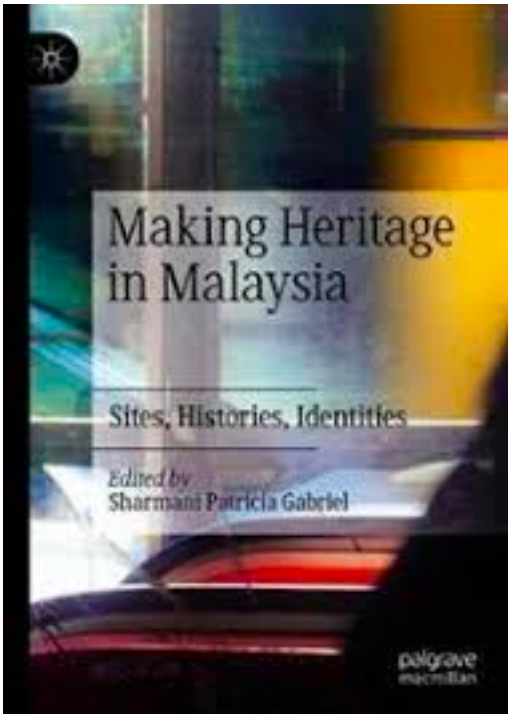
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Sharmani Patricia Gabriel
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CHAPTER 3

The Serdang Folk Museum and the Performance of Heritage: Community Museums as an Alternative to National Heritage

Sunitha Janamohanan

Introduction

The community museum is a new type of institution that we have seen emerge in the past few decades, gaining momentum in the 1990s, as a strategy for community empowerment. By 2010, a community-based approach to museums and cultural heritage management had become recognised by agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as vital for sustainable development and for the realisation and enactment of cultural diversity (Denis, 2010). In tandem with these global developments, we see in Malaysia the emergence of community-based cultural initiatives, from the children-oriented heritage activities of Penang-based arts and culture organisation, Arts-ED (founded in 1999), to the community- or place-based activism of artist collectives such as Lost Gens protesting the destruction of heritage in the

S. Janamohanan (✉)
LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, Singapore
e-mail: sunitha.janamohanan@lasalle.edu.sg

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Petaling Street area of Kuala Lumpur in the 2010s and the continuous work of Ranau-based Pangrok Sulap, a collective that uses woodblock printmaking as a tool for cultural expression and to build solidarity amongst local Sabah communities through collaborative art-making workshops. Heritage and cultural resistance are key themes of these collectives and also central to the work of other groups such as Rakan Mantin, led by painter Victor Chin, and the Kajang Heritage Centre in Kajang, initiated in 2000 by "Cikgu" (Teacher) Lee Kim Sin. The former focuses on shining a strong spotlight on a 200-year-old Hakka village in the one-street town of Mantin, Negri Sembilan, as a strategy against forced displacement. The latter is less urgency driven, focused on highlighting the built and cultural heritage of Kajang and its history as a mining town, but similar in terms of the tools it employs. Both organise cultural activities such as walking or bicycling tours, designed for cultural encounters between visitors and local residents and the presentation of oral histories. Both have also initiated and, in the case of Kajang, upgraded interpretive centres in their respective locales to showcase artefacts, photographs, maps and stories of their respective communities. While neither are "museums" by name, these efforts illustrate a growing practice of using material and traditional culture to make visible the stories and lived experiences of ordinary people and to reassert personal histories within larger national narratives that often suppress or erase such stories. Such activities are strategies of cultural resistance, as well as strategies of active, grassroots heritage-making.

This chapter takes the concept of "heritage" beyond the notions of property and inheritance in a material sense; neither is heritage understood within the parameters of the UNESCO categories of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which have been gaining national interest in countries like Malaysia that are increasingly recognising the economic potential of the heritage industries. Drawing on critical heritage studies, heritage is discussed here as "an embodied cultural performative practice that individuals, communities and societies engage in to negotiate both the meaning of the past, and the way in which that past is used to legitimize or to remake cultural and political values and narratives in, and for, the needs of the present" (Smith 2017b, 71). Heritage is also viewed as a *process* and not a product of the past, and, specifically, community heritage is viewed as being embedded within local specificity and significance (Stephens and Tiwari 2015).

Meanwhile, museums globally are in a state of transition from being collections-based institutions to spaces for engagement and interrogation,

and have been recognised both by communities themselves and museum scholars as a vital tool for groups who occupy a marginalised status in society (Watson, ed. 2007; Karp 1992). The latter often encompass those who are categorised as minorities within a larger heterogeneous population, and the museum becomes for them a space to challenge hegemony through the presentation of alternative narratives to the dominant state discourse.

This chapter focuses on the Serdang Folk Museum (SFM) in the New Village of Serdang, Selangor, as a study of a community museum and an example of the performance of heritage by a community with a specific history, defined by time and geography as members of a "shared symbolic estate" (Robertson and Hall 2007 cited in Stephens and Tiwari 2015). The Serdang Folk Museum asserts a narrative of history parallel to and distinct from the official historical narrative presented by museums of the state, upholders and propagators of "National Heritage", which is referred to as a special noun to distinguish it from "heritage" as a general concept and to give it its political and social implications. Referencing Stuart Hall, "The National Heritage is a powerful source of [cultural meanings, which bind each member individually into the larger national story]. It follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly 'belong'" (2000, 4). Thus, the Serdang Folk Museum will be discussed against a backdrop of National Heritage via the institutions of the National Museum, *Muzium Negara*, and the state museum of Selangor, the Sultan Alam Shah Museum. It is also examined within a framework of global community museum discourse and critiques of National Heritage.

Museums and Communities: Negotiations of Past, Present and Future

In any discussion of museums and heritage, the European and Anglophone legacy of heritage studies should be acknowledged, with its emphasis on the protection of material objects or places designated as having historical or inheritable value, and also with its implications of nationalism and concepts of National Heritage (Smith 2017a, 16–17). The museum is also inherently political, from its origins as a colonial institution of power that permitted the colonial state to imagine its colonised zones and subjects, to the modern era where the post-independent state has inherited this form of "political museumising" and continues a legacy of classifying, ordering and erasing (Anderson 1991, 183).

While the Eurocentric origins of the institution of the museum and collecting practices, and their socio-political implications, have been studied extensively (Bennett 1990; Hooper-Greenhill 1989; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Duncan 1991), I would argue that in Malaysia the institutional model that is inherently a colonial legacy has yet to be fully interrogated. Instead, the state institutions continue to perpetuate antiquated methods of classification and display and, ultimately, of control. The museum as an institution is part of a nation's heritage project, presenting to the public artefacts deemed to be of historical and national importance and managed by state authorities alongside historical monuments and sites. National collections convey decisions of who and what matters, whose stories are worthy of being told and present constructs of identities which the state legitimises through its institutional authority.

