

Restoration of Heritage Buildings and Colonial Towns as the Country's Cultural Inheritance



01

Human civilization is a humanistic process that comes in the form of culture and is expressed through local wisdom. Local wisdom can be explained as a creative adaptation towards the geographical, political, historical and situational condition which is seen through a person's attitude, mindset and behavior in managing his environment. According to Sartini (2006), there are several functions of local wisdom, namely for the conservation and preservation of natural resources, the development of human resources as well as for the advancement of culture and education. It can also serve as advice, belief, literature and taboo that guide a community, and hold a social value, as evident in the ceremonies they conduct, in addition to ethical, moral and political values of the community.

STORY BY Martono Yuwono



02

01 Txxxxxxx
02 xxxxxxxxx

Heritage Sites, Local Wisdom and Historical Preservation

Indonesia is blessed with an abundance of diverse cultural wealth, which can be seen as the country's heirloom. According to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of the year 2010 regarding Cultural Heritage, cultural heritage is a tangible inheritance that might come in the form of a cultural heritage object, a cultural heritage building, a cultural heritage structure, a cultural heritage site and a cultural heritage area which is located on land and/or in the water and needs to be preserved because it is historically, scientifically, and educationally valuable for the country in addition to having a religious and cultural value. To call something a part of our cultural heritage, it needs to be stipulated by law, with the criteria as follows: at least 50 years of age; has a special historical, scientific, educational, religious and/or cultural value; and has a cultural value that strengthens the identity of the country.

According to Suyono Sukanto in "Revitalization of Local Wisdom and the Efforts to Strengthen the National Identity of Indonesia" which was published by the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture, local wisdom can be seen as the identity of a country, especially in the context of Indonesia where local wisdom



03

has undergone a cross-cultural transformation that gives birth to cultural values between ethnic groups. An example of this can be seen in Indonesia's own local wisdom, which is reflected in the country's motto of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika."

A city has its own local wisdom that reflects human values as a cultural process that rises from a civilization, one that is passed on as a fundamental legacy that goes with the future development of the city. A city's local wisdom represents the identity and honour of the people/nation that needs to be protected, upheld, preserved and developed. Some examples of a heritage site or area that possesses a local wisdom include the old city

area of Kota Gede in Yogyakarta, Kampong Betawi Heritage Site in Condet, Jakarta, and the Machu Picchu site in Peru.

The destruction of some European cities as a result of the World War II was widely considered as the ruin of the center of civilization, which had initiated people's awareness about the importance of preserving history. Historical preservation is a dynamic effort to protect, preserve, develop and utilize historical buildings, sites and areas through conservation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, restoration, revitalization and adaptive reuse efforts. These efforts are aimed at parts and sectors of a city, city and village centers, and also natural sceneries and their surroundings

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEHMAHITA, ESTER APRILLIA, RAHMAD MARIN.



04



05

The Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, Herman Willem Daendels (1808-1811), had a large influence

which have historical, humanistic and civilization values, as stated in the 1975 Declaration of Amsterdam.

According to UNESCO, a heritage site is “a group of buildings: Group of separate or connected buildings, which because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science” (UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1987).

The Dilemma of Restoring Historical Buildings and Old Colonial Cities in Indonesia

It is believed that our ancestors were valiant seafarers who in their glory days managed to sail around the islands of Asia and Africa. This is evident in the characteristic of the old ports that reflect the might of kingdoms/sultanates in our naval Archipelago. But the powerfulness was cut short by three and a half centuries of political repression administered by the VOC and the East Indies government, which in effect had altered the identity of our nation from maritime-oriented into land-oriented.

Another effect of the colonialization is the repressed character of the people as well as a minority complex, a latent trait that the people of this country still carry even today.

