

ABSTRACT

Dynamics of Living with History, Heritage and Tourism in Penang and Macau

This presentation critiques some of the cross-purpose effects that can occur when heritage preservation is pursued primarily for the purpose of tourist development. The outcomes of such inhabitants – how people's lives change as tourism and self-consciousness about history and heritage increase. It articulates some of the transformations incurred by the "added value" of heritage designation as peoples' homes become "heritage houses," i.e. places that were once full of lived meaning but that change with investment and development into physical structures emptied of their original use and now notable primarily for their material design.

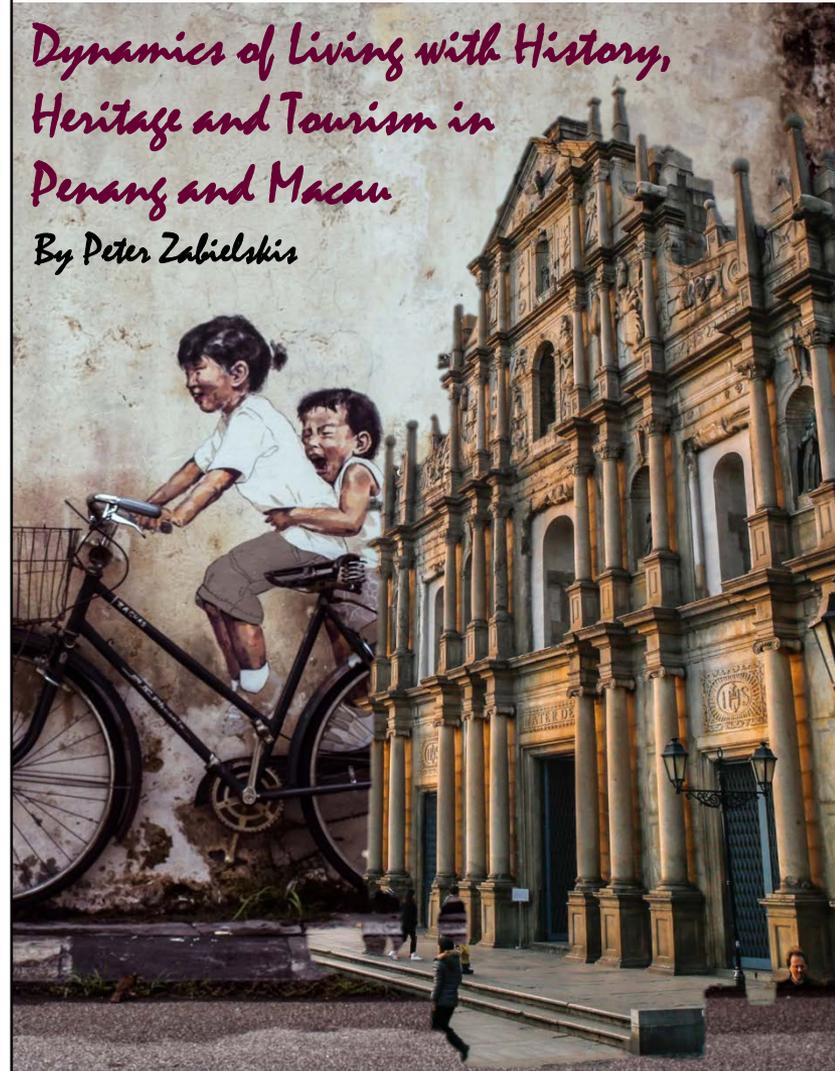
Two cases are compared and contrasted: the city of George Town, in Penang, Malaysia and Macau, a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Both include UNESCO designated World Heritage sites. Despite UNESCO's recent efforts to provide guidance on the protection of intangible heritage, the paper notes that both popular and governmental attention remains fixated on the tangible aesthetics of material structure above all else. This is the crux of a problem fostered by the self-consciousness of heritage itself: Private and local become public and global, resulting in residents' alienation from access to the continuity of lived connections to a valued past and the ability to manage change on their own terms. Homes become houses; place identities are transformed when they are projected onto a global stage. Efforts to preserve heritage can thus work against the goal of keeping history alive. The irony is that the imagination of residences -- where and how people lived in the past -- remains a primary trope in the creation of most heritage narratives despite the common emptying out of the places residents once called home.

Contrasting Macau, the formerly sleepy enclave that continues to develop mega-resort casinos with faux historical, Las-Vegas-style, international referents, with the case of the Khoo Kongsi clan house in Penang, in which modest row houses and community spaces provided in the original plan have now been repurposed into souvenir and museum spaces despite the complex's award-winning preservation, the conclusion is that heritage theorists and preservation practitioners would do well to ponder all the intangibles embodied in the ideas, experiences and uses associated with the places people call "home" vs. the externalized material aesthetics of houses and public spaces redefined too simply as beautiful and/or historically significant physical structures now cleaned up but emptied of life and expressive of more global than local ideals.



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*Dynamics of Living with History,
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Penang and Macau*
By Peter Zabielskis



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HISTORY & MISSION

HISTORY DEPARTMENT UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

The Department of History was established on January 15, 1959 and is the oldest department in Malaysia and the largest in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. The academic staffs specialises in various fields including history of Malaysia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Middle East, Europe, Africa and the United States.

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BIODATA

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Peter Zabielskis is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Macau, where he teaches courses in cultural anthropology, theory, the environment, and the anthropology of art. He previously taught at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, and at New York University where he got his PhD. and was active in the Culture and Media programme. His research interests include material culture, art, architecture, religion, heritage and the urban built environment in Macau and Southeast Asia, especially Penang and Malaysia.

He is the co-editor of *Penang and Its Networks of Knowledge*, recently published by Areca Books in Penang. Other publications include studies of civil society, heritage theory and urban development in Penang and Macau, the anthropology of village festivals in Leizhou, China, and the pressures of development and change experienced by a small Chinese temple in Macau. Other projects include theorizing the material culture of magic and trance in Chinese folk religion and a comparison of past, present and future transformations in the meaning and use of public urban space in Macau and São Paulo, Brazil.