

DISCOURSE ON MALAY ORIGIN, INSTITUTIONS, VALUES AND SYSTEMS

Khalidah Khalid Ali

Department of Management & Humanities, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia

Email: khalidahkhalidali@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Ethnic origins, values and systems, among other elements, frame the cultural identity of a society. The indigenous Malays represent the majority population of Malaysia. This article traces the Malay origin from socio-historical and anthropological lenses and outlines the institutions, values and systems of the Malay ethnic group. The study has chronologically investigated on the Malay origin in Malaysia and discursively examined, as a discourse, the factors that may have influenced the socio-cultural and value systems of the Malaysian Malays. Applying discourse analysis as a research technique and utilising library materials, texts and online resources to craft this interdisciplinary research, this study has found that the Malay origin, culture, values and systems are extensively influenced by external factors. Recognising Islam as the religion of the Malays with adab, akhlaq, Budi and Budi-Islam as components of the Malay ethical system, Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and British colonialism have significantly influenced Malay culture, values and systems.

Keywords: Malays, Malaysia, origin, culture, institutions, values

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Malaysian population is comprised of three major ethnic groups; Malay, Chinese and Indian by the proportions of approximately 51%, 20.8% and 6.2% respectively (Monthly Statistical Bulletin Malaysia, 2011; IndexMundi.com, 2018). The Malays are mostly found in Peninsular Malaysia, and they are the main indigenous ethnic group of Malaysia. They are referred to as "son of the soil" or the *bumiputeras* together with the *Orang Asli* in Peninsular Malaysia as well as other indigenous groups such as Bidayuh, Kenyah, Kayan, Iban and Kelabit in Sarawak and the Murut, Kadazan/Dusun in Sabah (Milner, 2011). Article 160 (Clause 2) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution legally defines a Malay as someone born to a Malaysian citizen who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, adheres to Malay customs and is domiciled in Malaysia or Singapore. The Malays are among the

few people whose race is legally defined (Mahathir, 1970); partly because of their dominance in the Malaysian political arena (Milner, 2011, pp.2; Siddique, 1981, pp.77).

This study is an interdisciplinary discourse that integrates Malay history, anthropology and social sciences (ethics included) in an attempt to further understand Malay culture, values and ethical system. The object of this study is the Malay ethnic group in Malaysia, and the subjects are the Malay origin, institutions, values and systems. This study firstly aims to chronologically investigate the historical facts on Malay origin in Malaysia in an attempt to define the Malays as an identity. Next, it will discursively highlight the factors that may have influenced the culture and value systems of the Malaysian Malays. Culture, a broad terminology, is a set of norms, values and beliefs of a particular group or community (Hofstede, 1980) and

from western perspectives, it covers a wide spectrum of one's life; from religion to rituals as well as language and ethnic group membership (Awang, Maros & Ibrahim, 2012) including ideas, morality and lifestyles (Eberle, 1992). The explicit and implicit standards of culture is well noted as one of the environmental factors influencing an individual's ethical values (Shaw, 2008; Khalidah, Zulkufly & Lau, 2018).

This study uses already available library materials, text publications and online resources to construct this discourse. However, as a research contribution, this investigative study analyses and integrates the salient aspects of the Malay origin, culture, values and systems through an interdisciplinary approach; a much desired initiative in the study of social sciences, especially in Malay studies, which have considerably focused on history and culture.

This article will be divided into two parts; the first part will cover the historical and socio-anthropological aspects in defining the Malays as an identity, including institutional factors that have shaped their culture and value systems. The second part will link the first part with deeper discussions on the Indianization process, Islamization and colonial influences (British colonisation inclusive). As a discourse, it will continue to investigate on Malay values as perceived by British and western scholars prior to 1957 Malayan independence (i.e. pre-colonial periods) and post-colonial periods, defined from 1957 till 2006 (Aida Idris, 2008). Comparisons will be made with the studies and publications of selected post-independence local Malay scholars/intelligentsia in the realm. Consequently, these may be reflective of the Malay values and norms prevalent during the pre-colonial and post-colonial phases as Malaysia transforms from an agro-based to a manufacturing/ industrial nation beginning 1970 till 2000 in support of economic growth and nation-building.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative interdisciplinary research, which integrates history, anthropology and social science disciplines, applies discourse analysis as a research technique. The term "discourse" originates from a Medieval Latin word, *discursus*, which means "to run to and fro" or "to run different ways." Oxford Dictionary simply defines discourse as written or spoken communication or debate. Stubbs (1983) further elaborates on discourse as a study that is concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence or utterance, inter-relationships between language and society which are concerned with the interactive or dialogue properties of everyday communication. Hence, discourse analysis is more often descriptive, interpretative and explanatory. It is also the most commonly used approach within social constructionism that links culture with a society.

Providing a broad definition of discourse from a social constructionist perspective, Phillips & Jorgensen (2002) have defined discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world). Hence, a discourse is further described as a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world - including knowledge, identities and social relations that maintains specific social patterns.

