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Reflections on Malaysian Urban Landscapes: Unplanned, Planned, and Preserved

David A. Lanegran

For geographers, cities are complex places consisting of both the visible landscape and the invisible forces that create the landscape over time. Landscapes are texts writ large and made up of natural and artificial elements. People created cities to provide access to the necessities of daily life. They minimize costs, save time, and enable us to earn a living. Cityscapes have functions and social meaning that go beyond their utility. Thus, the shape or design we give to cities reflects both our needs and values. There are religious spaces that are sacred to believers and recognized by others. There are ethnic landscapes created to provide a cultural identity for groups within a population. Monuments to political power abound. Such landscapes not only provide a container for the political process but also symbolize abstractions such as empires, nations, and even the cities themselves. The commercial landscape also contains activity spaces wrapped in symbolic skins. Even the unpolished industrial sites, railroad yards and stations, ports, and freeways symbolize the power of the marketplace and human endeavor. Our simultaneous creation of and reading of symbolic landscapes enables some people to sort themselves into communities of affinity, while others are forced to live in communities segregated by class and physical appearance.

Singapore and the cities of Malaysia afford a wonderful opportunity to read the landscape. Here we can see multiple landscape layers produced by a progression of economic activities and cultural groups seldom found outside of Southeast Asia. The physical environment, while interesting, is not spectacular. Therefore, the cultural landscape is more apparent and seemingly more significant. The blending of the

indigenous cultures with those of East Asia, South Asia, and Europe forces the observer to uncover meanings on several scales. In cities with huge airports, fabulous harbors, spectacular new towns, and some of the tallest buildings in the world, it is hard to avoid becoming a geographer.

One of the great crossroads of the world, the Straits of Malacca¹ and the Malay peninsula attracted merchant adventurers and soldiers of fortune from India and China for centuries before the Europeans ventured into the region. The urbanization process began with the development of city-states ruled by Hindu warlords who eventually claimed royal lineage.² By the beginning of the 15th century, the Port of Malacca was so famous that its name was given to the body of water that separates the Malay peninsula from the Island of Sumatra, the Straits of Malacca. It attracted the attention of the Three Jeweled Eunuch Prince, the Great Admiral Cheng-Ho, who, while engaged in a trade and reconnaissance voyage in 1405, delivered gifts and offered the Chinese Empire's protection for the Hindu Prince of Malacca against the Siamese kingdom.

In the 1420s, the Hindu ruler of Malacca converted to Islam and became the Sultan of Malacca. This change made the city and its port even more attractive to the Arab traders engaged in the lucrative East-West trade that passed between the Persian Gulf region and South Asia via the Straits to greater China and the smaller sultanates of Southeast Asia. The city became the hub of Islamic culture in Southeast Asia and dominated much of what is now known as Indonesia. In the middle of the 15th century, the Emperor of China sent one his daughters to be married to the Sultan of Malacca. She is said to have arrived with 500 handmaidens. Chinese Hill, an entire Chinese community, was built for her retinue. By that time, Malacca was the center of the spice trade, that great force of early modern globalization, and Iberian politicians and soldiers are reputed to have believed that whoever was lord in Malacca held Venice by the throat.

Arab sailors and traders could not maintain their grip on the riches of the Indies once the Portuguese sailed into the Indian Ocean. In 1509, Portuguese traders were attacked while attempting to establish trading relations with the Malacca Sultanate. This prompted the Duke of Albuquerque to return the favor and conquer the city. However, Arab traders avoided the Portuguese, and Malacca was soon overshadowed by Islamic centers elsewhere (most notably, Demah on Java). Thus, Malacca was transformed from an Islamic Malay city at the center of the trade network to an outpost on the frontiers of European expansion. It would never regain its former glories.³

The Portuguese rulers of Malacca were replaced by Dutch ones in 1624. The Dutch improved the town's fortifications and built a large *Stadthuys* on the high ground south of the river on the site of the palaces of sultans and the Portuguese fort. The large red structure was built between 1641 and 1660 to house the governor and municipal offices. The Dutch also built a church on the top of the hill with bricks brought from Europe. Although these new structures gave Malacca a vaguely European look, the Dutch followed the basic city plan established long before their arrival. The Dutch, having displaced the Portuguese, firmly maintained control of the sultanates on the Spice Islands and the southernmost tip of the Malaya peninsula.

