The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam: a case study

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ABSTRACT

Brunei Darussalam is a nation characterised by its cultural and ethnic diversity with long-lasting traditions prevalent among the majority of the Brunei Malay, but also among other ethnic minorities such as the Dusun, the Murut, the Belait, Bisaya, Kedayan, Tutong, Iban and the considerable Chinese community. These cultures reflect the cultural elements and practices of the Malay Archipelago, India, the Chinese diaspora, and Europe, but strongly shaped by Islam. These elements are reflected in architecture, in oral traditions, traditional craftmanship, performing arts, social practices and traditional knowledge related to the natural environment. However, over the last decades, due to the rapid development and industrial growth of the country, a shift in lifestyle has occurred and younger generations are no longer interested in inheriting intangible cultural heritage. To ensure the safeguarding of ICH, Brunei Darussalam ratified the 2003 *Convention* in 2011. This paper aims to offer an overview on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam, assessing the status and prospect of ICH safeguarding, analysing data on research on ICH safeguarding and considering the impact of the 2003 *Convention* in national strategies towards the safeguarding of ICH.

Keywords

Borneo, Brunei Darussalam, safeguarding, traditional knowledge, Malay, customary law, *Melayu Islam Beraja*, the Brunei Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)

Introduction

Over the last decades, it has been globally accepted that it is urgent that we ensure the survival of local, regional and national intangible cultural expressions. In the context of globalisation and the general idea that this has a homogenising effect on culture, it is urgent that we implement measures towards the

safeguarding of ICH. The processes of globalisation and the standardisation of culture have been reinforced and facilitated by mass media and information communication technologies [Appadurai: 1990; Robertson: 1998; Holton: 2000; Firouzeh: 2004]. The global cultural flows are determined by several factors such as human landscape, media, technology, economy and ideologies offering a fertile environment for social and cultural change.

The nature of intangible cultural heritage is related to ephemeral cultural expressions such as oral traditions, social practices, traditional craftsmanship and other forms of knowledge transmitted within cultural communities, which tend to be overlooked in the process of the rapid modernisation of developing countries and traditional cultures.

Acknowledging the risk that certain elements of intangible cultural heritage could fade into obscurity without a systematic plan to keep alive these traditions and safeguard traditional knowledge, UNESCO and its Member States approved in 2003 the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. In the *Convention*, the concept of safeguarding is defined as a set of actions to document intangible cultural heritage through the creation of inventories, and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills and meanings by working collaboratively with relevant communities, as these are the custodians of ICH.

The implementation of the *Convention* has been particularly relevant in developing countries and in other countries where cultural management practices and cultural institutions such as museums are underdeveloped. Generally, these countries lack national capacity, mostly in terms of qualified human resources and general awareness of the importance of safeguarding their living heritage, and therefore, they are more susceptible to cultural loss. Despite these facts, the implementation of the 2003 *Convention* remains in a developmental stage in the majority of the States Parties. Therefore, there is still a significant gap in research on the efforts, plans and challenges related to the implementation of the *Convention*, especially in the countries where it was recently ratified.

Rather than characterising ICH in Brunei Darussalam, this paper aims to offer an overview on the status of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through a survey of literature addressing ICH, analysing the impact of the ratification of the 2003 *Convention*, and assessing the predominant approach to the documentation and dissemination of knowledge about ICH.

Brunei Darussalam is an independent country, governed by an Islamic monarchy, located on the northern coast of Borneo Island, which is bordered by two East Malaysian states, Sarawak and Sabah. The country became independent from the United Kingdom on 1 January 1984 and is currently ruled by His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah who ascended the throne on 5 October 1967. The Sultanate joined the United Nations on 21 September 1984 and became a Member State of UNESCO on 17 March 2005.

Brunei Darussalam is a country endowed with a significant cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Since its independence and the increasing affirmation of national cultural and religious values, the Government of His Majesty has been making efforts towards the preservation of culture and traditional practices in harmony with the state concept, Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB). *Melayu Islam Beraja* underlines the institutionalisation of Islam as a state religion, the preservation of Malay cultural values, and the acceptance of the leadership of the monarchy [Aziz: 1994; Schottmann: 2006; Umar: 2013; Duraman: 2016].

On 12 August 2011 Brunei Darussalam ratified the UNESCO 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, and on 11 November 2011 signed the UNESCO 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.*

The current legal framework for the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam is defined by the Antiquities and Treasure Trove Act, Chapter 31 in the Laws of Brunei [B.L.R.O. 5/2002]. This legal document regulates moveable and immovable cultural heritage as well as natural heritage. However, the document has no reference to ICH and, therefore, at the moment, there is no specific legal framework for the safeguarding of ICH. As a result, Brunei Darussalam does not have a legal and institutional

definition of ICH, although the definition of ICH in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* [Article 2, & 1] is used in official documents and at government meetings.

