

UNDERSTANDING ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE NARRATIVES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY OF LENGGONG VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which local community understand and value archeological heritage, focusing on the perspectives of the Lenggong Valley World Heritage site community. The communication and interpretation of archaeological heritage mostly emphasizes the expert's rather than the community's perspective. This research investigates the narratives of the Lenggong Valley community as the medium of communicating the sociological aspects of archaeological heritage. This paper presents the preliminary report on the different forms of narratives that were used by the local community when they were approached to explain their understanding of the Lenggong Valley World Heritage Sites. Semi structured interviews were conducted with thirty local community individuals of various age groups, gender and community roles. The respondents are chosen to provide the layperson's perspectives in understanding archaeological. Interpretive thematic analysis is utilized to understand the responses and to map the narratives. The findings reveal four key forms of narratives that are commonly used by the local community in communicating their interpretation of heritage, namely meta-stories, folktales, myths and legends. The narratives serve to define meanings and values of archaeological heritage to the community and contribute to their sense of community as its help to define relationship with natural environment, making sense of world around them and give insights into local history and beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

Developing an in-depth understanding of prehistoric archaeological heritage has always been a struggle due to the challenge in connecting such a distant past to the present. Communication on archaeological heritage, largely coming from heritage professionals, such as archaeologists and state sanctioned bodies, tend to be technical, emphasizing on

the archaeological and scientific significances that are hard to relate to by the uninitiated. The discourses of these heritage professionals, with their particular narratives, meanings and assumptions also dominate national and international debates about the nature, value and meaning of archaeological heritage (Smith 2006).

Another side to archaeological heritage that has been largely overlooked is the sociological aspects of heritage that promises greater insights on the significance of the archaeological heritage to people in a particular society. The sociological insights relate to how the local community's understand the meaning and value of heritage. The archaeological heritage site's meaning and values may change over time as the understanding of its history develops in line with the changing needs and context of the community. Some researchers have begun to develop the concept of collaborative practices in communicating heritage by placing an emphasis on the importance of consultation with communities (Lynott and Lilley, 2000), highlighting on the social, emotional and intellectual connections that they have with heritage. Cornell (1997) insists on local participation to allow the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the learning process in the service of people's self-development.

The involvement of local communities in the communication of heritage and archaeology ensures the survival of social values of archaeological heritage sites. It has also been argued that the sharing of local heritage, customs and cultural values that are integrated within a local community would contribute towards a greater sense of place (McArthur and Hall, 1996). Therefore, the sharing of knowledge must not only emerge from a dominant group but also from the community that belongs to the place. Ballart (1997) argued that the dominant ideology of experts ignores the social contemporary interpretations of heritage and archaeological heritage which requires a group of people to recognize something as their own. Only then does the concept of heritage come into play as a social value. A valuable source in understanding the sociological aspects of archaeological heritage is the narratives of the local community. The way archaeological heritage is being narrated from one to another in a community reflects the locals understanding of it.

Local's participation and collaboration in providing social interpretations is significant so that archaeological heritage from the past could be linked to the society that inherits it at present. The sharing of knowledge must not only emerge from a dominant group but also from lays (locals) that belong to the place. This will encourage the local community to be actively involved in the development of WHS. Additionally, values that are linked to the local customs and culture would contribute towards a greater sense of community, defined as a feeling of closely connected to a place (McArthur and Hall, 1996).

This research focuses on the narratives of the Lenggong Valley community as the medium of communicating the sociological aspects of the archaeological heritage. The Lenggong Valley was announced as UNESCO's world heritage site in 2012, and since then has experienced a steady rise of visits from both local and international tourists. As it is customary at other world heritage sites, the narratives of the archaeologists dominate the communication of heritage and archaeological heritage in Lenggong

Valley. Echoing at the back of these narratives are narratives of the local community featuring interpretations that are not necessarily included in the authorized narratives.

As such, the focus of this research is on exploring the narration of archaeological heritage among the local community in the Lenggong Valley World Heritage Sites (LVWHS) to understand heritage and archaeology from their perspective. This paper presents the preliminary report on the different forms of narratives that were discovered when the local community was approached to explain their understanding of the Lenggong Valley World Heritage Sites.

