

ENGAGEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AS CUSTODIANS IN HERITAGE CONSERVATION ENRICHMENT

Pue Giok Hun

Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, MALAYSIA
E-mail: ghpue@ukm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

In 2005, National Heritage Act was enacted by the Government of Malaysia as an effort to protect and preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the country. Despite its significance and well intentions, the Act remains weak and limited in terms of its definition, scope, implementation and awareness. This, in particular, becomes problematic when it comes to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as it is living and continuously evolving. The increasingly rapid globalisation at the end of the 20th century causes more communities to become susceptible to frequent changes. In addition, Malaysian studies itself is still in the early phase of forming and building the breadth and depth of local knowledge of the country and its society. One particular aspect of concern is knowledge about minority ethnic groups with the potentials to be considered as regional heritage such as the various Peranakan communities in Malaysia. Hence, it is a race against time to have the communities' rich and invaluable culture documented for future preservation and conservation. Against this background, the present article explores theses as a potential viable source of knowledge on a minority ethnic community in Malaysia with a focus on Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan. Selected available theses pertaining to social aspects of the community that were written at bachelor degree levels at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Malaya (UM) from 1970s to 2010s are analysed using content analysis technique. Findings of the study suggests that theses can potentially serve as custodians to the untapped "treasure trove" of Malaysian heritage by preserving arcane information of the community at the grass-root level. Several theses written even go beyond "potentials" after they were

polished and published as books, subsequently providing a significant contribution to building and defining what we now know about the community and its heritage.

Keywords: heritage custodians, heritage conservation enrichment, minority ethnic groups, Peranakan Chinese of Kelantan, theses

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to protect and preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Malaysia remain lukewarm and move at abysmal speed. For instance, National Heritage Act was enacted as recent as in 2005 by the Government with the purpose of providing a general guideline of preservation or conservation of what is deemed as heritage in Malaysia. Despite its significance and well intentions, a decade later the Act remains weak and limited in terms of its narrow definition, scope, implementation and awareness (Nurulhuda and Nuraisyah, 2013; Halamy and Kibat, 2017), effectively limiting its efficiency in the actual work of preserving and conserving heritage (Azni and Nuraisyah, 2013). This in particular becomes problematic when it comes to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as the heritage is continuously evolving. The problem is because in Malaysia, information on ICH is often undocumented or unrecorded (Halamy and Kibat, 2017). As a result, Malaysia struggles to reconstruct the breadth and depth of its history and local knowledge that serve as building blocks of the country and its society's rich heritage.

The challenges of heritage conservation in Malaysia are further compounded by globalisation which, by the end of the 20th century, has affected all segments of many societies. Globalisation becomes a threat to sustainability of heritage due to its "homogenising forces" in various forms including modernisation and capitalistic development, resulting in "...the nuanced components of our cultural diversity, a great number of cultural expressions or 'intangible cultural heritage', are considered to be threatened with extinction..." (Stefano, Davis and Corsane, 2012: 1). This view echoes that of Appadurai's (1990), who believes that the tendency of globalisation to "streamline" diversity is due to the constant contestation between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation which is the axis in global interaction. When this occurs, minority groups are at a higher risk to be culturally absorbed by majority groups, especially those in close proximity. He elegantly describes this in his magnum opus, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*: "One man's imagined community (Anderson, 1983) is another man's political prison" (Appadurai, 1990: 295). In the issue of organising social difference according to ethnicity, the minority groups that Appadurai refers to might as well be the minority ethnic groups that exist at the marginal or periphery of a multi-ethnic society.

In this context, globalisation poses an imminent challenge for Malaysia's heritage conservation enrichment. As a country with a society that consists of over 70 distinct ethnic groups and which can be further divided to 200 sub-groups according to clans and dialects (Hood, 2006: 8), one particular aspect of concern is the knowledge production on minority ethnic groups, including those that are considered as regional heritage such as the various Peranakan communities in the Peninsular. *Peranakan* is a Malay term that was originally used in the 18th century to refer to womb, a vital part of women's reproduction system (Tan, 1988: 64). By mid-19th century, the term gradually came to refer to local-born of foreign descent, especially offspring from mixed marriages between foreign men (particularly Chinese) and native women (Tan, 1988: 44). Over time, the use of the term Peranakan includes an additional semantic aspect (Teo, 2003: 5), namely, highly localised non-native culture practiced by the local-born of mixed descent. In Peninsular Malaysia, there are five well-known Peranakan communities: Jawi Peranakan, Hindu Peranakan (*Chetti*), Chinese Peranakan (the Baba and Nyonya in Melaka and Straits Chinese in Penang), and Eurasian-Portuguese (the *Serani* in Melaka). Needless to say, the richness and uniqueness of these Peranakan communities' multicultural heritage were pivotal in the recognition of Melaka and Penang as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Beyond the "Big Five" Peranakan communities mentioned above, there are several other Peranakan communities in the Peninsular Malaysia, such as Peranakan Samsam in Kedah and Perlis, Arab Peranakan in Kedah, Sikh Peranakan in Perak, as well as Kelantan Peranakan Chinese (*Cina kampung*) and Terengganu Peranakan Chinese in the east coast (Pue, 2016). Each of the community is unique in its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, but remains little known and yet to be recognised due to lack of documentation and research.

While waiting to be "discovered", their cultural heritage continues to evolve and be influenced by internal and external factors. Unfortunately, the changes bring the communities towards the brink of "disappearance" both in terms of population size and cultural practices (Pillai, 2015; Lee, 2008; Fernandis, 2003). In the present scenario, it is a race against time to have the country's rich and invaluable cultural heritage and oral history documented to safeguard its sustainability. The question is how can local knowledge of these relatively unknown and diverse communities be constructed in a short time?