England, as the third European marine empire to invade Southeast Asia, had to content itself with staking territorial claims to small portions of the Malaya peninsula and northern Borneo. The British soon focused their energies on the lucrative trade between India and China. To facilitate this, they built new ports on islands just off shore of the Malay mainland. George Town was established to the north on Penang, and just south of the tip of the peninsula, Singapore was established on the island of the same name.

George Town was founded by Francis Light in 1786, when Malacca was ruled by the Dutch. Penang was to be a plantation colony, that is, a place for extracting wealth from the area and for the transshipment of goods between China and lands to the west. It was not intended to house large numbers of Europeans. Indeed, it was and remains essentially a Chinese city with a thin veneer of British colonial administrative landscape. For a time, British planters grew spices on suburban plantations but they could not really compete with production elsewhere. Light instituted a free trade policy and commerce soon boomed. The population also expanded from practically zero to 10,000 in a decade and a half.

For about two decades (from 1795 to 1814), during the Napoleonic Wars, the English occupied the Dutch territories in the region. While

many of the East India Company officers wanted to keep the Dutch territory, the Treaty of 1818 reinstalled Dutch authority in the colonial territories. Malacca was ceded by the Dutch to the English in 1825 in exchange for a port in Sumatra (then known as Bencoolen, now modern Bengkulu). By that time, Malacca was greatly overshadowed by the English settlements at Penang and Singapore. To make sure Malacca did not hinder the expansion of Penang, the old fortress was demolished and most of the city's inhabitants were relocated to Penang. The city did not receive investment during the 19th century. As a result, not only did it not grow at the rate of the other Straits settlements, it did not take on the typical colonial plan.

This treaty prompted Arthur Raffles, an officer in the East India Company, to establish a port further east, and in 1819, he selected the mouth of the Singapore River as the new center. In 1824, the English and Dutch agreed on spheres of influence in Malaya and the islands. The three ports, Singapore, Malacca, and Penang, were combined into the "Straits Settlements" in 1826. While the Settlements were ruled by the East India Company headquartered in Calcutta, the actual administration and management was done in Singapore. By that time, Singapore had become paramount, with a population of 100,000, most of whom were immigrants from China.

While the English ruled the trading cities directly, the "Residence Policy" was used to control the sultanates in the remaining area under their influence. The British Resident advised the sultans on the economic matters that interested the English, and the British military power guaranteed the continuation of the local rulers. This bargain eliminated the need for military conquest. By the end of the century, the sultanates were organized into the Federated Malay States, each with its own Resident. In 1909, they were joined, under British rule, with a set of states that had been under Thai suzerainty. These territories were linked to the rest of the Empire via the agents and officers in Singapore. The successes of Singapore relegated Penang to a secondary role in trade and colonial affairs.

Although English architects during the Georgian era are well known for developing wonderful planned cities like Bath and districts such as London's Regent Street, George Town, on Penang, is reputed to have been built without a plan. After selecting a rather poor place for his

wharf, Francis Light supposedly filled a canon full of coins and shot them into the adjacent forest. As people dug for the coins, they are said to have created the streets. Like most of the amusing myths of urban design, there is some truth in the story. Light laid out a grid for the commercial district close to the port, but each ethnic group laid out its own residential district. The small group of Europeans settled on Light Street. The Eurasians settled on Bishop Street and Church Street. The Straits Chinese (people of mixed Chinese and Malay ancestry known as the Peranakan) from Malacca and Dedah settled along China Street. The Tamil Muslims settled along Chulia Street. And all the groups mixed on Market Street. Each group was responsible for its places for worship and community gatherings. Few people called the settlement by the English name. For the Malay it was "tanjung," or the cape. The Chinese used "pho," meaning town in Hokkian.4

