

PHT *newsletter*

PENANG HERITAGE TRUST • PERSATUAN WARISAN PULAU PINANG

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Number 25

March 1996



Exhibition

The Art of Chai Gang Oils inspired by Chinese folklore

Tuesday 5 – Saturday 9 March 1996

10.00 am – 6.00 pm

Heritage Centre Penang

Syed Alatas Mansion, 128 Armenian Street

All PHT members are invited to the Official Opening on Monday 4 at 5.30pm at the same venue.

A percentage of the proceeds from the Exhibition will be donated to the Penang Carpenters' Guild Restoration Project.

Chai Gang studied at the Beijing Teaching College as one of only five students of Prof Chang Hung Siang and Prof Lu Chan. He then went to the prestigious Paris Art School, where he was encouraged to take up Chinese classical oil painting. A member of the China Artists Association, he is currently lecturing at Chan-Wei Teaching University.

He has been invited to take part in many important exhibitions in Beijing and Hongkong. His works, depicting scenes of Chinese folklore, has won him high praise from Jin Shang Yi, the Director of the



Central Institution of Art China, who described him as "an artist of immense talent and potential" in the tradition of realistic representation. In 1990, he won the grand prize in the First Shandong Youth Exhibition of Fine Art and Calligraphy. Many of his works have appeared in art books and magazines.

Chai Gan comes from the old city of Weifang, Shandong Province, the Chinese call the "world's kite capital". This is because Lu Pan, the patron saint of all Chinese builders, was also active there as master maker of kites.

His trip to Penang, sponsored by the Shandong government as part of its foreign cultural exchange programme, is in recognition of the historical connection between Weifang City and George Town. It is also in support of the efforts of the Penang community to restore the Loo Pun Hong or Carpenters' Guild here in Love Lane.

Restoration of the Loo Pun Hong - A Community Project Led by the Penang Heritage Trust

The Penang Heritage Trust and the Penang Carpenters' Guild have come together to form a committee to work on the project. The plan is to make the fund-raising and the actual restoration work a community effort involving not only the Trust and Guild, but also the Malaysian Architects' Association (Northern Branch), the Penang Contractors' Association, the Institute of Engineers Malaysia, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and craftsmen from China.

The restoration will include the setting up of a permanent exhibition of the Guild's antiques - gilded sedan chairs and other temple artefacts. There will also be an educational display of Chinese building science and traditions.

It is hoped that "The Art of Chai Gang" exhibition will give the fund-raising campaign a successful start.

The Historic Carpenters' Guild and Temple at Love Lane

In 1794, Francis Light wrote in a correspondence: "The Chinese residents are the most skilful carpenters, construction workers and machinery workers."

For more than 200 hundred years, craftsmen and builders from Canton have played an important part in building George Town. Their craftsmanship can best be seen in the city's Chinese, Straits Chinese, and eclectic heritage architecture. They belong mainly to the Loo Pun Hong, the historic Carpenters Guild at Love Lane. Their magnificent guild temple is dedicated to their patron saint Lu Pan.

The earliest Lu Pan association in Penang, based at 5 Penang Street, is believed to have been formed in 1851. The temple at Love Lane was built in 1865 by a contractors' association called the Northern City Guild. In 1885 the guild temple became a joint temple for the contractors' guild and a workers' guild called the Northern Lu Guild.

The lion dance and other martial arts were amongst the activities of the guild members. In 1956, the Guild put up an extravagant lion dance show to celebrate the centenary of the Municipal Council of George Town.

The temple records were destroyed during the Japanese Occupation, but some of the surviving oral history was written down during the centenary celebrations in 1954.

In the 19th century, all the carpenters and builders from China first called at the Carpenters' Guild in Penang before proceeding

to other parts of the peninsular to work. The handiwork of these craftsmen can still be seen in the magnificent Chinese temples and mansions throughout the country today. While some sojourners returned after completing their contracts, others settled here and passed on their skills, and their descendants are amongst the present members of the Carpenters' Guild.

The Carpenters' Guild at Love Lane, set up in accordance with Confucian principles, perpetuates an ancient tradition of Chinese guilds, the master-apprentice system of training.

Membership follows strict conditions. Novices, recruited in their teens, serve their masters faithfully for three years before they can be certified as full-fledged workers. A member must be a qualified craftsman and he must be prepared to honour the rules and order of the guild.

