

# **Documentation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH): Mak Yong Performing Art Collection**

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Received date: 5 July 2018

Accepted date: 9 August 2018

## **ABSTRACT**

*United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recognized Mak Yong's Theater Performing Art as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity since September 2005. Unfortunately, Mak Yong was declared as an irrelevant form of performing art due to the prohibition in the year 1991 since the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) took control of the state and views it as being non-compliant to Islamic teachings. To consolidate and nurture appreciation for the culture and heritage within a society, various efforts have been undertaken to protect it by collecting and documenting cultural heritage especially in the manifestation of intangible cultural value. Thus, this study explores the documentation strategy approach obtainable in cultural heritage institutions on preserving and safeguarding ICH collections. A pure qualitative methodological approach was used by employing a case study design, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the aperture on the implementation of documenting ICH collection in the National Archives, National Museum, and the National Library of Malaysia.*

Keywords: ICH Collection, cultural heritage institution, information heritage documentation, records and archives management

## **INTRODUCTION**

Heritage is a form of national identification that features a community's unique cultural heritage hereditary; it is a relic possessed from indigenous community, group, society or humanity which has grown to be a priority for the next generation to safeguard its legacy. Malaysia is one of the countries that comprise of various cultural heritages where most of them are documented and embedded in several mediums such as artefacts, manuscripts, sculptures, traditional motifs and textile designs, gold craftsmanship and others. To consolidate and nurture appreciation that is intact to the culture and heritage within a society, diverse efforts have been taken to protect it, by collecting and documenting cultural heritage be it with tangible or intangible cultural value. Part of these collections have been accumulated and stored in libraries, museums, archives, art galleries and cultural centres which requires enormous responsibility in preserving and making them retrievable to the public. Apart from these collections there are also other types of ICH collections such as traditional songs and music, legends poetry and poem, treatment and traditional herbs, oral tradition collections and others which need to be inheritable from one generation to the next.

Heritage is divided into two main categories: tangible and intangible heritage, which both have a significant interest to the nation, community, organization, and individual. Tangible cultural heritage can be defined as something permanently seen, static, and portable (Lowenthal 2005; McLean 2006; Jabatan Warisan Negara 2007; Wilson 2009). Meanwhile, intangible cultural heritage is something explicit such as knowledge, expertise interpreted through oral tradition, customs, values and culture, language, and literature (Boylan 2006; Yazid Saleh 2010; Ekwelem, Okafor, and Ukwoma 2011; Rees 2012; Howell 2013; UNESCO 2013). According to the Malaysia National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645), ICH is broadly identified as:

... any form of expressions, languages, lingual utterances, sayings, musically produced tunes, notes, audible lyrics, songs, folk songs, oral traditions, poetry, music, and dances produced by the performing arts,

theatrical plays, audible compositions of sounds and music, and martial arts, that may have existed or exists in relation to the heritage of Malaysia or any part of Malaysia or in relation to the heritage of a Malaysian community. (Malaysia Government, 2005, p.17).

UNESCO's endeavour throughout the Convention for the 2003 Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage concerning ICH has seen an expansion due to the response of the vanishing of traditions as a result of disappointment in local cultural reproduction, preservation, and continuation in the globalization age. This has incited Malaysia to get a proclamation of intangible heritage on 25 November 2005, UNESCO declared Mak Yong's Performing Art as the "Third Proclamation of Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" in the world. This is an enormous recognition and a huge responsibility to the nation to conserve and preserve it as a world heritage and to make it accessible and profitable to the country.

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Documentation**

Since the adoption of UNESCO 2003 declaration, safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage has become more efficient and vigorous. The role of local communities, supported by more local governments around the world, and participation of cultural heritage institutions now actively contribute to safeguard, document and promote their local intangible culture for various purposes. Moreover, Arantes (2012) adds that documentation and promotion, which have proven to be useful tools for safeguarding ICH, can also be interpreted as ways of staging or enacting heritage in the world media (photography, film, audiovisual recordings).

There are numerous ICH documentation project that have been carried out by cultural heritage institution for variety of ICH elements for example a project led by the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation in documenting Egyptian traditional culture (Crofts, 2010). This project, a collaboration with Folk Creativity Centre (FCC), implemented an analysis of collection which includes five main topics, covering different aspects of Egyptian culture. Furthermore, a project of documenting and archiving musical traditions in Western India (Chaudhuri, 2012) where embrace the community involvement in strengthening audio visual recording collection in Langas Manganiars and Mandolin traditional music. Likewise, another project for documenting Mangyan heritage of Mindoro, Philippines was conducted by the heritage center (Templanza & Templanza, 2015). They

analyzed the whole Mangyan collection at Mangyan Heritage Center and Center for Mindoro Studies.

