

Theory of Malay Continuation Cultures

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Abstract: Some books for instance *Mental Revolution* (1971) and *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) associated Malay community with negative traits, values and practices that could prevent them to prosper. They claimed as if this cultures still exist and embedded from previous generation to next generation. Hence, this paper aims to discuss this polemic through a qualitative design research using a content analysis approach. Research has found that a number of Malay scholars such as Syed Hussein Alatas, Zainal Abidin Ahmad, Senu Abdul Rahman and Taib Osman have discussed this issue in their books. Some of them said that the Malay community does have negative values and practices from generations to generation and some of them rejects this claim. The second group is more cautious and said that the Malays are not the only nation who behaving negatively as illustrated by the first group but it is a betrayal in manipulating the facts about the Malay community. The library research has led to a Theory of Malay Continuation Cultures.

Keywords: Malay, Culture, Continuation, Theory

1. Introduction

Malaysia is a multi ethnic races and religions. The Malay Muslim is the majority which represented about 60% of the nation. Even though they are the owner of this land, still some negative connotations such as backwardness in economy, moral decadence, corruption and poverty has been associated with them. The government through some ministries is aware of this fact and have introduced various policies, campaigns and programmes to overcome these problems and subsequently upgrade their standard of living. It is useless for Malaysian to have a first class infrastructure but the people have a third class mentality therefore they fail to maintain all the facilities provided by government (2003). Is it still exist nowadays? This polemic will be analyze in the next topic.

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative design research. The sources have been mainly gathered from the libraries. A rich collection of books, journals and documents will be analyze through a content analysis approach.

3. Literature Review

Negative values and practices among Malays has been debated academically by scholars and thinkers of the past through their books. It includes Syed Hussein Alatas, Zainal Abidin Ahmad, Senu Abdul Rahman, Taib Osman, Chandra Muzaffar and Western Orientalists. From the literature, it can be divided into two groups as both group have their own arguments. Therefore let us examine the opinion of the first group.

3.1 First Opinion

About 49 years ago, a book namely *Mental Revolution* was written by Malay scholars led by Senu Abdul Rahman. This book has analyzed Malays and as a result more than 30 negative values of Malays were listed. The writers claimed that Malays are lazy, old-fashioned, leaving everything in God's hands, very loyal to his master (Sultan), not afraid of poverty, don't want to be rich, happy with the ordinary way of life, extravagant, strongly indebted and can't be ridiculed. They also lack of initiative, less curious, less rational minded, lack of self-confidence, lack of concern for wealth, lack of effort, believe in fate which determines everything, not looking forward and do not appreciate time. (Halim Othman 1993:161)

Mental Revolution has actually concluded what has been said by Colonial officers such as Francis Light, Maxwell, Wilkinson, Winstedt and other Western Orientalist writers who want to give negative images to the Malay. According to Senu (1971:61):

Apart from well-mannered nature, in the opinion of other people, there is no good traits can be associated with the Malays.

Chronology of the negative images started since the colonial Portuguese era in Malacca after the fall of the Malacca Sultanate in 1511. Tom Pires, a Portuguese writer who lives in Melaka from 1511 to 1513 said that the Malays are lazy, unmodern, adore entertainment, enjoy cockfighting, unreliable, cheat, run amok and jealous. Valentijn, a Dutch writer, for example, said that the Malays cannot be trusted, adore to have fun and love while Godinho de Eredia, described them as arrogant, unreliable, like to steal, cheat, negligent in work, using time to have fun and love to sing. Senu (1971: 12-13) stated that:

Even though the opinions of foreigners such as Valentijn and de Eredia earlier were the opinions in the 16th and 17th centuries during the Portuguese and Dutch era in Malacca did various injustice to the Malays, and even though the authors wrote with extreme hatred, but it is also good Malay people find these images recently and said the Malays are lazy, do not want to work like everyone else...

