

Last Screens of Malaya: Preserving the Traditional Wayang Pacak through Documentaries

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Abstract

In recent decades, cultural heritage and archiving have become vital for preserving and making heritage more accessible. Improving techniques for preservation is essential for safeguarding a country's intellectual and economic wealth, enabling better conservation, cost savings, and wider distribution. Cinema, as both physical and intangible cultural property, plays a key role in this process through research-creation, which combines art, theory, and research. This approach also allows documenting intangible cultural heritage, challenging traditional methods by focusing on audience experiences, screening schedules, exhibition formats, and film reception. This paper is the first to discuss Malaysia's traditional 35mm Wayang Pacak using SDG Target 11.4—protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage—as its framework. It offers insights into the socio-cultural influences, technical evolution, historical development, and characteristics of Wayang Pacak using archival research and case studies. Additionally, it examines the collaborative research-creation process involving academics, filmmakers, and sound specialists in documentary production. Ultimately, this project aims to celebrate and preserve the Wayang Pacak, sharing it with both local and global audiences.

Keywords: 35mm Wayang Pacak, Malaysian Cinema, , SDG11, Cultural Heritage Preservation, Documentary Filmmaking.

Introduction

The traditional Malaysian *Wayang Pacak* is an outdoor cinema experience that involves screening films using 35mm projectors, a white screen, and an audio system. Having existed in Malaysia since before the nation's independence, this traditional art of using an analogue projector to screen films onto a white canvas is fast becoming a cultural experience fading in an increasingly modernised society. The comprehension of urgency to safeguard the *Wayang Pacak* as a form of cultural heritage was constantly within the subconscious of the principal investigator (PI) since 2018. The idea was mooted during his PhD studies in Melbourne, Australia when he saw a poster invite to a “cinema under the stars” event.

A mutual contact introduced him to Mr. Raghavan Kunchapah of Sri Devi Mobile Cinema, a septuagenarian who uses a 35mm film projector to screen films in an open field. His activity of screening films dates to when the Shaw Brothers screened films in the 1960s.

Having been involved in the film industry for over 50 years, his foray into film began with his passion for classic Tamil films while working in Johor Bahru as a mobile projectionist before being tasked to manage a mobile film projector in local estates around Skudai for agricultural employees. His setup consisted of a 35mm film projector attached to a truck booth, a display screen, and a stereo speaker setup. This effective setup allowed for easy manoeuvring, unloading, and quick playback.

The PI's determination to produce a documentary about Raghavan being the last Wayang Pacak projectionist was, however, short-lived when the COVID-19 pandemic caused travel to be restricted. Post-pandemic, exploration into the Wayang Pacak restarted. His unofficial research in Thailand,

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Singapore, Indonesia, and India through personal journeys to explore whether cinemas or projectionists using analogue projectors are still running in these countries yielded no results. This information gap led to a successful research grant application from the University, where the project leader now works to produce a documentary to archive the works and life of Raghavan as the possible last analogue projectionist in Malaysia.

Using the case study method, the researchers have gained intricate knowledge about cultural heritage practices and triangulated their data. The research team consists of academics, filmmakers, designers, and sound engineers who utilized their knowledge, skills, and experiences to attempt to capture through audio-visual format the stories, sights, and sounds of the activities carried out by Raghavan and, essentially, to explore and document the dying art of the Wayang Pacak in Malaysia.

This paper is divided into two main parts. The first introduces the dying phenomenon of the traditional Wayang Pacak as a form of intangible cultural heritage. This paper is the first to solely examine Malaysia's traditional 35mm Wayang Pacak exclusively, using SDG 11.4 as its framework to highlight efforts in protecting cultural heritage. It offers new insights into the socio-cultural and technical evolution of the Wayang Pacak, exploring its historical development, cultural integration, socio-political influence, and community engagement through a research-creation process. Secondly, this paper discusses the ongoing research for the documentary involving academics, filmmakers, designers and sound specialists.