## **Documentation of Mak Yong Performing Art**

Mak Yong is recognized as an ancient-theatre since the 18th century in Kelantan with forms and features of ritual, stylized acting and dance, vocal and instrumental music, song, creativeness of storyline and formal as well as spontaneous dialogue ( Sheppard 1960; Yousof 1979). It was presented as a royal theatre under the direct benefaction of the Kelantan Sultanate until the 1920s (Kvam, 2011). However, at present Mak Yong has become an unpopular cultural performing art due to the prohibition by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) in year 1991 since the political party took control of the state due to being resistant to Islamic teachings ( Shamsul Akmar 1991; Tang 1991; New Straits Times 1995; New Straits Times 1996; Ab. Aziz Shuaib and Raja Iskandar Raja Halid 2011 and Shuaib and Olalere 2013). In fact, this situation worsened when the country loss a few Mak Yong artist and practitioners such as the primadonna Khatijah Awang. This progressively dimmed this traditional performance since there is no more heir who is an expert in sustaining this heritage at not just national level but also international level.

Besides safeguarding ICH by performing it to the public such as by, using intellectual writing and discussion in seminars and, educational programmes to youngsters, Mak Yong also needs to be documented as part of the heritage conservation for education support, research and access to the originalities of this performance art. According to Matusky (2002), McCulloch (2004) and Chaudhuri (2012), various approaches can be applied in documenting ICH involving high technology audio and video recording, visual, movement, presentation and expression of audience in real time. In the meantime, this recording can be stored and preserved at the cultural heritage institution for future reference. However, to engage an authentic and reliable collection or recording of Mak Yong's performing arts or other ICH elements, good documentation strategies of ICH are required to ensure originality and trustworthiness of content and information of the resources. In year 1967, the first documentation of Mak Yong took place when Mubin Sheppard was the Museum Director at the time. He brought an Asian music specialist namely Professor William Malm from Michigan University of United States of America to compile, record and document about 11 Mak Yong's stories which consists of 90 hours monochrome videotape

that took 32 nights (Sheppard, 1969). This recording collection was also made a copy to be kept in the national museum. Nonetheless, referring to Mubin Sheppard's letter that was found in the national archive shows that he requested the recording for a recopy because the original collection was involved in a fire disaster at national museum which almost destroyed all museum collection at the time (Sheppard, n.d.). Unfortunately, no response was received.

To date researchers found that, there is no single recording that is fully documented on Mak Yong's performing art and being kept in any repositories in this country. This article will discuss the roles of cultural heritage institutions in documenting the heritage information management through strategies that can be done to achieve a successful documentation project for ICH collection.

### **Roles of Cultural Heritage Institution in preserving ICH**

In the case of roles in ICH documentation, periodic reports of States Parties submitted in 2016 reported the current status of the implementation of Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH on the Representative List. It described that various dedicated institutions took the responsibility in collecting and/or holding documentation resources such as museums, archives, libraries, national cultural studies, cultural institutions, galleries and others (UNESCO, 2016). It is also reported that currently no comprehensive protocol is available for collection and procedure related to documentation in view of the number and variety of bodies involved in different countries. This report reveals that cultural heritage institutions configure their roles in sustaining the ICH in their country through the process of acquisition, classification, description, storage, preservation, reference services, and advocacy towards offering an enriched cultural heritage to the public. Nevertheless, these various approaches are taken without any overarching methodology in documenting their ICH collection appropriately to them.

In the standpoint of documentation science, it can be said that the relationship among archives, museums, and libraries are "interconnected". They are connected because all deals with documentation concerning the activities of acquisition, classification, description, storage, preservation, and reference services are geared towards enriching cultural heritage (Sulistyorini, 2015). The collaboration of the documentation activities among these institutions will

initiate responsiveness in sustaining the cultural heritage and enriching the ICH collection. Cox (2003) describes this as a multi-institutional collaboration in establishing institutional archival programs rather than being especially dependent on collecting historical manuscripts, setting explicit goals for developing documentation, and merely achieving adequate documentation by analyzing existing records that are often fragmented. In addition, Perera and Chandra (2014) expressed that archives, museums, and libraries can collaborate not only in documenting ICH collection to ensure accessibility and sustainability for future generations but also in assisting countries to generate income for economic stabilization.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a case study research which was to explore the roles of cultural heritage institution in safeguarding ICH collection through documentation strategy. For the purpose of the study data were collected from the four (4) main cultural institutions in Malaysia, namely the National Archives, the National Library, the Department of National Heritage and the Department of National Museum using the semi structured interview question. The interviews focused on the specific contexts in documentation strategy model that was chosen for this research. The method of data collection implemented was personal interview which was conducted through series of semi structured interviews with 15 respondents concerning in the documentation and development of the ICH collection in the institutions. According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), interviewing people is the primary method to gather the various aspects of human experience.

