

Location	Taman Panorama Benak AVA Room; Fort Alice, Sri Aman	Ref No.	SA/WS/AR004
Subject	Workshop on the 13 th -14 th August 2013	Date	13-14.08.2013
		Time	Day 1: 2.00 – 4.30 pm ; 7.15- 9.30pm Day 2: 8.30am- 12.30pm
Attended by	Ref attached attendance list	Conducted by	Mike Boon
Recorded by	Geraldine Ho	Coordinated by	Goh Kaw Sze; Nelly Soh



Now you see it, now you don't. Before and after pictures of the site showing the project's progress.

From the 13th to the 14th of August 2013, I volunteered to be a facilitator in a two-day heritage awareness workshop, the latest program of 'Reminiscing Forgotten Treasures...Simanggang'. Whilst the previous workshop (in July) was based on the site of Fort Alice itself, this time the main venue was the AVA room of Taman Panorama Benak situated next to Fort Alice. This award winning spiral ramp structure designed by Mike Boon was intended as an observatory and learning centre for locals to view the *benak*. For those unfamiliar with the term, *benak* means tidal bore and is a natural phenomenon where a continuous wave builds up from a river mouth and flows upstream during high tide. It is most spectacular around the 3rd and 18th day of each lunar calendar month and coincides with the King tide. Lupar river in Sri Aman is one in approximately 400 estuaries in the world where this natural phenomenon occurs and it remains one of the small town's main attractions and major crowd puller.

When we arrived at the venue for registration, we received a pleasant surprise as the number of students attending the workshop had increased to 48(7 teachers and the rest students and public) and they had also brought their parents along. In an even more encouraging show of faith, some enthusiastic participants had braved the South China Sea and flown all the way from Kuala Lumpur to attend the programme. This was a great response, as it seemed the activity was finally sparking interest amongst the public.



Fort Alice, atop the hill in the far distance, as viewed from Taman Panorama Benak. (photographed by Wixin photography)



A night view of Taman Panorama Benak, the venue of the workshop. (photographed by Wixin photography)

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Day 1 (Tuesday, 13th August 2013)

Food Trail: Presentation

I had learnt that prior to the day’s activities, a group of teachers headed by Nelly Soh and Goh Kaw Hong had initiated a food trail project where students were quizzed on which dishes they thought would be the best representation of Sri Aman food culture. They then had to map out a trail for potential visitors to take in order to enjoy these local delicacies. The presentation of said Food Trail was to be the first agenda of the day and also served as a small test of the children’s presentation skills.

The students went up in groups of two to five to present and were of a varying range of ages. In addition to basic information such as ingredients, store name and technique of making the dish they also shared small trivia such as the temperament of the store owners and how they felt about the look of the food (apparently unroasted coffee beans look like worms and grumpy store owners had chased them away upon being approached for an interview). It was entertaining to learn how children view and question everyday things (like why certain foods taste the way they do) that adults take for granted and I was also very impressed that many of them were multilingual. For example, two of the groups chose to speak in both the English and Iban languages.

Altogether, 5 different types of food were presented during that session- *satay mee* (fried noodles with satay sauce), *yew char kueh* (Chinese fried crullers), *kopi* (local coffee), *cha kueh* (fried turnip cake) and fried noodles served on Simpoh leaves.

When everyone had finished with their slide shows, the coordinators and facilitators gave comments on each individual presentation and highlighted areas where the students could improve on. This included tips on preparation for presentations and public speaking skills.



Fried Noodles



Yew Char Kueh



Satay mee



Facilitators Nelly Soh and Miss Lim giving a preliminary introduction to the day’s programs.



Goh Kaw Sze giving presentation tips to the students.



Enthusiastic response from the participants during the workshop.

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Art Workshop

We then moved on to the second portion of the afternoon's activities, an art workshop. Kuching-based Sarawak Heritage Society members Karen Shepherd and Mike Boon launched into a talk entitled the "Concept of Modern Art" which covered both Western Art Movements and Chinese paintings. This was meant as a preliminary briefing to ease those new to the subject into what was to come - expressing what Fort Alice means to them through sketches.



Speakers Karen Shepherd and Mike Boon preparing their presentation.



Karen Shepherd engaging some of the younger students during her talk.

Now that the Fort has been fully dismantled, the children were asked to recall their most significant memories of her and convey this on a blank piece of B5 paper. Faced with this unfamiliar task, many were getting panicky and restless. To calm them down, Mike Boon guided them through deep breathing exercises. The room descended into complete silence for 3 minutes before the children dispersed to start drawing. At the end of the session a grand total of 32 sketches were handed in. Most were pencil drawings but were effective in their simplicity and a good effort, considering the amount of time allocated (a mere 5 minutes).



