3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of Malaysia as a country, the Melaka World Heritage Site is an active states in Malaysia, and its selection as a case study area. This chapter starts with the general location and historical background of Malaysia. The chapter encompasses an historical overview of the colonisation eras to highlight the post-colonial heritages that become tourist attractions in Malaysia in general, and Melaka in particular. The next sections in this chapter discuss the social and cultural characteristics of the local communities in Malaysia and specifically focus on the local community in Melaka. Then, the chapter expands on the tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the local community in Melaka. Finally, the current issues that related to heritage conservation and management in Malaysia and Melaka are discussed with reference to the local community participation.
3.1 Location and History

Malaysia is situated geographically in the heart of South-East Asia. Malaysia is made up of 11 States in the Malay Peninsula and another two States in the Northern part of Borneo Island (Figure 3.1). Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya) gained her independence from the British in 1957. In 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed, consisting of the 13 states and Singapore. However, due to political circumstances, Singapore became an independent nation in 1965 (myGovernment, 2011). The system of government in Malaysia is a constitutional democracy with a Prime Minister as the Head of Government and an elected Yang Di Pertuan Agong (King) as the Supreme Head of State. In addition, each State of Malaysia is headed by a Chief Minister. In 2010, Malaysia now had a population of more than 28 million people comprising of Malays (51%), Chinese (35%), Indians (10%) and other ethnic groups (4%) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011). The Islamic faith is closely identified with Malay society and has become an official religion in Malaysia. However, other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and many more are practised freely.

The first landmark of human civilization in the Malay Peninsula has been established since the 5th century AD. It was confirmed by archaeological excavation of the form of tomb temples known as Chandi at Lembah Bujang (Bujang Valley), Kedah. The Lembah Bujang is situated at the Northern part of the Malay Peninsula (Figure 3.1). It is believed that, since the establishment of Asian Spice Route between India and China, this location was used as an ideal resting destination while waiting for the monsoon to change (Ho, Ahmad and Norizal, 2005). Since this place was chosen as a ‘transit’ destination, eventually it has become an important location for trading and religious activities. After centuries of trade, the connections between East and West through the Straits of Malacca have made the State of Melaka a popular location. This is due to an advantage of being on the narrowest part of the Straits
where the deep water channel was near to the land. In addition, the mouth of the Melaka River forms a natural harbour that enables shipping to get near to the river bank (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Map of Malaysia

Figure 3.2: The location of Melaka River
Source: Melaka Gallery, 2008
Furthermore, it is probably Islam that became prominent during that period, rather than its spread during the period becoming prominent. At the time, the port of Melaka was known as a centre of trade, and dissemination of religion in the region (Figure 3.3). Melaka has flourished as a port-city for trading spices, textiles and pottery due to its strategic location (Badaruddin, Ghafar and Nurwati, 2001). The influences of these activities have endowed the town with a multicultural heritage. In consequence, a mixed culture has emerged as some of the traders settled in Melaka and established their family connections through marriage to local women. Therefore, as can be seen today, Malaysia is a multi-racial society with many ethnic groups.

However, the early 15th century was a period of colonisation in Melaka. With a motivation to conquer and control Asian spice trade routes, Melaka and Malaya (formerly known as Malaysia) experienced a colonisation period by three western rulers and these were by the Portugal, the Netherlands, and Britain.

![Figure 3.3: Map of Melaka](source: MyGovernment, 2011)
3.1.1 Portuguese Period (1511-1641)

The empire of the Malay Sultanate of Melaka ended abruptly when the Portuguese conquered Melaka in 1511. The collapse heralded a new revolution of colonisation in Melaka, as the Portuguese made improvements and changes on political structures, military strategy and residency dwellings (Manguin, 1988). The colonial landmark left by the Portuguese, and an icon of the city’s history, is A Famosa fortress, which is also known as the Porta de Santiago (Figure 3.4). The fort was surrounded by an enclosed area of 520-hectare wall, and the main purpose was for defending the city from any assault, especially from the sea. Inside these walls were two palaces, a castle, a meeting room for the Portuguese Council and five churches (Melaka Government, 2009). The Melaka town house during the regime of the Portuguese can also be seen today; these buildings are used for business and residential purposes. Nowadays, many of the houses are unoccupied but still remain as ancestral homes and also as part of the ‘heritage attraction’ in Melaka (Ho et al., 2005).

Figure 3.4: Gate of Porta de Santiago, also known as A Famosa
Source: Author’s fieldwork (2011)
3.1.2 Dutch Period (1641-1795)

After 130 years of Portuguese rule in Melaka, the Portuguese failed to maintain the glory and prosperity of Melaka because of political conflicts and wars (MBMB, 2011). In consequence, the Dutch took over Melaka in 1641. During the Dutch period, the city administration and management became more organized. The fortress was extended, and security features were improved in order to defend the fort from any assault.

