



Pierpaolo De Giosa

World Heritage and Urban Politics in Melaka, Malaysia

A Cityscape below the Winds

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| ADUN | <i>Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri</i> ('Member of the State Legislative Assembly') |
| AMANAH | National Trust Party (<i>Parti Amanah Nasional</i>) |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BERSATU | Malaysian United Indigenous Party (<i>Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia</i>) |
| DAP | Democratic Action Party (<i>Parti Tindakan Demokratik</i>) |
| Exco | State Executive Council (<i>Majlis Mesyuarat Kerajaan Negeri</i>) |
| HIA | Heritage Impact Assessment |
| ICCROM | International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property |
| ICOMOS | International Council on Monuments and Sites |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| JICA | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| JKKB | Urban Development and Security Committee (<i>Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Bandar</i>) |
| JKKK | Village Development and Security Committee (<i>Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung</i>) |
| LEAP | Integrated Community Development and Cultural Heritage Site Preservation through Local Effort in Asia and the Pacific (Local Effort Asia and Pacific) |
| MBMB | Melaka Historic City Council (<i>Majlis Bandaraya Melaka Bersejarah</i>) |
| MCA | Malaysian Chinese Association |
| MIC | Malaysian Indian Congress |
| NatCom | National Commission for UNESCO |
| NEP | New Economic Policy |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| OUV | Outstanding Universal Value |
| OWHC | Organization of World Heritage Cities |
| PAM | Malaysian Institute of Planners (<i>Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia</i>) |
| PAS | Malaysian Islamic Party (<i>Parti Islam Se-Malaysia</i>) |
| PERZIM | Melaka Museum Corporation (<i>Perbadanan Muzium Melaka</i>) |
| PKR | People's Justice Party (<i>Parti Keadilan Rakyat</i>) |
| SOC | state of conservation |



SPVMT Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple
UMNO United Malays National Organisation
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization



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Starter: Into a World Heritage City

You have to wait until night falls, and then walk silently along the walls, climb up one of the hills and sit quietly on the old stones, and you will hear it. It is almost a whisper, like the breeze, but you hear it all the same: the voice of history. Malacca is like that: full of dead. And the dead whisper. They whisper in Chinese, in Portuguese, in Dutch, in Malay, in English, some even in Italian, others in languages no one speaks anymore. But it hardly matters: the stories told by the dead of Malacca no longer interest anyone.

Malacca, on the west coast of Malaysia, is a city freighted with the past, soaked in blood and sown with bones. It is an extraordinary city where half the world's races have met, fought, loved and reproduced; where different religions have come together, tolerated each other and integrated; where the interest of great empires have struggled for primacy; and where today modernity and progress are pitilessly suffocating all diversity, all conflict, in torrents of cement, to create that bland uniformity in which the majority seem to feel at home.

– Tiziano Terzani, *A Fortune-Teller Told Me: Earthbound Travels in the Far East* (2002)

The World Heritage site of Melaka consists of a core area, the World Heritage property, of 45.3 hectares in the historic city centre, surrounded by a buffer zone of 242.8 hectares. When the Italian journalist Tiziano Terzani visited Malaysia in the early 1990s, Melaka was not yet included in the prestigious World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). At that time, however, the historical charm of its downtown and the ongoing urbanization changing its surroundings were perhaps anticipating its future international fame in the tourism industry. In this book, I explore the social and cultural processes of heritage designations in this Malaysian city with a particular focus on the effects of the World Heritage recognition obtained in 2008. Terzani was probably writing about one of the two hills that extends above what is today Melaka's World Heritage site. One is Bukit Cina ('Chinese Hill'), which is

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located in the buffer zone – the area that adds a further layer of protection to the World Heritage property. With hundreds of graves, it is believed to be one of the largest Chinese cemeteries outside China, although one can also spot some Malay Muslim tombstones. Bukit Cina is a quiet place, the largest green space downtown, popular among joggers. Those who make their way down the hill, just next to Poh San Teng Temple, will find one of the oldest monuments of Malaysia, a water well called Perigi Raja ('King's Well'), allegedly built in the fifteenth century. It has since become known as Hang Li Po's Well. According to legend, Sultan Mansur Shah built the well for Hang Li Po, a princess sent by the Chinese emperor to become his spouse. Today, it is mostly used as a wishing well by tourists. By throwing coins into the well, they hope to return to Melaka one day.

