

## THE ROLE OF SARAWAK MUSEUM IN SUSTAINING THE SARAWAK HERITAGE

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*Date received: 10 October 2023 | Date accepted: 10 November 2023 | Date published: 31 December 2023*

*DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51200/ejk.v29i.2700>*

**ABSTRACT** Cultural and social transformations in the modern era have highlighted the significance of museums in ensuring the survival of our past for future generations. As a non-profit, permanent organization that explores, gathers, maintains, interprets, and shows tangible and intangible legacies, the museum offers different experiences for education, enjoyment, contemplation, and knowledge sharing. This research used a descriptive qualitative approach to show that the Sarawak Museum Department has been effective since 1947 in protecting Sarawak's cultural heritage. The duty of the museum includes activities such as collecting, identifying, recording, conserving, protecting, and preserving the heritage, as well as assuring the transmission of the Sarawak heritage to subsequent generations through educational programming and exhibition.

**Keywords:** Museum, heritage, sustainability, Sarawak.

### INTRODUCTION

Modern shifts in societal and cultural awareness have made it clear that museums are important for the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. As a non-profit, permanent institution at the service of society that researches, collects, preserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage, the museum conveys ethically and professionally and with the participation of communities, offering diverse experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing. Therefore, numerous research has been undertaken on the role of museums in cultural heritage management

(García-Ceballos et al., 2021). enhance museum values (Simon, 2021) visitor experience (Trunfio, 2022), and community participation (Nassanet, 2021).

In Malaysia, museums are strongly associated with nation building, seeking to the project commonly shared experiences of the past, as well as becoming increasing attached to the tourism industry. The museum is classified according to the size of its collection, such as art museum, history museum, natural history museum, and many others. The oldest museum, which is Perak Museum, opened in 1883. Many other museums were established after independence in 1957.

## THE HISTORY OF SARAWAK MUSEUM DEPARTMENT



**Photo 1** Museum Sarawak, old building

*Source:* Sarawak Museum Department

In Sarawak, the State Museum was recorded in 1886, when Sir Charles Brooke established the new Sarawak Museum building and was the only museum in Borneo (*Sarawak Museum Gazette*, 1953). The museum was closed during the whole time of the Japanese occupation and the war years. In 1950 it resumed operations and established its archaeological section to conduct research and conservation of artifacts. Throughout 1950, the museums provided more assistance and support from citizens inside and outside Sarawak

than in the past many years (*Sarawak Museum Gazette*, 1951). The museum was closed during the whole time of the Japanese occupation and the war years. In 1950 it resumed operations and established its archaeological section to conduct research and conservation of artifacts.

An expansion of the Sarawak Museum began in 1954 to provide more extensive facilities for the selection of reference collections, special exhibits, surveys, education, and administration. The project was finished in June 1955 and occupied in 1956. The 15,000 square-foot addition comprises of the new office, research collections and library, storage, air-conditioned workrooms, and scientist-visiting services. For the first time, significant archaeological content collected during the first Borneo excavation during 1949-1953, will be handled (*Sarawak Museum Journal*, 1954).

