The Influence of *Budi*-Islam Values on Tunku Abdul Rahman (Tunku) Leadership

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Abstract

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The objective of the research is to analyse the influence of the *budi*-Islam values in shaping the culture and identity of the Malay community, especially on the aspects of politics and leadership in the Federated Malay States. Literature reveals that both the values play a prominent role in moulding the mentality, actions and conduct of the Malay community. The emergence of the elements of *budi* was a natural progression within the Malay society, and it was reinforced with the social norms and surroundings which were inspired by the philosophies of calmness of water and humble spirits of the paddy. The arrival of Islam to this part of the world further emphasized the status of *budi,* as the Malay traditions and Islamic teachings share various similar principles. The *budi*-Islam facets engaged in shaping the Malay identity were articulated through the social values of compromise, respect, cooperation, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and patience. The findings from textual analysis and history reveal that the elements of *budi*-Islam hugely influenced Tunku Abdul Rahman's (Tunku) style of leadership and beliefs. His affable manner and considerate nature when communicating with the multi-racial society, was effective in maintaining harmony. The stance taken by Tunku had protected the continuation of the Malay Political Supremacy and Malay-Islamic values, by going to the discussion table with the British colonial masters instead of launching a war against them as instigated by Chin Peng. Tunku was equally instrumental in averting Lee Kuan Yew's provocation, who proposed the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia.

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1. Introduction

Every community in the Malaysian society has their own distinctive traditions and culture. It is important to identify the traditions practiced by people, so that important elements such as religion, politics, language, education, economics and culture could be distinguished in the process of developing the unique identity of a nation. The article will discuss on the position of *budi*-Islam as the

building blocks of the cultural development and identity of the Malays, especially in the arena of politics and leadership, by focusing on the administration practices of Tunku.

An earlier research that underlines the roles of *budi*-Islam in the Malay culture was a study by Zainal Kling (1978, 1993, 1990), *'Adat, Sistem Nilai Tradisi Melayu, Melayu Baru: Pencerahan Adat dan Adab dan Hukum Adat Melayu'*. Even though the article does narrate the influence of *budi*, but the gist is more on the elaboration of the element and does not link up with politics and Malay leadership. Next, Wan Abdul Kadir's (1993) write-up on *budi* highlights the social values related to the elements of compromise, tolerance, respect, modesty, and forgiveness, but the ties to the Malay's culture and characteristics are not explained. The same goes to the research by Lim Kim Hui (2003) entitled '*Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study of Malay Ways of Reasoning and Emotion in Peribahasa*', that elaborates on the roles of *budi* through proverbs, without linking it to the Malay community's distinct identity**.** Hence, so far, no study has been conducted to analyse the influence of *budi*-Islam upon the Malay community's political standpoint and leadership styles. Past researches show that the values of *budi-Islam* have a lot of influence over the actions and conduct of the Malay community. It is further reinforced with the findings of the analyses on Tunku's political stance and leadership styles.

2. The status of *Budi-Islam* values as the foundation of the Malay community's culture and identity

The *budi* attribute prevalent among the Malay community is spawned from the thoughts, feelings and emotions that yearn for the good things in life (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993). Their wisdom leads them to make decisions based upon good morals; while the interaction between budi and social norms steers them to weigh upon their goals and the needs of others, which is reflected in the famous Malay saying, 'always think of others, and pay attention to their opinions'. The thoughtful manner is infused in the souls of the Malays, and reflected in their polite mannerisms, rich traditions and gracious behaviour (Zainal Kling, 1995). Hence, all these have contributed to the conception of an internal sentiment that is sensitive and altruistic. This refined manner is articulated with consideration and conscience that reflect their mentality and personality. When interacting whether with their own community or with members of other ethnic groups, they express themselves by adhering to the three basic principles of *budi* - creativity in speech that reflects their wisdom, a gracious manner that mirrors their fine disposition, and courteous use of language that reveals their modesty. Hence, *budi* refers to an assortment of behaviour, use of fine speech, and polished interaction skills between individuals that reveals wisdom, by being considerate to ensure that peace and harmony prevail in the diverse society (Zainal Kling, 1995; Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993)