A discourse is thus an analytic research technique which involves the analysis of language and discourse (in the sense of a speech communication) that is moulded by a social context, and in turn, builds up a picture of the world which is unique to the author of the discourse. The researcher is an instrument/tool, as he/she assumes the participant-researcher relationship while analysing dynamically within societal contexts from multidisciplinary approaches (Van Dijk, 1998, 2009). In crafting this particular discourse, the author has played her participant-researcher role to investigate, describe/narrate, analyse and integrate the salient aspects of the Malay origin, culture, values and systems by utilising library materials, text publications and online resources.

HISTORICAL GLIMPSES OF THE MALAY ORIGIN IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia had been one of the earliest homes of mankind (Turnbull, 1989). Old Stone Age evidence had been found in Lenggong, Kota Tampan, Perak and Niah Caves in Sarawak which proved that man had lived here more than 50,000 years ago (Ramili et al., 2012).

The Middle Stone Age marked the arrival of the Proto-Malays to Peninsular Malaysia (Zainal Abidin, 1980; Andaya, 2001). They belonged to the Oceanic Negroid or Melanesian racial group and depended on their subsistence through hunting and food gathering, although at a later stage they made and used pottery. Such an economy imposed on them a nomadic life and restricted their social organisation to small family groups. Hence, they were often associated with Hoabinhian culture in North Vietnam, where they were first identified. The Proto-Malays established themselves by 1000B.C. Through contacts, they acquired the skills of plant cultivation and animal domestication from China or South East Asia between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. This transition phase from a hunting and food gathering subsistence economy to a food-producing economy based on knowledge of the arts of agriculture and animal domestication marks the New Stone Age. Civilisation enhanced their knowledge and skills on agriculture and food production (Syed Husin, 2008, pp.9). The Proto-Malays were also knowledgeable in metallurgy and metalworking, and evidences were seen at Sungai Tembeling and near Raub in Pahang. In addition, they were very creative in pottery making, as evidenced by the excavation works at Bujang Valley, Kedah (Ramili et al., 2012). These skills could have been gathered from the civilisation at Dong-so'n on the banks of Song Ma River in North Vietnam through trade of tin and gold from Peninsular Malaysia. The Proto-Malays migrated into the archipelago, settling down into small communities. There was no clear barrier between the Malays of Peninsular and Sumatra (Zainal Abidin, 1980).

To summarise, the Proto-Malays, later referred to as the *Orang Asli* and the Malays make up the indigenous people or *bumiputera* of Malaysia. Despite the considerable differences between these various *bumiputera* groups, they share similar characteristics, i.e. adoption of an agrarian-maritime based economy and leadership through consensus (Syed Husin, 2008, pp.12).

The Malays, the Sri Vijaya Empire and the Melayu Kingdom

In the state's system of South-East Asia until the beginning of the 7th Century, the Indo-Chinese Peninsular was the main centre of political power (Arasaratnam, 1980). The Empire of Funan, centred on the Menam Basin, had a long period of dominance in the South-East Asian region. Lesser states in the Indo-Chinese and Malay Peninsular owed allegiance in varying forms to this kingdom (Arasaratnam, 1980). However, the Empire of Funan suffered a decline and many states in the mainland and islands of South East Asia asserted themselves. With this development, the focus of power in this region shifted to the Archipelago where Sumatra and Java became seats of strong kingdoms, and their rise was based on economic factors. With the downfall of the Empire of Funan, its strong grip of trade between India and China loosened, giving opportunity for other centres in the south to develop.

By the middle of the 7th Century, there were two states in Sumatra, both of which appear to have derived their strength from the trade that passed through the Straits of Malacca; Melayu (i.e. Modern Jambi) on the mouth of the Batang Hari River and Sri Vijaya (i.e. Modern Palembang), a Hindu/Buddhist kingdom (Andaya, 2001).

The rise of Sri Vijaya dated 683 to 686 A.D., and it was the first unified kingdom to dominate much of the Malay Archipelago. The Kingdom of Melayu later became Sri Vijaya's rival and extended along the east coast island of Sumatra. Nevertheless, Sri Vijaya's power extended further across the Straits of Peninsular Malaya to at least up to Ligor on the east coast of the peninsular. On the west, they controlled

the coast and all trading stations up to the emporium of Takuapa. The Sri Vijayan Empire/Dynasty was a maritime empire, largely dependent on sea trading (Andaya, 2001). The rulers were believed to belong to the Sailendra Dynasty, i.e. a Javanese dynasty (Zainal Abidin, 1980; Andaya & Andaya, 1984). Its capital, Palembang, was populated by merchants and money changers from many lands. It was strategically located to control the Straits of Malacca as well as the Sunda Straits. The extension of its power northwards into the Malay Peninsular up to Takuapa gave it control of the isthmus trade route as well.