Deep breathing exercises before the creative art workshop.



Tony, Claire and Chloe Sim from Kuala Lumpur brainstorming ideas for their sketches.



Participants taking up positions around the AVA room so that everyone has space to draw.



A brave individual sharing and explaining the concept behind his completed sketch with everyone.

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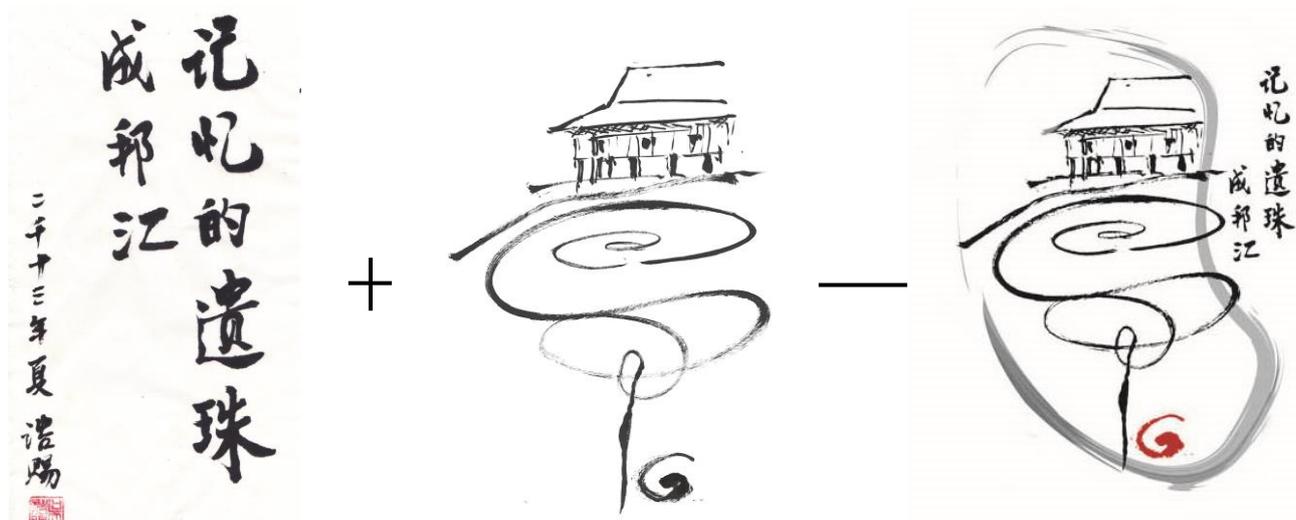


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Limited Edition Project T-shirt



Calligraphy

Sketches

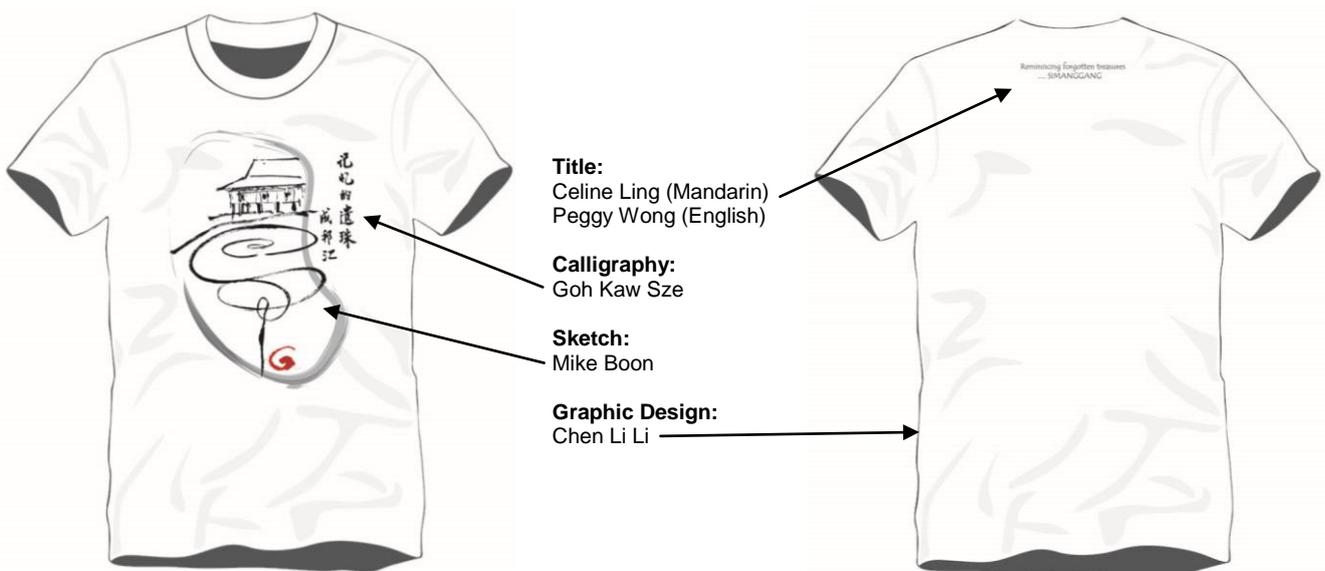
Graphics

The evolution and design process of 'Reminiscing Forgotten Treasures... Simanggang's official limited edition t-shirt.

