

Historical value of old schools

SLICE OF HISTORY: Apart from traditional heritage buildings, homes, shophouses and historical structures, educational institutions with heritage values are also affected by our extraordinary economic growth and development. The recent furore over Jalan Sultan and Petaling Street arising from land acquisition to facilitate the development of the new MRT Sungai Buloh – Kajang line demonstrates this amply.

SMJK Confucian is one of six schools in the Jalan Sultan area possibly being affected by the MRT expansion project. It was established in 1906 and is the first Chinese school in Peninsula Malaysia.

Kok Kim Tong, Executive Advisor to the Board of Governor, SMJK Confucian talks to NST RED on the heritage status of schools.

RED: Any particular features in SMJK Confucian that make it stand out as a heritage building?

Kok: The present school building was completed in 1922 and is now 90 years old.

The architectural design of the school building simulated the Beijing Style Quadrangle Courtyard style. Surrounding four sides of the quadrangular building are the classrooms with two flanking courtyards. It also

has the typical 'kaki lima' or veranda at the front of the building with the main door looking down at the bustling Jalan Sultan and Petaling Street. The whole building manifests the eastern virtues of simplicity and practicality. Through its long service of educating the nation, the school building has intrinsic historical, cultural and traditional values. It is the only existing historical architecture design of this nature in Malaysia.

RED: What are the relationships between academics/school administrators and developers/urban planners/government agencies in the preservation of heritage buildings?

Kok: In the preservation of heritage buildings, the school administrators, developers, urban planners and government agencies should forge a strategic partnership and create a win-win solution when confronting any issues. Stakeholders would then have a vested interest and will stand to benefit from the successful conservation of heritage buildings. As a result, each stakeholder would play their role effectively and efficiently in the planning and implementation of the conservation of heritage buildings.

RED: What is the level of awa-



SMJK Confucian school *before (during the 70s) and after (inset - current) conservation works.*

reness in students about the importance of heritage building and preservation?

Kok: Frankly, there is a serious information gap and lack of awareness. Students need to know more about the importance of heritage buildings, especially schools and their preserva-

on. However, the old boys of the school are very much aware and concerned about preservation.

Relevant knowledge of heritage buildings could be imparted to students within the school curriculum. For example, specialists and experts can be invited to give lectures during

history classes. This role can gradually be assumed by the teachers of the respective schools concerned. The students should at least be taught the multiple heritage values, which include the historical, educational and social-economical values of the heritage schools that they are studying in.