Against this background, this article seeks to explore the possibility of engaging tertiary-level students as custodians in heritage conservation enrichment. In particular, can students' theses be a potentially viable source of knowledge on minority ethnic communities' cultural heritage in Malaysia? In this context, Peranakan Chinese community of Kelantan has been chosen as the sample community. The community is selected for two reasons. First, they are relatively unknown to the mainstream society as opposed to the more popular

Baba and Nyonya community in Melaka. Despite belonging to the same category of "Peranakan Chinese", each community is distinct in the formation, degree of localisation and markers of their "Peranakanness" (Suryadinata, 2015: xii). One example would be in the case of Siamese elements combined with some Malay elements that are only found in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's ethnicity but not in the Baba and Nyonya community (Pue, 2017). To date, there are four local scholars who have been or have remained active in conducting extensive research on the community: Tan Chee Beng (1982), Teo Kok Seong (2003), Hanapi Dollah (1986) and Pue Giok Hun (2012). Second, the author's familiarity with the community as a research subject and a community member, enables her to identify the accuracy (or lack of), of the information in the theses. The theses will be examined based on the following two questions: (1) What can we learn about the theses, and; (2) What can we learn from the theses?

THESES AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The word *thesis* (plural theses) is an English word that was derived from Latin Greek which means "position" (Noor and Page, 2010: 31). Thus in general, a thesis may refer to a person's position or argument, regarding an issue. However, in the context of academic realm particularly in institutions of higher learning, a thesis refers to a type of document in academic writing genre that is usually written in the form of long and organised manuscript, about an issue addressed in a student's independent research as partial or full requirement for obtaining a degree. Before deciding on whether a student should or should not be awarded with a degree, the requirement to produce a thesis enables the university to "...test[s] your abilities to educate yourself, to demonstrate your expertise in collecting and analysing information, and to come to conclusions based on solid argument. It also gives you an opportunity to show how well informed you are, how well organised you can be, and how you can make a clear presentation of your work for effective communication" (Walliman, 2004: 3).

In some universities in Malaysia such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (henceforth, UKM), the term thesis refers to the typewritten document that is based on in-depth field research and submitted for postgraduate programmes (Master's or PhD). Meanwhile, for the coursework only or mixed-modes (research with coursework) of the postgraduate programmes, the written document submitted as partial requirement for the degree is referred to as a dissertation. At the undergraduate level, students are only required to submit an academic exercise as partial requirement for the Bachelor's degree although informally, the document is generally referred to as a "thesis". Other than for differentiating different degree

levels and programme modes, the terms academic exercise, dissertation and thesis are also used to denote the varying research features. An academic exercise is written based on a small-scale independent research, which is often conducted during the long semester break. A dissertation, particularly at Master's degree level, is written in order to capture the breadth of an issue. A thesis proper at PhD level requires that both the breadth and depth of an issue is studied. In this article, the term *theses* (singular thesis) is used in generic sense to refer to written document submitted as partial requirement for Bachelor's degree, thus interchangeable with the term academic exercises (*latihan ilmiah*).

Despite the fact that each local university in Malaysia produces thousands of Bachelor's degree holders and hundreds of Master's and Doctorate degree holders every year, it remains a daunting task for a researcher to trace, locate and access the theses. Each of the steps involved comes with its own challenges. A thesis is often initially traced from citations or references in newer studies in the same, or similar, subject. Even with the convenience of online search engines today, subsequent efforts to find full information of the thesis may be hindered due to a myriad of reasons: for example, database is not updated, problem of incomplete and inaccurate information, or simply, the information is not uploaded to the Internet.

If, by luck, one finds full and accurate information, the next challenge would be to locate the thesis. Owing to the sheer number of theses submitted every year, it is physically impossible to make every thesis available. Hence, the library at university or faculty level, keeps only selected theses. At UKM's Tun Seri Lanang Library for example, only theses submitted for Master's and Doctorate degree programmes and which are provided by the faculty or institute, are kept in hardcopy forms. Selected academic exercise submitted by the undergraduates up to the year 1993, are preserved in microfiche form and made available at the Media Centre on the second floor of the building. At a faculty or an institute with high number of students, only theses that obtained excellent grades are made available at its resource centre or library. The School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM, for instance, only keeps Bachelor's degree theses that received grades A or B plus (B+), as informed by the officer in charge of the resource centre (Siti Mariah Alias, 29 April 2015, pers. comm.). There, the only way to confirm and identify the availability of the required thesis is either by visiting the resource centre personally or by contacting the officer in charge. It should be mentioned that the officer may not always be able to man the resource centre according to the displayed opening hours, nor being present to answer the phone call. Often being the sole officer in charge, he or she must delegate the task of manning the resource centre along with other tasks at the faculty's office or at different locations.

