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**WINDOWS ON TO AN EVOLVING CULTURE:
EXPERIENCING SARAWAKIAN FESTIVALS**

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March 2010

for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**
in the **School of Arts and Social Sciences**
James Cook University

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Nature of Assistance	Contribution	Names, Titles and Affiliations of Co-Contributors
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Financial Support	Field Research	IMH Academy Raymond Lee
Rural Data Collection	Administrative Assistance/ Travel Arrangements Interviews and Transcription (Iban data for chapter 3) IMH Student Data	Abdul Muthalib Alvin Kon 16 IMH students

DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethical Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Human Ethics Review Committee (Approval H1814).

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's nationhood is recent and its creation is based on racial diversity and a culture of mutual respect. Part of the responsibility for that respect devolves on the young nation's extensive festival calendar. This celebrates the richness of Malaysia's cultural heritages and allows each racial group to celebrate in its unique way and to showcase the dimensions of that celebration to friends and colleagues in the community. This sharing is at the heart of the *1Malaysia* concept and strategy.

In the context of a dearth of published documentation about Malaysian festivals, this research focuses primarily on the experience of festivals from the perspective of the ordinary person in the community. The thesis scopes the major festivals in the Malaysian Festival Calendar in terms of historical background, key celebratory and cultural dimensions. This synthesis is used to select key case study festivals using three criteria: festivals with (a) a significant lineage of traditions over time; (b) a broad range of cultural dimensions (e.g., music, culinary tradition, visual pageantry, dance, etc.); and (c) demonstrated potential for maximizing involvement across the generations and the various ethnic groups within the community.

The study focuses on Kuching, the capital of Sarawak and investigates the experience of the four key festivals thus selected: - Chinese New Year, Gawai, Hari Raya Puasa, and Christmas. Data was sought across government, societal and people levels with a particular emphasis on the people level through interviews with ten families intact across three generations for each of the four study festivals. Interview questions ranged from general perspectives on festivals to festival specifics.

Key values across all festivals related to festive food and the importance of family unity/family reunion as integral to festival celebration; the social merriment/interaction element was also deemed to be central to festival celebration. Overall, the weight of opinion was that the significance of celebration was greater in the past than in the present.

In relation to specific festivals, the visual symbolism of Chinese New Year, for example – with its emphasis upon the colour red, the activity of spring cleaning, the gift baskets dominated by oranges, the lion dance – is extremely strong and evocative to participants and observers alike – and it is the backbone of the cultural tourism related thrust of this festival. However, the strong rootedness in the family and its personal traditions is much more integral to the family unit and unlikely to be readily accessible to the cultural tourist as a consumer of cultural spectacle; yet there are signs that this core is under threat.

In relation to Gawai it is clear that the commodification of the rural longhouse rituals as cultural spectacle fuels cultural tourism but begs the question as to what will become of the festival celebration *per se*. For Hari Raya Puasa, the results suggest that the togetherness of preparation with its intrinsic benefits (e.g., learning to cook, success with fasting, joking/chatting in togetherness) is compromised by a higher percentage of the female population being in paid employment, children studying and expressing a *no time* willingness to assist parents in preparations. By contrast with these three festivals in potential if not actual crisis, Christmas appears to be a stable festival rather than one in transition. Moreover, despite the widely vaunted policy of Open House at the Government level – and its demonstrated efficacy in promoting cross cultural understanding at a public level, the research reveals a clear difference between public and private festival celebration patterns and values. The thesis argues that, if there is no longer any participatory substance to the festival, all that remains is likely to be the sanitized and often commercialized cultural

spectacle at the periphery. This is considered in the context of what has been referred to in the cultural memory literature as the dilemma of *remembering to forget* or *forgetting to remember*. The implications of this and the current study are explored in terms of governmental policy, education and further research.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Festivals – Icons of a Culture

Joy and celebration have always been associated with physical manifestation – jumping for joy. The rhythm in people’s bodies reverberates to produce an output of music, song and dance. In earlier ages, festivals were associated with drumming and the sounds of rhythm as an expression of joy, victory or human satisfaction. Happy times were usually associated with loud merry making, stomping, and loud drums beating in celebratory mood.

The iconic festivals, celebrations, thanksgiving and feasts celebrated today date back to ancient times when people had less scientific understanding of the forces of nature and wished to placate them. Most festivals have derived from, or were initially associated with planting and harvest times (e.g., The World Harvest Festivals). Some are focused on honouring the dead (e.g., Old Souls Day, *Qing Ming* Tomb Festival). Many of these have evolved as secular festivals, with some religious overtones, into modern times (e.g., The Spring Harvest Festival, Moon Cake Festival). Other festivals began as sacred festivals (e.g., Christmas, Easter, Wesak Day) to commemorate important feast days or significant religious events.

Various secular contemporary celebrations are linked to some particular historic events (e.g., French Bastille Day, Anzac Day). Sometimes, however, particular events may spontaneously generate a national festival to manifest relief, joy, freedom and happiness (e.g., American Independence Day). Today festivals and feasts celebrated in secular society involve communal planning for programs, rejoicing, high revelry, dance, drinking, merry making, and outpourings of respect usually based upon established traditions and customs.

Secular celebrations differ from religious festivals as they focus more on the public honouring of outstanding persons, the commemoration of important historical or cultural events, or the recreation of cherished folkways (e.g., Confucius Birthday, Thanksgiving Day).

Typically, cultural civic festivals involve the broader community, regardless of religion or creed, and the whole family participates in the enjoyment of the festival, either as a participant or as a citizen of the nation enjoying public holidays for family and other activities. In Asia particularly, families unify forces and make great efforts to come together and celebrate. Celebrations and festivals typically involve both young and old. Whether sacred or secular, the entire community is encouraged to participate (e.g., during Hari Raya Puasa, Chinese and Dayak friends who do not celebrate the Muslim New Year visit Muslim friends in their Open Houses). This happens in modern day societies when multiracial communities visit other families celebrating important cultural festivals. Modern festivals of national or ethnic groups enrich understanding of the heritage of the people and especially educate the young (during Chinese New Year, for example, children and their families go visiting and, in this context, much explanation of culture takes place).

National festivals are mega festivals which the entire nation celebrates, regardless of religion or background (e.g., National Day Festival, American Independence Day). In Asia, festivals are celebrated with parades, gaiety, concerts, food festivals, open-air stage shows, theatrical performances, banquets and competitions. These provide windows to the culture of the nation and are used as an opportunity to inculcate a feeling of patriotism in the people. National songs are sung and broadcast throughout the nation, in the fields, in competitions nationwide, in dinner shows, concerts and cognate public events.

However, given that contemporary festivals are also linked to regional development, tourist events, promotions, or celebratory events such as the Singapore Arts Festival, there may be a danger of homogenization as the media gives little sense of the essential differences between festivals (see Plate 1.1.1).



Plate 1.1.1 Media example of Festival Promotion

In the past, younger generations were acculturated into the way the festivals are enacted by their elders and they, in turn, reproduced this for future generations. Currently, while festivals are a time for ensuring that cultural tradition is passed on, a time for sharing the events with the other races of a united nation, and a time for cultural and tourist exchanges thereby promoting movements and activities around the globe, there is a complexity and a diversity which militates against the simpler generational learning patterns of earlier times. What exists in its place?

To what extent have festivals been documented in sufficient depth to provide generational links and ensure cultural continuity in a manner similar to the familial acculturation which was for so long the traditional conduit. Extant research would seem to have been conducted at arm's length from the experience of the ordinary citizen/family as the following examples demonstrate. Latsch's (1985) book **Traditional Chinese Festivals** was prompted by her "*particular interest*" in "*the changes in the meaning and practice of the various (Chinese) festivals during the more than thirty years of tremendous change since 1949*" (Latsch, 1985:8). Her work thus contrasts her research on traditional Chinese Festival practices with changes she herself observed in recent practices in China. For example, she noted that, following 1980,

...among the middle-aged and younger generations in the cities, the belief in the old deities has tarnished, while the number of country people who still observe the old customs must surely be diminished (Latsch, 1985:33).

Scanlon's (1985) book is a cultural study of Southeast Asia through the lens of celebrations which is introduced (McKinley, 1985) as

...a guide to the festive life and major public holidays of the nations of Southeast Asia [which goes further than the] tourist literature...to bring together and compare systematically patterns of festivity throughout the region. (McKinley, 1985:III)

Scanlon (1985) himself sees his primary purpose as

...to give an insight into these events from an Asian viewpoint by examining the aspects of the festivals that the people themselves consider important [as he argues that] Most celebrations are from and for the ordinary folk, best observed at the local level. (Scanlon, 1985:X)

That said, in reality, he acknowledges as sources in each country studied, only people such as staff in libraries and museums, media and tourism office contacts; there is no reference

to sources such as citizens or festival participants. His reports of festivals are thus largely descriptive of festival process and precept and there is no sense of the festival experience at the people level.

Hubert (1998) has chronicled the different ways in which Christmas has been celebrated around the world illustrating, for example, the various accommodations made by countries like Australia and New Zealand to the festival traditions of Christmas in respect of climate/season. Again, there is no sense of how these accommodations influenced the person in the street. Yet people are the lifeblood of festival celebration and continuity.

1.2 The Role of Festivals as Cultural Markers

In Malaysia, festivals play a very important nation building role. The people of every culture look forward to festivals with delight as they enjoy food, dance, drink, thanksgiving, merry making with their families, time off from work, social events, get together sessions, fun, social events, good music and song, dressing up and preparations. These practices are definitely a litmus test of Malaysia's culture of good food, merry making, music making, happy chats and visiting with iconic festivals at the core. Armstrong (1988) notes that the holding of *Open Houses* to facilitate exchange visits of goodwill is central to festival celebration in multi-ethnic Malaysia.

Festivals in Malaysia are cultural markers in the annual cycle of life and represent the morphing of Eastern and Western festivals in Malaysia. Festivals such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, Gawai and Deepavali are dependent on the lunar calendar and have been celebrated for centuries. There are festivals and celebrations many people the world over celebrate (e.g., Christmas Day is always fixed on December 25th every year, but Easter

is based on the Christian calendar, Hari Raya Puasa on the Muslim calendar, and Chinese New Year on the 1st day of the Chinese Lunar calendar).

A nation's festivals reflect that nation's beating heart and culture. After the first of January (International New Year) the people of Malaysia begin their actual year with new plans and new resolutions. Shortly after, the Chinese in Malaysia prepare to celebrate the Chinese New Year which falls on the first day of the Chinese Lunar Calendar, usually between mid-January to early February. Towns and cities in Malaysia are filled with red decorations and Chinese New Year artifacts, foodstuff, celebration souvenirs etc. and Chinese New Year music resounds in the air.

Early in the year, usually around January to February, the cities and people of Malaysia also celebrate the Hindu Festival, Thaipusam, which is most spectacularly celebrated in Ipoh, West Malaysia. Two weeks prior to that celebration, flowers, offerings and special clothes are on sale in most cities as Hindus prepare their souls, sacrifices and homes for the Festival. In March, the Chinese prepare for *Ching Ming* Tomb Festival (*Ching Ming* literally means clear day festival signifying blue skies and beautiful moments together in Mandarin) if they are Buddhists, or Easter, if they are Christians.

In Sarawak, where most of the Dayaks are Christians, Easter is celebrated with greater ceremony than in any other state in Malaysia. Many Churches hold Lenten services and seminars, and grand Easter masses. Because of the larger number of Christians in Sarawak and Sabah compared to West Malaysia, Good Friday is only a public holiday in East Malaysia.

The birthday of Buddha around March is a day when Buddhists in the country flock to the temples to celebrate and a grand procession is held with floats. March to April is the time of the Kaul Festival in Sarawak, when the fishing season is scheduled to begin. This is the occasion for a grand celebration in Mukah, the Melanau fishing village of Sarawak in the 3rd Division where the fishing boats beautifully adorn the frontier of the seashores and river mouths.

In May, the state of Sarawak prepares for the very significant ethnic festival of Gawai Dayak which, by government decree, is now celebrated on the 1st of June. July is the month of the Rainforest World Music Festival, an international celebration of world music which has now morphed into a *mardi gras* in the rainforest cultural village of Kuching, Sarawak.

Between June and July, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, the Chinese in Malaysia celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival. Festival dumplings are for sale and there are usually colourfully adorned dragon boats lined up for the boat race. In Penang this has become an international event attended by people from many parts of the world. In Sarawak it is usually called the Regatta where sponsoring companies have competing teams in dragon boats. In August, Taoists and also Buddhists in Malaysia celebrate the 15th day of the seventh lunar month by appeasing the spirits of the dead with sacrifices, prayers and offerings in the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts.

National flags fly high in buildings, in cars, in schools and in the buildings of major corporate companies to show support for the National Day held on 31st August and coinciding with the period of mega sales. Holidays within Malaysia are promoted via the *Cuti Cuti Malaysia* campaign which encourages Malaysians to travel to other states of

Malaysia as part of the national integration plan for Malaysians to know and bond with their own country as well as to promote unity amongst the states.

Hence it is reasonable to argue that the Malaysian Festival calendar is a clear demonstration of what Degh (1978) described as

...a growing desire for ethnic recognitions in individuals and groups, a search for ethnic identity, and a conscious exhibition of distinctive ethnic traits. (Degh, 1978:36)

Counterpoised against this internal growth model of festivals is their role in cultural tourism where they feature simply as part of a

...kaleidoscope of planned culture, sport, political, and business occasions: from mega-events like Olympics and World fairs to community festivals; from programs of events at parks and attractions to visits by dignitaries and inter-governmental assemblies, from small meetings and parties to huge conventions and competitions. (Goldblatt 2002:1)

While there may be some inherent tensions between the preservation of a cultural through line and the commercial imperatives of tourism, there can be no doubt that Malaysia's still emergent nationhood builds heavily on the fostered respect each ethnic group has developed for others based on their special festival celebrations. In relation to the role of culture in the creating of a unified Malaysia, Oo (1991) for example has observed that

...the proverbial phoenix seems to have risen from the ashes. The cultural identity of different racial groups is promoted with imaginative splendor. The portrayal of different races on huge billboards at strategic locations, especially in the Federal territory, is indeed a highly visible promotion of a real Malaysia image...

Of course, another immediate impact is the revival of cultural pluralism, which seems to characterize the present face-lift that the country is undergoing

...as a national-cultural image is projected nationwide and overseas, individual cultural identity is highlighted through ethnic peculiarities such as traditional dances, dresses, hobbies and ceremonies...(Oo, 1991:55).

Daniel (2005) refers to the important goals

...of building and maintaining harmonious and peaceful inter-group relations, respecting everyone's status as citizens, providing special benefits for Malaya natives and building the nation of Malaysia even as they reflect tensions in the process of national formation. (Daniel, 2005:109)

He argues that the models and schema of Malaysia's diverse society "*are thus incompatible with any form of discrimination, inequality [or] exclusion as everyone, regardless of race or religion, is included in and belongs to Malaysia's multiracial society*" (Daniel, 2005:109).

This very strong and deliberate national policy is given further impetus by the introduction of specific city level festivals which engage all citizens but are imbued with ethnic neutrality. For example, the Kuching Festival, which was introduced in 1990 to mark Kuching's elevation to city status, is celebrated by its inhabitants across an entire month of food and arts events. During this month, some 50,000 people from Japan typically visit Kuching to participate in the *Cat Competition* and to visit the Cat Museum.

In August, most of the Chinese celebrate the Mid Autumn Festival by enjoying moon cakes and lighting lanterns. In September, there are preparations for Hari Raya Puasa after the month long Ramadan Muslim month of fasting. However, it should be noted that festivals such as Hari Raya Puasa follow the Islamic lunar calendar and not the Gregorian solar calendar. As such, Hari Raya Puasa will be celebrated approximately eleven days earlier each successive year. Moreover, the Gregorian date varies between countries depending on the sighting of the moon in various regions of the world. Between October and November, Indians celebrate Deepavali, the Festival of Lights. December is the month of Christmas

with streets filled with Christmas decorations, carols in the air, people shopping, shops decorated with gift suggestions and Christmas symbols like the Santas and Santarinas who give sweets and gifts to children. There is a feeling of excitement, anticipation, joy and hope. Thus the festival cycle ends. While some festivals mean more to certain nationalities or groups in the society, it is obvious that they create a rhythm of life which, to a very large extent, orchestrates the highs and lows of work, life, and enjoyment for Malaysians.

Although these festivals create the heartbeat and focal point of the annual calendar, there is little documentation to reflect this (see Table 2.2.1). A recent publication entitled **Gateway to Malay Culture** (Ragman, 2003), published in the Montage Cultural series, purports to provide a “*handbook on the Malays...useful to visitors to the Southeast Asian region or the Malay Archipelago*” (Ragman, 2003: Foreword). Of its eleven chapters, only one is devoted to Malay Festivals and comprises eight illustrated pages providing a brief description of key Muslim Festivals focusing largely on the process of each festival.

1.3 The Arts as Integral to Celebration

1.3.1 Music and Dance

The rhythm of drums, the reverberation of music, song and the movement of the ancient people in celebratory mode naturally lead to dance. Chants to celebrate the festivals have typically been associated with a good harvest, jubilant achievements, victory, births, birthdays of great men, thanksgiving, and memorable occasions. Music is thus central to creating the ambience, the aesthetics, the heartbeat and the soul of festivals.

In Sarawak, however, music has its genesis in specific roots. Church music was introduced by the early foreign European Christians evangelizing in the state and forming choirs and

bands. In the Chinese community, the early Chinese brought with them traditional Chinese instruments such as the *pipa*, *er bu* and *ku chern*. Each dialect group had its own songs, operas and folk tunes (e.g., the Cantonese Opera, Teochew Opera and Hakka *San Ko* (Hakka folk songs of the mountains)). The Arabs and spice merchants brought their musical skills in the form of singing and playing the *gendang* (round cylindrical drums), *gambus* (a stringed instrument shaped like a pear sliced in half with twelve nylon strings that are plucked with a pick) and *biola* (like a viola of present day though held differently). All of these have contributed to the contemporary Sarawakian musical culture which has now morphed into a particular celebratory style.

Each culture's celebration thus reflects its idiosyncratic ethnicity and rhythms. For example, during Chinese New Year, lion dances, the loud rhythmic beats of the Chinese drums, the pentatonic melodies of the Chinese tunes, all of which signify success, wealth, fortune, greetings, happiness, cheer and celebrations, permeate the air. The music of Chinese New Year is also synonymous with the bursting fire crackers that add to the sounds associated with the festival. The Chinese find joy in loud, cheerful toasting, expansive amounts of food to eat and drink, accompanied by loud singing, drumming and dancing in the presence of loved ones and families.

During the Gawai Dayak Harvest Festival, the ensemble sounds of brass gongs, the monotony of the chants and interlocking rhythms, the soothing sounds of the *sape* (pronounced "sa-peh", a traditional lute of the Orang Ulu community), the drone creating excitement of the improvisational beats, the sounds of the bamboo instruments, the outbursts of song and dance, serve as a reminder of the culture with which the music is associated. Gongs are used to usher in the Gawai, to welcome visitors to the longhouses, to initiate that urge to *ngajat* (traditional warrior dance) and to call the people to party all

night long. Dayaks recall that their drumbeats all originated from war calls. The Ibans, formerly known for head hunting, excited war call rhythms, inviting and provocative drumbeats, commonly signal other Ibans in relation to fighting, taking of heads, emergency calls and the signs of danger ahead. After the fights and war, communities went into full celebration, singing, dancing and drinking through the early hours of the morning. The Bidayuhs, mainly farmers, celebrated the harvest festival with gong ensembles, chants, and rituals sung to thank the Gods. The Orang Ulu typically sing chants calling birds to seek good omens or ask permission to go hunting. A successful hunting trip is followed by drinking, merry making, singing about success, chanting for protection and calling for signals from the birds.

1.3.2 Visual and Decorative Arts

Visual and decorative arts play an equally important role in festivals, often taking the form of ceremonial objects. In most Sarawakian homes where Open House is a local culture, decorative arts play an important role in giving the home, families and its nation a sense of the festival atmosphere. Floral decorations like lotus flowers, cherry blossoms, and pussy willows during Chinese New Year and yellow flowers during Hari Raya Puasa are used to create the traditional festive ambience. Personal decoration also plays a role feeding into the fashion industry with special/traditional/ethnically identifiable designs of *cheongsam* (traditional Chinese dress), *baju kurung* and *baju melayu* for Hari Raya, *saris* for Deepavali as traditional dress is customary.

1.3.3 The Culinary Arts

In Malaysia, as in some other countries, no festival would even happen without the culinary arts appealing to the appetites of those celebrating. Food and drink is undoubtedly a major festival staple. In Sarawak, many festival foods are the specialty of the region and even attract people from West Malaysia. *Tuak* (a alcoholic traditional beverage made from fermented rice, yeast and sugar), Sarawak *laksa* (spicy noodle in coconut gravy), *kolo mee* (local noodles), *terung asam* (egg plant), *midin*, *paku* (jungle ferns), *acar* (local pickles), sago dessert (soft sago pearls cooked in coconut sauce), and many other such local delicacies create mouth watering desires which entice people to flock to Sarawakian Festivals.

Each festival has its own specialties: *Niengao* (sweetened New Year cake), mandarin oranges, and *yee sang* (raw fish) are special to Chinese New Year, whilst *rendang* (Malay spiced coconut beef), *satay* (sweetened barbecued meat on skewers), *lemang* (a traditional food cooked in a hollowed bamboo stick lined with banana leaves, and made of glutinous rice and coconut milk with salt added for taste) and *ketupat* (a savoury rice dumpling wrapped in woven palm leaves and then sent to be boiled or steamed) are foods special to Hari Raya Puasa. Since some of these foods are found only during festival times, they are highly prized and enjoyed as part of each year's festival celebrations.

1.4 Festivals : The Unique Case of Sarawak

Sarawak is unique in Malaysia in that the highest proportion of its population is comprised of the Dayak people, which include the major ethnic groups of Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Melanau, Lun Bawang, Bisaya and some minor ethnic groups. Besides the Dayak majority,

Chinese and Malays comprise almost a quarter each, and then there is a minority of Eurasians and Indians (see Table 1.4.1).

Table 1.4.1 Racial Mix of Sarawak - 2006

RACES	POPULATION %
Bidayuhs or Land Dayak	8
Ibans or Sea Dayak	28.9
Chinese	25.5
Malays	22.2
Melanaus	5.5
Orang Ulu – Bisayas, Kayans, Kenyahs, Lun Bawang	5.7
Non-Sarawakian Malaysians (including Indians and Eurasians)	0.4

(Sarawak National Eye Care. 2006 Sarawak Census. Accessed 1 October 2009 - <http://www.sarawakeyecare.com/kuching.htm>)

Sarawak's uniqueness springs not only from its rich cultural diversity but also from the fact that there is amazing respect towards and enjoyment of all ethnic groups. East Malaysia remains now less urban and westernized than the major cities of West Malaysia. Household help is more common and work pressures are less insistent so that traditional celebratory modes are more in evidence than in West Malaysia where young people's tight work schedule can lead to simplification or diminution of festival preparation. There is a tendency for families in the big cities of West Malaysia to opt for a holiday and/or overseas travel during festival times rather than undertake the planning and preparation demanded by tradition. Many no longer see festivals as times to cherish tradition and culture or to ensure that their children understand their meaning and significance.

In Sarawak city and rural celebrations vary greatly in terms of food, time, music and traditional beliefs and practices. For example, at Christmas, city dwellers typically buy presents and shop, feast with Christmas parties, enjoy decorations, and are mesmerized by the silent pull of spending money for loved ones as indoctrinated by the shopping hype. Christians may attend midnight mass as a prelude to family gatherings in high revelry. In rural areas, however, Christmas may be the only time in the year when there is access to formal religious ceremonies. Hence, thousands will gather to worship with a priest who has traveled upriver or by land into the interiors where masses will be said.

There is less preparation in rural homes in terms of decorations or ornamentation and more preparation in terms of collecting bamboo for cooking, cutting firewood, making baskets for visitors, planting and harvesting, rearing pigs to an edible size and catching fish for a hearty meal. All these preparations are associated with farming, hunting and fishing activities which gather momentum for a well anticipated celebration fuelled by copious quantities of rice wine prepared especially for the event. The richness of this celebration is enjoyed but, sadly, not documented except in informal family and community oral traditions. Sandin (1977) has published a book on the Gawai Burong Bird Festival and Nuek (2002) reported his documentation of Bidayuh community rituals, ceremonies and festivals derived from one Bidayuh village. Apart from these two books related to Gawai, Chang's (1993) book entitled **Chinese Festivals, Customs and Practices in Sarawak** appears to provide the only other extant festival documentation. This situation is of concern given the changing practices identified earlier.

1.5 Rationale for and Aims of the Study

Given the apparently parlous state of the documentation of these important and traditional festivals, especially from the experiential viewpoint as distinct from that of the external observer, it is critical to redress this situation. This is of special importance given the need to create cultural continuity and to ensure that ensuing generations are educated, in both formal and informal ways, about their cultural heritage.

Hence this research aims

- (1) To document and probe the experience of key festivals in Sarawak both from the perspective of
 - (a) cultural spectacle, and
 - (b) the individual;
- (2) To use the data obtained from (1) above to
 - (a) develop a consolidated record of the public and individual experience of key festivals, and
 - (b) analyze the continuities and discontinuities between public and individual festival experience.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

In foregrounding the research, Chapter Two reviews the literature pertaining to festivals and festival behaviour as well as reviewing the extent and nature of the documentation of Asian Festivals. It focuses also on the available research evidence pertaining to the experience of festivals. The chapter concludes by posing questions in search of answers. Chapter Three scopes the Malaysian festival calendar and selects 14 major and 13 minor festivals for specific examination. Using a common framework, it provides a detailed

overview of each major festival from the perspective of historical background of sequence of preparation and celebration, and key cultural dimensions.

The methodology and analytic strategy for the study is developed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five presents a macro analysis of the data while each of Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine focus on the results specific to the four major festivals which were the focus of the research. Chapter Ten analyses festival commonalities and differences.

Finally, Chapter Eleven distils the results of the research, reflects on the efficacy of the research processes, and explores the implications of the study for government, education, and further establishes future directions.

CHAPTER TWO FESTIVALS AND FESTIVAL BEHAVIOUR

2.1 Festivals : A Global Perspective

There is compelling evidence from the global events web site <http://www.earthcalendar.net> (Accessed 18 April 2009) which documents holidays and occasions from countries and religions worldwide to suggest that there is probably at least one festival each day in some country around the world. Not all will be times when businesses are closed but all recognize a cultural event at some level of importance. On the day this site was accessed, for example, holidays included Health Day (Kiribati), Independence Day (Zimbabwe), Paul Revere Day (USA), and Official Flag Day (Denmark).

The site also recognizes holidays which have international import such as Christmas Day (December 25) and New Year's Day (January 1). Easter is celebrated by many following the Christian tradition, as is Labour Day to celebrate workers. Countries such as Canada celebrate Sir John MacDonald's birthday, St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day and Canada Day. Like all Commonwealth countries Australia celebrates the Queen's Birthday. Japan, on the other hand, celebrates "Coming of Age Day" and National Foundation Day. New Zealand in the south celebrates New Zealand Day on February 6 and Anzac Day on April 25 whilst Hong Kong has its Dragon Boat Festival, although this is not a public holiday. Germany celebrates the fall of the Berlin wall. France celebrates *La Fête de la Magdalene* and Bastille Day. The Philippines celebrate Ati-Atihan Festival, Day of Valour (*Araw ng Kagitingan*), Independence Day and Manila Day.

Russia celebrates Orthodox Christmas and Russia Winter Festival, Women's Day and Moscow Day. In Thailand, key celebrations include Thai New Year, which is celebrated on

Songkran Day, Coronation Day and *Loy Kratong* Flower Boat Festival. The United Kingdom celebrates days of the saints, namely St. David's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Queen's Birthday and Remembrance Day. Vietnam celebrates *Tet Nguyen Dan* (Lunar New Year) and Ho Chi Minh's Birthday.

As noted in 1.1, celebrations commonly have their origins in history, religion, special achievement, events, etc. More recently, family oriented festivals, cultural festivals, culinary festivals and other similar festivals have developed largely in response to cultural tourism or simply celebrative enjoyment. Globally, it can be seen that festival enjoyment builds upon convivial drinking (e.g., wine), performing arts such as music, song and dance, visual arts such as banners, flags, lanterns and balloons and even particular clothes and costumes all of which coalesce to create the festival experience.

The documentation of festivals varies widely both in depth and focus ranging from the deliberate seductiveness of many coffee table books to targeted academic research. The subsequent sections of this chapter will encompass this range in order to both scope the field and identify the niche for the current research.

2.2 Overview of Research on Asian Festivals

Table 2.2.1 provides an overview of extant publications, which pertain primarily to festivals and observances in the Asian context. Organised chronologically in order to map the development of the literature in this area, Table 2.2.1 provides in addition, author and title, nature of the publication, its focus, intended primary audience and orientation. The final column includes comments and perspectives from the point of view of contribution to the field.

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1927	Krohn	In Borneo Jungles	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dayak marriages • Headhunting • Family events feasts • Religious ceremonies • Annual ceremonies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Ethnomusicologists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • Ethnographic perspectives • Lifestyles • Music • Arts and crafts 	Some general background information
1943	Yang, translated by Chao.	The Dragon Boat Races in Wu-Ling, Hunan	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon Boat Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic description of the dragon boat race in Wu-Ling • Historical background on origin of festival. 	Conventional and what is very different as a festival in Malaysia these days
1952	Eberhard	Chinese Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year • Dragon Boat • Mid Autumn • Festival of hungry ghosts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • Legendary • Beliefs • Celebrating functions 	Dated Concepts and background only
1953	Anuman Rajadhon	Loy Kratong and Songkran Festival	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Thai festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists, general interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	Brief backgrounds and practices, not much details
1956	Arasaratnam	Indian Festivals in Malaya	Book	Indian Festivals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katha Shashti • Deepavali • Thaispusam • Thai Pongal Importance Rituals Historical .Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and historical practices 	Some good historical background Little on common practices and reasons for the practices

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1961	James	Seasonal Feasts and Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals in Egypt • New Yr Festival in Mesopotamia • Palestinian Festivals • Asia Minor festivals • Greek Festivals • Roman Festivals • Christian Festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk festivals • Calendar customs • Rituals • Historical background 	Traditional backgrounds and conventional practices with special emphasis on rural practices
1965	Manson and Moore	Malayan Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhist Festivals • Chinese Festivals • Malay Festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historians • Educators • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Background • Celebration rites • Tradition and culture 	Brief and targeted to generalised reader general for easy reading only
1970	Rousseau and Taab	“A Report on the Ibans”	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual rituals • Annual celebrations • Headhunting rituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers • Students • anthropologists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iban social organization with Anthropological background 	Good background on the beliefs and common practices of Iban lifestyles
1977	Matusky and Tan	Music of Malaysia	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysian Music • Backgrounds (ethnic) • Genres in society • Development of music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and information 	Good information of the various music of the ethnic groups. Nothing on lifestyles, background, or music of festivals
1977	Sandin	Gawai Burong: the chants and celebrations of the Iban bird festival.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iban Bird Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers, tourists, Ibans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chants and celebrations of Iban Bird Festival 	Iban community practices only

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1978	Dégh	The Study of Ethnicity in Modern European Ethnology.	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers • Historians • Analysts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicities and their significance, emotions and positions 	Significant in understanding the various views and opinions of the different ethnic groups in festivals
1982	Turner	Celebration! Attitudes in Festivity and ritual	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canela Initiation • Festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysts • Historians • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material components in celebration; Language of Festivals; • Sociation and sociability 	Good summary of background and meaning of celebrations and main components
1983	Muzium Negara Malaysia, Editorial	Exhibition in Chinese New Year Celebration in Malaysian	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year • Tradition • Culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year Festival 	Highlights only
1984	MacAloon	Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals towards a Theory of Cultural Performance.	Conference proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural performances of festivals, the dramatical aspects and the rehearsals behind various festivities 	A good understanding of what goes on behind the scenes at festivals and festival performances
1984	Higgins	Glyndebourne: A Celebration	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music • Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legendary • Relations • Stylistic approach • Historical background 	Targeted to generalized reader only

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1985	Scanlon	South East Asia: A cultural study through celebration	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Festivals • Malaysian religious ceremonies • Cultural celebrations • Indonesia • Political observances • Thailand religious ceremonies • Cultural celebrations • Burma family ceremonies • Philippines ceremonies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • Cultural beliefs and mechanism of celebrations 	Informative book on the cross multiracial celebrations of Asian regions. Some sense of commonalities and differences
1985	Latsch	Traditional Chinese Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Chinese festivals • Lunar New Year • Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background on the evolution and present-day celebrations of traditional Chinese festivals. • Local legends. 	
1985	Government Press	Kayan Religion	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kayan ritual and religious ceremonies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual cycle rituals • Lifecycle rituals • Religious beliefs • Myths • Historical background 	Some light on the traditional ceremonies and rituals in Sarawak. Little on changes and how they evolve
1987	Falassi	Time out of time: essays on the festival.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major world festivals • New festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenes of festivals • Continuity and change • Signs, symbols, rituals and social functions of festivals 	Collection of essays from different historical periods and areas by different authors

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1987	Chong	Traditional woodcarving ceremony: Melanau	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melanau rituals • Melanau traditional customs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodcarving • Healing rituals • Economic activities • Generic origins • Melanau art form-<i>bilum</i> 	Insight into Melanau rituals ceremonies
1988	Armstrong	Festival Open Houses – Settings for Interethnic Communication in Urban Malaysia.	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Malaysian festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of festival open houses and the resultant interethnic visiting in promoting interethnic communication 	Good comments on views of open house
1988	Munan,	Culture Shock!: Borneo	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local practices taboos and culture of the various ethnic groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habits, • Customs and etiquettes of the people of Borneo 	Generalist reader only
1988	Teiser	Ghost Festivals In Medieval China	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hungry Ghost • Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • Mythological • Legendary belief • Rituals 	Good historical background especially myths and legends
1990	Ross	Origin of the Chinese People	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations, backgrounds, changes 	General
1990	Koralek	Hanukkah Festival	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival of light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Future researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legendary 	Background and practices at a general level
1991	Macdonald and Majeed	A stroll through Borneo	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iban festivals • Kayan festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly personal experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic experiences • Customs and legend • Annual ceremonies 	Background information Personal experiences

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1991	Her World Magazine	Festival activities	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawai festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festive activities, food, drinks 	Brief, mostly general facts
1991	Oo	Ethnic Chameleon: Multiracial Politics in Malaysia	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of various ethnic sensitivities in Malaysia 	Good view to better understand the peoples opinions and ethnic sensitivities
1992	Manning	Spectacle	Article in Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festivals in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebratory behaviour 	
1992	Stoeltje	Festival	Article in Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festivals in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebratory behaviour 	
1992	Nais	Study of Dayak Bidayuh occult arts of divination	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omens and signs Terms Clarification Incantation 	Some background into the rituals and animistic practices
1993	Chang	Chinese Festivals Customs and practices in Sarawak	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese New Year Chap Goh Mei, Dragon boat, Tomb, Hungry Ghosts, Chong Yuan Jie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Chinese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese customs and practices 	Some good background and common practices in celebrating the Chinese Festivals
1993	Stepanchuk and Wong	Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts: Festivals of China	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese New Year Dragon Boat Festival Mid-Autumn Festival Hungry Ghost Festival, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General 	Chinese customs and practices	Mostly traditional practices, some of which shine light on the present day differences in modern Malaysia
1994	King	Ethnic groups of Borneo	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual festivals Annual rituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourists Youth culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical background Social structure Social stratification 	Some background information

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
1995	Dickson	Longhouse in Sarawak	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil • Only personal experience of longhouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations and personal opinions 	Personal experiences
1996	Hasegawa	The Dragon Boat Festival	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon Boat Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	Historical background	Advances towards cultural tourism
1996	Manser	Voices from the Rainforest: Testimonies of a Threatened People	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawai with autobiography experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Tourists 	Rural views of Sarawak	Personal views
1996	Thumboo	Cultures in ASEAN and the 21st Century	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultures in the ASEAN countries and its evolution 	Good cross section Views from various presentations
1997	Welch	Chinese New Year	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed information on how Chinese New Year is celebrated. 	Good overview
1998	Hubert	Christmas Around the World	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General information and facts • Customs • Legends 	Good overview and understanding of the Christmases past in various different cultures
1998	Kuutma	Festival as Communicative Performance and Celebration of Ethnicity.	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival in general, Estonian festivals in particular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivals serve as a tool for cultural unification and the expression of ethnic identity. 	Good understanding of the communicative process of festivals and roles ethnicities play
2000	Ngidang, Sanggin and Sallen	Iban Culture and Development in the New Reality	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directions and progress of the Ibans in Sarawak 	Cultural seminar papers presented in 1998
2000	Leigh	Borneo 2000 Proceedings of 6th Biennial Borneo Research Conference	Edited Conference Proceedings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Christmas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backgrounds of ethnic migrations, rituals 	Several cultural and rituals presented

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
2001	Jordan	Ceremonies for Life	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the unknown aspects of spiritualism 	Compares Dayak rituals and animistic belief. Examines spirituality in the rituals.
2001	Dietler and Hayden	Digesting the Feast – Good to Eat, Good to Drink, Good to Think: An Introduction.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient Ceremonial festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary experiences 	Helps the understanding the role of food in festivals
2001	Schmandt-Besserat	Feasting in the Ancient Near East	Article in Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasts and the dimensions 	Behavioural and ceremonial aspects
2001	Brown	Feasting on the Periphery: The Production of Ritual Feasting and Village Festivals at the Cerén Site, El Salvador.	Article in Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional village festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rituals and the ceremonial aspects in the villages 	Good understanding and insight to the Dayak festivals on a common basis
2002	Press Editorial	A Dayak Bidayuh Community Ritual, ceremonies and festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bidayuh festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • Tradition and culture • Myths and legends • Bisigai and Gawai celebration 	Bidayuh specific community only
2002	Wee	Local Cultures and the New Asia	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State, culture, capitalism in SEA 	General
2002	Tong	Making of Singapore Sociology	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal dynamics • Social organization 	Brief coverage of festival only
2002	Inda	Anthropology of Globalization	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background of lifestyle and celebrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global issues 	Effects of the changing faces of life on lifestyles of celebration

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
2002	Mehmetoglu	Economic Scale of Community Run Festivals: A Case Study.	Journal Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small community-run festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an economic scale approach • Small-scale events have direct economic impact 	For an insight and comparison to the village festivities in Sarawak
2002	Ooi	Cultural Tourism and Tourism Cultures: The Business of Mediating Experiences in Copenhagen and Singapore.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comparison between the cultural tourism strategies of Singapore and Copenhagen. 	Effects of cultural tourism to be aware of that may affect festivals involved with it.
2002	Nuek	Dayak, Bidayuh Community:Rituals, Ceremonies and Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawai • Bidayuh celebrations of lifestyle practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bidayuh cultures 	Practices and modes of celebration
2002	Robinson	A Mild Man in Borneo	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarawak in the past, rural experiences 	Personal experience
2003	Fu, Chay and Han	Gateway to Chinese Culture	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Chinese festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	General information only
2003	Goh, Fu and Koh	Origins of Chinese Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Chinese festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	General information only
2003	Ragman	Gateway to Malay Culture	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Malay festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	General information only
2003	Lim	Gateway to Peranakan Culture	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	General information only
2003	Soundar	Gateway to Indian Culture	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Indian festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	General information only
2003	Her World Magazine	Christmas as Style	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • activities 	Some good points on the Asian concepts and evolving changes

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
2003	Author Unknown	Birth of Gawai Dayak	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawai Celebrations • Past and present celebrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists, • General interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background and practices 	Very brief. Lacking details and depth.
2003	Encarta	Feasts: archaeological and ethnographic perspectives	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of feasts • Rituals • Historical • Perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Celebration behaviour and practices 	Good study of the backgrounds and experiences of feast in general
2003	Encarta	Types of festivals	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Worldwide celebration of festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General celebration modes 	General information only
2003	Boniface	Tasting Tourism: Travelling for Food and Drink.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism • Cultural lens • International case studies • Relationship between culture, geography and politics 	General tourist book lacking detailed information
2003	Sofield and Sivan	From Cultural Festival to International Sport—The Hong Kong Dragon Boat Races.	Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon boat festival with particular emphasis on the dragon boat races 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rebranding of the dragon boat races into an international water sport as opposed to a cultural-based event. 	A totally different perspective in the changes and expectations of the outcomes of the festival
2003	Taiwan Government Information Office	Chinese New Year Celebration	Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festive points • Food traditional culture 	Tourist brief information only

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
2004	Thiruman	The Politics of Cultural Tourism in Malaysia: Ethnic Chinese Spaces in Malaysia.	Conference Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in Malaysian tourism policy with respect to the more prominent portrayal of ethnic Chinese heritage. 	A good insight to understanding the effects these can cause in the festivals of Malaysia
2004	Yong	Asian Traditions and modernization	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditions and modernization 	Good surveys
2004	Senanayake, Nandy and Gomez	Ethnic Futures	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None in particular but explains the celebration, lifestyles of the ethnic minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature and dimension of problems of ethnic minorities and majorities 	Touch on Evolution of Ethnic Festivals
2005	Daniels	Building cultural nationalism in Malaysia: identity, representation, and citizenship.	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises the problem of building a national cultural identity within Malaysia's diverse society. 	Homogenizations possibilities evident
2006	Moey	Chinese Feasts and Festivals	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Food-lovers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival cookbook 	Facts and festival food specialities
2006	Author Unknown	Heritage Asia	Book/ magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabah Festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various heritage topics 	General points only
2007	Choo	Rasa Rasa Malaysia: Taste, the Senses and the Production of Meaning through an Anthropology of "Malaysian" Food.	Doctoral Thesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnography of Malaysian food. 	Great interest for culinary enthusiasts of festivals in future

Table 2.2.1 A Survey of the Literature on Malaysian Festivals (cont'd)

Date	Author/ Press	Title of Publication	Nature Book/Art	Focus Festivals	Audience For Publication	Orientation	Comments & Perspectives
2009	Bennett	Festival Spaces, Neo-Greenism and Youth Culture.	Conference Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contemporary youth music festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significance of contemporary youth festivals as nodal points for the development of eco-political sensibilities and practices in youths. 	Good insight for views in the cuotural specatacle from youth point
2009	Bianchini	Role of Festivals and of European City/Capital of Culture Initiatives for Revitalizing Public Social Life and the Urban Public Sphere.	Conference Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General European festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential of festivals to reshape and revitalize the use of urban public spaces and public social life. 	Roles highlighted various social aspects
2009	Regev	Festivals in a Small Country: Recognition, Cosmopolitanism and Isomorphism.	Conference Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prominent annual festivals in Israel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festivals as sites and events of artistic pilgrimage. 	Interesting view of size and significance
2009	Herbert	The Gawai Festival	Internet article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawai Harvest Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General celebration practices 	First-hand experience of celebrating Gawai in the longhouse.

Table 2.2.1 reveals that the published documentation of festivals over the period 1953 – 1993 was extremely scant, and the coverage overall was, at best, restricted. Yet this period was one of rapid urbanization, explicit government policy about interracial respect, both of which tend to militate against the preservation of festivals in their traditional forms. Post 1993 the focus is more on the generic culture of particular ethnic groups than on the specific of their festivals. Despite the omnipresence of festivals in the Malaysian/Sarawakian way of life and the strong official encouragement of cross celebration, there would appear to be little systematic documentation of the Festivals in Sarawak and seemingly no published research with regards to the perceptions of the people about these festivals, and the central roles these play in their lives. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of articles about Festivals (e.g., Herbert, 2009) and more research in relation to Festivals (e.g., Yusof, 2009) published via the internet. However, those focusing on Malaysia proved to be more tourism related articles on festivals (e.g., Sarawak Tourism Board on Gawai Dayak).

2.3 Other Documentation of Asian Festivals

As indicated in 2.1, data about Asian Festivals can be reduced from a range of very different sources – potentially including generalist publications loosely categorized as *coffee table* books, archival records, and the media. In the sections that follow, each of these areas will be reviewed in turn. Finally, the essential differences between rural and urban modes of celebration will be outlined.

2.3.1 Views from the Coffee Table

Coffee table books, by definition, are designed to stimulate the eye, to capture the imagination and to do so in the ephemeral moment of drinking coffee. Not surprisingly, the ratio of visuals to text is extremely high. Photographers revel in the capturing of evocative action (see

Plates 2.3.1 and 2.3.2), the celebratory moment (see Plate 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), festival food (see Plates 2.3.5 and 2.3.6) and breathtaking background scenery (Plate 2.3.7 and 2.3.8).

A family gathers to celebrate Hari Raya. It is customary to ask for forgiveness from elders and other family members with the salutation *maaf zahir batin*.



Plate 2.3.1 Young boy asking for forgiveness from elders. (Salleh, 2006:40)



Lion dancers are required to have elegance and perfect co-ordination, especially during daring manoeuvres.

Plate 2.3.2 Lion dance performance for Chinese New Year (Salleh, 2006:52)

Below: Celebrating Deepavali with friends from other ethnic groups.



Plate 2.3.3 A representation of a Deepavali Open House with people of different ethnicities. (Salleh, 2006:15)



Plate 2.3.4 Malay villagers celebrating Hari Raya Puasa in the *kampong* (Salleh, 2006:18)



Plate 2.3.5 Hawker selling traditional Indian sweetmeats and *murukku* (Salleh, 2006:67)

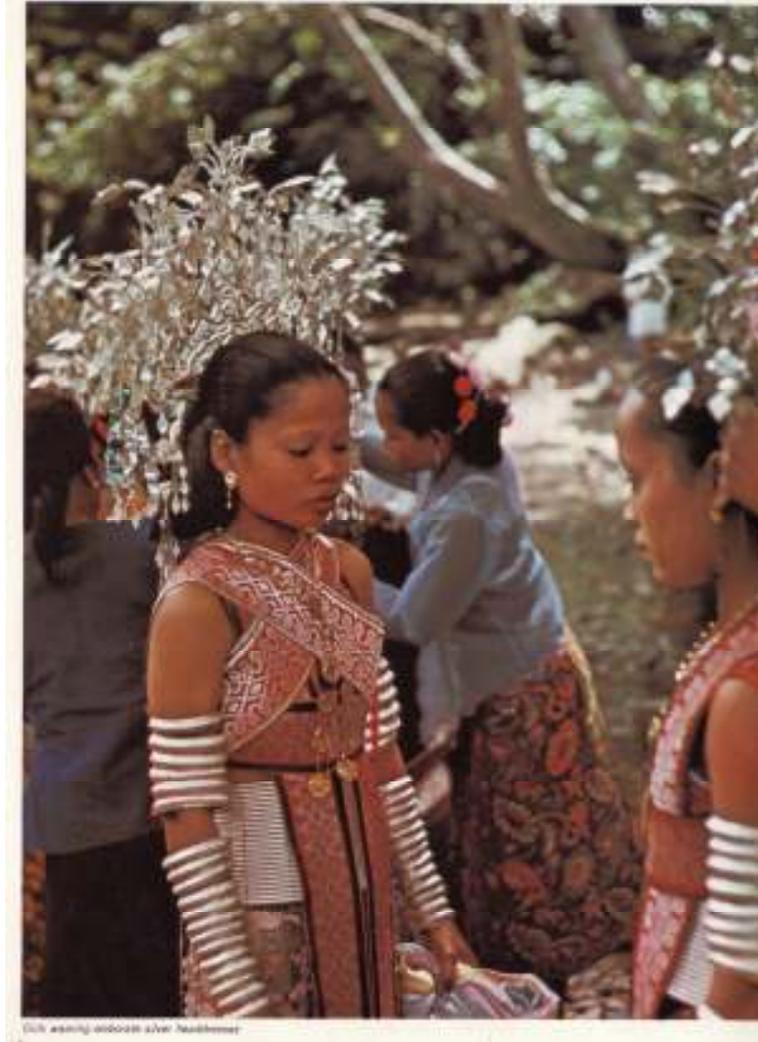


Plate 2.3.8 *Girl wearing elaborate silver headdress (Wright, 1972:118)*

As can be seen from Plates 2.3.1 to 2.3.8, the text accompanying the visuals (where available) provides little more than a descriptive label for them. The emphasis is thus on providing a visual experience for the reader/view even though the experience can only be one of spectator rather than participant.

2.3.2 Archives

The **Sarawak Museum Journal** contained several short articles about small festival happenings as reported in the **Sarawak Gazette** but these did not include coverage of historic or cultural aspects. One book on the festival entitled **Gawai Burong: the chants and**

celebrations of the Iban Bird festival (Iban Bird Festival) (Sandin, 1977) was included in the collection.

The libraries of Radio Television Malaysia were searched for archival records and some recordings of the Lun Bawang Festival chants were found in RTM Limbang as well as some Iban and Bidayuh chants in RTM Kuching.

2.3.3 Media

Contact with the Information Office of Sarawak, and the Ministry of Culture for any past information regarding Festivals of Sarawak recorded on video, tapes, films or in books revealed that there were no such records and all that the office had on file was documentation of the official opening, closing or visit by the Chief Minister or other Ministers who officiated at such ceremonies. Thus the only available records were of the official ceremonial arrival of the dignitaries; no records of the actual cultural, artistic or historic dimensions had been retained.

In addition, a letter written to high profile media groups (e.g., **Sarawak Tribune**, **Borneo Post**) seeking documentation of festivals in the past ten years yielded a nil response. A letter to the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Information also received no response.

2.3.4 Urban/Rural Celebration Modes: Kuching

There are some festivals, which have their origin in rural areas, for example, the Gawai Dayak Festival, Lun Bawang Irau Aco and the Kaul Festival which are unique to Sarawak and are celebrated more intensely in rural than in urban areas. These differences are perhaps best

illustrated by consideration of the Gawai Harvest Festival which is celebrated by Dayaks from all ethnic communities at the end of the harvesting season.

In Sarawak, given multiple ethnic groups with idiosyncratic cultural ways, each village had its own **Gawai** once harvesting was completed. Hence, there were many Gawai in Sarawak, each reflecting a different culture and time. However, in 1963, as indicated earlier, the Government decided when Sarawak joined Malaysia, to establish a single date for all Dayaks to celebrate Gawai together on June 1. Since then, only the Lun Bawang Irau Aco or Lun Bawang Harvest Festival is held at the end of May while all others celebrate their New Year on June 1. Lun Bawang, after their **Irau Aco** at the end of May, also celebrate Gawai Dayak, albeit only with **Open Houses**, drinking and merriment.

Only longhouse inhabitants celebrate rural Festivals. Prior to the celebration, the preparation of *tuak* or rice wine is very important. Nowadays, since most of the Dayaks have become Christians, those in rural areas have a priest visit their villages to celebrate **Mass** for them, which they then attend in huge congregations.

2.4 Perspectives on Festivals

Two major strands of literature on festivals derive from firstly the anthropological literature and secondly from the relatively recent discipline of tourism. While these have areas of commonality, there are also significant points of divergence.

2.4.1 Anthropological Perspectives

Falassi (1987) contends that a “festival is an event, a social phenomenon, encountered in virtually all human cultures” (Falassi, 1987:1). Falassi’s seminar book represent an initial

attempt to scope festivals across different historical periods and continents “primarily, even if not exclusively, for students and scholars in the fields in folklore and anthropology” (Falassi, 1987:10). Such a scoping exercise is necessarily selective and ranges from Goethe (1883) on “The Roman Carnival” to Abrahams’s (1987) delineation of “An American Vocabulary of Celebrations” to Eberhard’s (1952) description of “The Dragon Boat Festival”. As with the *coffee table* books, researchers’ perspectives are typically also through the looking glass from the outside; they are also dominantly, if not exclusively, spectator observations.

MacAloon (1984) distinguishes between a festival, which he regards as a joyful and uplifting celebration of unity, co-cooperativeness, excellence and achievement, and a spectacle, which is a grand and highly staged display of visual and auditory imaginary designed to evoke a sense of grandeur and awe in the audience, the latter view also being supported by Manning (1992).

Kuutma (1998) regards a festival as preparing

...communicative scenery for manifestations of ethnicity and cultural unity with the special objective to demonstrate and experience a particular identity. (Kuutma,1998:12)

Stoeltje (1992) points out that festivals have the following characteristics. They occur at calendrically regulated intervals. They are public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and have multiple voices, scenes and purposes (Stoeltje, 1992:201). They function as personal, familial and societal affirmation engendering social revitalization. Kuutma (1998) contends that festival *messages* “...concern the shared experience of the group and its power to act in its own interest”, thus contributing to the articulation of social issues. (Kuutma, 1998:13)

In relation to Asian Festivals, Anuman Rajadhon (1953) makes the point that the key festivals of Thailand, like many other Asian Festivals, have the common base of family unity, merry making, feasting particularly on special food, making time for respect towards elders, pride in

showing their achievements from the previous year, and the fostering of cultural dimensions amongst the younger members of the families so that a strong cultural heritage is developed and maintained. Some festivals also have religious fortitude as their foundation. The Loy Kratong and Songkran Festivals of Thailand, as with their Malaysian counterpart Festivals, make ample use of enjoyment (Anuman Rajadhon, 1953).

Dietler and Hayden (2001) regard festivals as an

...extremely significant aspect of social life on a worldwide scale and [assert] that understanding them is crucial for apprehending and comprehending many social and cultural processes in ancient societies. (Dietler and Hayden, 2001:2)

In a more generic sense, Turner (1982) argues that the celebratory instinct, which is the basis for the existence of festivals, is innate:

...wherever the human spirit is free, people celebrate. All cultures commemorate what makes them distinctive and worthy in their own eyes... (Turner, 1982:7)

Feasting on food and drink are both integral to festivals and to the merriment and conviviality perceived to be at the heart of celebration. Brown (2001) uses the term “ritual feasting” to refer to

...that social network in which communal food and alcohol consumption co-occurs with a series of requisite ritual performances,

And, in relation to the term *festival*, she references

...the period of time, usually several days, which is set apart for open public celebrations, including ritual feasting, ceremonial performances, and other form of entertainment. (Brown, 2001:370)

That such a synergy between feasting and festivals has had a long history is attested to by Schmandt-Besserat (2001) whose study of ancient Mesopotamian art revealed that

...in the ancient Near East, the importance of festivals was collecting as well as consuming victuals. (Schmandt-Besserat, 2001:397)

Offerings of food and other objects to ancestral spirits relate to certain festival practices and objects as evidenced by Choo (2007) in his study entitled *Rasa Rasa Malaysia: Taste, the senses and the production of meaning through an anthropology of 'Malaysian' food* (Choo, 2007:i).

2.4.2 Perspectives from Cultural Tourism

From the broader cultural tourism perspective, however, the definitional structure is much more expansive. Long (2008) asserts that “The importance of festivals in communicating community identity, history and cultural practices for visitors” (Long, 2008 – Accessed 9 May 2009) and identifies four broad categories of festival while acknowledging that these are not discrete and contain varying degrees of overlap; these are summarized in Table 2.4.1.

Table 2.4.1 Overview of Long’s (2008) Categorization of Festivals

Category	Exemplars
Celebration of particular cultural identities	“so called ‘ethnic’ community festivals including carnivals, meals, Chinese New Year celebration etc.” “may be of local, regional, national and international significance”
Arts Events	“various artistic genre festivals, exhibitions, award ceremonies, street arts, installation and performances”
State and Practical Occasions	“inaugurations...national anniversaries/commemoratives, VIP visits and tours”
Cultural Aspect of Other Events	“business conferences and events, sport..., educational and scientific events”

The spectrum implied in Long’s (2008) categorization of festivals moves a long way from the inherently family oriented view of Anuman Rajadhon (1953) for whom only part of Long’s (2008) first category would qualify. The celebratory basis in the Turner (1982) sense, festivals/events in many of Long’s (2008) categories is also open to question. For example, in artistic genre based festivals, the celebration may well be argued to be for the art forms *per se* rather than emanating from participants themselves as, say, in Chinese New Year. This celebratory aspect would seem to be diminished, if not non-existent, in the third and fourth categories.

Such an omnibus concept of festivals might help to explain the trajectory for the Dragon Boat Festival, which has been identified by Sofield and Sivan (2003). Yang and Chao (1943) have carefully documented the origins and development of the Dragon Boat Race which is held not only “...to avert calamities but also to foretell the harvest of the year” (Yang and Chao, 1943:11) and in which it is alleged that “...fighting and drowning are inevitable” (Mei Shang-yu, quoted by Yang and Chao, 1943:18). Writing much later in the 20th century, Hasegawa (1996) also refers to the complexity of the Dragon Boat Race and cites

...the ritual's meaning, function and organization, its relation to production and political power, the legends of its origin and related folk beliefs, and the symbolism of the dragon and the dragon's multiform powers. (Hasegawa, 1996: 191)

He refers also to the fact that its complexity is enhanced by the fact that it is not only a “religious ritual” but “...serves a variety of other functions”; for example, in Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos, “it is typically a rite of the royalty with direct links to the king’s authority” whereas in mainland China certain minorities “possess the Dragon Boat Race”, a plurality which Hasegawa (1996) sees as fundamentally problematic (Hasegawa, 1996:192). However, by 2003, impelled by a “...lack of diversity in the tourism product”, Sofield and Sivan (2003) describe the Hong Kong Tourist Association’s conscious attempt to re-shape and re-commodify the Dragon Boat Festival into “an international water sport” involving a morphing from cultural tourism to sports tourism (Sofield and Sivan, 2003:9). Such a transformation has occurred at the spectator level however and there appears to have been little concern to document the traditional participant experience from the perspective of those participants. Yang and Chao (1943) described the culmination of the race thus:

...the victorious boat rows with stern on. The men hold their oars vertically, dance and beat gongs on the boat. When it passes by the boat to be defeated the men on it threaten them. Those to be defeated try to do the same but less vigorously or, if a little farther, they remain silent and acknowledge to be defeated. At sunset, the boats disperse. At the home of the headman, feasts are prepared. The boatmen all gather there to dine. At the home of the victor, food and wine are especially abundant. His neighbours, relatives and friends come to congratulate him. (Yang and Chao, 1943:18)

Graphic as this description undoubtedly is, there is little of the individual human story, the sacrifices, and joy, which inevitably bulwark human endeavour. Indeed Hasegawa in 1996 points out that,

...In the midst of China's ongoing economic development and modernization the visual recording of China's traditional religious rituals and folk customs has only just began. (Hasegawa, 1996:192)

There is no mention of the verbal recording of experience and it may well be that time is running out/has run out for that important recording of the part.

The literature emanating from cultural tourism provides another potential source of insights into the *experience* of festivals. Indeed the International Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 1999) acknowledges both that “the natural and cultural heritage belongs to all people” and that heritage is a “broad concept” which “encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences” (ICOMOS, 1999:1). This definitional framework differs from the UNESCO (1972) “definition of the cultural and natural heritage” which, consistent with the earlier Venice Charter (1964), considers only monuments, groups of buildings, and sites as “cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 1972:2).

It would seem reasonable to expect that research pertaining to “past and continuing cultural practices” might be located within the spectrum of cultural tourism research. However, within the tourism literature, a schism between cultural heritage management and tourism has been identified (McKercher and du Clos, 2002). This schism is well characterized in their Table 2.1 (McKercher and du Clos, 2002:14) which is reproduced as Table 2.4.2 below.

Table 2.4.2 Comparing Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism

	Cultural Heritage Management	Tourism
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector oriented • Not for profit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector oriented • Profit making
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broader social goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial goals
Key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community groups • Heritage groups • Minority/ethnic/indigenous groups • Local residents • Organisations for heritage professionals/local historical groups/religious leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business groups • Non local residents • National tourism trade associations, other industry bodies
Economic attitude to assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence value • Conserve for their intrinsic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use value • Consume for their intrinsic or extrinsic appeal
Key user groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non local residents
Employment background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social science/arts degrees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business/marketing degrees
Use of asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value to community as a representation of tangible and intangible heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value to tourist as product or activity that can help brand a destination
International political bodies/NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICOMOS/ICOM/UNESCO (promote conservation of culture) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WTO/WTTC (promote development of tourism)
National/regional political bureaucratic bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National, state and local agencies and some museums concerned with heritage management, archives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National, state, regional tourism bodies

(McKercher and Du Clos, 2002:14)

McKercher and du Clos's (2002) tabular summary of key comparisons between cultural heritage management and tourism points to clear areas of tension and dissonance in values between the two and, to a large extent, characterizes their different orientations. As Brooks (2005) notes,

Tourism is largely a private sector activity that utilizes public assets for private gain...[it is] inextricably linked with natural and cultural heritage conservation. Those who protect and conserve the natural and cultural heritage, in all its forms, hold the keys to perhaps half of the world's tourism assets. (Brooks, 2005:1)

Yet this is clearly not a marriage made in heaven. Cultural heritage management has a primary goal of conservation, preservation and safe-keeping:

...the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their old-age traditions...the common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognised. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity. (The Venice Charter, 206: Preamble- Accessed 3 May 2009 - http://www.icub.org/artman/publish/printer_23.shtml#definitions)

In contrast, the buzzwords of tourism revolve around practicalities such as economic impacts (e.g., Brown, Var and Lee (2002); Mehmetoglu (2002), Chhabra, Sills and Cabbage (2003); visitor experience (e.g., the Tasmanian Visitor Survey which “provides a profile of the characteristics, travel behaviour, and expenditure of international and domestic visitors to Tasmania:” - Accessed 3 May 2009 – <http://www.tourism/tas.gov.au/research/tvs>); visitor flow (e.g., Holt and Kearsley’s (1998) modelling of typical visitor flows and behaviours); and sustainability issues such as congestion management (e.g., Dileep, 2006). These issues exist very much in the here and now of tourist industry survival – and so does the research in the area. For example, the report of the 2009 annual Nova Scotia Tourism Research Forum reminds readers explicitly that “...tourism research is so essential for planning your strategy and online marketing plan for your business” and highlights sessions on

Competitive Assessment, 2009 Outlook, Explorer Quotient, Opportunities in the NS Market, Economic Impact Update, Visitor Exit Survey and other research initiative and updates and research best practices – tracking online marketing programs (Tourism Research, E-Marketing and New Media – Accessed 3 May 2009- <http://tourismvc.wordpress.com/>)

This type of focus does not either necessarily or readily accommodate, at an experiential level, “past and continuing cultural practices” at the level of the ordinary person. Certainly the McKercher and du Clos (2002) definition of cultural tourism as “a form of tourism that relies on a destination’s cultural heritage assets and transforms them into products that can be consumed by tourists.” (McKercher and du Clos, 2002:6) contains at least one fundamental reason why extant research into cultural practices is both slim and scant. In the case of cultural festivals, for example, the experience of the ordinary person and family in the celebration of festivals is not one that can readily be turned into a consumer product with a commercially viable economic return.

Yet it is the fragility of human cultural assets which must be of vital importance both to the human cultural practice trajectory and to cultural capital. Research which has targeted the

experiences of people upon whom festivals impact has tended to be highly specific. Fredline, Jago and Deery (2003), for example, trialled an instrument designed to compare the social impacts of a range of events with residents following three different festivals. Subsequent factor analysis of results yielded six main factors which they characterised as follows:-

- Social and economic development benefits
- Concerns about justice and inconvenience
- Impact on public facilities
- Impacts on behaviour and environment
- Long term impacts on community
- Impacts on prices of some goods and services.

Their second study (Fredline, Deery and Jago, 2005) showed that, while these three festivals were perceived to have had significant community benefits, the majority of participants reported no personal impacts. Mason and Beaumont-Kerridge's (2004) study of the impacts of the 2001 Sidmouth International Festival focused only on visitors' and residents' attitudes to economic, socio cultural, environmental and community impacts.

At the beginning of his book on cultural tourism and tourism cultures, Ooi (2002) poses the question: "How can tourists know and understand a foreign culture when their visits are short and they do not have local knowledge about the places they visit?" A critical and valid question yet it does not seem that the resources exist to address this problem. Raj (2003) asserts that

Festivals provide an opportunity for the local communities to develop and share their culture, which create[s] a sense of values and beliefs held by the individuals in a local community and provide[s] opportunity for members of the local community to exchange experiences and information. (Raj, 2003:3)

While this is theoretically the case, both the points made by Ooi's (2002) question suggest that this is neither practicable in terms of time nor likely in terms of access. This again raises the

issue of the current apparent vacuum in local community level experiential accounts of festivals, especially ethnic festivals.

2.5 A Critical Research Niche

It is clear that research activity in relation to festivals spans disciplines, has been sparse, spasmodic and unsystematic in some, and highly focussed in others. There is thus no evidence of a coherent and/or consolidated approach. The focus of cultural tourism research has been primarily economic and, where social impacts have been considered, they do not seem to have taken into account effects on the individual person. Archival policies have not, it appears, deliberately privileged the festival experience over festivals as politico-social events where politicians are reported as presiding over festival openings and the purport of the festival is largely ignored. A case in point is the recent newspaper coverage of a new festival, *Pesta Birumuh* (**Borneo Post**, March 21, 2009). *Coffee table* literature is designed to entice visually and its primary purpose is usually evanescent pleasure rather than the provision of systematic information.

There is undoubtedly acknowledgement of change, often heralded by the phrase “in the old days” (e.g., Ragman, 2003:64) but no evidence of a groundswell to *construct* heritage in Brett’s (1996) sense. The goals of cultural tourism, however, as evidenced by the Dragon Boat Festival example cited in 2.4.2, have the capacity to give rise to changes which might threaten the traditional bases of and rationales for the festivals themselves. The National Tourism Development Authority, *Failte Ireland* (2007) for example, has a key goal “to link the Future Festival and Cultural Events Initiative to the new Cultural Tourism Strategy” (2006). Their stated fourth strategy for achieving this goal is to

...encourage the creation of a 'desired portfolio' – bundling festivals with other active/passive experience – based products while exploring options for building upon shared themes and concepts. (Failte Ireland, 2007:13)

One might argue that such a strategy might explain how the Dragon Boat Festival with its long history and significant traditions has moved from the ambit of cultural tourism to sports tourism. There is a real danger that festivals can be hijacked in the service of the aforementioned “other active-passive experience – based products” or in the pursuit of “options for building upon shared themes and concepts”. Some potential recent examples include the following.

- Bennett (2009) raises the possibility that “festivals may function as nodal points for the articulations of a series of developing youth sensibilities and practices centred on environmental awareness and neo-greenist ideology and practice”. (Bennett, 2009 – Accessed, www.euro-festival.org)
- Regev (2009) explores the potential of “festivals as sites and events of artistic pilgrimage”. (Regev, 2009, Accessed, www.euro-festival.org)
- Bianchini (2009) reflects on the prospect of festivals “to widen people’s mental and spatial horizons, in a political context which is being reshaped by forces including economic re-structuring, the energy and climate crunch, and new forms of youth and student activism”. (Bianchini, 2009 – Accessed, www.euro-festival.org)

While Thiruman (2004) was obviously not responding to such potential attempts to subvert festivals, he does nevertheless recognise “the limits of showcasing Malaysia’s ethnic Chinese heritage to tourists”. (Thiruman, 2004)

Thiruman’s (2004) warning is timely and in concert with the ICEF’s (International Cultural Exchange Foundation) recommendation that it is incumbent upon every society to consider and strike an appropriate balance between the rights of private individuals and public interest in relation to heritage issues. (ICEF, Accessed 9 May 2009 – <http://icefoundation.com/corridor.htm>)

In order to consider the competing demands in a more equitable and objective fashion, Table 2.5.1 develops from the McKercher and du Clos (2002) table reproduced as Table 2.4.2 by adding a third strand – Human Cultural Practices – also delineated according to the headings in Column One.

Table 2.5.1 Cultural Heritage Management, Tourism and Human Cultural Practices in Counterpoise

	Cultural Heritage Management	Tourism	Human Cultural Practices
Structure	Public sector oriented Not for profit	Private sector oriented Profit making	Annual calendar
Goals	A broader social goal	Commercial goals	Family oriented
Key stakeholders	Community groups Heritage groups Minority/ethnic/indigenous groups Local residents Organisation for heritage professionals/local historical groups/religious leaders	Business groups Non local resident National tourism trade associations, other industry bodies	Families Cultural groups Businesses Government
Economic attitude to assets	Existence value Conserve for their intrinsic values	Use value Consume for their intrinsic or extrinsic appeal	Discretionary spending mediated by cultural expectations
Key user groups	Local residents	Non local residents	Relevant cultural groups
Employment background	Social science/arts degrees	Business/marketing degrees	NA
Use of asset	Value to community as a representation of tangible and intangible heritage	Value to tourist as product or activity that can help brand a destination	Embedded familial practices/values
International political bodies/NGOs	ICOMOS/ICOM/UNESCO (promote conservation of culture)	WTO/WTTC (promote development of tourism)	NA
National/regional political bureaucratic bodies	National, state and local agencies and some museums concerned with heritage management, archives	National, state, regional tourism bodies	Government jurisdiction re-gazetted holidays

Table 2.5.1 demonstrates that the area of Human Cultural Practices, as with Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism, is distinct. As such it warrants a discrete strand of research; hence, while there is an obvious research need for detailed documentation of festivals, extensive knowledge of their historical background, festival rituals, ceremonial rites, common practices, festival food, music, arts, ceremonial objects, culinary arts, costumes and family traditions, the

personal experiential aspect of festivals is perhaps of more critical urgency. The inevitability of generational replacement means that, unless such research is initiated quickly, there will be no living memory of *in the old days*. It is this niche to which the current study will contribute.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Directions from the Literature : The Research Niche

It is clear from Chapter Two that there is neither consolidated documentary evidence about the ceremonial practices associated with traditional festivals nor about the human dimension of festival celebration. Hence this research will proceed in two interlocking phases to meet the aims outlined in 1.5. The first phase (Section 3.2) will consist of developing a framework within which to consider and present extant data in relation to Malaysian festivals. The second phase (Section 3.3 to 3.9) will focus on gaining data about how individuals and families respond to, experience and celebrate key festivals.

