

**AN EXPLORATION OF MALAYNESS IN
MARONG MAHAWANGSA
(THE KEDAH ANNALS)**

*EKSPLORASI KEMELAYUAN DALAM TEKS
MARONG MAHAWANGSA
(THE KEDAH ANNALS)*

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Abstract

The paradigm of Malayness in Malaysian literature is generally understood to refer to a situation where a person is defined under the element of ethnicity. Yet, it is hypothesised that there are still many elements which need to be included before it can be acknowledged and accepted that the paradigm of Malayness focuses on ethnicity only. This paper therefore attempts to explore the paradigm of Malayness in *Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals)* – a traditional Malay literary text translated by James Low (1849)– by focussing on six conceptual elements of Malayness, namely the Malay language, Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat/culture*, ethnicity and identity (Ida B. B., 2010). The objectives of this paper are to examine the portrayals of the Malay rulers centring on ethnicity and identity and to explore the depictions of Islam and the Malay rulers, in particular to the paradigm of Malayness. To achieve this, a textual analysis is undertaken as the methodology by extracting all the excerpts in the text in relation to the paradigm of Malayness, which is used as the conceptual framework. The findings show that Islam, the Malay rulers and identity play a more important role in the text compared to the other elements. It is suggested then that the outcomes from this study could open up further discussions on the aesthetic values as well as the usefulness of translated literary texts and can contribute to the scholarship on traditional Malay literary texts to be studied as part of the syllabus in Malaysian literature.

Keywords: Malayness, Islam, the Malay rulers, identity.

Abstrak

Paradigma kemelayuan di dalam kesusasteraan Malaysia secara amnya diketahui umum merujuk kepada situasi di mana seseorang itu diertikan di bawah rumpun etnik. Namun begitu, terdapat beberapa hipotesis yang perlu diambil kira sebelum ianya boleh diterima pakai dan diakui bahawa paradigma kemelayuan hanyalah merujuk pada rumpun etnik semata-mata. Oleh itu, kajian ini merujuk kepada eksplorasi paradigma Kemelayuan dalam teks Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals) – sebuah teks Melayu tradisional yang telah dialih bahasa oleh James Low (1849) – dengan memberi tumpuan kepada enam konsep elemen kemelayuan iaitu bahasa Melayu, Islam, para pemimpin Melayu, adat, etnik dan identiti (Ida B. B., 2010). Objektif kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji deskripsi Islam dan juga para pemimpin Melayu; khususnya dalam konteks paradigma kemelayuan. Untuk mencapai matlamat ini, analisis tekstual telah dijalankan sebagai metodologi dengan mengekstrak petikan-petikan teks yang berkaitan dengan paradigma kemelayuan yang digunakan sebagai konsep rangka kerja. Hasil daripada kajian ini mendapati bahawa Islam, raja-raja Melayu serta identiti memainkan peranan yang lebih penting di dalam teks berbanding elemen lain yang dinyatakan di atas. Secara kesimpulannya, hasil daripada kajian ini memberi nafas baru pada perbincangan serta dapat menerapkan nilai estetik dan juga mampu menerapkan faedah penggunaan teks literasi yang telah dialih bahasa. Selain itu, ianya juga mampu memberi idea baru pada pengajian teks Melayu tradisional untuk dijadikan sebahagian daripada silibus kesusasteraan Malaysia.

Kata kunci: *Kemelayuan, Islam, raja-raja Melayu, identiti.*

Introduction

Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals) is a traditional Malay literary text believed to have been written in the 16th century. It is a narrative on the lineage of Malay rulers of the Sultanate of Kedah, a state on the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia, as well as the history of the Sultanate of Kedah written from the beginning of the kingdom which started from Raja Merong Mahawangsa in about 16th century ago till the era of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah II in 1843.