In spite of the limitations and legacies of the museum institution, communities in various parts of the world strive to redress and reclaim the museum for their own intents and purposes. Such a reclamation is not without its complexities as it is bound by specific histories of displacement—often of migration, whether forced or voluntary—and the struggle for cultural survival in newly forged nations of diverse ethnic populations and competing heritage narratives. Heritage in all forms is in constant process of being made and remade and is, thus, a discursive practice (Hall 2000). The museum acts as a discursive tool in this process: an archive and medium for memory presentation, a space for the sharing of stories and of reflection and a space where heritage can be enacted and re-enacted.

The term "community" itself has gained currency in the field of heritage and cultural management, but requires definition. In the drafting of UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Convention—a key text that elevates the status of communities in terms of the role they can play in recognising and safeguarding cultural heritage—"community" is defined as a people who share a self-ascribed sense of connectedness, which may be manifested in a feeling of identity of common behaviour, as well as in activities and territory (Blake 2009, 61). In their study of community museums in Oaxaca, Mexico, Camarena and Morales (2006) define community as:

> a group that shares a territory, a common history, and a memory of its history. Its constituents have a common experience of constructing meaning and a way of life. It is a group capable of collective action in the interest of its members, capable of developing initiatives and struggles to contest those who act against its interests. (327)

The agency implied in the term "community" in this context is of particular note and one which I adopt in my discussion of community museums in Malaysia. The concept of a community museum builds on the idea of community itself as a site for contestation and struggle. The museum is adapted as an instrument to resist the imposition of cultural practices and values by either external parties or the forces of globalisation, and is wielded as a strategy for cultural survival.

The community museum as a site of resistance is also vividly seen in post-apartheid South Africa, where it has been instrumental as a strategy for continual social transformation. In his detailed study, Ciraj Rassool (2006) traces the genealogies of Cape Town's District 6 Museum to examine how it functions as a project of memorialising and identity making, and explores the notion of a "museum-as-collection as a space for the performance of history" (303). He also highlights how community museums tend to fall outside the structure of national museums and national heritage, elaborating that they:

> thus exist outside the official circuits of national funding for arts, culture and heritage […]. [T]he exclusion of these new and fledgling museums from the structures and national heritage priorities of the state has also created a sense of an independent cultural platform and has had the unintended consequence of enhancing the possibilities of constituting a vibrant, independent, contested public culture. (288)

This independence is a significant factor in such institutions, and is a defining characteristic of community agency. Whether as institutions contributing to civic life in functioning democratic states or as sites of resistance, the community museum fulfils a crucial role in a nation's cultural landscape. As heritage and history are used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present (Smith 2006), the independence as well as agency of community museums enables the making public of dissenting or alternative histories and identity constructions.

The negotiation of past, present and future is of profound importance for communities which have hitherto felt themselves to be marginalised in official discourse or whose stories and representation in popular culture have been controlled and manipulated through a system of othering and/or erasure. The Chinatown History Museum Experiment in New York's Chinatown, founded in 1980 as the NY Chinatown History Project,

employed dialogic and community-based approaches to historical research and public programming, with a profound impact on the participants and members of the community in contesting the way the Chinese immigrant experience in America is remembered and represented in mainstream history. As historian and co-founder John Kuo Wei Tchen (1992) describes:

> [T]he past becomes a touchstone against which the present and future are interpreted and understood […]. [A]cts of self-discovery shape and reshape individual and collective identities […] how people want to think of themselves in the present necessarily influences what they will remember about the past, and conversely, what they remember about themselves in the past influences how they think about themselves in the present. (292–293)

The museum, thus, poses strategies for collective remembering and becomes a medium for the re-presentation and validation of personal histories and individual memories. The Chinatown History Museum also creates a tangible presence that stakes the community's claim in the larger narrative of American history, an act which demands respect and acknowledgement from wider society. This is relevant here not to draw direct parallels with the Serdang Folk Museum—although like the Chinese communities in America, Malaysian Chinese too have a history of migration, diaspora and struggle but also success—but to raise questions of how a migrant community might claim their position in the wider historical narrative of a nation and how a minority ethno-linguistic group might safeguard and transmit their cultural practices. The Chinatown History Museum Experiment also highlights the impact that such memory projects can have—that its role is not merely in the realm of memory, but in how it affects the sense of self a community has of themselves in both the present and future.

National Heritage Versus People's Heritage

The contrast between community heritage and history and National Heritage and History reveals the politics of recognition at play in heritage-making. Distinct from identity politics, the politics of recognition refers to claims for recognition that are linked to demands and calls for restorative justice, social inclusion and greater equity in policy negotiations in the distribution of resources (Fraser 1995, 2000; Young 2000, cited in Smith 2017b). In a country like Malaysia where *Bumiputera*[1] preferential

economic and cultural policies dictate access to resources from education to housing and more, it is not surprising that any claims to equity made by minority groups would be viewed with trepidation, if not outright hostility. Heritage is implicated in this struggle, for as Smith asserts "heritage also becomes an arena where misrecognition may occur and be further propagated, as the ways in which hegemonic groups construct understandings of both themselves and 'the other' are significant potential acts of recognition and misrecognition" (26). The National Heritage discourse in Malaysia can be viewed as an extension of the preservation of Malay hegemony, requiring a selective process of labelling and describing that, it is argued here, deliberately misrepresents rather than truly reflects the diverse ethnic make-up of the nation.

The National Museum and Sultan Alam Shah Museum are both implicated in this project of misrecognition. As the Serdang Folk Museum is discussed in this chapter as offering an alternative narrative to National Heritage and state-endorsed history and identity construction, I turn now to the state institutions to provide a basis for comparison. As public institutions, they assume to hold a responsibility to present official notions of both history and Malaysian identity. More critically, they are also spaces that summon people to imagine themselves as citizens of a nation-state, as Sharon J. Macdonald (2003) sums up:

> Public museums […] invited people to conceptualise a sense of national or racial difference from others; and to experience their own worlds as relatively and reassuringly governed ones. They helped to convey senses of both stability and progress. They helped to instantiate a 'scientific', 'objective' way of seeing—a gaze which could 'forget' its own positionedness. They helped to think identities as bounded and coherent. (5)

The supposed coherence presented by such displays in a national museum is highly problematic when the official discourse in Malaysia is one that is characterised by the politicisation of ethnicity and religion and institutional efforts to maintain Malay hegemony in a post-colonial, multiethnic nation. The country's early history is one of fluid boundaries, the legacies of mainland Southeast Asian and maritime empires and of rather more cosmopolitan *nusantara* or archipelagic identities. It is also one of colonialism and colossal migration. The large influxes of Chinese and Indian migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to a multiethnic populace proud to call themselves Malaysian today, as annual

independence day celebrations and frequent national unity campaigns attest to, but whose cultural rights and position as equal citizens have been in a constant state of contestation (Kua 1990; Mandal 2008; Gabriel 2011, 2014; Rowland 2015).