3.2 An Overview of the Malaysian Festival Calendar

Table 3.2.1 provides an annualized overview of festivals in Malaysia, indicating the major focus of each Festival, the major relevant celebrating ethnic community (where appropriate), and the main areas/states celebrating each Festival while Table 3.2.2 lists the general cultural dimensions of key ethnic festivals in Sarawak. In the case of both tables, where festivals are the subject of further documentation in Chapter Four, the relevant chapter reference is included in brackets after the title of the festival.

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar

Dates	Festival	Focus	Ethnic community started	State in Malaysia	Remarks
January 1	New Years Day	1 st day of New Calendar Year	All	All	Global celebration
January - February	Chinese New Year (4.2)	1 st day of Chinese lunar New year	Chinese	All	Now celebrated by all in Malaysia
January - February	Thaipusam (4.3)	Hindu religious Festival- Birthday of Hindu God	Hindus in India	Johor, Perak, Sarawak, Selangor, Pulau Pinang,	Celebrated only by Hindus
January - February	Chap Goh Mei- Lantern Festival (4.2.3.5(f))	Closing of Chinese New Year Celebrations	Chinese in China and migrant Chinese	All	Chinese communities take the day off work. Most Chinese shops close by mid day
January	Lion and Dragon dance Festival	Art of Lion and Dragon dancing	Chinese community in KK	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	Annual event displaying dazzling lion dances and martial arts movements in celebration of Chinese mythology
January	Ponggal Festival (4.16.1)	Tamil Harvest Festival	Tamil Indians	All	Celebrated only by Indians of Tamil ethnicity
February	City Day	Celebration to mark city status of Kota Kinabalu	All in KK	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	Day to celebrate KK's city status, an annual affair with celebration activities
March	Pesta Birumuh (4.16.2)	Bidayuh Celebration Day	Bidayuhs	Sarawak	Cultural activities for Tourism
March – April	Chinese Tomb Festival (Qing Ming Jie) (4.16.5)	Chinese Old Soul's Day	All Buddhist and Taoist Chinese in China	All Buddhist and Taoist communities in Malaysia	Family focus, an annual affair
April	Besut Cultural Fest	Festival of cultures of Terengganu	Multicultural	Terengganu	A festival showcasing talents in arts, dance, music, theatre, in Terengganu
April	Water Festival	Bajau seafarers festival of lepas	Bajau community of Sabah	Semporna, Sabah	Traditional sailboats, tele-matches, boat tug of war and duck catching. Semporna is one of the world's best dive sites.
April	Day of Sikh Guru's creation-Vasakhi Day (4.16.3)	Sikh community visit the Gurdawars. New Year of Northern Indian calendar	Sikh community of Malaysia	All	Sikh's guru Gobind Singh Ji created "Khalsa Panth" Sikh Temple festivals in Malaysia.

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar (cont'd)

Dates	Festival	Focus	Ethnic community started	State in Malaysia	Remarks
March – April	Easter –Good Friday to Easter Sunday (4.6)	Christian religious festival	Christians in Rome	All	Good Friday, a day of penance, prayer and fasting. Celebrated by Christians in Sarawak and visited by non Christian friends during Easter Open House.
March – July	Sutra Arts Festival	All	All	Kl, Selangor	Contemporary and traditional dance, music and theatre festival
April	Malaysian International Kite Festival	All	Multicultural	Kelantan	All cultures meet for an International annual event in kite flying skills
April	Trade and industry cultural festival	All	Multicultural	Perlis	All types of cultural events to attract cultural tourism
April	Easter Beach Carnival (4.16.4)	Family-focused festival in conjunction with the Easter weekend.	All	Kuching, Sarawak	Unique family-focused event organized with tourists and Kuching residents in mind. Activities include the sale of food, Easter egg hunts, games etc.
April	Kaul Festival (4.4)	Opening of the fishing season	Melanau community of Mukah	Melanaus of Sarawak	To mark the start of the fishing season in Mukah, the fishing town of Sarawak
May 1	Labour Day	All	All/global	All states	Public holiday for all workers
May	Pesta Kaamatan	Kadazan Harvest Festival	Kadazans of Sabah	Sabah	Agricultural shows/exhibitions, cultural programs, buffalo races ,harvest festival
May	The Kedayan Festival (4.16.6)	Kedayan <i>Makan Tabun</i> or Annual Feast celebrated at the end of the harvest season.	Kedayans of Sarawak	Mainly the northern part of Sarawak	A day of feasting and special prayers called <i>Tablil Kumpulan</i> . As most Kedayans are Muslims, all things are done in an Islamic manner.
May	Wesak Day (4.7)	Buddhist religious festival celebrating the attainment of the Buddha's <i>Enlightenment</i> .	All Buddhists	All	A day of spiritual retreat and reflection, charitable works and a grand procession with a statue of the Buddha as the centrepiece.
May – June	Lun Bawang or Irau Aco Festival (4.8)	Lun Bawang community harvest festival	Lun Bawangs of Lawas, Limbang	Limbang, Sarawak	A harvest festival in the Lun Bawang style and tradition. In town of Lawas, there is traditional music competition featuring bamboo instruments and dances.

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar (cont'd)

Dates	Festival	Focus	Ethnic community started	State in Malaysia	Remarks
May-June	Dragon Boat Festival or <i>Duan Wu Jie</i> (4.5)	Festival to commemorate the patriotic poet Qu Yuan.	Chinese from China	All	Grand dragon boat races are held and special rice dumplings called bak chang are eaten.
June 1st	Gawai Harvest Festival (4.10)	Celebration of Harvest and in between starting the new planting season	Dayaks of Sarawak	Sarawak	The start of the harvest and month long celebrations in longhouses and villages state wide. Celebrated by all Dayaks in Sarawak which was set by Government in 1964 as the Dayak New Year. Ceremonial practices and rituals still carried out in pagan villages. All night partying and fun filled celebrations in Christian Dayak villages. Open House in the cities.
June	San Pedro Festival	Cultural fest to celebrate the birthday of patron saint of fishermen, San Pedro.	All Christians and reach out for all	Malacca	Fishing boats all decorated and blessed with prayers offered. Also filled with cultural events for tourism.
June	Colours of Malaysia Festival	All	All	Participated by all states, held in Selangor	Month long celebration provides visitors with the nation's multicultural diversity, its arts and tradition. Colourful and glittering parades in KL, music and dance, performance, food festivals and cultural exhibitions throughout the country.
June	Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di Pertuan Agong's birthday (4.16.7)	The King's birthday	All	All	The King's birthday is officially celebrated on the first Saturday of June each year regardless of the current King's actual birthday.
July	Pesta Benak or Tidal Bore Festival (4.16.8)	Celebration of the significance of the tidal bore in Sri Aman	All	Sri Aman, Sarawak	Started in 2001 as celebration of the tidal bore in the town of Sri Aman. Now filled with competitions, water sports and activities.
July	Rainforest Music Festival (4.11)	All	All	Kuching, Sarawak	World Music festival that brings singers and musicians from all over the world in a creative spirit of musicians of different ethnicities with concerts, jam sessions, workshops, lectures and parties.

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar (cont'd)

Dates	Festival	Focus	Ethnic community started	State in Malaysia	Remarks
July	Food and fruits fiesta	All communities in Malaysia	All	All states in Malaysia	A culinary fare of the many ethnic races and groups of the country. Fabulous range of Asian and international cuisine, huge variety of fruits tropical to temperate.
July – August	Hungry Ghosts Festival (4.16.9)	Chinese All Soul's Festival	Taoists of China	All Chinese Taoist community	Dead relatives return to visit living relatives. Food offerings to satisfy hungry ghosts. Day coincides with Buddhist Ullambana (deliverance) festival and Taoist Ghost Festival. Ceremonies at home, temples, associations. Prayers and food offered. Fake paper money burnt.
August	Top spinning Fest	All	All	Pahang	Competitions held for top spinning skills
August	Cooking and traditional food fest	All	All	Negeri Sembilan	Traditional food cooking, tasting and competitions
August	Kuching Festival (4.9)	Kuching celebrates its city day in month long festival	All	Kuching, Sarawak	Concerts, food fairs, exhibitions, parades, competitions to celebrate its city day achievement and memory
August	National Day	All	All	All states	Parades in all major cities and exhibitions, concerts, food fairs and competitions are held.
August	YTL Arts festival	All performing and arts group participate in an arts festival	All	Penang	A festival featuring music, culture, arts, dance, theatre
August	Asian Music Fest	Music making industry in Malaysia	All	All in KL, Selangor	All performances involved in the music making industry in Malaysia
September – November	Artist space annual festival of Arts	All	All	Kl, Selangor	Poetry and recital, plays song and dance, theatre and dance companies from Malaysia perform
September	Mid Autumn Mooncake Festival (4.12)	Chinese from China	All Chinese from all states of Malaysia	All states of Malaysia	A colourful traditional festival of the Chinese community. There are street parties and food fairs in most places e.g Kuching. Coloured lanterns usually become alive in the evening and children hold and light up lanterns of various shapes. Falls on 15th day of 8th lunar month

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar (cont'd)

Dates	Festival	Focus	Ethnic community started	State in Malaysia	Remarks
September	Governor's birthday (4.16.10)	The Sarawak Governor's birthday	All	Sarawak	The Sarawak Governor's birthday is officially on September 16th each year regardless of the current Governor's actual birthday.
October	Deepavali (4.13)	Indians in India	All Hindu Indians in Malaysia	All states	Also called Festival of Lights celebrated by Hindus on 7th month of Indian calendar. Rituals and ceremonies in temples. Open houses in Hindu homes.
October	Ramadan bazaar	Muslims in all states sell food to prepare for break of fast	Muslims in all states of Malaysia	All states	1-month Ramadan bazaar selling Malay food and traditional cakes for breaking of fest.
November	Hari Raya Puasa (4.14)	Muslims in Malaysia celebrate the New Year after month long Ramadan	Muslims of Malaysia	All states	All Muslims celebrate their new year. Special prayers at mosques, feasting, visiting of friends and relatives for Open House
November – December	Kedah Cultural Fest	Cultural festival for tourism	All	Kedah	All cultural events including music and dance
December	Winter Solstice Festival (4.16.11)	The Chinese Winter Solstice Festival also known as Dong Zhi/Tang Chek Festival.	Chinese	All	This festival marks the day of shortest daylight and weakest sunshine in China. It is a family celebration whereby coloured rice balls made from glutinous rice in a sweet soup are eaten.
December	Pesta Pulau Pinang	Festival of all kinds in Penang	All	Penang	Music, dance, arts, food, cultural events in a grand annual festival
December	Awal Muharram (4.16.13)	Muslims New Year	Muslims	All states	Prayers celebration among Muslim families
December	Hari Raya Haji (4.16.14)	The Muslim Festival of Sacrifice	Muslims	All states	This festival marks the end of the Haj period. The sacrifice of sheep, goats or cows is a common practice, after which the meat is distributed to the community.

Table 3.2.1 Malaysian Festival Calendar (cont'd)

December	Prophet Muhammad's birthday (4.16.12)	Muslims celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad	Muslims	All states	Parades, prayers and reading of religious poetry and songs celebrating the life of the Prophet and his teachings are held.
December	Christmas (4.15)	Christians celebrate birthday of Jesus Christ.	Christians throughout Malaysia	All states	All Christians celebrate this religious festival with masses, carolling, open houses, gift giving

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak

Festival	Time/Duration /Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Chinese New Year or Spring Festival (Chun Jie) (4.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January/ February 15 days 1st day of 1st lunar month Original more than 5000 years ago 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Reunion Celebrate Chinese New Year Calendar Pay respects to ancestors, parents, elders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lion Dance Chinese Orchestra & Songs as Prelude Buddhist “Carol” chants Beating of Chinese drums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culinary Fashion Flower arrangements House décor Building décor Company window displays Performing arts on TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total involvement Open house for everyone (5 days) Various differences from religious communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red Gold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandarin oranges Chinese lantern Prosperity Lion head Firecrackers Brown sweetened cake “Mei Hua” cherry blossoms or spring flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lantern Red packets Token of appreciation – hampers, gifts baskets, etc Lion dance Steamboat dinner (reunion) Open house Family reunion – respect for elders
Chap Goh Mei (Lantern Festival) (4.2.3.5(f))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15th day of 1st lunar 1 day only Started in 1963 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chinese Valentine’s Celebration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lion dance Chinese Traditional pop for community festival mode celebration tunes patriotic tunes by singers and bands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stick walking Monkey dance Dance – concerts, celebration arts – exhibition Clothes – all national costumes Cultural shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese community All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-coloured Huge focus on reds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lanterns Oranges Firecrackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throwing of oranges Lantern Procession

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Festival	Time/Duration /Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Thaipusam(4.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January • 1 day only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate the birthday of the Hindu Gods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious music • Processional music • Hypnotic chants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kavadi metal art • Floral art • Chariot art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Hindus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hinduism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orange, yellow • Multi – coloured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men in trance • Kavadis • Coconuts • Chariots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procession • Breaking of coconuts • Walking on burning charcoals (firewalk) • Dances • Parades • Concerts
Ponggal (4.16.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January • 1 day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvest festival, celebrates the onset of spring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious music • Processional music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kolam</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Tamil Indians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-coloured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kolam</i> and <i>kaavi</i> • Decprated cows and cattle • Sugar cane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking of sweet rice in overflowing pots • Procession of garlanded cows and cattle
Pesta Birumuh (4.16.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering unity • Promote Bidayuh cultural • Cultural tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bidayuh Tradition Dances • Bidayuh Songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketry • Mats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bidayuh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red • Black • White • Yellow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bidayuh Drum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dances • Parades • Concerts
<i>Ching Ming</i> Tomb Festival (4.16.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March / April 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honouring the Dead ancestors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary arts • Paper art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For paper arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper utilize objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family reunions • Paper art objects

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Festival	Time/Duration /Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Easter (4.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March / April 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Message of Christian salvation and love 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass / worship • Prayers • Procession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter eggs • Chocolate art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For egg artwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter eggs • The Cross 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest and most important Christian celebration • Easter concerts, drama, etc • Egg Treasure Hunt • Cultural Tourism Hit
Pesta Kaul (4.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of fishing season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only for procession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat decoration • Craft art • Food décor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melanau 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pagan Melanau / animist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat décor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serahung • Tibou 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibou games • Family reunions • Competitions • Arts and craft exhibitions • Cultural tourism
Vasakhi Day (4.16.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Year of Northern India • Day of Sikh Gurus creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temple prayers and chants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary • Floral • Fashion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sikh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sikism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	
Lun Bawang Irau Aco(4.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Thanksgiving and Harvest Festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dances • Bamboo dance performances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary • Crafts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lun Bawang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian • Animists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beads • Bamboo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bamboo band ambience • Bead work of the Lun Bawang

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Festival	Time/Duration/Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Wesak Day (4.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To commemorate the attainment of Buddha's Enlightenment • Most important event in Buddhist calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only during procession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Float decoration • Fashion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lotus flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass vegetarian meals for the poor and less fortunate.
The Kedayan Festival (4.16.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kedayan <i>Makan Tabun</i> or Annual Feast • Marks end of the harvest season. • Celebrates beginning of the New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kedayan community of Sarawak. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kedayan Muslims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Gawai (4.10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June • 2 weeks • Gazetted on 25th September 1964 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To celebrate the Dayak New Year • (Olden times) to appease the evil spirit • Thanksgiving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional ensembles in ritual overnight celebrations • Community singing • Accompany rituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance Festival between singing, etc • Display of art and craft • Special food in culinary art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originally for non Christian Dayak • Now for all Dayaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian • Animists • Pagans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just decorative • Brown or earth tone dominated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shield • Padi stalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midnight mass • Midnight celebrations / parties • Competitions / pageants of race

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Festival	Time/Duration /Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Dragon Boat Festival (<i>Duan Wu Jie</i>) (4.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July • 5th day of 5th lunar month • 1 day only • Started during warring period in China 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival of Chinese community to signify – ensure they are fed • Used to have messages in them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythm of oars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Decorations of the bots • Culinary skill in dumplings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese all exchange “bak chang” and have celebration dinners • Competitions for everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi coloured dragon boats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dragon boats • Zong Zi (mandarin) or “bal chang” (pyramid shaped glutinous rice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of dumpling • Dumpling making • Boat race • Festival dinner reunion
Rainforest Music Festival (4.11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid July • 3 days festival • Started in 1999 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring cultures and musicians of the world together • Prorogation of ethnic / folk music • Cultural tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main elements – to excite, to entertain, to display talents, to jam and make music • Cross country exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Fruits • Clothes • Drama • Décor • Handicrafts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper middle class • Pure ethnic groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Festival Deco • To represent their country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sape (Sarawakian Guitar) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic music and instrument as well as fusion • Tourism features • All celebratory modes of food, wine, dance and partying
Pesta Benak (4.16.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July • Third and eighteenth day of Chinese lunar calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival of the Tidal Bore • Occurs at special location at mouth of Batang Lupar river 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Band and dance performance to evoke carnival atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food • Handicrafts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ethnic groups • Tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale of food, drinks and handicrafts • Water sports

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Festival	Time/Duration /Origin	Aim/Purpose of Festival	Role of Music	Other Arts	Reach Into The Community	Religion	Roles of Colours	Symbols	Unique Features
Hungry Ghosts Festival (4.16.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> July-August Fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To appease wandering souls that are let out of hell in the seventh month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music in the form of gongs and chanting during Taoist prayers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper money Joss sticks Food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnic Chinese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pagans or Taoists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graves of ancestors are cleaned Joss sticks and paper money are burned as offerings
Kuching Festival (4.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 month of August Started in 1990 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrate city day Arts concerts Community celebrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All sorts of music and concerts Street party fiesta For procession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Month filled all arts festival for music, painting, crafts, dance, culinary, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All communities multi coloured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Cat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food fairs Competitions Music festivals Processions
Mid Autumn Moon cake Festival 4.12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15th day of 8th month Started over 2000 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exchange of moon cakes Originally harvest festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese opera stage music Traditional music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lantern making competition Moon cake making art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halal moon cakes for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi coloured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lantern Moon cakes Hand painting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lantern procession Tea parties Decorative designs and new innovative moon cakes
Awal Muharram (Islamic New Year) (4.16.13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st day of Islamic New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mark 1st day of Islamic New Year Beginning of prophets migration from Mecca 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Modern Malay pop Chants for prayers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non Culinary art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only Muslim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Islam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new crescent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical sighting of hilal (new moon) Family parties

Table 3.2.2 General Cultural Dimensions of Major Cultural Festivals in Sarawak (cont'd)

Hari Raya Haji (Feast of Sacrifices) (4.16.14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 Zulhijah • 1 day only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration after pilgrimage to Mecca 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chants for prayers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Muslim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim religious symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice of korban or sacrifice is offered • Prayer service in mosque • Family parties
Deepavali (4.13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November • 3 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindu New Year (Festival of Light) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindi music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary art • Floral art • Decorative lights • Kolam art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow mainly with flowers and light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light • Kolam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lights
Hari Raya Puasa (Festival of the breaking of fast) (4.14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of fasting month or 1st day of Syawal • Last 1 month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration to mark end of fasting month • Seeking pardon and forgiveness • Malay New Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Kompangs • Joget for festive • Malay pop for celebration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culinary • Fashion • Interior design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green • Gold • Yellow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ketupats • Green packets • Malay traditional clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open house • Helping orphans • Buka puasa buffer dinners
Christmas (4.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians celebrate birth of Christ • Others – holiday and loved one gifts giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carols • Popular Christmas tree • Traditional music ensembles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gift wrapping • Turkey roasting • Decorative arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red • Green • Gold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red, green decorations • Presents • Christmas tree • Mistletoe, bells • The Crib • Santa Claus • Christmas cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifts giving • Carols singing • Christmas parties • Midnight masses • Open house

3.3 Selecting Case Study Festivals

In selecting the human experiential case study festivals, it is important that they be ones with both a significant traditional heritage (including cultural dimensions) and a broad reach into the contemporary Malaysian community. These should also fit clearly into the category of Human Cultural Practices (see Table 2.5.1). The criteria for the selection of festivals are thus as follows:-

- Festivals with a significant lineage of traditions over time
- Festivals with a broad range of cultural dimensions (e.g., music, culinary tradition, visual pageantry, dance, etc.)
- Festivals with demonstrated potentials for maximizing involvement across the generations and the various ethnic groups within the community.

Table 3.3.1 demonstrates the application of these three criteria to the cultural festivals listed in Table 3.2.1. Asterisks are used to indicate the extent to which each festival meets the criteria with a maximum of five. The final column reflects an overall compliance score for each festival.

Table 3.3.1 Application of Criteria of Potential Festivals

Festivals	Dominant Orientation Significant			Criteria			Total Compliance Score
	Cultural Heritage	Tourism	Human Cultural Practices	Significant Lineage of Traditions over Time	Broad Range of Cultural Dimensions	Potential for Maximum Involvement	
Chinese New Year	√	-	√	*****	*****	*****	15
<i>Chap Goh Mei</i> (Lantern Festivals)	√	-	√	***	**	***	8
Thaipusam	√	√	√	**	****	*	7
Pesta Birumuh	√	-	-	-	**	*	3
Winter Solstice Festival (<i>Dong Zhi</i>)	√	-	√	**	*	**	5
<i>Ching Ming</i> Tomb Festival	√	-	√	**	*	**	5
Pesta Kaul	√	√	-	**	***	*	6
Wesak Day	√	-	-	**	*	**	5
Lun Bawang Irau Aco	√	√	-	*	***	**	6
Easter	√	-	√	**	*	***	6
Gawai Harvest Festival	√	√	√	**	*****	*****	12

Table 3.3.1 Application of Criteria of Potential Festivals (cont'd)

Festivals	Dominant Orientation Significant			Criteria			Total Compliance Score
	Cultural Heritage	Tourism	Human Cultural Practices	Significant Lineage of Traditions Over Time	Broad Range of Cultural Dimensions	Potential for Maximum Involvement	
Dragon Boat Festival (<i>Duan Wu Jie</i>)	✓	✓	-	**	*	**	5
Rainforest Music Festival	-	✓	-	*	***	*	5
Kuching Festival	✓	✓	-	*	***	*	5
National Day	✓	✓	-	*	***	*	5
Mid Autumn Mooncake Festival	✓	-	✓	****	***	***	10
Awal Muharram	✓	-	✓	**	*	*	4
Hari Raya Haji	✓	-	✓	**	*	*	4
Deepavali	✓	-	✓	**	***	***	8
Hari Raya Puasa	✓	-	✓	***	****	*****	12
Christmas	✓	✓	✓	*****	*****	*****	15

Two festivals (Christmas and Chinese New Year) achieve the maximum compliance score of 15 while Hari Raya Puasa (12) and the Gawai Harvest Festival (12) are clearly well ahead of all other festivals. These four will thus be the four focal case study festivals.

3.4 Sampling Community Experience of Key Festivals

Since the primary aim of the research is to sample the festival experiences of ordinary people within their normal contexts, the data collection for this study will seek qualitative rather than quantitative data in the main as it is the experiential voice of the people that is sought at this stage of developing research into festivals. Once initial qualitative insights are available then hypothesis testing will be appropriate and within broader survey parameters.

In this context it makes sense to identify a case study site which provides both diversity and density and, from a practical point of view, ease of access. Given the researcher's location, the site must necessarily be in East rather than West Malaysia. The state of Sarawak on the island of Borneo has the advantage that it is the original home of the Gawai Harvest Festival and the celebration occurs both in urban and rural locations. Its capital, Kuching, has a population of approximately 550,000 and, as the most important city in the state, is usually the centre for state and national level celebrations. Figures 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 show the location of Kuching within both East Malaysia and the state of Sarawak.



Figure 3.4.1 Map showing the position of Kuching within Malaysia



Figure 3.4.2 Map showing the position of Kuching within Sarawak

3.5 Potential Data Sources

Primary data, both documentary and experiential, will be sought within the urban context of the city of Kuching. Table 3.5.1 details the main potential sources of data and their levels of accessibility.

Table 3.5.1 Overview of Primary Data Sought

Key Community Levels	Key Nodes	Potential Data	Relevance	Potential Collection Strategies
Government	State	Policies	**	Documentary Research
	Municipal	Implementation Strategies	**	Interview
		District Level Practices	**	Interview
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious • Community • Ethnic • Recreational • Sporting 	• Rituals and Observances	***	Survey, interview
		• Community Level Practices	**	Survey, interview
		• Rituals, Traditional Practices	***	Survey, interview
		• Individual Perceptions	**	Survey, interview
		• Individual Perceptions	**	Survey, interview
The People	Senior Citizens	Perceptions of Change	*****	Survey, interview
		Historical Practices		
	Adults	Traditions, Changes, Memories	*****	Survey, interview
		Family Practices		
Children	Family Practices, Rituals	*****	Survey, interview	

3.5.1 The Government Level

Given the relatively small number of potential target officials at state and municipals levels, interviews are both possible in terms of time/access and appropriate because the interview format allows follow-ups to check information and probe more deeply. A short interview protocol was developed to collect both basic information re festival protocols and government policy re the role and potential of festivals and is included as Appendix A. It is deliberately brief in recognition of the time factor for these personnel. Ten target community leaders/government officials were selected from those presently holding important community leadership roles (e.g., the President of the Teochew Association) and high ranking officials in tourism and arts related government departments. These leaders also represent the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community of Kuching.

3.5.2 The Societal Level

The task of approaching individual organizations representing the five nodes at this level would be both enormous and potentially counterproductive as, apart from perhaps the various religious groupings, the special nature of many of these groupings stands apart from the specifics of festival celebration. Hence, a more generic sampling strategy was required.

Firstly, a tick/flick response card was prepared in relation to the cultural dimensions of festivals as seen in Figure 3.5.1.

Cultural Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important
Food					
Music					
Clothes					
Family					
Culture/ Tradition					
Religious Observance					
Gift Giving					
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs					

Figure 3.5.1 Cultural Dimensions Response Card

These cards were appropriately colour coded for each festival firstly to provide a visual stimulus for the respondent and secondly to facilitate data management (see Appendix B for a copy of the four festival cultural dimension response cards – Chinese New Year – red; Gawai Harvest Festival – brown; Hari Raya Puasa – green; Christmas – gold). The response cards were designed to be completed at each of the four relevant festival times by 150 randomly approached multiethnic adults in Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia.

An additional strategy for the societal level was a questionnaire to be administered to 40 randomly approached multiethnic parents of students at a learning institute in central Kuching with offerings primarily in early childhood, languages, dance and music. These respondents were the first 40 parents who visited the International Music House on the predetermined festival response day and met the criteria of sufficient education/language skill to complete the questionnaire and were representative of the multiethnic population of Kuching, consisting of the Chinese, Malay, Dayak, Melanau, Indian and Eurasian communities. Questions were developed from discussions with key informants. This questionnaire was structured to include 10 anchor questions that related to festival celebration in general and 13

questions that pertained to the festival that was currently being celebrated (see Appendix C 1 and C 2 for a copy of the questionnaire). Questionnaires were distributed at the four focal festival times thus potentially yielding 160 responses to the 10 anchor questions (4 groups of 40) and 40 responses for each specific festival for this Random Group.

3.5.3 The People Level

Given the experiential focus of the study and as is acknowledged in Table 3.5.1, the people level is potentially the most valuable. It is also the most amorphous and difficult to access in a meaningful way. In the festival context the familial node is potentially the richest source of experiential data since, typically, this is the level at which key festivals are experienced most richly. Festival celebrations are occasions where family members make special efforts to return, renew love and hearth, kith and kin. However, the family unit is not necessarily the easiest to access and a broad brush sampling approach is likely to yield a range of family configurations, not necessarily producing the most intelligible data for a primary documentation study of this kind. Ideally, the research needs data to establish benchmarks of celebration derived from the oldest surviving generation calibrated for subsequent generations meaning that the ideal target group would be families intact and accessible across three generations.

In seeking a model for such a data collection strategy, the work of Bechervaise (1988) offers a potentially useful framework. His cross-generational study of reading within families derived its primary data from intact three generational families who opted into the research in response to a newspaper advertisement seeking the participation of interested families, a strategy adopted for the current research. Bechervaise (1988) reaffirmed

... the principle espoused by Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and confirmed by Eisner (1981) that the finer points of influence within families and amongst individuals might potentially be excluded at the point of research design by the employment of large-scale statistical sampling. It was proposed instead that openly structured interviewing of the individual members of a selected number of families across three generations should yield 'key linkages' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973: 110) sufficient to establish a grounded theory within which the observations obtained might be understood and from which tentative conclusions at least might be drawn. (Bechaervaise, 1988: 104).

In the case of the current research, however, the three generational case study families would contribute to a triangulation of data in relation to the festival experience. For this reason it was decided to use as the Experiencing Festivals interview protocol the same questions as were being asked of the Random adult group (see Appendix C1 and C2).

Table 3.5.2 provides an overview of the planned cross-generational cohort.

Table 3.5.2 Overview of the Planned Cross-generational Cohort

Key Festival Groups	Target Numbers		
	Grandparents	Parents	Children*
Chinese (Chinese New Year)	10	10	20+
Dayak (Gawai Harvest Festival)	10	10	20+
Malay (Hari Raya Puasa)	10	10	20+
Eurasian (Christmas)	10	10	20+

* Families with a minimum of two children to be sought

3.6 Other Documentation

It is planned that the four focal festivals will also be documented visually in order to capture other aspects of the celebration experience. It is expected that such documentation will include spontaneous celebrations as well as those which emanate from a carefully scripted professional base. In addition, examples of media coverage will be collected in respect of each festival as it occurs.

3.7 The Special Case of Rural Celebration

In the case of the Gawai Harvest Festival, it is recognised that this festival is celebrated very differently within urban and rural communities. In rural communities, there is still significant adherence to traditional practices within longhouse settings. In order to augment the urban data, student responses to festival celebration practices in rural communities will be garnered. As part of their normal programme, groups of two Diploma of Music students undertake an assignment to record one designated aspect of the festival. In order not to interfere with their focus on data collection, a retrospective questionnaire was devised (See Appendix D) to garner their perceptions of the differences between urban and rural celebrations – to be administered after their assignment submissions had been completed.

3.8 Implementation of Data Collection Strategies

Table 3.8.1 shows each of the planned data collection strategies together with any deviations from the plan and the reasons why this was necessary.

Table 3.8.1 Implementation of Data Collection Strategies

Level	Nature of Data Sought	Deviations from Plan	Reason/s for Deviation/s
Government	Interviews with Government Officials	11 interviews	Opportunity
Societal	Responses to Cultural Dimensions	Fewer than 150 responses for some festivals	Blank and incomplete responses
	Responses to Anchor & Specific Festival Questions	Nil	
People	Grandparents', Parents' & Children's Responses to Anchor & Specific Festival Questions	Nil	
Supplementary Materials			
Other Documentation	Visual		
	Aural		
	Media Coverage		
Rural Data	Visual		
	Aural		
	Diary		
	Students' Retrospective Reflections on Rural Celebrations *		

* Two students who were unable to participate in the rural data collection assignment for the Diploma in Music undertook to conduct a small investigation (See Appendix E)under the aegis of the larger study targeting differences in response between the ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, Eurasian, Indian and Dayak). Given that the numbers were small, these data are used in a consolidated form to support the main data in Chapter 10.

3.9 Data Management and Analysis

Table 3.9.1 provides an overview of the data yield in respect of the major research tools utilised.

Table 3.9.1 Overview of the Data Yield

Group	Data Collection Strategy	Festival			
		Chinese New Year	Gawai Harvest Festival	Hari Raya Puasa	Christmas
Volunteer Cross Generational Families	Interviews with grandparents, parents, children	10 Chinese families (15 grandparents, 13 parents, 20 children) 48	10 Dayak families (17 grandparents, 16 parents, 19 children) 52	10 Malay families (18 grandparents, 14 parents, 19 children) 51	10 Eurasian families (16 grandparents, 18 parents, 20 children) 54
Random Sample of Parents	Interviews	40	40	40	40
Random Sample at Time of Festival	Checklist re cultural dimensions of festival	N = 153 Usable responses = 148	N = 150 Usable responses = 132	N = 150 Usable responses = 124	N = 150 Usable responses = 134
Other	Visual/Aural Documentation				
	Media Coverage				
Student Data	Retrospective Reflections on Rural celebrations		14 responses		
	Survey by two students	32 completed responses from tertiary student peers			

As is clear from Table 3.9.1 there are minor discrepancies between the data sought and the usable data obtained. However, the data yield was deemed an appropriate basis for analysis.

3.9.1 Treatment of the Data

All interviews were transcribed and, where responses were in a language other than English (e.g., Malay or Chinese), they have been both transcribed and simultaneously translated into English. In each case, idiosyncrasies of language have been maintained although repetition of

phrases etc. has been eliminated to create fluent transcripts for subsequent analysis and quotation.

Table 3.9.2 shows the major data sources from which the primary analyses in Chapters 5 and 10 derive.

Table 3.9.2 Derivation of Analyses – Chapter 5 and 10

Data Source	Questions	Chapter	
GENERAL ANCHOR QUESTIONS (Appendix C.1) Random Group (3.5.2) Cross Generational Group (3.5.3)	Q1	5.2	Festival Perceived To Be
	Q2 & 3	5.3	Creating A Good Festival
	Q5	5.4	The Family Vis-À-Vis The Festival
	Q6	5.5	The Role Of Specific Festival Dimensions
	Q4, 7 & 8	5.6	Festivals Cultural Conduit
	Q 9 & 10	5.7	Key Generational Learning
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Appendix A) Community Leaders/Officers (3.5.1)	Q6	5.8.1	The Role Of Festivals In Sarawak
	Q1 & 2	5.8.2	Defining The Community
	Q7, 8, 9, 10 & 11	5.8.3	Cultural Dimensions Of Festivals
	Q3 & 4	5.8.4	The Future Of Festivals
RESPONSE CARD IN RELATION TO CULTURAL DIMENSION (Appendix B) RANDOM SAMPLE (3.5.2)	Response cards completed and usable Chinese New Year = 127 Hari Raya = 113 Christmas = 129	10.2	Perceived Importance Of Cultural Dimensions
FESTIVAL CELEBRATORY DIMENSIONS (Appendix E.1)	Four Questions re-perceived importance	10.3	Core Values

Table 3.9.2 Derivation of Analyses – Chapter 5 and 10 (cont'd)

FESTIVAL SPECIFIC QUESTIONS (Appendix E2)	Q1	10.4.1	<i>Angpoms</i> (Chinese New Year) and Green Packets (Hari Raya Puasa)
	Q2	10.4.2	Gifts to Elders
	Q3	10.4.3	Open House
	Q4	10.4.4	Chinese New Year's Eve Reunion Dinner
	Q5	10.4.5	Lion Dances
	Q6	10.4.6	The Role of Red in Chinese New Year Celebration
	Q7	10.4.7	The Significant of Oranges, <i>nien bao</i> , fire cracker etc. during Chinese New Year
	Q8	10.4.7	Forgiveness Gestures in Hari Raya Puasa

Table 3.9.3 shows the data sources from which the major analyses across Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 derive.

Table 3.9.3 Derivation of Analyses – Chapters 6 - 9

Chapter	Festivals	Random Group (3.5.2) Questionnaire (Appendix C2)	Cross Generational Group (3.5.3) Interviews (Appendix C2)	Sections in Chapters
6	Chinese New Year			
	6.1	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Recollection And Preparations
	6.2	Q11	Q11	The Role of Religion
	6.3	Q6	Q6	The Role of Food
	6.4	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Specific Celebratory Dimensions
	6.5	Q5, 9 & 13	Q5, 9 & 13	Practices In Evolution
7	Gawai			
	7.1	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Recollections and Preparations
	7.2	Q11	Q11	The Role of Religion
	7.3	Q6	Q6	The Role of Food
	7.4	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Specific Celebratory Dimensions
	7.5	Q5, 9 & 13	Q5, 9 & 13	Practices In Evolution
8	Hari Raya			
	8.1	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Recollection And Preparations
	8.2	Q11	Q11	The Role of Religion
	8.3	Q6	Q6	The Role of Food
	8.4	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Specific Celebratory Dimensions
	8.5	Q5, 9 & 13	Q5, 9 & 13	Practices In Evolution
9	Christmas			
	9.1	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Q1, 2, 3 & 4	Recollection And Preparations
	9.2	Q11	Q11	The Role of Religion
	9.3	Q6	Q6	The Role of Food
	9.4	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Q7, 8, 10 & 12	Specific Celebratory Dimensions
	9.5	Q5, 9 & 13	Q5, 9 & 13	Practices In Evolution

In the case of Chapter Seven, as indicated in Table 3.9.1, there are additional data in the form of student's retrospective reflections on urban/rural celebration patterns (See Appendix D). Responses to the 14 questions are dealt with in 7.5.1 as summarized in Table 3.9.4.

Table 3.9.4 Derivation of Analyses re Urban/Rural Gawai Celebrations

Questions	Focus	Section
1,2 & 3	Urban/Rural Preparation for Gawai	7.6.5.1
9	Urban/Rural Celebratory Food	7.6.5.2
10 & 11	Differences Urban/Rural Festival Clothes	7.6.5.3
4	Observations of Longhouse	7.6.1
5	Perceived Key Celebratory Highlights	7.6.2
6	Family Celebratory Patterns	7.6.3
7	Highlight Festival Events	7.6.2
8	Personal Perceptions	7.6.2
12	Reactions to Visitors	7.6.1
13	Religious Observances	7.6.4
14	Overall Impressions of Longhouse Celebrations	7.6.2

3.9.2 Presentation of the Data

Chapter Four coalesces extant data about the historical and cultural dimensions of 14 major Malaysian festivals as well as 14 minor festivals. For the sake of logic and coherence these are presented as a single chapter despite the fact that this creates a very long chapter. Given the variability in amount and scope of data concerning these 28 festivals (e.g., nearly 50 pages for Chinese New Year compared with fewer than 20 for Hari Raya Puasa) and the

fact that there is no obvious hierarchy of festivals, this is argued to be the most equitable way of presenting them.

Chapters Five and Ten focus on the generic aspects of festivals and festival celebration while Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine each deal with one focal festival. Each of Chapters Six to Nine follows the same organisation and format. In the case of Chapter Seven, additional attention is given to the rural aspect of the celebration via the retrospective reflections of the tertiary student group (See Tables 3.9.1 and 3.9.4).

Chapter 10 analyses the Survey Groups' responses at the time of each key festival. It also presents the results of the Tertiary Students' survey as a micro group (see Table 3.9.1). The final section of Chapter 10 synthesizes the data in relation to each of the key festivals highlighting the points of tension for each as a prelude to the discussion of directions from and implications of the study in Chapter 11.

4.1 Documenting Key Festivals

Chapter Four provides documentation of Malaysian festivals more extensive and systematic than hitherto existed. The purpose of the chapter, as consistent with the methodology outlined in Chapter Three, is to consolidate extant information about each festival within a constant framework (historical background, sequence of preparation and celebration, cultural dimensions). The choice of festivals for scoping in Chapter Four was based (a) on their cultural significance and their import to the various ethnic communities constituting Malaysia. Obviously this eliminated festivals such as the largely commercial Malaysian Mega Sale, those directed primarily at domestic and international tourism such as Colours of Malaysia, and recent targeted cultural events (e.g., Malaysia Film Festival and the Artist Space Annual Festival of Arts). All festivals chosen for scoping in Chapter Four are characterized by significant cultural dimensions and have historical significance, albeit recent in some cases such as the Kuching Festival. Sections 4.2 to 4.15 deal with the more major festivals (including the selected case study festivals – Chinese New Year (4.2), Gawai (4.10), Hari Raya Puasa (4.14), and Christmas (4.15) while Section 4.16 deals with the minor festivals, albeit in less depth and detail. The documentation of the four selected case study festivals is also designed to provide readers with a reference point and backdrop against which to consider responses and discussions in relation to the human experiential data discussed in Chapters Five to Eleven.

4.2 CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR

4.2.1 Historical Background

The Chinese Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival or *Chun Jie*, is the most important Chinese festival to all Chinese in Malaysia, and possibly in the whole world. This festival, which originated over five thousand years ago, has been celebrated through the generations. Lasting for two weeks, the festival ends with the Lantern Festival or *Chap Goh Mei* meaning fifteenth night in Hokkien.

In the past, most Chinese were involved in agricultural production as farming was their main livelihood. They worked every day of the year and thus scarcely had time to meet, to enjoy or to get together with families and friends. This period was thus set aside specifically to socialize and, over the years, this has developed into the custom of celebrating the New Year. Most Chinese live very frugally, so this festival was a rare occasion for feasting and merry making. Preparations begin weeks before the auspicious event. In China itself, many Chinese seek employment in the larger cities and only return to China during this time to bring back money and to perform filial duties.

It is also a time around the end of January or early February when, following the dark and cold months of northern winter, plants, leaves and flowers begin to grow again, and there is the freshness of spring. Birds and animals return from hibernation and colours burgeon. Spring was thus a major occasion to celebrate in ancient China as the people looked forward to the warmer climatic changes when it was time to celebrate the life that was about to spring forth. Although this is felt much less in the tropics and in modern times when there is usually availability of heaters and electricity, Chinese New Year nevertheless retains that feeling of excitement and anticipation.

The myth surrounding the celebration of *Chun Jie* tells of the existence, in ancient China, of a terrifying beast named *Nian* (the mandarin word for *year*). This beast was known to terrify the villagers when it got up from its sleep to devour people – with the exception of those in homes adorned with any red colour. Hence the people gathered in groups, lighted up their homes, wore red clothing, hung red cloth and lanterns over their doorposts, and fired firecrackers to keep the beast that had just risen from hibernation at bay. Whilst there is no proven basis to this myth, certainly the real roots of *Chun Jie* lie in the celebration of the arrival of Spring. Nevertheless the symbols of the myth - the importance of the colour red, the giving of red packets, the firing of firecrackers - have been interwoven into the myths and legends of the past and handed down through oral tradition as integral practices of the festival.

The Chinese believe the New Year to be a time to take stock, close all their accounts, and issue *red packets* (*hong pao* in Mandarin and *angpaw* in Hokkien) which involves the sharing of their profits with their staff, the origin of the concept of a bonus. It was what the Chinese first called receiving red or *hua ang* in Hokkien which meant a cash bonus wrapped in red packets and given to them as an extra incentive and reward for their hard work.

The Chinese also believe that anything *owed* must be returned at this time as they do not like to begin the New Year with debts. Hence, any debts must be cleared and loans returned in full before the beginning of each New Year. Parental teaching is that it is a good practice never to owe as this would mean starting the New Year with a bad omen and the possibility that the rest of the year would not bring them good luck. Creditors thus go round collecting debts in the expectation that people will be most likely to pay at this time. Thorough cleaning goes on both at work and at home to ensure everything is clean and

cleared out in the belief that this makes way for the ushering in of new luck during the New Year.

4.2.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Chinese people take this celebration very seriously, whether their roles be as grandparents, parents, children, family members (e.g. in-laws, distant relatives), employers, employees and friends. All focus on displaying appropriate gratification and signs of filial piety, loyalty and love in relation to the key events of the festival. Table 4.2.1 gives an overview of the approximate timeline for preparation and celebration.

Table 4.2.1 Timeline for Preparation/Celebration Activities/Objects for Chinese New Year

Timing	Activity/Ceremonial Object	Discussed in Section	Notes
Weeks before preparation	Chinese New Year Card	4.2.2.1	Send to close friends, important acquaintances and relatives. Now much reduced due to use of e-cards.
Commences about a month in advance	Spring cleaning	4.2.2.2	Totally clean, sweep, repaint and decorate house to clear off bad luck and usher in new luck.
Purchased in advance	Firecrackers New Clothes	4.2.2.3	These were formerly significant to nullify any bad omens of the past year but are now more a ceremonial object for decoration and reminder of that belief. Used on three main occasions: A: Just before midnight to clear bad omens of the past B: Just before Lion Dance begins to clear any remaining bad omens C: Just before midnight of <i>Chap Goh Mei</i> Tailored or bought ready-made.
About one week prior	Twelve Animal Zodiac	4.2.2.4	Chinese anticipate the animal of the coming year by hanging its image as decorations.
At least one week prior	Food Hampers	4.2.2.5	Sent by business people as appreciation for help or services rendered.
At least one week prior	Protocol Baskets	4.2.2.6	Sent by relatives to elders as protocol to wish them all good and pleasant things for the new year.
According to fragility/longevity /state of preservation	Festival Food: leeks, <i>niengao</i> , oranges, fish, longevity noodles, red dates, eggs, limes, cabbages, black seaweed, tea, prosperity cakes.	4.2.2.7	Purchased in advance for reunion/celebration dinners and/ or Open House.
Before New Year Eve	Honouring the Dead	4.2.2.8	Christians offer masses and Buddhists offer food to honour ancestors and to remember them during the celebration
New Year's Eve	Reunion Dinner Staying late/ <i>Sou Sui</i>	4.2.3.1 4.2.3.2	Main Family Reunion Feast Traditional belief for long life of parents

Table 4.2.1 Timeline for Preparation/Celebration Activities/Objects for Chinese New Year (cont'd)

Timing	Activity/Ceremonial Object	Discussed in Section	Notes
Last checks	Red / New Clothes or accessories, shoes, bags etc.	4.2.3.1 (e)	For first day mostly red and brand new and for the next few days of the Chinese New Year
Prepared before midnight and given from 1 st to 15 th day	<i>Angpoms</i> or red packets	4.2.3.3	Days One to 15
A: Purchase items in advance B: Order food and services C: Collect and install them nearer the time	Decorative Chinese New Year objects: Spring couplets, Zodiac animal, floral art, red cloth and banners, gold money, lanterns, lime trees, chrysanthemum, peach and lotus flowers, pussy willows, bamboo, prosperity figures	4.2.3.4 4.2.3.5 lime trees 4.2.3.6 flowers 4.2.3.7 gold money 4.2.3.8 prosperity words 4.2.3.9 lanterns	Spring couplets, paintings, red lanterns, red banners hung outside at main entrance, lime trees, chrysanthemum, peace, lotus flowers, welcoming at entrance, gold money on display, prosperity words and lanterns hung up.
New Year 's Day	Tea Ceremony	4.2.4.1	For family members only beginning with grandparents, parents then children.
	Open House	4.2.4.2	All throughout the 15 days of celebration.
During the 15 days of celebrations	Chinese Opera or Martial Arts	4.2.3.4 (a)	Depending on availability of skills of society
New Year's Day 2 – 7		4.2.4.2 (b)	Visiting continues
New Year's Day 8	<i>Thi Kong</i> Birthday – Hokkien God	4.2.4.2 (c)	Special celebration for Hokkien Buddhists
Day 3 – Day 15	Chinese New Year visiting	4.2.4.3	Visiting families and friends
Day 1 – Day 15	Lion Dance	4.2.4.4	By invitation any time from Day One to Day 15
Day 15	Chap Goh Mei	4.2.4.5	Lantern Festival Closing ceremony of Chinese New Year

4.2.2.1 Chinese New Year Cards

Weeks prior to Chinese New Year, red Chinese New Year Cards are sent to remind relevant people of the coming season. While Chinese New Year Cards were originally all red, more recently pink, orange and even lighter colours of gold have been used as well. Plate 4.2.1 provides some examples of Chinese New Year cards.



Plate 4.2.1 Typical Chinese New Year Greeting Cards

These are gentle reminders of family or friendship ties; people in business also send them to those who have helped them or important officials who might be able to render help to them in any way. However, in recent years, e-cards have largely replaced the Red cards sent through the normal post. Red cards are also placed with gifts and/or hampers to signify to recipients from whence the gifts have come.

4.2.2.2 Spring Cleaning

In preparation for Chinese New Year, it is essential for all households to have a thorough clean up. Everyone is expected to help to clean up all sections of the house, including cleaning out cupboards and tidying every single nook and corner (see Plate 4.2.2).



Plate 4.2.2 Examples of a family participating in spring cleaning

Traditionally thorough cleaning was believed to banish bad omens so that new luck can settle in the premises more easily. No cleaning is permissible on the first day of Chinese New Year and all brooms, sharp objects and mops are put away so that no new luck will escape. In addition many houses and offices will be repainted and/or decorated and it is a common sight to see people painting their gates, fences and even doors. After cleaning, houses will be decorated.

4.2.2.3 Firecrackers

Firecrackers or *Pao Chu* in Mandarin, literally means *exploded bamboo*. As indicated in 4.2.1, in the very early days, myth had it that when the ancient Chinese in the Yellow River basin tried to drive away the Monster *Nien*, they set fire to bamboo stems to create loud explosions because it was terrified of loud blasting noises. Later, these bamboo stems were replaced with gunpowder wrapped in red paper. This represented the birth of firecrackers. Today firecrackers are a signal that the festive celebration has begun rather than a warning to evil spirits. It is common to hear firecrackers building up in momentum just before midnight of New Year's Day, at the entry of the Lion Dance, and at midnight of the eighth day as well as on the fifteenth day or *Chap Gob Mei* (Lantern Festival /closing ceremony). Some fifteen minutes before midnight on New Year's Eve, people start lighting

firecrackers. Shortly before midnight, this sound becomes increasingly deafening. Loud continuous explosions continue for ten minutes and then slowly fade. Firecrackers are also lit after the lion dance, thus ushering in joy, outburst of happiness and overwhelming success.

Now that firecrackers are illegal, they are largely symbolic with many families using mock or simulated ones hung at the front door of their homes. Some are still illegally smuggled into the country, sold and burnt as celebration objects. Plates 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 show real and simulated firecrackers respectively.



Plate 4.2.3 Real Firecracker

(Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/monkeyone/3229760632/> - Accessed 19 October 2009)



Plate 4.2.4 Mock Firecracker

(Source : <http://www.superstock.com/>- Accessed 19 October 2009)

4.2.2.4 The Twelve Animal Zodiac Calendar

In olden China, dramas were performed by the sorcerer or shaman, his helpers and actors who were dressed as tigers, cats, stags and other animals. They were regarded as representations of the spirits and, as such, were honoured by a small sacrificial act. The

ancient Chinese divided the course of the sun into 12 *houses* similar to the 12 star signs and believed that one animal ruled each house. In a great procession, 12 animals - the rat, cow, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey cock, dog and pig marched through the town under the direction of the shaman dressed as a bear with four eyes of bright gold. From those days onwards, each Chinese Lunar New Year is set to usher in the new animal.

The Chinese Zodiac is a twelve-year cycle based in Buddhism. The story tells of Buddha calling all the animals of China to his bedside, but only twelve animals came. Because he wanted to honour the animals for their devotion, he created a year for each animal. The twelve animals that appeared were the rat, ox, tiger, hare (rabbit), dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and the pig. Each animal has its own special characteristics (e.g., restlessness in monkeys and loyalty in dogs). Many people believe that these characteristics affect events that happen during the year. In addition, some people believe that people born in certain years will have qualities of that year's animal. There is also the belief that these animals are affected by the cycle of earth, wind, fire and water. It was recorded that Emperor Huang Ti introduced the first cycle of zodiac in the year 2600 BC. Like the Western Calendar, the Chinese Lunar Calendar is an annual one, with the start of the lunar year being based on the cycles of the moon. Each animal is repeated every twelve years.

Before the clock strikes twelve for the New Year to be ushered in, families and workers in offices prepare decorations of the new animal to signify the New Year. New Year cards and red packets are printed with the new animal signs. Hampers are also decorated with decorations of the new animal. Table 4.2.2 shows the animals, the years associated with them and their characteristics whilst Plate 4.2.5 is a pictorial depiction of the Twelve Animal Zodiac Calendar.

Table 4.2.2 Twelve Animal Zodiac: Animals, Associated Years and Characteristics

Animal	Date/Years	Characteristics
Rat	1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008	Charming, bright, creative, thrifty
Ox	1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009	Steadfast, dependable, methodical
Tiger	1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010	Dynamic, warm, sincere, leadership qualities
Rabbit	1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011	Humble, artistic, clear sighted
Dragon	1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012	Flamboyant, lucky, imaginative
Snake	1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013	Discreet, refined, intelligent
Horse	1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014	Social, competitive, stubborn
Sheep	1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015	Artistic, fastidious, indecisive
Monkey	1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016	Witty, popular, good humoured, versatile
Rooster	1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017	Aggressive, alert, perfectionist
Dog	1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018	Honest, conservative, loyal
Pig	1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019	Caring, industrious, home-loving



Plate 4.2.5 Twelve Animal Chinese Zodiac Calendar

(Source: www.bluewillowrestaurant.com/news.php - Accessed 11 November 2009)

4.2.2.5 Festival Food/New Year's Eve Reunion/Staying Up Late

(a) Festival Food and Their Preparation

Weeks before the Chinese New Year, food preparation begins. Firstly *Achar* (pickles) made from grated and sun dried papaya, cucumber, chillies, carrots are pickled to be eaten with tasty crunchy prawn crackers. *Achar* chilli (pickles to be stuffed inside emptied chillies and cooked in tasty pickled sauce) is also made weeks in advance as are all types of fruit cakes. Then cookies, cakes and food to be served for Open House are made. These include traditional favourites such as *kuih tart* (pineapple jam tarts with short crust pastry - Plate 4.2.6), layer cakes (colourful layered cakes baked layer by layer and placed together),

kuih bangkit (white powdery crunchy coconut cookies – Plate 4.2.7), *kuih pietie* (crunchy baskets filled with prawn, vegetables and topped with crabmeat and chilly), *niangao* (sticky brown cake in banana leaves), *whatt kuih* (pink and white coloured rice floured pudding – Plate 4.2.8), *kuih sepit* (egg batter spread thinly in round metal shapes and baked over fire, then rolled into cigarette-like rolls, also called love letters).



Plate 4.2.6 *Kuih tart*

(Source: <http://www.michemaylee.com> – Accessed 11 November 2009)



Plate 4.2.7 *Kuih bangkit*

(Source: <http://thestar.com.my/metro/> - Accessed 12 November 2009)



Plate 4.2.8 Whatt Kuih

In the more modern context, there are additions such as cornflake biscuits (round biscuits with crushed crunchy cornflakes), cheese biscuits (biscuits with grated cheese) and nestum biscuits (cookies with crushed nestum flakes).

These are served either in the snacks/cookies tray or on separate plates. For all open houses, there is always a savoury tray and a sweet /candy tray. These are usually coloured red and arranged either in a circular or octagonal tray called the *Tray of Togetherness* (Plate 4.2.9).



Plate 4.2.9 Food in Tray of Togetherness

Some of the foods served in these trays include

- a. *Longans* - dried *longan* food meant to bring good sons to families.
- b. *Cumquat* – sweet soured dried oranges to bring prosperity and gold to the families.
- c. Lotus seeds - believed to bring many children and a fruitful family

- d. Candied melon - believed to bring growth and good health for the families
- e. Red melon seeds- melon seeds dyed red to symbolize joy, growth, happiness, truth and sincerity
- f. Coconut - Coconut candies and cakes - symbolic of the round fruit meant to bring unity and togetherness in the family.
- g. Lychee nut - to symbolize strong family relationships
- h. Peanuts - to have long and fruitful life
- i. Sweets - for a sweet and joyous life
- j. Crackers - for an eventful and successful life.

(b) New Year Food Hampers/Significance of New Year Goodies

A week or two before New Year, Chinese families buy food and gifts for family elders and others which are placed in hampers or protocol baskets (See Plates 4.2.10 and 4.2.11).



Plate 4.2.10 Typical Chinese New Year hampers as sold in shops, signifying gratitude and good wishes for the New Year



Plate 4.2.11 Typical Chinese New Year hampers
(Source: <http://www.justmarketing.info> – Accessed 12 November 2009)

These items each signify different things – noodles (signifies long life), eggs (signifies life), button or black mushrooms (signifies roundness and unity), tinned food (food that can be served for the reunion dinner to wish the family good health), sweets (for sweet wishes in the coming year), etc.

All have red paper or stickers signifying good wishes for the coming year. These must be accompanied by an even number of mandarin oranges whose name *kam* sounds like gold, thus signifying the gift of prosperity. When the recipient receives gifts from his/her relatives, the basket is then emptied and refilled with foods (including oranges) as a reciprocal exchange. Appreciative business associates and companies also send such hampers to those who have helped them.

The significance of certain typical New Year foods is as follows:

- (i) ***Niengao*** (Round New Year Cake) signifies a hope for increased status in the coming year. This is a sticky brown sweet cake cooked and steamed in banana leaves. It is round in shape (to signify unity and roundness of the family) and about

three inches in diameter. A piece of red paper (usually cut in intricate design with the word “*Fu*” (luck) is centred on the cake (See Plate 4.2.12).



Plate 4.2.12 *Niengao*

The cake was initially used by pagans and Taoists to feed the Kitchen God on the twenty third day of the twelfth lunar month to ensure that he presented a good report of the family to the Emperor of Heaven. This has become mandatory for all New Year hampers and baskets for elders in order to bring sweet wishes and prosperity for the recipient.

(ii) Sweet Condiments

Varieties of sweets are colourfully packaged as gifts signifying all good wishes.

(iii) Noodles (*mee sua*) for wishes of long-life.

Long noodles signifying a long life are eaten first thing for breakfast on New Year's Day (See Plate 4.2.13).



Plate 4.2.13 Example of a traditional *Mee Sua* dish
(Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/96949523@N00/202686354> - Accessed 12 November 2009)

- (iv) **Dumplings (*wuo tiek*)** shaped like ancient gold money signify good fortune and are served during dinners, lunches (usually New Year's Day lunch) or tea breaks (Plate 4.2.14). They are made of pastry flour and the stuffing is made from pork, chicken or prawns minced and combined to create a ball shape within a pastry casing. These are given to families to wish them prosperity.



Plate 4.2.14 Chinese dumplings - *Wuo tiek*
(Source: <http://www.asianfoodchannel.com/guide.php?id=7> – Accessed 11 November 2009)

(c) Reunion Dinner

The night before the first day of Chinese New Year, the whole family gathers to enjoy the best dinner of the year. It is a time during which all family members make efforts to return home to be with their families and aged parents, no matter how distant they may be. The Chinese value family ties highly and look forward to these festivals which strengthen family

bonds. Those who are unable to make it home with their families on this night or during the Chinese New Year are usually very sad and sorely missed by their families. Children who have married and left home are expected to be back to celebrate this auspicious occasion with their families. Married ladies, however, must return home to their husband's family. Daughters are thus seldom at home dining with the family, unless they are not married. It is customary for sons and daughters-in-law to be at the parental home with their children. This has become understood amongst the Chinese customs and there is no argument about which family to go to.

Ancestors are remembered prior to the New Year as well. The non-Christian or pagan families always remember to burn joss sticks and invite them to have dinner with them. Christians offer masses for them. In some families, as early as five in the morning on New Year's Eve, family members are up cooking and preparing extra food for the ancestral table. Joss sticks are lit and symbolic paper money burnt before the meal. Grandchildren are then informed about their grandparents and great grandparents so that such stories can be carried down to successive generations. Through these ancestral worships, families learn about their ancestors, their roots and lineage.

This dinner is also called *Wei Lu* or *surrounding the stove*. It is the one dinner that all generations must eat together, to enjoy, to feel the harmonious family unity, to wish each other, and for the older generations, to actually see how big the family has grown, and to be proud of everyone's success. It is a time for the Chinese to feast on the most expensive dishes and to relax. Some families begin their dinners as early as 5.30pm but most families eat their meal around 6.30pm.

A steamboat in the centre of the table signifies unity and togetherness as the entire family shares and cooks it together. In the past, the steamboats were based on charcoal, but nowadays many families use the electric pot which also serves the same function. Nevertheless, many older parents still insist on keeping their charcoal fired one.

Eating does not begin until everyone is ready and the Head of the family and his wife are seated. In some modern families, the Head of the family leads the family grace. Those who are younger are expected to call those older to eat. Most families begin with the *Yee sang* or *raw fish* dish accompanied by colourful condiments and shredded vegetables such as carrots, cucumber, crispy noodles etc. served in a round dish. Everyone holds up a pair of chopsticks and toss the shredded vegetables high up in the air together shouting *Lo* and other good wishes as loudly as they can whilst tossing the food high (See Plate 4.2.15). *Lo* means together and higher, symbolizing the new luck to be more substantial.



Plate 4.2.15 Tossing the *Yee Sang*

After the tossing and wishing, the first soup dish is served. This is usually Shark's Fin Soup, or Eight Treasures Soup comprising eight special ingredients. Soups are usually cooked for many hours or double boiled to preserve their sweetness. The Chinese are known to eat frugally on normal occasions but for Chinese New Year, they are willing to buy expensive food. Other dishes are then served, dish-by-dish in modern times or simultaneously in the past. These usually comprise a fish, which is considered a necessity. Fish is served, usually

steamed or fried, during the New Year's Eve dinner or New Year's Day lunch or dinner (See Plate 4.2.16). The sound of fish in Mandarin, is *yu* with a homonym very similar to that meaning a surplus of luck and hope and good wishes*. Hence the Chinese believe that eating fish will bring them additional luck and hope for the New Year. Previously, they were purchased fresh from the market. Recently, fish have even been professionally packed as gifts.



Plate 4.2.16 Examples of typical Chinese-style fish dishes

(Source: <http://www.foodsteamer.org/> and http://elegantsufficiency.typepad.com/the_elegant_sufficiency/asian_dishes/ - Accessed 13 November 2009)

Some vegetables are always served including the black moss called *fatt choy* which means prosperous vegetable, the Chinese leek called *suan* meaning count which the Chinese believe should be eaten for prosperity. Many dishes served have propitious sounding homonyms to prosperity, good luck, good health or long life. There are also dishes with eggs as a symbol of life. The round steamboat serves as a good unified activity for the entire family (See Plate 4.2.17).

*This also explains why the Chinese like paintings with *Koi* fish, usually nine fish, to adorn their dining room. Sometimes, these paintings are given as corporate gifts to companies, their directors or executives, with the fish painting and the Chinese calligraphy *Nien nien yiu yu*, meaning new luck every year.



Plate 4.2.17 Steamboat dinner

Everyone dips raw food in small baskets into the steamboat, kept boiling hot with charcoal or electricity, for unity of family action. Special family recipes of chicken, beef, duck and pork are also served. Beer and/or wine accompany the merrymaking and toasting amongst family members.

After dinner activities include karaoke and games of mah-jong, poker and/or jimrami while the children play with fireworks outside the house in order to while away the time before midnight. Chinese New Year songs are played loudly while last minute preparations are completed.

(d) Staying Up Late (*sou sui*)

Some Chinese families believe that staying up late on Chinese New Year's Eve is a good omen for the parents of the family to have a long life.

4.2.2.6 The Changing Faces of Preparation

Table 4.2.3 presents an overview of the traditional preparations for a celebration of the Chinese New Year with special emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions. In the sections

which follow, specific comments will highlight the major differences between historical and contemporary celebration modes.

Table 4.2.3 Celebrating Chinese New Year in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Comments
Preparation	<p>(a) Thorough house cleaning by people themselves including children.</p> <p>(b) Prepare new clothes and shoes but mostly self made. More traditional Chinese clothes.</p> <p>(c) Sending New Year cards to friends and family early to avoid postal congestion.</p>	<p>(a) Cleaning mostly done by maids or cleaners and children are less helpful.</p> <p>(b) Clothes are mostly bought off the rack instead of made and are more contemporary in fashion.</p> <p>(c) More e-cards are sent now rather than posted cards.</p>	<p>To drive away remaining bad luck and make way for new luck to be ushered in.</p> <p>Fewer and fewer younger generation are bothering to do this now and clothes have become more casual.</p>
Costume/ Fashion Women	<p>(a) <i>Sam fu</i> – blouse with Chinese buttons and black pants</p> <p>(b) Long traditional Cheong Sam (No sleeves)</p> <p>(c) Materials traditional brocade.</p>	<p>(a) Short <i>Cheong Sam</i>, sometimes with sleeves varied, but mandarin collar and traditional buttons remain.</p> <p>(b) Malaysianized <i>Cheong Sam</i> with sarong modern materials. New sexy designs. Much shorter dresses.</p> <p>(c) Mostly ordered or bought.</p>	<p>Each year the Chinese attire is presented in slightly varied forms from very traditional brocade style to young peasant styles. Variations occur with the materials but the mandarin collar and Chinese buttons usually remain. In younger generations, it is more casual, even available in T-shirt styles.</p>
Men	<p>(a) Chinese Mandarin collared long sleeves, loose shirt with slits at the side worn with long pants</p>	<p>Modern shirt with pants. Some Chinese men still wear the traditional shirt with modern pants, or less formal variations of it. Mandarin collars and long sleeves shirt are common.</p>	<p>Most men prefer red short sleeved shirts, colourful Malaysian batik styled shirts (with reddish prints) and younger generations usually prefer shirt materials in comfortable short sleeves, practical for visiting.</p>

Table 4.2.3 Celebrating Chinese New Year in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Comments
<p>Song</p> <p>Music</p> <p>Dance</p>	<p>(a) Traditional Chinese Operatic arias Teochew Operas Chinese Operas</p> <p>(b) Traditional instruments like <i>er-hu</i>, <i>ku-chern</i>, <i>pipa</i> etc. playing classical Chinese melodies</p> <p>(c) Traditional Fan and Ribbon dance. Lion dance</p>	<p>(a) New Year Songs Pop fusion with Chinese traditional ethnic instruments and lion dance drumbeats</p> <p>(b) Modern pop instruments fused with Chinese traditional instruments and lion dance drumbeats</p> <p>(c) Modern Lion dances. Modern Chinese dances with contemporary backgrounds.</p>	<p>(a) There are always modern versions each year of the latest young singers, but the tunes remain the same or are varied to suit the singer's styles.</p> <p>(b) Much Malaysianized dancing with fusions of Chinese and Malaysian beats for modern dance or discos.</p> <p>(c) To entertain.</p>
<p>Home</p>	<p>(a) Plain red cloth adorns the main door</p> <p>(b) All cushions, curtains were home made by women</p> <p>(c) Traditional lanterns</p> <p>(d) In past, more Taoist Chinese – altars adorned</p>	<p>(a) Still fashionable to have red cloth but now in modern frills or factory produced ornate designs.</p> <p>(b) Modern factory made home furnishings like small cushions, posters, drapes, spring couplets.</p> <p>(c) Modern red lanterns</p> <p>(d) Simple altars.</p>	<p>(a) Each year there are additions to the decorations and home furnishings for the house, usually in line with the latest fashion, materials, and designs from the factories.</p> <p>(b) New things annually.</p> <p>(c) Altars no longer exist in Christian homes.</p>

Table 4.2.3 Celebrating Chinese New Year in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Comments
1. Family Practices	Reunion Dinner (<i>Wei lo</i>)	Still strongly practised	A compulsory duty to join parents for this meal.
2. <i>Sou Sui</i>	Children stay up late	Most stay till after midnight and go to bed after their parents	Believed to help parents have long lives.
3. Tea/ <i>Angpow</i> Ceremony	Children kneel to wish grandparents and parents and give or receive their red packets with good words and wishes	Some families still hold the tea ceremony but only when grandparents are alive. Most just give the red packets and wish them 'Happy New Year(<i>Gong Xi Fa Cai</i>)' with no ceremony	Becoming simpler and sometimes given without fanfare.
4. Open House	Must follow protocol order from oldest- grandparents, parents, oldest aunts and uncles, older sister and brother, then cousins, etc..... friends.	Mostly visit bosses, parents, elders on the first day. Elder relatives and respected clients on second day and closer friends on the third day.	Visits and preparation by younger generation much simpler
<i>Chap Goh Meh</i> (15th night or Lantern Festival)	(a) No work for most Chinese firms or early closure of shops and businesses. Closing of New Year with grand dinner and gambling. Fireworks follow. (b) Lantern processions in some towns. Throwing of oranges into the river for maidens to choose good husbands.	(a) Most Chinese work but return early for dinner followed by fireworks. (b) Lanterns not much for procession now, except carried by the children in the evenings. Many young ladies go for the walk along the waterfront but no longer practise throwing of oranges.	(a) Marks the end of Chinese New Year. Most places in Malaysia only have single ladies going out but no longer throw oranges into the river. Occasionally called the "Chinese Valentines' night" for young Chinese couples- a romantic night. Most Chinese still have a family reunion at night.

