

The Rungus Longhouse of Bavanggazo: Preserving Sabah's Cultural Heritage

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Received: September, 2024; Revised: October 2024; Published: November, 2024

Abstract

This study explores the unique cultural heritage of the Rungus people through their traditional longhouses in Bavanggazo, Sabah. It aims to understand how these architectural structures support the preservation of the Rungus language, traditions, and identity amid modernizing influences. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were gathered through interviews and direct observation to capture the lived experiences within these longhouses. The findings highlight the active role of the Rungus language in daily communication, the enduring practice of cultural ceremonies, and the architectural significance of longhouses in sustaining intergenerational heritage. Furthermore, the study discusses factors contributing to the decline of traditional longhouses and the initiatives by the Rungus community to preserve this cultural symbol. By emphasizing the intersection of architecture and cultural sustainability, this research offers insights into the challenges and strategies involved in safeguarding indigenous heritage.

Keywords: Rungus Longhouse, Bavanggazo, Indigenous Language, Cultural Preservation, Sabah Traditions

How to Cite: Zainuddin, N. A. N., & Yaqin, L. N. The Rungus Longhouse of Bavanggazo: Preserving Sabah's Cultural Heritage. *International Journal of Linguistics and Indigenous Culture*, 3(3). 230-246. <https://doi.org/10.36312/ijlic.v3i3.2350>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/ijlic. v3i3.2350>

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the unique cultural heritage of the Rungus people of Sabah, specifically through their traditional longhouses in Bavanggazo. The primary goal is to explore the role of these longhouses in preserving the Rungus language and cultural practices, thereby sustaining their ethnic identity. Amid rapid modernization, the Rungus longhouse emerges as a symbol of cultural resilience, embodying the customs, language, and way of life that define this group. These longhouses function not only as residences but also as central hubs for cultural preservation, where the Rungus language, traditions, and beliefs are actively practiced and transmitted (Ali & Yaqin, 2024).

Current research on Rungus culture and longhouses highlights both architectural and cultural dimensions. Scholars, including Ong (2006) and Appell (1978), have noted the distinct communal design of Rungus longhouses, which foster social cohesion through shared, open spaces. Earlier studies also emphasize the unique architectural features of these structures, constructed from natural materials like bamboo, palm fronds, and tree bark, suitable for the tropical climate and reflective of the Rungus' cultural identity (Bahauddin, Abdullah & Maliki, 2015). Additionally, the longhouses play an integral role in cultural ceremonies, such as the Magahau festival, which deepen the Rungus' connection to their land and shared ancestry (Hamdan et al., 2023). Yet, modernization has pressured these traditional structures, spurring various efforts to document and conserve this heritage. The Bavanggazo longhouse has become a focal point for these efforts, serving as a space where Rungus arts, music, and language are preserved and passed down to younger generations (Pugh-Kitingan, 2014).

However, a gap remains in understanding how longhouses function as active sites for language and cultural preservation in daily life. While prior studies have focused on structural aspects, tourism, or specific cultural practices, this research seeks to examine the lived experiences within these spaces in greater depth. Moreover, although some studies have documented the architectural transformation of longhouses for tourism, less attention has been given to how these modifications affect cultural and linguistic continuity within the Rungus community (Bahauddin et al., 2014).

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic approach to viewing Bavanggazo longhouses as dynamic and living cultural entities rather than static heritage artifacts. Unlike previous studies that often emphasize the commodification of longhouses for tourism, this research seeks to understand how the Rungus actively sustain their language and cultural practices in their everyday environments. Furthermore, this study provides scientific insights into the intersection between architecture and cultural sustainability, a critical issue given the increasing vulnerability of indigenous cultures to global modernization. By documenting the daily interactions and cultural practices within the longhouses, this research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between traditional architecture and intergenerational cultural transmission.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach to deeply explore the cultural and linguistic heritage preserved within the Rungus longhouse, focusing on lived experiences and intergenerational practices. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that emphasizes the study of people in their natural environments, focusing on their behaviors, cultures, and social interactions. It provides a rich framework for understanding the daily lives of the Rungus people within the context of their traditional longhouses (Gürcüm & Arslan, 2015; Reeves et al., 2013; Yaqin, et.al.,2023)

