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THE CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK OF HISTORIC INTERIOR SCHEME AS A GUIDELINE FOR FUTURE HERITAGE MUSEUM PLANNING: A CASE STUDY OF ‘RUMAH TEH BUNGA’ IN GEORGE TOWN PENANG

Norashikin Abdul Karim¹, Siti Norlizaiha Harun², Salwa Ayob³ & Zulkarnain Hazim⁴

*^{1,2,4}Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA MALAYSIA
³Faculty of Art and Design
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA MALAYSIA*

Abstract

The heritage museum tourism has rapidly grown, contributing the most income to Government of Malaysia while receiving local and global tourists. Since Malaysian museums are among the most important tourism assets for the country, they must be given attention, especially the interior spaces of the museum. The interior spaces carry different stories. Due to their own unique historic interior scheme (HIS), different interior features, room functions, spatial designs, historic materials, finishes, and the associated historical events would fill the interior spaces. Unfortunately, the significance of HIS has gradually disappeared due to the exhibitions in the museums. Accordingly, not only the historic integrity in preserving the heritage museum buildings cannot be complied with, but also the significance of the HIS is not highlighted in the exhibition. This study aimed to propose a HIS conservation framework as a guideline for preserving the historic scheme of museum building interior. The evaluation method was used to measure the HIS and HES of the interior space of the museum. ‘Rumah Teh Bunga’ also known as the Penang Malay Gallery in George Town Penang has been selected for the case study. Hopefully, the HIS framework would inform the museum bodies to make the interior spaces of the museum more memorable for tourists.

Keywords: conservation, framework, interior, historic scheme, tourism

¹ Lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA. Email: noras338@uitm.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Most of the heritage buildings in Malaysia have historically impacted the country. Therefore, the buildings need to be preserved and their history needs to be sought and shared, particularly by turning them into museums. Museums are often referred to as the “guardians of the nation’s history of treasures” because the role of the facility is appropriate for a heritage building (Ahmad, 2015; Harun, S. N., & Ismail, I., 2011; Karim, N. A., Harun, S. N., & Ayob, S., 2018). However, the question that arises is how far is a museum able to carry out its role as a guardian of heritage building, and how does a museum preserve and interpret a heritage building’s historic interior scheme?

A museum’s heritage building and its authentic interior characters have the power to notify the story of its passing. Some museums are the sole landmark, being monuments or fortresses. They stand as a sign of pride, like a palace or a mosque, and they are a place to commemorate the black tale of our country. One measure to preserve the country’s history is to restore and create an appropriate scheme for the transformation of historic buildings into heritage museums. Such a development would allow the museums to control and provide continuous care of the heritage buildings. The effort can also retain the buildings’ authentic characters in terms of architecture, craftsmanship, material and finishes, interior features, and interior scheme, which will deteriorate and fade with time if care is not taken. According to Abdul Aziz (2021), the museum’s heritage building may incur complexity and cause conflicting demands of meeting contemporary uses and expectations while still being obligated to retain cultural heritage values. However, Prihatmanti, Putri, and Devina (2017) realized its great benefits for social purposes, and commercial viability in these contemporary ages. Therefore, this study was conducted in order to propose an organized scheme of heritage museum building by proposing a framework conservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage Museum Building

Heritage museum buildings are considered a unique carrier of historical and cultural memory. The main task of a heritage museum body is to preserve, communicate some aspects of the past, and share the past through the museum’s site, structure, interior and furnishings, and landscape. Heritage museum buildings are the natural settings for teaching and learning history, and they can be among the most effective environments for successfully carrying out such tasks (Waveney District Council, 2012). Therefore, heritage museum buildings are meant to not only display artefacts, but also exhibit the inside and outside of the building itself, and its association with the surrounding. In fact, the function and purpose of museums building are to not only store display items, but also serve as a place for visitors to gain the knowledge of cultural objects (Leandersson, 2015). Heritage museum buildings have their own

unique characters. Here, the historic interior character means the details on the ceiling, floor, wall, and other interior features of each of the spaces in the building (ICOM DEMHIST, 2014). Grimmer, A. E. (2017) stated that doors, windows, columns, and a grand staircase were also the important detailing that strengthened the character of a historic interior scheme in a heritage building. **Figure 1** illustrates example characters.

