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Author(s)	Kevin Blackburn
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The Heritage Battles of Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Melaka in Malaysia

Kevin Blackburn

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Singapore

kevin.blackburn@nie.edu.sg

Abstract

This paper examines the political battles over heritage in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka since Malaysian independence. These preceded the successful listing of George Town in Penang and Melaka as World Heritage in July 2008, helping raise public consciousness on the value of built heritage in Malaysia. The decision to make George Town and Melaka World Heritage cities was taken in 1998 by the Malaysian government in conjunction with the Penang and Melaka State governments after a long succession of heritage battles led by Malaysian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The key heritage battles include the 1984 galvanising of the Chinese community against the development of Bukit China in Melaka. For Penang, the focus is on the protest against rapid urban redevelopment in George Town during the real estate boom of the early 1990s. According to architect and Vice-President of Badan Warisan Malaysia (the Malaysian Heritage Trust), Laurence Loh, speaking in 1996, 'More old buildings have been knocked down in Penang in the last five years than in the last 30 years'. The paper traces the role of NGOs in these heritage battles. The creation of the Badan Warisan Malaysia (BWM) in Kuala Lumpur during 1983 and the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) in 1985 are examined. The paper also surveys the heritage battles in the 1970s and 1980s before the creation of the BWM and PHT. These were fought by other NGOs, such as the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), formed in 1969, Institut Masyarakat (the community institute), organised in the mid-1970s, and Aliran, founded in 1977. These Malaysian NGOs pursued heritage conservation as part of a broader agenda of what they referred to as 'sustainable development'. They rejected the model of development advocated by Malaysian councils and state governments, as well as property developers that meant destroying what the NGOs saw as heritage areas and replacing them with modern shopping complexes, office towers, and tourist theme parks. The paper evaluates the impact of the Malaysian heritage NGO's ideas of 'sustainable development' across several decades.

Keywords: heritage, Malaysia, NGO, Penang, Melaka, Kuala Lumpur

INTRODUCTION

Despite sharing a common architectural heritage of tens of thousands of pre-World War II shophouses, Malay wooden houses, temples, mosques, and colonial buildings, Malaysia and Singapore have had divergent paths in heritage conservation.

In Singapore, the state has driven preservation and conservation. Lily Kong's 2011 history of Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and Alvin Tan Peng Hong's 2010 history of the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) reveal how the major decisions taken in designating conservation zones and gazetting historic buildings were made with little or no input from Singapore's Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) that had an interest in history or heritage conservation. Indeed, the Singapore Heritage Society did not even exist until 1987 after the key conservation areas of Chinatown, Kampong Glam, and Little India, as well as other areas such as Emerald Hill had already been decided upon by the URA. By 1987, the PMB had been listing historic buildings for conservation for 16 years. This distribution of work, the URA designating whole conservation zones, and the PMB picking out individual historic monuments and buildings for preservation, has categorised heritage conservation in Singapore.

In Malaysia, a different model prevails over a very similar architectural landscape. The rapid urban renewal in the Malaysian cities of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Melaka from the 1970s onwards led to the involvement of NGOs in heritage conservation. One activist from the Penang, Lim Teck Ghee, looking back on when he was Secretary of the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) from 1973 into the early 1980s, described the ideas behind their heritage conservation battles. Lim noted how, 'it was actually a campaign against a certain type of development, development that wastefully consumed resources and rewarded rich and powerful developers. We wanted a more sustainable form of development. Lim Jee Yuan's 1987 Institut Masyarakat (the community institute) book, *The Malay House* was written to show how the existing indigenous architecture was more sustainable and in tune with the environment. Heritage conservation was part of a wider agenda.' (Lim, 2012) Institut Masyarakat held exhibitions on heritage conservation and put out a heritage magazine to educate the public.

While the role of the state in Singapore's heritage preservation has been well documented, the role of Malaysian NGOs in preserving buildings themselves and negotiating with the state for preservation is not as well studied. Carolyn Cartier's work (1997) on Melaka and Gwynn Jenkins (2008) on Penang have suggested that NGOs have been vital for conservation but there is no comprehensive study across Malaysia focussing on the heritage NGOs themselves. The heritage battles of the Malaysian NGOs, in particular those in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Melaka illustrate this much more powerful role of heritage NGOs in Malaysia than in Singapore. Accessing the archival sources of these NGOs provides a viable methodology for evaluating how heritage NGOs in Malaysia have sought sustainable urban development as Lim Teck Ghee and other activists envisaged it.

The Penang Social Justice Activists of the 1970s

The origins of the heritage conservation movement lie in the NGOs that emerged from Penang and in particular its campus of the Universiti Sains Malaysia (The Science University of Malaysia, USM), which was established in 1969 as Malaysia's second university. USM attracted many academics who were influenced by ideas of the New Left and the environmentalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which offered alternatives to the dominant ideas of capitalism and economic development guiding the Malaysian state. These academics in turn produced many students who, like them, became activists for social justice by trying to achieve fairness and justice for the powerless and marginalised in the community.

The Consumers Association of Penang and Sustainable Development

The creation of the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) by S.M. Mohamed Idris, a 43 year old Indian Muslim Justice of the Peace, provided a focal organisation for young Penang based academics and university students who embraced New Left and environmentalist views of society. They attempted to build broad based community support to question the model of economic development which entailed rapid industrialisation driven by greed at the expense of the natural and built environment. The inaugural meeting of CAP on 7 November 1969, attended by 76 people, was arranged by the University of Malaya's Graduate Society of Penang. It had organised public meetings on consumer affairs with the Selangor Consumers Association and women's organisations, youth clubs, teachers and the general public.

CAP was registered as a society on 14 January 1970 and its multi-racial council adopted among its key objectives for 1970 the objective 'to take up Environmental Pollution as a major theme for the year as it was a topic of grave private concern in Penang and most likely to give the Association a continuous platform for projecting the Association's image.' Increasing industrialisation had brought many factories that were poisoning Penang's rivers and shores. CAP felt that 'the problem of pollution was established as a major item of civic concern in Penang in 1970 and the Association received widespread support and acknowledgement in its effort in this field.' (*Utusan Konsumer*, June 1971)

CAP's radical critique of capitalism made it very different from the traditional consumer associations in other Malaysian states (Lim, 2012). Before setting up CAP, Idris had a reputation for being outspoken on environmental and welfare issues. CAP very quickly embraced a wide agenda that went beyond protecting the public against defective products. At the second Annual General Meeting on 25 March 1972, Idris advocated a broad campaign against what he saw as unsustainable economic development that was causing environmental damage and harming the health of ordinary people. Rapid industrialisation of the Malaysian economy was almost an article of faith and anyone questioning its harmful by products such as pollution was seen as opposing progress (*Utusan Konsumer*, February-March 1972). Although his own education had been cut short at secondary school because of the war, his outspoken views attracted in

the 1970s a number of New Left students and young academics at USM, such as Lim Teck Ghee, who started teaching at USM after he completed his PhD on peasant agriculture in colonial Malaya at the Australian National University in 1971.

Lim noted that their New Left ideas and radical critique of capitalism caught the attention of the Malaysian Special Branch, which in the context of the 1970s Cold War atmosphere, suspected them of being linked to the Old Left of the Communists. The Malayan Communist Party up until 1989 was engaged in an armed struggle against the Malaysian government. Thus, according to Lim, Special Branch 'monitored' their early activities spent helping local communities of rural and urban poor against big developers and fighting industrial pollution, such as detecting mercury poisoning in the catches of poor fishing communities (Lim, 2012).

