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Research Article

The Value of Budi-Islam as the Foundation in Enhancing Ethnic Tolerance in Malaysia: A Case Study among Malay Students at the Public Higher Learning Institution

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Abstract

Budi-Islam is a core value that dominates the actions and mind-set of a Malay. It is revealed whenever a Malay starts to interact either with fellow ethnic members or individuals from different ethnic groups. The emergence of budi in the mind of a Malay is natural, and its presence is strengthened by their customs and surroundings, which are very much influenced by observing the traits of water and paddy. As a result of those interactions, another set of values such as tolerance, respecting others, cooperation, patience, modesty and forgiveness were developed. In order to identify the influence of these values in the Malay society, this study was carried out based on textual analysis among the Malay students at Public Higher Learning Institution. The findings show that the Malay students possess a relatively high level of tolerance based on their activities involving members of society from different religions, ethnicities and cultures.

Keywords: Budi-Islam; Ethnic tolerance; the Malay students

1. Introduction

The study focuses on the core values that influence the conduct, thoughts and actions of a community when interacting among themselves or with members from other ethnics. The core values are the inherited customs or rites, environment and religious beliefs that form the backbone of identity and culture of an ethnicity. The Malays' *budi-Islam* core values, coupled with the influence of their geographical elements and Islamic faith had led to the birth of strong social values like the spirits of tolerance, cooperation, respect, politeness and patience whenever they communicate with their social surroundings. The social values have greatly influenced the Malays' identity which were revealed through historical, qualitative or quantitative studies carried out. To better comprehend the impact of this core values on the present generation, the textual analysis study was used to study on the social interactions of Malay students in Public Higher Learning Institution (PHLI). The secondary data was derived from past research of both qualitative and quantitative findings.

The *budi* core values function as the compass of the Malay's character as claimed by past research (Kadir, 1993) which focused on the influence of social norms in the lives of the Malays. It

encompassed their religion, traditions, culture, language, political structure, economic development and educational system. Based upon these values, the identity of the Malays surfaced, which was materialized in their demeanour. Zainal (1993) also asserted that the dimension of *budi* was apparent from the community's embracing of the values of tolerant, cooperative, respectful, and forgiving. There are also an abundance of proverbs mirroring the Malays' conduct and actions which are synonymous to the Malays, which highlight their civilized mannerism whenever they speak their minds and avoid the use of foul language that could hurt the feelings of others (Norazit, 1997). Even though there are other studies on the influence of *budi* values in the Malay community, but the description is more concentrated on the Malays' sociocultural elements whether in their village surroundings or the transformation into the modern life (Norazit, 2001; Abdullah, 2001). There were also scholars that debated on the Malays' social interactions in the political system and sociocultural platforms (Barnard, 2005; Reid, 2004), business aspects (Richardson et al., 2016) and influence of Islam upon the communal life (Husin, 2022). However, the explanation is more upon the nature of society, without any focus on the *budi-Islam* core values in the social environment of the Malay students. Therefore, the research is bent on analysing the influence of both values among the Malay students in university.

2. Literature Review

The founding of a society's identity is very much reliant upon the core values, social system, and geographical surroundings. According to Broom and Selznick (1977) and Alisjahbana (1963, 1966), core values are referred to as the conscience - the values that influence one's social ideals in steering the character and actions of an individual.

> *'It stands for society and its demands, for all those social norms and prohibitions experienced as the voice of conscience'*

It is present in the mind, without one's awareness (Carolina, 2001), and controls the actions of a person in fulfilling his/her existence in a community. Meanwhile, the purpose of *core values* is the highest fulfilment to be achieved by an ethnic community, as it could provide contentment and happiness to man (Hiriyanna, 1975). Hence, the expression of action and conduct as desired will only surface when there exist a combination of core values and a coveted objective (Carolina, 2001; Alisjahbana, 1966) (objective resulting from the core values). Meanwhile, Immanuel Kant claimed that every man possesses their own set of core values or conscience that provides them with the sense that they are being watched, evaluated, scolded, or praised by an ever-present judge in their soul. The watchful "eye" is not something intentionally created, but exists in a person naturally, that will trail their every move like a shadow. Even if one tries to shake it off, but the core values will rear its head time and time again, and rustles elements of ire if it is side-lined (Alisjahbana, 1966).

Social norms are the set of social 'rules' that provide community members with guidelines on acceptable actions and conduct that are shared among themselves. It is also linked to values (Norazit, 2001), as social rules are guided by social (*ethos*) that are founded from the interactions between *core values* and social norms, which define the differences between good and bad ethics (Kadir, 1993, 2000).