From I-Tsing's voyage, it was known that there were regular sailings from Sumatran ports to Tamralipti, a port on the estuary of the Ganges River (Zainal Abidin, 1980). Sri Vijaya maintained strong relations with the Cholas, the most powerful maritime power of India at that time. Interestingly, apart from being a maritime trade haven, the Sri Vijaya Empire was an important centre for the expansion of Buddhism from the 8th to the 12th Century. Both the main sects of Buddhism, Hinayana and Mahayana were practised although the Mahayana form appeared to predominate. The Sri Vijaya Empire, after the raid by Cholas Empire in 1025 A.D. continued to flourish for two and a half centuries. However, at the same time, other rival centres grew. Within Sumatra, the focus shifted from the city of Sri Vijaya to Melayu, which then became a more important trading centre. Marco Polo, visiting Sumatra in 1292 described Melayu as the most important state. The rise of Majapahit Empire in Java and the Thai Empire in Siam undermined the remaining power of Sri Vijaya Empire. The Javanese took control of the Sunda Straits, and the Thais expanded southwards into the Malayan dependencies of Sri Vijaya Empire. By the 13th Century, the Sri Vijaya Empire was dissolved due to the rise of the Majapahit Empire, the Thai Empire and the Melayu Kingdom in Sumatra.

An analysis of this historical narrative implicates that from animistic beliefs and lifestyles, the Malay community had now been exposed to Hinduism and Buddhism within the socio-political and civilisational developments of the Sri Vijaya Empire and Melayu Kingdom. The next sub-section will discursively

examine the Malay community with the rise of the Melaka Empire and Islam as their religion. It will thus describe the Islamic influence on the Malay socio-cultural system and embedded values during the glorious times of Melaka as an Islamic state.

The Malays and the Melaka Empire

The importance of the Melaka Empire in Malaysian history and its reflection on the Malay identity could hardly be exaggerated. The chronicle of Melaka, the 15th Century Sultanate has even in modern times been assessed as the most glorious achievement of the "Malay" people (Milner 2011, pp.19). *Sejarah Melayu*, written in 15th and 16th Centuries and recompiled by the Johor court in 1612 spoke in glowing terms of the splendour, power and extent of the Malay Empire. This was also confirmed by Portuguese writers in the early 16th Century, e.g. Tome Pires who stated that "Melaka is of such importance and profit that it seems to me that it has no equal in the world... It is a city made for merchandise fitter than any other in the world..." (Zainal Abidin, 1980).

The First King of Melaka: A Descendant of Sri Vijaya Kings
Melaka was founded around 1400 by Parameswara, a young Sumatran prince. The *Sejarah Melayu* noted that he was the first king of Melaka (Zainal Abidin et al., 1992, pp.16). Literature suggests that he was Indian Hindu or an Indian/Malay/Aboriginal Malay mixed Hindu who fled Palembang in Sumatra due to power conflicts to take over the throne after the death of the Majapahit king, Hayam Wuruk and eventually founded Melaka in 1400 A.D. According to Zainal Abidin et al., (1992, pp.16), he was one of the sons-in law of Hayam Wuruk. Chinese and Portuguese sources registered him as *Pai-li-mi-sula* or Parameswara. He first opened Singapura (Temasek) before opening Melaka (Zainal Abidin et al., 1992, pp.16). Parameswara's conversion to Islam was unclear so far, with no evidence as to whether he had actually converted. There is a strong possibility that he was a Hindu when he found Melaka. Nevertheless, there is fairly convincing information that Parameswara converted to Islam since he married a princess of Pasai in 1409 and adopted an Islamic title, Iskandar Shah; a probable indicator of his conversion to the faith (Zainal Abidin et al., 1992,

pp. 25-26; Sabrizain, 2015). *Sejarah Melayu* further indicated that he used the Persian title, Iskandar Shah since his reign in Singapura in the 1390s.

The *Sejarah Melayu* also mentioned that the Islamic influence in Singapura traced back to the reign of Sri Rana Wikrama who established ties with the Sumatran Muslim Kingdom, Peureulak (i.e. Perlak). There was even a presence of *ulama* from Pasai in Singapura during the reign of his successor, Sri Maharaja, believed to be Parameswara's son, who took the name of Megat Iskandar Shah (Note: This was mentioned by Tome Pires, the Portuguese writer, in his book, *Suma Oriental*). Consequently, *Sejarah Melayu* noted that it was during the reign of the third ruler, Sultan Muhammad Shah (possibly the 'Modarfaxa' of Tome Pires), sometime after 1435 that the ruling class and the subjects began to convert to Islam. These facts are consistent with Marco Polo's exploration which had also noted that Islam was already established in Perlak, in the north coast of Sumatra, in 1291, when Ibn Battuta visited Pasai in 1345 (Winstedt, 1992).

Although Melaka's founding history seems to suggest that the society practised a mixture of animism and Hinduism (Zainal Abidin et al., 1992, pp.17; Milner, 2011), the society's culture was not shaped within the Hinduism found in India (Sandhu, 2008). This may imply that adaptation may have taken place with a mix of Animism and Hinduism within the Malay spheres.