The Traditional Malaysian Wayang Pacak

The *Wayang Pacak*, or the “Outdoor Movie Screening,” despite having a significant historical presence since before *Merdeka*, is not a subject matter that has been thoroughly explored academically. Observing the *Wayang Pacak* screenings through photographs shared online through different forms of social media often depicts large crowds of audiences seated outdoors in fields and estates. An analogue projector beams the moving images onto a white cloth screen, often held together by two makeshift poles; hence the use of the terminology ‘*Pacak*’, while a portable stereo system is attached to an amplifier. It brought the cinematic experience to those living in rural areas who could not afford a trip to the towns to watch films in the cinemas (Lee, 2021).

One of the earliest accounts documenting the existence of the *Wayang Pacak* during the pre-Merdeka days was through Che’ Sab @ Sabudin Bin Taib or Pak Sab’s narration (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 2017). Through the (then) Malaysian Information Department, British colonialists initially used the *Wayang Pacak* to disseminate government propaganda in the fight against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In 1947, Pak Sab was a motion picture operator for the Malaysian Information Department. His task as part of the “mobile unit” was to transport the *Wayang Pacak* equipment by lorry (or van or jeep) to the screening locations and screen films that delivered government policies as efforts to win people’s hearts to fight for independence. During one screening at Fraser Hills, they were unexpectedly ambushed by Communist terrorists. Despite being labelled as a “British stooge,” Pak Sab and his acquaintances continued with the screening. In a separate *Wayang Pacak* screening three months later in Triang, Pahang, the movie screen collapsed when the fastener was damaged. Pak Sab suspected that it was an act of sabotage by an undercover Communist terrorist who disguised as an audience member.

The *Wayang Pacak* was, therefore, used by the Malayan Film Unit (MFU) as the medium of propaganda and psychological warfare against the Communists by the British in Malaya (Gunaish et al., 2022). One of the symbolic images of MFU films was the leaping tiger at the beginning of its films. This symbol was a collective memory of the audiences accustomed to watching *Wayang Pacak* films, as attending such screenings was one of the few entertainment activities for those living in rural areas or the Chinese New Villages. The *Wayang Pacak* program screening MFU films was positively received by those living in rural areas. In 1948, a ten-day tour of the *Wayang Pacak* in Kuantan, Pahang, attracted approximately 4,000 people. *The Straits Times* reported that the success of this program meant the *Wayang Pacak* being held in Sungai Karang, Sungai Ular, Balok, Cherating, Kampung Lepar, and Gambang.

In popular culture, Mohammad Nor bin Mohammad Khalid, also known as Lat, is a Malaysian cartoonist

who has captured the nostalgic experience of the *Wayang Pacak* screenings and their activities through *The Kampung Boy* (1979), a graphic novel documenting Lat's life growing up in a Malay *Kampung* (village) in Gopeng, Perak. One of the most vivid moments Lat shared of his life in the *Kampung* was the screening of a film through the *Wayang Pacak*. The comic strips capture the setting up of the white screen attached to two poles while an amplifier is being set up. This mobile and outdoor cinema has a *Kampung* house in the background while children play without a care.

In the next frame, Lat narrates how the *Wayang Pacak* activity is essential as children from the neighbouring *Kampungs* make their way to the event. He describes his excitement: "Even watching the projectionist in preparation was exciting!" As the projectionist screens the reels onto the white screen using the analogue projector, children and adults are seen immersed in the scene of an immobile car getting caught on a railway track as an oncoming train is mere meters away. The projectionist, however, does not seem to share their enthusiasm, for presumably, he has already watched this reel numerous times.

Lastly, the film's screening is abruptly halted to make way for what Lat describes as a commercial break to sell deworming medicine. As the medicine seller explains an anatomic chart to uninterested children munching on sugar canes, a uniformed officer is spotted among the audience members. His presence is recorded in this visual graphic, for the *Wayang Pacak* activities were initially held during the days of Communist insurgency after World War Two. The uniformed officer would be a policeman placed at the *Kampung* to safeguard the security of the villagers against the threat of the Communist insurgents.

