

Architectural Conservation on an ex Colonized Country

the Semarang, Indonesia case

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Abstract

This paper look at architectural conservation in Indonesia as an ex Colonized Country, that 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 "*Pembusukan*" (Indonesia : spoiling)

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.

Key-words: Architectural conservation, ex-Colonized Country.

Introduction :

Usually, in many countries, architectural conservation face some common problems. 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 arose. This problem is contrary to the problem discussed above, 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. 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 give 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 Culturstelsel, many mining-products, workers: Rodi, Jugun Ianfu, liberty and even their dignity. All those have made the colonized people physically and psychologically hurted. They have feel 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 a Colonialism. A Colonial building was conciously 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 17th, 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 another military properties were managed in a military way. This military management reached the most strict 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 another military buildings, the Colonial buildings was guarded with standby guns, and taking photos of them was prohibited. No one had the permission to even had 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 became a nightmare for nearly all of the ordinary people for about 32 years.

Altruism paradigm in Conservation

Figure 1 : **"Lawang-Sewu"** building at Jl. Pemuda, Semarang, Painting, anonymous



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itectural 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.

In order to avoid recalling the bad memories of both Colonialism and Militarism, first we have to avoid Elitism from the treatment of the building, because Elitism, which alienated the building from ordinary people is the main cause that construct the image of a Traumatic-building. This means that we have to eliminate the psychological distance which have made a pseudo barrier that likely block the ordinary people to come and visit to the building. Refunctioning a Colonial-building to another Elite building will be too risky to be caught from an Elitism to another Elitism. The discourse to revitalize '*Lawang-Sewu*' - a very huge and significant Colonial building - at Jl. Pemuda Semarang, and to refunction it to an International Hotel, is an example of what we have just discussed above.

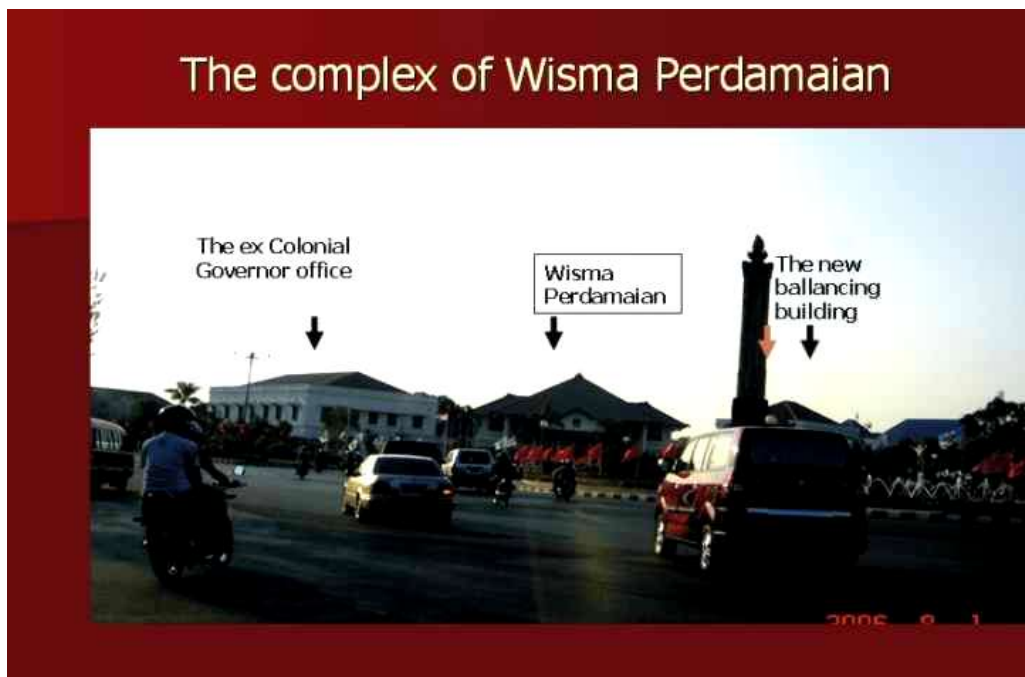
So then what should we do with our Colonial heritage building - which have been known - to have a very significant role in Semarang city ?. "Forgive but not forget", Wiseman said. We have forgiven , but we won't forget the Colonials and the Colonialism, because it is a part of our History. The best thing to do with our Colonial building is if we can give a new function as a Museum of the Colonialism itself. The ever frightened Building, will then become a very 'Welcoming building', it is open to every one, even the 'Now-Marginalized', the Grass-root people - can come inside. People can enter every room in that Huge and very Nice - but tough - building, that generation by generation cannot even look & watch at.

Of course not every Colonial building can be refunctioned as a Museum. So we ought to have some alternatives to treat our another Colonial heritage buildings. Elitism in that Colonial building have to be neutralized with Altruism and Populism in architecture. Another new function that can be given to the old Colonial heritage building

is therefore : a Lobby, Lounge, Waiting-room, a Restaurant , Tea-room, Coffee-shop, Supermarket, Shopping-center etc, all that means of an accessible Public room, the more Populist - in term of every class in the community can enter - is the better in term of the Neutralization from the Elitism of the Colonialism. The building itself have to be controlled by the City Government to avoid another effort to make that Colonial heritage buildings (which are usually laid at a very strategic site) again be Elite buildings which will always create psychological distance and barrier to the ordinary people.