These plantation colonies were valuable elements in the British empire. Consequently, Singapore and the other Straits settlements soon took on the characteristics of British entrepôts. Arthur Raffles, the founder, and Thomas Farquar, the builder, of Singapore, as well as essentially all of the English colonial administrators and businessmen that followed them, firmly believed in the separation of land uses and the separation of people by religion, class, and place of origin. The colonial plan for Singapore was basic. The river mouth was lined with commercial docks and warehouses. The land closest to the harbor became a center for government and business functions, and contains most of the monumental buildings. Two hills were leveled near the mouth to provide land upon which could be built the fine residential areas, government buildings, and a church. Although these sites are compact and crowded, the colonials established a padang, a large parade and playing field near the town center. These grounds were used for a variety of social affairs. They also have a somewhat cooler and fresher microclimate that must have been an attraction in an era without air conditioning.

The residential areas, strictly segregated by class and appearance, reflected both Asian and European architecture. The wealthy colonial officials built large houses in the Indian bungalow style on sites near the coast to take advantage of breezes and to be close to the commercial and cultural core of the cities. The primary residential sections reflected traditional building and street patterns of Asia. The basic house type was the shophouse style of south China. These structures were narrow and built wall-to-wall along all the central streets. These

houses are narrow with limited ventilation provided by open air courts. They are built with a masonry form of construction and have tile roofs. Originally, they were intended to provide first floor commercial space with residential apartments on the second story. Blocks were either constructed by clan associations or by individuals. In prosperous times, the shophouse areas were expanded and the amount of decoration increased. Those built after the turn of the century have plain facades. Very poor households lived along the waterfronts in houses built on stilts over the water or in more rough-hewn shophouses. Today, these structures can only be found in Penang.

By the end of the 19th century, the Straits settlements were home to Chinese merchants who became fabulously wealthy by trading in the busy markets of Penang and Singapore. Several of these men arrived in the cities penniless, with only a strong body, brilliant mind, and iron will. They amassed tremendous wealth and built mansions to match their status. These structures were usually placed on the European side of the Chinese districts and took full advantage of the sites. One such example is the Penang house of Cheon Fatt Tze, located in a district of mansion houses and stables built for the wealthy merchants in Penang. Melaka also has a small district of mansions built by Peranakan traders during the rubber boom.

In the middle of the 19th century, another urban place, Kuala Lumpur, joined the Straits Settlements in the race to dominate the region's economy and politics. Its interior location and its associated seaport make it a classical example of how the expansion of the urban industrial network from the European core penetrated the resource frontiers of all parts of the world in the quest for wealth. In 1857, prospectors discovered rich tin deposits in Ampang, and their town, Kuala Lumpur, developed into a typical rough, raw, mining boomtown where planning decisions were dominated by the land market and quest for the most profitable locations. The Klang River valley provided early road access to the sea at the river's mouth. The route to the city of Klang (Kelang) was converted to rail in 1886 and that city's port was greatly improved. This combination of interior resource location connected to a port by a single line of railroad is typical for the early phases of colonial exploitation of resource frontiers.

The tin miners were Chinese and the mine owners European and Chinese, while the rulers were Malay. The local ruler, Sultan of Selanger, appointed Yap Ah Loy to take charge of the Chinese miners, and he is credited with founding the modern city of Kuala Lumpur. In a few decades, the boomtown contained fine mansions built by the wealthy miners and traders as well as a large section of shophouses. The town burned in 1881 but, like other wooden towns of the era, was quickly rebuilt. In the 1880s, the local British Resident persuaded the Sultan to adopt an expansive town plan and to move the government from nearby Klang to Kuala Lumpur. Thus began the great rivalry between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore for domination of the regional urban hierarchy. In 1896, Kuala Lumpur replaced Singapore as the capital of the Federated Malay States, and began to develop as a primate city.