The objective of our paper is drawn from discourse on the Malay World; defined based on a cultural perspective as outlined by Kratz (2009: 105), ‘the Malay World comprises most parts of island Southeast Asia where there are Muslims and where the Malay language has been used for centuries in diplomacy, teaching and trade; or, in other words, where a knowledge of a range of registers of Malay was essential in order to communicate’. As Kratz describes it, the term also refers to a Malay World ‘as a cultural region’, one which ‘cuts across and negates colonial and all of today’s national borders’. As a result, there exist different meanings of Malay as viewed by scholars from different schools of thoughts. For example, “There was a time, particularly in rural areas where the population was overwhelmingly and uniformly *Melayu jati* and relatively untouched by immigration, when any convert to Islam was said to *masuk Melayu* (‘became a Malay’) (Nagata 1974: 339).” Another scholar, Syed Husin Ali (2008: 1), has interpreted the meaning of Malay as,

“Taking a wide social and cultural definition, the term refers not only to those who are settled in Peninsula, but also includes those in the larger area of the Malay Archipelago, embracing the Malay Peninsula and thousands of islands which today form the Republics of Indonesia and the Philippines. Although they are divided into many sub-groups, and perhaps as many dialects, linguistic and cultural experts always consider them as belonging to the same stock, known as the Malays or Malayo-Indonesians.”

The tool that will be used to discover the paradigm of Malayness in this paper is derived from a socio-anthropological perspective first conceptualised by the prominent Malaysian social anthropologist, Shamsul Amri Baharuddin or better known as Shamsul A. B. While Shamsul has conceptualised Malayness as an authority-defined social reality as promulgated in the Malaysian Constitution of 1957, we have chosen to use as our research tool a conceptual framework formulated by Ida Baizura Bahar (2010) in her unpublished PhD thesis which expanded and challenged Shamsul’s concept of Malayness: that the paradigm of Malayness in literature is an everyday-defined social reality comprising six elements namely the Malay language, Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat*/culture, ethnicity and identity. However, for the purpose of our paper, we have decided to focus on only five elements as our conceptual framework namely Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat*/culture, ethnicity and identity. We have decided not to focus on the Malay language, not

because it is not important, but because it is a foregone conclusion that the Malay language is an important element because the text has been written in the Malay language anyway.

To begin with, the concept of Malayness has always been associated with the notion of a person who is born as Malay in ethnicity. However, the definition of Malayness is hypothesised to be wide-ranging due to the scenario that the understanding of Malay identity seems to range within this region; for example, South-East Asia to the Australia and it spreads till the continent of Africa. Therefore, when a person is described within the paradigm of Malayness, it is necessary to understand that the paradigm is generally understood to refer to a situation where a person is defined under the element of ethnicity. However, it has been hypothesised that there are more elements needed in order for a person to be described under the paradigm of Malayness. Consequently, this paper seeks to explore the paradigm of Malayness in the translated version of the traditional Malay literary text, *Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals)*.

The paradigm of Malayness in *Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals)*

We begin our discussion with the first element in the paradigm of Malayness which is Islam. In the original traditional text of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, the family lineage of Raja Merong Mahawangsa till Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah is presented in page xxi (refer to Appendix I). However, as we can see, the first six generations in the lineage are not described as Muslims due to the reason that their names seem to differ from the rest. Furthermore, another evidence that show that the first six generations are not Muslims is presented in Chapter 13;

‘What is now the religion of this country,’ said the Sheikh addressing the raja? ‘My religion,’ replied Raja Pra Ong Mahawangsa, ‘and that of all my subjects is that which had been handed down to us by the people of old, the old men of former days. We all worship idols.’ ‘Has Your Highness then never heard of Islamism and the Koran, which descended from God to Mahomed, whose tomb is at Medina, which has superseded all others, leaving them in them possession of the devil. The devil could not act as he does if Koran was

generally known.” I pray you then, it this be true,’ said the raja, ‘to instruct and enlighten us in this new faith.’ Sheikh Abdulla, in a transport of holy fervour at this request of raja, hugged, embraced, and kissed the body of His Highness. He then instructed the raja in the *shahadat*, or the creed. (p.178)

