



IDENTIFYING GUIDELINES LIMITATION OF HISTORIC INTERIOR IN ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF HERITAGE BUILDING IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Adaptive re-use in heritage buildings is perceived as a viable alternative in restoring the existing building to accommodate for new or continued building use while addressing its heritage agenda. In the conservation approach of adaptive re-use, new interventions of historic interiors are often subject to insensible alteration particularly in its interior design outcome resulting in compromised heritage representation in Malaysia. The government's efforts to protect and manage historic buildings are illustrated by the implementation of the National Heritage Act 2005 and the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines 2016. However, there are insufficient guidance concerning new interior design works of a historic interior within Malaysia. The primary aim of this paper is to identify the current limitation of the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines in Malaysia pertaining to historic interior works and to contribute to the discussion surrounding this matter. The paper presents comparative analysis and interpretation of literature and grey documents (guidelines and policies) in adaptive re-use of heritage buildings in Malaysia. The data generated is compared with similar conservation approach guidelines from England and United States of America. The analysis revealed that the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines is a comprehensive document that underscores physical action to preserve the fabric and materials of heritage buildings. However, while the broad definitions for new design proposal to be sympathetic and visual appropriateness to the existing building character are acceptable, it may lead to unintended interpretation and consequences. The paper suggests that the existing guideline need to be accompanied with additional guidance to aid practitioners especially architects and interior

designers in dealing with historic interior using the comparative analysis with goals to intensify the value of historic interior that involves new intervention.

Keywords:

Historic Interior, Adaptive Re-use, Heritage Buildings

Introduction

Adaptive re-use of heritage buildings is a form of conservation strategy which falls under the restoration approach in conservation practice in Malaysia (National Heritage Act, 2005). The National Heritage Act identified that adaptive re-use involves full or portion exterior restoration with the interior adapted to modern functional use. Hence, new interior intervention is allowed under this approach within the design conditions and constraint outlined by the act.

Adaptive re-use in any type of building including heritage building has become increasingly important in an urban context, architectural and conservation strategy for the last decade (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, 2019). However, alteration and new design intervention in a heritage building is a complex task and there is no simple rule in preserving its cultural significance value as well as achieving aesthetic qualities (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019; English Heritage, 2008). Historic interiors are often subject to insensible alteration particularly in their interior design outcome (URA, 2019) resulting in compromised heritage representation in Malaysia. The exterior may be the most prominent visible aspect, but the interior can be even important in conveying the building's history and development over time (Jandl, 1988). The government's efforts to protect and manage historic buildings are illustrated by the implementation of the National Heritage Act 2005 and the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines 2016. However, there are insufficient guidance concerning new interior design works of a historic interior within Malaysia.

Historic interior is an ensemble of architectural features, ornamentation, interior finishing, ornamental arts, and artefacts that gives historical values through connecting the past, present, and future (Dudley et al., 2020; Klingenberg, 2012). Because it is an interdisciplinary endeavor that is still very much fragmented that needs to be addressed, historic interiors have historically been disregarded and overlooked (Dudley et al., 2020; Santana & Settles, 2014; Tucker, 2015). Therefore, due to out of concern for the loss of historic interiors when new interior intervention is involved in a conservation project, historic interior requires systematic guidance in managing change within the historic interior context.

The objective of this study is to identify the current limitation of the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines in Malaysia pertaining to historic interior works and to contribute to the discussion surrounding this matter. It is hoped that these inquiries can aid conservation professionals to acquire further understanding of historic interior conservation practice.

In order to identify the limitation, the main method of this study is documentary analysis on three types of documents as follows:

- 1) Grey literature – the main source of information in this paper are the Historic Building Conservation Guidelines (HBCG) of Malaysia, Conservation Principles, Policies & Guidance For The Sustainable Management Of Historic Environment (HE) by Historic England of United Kingdom and The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the

Treatment of Historic Properties by the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (IS).

- 2) Law – National Heritage Act 2005, Malaysia as the study scope is in Malaysia
- 3) Scientific Publications – Scientific publication related with the scope of the study, books as well as published presentations at academic conferences.