Unlike the port cities, Kuala Lumpur is centered on the confluence of the muddy rivers, which provide its name. Although the topography is very rugged and unlike the flat coastal plains, the general colonial pattern was also applied to the capital city. The *padang* and administration buildings lie at the core near the confluence. Recently, this area has been expanded to provide a place for national icons, the most significant of which is the National Mosque. Unlike its rivals, Kuala Lumpur became a railroad center and, consequently, has a formidable central station that now links both short and long distance travel.

The mining and rubber plantation economies soon replaced transshipping as the primary source of wealth for the colony. Both activities required more labor than could be provided locally and so migration from both South and East Asia was encouraged by the British. Hindu workers and professionals came from India and Sri Lanka. They were joined by Hoikian people and other groups from south China. Even though large numbers of migrants came to Kuala Lumpur, its Malay population was larger. It was and remains the most Malay of the large cities. Elsewhere, the Malay population tended to reside in subsistence and small trading communities called kampongs, located outside the reach of the urban centers. A large segment of the Indian population was settled in agricultural hamlets on the work centers of the enormous rubber plantations that covered the entire western coastal plain. While the company settlements had many urban functions, they really cannot be considered urban areas. However, a limited hierarchy of central places developed to service the nucleated rural settlements.

Nonetheless, the growth of mid-sized towns was stifled by the strong attraction provided by Kuala Lumpur and the other Straits settlements, especially Singapore. Overshadowed by both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, Penang and Malacca settled into a period of slow growth during the 20th century.

Aside from a grid of streets and a pattern of segregation by cultural groups, George Town was essentially unplanned.⁵ It was plagued by floods, poor sanitation, traffic congestion, and lack of open space. In 1921, Charles Reade was loaned by South Australia to the Federation of Malay States to provide guidance in town planning. Reade was trained in British town planning theory and believed in the concept of garden cities as developed by Ebenezer Howard. He saw his role as spreading these concepts to the Empire and published a book, *The Revelation of British Town Planning: a Book for Colonial Administrators*, in 1909. He developed a basic plan for George Town, which was then elaborated as a zoning law. The official map was published in 1931, but it seems as if it was not enforced. During the Depression, the economy was unable to produce a great deal of new development so the city languished through the 1930s and during the Japanese Occupation. Somehow, the plans for the city were lost during the occupation.

Having lost all the planning documents, the city administration had to start the postwar period with general ideas and local memories. Although the city government flourished during the 1950s, by 1966 it was necessary to transfer all the functions of the city council to the state of Penang. Since 1974, the island and the city have been governed as a unit by the Municipal Council of Penang. This move may have been made, in part, to weaken the domination of the city government by Chinese, because the state contains many *kampong* settlements.

In 1971, the state government was worried about congestion in the center city and also determined that a new capital building for the state was needed. Thus, an architectural firm was hired to develop a plan for the city center. Soon, the Central Area Planning Unit was created, consisting of private consultants and officers of the government. Their first task was to create a zoning law, which was followed by the designation of three areas in the old city for comprehensive redevelopment. In addition, a large area of the old shophouse and mansion districts was declared a conservation district.

The plan designated a 10.7-hectare area, where the government owned most of the land, to become the site for a new administrative and civic center with modern structures, complete with space for commerce, restaurants, hotels, and office functions. This location was more central than the existing government buildings, which still occupied the old colonial sites on the tip of the peninsula. It also provided the opportunity to clear away a large declining district and create a series of landmark structures. This was the first major redevelopment and large-scale commercial building project to occur in Malaysia. All the standard rationales for modern redevelopment projects were used to justify the massive project: it would revitalize business, optimize land use in the center, create new and large business opportunities in accordance with the New Economic Policy, provide income for the state, and, lastly, provide the state with much-needed office space and government workers with new and stylish housing. It would even include recreational space in rooftop gardens. This was an important feature because the shophouse developments contained no open space. One of the major goals of the project was to provide space for Bumiputera (Malayan) businessmen within the center of the city (which had always been dominated by the Chinese). It also provided the city's first modern office spaces and commercial outlets for the state's residents following a contemporary lifestyle.

