

SARAWAK'S ENDANGERED HERITAGE

Badan Warisan Malaysia | "Spotlight on Sarawak" | 7th July 2022

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President

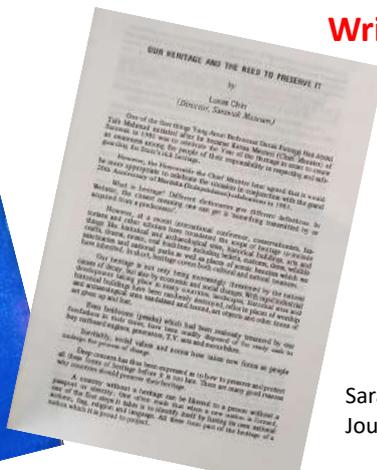
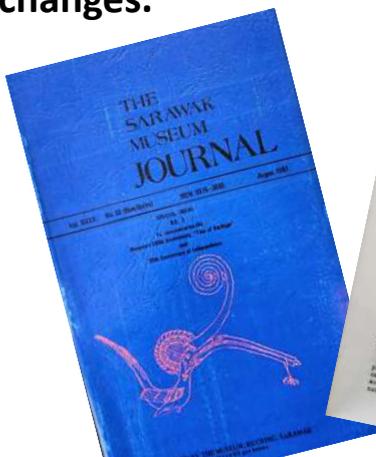


1

INTRODUCTION

"Our heritage is not only being increasingly threatened by the natural causes of decay, but also by economic and social changes."

Written in August 1983 !!!



Datuk Lucas Chin,
former Director,
Sarawak Museum

Sarawak Museum
Journal (August 1983)

2

AGENDA

- 1 Clarifying the terms: Sarawak, Endangered, Heritage
- 2 Why preserve our heritage?
- 3 Heritage conservation – evolving approaches
- 4 What Sarawak heritage is under threat?
- 5 What should be done?

3

1. CLARIFYING THE TERMS

SARAWAK

ENDANGERED HERITAGE

4



WELCOME TO SARAWAK

- 30+ ethnic groups
- 45+ different dialects
- Rich customs, art, music, practices, language
- Pre-history: 65,000 years ago evidence of human settlement at Niah
- Modern history : pre-Brooke, Brooke, Japanese, Colonial, Malaysia
- Extensive biodiversity

SARAWAK

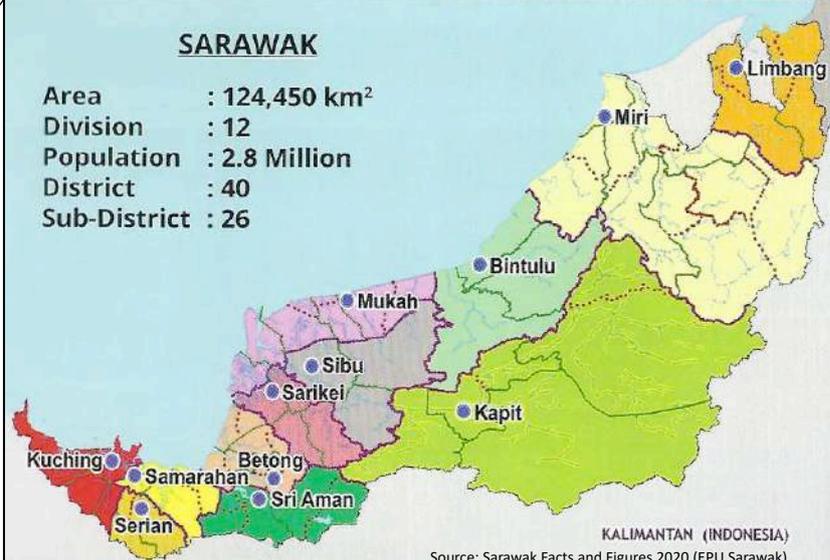
Area : 124,450 km²

Division : 12

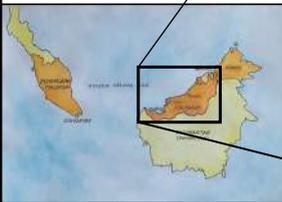
Population : 2.8 Million

District : 40

Sub-District : 26



KALIMANTAN (INDONESIA)
Source: Sarawak Facts and Figures 2020 (EPU Sarawak)



5

WHAT IS HERITAGE?