The Dutch made a lot of alterations to urban structures in Melaka, especially to town house structures (Figure 3.5). For instance, the road system was introduced and created a building line for constructions. The town houses elite outside the fortress were built as dwellings for the Dutch. The architectural designs were adapted from Chinese and European influences. This row of houses (Figure 3.5) developed the Dutch identity through three main characteristics (Ho et al., 2005):

i. The ground floor frontage has a single door with an extant shophouse window (Figure 3.5, plate 3.5).

ii. The brickwork has a drainage system (Figure 3.5, plate 3.6).

iii. The material used for the steps at the main entrance indicates the social status of the owner (Figure 3.5, plate 3.7).
3.1.3 British Period (1795-1957)

The British gained control of Melaka without the use of military force. This was due to the Dutch being at war with France, due to the French Revolution in Europe in the 17th century. Therefore, due the threat of the French taking hold of Dutch possessions in Asia (i.e. Melaka), Dutch officials negotiated a temporary hand over to the British in 1795 (Ali Khalid, 2008; Daniels, 2005). This event gave the British increasing power in Malaya. The British had already claimed possession of Penang in 1786, and with control of Penang and now Melaka, they completed their domination of trade in the Straits with the founding of Singapore in 1819.

However, fearing the return of the Dutch to the Southeast of Asia after the wars in Europe, the British decided to relocate all the traders to Penang. In consequence of this decision, people in
Melaka were ordered to move to new residencies in Penang. Furthermore, the Governor of Penang ordered Captain William Farquhar to demolish the Dutch fortress as a British ‘strategy’ to hamper the Dutch in regaining their trading foothold in the Southeast of Asia (den Teuling, 2009). As a result, in 1824, the Dutch handed over complete control of Melaka to the British in return for British possessions in the Indonesian Archipelago (Daniels, 2005).

3.2 Post-Colonial Communities in Malaysia

The three important periods of colonisations (Portuguese, Dutch and British) in Malaysia show the establishment of multi-racial groups in Malaysia. This was due to a wide array of migration especially from people in South-eastern Asia. For example, the Malays came from Sumatera and Java; the Chinese migrated from China while the Indians from India. Each of these races came into this country for diverse reasons, such as trade, the spread of religion, military support, and labour.

In the present day, harmonisation exists within the main races of Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, and Indian). Each of these ethnic groups belongs to one of three main religions, namely Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. In the city of Melaka in adjacent locations there are a series of religious structures, such as of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple (founded in 1673) at Temple Street, the Masjid Kampong Kling (founded in 1748) and the Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple (founded in 1781) at Jalan Tukang Emas. These worship buildings, which were built within 200 meters of each other, are proof of unity and a harmonious lifestyle dating back hundreds of years. Apart from that, elements of culture, language, socio-economics and religion have harmoniously merged within this society.
Despite the fact that Malaysian people vary in terms of ethnicity and religion, there is a similar tendency among Malaysians towards the usage of polite language in day-to-day society (Ab Razak, 2006). Indeed, it was inherited from Malays culture as an early ‘host’ of this country (Hoyt, 1993). In contrast, there is diversity in terms of Malaysian social structure, as the Chinese community has a more complex social structure (clan structure) than other ethnic groups (Malays and Indians). This is due to the influx of Chinese immigration to Melaka since the 14th century. Today, the Malaysian Chinese encompass a wide array of clans, namely Cantonese, Teochews, Hakkas, and Hainase. This diversity enriches Malaysian culture and identity. For example, each of the Malaysian ethnic groups celebrate their seasonal festivals at various times of the year. These ceremonies and festivals are often influenced by religious belief. However, in Malaysia, it is common to find people in different racial groups worshipping at the same sacred places and taking part in the religious activities of other religions. For instance, the Chinese society celebrates New Year on the first day in the first month of the lunar calendar. It is also called the spring festival, or the commencement of the lunar year, and a time to make plans for the rest of the year.

Furthermore, the Indian ceremonial festival is Deepavali or Diwali and celebrated by similar Indian ethnic groups worldwide. The celebration is also known as the ‘festival of lights’. This is according to translation of the Sanskrit “Deepavali”, meaning ‘row of lights’. The significance of involving the light is to celebrate the victory of goodness over evil and light over darkness.

The Indian Thaipusam celebration in Malaysia is the most fascinating and dramatic festival in comparison to other Malaysian religious festivals. It is celebrated every year between January and February (according to the Tamil calendar). Most of Hindu devotees from all over Malaysia gather at the ‘Batu Cave’ foothill in preparation for climbing 272 steps and praying at its
Majestic Temple (Figure 3.6) (Ward, 1984). The highlight of this celebration is the Kavadi procession up to the jagged face of the three main caves.

Meanwhile, the religious celebration for Malays is commonly similar to other Muslim countries. For example, a fasting period during Ramadan (according to the Islamic calendar) and Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca (especially for those who are financially and physically able).

![Figure 3.6: Batu Caves at Kuala Lumpur](image)

Source: Travel Asia, 2008

From the context of social economy, there is a monopoly by several clans or ethnic groups in Malaysia in a diverse range of employment sectors. Although the Malaysian government has nothing to do with deciding who is suitable for particular employment positions, the fact is that there is a majority of Malays (77.4%) working in public service agencies (Public Services Commission, 2011). Meanwhile, the Chinese own most of the private businesses and Indians are engaged in plantation labour.