If one leaves Bukit Cina and walks south, one will encounter the Gurdwara Sahib, a temple established by local Sikhs in the 1920s. Then, passing through a few rows of old shops and townhouses, one will reach another graveyard called the Dutch Cemetery (although most of those buried there are former British administrators). This graveyard is at the foot of the other hill of the World Heritage site, the famous St. Paul's Hill. Perhaps, when Terzani (2002: 137) visited Melaka in the early 1990s, it was easier to hear the 'voice of history'. The designation of the area as a World Heritage site has turned this hill into a crowded tourist spot, especially at weekends and during public holidays. But those who climb the hill still have the chance to hear the whispers of the past, sometimes accompanied by the tunes of a local busker playing his guitar inside St. Paul's Church. This unroofed church, built by the Portuguese in 1521 and originally named *Nossa Senhora da Anunciada* (Our Lady of the Annunciation), stands at the summit of St. Paul's Hill. There are many more tombstones within this ruined church, especially those of Dutch settlers. A statue of St. Francis Xavier stands a few metres away, missing a hand (the body of the Jesuit missionary was temporarily buried in this church before it was shipped to Goa in 1553). St. Paul's Hill has been the seat of several powers, from the Malay sultanate to the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the postcolonial local administration. The hill formed the core of a Portuguese fort called A Famosa (The Famous) which was subsequently destroyed by the British. The only part that was spared and that still stands is a gate, the Porta de Santiago. Many other colonial buildings are located on the hill and its immediate surroundings. In the seventeenth century the Dutch built the colonial governor's residence on this hill. It served as the Seri Melaka (house of local governors) until 1996. In the 1960s, the local government built the former seat of the Melaka State Legislative Assembly next to it. The hill is surrounded by many other colonial

Figure A St. Paul's Church



Author's photo, 2011

Figure B Statue of St. Francis Xavier



Author's photo, 2011

Figure C Porta de Santiago



Author's photo, 2011

buildings, such as the old Melaka Islamic Religious Council (*Majlis Agama Islam Melaka*, originally built by the Dutch as a residence) and the Bastion House, built in 1910 by the British, formerly the headquarters of the Dunlop Rubber Company.

On the southern foot of the hill, near the Porta de Santiago and the old Dutch Cemetery, there are more buildings that remind us of the crucial role this former port town has played in history (some are well preserved, others are more recent reconstructions). A two-storey wooden replica of the palace of Sultan Mansur Shah, destroyed by the Portuguese, was constructed in the 1980s. It seems that the past of the glorious sultanate has been erased after the conquest. But the replica of the Sultanate Palace is an attempt to dig into this past. From here, the visitor would easily spot a gyro tower taller than 100 metres named Taming Sari, after the legendary *kris* (a ceremonial blade) wielded by Hang Tuah – the most famous of the sultan's admirals. The former Malacca Club, built in the early twentieth century, stands with two golden onion domes nearby. Along with the esplanade that used to be down the hill, the Malacca Club was the main venue for social gatherings among Europeans. The area, then called Coronation Park (in honour of Queen Elizabeth II), later became a favourite playground among Melakans. In the past, St. Paul's Hill faced the sea, and it was possible to see the pier. Since the last century, land reclamation has pushed the sea further away. Just a few metres away from the Porta de Santiago, one can enter the Dataran Pahlawan Melaka Megamall, a shopping complex named after its location. It was previously a *padang* (Malay for 'field') known as *Padang Pahlawan* (Heroes' Square). In 1956, this was the place where the independence of Malaysia was announced for the first time.

