

Preserving Malaysia's Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is not only unique country with a multicultural diversity but also has a rich and numerous culture and heritage treasures. Therefore, as technology growth across world, many cultural heritages might become missing without any effective efforts in preservation and conservation of the culture and heritage. Within this scenario, the qualitative study was conducted through documents review, a field observation followed by a face-to-face interview with corresponding respondents to empirically ascertain the narrative history and uniqueness of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* which further propose an alternative approach in preserving *Gasing Leper Terengganu*'s heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Gasing, Intangible Cultural Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Cultural Heritage is something that is very valuable in displaying identity. Today, cultural heritage is essentially linked to the most vital challenges that humanity faces as a whole which range from climate change and natural disasters (such as loss of biodiversity or access to safe water and food), to conflicts between communities, education, health, migration, urbanization, marginalization or economic inequalities. And for that reason, cultural heritage is considered essential for promoting sustainable society, environmental and economic development (Imperiale, Fasiello and Adamo, 2021).

The importance of heritage preservation and conservation for sustainable socio economic development has amplified in Malaysia over the past few years. When looking at the importance of heritage for culture and development, the state of Terengganu in Malaysia is endowed with a variety of traditional arts, culture and invaluable heritage. Among the cultural heritage remains the traditional games that are part of the life of the previous community. Although some traditional games are no longer as popular as they used to be, they are still played in rural areas involving various age groups.

The *Gasing Leper Terengganu* is one of the art heritages that have the potential to be recovered. It was a community activity of the past to satisfy their leisure time. In addition, this game of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* also measures the level of skill and speed of a person in dealing with a situation. However, as technological advances, the traditional culture of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* have been threatened by the young generation. Thus the study on *Gasing Leper Terengganu* aims to empirically ascertain the chronicle and uniqueness of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* which futher propose a way to preserving *Gasing Leper Terengganu*'s heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Heritage: A Brief Definition

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009), there are different types of heritage based on UNESCO’s definition which are Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Different Types of Heritage

Cultural Heritage is further divided into tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Christoph Brumann, 2015). Specifically, Intangible Cultural Heritage generally refers to subjective aspect such as tradition, ethnic groups rituals, nations, and the international community. In other words, Tangible cultural heritage can be seen in many forms including buildings, sites areas, food, dress, and handicrafts. Besides, Natural Heritage is definable as locations or areas of land (might include national parks, marine protected areas, other reserves, botanic gardens and private conservancies, significant fauna and flora habitats, and geological sites) and sea that can be formally recognized for conservation purposes as heritage values by applying specific assessment criteria (N M Suaib et al, 2020).

Below is some of the examples of cultural and natural heritage in Malaysia those recognized in the UNESCO World Heritage list (Table 1).

Table 1. The examples of cultural, natural and indigenous heritage in Malaysia

Categories / Types		Examples
Cultural Heritage	Tangible cultural heritage	<i>Historic Cities of Straits of Malacca Archaeological Heritage of the Lenggong Valley, Perak</i>
	Intangible Cultural Heritage	<i>Mak Yong</i> <i>Gasing</i>
Natural Heritage	Sites (natural)	<i>Taman Negara (National Forest – Peninsular Malaysia)</i> <i>Kinabalu National Park, Sabah</i>
	Objects	<i>Tengkolok Diraja (Royal headgear),</i> <i>Perahu Kemajuan (boat)</i>
	Geopark	<i>Langkawi Geopark, Kedah</i>

The Heritage: A Values

Both Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage moreover provides different values including historical, informational, aesthetic and economic.

Table 2. The Cultural Heritage Values

Values	Brief Explanation
Historical	Can provide value
Informational	Can provide public education and the greatest informational value for scholarly research
Aesthetic	Can provide emotional experience and serve as a creative inspiration for the viewer
Economic	Can generates employment and revenue by local, national, or international

The Heritage: Research Done in Preserving Malaysian Cultural Heritage

Based on the literatures review, there are a numbers of efforts done by various researchers related to cultural heritage preservation in Malaysia reported that were mostly centred around tangible cultural heritage. Among those, study on the conservation and preservation of *Wayang Kulit* is the most popular study done toward those efforts. In particular, there are a study on the visual styles of the *Wayang Kulit* Kelantan (Khor, K.-K. and Y.M. Chan, 2009), design and development of interactive virtual *Wayang Kulit* (Talib, A.Z., et al., 2012), *Wayang Kulit* preservation using multimedia technology (Dahlan Abdul, G., 2011) into an interactive game (Ghani, D.B.A., 2015) and emulating the visuals of *Wayang Kulit* with Computer Generated Imaginary (Khor, K.-K., 2018).

