CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN GEORGETOWN, PENANG

by

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ABSTRACT

During my travels to other parts of the world in particular Europe, I am struck at how some
cities while having modern facilities and buildings seem to be able to conserve their past
heritage successfully. The excitement of exploring the modern city is heightened by the
pleasure of walking amid old urbanscape and occasionally seeing the locals way of life.
The modern and the old seem to to respect and work with one another.

Being a native of Penang I recognise the heritage value of the old historic city of George
Town. The shophouses, the narrow streets, the open markets, the ice-cream cart and
games on the five foot way was all part of a treasured memory. But in recent times with the
repeal of the Rent Control Act, the inner city has lost many of its residents and many
places had lost their vibrancy. There are many illegal buildings that were constructed in a
hurry sprouting up around. Nostalgia calls for everything to be the way it was but reality
shows that there are practical problems to be solved like bad living conditions and the
need for revitalisation to the place.

That sets me thinking on how continuity of what the people of Penang hold dear, can go
together with change that is needed in the city. In my dissertation I am setting out to
show that continuity and change can go hand in hand together without forgoing one or the other.

First of all both the social and physical aspect of Georgetown that gives the place its unique character is identified. This is done through analysis of certain streetscapes in different areas within Georgetown, and observation of the way of life of the residents there. Then by means of case studies, logical arguments and interviews proposals on how the past can be continued while accommodating change for the future is proposed. In the proposal one important component in the continuity of the inner city of George Town is functional conservation, which is the conservation of its current use in particular the retainment of its inner city residents. The residents are the source of the character and life of the innercity.

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