CAP's ideas on sustainable development and heritage conservation were articulated in November 1981 at a national seminar held at USM and organised with its off shoot, Institut Masyarakat called 'Appropriate Technology, Culture and Lifestyle in Development'. The conference papers of the seminar received extensive media coverage in Malaysia, with some being reproduced as features in Malaysian newspapers. In the resolutions of the seminar, CAP and Institut Masyarakat lamented 'the sad thing is that many Malaysians – consciously or unconsciously – are allowing the local culture to dissipate in the name of "progress", "development" and "modernization". CAP and Institut Masyarakat argued that the problem is that 'the present culture from the West is geared towards a materialistic, acquisitive and waste-oriented society'. They concluded, 'Our hope is that our people will be concerned about the preservation and refinement of our local traditional culture, as a basis for development to serve the basic needs – material and non-material – of our people.' One of their 'Action Proposals' to address this problem was that 'the role of historical buildings in the formation and maintenance of traditional culture and identity should be recognised and actively supported by the Government'. CAP and Institut Masyarakat stated that 'such support should have as its aim not only the conservation and restoration of key buildings and built areas of significance, but also ensure such buildings are fully integrated into the economic and social life of the community' (CAP & Institut Masyarakat, 1982, 14-17).

Resisting the Komtar Development in Penang during the 1970s

In 1970, the Penang State government, under Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu, decided to initiate the urban renewal of George Town, envisaging the concept of the Urban Centre, which had a 65 storey skyscraper known as the Komplek Tun Abdul Razak's (Komtar) tower at its centre. Penang's Urban Centre entailed demolishing 22 acres of mainly 304 pre-war shophouses, which were the homes of many rental tenants and small businesses (*Straits Times*, 1 January 1974). On 1 January 1974, when driving in the first pylon of the skyscraper named after himself, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdul Razak proclaimed: 'The success of this

project will change the outlook of George Town from a colonial heritage to a city reflecting a Malaysian society... The old order must give way to the new. We have to accept changes for the better.' Razak noted that some 'people tended to be sceptical' and 'feared they would be deprived of their income', but he assured them 'this urban renewal is in their own interests. We don't want to be stagnant.' He added: 'Modernisation of the old in the city is important, especially within the context of building a new, modern and progressive Malaysian society.' (*Straits Times*, 2 January 1974). Chief Minister Dr Lim waxed lyrical, saying that 'it also demonstrates what can be done in the urban areas to build a new united progressive society in the context of our new economic policy to eradicate poverty and to restructure society.' Dr Lim urged: 'We must develop in the existing city of George Town an area that can act as an epicentre for the future development of the city.' (*Straits Times*, 2 January 1974)

However, as the Komtar started to rise from the ruins of demolished prewar buildings, CAP railed against the overly ambitious plans for urban renewal that Prime Minister Razak and Penang Chief Minister Dr Lim hoped for: The Urban Centre Complex in Penang is an impressive and ambiguous project which is seen by a few officials to be a 'model of development' to suit the needs of the people.

The Urban Centre should in fact be deemed as the monumental model of a white elephant dedicated to the narrow-minded planning of the authorities who do not have in mind the needs of the man in the street.

The price tag for this exercise in monstrosity was given as \$200 million in 1972 by the Chief Minister. The complex which is to be built in five stages is now estimated to cost \$550 million.

...The price for a business spot in the first phase ranges from \$44,460 in the third floor to \$156,200 in the ground floor...

...The Chief Minister has declared in late 1973 that the first phase will fetch \$2.8 million in rates instead of the current \$35,000.

The majority of businesses in the urban centre area are petty traders and cottage industries. The exorbitant cost of a place at the complex and the killing assessment is enough to drive away any businessmen. (*Utusan Konsumer*, May 1976).

USM and CAP spawned many social justice activists. In 1977, Aliran was established by academics at USM with a much broader agenda than CAP. Aliran's stated aim was social justice. This included a radical critique of the type of economic development that the Penang State government and the Malaysian government had embraced. The organisation was headed by Chandra Muzaffar, a political scientist lecturer. Lim Teck Ghee was also a prominent member of Aliran.

Penang's First Heritage Battle – College-General in 1984

In 1982, the colonial Catholic seminary buildings and surrounding 6.5 hectare park land at College-General between Gurney Drive and Jalan Kelawei at Pulau

Tikus were sold to private developers Gurney Gardens for \$36 million. This was well above the value of the land according to its existing zoning of religious/institutional. In December 1983, the Municipal Council of Penang rezoned the land from religious/institutional to commercial and residential uses, which went against city planning policies. A petition against the rezoning garnered 900 signatures within a few weeks (*Aliran Monthly*, January 1984). The green space around the College-General buildings was a popular recreational area for the Penang public. Both CAP and Aliran feared another Komtar would arise. Aliran published an open letter from the Save College-General Campaign Committee. Their battle to stop the rezoning of the land was shaped by their memory of the Komtar:

Then there is the other group [the Municipal Council of Penang] who hold glossy visions of Penang as a second Hongkong or Singapore or even Manhattan. They foresee the rezoning as heralding construction complementary to the debatable attributes of KOMTAR...

...it is amazing that Gurney Gardens could be so full of pride in announcing their plans to create 'a new epicentre of growth of a sufficient magnitude to complement the government's KOMTAR' to quote their recent boast in a Malaysian journal.

Isn't evident by now that the last thing concerned Penangites care for is anything resembling KOMTAR!

Must the city repeat its mistakes? (*Aliran Monthly*, October 1984)

Aliran, like CAP, was at pains to argue that it was not against economic development but only against the model of economic development that was being imposed on the public:

Right from the start, we have stressed that we are not against development. Rather we are anxious to see that the type of development which takes place is relevant and appropriate.

In this connection, the campaign evolved from the residents' aspirations for a more social and public use of the seminary grounds.

Among the suggested uses were a museum-cum-gallery within the then existing building, a park with space for an outdoor museum, and sports facilities such as a public swimming pool, games courts, etc.

We hoped for a use that would have provided cheap and wholesome recreation for people for all classes and groups. (*Aliran Monthly*, October 1984).

Aliran noted that objectors to the rezoning of College-General saw the struggle as a heritage battle:

Historically and architecturally, the objectors said, the College-General building should be valued as a link with Penang's history. As the only building of its kind left in Penang, it should be conserved rather than summarily demolished. The grounds had always been open to the community for recreational uses, so in view of this, the building as well as

the grounds should, if possible be put to continued public use, such as a public library, a park or a cultural centre. (*Aliran Monthly*, January 1984)

CAP also noted that the battle to save College-General was the first time that many people in Penang mobilised in large numbers to save Penang's architectural heritage. In February 1984, CAP observed: 'For the first time, the public has come up in arms against a proposal to rezone a piece of land' (*Utusan Konsumer*, February 1984). CAP and its environmental group off shoot, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM, Malaysian Friends of Nature, established in 1977) submitted a joint memorandum against the rezoning to the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the Minister for Culture Youth and Sport, the Penang Chief Minister and the Municipal Council of Penang. They asked that the Federal Antiquities Act of 1976 be invoked to protect the seminary as a historic monument. CAP argued:

The College General building was built in the late nineteenth century under direction of some French missionaries.

With its elegant row of arches, it is a picturesque historical landmark which has attracted much public admiration.