The first phase was spectacular: a 65-story tower rising from a 4story podium block with an adjacent 19-story hotel with 460 rooms. The complex contains over 2 million square feet of rental space. Public space under a geodesic dome, movie theaters, and a parking ramp have also been built. The second phase, consisting largely of infrastructure and a parking ramp, was also completed. The rest of the land was sold to private developers. One of the developers began a shopping center in the mid-1990s but it remains uncompleted, due to current economic conditions. Despite the efficiency achieved by having all the government functions under one roof, along with the improved facilities contained in the structures, the project cannot really be considered a success. The hoped-for development of a large area by private investors has not occurred. Furthermore, the second major component of the plan, the Conservation Area, has not been widely accepted although a non-profit corporation, the Penang Heritage Trust, has worked hard to promote historic preservation and cultural tourism, and landlords and developers continue to seek permission to redevelop scattered sites in the district. There have been some notable

preservation successes in the old bungalow (the colonial mansion strip) with houses being converted to hotels, restaurants, offices, and housing. The grand Eastern and Oriental Hotel has undergone a major renovation in hopes of attracting tourists interested in the excitement of the old city.

The master plan was unable to stop the continued sprawl outward from the center toward the new town in the Free Trade Zone. Robert Nathan, a World Bank consultant, advised the government of Malaysia and Penang to become involved in the new global economy and take advantage of the global division of labor by making something for the world market rather than engaging in import substitution. A Free Trade Zone was established as a part of the New Economic Policy that has attracted a stunning number of electronic appliance assembly factories. This area has been so successful that it was necessary to build a bridge to the mainland to enable commuters to get to work. The town also attracted middle-class residents from the older parts of the city as well as technicians from other parts of the world. The town contains five-star hotels, shopping centers, entertainment centers, and, of course, factories. The lowest income workers remain in their *kampongs* and are bused to the city by their employers.

The situation in the core cities is not totally bleak, however. Private developers created high rise condo blocks with a view of the sea and other amenities. For example, Gurney Drive has developed as a place to shop as well as a sought-after residential area. Further, plans are underway to create more shopping areas in the town center. It is also possible to see many smaller scale redevelopment projects taken on by individual landowners and clan associations. There seems to be a sort of informal competition between clans to see who can best restore and maintain their temple and the surrounding shophouses.

Because George Town was dominated by developments in Singapore and its main port and industrial area developed in Butterworth, on the mainland across the narrow channel, there was little pressure for redevelopment of the city until the modern era. Therefore, today the city contains the largest stock of historic buildings of any of the four cities under consideration. It is likely that this is the largest and best-preserved vernacular landscape of the Chinese diaspora remaining in the world. At the beginning of the 20th century, every major trading city in

the world had a Chinatown. Few were as clearly reflective of southern Chinese culture as Penang, and even fewer have escaped urban renewal. The developments of the 1970s prompted many influential citizens to form a non-profit organization to help insure that this legacy is not lost. The Penang Historic Trust (PHT) is their vehicle for change.

The Trust resembles preservation groups in other parts of the world, and is a social as well as an advocacy organization. Its leaders are the influential members of the local community as well as residents of Kuala Lumpur and other parts of the country. It has emerged to fill the need to pressure the government to enforce its regulations and to promote private efforts to redevelop and preserve historic structures. In an effort to make sure Penang did not lose its character via the process of urban renewal, the Municipal Council sponsored an international conservation seminar in the late 1970s. Working with the German government and German students who volunteered their time and expertise, PHT identified buildings and areas for conservation. There have been many stunning successes in the preservation movement. The Leong San Ton Khoo Kongis, the ancestral temple of the Khoo clan in Penang, has not only been preserved, it has been expanded, and the shophouses owned by the Khoo clan in the area have been restored. The temple is a place for ancestor worship and provides an obvious statement about the success of the approximately 8,000 clan members in the city.

