

# Conservation of Semarang chinatown traditional settlement as physical characteristics of chinatown district

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## Conservation of Semarang chinatown traditional settlement as physical characteristics of chinatown district

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**Abstract.** Historical environment must be conserved due to their contribution toward cultural, social, economic and aesthetic values. They transfer the emotion, thought and backgrounds of social live to modern societies. As one of oldest settlements, Semarang Chinatown gives great influence toward Semarang City and has endless historical values. Old Chinese settlement is very thick with Chinese culture. It becomes the primary source of physical characteristics in this historical environment. However, physical and visual problems come along with the rapid economic growth in Semarang Chinatown. The old buildings that still remains in Semarang Chinatown are in deficient condition and losing their shapes. Moreover, modernization and economic growth influence the change building facade. Several old buildings were replaced with new buildings that tend not to adopt Chinese Architecture style. Consequently, it changes the value of the buildings and the value of the historical environment.

**Keywords:** Old Chinese settlement, Historical environment conservation, Physical characteristics, Semarang Chinatown.

### 1. Introduction

Settlement as a human's built environment was formed from housing construction process as a container from the dwellers activities inside. Rapoport [1] stated that settlement area is an architectural work, which reflect its people's life, with all the meaning within. Furthermore, uniformity and diversity are the expressions of manifested figural quality forming an image as an identity, which eventually give meaning to the specific area [1].

In Semarang municipality, one of the historical areas included in List of Heritage Conservation is the Chinatown of Semarang (Decree of Semarang's Mayor No.650/157, 2005). The Chinatown with its cultural richness along with its Chinese Architectural values is the vital part in the development of Semarang as a city. However, in line with its rapid economic growth in Chinatown, there are physical and visual problems in this region. As an old area, the buildings suffer dilapidation and deformation. On the other hand, the effect of economic and modernization have also changed the existing building facades. There are many old buildings replaced by newer ones, which tend to lose its Chinese Architectural values, so this will be the problem for the area considered as a Historical area.

Based on the aforementioned background, the objective achieved in this study is to analyze the building's facades changing in the Semarang Chinatown historical area.



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Figure 1. Location of Semarang Chinatown (Source: Dinas Tata Kota Semarang, 2015)

### 1.1. Conservation of Semarang's Historical Areas

Conservation activities is a process which includes repair, preservation, restoration, maintenance, adaptive reuse, and reconstruction [2]. In Semarang, the conservation efforts began based on the Decree of Semarang's Mayor No. 646/50, 1992 about the Historical Building Conservation in Semarang Municipality. The Decree was a form of response to the Act No. 5, 1992, regarding Conservation of Cultural Heritage in relation with 101 buildings considered as Cultural Heritage in Semarang.

The conservation efforts conducted by the Government of Semarang has been continued according to The Regional Act of Semarang Municipality, No. 8, 2003, about the Building and Environment Planning Guidelines (RTBL), followed by the Regional Act No.16, 2003, regarding the Building and Environments Planning Guidelines of Semarang Old City Area, which also mentions the Chinatown area planning. This regulation also introduces the Chinatown area as the Chinese cultural center of Semarang City. This policy aims to re-enhance and develop the potency of Semarang Chinatown.

So far, the common approach being done by the Government of Semarang, in term of conservation, is the data collecting of the historical buildings in Semarang municipality. There are 144 residential buildings listed in the Heritage Conservation List, which 4 of them are located in Semarang Chinatown having particular characteristics, where the dwellers of this area still maintains their social, economic, and cultural activities. Beside the rapidly developed economic activity, the historical Chinese artifacts are still existed in this region. The glorious footprints from the past are still obvious, though modernization effects are also visible in some parts. However the characteristics of the district as a historical area can still be seen and become a distinctive factor in comparison with other districts in the city.

The Chinatown of Semarang consists of high-density array of houses. Those houses are located oppositely and there is almost no space between each house, so this condition has formed narrow alleys. There's almost no front yard found, and therefore the buildings in this area are called "sitting on the ground" the lack of space between the street and the front part of the house Chinatown of Semarang [3]. The conservation approach using historical buildings data collecting is considered insufficient to conserve this historical district [4,5].