This predisposition began with a radical change achieved through the destruction of large ports across the archipelago before being forcefully turned into colonial cities during the VOC era, such as the eradication of Jayakarta and the establishment of Batavia (Jakarta today) in its place. The same thing could be seen in Makassar, Semarang, and many other ports throughout the archipelago. This phenomenon was exacerbated during the East Indies occupation with the enforcement of the Cultivation System (Cultuurstelsel) in 1830, which led to the development of plantation towns. Then during the “privatization” era in 1870, trade cities, mining towns and harbour towns were built. As a criticism against the Cultivation System, the “Dutch ethical policy” began in 1901, recognising the colonialist’s moral responsibility for the wellbeing of the indigenous people. This policy included three programs: irrigation, transmigration (which would later be misused as another means that benefitted the colonialists), as well as education, which was deemed to be significantly important for Indonesia.

in the development of the cities of Batavia (Jakarta today) and Surabaya, as well as in the colonial-style architecture seen in the East Indies throughout the 19th century, even though his rule was relatively short. His arrogant and firm governance style managed to revive the pride of the Dutch as a major colonial force at that time and in effect diminished the influence of the traditional Javanese architecture which was beginning to be adapted by Dutch aristocrats for their buildings in the late 18th century, including housing compounds that would later be known as ‘Indies Style Country House’ or ‘Transitional Dutch Indies Country House’.

The arrival of Daendels prompted the emergence of the architecture style known as the ‘Indische Empire’ with classical columns and fully symmetrical layout, an adaptation of the French Empire style that was adjusted to suit the climate and lifestyle of the East Indies people. This style was developed in the East Indies throughout the 19th century, as mentioned by Hadinoto in his work, “Daendels and the Development of Architecture in the East Indies in the 19th Century.”

We have become aware of the phenomenon through the words of the East Indies’ Director of the Public Works Department of that period, de Longh, who in



06

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMCORA, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, JEJAK VICKY

1941 stated, “These cities do not reflect the lifestyle of a city that can be seen in typical European cities. These cities are merely an amalgamation of several ethnic tribes who inhabit nearby villages. These cities do not possess an organic unanimity with the local people, nor with the tradition and history of the places where they are built. These cities are centres for social and cultural activities but not for the local community (inlanders). For them, these cities are places that are far removed from their lives and cultural growth.” We can read this from the excerpt of Ronald Gill in “Change and Morphology of Indonesia Towns,” written in 1988.

Yet ironically, we readily accept these colonial cities that have transpired into

cities throughout Indonesia without any further thoughts, without realizing or caring whether the spirit of place, or genius loci, is there. We also couldn’t care less about local wisdoms, which are actually the basic need of the people to develop a city as a cultural process. Indeed, it is wise to use de Longh’s statement as a wake-up call for us to immediately conduct an evaluation regarding city development in this country, as well as to plan an urgent cultural strategy.

Historical preservation should turn the process of history into a continuum, or a continuation of the cultural development that grows and develops within a society. There will be a connection between values of the past, present and future as footprints of history so

that people will not feel alienated about their history, and also give them a sense of belonging and pride which is needed in building a future spirit of the city. This is the main issue in the preservation of heritage buildings and sites, especially in colonial buildings and cities and especially when we associate that with the fact that the country’s local wisdoms are generally in disconnect. This is a tragedy of our social life that we must face as an anomaly in the history of city development. This is also something that we must work on. Raphael Lemkin in the “Introduction to the Study of Genocide,” 1948, states that “Colonialism cannot be left without blame.”

The Characteristics of Colonial Cities and Buildings in Indonesia

Colonial cities are those built by the colonialists, especially the Dutch who for centuries had occupied Indonesia. These cities were usually dominated by a defense fortress and were later turned into trading hubs, governing cities of the East Indies and then places to live for the Dutch people. Jayakarta, which was established by Fatahillah, was destroyed by the VOC and on top of it they built the VOC city fortress that was designed as a copy of the city of Amsterdam. Other examples are Fort Rotterdam in Makassar and Fort van der Wijk in Gombong. In total, there were around 300 defense fortresses built by the VOC during their occupancy in Indonesia. These strongholds were used as a defense line to guard the cities from attacks by local guerillas and foreign forces.

