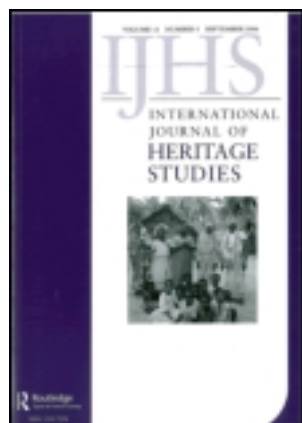


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Multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and making heritage in Malaysia: a view from the historic cities of the Straits of Malacca

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Based on the 'universal' values of economic development, democratic governance and cultural diversity promoted by UNESCO, the official policy of the Federation of Malaysia, known as *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020), promotes modernization with an emphasis on democracy, tolerance, culture and economic development, and asserts the multicultural character of Malaysian society while upholding the peaceful coexistence of its three largest communities (Malays, Chinese and Indians). The joint inscription of the two historic Straits cities of Melaka and George Town on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2008 was a reaffirmation of that policy. Our study illustrates the construction of this social model through the heritage process which was based on the tangible as well as the intangible heritage of the different ethnic groups that make up the Malaysian nation. Dubbed the 'Rainbow Nation' by the British during the colonial era, postcolonial Malaysia has reappropriated the label to construct its present and future identity. We focus on the agency of civil society activists, government officials and international experts in the process that mobilised, in turn, the values of nationalism and internationalism, communitarianism and multiculturalism, and universalism and cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: anthropology; multiculturalism; UNESCO; heritage; Malaysia

Introduction

Since UNESCO's 1972 convention on tangible heritage, which saw a steady rise in the number of natural, archaeological and architectural sites on a World Heritage List that for the most part pertains to countries in the northern hemisphere, many debates and demands have resulted in the formulation and the implementation of a new convention relating to intangible heritage. Calls for such a convention came primarily from countries of the global South, and from Asia in particular, who maintained that heritage could not be conceived of outside of the living culture and those who bear it. This was confirmed as policy by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage which was inspired, notably, by the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity (Smith and Akagawa 2009). Among the 135 countries that have signed the convention, intangible cultural heritage is now being intensively inventoried in order to make it visible (Labadi and Long 2010).

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The new configuration poses a number of questions to the anthropologist who is confronted with new issues and claims around culture – a key concept whose use and definition remain problematic within this discipline (Erikson 2001) – questions such as: What are the limits? On what conditions can a tradition be authenticated? Is there a transcultural reality? Other questions follow: In the globalised context, what is the connection between local cultural practices and the universal values promoted by UNESCO (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006)? What are the risks of reifying these practices (Smith 2006)? What agency do the various actors possess (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004)? And finally, what are the articulations that occur between nationalism and internationalism, and between modernism and cosmopolitanism?

This article looks at these various questions through a case study of Malaysia's (2008) Nomination Dossier, which proposed the addition of two historic cities on the Straits of Malacca to UNESCO's World Heritage List. The nomination file is emblematic on at least four counts. First, it joins George Town and Melaka,¹ the respective capitals of the states of Penang and Melaka in the Federation of Malaysia. Second, it represents Malaysia's first cultural site to be listed as part of the world's heritage.² Third, the dual candidacy highlights the government's vision of a Malaysian nation composed of three principal groups: Malays, Chinese and Indians.³ And finally, through our analysis of the discourses and the practices of the various actors, it allows us to illustrate the articulation between the particular and the universal, and to follow the transition from the level of city, region and state to that of international institutions like UNESCO and ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites).

Our analysis compares elements from the nomination file with communal realities that we observed at the two sites in the context of ethnographic research that we have been conducting regularly since 2006. To this end, we bring to bear various sources (regional, national and international documentation, press reports, brochures and leaflets, and academic literature) along with our own observations of and interviews with players involved in heritage protection and management (officials, civil society activists, and the local population). Wherever necessary, we specify the connections we are making between the diverse contexts of expression in public discourse and written sources, and our observation of practices on-site. This variation in the scope of the analysis, ranging between the local and the global, allows us to bring out the refurbishing of local realities that took place in the process of generating a candidate file that reproduces the national ideology of a Malaysian Federation, 'living in harmony and full and fair partnership'.⁴

The analysis also allows us to focus on the making of multiculturalism in the principal site of our field research, George Town, where UNESCO's evolving conceptualization of heritage played a not insignificant role. Our aim is to understand the agency of the parties on the ground as well as the issues that bring them together in political, economic and symbolic competition. Three examples in particular will illustrate our proposition and demonstrate differences concerning the representation of heritage that do exist between George Town and Melaka despite their joint candidacy. These examples allow us to interrogate the values on which the universalist ideology of UNESCO is founded as well as its implications for cultures on the ground, notably its local reinterpretations.

The UNESCO nomination file: making heritage in the Straits of Malacca

The two cities on the Straits of Malacca were jointly placed on the World Heritage List under UNESCO's (1972) Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.⁵ The federal state played an essential role in combining their cultural heritage which it believes represents its vision of a Malaysia long involved in an open network of international contacts and exchange – especially through the Straits – and which it seeks to consolidate through its current political, economic and cultural programmes. Malaysia's (2008) Nomination Dossier affirms a clear convergence between the federal state's official political philosophy (known by the name *Wawasan 2020* or Vision 2020) and 'universal' values of the same order promoted by UNESCO.