The research employed NVIVO11 to analyze the data from the respondent interview which contribute to the elements that are embedded in the documentation strategy model such analysis of collection, community involvement, collaboration among institution, response to the changes, strategic planning and creation of new collection.

### **Documentation Strategy for Mak Yong's Collection**

Using the documentation strategy model that was applied by previous scholar and practitioner in this field, the researchers were able to identify the elements that were employed and could be supported in the

heritage information documentation strategy. Furthermore, the researchers categorized each of these elements into equation groups and organized a checklist of frequency rate of elements according to scholar model. The table (Table 1) below illustrates work that was carried out;

**Table 1: Documentation Strategies Model**

Documentation Strategy element	Scholar					
	(Booms 1972)	(Ham, 1975)	(Henry, 1980)	(Samuels, 1986)	(Hackman & Warnow-blewett 1987)	(Cox, 2003)
Analysis of collection	/	/	/	/	/	/
Community Involvement				/	/	/
Collaboration among Institutions		/		/	/	
Response to Changes	/			/	/	/
Strategic Planning	/					
Creation of New Collection			/	/		

The results from the interview sessions revealed that some of the undertaken documentation strategy elements were impractical such as strategic planning and creation of new collection. Most of the respondents reflected that these elements were impractical nowadays. This can be inferred from a feedback by a respondent (C7) “...*strategic planning nowadays commonly embedded in the process of annual collection analysis; it is because the user request of the heritage collection is too small and we can't see the significance to have different strategic planning for heritage collection*”. Secondly, most of the respondents also revealed that it was unfeasible for the creation of a new collection especially for the heritage documentation because it required complicated process with the

highest commitment, as expressed by respondent (D14) who stated that “*not all cultural heritage agency will have an opportunity to create a new documentation for Mak Yong because Mak Yong itself is obsolete, it’s hard to find people who really practices it authentically and most importantly not all cultural heritage agencies are capable to develop a new collection, what we can do is practising oral history of Mak Yong*”. It shows that these two (2) elements are unworkable because of the redundancy of work and lack of authentic sources in creating a new collection.

Therefore, this study dropped these two elements and focused on other elements which currently are being carried out for the collection development in cultural heritage institutions. Besides that, the results of the interviews also ascertained two additional elements proposed by most respondents in improving the quality of documenting heritage information in this country. The new elements that are practiced by agencies and proposed by the respondents are Information Heritage Advocacy and National Heritage Centre for managing all of ICH collection.

### **Analysis of Collection**

The primary context involved in the implementation of documentation strategies for ICH collection consists of the analysis of the collection presented in the repository which also contributes to an acquisition procedure and collection development process that are practiced in archives, libraries and museums. This process is important in order to examine the current collection reserved in the respective repositories. Besides that, the analysis of the collection should be employed to ensure that every component of Mak Yong is documented efficiently for future generation’s reference. Findings from the interviews with information professionals involved in conducting the acquisition process and the collection development found that a few methods exist in the process of analyzing the Mak Yong collection.

Firstly, special collection research is crucial in ensuring that the process of analysis will be put into action effectively, efficiently and economically. The top management plays important roles in coordinating the work for this purpose. As stated by Ivey (2004), Newman (2010) and Huvila (2016) agree that good planning in coordinating a collection analysis can reduce the redundancy of collection and is indicative of the repository and drivers of change in documenting information heritage. As stated by respondent B2, he said that “*... do a deep research on Mak Yong collection and identify the lack*



*of information and write a proposal then it is up to the upper management to decide*". The research should be put into practice annually for different ICH elements; circuitously all types of ICH will be documented whether or not they are enclosed with international or national pronouncement.

Besides the special collection research, analysis of collection should be equipped with a committee that includes expert and assistants from all fields in conducting the process of analysis. The committee should be responsible to conduct a collection survey for the purpose of investigating the gap of heritage information. This action can be done by listing all the collections related to the elements of Mak Yong which can be categorized into a theme such as song and music, stories, presentations, character, spectacle, author or creator, date of deposit and others. From the gaps, the committee would be able to recognize the prospective depositor for collection development purposes, build a relationship with them and provide consultancy in terms of substance in preserving the cultural heritage information for the nation. Moreover, this progression can encourage cultural heritage institutions to conduct an acquisition for the lack of information in Mak Yong elements.