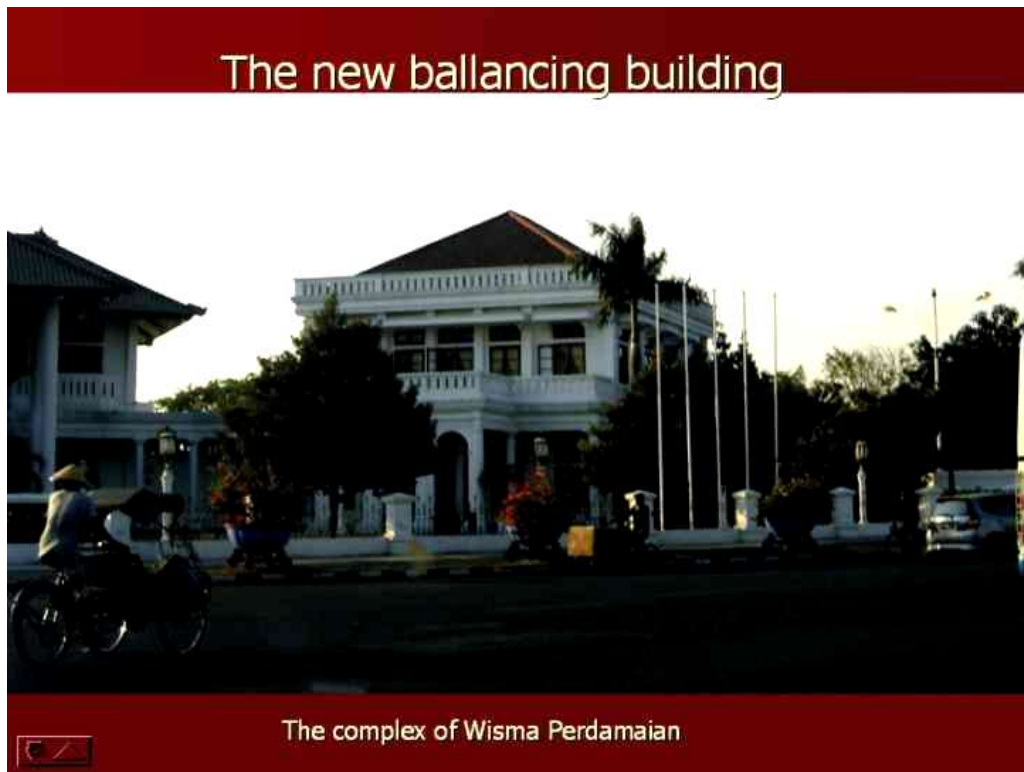
To Neutralize the Colonialism spirit of a common Colonial building, we can drag the Symmetrical-axis that are almost always applied in a Colonial building. By dragging the Symmetrical-axis from that Colonial building we can than make a reorientation of that building. To drag the Symmetrical-axis we can re-layout the axis of the lanscape or fitting another new building that can reduce the main Symmetrical-axis to a neither second or third axis, but not the first or main axis anymore.

Figure 2 : “Wisma Perdamaian” building in front of “Lawang-Sewu”



The '*Wisma Perdamaian*' has done this Axis-dragging. The former genuine mainbuilding - The ex Colonial Governor Office, at Jl. Pemuda (across the *Lawang-Sewu* building) - was placed as a second building in ballanced with the same-like new building - guarding-like - the new Main Javanese-style building which is the '*Wisma Perdamaian*', functioned as the Governor of Mid-Java office. This was an effort to treat a onced Colonial building to be reoriented and tame the onced Colonial building. However, the result, the Complex of buildings as the Governor of Mid-Java office is somehow still an Elite building which commonly have psychological distance and barrier to the ordinary people. And as we all know, that was the everafter problem.

Figure 3 : The New Ballancing building, in the Complex of Wisma Perdamaian



Along the *Jalan Pemuda* street we can find too, The *Walikota* 's office, as another Conserved Colonial Architecture in Semarang. On that Conservation, the City-government conserved the ex *Burgomaster*' office and still used it for the City-government's office. The City-government decided to build a high-rise building on the background - functioned as the main office - using the style and ornaments from the Old Colonial ex *Burgomaster*' office . The same ornaments, the same colours, the same detail

Figure 4 : The "Walikota" office, at Jl. Pemuda, Semarang



of windows and doors and many of another ' the Same' which adopted from the Old Colonial ex *Burgomaster*' office. From that many of 'the Same' attributes of architectural elements , we undeliberately let the Spirit of the building – which is the Colonial-spirit – still live and still working in that building. As we discuss before it is better to let the Elitism of the building move-away by functioning the old Colonial building as an accessible Public building.

Every people in this Republic have the right to feel invited , welcomed , homy and familiar from an ex Colonial building. Don't let the fire and the spirit of the ever Colonialism left in the present Conserved building. Let us serve a treatment in conserving the ex Colonial building that can make everybody in this independent Republic feel spiritfull, happy, and stand on our own dignity.

* Notes : Briefly presented in PowerPoint on the Environment&Urban Management Seminar, 2 -3 August 2006

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