The Loo Pun Hong may be seen as a forerunner of many of today's associations formed by members of the building profession - the architects, engineers, surveyors, contractors, and carpenters.

Lu Pan, Inventor and Father of Carpentry

Lu Pan is regarded as the father of all the Chinese crafts and building trades. The many legends and historical accounts about him were compiled mainly after the Tang dynasty.

Lu Pan was born Ban Hong Shu during the "warring States period" of China in the 5th century BC. His hometown was in Lu State, in present-day Shandong province. It was only during the Ming dynasty that he became known as Duke of Lu (Lu Pan). A Ming emperor, pleased with the builders of his new palace, awarded the posthumous title to their patron saint.

At the Carpenters Guild in Penang, Lu Pan is depicted as inventor of the compass, the set square, the ruler, and the marker and thread used for inking a straight line. The invention of the plane, the chisel, the saw, the key and the water wheel are also attributed to him. A master builder and craftsman, he once sculpted a bird so lifelike it looked capable of flight.

As a military engineer, he built a warship, also an extendable ladder for scaling fortress walls. He developed the kite into a human glider and an instrument for military reconnaissance. But upon the advice of the pacifist philosopher Mencius, Lu Pan stopped making fighting machines.

Lu Pan's wife is said to have invented the collapsible umbrella. Her feast day, which falls on the 20th day of the 12 lunar month, close to the day of the winter solstice, is often celebrated with more ado than that of her husband's.



HERITAGE RIDE

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon taking a

breezy ride in a pony-cart along the 'heritage trail' yesterday.

Dr Koh was on his way to launch the Penang Heritage Centre at Armenian Street after launching the Town and Country Planning Department's diamond jubilee celebrations at Fort Cornwallis. Tailing closely behind in trishaws were State Exco members and senior government officers. —

STARpic by ASRI ABDUL GHANI

CM: State acting on heritage conservation

By LEE SOO HOON

PENANG: The state government is taking preliminary steps towards heritage conservation this year in view of the urgency and controversy over the issue in the state.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday that the state would formulate a proper heritage policy and revise the state structure plan by the end of the year.

He said the policy would be in line with the conservation enactment being drafted by the Federal Government under the revision of the Rent Control Act.

"A technical committee under the Heritage Steering Committee will draw up proper guidelines of the policy for the already identified inner city conservation zone.

"The policy will be adopted by the State Planning Committee and implemented by the Penang Municipal Council. It will be translated to local plans in about two years," he said af-

ter launching the Penang Heritage Centre at Armenian Street.

Dr Koh added that during the interim period, the Penang and Seberang Prai municipal councils would set up a conservation unit with the participation of conservation experts from Australia and France.

"We will also form a professional committee to help the local government identify and categorise buildings for conservation inside and outside the inner city conservation zone.

"The professional committee will comprise of appointed individuals concerned with heritage conservation," he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Koh said the state government was also working on guidelines to set up a heritage conservation fund.

As a start, he said, it would use the state cultural fund to receive donation to the Penang Heritage Centre.

Later, with the formulation of proper guidelines, the fund would be used for building conservation, he added.

Chong Keat: Let locals handle heritage jobs

PENANG: The criteria and inventory of local buildings of historical and architectural merit should be established by qualified local people.

Architect and urban designer Datuk Lim Chong Keat said building restoration and reconstruction work could and should be undertaken by local contractors.

"We do not require foreign experts to tell us about our heritage. Heritage work should be undertaken by local people and resources.

"Although assistance from other governments should be considered, it should not displace or undermine local initiatives and capabilities," he said at a talk on *Key Issues on Heritage, Conservation and Development* on Friday.

Lim said the experience in the specialised field would also put us in the position to export professional and construction expertise.

Contrary to recent press statements, Lim said there was no problem in identifying Penang's architectural heritage as the listings "have largely been done, especially for Georgetown" in the Penang Structure Plan 1987.

The recommended list included the St George's

Church, Suffolk House and Government House, he said, adding that major clanhouses, temples, mosques, government buildings such as Bel Retiro, Crag Hotel and Udini House should also be considered.

"Negotiation, consent and the offer of incentives are preferred to drastic or bullying tactics for conserving privately owned buildings," he said, adding that over enthusiastic pressure groups would create antagonism and resentment.

The government, he said, should hold dialogues to ascertain the opinions of those affected and also to reach popular consent on conservation.

