

Art Identity of Sino-Portuguese Shop Houses in Phuket Town: Problems and Guidelines for Conservation and Tourism Development

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Abstract

The conservation of Sino-Portuguese shop houses, which attractively show art identity in tourism, is a principle that most people agree with, but there are problems in practice. The aims of this study were to investigate how art identity of Sino-Portuguese buildings could create a tourist atmosphere, and to highlight the problems surrounding the transformation of these buildings into tourist attractions. Data were collected via observation, interviews with 20 building owners and 25 tourists, using descriptive and content analysis. The results showed that the Sino-Portuguese buildings enhance tourism due to several factors. First, they reflect a Chinese style, since the buildings are elaborately decorated with auspicious symbols. Second, a mixture of Chinese and European styles result in unique architecture; classical orders as well as archways are integrated perfectly with the Chinese style. Furthermore, people of the new generation frequently seek reminiscences of the old days. Many Sino-Portuguese shop houses have been renovated to reflect this nostalgia. The problems are a lack of interest from state agencies, a delay in maintenance after being requested, and building owners' refusal to cooperate. The conservation guidelines should distribute local historical and traditional awareness among the young, set in place a conservation learning process for building owners, and guide the design of new buildings imitating the old style. Additionally, there should be a museum, an art gallery, and a learning center along a pedestrian street, all of which should reflect a certain local identity.

Keywords: art identity, sino-portuguese shop houses, Phuket, conservation, tourism development

1. Introduction

Phuket, one of the southern provinces on Thailand's Andaman coast, is prestigious for not only its beautiful beaches and crystal sea, but also for its historical cultural heritage, which is similar to other cities along the Malay Peninsula, particularly the architecture of shop houses, which are commonly known as Sino-Portuguese buildings among Thais. (Figure 1) In fact, the architecture was based on various forms of integrated artwork. As a result, these old shop houses have become the epitome of the old town areas of Phuket. These Sino-Portuguese buildings, indeed, are cultural heritage, passed on by Chinese immigrants, who migrated to various cities along the Peninsula during the early ages (fifteenth century), such as Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Due to the expansion of power from Europe into this region, Western art and culture inevitably influenced Chinese culture (Lim, 2003, p. 65). Thus, this contributed to the creation of a new identity of art in which Western styles were integrated well with Eastern styles, along the marine channel of the Malacca Straits (Knapp, 2009, p. 140-141). Most of the shop houses in Phuket were influenced by those in Penang, which is also located in the Andaman sea not far from Phuket. In the past, Penang, and especially, the area known as George's Town, used to be the biggest trading center in this region. Since the shop houses are located in different nations, the conservation standards of the buildings vary. For example, Phuket is renowned for its marine tourism at an international level, whereas the city of Penang is well-known as a historical, British colonial city on the Malay Peninsula (Bierre, 2006, p. 68-70). At present, when the trend is to reminisce about the old days, many attempts have been made by the local administrators to develop and make this special area of Phuket become more well known. In addition, the focus is also placed on culture conservation, parallel to nature conservation and tourism. However, the government's plan to enhance the tourism of Phuket's old town area seems too sudden for a number of local people to adjust themselves to such a new plan. In fact, the increase in the number of tourists is not only from the state's

aggressive tourism campaign, but also from the tales by visitors about beautiful old architecture with unique designs. According to Teo and Huang (1995, p. 589-615) who studied tourism and heritage conservation in Singapore, the beauty of old colonial buildings can, in fact, attract a large number of tourists; hence, it is quite essential to carefully conserve them. However, this kind of business-oriented policy has been strongly criticized by the Singaporeans. That is, the focus on economic value usually results in the creation of numerous artificial things that imitate traditional ones with the main purpose of attracting tourists. As a result, the attempts to maintain and conserve the national heritage have completely failed.

Undoubtedly, the art found on most of the Sino-Portuguese buildings plays an important role in attracting tourists. Hence, this challenges the researcher to find out which factors truly attract visitors to those antique shop houses in the old town area of Phuket, how certain problems arise from the participation of local people in a conservation plan promoted by the government, and what conservation guidelines should be feasible.