After the ratification of the *Convention* in 2011, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) formed a National Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH which was responsible for elaborating proposals to inscribe ICH manifestations on the *Convention's* list. However, thus far no element of ICH has been submitted for inscription from Brunei Darussalam. Cultural officers at the MCYS state that the ministry is currently drafting a legal document to enforce the safeguarding of ICH, which may imply a revision of the existing Antiquities and Treasure Trove Act. However, the Department of Culture and Arts (DCA) at the MCYS has been taking measures for the safeguarding of ICH, such as producing audio and visual recordings of traditional music, traditional dances, folk tales, and other expressions of oral traditions. In addition, the Museums' Department, the History Centre, and the Language and Literature Bureau, all under the DCA, have been leading community programmes, conducting research, and publishing a number of studies on ICH, such as the documentation of cultural practices, traditional knowledge and the inventorying of instruments, artefacts, and interaction within cultural spaces (i.e. with communities, heads of villages, and other custodians of traditional knowledge). Nevertheless, these initiatives are informal, random, and occasionally disjointed (different government departments under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports are following similar research or educational initiatives independently, for example). Additionally, these initiatives do not aim to create an inventory of intangible cultural heritage which would lead to effective safeguarding policies and strategies for ICH in Brunei. There is no statutory body in Brunei comparable to the National Heritage Board in Singapore or the Department of National Heritage in Malaysia, with the responsibility for overseeing heritage policies, managing cultural assets and developing an articulated and comprehensive agenda for both natural and cultural heritage.

Survey methodology

Both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam are strongly entrenched in cultural diversity and the distinctive ethnic groups living in the country. The Brunei Nationality Act of 1962 defines a Bruneian as any person, born in Brunei Darussalam before, on, or after 1 January 1962, who is commonly accepted as belonging to one of the following indigenous groups of the Malay race, namely, Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut, or Tutong. In addition to those seven ethnic groups there is also a considerable community of Chinese and Iban people who have rich tangible and intangible cultural heritages.

Considering that, at the moment, there is no national definition of ICH in Brunei, no legal framework for its safeguarding, nor any inscription of an ICH element on the *Convention's Lists*, it is fundamental that we investigate the efforts to develop a national policy for the safeguarding of ICH in Brunei, and analyse their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The first step in conducting this study was to inquire into the legal and institutional framework for ICH in Brunei and into the current status of programmes, policies, and initiatives furthered by the government and related NGOs towards the safeguarding of ICH. A plan was outlined to propose an accurate definition for the ICH in Brunei in order to decide on the scope of the research.

There were several meetings with the Director of the Culture and Arts Section at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports; with the Deputy-Director of the Museums' Department; with representatives of the Language and Literature Bureau; the History Centre; and also with community members of the various ethnic groups that exist in Brunei. MCYS granted access to the minutes of meetings of the National Committee for the ICH, which was formed immediately after the ratification of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. These minutes provided an understanding of the national plan for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and gave an insight into this Committee's perception of the national ICH.

An accurate understanding of Bruneian values is pivotal, not only for a comprehensive understanding

and definition of ICH, but more importantly, to comprehend how the *Convention* is accepted and implemented while observing the state concept of Malay Islamic Monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*).

The next step was to initiate a comprehensive survey and review of current and discontinued journals, monographs, catalogues, newsletters, bulletins, reports, conference proceedings, academic exercises, masters' dissertations, doctoral theses and compendia concentrating on the intangible cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam.

These publications are in English, Malay or bilingual. Some may also contain sections in local ethnic languages. Most of these publications are published by the government through the MCYS, the Museums' Department, the Language and Literature Bureau, the History Centre, the Ministry of Education and the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). These publications are easily accessible at the National Archives, the library in Bandar Seri Begawan and at UBD Library. Several government departments have produced thematic publications' indexes, and this facilitated the identification and categorisation of literature about ICH. The Museums' Department published an index to issues of the *Brunei Museum Journal* published between 1969 and 1997, and more recently produced an index of all titles published by this department up to 2014. UBD library has an online catalogue and keeps a significant collection on 'Brunei Studies' and a large collection of unpublished materials such as research reports, masters' dissertations and doctoral theses.