Table 4.2.3 Celebrating Chinese New Year in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Comments
<p>Food</p>	<p>(a) Sweetened tinned stuff, <i>niengao</i>, noodles, eggs and oranges sent to elders. Live chickens were also included.</p> <p>(b) Cookies and cakes and food all self made.</p> <p>(c) Red paper was cut and stuck on all things given.</p>	<p>(a) <i>Niengao</i> still sent by minority and older generation but professionally packed. Tinned goods still sent by older generation with noodles, eggs and oranges.</p> <p>(b) These foods are all pre-ordered and few of the young generation make their own.</p> <p>(c) Red paper stickers are now available with ready-made words.</p>	<p>(a) No longer practised by younger generations. Mostly only sent by business associates.</p> <p>(b) A mix of Western and Asian foods is now more popular. Served on candy tray for Open House.</p> <p>(c) Younger generations who still give such gifts do not paste red paper or stickers on their gifts.</p>

4.2.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.2.3.1 Traditional Family Practices, Cultural Values and Beliefs

Traditional Chinese culture is based on the following principles:

(a) Loyalty and Filial Piety

This principle is of great importance to the Chinese people historically as well as to those who have migrated to other parts of the world today. It applies very much also to Chinese families living in Singapore and Malaysia. Each person is brought up to be filial and loyal to family and friends, and to respect work and country. Parents train their children always to be grateful to people who have helped them, and especially to be respectful to elders at all times.

For these reasons, Chinese families believe in looking after their elderly parents and grandparents and living together as extended families. They are trained to think of elders before themselves. Even as the celebration draws near, they are expected to remember their grandparents/parents who have died and honour them with prayers, mass or offerings, and to give their best gifts to their parents.

(b) Sacrifice, Humility and Justice

The Chinese believe that justice, humility, virtue, honesty and humanity are vital principles. For these reasons, they are willing to sacrifice themselves to ensure these principles are kept and practised. Good Chinese parents teach their children to be principled in everything they do and to be humble at all times.

(c) Building Tolerance, Diligence, Knowledge, Patience and Perseverance

The Chinese believe that hard work is the route to success. They train themselves and their families to endure hardship, to be tough, patient, persevering, and to aim high.

(d) Harmony

The Chinese believe that one should live in peace and harmony with their families and society and that the home and family environments must be secure and peaceful for one to be successful in work and achievement. Extensive tolerance is expected in Chinese families especially among those staying together and protocol towards elders is practised at all times.

(e) Colour Red and Black Taboo

The Chinese associate red with joyous occasions. Traditionally, they believed that blood which was red, signified life. When older generations see red, they associate it with happy occasions and lively atmospheres. Gifts during Chinese New Year, birthdays, weddings, or thanksgiving/appreciation gifts, or money are all wrapped in red. Recently gold, commonly associated with prosperity, has become another colour loved by Chinese in their festivals. Red cloth is thus put up for most happy occasions. White and black are associated with death and never worn during Festivals and happy occasions. Plate 4.2.18 illustrates the use of red in domestic settings.



Plate 4.2.18 The Importance of Red in Chinese New Year Decorations

(f) Superstitions

House cleaning has always been a superstitious issue and even modern families thoroughly clean their house before the New Year Eve. This thorough cleaning was believed to throw away all the bad luck or bad omens and to make space for new luck to be ushered in. It was believed that if no thorough cleaning was done, the new luck would not follow and would not come into dirty households. (see 4.2.2.2)

In the past, after the third day, the floors could be swept, but this was kept in the dustpan in the corner and not thrown out till after the fifth day. Everything was to be swept inwards and not outwards as they were afraid that luck could be swept out. Buddhists or Taoists may still practise this although Christians no longer do so.

Shooting of firecrackers was also a way of sending off the old and bad, and ushering in the new and good. At midnight, after firing of the firecrackers, all Chinese families keep their doors open to usher in the new luck and fortune.

As indicated in 4.2.1, it is taboo if there are unpaid debts by New Year's Eve. The Chinese believe that everyone should refrain from using foul language or saying anything bad for the first five days. No words sounding like the word death are to be uttered. Inauspicious topics such as death, funerals, accidents and misfortunes are all taboo during the New Year. References to anything bad in the past years are also to be avoided. No one should cry as it is believed that there should be no shedding of tears. On New Year's Day, there should be no washing of hair for fear of washing away the good luck.

Whilst many of these taboos and superstitious beliefs are no longer practised and believed, deep down in all Chinese hearts, there are still many reasons, not always logical, for grandparents and parents to believe in them. Hence, as a show of understanding of one's culture and tradition, many of these taboos and superstitions are either maintained or avoided as a sign of respect and understanding.

(g) Exchanging Gifts

For a detailed explanation, please refer to Section 4.2.2.5 (d)

4.2.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

(a) Red Packets (*Hong Pau/Angpow*)

Money in small red packets (*angpow* or *hong bao*), is normally given on New Year's Day to children and to anyone who is not married. Children look forward to this, and are always busy counting and collecting their red packets during this time. Anyone who is married is expected to **give** red packets to family members as well as to the children of their friends who come to visit them. The amounts given in the red packets are usually in even numbers, as the Chinese believe that good things come in pairs. However, it is not the amount that

matters, but the gesture and good wishes that come with it. The Chinese usually say some auspicious words and wishes to the person to whom they are giving the red packet. Now there are even packets in orange, pink and floral papers, and they range in shape from rectangular to square. (see Plate 4.2.19)



Plate 4.2.19 Contemporary and traditional *angpows*

(b) Spring Couplets (*Tui Lian*)

Spring couplets are a pair of red strips of paper on which a set of auspicious Chinese sayings for the New Year are artistically written in Chinese calligraphy (see Plate 4.2.20). In the olden days in China, the story of the door gods, whose mighty generals wanted to protect the doors of every farmer's house, put two strips of red papers on either side of the door. The owner would have written similar inscriptions such as "May wealth and glory descend onto this household and make it complete" or "Prosperity, good health, joy and joy and descend onto this household" etc.

Writing spring couplets is a treasured art as they must always look balanced and sound poetic. In the past, it was believed that the evil spirits pass by those houses with the red spring couplets as they disliked the colour red, and would leave these houses alone. (see

4.3.1). These remain hung from the time of preparation prior to New Year but in some cities, there are people writing on the spot for some money even on New Year's Day itself.



Plate 4.2.20 Example of door banner and spring couplets

(Source: <http://www.cmchin.alchin1.com/blog/?m=200702> – Accessed 14 November 2009)

(c) Chinese Paintings

It was common during former Chinese New Years to see beautiful watercolour paintings depicting beautiful spring scenery, fishes or flowers. These paintings were intricate artistic works specially created to adorn the walls during this special season. Whilst costly, these paintings give a distinctive Chinese ambience. Such paintings are also usually given as gifts to authorities who have been of assistance.

(d) Door Banners and Lanterns

The main door is adorned with a red banner to indicate a Chinese family living inside and also for protection. Together with the lanterns, spring couplets, *fu* as the word for prosperity, banners, lime trees, chrysanthemums and firecracker decorations, the house is in readiness to usher in the New Year (see Plates 4.2.21 and 4.2.22). A pair of red lanterns light up the entrance with the spectacular touch of Chinese ambience.



Plate 4.2.21 Door banner and red lanterns



Plate 4.2.22 Upside down *Fu* indicating Prosperity

(e) Festival Decorations

(i) Flowers

The day before the Chinese New Year is an extremely busy time for all. Men are busy either paying last minute debts, collecting money owed to them or buying items for the home whilst women and other family members are busy with final cleaning and decorative touches or cooking preparations. Many shops close by mid day and Chinese businesses wind up for the year. Everything comes to a halt and the city seems quiet as many businesses are run by the Chinese. Fresh flowers are bought last minute during New Year's Eve for decoration of homes and altars. (see Plate 4.2.23) All types of beautiful floral arrangements adorn the florist shops. Specially arranged vases with Chinese New Year favourites like chrysanthemums (signifying gold and brightness), pink cherry blossoms and pussy willows are artistically arranged to beautify homes as these flowers signify spring time in China. Some floral arrangements include red and gold decorative items such as fans, birds and ribbons to give a festive ambience.

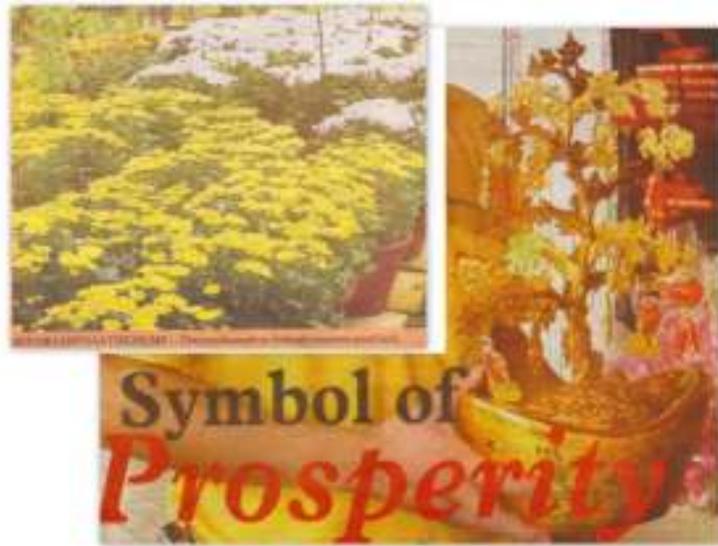


Plate 4.2.23 Chrysanthemum trees and a *money tree* signifying gold, brightness and prosperity

Many people also send floral gifts to friends and business counterparts who have helped them.

(ii) Bamboo (*Chu*)

Bamboo is a hardy plant that survives through the seasons and the Chinese believe that it is a symbol of strength and longevity. Bamboo plants are also depicted in many Chinese art and paintings. Its evergreen leaves signify life amidst all the changes. Hence, Chinese people like to have the bamboo plant for good luck in businesses and families each year (see Plate 4.2.24). In Chinese *Chu pau chia ying* means the announcing of good news or fortune.



Plate 4.2.24 Typical bamboo decorations for Chinese New Year

(iii) Lime Trees (*Kit*)

Golden limes placed at the entrance of houses or business premises are intended to bring good luck to people during Chinese New Year so most families try to acquire some pots if they do not already have one (see Plate 4.2.25). Some people call these *kam kit* or gold, as it is believed to bring them prosperity. There are many varieties of lime trees. Literally translated from Chinese, these are the “longevity lime, dragon lime, golden lime (*kim kit*) and four season lime”. *Chu sa kit* and other species crossbred between pomelos and limes are also very popular. The *Chu sa kit* produces reddish coloured limes and larger fruits and are always sold out well in advance of New Year’s Eve.



Plate 4.2.25 Lime trees

(iv) City Decorations

The entire city is decorated with street lights shaped like lanterns, dragons, fishes, Chinese characters etc. and the mascot figure of Kuching (which literally means cat in Bahasa Melayu) is dressed up in the Chinese attire of red jacket and Chinese hat surrounded by strings of Chinese lanterns all colourfully lit (see Plate 4.2.26).



Plate 4.2.26 Examples of Chinese New Year festive decorations in Kuching

4.2.3.3 Festival Clothes

In the nineteen sixties and seventies, there were still many Chinese in the rural parts of Sarawak and older folks in the cities who wore the Manchu style or Manchu inspired men's clothes and the women who wore *sam fu* (generic term formed from *sam* meaning upper garment or blouse, and *fu* meaning pants or trousers). These were inspired by the Manchu style of clothing worn by Chinese during the Qing dynasty. In the earlier days, the sides and the ends of the cloth used to make the *sam* were normally bound with fabric to avoid fraying, making a kind of frame outlining the edges. The *sam* was worn by both men and women. Villagers and general workers in Sarawak and Malaysia wore simple *sam fu* with black trousers and light blue tops for daily use and darker blue or purple for more special occasions.

On grander occasions, and for richer folk, the *sam fu* would be embroidered with elaborate edges, sleeve bindings, or the curved opening called the *tau kam*. Those of rich women

were made from silk or very expensive ornately embroidered materials. Ordinary people used to make them from hemp or hard wearing fabrics. The Hakka women who migrated to Sarawak earlier on wore longer *sam*, whilst the others wore shorter, more fitted styles. Younger unmarried women normally used shorter tops whereas married women usually wore longer tops to hide their trousers under the skirt. The trousers were straight cut with waist bands. In Sarawak, as the weather was hot, men did not wear the jacket like those of their forefathers. Many had hidden pockets called *oi hau*.

A much more formal style worn during festivals like Chinese New Year was the cheongsam for women. These were more common after the Second World War. In China, the Chinese normally wore smart jackets over their cheongsams. The cheongsams also developed from robes worn by the Manchu women during the Qing dynasty. (Garrett, 1987:15) After the 1930s, the cheongsam became tighter and a second style emerged called the *qi pao* with a banded collar, six buttons and three quarter length sleeves. In Sarawak, these were mostly ankle length until the recent nineties when the hemlines were shortened. Modern cheongsams are varied with sleeveless, bareback tops, very high slits at the sides and a very tight body hugging fit. During the recent Chinese New Year fashion updates, there were many traditional styled cheongsams and *sam fus* made with Malaysian sarong materials, local Chinese polyester fabrics, modern hues and colours depicting the most fashionable hues and styles.

In present day Sarawak, Chinese New Year clothes are becoming more casual even for the first day of the Chinese New Year. The Chinese still believe that new clothes bring new luck and the colour red is still dominant, though modern hues such as orange, pastels, shocking pink and purple are now also in fashion. The Chinese style mandarin collar remains on many clothes, even those made with T-shirt materials although they are less

formal collars which are not stiff or high follow the neckline with less formality. The curved cut or *tau kam* cut is also dominant in many Chinese style or Chinese inspired tops. Silk black trousers worn with flowery western inspired tops were fashionable in the eighties whereas in the nineties, looser tops worn with straight cut trousers or short skirts were in vogue. In recent years, looser tops or Bengali Indian inspired tops, with very tight hugging trousers or fitting blouses are also in style.

4.2.3.4 Festival Music and Dance

(a) Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has always been performed during important Chinese Festivals, especially during Chinese New Year, local Chinese festivals such as Buddha's birthday celebration, Hungry Ghost Festival, etc. It was part of the entertainment or performing arts of the Chinese during these Festive times. Chinese opera dates from over 900 years ago. Early Chinese traders first introduced the opera to Malaysia way back in the mid-sixteenth century when travelling troupes came with the traders, making it a popular form of entertainment when there was no television or cinema. However it is a dying art as now there are only a few youths and older folks who are still interested in the preservation of this performance art. The music of the opera lives on and is performed either as solo arias during Festival shows or re-enacted as live opera shows if actors and actresses are available.

Chinese opera encompasses a combination of various skills such as the singing of poetic arias, movement, drama, acrobatics, martial arts, dance and acting. The art is very specialized these days and, although it used to be popular in the various dialects such as Hokkien and Teochew in Kuching and Penang, Foochow in Sibul, Cantonese in Kuala

Lumpur, etc., its performances are also now very limited. However, the Teochew opera is the only remaining operatic art in Kuching.

During certain special festivals, to commemorate their centenary year, golden anniversary, etc., some clans get together to organize an opera performance to entertain their own ethnic society. In the case of the Festivals of the Hungry Ghosts, operas were believed to entertain the dead and the living. Very often, in order to produce an opera these days, some of the cast are invited guests from China, Taiwan, Singapore and other parts of Malaysia.

In the past, during Chinese New Year or important Chinese festival dates, the little theatres would be packed with people in the evenings, all eager to enjoy the free opera performances.

The stories of these operas were derived from Chinese classical literature and ancient Chinese mythologies depicting legends, crusades, rebellions, victories, heroic deeds, or intriguing situations that provoked heart rending drama and acting. The main feature of these types of opera is the elaborate make up and costumes, usually very colourful and ornate, and the traditional Chinese orchestra that accompanies it. These operas, supported by theatrical effects such as lighting, dramatic sounds of clashing cymbals, thunder, etc. are very grand, elaborate and culturally important and feature significant historical figures and situations. Colours have special meanings as codes or ranks within the opera. Yellow is always the Emperor's colour and purple is always the colour of the barbaric people. Long, black beards, silver beards or white beards all depict different personalities of various rankings. Younger generations in Malaysia are no longer appreciative of this dying art and, with its loss of popularity and the rise of other more popular activities and entertainment

such as karaoke. Chinese opera is gradually being replaced by modern pop concerts and is continually fighting for survival.

(b) The Mystical Lion Dance Rhythm

The Lion Dance is integral to the sounds of Chinese New Year. Modern New Year songs also have the sound of the beats of the Lion Dance to prompt listeners to anticipate its arrival. The celebration comes alive with its loud thunderous sounds beating away with high energy and vitality to create excitement, cheer and loud celebration.

(i) Historical Background

The Lion has always been regarded as a guardian creature in the lives of the Chinese, being featured as the mount of Manjusri in Buddhist folklore. These days, variations in the lion dance are created from Asian countries, each with its own significance and style, namely the lion dances from Malaysia, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc.

(ii) Types of Lion Dances

In the past, there used to be the Northern lion dance and the Southern lion dance in China. Northern lion dances were usually dances for imperial court or palace entertainments. Occasionally, a huge giant ball leads or lures the lions. The lions then perform stunts or lifts, balancing occasionally with stands on the ball. Ninghai, in Ningbo, is the homeland of the northern variety of the lion dance. The northern lions were usually red, orange and yellow, usually shaggy, with a huge golden head, long hair and floppy ears. These lions came in pairs of a male and a female. Sometimes there was a family of adult lions and a pair of young lions. This dance is usually more acrobatic in nature and mostly performed for grand entertainment.

Southern lions were much more colourful with larger eyes, very distinctive heads and a huge single horn at the centre of the head. The dance was usually more symbolic, performed to exorcise or drive away evil spirits and to usher in good luck and fortune for prosperity. Guangdong is the homeland of the southern variety of lion dance (see Plate 4.2.27).



Plate 4.2.27 Southern Lion Dance Performance during Chinese New Year

The Southern style can be divided into the *Fat Shan* (Buddha Mountain), *Hok Shan* (Crane Mountain), *Fat Hok* (minor style of kungfu style) and *Qing Shi* (Green Lion). *Fat Shan* is the style of many kungfu schools. It involves many powerful moves and skills in prancing and postures. The *Hok Shan* is a more contemporary style with more realistic movements resembling real life lions and acrobatic stunts. Some troupes even do pole-jumping. There are three types of lions, namely the red lion representing courage, the golden lion representing liveliness and the green lion representing friendship.

(iii) Contemporary Lion Dances

Lion dances, believed to bring good luck and fortune, are now also performed during weddings, the opening of new business premises and Chinese New Year in individual homes. Lion dance troupes, many of them from martial arts schools or associations, visit homes, shops, departmental stores, etc. to start the year off with a bang! Owners prepare *angpows* for them tied to a head of lettuce and hung from a high pole. The lion then approaches the pole curiously, grabs the lettuce with its mouth, then spits out the smaller pieces (after breaking it into smaller pieces inside), tossing it out to bring good luck and fortune to the business and the owners. The dancers then receive the money from the *angpaw* as the reward. Nowadays, some owners put pineapples, oranges, pomelos, sugar cane shoots etc. out for the lion to consume.

(c) The Dragon Dance

Like the lion dance, the dragon dance plays an important role in Chinese culture and festivals (see Plate 4.2.28).



Plate 4.2.28 Media images depicting Lion and Dragon dances

Originating from the Han Dynasty in ancient China, the Dragon is regarded as a sacred creature, symbolizing power, courage, righteousness and dignity. The Chinese have great respect for the Dragon using it as a sign of their ethnic identity. Many ceramic jars, pillars and grand palaces have dragons carved on them, symbolizing splendour, grandeur and imperialism. Unlike the lion dance which basically only requires two people, one at the head and one in the middle, the dragon dance requires many more performers to animate a dragon approximately 112 feet long. Drums are used to accompany the dragon's movements, including the Chinese big drum, cymbals and a gong.

4.2.3.5 Festival Events

(a) New Year's Eve

Please refer to Section 4.2.2.5 (b) for a detailed explanation.

(b) Chinese New Year's Day

Most Chinese wake up cheerful on the morning greeting each other and have a breakfast of *mee sua* or longevity noodles with eggs to signify life. They then bathe and dress in their new red clothes and prepare tea (sweet tea of *longan* and dates) and red packets for the family tea ceremony.

New Year songs, mostly modern pop styles, are vibrantly on the air, giving the home and neighbourhood an air of festivity. Some families now no longer gather specially for the tea or *angpou* ceremony and only wish each other once they meet. In other families, tradition is kept very tight as the parents believe that it is essential for the children to know the steps to hand down by living examples.

(c) Families/Traditional Tea/*Angpow* Ceremony

Every New Year, families will have their own gathering to wish each other the best for the New Year ahead. Traditional families expect their children and in laws to kneel and serve them tea whilst wishing them although these ceremonies and formalities are not universally followed today. After the tea ceremony, the parents give their children red packets (*angpows*) and wish them in return. Children who are married and working, also give their parents substantial sums as their yearly contributions; these are usually proportionate to their own wealth and success. The children serve the parents red dates and *longan* (red dried fruit) tea (see Plate 4.2.29), after which a family photo is usually taken with a background of loud blasting Chinese New Year songs.



Plate 4.2.29 Traditional Tea Ceremony

(d) Open House

In Malaysia and especially in Sarawak, Chinese families hold Open Houses to invite their friends of other ethnic backgrounds and religions to visit during which time they are served food and drinks. Houses are tastefully decorated and guests served the best food the hosts can afford.

(i) Early on the first day of the lunar New Year, Chinese first wish their parents and then proceed to the houses of their older relatives or bosses. Colleagues visit each other wearing their new clothes, all ready to show off their houses and new outfits. They wish each other Happy New Year or *Gong Xi Fa Cai* meaning “Congratulations, hope you grow in prosperity” followed by other good wishes such as “Long life ahead, or a prosperous year to come, or hope you will find a good wife to settle down this year, or hope you will have children this year, or hope you will be healthy” etc. They are then served with New Year delicacies and drinks. Happy conversation as well as laughter resounds.

(ii) The second to seventh days

The second day was once a time for praying to the Gods as well as to their ancestors. Most Taoists and Buddhists offer food and memorial offerings to their ancestors. Lavish food is offered and the family burn paper money for them. Joss sticks are also lit for them. On this day, the Chinese used to be extra kind to dogs and feed them well as they believe that the second day is the birthday of all dogs. On second days, the Chinese begin some of their Open House visits to older family members such as aunts and uncles, great aunts and uncles, and some higher ranking colleagues.

The third and fourth days are usually for son-in-laws and daughters to pay respects to their parents-in-law. These are days that daughters who had married would return home with their husbands and children to visit their parents/parents-in-law. The same still happens in many families now, except that they no longer have to follow the rigid rules as set by earlier Chinese families. They can now return at a convenient time and many daughters even join in family reunions if there is no ceremony in their husband’s family. In Kuching, these are days when most office colleagues visit each other and children go out with their friends for house to house visits.

The fifth day is called *Po Woo* (meaning to fill up your luck) so many people stay at home on that day. In the past there used to be no visiting on that day as it was thought that it would bring them bad luck or that they might have missed out on the refilling of their luck. Nowadays, they do not heed these old beliefs and most visiting continues as usual.

On the sixth day, the Chinese visit their relatives and closer friends freely and spend longer time with them, chatting and eating as the crowd lessens. Many also visit the temples to pray for good fortune and health. Many businesses burn firecrackers on this day to begin their work for the New Year, but they only open the doors, light firecrackers and then shut again.

The seventh day of Chinese New Year is for farmers to display their produce. Farmers concoct a drink from seven types of vegetables to celebrate the occasion. The seventh day is also considered the birthday of human beings. Noodles are eaten to promote longevity and raw fish for success. By this time, most businesses would have officially opened their businesses for the New Year, albeit only for a very short time.

(iii) On the eighth day, the Fujian people have another family reunion dinner, and at midnight they pray to the God of Heaven, *Tian Gong* or *Thi Kong*. They also call it *Thi Kong Say* meaning *Birthday of the God of Heaven*. At midnight, most Fujian (Hokkien) people will set up offerings on altars framed with sugarcane outside their houses, and burn joss sticks and paper money to the God of heaven.

On the ninth day, they make offerings to the Jade Emperor. By this time, most of the families will have returned home from outside their hometown and be preparing to return to work.

The tenth through to twelfth day are days that close friends and relatives are invited to dinner or gather to chat, gamble, or talk about their New Year with their own families. Older folks compare their children's successes and failures; many will be sharing their experiences with grandchildren, in laws etc. with their close friends. After all the rich food, the thirteenth day is kept for very simple clear food such as rice congee and mustard greens served with Chinese tea to cleanse the body system.

On the fourteenth day, families prepare for the celebration dinner and Lantern Festival of day fifteen. Women go to markets early to buy food for the next day and preparations are in train for yet another big dinner. Children and others make lanterns for the processions or for playing in the evening.

(e) Protocol for Visits

The Chinese family always stresses respect for anyone older. For this reason, a Chinese boy/girl/man/woman must call the older person by rank, e.g., eldest aunty, second aunty, youngest uncle and never by name. This applies even to cousins who are a year older. Respect is observed even during New Year visits as protocol is expected to be known to the families. One must visit anyone older than oneself in the family. Hence, it is understood that all families will visit their grandparents or great grandparents, parents and older relatives first. No elder relative will visit someone younger than them first. Nor will those in the younger ranks expect to wait for people to visit them first. This act is synonymous with the Chinese belief that respect must be given where it is due. They bring with them two oranges and offer these at the entrance to the house upon entering whilst wishing them *Gong Xi Fa Cai* (see Plate 4.2.30). They then take off their shoes and always call the

elders first before going in the house. All employees will visit their bosses and office seniors in order of rank immediately after their grandparents and parents.



Plate 4.2.30 Mandarin oranges

(f) *Chap Goh Mei* (15th Night) or Lantern Festival

Chap Goh Mei means Fifteenth Night in Hokkien dialect. It is literally the fifteenth night of the Chinese New Year and is the last day of the New Year celebrations for the Chinese. Many Chinese families ensure that they are home early if they are working to join in the family dinner, which usually comprises similar favourites to the New Year's Eve dinner, or variations of them.

In the past, families would work on their lanterns to be displayed on the night itself. They would get their lamps and lanterns ready for the final night of the great festival. Formerly, the more special or unique the lantern, the higher the prestige of the family which displayed it. Families would handcraft lantern in the shapes of huge balls, cubes, animals, geometric shapes, planes, cars, flowers, etc. and then sell them in the Lantern market prior to the festival. The contemporary celebration is different only that lantern are not made but purchased.

Many lanterns would be lit on the first day of the New Year, and usually from around the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth day of the lunar New Year. Formerly, men would wear masks, children dress up in costumes, and ladies would move in the streets carrying lit lanterns. In the past in China, many people would be involved in processions resembling Mardi Gras parties in the streets followed by stilt dancers, pantomimes, associations and their representatives, lion dances and long dragon dances, all of these elements making for an evening of celebration.

4.3 THAIPUSAM

4.3.1 Historical Background

Thaipusam, also known as the *Festival of Penance*, is the major Hindu religious festival in Kuching, Sarawak, although the population of Hindu Indians in Sarawak is less than one per cent. Lasting for three days, it falls in the Tamil month of *Thai* (15th January to 14th February) and *Pusam* is the eighth star among the twenty seven stars in the Hindu astrological system. The Festival of Thaipusam falls on the day on which the star *Pusam* (Pushya in Sanskrit) is on the ascendant in the month of Thai. The *Pusam*, which falls in the month of *Thai* and very often coincides with the full moon day, is taken as the *Thai Pusam*. The presiding deity of this star is the planet Brihaspati (Jupiter). Brihaspati is a beneficent influence and amongst the luckiest of the planets. Hence worship offered on this day is regarded as bringing special benefits to worshippers. Of the many myths woven around its observance, most are connected with Siva and his son Subramanya.

In the past in India, the annual festival of *Thai Pusam* was celebrated on the Pusam Natchththiram day in a significant way. The significance of *Thai Pusam* Valipaadu and its connection with Thiruvudai – Maruthur Siva temple also derives from the pathikams of both Sain Thirugnanasambanthar and Sain Thirunavaukkarasar. It appears that the origin of *Thai Pusam* worship has some connection with the occurrence of God Siva. The worship of God Maruga is also important on *Thai Pusam* day. (Belle, 2003)

This is a Festival associated with South Indian Hindu rites in which there are many myths of the deity Murugan and a demon Idumban, as well as other stories. The festival is based on the portrayal of Idumban carrying a *kavadi* (a large frame made of wood, aluminium or iron, decorated with flowers, coloured paper, tinsels, fresh flowers and fruits and carried by

designated *kavadi* bearers), signifying a burden. The worship of Subramanya, or Murugun as he is commonly called, is most popular in South India. In Malaysia, it is mainly known as the birthday of the Lord Murugun or Lord Subramanya who is looked upon as a war god and as a universal dispenser of favours to all who worship him. He is also the family deity of the Chettiar community.

4.3.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Thaipusam preparations begin some four weeks before the actual celebration with the construction of *kavadis* and cleaning/decorating of chariots. Temples are also cleaned and decorated and spiritual preparation in terms of fasting, prayers and meditation is made (see Plate 4.3.1).



Plate 4.3.1 Preparations in the temple before Thaipusam

Many believers begin their own preparation of flowers and food for the celebration as well as setting their own hearts and minds into a state of purity.

4.3.2.1 Festival Food and Offerings

Weeks before the Festival, food trays are prepared with beautiful decorations and craftsmanship. Milk pots are first cleaned and the empty pots placed over the smoke to fumigate the interior some weeks before the Festival Day. These are then decorated before being blessed and filled with milk on the day of celebration.

Banana leaf plates filled with offerings of incense, fruits, betel leaves, coconuts, etc. are spread on the ground before the procession. Incense, usually placed on live charcoal in a firepot, fills the whole space with a dense cloud of fragrant smoke. Milk is then poured into each pot at the appropriate time and sealed with a leaf over the rim. Objects of worship may include pictures of the Gods, statues, stones, pots, fire, etc. The objects must be pristine and protected from pollution.

The second type of offering is food which varies, but a transaction of food between deity and worshippers is a universal Hindu ceremonial act. Food is offered to the deities, and then taken back from the altar to be distributed to worshippers. Such food includes all kinds of fruits, honey, milk, oil, bread, vegetables and coconut.

Before the celebration actually begins, worshippers prepare their offerings (see Plate 4.3.2) Then the Procession begins and is followed by the celebration when the culinary skills of the people are put to the test with servings of the best Hindu food such as curries, *dhalls*, *roti*, etc.



Plate 4.3.2 Devotees preparing offerings before the start of the celebration

4.3.2.2 The Celebration Procession

The procession consists of devotees who have fasted for many days who offer thanks and prayers in the hope that their requests will be answered and their sins forgiven. During fasting, they drink only milk for nourishment. The night before the Procession, the statue of Subramanya is decorated with expensive jewels and finery, sometimes with two consorts, Valli and Theivanai on either side and set on a tall chariot usually drawn by bullocks but occasionally people.

Early in the morning before dawn, devotees bathe themselves clean in the river or sacred bath and say prayers. Some of the *kavadi* bearers fall into a trance, and are filled with incredible energy and strength to bear with sufferings. Typically they dance or walk during the procession carrying the heavy *kavadi* without feeling its strain or heat. Along the way,

they are followed by ordinary devotees, supporters and families, accompanied by religious music, songs and playing of drums or cymbals to keep the rhythm going along the road to the temple.



Plate 4.3.3 *Kavadi* bearers undergoing spiritual and mental preparations before the start of the procession

During the procession, which is at the normal pace of a walk, coconuts are broken along the way to prepare and cleanse the path for the *kavadi* bearers. During the procession, one also sees devotees dressed in bright coloured clothes, beautifully adorned women with flowers, pageantry and throbbing excitement to accompany the breaking of coconuts along the way to the holy shrine. There is a cheerful mood and, at the midway point, people who are in a trance demonstrate their power by walking on burning hot charcoal as another form of homage to Lord Subramanya. The chariot which carries the picture or statue of Lord Subramanya is usually very ornately decorated with flowers and lights. The temples

have a carnival like atmosphere as throngs of people and devotees gather or are attracted by the sheer gaiety, pageantry and festival mood of the procession.

4.3.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

This is the most dramatic and emotional display of Hindu religious fervour as Hindus throughout Asia gather to celebrate and thank their God for their blessings. It is also an occasion to do penance for past sins through rituals of self-mortification. The culture of displaying strength through sacrifices (often walking a long journey or climbing hundreds of steps up to the caves) and making offerings are learnt by the young in families as they watch elders in a stunning display of pierced bodies carrying huge metal or steel *kavadis*.

Cultural preparations made weeks before Thaipusam include the aforementioned fasting, doing good, going on strict vegetarian diets, intense meditation and prayer, recollecting all sins and making decisions to do penance and hence live a new life.

Visual and performing arts take the form of jewel-studded statues of Lord Subramaniam, ornately decorated bullock driven chariots and rousing processional music with the beating of drums and singing of verses from the Hindu Vedas. Offering trays to be received by the deity during the procession may include humble offerings of incense, bananas, smashed coconuts and flowers.

4.3.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

The *kavadi* is the most important ceremonial object in this festival apart from the chariot carrying the statue (see Plate 4.3.4). The *kavadi* is, in effect, a miniature shrine. A small pot of milk is sometimes attached to each end of the pole which supports the structure.

The bearers have three small skewers, each representing Murugun's *vel* (the lance, or special weapon) inserted into their flesh; one through the skin of the forehead, one vertically through the tongue and one horizontally through the cheeks (see Plate 4.3.5). There are more elaborate and impressive *kavadis* consisting of huge aluminium frames supported by shoulder pads and a belt at the waist. These support huge aluminium arches extending outwards. Some *kavadi* bearers, however, have hooks implanted in their backs.

Before the *kavadi* bearers begin their journey they assemble at the temple where they have a purification bath followed by a ceremony after which they fall into a trance. They endure high degrees of pain because they believe that they have been given miraculous powers to perform remarkable feats. There is amazingly no pain, no scarring, and no blood when they are pierced, and they prepare for this by undergoing specific rites during the preceding month. The devotees overcome pain as their minds are attuned to spirituality and liberation from worldly desires.



Plate 4.3.4 Colourful *kavadis*



Plate 4.3.5 Man with *kavadi* pierced through cheeks

4.3.3.2 Festival Clothes

Thaipusam is very colourful as *Kavadi* bearers are mostly bare-chested and musicians are usually dressed in colourful Indian suits. Indians love bright strong colours and most women are in bright coloured *sarees* and shiny bangles and jewellery. Men are in traditional Indian wear. However, some modern families only wear normal everyday clothes. Some women wear the pant suit called *Punjabi suits* with matching shawls.

4.3.3.3 Festival Music

The normal Hindu chant of *Vel, Vel* (lance, lance) is a common accompaniment during the procession and is chanted in loud choruses. Musicians carrying long drums may accompany the *kavadi* bearers with drum beats whilst devotees dance and sing. The regular rhythm of the drummers keeps the procession going in line. Whenever the procession

approaches a point of importance, for example, passing a shrine or a temple or when the *kavadi* carriers are in a trance, the music may become more animated. There are chants of prayers as the *kavadi* carriers put on their frames, and as those who walk on coals or special people move into a trance, and along the way, chants are recited and become louder and louder as the procession approaches the shrine or the altar.

4.3.3.4 Festival Dance

Dancers support the procession by keeping it in line and in rhythm. They move in a line and dance rather freely alongside or behind the *kavadi* carriers. Whenever the procession reaches a large crowd, the dancers may stop to walk and dance in one spot for a while, and then the procession moves on after the short dance is completed. The dancers then move in a straight line again, dancing along as they move on with the procession. A group stays just behind the carriage and sometimes, a group of dancers precedes the carriage. Such dancers are usually dressed in very colourful traditional costumes and coordinate their movements, singing and chanting as they follow the processional music.

4.3.3.5 Visual and Decorative Arts

The visual arts include the very elaborate decorations on the shrines, the altars, the chariots, and the food offerings which are intricately, artistically and colourfully presented. The picture of the God Subramanya is placed in a frame and decorated with brightly coloured and fragrant flowers. Flower heads are used to frame the picture of the God, after which on the second day, the remaining flowers are used to decorate the *kavadis*. Bouquets or small vases of flowers are also placed as offerings.

4.3.3.6 The Chariot

An elaborate and colourfully decorated chariot leads the procession. With the framed picture of the God in the centre and placed high up, and surrounded by decorations of brightly coloured lights, the chariot is the most sacred part of the procession.

4.3.3.7 The Offering Trays

The offering trays are small trays beautifully decorated with leaves, flowers or ribbons and contain the food offerings for the Gods and food offerings as sacrifice. There are also offerings of cloth, coconuts, lights, flowers, fruits, etc., all tastefully placed in these offering trays. These are placed on the altars or in the temples to be blessed and received by the priests who take them to be offered to the Gods.

4.3.4 Commonalities between Thaipusam in Sarawak and West Malaysia

Due to the small number of Hindu devotees in Sarawak, there is a smaller availability of celebration objects and festival food or religious items for sale. Families also celebrate it on a smaller scale compared to their counterparts in West Malaysia.

Many temples in Malaysia hold celebrations for Thaipusam – the grandest being in the Batu Caves Temple some eight miles from Kuala Lumpur. Thousands of Hindus in Kuala Lumpur make the annual pilgrimage a very important event. They carry the *kavadis* up the 272 steps of the famous Batu Caves temple where they then offer it at the feet of the deity and request acceptance of their penitence. The Festival is celebrated on a large scale in the states of Selangor, Pulau Pinang, Negeri Sembilan, Johor and Perak whereas, in Kuching, it is celebrated on a smaller scale. In Kuching, the Sri Kaliyaman temple at Ban Hock Road also holds celebrations for the festival but the number of devotees and the public is

relatively small. Temples celebrating this festival usually have an elaborate chariot intricately made and carved from wood, plated with silver, and ornately decorated with statues of gods, goddesses and animals. The chariot is usually adorned with flags and tinsel. This chariot is then drawn in procession, joined by many devotees singing and chanting.

4.4 PESTA KAUL OR KAUL FESTIVAL

4.4.1 Historical Background

The Kaul Festival is a celebration of the cultural heritage of the Melanaus. The Melanaus comprise about six per cent of the population of Sarawak. They live mainly along the coastal strip of Sarawak between Kuala Rejang in the South and Bintulu in the North. They cluster around the banks of the rivers by the towns of Igan, Oya, Kukah, Balingian, Tatu and Kemena. Many Melanaus are also found in the districts of Sarikei, Sibul and Bintulu. Most have now converted from pagan animistic beliefs to become either Christians or Muslims. The word Melanau was given to them by the people of Brunei. Over a hundred years ago, many of the Melanaus lived in the longhouses but now many have moved to the riverside or cities and others also now live in Malay style houses.

When the Melanaus were pagans, they practised pagan beliefs. Kaul was thus a festival for the God of the sea, celebrated every year around March/April to mark the start of the fishing season. Besides initiating the fishing season and assuring the safety of the fishermen, it is also a time for casting out sickness from the villages and imploring the Gods to increase the productivity of the crops.

The Melanaus are mostly fishermen and Kaul is a pagan thanksgiving festival held by various Melanau villages to appease the spirits of the seas. It is traditionally held at river mouths after the rages of the Northwest monsoon are over. With the majority of Melanaus now converted to Muslims or Christians, the Kaul festival has evolved into an ethnic celebration unique to the Melanau culture.

Traditional Melanau families regard this as the biggest event of the year as it signifies their New Year. Hence, all families try to return home to celebrate this season together. Families in home towns take part in preparing food for the offerings, cleaning the Festival location and in decorating the vessels.

4.4.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Weeks before the Kaul Festival, the villages by the sea of Mukah and near the river are decorated with buntings and flags signalling the arrival of the festival which is always celebrated on the left side of the river. This month also marks the beginning of the Melanau calendar called *Pengejin*.

4.4.2.1 Festival Food/Offerings and Rituals

The Headman hits the *canang* (small brass gong) to signal the first warning seven days prior to the Festival. This gives time for people working at sea or in the fields to travel home for preparations. The second gong is sounded three days before Kaul Festival to sound the alarm to villagers that they should stop whatever they are doing immediately and be ready for the ceremony.

Preparation for the rituals includes each family cooking food, making or buying baskets for food offerings called *serahungs* (see Plates 4.4.1 and 4.4.2) and cleaning of the entire festival area. This cleansing symbolizes a simple invitation to the spirits to clear evil lurking around, whilst decoration of the place with visual arts such as colourful banners, decorating the boats and dressing up the vessels with flag buntings, flags, masks, etc. are all artistically done to ensure that other neighbouring villages know of the approaching festival.



Plate 4.4.1 Detail of a *serahung*



Plate 4.4.2 *Serahungs* filled with food offerings

The traditional rituals comprise of prayers, singing and chanting to call upon the spirits of the sea to come for food offerings and to spare the lives of fishermen soon to be going out to sea. It is also a time when healing takes place so anyone who has a sick relative or family will be waiting for this festival to bring their problems to the festival and seek healing. Colourful costumes are also worn, reflecting the loyalty and tradition of the Melanaus.

The music of the chanting begins serenely and is then gradually accompanied by the traditional musicians who continue the rituals with accompaniment, chanting, dancing and healing. In modern times however, the focus of the festival is more on the fiesta of food and games in which the entire community and all other ethnic races participate after the blessing. As most Melanaus have now become Christians, the ceremony is focused upon food and visual preparations, dressing the vessels, the site of the Festival, and the symbolic food baskets carrying food offerings. This is followed by blessings and prayers by priests or *Umams* (Muslim religious men), traditional dances, performances, celebrations, copious quantities of food common to all Festivals, and the official opening of the Festival by a Government Minister or official.

After the opening, the Festival sets into rhythm with young Melanaus showing off their skills on the *tibou* (Melanau display of manhood and bravery by shown by swinging from very high swings made of bamboo frames) and the entire community enjoying various food stalls, sales of handicrafts, game competitions, karaoke singing competitions, beauty contests etc.

Preparatory activities begin before sunrise. Two fishing boats representing all fishermen, ride out to sea - a small one and a larger one, both beautifully and lavishly decorated with trimmings, flags and palm leaves (see Plate 4.4.3).



Plate 4.4.3 Decorated Fishing Boats

The *serabungs* are built around two-metre poles to hold the offerings and to bring them to the spirits of the seas. The offerings are symbolized by sago pearls (an important industry for the Melanau people), sago biscuits, *beraih munieng* (yellow rice), *penyaram* (traditional cake), *pais* (*paeh*), *papit* (*ketupat* of new rice), *ruko kirai* (cigarette of nipah palm) and *belen* (*sirih pinang*/betel nut) placed on the *serabungs*. There is a belief that salted duck eggs must **never** be placed in the *serabungs* or the Gods will cast bad luck on the people.

4.4.2.2 The Celebration Procession

Early in the morning of the Festival day, all families in each village gather to bring offerings and food to the official launching place. The foods which comprise the following are then blessed and placed into the *serabung*.

1. *Bertih* (seeds)
2. *Beraih munieng* (yellow rice)
3. *Nase' kunyit* (yellow rice that is already cooked)

4. *Bubur kacang hijau* (green peas porridge)
5. *Kuih penyaram* (brown sweet traditional cake)

The ritual food offerings are placed in one or two lines on the beach where the ceremony takes place. All members of the family need to be present in order to participate in the blessings of the festival. The Headman of the village takes the bowl of yellow rice and does the *berjampi* or official ritual of the ceremony, calling the spirits of the sea and inviting them to come forward to receive the offerings from everyone. After the *berjampi* ceremony, the Headman sprinkles yellow rice as a blessing and returns to invite the Gods. After the *berjampi*, the area is cleaned. The Headman and others bring the *serabungs*, together with the food offerings of the villagers to the sacred place, usually by the mouth of the river or river front. The celebration then begins. Some of the activities are *mengalai*, *perpencak silat*, *main gasing* and children play the *gawai*, *asin*, *kulit*, *ugo*, *guli* and others.

The superstitious belief is that, after the Kaul ritual is performed, no one is allowed to go into the jungle or go out to sea for three days. If they break the rule, they are fined. As payment for their fines, they have to pay with a golden brown chicken, a piece of gold and one *lembing*. The Melanaus celebrate Pesta Kaul as their New Year Festival instead of Gawai.

4.4.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.4.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

Festival objects include:

1. *Serabung* – Traditional baskets used to contain the food offerings of the villagers which are then carried out in procession to the sea.
2. *The Tibou* - The traditional bamboo swing, is played as soon as the rituals are over.

3. *Festival Souvenirs* – Mini *serahungs*, *tibous* or arts and crafts of the Melanaus.
4. *Fishing nets and boats* – signifying the seaman's needs and accessories

4.4.3.2 Festival Clothes

The Headman, shamans and senior Melanaus dress formally in their best Gawai clothes. Though all are traditional ethnic costumes, those of the Shamans and Headman have more elaborate headdresses and colourful sashes with golden threads, woven by the women folk for special occasions. All the people who are involved in the ritual or carrying festival objects are dressed in their best traditional Melanau costumes.

4.4.3.3 Festival Music and Dance

Typically the Melanau's traditional dances begin immediately following the blessing of food offerings and the beating of the gongs by the Ministers. These traditional dances begin whilst the food is being carried down to the boats. Dances resembling fishermen's dances are also performed. After this people break into song and dance in celebration.

4.4.3.4 Festival Events

The main game following the food offerings and blessings is the *Tibou* or game of showmanship (see Plate 4.4.4). The young Melanau man climbs a high bamboo pole and swings from a great height. His bravery and confidence is shown by how high he dares to swing the *tibou* (see Plate 4.4.5). There are screams and shouts of excitement from the women folk and the rest of the villagers as he swings way up high and is followed by applause and shouts of encouragement.



Plate 4.4.4 A typical *tibou*

(Source: <http://onemukah.blogspot.com/2009/06/kaul-festival.html> - Accessed 17 November 2009)



Plate 4.4.5 Young men participating in a game of *tibou*

(Source: <http://onemukah.blogspot.com/2009/06/kaul-festival.html> - Accessed 17 November 2009)

Whilst the *tibou* is happening, the main vessel which will lead the row of ships in the procession will be elaborately dressed with buntings, flags, lights and decorative materials. The rest of the boats will follow suit.

4.5 DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL (*DUAN WU JIE*)

4.5.1 Historical Background

Many years ago in China, the Dragon Boat festival was first celebrated by tribes to prevent disasters and misfortune but these days, it is mostly known as a commemorative day for the poet Qu Yuan. Qu Yuan was a great minister and as a result of his great disappointment in his country, he committed suicide and jumped into the river. When the fishermen heard they were extremely sad because they admired his sincerity and patriotism and so they started to search for him with loud drumbeats and hitting of the gongs. They threw food wrapped in leaves into the river to divert the fishes from eating his body. This original festival gave way to the Dragon Boat Festival which brought the custom of making rice dumplings.

The Dragon Boat Festival or *Duan Wu Jie* falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. Locally it is known as the *Bak Chang* Festival (in Hokkien, rice dumplings) or *Fifth Moon Festival*. During this time, the majority of Chinese make and exchange rice dumplings wrapped in *pandan* or lotus leaves and steamed over slow charcoal fires or boiled for many hours. Occasionally, some states organize Rice Dumpling making competitions.

Beautifully coloured dragon boats with teams of twenty men compete in a dragon boat race which has now become an international event in Penang (see Plate 2.4.2) whilst in Sarawak, the boat race is called the Regatta. In all other states of Malaysia, the Festival is celebrated by the Chinese, although there are now dumplings with halal chicken which Muslims may consume. It is a grander event in East Malaysia, mainly because people have rather more time to return home to cook or to prepare a dinner. People in the cities of West Malaysia

are busier and there is so much traffic that many opt to go to restaurants for dinner instead of cooking their favourite dishes, unless the wives are not working. Celebration has thus been simplified and many busy families no longer celebrate this festival except for the eating of the dumplings.

4.5.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Chinese prepare for the Dragon Boat Festival weeks prior by buying ingredients for making dumplings. Competitions are usually held for the very adept or skilled dumpling makers in major cities.

Longboats for the Regatta or International Boat Races are decorated and participants who have been sent to represent their companies at the competitions carry out intense practice sessions.

About a week before the festival, it is the practice for families and friends to exchange dumplings. Those who do not make them, buy them to reciprocate those given to them by others. On the day of the Festival, Chinese parents usually hold a special and elaborate dinner and children are invited to bring their families to the grandparents' home for dinner. In the evening, after dinner, families chat, watch TV and drink Chinese tea.

4.5.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

In the 21st Century, the Dragon Boat festival is more a family affair of dinner and exchange of rice dumplings, so it is the culinary skills of making various types of *bak chang* or dumplings that makes all the difference. In places like Penang, with the establishment of

the International Festival of the Dragon Boat race, cultural dimensions include colourful costumes for the competitions, artistically designed dragon boats, and special food and souvenirs for people to take home.

4.5.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

This is an important cultural ritual for the Chinese to remember their elders by giving them rice dumplings, usually given in even numbers and reciprocated. Most families congregate in the evening, meaning most people leave work early that day and Chinese offices close early to allow for family meals and celebration. In the evening, a procession, usually comprising floats sponsored by various corporate companies and associations, as well as involving students and representatives of societies carrying lanterns, takes place.

4.5.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

Only the Dragon Boats in Penang still simulate the dragon head and a long tail at the boat's end, scales at the sides, usually in green and red to resemble a long dragon, brightly decorated for the international dragon boat race. These are set into motion by colourful paddles carried by the participants all rowing together. If there is a procession, then beautiful floats also become ceremonial objects (see Plate 4.5.1).



Plate 4.5.1 Dragon Boats from the Penang International Dragon Boat Race
(Photo Credits : Lim Soo Peng)

4.5.3.3 Festival Food

The dumplings given to elders are made from glutinous rice wrapped around onions, salted eggs, mushrooms and meat. There are two main kinds – salty or Chinese and sweet or Nyonya. In the Chinese type, the meat is cooked with chestnuts, dried prawns, five spice powder, soy sauce, and mushrooms and stuffed in a triangular shaped leaf surrounded by glutinous rice which is then steamed for four hours (see Plates 4.5.2 for shape and 4.5.3 for recipe). Sometimes a salted egg yolk is added to the meat. The Nyonya version has meat seasoned with spices such as coriander which is therefore slightly sweet.



Plate 4.5.2 Glutinous rice dumplings

(Source: <http://thestar.com.my/metro/story.asp?file=/2009/5/28/central/3979757&sec=central>
– Accessed 18 November 2009)

Black and White Glutinous Rice Dumpling (Recipe by Amy Beh)

Ingredients:

- 300g black glutinous rice
- 650g glutinous rice
- 100g split green peas
- Dried bamboo leaves, boiled, washed and soaked
- Hemp strings
- *Pandan* leaves, washed and cut into 3–4cm long
- 200g candied winter melon, diced.
- 100g dried Chinese mushrooms, diced.
- 75g lotus seeds, soaked for 1 hour
- 3–4 tbsp oil

Filling:

- 1 tbsp minced shallots
- 1 tbsp minced garlic
- 40g dried prawns, pounded
- 1.5cm *cekur* roots, cleaned, smashed and pounded
- 1 tbsp preserved bean paste (*tan cheong*)
- 2 ½ tsp coriander powder, mixed with a little water into a paste

Seasoning:

- 1 tsp light soy sauce
- 2–3 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tsp pepper

Method:

To prepare rice, soak both types of rice and split green peas separately overnight with an addition of 1 tsp salt to each. Drain and add 2 tbsp oil and 1 tbsp sugar to each type of glutinous rice and set aside.

To prepare filling, heat oil in a wok and stir-fry shallots, garlic and dried prawns until golden brown and fragrant. Add coriander powder paste, *cekur* and bean paste and fry until fragrant. Add mushrooms, winter melon and lotus seeds and mix in seasoning to taste and combine.

To wrap dumpling, take two cleaned bamboo leaves and fold at the centre to form a cone. Line cone with 1 ½–2 tbsp glutinous rice mixture. Add in 1 tsp split green peas and 1 tbsp filling mixture. Cover with glutinous rice mixture again and top up with a *pandan* leaf. Using fingers, press down the rice to make it compact.

Fold bamboo leaves over to form a pyramid shape and tie tightly with a length of hemp string. Bring dumplings to boil for 3–4 hours or pressure cook for 50–60 minutes until cooked through. Remove and hang up to dry.

Plate 4.5.3 Recipe for glutinous rice dumplings

(Credits: Amy Beh; Source: <http://kuali.com/recipes/viewrecipe.asp?r=1384> – Accessed 19 November 2009)

4.5.3.4 Festival Dishes

Typical Chinese dishes comprising well prepared soup with good stock, preferably double boiled soup that has been cooked on a slow charcoal fire for hours, stir fried vegetables, pork, chicken, braised duck, prawns, fish and occasionally steamboat are served with rice (see Plate 4.5.4).



Plate 4.5.4 Examples of Festive Dishes

4.5.3.5 Festival Clothes

Only the boat racers are colourfully dressed in their team colours, usually a T-shirt or vest with coloured long pants or shorts and matching caps.

4.5.3.6 Boat Racers' Performance

The performance of these racers involves displays of months of synchronized practice to develop rhythm, coordination and speed (see Plate 4.5.5).



Plate 4.5.5 Penang International Dragon Boat Racers

(Source: <http://www.visitpenang.gov.my/> - Accessed 19 November 2009)

4.5.3.7 Visual and Decorative Arts

The boats and the race venue are decorated with colourful artistic works of arts with dragon heads, tails, and cleverly painted scales on the sides of the boats. Buntings and colourful flags are also often attached. Such decorations are in evidence weeks before the Festival for people to anticipate the coming event.

4.6 Easter

4.6.1 Historical Background

Easter is one of the most important festivals celebrated by Christians as it signifies the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a critical marker in the ecclesiastical year commemorating the most significant event of the Christian calendar. After Christ's death over 2000 years ago, every Sunday was a commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ, which had occurred on a Sunday. Easter has no fixed date like Christmas, but usually falls between the end of March and the end of April. Easter has always been intimately connected with the solemn rite of baptism, and today, many churches hold grand baptisms of new Christians on the feast of Easter. Easter celebrations also reflect on peace and forgiveness as it is a time for reflection on suffering, injustice and hardship. During Good Friday services, Christians meditate on Jesus's suffering and on his words spoken from the cross.

Many Christians believe that the Easter festival is related to the Hebrew tradition, the Jewish Passover. This is celebrated during the first month of the Hebrew lunar year which commemorates Israel's deliverance from 300 years of bondage in Egypt. The early Christians regarded Easter as a new Passover observed in memory of the advent of the Messiah, as told by the prophets. The feast of Easter was well established by the second century. After the fourth century however, Good Friday was observed as a separate occasion.

The Easter period begins with Ash Wednesday which is the first day of the season called Lent which ends with Easter Sunday. The week following Easter Sunday is known as

Easter week or Octave of Easter. Traditionally Easter lasted 40 days from Easter day till Ascension Day but now it lasts for 50 days until Pentecost.

4.6.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Lent is a time of preparation, confession, repentance and attempts for growth in holiness and purity. It is a time when one tries to be a better person by controlling tempers, anger, lusts, extravagance etc. and to lead a better life of purity, holiness and integrity. It is a time when all Christians try to improve themselves from the state they are in and exert discipline to do away with bad habits, weaknesses such as bad tempers and evil judgment of others. As such, for the whole forty days, Christians practice simplicity, tolerance, patience, control and restraint.

The week before Easter, known as Holy Week, is a special time in the Christian tradition. It begins with Palm Sunday when Christians recall Jesus's victorious entry into Jerusalem and palms are distributed for blessing on that Sunday. Many churches hold processions with Christians carrying palms and singing hymns of victory. Confessions are heard throughout the month. Masses are said on the night of the Maundy Thursdays to recall the last supper Jesus had with his apostles before his agony in the garden. Good Friday is a memorial service of his death on the cross called *The Crucifixion*. Saturday is called Holy Saturday and Christians gather to wait for the midnight celebration of Easter with an Easter vigil. These three days are called the *Easter Triduum* (Latin for three days). Eastertide or *Paschaltide* begins on Easter Sunday till Pentecost. The Easter festival varies amongst Christians, with Catholics continuing the traditional sorrowing rituals.

4.6.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.6.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

(a) The Easter Egg

Many countries celebrate Easter with sweets and baked goodies. Eggs are a traditional symbol of new life and, according to Purton's book **Festivals and Celebrations**, eggs were dyed in ancient times by the Egyptians and Persians, who then exchanged them with friends. Over time, particularly with Ukrainians and other Eastern Europeans, these eggs were known for their beautiful and intricate designs. The *bejeweled Easter Egg* was created by Peter Carl Faberge in the late 1880s in St. Petersburg. It was called the *Lapis lazuli* egg and was in gold, enamel, pearl, diamond or ruby which featured a hinged, enameled yolk that concealed a royal crown which opened to reveal a ruby egg. (Airey 2000, Accessed 3 Jan 2010, <http://home.howstuffworks.com/holidays/easter4.htm>) Today in Sarawak, most children in schools create beautifully decorated or painted hardboiled eggs as part of their art project work. Many families or societies organizing Easter programs for children give chocolate Easter eggs beautifully wrapped in golden or colourful wrappings. Others hide them on Easter Saturday nights to be found on Easter Sunday mornings. (see Plate 4.6.1)



Plate 4.6.1 Decorated Easter eggs.
(Source: <http://www.womansday.com> - Accessed 3 Jan 2010)

(b) Rabbits or Easter Bunnies

The Easter bunny has its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore. The Hare and the Rabbit were regarded as the most fertile animals and served as symbols of new life during the Spring season. The ancient Egyptians however, related hares to the moon. The hare and eggs have also been related to the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre. Though some claim that it is the hare and not the rabbit that should be treated as the true symbol of Easter, children only associate the rabbit with the Easter Bunny. It is recorded that the bunny as an Easter symbol had its origins in Germany as it was first mentioned in German writings in the 1500s. The first edible Easter bunnies were made in Germany during the early 1800s and these early Easter bunnies were made of pastry and sugar. The Easter bunny was then introduced to American folklore by the German settlers who arrived in the Pennsylvania Dutch country during the 1700s. (Holidays on the Net, Accessed 4 Jan 2010, <http://www.holidays.net/easter/bunny1.htm>)

In Kuching, the bunny has become a character for children during Easter. Children are told that on Easter Sunday morning, the Easter bunny delivers chocolate Easter Eggs to their homes just as children are told about Santa Claus at Christmas. It is a common sight in Kuching to see chocolate bunnies being purchased as gifts for children. (see Plate 4.6.2)



Plate 4.6.2 Chocolate Easter Bunnies
(Source: <http://www.countryliving.com/> - Accessed 3 Jan 2010)

(c) Hot Cross Buns

According to the book **Dates and Meanings of Religious and other Festivals**, hot cross buns used to be kept especially for Good Friday with the symbolism of the cross, although it is thought that they originated in pagan times with the bun representing the moon and its four quarters. It was believed that in pre Christian times, pagans offered the God Zeus a cake baked in the form of a bull with a cross on it to represent its horns. It was believed that these buns had miraculous healing powers when made and eaten every Good Friday. People even hung hot cross buns in their kitchen to protect their households from evil.

(d) The Cross

The Cross is the real symbol of Easter as it signifies every memory of Jesus' suffering and trial. It is a reminder to every Christian to live a life of triumph and joy even in the midst of difficulties and to follow in the footsteps and life of Jesus Christ in their path to holiness and living a life of love.

4.6.3.2 Festival Music and Dance

Easter music focuses on special praise and thanksgiving. Songs about the cross, freedom and salvation, the joy of Christ's death and resurrection, worship, gratitude and adoration are significant in more traditional churches. Classically arranged songs for choirs in two to four parts accompanied by the organ, piano or strings are typically very grand. Many churches also perform cantatas with the same themes as well as the joy of Easter by way of preparation. In more contemporary worship environments, solo singing accompanied by bands leading congregations in joyous songs about Easter, some followed by dances choreographed to enliven, enhance or revive the spirits with visually graceful dancers playing tambourines.

4.7 WESAK DAY

4.7.1 Historical Background

Wesak or **Visakha**, takes its name from the month in which Sidharta Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism, was reportedly born. It is celebrated globally as the Taurus full moon to commemorate the attainment of the Buddha's *Enlightenment*, which is the central event in Buddhism, making *Wesak*, the celebration of that *Enlightenment*, the most important festival of the Buddhist year.

For Buddhists, it is a time of spiritual retreat and contact, a time to still the mind and to maintain inner peace. It is believed that with the lighted way, the entire zodiac can be approached and understood from an angle of light.

The significance of *Wesak* is that the forces of enlightenment are available at Taurus full moon, marking the high water mark of spiritual blessings for the world and opening a channel of communication between humanity and the deity.

4.7.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Weeks before the Festival, Buddhists prepare and buy what they will need for the Festival rituals. Joss sticks, paper money for burning, lotus candles, oil, doves and gifts for the orphans or the aged are all purchased in advance. Some Buddhists also prepare themselves with acts of charity and even fasting.

4.7.2.1 The Festival Day

On the day itself, Buddhists wake up early and after a bath and prayers, they begin a day of purity. This begins with keeping a vegetarian diet and vegetables of all kinds are creatively cooked. Many temples and societies hold gatherings, offering free vegetarian meals to all who gather there. Some of these meals are sponsored by successful Buddhists who wish to donate to charity or sponsor such meals for a happy occasion. Most of the vegetables are skilfully cooked in Chinese style - stir fried, braised, steamed, deep fried, made into soups etc. and eaten with rice. Special desserts of beautifully coloured lotuses, sweetened flowers etc. are also served or for sale.

Lunch is always held on a large scale in the temples as some rich sponsor would get restaurants to cook vegetarian food for the less fortunate – the poor, the elderly and the homeless - to come and dine.

The people then proceed to light their lamps, or release pigeons or burn joss sticks. In the evening, a grand procession consisting of devotees carrying joss sticks or flowers, lighted candles in the shape of lotus flowers, and decorated floats as well as musicians all follow the parade around the town.

4.7.2.2 The Procession

The procession includes the big and decorated statue of Buddha either carried by devotees or placed on a beautifully decorated lorry float followed by rows of lighted and decorated floats, devotees carrying lanterns, lights, joss sticks etc. all ornately dressed in traditional costumes, religious costumes, society uniforms, or as ethnic dancers. Many companies sponsor floats comprising of pretty, traditionally dressed maidens, huge Buddhist

decorations and coloured lights proceed in a slow procession around the entire city. The streets will be closed to traffic and thousands line the streets to watch.

4.7.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

As Wesak is a religious Festival, cultural dimensions focus on the religious celebrations beginning with the preparation several days before the Festival. The celebrations at the temple begin at dawn with prayers and acts of penance and thanksgiving for the day, culminating in the cultural procession at night.

4.7.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

Several days before Wesak, some Buddhist families begin rituals such as fasting or preparing themselves spiritually for the big day with prayers and meditation. With the cleansing of their souls, penance and acts of thanksgiving and forgiveness, it is hoped that on Wesak Day, they will receive special blessings and can communicate directly with Buddha for their wishes and pleas. Some staunch Buddhists practice deep meditation, abstaining from beef or meats and oily food. Others help in the Buddhist societies to prepare the flowers, floats, altars, temples or places of celebrations.

On the day itself, at dawn, the family devotees bathe themselves and go to the temple to pray, to attend talks or spend time for retreat and meditation. They then help either to serve food to the less fortunate or hold big vegetarian meals for all.

4.7.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

Joss sticks, incense, paper money, offerings, pigeons or doves (symbols of freedom released to get rid of bad luck, suffering and poverty.), the lotus flower and the prayer beads are all ceremonial objects. Most of the devotees light joss sticks and burn incense either in the temples or at home as a sign of respect and prayer to their God (see Plate 4.7.1). The fragrance of the joss sticks gives them a feeling of purity to be attained, cleanses them from the evils of this world and sets their minds and wills to do good.



Plate 4.7.1 Decorated ceremonial altars

4.7.3.3 Festival Clothes

The Festival will see monks in saffron coloured clothes chanting in the temples or giving lectures to devotees about the life and practices of Buddha. There may also be readings about the lives of those disciples who have attained Enlightenment. These are self-autobiographies written by the disciples themselves and shared with all devotees.

The colourful part is when the Procession begins in the evening. This sees the devotees in their societies' uniforms, colourfully decorated lorries and floats, traditional clothes mostly of the Chinese Heritage, traditional dancers dressed in costumes of China, lion dancers, stilt walkers etc. all colourfully dressed in their Festival clothes (see Plate 4.7.2). Nowadays, we see much more of the multicultural Malaysia's clothes represented by various ethnic societies to show a harmonious and happy nation.



Plate 4.7.2 Devotees in colourful costumes

4.7.3.4 Festival Music

Festival music includes the traditional music of the Sutra chanting that follows the prayers during the procession. The procession in the evening is a yearly affair that the Buddhist society hosts. During the procession, there is either traditional Chinese music, or piped pop music. Devotees carrying joss sticks of lotus flowers and lights, follow behind, chanting or singing songs of praise and thanksgiving.

4.7.3.5 Festival Dance

This includes the Chinese folk dancers on top of the lorries that are beautifully and colourfully dressed in traditional costumes. They dance from time to time and at times sit and wave to the crowds who have gathered. Participating in the procession would be also the lion dancers with the lion drum beats and stilt walk dancers who walk on stilts, swaying to the accompanying music whilst moving in the procession (see Plate 4.7.3).



Plate 4.7.3 Lion dancers participating in the ceremonial procession

4.7.3.6 Visual and Decorative Arts

The temples are washed and beautifully decorated with flags, buntings, colourful trimmings, lanterns and flowers. The Procession consists of fancifully decorated and lighted floats on moving lorries, sponsored by societies and companies and adorned in lavish displays of flowers, lights, buntings, and decorations (see Plate 4.7.4). The statue of the Buddha will be placed on one of these main trucks and ornately decorated with flickering lights and flowers.



Plate 4.7.4 Fancifully decorated lighted floats on moving lorries

4.8 LUN BAWANG – THE IRAU ACO

4.8.1 Historical Background

The Lun Bawang are people belonging to the Orang Ulu ethnic group who have a small population of around 600,000 in the state of Sarawak, settled predominantly around Limbang and Lawas which is the centre of the Lun Bawang Festival Day (**Irau Aco Lun Bawang**). This is a time when all Lun Bawangs from Sabah, Brunei and Kalimantan gather to join in the celebration of their ethnic group and to nurture and preserve their culture.

The Lun Bawang Irau Aco, celebrated across three days, began in 2003 after the Chairman of the Lun Bawang Association decided that it was time to unify the small numbers of ethnic groups in joint celebrations. The theme of the 2009 celebrations was *Rurum Do ngecing Peruan* which literally means *unity brings blessings*.

Hence the entire festival is built around cultural pride in the Bamboo Band, Lun Bawang chants, music, dance and song, their artistry in beadwork, basketry and ceramics, and exposing the younger generations to these practices before they die out. The three-day festival gathers Lun Bawangs both young and old to display their culinary, performance and visual arts, allowing other people from multicultural Malaysia to participate and support their handwork industry. This festival is a happy and much anticipated time for Lun Bawangs in Sarawak, who are proud of their rich cultural heritage and wish to share it with the entire community.

Like many of the Festivals celebrated in Sarawak, other ethnic groups come to join in the celebrations of the Irau Aco. Visitors to Sarawak also come to witness the colourful

costumes, traditional music and dances. The Festival is usually opened by a Minister who presents certificates or simply declares the ceremony open. This declaration is followed by speeches, pomp and fanfare with performances by bands and dancers. Balloons are released, ribbons are cut and the ceremony begins.

4.8.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

A longhouse with seven units to symbolize the seven areas of Lun Bawang presence in Sarawak is built to showcase community skills. Each longhouse, assigned a community leader or *Penghulu*, exhibits its own special skills e.g., those from Ba 'Kalalan exhibit their salt and *parang* (sword) making skills; the Long Semadoh group demonstrate bamboo musical instrument making skills, the Lawas – Damit group show their bead making, the Tagal – Merapok group model their sculpture and sprung platform (for entertainment and amusement), the Trusan group showcase their costume making, the Long Luping exhibit their hunting tools and gear and the Limbang group will show their basketry and weaving skills.

The festival atmosphere is enhanced by games, competitions and food fairs. The first day is dedicated to sports activities such as football matches, tele-matches and competitions. The second day is completely dedicated to cultural and traditional performances: bamboo band concerts, traditional Lun Bawang Long Dance, *Tutlu* (poetry recitation), bamboo pipe shooting competition and oral tradition chanting followed by a concert in the evening.

The celebration culminates in beauty competitions to discover the new Lun Bawang Queen for the year. After that, there is drinking, partying, singing, dancing and feasting. Tele-

matches, football matches and other sports continue whilst others move around the stalls buying food and drinks.

4.8.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.8.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

Families prepare for this festival weeks and months in advance, setting a date by which handicrafts must be completed for sale; families return home to celebrate, performances and visual arts are ready for display. The younger generations rehearse for bamboo band or traditional dance performances, following the footsteps of their forefathers with the chanting of their *arin* (Lun Bawang chants of love). Beads, baskets and ceramics are displayed for visitors to the Festival.

4.8.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

Festival objects displayed during the festival are the *parang* (sword), bamboo instruments and products, beads, sculptures, costumes, as well as arts and crafts such as baskets and weaving. (see Plate 4.8.1)



Plate 4.8.1 Lun Bawang Ceramic Beads.