1.1 Aims of the Study

- 1) To study which artistic qualities of Sino-Portuguese shop houses enhance tourism
- 2) To investigate certain problems and explore some practical conservation guidelines for tourism

1.2 Research Methodology

Data was collected from related documents and direct visits to the locations, and with the permission of the shop house owners, data information was also collected through the following procedures:

- 1) Observation and photographic recording of physical characteristics of Sino-Portuguese buildings
- 2) In-depth interviews with both the shop house owners and tourists

1.2.1 Samples of Key Informants

The samples were composed of 20 key informants, the owners of the shop houses, who always complained about conservation problems, whereas other 25 key informants were tourists who were selected with accidental samples.

1.3 Data Analysis

The cassette-recorded data was interpreted, while certain physical characteristics of the buildings based on the photographs were analyzed. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis.

1.4 Results

Based on the investigation on art identity of the Sino-Portuguese buildings, which play an important role in promoting tourism of Phuket old town area, it was found that there were two major unique characteristics.

1.4.1 Chinese Culture

The buildings were constructed with unique Chinese architecture. For instance, many shop houses were built along streets. Each shop house has a narrow front section with a particular length from the front to the back. Indeed, such structures were culturally derived from Chinese shop house architecture, which was quite popular in southern China and this cultural influence was first brought into the Malay Peninsula by early Chinese immigrant merchants (Sthapitanonda & Mertens, 2005, p. 214-218). Another interesting characteristic is that each shop house shares the same brick wall, which is usually higher than the roof. In fact this high brick wall serves not only as a divider separating specific portions of a house among the owners but also as a fire break (Davison, 2010, p. 14-16). The curved porcelain roofs, which look like longitudinally cut bamboo, were alternately arranged face up and down, similar to most of traditional Chinese houses. There are two styles of the front parts of a shop house: the first one has a door in the middle and parallel windows, and the second style is a widely open front part of a house with a folded door. Actually the first style is more attractive and unique, with two-layer doors, and the first door-panel was built in half. Unfortunately, there is a decline in the number of shop houses of the first style because business advantages are considered to be a priority.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Additionally, most of the buildings are decorated with auspicious Chinese emblems, such as a bat, a lion (Figure 2), a mystic knot, some coins and a Chinese mythical creature with a scaly body, a dragon's head, and four feet, or with some auspicious Buddhist emblems. Each item symbolizes a particular characteristic. For example, a bat stands for fortune, a lion refers to power, and prosperity, whereas a coin represents wealth, fortune, and a mystic knot symbolizes longevity (Williams, 2002, p. 291). Moreover, many houses are decorated with Chinese dolls. Meanwhile, underneath a window, stands a lion surrounded by a number of trees, with its head placed in the center and vines climbing along both sides. This kind of pattern is derived from the city of Penang. It was constructed together with the building, and decorating a house with certain patterns usually depends on financial status of an owner. Decorative patterns, in fact, are considered as one of the important parts in a house design. All these decorative patterns should be perfect and complete. That is, no one particular part should be missing; otherwise, this might bring a good deal of misfortune to the owner. (Tepsing, 2013, p. 162) In addition, since most of the upper part of a house was decorated with such a well-woven pattern, not only its beauty but also its uniqueness are attractive to people who pass by, and it is believed that viewers will be blessed under those auspicious emblems as well.

A number of Sino-Portuguese buildings have been converted into different types of stores, such as a restaurant, a Chinese drug store, a clothing shop, a gallery, and a convenience store. Inside the shops, numerous shelves for displaying merchandise were put against the walls, and in some shops an excessive number of shelves were placed outside. Interestingly, a particular attraction is found at a kind of Chinese coffee shop where traditional coffee and tea is served on a round table with Chinese-style chairs. The smells of traditional Chinese herbal medicine are present while walking past a Chinese drug store. All these, in fact, revive nostalgia for the old days dating back to the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants. A number of crowded shop houses truly attract a lot of customers, who can enjoy choosing variety of goods. Sometimes, a street is closed to the public for a particular festival or an entertainment event, with all the shops being lit by colorful lights along both sides of the street. Therefore, many tourists are drawn to not only these beautiful unique shop houses, but also living Chinese culture. According to a traveler's notes, "I need to go again. Always something new is happening on Thalaug Road too, but it's low key. New cafe, fresh paint on a crumbly exterior, and regular street fair and festivals if you want a bit of history culture and local life...old Phuket Town is where it's at." — Monkey, 2011, field note