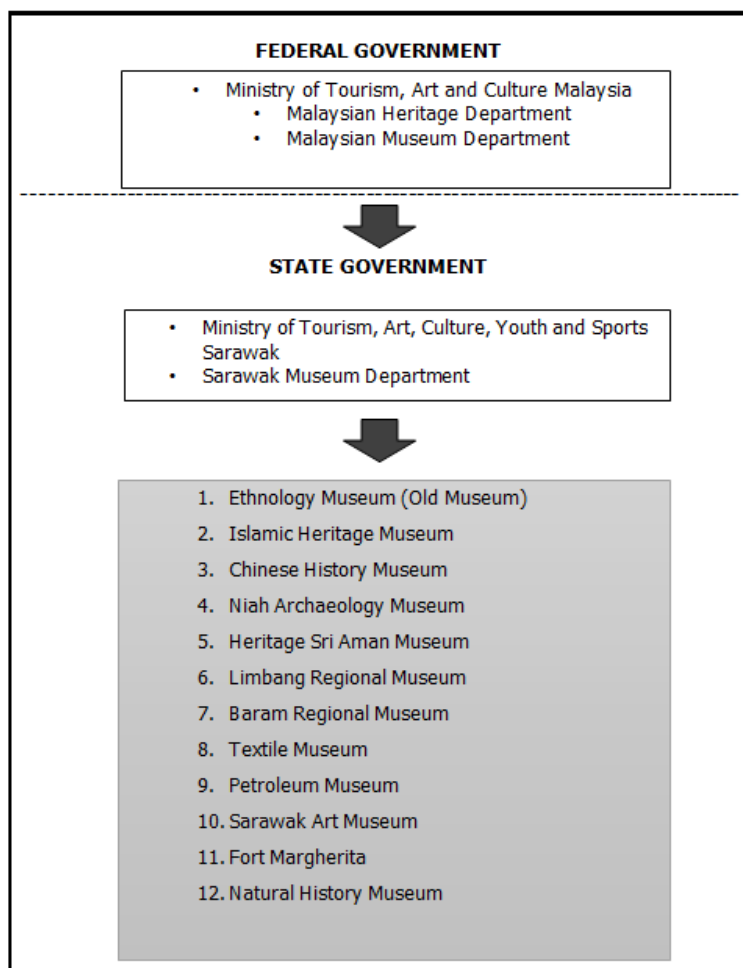
In 1955, when the New Building was opened, ample capacity became available for the first time to routinely archive tens of thousands of archaeological artefacts, display thousands of easily accessible reference books, and provide study facilities for visiting scientists (*Sarawak Annual Report*, 1995). The Old building which housed the main show and displayed in addition to the function of the museum was demolished in 1958 (Harrison, 1959). The Old building which housed the main show and displayed in addition to the function of the museum was demolished in 1958. This Old Building had required a significant renovation for some time during the year the Department of Public Work conducted comprehensive restoration. A new roof was placed on, the two end galleries re-made with air-conditioning and internal lighting, the whole redecorated, among other items. It inevitably required the indoor efforts of a large part of the museum staff over the year. Large-scale reorganization and renovation of the displays in this Old Building are now in the next phase (*Sarawak Annual Report*, 1958). The repositories which are in the New Building have steadily improved the collection on a smaller scale. This old building had to be extensively restored by the Department of Public Work. During the restoration, among other things, a new roof was put on, the two end galleries were redesigned with air-conditioning and interior lighting, the whole thing was new decorated. It inevitably required indoor deployment of the substantial proportion of the museum staff during the year (*Sarawak Annual Report*, 1958).

Now a day, Sarawak Department has successfully constructed the new Sarawak Museum Complex, which includes four levels permanent exhibition. Level one, children’s gallery, which is particularly suitable for museum-based learning in primary school. Level two is art and crafts, with a unique adult education program. Level three is the largest exhibition space in the new museum. Level four involves the creation of human settlements in Sarawak and Borneo. Level five is an art-based or visual exhibition, which focuses on classifying core items including beads, ceramics, basketry, textiles, sculpture, paintings, and metalware.



**Photo 2** The New Sarawak Museum Complex

*Source:* Sarawak Museum Department



**Figure 1** The hierarchy of Sarawak heritage management

*Source:* Sarawak Museum Department

## **HERITAGE PRESERVATION**

As mentioned by Tom Harrisson in 1959, the Sarawak Museum's earliest function is to present exhibits in a way that even the illiterate can enjoy; keep the exhibits fresh so the museum doesn't stagnate; depict the selection and function of the museum as comprehensively as possible; separate select and

rare displays from duplicate research and specimen collections; to motivate people to examine the reference collections while getting outsiders to talk to, educate and interact with local people about their specific challenges; to take a radical and perceptive look at the museum's activities, avoiding complacency or pedantry whenever possible.

When Sarawak gained its independence through the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the Sarawak Museum was standing on a sound footing and enjoyed international recognition as a research institute and an institution of higher learning. The objectives of the museum were then as now, to be interested in everything; and to collect everything-plants, snakes, butterflies, as well as, porcelains, arts and prehistoric artifacts; to presents well selected exhibits and arrange them in a way that even illiterate people from the rural area can enjoy them; to keep changing the exhibits and never let the museum get static or stale; and to explain the collection and museum work, as widely as possible, by giving lectures, and by publishing articles in local publications. The *Sarawak Museum Journal*, published annually, contains articles on a variety of disciplines such as archeology, history, natural and social sciences, including oral traditions, legends, folklores, and other aspects of Sarawak. The journal is distributed world-wide. In addition, occasional papers and pamphlets on tropical and interesting subjects are also published and are cheaply made available to students and tourists.

#### **a. Collecting, Identifying and Documenting**

As a cultural heritage management organization, one of the museum roles in preserving cultural heritage is collecting, identifying, and documenting (Matteo et al., 2021). Heritage collecting is the process of heritage management which leads to the development of repositories that are covered by a separate legal body. There are many different values in cultural heritage: visual, geographical, societal, science, religion, environmental, educational, and much more (Lobato et al., 2020). Historical values mean the cultural heritage reflects the centuries and civilizations that have ended. Educational value places cultural heritage at the centre of both community education and research. Aesthetic qualities, cultural heritage can provide the viewers with aesthetic values, emotional experience, which contributes to

personal growth and development. For contemporary artists, traditional forms, and modern style cultural heritage acts as a creative inspiration. In many countries, economic values, cultural properties containing archaeological sites, landmarks, historical buildings and houses, and archaeological and ethnographic objects for museums-is a significant tourism priority (McKercher & Ho, 2006). As such, regional, national, or international tourism produces jobs and incomes. *Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance 2019* state that antiquity includes: -