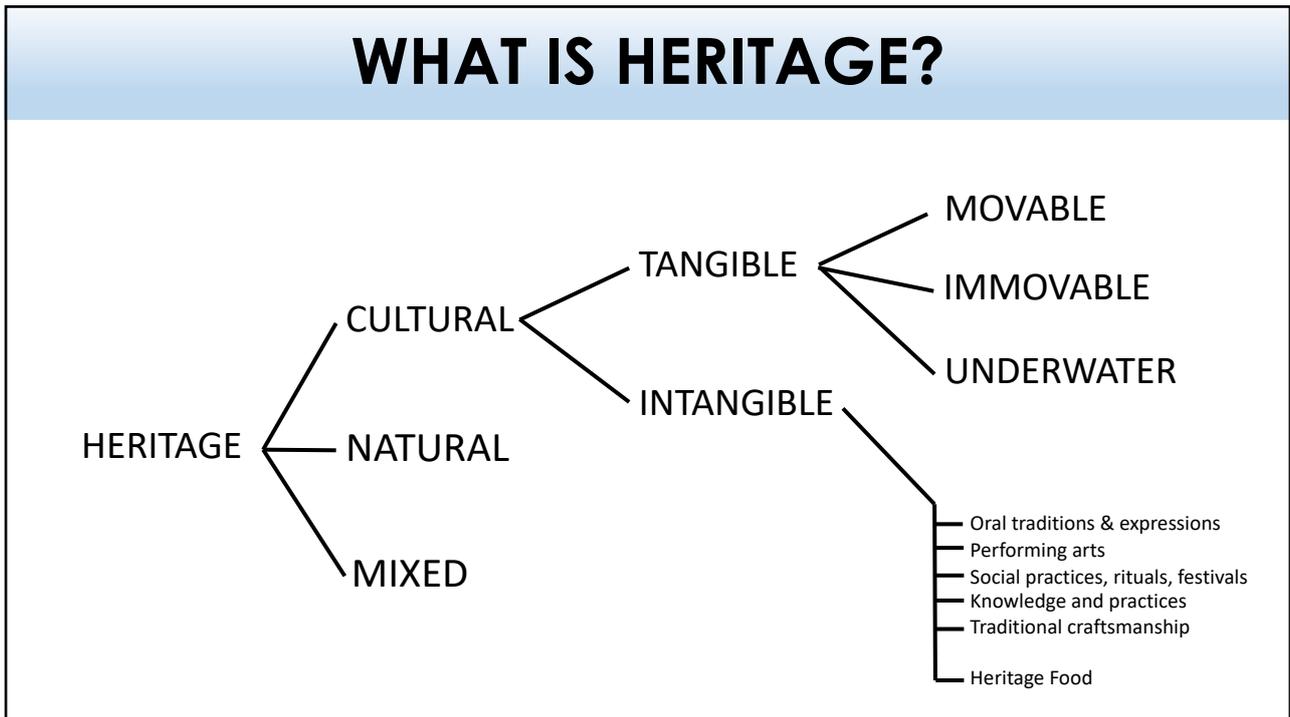
“... what we have inherited from our **ancestors,
that which we enjoy and value in **our times**,
and which we **choose** to pass on to our **future generations**”**

From a UNESCO Conference, 2013

“Heritage is ... an inheritance from the past destined for the future. It is a product of the present purposefully developed in response to current demands for it, and shaped by that market. ... the past is a quarry of possibilities from which selection occurs not ... by chance survival but by deliberate choice”

(Ashworth 1994:1)

6



7

WHAT IS HERITAGE?

- **TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE** refers in general to all the material traces such as archeological sites, historical monuments, buildings, artefacts and objects that are significant to a community, a country and/or humanity. Tangible cultural heritage are sometimes divided into: movable, immovable and underwater.
- **INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE** includes the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.
- Our **NATURAL HERITAGE** comprises the components of the natural environment that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for present and future generations, Examples: natural features, geological & physiographical formations, natural sites, and unique flora and fauna.







