

Sustainability of Baba Nyonya Tourism Heritage Culture in Malacca

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Article Info

Volume 83

Page Number: 9972 - 9980

Publication Issue:

May - June 2020

Abstract:

Malaysia is experiencing the tremendous tourism development. Diverse ethnic differences provide huge opportunities for Malaysia to showcase its uniqueness in architecture, traditional costumes, handicrafts, music, dance which reflects the colorful heritage and culture mixed and most of these cultural heritages are recorded in various formats too. In general, there are lack of studies addressing sustainability of cultural heritage especially in Baba Nyonya culture. Previous studies highlighted proper preservation, efficient management and aggressive promotion as factors to sustain cultural heritage. This study aims to analyze the status, issues, strategies and challenges of local community involvement to sustain Baba Nyonya culture in Malacca. Face to face interviews were conducted across six stakeholders of Baba Nyonya culture including museums, restaurants, travel operators, government agencies and local communities. There are four core factors that affect the decision-making process in Baba Nyonya sustainability includes environment; economic; culture and social factors. It was found that there are arise from conflicts in the management of cultural heritage tourism in Malaysia faced by stakeholders such as travel and museum managers, government and local communities.

Keywords: *Baba and Nyonya culture, cultural heritage tourism, sustainability, qualitative.*

Article History

Article Received: 19 November 2019

Revised: 27 January 2020

Accepted: 24 February 2020

Publication: 18 May 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

The policies and regulation set by State Government of Malacca contribute significantly to the development of tourism towards sustainable tourism. Previous researchers have put more attention to the involvement of local community in the development of tourism in Malacca. Nonetheless, lack of study has been carried out to investigate the issues to sustain traditional culture such as Baba and Nyonya. Previous research highlighted the lack of evidence that on local community roles and tourism studies given the importance of local community involvements in developing tourism destination.

Recently, community involvement is acknowledged to be one of the factors that keep tourism sustainable, protect cultural heritage despite some disagreements on the contribution of its involvement (Terzić, 2014). On another note, some researchers admit that tourism destinations

involve many parties to be succeeded including government initiatives and stakeholders such as private sectors, industry players, NGOs and the local communities (Vourc'h, 2003). In addition to this, studies highlighted that the community support is also important in tourism development and planning for a destination (Feigher, 2002). Similarly, to achieve sustainable tourism there is always the need for support from the host community (Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, 2010). As community play significant role in developing tourism destination, there is a need to study the community capacity, not only for community development, but for significantly relevant tourism development.

This study focuses on the sustainable of heritage tourism in Baba Nyonya culture, which is one of the ethnics in Malacca. The purpose of this paper was to analyze and discuss the issues, strategies and challenges of local community involvement in

sustaining the heritage tourism of Baba Nyonya culture in Malacca.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of cultural heritage tourism is diversified since it is a complex area which involve the business of tourism, the needs of the host community and the management and preservation of heritage assets (Timothy, 2014; Kaitlin, 2007). However, previous literatures highlighted several factors including; 1) the role of cultural heritage resources in creating and maintaining the identity of individuals and communities; 2) recognition that cultural heritage resources can play an important role in the sustainability, renewal and development of the community; 3) the role that cultural heritage resources can play in providing recreation opportunities (Poria, 2003)

It is often said, that “The person you are is synonymous with the place you grew up”. Everybody has a ‘personal geography’, which means that you even without noticing it, more or less unconsciously to adopt the ways of your local environment such as what you eat, what you drink, how you speak, how you dress, how you live. All these things form a person’s individual cultural heritage (Helena, 2008). Nowadays, the importance of cultural heritage is growing in a world undergoing globalisation.

Cultural tourism, which is based on the exploitation of cultural heritage, is one of the fastest growing tourism niche in the world (Timothy, 2014). There is an increasing demand of cultural tourism due to the changing preference of tourists spending their holiday, instead of going to the beach, tourists prefer to experience profound culture/lifestyle, which they often find either in the nature of distant countries or in their cultural heritage (Alfredas, 2008).

Benefits of cultural heritage tourism are many such as diversification of local economies and the preservation of community’s unique character (The National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008). National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) (2003) lists many of its benefits such as

encourage resource protection; attract more visitor expenditures; strengthen the local economy; create employment opportunities; preserve the specified character of a community; increase community pride, increase tax receipts; keep community aware of its resources; and spark economic growth (www.kaitlinmcshea.com).

In addition, Cela et al. (2010) highlighted cultural heritage tourism remind a community of people to their cultural rooted and grow interest in one’s own history or culture, therefore its served as a strong drive for people to preserve that culture. Cela et al. (2010) also agreed that since cultural heritage tourism could potentially provide major economic benefits to host communities, it also give great motivation for them to well manage and preserve their historic, natural and cultural resources.