As discussed above, the elements of language, religion and socio-economy illustrate the diverse background of communities in Malaysia and the wealth of culture and traditions still practised in Malaysian society. Hence, there is an overview provided of the ethnic groups in the
Chapter Three: Background to Malaysia

The historic city of Melaka, and the following section highlights the uniqueness of communities in Melaka.

3.3 The Study Area

This research has selected Melaka Historic City as the case study area. This city has been divided into two areas, one being the Civic Area and the other the Old Quarter Area (Figure 3.7). Nurulhalim (2006) has created two categories in terms of both heritage attraction and resources. These are man-made attractions designed for tourists and man-made sites not initially designed for tourists (See Appendix 3.1). Both categories can be found within the Civic Area and Old-Quarter of Melaka.

The Civic Area is mainly known as a ‘honey-pot’ location among the tourists. This area is loaded with heritage architecture, especially the evidence of colonial structures (i.e. buildings, monuments, cemeteries). These buildings are mainly being utilised as museums or galleries (see Appendix 3.2).

Figure 3.7: Civic and Old Quarter Areas in Melaka
Source: Melaka Government, 2009
The Old Quarter Area has been known from the early days of the Malay Sultanate, and throughout the era of colonisation, until today as a residential area. However, since the booming of the tourist industry in Melaka, this area has been highlighted in tourism marketing and promotion as ‘living heritage’ attractions. It is part of the local government strategy to reduce ‘pressure’ in the Civic Area due to the increasing number of tourists every year (Figure 3.8).

The enriched heritage assets (tangible and intangible) available within both areas have gained the city of Melaka the status of UNESCO World Heritage City on 7th July 2008. The UNESCO committee has included Melaka (and Penang) on the World Heritage List based on the Outstanding Universal Value (UNESCO, 2008) as it has met the three criteria as explained in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. For example, Melaka and Penang represent multi-cultural trading towns in East and Southeast Asia, multi-cultural tangible and intangible heritage and a mixture of influences which have created a unique architecture, culture and townscape (See Appendix 3.3).

![Figure 3.8: Tourist arrivals to Malaysia and Melaka (2006-2011)](source: Tourism Malaysia (2011) and Tourism Melaka (2011))
With this recognition, UNESCO has enhanced the heritage tourism industry in this city. Due to limited resources (i.e. nature environment) that can be utilised to stimulate the demand of tourism (i.e. ecotourism), the only resource available in Melaka is urban heritage. Therefore, cultural heritage in Melaka has become a vital and important element for marketing and promotion of tourism activities within this city.

3.4 Communities in Melaka World Heritage Site

Apart from the main ethnic group common throughout Malaysian society, Melaka is unique in terms of its diversity in comparison to the historical cities in Malaysia. Melaka city is “where it all began as the birth of a nation” (Worden, 2001). According to Drakakis-Smith (2000), the image of Melaka as an international trading port since the 14th century has never faced a gloomy era. Despite the fact that Melaka no longer serves as an important trading port, people are still flocking to this city. Indeed, the city of Melaka now serves the people through its history and heritage via tourism. One of the popular history and heritage elements in this city is the uniqueness of Peranakan communities. Tourists are keen to experience the authenticity of this ethnic group through its cultural heritage resources such as local customs, foods and other traditions (intangible), and architectural its structures (tangible).

In general, the word Peranakan means ‘local born’ in English. This is indicates the descendants of mixed marriages between foreign migrants and local women, especially during colonisation. These communities started to evolve since the regime of the Portuguese in Melaka. This suggests that the Portuguese did not construct a racial barrier, unlike the Dutch and British colonisers after them. Currently there are two Peranakan communities in Melaka. These are: Baba and Nyonya, and Chitty.
3.4.1 Peranakan Baba and Nyonya Community

The Peranakan Baba and Nyonya known as Straits-born Chinese is a more prominent community than the Peranakans, as the Peranakan Baba and Nyonya emerged much earlier than the others. When the Dutch ruled Melaka in 1641, the Chinese population grew substantially, as the Chinese migrants had considerably more motivation to migrate to Melaka under the Dutch than they did under the Portuguese. This is because during the Portuguese regime, the Chinese merchants were treated unfairly with higher taxes on Chinese goods and restrictions on Chinese ownership of lands in Melaka (see Hoyt, 1993 p. 23). This had encouraged the Chinese migrants to leave Melaka and trade in other places in the region.

However, when the Dutch ruled Melaka, the Chinese workers from Batavia (Dutch colonial centre in Java) were brought to Melaka to rebuild the plantation areas that had been destroyed during their long siege of Melaka (Daniels, 2005; Hoyt, 1993). Meanwhile, the second wave of Chinese migration to Melaka was due to the fall of the Ming Dynasty when the people of China flocked to Melaka looking for a better life, and the Dutch administrators who noticed a strong work ethic within the community welcomed them. Hence, the two waves of Chinese migrants merged and the older Chinese community in Melaka began to take shape in terms of culture and identity. Moreover, the intermarriages and acculturation between Chinese migrant and local women created a new “hybrid” race in Melaka called Peranakan Baba and Nyonya.