The status and prospects for ICH safeguarding in Brunei Darussalam

Many government departments are deeply involved in activities regarding intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. These efforts and initiatives are mostly related to the living culture of the seven ethnic groups: Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut, or Tutong. In his *titah* (a Malay royal speech addressed to the nation, describing government policies and plans or general orders regarding civic matters), His Majesty the Sultan and *Yang Di-Pertuan* of Brunei Darussalam has continuously upheld the urgency of safeguarding the Malay language and the value of the cultural traditions of the seven ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam. The Ministry of Education, through the 'National Education System for the 21st Century' [SPN21], has been prioritising the development of integrated learning areas related to the values of culture and tradition, and arts and crafts, through the compulsory subjects of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) and the Malay Language.

Universiti Brunei Darussalam is the national public university and a leading institution in academic research in the country. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Academy of Brunei Studies, the Institute of Asian Studies and the Language Centre have been conducting in-depth research on ICH and leading several initiatives towards its safeguarding. However, these research initiatives are seldom or never synchronised with those conducted by the MCYS.

The MCYS, through the Culture and Arts Department Section, has been creating an inventory of arts and crafts and ICH in general: The Museums' Department has been more focused on conducting anthropological research related to both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Finally, the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) has been collaborating with the MCYS in drafting legal documents for the safeguarding and conservation of ICH in Brunei Darussalam. However, despite the ratification of the *Convention* in 2011, the legal framework remains unchanged and without any efforts being made to endorse the precepts of the ICH *Convention*.

Strengths and weaknesses of the research on ICH in Brunei Darussalam

Despite the non-existent legal framework for the safeguarding of the ICH, and the recent ratification of the *Convention*, the scientific community in Brunei has been prolific in producing literature on ICH. The literature survey found 405 references to intangible cultural heritage in Brunei Darussalam. Most of this literature has been produced since the establishment of the Museums' Department in 1965, boosted by the research conducted, and inventories created, in the context of collecting ethnographic data in preparation for the opening of the Brunei Museum in 1972. This early stage of research on ICH resulted from a strong collaboration between local and international

researchers, mostly from the United Kingdom. Additionally, throughout the years, several Bruneian researchers received training at the British Museum, went overseas to take MAs and/or PhDs, and attended international training workshops.

With the establishment of UBD in 1984 and its growth over the last 35 years, the academic community conducting research on ICH has been developing more intensively, particularly in the genres of oral tradition (local ethnic languages, and the documentation of folktales, ballads, chants, prose and verses), and social practices. The Language Centre currently offers Borneo Languages courses (Brunei Malay, Dusun, Iban, Belait, Tutong and Lun Bawang, the language commonly spoken by the Murut People). At the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Academy of Brunei Studies the research is more focused on linguistics, in the socio-cultural uses of language, on the social and anthropological practices of the peoples in Brunei, and on the knowledge involved in traditional craftsmanship.

Often, the authors of these studies are members of the ethnic communities which have been carriers of traditional knowledge, learning to speak their indigenous languages, engaging in ethnic social practices, listening to oral traditions, singing traditional songs and observing their customary laws. Frequently, the authors are primary informants who became members of academia or officers in government cultural institutions, such as the Museums' Department. However, the academic community conducting research on ICH is still extremely small. The MCYS (which includes the Museums' Department, the Language and Literature Bureau and the History Centre), lacks trained, experienced and specially qualified staff in the areas related to both tangible and intangible heritage management. Most of the experienced and qualified staff at the Ministry who have been leading research and publishing regularly on ICH over the last decades, have recently retired.

In short, the strength of research activities on ICH in Brunei lies in the long-lasting collaborations between international and local researchers and the strong connection of local researchers with the living culture within their own ethnic groups. On the other hand, the weakness is the reduced number of