(Source: <http://www.sarawakhandicraft.com/> - Accessed 3 January 2010)

4.8.3.3 Festival Food

Traditional Lun Bawang food include *nubak rinagas* or rice cooked with lard and made into round balls, *kelupis* or glutinous rice cooked in salt and wrapped in leaves(*daun itip*) and steamed, *tinapeh* or ground tapioca made into cakes, as well as non-traditional food such as burgers, fried rice, coloured drinks, ice creams, a wide variety of cakes, barbecued chicken wings and meats, and all kinds of Malaysian food like *satay* and *rojak* are also available, sold at stalls in the busy festival atmosphere.

4.8.3.4 Festival Clothes

The Irau Aco is a colourful event and during the festival days, the Lun Bawang people proudly dress in traditional clothes for bamboo band performances, traditional dances, festival activities and the beauty contests. Lun Bawang men usually wear shirts made from tree bark and trimmed in red, with their red headgear and loin cloth. Ladies dress either in sleeveless blouses, ornately designed with beads and patterns worn with a belt over black sarongs with beads round their necks, or in black long sleeves and sarongs worn with a small *terendak* hat as well as colourful beaded belts (see Plate 4.8.2).



Plate 4.8.2 Lun Bawang men and women in traditional costumes.
(Photo credits: Johan Suhaimi)

4.8.3.5 Festival Music

The Bamboo Band comprises several types of bamboo instruments blown in unison and in harmony. The small flute or *suling* plays the melody whilst the other bamboo instruments like the *bas*, play the bass. Others play the accompaniment. Hence many of the Malaysian and Orang Ulu folk tunes (e.g., *Busak Pakni* Little Flower song) are played and arranged for melody, accompaniment and bass. Due to the heat, some of the instruments go out of tune, but people always know how to listen for adjustments! (See Plate 4.8.3 and Plate 4.8.4)



Plate 4.8.3 A Lun Bawang bamboo band performance



Plate 4.8.4 Lun Bawang men playing the *bas*

4.9 KUCHING FESTIVAL

4.9.1 Historical Background

The Kuching Festival began on the first of August, 1990 when Kuching was declared a city. Initially it was a one-day event with parades, concerts, food fairs and events to mark Kuching's achievement of city status. However, since that year, August has been *Kuching Festival* month beginning with City Day Parade on August 1st to launch the Festival followed by the Food and Fun Fair at the former Jubilee Hall and grounds, comprising Kuching's top hawker stalls, and a month long celebration of concerts, competitions, events for arts, sports, and mega sales in the stores. Plate 4.9.1 shows the official logo and the costumed *kucing* (cat) participating in festivities.



Plate 4.9.1 Kuching Festival logo and mascot

4.9.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

The city of Kuching comes alive with celebration and fiesta begins with the Opening Ceremonies and continues with a grand parade comprised of Kuching's youths and college

students, school bands, organizations, corporate company floats, all adorned and brightly coloured with flickering lights, bright tinsels and banners. To launch the parade and celebrations, there is a grand fireworks display and the entire city comes alive as families stroll along the Kuching waterfront in a celebratory mood.

All shops and shopping malls take advantage of the month long Festival and offer great sales discounts and attractions. During this month, there are various activities such as performances by Chinese orchestras, jazz bands, band competitions, culinary arts competitions and writing competitions appealing to an entire demographic spectrum including families, couples, the young and the old. (see Plate 4.9.2).



Plate 4.9.2 Examples of Kuching Festival events

4.9.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.9.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

Families capitalize on the festival atmosphere and take their aged parents and siblings, children and grandchildren out to enjoy food fairs, parades and cultural shows. It is very much a time of family togetherness cultivated in this celebration to foster harmony.

4.9.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

Festival objects comprise predominantly of banners for promotional events such as competitions, concerts, sales, food fairs, and all kinds of events for the month. There are also ethnic souvenirs, especially the *cat* which is the mascot of Kuching (see Plate 4.9.3). Kuching's mascot is dressed up with his celebratory bow tie as with other various traditional costumes during the year to suit various Festivals. The city's cat statues are all appropriately dressed with surrounding areas lit and decorated. The city is filled with handicrafts and souvenirs of the cat as the word *Kuching* is the Malay word for *cat*.



Plate 4.9.3 Kuching Cat Statue decorated for the Kuching Festival

4.9.3.3 Festival Food

The annual festival ground located at Jalan Padungan, is huge and accommodates hundreds of food stalls featuring Chinese, Malay, Dayak, Indian and Western cuisine. This is one of Kuching's premier food fairs where top food stalls gather nightly to serve city audiences and tourists alike. These include Kuching noodle stalls of *kolo mee*, fried *kuah teow*, Muslim and Indian stalls of *roti canai*, *nasi lemak*, *tandoori chicken* and *nasi briyani*, Western stalls of chicken wings, fish and chips, burgers, pastas as well as representation from the "Best of Kuching Highlights" such as Sarawak *Laksa* (vermicelli with prawns and chicken strips in spicy coconut gravy).

It is an invigorating experience to observe the high spirits and enthusiasm with which food vendors and cooks demonstrate their skills in cooking and making mouth-watering delights, whetting appetites and intriguing foreigners. The spectrum of Malaysian cuisine is served as visitors and residents sit around open air dining areas facing a man-made lake amidst a festival atmosphere of buntings, flags, decorations, colours and contemporary music.

4.9.3.4 Festival Clothes

During the parade, participants dress to feature the multiculturalism of Malaysia. Scouts in uniform, cultural performers, singers in national costumes, art college staff and students dressed in cat costumes and colourful floats sponsored by the corporate companies participate in a parade of tantalizing colours, costumes, music, song and dance.

Concert performers wear ethnic costumes for performances which attract artistes from all over the world

4.9.3.5 Festival Music

Music includes performances by Chinese orchestras, the State orchestra, the State choir, school choirs, school bands, as well as singing competitions, parade music, shows in the amphitheatres, the concert halls and the waterfront. Associations usually showcase significant traditional heritage dances and music performances. Concerts also feature visiting artistes with other national cultures (for example acrobatic and Chinese music troops from Singapore and China) as well as performing bands from other parts of Malaysia.

4.9.3.6 Visual and Decorative Arts

Kuching Festival decorations are bright and colourful. Fairy lights, banners, posters, decorated cats, announcements of upcoming events such as concerts etc. are used to attract crowds.

4.9.3.7 Festival Events

Art competitions, handicraft bazaars, drawing competitions for children, art exhibitions by Sarawak's artists, fine arts displays etc. are all on offer during this month.

4.10 GAWAI HARVEST FESTIVAL

4.10.1 Historical Background

The word *Gawai* meaning *celebration* was used to encompass days of focal activities of importance to longhouse inhabitants. Hence, whenever there was a need for a certain *Gawai*, elected persons of importance in a longhouse, usually the head of some of the main families, would gather to discuss how best to manage the event.

In the past there were several types of *Gawai* for each ethnic group. For example, the Ibans would celebrate *Gawai Hantu* or Festival of the Ghosts, whilst the Bidayuhs of Singgai would celebrate the *Gawai Adat Katang* Festival to placate the spirits of the heads taken in battle or traditional headhunting. The Bidayuhs celebrated various rituals called *Gawai* to bless the people with bountiful harvest. Gawai Dayak is the day dedicated to all Dayaks in the state of Sarawak for the celebration of *Gawai*. As farming has been their main activity, and June is the season that intervenes between the collection of a harvest and preparation for the next season, Gawai Dayak is the festival for thanksgiving for a good Harvest and the preparation for the next planting season. It is also the beginning of the New Year for Dayaks.

Before most Dayaks became Christians, many were animists and believed that spirits inhabited the longhouses. Many rituals were carried out for various purposes such as weddings, funerals, planning for the building of a new longhouse, healing, births, appeasing the spirits, choosing the right plots for planting, blessing of the fields and appeasing the attacks of pests or evil spirits.

One of the earliest Iban *Gawais* was the *Gawai Benih* or *Festival of the Seed*, given that *benih* means seed of the rice padi. This was initiated as a gesture of appreciation for the good seeds people had. They hoped that, after praying over and blessing the seeds to be planted, good harvests would result. After the fields were ploughed and prepared, a *Gawai Benih* was held by the longhouse chief or *Tuai Rumah* (Festival Chief) with the participation of the entire longhouse.

After a short period, a *Gawai Batu* is held (literally *Festival of the Stone- Batu*). This stone is used for sharpening knives as well as for cutting grass in the fields. The Festival's rituals involved inviting spirits to govern the stones in sharpening the knives and to produce sharp instruments so that the fields might be easily and effortlessly prepared. Called *Jampi* by the Ibans, a chicken was usually slaughtered and sacrificed and the blood was used for most of the events requiring blessings; the feather of the chicken was dipped in its blood and sprinkled over both the seeds and the stone. The *jampi* is still being carried out in modern longhouses, mainly as a symbol of remembrance of former celebrations (see Plate 4.10.1).



Plate 4.10.1 A longhouse *jampi* (Wright 1972: 138)

Even grander festivals were the *Gawai Kenyalang*, commonly called *Gawai Burong* (Festival of the bird *Kenyalang*), the Ibans revering the bird *Kenyalang* as a kind of God. The decision of the *Kenyalang* was sought for directions, for blessings, for approval as well as for appropriate dates for any grand occasion. The ceremony to call for the spirits of the birds took weeks of preparation, and a grand *Gawai Burong* ceremony lasted for days. Following that, the people waited a week before resuming farming activities.

The Ibans were also known as the *Headhunters of Borneo* and were notorious for their very brave and unchallengeable spirits. Boys were trained from very young to be brave warriors and this inculcated a spirit of manhood. They believed early training to be vital lest the spirit be dried with age in what the Ibans call *keringkan semangat*. A *Gawai Gigit Besi*, or *Festival of the Biting Iron Rod*, as it is literally translated, was an occasion during which young

men held iron swords in their mouths after puberty (see Plate 4.10.2). The Ibans believed the young men who had undergone this feat would have no fears about anything. A plate was used to cover their heads while praying was carried out and the plate was waved several times over the young man's head to prevent loss of brave deeds and spirits. A live chicken was then waved over the young man and killed on the spot and the blood used with the feathers to bless the young upcoming warrior (see Plate 4.10.3). During this blessing, soft Iban beats are heard on the *engkerumongs*, *dumbaks* and *ketebongs* being played continuously after which the young man drinks the blessed water and wine or *tuak* (strong rice wine).



Plate 4.10.2 Iban man performing the *Gawai Ngigit Besi*



Plate 4.10.3 Iban elder performing the *Jampi*

In remembrance of this, contemporary Dayaks toast each other during Gawai Dayak or any other grand occasions and wish each other *Gayu-Guru, Gerai-Nyamai*, meaning long life, health and prosperity! After toasting and drinking, the rhythms of the bronze *engkerumongs* begin again and crescendo to a loud point, whilst dancers get up to *ngajat* or dance the Iban warrior dance. All such *Gawais* or longhouse festivals are almost extinct as very few of the older generations are left to perform these rituals. Most people in the longhouses have now been converted to Christianity and no longer hold these beliefs.

4.10.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Table 4.10.1 provides an overview of the timing of the various preparations for Gawai.

Table 4.10.1 Celebrating Gawai in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Remarks
Religious preparation	Blessing of <i>padi</i> Blessing of pounded rice Blessing of food/harvest Blessing of livestock to be killed Preparation of <i>Ranyai</i> Preparation of <i>Tuak</i> Preparation of <i>Lemang</i> <i>Muai anutu rua</i>	One month before Three weeks before Two weeks before Two days before Two to three days before One month before One week before One week before	Each longhouse decides its own timetable by committee decree. To cast out greed, evil or bad luck
Gawai Tuak	Marks opening ceremony	One week before Gawai	Blessing of the <i>tuak</i>
Symbolic Practices	<i>Miring</i> <i>Jampi</i> <i>Biao</i> <i>Masin pengabang</i> <i>Cast out bad luck</i>	Still practised but only symbolic if they are Christians. Traditional rituals carried out if they are still animists. Guests must drink the blessed <i>tuak</i> before they enter the longhouse Dragging of basket from room to room for residents to throw out their unwanted things to symbolize the clearing and casting out of bad luck or evil	Changed when Ibans and Dayaks became Christians Still carried out symbolically every Gawai Still carried out symbolically in most longhouses
Food	Rice, glutinous rice. Traditional cakes: - <i>Kuib Jala</i> - <i>Kuib Majaran</i> - <i>Kuib Pengaman</i> - <i>Kuib sarang semut</i> <i>Lemang</i> Roasted pork Roasted chicken <i>Pansub</i> <i>Tuak</i> <i>Kasam</i> (fermented pork) <i>Upa laleh</i> (fermented fish) <i>Dann Ubi</i> (tapioca leaves)	Rice Traditional and modern cakes <i>Lemang</i> Roasted pork Roasted chicken <i>Pansub</i> Beer <i>Tuak</i> Baked/grilled fish Curry chicken <i>Satay</i> <i>Midin</i> (ferns) <i>Ulam</i> (fresh vegetables with spicy <i>belachan</i> sauce)	Introduction of other ethnic foods from those who work in the cities e.g., <i>satay</i> , curries, Chinese food

Table 4.10.1 Celebrating Gawai in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Preparations compared (cont'd)

Activities			
1. Traditional Dance	Dance round the <i>Ranyai</i> tree	Disco/ free dancing	Very popular with <i>joget</i> , Malaysianized dancing to karaoke music
2. <i>Ranyai</i>	Welcoming dance	For children,	
3. <i>Ngajat</i> competition	Traditional dance/ <i>Ngajat</i>	Now mostly as competitions	
4. Blowpipe competition	A survival art	Now symbolic only as competitions	Contemporary masses with modern pop instruments or with traditional ethnic instruments and languages are both equally popular.
5. Singing competition	Used to be for entertainment in traditional poems and <i>sajak</i>	Now in modern karaoke	
6. Beauty competition	Beauties gather around <i>ranyai</i> tree	Now as competition	
7. Grand Midnight or Festival Mass	Non existent	Villages gather from far and near in a community hall presided by a visiting priest.	

Weeks or even months before the Festival, people in longhouses prepare for the most important celebration element, rice wine. *Tuak*, also called *Ai pangayu* by the Ibans, is a special and indispensable treat for Festivals. When most of the people were still animists, *Tuak* was used to welcome or *invite* Gods of the Festivals as it was felt this would appease and please the Gods and would return blessings. *Tuak* is the alcoholic beverage common to all Dayak races in Sarawak: Ibans, the Bidayus, Orang Ulu, Melanau, Lun Bawang, Bisayas, Kayans and Kenyahs.

Its main ingredients are glutinous rice, yeast and sugar. The rice is first cooked and allowed to cool. The correct amount of yeast is added and the mixture placed in clean containers or earthen jars and kept in cool corners for the minimum fermentation period of a week. It then turns watery and the juice which is then extracted is called *Tuak*, the taste of which can vary from sweet to bitter, sour to sweet sour, or plain. *Tuak* is also very important for the *Miring* (ritual calling of the Gods for blessings) part of the Festival. It is first offered to the Gods and then to visitors gathered by the *ruai* or verandah of the longhouse (see Plate

4.10.4 and 4.10.5). Older generations claim their forefathers learnt the art of making *tuak* from the Gods or heavenly beings called *Orang Panggau Libau*.

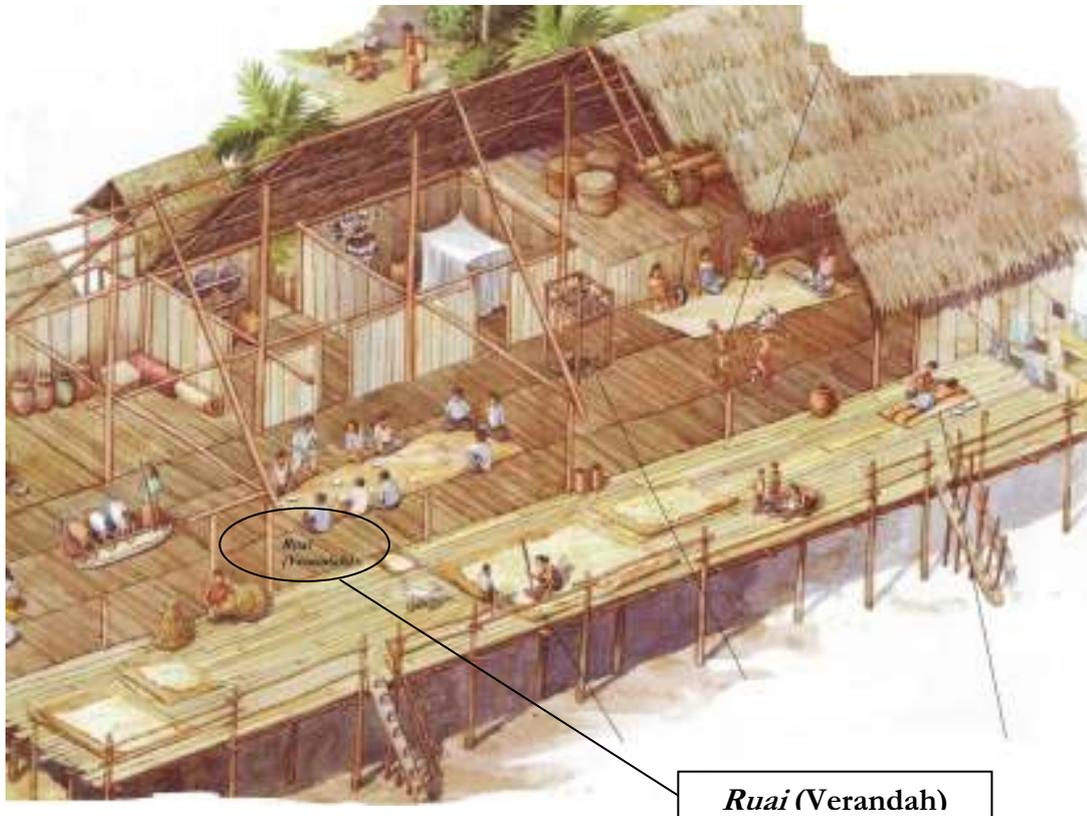


Plate 4.10.4 Cross-section of a longhouse with the *ruai* (verandah) highlighted. (Salleh, 2006:90)

There is a cleaning out of the longhouse and two boys or men would drag a *chapan* or winnowing basket from one end of the longhouse. Families from each room would then throw their unwanted things out into the basket as a symbol of casting away any bad luck from the past year. All these would then be symbolically thrown out with some prayers or chants at the end of the longhouse to the ground. Cleaning of the longhouses would be the task of the women. Many people also visit graves to clean the graveyards as a sign of respect for their ancestors. These days, most Dayaks only clean or visit the graves of their ancestors during Old Souls Day in November.

In the Bidayuh longhouses, the symbolism of *Adat Katang* highlights simulates the rituals they looked forward to in the past. Modern Bidayuhs no longer believe in these rituals but see these symbolic practices as reminders of their past. To begin the month-long celebration, a day is set when the Headman strikes the gong to “open the ceremony” and some drinking of *tuak* and food commences the Gawai officially.



Plate 4.10.5 Iban man pouring *tuak* with a coconut shell. (Wright 1972:83)

When Gawai Dayak draws near, many city dwellers still return to the villages or longhouses to celebrate the occasion with their families. Occasionally, parents are brought to the cities to celebrate *Open House* with the children and their friends. Many of the traditional rituals have gone and are now replaced by Christian prayers and singing. Some Dayaks still carry out the *muai antu rua* at least symbolically to cast away greed, evil or bad luck from their rooms. Dayaks from the longhouses that are animists still practise traditional rituals and paganistic ways. Others however, have adopted modern Christian celebrations but retained some of the traditional major practices symbolic of the past.

As midnight approaches on Gawai eve, dancing becomes more animated and music gets faster and louder until the clock strikes twelve. After this, music softens down, or in some cases continues with all night dancing and singing. Very few longhouses have older folks who can still chant the *bepantuns*, *bedrambans*, *berdungai*, or *besanggai*, chants of various types about the days gone by. These are epic poems about the preparation of the Iban men for war and head hunting and the success stories told of their achievements. In longhouses where there are still some older generations who can chant this, all night long chanting continues for a week in the longhouses after the midnight of Gawai Dayak.

In the urban centers, most Dayaks prepare for Open Houses like their Chinese, Malays, or Indian fellow colleagues and friends. These include getting ready the *lemang* (bamboo cooked rice baked over slow fire) (see Plate 4.10.6), chicken in bamboo, and other Dayak delicacies for serving on June first together with their *tuak*.



Plate 4.10.6 Roasted *Lemang*.

As in any celebration and festival, the host is dressed in traditional costume and houses are prepared to peak condition with the best foods served. Visiting lasts a few days beginning with respect for elders and employers, and ending up with visiting office colleagues and very close relatives. Most churches have grand festival masses on June first for blessings for

the family, and traditional ensembles resound in the church halls. Like many harvest festivals in the universe, there is some resemblance across celebrations. In Sarawak the biggest festival is celebrated both in modern Dayak homes and in the most traditional rural longhouses (see Plates 4.10.7 and 4.10.8).



Plate 4.10.7 Gawai in the traditional longhouse (Wright 1972:31)



Plate 4.10.8 Open House in the contemporary longhouse

4.10.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.10.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

The cock in the traditional cock fighting (see Plate 4.10.9), the pig to be slaughtered for the foretelling of the fate of the people for the coming year (see Plate 4.10.10), the *Ranyai Tree* (sacrificial offering post) (see Plate 4.10.11), the *kayu lemambang* or bamboo stick that is used for all the ritual processions to keep time (see Plate 4.10.12), the traditional music instruments (see Plate 4.10.13), and the shield and sword (see Plate 4.10.14) (only used for *ngajat* dancing these days) are all ceremonial objects of importance for the Festival. In the past, men danced with the sword and shields and showed how they took heads or went for jungle hunting, or killed their enemies and these ceremonial objects remind them of their victory.



Plate 4.10.9 A cock-fight in progress (Wright 1972:49)



Plate 4.10.10 Foretelling the future using a sacrificial pig's liver



Plate 4.10.11 The *Ranyai Tree* (sacrificial offering post)



Plate 4.10.12 A *kayu lemambang*



Plate 4.10.13 Traditional Iban music ensemble



Plate 4.10.14 Iban warrior wielding a sword and shield whilst dancing the *ngajat* (Wright, 1972: 128)

4.10.3.2 Festival Food

Amongst all the cultural dimensions of *Gawai*, *Tuak* is still by far the most important to the Dayaks. Various types of food are special to the Dayaks only during *Gawai*, for example,

traditional fish net cake, *kuib sarang semut* (ant's nest cake), and *kuib penyaram* (crispy round cake), highlights of roasted pig, roasted chicken, *lemang* (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo), chicken in ginger, *midin* (jungle ferns)(see Plate 4.10.15) and *paku* (bigger type of ferns). Other traditional Dayak delicacies include chicken in bamboo, or pork in bamboo called the *Pansub*, fermented pork called *Babi kasam* and fermented fish called *Upa Laleh*.



Plate 4.10.15 *Midin*, or jungle fern.

Food from the rituals is eaten after each one is completed with villagers gathering and consuming them as a meal. After the blessing of the baskets from the river, the food is placed on plates and the feast begins (see Plate 4.10.16).



Plate 4.10.16 Feasting on ritual food after the blessings.

4.10.3.3 Festival Crafts and Clothing

Contemporary longhouses are adorned with carvings, weavings, basketry and mats weeks before Gawai; these are hung in front of the door of the family who made them. Some of the woven conical hats are even hung on the wall at their entrance (see Plate 4.10.17). Families are proud of their handiwork and such displays at Gawai occasion praise and admiration for the makers.



Plate 4.10.17 Woven conical hats hung as decoration on wall of longhouse

Dayak women also weave *pua* design cloth to be made into boleros to be worn over long-sleeved shirts, T-shirts, or blouses during Festival times (see Plates 4.10.18 and 4.10.19).



Plate 4.10.18 Examples of *Pua* design

Those doing the *Ngajat* (Iban traditional dance) wear traditional cultural dress and headdress. For the Ibans, the colour of their costumes are black trimmed with red, and

includes panels of silver, black etc. and the skirts have hanging silver coins dangling and clanging loudly for attention! Ladies also wear intricately beaded collars with a very elaborate matching silver headdress called the *sugu tinggi* (see Plate 4.10.20). Other Dayak races have their own traditional dress worn only before midnight prior to the beginning of the celebrations with traditional dances. Now it is mostly only dancers who wear traditional costumes. Others tend to wear new shirts or blouses.



Plate 4.10.19 *Pua Boleros*



Plate 4.10.20 Young Iban girls wearing traditional costumes
(Photo Credits : Roslan Tengah; Source:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lanraga/2965585435/>)

4.10.3.4 Festival Music

The next important dimension is the gong music or *engkerumong* (eight small brass gongs on strings in long wooden box hit with wooden mallet – see Plate 4.10.21) beats that fill the entire longhouse and resonate throughout the entire night.



Plate 4.10.21 Iban *engkerumong* played to accompany dance

In fact, the chanting, singing, rhythmic beats that keep changing according to the longhouse activities are the heartbeats that signal the order of events. When the beats change, everyone knows that it is either time to dance the *Ngajat* or time for dinner, or time to join in the dancing or time for chanting. Traditional and improvised beats on the *enkerumong* (see Plate 4.10.21), *dumbaks*, *ketebongs*, bass drums (brass ensembles) or mixed ensembles (with percussions) etc., inform the neighbourhood that a particular longhouse is having a great time and that celebrations are under way. The beats invite people to come and visit them, to celebrate and feast with them. The gong begins the call to celebration and the *engkerumongs* answer in interlocking rhythms whilst drum beats from the *dumbak* (short drums) and *ketebongs* (long drums) beat in rhythm. Chanting goes on all night. When the instrumental rhythm changes, people know it is time to change to different activities. Nearer midnight on Gawai eve, the beat gets more animated and everyone spontaneously dances.

4.10.3.5 Festival Dance

The *Ngajat* (warrior dance) is a performance in itself (see Plate 4.10.22) harking back to days when victory and success in headhunting was celebrated. The music is very majestic and loud and at a fast tempo. The women's *Ngajat* was, in the past, a dance of applause, joy, celebration and pride in the return of their warrior husband's success. Gradually, it has morphed into dances of appeal used to tease women folk to the attractions of the young Iban men, and the gentle agreement of the opposite sex.



Plate 4.10.22 Iban man wearing traditional costume dancing the *ngajat* (Wright 1972: 119)

As many more youths now live in cities for work and only return to villages once a year during the Festive breaks, these dances have become a time for mating displays. Men coming back from elsewhere dance the *ngajat* to encourage the men to be active, to remember their brave warlike spirits and the tough and fearless days of their ancestors. During such gatherings, usually before midnight prior to the arrival of the grand moment of the Festival, men dance the *ngajat* to invite women to do the same, to showcase their strong bodies, to attract the attention of women, and to break the silence or uneasiness which may occur because they have not seen each other for a period of time. Women respond and urge their friends to do the same. Many applaud and encourage women to stand up to represent them and answer to the call to dance. This dance then creates a social bridge for the younger men and women who have returned home from their places of work to become friends within the village.

4.11 RAINFOREST WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

4.11.1 Historical Background

The Rainforest Music Festival, Sarawak's pride, was initiated in 1997 as an ethnic music festival set in the rainforests of Borneo, an exotic concept which has gradually resulted in a huge tourism success. Since Sarawak has a rich cultural diversity of ethnic music from the various tribes, the festival was established as a point of convergence for those interested in ethnic music to come together to perform, enjoy ethnic music from around the world, to share and exchange interests and ideas, and to gather in celebration mode with their pride and heritage all clearly demonstrated in their colourful national costumes, songs, dances and collaborations.

The festival is held against the backdrop of the lush, green rainforests of Sarawak against the tall mountains, blue skies, and the vast South China Sea. The cultural village of Kuching, Sarawak is a living museum of many villages and longhouses of the various tribes of Sarawak and is a perfect setting for the Festival with a huge outdoor stage against the mountainous backdrop of performers, vast open spaces next to the thick vegetation right in the midst of a rainforest setting as well as clusters of stalls selling food, ethnic instruments, souvenirs and handicrafts. Within this festival atmosphere, twenty to thirty thousand gather to attend ethnic festival workshops and performances.

4.11.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Months before the Festival, auditions for the performances and concerts pour in and musicians are selected on the basis of the countries from whence they come as well their performances. The festival stage is set and huts for workshops are erected. Banners and

posters appear nearer the time. A week before the Festival, stalls for food, handicrafts and souvenirs are set up.

With the arrival of the performers several days before the festival, pre-festival shows to give local audiences a taste of the exciting performances to come are set up around the main malls and popular places. The night before the Festival will see many tourists already checked in to the seaside resort hotels awaiting activities around the Festival site.

The opening night is always packed to capacity. Workshops by visiting groups as well as local participating groups are held during the day and the evening then sets into a fever with international and local performances thrilling and exciting viewers. Festival attendees enjoy the performances in a relaxed outdoor open air show whilst eating, dancing, singing or simply enjoying the *Mardi Gras* ambience and party-like atmosphere.

4.11.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.11.3.1 Festival Music and Dance

The opening and closing nights are the major highlights of the magical weekend as they are alive with music, song and dance live on stage, recorded for sale on CDs, DVDs, etc. or on the air for enjoyment. An extensive selection of ethnic music from around the world is available with both fusion and contemporary versions to suit the palates of younger generations. On these evenings, the entire cultural village and festival scene is one huge party with the crowd singing, dancing and playing instruments.

4.11.3.2 Festival Food

A wide selection of Festival food ranging from local delights to snacks, international favourites, ready-packaged food and drinks, local food products (such as Sarawakian export range pepper, local tea and sago snacks) and fast food are available.

4.11.3.3 Festival Clothes

This festival is a most exciting and colourful event with international performers in unique ethnic clothes and festival participants in casual clothes combining to create a memorable fiesta.

4.11.3.4 Festival Souvenirs

Festival souvenirs consist of miniature music instruments from various tribes, live size instruments, recordings on CDs and DVDs, ethnic costumes and accessories, local Sarawakian souvenirs such as handicrafts, mats, batik, beaded bags and local products such as pepper products and tea are all sold in stalls around the festival site. These are purchased by excited attendees, used on stage during performances, or seen worn by the performers and supporting staff walking around the Festival arena.

4.12 THE MID AUTUMN FESTIVAL

4.12.1 Historical Background

The Mid Autumn Festival, known as the *Moon Cake Festival* or *Zhong Qiu Jie*, is one of the most important Chinese festivals in Malaysia after the Chinese New Year. Originally a harvest festival in China, there is much folklore with the moon festival. It is a *moon festival* celebrated not on the day of equinox (21st Sept) but on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, around September of each year. As the Chinese calendar is essentially a lunar calendar, the fifteenth day of each month always has a full moon making for a romantic festival associated with a beautiful moonlit autumn night embellished with well-lit lanterns.

It is recorded in history that during the Sung Dynasty Chinese Government officials exchange round shaped cakes. To the Chinese these shapes symbolizes completion, togetherness, unity and the achievement of success. During the day, they ate moon cakes and round shaped fruits such as apples, oranges, peaches and grapes while at night, they drank Chinese wine or tea and admired the full moon. Gradually everyone in China came to celebrate this festival. Lanterns in round, cubical, animal, floral shapes etc. are paraded by the children and displayed lit at night. Many people worship the moon on the fifteenth night. Ladies throw oranges in the sea in the hope of getting good husbands. The Chinese Taoists believe they should appease the spirits of the dead, and they also depended on the moon for light before electricity was supplied to the villages. It was an enchanting evening of brightness, happiness, joy, reunion and jubilation under the bright and romantic moon.

During the Yuan Dynasty, the Hans led a rebellion against the Mongol Empire. Moon cakes were used as a form of communication for the people because they knew that the Mongolians did not eat mooncakes. Tiny slips of paper were inserted into each moon cake

as it was made and cakes were distributed. The message thus made its way to all households warning them of the planned attacks. At the appointed time, the Mongol Empire was overthrown and this festival subsequently became very popular. Others believe in another legend which tells about the beautiful noblewoman *Chang Ngo* who flew up to the heavenly kingdom and to the moon, fearing her husband's cruelty.

About a month before the actual festival, Sarawak is filled with shops making and selling moon cakes and lanterns. Some of these bakery shops are set up only for the moon cake season.

4.12.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

A month before the auspicious day, shops specializing in the preparation and sale of moon cakes, including *ad hoc* stalls, are set up with lights and decorations to draw the attention of passersby and remind people of the time of year. Stalls which display the art of making moon cakes draw huge crowds and encourage people to buy moon cakes for relatives and friends, or simply to enjoy the sweet taste of the once a year delicacy themselves. People buy and send cakes to their relatives and friends thereby prompting reciprocal action.

In earlier times, this was a family festival when children took care to be home to spend the evening with their parents and families. It was also a festival when respect for elders was shown by remembering them and presenting them with packets of moon cakes for the festival. Most Chinese offices close early on the night of the Festival and a grand dinner is prepared. There is again the feasting to promote unity amongst Chinese extended families. Again, like the Chinese Lunar New Year, the families prepare a grand meal and wait for parents to be seated at the table before starting their meal. After dinner, the older

generations sit outside, drink tea and eat moon cakes while watching their children and grandchildren light up their lanterns and play around the house. The entire house is brightly lit and rows of Chinese lanterns fill up the garden and the surrounding vicinity, creating a happy and uniquely Chinese atmosphere.



Plate 4.12.1 Magazine featuring Mooncake Festival (Source: Virtual Malaysia)

In Kuching City, a huge Street Carnival is held annually in Carpenter Street (see Plates 4.12.1 and 4.12.2) and is visited by all races as well as visiting tourists. Many performances and food including the *halal* moon cake is now on offer. This carnival has become the highlight of family activities compared to the former family tradition and has become the public face of the festival. Festival activities include a huge stage with cultural and musical performances. Some of Kuching’s best hawkers line the streets with their stalls. Families bring friends and parents to witness the grand occasion of music, song and dance. All kinds of moon cakes and lanterns are for sale and the shops are brightly lit with decorations.



Plate 4.12.2 Street scenes from the Sarawak Intercultural Moon Cake Festival, 2004.

Conservative Chinese families erect huge altars outside their houses to burn joss sticks and offer fruits, candles and some food to worship the moon. There are live moon cake making demonstrations and many families have now learnt the art thus participate in the moon cake making competitions as part of improving and maintaining these skills. Charitable works are also carried out on this occasion for the less fortunate.

After dinner a long procession of Buddhist followers carrying joss sticks, school children carrying lanterns, numerous beautifully decorated company-sponsored floats, parades of people in traditional dress, traditional dances, various representations of the ethnic communities, lion dances, etc. parade on the streets whilst spectators pack the streets to catch a glance of the procession. Families at home drink tea in full moonlight after dinner. Hundreds of free lanterns are given out to be lit on the evening of the Festival, giving Kuching a beautifully warm evening of lantern lights.

In the past, Chinese orchestras and traditional Chinese music were played in the evenings and Chinese Teochew operas were staged. (see Plate 4.12.3). Now it has become more of a party carnival for everyone.



Plate 4.12.3 Performances of Chinese traditional music at the Sarawak Intercultural Mooncake Festival, Kuching 2004.

4.12.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.12.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

Key festival objects in this festival are obviously moon cakes and lanterns. There are many varieties of lanterns, red gift boxes of moon cakes, and Chinese ornaments for sale. Where traditional lanterns were made from thin transparent coloured paper, now, glossy, thicker and luminous coloured paper is used. Shapes have become more exciting and adventurous. Animals, cars, planes, flowers, etc. have now replaced the traditional round, cubical or cylindrical lanterns. Recently, images of Superman, Spiderman, spaceships, satellites, etc.

have been introduced. Formerly, the round cylindrical lanterns had tiny lit candles within them. Subsequently battery-operated ones were introduced.

4.12.3.2 Festival Food

The earliest moon cakes were simply sweet wheat flour cakes. Contemporary varieties include sweetened mashed beans or *tow sar* filling, salted egg yolks, mashed lotus seeds and almonds called *lin young* and also pastry made of wheat flour flavoured with pandan leaves. Durian, strawberry, lemon, chocolate and mango flavors have now become very popular in Kuching (see Plate 4.12.4).



Plate 4.12.4 Mooncakes with various fillings (Source: Virtual Malaysia)

4.12.3.3 Festival Music

Although Chinese traditional music is still played in exclusive Chinese restaurants in the evening when dinner is completed and people are ready to be entertained, most city folk listen to fusion favourites such as Mandarin, Malay or English pop music. Traditional

Chinese dances with lanterns or Chinese maidens dancing with ribbons and fans were popular in the past but have now largely been replaced by pop music.

4.12.3.4 Visual and Decorative Arts

The artistic talents of the painting on Chinese lanterns are highly prized but are fast diminishing as factory printed lanterns and plastic ones are now readily available and adorn moon cake shops, the lantern shops, and the street carnival platforms.

4.13 DEEPAVALI FESTIVAL

4.13.1 Historical Background

Deepavali is the Sanskrit word meaning *row of lights*. It is the *Festival of Lights* or *Diwali* and is celebrated by Indians, especially Hindus, all over the world to honour the triumph of light over evil. Deepavali is celebrated in Dussera, on Amawasya – the fifteenth day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashwin (Aasho) in October/November. It is also the seventh month of the Hindu solar calendar, or the fourteenth day of the Tamil month, Aipasi. It is a festival of joy, splendour, happiness and light celebrated over a four-day period whilst in West Malaysia it is just marked by a one day public holiday.

In India, this one Hindu Festival unites all Indians. In Malaysia, the entire nation, especially those celebrating this festival, unite to celebrate the triumph of good over evil. Traditionally, small oil lamps (called *diyas*) are lit and placed around the home, in courtyards, at the windows and on roof tops. In some cities, candles are used to replace the lamps. This Festival is accompanied by the exchange of sweets which are thus manufactured in very large quantities at this time.

From the Hindu epic Ramayana, Diwali celebrates Rama's homecoming after the defeat of Ravana. In North India, Diwali celebrates Rama's homecoming from fourteen years of exile that is his return to defeating Ravana and his coronation as king. In Gujerat, this festival is celebrated in honour of Goddess Lakshimi. In Bengal, it is related to Goddess Kali. Wherever the celebration occurs, there is a similar spirit and renewal of life. In Sarawak, the percentage of Indians is small, unlike in West Malaysia, so Deepavali is not a public holiday but is nevertheless the most important Indian Festival. In India, it celebrates victory although different areas celebrate it in different ways. Sikhs in Malaysia celebrate

Diwali to mark the safe arrival of Guru Hargobind Sahib from prison (leader of the Sikhs who began teaching Sikhism).

At dusk, when darkness gradually unfolds, flickering lamps adorn homes, buildings, shops and streets. To many of the Indian community, the lighting of the lamps represents a way of paying obeisance to God for attainment of knowledge, peace and valoured fame. Houses are lit to welcome Lakshimi, Goddess of wealth and prosperity, and firecrackers are ignited to invite people to come to their homes to celebrate.

4.13.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Even though Deepavali has never been celebrated on a grand scale in Malaysia, many Indians invite their friends and colleagues to their homes for Open House visits. The people of Sarawak especially anticipate this time because the best curries are served in Indian homes.

Some weeks before Deepavali, people send their Indian friends Deepavali cards or e-cards; some even send gifts. On the day itself, Indians dress in beautiful new clothes and highly ornamented gold jewellery to visit the temples. Before they dress, they take part in the traditional oil bath that precedes the festivities. In the past, the Indians believed that this was the day their Goddess Lakshimi emerged from the oceans. The celebration includes visits to temples and prayers at household altars adorned with lights, sweets and other offerings. Families gather to pray for health, prosperity and peace. After prayers, sweets are distributed to neighbours, relatives and friends. Small lamps called *diyas* made from clay and filled with coconut oil and wicks were a common sight and some still use these today. Indians celebrate the victory of Lord Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, over the demon king Ravana. They believe that during Deepavali, the souls of the deceased are freed

from hell. In lighting the lamps, the people hope that the path to heaven will be made clearer for their ancestors.

4.13.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.13.3.1 Ceremonial Objects

- (a) **Diwali lamps or *diyas*** - The main ceremonial objects are the Diwali lamps or *diyas*, traditionally cotton string wicks inserted into small clay pots filled with oil. (see Plate 4.13.1)



Plate 4.13.1 A traditional Diwali *diya* (lamp)

(Source: <http://diwali-celebrations.blogspot.com/2009/09/significance-of-diwali-diyas.html> - Accessed 25 December 2009)

- (b) **The *kolam*** – Another ceremonial object of Deepavali in Malaysia is the *kolam*, which is a very colourful design drawn on the ground at the entrance of houses, malls, offices, etc. It serves as a welcome symbol for guests and signifies that Deepavali is celebrated in that place. Coloured rice or desiccated coconut is used to create the design (see Plate 4.13.2).



Plate 4.13.2 A colourful *kolam* surrounded by *diyas* (Salleh, 2006:65)

4.13.3.2 Festival Food

Most families fill beautiful trays with special Indian sweets for offerings. Small preserved fruits with mild spices are also served in elegantly adorned trays which are placed at the altars of homes for thanksgiving and offering. Colourful candies, condiments or spiced titbits may also be offered.

Traditional Indian food like the *Channa Battura* or the *Chapathi* and *Dhall* (bread/dough and mashed yellow lentils cooked with spices) are always present at this time; curries may be soft gentle North Indian curries or red-hot South Indian curries. Sometimes thin crispy *Dosai* (batter spread thinly over pan and folded) is served. North Indian cuisine comprises more of *dosai*, *chapathis*, *rotis*, *phulkas*, *puris* and *naan* (different versions of the pastries and flatbread) as North Indians consume more wheat whilst South Indians prefer rice. However, in Malaysia, rice is a staple for all Indians and it is sometimes cooked in Indian spices such as *briani* (rice cooked in yellow tumeric and spices). Kashmirian cuisine tends to have more sweet ingredients and fruits whereas Tamil cuisine uses more tamarind to add

sourness to the dishes. Meats are served in all cuisines but in Malaysia the popular one is barbecued *tandoori chicken* marinated in yoghurt and spices. Influence from Tibetan areas includes soups, seafood cooked in sauces, coconut or yogurt and steamed in banana leaves.

Most of these foods are served with condiments such as pickles. These *chutneys* can be either pickled lime or mangos in sweet sauce. Food is usually served on banana leaves in Malaysia or on stainless steel plates called *thalis*. Most Indians eat with their hands very skilfully and neatly. Tea is commonly served, sometimes including ginger for taste although the commonest version is tea with milk that is *pulled* or *tarik* (Malay) by swishing it from cup to cup until it froths. *Lassi* is also very common with the Malaysian addition of mango and other fruits.

Most of these foods are served for Open Houses. Typically all kinds of Indian flatbreads or dough are served with vegetarian, chicken or mutton curries, and pastries such as *samosas* (curry puffs). A wide variety of sweet cakes and desserts are also served. *Lassi* (with yogurt) and milk teas with a wide variety of sweets and titbits are usually served.

4.13.3.3 Festival Clothes

Most Indians, whether Hindus, Tamils, Bengalis etc., wear traditional clothes on the first day of Deepavali especially when friends of other races visit them. As indicated in Plate 4.13.2, they are beautifully adorned in fabrics of bright colours and gold threads and the women wear significant gold jewellery. The women also place a bright red dot in the middle of their foreheads and some even put beautiful flowers in their hair. The men wear long sleeved shirts with mandarin collar and pants of the same colour; some wear Punjabi suits. Beautiful *sarees* (Indian traditional dress) in the brightest and most elaborate colours are

worn with short matching tops and Indian footwear comprising open toe sandals and slippers adorned with coloured stones.

4.13.3.4 Festival Music

Traditional Indian music in Malaysia includes both Indian Carnatic Music and Hindustani Music. Carnatic music is known to have originated from the Southern States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There are many rhythmic *ragas* (something like 72 different melodic patterns and fundamental scales) and seven basic forms of *tala* or rhythms. This is usually played with instruments such as the violin or flute which plays the melody, and the *mridangam* (side drums).

Hindustani music however, is a classical Northern Indian art form based on the 10 basic *raga* or scales usually played by the *tanpura* (Indian guitar) or *sitar* (guitar) or even the *sarangi* (lute-like instrument), the *tablas* (small round Indian drums, several together) and the harmonium. The Syed Baba groups also chant and sing rhythm and lively melodies accompanied by the *tablas* (Indian drums) and occasionally, the tambourines (in Malaysia). Classical Indian tunes in Malaysia have been over taken by Indian pop and Bollywood styles.

4.13.3.5 Festival Dance

Indian culture has many dance forms but, given the small number of Indians in Sarawak, one sees Indian dance performed less often than in West Malaysia. There are some dances such as *bhjarata natyam* from Tamil Nadu in South Eastern India, *kathak* from North India, folk dances like *chau* or *garba* and *bhangra* which are seen during Festival concerts or dinner performances. At Deepavali they are performed at Indian temples.

4.14 HARI RAYA PUASA

4.14.1 Historical Background

Hari Raya Puasa, also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri, (Malay term) or *Eid ul-Fitr* ((in Arabic) literally means the celebration day of fasting and is the most significant festival celebrated by the Malays of Sarawak. Since most Malays in Sarawak are Muslims, Islamic practices pervade almost every aspect of Malay life. It is also the day when the new moon is sighted at the end of the fasting month and it also begins the first day of *Shanwal* (New Year).

During the Ramadan month when Muslims throughout Malaysia begin their fast (mandatory from dawn till dusk), there is a general understanding amongst work colleagues that they be exempted from long hours or heavy work. They wake up early to begin preparing the food to be eaten before the dawn breaks. After a full meal and prayers, they exist during the day with neither water nor food until the fast is broken after prayers in the evening.

During this month, special desserts and popular Malay favourites are available in the *Pasar Ramadan* or the special market established only during the month of Ramadan. Local Malay favourites and delicacies such as *ikan panggang* (baked fish), *pulut* (baked glutinous rice) and *kuib muih* (cakes and sweets) are available for sale. Muslims buy them early in preparation for feasting when the fast is broken and dinner is served. During this month, people abstain from all things evil, including smoking, bad indulgences, sex and gluttony to allow them to purify their thoughts and hearts. They then feast in the evenings on their favourite foods.

4.14.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Table 4.14.1 compares the traditional and contemporary cultural dimensions of Hari Raya Puasa.

Table 4.14.1 Celebrating Hari Raya in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional Realizations	Contemporary Development	Comments
Costumes / Fashion	(a) Men in <i>Baju Melayu</i> , <i>songket</i> , handwoven <i>sarongs</i> . (b) Women in long ornate embroidered <i>baju kurung</i> all mostly self made. (c) Individual cloth selection.	(a) Traditional <i>Baju Melayu</i> top with simpler modern <i>sarong</i> (b) Modern <i>baju kurung</i> , modern prints and materials ready made or tailored (c) More families are in thematic colours	Every year traditional costumes are varied in designs and materials. The latest materials and designs are usually more practical and cooler.
Food	(a) Charcoal fire homemade pound cakes and biscuits. (b) Women group together to work then distribute the finished products. (c) All dishes for Open Day self prepared in own house.	(a) Modern cakes purchased. Simpler and less elaborate cakes made. (b) Working women order traditional delicacies, though housewives still make festive delicacies. (c) Most food ordered by those who can afford it or cooked with the assistance of maids.	Labour saving time to maintain the spirit and the tradition where women no longer have the time to do all the preparation themselves. However, many still look forward to the festivals to enjoy the traditional festive food only available annually.

Table 4.14.1 Celebrating Hari Raya in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional Realizations	Contemporary Development	Comments
Song	(a) <i>Asli</i> traditional tunes more popular.	(a) Modern Malay pops taking over. Some traditional music still left with the older folk in rural areas.	Each year a more modern version is produced. However, many still sing the well-known popular New Year tunes, but with slight variations in their own renditions.
Music	(b) Some traditional <i>gambus</i> music with <i>rebana</i> or duos comprising a <i>gendang</i> and a violin.	(b) <i>Kompangs</i> only used in weddings now. In urban homes and centres, mostly pop Malay music.	
Dance	(c) Lively music invites and entices people to dance the <i>joget</i> (Malay festive dance)	(c) <i>Joget</i> still danced though taken over by <i>dangdut</i> , disco and Malay rap.	
Home	Kerosene lights, curtains, cushions, all household linen homemade by women.	Modern electrical lights Mostly ordered or bought ready made from professional home furnishing providers in modern designs and materials	Electrical coloured fairy lights are used instead of kerosene lamps.

Table 4.14.1 Celebrating Hari Raya in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional Realizations	Contemporary Development	Comments
Preparation	Significant last-minute purchases No traffic jams	More planned and systematic buying Traffic jam a week before is very common	More available help in terms of ready made and cheaper China-made products now.
Traditional culture	Prayers Fasting Greetings	Mostly still kept : Prayers Fasting Greetings	Gradually increasing number of families avoid the fuss by taking holidays abroad.
Family	All gather back in parents' home for the celebrations.	Not necessary as many are abroad. With opportunities for study abroad many are not able to return or have adopted the concept of holidaying.	Celebrations simpler and more practical in the cities. As the children go abroad to study, there is westernization and simplification of the festival culture.

Table 4.14.1 Celebrating Hari Raya in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional Realizations	Contemporary Development	Comments
<p>Food</p>	<p>Dominant types in order and preparation</p> <p>1. Cakes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-layered in various colours, pound cake with <i>kaya</i> (jam filling) typically baked over charcoal fire <p><i>Kuih Jala</i> – Net webbed and sweet batter cooked on a very hot skillet until crunchy over slow wood fire</p> <p><i>Kuih Koci</i> – bite sized cakes wrapped in banana leaf and steamed over hot water on a wood fire</p> <p><i>Kuih Sepit</i> – egg batter thinly spread over a round shaped skillet and quickly rolled into a long cylindrical roll</p> <p>2. Cookies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pineapple tarts – basic pastry with pineapple jam filling intricately decorated by hand with individually cut out designs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercially produced pound cake with reduced layering and colours No contemporary equivalent Rarely seen on contemporary table Similar contents but shape changes for ease of preparation Same batter but folded rather than rolled for easier preparation Same ingredients and basic shape but lacking in intricacy and design additions 	<p>Each year new designs and modern cakes are improvised for the serving table.</p>

Table 4.14.1 Celebrating Hari Raya in Sarawak : Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional Realizations	Contemporary Development	Comments
	<p><u>3. Savory items/ dishes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glutinous rice eaten with curries, rice mixed with coconut milk and a little salt and cooked in a bamboo boat 3 feet in length, lined with banana leaves, before the rice is poured in for baking over charcoal fire (<i>lemang</i>) • Curries • Chicken/ lamb/ mutton dishes cooked in spices • Baked <i>terubok</i> (like garoupa) wrapped in banana leaf and baked over hot coals • Ground Tapioca drink with coconut milk chilled • <i>Ketupat</i> (steamed rice cake) in woven coconut leaves is a favourite. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition maintained • Tradition maintained • Tradition maintained • Some ready made <i>ketupat</i> cases available now. • Can be commercially ordered. 	<p>Mostly simplified with use of ready mixed spices</p> <p>Remains a favourite today</p>

The earliest preparations for families involve buying new clothes for children, cleaning the house, repainting, upholstery, buying new appliances for homes in order to upgrade their lifestyle after a year's hard work. Women also begin collecting ingredients and baking tools for making of celebration cookies and food. Tithes and donations are given during the month to help the less fortunate and orphans, a practice which is called the *zakat*. The minimum *zakat* is two kilograms of basic foodstuff such as rice, wheat, dates or the cash equivalent. Graves are cleaned to include and remember loved ones. Purchases for families, homes and elders are a way of showing filial love and appreciation for loved ones.

Nearer the time, once houses slowly take on a decorated mode, more perishable food and biscuits are made and cooked (see Plate 4.14.1)



Plate 4.14.1 Typical Festive Food served during a Hari Raya Puasa Open house

Family and personal responsibilities and bonds, repairing of broken relationships and hurts, forgiveness etc. all need to be finalized. The excitement of music and song, new fashions and food for the Festival signal the anticipation and climax of a great Festival. A culture of honouring loved ones, family ties and renewal of friendship ties exemplify the spirit of Islam which is often depicted in the media (see Plate 4.14.2).



Plate 4.14.2 Media Coverage: honouring elders and acts of forgiveness during Hari Raya Puasa

4.14.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.14.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

Most Muslim families train their children and family members to fast from as young as four or five years old beginning with just half a day. The essence of the Islamic faith is to teach their young and older believers to fast from the enjoyment and pampering of the flesh. During this month they are taught to refrain from pleasures and enjoyment of food, sex, entertainment and luxury so that they understand what it is like to be really hungry and deprived. This in turn helps them to know the sufferings and difficulties of their less fortunate brothers, sisters, and friends.

During this month, Muslims must practise charity and love, caring for the unloved, underprivileged, and their suffering neighbours or friends. They are also to refrain from anger, quarrels, fights or disagreements of all sorts. They are to attempt peace with those they have wronged or to forgive those who have wronged them.

At the break of fast, compulsory dates are first taken (to break fast gently), followed by food such as *ulam* (fresh uncooked vegetables) cut and eaten with *sambal* (spiced paste). After the joy of *iftar*, *sabur*, which is the first meal in the morning before dawn begins again, is eaten. It was believed that the Prophet Muhammad enjoyed *sabur* as a blessed act which makes Islam different from all other religious teachings in relation to fasting. In the past, people would wake up in the dark and waken each other with shouts and yells of “*sabu!*” until alarm clocks came into their lives. Elders would wake up and grope in the dark to light their *pelitas* (kerosene lamps).

4.14.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

(a) ***Pelita*** - Ceremonial objects for Hari Raya include the *pelita* (kerosene lamps) usually made in the past from bamboo fitted with wicks in a can of kerosene (see Plate 4.14.3). These are lit in the early hours of the morning for women folk to rise to prepare food for the family. These are also lit in the compounds of houses to signify that they are celebrating the festival to come. The contemporary *pelitas* are in the same shapes but all electrically fitted.



Plate 4.14.3 Traditional bamboo *pelita*. (Source: <http://www.knizam.com> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (b) ***Ketupat*** - The *ketupat* is the main festival food for this Malay festival. It is cooked rice stuffed in a woven packet made from leaves and served with nutty spicy sauce (see Plate 4.14.4). The *ketupat* is now a symbol of the Malay festival so much so that street decorative lightings, festival sign boards, backdrops for Festival messages etc. are decorated with *ketupat* designs to usher in the coming Malay festival.



Plate 4.14.4 *Ketupat* made with *daun palas* (a species of palm tree) leaves
(Source: <http://www.ricewisdom.org> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (c) ***Kain pelikat*** - The *kain pelikat* is a two metre piece of cotton cloth or *sarong* (sides sewn together) folded to form a piece (see Plate 4.14.5) and given by younger generation as gifts to family elders as tokens of gratitude and appreciation.



■ Plate 4.14.5 *Kain pelikat* - gifts for elders.
(Photo Credits: Natinski)

- (d) **Dates** - Dates are dried fruits taken at the start of the *iftar* (break of fast) to gradually ease the process of inducing the stomach into the eating mode.(see Plate 4.14.6)



Plate 4.14.6 Dates for *iftar* (break of fast)
(Photo Credits: Choo Yut Shing)

4.14.3.3 Festival Food

Please refer to Table 4.14.1 (Food) and Sections 4.14.3.2 (b) and (d) for a detailed description of Festival Food.

4.14.3.4 Festival Clothes

Please refer to Table 4.14.1 (Costumes/Fashion) and Sections 4.14.3.6 (a) – (e) for a detailed description of Festival Clothes.

4.14.3.5 Festival Music and Dance

Contemporary Hari Raya festival music is dominated by the pop music industry which produces ever more enticing, nostalgic and ceremonially provoking tunes. Such pop style Hari Raya lyrics speak about packing to return to the villages to be with family, wish patrons and friends a great celebration so that feelings of exhilaration and joy and memories enhance anticipation of the people preparing for the festival. Shoppers are

reminded of the lack of time, the need to rush, to hurry to make purchases. Mouth-watering reminders of mother's home cooked meals and festival favourites are embedded in song lyrics. Digitally produced tunes and lyrics have now largely replaced traditional *gambus* (middle eastern guitar with rounded body and bent neck), *gendang* (round big drums played in a sitting position and hit by the hands, made from rattan and animal skin with many varying tones), *kompangs* (small, round, hand-held percussion drums hit with one hand) etc.

Festival dances comprise rousing, fiesta-like *jogets*. In the past there was only a violin and a *gendang* accompanying this dance and the duo would play a rousing, driving rhythm prompting people to move and dance. Called the *bermukun*, it was characterized by joyful, happy movements swinging to the rhythmic prompting which resulted in celebratory dance movements usually free and in time with flapping arms and swaying bodies. Duos go round the entire village and to homes to create the dance atmosphere after or before meals or at family parties or community halls. This practiced has now diminished as most people put on western dance tunes to enjoy family dances.

4.14.3.6 Visual and Decorative Arts

- (a) Festival Clothes - There are decorative arts in the *kain songket* which are special *sarongs* with woven gold threads (cloth worn by men around their waist over the trousers) and are worn only by the well-to-do on grand festive occasions.(see Plate 4.14.7)

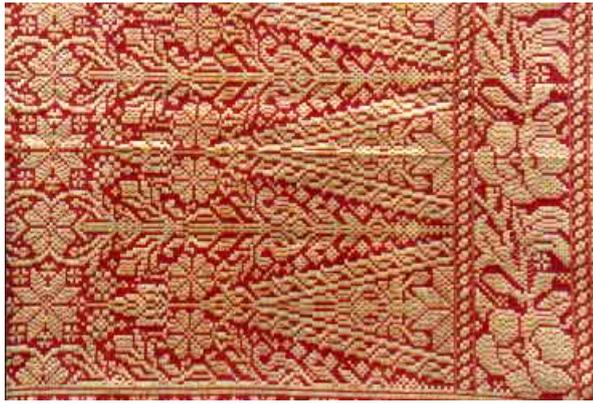


Plate 4.14.7 Detail of intricate gold-thread embroidery on a *kain songket*
(Source: <http://www.museum.sarawak.gov.my> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (b) *Baju Kebaya* - Intricate designs and artwork embroidered on the sides and edges of the front opening and sleeves of the *baju kebaya* (women's fitted tops worn over *sarong* long skirts) blouse. These are worn usually by the older ladies on the first day of the Festival. (see Plate 4.14.8)



Plate 4.14.8 Intricate designs on *baju kebaya*
(Source: <http://clovetwo.com> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (c) *Sarongs* - Worn by both men and women or given as *kain pelikat* as a gesture of gratitude to the elders. These include clever artwork, at times batik and at other times patterns of Malaysian prints on the cloth (see Plate 4.14.9).



Plate 4.14.9 Male and female *sarongs*

(Source: <http://eastcoastlife.blogspot.com> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (d) *Baju Kurongs* - Loose long sleeved tops worn over a sarong skirt by ladies, youths and children on the first and second days of Hari Raya as traditional clothes (see Plate 4.14.10). These days families follow a colour theme.



Plate 4.14.10 Examples of *baju kurongs* and *sarongs*

(Source: <http://www.pahang-delights.com> – Accessed 4 January 2010)

- (e) *Songkok* – A black, velvet, oval-shaped hat for men is worn with the *baju Melayu*.

- (f) Embroidered house furnishings with grand, ornately decorated furniture and intricately designed drapes, curtains, tablecloths - usually with gold bright colours are an integral part of the Malay household.
- (g) Flower arrangements are large, impressive and ornate in gold and green, favourite Malay colours.
- (h) Food containers are elaborate for the well-to-do families, usually in silver, gold or decorative enamels with a lighted candle below to keep food warm.

4.14.3.7 Festival Events

On New Year's Eve, once the day of celebration is confirmed after the sighting of the moon, the last breaking of fast is always more special with family members gathered after their arrival from various places of work. All *zakat* (dues to the less fortunate) being paid and a good month of reparation and fasting done, they prepare to enjoy a great feast together after reciting the *takbir* or prayer glorifying Allah.

The final *Eid* prayer has no *adhan* or *igama* and consists only of two *raka'ahs* followed by *khutbah* (sermons) at the mosques. This is then followed by supplication for forgiveness and mercy to help individuals and those around them to lead better lives with greater determination, discipline and care. It is then customary after the prayers to visit elders, remember the family members who have died by visiting graves (sometimes left till the morning of the first day of the Festival) and getting ready for midnight and the close of Ramadan.

On the morning of *Eid*, after the *takbir* prayers, and the *Eid Solat* or *Suboh Solat* (visiting the graveyards), favourite foods are consumed and celebratory breakfast by participants

dressed in new clothes who are then ready for the busy day of greetings. Families first gather themselves to greet their elders and parents with a *salam* (a significant ritual in which families gather to ask forgiveness from their elders for wrongs or sins of omission and to greet and wish them). This is usually carried out before the arrival of guests for the Open House.

4.15 CHRISTMAS

4.15.1 Historical Background

Christmas is a festival celebrated internationally by Christians to commemorate the birthday of their saviour. The first observance of Christmas celebrated was in Egypt. However, from the Holy place of Ethiopia, with an overview of the celebrations, Hubert writes about Christmas beginning as a procession.

...at Christmas time, come pilgrims from every corner of Ethiopia, and they sit there chanting, praying away the vigil hours until the dawn of Christmas day, when there is a procession from another church on another hilltop. Reaching their destination on the Lalibela hillside, a service is held in the rites of the Coptic Catholic Church. Religious observances over, the pilgrims begin the 'Birthday' celebrations. All enjoy feasting, dancing, and singing. (Hubert, 1998: 53)

The early Christmases were told in writings found in the great church of the Archbishop Gregorius in Egypt. Hubert (1998), in her book **Christmas around the World**, cites several sources *in search of the place of the Nativity-Bethlehem*, noting that,

...at Christmas time, pilgrims from all over the Christian world descend on the little town, to celebrate the two thousand year old mystery in the Church of the Nativity.

....One of the overriding memories of most visitors is the enormous number of cars and buses, especially the cavalcades of traffic on all roads leading into Bethlehem, made up of dust tracks, which begin early on the morning of the 24th carrying thousands of people into Bethlehem for the services of Christmas Eve.....(Hubert, 1998: 58)

During Christmas in the traditional region, there is deep snow on the ground and it is very cold, dry and frosty. Therefore, their Christmas supper, *Wigilia* or the Vigil is also known as the star supper. The children watch eagerly for the star to rise and when it twinkles everyone starts supper.

Christmas in a hot climate is an entirely different affair. In December, in Australia for example, it is so hot that people do not need to sit around keeping warm by the fireplace. Australians are known for celebrating their Christmas on the beach. Carols in the park are also a common event. A Christmas dinner in Australia is often an *al fresco* meal. In China by contrast, it is cold and wintry and carollers are warmly dressed in thick winter clothing. Christmas is celebrated in cities and in rural areas where Christian missionaries have worked. Christmas is one of the most welcomed and joyous festivals in Sarawak mainly because over half the people of Sarawak have now become Christians. Christmas is a time when most members of families who work away from home return to bring gifts to their parents and families. These are received with great fervour and excitement. This practice covers the entire land area of Sarawak, ranging from the major cities to the rural areas, where most of the Dayaks, who formerly practised animistic beliefs, are now Christians. The entire state and nation celebrates this season in the spirit of the most amazing racial harmony, as families observe their own cultural traditions and beliefs. In rural churches and longhouses, traditional music ensembles comprising gongs, drums and *sape* resonate on the celebration platforms whilst bands and pop music dominate the major cities and modern homes.

Christmas is usually associated with *white* or snow in most magazines, and scenes depicting the magical winter wonderland of Christmas. In Sarawak (the land of the hornbill) Christmas is usually hot and wet as it occurs in December, the *Landas* or raining season

month, and can be scattered with showers of light rain almost every day. Nevertheless, in Sarawakian shopping complexes, many stores still put up fake snowflakes and cotton-wool copies of fake snow dripping from the mantelpiece or ceilings.

Landscapes and buildings, turned into dreamy magical winter wonderlands, dressed in snowy mantles and frosty covered windowpanes, are embellished with ribbons, candles and trimmings of gold as in European countries. In contrast, however, most of the longhouses in the rural areas of Sarawak are draped with *nipah* palms and fairy lights. Kuching City's decorations include Sarawakian motif lights, some local settings and a mix of European influenced settings. The city is decorated with thousands of fairy lights, the trees lit up with bright coloured lights as a backdrop for members of families returning home to celebrate and enjoy the local delicacies like *rending* (dry beef curry), *laksa* (thin noodles in tasty spicy soup), *satay* (skewered sweet meat and peanut sauce) and Kuching's well known *kolo mee* (dried noodles with meat or seafood) or the *tomato kueh teow* (white pasta in tomato sauce).

4.15.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Table 4.15.1 compares the traditional and contemporary cultural dimensions of Gawai.

Table 4.15.1 Celebrating Christmas in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared

Cultural Dimensions	<i>Traditional</i>	Contemporary	Remarks
Choir singing	Carols and hymns in Latin	Carols and tunes in English. Many even in pop style	Youths prefer tunes accompanied by bands. Some rural churches sing <i>a capella</i> .
Inter denominational choir	Get together for Carols	Still practised	
Midnight mass	Grandest full mass followed by procession	Still practised in two languages. Some have a vigil preceding	
Christmas parties	Mostly organized by social clubs for children	Now held in commercial places like McDonalds	A time to treat the underprivileged, elderly, single mothers
Open house	Begins after midnight mass	Begins on Christmas Day	Visited by all non-Christian friends
Gift giving	Simple gifts for families and close friends	Mostly commercialized. Becoming more expensive and elaborate	Many social organizations give to the underprivileged

Table 4.15.1 Celebrating Christmas in Sarawak: Traditional and Contemporary Cultural Dimensions compared (cont'd)

Cultural Dimensions	Traditional	Contemporary	Remarks
Christmas Dinner	Family reunion dinner on Christmas Eve	Still held on Christmas Eve	Family open presents and attend Midnight Mass after which feasting continues
The Kuching Mascot		Kuching City's <i>Cats</i> dressed in red vest and green Christmas decorations	
Clothes	Traditional dress : e.g. <i>Chawat</i> for men and traditional dress for ladies	Dancers and performers wear traditional costumes while others simply wear their best or new clothes	
The shield The sword	Still used for performance	Only significant for performances	Shield and sword were only symbolic for the Dayak dances which were common in all Festivals.
Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Christmas turkey and roast lamb ✓ Mince pieces ✓ Fruit cakes ✓ Christmas logs ✓ Christmas pudding ✓ Local dishes ✓ Christmas pie 	Done at home	Still mostly ordered Still, mostly ordered Still, but now pre-packed ones Many ready made Many from tins Ordered -	In past people more capable to make their own. Now mostly ordered More local dishes used

In Sarawak, as rural and urban Christmas celebrations differ, two different sets of preparation and celebration occur.

(a) Urban Preparation

In urban areas, as in all the major towns and cities of Sarawak, Christmas is mostly commercialized and modern. Shopping is the focus of Christmas in cities and shopping complexes which are adorned with Christmas decorations plus advertised gift suggestions. There is intensive carolling in the cities by youths and choral groups. Some weeks before Christmas, many of the eateries begin organizing children's Christmas parties, games, and party packages.

(b) Rural Preparation

In rural areas of Sarawak, the atmosphere of Christmas preparations begins months before the actual date. Many people living in longhouses have also converted to Christianity and hence Christmas is one of the biggest celebrations in the year. Dayaks celebrate Christmas and Easter to a greater extent than Gawai Harvest Festival now as they shun animistic beliefs for masses which are held only during big occasions in villages. Months before, women start food preparations by making rice wine (*tuak*), salting and fermenting pickled food, burying fish under the seabed and keeping salted meat in jars. In rural celebrations, firewood, bamboo and rattan are collected and prepared. In the weeks before Christmas, family members working abroad or in West Malaysia gradually return home.

(c) Rural Rituals

Since Dayaks have become Christians, many traditional rituals are no longer practised. Families who hold animistic beliefs practise rituals and calling of spirits. However, in the

Christian longhouses, certain practices are only followed in symbolic memory as many have now exchanged these rituals for family prayers and masses. *Miring* and *Jampi* are only symbolically performed to signify the official opening of the celebrations and the blessing of the longhouse. Food symbolically prepared on small round plates is still blessed with prayers but not with the calling of the spirits as in past Christmases.

4.15.2.1 Festival Food

The celebration of Christmas in the city has been permeated by the celebrative modes of the West. Families celebrating in cities ensure there is roasted turkey, baked potatoes, mince pies, roasted duck, roasted pork, leg of lamb, Christmas puddings, wine etc. which have become food staples. Many families also arrange to have carollers singing as they dine. It has now become more fashionable to have Malaysian favourites on the table as well since many family members return home and long to see childhood favourites.

Many good chefs however, still exhibit their culinary skills with baking traditional Christmas cake, Christmas logs, mince pies, roasted turkeys, and other Christmas favourites. Dayak families however, love their chicken in bamboo, *lemangs*, (roasted glutinous rice), roast pork, *kesam* (fermented pork) and ethnic cakes. Indian Christians always cook curries as friends anticipate such treats in their *open homes*. Hence preparation and celebratory food reflect ethnic family favourites.