The next challenge would be to access the thesis itself. Libraries and faculty resource centres are often off limits to individuals who are not members. Even members may have a difficult time to access the thesis due to various restrictions, such as the theses are not allowed to be borrowed out or photocopied, and limited opening hours. Unfortunately, it is also not uncommon for the thesis itself to be misplaced or missing after years of inefficient filing system.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, there are three local scholars who have published a compilation of theses in their respective institution or field. Tan Chee Beng (1995) with the assistance of two Master's degree candidates compiled a list of theses that were submitted from 1972 to 1992 to the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Universiti Malaya (henceforth, UM). The list consists of 840 academic exercises for Bachelor's degree, 25 Master's degree theses, and 10 PhD theses that span over 43 subjects. He notes that, "Overall, most of the academic exercises are useful for researchers. They are generally weak in theoretical perspectives, as can be expected at the B.A. level, but many of them do contain important information and even critical analyses of the various dimensions of Malaysian society ... I am of the opinion that the academic exercises form an important heritage and strength of the Department" (Tan, 1995: 493). In 2002, Sarjit Singh Gill published a bibliography on Sikh community in Malaysia (1937–2002) which included theses from UKM and UM. Out of 124 references listed, 29 are theses from UKM and UM combined. Some of the theses, he believes, have the potential to make significant academic contribution and should be translated and published as books or journal articles (Gill, 2002: 170). Hasan Mat Nor (2012), a renowned social anthropologist who specialises in Orang Asli studies, published an annotated compilation of 244 materials including 120 theses, written in Malay language about Orang Asli that are available at UKM. Hasan finds that the document written in the Malay language provide a different kind of approach and orientation in comparison to the writings by western scholars (Hasan, 2012: 18).

METHOD OF STUDY

In this article only academic exercises on Peranakan Chinese community of Kelantan that were submitted as partial requirement for Bachelor's degree programmes in social science faculties at UKM and UM, particularly in anthropology, sociology and history disciplines, are analysed. The two universities are chosen because they are two of the oldest public universities in Malaysia and, therefore, house the majority of the theses written on the community that have been cited. In 2014,

the author began the search for relevant theses based on lists of theses submitted up to the year 2013 that are available in UKM via Tun Seri Lanang Library; School of Social, Development and Environmental Studies (*Pusat Pengajian Sosial, Pembangunan dan Persekitaran, PPSPP*) and School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies (*Pusat Pengajian Sejarah, Politik dan Strategi, PPSPS*) at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK). Available theses from UM were searched through the library's Pendeta Discovery search engine. From the search, 43 academic exercises and Master's theses that were written partially or fully about the community were identified. In the end, only 30 were selected for analysis (refer Appendix). The rest were omitted based on two criteria set as boundaries for the study. Firstly, the theses were not accessible physically at the time of data collection. This might be due to the particular thesis not being available at the time, or is misplaced or missing. For this reason, the number of theses from UM that the author could access during each visit was significantly reduced. On the contrary, as an academic at UKM, the author was given the courtesy permission to study the theses from PPSPP and PPSPS resource centres for an extended time, enabling thorough searches to be conducted on the theses available. This inevitably caused the sample pool and the subsequent analysis, to centre on the UKM context. Secondly, the theses that were not focused on Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community per se were omitted in order to avoid generalisation or even misrepresentations. However, four theses that did not study Peranakan Chinese per se, but on subjects that are significantly related to the community were exempted from the limitation. Two of the theses studied on Theravada Buddhism (regarding Buddhist celebrations and Buddhist monks respectively), a thesis on Kingdom of Siam's (the present-day Thailand) power and influence on Kelantan society prior to 1909 Bangkok Treaty with the British, and finally a thesis that examined the effect of state government's ban on folk entertainment including the iconic *wayang kulit*. The four theses are marked with asterisk in the Appendix.

The theses are then analysed using the content analysis technique, which is defined as "...a method of data collection in which some form of communication (speeches, TV programmes, newspaper articles, films, advertisements, even children's book) is studied systematically" (Adler and Clark 2003: 379). For the purpose of this article, the theses' particulars such as researcher's ethnicity, supervisor, ethnonym that is used to refer to the community, region(s), and subjects in focus are recorded. Meanwhile, cultural components that are covered are examined to identify the general pattern of theses and research undertaken against the change of time. The following section will discuss what can be learnt about the theses.

THE FINDINGS

What Can be Learnt About the Theses?

The first part of the finding revolves around what can be learnt about the theses. This includes who, where and what subjects written on Chinese Peranakan community in Kelantan. In the span of 34 years (1977–2011), it is found that the distribution of theses produced can be represented in a graph below (Figure 1).

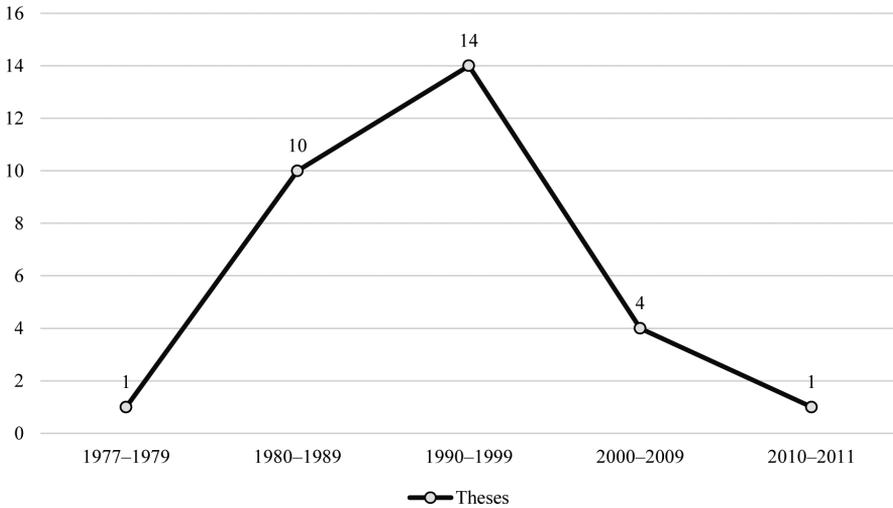


Figure 1: Number of theses produced, 1977–2011.