1.4.2 Western Culture

Actually, the Sino-Portuguese buildings reflect various Western characteristics, such as an archway in the front part of the shop house, the curved ridges, which add a pleasant and graceful look to the buildings. In addition, the long open walking path along the front part of the shop houses enable customers to go shopping without being exposed to sweltering heat or rain. The colonnade walk way, one of the Western architectural elements, was first introduced by Dutch people to Batavia, a city on Java Island in Indonesia before it was widely spread to other regions on the Malay Peninsula. Later, Sir Stamford Raffle, the British Regent, realized the advantages of such open walking ways, so he decided to issue particular regulations, which stated that a 5-foot open walking way shall be provided to the public in the front part of all the shop houses constructed within the British Colonial region. (Figure 3) As time passed, this special open walking path has been known as the "five foot way" (Davison, 2010, p. 22) Therefore, it is assumed that the construction of this special open walking way in Phuket, in fact, must be derived from its counterpart in Penang. Interestingly, this model of a walking way is called *JK Lemah Kaki* in Malay language. The word *Lemah* means five, and the word *Kaki* refers to the foot. Similarly, in Phuket, it is known as *Ngo Kaki*. In fact, the word *Ngo* means the number 5 in Fugian, a Chinese dialect, whereas *Kaki* is borrowed from the Malay language. Moreover, other Western features can be obviously noticed

by the use of floor tiles along the five foot walking ways as well as inside the shop houses. These special floor tiles with unique and distinctive patterns were imported from Europe during the Victorian Period. However, at present, the number of buildings with unique traditional floor tiles remains very few.



Figure 3



Figure 4

When compared to those modern buildings, the decorative patterns in the front part of the traditional shop houses are considered the most outstanding distinctive characteristics. It was popular by that time for both the owners and the architects to use a combination of Western and Chinese designs. For example, pillars were decorated with various types of orders: classical, Ionic, Corinthian, and swag. (Figure 4) Additionally, above the window and along its curved frame lie the designs of winding twigs and branches of trees, which look as if they were growing out of the building walls. (Tepsing & Wattanasin, 2006, p. 245-250). This model of decorative style on buildings is closely similar to that in both the Baroque and Rococo Period of the 17th Century. Also, certain decorations known as Art Nouveau, with designs winding around the pillars or along the walls, and Art Deco, with geometric shapes, were used to decorate some buildings. Most importantly, various designs of distinctive periods have integrated perfectly well to serve the purpose of decoration. In fact, this is due to one contributing factor: the concept of eclecticism, which emphasizes the selection and collection of numerous beautiful items. This concept was considerably popular in Europe during the Victorian Period or the early 19th Century (Tepsing, 2011, p. 103-106). Therefore, many new designs emerged, whereas the old patterns which were hard to forsake, still remain.

Most importantly, the two major factors that contribute to certain Western architectural characteristics in Sino-Portuguese buildings are as follows:

1) The Expansion of Colonialism

Although during that time Phuket was not under colonization, cultural influence extended to Phuket via the city of Penang. This was due to the fact that both cities are located in the same marine areas. After being colonized, Penang was fully developed to become not only the most modern city in South East Asia but also a duty-free port city. It turned out to be the center of buying and selling of natural rubber and tin from Phuket.

2) Modernization of Phuket During the 19th Century

Since some powerful European countries were models of development, to follow certain Western culture was considered modern. As a result, to be socially recognized, many Chinese on the Malay Peninsula preferred to have their houses built based on Western architecture (Nin, 2001, p. 18-19). For instance, a whole house might be constructed in a complete Western style or simply a part of it. Meanwhile, like those in Penang, some wealthy, modern people in Phuket also had their houses built with a similar style.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Hence, the perfect integration between Western and Chinese styles as well as exquisite decorative designs contribute to the fascinating charm of the buildings. Although these magnificent decorative designs appear only on some buildings, they help to create not only value but also meaning to the whole building. In addition, certain Western decorative designs were modified to perfectly blend with the Chinese ones, which truly create wonder to those shop houses. For example, the Ionic style was modified to combine perfectly well with a figure of a bat, a Chinese emblem symbolizing fortune. (Figure 5) Most importantly, according to one tourist's statement, the East and the West have been imprinted not only amazingly but also meaningfully on the narrow space of the shop houses: *"I am so amazed at those people, I was wondering how they could combine Western art with Chinese art."* —Jumpen Onthong. Interview date 16 June 2011

