

UKM Teaching and Learning Congress 2011

The importance of learning islamic history and civilization of Malaysia in the building of human capital and identity of the muslim society in Malaysia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study the importance of learning Islamic History and Civilization in Malaysia for human capital building and identification of the muslim society in Malaysia. Its aim is to clarify the importance of this course, specifically at the Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, and the need to produce graduates who are conversant in this field in order that they may utilise it in their lives regardless of whichever field they venture into. This study uses the library research method by analysis and evaluation with an argumentative as well as narrative approach. The results of study finds that knowledge and conversance in this field is integral in the formation of human capital and identity of the muslim society in Malaysia. Knowledge and conversance in this field would enable Malays to know the 'true' history of the muslim ummah in Malaysia. This knowledge is crucial to help them form and build a Malay-muslim generation in Malaysia, strongly attached to Malay traditions which have once brought the muslims to the pinnacle of success.

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Keywords: History; human capital; Islamic civilization; Malay; muslim generation; muslim society; true history

1. Introduction

The course, Islamic History and Civilization in Malaysia, was first offered to undergraduates in the 1st semester of Session 2000/2001. This course is an improvement on the course, History of Islam in Malaysia. It is a compulsory course at the Department of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization in line with the objective of the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FIS) to produce graduates who are truly knowledgeable, generally in the field of Islamic studies, and specifically in the field of Islamic history, and who are able to use their knowledge to guide society. Through this course, the faculty would be able to produce society which truly understands Islam, possesses sound ways of thinking, awareness and realization as well as feelings of responsibility to the country based on Islamic principles,

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philosophy and thinking so that a disciplined society is formed (Guide for Undergraduates 2000-2001). This course is important in the formation of a generation with a strong Islamic identity and character because transparent exposure to the ummah's history and civilization will give them awareness of past history which enable them to recognise their self-potential as well as to foster the spirit of love, pride and loyalty to the country. The emphasis on Islamic history and civilization in Malaysia is very important as knowledge of history is essential for a nation to chart its future life. The importance of learning history cannot be denied because a nation or ummah may learn its lessons from history so that adverse incidents or matters may serve as a warning.

This field is important in order that the human capital formed possesses the knowledge and conversance of the history and achievements of the muslim ummah in Malaysia as that is the true picture of their history. They are responsible for re-evaluating history in planning and producing an Islamic generation with a strong identity when facing the many challenges of a globalized era. It is only with knowledge of Islamic history and civilization in Malaysia that the Muslim ummah, specifically the Malay race of Malaysia will know the history of their race. They cannot deny Islam's role in their lives. All matters are viewed through Islamic law such as forbidden or permissible; obligatory or optional; and disapproved or commendable. Certainly there is a 'virtual' reward or punishment which cannot be visible, that is, merit and sin. The muslim ummah should be concerned with the concepts of mercy and plague or calamity (punishment) from Allah SWT. Thus, this field is important to be emphasized at higher learning level to produce human capital which is able to make history as a guide in re-building the position and strength of his race and country (Abd Rahim 1999). Some even hold the opinion that history is like a basic mould for the young generation's life (Abdul Razaq 2007).

2. Malay-Islam History Through One's Own Eyes

As a muslim, whether young or old, illiterate or educated, there is one thing we must sincerely admit, that is, the reality that we are muslims. The Malay race has long embraced Islam and their history is a picture of the reality of their lives as muslims. As muslims, do we desire to see our history through other people's eyes? Would a race recognise the real faces of their ancestors through the interpretation of others' eyes? How should we deny the influence and status of Islam in the history of the Malay race which has lasted for hundreds of years? Thus, Islamic history and civilization in Malaysia is very important for the Malay race to recognise the real faces of their ancestors. The history of the Malay race must be seen with their own eyes so that the vast confusion which appears in their history may be resolved. How should the history of the Malay race be used to arouse national spirit and patriotism in the new generation (Abd Rahim 1999) when such history is seen from the eyes of others who are negative and scornful? Western scholars who do not understand Malay culture give a very unsatisfactory and incorrect view of local history (Abd Rahim 1999), and we blindly follow their theories and opinions. Are the new generation Malays proud of their ancestors who are constantly associated with being dirty and lazy? Are they proud of their ancestors who are considered bandits and pirates?

The history of Malaysia or the Malay race specifically, should not be seen merely with Malay eyes but must be viewed through Malay-muslim eyes. Then many differences will show up because the Malay race of the past had charted history based not only on tradition but also on Islamic teachings. In some situations, the Malay customs are a mixture of Malay traditions and Islamic precepts. At times, Islamic law itself was adopted as Malay tradition. When this happened, if seen through the Malay eyes only, the true side of Malaysian history still remains to be seen, remains blur or, even sadder, deviates from the true story. Take for example, the issue of Malay opposition to British action in repealing the traditional land system or procedure. In the Malay customary land system, the right of ownership of the Malay society is obtained by exploring the jungle, clearing and cultivating the land. The Malays did not have to pay anything for the land (Rahimah 2000). This was the land system practised by the Malays before the Westerners came. This system was regarded by the British as backward and was replaced by a more systematic land procedure. Some of the Malayan population rose up against the abolition of the Malay traditional land system. Without Islam, opposition to the repeal of the traditional system would have been regarded as only a normal opposition to a change from the old to a new system. It would be a matter of course that something obsolete or backward be replaced by a more suitable new system.

However, on comparison of the traditional land system to the Islamic land system, it is clear that the traditional land system originated from the latter (Ridzuan 1994). Thus, when viewed through the Malay-muslim eyes, the factor of the Malay opposition to the British system changes. Their struggle was not merely a normal opposition but

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