- a. Any object, whether movable or immovable or a part of the soil or underwater within the territory of Sarawak, which has been constructed, shaped, painted, carved, inscribed, erected, or otherwise produced or modified by human, non-human agency and which is or is believed to be at least fifty years old.
- b. Any part of any such object referred to in paragraph (a) which has been excavated, modified, added to, reconstructed, or restored, which have documented history or records and are one hundred years old or more;
- (c) any human, plant or animal remains or impressions which is or is believed to be at least one hundred years old; and
- c. any other object which in the opinion of the Director is of outstanding historic, artistic, cultural or traditional interest or value and ought to be preserved as a heritage of the people. Any discovery of an object or a monument for which there is reason to believe it is an antiquity must be notified immediately by the finder to the authorities. The finder is required to act to protect the integrity of the site of the discovery and if the discovery is an object, may require it to be delivered to the authorities. Any person who, being the finder of an antiquity, fails to report the antiquity, or to take action to protect it, or to state the circumstances of the discovery of the origin of the antiquity, or willfully makes a false statement of such circumstances or such origin, shall be guilty of an offence and shall, upon conviction, be punished with a fine not exceeding twenty thousand ringgit or imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to both. Any person wishing to sell or otherwise dispose of an antiquity shall give notice of the proposed transaction to the Director or, if such person is a native of Sarawak, to a District Officer, who shall forthwith inform the Director.

Over the years the Sarawak Museum was able to increase the number of its ethnographic, archeological, and natural history collection tremendously, more and more categories of collection ranging from seashell to teak-wood furniture were donated to the museum for exhibition and display while some were given because the means of keeping such heirloom takes too many efforts and space for storage.

**Table 1** Sarawak Museum collection

No.	COLLECTION	AMOUNT
1	History and Reference	20,920
2	Archive Photos	59,790
3	Ethnology	217,66
4	Archaeology	250,000
5	Zoology	108,167
6	Islamic Heritage	730

Source: Sarawak Museum Department

Conservation of artefacts is the next step before they are stored. Identity has been taken up with great enthusiasm by archaeologists, and scholars have explored the topic in a variety of documentation is a complicated process and includes a spacious suite of activities that include surveying, testing, and monitoring and gathering textual and other information. photogrammetry is called upon to offer its services at a variety of levels and in all combinations of object complexities, scientific procedures, quality requirements, usage of final products, time restrictions and budget limitation documentation are both the product and action of meeting the information needs of heritage management. It makes available a range of tangible and intangible resources, such as metric, narrative, a thematic and societal record of cultural heritage. It is a continuous process enabling the monitoring, maintenance, and understanding needed for conservation by the supply of appropriate and timely information (Bedford & Papworth, 2013).

Documentation of cultural heritage is experiencing an explosion of innovation. Over recent decades, new tools have developed including laser scanning, rapid prototyping, high dynamic range spherical and infrared imaging, drone mapping, and multi-dimensional virtual reality and device



rendering (Merriman, 2008). They give us visions and data that are at once seductive, intriguing, and even sometimes deceptive. Their implementations are in learning, research, risk assessment, forecasting, and designing the conservation. The past generation only had the film camera, notebook and pencil, tape measures and slide rules—now we are holding devices in our pockets and laptops (Jones, 2018).

Museum artefact management uses Angkasa Collection Management System, which is a robust system for tracking and maintaining objects within a museum. It collects details and photographs of collections under the care of a museum, improves efficiency in the administration, monitoring and recording of collections, gathers and consolidates information for decision-making by management and offers versatile means of obtaining information from specific user groups (Jones, 2018). Under this programme, the modules available include registration of institutions and individuals, accession of artefacts, cataloguing of products, registry of items, description of pieces, details on purchases, sources and background of objects, valuation and protection, loan and display, restoration and care, regular questions, and records (Murillo de la Cueva & Cabrera, 2021). Sarawak Information System (SAINS) was controlling the collections management system. RM382, 908 has been allocated for the documentation initiative since 2001, while RM 29,000 was allocated annually from 2014 until 2017.

#### **b. Protection, Preservation and Conservation**

Concepts such as conservation, preservation and conservation are related to actions taken to conserve cultural heritage. Constitutional, procedural processes have regulated the preservation of heritage artefacts, and positive public opinion is essential for good security. The protection of this heritage cannot be based solely on the use of geological techniques. It needs a broader context for knowledge and skills in technical and scientific matters (Pluszyńska, 2020).