A. A Unique Culture of Baba Nyonya

Malacca has been regarded as a World Heritage City by the World Organization of Heritage UNESCO in 2008 (UNESCO, 2015). This is due to the fact that there is more than one heritage site found in Malacca; for instance, Dutch heritage in Malacca is evident from the Stadthuys monument (an iconic Red Building) and St Francis Church (with Gothic design) which are more than 200 years old, situated in the heart of Malacca town. According to Baba Nyonya is an ethnic group that is characterized by a unique combination of Chinese and Malay influences, and their descent can be traced to Chinese traders who settled in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth century and married local women. As a community, the Baba Nyonya’s believed they have retained a unique identity and distinct from Chinese immigrants to the region and highlights their adaptation to several aspects of Malay lifestyle including food, language and dressing (Henderson, 2003). Baba and Nyonya community talk in Baba language which mix the Malay language and some words from different culture such as Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, Tamil and English. As a result of adopting, adapting and practicing various cultures, members of the Baba Nyonya community have mastered three languages: Chinese, Malay and British (Ahmad, 2012). Baba Nyonya’s culture thus involves a

fusion of Chinese and Malay cultures, as well as European and Indonesian influences.

Nowadays, the Culture of Baba Nyonya at Malacca is difficult to sustain by the reason of without a wider sense of group solidarity (Kim, 2008). Moreover, within the governmentally imposed racial framework of ‘Malay, Chinese, Indian and Other’, in place since the colonial era, Baba Nyonya’s are classified as Chinese for the purposes of identity cards (Lim, 2011). In many ways, therefore, the unique characteristics of the Peranakans have been systematically devalued and their sense of identity weakened (Kim, 2008). Wee (2000) highlighted that it is quite impossible to live the Baba Nyonya lifestyle nowadays due to the modern lifestyle of its descendants’. To make things worse, the language is dying and the knowledge of complex customs challenged the modern Peranakans to practice it. Nonetheless, with the government support and growth of culture heritage tourism at Malacca, the culture of Baba Nyonya had been retrieved and revives and practice especially in strengthen the economy through creative crafts and authentic food (Luebe and Hussin, 2019).

Despites of the uniqueness of Baba Nyonya heritage culture in Malacca, the local community seemed to be unsatisfied with the current situation which may lead the Baba Nyonya heritage culture demolished and cannot be sustainable any longer. Without the interest and commitment from local community, it is a challenge to sustain Baba Nyonya heritage culture as tourism product or a culture by itself. If the culture is no longer sustainable, thus, younger generation will no longer acknowledge the uniqueness of Baba Nyonya. Thus, this research focus on how to sustain the Baba Nyonya cultural heritage tourism in Malacca by studying the issues and challenges faced by its stakeholder including local community and government.

B. Sustainable Tourism

Sinteza (2014) linked tourism and sustainability development base on two factors, the natural resources used to develop tourism and the

importance of tourism in world economy. Given the nature of tourism, the communities area often used as tourism destination resulting impact to the communities’ quality of life. Previous research highlighted that mass tourism often endangers or destroys the natural habitat, pollutes water or soil, produces excessive noise. Next, tourism development inadequately responds to the needs of the local population and impairs their quality of life because it does not take into account the specifics of their tradition, culture, religion. On the other hand, sustainable tourism balances economic development against the limitations imposed by the environment and the needs of the local population. For that reason, sustainable tourism has been promoted as a form of tourism development in the 21st century in the official program of the UNESCO Agenda 21.

Chapter 4 of Agenda 21 is entitled “Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development” and its Article 43 states: “Promote sustainable

tourism development, including non-consumptive and eco-tourism, ... in order to increase the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages; promote sustainable tourism development and capacity-building in order to contribute to the strengthening of rural and local communities” (European Commission Communication on Tourism, 2012).

C. Local Community Support in Sustainable Tourism

UNESCO (2015) discusses the importance of community participation throughout the whole process of decision-making, implementation and enforcement has been widely acknowledged. Community is emphasised, as heritage, both natural and cultural, is a shared phenomenon among members of a community. The shared values and the living cultural experiences of a community are transmitted from generation to generation, giving the members a sense of shared history, shared inheritance, a sense of sameness, hence a shared sense of collective identity and

collective memory of who they are, what they have in common, and what they have inherited from their previous generations (Ong, 2017). Simultaneously, this shared sense of sameness engenders a tendency to see themselves as different from others, and that they are unique.

