UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

PUBLIC EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL BUILDING FACADES IN THE VICINITY OF DATARAN MERDEKA, KUALA LUMPUR

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By

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**PUBLIC EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL BUILDING FACADES IN
THE VICINITY OF DATARAN MERDEKA, KUALA LUMPUR**

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Amir Hossein Askari

July 2009

Chairman: Kamariah binti Dola, PhD

Faculty of Design and Architecture

Historical district is an important element of city image content. Among the visual
elements of a historical district, the building façade is an important element in
representing the architectural features. Building façade is mostly the matter of
evaluation to portray the visual characteristics of an environment. Therefore, giving
attention and imposing sensitivity to the evaluation of building facades in a historical
district directly influence the historical images.

A historical area adjacent to Dataran Merdeka, located in Kuala Lumpur city, was
chosen as the study area. The issue is focussed on the lack of harmony among the
shapes, colours, decorations, and architectural styles of the historical building facades
which have influenced the historical images in the study area. This inconsistency is in
contrast with the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 visions, which emphasizes on

creating strong images for all the districts in Kuala Lumpur city. Thus, to deal with the stated issue, the main objective of the study was to investigate the building facades which represented the historical images of the study area based on the public's evaluation. The second objective was to investigate the architectural elements and characteristics which influence the public's evaluation of the historical images of the building facades in the study area. The third objective was to identify the visual elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation. Finally, the research tried to explore the urban elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation.

A quantitative method was used to achieve the objectives of the study. In this line, a questionnaire-based survey was chosen as a data collection instrument. The research participants chosen were visitors who are familiar with the area, and willing to answer the questions. Data analysis was carried out using both the content analysis and inferential analysis.

The results suggested that the facades, with the highest mean scores, were considered as strongly representing the historical images and these include harmonious arches, columns, pilasters, ornament, and bright-coloured materials. Cleanliness, the use of appropriately architectural details, legibility, coherence, and the harmonious repetition of the elements were identified as the other factors which also improved the historical images of the facades. Moreover, the results also denoted the architectural

style, colour, shape and material of the facades as the architectural elements, and the harmony between historical and modern buildings and street furniture as urban elements which influenced the evaluations of the historical building façade images. The findings of the study assist urban designers and planners to consider the importance of people's evaluation of historical building facades.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia, bagi memenuhi keperluan Ijazah Sarjana Sains.

PENILAIAN AWAM BERKENAAN FASAD BANGUNAN BERSEJARAH DI DATARAN MERDEKA, KUALA LUMPUR

Oleh

Amir Hossein Askari

Julai 2009

Pengerusi: Kamariah binti Dola, PHD

Fakulti Rekabentuk dan Senibina

Daerah bersejarah merupakan elemen penting di dalam kandungan imej sesebuah bandar. Di antara elemen-elemen visual daerah bersejarah, fasad bangunan adalah elemen penting dalam penonjolan ciri-ciri senibina. Fasad bangunan merupakan perkara terpenting di dalam menilai karakter visual sesuatu persekitaran. Oleh itu, memberikan perhatian dan mewujudkan sensitiviti terhadap penilaian fasad bangunan di daerah bersejarah secara langsung boleh mempengaruhi imej sejarah tersebut.

Kawasan bersejarah bersebelahan Dataran Merdeka telah dipilih di dalam kajian ini. Isu kajian tertumpu kepada kekurangan harmoni dari segi bentuk, warna, dekorasi dan gaya senibina fasad bangunan bersejarah yang memberi kesan terhadap imej-imej sejarah di kawasan tersebut. Ketidakseragaman ini didapati bercanggah dengan visi pelan Struktur Kuala Lumpur 2020 yang menekankan kepada pembentukan imej-imej

yang jelas bagi kesemua daerah di bandaraya Kuala Lumpur. Bagi menangani isu tersebut, objektif utama kajian ini adalah menyelidik fasad bangunan, iaitu samada ianya menggambarkan imej sejarah kawasan kajian berdasarkan penilaian awam. Objektif kedua kajian adalah untuk mengenalpasti elemen dan karakter senibina yang mempengaruhi penilaian awam tentang imej sejarah fasad bangunan di kawasan kajian. Objektif ketiga adalah untuk mengenalpasti elemen visual yang mempengaruhi imej sejarah fasad bangunan dalam kawasan kajian berdasarkan penialian umum. Akhir sekali, kajian ini cuba meneroka elemen perbandaran yang mempengaruhi imej sejarah fasad bangunan dalam kawasan kajian berdasarkan penialian umum.