Research Design and Setting

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Bavanggazo, Kudat, Sabah, within the culturally significant setting of the Bavanggazo Longhouse. This immersive environment offered an authentic and dynamic space to closely observe and document the Rungus community's cultural practices, language use, and daily routines. The Bavanggazo Longhouse, as a living heritage site, facilitated an in-depth exploration of the interactions, traditions, and spatial arrangements that underpin Rungus life. Ethnographic methods proved particularly effective for this study, enabling the collection of "rich, thick descriptions" that capture behaviors, social dynamics,

and cultural expressions as they unfold naturally, adding depth and context to the findings (Yaqin, et.al., 2022; Gürcüm & Arslan, 2015; Reigada et al., 2019).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and audio-visual documentation to ensure a robust and detailed dataset.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with key informants, including Alex J. a 49-year-old local from the Kudat District and an experienced tour guide at the Bavanggazo Longhouse. The interviews focused on understanding the role of the longhouse in preserving Rungus language and culture, community life, and the impact of modernization.
- **Direct Observations:** Observational data were gathered through active participation in longhouse activities, such as traditional dances, games, and ceremonies. The observational nature of ethnography, which allows researchers to capture behaviors and interactions in real-time, was critical for understanding the dynamic social context of the Rungus community (Gürcüm & Arslan, 2015)
- **Audio-Visual Documentation:** Audio recordings captured linguistic nuances and cultural narratives, while video recordings documented ceremonies, daily routines, and communal activities within the longhouse. These recordings complemented field notes and provided a detailed visual and auditory context for analysis.

Analytical Methods

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to cultural preservation, language use, and the significance of the longhouse in Rungus heritage.

1. **Transcription and Coding:** Audio and video recordings were transcribed verbatim. Field notes and transcripts were coded systematically to categorize key themes, such as intergenerational language transmission, the role of architecture in cultural sustainability, and the impact of modernization on Rungus traditions.
2. **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis was conducted to explore recurring patterns and relationships within the data. This included examining how daily practices within the longhouse reinforced cultural identity and how the spatial organization of the longhouse facilitated cultural and linguistic continuity.
3. **Triangulation:** Multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and audio-visual documentation) were cross-verified to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. This approach ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Rungus cultural practices and the significance of the longhouse in sustaining their heritage.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the fieldwork. Participants provided informed consent, and their identities were anonymized in the data analysis and reporting to ensure confidentiality. The reflexive nature of ethnographic research, which emphasizes critical reflection on researcher positionality, was employed to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the data (Mannay & Morgan, 2014; Walby, 2007). By incorporating diverse techniques such

as participant observation and interviews, the study gained deep insights into the lives of the Rungus community, aligning with the principles of ethnographic research (Gürcüm & Arslan, 2015; Ortega et al., 2023). This methodological approach not only ensured the collection of rich, contextual data but also provided insights into the dynamic relationship between the Rungus longhouse, language, and cultural preservation, offering a holistic view of this indigenous heritage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Rungus ethnic is one that has retained some aspects of its socio-culture and socio-economic heritage. However, there are several factors that led to the disappearance or extinction of another part of the Rungus ethnic culture. One of the factors is the influence of globalization and the current of modernity, which has caused the younger generation to lose interest and not see the importance of these traditions. Another factor is that some cultures or beliefs are considered contrary to religion or no longer relevant, which can be embarrassing if still practiced now. However, the majority of the Rungus still continue to defend their beliefs and cultural heritage that they have practiced since childhood and pass it on to the next generations.

Infrastructure of the Rungus Longhouse

The Rungus ethnicity is well known for its longhouses because, in the past, the residents lived communally in a longhouse that could accommodate approximately 100 families. The Rungus Longhouses are built using basic materials from plants that can be found around the area, such as bamboo trees, that are cut and arranged neatly to be used as the floor of the house, the walls are made of wood, and the roof of the house is made from nipah leaves or reeds. In a longhouse, each family will get a room with a small kitchen in it. In the past, if any of their family members got married, they would first live with the bride's family before building their own longhouse. Therefore, the house would be expanded to add rooms and, at the same time, the number of residents in the longhouse will also increase.