Community involvement has already been a central topic in development projects to achieve sustainability and equity, especially for rural development (Rifkin and Kangere, 2002). Generally, community involvement is the essential method to

protect local natural resources positively (Tosun, 2006), protect the tourism environment (Roseland, 2005), cherish local culture resources (Tsaur et al., 2006) and conserve cultural heritage (Sirisrisak, 2009). Community involvement is also an important guarantee of sustainable tourism development and successful operation (Tosun, 2009; Yoon et al., 2001; Ryan, 2002), in which a threshold level between acceptance and rejection of tourism should be preferentially measured in terms of the community's attitude (Meimand, 2017). Spencer (2010) argues successful tourism development on reservations rests on effective tourism planning, in which community involvement is a prerequisite. Zubair et al. (2010) also comment that the public should be provided enough opportunities to access every stage of the planning process. Even the most well-planned and well-meaning mitigating programmes of tourism will be implemented badly unless indigenous people can involve effectively in the whole planning process (Omeregbe, 2012)

Many studies have discussed this issue in terms of the level of community participation (Tosun and Timothy, 2003; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; Krippendorf, 1991). The concept of community participation or a participatory approach is about creating opportunities for members to engage in decision-making and planning. It is a process in which individuals take part in decisions affecting their lives (Aref, 2009; Landorf, 2007; Sirakaya, et al., 2002; Tosun, 1998). It also leads to greater understanding in dealing with problems, and increased ownership of activities (Razzaq, et al., 2011; Okazaki, 2008; Tosun and Timothy, 2003). Pizam et al. (2004) also linked the community

participation as a function of their economic dependence on tourism. According to Pizam et al. (2004) positive correlations have been found locally community participation and their economic involvement in tourism.

III. METHODOLOGY

This adopted the exploratory qualitative research design to meet its objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the issues and strategies adopted by government and challenges for local community involvement to sustain the Baba Nyonya cultural heritage in 2017. Data analysis method such as thematic analysis was adopted to investigate the sustainability of Baba Nyonya cultural heritage in Malacca. Interview data were transcribed, coded and lastly theme emerged and selected as elements of issues, strategies and challenges of Baba Nyonya cultural heritage in Malacca.

IV. FINDINGS

A. *Strategies of Sustainable Cultural Heritage of Baba Nyonya in Malacca*

There are lot of strategies that can be applied to make sure Baba Nyonya heritage in Malacca maintained sustainable. However, in local government representatives view, there were two main factors that affected the strategies that has been implemented to Baba Nyonya heritage tourism. They were i) internal factors and ii) external factors. Basically, internal factors included 5M's which were management, manpower, machine, material and money. While external factors included two sub factors which were macro and micro factors. Macro factors referred to factors that affected the organization indirectly which included political, environment, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and legal factors. However, micro factors were factors which affect the organization directly which included customers (tourists), competitors, supplies and public. In local government representatives view, not all factors were noted in their respond as the respondent only discussed about the short term strategies (UNWTO, 2011)

All respondents from local government

representatives and local stakeholder representatives seemed to be focusing on external factors. However, there were some respondents who also concerned on internal factors as well as Respondent

2,3,4,6 and 7. Most of local government representative included internal factors in their short term strategies. However, only a few local stakeholder representatives did the same way. Local stakeholder representatives seemed to be more focus on external factor than internal factors. Undoubtedly, benefits would be gained from employment and economic income via local community involvement in heritage conservation and tourism. In addition, personnel from the tourism department have illustrated that the influx of tourists to Malacca do provides an easy source of money to aid the community of Baba Nyonya. In order to maximize income derived from tourism, government and local stakeholders do emphasize the need to be creative in utilizing the resources in the city.

B. Challenges of sustainable cultural heritage of baba nyonya in Malacca

Respondents were also asked whether the community were approached in the decision-making process. Interestingly, the results from both local government representatives and local stakeholder representatives revealed that the local community had little engagement from local government authorities. Therefore, respondents' opinions towards community involvement in Baba Nyonya heritage culture sustainability showed that there were few indicators from interview results to show direct engagement with the local community.

Local government respondents address that their challenges were focused on local community and funding and resources problems. Most of the respondents mentioned on local community participation as their strongest challenges in adapting sustainable cultural heritage tourism in Baba Nyonya community. Some of the local community seems does not have any interest to join the workshop or seminar that have been offers to them. In addition, to encourage community participation in Baba Nyonya cultural heritage sustainability, there were similar

programs and training sessions such as workshop and seminar planned to both educate and create awareness among the local community from the government sectors. Again, a low community attendance creates a great challenge to local authorities. The respondents from government sites suggested that the local people's attitudes could be a factor to this challenge.

