

**CONSERVATION IN INDONESIA:
'WHO' AND 'WHAT' WAS/IS BEING CONSERVED?[⊗]**
(konservasi kota di Indoneia – 'apa' dan 'siapa' yang dikonservasi?)

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Abstrak

Meskipun dengan menggunakan ICOMOS misalnya, telah dapat disodorkan pengertian mengenai konservasi, tetapi dalam kenyataan masih saja ada pengertian-pengertian lain mengenai konservasi itu. Demikian banyak pihak yang terlibat dan berkepentingan dengan konservasi telah menjadi salah satu penyumbang utama bagi hadirnya demikian banyak pengertian konservasi itu. Demikianlah, sebaiknya dengan jujur diakui bahwa konservasi memiliki pengertian yang tersendiri dalam tradisi konservasi di Nusantara, dan oleh karena itu, pengambilan pengertian-pengertian dari luar semestinya diwaspadai dan diterima dengan kritis. Dan oleh karena itu, isu berupa pengertian konservasi yang bukan berakar pada tradisi Nusantara itu, akan ditatap dengan kritis dalam makalah ini, yakni tradisi kesejarahan, seni lingkung-bina, dan teknologi konservasi pada khususnya; dan sambil mendiskusikannya, sejumlah kasus lokal akan dimunculkan sebagai kasusnya. Pada akhirnya, sangat kritis untuk menengok kembali obyek konservasi yang semestinya lebih diutamakan: obyek kolonial atautkah obyek Nusantara?

A. Introduction

We never imagine that conservation will be in our vocabulary if there is no single building, space or event is ever occurred in the past. Put it in a simplest way and meaning, any conservation is how to make any artifact lives longer in the future. The business of conservation, then, may simply center in the 'how' of that enterprise. Even though conservation is a universal business, yet, the 'how' is local. Any imposition on this 'how', will only find conservation is merely a concern of a small number of people and communities. It is highly difficult to cope with the opinions that the conservation in Indonesia is more a legacy of the colonial time than a legacy of the Indonesian. Legally, the law of heritage is seemingly an updated version of the colonial law; the object of conservation as well as its focus on conservation is almost all colonial buildings and artifacts; the advocacy of conservation itself, mostly oriented their views and concepts on what the European and American do in conservation. Those factors always make the Indonesian conservationists find it difficult to answer the question of why conserving the colonial building. Any answers in terms of history will only find themselves being cornered in the question of "history of the colonial?" In terms of the history of the city, the fact that most Indonesian cities are planned, designed and built in the colonial time, then, the question is "is it the history of

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colonial city?” Turn it architecturally, the beauty and splendor of esthetics are practically western, then, the question is: “why conserve western esthetics works?”

Should we call the above questions are the weak point in conservation in Indonesia, we also find that those conservationists are tend to be situated and positioned as ‘alien’ within the skyrocketing development of Indonesian cities. They are listened, but that is the end of it. Any success in conservation in Indonesia, then, is more an exception than a common work of practice.

Failure to provide the satisfactory answer is not the only problem that conservationists in Indonesia must cope with. They will also seemingly like a white clean sheet of paper in saying about conservation within the Indonesian. The fact that most Indonesian architecture is of wood, perishable materials, has pushed the conservationists to remain silent. Should they must speak, the candi-s and Indonesian-built mortar buildings (mostly of 19th and early 20th century) are their representatives. The candi-s, happily, satisfies those conservationists in pointing the conservation of non-colonial artifact, thanks to archeologists who have intelligently do the work; but not with that of mortar buildings.

To sum up, the concept and idea of conservation that the Indonesian adopts from Europe and America works quite well for colonial buildings, at the expense of unanswered questioned that only cornered the conservationists. From cases below, the author will argue for the practice of conservation among the Indonesian; a conservation practice that may embark from different concept and idea of conservation that the Indonesian conservationists adopt.

B. The Semut Station

It might be the first case of conservation in Indonesia where the involvement of all parties in conservation actively involved in, and in a positive action to save colonial artifact, the case of Semut Train Station of Surabaya (officially named Stasiun Kota). This event happened in 2003 and is still goes today so the redesign and re-function is underway. However, the Semut case will probably be hardly becomes a milestone in the winning battle of conserving colonial artifacts in Indonesia. This is not to undervalue the restlessly fight and action of those conservation groups in Indonesia, but there seems one or two substantial problem(s) is experienced by those groups. The success in solving that problem had only made the conservationists happy. It might be for the first time in Indonesia that the legislative, the police, the mayor, the Indonesian Institute of Architects, community groups and individuals calling themselves expert in conservation unanimously agree against the developer of the Semut project. Unfortunately, publications about this great success of the conservationists is very poor; the big event now just a local happening of yesterday. Conservationists seemingly forget that publications are one of sharp weapon to support their action.