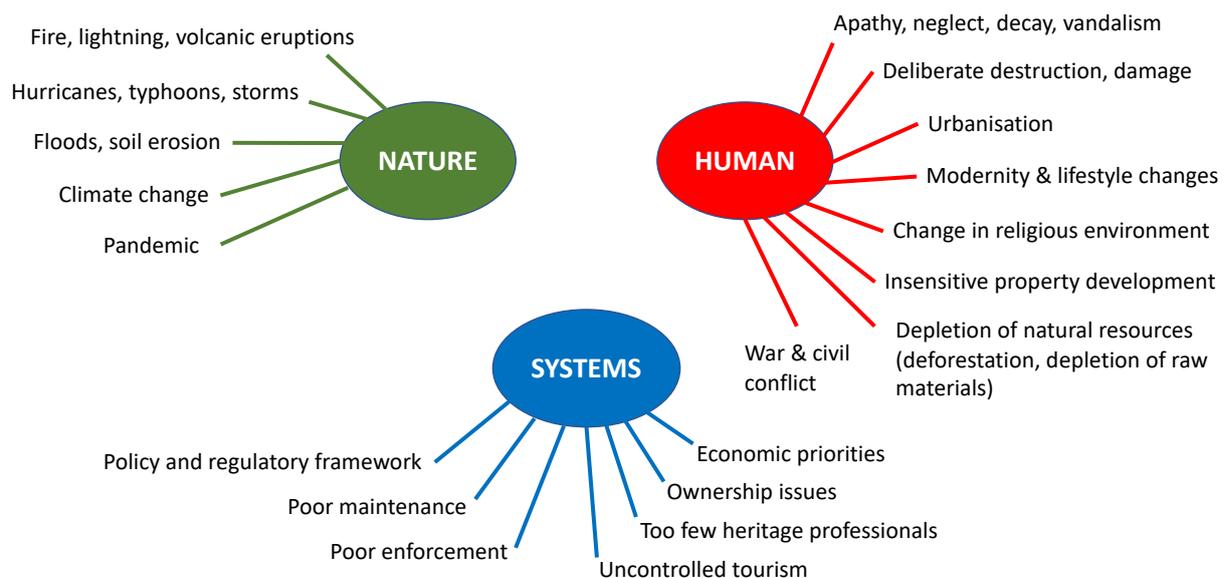

8

WHAT DOES 'ENDANGERED' MEAN?

- Usually 'ENDANGERED' is used to describe plant and animal species that are not doing well, perhaps to the point of near extinction
- Extending the term to heritage, it references THREATS that may cause our heritage assets to be destroyed, diminished or eventually disappear
- 'Endangered heritage' can be a fluid and subjective term
- Endangerment to tangible heritage assets may be somewhat clearer than intangible heritage
- Different categories of threats:
 - Nature
 - Man
 - Systems

9

THREATS TO HERITAGE



10

2 WHY PRESERVE OUR HERITAGE?

11

SARAWAK IS SPECIAL

OUR RICH HISTORY

OUR MULTI-ETHNICITY

OUR CULTURAL FUSION
(+ CROSSOVERS)

OUR BIODIVERSITY

Sarawak's Rich and
Unique Heritage

12

HISTORY OF SARAWAK

105 Years of Brooke Rule (1841-1946)

Japanese Occupation (1941-1945)

British Colony (1946-1963)

Sarawak, Sabah, S'pore & Fed of Malaya form MALAYSIA (16 Sept 1963)

13

WHY PRESERVE OUR HERITAGE?

A Sampling of Feedback

SHAPES OR REINFORCES OUR IDENTITY

SHARED ROOTS, SHARED VALUES, SHARED DESTINY

HISTORY AND HERITAGE CONNECTS US AS SARAWAKIANS

PRESERVES OUR HISTORY

REMINDS US WHERE WE CAME FROM

HISTORIC PRESERVATION SUPPORTS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

LOSING OUR HERITAGE IS LIKE LOSING THE 'SOUL' OF OUR PEOPLE

PROPAGATES OUR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

OUR HERITAGE IS OUR COMMUNITY'S HEIRLOOM

ADDS CHARACTER AND DISTINCTIVENESS TO SARAWAK

OUR HERITAGE CAN EMPOWER OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

KEEPS OUR INTEGRITY AS A PEOPLE

A RICH HERITAGE CAN HELP TOURISM SECTOR

14

3 HERITAGE CONSERVATION

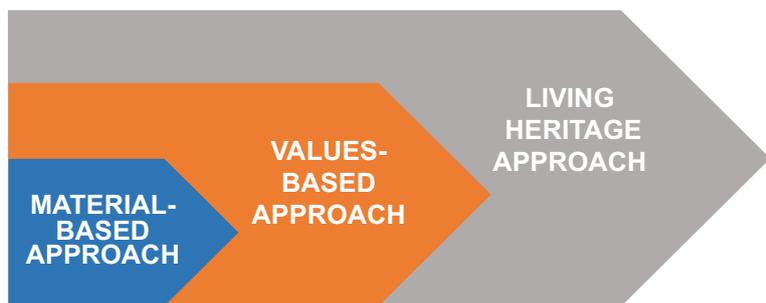
Evolving Approaches

15

HERITAGE CONSERVATION – Principles & Approaches

PRINCIPLES

1. Preserving historic condition
2. Authenticity
3. Integrity
4. Minimal intervention
5. Cultural traditions
6. Appropriate technology
7. Disaster preparedness

