

Cave Archaeology of the Lenggong Valley, Malaysia: A Heritage Management Perspective

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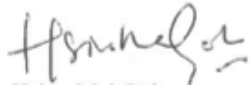
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I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hsiao Mei Goh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hsiao Mei Goh

Abstract

This dissertation reviews the contemporary cultural heritage management system in Malaysia with a special focus on three archaeological cave sites – Gua Gunung Runtuh, Gua Kajang and Gua Harimau—that form part of the World Heritage Listed site, the Archaeological Heritage of the Lenggong Valley. The study first synthesizes the archaeological data of these caves and presents a regional synthesis of the cave occupation of the Lenggong Valley during the Late Pleistocene-Holocene periods in Southeast Asia. The project also investigates the contemporary heritage management planning for the Lenggong Valley and further explores the social significances of these caves from a community perspective by adopting a Burra Charter-inspired heritage assessment process, on the assumption that this significance is the key to determining management priorities. Results of this study reveal that the cave sites of the Lenggong Valley were continuously occupied by prehistoric humans from 14,000 to 1,500 years ago. Investigations into the recent use of the caves surprisingly revealed that the local community associated these caves with several important social and historical episodes, and these caves are still being used by the local community on a daily basis. However, it is ironic to discover that contemporary conservation and management of the Lenggong Valley tend only to emphasize the archaeological values of the area and disregard the other heritage values associated with the local community. Examination of the contemporary heritage management plan for the valley showed that the rate of consultation with, and inclusion of, the local community in management planning is fairly low. The social significance assessment of the caves has shed new light on the interpretation of the cultural heritage of the valley, as well as reflected the divergences between the official values ascribed by professionals, such as archaeologists, to the site and the non-official values. As the present practice solely relies on heritage professionals ascribing meaning to the sites, the discrepancies between how such professionals and other officials and local stakeholders perceive their heritage reflects the domination by professional groups of the cultural heritage assessment process in Malaysia. This study addresses a need to rethink the old heritage management approach and urges the need for a greater recognition of the social significance of the caves of the Lenggong Valley. It also argues that the successfulness of heritage conservation in the Lenggong Valley is highly dependent on local conservation efforts, and this can only be achieved if heritage officials acknowledge the importance of local values and actively incorporate local ideas into the future management planning of the valley.

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