As seen in the excerpt above, there are various references to Islam, *Mahomed*, *Koran* as well as *shahadat*. As stated by B. Aisha Lemu,

Islam is a submission to Allah. Submission means to give oneself physically, emotionally, and spiritually in the service of Allah. A Muslim is one who submits to Allah...it follows that the message brought by Prophet Muhammad PBUH...” (p.1)

One of the greatest desires of a Muslim is to visit Madinah...The visit to Madinah is not a part of *Hajj* rites, yet every *Hajj* feels his mission incomplete without a visit to this “Illuminated City” (Madinah al-Munawwarah).”(p.195)

As we have defined what references to *Allah*, *Mahomed* as well as *Medina* in the excerpt mean, we now attempt to define what *Koran* and *shahadat*/Creed mean. According to Yusuf Al-Qardawi;

The Islamic creed is the seal of all heavenly inspired systems of belief. It is substantiated and elucidated by the Holy Qur’an and the practice and examples of the Messenger of Allah. It is embodied in the belief in Allah, in the Day of Judgement, in the angels...” (p.43)

On the other hand, according to Abdullah Yusuf Ali;

The Qur’an,...is a Book of broad general principles rather than of legal minutiae. The Book’s main aim is to expound, clearly and adequately, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Islamic programme for life. It seeks to consolidate these by appealing both to man’s mind and to his heart. Its method of guidance for practical Islamic life does not consists of laying down minutely detailed laws and regulations. It prefers to outline the basic framework for each aspect of human

activity, and to lay down certain guidelines within which man can order his life in keeping the Will of God.”

As we recall the excerpt above, we can argue that Islam is presented in the text as part of the paradigm of Malayness due to references to the various concepts in Islam. Therefore, it complements the concept because, from a religious point of view, Malayness refers to those who are Malay speakers and, at the same time, are Muslims.

The next element which we will discuss is the Malay rulers. As stated in Article 38 of the 1957 Constitution of Malaysia, the Supreme Head of Federation is known as *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* who is also the head of the Conference of Rulers (*Majlis Raja-Raja*). However, Malayness in this aspect refers to the idea of the supreme institution of monarchy consisting of the Malay rulers, other words, known as *sultans*. The understanding of Malayness in relation to the Malay rulers in this context refers to the one defined by Ida Baizura Bahar (2010), it is,

understood to refer to those who uphold the principle of loyalty to the Malay rulers in the form of a diabolical relationship between the Malay rulers and the subjects, known as *daulat* and *derhaka*.

Here, *daulat* is described as a situation whereby a person obeys all the orders summoned by the Malay ruler while *derhaka* is defined as when the order has not been obeyed or carried out.

Before we begin our discussion on the Malay rulers, it is imperative for us to expand on a story in relation to the conceptual element of the Malay rulers. The family lineage of Raja Merong Mahawangsa shows the existence of one of the rulers by the name of Raja Ong Maha Perita Deria, or also known as Raja Bersiung, in the 5th generation. Indeed, there is a story behind why he was nicknamed as Raja Bersiung. He was known as a person who loved to eat *sayur lechek* or vegetable soup. Unfortunately, one day, his cook accidentally cut her finger and a single drop of blood dropped in the soup during preparation. When Raja Bersiung was having his meal, he realised that the soup tasted more delicious than before. Therefore, he summoned the cook to reveal the reason why the vegetable soup tasted better than the previous ones.

In relation to the concepts of *daulat* and *derhaka*, the cook has been ordered by the ruler to deliver the truth about the recipe and, in the excerpt below, it shows the idea of *daulat* in which the cook obeys and tells the truth about the ‘secret ingredient’ she had included in the vegetable soup. The excerpt extracted below illustrates the confession of the cook to Raja Bersiung,

“Where is the cook who dressed the curry?’ When the cook came before him, he enjoined her to faithfully tell him with what condiments she had seasoned the curry he had just eaten..., ‘If you do not fully acquaint me, you die instantly by the edge of this sword. The cook, who was a woman, reflected in her mind, that death would be certain whether she told the truth or nor, and that it would be best to speak the truth at once, which she accordingly did, throwing herself on the raja’s mercy...’ Then,’ said the raja, ‘take this cup and, after filling with his blood, bring it back quickly to me.” (p. 118).

