

CURRENT COMMUNITY BASED PROJECT

“ Reminiscing forgotten treasures ... SINIAWAN ”

This is a joint project implemented by Sarawak Heritage Society & The Talent & Art Performing Group, for Swee Gek Kung Siniawan Sarawak & Supported by BlueScope Lysaght (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd.

INTRODUCTION

In line with the Society's main agendas for the coming years, which is capacity building, public awareness and education to strengthen the understanding on cultural heritage conservation, the Society will continue to work closely with schools and other interested organisations and communities, with lectures, talks and heritage walks.

Other than that, this year the Society will introduce community projects to reinforce public awareness through participation by the local community concerned.

Siniawan Town

The first of this community-based project will be the documentation of Siniawan town, a rare remaining example of early small township about 16 miles from Kuching, where time seemed to have stood still.

Located by Siniawan main road are two rows of 48 wooden shophouses. It has a police station, a Chinese temple, the Ong family mansion, an old abattoir and a primary school. Approaching Siniawan Bazaar, visitors can see Gunung Serembu where Sir 'James Brooke, the first White Rajah of Sarawak had his mountain top resthouse.

Other significant historical event of this place included Datu Patinggi Ali together with other Bidayuh Chiefs staging the famous anti-Brunei movement in 1830s.

This is a flood prone area with the most serious flood in records in 1963, and in 2003 and 2004, where flood water reached the roof top and first floor respectively.

With the new Kuching-Bau road by passing the town centre, the traditional social and economic conditions have been greatly affected. The shop owners are moving out to the housing estate nearby and there is evidence of 'outsider' buying in at low property rates.

Objectives

Through our documentation process that intended to involve the locals, we wish to restore their sense of 'local pride' and hope that they will find a way to sustain their

existence without compromising to development and authenticity.

This inventory-styled documentation process will involve several levels of recording of tangible (i.e. buildings, sites, etc.) and intangible heritage (i.e. trades, lifestyle, culture & history). Both anthropological and historical observation will be benefited from the compilations of written records, i.e. documents kept at the local temple, which also served as their local community center, and also, compilation of oral history that will have to be done from interviews with the local elders.

Based on the documentation, this information gathered will be tools for the next step of proliferating heritage conservation through education and awareness by involving the immediate and other interested members of the local residents and other public volunteers.

Through this process of documentation and eventually sharing the information with the locals through awareness and education, the Society hopes to be able to help them reinforce and foster the understanding of their unique identity, sense of belonging and thus a strong sense of local pride.

This project also aims at providing sustainable economic opportunities to provide the quiet dying town a new



Photo of Siniawan Town taken by KHO HAI SENG in 1937.