TO VALUE THE PAST IS TO ALTER THE PAST
The Changing Context of Chinatown

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to study the truth of Lowenthal’s ‘To value the past is to alter the past’ in the context of Singapore’s urban conservation efforts. It is undeniable that there are many benefits when we value the past. The solution is by seeking permanence in the past through the practice of urban conservation. Therefore, a whole set of regulations are drafted out to ‘Retain, Restore and Repair’ the remaining ‘relics’ found in these conservation areas. New interventions that are out of scale, context or trade, are not recommended. Ironically, in the good cause of valuing the historical past of the area, has led to alterations and loss of the original lifestyle and atmosphere of the place. Many have criticised the sterile outcome of the conserved environment. The more interventions there are, the more illusory the permanence of the past becomes. The past is now a reinterpreted version, by our generation and it is inevitable that it will be altered with every generation after us. This ‘before and after’ conservation analyses of streets in a selected sub-district of Chinatown Singapore, aims to identify the inevitable changes. In addition, to bring Lowenthal’s claim one step further, there will be a discussion on the implications of these changes. Finally, how the awareness of these implications, contributes to reviewing of plans for the future, will be discussed.

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