According to Appell (1978), the Rungus Longhouse is divided into two main sections; namely *ongkob* and *apad*. The *ongkob* section is considered a private area for the residents of the house. Within the *ongkob*, there are several sub-sections that are used for certain activities; *ropuhan* as a place to cook, and *tingkang* is used as the sleeping area. The *tingkang* is built a little higher and made from large bamboo that is split into small pieces. It is understood that children will sleep in the lower part of the sleeping area, and when they have grown up, men will sleep in the *apad* area. However, for women, even when they are adults, they will still sleep in the *ongkob*. Meanwhile, the second section is the *apad*, which is an open and spacious area where daily activities for the longhouse residents are conducted, such as pounding rice, performing dances, making handicrafts, and sleeping area for the men. A wall was also built to act as a boundary between the *ongkob* and *apad* areas, which was accompanied by a door to allow residents to enter and exit the *ongkob* area.



Figure 1: *Ongkob* area.



Figure 2: *Apad* area.

In addition, items that are not often used are stored in a space called *abai*, which is located above the *ongkob* and positioned is not very high to facilitate the retrieval of items. Items that are often used are stored in the front of the longhouse, known as *linsosod* or *borolungan* (Ong, 1995). In the past, the residents used the area under the longhouse, known as *kolong*, to keep domestic animals such as chickens, buffaloes, and pigs, and was also used as a defensive monument against enemy attacks (Mahfar and Jusilin, 2017). If the longhouse extended to the riverbank, a new longhouse would be built next to the existing one. Building a new longhouse will take about a month due to the need to gather materials from the forest, but with the help from the people there, the construction of the longhouse only takes two weeks. Rungus Longhouses tend to be built close to the rivers because, in the past, there were no modern

facilities such as water pipes. Therefore, the Rungus people will take water using a *pangga* and carry it back to their respective longhouse.

Now, the Rungus traditional Longhouses has undergone rapid renovation and upgrades. According to Ong (2006), the Rungus people refer to these modernized longhouses as government longhouses, or *valai dot porinta*. These government longhouses were built using concrete materials to replace the traditional ones. The changes made through the help of government funding are to replace the roof made of nipah leaves with zinc, replacing bamboo materials with wooden planks, and introducing a new multi-story structure. This is due to the concern of Sabah government which considered that the Rungus traditional Longhouses were symbols of backwardness and unsafe. The perception was that the presence of traditional longhouses could negatively impact Malaysia's image as a modern and developing country. The new concrete longhouses are now equipped with facilities such as electricity and water. This marks the transition to the modern era in the life of the Rungus people.

Figure 3: Map of Sabah (Malaysia)



The traditional Rungus Longhouse, also known as *Vinatang*, was built in April 1992 as a homestay for visitors or tourists who want to learn and understand the traditions, culture and experience the lifestyle of the Rungus people. Rungus Longhouse is one of the attractions located in Kudat district that can be visited by tourists when traveling to Kudat. This longhouse is located about 41 km from Kudat Town or approximately 100 km from Kota Kinabalu Town. The preservation of the Rungus Longhouse as accommodation is one of the initiatives taken by the Rungus people to preserve their culture, while at the same time offering a unique experience to visitors. This initiative involves modification of existing traditional longhouses to make the accommodation comfortable. These renovations include the restoration of the original structure of the longhouse and improving damaged building materials to enhance visitor comfort. However, this effort is done with full sensitivity to the authenticity and uniqueness of the traditional longhouse, by ensuring that the traditional features and architecture of the Rungus ethnicity are still maintained.

Rungus Language

In the Rungus Longhouse, the use of the Rungus language is a common practice among the residents. The majority of the Rungus ethnicities use the Rungus language as the main language to communicate in their daily lives. This is an important aspect in maintaining their cultural identity. Parents in the Rungus Longhouse typically teach their children the Rungus language from an early age. They consider the Rungus language as a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and passed on to the next generation. Therefore, in daily life, parents train their children to use the Rungus language to communicate. However, when children there begin their formal education at school, they will be taught Malay. However, Malay education at school does not undermine the position of the Rungus language in the daily lives of the Rungus ethnic. It is important to note that not all parents in the Rungus Longhouse teach their children the Rungus Language. Modern lifestyles can lead some parents to prefer using other languages, such as English language to communicate. This can eventually result in a lack of knowledge and ability to speak the Rungus language among the younger generation. This will create a challenge in preserving the Rungus language and culture within the Rungus themselves. Table 1 below shows several words in the Rungus language that are used in daily communication. *Amai* refers to a man and *Inai* refers to a woman. Both words are terms and titles used for men and women in the Rungus tribe. The words listed below reflect the diversity and richness of the Rungus language and culture in their longhouse. This shows how important it is to preserve their language and culture in daily life.