### **Community Involvement**

Community involvement focuses on the method and initiatives taken by cultural heritage institutions to encourage participation in the documentation strategy. The study discovered a few approaches available in gaining community involvement such as actively developed networking with the elite within Mak Yong community for example connoisseurs, high profile figures, public agencies and in non-elite members of the community such Mak Yong groups performer, culture artist, practitioners and person who enthusiast of Mak Yong to transferring knowledge and personal collection and building relationship with community involvement for the purpose of executing its heritage research and documentation. The significance of community involvement in the documentation strategy is vital in encouraging contemporary linkages to one's distinctive cultural past (Kurin, 2004).

Contribution of expertise known as knowledge expert that treated as an asset of the relevant Mak Yong community which can be transferred to a cultural heritage institution and developed further (Manetsi, 2011). Almost all of respondents agreed that expert involvement is a major channel in documenting vital information about Mak Yong as mention by one of respondent that *"they are resources person, meaning that the*

*information from them is most crucial and authentic sources that we should documented".* This contribution can be made through knowledge transfer such as writing, publication, oral history and knowledge sharing. All these processes can not only fill the gap of collection in the repositories but also provide reliable and trustworthy of information for reference and future research. Furthermore, a good relationship with the expertise is capable of providing a lustrous cultural heritage collection's to the public reference as well as can see the significance of this heritage toward national development through the documentation.

In addition to expertise, indigenous communities or practitioners who are still enthusiastic about Mak Yong should also take part in this approach. Cultural heritage institutions should play an important role as the medium the between government and these groups in order to contribute to the continuation of their legacy in endeavour Mak Yong as a national and world heritage. Financial initiatives and support from the government and NGO's are able to flourish the Mak Yong performance and directly nurture the creation of new collection and present prolongation ICH information documentation.

### **Collaboration among Institutions**

In the context of collaboration among institutions, the study discovered that the initiative for cooperation among cultural institutions in safeguarding the ICH collection is perceptible in all cultural heritage institutions. However, the purpose for documenting Mak Yong's collection is only visible between archives and museum but not to library, it is because the collection of national library is preserved to all aspect of publication in country. Libraries do not have any special specification on cultural heritage collection. Method of collaboration that has been taken by these institutions is through information collaboration and information professional collaboration among the professional workers.

Collaboration among cultural heritage institutions is actively put into practice given the same circle of directive because they are in the same ministry and given the same mandate which responsible to preserving and disseminating right information to the right people in the right format. However information collaboration has also been done by other institution such research centres, higher learning institutions, government agencies and other corporate bodies which contribute to the field. The collaborations consist of collection and information resources exchange among agencies,

reference services and research consultation regarding the subject matter related to the information held in the cultural heritage. These collaborations are commonly practiced by each cultural heritage institution for cultural heritage collection or other types of collections (Robinson, 2015). Nonetheless for Mak Yong collection has an inactive collaboration between other agencies due to the lack of information resources in the cultural heritage institution itself. According to the respondents, this situation is commonly leads by the feeble management by the authorities and lack of enforcement by the Malaysia National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645) toward the heritage information management.

Meanwhile, information professional collaboration is a crucial element in formulating a successful documentation strategy because it is a motivation to the systematic and centralized approach in documenting heritage information management. In addition to this, sharing skills among the staff of a cultural heritage institution can offer a better benefit to the government in sustaining the heritage information; it can enrich the agencies with knowledge workers and professional worker in the future. Staff can share their technical skills such as conservators from a museum, library or archives, audiovisual technician staff from archives to other agencies related to the production documentary. This collaboration is also known as the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS) where agencies can exchange their expertise with the staff.

## **Response to Changes**

With regards to the response to changes, all cultural heritage institutions in this country are aware of the need to revolutionize information and collection (Radiah Amin et al. 2012; Rusnah Johare and Masrek 2012; Mansor, Y. Jaafar, S, B Manaf 2013; Zuraidah Abd Manaf et al. 2013). In addition, an archive and a library have employed a digitization program for the collection including ICH collection. Meanwhile, the museum is attentive to the development of collection synchronized with the expansion of information communication technology and user information needs. Due to the rapid changes in technology, the organizations must narrowly scrutinize the greatest approach of preserving the digital collection so that they will be sustainable even if the technology changes.