Drawn up in 1991 by then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, *Wawasan 2020* is the ideological expression of a modern Malaysia that emphasises democracy, religious tolerance, the richness of its cultural values, economic development, internationalism and multiculturalism.⁶ In the view of federal and regional officials, the inscription of the two historic cities of Melaka and George Town on the World Heritage List would help Malaysia to become an 'intelligent and well-formed society' and serve as 'a formidable force' to prevent any negative developments (Jamil 1998).

Analysis of the nomination file shows the deliberate inscription of the region in a long history. Under the authority of the federal government, the editors of the file trace the harmony between the communities composing the Malaysian nation into the distant past. They show that Melaka has had five centuries of contact with the West through a succession of colonial empires (Portuguese, Dutch, and lastly, British beginning in 1824) and several waves of immigration. Penang's history is shown to be shorter, a little more than two centuries dating from the British founding of George Town in 1786. Under the British in the late eighteenth century, Melaka and George Town became the two most important commercial ports on the Straits route linking Europe to China via the Indian subcontinent. As such, they were important destinations for migrants from all over Southeast Asia, but primarily from China (see e.g. Furnivall 1956, Giordano 2004), which is borne out by the present composition of the population.⁷ According to the nomination file, the presence of significant Chinese and Indian communities that maintain constant contact with their respective diasporas constitutes a de facto multiculturalism that is constantly being replenished in the two historic cities. A prominent feature of the nomination file is its emphasis on the ethnic particularities of the different groups, along with the existence of common languages that transcend ethnic boundaries, in effect an active syncretism. Here we find the idea of a harmonious multicultural society which the world is invited, via the World Heritage List, to visit, admire and appreciate.

In support of the joint candidacy of George Town and Melaka, the nomination file also underlines the broader aspect of the Straits as a spice route and the site of Western commercial trading posts (Malaysia 2008, p. 124), which takes in the cities of Singapore and Phuket as well. This broader view serves as a supplementary argument for the appropriateness of the candidacy in as much as it tracks with UNESCO's interest in multiplying the world heritage of 'roads' and 'routes' for slaves, silk and spices.⁸

The Street of Harmony: making multiculturalism in Penang

The making of multiculturalism in Penang actually began some 20 years ago, with a new interest in several aspects of its architecture and history, its cultural, religious

and culinary activities and its traditional crafts. The movement was strongly bolstered by intense intellectual production on multiculturalism in the form of reports (e.g. Jamil 1998, Khoo 1994), press coverage (*Pulau Pinang* magazine published many articles on heritage streets and buildings in old Penang), illustrated popular histories (e.g. Khoo 2008, Lin 2002, Tan 2007), books on George Town Streets (e.g. Khoo 2003), and national and international academic conferences.⁹ A number of administrative and juridical decrees also came into play in the preservation of Penang's heritage (see e.g. Malaysia 2008, 136–42 and 154–68). And finally, awareness campaigns helped to underline the importance of conservation among the different communities.¹⁰

All of these activities culminated in the concept of the Street of Harmony (see Figures 1 and 2), formulated in 2002 under the aegis of the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT), which has been the main promoter of heritage conservation in Penang since 1987.¹¹ The Street of Harmony connects places that are considered symbolic of Penang's various communities. It was conceived from a universalist perspective that brought together different histories (notably those of the East and the West), different religions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism), different diasporas (from Aceh in what is now Indonesia, from the Hadramaut in Yemen, and from China, India and Europe), and different architectural heritages (a series of Chinese shophouses,¹² as well as buildings in the Malay vernacular and the India-inspired style).

In practical terms, the Street of Harmony translates into thematic itineraries or 'trails' that pass by houses of worship and sites of exemplary architectures, cuisines, and arts and crafts. It celebrates the diversity, tolerance and harmonious cohabitation

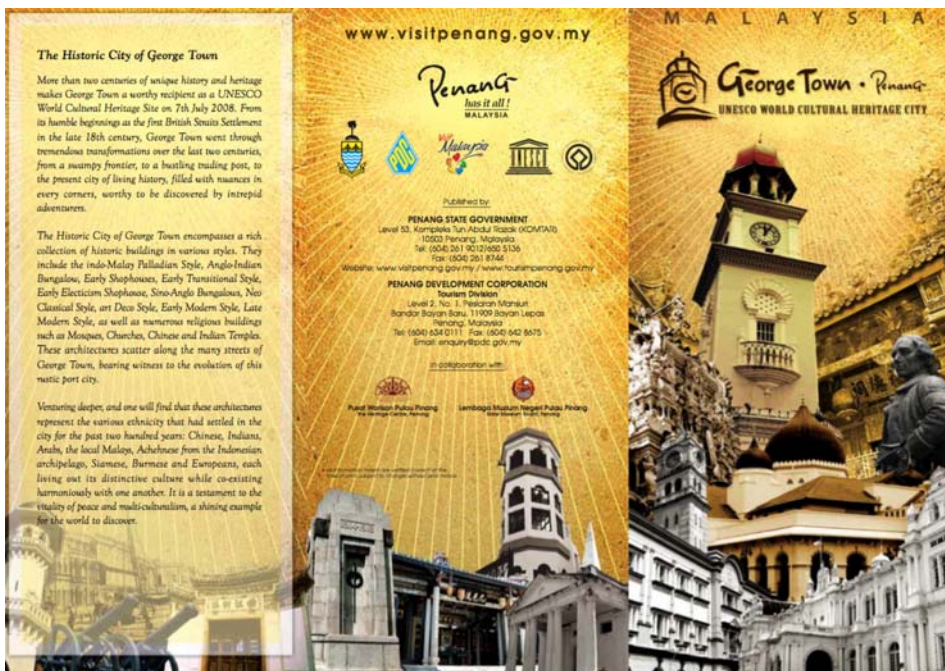


Figure 1. Street of Harmony: the heart of the celebrations (www.visitpenang.gov.my).