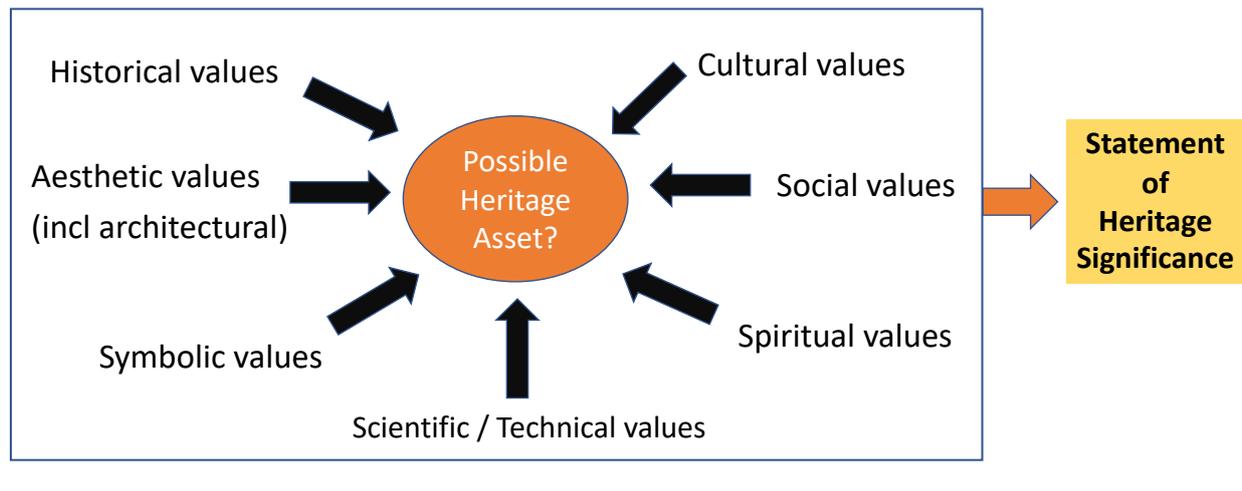


- Preservation of past with attachment to material (authenticity)
- Top-down & expert-driven
- Focus on historical and aesthetic values
- Community not involved
- Values considered expanded to include more perspectives, esp. from stakeholders in community
- Example: historical, aesthetic, cultural, social, spiritual, symbolic & scientific values
- Trying to safeguard community connection with heritage
- Conservation does not aim at solely preserving the fabric but at maintaining continuity
- Community-based approach

16

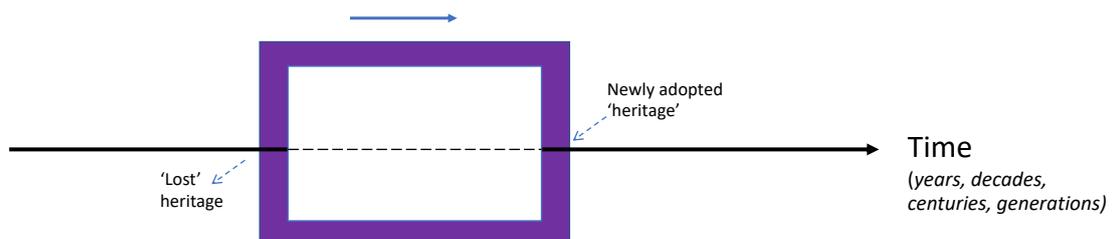
VALUES-BASED APPROACH

Values considered expanded to include more perspectives, especially from stakeholders in the community



17

A 'SLIDING WINDOW' PERSPECTIVE OF HERITAGE



- A natural process
- The time frame we remember is within the window
- Heritage from the more distant past gets forgotten / discarded / distorted
- New items are added that in time become heritage
- The window may be elongated if we intervene and do more research, conservation and safeguarding of our heritage

18

4

WHAT SARAWAK HERITAGE IS UNDER THREAT?

19

LOST HERITAGE?

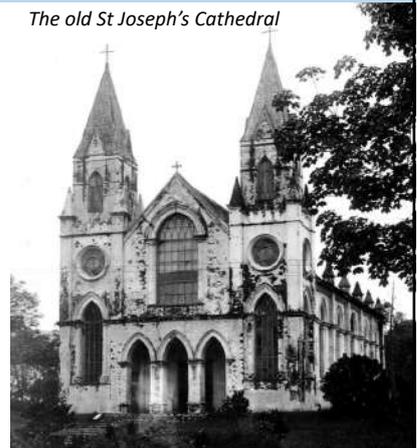
(Part 1)



The wet markets on Jalan Gambier



Government Resthouse



The old St Joseph's Cathedral



Kuching Central Prison



The Old Tan Mansion, Padungan

20

LOST HERITAGE?

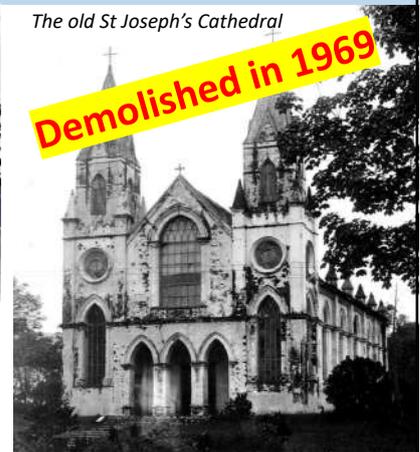
(Part 1)



The wet markets on Jalan Gambier



Government Resthouse



The old St Joseph's Cathedral



Kuching Central Prison



The Old Tan Mansion, Padungan

Old Tan Mansion was demolished to make way for Odeon, then demolished for the high-rise now under construction

21

LOST HERITAGE?

