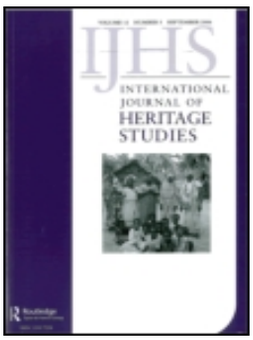

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Understanding and using built heritage: Singapore's national monuments and conservation areas

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Issues of heritage administration in the city state of Singapore are examined in the paper with specific reference to decisions about the designation of national monuments and conservation areas. The analysis reveals growing official interest in built heritage conservation for a combination of economic, socio-cultural and political motives. However, commitment is constrained by the importance attached to economic development objectives and there is an emphasis on maximising the commercial potential of old buildings through adaptive reuse. Questions are also raised about the meanings of national identity and nationhood and the challenges of selecting and preserving structures which embody these concepts in relatively young and rapidly modernising countries.

Keywords: built heritage; conservation areas; national monuments; Singapore

Introduction

This paper explores questions of heritage administration within the context of the city state of Singapore, a former British colony which celebrated 45 years as an independent republic in 2010. The focus is on official conservation policies and underlying agendas, evidenced by the designation of national monuments and conservation areas and changing usage. Built heritage emerges as perceived to have an important function in contemporary society, but there is some uncertainty about what exactly constitutes the nation's heritage and how it might best be conserved. There is an emphasis on adaptive reuse for commercial enterprises, but also tensions between development and conservation; the former tends to take precedence, raising doubts about whether an appropriate and sustainable relationship has been struck between the two forces.

A case study was chosen as suitable for the purpose and is based on material in the public domain, supplemented by fieldwork observations. Details of national monuments and conservation areas produced by relevant agencies were especially useful and these organisations were also consulted about certain buildings, the fate of which was unclear. Examination of all conservation area properties was beyond the scope of the paper and the larger areas where there are multiple buildings were excluded from aspects of the evaluation. Central themes in research on heritage and its conservation, summarised in the opening literature review, represent the academic foundation for the paper and inform the approach adopted. While unique, the situation in Singapore affords insights into the problems confronting relatively young and rapidly modernising

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countries as they strive to reconcile the often conflicting demands of conserving remnants of history while meeting current needs and planning for the future.

Literature review

Cultural heritage is a broad and complex concept, embracing buildings from the past which have assorted meanings and serve many purposes (Smith 2006). Built heritage can be costly to maintain (Greffe 2004), but it has income generating potential and the adaptive reuse of conserved old buildings can yield revenue and profits (Langston *et al*. 2008). Economic returns are perhaps easier to quantify, albeit sometimes contested (Mason 2008), and partly determined by market forces while socio-cultural worth is more abstract. It covers aesthetic, historic, social, spiritual and symbolic merits which are decided by people and communities (Avrami and Mason 2000, de la Torre 2002). Politics too shapes ascription of economic and socio-cultural value and leads to government involvement in heritage management and marketing (Henderson 2009). The significance allotted to heritage thus depends upon the individual, society as a whole, historical era, economic circumstances and political regime (Graham *et al*. 2000).

The identification of sites is a means by which official bodies recognise and valorise built heritage deemed to have a special standing. The most famous appellation is perhaps that of UNESCO World Heritage (Leask and Fyall 2006), but many governments operate listing schemes which are usually accompanied by protective measures. Examples are numerous amongst Western nations such as those of Europe (Pickard 2001), including England (English Heritage 2010), although less evident in the developing world. Heritage policies are not well embedded in certain Asian regions, for example, where there are barriers to enforcement and more urgent calls on scarce resources (ADB 2006). Wherever the location, arrangements for awarding heritage status may not satisfy everyone with complaints about selection criteria, insufficient funding and inadequate protection. There are likely to be differences in attitudes amongst stakeholders and greater popular participation is often advocated with a view to giving the less powerful a voice in decisions (ICOMOS 1990). Nevertheless, despite their shortcomings, formal mechanisms do indicate consensus about public sector obligations concerning the guardianship of built heritage.