Next, the third element which we will discuss is *adat/culture*. The definition of *adat/culture* as formulated by Ida Baizura Bahar is,

“Malayness is understood to refer to anyone who lives a way of life based on a set of customs, system of beliefs as well as substratum of older beliefs and a cultural heritage which is exclusive to, and have continued to exist among the Malays.”

To make a connection with *adat/culture* in the text, we need to return to the story of Raja Bersiung. Here, Raja Bersiung is then attacked by his *rakyat* due to his abuse of power, namely to order the deaths of his subjects simply to fulfil his gluttonous desire and viciousness by killing the subjects; therefore, he has to go on exile. While he is in exile, he meets a lady and, later, they have a son. As a result, the kingdom of Kedah no longer has a ruler; therefore the Queen of Raja Bersiung and four other ministers order the astrologers in their kingdom to search for any suitable person to rule the kingdom. While the astrologers are performing their duties, they discover a person who is seen as the most appropriate one to replace the ruler,

“The astrologers opened, accordingly, their book and inspected it, then they raised their heads. ‘Well,’ said the

raja, ‘what is the result?’ ‘O Shah *i alum*,’ replied the diviner, ‘the person who should become the Raja of Keddah is living in that country. He alone must be raja, no one else in or out of Keddah should be raised to that dignity for he is of true lineage, and should any other person be placed in that government...’ (p.133).

After they have found the right candidate, who happens to be Raja Bersiung’s biological son with the lady, the four ministers then dress the boy as according to the attire of an appropriate ruler. The excerpt below illustrates the physical appearance of the son of Raja Bersiung as well as the manner in which to dress a ruler,

“Now, the boy, the son of Raja Bersiyong, was in the house at the time, but his mother was in the betel garden and her parents were in the rice field. So, Kamala Jauhari thrust her trunk into the house to take out the boy, and he, seeing this movement and being loosely clothed, quickly wrapped around his loins the cloth of forty cubits in length which has belonged to his father [Raja Bersiung].”

The *mantris* had the boy dressed quickly in royal robes and they put on his head a crown of gold set with precious stone, such as great rajas were wont to appear in, all which much improved his otherwise handsome features and person.”(p.135)

To understand the importance of the excerpt above, it needs to be mentioned that a person will be regarded as a ruler when s/he is dressed in appropriate attire as befits a king in addition to speaking using proper royal language and is the descendant of a ruler. According to Milner (p.60), the Malay ruler,

“...was exceptional too in his manner of dress and accommodation, the use of a special language in conversing with him, and the stress on his descent through a male-line – while the wider community was generally characterized by bilateral (or cognatic) descent, which gives importance to both genders and reduces the significance of genealogy.”

The next element which we will analyse is identity. According to Ida Baizura Bahar (2010);

“By identity, Malayness is understood to refer to those who display a sameness in terms of characteristics, which makes the entity of paradigm *Kemelayuan* (hence, the paradigm of Malayness) definable and recognisable, covering both tangible and intangible ideas, knowledge, experiences, expertise, skills and awareness of anything exclusive to the heritage of the Malays and the Malay World, including in the form of proverbs and sayings, music and songs, traditional sports and games as well as the performing arts.”