NARRATIVES IN COMMUNICATING HERITAGE

The present approach in communicating archaeological heritage at WHS such as the LVWHS tends to muffle the local communities perspectives in understanding the sociological significance of archaeology. Archaeological heritage narratives at WHS tend to revolve around the Authorized Heritage Discourse or AHD Smith (2006), a discourse by heritage professionals and policy elite with particular narratives, meanings and assumptions that tend to dominate national and international debates about the nature, value and meaning of archaeological heritage. Interpretations of archaeologists may not be parallel to local community's interpretation. Exploring local archaeological heritage narratives may help to highlight the sociological perspectives of the past at archaeological heritage sites and allows the attachment of a more comprehensive understanding of the site. The kind of folklores that relate to the sites provide further insights into how the past is experienced, negotiated and understood in the present. The voices of the local community would provide multi-dimensional perspectives on the meanings and values of heritage and archaeological heritage in making the past relevant to the present.

Local community's narrations serve as the source of stories that reflect how the community understand archaeological heritage and the social significance of these heritage. For example, meta stories of archaeology are defined as stories of archaeology in which contemporary audiences (e.g. local community and tourists) themselves are envisioned as characters engulfed in a plot about archaeology or the past that gives meaning and perspective to their present day live (Holtorf, 2010). Meta stories connect archaeological findings from the past with matters of considerable social significance in the present day. On the regional and sometimes local level, archaeological stories are used to express a sense of collective belonging. Similarly, members of a given social class or members of a certain family may express who they are by telling collective stories about the past. That creates a plot in which they locate themselves as characters.

In this research, local community's narrations are viewed as way for the local community to communicate to external parties such as archaeologists and tourists. Local community is the focus of the research and narratives that are collected from them would be used to understand better ways in communicating archaeological heritage to the layperson.

One important implication of this approach is that, if archaeological heritage is understood as a representative of multiple meanings and values, then it proposed that

the local community is provided the opportunity to communicate and relate to heritage and archaeology in unique ways. By exploring the range of possible meanings and values that archaeological heritage may represent for the people, this research will contribute towards integrating the knowledge of the local community into the archaeological heritage discourse. Archaeological heritage narratives of the local community will help us to understand and appreciate the community's meanings, values and interpretations of heritage and archaeological heritage.

Paying attention to the community's narration of archaeological heritage gives access to the considerable amount of local knowledge concerning archaeological sites. The involvement of local communities in the communication of heritage and archaeology ensures the survival of the social values of archaeological heritage sites. Cornell (1997), defines local participation as insistence on the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the learning process in the service of people's self-development. When defining archaeological heritage many scholars and politicians, as well as the general public, perceive the archaeological record or archaeological remains (sites, objects, etc.) as heritage, recognizing only the scientific values.

In brief, the perspectives of the local community at a WHS at Lenggong Valley need much emphasis. This is because, those who are involved in heritage communication are enmeshed in the power relations among authorized parties such as archaeologists, NGO's and other state sanctioned agencies or international bodies like UNESCO. If local's voices are overshadowed by these dominant authorities, it may lead to the lack of local community's participation in ensuring the sustainability of the archaeological heritage.

This research underscores the importance of local community as key stakeholders because the archaeological heritage belongs as much to them as it is to the world. Hence, this study seeks to explore some of the complexities of communicating archaeological heritage by focusing on the ways in which people understand and value archaeological heritage and the meanings it represents for them and their lives. In addition to the scientific facts, heritage should be about shared past, history, experiences and practices, about the stories that a community tells about itself.

