

## *Executive Summary*

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Malaysia is a country blessed with diversities—natural, historical, cultural, lingual, and political. Despite distinct differences, communities of this country have been living together peacefully. People of the country learnt to communicate, compensate, and collaborate to bridge their differences. This is best demonstrated in elements of everyday life such as language, songs, dances, games, and food.

This report of Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region 2016 aims to collect data on current safeguarding efforts of the diverse and robust intangible cultural heritage in Malaysia. With the invitation from the International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region and with blessings from National Heritage Department of Malaysia, George Town World Heritage Incorporated—as the site manager for George Town World Heritage Site, was given the opportunity to prepare this report.

Safeguarding efforts on intangible cultural heritage in Malaysia have been committed by individuals, organisations, and governmental agencies at the federal, state and local levels way before the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was introduced in 2003. Most of the individuals, groups, associations or communities who engaged in these efforts have framed their activities using different styles of coding systems, terminologies, approaches in categorisations, and so on. Many of them are not registered, not linked to any governmental activities, or not available at any online platforms. To overcome these challenges in generating this report, the research team from George Town World Heritage Incorporated has adopted methodology such as interviews, literature reviews on published documents, online search, and archival references. Most of the documents referred to are written in Bahasa Malaysia, English or Chinese. Due to the lack of resources, documents written in other vernacular languages are excluded in the report preparation.

The objective of this report is to provide preliminary and overall view of the work conducted by various stakeholders at the federal, state and local levels in Malaysia. A nationwide inventory, however, is urgently needed to investigate and

identify the comprehensive and inclusive database on this matter. It is also hoped that information provided in this report can enhance the networking of concerned experts in the field of intangible cultural heritage within Malaysia as well as across the Asia Pacific's Member States.

This report begins with the analysis of the safeguarding system and policy in Malaysia. We investigated the Malaysia National Heritage Act 2005 as well as heritage related enactments and policies at the state level. The second chapter on Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory details the National Heritage Register List from 2007 to 2015 as compiled by the National Heritage Department of Malaysia. We also introduced the Cultural Mapping Portal on Performing Arts by the National Department for Culture and Arts, and the Directory of Traditional Trades and Occupation by George Town World Heritage Incorporated.

In the third chapter on Information on Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements, we elaborated on eleven (11) elements from the National Heritage Register List from 2007 to 2015 as established by the National Heritage Department of Malaysia. It was a difficult decision to limit our reporting to a small number. These elements, individuals, groups, communities and organisations were selected based on the availability and reliability of information. We also provided twenty-three (23) contact's information on the individual practitioners, and five (5) groups at the chapter on Intangible Cultural Heritage Practitioners, Groups, and Communities. Readers are welcomed to explore the other elements in Malaysia, which may be very diverse and less known from the mainstream understanding.

At the chapter on Relevant Organisations, we detailed sixteen (16) federal agencies, and one hundred and fifty-eight (158) state level agencies in the list. The research team wishes to highlight here that this list can be more comprehensive in the next phase of the study. Likewise, we only exemplified four (4) conferences and seminars as well as forty-one (41) workshops relevant to intangible cultural heritage that were organised in Malaysia during the period of 2010 to 2016.

The chapter on Transmission System details five systems: two by the federal governmental agencies, one by the state agency, and two by the non-government agency. These are: 1) National Heritage-Living Person Category (National Heritage Department), 2) Master Craftsmen and National Master Craft (Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation), 3) Intangible Cultural Heritage Apprenticeship Programme (George Town World Heritage Incorporated), and 4) Living Heritage Treasures Awards (Penang Heritage Trust) and 5) Penang Apprenticeship Programme for Artisans (Penang Heritage Trust). The chapter on

Pending Issues and Urgent Needs regarding the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is not available in this report. The final chapter details the reference materials used by the research team.

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Although Malaysia endorsed the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013, the safeguarding efforts and persistency have started many years ago by the artisans, craftsmen, and cultural heritage workers. It is hoped that this report can provide the impetus for a more comprehensive inventory and concrete safeguarding efforts and reflect the rich, organic, and diverse cultural heritage in Malaysia.

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On Behalf of the Research Team

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