Engaging the past of the city through the conservation of heritage building

Yulia Nurliani Lukito*, Amalia Nurul Rizky
Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Indonesia, Depok 16424, Indonesia
*Corresponding e-mail: yulianurliani@yahoo.com

Abstract. Built heritage is a physical representation of culture that provides a connection with the past and important for aesthetic and symbolic values for the city. The conservation of built heritage is a necessary not only to engage with the identity of but also to sustaining development in the city. However, heritage buildings are vulnerable to development and modernization. The paper examines a colonial building in Jakarta that has been converted into different functions through various levels of physical modifications. 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 1912 as N.V. Bouwploeg, a Dutch architecture firm that developed the nearby residential area of New Gondangdia. The New Gondangdia, including Menteng as its central area, was developed according to modern garden city principles. During its lifetime, the building was used for different purposes such as a post office and a train company office. After Ali Sadikin's term as Governor of Jakarta, the building was converted into a mosque. The architecture of the building follows the Dutch Rationalist style but adapts to local climate such as a ventilation tower in the center of the building to regulate the temperature inside. Through historical and field research, this paper discusses the benefits and possible distortions of history manifest in the transformation of colonial buildings. Moreover, learning from the conservation of building heritage and urban area in the city may support the idea of livable memory of urban area and sustainable city.

Keywords: heritage building, colonial building, livable memory, building conservation

1. Introduction

During the Dutch colonization in the Dutch East Indies or present day Indonesia, the Dutch laid several foundations on settlement and infrastructure mostly with European architecture as their models. Since 1619, Batavia (the present day Jakarta) was the stronghold of the Dutch trading company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Companie-VOC) that controlled all spice trade in Asia. To safeguard their commercial interests, the company gradually took surrounding territories. Dutch settlement in the coastal area was simply consisting of warehouse, some basic-accommodation but later on it developed into a big city with commercial and military buildings. Even after VOC was dissolved in 1800, the Dutch colonial government still took Batavia as their central administration. The city of Batavia consisted of two centers: the lower city in the north and a new district of Weltevreden in the south. There were new European suburbs that arose around the Koningsplein with spacious, monumental cityscapes emulating current trends in Europe. The essentially linear structure of Jakarta was well established with the old core and port was in the north and the new core and European residential area was in the south and kampongs filled in around it.

Architecture that was developed during the Dutch colonial era became relatively an expression of European products with little adaptation to local architecture. This kind of buildings were actually not suitable for the tropical climate and local conditions (Sidharta, 2002). There were some problems
emerged from the built environment ranging from unhealthy houses to segregation issues. Approximately after 1870, when there was a rapid development of private enterprise in the Dutch Indies, there was an expansion of commercial activities and build environment. The Dutch started to build houses and building according to tropical climate with relatively high humidity and rainfalls (Ardiyanto, 2015). Since then, architecture in the Dutch East Indies was known as having their own characteristics such as having an extended roof to deal with rain water as well as high ceilings and big openings to provide cross ventilation.

Starting from the early twentieth century, the form of traditional architecture that was able to adapt to the tropical climate had inspired the architects who came from the Netherlands at this time to search for the East Indies architecture in Indonesia. The architectural works derived from the synthesis between elements of Western and Eastern cultures (Kusno, 2000; Widyarta, 2002). This idea was supported by PAJ Moojen (1907), a Dutch architect working in the East Indies who criticized the quality of architecture during that period as a bad imitation of Hellenistic architecture but without spirit, nor an enthusiasm in design. Moojen, who in 1910 became the head of Art Society in the Indies, preferred modern architecture but with some adaptation to local conditions, including local construction method, traditional buildings and local materials (Sudrajat, 1991). Moreover, Moojen did not ignore modern development in architecture such as the use of concrete and modernist approach to function. The combination between modern and local elements could create good buildings suitable for tropical climate (Lukito, 2016).

Kevin Lynch in the Image of the City (1960) discusses the concept of public image and connects that idea to the image of the city, its elements and urban morphology. He mentions that the characteristics of a landmarks as a singularity, an easily identifiable form, and contrasts of scale, materials, and shapes that makes different figures as well as continuity with their surroundings. The image of the city can be revealed from a connection of the past, especially through conservation of buildings that give a certain identity to the city (Feiden, 1982). Although each individual creates and feels his own image, there seems to be considerable agreement among members of the same group on the image of the city. Through physical qualities, which are related to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image, the image of urban environment may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure and meaning (Lynch, 1960). Identity means that an individual first must be able to identify a place into something specific and see the difference with the other buildings (individuality of a landmark). One can see the structure and the relationships or patterns of an object with another objects in surrounding areas. A landmark then has a meaning or significance, both functionally and emotionally.

