



# Cultural memory of glory of the imperium Melayu at Pulau Penyengat: An exploration of Contrapuntal Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

This research serves as a reminder of the glory of the ancient Malay kingdom of Riau. The presence of Pulau Penyengat is strategic due to the strong cultural memories of the local community. Consequently, the island stands as a witness to the historical triumphs of the Malay kingdom of Riau. The study presents memories and cultural recollections on Pulau Penyengat. The method employed in exploring these cultural memories is contrapuntal sociology exploratory. The media used for data collection is a digital camera. Data presentation includes recent photos of historical sites on Pulau Penyengat. The research data sources consist of field data and exploratory literature data relevant to the theme of this research. The findings of this research identify the persistent cultural memory of the Malay empire on Pulau Penyengat as an advantage for tourism in the region. Furthermore, the parts of the kingdom that remain intact at the historical site serve as strong reminders of the ancient Malay kingdom that still linger in the memory of the people of Pulau Penyengat.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the cultural memory of the Malay empire's glory on Pulau Penyengat. The success of the Malay empire is inseparable from the memory of the prosperous Riau-Lingga Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Riayatsyah from 1777 to 1812 (Akbar et al., 2019). Located off the coast of the Riau Islands Province, Indonesia, Pulau Penyengat holds the history and glory of the Malay Empire that once ruled in the 18th century. As a cultural and governmental center, Pulau Penyengat bears silent witness to the past glory, which reached its zenith under the rule of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate from 1761 to 1784 (Oktasari, 2012; Zakariya & Oktasari, 2020). During this period, Pulau Penyengat served as a significant political, economic, and cultural hub, playing a crucial role in the development and preservation of Malay culture.

Over time, the glory of the Malay Empire on Pulau Penyengat began to fade. The colonial era and significant social changes altered the political and cultural landscape of the island. Although many historical remnants remain, including grand palaces and mosques, the sustainability and understanding of the cultural memory of the Malay Empire's glory on Pulau Penyengat have become increasingly important (Goh, 2014; Hutchinson, 2012).

This study aims to explore the cultural memory of the Malay Empire's glory on Pulau Penyengat by applying a contrapuntal sociology approach. Contrapuntal sociology allows us to explore and analyze social phenomena from various contrasting or contrasting perspectives (Muzaini, 2021). With this approach, we can understand how the cultural memory of the Malay Empire's glory on Pulau Penyengat is formed, preserved, and articulated by various social actors involved (Muzaini, 2017).

The significance of this research lies not only in uncovering long-forgotten history but also in contributing to an understanding of how cultural memory can be an integral part of the social and cultural identity of a community (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008; Mustari et al., 2023). By analyzing the social dynamics involved in the formation and preservation of cultural memory, this research is expected to make a tangible contribution to the preservation and enhancement of understanding of local history and culture.

Pulau Penyengat is not only the object of research because of its rich historical heritage but also because of the complexity of social relationships within it (Swastiwi, 2022). By applying contrapuntal sociology, this research investigates how cultural memory related to the glory of the Malay Empire on Pulau Penyengat is articulated and translated through visuals.

Exploring the memories and cultural memory of Pulau Penyengat not only stretches the threads of past glory but also provides valuable perspectives on how this heritage impacts the identity and lives of local communities. Pulau Penyengat, with its unique history and culture (Ahsan et al., 2023), opens a window to understanding how the glory of the Malay Empire shapes the formation of its character and values.

A deeper understanding of this cultural memory can provide insights into how history and past glory are interpreted and connected to contemporary identity (Lee, 1999). It can also help in designing more effective preservation and educational strategies to conserve the cultural heritage of Pulau Penyengat.

In the context of evolving globalization, where local cultures are often threatened by the tide of modernization, a further understanding of cultural memory can play a key role in strengthening local identity and preserving unique cultural heritage (Rashid, 2015; Swastiwi et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of how cultural memory can be safeguarded and preserved in the context of changing social and cultural dynamics.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The method employed in exploring cultural memory is descriptive exploratory visual. In data collection, the researcher utilized a site visit method to Pulau Penyengat. The field research site visits were conducted twice by visiting historical sites and identifying cultural heritage in the Pulau Penyengat area. Therefore, the researcher used a data collection tool in the form of a mobile phone camera. Site visits differ from fieldwork, where site visits as a method require three different perspectives: site visitors, people at the visited sites, and those who arrange or commission the visits (Lawrenz et al., 2003).

Archival studies with a Contrapuntal Sociology approach were conducted by exploring relevant literature on the theme of this research data, including exploring historical photos on Pulau Penyengat in the past. Data presentation is complemented with recent photos of historical sites on Pulau Penyengat. Then, narratives and descriptions were analyzed with relevant literature sources (Bosch, 2016).