There was only one thesis submitted in the year 1977. Within the first 10 years, the number drastically increased to 10 in the 1980s, and increased slightly to peak at 14 in 1990s. The number of theses written about the community rapidly decreased to four in the first decade of the new millennium. Finally, the sole thesis about the community was written and submitted in the year 2011. The majority of the theses ($n = 27$) were written by Chinese students, and the remaining three were written by Malay students. This suggests that students select the subject for their theses based on what they already know and have access to. From the theses, it is not possible to fully determine whether the students were members of the Peranakan Chinese community. This is because based on UKM's house style for thesis-writing, students were not required to provide personal information (Pusat Pengurusan Siswazah, 2009; Pusat Siswazah, 2015). Nevertheless, there were some students who did include their biodata in their theses. Information such as place of birth and name of primary and high schools suggest that most Chinese students who wrote about the community were indeed Kelantan Peranakan Chinese themselves. The three Malay students were also from Kelantan.

The theses were submitted to four departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, (*Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, FSKK*, and since 2001 is known as *Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, FSSK*), UKM and two departments in Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (*Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial, FSSS*), UM (Table 1):

Table 1: Number of theses submitted according to Department, 1977–2011

Department	1977–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2011
History, UKM	1	5, 7,	17, 19, 20,	26, 27, 29	
Anthropology & Sociology, UKM		2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 24		
Development Science, UKM			25	28	
Anthropology & Sociology, UM		6	23		
East Asian Studies, UM					30
Total number of theses	1	10	14	4	1

Note: Refer to respective number in Appendix for details of the thesis. The numbers in the columns of the table denote the respective thesis as listed in the Appendix. For example, the number "23" refers to thesis written by Wee Boon San in 1996 from Department of Anthropology and Sociology, UM.

As shown in Table 1, 18 of the theses were from Anthropology and Sociology Departments; 9 from Department of History, 2 from Developmental Science (UKM only) and 1 from Department of East Asian Studies (UM). Concomitantly, Table 2 shows that although the students were cumulatively supervised by 15 lecturers, there was a clear concentration of supervisions on students from Department of Anthropology and Sociology, FSKK, UKM, to two lecturers: Mohamed Yusoff Ismail and Cheu Hock Tong. Both lecturers were social anthropologists by training and renowned scholars in their respected field of specialisation (anthropology of religion). There were also two other supervisors that have done extensive research on the Peranakan Chinese, namely Tan Chee Beng and Oong Hak Ching.

With high concentration on the anthropology and sociology and history fields, all but two theses opted for a combined method of library research and primary data collection through interview, observation and questionnaires at fieldwork that were often conducted during long semester break. Only two theses from the Department of History that focused on past histories were conducted through archival work. This suggests that the data in the theses originated from primary sources, including the community itself.

Table 2: Number of theses according to Supervisor, 1977–2011

Supervisor	1977–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2011
Pamela Sodhy	1				
Mohamed Yusoff		2, 8, 9, 10,	12, 15,		
Ismail		11	16, 24		
Zaidah Mustapha		3			
Cheu Hock Tong		4	13, 14, 18, 21, 22		
Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud		5			
Albert Gomez		6			
Mohd Kamaruzaman Abdul Rahman		7		26	
Oong Hak Ching			17	27	
Kobkua Suwannathat- Pian			19, 20		
Tan Chee Beng			23		
Misran Rokimin			1		
Chin Kok Fay				28	
Zubaidah Vp Hamzah				29	
Isa Ma Ziliang					30

Note: Refer to respective number in Appendix for details of the thesis. The numbers in the columns of the table denote the respective thesis as listed in the Appendix. For example, the number "23" refers to thesis written by Wee Boon San in 1996 from Department of Anthropology and Sociology, UM.

What Can Be Learnt About Kelantan Peranakan Chinese Community?

The second part of the finding focuses on what can be learnt about the Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan from the theses. In the time span of 34 years, one significant finding from the analysis is the change of ethnonym of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community which depict the complex nature of Peranakan phenomenon.

Figure 2 shows that in the 1970s, the community is known only generally as Chinese (*orang Cina*). However in 1980s, the community began to be referred to with three other ethnonyms as well: rural Chinese (*Cina kampung*), Peranakan Chinese (*Cina Peranakan*), and Siamese Hokkien (*Hokkien-Siam* in Kelantan Peranakan Hokkien dialect, also known in Malay language as *Cina-Siam*). This suggests that the community was unique enough to be distinguished from other Chinese communities elsewhere. Among the four ethnonyms, the use of the label rural Chinese (*Cina kampung*) was prevalent in the 1980s. In 1990s, the use of the

label Peranakan Chinese (*Cina Peranakan*) overtook the label rural Chinese which had decreased in usage, to become the prevalent ethnonym. The preference for the ethnonym Peranakan Chinese continues to the 2010s, whereas the term *Cina kampung* ceased to be used by 2000s. Throughout the years until 2000, the term Chinese proper was second most frequent ethnonym used. Meanwhile, there is only one thesis written in 1981 that used the term Hokkien-Siam as the ethnonym for the community.