In turn, these VOC strongholds grew as modern cities by putting forward the principal of efficiency, in line with the industrial revolution of the 18th century Europe that escalated hand-in-hand with the capitalism-industrialism system. The cities burgeoned in the privatization era after 1870 to facilitate plantation projects and after the introduction of the Dutch ethical policy that regulated the development of modern administration bureaucracy in the domain of the municipality. This policy was administered in all of the cities under the occupation of the East Indies Company, such as Batavia, Bandung, Malang, Makassar, Sawah Lunto,

- 03 xxxxxx
- 04 xxxxxx
- 05 xxxxxxxx
- 06 xxxxxxxx

- 03 XXXXX
- 04 XXXXXX
- 05 XXXXXXX
- 06 XXXXXXXX

Bukit Tinggi, and many others. Only a few cities were left with their local identities, among which were Cirebon, Banten, Jogja, Solo and other smaller towns, such as Tasikmalaya, that were located in remote areas and therefore were not considered strategic enough for the government to base their control.

There are two classifications of colonial cities: coastal or remote. Coastal cities were designed as harbour towns and trade centers that had a strategic role in distributing produce from the archipelago to the Netherlands. Examples of harbour towns are Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Padang and Makassar. Remote cities in far-off areas had the attributes of plantation towns, agricultural towns, industrial towns and mining towns that facilitated plantation activities and the gathering of other produce from across the archipelago. These could be seen in Bandung, Malang, and Sawahlunto, among others.

The development of colonial cities in the East Indies was structured, systematic and massive, with the colonialists bringing in Dutch architects to design cities as well as colonial buildings with a 'modern' trait by copying the style of architecture in their own country. Obviously, the designs were adjusted for the tropical climate according to their interpretation and were decorated with artefacts bearing local flavours as accents. There was a gap in the structure of colonial cities, namely the "upper social class" (wealthy landowners) who lived in the city centres while the indigenous people or "inlanders" who were only allowed to watch — as opposed to being involved as subjects —



07

the developments. These second-class citizens were placed on the outskirts of the cities.

Helen Jessup in Handinoto divided the development of colonial architecture during the East Indies era into four periods, namely: (1) From the 16th century until the 1800's when the VOC governed the land, during which time the colonial architecture did not have a clear orientation; (2) The 1800's until 1902 when the East Indies government took over, with a short stint by the British government in 1811-1815. This period saw the construction of imposing structures in the neo-classical style that was different from the Dutch architecture at that time; (3) The years 1902-1920, during the application of the ethical policy where housing compounds designed in the style of modern Dutch architecture grew rapidly; (4) The period from 1920 until the 1940's when eclecticism emerged as the typical architecture style of choice in the East Indies period.

One example of the eclecticism style can be seen in Bandung's Gedung Sate. The building used to function as a Dutch Government Office (Gouvernements Bedrijven) and was designed by a team consisting Ir. J. Gerber, a famous young architect who graduated from Delft Technical Faculty in the Netherlands, Ir. E. H. DeRoo and Ir. G. Hendriks, as well as the Gemeente van Bandoeng group which was led by Colonel (Ret.) VL. Slors.

Gedung Sate was built between 1920 and 1924 and involved 2,000 workers, 150 of whom were sculptors (tombstone carvers) and Chinese woodcarvers who came from Konghu/Canton, in addition to bricklayers, coolies (unskilled laborers), and construction workers who came from the native people of West Java.

There are several architectural styles that form the design of Gedung Sate. The windows apply the Spanish Moorish flair while the building itself borrows from the Italian Renaissance style. Asian influence can be seen in the towers, adopting the roof of a Balinese temple (pura) and Thailand's pagoda. At the top of the building is a metal spike that resembles a 'satay skewer' with 6 satay ornaments that symbolize 6 million guildens, the amount of money spent on building the Gedung Sate.

After the Indonesian Independence, the "irregular" phenomenon of a city's character that began from the VOC era and continued into the East Indies period, in which a new city character was immediately embedded onto the ruins of an old city, seems to be taken for granted. This potentially repeats the practice of permissively embedding a city's character onto the social-cultural vacuum in the name of "modernization." As Ronald Gill, a Dutch architect once said, "Indonesian architects



08



09

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, AGUS PRATMODJO, ANE IQBAL

are not interested in the characters of cities impacted by the repression of colonial culture. They are more interested in the modern architecture engineering."