The Melaka Community and its Social System

The Melaka people were mixed with different origins, and the society was hierarchical, the highest being the king and family, followed by the dignitaries (*golongan bangsawan*), the common/ordinary people (*golongan orang merdeheka*) and the slaves (*hamba*). Nevertheless, under the Sultanates' commitment to Islam as a religion, Melaka soon blossomed into an exciting cosmopolitan trading centre, bringing merchants and adventurers from India, Siam, Holland, Portugal and Britain to deal with carpets, silk, spices and other exotic riches, as described in Tun Sri Lanang's *Sejarah Melayu*, Tome Pire's *Suma Oriental* and I-Hsing's voyage.

Prior to the coming of the Portuguese in 1511, the life of the people of Melaka was centred upon the royal court. The Melaka Sultan had no state council to advise him. He declared war and peace, decided on questions of law and death. Although he had no formal council to advise him, he had his *Bendahara*, (equivalent to *Menteri Besar*), the *Laksamana* and *Temenggong* to consult on all matters (Zainal Abidin, 1980; Muhammad Yusoff, 2015).

The main source of income for a ruler seems to have derived from the taxes paid by the foreign traders that came to trade in Melaka. He also obtained wealth from his conquests and tributes from vessel states. Life in the Melaka Empire was governed by two major laws; *Hukum Kanun Melaka* and the Maritime Laws of Malacca. *Hukum Kanun Melaka* reflects the agricultural nature of the society. The Maritime laws of Malacca highlight the roles of the *Nakhoda* or ship captain and the rights of the crew. Despite these laws, the Malay rulers normally enjoyed almost absolute power. The image of a Sultan was portrayed as a "superpower" beyond challenge. However, the power was not merely derived from the fact that he could exercise many rights, but the Malay masses themselves accorded the ruler with what could be termed as "blind loyalty" (Zainal Abidin, 1980, pp. 21).

The cultural tradition of the Malays played an important role in shaping this attitude. There are two traditional Malay concepts which could have a strong influence on the people- *daulat* and *derhaka*. *Daulat*, i.e. sovereignty is not merely a legal concept but cultural, or even a religious one within Islamic contexts since Muslims are taught to respect leaders. The Quran reads, "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Then if you disagree in anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the *Last Day*. That is best and more suitable for (final) determination" (The Quran, Surah AnNisa, Verse 59).

The *daulat* endows the ruler many rights and privileges, places him above his society, beyond reproach and criticism. *Derhaka*/disobedience or rebelling against the ruler is perceived to be immoral and disrespectful

from Malay tradition. It is highly unlikely that a traditional Malay person would openly criticise his Sultan (or even a leader).

The day to day affairs of the state were normally carried out by the different officials. The *Bendahara* was the chief advisor to the Sultan, and the two notable figures as *Bendahara* were Tun Perak and Seri Maharaja. The *Bendahara* and other officials did not receive regular salaries. In fact, the *Bendahara* received a certain percentage of the taxes paid by the foreign merchants for permission to trade in Melaka and each official was entitled to participate in trade. The *Laksamana* has been popularly regarded today as the equivalent of an admiral or chief of staff of the navy. But the *Laksamana* of Melaka was more than just an admiral. *Laksamana* Hang Tuah was as much a warrior on land as at sea. The *Temenggong*, generally regarded as the chief police officer was responsible for maintenance of law and order. The *Shahbandar* is another important official of Melaka; equivalent of the present harbour master but with the additional responsibility of allocating store-houses and trading areas for the diverse groups of traders who came to Melaka. During the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah, police stations were established all over Melaka. Theft was eradicated and justice was then a meaningful concept, internalised by the community (Zainal Abidin, 1980).

These elaborations are indicative of the roles played by the rulers and the Malays in Melaka, i.e. they were actively involved in administration and trading. They were also regulating daily activities within governance mechanisms to ensure efficiency and organisational effectiveness for social justice.

While acknowledging that Melaka was a flourishing commercial and cosmopolitan state, the presence of foreigners had political significance, for the Arabs, and the Indian Muslims managed to establish their roles in the court circle of Melaka (Abdur-Rahman & Ahmad Murad, 2014). Arab religious teachers occupied a special position in the Melaka community. The teaching of Islam, a religion introduced to Melaka at a very early stage of its foundation had progressed

significantly by about the middle of the 15th Century. The *Sejarah Melayu* recorded the sending of a delegation from Melaka to Pasai to discuss theological questions with the Muslim scholars in Pasai. Melaka, prior to the Portuguese conquest was not merely a trading port but a centre for the study of Islam, hence signifying the Malays and their stronghold to Islam as a religion.

In the early stage of its history, Melaka had to face the threat from Siam. However, she managed to defend herself from the Siamese attacks and strengthened her position as an entrepôt and Islamic centre. By the beginning of the 16th Century, the extent of Melaka Empire included Klang, Bruas, Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Patani on the Malay Peninsula, while Kampar, Siak, Indragiri and Siantan on the east coast of Sumatra were also part of the Empire.

Melaka's foreign policy seems to be based on her cordial relations with Siam as a "protectionist" strategy since Siam was equally powerful. In addition, establishing cordial relations with Siam was crucial to ensure a sufficient flow of rice for the people, to sustain her position as an important regional trading centre as well as a strategic centre for the study and spread of Islam.