Through a short video posted on Facebook, the Malaysian animation *Upin and Ipin* (2020) captures the activities surrounding film screening in a *Kampung* using the *Wayang Pacak* method. Aptly titled *Wayang Pacak*, this 58-second short pays homage to Lat's *Kampung Boy*, as scenes of excited children arriving at the *Kampung* to attend the *Wayang Pacak* activity are captured. This scene is preceded by the arrival of a Department of Information van that uses a loudhailer to announce the upcoming screening of the next *Wayang Pacak* film with a panel attached to the side of the van bearing the poster of *Anakku Sazali* by P. Ramlee.

As the scene cuts to the night of the screening, excited villagers position themselves comfortably on woven mats as the film is screened on the canvas. As the light from the projector in the rear of the van beams onto the screen, lightning flashes across the sky, and the rain interrupts the film's screening. After the rain, villagers return to take their places on the mat as the projector in the van continues screening *Anakku Sazali*.

More memories of the *Wayang Pacak* screenings are shared through Facebook comments. Amongst the various comments, one mentions remembering the presence of a "Milo van" that served free beverages to the villagers. Another comment is a recollection of a minimal fee being charged. Other comments mention how grease was applied onto fences to prevent gate crashers from entering without payment. In contrast, another mentions the absence of the Department of Information *ceramah* or talks during the intervals held during the screenings, and others speak about how watching films at these traditional *Wayang Pacak* was a nostalgic experience.

Digital Wayang Pacak Screenings

"In the era of Netflix and Viu (online streaming), who would have thought Wayang Pacak, which is the open-air screening that was popular in the 70s, still has its own fans." (Haris Fadzilah, 2023).

Today, efforts to revitalise the *Wayang Pacak* are being made using digital platforms. In August 2013, former Minister of Youth and Sports Khairy Jamaluddin, through the Department of Information Malaysia (JAPEN), screened *Tanda Putera* via *Wayang Pacak*. This effort was politically motivated to counter the action of the Penang's State Government, which prohibited the film from being screened in its cinemas. Paradoxically, the *Wayang Pacak*, which was a tool for propaganda tool during the colonial period, was again used to achieve certain political purposes (Sabri, 2013).

Then, in 2019, a political event dubbed *Pemimpin Berrsama Komuniti* (Leaders with the Community) screened *Paskal* using *Wayang Pacak* method on a futsal pitch in Kuala Pilah. The event became political as the event poster featured local politicians (*Pemimpin bersama komuniti Paskal*, 2022). Lastly, in November 2022, *Mat Kilau: Kebangkitan Pahlawan* was screened using the *Wayang Pacak* at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Kota Bharu. News coverage showed the candidate dressed in a political party's regalia, mentioning that the people in Kota Bharu needed more *Wayang Pacak* since the town has no modern indoor cinema (TV9, 2022).

Other “patriotic” films screened using the *Wayang Pacak* was in Sekinchan organised by the Sabak Bernam District Information Office (PPD) as an effort to bring back fond memories and inspire patriotism among the local community. Attendees highlighted the importance of such programs in reminding the people to appreciate the contributions and sacrifices of the nation's security forces (Ministry of Communications, 2023). In Kelantan, the *Wayang Pacak* screening of “Bukit Kepong” at Pulai Chondong Market Square was reported to have attracted 2,000 audiences daily (Ahmad Zaidi, 2022), whilst a *Wayang Pacak* event by RTM in Pekan Kecil Kampung Terpencil in July 2022 was done to help enhance the sense of togetherness and neighbourhood after the various lockdowns (RTM, 2022). In 2017, the animation *Didi & Friends* was screened at the Festival Kre8tif, Cyberjaya (*Didi & Friends - Lagu Kanak Kanak*, 2017). Following that, in conjunction with the Kuala Lumpur International Arts Festival 2018, five local films were screened, including *Jagat*, *Hoore! Hoore!*, *Interchange*, *Batik Girl*, and *Adiwiraku*. The free screening sessions were held in the low-cost apartment area around Taman Melati, Setapak (*Jagat the Movie*, 2018).