Other than *Wayang Kulit* research, studies on the food heritage through food identity and based on age of public perceptions were also done to preserve local food heritage and identity (Md Ramli, A., et al., 2016, 2020). Beside, preserving an iconic heritage buildings through virtual reconstruction (Esmaili, H., P.C. Woods, and H. Thwaites, 2015), digital preservation of Rumah Tok Su – a traditional Malay house in Kedah (Ibrahim, N. and K.A. Azmi, 2013) and 3D model of Teratak Zaaba- traditional Malay house (Ibrahim, N., et al., 2009). A part of that, a study on virtual preservation of panoramic Kota Kuala Kedah (Jabbar and Jusof, 2014) and digitising facial expressions for preservation of a Malay folkdance called Mak Yong (Idris and Musa, 2020) are among efforts done in using computer graphics and media technology in preservation of cultural heritage.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was conducted through documents review (secondary data), field observation and face-to-face interview with respondents (primary data). Library research was conducted to analyse the contents of selected articles comprising journal articles, books, book chapters, and newspaper clippings. The literature review referred to this study considered three main keywords namely heritage, culture and preservation. The relevance of all keywords is linkage to the importance of physical attributes as well as issues and problems related to the cultural heritage preservation.

The sites

The inventory data collected by the field observation and face to face interview taken in the sites studies focused on selected traditional villages, Kuala Nerus District in Terengganu, Malaysia. All information's and identities of respondents was kept confidential and only be disclosed with their consent. In general, the presence of traditional villages around the city of Kuala Terengganu conveys the socio-cultural identities of genuine Malay communities.

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

History of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*

The word *Gasing* comes from two words, ‘*Gah*’ and ‘*Berpusing*,’ which means to turn swiftly and upright. Some say the word *gasing* is derived from the syllables ‘*Ka*’ and ‘*Sing*.’ ‘*Ka*’ is an abbreviation of wood, while ‘*sing*’ is an abbreviation for a twist following its twisting nature (Informasi Kraf Malaysia, 2013). Historically, *gasing* was originated made from a game that used a fruit from *Berembang* tree. This tree species is easily found in river areas and areas that are constantly flooded by the tide at all times. Along with the changes in time, the manufacturing of modern *gasing* has been developed using various types of wood, such as *Meranti*, *Cengal Merbau*, and *Keranji*. However, it still maintains the shape of the *Berembang* fruit, which is round, flat, and axial. And the *Gasing Leper Terengganu* was introduced around 1890s by the late Che Hussin Zainal, a carpenter and also a farmer. His carpentry skills allowed him to be inspired to create *gasing* according to his creativity.



Figure 2: Fruit of *Berembang* tree

The *gasing* has three main parts which are the head, body and stern of the *gasing*. There is a slight depression at the bottom of the *gasing* head and this part is called the *gasing* neck. Its purpose is to wrap the *gasing* rope. The axis is placed at the stern of the *gasing* to maintain the balance of the *gasing* ‘s rotation on the floor. The diagram of the basic structure for *gasing Leper Terengganu* as presented in Figure 3.

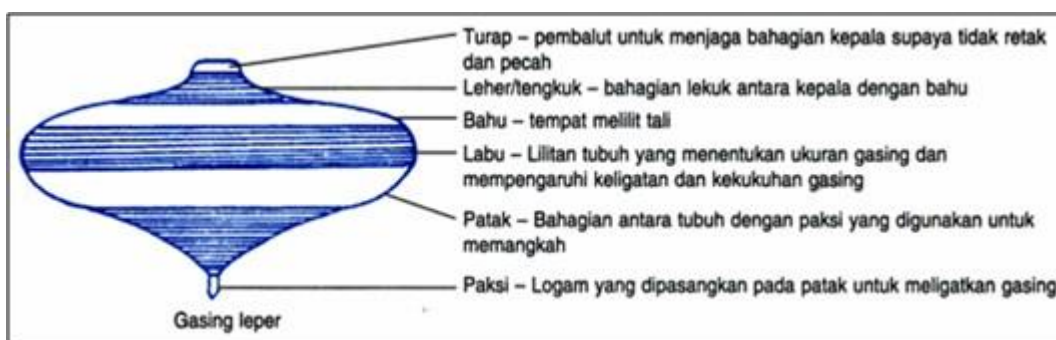


Figure 3: Diagram of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*

The Uniqueness of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*

The traditional game of *Gasing Leper* Terengganu is one of the unique local art heritage. Its uniqueness commenced from the manufacturing process that combines traditional and modern elements in a production and also the way of playing it. In particular, the size of the *Gasing Leper* is quite large (almost 8kg) compared to others which about 20 inches in circumference, round and flat. Further, the Penaga wood is most common wood be used to make *Gasing Leper* as the wood has a quality of hardness and different durability from other woods. A rope using wood bark that be twisted by hand is needed in order to playing the *Gasing Leper* (Figure 4).



Figure 4: The process of making a rope using wood bark twisted by hand.

