

Conservation and Safeguarding Cultural Identity of a Local Community at Tjong A Fie Mansion in Medan

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ABSTRACT

Tjong A Fie Mansion is the only Chinese museum which is located at the heart of Medan City. It is the only ancient building which stands still with its vintage style in the commercial street surrounded by shops and restaurants. Despite of the modernization happening surrounding Tjong A Fie mansion, it does not grind the authenticity and cultural identity of the mansion. The mansion is kept as it is without being transformed into a business area. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to find out the conservation and safeguarding cultural identity of a local community effort at Tjong A Fie Mansion. This research is using qualitative method as its research approach. As the data collection method, the writer uses in-depth interview with informants, email interview, and observation. The data is validated using source triangulation. The results of the research show that some conservation efforts have been done at Tjong A Fie Mansion and the heritage use intensity is low. Some efforts still need to be done to protect cultural traditions. Most parts of the mansion are still authentic and some efforts need to be done to preserve the genuine experience of the mansion. Some efforts to conserve and safeguard the cultural identity which are related to education have also been done.

Keywords: Conservation, Safeguarding Cultural Identity, Cultural Education, Tjong A Fie Mansion.

INTRODUCTION

A city or an urban area could become a potential tourist destination. Increasingly, urban areas have been transformed as “centers of control, interaction, creativity and enjoyment” (Burtenshaw et.al., 1991:70 in Naumov, 2014). This is also possible for a city with heritage and cultural resources within urban settings.

Medan is the capital city of the province of North Sumatera in Indonesia. There are some historical sites right in the middle of the city which extend from Brigjend Katamso street, Pemuda street, Ahmad Yani or Kesawan street to Balai Kota street (Jansen-Verbeke in Ashworth and Page, 2011 in Ginting, 2018). Among those historical buildings, Tjong A Fie Mansion is the only Chinese museum which is located at the heart of Medan City, to be exact at Kesawan street, Medan (*Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata kota Medan*). It is the only

ancient building which stands still with its vintage style in the commercial street surrounded by shops and restaurants. With Chinese, Malay, and Art Deco influences in its architecture style, this mansion is called "a historical jewel in Medan". **Tjong A Fie Mansion** was built in 1895 on an area of 8000 sq. meter with the layout of 35 rooms and 2 storeys. Due to its historical legacy, the mansion is registered as a historical landmark as well as a cultural heritage building and museum (<https://tjongafiemansion.org/>).

Tjong A Fie Mansion as an urban heritage was turned into a cultural tourist destination by the descendants of Tjong A Fie in 2009. Since it was open for public, the numbers of visitors, both domestic and inbound tourists have been increasing. People are interested to visit this mansion due to the historical value related to Tjong A Fie (1860 – 1921), a generous Chinese trader and a philanthropist who had contributed in the development of Medan city (Nababan, 2013).

Despite of the modernization happening surrounding the mansion, it does not grind the authenticity and cultural identity of the mansion. The mansion is kept as it is without being transformed into a business area. Therefore, this research explores the conservation and safeguarding cultural identity of local community efforts which have been done towards the mansion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Richards and Hall in Wu (2018) stated that sustainable tourism was based on “the assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community and its environment” and that it was necessary to be conducted in the context of the local community. In Indonesia, sustainable tourism has become a strategic agenda to speed up tourism as a leading sector in national development (Rahmanita, 2015).

Heritage tourism defined by the National Trust as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources” (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008). Urban heritage tourism is the intersection between urban tourism and heritage tourism, that is heritage tourism, based on relics, that occurs in cities. It is an important activity for most historic cities that will contribute in achieving sustainable development in the historic city (Wu, 2018).

Cultural tourism attraction can be elaborated including tangible and intangible tourist attraction (PP RI No. 50 Year 2011 in Hidayat et. al., 2017). The indicators of the conservation of cultural heritage and safeguarding cultural identity of local community are presented in the following table:

Table: 1 Indicators of Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Safeguarding Cultural Identity of Local Community

| Main Aspects | Sustainable Issues/ Indicators |
|---|---|
| Conservation of cultural heritage | Heritage use intensity Protection of cultural traditions |
| Safeguarding cultural identity of local community | Authentic presentation of cultural heritage Cultural education |

Source: Durovic and Lovrentjev, 2014

Dastgerdi and Luca (2018) used Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach in defining conservation. It is understood as a method to manage the process of change in an urban environment, not as a simple tool for the protection of selected heritage items. The major concern of Heritage conservation was with techniques of safeguarding the existing material from architectural monuments, with the reason of respecting the remaining fabric, use, associations and meanings (Burra Charter).

