

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## BELANJA ME MAKAN, DON'T FORGET ME: A HEARTFELT REFLECTION ON MAYBANK TOWER AND MERDEKA 118

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ABSTRACT

This reflective article presents a personal narrative inspired by the witnessing of Malaysia's tallest skyscraper, Merdeka 118, alongside the historical Maybank Tower and the globally recognized Petronas Twin Towers. Drawing on daily experiences from 2019 to 2025, this reflection intertwines architectural progress with cultural memory, highlighting how the rise of Merdeka 118 symbolizes Malaysia's ambition to stand tall on the global stage. Through the use of metaphors and personal anecdotes, the article gives voice to the once-proud Maybank Tower, personifying it as an elder who gracefully watches the younger generation surpass it in height but not in historical value. The narrative emphasizes that while architectural marvels like Merdeka 118 showcase innovation and economic advancement, it is equally vital to honour the legacy of structures that once embodied national pride. The reflections call for humility, gratitude, and respect for the sacrifices of all those, including workers, communities, and past generations—who made such monumental achievements possible. Ultimately, the article advocates for a balanced vision of progress that respects both the towering heights of ambition and the enduring foundations of heritage.

KEYWORDS

Merdeka 118, Maybank Tower, Kuala Lumpur skyline, architectural heritage, Malaysian identity


### 1. INTRODUCTION: A PERSONAL WITNESS TO MALAYSIA'S SKYWARD DREAMS

Since 2019, I have been an eyewitness to an extraordinary transformation in the heart of Kuala Lumpur: the rise of Merdeka 118 (Figure 1). Each day as I sent my eldest daughter (graduated in 2024), and today (12 July 2025)

my youngest daughter to Confucian Private Secondary School at Jalan Hang Jebat, I watched this mega building grow before my eyes, from a modest foundation to a sky-piercing monument. From both close-up (Figure 2) and afar (Figure 3), Merdeka 118 now proudly claims the title of the tallest building in Malaysia and the second tallest in the world, standing as a shimmering testament to ambition, engineering, and national pride.

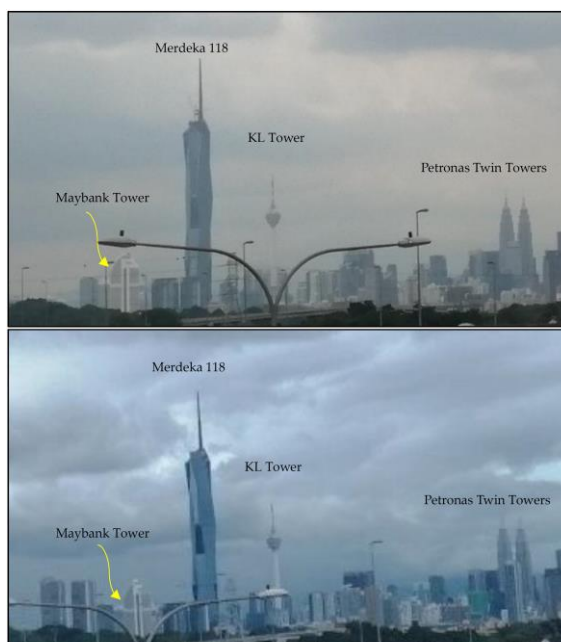


**Figure 1:** The progressive construction and completion stages of Merdeka 118 as viewed from various angles and times. The left photo shows the tower under construction on 25 April 2022, and the right photo displays the fully erected spire of completed Merdeka 118 on 12 July 2025. The towering presence of Merdeka 118 now dominates the Kuala Lumpur skyline, symbolizing Malaysia's modern aspirations while quietly overlooking the historical legacy of nearby landmarks including the Maybank Tower. Photos are original and taken by the author/family members.

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**Figure 2:** A close-up perspective highlighting the contrast between the iconic Maybank Tower (left), once the tallest building in Malaysia since 1988, and the rising Merdeka 118 (right). Both were photographed on 21 November 2024, these images juxtapose the enduring heritage of the Maybank Tower (left), which symbolizes Malaysia's post-independence identity, with the modern architectural triumph of Merdeka 118 (right), reflecting the nation's ambitions for global recognition and progress. Photos are original and taken by the author.



**Figure 3:** A panoramic view of Kuala Lumpur's evolving skyline captured from afar. The top image, taken on 25 April 2022, and the bottom image, taken on 18 January 2025, showcase the towering presence of Merdeka 118, now the tallest building in Malaysia, standing proudly alongside the iconic KL Tower and the Petronas Twin Towers. The Maybank Tower, once the tallest and the pride of Malaysia since 1988, is also visible—smaller in height but monumental in historical significance. These contrasting images symbolically portray the journey of Malaysia's architectural heritage, where the old and new coexist, reminding us not to forget the legacy of the past while reaching for the future. Photos are original and taken by the author/family members.