Another important reason for government engagement with heritage is that it is a vehicle through which national and other identities can be expressed on domestic and international stages in pursuit of political ends (Munasinghe 2005). Questions of heritage, identity and conservation have a particular pertinence in countries which were once colonies (Hall and Tucker 2004), especially if these have heterogeneous populations (Shaw and Jones 1997). Rulers must seek to cultivate a unifying sense of fellowship amongst the citizenry and heritage in its various manifestations can play a role in this process, telling the story of a common history which helps to explain the present and implies a shared destiny (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Authorities also have to decide on strategies for the demolition and safeguarding of built heritage, some of which is associated with subjugation (Western 1985), as part of physical planning. Arguments in favour of conservation may not be sympathetically received and there are further threats to heritage in urban environments under severe development pressures, illustrated by Asian instances of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Heritage 2007) and Kuala Lumpur (Mat Nayan 2010). Tourism must also be taken into account and the appeal of heritage to visitors can contribute positively to its conservation; at the same time, it can aggravate damaging impacts (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009).

Research into cultural heritage is thus very wide ranging and the subject has drawn the attention of academics from diverse disciplines whose work has relevance for practitioners. An important issue emerging from a reading of the literature relates to the features and requirements of heritage administration, incorporating conservation policies and the political uses and abuses of heritage. Administrators are expected to manage commercialisation and politicisation pressures, give due regard to stakeholders and endeavour to engineer constructive relationships between conservation and economic and physical development. Heritage is also seen to constitute capital which takes economic, socio-cultural and political forms and the weight attached to each and the manner in which it is spent is a consequence of conditions prevailing in countries. The extent to which such conceptions of heritage and the dilemmas and dynamics of its administration are observable in Singapore are discussed in the remainder of the paper after a brief introduction to the republic in order to set the scene.

Singapore in context

Singapore's modern history is usually judged to begin in 1819 with the arrival of Stamford Raffles who claimed it as a trading post for his employer, the British East India Company. The port flourished thereafter and the small island became a Crown Colony governed by the British. Originally inhabited by Malays, migrants were enticed from the rest of the British Empire and beyond and established a series of ethnic communities, the largest of which was the Chinese. The Second World War led to invasion by the forces of Japan, a humiliating British defeat in 1941 and Japanese occupation until 1945. The end of the war was followed by moves towards self-government in the late 1950s and the attainment of full independence in 1965 after Singapore's expulsion from the Federation of Malaysia (Turnbull 1989). The country's future as an independent republic was in some doubt, but it was to make rapid progress. Prosperity was achieved through industrialisation and urbanisation programmes directed by long term planning which transformed the economic, physical and social landscapes (Dale 1999). Multi-storey blocks of apartments and commercial properties are now ubiquitous and there is a futuristic skyline of modern edifices in the heart of the city.

Singapore's resident population of almost 4 million comprises a mix of those of Chinese (75%), Malay (14%), Indian (9%) and other ethnic origins (Singapore Statistics 2009). They are ruled by the People's Action Party (PAP) which has been in office since 1959. Renowned for its exercise of order and control and sometimes criticised for its handling of opposition (EIU 2009), the regime has delivered one of the highest standards of living in Asia to citizens appreciative of this fact. However, there is apprehension within government about the potential for discord and a repeat of the 1964 race riots. There are frictions under the veneer of harmonious multiculturalism and the Chinese are politically and economically pre-eminent (Lai 1995, Rahim 1998). The official response has been to devise and articulate visions of a Singaporean identity which binds people together and inculcates loyalty to the country and government, the fate of the two portrayed as inextricably linked, whilst respecting ethnic differences.

The PAP's ousting is unlikely in the immediate future, but the new generation of party leaders confronts a maturing society which is more willing to question the political *modus operandi*. There are also anxieties about emigration and a desire to ensure that talented Singaporeans are not lured overseas. Government must therefore strive to both retain power and relax restrictions in accordance with twenty-first century

realities. Its formidable tasks are conveyed in the Concept Plan which documents land use over a 40–50 year period and is regularly reviewed. The current review, due to be completed in 2011, is concerned with

> how we can maintain and enhance our quality of life even as we continue to plan for future growth; how we can provide for the needs of an ageing population; how we can nurture and retain our unique identity to make Singapore an endearing home; and how we can all contribute to create a sustainable Singapore which balances growth with responsible environmental management. (URA 2010a)

The place given to built heritage in the search for answers to these questions and allocation of responsibilities is now considered.