In general, the meaning of Peranakan Baba is a honorific applied to male adult and Peranakan Nyonya to female adult. In the context of social language, the Peranakan Baba and Nyonya retained the Baba Malay language which had developed over hundreds of years. Baba Malay is a form of language from a mixture of Malay and Hokkien dialects. It was known as a ‘trading language’ in Melaka. The capability of Baba to speak a dual-language was useful to assist the
interaction between Malay and Chinese traders, which is an important part of the intangible heritage of this region.

With regard to religious adaptation, this ethnic group is still devoted to Buddhism. For this reason, it was observed that there are no buildings specifically for Peranakan worship around the city of Melaka. Although, the Baba and Nyonyas share a common faith in regard to tradition and ritual practise, their Buddhism practice has evolved. It has become assimilated into the culture of the indigenous Malays. For example, in celebrating the Chinese New Year, it is common to see red cloth banners in front doors with lanterns hanging above them (Figure 2.9).

Since the Chinese pronunciation of ‘lantern’ has a similar sound to ‘son’, it symbolically signifies ‘procreation’. The use of red banners means good-omen. This is culturally unique, and these displays can only be found in Melaka and Penang, and are seldom seen elsewhere (Jimmy, 2006; Tay, 2006).

During the regime of British rule, this ethnic group became wealthy and successful. Most of them were involved in the agricultural plantation and commercial activities. Meanwhile, for those who had a proper educational background there were opportunities to work in the Civil Service, the Municipal Department and the Education Department (PERZIM, 2011).
Furthermore, since this ethnic group was closely associated with the British, some of the Babas copied the lifestyle of the British in almost every detail. In many ways, it more British than the British’. However, behind the British lifestyle, they still retained their Chinese roots and belief. “The Babas had their mansions, their big cars, their horses and carriages, their ‘black-tie’ dinner parties, but behind the social façade lay a unique mix of Chinese and Malay worlds” (Jimmy, 2006).

This ethnic group played a significant role in influencing architectural design in this city. Since they were the wealthiest ethnic group during this period, they were able to hire skilled craftsmen to build and design houses like the British. As the saying goes, “in the old days the Babas and Nyonyas knew how to live!” This is evident to Baba and Nyonya’s architectural design which can be seen through the architectural details of the row of houses along Heeren Street (Figure 3.10). However, there is a debate over the origins of Heeren Street. Are these Baba and Nyonya details adaptations as research indicates a differing authorship in terms of original commission.
According to collective history gathered from conference proceedings in 2006, entitled ‘Seminar Pengkisahan Melaka’ (Conference: History of Melaka), there was no evidence to show the houses along Heeren Street were first built by the Baba and Nyonya ethnic group.

In addition, these two- or three-storey buildings were built during the regime of the Dutch in Melaka (1641–1795) and these houses were occupied by rich and elite people (Dutch). It is easy to determine that the houses were built for the Dutch. The word ‘Heeren’ in Dutch means ‘lords’ in English. This indicates the influence, power or position held by an individual in order to be called lord as a title or name. Therefore, the Heeren Street was known as an elite residential area during the Dutch period in Melaka.
However, when the British took over Melaka, the houses at Heeren Street were neglected, as the British refused to stay in terraced houses, such as the ones in Heeren Street. The British officers (i.e. Governor, Government Officers and elite traders) preferred to stay in Bungalows on the hills (Samshor, Saidon, Azlizam, Mohd and Abdullah, 2009). Hence, the Chinese who were quite well off started to buy all the houses along Heeren Street (Jimmy, 2006).

Since the Babas and Nyonyas took over the houses in Heeren Street, there was a progression of adaptations in various architectural styles (i.e. Straits Eclectic, Art-Deco, Neo-Classical and others) (Abdullah Zawawi and Abdullah, 2008). These adaptations to architectural features are required for good ‘Feng Shui’ (Elaine, 2006). For example, a previous Dutch house design had their main door at the side and eye-lid window in the centre. However, the new Chinese resident changed it to look like a ‘face’, with the main door in the centre and two windows at either side. They then hung the typical two lanterns with a name given to the house (See Appendix 3.4).

This development came abruptly to an end in 1941 when the Japanese invaded Malaya (Wee, 2006) and any person or group associated with the British government became an enemy of the Japanese. The golden era of Baba and Nyonya in Melaka was over and they never fully recovered after World War II. In the present times, cultural values and religious beliefs held by Baba forefathers have eroded. A younger generation is more focused on global modernisation, and the Baba and Nyonya community has became smaller due to mixed marriages. Research has identified that this community has lost more than 50% of its original culture with the passage of time (Lewis, 2006; Jimmy, 2006). However, the Peranakan organisation and state government agencies have tried to increase awareness of Peranakan heritage through various activities and programmes to the Malaysian public and Peranakan itself (Paiman, 2003).
3.4.2 Peranakan Chitty Community

Similar to their Peranakan cousins (Baba and Nyonya); the Chitty community is also a hybrid community that emerged from inter-marriage, between the Hindu immigrants and local women from different ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese, Javanese and Bataks (Ravichandran, 2009). Although the Baba and Nyonya is prominent in business, politics, and has left a significant impact on Melaka architectural design, in historical context, the Indian (Chitty) community had a long presence in Melaka and significantly contributed to the formation of the nation (Malaysia). This is based on archaeological excavations evident in the oldest ruins of Hinduism found in the Northern part of Malaysia dating back to 5th century AD (Figure 3.11) (Narayanasamy, 2006; Ho, et al., 2005).