In the case of archaeological sites, Sarawak Museum Department using historical documents and analysis to monitor the current conditions of the archaeological site. For further research, several international charters

accept that each historical information from a location should be preserved in-situ and held in a public archive (Colwell, 2016). Each stage of the work, including clearance, consolidation, rearrangement, and integration as well as the technical and formal characteristics found during the work, should be reported and registered accurately. Many foreign charters, regulations, and treaties generally emphasize the protection of an original state as a documented type of historical status based on historical research and cultural value, before and after discovery or inquiry. The importance of a platform should be described based on research and study, and a framework should be agreed on to direct specific initiatives (Manfriani et al., 2021).

However, in restoration of buildings and monuments, conservative appointments are rendered before work is done on conservation. For this appointment, the Public Works Department and the Sarawak Museum Department have issued a letter to the Sarawak Financial Secretary's Office authorizing the selection of the Consultant. A comprehensive analysis was then carried out by a contractor or inspector to determine the context of the building and the location, which included the architecture, the past, the importance of the building and the current condition. Proposal for conservation work is required to set the framework of conservation work includes study shortcomings, measurable models, inventories of components, treatment methods, conservation solutions and guidelines, scientific and laboratory experiments (Calafat, 2021).

While pre-conservation studies are for the documentation of building materials; consequently, by suitable photography and video technologies, the exploration of methods and techniques that represent the existing building architecture, scale, and physical condition. Reports during conservation work are designed to document conservation work as the project goes on. Provided with appropriate photography and video methods and monthly records, the job processes and documentation during the construction conditions are two things that need to be highlighted. Documentation during conservation work records the entire building structure once the conservation work is complete, including the parts involved in improvements such as extensions and replacements. The recording work can be done using compatible imaging and video techniques. Once all the conservation work and related matters have

been done, the actual conservation study takes the last place. It is planned to collect all the information about the project and all the conservation work involved during the project (Shekhar et al., 2019).

The restoration and conservation of monuments must use all the disciplines and technologies that can lead to the research and protection of the architectural resources for monument or renovation. The aim to protect and rebuild monuments is to maintain them as works of art no less than as historical evidence. It is essential for the protection of the monuments that they are permanently preserved. Monument restoration is always encouraged by allowing the use of them for some useful social intention. Therefore, such use is acceptable, but it must not alter the building's architecture or appearance. Only within such constraints can and may be required modifications requested by a change of feature be envisaged. Conserving a monument requires maintaining an environment that is not out of proportion. It must be preserved wherever the conventional environment remains. No new construction, renovation or alteration that would modify mass and colour relations shall be allowed (Ankersmit et al., 2021).

The process of artefact conservation in Sarawak begins with identifying artefacts. Once they are identified as valuable artifacts, then the process of analyzing the artifacts is done. Artifact analysis also needs to use scientific methods and systematically performed. This is to determine the most appropriate conservation method for the artifact. It should be noted that each artifact has a different method during the conservation process. After that, the process of recording the artifacts was done. The artifacts are then stored, and conservation reports are provided for reference purposes (D'Agostino et al., 2015).

### **c. Exhibition and Transmission to Future Generations**

The section of the exhibition aims to install exhibits in galleries and museums ranging from permanent and temporary shows, and to guarantee the displays, images, signs, and gallery captions are in good condition and up to date (Chhabra, 2010). Presenting the archaeological legacy to the public is a compelling way of fostering an understanding of modern societies' history

and advancement. It is also the most effective way of fostering an awareness of the need to preserve it. Presentation and facts should be viewed as a mutual understanding of the current state of knowledge; hence, it should be periodically updated (Jurado-Rivas & Sánchez-Rivero, 2019). It should consider a previous perception of the multifaceted methods. The exhibition of archaeological sites to the public, widely considered, involves a large and confounding series of interactions between a cacophony of visitors, each with its hugely different needs, and an almost cacophonous range of archaeological backgrounds, each with its problems and challenges.

Educational services sometimes are typically an integral part of the administrative role of the museum from a policy point of view, and always in serving its sense of purpose. Consequently, the partnership between the museum and universities, colleges, and schools at all levels is another significant aspect of its institutional background, which needs adroit management. The museum could be an excellent location for informal learning, while educational institutions usually provide the best environment for formal education. There is a long-standing network of museum educators who have given a great deal of support to museum and heritage educators, both nationally via their annual conference, publication, email conversation list and regional workshop (García-Almeida, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

The Sarawak Museum plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage by carrying out the following tasks in a three-step process: collecting, identifying, and documenting artifacts; protecting, preserving, and conserving; to exhibit this knowledge and pass it on to the next generation. Heritage management is a practice carried out methodically and in accordance with established processes. In addition, Sarawak is equipped with Standard Operating Procedures that can serve as a reference for cultural resource conservation. This is something to be proud of, especially considering Sarawak's rich cultural heritage. In this way, the form of cultural heritage management is maintained together with the many partners involved.

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