The three primary documents (HBCG, HE and IS) as the selected primary source of this study is in accordance to the following reasons:

1. HBCG act as the main guideline in conservation practice in Malaysia. Identifying the current content, including its limitation, will allow the study to focus on identifying its shortcomings and suggest new conditions to improve this document related to historic interior.
2. HE is an established guidelines that focused on sustainable management of historic environment developed by Historic England, one of the oldest and referred to worldwide. The study identifies that HE emphasis quality design for any new proposal through skilled designers that is absent in other guidelines.
3. IS is an established technical preservation brief discussing historic interior preservation techniques since 1988 through their Interior Handbook of Heritage Building. Thus, it is a vital document in this study which no other documents have developed such detail and progressive information to date.

Comparative analysis method is adopted to analyse the data gained from the works of literature, documents, and their content by focusing on guidelines that involve new work or new design as it is the most relevant criteria related to new intervention of historic interior.

Main Results

Although the comparison of guideline documents from other countries selected are developed and established in their conservation practices than Malaysia, this paper intends to capture different interpretations, understandings and approaches in dealing with historic interiors as shown in Table 1.

Historic Building Conservation Guidelines of Malaysia (HBCG)

HBCG which mainly developed from The Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 2013) identified conservation of heritage buildings as the actions and the means taken to conserve the cultural significance of a building. It adopts approaches to prevent the deterioration of buildings and prolong the life of a building as well as its current and future utilization.

According to HBCG content outline, there are no dedicated guidelines related to new historic interior design work as the guidelines emphasise the conservation principles and processes, documentation and conservation guidelines. It is merely focused on building parts and elements which only underscore physical action to preserve the fabric and materials of the heritage buildings. Interior design can be viewed as a new design in the context of conservation of heritage building. Therefore, HBCG identifies essential guidance which new design must be sympathetic in its interpretation, has minimal impact, able to distinguish between the old and new and appropriate to the visual layout (shape, colour, scale, texture and material) while respecting the cultural heritage significance of the place.

HBCG emphasis authenticity in material, design, craftsmanship and building layout of a heritage building as their conservation etiquette and concept. This concept within historic interior is a complex concept due to constant changes of elements within the historic interior (Jaenen, 2008). An understanding of the historic interior changing nature and how they develop over time has to be understood by designers for a more sensitive approach in proposing new interior design within a historic building context (Tucker, 2015). The Hoi An Protocols (2009) underscore experts among conservators, art historians, architects, material specialist etc. lead by a conservation architect should be assembled at the beginning of the project to safeguard the heritage significance. Therefore, dealing with historic interior which recognized as part of the significant element in a heritage building requires the work of skilled designers which is absent nor emphasised in HBCG.

Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of Historic Environment by Historic England (HE)

HE identified conservation as a process of managing change that will best sustain its heritage values while recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations. HE outlines logical approach to the making decisions and offers guidance through a systematic process from understanding its conservation principles, heritage values, assessing heritage significance, managing change, policies and management.

Similar to HBCG, no specific guidelines on historic interior were mentioned, however it does outline guidelines in new work and alteration which shall be the reference in any new interior design proposal. When involving new work and new design, HE emphasises quality design, use of material and detailing as well as the involvement of skilful designer as the most essential. New intervention must fit comfortably in its context that delivers aesthetic qualities of a place such as its scale, composition, silhouette and proportions.

HE established framework for managing change of physical intervention in the historic environment by understood the scope of the proposed change which must be based on sufficient information and research about the heritage significance. The process of assessing values and significance of a heritage building as outlined in HE is essential when preparing new proposal.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties by U.S Department of the Interior National Park Service (IS)

IS emphasise systematic methodology through professional assessment in identifying significant interior elements; interior space, features and finishes that contribute to the interior's history and character. It recommends guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, restoring and reconstructing historic interiors. Understanding the hierarchy and importance of interior spaces, features and finishes, will influence decision making in conservation treatments and techniques to the existing fabric. IS recommends new design or alteration to be compatible with the overall historic character of the building while explicitly distinguish it from the authentic historic features.

This document is a useful reference in assessing historic interior conservation practice in Malaysia focusing on investigation terminology and methodology processes as it provides guidance specifically in interior for historic building (Harun et al., 2020). The conservation process parallels with HBCG with the addition of detailed recommendation on how to conserve historic interior chronologically.