In Sibul, Sarawak, “Moonlight Cinema” featured *Ola Bola* in April 2022. The event was held to foster unity and harmony among the participants (Dayakdaily, 2022). In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the Sabah Art Gallery (SAG) organised two *Wayang Pacak* sessions to ensure the tradition and culture are remembered. Binisol (2023), the first *Nite Picnic Inaugural 'Wayang Pacak'* was held in April 2023, followed by a second session focused on Autism Awareness in July (Sabah Art Gallery, 2023). Meanwhile, the Sabah District Information Office (PPD) has also conducted a two-day *Wayang Pacak* session in August 2023. The screening session featured the local action film *Air Force the Movie: Selagi Bernyawa*. The event was in conjunction with the *Program Kita Madani* and successfully attracted young kids and children to join the screening (Abd Rahim, 2023).

History of Screens and Entertainment in Malaysia

For centuries, Southeast Asia had a performance tradition in multiple forms throughout Malaysia, Cambodia, Java, Bali, Laos, and Thailand (Osnes, 2010). The shadow puppet theatre is a medium in which great epic tales of heroes and magic are told to a wide range of audiences nationwide. In Malaysia, shadow puppet theatre is known as *Wayang Kulit*. A single muslin screen separates the audience from the *dalang* (puppeteer), who voices and animates intricately designed puppets that cast fantastical images and shadows upon the screen. This storytelling tradition predates cinema with its adaptations of great Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Traditional *wayang kulit* had elements of mysticism and ritualistic gestures concerning the *dalang's* relationship to the puppets.

During the 19th century, the British colonialists created an influx of non-indigenous cultural activities such as silent film and commercial theatrical performances by touring troupes worldwide (Matusky and Tan, 2017). From European and American Operettas to Chinese operas and Farsi troupes, the expanding cosmopolitan cities of the Malay peninsula experienced many new forms of entertainment during the turn of the century. The *Bangsawan* appeared as a staged performance greatly influenced by the Parsi troupes from Bombay, which travelled throughout Southeast Asia. Meaning ‘of noble birth’ in Malay, the plays featured in *Bangsawan* are commonly associated with royalty. Following the traditions of Parsi theatre, these travelling theatre troupes would perform stories from Arabic-Persian romances, Hindu epics, European plays and Malay and Chinese stories (Van der Heide, 2002).

The multi-ethnic element of *Bangsawan* is also reflected in its management, performers, and audience. *Bangsawan's* popularity during the 1890s was due to Malay being its primary language and the commodification of its songs and plays through the sale of music records and radio stations playing their

music. However, the biggest contribution to the popularity of *Bangsawan* during the turn of the century had to do with the successful introduction of amusement parks in large cities that provided a central entertainment hub that featured *Bangsawan*, Chinese opera, Persian theatre, European theatre, gambling halls, dance parlours and films. These parks were owned by entrepreneurs like the Shaw Brothers, who eventually became Malaya's film distribution and exhibition tycoons. The decline of *Bangsawan* in the 1950s was due to the rapid development of cinema.

Among the earliest Southeast Asian nations to establish a local film industry, Malaya's first film, *Laila Majnun* (1933), directed by B S Rajhans, paved the way for cinema's place as the main entertainment (Hisham, 2019; Lee, 2021). The Shaw brothers established Malay Film Productions, and film stars like P. Ramlee and Ibrahim Pendek became household names as the Malay film industry produced a golden era of cinema in the nation. The introduction of television in 1963 eventually led to the shrinking of cinemagoers. The separation of Singapore from Malaysia also greatly split the country and its demographic. Foreign movies were being imported into the country, and the rising cost of production greatly impacted cinema-going culture. Soon, foreign movies from Hollywood, Bollywood, Hong Kong, and Indonesia became the staple of cinemas in Malaysia.

Today, alternative cinema exists in Malaysia as smaller film communities that stage screenings and film discussions to preserve cinema culture in an age of streaming platforms and social media content (Lee, 2012; Hassan, 2023). Wong Tuck Cheong set up Kelab Seni Film Malaysia (KSFM) to show Malaysian audiences a larger variety of films outside mainstream cinema-going culture. KSFM would borrow and rent (when they could afford it) films in a collaborative effort in Taiwan, Fiji, Hawaii, and Ireland. *Kuala Lumpur Film School* (KLFS) and *Rumah Filem* were among other film communities that operated on a smaller scale to foster an alternative cinema-going audience. The nomadic nature of film communities like KLFS enables them to side-step the red tape of bureaucracy that hinders the accessibility of films to the general audience.

