

Museum Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage in the Northern Region of Peninsula Malaysia¹

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses myriad of museums that are located in the northern region of peninsula Malaysia and their efforts in the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage. The study adopts the historical approach but with a tinge of cultural anthropology while the research methodology is based on museum visits, a scrutiny of publications and pamphlets issued by museums and discussion with those closely associated with museums. Besides the dominance of Malay culture museum efforts of preservation and conservation of cultural heritage including royal ceremonies are selectively undertaken. Certain aspects of Malay culture are marginalized just like the cultural heritage of other ethnic groups. Then there is competition within and among museums. This competition is an extension of the political competition which had existed since 1957.

Key words: Museums, preservation, conservation, historical approach, cultural heritage, Malay culture, selective, marginalized, competition

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini membincangkan pelbagai muzium yang terdapat di utara Semenanjung Malaysia serta usaha pemuliharaan dan pemuliharaan warisan budaya yang mereka jalankan. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan sejarah dan antropologi budaya sementara kaedah kajian pula merangkumi lawatan muzium, penelitian ke atas penerbitan dan risalah yang dikeluarkan oleh muzium serta perbincangan dengan mereka yang berkaitan dengan muzium. Kajian mendapati selain berpaksi kepada budaya Melayu pemuliharaan dan pemuliharaan warisan budaya termasuk adat istiadat diraja dilakukan secara terpilih. Terdapat beberapa aspek warisan budaya Melayu yang dipinggirkan. Hal yang sama juga berlaku kepada warisan budaya kelompok etnik lain. Kemudian terdapat pula persaingan dalam dan antara muzium. Persaingan ini merupakan lanjutan daripada persaingan politik yang wujud di Malaysia sejak 1957.

Kata kunci: Muzium, pemuliharaan, pemuliharaan, pendekatan sejarah, warisan budaya, budaya Melayu, terpilih, dipinggirkan, persaingan

INTRODUCTION

The preservation and conservation of cultural heritage had been undertaken in a number of ways. One was (and still is) through oral sources which is transmitted to subsequent generations, such as folklore, although the demise of these sources could mean putting the heritage at risk. Timely recordings using sophisticated gadgetry greatly helps in their preservation (Mohd Taib 1988: 4-15, 138-141). This brings us to the second mode – the recording of oral traditions and their publications which provide useful reading materials especially for children. Other aspects of the heritage are recorded in traditional chronicles like the *Sejarah Melayu* and the *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu* which record for posterity royal ceremonies and etiquette of the Melaka sultanate (Abdul Samad Ahmad 2003; Sudjiman 1993).

The third mode is through daily usage although rapid urbanisation and western education had affected local attitudes and perceptions. The traditional practice of circumcision was replaced by a modern one rendering the *Tok Mudim* (village surgeon) obsolete although certain ceremonies associated with circumcision are still in place (Syed Alwi 1962: 8-12) while popular attitudes towards quasi religious feasting (*kenduri*) had changed. Betel chewing (*kunyah sireh*) which used to be an essential part of social intercourse and ceremonies have gone out of fashion, even deemed a health hazard, although intricate *tepak sireh* (betel sets) are highly valued as ornamental objects and museum displays while the *sireh* (betel) leaf is indispensable in Malay flower arrangement for various occasions. This brings us to the last mode, the role of museum although museum exhibits are susceptible to changes or replacement.

In the last few years a number of museums located in the northern region had become the subject of various studies. Mohamad Saad (1993) focuses on the Perak Museum in Taiping while Abdul Rahim (1996) on the Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum. Both accord much emphasis on the establishment and developments of these museums. Norhashimah (2005) had looked critically at the Penang State Museum and the Penang Islamic Museum. She concludes these museums had inevitably become vehicles for government propaganda which also afflicted museums in other parts of the world (Kaplan 1996; Sherman & Rogoffs 1994). Elsewhere I have looked at the Penang State Museum, Kedah State Museum and the Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum and their selective foregrounding of historical exhibits with only those deemed

suitable towards nation building put on display (Abu Talib 2008). This nation building aspect is a continuation of the museums' pre-1957 role. As cogently argued by Anderson, museums, just like archaeology, maps and census, became crucial component of the imagining of the colonial state imposed on the colonized (Anderson 1991: 163-185). They also became part of an ingenious control mechanism to ensure "natives stay as native". All these were subsequently appropriated by new nation states for its own interests, often narrowly defined and contestable.

Based mainly on historical approach but with traces of cultural anthropology this study focuses on museums located in Penang, Perlis, Kedah and northern Perak which represent an aggregation of museum types found in Malaysia. Museum story line and its cultural foregrounding are an integral part of nation building that harps on Malay cultural (and political) dominance. This is evident in the way heritage preservation and conservation is undertaken in museums, museum competition and competing heritage, and the foregrounding of royal ceremonies and etiquettes. Even for Malay culture, identified as the self in contrast to the other which refers to non-Malay culture, there is the question of whether existing preservation and conservation efforts are sufficiently comprehensive. Beside site visits the study refers to museum pamphlets and publications, the standard accounts on museums, culture and heritage as well as discussion with museum professionals – the bureaucrats, consultants and those who worked in museums.

MUSEUMS IN THE NORTHERN REGION

Museums in the northern region, or in Malaysia, can be classified into three broad types although these are not mutually exclusive. They come under the purview of different bodies including the federal government (Department of Museums and Antiquities), the state government, university and private or other entities.

Type one is the general museums which are found in all states not just the northern region. Befitting their name the exhibits include those relating to culture and history with the latter occupying significant space in the Penang State Museum, the Perak Museum, the Kedah State Museum and the Kota Kayang Museum in Kuala Perlis. A variant of this type is the Universiti Sains Malaysia Museum, renamed the Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah, which started as a teaching museum in 1982 that combines both science and arts in its foregrounding of exhibits including

regular thematic exhibitions. The museum had hosted foreign researchers while its staff undertake research on media art, contemporary art practices as well as action oriented research on audience-development programmes and community-driven projects (Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah 2007).

Equally important are the type two museums which focus on selected themes. These include the Forestry Museum in Telok Bahang, the Islamic Museum, the Balai Seni Pulau Pinang and the Pinang Peranakan Mansion which is actually a Baba-Nyonya museum. For Kedah, the notable museums in this category are the Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum in Merbok, the Paddy Museum in Gunung Keriang (with another branch in Langkawi) and the Balai Seni Negeri which preserves cultural heritage that are uniquely Kedah. In Perak, the Lenggong Archaeology Museum comes under similar category.

The third type is the royal museums and royal gallery which focus on the royalty, royal lineage or genealogy, customs and etiquettes, ceremonial matters, and royal memorabilia. These are the Kedah Royal Museum in Alor Setar, the Perak Royal Museum in Kuala Kangsar and the Perlis Royal Gallery in Arau.

Almost all these museums occupy heritage buildings except for the Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum, the Kota Kayang Museum, the Kedah State Museum and the Paddy Museum. The structures of these four museums are of recent origin. The architecture of the Kota Kayang Museum which opened in 2000 is exquisitely local, styled after the long roofed Perlis house. The Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum is shaped like an octagon reflective of the 8 wind directions which is an important part of the indigenous world view.

The Kota Kayang Museum which is divided into east and west wing is sited near the mausoleum of 2 former rulers of Kedah and former administrative capital of the state (Perlis then was part of the Kedah sultanate). The museum displays a replica of the Bunga Mas & Perak and details its itinerary from Arau to Bangkok. The presentation of tributes to the Siamese monarch was reciprocated with suitable gifts and attires after which the Perlis emissaries were allowed to depart for home.