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact meaning of *budi* based on scientific judgement, as it relates to an internal abstract nature that could only be inferred based on an assemblage of actions, ideas, word choice, gestures, artistic values in the form of songs, lyrics, theatrical performances, dances, carving motifs, and sketches. The same goes to the Malays' reverence reserved towards the elders, as they would address the older folks by calling them uncle, aunt, brother or sister; and the unwritten rule expects them to bend their bodies partly (bow) as a mark of respect when they need to walk in front of

the elders. Furthermore, the Malays' collection of proverbs and poetry also echo the importance of *budi* values in their lives (Tengku Lukman Sinar, 2001),

Baik pada awak, maka baiklah pada saya

(Good on you, Well then also on me)

The emergence of *budi* values could be deduced from the ties with the Customary System that functions as the Malays' social yardstick. The system has been in p ractice for hundreds of years, since the pre-Islamic era, which was embraced by the Malay-Deutro tribe from Yunan (Abdullah Alwi, 2001: Ahmad Ibrahim, 1970; Hooker, 1972). This highlights the fact that for the Malays residing in the Malay realm, whether they are Muslims or otherwise, the Malay traditions are infused in their culture (Zainal Kling, 1996). It includes the native peoples of Bidayuh, Kenyah, Kayan, Iban and Kelabit from Sarawak, the indigenous tribes of Murut, Kadazan/Dusun in Sabah, Batak in Sumatera, Tarodja in Sulawesi, and ethnic Malays in the Philippines and in the Malay Peninsula

The Malay Customary System is divided into two parts, the first being the traditions that encompass the patterns of conduct and way of life in the long term, to a point that they have been saturated as traditions. Secondly, there are elements viewed as styles or traditions that undergo renewals and transformations throughout the years. These elements are not considered as the core values as they could be adapted, and are categorised as rituals and practices. The article will delve further into the first custom, which relates to actions and conduct embraced by the Malay community. It is categorized as social norms that include ethics and morale codes founded upon social values (Norazit, 1997; Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000). It is these traditions that influence the demeanor of the Malays when they interact, whether with their own people, or with non-Malay communities. Research reveals that when the Malays communicate with individuals from other communities, they tend to display the elements of compromise and respect, and would strive to evade any form of conflict. It is this kind of attitude that favours the election of Malay leaders to govern Malaya or Malaysia, in order to maintain peace and harmony in the multi-racial and multi-religious nation (Wan Norhasniah, 2012). The manner is borne out of the influence of the peaceful environment, as the sacred land that is sheltered from natural disasters like extreme flood, famine, and cruelty of kings, rulers and administrators (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1977; Swettenham, 1907; Winstedt, 1925).

The elements of *budi* have shaped the Malays into individuals that are courteous and cultured. Even though faced with adversities or conflicts, they are still capable of holding back their displeasure and maintain their politeness by being civil in expressing their opinions (Lim Kim Hui, 2003). Public arguments involving Malays were almost unheard of, and use of weapons were not favoured, as they were regarded as discourteous, impolite, rude or ill-mannered. This is in line with the observation by Milner, 2003) who claims that the Malays are the least confrontational ethnic group, as they are the community least involved in wars or violent conflicts. Hence, it somehow points to the fact that *budi* has a significant role in influencing the culture and identity of the Malay community (Lim Kim Hui, 2003), which was strengthened with the arrival of Islam to the region

Islam's immersion into the Customary System has elevated the status of traditions to being the elements that bind the relationships between people, to the connection of man and his Creator. The rich traditions observed by the Malays are reflected in the saying, "It is better to let a child die than to lose

our customs". However, the customs mentioned in the proverb does not merely refer to the observed traditions, but reflect Islamic beliefs and teaching (Zainal Kling, 1993; Syed Alwi bin Sheikh al-Hady, 1965). The Muslims' strong devotion towards Allah the Almighty has goaded them to sacrifice their lives towards protecting the sanctity of Islam from being derided, ridiculed or scorned. There were a number of Malay patriots like Tuk Janggut, Datuk Bahaman, and Abdul Rahman Limbung who lost their lives in their quest to defend the holiness of Islam against the threats of British (Ramlah Adam, 2003).