In 1403, a delegation from the China Embassy visited Melaka. The visit provided her an opportunity to depend on a powerful protector without having to sacrifice her independence. Her relations with China in the early 1400s appeared to have been motivated by a desire to maintain a political balance between China and Siam. Melaka flourished until 1511 when she was attacked by the Portuguese. The last ruler, Sultan Mahmud still retained sovereignty and authority over most of his empire in the Malay Peninsular and in Eastern Sumatra, operating in Johor, who then set up a new capital in Bentan.

To conclude this section, Melaka became not only a renowned trading port, frequented by traders from the East and West but a strong Islamic centre of teaching. The historical glimpses of the glory of Melaka Empire saw the Malays embracing Islam as a religion under the

leadership of the Sultans with sovereignty. The Malays, who were Hindus and Buddhists had now become Muslims with Islam as their religion. Placing in context of Malay culture, directly or indirectly, cross-cultural influences are bound to emerge within the Malay community, much as they embrace Islam as a religion. Next, this discourse will discursively examine the extent of influence of Indian culture on the traditional Malay culture (social life inclusive) in Malaysia.

The Indianization of Malay Culture

The geographical location of Malaya (Peninsular Malaysia) makes it possible for Indian culture to influence the Malay community. Indo-China is in the north, while the Malay Archipelago, part of it is Malaysia, is in the south (Muhammad 2009, pp. 67). Sea route users in the olden times will conveniently find that Malaya is mid-way between India and China. Malaya's strategic location has, therefore made it an important voyage stopover. Before the Europeans arrived in this region, it was a place that saw the reign of Indian political powers. Even before the 4th Century, Malaya had been visited by Indian traders (Winstedt, 1961, pp.3). In the later years, they were followed by the Brahmins and the monks. It was here that the Indian religions made contact with the animistic Malay pagans (Winstedt, 1961, pp. 3).

The ancient Indian influence in the life of the Malays is undeniable due to the fact that between the 8th and 14th Century, two majestic Indian kingdoms, i.e. Sri Vijaya (an Indian origin Buddhist kingdom) and Majapahit (an Indian origin Hindu Kingdom) had emerged and dominated the Straits of Melaka (Muhammad, 2009, pp.67- 68). The relationships between the Malay culture and the monks have taken place before the peak of the Sri Vijaya Empire based on archaeological discoveries in Western Borneo. Archaeologists, in fact, found artefacts such as Buddha images and carnelian beads dated between 4th and 8th Century (Collin, 1998, pp.5). A more recent discovery of Bujang Valley with the temples, situated near to the Muda River in Kedah showed that the area was the earliest Malay kingdom and it had been greatly influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist religion (Abdur-Rahman & Ahmad Murad, 2014). Readers may

also refer to the significant archaeological works of Nik Hassan Suhaimi and the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) team on these discoveries. Quoting from Collin (1998), "The implication is that Melayu culture influenced by Indian ideas would have begun here before the development of a similar culture in South East Sumatra at Sri Vijaya/Melayu between the 7th and 11th Centuries CE." (Andaya, 2001, pp.317).

In sum, Indian influence is significant in Malay culture due to the geographical location of Malaya as a sea route and middle pathway between India and China. Direct contact with Indian civilisation through colonial domination and trading activities took place at the beginning of the 4th Century. Indian civilisation and traditions have in fact influenced the language, scripts, calendars, culture, customs (including the Malay *adat*, i.e. ritual) and artistic aspects of the Malays (Sandhu, 2006; Muhammad, 2009, pp.67-69), what more religious rituals to some extent. To mention among the many examples, Malay words such as *budi* and *kerajaan*, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics and characters/images in the *Wayang Kulit* performance, the *Malay wedding* "*bersanding*" ceremony are all Indian cultural features, which have assimilated in Malay culture and way of life (Winstedt, 1992). Despite the spread of Islam in the Malay Peninsular, many Sanskrit phrases and ceremonies that had been integrated into local culture remained; for example, *puteri*, *samudra*, *puasa*, *neraka*, *sembahyang*, *majlis berinai*, *mandi Safar*, etc. (Sabrizain, 2015).

In fact, *Budi*, a Sanskrit word that carries the literal meaning of intellect (it relates to Buddha) refers to a set of internal ethical values that shapes one's mentality and personality (Dahlan, 1991; Wan Norhasniah, 2011; Lim Kim Hui, 2003). Later, *Budi-Islam* was coined by a Malay scholar, Zainal Kling (1993) to blend with Islamic ethics and values practised by the Malays.

Indian influence in Malay culture is beyond doubt. Indian culture blends with the animistic and Islamic features of Malay culture. The following sub-sections will discuss western colonial influence on traditional Malay social structure and cultural landscape, including values.