(Part 2)



The practice of headhunting



Miri Long Jetty



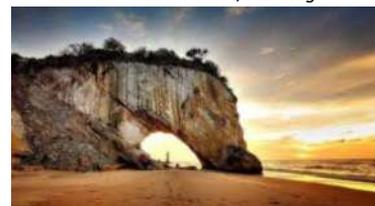
Rex cinema, Kuching



Old Secretariat / Treasury building, Kuching



Elongated earlobes



"Drinking Horse" rock formation, Miri

22

LOST HERITAGE?

(Part 2)



The practice of headhunting



Miri Long Jetty



Rex → Multi-Storey Carpark



Old Secretariat / Treasury building, Kuching



Elongated earlobes

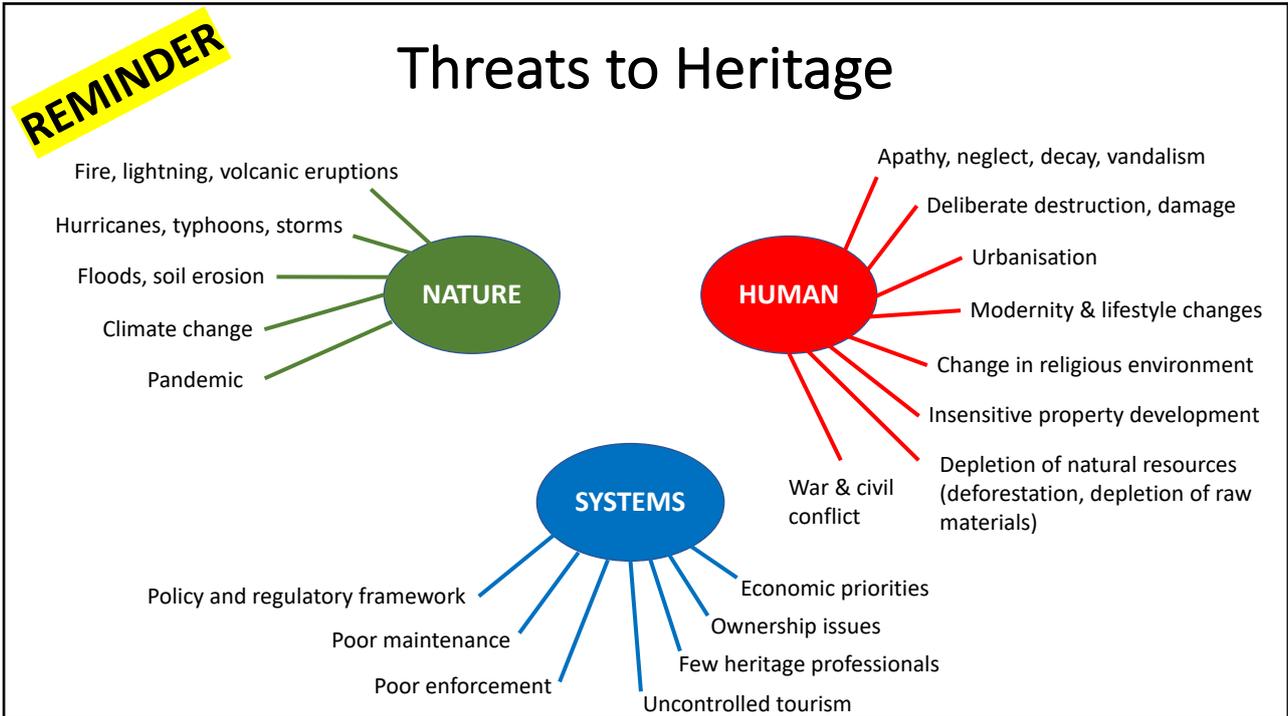


"Drinking Horse" rock formation, Miri

23

Join me on
Whirlwind Tour
existing herit

24



25

BROOKE & COLONIAL ERA BUILDING

Old Courthouse, Kuching (1874)

The Astana, Kuching (1870)

Fort Margherita (1879)

General Post Office (1931)

The Sarawak Museum (1891)

The Pavilion, Kuching (1909)

Fort Sylvia (1889)

Fort Alice (1864)

ENDANGERED ?

ISSUES: Gazettement * Conservation * Buffer zone * Repair & maintenance * Repurposing / adaptive reuse * Skilled craftsmen

26

TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS 1

MALAY style houses

(photo from speaker's own collection)



Rumah Batu, Kuching



Darul Maziah, Kuching

Longhouses



Murat longhouse along Skrang River ... (photo by Louis Jap)



Annah Rais longhouse (photo from STB)

ENDANGERED ?