Indeed, the building possesses a unique and historical architecture, and is an excellent example of old institutional buildings that are fast disappearing to make for modern urban development. (*Utusan Konsumer*, February 1984)

The battle to save College-General was lost in 1984. There was a further loss. The area next to it, Kampong Serani, had long been the home of Penang's Portuguese-Eurasian community. The Kampong Serani area of 4.8 acres was sold by the Roman Catholic Church to private developers to be converted into shops and terrace houses (Goh, 1998). The closeness of the College-General and Kampong Serani to the Penang's attractive northern beaches and proximity to George Town meant that their surroundings were gradually being transformed by retail complexes and condominiums. Redevelopment began in 1992. By 1994 the destruction of the ramshackle kampong with its historic school, called Noah's Ark, was complete (Goh, 2001, Goh, 2002, & Sibert, 2001).

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MALAYSIAN HERITAGE NGOS IN THE 1980s

The 1980s saw the rise of the key heritage NGOs that would dominate the debates over heritage in the 1990s and early 21st Century. They were distinct from the 1970s NGOs who had heritage as just one item on their agendas for social justice. They emerged because of increased awareness of the value of heritage in the 1980s among elites and the public.

The Battle for Bukit China, 1984-1985

In 1984, Melaka had also become the scene of an urban renewal dispute that would be the most public heritage battle in Malaysia. In 1982, when Datuk Seri Rahim Thamby Chik took over Melaka as Chief Minister, at the age of 32, he wanted to 'rid the historic city of its "sleepy hollow" image'. Rahim said: 'I wanted

to turn Malacca from a State which portrays lethargy, a State known only for buah Malacca, batang Malacca, Bukit Cina and Tanjung Keling, to one which is progressive and vibrant.' (*Business Times*, Malaysia, 12 April 1989) In Rahim's sights was the redevelopment of Melaka's historic Chinese cemetery, Bukit China, which consisted of 12,500 graves and covered 42 hectares (104 acres). The cemetery dated back to the early presence of Chinese in Malaysia during the Melaka Sultanate of the fifteenth century.

On 5 October 1983, the Melaka State government informed the trustees of the Bukit China Cemetery, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, that it intended to develop the site into a residential and business area. Despite the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple's desire to keep negotiations private, Rahim publicly announced his plans to develop Bukit China in the Melaka State Assembly on 10 April 1984. The cemetery would be turned into commercial and residential space with a large shopping complex, shophouses, as well as a sports centre and a cultural and music theatre and a library. A seven storey pagoda and a handicraft centre were also part of the redevelopment. A few late Ming graves and Muslim graves were to be preserved, but 80 per cent of Bukit China was to be redeveloped (Cartier, 1993). On 24 April 1984, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple Trustees publicly responded saying that they would not approve of any redevelopment or use of the site other than as a burial grounds as already declared in State's Cheng Hoon Teng Temple Ordinance of 1949. The intransigence of Bukit China's trustees prompted the State government to on 23 June send them a \$2 million quit rent bill going back to 1968.

The heavy handed nature of the actions of the State government started to turn public opinion against their actions. Malaysia's political parties weighed into the debate. On 30 June, Lim Kit Siang, Leader of the Opposition political party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), demanded the withdrawal of the quit rent claim on Bukit China, citing legal precedents that burial grounds were exempted from quit rent. On 2 July, Lim went further and organised a demonstration at the foot of Bukit China. Then on 8 July, 1,500 people attended a DAP organised protest at the site. By now a national issue, the Chinese community of Malaysia started to overwhelmingly support keeping Bukit China as heritage. On 17 July, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple placed notices in the major Malaysian newspapers rejecting any development of Bukit China. Many NGOs, such as Aliran and the Badan Warisan Malaysia, with their prominent leaders, Lim Teck Ghee, and Mubin Sheppard, publicly backed the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple (*The Star*, 18 July 1984).

On 23 July, in the Melaka State Assembly, Rahim tried a new tactic of getting Bukit China developed by outlining three proposals – the first was letting the Chinese community organisations redevelop it, the second was a joint government and Chinese community development, and the last option was the government would go it alone if the other options were rejected. Rahim proposed several additional areas of the cemetery that would be preserved. He added that

the Master Plan for the development of Malacca was almost ready and that it 'reflected the Government's "total commitment" to see the State evolve into a progressive and dynamic one' (*The Star*, 24 July 1984). On 7 August, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple announced that 90 Malaysian Chinese organisations were opposed to developing Bukit China.

Rahim's tactic of trying to divide the Chinese community with the several redevelopment options seemed to be working when he announced on 12 September two plans for the redevelopment of Bukit China - his own and a plan very similar to his own but submitted by the Tan Koon Swan faction of one of the ruling parties of the Malaysian government, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). At the same time, Rahim reiterated that Bukit China 'will definitely be redeveloped' (*The Star*, 22 February 1985). Tan, who had developed Malaysia's casino at Genting Highlands, went even further in his redevelopment plan with theme parks, such as a 'Mini Disneyland', a 'Time Channel', as well as a centre for food hawkers and souvenir shops (*Shin Min Daily News* (24 November 1984).

However, Rahim's options did little to stop opposition to redevelopment. On 13 September, the DAP rejected both plans. Increasingly, members of the public were engaging in more activist protest. On 19 August, 23 people were arrested at a 'Jog to Save Bukit China' at the site. The DAP was organising 'Save Bukit China' cyclethons, walkathons and jogathons throughout Malaysia. On 12 October, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple announced that over 294,000 people had rejected redevelopment of Bukit China in a 'referendum' they had conducted. On 3 November, the DAP submitted a petition against redevelopment signed by 300,000 people. Redevelopment of Bukit China was becoming so unpopular that even Tan Koon Swan retracted his plan and on 6 November denied he ever had submitted it to Rahim.

On 30 November, MCA assistant general Senator Lim Sean Lean and Petaling Jaya MP on behalf of the MCA made a joint statement that they backed the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple against redevelopment. On 1 December, 48 MCA branches in the State of Melaka supporting the Tan Koon Swan faction of the MCA decided to let the national leaders of the political party handle the issue. On 3 December, the MCA set up a 'Save Bukit China Fund' to help pay the \$2 million quit rent. Four MCA ministers in the Malaysian Cabinet donated a month of their salaries to the fund. Malaysian leaders sensed how communally divisive the issue had become. On 11 December, the Malaysian Consultative Council of non-Islamic religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism called on the Melaka State government to drop its demand for \$2 million of quit rent on the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple. On 20 December, the Cheng Hoon Temple went to the Malaysian High Court to contest the levying of \$2 million of quit rent on Bukit China.

On 5 January 1985, the DAP called off its campaign as the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir intervened to remove Bukit China as source of division between Malaysia's different races, religions, and cultures. Behind the scenes

intervention by Mahathir seemed to defuse the issue. On 6 February 1985, the Melaka State government and the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple reached an agreement that there would 'beautification' of Bukit China. On 18 February, the Cheng Hoon Temple submitted its proposals for the beautification of the Bukit China site. A few days later on 21 February, Rahim told the public that an 'amicable settlement' had been reached and the dispute was over (*The Star*, 22 February 1985).

Although resolved, the Bukit China heritage battle continued to be a major heritage issue into the 1990s, as elements of the dispute played themselves out. In February 1987, all the 18 joggers arrested on 19 August 1984 during the DAP's 'Save Bukit China Walk and Jog' at the site still had their cases before the courts after two subsequent trials. (*New Straits Times*, 20 February 1987, and *The Star*, 19 February 1987). Rahim and the Melaka government pursued the Cheng Hoon Temple over the quit rent owed on Bukit China, increasing the bill to \$8.1 million in June 1991 (*New Straits Times*, 18 July 1991 and *The Star*, 18 July 1991).