C. The Praban Kinco

The site is only a couple of meters wide and depth, yet, its location in the center and most commercialized part of Surabaya, is almost intact for more than one century. More interestingly, is well maintained. At another spot, this time is once an elite residential area, the Darmo area of Surabaya. There, we may find the Embah Bungkul spot that also enjoy the well-maintained condition for more than one century. Both spots are free from any threat of demolition and elimination from city planning and regulation. Since both spots are

places where a local figures (Surabayanese) are buried, conservationists may argue that cemeteries are objects that may automatically been preserved or conserved. It is the culture and tradition of the Indonesians, so the conservationists will say, that provides 'conservation by the people' so as even any detailed plan of any city will not doing any change on them.

The Praban Kinco and Embah Bungkul are just two among so many spots alike in Indonesia that the business in conservation is more toward enjoyment than a struggle. Into this case we may include the Alun-alun and Palaces of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, hundreds of pura-s in Bali and even villages like where the Baduy Dalam and the Amattoa. Quite unfortunately, they are objects of real practice and operation of conservation that the professional and academic conservationists of Indonesia turn their head away. For them, those spot and cases are the area of culture and tradition which quite dissimilar to the concept and idea of culture and tradition in the 'western' way. Being abandoned as cases of conservation by academicians and professionals in conservation, this paper will present pictures of conservation that Indonesian has and still practice. Since the author is not even academician and practitioners in conservation, he will leave these following pictures to those distinguish professionals and academicians in conservation to work with, and ultimately conclude whether what the Indonesians do is worth labeled "conservation"..

The Praban Kinco spot is dwarfed by its surrounding shops, thus making this spot fail to become a dominant element of the area. Neither shop are giving attention to this spot nor donating any cents for it. The business and economics of the shops is not devalued by the existence of the Praban Kinco spot. But it is not one abandoned spot since her members and communities is still belongs to it, regularly visit and perform gestures of homage; yet, they are not living within the close distance to the Praban Kinco grave. The Embah Bungkul spot is similar with the Praban Kinco, only the surrounding is one of elite residential area of Surabaya.¹ Then, both spots experience that neighbor is not the one we may expect to give attention to. The neighbor neither respect; they just take it for granted. As long as this spot does not affecting the neighbor negatively, each one will go his or her own way. One may argue that the Praban Kinco case is safe because of its smallness in area, but he or she will find that the Embah Bungkul is hundreds of square-meters spot, yet it also a safe place against any threat of inversion into commercial or residential ones.²

¹ Today, this Darmo area is gradually changing herself into small-offices area.

² The Surabaya Zoo, established during the colonial times, is only hundreds away from the Embah Bungkul, and is now under a threat to conversion into a commercial block.

D. The Botopotih and the Peneleh Graveyard

The cemetery and the place for doing religious activities are mostly places where any demolition and the like is not a threat. Its sacredness is suspiciously pointed as the reason. But this is not quite true. Take the case of Peneleh graveyard of Surabaya where Europeans are buried. It is now an abandoned place and only waiting for any investors to turn it into a commercial precinct. The Botopotih graveyard of Surabaya is older than the Peneleh, but the condition is the contrary; it is well maintained and there is hardly any issue in demolition. The Botopotih is a place where one particular community of Surabaya belonging to. In a certain time in the year members of this community visit the grave of their predecessors, and even organize programs and activities beyond the regularities. In its spot, a juru-kunci is commissioned and responsible for the maintenance and the story/history of the spot. A periodic visit of the family member to pay homage for the beloved ones buried in this Botopotih is not merely a tradition and religious gesture.³ It also becomes a time for evaluating the condition of the grave. Once it is found that a repair and upgrade is needed, then the juru-kunci is the one appointed for it. As the result of all those activities, the Botopotih is always in good and recent condition.

About the Peneleh spot, it is beyond any doubt that in the colonial time this graveyard must be much more beautiful and neat than the Botopotih. Traces of that beauty is still present today. Still, in colonial time, this graveyard is located in the middle of 'native' Surabayan people, people who will not have any right to be buried in the Peneleh, but fully entitled a place in the Botopotih! Abandoned since Indonesia proclaimed her Independence, the Peneleh graveyard is tightly surrounded by dense mortar houses, so as make the Peneleh hidden from the public. The Peneleh also has the juru-kunci, but can he do the same as the Botopotih juru-kunci? Who are the community that belongs to this spot, who does a periodic and regular visit to see and evaluate the condition, and ultimately, who commissioned this juru-kunci? The Peneleh does not furnish herself with system and community who will safeguard her; the Botopotih does.