But let us not forget those who came before. Before Merdeka 118 and even before the Petronas Twin Towers (451.9m) and KL Tower (421m) (Figure 3), which it stood as the tallest buildings in the world since 1996 (until 2004), there was the humble yet iconic Maybank Tower. Completed in 1988, the same year the world was fixated on the summer Olympic Games in Seoul (South Korea), the Maybank Tower once stood as the tallest structure (244m) in Malaysia, symbolizing post-independence aspirations and modernity. Now, as newer and taller giants rise, I find myself reflecting deeply: If I were the Maybank Tower, how would I feel to see my time of glory fading into memory?

## 2. IF I WERE THE MAYBANK TOWER: THE ELDER SPEAKS

If I were the Maybank Tower, I would speak not with bitterness but with the quiet dignity of an elder who once stood at the center of the nation's

pride. I remember the days when people lifted their eyes to the sky to admire me. I was more than just concrete and glass; I was a symbol of Malaysia's growing economy, of hope, of rising confidence. People took photographs of me, they talked about me, and they felt inspired by me. But time moves swiftly. In 1998, the Petronas Twin Towers ascended beyond me, taking the title of the tallest, not only in Malaysia but in the world. I watched as my children soared higher, and I smiled. Because that is the natural order of things: the new must surpass the old.

Now, in the shadow of Merdeka 118, I find myself rarely noticed. My name is seldom mentioned. Yet I carry no resentment. My heart is filled with pride, because every new tower that rises carries within it the legacy of the ones before. I want to whisper to the younger generation: Do not forget me entirely. Every tall building starts with a first step, and I was that step. As Balkish Roslan and Ariff (2019) explained, buildings like mine reflect

the post-independence identity of Malaysia, and in our cityscapes, we hold the layered history of who we once were and how far we have come. Though I may not dazzle with height, my value lies in memory, in endurance, in the story I helped shape. I still wish that the young towers "*Belanja me makan la*" (Treat me to a meal; 请我吃饭; பசுமாக்க கோட்டி சாப்படிக்கும்), sometimes. Message me la if I am lonely, show me some respect as your old *sifu* (Teacher; 老师; மாளவி) is still living. Don't just *jalan lalu* (Walk past; 路过; நதக்கும் கடந்த) without even looking up, okay!

### 3. WHY MANY FORGET ME: THE FADING OF MEMORY

But why do so many forget me? Perhaps this is human nature. We are drawn to the newest, the tallest, the boldest. We live in a time when everything must break records to be appreciated. The Petronas Twin Towers captured the imagination of the world, and now Merdeka 118 has risen higher still. Yet, in this rush for the spectacular, the quiet achievements of the past are often neglected.

I do not seek to return to the spotlight. Instead, I wish to gently remind Malaysians that progress does not erase the past—it builds upon it. Every step forward stands on the foundations of what came before. In the words, preserving and adapting buildings like mine contributes not only to cultural heritage but to environmental sustainability as well of (Strumiłło, 2020). The reuse and conservation of historical buildings align with global calls for more sustainable development. I remain here, standing firm, not just as a relic but as a chapter in the living story of this nation. I still want to see my *anak cucu* (Children and grandchildren; 孩子和孙子; மகன் குடிமகள்) grow taller, but remember la: Don't be *sombong!* (Arrogant; 傲慢; காற்புறும்), Don't *lupa diri* (Forget your roots; 别忘记本来; நான்கலை மரந்துக). If you rise, rise together with respect.

### 4. IF I WERE THE MERDEKA 118: THE YOUNG CHAMPION'S VOICE

If I were Merdeka 118, I would be brimming with youthful pride and excitement. In just a few short years, I have soared to the top—standing at 679.9 meters with 118 magnificent storeys, making me the second tallest tower in the world (Abdelrazaq, 2025). I am not merely tall. I am a feat of modern engineering, a symbol of Malaysia's ambition, innovation, and determination to be counted among the greatest cities on earth. I am built from the most advanced High Performance Concrete (HPC) ever used in the country, reaching grades up to C105 to optimize my structural elements, enhance durability, and maximize floor space (Abdelrazaq, 2025).

