Collecting memories of the city through the conservation of heritage building

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Abstract. Heritage building has a role for the city and the society that is associated with emotional, cultural, and use values. Those values are parts of collective memory and create the identity of the city. Some heritage buildings are vulnerable to modernization and even when the government conserves those buildings, some important values of the buildings are lost. This paper discusses a colonial building in Jakarta that has been converted into different functions. As a case study is Cut Meutia Mosque in Menteng, designed by a Dutch architect PAJ Moojen during the Dutch late colonial era. The building was initiated in 1922 as N.V. Bouwploeg, an architectural firm that developed the nearby residential area of New Gondangdia. This area was developed according to modern Garden City principles and the Bouwploeg was known as the gate to Menteng area and the architecture of the building was considered very modern and unique at that time – illustrating the importance of the building for the city. After Indonesia’s independence, the government converted the building into different functions such as an office and a mosque. Although the function of the building has changed, the building is still related to triggering a collective memory of the new area that should not be ignored in the effort of conserving the building. Through historical and field research, the paper aims to discuss some changes and lost values of the building as the result of conserving the colonial heritage, especially about collective memory. Hopefully, learning from the conservation of building heritage and city collective memory may support the idea of livable memory of heritage building and even a

1. Introduction
Jakarta experiences rapid urbanization and modernization that dramatically changes the unique history of the city including during the Dutch colonial time. Some efforts to conserve historic sites comprise a common problem of creating the “amnesia” phenomenon over the disappearance of unique characteristics of the urban cultural context. Jakarta’s development has brought to the issues of saving cultural heritage and urban characters. All of these lead to the necessity in the consideration of urban memory as the collective impression of the formation and change of Jakarta.

The city consists of some typical images of collective memory where relationships between individuals and groups are established in relation to the things and designs of the city as part of the process of habitation [1]. Collective memory preserves the past through urban conservation and historical building can tell the history of people and places and important thing happened in the past [2]. The idea of conserving historical building is to have buildings and places of the important memory that can provide a sense of anchoring and establish the legitimacy of public identity particularly in time of change [3]. People have a connection with buildings such as a landmark and the surrounding
area that create the image of the city [4]. A landmark creates a particular identity of the city as well as a livable memory and specific impression of the area.

One of the landmarks of colonial time in Jakarta, known as Batavia or the center of Dutch colonial administration, is Cut Meutia Mosque that has an easily identifiable form and even a contrast to other residential buildings in Menteng. However, the continuity of the building with its surrounding as well as with the urban memory of Menteng area cannot be seen anymore due the fast development of the city. Masjid Cut Meutia, formerly known as Bouwploeg, stands for the loss of urban memory and a connection to the past that states to the glory of Menteng as the first modern settlement in the country. Bouwploeg and a building located in front of it (Kunstkring), become the gate to Menteng area. The conservation of Bouwploeg is not as good as Kunstkring, therefore the idea of the gate is somehow lost. Bouwploeg, with the singularity and the unique character of the building, used to be a famous landmark for Menteng areas.

Problems that arise in the process of conserving a heritage building often occur because physical changes of the building do not consist with values that the building has such emotional, cultural, and use values. Doing a historical review is the main key because the review can help to explain the initial purpose of constructing the building, the importance of the building for the society and how the connection with the past and the present. The identity of the building can be identified as its relation to the city such as a landmark and a symbol of a city. The importance of building on a site is how the building is remembered so that the building has its own identity. The values contained in buildings that determine what buildings are built in a city. When the value of the building is clear, the look of a city connected the past and can be a learning in the present. One of important values to be considered is urban collective memories, or the publicly presented past such as historic sites, and widely noticed historical art and monuments [5]. Collecting urban memories can be embedded in the effort of conserving a building with two basic strategies: historical and urbanistic approaches [6]. A historical approach is a traditional way of conserving field where people interpret individual monuments and their inherent values as the witness of the past and contrast to the present. An urbanistic approach embodies the engagement of conservation with the urbanization and other social-environmental issues in order to have a more flexible strategies and negotiations.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to debates surrounding the role of heritage conservation in shaping urban identity especially through the preservation of urban memories. The focus is on built heritage conservation in Jakarta, which provides an interesting and complex case due to its rich built environment heritage as a legacy of colonialism and an often uncritical development. In this paper, we provide a perspective of the importance of memories of the urban area during the colonial period but relatively deprived in the conservation process and causing the loss of important values.

As a case study is Cut Meutia Mosque as a heritage building of the Dutch colonial period. There are some physical changes in the sections of the building to adapt the new functions. Cut Meutia Mosque has not gone through an official conservation program but the function of this building has been changed for several times. The transformation of the historical building of Bouwploeg reflects how the building can still function but vulnerable to development and modernization. The physical modifications of the building may even cause the distortion of the history, so there is the possibility of displacement of value from the original building such as undermine the importance of the building as the gate to modern section of the city.