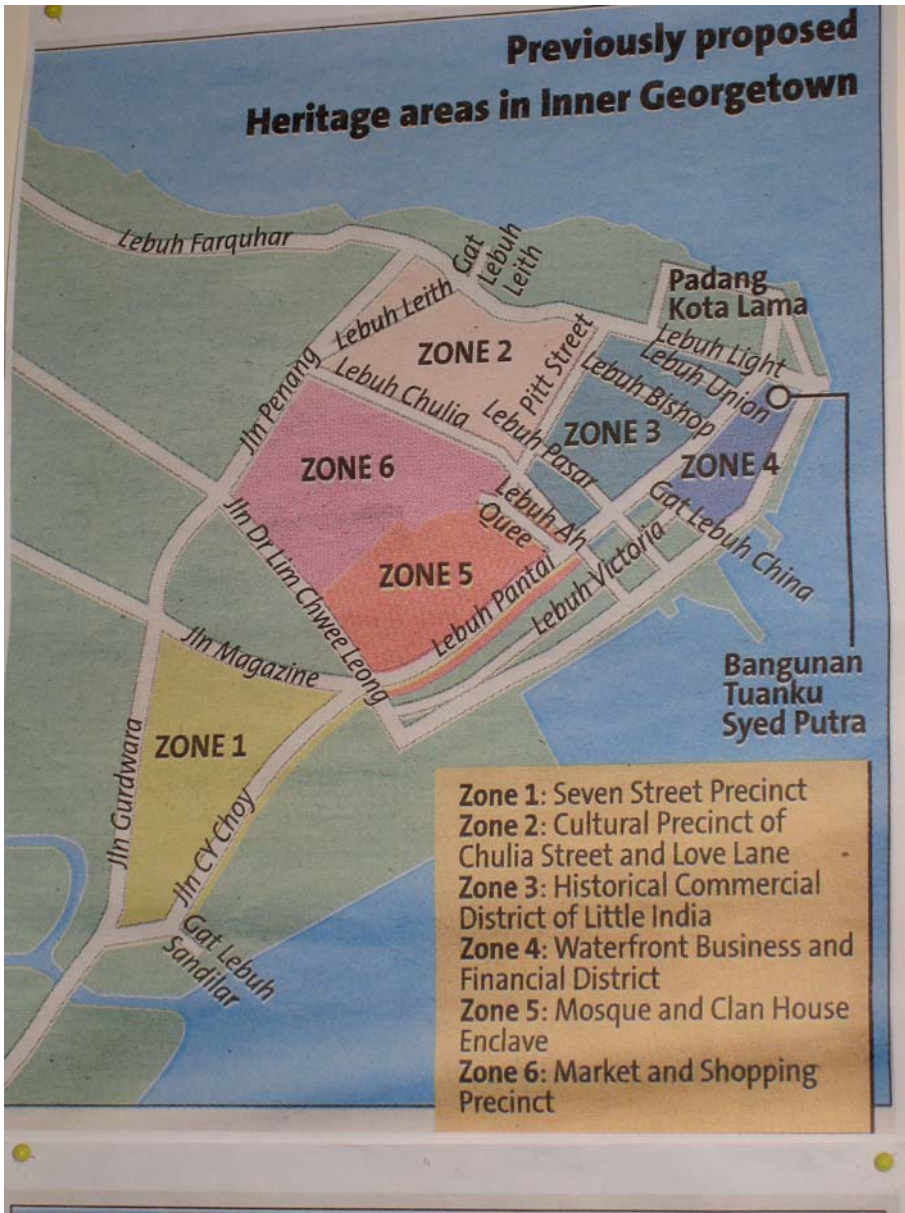


Figure 2. The historic centre (authors' photograph).

of the different communities throughout the region's long history. One of the trails suggested to national and international tourists is the 'World Religions Walk, Penang', which is closely associated with the Penang Global Ethic Project whose philosophy is to promote harmonious and ecumenical coexistence among the various faiths represented in Penang.¹³ A 'Historic George Town Trail' incorporates several itineraries to describe the civil and military implantation in the city, underlining its 200 years of 'multicultural history', while a 'Traditional Trades and Food Trail of

George Town' focuses on the diverse origins of the traditional crafts and cuisines to be found along the way.¹⁴

The Street of Harmony was a strategic location in the celebration that took place 25–28 July 2008, in honour of George Town's addition to UNESCO's World Heritage List.¹⁵ We experienced it personally, both as observers and as participants, when during our second field trip our impressions as tourists visiting the site were solicited, and our 'expertise' as anthropologists studying heritage was sought. The parade that year went past emblematic sites in the city's historic centre (mosques, temples and churches) that are supposed to symbolise harmony among the religions and communities in the state of Penang.¹⁶ The importance accorded the Street of Harmony helped to consecrate it as the multicultural site par excellence in Penang. Since then it has become the location of a ritual commemoration of UNESCO World Heritage Day, which is now observed annually on 28 July. This festive device underlines the UNESCO label attached to the city of George Town.¹⁷ Henceforth, the various communities are encouraged, when the occasion presents itself, to use this space in an ecumenical spirit of mutual recognition.