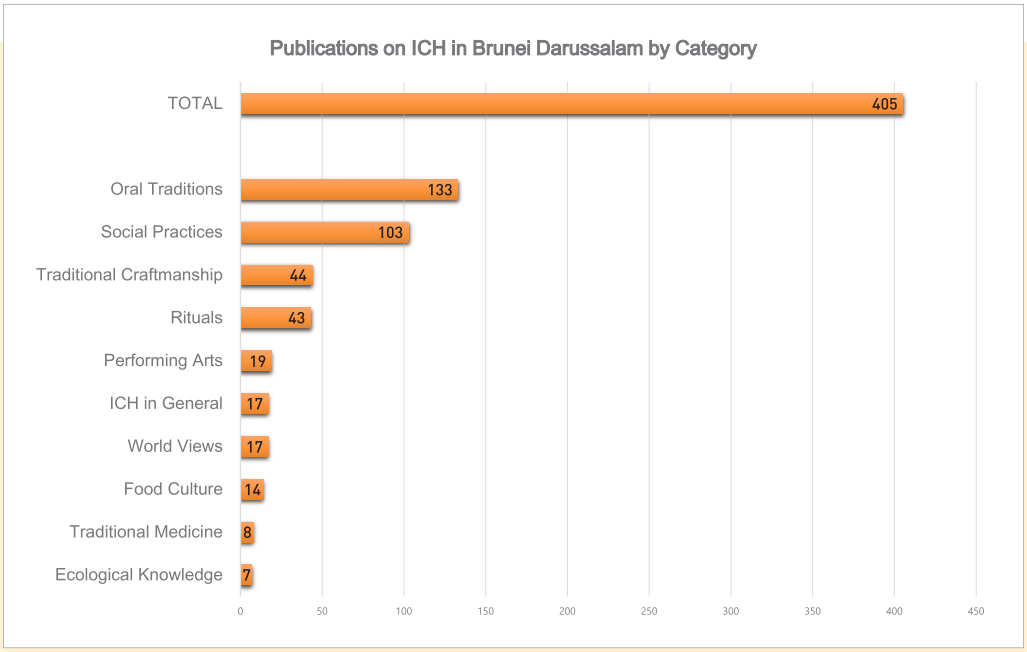


Figure 1
Publications on ICH in Brunei Darussalam by category.
This chart presents the results of a literature survey conducted between November 2017 and February 2018 by the author for the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI). The full list of publications can be consulted at https://www.irci.jp/ichdb/.

experienced and qualified researchers to continue and develop research on ICH.

Predominant genres in ICH literature

Over the last 65 years the academic community in Brunei Darussalam has been conducting research in all genres of ICH. Brunei's ICH is particularly abundant in its oral traditions, which include the languages spoken by all the different ethnic groups living in the country, as well as the numerous folk tales, ritual recitations and songs, which may have countless variations from one village to the other even within the same ethnic group. The multicultural and multi-ethnic diversity in Brunei also results in a miscellany of social practices, rituals, beliefs and traditional arts and crafts [Figure 1].

The predominant genres in ICH literature focus on oral traditions and social practices, together accounting for more than 55% of all references to ICH (236 out of 405). This research is mostly concentrated on the language and linguistics of the Brunei Malay, Dusun, Tutong, Belait, Bisaya, Kedayan and Murut people. It also includes studies on the native languages of other peoples living in Brunei such as the Iban and the Penan.

It is important to mention the publication of dictionaries of Brunei Malay Language, Tutong-Malay, Malay-Tutong, and Kedayan-Malay, Malay-Kedayan which are resources for the documentation and study of non-literary languages. Brunei Malay is a local variant of the standard Malay which is widely spoken in Brunei and in some parts of the coastal areas of East Malaysia, such as Labuan, Sipitang, Lawas, Papar and Limbang. The study of the Malay language and other minority languages is prioritised in line with the national policy to uphold national traditions and cultural identity. In Brunei, language is strongly related to social practices and cultural values, such as religious practice, family kinship and marriage celebrations, festivities, social obligations and royal customs.

Along with the research on local languages, the academic community has been much involved with the collection, transcription and transliteration of folk tales, songs, anecdotes and other oral expressions from the distinctive ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam. Several research projects led by scholars at UBD, as well as by professionals at the National Archives, the Language and Literature Bureau and the Museums' Department were conducted with the objective of collecting and making an inventory of the comprehensive oral traditions in the country. A substantial corpus of these oral traditions was translated from ethnic languages into Malay and published. However, references in this genre translated into English are scarce, and the collection is not categorised and systematised, except for a series of five volumes published by the Museums' Department, entitled *Pertuturan*.

The second predominant genre of ICH literature is about social practices. In the context of Brunei ICH, social practices include a comprehensive array of the life and social activities of the Brunei Malay and the other ethnic groups predominant in the country. Some of these activities include traditional games, the observation of royal customs, the application of customary laws, the documentation of the everyday life of several ethnic groups and the communities concentrated around the Water Village (*Kampong Ayer*), traditional ceremonies, and the socio-cultural organisation of each of the ethnic groups.

Lastly, the third most predominant genre in ICH literature is traditional craftsmanship, equally shared with rituals, together accounting for approximately 21.5% of all the references in this survey. Bruneian traditional craftsmanship includes the knowledge involved in the production of *kain tenunan* (woven textiles), *anyaman* (plaited arts), boat making, *kris* making, vernacular Malay architecture, brass making, goldsmithing and woodcarving.