The Influence and Impact of Colonisation on Malay Values

The fall of Melaka in 1511 to the Portuguese marked the beginning of western colonisation and dominance in the Malay Archipelago. For 130 years, the Portuguese held Melaka. Despite incessant Malay attempts at recovering the city, Melaka finally fell to the combined forces of the Malays and the Dutch in 1642. Portuguese conquest of Melaka was economically motivated as the aim was to use the port as a base of operations in their bid to control the trade of the East Indies. However, although there were long spans of Portuguese and then Dutch rule which centred in Melaka, it did not have any significant impact on traditional Malay social structure and cultural landscape compared to the British influence during their colonisation periods as well as after Malayan independence. Quoting from Shamsul (2001), "The British interfered with the local thought system, and by doing this they increasingly disempowered the natives by limiting their ability to define their world; subsequently, the local order of things was replaced by a foreign one, a slow but steady process that has effectively been conducted through a systemic application of a number of so-called investigative modalities" (Cohn, 1996, pp.6; Shamsul, 2001).

British Colonialism and its Significance on Malay Values

The Malay Peninsular/Malaya was under British rule from 1786 (i.e. when Francis Light occupied Penang and founded Georgetown) till her 1957 independence. It was during this period that the traditional Malay society underwent an extensive structural change in the wake of British reign due to its long rule and relationship within the community's socio-economic system. The impact of British colonisation is not only seen in Malaya's institutional arrangements but also the society's values within a multicultural environment (Khalidah, 1983, pp.29; Muhamad, 2009, pp. 51; Rusnah, 2005).

Several social science scholars refer to this phenomenon as British colonialism, western hegemony or even imperialism. In fact, it is linked with the European colonial policy of expansionism that had begun since the 15th Century to subjugate

most parts of Asia and Africa (Mohd Abbas, 2011) and they continued to expand their influence to underdeveloped countries of the world. The motto behind the coming of the western powers was based on the 3Gs; gold, glory and gospel. With regard to the "gospel" agenda, the Europeans were driven by the zeal and passion for the spread of Christianity (mainly the Catholic version) to the Asians, and Africans whom they thought were strong in animistic beliefs (Block, 2002; Mohd Abbas, 2011).

The British in particular also practised the "divide and rule" policy to strengthen their power and influence while implementing the colonialism agendas. Prior to the 1957 independence, the rural Malays were mainly agriculturalists compared to their roles during the glorious historical years of the Sri Vijaya and Melaka Empires. The British did not merely divide the Malays from the Chinese but went ahead to divide the rural Malays from the town Malays (Mahathir, 1970, pp.41). Quoting from the *Malay Dilemma* (1991), "The Malays of the rural areas remained pure bred... Socially they mixed hardly at all with non-Malays and were exclusively farmers with no interest in trade or craftsmanship... Deeply religious, orthodox Muslims, the Malays remained in abiding fear of the evil spirits of their past animist beliefs... The town Malays were usually of mixed Malay-Indian or Malay-Arab descent. They moved freely among the non-Malay Muslims... They had been ousted from business by the Chinese but had made progress as officials and administrators" (Mahathir, 1991, pp. 37- 41).

This demographic/socio-cultural scenario carried on until the 1960s. There is a distinct divide by economic activity between races within the nation's multicultural society; the Malays were mainly peasant farmers and fishermen; the Chinese were prosperous businessmen, and the Indians were salaried workers at rubber and oil palm estates, mostly owned by the British.

Pre-and Post-Colonial Discourses on Malay Values

British discourses on Islam prior to 1957 Malayan independence perceived differences between Malays and other ethnic groups; the Malay language,

the notion of a “depressed community” and class divisions (Syed Muhd. Khairudin, 2009). The Malays had also been portrayed and labelled as an indolent race (Syed Hussein, 1977). Through their published writings, British, Spanish, Dutch as well as American scholars and administrators became active purveyors of the myth that, unlike the Chinese and Arabs, Malays were unwilling to work over long periods of time and lacked the competitive spirit that was deemed necessary for development and progress. Such fallacious discourse, according to Syed Hussein (1977), was perpetuated by nationalist writers and politicians in Malaysia, prominent among whom were Mahathir Mohamad (1970) and Senu Abdul Rahman (1973). To be Malay became synonymously linked to being lazy and unindustrious. It seems that laziness had been embedded within the process of Malay identity formation.

Conversely, the knowledgeable and educated Malays had significantly been influenced by western values and ideologies such as secularism, a western ideology separating worldly affairs with religion; an impact of British colonisation of Malaya prior to 1957 independence (Rusnah, 2005; Shamsul, 1996). They seem to emulate the colonial values and way of life. The British or perhaps the West seemed to be their role models.

Although the British rule ended with Malayan independence, the orientalist/colonialist mythologising of the Malays has yet to be eradicated. For instance, there were local Malay scholars’ publications highlighting the unfavourable images of the Malays. Such propagations were made by Syed Hussein Alatas in his famous publication, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977). These pieces may be perceived as reproductions of Malay images during the British colonial days that support the views of British writers such as Hugh Clifford and Frank Swettenham (former British Residents in Malaya) to paint an indolent image of the Malays and their backwardness.