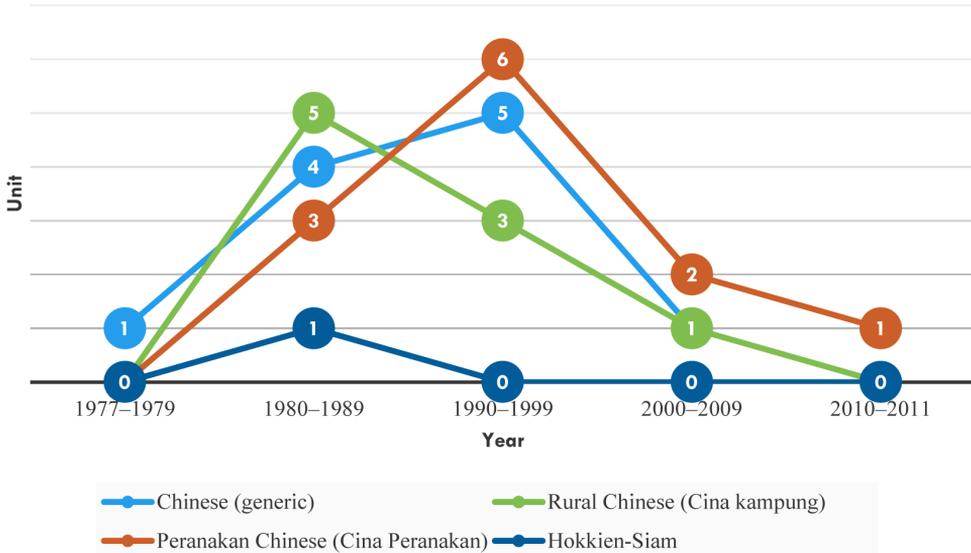


Figure 2: Ethnyms used to refer to the community in theses, 1977–2011.

The change of the ethnonym used in the theses correlates with the change on how the community was perceived by others and by themselves. It also suggests the community's internal contestation about their self-identification. As Kelantan Peranakan Chinese do not have a distinct label for themselves (Tan, 1982: 31), a generic autonym for Chinese, i.e., *teng lang* has been used by the community to refer to themselves in Hokkien dialect. Another autonym, *Cina kampung* (or its Hokkien variant, *teng lang kampung*), is used by the community members only when differentiating themselves from other Chinese in Kelantan. Writings by prominent researchers who studied the community and had published extensively in the 1970s and 1980s such as Robert Winzeler, Roger Kershaw and Mohamed Yusoff Ismail, had popularised the term into an exonym "rural Chinese" (*Cina kampung*) to distinguish the community from the late comer and less assimilated group of Chinese in Kelantan, namely the "urban Chinese" (*Cina bandar*). The same dichotomy was also used by Hanapi Dollah when he wrote his M.A. thesis in 1978, which was subsequently heavily referred to by the undergraduates. However,

from 1982 and especially in the 1990s onwards, a prominent scholar on Peranakan Chinese in Melaka, Tan Chee Beng, began to write on the community. At first Tan (1982) referred to the community as Peranakan Chinese due to his misguided belief that it was a common label of self-identification, but nevertheless retained the term due to the similarities with Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia and Melaka. The community then began to officially embrace the term with the establishment of the Association of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese (*Persatuan Peranakan Cina Kelantan, PPCK*) on 15 February 1989. The term *Cina kampung* remains widely used outside of the academic realm and in the mass media.

Location-wise, theses were written based on data collected from Peranakan Chinese communities mostly in Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Tanah Merah and Kota Bharu districts (Table 3). The concentration of these districts reflects the pattern of Peranakan Chinese settlements which are located on the Kelantan delta along the Kelantan River. In retrospect, this overview resonates in the publications about the community in the present-day.

Table 3: Districts studied in theses, 1977–2011

Region	1977–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2011	Total (n)
Kelantan (general)		5	12, 18, 19, 22, 25			6
Tumpat		8, 9, 10	13, 15, 20, 21			7
Pasir Mas		2, 7, 10, 11	17, 21	27		7
Machang		3	24			2
Tanah Merah			16, 21, 23	28		4
Kota Bharu	1	6		26		3
Bachok		4	14	29		3
Pasir Puteh						0
Kuala Krai					30	1
Jeli						0
Gua Musang						0

Note: Refer to respective number in Appendix for details of the thesis. The numbers in the columns of the table denote the respective thesis as listed in the Appendix. For example, the number "23" refers to thesis written by Wee Boon San in 1996 from Department of Anthropology and Sociology, UM.

Overall, the theses are found to have touched 18 subjects: phenotype, history of the settlement, food, clothes, house, language, religion, wedding, funeral, birth and childcare, organisation, kinship, economy, politic, education, leisure and

folk entertainment, healthcare, and interethnic relations with other local ethnic groups (Malay and Siamese). Two issues that garnered much attention from the students were sociocultural aspects and religion – two significant components in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity markers in addition to phenotype characteristics and language (Pue and Kaur, 2014: 61). Interestingly, the theses depict a strong similarity in their discourse on tangible aspects of the community (such as phenotype, food, clothes and house) as opposed to the intangible aspects (such as language and customs).

On the one hand, this suggests that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community may be identified by certain characteristics that non-Peranakan Chinese do not have, and they tend to centre on the tangible aspects which are easier to observe. With regard to phenotype, for instance, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese are often described as having similar phenotypical characteristics of local Malay or Siamese (darker skin tone, wider eyes with double eyelids, and fine, brownish hair) vis-à-vis those typically associated with "Chineseness". Clothes that are worn daily by the community members and local rural folk alike, such as the practice of wearing tube-like cloth (*sarong*) with *kebaya* blouse for the women and shirtless or unbuttoned western shirt for the men. Food preparation and consumption by the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese are similar to that of other ethnic groups in the rural area, from eating with hands instead of chopsticks, to cooking and eating local dishes including the local condiment *budu* (fermented fish sauce). Despite the localised taste buds, they remain distinctly Chinese when it comes to the food prepared for religious activities, especially during birth, wedding and funeral. Growing up closely interacting with the Malays and Siamese in rural areas, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese often partake in the same leisure activities such as cock-fighting, kite-flying, and watching folk entertainment including shadow playing (*wayang kulit*) and *mak yong*.