Accordingly, the paper is structured as follows: firstly, we locate the discussion within the literature on conservation of built heritage. Secondly, we provide an overview of Masjid Cut Meutia as Menteng gate, as a case of conservation that underscore the importance of memories of the place such as ignoring the building’s original form and urban memories related to the building. Finally, we develop conclusions with wider significance for built heritage conservation and memories of the city.

2. Methods
In discussing the conservation of heritage building, we use both a literature review for the heritage building in Batavia, some principles of conservation and the relation of conservation and urban
memories. The literature review helps to clarify the relationship between history and architecture, which relates to the value of buildings and the conservation. We also conducted a field research to get necessary information of the heritage building and the surrounding areas, including changes in the building and its functions, as well as its symbolical meaning as a landmark. The method of analyzing architectural and historical data is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine changes, characters and symbolical meanings of the site and the building as well as the relation of the heritage building to the history and image of the city.

3. Results and Discussion
Cut Meutia Mosque Building located on Jalan Taman Cut Meutia No. 1 Menteng, Jakarta. Menteng was a part of New Gondangdia area during the Dutch late colonial era and today is known as a heritage site according to the Governor of Jakarta’s decree No.D.IV.6098/D/33/1975 with the restoration of the 300 hectares. Cut Meutia Mosque covers a land area of 1792 square meter with an area of 950 square meter for the building. The shape of the building is symmetrical on each side and at the top of the building stood a rectangular tower. With the height of 22 meter, Bouwploeg was relatively higher than other houses located in Menteng.

![Figure 1. NV. De Bouwploeg the 1920s. Source: troopenmuseum.nl.](image1)

![Figure 2. Cut Meutia Mosque in 2016. Source: author’s collection.](image2)

The initial function of the building was an architectural office of Naamloze Vennootschap de Bouwploeg, founded by architect named Pieter Adriaan Jacobus Moojen. The building was built in 1912 and at that time the office had a main task to design the nearby residential area called New Gondangdia. The architecture of the building follows the Dutch Rationalist style, which combines rationality of science and structural considerations, as a way to conform function and local conditions. The building contains a ventilation tower at the center of the building to regulate the temperature inside.

Menteng was a part of New Gondangdia area that was planned as a Garden City developed during the 1910s. This area was located in the southern part of Koningsplein became a new residential area for Dutch people. The area was the first planned suburb in colonial Batavia designed by PAJ Moojen, a member of the commissie van toesicht op het Geheer van het Land Menteng established for developing the city of Batavia. This committee was responsible for developing the larger area of Gondangdia with Menteng as its center [7]. Moojen’s plan resembled the garden city model of the English reformer Ebenezer Howard, including wide boulevards and concentric ring of streets and some squares. For practical and functional reasons, the plan of Menteng residential area was changed by F.J. Kubatz during the course of the 1910s [8]. This area has become one of the most expensive areas for residential real estate in Jakarta up to the present for having strategic location and good public facilities.

Bouwploeg had a role as a "gate" for the New Gondangdia region. In the master plan presented by Moojen, two buildings became a gate to Menteng area, one was the Bouwplog and another building located in front of it named Kunstkring.
3.1. Characteristic of Cut Meutia Mosque

Cut Meutia Mosque is located on a triangular-shaped land and the building faces the north where Koningsplein or Lapangan Monas is located. The building has a symmetrical cross plan and the middle part has higher walls up to 22 meters that functions as a ventilation tower. The rectangular top part of the building is added with a segmental dome. At the time, some Dutch architects struggled to find a way to adapt buildings to tropical climate and Moojen decided to use Western architectural forms with the idea of a ventilation tower found in local architecture. The four sides of the building have gable roofs, which clearly become a reminiscent of Dutch architectural form, but the ventilation tower and big openings are two ways to achieve good air circulation for the building. The use of gable roof, brick and cement, as well as the use of columns and dome have strengthened the characteristic of Western architecture, but Moojen was appreciated for successfully dealing with local climate.

There are some parts of the building changed due changes of the building function. After an architectural office, the building was used as the department for drinking water, a post office and a train company office. After the independence, the building was used as the Central Jakarta mayor
office (1959-1960), a drinking water department (Perusahaan Air Minum), Department of Residential of Jakarta (Kantor Dinas Urusan Perumahan Jakarta), and People Assembly (MPRS). From 1964-1970, the building became the Office of Home and Religion (1964–1970). The building was converted into a provincial mosque on 18 August 1987 under the Jakarta Governor’s term Ali Sadikin with SK Gubernur No. 5184/1987. Some new openings and canopies are added to the building. Although generally the building still maintains its architectural forms, changes on the façade causes the building to lost its originality and character. Depicted in Figure 6 and 7 are old and new window frames that neglected the original forms. Previously, there was a grand staircase in the building but the lower part of the staircase is removed in order to give more space for prayers. Now the stair is located at the front of the building.