Cultural Heritage, Archiving Works, and UN SDG11.4

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) aim to transform the world and call for action to end poverty and equality, protect the planet, and ensure everyone enjoys health, justice, and prosperity (UNDP, 2024). As part of efforts to protect the planet, the past decades have seen increased discourse about heritage values amongst heritage professionals, governments, and communities (Avrami et al., 2019). In line with SDG Target 11.4, there is an increase in efforts globally to strengthen, protect, and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage to advance the relevance of heritage conservation and management to retain the cultural significance of places by balancing the aesthetic, historical, scientific, and social values held by the generations from the past, present, and future. Improving methods to preserve and access cultural heritage is crucial for three reasons (Derclaye, 2010).

First, the importance of safeguarding and accessing the cultural heritage of any country is undeniable, for cultural heritage reflects a nation's intellectual and economic wealth. This wealth ensures that memories are kept alive, and this helps preserve the history of a country. Second, in the digital age, digitalisation enables better preservation works, costs less, and is disseminated cheaply. Increased bandwidth and downloading capacities allow anyone to access cultural heritage from anywhere in the world.

UNESCO states that cultural heritage is “the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.” Besides monuments and groups of buildings, UNESCO also lists “sites” or works of man or the combined works of nature and man (UNESCO, 1972). In the same document, UNESCO also states that cultural heritage includes intangible heritage that is defined as “living expressions and the traditions that countless groups and communities worldwide have inherited from their ancestors and transmit to their descendants, in most cases orally”.

The preservation of heritage is crucial for four reasons. First, scientific (research and increased knowledge). Second, political (messages and symbolism). Third, social (sense of place and cultural

identity), and fourth, economic (attracts tourists and visitors to the region) (Boyd & Timothy, 2003). While most cultural heritages are informal, these forms of heritage are crucial in economic and social life. Cultural heritages require public protection and explicit management, for these are leading institutions that bring together history, territory, and society while helping to define the cultural contexts of society (Barrere, 2015).

Power of Film and Cultural Heritage

Cinema capably brings together the art of filmmaking and the preservation of cultural heritage. The art of filmmaking has also been a tool that froze images in time and allowed this to happen by capturing moving images with sound. While cinema has been preserving culture and heritage for more than a decade through the art of filmmaking, it is only in the current years that filmmakers, historians, academics, and public members have been paying closer attention to this art form. The preservation of cultural heritage using filmmaking can be carried out through research-creation; blending the practice of art, theories, and research so it becomes a transdisciplinary practice used by practitioners and academics. As research-creation becomes an overarching concept that encompasses various practices such as art-based research, research-led practice, and practice-based research, its goal is to offer a better understanding of bringing forth a methodological space with potentially alternative visions of research, art, and innovation that bring about results unobtainable using existing approaches (Stévanec & Lacasse, 2019).

Cinema is a tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Bonaviri, 2022). While films are not listed as “monuments” or “groups of buildings,” films can be located between “sites” and “film archives. The UNESCO 1972 convention never stated films or film archives as “sites.” However, they can be inscribed into the World Heritage List based on four criteria – capable of representing a masterpiece of human creative genius, capable of exhibiting a critical exchange of human values over time and within a cultural area; capable of bearing unique testimony to a cultural tradition or civilization either living or disappeared or tangibly associated with events or living transitions, ideas, beliefs, and artistic and outstanding literary works. Thus, locating and mapping important film archives is a progressive step towards building “cinema archives footage” using films with strong cultural values.

A focus on film and television has characterised research on audiovisual cultural heritage, while audiences and their experiences still need to be addressed entirely (Ercole, et al., 2016). Introducing cinema heritage challenges traditional taxonomies that sideline cultural consumption practices from normative categorisations. As such, critical attention should be given to audiences as they consume cultural products. Focusing on their cinema experiences, including cinemagoing practices, screening schedules, exhibition structures, and reception of specific films, will allow for a new and holistic form of cinema heritage. This cinema heritage will entail tangible forms (cinema theatre buildings), intangible forms (oral history related to cinemagoing experience), and digital forms (digitised texts and images, audiovisual material, and film programming databases).

