

Understanding the Significance of Cultural Attribution

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Rec date: November 30, 2015, Acc date: April 5, 2016, Pub date: April 7, 2016

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Abstract

There are three types of heritage; Historical heritage, Cultural heritage, and Nature heritage. This paper will review on early knowledge of the cultural heritage. The cultural heritage is not a new thing in Malaysia, yet it still in an early stage of overall implementation. This paper reviewed from the attribution of culture to tangible and intangible term and its significance towards evolution of a community. Without cultural heritage, a society or country will lose its main source of self-expression and in the end their self-realization. From the past we learn, for the future we build.

Keywords: Historical heritage; Cultural heritage; Nature heritage; Implementation; Self-realization

Introduction

Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Malaysia Prime Minister known as the 'Father of Nation'. He held the most crucial position as Malaysia just got her independent in August 31, 1957. Not only triumph to wider federation Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak, he also a very thorough and meticulous leader especially on the racial harmony, pluralism, and multi-racialism issues [1]. Continuous Tunku Abdul Rahman conception, on February 28, 1991, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (fourth PM) introduced the 'Vision 2020' which the vision is to make sure Malaysia is fully developed country by the year 2020. Following the vision, it transform Malaysia not only into industrialized country, he also demanded Malaysia to be 'developed country' with six major aspects; economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally.

"Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions; economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, in terms of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence".

Holding to the vision, sustainable development concept is being applied to the most of Malaysia practices. According to Chiras [2], sustainable development is defined as a stage of improving and compromising between the current needs and the ability of future generation. It is a powerful concept which concerning the intergenerational equity which able it to keep in existence, to maintain and endure. Sustainable development should concern the human needs on the strategies designed but not only the need for a healthy environment, they need to take into account the needs for recreation, respectable work, good pay, peace, freedom from harm and etc. without bankrupting the Earth.

Following one of the major aspects to be 'developed country'; culturally, Malaysia introduced the National Heritage Act 2005 (NHA),

Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage, National Landscape Department Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Town and Country Planning 1976 (TCPA), Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1974 (EIA), Street Drainage and Building Act 1976, Uniform Building By-laws 1984 as the lead govern in heritage conservation matters. Expanding the awareness of this matter, public started the non-government organizations that further become important organization to Malaysia such as the Malaysian Heritage Trust, Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), and Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM). In order to archive any sustainable development planning, the authors believed that public participation is one of the crucial stages especially in cultural conservation planning.

Cultural Attribution

Rapid improvement in heritage development of Malaysia brings to a very wide range of perspective. Commonly, heritage known as a legacy that passed down to next generation continuously either in man-made or nature forms which it unites the historical heritage and cultural heritage. The historical heritage consists of movable and immovable artifacts, while the cultural heritage refers to tangible or intangible heritage. In the Antiquities Act 1976 indicates the movable heritage as monuments which can be interpreted as all built structures or parts of it which can be move easily. While the immovable heritage also known as the historical artifacts which including any man-made artifacts example religious, traditional, cultural, art or historical significance (manuscript and textile) and 'antiquities' which is any objects or part from the archeological remains. The cultural heritage also involves tangible artifacts which is something that permanently sees and touchable (handicraft/artwork), while beliefs, knowledge and expertise translation form oral tradition, cultural, language, correspondence, and folk dances are fall in intangible artifacts. In addition, there is natural heritage which consist local fauna, flora and geological. With a very long history background of Malaysia, and diversity of practices over generation, it's brought to an assimilation of National Cultural Heritage. Malaysia is one of the countries to have diversity and colorful of historical and cultural heritage which enrich the Malaysia in all aspects.

National heritage Act 2005 is an act to permit any restoration and conservation process, either on historical heritage, natural heritage, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, underwater cultural heritage and other related matters (Figure 1).

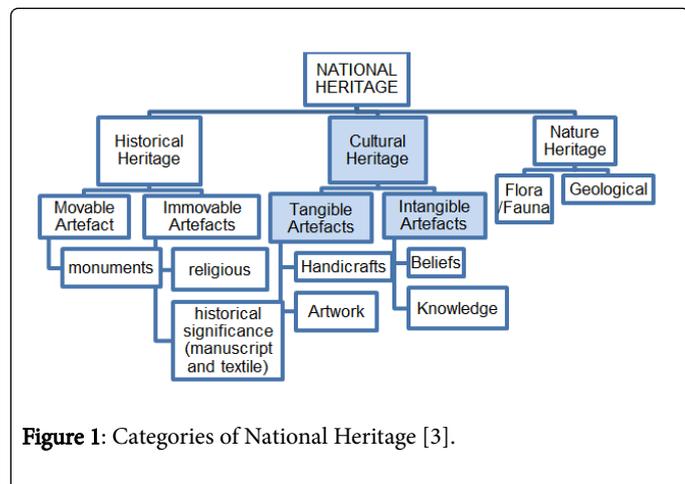


Figure 1: Categories of National Heritage [3].