2. Revival of Public Interest in Ancient Sites

Actually, no matter the style, most of the Sino-Portuguese shop houses illustrate people's taste in beauty in the past. When tourists make a visit to the old town of Phuket, they not only admire its antiquity but also perceive the wisdom of people in the past. As a result, city administrators at both local and national levels, as well as various private agencies have cooperated to improve the old town area to become a major tourist attraction. Indeed, both a trend of world heritage conservation and work of development conducted by many concerned agencies have interestingly motivated people of the new generation to take an interest in tourism pertaining to nostalgia. Consequently, a number of Sino-Portuguese buildings have been considerably renovated, and so emerges a lucrative business of nostalgia. The artistic qualities that attract tourists seeking nostalgia consist of the following factors.

2.1 Activities Arranged by the State Agency and an Aggressive Public Relations Campaign

Based on the 4th version of the Economic and Social Development Plan 1977-1981, certain conservation plans have been established, this includes architecture, artistic work, local and national historical sites. Accordingly, the Tourism Organization of Thailand has realized the importance of Phuket as a tourist attraction, with many interesting and unique things to offer, such as beautiful beaches and a number of historical sites. According to the study of the cooperation between Thailand and Britain by Hunting Technical Services Limited, "The old town of Phuket consists of many outstanding buildings which stand along both sides of a number of streets, and local architecture truly reflects how perfectly the European and Chinese styles have been integrated. Indeed, this is regarded as the most valuable features, and such unique combination contributes to interesting images to viewers, especially tourists." Moreover, many activities promoting tourism have been held by all concerned agencies, such as development and research projects, a variety of media used for public relations, and the most concrete one was the special event (Phuket history activities), first held in 1998 (Suvanasupana, 2012). Since then this special festival has been held annually until the present.

2.2. The Establishment of Local Cultural Heritage to Be Cultural Heritage of the Nation

Originally, these old shop houses were not attractive to tourists. However, when the Thai government realized the economic value and advantages of tourism, the focus was shifted to improve the cultural heritage of Phuket (Tepsing 2012, p. 38-39). Therefore, certain local culture has been included in the urgent policy of national tourism development, through various attempts: set up of conservation of the Sino-Portuguese buildings networks – the shared heritage – with Malaysia and Singapore, and renovation of such buildings by experts from Department of Fine Arts. Most importantly, these old, unique buildings have become not only an emblem but also a novel national identity, with an image of plural culture. The Thai government proclaimed 1994 to be the Thai Culture Year to promote tourism and attract more foreign tourists. Since then the issue of Thai culture has been not only extensively discussed but also more widely exchanged among the public, especially the topics concerning a national and local identity, which are based on a wide cultural diversity. Additionally, due to the foundation of the Ministry of Culture, various cultural heritages have obviously been revived and restored rapidly. According to Peleggi (2002, p. 1-9), a phenomenon of cultural heritage awareness took place in Thailand around two decades ago, and then it has gradually expanded through dramatic transformations because of the growth of the tourism industry.

2.3 The Revival of Nostalgia Business

The areas of Phuket old town have been created to be a place for reminiscences of the old days due to various enhancing factors: the promotion of conservation tourism, the business of nostalgia and protection of such buildings, as well as a spread of knowledge pertaining to the old architecture of such areas by state agencies. As a result, many old buildings with Sino-Portuguese architecture have been renovated. Nostalgia for the old days has also been revived through various types of businesses: guest houses, coffee shops, restaurants selling traditional food, and arts and crafts shops (Figure 6). Most of the shops are decorated with antique furniture, such

as a set of traditional tables and chairs. Hence, all of these will attract a large number of tourists to visit and enjoy a place of special cultural heritage. According to an interview with a businessman, "It sounds quite wonderful to sit in an old coffee shop with ancient style, and while slowly sipping tea and enjoying some desserts, in front of me, I am simply looking at those old shop houses. They are so gorgeous and classic that I got a feeling as if I was going back into my grandparents' time." —(Amnoi Mangkong interview date 17 June, 2011)

Therefore, based on the previous interview, it can be said that a project run by the state to create a kind of memorable place that can bring back a childhood memory has been quite successful. In fact, certain events that were recorded in the history can also be reflected through architectural art. In addition, a presentation of the past to people of the young generation should be coupled with the provision of tourism facilities to create a nostalgic atmosphere adding a new perspective to consumers.

