REVITALISING CHINATOWN?

A STUDY OF THE DECISIONS AND POLICY-MAKING POWER OF THE ELITE AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE AND LIFESTYLE

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SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN & ENVIRONMENT ON 29 NOVEMBER 2000 IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

ABSTRACT

Chinatown has always been a historically significant landscape in Singapore. Its significance was officially recognized by the state when it was gazette as a conservation area in the late 1980s. This paper aims to study the development of Chinatown and the impacts and effects that were brought about onto its landscape through the formulation and implementation of major decisions and policies. The time frame of the analysis began from the post independence era from 1965, up to 1998, when Singapore Tourism Board drew up a proposal to revitalise Chinatown.

Besides tracing the effects that major policies and decisions had on Chinatown, the paper goes further by giving objective analyses of the policies and decisions, and discusses alternative proposals wherever possible, to fine tune these policies and decisions so as to reduce drastic impacts on the landscape.

The paper is arranged in a chronological order discussing major time periods, beginning with a brief introduction of Chinatown after Raffles's arrival in 1819. The analyses began with post independence from 1965, modernization programs up to the 1980s, conservation in the late 1980s and STB's proposal in 1998.

One major component that was extracted in the conclusion was that policy formulation should not be perceived as being a uniform solution serving a general agenda. There is a need to achieve a balance between formulating policies and decisions that are necessary to the development of the nation, and allowing a certain degree of adaptability to allow fine tuning before final implementation, to lessen negative impacts on unique landscapes like Chinatown.

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