The community that is the focus of this chapter is one formed by a specific era in Malaysia's history known as the Emergency Period, which lasted from 1948 to 1960 and which resulted in the forced relocation of mostly Chinese settlers as an effort to contain the communist insurgency in Malaya. Following the end of World War II, the returning British had found themselves having to contend with ever-stronger stirrings of nationalism in various forms, of which the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was a particular threat. Chinese villagers were perceived to be sympathetic to the communist cause; therefore, as an attempt to manage this threat and cut off communist access to resources, hundreds of New Villages (*Kampung Baru*, to give them their Malay terminology) were set up between 1950 and 1952, a programme that saw the relocation of about half a million, predominantly Chinese, settlers, although the creation of Malay New Villages has also been documented.

This is the particular history of the Serdang Folk Museum and its community, to which I will return later. In my examination that follows of the exhibitions of the National Museum and Sultan Alam Shah Museum, I will focus on how the Emergency Period is recounted, while also looking at how Malaysian society is represented within their galleries. It is reiterated here how museums, as official heritage institutions, are also places for the articulation of social ideas, organised in terms that legitimise and dictate identities, and, thus, as places that define relationships with communities (Karp 1992). The messages and images that they transmit are meanings that shape their audiences' understandings of self in relation to others and to the nation.

The National Museum, opened in 1963 to much fanfare as an emblem of Malaysian modernity and independence, has undergone a number of changes since its inception, and is also often influenced by a tourism agenda as it sits under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. Managed by the Department of Museums Malaysia (*Jabatan Muzium Malaysia*, JMM, previously known as the Department of Museums and Antiquities), the stated objectives of the JMM are:

> to preserve, conserve and disseminate knowledge about the country's historical, cultural and natural heritage; to create public awareness of the

> country's rich heritage history, its multiracial culture and its natural environment; to foster a harmonious society with high moral standards and to assist the efforts of the government to promote and develop the tourism industry. (Department of Museums Malaysia)

However, in 2007, the National Museum became essentially a history museum after the closure of the National History Museum, which Abu Talib Ahmad (2015) describes as a "convenient excuse for the removal of non-Islamic cultural elements", rendering it more acceptable to Islamic purists and presenting a new arrangement complementing the history textbooks of the new curriculum, revised in 2001 to include an element of patriotism (16–20). The National Museum has always been defined by its nation-building agenda, but, over time, the ideals of multiculturalism, a founding objective, seem to have faded in a project of gradual erasure of non-Muslim and non-Malay cultural aspects. The National Museum is divided into four galleries: (1) Early History; (2) the Malay Kingdoms; (3) the Colonial Era and (4) the 'Malaysia Today' gallery, which focuses on the country following its independence in 1957. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on only two of these sections to draw parallels with Serdang: the Colonial Era and Malaysia Today.

Designed as a series of dioramas and displays of artefacts comprising mainly weaponry, the Colonial Era gallery takes visitors through a brisk history with touch points on Melaka and the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch, select acts of resistance and negotiations with the British and a section on Japanese rule. The overarching narrative is of conquest and resistance, with a brief inclusion of the industries of tin mining and rubber. In his assessment of the gallery, Abu Talib highlights the absence of any mention of Malaysia's plural society and its evolution, suggesting the discomfort amongst contemporary (non-Malay) Malaysians of being associated with the term 'immigrant' as being a possible reason for the downplaying of this fact of their historical origins in Malaysia and that "the disappearance of the term 'migrant' from the museum is politically correct but historically flawed" (24). This proposition of political correctness is debatable, however, as there are numerous ways this fact of history may be presented that take into consideration peoples' sensitivities, yet is able to offer a more multifaceted and inclusive dimension to the story of the nation's development.

The Emergency Period is one of eight sections in the final gallery of modern and contemporary Malaysia. A wall case presents two

mannequins—one dressed in the uniform of the Malayan Army and the other in the outfit of the Malayan Communist Party—while a wall presents a timeline of key events (Fig. 3.1). The language employed is predictably biased, with the communists described as mounting an "armed and violent resistance", bringing social, political and economic instability, and that the "country's infrastructure was destroyed by the terrorists and people lived in fear". We are told under the heading "Destruction and Pain" that "day to day activities and movements of the people were curtailed as a result of these [communist] attacks", and the creation of New Villages is mentioned in just one line under the heading "Communist Fighting Strategies".

As with the Colonial gallery, the emphasis in modern Malaysia is on treaties, nationalism and the road to nation-state status. The human element and socio-cultural impact on actual people does not seem to be a consideration worthy of representation. Throughout the exhibitions,

Fig. 3.1 Wall display of the Emergency Period at the National Museum, Gallery D, "Malaysia Today". (Photograph by author)

there is an absence of the voices of ordinary citizens and nothing that brings home the realities of life for actual people and of the impact on actual society of the events being chronicled.

As one moves on through the gallery, glimpses of Malaysia's plural societies can be seen in the founding of the modern political parties and, of course, the infamous May 1969 riots.[2] Racial cooperation and ethnic balance is significantly emphasised. Finally, the visitor arrives at the only section of the museum to touch on cultural aspects. Under the heading "Malaysian Culture", the museum features a display of mannequins in "ethnic" costumes (Fig. 3.2), and a poster display of information about each of the major ethnic groups in Malaysia.[3] This method of showcasing "culture" has seen little change over the decades, and is a gross and essentialising simplification where cultural identity is reduced to costumes and descriptions of customs or celebrations. For example, the "Chinese" woman is always depicted in a *cheongsam*, usually red, an auspicious colour

Fig. 3.2 Mannequins in ethnic costume in the "Malaysian Culture" section of the National Museum. (Photograph by author)

in Chinese culture; the "Iban" man of Sarawak always appears in his feathered headdress and loincloth, clutching a shield; and the "Eurasian" woman wears the traditional folk dress of the Portuguese, which members of the Kristang community of Melaka don for cultural performances, but this does not represent Eurasians of non-Portuguese descent, misleadingly and inaccurately grouping them as one monolithic and antiquated cultural community.