![Figure 3.11: Ancient tomb temple in the Bujang Valley, Kedah](image)

Source: Department of Museums Malaysia, 2011

It is evident that the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism have been embedded into Malaysian social-culture, especially Malay society. For example, some Malay language in day to day communications was adopted from Sanskrit language (See Appendix 3.5). Likewise, the usage of Henna during Hindu ceremonies, such as for a wedding (i.e. bride), has also been adopted into Malay culture (Figure 3.12). However, as the Islamic faith is closely identified with
Malay society, according to Islamic law (Sharia law)\(^1\), only women (i.e. bride) are allowed to use henna, and this is limited to her fingernails. Meanwhile, it is forbidden for men to apply Henna on their hands or feet (ZIKR, 2006).

The influx of Indian immigrants to Melaka increased during the Melaka Sultanate regime (1400-1511). Ravichandran (2009) and Narayanasamy (2006) revealed several reasons for Indian merchants settling in Melaka. Firstly, as a reward of helping the Portuguese to invade Melaka (1511-1641), the Chitties were accorded special privileges. Secondly, one of the Chitties (Nina Chitty) was appointed to the post of Bendahara (Prime Minister). Therefore, with such a powerful position being occupied by a Hindu, more Indian traders flocked to Melaka to build the Indian residential settlement. Finally, this Indian immigration led to intermarriage with Malay women. According to Hinduism, women are not allowed to cross seas; therefore, most of these merchants were males and bachelors and some of them had to stay back in Melaka to look after business activity. This encouraged intermarriage during the transitional period when Islam

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1 Sharia law is a Muslim or Islamic law. It covers both civil and criminal justice as well as regulating personal and moral conduct of individuals based on the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad’s teachings (Esposito, 2003)
had not yet taken root in Melaka society, and hence the Chitties were not compelled to convert to Islam when marrying Malay women.

However, since the Dutch took over Melaka in 1641, the Chitty’s trading activity was strictly controlled by the Dutch. For instance, a higher import duty was levied on Indian traders when entering Melaka on non-Dutch ships. This was a strategy on the part of the Dutch to reduce the number of Indian immigrant in Melaka. This is because the Dutch were suspicious of Indian traders as they thought they could be Portuguese stooges set to regain Melaka. The Dutch, however, were unable to implement this method effectively as it did not stop the influx of Indian merchants nor their trading activity in Melaka. As a result, the Indian immigrants progressively increased each year (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Indian immigrants in Melaka 1678-1957

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1678</th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1817</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>2,986</td>
<td>3,277</td>
<td>7,527</td>
<td>18,857</td>
<td>23,266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Melaka Population | 4,854 | 9,635 | 19,647 | 77,756 | 124,952 | 153,691 | 291,211 |

Source: Singh and Wheatley, 1983

In addition, the role of Indian traders in Melaka increased trade and port revenues to the Dutch government. As a token of appreciation, the Chitty community received several land grants from the Dutch. From the land given, the Chitty community built the Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple (1781) which has now become the oldest Hindu temple in Malaysia and Singapore (Figure 3.13). In fact, the architectural design of this temple has several Dutch architectural features (Ravichandran, 2009; Narayanasamy, 2006; Kamarul and Lilawati, 2004).
However, there is a small dwelling that is highlighted as a unique architectural design as it embodies Chitty identity in its decorative style. Ravichandran (2009) argued that some of these houses survived until 1950s, but many were demolished to make way for newer structures.

Meanwhile, when the British took over Melaka temporarily from the Dutch (see Section 3.1.3), the Chitty community started to be treated ‘unfairly’ by the British. For example, the Chitty community nearly lost the root of their homeland when the British decided to remove the population in Melaka to Penang. However, it was saved by Stamford Raffles, who was against the decision to demolish the fortress of Melaka and relocate the Melaka born inhabitants to Penang. Although the order was rescinded by the British, during the early years of British officially rule of Melaka, the Chittys were no longer connected to any serious business or trading activities other than farming.

![Figure 3.13: Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple (1781)](image)

*Source: Author’s fieldwork, 2011*
In the early 19th century, the Chitty community became less well known by the Malaysian public. This is due to the British bringing low caste, illiterate, and destitute Indians from South India to fill the growing need for labourers on plantation and urban infrastructure projects. In addition, as was the case with the Straits-born Chinese and more recent Chinese immigrants, higher caste and higher-class “Indians,” who gained local prestige through interactions with the British, began to overshadow the “Chitty”.