When cultural heritage has been made concrete and ready for tourism, it will bring principal income to the country; therefore, the conservation of cultural heritage for tourism should be conducted seriously.

3. Problems of Conservation

Despite support from many concerned state agencies and people's participation in conserving certain cultural heritage, some problems inevitably arise from two major factors: government sectors directly responsible for conservation work, and building owners, as follows.

Lack of understanding and a delay in maintenance of buildings by the government sector after being requested. According to an interview with one of the building owners,

"When a roof turns old, I could not get it fixed. If one tile is leaking, the rest must be removed since it is impossible to find the tile of a traditional style. When I want to get the building renovated, I cannot find a skillful workman. Both the government and the Department of Fine Arts keep telling us to take good care of these old shop houses, but they never told us where an experienced repairman could be found and how to repair them, and it would be much more costly to have the buildings fixed with traditional procedures."

(Aun-nob Khamgrajai Interview date 16 June, 2011)

"When a roof was leaking, or some designs were broken, I immediately notified the problems to the Department of Fine Arts. But it took such a long time for the authorities to come. A formal request letter is essentially needed, so I think, I had better solve problems by myself. But.. there is another problem following... The fixing process is, in fact, not correct in accordance with those regulations set by the Department of Fine Arts."

(Pracha Tantawanit Interview date 16 May, 2007)

Based on the interviews, most of the problems have resulted from lack of materials, skillful workmen, and capital. At present, roof tiles of the traditional style are not produced any more. Therefore, it is impossible to find the traditional roof tiles to replace those cracked ones. Also, both the skills of paving traditional tiles and the skills of mixing plaster into decorative stucco have not been passed on to others. This is due to the fact that continuous transfer of certain traditional wisdom has not been truly enhanced by the state agency. Most importantly, people of the young generation have not been encouraged by the government sector to learn how to create Sino-Portuguese art. Moreover, both the maintenance and renovation of the buildings with traditional procedures are usually more costly than the modern ones. Also, there is no supporting budget from the state in this matter.

Other problems directly arise from the building owners themselves, who put more focus on business than conservation. As a result, most of them not only refuse to cooperate but also consider it their right to possess a certain space. For example, they denied opening the five-foot archways, so some parts were intentionally blocked. (Figure 7) According to a local academic,

"I used to request the owners to move all of their merchandise displayed in front of the shops into the inside, so a long walking path could be opened wide like before. And I also offered to look for workers to break down those dividing cement walls. But, very few of them agreed."

(Sommai Pintragoo Interview date 16 June 2011)

Since most of the building owners want to benefit from the rent fee of setting up billboards, this also contributes to another problem. For example, some buildings have been fully covered with billboards, whereas certain boards are placed only on a section of the shop houses. As a result, not only the beauty of such traditional buildings has been inevitably obstructed (Figure 8); but also the image of the old town, whose glorious past was reflected through such art, will also wear away.



Figure 7



Figure 8

4. Guidelines for Conservation Tourism

Based on the data collected from documents and interviews, certain approaches for developing as well as creating conservation tourism atmosphere can be summarized as follows.

1) To encourage the young generation to be aware of their own culture and history, and such realization of the architecture heritage's value will usually lead to conservation awareness. This can be done regularly through various media as well as certain activities among different groups: children, the youth, and young adults. For example, train children to be tour guides of their hometown, or encourage them to create decorative designs of stucco. Indeed, the frequent practice doing such activities will usually result in gradual absorption of the art, which eventually inspires those young participants to conserve their own identity. Then, the establishment of conservation awareness also will be transferred to a family as well, as mentioned by an owner of such buildings.

"If you want to make conservation work successful, it is necessary for owners of the buildings to realize the value by themselves. In fact, they should discover themselves through the renovation of the buildings. Then success is achieved."

2) To set a learning process of conservation for building owners is regarded as one of the practical approaches which will encourage building owners to pursue knowledge via attending training programs or seminars run by a state agency, demonstrating how to repair stucco designs, or how to carve a certain design on a door or a window.

Unfortunately, there were few interested people who attend such training programs. This is due to lack of formal standards and cooperation among craftsmen. (Pimonsathean, 2001, p. 11). Consequently, it is essential to set up not only networks but also common shared standards. In addition, a list of skillful craftsmen should be made by concerned agencies as well as the set up of contact channels with craftsmen and a public relations unit.