Standing in for the representation of Malay culture, at least, is a smaller museum in the museum complex, the Museum of Malay Customs, *Muzium Adat Melayu*. Its exhibits include an overview of various aspects of Malay cultural life: performing arts and music, traditional dress, cooking and leisure. Other than the single section of the Malaysia Today gallery mentioned in the preceding paragraph, nowhere in the official museum narrative of Malaysia are the country's ethnic, cultural and religious diversities, and the myriad ways in which they exist in both the past and the present, depicted.

The Selangor state museum, the Muzium Sultan Alam Shah, is described by Abu Talib more favourably, who claims that state museums feature Malaysia's plural society "in a big way", though he acknowledges that they still present a Malay dominance in their narratives (256). However, this was not found to be the case by this author. The Shah Alam museum orients visitors as soon as they enter the galleries with an overview of the work of the Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation of Selangor (*Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Negeri Selangor*, PADAT), an organisation that has taken over the administration of the museum from the Selangor Museum Board, and whose mission is explicitly stated as being to "*memperkasakan adat Melayu dan warisan negeri Selangor*", to empower Malay customs and the heritage of the state of Selangor, with the responsibility of maintenance, preservation and empowerment (*memelihara, memulihara dan memperkasa*) of those customs.

The word "empowering", *memperkasakan*, is a curious choice of terminology, suggesting that Malay customs have been disempowered or are under threat. Although more conventional terms such as preservation are also used, and in its statement on the history of the institution we see the phrase "ennobling Malay culture", it is "empower" that is used in both its mission statement and the museum's organisational objectives. Unlike the way we see empowerment discussed in the context of marginalised communities, when used in the context of the *museum of the state* (emphasis added), the term suggests a need to assert and establish the dominance or supremacy of Malay culture.

Not vastly different from the National Museum, the first-floor gallery is devoted to history—a Selangor-centric history but one, nonetheless, where its major events, findings and narratives mirror the national narrative of evolution and development. We see the familiar mechanisms in the display of dioramas and painted impressions of battles and the imagination of events in history; archaeological findings; and artefacts dominated by weaponry and miscellaneous paraphernalia that speak of the development of the state from a mainly political, militaristic and economic standpoint. One major difference, though, is the royal presence, as the state museum falls under the patronage of the sultan, the ruler of the state. A section on royal regalia confronts the visitor at the very start of the gallery, while further royal artefacts appear occasionally at various points in the unfolding chronology of events.

Overall, the historical exhibitions prioritise incidents and events over society, and culture is mainly represented through objects placed in vitrines, devoid of context. The cultural galleries showcase craft objects, ceramics, cooking utensils, clothes, as well as displays of marriage, birth and burial customs. Almost all of these, however, are artefacts of a sort of pan-Malay culture. Once again, we do not see any representation of the other ethnic groups of Malaysia, though the indigenous Orang Asli get a brief mention. The seemingly deliberate erasure of Malaysia's plural society and their histories and stories deserves further attention but is not the focus of this chapter. While acknowledging that it is absolutely vital that the museums undergo serious reassessment, the point is made here to underscore the significance of alternative, independent spaces where other stories can be told—a people's history and heritage versus the national.

The history section devoted to the Emergency Period continues the official national narrative about communism and the measures taken to combat it, though it adopts a somewhat more neutral tone. One image in a montage of mostly soldiers depicts villagers lining up for food rations, but apart from this, there is, once again, nothing to convey a sense of life during this period (Fig. 3.3). It is precisely these aspects of life that the Serdang Folk Museum, however, offers to its visitors.

The Serdang New Village and Folk Museum

The New Village programme from 1950 to 1952 significantly changed the social landscape of Chinese communities across the country. Some existing settlements were grouped together and fenced off, while others

Fig. 3.3 Gallery display featuring rifles and semiautomatic weapons against a background of photographs, in a section on the Emergency Period at the Sultan Alam Shah Museum, Selangor. An image of New Village residents lining up for food rations is shown in the top right corner, in the black and white image second from the right. (Photograph by author)

saw relocations over considerably large distances. Lasting twelve years, the Emergency Period changed not just the composition of domestic settlements but also the livelihoods of its residents and their access to resources, and had an irrevocable impact on their social structures.

The influence of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), and its wartime movement, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), is said to have been considerable at the time, "fir[ing] the imagination of the rural Chinese and giv[ing] them a sense of solidarity" (Sandhu 1973, xxxiii). However, the resettlement is also described not just as a programme of detention camps or of segregation but also as providing settled communities facilities such as water and infrastructure that would help provide incentives to them to cooperate with the authorities, while also cultivating a sense of loyalty to their benefactors. This forging of a "stake in the country" (Strauch 1981, 129) was, therefore, also a battle for the hearts and minds of the villagers. Facilities in the standard New Village, as documented by Kernial Singh Sandhu in his 1964 article "The Saga of the 'Squatter' in Malaya" and in the introduction chapter to Ray Nyce's 1973 study for the Malaysian Sociological Institute, included

> a police post with adjacent quarters; a dispensary; a school; administration-cum-community hall and staff quarters; cooking and bathing facilities for police, administration, and […] communal kitchens in New Villages which were under severe food restriction. A wire fence enclosed the public building(s) and the settlers' houses, pigsties, and domestic gardens. (162–163)

The villages are also described as being little more than densely packed shanty towns, comprising simple wooden houses with *atap* (thatch) or zinc roofs, all fenced in by barbed-wire fences.

The New Village of Serdang, Serdang Baru, was one of forty-nine New Villages set up in the state of Selangor. Today, known as Seri Kembangan, the original New Village is now part of a thriving township of over 20,000 inhabitants, located less than half an hour's drive from the capital city centre of Kuala Lumpur. It is also the largest New Village in the state of Selangor and the second largest in the country. Though the barbed-wire fences are long gone and later-day rows of shophouses confront you when you turn off the Bukit Jalil Expressway to reach the settlement, vestiges of the original New Village remain in the higgledy-piggledy short streets and distribution of houses. The architecture of the New Village is in itself a display of the waves of development of the past seventy years, with the last few original wooden shanty houses of the 1950s dotted amongst modern, concrete houses that bear the aesthetic and material evidence of the ensuing decades through their grillwork, pillars, roof tiles and ornamentation.