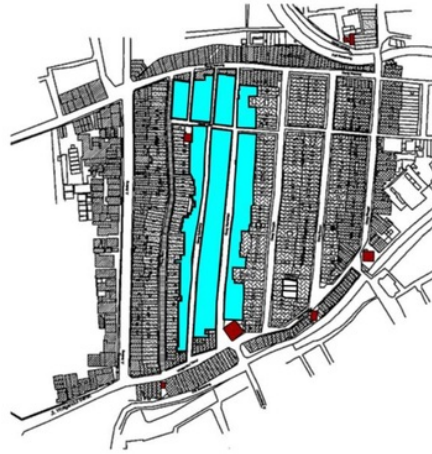


Figure 2 Traditional Residence Location in Semarang Chinatown (Source: Author analysis, 2017)



Figure 3 The Traditional Housing Facades in Semarang Chinatown

### 1.2. Semarang Chinatown Historical Area

The history of Semarang Chinatown was started in 1740 [6]. Semarang was a seaport visited by various ethnicities, groups, and nations. Chinese was one of them, who later on resided in Semarang. Due to the rebellion of the Chinese ethnics in Batavia (Jakarta), in 1740 the Dutch Colonial Government ordered the Chinese society to be localized in a certain region which nowadays is known as the Chinatown of Semarang. The purpose of the Dutch colonial government is to ease the supervision.

On the early stage, the buildings on these alleys belonged to the Chinese residents. Nowadays those areas are mostly developed into a commercial district. Only in Gang Tengah, Gang Cok, and Gang Gambiran can we identify some traditional Chinese residential buildings, as seen on Figure 2 and Figure 3.

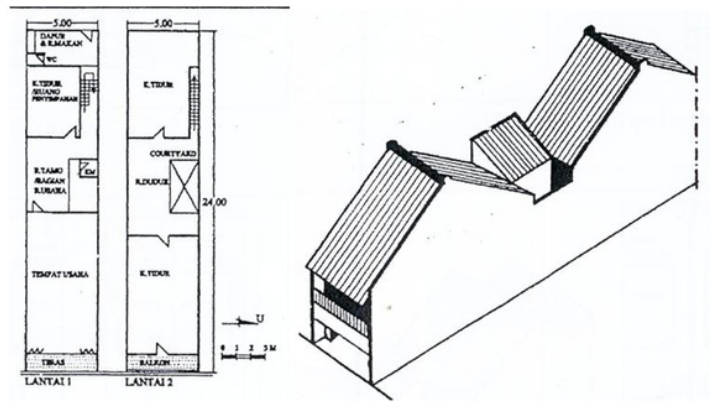


Figure 4 Illustration of a house used for business (Source: Reference [7])

According to Rosiana [7], the typology of residential buildings in the Chinatown district consists of two types:

- a. The houses with multiple uses for business. They are two-storey houses where the first floor is utilized as the business place (store) and the second floor is for living place, as seen in Figure 4.
- b. The purely residential houses, as seen on Figure 5 and Figure 6. The typical characteristics of the houses are: (1) Two-three storey row house in log array, and (2) Most of them were initially built in big sizes and later were turned into smaller houses

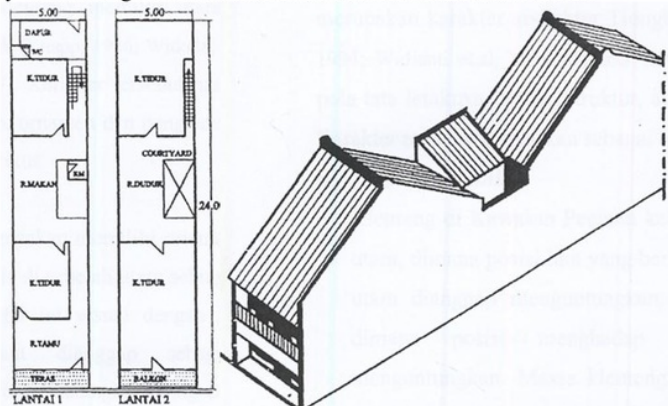


Figure 5 Illustration of pure residential house (Source: Reference [7])

Traditional Chinese houses use a folded roof, with a unique curve on their two edges. The people of Semarang called this kind of roof edges as Konde roof. As heritage buildings, the existence of these old buildings has become the physical characteristic of Semarang Chinatown district. One of the images of the district was established by the presence of the group of residential buildings with highly Chinese Architecture values. Therefore, the changing of the building façade will create a problem in the future. Although there are four buildings in the middle of the Semarang Chinatown already listed as Heritage Conservation Buildings, it still is insufficient to maintain the whole characteristic of the Chinatown District.