Rituals are predominantly covered in studies on the wedding ceremonies of the various ethnic groups. This genre also includes, more rarely, traditional rituals such as rites of passage, death ceremonies, Dusun religious ceremonies, harvest celebrations and other mystical practices related to indigenous beliefs.

The predominant methodological approaches for ICH safeguarding

The predominant methodological approach for ICH safeguarding in Brunei Darussalam concentrates on the presentation and documentation of ICH and the creation of inventories, although the definition for the

criteria and information to be included in these inventories is not clearly specified.

The documentation of living cultural forms has been collected randomly by museum officers, members of academia, members of the communities and cultural sector professionals, who generally are not acquainted with the international standards for the safeguarding of cultural heritage established by UNESCO, or the precepts of the 2003 *Convention*. More recently, immediately after the ratification of the *Convention*, the newly-established National Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage attempted to draft a list of Brunei ICH according to the genres defined in the *Convention*.

Over the last forty years several government institutions have been conducting multidisciplinary and holistic research on ICH through the collection of data, the publication of research and the creation of inventories of video recordings, photographs and audio tapes. In tandem with the documentation and inventorying of ICH, the promotion and awareness of ICH has been a priority set by the government through educational programmes at all education levels, and outreach initiatives led by the Museums' Department, the Language and Literature Bureau, and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

In addition, several government departments, such as the MCYS, have been promoting and presenting ICH through cultural festivals focused on traditional dances, traditional music, wedding rituals and material culture, traditional customs and beliefs. Intangible cultural expressions from Brunei were also promoted at international festivals, such as the ASEAN Rice Festival in 2015.

Other forms of presentation of ICH feature in other initiatives and programmes such as *Promosi Kebudayaan* (Cultural Awareness), *Activiti Cuti Sekolah* (School Holiday Activities), *Muziumku Warisanku* (My Museum, My Heritage), travelling exhibitions organised by the History Centre, and the organisation of local and international traditional music competitions.

Strengthening methodological approaches for ICH safeguarding

Documentation and the inventorying of intangible cultural heritage are fundamental to the promotion and awareness of ICH among the communities and are essential for the safeguarding of ICH [Smith and Akagawa: 2003; Kurin: 2004, 2007; Stefano, Davis, and Corsane: 2012; UNESCO: 2018; Akagawa and Smith: 2019].

Brunei Darussalam now needs to strengthen its strategy for ICH safeguarding through the creation of a legal framework to ensure the definition, classification and protection of ICH. Additionally, the formulation of a National Plan to establish concepts, methodologies, criteria and a programme of actions to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of Brunei Darussalam should be a priority. The strategy for safeguarding ICH should emphasise a set of combined initiatives and actions concentrated on research, documentation, promotion, communication, training and the dissemination of intangible cultural expressions, and on the leading role to be played by the communities, groups and individuals who are the owners and carriers of such heritage.

Currently, the notion of safeguarding in Brunei centres on the documentation of ICH and its promotion among the general population, rather than on ensuring the continuity of these living cultural expressions within the communities themselves, and involving the community in the transmission of their cultural traditions to the next generation. The National Plan should strengthen interaction with the heads of the villages (*ketua kampong*) and community leaders, encourage the formation of cultural associations and NGOs consisting of members of the ethnic communities and carriers of ICH, stimulate the sharing of intangible cultural heritage by the members of the communities, intensify the participation of the communities in the presentation and promotion of traditional knowledge, take action to ensure the continuity of cultural expressions governed by material, temporal and spatial rhythms, and collaborate with the communities in the creation of an eco-system for the transfer of knowledge and learning within and outside the community.

The participation of communities in research activities and the safeguarding of ICH

As mentioned above, a significant number of

research projects are conducted by members of the communities or people who have strong ties with the communities. Normally, their interest in leading research on ICH is linked with efforts to safeguard family and ethnic traditions, to document the cultural expressions of their communities and to create awareness of the threat of cultural loss.

The various ethnic groups in Brunei are sometimes scattered and only a few are institutionally or socially organised. Therefore, the participation of the community in research activities is limited to certain villages, locations and groups of people. Occasionally, research projects cross and compare cultural expressions from different locations and the participation of their respective communities. Such is the case with language, oral traditions and stories, as well as with craftsmanship. The Language Centre at Universiti Brunei Darussalam initiated courses in 'Borneo Languages' in 2010, and has been working with the communities since then in the transmission of these ethnic languages and the awareness of ICH related to oral traditions. Members of the communities often contribute to the content of these courses which also include cultural expressions related to oral traditions. Additionally, academic researchers and postgraduate students of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences often conduct field research involving community members as informants. As part of their field research, academics and museum professionals regularly collaborate with the communities in the documentation of ritual practices, seasonal celebrations, customary practices and social engagement. More recently, during the preparations for the launch of the Belait District Museum in July 2016, officials from the Museums' Department collaborated with members of the Belait community who contributed their knowledge to the content of the museum exhibitions.