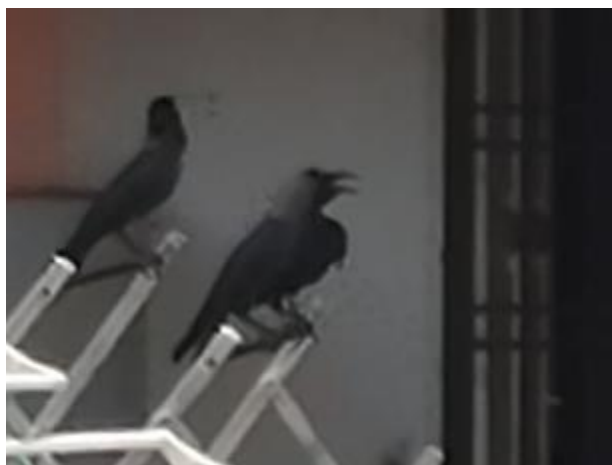
But with my new crown comes a responsibility. I must not fall into

"superego." I must remember that I exist because of the countless sacrifices of people from all walks of life. From the Bangladeshi workers who built me brick by brick, to the Malaysian families who endured traffic diversions and daily inconveniences along Jalan Hang Jebat, I was carried to completion on the backs of the many—not the few. Even small, almost-forgotten sacrifices, such as the detours parents like you had to take just to bring children to school, form part of my story. I must repay this debt not just by being a pretty face, but by helping grow Malaysia's economy, job opportunities, and purchasing power, not just debts and credit cards, okay? Remember, boy, even you need to "*Belanja your old mentors makan*" (Treat your old mentors to a meal; 请老师吃饭; பசுமாக்க சாப்படிக்க) and *Jangan lupa jasa orang!* (Don't forget people's contributions/sacrifices; 别忘记别人的恩情; மக்களின் பங்களிப்பை மறக்காதீர்கள்).

### 5. MERDEKA 118 AND MAYBANK TOWER: A TALE OF TWO TOWERS

The story of Merdeka 118 and Maybank Tower is not one of competition but of continuity (Dupré and Smith, 2008). Merdeka 118 represents the future—a Malaysia that is ambitious, modern, and forward-looking. It stands as an engineering marvel that has pushed the boundaries of construction through innovations in HPC, optimized structural design, and stringent quality assurance systems (Abdelrazaq, 2025). In contrast, the Maybank Tower represents the past—a Malaysia rooted in its post-independence dreams, carrying the values of endurance, stability, and cultural heritage (Balkish Roslan and Ariff, 2019). Though Maybank lacks the dizzying height of Merdeka 118, it holds something equally important: memory and soul.

The difference between these two towers is not just height. It is philosophy. While Merdeka 118 symbolizes cutting-edge advancement, the Maybank Tower reflects the quiet dignity of history, and highlighted, such older structures can be adapted and reused in ways that promote sustainability, adding social value without waste as (Strumiłło, 2020). In a sense, the Maybank Tower is the mentor, and Merdeka 118 is the student, one carries the torch of tradition, the other lights the path to new possibilities. Remember la: Every *anak* (Child; 孩子; குழந்தை) must still *Hormat orang tua!* (Respect the elders; 尊敬老人; முதியோரை மதிக்க) As the great philosopher Confucius reminds us through his timeless teachings on filial piety, it is in honouring those who came before us that true virtue lies—just like in the world of black crows (Figure 4), who are scientifically reported and aid to care for their aging parents, a lesson taught in many cultures and even seen in school classes like 'Filial Piety Junior 1 (Knapp, 2004; Keus, K., and Harde, 2022; Chen and Coomans, 2024).'



**Figure 4:** Two black crows perched side by side, symbolizing the timeless value of filial piety—a virtue deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy. Just as crows are believed in many cultures to care for their aging parents, this image reflects the wisdom of "Every anak (child) must still hormat orang tua (respect the elders)"—a lesson not only for humans but mirrored in nature itself. Photos are original and taken by the author.

### 6. LEGACY, PROGRESS, AND HUMILITY: A SHARED DREAM FOR MALAYSIA

At the heart of it all, both the Merdeka 118 and the Maybank Tower embody the Malaysian spirit—resilient, ambitious, and forward-moving. Maybank, though largely overshadowed today, still stands with quiet pride, like a wise elder who has seen the nation grow from its early post-independence years into the economic tiger it aspires to be. Merdeka 118, in contrast, is the youthful prodigy, shining bright on the global stage, eager to carry Malaysia's aspirations into the future.

Yet one without the other is incomplete. There is wisdom in the old and energy in the new. There is beauty in progress but also in preservation. The towers remind us that as we reach for the sky, we must remain grounded in humility, kindness, and *Kesyukuran* (gratitude; 感激; நன்றி) sometimes smile to myself and imagine a conversation between the two towers—Maybank reminding Merdeka: "*Jangan terlalu bangga la!*" (Don't be too over-proud; 不要太自骄; மிகந் திகார்கா). Remember those who helped you rise. Without me, you would not be where you are today." And Merdeka 118, in return, replying with respect: "Thank you, elder. I

will carry the flag forward, but I will not forget you. *I belanja you makan* (I will treat you to a meal; 我请你吃饭; பசுமாநக சாபடிக்கும்), one day-You have my words!"

In the end, it is not only the height of our buildings that defines us as a nation—it is the depth of our values, the warmth of our humanity, and the strength of our unity. May both the old and the new stand tall together in the Malaysian skyline, for they are chapters of the same beautiful story, in our everyday living (stressful) lives.

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