Kaedah kuantitatif digunakan bagi mencapai objektif kajian. Selaras itu, borang soal selidik telah digunakan sebagai instrumen pengumpulan data. Peserta kajian yang dipilih merupakan para pelawat yang mengenali kawasan kajian dan bersetuju untuk menjatab soalan. Data pula telah dianalisis menggunakan "content analysis" dan "inferential analysis."

Keputusan kajian menunjukkan fasad bangunan dengan skor min tertinggi di anggap sebagai contoh yang baik untuk mempamerkan imej sejarah. Ini termasuk yang mempunyai kombinasi harmoni di antara gerbang, tiang, pilaster, hiasan bangunan di samping mempunyai bahan binaan berwarna cerah. Kebersihan, penggunaan perincian binaan yang bersesuaian, "legibility", koheren dan elemen-elemen ulangan yang harmoni dikenalpasti sebagai faktor-faktor yang dapat memperbaiki imej sejarah

bagi fasad bangunan. Hasil kajian juga mendapati bahawa gaya senibina, warna, bentuk dan bahan binaan fasad bangunan sebagai elemen senibina yang mempengaruhi penilaian imej fasad bangunan bersejarah. Hasil kajian dapat membantu pereka bentuk dan perancang bandar untuk menekankan kepentingan penilaian orang ramai tentang fasad bangunan bersejarah.

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Special thanks and appreciation to my family, for the encouragement and support they had given me throughout my study period.

I clarify that Examination Committee has met on **10/07/2009** to conduct the final examination of **Amir Hossein Askari** on his **Master** thesis entitled, "**Public evaluation of historical building images at the area adjacent to Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur city, Malaysia,**" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher degree) Regulations 1981. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

Members of Examination Committee were as follows:

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date: 16 October 2009

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institutions.

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AMIR HOSSEIN ASKARI

Date:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Background of the Study

The aim of this research was to investigate the public evaluations of the historical building façade. In line with this, the building facades with strong and poor historical images were elicited, and the reasons for the strong or poor images of these historical facades were also investigated based on the public evaluations. The research also aimed to find out the architectural and urban elements that influence the historical images of the facades. The urban elements are explained as distance between buildings, harmony between historical and modern buildings, building function, street furniture, use of sculpture, street width, surrounding shop design, signage, information plaque, and traffic (based on researcher observation). More information on these factors is given in Appendix A (Part B, p. 120). Implicitly, this research aimed to pursue the Kuala Lumpur City Hall's vision of creating image-able historical districts, which could be achieved through public evaluations of the facades.

The study area included the places adjacent to Sultan Abdul Samad Building and Dataran Merdeka. The existence of important constructions such as Sultan Abdul Samad Building, with a blend of Moorish and Mongol architecture, as well as many historical shop houses, has introduced it as a heritage zone for Kuala

Lumpur city (City Hall Kuala Lumpur, 2008). The map of the study area, the secondary heritage zone, and the distribution of building facades are shown in Figures 12, 13, and 15 in Chapter Three.

In the discourse of historical image, a discussion on Lynch's theory on city image is crucial. Lynch (1960) elaborated that the content of the city image could be classified into five elements such as paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. From a different view, Luque-Martínez *et al*. (2007) explained that city image is a combination of cognitive and affective elements. The former encompasses behaviours which the public declares to identify the characteristics of the city, while the latter is related to public behaviour that flourishes in consideration of past experiences attached to a particular place.

Districts, particularly historical districts, are important elements in enhancing of the quality of a city's image. A historical district is considered as comprising of a group of historical buildings, in which their interrelation is very important (Naoi *et al*., 2006). Lynch (1972), Millar (1989), and Moscardo (2000) argued that historical districts are places which offer chances for visitors to appreciate the past. Therefore, investigating the public evaluations of the historical building facades, as important elements of a historical district, seems vital in order to enhance the historical image of the district.

Zaleckis (2003) stated that there are characteristics which make a district or a built-environment (historical building façade as an important element) image-

able; these include legibility, coherence, complexity, and mysteriousness. Through legibility and coherence, environment is understood, and in deeper view, complexity and mysteriousness are related to exploration of environment (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Staats and Kips, 1992). Visual richness is another explanation of complexity, and historical building facades with high visual richness are preferred over those with low visual richness (Herzog and Shier, 2000).