Apart from that, the peaceful geographical surroundings also play a major role in the formation of the *budi* elements. The Malay realm has always been associated with forces of the seas and islands. They are hugely inspired by the philosophies of calmness of water and humble spirits of the paddy. Naturally, water is infused with mild and modest characters, while the paddy is thought to represent humility, as the more paddies a stalk holds, the lower it bends. It is these types of traits that have been inculcated into the souls of the Malays. For example, respected Malay individuals are always modest, as the wiser they are, the more noble deeds they perform, and the humbler they become (Lim Kim Hui, 2003)

With a pleasant weather and safe location, the Malays had always led a pleasant life. They were used to toiling the lands immediate to their surroundings to eke out a living. Their harvests were bountiful, their mild seas were plentiful with catch, and their forests could provide them with all their needs, so they had no worry of being starved (Swettenham, 1965; Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1977; Winstedt, 1925; Mahathir Mohamad, 1970; Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993; Barber, 1971). The agreeable environment provided windows for pleasure-seeking activities, entertainment and relaxation, and even lulled them into avoiding hard work. The situation fostered better ties between the community and their surroundings which led to the birth of *budi,* a feeling of gratitude towards the gifts harvested from nature.

For better understanding on the influence of the values of *budi* on the political and management styles of Malay leaders, the analysis will focus on Tunku's leadership during his tenure as the first Prime Minister of Malaya/Malaysia.

3. The influence of *budi*-Islam values on the Malay political system

The emergence of the Malay ethnics from one race has connected the peoples through social and political structures, as they are inherited from kingdoms scattered throughout the vast expanse of the Malay archipelago, such as the empires of Srivajaya, Malay-Majapahit and Malay-Islam of Melaka (Zainal Kling, 1995; Wolters, 1990; Newbold, 1839; Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993; Khazin Mohd. Tamrin, 2001). The Malays' social structure was divided into two echelons – the aristocrats, and the commoners that are made up mainly of farmers dwelling in villages. One's status in society is determined by birth. The differences in surroundings, social background and education have sparked clashes of values between the two factions, which became more apparent during the British colonization, followed by the influx of immigrant arrival, and continued to be felt to the present day (Rustam A. Sani, 1983; Gullick, 1958; Roff, 1975).

The influence of the core values of *budi-Islam* is reflected through the Sultan's concern over his subjects. In return, the commoners show their loyalty towards the king's commands. The action correlates with the teachings of Islam, as revealed in the verses of al-Quran, and stated in the *Waad* principles (Chandra Muzaffar, 1992)[1], which conditions that a King must be fair to his subjects, and the citizens must obey their leaders. If the Sultan is unjust and succumbs to his fervour, Allah the Almighty would unleash disaster and demolish his kingdom as what had transpired in the earlier periods (Reid, 2004). The *Waad* principles were the result of decree between Sri Tri Buana, the first Malay chief from the lineage of the King Iskandar Zulkarnain with Demang Lebar Daun who was a representative of the citizens. The principle declares the responsibilities of the statesmen to the citizens, and vice versa. Their loyalty is guided by the core values of budi-Islam, where commoners have to adhere to the orders of their chieftains as long as it does not go against the principles of *Waad*, and as long as they are not harmed (Zainal Kling, 1983; Hanapi Dollah, 1996). This marks the beginning of the Malay political prowess that commands the loyalty from Malay community as the noblemen and the commoners have roles to uphold their rights and protect the values of Malay-Islam.

Unquestioned loyalty by the people to their leaders was an action that had been prevalent in the Malay community since the feudal days (Chandra Muzaffar, 1992). The blind faith entrusted upon the kings' rule had led to abuse of power by some kings who commanded that their subjects followed their every command without any objection, even if the directive went against the teachings of Islam or humanitarian values. For instance, Sultan Mahmud enjoyed cavorting with many women, to the point that he pronounced the death sentence upon Bendahara Seri Maharaja who was accused of intentionally hiding his daughter Tun Fatimah, who was engaged to Tun Ali. When there was malicious rumour that Bendahara Seri Maharaja was planning to overthrow the king, Sultan Mahmud sentenced the death penalty to both the Bendahara and his son-in-law, Tun Ali, and the king ended up marrying Tun Fatimah (Shaharuddin Maaruf, 1988)

Today, the concept that 'a just king is revered, but a cruel king is disobeyed /ousted' (Zainal Kling, 1982) generates various values like solidarity, cooperation, and respect; while the core values of budi have bred elements of loyalty from the people towards their leaders. However, if the leaders fail to adhere to the principles of *Waad*, they would lose the people's allegiance towards them.