The process of making ropes used wood bark for the *Gasing Leper* is also in contrast to other which commonly used nylon fabric straps. Moreover, the Nisan Kerek was used to ensure that the *Gasing Leper* rope is sticky and easy to grip the top body of *Gasing Leper*, which is one of the unusual elements that notbe used by other (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Tools used in the *Gasing Leper* game.

Another uniqueness of *Gasing Leper* is the way it is be played although it looks similar to other especially

after rotated. Firstly, the player needs to release the *Gasing Leper* from the rope and make sure the *Gasing Leper* spinning. Then, the palyer will scooped the *Gasing Leper* using a " *kayu penyokak*" (Figure 6) and placed *Gasing Leper* on a glass plate. When the *Gasing Leper* spins on the glass, the " *Tukang Bela*" will ensures that the *Gasing Leper* continues to rotate. The player of *Gasing Leper* methods commoly put cooking oil or lubricating oil on the surface of the plate in ensuring the *Gasing Leper* spinning longer (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Gasing Leper is scooped using a " *kayu penyokak*" before being placed on a glass plate.



Figure 7: " *Tukang Bela*" puts cooking oil or lubricating oil on the surface of the plate to ensure that the top continues to rotate.

There are also several terms used for equipment, courts, and games of Gasing Leper Terengganu. The terms that was first introduced and still used till today are listed in Table 2 below. Most of the terms used in the Gasing Leper Terengganu games are taken from the local community dialect.

Table 3. Terms in the Gasing Leper game.

TERM	MEANING
ALIK	: Spinning.
LAWAN ALIK	: Opponents turn around.
EMBAK	: Victory is based on the top of the rudder.
EMBAK KENA	: Reciprocate the opponent’s victory.
DEBUS	: The tops do not hit between the opponent’s tops.
MEDANG	: The ring.
BELAH MEDANG	: Division of corners in the ring.
NOBAT	: The striker is allowed to striking three times in a row in order to gets an embak.
PENALTI	: Punishment if breaking the rules.
GOLEK	: Tops that do not twist swiftly on the base.
KUBU	: Pile of soil to place the spinning tops on a plate.
SERKUP KUBU	: Windbreaker.
LOH LAH	: Pangkah allowed.
GABUS	: The trial round before starting the pangkah.
NAIK	: The winning spinner will be allowed to pangkah to the opponent.
BONG	: A small circle in the middle of the field is made of pusu soil.
BELA	: The process of balancing the tops on a plate.

Each terms cannot be changed to another term even if it has the same meaning. For example, the word “alikh,” which carries the meaning of turning, cannot be referred to as “berpusing,” while the term “lawan alikh” cannot use the term “lawan berpusing.”

Types of Gasing Leper Terengganu

Gasing Leper is divided into three types that have the same shape and properties which distinguished by size. They are *Gasing Leper* Kemudi, *Gasing Leper* Menekok and *Gasing Leper* Haluan. The *Gasing Leper* Kemudi has a circumference of 20 inches, the *Gasing Leper* Menekok is 19.5 inches, and the *Gasing Leper* Haluan is 19 inches. The permissible weight of these three different *gasing* is not more than 2 kilograms. For each games, this three *gasing* must be used every time the games be held. If the number and type of tops are not sufficient, then the top games cannot be held.

TYPES OF GASING LEPER TERENGGANU		
<i>Gasing Leper</i> Kemudi	<i>Gasing Leper</i> Menekok	<i>Gasing Leper</i> Haluan



Figure 8: 3 Types of *Gasing Leper* Terengganu

DIY Gasing Leper Terengganu

With the empirical data that covered history, uniqueness and types of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*, this research proposed a new approach in preserving the heritage of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* which is DIY set kits of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*. The DIY kits can easily play by the public and also helping the young generation aware of this local heritage.



Figure 9: DIY kits of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*

CONCLUSION

In today's era of gadgets and technology, traditional games known as folk sports are getting less and less attention among the community. Today's new generation can't enjoy the thrill of running around in a wide field and sweating. The constraints of playing space and the fear of social crime cause children to not be free to play like previous generations. Within this, preserving the cultural heritage for the enrichment and education of present and future generations is crucial. *Gasing Leper Terengganu* is a unique and artistic local cultural heritage. Seeing the high potential of *Gasing Leper Terengganu*, it needs to be developed and

fought to become a significant art heritage in this era of modern technology. Interest in *Gasing Leper Terengganu* must be instilled in the souls of the younger generation. Efforts in preserving the art of local heritage need to be intensified and implemented so that the origin of a nation can be known, appreciated, and inherited fully. Programs to educate and publicize the game of *Gasing Leper Terengganu* among the youth should be given more emphasis by holding various programs extended to all districts in Terengganu. Hopefully, the effort to lift the *Gasing Leper Terengganu* game again gets cooperation and opens the eyes of all parties to come forward to raise this tops game back to the proper level. The commercial value of this traditional game is very high and a thousand times more dear if left alone.

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