Writers and colonial officers such as Raffles (1835), Wheeler (1928) and Swettenham (1946) also saw the Malays as having negative values. For example Swettenham (1946) quoted that the Malays were always a traitors, extravagant, love gambling, always in debt, fleeing someone else's wife and so on. The Malays are also seen as having poor orientation towards achievement, don't want to work hard and focus only on mundane life (Halim Othman 1993:137).

Suhana Sulaiman (1981) has listed ten negative Malay traits:

1. Dared not risk
2. Lack of trust
3. Believes fate determines everything
4. Does not look forward
5. Lack of initiative
6. Untrustworthy and unreliable
7. Have skill but careless at work
8. Don't want to accumulate wealth or become rich
9. Satisfied with the ordinary and normal way of life
10. Adore entertainment

Some articles and books about the Malay community usually give such a negative impression (Senu Abdul Rahman 1971:12). For instance, when we referred to The Oxford English Dictionary, there are some negative statements about the personality of Malays. The word "Malay" means:

One of the race predominating in Malacca and the Eastern Archipelago, A Malay: more strictly one of those who call themselves by this name and speak the Malay language. (Simpson, Weiner 1989:257)

The characteristics of Malays are:

The natives of the island, as most other Malays, very treacherous. In person Malays are short, squat and robust. As murderous as a quick-tempered Malay.

Moreover, in the Encyclopedia Asiatica, it has been stated that:

In character, Malay is impassive. He exhibits a reserve, diffidence and even bashfulness which in some degree attractive, and leads the observer to think that the ferocious, blood thirsty character imputed to the race must be grossly exaggerated. He is not demonstrated, his feelings of surprise, admiration or fear are never openly manifested and are probably not strong felt. He is slow and deliberate in speech, and circuitous in introducing the subject he has come expressly to discuss. (Balfour 1982:807).

Taib Osman (1994:35) has stated that Western writers gave a negative view in defining the Malay personality. He said that:

Gulick's description about Malays personality who always calm and peaceful except when he felt insulted or humiliated. This will trigger a condition called as heartache by Gullick. It may be more appropriate if called revenge or anger because supposedly from here then what is said to be peaceful at first turned to hectic when the Malays run amok.

Balfour (1982: 808) said:

For instance a man sitting amongst his friends and relatives will, without provocation, suddenly start up, weapon in hand, and slay all within his reach. I (Dr. Oxley) have known as many as eight killed and wounded by a very feeble individual in this manner.

Amok was likened to stinging disease, two features that show uncontrolled behavior or unconsciousness in Malay culture. Gullick concerns is the nature of the Malays if not insulted or humiliated, they can receive all the challenges with ease, but when they feels insulted or humiliated, they will forget their self and run amok. In the Malay history, there were several times they run amok when they were hurted, like the protest rally against Malayan Union and the bloody tragedy of 13th May 1969.

The Malay Dilemma (1970) was written by Mahathir Mohamad after this tragedy. This book also discussed about the negative traits of Malays. Mahathir Mohammad (1970: 31) stated that:

While in their hearts (Malay community) are still embedded traits and attitudes formed since many centuries ago.

Perhaps this is what Syed Hussein Alatas and others want to refute in their writings.

3.2 Second Opinion

Generally this group don't agree with several claims that Malays have negative values, traditions and culture in their lives. Among the famous figures is Syed Hussein Alatas who has written many books and articles and deny all the allegations. This is exactly what Syed Hussein Alatas emphasized, especially in his book *The Myth of Lazy Native* (1977) and *Who Is Wrong; About Mental Revolution and the Malay Personality* (1972).

For example, in his book *The Myth of Lazy Native* (1977), he argues that an accusation about the laziness of Malays by colonials are baseless. Even worse, it is for the sake of their own ideology and hide behind the laws to mobilize the indigenous workforce and looking for an excuse to oppress and colonize Malaya. They assumed that humid and hot tropical climate, disease infection and the luxury life of Malay leaders have caused them to suffer. They become a human without ambition. For example, according to Syed Hussein Alatas (1977:145), Hugh Clifford, a British colonial officer in Pahang once said:

The Malays have become an unprofitable members of the community because they do not provide labour to develop resources of this country.