Heritage administration in Singapore

Built heritage in the young republic was generally regarded as an unwanted legacy and its conservation was not allocated a high priority in the rush towards modernisation and economic growth. However, there was a shift in thinking by the late 1980s when authorities had become more aware of cultural heritage and involved in conservation and protection (URA 1991). Underlying motives were partly economic and arose from an understanding that heritage was a resource which could be employed in destination branding and marketing to attract investors and tourists (Yuen and Ng 2002). Without a stock of heritage assets, Singapore was at risk of becoming a city of 'bland modernity' (Beaumont 2009, p. 307) of declining attraction to visitors. At the same time, a social and political agenda was apparent as heritage was harnessed to nation building (Yuen 2005). Support for conservation has been maintained in the twenty-first century for the combination of reasons outlined and this multi-functionality of heritage explains why it has been given greater attention in national plans. In addition, popular interest in the subject has grown (URA 2010b; Yeoh and Ho, 1997), although this should not be exaggerated, and a Heritage Society has been active since 1987. Outcomes have, however, not always met with approval and critics have bemoaned the loss of built heritage and the treatment of that which remains (Jones and Shaw 2006), complaints which are elaborated later.

The National Heritage Board (NHB), founded in 1993, has official responsibility for heritage under the aegis of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA). Its stated objective is to

> make heritage an enriching part of everyone's life and enable a better appreciation of our cultures, heritage and national history to give us a sense of purpose and belonging. Increasingly the focus is on engaging the active participation and support of the public, private and people sectors to ensure that there is a concerted and integrated approach to heritage preservation and promotion. (MICA 2010)

The Board's 'brand promise' and 'unique positioning statement' is 'living heritage, dynamic cultures' (NHB 2010) and a Heritage Industry Incentive Programme is designed to 'seed new private museum and heritage ventures, upgrade museum galleries, expand markets and strengthen product development' (MICA 2010). The Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) was merged with the NHB in 2009, a step depicted as enhancing the 'entire heritage ecosystem' (SG Press Centre 2009). Its principal function is the designation of national monuments in compliance with the 1971 Preservation of Monuments Act (PMB 2010a).

Another key actor and one with which the NHB and PMB cooperate is the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the national planning agency reporting to the Ministry of National Development. The URA is in charge of the Concept Plan and oversees land use, its primary goal being to maximise the commercial potential of what is a scarce commodity in Singapore where reclamation has occurred but is reaching its limits. The agency has acquired conservation duties since the 1970s, when it first started to work on the rehabilitation of state owned properties, and now asserts that 'conservation of our built heritage is an integral part of urban development and planning in Singapore' (URA 2010c). Decisions about buildings and districts warranting conserving are made by the URA which also issues guidance about good conservation practices and regulations on usage and physical alterations.

Government views of heritage

Official statements illuminate recent thinking about inter-connected issues of heritage, conservation and identity. Ministerial comments stress the importance of maintaining 'identities and social memories', especially in stemming outward migration. Rapid development is indispensable, but must be 'undertaken sensitively and accompanied by conservation so that we can capture the history and character of meaningful places as we evolve as a nation'. Conservation is thus an 'integral part of our effort to build up the social and historical foundation of Singapore. In helping to create a sense of attachment to familiar places among Singaporeans, conservation helps to root Singaporeans to their homeland' (Fu 2006). When talking about the Concept Plan, the National Development Minister said that 'with our new hardware in place, we need to look beyond the physical, to search for the "soul" of our city, and work towards enhancing it' (The Straits Times 2010).

According to the NHB, 'our heritage is what brought us this far as a nation. It shapes our values, inspires our aspirations and gives us an identity that is unlike any other. It is what makes us Singaporean. There is an immense sense of pride when we retrace our history and uncover nuggets of stories that tell us who we are'. While Singapore's ethnic cultures are 'distinct, we embrace and celebrate our cultural diversity as one nation' (NHB 2010). The PMB maintains that the 'walls of each monument resound with pages of our history and the people behind them. They tell of struggles and sacrifices, sadness and joy. Understanding our nation's journey through these historical buildings will help Singaporeans appreciate our shared national psyche'. However, it admits that 'even as we preserve old buildings, their functions may change. So as we preserve history, we also give these icons of the past a new lease of life' (SG Press Centre 2009), a point frequently made by the URA.