Table 1: Several words in Rungus Language.

English Language	Rungus Language
Men	<i>Amai</i>
Women	<i>Inai</i>
Good morning	<i>Sasarap</i>
Good afternoon	<i>Minsosodot</i>
Good night	<i>Sootsodot</i>
Thank you	<i>Konsapatan/Piromitan</i>
Welcome	<i>Miradi</i>
Drink	<i>Inumun</i>
Look	<i>Monimpan (jauh)</i> <i>Mongimut (dekat)</i>
Yawn	<i>Mongoringpap/Ngiringupap</i>
Sleep	<i>Modom</i>
Dreaming	<i>Monginipi</i>
Sit	<i>Mogom</i>
Stand up	<i>Ningkakat</i>
Someone	<i>Sangulun</i>
Baby	<i>Itanakutepudukku</i>

Socio-Culture In The Traditional Rungus Longhouse

Religion and Belief in the Rungus ethnic

In the Rungus Longhouse, religion and beliefs play an important role in the life of the Rungus ethnic. In the Kudat area, there are various religions that are practiced. The majority of the population is Christian (around 70%) and a small part is Muslim (around 30%). The existence of a mosque in the Motong area shows a significant Muslim community in that region. According to Rutter (2007), the Rungus people were also known as *Pagans* or practiced animism. Now, most of them have embraced religion and practice certain religious teachings. In addition, there are also several beliefs and taboos that are still practiced within the Rungus ethnic. For example, in hunting activities, there are certain steps that need to be followed, and it is believed that after returning from the forest, one should not enter the house immediately. However, along with the passage of time and the spread of religion, practices such as worshiping *berhala* have decreased among the Rungus ethnic. Some beliefs and taboos, like the prohibition of bringing the hearts of bananas into the room because it is believed that doing so will anger the devil, are also no longer practiced as they are considered irrelevant and contrary to religious teachings.

However, there are still some beliefs that are upheld and practiced today, such as the prohibition against making noise after 8 p.m to respect and not disturb the surrounding people, such as nearby neighbors. Apart from that, the Rungus people are believed to have ritual ceremonies that are inherited from generation to generation. This can be seen through a study by Lazarus and Saearani (2023), which explains that there is a ritual ceremony among the Rungus known as the *mamapak* ritual ceremony. The *mamapak* ritual is performed to protect themselves from the supernatural and hoping for a peaceful and happy life. Nowadays, it can be seen that there is a significant change in religion and beliefs among the younger generation, who may not be able to fully accept or practice the traditional rituals. However, there are efforts to preserve some practices that are considered to have a positive impact on the lives of the Rungus people, such as prohibiting residents from making noise at night. This reflects the dynamic between tradition and modernity within the Rungus ethnicity.

Naming Children in the Rungus Ethnic

In the past, the tradition of naming children in the Rungus Longhouse was inspired by the beauty of the surrounding environment and elements of nature. For example, they may choose names that refer to rivers, mountains, flowers, or animals that are considered special or hold significant meaning in the life of the Rungus people. This practice reflects the deep connection between humans and their environment, as well as a belief in the power and uniqueness of nature. However, in modern times, especially with the influence of external factors and advancing modernity, the trend of naming children among the Rungus tribe has undergone changes. They are more inclined to name their children with names influenced by foreign cultures, especially from Western cultures. This shift might be due to the influence of social media and culture from the outside. Additionally, changes in family values and perspectives on modernity can encourage the selection of more modern and contemporary names. This change in naming shows a change in cultural identity and values within the Rungus people. However, there are still some families who still maintain and practice the old tradition by choosing names inspired by nature. This is very important in preserving cultural heritage and the deep connection between humans and the environment in the lives of the Rungus people.