Quite unexpectedly, the atmosphere of St. Paul's Hill stops at its foot, announced by the loud music coming from the trishaws (*becak*) that transport tourists around the World Heritage site. (Many have added modern sound systems to their traditional trishaws, nowadays overdecorated with Hello Kitty- or Doraemon-like images that attract tourists.) Trishaws ride back and forth from this area to the Melaka River. A row of red buildings will lead to a roundabout, better known as the Dutch Square (colloquially referred to as Red Square). Here two landmarks stand out. The Stadthuys (former Dutch Town Hall) was built in the middle of the seventeenth century. Next to it, in the eighteenth century, the Dutch built Christ Church to celebrate the centenary of their occupation. These two buildings were originally painted in white, but the British repainted them in red. Today red is the colour of history in Melaka. Many Melakans call the Stadthuys *bangunan merah* ('red building'). At the centre of the square a fountain dedicated



Figure D Tourists posing in the Dutch Square. In the background: The Stadthuys, Tan Beng Swee Clock Tower, and Queen Victoria Fountain



Author's photo, 2013

to Queen Victoria stands close to Tan Beng Swee Clock Tower. The latter was built in 1886, but its architectural style blends harmoniously with the surrounding buildings. The historical aura of the Dutch Square meets more recent additions. A replica of a Dutch windmill stands just in front of the Stadthuys. Hordes of tourists pose for pictures in front of it. The addition of a sign reading 'I Love Melaka' is also appealing in this regard. One's eye will probably fall on the reconstructed Bastion Middleburg, part of the old fort the Dutch added to the Portuguese walls before the destruction ordered by the British. From the Dutch Square, one can also spot other recent renditions of Melaka's past: a replica of the Melaka Sultanate Water Wheel, along the river, and a replica of the *Flor de la Mar*, the galleon with which Portuguese general Afonso de Albuquerque conquered Melaka in 1511.

St. Paul's Hill and the Dutch Square constitute only part of the World Heritage site, the section usually referred to as the old civic area. The Melaka River divides it from the other part of the old settlement. The river played a vital role in the commercial life of this former trade hub. Today, however, there are no boats except those of the Melaka River Cruise: onboard, passengers either snap pictures or wave their hands to greet those onshore. By crossing the Tan Kim Seng Bridge from the old civic zone, one will reach the other side of the World Heritage site, the old residential-cum-commercial

zone. Arguably no area in downtown Melaka is more crowded than here, especially at weekends during the famous Jonker Walk night market. Here the townscape turns into a harmonious grid of streets with lines of historical shophouses and townhouses. Most of them have been turned into hotels, guest houses, bars, eateries, and souvenir shops. But the old charm of the area can be still felt when one gazes at the antique shops, ancestral residences, Chinese clan associations, old artisans' workshops as well as more recent artists' studios. Jalan Hang Jebat and Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock – still better known with their old Dutch names, Jonker Street and Heeren Street – are perhaps the best spots to admire these examples of vernacular architecture, where Western elements meet the East. Typically buildings with narrow façades of one to three stories high, shophouses and townhouses are lined one after the other along rows on both sides of the streets. Whitewashed walls pair with other pastel-coloured shophouses. Colourful frescoes blend with stucco panels, auspicious Chinese calligraphy, Malay-inspired floral motifs, Corinthian columns, Venetian windows, Art Deco, and sometimes modern murals, a chaotic mosaic of world styles harmonized under the same tiled sloping roofscape.

But harmony is not merely confined to these building types. In between these old shophouses and townhouses there are also many places of worship that flesh out a multi-ethnic and multi-religious urban fabric. (There are additional sacred spaces, such as the mausoleums, or *makam*, attributed to two legendary warriors from the sultanate period, Hang Jebat and Hang Kasturi.) It is no coincidence that a row in this area was recently named Harmony Street. Here a series of places of worship stand in line – a few of them are among the oldest consecrated spaces in Malaysia. First, one will encounter the Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple, built in 1781 on a plot of land granted by the Dutch to a local Hindu leader. Dedicated to the elephant-headed god Ganesha, this place of worship is believed to be one of the oldest functioning Hindu temples in Malaysia. A few steps away, one will spot a minaret beside a green pyramidal roof with a lotus-like pinnacle at the top. This is the Kampung Kling Mosque. It was originally a wooden structure when it was allegedly built by Indian Muslim traders in the eighteenth century. It was rebuilt in brick a century later. The shape of the roof and other architectural features makes this mosque one of the oldest in the nation. (The Kampung Hulu Mosque is not far away. It features a similar pyramidal roof and pinnacle, and is another of the oldest Muslim places of worship still functioning in the country.) Walking further along Harmony Street, one will eventually arrive at the Cheng Hoon Teng

Figure E A view of historical shophouses and townhouses from Bastion Middleburg



Author's photo, 2011

Temple. Believed to be the oldest functioning Chinese temple in Malaysia, it plays a crucial role in the practice of the Three Doctrinal Systems of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. The temple has undergone several additions and restorations, but it has been located on this site since the seventeenth century.