Whether in the towns or longhouses, Christians celebrate the foods of Christmas only after the religious celebration of Christmas mass. Weeks before, during the season of Advent, Christians count down to the actual day of festival on 25th December with preparations of the heart. They go to confession and make renewals within themselves to improve, purify and be better Christians. Some may attend a vigil in the city before midnight mass, whilst in

rural areas, massive preparations are made for Christmas mass. Some rural areas have the priest serving masses in their villages only once or twice a year making it a grand occasion for them. After mass, the heart of the Christmas celebrations is the family gathering and fellowship. Most families, whether rural or urban, look forward to this occasion when all members of the family return to celebrate together. Apart from feasting, merry making, drinking, dancing and singing, it is the joy of being reunited that has central meaning for the celebrating families.

4.15.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

4.15.3.1 Traditional Family Practices

Whether they celebrate it in longhouses (rural) or urban homes, most grandparents and parents want children to enjoy the time of celebration together. Many families, whether Chinese, Indian, Dayak or Eurasian, celebrate Christmas because they are Christians. Family traditions and beliefs are based on the giving of gratitude and love grounded on the examples of Jesus Christ. Families prepare by doing good, giving to the less fortunate in works of charity, bringing joy to the aged and the disabled. Even children are trained to give from their savings or to wrap gifts for rural children. Church groups visit the rural churches and bring clothes, food, money and gifts to them. Families then attend the Festival masses before major feasting begins.

4.15.3.2 Ceremonial Objects

Ceremonial objects for Christmas in Sarawak have become synonymous with the crib, the Christmas cards, the mistletoe, Christmas tree and Santa Claus.

(a) The Crib

The crib is a very important Nativity image. It comprises a manger scene of the baby Jesus in a bed of straw with Joseph and Mary at his side and animals like the donkey, cow and lambs as well as shepherds gathered all around. Many churches also set up cribs outside the church where children and families visit before, during and after Christmas. Carols are sung near the crib to recreate the atmosphere of the manger in Bethlehem. Today, cribs are also given as family gifts and are blessed by priests, so that the families will also receive the same blessings and joy that Christmas brings (see Plate 4.15.1).



Plate 4.15.1 Traditional Nativity Scene
(Source: <http://www.aachristmas.com> – Accessed 3 Jan 2010)

(b) The Christmas Card

Christmas cards were painted first by well known painters and scenes of the manger and nativity were first sent to friends with greetings and well wishes. However, later cards included Santa, reindeers, bells, stocking and all kinds of wintry scene depicting a cold Christmas. Christmas cards used to fill post boxes and jam postal service prior to

Christmas. Now more people send e-cards and emails to their friends saving costs in the process (see Plates 4.15.2 and 4.15.3).



Plate 4.15.2 Examples of Christmas cards
(Source: <http://www.gallerycollection.com> – Accessed 3 Jan 2010)



Plate 4.15.3 Example of Christmas card circa 1873
(Source: <http://www.boltonmuseums.org.uk> – Accessed 3 Jan 2010)

(c) The Mistletoe

Mistletoe is significant during Christmas time as it was hung on the door at Christmas to indicate households which were Christians and those that were not. Initially the Greeks thought it had mystical powers and hence it was associated with its folklore. It was also believed to have protective, sacred, mysterious, magical powers that could even be related to productivity, fertility or peace. The mistletoe is a dried parasitic plant called *Phoradendron flavescens* later formed into a round ring and used as a Christmas decoration in Malaysia (see Plates 4.15.4 and 4.15.5). (University Saskatchewan Extension Division, Accessed 19 October 2009, <http://gardenine.usask.ca/misc/mistletoe.html>)



Plate 4.15.4 Christmas Wreath made of mistletoe
(Source: <http://www.marthastewart.com> – Accessed 19 October 2009)



Plate 4.15.5 Original Christmas Mistletoe Decoration.

(Source: <http://www.openwindowdesigns.com> – Accessed 19 October 2009)

(d) The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is obviously the main ceremonial object that signifies the festival of Christmas. As soon as it is up in the shopping malls, it rings an alarm for shoppers to hurry and buy their gifts for their loved ones.

The earliest Christmas trees were first placed on tables and decorated with food such as candies, wafers, fruits and cookies before they evolved to the stage where gift items such as paper-cut dolls, books, ribbons, laces and cut-out paper designs were placed beneath them. The earliest Christmas trees were branches of evergreen trees which were placed on tables and decorated with food. By the 16th Century, the cutting of evergreens had become so popular that these trees became scarce. Hence wooden Christmas pyramids adorned with branches and candles were substituted. Today, Malaysian families decorate their Christmas trees idiosyncratically. Jewellers richly endow their Christmas trees with expensive jewellery, fruit sellers decorate trees with beautiful fruits, florists create colourful floral Christmas trees etc. Christmas in Sarawak has become a highly creative affair as artistic people use this

time of the year to adorn their houses with their own decorative designs and themes (see Plates 4.15.6 and 4.15.7).



Plate 4.15.6 A traditional Evergreen Christmas Tree
(Source: <http://www.countryliving.com> – Accessed 19 October 2009)



Plate 4.15.7 Contemporary jewellery Christmas Tree
(Source: <http://elitechoice.org> – Accessed 19 October 2009)

4.15.3.3 Festival Clothes

Festival clothes for the Catholic Church during Christmas midnight masses and Christmas Day for the main celebrants and priests are gold vestments; decorations are also gold. Choirs are commonly dressed in white togas with gold collars. Apart from church officials, others are casually dressed except for mass when most churchgoers dress up smartly for the birthday of their King. Clothes are not a consideration in rural celebrations so, apart from traditional dancers in ethnic costumes, everyone else is casually dressed. In restaurants and shops, workers are dressed with a gesture to Christmas by way of Santa Claus hats, Christmas earrings, T-shirts, ties etc., mainly in colours of red, green and white (see Plate 4.15.8).



Plate 4.15.8 Santas and Santarinas in Penang
(Source: <http://thestar.com.my> – Accessed 3 Jan 2010)

4.15.3.4 Festival Music and Dance

The most important performance art during this time is choral singing in churches. Church choirs work hard to prepare for this auspicious occasion. They also perform as carolling groups to bring cheer to the underprivileged, the poor, the lonely and the sick. They also

sing in the hotel lobbies to attract donations. Many church bands also practice diligently to bring Christmas joy.

In the rural communities, gongs and brass ensembles play continuously to demonstrate that the longhouse is in celebration mode. The sound of the gongs and *engkerumongs* call for action for all. Before midnight, *ngajat* or dance competitions are held in the longhouses for the people to showcase their dance skills and for entertainment. After midnight on Christmas Day, people dance all night, partying till the early morning hours.

4.15.3.5 Visual and Decorative Arts

The most visual and decorative festival in Sarawak is Christmas given that the entire city is decorated with lights and Christmas decorations abound not only in shopping malls but also in homes, churches, schools and businesses. Gifts with different styles of wrapping and presentation, food in elaborate festive presentations and fashion (Christmas and New Year's Eve Balls) are avenues for expression of visual and creative arts.

4.15.3.6 Festival Events

This differs according to whether the Festival is celebrated in cities or rural areas. In the cities, many shops display attractive offers, sales or special Santa Claus presents for children immediately prior to Christmas. Christmas parties for companies, children and the disabled are commonly organised.

4.16 OTHER MINOR SARAWAK FESTIVALS

Whilst some of the following festivals are celebrated with a public holiday, these are festivals with relatively few and/or narrow celebratory dimensions or those celebrated only by a minority of the population.

4.16.1 PONGGAL FESTIVAL

4.16.1.1 Historical Background

Ponggal or Thai Pongal is also called Makara Sankaranthi, since it is celebrated on the first day of Thai when the Sun enters the Makar Rasi (Capricornus). This is usually around mid January and is the only Hindu festival that follows the solar calendar. It also signals the end of winter and the onset of spring and is a time when farmers celebrate what was originally a Harvest Festival. An ancient Festival of the people in South India, particularly Tamils, the history of Ponggal can be traced back to around 200 BC to 300 AD. Although Ponggal originated as a Dravidian Harvest Festival and is mentioned in Sanskrit Puranas, historians identify the festival with the Thai Un and Thai Niradal which are believed to have been celebrated during the Sangam Age.

During ancient celebrations of this festival, girls prayed for rain and prosperity of the country. They worshiped the idol of Goddess Katyayani sculptured from wet sand. When penance was over, this action would bring rain to nourish the padi fields, traditions and customs still followed today. There are several legends associated with Ponggal, and the two most popular are stories related to Lord Shiva and Lord Indra.

In Malaysia Tamil Indians, who are either Muslims or Christians, celebrate this Festival; in Sarawak their numbers are small. According to Hindu mythology, the Ponggal celebrations commence on the day of the Gods which occurs after a six month long night. The festival is celebrated with great fervour over three to four days as it is the most important Tamil harvest festival.

A special *puja* or traditional ritual is performed on the first day when farmers worship the sun and the earth by anointing their ploughs and sickles with sandalwood paste before proceeding to harvest their *padi* with these consecrated tools.

4.16.1.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

The festival is heralded when markets receive stacks of sugarcanes, turmeric saplings and multiple varieties of farm produce. People prepare early for this celebration by decorating homes, discarding old and/or unwanted items, clearing rubbish and re-painting houses. Women begin looking for new clothes and colours. Courtyards are cleaned and fresh mango leaves are hung at the front door of the houses. Sweet rice is the most important preparation. This dish is prepared with rice, *dhall*, jaggery, dry fruits, sugar and milk cooked in the open in a new clay pot, sometimes decorated or painted on the outside. Pots are allowed to boil over, signifying plenty and prosperity for the year ahead. This dish is offered with thanks to the Sun God and partaken as Prasad.

On Bhogi day (festival eve) the Ponggal preparation involves all family members cleaning and discarding items in a bonfire lit before sunrise. On Ponggal day itself, houses look their best, new clothes are worn and gifts are bestowed upon all relatives, especially newly married couples and babies. Kanumu, also called Mattu Pongal, is when the cattle and cows

are worshipped. The cow is a symbol of prosperity through milk and working in the fields. They are painted and decorated with bells, seashells and beads, garlanded and paraded around the village. The atmosphere is festive, full of revelry and fun with colourfully dressed Tamil Hindus in new glittery clothes, music, singing, drumming and chanting. Sometimes, a *Jallikattu*, a violent taming of the bull contest marks this day. People make it a point to visit temples and invoke the blessings of the Gods for a good and prosperous year ahead. They serve many varieties of savouries and sweets and visit each other's homes to exchange greetings. During this season the people also eat sugar cane and decorate their houses with *kolam*.

The *kolam* is a significant celebration object in this Festival as it identifies families celebrating it. The history of the *kolam* dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization (around 2500 BC) when *gopis* or milkmaids drew *kolams* to forget the pain they experience when their beloved Krishna is away. Later, *kolam* drawing became listed as one of the 64 forms of art in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra. In Malaysia *kolams* are drawn in homes of Buddhists, Muslims or Christian Tamil Hindus to symbolize happiness and prosperity. It also represents concern for living creatures. Insects and birds feed on the rice flour used to create the art, usually placed at the entrance of the houses, serving also as a welcoming sign for guests during Open House. Typically the *kolam* has bright red borders or *kaavi*, which are believed to prevent evil and undesirable elements from entering houses. Family members usually design the *kolam* together in the spirit of fellowship and love. Sometimes at the centre of the *kolam* cow dung is placed. It holds a pumpkin flower with five petals, a symbol of fertility and offering of love to the presiding deity. However, due to the odour and hygiene issues, cow dung is no longer included.

4.16.2 Pesta Birumuh

Pesta Birumuh constitutes a new Bidayuh festival introduced on March 21st, 2009 by Datuk Wilson Baya Dandot, the State Secretary and also the Chairman of the Festival Committee. He launched the Festival for the Bidayuhs with the slogan “From the padi fields to the knowledge farm” and expressed the need for farmers to participate in the knowledge economy.

4.16.2.1 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

In 2009, Bidayuhs from different areas and dialects gathered at the Serian Mini Stadium where some sixteen contingents had a march past to initiate the Farming Fiesta for the Bidayuhs. As a festival designed to unite the Bidayuhs in showcasing their culture and traditional customs to the public and the youth, colourful Bidayuh costumes were worn by dancers and ethnic groups. There were singing competitions, a battle of the bands, selection of the Bidayuh idol together with an array of traditional and contemporary food to attract the public. Naturally, weeks prior to the Festival, Bidayuh groups practised dances, prepared to display their arts, and organized the parade and celebration. Bands rehearsed with increased intensity, contingents prepared costumes for the march past and decorated the venue for the carnival.

4.16.3 The Sikh Vaisakhi Festival

For the minority Sikh community of Kuching, the *Vaisakhi* is the most important Festival because it helps them to remember their culture and heritage. The Sikhs call it their birthday, reflecting the occasion some 300 years ago on 30th March 1699 of the ceremonious formation and declaration in Anandpur Sahib, Panjaab, of the *Khalsa Panth*,

the sacred nation of the pure, free and sovereign rule by the tenth and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh.

On the day of *Vaisakhi* in 1699, the Guru convened a large open air gathering at Kesgarh at Anandpur. On this day, special *Hukam Namas* (orders) are sent to all Vaisakhi participants. Historically, divine music was sung and *Asa Di War* (morning hymns) were chanted. Five men, killed that day as a sacrifice, became known as the *Five Beloved Ones*, the first members of the order of Khalsa. The Guru Gobind Singh was then baptized by his disciples. This gave the Sikhs a perfect principle of democracy and the five dead Sikhs were baptized. The Hindu castes were demolished and the Sikh religion was born. From this day, all Sikhs, including those in Malaysia, celebrate *Vaisakhi* Day with prayers and visits to the Sikh Temple. Wearing colourful Sikh costumes and turbans, families come together to pray and celebrate the day of remembrance.

4.16.4 The Easter Beach Carnival

An annual Festival called the *Mini Carnival* has been held every year since 1998 during the Easter weekend in April at Damai Beach, Kuching based on the Copacabana beach model. It is a fun filled day with an assortment of game stalls, food outlets serving all types of delicacies such as roasted/steamed chicken, *nasi briyani* (yellow spiced rice), *ikan panggang* (roasted fish with spicy sauce), banana fritters, fresh coconuts and many more mouth-watering delicacies. Typically the day begins with a mass aerobic exercise in which many families participate, often paid for by corporate companies which support staff and families to enjoy these events as family outings. There is a choice of games, treasure hunts, coconut bowling competitions, Easter egg hunts, seashell painting competitions and such like for

children, adults or families. This provides a unique and enjoyable festival for residents and tourists which culminates in a seafood buffet treat.

4.16.5 *Qing Ming* Tomb Festival

The *Qing Ming* Festival or Clear Bright Festival is also known as Ancestor's Day or Tomb Sweeping Day. It is one of the most important festivals for pagan, Taoist and even Buddhist Chinese whose main family gathering besides Chinese New Year is the *Qing Ming* Festival. A traditional festival which falls on the 104th day after the winter solstice, or 15th day from the Spring Equinox, usually occurs around April 4th (for 2009) or April 5th (for 2010) of the Gregorian calendar. Since *Qing* means clear and *Ming* means bright, this signifies an excellent time for people to go outside and enjoy the green and beauty of spring time and also to tend to the graves of their departed loved ones. During this time, all family members decide the date that they will return to visit their parents' graves, burn joss sticks and paper money, bring food offerings and unite for family gatherings.

Many families buy paper products carefully folded and shaped into the favourite and/or desired possessions of their loved ones, believing that burning them at the graves will give their loved ones what they hoped for in the next life. Family members gather early in the morning ready with pre-prepared food at the graves of their loved ones. There they light joss sticks, clean graves and tomb sites, place fresh flowers and burn the paper sacrifices. The remainder of the day is devoted to family meals at home and moments of fellowship.

4.16.6 The Kedayan Festival

The Kedayans, the smallest ethnic group in Sarawak, are mostly resident around Miri and the northern part of Sarawak. Some Kedayans have also settled in Berkenu, Lawas and

Limbang. In addition, some live in Sabah and Brunei Darusalam. Most of them are Muslims. In the villages of Bekenu, namely Kampong Satap and Kampung Hunai, most of the residents are Kedayans. The Kedayans believe that these ethnic Festivals will keep the small ethnic group united and harmonious, and that their culture will be passed on to younger generations.

The main traditional Festivals is the *Makan Tabun* or Annual Feast celebrated by all Kedayans. This Festival is celebrated annually after the rice harvesting season and marks the beginning of the New Year as well as commemorating Kedayans who have passed away.

4.16.6.1 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

On the first day, people prepare by cooking and cleaning. Women prepare the traditional dishes which include the *kelupis* (glutinous rice in leaves), *kuib penyaram* (traditional cake made from rice flour and dark sugar) and *kuib wajik* (also glutinous rice with brown sugar). Men set up eating-places outdoors and slaughter cattle for the feast.

The next day, people gather to offer prayers to the dead (*Tablil Kumpulan*) before feasting. Three offering ceremonies are held per year; the first is during the *Ramadan* month, and the second occurs a week before *Hari Raya Puasa*. The third, *Makan Tabun*, is undertaken in an Islamic manner with *imans* or *uztaḥ* (Muslim priest or Holy men) called to lead the prayers.

4.16.7 Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di Pertuan Agong's Birthday

4.16.7.1 Historical Background

The Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di Pertuan Agong or King of Malaysia is elected by the nine Sultans of the Malay Sultanate. The position is *de facto* rotated every five years and the Yang di Pertuan Agong's role is that of a constitutional monarch. The Federal Constitution and Parliamentary Acts define the extent of his powers as the Federal Head of State as well as the head of Islam.

In 1957 after the formation of Malaysia, the Council of Rulers met to elect the first occupant to the throne. Ever since that year the birthday has been celebrated by Malaysians throughout Malaysia. The King's birthday is officially celebrated as a national holiday on the first Saturday of June each year as determined by the Government.

4.16.7.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

As a public holiday, all states in Malaysia organize a state recognition and celebration of the significant day as the official birthday of the King of the country - even though the date is not his actual birthday. On this day there are parades and official celebrations involving the cabinet of the Government. After this, the King confers honours and titles on distinguished members of the public. From 2006, a King's Scholarship has been awarded to ten outstanding postgraduate students to pursue studies in high ranking universities across the world.

4.16.8 Pesta Benak

4.16.8.1 Historical Background

Pesta Benak comes from the word *benak* which means tidal bore. It occurs everyday at a special location at the mouth of the Batang Lupar River which flows 200km from its source in the Kapuas Mountain to the Teluk Datu of the South China Sea. During high tide, which is normally on the third and eighteenth day of the Chinese lunar calendar, huge tidal bores can be seen. The *benak* continues for another 30km inland before ending near the small village of Engkilili.

4.16.8.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

With the Festival of the Tidal Bore or Tidal Bore Carnival as it is commonly called, many events to encourage cultural tourism are organized. Before the day of the giant tidal bore festival, village folks prepare sports equipment, sport accessories, water sport games, food and drinks for sale as well as handicrafts by local Dayaks for exhibition purposes or for sale as art work. Competitions of various kinds such as games, karaoke etc. are held to build a carnival effect. Band and dance performances are also staged on Festival platforms built specially for the occasion.

4.16.8.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

These revolve around food. Local fruits, local dishes comprising local produce such as jungle ferns, *pansub* (chicken in bamboo), *lemang* (glutinous rice in baked bamboo), salted fish, seafood of various cooking styles, crabs etc. are all ready for sale. Decorative banners and posters also form part of the art work for the festival. Arts and crafts of the local Dayaks such as beadwork, baskets, weaving, hats etc. are for sale. In addition, sports

equipment and aids such as floats, goggles, kicking boards etc. for water games are available for sale, so that participants can enjoy the water play, water games competitions and water sports over three days.

4.16.9 The Hungry Ghosts Festival (*Zhong Yuan Jie*)

4.16.9.1 Historical Background

The Hungry Ghosts Festival or *Zhong Yuan Jie* in Mandarin is a pagan Taoist/Buddhist Festival celebrated by the Chinese in Malaysia. It falls on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month and is also called the *Yu Lan Hui* or Chinese Old Soul's Day or *Pbor* in Hokkien.

For pagans or Taoists, it is a festival to appease the wandering hungry ghosts that come out during the seventh month. It is believed that the gates of hell are opened during the seventh month to allow unborn souls and wandering ghosts to wander on earth and mingle with the human world for food and other needs. Thus, many pagan or Taoist families prepare food and items that these hungry souls would need and place them as offerings on an altar with incense and joss sticks so that they will not disturb families. Food and joss papers are then burnt as offerings to these souls for the entire seventh month.

The Hungry Ghosts Festival began initially as a Buddhist Festival to commemorate the filial piety of the chief disciple of Buddha called Muk Lian. After Muk Lian attained the status of future Buddha, his mother was confined in the hungry ghosts section. Muk Lian brought her food but it was often taken by other hungry ghosts. It was only after the intercession of Buddha, who was impressed with Muk Lian's devotion and dedicated filial

piety that Muk Lian succeeded in providing for his mother. Since then, many people have paid attention to the worship of their parents and ancestors.

4.16.9.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

Weeks before the Festival, pagan or Taoist families buy joss sticks and papers. Food is prepared for the festival as well and the graves of ancestors are cleared. Food to be prepared for the Festival as well as the clearing of the ancestral graves is discussed by the families. Paper money is folded and strung into rings. Some families buy unusual paper luxury items of this world to be burnt for the dead.

During the day, the family members may worship at home, visit the graves of ancestors or, alternatively, visit the place in temples where the ashes of their loved ones are kept. They offer food and burnt offerings to ancestors and hungry ghosts. Ceremonies are held in most temples and associations. Taoist priests chant prayers accompanied by gongs, drums and music. A shed and altar are usually set up and incense pots and offerings of cooked food such as meat, fruits, tea, cakes, wine and flowers are placed to make offerings for the ghosts so that they will not interfere with human beings or their businesses.

4.16.9.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

This is not regarded as a good month for marriage or celebrations. Children are usually advised to avoid going out at night. There used to be a particular ritual of *food grabbing* at the altars in the temples and it was considered bad luck if you could not manage to secure any food at this time. Artistic articles made from bamboo frames and paper which are intended to be burnt for the dead are for sale.

4.16.10 The Governor's Birthday

A day is set aside in the state of Sarawak for the celebration of the Governor's birthday. As it is a public holiday to give recognition and gratitude to the incumbent Governor, no work is mandated on that day so offices and shops are closed. Citizens in the state celebrate with their own families on this day as a day of rest, cleaning, outing, feasting or family fellowship. Any civil servant or member of the public awarded with State Honours for the Governor's Birthday attends a formal ceremony of the presentation of the awards by the Governor himself. The date is September 16th each year regardless of the actual birth date of the Governor.

4.16.11 Winter Solstice Festival (*Dong Zhi/Tang Chek*)

The Winter Solstice Festival or *Dong Zhi* (in Mandarin this means Extreme of Winter) is one of the more important Chinese Festivals. It originated from the Han Dynasty as it was the first day of *Dong Zhi* and signifies that everyone is a year older. It is the time when Chinese farmers celebrate the day of shortest daylight and weakest sunshine around 22nd December or on the first day of the *Dongzhi* solar term. This is also the time when farmers stop work due to the cold and the start of winter.

On this day, Chinese congregate to remember this significant day with the eating of coloured rice balls made from glutinous rice in sweet soup following which a family meal is served. During winter in China, dumplings are usually served. In Kuching, Sarawak, Chinese companies may close earlier on this day to allow families to gather to celebrate the evening meal together.

4.16.12 Prophet Mohammad's Birthday

4.16.12.1 Historical Background

The history of this celebration derives from the early days of Islam when successors of the Companions of the Prophet held sessions in which poetry and songs were composed to honour the dignity and the righteous example of the Messenger of Allah. These poems and songs were recited and sung to overflowing crowds in the major cities of the Islamic Civilisation. Some scholars claim that the immediate companions of the Prophet did not necessarily engage in the practice of *Mawlid* and *Nabi*. However, it is understood that *Mawlid* and *Nabi* are more than just poetry readings; it is a spiritual and social occasion for the Muslims who celebrate it.

Although this has been a cause of disagreement among Muslim jurists, scholars and *literati* since its inception, over time Muslim rulers and intellectuals have come to accept it as part of the mental and emotional furniture of Muslim society. It is a memorial day when the *Sirah* (life story of the Prophet) is revisited and scholars and singers in the Sufi tradition remind members of the *Ummah* about the teachings of the Prophet and the successes and challenges of the young Muslim community in Mecca and Medina. The birth of Prophet Muhammad signifies the introduction of Islam, bringing to mankind a message of peace, goodwill, universal brotherhood and hope for salvation.

4.16.12.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

In Malaysia, early preparations of poetry reading amongst *quran* groups occur and each Muslim group prepares stalls and/or the celebratory areas in which they are involved. The parade proceeds from Padang Merdeka to the mosque or through routes assigned by the Government. Chanting of prayers praising Muhammad and his teachings, as well as talks

discussing the need to revitalize the Islamic faith are organised by mosques to communicate the teaching of Prophet Mohammad to younger generations. Each year, celebrations change as parades move to different districts. After the parade, there is always a seemingly infinite variety of food available for purchase as well as each family meals and celebrations.

To celebrate the occasion of Prophet Muhammad's birth, Muslims observe a twelve day festival from the first day of the month, Rabiul Awwal until the twelfth. This festival is also a time for the distribution of food to the poor.

4.16.12.3 Key Cultural Dimensions

Food remains the main dimension of the festival. Malay culinary skills create favourites such as *rending*, *nasi kunyit*, *satay*, *lontong*, *ulam*, baked or grilled *terubok* fish for family, social events and parties. Family practices relating to prayer time, celebratory modes, fellowship and honouring the Prophet are carried out in individual ways as passed down in tradition by the elders. Visiting tends to happen only among family members.

4.16.13 Awal Muharram

4.16.13.1 Historical Background

Awal Muharam, also called Maal Hijrah, is an important day for Muslims as it is the first day of the Muslim (Islamic) calendar (Hijri) which is the Muslim New Year. It was believed that Prophet Muhammad had been preaching the doctrine of Islam to a largely idolatrous Makkah. His progress of converting people to Islam had been slow and beset by many obstacles and problems. His followers were also constantly persecuted. Then in the year 622 A.D he directed his disciples to leave for Yathrib and built the first mosque there,

calling the city Medina. The people there were soon known as *Ansar* and the migrants were called *Muhajirin* (migrants). From this year onwards, Islam grew and spread far and near. It was this migration that allowed Islam to grow.

From that year, Muslims set their calendar from this historical event. The year of the Hijrah began to be noted as A.H (Anno Hejiriyah) or commonly called the year of Hijrah. For this reason, the Muslims New Year is also called **Maal Hijrah**. The meaning of Maal Hijrah is migration. It is believed that on this day, Muslims remember the success of the growth of Islam and the possibility of living Islam as a religion. It was the year that Prophet Muhammad finally succeeded in promoting and teaching Islam and the year that he migrated from Mecca to Medina. Maal Hijrah can also mean changing from bad to good. It is believed to be a time for evaluating oneself for improvement, advancement and achievement. .

4.16.13.2 The Sequence of Preparation and Celebration

As with any religious celebration in Malaysia, Muslims dedicate this day to prayers, religious practices, family rituals and undoubtedly also feasting. It is also a day for families to come together, to make peace if there have been any quarrels, and to seek forgiveness for wrongs. The usual prayer routine of five times a day is still faithfully maintained. Most families make time to enjoy cooking, preparing, feasting and family time. It is a public holiday in Malaysia.

4.16.14 Hari Raya Haji

Hari Raya Haji, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice, is the next grandest Muslim festival after *Aidilfitri*, also known as *Aidiladha*. In Malaysia, it is very commonly known as Hari

Raya Korban and is a public holiday. It is usually celebrated just two months after Aidilfitri on the 10th day of Julhijah, the 12th month of the Muslim calendar and marks the end of the Haj period as can be deduced from the name of the Festival. Each year, many thousands of Muslims make their *haj* journey to Mecca, the Holy Land in Saudi Arabia. Men returning from the *haj* are given the title *Haji* whereas the equivalent for women is *Hajjah*.

This day commemorates the sacrifices of Prophet Abraham in obedience to God, and calls on Muslims to follow the way of obedience and sacrifice to God. Observance of the *korban* (sacrificing of sheep, goats or cows slaughtered as a voluntary act) is carried out after the prayers held at the mosque. The meat is then distributed to the community especially the poor and needy. The rest of the day is spent entertaining guests, visiting friends or simply feasting at home with family members.

CHAPTER FIVE FESTIVALS: THE MACRO VIEW

5.1 The Kuching Perspective

Both the Random Group participants and the Cross Generational Groups responding in the context of the four focal festivals – Chinese New Year, Gawai, Hari Raya, and Christmas were asked a series of general questions regarding festivals (see Appendix C.1). In the sections which follow, these general perceptions of the role of festivals form a Kuching perspective against which festival specific experiences and behaviours (see Appendix C.2) will be discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, each devoted to one of the four focal festivals.

5.2 Festivals Perceived to be Important

Table 5.2.1 presents the groups' perceptions regarding those festivals which are the most important to celebrate. Given that multiple festivals could be and were chosen by respondents, percentages are calculated as a percentage of total festival choices by each group.

Table 5.2.1 Perceptions of Most Important Festivals to be Celebrated

Festival	GROUPS				Total
	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	
	%	%	%	%	
Chinese New Year	37.63	13.11	15.85	20.19	19.01
Christmas	23.5	23.5	19.11	23.08	21.09
Hari Raya	12.9	12.02	24.8	0	16.61
Gawai	8.6	22.95	15.45	11.54	15.97
Easter	6.45	7.65	2.03	9.62	5.59
Deepavali	0	2.19	2.85	0.96	1.92
New Years Day	0	1.64	0.81	0.96	0.8
National Day/Merdeka/ Independence	2.15	6.01	6.1	0	4.47
Governor's Birthday	0	0.55	0	0	0.16
Kuching	1.07	0	0.41	0.96	0.64
Thaipusam	1.07	0.55	0.81	0.96	0.48
Mooncake	4.3	0	0.41	1.92	1.12
Wesak Day	0	0	0	0.96	0.16
Mid Autumn	0	0	0.41	1.92	0.48
Rainforest	0	1.09	2.44	0.96	1.44
Winter Solstice	0	0	0	0.96	0.16
Hari Raya Haji	0	0	3.66	0	1.44
Awal Muharam	0	0	1.22	0	0.48
All Festivals	2.15	8.74	3.66	14.42	6.71

Overall and, indeed, within each specific festival group, the four festivals perceived to be the most important were Chinese New Year, Gawai, Hari Raya, and Christmas, a finding that also vindicates the decision to focus on these four festivals as focal festival case studies. Apart from Easter, which was perceived as an important festival by 5.6 per cent of respondents, and some who saw *all* festivals as important (6.7%), other festivals received a low number of mentions across the samples. There was some sense expressed by the group that “public holidays define important festivals”, a view consistent with the four festivals perceived by the group to be the most important celebratory events.

Relatively few respondents provided a rationale for the festivals they regarded as important; it was almost as if they regarded the selection largely as a given. However, those who

substantiated the choice of festivals they believed as important to celebrate provided rationales encompassing the following areas:

- *We can visit neighbours and create goodwill.*
- *The nation also celebrates and we have family gatherings and re-unions.*
- *It's like a memory of our Freedom Day (Hari Raya).*
- *Hari Raya is to glorify Allah for his works and blessings.*
- *National Day [is] important because it is celebrated by the whole nation and reminds us of our freedom as a nation.*
- *Because we are a multi-racial country that does not belong to one ethnic and we must respect and celebrate each ceremony.*
- *It is because we feel so close and can exchange gifts with our relatives and friends (Christmas).*
- *We can pray for each other.*
- *All festivals are important as it reminds us of the 'finer' things in life. It brings us all together in understanding and unity, particularly with the Open House concept.*
- *It calls for the gathering of families, big or small, enjoying table fellowship and sharing life together. It is a 'nourishment' of the body and family ties.*
- *Each ethnic group with their major New Year festival and National Day.*
- *They are the reflection of the unique multicultural, races and religions in Malaysia.*
- *Family unity, to show love and care towards one another (Christmas).*
- *They bring our family members closer together (Gawai and Hari Raya).*
- *Because it is important for us to remember our roots where we come from (Gawai and Christmas).*
- *Because this a time when everyone is happy (Christmas).*
- *Through these festivals, we are able to carry on our traditions. More importantly, these festivals signify the different races.*
- *To keep our traditions and values, retain our identity.*
- *These celebrations all foster goodwill and respect and forgiveness in families.*
- *Promotes unity and understanding among the people.*

While the number of respondents advancing a rationale for their choice of festivals important to celebrate was low as a proportion of the total sample, the rationales advanced demonstrate the fundamental Malaysian multiracial respect and willingness to participate towards not simply harmonious co-existence but co-celebration and active involvement.

5.3 Creating a Good Festival

Table 5.3.1 summarizes the key elements identified by participants as important in creating a good festival. Again, as with Table 5.2.1, given that multiple elements could be and were chosen by respondents, percentages are calculated as a percentage of total element choices.

Table 5.3.1 Key Elements Important in Creating a Good Festival

Elements	Group				Total
	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	
	%	%	%	%	
Festive Food (wine)	18.42	16.45	24.84	21.3	20.45
Music/Song/Dance/Costumes	2.63	9.87	11.76	14.81	10.43
Merrymaking Atmosphere/ Showcasing Culture/Cultural Unity/Anticipation/Fun	6.57	23.68	10.46	12.04	14.31
People/Parties/Social Gatherings/Friends/Visiting/ Social Occasions/Good Community Spirit	7.81	7.24	3.27	3.7	5.32
Monetary success to enable celebration	10.53	6.58	9.8	4.63	7.77
Gift Exchange	2.63	0.66	0	0.93	0.82
Good Health	5.26	0.66	1.31	0	1.43
Good Preparation/ Family Preparation	11.84	1.32	2.61	1.85	3.48
Family Unity/Reunion/ Getting together	15.79	15.13	6.54	14.81	12.47
Religious Blessings/ Celebration	7.89	2.63	1.31	0.93	2.66
New/Nice Clothes	3.95	1.97	1.96	2.78	2.45
Decorations/Furnishings/Festival Objects	2.63	3.29	1.31	9.26	3.89
Parades/Entertainment	1.32	1.32	2.61	0.93	1.64
Relief from privation – e.g., fasting	1.64	0	0	0	0.2
Time to celebrate /holiday/ public holiday	1.32	0	0	0	0.2
Shopping	0	0.66	1.31	0	0.61
Master of Ceremonies	0	0.66	0	0	0.2
Ceremonials/Rituals	0	1.32	0	0	0.41
Meaningful traditional customs and values	0	6.58	2.61	2.78	3.48
Harmony/Peace/Unity/ Community/ Country	0	0	5.88	9.26	3.89
Happiness/Happy People	0	0	7.2	0	2.25
Open House/ Visiting/ Open Heart	0	0	0.65	0	0.2
Tolerance/Respect/Co- operative mood	0	0	3.27	0	1.02

Overall Festive Food is perceived as the dominant ingredient for a good festival, followed by Merrymaking Atmosphere/ Showcasing Culture/Cultural Unity/Anticipation/Fun, then Family Unity/Reunion, the Arts, and then the financial resources to make it all happen. As participants expressed it, there are certain “*celebrating must haves*”:

- *Because the food makes the festival more significant.*
- *Food, music, family gathering and drinking, because without all these elements the Festivals wouldn't be complete.*
- *The food brings happiness and pleasure to everyone.*
- *Festival feasts, music and arts create excitement.*
- *The food, the atmosphere and the special dances and culture because each element has a special meaning in a festival and without either one of the elements, the festival would lose its purpose.*
- *You only get certain foods at celebrations.*
- *Ample food symbolizes prosperity and we would not go hungry the rest of year.*

However, within the four festivals there were certain differences in the priority of the elements as is demonstrated in Table 5.3.2 which shows the ranking of the top seven elements.

Table 5.3.2 Ranking of Elements Important to Creating a Good Festival

FESTIVAL ELEMENTS	RANKING WITHIN EACH FESTIVAL			
	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas
Festive Food	1	2	1	1
Merrymaking Atmosphere/ Showcasing Culture/Cultural Unity/Anticipation/Fun	7	1	3	4
Family Unity/Reunion	2	3	5	2.5
Music/Song/Dance/Costumes		4	2	2.5
Monetary success to enable celebration	4	6.5	4	7
Meaningful traditional customs and values	-	6.5	-	-
Good Preparation/ Family Preparation Good Preparation/ Family Preparation	3	-	-	-
Harmony/Peace/Unity/ Community/ Country	-	-	7	5.5
Happiness/Happy People	6	5	6	-
Religious Blessings/ Celebration	5	-	-	-
Decorations/Furnishings/ Festival Objects	-	-	-	5.5

Within the Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Christmas festivals, festive food attained the top rank and for the Gawai group, the second rank. For the Gawai group a merrymaking atmosphere showcasing cultural unity was of pre-eminent importance (rank one) while, for the Chinese New Year group, this element ranked as of least importance (rank seven). The festival aspect of family reunion/family unity was of more crucial importance for Chinese New Year, Christmas and Gawai groups than for Hari Raya where music, song, dance, etc. and a general merrymaking atmosphere were more important. Religious blessings/celebration as an important festival element featured only in the rankings for Chinese New Year.

Participants were also asked to indicate their personal festival enjoyment perspectives – what they enjoy most in the celebration of Malaysian festivals. Table 5.3.3 shows the identified areas of personal enjoyment with percentages again being of the total number of such mentions in each case.

Table 5.3.3 Participants' Identified Areas of Personal Enjoyment

FESTIVAL ELEMENTS	PERSONAL ENJOYMENT PERSPECTIVES				
	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
People/Friends/Parties/ Social Occasions	23.08	19.72	8.76	4.05	13.97
Festive Food	21.54	16.20	17.07	18.02	18.58
Festive Drinks	3.65	5.63	0	2.7	3.38
Family Unity/Reunion/ Togetherness	24.62	17.61	24.32	8.11	15.70
Community celebration/ racial harmony/unity	0	16.20	11.28	29.73	14.49
Music/Song/Dance/ Costumes	0	5.63	7.52	6.76	5.56
New clothes/shoes	3.08	1.41	4.51	4.05	3.14
Shopping/sales	1.54	2.11	5.52	0	3.38
Cultural traditions, beliefs & practices	0	1.41	4.51	8.11	3.38
The Festival itself	0	0	0	0.75	0.24
Relief from privation	2.5	0	0	0	0.48
Good Preparation/ Creating Atmosphere	6.15	0.70	0	2.70	1.69
Going back to the village	0	0.70	0.75	0	0.48
Gift Exchange	4.62	1.41	0.75	2.70	2.42
Public holidays	0	2.11	0.75	0	1.45
Visiting/Open House	0	3.52	0.75	5.41	2.42
Merrymaking/fun/ holiday relaxation	3.08	2.82	6.77	4.05	4.35
Religious Blessings/ Celebration	4.62	0	0	1.35	1.45
Parades/Displays/ Fireworks/Decorations / Entertainment	1.54	2.82	6.77	1.35	3.38

Over all four festivals, the key personal enjoyment factors revolve around festive food, family togetherness, community celebrations (the “excitement of multiracial harmony”), friends and social occasions; together these account for 60 per cent. For Gawai and Hari Raya these four personal enjoyment factors account for approximately 70 per cent.

- *Socializing, food and drinks – meeting friends and relatives that we seldom get together with. (Gawai)*
- *The variety of food stalls and excitement of multicultural harmony. (Hari Raya)*

- *When friends visit as it brings us closer together. (Gawai)*
- *The good friends and seeing our parents. (Gawai)*

The three key personal enjoyment factors for the Chinese New Year - festive food, family togetherness, friends and social occasions - account for approximately 70 per cent but community celebrations do not feature at all as a personal enjoyment factor:

- *The good food because only once a year do we get to eat lavishly. (Chinese)*
- *I have enjoyed gatherings with family members and friends during the celebration of our festivals because then we are able to strengthen the relationship with one another as well as enjoying each other's company. (Chinese)*
- *All children return. (Chinese)*
- *Cooking for family makes us all happy. (Chinese)*
- *Social interactions with family members and friends. (Chinese)*
- *Festivals are good time for people to make an effort for reunion with family and to visit one another. (Chinese)*
- *The warm and special feeling of gathering. (Chinese)*

For Christmas, however, the community celebration factor accounts for 30 per cent while festive food friends and social occasions together account for another 30 per cent:

- *The coming together of friends, family and colleagues in sharing the joy/ hope improves ties because we let others into our lives, share, and get to know each other at a different level, in a different setting. (Christmas)*
- *The fostering of friendship, love and brotherhood. (Christmas)*

All other factors are less than 10 per cent across all festivals.

5.4 The Family *vis à vis* the Festival

Participants were asked to identify the family values which they perceived as an important essence of the festival. Table 5.4.1 presents the important family values identified for each festival as well as across all four festivals.

Table 5.4.1 Important Family Values Identified for Each Festival

Values Perceived To Be Important	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Family unity/love/harmony /communication	43.48	37.23	38.27	43.10	39.63
Family Reunion/bonding/visiting/togetherness	30.43	36.17	29.27	34.48	32.18
Family principles to be learned/responsibility	10.87	11.7	18.18	12.07	14.36
Respect for Elders	9.78	4.26	8.39	5.17	7.45
Family celebration/peace/enjoyment	5.43	10.64	5.89	5.17	6.38

Key values are remarkably consistent across all festivals suggesting perhaps the existence of festival universals. As one participant expressed it, the value lies in

- *Renewing ties. That's why the Chinese have reunion dinners, the Malays indigenous population have "balik kampong" (returning to hometown). It is all about forgiveness, communication, understanding and sharing – things that are sadly sometimes forgotten during other times. (Christmas)*

Family togetherness, tolerance, reconciliation, gift giving, joint activities and celebration are seen to be the key features:

- *Festivals give the family a focus. (Chinese)*
- *Love and peace. (Christmas)*
- *The family values that can be seen as an important essence of festivals are unity and learning to compromise through discussions during the preparations and by working together. (Chinese)*
- *A focal point for reunion. (Gawai)*
- *Festivals are a reminder to return. (Chinese)*

- *Unity and love. (Gawai)*
- *Family get to unite and talk. (Chinese)*
- *Family closeness in this busy and materialistic world. (Chinese)*
- *Respect for the parents and elders. (Chinese)*
- *The value of respect and togetherness. (Hari Raya)*

Participants clearly had a strong sense of the socializing effect of festivals, the notion of lessons to be learned and a sense of responsibility to be gained: “*Families save for the festivals and learn values through it*” (Gawai). It is very much the flip side of the enjoyment aspects cited in the creation of a good festival (See Table 5.3.1).

5.5 The Role of Specific Festival Dimensions

This researcher’s analysis of coffee table books and tourist orientated literature devoted to the focal festivals in this study (See 2.1 and 2.3.1) suggests that certain dimensions commonly dominate the festival experience (clothes/costume, food, music, art). Respondents were thus asked to reflect on whether these dimensions play an important part in the festival experience for them and for their families. Table 5.5.1 details the perceived importance of these specific dimensions for individuals and their families within each of the festival groups and for the total group.

Table 5.5.1 Perceived Importance of Specific Festival Dimensions for Respondents as Individuals and For Their Families

Perceived Importance	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Very Important	22.22	12.50	25.88	2.38	17.71
Important	33.33	73.61	47.06	88.10	56.83
Quite Important	38.89	6.94	21.18	9.52	20.30
Not Really Important	5.56	6.94	5.88	0	5.17

Overall 75 per cent consider these dimensions important or very important. While only seven per cent or less regard these dimensions of any of the four festivals as *not really*

important, 85 per cent of the Gawai participants perceive them to be important or very important compared with 55 per cent of the Chinese New Year participants. For the Christmas participants 88 per cent see them as important.

Relatively few cited reasons for the importance of these dimensions although some did indicate an order of importance and/or certain exclusions as exemplified below:

- *Food, art, clothes and music in the order of importance.*
- *Quite important for food and art.*
- *1. Clothes; 2. Food; 3. Art; 4. Music*
- *Quite important but not for art.*
- *Food I think is important.*
- *Food more important.*
- *Mostly food, not so much others.*
- *Only food.*
- *Putting on new clothes and tasting of variety of foods.*
- *New clothes - a must; Food – a plenty; House – some Chinese New Year decoration; Music – Chinese New Year songs*
- *Food important; others not so.*

As might be expected from the general importance ascribed to festive food, this dimension was perceived to be more central than the others. Moreover, those who offered a rationale for their perception of importance saw these dimensions more as playing a supporting role in generating the festival ambience than as the central *raison d'être* for the celebration:

- *It all adds and creates the total mood for the celebration.*
- *They play a role to create a feeling of joy in celebrating the festivals.*
- *When you hear certain songs, it immediately marks that festival.*

- *All make the festivals significant and festive.*
- *Definitely they create the spirit of celebrations and bring joy and cheerfulness.*
- *Music is important at Christmas but just to get into the spirit of the season. Festivals for my family are more a time to reflect and reconnect at a deeper level. To me, music creates the mood. Other art, craft, food, clothes do much of the same.*

5.6 Festivals as Cultural Conduit

There is also a strong perception that festivals act as a cultural conduit acculturating successive generations to important customs and traditions. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they perceive festivals to be celebrated more significantly in contemporary times or in the times of earlier generations. Table 5.6.1 summarizes participants' responses by festival and overall.

Table 5.6.1 Respondents' Views of Traditional and Contemporary Festival Celebrations

Festivals celebrated more significantly	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
In earlier times	74.70	57.27	64.08	73.77	66.00
Currently	19.54	33.64	25.35	19.67	25.50
The same	4.60	2.73	3.52	1.64	3.25
Just different	1.15	6.36	7.04	4.92	5.25

Of the small percentage who regarded the significance of the festival celebration as *the same* now as in the past, there were two types of response. One perspective might be regarded as a trade-off:

- *More meaningful last time but more to enjoy now.*
- *They did more to prepare. We buy more things.*
- *They had traditional stuff. We enjoy the feasting and partying*

while the other is more purposive and singular in its family focus:

- *I believe if we instil importance of festivals in our children they will know their importance and hopefully continue to celebrate them.*
- *In my opinion, it has not changed much for my family. However, in some families, we can see that they prefer to go for holidays elsewhere than celebrating the festivals back home.*

Others saw it as *just different* rather than as a difference in significance:

- *Different weightage last time tradition and custom more important; now house is more important.*
- *Celebrate in our own ways.*

Overall, however, the weight of opinion was that the significance of celebration was greater in the past than in the present and especially so for Chinese New Year and Christmas. The evidence cited for this view emphasized particularly a greater sense of tradition, custom, meaning, fellowship, symbolism:

- *It was ritually very controlled in those days.*
- *It is the traditional customs.*
- *More rituals to be practised.*
- *Less and less culture now.*
- *More meaning and heart.*
- *Formerly as there was more fellowship.*
- *They were more confirmed in their belief.*
- *They have many superstitions and customs to follow.*
- *More customary ways, many are cut now.*

Others drew comparisons, some more judgmental than others:

- *Festivals were celebrated more significantly in the earlier days of my parents and grandparents because they appreciate these festivals more and made them an important event in their lives unlike the generation in present time [who] put assets ahead festivals, forgetting their values.*
- *We take it too lightly now as we do not know the true meaning of these festivals.*
- *[They] were uniquely celebrated during the earlier times because life then was simple. Nowadays some festivals have been commercialized and so they lose their true nuances.*

- *The chase for material gains has made preservation of one's own culture a less important consideration.*
- *This is because the people nowadays like to take everything easy so they rather went travelling apart from celebrating the festivals.*
- *They only stressed on the festival, we on the shopping.*

For some the reasons are economic and a product of changed lifestyles:

- *All the Chinese New Year stuff done by families themselves e.g., slaughtering of chickens, ducks, making of goodies, making of new dresses etc. Nowadays these things can be bought.*
- *They didn't have the kind of lifestyle we have.*
- *More last time, now the children are so busy.*
- *People were more creative as they had to make things themselves. They prepare better too. We work till last minute.*
- *It was more significant last time. Now we just sit and relax, too tired to go visiting.*

Interestingly the reasons why some perceive contemporary celebrations to be more significant are also economically based:

- *It is better now. Children can afford better festivals.*
- *Very simple last time. More fun and celebrations now.*
- *Because of the economic factors and financial constraint.*
- *Our time because last time they were poor.*
- *Present. Nothing much in earlier days.*
- *Now. Earlier was simple.*
- *Now. Last time they were poor.*
- *Earlier we only have Chinese New Year – very traditional, a simple dinner with chicken, fish or duck but now we can go to very special dinners in restaurants and there are festivals in town like Moon Cake to go to as a family.*
- *Society is rich enough to celebrate.*
- *There is more to celebrate.*

However some see festivals as a rare opportunity for family togetherness:

- *More significant in the present time because younger generations are always busy and seldom spend time with their grandparents. Some don't even know who their relatives are. CNY brings them closer but only once a year.*

Table 5.6.2 summarizes, in rank order, the main points of contrast between past and present celebrations across all festivals.

Table 5.6.2 Perceived Points of Contrast: Traditional and Contemporary Celebrations

PAST	PRESENT
• greater sense of ritual (1)	• people now have no time for all the fuss, too much stress now (3)
• simpler festivals of tradition (2)	• people take all these things for granted now (8)
• self-reliance/primitive infrastructure (4)	• now Christian, no culture left, too western, only eating and drinking, too commercialized (1)
• greater concern/responsibility for preparation & creation of atmosphere (3)	• shop and urge to buy too powerful, now we buy or order, greater access to celebratory items, now so much to buy ready made (2)
• genuine sense of celebration (5)	• different values, more meaningfully celebrated now (5)
• did not incur such huge expense (6)	• less rituals, less visiting, less celebration now (8)
• women were homemakers	• women all have careers
• greater sense of family values (8)	• educational background and status now very different (6)
• more meaningful practices	• advances in science, technology and globalization (4)
• more beliefs and taboos, customs and beliefs were strictly adhered to (7)	• disruptive influence of TV, career and international cities, inter-racial influences (8)
• they were simple village festivals, celebration was more localized	• influenced by media and tourism agendas
• too much of obedience	• times change

Table 5.6.2 illustrates very clearly the trend in the profile of celebration for the increasingly time poor and work stressed younger generations. Yet both a sense of reality and a sense of regret are also very evident in the explanatory comments advanced by respondents:

- *It was very different. People were simple, less educated, hard working and ever happy to celebrate. Now families are stressed.*
- *There were less traffic jams and most things were self made, so people were more resourceful.*
- *Now the festivals are celebrated to suit the modern lifestyle and unsuitable ones are no longer practised.*
- *I do not see my mother prepare as much as my grandparents.*

- *They do so many things to pay respect.*
- *We do everything ourselves as there was no ready made stuff.*
- *Now it is such a rush and less of customs. Besides family, it can be just another holiday.*
- *It was grand then and they had so many stories.*
- *Now young people can't be bothered as much.*
- *Last time so much protocol. Now more on celebration.*
- *Very simple but more time.*
- *There was more time to do everything and enjoy.*
- *It's like the Stone Age and the Cyber World.*
- *The children are so tired and busy they want to relax.*
- *The people were different – simpler, obedient.*
- *We don't do all that now because we are Christians.*
- *These days people do away with everything.*
- *In the past, it was more on customs and less on material things and shopping or elaborate decoration for the home.*

Participants were also asked, given the context of recognition of what has changed in the celebration of festivals, the extent to which they saw it as important to document the festivals. Table 5.6.3 details the levels of importance designated for each festival and overall.

Table 5.6.3 Perceived Importance of Documenting Festivals

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total Group
	%	%	%	%	%
Very Important	22.39	17.14	25.00	25.58	22.35
Important	59.70	60.00	46.43	58.14	55.30
Quite Important	11.94	17.14	23.81	11.63	17.05
Not really important	5.97	5.71	4.76	4.65	5.30

For each festival at least 70 per cent regard it as Important or Very Important to document festivals. Fewer than six per cent regard festival documentation as Not Really Important. Table 5.6.4 provides examples of the rationales provided for the level of perceived importance.

Table 5.6.4 Rationales for the Perceived Importance of Documenting Festivals

LEVEL OF PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE	EXEMPLAR RATIONALES
Very Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To a very serious extent to keep our Chinese culture and traditions alive and not to lose our Chinese identity. • How do children learn if we don't document. • So much has changed now. Very good for records. • Extremely important because in many parts of the country people are not celebrating and in generations to come they will have no idea of them. Even now they may not be celebrated in what once was considered the traditional way. • The rituals and beliefs should be documented as the modern society is beginning to shun away from them. Hence documenting them would enable the younger generations to know more about their culture. • It is critical that our festivals be documented as they evolve over time merging with popular culture and other cultures as we become more integrated. Integration is not wrong, however knowing why and how things were done traditionally give us our roots. • Our festivals have deep rooted meanings and significance which will be lost if they are not documented. • Festivals reflect the uniqueness of people's culture. Hence documenting such gatherings or festive celebrations is vital.
Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important or we town Ibans won't know our own culture. • Don't see any documentation around. • So much lost already. • It is so different now. • Important because they can change then we have no records. • Reminds us of the good times. • It is important to document festivals from various dimensions so that the new generations could understand the changes.
Quite Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quite Important just as records of all the change. • Quite Important so we can trace our roots. • Quite important because the next generation should know about these festivals.
Not really Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not that important. We have it every year.

There is considerable consistency in the rationales advanced by respondents in relation to the importance of documenting festivals but some diversity in the importance attached to these.

5.7 Key Generational Learnings

Respondents also had very clear ideas about what should be documented for future generations. Table 5.7.1 presents respondents' perceptions of what should be documented in relation to festivals for the benefit of future generations.

Table 5.7.1 Respondents' Perceptions of Festival Aspects Considered important to document

Festival Aspects considered important to document	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Traditional Family customs & values	36.46	14.74	30.00	52.27	30.48
Traditional stories, music, dance, songs, art, poetry	3.13	21.05	5.00	15.91	10.79
Specific festival rituals, e.g., visiting, forgiveness gesture, gift giving	11.46	20.00	15.00	4.55	13.97
Traditional food, drink	4.17	9.47	11.25	-	6.98
Traditional clothes, costumes	1.04	6.32	2.50	-	2.86
The cultural background of each festival	19.79	14.74	6.25	20.45	14.92
Racial uniqueness, ethnic roots, multicultural enjoyment	6.25	2.11	15.00	-	6.35
Religious beliefs, teachings	3.13	1.05	1.25	4.55	2.22
Changes and their history	3.13	1.05	1.25	-	1.59
No specific suggestions	11.46	9.47	12.50	2.27	9.84

Overall the documentation of traditional family customs and values was deemed to be of central importance although, for the Gawai festival, this was overshadowed in importance firstly by traditional stories, music, dance, songs, art and poetry and secondly by specific festival rituals. Although food assumed considerable importance in the personal celebration of festivals (See Table 5.3.1), its documentation was seen to be less important than the cultural background and other cultural aspects of festivals. Typically respondents perceived these to be integral to their identity and roots:

- *The Salam, the fasting must never go.*

- *These must be celebrated from the heart not put on.*
- *Goodwill, family ties, extended family relationships, racial identities, language, music and element of arts, folklore seem to be values and valuable elements that need to be preserved by making careful records and by making it a part of our educational resources.*
- *The traditional values should not be lost.*
- *The visiting keeps the link between elders and younger generations.*
- *The values of unity, love, care, respect, honesty and the importance of our culture and tradition must be handed down to the future generations.*

From a personal experiential point of view respondents were asked to nominate those of their own family traditions that they deemed important to pass on to the younger generation. Table 5.7.2 details these for each festival and overall.

Table 5.7.2 Family Traditions Respondents' deem important to pass on to Future Generations

Important Family Traditions	Chinese New Year	Gawai	Hari Raya	Christmas	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
Family Values & Principles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unity, cohesiveness • togetherness • tolerance • harmony • respect for elders and their knowledge • humility • hard work • forgiveness • strength • bravery, courage • patience • trustworthiness • generosity • gratitude, thanksgiving for providence • sharing, Open House • greetings • family protocol and expectations • discipline 	50.00	52.17	40.98	53.57	47.85
Religious precepts, beliefs	3.57	3.26	9.02	3.57	5.52
Racial Identity, tolerance	1.79	1.09	2.46	1.79	1.84
Family celebration practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • love & warmth in celebration • traditional family customs • family food favourites • Mum's recipes • how to prepare traditional food 	37.50	29.35	36.89	35.71	34.66
Festive Origins, traditional meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simplicity 	7.14	10.87	4.92	5.36	7.98
Traditional music, dance	-	3.26	-	-	0.92
Charity, help/joy for underprivileged/orphans	-	-	5.74	-	2.15

As might be expected the greater majority of important family traditions across all festivals relate firstly to Family Values and Principles and secondly to the intimacies of Family Celebration Practices:

- *I learnt some traditional dances and ways to make traditional costumes and food from my family that should definitely be passed on to the younger generation.*
- *We must work as a team and practise teamwork.*
- *My family has greatly helped me build my strength of character. Being optimistic and hardworking are values which my late father had inculcated in me.*
- *Respect and togetherness. You need your family as they are the ones you can always count on.*
- *The mother must tie the festivals in with good food and family get together.*
- *The rules of the family such as to pay one's respects to each other especially to the old.*
- *Take care of the old and give them joy at festival time.*
- *No need to be elaborate or pompous for festival; just enjoy, be simple and foster good fellowship rather than grandeur.*
- *Cooperation and close rapport and the belief to inculcate traditional values and cultures.*
- *The protocol baskets are a yearly reminder of love.*
- *Tradition – never wear black, always talk about good things, always greet the older ones first, table manners, spend more time with family instead of friends.*
- *Being an honest trustworthy person of integrity and in all successes one must remember one's roots.*
- *I learned that we must not squabble during Chinese New Year. It is said to bring bad omen. It is also a good thing to do so that, for the rest of your life, whenever you want to pick up a fight with anyone, you will think of Chinese New Year and problems are easily solved. This should be passed down to younger generation.*
- *All practices that bring the family peace joy and harmony.*
- *My mother's oral prose/sayings that have teaching values.*

5.8 The Officials' Perspective

Eleven government leaders/officials and community leaders were interviewed in relation to government perspectives on the role and importance of festivals at a national and community level. In the subsections, which follow, these perspectives are synthesized.

5.8.1 The Role of Festivals in Sarawak

The group interviewed was at one in its perception of festivals as critical to the Sarawakian identity, both nationally and internationally, for a range of reasons:

- *Our cultural heritage is based on that, isn't it?*
- *[They are] very important in giving us a feel of a rich cultural heritage and a united and cultured nation.*
- *[They are] very important in shaping the culture of the youths.*
- *They make Sarawak a very colourful and rich state, unique in its heritage.*
- *[They play] a very important role since our whole year is filled with at least one festival a month.*
- *The population of Sarawak is made up of a vast mixture of races and ethnic groups. Each of these ethnic groups has its own culture, festivals and folklore. Some of these festivals, for example, the festival of Gawai Antu, cannot be found anywhere else in the world. It provides a unique cultural identity for Sarawak.*

Sarawakian cultural government leaders and officials, not surprisingly, regard identity as a significant marketing draw card for the state and the cornerstone of its tourism policy:

... festivals are a big drawing focus for tourists to come to Sarawak since families who intermarry bring their spouses, relatives etc. back during the festivals, visitors come specially to witness the festivals etc., and tourists from the world over come to partake of these festivals such as the Rainforest Music Festival which, in turn, build the interest of the younger people to preserve their music. (Interview with Government Leader A, August 24, 2005)

The festival calendar and the tourism promotion calendar are closely intertwined since

A high percentage of our national income is from tourism which contributes to a high percentage of the economy annually. (Interview with Government Leader A, August 24, 2005)

The dominance of festivals in the life rhythm of Sarawak with a major festival occurring every month is seen by Government Officials as contributing to “...a richer cultural heritage (for Sarawak) compared to other states in Malaysia” (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004). Festivals are perceived to contribute also to the quality of life as “they are very much looked forward to and help to shape a generation of good, honest, sincere and loving people” (Government Officer 3, July 7, 2004)

There is also a strong view that festivals create the image of Sarawak as “a very colourful and rich state, unique in its heritage” (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004). Officials also stressed the educational role of festivals in terms of (a) shaping the culture of the youths (Government Officer 6, December 10, 2004) and (b) creating “a united and cultural nation” (Government Officer 7, February 10, 2005). Festivals, indeed, form a key plank in the Sarawak Government Tourism Policy. Officers perceive it to be highly successful:

- *Look at how crowded the streets are and how packed with foreigners who are intrigued – that speaks for itself (Government Officer 1, May 7, 2004)*
- *Festivals shape the Tourist Industry here (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*
- *Festivals are the main focus of the heart and soul of the people. (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004)*

5.8.2 Defining the Community in Sarawak

As one Government Head expressed it, festivals “... are the main focus of the heart and soul of the people” (Interview with Government Leader C, May 7, 2004). Another leader however places this in a global perspective:

With the rapid developments in the field of transportation and information communication technologies, the world has become borderless. The influx of foreign cultures is rapidly eroding the crux of moral values that hold a community together for centuries. The disappearance of some of the minority cultures in the world serves to remind us of the loss of our world heritage. Keeping the

cultural festivals alive is one of the most crucial ways to preserve the identity of a race. (Interview with Government Leader B, September 19, 2004)

The third official points out that festivals “*help shape*” either “*a cultured or uncultured*” community. They are seen to be very important “*especially for our youth*” since “*without these we will just be another Western nation*”. Furthermore, as another interviewee argues, festivals are

... the essence of a culture through which the very essence of a community is defined. (Interview with Government Leader C, May 7, 2004)

Consequently, he believes that “*The rich cultural heritage of a community is most clearly in view when their festivals are celebrated*” and hence argues that “*It is through such practices and the inherent cultural beliefs that a community remains intact*”. (Government Leader C, May 7, 2004) It is his contention that the values underlying cultural practices “*serve to unify the community by providing a reference [point] for certain accepted social behaviour*” citing, as exemplars, the following:

... the importance of family reunion attached to the Chinese Lunar New year serves to keep the Chinese family structure closely intact [and]

The history of the Mooncake Festival reminds the Chinese of their miserable past under the oppressive tyrants. It constantly drives home to them the importance of unity in achieving racial harmony. (Interview with Government Leader C, May 7, 2004)

In identifying festivals and practices critical for the community, there was a tendency for each to interpret and respond to the questions from the perspective of their own racial/religious affiliations or, alternatively, to cite all. However, the role of specific rituals was identified as of particular importance from a variety of perspectives:

- *The organization of all the cultural dimensions that are necessary for the success of the festival such as the variety in the ethnic groups, the nature of the music, the ambience of the place, the varieties of the food, the setting of the festival site, etc. (Interview with Head of Tourism, November 2, 2004)*
- *The Open House – it creates unity, interracial understanding and tomorrow. (Interview with Corporate CEO, November 3, 2004)*
- *House visits provide a chance for the whole community or clan to say good or kind words to each other. Its also allows people to clear any misunderstandings or discuss plans for the year ahead.*

Presents and ang pows are exchanged as a signed of goodwill and to bring luck to the receiver. (Interview with Government Leader B, September 19, 2004)

5.8.3 Perceived Role of Specific Cultural Dimensions

Table 5.8.1 presents government leaders/officers and community leaders' perceptions of the important of specific cultural dimensions in the celebration of festivals.

Table 5.8.1 Perceived Importance of Specific Cultural Dimensions in Festivals for Government Leaders/Officers and Leaders

Perceived Importance	Food	Music	Clothes/ Costumes	Religious Observance
	%	%	%	%
Very Important	90.91	9.09	0	9.09
Important	9.09	63/64	54.55	90.91
Quite Important	0	27.27	27.27	0
Slightly Important	0	0	0	0
Not Very Important	0	0	18.18	0

Overwhelmingly, food is perceived to the most critical element in a festival:

- *It is a major component of every festival. (Government Officer 10, June 8, 2006)*
- *It makes all the difference. (Government Officer 8, August 18, 2005)*
- *Needless to say it is for all. (Government Officer 6, December 10, 2004)*
- *Food is everyone's attraction net. (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004)*
- *It is one of the only common denominators that bring the other races to partake and witness and to be a part of the ceremonies. (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*
- *Very important for everyone young and old. (Government Officer 3, July 7, 2004)*
- *The layman's focus in all these festivals. (Government Officer 5. Dec 10, 2004)*

Religious observance is seen to be important by the majority because each festival caters for a different group even though most festivals are now seen to be “enjoyed by the entire community”.

Music is seen to play an important role in creating “the atmosphere” in most festivals as “each has its own tunes and ambience”, to be central in others like the Rainforest Festival and to contribute significantly in “church and religious celebrations”. Music was also seen as creating differentials between festivals, a reminder of the next festival with anticipation, excitement and some anxiety.

- *Music “makes the festivals all different, each with its own tunes and ambience” (Government Officer 7, February 10, 2005)*
- *It creates the unique differences in rhythm, dances and atmosphere (Government Officer 6, December 10, 2004)*
- *Music plays quite an important role in setting the reminders and creating the mood (Government Officer 8, August 18, 2005)*
- *I don’t see how one can do without music (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004)*
- *The music sets the mood for the excitement, rush and preparation of the festival and when it’s in the air, it makes me hurry with my preparations. (Government Officer 8, August 18, 2005)*

Government Officer Five (December 10, 2004) pointed out that the role of music in former times, for example, “*during healing and rituals (because) then chants were important*” was greater than it is now. It was, however, also noted that for the relevant ethnic and/or religious group, music plays a more central role.

Clothes are perceived to play an important role in certain religious ceremonials (e.g., Gawai), to be important “*for tourists or on lookers*” as “*visual impacts are the greatest*”, and for making the cultural “*unique, rich and different*”. Costume was seen to be of central significance in establishing sense of grandeur for tourist and onlookers because “*visual impacts are the greatest and festivals become that extra special when colour for costumes are involved*” (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004). They are seen also to be integral to making festivals “*uniquely Malaysian*” (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004).

Participants were asked to express their views in relation to a number of specific New Year practices/rituals as discussed in the following sections:

The *Open House* aspect of Festival celebrations was seen mainly as positive but also as

- *Part of Malaysian culture*
- *[a] good tradition uniquely Malaysian to be carried on*
- *... a phenomenon unique to this part of the world*
- *Are excellent selling points for tourism*

At least part of this positive spirit on the part of respondents may be attributed to the Malaysian Government's policy of promoting Festivals as a means of achieving national harmony and respect:

- *It is good to have Open House as it fosters goodwill, forgiveness and renews family ties.*
- *Good for racial harmony.*
- *...must be perpetuated for continual understanding, tolerance and harmony.*
- *It is a good chance for people to get along.*

Others see the Open House more globally as a social delight which is enjoyable:

- *Good/Very Good*
- *Good. Should carry on*
- *Very fun*
- *No stop visiting is good*

Again, however, lack of money and other pressures intervened for a minority of respondents:

- *Good but a headache/very tiring.*
- *Good but now people spend too much to impress.*
- *A lot of preparation – make it simple.*
- *Quite a headache and pressure if no money.*

A small number are not able to participate where they live and work:

- *Hardly- we always go back to kampong.*
- *Must go back to longhouse.*

In essence, there is wide acceptance of the concept of Open House and a sound understanding of its underlying strategic direction. As one participant expressed it, “*might as well migrate if one closes house on Chinese New Year*”.

5.8.4 The Future of Festivals

Government and community leaders and officials are of the opinion that some traditional festival associated practices lack cotemporary relevance, especially to young people. Certain belief issues were perceived to be likely to impact on retention of practices, for example:

- *The long rituals because we no longer believe in them. (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004)*
- *Those that do not relate to young people like calling of birds, spirits, omens. (Government Officer 6, December 10, 2004)*
- *Some that are no longer applicable to the youth of today, for example, the traditional rituals that go on for many weeks with chanting to invoke the spirits and the animistic beliefs like black magic. (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*
- *Calling of birds, spirits, omens. (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004)*
- *In order to gain favour with the God of future [in Chinese New Year], a number of symbolic rituals may be performed – like opening the front door of the house at certain hours or hanging the mandarin character Fortune upside down. Whereas these sorts of actions may not cause any harm, it does make [people] think that wealth and prosperity can be had by performing some rituals. In their eagerness to win favour of the God of Future, they tend to become selfish and they tend to put personal gains above the common good of the community. (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004)*
- *The traditional rituals that go on for many hours with chanting to invoke the spirits, and the animistic beliefs like black magic. (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*

There was also some tension in the minds of government officials between a belief in and desire to retain traditions and recognition that lack practicality and/or belief would

inevitably affect retention. Practical issues identified as likely to affect retention included the following:

The potential negative impact on the environment of throwing oranges into the river as part of the Lantern Festival...