On the other hand, the rarity and diversity of discourse on intangible aspects has only made the theses more valuable. The reason for its value and diversity is the accessibility to the knowledge itself. Often kept in the form of oral stories, the knowledge on the belief and practice is usually transferred to selected few from one generation to another within a single clan or locality. This includes the belief that surrounds life-changing events such as pregnancy and birth, wedding and funeral which subsequently influences how norms and customs were conducted during the events. How and why localisation took place in terms of the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese culture were also touched upon in some of the theses, such as with regard to the incorporation of Theravada Buddhism – which is influenced from Kelantan Siamese community – into Peranakan Chinese's "original" religion of Confucianism and Taoism and its subsequent significance as a religious institution in the community's social life.

DISCUSSION

Written materials have always been considered as relatively more reliable and authoritative when compared to verbal materials that are seen as more fluid and personal. Deconstructionists such as Derrida, for example believe that writing enables the status of a subject matter to be better depicted and captured as opposed to speech: "...writing, in its signifying function which leaves its trace independent of the subject (once it is written) better depicts the ontological status of the subject rather than speech, which is tied to immediate presence" (Sherman, 2014: 99). With regard to academic writing and heritage, this characteristic significantly increases the written materials' credibility and contribution in the knowledge preservation and production.

Yet, theses, particularly those written as academic exercise for partial requirement for Bachelor's degree, are often overlooked in the process of knowledge production in the big picture. On the one hand, they are generally assumed to be not academically refined; from the relatively weak theoretical orientation, to the theoretical connection with the data, and even the exceedingly short time allocated for data collection at fieldwork – often arranged to be conducted during semester break which might be insufficient. On the other hand, the theses are elusive to find and refer to due to the limited copies available and restricted access.

From the analysis of the 30 selected theses, which are mostly from the Department of History and Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM, the concerns about the viability of the theses as source of knowledge, is indeed understandable. In the process of topic selection for the thesis, the students prefer to study about what they already know and have access to. At a glance, this may seem like not what a "real" anthropologist do; but as somebody who is already an insider, it is a pragmatic approach in overcoming the basic hurdles of doing anthropology (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987). This includes getting access to enter the community through the gatekeeper, the time-consuming of rapport-building, and ultimately, to "...achieve access to native's point of view" (Narayan, 1993: 672). In addition, this issue should not be of concern as the students were guided by experienced lecturers as supervisors; they themselves were established scholars and the authority in their respective fields. In this case, a supervisor's role may influence the quality of the theses produced by the students. Furthermore, theses that are accessible at the library or resource centre of a faculty or university, are selected ones that have been examined and given high grades (minimum of grade B plus); this can be considered as an assurance on the quality of the theses referred.

From this study, two significant findings have been identified. Firstly, it shows that theses, even at the Bachelor's degree level, have the potential to be an untapped Malaysian heritage's "treasure trove" or "reservoir". In the context of

heritage conservation enrichment, analyses of the 30 theses suggest that overall, Peranakan Chinese of Kelantan's elements of tangible and intangible cultural heritage which consists of intensely localised Chinese culture with local Kelantan Malay and Thai influences, is a rare example of multiculturalism practiced in harmony, as a result of long-term interethnic contacts, and at one point in time, catalysed with the mass practice of interethnic marriages. As such, the community may have what is considered to be Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as depicted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), i.e., "...cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity" (UNESCO, 2012). This includes, for example, wearing clothes that are compatible with the local society's standard of modesty, consuming food that are commonly consumed among rural folks regardless of ethnicity and religion (*makanan orang kampung*), fluent in Kelantanese Malay which is the region's lingua franca, and even the embodiment of communal spirit in the form of *gotong-royong*.

Secondly, this preliminary study proves that through theses writing, undergraduate students can, and do, contribute to heritage conservation enrichment as custodians. By conducting research and documenting it in written form, the students have significantly contributed in enriching the knowledge on the minority ethnic group that many are unaware of by preserving arcane information and baseline data of the community at the grass-root level. Among others, information on how a village gets its name, and yesteryear's cultural practices that are uniquely practiced by the community in a particular region, and archaic reports or documentation that are difficult to come by. This includes, for example, the age-old rituals of *chiu thau* (hair brushing) by the bride and bridegroom, and *chia teh* (tea offering) to family elders during wedding ceremonies that the community commonly practices today, are no longer observable in Chinese weddings elsewhere in the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. As an added bonus, in addition to the information in written form, some theses even included what are now considered as rare photos or documents as part of the content, or as an appendix. For instance, Owee Kim Jim's thesis written in 1987 shows a photo of bridal attire in the form of *kebaya labuh*, worn by Kelantan Peranakan Chinese women in 1920s in comparison to western wedding gown in the 1980s. Another example is Tan Tin Loon's thesis written in 1994 that contains copies of actual document that would be difficult to look for, and to access, such as agreements between British and other parties which involve Siam power in Kelantan, e.g., Burney Agreement 1826, Memorandum by Chamberlain, British-France Agreement 1896, Secret Agreement British-Siam 1896 and Bangkok Treaty 1909; and correspondence letters between Kelantan sultan and British (Duff). Indirectly, the theses also pave the way for future researches by providing glimpses or ideas of the more critical issues that underlay

the Peranakan phenomenon such as the definition of Peranakan as an analytical concept, diversity along the spectrum of assimilation, racial compartmentalisation and identification, paradox between citizen equality versus affirmative action, as well as the revivalism and commodification of identity and heritage in the face of globalisation.