The URA acknowledges that the

> restoration of our historic areas adds variety to our streetscapes and modulates the scale of our urban fabric, creating the visual contrast and excitement within the city while protecting the important reminders and representations of our past. It adds to the distinctive character and identity of our city, giving it a sense of history and memory of the place. (URA 2010c)

The stance does not preclude change and the Deputy Director of Conservation and Development Services has stated that

> conservation goes beyond architectural details and ornamentation. It has to be sustainable in the long run to achieve a balance between modern redevelopment and keeping

> the past for people … to make conservation attractive to owners, we allow old and new developments to minimise potential economic loss. We also allow flexible negotiations for adaptive reuse of old buildings as driven by the market. (Teh 2006, p. 26)

Heritage is thus presented as a window onto history and as central to the character of the country and its inhabitants. Preservation and conservation are ways of commemorating and extolling ancestral cultures while reinforcing notions of an overarching and unifying Singaporean identity. Reminders of past deprivations and adversities forge ties and a feeling of community, highlighting attainments as a nation and the relative comfort and prosperity of modern day individual lives. Government is clearly keen to nurture patriotic sentiments which it believes will help to cement cohesion across racial divides and consolidate its own position. Economic imperatives also cannot be ignored and dictate constant growth which in turn contributes to social stability and has hegemonic returns. Pragmatism and a keen commercial intelligence thus temper any enthusiasm for conservation which, it is argued, is compatible with development and adaptive reuse is favoured as a vehicle for reconciling conflicts between the two forces. How these ideas affect decisions about national monuments and conservation areas is examined hereafter, but it should be noted that the position adopted and ensuing policy tend to privilege development. The imbalance suggests possible weaknesses in the overall approach, the existence of which is mentioned again below and returned to in the final section.

National monuments and conservation areas

A formal system of heritage management is fairly new in Singapore and monument designation commenced in the early 1970s, followed by that of conservation areas in the late 1980s. The figures in Table 1 show a peaking of the former in the 1990s and of the latter in the 2000s. A total of 94 conservation areas, spanning sites from single structures to small districts and covering over 7000 buildings (URA 2010d), and 61 national monuments had been formally gazetted or listed by 2010. National monuments are chosen on the grounds of 'historic, cultural, traditional, archaeological, architectural, artistic or symbolic significance and national importance' (PMB 2010a) and conservation areas for their 'historical and architectural significance, rarity in terms of building types, styles and their contribution to the overall environment' (URA 2010c). Guidelines for each monument try to ensure appropriate preservation and restoration and the URA asks for adherence to the 'fundamental principle' of 'maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair' (URA 2010e) in the case of conservation areas. Such criteria and strictures echo those operational in other countries and imply a degree of subjectivity in application. The URA accepts that historic significance, surrounding developments and long term plans for the land shape the treatment of 'different groups of conservation areas' (URA 2010e). Public discussion would seem to play only a small role in the process and open resistance to

Table 1. Number of designations 1970s to 2010.

Type of designation	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010	Total
National monument	18	4	21	12	6	61
Conservation area	–	8	30	56	–	94

Sources: PMB (2010b); URA (2010d).

government actions in general is unusual in Singapore. Feedback may be invited, but is not always proffered or acted upon and civil society is at a nascent stage (Lee 2002).

The original functions of the buildings under review can be broadly defined under the five main classes of commercial (shops, offices, hotels, entertainment venues and factories), official (government, military and public services including education), other non-commercial (social and charity), religious (places of worship and shrines) and residential (private homes). Areas and streets are additional categories describing conservation areas, usually of shophouses and terrace houses, which serve mixed purposes. Shophouses are small and narrow structures, intended for work on the ground floor and dwelling in the upper storeys, linked by a covered pavement about five feet wide known as a five-foot-way (Figure 1). They are typical of nineteenth and twentieth century South East Asian settlements and styles range from Early (1840–1900) through Transitional (divided into First in the early 1900s and Second in the late 1930s) to Late (1900–1940) and Art Deco (1930–1960) (URA 1995).