Ahmad [4] did mention that culture and heritage are considered as the primary aspects underpinning on a national identity and sovereignty. It is unique as their forms and means of tangible and intangible expression constituted the local heritage values. Heritage refers to a legacy or inheritance valued things that continue to be passed on to the next generation. It should be preserved as national treasures and for the next generation to posterity. According to Hamid [5] indicated that heritage is a mutual between creations and products (nature and man-made) that form the environment in time and space. It's a form of reality that control by local community that they inheritance by previous generation and for us to acknowledge and participate in order to maintain its novelty.

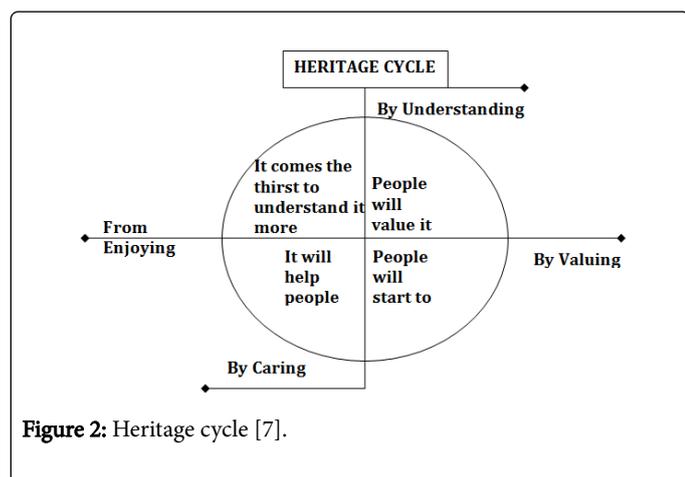


Figure 2: Heritage cycle [7].

These diagram shows the cycle on how to bring the past into our future (valued it). In the first quarter; by understanding heritage (in this case its culture) – people will value it. Second quarter; by valuing it - people will start to care. Third quarter; by caring – it will help people to enjoy it and last; from enjoying it – it comes the thirst to understand it more (Figure 2).

There is various definition of culture. According to Prentice [6], culture is a complex of distinct spiritual, emotional, intellectual and material features that form character to a particular society or group

and its inflict on their way of life. It encapsulate a nation's soul and spirit as usually in forms of the arts, literatures, lifestyle, creativity, knowledge system, traditions, beliefs, historic buildings, sites, and other invaluable assets. It often shared, learned, transmitted across generations, adaptive, and integrated. The meaning of culture then spread into nine [7]. Culture defines as

- The group that possession the knowledge, experience, values, attitudes, beliefs, religion, material objects, and concept of the universe through generation acquired.
- A system of knowledge shared by a large group.
- Communication.
- Cultivated behavior.
- A way of life that followed by a certain group of people including beliefs, values, symbols, the way they thinking,
- Including the patterns, implicit and explicit of behavior that transmitted by symbols such as artifacts.
- A learned behavior of certain group that considered as traditional and passed down to next generation.
- A collective program that differentiates between groups.

The authors also include the manifestations of culture. Symbols, heroes, rituals are tangible aspects from particular culture' practices. It was believed that an intangible aspect is the true meaning of culture because it's only discovered when the practices are interpreted by the insiders (Figure 3).

Symbols: words, pictures, objects, gesture which understand by only particular culture or who shared. It is the outermost layer as it commonly copied by others from a particular culture.

Heroes: persons or characters, past or present, real or fictitious that own his characteristic which become the most cherished in a culture. Usually it serves as a model for a good deed.

Rituals: collection of informally essential such as the way of greetings, paying respect to others, social ceremonies, religious etc.

Values: It is the core of any cultures including the good-evil, right-wrong, natural-unnatural. There are many other values that remain unconscious to whom hold it. It often can't be debated nor directly observed by others. The way people act is the only way to interfere the values but under different circumstances.

There are layers of culture that need to be understood. Even in a same culture, there are six different layers that differentiate individual.

- The national level: Related to the nation.
- The regional level: Related to ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level: Related to female and male
- The generation level: Related to the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level: Related to educational opportunities and profession variances.
- The corporate level: Related to the particular culture of a corporation. Relevant to who are employed.

Parallel with the topic discussed, Li and Karakowsky [8] mention about cultural awareness. They divided it into two categories; a) identify the cultural differences, and b) discussion and reading about other cultures.

