The Protection of Cultural Environment and Historical Heritages in Malacca

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Abstract. Malacca, a world heritage city of Malaysia, is famous for its multicultural history. The building environment of Malacca is featured by verandas, churches and temples, which reflects the unique developing process of this historical city. This paper analyzed the expression of multi-cultures, formation of genius loci (pervading spirit of a place), restoration of commercial district and the course of organic renewal of history and cultures, in the context of cultural environment recreation of historical heritages. This paper would shed light on the protection and renewal of historical heritages in China.

Introduction

China’s economic growth has been very rapid since the late 1970s, which is accompanied by accelerated urbanization. In the process of urbanization, the scale of construction has increased unprecedentedly. Moreover, the influence of economic globalization and the relative lag of local culture has brought unprecedented impacts and challenges to the protection and development of China’s historical and cultural heritages. Cultural heritage is the legacy of human cultural history, which represents the symbol of times and the crystallization of wisdom [1]. How to sort out the contradiction between protection and development in the process of modernization, to maintain the local traditional cultural characteristics, and to avoid similarities between different cities, are problems worthy of study [2]. The ancient city of Malacca, located in Southeast Asia, is a successful case of complete preservation in the period of rapid economic development in Malaysia through various mediations and efforts. The lessons that learned from Malacca could shed light on the protection of cultural environments in China cities.

Malacca (Malay: Melaka) is located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, on the edge of the Straits of Malacca, which is the capital of Malaysia's Malacca state. On July 7, 2008, according to the World Cultural Heritage Conference held by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Malacca City was officially listed as a world heritage. Malacca is the oldest ancient city in Malaysia. Surprisingly, the overall cultural environment of the ancient city is very well preserved. The architectural landscapes of local architecture, western churches, and oriental temples all present a unique imprint of the historical development of this ancient city.

The protection of historical and cultural heritage needs to be done in multiple ways. First, it needs to protect the core area of cultural heritage itself. Second, buffer zones and protected areas around the core area need to be built. Third, the original features of cultural heritage need to be preserved as much as possible. The newly built buildings must also follow the original spatial order, and achieve the overall coordination in terms of height, color, texture, etc., which is called “organic renewal” [2]. Organic renewal includes three important aspects: respecting cultural heritage, highlighting cultural heritage and strengthening the original cultural environment. It is worth emphasizing that the organic renewal of the cultural environment focuses on the overall protection and the search for a balance between protection and development, which is a dynamic process [3]. The cultural heritage protection of the ancient city of Malacca is a process to achieve organic renewal of the cultural environment through the expression of multiculturalism, the shaping of the spirit of the place, and the revival of the commercial district. The successful protection of cultural heritage has brought this ancient city a new vitality.
Expression of Multi-culture

As the mainstay of maritime traffic between the East and West, this cultural city with more than 600 years of history has gone through several distinct development stages as follows: 1) a small fishing village; 2) an agriculture and rubber manufacture hub; 3) a thriving tin mining industrial city; 4) a prosperous maritime trading center; 5) the gradual decline of the traditional trading center; 6) a famous tourist destination. The colonial history of Malacca has made the city a unique multicultural destination in the world. A large number of museums are typical examples of Malacca's exploration and interpretation of its multicultural history. Malacca has more museum per capita than many famous European cities, which is a special case in third world countries. It is worth mentioning that almost all museums have very successfully used historical buildings and replaced their original functions. The museums themselves have become special carriers of Malacca's multiculturalism.

The Stadthuys, or “Red House”, located on the mountainside of St Paul, is used to be the office of the Dutch Governor and Deputy Governor but now it is the History and Ethnography Museum of Malacca [4]. The Stadthuys was built in the 1650s, which is the oldest Dutch-style building in Southeast Asia. It has been the seat of government for more than 300 years and was not changed to the Museum until 1979. The four-story building has a building area of 49,200 square feet and the main body of the building retains typical characteristics of a Dutch building: thick red stone walls, heavy wooden doors and windows and wide stone steps. In 1985, the Malacca Public Works Bureau began a four-year restoration work for the Red House. The museum displayed the detailed colonial history of Malacca city and portrays the lifestyle of the different communities that make up the population of Malacca including the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, the Portuguese, the Baba and Nyonya etc. Zheng He (or Cheng Ho) Gallery on the second floor showcases Zheng He's maritime voyage through the Straits of Malacca and the growing relationship between the Malacca Sultanate and Ming dynasty of China. Malacca Sultanate Palace Museum is a modern reconstruction of the palace of the Malacca Sultanate. This stilt-style building represents the highest peak of the architectural art of Malacca during the Sultan period and displays the etiquette, customs and cultural development of the Sultanate history. The Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum, located in Jonker Street, presents the home life and cultural characteristics of the ethnic Chinese-Malays called Baba-Nyonya [5] or Peranakan community.

For the protection of historical and cultural heritages, it is necessary to preserve the authenticity of historical relics [6]. Specifically, the reinforcement, restoration and reconstruction of the building must respect the original appearance and follow the principle of “repairing the old as the old”. Furthermore, the new functions of historical buildings should be related to its original history. These are the rules employed in all the museums of Malacca. These museums not only have realized the protection and excavation of local multiculturalism through the activation and utilization of historical buildings but also given new vitality to those old buildings. Moreover, ticket incomes of these museums also provide sufficient financial support for long-term protection of those historical buildings.