Apart from social norms, physical surroundings also influence the development of core values. It refers to geographical elements that influence the cultural components, such as warm and cool climates are suitable with ethnic communities that are equipped with suitable materials. On the other hand, communities that have been exposed to the cruelty of leaders or natural disasters, they would be endowed with strong emotion, diligence, radical attitude, aggression and sectarian sentiment to fortify their survival skills compared to communities that live among idyllic surroundings (Mahathir, 1970). The combination of social norms and physical surroundings had indirectly influenced some ethnics to embrace an easy-going and tolerant disposition, while there are

also communities which are sectarian and aggressive (Broom & Selznick, 1977). The *core values* instilled in a person would influence their interaction with their environment, including their religion, traditions, language, economy, socio-political ideals and arts, which then steer the formation of a community's identity.

2.1   The core values of budi-Islam as the foundation of the Malays' identity

The *budi* value is the soul that emerged from the combination of *budidaya* or culture. *Budi* is referred to as soul, while *daya* is the physical force. Upon the assimilation, it results in a culture that attributes to all forms of tradition unique to the Malays. The covert intention of *budi* is to retain the peaceful and harmonious ties between men (Zainal, 1995). The phenomenon of *budi* is the inception of ideals formed in the mind, heart and emotion that aspires to attain the good things in life (Kadir, 1993). Through this, the Malays make choices that are aligned to the desires of the ethics, and from the interaction of *budi* and social norms, they will consider their personal needs and those of outsiders in accordance to the saying, 'think of others and pay attention to what others have to say'. The fostering of the thoughtful character had given rise to the establishment of the Malay etiquette that is courteous, cultured and civilized (Zainal, 1995). In determining one's identity when interacting with their own kin or with people from other communities, the *budi* core values stress upon three main principles, that are the intelligent interaction skills when communicating, manners that highlights esteemed character, and choice of discourse that showcases gentle mannerism. Hence, *budi* is purported to refer to a cluster of actions, refined use of language and excellent interaction skills among man by applying considerate reasoning to preserve harmony (Zainal, 1995).

The emergence of *budi* core values can be perceived as a link towards the Customs system that function as the Malays' social norms. It focuses on two main principles, the first is by making the customs as a way of life, or traditions that could be adapted and revived. The customs are not deemed as fundamental in nature as it could undergo transformations, thus categorized as customs and rituals (Norazit, 1997, 2001; Abdullah, 2001; Zainal, 1993; Hooker, 1972). The second caters to the Malays' patterns of character and way of life that have been accumulated over thousands of years that they have been embedded as tradition (Husin, 2011). They are traditional rules or social norms that comprise of ethical and moral codes drawn from the *budi* core values and expressed through social values, and establishment of the Malays' character and mind (Carolina, 2001; Rozehnal & Pepinsky 2019). By embracing the values of *budi,* the Malays are celebrated as a community that is graceful and cultured. Their refined mannerism is always kept in check even when they are faced with conflicts, as claimed by Milner (1982) when he described them as a society that was less inclined to be involved in wars or brutal conflicts.

The *budi-Islam* core values were fortified by the Malay kingdom's geographical elements which was highly influenced by the elements of being surrounded by the sea and dotted by islands (Lim, 2003; Aziz, 2000). The surroundings had strengthened the development of the *budi* core values through their affiliation to the sacred land, hence it was no wonder that their lives were infused by the substance of water and the spirit of the paddy. Naturally, water possesses the elements of grace and modesty, while the paddy portrays the features of humility. For instance, a respected Malay individual is one who is humble, where the more learned he is, the more noble and humble he becomes (Lim, 2003). The Malay Peninsula was blessed with a pleasant climate; and a territory which was shielded from natural disasters. This idyllic atmosphere had indirectly influenced the heart and mind of the native Malays to not perform laborious tasks (Abdul, 1977) as whatever they needed were abundantly available from the fertile lands, calm seas and resource rich forests that protected them from famine (Swettenham, 2003; Abdul, 1977; Winstedt, 1925; Mana, 2005; Mahathir, 1970; Barber, 1972). The pleasant situation not only allowed them the opportunity to fill their free time with lots of fun, entertainment and rest periods (Mahathir, 1970), but also the chance to take it easy to eke out a living. The peaceful and harmonious nature had strengthened the tie between the Malays and their surroundings, which sparked the inner feeling known as *budi*, a way of showing their gratitude to the

surrounding environment.