Melaka emerged out of the 1980s with greater provisions to protect its heritage. The State of Melaka gazetted the Chinatown-St Paul's Hill area as a heritage zone under the State's Preservation and Conservation of Heritage Enactment Act of 1988. On 15 April 1989, the State Government declared Melaka a 'Historical City' before Malaysian Cabinet Ministers and representatives from UNESCO (*The Star* 16 April 1989). This designation was aimed at aiding Melaka's bid to be designated as a World Heritage city, which it failed unsuccessfully to achieve by itself in the 1980s and again in the 1990s (Worden, 2010).

Badan Warisan Malaysia and Saving the Central Market, Kuala Lumpur in 1984

In Kuala Lumpur, a similar trend was occurring as in Penang and Melaka. Unchecked development was threatening many areas that were perceived to be historic cultural sites. The Batu Caves were a sacred site for the Malaysian Indian community with their Lord Murugan shrine and Sri Mariaman temple. They also contained an endangered bat population. The caves were threatened by destructive blasting from a nearby quarry. In 1980, CAP, the Malayan Nature Society, and Indian community organisations led a successful public campaign to save the Batu Caves from damage (*Utusan Konsumer*, October 1980). Many ordinary members of the public became involved. This and other threats to Kuala Lumpur's heritage brought about the creation on 2 August 1983 of the Badan Warisan Malaysia (Malaysian Heritage Trust, BWM). One of its founders architect Chen Voon Fee described the creation of the BWM: Founded at the tail-end of the building boom, it was very much the belated child of the times. Concerned citizens, appalled at the rapid disappearance of KL's lovely old buildings, did not cry and wring hands. Instead, they rallied and acted! (BWM AR, 1988)

The BWM's first heritage battle was the preservation of the Kuala Lumpur Central Market. It was built in 1936 as a wet market for fresh meat, fish, and vegetables. However, the Central Market was about to be demolished in 1984, when the BWM mobilised public opinion behind preserving it. The BWM also persuaded the developers, Harta Bumi Sdn, that its revitalisation rather than demolition was more profitable. In the words of the BWM, the NGO ensured that when it was restored and reopened in October 1985 the Central Market was 'adapted for re-use as an open space bazaar-like centre, unlike the long dull corridors and glass box layout of most shopping complexes or plazas' of Kuala Lumpur (*Berita Warisan*, December 1988-February 1989). Handicraft and souvenir stalls dotted the area with restaurants and food and beverage outlets. The idea was to turn the place into a "cultural market" along the lines of London's Covent Garden, Boston's Fanueil Hall Market Place and New York City's Street Seaport (*Berita Warisan*, December 1988-February 1989) The architect responsible for the revitalisation of the Central Market was none other than Chen Voon Fee from the governing council of the BWM (BWM AR, 1988). Chen completed the process with the co-operation of the firm of Singapore architect William Lim who founded the Singapore Heritage Society in 1987. Commenting on the success of the project, the BWM concluded:

The realisation of the Central Market is a result of a fortunate combination of many factors including increasing public awareness on heritage issues, suitable economic conditions, political support, enlightened developers with definite visions, responsive bureaucracies, committed and dedicated designers.

The Central Market is proof of intelligent adaptive reuse preserving the cultural heritage of old buildings and yet contributing to modern physical development in urban centres (*Berita Warisan*, December 1988-February 1989).

The success of the revitalisation of the Central Market and other projects that the BWM was involved in during the 1980s indicated that it was a heritage NGO that had significant influence and resources. It was not an arm of the state, but modelled on the National Trust of England, which, too, could exert influence and garner considerable financial resources for heritage preservation. The founders and leaders of the BWM were influential members of Malaysian society. Mubin Sheppard, its first honorary secretary, had set up Malaysia's national museum and national archives. He had connections into the political and business elites of Malaysia. Harun M. Hashim, the BWM's first president, was a senior judge who also was well connected in the ruling elite. Jimmy Cheok-Siang Lim, its first vice-president, and Chen Voon Fee, the BWM's first Honorary Treasurer, were both well regarded architects. BWM for its first decade was run by a small group of individuals who constituted its council of 16 members. Oddly many ordinary supporters of the BWM initially formed a separate organisation known as Persatuan Sahabat Warisan Malaysia, (The Friends of Badan Warisan Malaysia). The BWM council wanted the two organisations to join together, but 'The Friends' rejected these proposals from its inception in 1987 until 1993, preferring to

remain separate and focused more on popularising the heritage cause through activities such as 'Heritage Hunts' (BWM AR, 1987).

The BWM from its inception in 1983 had as its overall objectives to preserve historic buildings and educate the public on heritage, but it also had the power to acquire, voluntarily, historic buildings or pay for their restoration (Memorandum and Articles of Association of Badan Warisan Malaysia). To do this, the BWM needed to raise large sums of money, which it had the capacity to do from its inception. In this respect, the BWM closely followed the National Trust of England, which it was closely affiliated and looked to as a model. For large financial donations, the BWM could draw upon the members of its council who had connections with the big business and the ruling elite. In 1986, the BWM received \$238,760 in donations. The BWM bought and restored an historic istana or palace called Istana Tengku Long in the Malaysian State of Terengganu. The cost of this for the BWM was \$150,000. In October 1986, the BWM simply donated this restored historic building to the State of Terengganu, and it was re-erected at the Terengganu State museum. In the same year, the BWM spent \$195,149 restoring historic buildings, such as Gedung Raja Abdullah, which did not belong to it (BWM AR, 1987). The reliance on corporate donations and its tendency to draw on its influence within the Malaysian establishment while empowering the BWM also meant that it tended to refrain from the heritage activism that had characterised heritage battles in Penang and in Melaka.

The Formation of the Penang Heritage Trust in 1985

The creation of the BWM was soon followed by the formation in 1985 of the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT, or Persatuan Warisan Pulau Pinang), which was partly modelled on the BWM. However, the PHT drew much more than the BWM on heritage activism. It combined the conservatism of the BWM's National Trust of England model with the approach of NGOs of the Penang 1970s social justice activists. This mixture in Penang would bring about a new phase in heritage activism. According to the PHT 'the idea of setting up a heritage group in Penang was mooted by a group of conservation stalwarts – comprising of people from diverse professions – who met informally as early as March 1985 to define and identify the urgent need as well as possible areas for conservation and preservation in Penang' (*Warisan*, March 1987). This group had its first official meeting as the PHT at the E&O Hotel on Farquhar Street on 1 September 1985, attracting 24 people. On 22 August 1986, the PHT was registered as a society.

Ironically the inaugural chairman of the PHT was Lim Chong Keat, who had been the architect of the Komtar and was the brother of the Penang Chief Minister. He was unrepentant about the Komtar, and even gave a tour of the building to members of the PHT where he 'briefed the group on the concept behind the Komtar development and the rationale of developing comprehensively over the 27-acre KOMTAR site – to curb sporadic and speculative development in George-town as well as to conserve and preserve certain parts of the inner city' (*Warisan*, March 1987). There had been a minor heritage conservation

component of the Komtar plan in the 1970s, which Lim was now keen to talk up, despite it never being taken seriously.