The impact of the 2003 *Convention* on literature and research activities

Soon after the ratification of the *Convention* on 11 November 2011, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, formed a National Committee for World Heritage consisting of representatives from governmental institutions dealing with culture and education. Chaired by the Deputy-Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Datin Hajah Adina binti Othman, the National Committee for World Heritage aimed to elaborate a plan for the implementation of both conventions ratified in 2011. In the following year, the MCYS held a workshop about the procedures to be followed in adopting the *World Heritage Convention*. This workshop, dubbed the 'World Heritage Nomination Procedure', was conducted by Dr Suyud Winarno MM, a representative from UNESCO Indonesia. It included a series of lectures and visits to potential heritage sites. The workshop provided a framework to enable the implementation of the UNESCO conventions, included an extra-budgetary plan that would last for 18 months, defined the criteria for the assessment of heritage values, created a plan for the management and safeguarding of cultural heritage and a process for the inscription of properties on the *World Heritage List*, and listed the instructions for overseeing the state of conservation of cultural heritage. Immediately after the workshop, the National Committee had its first meeting and defined its responsibilities, which were:

1. Enforce the responsibilities assumed with the ratification of the *Conventions*
2. Advise, approve, enforce and oversee the programme and projects related to the conventions
3. Provide the rules and regulations for the national committee
4. Be the representative between Brunei government and UNESCO

There had to be legislation to approve the research strategy and the plan for the implementation of the 2003 *Convention*, collaboration with UNESCO experts to identify the categories and criteria for ICH in Brunei to start an inventory, a budget had to be established for publications, workshops, consultation, research and education, trainees had to be appointed to prepare the data for the UNESCO experts and strengthen the collaboration with NGOs and the community.

In October 2012, the Working Committee for ICH held a second meeting at which it presented a tentative list of ICH, and relevant community members were consulted to revise the list and add missing cultural properties. The Working Committee looked for opportunities to develop cultural industries, monetise

traditional culture and develop tourism, following the Malaysian example of 'One Village, One Product' (*Satu Kampong, Satu Produkt*).

The Chair of the Working Committee prioritised research on ethnic languages through recordings and other forms of documentation. The Working Committee for ICH also agreed that the management of research activities should concentrate on the safeguarding of Bruneian national identity and the revival of traditional culture under the guidance of the religious values of Islam. One of the efforts to enhance the research activities after the ratification of the 2003 *Convention* was the initiative from the Culture and Arts Section of the MCYS to promote Ashik Dance, and the event 'Language Month', to promote ethnic languages and the national language of the country through literature competitions and reading programmes. Unfortunately, the files consulted at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports show there was no further development of the strategies proposed to implement the 2003 *Convention*, nor any plans for researching ICH [Figure 2].

However, in April 2013 the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, together with UNESCO, organised a forum entitled 'UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention'. Participants included Masanori Nagaoka, Head of the Culture Unit of the UNESCO Office in Jakarta, and other representatives from specific government ministries, NGOs, district officials, community members, academics from Universiti Brunei Darussalam and policy makers, to discuss the strategy for implementing the 2003 *Convention*. Divided into three sessions, the forum discussed topics including the 'Introduction of the 2003 C*onvention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*', 'UNESCO's Strategies for the Implementation of the 2003 *Convention* in Asia and the Pacific', and 'Discussion with the National and Working Committee members on UNESCO's proposed project entitled 'Strengthening Capacity Building for the Promotion and Implementation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Brunei Darussalam''. The first and second sessions discussed collaboration in safeguarding ICH at both international and regional levels, in particular its challenges in the Asia and Pacific region. Masanori Nagaoka presented UNESCO's strategies for the implementation of the 2003 *Convention*, while giving an overview of various ICH safeguarding practices in Southeast Asia. Nagaoka also outlined UNESCO's view on the importance of regional collaboration and network building among stakeholders. The meeting then invited