Since then, the Chitty community is often known and referred to as a common Indian community. In fact, the Chitty community is culturally much more unique than other Indian communities in Malaysia. The Peranakan Chitty can only be found in Melaka, although some small numbers reside in Singapore (Ravichandran, 2009; Bremmer, 1927). Certainly, the Chittys have no roots in India. After settling in Melaka, they gradually severed their relationships with their relatives in India. Moreover, the ‘Chitty’ is considered an ‘outcast’ in terms of the Indian caste system. This is due to their inter racial marriages being unacceptable in the Indian conservative caste system; their non-Indian wives and children were not taken back to India. Therefore, with no ties with Indian descendants, the Chitty view Melaka as their place of origin.

Although, the Chitty and the Indian community are both devoted to the same Hindu faith, the Chitty community practices their religious ceremonies and beliefs in a unique manner in comparison to other Indian descendents. The Chittys are assimilated with the indigenous Malay’s socio-cultural fabrics, such as in terms of spoken language, clothing, food, and other aspects of general social conduct. In terms of physical appearance and skin complexion, they bear resemblance to the Malays and Baba Nyonyas, possessing more mongoloid than aquiline features of South Indians (Raghavan, 1977; Bremmer, 1927). Malay is their sole maternal
language, although they do speak English, but they have limited knowledge of the Tamil language, or any other Indian language. Thus the communication between Chitty and Indian community is only at a basic level. The main interaction between these two ethnic groups is in matters of religious activities.

At present, both the Chitty and Baba and Nyonya communities have faced pressures in a new global city. The pressure of modernisation and globalisation could potentially revolutionise their culture and traditions. In terms of socio economic structure, many of them joined lower and subordinate ranks of the public service, as clerks, teachers, technicians and unskilled labour (Ravichandran, 2009). Meanwhile, those who have a better academic qualification have left for other cities like Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. To some extent, these communities need to be highlighted as an intangible heritage asset at least at national level. The government should play a vital role in financially supporting awareness of these marginal ethnic groups among the Peranakan communities and the public.

There is evidence that the government has made an effort to highlight the uniqueness of these communities to the public, via tourism development, by creating a museum for each Peranakan community (see Appendix 3.2). However, it can be argued that there is a lot more that can be done by the government, such as, to enable and encourage the involvement of local community groups in promoting their own culture and heritage awareness, and to develop a better infrastructure if related to tourism development. For instance, recent tourism development, namely the heritage trail, has shown a ‘failure’ in terms of community engagement. In fact, it has created tension between local communities and local government due to both parties being unable to reach consensus. The climax of this event occurred when the community of Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple decided to banish the trail’s
information panel at the front of this temple. This is because the community cannot accept the false information about their religion and the historical context being delivered to the public. The government should take serious action over carefully assessing the interaction and needs between local community as a ‘living heritage’ and cultural heritage resources in order to ‘serve’ them and develop a viable tourist attraction in the city.

3.5 Heritage Assets in Malaysia and Its Challenges

The influence of ‘colonial rule’ can be seen in many historical cities in Malaysia. Physically, most of the city’s landmarks are dominated by colonial architecture. In consequence, it provides significant physical characteristics to a city. It has created a lucid image and a distinct identity to Melaka’s city heritage, which differentiates it from other cities in Malaysia. Examples of remaining colonial structures or architecture can still be found in most capital cities, including Melaka, George Town, Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Ipoh, Taiping, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu.

Less evident within these cities is genuine local identity (Malaysia) in the form of Malaysian architecture. This is probably due to the degradable materials of local structures such as timber and Atap Nipah (Palm roof). Therefore, the risk of decay (i.e. humidity: 80% all year, temperatures range: 21°C to 32°C) would be higher than concrete materials (for most colonial structures). Besides, the colonisation contributed to the damaging of all these physical fabrics (timber culture) through wars and demolition to build new colonial architecture.

“...at the fall of Melaka to Portuguese regime, the army brutally destroyed all the Malay Sultanate structures. This is included the mosques, mausoleums and the palace. The remnants of these structures and human skeletons were used to support and stabilise the soil profile to replace the wooden fortress with brick structures.”

(Adapted from Hikayat Mushi Abdullah, 1970) (See Appendix 3.6)
Apparently, there was a strong connection between the outer fabrics and local values towards traditional structures. For example, the details of art work on the physical structure represented identity and a sense of pride in traditional or cultural values. However, there is concern in Cultural Heritage Management circles that ‘heritage assets’ can be seen as a burden, the ‘dead hand of the past’ in the eyes of some members of society (Lee et al., 2007). For example, some local people claim evidence of colonisation should not be preserved at the present. This is because these were against Malaysian heritage as they were reminding people of the colonial past. In respect to the community, as a guardian or owner of cultural heritage identity in heritage setting, it is certainly not an easy task for the heritage manager (government) to gain the confidence of local people in a way to explain the importance of preserving cultural heritage resources such as colonial buildings. Although the government can use the heritage act and legislation in order to force the survival of colonial heritage, the need for local community support is essential to ensure the sustainability of heritage conservation.