PHT has also preserved the Penang mansion of Cheong Fatt Tze, one of the wealthiest Chinese merchants of the region. Known as one of China's last mandarins and first capitalists, he amassed an incredible fortune in trade and tin mining after arriving in the region penniless at the age of sixteen. This restoration follows the classic house museum style and program. The thirty-eight-room structure has five courtyards and is an amalgam of Chinese and European styles and technology that reflects the role of Cheong Fatt Tze in the world at that time. The Trust is encouraging other groups to preserve their sacred buildings and develop museums to articulate their group's role in the development of the city and region. To date, about two dozen sites have attracted some form of restoration.

Most notably, the Trust has promoted cultural tourism in the world community. It succeeded in getting the conservation district of Penang designated by the World Monuments Fund of New York as one of the World's 100 Most Endangered Sites. Together with a group from

Melaka, it attempted to get recognition from UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. PHT has also partnered with American Express Corporation to develop interpretive materials on its sites, and with the Japan Foundation for its publication program.

It is too early to declare a victory for the preservation of this old city. The guidelines for preservation and conservation developed by the city offices are focused on keeping the monuments and places of worship, but will allow the replacement of the two-story shophouses with new construction. This redevelopment process has been intermittent because of the slow economy and because the city's residential districts were protected until 2002 by a rent control law that limited the economic returns for landlord. The removal of the rent control is expected to have a negative impact on the preservation effort.

It is hard to determine the potential for preservation and restoration of these blocks of shophouses. They are clearly unique and when remodeled can be converted into smart townhouses, as has been done in Singapore. However, the town center of Penang is not anything like central Singapore and there does not appear to be evidence of a gentrification movement. It is, of course, very early in the preservation and conservation phase. There is every reason to believe that PHT and others will be successful in preserving the monumental structures and will develop a tourist trade sizable enough to maintain restaurants and hotels in refurbished historic structures. The difficult step is to start the gentrification process that will restore the area with private money and sweat equity. At present, the upwardly mobile are attracted to high rise condos with ocean views, townhouses, and semi-detached houses in the new towns. It is possible that George Town could become an area of second homes for Chinese in Singapore and other locals who wish to have some deeper connection to their roots.

The Penang Historic Trust may have an impact on Malaysian culture beyond its impact on the landscape. As is the case in the United States and most parts of Europe, women are playing leadership roles in the preservation movement. This is especially significant in Malaysia where politics are strongly gendered and male dominated. In addition to the usual sorts of seminars of architectural topics, such as urban signage and garden design, PHT organizes women. For example, in May 2001, the Trust held a seminar on "Local Government — Local Community Dialogue on Women in Urban Governance" that was attended by 200 women. This conference brought together women from the United States, Fiji, and Nepal, as well as other cities in

Malaysia, to develop strategies to help marginalized women of all ethnic groups. The preservation movement in the United States was totally dependent upon the vision, energy, and organizational abilities of women in its early phases. It appears that this may be the case in Malaysia, and in so doing it will bring many women into local politics and governance.

In the 1990s, Melaka was declared Malaysia's Historic City and underwent a boom in real estate development and the construction of tourist facilities.7 Melaka is an easy drive on an excellent freeway from Singapore and is rapidly being drawn into that city's sphere of influence. Residents of Singapore seeking space, a historic landscape, and inexpensive recreational facilities for their children have become both creators and consumers of Melaka's tourist culture. The main road linking the old town to the Singapore-KL expressway is lined with resort hotels, golf courses, butterfly parks, crocodile farms, aquariums, zoos, waterslides, condominiums, re-created traditional houses and villages, restaurants, gas stations, and the usual roadside attractions that make the North American traveler feel at home. The marketing of history and culture in this way is a typical post-modern phenomenon called commodification, and it drives the tourist business worldwide. Melaka is now entering yet another phase in its long history. While families from the densely settled neighborhoods of Singapore and Malay cities flock to the new facilities in suburban strips, visitors from further afield arrive on cruise ships that dock at new wharf facilities that would have stunned the Islamic and European merchants of old. It is ironic to see the historic city as essentially one small piece of a set of entertaining locales in a post-modern landscape.