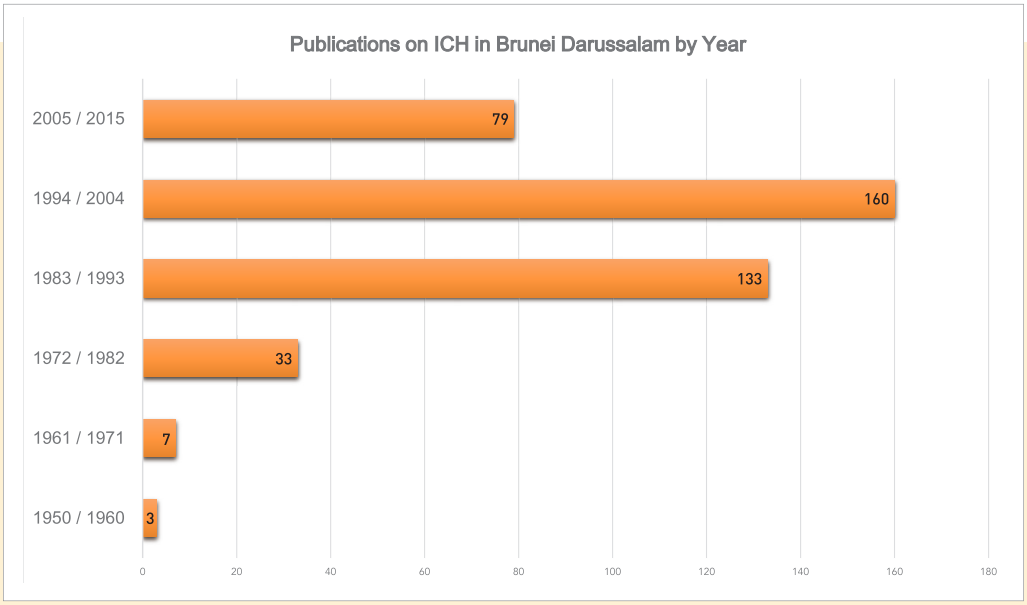


Figure 2
Publications on ICH in Brunei Darussalam by Year.
This chart presents the results of a literature survey conducted between November 2017 and February 2018 by the author for the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI).
The full list of publications can be consulted at https://www.irci.jp/ichdb/.

designated members of the Working Committee to identify prioritised actions for the implementation of the *Convention* at national level [Figure 3].

However, despite all the documents and plans of actions toward the implementation of the *Convention*, my literature survey demonstrates a clear decline in the number of research publications related to ICH in the period between 2005 and 2015, especially when compared with the period between 1994 and 2004. There is no evidence that supports the effectiveness of the above-mentioned plans as the government reports do not reflect the continuity of an agenda towards the safeguarding of ICH after 2013.

Final considerations

The ratification of the 2003 *Convention* in Brunei Darussalam has been largely ignored and its implementation has been demonstrated to be ineffective. The analysis of research literature on ICH reveals that it has clearly declined in quantity since 2004, especially due to the discontinuation of the *Brunei Museum Journal* which was one of the most reputable and prolific platforms for national and international researchers on ICH in Brunei.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports still needs to define and identify which cultural traditions are to be safeguarded, how and by whom. [Kurin: 2007] In the process of recognising which cultural traditions need to be safeguarded, measures need to be taken to integrate and involve community members in the identification of ICH to ensure its viability and sustainability. Government officials need to urgently establish competent bodies for the safeguarding of ICH based on the combined efforts of the community, academia, government cultural institutions (museum professionals) and education. These bodies would outline a national framework for the safeguarding and promotion of ICH through educational, artistic and legal interventions. Despite the significant amount of research conducted on ICH in Brunei Darussalam, one would have to conclude that the promotion of this knowledge does not go beyond archival documentation and the limited display of museum collections. The pivotal role of museums as a platform for public and official recognition of cultural expressions is widely acknowledged [Kreps: 2003; Basu and Modest: 2014]. Worldwide, museums have been venues for cultural exchange and the presentation of living traditions by their own communities. The display of collections of objects representing Bruneian material culture needs to be complemented by educational programmes involving the relevant cultural communities who, as custodians of ICH, are fundamental to the interpretation and understanding of traditional knowledge. The Brunei Museum, one of the most relevant cultural institutions contributing to the promotion of ICH in Brunei, has been closed since 2014.