Direct cause of heritage erosion, he said, arose from the ad-hoc approval of higher densities and conversion of use, which were incompatible with traditional area.

"If you approve a 36-storey development, you can hardly hope to direct that its two-storey neighbours should also be conserved," he said.

The talk was jointly organised by Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia (Northern Chapter), Penang Housing Developers Association and Penang Ratepayers Association.

Wednesday 31 January '96

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Penang draws up heritage policy

By M. Sahibullah

THE newly-formed Penang Heritage Steering Committee is currently formulating a comprehensive heritage policy and set of guidelines with a view to incorporating them in the structural plans for the State's two local councils.

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said since the structure plans would be reviewed to make them consistent with the Federal enactment, this would give the State the opportunity to incorporate the heritage policy and guidelines into its structure plans and subsequently into the local plans.

He said the Federal Government was presently formulating a heritage enactment in conjunction with the repeal of the Rent Control Act.

Koh, who is also chairman of the Heritage Steering Committee, said the committee had set up a technical committee comprising professionals such as planners, architects and developers who are interested in heritage and conservation, to assess and evaluate buildings in the State which should be conserved.

Speaking to reporters after opening the Penang Heritage Centre at the restored Syed Alatas mansion in Lebuah Armenian recently, Koh said, to date, the committee had already identified and demarcated the inner city area of Lebuah Acheen and Lebuah Armenian as Penang's cultural heritage zone.

He said once the committee had formulated the guidelines and policy, it would submit it to the State Planning Committee which would in turn issue a directive to the Penang Island Municipal Council (MPPP) and Seberang Prai Municipal Council (MPSP) to implement the guidelines in the redevelopment of rent control premises or old buildings.

"This will enable the two councils to incorporate conservation and heritage aspects into their guidelines for the redevelopment of such premises during the interim period while waiting for implementation of more comprehensive guidelines after the Federal heritage enactment has been passed and gazetted."

He said the next step would be to translate the guidelines into the local

plans, adding that the local plan for the Lebuah Acheen and Lebuah Armenian heritage zone was expected to be ready in two years.

Koh said Penang's reason for taking such preliminary steps was consistent with the Federal Government's enactment to incorporate conservation and heritage aspects into the redevelopment of rent control premises after the repeal of the Rent Control Act.

Earlier, in his opening speech, Koh said the committee had also resolved for both the MPPP and MPSP to each set up a conservation unit as both have provisions in their constitution to establish the post of a conservation planner or architect.

"As we currently do not have that many local professional experts in this field, we hope to resolve this by seeking assistance from either the French, Australian or German governments to supply conservation planners or architects to fill the post on a Government-to-Government basis."

Earlier, pro-tem committee chairman of the Penang Heritage Centre, Tengku Iduara Tengku Askandar, described the State Government's move to demarcate

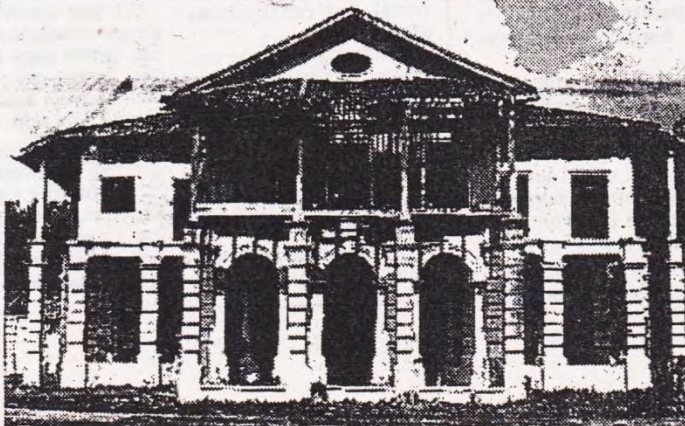
the Lebuah Acheen and Lebuah Armenian area as a conservation, cultural and heritage zone as being highly appropriate and significant considering that it was in this area that town planning started in the country some 75 years ago.

She said since the centre opened last June, various programmes such as seminars, talks and discussions on conservation issues had been held with encouraging results, indicating growing interest among Penang folk in such matters.

"Later, we hope to organise more seminars and training programmes on conservation and restoration of old buildings, especially for local contractors and developers, with the primary aim of increasing their awareness on the need to conserve and restore some of the old buildings in the State."