The UNESCO nomination project: local and global issues

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Penang that played an active role in promoting George Town's heritage were also involved in the project to develop the city's candidacy for the World Heritage List, whereas in Melaka the effort from start to finish was mostly the work of local political authorities. The role of the NGOs in Penang reflects the strength of local civil society which consists of numerous organizations devoted to the environment, development, education, women's rights, religious ecumenism, arts and culture – in short, to the city's heritage. These civil associations were the stimulus for a conservation policy linked to a desire to promote the economy and tourism in the region. Through their actions and interventions, they drew attention to legislative and administrative shortcomings in these areas. They helped at different political and administrative levels in the municipality of George Town and in the state of Penang to formulate a coherent policy promoting their heritage. Their work was facilitated at the federal level by the Heritage Department within Malaysia's Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, and by the National Heritage Act 645 which was passed in 2005. NGO initiatives were translated into concrete conservation measures that helped Penang to catch up with Melaka, where government intervention was more aggressive (see Jenkins 2008, pp. 141–147).

In their effort to place George Town and Melaka on an equal footing, regional and federal authorities were assisted on several occasions by international experts. Malcolm Grant, the British barrister and town planning expert, tried to reconcile contradictory goals in the respective ministries of housing, culture, arts and tourism. The French conservation architect Didier Repellin collaborated with a team of architects from Penang in 2001 to redraw the contours of the historic site in George Town with a view toward conservation. And from Germany, Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO's Cultural Advisor for Asia and the Pacific, proposed in 1998 that the candidacies of Melaka and Penang be combined.

The state of Penang and the NGOs initially collaborated with UNESCO on the restoration of several historic buildings that subsequently received awards for excellence. With support at various levels of government, heritage activists next utilised

programmes suggested by UNESCO to carry out awareness campaigns in different communities. These operations were aimed as much at conservation of the tangible and intangible heritage as they were at getting the target communities directly involved in the enterprise. This was the case with Local Effort and Preservation (LEAP) support for two conservation projects at two sites connected to the Street of Harmony axis in George Town's historic centre, which we will discuss in greater detail further on (see also Jenkins 2008, pp. 173–175). Raising public awareness also included organizing academic conferences and debates on the opportunities and the appropriateness of a policy to preserve Penang's heritage, as noted earlier.

These various actions allowed the NGOs to shape the heritage question not only in terms of the built environment but also in terms of the 'living culture', and here they anticipated UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by several years. The NGOs would ensure that this factor was emphasised in the Nomination Dossier.

All of these elements together allowed the project to ripen as it came to focus on the 'exceptional universal value' of adding George Town and Melaka to the World Heritage List. Once the nomination file was vetted by experts at ICOMOS which gave the file its imprimatur, it was ready for submission. It met three of UNESCO's criteria by highlighting, first, the excellence of the two sites as historic colonial cities with rich traditions; second, the historic character of their living multicultural heritage and the coexistence of the great religions in both cities; and third, their exceptional architectural schemes, notably including shophouses which synthesise various cultural and religious elements borrowed from China, Europe, India and the Malaysian archipelago. UNESCO endorsed these three arguments in its decision of July 8, 2008, and thus acknowledged the multicultural dimension of the two cities.

As we will demonstrate, UNESCO approval could only have been won after the local reality had been polished up and a purified and coherent vision of it was constructed. Our engagement on the ground with officials and heritage activists and in the multiple conversations we initiated or were invited to join in the context of organised seminars and conferences, personal interviews, and informal discussions,¹⁸ brought to light a more heterogeneous reality where the issues and the disagreements among the various parties were quite sharp. The generation of the UNESCO nomination file necessarily downplayed conflicts that arise at all levels of Penang society; it smoothed over disagreements among various groups in their respective conceptions of heritage; it toned down the rivalry between 'living culture' and 'commercial culture'; it overlooked 'gentrification' in the historic center; it finessed contradictions between 'tangible' and 'intangible' culture; and finally, it did not discuss the relevance of 'integrity' and 'authenticity', ideas which are at the very heart of UNESCO's discourse.¹⁹ Our next section will be devoted to a detailed analysis of the gap between the brightened-up vision of the nomination file and the local realities as they are lived by the various communities.

Facing World Heritage listing in Penang: conflict and innovation within communities

We will use three examples from our field research in Penang to analyze and put into perspective the conflicts that resulted from competing views on how to define George Town's heritage. We will also discuss several issues underlying the connections between tangible and intangible heritage, local and global agency, communalism and

citizenship, fragmentation and homogenization, nationalism and internationalism, and modernism and cosmopolitanism.