LENGGONG VALLEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Lenggong Valley, Perak was carved on the archaeological world map when it was announced as the UNESCO world heritage site in 2012. It is a small town situated in the north of Perak, Malaysia. It holds clues to the origin of mankind, and has been recognized as one of the most important paleontological sites in the world. Research by the Archaeological Research Centre of USM indicates that the site is one of the oldest prehistoric human settlements in the world. Unique elements which contribute to Lenggong Valley being recognised by UNESCO as a WHS include the presence of an undisturbed Palaeolithic stone tool workshop, the discovery of the australomelanesoid 'Perak Man' in 1991, and a number of caves showing evidence of prehistoric burials. Lenggong Valley is also a prominent tourist site due to its beautiful natural landscape. The valley is surrounded by the *Titiwangsa* ranges and *Bintang* ranges, with rich flora

and fauna that offer one of a kind experience to visitors. There are many caves with recreational and historical values to be explored in Lenggong. In addition to its geological wonders, the valley also offers numerous local delicacies that have become one of the major attractions to the local tourists.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Semi structured interviews were conducted with thirty local community individuals of various age groups, gender and community roles. The respondents are chosen to provide the layperson's perspectives in understanding of archaeological heritage narratives. Interpretive thematic analysis is utilized to understand the responses and to map the narratives.

FINDINGS

In exploring the essence of archaeological heritage narratives in Lenggong, local community was inquired on how they share meanings and values about archaeological heritage among local community and others through narratives. The following are the types of narratives that were used to communicate the meanings and values of archaeological heritage.

Meta stories

Meta stories are recounting of a sequence of events that relates to one's life. These stories could be in the form of a family story, an ancestral story, a cultural or religious story, a story of a place and a story of a particular time. Meta stories are linked to one's meaning and purpose in life and set directions for actions. Telling meta-stories bring reality to people's lives. Meta-stories also help in connecting with thoughts and feelings of people from the past.

The meta archaeological stories from the local community indicate that they believe they are the predecessors to the Perak Man, whom they believe was among the first human to live in Perak. Artefacts in Lenggong remind the community that they are part of the Perak Man lineage, and hence the artefacts are highly valued as their connections to their past. Their reflections on the stories of Perak Man puts them in a nostalgic frame of mind in which the past is admired for something now lost or no longer there to celebrate. Their visits to the past in the form of meta-stories provide them perspectives that redefine their present way of life such as the food they eat, the traditions and customs that they uphold, their language and the myths and folktales that they tell.

Participants in this study link the archaeological heritage to their current tradition, culture and beliefs and thus as they tell the stories, they are actually giving fresh insights to the stories. A participant explained that the community narrate stories in order to protect their heritage or sites that belong to the local community. These meta-stories summarize the parts and parcels of Lenggong community's life.

Folklores

Folklores are important in gaining different forms of truths. Folklores are mostly linked to historical evidences. It has been explained that folklores an active and creative aspects of tradition. The findings in this study highlights the creative ways that the elders try to make meaning of the archaeological heritage. Folklores in Lenggong include elements of way of life of a group of people that are creatively expressed through folk songs and tales. Folklores in Lenggong also consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that highlight the traditions of a local culture. Local rituals like supernatural practices can sometimes be considered folklore, whether formalized in a cultural or religious system like weddings. According to senior citizens in Lenggong, Malay historical texts are rich in mythical and legendary stories with superficial aspect. In Lenggong valley, the folklores reflect the collective experiences of the community and mirror the challenges that the community constantly faces.

The finding reveals three main folklores that are prominent in Lenggong, namely local folktales, myths and legends. These folklores present insights into the local history, beliefs and the relationship between man and his natural environment, and how the Lenggong locals feel about the place. Folktale is an old story that reveals customs of a culture. The findings of this research indicate that folktales embody the popular attitudes, beliefs, customs, traditions, and values of the local community. Folktales in Lenggong provide order to seemingly random experiences, as well as express one's culture's belief system. By expressing ideas and past tales of culture and beliefs of traditional Malays and *Pattanis*, the folktales spread awareness on the importance of retaining and preserving the local heritage.

The Lenggong's folktales fairytale-like stories, stories involving talking animals and ghost stories. These stories give us a glimpse into morals, values and lifestyle of the local community in Lenggong. Tales of Bukit Bunuh (Murder hill), originally know as Bukit Pembunuh, is popular among local community. The folktale of Bukit Bunuh tells a story in which a husband and wife murder each other in the quest for gaining wealth. This folktale is shared and retold over and over to both the local community and those visiting, including the archaeologist. The re-telling of stories such as this can be viewed as the local community way of preserving their precious old traditions and beliefs. The folktales also reinforce social bond between elders and children, and connect individuals in the community.