Also present at the ceremony were State Assembly Speaker Datuk Yahaya Abdul Hamid, State Executive Councillors Dr Sak Cheng Lum, Kee Phaik Cheen, Abdul Latiff Mirasa, Koay Kar Huah and Dr K. Rajapathy, State Secretary Datuk Mohd Nor Abdul Rahim and French ambassador Edouard Braine.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PRE-WAR BUILDINGS BY STATE



State	Total (%)
Johor	2,323 (11.2%)
Kedah	1,282 (6.12%)
Kelantan	373 (1.8%)
Kuala Lumpur	1,763 (8.4%)
Melaka	2,177 (10.5%)
N. Sembilan	999 (4.8%)
Panang	831 (4.0%)
Perak	3,351 (16.1%)
Perlis	25 (0.1%)
P.Pinang	5,057 (24.3%)
Sabah	10 (0.05%)
Sarawak	1,010 (4.9%)
Selangor	1,166 (5.6%)
Terengganu	420 (2.0%)
Total	20,876 (100%)

Source: Kajian Inventori Warisan Senibina Malaysia, 1992/93

SATURDAY February 3 1996 THE STAR



Khairiah ... 'maximum fine is RM100,000'

Saving trees and old buildings under Act

By LEE SOO HOON

PENANG: The amended Town and Country Planning Act 1995 has adopted new provisions to ensure that future development in the country conforms with environment and building conservation requirements.

Federal Town and Country Planning Department research-unit assistant director Khairiah Talha said the provisions included preservation of trees and natural topography, provision of open spaces and conservation of historical buildings.

Focusing on building conservation, she said the amended Act would give power to the local authority to identify buildings with historical and architectural values for the local plan.

She added that contravention of the local authority's decision would carry a maximum fine of RM100,000.

On the other hand, the Act also requires developers with projects near heritage buildings must show justification for their development proposals and layout plans, she said.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1995

Amendments to the 1976 Act

Khairiah was giving a talk on the Act's implications on heritage conservation at the Penang Heritage Centre at Armenian Street yesterday.

Saying that the Act would affect the structure and local plan, she added that it was up to the various states to decide when to implement it.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon had said last month that Penang would be the first state to implement the Act in April.

On environment, Khairiah said the Act has also defined open spaces in detail because in the past developers have used open spaces meant for community needs for building projects.

Penang Housing Developers Association chairman Eddy Choong who was also present, expressed support for the Act.

However, he stressed that it should also take into consideration the constitutional rights of the landowner whose house had been identified for conservation.

He said the government must ensure that it had enough manpower to enforce to Act before implementing it.

January 18, 1996

Penang to lead in adopting changes to Act

PENANG: Penang will be the first state to implement the Town and Country Planning (Amendments) Act 1995, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday.

He said the local authorities were studying the amendments and would implement them by April 1.

Describing 1996 as the *Year of Planning* for the state, Dr Koh said the revision of the Penang Draft Structure Plan was expected to be completed by year end.

He added that seven local plans — for Penang Hill, Tanjung Tokong, Tanjung Bungah, Batu Ferringhi, Teluk Bahang, Bukit Mertajam and Butterworth — would also be put up for public exhibition and hearing with the revised structure plan.

Dr Koh was speaking at the launching of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Town and Country Planning Services Department. Penang is the first state in the country to be involved in town planning when it set up the Committee of Assessors in 1801.

Describing Penang's early start in planning as "both fortunate and unfortunate," he said the state's rapid development had resulted in land constraints and other problems.

"Penang is today the focus of controversies like heritage conservation versus development, the balance between development and the environment, worsening traffic in George Town and the housing issue," he said.

Dr Koh urged the relevant government departments involved in planning to adopt a pro-active approach in anticipating problems and a positive one in solving them.

Need for fair listing procedures

LOCAL Government Department director-general Datuk Lim Boh Ang says additional legislation to promote conservation of Malaysia's heritage architecture is necessary and it should aim at doing a listing of such structures.

To do a listing is to enter the buildings under discussion into a legal register which has to be done by law. What this means, explains Lim, is that "owners of listed buildings will not be allowed to demolish or alter their buildings without the permission of the authorities."

At the same time owners of listed buildings may be persuaded not to bulldoze or interfere with the character of a heritage building or area if incentives are given to them.

But what sort of approach should Malaysia adopt? As Universiti Sains Malaysia's Dr A. Ghafar Ahmad says: "It is important that listing procedures are seen to be fair and impersonal yet achieve control over areas and buildings considered important in this context."