The Kedah State Museum started in 1957 as the Kedah History Museum. It was located on the ground floor of the Balai Besar and the adjacent Istana Pelamin. In 1961 the museum moved to a new building in Bakar Bata and in 1964 changed its name to Kedah State Museum. In 1997 the museum moved to the present premise in Alor Merah. Istana Pelamin was subsequently renovated and turned into the Royal Kedah

Museum in 1983. Arrangement for the present exhibits were completed in 2008. The circular shape Paddy Museum was opened to the public in the 1990s while the Balai Seni Negeri Kedah, which occupies a former court building, was opened in July 1983. Exhibits in the latter include handicrafts, paintings and other art works by those originally from Kedah who had gained national and international fame such as A.B. Ibrahim and Ibrahim Hussein (Khoo & Alia 2010).

The Balai Seni Negeri Kedah conducts various activities including Islamic calligraphy and the art of putting on traditional headgear (*destar*) which is associated with royal ceremonial occasions. A few of these *destar* are put on display showcasing 17 styles for state officials including 4 for the royalty with the *destar Pucuk Rebung* which is reserved for the sultan. Former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was accorded his own exclusive style – *destar Seri Indera Putera*. Even the *nobat* players have their own exquisite *destar getung*. The Kedah State Museum foregrounds a more plebian *destar* called *tengkolok*, the headgear associated with wedding attires of Malay commoners. Elsewhere the *tengkolok* is known as *tanjak* which is used for both wedding and ceremonial occasions. In most states only certain individuals are commissioned to make the *destar/tanjak* for royal ceremonial occasions and usually from exquisite Terengganu *songket* in return for a fee.

The Paddy Museum provides information on myriad aspects of paddy cultivation which is the main economic activities of Kedah and Perlis throwing insights on the life of the rural farmers. Between the 14th -17th Century Kedah (along with Perlis) evolved from a trading community to an agricultural one which was further intensified with the construction of the Wan Muhammad Saman canal in 1885 linking the Kedah river to the foot of Gunung Jerai. However canal constructions had been undertaken earlier by Sultan Dhiauddin in present day Perlis in the 18th Century. One canal runs from Kota Indera Kayangan to Bukit Pinang and another from the Perlis river to Anak Bukit and the Kedah river. According to the Kota Kayang Museum these canals were used for communication (travel), irrigation and settlement purposes.

The Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum has 2 main galleries. The first gallery foregrounds the Lembah Bujang as a commercial hub within the Southeast Asian region with Indian, Chinese and Arab traders involved in the trade while the other gallery foregrounds cultural and architectural artifacts related to Indian influences and Hindu-Buddhist heritage. The Bujang Valley civilisation shows “the Malays had already

possessed the skills in architecture, carving, sculpting, writing beside knowledge in trading and commerce” (Wan Shamsuddin 1992: 2). Similarly, the Kedah State Museum accepts the importance of this non-Islamic heritage as an important part of the state’s 1,500 year history although certain sections of Muslims view the preservation of Hindu-Buddhist edifices as contrary to Islamic tenets. They advocate their destruction but the intervention of the sultan of Kedah ensured its continued existence (Abdul Rahman 2003: 210).

Traditional texts from Kedah like the *Al-tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* had considerable influence on historical displays at the Kedah State Museum; a copy of this text and the equally famous *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Kedah annals) are put on display. This museum foregrounds traditional ceremonies, folk games, musical instruments, visual art forms and aspects of daily life besides ceremonies relating to the Chinese, Indians and Sam-Sam while the central focus remains the history and culture of the Kedah Malays. Their display is aided by adequate lighting but minimal gadgetry unlike the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur or the technology savvy Singapore National Museum. Instead the focus is on photographs, dioramas, captions and exhibits that are regularly rearranged.

The Penang State Museum was formerly a school while the Penang Islamic Museum is located at the former mansion of well known Malay leader Syed Al-Attas who was also a successful trader in the Penang-Acheh trade in the mid-19th Century (Salina 2005). The Penang State Museum foregrounds the cultural mix associated with Penang island which before 1800 was known as Tanjung Penaga through myriad races and cultures while the unique mix-marriages gave rise to the unique hybrid culture and language associated with the Chinese Peranakan (Baba and Nyonya), Jawi Peranakan (Jawi Pekan) and Arab Peranakan.

Opened in 2010 the Pinang Peranakan Mansion is “more than just a museum, as this century old stately mansion of eclectic design and architecture incorporates Chinese carved-wood panels with English floor tiles and Scottish iron works”. The mansion is really a manifestation of Peranakan opulence and grandeur at its best.

Run by the Malay Chamber of Commerce, Penang Branch the objective of the Islamic Museum is to attract “visitors attention to the Lebuah Acheen historical heritage, to document historical facts of the Malay-Muslim community, act as resource centre for studies, researchers and the general public and to put up an Islamic heritage trail.” Besides Islamic heritage the museum also foregrounds Indian-Muslims and Arab

Peranakan which formed a sizeable component of the Malay population and its economic strength (Md Salleh 1984).

The museum showcases the cultural aspect of the Malay-Muslims, history of the Muslim community and the arrival of Islam to Malaysia. It accords considerable emphasis on Islam and culture through the foregrounding the *Aidilfitri*, *Aidiladha*, *Maulidul Rasul*, pregnancy and Quran recital. The exhibits include a replica of the Terengganu inscription of the 14th Century which was cited as “proof of the arrival of Islam to this east coast state,” *bedok* used by mosques to announce prayer times, a copy of the Quran and Jawi manuscripts.

The spread of the faith in Penang, the museum claims, was contributed by various groups including traders, and Islamic scholars while the role of the print media which thrived in Acheen Street was crucial. There is information on the hajj; Acheen Street was the converging point for those from Kedah, Perlis, Pattani and Kelantan until the 1970s when airplane replaced ship as the major mode of travel to Jeddah.

Most museums offer a combination of history and heritage preservation and conservation although representations of these aspects are done selectively. Quite often there is a separate section that deals with history and preservation/conservation aspects. In the Penang State Museum, the culture hall is located on the ground floor while the history hall on the other floor. Even in the history hall aspects of culture are not entirely excluded. The main section of the Kedah State Museum is devoted to Kedah history from the pre-historic period until post-Merdeka while cultural exhibits are scattered on the other floors. At the Kota Kayang Museum history dominates museum exhibits, from the pre-historic period to the 1840s, when the state was carved by the Siamese from the “troubled and chaotic” Kedah sultanate, until the post-1957 period. Aspects of local Malay culture are interspersed with the history exhibits. The museum acknowledges the Perlis-Kedah and Perlis-Satun (Setul) linkages. Like the Kedah State Museum it foregrounds resistance to the Siamese but not Siamese colonialism in this part of the Malay peninsula.

A major issue with many museums is the haphazard translation of the Malay caption into English. This weakness is most noticeable in the Paddy Museum, the Kedah State Museum and the Kota Kayang Museum; this requires immediate rectification. Below is a sample taken from the Kedah State Museum:

“The state is known as ‘granary state’ [sic] with the majority of the people as paddy farmers, grocers [sic] and fishermen. The people of the state have on their own interested [sic] in organizing activities such

kinds of folk games and also doing stage performances [sic] which are held in their own society [sic]. Therefore the society [sic] of Kedah has succeeded to form their own identity which is something for them to be proud of.”

Not all museums are popular with visitors. A few museums charge visitors but still managed to draw sizeable crowd such as the Paddy Museum and the Penang State Museum; others like the Muzium Kota Kayang, the Kedah State Museum, the Balai Seni Negeri and the Kedah Royal Museum do not charge entrant fees but the crowds are not coming although the last two museums are located within Alor Setar’s heritage enclave.

To attract and sustain crowd interest it is necessary for museum bureaucrats to organize periodic exhibitions on selected themes creating a Disney type atmosphere that could increase gate takings. In the case of the Kedah State Museum exhibitions on ghosts or the automotive industry managed to attract large crowd who took time to view the permanent exhibits. The Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah held a *puisi* recital and exhibition in 2008 which was well received by the local public. In March 2010 the museum organized an exhibition on Tun Seri Lanang (1565-1659) and the launching of the *Sulalat al-Salatin ya 'ni Perteturan Segala Raja-Raja (Sejarah Melayu)* the book that he wrote between 1612-14 followed by an exhibition on this 17th C literary icon. The event was well attended by the USM academic fraternity and delegates from Pahang, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka and Acheh which include a few 8th generation descendants of Tun Seri Lanang.