Almost half of all national monuments are allied to religion and are of matching architecture, dating primarily from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Christian churches and chapels have the highest share, with 12 out of 28, while Chinese temples and mosques and other Islamic institutions are equally represented. Two Jewish synagogues and Indian temples are also on the list. Official edifices constitute over one-third of monuments, including four educational establishments. Many of these were built in the 1920s and 1930s of Neo-classical design, especially government offices, although certain administrative buildings survive from the early days of colonial rule. The eight miscellaneous commercial buildings are products of the eras in which they were erected and prevailing fashions, notably Art Deco and Neo-classical influences which were common before and after the Second World War. Non-commercial buildings number seven and are those used by social groups, both Chinese and European. Only two former residential properties, from 1885 and 1902, are monumentalised.

In terms of conservation areas, bungalows (either singly or in clusters) comprise a quarter of the total. They were mainly constructed between 1900 and the 1930s and several are of a black and white, half timbered Tudor style. The 18 official buildings are schools and government offices spanning a wide period, fire and police stations opened in the 1930s and nineteenth century military facilities. Neo-classical was a popular design for several colonial buildings and Art Deco was also favoured in the 1930s and 1950s. The only non-commercial building is the Victorian Singapore Cricket Club, once the preserve of the colonial rulers. Commercial buildings number 11 and are again predominantly pre-Second World War, but include some early high rise office blocks from the 1950s as well as a theatre and cinema. Shophouses, alongside terraced houses, explain the extent of street conservation which constitutes almost a quarter of all conservation areas. These locations extend from a small section of street to adjacent streets in combination and are almost exclusively pre-independence. More extensive sites make up the remainder and incorporate the traditional ethnic enclaves of the Chinese, Indians and Malays. Shophouse architecture of all phases is the primary reason for their conservation status, but the slopes of the Southern Ridges have been conserved partly because they were the scene of critical battles during the Japanese invasion.

An overview of construction periods, excluding larger conservation areas, discloses an uneven distribution. Over half of both national monuments and conservation areas date from 1900–1939 and a further third of monuments from 1850–1899, with none

Figure 1. Assorted shophouses in Chinatown. Photo courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board. Photographer: Mohamed Herman Shah Bin Roslan.

from republican years. Conservation area buildings occupy a wider spectrum of dates and post-independence designations make up 12%. These are three churches (from 1965, 1967 and the 1970s), a religious mission from the 1960s, a college campus completed in the 1960s, a satellite town civic hall opened in 1974 and Customs offices from the 1960s. The selection is attributed by the URA largely to architectural qualities, including the International Modern features of the campus which are an 'historic and symbolic break with the past'. The town hall owes its inclusion to being a 'key land mark symbolising Singapore's economic and industrial progress' (URA 2010d).

Changing uses of national monuments and conservation areas

A comparison of original and current purposes was conducted in order to identify changing uses and any emergent patterns. All national monuments were included, but only those conservation areas consisting of single or small collections of buildings. Most national monuments related to religion were found to be exercising their original functions with the exception of an unused Muslim shrine and the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus Chapel. The latter, together with a mid-nineteenth century residence, forms the commercial complex of food and beverage outlets and retailers known as CHJIMES where the old chapel is an event space (Figure 2). Official buildings tend to still be in public hands, although only five are completely unchanged in occupancy, and several are given over to museums and art galleries. The three instances of a switch to commercial use are army and navy offices and a power station which are now a bank training centre, part of a country club and a nightclub venue respectively. Of the other non-commercial buildings, two are unaltered in their tenancy while a Chinese medical charitable institution is the headquarters of a health supplement

Figure 2. CHJIMES. Photo courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board. Photographer: Li Zhiwang.

company and a social club for Germans has been incorporated into a hotel. The two erstwhile private homes house an American university Business School campus and a museum dedicated to the Chinese revolutionary leader who spent time there. Four of the five commercial buildings remain as business premises, amongst them the famous Raffles Hotel, and the factory where the British military formally surrendered to the Japanese in 1941 is a museum devoted to this event and its repercussions.