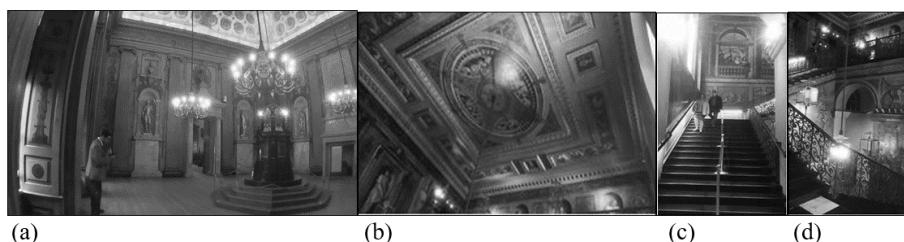


Figure 1: (a) Kensington Palace in London which has been transformed into a museum. (b) Grand Ceiling. (c) Grand Staircase. (d) Grand column in the heritage building museum of Kensington Palace London.

Historic Interior Scheme (HIS)

In general, a historic interior scheme refers to the historic character of an interior building property that should be retained and preserved. The character of a historic interior building may be defined by the form and detailing of the interior materials, such as masonry, wood, and metal, plaster and paint; and interior features, such as moldings and stairways, room configuration and spatial relationships, as well as structural and mechanical systems (Morton & Hume, 1983; W. Brown Morton, Gary L. Hume, 1997). Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (1995) have described a HIS as encompassing historic interior features and finishes that are important in defining the overall historic characters of a building, including the columns, cornices, base boards, fireplaces and mantels, paneling, light fixtures, hardware, flooring, wallpaper, plaster, paint, and finishes, such as stenciling, marbling, graining, and other decorative materials that accent interior features. This definition has been widely supported by Grimmer (2017), Anne E. Grimmer, Jo Ellen Hensley (2011) and Morton III et al. (1997). These scholars maintained that the elements of the interior scheme were also the pulse of a heritage building and therefore, should be respected and not destroyed.

A HIS refers to an interior that is expected to possess characteristics such as the integrity of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. These characteristics are associated with significant events and/or people; embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; represent the work of a master or possess high artistic value; and yield important historical information. The additional criteria for the designation of landmark interiors vary based on the type of interior, but most emphasize the distinct qualities of being

unique, innovative, intact, and consistent with the style of the exterior. Hence, the importance of HIS is upholding integrity (Alliance Greater Philadelphia, 2007; Jokilehto, 2006; Pearson & Marshall, 2011). Other than that, a HIS includes a decoration scheme. It should be based on an era, and the character of the era lends strength to the characters of the space (Young, 2007; Grignolo, 2014).

It can be concluded that a HIS is the historical character of an interior space that evokes the identity of an interior era. A HIS is also an important historical record that is the tangible expressions of a century's identity and experience. Therefore, the HIS of historic space integrity should be respected in terms of location, setting, design, material, workmanship, feeling, and association. **Table 1** briefly presents the the HIS of historic space integrity criteria. These criteria will be used to measure the level of change of the HIS of the selected case studies.

Table 1: Summary of HIS of Historic Space Integrity Criteria

HIS of Historic Space Integrity Criteria	Finding of units
1. Location	Space location; Sense of location
2. Setting	Character of setting; Features setting; Setting of object/monument; Setting of furniture/masterpiece
3. Design	Design; Material; Technology; Space organization; Space proportion; Space structure; Space scale/size; Ornamentation
4. Material	Color; Pattern; Texture; Sense of period/time; Sense of space
5. Workmanship	Construction skill; Traditions technique; Ornamental details; Technique of making object/monuments, finishes and craft of people
6. Feeling	Physical characteristic; Historic scene
7. Association	Linking with historic people, historic event and culture

Source: Illustrated by Author (2019). Adopted from National Park Service (1997); Wyatt (2002); Jokilehto (2006); ICOM DEMHIST-ARRE (2014); The Georgia State University World Heritage Initiative (2017); Alho et al. (2010); Grignolo (2014); Duncan (2011); Little et al. (2000).