Koay Jetty

Our first example is the Koay clan village. Situated on a jetty like six other so-called Chinese clan jetties in George Town (see Figure 3) and built on stilts very near the port, the Koay village had been inhabited since 1950 by Chinese of Hui ancestry, that is, Muslims from southern China who share the patronymic Koay. A few weeks before our first field visit in 2006, Koay Jetty was demolished under the pressure of inexorable urban growth, and the residents were relocated to new modern housing. The destruction of the village met with strong opposition from activists in Penang's political, economic, cultural and religious milieu and sharpened several issues, particularly in light of the drive to add George Town to the World Heritage List. The issues were the current ethnic classifications, the definition of intangible heritage, and the respective activist capabilities of villagers and civil society organizations. The disappearance of Koay Jetty and the virulent exchanges among the parties involved were decisive factors in the interest we would thenceforth bring to the question of heritage and its management by various communities, government officials and international experts in Penang and later in Melaka. In a sense, the jetty provided us with an ideal point of entry into these questions.²⁰

In defending the original habitat, heritage activists initially emphasised the exceptional character of the Koay as both Muslim and Chinese. By insisting on



Figure 3. A jetty souvenir shop (authors' photograph).

their exemplarity, the activists intended to draw attention to Penang's greater multi-cultural diversity and thereby point up the limitations of the 'ethnic' statistical representation of the three main groups. By identifying the inhabitants of Koay Jetty as an additional category among the Muslims of Malaysia, they sought to soften the official position which closely associates Islam with Malays and conversely Malays with Islam, and thereby to highlight a Malaysian identity that was even more diversified and cosmopolitan.

Concerning the respective mobilization capacities of actors involved in the destruction of the Koay jetty, the majority of its residents were in favour of the relocation plan offered by the government and the real estate developers, which would provide them with modern comfort in compensation for the demise of their village. As many assured us during our meetings, they felt that they could easily continue to live their 'traditions' once they had moved to their new environment of high tower blocks. On the opposite side, those campaigning for the preservation of the jetty considered it vital to maintain the residents in their original habitat, with certain material improvements, in order to preserve the Koay identity. The Penang Heritage Trust was the principal leader of this campaign, with support from several civil society organizations.²¹ They proposed to maintain the inhabitants *in situ* by involving them in an eco-neighbourhood project that would reconcile their living culture with their ecological environment, which in this case was a small mangrove forest. They also proposed the creation of an international centre combining scientific study, an educational programme, and touristic development oriented toward the traditional crafts and fishing and leisure activities for a national and international clientele.²²

Faced with the government's relocation programme, which they associated with an aggressive modernism and an outdated concept of development, heritage activists supported an alternative modernism, a lasting development that would preserve George Town's cosmopolitan character. The issue here was clearly the close overlap of nature, the built heritage, and the intangible heritage, and to address this the defenders of Koay Jetty did not hesitate to use UNESCO's new definition of heritage from its 2003 Convention. The only risk they failed to fully assess was that of the commodification of Koay culture implicit in their proposal, something that appears to be happening on the other clan jetties that were saved from destruction and are now part of the core zone protected by UNESCO,²³ and as such, are called upon to serve as 'ethnic' window-dressing for cosmopolitan tourism.

Lebuh Aceh Mosque

The second example from our field research in George Town is related to the *waqfs* (Muslim trusts) that hold properties on Aceh Street, or Lebuh Aceh. Until not very long ago, the Malay population was concentrated around the mosque of the same name on this historic artery. Lebuh Aceh Mosque was founded in 1818 by Syed Hussein Aidid, an immigrant from Aceh, and its Indo-Malay architecture is unique in the region (Figure 4). Taking advantage of the repeal of the Control of Rent Act in 2000 (*Akta Kawalan Sewa*, or AKS, originally enacted in 1966), a huge real estate development project was launched under the direction of MAINPP (*Majlis Agama Islam Negeri Pulau Pinang*, or the Islamic Religious Council of the State of Penang). The project was initially conceived in the 1990s and was supported by federal and regional government authorities, Muslim religious authorities and Malay



Figure 4. Lebuah Aceh Mosque (authors' photograph).

financial interests. Its purposes were to increase the already low number of Malays in George Town by adding housing density and to modernise the quarter by converting former shophouses into a *haj* (pilgrimage) museum, art galleries, souvenir shops, a Koranic school and a cultural centre (see Jenkins 2008, 176–177). As we shall see, the stakes involved in this plan to renovate the quarter brought into contact several interacting levels of reality: the desire for modern development coupled with the economic and social promotion of the Malays, different and even

conflicting conceptions of Islam, Malay supremacism and multicultural policy, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

The primary goal of the project's promoters was to raise the profile of Malay identity which, in their view, could only come about with a level of modernization the Malays as a group had not yet experienced and which even affirmative-action policies favouring them had failed to fully accomplish.²⁴ Economic development was clearly seen as a higher priority than heritage conservation in promoting Malay ethno-national identity. The project was associated with a modernizing conception of Islam (Islam *hadhari* or 'civilizational' Islam), that is, an Islam compatible with competition and economic progress. This extrovert and international Islam was oriented more toward development than preservation, except in the case of buildings that bore witness to the earliest presence of Islam on the island, and this position found strong support among the Malay elite.