In the past museums do provide pamphlets about its history which are most useful to the public, although the dates of their establishment are often missing. In recent years these have become scarce commodity. The Kedah State Museum provides guided tour to group visitors but this had to be requested well in advance which might be of no benefit to first time visitors. The Pinang Peranakan Mansion provides similar service but only to groups of 10 or more persons. Equally crucial is to have trained museum professionals which are sorely lacking. This malady afflicts all museums under study. Overall museum foregrounding is overwhelmingly based on Malay culture which dominates national culture while the non-Malays (other) are marginalized. One Indian academic had expressed misgivings about the Kedah State Museum which he believes, and rightly so, had not been fair to the Indian community including the economically important money lenders or Chettiyars.

MUSEUMS AND THE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Unlike Melaka and Kota Bharu where museums are located within specific enclaves, museums in the northern region are scattered at different sites. Location wise they are not visitor friendly. As elsewhere, the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage is selectively undertaken with the efforts dependant on museum professionals and the state's political bosses. Museum exhibits are susceptible to changes depending on museum authorities and political expediency although changes are not intrinsically negative. Innovative changes could enliven museum presentations and sustain visitor interests not to mention possible increases in gate taking despite local museums' minimal usage of modern gadgets. At times changes have nothing to do with the exhibits. In Selangor political changes in state administration affected the position of a senior museum official although such development had yet to be seen in Kedah and Penang which had experienced similar changes in 2008.

State museums do promote specific story line peculiar to each state. The evolution of multi-culturalism permeates exhibits at the Penang State Museum although this failed to mention prostitution among the Japanese during the early 20th century despite it being a significant part of this community in Malaya, Borneo and Singapore. At other times multi-culturalism resulted in competing heritage and museum competition.

For both Kedah and Perlis, Malay cultural dominance reverberates throughout. For these museums one could not deny the role of consultants who were instrumental in foregrounding the states' history and culture with varying degree of sophistry and excitement although for Kedah this led to confusion on the position of Sultan Dhiauddin Mukaram Shah (1797-1804). In the State Museum he appears as the 21st ruler; in the Kedah Royal Museum he was demoted to Raja Muda while in popular accounts he is cited both as ruler and acting ruler (Abu Talib 2007: 49).

The following discussion covers museum preservation and conservation by focusing on selected aspects namely marriage ceremonies, weapons, household utensils, tools and farming implements, popular past times, entertainment and music, *tepak sireh*, and the heritage that is missing in museum displays.

Marriage Ceremonies

At the Kedah State Museum visitors are greeted with a diorama of Malay, Chinese, and Indian weddings with all couples in their traditional attires. There is also a Malay *hantaran* (betrothal gift) consisting of brass wares, *songkok*, *songket*, hand bag and *tepak sireh*. In the Malay wedding the *Mak Andam* is indispensable while the bride sports a *baju kurong* with *songket* and *selepong* and the groom in *baju Melayu cekak musang* complete with *sampin*, *bengkong*, *tengkolok* and keris. In another section are shown typical Kedah wedding attires and the *tengkolok*. Coming in various shapes and colours these *tengkolok* are differentiated by fanciful names like *Bunga Batu*, *Bunga Padi*, *Semarak*, *Dayang Mas*, *Serampang Perak* and *Dendam Tak Sudah*.

The museum describes Malay marriage beginning from *merisek*, betrothal, and the *bersanding* which is meant to announce publicly the couple are legally married. There is a diorama of a marriage solemnisation ceremony with the presence of the groom, the kadi, witnesses, close relatives and guests with the bride seated in the background. The *pelamin* is for the enthronement of the couple during which they receive blessings from guests while the bridal chamber is where the newly wed meet in privacy for the first time.

The *pelamin* is similar to the *singgahsana* (royal throne) complete with a beautifully decorated dais (*peterakna*). The size and grandeur of the *pelamin* is dependant on the status of the bride's family. The couple is made to sit on the *pelamin* with the *pengapit* on both sides providing some cool with their fans while guests sprinkle rosewater (Syed Alwi 1962: 22-48). The groom and the bride resemble a sultan and sultanah on their thrones, receiving the homage of their people. Hence the term *raja sehari* (king for a day) is appropriately accorded to them.

Some of the heritage is quite elaborate; not all are faithfully subscribed while the museum notes only the important ones. The *merisek* (investigation and selection of the bride), engagement, sending of the dowry, marriage solemnisation, and *bersanding* are still widely practiced while *mandi berlimau* (ceremonial bathing of the couple after the third day and consummation of marriage) and *sambut-menyambut* are less so. In fact *mandi berlimau* is uncommon these days except among the royalty while *sambut-menyambut* is very much simplified but still accompanied by merriment and feasting (*kenduri*). Not foreground is the *berinai* (henna ceremony) which takes place the night before solemnisation.

The Penang State Museum provides an equally colourful representation of Malay wedding although not quite as detail compared to available accounts (Muzium Negara 1978). It foregrounds the many items associated with the *hantaran* – silver and brass wares, adorned *tepak sireh*, rosewater container, sweets and fruits, ring box and kohl (*celak*) holder. The *tepak sireh* is an important item in the dowry and a popular betrothal gift. The *hantaran* is given before the actual marriage to ensure smooth preparations. Religious music like the *marhaban* accompany the ceremony. The museum foregrounds the kind of intricate *songket* worn by the bride and groom which is different from the 1930s daily wear of *baju kebaya pendek* and *batik susun* for the women while for the men, *baju Melayu cekak musang*, *kot asam pedas* and *pulicat*. Besides the bridal chamber, traditional Malay jewelry used in weddings and other occasions like ornamental hairpins, filigree belt, buckles, bangles, necklace, brooches and earrings are put on display.

The Kedah State Museum foregrounds brief but informative write ups for the Chinese and Indian weddings as well as the kind of dowry involved. As with other ethnic groups, Chinese wedding puts emphasis on appropriate attire, with the ceremony commencing from the house of the bride, the family table (*sam hai*), to conclude with wine drinking followed by prayers. The dowry includes money, blanket, pillow, clothing, cosmetic, candle holder, fruits and a pair of shoes. There is no mention of the subsequent celebration and merriment in hotels or restaurants or recent changes in the dowry.

The Penang State Museum provides a colourful representation of prewar Straits Chinese or Peranakan marriage ceremony. The exhibits include wedding bed, cupboard, dowry chest, wash basin stand – all finely crafted from hard wood by skilled Chinese artisans who might have been brought from China - and marriage attires. There is also photographs of different bridal attires worn on the first day of the wedding, the third, the 12th and the 30th day. The Peranakan attires combine Chinese, western and Malay influences with these later crafted in Shanghai. The museum does not elaborate on the significance of these dates nor provide the full detail of Peranakan wedding of yesteryear. The Pinang Peranakan mansion displays a bridal chamber with three wedding crowns, various types of bridal necklace, buckle, and silver-gilt hairpin.

Elsewhere we have details of Peranakan weddings which are described as “a sumptuous, 12-day affair, comprising different ceremonies which are an inexplicable and fascinating blend of Chinese and Malay customs. The *chiu thau* ceremony, held on the wedding eve when the

bride, dressed in white, had to sit in the centre of a *nyiru* (bamboo tray) and had her hair combed by the mistress of ceremony. This poignant ceremony symbolized the girl's passage from childhood to womanhood" (Cheo 2009). Other equally elaborate ceremonies include the casting of the horoscope, exchange of gifts before the wedding, the eating of rice balls symbolizing marital bliss, paying obeisance before the altar and ancestral tablets, the unveiling ceremony, and the surrendering of the cloth to the in-laws the morning after to show proof of the bride's virginity. As the norm with traditional Peranakan weddings, the function ends with the *ronggeng* in which mixed sex couple danced and exchanged verses (*pantun*) to the compliment of western and Malay music (Tan Sooi Beng 2009: 160).