On the other hand, these critically written pieces may be seen as positive attempts and wake-up calls to challenge the Malays so that they will self-realize

and compete with the other ethnic groups to ensure that they are not being marginalised and regarded as “foreigners” in their homeland (Mahathir, 1991, pp.91). Ironically, the Malays, among the local natives in 1950s and 1960s portrayed character traits that are “weak,” “docile” and possessed an “easy going” or ‘happy - go lucky attitude” (Mahathir, 1970). Senu Abdul Rahman, in his *Revolusi Mental* (1973, pp.26-27) urged the Malays to change their mindsets and problem-solving approaches in all aspects of life in order to be progressive and successful while coping with the post-independence challenges. Although Senu (1973) concurs with Mahathir’s observations on the “happy go lucky” Malays then, he conversely challenged Mahathir’s perceptions on the “backwardness” of the Malays arising from biological and hereditary factors (Mahathir, 1991, pp.28-33; Nasir & Chee, 1984) to inspire the Malays to move forward as fate and luck lie in the hands of the Creator. Nevertheless, he viewed that it is inappropriate for the Malays to be over-dependent on government support through public funds and benefits. These sentiments came after the 1969 racial riot and at the time when the government introduced the NEP, a long-term affirmative action to alleviate poverty among the poor; the Malays themselves. The negative perception of the Malays seems to continue even in the 1980s, as espoused by Zawawi Ibrahim (1987) who also viewed that the perpetuation of negative images of the Malays has persisted up until the present day.

While noting that some local elites have painted a negative image of the Malays even after independence, be it for the better or otherwise, as mentioned, there were also prolific scholars such as Syed Hussein Alatas who were denying the fallacious myth of the lazy Malays at the same time. In fact, Mahathir’s viewpoint on the Malay values, in *Malay Dilemma* (1970) contrasted sharply with Alatas’s arguments in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977). Syed Hussein Alatas proclaimed that it is unjust to stereotype the Malays as lazy and indolent people. Aptly, Alatas, in his deep and critical thoughts justified that such a negatively portrayed image was linked with British imperialism to colonise the native’s minds and promote the colonial capitalism ideology in the East that prevailed throughout the 18th till 20th

Century (Syed Muhd. Khairudin Aljunied, 2009). The stereotyping image of the lazy native/indolent race that the British colonial rulers (Bolt, 1971) imparted and perpetuated on the Malay subjects was no more than "an expression of the fundamentals of the post-colonial doctrine of subjugation and component" (Hairudin Harun's report/ writing entitled "Post-Colonial Discourse in Malaysia).

Nevertheless, while this discourse notes on the "negative image" discussions of the Malays in identity, several local studies have fairly revealed the good Malay values. Zawawi (2008) highlighted that their cultural values included respect for others, faith in God, humility, and indirectness. Other Malay values include affiliation, appreciativeness, fairness, loyalty, obedience, being tolerant and hospitable (Zawawi, 2005; Zamani, 2003); values that very much represent *budi* and *adab*. A cross-examination of these values seem to conclude that they are also virtues of people with *iman* and *taqwa* within the context of *akhlaq* which subsumes all actions that are characterised as 'amal saleh (i.e. virtuous deed) in the terminology of The Quran (Khalidah *et al.*, 2010). Interestingly, these values seem to be convergent and complementary with a western study by Donald Zauderer on the attributes of people with high integrity (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2009; Khalidah *et al.*, 2018; Khalidah, 2019). In addition, such positive traits are also extensively covered in Imam al-Ghazali's famous writings in *Ihya Ulumuddin* (Ad Dimasqi, 2012).

As Islamic/Muslim believers, the Malays also have strong beliefs in the concept of Supreme Being-Allah the Almighty (Abdul Rashid & Ibrahim, 2008). This is a quality of *mukmins* who consistently uphold the first principle of *iman* as mentioned above and believe in enlightened undivided obedience to the Creator, being His servants while upholding the five pillars of Islam, the six principles of *iman* and the rules in The Quran. Ultimately, these are the characteristics of the *motaqeens*, i.e. people who hold *taqwa* (God-consciousness).

The Malay community is also known for its non-confrontational behaviour (Zamani, 2003) and would

strive to be "subtle" in their conversation (Ali, 1995). This is done by employing indirectness in order to avoid conflicts (Ali, 1995). Many existing literatures on the Malays have described them as being polite and indirect (Zawawi, 2008; Salleh, 2005; Maros, 2006; Awang *et al.*, 2012); as signs of diplomacy and respect for others rather than being interpreted as "docile," weak or lacking in courage and assertiveness. Aptly, these actions are highly regarded and professed in Islam to maintain harmonious relationships with fellow humans. In fact, this is *adab*, defined as the "code of personal conduct, which is expected of an individual in his relationship with others including the need to be cautious with words and speech and be tolerant towards others (Asma, 1996).

Mahathir (1970) has undoubtedly been critical in addressing the Malay values in his *Malay Dilemma* (1970). However, he has appropriately highlighted their positive values such as uprightness within the strict religious code of Islam and *adat* as a duty and propriety (pp.199, i.e. supporting Kant's deontological ethical principles). On the contrary, he has interestingly claimed that the Malays do not have hedonism as a code of ethics (*Malay Dilemma*, 1991, pp.199).