Leader of the Rungus Longhouse

The leader of the Rungus Longhouse, called a *Vozoon*, is an individual who holds an important role in guiding and making decisions for the Rungus people. *Amoi Angkong*, inherited the responsibility as a leader from his father. When a leader passes away, the position is traditionally passed on to his son. If he has no son, the position of leader will fall to his male nephew. This practice shows the importance of inheritance in Rungus leadership, reflecting the cultural norm that the leader must be a male. This may be due to the belief that men are more suitable managing all affairs, while women play an important role in managing household needs. The leader's room in the Rungus Longhouse is located near the entrance, specifically in the first room. This placement facilitates access for residents and signifies the leader's high status within the longhouse hierarchy.

To become a leader, the individual must have skills at organizing and managing all the affairs of the people there, as well as be able to apply the knowledge and experience gained from his father. In addition, *vozoon* must also understand the laws that have been established since ancient times, such as the punishment for an offense, for example, knowing that cutting off the hand is not a punishment that should be given immediately when a person commits the crime of stealing but should be considered only after a first warning. Leaders are not only leaders, but they are also responsible for taking care of the community's needs. They also take on a role in solving domestic problems, such as making sure each family member in the longhouse has enough food. This shows the personality and responsibility of the *vozoon* in looking after the well-being of the Rungus people. Overall, the leader should be respected and recognized by the people as a fair and wise leader. *Vozoon* plays an important role in upholding customary law and maintaining peace and harmony in the Rungus.

Traditional Food in the Rungus Longhouse

The traditional food in the Rungus longhouse shows a rich cultural heritage and wisdom in balanced nutrition. The people there tend to eat vegetables such as yam sprouts, banana hearts and papayas that can be obtained from around the longhouse. This shows efficiency in the use of natural resources and awareness of healthy eating. Also, if they caught after catching fish in the river, they would mix it with cooking vegetables. They also have traditional sweets such as *bintano* made from cassava, wrapped in banana leaves before cooking. In addition, corn fruit is also part of their diet. The Rungus also like to eat salty and sour food such as *sinamu*, a type of pickle made from fruits such as mango, jackfruit and papaya that are salted and stored in tajau before being eaten with rice.

Rungus food tends to avoid sugar, using honey as a sweetener for food and beverages. In the old days, drinks like coffee were not available. Therefore, they mixed honey with hot water for a sweet drink. This reflects their adaptation to natural resources and awareness of health. Due to their well-maintained diet, the majority of the Rungus people are healthy and long-lived, for example, the informant's grandmother passed away at the age of 103. This shows the connection between a traditional diet and good health. Although modern food often contains a lot of sugar, the elderly there still practice a sugar-free diet, showing persistence in continuing the tradition of healthy food. Rungus traditional foods show values such as effectiveness in

utilizing natural resources, health awareness and preservation of cultural heritage. This plays an important role in the daily life and health of the Rungus people.

Traditional Games in the Rungus Longhouse

Traditional games play an important role in the daily life of the Rungus people in their longhouses. *Mengatip-atip* is a well-known traditional game among the Rungus tribe, where players lift their feet to avoid being struck by bamboo. This game indirectly tests the player's agility and reflexes. *Mongunatip* is the name given by the Murut tribe for the game *Mengatip-atip*. In addition, the *Minranggo* game is a game that is played outside the longhouse and is made of bamboo material. Players will walk around using this tool. Although these traditional games are less frequently played now, it is important to remember that cultural values and heritage are still conveyed through these traditional games. Therefore, children in Rungus longhouses are always encouraged and taught to appreciate and play traditional games. Through traditional games, the younger generation will be able to learn values such as cooperation, patience and courage and at the same time be able to preserve the cultural heritage that is important for the Rungus people. Therefore, the teaching and preservation of traditional games is very important in ensuring that the cultural heritage of the Rungus tribe lives on and is appreciated.