As noted by many commentators the opulence in Peranakan weddings was subsequently affected by the changing perceptions towards traditional values brought about by western education, the conversion to Christianity besides changing economic fortunes caused by the slump of rubber prices in the late 1920s, the depressions of the 1930s and the Japanese occupation (Fraser-Lu 1989: 77-81).

The Kedah State Museum describes in detail Indian wedding ceremony and the kind of attires the couple wear. The wedding begins with the *swami* lighting the fire or *Agni* with the couple required to circumbulate three times. The groom then places a ring on the bride's index and ring finger. This is followed by the groom tying the *thali* on the bride's neck and the couple is officially married. For married women the *thali* is a most valuable item from the whole proceedings.

Visitors are informed of the importance of the banana tree, and traditional music in Indian weddings while the dowry includes cash, sweets, jewelry, clothes, *sireh* leaf and coconut. As for the Orang Asli, Sikh and Siamese weddings, minimal information is provided by these museums.

Weapons

A few museums put on display early stone and iron weapons and tools that were used thousands of years ago by local inhabitants. Others foreground more recent weapons although the display covers almost exclusively Malay weapons. At the Kota Kayang Museum the weapons shown include cannons (*meriam ekor* or swivel cannon), *tekpi* or Chinese combat weapon, and the many types of machete (*gadang*, *klewang* and *golok jembal*) while the adze (*beliong*) is actually a tool used by

the Orang Asli to cut down trees and to split the trunk into planks. Other weapons on display are the keris, *parang*, *lading*, small spear, long keris, the many types of short keris (*keris Pekaka*, *keris Bugis* and *keris Bali*), other types of Malay weapons like *rencong*, *tumbok lada*, *badik* while smaller weapons like *lawi ayam* and *kerambit* were also used by women who hid them in their *sanggul* or dress.

The long keris served as weapon for self defence, as well as symbol of power and status among the traditional aristocracy. This type of keris originated from Sumatra and was used in the execution of criminals on the order of the raja. Connoisseurs or keris lovers might be attracted to the keris blade (straight or wavy), the wooden hilt (the *Jawa Demam*/grief stricken Javanese or *burong*/bird type) and the sheath. The museum does not provide any names to these keris although they are known to have exotic names like *Sigar Jantan*, *Kapak China* and *Marhum Kadaton*.

The *Sejarah Melayu* informs us the best keris came from Java which was used in the deadly duel between a Majapahit warrior and his Melaka counterpart Hang Tuah. This particular weapon, the Keris Taming Sari is now part of the Perak royal regalia. Equally missing is information on keris classification. Hill (1998: 29-30) classifies them into 7 types namely the Bali, Lombok and Madura type, the Javanese type, the peninsular (northern) type, the Bugis type, the Sumatran type, the Pattani type and the Sulu type (*sundang*).

In many states traditional weapons including keris are associated with the royal regalia. Hill claims spear and sword occupy a higher position than keris which may be correct for certain states. All are held in high esteem; some are believed to possess supernatural qualities even in modern time. For Perlis the state regalia consists of the throne, crest on the royal headdress, tiara, short keris, sword, a round silver *tepak sireh*, spear and lance and the Quran. These items are used in the royal installation ceremony while selected items of the regalia are worn by the raja and his consort during other ceremonies. Other important ceremonial instruments and weapons put on display are swords, spear, bow and arrow.

The Kedah State Museum includes a more extensive display of various types of traditional Malay weapons including swords, spears, machete, and intricately designed keris. Other weapons foreground include *pedang* and the *meriam ekor* which used to grace Kedah fort. Before the end of the 19th Century the keris formed part of Malay attire but presently confined to ceremonial occasions including wedding. In the past the keris was

accepted as proxy in marriage ceremony representing the groom; it also formed an important part in initiation and puberty ceremonies in Makassar and Java (Hill 1998: 27, 45-46).

The extensive collection at the Kedah State Museum rivals similar collection at the Kota Bharu Museum of Royal Ceremonies and Etiquette. Hill had studied these weapons covering the different types of spears, swords, knives, small daggers and keris. For keris he focuses on its physiology, origins and early history, classifications, and beliefs in its supernatural powers. In fact Hill provides much more information on the keris than any of the museum does.

Household Utensils, Tools and Farming Implements

There is not much on household utensils. The Kota Kayang Museum foregrounds *belanga* (earthen pot) used for cooking, jar with handle used for storing drinking water, ceramic mug used for storing kitchen ingredients, pickle jar which was also used as food storage containers, and water jar (*buyong*). Also foreground are utensils for daily use dated to the 17-18th Century such as the “footed” *tepak sireh* (*tepak sireh berkaki*), multipurpose box, tobacco box, wooden rice larder, pestle and mortar, oil lamp, brass pots often associated with the wealthy, large covered serving tray used to serve rice to guests during feasts, small trays and cooking pots. Other items include brassware, brass tray, covered food box, *tepak sireh*, *sireh* bowls, betel slicer and bowls to store lime, betels, cloves and so forth.

The Penang State Museum foregrounds the different type of moulds used in making Malay traditional sweets such as *baulu*, *kuih bakar*, *apam bakar*, *putu mayang*, *kuih dangai*, *putu beras*, *kuih bangkit* and *kuih cara*. The museum provides colorful pictures of *kuih loyang*, *putu kacang*, *putu beras*, *kuih bangkit*, *baulu* and *kuih cara*. The Pinang Peranakan Mansion foregrounds metal and wooden moulds for Peranakan sweets including *baulu* and *kueh kapit*; these show both Chinese and Malay influences.

There are different types of implements used by Malay peasants including those in the processing of paddy into rice or rice into flour such as the *lesong tumbok*, *nyiru*, *penampi*, *alu*, *pengisar batu* (grinder) to grind rice into flour, *penampi padi*, *gerek tua*, and *anok rodi*. Products made from rice include vermicelli, *laksa*, myriad sweets and *emping* (rice flakes) which is no longer a popular snack although still available at Alor Setar’s famous Pekan Rabu. At one time the heavy *lesong kaki*

was used to pound paddy into rice which is a laborious process; at present this is done by machinery. Also on display are the traditional ploughing tools like *anok*, *kuku kambing*, *pengadar semai*, *tenggiling*, *kok*, *sisir kayu*, *tenggala Cina*, *tajak besi*, *lorong air*, and *sisir kapor* although the use of Japanese Kubota tractor had significantly changed the farming landscape and cultural life of the paddy farmers.

Other exhibits include wooden water wheel from Kampuchea, *lesong*, *alat menampi*, and pest control methods used in paddy fields. The Paddy Museum foregrounds the different modes of catching fish used by farmers including *taut*, *sepilah*, *tuar*, *serkap*, *serampang*, *bubu*, *raga* and *belat karung*. These are made from bamboo and rattan which are plentifully available. However, in recent years the consumption of fish caught in paddy fields or irrigation canals might pose health hazard due to overuse of pesticides. Then there are *tempayan* (large jar) to store rice, *bakul mengkuang* to store paddy in small quantity, *kepok* to store paddy with the stalk still attached which is located under the house and *jelapang*, the place to store dried clean paddy.

Malay traditional dwellings formed an important part of the rural landscape. The Balai Seni Negeri Kedah puts on display a miniature traditional house with its intricate wood carvings and motifs that are found on windows, doors or walls of such houses. The exquisitely crafted edifice allows the visitor to understand the various house parts while the motifs are ascribed certain names like *bunga tanjung*, *awan larat*, *salar kacang*, *bunga telipok* and *bunga ketumbar*.