After a long discussion with the respondents, the findings reveal that two main changes need to be considered in order to make sure the Mak Yong collection is able to retain permanently in the nation. Firstly,

institutions must respond to current information changes in Mak Yong itself that contribute to the extinction of Mak Yong performance and practitioners. In addition, the lack of awareness and interest among young generation today also contribute to the cultural heritage to maintain the information (Keough 2002; Ohinata 2010; Kamatula, Mkeni-Saurombe, and Mosweu 2013; Rodrigues 2016). Archives, museums and libraries should engage in recreation for documenting the originality and authenticity of information resources. The changes in terms of performance structure, costume and accessories design, music, dialogue, storylines and others should be identified in order to construct the changes of information revolution for Mak Yong Performance Arts.

Besides that, response to the changes of collection is also significant in documentation strategies especially in the technological stream today. Media storage, device, application and format platform have become more high density in the cultural heritage institutions which are bonded with the eligibility of a physical collection. Nevertheless, Wellington (2013) and Huvila (2016) state that the advancement of technology can present more advantages because it has created a catalyst for escalating amounts of integrative practice between cultural heritage institutions such as galleries, libraries, archives and museums. The study also revealed that networking among cultural heritage institutions is able to help the ICH collection especially Mak Yong to be preserved through the digital age.

### **Information Heritage Advocacy**

Consequences to the economic recession at present unswervingly creates struggles for cultural heritage institutions as they are hard-hit by the lessened support from the government, public and private sectors. Thus, the present set of circumstances has made it clear that sound advocacy needs to be at the top of the priority list for cultural heritage organizations (Gwinn & Valletta, 2009) especially due to its fragile nature and danger of disappearing ICH. Some notable examples include the loss of dialects and languages, chants, the art of pottery making, and many more. Therefore, cultural heritage institutions should play as agents in developing a communication flow or channel of this ICH through the collections.

Most respondents opined that cultural heritage institutions should be more proactive in planning and giving advocacy to the public through creating interactive tools such as early educational cultural heritage syllabus at the primary school, short documentaries and commercials on broadcast

channels and others. Nemani (2012) also suggests that there should be exposure to ICH collection through CD-ROMs and guidebooks, and social media pages such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many more; creating short educational films and documentaries; establishing an interactive webpage; and developing educational toolkits, and drawing and colouring books for children. It also includes developing advocacy materials such as brochures, posters, pamphlets, calendars, magazines and newsletters to promote work on the safeguarding of ICH. These initiatives directly reduce the needs for fund allocation in dissemination and sustaining ICH to the public.

The benefits of information heritage advocacy include increased awareness, improved depositor relations and networking and the development of new or the expansion of existing ICH collections. The advantages of advocacy events will also increase responsiveness for the respective department, collection acquisitions and development, and the creation of new connections and collaborations with other agencies in sustaining ICH in the country.

### **National Heritage Centre**

Although most UNESCO state member parties have not assigned a dedicated centre for documenting and preserving the ICH collection they utilize museum, archive, library and other cultural hubs to manage it. However there are also some countries that emphasize a specific institution for managing and preserving information and collection related to ICH (UNESCO, 2016). This clearly shows that special care and interest towards ICH collection is carried out by countries that appreciate their cultural value is in line with country development. The findings from the study reveal the need for a specific centre known as the national heritage centre for safeguarding national cultural information including tangible or intangible heritage.

Most respondents agree that the establishment of a national heritage centre is capable of developing a new phase in the documentation of heritage information management where a centralized collection is responsible for collecting and preserving in a solitary hub. Moreover, this centre can also play an active role in the cultural fieldwork network program which is extensively for community participation in cultural heritage management and documentation. There are many expected benefits obtainable from this centre such as systematic cultural heritage information from the ground

level as public reference, focused resources storage, holistic management of ICH documentation and many more that will ensure the transmission of social values and safeguarding cultural identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Documentation of the ICH requires a distinctive methodology contrasted with execution towards heritage sites, monuments, buildings, and nature. ICH, much like language, workmanship, music, and dance, is more complex and requires particular information, knowledge and ability towards preserving it. The treasured and sensitive value needs to be rearranged through cultural heritage expertise that covers prospective dancers, musicians, minstrels, writers, historians, and the local community, and it requires guidelines in documenting their collection systematically. A good documentation strategy in cultural heritage institution is able to show the eagerness of the country in sustaining and safeguarding our value of ICH and committed to transmit for the new generation to appreciate it. Finally, all cultural heritage institutions and public can benefit from an enhanced awareness of ICH and the significant aspect of documenting our heritage for better understanding.

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