Based on the details, it could be inferred that the combination of the *budi-Islam* core values and the domain of the Malays had led to the birth of social values like tolerance, cooperation, respect, patience and forgiving. The inculcation of the values had rendered the Malays as being affable in nature, as displayed in the following conceptual framework, which shows the existence of the *budi-Islam* core values which led to the tolerant nature of the Malays' identity.

2.2 The Tolerance value as the basis of the Malays' social interaction and identity

The word "tolerance" is derived from a Latin word "tolerare" which means bearing physical pain, exhaustiveness and coolness. It also refers to one's acceptance and the need to be fair towards individual differences in ideas Schirmer (2012), and respecting the differences in the aspects of culture, traditional practices, history and value system (Paimah & Azmir 2015). The result of the observance had indirectly nurtured the feelings of respect and acceptance of other communities from diverse cultures and backgrounds (Janmaat & Mons 2011).

Preserving the values of tolerance was unveiled in the Malays' pre-independent community, which continues to the present day. From the historical aspect, insurgency by the people towards the ruling aristocrats had never taken place. Only minor skirmishes had erupted among the aristocrats involving the Sultans or ministers due to the squabble for power, or between the aristocrats and the Sultan due to punishments meted out by rulers which were perceived as cruel. Meanwhile, the commoners were fully supportive and loyal to the rulers due to their noble ways, and were adamant to preserve the Malay-Islam values. During the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah, he went out of his comfort zone to disguise himself as a commoner with the mission of protecting Malacca from thieves. It was to ensure the public's safety especially with Malacca's reputation as the centre of trade (Shafie, 1982).

The Malay leaders' gracious manner and tolerance to assist their subjects without regard to their background, continued well into the British era. It included Onn Jaafar's struggles to improve the Malays' economic progress. He claimed that the reason the Malays continued to be poor were due to the British's reluctance in providing financial assistance to reduce their level of poverty. Hence, he organized peaceful dialogues with the British to provide opportunities for the Malays to be part of the state administration, join English schools, and improve their economic standing (Roff, 1975). Even though the criticisms were levelled at the British openly, but Onn rejected the use of force, as he believed that taking a harsh stance would only deprive the ethnic and the motherland further (Ramlah, 1992, 2004). A similar standpoint was embraced by Abdul Razak (Milne & Mauzy 1986), who introduced the New Economic Policy to alleviate poverty among the Malays, especially those residing in remote areas. A few organizations were formed to assist them improve their livelihood, such as Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), *Lembaga Padi Negara* (LPN) and *Lembaga Kemajuan Perikanan Malaysia* (MAJUIKAN) (Aziz 1974). Mahathir Mohamad continued to embody a similar approach to enhance the Malays' stature in science, technology, industry and education from the early days of independence until they succeeded in establishing a new breed of modern Malays and middle-class Malays who were competitive in nature (Ariffin, 2003). By being compassionate, tolerant and considerate towards the subjects, the people responded by showing their loyalty to the leaders. To ensure that they maintained a harmonious existence, any mass rebellious acts towards the rulers or Sultans had never been committed by the Malays (Husin, 2011).

Meanwhile, when the need arose to interact with non-Malay communities, it was apparent that the Malays had never been inclined to showcase any partisan or over-zealous traits. By observing the *budi* core values, Islam, and the Malay environment, the people had turned into open-minded and tolerant individuals when they interacted with other communities. In fact, their readiness in respecting and accepting different ethnic traditions were lauded by the non-Malays (Syed Alwi, 1965).

According to Luis (1993), and the values of respecting and tolerating among the Muslim Malays had rendered them to be different from Arab Muslims who were deemed as pessimistic and stern towards foreigners. These noble values had even allowed other Muslim ethnics to be accepted as part of the Malays, such as those from Arabian and Indian origin (Mohd. Aris, 1985). The Chinese also acknowledged that the Malays' highly tolerant nature had provided them with the opportunity to open up settlements across the country. In fact, it had even influenced some Chinese migrants who had resided in the Malay Peninsula since the 3rd Century to assimilate the Malay culture, resulting in the birth of the Baba Nyonya community (Tan, 1975).