The Penang State Museum foregrounds the front part of a typical Penang Malay house, the design and plan for such structure and tools used in house construction. On the other hand Islamic influence on traditional Malay houses often known by its roof style Gajah Menyusu (or the Bumbong Lima type), calligraphy and assorted patterns found on doors and windows of such houses are highlighted by the Penang Islamic Museum. Fine specimen of wood carving, intricately carved crown and screen, and Islamic calligraphy (*khat*) from various parts of the world are also put on display. The old Kubang Semang mosque in Seberang Perai reflects Islamic influence on building architecture although other mosques like the imposing Kapitan Kling mosque or the Batu Uban mosques are equally significant architecturally or historical (Zulkifli 2007; Zulkifli & Badrul Hisham 1994).

There is little on traditional crafts although the ones shown are invaluable heritage material. In the Kedah State Museum the centrepiece is undoubtedly a diorama of 2 women doing the mat and *bakul* from

mengkuang leaf which is a dying art. Other crafts highlighted include *seni tekad* (embroidery) associated with intricate fans used in wedding ceremonies and *seni ukir* as well as copper products like *cepu*, kettle, *dulang*, *tepak sireh*, spoon, scented water receptacle, jewelry boxes, intricately designed flower pots, candle holder, big brass basin, an old fashioned iron and oil lamp. At present these are mass produced by machines; this popularises its use but contribute little in encouraging the younger generation to take up traditional crafts.

Popular Past Times, Entertainment and Music

This aspect is well foreground in state museums, the Kedah Royal Museum and the Penang Islamic Museum. One popular past time was bull fighting which took place at the end of the harvest. Anak Bukit was well known for bull fighting with its ring capable of accommodating 4,000 spectators. The museum foregrounds a diorama of the arena and bull fighting in progress. Preparations took place 4 months prior to the actual event with *bomoh* or *pawang* playing an important part. The colorful spectacle was banned in 1936 because of inherent cruelty to animals and associated social ills afflicting rural life.

Equally important are the exhibits and dioramas relating to other past times, music and entertainment of the Malays and Sam-Sam. Excluded are Indian and Chinese music, musical instruments or the kind of past times and entertainment associated with them. There is information on *sepak raga*, which is played in a circle while a photograph shows its modern version. There is also a diorama of the *silat* which was used for defence, offence and light entertainment. Popular past times foreground include the *congkak*, *kasut tempurong* which is popular among children, the *halu pulau* which is associated with rice cakes preparation just before the harvest and merriment associated with producing the *emping*. Other important pastimes foreground are cock fighting and kite flying; farmers dabbled in them for fame and enjoyment with perhaps a dose of gambling.

Local musical instruments are either those commonly found in Southeast Asia (gongs, drums and flutes) or those that have close affinities with Islamic culture (*rebab*, *rebana*, mandolin and *nafiri*). There is a diorama of the *hadrah*, its musicians and participants with males masquerading as female dancers. The associated instruments include *kompang*, *gendang besar*, *rebana ibu*, *rebana anak*, tambourine and violin. The songs and dances originated from the Arabian peninsula. In

Kedah and Seberang Perai *hadrah* often enliven weddings and circumcision ceremony.

Many museums foreground the *rebana* or *gendang besar* which is an important aspect of traditional music. Traditional music is associated with both religious and non religious aspects like the *semangat padi* which is a legacy of animistic practices (Mohd. Taib 1988: 216). Music is also related to traditional Malay medicine through the holding of séance with the *pawang* invoking the spirits similar to Kelantan's *main puteri* (Hamidah Yaacob 1998). According to Mohd. Taib *Mek Mulong* performances are deeply rooted in the local folk culture, with the stage, instruments and the players blessed prior to the performance so as to preserve harmony between the world of mortals and the spiritual world. It is performed at night until the wee hours of the morning.

Mek Mulong thrives in Jitra's Wang Tepus area notably among the Sam-Sams. This traditional theatre is accompanied by singing and music; this is the aspect that is often shown to the public. Its ritual aspect is frowned upon by the religious bureaucracy; hence this aspect is often downplayed. The Kedah State Museum foregrounds musical instruments associated with *Mek Mulong* like *gendang*, *serunai*, *golok*, *tongkat Tok Wan*, *gong*, *kecerak*, *nota ketujuh*, *kaus*, *selendang*, *bengkong*, *tengkolok* and masks worn by the Tok Wan who is the central figure in the performance.

Equally important is the *nobat*. The Kedah Royal Museum shows a diorama of the *nobat* which consists of 7 players in traditional costume - *destar*, coat, *sampin* and white Malay *baju*. The musical instruments shown are the *nohara* (kettle drum), *gendang ibu* (big drum), *gendang anak* (small drum), *nafiri* (trumpet), *serunai* (flute) and gong. The caption highlights the types of *nobat* instruments including the long rattan used by the *mahaguru* (band leader) to conduct the *nobat*. The number of instruments is much less than the 17th Century Pattani version which boasted of 32 and a repertoire of 25 tunes. The museum does not mention any *nobat* tunes; for late 19th Century Johor the popular ones include "Ibrahim Khalilullah" which was played for the ruling monarch besides "Iskandar Shah Zulqarnain", "Arak-Arak" and "Lagu Perang" (Syed Alwi 1962). Jelani (2010: 94) provides a more extensive list: 16 for Perak, 6 for Kedah, 16 for Selangor and 11 for Terengganu. Some of the common ones include "Arak-Arak", "Aleh-Aleh Panjang", "Dang Gendang", "Lenggang Che Kobat", "Anak Raja Membasoh Kaki", and "Rama-Rama Terbang". The Perak and Kedah *nobat* originates from Melaka; the *Sejarah Melayu* mentions it as symbol of Melaka's suzerainty over

Kedah which is downplayed by the museum while the *Al-tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* claims the *nobat* was brought from India during the 18th Century. The Terengganu *nobat* is a legacy from Johor-Riau which goes back to Melaka.

The *nobat* is played during formal or ceremonial occasions including the installation of the sultan, royal funeral, the appointment of chiefs or other state ceremonies in which the sultan is present. Scholars claim it was used to legitimize the authority of the ruling class and to ensure the different category of the *rakyat* remained in their respective social stations. The sacred aura of the *nobat* is maintained by the status accorded to it, the belief that the instruments are of extraordinary nature and the requirement for the people to accord it respect equal to that due to the ruler (Mohd Taib 1988: 209). All these are downplayed in the museum.

There are many more traditional musical instruments exhibited in Penang museums like *gambus Melayu*, *rebab*, *gendang* and flute. Some of these are related to the *boria* which was an important part of 19th and 20th Century Penang Malay entertainment. It came into existence in the mid-19th Century, very much associated with Indian-Muslim soldiers but with heavy Persian influence. Since then its form had undergone significant changes (Rahmah Bujang 1987). *Boria* participants were known for their riotous outfits while *boria* troupes keenly compete with one another that led to incessant village rivalry (Mahani Musa 2003) that sapped the community as precious energy were channeled into wasteful pursuits (Mohd Yusof 1922, 2007). In the postwar period *boria* is associated with attempts to impart certain social and political messages to local Malays including exhorting them to be more progressive farmers (Sohaimi & Rosmah 2010). At present *boria* is viewed negatively as a state propaganda tool with ‘boria’ being accorded unsavoury connotations by certain sections of the younger generation.

In Penang the *boria* was enjoyed by both Malays and Chinese. Quite often rich Chinese families acted as *boria* patrons with the troupe performing from house to house, owned usually by wealthy Malays, and for a fee. The museum foregrounds a picture of a *boria* troupe with a pretty Chinese lady, presumably from the family of the patron. The museum puts on display colorful *boria* attires and associated musical instruments – the violin, tambourine, harmonica, maracas, flute and a baton used by the leader.