The Serdang Folk Museum (SFM) would not easily be recognised as a professional museum by international standards, with its implications of professionalism and expert knowledge; neither does it fit the appearance of the type of institution one normally associates with the title of museum. Located in a basement below the school hall stage of the SRK(C) Serdang primary school, the folk museum was set up in 2012 as the result of local community leaders feeling there should be a physical space to commemorate their history. A large rectangular room, it displays a mixture of objects and photographs to convey the history of the Serdang New Village. The room also includes a small, flat-screen TV for audio-visual displays or screenings with a few rows of chairs and benches, and the rearmost end of the room used as a storage area. The SFM is managed by volunteers and its rent and utilities are wholly underwritten by the school.

The idea for the museum was first mooted during the "Serdang Community Art Carnival" of 2012, a community festival led by Chinese

theatre practitioner and educator, Soon Choon Mee. Soon had been the initiator and organiser of such festivals since 2008, the first of which was held in Kajang, and subsequent ones in the nearby townships of Hulu Langat Batu 14 and Batu 11 Cheras,[4] all townships within an approximate 10 km radius from where Soon herself resides in Cheras. Inspired by community festivals in Taiwan combined with an early desire to bridge the gap between arts practitioners and residents who do not typically attend arts events, Soon devised the carnivals as taking place in community spaces such as school halls and public streets, and as involving the participation of local schoolchildren. The success of her efforts is attributed to the collaboration between the Parent-Teacher Associations of the local schools in the districts and of the enthusiasm of residents and local shopkeepers to participate in these very localised and community-driven celebrations of culture.[5]

The museum project was spearheaded by the then chairman of the Parent-Teacher Association of the school, Ho Hwong Fock. The impetus for the project is also attributed to a particular activity in the carnival that highlighted the declining trades in the area. According to Chan Yan Keong, who has acted as curator of the museum since its inception, this particular activity triggered an awareness about the loss of knowledge and heritage that was taking place in the community, leading to the idea to make the engagement between both residents and schoolchildren more permanent and to have a centre that acts as a repository of memories and stories. Chan has been a driving force behind the creation and continued operation of the museum, a role he performs on a completely voluntary basis, and one that encompasses the traditional meaning of "curator" as a custodian and caretaker of artefacts. The role of custodian is currently shared with Goh Seng Guat, the former vice-principal of the school, and who, since 2017, is meant to be assuming more of a curatorial role, though Chan is still very much active. Chan has been the primary informant for this case study, and has a personal and close relationship with both the school and the village of Serdang. A former "old boy" of the school himself and lifelong Serdang resident whose children were also pupils of the school, he has been a member of both the Parent-Teacher Association and the school board, and his wife worked as an administrator in the school for thirty-seven years until her retirement. He describes himself as "actively involved", and it should be mentioned that Chan has also been an equally committed supporter of Serdang artists and is the Founder-Chairman of the Serdang Art Gallery established in 2015.

The museum project is described in an introductory text, at the start of the exhibition, as a community-led activity called "Discovering Serdang", initiated by the SJK(C) Serdang Baru 1 and in collaboration with SJK(C) Serdang Baru 2, SMK Seri Kembangan, the Serdang Baru Christian Church and Serdang Buddhist Association. Translated from the Chinese, it reads:

> Thus, an exhibition entitled "Serdang: The People's Story" was formed. "Serdang: The People's Story" showcases various items from the past and historical photographs that tell the lives of those who call Serdang their home. Through this exhibition, SJK(C) Serdang 1 hopes to revive the rich history of Serdang and its people, reminiscing on the forgotten past and preserving its values and memories for generations to come.

Until late 2018, the displays of the Serdang Folk Museum remained little changed from the latter's inception in 2012. The left wall originally depicted a map of the village made by local schoolchildren through a cultural mapping activity held during the carnival, while running along the length of the left side of the room was a red band with photographs and various cultural artefacts and memorabilia arranged around it, giving the impression of a timeline (Fig. 3.4). Dominating the right side of the room

Fig. 3.4 A section of the original wall display of the Serdang Folk Museum. (Photograph by author)

Fig. 3.5 A recreation in the Serdang Folk Museum of a traditional wooden house typical of dwellings in the 1950s and 1960s. (Photograph by author)

is a reconstruction of an old wooden house, filled with objects and paraphernalia to recreate a dwelling that would have been typical of the settlement in the 1950s and 1960s (Fig. 3.5). Also on the right wall, soon after you enter the museum, is a map and typology of buildings within the boundaries of the original village made by visiting Taiwanese university students.

While the right side of the museum remains the same, the other sections of the museum have undergone a revision and the museum now boasts a new wall-mounting system that allows for the easy changing of display materials.[6] For the purpose of this chapter, the current display will be described in greater detail, with a caveat that the displays are intended to be updated periodically; therefore, the information that follows only pertains to the current exhibition. Nevertheless, frequent major changes to its content is not anticipated, given the informal way in which the museum operates and the limitations in resources. The current display mainly makes use of the same artefacts and many of the same photographs, and still follows a chronological arrangement, except that now the photographs are shown in new frames and in a more conventional gallery hang (Fig. 3.6).

None of the people involved in both its founding and current operations have any professional training or experience in the setting up or

Fig. 3.6 Updated display, in a section devoted to "Education in Serdang—from 1920 to the present". The photos include images of graduating students, teachers and a copy of a primary school certificate from 1953

running of a museum, though the community leaders do demonstrate an understanding of what a museum entails: exhibitions of artefacts and images with captions and labels. They make use of rudimentary and inexpensive methods of display, and artefacts are arranged according to theme and type. They open the museum when there is a need, either for their own activities or for scheduled visits. The SFM is neither a registered society nor company, and there does not seem to be any intention to make it a more formal organisation.

The artefacts in the museum are mementoes from the past collected through an open call to members of the community. Notices and letters were sent to schoolchildren's parents for the donation of old objects and photographs—"anything their grandparents used" as Chan describes—with the committee looking specifically for objects that could illustrate the founding of the New Village or life in the early years, preferably nothing

after the 1980s. The resulting collection of objects was organised and arranged through a collective effort that included members of the project committee, local residents and carnival volunteers made up of young people in their twenties, mostly design and art students from local colleges. The old house exhibit was constructed out of salvaged parts of a house that was demolished to make way for a modern bungalow, and obtained from its owners for the explicit purpose of display in the museum.