Heritage use intensity is related to carrying capacity of the heritage site. UNWTO in Manzo et. al (2017) defines carrying capacity as “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, and socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction.”

When the numbers of tourists exceed the carrying capacity of a destination, it will result in overcrowding. When overcrowding happens, there will be five major problems occur. They are alienated local residents, degraded tourist experiences, overloaded infrastructure, damage to nature, and threats to culture and heritage (Manzo et. al, 2017).

Safeguarding focuses on the processes involved in transmitting, or communicating intangible cultural heritage or in this point, cultural traditions, from generation to generation, rather than on the production of its concrete manifestations, such as a dance performance, a song, a music instrument or a craft. Safeguarding them is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning. The transmission could be realized through education (Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in 7th Diversity Matters Forum, 2014).

Authenticity is associated with culture and traditions with a particular reference to unique, true and genuine experiences (Sharpley, 1994 in Naumov, 2014).

Cultural education could be in a form of formal and non-formal. It is a way of how tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be safeguarded (7th Diversity Matters Forum by Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, 2014).

Cultural identity or ethnic identity reflects the way individuals think about their own group and the relationship between their group and the other ethnic groups (Comprehensive Clinical Psychology, 1998). It is a self-identified group membership which develops from highly personal beliefs that reflect personal experience and social interaction. Due to that, ethnic identity is highly variable even among people who have a lot in common (Blume, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This research is using qualitative method with descriptive approach. The purpose of this research is to explore about the conservation and safeguarding cultural identity of the local community efforts of Tjong A Fie Mansion. The timeframe of this research is from December 2019 – January 2020.

The writer uses in-depth interview with informants, email interview, and observation. The source of primary data is from the Division Head of *Dinas Kebudayaan Kota Medan* (Department of Culture), Pak Fahmi; the descendant and also the management of Tjong A Fie Mansion, Ibu Mimi; and Pak Rudi as Ibu Mimi's assistant. Pak Fahmi was chosen because of his involvement in the conservation of the mansion. Ibu Mimi was chosen because of her involvement in overseeing and managing the mansion, and Pak Rudi was chosen because of his involvement in education area related to Tjong A Fie. The source of secondary data is from journal articles, books, online books, and websites related to heritage conservation and safeguarding of cultural identity.

The data collection methods being used are interview and observation. Observation was conducted at Tjong A Fie Mansion during operational hours within the timeframe of the research, which is from December 2019 – January 2020.

FINDINGS

In ensuring both the reliability and the validity of the data, this research uses the triangulation with multiple sources of data method. The multiple sources of data are the Division Head of *Dinas Kebudayaan Kota Medan* (Department of Culture), Pak Fahmi; the descendant and also the management of Tjong A Fie Mansion, Ibu Mimi; and Pak Rudi as Ibu Mimi's assistant, mentioned previously.

The writer uses technique of data analysis based on Miles and Huberman (1994) cited Sugiyono (2017) which involves three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

a. Data Reduction

The researcher collected data about conservation of Tjong A Fie Mansion and safeguarding cultural identity of local community through interview, observation, and email. The researcher then transcribed the data. The irrelevant data which were not related to research focus were discarded.

b. Data Display

The researcher displayed those data in the form of descriptive table.

c. Conclusion Drawing/ Verification

Conclusions are drawn from the data display by focusing on the indicators, those are, heritage use intensity, protection of cultural traditions, authentic presentation of cultural heritage, and cultural education.

Regarding the heritage use intensity, Ibu Mimi said that during low season, the number of visitors was around 25 to 40 people per day and during high season were 100 people per day. Therefore, the problem of overcrowding only happens during high season or public holiday. While according to Pak Rudi, the maximum capacity of visitors coming at the same time is around 60 people with the average number of visitors per day around 500 people. Therefore, overcrowding has ever happened at Tjong A Fie mansion.

In the main aspect of conservation of cultural heritage with the indicator: protection of cultural traditions, Ibu Mimi hoped that people will remember and learn from the philosophy of Tjong A Fie, which was a person who embraced unity in diversity; pluralism, and loved to help the poor. The customs of '*Chengbeng*' (pilgrimage to the grave) and taking care of Tjong A Fie worship altar on the second floor also need to be protected. According to Pak Fahmi, it is the philosophy of intermingling, affiliation between Chinese and native culture; and the kindness of Tjong A Fie with the local community as the intangible cultural heritage element that needs to be protected. However, Pak Rudy did not give his opinion.