The diverse views within the PHT were voiced on 11 September 1986 at a forum of two dozen people, called 'Prospects for Heritage Action in Penang' to decide the directions that the PHT should take. On the agenda were several questions about the future role of the PHT. Members asked 'should it be directly involved in municipal town planning or be apolitical? Should it be tourist oriented?' The last British governor of Penang, Sjovald Cunyngham-Brown, who had retired in Penang to write history, argued for a conservative approach of selling the virtues of heritage for tourism: 'What is required is the co-operation of the government, after all for the tourist industry to be a money-spinner of the State, it is necessary to preserve old buildings, to preserve our scenic coastline and develop Georgetown into a healthy urban centre' (*Warisan*, March 1987). Dr Ghulam Sawar, a USM lecturer took a similar position: 'Tourists are here to experience our living heritage.' (*Warisan*, March 1987) Goh Ban Lee, a research fellow from the Centre for Policy Research at USM, also made the same point arguing that the Municipal Council can preserve buildings as heritage while the PHT raises the public's awareness of the value of heritage by connecting its value to tourism. She also saw the PHT as 'a pressure group' on the government. Other PHT members disagreed about stressing heritage's value for tourism in order to win support for the cause. Lim Chong Keat eschewed the connection with tourism preferring the idea of an elite 'Trust in a civic sense, based on broad-based action, not populist as against elitist' (*Warisan*, March 1987).

The PHT, like the BWM and the National Trust of England, soon started to move in the direction of exercising the power of acquiring historic buildings and restoring others using funds that it had raised. On 19 October 1986, members of the PHT visited the abandoned and derelict Suffolk House, which was formerly the residence of several early governors of Penang. In December 1986 Lim Chong Keat informed the Municipal Council that urgent action needed to be taken and suggested forming a Trust between the PHT and the State and Municipal Council. In January 1987, such a Trust was formed, and in March the Council agreed to acquire the land. The PHT began its decades' long restoration of Suffolk House. At the same it committed itself to the restoration of the Syed Alatas Mansion, which was also derelict. The idea was to turn it into a Penang Heritage Training Centre to teach many of the traditional crafts and techniques for restoring historic buildings (*Warisan*, March 1987).

In 1987, the PHT began to agitate for the acquisition of the Cheong Fatt Sze Mansion, which was also in a serious state of disrepair. The descendants of Cheong Fatt Sze were seeking to sell the property. In 1990, the mansion was bought by PHT supporters, architect Laurence Loh and his historical researcher wife Lin Lee Loh-Lim. Loh had grown up in Penang, but studied architecture in London and worked in Cornwall on low impact alternative technologies in building from 1973 to 1974. He returned to Malaysia in 1974 at the age of 24. While

working in a Penang architecture firm after his return, Loh taught at USM's School of Housing, Building & Planning from 1976 to 1979. Later, he organised Penang's first heritage conference in 1986, as chairman of Persatuan Akitek Malaysia's Northern Chapter that brought together many local and international architects, academics, and urban planners.

Loh saw the Cheong Fatt Sze Mansion restoration project an opportunity to stop 'just talking' and to 'put his money where his mouth is' (*The Edge*, 11 July 2005). By 1995, Loh and Loh-Lim had restored much of the mansion to its former glory using many traditional building techniques that were being gradually lost in Penang, as many old buildings were not restored and left to decay. However, it took 12 years before the restoration was fully completed. Looking back on the project in 2007, Loh-Lim described the significance of Cheong Fatt Sze Mansion as the first restoration project of its kind in Penang:

The principle [sic] importance of the restoration lies in the impetus it provided in the drive to instill conservation consciousness in George Town. It also set the benchmark of architectural restoration integrity, in a milieu not notable then for its quality of restoration work. Traditional restoration techniques revived in the works, are now acknowledged as widely applicable through-out the historic city (Loh-Lim, 2007:64).

THE HERITAGE NGOS ENGAGE THE STATE IN THE 1990s

The 1990s saw two trends emerge among the heritage NGOs. They began to more easily mobilise public opinion behind them and they also were more readily able to engage governments that were keener to further the cause of heritage conservation than before. The campaign to save Penang Hill from development during 1990 to 1992 was similar in impact to the 1980s campaign to preserve Bukit China in galvanising support behind conservation of both natural and built heritage.

The 1990-92 Campaign to Save Penang Hill

In September 1990, it became public knowledge that the Penang State government was considering a tourism project called The Penang Hill Resort Project to redevelop 900 acres of Penang Hill into a place of luxury hotels, condominiums, shopping complexes, theme parks and golf courses (*Utusan Konsumer*, September 1990). The first the Penang public knew about The Penang Hill Resort Project was on 1 September 1990 when Penang Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu and Vincent Tan, managing director of the company developing the project, Berjaya Corporation, signed a Memorandum of Understanding. On 8 September, eight NGOs formed the 'Friends of Penang Hill' to stop the development. These groups were CAP, which led the others, the Malayan Nature Society, SAM (Sahabat Alam Malaysia, Malaysian Friends of Nature), ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement), EPSM (Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia), Aliran, the Penang Youth Council and the USM Academic and Administrative Staff Association (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-September 1990).

While the key argument was about nature conservation, concerns about preserving Penang's built heritage were also raised. Khoo Salma Nasution on behalf of the PHT supported the coalition to stop development saying, 'The Penang Hill Project may cause indiscriminate damage to the heritage buildings, the existing forest, and the historic character of Penang Hill.' (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-September 1990).

In October, support continued to grow with damning criticism from the Penang Ratepayers Association and the Penang section of the Malaysian Trade Union Council (*Utusan Konsumer*, October 1990). In November, the Malaysian Department of the Environment rejected the Penang Hill Project and its Environmental Impact Assessment Report, which was required for development to proceed (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-November 1990). During November and December 1991, Penang school students and their geography teachers were organising exhibition and trips to Penang Hill in the campaign to save it from development (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-January 1991). On 30 November, a large public forum was held by CAP and a petition against the development signed by 19,772 people presented to the meeting (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-December 1990).

In January 1991, the new Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon appeared to back away from the project when he told the Penang Assembly that he did not know about the project until his former Gerakan Party leader and Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu had signed the MOU on 1 September 1990 (*Utusan Konsumer*, January 1991). Dr Koh had been his former leader's political secretary (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-December 1990). On 22 January 1991, S.M. Mohamed Idris, the President of CAP, with representatives of the Malayan Nature Society and SAM presented a petition of 28,000 signatures against the redevelopment of Penang Hill and also an alternative plan to conserve it to Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-February 1991).

When the developer of Penang Hill, Bukit Pinang Leisure submitted its revised proposal in July with a new Environmental Impact Assessment the reaction was even stronger with the NGOs against it pointing out that the revised plan was worse than the original (*Utusan Konsumer*, August 1991). Another public forum was held on 8 September with 300 people voicing their rejection of the revised plan (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-September 1991). In March 1992, the Malaysian Department of the Environment rejected the developer's revised Environmental Impact Assessment Report. Dr Koh conceded that there would be no development of the Penang Hill and accepted the alternative plan put forward by the NGOs. Reviewing the battle to save Penang Hill, CAP acknowledged how much support had been mobilised, arguing: 'Public played vital role to save Penang Hill'. Crucial to saving Penang Hill from development, CAP said, were the '40,400 signatures from people who wanted to save Penang Hill as natural heritage' (*Utusan Konsumer*, April 1992).

The mobilisation of the public to save Penang Hill as natural heritage had implications for galvanising opinion to save Penang's built heritage. Khor Kok Peng, veteran journalist and columnist for CAP, made this point early on in the battle for Penang Hill. He outlined CAP's opposition to a certain type of development that the Penang Hill Project represented. Khor in approaching what he called 'tourism and recreational development' rejected 'the obsolete "Man-Conquers-Nature" philosophy which would destroy natural resources and the environment in order to construct hideous buildings'. He embraced what he 'ecological and sustainable development' promoting 'small-scale ecology-enhancing projects'. Khor added that 'Penang also has many historical buildings and monuments which we can preserve, conserve and highlight as tourist attractions. Outstanding examples of local culture (such as a good Malay house within a traditional kampong) could also be identified and highlighted as tourist attractions.' He continued, 'There are many other examples which well planned can serve as tourist attractions that harmonise with and enhance Penang's natural beauty and environment as well as local cultures'. Khor concluded, 'The economic benefits from such a model of tourist development could be as great as the present model of large-scale development. It would have much less negative side effects (or economic costs). It would provide many jobs and spread out the benefits more equitably' (*Utusan Konsumer*, September 1990).