In this research, a contrapuntal sociology approach is used to analyze different layers of memory from various community groups involved in shaping cultural identity on Pulau Penyengat. This concept leads to a deeper understanding of how historical narratives and the glory of the Malay Empire are reconstructed, defended, and debated by various social actors on Pulau Penyengat.

By adopting a contrapuntal approach, this research highlights the importance of inclusivity in cultural heritage preservation efforts. This means recognizing and considering various perspectives and experiences in the construction of collective memory and historical narratives. Thus, this research not only explores cultural memory but also offers thoughts on how this memory can be preserved inclusively for future generations (Tamm, 2013; Van den Scott, 2017).

In the contrapuntal sociology approach, researchers can see more than one perspective or point of view in analyzing a social phenomenon. For example, in the context of contrapuntal sociology readings, researchers not only confine themselves to one narrative or interpretation of a social issue but also try to understand how different narratives contradict and interact with each other (Lee, 1999).

One example of applying contrapuntal sociology readings is in studies of ethnic or religious conflicts. For instance, in an ethnic conflict between two groups, the contrapuntal approach allows researchers to see how each group forms and defends its own narratives about history, identity, and claims to territory. By understanding these different perspectives, researchers can better unearth the roots of conflict and seek more inclusive solutions.

Furthermore, contrapuntal sociology readings can also be applied in studies of collective memory and cultural identity. For instance, in the context of studying the cultural memory of the Malay Empire's glory on Pulau Penyengat, the contrapuntal approach enables researchers to explore various narratives and interpretations of the past from different community groups involved. This can help understand how memories of the Malay Empire's glory are reconstructed, defended, or even contested within the local community.

Contrapuntal sociology readings contribute valuable insights to the development of knowledge about the complexity of social and cultural realities (Kaufman, 2004) (Beshara, 2021). By allowing us to look beyond single narratives or dominant perspectives, this approach opens the way for a deeper and more inclusive understanding of complex social, cultural, and political dynamics (Caputo et al., 2002).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### **Cultural Memory: The Glory of the Malay Empire in Remembrance**

In the 18th century, Pulau Penyengat served as a center of power and culture for the Malay Empire (Matheson, 1989). As a significant seat of power at that time, Pulau Penyengat holds many stories of past grandeur and glory. Historical buildings, royal tombs, and ancient artifacts scattered across the island bear silent witness to this glorious past. However, more than just physical remnants, Pulau Penyengat also serves as a place where the cultural memory of the Malay Empire continues to live and evolve. This includes being the birthplace of Gurindam Dua Belas by Raja Ali Haji, a Malay intellectual in the 19th century (Helmiati, 2021; Niko & Solina, 2023).

In the past, Pulau Penyengat was filled with traces of glory. In the 18th century, the island became the center of governance for the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. The island held a very important position in tracing the history of the rise and fall of the Malay Empire over 120 years (since the establishment of the Riau Kingdom in 1722), which consisted of the territories of the Johor Sultanate, Pahang Sultanate, Siak Sultanate, and Lingga Sultanate (Matheson, 1989). Magnificent structures such as the Sultan Riau Palace and the Sultan Riau Grand Mosque stand as silent witnesses to the splendor of captivating Malay architecture. Memories of this past showcase the prosperity and wisdom of rulers who created a prosperous and multicultural region.



**Figure 1.** The Riau Lingga Empire Palace (The Palace Complex was inaugurated in the year 1900 AD)

One highlight of Pulau Penyengat's memories is the role of women in building its glory. Tengku Bilik played a significant role in the history of the Riau-Lingga kingdom. Her full name is Tengku Bilik Halimah binti al-Mahrum Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Mahdi. She was the sister of Sultan Riau Lingga (1883-1930), Sultan Abdurrahman Muazzam Syah II bin al-Mahrum Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Mahdi.



**Figure 2.** The Tengku Bilik Palace, which served as the residence of Tengku Bilik Halimah binti al-mahrum Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Mahdi and her family

The glory days of Pulau Penyengat did not last forever. By the end of the 19th century, the sultanate fell into the hands of the Dutch (in 1911). Traces of colonization are still visible in some colonial buildings scattered across the island, such as the Fortress, which remains intact with its armaments.



**Figure 3.** Bukit Kursi Fortress (A Defensive Fortification Still Equipped with Weapons)

One crucial aspect of the cultural memory of the Malay Empire on Pulau Penyengat is the continuously updated and preserved narratives by the local community. When visiting this island, tourists are treated to stories of the glory of Sultan Riau and the powerful Malay sultanate. In every story told by local residents or tour guides, traces of the past are brought back to life. These stories serve as strong reminders of the rich cultural heritage and magnificent history.



**Figure 4.** The Residence of Raja Daud (a renowned physician during the Riau Lingga Kingdom) at Pulau Penyengat which remains intact.