Syed Hussein Alatas has shown evidence that the Malay community in Malaysia always work hard in life in order to refute all these allegations. They are diligent and skillful in their respective fields of work but as a dignified race, they are not ready to be the production tool of colonialists who treated them as slaves in their own country.

Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:140-142) has criticized *Mental Revolution*. According to him, *Mental Revolution* is full of confusion, ordinary knowledge without depth, influenced by the colonial philosophy and Western Capitalism, careless, lack of intellectual depth, has ridiculous conclusions in some examples, contradictory statements, ignores various works and previous opinions about the same issue for about a century. Strictly speaking, it does not went through in-depth assessment or referred to the absolute historical facts about Malays.

Syed Hussein Alatas has also criticized *The Malay Dilemma* written by Mahathir Mohammad. For examples Mahathir said that amok is part of the Malay character. According to Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:173), we cannot conclude that because one of the Malay run amok so that all Malays also run amok. This is because in Indian and Chinese tradition they also exhibit rampant behavior. Through history, the Chinese and Indians were ever known to have killed their family members because of mental illness. This indicates that amok is not only limited to certain community.

So that amok, corruption, loss of memory, unethical, harmed another person's body is not a personal traits of Malays because Malay culture does not prioritize it, do not teach it through a legitimate education channels and it is not practiced by the Malays collectively. (Syed Hussein Alatas 1972:11).

Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:167) explains that the confusion of *Mental Revolution* is they generalize various traits to all Malays as he said:

All the negative traits that has been registered by *Mental Revolution* were exists among a few of them but it is not proper to generalize it to all Malays.

Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:174) added if we generalize the character of a race based on the actions of a few people, then it will led to chaos. The Malays tend to steal because some of them stole, the Malays are lazy because some of them are lazy; Malay women are not faithful to their husbands because that's part of their nature; Malay prople are crazy because some of them crazy, Malays are smokers because a number of them are smokers. Then we can continuously calculating the negative values of Malay community, which is based on the fact that some Malays sometimes exhibit these characteristics.

For example, corruption start as early as civilization began. Moreover it is a global problem that occurs not only in developing countries but also in rich countries. Corruption is increasing not only in Malaysia but also in other countries. It actually cause by more general factors. Among those factors are low standard of ethics, faith and intellectual which enable them to take bribery easily (Shamsul Amri 1990:75). However, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972:24) recognizes that corruption among politicians in Malaysia is one of the setback in order to prosper as a nation.

4. Result and Discussion

The negative values and practices among the Malays has actually been debated by scholars. From the literature, generally there are two groups of scholars who have different views and opinions about the negative practices of the Malay community. There is a group of scholars who say that the Malays did have a negative practices that have traditionally rooted in their daily life. This opinion is led by Senu Abdul Rahman and Mahathir Mohamad. There is a group of scholars who rejected this claims. Syed Hussein Alatas led this group. The second group is more cautious and stick to the argument that the Malay race was not a bad race as said by the first one but it is a betrayal in manipulating the facts about the Malay race.

From the data we can conclude that there are two opinions regarding this polemic. The first opinion says that the Malays have negative values and practices in their lives and the second group of scholars have rejected the opinion of first group. They said that the opinion of the first group is not true at all.

It is clear that some Malays nowadays not only inherited negative values and practices. The fact is they also inherit positive values. This foundation has led us to a Theory of Malay Continuation Cultures. To explain this, let us examines the chronology of some scholarly opinions that support and lead us to this theory.

Taib Osman (1983: 60-61) has encouraged researcher to study the history, because by knowing what has happened in the past then our path forward will be clearer. Taib Osman (1983:143) had analysed Sulatus Salatin and stated that despite what has been narrated by Sulatus Salatin occurred approximately only one hundred years, the time line is short if we compare it with the entire history of the Malay race, but in my opinion, less than a hundred years told by Sulatus-Salatin about the state of Melaka has the most prominent place, because not only Melaka in the fifteenth century to the connector on the history of the Malay culture, rather it be a trendsetter in the Malay politics after that, even though it itself disappears.