The objectives of the Serdang Folk Museum, as described by Chan, are, first, to have students remember the era of their grandparents and, second, for them to become involved in art and cultural activities. A third objective evolved following the museum's establishment and positive reception from the public, especially scholars from Taiwan and scholars of Chinese culture and history in Malaysia, and this was of its role in upholding Hakka culture. Approximately 90% of the residents of the village are said to be of Hakka descent, and aspects of Hakka culture and the Hakka language have been incorporated into their activities with the museum becoming the location and organising nucleus for occasional cultural celebrations and programmes that have featured Hakka food or the performance of Hakka poetry and songs.

To date, the museum has appeared in Mandarin news programmes on national television, and has also been the subject of various forms of video documentations and studies by ethnic Chinese and Chinese-speaking groups and individuals outside of Serdang.[7] The museum also plays host to visiting school groups in addition to regularly being used as a learning tool for the pupils of the SRK(C) Serdang. As the SFM is privately managed and located within the school grounds, to which the public does not have access, it is not technically a "public" museum, but visits can be easily arranged by appointment through Facebook, and there is no admission fee to enter.

The contents of the main exhibition are divided into five sections:

1. "A Brief History"—the name of the village is attributed to the Serdang Tree (*Pokok Serdang Cina* in Malay, scientific name *Livistona chinensis*); it is further described as having seen a name change from Serdang Lama to Serdang Bharu, with its origins linked to a railway line of 1897, which was significant for the transporting of tin and rubber. The plaque in this section proclaims that the name "Serdang" has existed for "more than one hundred years", very clearly situating it as pre-dating the New Village.

2. "The Early Days"—from 1948 to 1960, including the 1950–1952 resettlement and establishing of Serdang Bharu (old spelling, later changed to Baru).
3. "Development of Serdang"—with key milestones being the founding of the SMJK (Inggeris) Serdang Bharu, later renamed as SMK Seri Kembangan in 1965; the building of Taman Seri Serdang in 1976; and the Serdang Market, now known as Pasar Seri Kembangan, erected in 1977.
4. "Education in Serdang"—from 1920 to the present.
5. "The Economy of Serdang"—rubber tapping and tin mining.

In addition to each section heading, there are also two larger panels of text, presented in the form of printed and hung banners. The first, mentioned earlier, acts as an introductory panel, describing the early settlement of Serdang, known as Serdang Lama (Old Serdang), through its occupation by the Japanese in 1941 and the Emergency-enforced relocations, listing by name each settlement brought under the new jurisdiction of the New Village, Serdang Bharu. The second details the Tham Gong Temple, a nearby temple and local landmark. Originally built in Pandan in 1896 as a temple for mining workers in Sungai Besi and for residents of the various villages who were later relocated to Serdang Bharu, the temple itself was relocated in 1950, and has continued to be an important religious node for the New Village community.

According to Chan, a second display that commemorates the history of the local church, the Serdang Baru Christian Church, is in the works. The Serdang Baru Christian Church was founded by missionaries in 1952 and ran a clinic which Chan mentions as having been especially important to the community as it was the sole provider of medical services at a time when no one in the village could afford medical care.[8] Elements of the villagers' spiritual beliefs are thus presented, while also capturing the role religious institutions played in the secular and community life of the village.

It is not possible to describe in detail every photograph and accompanying caption, but they are summarised here to construct an image of the overarching narrative that is presented at the SFM. From the start, the history of Serdang is established as pre-dating the New Village, giving the community a link to a past of almost a hundred years and to a time when the earliest settlers were free agents. Especially notable photographs of the Emergency Period include one that shows villagers heading to work and "waiting for the gates to be opened", and an "Anti-Bandit Procession

against the Malayan Communist Party" described as led by British Superintendent F. A. S. Caldwell and a local congressman. There are also images that portray life in the village—sundry shops, a local resident posing with his motorcycle or a group embarking on an excursion to Melaka. Also shown are select incidents that hint at the community's political life—an "evening of entertainment" in conjunction with the Parti Rakyat Malaysia's (Malaysian People's Party) second anniversary celebrations in 1956.

Throughout we see evidence of life under the Emergency Period but in images that are of ordinary people going to work, going to market, in social units and engaging in various aspects of everyday life. While it is true that in such a display these figures can appear disjointed in the absence of a narrative thread binding them together in a tightly structured story frame, the viewer with a sense of history should be able to make these links—this, in fact, being how exhibitions function, the displays are only half the work, with it being the viewer's job to fill in the blanks. Given the lack of professional expertise, the contextualisation of the information presented could certainly be improved and the artefacts also more effectively incorporated into the displays; however, compared to the exhibitions of the National Museum and the Sultan Alam Shah Museum, the photographs of the Serdang Folk Museum and their brief captions are able to convey a wealth of information on a community of people and how larger historical events shaped their lives. They also help towards tracing the evolution of a town that mirrors the experience of a significant portion of ethnic Chinese communities across the country.

The exhibition also firmly seeks to demonstrate Serdang's importance, not just to the local community, but to the development of the nation. This is both implied and explicitly stated, as in the description under Section 3 of the exhibition, 'Development of Serdang', for instance: "Due to its strategic location, Serdang was a high point of interest for the federal government and was visited by multiple leaders in the country which led to its development". This is also conveyed through photographs of visits on separate occasions by the highest officials: Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's first Prime Minister, and the then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, and in the 1970s and 1980s, of visits by the Selangor chief ministers of the time.

The importance of education and Serdang's contribution to the nation's economic development are major themes. The title panel in the education section states the founding of the first school in 1920, of the Serdang

School of Agriculture in 1932, and mentions that the opening ceremony of SJK(C) Serdang Baru 1 on 20 September 1952 was attended by Sir Henry Gurney, British High Commissioner of Malaya. It also includes a statement that he was assassinated sixteen days later. The exhibition thus establishes links to major figures in national history, both by bringing them into the narrative of Serdang, while also framing the community's experience within a narrative of the nation, drawing a compelling line from the village to national events.