Opponents of the project were united primarily under the leadership of the BWMLA (*Badan Warisan Masjid Melayu Lebuah Aceh*, or Heritage Committee of Aceh Street Malay Mosque). Their core demand was the strict preservation of the site. They wanted to draw attention to the ancient presence of Islam in George Town and to underline its importance in the multicultural system in the state of Penang where the Malays are clearly in the minority with respect to the Chinese. In a somewhat unusual alliance, their approach met the more heritage-oriented, ecumenical and cosmopolitan motivations of the heritage activists led by the Penang Heritage Trust. The PHT wanted to preserve this built area that was characterised by exceptional historical and architectural features dating back to the period of Aceh's influence in the region, and by the fact that it was inhabited by a population practicing a discreet Islam, a communal Islam living in harmony with the other religions practiced in Penang and in the spirit of the Street of Harmony. In order to maintain this vital social fabric, the PHT mobilised residents to take part in its renovation, and in this it was aided by ways and means made available by the local offices of UNESCO. Thus, a 'Community Participation in Waqf Revitalization' was launched in the context of Local Effort and Preservation (LEAP) between October 1998 and March 2000.²⁵

The position of those who defended the Lebuah Aceh site – among them mainly the PHT – conveys the conviction that Penang society is diverse and all of its components are equal, or to be more precise, they should be so. It opposes the national ideology of the Federation of Malaysia which holds that the Malay component should have an advantage over all the others, and it reopens the question of the hypervisibility of Islam as a factor in the national or ethnic identification of the Malays. However, whether it ignores or challenges any hierarchical organizing principle among the groups that constitute the Malaysian federal and national entity, this stance not only ignores the balance of political, economic and ideological power that still reigns among these groups, but it helps to place them in obvious juxtaposition; it even helps to essentialise them, not to mention the various instrumentalities that it makes way for in the game of social and political dynamics.

Khoo Kongsi

The third and last example is Khoo Kongsi, a traditional Hokkien temple built in 1854 and owned by the most powerful Chinese clan in Penang (the Khoo). The temple stands on Cannon Square (Figure 5), an enormous courtyard sheltering 24



Figure 5. Cannon Square (authors' photograph).

shophouses and an impressive opera stage. A project to renovate the temple and its dependencies was proposed in 1995 with the approval of the temple association's directors (see Khoo and Jenkins 2002, pp. 219–221, Jenkins 2008, pp. 170–173). Significantly, the plans called for turning the dwellings on Cannon Square into strictly tourist-oriented shops, boutiques, restaurants and a hotel.

Cannon Square was slated to be emptied of its residents, who were the poorest members of the Khoo clan (the wealthy having long ago moved away) and who lost rent-control protection when the AKS was repealed in 2000, as mentioned earlier. Yet the shophouse tenants demonstrated their opposition to the project in spectacular fashion, and two years later, in 2002, a compromise was reached whereby the habitat would be given a light renovation and those tenants who had not yet moved out were offered the option of continuing to reside on the upper floors while devoting the ground floors to the new business that tourism was expected to bring. Thus recast as guides to the past and storytellers of clan traditions, they would be obliged to attend to the visits of national and foreign tourists, especially Chinese from the mainland and the Southeast Asian diasporas.

The temple has since been restored and its ground floor now houses a museum on the history and genealogy of the Khoo which we have visited on each return in order to evaluate its museological strategy and the public it is trying to attract. Part of Cannon Square has been restored and converted into a school, while the last 14 shophouses still await local and international investors with an equal interest in promoting the clan's history and worldwide renown and in the opportunities of restoration and development for heritage-based tourism.²⁶ This example highlights once again the very close overlap between tangible and intangible heritage.



Figure 6. Armenian Street (authors' photograph).

Another key issue involved in this project is the commercialization of culture along with the trend toward gentrification, both of which were supported by those who speak for the clan. These trends are affecting a not insignificant part of the historic heart of George Town, and most importantly, Lebuah Armenian and Lebuah Aceh, two central streets off the Street of Harmony axis which have a significant concentration of shophouses. These buildings are beginning to be renovated by the middle-class elite who want to reinvest in the historic centre, if not to reside there, at least to develop activities that they enjoy, such as art galleries, ethnic or upscale restaurants, museums, and more generally, tourist-oriented craft shops.²⁷

Heritage tourism development and gentrification in the historic heart of the city combine the interests of a segment of the Chinese elite, who are part of the majority in Penang, it should be remembered, and a top-tier economic force at its centre. By reinforcing their economic position and valorizing their own cultural and religious characteristics, these new tourism projects help to legitimise the Chinese presence in George Town and on the island of Penang and to further entrench it in both the lived and the imagined space. Their economic strength and cultural aura in turn help the community to inscribe its presence within a greater national and international network, that of the Chinese diasporas in Southeast Asia who are invited to visit the cult sites in George Town and Penang and contribute to their renovation, and even to develop new sites which in turn help reinforce the local community.

This process of renovation and gentrification highlights one last issue, that of the 'cosmopolitan multiculturalism' (Kahn 1997) embraced by PHT heritage activ-

ists, a large number of whom, it should also be remembered, are recruited from among the Chinese, which sometimes puts them in a false position not only with regard to the less fortunate segments of their own community but with regard to certain elements in other communities as well.