Old CHINESE mansions



Chan mansion, Kuching



Former home of Ong Ewe Hai, now 'The Marian' hotel, Kuching

ISSUES: Methods of construction * Unique designs * Fewer skilled craftsmen * Fire danger * Modernity & changes in lifestyle

TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS 2

"Longhouse life has been a long-term choice of Sarawak's rural communities ... But **the traditional longhouse is vanishing along with traditional lifestyles**. As cultures shift and cultivation becomes increasingly rooted, the life in the longhouse is diversifying, fragmenting and fracturing. Sometimes replaced by modern materials, sometimes moving into individual residences, the old super-structures of belian and bamboo are either fading into memory or are increasingly unoccupied. Even worse, **images of wooden longhouses consumed in flames go up on social media with depressing regularity**, the whole state going up in arms over the tragedy of another traditional structure consigned to ash.

But, **in reality, longhouses were rarely designed to last**. Despite their size and durability, they were always a fluid construction dividing and mutating with the community before space constraints and agricultural complaints would drive them to migrate. Permanence itself is a new idea, born of new beliefs, new traditions and new lifestyles ..."

"A Tale of Two Longhouses" by Karen Shepherd, KINO(Sept-Oct 2019)

Longhouses



Murat longhouse along Skrang River ... (photo by Louis Jap)



Annah Rais longhouse (photo from STB)

ISSUES: Methods of construction * Unique designs * Fewer skilled craftsmen * Fire damage. * Modernity & changes in lifestyle

PLACES OF WORSHIP



Masjid Al Qadim, Sibul (circa 1830)
UNDERWENT 4-5 YEAR CONSERVATION, RE-OPENED IN APR 2022

ENDANGERED?



St James' Church, Kpg Quop (1865)

ATTENTION NEEDED



The Indian Mosque, Lorong Sempit, Kuching (1834)

NOW USED FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



'Tua Pek Kong' Temple, Kuching (1871? 1843? 1770?)
MULTIPLE RENOVATIONS OVER THE YEARS

ISSUES: Cost of repairs & maintenance * Modern facilities * Changes in expectations of faithful * Shortage of skilled craftsmen

PLACES OF LEARNING



Originally known as James Brooke Malay College, changed to Madrasah Melayu Sarawak (1930), & since 1992 the Islamic Heritage Museum, Kuching

WELL REPURPOSED INTO MUSEUM

ATTENTION NEEDED

ENDANGERED?



The Old Hokkien School building, Kuching (1911)



'St Joseph's School' 's Mill Hill block (1886, 1894)

RESTORATION WORK WAS COMPLETED IN 2021

ISSUES: Preserving the legacy * Repurposing and adaptive reuse * Structural integrity * Funding conservation / restoration

“HERITAGE SHOPHOUSES”



Main Bazaar, Kuching (1960s)

ENDANGERED ?

Main Bazaar, Kuching (2000s)



THE ISSUES: Incompatible or unsightly additions to streetscape * No clear do's & don'ts of modification & renovation * Aesthetic values? * Lack of enforcement * Need to have a 'heritage precinct'?

31

WEAVING: THE PUA KUMBU



“The Pua Kumbu, the hand-woven warp ikat textile ... represents the quintessence of Iban culture. It is, depending on the design, historical archive, a mythological or religious story, or a personal tale. It is a statement about the soul of the weaver and her relationship with the spirits.”



The PUA KUMBU tradition

- Inspiration (dreams? omens?)
- The rituals
- The designs
- The craftsmanship
- The weaver
- Weaver status in longhouse
- The beliefs (spiritual dimension)
- The product
- Meanings?

Is the Pua Kumbu endangered?

32

A VALUE-BASED REVIEW OF THE PUA KUMBU

Historical values
 Little written documentation of Iban cultural history makes it hard to trace an accurate record of the origin and devt of the Pua Kumbu tradition. Iban history is best remembered from oral traditions passed from generation to generation.
 Iban legend has it that the skill of weaving was brought down to earth by goddess Kumang who was sent to connect the 2 realms (upper world and human world) with the textile.

Aesthetic values
 Many Pua Kumbus are clearly beautiful. Features considered especially aesthetically pleasing include the symmetry, the clarity of the pattern and colour, consistency of tension of the backstrap loom, and the intricacy of design.

Symbolic values
 The Pua Kumbu textile design (i.e. colour, composition, motifs, patterns) forms a certain symbolic language, often depicting their sacred tradition, legend, stories and rhymes that are core to Iban beliefs and origins.



Cultural values
 The Pua Kumbu hand-woven warp ikat textile represents the quintessence of Iban culture. The Pua Kumbu is used in most Iban rituals, including those of birth, marriage, death, even the ceremonial receiving of heads captured in battle.

Social values
 Weaving is a way of evaluating status for women in the Iban community. A woman, depending on her use of dye, design and skill, will fit into a certain rank within the community. In order to be a master weaver, a woman has to move up from rank to rank.

