The Reality of Malay Cultural Heritage Practitioner: Can they sustain the legacy?

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to identify the scenario faced by the Malay cultural heritage practitioners in Melaka to sustain the local traditions. The data was gathered by using in-depth interview with the practitioners that are still involves actively in Malay cultural heritage activities like Batik printing, rattan weaving, woodcarving, producing traditional food, practising Malay martial arts, songs and dances. Purposive sampling method was applied in identifying the participants for the interview. Feedbacks given by the practitioners reveal that modernization impacts greatly on the local economy, environment as well as affecting the social cohesiveness. Therefore, stakeholders as the major player need to play an important role in developing an effective action plan in order to sustain the Malay cultural heritage products.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is designed to clarify the reality of being a cultural heritage practitioner these days. The cultural heritage practitioners can be defined as those people who are still actively participating and producing the cultural heritage products like Batik printing, rattan weaving, woodcarving, producing traditional food, practising Malay martial art, song and dance. The cultural heritage product is a combination of tangible and intangible heritage. The tangible heritage is an object that can be seen physically like monument, buildings and site [1]. Meanwhile, the intangible heritage is a non-physical object like oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts [2]. Nowadays, the trend in tourism is people tend to focus on conservation aspects like historical buildings and monuments [3]. Very few of them noticed the existence of intangible heritages like traditional craftsmanship, traditional song and dance and traditional cuisine [10]. This type of heritages will be vanished due to the lack of interest among the new generation to continuously preserving the old tradition. In the context of this study, the Malay cultural heritage practitioners have become the prior attention by the researcher. It is written in history that the Malays are those people who settled in the Malay Land (Tanah Melayu) before the admittance of Indian and Chinese. Thus, various kind of cultural heritages belong to Malay are supposedly to be seen many in Malaysia. Unfortunately, only few attractions of Malay cultural heritages were well-maintained in Malaysia [4]. This paper focuses on Malay cultural heritage practitioners who are involve actively in the Malay cultural heritage activities.

Methodology:

This study was conducted in Melaka, Malaysia. Melaka is located in Peninsular Malaysia and bordered by Negeri Sembilan and Johor. Melaka has been chosen as the study area because of the history of Melaka is recorded from the beginning of the Malay Sultanate Empire in 14th century before it was ruined by the Portuguese in 1511 [5]. Besides, Melaka is rich with cultural heritage and it is proven by the declaration of Melaka historical city as the world heritage site in year 2008 by UNESCO. The attractions located within Melaka historical city comprise of the heritages that represent the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Baba Nyonya, Dutch, Portuguese and British. These heritages are the consequences from the past history where Melaka used to become the trading port for traders from India, China and Arab. For the purpose of this study, the three districts...
in Melaka namely Jasin, Alor Gajah and Melaka Tengah have become the study area since the Melaka cultural heritage practitioners can be found scattered within Melaka state.

**Fig. 1**: Map of Peninsular Malaysia [6].

**Fig. 2**: The District in Melaka [7].

The Malay cultural heritage practitioners in Melaka were selected as the respondents for this study. The researcher used qualitative method through in-depth interview to gain information from the respondents. Besides, photographs were used as the evidence to support information given by the respondents. The respondents were selected by using purposive sampling. The reason behind this approach is the category of Malay cultural heritage is very wide and comprises of two major aspect namely tangible and intangible heritages. Therefore, each respondent represent one category of Malay cultural heritage. The information about the respondents were obtained from National Heritage Department, National Department for Culture and Arts (Melaka), Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Melaka), and other sources from the internet like blogs and websites. In addition, the information was gathered from the respondents and their networks that have the skills in producing the Malay cultural heritage products. The respondents were approached by phone calls to make an appointment one week before the interview sessions were conducted. Overall, 20 respondents had given their commitment to share their knowledge in producing the Malay cultural heritage products. The duration for the interview session took around 30 minutes to 2 hours to be completed and it depends on the time frame given by the respondents.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Results and discussions in this paper were extracted from the perspective of Malay cultural heritage practitioners. The findings elaborate the dilemma among respondents to sustain the culture that has been brought by the older generation and subsequently be practiced in modern days.

*To sustain Malay cultural heritage product from economic perspectives:*

In previous days, cultural heritage product is produced for daily use. It used to function as the costume, shelter and tools for cooking. The product is design according to its function rather than focusing on the aesthetic aspect [8]. In the context of Malay cultural heritage product, Dodol (type of traditional food), food cover, Keris (Malay sword) and Capal (Malay traditional shoes) were produced to fulfil the daily needs [9]. However, in modern days, the production of cultural heritage product is customer oriented. The design and its function were totally based on customer’s demand. Therefore, in order to meet the customer’s demand, the practitioners need to sacrifice the originality of the Malay cultural heritage product in term of method of
production and design. All respondents agreed that they are following the current trends and demand from customer. For example, Dodol as traditional food has been commercializing globally. Consequently, the pattern of Dodol now has transformed from the traditional cook to machine–based cook.

"...May be forced to give up with traditional method...this is the problem faced by entrepreneurs...because we have to move forward and adapt with market and demand because we want to go for global market."

To sustain Malay cultural heritage product from the environmental aspects:

Cultural heritage product is explicitly adapting with the nature. The material, method of production, its function and designs are related to the environmental aspects. In Malay cultural heritage product, the aspects of environment can be traced through the traditional handicraft like rattan weaving, Keris and Batik painting. The aspects of environment is based on the materials like rattan, iron, plant and wood. Past generations used these nature-based materials because there is no advance technology unlike in the modern days. The past generations live in the nature. Hence, the products were basically generated from the natural resources. The human’s ability has revolutionize the cultural heritage product by using modern technology as it helps in saving cost and time of production. For example, colour usage for Batik painting has been replaced with chemical colour instead of using colour extracts from plants. Through interview sessions, 15% of the respondents are still adapting the natural material, old method and using traditional designs. On the other hand, 85% of the respondents are mixing the modern and traditional way of making Malay cultural heritage products. For example, they used natural material but the design is customers oriented. Figure 1 proves that the respondents are preserving the nature by injecting environmental elements into their products.

To sustain Malay cultural heritage product from social perspectives:

The cultural heritage delineates people way of life. By practising the old tradition, the social cohesiveness can be achieved. It can be seen clearly in the context of intangible cultural heritage like oral tradition and expression, performing arts and traditional craftsmanship. In this study, the Malay cultural heritage product creates unity among the practitioner. It can be seen through the traditional food making where the mother teaches their daughters on how to cook a meal. Besides, traditional games like Gasing and Takraw allow the community to have fun and spending time together that can ultimately strengthen their relationship with each other. Today, as the modernization goes on, the whole life is changing. It is good then when the food is easily prepared such as the fast food and the computer games which can be played at home. These scenarios have resulted in lack of interaction among family members and the community in the neighbourhood.

Summary:

In any part of the world, the past generations has left the precious elements that need to be preserved and safeguarded. In the context of Malay cultural heritage product, the dilemma among them is to meet the customers’ need and desire which resulted on the negligence of traditional method and hence look for modern way to produce the product. On the other hand, they have to synthesise both the traditional and modern process in order to fulfil the customers’ desire. In reality the practitioners of Malay cultural heritage product in Melaka in preserving the old tradition has been outnumbered by their counterparts. The practitioners who are based on business oriented will leave the old tradition in order to attract the customers amidst the practitioners who are heritage lover that will sustain the legacy of Malay ethnic.

REFERENCES


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