... very old superstitious traditions that are too bothersome should be dispensed with, like doing so much preparation and cooking so many dishes to offer to Gods and ancestors, burning of expensive paper items to ancestors, burning very expensive joss sticks and paper money. (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004)

A somewhat different perspective is that “*we should try to retain all unless they prove not to be practical*”:

- [Dispense with] *only if very inconvenient or not good for the environment e.g., throwing of oranges into the river on Lantern Festival may not be environmentally friendly. (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004).*

Traditions which this group of officials/leaders believe must be maintained include respect for elders:

...The tradition of respect for the elders, the love for peace and stability should be maintained (Chinese Community Head, Government Leader A, August 24, 2005)

...family dinners because they create the family ties (Government Leader C, May 7, 2004)

...The dumplings given to the elders as respect and family dinners because they create the family ties (Government Officer 1, May 7, 2004)

.....I feel for future generations that continuous filial piety must be stressed because with the foreign culture infiltrating the communities so badly, the younger generations will think it is perfectly alright to adopt the western cultures of leaving their parents and living their own separate lives and cut the strings completely. This would be a disaster in our ... community. (Government Officer 4, November 2, 2004)

One, however, tempered this by commenting that maybe there was “*too much of bowing to the elders and respect demanded of people in the past..., expecting the traditional dressing except on very grand occasions, etc.*” (Government Leader 1 May 7, 2004).

The general view was that the cultural traditions and the diversity of these traditions were very important and central to the emergent national identity that is Malaysia. They

recommended maintenance of the historical background, meaning and significance of each festival celebration:

- *...the cultural of the ethnic people...for example, the bamboo band music of the Lun Bawang, the joget of the Malays, the culture of the Moon Cake Festival... (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*
- *Their own ethnic customs and traditions so each ethnic group is proud of their own culture and together, we are proud of our racial cultural harmony. (Government Officer 6, December 10, 2004)*
- *All the traditions as much as possible because if we do not teach them, they will do away with everything and we will be cultureless people. (Government Officer 9, June 8, 2006)*
- *The spiritual aspect of the celebrations [and their] actual historical background and meaning. (Government Leader B, September 19, 2004)*

In essence, they, the community leaders and officials who participated in the interviews expressed the concerted view that festivals are of great importance to Malaysia. The reasons advanced may be summarised in terms of their role as:

- *A crucial conduit for cultural learning.*
- *Critical in inculcating a sense of national identity.*
- *Developing and maintaining a harmonious multi racial/multi cultural nation.*
- *Creating a significance source of income for tourist industry.*
- *Remaining a focus for religious celebration.*

In terms of achieving these ends, certain festivals were identified as of particular importance (e.g., the economic contribution of the Rainforest Festival to tourism figures, the keynote Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter, Gawai to the Dayaks and Chinese New Year to the Chinese). However, many government officers stressed that **all** festivals were important to the nation since they were integral to Malaysia's inclusive policies.

Government officers identified a range of celebratory aspects/practices which they perceived to be of critical importance:

- *Maintenance of the through line of traditional customs and practices to create continuity of meaning. (Government Officer 7, February 10, 2005)*
- *Centrality of spiritual underpinnings of each festival. (Government Officer 10, June 8, 2006)*
- *Focal importance of the family unit across Malaysians society. (Government Officer 5, December 10, 2004)*
- *The practice of Open House as a giving symbol of unity, openness, racial harmony and increased understanding. (Government Officer 2, July 7, 2004)*
- *The spirit of co-operation fostered by the organisation and preparation of the cultural dimensions. (Government Officer 10, June 8, 2006)*
- *Evidence of community participation and enjoyment. (Government Officer 8, August 18, 2005)*

The Malaysian media reinforce these messages and their importance as each festival occurs.

At the Wesak Day celebrations on 9 May 2009, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak was reported as reminding the nation that:

...efforts to strengthen national unity and solidarity are not solely the responsibility of the government but also the individuals among the Malaysian society.

...individual [can] contribute to the effort by caring for their friends from various races...small gestures such as making friendly phone calls or sending cordial text messages, and offering assistance to those in need [will] go a long way in nurturing unity.

...people of various races should also help one another in times of trouble. For instance, when an accident happen[s], they should help the victims without asking whether they are Chinese, Malay or Indians because they all Malaysia in need of help...Malaysians should help fellow Malaysians irrespective of their races or religions background as this [will] be the spirit that [will] make the country strong and resilient...

...the ability of multiracial Malaysians to live in peace and harmony epitomise[s] the "1Malaysia" concept where Malaysian share "one dream", one people, one nation's ideas"

...it [is] important for the [Malaysian] people to look for common values of their respective religions and cultures...if we look at the similarities rather than the differences, we are making ourselves part of the solution. If we are preoccupied with the differences, we will become part of the problem...I call on Malaysians to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. This is our way forward... (Sunday, Eastern Times, 10 May 2009:1).

CHAPTER SIX CHINESE NEW YEAR

6.1 Recollections and Preparation

Table 6.1.1 summarizes participants' earliest memories of Chinese New Year, as one expressed it, "since childhood", derived from both the random group survey and cross-generational interviews. In each case here, and in subsequent such tables in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, percentages are calculated within each group and then within the total group. For example, 24 per cent of the random group's memories were social in orientation compared with 17.31 per cent for families; the combined groups' social memories accounted for 20.59 per cent of the total.

Table 6.1.1 Earliest Memories of Chinese New Year

Focus of Memory	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Social						
• Visiting elders	3		5		8	
• Fun, games, cousins	8		4		12	
• Open house	1		0		1	
% mentions		24		17.31		20.59
Food Related						
• Slaughtering animal	3		2		5	
• Baking cakes	4		0		4	
• Specific & preparation	4		5		9	
• Festival food						
% mentions		22		13.46		17.65
Preparation						
• Fun/rush/helping	8		0		8	
• Decoration of house	1		0		1	
• Simplicity/thrift	2		1		3	
% mentions		22		1.92		11.76
Ritual Practices						
• <i>Ang poms</i>	3		1		4	
• Religious observation	1		4		5	
• New/red clothes	5		2		7	
• Midnight firecrackers	2		1		3	
• Gift exchange	0		2		2	
• Traditional customs	1		1		2	
% mentions		24		21.15		22.55
Family Related						
• Family incorporated time	0		8		8	
• Respect for elders	2		1		3	
% mentions		4		17.31		10.78

Table 6.1.1 Earliest Memories of Chinese New Year (cont'd)

Focus of Memory	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
From childhood (non specific)	1		13		14	
% mentions		2		25.0		13.73
Pleasure Related						
• Enjoyment/carefree	1		1		2	
• Holiday break	0		1		1	
% mentions		2		3.85		2.94
Total	50		52		102	

The *ritual practices* associated with Chinese New Year – religious observances, the significance of *red*, *Ang Pows*, etc. – dominate but are closely followed by the *social* aspects and associated celebratory food. Not surprisingly, family related memories are more often remembered by the generations given the family context from which they were recruited and in which they were interviewed.

The flavour of specific memories is reflected in the following comments which capture, in some instances, the intersection between the social and the ritual:

Social

- *I remember the rush to visit during the New Year. We had non-stop visiting and the protocol of who to visit first. As soon as no visitors come, we had to quickly sneak out to visit the neighbours or aunties and then rushed home to continue the open house. (Family, Mother)*
- *I can only recall the pride and joy we had when we put on our new clothes and new shoes and went visiting. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *My earlier memory was the excitement of visiting just to get ang pows (red packets). (Family, Grandson)*

Food Related

- *I remember in our earlier days, we only had chickens and ducks during New Year, a feast we all looked forward to. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *When we were young, my earliest memory of the New Year was the fun we had with drinking aerated water or canned drinks (then bottled fizzy drinks) such as green spot, F&N orange, etc. (Random, Female)*
- *Having chicken as one main dish. Now chicken is so common. (Family, Mother)*

Integral to the recollection of Chinese New Year from childhood are memories related to the preparations integral to the festival celebration. Table 6.1.2 present participants' perception of preparations they regard as central to Chinese New Year celebrations.

Table 6.1.2 Perceptions of Special Chinese New Year Preparations

Nature of Preparation	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
House Related						
• Cleaning/renewing	13		10		23	
• Decorating	1		7		8	
% mentions		28		23.94		25.62
Shopping						
• Food	0		8		8	
• Gifts	1		1		2	
• Clothes	1		5		6	
• Firecrackers	6		6		12	
	3		1		4	
% mentions		22		29.58		26.45
Food Related						
• Slaughtering of pigs, chickens, ducks	0		2		2	
• Firewood/charcoal for cooking	0		3		3	
• Cooking for ancestors	0		1		1	
• Preparing Reunion Dinner	15		17		32	
• Open House	0		1		1	
% mentions		30		33.80		32.23
Gift Related						
• Sending basket to elders	3		1		4	
• Sending cards	1		0		1	
• Making/buying gifts	0		5		5	
% mentions		8		8.45		8.26
Investment						
• So much to do/buy	2		0		2	
• All involved	1		0		1	
% mentions		6		0		2.48
Low/no involvement	3		3		6	
% mentions		6		4.23		4.96
Total	50		71		121	

Over 85 per cent of preparatory activity is focused on food related and house related preparations supported by the shopping which is a prelude to these activities. The buzzing excitement of these preparatory activities is reflected in the specific comments made by interviewees although it is also clear that there can be a negative side for some:

- *I remember doing everything manually in those days as there were little machine help. Cake batter beaten manually, cushions sewn manually, floors polished with coconut husks manually, grass cutting manually, clothes washed manually, chickens slaughtered manually, etc. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I remember it was quite stressful having to clean the entire house so thoroughly just before the New Year. Even the stores were cleaned and rubbish thrown out. (Family, Mother)*
- *I remember special preparations were made for all the food, clothes, decorations, cleaning of the household etc. and I felt I had to help a lot being a new daughter-in-law in the house. (Random, Female)*

Negative feelings and/or anxiety seem to have been experienced by daughters-in-laws in particular, many of whom reported feelings of pressure and/or nervousness associated with their role in preparing for Chinese New Year. Positive emotions (excitement, anticipation, fellowship, enjoyment, fun, happiness, the joy of celebration) dominated (60%) over negative emotions (19%) or a sense of the pressure/responsibility of it all (19%).

Even though the majority of interviewees were positive about their experiences, the tensions between the inputs and the outputs emerge very clearly from the comments:

- *I remember helping even in the slaughtering of chickens as that was the only time we had chicken meat! I enjoyed helping though it was very tiring. (Random, Female)*
- *I remember all the special protocol baskets we had to send to the elder relatives and all of them had a live chicken in it, some eggs, sweets and long life noodles. I felt quite a strain then in having to buy so many things when there was limited budget. (Family, Mother)*
- *I remember getting up at 5am to prepare for the New Year Eve's dinner. I only wanted the rest and fresh food. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I remember sewing everything for my children in the past. Not just one dress each but at least three suits each. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I had to make all the biscuits, cook the food, prepare the protocol baskets, clean the house and decorate it all alone. (Random, Female)*
- *I remember the numbers of protocol baskets I had to prepare and so many things to buy for the elders. It was quite stressful then. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *I remember baking everything with charcoal fire. It was fun then, but I cannot see it being done now. We even had to get our own firewood. (Family, Grandmother)*

- *I remember the streets were also crowded with last minute shoppers and things to buy but nothing like what we have now. (Random, Male)*

In the majority of cases, interviewees remembered that their role was largely ancillary, that they were helpers. Table 6.1.3 summarizes participants' remembered roles *vis à vis* preparatory activity.

Table 6.1.3 Perceptions of Remembered Roles in Chinese New Year Preparations

Remembered Roles	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Helper	17		15		32	
% mentions		44.74		40.54		42.67
Specific Tasks						
• Shopping	3		2		5	
• Cleaning/washing	3		0		3	
• Decorating house	0		1		1	
• Preparing/decorating food	2		6		8	
% mentions		21.00		24.32		22.67
Responsible for initiating action	6		7		13	
% mentions		15.79		18.91		17.33
No real roles	7		6		13	
% mentions		18.42		16.22		17.33
Total	38		37		75	

Over 60 per cent of interviewees remember their primary role to be that of *helper* or as being responsible for a defined task; predominantly they reported positive feelings towards their role. However, the following specific comments reveal the inherent anxieties and the hesitations, especially from those in the daughter-in-law role:

- *Being an in-law, I only obeyed and finished my task. (Random, Female)*
- *I only took instructions from my mother-in-law. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*
- *I followed what my mother-in-law did until I had my own place. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*
- *I was just helping my in laws until they died and I had to be in charge. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*
- *I did everything on my own. (Family, Mother)*
- *I was the eldest so I had to be responsible for many roles. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Being the youngest, I only took instructions for what had to be done. (Family, Son)*

- *Mostly a helper in everything. (Random, Female)*
- *I had to be solely responsible for everything. (Family, Mother)*

The most pleasant associations with Chinese New Year preparations, perhaps not surprisingly, were not associated with what might be regarded as the *drudgery* but with ancillary benefits like companionship, outcomes and intrinsic rewards. Table 6.1.4 presents a summary of those valued associations.

Table 6.1.4 Most Pleasant Associations with Chinese New Year Preparations

Associations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Outcomes						
• Eating together/good food/reunion dinner	3		5		8	
• Family coming home	1		6		7	
• Clean house, etc.	5		2		7	
% mentions		20.93		31.70		26.19
Intrinsic Benefits						
• Learning how to do things	0		3		3	
• Shopping in preparation	1		3		4	
• Being helpful	6		0		6	
• Being prepared	4		9		13	
% mentions		25.58		36.59		30.95
Extrinsic Benefits						
• Buying new clothes	0		4		4	
• Visiting in new clothes	3		2		5	
• Ready to receive <i>Ang Pows</i>	1		0		1	
• Playing games, lighting firecrackers	4		3		7	
% mentions		18.60		21.95		20.24
Family Togetherness						
• Everyone continuity	5		2		7	
• Joy in togetherness communication	10		1		11	
• Listening to stories	0		1		1	
% mentions		34.88		9.76		22.62
Total	43		41		84	

Indeed, it is noteworthy that the comments relating to these associations make no reference to the underlying hard work and/or stress:

- *Baking and making the New Year delicacies. It was a once a year specialty. (Family, Mother)*
- *Working together with relatives to get the baking and cooking done. (Family, Mother)*
- *Talking, chatting, laughing and working to get full preparation done. (Random, Female)*

- *Getting all the support and help in cleaning and then finding that the whole house is brand new, a very satisfying feeling. (Random, Male)*
- *Making all the children's clothes on my own and seeing them so happy. Very rewarding. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Making all the curtains and cushions totally unaided and hanging it up and the family and friends admired it. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Going out with my husband to get all the things for the house and the baskets. Enjoyed doing some things together. (Family, Mother)*
- *Making all the goodies for New Year. It is a pride to present them all on the Open Day. (Family, Mother)*
- *Getting the house cleaned and decorated and sitting down on New Year's Eve to see the finished results. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Thinking of recipes to cook and trying them out before New Year. (Family, Mother)*
- *We all get together to laugh and talk. (Random, Male Youth)*

6.2 The Role of Religion

Table 6.2.1 records participants' reports of the nature of religious observances practised in relation to Chinese New Year Celebrations.

Table 6.2.1 Religious Observances practised in the Celebration of Chinese New Year

Nature of Observance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Religious						
• Attendance at Church Service	14		12		26	
% mentions		34.15		25.53		29.55
Ritual Observances						
• Burned joss sticks and cake offering	3		2		5	
• Offer food to ancestors/Gods	3		4		7	
• Prayer to Prosperity God/Buddha/Jesus	1		3		4	
• Burning of paper money	0		1		1	
• Prayers before meal	0		2		2	
% mentions		17.07		25.53		21.59
Yes but not defined	8		6		14	
% mentions		19.51		12.77		15.91
Nil	12		17		29	
% mentions		29.27		36.17		32.95
Total	41		47		88	

About 70 per cent of interviewees practise some form of religious observance in association with Chinese New Year. These practices range from formal Church Service attendance to more informal participatory practices as indicated by the following reminiscence:

- *On New Year's Day, a group of young Chinese carollers come to sing chants and pray for a peaceful year ahead for us. We burned joss sticks and pray with them. At the 15th night we burn joss sticks for thanksgiving for a good New Year. (Random, Female)*

The following responses exemplify the range of practices:

- *We only go to mass on New Year Day for the blessings of the oranges. (Family, Mother)*
- *Yes, as Buddhists, we pray to the Kitchen God for blessings and make food offerings on New Year Eve before dinner, New Year Eve morning to invite all the ancestors for lunch and at midnight. Then we wait for the appointed time of the God of Prosperity that usually comes after midnight. We receive him with joss sticks and pray for good fortune for the next year. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*
- *We have fruits offering at the altar for the New Year and we burn joss sticks daily to ask for blessings. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *On Chinese New Year day we bring a lot of oranges for blessings and attend the mass to ask for a good year ahead. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *As Taoists, we pray to the Kitchen God to bring good reports for us, and place fruits at the altar with burning of joss sticks. On New Year's Eve, we prepare eight types of food and tea and invite all our ancestors who have died to join us and to pay them respects. At midnight, we burn the big giant joss stick and pray for peace in the family. After midnight, we all rush out to welcome the God of Prosperity with joss sticks. (Family,, Daughter-in-law)*
- *We pray to Kuan Yin the Goddess of Mercy for protection and to ask for good fortune before and during the New Year. (Family, Grandmother)*

6.3 The Role of Food

Table 6.3.1 details the perception of the importance of food in the celebration of Chinese New Year.

Table 6.3.1 Perceived Importance of Food in the Celebration of Chinese New Year

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	9	23.68	21	56.77	30	40
Important	24	63.16	8	21.62	32	42.67
Quite Important	3	7.89	8	21.62	11	14.67
Slightly Important	1	2.63	0	0	1	1.33
Not Very Important	1	2.63	0	0	1	1.33
No Response	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	38		37		75	

While food is *very important* to over 55 per cent of families, it is either *very important* or *important* to over 80 per cent across both groups sampled. It is almost universally regarded as the magnet *holding together all the family members*:

- *I would think it is still the most important thing the family has to worry about and the family looks forward to. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *All the preparations centre on cooking, baking, getting the meals ready for the big family once everyone returns home. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I think even if all the dimensions have been lost, food is something people all still look for and anticipate. It's very important. (Family, Father)*
- *For us Chinese, all our happy times are centred around food, drinks and feasting on special food. (Random, Male)*
- *We will cook many special dishes and sit at one huge table to eat together. It is as important as one family. (Random, Male)*
- *Food is important because it gathers the people together. Cousins and children together. Parents and siblings get together, all for food. (Family, Father)*
- *The sense of unity is achieved only when everyone feasts together, those from far and near. Hence I think it is so important. (Family, Granddaughter).*

Variety and abundance are important principles in preparing and catering for Chinese New Year:

- *First of all my entire family believes we have to prepare more than enough food so that we will be prosperous and have food to eat throughout the year. The dining table with the food plays the unifying role as it is the place where all member of the family meet once a year. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Food is the major focus of all families for the entire period of New Year because whilst there may not be that much going on nowadays, families still stay to gamble, talk, children play etc., and*

when it's time for meals, it must be ready and tasty. There is a headache for all the housewives, mothers and preparers of the meals. (Family, Grandmother)

- *Coming from a big family, it is the one thing my mum worries about and focuses all her attention on. There are too many members to go out to eat or to buy food for, so we always cook and it's a real task cooking for so many mouths. However, yes, I think it is very important for big families! (Random, Female)*
- *I feel that it is the one time in the year that people expect special food on the table, so it's a very important issue indeed and also a costly and tiring one! (Random, Female)*

Regardless of whether food is seen to be very important or not, the Reunion Dinner is perceived to be the centrepiece of the celebrations:

- *Not that important except for the Reunion Dinner. (Random, Female)*
- *Reunion Dinner is so important. The rest is only as long as there are things to serve when guest come. (Random, Male)*
- *Food not important but the time spent in preparing an extraordinary menu signifies the importance of the occasion and perhaps makes the reunion more memorable. (Family, Daughter)*

6.4 Specific Celebratory Dimensions

A range of different celebratory dimensions in relation to Chinese New Year was explored across the groups, specifically the family; culture and tradition, clothes, music, gift giving, Chinese New Year decorations, objects and souvenirs.

6.4.1 Music

The groups' perceptions of the importance of music to the celebration of Chinese New Year are presented in Table 6.4.1.

Table 6.4.1 Perceived Importance of Music in the Celebration of Chinese New Year

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	5	12.83	4	10.81	9	11.84
Important	12	30.77	17	44.95	29	38.16
Quite Important	4	10.26	8	21.63	12	15.79
Slightly Important	12	30.77	4	10.81	16	21.05
Not Very Important	6	15.38	4	10.81	10	13.16
Total	39		37		76	

In comparison with the family, culture/tradition, and food, music is seen as much less important. Nevertheless, there are those who see music as personally integral:

- *It is important for me because it gives me the mood for the festival. It begins to feel it is really approaching when the music goes on the air. It's like a strong reminder. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Do not think we can have a Chinese New Year without the music. It won't feel like it's New Year. (Family, Son)*
- *I love Chinese New Year songs and music. It makes my heart very happy. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*
- *The music reminds me that my whole family is coming home and being together again. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Some nice combinations of pop and tradition instruments in the songs. They are very nice. (Family, Mother)*
- *I just love all the songs. They are so cheerful and happy. (Random, Male).*

Some, however, see it more as an unwelcome interruption:

- *It's not important to me at all with so much to prepare. (Random, Female)*
- *It's not important. In fact sometimes it gets so loud it can be a nuisance. (Random, Male)*
- *Appropriate music for certain festivals is played constantly everywhere in public areas. When I go home I no longer want any of it. (Random, Female)*

whilst others regard it as essential in creating the appropriate ambience for the celebrations:

- *Some are too loud with cracking firecrackers but it really sets the mood. (Random, Female)*
- *Gives us the ambience when everyone is back and we put it on full blast. (Random, Male)*
- *Like all festivals, do not think we can do it silently. It must be the most important ingredient in creating the mood, ambience and settings. (Family, Father)*
- *Music sets the mood of the festive season. (Random, Female)*

6.4.2 Clothes

The preparation of new clothes is also seen to be an important element in ushering in the New Year. Table 6.4.2 summarizes the perceptions of the importance of clothes.

Table 6.4.2 Perceived Importance of Clothes in the Celebration of Chinese New Year

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	10	25.0	5	18.52	15	22.39
Important	11	27.5	8	29.63	19	28.36
Quite Important	4	10.0	9	33.33	13	19.40
Slightly Important	4	10.0	0	0	4	5.97
Not Very Important	10	25.0	5	18.52	15	22.39
No Response	1	2.5	0	0	1	1.49
Total	40		27		67	

While overall 22 per cent see clothes as very important, over 70 per cent regard them as important or quite important. It is very clear from the responses that the symbolism of new clothes *to make a good and new start* has now accrued new social pressures:

- *Since time immemorial, all of us get new clothes for the New Year. Hence it has become an important issue to get nice clothes. (Family, Daughter)*
- *It is very important actually. No one ever steps out on the first day in old clothes, I don't think. (Random, Female)*
- *I think it is more of a superstition that one must wear new clothes to get new luck for the New Year. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *It has become a tradition since we were children, to get at least a set of everything new for the first day. (Family, Mother)*
- *It is important as it feels like New Year when one has new clothes. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *It just makes everyone feel like there is a definite pressure to wear something new. (Random, Male)*
- *Most of the time, it is very important as once a year, especially on the first day, we all step out in Chinese New Year red clothes. (Family, Daughter)*
- *We always make sure we wear red in Chinese style as it was important to our older parents-in-law who wanted to see us all in red. (Family, Daughter-in-law)*

- *Red and in traditional Chinese style was a sort of need as it was a unspoken expectation to step out on first day of New Year in our cheongsam, samfu or at least some red Chinese style blouse. (Family, Mother)*
- *It is still very important though the clothes have become more casual. People are just practical because buying new cheongsams will mean they can't use it to work or for going out any other day. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I must have the new sets of clothes from my parents because that is the only time I can really ask them for what I want. It has become a must! (Random, Female Youth)*
- *I can't think of anyone without new clothes, so it's very important to have something new. (Random, Female Youth)*
- *I suppose only if you really can't find something you like, then you don't have new clothes. (Random, Male)*
- *Always make sure everyone from my children, husband, to my sisters get new clothes every year. (Family, Mother)*

6.4.3 Decorations

While clothes are regarded as important, at least to some degree, by the majority, such is not the case for Chinese New Year decorations. Table 6.4.3 presents the perceived importance of Chinese New Year decorations.

Table 6.4.3 Perceived Importance of Chinese New Year Decorations to Self and Family

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	2	5.0	1	2.70	3	3.90
Important	6	15.0	5	13.51	11	14.29
Quite Important	11	27.5	9	24.32	20	25.97
Slightly Important	20	50.0	12	32.43	32	41.56
Not Very Important	1	2.5	10	27.03	11	14.29
Total	40		37		77	

Many of the interviewees did not see Chinese New Year decorations as important although many acknowledged the importance of the colour *red*:

- *I prefer simpler uncluttered homes with just some taste of red. (Family, Mother)*

While a number felt that cleanliness was more important than decoration,

- *Not so important to decorate but it must be very clean first! (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Not as many decorations but a well cleaned and painted house. (Family, Granddaughter)*

others see it as a matter of personal taste:

- *We used to make all these decorations but these days, they are all ready made so people don't bother to be creative anymore. (Random, Female)*
- *It is nice to hang a thing or two and decorate tastefully with some things, but not too much. (Random, Male Youth)*
- *Almost everyone does something for the home, be it simple or elaborate. It is only because the society forces one to with the availability of decorations and with neighbours all hanging things. It is not necessary but it can be nice to create some festival atmosphere. (Family, Mother)*
- *These have become so elaborate. Sometimes it takes the focus away from the more important things like the twin spring couplets which have far more meaning and relevance than all the hanging gold stuff. (Family, Daughter)*
- *A red cloth at the entrance is necessary for every Chinese home. If possible, the two red lanterns at the entrance and the pair of spring couplets at the door, a must. (Random, Female)*
- *We hang quite a lot of nice things around the house and it feels very festive. It is more for ourselves to enjoy the New Year decorations rather than for friends to see. (Family, Mother)*
- *I decorate it because my friends and relatives are all coming for the Open House. (Random, Male Youth)*
- *There is no necessity in decorations as long as there is some touch of red and perhaps a jar of flowers. (Random, Female)*
- *In the past, we only hung Chinese New Year cards. Nowadays I received so little cards because people are sending electronic cards now. (Random, Female).*

Some are obviously now feeling commercial pressures:

- *It has become such an important thing. In the past, we only clean the house, perhaps hang red cloth at the front door, put some flowers and hang some Chinese New Year cards. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *There are more and more things coming out in the market from China for home décor during Chinese New Year. A lot of red and gold things are being sold and I think sometimes people hang far too much. (Family, Granddaughter).*

6.4.4 Celebration Objects

While Chinese New Year decorations for the home are seen as relatively low in importance as far as these groups are concerned, celebration objects and gift exchange are seen in a different and more positive light as evidenced in Table 6.4.4 which details the specific Celebration Objects perceived as important.

Table 6.4.4 Perceived Importance of Celebration Objects in the Celebration of Chinese New Year

Celebration Objects/Souvenirs	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gifts						
• <i>Ang Pows</i>	28		21		49	
• Orange	10		12		22	
• Noodles	2		1		3	
• <i>Niangao</i>	5		6		11	
• Eggs	1		0		1	
• New Year Card	1		0		1	
% mentions		61.84		60.61		61.27
Decorations						
• Red Lanterns, etc.	9		4		13	
• Fire Crackers	7		0		7	
• Flowers	0		2		2	
% mentions		21.05		9.09		15.49
Rituals						
• Chinese New Year Food	4		4		8	
• Lion Dance	5		2		7	
• Paper Money	0		2		2	
• Joss Stick	2		6		8	
• Clothes	1		0		1	
% mentions		15.79		21.21		18.31
Nil	1		6		7	
% mentions		1.32		9.09		4.93
Total	76		66		142	

The dominance of gifts in the Celebration Objects perceived to be important and the low level of importance attributed to decorations reinforces the picture which emerges from Table 6.4.3. However, comments from individuals suggest that there are idiosyncratic family patterns in this regard:

- *Many decoration objects such as gold money, the word for prosperity hung upside down, red cloth and red lanterns are important to us. (Family, Mother)*
- *The octagonal candy tray for serving is an important celebration object. (Family, Mother)*
- *Firecrackers are the most important celebrations objects. They create the atmosphere for celebration. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Red cloth at the front door, Ang Pows and firecrackers are very important. (Family, Mother)*
- *I always make sure we have the leek and moss that the family must eat for prosperity. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *All our neighbours hang the pair of red lanterns at the front door. I think that they are important in telling the people that these are Chinese houses. (Family, Father)*
- *One must get ready the Ang Pows, the firecrackers, the red cloth, the red decorations. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I think Ang Pows are the most important. (Family, Father)*
- *Ang Pows and joss sticks are important for me. (Family, Mother).*

6.5 Practices in Evolution

Respondents in both groups were questioned regarding the importance to themselves and to their families of the traditional customs and family values implicit in the celebration of Chinese New Year. Table 6.5.1 summarizes the results.

Table 6.5.1 Perceived Importance of Traditional Customs and Family Values in Chinese New Year

Perceived Importance		Random Group		Families		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
SELF	Very Important to Self	15	37.50	8	22.22	23	30.26
	Important to Self	18	45	11	30.56	29	38.15
	Slightly Important to Self	3	7.50	7	19.44	10	13.16
	Not Really Important to Self	4	10.00	10	27.78	14	18.42
	Total	40		36		76	
PARENTS/ GRANDPARENTS	Very Important to Parents, Grandparents	16	44.44	14	35.00	30	39.50
	Important to Parents, Grandparents	10	27.78	16	40.00	26	34.20
	Slightly Important to Parents, Grandparents	6	16.67	8	20.00	14	18.42
	Not Really Important to Parent, Grandparents	4	11.11	2	5.00	6	7.90
	Total	36		40		76	

Almost 70 per cent see traditional customs and family values as important or very important to themselves whereas slightly more see these customs and values as important or very important to their parents and grandparents. However, while almost 30 per cent regard these customs and values as either *slightly* or *not very* important to themselves, slightly less regard their parents and grandparents as feeling the same way.

In the comments which emanated from these perceptual judgments, certain principles were enunciated:

- *The whole Chinese upbringing revolves around culture, customs, principles, values and respect. For extended families to stay happily together, these principles are very important. During Chinese New Year when the entire family is together, one can experience tensions, stress etc. if these values are not fully in force, understood and practised. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *Understanding the customs and family values of Chinese New Year is learnt only year by year and not taught at one go. Hence, it is important one has the right attitude and understanding of all these principles to be able to display understanding when one marries into another totally different family. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Because the Chinese have certain beliefs such as the father is always the head of the home, the wife should be obedient, home caring, loving and capable to take care of all domestic matters, it is of utmost importance that these values are handed down to all generations. (Family, Father)*
- *With the strong influence of foreign cultures especially Western, on our children these days, it is of prime importance that the children understand what Chinese culture and customs is all about. (Family, Father)*
- *Most important because for us Chinese, it is all about knowing your culture and background. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Respect, protocol and our Chinese values are most important and must be instilled to the children from young. These are all learnt during the Chinese New Year season. (Family, Son)*
- *Children learn from examples and can see during the Chinese New Year about our Chinese culture and respect. (Family, Grandson)*
- *This is the best time for inculcating the family values and customs. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *It has always been important and will be important as long as the children are still in the Asian context. A lot of these values change once they go overseas. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I learnt a lot of things during Chinese New Year about protocol, respect, superstitions, taboos, beliefs, customs, expectations of Chinese parents, etc. and will teach these to my children as well. (Family, Grandson)*

- *Traditional customs and family values are the roots of my race and should be passed on for future generations as they identify the family, the society and civilization. (Family, Mother)*

In addition, a certain disquiet was expressed:

- *It used to be not important but at our age to find that the younger generation starting to be western it is a serious matter to let them know their culture and tradition. (Family, Son)*
- *So much is gone now – we better revive some of it. (Family, Granddaughter)*

In fact, interviewees reported a significant number of changes observed in the contemporary celebration of Chinese New Year. Table 6.5.2 summarizes the nature of these perceived changes.

Table 6.5.2 Changes perceived in the Contemporary Celebration of Chinese New Year

Perceived Changes	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reduced						
• Preparation	5		1		6	
• Attention to detail/tradition	4		2		6	
• Cake making	1		0		1	
• Visiting	7		8		15	
• People coming to open house	1		0		1	
• Formality	2		5		7	
• <i>Ang Pows</i>	0		1		1	
• Fellowships	1		1		2	
• Fun	1		3		4	
• Firecrackers	1		2		3	
% mentions		52.27		47.92		50.00
Increased						
• Simplification/informality	1		1		2	
• Buying ready made	11		3		14	
• Clothes off the rack	1		0		1	
• Travelling/holidaying	4		2		6	
• Commercialization/ materialization	3		7		10	
• Money required for celebration	0		7		7	
• Following of beliefs by children	0		2		2	
% mentions		45.45		45.83		45.65
Nil/don't know	1		3		4	
% mentions		2.27		6.25		4.35
Total	44		48		92	

It is interesting that the majority of comments that both the reductions and increases are largely perceived as negatives:

- *There was a lot more fun and joy in the unity getting together with friends, neighbours or relatives to make cakes and to prepare food in those days. Everything is ordered these days and the spirit of doing things together is gone. (Random, Female)*
- *The younger people had to help and join in the preparation those days. It just seems the youths these days are so stressed out with examinations and tuitions and they can't do very much to help. (Random, Male)*
- *I felt my earliest memories of New Year were that it was such an important event that everyone looked forward to. It was also much more special and meaningful since everyone made a big fuss about it. It just seems everyone is so reluctant to make it a grand event now. People are just too tired. (Random, Female)*
- *Less people baking and making. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Less fuss about the open house and visiting. (Family, Father)*
- *All ready made dresses and blouses. (Family, Mother)*
- *Less formal wear like T-shirts and jeans for visiting. (Family, Grandson)*
- *Many decorations now available. Very little in those days, all self made. (Random, Male)*
- *Fusion food on the New Year Eve table compared to true Chinese delicacies. (Random, Male)*
- *People are just serving what the family enjoys. (Family, Mother)*
- *Very much less visiting. (Family, Father)*
- *Younger people no longer help in the chores. They are too busy. (Random, Male)*
- *Not much firecrackers sounding compared to earlier times. (Random, Female)*
- *Major changes as people no longer make things but order them or buy them. (Family, Mother)*
- *Many more things available for buying. (Family, Mother)*
- *A lot of people go travelling. (Family, Daughter)*
- *A lot of people catering for food. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *A lot of people eat out. (Random, Male)*
- *Many food stalls also open even on first day of New Year. (Random, Male)*
- *Both working parents now take the opportunity to relax and catch up. Hence cannot do much for the preparations. (Family, Father)*

- *It was more joyous in the earlier times and much busier. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Much more money needed to make the festival special now and there is so much to buy. (Family, Father)*
- *Very hard to get the younger generation to help nowadays. (Family, Father)*
- *Seems that the people are not so anxiously looking forward to celebrate these festivals and it is becoming a stress for many. I feel rather stressed with having to get so many things done when I don't have leave from working time. (Random, Male)*
- *A lot of times the children suggest eating at the hotels, which are very expensive. Fine dining has become more and more a trend. (Family, Father)*
- *Quite a fuss to do so many things. I would rather take it easy and relax going somewhere. (Family, Son)*
- *Children spoilt and don't help. (Family, Mother)*
- *Children love fast food. (Family, Father)*
- *Children not so anxious about participating in the preparation – a gap between the two generations. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *Many of the traditional beliefs are no longer being practised nowadays like no sweeping of the floor, pay respect to deceased members of the family. (Random, Female)*
- *A lot of work in the entire preparation and I had to help in many things. I felt very responsible for them. It does not seem that the people these days feel like that anymore. They can't be stressed out doing all these and would rather just go away for holiday. (Random, Male)*
- *All things to be given to people had to be pasted with a nice red sticker that we had to make cutting nice patterns out of the red paper. Nowadays, red stickers are available. (Family, Mother)*
- *We made everything those days. The people are very lucky nowadays things are all ready made. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Cleaning of the house in those days was very thorough. We practically cleaned everything and every panel. (Family, Grandfather).*

Hence, while some express gratitude that the increased availability of ready-made alternatives to the homemade has reduced the stress of Chinese New Year preparation, there is also a sense that these traditions should not be allowed to sink into oblivion – within reason:

- *OK but not too much. (Family, Grandson)*
- *Should be carried on. (Random, Male)*

- *Some are too superstitious and silly. I don't believe in all the past ancestor worships etc. (Random, Male)*
- *I consider traditional customs important because it gives identity to a race. (Random, Female)*
- *Must be followed. (Random, Male)*
- *Some are too much to follow. (Family, Daughter)*
- *It helps to observe and preserve them. (Family, Son)*
- *Yes but not too fussy. (Random, Male).*

Somewhat against the trend, one parent asserted that *my family ensures all traditions are still carried out.*

In this context of cultural maintenance, interviewees were asked to identify what they perceived to be the most important Chinese New Year traditions, customs, practices and cultural dimensions. Table 6.5.3 summarizes their perceptions.

Table 6.5.3 Perceptions of the Most Important Chinese New Year Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions

Most Important Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family Practices						
• Traditions, beliefs, prayers, fellowship	20		16		36	
• Respect for elders	7		3		10	
% mentions		42.19		34.55		38.66
Ritual						
• Food	3		3		6	
• Reunion Dinner	3		9		12	
• Visiting	7		5		12	
• Open house	3		2		5	
• Gift exchange/giving	0		3		3	
• Red clothing, decorations	1		1		2	
• Oranges	2		0		2	
• <i>Ang Pows</i>	8		8		16	
• Tea ceremony	3		0		3	
• Protocol baskets	1		2		3	
• Firecrackers	1		0		1	
• Offering to ancestors/gods	1		0		1	
• Bringing in good luck	0		1		1	
• Lion dance	3		0		3	
% mentions		56.25		61.82	70	58.82

Table 6.5.3 Perceptions of the Most Important Chinese New Year Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions (cont'd)

Most Important Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions	Random Group	Families	Total
Rest and relax	1	0	1
% mentions	1.56	0	0.84
Nil/don't know	0	2	2
% mentions	0	3.64	1.68
Total	64	55	119

Family practices in total are perceived to be the single most important group of traditions relating to Chinese New Year suggesting that it is within the family unit that traditions are introduced, nurtured and, ultimately, valued by the individual. While rituals overall are seen to be important, the dominant ones are *Ang Pows* and the Reunion Dinner. In the main, individuals' comments expand upon and support these findings, especially in relation to the centrality of the family and tradition:

- *The culture of understanding the family values and the meaning of the tradition is most important. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I feel the family unity and harmony is most important. (Random, Female)*
- *I felt that the family can all come back home is the most important. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *I think the customs and traditional values are most important, then of course the good food. (Random, Male)*
- *The most important thing is that we must make sure the Chinese race now and future do not forget his/ her roots and culture. (Random, Male)*
- *I consider the Open House important and really hope that it wouldn't die out. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *For the children, I think the new clothes are the most important. (Family, Granddaughter)*

For some food dominates:

- *I think food is the most important. (Family, Mother)*
- *Special festival food is most important. (Random, Male)*

while for others it is a combination of food and family:

- *Of course, the family can all be back together and there is good food. (Random, Male)*

- *Food, clothes and family values. (Random, Female)*
- *If the family is united, harmonious and healthy and there is good food around for feasting is the most important. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Special food of the festive season for everyone and family values are practised. (Random, Male).*

Prosperity is of central importance for others:

- *I think if the family is well and prosperous, that is most important. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *The success of everyone is the most important thing for New Year. If the children are successful, the family is prosperous. (Family, Mother)*
- *Prosperity and money brings all the happiness and makes everyone happy. (Random, Male)*

7.1 Recollections and Preparations

Table 7.1.1 summarizes participants' earliest memories of Gawai for both the random and the cross generational family groups.

Table 7.1.1 Earliest Memories of Gawai

Focus of Memory	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Traditional Celebrations						
• Rituals	11		4		15	
• Longhouse	6		3		9	
• Blessings	1		1		2	
• Happy Merriment	3		1		4	
• Thanksgiving	6		2		8	
% mentions		52.94		44		50
2. Preparation						
• Food	1		3		4	
• Rice Pounding	1		0		1	
• Breeding animal livestock for feast	1		0		1	
• Viewing preparations	1		1		2	
% mentions		7.84		16		10.53
3. Social						
• Visiting	4		3		7	
• Social Fun	4		3		7	
• New Clothes	1		0		1	
• Helping	1		0		1	
• Family (Togetherness)	5		4		9	
% mentions		29.41		40		32.89
4. Nil/Not Sure/Can't Remember						
	5		0		5	
% mentions		9.80		0		6.58
Total	51		25		76	

Overall, traditional rituals and longhouse celebrations are of dominant importance to both the Random Group and to the Family Generational Group accounting, in total, for 50 per

cent of all comments. If one were to regard *family togetherness* as integral to the traditions of celebration (which arguably it is) then this percentage would rise to above 60 per cent. In an era where there is scepticism about the ultimate survival of these traditions, it is noteworthy that these are still overwhelmingly perceived to be important.

As can be seen from Table 7.1.1, rituals constitute the earliest memories of the people surveyed. They remember and contemplate the longhouse celebrations, the traditional blessings and preparations observed, the rituals of thanksgiving etc. Fifty three per cent of the random group and 44 per cent of families felt that those earliest memories were retained and revitalized at each successive festival. Forty per cent of families felt that social visiting, new clothes and family togetherness were their most important earliest memories.

For many people surveyed, memories of Gawai derived from childhood days in the longhouses and rural settings:

- *My earliest memory was as a child in the longhouse, we had very traditional rituals to evoke and thank the spirits and there were many Gavais before the actual Gawai. (Random, Male)*
- *Earlier days were so simple and traditional: it was all revolved around the rituals. (Random, Female)*
- *My parents used to take us back to the longhouse and we enjoyed the change of rural living from the cities, bathing in the river, going into the jungles to collect bamboo for the rituals. (Family, Grandson)*
- *Everyone in the community celebrated together in joy and happy atmosphere. I remember I did not sleep all night. (Family, Father)*
- *I remember going door to door to visit friends in the longhouses. (Family, Father)*
- *Memories are vivid of the rural settings and the rituals. (Family, Mother).*

Table 7.1.2 lists the groups' perceptions of their memories of special Gawai preparations.

Table 7.1.2 Perceptions of Special Gawai Preparations

Nature of Preparations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. House Related						
• Cleaning/Community Preparation	5		3		8	
• Ritual Preparation	4		6		10	
• Gathering things (e.g., Bamboo etc.)	2		1		3	
% mentions		26.19		27.03		26.58
2. Food Related						
• Traditional food	17		17		34	
• Preparation of livestock	1		1		2	
• Slaughtering of pigs	3		2		5	
• Religious – Church preparation	1		1		2	
% mentions		52.38		56.76		54.43
3. Social						
• Send greeting cards	2		2		4	
• Trip preparation	1		0		1	
• Gift preparation	1		1		2	
• Shopping	1		1		2	
• Dance preparation (Ngajat)	2		2		4	
• Competitions preparations	1		0		1	
• Feasting	1		0		1	
% mentions		21.42		16.21		18.99
Total	42		37		79	

Food related preparations dominate the memories of both groups, especially the preparation of the traditional foods. Preparation for festival rituals accounted for only 12 per cent of memories compared with almost 20 per cent for socially related preparations.

Responses here indicated a sense of change, of practices in evolution:

- *In the olden days there were a lot of prayers and chanting for the steps of the harvest from the blessings of the seeds, blessing of the instruments used, blessing of the harvest, the winnowing, the stored rice, and finally the 'miring' or 'blessing of the longhouse'. (Random, Male)*

- *There were several Gawaiis in minor celebrations of each particular blessing such as seeds, the harvest, etc. before the actual big celebration of the Festival. (Family, Father)*
- *So much has changed now. Our children have gone out to work to bring back modern entertainment such as karaoke, videos, etc., new food, modern household products etc. and the longhouse folks like/enjoy / or are proud of the changes. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *The most special preparations and event the people waited for was the killing of the pig and the reading of the fate of the longhouse. Before that all the rituals for the praying, slaying, reading of the liver (to tell the fate of the new year for the longhouse) and finally dividing it for roasting and cooking. However, all these have changed since the people became Christians. Longhouses not converted yet still practise this in a special way. (Family, Grandfather).*

Table 7.1.3 summarizes participants' remembered roles *vis à vis* preparatory activity for Gawai.

Table 7.1.3 Perceptions of Remembered Roles in Gawai Preparations

Remembered Roles	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Proactive						
• Decorate Church	1		1		2	
• Receive guests	2		3		5	
• Entertain children	2		3		5	
• Buyer	1		1		2	
• Unspecified leadership	7		7		14	
% mentions		36.11		65.22		47.46
2. Support Roles						
• Protocol	1		1		2	
• Driver	2		1		3	
• Visitor	2		2		4	
• Sender/Collector	2		1		3	
• Unspecified Helper/Follower	14		3		17	
% mentions		58.33		34.78		49.15
3. No Role	2		0		2	
% mentions		5.56		0		3.39
Total	36		23		59	

For the Families Group proactive roles were remembered while the Random Group recollect support roles; however comments from both indicate a fairly relaxed and non-stressful preparation environment:

- *The longhouse is such a relaxed environment. I just like to sit around and do nothing. (Random, Male)*
- *I remember we were all very united, after the Headman held a meeting, all the jobs would be divided and the women would hold their own little discussion on the things to be done and how to get about doing it. (Random, Male)*
- *For the chanting roles, only a few of us could do it and it was from interest that we copied the old men who chanted it. Not everyone could do the rituals chanting role. We believe the spirit governed it. (Family, Son)*
- *I felt very important, as we were the few men in the committee who directed everything in our longhouse. We would appoint, assign, check and make sure things were all ready for the celebrations. (Family, Grandson)*
- *I remember we always worked as a team, never alone and I felt very good because they always asked me for instructions for the cooking and we did everything together. (Family, Mother).*

Table 7.1.4 presents a summary of participants' most pleasant associations with Gawai.

Table 7.1.4 Most Pleasant Associations with Gawai Preparations

Associations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Family Related						
• Togetherness	3		3		6	
• Return of children	2		2		4	
• Interaction with older folks/children	1		1		2	
• Going back to longhouse	2		1		3	
% mentions		17.78		25.00		20.55
2. Preparation						
• Food	14		3		17	
• Prepare house	3		3		6	
• Harvestings	1		1		2	
% mentions		40		25.00		34.25
3. Social						
• Being with friends	4		3		7	
• Excitement	2		2		4	
• Wearing traditional dress	1		1		2	
• Helping	6		2		8	
• Visiting, parties	3		3		6	
• Playing firecrackers	1		1		2	
% mentions		37.78		42.86		39.73

Table 7.1.4 Most Pleasant Associations with Gawai Preparations (cont'd)

Associations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
4. Shopping	1		1		2	
% mentions		2.22		3.57		2.74
5. None	1		1		2	
% mentions		2.22		3.57		2.74
TOTAL	45		28		73	

For the Random Group both Preparation for the festival (40%) and Social Aspects (37.78%) were important, again epitomizing a relaxed frame of mind:

- *I think the most pleasant part is the relaxed feeling of just sitting around the longhouse and join others in preparing the materials for the festival. (Random, Male)*
- *I enjoyed cleaning my house and preparing it like all friends of mine who prepare their homes for Open Days during their New Year. (Random, Female)*
- *The preparations are much simpler compared to the other festivals and I think it is good to keep it simple here so people are not stressed out with the preparation. I enjoyed the food for the festival. (Random, Male)*
- *I enjoyed going out to buy some new clothes for my children for the festival as we live in the city. (Random, Female).*

For the Families, Social Aspects (42.86%) were clearly ahead of Preparation (25%) as reflected in their comments which rarely include explicit comments on the pleasure of preparation:

- *The nicest part is joining all the women of the longhouse in making the traditional cakes and biscuits. There is such a simple feeling of “gotong royong” (cooperation and togetherness) or spirit of unity. They are so cheerful and happy and there is a lot of chatting, talking and laughing as we get the work done. (Family, Mother)*
- *I always feel so happy when I see the children all returning home and bringing with them some gifts. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Just being together with the family, to see my parents and be in the rural simplicity again is great joy to me. (Family, Father)*
- *It brings all the memories of my childhood back and our brothers and sisters are so happy just to be able to chat and discuss our different environments, with excitement to our parents. (Family, Mother).*

7.2 The Role of Religion

Table 7.2.1 records participants' perceptions of the nature of religious observances practised in relation to the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.2.1 Religious Observances Practised in the Celebration of Gawai

Nature of Religious Observance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Preparatory						
• Prohibition to sweep house two days prior	1		1		2	
• Preparation for mass	1		1		2	
• Prayers before celebration	14		11		25	
% mentions		21.92		33.33		25.89
2. Celebration Specific/Social						
• Food	14		3		17	
• Prepare house	3		3		6	
• Harvest things	1		1		2	
% mentions		24.66		17.95		22.32
3. Religious						
• Attend mass	10		5		15	
• Communal mass	2		2		4	
• Gawai prayers	7		3		10	
• Call for elders to bless	2		1		3	
• Rituals for family	5		5		10	
• Rituals for dead	2		1		3	
% mentions		38.36		43.59		40.18
4. Nil	11		2		13	
% mentions		15.07		5.13		11.61
TOTAL	73		39		112	

For both groups over 50 per cent of mentions relate to specific religious observances. For the Random Group celebration specific social activities receive the next highest mentions (40%) while for the Families Group both domestic and religious preparations receive the second highest mentions (40.63%).

Some participants mention only their present status as Christians:

- *Being Christians now, we only wait for the mass and go to Church. Sometimes the priest comes only once a month or at Festival times only. (Random, Female)*
- *When we are in the cities, we go to mass. When we are at the longhouses, we have to wait for the celebrations to happen when a priest comes to celebrate only on the morning of Gawai or at midnight before Gawai. (Family, Father)*
- *We never do anything else except attend mass if there is any available when we return for Gawai. (Random, Male)*

while some make explicit references to the characteristics of the old practices

- *At the animistic longhouses, ritual preparations go on months or weeks before the actual Gawai. This slowly climaxes Gawai after Gawai until we finally reach the real event itself with long hours of continuous prayers and offerings. (Family, Father)*
- *The ritual preparations used to be very tedious with lots of small offerings and prayers, chants and calling of the spirits, or visiting the graves. (Family, Grandfather),*

and others make direct comparisons between old and new ways:

- *The animistic ways had more rituals, prayers and religious offerings before the festival itself, but when we all became Christians; there was more of communal masses, prayers, praise and worship etc. during the Festival itself. (Random, Male)*
- *Only before in the past when the rituals were said all night and our families were not Christians. (Random, Male).*

7.3 The Role of Food

Table 7.3.1 details respondents' perceptions of the importance of food to Gawai celebrations.

Table 7.3.1 Perceived Importance of Food in the Celebration of Gawai

Perceived Important	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	10	25.64	15	36.59	25	31.25
Important						
• Just Important	4	10.26	4	9.76	8	10.00
• Traditional food	8	20.52	8	19.51	16	20.00
• Gives identity	1	2.56	1	2.44	2	2.50
• Important because of ancestors memory	3	7.69	2	4.88	5	6.25
• Common interest	1	2.56	1	2.44	2	2.50
Important		43.59		39.02		41.25
Quite Important	6	15.38	5	12.20	11	13.75
Slightly Important	6	15.38	5	12.20	11	13.75
TOTAL	39		41		80	

Food is important/very important to around 70 per cent of the random group and around 75 per cent of the families group. The importance relates to traditional food, its centrality in identifying the Dayak people, its symbolism for ancestral memories, and its role as an agent in generating a sense of community.

It is obvious that many feel traditional food to be important because it gives them the memory, identity and, as both groups say, “common interest for returning home”.

- *I miss the traditional food and long to be back for it. (Random, Male)*
- *Having worked in the city for years, it is such a joy to enjoy the longhouse cooking and pure simple jungle specialties. (Random, Male)*
- *Its so refreshing and such a nice change to be back in the longhouse to taste all the traditional food again. (Family, Daughter).*

There is no doubt that food is a very important cultural dimension in the celebration of Gawai with around 70 per cent of both groups perceiving it to be very important or important.

7.4 Specific Celebratory Dimensions

This section deals with participants’ perceptions of the importance of a range of cultural dimensions to the celebration of Gawai.

7.4.1 Music

Table 7.4.1 presents perceptions of the importance of music to the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.4.1 Perceived Importance of Music in the Celebration of Gawai

Perceived Image	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	1	2.22	1	3.70	2	2.78
Important	21	46.67	1	3.70	22	30.56
Quite Important	4	8.89	5	18.52	9	12.50
Slightly Important	4	8.89	4	14.81	8	11.11
Not Important	12	26.67	13	48.15	25	34.72
No Response	1	2.22	1	3.70	2	2.78
<i>Has changed so much</i>	2	4.44	2	7.41	4	5.56
TOTAL	45		27		72	

Over 40 per cent of both groups regard music as *Important* or *Very Important* to the celebration of Gawai. Specific reasons advanced for its importance include the fact that it brings back memories, the nostalgic feeling of rural settings which makes people feel like dancing, and re-creates the ambience of memorable festivals from childhood. Others comment on the role of traditional music in creating the remembered atmosphere.

It seems that the traditional beats of the brass ensembles that once were the heartbeat of the Gawai Harvest Festival are almost extinct in many longhouses now having been usurped by karaoke and pop rhythms. As the comments clearly indicate, participants lament that the traditional music is gradually fading and regret the invasion of what they perceive to be inferior contemporary versions:

- *A lot of traditional music is gone now and heard only in some villages. They are also used for different functions now. In the past it used to be part of the celebrations. Now it is used to signal the start of the festival, the arrival of guests or the calling of dinner or lunch time for people to gather and eat. Other than that, the longhouses are being invaded by radio, CDs and karaoke pop. (Random, Male)*
- *In the past, there was always continuous traditional brass gong ensemble playing at different times during the Festival, to call people for meals, music to accompany the rituals, music for the ngajat competitions, music for dancing etc. Not many young people play it now as many of the old ones have died. (Random, Male)*
- *The music is very important in 'taboh '(traditional dance beat)' ngajat' as it is uniquely our own Iban dance beat so if music is not learnt by our young people, all ngajat will stop in the future. (Family, Grandfather)*

- *It makes me feel the closeness of our great ancestors when I hear the traditional beats. (Family, Father).*

The generational differences are very clearly delineated in the responses made by participants:

- *There are less and less people learning to play the traditional music instruments these days as they have been handed down by oral tradition. Youths like to play the electric band instruments. (Family, Father)*
- *Only a very few of us can sing the old chants to invoke the spirits. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *The music of Gawai means joy and it makes me think of my childhood with my parents. (Random, Female)*
- *The whole Festival is now taken over by storm with Bidayuh and Iban Pops. There is hardly any traditional music left except at the start of the festival played by the older folks. (Family, Grandson)*
- *The problem is that the youths think it is old-fashioned to be playing ethnic music and more trendy to play Western pops. They much preferred the pop compared to traditional music. (Random, Male).*

Some are tolerant and understanding of the changes rather than simply lamenting them :

- *There are a lot of good Iban and Bidayuh pops which the young people relate to. The younger Dayaks prefer it and enjoy it more. (Family, Grandson)*
- *The whole longhouse has a mixture of karaoke pops, radio Bidayuh pops and some traditional music. (Random, Male)*

while some simply reject with intolerance:

- *I don't like the traditional music. It's boring. (Random, Male).*

7.4.2 Clothes

Table 7.4.2 summarises the perceived importance of clothes to the celebration of Gawai

Table 7.4.2 Perceived Importance of Clothes in the Celebration of Gawai

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	1	2.44	1	2.86	2	2.63
Important	15	36.59	10	28.57	25	32.89
Quite Important	4	9.76	4	11.43	8	10.52
Slightly Important	1	2.44	1	2.86	2	2.63
Not Very Important	20	48.78	19	54.29	39	51.32
TOTAL	41		35		76	

Approximately half of both groups regard clothes as relatively unimportant to the celebration of Gawai. This is consistent with the relaxed approach already noted among respondents:

- *In the normal Gawai festival, there is no difference in the clothes worn. (Random, Male)*
- *Most men do not wear a shirt and only wear casual shorts. Ladies only wear sarongs and a blouse. The very old still go topless. (Random, Male)*
- *There is no fuss about clothes in the longhouse. (Family, Father)*
- *I feel it is least important of all the dimensions. (Random, Male)*

However some made reference to the costumes worn for traditional dances:

- *Clothes for the traditional dance are important, as it is significant to the Festival. (Family, Mother)*

or to clothes as a way of distinguishing between the different ethnic groups:

- *Clothes are important as the different types of traditional clothes separate one ethnic group from another in a big celebration. (Random, Female).*

Others had a much more pragmatic attitude to the function of new clothes:

- *Quite important as it is our 'new clothes for the 'New Year'' but it depends on our budget. (Family, Mother)*
- *Having new clothes was a once a year affair but it is not so important anymore unless we celebrate it in the city and there is visiting during Open House. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Clothes are important to us as teenagers as we only get our new jeans and shirts once a year and we need new clothes for visiting. (Random, Male).*

7.4.3 Decorations

Table 7.4.3 presents perceptions of the importance of decorations to the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.4.3 Perceived Importance of Gawai Decorations to Self and Family

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	3	7.50	3	7.32	6	7.41
Important	7	17.50	6	14.63	13	16.05
Quite Important	4	10.0	1	2.44	5	6.17
Slightly Important	7	17.5	10	24.40	17	20.99
Not Very Important	18	45	20	48.80	38	46.91
Not Sure	1	2.50	1	2.44	2	2.47
TOTAL	40		41		81	

Around 60 per cent of both groups perceive decorations to be either not very important or only slightly important to the celebration of Gawai:

- *I think it has very little significance. (Random, Male)*
- *No one ever worries about the home decorations in the rural settings. (Random, Female)*
- *It has so little importance. Many more important things. (Family, Son)*

Some respondents see at least a token gesture to traditional gestures as important:

- *At the longhouse, we only put up some of the weavings and draw out the new mats. (Family, Mother)*
- *It is not important at all. There is usually only the shield that we put up as a symbolic reminder of our ancestors warring past victories. (Family, Daughter)*
- *People used to decorate their homes with fresh cut palms for the parties at nights and this is still carried out in the longhouses that hold parties and dances. (Family, Father)*

whereas others have only a concern for cleanliness at this time:

- *We do not normally put up anything at all. However, the house should be cleaned. (Family, Mother)*
- *Not important to decorate but must be clean and tidy. (Random, Female).*

7.4.4 Celebration Objects

Table 7.4.4 details celebration objects perceived to be important in the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.4.4 Perceived Importance of Celebration Objects to the Celebration of Gawai

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Traditional						
• Gong	3		3		6	
• Sword	6		3		9	
• Harvesting tools	1		1		2	
• Bamboo	1		1		2	
• Shield	3		3		6	
• <i>Rampai</i> (ritual pole)	2		2		4	
• Old age souvenir	1		1		2	
• Wood/bamboo carving	1		1		2	
• Headgear	1		2		3	
% mentions		36.54		35.42		36
2. Food						
• Traditional food	2		2		4	
• Food souvenirs	1		1		2	
• Basket of rice	1		0		1	
• <i>Ai Tuak</i> (Rice Wine)	2		2		4	
• The Pig	5		6		11	
% mentions		21.15		22.92		22
3. Religious						
• The Cross	1		3	6.25	4	
• The bamboo ritual pole	1		1	2.08	2	
% mentions		3.85		8.33		6
4. Social						
Greeting cards	3		3		5	
% mentions		5.77		6.25		6
5. Don't know/none	17		13		28	
% mentions		32.69		27.08		30
Total	52		48		100	

While traditional celebration objects such as the sword, gongs and shield receive almost 40 per cent of mentions with food and wine receiving a further 22 per cent of mentions,

around 30 per cent do not perceive any such objects to be of importance or express uncertainty about the issue of importance. Even those who do see celebration objects as important have a minimalist approach:

- *There is only the handling of the sword for ‘proof of manhood’ in our time. (Random, Male)*
- *The pole held by the shaman for the rituals is a special celebration object. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *All the things and altars for the rituals were the most important celebration objects in the past. (Random, Male)*
- *I think the sword. It was used for everything important – preparation, killing of chickens or pig, dance, protection, etc. (Random, Male)*
- *Bamboo is very important as we use it to make many festival objects such as altar for rituals, containers for cooking, etc. (Family, Mother)*
- *The gong maybe. It was used for all the traditional dance and music and for calling the community people to eat, to start the ceremonies or to signal the arrival of the guests. (Random, Male).*

For many, however, such objects would seem to be a point of indifference:

- *I don’t really see any celebration objects that are very important in our village. (Random, Male).*

7.5 Practices in Evolution

Interviewees in both sample groups were questioned regarding the importance to them and to their families of the traditional customs and family values implicit in the celebration of Gawai. Table 7.5.1 presents the groups’ perceptions of the importance of traditional customs and family values to Gawai.

Table 7.5.1 Perceived Importance of Traditional Customs and Family Values in Gawai

	Perceived Importance	Random Group		Family Group		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
SELF	Very Important	16	37.21	11	28.21	27	32.93
	Important	10	23.25	15	38.46	25	30.49
	Quite Important	7	16.28	7	17.95	14	17.07
	Not Important	7	16.28	5	12.82	12	14.63
	No Response	3	6.98	1	2.56	4	4.88
	Total		43		39		82
PARENTS/ GRANDPARENTS	Very Important	16	57.14	11	33.33	27	44.26
	Important	5	17.86	14	42.42	19	31.15
	Quite Important	5	17.86	4	12.12	9	14.75
	Not Important	1	3.57	1	3.03	2	3.28
	No Response	1	3.57	3	9.09	4	6.56
	Total		28		33		61

Over 60 per cent of individual respondents in both the random and the families groups perceived traditional customs and family values to be very important or important compared with their 75 per cent attribution of these as very important/important to parents/grandparents. These figures are probably an underestimation of the true perception of importance as, in many cases, respondents' language lacked a sense of the subtleties of degree and, whereas some in relation to other Festivals would say "important, oh yes, very important", the more typical response in relation to Gawai was the simple affirmative "yes". However these perceptions of importance were very much in the context of the shifting sands of change. A number of issues were raised by respondents, interestingly often in the past tense, including the traditional authority of the Headman and the paternal head of family:

- *The traditional customs were very much dependent on what the Heads of families have agreed to do and everyone listens to the Headman. (Family, Daughter)*
- *The family values were usually very well understood. The father was always the Head of the home and he made decisions on everything. Mum never had a say and children only follow/obey. (Family, Son)*

and the privileging of the male:

- *The training of the Iban boys to be tough and resilient I feel, is very much a part of our culture as the past men used to go Headhunting and feared nothing. During Gawai, my growing brothers had to be prayed over as they grew up and the sword passed to them as a symbol of achieving their manhood. They then had to do the ngajat to demonstrate they now knew the 'tricks of the trade'. This also helped to woo the Dayak girls who were still young, single, and full of admiration for them. (Family, Son)*
- *The rule in the longhouses is always that the men did all the planning, praying, blessing, dancing,, drinking etc. whilst the women cooked and prepared the food for the festival. All men and women sat around to drink and the family didn't mind the amount of drinking as it was a culture of 'once a year getting drunk'. However, sometimes it was no longer tuak, but beer that was served. (Family, Daughter).*

These traditions are seen to been eroded by exposure to the cities:

- *Many of these values have changed since my children worked in the cities. Sometimes they no longer believe what we say and think that it was all too traditional and superstitious. They explain their own values to us nowadays. (Random, Male)*
- *The family traditions have got less and less since more people worked in the cities. (Family, Mother)*

Some referred to the transition from traditional practices to Christianity and the accommodations made in the process:

- *In the past, the whole festival was centred around the rituals so we used to wait for one ritual after another, and listened to a lot of singing and chanting all night long. After being Christians, all that stopped. (Family, Mother)*
- *Until today, despite the entire longhouse being converted to Christians, the "miring" ceremony is still carried out as a blessing to start the ceremonies and a blessing to the longhouse. However, this is only done as a symbolic memory of the past, no longer as a belief.(Family, Father).*

Table 7.5.2 summarizes respondents' perceptions of changes in the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.5.2 Changes perceived in the Contemporary Celebration of Gawai

Perceived Changes	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Reduction / Less						
• Youths involved in traditional music	10		17		27	
• Less interest in celebrating	4		6		10	
• Energy	2		7		9	
• Rituals gone	7		2		9	
• Less visiting	4		6		10	
• No more traditions	4		5		9	
• Smaller scale	3		4		7	
• Less cultural	1		1		2	
% mentions		67.31		76.19		72.17
2. Increased/More Commercialized						
• More converts to Christianity	5		6		11	
• More modern/fusion food	5		3		8	
• More things to buy/commercial	1		1		2	
• Singing competitions now pop, no traditional	4		3		7	
% mentions		28.85		20.63		24.35
3. No changes at all	1		1		2	
Not sure	1		1		2	
% mentions		3.85		3.17		3.48
Total	52		63		115	

Within families over 70 per cent of mentions related to changes that pertained to a reduction in the festival; the comparable percentage for the random group was over 60 per cent. Moreover the comments relating to increases tended to be negative rather than positive.

Table 7.5.3 presents respondents' perceptions of the traditions, customs, practices and cultural dimensions most important to the celebration of Gawai.

Table 7.5.3 Perceptions of the Most Important Gawai Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions

Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Rituals						
• Unspecified Rituals	4		3		7	
• Miring	1		1		2	
• Ngajat/Traditional Dances	2		1		3	
• Cultural Practices/Beliefs	7		5		12	
• Traditional Blessings	3		2		5	
• Tradition Toast (<i>Ngirup Ai Tuak</i>)	1		1		2	
• Traditional Music	1		1		2	
• Communal Unity (<i>Gotong Royong</i>)	9		7		16	
% mentions		50.90		52.50		51.58
2. Families						
• Respect for elders	2		1		3	
• Family reunion	6		6		12	
% mentions		14.55		17.50		15.79
3. Religious						
• Prayers before celebration	4		3		7	
• Thanksgiving	2		2		4	
• Gawai Mass	3		2		5	
% mentions		16.36		17.50		16.84
4. Social						
• Open House	4		2		6	
• Visiting in longhouses	6		3		9	
% mentions		18.20		12.50		15.79
Total	55		40		95	

Over 50 per cent of each group perceived rituals to be the most important Gawai traditions and practices despite the fact that a high percentage of the people have now converted to Christianity. Traditional values and practices such as ritual dances, blessings, toasting and drinking, music and communal unity remain important values to this day.

Across both groups there was evidence that Christian religious practices are now important:

- *Praying and waiting during the festival eve is most exciting. (Random, Male)*
- *I think going to mass to get the festival blessings are important. (Random, Female).*
- *Going to midnight mass is exciting. (Family, Granddaughter)*

Togetherness is central, whether this be through family bonds:

- *Family togetherness once the children are grown up is the most important things to us. (Random, Female)*
- *I consider the family members who are working abroad and who can come back for the festival as the most important. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I think understanding the traditions, customs and family unity is most important. (Random, Male)*

or simply the *gotong royong* spirit of togetherness and doing or preparing things together as a community:

- *Eating together, chatting and talking are the best pastimes. (Random, Male)*
- *I think the bonding and fellowship amongst members of one longhouse and community are very important. (Family, Mother)*
- *Traditional dance to receive guests is a value to be kept. (Random, Male)*
- *Ngirup Air Tuak (toasting with wine) should be handed down and never done away with. (Random, Male)*
- *Eating as a whole community together is unique in a longhouse. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *Preparing the house for open house. (Family, Mother)*
- *Being together with my friends and going round visiting. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *Getting new things and preparing the house and food for Open house. (Random, Female)*
- *Waiting for the eve of the festival and feeling the happy atmosphere. (Random, Female)*
- *Wishing each other and going visiting. (Family, Mother)*
- *Wearing new clothes and shopping or preparing for it. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *Partying all night. (Random, Male)*

7.6 The Longhouse Gawai

As indicated in 4.6, retrospective comments about the longhouse experience of Gawai were sought from Diploma of Music students who were undertaking course assignment work during the festival. The students' perceptions are synthesized in the following sections.

7.6.1 The Longhouse Festival Atmosphere

The students were unanimous in their observation of the “getting ready excitement” which pervaded the longhouse upon their arrival. They noted the evidence of careful preparation, decorations with *pua* and handicrafts, “excited faces and hearts”, the “relaxed festival mood”, the friendliness, sincerity and togetherness of the longhouse inhabitants as they welcomed them to the celebration. The genuine warmth of Iban hospitality was experienced by all students who felt that they were “out to give us their simple best”.

7.6.2 Longhouse Festival Highlights

Festival highlights mentioned by students related to the spectacle – “rituals”, “non-stop dancing, eating and singing”, to the “amazing sight” of total gregariousness – “huge scale eating, feasting and drinking”, the “chorus of everyone clapping and joyful”, the “involvement of everyone celebrating, merrymaking and eating together”, and to the fact that they were included and “invited to participate”. Events and/or aspects of particular interest to students ranged from the positive - the “fun” of the “*Ngajat* competition and beauty pageant”, enjoyment of the “very colourful and expressive” dance performances, the “awesome sight” of “the huge feast prepared [and] all laid out on the floor” – to the negative – “extreme excessive eating and drinking”.