Table 1 Comparison Analysis of Historic Interior Context Through Conservation Guidelines in Malaysia, England & United States of America

Guidelines	Malaysia (HBCG)	England (HE)	USA (IS)
Guidelines related to new interior intervention	<p>No specific guidelines but the following notes relates to new work or design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Prioritize original materials and features as authenticity. . Sympathy in interpretation and use . Appropriate to the visual layout such as shape, scale, colour, texture and material. . Minimum risk of loss of vital parts and uncertain damage during testing of building materials. . Reversible interference. . Minimal modifications to building fabrics. . Able to distinguish between old materials and new material additions. . Provides maximum reinforcement to the original structure 	<p>No specific guidelines but the following notes relates to new work or design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Sufficient information comprehensively to understand the impacts of the proposal . The proposal should not materially harm the values of the place . The proposal aspires quality design and execution which may be valued now and in the future . The proposal is designed not to prejudice alternative solutions in the future 	<p>Guidelines of interior spaces, features and finishes are in accordance with conservation approaches, preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, reconstruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . New design shall be compatible with the size, scale, material, colour of the heritage building . Sensitive design approach . Alteration to be consider if it helps to reveal historic character, to address natural hazards and sustainability
Authenticity	Emphasise as a conservation concept	Depending upon comprehensive understanding of values	Depending upon its level of significance
Values / Significance	<p>Aesthetic Educational Exceptional Historical Uniqueness Representational (S. Ariffin, 2021)¹</p>	<p>Evidential Historical Aesthetic Communal</p>	<p>General statement of “exceptional significance in American history” Architecture</p>
Experts requirement	Emphasis on conservator and contractor criteria	Skilled designer is required to achieve quality design	Decisions shall derive from historic preservation specialist’s consultation

Preservation brief for Historic Interior	Not stated	Not stated	According to conservation approaches . Identifying and evaluating spatial characteristic . Identifying historic character-defining features and finishes . Recommended approaches . Meeting safety code . Protecting interior elements
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¹ As presented by Prof. Dr. Syed Ahmad Iskandar Syed Ariffin in his talk entitled Assessing Heritage Asset: Concept, Methods & Approaches dated 14 February 2021

Historic Interior Challenges in Adaptive Reuse

Historic interior is an ensembled of architectural elements, decoration, interior finishing, decorative arts and objects in any historic building that offers historical values that safeguard its historic aspects by connecting the past, present and future (Dudley et al., 2020). According to Tucker (2015), past literature reveals that the preservation briefs mostly gave significance to the technical aspect in the conservation of the building's shell, materials, and architectural elements whereby limited research had been conducted to explore the decision-making process in historic interior. All conservation decisions are the result of the heritage value judgement (Fredheim & Khalaf, 2016). The National Heritage Act and The Burra Charter that support HBCG shows consistency in emphasising cultural heritage significance is the forefront objective of any conservation projects. This opens up further discussions on how to explicitly understand the cultural significance during the interior design process in order to ensure the new intervention outcome in line with the conservation objectives.

The interior approach in adaptive re-use of heritage building has been increasingly discussed for the past decade among scholars such as Brooker and Stone (2018), Scott (2008), Plevoets and Cleempoel (2014) and Tucker (2015). Historic interior conservation is an overlapping of multidisciplinary practitioners in its project nature. Previous literature recommends variety approaches in dealing with new intervention of historic interior. Among the approaches are the poetic and palimpsest approach that embraces the memory of the building (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019; Tucker, 2015), the interior design principle approach (Brooker & Stone, 2018; Klingenberg, 2012) and the authenticity driven approach (Jaenen, 2008).

The listed challenges and comparative analysis of Table 1 reflect the true nature of historic interior conservation practise discourse and suggests that the existing HBCG need to be accompanied with additional guidance dealing with new intervention in a historic interior context to safeguard its significances.

Conclusion

Whilst there are certain commonalities between the guideline documents from the three countries, there remain differences in the mechanisms on how it guides practitioners dealing with new design of adaptive re-use historic interior context. Malaysian HBCG is a

comprehensive document that underscores physical action to preserve the fabric and materials of heritage buildings. However, while the broad definitions for new design proposal to be sympathetic and visual appropriateness to the existing building character are acceptable, it may lead to unintended interpretation and consequences—The comparison study conducted had demonstrated that the complexity of new interior intervention in a heritage building poses unique conservation challenges. Consequently, this comparative study suggests new ideas on how to improve the existing guidelines with goals to intensify the value of historic interior that involves new intervention.

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