Alternatively, by highlighting their intangible heritages and shared history one may encourage a sense of pride among the local people (Graham, 2002). For example, language, food, dance, and religious celebration and festival represent the multiple culture of Malaysian society. All of these intangible heritages are inherited from one generation to another. Besides, some of these cultural heritages are significant in terms of colonisation heritage for instance the emergence of a mixed ethnic group called Peranakan, now ‘hidden’ within Malaysian society. It maybe possible to enhance the interest of local people in preserving their colonial heritage.

However, as a developing country with increasing population, traffic congestion and growing demand for commercial space, there is increasing pressure to sacrifice heritage for modern urbanisation. The pressure does not only affect physical heritage assets, but it could affect the
local social culture. For example, people’s behaviour and attitudes might be changed towards their own local cultural and traditions as with the younger generation who see traditional culture as an outdated practise. Considering the evidence and values of Malaysian heritage, the initiative and commitment of Malaysian authorities to actively support, preserve and protect such heritage assets should be continuous and on-going.

In addition, the written documents regarding heritage preservation and conservation work have been formulated by the Central government in Malaysia. In essence, the importance of these documents is necessary for heritage practitioners to comply with the guidelines, rules and legislations that relate to Malaysian heritage. For instance, since the replacement of previous heritage acts (Antiquities Act, 1976 and Treasure Trove Act 1957) with the National Heritage Act of 2005, there is now a comprehensive legislation to provide guidance for heritage conservation and preservation in Malaysia. In addition, the Division of Heritage was renamed the Department of Heritage in March 2006. Its remit as an agency is to carry out the work relating to heritage assets in Malaysia.

3.5.1 **Registration for National Heritage in Malaysia**

The formulation of the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) can be argued as the most comprehensive Act that has ever been made to preserve, conserve and manage cultural heritage in Malaysia (Yuszaidy, Hanapi and Ab Samad, 2011). This Act has encompassed a wide range of cultural heritage resources in Malaysia. The main context of this Act has included two elements of Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage at a large scale. For example, the element of Cultural Heritage consists of two types of tangible heritage and intangible heritage. Meanwhile, the context of Natural Heritage has been extended to include the Underwater
Cultural Heritage as part of its jurisdiction over heritage law for safeguarding the underwater heritage in Malaysia.

According to Section 67 in the National Heritage Act 2005, there are three categories of heritage assets in Malaysia. These are Heritage Sites, Heritage Objects and Living Persons. Both Heritage Sites and Heritage Objects have been broken down into several types of cultural heritage resources (see Figure 3.14).

![Figure 3.14: Categories and types heritage assets in Malaysia](image)

Until 2011, there are 233 heritage assets have been registered as National Heritage (see Table 3.2 and Appendix 3.7). ‘National nomination’ is to allow cultural heritage resources being eligible for funding and comprehensive care for conservation and preservation of the heritage asset, as stated in National Heritage Act (see Part V, Section 20 – 22; Part X, Section 72). It is noted that the declaration for National Heritage has included the Living Person as part of the government initiative to expand the concept of intangible heritage in Malaysia (see Part X, Section 67 (2)). Until 2011, seven Living Persons were declared as ‘Living National Heritage Figure’ drawn from various skill backgrounds and prominent figures in the field of arts and culture (see Appendix 3.8).
Table 3.2: Breakdown of National Heritage Assets in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SITE</td>
<td>Building/Monument</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archaeology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBJECT</td>
<td>Tangible</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intangible</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVING PERSON</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that the formulation of the National Heritage Act has enhanced public participation. For example, according to Section 50 (1), “any person [Malaysian citizen] may apply for an object\(^2\) [or historical object\(^3\)] to be registered as a heritage object”. However, this is limited to the application for heritage registration of a Heritage Object\(^4\). Meanwhile, according to the National Heritage Act, Part VII (Chapter 1, Section 24), the Commissioner has the power to nominate or designate a heritage site. If that “a site has no natural or cultural heritage but the Commissioner satisfied that it should be designated as a heritage site because of its proximity to, and for the protection and enhancement of, another site designated as a heritage site under section 24, the Commissioner may designate such site as a heritage site” (Section 25 (1)). The public is still engaged, but the approach is quite different from previous public nominations. In this case, the ‘engagement’ is in allowing the public to show their ‘objection’ to the designation

\(^2\) "object" includes any moveable antiquity, tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage and historical object but excluding treasure trove

\(^3\) "historical object" which means any artefact or other object to which religious, traditional, artistic or historic interest is attached and includes any — (a) ethnographic material such as a household or agricultural implement, decorative article or personal ornament; (b) work of art such as a carving, sculpture, painting, architecture, textile, musical instrument, weapon and any other handicraft; (c) manuscript, coin, currency note, medal, badge, insignia, coat of arm, crest flag, arm or armour; or manuscript, coin, currency note, medal, badge, insignia, coat of arm, crest flag, arm or armour; or (d) vehicle, ship and boat, in part or in whole, whose production has ceased.

\(^4\) "Heritage object" means an object declared under section 49 or registered under section 51 as a heritage object.
of the site by sending a notice of objection to the Commissioner (as stated in Section 28), and in being able to attend the ‘hearing’ session (as stated in Section 29) to voice their opinions.