Regarding transmission or communication of intangible cultural heritage and traditions to the next generations, Pak Fahmi mentioned about mansion visits by three secondary schools. University students are also welcomed to do research about Tjong A Fie Mansion. As for Ibu Mimi, she always welcomes young people with education purposes, but not other purposes. The mansion also has an Instagram account which is relatable to young people. However, Pak Rudi brought up about the tradition of cleaning the worship altar and graveyard regularly done by the descendants of Tjong A Fie.

Regarding the effort to educate community about Tjong A Fie, Pak Fahmi said that there was no specific effort. As for Ibu Mimi, the mansion is also called as Tjong A Fie Institute which is a facility to educate community about Tjong A Fie philosophy. They also have an educative and informative website. A lecturer is also hired to take care of the education area. Students from poor schools were charged much cheaper than the normal ticket price. Intern students are welcomed. As for Pak Rudi, educating the community is done through conveying the history and contributions of Tjong A Fie to all visitors.

In the main aspect of safeguarding cultural identity of local community, with the indicator of authentic presentation of cultural heritage, according to Pak Fahmi, everything in the mansion is still original. Re-painting, adding stone fence in front of the mansion, repairing were done when necessary. As per Ibu Mimi, everything is still original. Reparation of the damaged woods due to termite, leakage, and the broken roof tiles have been done. The mansion still presents the mixture of Chinese, Malay, and Dutch cultural in the interior until now. As per Pak Rudi, all elements of the building are still maintained in its authenticity and not renovated totally by the owner to keep its historical value, typological elements, and ornamental of the building.

Regarding the way to keep the authenticity of the mansion, according to Pak Fahmi, the owner still coordinates with the Culture Department for rehabilitation matters. As per Ibu Mimi, keeping the authenticity is done through restoration or fixing all the broken parts without changing the shape, not only re-painting. In addition, Ibu Mimi mentioned about flood at the forecourt of the mansion during rainy season that has not been dealt with. As per Pak Rudi, the owner has a commitment of not renovating the building totally.

In the main aspect of safeguarding cultural identity of local community, with the indicator of cultural education, Pak Fahmi said that the best way to educate community about Tjong A Fie Mansion is by conducting art performances regularly at the mansion to attract the society. As per Ibu Mimi, promoting the philosophy of Tjong A Fie to young people so that they could imitate is the best way to educate the community. As per Pak Rudi, it is to encourage the society to visit the museum, not only as a tourist destination but to learn about the history of Tjong A Fie.

Regarding the plan to collaborate with tourism school or university, Pak Fahmi says that there is a possibility. As per Ibu Mimi, they have been collaborating with students from the major of history, English literature, Chinese literature, and architecture; and they are interested to collaborate with the tourism major. As per Pak Rudi, they have collaborated with Education Department, Culture Department, Tourism Department, Indonesian Museum Association, universities and schools.

The heritage use intensity of Tjong A Fie Mansion is considered low. Even though there was a big difference in the average number of visitors per day by Ibu Mimi and Pak Rudi, Pak Rudi and Ibu Mimi (indirectly) agreed that overcrowding has ever happened at Tjong A Fie Mansion. When there is overcrowding, visitors are divided in groups in entering the mansion and the second level. However, overcrowding only happens during holiday season.

Due to the low heritage use intensity, this supports the conservation of cultural heritage of the mansion. When overcrowding does not happen, the five major problems of overcrowding such as alienated local residents, degraded tourist experiences, overloaded infrastructure, damage to nature, and threats to culture and heritage, will be eliminated. In addition, not getting overcrowded also will not threaten a destination's spiritual and physical integrity (Manzo et. al. ,2017). Therefore, this is good for the conservation of cultural heritage of the mansion.

In the main aspect of conservation of cultural heritage with the indicator: protection of cultural traditions, both Pak Fahmi and Ibu Mimi agreed that the historical legacy and the philosophy of pluralism, embracing diversity, contribution to the society, unity in diversity, intermingling as the intangible cultural heritage element that needs to be protected.

For tradition, Ibu Mimi brought up about the Chinese rituals, that is the customs of '*Chengbeng*' (pilgrimage to the grave) and taking care of Tjong A Fie worship altar. In order to protect this tradition, there is a need of a Buddhist successor outside grandchildren (external) to continue the Chinese rituals or traditional customs, since most descendants of Tjong A Fie have converted to Moslem and Christian.