3) To construct a new building in imitation of the old style, to replace a deteriorating one, is another interesting approach. For example, to make new buildings compatible with the old traditional ones, certain unique traditional decorative designs should be applied to the new buildings. Unfortunately, at present, a number of Sino-Portuguese buildings decorated with excessively luxurious designs have been strongly criticized, since such decoration is directly imitated from both Malacca and Penang. In fact, the study of the traditional style in Phuket has never been thoroughly conducted. According to an interview

"I think that shop houses have been built with too many distinctive styles mixing together. All the decorative designs were painted in gold color. In my opinion, in Phuket, it is rare to find such an extravagant building like this one." (An-Nob Saengam. Interview date 17 June 2011)

Interestingly, the government has played two simultaneous roles: the destroyer and the creator. That is, many new buildings with the imitation of the old style have been constructed to promote tourism, in particular, decorative designs with no standards, which are often used as a background for taking photos. However, these decorative designs have been variedly restored without consulting local historical data that truly reflect Phuket's identity.

4) Since most of the building owners rely on the benefits of rental fees, it seems quite difficult to solve the problems of blocking the footpath in the front part of the shop house, despite being a public area, and the set up of numerous billboards on the buildings. However, in the long run, when a certain awareness, such as the benefit to the public, has been established among children and the youth of the new generation, these problems might be minimized, and to achieve such goals, this can be done through a variety of activities, including the addition of

local history into the syllabus and regular arrangement of activities enhancing conservation.

5) Activities enhancing tourism should be held on some important streets, especially in the old town areas. Therefore, the surrounding landscape should be particularly improved, including certain interesting streets where various tourist attractions are located: a museum, an art gallery, and Chinese shrines. Also, activities can take place on some of the streets that have been converted to pedestrian streets, where local people as well as visitors can join activities together. For example, one of the conservation activities held annually is widely known as “The Revival of Phuket in the Old Days,” which focuses on the past traditions: Peranakan food, and people wearing traditional Peranakan costumes. In some years, there is a show of a Peranakan wedding ceremony. All of these are considered parts of a campaign to preserve not only ancient buildings but also local traditional customs. Unfortunately, both art and culture appreciation could not be perceived during a period of a 10-day festival. On the contrary, certain development guidelines should be considered to achieve the greatest benefits out of these street activities. For instance, some major streets should be converted into a source of knowledge where people can learn all the time. Moreover, there should be more museums, art galleries, and other learning resources along both sides of the street. In fact, some of the old traditional buildings can be converted into museums displaying distinctive subjects, such as food and clothing. Interestingly, these learning resources stand amid a variety of shops and stores, and they could serve as a place where people can rest and gain some knowledge at the same time.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings, two principal aspects are reflected through art of the unique Sino-Portuguese buildings: Chinese and Western styles, which were combined perfectly well either separately or integrated. However, without the promotion of the art as cultural heritage both at local and national levels, which, in fact, helps to revive not only antiques but also create a lucrative business, such splendor would never exist.

Indeed, when the cultural identity of the East was integrated perfectly well with the Occidental one from Europe, this reminds us of the long existence of the buildings.

However, all of these, in fact, have been newly created. For example, a lot of shop houses have been renovated with additional features to meet consumer trends, such as a coffee shop and a bakery selling only traditional desserts. Moreover, unique art features that reflect local identity and the localism trend have made the buildings more attractive to tourists.

This is also consistent with Hobsbawn and Ranger’s assertion (1983, p. 2-90). Many architectural places around the world seem to exist for a long period of time, but they, in fact, were invented or created recently to serve different purposes, such as politics and capitalism.

Actually, the term *Sino-Portuguese* is derived from the combination of two major words. *Sino* refers to Chinese, while the latter means the West. However, the use of the term *Portuguese* has caused confusing problems. In fact, the art used in both building construction and decoration is more from the English and the Dutch styles. Therefore, the term *Portuguese* does not represent all Western art. According to the study by Saykaret (2004), a definition of Chinese-Portuguese architecture used in the construction of buildings in the old town areas of Phuket is actually considered inappropriate nowadays. This is due to the fact that there have been no records of such words in the history of architecture at all; nor could they be found in any foreign documents, such as in an article by Khoo Joo Ee (1998). Interestingly, this special term was invented and used to name those old buildings that were constructed during 19th century in Thailand, particularly in Phuket. Moreover, to create a new image of being an ideal destination for both cultural tourism and natural marine beauty, the term has been popularly and widely spread to not only emphasize the actual existence of such traditional buildings but also to create public interest in ancient sites of the city.