It is important to understand that the cultural memory on Pulau Penyengat is not homogeneous. Various community groups have different perspectives on the history and glory of the Malay Empire. For example, descendants of Malay nobility may have different views from local residents or tourists visiting the island. Conflicts of interpretation and understanding of history can arise, and this is part of the dynamics involved in the formation and preservation of cultural memory (Caputo et al., 2002; Kansteiner, 2002).



**Figure 5.** The Tomb of Raja Ali Haji Complex

Pulau Penyengat bears witness to the dynamics of globalization and ongoing modernization. Social, economic, and political changes occurring on Pulau Penyengat also influence how the cultural memory of the Malay Empire is understood and preserved. These changes may pose new challenges in maintaining the integrity of cultural heritage and history, but they also present opportunities to create more inclusive and contextual narratives.

Over time, Pulau Penyengat has transformed into a place of tranquility and peace. Now, the island has become an attractive historical tourist destination for both local and international tourists. Many visitors come to explore the historical alleyways, visit heritage houses, and contemplate at the tombs of Sultan Riau.



**Figure 5.** The Royal Tomb Complex

Based on the current situation, Pulau Penyengat serves not only as a place where the cultural memory of the Malay Empire continues to thrive but also as a stage where contemporary social, political, and cultural dynamics unfold. A deeper understanding of Pulau Penyengat and its cultural memory is crucial not only for preserving valuable cultural heritage but also for comprehending the role and significance of history in shaping contemporary identities and societies.

#### **Memory of Pulau Penyengat Today**

Contemporary Memories of Pulau Penyengat History records a series of triumphs and heroics involving various civilizations worldwide. The Malay Empire, a cultural marvel that reached its peak of glory in the Classical Era, stands as a significant landmark in the history of Southeast Asia (see Barnard, 1994). This historiography, which weaves the threads of Malay empire's splendor, carves out a rich collective memory of culture, art, and achievements within Malay society.



**Figure 6.** The distinctive Street Gate on Pulau Penyengat

The power of the Malay Empire extended from the Malay Peninsula to the Nusantara islands, marking their presence as a dominant force in the region. The arrival of foreign explorers and traders from China, India, Arabia, and Europe bore witness to the significance of this empire. One cultural aspect ingrained in the collective memory is its relationship with trade. Through strategic ports like Melaka, this empire became a highly important trading center. The wealth of natural resources and strategic geographic location provided opportunities for beneficial cultural

exchange and trade. As a stopping point, Melaka became a meeting place for various cultures, languages, and beliefs, shaping a cultural memory that reflects tolerance and diversity.

Art and architecture formed the foundation of the Malay empire's cultural wealth. Beautiful carvings and intricate woodwork served as testimony to the skill of Malay artists. Architectural structures such as palaces and mosques showcased the beauty and elegance of Malay architecture. This excellence enriched Malay culture and left behind an artistic legacy that remains alive in cultural memory to this day.



**Figure 7.** The Original Architecture of the Malay House at Pulau Penyengat

The importance of the cultural memory of the Malay empire is also reflected in language. Malay language, which flourished and was respected during the empire's glory, became the language of trade and diplomacy in the region. The influence of the Malay language can be found as far as the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia, creating a cultural and linguistic cohesion that preserves the memory of the Malay empire's glory.



**Figure 8.** Residential Areas with Houses above the sea

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Pulau Penyengat, as a faithful guardian of history, preserves invaluable cultural heritage, creating space for in-depth study on how past glory shapes identity and community life. By tracing the history of the Malay Empire through magnificent architectural remains, it bears witness to the resilience of a captivating civilization. This heritage is not merely a collection of land, stones, and buildings, but the soul of stories and values passed down from generation to generation. The memories and cultural heritage of Pulau Penyengat also reflect the strength of the local community in preserving their heritage. The active participation of the community in conservation efforts and improving the welfare of society is key to the sustainability of cultural heritage. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding sustainable and inclusive conservation practices. Pulau

Penyengat continues to be a destination that provides unforgettable experiences for every visitor, carrying eternal memories that embrace the past and the present.

This research contributes to theoretical advancements in Contrapuntal Sociology and postcolonial studies while offering practical benefits in heritage preservation, community empowerment, and policy formulation. Insights from the research can guide the preservation and promotion of Pulau Penyengat's cultural heritage, helping to develop strategies that respect and highlight local history and identity.

Nikodemus Niko: write up introduction, method and fieldwork. Casiavera: write up introduction and analysis. Herry Wahyudi: write up analysis and conclusion. Alfian Eka Saputra: fieldwork and collecting data. Adhitya Qurdiansyah: fieldwork and collecting data. Afrina Caroline: fieldwork and collecting data.

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