The medium of film adequately documents and presents intangible cultural heritage (Furlan, 2015). Films are a research method to collect data, create knowledge, identity, continuity, and memory, safeguard, protect, and preserve heritage, and transmit heritage to those from different generations. Ethnologists and anthropologists attempt to understand as observers how cultural policies on intangible cultural heritage affect phenomena and communities. Participatory cinema becomes research work as it becomes an encounter between a researcher and the studied community, and the film that becomes a result of this encounter also reflects the researcher’s standpoint and is extended to the discourse on film.

Methodology

Following the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2022, a grant application to revive the Wayang Pacak documentary project was initiated. The Principal Investigator (PI). A multidisciplinary team was formed to lead the research-creation process while also serving as a support system for early career researchers. The joint efforts in writing the grant application led to the approval and in-depth research

on Wayang Pacak.

The ethics review application posed a real challenge, in which the intricacies of ethical compliance in research were highlighted. This process requires attention to detail and involves multiple documents, such as the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification and agreement form. It was imperative to maintain integrity and transparency, as well as maintain effective collaboration and communication with the university's research services during this phase. Despite the challenges, the team successfully obtained the ethics clearance, which enabled the initiation of the pre-production stage.

This research takes the framework of research-creation of Springgay and Truman (2016), stressing the speculative nature, the creation of enabling constraints, problematisation through concept creation, the importance of 'thinking-in-movement', noting and reworking emergence, and focuses on producing more than just representation. Our approach combines these elements to produce a documentary, following the project coordination with the research-creation principle, especially in documenting the challenges in Malaysian cultural heritage.

The methodology integrates archival research, a case study approach, and filmmaking. Archival research will benefit the study of Asian culture and interdisciplinary approach, examining the film analysis and exploring documentaries on intangible cultural heritage. This includes film policies, blogs, and academic journals for insight into cultural preservation. This method has been instrumental in the writing of the context, background, and literature review. The case study approach is highly regarded in the social sciences and practical-oriented field, as stated by Starman (2013). It involves four critical phases, according to Rashid et al. (2019): Foundation, Pre-Field, Field, and Reporting. In the Foundation phase, the researchers established the philosophy research and logic essential to framing the research and developing new theories. The pre-field phase involves determining the case study and developing a protocol for evidence gathering and analysis. The Field phase requires the researcher's active involvement in collecting and translating empirical materials through interviews, observation, and document collection, emphasising the importance of understanding cases and building rapport. Finally, the Reporting phase emphasises the detailed presentation of the case, participants' relationships, field protocol, empirical material analysis, and conclusions, stressing the importance of structured reports and narrative-like writing to effectively convey the study's findings.

The data and information gathered from the case study approach will then be used to produce a documentary. As part of the case study's reporting approach, the genre of the film will be categorised as documentary. The production concept will be informative and educational. Audio will be recorded as interviews, voice-over narration, ambient, and from the projector, which will then be mixed with background music in the post-production. The filmmaking process will translate the case study findings into a documentary using filmmaking techniques by Winters (2021). These include visual storytelling, utilising experienced cast and crews, production design, camera techniques, sophisticated lighting, and upscaled post-production.

The research team's collective expertise, consisting of filmmakers, sound engineers, and experienced editors, ensures a high operating standard of filmmaking. The documentary aims to be educational, focusing on preserving cultural heritage through the lens of the subject, thereby bridging archival research with practical filmmaking. The filmmaking process of this documentary will follow the conventional stages of research – pre-production – production – post-production – exhibition, and distribution (refer to Figure 1).