![Figure 6. Existing windows with bamboo curtains. Source: troopenmuseum.nl.](image1)

![Figure 7. New window frames and canopies are added on the façade. Source: author’s collection.](image2)

The building structure was a simple system of columns and beams that were explicitly understood from the façade. The architect did not put many ornaments – except for some geometric ornaments on the columns and beams – since he preferred modern architectural principles that emphasized functionality in the building. Having changed into a mosque, the building is now decorated with calligraphy on the inner wall. Some ornaments such as the ventilation holes, the railing and on the interior walls remain the same. Depicted in Figure 6 and 7 are the original and the new windows in the building; the new windows have arch windows commonly found in local mosques.

3.2. Collecting Memories of Cut Meutia Mosque as a Gate to Menteng

In the master plan of New Gondangdia, Moojen intended to make the two buildings that he designed as the gate of Menteng, and he considerately placed the buildings following the importance of the site. Bouwploeg was one of the first buildings people would see when they came from the city of Batavia to the new southern area of development. The symmetrical façades of the building were an elegant way to welcome people from four directions, so that people recognized the building as a landmark. Across the building was another modern building, Kunstkring, aimed to house art pieces and exhibition and was opened on the 17 April 1914. Kunstkring was the art society in Batavia that was founded for the first time on 1 April 1902 with the purpose to promote the practice of and the enthusiasm for the fine and decorative arts of the Indies. This building had various functions but still related to the arts. It featured various arts exhibitions during the the 1930s such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin, Marc Chagall and the likes. One of the wings of this building became a place for a very popular café known as Stam en Weynes. Both Bouwploeg and Kunstkring stood for many years to marked the area and reminded people the modern part of the city.

Cut Meutia Mosque stands on a triangular-shaped land and possesses a garden in front of the building. Figure 8 and 9 show the centrality of Cut Meutia Mosque and Kunstkring – located between two major streets – that can easily attract people from various directions. The fast development of Menteng area and the absence of adequate sidewalks along the main streets have
weakened the importance of the site while the development of railway behind the Bouwploeg seems to block the view from the west direction.

Figure 8. The gate of the new residential area of Menteng Garden City in the 1910s. Source: bataviadigital.perpusnas.go.id.

Figure 9. With its crowded present condition, Cut Meutia Mosque cannot be identified as a gate to Menteng. Source: author’s collection.

Although both buildings are still in good conditions, the idea of the buildings as the landmark and the gate to Menteng area is faded with the fast development of Menteng area. Unlike Kunstkring that has gone through conservation program, there is no comprehensive conservation program for Bouwploeg. The maintenance of the building is relatively good since the building functions as a mosque, but unfortunately, there is only limited effort to discuss the importance of the building as a landmark to Menteng area. In addition, people who enter Menteng area may be overwhelmed by crowded buildings and vehicles and cannot experience the gate to Menteng area. A possible way of enhancing the experience of the gate is by restoring the pedestrian walk and the re-arrangement of the site. Since from the beginning there is only limited effort to conserve the building in relation to its symbolic meaning of the gate, there is already a loss of the importance of both Bouwploeg and Kunstkring as the gate to modern residential areas. Some efforts of conservation may be successful to discover the facts of the past and the importance of the building but memory’s goal is identity [9]. History prioritizes truth while memory is content to reorganize the past to create an identity of the urban area.

Some physical factors that led to the deterioration of the meaning of the gate and the landmark are [4]:

- The background of Cut Meutia Mosque is filled by some new objects that complicate the view to Masjid Cut Meutia and differentiate the building from its surroundings.
- The structure of the Cut Meutia mosque is still easily identified because of its outstanding architectural form that expresses its individuality visually. However, there is a lack of distinction of scale, material, and physical form of Cut Meutia Mosque that can be seen from afar in order to produce a different figure with its surroundings.
What happened to Bouwploeg is an effort of conserving the building without engaging to the site and the urban memories. Authenticity of historical building like Bouwploeg was only loosely considered in the process of conserving the building and seldom represented any effort to the creation of a memory site. In understanding the building, people may be able to understand and interpret individual monuments like Bowploeg as the witness of the past. However, there is not enough engagement of building conservation with the urbanization and other social-environmental issues so that people cannot easily engaged with the urban collective memories such as the building as the gate to new Menteng area and the symbol of modernization in the city (Figure 10 & 11).

4. Conclusion

Conservation is about an engagement both with the past and the present, with history and modernity. It means that people can understand changes and efforts in conserving built environment and honor the past, present and future of that built environment. In an attempt to conserve historic buildings, not only how the buildings still function is important, but also includes what important values those historic buildings have in relation to history, site and collective memories. People connect to historic buildings not only on how the building can be remembered physically but also how the buildings represents the collective memories of people.

Cut Meutia Mosque underwent some physical changes such as the removal of stairs, the addition of canopies and the replacement of old windows in accordance with changes in building functions. There is only little attention to the value of buildings as historical buildings. Moreover, there is not enough consideration for historical aspect, especially the idea that the building is related to urban collective memories of modernization in the city. The physical changes of the Cut Meutia Mosque caused some changes in the visual representation of buildings that is distant from the historical values. There is no visual emphasis of the building as the gate to Menteng that consequently contributed to the loss of urban collective memories.

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