Spiritual values
 According to master weavers, the intricate patterns and designs rendered artistically on the yarn is not an outcome of personally planned artwork that they may draw and weave. The detailed patterns are whispered and shown to them in their dreams by the gods and the Divine Source. These sacred dreams and visions are only for the chosen ones who must materialize them into forms of motif, symbols and colours on the yarn.

Scientific/Technical values
 The process of making the Pua Kumbu is an intricate one, with required technical skills in (1) preparation of the Cotton Yarn, (2) Preparing the Dyes, (3) treating the raw yarn with Mordant, (4) Dyeing, (5) Warp ikat technique, (6) Weaving

33

ORANG ULU CARVING

- The Orang Ulu (Kenyah, Kayan, Kajang, Punan, Berawan and others) were among the most skilled and decorative carvers in Sarawak, producing a wide variety of beautiful wood-carvings from huge burial structures to panels to intricate ivory earrings.



Hornbill ivory earrings



"Hudok kelunan" effigy



Kenyah door



War canoe prow ornament



The kelirieng (burial pole)

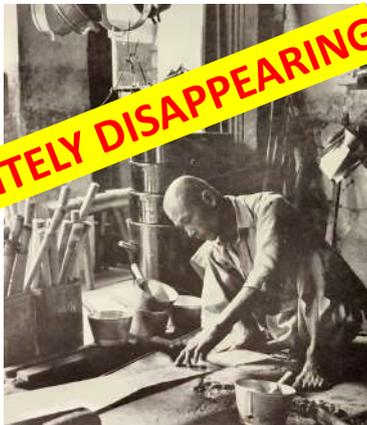
ISSUES: Keliriengs being discarded * Changes in societal beliefs * External influence * Fewer skilled craftsmen * Urbanisation

34

VANISHING TRADES



Makers of rattan furniture
(Photo by Hedda Morrison)



Tinsmith in Kuching
(Photo by Hedda Morrison)



Blacksmith in Kuching
(Photo by Paul Sarawak)



Malay boatbuilders in Kuching
(Photo courtesy: traditionalboat.blogspot.com)

MOST DEFINITELY DISAPPEARING

ISSUES: Economic changes * Automation * Modern substitutes * Change in demand * Next generation not keen * Skills lost *

35

MUSIC, DANCE & PERFORMING ARTS



Selengut (nose flute)



Rajang Ba'uh (eagle dance)



ENDANGERED TRADITIONS



Chinese opera



Ngajat



chants



ritual dirge



Hornbill dance of the Kenyah

ENDANGERED or EVOLVING ?

ISSUES: Modernity * Newer forms of entertainment * External influences * New generation not adopting old traditions

36

MANY OTHERS I WISH I HAD TIME TO MENTION...

- Beadwork
- Basketry
- Ceramics
- Songket & keringkam
- Festivals
- Tattoos
- Disappearing languages
- War memories



37

ENDANGERED NATURAL HERITAGE



Orangutan



Big-nosed proboscis monkeys

Sarawak has around 280 species of plants and 50 species of animals listed as **Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable** under The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) **Red List of Threatened Species**



Rafflesia



Sea turtle



Rhinoceros hornbill



Paphiopedilum sanderianum



Santubong



Mulu

38

5

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

39

TAKING STOCK: WHAT HAVE WE DONE WELL?

- Sarawak Heritage Ordinance (2019) ... *can serve as a basis for progress*
- Additional entries into the Sarawak Heritage Register in 2019 (e.g. RCBMH, St James' Church Quop, Santubong archeological sites) ... *see list on SHS website*
- Sarawak Heritage Council
- Opening of Borneo Cultures Museum (2022)
- Many other special focus Museums
- Conservation of built heritage: Old Courthouse, various Forts, Brooke Dockyard (in progress), Mill Hill block of St Joseph's School ... *some govt-led, some private*
- Initiatives to promote ICH (e.g. pua kumbu, songket & keringkam ...)
- Sarawak Cultural Village *our living museum*

40

MUSEUMS



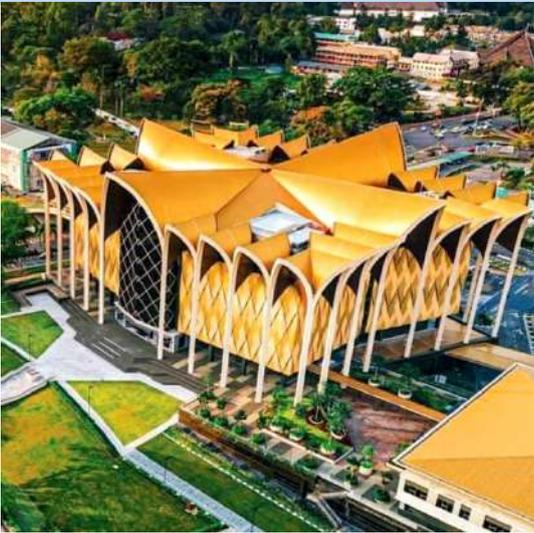
The Sarawak Museum



Brooke Gallery @ Fort Margherita



The Chinese Museum



*Borneo Cultures Museum
(opened on 9 March 2022)*



Tun Jugah Foundation



Islamic Heritage Museum



Sarawak Cultural Village – a living museum

41

SEMENGGOH WILDLIFE CENTRE

- Wildlife sanctuary and nature reserve
- Set up in 1975 to care for wild animals that had been previously kept as illegal pets, orphaned or found injured in the rainforest
- Orangutan rehabilitation and research centre, with feeding station encounters for visitors
- 25km from Kuching