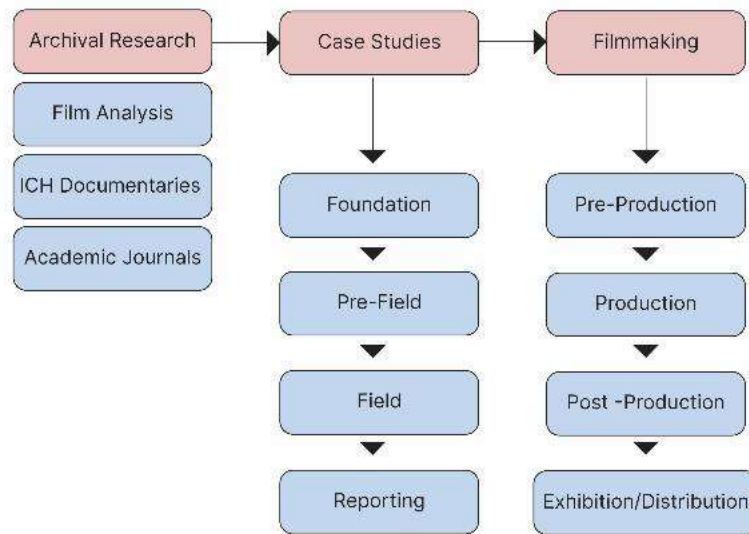


Figure 1: Methodology used in this research-creation project.

In summary, an integrative approach is done by combining archival research, case studies and filmmaking to holistically document and preserve *Wayang Pacak* as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The findings from the archival research and the case study into a documentary. While ensuring ethical compliance, this collaborative effort involves a team from different expertise and disciplines. This approach ensures the final output not only document the practice, but also contributes to its preservation, creating a record for future generations.

Analogue Projectors In A Documentary – A Case Study Approach

Using the case study method to fulfil the pre-field phase, the researchers have gained intricate knowledge about cultural heritage practices and triangulated their data, including its pre-independence propaganda dissemination. Using Raghavan as a primary case study fits within the matrix of using filmmaking to document and archive an intangible heritage culture that will disappear with time. As a reflective paper, this section will only discuss the foundation, pre-field and field stages of the case study approach.

To discuss the foundation and pre-field phases, it was decided that the traditional *Wayang Pacak* using 35mm projectors was suitable as the subject matter for a documentary. This was further determined as the researchers acknowledged how the documentary is part of Adrian Lee's Reel Heritage Series short documentaries to document the sights and sounds of a vulnerable trade that borders on extinction. As digital technology replaced analogue filmmaking, an introduction to "cinema under the stars" (essentially a form of *Wayang Pacak*), and *Cinema Paradiso* (1998), the idea to document the *Wayang Pacak* was initiated due to the understanding of how the cranking sound of the projector accompanying the ray of light from the projector's booth would soon disappear.

To further strengthen their effort of exploring if the *Wayang Pacak* and analogue projector were indeed going obsolete, personal and professional travels to Penang, Kuching, Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta, Bandung, Mumbai, and New Delhi through detours to local cinemas showed that they no longer used an analogue projector. These discoveries strengthened the topic for the *Wayang Pacak* documentary.

This realisation that analogue film and the *Wayang Pacak* could be the subject matter of a documentary series led to the introduction to Raghavan, a septuagenarian who had been screening films using a 35mm projector in an open field for more than five decades.

As part of an effort to spearhead the research-creation process, a group of like-minded researchers was assembled. The team consisted of full-time academics who were also filmmakers, designers, and sound engineers. Upon securing ethics approval from the university, the researchers contacted Raghavan with more details about the documentary shoot, understand protocols and needs, and need to further recce the surroundings for the documentary's B-rolls or additional 'filler' footage. After contact was made with Raghavan, a recce was conducted in his hometown of Skudai, Johor.

During this field phase session, the researchers had settled on the fact that Raghavan was the last remaining projectionist using a 35mm analogue film projector to screen films. Raghavan however, introduced the team to a second projectionist, who screens films in Malacca. Raghavan then introduced a third projectionist in Alor Setar, Kedah, a fourth in Parit Buntar, Perak and a fifth in Puchong, Selangor. The researchers then realised they could now produce multiple short documentaries and a feature-length documentary.

As such, the short documentaries will individually archive the life stories of each projectionist. The researchers also discovered a common thread shared by the projectionists; the father-son association, where the art of the *Wayang Pacak* was passed down from a father to a son. These ideas will be further explored in the writing of the reporting phase, which would then be used in the writing of the scripts.