> *'...Malaya opens its door to the world with the liberal hospitality scarcely known elsewhere. The hospitality is abused when groups of any kind seek to establish here little China, England, or anything else... Malaya is not part of China...'*

The Malays' highly tolerant nature was also present during the reign of Raja Brooke in Sarawak. Their gentle manners were highly praised by Brooke's wife, Margaret. The Malays' tolerant, cooperative, and accommodating traits had touched her, especially during her grieving period of mourning the death of her child. It was documented that her frustration of the inability to bury her child within a church cemetery compound dissipated when the Sarawak Malay noble men gathered together and worked side by side to bury the child within the castle grounds. Their collaboration had indeed removed her negative perception that Muslims were fanatics and had no compassion towards other religions. Apart from that, she also regarded the Sarawak womenfolk to be graceful, as they were respectful towards their guests without discriminating them according to their ethnic, especially when they held feasts. Their courtesy made it easy for the English officers' wives to befriend them, compared to ladies from other ethnicity (Brooke, 1986).

The Malays' tolerant nature is highly valued in executing their responsibilities as a worker. Malaysia's participation in various United Nations' peacekeeping missions often received positive feedback from locales, like in Lebanon and Congo. The main factor was that, the mainly Malay Malaysian officers were unprejudiced, easy to befriend and ever-ready to adopt local customs. For instance, the main success of the Malaysian Battalion (MALBATT) officers in their peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu, Somalia, was due to their tolerance with the Somalian way of life, and went out of their way to buy weapons, arrows, and craft products; or when their vehicles were stopped or thrown with stones. With their understanding of the people's unfortunate level of poverty, they managed to form good cooperation with the local community (Husin & Nordin 2020).

3. Methodology

The qualitative research is a type of social study that centres upon the manner's human interpret things and explores their logical experience, including their home surroundings (Holloway, 1997). It is a logical step towards understanding a situation based upon unique contexts and interaction skills. The study did not attempt to forecast the future, but aimed to interpret the phenomena taking place and what might take place in the future. Hence, the research applied the triangulation method which is the combination of more than two techniques to collect data and information in order to achieve the objectives. According to Potter (1996), triangulation is a process of reinforcing the findings of a study from qualitative instrument by re-examining the data. The process involves the combination of various approaches to collect data and information to verify and validate the interpretation of a study. This study also applied various resources to obtain data and information by employing the library method, interview with students, and analysis of documents to assist the researcher in ensuring that the findings would have high validity and reliability. Hence, the study utilized the triangulation approach by using the qualitative method, which was an important aspect of the study to implement comparative measures and cross examination on the various data and information to ascertain their validity. Apart from that, the study categorized the data and

information into two sources, which were primary and secondary data. According to Hinds, Vogel, Clarke-Steffen, Szabo and Strang (1997), an analysis that employs secondary data involves the use of available data to study something different from previous studies. It means that a new study can be conducted to look into new research problems or investigate alternative perspectives based on a similar study.

In this research, the library method was implemented to scour for secondary data and information, which were retrieved from published documents like books and articles related to core values, the Malay rituals, history and quantitative data of the PHLI Malay students' interaction. The published sources include 'the place of values in the behavioral sciences, Indian conception of values; Values as integrating forces in personality, society and culture; *Budi* as the Malay mind: A philosophical study of Malay ways of reasoning and emotion in *peribahasa*; *Budi-Islam*; It's Role in the construction of Malay Identity in Malaysia; The British presence in the Malay world: A meeting of civilizational traditions, understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of diverse modern identities; Contesting Malayness: Malay identity across boundaries; *Adat Melayu Mengikut Perspektif Orang Islam di Malaysia*; The practice of cultural tolerance among peacekeeping operation; The Malay dilemma, Malaysia, tradition, modernity and Islam; *Magnitud toleransi and urbanisasi dalam kalangan pelajar pelbagai etnik: Kajian perbandingan di Kuala Lumpur dan Kuantan*; Ethnic tolerance among students of Public Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia and *Respons pelajar Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam terhadap pluraliti agama di Malaysia*'. All these publications consisted of critical and comprehensive discussions on the emergence of core values and their impact on society, especially the *budi-Islam* core values. As the study was contemporary in nature, any changes and developments to the geopolitical landscape, including political scenario and latest developments in the armed forces must be followed closely to ensure that the data were collected swiftly and accurately. Meanwhile, in collecting the primary data, the study has combined two techniques - by conducting interview sessions and analysis of documents

4. Results and Findings - The Effects of Budi-Islam on Ethnic Tolerance among Malay Students

4.1 A study on tolerance level among students in PHLI

The case study focused on the PHLI students especially the Malay students since there were a number of past research conducted on ethnic tolerance among students regarding the issues of religion (Mohd Farid & Khadijah, 2017; Siti Khatijah & Fadzli, 2017), ethnicity (Zulkernain & Husin, 2018; Nazri & Mansor, 2014) and social interaction in the context of urbanization (Paimah & Mohd Azmir, 2011). Meanwhile, the process of selecting the respondents was almost similar, as third year students from various ethnic groups were chosen as they were considered to have reached the level of maturity and to have good socializing experience with friends from different faiths, traditions, culture and language (Zulkernain & Husin, 2018).