Displays such as these clearly situate Serdang within the historical development of Malaya and Malaysia. This is not a community in isolation but a community that is very much part of the development of a new nation—and, furthermore, not a passive one but one that actively contributed and continues to contribute to its construction. The word "hardships" is mentioned in the introductory text—"In the early twentieth century, Chinese immigrants from Southern China left their homes in search of a better life. Having arrived in Serdang, the predominantly Hakka community built their lives in a foreign land amidst hardships and stayed until this very day"—and was also used by Chan in our conversation when explaining to me what he hopes young people will gain from the exhibition—a sense of the hardships experienced by their grandparents. It is clear that the struggles of the community are an integral part of their memory-making. Their evolution is not to be romanticised, but their experience is also not presented as one of tragedy or persecution. Information is presented in a factual tone with little embellishment but also without censorship. An excerpt from the introductory panel that sums up the Emergency Period is shown below:

> In 1949, the British Administration declared the Malayan Emergency in an effort to establish control over the Communist Party. Residents from Kampung Pisang (opposite Serdang Railway Station), Port Heng, Heng Street, Prang Besar (now Putrajaya), Pandan and Pantai (Sri Petaling area), Kuyoh, Sungai Besi and similar areas were forcibly relocated to a settlement in the old Puchong area, three kilometres away from Serdang Lama. In just three years, there were almost 1,800 families in the settlement. The living conditions of the settlement were harsh due to stringent curfew measures used by the British Administration, and it was surrounded by barbed wires. Within this period, the 500 acres of guarded camp was named Serdang Bharu (Serdang New Village). In 1952, the Malayan Emergency was brought to an end.[9]

The Serdang Folk Museum, thus, presents a mix of artefacts from ordinary people's lives that tell a history of poverty and hardship, and also of industry and development, and a series of photographic records places them squarely within the politics of the country. While the quaintness of the "old house" display and the valorisation of "dying trades" in the media and on public blogs and social media sites tend to often be couched in sentimental nostalgia, which can obscure underlying tensions, such nostalgia is markedly absent in the SFM with little reminiscing evident in the factual retelling of history through curated photographs and captions. Furthermore, as observed in New York's Chinatown History Museum Project:

> the more the activities of reflecting and remembering are made public, the more individuals will become active in identifying the differences and similarities in their experiences with one another and with people who have not lived their experience. At this point more critical insights begin to challenge simple nostalgia. People can begin to bridge the differences between their experiences and others', and feelings of mutual respect begin to surface. (Kuo 1992, 293)

The act of museum-making is a means of claiming space and validating the position of a community in a society in which their particular histories are not evident, a society where ethnicity and cultural heritage are deliberately and systematically erased from national narratives. This is a society which still feels the legacy of the National Cultural Policy of 1971 and its contested principles that continue to uphold the primacy of Malay culture at the expense of Malaysia's other ethnic and cultural groups. The process of villagers coming together, drawing from individual memories and participating in an act of collective remembering through the sorting and organising of their artefacts and records, enables them to engage in an act of heritage-making. Heritage is not simply the objects in the museum or the wooden house, but the living memory that is activated in this process of remembering, as well as the performance of being Hakka. Heritage is bound indelibly to the landscape which it inhabits, and which defines the community with its particular history and context.

Concluding Thoughts

The Serdang Folk Museum is an example of a community museum that is conceived, developed and run by community members. It receives no funding support from the government and has not relied on professional

museum experts in its construction and production of exhibits, nor in their interpretation. Its exhibitions were not designed with an outside audience in mind but as meant to be serving its own community. Due to the "appointment only" nature of the visits to the SFM, the visitor experience is very much mediated through volunteers such as Chan. All the display text is in Chinese, which also makes it accessible to a very specific demographic. The experience is, therefore, one that brings you into direct and close contact with the originators and community custodians of these memories, supported further by oral accounts delivered as part of one's guided experience of the museum.

The museum can be significantly empowering to both the Serdang community and also to any visitor with a shared past, whether of Hakka descent or who have lived or live in a New Village. This history surfaces and gives prominence to a shared heritage that has for the most part gone undocumented in the public eye. The community museum is a platform for both individual and collective voices to be heard, for shared remembering and the staging of memories and the practice of culture. It is a strategy for organisation and community empowerment. Its power lies not just in the staging and output of exhibitions, but in the very processes of organising, gathering, remembering, arguing and resolving conflict. By a community coming together to do this, it can strengthen bonds and build solidarity amongst its members; it fosters respect for self and each other and allows for a community to be seen in ways they want to be seen by other members of society. It also enables collective claims for recognition with its socio-political implications and potential for political action.

Through the comparison of the narratives presented in the state institutions and those of the SFM, the omissions and gaps in the construct of National Heritage, which emphasises a nation-building theme over the many subjective lived experiences of the populace, clearly emerge, alongside a more problematic reduction or erasure of community identities. However, what is also evident is that grassroots agents are claiming spaces for themselves, and that alternative forms of archiving, research and documentation are taking place. The story of modern Malaysia is incomplete without the more sensitive episodes in the nation's history that have thus far been downplayed in school history curricula and in the official institutional representations. By eliminating social history from official accounts, the state is able to present a more black and white reading of the past, without the shades of grey that inevitably arise when the human

factor is foregrounded. It also enables the (mis)representation and misrecognition of communities according to state agendas.

In the case of the Emergency Period, scholarly attention has taken place in waves, as highlighted by Judith Strauch in the introduction to her 1981 case study of a New Village in Perak: "though the new villages received some notoriety in the war literature of the 'Emergency' and were the focus of more serious studies in the 1960s, they have not been singled out for much scholarly attention (since)" (126). The Emergency Period may be over, but it seems that the struggle for the hearts and minds of Malaysians continues. Malaysian filmmaker Amir Muhammad's film *Lelaki Komunis Terakhir* (*The Last Communist*) was famously banned in 2006 on account of its "sensitive" subject matter, a ban that is still in effect today ("Censorship Board: Ban on Amir Muhammad's Lelaki Komunis Terakhir still on", *The Star*, 6 October 2018, accessed 13 April 2019). There is much to suggest that communism is the trigger here,[10] and the possibility that communism may be presented in favourable or sympathetic terms seems to be a fear within sections of the government; this is a fear that results in outright suppression rather than dialogue. More recently, in April 2019, the news portal *Malaysiakini* reported a call by an opposition party lawmaker for new or amended museum regulations to monitor the artefacts and contents displayed in private museums because of claims that activist groups were "attempting to distort history, particularly with regard to the Communist insurgency" (Kow Gah Chie, "Gov't urged to regulate private museums to prevent 'distortions' of history", *Malaysiakini*, 4 April 2019, accessed 7 April 2019). Barisan Nasional lawmaker Mastura Mohd Yazid is quoted as saying that "they (the communists) were not (freedom) fighters. The real (freedom) fighters were the security forces who fought the Communists" and that "recently, there was a group of activists who worked hard to change these historical facts", clearly indicating that for certain political officers, any aspect of history other than the official government-sanctioned version is impermissible.