Heritage Exhibition Scheme (HES) and Heritage Interpretation for Heritage Museum

The practice of Heritage Exhibition Scheme (HES) refers to the Heritage Building Museum Interpretation. Interpretation is fundamental for a department to foster recreation and heritage, and understand and engage in conservation. Interpretation helps to demonstrate the values that connect a heritage building to our communities. Nowadays, preserving a heritage place requires developing and improving the skills in heritage interpretation. To succeed in heritage interpretation, an ongoing commitment is required. Therefore, museum bodies should play their role in correctly by communicating the history of a heritage building museum. With regard to the interpretation of a cultural heritage place, the ICOMOS Charter has highlighted that there is no choice when preserving a cultural heritage that comes from a heritage site as all the elements of the site interpretation should be presented to the public honestly (ICOMOS International Scientific Committee, 2008). According to Dumbraveanu, Craciun, and Tudoricu (2016), the heritage interpretation is a vague concept,

expressed in general terms and usually covering all the activities carried out in situ in the museum in relation to visitors. However, the museum staff is mixed, consisting of, among others, conservation specialists, researchers in charge of providing information (be they historians, biologists, etc.), museum educators, and guides. Heritage interpretation can enhance a visitor's experience. It may also strengthen the relationship between a site and those who live around it (Liam, 2012). Tilden (1977) also reported six principles. Hence, the pioneer definitions of heritage interpretation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Six Principles of Heritage Interpretation

Six Principle of Heritage Interpretation
1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information, but both are different. However, all interpretations include information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is to a certain degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best will require a separate program.

Source: Tilden (1977)

Table 3 briefly presents the HES indicator adapted from the heritage interpretation criteria of a unit. These criteria and finding of unit were used to measure the degree of acceptance of an heritage exhibition scheme for the selected case studies. The criteria are simplified as follows:

Table 3: Summary of HES for Heritage Museum Building Exhibition

HES Criteria for Heritage Museum Building	Analysis of LR
1. Medium interpretation	Visitors' interaction, interpretation program and plan.
2. Story of history	History, building's history, tell the story of building, heritage story associated with building, cultural and people.
3. Display art	Building's setting and boundaries, building's architecture and physical, science and art, show the building, display the items of culture, display the architecture of building and features.
4. Program/Activity	Event, activities, cultural activities, heritage interpretation program and plan.

Source: Illustrated by Author (2019)

The Theoretical Framework for Historic Interior Scheme Conservation for Heritage Museum Building

The criteria include: *Criteria 1* - The criteria of historic interior scheme (HIS) involve seven indicators: location, design, material, workmanship, association, feeling and setting; *Criteria 2* - The criteria in heritage exhibition scheme (HES) involve four indicators: medium interpretation, story of history, display art and program/activity. These criteria were proposed for evaluating the extent of change in the historic interior schemes for an heritage museum building. Those two main criteria would be a novel knowledge contribution to this research field. The criteria are illustrated in a theoretical framework as shown in Figure 2.