The paper concerns with history and architecture as well as how conservation of heritage building affect the built environment. In conserving colonial buildings, historical reviews are the key to explaining the purpose of the building, the function of society at that time and the connection with the historical site. This paper is related to a building that has been converted into different functions and changes in the meaning of the building. Dodsworth (2009) describes the importance of both physical and non-physical characteristics of the site and its surrounding environment to the existing character, identity, and value of the building. Without referring to the importance of the building in the past, there will be distortion of meaning for the heritage and the loss of identity of the building.
Menteng was the first modern settlement in Jakarta after a decentralized system in the early twentieth century was implemented in the Dutch East Indies. There were many traces of colonial buildings that had a symbolic value for the existence of the Dutch East Indies society in the past. Cut Meutia Mosque was one of those traces of colonial building heritage designed by a Dutch architect Pieter Adrianss Jacobus Moojen. Cut Meutia Mosque was located on Jalan Taman Cut Meutia No. 1, Kelurahan Gondangdia, District Menteng, Central Jakarta. This building functioned as a mosque in a residential area with the size of the site 1792 m² and the building 950 m². At first, this building was known as NV. De Bouwploeg, an architectural firm office built in 1912 in order to develop the nearby residential area of New Gondangdia and known as one of the gate to the New Garden City of Menteng. The strategic location of Bowploeg was not only as a gate to the garden city but also symbolically showed the direction of the development of Batavia. Before converted into a mosque, the building was used for different functions and in addition to this there were several parts of the building that had been changed. At the present time, the meaning of the building both as the gate and the landmark for the new garden city is faded.

One of the problems faced in the conservation of heritage building is the various levels of physical modification that will affects the values of the heritage building, as a physical representation of culture that provides a connection with the past and valuable for aesthetic and symbolic values for the city. Although the conservation of built heritage means not only to engage with past but also to sustain the development of the city, the heritage buildings are vulnerable to fast development and modernization. The aim of this paper is to analyze one of colonial buildings in Jakarta, Cut Meutia Mosque in Menteng, that has been converted into different functions through various levels of physical modifications. This paper discusses how conservation and transformation of colonial buildings can create some benefits as well as a possible distortion of the meaning of the building, especially as the landmark and the gate to the Menteng area. Hopefully, this paper is able to emphasize the importance of comprehensive conservation of heritage building, both physically and symbolically in order to enhance the image of the city and the idea of livable city.

2. Methods
In discussing the conservation of heritage building, we use both a literature review for heritage building in Batavia, some principles of conservation and the image of the city. 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 landmarks. 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. Discussion
Menteng Garden City was a new urban design developed in the 1910s located in the southern part of Merdeka Square (Koningsplein). This area became a new residential area for Dutch people. At first, the area was the first planned suburb in colonial Batavia made by Moojen, as a member of development group established the Batavia city government the commissie van toesicht op het Geheer van het Land Menteng. This committee was responsible for developing the larger area of Gondangdia with Menteng as its center (Silver, 2007). 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. The plan of Menteng residential area was designed by Moojen and then changed by F.J. Kubatz during the course of the 1910s. Supported by easy access to central business district and its strategic location, this area has become one of the most expensive areas for residential real estate in Jakarta.

Figure 2. Maps of Menteng Garden City by Moojen (red) and Kubatz (yellow).

Good plan and conservation of buildings, green areas and well integrated streets make Menteng a feasible area for accommodating the collective memory of the past for the present time. Some buildings in Menteng become landmarks and have special functions for this area, such as the official residence for the Jakarta governor and ambassadors. One important part of this area is the north entrance to the area that for some decades becomes a landmark to the new development of Batavia and a connector to important buildings around Koningsplein or Lapangan Merdeka. Not only buildings near the north entrance play an important role as a landmark but also helps people to orient themselves to the big area and give a special impression of the expansion of Batavia into a modern city.

The main planning and construction activities of residential areas in New Gondangdia were handled directly by the architect firm Naamloze Vennootschap de Bouwploeg, founded by Moojen in 1912. Therefore, the name of office building for this firm was also Bouwploeg, which also meant a construction team. Bouwploeg was known not only as the design and planning office but also as the entrance to Menteng area alongside Kunstkring building. Moojen also designed and Kunstkring Art Gallery in 1914 as a landmark that welcomed visitors to the new Menteng Residential Area mainly with New Indies Style houses that was known as a modern architectural movement in the Dutch Indies. This new style combined the one-storey Indish-style villa with modern two-storey structures (Tjahjono, 1998). Kunstkring was intended to become the cultural center of Batavia during the early twentieth century. Moojen was the head of the Bataviasche Kunstkring in 1910 and he was interested
in the visual and decorative arts. In short, Moojen built two buildings that were located across each other, Bouwploeg and Kunstkring Art Gallery, as the entrance to New Gondangdia.

Moojen used Bouwploeg as the planning office for Menteng area for approximately thirteen years, and then the function of the building was changed into an office for irrigation called Provinciale Waterstaat for seventeen years. Bouwploeg became one of celebrated buildings in Batavia for three decades before the Dutch ended its colonial period in the East Indies. After the independence of Indonesia, the building was used as a warehouse. The building was used for different functions such as post office and train company office. From 1959 until 1960 the building was used as a mayor office of Central Jakarta and later became a drinking water department and then Department of Residential of Jakarta, and People Assembly. From 1964-1970, the building was used as the Office of Home and Religion (1964-1970). This building becomes a mosque for almost fifty years, starting from August 1987 during Ali Sadikin’s term as Governor of Jakarta.