E. The Gunung Kawi of Malang

The Gunung Kawi was a burial place of one local figure, religious figure. At present day, it is a pilgrimage at its outset, yet actually it is a place where the destiny in economic business is sought. If the Botopotih is a place where the big-community of family members is tied to, the Gunung Kawi is not like that. It is for every one who is having particular purpose with this spot. Chinese and Indonesian, Christians and Moslems, male and female, young and old, all mixed into one single people who are purposefully belongs to Gunung Kawi. Each one performs his/her own ritual and enjoys the welcoming attitudes and gestures of the people who live in the surrounding place. Issues tell that the wealth and well-maintained condition of this Gunung Kawi is mainly from those who believe that Gunung Kawi is the key drive for their success, and particularly success in becoming rich and prosper. Those successful pilgrim spread their success through words to others, and it is this 'words of mouth' that strongly conserve the Gunung Kawi. Yes, it is 'words of mouth' that mostly do the success. This may take the form of myth, of mystics and others, but what the

³ Even, formalized as religious calendar of event is a tradition among this Surabayans to clear the grave from any possible dilapidation, called *nyadran* among the Jawanese.

pilgrim says is mainly what the pilgrimage place is relied on. Recently, the people of Gunung Kawi has even sets an annual calendar of events that only make the atmosphere of myth and mystics more dense in the one side, but on the other side encourage more visitors. In its turn, this impression by the pilgrim that accumulates and formalized into one that we may call it myth and mystics. In the case of Gunung Kawi, the multi-ethnicity, multi-religiosity as well as respects of gender are saying the same myth and mystics.

F. The Pohsarang Catholic pilgrimage

The Pohsarang Catholic church was designed by one of leading modern architect during the colonial time, Henri Maclaine Pont. It is originally a village church of the early 1930-s with postmodernist approach to indigenous architecture. Today, every Thursday evening this church and the village it is located (majority of its people are Moslems) is densely packed with catholics who perform rituals; a ritual that beautifully combine the jawanese and the catholic rites. The secret of success that Gunung Kawi experience, strongly imitated by this pilgrimage. Advertisement in a national magazine for the catholic community, has even boasting this Pohsarang as one destination of religious tourism. Second renovation in the 1990s not only preserves the originality of the church, it also enlarge the area of pilgrimage so as to create a kind of pilgrimage park. Here, the Pohsarang not only belongs to the catholic, but also the village (who are not catholic!). The building of myths and mystics around this Pohsarang, also major key for her success in conservation and tourism.

G. The Bale Magangan – Palace of Surakarta

In 2003 a design competition is held for the Alun-alun Kidul of Surakarta Palace. This event sparked a discussion between the author and the other members of the jury, who are the benefactors of the Surakarta palace in particular, and the Jawanese culture in general. This discussion is not about the competition, but about the place where the jury examining the entries. It is an open pavilion called Bale Magangan. This building is considered as the southernmost part of the palace's building complex. A renovation was underway at times of discussion. The norm and form of the building within the concept of a palace has only made those benefactors heavily against the change from wood column into a reinforced concrete column. "We agree that the building was in the dilapidated state, but the solution of providing concrete has ruined and even thrown away the value and status of this building, particularly within the constellation of the Palace's ideas." One thing made them deeply fall into anger is that the renovation has turned the wood column thrown in the garbage. "It is more than one century old, and entitled as heritage artifact. But the renovator has put it merely as garbage!" Yes, In its smallest scale, one single open building in this case, even a sense of conservation is deeply implanted among the member of the community who belongs to the culture, tradition and value where the artifact is becoming one integral part of it. Here, progress and technology is welcome as long as the norms and values of tradition and culture is well maintained.

From different angle of observation, this Bale Magangan case is not different from the Semut Station case. Located at a remote and almost hidden from the public, the Bale Magangan, an artifact in Jawanese style, turns her into an abandoned place. Once the owner do something about, the guardian of the conservation shout against loudly. However, since

this Bale Magangan case is not responded by the public, only desperation fills the heart of the guardian of conservation.

