

# An Overview on Intangible Cultural Heritage In Malaysia

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## **Abstract**

Malaysia is a country of many races and cultures. Melaka and George Town are among them which reflect the encounter on cultural elements of the Malay Archipelago, India, China and Europe that created a culture, architecture and the most beautiful heritage buildings. Intangible cultural heritage is a legacy that is easily vanished by the passage of time versus current tangible heritage. This is because the younger generation is not interested in inheriting the cultural heritage, it is therefore feared that the heritage will be vanished. The objective of this article is to list the elements contained in the intangible cultural heritage, namely performing arts, customs and culture, language and literature, fine art/crafts, and heritage of the living. The importance of this article is that the public can find out about the importance of intangible cultural heritage, thereby maintaining the heritage. Thus, the society will appreciate more the diversity of cultural heritage in Malaysia and increase self-esteem, especially the younger generation.

**Keywords :** Element, Intangible Cultural Heritage

## **1. Introduction**

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has approved a conference entitled "Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2003) and has been adopted by 130 countries. This conference has identified five key elements in cultural heritage intangible namely (i) oral traditions (ii) performing arts (iii) social practices, rituals and cultural practices (iv) knowledge and practices that emphasize the importance of natural and universal (v) craft/handicraft skill (UNESCO, 2016).

Malaysia is rich in intangible cultural heritage belonging to various races. Changing times and less attention has led to the intangible cultural heritage suffered loss and extinction (Yusof, 2016).

## **2. Definition**

According to the National Heritage Act (2016) intangible cultural heritage is an act or movement of people which can be seen, touched, tasted, smelt or heard, when it is done or exists, but no longer can be enjoyed when it was lost or missing. National Heritage Act 2005, also explained that the cultural heritage intangible is like a form of expression, language, utterances, sayings, songs produced by music, note, lyrics, can be heard, singing, folk songs, oral traditions, poetry, dance, acting and others that are generated through the performing arts. In addition, theatrical performance, sound and music arrangement, and martial arts are also a heritage that reflect Malaysian culture.

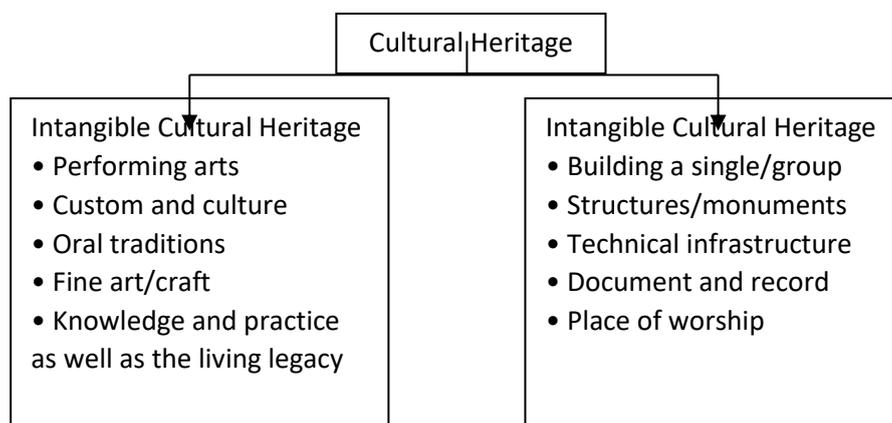


Figure 1 : Cultural Heritage (Saleh, 2010)

### 3. Five key elements of intangible cultural heritage in Malaysia

#### 3.1 Performance Art

Performing art is a form of stage performances conducted directly or indirectly to the audience or audiences that involves four basic elements, namely time, space, and the relationship between performer and audience. This presentation can be held by a guide script or no script, random, spontaneous or planned meticulously, and it can happen at any place and at any convenient time. There are three types of performing arts, namely theatre, dance and music. Theatre is one of the divisions in the performing arts that use a combination of acting (dialogue speech, gestures, facial expressions, emotions), music, dance, sounds, ritual element, lighting, set, tools, costumes, makeup and the admiration stage element. The theatre art that has been elected as the National Heritage 2015 is Jiken and Mek Mulung Jikey theatre art.

The art of dance is a rhythmic body movements performed in a particular place and time for socializing, expressing feeling, intentions and thoughts. Music or the sounds that accompany dancing reinforce the intention to be conveyed by the dancers or dance choreographer. The dance is divided into several dance genres such as traditional folk, modern, contemporary and dance dedicated to the palace such as *joget gamelan*. Performing arts dance that has been elected as National Heritage in 2015 is *Tarian Piring*. Moreover, the music is a division of art that contains the sounds that are arranged either by voice (vocal), nature or the environment and equipment that intentionally produced by human being to extract rhythmical sound through it. There are different genres of music in Malaysia such as original music, *pop yeh-yeh*, rhythm Malaysia, ethnic, *nasyid*, jazz, rock, pop and so on. Performing arts, traditional music that has been elected as the 2015 National Heritage is the Nobat music art (Department of National Heritage, 2016).