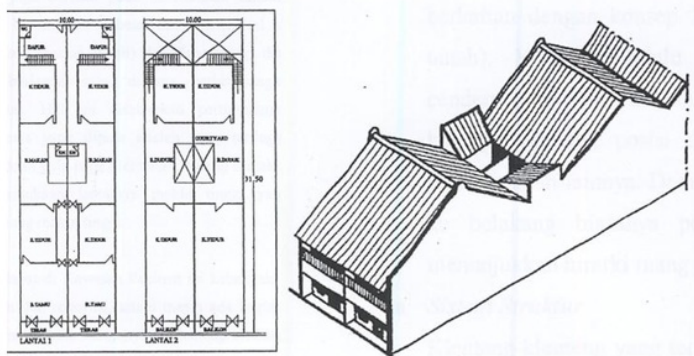


Figure 6 Illustration of Attached House Consisting of Different Units (Source: Reference [7])

## 2. Methods

There are 3 main research methods being used in this study, which were:

- Literature Study. Mainly concerned with literature of conservation activities taking place in Semarang Chinatown and documents of physical analysis of buildings with Chinese architecture.
- Direct observation in the Chinatown area, by identifying physical evidence of the Chinese Ethnic settlement. From the observation, we could find the specific identity and morphology of the buildings in the study area.
- Interview with the stakeholders of the Chinatown.

## 3. Discussion

The Chinatown as a historical place in Semarang recently face a problem concerning the district identity. The development process on the area is focusing more on the economic and efficiency factors causing a significance changing on the unique characteristics of the Chinatown. Development and modernization of the city have created similarity and uniformity of the city's image. It is a threat to the uniqueness of the Chinatown as a heritage area.

Based on the data collected from the field, the change occurring in the Chinatown area was caused by multiple factors such as:

- Deteriorating of the building elements that forced the inhabitants to change them with new building materials.
- Population growth. The division of inheritance has caused the big house to turn into smaller units, and this fact has a direct impact to the façade of the buildings.
- Economic Factor. There are residential buildings that have been fully changed into storages or business units.
- Changing of Ownership
- Lack of awareness from the society to conserve heritage buildings at their area.



Figure 7 Location of buildings with different style



Figure 8 Deterioration of the buildings

Most of the façade changes on Chinatown were done by replacing the old-classic Chinese styles into modern and simplified ones, due to financial problems, lack of craftsmanship, and alternative materials availability.

A couple of sub-districts such as Gang Warung, Gang Pinggir, and Gang Besen have been changed with modern architecture, totally different from the typical Chinese Architecture within the area, as shown on the Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9. This replacement varies from minor replacement to total conversion. There were adjustments on some cases where the owner combined the old elements with the new ones.



Figure 9. The temple located at the end of the crossroad



Figure 10 Typical *Konde* Roof

The function of the buildings has also experienced major adaptation. Most of the buildings on the main street have become commercial buildings. If the area does not have any Kong Hu Chu Temples and some building with Konde Roofs, the image of this particular area will only be a fully commercial district, same with other similar districts all over the city as shown on Figure 10. There are more building facades ignoring the unity, harmony, and architectural locality and uniqueness aspects in Semarang Chinatown, these phenomena will lead to a high variation of modern buildings that cause the decreasing of urban quality.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is a dilemma when facing a fact that this cultural heritage area experiences physical and visual problems. The existence of classic-Chinese architecture is the historical evidence of Semarang as a city. Seemingly, economic and population growth factor are the prime causes of the characteristics decreasing at the Heritage Area. The physical identity discussed in this study referred to the metamorphosis of the façade, from the classic Chinese architecture into the modern one. The lack of guidance in maintaining the characteristics of the building facades will eventually cause the losing of Chinatown identity that was once existed. The Semarang Chinatown as a the Heritage Conservation Area is an interpretation of history, deeply filled with Chinese Architecture values that distinguishes this area from other parts of the city. Therefore, the Municipality of Semarang needs to create strategies to preserve the uniqueness of this district and to maintain the existence of Semarang Chinatown for the sake of our future generations.

#### 5. Acknowledgments

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