3.1. The role of budi-Islam values in the political and leadership styles of Tunku

Tunku is a towering figure in the Malaysian political arena. As the first Chief Minister of Malaya, and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, he was instrumental in engineering the independence of Malaya in 1957, and later, the formation of the Malaysian federation in 1963. His massive contribution has led to him being conferred the honorary title of The Father of Independence, or the Father of Malaysia. The image is what leads to Tunku being a household name among the Malaysian people (Mushahid, 2015; Mat Yazid, 2014; Ahmad, 2013; Abdullah Ahmad, 1987).

Tunku's reputation as a capable leader was acknowledged by many scholars. It was prominent from his credibility in changing the landscape of Malaysian politics, and the mentality and spirit of

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[1]The Malay annals show that the Sultans would only be mean to certain individuals, not to every resident. In fact, it was common for the noblemen to have disputes, but the commoners were not affected by it.

nationality among the people of Malaya back then. During his tenure as Prime Minister, he had to face numerous oppositions from eminent political figures like Dato' Onn Jaafar, Dr. Burhanuddin Helmi, Lee Kuan Yew and President Soekarno. However, with a strong level of tolerance and patience, he managed to solve the conflicts and threats in peace. Apart from that, Tunku also faced adversities from the British's tactics, which forced him to compromise in the aspects of economy, education and social issues to obtain independence by uniting the main ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians. With the British's cooperation and Tunku's willingness to compromise by pardoning members of the Malaya Communist Party (PKM) (Lenard Lim Yangli, 2011; Chin Peng, 2003), the threat was minimized when the guerrillas retreated to the Thailand border. It was a tall order and not an easy feat, but Tunku successfully resolved the situation.

The influence of the *budi*-Islam elements in Tunku's leadership was obvious in a number of occasions during the pre-independence days. For example, the Japanese occupation had caused various hardships to the Malays, and strained their relationship with the ethnic Chinese. A majority of the Malay kings showed their compassion towards the welfare of the peoples, which was also akin to Tunku's stance over the matter. He was responsible in persuading his father, the then Kedah Sultan, from leaving the state of Kedah to move to Penang (Ramlah, 2004; Miller, 1959; Cheah Boon Kheng, 1979) on the grounds that they should stay to fight and combine forces with the locales in Kedah to defend their native land from Japanese attacks. He was also responsible to obtain the protection letter from the Japanese army chief to guarantee the safety of the Malay community if they were to come across the army (Ramlah, 2004).

The display of the *budi*-Islam values were apparent through Tunku's give and take attitude in the episode that was supposed to lead to independence, the Baling dialogue. It took place in 1955, between the leaders of the United Malay Nation Organization (UMNO) with the leaders of Malaya Communist Party (PKM). Tunku's objective was to fulfil the conditions set by the British that in order to be granted independence, the civil war with PKM should be over. Hence, Tunku aimed to placate Chin Peng to surrender, and that the members would be pardoned unconditionally (Ramli, 2004). According to Noel Barber, the noble act exemplified by Tunku highlighted his kind-heartedness and sincerity (Barber, 1971). In fact, Chin Peng also admitted that the way Tunku conducted the discussion, and the fact that he evaded from using disparaging remarks, like *stooge* which was hurled by David Marshall towards Chin Peng, opened the door towards reconciliation. In fact, he believed that if the dialogue had taken place between PKM, Tunku and Tan Cheng Lock, a truce might have been reached (Chin Peng, 2003)

However, the dialogue failed to reach its objective, due Chin Peng's ego and refusal to compromise. Tunku's mission was to put an end to violence and guarantee peace and safety to the society, but Chin Peng's vision was to get the communist ideologies recognized and obtain endorsement for PKM's party and activities (Chin Peng, 2003). Even if the dialogue failed, but it highlighted Tunku's success in suppressing Chin Peng's ego in claiming that he was the determining factor in guaranteeing Malaya's liberty from the British, by declaring that Malaya's peace or disorder was his call to decide (Ramli, 2004). As a result of the dialogue, Tunku resolved to fight PKM and put an end to their violence in order to restore peace to the nation. By compromising and applying delicate methods of

discussion, British handed over the mandate of power to Tunku, which culminated with the declaration of independence on 31 August 1957, even though the PKM movement was still at large. In fact, the sovereignty was granted without any bloodshed or war taking place, which was a stark contrast with what transpired in Indonesia and Burma (Myanmar) (Khoo Kay Kim, 2007).