Restoration of Colonial Cities in Indonesia: A Therapeutic Strategy Is Needed

After 70 years of independence, the people of Indonesia are still struggling to rediscover

the country's character as a maritime nation. Indonesia is also not ready to face the challenges of the global era. Now, we are trying to catch up on some parts the country's developments that are still lagging. We were recently reminded of our country's unsolved core problem when Jokowi-JK launched the Indonesia as a Maritime Axis doctrine in Sunda Kelapa old port on 22 July 2014. However, we still need a change in our mindset through various breakthrough efforts, improvements in the quality of our human resources, hard work, moral ethics as well as responsibility in building the future of our country as proof of the "mental revolution" declared by President Joko Widodo. No less important is the revolution in building cities as a cultural strategy, especially in harbour towns, in order to build the character of these cities and their citizens. To quote Sir Winston Churchill, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

Historical preservation as a part of city development has the objective to unearth and rediscover the soul or local wisdom (spirit of place) in Indonesian cities in order to strengthen the character of the nation as well as to improve its dignity and self-esteem, and also to promote the cities as tourist destinations as regulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of the year 2010 regarding Cultural Heritage. These efforts are not only limited to the physical rehabilitation of buildings and areas, which can be achieved through renovation and redecoration, and are not only designated to benefit business and the tourism industry. Nor are they done for mere pleasure or to satisfy certain people's hobby, or done for nostalgic purposes or any old-time penchant of a select few, especially those that glorify colonialism values.

Colonial cities, especially harbour towns, need to be restored as a therapeutic strategy to reinstate the nationalistic spirit and patriotism. This was pioneered by Ali Sadikin, the Governor of DKI Jakarta from 1966 until 1977, when he restored Kota Tua Batavia and turned it into Fatahillah Park. He also restored and converted the VOC warehouses into the Maritime Museum, 55 traditional Betawi dwellings and a 35 km path in Condet area.

His efforts were continued by the next governors of Jakarta, including turning the STOVIA Building into Museum Kebangkitan

Nasional (Museum of National Awakening), Museum Sumpah Pemuda (Museum of Youth Pledge), Gedung Joang 45 (Battle of 45 Building), Husni Thamrin Museum, and historical islands in Kepulauan Seribu, to name just a few. Some traditional structures were also refurbished, such as Si Pitung's house in Kampong Marunda and Al Aydrus Mosque in Kampong Luar Batang. Ali Sadikin's tenure also saw the construction of monuments and statues that strengthen the nation's spirit and patriotism, including the Rapat Raksasa Monument (Grand Assembly Monument) in Ikada Square (today known as Monas), Kota Kemenangan Jayakarta Monument (Monument of Jayakarta Victory) in the old site of Jayakarta, MH Thamrin Statue, and many others.

However, the escalating current trend of creating non-historical buildings which have no discernible values—a trend that is being conducted in a massive, structured and permissive way as evident in the large number of new superblocks and malls—has diminished Jakarta's character as a "Kota Joang" (City of Battle—DKI Jakarta's Museum and Preservation Department, 1998). It is feared that the embedding trend that was the practice during the colonial era will continue today. At the very least, the eradication of local wisdom and character is still a feature of today's city planning and development.

Therefore, an integrated effort to preserve heritage buildings and sites is needed as a part of city planning and development as written in the Declaration of Amsterdam in 1975. Nationalism and patriotism as a therapeutic strategy in the rebuilding and restoration of colonial cities, which is the legacy of Ali Sadikin's government, should be continued by present and future generations as something that is entrusted to them.

This was the writer's suggestion through Jakarta's 'Patriot Path' which includes establishing several Patriot paths to restore the character of Jakarta in the spirit of nationalism and patriotism. This concept was brought into the attention to Joko Widodo, the former DKI Jakarta Governor in 2012-2014, and was approved to be implemented, beginning with the development of the Nusantara Gallery as the prime mover through APBD-P 2013 (Revised Local Government Budget) of DKI Jakarta's Tourism and Cultural Department, before being made inactive. ■