Highlighting the day was the unveiling of the program's limited edition t-shirt, only available for sale during the evening session of the workshop. Graphically composed by Chen Li Li, the t-shirt is the result of a collaborative effort between many dedicated volunteers and is their take on how their memories of Fort Alice can be conveyed with a simple design.

First off the name of the program, 'Reminiscing Forgotten Treasures...Simanggang' was bestowed in Mandarin by Celine Ling and this was translated into English by Peggy Wong. The phrase was then written out in traditional Chinese calligraphy by Coordinator Goh Kaw Sze and incorporated into the design of the shirt, along with sketches of the Fort and her surrounding elements by Mike Boon.

The shirt was popular amongst the children who were delighted that they finally had a souvenir they could keep in remembrance of their time in the program. After the unveiling, we broke off for dinner at around 4.30pm.



Title:
Celine Ling (Mandarin)
Peggy Wong (English)

Calligraphy:
Goh Kaw Sze

Sketch:
Mike Boon

Graphic Design:
Chen Li Li

The official t-shirt is the result of a collaboration between many dedicated individuals

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Public Talk

Later that night, we regrouped at the AVA room for the scheduled evening public briefing sessions. The guest speaker for the night, Chua Chen Choon, was introduced as a local researcher and author from the Sarawak Chinese Cultural Association. He gave an informative talk (entirely in Mandarin) on the old forts in Sarawak. Mr Chua was a passionate speaker and it was evident that he was well versed in his subject area.

Next up was Mike Boon who gave a progress update on the conservation of Fort Alice. He shared the methodology in recording the building components of the Fort. He also showed how each step was carefully documented with sketches, drawings, photographs and videos so that the Contractor can reinstall the components accordingly with traditional carpentry works.

After his talk, one of the Conservators-on-site Jake Ooi shared his experience spending 3 weeks of his life in the company of old timber pieces. Along with his team mate Eng Chee Kian, Jake is a fresh graduate from Penang, sent to Sri Aman on his very first job for Ori Green Design Studio the conservation company hired to assist in the Fort Alice conservation. His job had been to painstakingly label and record every piece of timber taken down from the Fort, sketch out its wooden joineries, and also produce a detailed report.

Following this, the floor was open for a Question and Answer session. Local historian Mr. Tay Chek Pin (郑泽冰) graciously volunteered information he had obtained from the Sarawak Gazette 1931 on the Astana in Sri Aman (which has unfortunately been demolished). According to Mr. Tay, the then Resident had invited three Malays and an Iban to lay the very first post of the Astana. These individuals had been selected because they were descendants of craftsmen who were involved in the construction of Fort Alice. The second post was laid by a Chinese *tauke* (businessman) from Sri Aman bazaar, chosen because of his pivotal role in assisting in the development of Sri Aman. This bit of information further reinforced the point that Fort Alice and Sri Aman could not have been built without racial unity between the Malays, Iban and Chinese

The limited edition t-shirts sales commenced after the talks and due to high demand were almost sold out. In addition to t-shirts, books published by the Sarawak Chinese Cultural Association were also available for sale.



Volunteer local photographer and videographer Mr. Tan Chek Boon in action.



Historian and researcher Chua Chen Choon started the night with the history of Sarawak's Forts.



Young Conservator Jake Ooi (Penang) sharing his experience of living in Sri Aman.



Mr. Tay Chek Pin sharing his research on Sri Aman history during the Q&A session.



A student browsing through the books on sale after the talk.

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**Day 2 (Wednesday 14th August 2013)
Food Trail: Sampling Local Delicacies**



The next day, we again assembled at Taman Panorama Benak at 8.30am before being guided on a food trail tour as a follow up to the previous day's presentation. The teachers had split the children into 3 groups with each group assigned 2-3 visitors. With close supervision by the teachers, they then brought us around town to try the local delicacies they had talked about.



Since different groups tackled different dishes, visitors were free to choose whichever food they wanted to try. I opted for the *satay mee*, a curiosity I had never heard of before setting foot in Sri Aman. As it turns out, what *satay mee* basically was were fried yellow egg noodles in a spicy ground peanut sauce (normal satay sauce) topped with slices of pork. In addition to the delicious noodles, the teachers also distributed freshly made crunchy *yau char kueh* accompanied with a chilli dip for us to sample.