Traditional Clothing in the Rumah Longhouse

Traditional clothing for the residents of Rungus longhouses plays an important role in maintaining their identity as well as distinguishing them from other ethnic groups. Rungus traditional clothing is often worn during important events in Sabah, such as Keamatan day, wedding ceremonies, ceremonies and other celebrations. This dress is not used on normal days, but it is a symbol of identity and cultural pride at important ceremonies. Rungus women's traditional clothes are decorated with various bead decorations created according to their creativity. This is in line with the findings of Ling and Jusilin's (2018) research, that there are several types of motifs applied to Rungus women's clothing, namely, geometric motifs, organic motifs, flora-type motifs and fauna-type motifs. The combination of artistic elements and design not only shows the value of beauty, but also presents the culture and identity of the Rungus people. Rungus women's traditional clothing has various unique elements, among them sounds like a *giring*, especially on the neck, adding distinctiveness to their traditional dance. In the past, Rungus women also wore *taming* made of *luyang* materials worn on their feet, but now the use of *taming* has declined due to its weight. In addition, bracelets made of *luyang* material are also used by Rungus women, believed to offer health benefits by expelling gas and preventing disease like gout. In the past, these bracelets were cleaned with beach stones but are now cleaned with soap at home. Additionally, in the past, traditional soap made from leaves is still found in some areas of thick forest as the ones around the longhouses have been poisoned so that they don't grow anymore. Although this traditional soap making is now decreasing and is almost no longer used, it is one more aspect of cultural heritage that needs to be protected. The traditional clothes of the Rungus must have their own uniqueness. Therefore, these clothes need to be preserved and passed on to the next generation to prevent them from fading away.

Handicraft Art in the Rungus Longhouse

Beadwork is a significant aspect of Rungus identity, which features various shapes, patterns and motifs. According to Mahfar and Jusilin (2017), the uniqueness of Rungus beads features motifs inspired by nature and animals as a symbol and identity of the Rungus. One of them is the *pinakol* bead, which has been passed down from generation to generation among the Rungus people. *Pinakol* is a type of accessory that is attached to the traditional clothing of the Rungus people and is often displayed during wedding ceremonies. This handicraft is a Rungus heritage that is mandatory for them to pass down to their daughters. This cross-body string accessory carries symbolic meanings, often decorated with various motifs and patterns representing essential elements of Rungus life. Traditionally, *pinakol* usually contains five main motifs, namely *Tiningulun*, *Tinompuling*, *Tinugarang*, *Vinusak*, and *Tinutub*. The use of beads, colors and designs can distinguish the Rungus from other ethnic groups in Sabah. The symbol and identity of the Rungus tribe is shown through the patterns and motifs of the traditional handicrafts of the tribe.

Traditional Musical Instruments in Rungus Longhouse

Traditional musical instruments play a significant role in Rungus longhouses, including performing arts and social interaction. The *Gong*, is one of the important instruments played when performing traditional dances and also in ceremonies. In addition, *sompoton* is also one of the traditional musical instruments made from bamboo, produces a soft and melodic sound. Next, *sundatang* is a traditional musical instrument shaped like a guitar. *Momundatang* is also a musical instrument with a larger shape and *mongurari* is a musical instrument made of leather and creates different and loud sounds. The *uruding*, made of bamboo, is played to accompany singing or express affection indirectly. In Rungus culture, men are more likely to use *uruding* to convey their feelings to the woman they like indirectly because if they convey it to the woman directly, they will be fined or *sogit*. This traditional musical instrument not only enriches the art and culture of the Rungus people, but also preserves the cultural heritage so that it can be passed on to the next generation.

Tradition of proposing or ‘Merisik’ in the Rungus Culture

The tradition of proposing for the Rungus tribe is a process that involves several traditions and procedures that are strongly held until now. In the old days, when a man wanted to marry a woman, his parents would go to the woman's family home to propose. The woman and her family are expected to accept the proposal without any objections, even if the woman has no feelings at all for the man who proposed. Rungus women are indeed controlled by their parents, so they are not allowed to meet or talk to men except in certain circumstances, such as during the rice harvest season in the fields. If the proposal was rejected, the woman's family faced a fine, known as *sogit*, which involves animals, where a small fine is a two-legged animal such as a chicken, while a large fine is a four-legged animal such as a pig or buffalo. This tradition has been inherited from previous generations, as most of the Rungus people in the past did not have a religion. However, with the spread of religions such as Islam and Christianity, practices such as fines are decreasing because they are considered contrary to religious teachings. The tradition of proposing in the Rungus tribe is one of the important examples to show that the tribe's traditions can influence the relationship between the family and the community in marriage tradition.