Tepak Sireh

The Kedah State Museum, the Kedah Royal Museum, the Kota Kayang Museum, the Penang State Museum and the Penang Islamic Museum foreground many types of *tepak sireh* and related paraphernalia – the *bekas sireh*, *cembul*, *kacip*, *gobek*, *celepas* (tobacco box) and *ketur*. There are also replicas of *sireh* leaf, gambier, betel and lime. In Penang shredded tobacco leaves are added to the condiment, chewed and spitted out. Others use the *gobek* to crush the condiments before chewing them. Elsewhere a small pestle and mortar is used for this purpose. These are on display at the Penang State Museum. The Kedah State Museum displays different sets of *tepak sireh* for the royalty, the nobility and commoners. Other than craftsmanship, the difference is indicated by physical shape: the royal set is rectangular and golden in color, the one for the nobility is round while for the commoner, a small square.

These *tepak sireh* show marked differences in sophistry. The one shown at the Penang Islamic Museum originated from the Malay-Indian trading community: its rough craftsmanship is reflective of a community which is culturally in flux while those displayed at the Penang State Museum is much more refined. Those on display at the Kedah State Museum, Kedah Royal Museum or the Kota Kayang Museum show finer craftsmanship reflective of the power of the Malay rulers and their control over the artisan class who only produced for the rulers, chiefs and their associates.

Usually the set is made of brass or copper; there are also those made of wood. The Peranakan Chinese too have their own in the shape of round lacquer boxes. These colorful boxes come in pairs, one for the betel and *sireh* leaf and the other for lime, gambier and tobacco. *Sireh* also features in Peranakan weddings as well as part of offerings in ancestor worship (Tan Chai Cheng 2010: 176).

The *tepak sireh* used to occupy a special place in Malay society with serving *sireh* an essential part of almost all ceremonies including royal feasting (Sudjiman 1993: 218, 256) and among commoners. To chew betel, one choose a leaf from the *sireh* bowl, smears it with lime paste, add gambier and slices of the betel nut, and fold the leaf; folding the sides inwards, then the part nearest to the stalk and finally the top of the *sireh* leaf. The wrapping is chewed after which the reddish liquid is spitted out (Syed Alwi 1962). The Kedah State Museum shows a diorama of 2 women partaking *sireh*.

The Kedah State Museum provides information on the content of the *tepak sireh* – the betel nut, gambier, lime and the *sireh* leaf - but does not dwell on the *sireh* leaf. The Penang State Museum indicates the types of *sireh* used for different occasions such as *sireh tanya* (fixing marriage), *sireh adat* (ceremonial), *junjung sireh dara* (virgin bride), *sireh lat-lat* (invitation) and *sireh pengantin* (betrothal). These probably come in certain arrangements which is not foreground in any museums.

The *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu* provides many names to *sireh pengantin* that accompany royal betrothal ceremony – *naga berarak*, *wilmano indera*, *mega membangun*, *sireh garuda melayang*, *sireh nuri berjentera*, *sireh merpati sekawan*, *sireh ghurab beredar*, *sireh lancang beralih*, *sireh masjid dengan mihrab & mimbar*, and *sireh mahligai benderung*. These were contributed by state officials ranging from the Bendahara to the Penghulu Bendahari. However the finest arrangement came from the king himself – the *panji menyanjung taman* (Sudjiman 1993: 70-71, 230-231).

The Missing Heritage: Other Ceremonies, *kenduri* and *bomoh/pawang/dukun*

The museums' foregrounding of cultural heritage is selectively undertaken with emphasis on Malay culture which had assimilated much external influences in the past (Mohd Taib 1988). In recent times the issue of Islamic and non-Islamic heritage have been subjected to much critical assessment and there are suggestions of discarding Hindu-Buddhist legacy so as 'to purify' the heritage (Ismail Hamid 1985). At present the pre-Islamic heritage located at the Lembah Bujang Archaeology Museum remains unassailable: attempts to dislodge them would face resistance from the Department of Museums and Antiquities, the Kedah ruler and the wider academic fraternity beside possible censure from UNESCO, the self proclaimed global protector of heritage.

The museum foregrounding of Malay culture lacks width and depth; not only unIslamic heritage excluded, the 'neutral' ones too suffer similar fate. There is nothing on the *adat bersekampung* (*mukim/kampung* custom) which used to be important part of village life as it was meant to ensure general welfare of the inhabitants within the spirit of *gotong royong*. This aspect is slowly disappearing despite its promotion of neighbourliness and helped in the prevention of petty crime. In their daily life the Malays are closely associated with other ceremonies

like *melenggang perut*, birth rituals, hair cutting ceremony and circumcision.

Malay ceremonies invariably end with a *kenduri* which helps to cement social bond within village society. *Kenduris* are something locals looked forward to not just the sumptuous food but also to catch up with relatives, fellow villagers besides making new acquaintances. The *kenduri* is associated with certain kind of food and delicacies. The usual fare is beef while fish, deemed more plebian, is excluded. For the northern region these could include *gulai kawah*, *daging asam rebus*, the spicy *acar buah*, Kedah *laksa* or Penang *laksa*, *pasembor Kodiang*, *kerabu sayur* and *tapai pulut*. Foreign influences notably from the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Thailand and other parts of the Nusantara region are unmistakable in some of the local cuisines although these aspects never appeared in museums.

The museumising also avoids religiously controversial issues. There is no information on the *bomoh*, *dukun* or *pawang* who are still important even among educated urban Malays. What little there is on the subject appears only in relation to the bull fighting at Anak Bukit mentioned earlier. These individuals and their craft are often associated with elements of magic while their followers attempt to reconcile its practices with Islamic tenets (Skeat 1900; Endicot 1970; Mohd Taib 1988; Haron Daud 2001, 2004). Haron Daud, for instance, had shown the preponderance of unIslamic elements in the mantras used by the *bomoh*, *dukun* and *pawang*. Yet in certain royal ceremonies in Perak the *bomoh/pawang* are indispensable; they are called royal *pawang/bomoh*.

These individuals do have a place in contemporary Malay society. As cogently argued by Mohd Taib (1988: 174-175),

“the institution of the *bomoh* is based on supernatural premises with its pattern circumscribed by the indigenous traditional order of the supernatural world on the one hand and the Islamic ideals on the other. The importance of the *bomoh* does not lie only in the function it performs in everyday life, but also in its influence on the world view of Malay culture with regard to causation, nature and cure of sickness. Even with the coming of Islam the supernatural notions had undergone some changes but the underlying supernatural dimension of the institution remain unchanged. Rather Islamic ideas have helped to give new meaning to the institution. Nor does the institution adversely affected by the introduction of western medicine and concept of sickness. Malays see western medicine as alternatives of tackling the same problem. Thus for the western educated Malay in the urban area recourse to the *bomoh*

is all part of *ikhtiar* (resourcefulness)’ especially when western medicines are not immediately effective or in cases of mental illnesses.

MUSEUM COMPETITION, COMPETING HERITAGE

Cosmopolitan Penang provides an example of museum competition and competing heritage in museums. Competition could be confrontational or subtle while diverging views towards the concept of national culture which is Malay based (Mohd. Taib 1988: 272-285) do have an impact on this competition.

The competition is related to the nature of the plural society and the ethnic mix found in Penang that witnessed the emergence of hybrid cultures associated with the Chinese Peranakan, Jawi Peranakan, and the Arab Peranakan. These ‘creoles’ later reidentified themselves as either Chinese or Malays. In 2000 the state’s population was recorded at 1,390,500 with Chinese at 631,000, Malays and other bumiputeras at 605,200 and Indians, 147,200 while others including Eurasians at 6,100 (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia 2005).

The Chinese concentrate in various parts of the island and thriving urban centres of Butterworth and Bukit Mertajam, the majority of Malays are located in Seberang Perai, the non-urban parts of Penang island (Telok Kumbar and Balik Pulau) and sub-urban enclaves like Tanjong Tokong, Kampong Melayu Air Itam and Perak Road while Indians are fairly distributed in Gelugor, Bayan Baru, Tanjong Bunga while on the mainland, Butterworth and estates in south Seberang Perai. The much smaller Sikh population (about 3,000) are evenly distributed within the state, with the two *gurdwaras* (religious house) on the island and Butterworth becoming the focus of Sikh religious and social life. The small Eurasian population is found mainly on the island. Historically they are identified with Pulau Tikus, an up market residential area which is also popular with the Chinese upper-middle class.