Appetite sated and with extra time to spare, the children brought us to the nearby wet market to look at local produce such as live sago worms and farmed tilapia fish. They were the perfect hosts, very detailed with their introduction to their hometown and what it has to offer, going out of their way to ensure that the foreigners did not feel out of place. When the tour ended, we returned back to Fort Alice to start the second session of the day- traditional carpentry demonstration.



Angel Tay and her grandfather, the original owner of the fried noodle stall.



Very much a family business – The younger Mr. Tay helped every day by his family.



A participant polishing up the remaining noodles.



Participants getting acquainted with fresh local produce sold at Sri Aman's wet market.

Our enigmatic tour guides of the day.

- Top: Team Satay Mee;
- Middle: Team Fried Noodles;
- Bottom: Team Char Kueh.

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Traditional Carpentry Demonstration

The traditional carpentry demonstration was coordinated by Mike Boon and shown Master Carpenter Ting Nik Sing and his employees. Master Sing and his employees were also in charge of dismantling and reconstructing the timber fort.

After a safety briefing and the distribution of hard hats, we were led to the top of the hill and told to gather around two workers who were chiselling pieces of timber. Master Ting, with the aforementioned workers, started off by displaying how traditional wooden support structures such as beams are assembled together without any nails (they used dowels and timber joints instead). They then went on to show how they had carved each of these wooden parts with traditional tools and how sturdy a wooden joint can be when constructed properly. All the components were made by hand and it was evident that these were skilled craftsmen who took pride in their work.

In an exciting conclusion to the day, Master Ting held an impromptu mini woodworking workshop for the children. In pairs, they were each handed a hammer and chisel and guided by the craftsmen on how to bore a mortise into the belian wood (a mortise is a hole in the wood where another piece of timber with a protruding tenon is to be slotted in to make a joint). The workshop concluded at around 12.30pm in the late afternoon where tired but satisfied the participants dispersed.



The Project's Master Carpenter Mr. Ting Nik Sing demonstrated how the timber frame of Fort Alice will be reconstructed. All the components are produced with traditional tools and techniques.



A participant testing out the sturdiness of the frame.



A hands-on experience for participants attempting to reassemble the timber components.



Contractor's Site Manager Mr. Tan Ting Huat helping a participant in the proper way of using a hammer and chisel.



Carpenter Mr Ting guiding a participant to mark the outline of a mortise.



Site Supervisor Mr. Chong Min Chew demonstrating the correct angle at which a chisel should be held.

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Preliminary Safety Briefing



Marching into the site with great anticipation.



Mike Boon giving a safety briefing before entering the site.

Before entering the site, participants were given a preliminary safety briefing by the coordinators. In addition to basic safety rules such as not straying away from the group or playing with any of the tools on-site, each participant was also handed a hard hat and instructed to always keep it on. They had also been passed a list beforehand on the proper attire to wear on-site (long trousers and close toed shoes) for further protection.

Surprise of the Day: Backwood Cooking

Upon learning of the student’s planned Food Trail, Master Ting and Site Supervisor Tan Ting Huat had specially arranged for a companion food demonstration to show the participants traditional techniques of cooking with bamboo commonly adopted by the Iban and Malay communities. They used two dishes as examples, *lemang* (glutinous rice) and *ayam pansuh* (bamboo chicken). Both types of food utilise 600mm long sections of thin-skinned bamboo (albeit of different diameters- *lemang* uses bamboo of 50-60mm diameters whilst the ones used for *ayam pansuh* is almost twice of that), and banana leaves as natural cooking utensils over slow open fires.



Unexpected food demonstration- Students shown traditional cooking techniques using bamboo and banana leaves.

To make *lemang*, bamboo is lined on the inside with clean banana leaves. Then locally farmed rice mixed with water, *santan* (fresh coconut milk) and a little salt is carefully poured into the bamboo and stoppered with more banana leaves. The mix is then placed over an open fire and turned regularly to ensure even cooking. When fully cooked, the bamboo is split open and the rolled rice is cut into small sections, forming what we know as *lemang*.

Except for different ingredients and the omission of banana leaves as an inner lining, *ayam pansuh* is cooked the same way. Pieces of chicken and salt are poured into the bamboo, stoppered with young tapioca leaves, and cooked over an open fire. The stars of the show here are the young tapioca and *bunggang* leaves (*Eugenia* sp.). Added as vegetables and herbs into the dish, their robust flavour is what gives *ayam pansuh* its unmistakable taste. It should be noted that this cooking method with *bunggang* and tapioca leaves is not limited to only chicken, other meats such as catfish are routinely cooked in a similar manner.

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