This observation draws interest because hedonism, a utilitarian thesis of ultimate pleasure in the absence of pain, is a western concept that is neither a Malay value related to *adab*, nor *budi*, what more *akhlaq* from Islamic contexts (Khalidah & Ahmad Murad, 2014; Khalidah, 2019). Pleasure and happiness in Islam is always associated with a religious value of *syukur* (gratitude) to the Almighty who has granted humans with everything they own. Islam, therefore, does not fully support the view of pleasure without pain as advocated by Bentham and Mills (Abdullah & Zainol Abidin, 2012; Khalidah & Ahmad Murad, 2014). Hedonistic features certainly have limitations within *Syariah* principles.

Mahathir also observed that formality and ritual rate very high in the Malay concept of values. These values are viewed positively from Islamic dimensions, although they may be seen otherwise from western/

secular viewpoints. In addition, fatalism is also very much evident everywhere and greatly affects the whole Malay value concept (Mahathir, 1970, pp.200). Fatalism, being relative and subjective, no doubt, has its limitations (Mahathir, 1970) as highlighted by Mahathir. However, Muslims have also been preached to strive for the best before leaving to fate or *tawakkal*, another religious virtue of Muslims (Khalidah & Ahmad Murad, 2014; Noorazzah, 2010). Hence, fatalism may be a virtue from Islamic dimensions since it is part of faith (*iman*).

Malay Origin, Institutions, Values and Systems: Findings and Analysis

Origins, institutions, culture and values reflect a society's civilisation and an ethnic group's identity formation. Placing in context of this interdisciplinary discourse, and noting that all Malays in Malaysia will traditionally claim that Islam is their religion, this study concurs with earlier studies that the Malay culture is a mixture of other cultural influences including Animism, Hinduism and Islam (Muhammad, 2009; Mahathir, 1970; Muhaimin, 2010; Wan Norhasniah, 2011; Mutalib, 1993), the cultural-spiritual feeders of the Muslim Malays. Malay civilisation had evolved through various stages or phases of beliefs, beginning with primitive Animism, followed by Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, respectively.

Tracing from their origins as elaborated in the earlier part of this discourse, the Malay ethnic group has in fact undergone social/mental revolution and cultural transformation, stripping away many feudal values which are still peculiar in other indigenous groups (Milner, 2011). The traditional Malay culture and values had been significantly influenced by Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. However, as Islam is a religion that promotes monotheism and adherence to *Syariah* principles of Allah S.W.T., the cultural transformation has also deeply embedded Islamic religious practices and rituals in the life of a traditional Malay Muslim, being a believer of Islamic faith. This is where *adab* and *akhlaq* are much emphasised in Muslim life. Nevertheless, although animistic and Hindu features, as reflected in the practice of *adat* have waned over the years, such features may still

be identified and practised in the Malay culture until today.

A chronological analysis on the phases of the Malay civilisation in Malaysia suggests that the Malays have evolved and undergone six major transformation periods (Muhammad, 2009) that have shaped and somewhat defined their culture, beliefs and values;

- i. The period of radical change in belief system from polytheism to Islamic monotheism;
- ii. The period of Muslim Sultanates, i.e. the period during which the Islamic beliefs and practices and the pre-Islamic Malay customary laws and values were practised in the community;
- iii. The period of reformist movement to purify the "unislamic" beliefs and practices such as on superstitions, accretions and mysticism; (not covered in this article)
- iv. The period of struggle against European imperialism that was regarded by the Malay as foreign disbelievers. During this period, *jihad* became religiously motivated to challenge them;
- v. The period of ideological and political struggle between secularly-oriented political forces, systems and elites with reformist-oriented Muslims. It was during this period that the ideas or concepts of the Islamic state and Islam as a way of life were propagated, and
- vi. The period of post- Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) that had strongly influenced Islamic resurgence among the Malays in Malaysia. This had enhanced Islamic thoughts within a secular socio-political landscape; defining the need to holistically internalise and embrace Islam as a way of life. (See Hassan, 2004; Muhammad, 2009)

CONCLUSION

Malay civilisation in Malaysia had undergone various stages of beliefs, beginning with primitive Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. As much as the Malays have been identified with Islam as their religion in faith and identity, animistic and Hindu/Buddhist cultural rituals (including *adat*) had significantly

influenced the Malay society, especially those in the rural areas, although it has slowly eroded with time. Recognising Islam as the religion of the Malays with *adab*, *akhlaq*, *Budi* and *Budi-Islam* as elements of the Malay ethical system, Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and British colonialism have significantly influenced Malay culture, values and systems. Although *adat* has features of Hindu beliefs, as long as the practices do not violate the principle of Islamic monotheism, it may be practised as norms while defining the Malay socio-cultural identity, being the main ethnic group of Malaysia. Western orientalisks have no doubt painted an indolent image of the Malays during the pre and post-colonial times. However, while the "lazy/indolent Malay" image remains in perception and supported by some Malay intelligentsia themselves, several local studies have fairly highlighted the positive character traits of the Malays, as discursively discussed in this discourse.

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