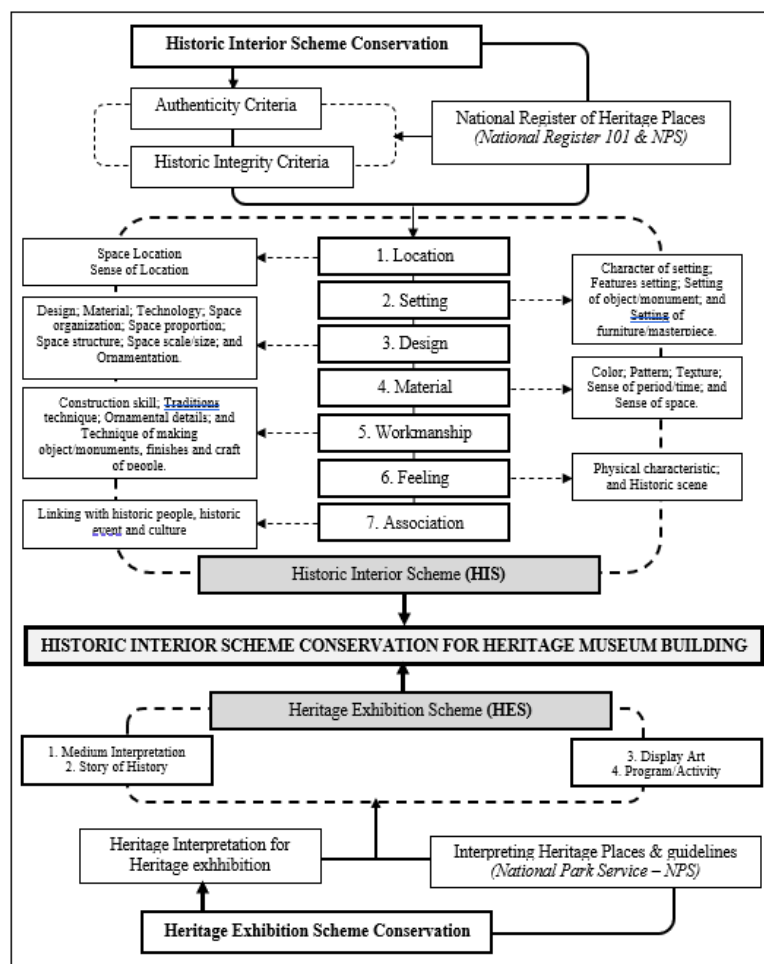


Figure 2: The Theoretical Framework for Historic Interior Scheme Conservation for Heritage Museum Building

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Method: HIS & HES Evaluation

Two evaluations were used in this study: historic interior scheme (HIS) and heritage exhibition scheme (HES). The indicators were used as a unit analysis to measure the level of change for the HIS and degree of acceptance of the HES. Investigating the level of change on heritage building museum conservation requires: history research to identify historic character of the building; observation on site, researchers to participate as an observer evaluation on the level of change for the authentic historic character; fieldwork researcher; consultation with curator, conservator and museum staff; visual materials to identify the era and the authentic historic scheme.

This HIS and HES evaluation was conducted on the selected case studies. The researchers were assisted by museum experts and museum staff such as the curators, museum designer, and conservator. An evaluation rubric form was developed based on the evaluation criteria or unit analysis according to the results from the literature review. The following list was the criteria or unit analysis that HIS evaluation were evaluated based on the rubric scale adopted from ICOMOS (2008), marked in either blue, green, orange, and red (See Table 4a), and HES evaluation were evaluated based on weightage for degree of acceptance adopted from Kalman (1980), and marked in the gradient of yellow to red (See Table 4b).

Table 4(a): The criteria of rubric scale/severity of change to be assess in the HIS evaluation

Criteria	SCALE / SEVERITY OF CHANGED				
	5	4	3	2	1
1.Location	No change	Negligible change	Minor change	Moderate change	Major change
2.Design	Exceeds Expectations	Meet Expectations	Developing Expectations	Below Expectations	Very Low Expectation
3.Material					
4.Workmanship					
5.Association					
6.Feeeling					
7.Setting					

Table 4(b): The weightage for degree of acceptance to be assess in the HES evaluation

Point	Group	Color	Description
75 - 100	A	Yellow	Of major degree of acceptance for Medium Interpretation/Story of History/Display Art/Programme & Activity
50 - 74	B	Orange	Of importance degree of acceptance for Medium Interpretation/Story of History/Display Art/Programme & Activity
25 - 49	C	Light Red	Of value as a partial degree of acceptance for Medium Interpretation/Story of History/Display Art/Programme & Activity
0 - 24	D	Dark Red	Of no importance degree of acceptance for Medium Interpretation/Story of History/Display Art/Programme & Activity

DATA COLLECTION
Case Study: ‘Rumah Teh Bunga’