Shaping the Spirit of the Place

In the long-term practice of historical and cultural protection, it has been realized that the protection of the building elements only cannot preserve the overall historical information. The historical environment in which the building is located must also be protected. The protection of the historical city of Malacca has three levels of protection: single buildings, historical blocks and historical towns. The most important aspect of the organic renewal of the overall cultural environment of historical blocks is the shaping of the spirit of the place. The spirit of the place refers to the characteristics and uniqueness of a place or place that is different from other places. The unique spatial texture, spatial order and spatial structure of the ancient city of Malacca bring different physical and mental experiences to the people. The road form, shape characteristics and architectural style of the ancient
city carry rich historical and cultural information, which is contrary to the modern urban environment.

The buildings surrounding the Dutch Square are mainly decorated with “Malacca Red”. The “Red House” mentioned above was white before the 18th century and was not replaced by red until 1820. The famous "Malacca Red" is said to come from Red House. This red color has added a beautiful scenery to the tourism development of Malacca today. Starting from the entrance of the ancient city to Dutch square, the street space, commercial and residential buildings are all red. These red color buildings have made Malacca a very special space characteristic that is different from other places. The spirit of place of this ancient town has been strengthened and extended through these distinct buildings.

Another famous site is St. Paul Hill, which has reshaped the spirit of the place with its originality. Among them, the St. Paul's Church in Malacca on the top of the mountain, built by the Portuguese in 1521, is the oldest church built by Europeans in Southeast Asia. Nowadays, only the outer walls of the church are preserved and the roof is basically gone. The ways to protect the church is not to re-create, but to retain the true imprint of history and to reflect its flawless beauty. Similar approach was also employed for the protection of the Old Town Gate at the foot of the St. Paul Hill, which enables people to touch the gunfire of historical battles nowadays. In brief, the protection of St Paul Hill region is mainly through the preservation of the originality of these buildings and emphasizing the uniqueness of its incomplete beauty to reshape its place spirit, which allows people to re-examine the value of history and culture.

The basic style and feature in the old towns, representing the spirit of the place, maintains a dynamic balance for a certain period of time. New balance status will be established after an important historical event occurs [7]. Historical buildings are not only the witnesses of the special historical period at that time, but also the starting point for the formation of a new dynamic balance in the neighborhood. The cases mentioned above represent the dynamic balance of the spirit of place of Malacca in various historical stages. In the protection of historical and cultural heritage of the ancient towns, newly built environment needs to strengthen the cultural symbolic meaning of the spirit of the place, which could guide more people to join the protection of historical and cultural heritage.

Revival of Commercial District

The protection of historical heritages is not only to protect the historical buildings but also to protect and adapt the lifestyle and living environment to fulfill the needs of urban development. Regaining the vitality of the neighborhood is the key in protection of historical and cultural blocks, which is also the soul of the organic renewal of the cultural environment. How to satisfy the needs of contemporary people on the basis of maintaining the original architectural style of the ancient city is the key to re-activate the neighborhood. The protection of historical heritage should not be at the cost of impeding the improvement of the living standards of the residents.

The ancient city of Malacca is famous for its Jonker street, which starts from Melaka River near the Stadhuis. The street with arcade-houses is busy day and night, showing the folk customs of Malacca. The street is filled with historical houses with distinct characters known as the "five-foot base". For these houses, the first floor has a 1.5m wide walkway with a roof. The walkway is generally located in front of the shop-house to facilitate pedestrians. This form of architecture was introduced by the British and this corridor practice has become a norm for contemporary urban shop building. In the buffer zone around the ancient city and the new area around the city, almost all first floors of the buildings use the same architectural style of the Jonker street [8], which not only continues the architectural order of the ancient city, but also adapts to the climatic characteristics of the tropical region.

The arcade block was originally used for residence and small retail businesses. In order to meet the needs for tourism development, the arcade block has been transformed into a multi-functional comprehensive commercial district integrating residence, catering, retail, leisure and office. On weekend nights, Jonker Street has a night market, and a wide variety of goods are available to meet
the diversiform needs of tourists and local residents. In addition, a large number of Chinese assembly halls and temples are also preserved in this block. These functional spaces not only provide daily gathering places for the residents, but also present a diverse and authentic Malacca living scene for the tourists.

The revival of the commercial district has injected new blood into the ancient city. The development of the tourism economy has brought more possibilities to the prosperity of the ancient city. To restore the vitality of commercial districts, it is necessary to combine regional cultural characteristics and local living customs and adapt them to the needs of economic development.

Conclusions

The rich cultural resources of Malacca [9] are the basis for the protection of historical heritage of this ancient city. On this basis, through the excavation of multiculturalism, the shaping of the spirit of the place and the revival of the commercial district, the organic renewal of the historical and cultural environment of the ancient city of Malacca was achieved. This process is not a one-step process. The government's support and the participation of local residents are important in this process.

In the buffer zone of the ancient city of Malacca, there are still many houses that are vacant, waiting for repairs and regaining vitality. The organic renewal of the cultural environment of Malacca is not a day's work. It has gone through several distinct stages: 1) purely guided by economic development; 2) demolition of historical buildings in the city; 3) realizing the value of historical heritage; 4) the development and utilization of historical heritage to promote protection. China is facing such a similar development situation. The protection of historical heritages in the process of fast urbanization is worth of discussion. This article summarizes the experiences of the protection of the historical and cultural heritage in Malacca. It is hoped that this article will be shed light on the protection of China's historical and cultural heritages.

References