Important Days in the Rungus ethnic

Important days in Sabah, such as Hari Keamatan, an event that is celebrated with full of excitement and joy, almost similar to Hari Gawai in Sarawak. It is a day when the Rungus and other ethnic groups in Sabah gather to celebrate their traditions and culture. On Keamatan Day, there are various traditional activities, including dancing, feasting and competitions. The day is considered a time to gather with all communities and appreciate their culture. One of the most highly anticipated events is the beauty pageant, known as *Gimpukut* among the Rungus. In the past, winners were chosen based on their beauty and ability to do various daily tasks such as weaving, pounding rice and farming.

In addition, Rungus women are also said to have knowledge of self-defense, even though they mostly stay at home. If there is a possible attack at home, they can defend themselves with self-defense skills and use tools such as spears, nets or machetes. However, firearms are not used. In addition, tools such as *sumpit* are not often used because the poison is capable of killing the *sumpit* maker himself. However, now the selection of beauty pageants focuses more on physical beauty and the jewelry used. Keamatan day is not only a day of celebration, but also an opportunity to preserve and maintain the traditions of the Rungus people. Through these festivals, the values of joy and cultural diversity are strongly emphasized, while at the same time ensuring that the traditions and culture can be continued by the next generation. Despite similarities with the other cultures such as in China and Mongolia, the Rungus maintain a strong connection to their traditions. This is because they have accepted and practiced culture and tradition since they were children and have become part of their identity and daily life. The Rungus respect and continue the traditions and culture that have been inherited from previous generations as an integral part of their identity and daily life.

Socio-Economics In The Rungus Traditional Long House

Agricultural Sector

According to Suadik (2018), in Malaysia, especially among the Rungus, agricultural and fisheries sectors are very important occupations in ensuring the survival of the community. Almost all the Rungus are involved in various forms of agriculture, fishing and the livestock sector as the main source of livelihood. One of the main crops grown is growing rice, which is a staple food source. In addition, the Rungus also collectively farm rubber trees (Mahfar and Jusilin, 2017). The Sabah government, through the *Sabah Rubber Industry Board (SRIB)* has encouraged Sabahans to engage in the rubber plantation sector as another source of income. Rubber plantation is an important industry in Sabah and provides economic benefits to many families in the area. The products of this rubber plantation can be sold as an additional source of income for the locals. Apart from growing rice and rubber plantations, the Rungus are also involved in various other types of agriculture including fruit and vegetable crops. For example, bananas, banana hearts, sweet potato, papayas and bamboo, for personal use and market sales.

Fisheries Sector

The fishing sector is also the second economic contributor to the Rungus. The Rungus will go fishing according to the season. During rice planting seasons, they will focus on agriculture,

and when waiting for the harvest, the residents will head to the sea to fish, showcasing their flexibility in managing time and income sources. Overall, the agricultural and fisheries sectors play an important role in the life of the Rungus in Sabah. They rely on these diverse sources of income to support their daily life and preserve local natural resources.

Livestock Sector

In addition, in Gombizau and Matunggong village, there is a Rungus community that develops honey bee farming. Rungus women play a major role in carrying out these activities through the Women's Honey Bee Breeders Group (*Kumpulan Wanita Penternak Madu Lebah*), as stated in Mahfar and Jusilin's study (2017). Through their involvement, it not only creates job opportunities and income, but also preserves traditional agricultural practices. Therefore, honey bee farming has become a symbol of production between traditional cultural preservation and modern adaptation.

Business Sector

In Rungus Longhouse, other than being able to enjoy a unique and valuable experience there, visitors also have the opportunity to buy various handicrafts made by Rungus women, such as bracelets, necklaces, and other beaded items. One of the handicrafts that is very famous and appreciated by the community is the beadwork known as *Pinakol*. All the beaded artwork sold in the Rungus longhouse is not only an important cultural heritage for the Rungus tribe, but also a symbol of identity and pride for them. Through this handicraft too, they can inherit traditional values and appreciate the beauty and richness of their own culture. Therefore, buying and owning Rungus handicrafts supports the local economy and helps preserve traditional values and the richness of Rungus culture. By bringing this heritage to a more modern and relevant platform, the Rungus can ensure that their heritage will continue to live on and be appreciated by future generations.