Students' dual roles as both participants and spectators are evident in their impressions:

- *It was amazing that on the midnight before the festival, longhouse participants all danced, drank, and a team of people walked in rounds throughout the whole longhouse with the gongs and long drums beating continuously non-stop. They continuously sang praises of thanks to the 'padi' gods and spirits and chanted endlessly in an amazingly marathon feat for musicians, singers and chanters. Some people sprinkle food around the longhouse as the team chanted as if feeding and thanking the gods present and as a mark of appreciation for their help for a good harvest. (Maybelle)*
- *The feast is interesting because it is rarely or never done in urban places where the whole village is gathered at one area to celebrate together. (Andrew)*
- *The 'miring' was of particular interest because it meant so much to the longhouse residents and all participated from preparation to celebration. (Taba)*
- *The traditional welcome by the longhouse chief and elders and traditional dance/music. They are deeply rooted to their customs and traditions. Welcoming the guests with 'tuak' (rice wine) and 'ngajat' (Iban traditional dance) dressed in their full traditional attire is just special. Dancing, drinking, eating, and merrymaking all day long turned this once quite a remote area to life! (Patricia)*

as well as in their reactions to what they observed. Kristie found “the way they force us to drink and eat” off putting as also did Kevin who commented on the “rough pressuring of guests to drink, eat and dance” and Martin who found the “serving of *tuak* too assertive”.

The spectacle of excess offended some students:

- *The amount of drinking and number of people getting drunk! (Richard)*
- *The excessive drinking and falling, sleeping on the floor after getting drunk! (Siew Siew)*
- *The noisy rowdy feasting and toasting. It was all too overwhelming ((Kevin)*
- *The laziness sleeping after being drunk. it was very awful, even stinks. Too loud blasting music. (Daniel)*
- *[The] smell in the longhouse – too much drinking and food left over (Stella).*

Others were simply ambivalent about some aspects of the rituals they had observed:

- *The slaughtering of the pig and looking into the future by judging on the condition of the liver is interesting [but] it's quite off putting as well as you witness the whole thing – not for the fainthearted. And the smell as well (Albert)*
- *The 'miring' (offering) ceremony was rather creepy. No offence but all these rituals sent chills to my spine. Slaughtering of chickens and pigs openly for rituals and food was just not my kind of thing. Talk about cruelty to animals! (Patricia).*
- *Freaky because of the slaughtering of the pig. (Kristie)*

Nevertheless their overall impressions of the longhouse Gawai were uplifting:

- *Very different, special and unique. (Kevin)*
- *Quite a different experience from urban celebrations. People are really celebrating and enjoying themselves and very very sincere and give us their utmost 'best'. (Richard)*
- *Very impressive preparations and traditions. (Taba)*
- *Memorable experience and uplifting awakening moment. (Sarifah)*
- *Very enjoyable, relaxed. No pretence. (Jane)*
- *Very exciting, different and unbelievably warm hospitality. (Siew Siew)*
- *Very fun, relaxed, joyful and uninhibited. (Stella).*

7.6.3 Family Celebratory Patterns

The students' dominant impression was one of family togetherness and sharing across all doors of the longhouse:

- *[There was] a wonderful togetherness that no one will feel lonely in any celebration. They were all happy. No individual was sad. (Taba)*
- *Families from every door of the longhouse celebrate together as one big family. All preparations were done as a team. (Patricia)*

an observation which prompted a number to contrast these characteristics with urban celebrations:

- *In rural they just present what they have. In urban they will 'borrow' 'lend' or buy just to impress. (Richard)*
- *According to what they can afford in urban but in rural all the same for rich or poor. (Siew Siew)*
- *In the rural all celebrate the same way. Urban – depends on ability and financial standing of the families. (Daniel)*

7.6.4 Religious Observances

Students noted particularly rituals “some very animistic, some symbolic”, the *miring* ceremony as “unique to their race and beliefs” and “the most important event of the

celebration where folks offer prayers to their God and ancestors for blessings and good luck and fortune”. A number commented also on what they perceived to be imperatives:

- *‘Must do’ beliefs like forcing people to drink before entering the longhouse and the casting out of ‘old’ bad luck. (Maybelle)*
- *They are quite particular about pleasing the spirits of their ancestors, seeking blessings for the health and crops. (Martin)*
- *The drinking of ‘tuak’ before entering the longhouse. It was a must. They were afraid outsiders bring in bad luck or evil. (Kevin)*

7.6.5 Rural/Urban Differences

7.6.5.1 Preparations

Urban and rural preparations for the festival were perceived to be quite different. Urban preparations were characterized as “nothing special”, “less festive”, “simple and contemporary”, “small scale” and completed “in a few days”, “rushed and trying to impress”, “commercialized” in terms of “buying and decorations”, and “the same as every festival”. By contrast “rural preparation is taken more seriously” and involves “huge preparation” over months. Students regarded rural preparations as “a lot more meaningful” and as “taken seriously” because everything is “home made and traditional”. They referred to the “laid back”, “simple”, “co-operative” and “team oriented” nature of rural preparations where “families get together in merriment” and “all families are involved” leading to a “more festive” atmosphere of “sincerity” because “heart and soul” are engaged.

7.6.5.2 Food

Nowhere is the perceived schism between urban and rural celebrations of Gawai more apparent than in students’ descriptions of food differences:

- *‘Ayam pansub’ and ‘babi pansub’ [vs] KFC/pizza/curry. (Kristie)*
- *Traditional variants of festive food [vs] westernized. (Martin)*

- *Authentic Dayak cuisine [vs] fusion food. (Siew Siew)*
- *Natural traditional food [vs] deep fried. (Jane)*
- *Fermented food prepared for months, roasted food and lost of fresh vegetables [vs] multicultural fusion food. (Daniel)*

While the reality could not be as black/white as the students perceive it to be, the comparison remains stark.

7.6.5.3 Clothes

A similar dichotomy is perceived in relation to clothes. Urban gear is seen to be “casual in line with modern society and trends”, “modern/new”, “smart”, “simple and modern – sleek and chic”, “new, fashionable modern”. The rural dress code is seen to be “casual”, “not new” for all except those with official roles:

- *Typically traditional clothes for the big events like rituals and dances. (Martin)*
- *Some men in traditional woven vests except for chief, elders and dancers who are dressed in full traditional clothes. (Patricia)*

CHAPTER EIGHT HARI RAYA PUASA

8.1 Recollections and Preparations

Table 8.1.1 summarizes participants' earliest memories of Hari Raya Puasa derived both from the random and cross generational groups.

Table 8.1.1 Earliest Memories of Hari Raya Puasa

Focus of Memory	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family Related						
• Visiting elders	5		10		15	
• Family gatherings	9		15		24	
• Greeting grandparents, etc.	7		7		14	
• Meet cousins	2		4		6	
• Kissing hands of grandparents, etc.	1		2		3	
% mentions		29.27		37.62		33.88
Social						
• Open House	4		3		7	
• Fun, games, <i>bunga api</i> , etc.	7		9		16	
• Visiting friends	4		3		7	
• Celebrating (parties, dinners) with friends	3		1		4	
% mentions		21.95		15.84		18.59
Rituals						
• Visiting graves of ancestors	1		2		3	
• Firecrackers	1		1		2	
• Green packets	8		7		15	
• Religious observances	5		5		10	
% mentions		18.29		14.85		16.39
Preparations						
• Getting new clothes, shoes	3		3		6	
• Getting <i>pelitas</i> /coloured lights	11		12		23	
• Decorating the house	1		3		4	
• Preparing festive food	5		10		15	
% mentions		24.39		27.72		26.24
Specific Childhood						
• Loss of mum	1		1		2	
• Carefree days	1		1		2	
• No money for celebrations	3		2		5	
% mentions		6.10		3.96		4.91
Total	82		101		183	

Social memories dominate and account for a third of all mentions:

- *It was always the best time of year when all our cousins came home and my grandma's place was so crowded. We all slept on mats on the floor and it was such a picnic time for us. It never mattered as we talked all night and enjoyed having fizzy drinks for once in our life! We also played games and fireworks (Family, Grandson)*

- *My best and happiest moments were when all the cousins came home and preparation begins which climaxes on the Raya eve with feasting after breaking fast. (Random, Male).*

There is remembered pride in attaining the status of fasting:

- *My earliest memory was the first time I started fasting, I felt so proud and grown up and was proud that I never really struggled with it. I began with half a day and then to a full day of fasting. My mum trained me gradually to be stronger. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I will never forget the first time I greeted and asked for forgiveness from my parents in my first “salam”. (Family, Granddaughter)*

and in the practice of key rituals:

- *I remember going to the graves of my grandparents and we brought flowers there, recited the verses from the Quran and to the children who came to help and clean the graves, we gave them some green packets. (Family, Grandson)*
- *I remember the first time we were given the green packets were the greatest excitement of our lives. (Random, Male)*
- *I always remember Hari Raya as a child with the getting of new clothes. That was the only time we could ask for anything new. (Random, Female).*

For some the spectacle has particular potency:

- *My earliest memories were when my grandparents lit the oil lamps with kerosene and bamboo and the whole place looked so beautiful. (Family, Grandson)*
- *The best memory I had been about the whole kampong lit up in colourful lights and everyone had cleaned their houses and fireworks were all in the air. (Random, Male)*
- *I will never forget the whole kampong all lit up and children all dressed up in baju Melayu (Malay national dress) playing the sparklers in the whole neighbourhood and loud Hari Raya music in the air. (Random, Male)*

Others remember the bustle and panic when the sighting of the moon confirms the date of

Hari Raya:

- *I remember the rush and excitement on Raya eve when we heard the announcement on the radio about the confirmation, we all rushed to town to buy beef and chicken and mum and grandma started cooking so fast. We all had to help as members of the family. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I remember the long queues and jam in town the minute the news of the Raya was announced as people all rushed to buy coconut and curry, chicken etc. because we did not even have refrigerators then so we never could store anything in the fridge. (Random, Male).*

Alas, to some, this now seems like paradise lost:

- *When we were kids, it was so carefree, now we have so many worries and pressure for the preparation of the festival. (Random, Male)*

Table 8.1.2 presents participants' perceptions of preparations they regard as central to Hari Raya celebrations.

Table 8.1.2 Perceptions of Special Hari Raya Puasa Preparations

Nature of Special Preparations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
House Related						
• House preparation	17		16		33	
• Fix lights/ <i>pelitas</i>	2		2		4	
% mentions		36.54		32.14		34.26
Food Related						
• Food preparation	20		18		38	
• Grand Raya eve dinner	2		2		4	
• Slaughter chickens	1		1		2	
• Training of fasting	1		2		3	
• Deliver food	2		1		3	
% mentions		50		42.87		46.30
Clothes Related						
• Buying new clothes for self	3		11		14	
	4		3		7	
% mentions		13.46		25.0		19.44
Total	52		56		108	

Food and house related preparations dominate for both groups:

- *Preparation of more special goodies like layer cake and special biscuits [which] felt very exciting and fun. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *Preparation of special food for the family dinner like ketupat, lemag, etc. and I felt proud that my mum gave me a chance to help. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I remember we had to beat the eggs and flour with the portable hand beaters made of spiral iron as there were no electric cake beaters then. It seemed so exciting then and we were fighting to get turns to do it. Now our kids' would not offer help for anything like that! (Family, Mother)*
- *I remember preparing to make Raya eve such a happy, joyful atmosphere with special food and cakes. (Random, Female)*
- *I remember feeling proud that I helped kill 30 chickens for the festival as we were poor and that was such an achievement! (Random, Male).*

Remembered house preparations took a variety of forms:

- *I remember waxing the floor with dried coconut husk after the polish was put on the floor. There were no electric floor polishers then! It was so tiring but fun! (Family, Grandson)*
- *Helped parents prepare the kerosene lamps and light them and feeling so happy when they were all lit! (Family, Grandson)*

and then there was shopping:

- *I enjoyed the shopping and buying of new clothes as that was the only time we got any new dresses or baju kurongs. (Random, Female).*

Table 8.1.3 summarizes participants' remembered roles *vis à vis* preparatory activity.

Table 8.1.3 Perceptions of Remembered Roles in Hari Raya Puasa Preparations

Remembered Roles	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Generic						
• Observer	12		12		24	
• Helper	21		13		55	
• Deliverer	1		3		4	
• No real role	1		1		2	
• Participant	4		14		18	
% mentions		79.60		67.20		72.57
More Specific Roles						
• Leading role	5		6		11	
• Cleaner	1		1		2	
• Mother and wife	2		12		14	
• Receive guest	1		1		2	
• Cook	1		1		2	
% mentions		20.41		32.80		27.43
Total	49		64		113	

Generic roles were dominant for both groups although, as responses indicate, they were largely gender specific:

- *There are many duties to be done and some are just for the men whilst kitchen duties were mainly for the ladies. (Random, Male)*
- *I loved to help my mum but hardly got a turn, as there were other sisters who could do more than me. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Always loved to help my mum and aunt make cakes. (Family, Daughter)*

- *Helped my grandma with the making of cookies and did most of the washing up or running around. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Always part of the team of womenfolk who helped around the house to prepare food or cleaning. (Family, Daughter)*
- *I was the eldest in the family so I always had so much to do and remember being supervisor for completion of works such as making of ketupats (rice in coconut leaves) or baking. (Family, Daughter)*
- *I remember being so excited about being able to help the women in the making of cookies and baking. It was so fun and exciting. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I remember my granddad always asked me to go and cut the bamboo to prepare for the oil lamps or “pelitas”. I used to get scratched a lot walking into the jungle areas but always enjoyed it. (Family, Mother)*
- *I was always the errand boy whenever my mum needed something from the small shops. I remember running back and forth and never got angry if she forgot something else and I had to run back again. (Family, Grandson).*

Table 8.1.4 summarizes the participants’ most pleasant association with preparations for Hari Raya Puasa.

Table 8.1.4 Most Pleasant Associations with Hari Raya Puasa Preparations

Associations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Outcomes						
• Preparing the house	6		5		11	
• Waiting for midnight on eve	2		1		3	
• Being with family	3		9		12	
• Joking, chatting whilst preparing	1		1		2	
• Preparing things together	9		10		19	
% mentions		34.43		21.85		26.11
2. Intrinsic Benefits						
• Learning to cook	2		5		7	
• Seeing completion of work	2		2		4	
• Success with fasting	2		3		5	
• Hearing the music	1		2		3	
• Shopping	4		13		17	
% mentions		18.03		21.0		20.00
3. Extrinsic Benefits						
• Buying new clothes	4		14		18	
• Fixing lights and seeing the whole place light up	5		18		23	
• Receiving green packets	3		5		8	
• Playing games, lighting fireworks, etc.	1		2		3	
• Playing traditional games	1		2		3	
% mentions		22.95		34.50		30.56
4. Family Togetherness						
• Family chatting and eating together	9		10		19	
• Preparing together	1		1		2	
• Children all returning to celebrate	2		3		5	
• Pray together as family	1		1		2	
• Returning to kampong	1		9		10	
• Playing with cousins and friends	1		3		4	
% mentions		24.60		22.70		23.33
Total	61		119		180	

The buzz and excitement of preparation evoke pleasant associations for respondents so that few, if any, explicitly refer to the drudgery:

- *It is a very exciting time packing and buying things ready to bring home to our old family house and see the family members again. (Family, Daughter)*
- *I just love cleaning and getting the house ready and seeing the family members returning one by one and finally on the eve of Raya, the house is just superbly at its best! (Family, Grandson)*
- *It is more of the preparation together as we clean, chat and talk about our own experiences, joys and problems and listens to the music on the radio blasting away the tunes that get all our excitement and juices in anticipating the festival. (Random, Female)*
- *Fixing the lamps and seeing the whole place light up and finally the entire village light up is such excitement and joy. (Family, Father)*
- *Preparing the food and seeing the family enjoy the food is such great happiness to me, especially that God gives us so much to enjoy. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Preparing to return to the villages to see our parents is already such excitement and anticipation. (Random, Male).*

Religious preparation also has pleasant associations:

- *When I have fasted well and did my religious preparations well, I feel so happy to celebrate the best Raya of all. (Family, Father)*
- *It's the religious preparation that prepares the soul. If we have sacrificed and prepared well, our joys are equal to our preparations. (Family, Mother).*

For some there are specific memories which evoke pleasurable associations:

- *Getting new clothes was always so exciting as a child because that was the only time we would get anything new. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Getting green packets was special as a child and giving them as parents was even more joyful. (Family, Father).*
- *We couldn't wait to get to play with our cousins again and we would play all the traditional games like meriam buluh or firecrackers or sparklers and it was so memorable and fun. (Family, Grandson)*
- *I always remember the counting down of number of days to return to the kampong to meet our grandparents and cousins. (Random, Male).*

8.2 The Role of Religion

Table 8.2.1 records interviewees' reports of religious observances they practise in relation to Hari Raya celebrations.

Table 8.2.1 Religious Observances practised in the Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Nature of Observance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Prayer Related						
• Fasting prayers	13		2		15	
• Reading Quran	6		8		14	
• Prayers for dead ancestors	5		13		18	
• Prayers for forgiveness	6		8		14	
• Prayers at the mosque	3		3		6	
• Prayers before, on the day of Raya and after.	16		30		46	
• Prayers of thanksgiving after celebration	2		5		7	
% mentions		62.96		62.73		62.83
2. Deeds/Rituals						
• Charity money for the poor	3		3		6	
• Salam (forgiveness gesture on the morning of Raya)	24		29		53	
% mentions		33.33		29.09		30.89
No religious practice involved	3		9		12	
% mentions		3.70		8.18		6.28
Total	81		110		191	

Only six per cent of mentions relate to the absence of religious observances in association with Hari Raya which suggests that the majority of respondents engage either in fasting:

- *There is the fasting month that every one looks forward to for a good preparation. (Family, Mother)*
- *Most important are the practices during the fasting month that we should follow, the salam which should not be missed and the visit to the mosque for the men. (Random, Male)*
- *It's the fasting preparation of one's soul and saying of prayers every night before breaking fast and then the salam at the parents' place. (Family, Grandson)*

prayers, readings, and/or attendance at the mosque

- *We do not have any special religious practices except for the prayers before breaking of fast at night. (Random, Male)*
- *The men all go to the mosque early in the morning before we visit our parents. (Random, Male)*
- *We try to go to the mosque and pray more often during the fasting month. (Family, Daughter)*
- *There is no religious constraint but we all know our duties for the month of Ramadan with prayers of five times a day and before the breaking of fast. (Random, Male)*

- *We pray before, during and after the celebrations. (Random, Male)*
- *We try to read the Quran more often in the month before Raya and also try to change our bad habits. We give zakat fitrah which is a must for all Muslims celebrating Hari Raya to help orphans celebrate. (Family, Mother)*
- *We pray the Quran and make sure the family gathers at the graves of our ancestors on the morning of Raya. (Family, Father)*
- *I try to ensure the family practise all the religious practices like prayers, fasting, ask for forgiveness, do good, remember the less able, etc. more intensely during the fasting month of preparation. (Family, Mother).*

For the children, it seems, there is now a more secular emphasis:

- *It is normally the adults who pray. We only had to fast for half a day or not at all. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *As children, we were more interested in the preparations of the food or getting new clothes and didn't think the religious duties to be of much importance in the celebration, but we had to perform some duties before we could go out to play. (Random, Male).*

8.3 The Role of Food

Table 8.3.1 details participants' perceptions of the importance of food in the celebration of Hari Raya.

Table 8.3.1 Perceived Importance of Food in the Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Perceived Important	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	12	30	8	15.69	20	21.98
Important	15	37.5	25	49.02	40	43.96
Quite Important	11	27.5	17	33.33	28	30.77
Slightly Important	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not At All Important	1	0.25	1	1.96	2	2.20
No Response	1	0.25	0	0	1	1.10
TOTAL	40		51		91	

Around 70 per cent of all participants regard food as important or very important. However, as their comments suggest, it may be more what the food signifies that is important to them rather than the food *per se*:

- *It reflects our culture and is one of the most important things in the celebration. (Random, Male)*

- *Traditional food should be served to reflect our culture. (Random, Male).*

It is also clear that food and social generosity go hand in hand:

- *Seems the most important thing for Open House. (Random, Female)*
- *Reflects our generosity of our overflowing happiness. (Random, Female)*
- *Shows our ability to provide and celebrate with all. (Random, Female)*
- *Share our joy and providence from God. (Random, Male)*
- *Yes, this is of great importance and is what all the families get excited preparing together. Food is one thing. The other is the food for guests at the Open House. Both are important. (Family, Mother)*
- *When we were younger we enjoyed some good food, but we save some of the best food for our friends when they visited. (Random, Male)*
- *Even for Open Day, food is most important. Friends come looking at the food prepared, admire the cakes and praise the women for the food cooked. (Random, Male).*
- *Even not so well to do families put up their best for Open Day food served. (Random, Male).*

Many felt food was one of the most important parts of preparation for the Festival, some acknowledging the role of technology in rendering certain tasks easier:

- *Months before, we would get ready materials needed for the festival like spices, bamboo leaves, rear chicken, etc. Now it is all easily available. (Random, Female)*
- *We used to do everything ourselves in the past from beating the eggs, to preparing the ketupat covers, to containers, to grinding of the spices etc but these days the machines can do everything so easily and efficiently and things are so easily available in ready-made forms. (Random, Female)*
- *The whole celebration was centered on food preparation besides the fasting. It was all about buying and making some special food for breaking of fast (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Yes, this is of great importance and is what all the families get excited preparing for. (Family, Father).*

Others see food as the critical ingredient in creating family togetherness and unity:

- *We saved hard to make the occasion special by having good food. This was the only time we had chicken or beef as special dishes on the table. Nowadays, we look forward to even more special food like seafood for instance. (Random, Female)*
- *This is what the family feels is celebration. When there is special food on the table and feasting, there is joy for young and old. Everyone comes to the table excited. All the children and women spend the entire time preparing food. (Family, Grandmother)*

- *We always try to put up the best we can afford for Raya. We use up all our savings for this and a lot of it is for buying food. (Family, Father)*
- *As long as there is good food, everyone is happy..... or at least they seem to be! (Random, Male).*

There are some respondents, however, who feel that there may be too much emphasis on the importance of food and that, whilst it remains important, there are issues like peace and unity in the family, having a forgiving attitude etc. that far outweigh the importance placed on food:

- *We all worry too much about food but I feel that togetherness, peace and unity are far more important in the family. Simple tasty food will do. (Random, Male)*
- *Many people believe this is important but I think the act of forgiveness far outweighs the food for a meaningful festival. (Random, Female)*
- *Even though family unity and good preparation is most important, good food is always a key factor in the celebration of any festival. (Random, Female)*
- *I think it should not be the most important thing as family togetherness, peace and unity are far more important. Simple tasty food will do but the family must be loving and joyful. (Family, Grandfather).*

8.4 Specific Celebratory Dimensions

A range of celebratory dimensions for Hari Raya was explored across the sample groups, specifically the family, culture and tradition (clothes, music, gift giving), decorations and souvenirs.

8.4.1 Music

Table 8.4.1 details participants' perceptions of the importance of music in the celebration of Hari Raya.

Table 8.4.1 Perceived Importance of Music in the Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	10	20.83	10	22.22	20	21.5
Important	18	37.50	17	37.78	35	37.6
Quite Important	11	22.90	9	20	20	21.5
Slightly Important	8	16.67	8	17.78	16	17.2
Not Very Important	1	2.0	1	2.22	2	2.15
Total	48		45		93	

Table 8.4.1 shows that music is attributed a similar level of importance in the celebration of Hari Raya by both groups. There was a sense that the music helped to set the mood, create the excitement, and build up anticipation:

- *I think the music is so important to set the mood. (Random, Female)*
- *We can only get the mood of the festival from the music that is played so loudly in the air everywhere. (Random, Male)*
- *Adds to the nostalgia. (Random, Male)*
- *Adds to joy of preparation. (Random, Female)*
- *Adds to the ambience of the celebrations. (Random, Female)*
- *Relaxes me and makes me happy. (Random, Male)*
- *The music makes it different from ordinary days as we anticipate the festival. (Random, Male)*
- *I enjoy the music that is on the radio, shopping centers, and offices, everywhere. It makes me very happy. (Family, Mother).*

For some there is more pressure than pleasure in the music's constant reminders of the approach of the festival:

- *I get very nervous when I begin to hear the Hari Raya music played, as there is so much to prepare and to buy. (Family, Mother)*
- *I think the music is important because after hearing it on the air; I always make sure I get something going for the preparation, but until I hear it, I don't even bother getting started. (Family, Grandmother).*

Others have sad associations with the music:

- *For those who are happy and everything is going well financially and in the family, it is such happy time, but I can still recall the times when I felt so sad hearing the music after I lost my dad. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *Stirs some of my memories – sometimes happy, sometimes sad. (Random, Female)*
- *It makes me very sad when I hear it and think of loved ones lost. (Random, Female).*

There are also those who feel that the festival music gives them strength and is integral to the celebration:

- *The music begins as soon as the Ramadan begins and though it is still tough for us to get the discipline of fasting, the music makes us happy to persevere and to concentrate on getting prepared in every way. (Random, Female)*
- *Each ethnic group has its own music, making each festival very different. (Random, Male)*
- *Adds to the merriment of place and people. (Random, Male)*
- *It is an ingredient that cannot be separated from celebrations. (Random, Female).*

Inevitably there are also those who question the loss of tradition in the music:

- *I think it is only pop Raya music we get nowadays. I hardly hear any traditional instruments played except the prayer groups on Raya day itself. (Random, Male)*
- *I think the music is all commercial music now and it is all set to make us excited about buying things. (Random, Male).*

8.4.2 Clothes

Table 8.4.2 summarizes respondents' perceptions of the importance of clothes in this festival.

Table 8.4.2 Perceived Importance of Clothes in the Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	14	31.11	13	22.81	27	26.47
Important	19	42.22	17	29.82	36	35.29
Slightly Important	12	26.7	18	31.57	30	29.41
Not Important	0	0	9	15.79	9	8.82
Total	45		57		102	

Clothes have greater importance for the random group (73% - very important or important) than for families (52.63%). The importance of clothes even transcends poverty:

- *We always had new clothes for the Festival, even when we were young and poor. (Random, Male)*
- *Even the poor try to get new second-hand clothes from the stores or markets. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *I think it is something we all look forward to once a year, to walk out on the first day of Raya proudly in our new clothes, when our friends come to visit. (Random, Male)*
- *All families will try, not matter how simple, to have new clothes for everyone, otherwise it does not feel like New Year. (Random, Female)*
- *Even the poorest families get new clothes for everyone, especially new shoes, since we all go visiting and people look at our shoes when we take them off. (Family, Mother)*
- *I try to ensure that everyone in the family has at least 2 new sets of clothes and a set of new shoes. (Family, Mother)*
- *It is necessary, so that everyone feels happy. (Family, Mother)*
- *Everyone has something new for the New Year and immediately after that, we all wear new clothes to work. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *This is a costly affair and a big headache for us working parents to get new sets of things for everyone, so we usually buy something new at the beginning of the year and keep them. We collect them slowly and add to it so that by the time Raya comes, we do not have to rush and panic. (Family, Father)*
- *Everyone wants a new set of clothes for the New Year. It has been tradition from days in the past when every family tried to make their own new clothes. (Family, Mother).*

Clothes for children are a priority:

- *I always make sure my children get the new clothes first. They are all waiting for this once a year excitement. Only after I have found theirs, then I will look for something new for myself and my husband. (Family, Mother)*
- *All the children get a new set from head to toe. They all get new shoes, socks and songkoks. We usually get new clothes but not necessarily new shoes. (Family, Mother).*

Despite the view that traditional clothes are important for the preservation of their heritage and add to the pride of the celebration:

- *Clothes, especially traditional clothes, are so important because that the one time in the year, friends of all races see us as one ethnic community, proud of our heritage. (Family, Father)*

- *Important as our traditional clothes add to the pride and status of the celebration. (Family, Father)*
- *Everyone dressed up in new traditional clothes give the ambience to the celebrations, (Family, Grandmother).*

There nevertheless appear to be tensions between traditional clothes and clothes which have a life beyond the festival:

- *We always have the Baju Melayu and Baju Kurung for the first day and sometimes the second day too. After that, we are back to shirts and blouses, or pants and tops, all in western style. (Family, Father)*
- *We make sure that we are dressed in traditional clothes for at least the first day. After that, we try to get the normal clothes that we can then wear to office or for casual outings. (Family, Father)*
- *Yes, we all have new clothes, but I rather prefer T-shirts and jeans though I still have to wear my baju kurung on the first day. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *My mum gets all the new clothes but as I grew older, I preferred to choose my own clothes. I think the T shirts and jeans are more practical and I will use them more than the traditional clothes. (Family, Granddaughter).*

8.4.3 Decorations

Table 8.4.3 summarizes the perceived importance of decorations to the celebration of Hari Raya.

Table 8.4.3 Perceived Importance of Hari Raya Puasa Decorations to Self and Family

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	22	37.93	2	8	24	28.91
Important	20	34.48	4	16	24	28.91
Slightly Important	5	8.62	10	40	15	18.09
Not So Important	11	18.97	9	36	20	24.10
Total / Percentage	58		25		83	

Hari Raya decorations are regarded as very important or important by over 70 per cent of the Random group whereas over 70 per cent of the Families group regards decorations as not so important. Comments focused mainly on the home where they tend to be minimalist in nature:

- *The home decorations made our family excited about the Raya. It was a joy to see the home transform from an ordinary one to a special one. (Family, Mother)*
- *When we were young, we used to be excited about helping with the decorations of the house. There were fewer things to buy in the earlier days, but nowadays there are so many special and new things to hang around the house. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *When the house is painted and old cushion covers changed, it feels dressed up and set the atmosphere for the New Year. Most people are very house-proud. (Family, Father)*
- *We all try to make out house the best during the Festival time. We try to add some new things, be it a new TV, new chairs, new curtains, serving trays or new cushions. (Family, Grandson)*
- *The house must be “spick and span” for all visitors to see as they only come once a year so the house must be decorated and at its best appearance. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I have minimum decorations, usually simple but neat. (Family, Mother).*

While the Random group regarded decorations as important they were not expansive about their nature or extent.

8.4.4 Celebration Objects

Table 8.4.4 summarizes the perceived importance of celebration objects in the celebration of Hari Raya.

Table 8.4.4 Perceived Importance of Celebration Objects to the Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
• Green packet / <i>duit raya</i>	33	55	27	36	60	44.44
• <i>Kain pelikat</i> (for old folks)	4	6.67	14	18.67	18	13.33
• <i>Ketupat</i> (rice packs)	2	3.33	8	10.67	10	7.40
• <i>Songkok</i> (headgear)	3	5	2	2.67	5	3.70
• Prayer objects (e.g. prayer mats)	2	3.33	2	2.67	4	2.96
• <i>Sarong</i> (wrap arounds)	2	3.33	2	2.67	4	2.96
• <i>Pelita</i> (lamps)	5	8.33	9	12	14	10.37
• Traditional dress	1	1.67	1	1.33	2	1.48
• Raya hampers	6	10	8	10.67	14	10.37
• None	2	3.33	2	2.67	4	2.96
Total	60		75		135	

The dominantly important celebration objects for Hari Raya were green packets:

- *The green packets are the main objects of the celebration. As a child, I looked forward to it with great anticipation, as a parent, I worry about it as I have to give a lot of green packets out and it is a financial strain, and as a grandparent, it is my greatest joy to see the children wait for their green packets every Raya. (Family, Grandparent)*
- *As a child this was the most important thing for me during the Hari Raya celebrations. (Random, Female).*

Other traditional celebration objects retain significance:

- *I never forget to buy the kain pelikat for my grandmother and grand aunties but it seems that the tradition is now dying off and many younger generations are no longer giving it before Raya. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *New sarongs, songkoks, baju kurung pins etc. are all accessories needed as celebration objects. (Random, Female)*
- *There are the songkok that we must buy before every Raya. (Family, Father)*
- *My grandpa gives me his songkok and I only wear it during Raya so it's not a problem. (Random, Male)*
- *My dad always buys a new songkok every Hari Raya, because he uses it all the time to Friday prayers at the mosque and it is important to him. (Random, Male)*
- *Every Raya we find ourselves buying food containers and new trays for serving during the Open House. (Family, Mother).*
- *To me, it is the pelita that signifies the Raya in the kampongs and is a main celebration object for the homes. However, a lot of that is lost now as people progress to electric lights (Random, Female).*
- *I think it is the pelita that makes our Hari Raya special. Other festivals do not see people all lighting up their homes with coloured lights (Family, Mother).*

8.5 Practices in Evolution

Participants were questioned regarding the importance to them and to their families of traditional customs and family values implicit in the celebration of Hari Raya. See Table 8.5.1 summarizes the results.

Table 8.5.1 Perceived Importance of Traditional Customs and Family Values in Hari Raya Puasa

	Perceived Importance	Random Group		Family Group		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
SELF	Very Important	9	34.62	14	25	23	28.05
	Important	15	57.69	41	73.2	56	68.29
	Quite Important	1	3.85	1	1.76	2	2.44
	Not Important	1	3.85	0	0	1	1.22
	Total	26		56		82	
PARENTS/ GRANDPARENTS	Very Important	37	66.07	31	51.67	68	58.62
	Important	18	32.14	24	40	42	36.21
	Quite Important	1	1.79	5	8.33	6	5.17
	Not Important	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	56		60		116	

While, across both groups, 90+ per cent of respondents indicate on their own behalf and that of their grandparents the perception that traditional customs and family values in Hari Raya are very important or important, there are differences between self perceptions and those attributed to their families. Approximately 35 per cent of Random Group respondents perceive traditional customs and family values to be *very* important compared to the 66 per cent attributed to parents/grandparents. The parallel percentages for the Families Group are 25 and 52 per cent.

There is thus a considerable generational gap in the perception of the importance of traditional customs and family values. For the *Self* perceptions across both groups, the traditional customs and family values explicitly mentioned are dominated by visiting and green packets, followed by attending the mosque, traditional preparations and orphans funds. The comparable profile for the parents/grandparents is dominated by asking forgiveness (*salam*) and respect for elders, followed by *guarding our culture and passing it down*, *pelitas* in homes, traditional family preparations and cooking. It is noteworthy that there is no overlap between these lists!

Respondents' observations about the *salam* indicate its current potency in the Hari Raya festival:

- *This is the most important thing I make sure my children know about the festival. It is the order of protocol at which we begin our salam (asking for forgiveness and wishing everyone well) early in the morning starting from the oldest members in the family and going down the line of rank. It is the best thing about Raya, I feel. (Family, Mother)*
- *I really hope this traditional custom of salam and family unity is preserved because it is the most important part of the Raya. Everyone knows their own duty no matter how faraway they are because of the upbringing and there is a loud conscience that pricks us if we are not back for this part of the Raya. (Family, Grandson)*
- *I think it is the family unity and reconciliation that is most important. (Family, Mother)*
- *We all look forward to the traditional customs that are always ensured in the family. My grandparents wait for the time when everyone comes together at the appointed time and we begin confessing our misdeeds, failures etc. and ask for pardon and forgiveness. We then wish everyone, hug them and feel very happy. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *In anger or moment of temper, some families move out, quarrel or disagree. This is the best time for saying we are sorry and reconciling with one another. It is a very touching part of the New Year and we are usually in tears. After that we all feel very repentant and happy. (Family, Mother)*
- *The salam, Open House, Ramadan fasting, and prayers are the traditional customs all Muslim families should have. It creates family togetherness and unity and reconciles any misunderstandings that could have taken place. It is of utmost importance for all families in this modern world. (Family, Grandfather).*

Table 8.5.2 summarizes the changes perceived by the respondents during contemporary celebrations of the festival.

Table 8.5.2 Changes perceived in the Contemporary Celebration of Hari Raya Puasa

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reduced						
• Traditional homemade <i>pelita</i>	5		3		8	
• Traditional games	1		1		2	
• Elaborate preparations	5		3		8	
• Self made food items	4		6		10	
• House help, communal help	4		4		8	
• Celebration intensity/time	3		4		7	
• Greeting cards	2		2		4	
• Rituals	5		13		18	
• Traditional customs and practices	3		9		12	
• Baking and making fanciful Raya favorites	7		14		21	
• Celebrations in villages	3		3		6	
• Home made celebration objects	2		6		8	
% mentions		60.27		55.28		57.14
Increased						
• Prices of goods for celebration	4		9		13	
• Festival objects	2		4		6	
• Equipment and gadgets/electrical goods to assist	1		3		4	
• Demand from children for expensive things/clothes/shoes, etc.	4		6		10	
• Amount of money in green packets	5		6		11	
• Intensity in feasting	3		3		6	
• Purchasing power and things to buy	2		2		4	
• Celebrations in hotel, etc.	3		11		14	
• Varieties in clothes, food, decorations, etc.	2		2		4	
• Family vacations overseas	3		9		12	
% mentions		39.73		44.72		42.86
Total	73		123		196	

Almost 60 per cent of comments related to what was perceived to be a major reduction in traditional customs and festival practices, traditional games and celebratory modes:

- *There are fewer and fewer families making the pelitas themselves nowadays. Most people only resort to using coloured electrical bulbs. The traditional kampong look is gone. (Family, Father)*
- *I used to play traditional games with my cousins in the past but these days, my kids play the game boys and computer games more. (Random, Male)*
- *There is less elaborate preparation and everyone is attempting to simplify it because it is just impossible for us working in the cities to even think about all the details until our work is over and its time to go home. We only managed to get the kids some new clothes and buy whatever we can. (Random, Male)*
- *There are no more long holidays so the entire Festival is shortened and we have to get back to work. (Random, Female)*
- *Formerly, we used to make everything ourselves, beat our own eggs for baking, sew the cushions and curtains, children's dresses or baju kurongs, etc. but now we can buy all these more easily in the supermarkets. (Family, Mother)*
- *We used to work in groups in the community, and women would all get together to bake together and then divide the output. It was so much more fun but these days, all the women are at work. (Random, Male)*
- *I seldom send greeting cards now, only e-greetings. (Random, Female)*
- *Most of the rituals our grandparents introduced or practised are gone. The children like simpler modern celebrations. (Family, Grandmother)*

Consistent with other festivals, the perceived changes involving increases were not, in the main, viewed positively:

- *I noticed increased intensity in partying and feasting and much less in the cultural or traditional values. (Random, Female).*
- *Most of the time, my children want to go and celebrate in the big hotels in the cities so we bring the grandparents there as well. (Family, Mother)*
- *There are certainly more gadgets and electronic / electrical devices to help the modern homemaker with many duties. (Random, Male)*
- *Things are all getting more and more expensive. (Random, Female)*
- *The children these days are not like those in the past. They see all these nice clothes and shoes on TV and can ask for them, specifying the exact patterns they want. (Family, Grandmother).*
- *The amounts in the green packets are getting more and more. (Family, Mother).*
- *There are much more varieties in clothes, styles, food and decorations for the celebrations to buy these days. (Random, Female).*

- *Many of my friends like to relax and enjoy themselves after working so hard in the year, that instead of going back to celebrate, they opt for a holiday vacation overseas. (Random, Male)*

Table 8.5.3 presents the traditions, customs, practices and cultural dimensions considered important to celebrating Hari Raya Puasa.

Table 8.5.3 Perceptions of the Most Important Hari Raya Puasa Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions

Most Important Traditions, Customs, Practices And Cultural Dimensions	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family Practices						
• Traditions (<i>salam</i>) beliefs, prayers, fellowship	10		13		23	
• Respect for elders	13		11		24	
% mentions	30.26		23.53		26.40	
Ritual						
• Food (mum's/family Recipes)	7		9		16	
• Family dinners	5		9		14	
• Visiting	12		11		23	
• Open house	7		7		14	
• Gift exchange/ giving (<i>kain pelikat</i>)	1		5		6	
• Decorations	2		4		6	
• Firecrackers/fireworks/sparklers	5		6		11	
• Pay <i>zakat</i> (orphan fund)	1		3		4	
• Prayers/mosque visits	0		2		2	
• Gravel ancestral visits	2		2		4	
• Green packets	4		10		14	
% mentions	60.53		66.67		64.04	
Social						
• Parties/dinners	7		10		17	
% mentions	9.21		9.8		9.55	
Total	76		102		178	

Family practises and rituals are perceived to be of almost equal importance in Hari Raya:

- *I think the traditional customs are the most important and make this festival different from other secular ones. (Random, Male)*
- *I think the family unity and reconciliation is most important. (Family, Mother)*
- *If not for the traditional customs and family values, it will be another ordinary national festival. (Family, Grandmother)*

- *It is the culture and traditional custom of Raya that makes it so special for Muslims in the eyes of all the other religion. (Random, Female).*

Valued customs include the following:

- *I think food and Open House are the most important in every Raya and in every household. (Random, Female)*
- *Food – its preparation, variety, specialty, presentation etc. is what is special. It also makes the festival different from those of other cultures. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *Its excitement once we all dressed up in our new clothes and shoes, and we can go visiting after the salam (asking forgiveness). (Random, Female)*
- *Every year first thing in the morning, the whole family will visit the graves of our grandparents first. This is an important family tradition. Not all families do that now. (Family, Mother)*
- *On the eve before Raya, we must go and contribute to the Orphans' Funds and I think this is important to be continued as valued tradition and custom. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *I still value our meeting the cousins once a year, the fun we had playing with firecrackers or sparklers, or games, and then wearing all our new clothes early in the Raya morning to collect our green packets. I will never forget those childhood memories and it teaches me to ensure my children can enjoy this family time also with their cousins each year. (Family, Mother)*

CHAPTER NINE CHRISTMAS

9.1 Recollections and Preparations

Table 9.1.1 summarizes participants' earliest memories of Christmas derived both from the random and cross-generational groups. As in comparable tables in previous chapters, percentages are calculated within each group and across the total group.

Table 9.1.1 Earliest Memories of Christmas

Focus of Memory	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Social						
• Visiting, open house	2		38		40	
• Parties	11		12		23	
• Celebrate away from home	0		2		2	
• Competitions	2		1		3	
• Returning to village	6		5		11	
• Carefree longhouse celebrations	3		0		3	
% mentions		24		53.70		39.42
Food Related						
• Food preparation	5		2		7	
• Family reunions	4		3		7	
• Christmas favourites	1		4		5	
% mentions		10		8.33		9.13
Preparations						
• Preparing house/decorations	3		1		4	
• Preparing Christmas tree	4		5		9	
• Wrapping presents	27		12		39	
• Choir practice	4		2		6	
• Shopping/buying presents	1		0		1	
% mentions		39		18.52		28.37
Religious						
• Church/midnight mass	9		5		14	
• Village communal activities	1		1		2	
% mentions		10		5.56		7.69
Christmas Festivity Related						
• Santa Claus	8		10		18	
• Shop/window décor	3		0		3	
• Winter wonderland scenes/stockings	6		5		11	
% mentions		17		13.89		15.38
Total	100		108		208	

For the Random group the most pervasive and lingering memories were of preparing for Christmas (39 per cent) while for families, memories of social events (53.7 per cent) were

dominant. For both groups religious memories were the least retained; food memories were also infrequently reported. Comments ranged from the anticipatory pleasure in installing Christmas decorations:

- *I can still remember after cleaning the house, we would take all the Christmas decorations out, set up the tree, hang the mistletoes and stockings, bunting and tinsels until the place looked so nice. (Family, Mother)*
- *We all helped to put up the tree, hang up the decorations and enjoyed doing all that together. It was most exciting when the lights were done and the place felt already like Christmas. (Family, Son)*
- *I can recall the number of presents we had to wrap was so much, and mum made sure we wrapped them really nicely with beautiful wrappers and beautiful bows and ribbons. (Family, Daughter)*

to memories relating to the celebration::

- *My memories are vivid about us all getting ready to return to the longhouse, packing things to bring back into the car, bringing all the food and gifts for the family members. (Family, Mother)*
- *I remember visiting all the elderly family members on Christmas day first thing in the morning. Most family members would also gather there and the cousins would have a great time chatting and playing. (Family, Daughter)*
- *As a teenager, I recalled the joys we had of our Christmas parties and all the excitement preparing for it. (Family, Mother)*
- *I can still recall the simplicity and relaxed feeling of celebrating Christmas after the midnight party. We just sat and talked in very relaxed and calm environments and the family all visited each other to chat and eat and drink. (Family, Mother).*

While the percentage of religious mentions was low, the potency of these memories was strong and evocative:

- *I remember dressing up all in white and the men with their long sleeves and necktie and being so smart and fresh for the midnight mass. (Random, Male)*
- *I can still recall how beautiful the church was done up with lights and bows and hollies, and the midnight mass was so grand, and celebrated by many priests and bishops. (Random, Male)*
- *I cannot forget the huge communal mass we had at midnight with the longhouse communities. Thousands of people walked from miles away just to be there. It was exciting as a loud band was playing and after mass, the people just danced, sang, and sat around. It was a remarkable sight. (Random, Male)*
- *I can remember the times when we had so many choir practices to practice the carols and finally, we went carolling in huge busloads. (Random, Male)*

- *It was so nice to go carolling and to bring joy, gifts and smiles to the children, the aged and the lonely. Now they are all just nice memories. (Random, Female).*

Christmas festivity memories were often related to children and their wonderment:

- *I had to be Santa Claus for the party. The children tried to guess who I was. It was fun. (Random, Male)*
- *There is nothing like explaining the whole mystery of Christmas to my own children. (Random, Male).*

Table 9.1.2 presents participants' perceptions of preparations they regard as central to Christmas.

Table 9.1.2 Perceptions of Special Christmas Preparations

Nature of Preparation	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
House Related						
• Cleaning/decoration	20		15		35	
% mentions		22.72		18.51		20.71
Food Related						
• Food preparation	19		18		37	
• Christmas favourites						
• Traditional food	5		5		10	
• Open House						
% mentions		27.27		28.40		27.81
Shopping						
• Presents	10		6		16	
• Food	7		6		13	
• Clothes	3		4		7	
% mentions		22.72		19.75		21.30
Religious Preparations						
• Choir practices	5		3		8	
• Traditional rituals	2		2		4	
• Spiritual preparations/ confession	2		3		5	
% mentions		10.23		9.88		10.06
Social						
• Christmas cards	1		1		2	
• Parties	7		8		15	
• Gifts exchange	3		8		11	
• Christmas games, competitions, plays, acting Santa, preparing decoration for White Christmas, etc.	3		1		4	
• Helper – getting things ready	0		1		1	
• No special preparations	1		0		1	
% mentions		17.05		23.46		20.12
Total	88		81		169	

Most important preparations were food related, albeit higher for the cross-generational families. The latter is consistent with the more highly adult nature and responsibilities of this group:

- *We have to get all the decorations, the tree, the gifts, the food for Open House and greeting cards ready for the preparations. (Random, Female)*

- *I look forward to preparing all the family favourites during Christmas as all the children, grandchildren return home, and the family meals are the most important for me and for them. (Random, Female).*

The responsibilities of preparing for gift giving are also felt by the younger generations:

- *To me the most special preparations are really shopping and thinking what gifts to buy for all my family members and friends. (Random, Male)*
- *So much of our time is spent preparing for the presents for all our family members and close friends. This is the biggest headache but it is fun too. (Random,, Female)*
- *I love the shopping, atmosphere of festivity, music and gift shops that display all the beautiful gifts and I spend a lot of time going shopping to slowly select the best gifts for all. (Random, Female)*

While, as for early memories (see Table 9.1.1), religious preparation receives the lowest mention rate for both groups, those who do mention this aspect of the festival tend to be very focused:

- *I think the advent preparation of getting one's soul prepared for the celebration is far more important than all the business of shopping and buying of gifts. (Random, Female)*
- *I go to confession, attend more Lenten reflections and masses as a preparation before Christmas. I think nowadays the younger people are all too attracted to the commercial aspects of celebration with parties, and the lure of shopping centres to buy and spend, which defeats the whole purpose of our Christmas celebration. (Family, Mother)*
- *I attend more choir practices for carolling, and then join the groups to bring joy to the poor, the underprivileged and the aged as my most special preparations for Christmas. (Random, Female)*
- *Months before, our choir would be busy having extra practices intensifying as the festival drew near. I cannot forget the joy we had when we went travelling and carolling from house to house with candlelights. It was so memorable. (Random, Female).*

On the other hand, the apparent low level of religious preparation may suggest that, despite the festival's fundamentally religious *raison d'être*, social and commercial imperatives have taken precedence:

- *I have to be busy preparing for children's Christmas parties, getting involved with Santa Claus and getting the gifts and food ready for all these events as they are part of the church activities for children of the Parish. (Random, Female)*
- *There is so much to buy, shop, and prepare for gift exchanges that it takes all my time as preparations for Christmas. (Random, Female).*

Table 9.1.3 summarizes participants' remembered roles *vis à vis* preparatory activity.

Table 9.1.3 Perceptions of Remembered Roles in Christmas Preparations

Remembered Roles	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Central Management Role	6		9		15	
Helper	37		10		47	
Observer	9		2		11	
Participant	4		2		6	
% mentions		65.88		31.94		50.32
Specific Tasks						
• Food preparation	9		6		15	
• House preparation/ decoration	10		4		14	
• Shopping	2		4		6	
• Wrapping/getting ready presents	3		2		5	
• Acting as Santa	3		5		8	
• Singer in choir	2		28		30	
% mentions		34.11		68.01		49.68
Total	85		72		157	

For the random group, the helper role dominates whereas, perhaps for the structural reasons mentioned in relation to Table 9.1.2, the families group divides primarily between the helper and the central management role. This role, it seems, is both all encompassing and potentially stressful:

- *I remember I had to single-handedly take care of everything in the preparations from the clearing and decorating of the house, to the preparation and cooking of food for the entire family and to add to it, all the getting ready of gifts for everyone. Besides, in the earlier days, we had to make everything ourselves as there was little ready made things to buy. (Family, Grandmother).*

The helper role however, seems to make many fewer demands, particularly on the psyche:

- *I was mainly helper in all that needed to be done. I helped with the decorations and cleaning of the house, the wrapping of presents, the food preparations and getting everything ready for Christmas day. (Random, Mother)*
- *I didn't get to help very much, only participated in all our family activities as we had a helper in the house who worked with my mum to prepare everything. (Random, Child, Female)*
- *I helped mum mainly with the food preparation and the decoration of the house. (Random, Child, Female)*

- *I helped to wrap the presents and when mum prepared the food for Christmas. (Random, Child, Male)*
- *I helped to get all the decorations done and the setting up of the tree. (Random, Child, Female)*
- *I had to be Santa Claus for some of the children's parties and I usually helped with setting up the place for them. (Family, Father)*
- *I remember helping in whatever my mum or grandmother wanted to be done for the house. (Random, Female)*
- *I was mostly helper in everything as my mum would lead and we did what we were instructed to do. (Random, Female).*

Dominant tasks revolve around food preparation and house preparation/decoration. Most in the central management role see their special responsibility as preparing family favourites to enjoy together:

- *I look forward to prepare all the family favourites during Christmas as all the children and grandchildren return home and family meals are the most important for me and for them. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *To me the preparation of some special favourite meals, both local and western, for the children and grandchildren are the most special preparations I make for Christmas. (Family, Grandmother).*

Those in the helper role typically referred to the need to organise gift giving:

- *To me the most special preparations are really shopping and thinking what gifts to buy for all my family members and friends. (Random, Female)*
- *So much of our time is spent preparing for the presents for all our family members and close friends. This is the biggest headache but it's fun too. (Family, Daughter)*
- *I remember the excitement to shop for our cousins and to buy gifts for everyone was such great fun! (Random, Female)*
- *At one time, we had so many presents to wrap and I was left to take charge of that. It was hours to Christmas Eve! (Random, Female).*

Table 9.1.4 presents a summary of respondents' most pleasant associations with Christmas preparations.

Table 9.1.4 Most Pleasant Associations with Christmas Preparations

Associations	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Home Related						
• Decorating/preparing	12		4		16	
• Returning to village	6		4		10	
% mentions		22.2		15.38		19.55
Preparation						
• Food preparation	15		5		20	
• Christmas – stockings	1		0		1	
• Fixing Christmas tree	5		8		13	
• Buying clothes	2		4		6	
• Hearing carols whilst preparing	3		2		5	
• Charity visits to bring joy	3		0		3	
% mentions		35.80		36.54		36.09
Presents						
• Receiving	4		3		7	
• Giving	1		6		7	
• Buying/shopping	10		8		18	
• Opening	1		0		1	
• Presents for charity	1		0		1	
• Wrapping presents	3		1		4	
% mentions		24.69		34.61		28.57
Enjoyment						
• Holiday break	1		0		1	
• Non stop celebration	1		1		2	
% mentions		2.47		1.92		2.26
Family						
• Family reunion	6		5		11	
• Explaining Christmas to my own children	6		1		7	
% mentions		14.81		11.54		13.53
Total	81		52		133	

Despite the responsibilities and hassles inherent in the preparatory phase, participants nevertheless regard these as the most pleasant Christmas associations (40 per cent):

- *Preparing special food for the family still rank the most important in our special preparations for Christmas as the whole family returns and enjoy eating and feasting. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Getting the home cleaned, decorated and setting up the Christmas tree is the most pleasant. It sets the mood for Christmas. (Family, Mother)*
- *As soon as we begin shopping and buying the presents, even planning and seeing what's in the stores, we already begin the special preparations for Christmas. (Family, Father)*

Giving, receiving and sharing aspect of Christmas received 25 per cent of random mentions and 35 per cent of the families' mentions as most pleasant associations:

- *Christmas is all about giving and receiving, sharing and bring joy to those less privileged. It is about sharing Christ's love and providence for us. So I really enjoy being with our women group to bring food, gifts and joy to all these people. (Family, Mother)*
- *Buying and shopping for presents, wrapping them, and setting up the tree and enjoy the joy of giving during this season. (Family, Father).*

Approximately 22 per cent of random and 15 per cent of families' mentions related to home decoration or returning to villages as their most pleasant associations:

- *I look forward to the trip back to our longhouse to celebrate. The preparation for the trip back, buying things to bring home, gifts for all and preparing what to bring is great joy. (Random, Female)*
- *Getting the home dressed up for Christmas with the mistletoe, the lights and the stockings, and setting up the tree are special to me and gets me all excited for Christmas. (Family, Mother).*

A relatively small percentage of mentions (15 % random and 12 % families) related to the family reunion aspect of Christmas:

- *It is nothing like waiting for the children all to be back and feasting together. It's great fun when everyone is back to prepare the food and special dinners together and set the Christmas atmosphere for parties. (Family, Grandmother).*

However, a small percentage of mentions (4.8 % random and 11.5% families) reflected the view that enjoyment of holiday breaks was more important than preparations for Christmas:

- *It is all too tiring to go shopping and buying for other people and to cook up all the special dinners. I enjoy just going away and taking a break. (Family, Mother).*

9.2 The Role of Religion

Table 9.2.1 records participants' reports of the nature of religious observance practised in relation to the celebration of Christmas.

Table 9.2.1 Religious Observances practised in the Celebration of Christmas

Nature of Observance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Church/Mass						
• Only go at Christmas	28		9		37	
• Mass/Spiritual Preparation	21		9		30	
% mentions		75.38		41.86		62.04
Prayers						
• Good Year/Blessings	3		7		10	
• Thanksgiving	2		5		7	
• Improvement of Lifestyle	2		4		6	
• Advent			2		2	
% mentions		10.77		41.86		23.15
Rituals						
• Confession	5		1		6	
• Choir Practice	4		6		10	
% mentions		13.84		16.28		14.82
Total	65		43		108	

Non-Christian participants have a different view:

- *No, we are not Christians so we watch the millions going to church. (Random, Female)*
- *For us, it is the best time of the year. No, we do not have any religious duties. We enjoy the parties, dinners and sometimes we go travelling. (Random, Male)*
- *No, we do not have any religious duties. We do exchange gifts and most of the time during this Festival; we have a lot of parties and socialising. (Random, Male).*

Those who are nominally Christian fall into two distinct groups. The first might be characterized as Christmas Christians who patronise religious observance only at this time of the year:

- *It is only about going to midnight masses and visiting the crib. (Family, Son)*
- *The actual celebration of midnight mass is the highlight of the festival. (Family, Grandfather).*

The second group is much more fundamentally tuned to the religious significance of Christmas:

- *As Christians, these are the most important part of the festival. It is all about our preparation during advent that makes a good Christmas. (Random. Male)*
- *Our family prepares for Christmas with more masses, sacrifices like fasting, attending novenas, advent reflection, etc. so the arrival of Christmas feels like a climax. (Family, Grandmother)*

- *All the extra choirs and carolling practices, but I believe those are religious as well since we all sing songs of praise and adoration. We go to confessions a week before and then for the midnight mass. (Family, Mother)*
- *Yes, we prepare souls for Christmas by visiting those that are sick, bedridden, lonely under privileged etc. read the bible for them, talk to them, pray with them and sing for them to bring them cheer at Christmas. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *It is the biggest and most important festival for us as Christians, so it is about preparation, prayers, sacrifices and thanksgiving. The actual celebration of masses the highlight of the event. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *We sing songs of praises of worship in the church and say our prayers. (Random, Male)*
- *Yes, I believe the better our preparation and the harder we work at Church and in prayer, the better a Christmas we will have. (Random, Male).*

For those in rural settings, Christmas may be the annual opportunity to participate in a formal Church ritual:

- *We wait for the priest to come for a huge Christmas day mass. (Random, Male)*
- *At the longhouses, there is all that waiting and praying before midnight mass is celebrated on a grand scale. (Family, Mother).*

One respondent sounded a note of warning in relation to his family in this regard:

- *Of course, my religious duties are very important. However, not all members of my family think so and it is so hard to drive them to Church these days. They are only interested in shopping and buying gifts during Christmas. (Random, Male).*

9.3 The Role of Food

Table 9.3.1 details the perception of the importance of food to the celebration of Christmas.

Table 9.3.1 Perceived Importance of Food in the Celebration of Christmas

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	21	34.43	12	29.27	33	32.35
Important	25	40.98	20	48.78	45	44.12
Quite Important	10	16.39	2	4.88	12	11.76
Slightly Important	2	3.28	5	12.20	7	6.86
Not Very Important	3	4.92	2	4.88	5	4.90
Total	61		41		102	

Over 70 per cent regard food as very important/important. Typical reasons given by these groups for the importance of food included the type of food (traditional food, western Christmas favourites), the importance of food as thanksgiving and for the family reunion.

Food is highly nostalgic for some respondents:

- *I miss our entire local delights so cannot wait to eat mum's home cooked special meals! (Random, Male)*
- *There is nothing I miss more than all the local hawker delights and mum's special Asian delights that we do not get overseas. (Random, Male)*
- *I usually cannot wait for mum to cook the Christmas Western favourites we only have once a year for our family reunion like roasted turkey, roast leg of lamb, potatoes, steaks or Christmas puddings! (Family, Daughter)*
- *I remember I could not wait to eat the traditional Christmas meal mum usually had on the midnight before Christmas. There was turkey, lamb, roast beef, potatoes, salads, soup and the Christmas pudding all of which we never get during normal times. (Family, Son)*
- *Some of the hearty western meals especially the desserts, roasted turkey, beef or lambs are as important as it is the grandest meal of the year for us! (Family, Grandfather).*

The plenitude of food is of special significance in rural areas:

- *I think food is all what the women in the longhouse worry about. They are almost busy preparing and cooking all day for everyone to enjoy eating together in a longhouse way! It is an amazing sight when the food is lined up in a big long row with so many little plates and everyone sitting down along the ruai (balcony) to eat together. (Family, Father)*
- *Most important was the pig as it was a sign of success and when we have more elaborate food, it means we had a successful year. (Family, Father).*

On the other hand, concerns were expressed about the potential for over indulgence and the need to exercise restraint:

- *Some of the hearty western meals like meats and sweet Christmas puddings are no long popular/practised as we get more health conscious. (Family, Mother)*
- *I am only worried about over eating during this festival time because we need to be more careful with the amount of meat or sweet desserts we eat during that time. (Family, Father).*

Those who regard food as quite or only slightly important argue that it should have a proper place in the scale of celebration:

- *I think we should all prepare ourselves going to confessions, advent reflection and masses to prepare our souls with spiritual food, which is far more important than edible food. Christmas has lost its main purpose of celebration by commercial lure of savoury and romantic Christmas dinners and set menus all tempting diners in the newspaper advertisement. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *It is important to get all the preparation for food ready as the whole family is back it is not the most important thing as I believe the part of Christmas should never be overtaken by all our preparations for food. We only feast after Christmas day itself as we try to eat simple during the season of Advent. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Yes, it is quite important because everyone is busy with gifts etc. but when it comes to meal times, they all come hungry to the table waiting for a great feast! (Family, Father)*
- *I suppose all festivals do put some importance on food because of the gathering of family so yes, we are quite busy with food preparations. (Random, Male).*

9.4 Specific Celebratory Dimensions

Celebratory dimensions relevant to Christmas were explored with participants, specifically the family, culture and tradition, clothes, music, gift giving, decorations and celebratory objects.

9.4.1 Music

Respondents' perceptions of the importance of music to Christmas celebrations are presented in Table 9.4.1.

Table 9.4.1 Perceived Importance of Music in the Celebration of Christmas

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	9	17.65	7	22.58	16	19.51
Important	31	60.78	18	58.06	49	59.76
Quite Important	5	9.80	2	6.45	7	8.54
Slightly Important	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not Very Important	6	11.76	4	12.90	10	12.20
No Response	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	51		31		82	

Music is regarded as important or very important to the celebration of Christmas by approximately 80 per cent of respondents. Many cite, in various ways, Christmas carols as an important part of Christmas past and present.

- *I love the joy the music bring to families through carolling and how it sets people in the mood. It can also bring joy to the elderly and the sick. (Family, Mother)*
- *There is always a magical feeling in hearing the carols. Yes, I think it is a very important part of the celebration. (Random, Female)*
- *It touched me so much. I can never forget my carolling days in younger years. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Yes, the carols of Christmas have the special feeling of beautiful memories, sad or happy. It is very nostalgic! (Family, Grandmother)*
- *Everyone gets excited the minute Christmas music is in the air and the excitement build up from the increased play of carols on the radio, media and shopping malls. (Family, Mother)*
- *Music is the evergreen part that has not changed when it comes to traditional carol. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *The choirs are fantastic and masses are so grand. Carolling groups also have fun, music that brings joy. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *I love the traditional carol but I do not mind the modern ones too. It is a very important part of the season. (Family, Mother).*

For other respondents the rationale for the importance of music is more generic, relating to memories of childhood and/or the power of music to evoke the sense of the festive season:

- *It is very important reminder of the season and it is the ingredient that builds up momentum for anticipating its coming. (Random, Female)*
- *I have always loved Christmas music since my childhood and feel it is integral to the celebration. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *It is not Christmas without its special music. I like even the modern ways Christmas music is redone. (Random, Male)*
- *Music is very important part of Christmas and would not be the same if it was not there. (Random, Youth, Male)*
- *I love the music old and new. It is very special. (Random, Youth, Female)*
- *The best music of all festivals. It is most special to me and touches me. (Random, Youth, Female)*

- *It is the best music of all festivals. It is most special to me and touches me. (Random, Youth, Male)*
- *Choirs are fantastic and masses are so grand. Carolling groups also have fun and their music bring joy to many homes. (Family, Grandfather)*
- *I think the music is what makes the whole feeling feel like Christmas in the Church because there is nothing else there, but on the air in the radio and in the shopping malls, it adds to it all. (Family, Father)*
- *It is great. In the villages, its combination of modern and traditional. In the city, it is all western but recently, Bidayuh and Iban karaoke singers came out with new local carols. (Family, Father)*
- *The traditional music is important for dance and reminds us of our own unique culture. (Family, Grandfather).*

Some respondents, however, express doubts about what they perceive to be an unfortunate transition from traditional Christmas music to pop:

- *Not much traditional music left, only pop. (Family, Father)*
- *It is added to the joy and the celebration but there was little gong music (traditional) left, mostly loud Iban pop. (Family, Grandfather).*

Others recall sad memories or regard traditions are being eroded:

- *It brings tears to my eyes when I hear the Christmas music as I think of the first Christmas when I lost my dad and I never want to hear it again. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I cannot bear those nostalgic Christmas tunes as I feel too sad thinking about my husband and all the good Christmases we spent together. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *When we are back in the longhouse, we want to hear traditional music which is now slowly lost as the younger people do not play them and there is a flood of pop music. (Family, Grandmother).*

A more positive view is that Christmas music helps create the ambience and sets malls abuzz with vibrancy and liveliness:

- *It is what makes the shopping centres come alive with their displays and creates the mood for shopping. (Random, Youth, Female)*
- *It reminds me of the joy of shopping in those lovely surroundings with lovely tunes to hear, beautiful sights to behold and nice White Christmas settings all made commercialised by the malls. (Random, Youth, Male).*

9.4.2 Clothes

Table 9.4.2 presents participants' perceptions of the importance of clothes/new clothes to the celebration of Christmas.

Table 9.4.2 Perceived Importance of Clothes in the Celebration of Christmas

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	2	4.55	10	28.57	12	15.19
Important	21	47.73	17	48.57	38	48.10
Quite Important	11	25.00	4	11.43	15	18.99
Slightly Important	8	18.18	4	11.43	12	15.19
Not Very Important	2	4.55	0	0	2	2.53
Total	44		35		79	

Almost 80 per cent of families regarded clothes as either important or very important compared to 50 per cent of the random group. Yet the rationale for these perceptions of importance is more equivocal than these figures might suggest since they have less to do with clothes *per se* than, in many cases, their significance:

- *It is very important that the best clothes are worn to Church for the birthday of the King of Kings. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *It is very important to be specially dressed for the grand midnight high masses as the atmosphere is of a very special one. (Family, Mother)*
- *All of us have to wear white for the grand midnight mass for women and white long sleeve shirts and ties for the men. A certain formality is expected. (Family, Father)*
- *We have to wear white for all carollers going house to house. (Random, Female)*
- *Need not be new but must be nice and special as I feel it is a big occasion for the Church. (Random, Male).*

Even those who do not see great importance in clothes share this sense of what is appropriate to wear in Church:

- *Not of great importance, as long as it is neat and respectable especially when it is a feast in Church. (Random, Male)*
- *Not important at all but I think decent dressing for mass is important as these days, there are people wearing shorts, slippers and skimpy t-shirts to mass. (Random, Female)*

- *It is not important at all although I think people should dress well for the masses. (Family, Mother).*

For some clothes were deemed important for social reasons:

- *We tend to buy some new clothes for visiting so we can show our close friends and relatives something new. White seems to be a favoured colour. (Random, Female)*
- *Yes, when we have a party during Christmas, everyone is expected to put on their best. (Family, Mother).*

Others felt that the role of clothes had changed somewhat with expectations being “quite casual even for visiting” (Random, Female) and formal attire a requirement “Only during bigger gatherings or dinners” (Random, Male).

Some participants regarded new clothes as a tradition at Christmas:

- *Yes, it has been traditional that we always get new clothes during this time of the year. A lot of it comes now as gifts. We also get new shoes. (Random, Female)*

while others had a very relaxed attitude:

- *Sometimes if we meet some nice clothes, we may get something nice for Christmas but it is not necessary for new clothes. Could be something nice we bought earlier. (Random, Female)*
- *No new clothes except sometime white dress required for choir. (Random, Male).*

or did not see new clothes as necessary:

- *Not necessary to have new clothes I feel. (Random, Male)*
- *No one in the family ever asks for new clothes this season. (Random, Male)*

For one somewhat desperate respondent, clothes were seen “only as a last resort as an unimaginative gift for dad when all else fails” (Random, Female).

9.4.3 Decorations

Table 9.4.3 presents the perceived importance of Christmas decorations.