Figure 1: Performance Art of Gamelan  
(Sumber : Google)

### 3.2 Custom and Culture

The custom is an outburst of rules and guidelines for any nation. Rules and guidelines are guidance when certain laws are executed and become a practice of ancestor (Hanafiah, 2004). According to Deraman (1992), society forms a culture and culture organizes life of the community. Culture is a way of thinking, how to interact, how to feel and behavior of people. Folk culture also refers to the music, storytelling, popular beliefs and customs practiced by certain communities (Hussein, Nor & Manap, 2001). Among the Malay community that rich in traditions such as communicating, eating and drinking, visiting family and other customs. In addition, custom is a habitual way of life practiced by the people of Malaysia such as the customs of the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Sabah ethnic, Sarawak and the aborigines (Manaf, 2001). Malaysians are rich with traditional heritage that still exist such as traditional games, for example, *batu Seremban*, *congkak*, *Dam Haji* and others. Furthermore, the martial art is one of the customs that existed centuries ago.

There are several types of martial arts, among them are Malay *Persilatan* Art, Silambam, Wushu, Kuntau and so on. Martial art that has been declared as a 2015 National Heritage is Malay *Persilatan* Art and Silambam. Heritage food is included in the category of cultural heritage. Malaysia is a multiracial country and that has contributed production of various types of cuisine heritage. There are 51 kinds of food heritage that has been declared as 2015 National Heritage such as *Air Nira*, *Ice Kepala*, *Bubur Anak Lembah*, *Inang-inang*, *Lompak Tikam* and so on. Finally, ia traditional medicine that has been passed down from generation to generation which become a society belief in Malaysia. Traditional medicine uses a lot of natural resources and vegetation. Seven kinds of traditional medicines have been announced

as the 2015 National Heritage such as *Main Puteri*, *Ulik Mayang*, *Bekam*, *Bomoh Patah*, Traditional Massage, Village Midwives and *Sewang*.



Figure 2 : Traditional game (congkak)

(Source : Google)

### 3.3 Verbal tradition

According to Sulaiman (2011), oral tradition, oral culture and oral custom are messages or advice submitted by generations of one generation to the next. Reminders or advice is delivered in the form of speech, debate, singing and expression found in the form of poetry, folklore, advice, ballads, songs or proverbs. The Malay Manuscript is any form of handwriting using the Jawi script in the Malay language about nature and Malay civilization about 100 years ago (National Library, 2014). Malay manuscript writing is using materials such as paper, bark, palm leaf, bamboo, ivory, wood and fabric. Recent discovery about the Malay manuscript is 'Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai'. This manuscript is the oldest book in Malay literature around the 16th century which tells about the life of the Pasai Kings (Azam & Yatim, 2012). Malay Manuscript is a source of documentation that tells the vagaries of Malay's life in the past is a source of reference for present study (Hasbullah & Mustafa, 2014).



Figure 3: Terengganu Inscription Stone

(Source: Google)

### 3.4 Fine art/craft

Art sculpture in Malaya existed since more than 500 years ago. Malay rulers and merchants in the past played a role in developing and promoting the art of engraving. Malay art carpentry at that time focused on materials such as wood, textile, gold, copper and silver as the base material for work (Shuaib, 2011). According to the Department of National Heritage (2016), fine art is a process of building, creating or producing the object or goods through creativity and work exquisiteness of a very good quality. In addition, the fine art also consists of drawings, paintings, prints and sculpture. Fine art is passed down through the generations of our ancestors. Malaysia is a country with a multi-racial society, therefore, there are many kinds of carvings or crafts such as the architecture of residential houses and mosques, daily clothing making, pottery or ceramics, batik, wood carvings, woven mats, woven songket, manufacturing clothes, silver and gold embroidery, batik, *pua kumbu*, headbands and woven fabrics, beads, production of copper, *labu sayung*, jewellery and others.



Figure 4 : Carving Art

(Source : Google)

### 3.5 National Heritage of the Living

In the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645), there is a subsection that says that 'any person living as a National Heritage' (Yusoff, Dollah & Kechot, 2011). Thus, a total of five living people who have been elected as National Heritage of Life (WAKOH) in 2015 from various background of skills and expertise in the field of arts and culture. Among the luminaries were Dato 'Aripin Bin Said (Folk Songs), Romli Bin Mahamud (Awang Batil), Maznah Anak Unyan (Aboriginal Traditional Woven Handicraft), Mathew Ngau Jau (Sape Music), and Saad Bin Talib (Mek Mulung) (Department of National Heritage, 2015).



Figure 5 : Awang Batil

#### 4. Summary

Intangible cultural heritage extinct for two main reasons, namely a change in the traditional and a transition towards modern times. Changes in the modern way of life that have left more significant impact in terms of loss, abandonment, extinction and destruction. In case, a change can be controlled will make the younger generations have a strong identity and also contribute to the national economy. This is because, if the intangible cultural heritage is preserved and passed down it will become a tourist attraction that is based on heritage tourism.

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