Unfortunately, there have been many problems arising from the attempts to conserve these Sino-Portuguese shop houses, such as the lack of interest from state agencies and a refusal to cooperate by the local people. For example, a request that was made by a local administrative official to open archways in the front part of buildings for public convenience was ignored. Therefore, this can be regarded as a regional problem. Similar problems, such as holding the full right to possess areas, also occurred in Singapore, as mentioned in the work by Davison (2010, p. 22). Certain attempts made by colonial officials to keep the walking paths free from being used to display merchandise, by opening some space for walking, achieved little success. In fact, a certain period of time was needed in order to quell the uprising incident known as the “Veradah Riot of 1888.” Similarly, despite authorities’ request pertaining to setting up of numerous billboards, very few building owners cooperated. Accordingly, it seems that management by state agencies has resulted in some conflicts. Based on the study by Krutraysho and Branwall (2010, p. 670-691), both Phuket’s society and the conflicts among those who seek

business advantages are, indeed, derived from a policy of tourism promotion run by the government.

Hence, the possible conservation guidelines that have the least effect on the environment should include establishment of local historical and traditional awareness among the young generation to make them realize the true value of cultural heritage. According to Taylor (2007, p. 94), visitors to cultural landscapes could be given a sense of participation.

Most importantly, a certain approach should be established to encourage people to not only perceive but also appreciate works of art since it is regarded as one of the means to truly understand both history and relations among culture in different contexts. In addition, appreciation of art usually leads to not only self-development but also society's awareness. Indeed, the work of art helps to purify the mind and to enhance virtue. According to Galla (2012, p. 6), at present, certain wide perspectives consistent with such existing context, which focus on fairness, dignity, and happiness, are needed in developing humans. Also, to establish a learning process of conservation, positive attitude and equal fairness should be first created among people within community.

As a result, when fairness and understanding have been achieved in the community, and if the government truly takes action with sincerity, people's cooperation in construction of new buildings that are compatible with the traditional ones will be easily sought. Importantly, awareness should be established among people within the community.

Indeed, a traditional way of life belonging to a former society has been adversely affected by the modernization of Phuket city. People have become more selfish and profit-oriented but less cooperative. That is, people do not value cooperation, which used to be practiced in the past, nor do they realize the advantages of participation. In addition, there has been some doubt about assistance provided by the government as well.

Accordingly, it is essential to encourage people of the young generation to take an active part as conservationists, and this is also consistent with Puangkaew's study (2003, p. 131-132), which stated that at present, lack of transfer of knowledge or information from the old generation to the young one normally results in less appreciation or taking no interest in the past at all. Indeed, if a chance is provided to encourage people of the young generation to participate in transferring this cultural heritage, certainly, everyone will not only realize the value of conservation but also join hands in developing their hometown. Hence, the traditional uniqueness of Phuket will remain forever.

Most importantly, in Thailand, where the emphasis has been put on a wide diversity of culture, the artistic style of Sino-Portuguese shop houses has reflected not only the architectural uniqueness of Phuket city but also certain important cultural relations that are particularly beneficial for tourism. Therefore, certain development guidelines should include not only sustainability but also conservation to maintain the unique beauty, which is, in fact, derived from relationships among people of varied culture in the past.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Policy

Conservation work should be actively conducted by the government and other concerned agencies. For example, a course of conservation should be included in the education curriculum. Also, a transfer process of traditional craftsman's skills should be developed. As a result, all of these may lead to a novel art profession, a task focusing on the decoration of Sino-Portuguese buildings only. If the government sincerely takes action, certainly, public participation can be expected.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Studies

- 1) Further research should explore and focus on developing an appropriate transfer process of ancient craftsman's skills, which should also be compatible with the time. In addition, certain lost wisdom should be revived and made interestingly attractive to the new generation.
- 2) The effects of Sino-Portuguese building development projects run by the state and those that have been initiated by people in a community should be further investigated to see how they are different from each other.

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