Conclusion

We will conclude by observing that George Town's inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List was the result of a series of accommodations, the first of which is related to a form of historicity in which the before and the after are still determined by Europe's irruption into this part of the world. The archipelago had seen migrations long before Europe came on the scene: the Chinese diaspora, the Arab diaspora, and the diaspora from Aceh in present-day Indonesia were active since at least the thirteenth century and continued after the start of European colonization. We might then pose the question as to the relevance of an accommodation that in effect allows George Town to even more efficaciously claim the image of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism which it is now trying to present, notably through its 'living culture'.

The city of Melaka is likewise accommodating itself to this Western-inspired regime of historicity because it allows the state of Melaka to legitimise the national construction that it too wants to insert into a long history of international exchange, and whose museum exhibition strategy strongly emphasises its various endogenous (Malay, Muslim) and non-native (Portuguese, Dutch, British and Chinese) influences (see Worden 2001).

One aspect of these accommodations is the *polarity* between the two cities which delineates the issues and potential conflicts extending throughout the Federation of Malaysia since its independence. In the state of Penang, the three principal component groups of Malaysia's population are strongly represented and interdependent, with the Chinese element predominating. Turning its particular composition to good account, Penang considers itself both the crucible of a multicultural society and a symbol that should stand for the entire Malaysian Federation. In Melaka, by contrast, the Malay stamp remains stronger. The two cities personify, each in its own way, the new postcolonial Malaysia, torn between recognizing the principle of multiculturalism that unites Malays, Chinese and Indians – the 'holy trinity' as many activists speak about this official ethnical representation – and the pre-eminence of the Malay element asserted in the federal Constitution. It was for the purpose of representing the composite dimension of the Malaysian nation in a balanced manner, and after several isolated and fruitless attempts by both cities (see Jenkins 2008, 138–148), that the players involved – UNESCO experts, the Federation of Malaysia, the states of Melaka and Penang, and heritage activists – united around the proposal for the joint candidacy of the two state capitals.

Other accommodations in Penang and Melaka were made through legislative and administrative arrangements, real estate renovations, the production of cultural discourses and the promotion of participatory action, all directly inspired by the European experience and actively supported by UNESCO. In Penang this resulted in the construction of a purified image of reality that nevertheless fails to erase the many issues and contradictions running through the society. Such is the case, notably, for conceptions of nationalism and internationalism, universalism and cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and communalism which seem to be more or less shared by the

different parties involved, but with a different emphasis depending on which community, which social class, and which political ideology they identify with.

For some, internationalism is above all economic and modernizing: this holds true for a good part of the political class – whether of Malay or Chinese origin – which favours a nation-state oriented toward globalised development and modernism and which internally manages an ethnic diversity frozen in the official categories. From this vantage-point, heritage is an instrument in the service of that policy. For others – and this holds true for most heritage activists (here we recall the NGOs' leading role in promoting Penang's heritage, in contrast to Melaka where the state took the lead) – cosmopolitanism is above all the expression of an alternative modernity in which the constituent elements of civil society should have the last word. This position defends the idea of a more robust multiculturalism and a more open democracy in which the preservation of heritage as the memory of the various communities is an essential motivating force.

For the majority of the population, however, what is also at stake is a life unconstrained by the purified version that is offered to them as a mirror image. The different groups and subgroups that make up the various communities do not stand firmly behind one side or the other. If necessary, they even play them off against each other. They live side by side, often in harmony, but definitely not in the ideal harmony one would hope to see. Nor are they always prepared to accept an excessively modernist development or to disappear into the big housing projects that real estate developers and the political class have in store for them.

In conclusion, we consider that our analysis of the process of defining heritage in George Town, and subsidiarily in Melaka, shows how different players have taken up UNESCO's criteria and appropriated, inflected, and subjected them to their own development goals. All of which goes to show that UNESCO's guidelines serve as a differential gear for different parties, be they representatives of the government, civil society activists, economic or political powers, or members of the various communities involved.

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Notes

1. We have chosen to use 'Melaka' to designate the state and its capital of the same name, as per local usage, but to follow English usage for the 'Straits of Malacca'.

