**House vs. Home in Penang and Macau: Transformations in place identity through tourism and heritage preservation**

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This paper 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 projects easily become -- even if historically sensitive and despite good intentions -- reduced to sanitized modernist simulacra whose significance is defined away from and against local meanings, uses, and economic structures, most often in the interest of external big business. Retention of fragments of “original” historic architectural fabric notwithstanding, what results is all too often the presentation of an idealized past that is just as invented and virtual as any purpose-built theme park with historical motifs. The analytic proposed here focuses on the effect this dynamic has upon senses of identity and place attachment among local inhabitants. 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 case studies are compared and contrasted: Macau, a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, and the city of George Town, on the island of Penang in Malaysia. 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.

The cases considered are 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, and the loss of a sense of continuity, familiar identification, and ease of use of public space for residents in Macau, as the formerly sleepy enclave continues to develop mega-resort casinos with faux historical, Las-Vegas-style, international referents. 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 “home” vs. the externalized material aesthetics of houses 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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