Idris, as President of CAP, articulated its attitude to heritage when he gave an address on 26 May 1990 at CAP's 'Our Malaysian Heritage' exhibition at which Ministry of Education officials, teachers and school children attended. He said, 'In our bid to modernise quickly and also as a result of colonisation, we are losing very important and integral parts of our identity confidence, dignity and ways of solving problems.' Idris declared:

The rapid extinction of our rich and diverse local cultures, technologies, skills and knowledge is a danger which is still unfelt by the majority of Malaysians. We currently lead our lives as if we have had no heritage, no richness and no pride in our indigenous culture and systems... We hope that our heritage will be rediscovered and revitalised before we lose them all and become up-rooted 'modern-western' people without any confidence or attachment to our roots. (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-June 1990).

He elaborated that preserving heritage meant adopting a different model of development. Idris described how 'there is a great need for our young to appreciate and take pride in the richness and value of our indigenous systems and knowledge', adding that 'it is in these indigenous traditions that are found the seeds of hope for alternative development models.' Idris commented that 'recognising this, CAP has made several efforts to get the Government to give serious thought to rediscover, study and document our own indigenous solutions before they are completely obliterated in the name of progress'. He cited, as one effort by CAP, the 1981 national seminar CAP had organised on 'Appropriate Technology, Culture and Lifestyle Development'. Idris then mentioned, 'We have

also promoted the Malay house as the most viable form of housing to meet Malaysia's housing needs' (*Utusan Konsumer*, Mid-June 1990).

The battle to save Penang Hill helped galvanise public opinion behind the PHT's push for heritage conservation during the early 1990s real estate boom that Penang experienced. In 1996, looking back on this period, Laurence Loh, Vice-President of BMW, commented: 'More old buildings have been knocked down in Penang in the last five years than in the last 30 years' (*News Straits Times*, 12 January 1996). Khoo Salma Nasution, the PHT secretary, made the same point in December 1995, when she calculated that George Town's bungalows and mansions had dwindled from 600 to about 100 in just five years. She argued: 'In the last few years as many buildings have been destroyed as in the previous 50 years put together to make way for apartments, condominiums or commercial complexes' (*The Star*, 9 December 1995).

The Struggle to Preserve Built Heritage amidst Penang's 1990s Real Estate Boom

In 1996, according to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Syed Zainol Abidin Aidid, it was not just growth that was responsible for rapid demolition. He maintained that there was 'an apparent degree of unawareness among ourselves on the value of these treasures'. Chis Abel in his assessment of Malaysia's architectural heritage noted that unlike other Southeast Asia countries, such as Indonesia and Cambodia, Malaysia had few ancient grand monuments, such as Borobudur and Angkor Wat, which helped shape the history of the region. Abel said: 'What it has, instead, is a rich variety of rural and urban domestic architecture, moulded partly by indigenous traditions and partly by colonial and other influences' (*News Straits Times*, 12 January 1996). A study by UTM's Faculty of Built Environment revealed a rich heritage of 30,000 pre-war buildings in some 247 cities, town and villages, with 70 per cent of these under Rental Control Act, which was in the process of being repealed in the 1990s. Most of these buildings were in central business districts and thus vulnerable to redevelopment (*News Straits Times*, 12 January 1996).

During Penang's real estate boom of the early 1990s, one particular demolition acted as a catalyst for heritage conservation. On Christmas Day 1993, the developer Dolphin Square, ignored a Municipal Council heritage site protection order, and demolished the Hotel Metropole. It was also known as Asdang House, the former holiday home of the Khaw family, governors of Southern Thailand at the turn of the century. Hotel Metropole had been built as a mansion during 1900 in a Moorish architectural style near the seaside in an area of George Town known as 'Millionaire's Row'. Under the Municipal Council's laws the maximum fine for demolishing a designated protected heritage site was a \$50,000, which was regarded as paltry for any developer. Anil Netto, a writer with the PHT, noted the effect of this blatant breach of conservation guidelines:

Its bitter end galvanized the heritage movement. Like a phoenix rising from the hotel rubble, their cries rang out. The PHT issued several press statements and the media gave full play to the story. Under such pressure, local authorities set up a heritage advisory committee, made up of interested groups – including the Housing Developers Association (Netto, 1995).

The heritage advisory committee that was set up with the Municipal Council of Penang had as its chairman S.P Choong who was a leader of the ruling party Gerakan, but also active in the PHT. The main task of the heritage advisory committee was to identify heritage monuments, areas, and complete streets that it could recommend to the Municipal Council to save. The Municipal Council of Penang had already devised urban design guidelines for five designated historical zones in 1987, but as the PHT's Secretary Khoo Salma Nasution pointed out only 15 per cent of the buildings in these areas would have been fully protected and avoided the fate of the Metropole Hotel. These were structures such as churches and museums.

The main concern of the 200 members of the PHT was the lack of a national conservation act to protect heritage, which seemed to be under increasing threat. George Town's more than 12,000 prewar buildings had mostly survived because of decades of rent control that discouraged owners from redeveloping and making major changes to their properties. However, as Anil Netto remarked:

The same rent-control laws that deter owners from making significant changes to their buildings' architecture have also triggered years of neglect. The structures are sturdy, but peeling paint and crumbling plaster have stripped them of their former glory.

A coat of paint and minor renovations could restore them to their stately selves; abolishing rent control might prompt owners to take such measures. It could also backfire, triggering a real-estate bonanza: Penang is running out of space to accommodate its urban sprawl, and their location, close to the city centre, makes them prime development targets (Netto, 1995).

Rent Control in Penang was due to be phased out in 2000. The fear among the heritage NGOs was that major redevelopment would occur once owners had an incentive to demolish their old shophouses.

The Penang Government of the Mid-1990s embraces Heritage for Tourism

The close association of the PHT with the Municipal Council and State government on the heritage advisory committee after the Hotel Metropole demolition brought about changes, despite both sides initially being very suspicious of each other (*PHT Newsletter*, December 1995). The argument of preserving heritage in order to reap the benefits of increased tourism attracted the politicians, who were previously more beholden to developers who could pay high rates to fund the council (Netto, 1995). Kee Phaik Cheen, the State

Executive Councillor for Tourism, Culture, Arts, and Women's Development, spoke of the need for introducing a State Heritage Enactment, citing heritage's value in tourism as a reason:

There are 12,000 pre-war buildings in George-town alone. With the existence of the new enactment, we hope to turn Georgetown into a heritage city with all the antiquated architecture and old world ambience retained to attract tourists (*New Straits Times*, 27 October 1995).

In 1995, Kee outlined how conserving heritage was part of hers and the Penang government's tourism and development strategies for the 21st century:

...there is an urgency to promote new facets of the state's heritage as significantly different tourism products...the city's colonial past, living traditions, architectural richness and multicultural heritage can be thematically recreated as 'historical precincts', 'ethnic enclaves', 'zones of adaptive re-use', and 'ensembles of aesthetic buildings'. These, together with Penang's food and handicraft, are cultural and heritage attractions which can be repackaged in the form of informative guided tours that may even encourage tourist participation in the living culture of Penang's people. Furthermore, such products are readily marketable to incentive groups which are invariably here for a cultural experience (Kee, 1995, 182).

Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon, when discussing a draft of the State Heritage Enactment with Kee, made a similar point:

Our aim is to encourage more heritage development to preserve the history as well as attracting tourists. As most of the pre-war buildings are not owned by the state government, all we can do is seek the co-operation from the private sector to upgrade and help convert the buildings into hotels, shops or clubs (*New Straits Times*, 27 October 1995).

The response of the PHT was impatience, as promises in the past had not lead to any abatement of demolitions:

Our highest authorities have spoken, promising Penang what is called the State Heritage Enactment. They've made it quite clear that their thoughts no longer revolve entirely around new development. They're fully aware of what is endangering our heritage and that protecting it can only be done by government fiat. The question is – when, how soon, can they deliver and Penang have this long-awaited enactment? (*PHT Newsletter*, December 1995)

The Penang State government acted in 1996, becoming the first Malaysian State to implement the amendments to the Federal Town and Country Planning Act of 1995 which improved the original 1976 act of the same name (*New Straits Times*, 18 January 1996). Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh promised that 1996 would be the year of town planning for Penang. He said that the Heritage Enactment Act would solve the urgency of trying to save many of the old buildings when rent control was removed. He promised to involve heritage NGOs and heritage

professionals more, commenting: 'We will also form a professional committee to help local government identify and categorise buildings for conservation inside and outside the inner city conservation zone' (*The Star*, 18 January 1996). Lim Chong Keat of the PHT countered that 'there would be no problem identifying Penang's architectural heritage as the listings "have largely been, especially for Georgetown" in the Penang Structural Plan 1987' (*The Star* 6 February 1996). The Housing Developers Association became wary of designating new areas as heritage, and questioned whether the process would be done at the 'whims and fancies' of the PHT. The Municipal Council of Penang was moving closer to the position of the PHT, and countered that conservation of heritage buildings had been part of council planning policy since 1973 when the Interim Zoning Plan of George Town was first conceived (*Sunday Star*, 10 December 1995).

Slowly, the argument for preserving heritage as a way of encouraging tourism began to take hold of the Municipal Council of Penang and the State government. The Penang Tourist Guides Association wrote an open letter to the press, in which it stated: 'Heritage is one of our strong tourism products. Let's not destroy it' (*PHT Newsletter*, May 1996). The Association, which had several PHT members in its ranks, referred to the book produced in 1993 by Khoo Salma Nasution, the secretary of the PHT, *Streets of George Town Penang* as being invaluable to tourist guides, and recommended 'it is one book every Penangite should possess' (*PHT Newsletter*, May 1996).

MALAYSIAN HERITAGE NGOS AND WORLD HERITAGE IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

In the first decade of the 21st Century, Malaysian heritage NGOs worked much more closely with government planners. The catalyst for this change appears to have been the decade long campaign to list Penang and Melaka for World Heritage. This achieved success on 10 July 2008 when the two cities of George Town and Melaka were inscribed jointly as World Heritage by UNSECO. During this period, Heritage NGOs continued to push their model of sustainable development for Malaysian cities and towns, while the state was mesmerised by the tourism potential of heritage conservation.

World Heritage Listing and the Heritage NGOs

On 10 February 1998, Richard Engelhardt, the UNESCO Regional Unit Head for Social and Human Science in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, presented a paper at a heritage conference in Penang entitled: 'Can Penang Become A World Heritage Site, The Role of Public-Private Partnerships In the Conservation of A Living Historic Town'. He was on a five day trip to Penang at the invitation of the Penang State government to study how Penang could apply for George Town to be listed as World Heritage (*The Star*, 11 February 1998). From Engelhardt's visit the State government planned another seminar in July with UNESCO, which, according to the Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh 'would enlighten landowners and developers on the "tremendous" economic potential of heritage buildings'. Dr Koh mentioned, 'Some of these people are unaware of the benefits' and concluded

that 'the seminar would dispel apprehension among them on heritage matters' (*The Star*, 17 February 1998). For Dr Koh and the Penang State Government those benefits were increased tourism.

Heritage conservationists in Penang began to rethink through what model of development they would want for Penang. For conserving heritage, the PHT rejected the model that Singapore was using. Khoo Salma Nasution, the secretary of the PHT, wrote:

In theory, Singapore's conservation programme ought to have been a model for Asia. It has after all managed to conserve entire prewar precincts. But Singapore discovered to its dismay that strong planning and legislation were not enough to preserve the flavour of the past. Developers misunderstanding the specific needs of conservation, opted for makeovers that edged out the original neighbourhood dwellers, who took with them the sound, smell and flavour of neighbourhood life...

Up north, Penang still has a vibrant mix of cultures and urban street life. For the moment, its soul remains intact: a city where neighbourhoods, precincts and buildings – the two century old fort and waterfront, hill station, eclectically styled mansions, ancient houses of worship and about 10,000 prewar shophouses – still breathe a cultural rich and organic life. But admittedly, some buildings need intervention to restore their grace. (Khoo, 1997)

She rejected what Kuala Lumpur had done generally in heritage conservation, but embraced the restoration of the Central Market:

As a form of historical conservation, Kuala Lumpur opted for "facadism," literally: monstrous tower blocks rising out of shells of colonial-era buildings. A gratifying exception is the revitalization of the art deco Central Market and its surrounding area of Chinese shophouses. (Khoo, 1997)

In July 1998, the Penang and Melaka State governments in conjunction with the Malaysian government announced that they intended to seek joint World Heritage listing for both George Town and Melaka. The PHT saw this as endorsement of the model of urban development that it had been long advocating:

UNESCO's interest in Penang has resolved us in our efforts to work towards the continuation of the viability of inner city survival. It is not soulless and empty monuments that we are seeking to retain, it is people's lifestyles operating within these same wonderfully scaled, meaningful and functional structures that make up our inner city. It is the aspiration of the Penang Heritage Trust that Penang be put on the World Heritage Map and we believe that the people of Penang share our aspiration. We will then be recognised, not because we are a dead monument, but because we are a living city with great potential for sustainable development (*PHT Newsletter*, November/December 1998).

With the end of rent control in George Town in 2000 the fear arose that many traditional crafts would vanish from the heritage area because the people engaged in them would be unable to pay the increased rents, the PHT once again reiterated its model of development that it was pursuing: Considering that the State Government of Penang has declared its intention to nominate George Town for World Heritage Status, we wish to stress that this nomination should not be for the sake of attracting tourists per se, but it should be a commitment to the people of Penang that the Government will do all it can to ensure the sustainable development of our historic city through cultural development and community development (*PHT Newsletter*, May-June 1999).

In a way the PHT was putting forward a model of urban development that its fellow Penang NGO, CAP, had been advocating since the 1970s. When Rent Control was finally lifted in 2000 both the PHT and CAP were active in helping the tenants deal with landlords raising the rents or evicting them.

The BWM and the Model of the National Trust of England

With the national support behind the campaign to list Penang and Melaka as World Heritage cities the cause was taken up by the BWM, which had as its President Ahmad Sarji. Entering the 21st century, the BWM hoped to achieve in Malaysia a similar influence to that the National Trust of England enjoyed in the UK. In December 1995, the BWM had appointed as its president Ahmad Sarji, Chief Secretary of the Malaysian Cabinet (1990 to 1996) (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008, 211-213). The leadership of the BWM calculatingly recruited Malaysia's most senior civil servant whose wide interests included a fascination with history and Malaysia's past (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 702). As a result, the BWM immediately increased its influence in the corridors of power of Malaysia's administration and in its business board rooms. Ahmad Sarji was Chairman of Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB) from 1996 to the present. This government linked company was the instrument of the New Economic Policy shifting more wealth to the Bumiputras or indigenous people of the country.