In the selection of PHLI, some researchers opted to choose the earlier-established universities, which are listed as Malaysian research universities like Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) (Mohd Farid & Khadijah, 2017; Nazri & Mansor, 2014). There were also studies that included Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) to measure the level of tolerance among the northern residents and also students on urbanization (Paimah & Mohd Azmir, 2011). On the whole, the picking of the PHLIs was significant as all of the institutes were the main university of choice among students from diverse ethnics, religions, traditions, culture and language. Hence, the study's selection of third year Malay students in PHLI was fitting as the third-year student population came from diverse Malaysian plural society. The findings would offer an insight on the influence of *budi-Islam* core values in steering the Malay students' tolerance level when interacting with students from different ethnicity on campus.

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4.2   The influence of budi-Islam on ethnic tolerance among Malay students at PHLI

To ascertain the influence of *budi-Islam* core values on the tolerance values among Malay students in PHLI, the study analyzed the findings of past research conducted among the Malay students. In Zulkernain and Husin's (2018) study on the level of ethnic tolerance among students in UM, UKM dan UPM, the findings showed that the Malays notched the highest level of tolerance compared to others ethnicities. Their character and actions had a strong affiliation with the Malays' customary system and social norms. It meant that they were more open-minded to socialize with people from different ethnics who had contrasting religions, customs, culture and language (Husin, 2011). Nonetheless, others non-Malay students also displayed good tolerance position whenever they interacted with friends from different religions and ethnics as they had no problems to discuss about issues on ethnic ties.

Even though the Malays had no reservations in accepting people from different ethnics, however, when it came to issues related to Islam, they were confined to adhere to their religious conventions, such as in the sharing of rooms with friends from different ethnics. It was related to the *budi-Islam* core values that influenced the way they behaved and acted when they communicated with their college mates. This is reflective of the findings in the study by Nazri and Mansor (2014) which discovered that only few numbers of Malay students were prepared to share a room with a person from a different religion, compared to others non-Malay students. A similar scenario was observed when they were asked on whether they would pay visits to the house of friends from different religions. Most of the Malay students are quite hesitant to visit non-Malay counterpart as to avoid matters that are against *Syariah*. According to Qaradawi (1985), Islam does not restrict the sharing of a home with non-Muslim individuals. However, if a Muslim was influenced by their non-Muslim counterparts' way of life like not wearing Islamic-compliant dress, consuming alcohol, or mingling freely with the opposite sex, then it was regarded as sinful to live in the same house. The same goes with the visits made to the homes of non-Muslim friends. If the house was found to be indulging elements that were against the teachings of Islam, like serving alcoholic beverages and socializing freely with the opposite sex, then it was also considered unlawful.

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Meanwhile, from the aspect of sharing political powers and business ventures, it was found that the Malay students were more willing to share, compared to the non-Malays. It could be inferred that the assimilation of the *budi-Islam* into their way of life had nurtured the Malays to be more charitable, and more compelled to share powers with the non-Malay communities. This stance continues up to the present day, and had undoubtedly influenced the perspectives of the Malay students. The research by Nazri and Mansor (2017) showed that most of the students agreed to the power sharing concept, and felt that it was a healthy political feat. In the matter of business, they also

agreed with the sharing concept as it was seen as an alternative to reinforce the country's economy. Their actions and attitude were closely related to the values of compromise and tolerance which had been present in the Malays' culture, without any prejudice towards race or religion. This is due to the Malays' noble ideals to preserve peace and harmony in the society (Shaharuddin, 1988)

5. Conclusion

The inculcation of the *budi-Islam* as the core values in the lives of the Malays had resulted in the observance of the values among the Malay students in PHLIs. A majority of Malay students were found to be embracing the values of tolerance when interacting with fellow students from different ethnics whether in joining cultural activities, sharing of political powers, or developing business projects. The situation allowed them to be easily accepted by students from different religions. However, when it came to religious issues, the Malays were inclined to adhere to the Islamic rules and laws as stated in the al-Quran and al-Sunnah. Hence, to avoid any misinterpretation among students from different religions and ethnics, every party should strive to understand the traditions and practices of each ethnic group that share the same college, organization, or residential area. The core values of *budi-Islam* had indeed influenced the Malays' conduct and actions, which were not just found to be present among university students, but also in organizations and associations managed by the Malay individuals.

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