Table 9.4.3 Perceived Importance of Christmas Decorations to Self and Family

Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Important	6	12	0	0	6	6.67
Important	12	24	18	45	30	33.33
Quite Important	11	22	14	35	25	27.78
Slightly Important	17	34	7	17.5	24	26.67
Not Very Important	4	8	1	2.5	5	5.56
Total	50		40		90	

Fewer than 40 per cent of respondents perceived Christmas decorations to be important/very important with the majority (over 50%) regarding them only as *quite* or *slightly* important. Those who saw decorations to be important saw them primarily as an anticipatory signal, a sign that Christmas is nigh:

- *Very important because the feeling of Christmas only begins when one sees the Christmas tree and lights and all the things hung up. (Random, Female)*
- *The most important for our children and family members because everyone gets excited once we start putting things up together for Christmas. (Family, Mother)*
- *Mistletoe at the door signifies the family celebrates Christmas and friends can then come for the visiting during Open House. (Random, Female, Youth)*
- *It is one of the important events to getting the family members to dig out all the decorations items that are stored for a year, and begin setting the place look like its Christmas. (Random, Male, Youth)*
- *The whole atmosphere in the city makes one feel very anxious about not having completed our gifts buying! However, it is the setting and décor in town that makes us come home to start pulling out decorations for our home. (Random, Male)*
- *One of the most important since it made up the most important feeling that Christmas has finally come! (Random, Female)*
- *Very important because the feeling of Christmas only begins when one sees the Christmas tree and lights and all the things hung up. (Random, Male)*
- *We love to do the place up nicely with decorations because all the children come home that time and it is wonderful to see our grandchildren and children open presents after the Christmas dinner. (Random, Female)*
- *The colours of red, green and gold have become important in getting the home ready and once the tree is up, the lights are on, and the mistletoe is hung outside the door, it really feels like Christmas. (Random, Female)*

- *I think particular for Christmas more than the other festivals the decorations are important to our family because although we are Christians, it is only going to Church. Christmas only comes to the family when the home is all feeling like Christmas, we pray near the Christmas tree, and young carollers come to sing carols! (Family, Mother)*
- *People are beginning to bring decorations of the city to the longhouse to create that Christmas atmosphere. (Random, Male)*
- *For our children's sake, it is such fun to see them excited about helping to put up the decorations. (Random, Female)*
- *Of course, our family looks so extra cheerful when the whole house is decorated and lit up with Christmas lights and the tree! (Family, Grandmother).*

Those who consider Christmas decorations to be unimportant see them as excessive or even irrelevant:

- *I rather think it is important to have some decorations but it can get excessive and the decorations are getting so expensive now that it costs a bomb! We should keep it simple. (Family, Father)*
- *It is important only if we have Open House, which we did many years ago, but nowadays, it is just too bothersome, so we keep it simple by going to Church and going out to eat. Hence, there is no need to decorate the house up so elaborately. (Family, Mother)*
- *I think it is not important to our family, as the Christian values of preparing our souls, reconciliation, creating peace and joy, giving joy to the privileged, etc. far outweigh the decorations. (Family, Father)*
- *I do not really like all the fake snow, golden tinsels and red and green decorations that try to turn our house into a fake winter wonderland or Christmas town. I prefer a more solemn and holy atmosphere and feel that Christmas should begin in the heart. (Family, Father).*

9.4.4 Celebration Objects

Table 9.4.4 details the celebration objects perceived by participants to be important in the celebration of Christmas.

Table 9.4.4 Perceived Importance of Celebration Objects to the Celebration of Christmas

Celebration Objects	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gifts						
• Christmas hampers/gifts	10		17		27	
• Foods favourites such as chocolates	3		3		6	
• Christmas toys	1		2		3	
• Stockings	2		7		9	
% of mentions		13.79		36.70		23.08
Decorations						
• Christmas tree	29		17		46	
• Christmas décor	11		5		16	
• Christmas candles	6		2		8	
• Mistletoe	6		2		8	
• Snow/white Christmas	6		4		10	
% of mentions		50.00		37.97		45.13
Religious/Ritual/Objects/Decorations						
• Crib/manger	15		8		23	
• Bible	9		0		9	
• The Cross	2		2		4	
• The Rosary	1		2		3	
• <i>Ranyai</i> Tree	1		1		2	
% of mentions		24.14		16.46		21.03
Secular Objects						
• Santa Claus	6		3		9	
• Christmas cards	8		4		12	
% of mentions		12.07		8.86		10.77
Total	116		79		195	

Consistent with the data presented in Table 9.4.4, Christmas decorations dominate overall (45.13%) in the important celebration objects. Of these the Christmas tree received over 50 per cent of mentions, including the Iban equivalent - the *Ranyai* tree:

- *The Christmas tree is a must in the house for Christmas. (Family, Mother)*
- *The Christmas tree, lights and mistletoe make the house feel like Christmas. (Random, Female)*
- *The Ranyai tree for us Ibans, is significant of the past, brings memories and is the main focal point of our longhouse celebration. (Family, Father).*

There are differences between the random and the families groups however, in what they regard as important. While the families' preferences are dominated by Decorations (28.99%) and, specifically, the Christmas tree, they also consider Gifts to be important

(26.36%) and, to a lesser extent (18.84%) Religious/Ritual Objects. For the random group Religious/Ritual Objects are second in importance while Gifts are lowest in importance.

Respondents referred powerfully to the associative symbols of Christmas:

- *I think from young, the Santa Claus, Christmas bells and bows, hollies and Christmas tree are so important to create the feeling of Christmas in the homes. (Random, Female)*
- *We have learnt from young to associate white snow, white dresses of choirs, golden tinsels, green hollies and Christmas trees, colourful lights and golden balls with Christmas. (Random, Male)*
- *It is the red, green and gold decorations all over that paint the town like Christmas. (Random, Male).*

Respondents commented on the significance of the religious symbolism:

- *I love the little angels, cribs, holy family and religious celebration object of Christmas. (Family, Mother)*
- *Christmas candles – it is supposed to bring joy and light to people in the dark who do not yet know Christ. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *The crib and manger – that is what Christmas is actually all about. (Family, Father)*
- *The Bible – it is the source of Christmas. (Family, Father)*

although there was a sense that this is somehow being eroded:

- *The Churches used to have big cribs that everyone pays a visit to and that were the most important celebration object of all. It is still there but some have gone already. It is sad that other commercial and fun objects have taken over. (Family, Father)*
- *I think the religious objects have lost its importance to the increased celebration objects of commercial use and fun. (Family, Mother).*

9.5 Practices in Evolution

In both sample groups respondents were asked to reflect on the importance, to themselves and to their families, of the traditional customs and family values implicit in the celebration of Christmas. Table 9.5.1 summarises the results.

Table 9.5.1 Perceived Importance of Traditional Customs and Family Values in Christmas

	Perceived Importance	Random Group		Families		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
SELF	Very important to self	12	22.22	2	8.33	14	17.95
	Important to self	30	55.56	14	58.33	44	56.41
	Slightly important to self	8	14.82	5	20.83	13	16.67
	Not really important to self	4	7.41	3	12.50	7	8.97
	Total	54		24		78	
PARENTS/ GRANDPARENTS	Very important to parents/ grandparents	11	52.38	16	50.00	27	50.94
	Important to parents/ grandparents	10	47.62	12	37.00	22	41.51
	Slightly important to parents/ grandparents	0	0	4	12.50	4	7.55
	Not really important to parents/ grandparents	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	21		32		53	

For the random group in relation to *Self*, traditional customs and family values were important/very important to approximately 80 per cent compared to less than 60 per cent for the families group:

- *For us nothing is more important that celebrating the festival with our families as our parents wait for all of us to return at this time.(Random, Female)*
- *We love the family gatherings and enjoying ourselves with people who are closest to us.(Random, Female)*
- *To me, the festival is not meaningful if my children and grandchildren are not home to celebrate.(Family, Grandmother)*
- *Now that my kids have left home, I only wait for them to be back during Christmas. (Family, Mother).*

However, both groups perceive traditional customs and family values to be very important/important to their parents and grandparents:

- *When I was younger, I knew my grandparents only waited for Christmas when every one of my uncles, aunts and cousins would be home.(Random, Female)*
- *It was a family time of great significance to my grandparents because they would be upset if any of us could not go back for Christmas.(Family, Granddaughter)*

- *It was our family traditions to celebrate mass once everyone has returned home and everyone would make sure they were back. (Family, Mother)*
- *I would not have known how to celebrate Christmas without my parents and grandparents. I would not even know how to tell them if I could not go back. (Random, Female)*
- *It is like the focus of the entire celebration. I plan my presents for my parents and grandparents months before the celebration because family traditions and togetherness can never be sacrificed. (Family, Granddaughter).*

Some of the comments from the respondents exemplify these points:

- *Our family celebrates Christmas in a very intimate and religious way. The entire family prepares well spiritually for the Christmas celebration and the prayers together, thanksgiving and masses are the main concern. Presents are only small gifts as tokens of love. We do have some more special meals but the prayers and fellowship before meals are more important. (Family, Mother)*
- *We are all busy career people who work hard throughout the year, so I think during these festival times, it is so important for us to spend some time really being with our parents and grandparents and learn from them the special family values. (Family, Father)*
- *The family values and customs are so important and we try to inculcate these to our children as well. During festival times, we see and learn a lot of values and I try to explain what our grandparents share with us to our children. (Family, Father).*

On the other hand, the younger people feel they need to know more:

- *I appreciate our family values and customs, our family recipes, and family secrets of success. However, I must admit I really do not know enough and need to learn and appreciate more of it myself. (Family, Granddaughter)*
- *I am only beginning to learn all these values and customs as my own children are growing up. We were all too busy with our work and bringing up the children to even realise these values. (Family, Daughter).*

Others express negativity towards the declining values and customs comparing them with the past:

- *I think in the past it was more meaningful as there we more time and interaction with the family, but now, everyone seems to busy, so it is buying presents that has put pressure it all. We get together and disperse all too soon. It has lost its meaning. The time together is now short. (Family, Daughter)*
- *We do not have time anymore working until Christmas Eve and then having to get presents ready is real headaches. (Random, Male)*
- *We still have our family togetherness and celebrating together but people worry of valuing doing the job of celebrating together and learning family unity from each other. (Family, Granddaughter).*

Participants were asked if they perceived any changes in the contemporary celebration of Christmas. Table 9.5.2 summarizes the nature of these perceived changes.

Table 9.5.2 Changes perceived in the Contemporary Celebration of Christmas

Celebration Objects/ Souvenirs	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reduced						
• Less traditional (more simple)	9		4		13	
• Interest in rituals	6		3		9	
• Celebrative programs/ visiting	6		2		8	
• Preparation time	1		1		2	
• Understanding of background behind festival	5		1		6	
• Making celebration items by oneself	0		2		2	
% mentions		39.7		33.33		37.38
Increased						
• Shopping/spending	6		2		8	
• Commercialized	10		7		17	
• Asian food varieties	1		4		5	
• Late night shopping	3		2		5	
• Families go away for holidays	4		7		11	
• Expensive gifts	6		2		8	
• Influence from media and advertisements	7		0		7	
% mentions		54.41		61.53		57.01
Remain same/don't know	4		2		6	
% mentions		5.88		5.13		5.61
TOTAL	68		39		107	

Changes were perceived by both groups in terms of reduction and increase, both often tinged with negativity:

- *Much simpler than in previous times. (Family, Daughter)*
- *Much more elaborate things available, but much less on culture preservation or tradition. (Family, Mother)*
- *Much less visiting, no longer hold group visiting. (Family, Youth, Female)*
- *Family gatherings are reduced due to shorter times together. More of touch and go. (Family, Male, Youth)*

- *The people no longer meditate or appreciate the real meaning of Christmas. (Family, Mother)*
- *The celebrations and feasting may increase, but the understanding of the real meaning decrease. (Family, Mother).*

On the other hand, many of the increases are not seen in a positive light either:

- *Youths are more spendthrifts and becoming more materialistic in values. More demands from youths on clothes, food, outings to discos, expensive yuppie areas. (Family, Mother)*
- *Much more spending on dressing up the house and buying food etc. for Open House compared to previous times when it was all self-made. (Family, Grandmother)*
- *A lot more commercial pressure to buy and shop. (Family, Mother)*
- *Increased availability of well packed gifts and ideas. (Random, Female)*
- *There is a lot of midnight shopping and shops open now till very late. (Random, Male)*
- *The children expect expensive gifts. (Random, Female)*
- *The children expect expensive gifts and dream for the items advertised. (Random, Female).*

Respondents lament much of what they see to be the outcomes of these changes:

- *As more of us move to work in the big cities, we buy back things that are more advanced and look forward towards advancement rather than preservation of our culture. (Random, Male)*
- *We have so much work until Christmas Eve and usually when the celebration comes, we are exhausted and need a break. (Random, Female)*
- *A lot of things are ready made compared to previous times when we made everything ourselves. (Family, Father)*
- *Focus on the gifts more than the actual meaning of Christmas. (Family, Mother).*

Respondents were also asked to identify what they perceived to be the most important Christmas traditions, customs, practices and cultural dimensions. These are summarized in Table 9.5.3.

Table 9.5.3 Perceptions of the Most Important Christmas Traditions, Customs, Practices and Cultural Dimensions

Most Important Traditions, Customs, Practices And Cultural Dimensions	Random Group		Families		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family Practices						
• Traditions, beliefs, prayers, fellowship	7		7		14	
• Family prayers	5		7		12	
• Family reunion dinner	1		10		21	
• Family gift exchange	11		15		26	
• Communal unity	0		0		0	
• Receiving carollers	3		2		5	
• Return to villages	3		7		10	
• Open house	6		8		14	
• Decorating the tree together	6		2		8	
% mentions		36.21		54.21		44.84
Rituals						
• Food preparation	13		7		20	
• Christmas eve party	7		3		10	
• Visiting	5		8		13	
• Open house	6		8		14	
• Offering to ancestors (animists)	3		0		3	
• Church celebrations	22		9		31	
• Rituals in villages	2		2		4	
• Thanksgiving	4		2		6	
• Charity works for less privileged	7		1		8	
• Traditional customs	4		6		10	
% mentions		62.93		43.00		53.36
Don't know	1		3		4	
% mentions		0.86		2.80		1.79
TOTAL	116		107		223	

Family reunion dinners, family gift exchanges and preparation for the celebration in terms of food, going to Church are seen as the most important traditions. The holiday atmosphere at Christmas adds to the family's joy in doing things together:

- *Each year, I look forward to seeing the family all come together and the great thing is that it is holiday time and so the entire celebration just seems like a really enjoyable period. (Random, Female)*
- *The preparation of the whole festival from setting up of the Christmas tree and decorating, to food preparations and shopping/ wrapping of presents are all part of the family joy. Our parents love to see us all chatting and laughing whilst preparing for it. (Family, Daughter)*

- *To me, it is the joy of giving and receiving and most especially to bring joy to the less privileged and disabled. (Random, Male)*
- *The greatest joy is to be together as family preparing and waiting for the day, then praying together and celebrating mass together and finally feasting and laughing together. (Random, Female)*
- *I think our celebrations are simple but it is all family oriented and it is all about doing things together and sharing the joy with everyone else. (Family, Mother)*
- *The traditional customs and practices are so different from the urban celebrations of feasting, partying and open house, so it depends on where I am. (Family, Father).*

CHAPTER TEN FESTIVAL COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES

10.1 Introduction

As was explained in 4.4.2, at the time of each of the four case study festivals, a group of 150 adults was randomly approached to complete a tick/flick response card in respect of the perceived importance of a range of cultural dimensions. The results of this group's perceptions for each of the four festivals will be discussed separately prior to an analysis of commonalities and differences across festivals.

10.2 Perceived Importance of Cultural Dimensions

Table 10.2.1 presents the participants' perceived importance of a range of cultural dimensions in respect of Chinese New Year celebrations.

Table 10.2.1 Perceived Importance of Cultural Dimensions: Chinese New Year

Cultural Dimensions	Very Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Unimportant	No Response
Food	10.81	57.43	27.03	2.03	2.03	0.68
Music	3.38	10.81	31.08	38.51	16.22	0
Clothes	6.08	37.16	28.70	21.60	6.08	1.35
Family	76.35	16.89	1.35	2.70	2.03	0.68
Culture/ Tradition	62.84	24.32	6.08	3.38	2.03	1.35
Religious Observance	37.84	31.76	16.89	8.78	6.76	1.35
Gift Giving	7.43	41.89	24.32	18.92	6.08	1.35
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs	4.05	30.41	32.43	21.60	10.14	1.35

Overwhelmingly Family and Culture/Tradition are perceived to be extremely important dimensions of the Chinese New Year celebrations; these are followed at some distance by Religious Observance. Food is perceived as important or extremely important by almost 70

per cent followed by Gift Giving and Clothes. Music is perceived to be of lower importance than any other single cultural dimension.

Table 10.2.2 presents participants' perceived importance of a range of cultural dimensions in respect of Gawai celebrations.

Table 10.2.2 Perceived Importance of Cultural Dimensions: Gawai

Cultural Dimensions	Very Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Unimportant	No Response
Food	14.48	63.28	11.72	3.91	5.47	0.78
Music	3.91	27.34	47.66	11.72	8.59	0.78
Clothes	2.34	7.81	25.00	46.88	17.18	0.78
Family	75.78	13.28	4.69	1.56	3.91	0.78
Culture/ Tradition	50.00	37.5	4.69	2.34	5.47	0.78
Religious Observance	37.50	21.09	26.56	7.03	7.03	0
Gift Giving	0.78	2.34	13.28	39.06	43.75	0.78
Festival Objects/Art /Souvenirs	2.34	3.91	4.69	32.03	57.03	0

Family is the most important dimension for Gawai as 75 per cent regard it as extremely important. Next to Family, Culture/Tradition is extremely important for 50 per cent and Religious Observance for just over a third of respondents. Food is important or extremely important for almost 80 per cent while almost 50 per cent regard Music as Quite Important. Neither Festival Objects/Art/Souvenirs nor Gift Giving are perceived to be of importance in relation to this festival.

Table 10.2.3 presents participants' perceived importance of a range of cultural dimensions in respect of Hari Raya celebrations.

Table 10.2.3 Perceived Importance of Cultural Dimensions: Hari Raya Puasa

Cultural Dimensions	Very Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Unimportant	No Response
Food	28.95	61.40	6.14	0	2.63	0.88
Music	0.88	21.93	52.73	14.04	9.65	0.88
Clothes	13.16	41.23	40.00	5.26	4.39	0.88
Family	64.04	28.95	2.63	1.75	2.63	0
Culture/ Tradition	48.25	38.60	7.90	2.63	2.63	0
Religious Observance	34.21	23.68	34.21	2.63	3.51	1.75
Gift Giving	0	7.02	51.75	36.84	2.63	1.75
Festival Objects/Art /Souvenirs	6.14	15.80	47.37	23.68	6.14	0.88

Family is the dominant cultural dimension in relation to Hari Raya followed by Culture/Tradition. For 90 per cent, Food is either important or extremely important while the comparable percentages for Religious Observance and for Clothes are over 50 per cent. Music, Gift Giving, and Festival Objects/Art/Souvenirs are perceived as quite important by around 50 per cent of respondents. Hence, all cultural dimensions are of some importance in respect of Hari Raya celebrations.

Table 10.2.4 presents the extent of participants' perceived importance of a range of cultural dimensions in respect of the Christmas celebrations.

Table 10.2.4 Perceived Importance of Cultural Dimensions: Christmas

Cultural Dimensions	Very Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Unimportant	No Response
Food	0	31.00	34.88	31.78	0.77	1.55
Music	10.85	26.38	40.31	19.38	1.55	1.55
Clothes	5.43	8.53	38.76	22.48	9.30	15.50
Family	67.44	27.13	3.88	0	1.55	0
Culture/ Tradition	68.99	22.48	3.88	3.10	1.55	0
Religious Observance	78.89	14.78	2.38	2.38	2.38	0
Gift Giving	63.57	27.31	2.38	3.88	1.55	0.77
Festival Objects/Art /Souvenirs	19.38	52.73	15.15	9.31	3.10	0

Religious Observance is perceived to be extremely important in the celebration of Christmas by approximately 80 per cent with about 70 per cent deeming Culture/Tradition, Family and Gift Giving to be extremely important as well. Over 70 per cent also see Festival Objects/Art/Souvenirs as important or extremely important. 60 per cent perceive Food and Clothes as only quite or slightly important.

Table 10.2.5 aligns the perceptions of important cultural dimensions across all four focal festivals. In each case, Extremely Important/Important categories and Slightly/Not Very Important categories have been combined to enhance broader comparability across festivals. The final section of Table 10.2.5 presents the consolidated perceptions of the importance of cultural dimensions across some 522 respondents.

Table 10.2.5 Perceptions of Key Cultural Dimensions Sampled at Four Focal Festival Times

Festival Dimensions	Chinese New Year			Gawai			Hari Raya			Christmas			Total Sample		
	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %
Food	68.24	27.03	4.06	77.76	11.72	9.38	90.35	6.14	2.63	31.00	34.88	32.55	66.93	20.82	12.26
Music	14.19	31.08	54.73	31.25	47.66	20.31	22.81	52.63	23.69	37.23	40.31	20.93	27.27	44.24	28.48
Clothes	43.24	27.70	27.68	10.15	25.00	64.06	54.39	40.00	9.65	13.96	38.76	31.78	31.72	32.93	35.35
Family	83.24	1.55	4.73	89.06	4.69	5.47	92.99	2.63	4.38	94.57	3.88	1.55	92.84	3.09	4.06
Culture/ Tradition	87.16	6.08	5.41	87.50	4.69	7.81	86.85	7.90	5.26	91.47	3.88	4.65	88.59	5.61	5.80
Religious Observance	69.60	16.89	15.54	58.59	26.56	14.06	57.89	34.21	6.14	93.67	2.38	4.76	69.90	19.61	10.49
Gift Giving	49.32	24.32	25.00	3.12	13.28	82/81	7.02	51.75	39.47	90.88	2.38	5.43	39.49	33.76	37.74
Festival Objects/Arts/ Souvenirs	34.46	32.43	31.74	6.25	4.69	89.06	21.94	47.37	29.82	72.11	15.15	12.41	33.00	25.30	41.70

For each of the four festivals Family is the single important dimension with around 90 per cent for Christmas, Gawai and Hari Raya and in excess of 80 per cent for Chinese New Year. Culture/Tradition is also of dominant importance for each of the four festivals. Religious Observance is regarded as more highly central to Christmas than to any of the other three festivals. Food is also highly important to Gawai (78%) and Hari Raya (90%), less so to Chinese New Year (68%) compared to a relatively minor extent in respect of Christmas (31%). Clothes have relatively little importance for Gawai and Christmas compared with the other two festivals. On the other hand Gift Giving is very dominant in importance for Christmas (90%), dominant for Chinese New Year (50%), and of minimal importance (<10%) for Gawai and Hari Raya. Festival Objects/Art/Souvenirs are much more important as a cultural dimension of Christmas than in relation to the other three festivals. A similar pattern across the festivals is also true of Music although the importance levels are lower.

The consolidated view of all participants based on the four festivals is a universal one in that Family and Culture/Tradition are critically important to the celebration of the festival. Religious Observance and Food are perceived by almost 70 per cent to be very important/important. Around one third of respondents regard Gift Giving, Festival Objects/Art/Souvenirs, Clothes and Music as very important /important. However, around the same percentages regard these dimensions as only slightly important/unimportant.

As indicated in 4.7, an unanticipated source of data became available when two students who were unable to participate in the rural data collection (see 4.6) elected to conduct a mini study within the aegis of the main study. Using a small sample of their fellow tertiary students (N=32), they administered the Cultural Dimensions Response Cards (Appendix

B) and two instruments, which tapped specific aspects of festival celebration (See Appendix E).

Table 10.2.6 presents the analysis of the students' data in the same format as that used for the main data in Table 10.2.5.

Table 10.2.6 Tertiary Students' Perceptions of Key Cultural Dimensions Sampled at Four Focal Festival Times

Festival Dimensions	Chinese New Year			Gawai			Hari Raya			Christmas			Total Sample		
	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %	Very Important/ Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important/ Not Very Important %
Food	70.00	16.00	14.00	37.93	20.69	41.38	72.73	13.64	13.64	33.33	26.67	40.00	54.96	19.08	25.95
Music	36.00	20.00	44.00	31.03	24.14	44.83	18.18	31.82	50.00	56.67	30.00	13.33	36.64	25.19	38.17
Clothes	56.00	24.00	20.00	6.90	31.03	62.07	44.83	27.27	13.64	23.33	20.00	56.67	38.17	25.19	36.64
Family	78.00	4.00	18.00	58.62	13.79	27.59	77.27	4.55	18.18	83.33	10.00	6.67	74.81	7.63	17.56
Culture/ Tradition	64.00	14.00	22.00	68.97	0	31.03	86.36	4.55	9.09	70.00	13.33	16.67	70.23	9.16	20.61
Religious Observance	36.00	16.00	48.00	62.07	3.45	34.48	68.18	4.55	27.27	73.33	10.00	16.67	55.72	9.92	34.35
Gift Giving	38.00	22.00	40.00	3.45	10.34	86.21	18.18	36.36	45.45	76.67	6.67	16.67	35.88	18.32	45.80
Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs	38.00	23.00	84.00	20.69	13.79	65.52	40.91	18.18	40.91	53.33	20.00	26.67	38.17	21.37	40.46

The dominant dimensions at Chinese New Year for this group are Family, Food and Culture/Tradition. Clothes are not far behind indicating the younger demographic of the group. Gift Giving, Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs, Religious Observance and Music are equal in importance between 36 and 38 per cent.

The pattern for Gawai is different in that Culture/Tradition and Religious Observance are higher than Family and Food which is less than 40 per cent. Gift Giving is considered very low in importance by 86 per cent as are Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs (65.52%) and Clothes (62.07%).

Hari Raya is similar to Chinese New Year in that Culture/Tradition, Family and Food are of central importance. In this case, however, Religious Observance is also considered very important/important (68%). 50 per cent regard Music and Gift Giving as quite unimportant. On the other hand, in relation to Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs perceptions of importance were divided with 41 per cent regarding them as very important/important and 41 per cent seeing them as very low in importance. At Christmas, Family, Gift Giving, Religious Observance and Culture/Tradition are of high importance (70+ per cent). Music and Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs are perceived to be of high importance (50+ per cent) while Food and Clothes are seen to be of relatively low importance by the majority of respondents. Across all four festivals for this group, Family and Culture/Tradition are clearly very high in importance.

There are certain points of difference between the importance rankings presented in Tables 10.2.5 and 10.2.6. These may be an artifact either of the differential sizes of the two samples, their different demographics or both. Table 10.2.7 plots the rounded percentages from the Very Important/Important columns from the Survey Group (Table 10.2.5) and

the Tertiary Student Group (Table 10.2.6) under each festival and for the total group across all festivals.

Table 10.2.7 Comparative Levels of importance across the Survey and Tertiary Student Groups

Festival Dimension	Chinese New Year			Gawai			Hari Raya Puasa			Christmas			Total Group		
	Survey %	Tertiary Student %		Survey %	Tertiary Student %		Survey %	Tertiary Student %		Survey %	Tertiary Student %		Survey %	Tertiary Student %	
Food	68	70		78	38	↓	90	73	↓	31	33		67	55	↓
Music	14	36	↑	31	31		23	18		37	57	↑	27	37	
Clothes	43	56	↑	10	7		54	45		14	23		32	38	
Family	83	78		89	59	↓	93	77		94	83	↓	93	75	↓
Culture/Tradition	87	64	↓	87	69	↓	87	86		91	70	↓	88	70	↓
Religious Observance	69	36	↓	58	62		58	68		94	73	↓	70	56	↓
Gift Giving	49	38	↓	3	3		7	18	↑	91	77	↓	39	36	
Festival Objects/Arts/Souvenirs	34	38		6	21	↑	22	41	↑	72	53	↓	33	38	

* In the third column under each festival difference, arrows denote differences greater than ten between the two groups. The yellow arrows point upwards and indicate that the Tertiary Student Group conferred a higher level of importance than the Survey Group. The green arrows point downwards to show the Tertiary Student Group's perceived level of importance is lower than that of the Survey Group by more than ten.

While acknowledging that the Tertiary Student Group is smaller in size, the downward trend in relation to Family, Culture/Tradition and Religious Observance may be interpreted as a potential wake-up call, especially given that these students have and are gaining the benefits of a tertiary education.

10.3 Core Values Underpinning Festival Celebrations

This section reports analyses of the additional data collected in relation to the Tertiary Student Group. Table 10.3.1 presents the tertiary student group's perceptions of the importance of four festival celebratory dimensions (See Appendix E.1).

Table 10.3.1 Tertiary Students' Perceptions of Festival Celebratory Dimensions

Festival Celebratory Dimensions	Level of Importance				
	Extremely Important %	Important %	Quite Important %	Slightly Important %	Not Important %
Personal Celebrations	20.00	53.33	20.00	6.67	0
Family Celebrations	40.63	50.00	9.38	0	0
Children Learning about Festival Traditions	43.75	31.25	15.63	6.25	3.13
Annual Personal Anticipation of Festival	40.63	37.50	21.88	0	0

Students see festivals as more important to their families than to themselves personally. Notwithstanding this discrepancy, almost 80 per cent indicate that their annual anticipation of each festival is very important /important to them and 75 per cent believe that it is very important/important that children learn about the traditions of each festival.

10.4 Attitudes to Specific Festival Practices

The Tertiary Student Group responded to eight festival specific questions (See Appendix E.2). The sections which follow synthesize their responses and further align the picture of each festival that emerges from Chapter Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.

10.4.1 *Ang Pows* (Chinese New Year) and Green Packets (Hari Raya Puasa)

Ritual gift giving is inextricably associated with certain festivals. In particular there are the gifts which are traditionally delivered to elders before festivals such as Chinese New Year and the red packets (*ang pows*) which are mainly given to children as part of the same festival; for Hari Raya there are green packets which carry similar symbolic meanings.

While a small number of respondents either did not respond or did not proffer an opinion in this regard, the majority expressed positive reactions to this cultural practice. The giving/receiving of *ang pows* and green packets was regarded with a great deal of fondness and nostalgia by the tertiary students:

- *As a child receiving ang pows was always something I looked forward to. As an adult, it's about giving and sharing.*
- *The only thing I looked forward to when I was growing up!!*
- *As a child I felt lucky to receive "ang pow" at Chinese New Year... As an adult I now understand that "ang pow" are to bring us luck and good fortune. I suppose to help set us up for life.*
- *Happy to see kids getting it are thrilled.*

There is a sense that this tradition is both important and significant:

- *One of the traditions which I feel must be passed on to the future generations.*

- *Good idea – happy feeling.*
- *Need not be much – meaning is more important.*
- *It gives us a feeling of thanks whether as giver or recipient because it's a sharing of wealth and good fortune.*

Nevertheless, there were a few negative reactions, mainly to do with cost factors:

- *Need quite a bit of money. OK when you are not poor.*
- *Only symbolic – now materialistic.*

To balance this out, however, this was seen to be a “*tradition that should be perpetuated*”.

10.4.2 Gifts to Elders

In relation to gifts to elders, positive comments related to the need to show them respect:

- *Should be considered as respect to them.*
- *To me that is to show respect.*
- *Act of homage and respect to elders.*
- *Good custom as it reflects respect for the elders and sharing of food.*

Others saw it more globally as:

- *A good idea.*
- *Yes – but only symbolic.*
- *Protocol was important.*
- *It is a good tradition.*

On the negative side, there were perceptions of pressures

- *Must be simple – not too complicated.*
- *Quite a pressure also.*
- *Not spend too much money.*
- *Don't know what to buy.*

although these pointed more to perceived difficulties in carrying out this particular tradition rather than dispensing with it.

10.4.3 Open House

As a concept integral to the 1Malaysia goal embraced by the Malaysian government, there is clear evidence that its philosophy and practice is endorsed by the public and operates across all four key festivals:

- *It is good to have Open House as it fosters good will, forgiveness and renews family ties.*
- *It is a good chance for people to get along.*
- *The Open House concept is a phenomenon unique to this part of the world which must be perpetuated for continued understanding, tolerance and harmony.*
- *It is part of Malaysian culture.*
- *A good tradition uniquely Malaysian to be carried on.*
- *Might as well migrate if one closes house on Chinese New Year.*
- *Good for racial harmony.*

Plate 10.4.1 provides examples of newspaper articles stressing the importance of the Open House concept to 1Malaysia.



Plate 10.4.1 Newspaper articles on importance of the Open House concept

Some respondents see the practice as intrinsically enjoyable:

- *Non-stop visiting is good*
- *Very fun*
- *Very good/good*
- *Good – should carry on*

On the other hand, those who return to the *kampung* question the relevance of the practice:

- *Hardly. We always go back to kampung.*
- *Must go back to longhouse.*

Another group sees the relevance of the Open House tradition but also acknowledges its downsides:

- *Good but a headache*
- *Good but now people spend too much to impress*
- *Good but very tiring*

Others were dominantly mindful of the negatives:

- *A lot of preparation – make it simple.*
- *Quite a lot of fuss.*
- *Quite a fuss. Should be simpler.*
- *Quite a headache and pressure if no money.*
- *Not very necessary – so stressful.*

10.4.4 Chinese New Year's Eve Reunion Dinner

The significance and hence importance of the reunion aspects of Chinese New Year were universally acknowledged by Chinese respondents (while those from other racial groups either did not respond or acknowledged *don't know*). While some focused only on the global pleasurable level:

- *Very good/ Good.*
- *Very important.*
- *Good and fun.*

others were much more specific about its intent:

- *Their point is to re-unite the whole family*
- *A time when family members get together/ bring all family members together*
- *Good if it brings closer relationships*
- *...important for rejuvenating family ties*
- *A disgrace if one doesn't turn up for it*

In summary, it is seen as a *favorite time of the whole celebration – the anticipation, excitement and reunion dinner.*

10.4.5 Lion Dances

Respondents were generally positive about the lion dances which characterize the Chinese New Year Festival, feeling that they are *good, cute, fun* and

- *create the atmosphere of joyful and prosperous celebration*
- *[are] good to lighten up the festival*
- *set the mood*
- *create the rhythm.*

Some, however, expressed certain reservations:

- *noisy personally but glad to see the kids love them*
- *[they are] not particularly significant during Chinese New Year as we can see them now and then like religions, festivals, processions, opening of shops/businesses, etc.*
- *as culture, no problem*
- *as a symbol of entertainment it's okay but not otherwise.*

10.4.6 Role of Red in Chinese New Year Celebrations

Participants were asked about their adherence to the traditional belief in red clothes and domestic decoration as integral to Chinese New Year. Approximately equal numbers said simply *Yes* or *No* while others qualified their response:

- *I do it mainly so as not to hurt elders. Chinese New Year is a red celebration – a celebration of renewal of luck/fortune/prosperity, etc. – all things traditionally associated with red and gold.*
- *I do it because it is a tradition. Not that I believe the reasons the older generation did it for.*
- *I don't believe in the reason for red colour but I believe it should be preserved as a Chinese tradition and Chinese identity.*
- *Wearing red not so but decorating the house red yes.*

10.4.7 The Significance of Oranges, Niengao, Firecrackers, etc. during Chinese New Year

Apart from those who were unaware of the significance of these items, views tended to be polarized between those who regarded these items as of critical significance:

- *Very important symbols of Chinese New Year. They symbolize the Chinese race. They unify the Chinese race globally as no matter where you are, people can identify the Chinese race with these symbols.*
- *Important to keep.*
- *All traditional practices that should be continued.*

and those who sensed an increasing façade:

- *It's okay if there is no significance attached, e.g., good luck etc.*

- *Firecrackers no. Replace with other practices.*
- *Interesting. It brightens up the mood.*

Often the significance of these items is lost but the ritual continues:

- *Oranges: we will give to others – especially friends and family – always in pairs. As a symbol of giving “gold”/prosperity – or is it just a gift without the meaning?*
- *Niengao: had religion significance – to stop kitchen god from telling tales. Those practicing Christianity do not believe this but we still enjoy eating it.*
- *Firecrackers: to scare off evil spirit. Again for Christians this is not necessary. It is also environmentally unfriendly. But any Chinese New Year would not feel like Chinese New Year without a loud burst of firecrackers.*

This equivocal attitude may well result in a denouement leading to a reduction in such symbolic observances.

10.4.8 The Role of Forgiveness Gestures in Hari Raya Puasa

As with many other traditional practices in relation to festivals there is both ambiguity and ambivalence evident:

- *Suppose not only during Raya or any other festival quite a good practice.*
- *You can ask for forgiveness anytime, you don't have to wait till Hari Raya Puasa.*
- *The Hari Raya Puasa forgiveness is important when done sincerely as this re-opens ties with family and rekindles communication. That is, you don't have to wait till someone is on their death bed/passes on to either seek/give forgiveness or reject for the rest of one's life.*

as well as approbation and support:

- *It's quite a good start to unity amongst family members.*
- *Excellent/very good/good/very important/okay.*
- *Good time to make amends. A chance to melt hearts.*
- *Very good tradition. Should be practised by other races*
- *Good but must be genuine.*

10.5 Key Festivals in Review: Practices and Experiences

This section synthesizes, for each of the four festivals studied, the key findings in relation to the realities of festival experience.

10.5.1 Chinese New Year

The visual symbolism of Chinese New Year – with its emphasis upon the colour red, the activity of spring cleaning, the gift baskets dominated by oranges, the lion dance – is extremely strong and evocative to participants and observers alike. However, the rootedness of Chinese New Year celebrations in the family unit is likely not to be apparent to the observer – the cultural tourist – for the most closely meaningful practices associated with this festival occur only within the tightly knit familial unit.

This fact may well be both the festival's most significant strength and its strongest potential danger. The evidence of the experiential data from this study is that the pressures – both real and perceived – of the twenty first century life/work balance conundrum have the power seriously to erode the capacity of Chinese New Year to generate and maintain the family loyalties and unity that have traditionally been both its *raison d'être* and its strength.

The pressures of preparation felt and reported by many respondents have resulted in two kinds of reaction – opting out and taking a vacation away from it all or *buying in* as much as possible to reduce the stress of preparation. Neither *solution* is likely, ultimately, to contribute to the fundamental values of the festival. Even the simple abrogation of the communal making of Chinese New Year decorations in favour of purchasing commercial varieties means that another avenue for the development of creativity within the home

environment is closed – and this at a time when the creative economy of a nation is critical to its ultimate success.

As many of the respondents are aware, the acculturation process that takes place as part of a family's style and manner of celebrating Chinese New Year is not a one-off event. It is an accretive process and children/young people need to experience it as an iterative event if the values and behaviours associated with it are to be effectively assimilated. There is thus a significant tension between the universal perception of the importance of the Chinese New Year festival in the maintenance of family unity, culture and tradition and the insidious processes of erosion revealed by the current research.

10.5.2 Gawai

Gawai is very much a festival in transition as is evident from the virtual schism between rural and urban modes of celebration. Given its origin as a harvest festival and the intimate relationship between its fundamental rituals and the longhouse culture, it is currently *alive* because of urban dwellers' memories of and associations with longhouse celebrations. These connections cannot be infinite and are currently at significant risk. The commodification of rural longhouse rituals as cultural spectacle fuels cultural tourism but begs the question as to what will become of the festival celebration *per se*. The abandonment of practices rooted in superstition, embracing of Christianity, greater commercialization and infiltration of other influences (especially on young people) will inevitably result in a diminution of the festival's traditional practices.

Indeed evidence from respondents is that even now the family aspect of Gawai is less central than ceremonial rituals, religious practices and social interaction (see Table 7.5.3).

Yet even ceremonial practices seem under threat. So much of the celebration depends upon music, dance, and the proper order of events; hence it is not surprising that respondents express concern that young people show little interest in attaining proficiency on traditional instruments preferring instead karaoke and modern instrumentation.

10.5.3 Hari Raya Puasa

Traditionally Hari Raya Puasa has been a festival which was a celebratory culmination after certain personal obligations had been met and discharged. These *obligations* involve fasting, compensatory preparations during the period and seeking ritual forgiveness from elders for misdemeanors of both commission and omission. There was a through line from fasting and obligations to the dimensions of celebration.

In the current context there are signs that this through line is neither as clear nor as strong as once it was. The togetherness of preparation with its intrinsic benefits (e.g., learning to cook, success with fasting, joking/chatting in togetherness) is compromised by a higher percentage of the female population being in paid employment, children studying and expressing a *no time* willingness to assist parents in preparations.

These and similar factors together with a penchant for a contemporary interpretation of Hari Raya celebrations – the use of electric bulbs instead of the traditional *pelitas*, simplification of preparatory activities (buying in prepared food, purchasing Raya clothes as purveyed commercially, sending e-greetings instead of mailing Raya greetings - albeit by card, opting for a holiday vacation overseas, taking the grandparents to Raya celebrations in big hotels) militate against an appropriate balance between traditional cultural values and

evanescent pleasures of partying and feasting which have not been *earned* in the same ways as previously.

The memories of current older generations still allow them to translate the *kampong* context to their celebrations and this confers meaning and value on the festival. Once those memories are interred with their owners, it is a moot point whether the through line can be maintained and sustained.

10.5.4 Christmas

Of all four festivals studied, Christmas is probably the most democratic in its reach across the community. There is not the same sense that it is the province of one particular cultural group which others must respect; the evidence of this study is that all groups buy in to Christmas at the social level, if not totally at the religious level. Christmas is a stable festival rather than one in transition. One might speculate that it may be the birthday aspect which lies at the heart of Christmas that touches all hearts and experiences so that all feel a genuine reason for participating, especially in view of the world wide delight of little children in Santa Claus and the *mystery* delights which follow his nocturnal visit.

Indeed, though many respondents did not participate by faith or precept in the religious aspects of Christmas, the spectacle of Christmas engages them as they watch people at Church celebrations on television. In the longhouses where many people have converted to Christianity there is joyful celebration of the Christian tradition through the Mass but a sense that the festivities and feasting have been accommodated to “the longhouse way”.

Despite the solidity of Christmas as a largely universal family time, the festival of Christmas is not immune to at least some of the pressures which can serve to obstruct the celebratory process. Again, these revolve around time for preparation, knowledge of the fundamental purpose and values of the festival as well as the lure of the commercial.

CHAPTER ELEVEN REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENTIAL: DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Realities of Experience

In the context of Malaysia's need to create cultural continuity and to ensure that ensuing generations are educated, in both formal and informal ways, about their cultural heritage, this research set out:

- (3) *To document and probe the experience of key festivals in Sarawak both from the perspective of*
 - (c) *cultural spectacle, and*
 - (d) *the individual; and*
- (4) *To use the data obtained from (1) above to*
 - (c) *develop a consolidated record of the public and private experience of key festivals, and*
 - (d) *analyze the continuities and discontinuities between public and private festival experiences.*

What has emerged from the research?

- A consolidated account of major and minor festivals in the Malaysian calendar, using a common framework (Chapter Three), has been compiled to create the first such document of its kind available. This will form a platform on which further documentation, both visual and verbal, can build;

The three pronged sampling frame used in the experiential data collection has yielded the following insights:

- Sarawakians regard *festivals* in the generic sense as key markers in the annual cycle of life;
- Those festivals which have the highest valence for individuals are those which have special significance in the calendars of the major ethnic groups, namely Chinese New Year, Gawai, Hari Raya Puasa, and Christmas;

- *Official* documentation of festivals seems currently confined to the recording of the role/s of significant political figures in civic festival celebrations;
- The expansion of cultural tourism has resulted in increased public emphasis on iconic festival celebration (e.g., lion dances symbolizing CNY, the making and drinking of *tuak* to celebrate Gawai) rather the festival's *raison d'être* which is of greater significance to those integral to the celebration. The cultural spectacle aspect of festivals is reinforced both by the tourism and the coffee table book literature, neither of which move much beyond the externals of cultural practice especially in relation to food and to dance, music and song;
- Across all four key festivals individuals articulate both public and personal *meanings* central to celebration. These include *national freedom, respect for and celebration of racial diversity* (public), *nourishment of family unity and goodwill, roots, tradition, and identity* (personal).

Despite the widely vaunted policy of Open House at the Government level – and its demonstrated efficacy in promoting cross cultural understanding at a public level, the research reveals a clear difference between public and private festival celebration patterns and values. At the personal experiential level, while this study yielded occasional references to the success of the Government's Open House policy in generating and maintaining racial harmony, there were no *experiential* mentions of attending public Open Houses as integral to either the cross generational family or random groups' celebration of any of the key festivals. Figure 11.1.1 provides a model which might be conceptualized as the kernel of festival experience across the society.

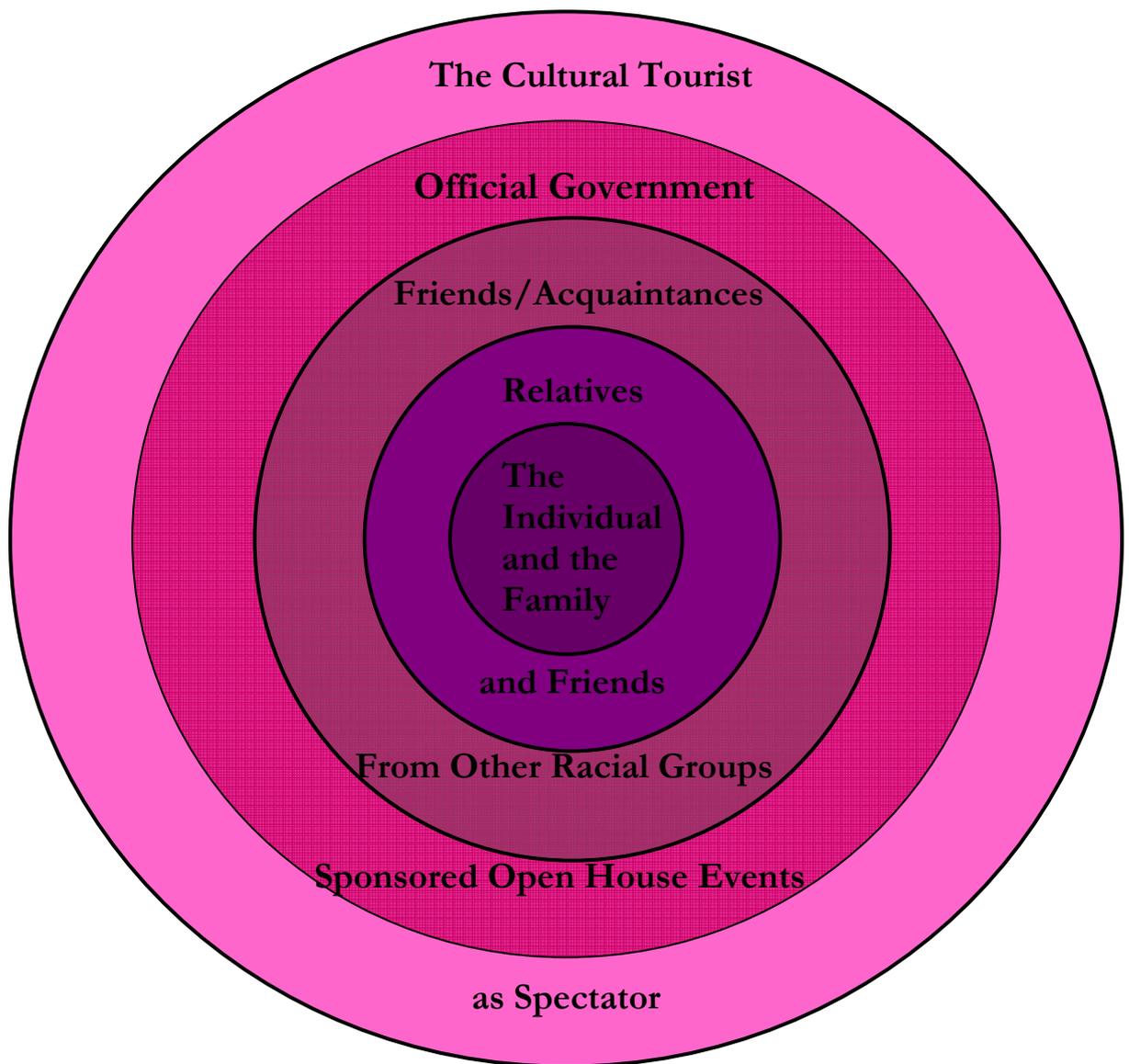


Figure 11.1.1 The *Kernel* of Festival Experience

At the inner point of the kernel exists the most potent participatory experiences which have shaped the lives of individuals and their families, inculcating core values, a sense of family practices and their place in cultural traditions. As the kernel moves to its outer shell, the experiences become less and less potent, less personally intense and, ultimately, distanced and only from the perspective of the spectator.

The fundamental issue implicit in this model is that, if the inner part of the kernel is eroded or disappears (as appears to be presaged by the 10.5 analyses of at least Chinese New Year, Gawai and Hari Raya Puasa), then there is no longer any participatory substance to the festival. All that remains is the sanitized and often commercialized cultural spectacle at the periphery. This needs to be considered in the context of what has been referred to in the cultural memory literature as the dilemma of remembering to forget or forgetting to remember.

Ong (1982), for example, believes that “the present imposes its economy on the remembrance of the past”. In reporting on the Society for Cultural Anthropology’s *Culture and Memory* Conference, Atkinson (1991) cites Fredrik Barth’s issue of the “persistence of cultural forms” in which context he raised the question

What are the processes that combat the tendency of a tradition to diverge in different directions or to drift unrecognizably from its roots? (Atkinson, 1991:18)

Tota’s (2001) view is that “the parts of the past that have lost their salience for the present are simply forgotten” (Tota, 2001:201) and she argues that,

In considering how societies forget their past, we must ask the following questions: under which circumstances, to what extent, through what processes, and in what cultural form. (Tota, 2001: 196)

This issue was also the subject of a 2008 conference hosted by the Kent Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (KIASH, 2008. Accessed 17 October 2009;

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/kiash/events/culturalmemory/index.html>). Some of the questions posed in relation to this conference are of potent contemporary relevance to Malaysia:

Is forgetting a necessary part of functioning under the demands of contemporary modern life? Is the social order allowed to veil memories in order that society may survive by forgetting? To what extent is the construction of individual identity dependent on wider social and cultural life? Does contemporary life require individuals to forget in order to survive? Or is identity (individual and collective) concerned with inventing a narrative about the past?

(KLASH, 2008. Available at:

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/kiash/events/culturalmemory/index.html> - Accessed 17 October 2009)

11.2 Reflections on the Research: Process and Product

What began as a passionate search for materials and data pertaining to Festivals in Sarawak and Malaysia culminated in the realization that, given the lack of extant documentation in relation to the festivals of Sarawak, this research could only seek to make an initial contribution to the huge void which yawned in front of the questions in search of answers. The experiential data constitute a unique slice of Malaysian life at a moment in time providing genuine insights into the realities of festival celebrations across three generations. To some extent the interviews were constrained by the language facility of participants and it was also noticeable that participants were not used to being asked to give opinions although they were pleased at the opportunity. This is consistent with the Karachristos and Warlas (2008) observation that

In spite of opposite opinions / suggestions we have noticed that emotional approach and assimilation of the interview to a social contact helps people in old ages to feel more comfortable and to let themselves free to express their personal life course. (Karachristos and Warlas, 2008:1 - Available at: www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/cisdip/docs/esrea/33.pdf - Accessed 19 October 2009)

With hindsight – and access to greater resources – expansion of the cross generational family interviews – in both numbers and range of geographical locations - would have been desirable. However the study was necessarily limited by time and financial constraints to sampling festival experiences in the city of Kuching (supplemented by some rural data). Regardless of its scale, however, it nevertheless represents a strong wake up call to the nation.

11.3 Directions from the Research

Given that this thesis provides foundational research especially in relation to human experience of festivals (see final column of table 2.5.1), there is considerable scope for publication. Initial possibilities include:

- a book with the working title **Windows on to an Evolving Culture – Sarawakian Festivals**. The audience envisaged for this book is primarily the tourism, government and corporate sectors with the aim of delineating the festivals of Sarawak and their key cultural dimensions. An accompanying DVD is planned.
- the preparation of a text entitled **The Early Childhood Companion to the Sarawakian Festivals** designed to introduce children in the early learning context to the importance of festivals in families as well as to key celebratory dimensions.

- the preparation of a companion text entitled **The Junior Resource Book of Sarawakian Festivals**. This will be a resource and activity book for the primary school age child providing clear insights into the genesis, historical background and key cultural aspects of each Festival's cultural beliefs, practices, family traditions, and ceremonial artifacts.
- the development of cross curricular text on Festivals which would also assist teachers in the process of enabling the students to become independent learners - and users - of the English Language.

11.4 Implications of the Study

The current study has clear implications for a number of areas, specifically government policy, especially in the areas of tourism and inter racial cooperation and harmony. The implications for education and for further research are equally potent. These will be discussed in the following sections.

11.4.1 Government Policy

The Government has a strong commitment to the *1Malaysia* concept as it strives to forge a united nation committed to co-operative economic, social and cultural development and expansion. It must consider whether, in the pursuit of this policy, there is an inherent danger of *forgetting to remember*. This is, of course, not a necessary consequence of the policy but perhaps an undesirable one if adequate preventative steps are not taken. Such steps involve proactive strategic policy development in a number of areas, particularly in the conservation of human cultural practices (see Table 2.5.1), education – both in terms of formal schooling and public awareness, and development of a targeted program of

research. Overarching principles for such a policy are explicitly stated in the interviews with government officials who see the country's festivals as critical in

- the inculcation of a sense of national identity
- acculturation to tradition and cultural heritage
- the maintenance of multi racial harmony
- enhanced meta cultural appreciation
- the retention of spiritual foci.

There are many projects which could be initiated in support of such principles which might include

- a counter to the minimalist mode of celebration preparation could be instituted through both the formal education process and cultural tourism - for example, focussing on the demise of self made festival objects. A national design competition could be held in conjunction with the four major festivals over a five year period, each year specifying two or three traditional festival objects and requiring entrants to research and document their genesis and then design a functional object compatible with its origins but with contemporary application. The winning designs could then be manufactured commercially and marketed with the designer's documentation to the cultural tourism as well as the domestic sector;
- conservation of existing festival artifacts;
- establishment of the parameters of responsible cultural tourism. The importance of genuine and empathetic cultural understandings in a global society cannot be underestimated. Hence it is important to provide tourists with more enduring ways of comprehending - beyond the spectacle to be photographed and archived in a relatively unvisited family space;

- partnering with education to take concerted responsibility for the through line traditionally provided by festivals so that cultural memory is actively nourished rather than permitted to languish;
- the commissioning of carefully researched conservation quality documentaries about Malaysia's festivals with global television appeal which will also educate armchair travellers across the world;
- the researched creation of visual resources suitable for both formal education and public awareness purposes.

11.4.2 Education

This research has profound implications for education in Malaysia. As acknowledged, the intergenerational comparisons make it very clear that the pressures of contemporary living are biting at the very heart of Malaysian culture and that, unless steps are taken, many important cultural traditions will be eroded or even decimated. Currently, as this research has demonstrated (Chapter 2), little pedagogically appropriate documentation of festivals exists. Pfaff-Czarnecka, Rajasingham-Senanayake, Nandy and Gomez (1999) refer explicitly to the creation of a multi-ethnic society in Malaysia, the reality that

... ethnic conflicts and antagonisms have arisen in the past over the struggle of the different ethnic communities to preserve their distinct cultural identities [and the fact that] Two important areas which have been of much concern to the various ethnic communities are the protection of their language and culture. (Pfaff-Czarnecka et al., 1999:168)

Certainly this is of fundamental importance as is indicated in previous sections, but it is of at least equal importance to remember that language is a living entity with its own idiosyncratic dynamism. If a society's current members are unable, or only partially able, to

express their core feelings and values, “protection of their language and culture” is unlikely to occur because it will wither because of lack of use in the current culture; in other words, language facility and versatility is our key to the maintenance of culture – and the health of the language itself.* Malaysian festivals provide a cultural context in which English is used to communicate in social settings. Why could there not also be contexts in which:

- English is the medium of the acquisition of content; and
- English is developed in appropriate ways through tasks which challenge students both to problem solve and to apply content knowledge in new and creative ways.

Figure 11.4.1 shows how cultural context, language acquisition and problem solving interact and form the crucible in which independent learning develops.

*Dialects are a special instance of this. e.g, Hockien celebrate the eighth day of Chinese New Year by honouring the Emperor God whilst other races don't, and there are differences in the food preferences in the different dialects which disappear once the family culture dissipates.

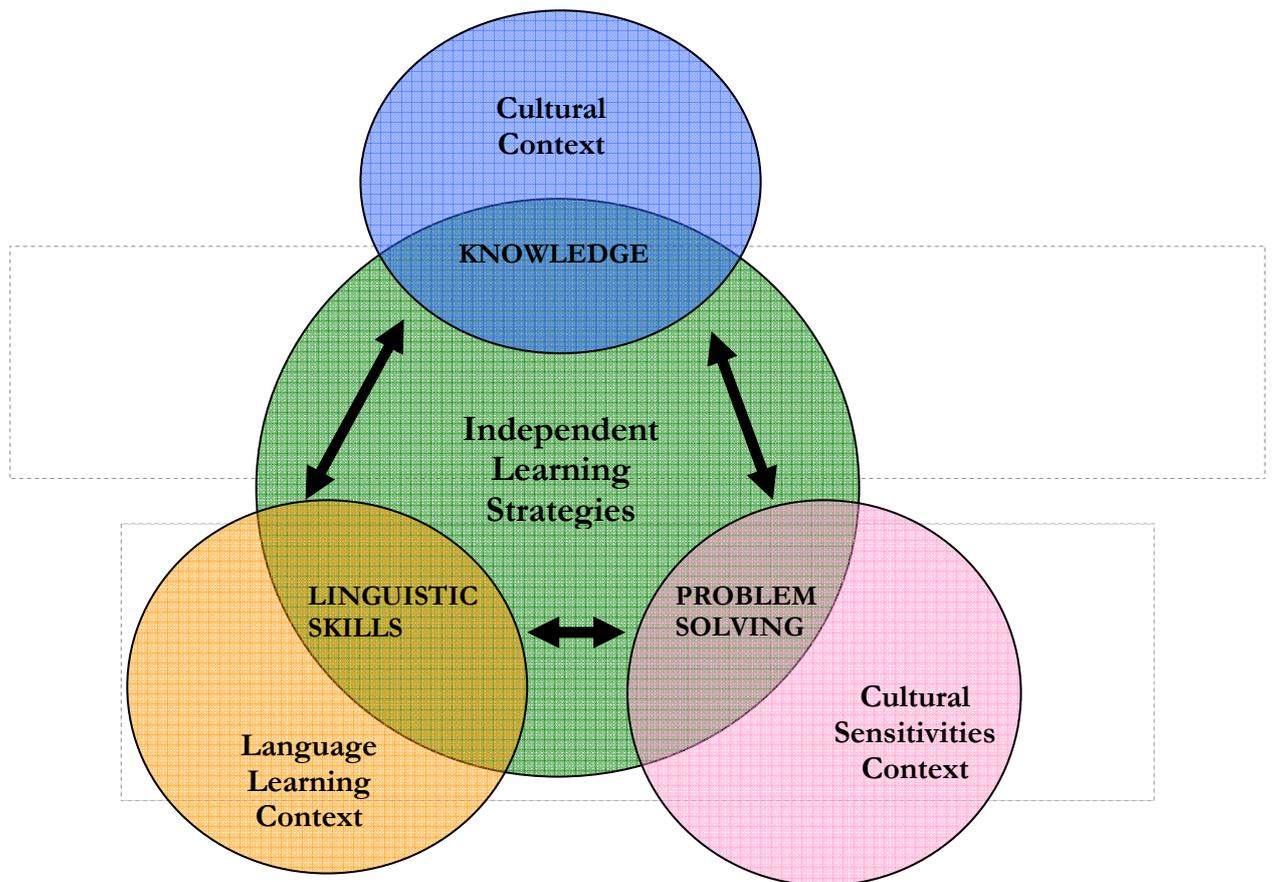


Figure 11.4.1 The Independent Learning Crucible

Since appropriate and stimulating educational resources are severely restricted in relation to the area of Malaysian festivals, and the evidence is that young people already have a high level of engagement with festivals, the opportunity exists to create a learning area in which students' existing knowledge and experience of festivals can provide the crucible in which linguistic and problem solving skills are developed and honed towards the independent learning strategies and critical thinking skills so essential to higher learning.

The Object Dialogue Box developed by Hedsor in the United Kingdom (Hedsor, 2008. Accessed 19 October 2009; www.objectdialoguebox.com/) offers just one possibility for

the kind of creative learning stimulus that could be developed. Radley (1980) points out that

Remembering is something which occurs in a world of things, as well as words, and ... artefacts play a central role in the memories of cultures and individuals.... Artefacts survive in ways unintended by makers and owners to become evidence on which other interpretations of the past can be reconstructed. (Radley 1980: 57-8).

The creation of an Object Dialogue Box using historical self made festival objects would function as a resource to stimulate both student discussion and problem solving as well as teaching them about the genesis and development of their heritage.

11.4.3 Further Research

A foundational research study of this kind inevitably prompts more avenues for research than could possibly be contemplated by a single researcher. What is required is the development and funding of a national research strategy in this area. However, certain studies would seem to have more urgent importance in the light of imminent generational replacement and the likely loss of critical information:

- there is an urgent need to expand the knowledge base about the cultural dimensions of Hari Raya Puasa;
- the current study needs to be replicated in other key Malaysian urban centres;
- research is needed in relation to urban dwellers' celebration of Gawai and the experiential consequences of contemporary modes of celebration;
- particularly in relation to Chinese New Year there needs to be a more global comparative study comparative study of celebratory modes and accommodations;
- a longitudinal study of festival experience needs to be instituted, perhaps based, in

the first instance, around the core provided by the parents/children of the current cross generational sample; data could be collected at 10 year intervals which would mean that the second tranche study should be conducted in 2014;

- a further more detailed cross sectional study of children's experience of festivals both from the familial and the societal point of view should be initiated.
- there is a need to study the cultural dimensions in greater detail; food and music are two obvious initial examples;

It is also important to consider the underlying linguistic commonalities of the festivals of Malaysia. For example:

- Might there be there some common denominator/s in terms of the same or similar words or expressions used across the festivals in Sarawak?
- As one Malaysian nation, all at least bilingual and mostly trilingual, what are some of the common threads of communication or expressions of the joy, stress, anxieties, fulfilment, etc. of Festivals?
- What are the common symbolic threads of the dances, chants, songs and music of these Festivals?
- To what extent are there similarities/differences in the underlying language of fashion, food or celebratory objects across Festivals?
- To what extent is there a common language of ritual observance embedded in festival narratives and family stories?
- Given that certain languages are linked to particular festivals (for example, Mandarin to Chinese New Year, Bahasa Melayu to Hari Raya Puasa, English to

Christmas, and Dayak to Gawai), to what extent do the multi-lingual celebrations integral to OneMalaysia impact on the rituals/celebration of these festivals?

- How have the family traditions of Festivals been most effectively transmitted given the changes in and additions of languages and dialects of newer families through intermarriage?

A number of more generic questions also arise from the research:

- To what extent do we know whether there is a generational cycle of diminution in relation to festivals across cultures?
- To what extent are there festivals whose ritual celebratory patterns have survived centuries, migratory patterns and increasing industrialization/technological advances?
- What effects has globalization had on the rituals and practices integral to individual festivals?
- To what extent has the liberation of the female from the domestic environment (or, alternatively, the economic necessity/imperative to secure a double income to meet the demands of family etc.) impacted on festival celebration as a societal socialization process?
- To what extent is the Sarawakian government strategy in relation to promoting cross cultural celebration of key festivals impacting on the younger generation's sense of cultural identity and appreciation of cultural traditions?
- If the extant documentation in relation to a festival is primarily or solely about the objective processes and artifacts of the individual festival, to what extent might that not ultimately amount only to a series of static words and visuals sampled at a series of moments across time? In other words, what is a festival without the other side of the coin – individual experience?

- To what extent do festivals which survive and grow over time - without sacrificing their roots – need to accept the educational challenge to bring neophyte generations on board?
- If this educational challenge is to be met, should such a responsibility any longer solely be that of parents? What might be the roles and responsibilities of the state? The education system? How might these be shared?
- What might be the danger signs for the integrity and longevity of a festival?
- What festival fundamentals need to be maintained for (a) festival survival and (b) festival continuity?

On a conclusive note, the language of festivals opens up a huge area for future research. Since English was the only language brought to light for future researchers, similarly Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu also open up further options for researchers on connections between languages and the various festivals, or even how festivals could be the common denominator for the beginning of teaching materials, teaching aids, or teaching strategies for the development of the languages since communicative skills for interviewing and surveys, reading skills on festival topics for research, as well as writing skills for all cultural dimensions and various festival aspects may be acquired and trained. The language of festivals comprising the written historical backgrounds and descriptive explanations, the enquiring and communicative surveys, as well as the listening aspects of stories told may all be part of a very good language development process. The language of festivals will also include the unity of all races in the light of the "1Malaysia" concept which can be a very solid and supportive ground for unity and solidarity amongst all races in Malaysia, since happy celebrative festival modes are excellent vehicles for getting the message of harmony, peace, love and joy across to all.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Government Leaders and Officials

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Government Officials or Community Heads/Leaders

1. How important are the Festivals in defining the community? What place do you think they stand in the peoples' delight and celebrations?
2. What festivals do you consider most important for your community? Why?
3. What aspects of their celebration do you regard as critical? Why?
4. In terms of future generations, what traditions must be maintained? Why?
5. Might any traditions be dispensed with? Why?
6. What roles do you believe Festivals play in defining Sarawak? How important are these festivals in terms of our State Tourism strategy?
7. How important is food in the celebration of community festivals?
8. What role does music have in community celebrations?
9. Are clothes or costumes of any particular significance during these festivals?
10. Are there specific religious observations in any of the festivals your community celebrates?

APPENDIX B

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS CARDS

B.1 Chinese New Year

B.2 Gawai

B.3 Hari Raya

B.4 Christmas

B.1 Chinese New Year (Red)

Cultural Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important
Food					
Music					
Clothes					
Family					
Culture/ Tradition					
Religious Observance					
Gift Giving					
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs					

B.2 Gawai Harvest Festival (Brown)

Cultural Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important
Food					
Music					
Clothes					
Family					
Culture/ Tradition					
Religious Observance					
Gift Giving					
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs					

B.3 Hari Raya Puasa (Green)

Cultural Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important
Food					
Music					
Clothes					
Family					
Culture/ Tradition					
Religious Observance					
Gift Giving					
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs					

B.4 Christmas (Gold)

Cultural Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important
Food					
Music					
Clothes					
Family					
Culture/ Tradition					
Religious Observance					
Gift Giving					
Festival Objects/Art/ Souvenirs					

APPENDIX C

FESTIVAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS/QUESTIONNAIRES

**C.1 General Questions Regarding
Festivals**

**C.2 Specific Questions for Each Major
Festivals**

C.1 GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING FESTIVALS

1. Which in your mind, are the most important festivals we celebrate? Why?
2. What are the key elements that you think are important in creating a good festival?
Why?
3. What have you enjoyed most in the celebration of our festivals? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe is important to document our festivals? Why?
5. What family values do you see an important essence of festivals?
6. Are clothes, food, music, art, of any importance in festivals for you and your family?
7. Do you think these festivals were celebrated more significantly in the earlier days of your parents and grandparents, or in the present time? Why?
8. Do you think there were differences in these festivals during your grandparents' days?
Why?
9. Is there anything in particular you think we should record from these festivals as traditional values that you want recorded for future generations?
10. What did you learn from your family that you feel you must pass on to the younger generations?

C.2 SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR EACH MAJOR FESTIVAL

1. What is your earliest memory of this festival?
2. What special preparations do you remember being made? How did you feel then?
3. What part did you play in these? How did you feel about the role?
4. What is your most pleasant association with preparation for the Festival? Why?
5. Have you noticed any changes in celebrating the Festivals these days? What are they?
6. What is the importance of food to you and your family in this festival?
7. What is the importance of clothes to you and your family in this festival?
8. How about music of this festival? What did it mean to you?
9. What did you think of the traditions, customs and family values in this festival? Was it important to you? To your grandparents and parents?
10. How significant was the home decorations to you and your family in this festival?
11. Do you have any religious practices before or after this festival?
12. What celebration objects or souvenirs do you consider important in this festival?
13. Which of these traditions, customs, practices, or cultural dimensions do you consider most important in this festival?

APPENDIX D

URBAN AND RURAL DIFFERENCES IN GAWAI CELEBRATORY PRACTICES (STUDENT DATA)

Questions on the experiential views of Gawai Celebrations in the longhouse (and the city)

1. What in your view and observation characterizes Gawai preparations in the urban centres?

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2. What in your view and observation characterizes Gawai preparations in the rural centres?

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3. What are the main differences between urban and rural preparations?

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4. Describe your initial observations of the longhouse when you arrived? Was the festival atmosphere apparent already? How?

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5. What were the key celebratory moments for you in relation to the longhouse celebrations?

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6. What impressions did you gain/ evidence did you collect about how different families celebrated Gawai? Individuals within families?

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7. What events on Festival day did you find of particular interest? Why?

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8. Was there anything which you found off putting? Why?

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9. What food differences did you observe in the Festival compared with Kuching?

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10. What clothes are worn for the festival in the longhouse?

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11. What clothes are worn in Kuching?

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.....

12. What was the reaction of the village folks to you as a visitor to the festivals?

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.....

13. What religious observances did you observe? Why? What seemed important about them?

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.....

14. Give your overall impressions of the entire Gawai experience in the longhouse

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APPENDIX E

TERTIARY STUDENTS' FESTIVAL QUESTIONNAIRES

**E.1 Importance of Festival
Celebration Dimensions**

E.2 Festival Specific Questions

E.1 IMPORTANCE OF FESTIVAL CELEBRATION DIMENSIONS

Festival Celebration Dimensions	Extremely Important	Important	Quite Important	Slightly Important	Not Very Important At All
To what extent are the celebrations of importance to you?					
To what extent is your family's celebration of importance to you?					
How important is it to you that children learn about the traditions of this festival?					
To what extent do you look forward to this festival each year?					

E.2 FESTIVAL SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. What did you feel about the giving of “*angpoms*” during Chinese New Year? Or “green packets” during Hari Raya Puasa? How do you feel now?
2. What about the gifts to be delivered to elders before the New Year? Or Hari Raya Puasa? Or Gawai? Or Christmas?
3. What do you think of Open House during Chinese New Year or Hari Raya Puasa, Gawai or Christmas?
4. What do you think of the Chinese New Year’s Eve reunion dinner?
5. What do you think of the lion dances?
6. Do you still believe in wearing red and decorating the house in red for Chinese New Year?
7. What do you think of the significance of oranges, “*niengao*”, firecrackers, etc. during the Chinese New Year?
8. What do you think of the “forgiveness” gestures for the elders in the family during Hari Raya Puasa?