Although space does not permit an in-depth set of observations on the urban landscape of Kuala Lumpur, mention must be made of the sharp contrasts and similarities between Kuala Lumpur and the coastal cities.⁸ With a population of 1.5 million and aspirations to become a world city, Kuala Lumpur presents a scene markedly different from both Melaka and Penang. While the site is very different from Singapore's, the leadership of Malaysia clearly uses that city-state as a

model for, and measure of, its own development plans and status. (Space does not permit a discussion of Singapore.)

During the late 19th century, Kuala Lumpur and the region around it developed in a fashion similar to the Black Country west of Birmingham in the British Midlands. The several major tin mine pits attracted workers and settlements to them while the centers of management, finance, and government coalesced in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, the metro region has the usual tensions between the pull of the center and the tendency to sprawl. The rail line through the Klang Valley developed as an industrial corridor, and today the Valley is the industrial core of the nation's economy. The port at Klang is a tremendous affair with three separate and huge dock facilities. The facility was built in anticipation of demand and to guarantee shippers excellent service. There is evidence of a national policy to pull shipping business away from Singapore's superport to Klang.

The economic boom enjoyed by Malaysia provided the government with financial resources to invest in infrastructure and new modern buildings. The result is an extensive freeway network that provides routes for the growing number of locally manufactured cars. These freeways are focused on Kuala Lumpur and penetrate into the city's core. They are complemented by heavy and light rail commuter service, which is made necessary by the lack of space and concentration of office work in the city center. Although the planning documents for the nation are not public, landscape evidence indicates that planners used the concepts of British and Northern European urban planning. There has been a concerted effort to develop a modern core and create a series of new towns.

The planners moved the center of the city away from the old colonial center at the *padang* and rail station further east to the 19th century mansion district, and created a section now called the Golden Triangle. The decision to build a new center meant that the old residential areas and shophouses could be preserved. The major markets have been refurbished and enclosed in a series of air conditioned mall-like structures packed with small kiosk-type shops.

The Golden Triangle afforded architects and government developers the opportunity to build over three dozen modern and postmodern skyscrapers. The mansion district is now embassy row and the Triangle has the city's greatest concentration of fine hotels, shops, and restaurants. The cluster includes the Petronas Twin Towers, among the world's tallest buildings. The 88-story twin towers rise from a slight

hill and are surrounded by open space. The building was a government project and Petronas, the government oil company, owns 49 percent of the building. The government center in Penang was built along the same theoretical planning concepts but, of course, is on a smaller scale.

Outside of the town center, the planners developed a series of destinations in the sprawling metro area. A recreational development with a superhotel was developed around a former tin pit (now an artificial lake). Government agencies have constructed signature buildings and private developers have created dozens of auto-oriented residential communities.

Like the new town and free trade zone in Penang, developers in Kuala Lumpur have created a modern industrial park and transportation facility designed to attract the research and development firms working in communications and electronic technology. In addition, a superairport and freeway system with a high technology corridor (called the Multimedia Super Corridor) was created south of the city. The Super Corridor lies between the older suburbs, associated with the mine officials, and the new International Airport. It occupies approximately sixty square miles.

Most of the land in the Super Corridor is still occupied by palm oil plantations owned by the national government. However, two new communities are under construction and suburban sprawl has caused the northern section to urbanize. In an effort to create amenities in the zone, several golf courses have been built, an artificial lake was created, and a grand prix racetrack was constructed. The new communities are Petrajaya, the government city based around the Prime Minister's office and associated government agencies, and Cyberjaya, a development designed to be home to a wide range of technology, research, and production companies. Petrajaya is a spectacular new town that has so far cost the national government U.S. \$8 billion to build. The governmental structures are designed to impress visitors with the power of the national government. The basic urban design follows classic British new town theory with spatial separation of functions, compact housing districts, and an auto-dependent transportation system. This plan is overlaid with a modern architecture in an Islamic style.