The government is aware of the importance of public engagement in the conservation and management of cultural heritage. However, it can be argued that the level of empowering the public is not yet at the level of the decision making process. It is limited to a form of tokenism (see Section 4.4) as highlighted by previous authors such as Kwan (2010), Ahmad Puad (2005), or Kamariah (2003). The public is allowed to nominate any heritage object that he/she believes to be valuable in terms of cultural and heritage significance; or to voice their opinions or objections via SERANTA (public engagement) about the designation of the site. Kamariah and Dolbani (2006) have pointed out an issue over the transparency of the decision making power via SERANTA programme, as it appears merely to fulfil legal requirements, as stated in the National Heritage Act 2005. This gives a perception that decision-making for designation of a heritage site is purely politically influenced (Kamariah, 2003). This can be related to several controversial issues regarding the government decision making against the needs of the public (local people) to highlight cultural heritage identity. For example, there was a public outcry over the government’s decision to demolish two public ‘heritage landmarks’, namely Pudu Jail (Figure 3.15) and Bok House (Figure 3.16). Both properties were demolished in order to make way for what has been rumoured to be a commercial centre. Based on the location and the current value of these buildings (land), a decision based on and influenced by economic purposes was made in terms of long-term market investment rather than heritage values. Likewise, a similar situation had occurred in Hong Kong, where the credibility of the Hong Kong government has been challenged by the public due to the government’s decision to demolish two socially-valued heritage sites – the Old Star Ferry Pier, and the Queen’s Pier in 2007 (Kwan, 2010). Both Tsui (2007) and Elizabeth (2006) in their separate articles note that the
government had shown their short-sightedness, profit oriented attitude and an indifference towards local cultural heritage identity.

Plate 3.10: Ariel view of 116 year old Pudu Jail

Plate 3.11: End of an era:
A pile of paper money is burnt as a symbolic gesture to the ‘death’ of Pudu Jail by a few Malaysians who are calling for the preservation of the historical landmark.

Figure 3.15: Pudu Jail (1895) one of the oldest remaining buildings in the Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Source and caption: The Star, 2010

In addition, the controversial decisions are not solely to do with the demolition of heritage properties. It was observed that the government had permitted an alien structure (physical construction) to be built in a particular or fragile heritage setting, where it could disturb the landscape or the bonding between the area and its identity. For example, the Melaka State Government announced that a themed restaurant franchise (Hard Rock Café Melaka) would be built within the UNESCO World Heritage Site by the end of 2012 (Melaka Travel, 2011; The Star, 2011; See Appendix 3.9). Although the decision did not violate the status of World
Heritage Site as a whole nor was there an objection from the World Heritage Committee (WHC), several protests amongst the public and NGOs upon this decision seemed to have little impact on the local authority’s decision. In comparison, a similar issue that created uproar in China was due to a government proposal to allow the Starbuck coffee shop to operate inside the Beijing’s Forbidden City, but here negative public opinion made the government close down the premise (BBC News, 2007 and see Appendix 3.10).

The above examples highlight similar issues in terms of government decisions to allow foreign investors to invade local businesses. However, the lack of impact made on the government decision in Melaka or note taken of local disagreement and resistance to their proposal would suggest a government system that took little notice of local community grievances rather than a low level of awareness among the local people to voice their objection with confidence.
The issues discussed above have shown up a gap between the authorities and people in public regard to the needs for development and preserving cultural heritage. Apparently, there are two factors that often create conflict of interest in Malaysia. First, a top-down approach adopted in managerial systems in Malaysia often influences the decision making process. Certainly, the government’s commitment to conservation activities can be seen through the formulation of heritage conservation and management policies through active engagement among stakeholders (Melaka Action Plan, 2010; Melaka Management Plan, 2008; National Heritage Act, 2005). However, the current concept of public engagement has been used by the authorities as a form of window-dressing to placate local people. It gives the local people the
illusion that they have played a larger role in the decision-making process. However, in reality, this approach is mere political spin to settle local authority administration dispute.

Secondly, it could be determined that a lack of public commitment to participate in conservation aspects could be caused by a lack of knowledge and awareness about conservation and preservation. A lack of participation and less public interest could potentially jeopardise not only physical heritage, but it might affect socio-cultural heritage as well. In general, management of heritage assets in Malaysia can still be improved, especially in relation to the imbalance between government administration and local community participation.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the evolution of cultural heritage identity in Malaysia through a historical timeline of colonisation and trade. The multi cultural and unique blend of heritage characters that exists since pre and post colonisation in Melaka highlighted the richness of intangible heritage resources. It is evident that the cultural heritage resources can be utilised for the benefits of the local community and local government alike, as in the development of tourism. However, several issues were raised with regard to heritage conservation and management which challenge the success of the one-way decision making process implemented by the government. Certainly, this is in consequence to limited community engagement where the top down government’s administration structure is dominating the power of controlling the decision making process. The next chapter presents the importance of the involvement of the local community in cultural heritage management. This will further examine the current position and practice that has often been implemented by local government especially in tourism development.