Symbolising the influence that Ahmad Sarji brought with him, in 1996, he successfully persuaded Prime Minister Mahathir to give to the BWM for its new headquarters a large block of land with an old colonial bungalow on it at No.2 Jalan Stoner, in the heart of one of the prime real estate areas of Kuala Lumpur, where the old colonial government staff housing quarters were located (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 702).

With Ahmad Sarji as its President, the views of the BWM on heritage were listened to more and it was able to receive large donations. The BWM very much followed the path of the National Trust of England under Ahmad Sarji (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008). In 1994, when it was proposed to knock down both Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara in Kuala Lumpur, Ahmad Sarji was able to reverse

the decision in the late 1990s and get funds from PNB to buy them in 2000 and then restore the historic buildings (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008, 207-209). Laurence Loh, BWM's Vice-President, and Malaysia's foremost heritage restoration architect, worked on the restoration. They were handed over to the Malaysian government in 2007.

The UNESCO listing of Melaka and Penang required a model conservation project in Melaka. This would provide examples of the techniques of restoration for other buildings to adopt and follow in the conservation area. Penang already had the Cheong Fatt Sze mansion restored by Laurence Loh and the PHT. To fulfil this role in Melaka, during 2001, Ahmad Sarji was able to gain the funds to enable the BWM to restore one of Melaka's early shophouses from the 1700s at No.8 Heeren Street (Jalan Tan Cheng Lock), which was owned by the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 706).

The BWM helped draft the 2005 Heritage Conservation Act for all of Malaysia, which the World Heritage listing of Penang and Melaka also required. Ahmad Sarji chaired the committee for the BWM. On it were also representatives of the Town and Country Planning Department. The BWM outlined that it wanted greater community involvement in urban development so that traditional activities in heritage areas could be maintained. Commenting on this committee, Ahmad Sarji wrote, 'The BWM has been spear-heading efforts since 1998 for the introduction of a new heritage law in Malaysia which will not only promote conservation and enhancement of historic buildings and zones, but will also secure the proper management of these sites and promote schemes for education, for community involvement in decision making and for practical and financial assistance for owners and residents in these neighbourhoods' (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 726).

The 2005 Heritage Conservation Act set up a heritage register on which historic buildings would be placed as 'National Heritage' once they were identified. The government could gazette historic buildings and control any changes to them. A National Heritage Conservation Council was established with representatives of heritage NGOs and conservation specialists. However, most of the powers of the Act were placed in a member of the civil service who was designated as the Commissioner of Heritage. He could place buildings on the Heritage Register and acquire heritage buildings, as well as stop demolitions or structural changes by issuing protection orders. The Council's role was largely to advise the minister and the commissioner, who were not bound to accept its advice.

In drafting the 2005 Heritage Conservation Act, the Malaysian Government rejected the key recommendation of the BWM and Ahmad Sarji for the establishment of a powerful National Heritage Conservation Corporation, which would have had wide powers comparable to the National Trust of England. The BWM proposed that this organisation should acquire or dispose of any historic buildings or land in or outside a historic zone. It had would have had unfettered

power to carry out restoration in an historic zone. The BWM envisaged this powerful corporation as working hand in hand with itself in identifying sites for gazetting as well as educating the public (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 726-730). What they got was the Commissioner of Heritage.

Despite the Heritage Conservation Act and the listing of Penang and Melaka as World Heritage, Ahmad Sarji in 2011 observed that the BWM was a long way from operating like its model organisation, The National Trust of the England, which had been given its powers by legislation from the House of Commons 100 years before. Ahmad Sarji lamented the differences between the BWM and the National Trust:

Like the BWM, it relies heavily on the generosity of its supporters and friends, but unlike the BWM (with about 400 members), the National Trust has two million members and its membership subscription, gifts and legacies and the contribution of more than 34,000 volunteers ensure its strength. It also has the unique statutory power to declare land inalienable, that such land cannot be sold, mortgaged or compulsorily purchased against the Trust's wishes without special Parliamentary procedure. The endowment of this special power means that protection of heritage buildings by the National Trust is forever. It protects over 200 historic houses, 230 gardens and 25 industrial monuments apart from many thousands of hectares of countryside and large stretches of outstanding coastline (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 742).

In a significant respect, the BWM did expand like the National Trust of England with autonomous State heritage trusts emerging out of branches – the Melaka Heritage Trust in 2001, the Perak Heritage Trust in 2003, and the Sarawak Heritage Trust in 2006. Despite their small memberships, they often saw their objectives as not just being pressure groups to preserve historic buildings in their communities but as agents for educating the public on the value of heritage at the neighbourhood level (Ahmad Sarji, 2011, 703).

The debates over the Heritage Conservation Act helped foster the misperception among the Malaysian public that the BWM does have, like the National Trust of England, the powers to stop the destruction of historic buildings. A case arose in Kuala Lumpur in 2012. Victor Chin, artist and photographer, had been trying throughout 2012 with other heritage activists to stop the demolition of historic buildings along Kuala Lumpur's Jalan Sultan in Chinatown to make way for the expansion of the city's train lines. In June 2012, Chin criticised the BWM for not exercising the powers to protect historic buildings that the BWM wished it had, but did not possess under the Heritage Conservation Act: 'Badan Warisan (The National Heritage Trust) — the body set up to protect heritage buildings — has been silent on this matter'. Christine Foo wrote to agree with Chin saying: 'What can we the public do to stop this desecration of our heritage. Like you have said our Badan Warisan is hopeless.' (*The Malaysian Insider*, 3 June 2012).

The BWM has acknowledged how effective the Heritage Conservation Act could be if implemented well with community, business, and government support, but it lamented that land owners, developers and the public in Malaysia were not heritage consciousness enough for it to work effectively. Ahmad Sarji highlighted this in an address on the 15 April 2008 at the 'Dialogue on Governance and Heritage Conservation' organised by *Kumpulan Penyelidikan Governans & Pendidikan Pemuliharaan Warisan* of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia: In the past, when heritage buildings were demolished, we always put the blame on the absence of a comprehensive legislation to protect our heritage. But now, despite the law, the losses continue, not only through acts of demolition... (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008, 214)

Ahmad Sarji argued that there was a need to focus on educating the public especially 'those responsible for making our towns and cities liveable places' because 'at Federal, State, and local levels, there is not enough expertise available and decisions are therefore being made by people who are not suitably qualified'. He argued:

Here education will play a big role – but education has to start from young. Our school system has to find ways to inculcate our young people to love and appreciate our heritage. By the time they get to university, their bias will already be set, whether for or against heritage conservation (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008, 214).

He referred to the need to demonstrate that heritage conservation was about having sustainable development:

Heritage is validated when it is the base on which we regenerate our historic neighbourhoods, towns and cities. If we ignore our heritage, we ignore our past, and we cannot build a sustainable future unless it has deep roots (Lim Chiang Moh, 2008, 214).

CONCLUSION

Malaysian NGOs when they participated in battles to save the country's heritage have often used their conception of 'sustainable development' to explain the model of development that they prefer. This has sometimes been to counter the accusation from property developers that they are just 'anti-development', but more often it has been from a genuine desire to articulate a model of development that is more in tune with what they see as the history and culture of Malaysia. There has been a distinctive evolution of their conception of 'sustainable development' shaped by events and circumstances from the 1970s to the present. The ideas of 'sustainable development' of the Malaysian heritage NGOs originated from 1970s New Left and environmentalist conceptions of the term and more conservative notions of heritage that have come from the National Trust of England. Yet, what has been emerging is a heritage conservation experience that contrasts with that of their near neighbour, Singapore, which has inherited a similar architectural landscape.

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