate the pejorative brand of Semarang, as a non-fertile town for cultivating art and culture. It is the culmination of Semarang's actualization to all the residents dignity to be a multi dimension prosperous people.

The Heritage with Multi Ethnics district becomes a monument of Unity with diversity in harmony, over the Semarang's citizen and need to be conserve for the sake of history and on behalf of the mutual benefit for the Semarang's citizen this time-being. For example, the Semarang city with the Multi-ethnics conservation area can be a favorite tourism destination with multi-ethnics attraction, culinary, culture, architecture and everyday-life atmosphere, which can generate and improve all every aspects of the life of the city. Depart from this point of view, we can firmly and strongly propose and campaign this "Multi Ethnics Semarang's city conservation" as a public awareness and movement.

#### IV. References :

<sup>3</sup> Kanjengan district, had been demolished and turn into a shopping center about 20 years ago, need a great efforts to return this district to a reconstruction conservation area

<sup>4</sup> Dibya Puri Hotel, now is under the threat of "Intentionally decaying strategy", (see : Soesilo Rudyanto, "Intentionally Decaying Strategy, a threat to architectural heritage, Semarang case, Presented for The third International Conference on Environment and Urban Management, "City marketing, Heritage and Identity", 24rd - 25th August 2007, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, Indonesia).

<sup>5</sup> The Kampong Bustaman festival, can be a prototype of traditional Semarangan festival

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