Case Study: Raghavan the Projectionist

Raghavan started working in film at the age of 17. After schooling, he joined a cinema company due to his interest in films. His job specification was a mobile projectionist. The mobile projection setup comprises a 35mm film projector, power amplifier, portable polyester screen, and mono speaker. He learned most of the film work from his employer, Rajangam, on basic editing, archiving, and equipment care. Occasionally, he was required to edit and reduce film duration to achieve optimal screen time.

His primary interests are Indian classics such as Indian MGR and Sivaji Ganesan films. He will also project classic Chinese Films at temple gatherings. His interest in films is driven by positive motivation, emotional messages, the importance of family influences, morality, and pure entertainment. In the later stage, his associate, Rajangam, guided Raghavan on extended editing, censorship guidelines, and business strategies.

Raghavan mostly screens films at plantations for a Malay audience. He plans his showcase locations with the plantation manager for weekend playback in rubber plantation villages surrounding his neighborhood. Due to the weight of the equipment, the mobile setup is fixed at the back of his van for easy installation. The modification involved removing the back seat and metal framing to accommodate the projector.

During the weekends, the company will send Raghavan to the estates for scheduled screenings of the movies. The *Wayang Pacak* will be the only form of cinema entertainment for the community there. Often assisted by estate community members during set up, this activity lasted 30 years until digital technology took over. Besides screening movies, Raghavan has edited films for Filem Negara Malaysia to remove censorship-based topics and content.

Raghavan is devoted to film preservation and has an extensive collection of old vintage films in multiple formats. In the early 1980s, before the emergence of VHS, he had a technical team for service and maintenance. As the years went by, Raghavan learned the techniques and purchased third-party resources to do it himself.

His main concern is that the younger generation will fail to know how to use and preserve a film projector and its role in society. This passion is shared with his son who is equally apt in the setting up of the *Wayang Pacak* set. His son understands how the grittiness of a 35mm film with immersive coloration, unique crank sound, and contrast has a quality unmatched by digital playback. He also understands how the skill set to operate a projector requires careful details on reeling, flickering, and switching is considered an art by itself. As such, the 35mm film projector and the experiences of the

projectionists represents technical excellence, historical significance, and artistic value, making it a cherished piece of cinema history.

Discussion, Conclusion and Further Plans

The researchers had contacted all five of the *Wayang Pacak* projectionist. They were very welcoming and excited to share their time, expertise, and knowledge with the research team. Plans have been made for interviews, further research, pre-production and production for all 5 projectionists. There will be several protocols that the team will need to adhere to, such as requesting formal permissions to screen from local councils, on top of consent to be part of the documentary. Location scouting will be conducted in Alor Setar and Parit Buntar to determine the best sites to shoot the documentaries in the second half of 2024.

The subsequent phase would be the reporting phase, which will influence the filmmaking methods of Winters (2021). The researchers, who are part of the Malaysian filmmaking industry, will utilise their knowledge, skills, and experiences to film the stories, sights, and sounds of the activities of the projectionists. This documentary's filmmaking process aims to fulfil the ten steps highlighted by Winters (2021) and follow the conventional filmmaking stages of research – pre-production – production – post-production – exhibition, and distribution. Prior to the documentary shoots, the team will produce the overall storyline to ensure the smooth running of the production and editing processes.

This research and its outputs will significantly benefit the filmmaking industry, academia, and Sunway University, for it delves into a contemporary subject matter and can reach a worldwide audience. The documentary aims to preserve the intangible cultural heritages through the practice, experiences and stories concerning our Malaysian culture and lifestyle that will disappear with time. The archival aspects of these films will play a crucial role in academics in the present era by providing insights into the operational processes and efforts required to run such projectors. Introducing this documentary will highlight the technical elements, experiences and stories of maintaining a projector, its capabilities, and the stories accompanying them to the younger generation.

Finally, this documentary will be screened at international film festivals as part of the university's creative output and contribution to the film industry. This contribution will allow us to introduce our research findings, preserve cultural heritage, and celebrate the university's role in creativity and innovation.

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