Many Bruneian cultural traditions have a strong relationship to the natural environment and the spirit of place, for example, the water village (*Kampong Ayer*), the Brunei River, the rainforest and all the natural resources in it. Government officials and competent bodies established to ensure the safeguarding and sustainability of living heritage need to strengthen their collaboration with the communities to facilitate the implementation of strategies for the continuity of cultural expressions *in situ* [Peers and Brown: 2003; Guobrandur: 2004; Cole: 2006; Watson: 2007]. Other nations in the region have established bodies - such as a National Heritage Council (Malaysia) or a National Heritage Board (Singapore) - which have been effectively implementing programmes for the safeguarding of their cultural identities, Malay traditions and ensuring the continuity of cultural practices [Henderson: 2012; Cai: 2017;

2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-east Asia		
State	**Date of Instrument Deposit**	**Type of Instrument**
Singapore	2018	Acceptance
East Timor	2016	Ratification
Thailand	2016	Ratification
Myanmar	2014	Ratification
Malaysia	2013	Ratification
Brunei Darussalam	2011	Ratification
Laos	2009	Ratification
Indonesia	2007	Ratification
Cambodia	2006	Ratification
Philippines	2006	Ratification
Vietnam	2005	Ratification

Figure 3
2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in South-east Asia.

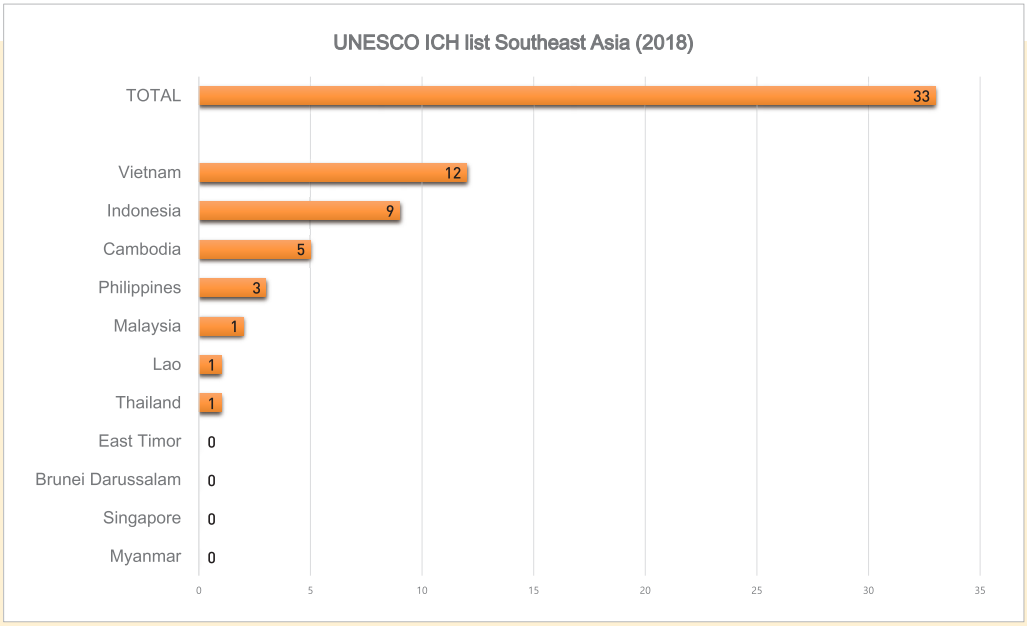


Figure 4
UNESCO ICH list Southeast Asia (2018).
The elements inscribed include representative list, urgent safeguarding list, and register of good safeguarding practices.
This chart presents the results of a literature survey conducted between November 2017 and February 2018 by the author for the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI).
The full list of publications can be consulted at https://www.irci.jp/ichdb/.

Mustafa and Saleh: 2018] The National Heritage Act of 2005 in Malaysia establishes a legal framework for the conservation and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage and defines intangible heritage as

> *any form of expressions, languages, lingual utterances, sayings, musically produced tunes, notes, audible lyrics, songs, folksongs, oral traditions, poetry, music, dances as produced by the performing arts, theatrical plays, audible compositions of sounds and music, martial arts, that may have existed or exist in relation to the heritage of Malaysia or any part of Malaysia or in relation to the heritage of a Malaysian community.*

Additionally, the act recognises communities as the custodians of ICH and the ones responsible for its safeguarding in collaboration with the National Heritage Council, which ensures compliance with the guidelines and standard safeguarding practices. By contrast, Singapore's National Heritage Board Act of 1993 does not specifically designate intangible heritage, but its safeguarding and preservation of cultural traditions is embedded in the establishment of competent bodies, and the establishment and definition of cultural and heritage institutions such as museums, heritage centres and archives. Brunei Darussalam shares historical and cultural commonalities with Malaysia, Singapore and other neighbouring countries which offer a set of good practices and case studies which could strengthen the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Brunei [Figure 4]. The strategy for safeguarding ICH requires national ICH policy, a solid network of museums and heritage institutions, and strong collaboration with the communities.

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