42

WHAT SHOULD WE DO? 1

• OVERALL

- Remind Sarawakians of the value of their HERITAGE
- Heritage appreciation should move beyond “feel good” and “how beautiful” sentiments ... towards a community willingness to ACT
- There’s real URGENCY to act to protect our heritage
- Heritage conservation may go against short-term economic interests, but is crucial for long-term success
- Sustainable heritage management requires clear policy and strategy, a legal and institutional framework in place, and effective enforcement



43

WHAT SHOULD WE DO? 2

• CONSERVING BUILT HERITAGE

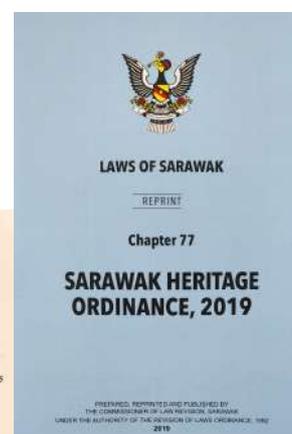
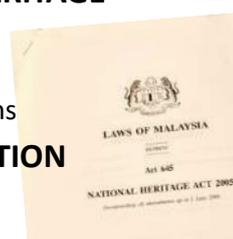
- Enforce the Sarawak Heritage Ordinance (2019)
- Include more heritage sites and historic buildings in Heritage Register
- Develop a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for each
- More heritage conservation specialists needed
- Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) for all development projects
- Innovative Business Models
 - e.g. adopting, repurposing, adaptive reuse, funding, PPP

• SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Get community engaged
- Inventorise and document ICH
- Plan initiatives to safeguard specific ICH domains

• SUPPORTING NATURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

- Get involved and engaged



44

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY...



45

REFLECTION

Heritage management is a complex and difficult challenge

1. In multi-cultural Sarawak, the **VALUES** that different communities / individuals ascribe to heritage items can vary widely. Statewide heritage prioritization exercises can be complex.
2. Communities tend to focus on **SHORT-TERM** or "bread and butter" issues. This can clash with **LONG-TERM**, statewide efforts towards sustainable heritage management
3. The **MEASUREMENT OF ECONOMIC IMPACT** of good heritage management is often not straightforward
4. **PRIVATE OWNERS OF BUILT HERITAGE** often resist to measures curtailing what they see as their basic owner rights (e.g. govt rules on private heritage buildings)
5. Inclusive and integrated **COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH** (as opposed to "top-down") are seen as ideal, but can be **complex, time-consuming**, and require good negotiation skills
6. "**SILO EFFECT**" – many groups (both in govt and non-govt) are pursuing heritage-related activities, independent of each other
7. Effective heritage management requires a multiplicity of **CROSS-SECTORIAL SKILLS** (e.g. sociologists, ethnographers, architects, planners, technicians, historians, etc). Experienced heritage professionals are hard to find.
8. Government resource allocations skew towards museums.

46



About Sarawak Heritage Society

- A non-partisan, non-governmental and non-profit organisation
- Founded in 2006
- Currently we have 120+ members
- Focus on tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Sarawak
- Our key activities: Awareness, Advocacy & Advisory
- We engage with government, private sector and academia



47

A CLOSING MESSAGE

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR OWN HERITAGE

1. Start with earlier generations of their family
2. Learn with food (especially traditional dishes)
3. Teach with stories (e.g. cultural folklore, traditions)
4. Educate with movies, books, online resources
5. Visit museums, heritage sites & cultural festivals
6. Pick up the language (or dialect)
7. Explore their family tree



48

THANK YOU

If you have further questions,
email me at jslyong@gmail.com

You can also find more information on Sarawak Heritage Society's activities
at our website www.sarawakheritagesociety.com

Acknowledging the support of

*Rose Au, Dr Elena Chai, Chang Yi, Marian Chin, Francis Frey, Louis Jap, Jee Foong, Dr Peter Kedit, Vernon Kedit, Dr
Connie Lim, Lim Yu Seng, Datin Dayang Mariani, Dr Kit Pearce, Yon Syafni Samat, Karen Shepherd, Ar Wendy Teo,
Donna Yong & Dr Atta Idrawani bin Zaini*