The national government has invested heavily in these urban landscapes and infrastructure as part of the New Economic Policy that is intended to bring Malaysia into the ranks of developed countries. To date, they have built in advance of actual need. However, in the highly competitive Asian market, area nations must have an infrastructure comparable to the newly industrialized states if they expect to attract direct foreign investment. Furthermore, the large public works projects are used to stimulate the national economy and develop local expertise in the trades and financial fields. The first phase of the development investment worked well for the country. The current softening of the world economy has slowed the progress of Malaysia, but growth continues. By investing in the nation's infrastructure, the government is able to recycle savings and earnings from exports of oil and manufactured goods.

The urban landscapes of the largest Malaysian cities are Janus-like, reflecting both the complex multicultural past as well as the expectation of a future place among the industrialized nations and sophisticated world cities. Cultural monuments have been preserved, the Chinese districts have not yet been destroyed in Penang and Melaka, and colonial structures have been either turned into museums or recreation facilities. The government has made use of urban planning concepts from around the world and created a skyline in Kuala Lumpur that rivals the most highly developed capitals in all parts of the world. The landscape separates the major cultural groups in the country, although not by legal segregation. Instead, we see the effect of two centuries of social differentiation by place of origin. The colonial segregation model conformed to the communities of affinity among the new immigrants. These communities of affinity have remained the basic building blocks of the older sections of the cities and characterize the ex-urban settlements. The new towns can be expected to promote settlement patterns based on income rather than culture and thus break the traditional pattern. As Malaysia continues to urbanize, the leaders of this multicultural state will be forced to confront the long-term viability of the patterns of spatial separation that characterize this country's history.

Notes

- 1. The spelling of this place name has been modernized from Malacca to Melaka. The old spelling will be used in a discussion of the city's history. The modern spelling will be used for comments on the contemporary scene.
- 2. The best short history of Malaysia is the Hungry Planet Guide *Malaysia*, *Singapore & Brunei* (Oakland, Cal.: Lonely Planet Publications, 2001).
- 3. Information about the development of these cities is based upon field observations and exhibition texts in the museums of George Town and Melaka.
- 4. "Exploring the Streets of George Town," Penang Historic Trust, no date.
- 5. The following section on urban planning in Penang is based upon several days of field observations and interviews with Dr. Goh Ban Lee, Professor of Urban Planning at Universiti Sains Malaysia during January 2002, and two of Dr. Lee's unpublished papers, "Urban Renewal In George Town," presented at SEACEUM 6 Leadership Seminar or "Reviving Cities: Enterpri, Marintine, Heritage Opportunities," organized by the Institute Sultan Iskandar at Malacca, October 26–27, 1999, and "The Foundation of Urban Planning in George Town and Adelaide," 1987.
- 6. The discussion of the Historic Preservation movement is based upon several days of field observations during January 2002, conversations with members of the PHT, the PHT Annual Report, 2000, and a variety of promotional materials and guides to various sites.
- 7. This discussion of Melaka is based upon field observations and interviews with merchants and tourists during January 2002.
- 8. This discussion of Kuala Lumpur is based upon field observations in the Klang Valley and in that city's port, observations within the City Center and Petrajaya, and interviews with Dr. Alias Abdullah of the International Islamic University and Hoi Peng Ton of the Malaysia Star newspaper during January 2002. Maps used include "Major Highways in the Klang Valley," 1999, published by Geomatics Data Service; The Concise Street Directory KL & Klang Valley, World Express Mapping, n.d.; and "The Map of Malaysia," published by TTG Asia Media Pte. Ltd., 2001.