With reference to the text, there are a few examples in the text which demonstrate this idea of sameness in terms of characteristics which embody the paradigm of Malayness. This can be seen from the text when the children of Raja Merong Mahapusidat are summoned by their father to found a new kingdom. The excerpt below shows this idea of sameness;

“Raja Marong Maha Posidat gave orders, very soon after this project of settling his son had ben gained, that his four ministers should collect a body of armed men, horses and elephants, with every requisite for another expedition...The expedition passed through the deep forests and over hills, passing the time in all kinds of amusement and sports of the field and, when it reached a deep pond or pool, the people stopped to fish. At length the colony reached a large river which descended to the sea.”(p. 91)

“...I desire to raise my daughter to the dignity of a raja and to settle her in a government...They soon entered upon a wild, woody tract, covered with primeval forest of a great extent and unfrequented; then having quitted that broad level country, the elephant led the expedition over hills and mountains. When the colony had approached near to the sea there and had arrived at a large river which emptied itself into the sea...”

As seen in the two excerpts above, this idea of sameness is depicted whereby two children of Raja Merong Mahapusidat are portrayed using the same techniques when they are about to found a new kingdom.

Finally, the last element to be analysed is ethnicity, defined by Ida Baizura Bahar as,

“Malayness here is understood to refer to *suku bangsa* (ethnic group) whose Bahasa Melayu is its *bahasa ibunda* (first language) who in the end becomes a Muslim. Malayness in this aspect also understood to refer to the understandings of the terms race as well as *bangsa* which represent the Malay as a group of people.”

In the text, His Highness is not depicted as ethnically Malay. However, through his marriage to one of the Malayan raja daughter, he is further described in the text as being Malay in ethnicity. The excerpt below shows that the king is married to a daughter of a Malayan raja; therefore, their descendants are now described as Malay in ethnicity:

“Now, His Highness had married a lady, the daughter of a Malayan raja (still no name).” (p. 116)

Conclusion

All the five conceptual elements which comprise the paradigm of Malayness - Islam, the Malay rulers, *adat*/culture, ethnicity and identity - have been discussed together with excerpts taken from the text and the findings demonstrate that the paradigm of Malayness has been depicted clearly through the text. The findings also show that Islam, the Malay rulers and identity play a more important role in the text compared to the other elements.

In terms of ethnicity, the connection between the Malayness elements and the Malay rulers is very limited because it can only be evidenced from one single perspective which is the marriage between one of the Kings (where his name is not mentioned) with a daughter of one of the Malay rulers. The reason why this example has been described as part of the ethnicity is due to the reason that the definition of ethnicity formulated by Ida Baizura Bahar is based on the understandings of *bangsa*. In relation to *bangsa*, through the marriage to

a Malay princess, the sultan has now been described as belonging to the Malay community. When it comes to identity, the same finding is found where there is only one element that can be used as part of the conclusion. As recalled, identity has been described as an element that portrays sameness. However, the sameness that appears in the text does not meet the understanding of Malayness for identity.

Indeed, Islam and the Malay rulers are the two biggest contributions in the text whereby most of the discussions focus on these two elements. To begin with, there is a lot of emphasis on the Islamic faith in the text, where, in the original itself, there is one chapter which has been allocated on the narrative pertaining to the coming of Islam into the region. For the translated text, a few chapters have been allocated to discuss about this issue as well. Thus, the representation of Islam in the text can be said to be in great detail because a few chapters have allocated to this and has been discussed in great length as we have presented.

The Malay rulers in this text have been depicted as a group of people who govern the kingdom, firstly, without any proper religion, especially to the Islamic faith as a guidance. Then, there is the narrative on a cruel king, namely Raja Bersiung, to a ruler who transformed himself and the whole kingdom to be better and, last but not least, the narrative of a ruler who is concerned about the future, namely Sultan Muazzam Syah ibnu Sultan Muzalfal Syah. This particular ruler had undertaken upon himself to issue an edict to the intellects in his kingdom to record all events that had taken place in this kingdom in order for future generations to have better understandings about the kingdom.

Last but not least, it is suggested then that the outcomes from this study could open up further discussions on the aesthetic values as well as the usefulness of translated literary texts and can contribute to the scholarship on traditional Malay literary texts to be studied as part of the syllabus in Malaysian literature.

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APPENDIX I

PENGENALAN lxxi



Lampiran II: Jurai keturunan Raja-raja Kedah menurut *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*.