He adds that experience throughout the world has shown that listing may have social and political repercussions as well as architectural significance.

Ten years ago, it was proposed at a Badan Warisan-organised seminar that the provisions for the listing of buildings should be modelled along the British line after which the Malaysian planning system is closely patterned. At the same time the successes and failures of other countries should also be studied.

A plan to bring in further legislation to defend Malaysia's heritage structures and sites has been discussed by many. No date has been set for its introduction but Lim says the act is now being drafted by his department.

"The intended legislation," adds Lim, "is to provide protection to traditional architecture and historically significant areas not covered by the Antiquities Act 1976 which only looks after ancient monuments at least 100



GHAFAR
...repercussions

years old and historical sites which have been declared as such."

Aside from the deficiency of the Antiquities Act 1976 there are, as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Syed Zainol Abidin Aidid puts it, "loose provisions within a few other acts such as the Local Government Act 1976 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 which are almost meaningless in terms of their effectiveness to protect historic buildings and those of architectural and cultural import without proper interpretation."

The Town and Country Planning Act 1976 requires that anybody wanting to develop or re-develop an area must first obtain planning approval from the relevant authority which can impose conditions on any development proposed.

The authority can also revoke a planning approval if it is found that the development work carried out is not in conformity with what is allowed.

Even though Section 19 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 prohibits the development or demolition of buildings without the authority's permission, the penalty — even with the increase following the recent amendment — is hardly a deterrent. Violaters could now be asked to pay a maximum fine of RM\$100,000, up

from RM\$50,000 previously.

"What a pity," laments a conservationist. "The increased penalty should have been RM1 million if the idea is really to deter."

In the case of a building that has been razed illegally the owner may be required to reconstruct the building to its original state.

Moreover, under the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974, the local authority may not entertain or approve a plan for a building intending to replace the levelled one.

The saga of Penang's Metropole Hotel (built in 1900) which was unlawfully torn down on Christmas Day three years ago amply illustrates the precarious state in which old buildings find themselves in.

Shortly after its wrecking, owner Dolphin Square Sdn Bhd was served notice to rebuild the hotel to its original form but since then it has been given two extensions but two years have passed and there is no sign of the hotel being rebuilt.

Dolphin Square Sdn Bhd was convicted and fined a minuscule RM10,000. Following an appeal by the Penang Municipal Council, the amount was raised to RM\$50,000.

But as Lim opines, "despite the deterrence in existing legislations there is no guarantee that an owner will not demolish a building or carry out work in the plot of land on which sits his heritage property."

Lim hints that through the new legislation the authorities "could be thinking of providing some incentives" to owners of heritage properties, and, one way could be the creation of a fund "to assist owners to preserve their old buildings".

Since heritage is a community concern, "no one individual should be asked to shoulder the burden of conservation alone," says Lim.

Only two weeks ago, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon announced that Penang plans to set up a fund to buy or renovate old buildings for heritage conservation.

Echoing the view of many, Syed Zainol wants the new law to consider a whole neighbourhood, places, roads and community for conservation and not just individual buildings of historic or cultural significance as is the case now.

Says he: "Take Jalan Tan Cheng Lock and Jalan Hang Jebat both of which are in Malacca. It is pointless to conserve just one building in the area when the whole streetscape is made up of an assortment of structures."

Happily, he adds, the Malacca Municipal Council has initiated a plan to conserve the entire site based on a study by Badan Warisan Malaysia.

Says Lim: "When you talk about a row of buildings you are talking about a whole community with its social and economic life and it is important to conserve that as well."

Insufficient legislation as well as evolving a suitable method of discovering and recording the country's traditional buildings and historic zones are only part of the problems affecting heritage conservation here.

That Malaysia lacks technical knowledge in repairing and maintaining old buildings is borne by the fact that some conservation attempts have proved to be disastrous.

"There are few skilled labourers and technical experts in conservation methods and techniques," says Ghafar.

"This is a major problem because almost all conservation work involves both repair and maintenance requiring understanding and analysis of building defects among other things."

While waiting for the new law on architectural protection to be enforced — which Syed Zainol predicts would take a while — he says "conservation work can still be carried out within the confines of the present planning mechanism."

Urgently needed are conservation guidelines and, he says, "planners in local authorities should initiate their preparation and incorporate them in their local plans." — By Faezah Ismail