H. Rituals and Conservation

I must admit that the above cases are not categorized or qualified as one of conservation, at least at present. Folklore or oral history, anthropology or cultural studies and tourism perhaps the most suited discipline that care. Taking aside the disciplinarity of knowledge and trying to find whether the Indonesian acknowledge and even familiar with conservation, those cases have shed a light, no matter how vague it is. Here, the building, the object or the artifact is conserved in an indirect way, and possibly, even not purposefully. It is seemingly that the conservation embarked simply one of family and greater-family affairs concerning the dead. The love and respect to the dead has sparked the performance of gestures from the family (and greater-family) members. Organized by time, the performance that combines the religious gestures give rise to rites and rituals in a regular and routine base. The benefit and positive life of the greater-family resulted from this routine attract relatives and neighbor to join the routine rites and rituals. The routine performance is now belongs to a community affair and institutionalized by this community in a number of ways such as certain time and day of the year (especially the time of birth and/or death). Here, we must note that the transformation from family affair into one of community affair is one key element in the success of conservation. People who are not member of this greater-family is freely and willfully admitting themselves as member. A 'sense of belonging' among people and greater-family now crystallized and becomes one of strong guardian for the performance and site. This rites/rituals (performance), eventually, is institutionalized into tradition that the community adopts and follows. To maintain the tradition, a myth or mysticism is built among them. However, since myth and mysticism is an object that may easily dispersed and communicated through 'words by mouth', it only affected in a growing number of members, hence, reinforce the tradition and allowing wider publication. Here, what we mean by tradition is not only the festivals and gestures, but also covers a number of legend, folklore, stories and oral histories, costumes, norms and ethics. Insofar, the building, the object or the place where the rites and rituals is performed is given position as respected object/place, not the conserved one. Eventually, to look after the object/place, the member establishes rites/rituals for it. Here, the fulfillment of rites/rituals that the member is paying their attention at first place, not the looking after the object/place. At this particular point we may find that conservation of object/place is not highlighted, but the rites/rituals do.⁴

⁴ Sutrisno Murtiyoso, one prominent figure in Nusantara architecture and critics in culture and tradition once argues that the conservation in Indonesia is not the conservation of object, but of rituals. His view was expressed in a discussion with the author concerning the abstract of this paper. Visiting any pilgrimage site is not to enjoy the artifact, but to perform rites and rituals. Tradition in rites and rituals are more given attention, thus, being stricter to be conserved than objects and accessories surround it. Here, myths and mystics play the role as the server in such a static nature. From time to time, myth and mysticism are updated so as always in tune with the dynamic of the culture. Thus, left the artifact as merely a subordinate part of the pilgrimage. In many occasions, it is even the site (the topos) that prompts the visit, and not the artifact. I also agree with Sutrisno Murtiyoso that the term rites and rituals, as well as myth and mysticism should not be limited to pilgrimage and religious activities. It should be extended so as to cover the daily life of the people.

The building, artifacts and the site is said as the object that tradition will function properly and correctly. At the heart of the conservation, they are only the 'where'-ness toward the tradition. Thus, to visit the place where the tradition is originated considered as the ultimate gesture in performing the tradition. Visitors who perform rites and rituals at this site pay their highest attention to the proper and correct performance of tradition, disregarding what the site equipped, organized and presents its form. It is then, important to the site to serve the tradition best.⁵ Consequently, alterations or even transformation of form and styles is not an issue in this 'practice of' tradition. Naming is another evidence for the 'where'-ness of tradition and conservation. Every name given to the site does not point to the building or the artifact, and people know the name quite well as the site to perform the tradition. To build a site that is absolutely a copy of the Embah Bungkul in Jakarta, for instance, is not impossible. Yet, it is the Embah Bungkul in Surabaya that people will perform the rites and rituals. In short, the conservation of building and artifact is not an issue. This will only leave the conservation of building and artifact as the obligation, norms or ethics for the designer and planner.

I. Concluding remarks

The tradition of conservation among the Indonesian may closely in tune with those of the European and American (the western).⁶ What might them different one from each other is that the west integrates the building in the conservation while the Indonesian only limited to the site. It is important to the Indonesian that the tradition enjoys well performance in the site, thus paying a particular attention to the form of its respective buildings and artifacts. More importantly, the Indonesian cares the tradition more than the building, tradition that we may not understand it simply as one of culture and belief among non-modern. Understanding the conservation among the Indonesian will only find that conserving the colonial buildings and artifacts may end up in desperation among professionals and academicians of conservation in Indonesia.

⁵ The Sendang Duwur and Masjid Alun-alun Malang are probably best representatives of this. In Sendang Duwur, the masjid is hardly shows original state; and in Malang, the latest renovation has only demolished the earlier and more original form. Yet, both sites never experience the diminishing number of visitors to do their Islamic praying.

⁶ I guess that the western developed their knowledge in conservation from the tradition that they have practiced for long. Through the understanding of tradition the conservation formulated as simply: "professionals language and translation of tradition". However, we must note that the context and content of tradition between the west and the Indonesian are not similar. Hence, a translation and professional language of tradition for Indonesia is a must for the conservation to enjoy its success.