Regarding transmission or communication of intangible cultural heritage and traditions to the next generations, both Pak Fahmi and Ibu Mimi agreed that there is a transmission or communication of intangible cultural heritage and traditions to the next generations and it is done through education. While Pak Rudi brought up about the tradition of cleaning the worship altar and graveyard which needs to be transmitted or communicated to the next generations.

This is in line with Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in 7th Diversity Matters Forum (2014). Safeguarding cultural traditions could be done by transferring knowledge, skills and meaning from generation to generation.

Regarding the effort to educate community about Tjong A Fie, all of them agreed that some efforts have been made to educate the community about Tjong A Fie Mansion all this time.

In the main aspect of safeguarding cultural identity of local community, with the indicator of authentic presentation of cultural heritage, all of them agreed that everything in Tjong A Fie Mansion is still authentic. Some reparations were done due to the age of the building. However, the changes are not totally to keep its historical value and authenticity. The mansion still presents the mixture of Chinese, Malay, and Dutch cultural in the interior until now. This is in-line with Tjong A Fie philosophy, those are intermingling and unity in diversity.

Regarding the way to keep the authenticity of the mansion, all of them agreed about renovation in order to keep the authenticity of the mansion.

However, as Pak Fahmi said, the restoration, renovation, or rehabilitation have to be done under the coordination of the Culture Department and without changing the original form. Pak Rudi and Ibu Mimi agreed that the renovation is not totally.

This is in line with the theory restoration that is the act of restoring to a former state or position, to an unimpaired or perfect condition, and to bring back to the original state to a healthy or vigorous state' (Bradshaw, 1997:8).

Apart from the above mentioned, Ibu Mimi talked about flood at the forecourt of the mansion during season. This does not reflect the authentic image of the mansion in the old times. According to Sharpley (1994) in Naumov (2014), authenticity is associated with culture and traditions with a particular reference to unique, true and genuine experiences. Refer to this definition; flooded forecourt of the mansion does not reflect the genuine experience of the mansion, since it never had any flood in the old times. There is still no clear solution to this problem. If this keeps on going on, it will definitely threaten the authenticity of the mansion, and therefore the cultural identity of the local community.

In the main aspect of safeguarding cultural identity of local community, with the indicator of cultural education, Ibu Mimi and Pak Rudi concerned about promoting the philosophy and history of Tjong A Fie as the best ways to educate community about Tjong A Fie Mansion. It should start from the tour guides' explanation to the visitors. All visitors have to given explanations regarding the philosophy of Tjong A Fie, not only for photo takings. This will promote the philosophy and history of Tjong A Fie. According to Pak Fahmi, educating community could be done through conducting art performances.

Regarding the plan to collaborate with tourism school or university, the collaboration with universities and schools have been done, but not specifically with tourism school or university. However, there is a plan of collaboration in the future.

This is in line with the 7th Diversity Matters Forum by Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts (2014), stated that the appreciation of cultural heritage should be communicated through an integrated education approach in order to sustain the preservation of cultural heritage. This will safeguard the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

Tjong A Fie Mansion as an urban heritage in Medan acts as a cultural identity of Medan. The ability of Tjong A Fie Mansion in maintaining its authenticity and its establishment is related to the conservation and safeguarding of cultural identity efforts towards the mansion.

The exclusivity imposed by the owner indirectly supports the conservation of the mansion. Only people who are interested to learn about the history of Tjong A Fie are welcomed to the mansion, not for other business purposes.

In term of heritage use intensity, the numbers of visitors have been controlled during public holidays so that not too many visitors entering the mansion at the same time. In term of protection of cultural traditions, it still needs a lot of effort to promote Tjong A Fie's philosophy to the society, especially related to intermingling and unity in diversity. The Chinese rituals and traditional customs of the mansion are also threatened due to the lack of interest of the younger descendants to conserve and continue practicing it, while looking after the mansion.

The cultural identity still reflects the authentic presentation of Tjong A Fie Mansion. The mansion still presents the mixture of Chinese, Malay, and Dutch cultural until now. This is in-line with Tjong A Fie philosophy; those are intermingling and unity in diversity. The interior design of the mansion represents each of the different culture. They are conserved in its authenticity until now. Only some parts of the mansion were damaged due to its age. In addition, the flooded forecourt of the mansion during rainy season will ruin the authenticity of the mansion as a whole if it keeps on going .

Cultural educations are conducted more than providing reliable tour guides at the mansion for visitors. The management has an official website about Tjong A Fie Mansion. Secondary schools students were invited to learn about the history of the mansion, university students were allowed to do researches about the mansion, they were allowed to do internship there, and the owner welcome students visiting the mansion more than visitors with other business purposes.

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