The Malacca Sultanate was indeed the basis of the political system and a continuation to the Malay culture today. The institution of the king and the current administrative system is based on the Malacca Sultanate. Furthermore, Taib Osman stated that:

The state of Melaka is a Malay kingdom that stands for almost 115 years in the Malay Peninsular. He is the heritage and connectors Malay civilization and the country that began with Srivijaya and Majapahit and dozens of Malay royalty in Malay archipelago. He was able to give birth to a tradition in the Malay culture itself.

Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:38) also talk about this theory, including negative and positive values. According to him, the Malays practice both these values in their lives. Sulatus-Salatin (2011) have stated many positive values of Malay. For example, the nature of communal work, politeness, respect for parents, trust, defense of friends, honest, virtuous and respect for the rights of neighbors as has been suggested by Islam. All values are still practiced by Malays nowadays. It is similar with negative practices. Practices like slander, bribery, adultery, drinking alcohol and others were documented in Sulatus-Salatin.

This opinion is supported by Chandra Muzaffar (1983:54-55), which says that in the history of Malay culture and other cultures, corruption that existed in the fifteenth century that seems to continue until now. He described it as a dominant act until it became an important aspect of politics and social life, especially involving the relationship between merchants and the elite. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that there are some negative trends, dominated the pessimists are still patterns Malay community life today, which should be abandoned. Strictly speaking, corruption, fraud, money politics, blackmail, insults, slander and other negative practices are already familiar among the Malays (Idris Zakaria 1991: 211).

Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:39) had analysed Sulatus Salatin and said that:

It was clear that the contents of Sulatus Salatin contain too much unhealthy elements from the perspective of Islamic philosophical thought, or other humanitarian understandings that can develop the human soul today.

In line with the explanation above, Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:40,100) further recognizes that such practices should not happen in Muslims community. He in this case said that Sulatus-Salatin (which tells the story of older Malay generation) not only contains "too much" negatives practices but also is an "opiate" and "poison" (1972: 52), "deviate" and even "openly violate the teachings of Islam.

He then argued that slander, corruption, and sex scandal should not be practiced by the Malays who consider themselves Muslims. Indeed, only a few Malays who practice these negative behaviors and most of them are leaders and upper classes elit. Syed Hussein Alatas (1974:58) said if Malays are choosing Islam, they must practice the authentic values of Islam, which is full of tolerance, live peacefully with other people, eradicating poverty and moral corruption, abandoning and condemning all bad elements in their own culture, for the well-being of the future generation.

Therefore, the opinion of Taib Osman who stated that there is a basis of continuation of cultures between the previous generation and the latter generation supported by some thinkers such as Syed Hussein Alatas, Chandra Muzaffar, Mahathir Mohammad (1970:31) and Ramlah Adam who specifically relate the negative practice of Malay community today with the moral problems that occurred during the era of the Malacca Sultanate. However this discussion is not only about negative values. They also inherit positive values. It is clear that some Malays nowadays not only inherited negative values and practices. This foundation has led us to a Theory of Malay Continuation Cultures.

In this regard, Zain Abi (1998: 38) stated that but if you reflect for a moment, see what happens nowadays, we became very sad because of the way we think, the way we act, the whole mind and intellect that shape the Malay worldview or *welstanchaung* remained the same as five hundred years ago, still long as the Malacca Sultanate itself.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the views of scholars such as Taib Osman as stated earlier are well founded. It is clear that some Malays nowadays not only inherited negative values and practices but they also inherit positive values. The basis of history and culture is not to be denied. It was institutionalized in the life of Malays. What distinguishes between an individual is Islam and faith to Allah s.w.t. because Islam civilize a human.

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