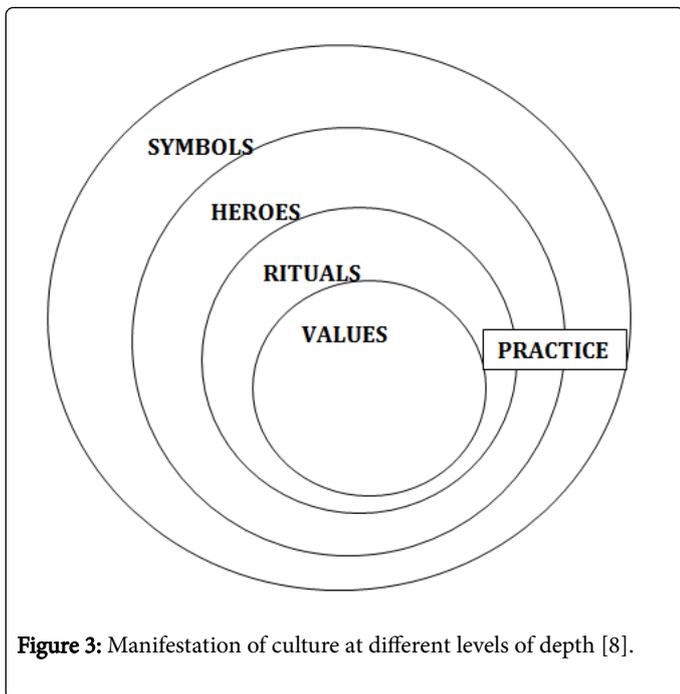


Figure 3: Manifestation of culture at different levels of depth [8].

Identify the cultural differences

It is vital to recognize the different between home' cultural with the country corporation' cultural. This is to relocate the adaptability of home' cultural to the foreign environment. There is not much on tangible but there are some culture aspects either learned consciously (e.g. method of greeting) or subconsciously (e.g. methods in solving problem). It is not an easy task, yet, it possible.

Discussion and reading about other cultures

To develop cultural awareness, reading and discussion are important. The opinion or voice should be carefully presented and it is good to have variety of viewpoints for the same culture.

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is a wide concept. It's depends on how a country define it. But basically, cultural heritage concept perceived as movable or immovable assets of artistic, technology, architectural, historical, archeological values that represent the country. According to ICOMOS (2002), cultural heritage is an expression either tangible or intangible way of life that might developed by the community and passed down to next generation including objects, customs, practices, values, and artistic. It also define as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes that passed down from generation and for present generation to maintained and for future generation to get benefit from it (UNESCO, 2014). Portray to have vibrant, conquered by traditional communities which hold on to the peace, respect, tolerate and stability of mixing races and cultures, give Malaysia and other Southeast Asian (SEA) a unique form of country. Being part of significant route for spices, Malaysia has turn to a mosaic cultures which giving her the most colored country from people to architectural design and able to create amalgamated culture (Baba Nyonya).

There are three types of cultural heritage:

- Built Environment including buildings, townscapes, and archaeological remains.
- Natural Environment such as rural landscapes, coasts and shorelines, and agricultural heritage.
- Artifacts which are books and documents, objects, and pictures.

Tangible and Intangible Heritage

For decades we are exposed with the term tangible heritage rather than intangible heritage. The physical appearance makes it easier for people to understand and digestible while for intangible, it is more on interpretation of individual. Buildings, landscapes, or artifacts are some of the tangible form of heritage while voices, values, oral history, traditions which sometimes it perceived through religious ceremonies, clothing, form of shelter, cuisine, skills and technology, performing art, or storytelling.

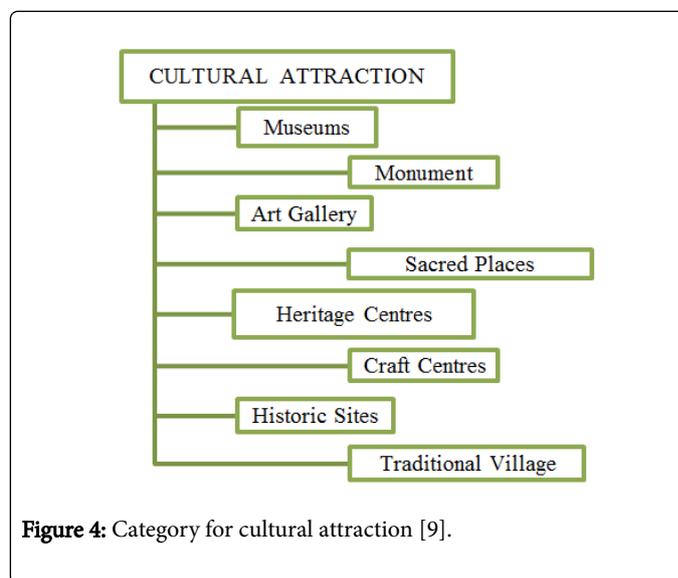


Figure 4: Category for cultural attraction [9].