Turning to conservation areas, all commercial properties still act as such even though one is awaiting redevelopment. In contrast, almost half of official buildings have seen different uses which are mainly of a commercial nature. Notable examples are the conversions of the Customs offices into a night entertainment spot, the Fullerton administrative building into a luxury hotel (Figure 3) and a Traffic Police base into a design centre. A naval facility is slated for new hotel development and a police/army camp has been sold for a mixed retail, residential and office project. On the offshore island of Sentosa, military fortifications serve as a visitor attraction and colonial buildings have been amalgamated into luxury hotels. Two ex-fire stations are unused. Religious buildings and the Singapore Cricket Club remain unchanged, apart from CHIJMES which is both a national monument and conservation area. Four bungalows have been integrated into separate condominiums and one has become a restaurant. Another lies abandoned, occasionally visited by locals interested in the supernatural who believe it to be haunted. A bungalow on the small offshore island of Pulau Ubin acts as an interpretative centre for a nearby nature site and another on the Southern Ridges is a museum telling the story of the defence of Singapore in 1941.

Although omitted from the review, the condition of certain other conservation area types deserves mention. Stretches of shophouses and terrace houses often still provide residential and commercial accommodation, but some have undergone gentrification.

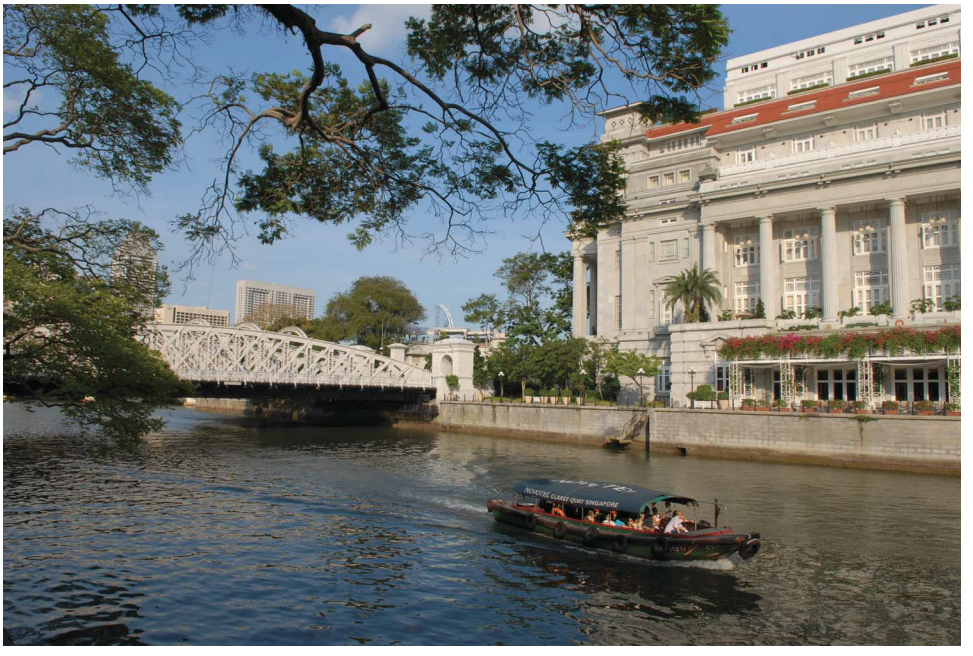

Figure 3. The Fullerton Hotel. Image courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board. Photo by Eugene Tang/Singaporesights.com.