The influence of *budi*-Islam values was also prominent in the road to independence and the process of nation building. It was mirrored in Tunku's display of conciliatory manner, which incited wrath among Malay politicians and public. Historically, the efforts to achieve independence resulted in collaboration between UMNO that represented the Malay community, and Malayan Chinese Associations (MCA) which represented the Chinese community (Ramlah, 1998). The formation of the *Communities Liaison Committee* (CLC) that stood for the British government in 1949, led to better cooperation between the parties to iron out differences, and allowed them to stipulate demands for pressing issues like citizenship rights, language and education, and election system that involved Municipality Council and Federal Legislative Council. To meet the objectives, the Malay leaders were ready to compromise by relinquishing the Malay political supremacy and granted citizenship through the *jus soli* principle to more than two million immigrants (Shukri, 2010; Mohd, R., & Mohd, Y. 2010; Ongkili, 1985)

The mission to achieve independence at all cost had spurred Tunku to undermine the domination of Malay-Islam values as the foundation of nation building, as proposed by Dato'Onn Jaafar. Thus, disparity erupted among the Malay community during the period. Tunku was critical towards a few outspoken UMNO stalwarts, who were labelled extremists when they tried to re-enact the policy "Malaya for Malays" (Ramlah, 2004). This was due to the fact that the landscape of Malaya had transformed from being Malay-based to multi-ethnic. To win over support from the Chinese and Indian communities, Tunku was prepared to sacrifice the rights of the Malays by reducing the number of UMNO-contested seats in the 1955 Federal Election from 40 to 35 seats. From the five seats, three were handed over to MCA who would contest in 15 instead 12, while two were given to MIC to ensure that they would be well-represented in the PERIKATAN[2] coalition (Means, 1976). Apart from that, the core principle for the Malay language was also slackened, with the assurance that it will become the national language within 10 years. Meanwhile, the status of the non-Malay ethnic groups' language and culture would also be safeguarded. In fact, Tunku also laid the condition that chosen election candidates must be proficient in English. Even if there were conflicts among the multi-ethnic leaders during the stages in formulating the policies, but it did not escalate into a major confrontation with the leaders. The give and take approach practiced managed to minimize any hostility directed towards the UMNO chieftains were appeased in order to achieve harmony in the diverse society (Ramlah, 2004).

In general, the influence of *budi*-Islam, with the values of compromise, patience, respect and stress on dialogues, had paved the way for Tunku to demand for independence from the British through a council chaired by Lord Lennox Boyd in 1956. Tunku's grace and mild temperament had convinced MCA and MIC to join forces with UMNO in the quest to secure independence. In fact, his position as the son of a Sultan had lent him support from the Malays as they saw him as an extension of the Malay

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[2] PERIKATAN was the coalition formed between the three main parties that represented ethnic communities in the Malay Peninsula. It was made up of UMNO that represented the Malays, MCA that was formed by the Chinese, and MIC that struggled for the rights of the Indians.

political tradition. It accorded the respect and trust from representatives of the British government, MCA and MIC to accept UMNO as the leaders of PERIKATAN (Neil, 2011; Ramlah, 2004).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of *budi*-Islam values had laid the foundation for the identity of the Malays as a community that place a major emphasis on the spirits of tolerance and respect, either among their own people or with others from different backgrounds. The stance ensures that peace would prevail within a society, by being tolerant, cooperative, and accommodating. All these values made certain that the Malays were shielded from threats by their conquerors, the British or Japanese. Tunku Abdul Rahman's gentle manners mirrored the values of the peace-loving Malays, which had steered them in weathering whatever conflicts or adversities they had to endure. They will continue to display their respect and pleasant mannerisms as long as the Malay rights and religion are not under any form of threat or provocation. Past confrontations that involved Malay leaders include the attack on the Naning chieftain, Penghulu Dol Said by the British soldiers; and the murder of James Wheeler Woodford Birch (J.W.W Birch), the British Resident of Perak.

Acknowledgements

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