2. Two other Malaysian properties on the island of Borneo were listed in 2000 as natural heritage sites: Kinabalu Park (approximately 30,501 acres) in the state of Sabah, and Gunung Mulu National Park (approximately 21,394 acres) in the state of Sarawak. See UNESCO n.d.
3. The ethnic division into these three main groups arose from the political intention stated since independence and supported since then by the majority political coalition. It concerns peninsular Malaysia only, and its purpose is to insure a balance among these groups. This policy is directly linked to British colonial practice in Malaysia and lies at the root of the idea of the 'Rainbow Nation', as it was designated by Westerners during the colonial era (Giordano 2004).
4. See Wawasan 2020 n.d.
5. See the decision at UNESCO 2009.
6. The first of Wawasan 2020's nine challenges is to establish 'a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one "Bangsa Malaysia" [Malaysian nation] with political loyalty and dedication to the nation' (see n. 4 supra). For further developments on Wawasan 2020, see, for example, Bunnell 2004. For modernity in Malaysia, see Giordano 2004, Goh 2002, Kahn 2008, Shamsul 2001.
7. In 2010, the population in the state of Melaka was 57% Malays, 32% Chinese, and 11% Indians and others; in the state of Penang it was 43% Chinese, 40% Malays, 10% Indians, and 7% others (Wikipedia 2011, which cites government sources unavailable to the general public). In 2000, the population in the city of George Town was 60% Chinese, 30% Malays, and 10% Indians (Giordano 2004, p. 97). Note that the statistical representation of the various communities is a sensitive issue which affects their clout in the political arena.
8. See 'The Slave Route', 'The Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue', and 'The Spice Route' at <http://www.unesco.org>.
9. A series of four colloquia devoted to Penang's main ethnic communities was held in 2001 and 2002, followed by a major international conference on The Penang Story: A Celebration of Cultural Diversity, 19–21 April 2002. These events were part of the process that led to George Town being named to UNESCO's World Heritage List.
10. See Jenkins (2008, 147, 173–174) for examples of Local Effort and Preservation (LEAP) projects launched with the help of UNESCO. See also the developments presented below.
11. The Penang Heritage Trust is a non-governmental organization composed of many activists from Penang civil society – such as journalists, architects, engineers, academics, intellectuals, artists and economic promoters – and is open to all communities, although its membership is mainly Chinese. This very active organization is involved on several fronts: it organises a variety of activities and publishes informational and promotional leaflets.
12. A shophouse is a traditional Chinese two-storey home that combines economic activity on the ground floor and living space on the floor above.
13. For further information, see Global Ethic Penang 2006.
14. Trail maps are published by PHT and Arts-Ed (Arts Education Programs for Young People) and distributed in hotels, galleries and museums and at the Penang Heritage Center.
15. Celebrations in the city of Melaka lasted the entire month of August 2008 and ended with the *Merdaka* on August 30, the Federation of Malaysia's Independence Day.
16. Celebrations in George Town began with the visit of Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and other civil service and religious representatives to the main houses of worship on the Street of Harmony, and continued with concerts, plays and street performances at different locations around the historic centre, notably Armenian Street and Cannon Square for the Chinese, Aceh Street for the Malays, and Little India for the Indians. One day was also devoted to an open-door visit to various places of the city and notably to the Chinese jetties.
17. As of 2010, the entire month of July is devoted to cultural and artistic celebrations, including exhibitions, concerts, plays, dance performances, sports competitions, films,

- etc. 'To celebrate George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and to showcase the unique diversity of our culture and heritage' is the mission of the George Town Festival which was created for this purpose.
18. These various working sessions, most of which took place in Penang, involved members of the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT), the Penang Heritage Center (named George Town World Heritage Incorporated since 2010), the Penang Global Ethic Project, the Heritage of Malaysia Trust (*Badan Warisan Malaysia*), the Socio-Economic and Environmental Research Institute (SERI), Han Jiang Teochew Temple, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Arts-Ed (Trails), the Xiao-en Cultural Foundation, the Koay Committee, the Penang Apprenticeship Program for Artisans (PAPA), the Little Market, etc. We further extended our work through archival and journals research, electronic correspondence, etc.
 19. ICOMOS has proposed these ideas in various official documents such as the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity and the 1999 International Cultural Tourism Charter (Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance).
 20. For additional details, see Graezer Bideau and Kilani 2009.
 21. These organizations included the Malaysian Nature Society, the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association, Sahabat Alam Malaysia, the Penang Inshore Fishermen's Welfare Association, the Consumer Association of Penang, the Friends of the Penang Botanic Gardens, the Baiqi Koay Community, Malaysian travel and trade associations, and Penang tourist guides associations.
 22. Interview with Will Marcus (Argo Architects), an Australian specialist in ethical architecture and site rehabilitation, and Penang historian Ong Seng Huat, who jointly submitted a project to the local government to integrate the jetties into an eco-tourism framework.
 23. Strictly speaking, the core zone is the protected area while the buffer zone that wraps around the core zone is supposed to protect the latter from encroachment. In George Town as in Melaka, the core zone roughly corresponds to the historic centre. In George Town it covers an area of 44.27 acres, with 1,700 buildings and a population of 9,379. Melaka's core zone is 15.63 acres, with 600 buildings and 3,420 residents.
 24. Malaysia's Constitution distinguishes between Bumiputra ('sons of the earth'), i.e. Malays, and non-Bumiputra, i.e. non-Malays, and grants supremacy to the Malays. Malay supremacism is exemplified in successive positive affirmation policies such as the NPE (New Political Economy) in the 1970s, whose goal was to improve the Malays' economic status, and Wawasan 2020 in the 1990s (see n. 4 supra), which includes a component specifically concerning the Malays. The category of Malay is defined in Article 160(2) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution by the profession of Islam, the use of the Malay language, conformity to Malay custom, and lastly, having a direct connection to the country whether through birth, or kinship (see Jenkins (2008, pp. 26–27).
 25. See Lubis and Khoo 2000; the authors clarified and explained this document to us on several field visits to the area which included specially guided tours of the site.
 26. See the Penang *Star*, 17 and 30 July, 2008.
 27. On Armenian Street in particular, we note the historic home of Dr Sun Yat Sen where he lived during his exile in Penang and which now houses a museum dedicated to him, along with the Edelweiss Café renovated in Art Deco style with Swiss detailing, and the 'Straits Collection' Heritage Boutique Hotel Bon Ton and its shops.

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