In recent years, we have, in fact, seen an increase in a new type of researcher: artists, culture workers and enthusiasts of history, initiating and participating in activities that seek to engage with the past in ways that are rooted in the present. Projects like Soon Choon Mee's art carnivals and the 2009 participatory arts project *Entry Points* by Serdang-born and now Singapore-based artist Chu Chu Yuan have sought to create engagements between artists and residents of Serdang. Independent archive and research initiatives like the Malaysia Design Archive and the Rumah Attap

Library and Collective 84, both located in the Zhongshan building in Jalan Kampung Attap, Kuala Lumpur, a sort of commune of creative businesses and nonprofit entities, are both contemporary initiatives where academics, researchers and history buffs are able to gather, organise educational talks and workshops, and develop a network of critical, socially minded, independent advocates of heritage. Such efforts contribute to a groundswell of a people's history and community heritage movement.

In conclusion, however, I wish to strike a cautionary note. There is a risk that community-specific efforts could become closed to the rest of society in the bid to take control of their own cultural interpretations and representations, something exacerbated by the language divides that mark Malaysia's socio-cultural landscape—seen most often between dialect-speaking and Mandarin Chinese, Malay-speaking communities and English-speaking urban and suburban middle-class communities, but not excluding Tamil-speaking communities and the diverse groups of Borneo with their many languages and accompanying politics. Just as the state museums' National Heritage discourse is overwhelmingly Malay-centric (Abu Talib 2015), community heritage can easily become overwhelmingly ethnocentric in its engagement with its present and its past.

It must be mentioned that this investigation was conducted entirely in English and the texts which I was able to draw from were also written in English with the exception of a few translated works. There are scholars writing in Chinese on the topic of new villages or Malaysian history, to whose works I do not have access, but who would be well known to the custodians of the Serdang Folk Museum. It is evident that there is also a large network of ethnic Chinese artists and people engaged in various cultural work in or from Serdang. While the act of validation that the folk museum brings to the Chinese community, both of Serdang and beyond, mainly owing to its media reach, is important, it is a delicate balance between community pride and a potential ethnocentric communalism. As Kuo (1992) cautions in his discussion of the Chinatown History Project:

> (While) a more integrative and inclusive community history can help to counter the sense of marginalization and disempowerment vis-à-vis the large society […] this type of community history can also be limiting and claustrophobic. For example, the celebration of Chinatown's history can become too narrow-minded and overly culturally nationalist […]. Chineseness can easily be overemphasized, becoming an essentialist and quasi-genetic characteristic untouchable by comparisons with other experiences. (294)

These complexities are ones that cannot be ignored and must be addressed with sensitivity and commitment. Community museums such as the Serdang Folk Museum do play a vital role for both the community of origin but also for the rest of society as an opportunity for intercultural dialogue. They can empower through acts of community-led agency and redress imbalances in the National Heritage narrative. However, for the community museum to be of most value to the community, it also needs to be self-reflective and to engage more directly with other segments of society. This will allow for the mutual exchange of experiences of being Malaysian and the intermingling of both shared and distinctly different heritages. Only then can we see the museum become truly discursive in enabling conversations to take place within and between communities and to facilitate mutual understanding and empathy. Only then do we also see the museum achieve its value as a site and process of heritage-making and for the enactment of public culture.

Notes

1. The term *Bumiputera* roughly translates to "sons of the soil" and is the official term used by the Malaysian government for ethnic Malays and those considered indigenous to the Malay lands. Controversial affirmative action policies for those categorised as *Bumiputera* were implemented, following the 1970 New Economic Policy, and continue to be in effect despite various calls for reform of what is perceived as an outdated ethnic-based policy that leaves itself open to abuse and which has not necessarily yielded the desired results.
2. The Federal Elections of 1969 were marked by ethnic-based protectionism and the election result, which saw large wins by ethnic Chinese parties, led to victory celebrations and counter-rallies by supporters of the ethnic-Malay party the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), that deteriorated in communal violence on 13 May 1969. This incident is widely framed as the darkest period in Malaysia's history and although firmly recognised in official accounts of history, the dissection of the incident has been avoided in school history books and only in recent years has the experiences of individuals who lived through this period being given more attention in the media.
3. This is the standard for official representations of Malaysian multiculturalism, completely disregarding the vast diversity of Borneo and the many different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups within Indian and Chinese

communities. It has also consistently grouped Nusantara cultures—Bugis, Javanese, Mandailing, among others—under the heading of "Malay".

4. Cheras is a suburban township about fifteen minutes from Kuala Lumpur city centre. Kajang and Serdang are neighbouring townships in the state of Selangor, more or less located within a 10 km radius of each other.
5. For further details of Soon Choon Mee's Community Art Carnivals, see the case study commissioned by Arts-ED in 2014, available at https://www.communityarts.my/case-studies. Around the same time, various networks of artists and cultural practitioners have been organising similar community-centred activities, such as Lost Gens in Kuala Lumpur, Aisyah Baharuddin in Shah Alam, Arts-ED in Penang, the Pangkor Festival in Pahang and the Kuala Sepetang Festival in Perak, to name a few.
6. This is explained by Chan as a new system that permits updates to the museum displays, while also accommodating the needs of the Serdang Art Gallery, an independent organisation that he also oversees, which is now going to be sharing the museum space. The new system is, therefore, both seen as an upgrade and also a strategy for how to manage both needs moving forward.
7. Many of these are documented on the Serdang Folk Museum (沙登民间故事馆) Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/Serdangfolkmuseum/
8. A brief but fascinating account of the Serdang missionaries can be found in Chap. 1, "Long Live the Missionaries", of Ong Hwee Keng's *More Ordinary Man's Stories* (2009), now out of print but available online at http://deargoldie.com/2016/07/12/an-ordinary-mans-stories-book-2/. The website also reproduces the chapter along with photographs, including one of the old clinic.
9. The dates presented in the SFM are factually inaccurate: 1949 is described as the start of the Malayan Emergency, whereas, in actual fact, it began in 1948 and lasted till 1960. The panel describes the Emergency as ending in 1952, but 1952 was the year that the New Village relocation projects ended. All textual information presented in the museum is written in Chinese and was translated into English with a professional translation service and verified by two additional readers, after the interviews with Chan. At the time of writing, it was not possible to revisit these with the curator, Chan, as he has been in recuperation from a series of operations. It is the author's speculation that the dates speak directly to the period of the creation of the village within the time frame of the Emergency.
10. A detailed discussion from the filmmaker's point of view is available on the official film blog: http://lastcommunist.blogspot.com/2006/05/why-is-lelaki-komunis-terakhir-banned.html

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