Inter ethnic competition is a product of the tenuous minority-majority relationship. It is an extension of political contestation. It manifests also in competing efforts to write (and re-write) Penang history which had attracted considerable interests from many quarters (Muhammad Hj. Salleh 2008; Tan Kim Hong 1987) when crucial aspects of that history are excluded from the national narrative.

From the minority viewpoint myriad contributory factors are identified including an inherent lack of self-confidence brought about by specific

historical experience besides existing unfavorable political and economic conditions vis-à-vis the majority group. The siege mentality also afflicts the majority group as it seeks to hold firmly whatever gains that had been achieved. Despite the political control they had wielded on the state since 1957 Chinese based political parties still have to come to grips with an UMNO dominated federal government and the federal bureaucracy including the Department of Museums and Antiquities which is Malay dominated (as the case of the entire civil service). As a result the foregrounding of both Malay and Chinese culture in the Penang State Museum are evenly divided although for both, the foregrounding is selectively undertaken.

This inter ethnic competition resulted in South Asians accorded little space with the Tamils given prominence over other sub-categories like Sinhalese or Sikhs who were equally significant in Penang and its ethnic potpourri. In fact the last two sub-groups are not foregrounded in the museums although efforts are being made to rectify them.

More subtle but no less significant is the intra ethnic competition. Historically the Straits Chinese or Peranakan were the dominant group within the Chinese community but since the early part of the 20th Century they were eclipsed by newcomers from China. In subsequent years the Chinese Peranakans have become more sinicised and the lines between them became blurred with increasing intermarriages (Sohaimi 2010). Peranakans still dominate museum displays at the Penang State Museum while the Pinang Peranakan Mansion foregrounds their opulent life style before the second world war. The attention is historical, cultural and sentimental but it commoditised Peranakan heritage for the global and domestic tourist market thus ensuring its continued preservation and conservation.

Intra ethnic contestation exists within the Malay categories. The federal constitution had settled the definition of Malays – those born a Malay, habitually speaks the Malay language and belief in Islam. This laid to rest the long running, and at times acrimonious, polemics on what constitute a Malay that had begun in the 1920s. For Penang the Malay Peranakans were a significant group but museum displays have not adequately focus on them. Present day descendants of Peranakans consider such category irrelevant while their identification as Malays is influenced by possible economic and other gains at the price of history, heritage and a colourful past. The newly established Malay Museum (2010) located in Hutton Lane also foregrounds Malay heritage although dissenting voices favour the foregrounding of Jawi Peranakan heritage.

There is much basis on this argument as historically Hutton Lane was once dominated by Jawi Peranakan. To them Hutton Lane was fondly known as Jalan Hatin.

In the Islamic Museum cultural aspects of the Malay-Muslims are accorded much space including the profiles of the community's accepted leaders. These include Haji Abdullah Fahim, Haji Ahmad Badawi, Sheikh Omar Basheer, Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, Ahmad Rashid Talu and Sheik Mohd Tahir Jalaluddin. These names are either Malays or Arab Peranakans. The first two names are closely related to a former prime minister; based on their contributions to the community (Fadhullah 2005) their inclusion may be correct although others see the move patronizing. Both Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi and Ahmad Rashid Talu are well known literary figures. There is difficulty to identify Jawi Peranakan names although many economically successful personalities have emerged in the 20th Century who could be showcased.

There is very little on *wakaf*lands which is a contentious issue within the Malay-Muslim community. In recent years there is considerable polemics on its economic potentials with opinions divided; the grass root wants such developments to benefit the entire Muslim *ummah* not just a few politically connected entrepreneurs. Others were concerned with the plight of those living on *wakaf*lands who would be displaced by such development (Ariffin 2005).

Historically the Indian-Muslims were major contributors to this type of land within George Town. Bequeathed for the benefits of Muslims their existence is a source of much pride to this community although its history is interspersed with corruption and misuse. In old maps of George Town, the area around the Acheen Street mosque was known as Malay Town populated by myriad Malay groups besides Indian-Muslims. This appellation had long disappeared while the Malay-Muslim connection is denoted through the enclave's *wakaf* property which are rented out well below market value to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The enclave also hosts a thriving jewelry industry which is helmed by Indian-Muslims.

Not quite captured by this museum is the history of Malay publishing and press which began at the end of the 19th Century. Its impetus began with English owned presses and later Chinese and Indian printers before Malay printers came to the scene (Jelani Harun 2005). By the early part of the 20th Century well known Malay publishers/printers include the Freeman Press (Acheen Street), Muhamadiyah Press (Hutton Lane), United Press (Dato' Keramat), Persama Press (Acheen Street), Bahtera Press (Acheen Street), Jelutong Press (Jelutong Road), Al-Zainiah Press

(Pitt Street), Percetakan Sahabat (Penang Street) and Al-Huda Press (Dato Keramat) making Penang an important centre for knowledge dissemination in pre-war Malaya and the Nusantara region. Bahtera Press is still located in Acheen Street and publishes religious treatises.

These presses were dominated by both Peranakans and Malays. The prominent names include Pawan Muhammad Syarif bin Abdul Kadir, Dabab bin Haji Muhammad Salleh, Shamsuddin Muhammad Yunus, Haji Sulaiman Rawa, Al-Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, Sheikh Abdullah al-Maghribi and Syed Abdul Rahman al-Habshi. These presses published religious texts, historical texts including the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* and *Al-tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah*, novels including well known ones, magazines and newspapers like *Idaran Zaman* which plays a significant role in the Malay awakening and reformation before 1941. Newspapers and magazines also led to the emergence of individuals who became icons in the Malay publishing world like Al-Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, Rashid Talu, Othman Kalam, Muhammad Yunus Abdul Hamid, Za'ba and Abdul Rahim Kajai. One scholar describes them as “modern thinking editors, open to critical ideas and knowledge and were agents for changing the mind set in Malay society.”

ROYAL MUSEUM/GALLERY AND ROYAL CEREMONIES AND ETIQUETTES

The *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu* describes elaborate royal customs and ceremonies relating to pregnancy (*melenggang perut* or rocking the abdomen during the 7th month), birth (including post partum ceremonies), hair cutting, betrothal, marriage (including henna ceremony and wedding rituals), coronation, funeral and commemoration ceremonies. It describes the rituals involved, participants and myriad paraphernalia used in these ceremonies (Sudjiman 1993: 8-13).

Other accounts (Syed Alwi 1962) discuss various aspects of royal ceremonies including the *nobat*, marriage and coronation of rulers. Ceremonial texts provide much information on various aspects of royal ceremonies including *melenggang perut*, birth, “*Belah Mulut*”, hair cutting, circumcision, enthronement of the raja, ceremonies relating to death and mourning, marriage, court language and royal ceremonies (Jelani Harun 2010). Some of these texts are *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu*, *Adat Istiadat Negeri Terengganu* and *Sejarah Raja-Raja dan Adat Istiadat Negeri Sembilan* besides the unpublished “Peraturan Istiadat

Perkahwinan Diraja Kedah” and “Peraturan Adat Istiadat Pertabalan Sultan Kedah”.

The ceremonial texts provide detail information on the kind of royal ceremonies and etiquettes which are useful for the present discussion. In the *Adat Istiadat Negeri Terengganu* for instance, the ceremonies and etiquettes refer to dispensing of royal honor, royal attendance during the Prophet’s birthday celebration, henna ceremony, *khatam Quran* (completion of reading the Quran), circumcision and ear piercing, royal wedding, water procession, and palace attires (Jelani Harun 2010: 17-18). The *Adat Istiadat di Perlis* relates to coronation, receiving guests, mourning, dispensing of royal honor, and royal musical instruments (Jelani Harun 2010: 31-32).