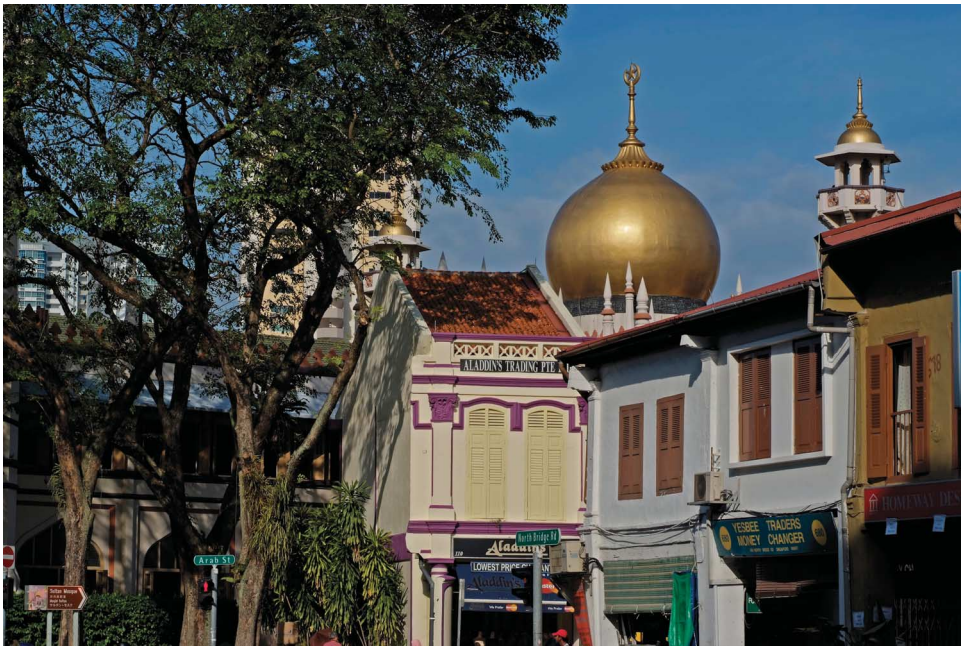

Figure 4. Kampong Glam. Photo courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board.

High rents can put them beyond the reach of those with more modest incomes and the traditional traders who are likely to have been denizens in the past. Such trends are observable in the historic districts of Chinatown (Figure 1) and Kampong Glam (Figure 4) and, to a lesser degree, in Little India (Figure 5). Owners and landlords there are asked to conform to conservation plans (URA 1995), but also to think about productive synergies between conservation and commerce. The results and some initiatives to develop and market the ethnic enclaves as tourist attractions have prompted criticisms of excessive commercialisation and erosion of authenticity (Yeoh and Huang 1996, Chang 2000, Henderson 2005).

There are similar reservations about the renovation of the shophouses and warehouses and other commercial buildings lining the Singapore River. Boat Quay (Figure 6) and Clarke Quay, both conservation areas, have become leisure environments offering bars, restaurants, shops and other entertainments. Redevelopment may, however, be of a sort which is not fully compatible with the vernacular architecture or historic significance of the riverside (Chang and Huang 2005). Sometimes new enterprises housed in heritage properties on the river or elsewhere also seem oriented towards tourists or more affluent residents, excluding and perhaps alienating the many Singaporeans who could claim it as their own heritage. These accusations have been levelled at a very expensive Chinese restaurant installed in a transformed 1930s pier where 'amid all the marble and fancy furniture, there is nothing … to hint that this landmark was once an important destination for generations of migrants and travellers arriving at, or departing from, the colony' (Wu 2009). Even where there has been no alteration in function, there has often been extensive repair and refurbishment. Adaptive reuse has also sometimes necessitated radical interior structural modifications behind conserved facades, detracting from the spirit and architectural integrity of buildings.

Figure 5. Little India. Image courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board.

Figure 6. Boat Quay. Photo courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board. Photographer: Jessica Koh.

Discussion and conclusion

The preceding account has revealed how selected old buildings in Singapore are valued by officials as emblematic of the nation's heritage and worthy of conservation for socio-cultural and political reasons. The buildings are not just physical edifices, but symbols of historical experiences and facets of contemporary cultures; as such, they are perceived to have the capacity to nurture a sense of citizenship and help anchor individuals to the country. Occupation by foreign powers and its lessons are not to be forgotten and certain monuments, as well as conservation areas, evoke European influences and colonisation. Neo-classical structures have been described as an assertion of imperial authority and dominion (Yeoh 1996) which could create awkwardness for some post-colonial authorities. Nevertheless, several have been hailed as deserving of protection in Singapore and this can be interpreted as an expression of self-confidence. Decolonisation was relatively peaceful in the city state which prospered thereafter to surpass its colonial masters in some fields. There is no embarrassment about honouring Raffles, for example, whose legacy is recalled in two statues. His name has also been appropriated by a miscellany of places and products such as a shopping mall, private hospital and Singapore International Airline's premier travel class, all with connotations of superior quality. Famous figures and buildings from the past are thus evocative directional signs of a journey from colony to successful nationhood (NHB 1998).