Figure 3(a) - Building



Figure 3(b) - Ground Floor

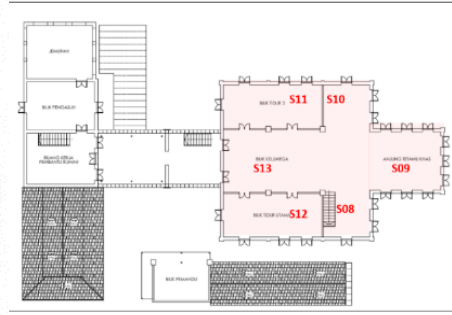
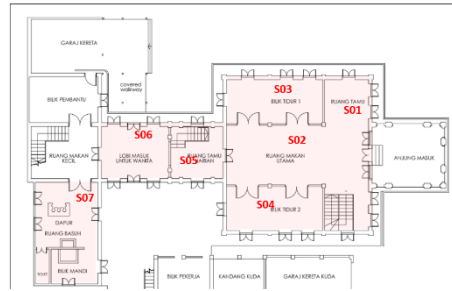


Figure 3(d) - Kitchen and wash area

Figure 3(c) - First Floor

‘Rumah Teh Bunga’ is also known as the Penang Malay Gallery. ‘Rumah Teh Bunga’ is a heritage museum classified under the residential category. It is located at No. 138, Hutton Road, George Town, Penang. It was built in 1893 by one of the richest Jawi Peranakan, Tuan Abdul Wahab, in the late nineteenth century (Figure 2a). The interior of this mansion has a very strong historical character. The identity and character of the original history of the interior were preserved by the design and layout of the interior. The house has two floors. The house was originally stretched long to the back and it stood within a rectangular fence. The ground floor consists of spaces for formal activities, such as the living room and the dining area for outdoor guests, two bedrooms for outdoor guests, the women’s lobby, and the kitchen. On the ground floor are a small dining room, a maid’s room, a car garage, a work room and a horse barn (See Figure 2 a,b & c).

The upper floors (See figure 2c) of the house comprise spaces for personal and family activities, such as a special guest suite for the relatives, right ‘Anjung’, left ‘Anjung’, one main bedroom, one family bedroom, a family lounge, and a dressing room. All of these spaces were involved in exhibitions.

There are also other floors such as hallway lobby, maid work room, babysitting room and open sunroom. All of these spaces were not involved in exhibition activities but are used as staff walkways, staff offices, and staff lounges. The spaces evaluated were only those involved in such exhibition activities as described in the Table 5.

Table 5: List of interior spaces involved in the 'Rumah Teh Bunga' Exhibition

Space No.	Original Space	Original Function/Activity	Museum Function/Exhibition
S 01	<i>Main Guest Hall</i>	Welcome guest area	Opening Penang Island
S 02	<i>Main Dining Hall</i>	Guest dining hall	Info Corner (History)
S 03	<i>Bedroom 1</i>	Guest bedroom	Trade & Business Exhibition
S 04	<i>Bedroom 2</i>	Guest bedroom	Politic, Administrative & Haji Exhibition
S 05	<i>Daily Living Area</i>	Daily guest chat area	Traditional Food
S 06	<i>Ladies Entrance Lobby</i>	Women waiting area	Family Dining Lobby
S 07	<i>Kitchen, Wash Area, Bathroom & Toilet</i>	Cooking, wash and shower area	Kitchen, Wash Area, Bathroom & Toilet
S 08	<i>Right 'Anjung'</i>	Family and guest area	'Tokoh' Exhibition
S 09	<i>Special Guest Hall</i>	Special guest rest area	Boria Performing Art
S 10	<i>Left 'Anjung'</i>	Family and guest area	Education & Publication Exhibition
S 11	<i>Bedroom 3</i>	Children bedroom	Penang Marriage Culture
S 12	<i>Master Bedroom</i>	Parent bedroom	Traditional Costume Exhibition
S 13	<i>Family Area</i>	Family rest area and dressing area	Family Area (setting with TV and sofa set) and Dressing Area