Myths

In Lenggong, myths provide vital insights into their identity as locals of the place. Myths are traditional, typically ancient stories dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in worldview of a people as by explaining aspects of natural world. However in Lenggong, these legends and myths provide vital insights into local history and beliefs. The Lenggong community seem to take myths as real, that is they belief the mystical aspects of the myth as historical events that had actually took place in the past. Many talked about the rock formations inside caves, purported to be the petrified humans and animals that have been cursed by a mythical force. A village called *Kampung Geluk* in Lenggong was said to owe its name to a gold vessel (Geluk) that appeared nearby the river of the village. Another

myth that are popular among the local community was about a princess that has been cursed into a stone that can now be visited at a local cave; another is about a big rock that was thrown from Kelantan (a state located far East to Lenggong) which led to the formation of small lake in the area.

Ancient stories such as myths are often meant to explain the mysteries of life or nature. Myths are where they narrate about mythical beings of the place. In the case of Lenggong, the purpose of myth is to account for origins of something. They explain aspects of natural world; delineate the psychology, customs or ideals of a society. Many places in Lenggong have legends and myths behind their names.

Legend

A legend, on the other hand is a story which is told as if it was a historical event rather than as an explanation for something or a symbolic narrative. In the context of Lenggong, a legend is a traditional tale handed down from earlier times which believed to have a historical basis. Legend may be transmitted orally, passed on person-to-person, or, in original sense and through written text. Legend is story about personality and supremacy of historical figures in Malay history. As described by Yusoff Iskandar (1986) that legends are slightly different from myth. Findings demonstrate that legendary stories of Lenggong share historical characteristics in sense they are less fantasy. In Lenggong, legends are passed down from a person to person orally. In the case of the Gua Puteri, there are no archaeological findings at the cave but the cave is famous for its legends. Two rock formations are said to be the guardians (prince and princess) of the caves. According to participants, local community used to visit the cave to request for wedding paraphernalia such as pots and pans; the items would magically appear the next day. Local legends in Lenggong help people to define their relationship with their natural environment. Their belief in stories of demons and spirits help them maintain a sense of awe and respect for natural environment while restraining them from destroying them.

CONCLUSION

These narratives found in the study serve to define meanings and values of archaeological heritage to the community and contribute to their sense of community as it helps to define relationship with natural environment, making sense of world around them and give insights into local history and beliefs.

The participants expressed that communicating archaeological heritage from their perspectives in addition to those of the archaeological experts is beneficial as it helps the lay person to better understand how the heritage is implicated in the life of the local community. They believe that their stories should be included in future interpretation of archaeological sites. For them narratives that highlights social perspectives reflect personal experiences.

The participants also highlight the significance of connection social experience with social objects and social surroundings. Social experiences that carry archaeological heritage values strike much resonance with local community. For locals, to describe archaeological findings as social object, they need them to be linked to social experiences that are personally relevant to locals.

This research contributes to the understanding of heritage and archaeological heritage and its multiple meanings and values from the local community's perspective. The research has also emphasized the local's standpoint by emphasizing the local's knowledge in communicating heritage, in ways that are different from the authorized narratives. Artefacts are interpreted in different ways by academics and non-academics but both make the past, in their own way, meaningful in the present.

The findings also reveal the forms of narratives that are used by locals in communicating heritage and archaeological heritage. Archaeological heritage narratives serve as tool for locals to communicate their interpretations of heritage in a unique way. Findings of this research emphasize on the importance of personal understandings of heritage and archaeological heritage and the ways they influence heritage interpretations. There is much scope to build on these findings by exploring how personal understandings of heritage shape the interpretation of heritage. Given largely homogenous sample within this study, there is a need to explore how heritage and archaeological heritage is understood and valued within and across different cultural groups. It is hoped that these findings will encourage future research to place emphasis on developing archaeological heritage interpretation from a sociological perspective.

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