The Figure 4 shows the form of cultural attraction that most commonly use to preserve, maintain, and shows to public. The tangible heritage is meaningless if there is no story behind it, while intangible heritage need tangible to visualize it. There is always a value (reason) in each heritage. There are;

- Age and rarity value - each period bring up different and concrete identity.
- Architectural value - the design, the proportion and the contribution that the architecture of a building has made to the quality of the everyday experiences
- Artistic value - can clearly see on the quality of craftsmanship or directly to artwork.
- Associative value - picture by building or places has with an event or personality in history.
- Cultural value - historic building we can see a lot of thing such as lifestyles, use of material, crafts and technique of the past used in construction.
- Economic value - tourism is one of sector that brings huge impact to the economy.
- Educational value - historic site and building help us to learn about period of history, past way of life, social relations or construction technique.

- Emotional value – some people may feel emotional attach to the place or feel some sense of wonder n respect from the history especially the craftsmanship.
- Historic value – it not only the physical evidence from past, but it contain important event to individual, local, and nation.
- Landscape value - not only building with the post-era architecture but some space or landscape that creates by man.
- Political value
- Public value - sometimes also regard as politic or history value.
- Religious and spiritual values
- Scientific, research and knowledge value - not only learn about the design but also a lot of thing such as building technique, material used.
- Social value - social values of historic places are a part of social interchange to local community.
- Symbolic value – monument is the best symbolic value in historic place.
- Technical value - technology system that used in the construction of the past will contribute to advancing today technology.
- Townscapes value – not only for one historic building, it also contribute to a group of buildings, street, and townscape. [10]

- Memorabilia and Nostalgia: The preservation of a craftsmanship or any cultural heritage recognized as a source of pride to any related community and of course to offer the sense of memory.
- As a Tourism Product: The money earning to a country which is through the significance of cultural heritage that could create more job opportunities and downstream business (accommodation etc.).



Figure 5: (a) Example of Malay’ artwork (b) Example of Chinese’ artwork (c) Example of Indian’ artwork.

Tangible (artwork and handicraft) and Intangible (belief and knowledge) in Malaysia (three major ethnic)

In daily routine, cultural heritage can be seen everywhere depending on the ethnicity, their culture, the availability and the suitability of the culture in current setting (Figure 5).

For intangible example, Malay believed that if unmarried women sing in the kitchen, when grow up, they will married to an old man. In Malay culture (Figure 6), a girl usually is the one that responsible with the kitchen duty. So, the reason behind the believed is to avoid the girl from spitting on food. The Chinese believed that at the front door of the house, no sharp edges (all the planting is rounded) should be planted as to avoid from losing any luck (front door is a strong entrance-positive energy) (Figure 7). While for Indian, they believed that if a pencil is sharpen from both sides, there will be a constant fight between the parents. It’s only to frighten the kids (Figure 8).



Figure 6: Example of Malay handicraft (a) ‘Labu sayung’(to stored water), ‘raga’(to stored food), ‘tudung saji’(use to cover food on a dining table) (b) Example of Malay’ game, ‘Wau’(like kite but its more heavy and carved), ‘wayang kulit’(puppet shadow), ‘kompong’(frame drum) (c,d) Plait baskets and bags (e) Batik (use for cloth or decoration). The woman doing ‘cantiing batik’.

The Significance of Cultural Heritage

According to Koermo [11], the cultural heritage is the process that able its significance to be presented not only for today generation, it also offer for future generation. There are four crucial reasons why it’s important.

- A Reflection of National Integrity and Sovereignty: There are many challenges that Malaysian who interested in cultural heritage has to face due to the lack of written historical records and protection of historical evidence. Not only that, there are much of the available material who written only interpreted by themselves according to their prejudices and may be some of them put a little bit more ‘colored’ to suit their records.
- A reflection of a People’s Technology and Creativity: The artifact left behind by earlier generation must be appreciated and preserved as it is one of evidence that represent the level of intellectual and creativity development. It should be preserve as original as possible.



Figure 7: Example of Chinese handicraft. (a) Art on bottle (b) Painted umbrella with flower motif (c) Keychain-like (d) Hand-fan (e) ‘Teko air’ (Chinese-jar).



Figure 8: Example of Indian handicraft (a) Industrial product of Indian (b) Decoration of vase (c) Finishing Floor art.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage gives much more benefits towards society. It helps current generation to learn any success and mistakes that earlier generation did as a guide or make it better. It creates awareness and this makes the society to have a concrete identity, self-respect, and building up a strong country. Without cultural heritage, a society or country will lose its main source of self-expression and in the end their self-realization. From the past we learn, for the future we built.

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