3.1. Physical conditions of Cut Meutia Mosque
Cut Meutia Mosque is located on a triangular-shaped site and the building faces the north where Koningsplein is located. Cut Meutia mosque is symmetrical on each side and looks massive with a rectangular top added with a cloister vault or a segmental dome. The building has a cross plan; the middle part has higher walls up to 22 meters that functions as a ventilation tower. At the time, some Dutch architects struggled to find a way to adapt buildings to tropical climate and some used both Western and local architectural forms. The four sides of the building have gable roofs, a reminiscent of Dutch architectural form. The ventilation tower is a way to deal with local climate so that the air circulation in the building will be good. The shape of the building depicted mainly Dutch or Western architecture but it had been adapted to Indies contexts through the ventilation tower. The use of gable roof, brick and cement, and the use of columns and dome strengthened the characteristic of Dutch architecture.

The plan of Cut Meutia Mosque resembled the church plan especially with the cross plan and the dome. This building has a high roof with some large windows so that fresh air can enter. The building is considered to be a pioneer of the New Indies-style architecture that is more appropriate for tropical climates. Originally, there is a kind of grand staircase in the building. However, the lower part of the staircase is cut in order to give more space for prayer so that now there is a discontinuation of the big staircase from the second floor. At the entrance there is a dormer that serves as a divider between inside and outside, as well as a determinant of the building facade.
There are some parts of the building changed due changes of the building function. There are some canopies added around the building. Some openings are added and the result is the loss of building pattern and material. Although the building still maintains its architectural forms, changes on the façade and the staircase cause the building to lose its originality and character. Depicted in Figure 5 are old and new window frames. The new window frame does not follow the old shape but the common window for the mosque in Jakarta. Originally, all openings in the building have the same pattern in all sides of the building. The number of openings in the building confirm that the architect tried to adapt to local climate through facilitating cross ventilation in the building. The architect also did not put too many ornaments since he preferred modern architectural principles. The building structure is a simple system of columns and beams that are shown explicitly with some geometric ornaments on the column and beams. Having changed into a mosque, the building now is decorated with calligraphy on the wall. Some ornaments remain the same such as the ventilation holes, the railing and on the interior walls.

3.2. Symbolical Meaning of Cut Meutia Mosque
In the master plan of New Gondangdia, Moojen intended to make the building as a gate of Menteng and he considerately placed the building following the importance of the site; Bowploeg was one of the first buildings people would see when they came from the northern area. The symmetrical façade of the building was a way to welcome people from four directions, so that the building possessed a quality of a landmark. Across the building was another modern building, Kunstkring, aimed to house art pieces and exhibition that in itself bore the idea of a landmark. Both Bowploeg and Kunstkring stood for many years to mark the area and reminded people the idea of modern part of the city.

Cut Meutia Mosque stands on a triangular-shaped land and be the one with the garden in front of the building (Figure 8). The centrality of the mosque and Kunstkring – located between two major streets.
– actually can attract people. The absence of adequate sidewalks along the main streets also weakens the boundaries of the landmarks.

Figure 9. Bowploeg, the gate to Menteng Garden City.  
Figure 10. Cut Meutia Mosque cannot be identified anymore as a gate.

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. Unfortunately, there is only limited effort in conversation to relate the buildings with its site and to conserve the buildings 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. 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 loss of the importance of both Bowploeg and Kunstkring as the gate to modern residential areas.

Figure 11. Surrounding Cut Meutia mosque.

A landmark creates a particular identity of the city as well as a livable memory and specific impression of the area. As Lynch mentions, people have a connection with buildings and the surrounding area that create the image of the city. Cut Meutia Mosque is a landmark – an easily identifiable form – and even a contrast to other residential buildings in Menteng. However, the continuity of the building with its surrounding cannot be seen anymore due the fast development of the surrounding areas. Bowploeg can actually give a connection to the past – to the glory of New Gondangdia. The conservation of Bowploeg can enhance the identity of the city part but unfortunately the idea of the gate to modern residential area is somehow lost. Nowadays, it is hard to understand Cut Meutia Mosque as a gate to Menteng area. The singularity of the building and the unique building
shape used to be a strong landmark but now Bowploeg had lost its role as the gate to Menteng area, although the building has been well conserved.

4. Conclusion
The conservation of built heritage is necessary in engaging the physical and symbolical identity to sustain development in the city. In conserving heritage buildings, what important is not only how the buildings are able to stand for future generation but also how to connect with the past. There are physical and symbolical values of buildings and a conservation of heritage buildings should be able to include those values. In the case of Bowploeg or Cut Meutia Mosque, the building had gone through changes in functions and conservation. However, even though the building is still in a good condition, the some symbolical values may be lost, especially in relation to the importance of the building as the gate to new Menteng area during the Dutch colonial period. Through historical and field research, this paper demonstrates the benefits and possible distortions of history manifest in the conservation of colonial buildings as well as a possibility of conservation of building heritage to support the idea of livable memory of urban area and sustainable city.

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