In the context of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese in particular, the students' decision to study the community is itself a significant contribution towards the heritage enrichment of the community. As a community that was formed as a result of intense assimilation process between the Chinese and two local ethnic groups (Kelantan Malay and local Siamese), their culture and particularly the language, is very difficult to master by an outsider. Tan Chee Beng once wrote that, "...Ideally, an investigator who wishes to study the Chinese there should be able speak the three languages" (Tan, 1982: 26–27). As a result, less financial costs and time are wasted compared to preparations to be undertaken by a non-native speaking researcher before he or she could be able to collect data during the fieldwork.

Finally, undergraduate students may be seen as the unsung heroes whereby their theses serve as building blocks in the construction of knowledge production to theses that were written at postgraduate levels as well as in journal articles or other publication that have become main references regarding Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community. The oft-cited article written by Tan Chee Beng in 1982 itself, had referred to an academic exercise written by Chia Ai Yet in 1981. Likewise, the bibliography in Hanapi's 1986 publication contains as much as 19 theses that he had referred to. As such, theses have already significantly contributed to building and defining what we know about the community today.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia's rich tangible and intangible heritage have been well-known and enjoyed by its multi-ethnic society, especially at the everyday level. Nevertheless, its sustainability in terms of preservation and conservation is questionable due to lukewarm efforts at the state level. While Malaysia struggles to reconstruct the breadth and depth of its history and local knowledge that serves as building blocks of the country and its society's rich heritage, the society is constantly on the losing end as the heritage, particularly with regard to intangible cultural heritage, is ever-changing due to its dynamic nature. With some heritage on the verge of becoming lost without a trace, such as the various Peranakan communities in the Peninsular Malaysia, it is a race against time for their local knowledge, history and practices to be recorded and constructed as quickly, and as widely, as possible. This is where theses, as a readily available but underutilised source of knowledge,

would be useful in the construction of local knowledge as building blocks for the sustainability of heritage.

In the case of Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan, this study finds that theses written by tertiary-level students as partial requirement for Bachelor's degree, do indeed contain a spectrum of arcane knowledge of minority ethnic communities that are often difficult and time-consuming for outsiders to access to. Despite utilising a simple method of content analysis, this preliminary study serves as a starting point in exploring the role of theses in highlighting and preserving local knowledge of a community with potential OUVs that are rarely found elsewhere in the country, whereby cultural elements of three ethnic groups – Chinese, Malay and Siamese, are moulded into one uniquely Kelantan Peranakan Chinese cultural heritage.

Although the present article supports the idea that tertiary-level students have the potentials to serve as custodians in heritage conservation enrichment via their undergraduate research and theses writing, the idea is not without its set of challenges. From the findings, there are three immediate and overlapping concerns that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of tertiary-level students as custodians in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese heritage conservation enrichment in the long run.

First concern is regarding the decreased number of theses written about the community. The number of theses written on the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community by tertiary-level undergraduate students peaked in 1990s. Two decades later, the number of theses written about the community had dwindled. This can be the result of direct reduction in the number of enrolment of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese students in related social science disciplines at both UKM and UM after 2000s. With improved quality in the education system nation-wide and the increased accessibility to a myriad of information through mass media and mobility, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese students' choices of disciplines at higher education institutions were broadened beyond the faculty of arts and social sciences. The discipline was often chosen as a "safe bet" due to its relatively lower requirements for entry, thus the students enjoy higher probability of getting accepted into the universities. After the years 2000s, it became more common to find Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youths studying in other popular disciplines of the day, such as in creative industries. The second concern revolves around the seemingly limited choice of subjects for the theses written on the community whereby they are often settling down on one or several of the 18 "obvious" subjects mentioned previously in the earlier segment of this article; so much so that is seen as reaching its "saturation point". The final concern is on the sustainability of the thesis itself. It is rarely proven useful beyond its need as partial requirement for undergraduate programmes. As such, programmes that gear towards employment and practicality

are preferred, such as offering industrial training (with the option of getting hired at the company immediately afterwards) instead of thesis-writing which are seen as more difficult but impractical.

As such, more efforts and involvement of the various stakeholders are required in order to optimise tertiary-level students' potential as custodians to the fullest. One of which would be the implementation of systematic approach in encouraging the students to study the community with tangible and intangible cultural heritage for their thesis requirement, be it in the form of monetary or services assistance from government agencies, corporate sectors, and NGOs. Second, an annotated bibliography of theses written on the community should be published as a reference for tertiary-level students in identifying which aspects have been studied extensively, and which aspects are yet to be studied in earnest (Pue, forthcoming). Third, excellent theses must be published as books in order to facilitate accessibility of the knowledge and awareness of the communities' heritage by the public. Some theses written in the 1970s and 1980s in particular, were so well-written that they might even be at par with doctorate dissertation written in contemporary times (Collins, J. T., 26 August 2016, pers. comm.). By acknowledging the contribution of undergraduate students in heritage conservation enrichment at the early stage of their tertiary-level education via their theses, it is hoped that it would further motivate and encourage the students to extend their engagement as custodians in heritage preservation and conservation that they had helped constructed, beyond their Bachelor degree level for the sake of mutual future.

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APPENDIX

The table below lists the selected academic exercises on Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan available from UKM and UM, 1977–2011. The symbol asterisk indicates academic exercises that do not focus on the community per se, but significant in providing a wider picture of the sociocultural setting in Kelantan in which the community lives.