The professedly even handed approach which characterises the government's handling of sensitive race relations issues is evident in the choice of monuments epitomising the faiths of the main ethnic groups. However, the large number of churches monumentalised in a society where Christianity is followed by only a small proportion of the population appears to be an anomaly. It is also surprising that nearly all monument and conservation areas, while ranging from modest Chinese clan houses to presidential palaces, pre-date independence. The post-independence paucity could be an outcome of a short history, but also of uncertainty about what merits remembrance and celebration. Identifying in built form representations of the special attributes and key events of a state less than 50 years old, renowned for order and which commonly defines itself in terms of economic advances, may pose difficulties. The question of what it means to be Singaporean is also not easily answered and strong feelings of ethnic affiliation have to be aligned with formally sanctioned visions of an all-embracing national identity.

Heritage designations from 1965 onwards seem set to grow as time passes, but the options could be further constrained by the pace of development and redevelopment (Kwok *et al*. 1999). One victim has been the National Theatre completed in 1963 to mark self-government and torn down in 1986 after being declared structurally unsound. Other potential conservation sites which are repositories of collective memories are the early Housing Development Board estates, hawker centres, wet markets and schools which have disappeared or are at risk of doing so in the constant upgrading and rebuilding which is prevalent in Singapore. Some such buildings are in districts pressurised during construction booms, especially on the fringes of the city centre, when land prices escalate. State approval for redevelopment may be granted and often means clearance and high yielding construction projects exemplified by condominiums (Tan 2008).

A more recent example of a significant loss was the demolition in 2005 of the former National Library, opened in 1960, to make way for a road tunnel intended to ease traffic congestion. There were pleas to save the National Library by many for whom it invoked fond memories, but only two red brick entrance pillars were left

together with a wall of original bricks assembled in the new library garden. Its fate is a reminder of the strength of the urban development impetus and the primacy of commerce in Singapore. The dominant and inviolable principle is that land must be utilised productively to safeguard the economic progress on which the future of the nation depends. Some built heritage can be retained, but some must be sacrificed in the national interest. Buildings which survive should generate financial returns where possible and the pattern of changing use is indicative of greater commercialisation, at least in the domain of conservation areas. Thus, despite formal conservation efforts, there are limits to the commitment with an apparent privileging of development over conservation which seems likely to persist.

Singapore is an interesting context within which to explore issues of heritage and the contemporary world given its dynamic economy, ethnically mixed society, strong and long standing government and history as a colony and republic. Although highly distinctive, the case illuminates the ways in which wider circumstances inform official conceptions of heritage and the policy agendas related directly and indirectly to its conservation. Public sector heritage administrators are exposed to a series of interlinked external as well as internal forces which engender both problems and opportunities. Governments are key actors, although not all are able to engage in the visionary planning of a type practised in Singapore. Visions may, however, not always correspond to realities and nationhood is an evolutionary process. Manifestations of national identity and defining experiences as a nation, rendered tangible in monuments and sometimes conservation buildings from the modern histories of young countries, may not be easily or quickly discernible. Economics and political cultures may also inhibit lobbying for the protection of built heritage by those within government circles and society at large.

Certain dimensions of official interpretations of heritage and attitudes towards its administration in Singapore, revealed in decisions about monuments and conservation areas, are therefore not confined to the city state and apply more generally. The debate about what constitutes national identity and its appropriate commemoration in an era of globalisation and shifting populations and borders has resonance worldwide, as does the politicisation of heritage. Many cities too, especially in developing countries, are addressing the challenge of how to accommodate the often conflicting requirements of development and conservation in a satisfactory and sustainable manner. Singapore's activities in the field as it evolves as a nation justify attention in order to better understand changing notions of heritage and its multiple roles in the twenty-first century. Comparative case studies would be of value and the subject of resident opinion about, involvement in and responses to formal policies is an important avenue for future research.

Notes on contributor

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