Most of the buildings and streets in the two areas described above are visited every day by tourists, but heritage does not end at the boundaries of the World Heritage site. Beautifully restored shophouses and townhouses – some of them dilapidated, but old and charming nonetheless – exist beyond the buffer zone. Additionally, places of worship such as Tengkeri Mosque on Tengkeri Street, further west from the old residential area, and St. Peter's Church on the northern side of the historic city centre, the oldest functioning Roman Catholic church of the country, equal the venerability of religious places within the World Heritage site. Other important historical areas are the so-called 'heritage villages': low-rise centuries-old neighbourhoods, such as Kampung Morten with its traditional Malay wooden houses in the middle of the city, Kampung Chetti, which is also rich in vernacular architecture, especially in regard to its Hindu temples and shrines, and the Portuguese Settlement, where Eurasian residents disseminate the history of Melaka from the era when the East met the West.

Figure F Kampung Kling Mosque

Author's photo, 2011

Figure G Cheng Hoon Teng Temple

Author's photo, 2011

Mr. Sham, a Singapore-born Malay trishaw driver in his 60s, used to see heritage everywhere in these areas. He once told me, 'It is heritage *lah*, everywhere here!' In this book, however, I am not merely dealing with 'things', but rather with the social and cultural processes unfolding around the making of heritage. 'There is, really, no such thing as heritage,' Laurajane Smith (2006: 11) warns us. This understanding of the concept of heritage is now a pillar of the multidisciplinary field known as critical heritage studies. Rather than a 'thing', heritage is 'a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present' (Smith 2006: 2). Different shades of heritage emerge in this process of remembering and the construction of meaning around the past in the present. If one strolls with Mr. Sham along the streets of Old Melaka, heritage will appear at every step. (He used the English word 'heritage' interchangeably with the Malay term *warisan*.) He knew many stories and had a word for everything. With a plate of *nasi lemak* (he loved this local fragrant rice dish) for lunch, even food becomes tradition (*tradisi*). His trishaw was heritage, too, *pusaka*, because he inherited it from his father. *Sejarah* ('history') and *adat* ('customs') emerge from every building and place of worship. Passing the Stadthuys he would say it is one of the oldest buildings in town, a 'colonial legacy' (*peninggalan penjajah*). He even had stories about buildings that were long gone. 'History that has come back to life' (*Satu sejarah hidup kembali*) was his description of the replica of the Sultanate Palace – the new building, not the original one destroyed during the Portuguese conquest. These are all things that are *turun-menurun* ('passed down from generation to generation'). According to Mr. Sham, the individual buildings and the entire area represent something that needs respect. 'Cannot mess with it' (*Tak boleh kacau-kacaukan*). In this book I try to explore these shades of heritage.

Note on Language(s)

Mr. Sham's words are in the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*, the *Bahasa Kebangsaan*, literally 'National Language', alternately referred to by officialdom as *Bahasa Melayu* or *Bahasa Malaysia*). This book contains many Malay words. Melaka, however, is inhabited by a truly cosmopolitan and code-switching society, and this research is filled with several words from other languages. Thus, when I am not referring to Malay, I will inform the reader of the language being used. Rather than a note on transcription, as is often the custom in academic books, my approach is intended to be



consistent with what is heard in Melaka. I follow a more conventional way for languages with standardized orthography that are taught in the so-called vernacular schools, the non-Malay-medium schools. For Mandarin, I follow the official Hanyu Pinyin orthographic system. For Tamil, I follow the orthographic guidelines of the Madras University Tamil Lexicon. There are, however, many other words from non-standardized languages which are widely spoken in Melaka, without forgetting Manglish (or Malaysian English): from Melakan slang to local creoles such as Baba Malay, Chetti Malay, the Portuguese-based Kristang as well as other diaspora languages like Hokkien. In these cases, I will use transcriptions (mostly anglicized and Malaynized) that are as close as possible to colloquial everyday jargon. I also retain the Manglish particle *lah*, which is often used to express emphasis at the end of a sentence.