Factors That Led To The Extinction Of The Rungus Traditional Longhouse

Several factors contributed to the extinction of Rungus traditional longhouse, including negative perceptions from various parties. The Sabah Government considers these traditional longhouses as a symbol of backwardness, believing that the traditional longhouses will negatively impact Malaysia's modern image and developing country. In this modern era, traditional longhouses are often seen as inappropriate, unhealthy, even uncivilized settlements, as explained by Ong (1995). In addition, the Sabah Government also encourages the Rungus to live in modern longhouses. This is due to the concern of the Sabah Government which considers that traditional longhouses are unsafe and increase the risk of injury, property damage and collapse. Concerns about safety, health and the risk of structural collapse also discourage support for preserving traditional longhouses. However, for the sake of the Rungus and other races, this perception needs to be considered from a positive point of view. Modern longhouses offer facilities such as electricity and water facilities, and can improve the quality of life of the Rungus.

Apart from that, the main factor that caused the decrease in the number of Rungus traditional longhouses is that the changes in the culture and lifestyle of the Rungus people also affect their

selection of living settlements. The younger generation is likely to be more open to modern life and the comforts of a modern longhouse compared to previous generations who are more tied to cultural heritage and tradition. Globalization, urbanization and the influence of social media also influence their lifestyle choices, reducing interest in preserving traditional longhouses. Overall, these factors diminish community support, particularly among the youth, risking the loss of valuable cultural heritage.

Rungus Ethnic Initiatives To Preserve Traditional Longhouses

The Rungus people have undertaken various initiatives to preserve traditional longhouses, such as converting them into homestays to offer a unique experience to tourists or visitors. This approach involves restoring the original design and repairing damaged materials to improve visitor comfort while maintaining traditional features. However, this effort was carried out with full sensitivity to the authenticity and uniqueness of the traditional longhouse, by ensuring that the traditional and architectural characteristics of the Rungus people were maintained. By opening a longhouse as a homestay, the Rungus people not only provide unique cultural experiences of the Rungus people's life in the past, but also teach the younger generation to appreciate and preserve their heritage. These initiatives offer economic benefits and play an important role in preserving the cultural identity of the Rungus people for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the experience of staying overnight in the Rungus longhouse, it can be concluded that the experience provides a valuable insight and an opportunity to directly observe the use of language, culture and society in Bavanggazo, especially in the Rungus longhouse. The Rungus language is not only a communication tool, but also carries an identity and cultural heritage that needs to be valued and preserved. The longhouse's cultural and traditional practices reflect a harmonious community that respects each other in the past and now. Despite the younger generation's preference for modern living, they are still encouraged to maintain the Rungus culture and traditions. Building traditional longhouses introduces this heritage to younger generations and visitors, ensuring the sustainability of inherited traditions and culture. The Rungus traditional longhouse in Bavanggazo is not just a homestay, but also stands as a historical mirror that reflects the traditional Rungus life. Therefore, its existence is important as a heritage that needs to be preserved for the well-being of future generations, who will see it as an inspiration and pride in their cultural identity. Therefore, preserving the Rungus traditional longhouse is to ensure that the heritage continues to shine in the present and in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

Future research could involve comparative studies between Rungus longhouses in Bavanggazo and similar indigenous communal structures across Malaysia and Borneo, providing a broader understanding of traditional housing as a medium for cultural continuity. Such comparative research would highlight commonalities and unique adaptations among different ethnic groups, deepening insights into how architecture supports cultural preservation. Additionally, linguistic studies within these cultural contexts are crucial, as language is integral to Rungus identity. Investigating how the Rungus language transmits cultural knowledge,

values, and identity could yield valuable information on intergenerational language transmission, revealing how the language is maintained, adapted, or transformed both within and beyond traditional settings like the longhouse.

Author Contributions

AM led the conceptualization and design of the study, conducted fieldwork, data collection, and analysis, and drafted the manuscript. YQ, contributed to the study design, supported data analysis, and provided critical revisions to the manuscript. Both authors participated in interpreting the findings and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Funding

This research received no external funding

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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