In different studies, the importance of building façade exterior elements such as colour (Ahmad, 1998; Karaman, 2005; Hui, 2007) shape and material (Karaman, 2005; Hui, 2007) in enhancing image have been accentuated. This implies that harmony among exterior elements results in appropriate images of building façades.

Observing building facades in the study area revealed the use of different colours such as pink, green and incompatible shapes with context which probably influence the historical images of the facades. This opens chance for the study to investigate facades that can represent historical images of the area more clearly, based on the public evaluations. In total, the results of the study contribute to the future development and conservation of the historical facades of the area, and lead to possessing more image-able historical district.

1.1   Problem Statement

Building façade, as an important element in a historical district, plays an impressionable role in presenting the historical image. This is a subsequent result of Lynch's theory on city image in 1960, which introduces district as one of the effective elements of a city's image.

Various studies by Hassanuddin (2003), Shamsuddin and Sulaiman (2003), Ruhaizan (2004), and Ujang (2007) have stressed on the weakness of urban-architectural image of districts and most urban centres in Kuala Lumpur city. In another study, Wan Ismail and Shamsuddin (2005) explained about the poor condition of shop houses in the old town centres in Malaysia, which might have implicitly alluded to the inappropriate historical image of the study area as well.

Considering the results of the previous studies, the problem pursued in this study is that inconsistency of shapes, colours, decorations, and architectural styles has caused most of the facades not to have strong historical images. The City Hall Kuala Lumpur (2004) also stressed on the lack of harmony and inappropriate juxtaposition of buildings in the old city centre, which is in contrast with the objectives of the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 to create strong images for the districts of Kuala Lumpur city. In fact, this issue verifies the problem statement of the study. Based on the problem mentioned, as well as to find out the visual elements of the building facades and urban elements which contribute to

the enhancement of the historical building facades images in the study area, the two following hypotheses emerged in this research.

Hypothesis1: H_1 (alternative hypothesis): The visual elements such as shape, colour, material, and architectural style are important to represent the images of the historical facades in the study area. H_0 (null hypothesis): The visual elements such as shape, colour, material, and architectural style are not important to represent the images of the historical facades in the study area.

Hypothesis 2: H_1 (alternative hypothesis): The urban elements such as harmony between historical and modern buildings and street furniture influence the historical building facades images. H_0 (null hypothesis): The urban elements such as harmony between historical and modern buildings and street furniture do not influence the historical building facades images. To have an illustrative introduction of the problem statement, Figures 1 and 2 portray the lack of harmony in the building facades (elements) in the study area.

Figure 1. Lack of Harmony in the Elements of the Building Facades (Amir, 2007)

Figure 2. Lack of Harmony in the Colours of the Building Facades (Amir, 2007)

1.2   Research Question

The following research question and sub-questions have been proposed for this study in line with the problem stated.

a) What is the public's evaluation of the building facades which represent the historical images of the study area?

1.2.1   Sub Research Questions

a) What are the architectural elements and characteristics which influence the public's evaluation of the historical images of the building facades in the study area?

b) What are the visual elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation?

c) What are the urban elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation?

1.3   Research Aim

The aim of the research is to investigate the public's evaluation of the historical building façades images in the selected study area.

1.4   Research Objectives

Since historical images are mostly evaluated by visitors who came to the study area, the objectives of the study were based on the public's evaluation. The following statements are outlined as the research objectives of the study:

a) To investigate the public's evaluation of the building facades which represent the historical images of the study area

b) To investigate the architectural elements and characteristics which influence the public's evaluation of the historical images of the building facades in the study area

c) To identify the visual elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation

d) To explore the urban elements which influence the historical images of the building facades in the study area based on the public's evaluation

1.5   Significance of Research

The findings of the study could contribute greatly to the enhancement of the historical images of the building facades in the study area, which have impact on the quality of the image of Kuala Lumpur city. The significance of this study is that the results derived from the public's evaluations of the historical images are empirical for future development or conservation of building facades, as well as to assist professionals such as planners, architects, urban designers and policy makers in making decisions on the future development, especially at these historical sites.

1.6   Theoretical Framework

The approach employed in this study is described in four distinguished stages.

1.6.1   Stage 1 (Preliminary Stage)

The preliminary stage of the study includes refining the objectives, scope and literature review of the study. The literature review is carried out to establish an understanding of the issues covered in this study such as, city image, and evaluation of the historical building facade image. Sources of information are collected from various academic books, published documents and online journals, as well as conference papers and other research publications. The study design, questionnaire design, and a pilot study were also included in this stage of research.