ANALYSIS AND FINDING

The Result of HIS and HES Evaluation in Penang Malay Gallery

Figure 3(a) and 3(b) show the results of the level of change for HIS and degree acceptance for HES in the 'Penang Malay Gallery' according to the evaluation indicators. Overall, the level of change for the 'Rumah Teh Bunga' was medium. This level was considered to be at the successful state of developing the expectation of an HIS scheme. The HIS of the 'Rumah Teh Bunga' was considered preserved; the shape, the historic features, and the significance of its interior space could still be seen and felt. As shown in Figure 3(a), the location of all spaces remains at the original position, however, there are changes in materials and workmanship due to the difficulty of obtaining original materials and craftsmen, and unfortunately most of room's setting has changed due to the changed to the new function. Nevertheless, only the kitchen and wash area (See figure 2d) managed to restore the original scheme and the original atmosphere of the Jawi Peranakan kitchen can be felt. Meanwhile, Figure 3(b) shows that the highest acceptance degrees of the heritage interpretation of 'Rumah Teh Bunga' are the use of display art. This method was used to display artefacts to (i) show off the design in the building, (ii) expose the physical space itself, and (iii) insert

moving objects like heritage furniture, accessories, rugs, tableware, foodware, kitchenware, and others. In fact, this interpretation of display art can also help revive and restore the historic interior scheme of the Jawi Peranakan home.

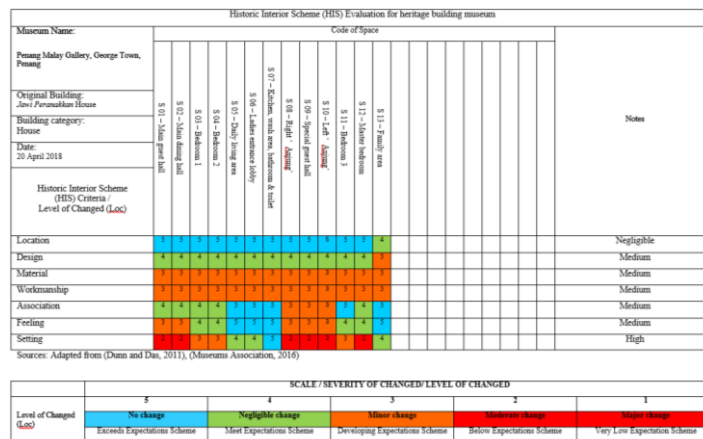


Figure 4(a): The result of the level of change of the HIS in ‘Rumah Teh Bunga’

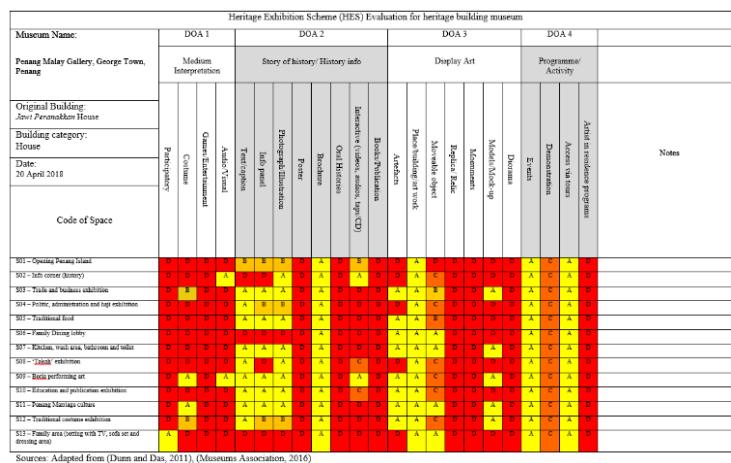


Figure 4(b): The result of the degree acceptance of the HES in ‘Rumah Teh Bunga’

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the proposed HIS conservation framework is critical to counter the lack of guidelines to conserve the existing heritage buildings in Malaysia. Improvements of this framework include additional elements that are more focused and specific to interior space and the new function of the museum. The

improvement of this new element is necessary as a result of the efforts to conserve heritage museum buildings in Malaysia. Setting up these more specific guidelines is also a step towards culminating and sharing the knowledge and findings with museum experts and heritage building conservators in Malaysia.

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