The *Susunan yang Pertama Adat Lembaga Orang-orang Melayu di dalam Negeri Perak Darul Ridzuan daripada Zaman Purbakala* provides detail on the following: regulations on titles of raja and functions, regulations on administration of the state, dressing and attires, royal audience, seating at the audience hall, royal salutation, royal betrothal, wedding, mourning, coronation, color and signs of royalty, speech and petition to the rulers (Jelani Harun 2010: 21). Jelani is impressed with this text which he claims “a short and compressed manual. All procedures are noted in detail, step by step, the palace officials involved in these ceremonies, the necessary paraphernalia and the specific tasks that have to be undertaken.” In these ceremonies the royal *pawang/bomoh* plays an important role.

By comparison there is not much museumising of royal ceremonies and etiquettes while the available ones lack depth and variety and far short of what is discussed in ceremonial texts. As shown by the Kedah Royal Museum the focus is more on specific rulers, royal memorabilia and royal genealogy.

The Kedah Royal Museum foreground royal wedding and the *nobat*. The Kedah version of royal wedding is steeped in tradition although only the henna leaf picking ceremony is foreground. Equally important are related items like belts, buckles, brooches, and hairpin which are put on display. There is also a bridal chamber with intricate craftsmanship (special decoration of the bridal bed, dressing table, royal changing room and henna ceremony). A diorama of royal wedding foreground the royal couple, bridesmaids, the Bunga Telor, wedding gifts and brass rosewater container.

The 1904 royal weddings involving 5 children of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (2 princes and 3 princesses) is accorded prominence through

pictures of the Penchak Persada (wedding pavilion), gifts from the people, and the bathing pavilion at Istana Pelamin. The celebration was held for 90 days with day and night festivities. All government offices in the vicinity were closed. There were nightly entertainments including gambling while the districts contributed rice, cows, buffaloes and other provisions. The wedding cost 3 million Straits dollars and jeopardized the state's finances forcing Alor Setar to request financial assistance from Bangkok and Kedah subsequently placed under tighter Siamese control. Writers like Wan Yahaya (1928) put the blame squarely on the reigning sultan for the state's predicament.

There are many exhibits from the royal memorabilia including *gobek*, intricately designed *tepak sireh*, betel nut slicer, pendant, brass wares, silverwares and finely designed fruit tray. Sultan Abdul Hamid used to own many *tepak sireh* including those made of wood, silver or brass.

Equally interesting are pictures of Kedah sultans, long spear and long keris from the Sultan Abdul Hamid collection, awards received from abroad including those from Bangkok and presents given by Rama 5 in 1895. Equally impressive is the royal weapon collection which include 3 old shot guns and traditional weapons; these augments the collection located at the Kedah State Museum.

The Kedah Royal Museum does foreground the ruler officially regarded as the best in the lineage. That honour falls on Sultan Abdul Hamid (1882-1943) who is accorded the epithet "father of modern Kedah" although Kedah traditional historiography is divided on this issue. In recent years this epithet had been contested by history students although such debates were never publicized.

Sultan Abdul Hamid is accorded four frames with pictures of him in official attire, traditional costume and during the 1911 visit to London. There is considerable information on his life and visits to foreign lands which include Thailand, Burma, India, Palestine, Singapore, France and England besides the Malay states. Sultan Abdul Hamid was ably assisted by his prime minister Wan Muhammad Saman, raja muda Tunku Mahmood and later Tunku Ibrahim and mufti Haji Suleiman Sidiq. Personal items put on display include tea sets, 2 guns, jewelry box, an ash tray made from buffalo horn, *songkok* and *tepak sireh*. He also received awards from London and Bangkok while a picture of him opening the Wan Muhamad Saman bridge in 1926 and the Zahir mosque in 1915 are on display.

The other interesting aspect foreground is the Kedah royal lineage. In one part of the museum it was claimed this lineage began during the

5th – 6th Century but in the royal lineage section the ancestry began with Mudzaffar Shah (1136-1179), the first Muslim ruler who was styled sultan in a genealogy that had remained unbroken until the present 28th ruler, Sultan Abdul Halim Shah (since 1958). The case of Tunku Dhiauddin is perplexing: he was only styled Raja Muda Kayang (1797-1804) while in the Kedah State Museum he is accepted as the 21th ruler in the lineage. This anomaly is interesting as the same highly respected individual served as consultant for both museums. On the other hand the Kota Kayang Museum took note of Kota Indera Kayangan being the administrative capital of Kedah (and Perlis) between 1798-1804. Implicitly Dhiauddin is accepted as raja.

By comparison the Kelantan Museum of Royal Custom and Etiquette and Istana Lama Bukit Chandan in Kuala Kangsar are much better in their preservation and conservation of royal customs. Beside wedding and betrothal the former focuses on royal ceremonies like *pijak tanah*, *melenggang perut*, *menurun air bayi*, circumcision, bathing ceremony, regal custom including royal wedding attires, and *hantaran*. Each of these are located in separate rooms which faithfully replicate the original customary practices of the Kelantan royalty. The museum also houses the royal textile collection, copper wares and personal items owned by the royal family. The royal textile collection is given exquisite names like *kain limar*, *kain limar songket*, *kain potong punca* and *kain akeh rosak*. Istana Lama Bukit Chandan foregrounds the regalia, *nobat*, royal ceremonies, genealogies and other matters relating to the Perak sultanate which derived its lineage directly from the Melaka rulers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the colonial period museums became intrinsically connected with colonial efforts to impose on the colonised an imagining of the colonial state. New nation states like Malaysia later appropriated these functions for nation building purposes although this is increasingly contested. This nation building aspect is done through selective foregrounding in heritage preservation and conservation based on the dominance of Malay culture which resulted in the marginalisation of the “other”. Even within this dominant ideology (the “self”) the foregrounding is selective with those religiously incorrect suffer exclusion although these are still important in contemporary Malay society.

The contestation led to competing heritage within and among museums. There is now increasing clamour for more diversity in museum representations or as a scholar puts it voices “demanding full representation in any representation of the history of which people are a part” (Harrison 2006: 47). There are also museums devoted to ethnic groups like the Chinese (including Peranakans) in Penang, Melaka and Johor Bahru.

Museum efforts relating to the preservation and conservation of royal ceremonies and etiquettes are palpably inadequate with much space accorded to individual rulers and related memorabilia. Such attention is in line with the national ideology of Rukun Negara (national principles) which accepted the royal institution as a pillar of the nation state; the foregrounding of certain rulers are meant to buttress the royal institution. Many Malays still see the royal institution as crucial component of their very existence, well being and by extension the nation although an increasing number of them see it as anachronistic relics of a discredited feudal past.

These conclusions might be based on a limited number of museums located in the northern region of peninsula Malaysia, all grouped under the Northern Corridor Economic Region but after scrutinizing other museums in Sabah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor and Johor the conclusions are equally valid for other museums and by extension to other parts of the country.

NOTE

¹ The northern region of peninsular Malaysia (Perlis, Kedah, Penang and north Perak) is well endowed with both natural (flora, fauna, geological formations and so forth) and cultural heritage which is a product of man and his interaction with the natural environment. This article focuses only on the region’s diverse cultural heritage. It is funded by a three year (2007-2010) research grant from Universiti Sains Malaysia entitled “Natural and Human Heritage of the northern region of peninsular Malaysia covering Perlis, Kedah, Penang and north Perak”. Different versions of the paper was read in a departmental seminar, the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSK), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in December 2009 and another seminar in May 2010 at the Eastin Hotel, Penang which was organised by the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia. I am grateful to many people for their incisive comments during these seminars especially Professor Dato’ Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, Professor Emeritus Dato Asmah Haji Omar and the enthusiastic FSSK crowd.

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