However, the respondents from local community sides were insisted that the programs that have been organized did not really show the culture. Local community has pointed out few challenges theme which were government factors, local community involvement and tourist factors. They discussed on how they feel on government actions on their culture. They seemed to not satisfied on the level of participation of the local community into the decision making level. Besides, their problems also outlined on problem with tourist manners that sometimes neglect their culture such as taking photos at the forbidden area, does not respect their culture and many more.

V. DISCUSSION

The result of the present study does include the internal and external factors as supported by UNWTO (2011). As mentioned before, internal factors included 5M's which were management, manpower, machine, material and money. While external factors included two sub factors which were macro and micro factors. Macro factors referred to factors that affected the organization indirectly which included political, environment, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and legal factors. However, micro factors were factors which affect the organization directly which included customers (tourists), competitors, supplies and public. In this research findings, not all factors were included as respondent only discussed about the short term strategies.

This study indicates that few factors were discussed in the strategies in community involvement of Baba Nyonya sustainable cultural heritage tourism which includes management, manpower, money, socio-cultural, legal, tourist and stakeholders. Interestingly, this finding is consistent with the previous literature such as from

Nadia (2017), Pedro et al. (2017) and Boschi (2012) The present finding also support WHO (2000) statement which stated that management should develop skills and build competencies and capacities within the communities. Besides, this research finding also in the lines of earlier literature from McGee (2009), Radzuan (2016) and Boschi (2012) about the policy structure and legal part from their findings. Besides that, Chris (2013) and Felicity (2011) mentioned in their researches about community participation and communication that reflects the

socio-cultural strategies that has been found in this research finding.

This study highlighted the challenges on local community involvement dealing with the sustainable cultural heritage of Baba Nyonya in Malacca. The relevance of Chhabra (2009) claims that community involvement cases in the design process are rare is clearly supported by the current findings. When it does, inputs are limited to negotiations and not active participation, in relation to strategies developed by the planning body or formal planning authority. In fact, participatory and community participation in sustainable tourism development depends on the community's ability to eradicate certain obstacles were supported from the literature by Razzaq, et al. (2011); Okazaki (2008); Ismail (2014) and Pongponrat (2007).

Besides that, there were some other challenges that have been derived from this research finding which were government, funding and tourist aspects. Badhardt (2006) research was in lined with the current findings which mentioned the barriers in communication between government and local community. Besides that, the government has made a little attempt for the residents to become a decision maker.

The government often uses a legislative policy as a point of law in making a final decision in management practices. An example related to the decision making process is a little attempt by the government to arrange a series of activities to educate the local community about the importance of conservation and management of heritage.

Besides that, lack of funding and resources that is supported by Walter (2000)

does reflect in this research finding as respondents does address as the funding that has been granted sometimes did not enough and only cover for few aspects such as preserving the cultural artifacts only. In comparison of other government such as Singapore government, they has recognised the importance of the Baba Nyonya culture and has a substantial allocation yearly for promotion and preservation purposes of Baba Nyonya community. With the promotion such as television drama mini-series remake of Baba Nyonya community, it has resulted in the huge influx of foreign tourist to Singapore due to popularity of the show.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, seems that the involvement of the local community in decision making processes is still at a very 'fragile' stage in managing the cultural heritage in Malaysia and Melaka in particular. Certainly, this is due to limitations in the community ability to voice their opinion or be heard by the government. Despite the lack of government 'willingness' to incorporate the involvement of the local community into their administrative framework, the research findings suggest that the government also failed to comply with the needs of the local community specially to generate more economic opportunities. Apparently, the government has limited access to understanding the nature of community attachment towards heritage resources. Therefore, this research suggests that the relationship between the government and local community is not yet at the stage of maturity. In particular, it requires a longer process of understanding for the 'needs and wants' to be delivered and agreed between both government and community, in order to manage and mobilize the cultural heritage resources to meet

both conservation and tourism needs. In general, this study is believed to have expanded the existing body of knowledge on community involvement towards managing cultural heritage assets particularly in developing countries, while providing valuable insights into the practicality of

this approach in Malaysia. The importance of local community involvement in Malaysia, however, require two major improvements in legislation and understanding before it can be fully successful. Firstly, to overcome the limitations of community participation in the decision making process. Secondly, to consider the community attachment towards cultural heritage elements, before developing tourist attractions in heritage settings.

Further research can use this data as a foundation to develop a theory, or a model in the context of Malaysia in particular, and in developing countries, in general. Since this study is applied research, it also contributes to direct practical implications for heritage conservation policy and practice in the country.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We greatly thank the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia for providing us the Grant Tier 2 to complete this research.

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