List of selected academic exercises on Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan, found in resource centres in UKM and UM, 1977–2011

No.	Theses
1*	Muhammed Hj. Idris. 1977. Masyarakat Cina di Kota Bharu, Kelantan: Satu kajian kes dari tahun 1945–70an. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
2	Chia Ai Yet. 1981. Pemujaan dewa penjaga: Satu kajian kes di Kampung Kasar, Pasir Mas, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
3	Owi Teong Chun. 1983. Komuniti Cina Kampung Tanah Merah Machang Kelantan: Satu kajian sosio-budaya terhadap sebuah kampung etnik minoriti. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
4	Lim Ann Teck. 1986. Perayaan pemujaan Hock Teck Cheng Sin: Satu kajian kes di Kampung Balai, Bachok, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi & Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
5	Khoo Sew Khing. 1987. Sejarah orang-orang Cina di Kelantan, 1900–1940. Jabatan Sejarah, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
6	Koh Boo Siong. 1987. Hubungan sosial, agama dan etnik: Suatu kajian di kalangan komuniti Peranakan Cina Kampung Peringat, Kota Bharu Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Universiti Malaya.
7	Owee Kim Jim. 1987. Perubahan adat-resam di kalangan masyarakat Cina Kelantan dalam abad ke-20: Kajian kes di Pasir Mas Kelantan. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
8	Kee Kim Tee. 1988. Kepentingan wat kepada masyarakat Cina di Kelantan: Satu kajian kes. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
9	Tan Tian Heng. 1988. Sami Buddha keturunan Siam dan sami Buddha keturunan Cina: Satu kajian perbandingan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
10	Lau Siu Hong. 1989. Institusi sami perempuan: Satu kajian kes di beberapa buah biara Buddha di Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

No.	Theses
11	Teo Kim Hong. 1989. Pengaruh budaya Melayu dan Siam (Thai) terhadap komuniti Cina: Satu kajian kes di Kampung Sakar. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
12*	Ko Po Ham. 1990. Hari-hari kebesaran dalam agama Buddha: Satu kajian kes di Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
13*	Leng Siang Yong. 1990. Peranan bikhu Siam di Wat Machimaram, Kampung Jong Bakar, Tumpat, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
14	Tum Sow Kin. 1990. Adat perkahwinan komuniti Cina Kampung di Kampung Balai, Bachok, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
15	Chua Kian Sek. 1991. Memuja makhluk ghaib Sin: Satu kajian kes mengenai kepercayaan dalam komuniti Cina kampung di Wakaf Bharu, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
16	Tan Thon Lim. 1991. Amalan Samadhi (meditasi) sebagai suatu perlakuan keagamaan dalam agama Buddha: Satu kajian kes di Pusat Meditasi Pacha Lilai, Kampung Kuang, Tanah Merah, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
17	Kang Hook Tiang. 1994. Sejarah perkembangan sosio-budaya komuniti Cina Peranakan Kelantan: Satu kajian kes di Kampung Pasir Parit, Pasir Mas. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
18	Ng Lu Cheng. 1994. Komuniti Cina Peranakan di Kelantan: Satu kajian sosio-budaya. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
19*	Tan Tin Loon. 1994. Pengaruh Siam ke atas perkembangan politik dan sosio budaya di Kelantan (1782–1909). Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
20	Teyun Thian Eim. 1994. Sejarah perkembangan sosio-budaya masyarakat Cina Peranakan: Satu kajian kes di Wakaf Bharu, Kelantan (1970–1990). Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
21	Yap Eyam Oun. 1995. Perkahwinan campur di antara etnik Cina Peranakan dan Siam: Satu kajian di Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
22	Yap Hock Ann. 1995. Integrasi kebudayaan etnik Siam dengan etnik Cina: Satu kajian dalam perkampungan Siam di Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
23	Wee Boon San. 1996. Komuniti Cina dan penyesuaian setempat: Satu kajian kes terhadap komuniti Cina Peranakan di Kampung Jelatok. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Universiti Malaya.

No.	Theses
24	Goon Soon Ai. 1998. Peranan pusat meditasi kepada masyarakat beragama Buddha: satu kajian kes di Pusat Meditasi Bukit Kecil, Kampung Pasir Senor, Temangan, Kelantan. Jabatan Antropologi dan Sosiologi, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
25*	Lim Wen Ling. 1999. Masa depan kesenian wayang kulit di bawah pemerintahan kerajaan PAS di Kelantan. Program Pembangunan Wilayah, Fakulti Sains Pembangunan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
26	Elena Siew Saw Hoon. 2001. Komuniti Cina di Pasir Tumbuh, Kota Bharu. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
27	Eyo Leng Yan. 2001. Tinjauan aspek keagamaan dan kepercayaan masyarakat Cina Peranakan. Kajian kes: Kampung Pasir Parit, Pasir Mas, Kelantan. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
28	Tan Chai Giot. 2003. Perubatan tradisional di kalangan masyarakat Melayu dan Cina: Satu kajian di Tanah Merah, Kelantan. Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
29	Mohd Zailani Yaacob. 2009. Sejarah perkembangan sosio ekonomi masyarakat Cina Peranakan di Kelantan pada tahun 1960 hingga tahun 1980: Kajian kes di Bachok. Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
30	Suriana Nordin. 2011. Gaya hidup masyarakat Cina Peranakan Kelantan. Jabatan Pengajian Asia Timur, Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial, Universiti Malaya.

Note: The asterisk mark (*) indicates academic exercises that do not focus on the community per se, but significant in providing a wider picture of the sociocultural setting in Kelantan in which the community lives in. Source: UKM and UM, 1977–2011

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