THE POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES IN THE CONSERVATION OF HAJJ HISTORY AND HERITAGE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The study aims to identify the prospects and challenges in preservation of hajj history and heritage in Malaysia.

Methodology: This paper reports the analysis of documents and data collection on hajj conducted through library research.

Principal Findings and Novelty: The results of this study show that the principal challenges in preservation of hajj history and heritage in Malaysia are limited literature, difficulties in obtaining information pertaining to Hajj in pre-Malaysia days, poor documentation of the primary sources as well as individual narratives on hajj exercise and unrecorded stories and memories of individuals. This study shows that the history and heritage of Hajj are seen to have tremendous potential to assist in strengthening the tourism industry based on heritage in Malaysia.

Applications of this study: Appropriate measures are to be taken by the government to prevent the loss of history and heritage of the Hajj operations in Malaysia. Efforts must also be made to document the memories of different parties who were directly involved in the Hajj exercises for future widespread.

Keywords: Hajj, Heritage of Hajj, Makkah, Hajj Memory, Malays.

INTRODUCTION

The pilgrimage to Makkah shows that human mobility began very early and is essential in human history before the era of European colonisation. From a statistical viewpoint, the number of Malaysian Haj pilgrimage can only be traced as early as 1884 when 2,806 pilgrims as shown by Table 1. Up to 1941, the number of Malaysian Hajj shows an increase even though the movement decreases due to current and international situations. Other than the political situations that affect the security of sea travels, the financial positions also influence the visits of the Malays to Makkah. This situation is proven by the number of Malays that perform the hajj in 1911 that shows an increase to 11,707 and 11,243 in 1913 due to the rise of rubber prices in 1909-1910. The rubber prices that fell to the unprecedented low in 1913 affected the Malay pilgrimage to 8,344 in 1914. The number of pilgrims increased significantly in 1920 due to considerable improvement in travel safety. When opportunities were available, the hopes and intentions of the Malays to perform hajj, postponed for several years, were utilised to the maximum. However, the 1925 Hejaz War again interrupted the smooth flow of Hajj activities. When conditions improved, as in 1928, the number of Malay pilgrims increased again. The period from 1930-1940 showed a marked decline in their number following a worldwide depression; hajj activities ceased again in 1941 because of the Second World War (Aiza Maslan, 2014).

Table 1: Statistics of Hajj Pilgrims from The Malay States, 1884-1942

| Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims |
|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|
| 1884 | 2,806    | 1904 | 4,246    | 1924 | 3,317    |
| 1885 | 3,685    | 1905 | 5,349    | 1925 | -        |
| 1886 | 2,889    | 1906 | 6,511    | 1926 | 550      |
| 1887 | 2,084    | 1907 | 5,172    | 1927 | 1,940    |
| 1888 | 2,659    | 1908 | 4,689    | 1928 | 9,875    |
| 1889 | 2,361    | 1909 | 2,930    | 1929 | 4,646    |
| 1890 | 3,532    | 1910 | 7,177    | 1930 | 4,353    |
| 1891 | 4,120    | 1911 | 11,707   | 1931 | 1,334    |
| 1892 | 4,667    | 1912 | 8,743    | 1932 | 329      |
| 1893 | 5,764    | 1913 | 11,243   | 1933 | 320      |
| 1894 | 2,209    | 1914 | 8,344    | 1934 | 514      |
| 1895 | 4,998    | 1915 | World War 1 | 1935 | 712      |
| 1896 | 2,837    | 1916 | World War 1 | 1936 | 1,046    |
The yearly Islamic pilgrimage to the Holy city of Makkah is one of the earliest human mobility and one of the most important and most ancient religious pilgrimages in the world. This figure is high compared to Egypt (1984) which is situated very near to the holy land. This highlights the undertaking of the Hajj in Makkah, the Malays who are successful in performing the Hajj every year. According to Roff (1982), looking at the ratio of Malaya’s population around the 1920s, 6 out of 1,000 people performed the hajj in the holy land. This figure is high compared to Egypt, which is situated very near to the holy land, but only one out of 1,000 of its population.

| Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims | Year | Pilgrims |
|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|
| 1897 | 4,635    | 1917 | World War I | 1937 | 2,882    |
| 1898 | 2,528    | 1918 | World War I | 1938 | 5,115    |
| 1899 | 3,090    | 1919 | 1,270     | 1939 | 2,059    |
| 1900 | 2,107    | 1920 | 14,397    | 1940 | 45       |
| 1901 | 4,356    | 1921 | 9,593     | 1941 | World War 2 |
| 1902 | 4,896    | 1922 | 5,671     | 1942 | World War 2 |
| 1903 | 7,612    | 1923 | 5,576     |      |          |

Source: Aiza Maslan (2014)

Other than Hajj, Hijaz becomes the attraction among the Malays who are willing to deepen the study on religion. It has become the normality for parents who are strongly committed to religion especially in the northern part of Malaysia and the east coast of Malaysia to send their children to perform Hajj and at the same time live in Hijaz to deepen the religious knowledge in 19th and 20th century. Many Malays are proud of their sons who are successful in performing the Hajj continue their studies at Hijaz as indirectly their families would be highly respected by the community (Aiza Maslan, 2014). The pattern of the mobility of traditional Malays society in pursuing knowledge begins typically in their state before moving to the neighbouring states. The students from Kedah will move to Kelantan or vice versa. They later move to Patani before pursuing their education in the Islamic knowledge centres that they dream of going, Makkah, after getting some knowledge in their states (Awang Had, 1977).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relations between the Malay world and the Middle East began in BC. The arrival of Islam in the seventh AD and the acceptance of Islam as a religion have become a culture of life that strengthens the relationships.

Interaction with The Middle East

According to Mohammad Redzuan (2015), even though the society in this region interacts with the Middle East since the beginning of time through trade activities but the religious factor becomes the main factor that binds the relationships and interactions that transcend beyond borders and through many periods. The Islamization process strengthens relations between the Malay world and the Middle East, especially Hijaz. The five-a-day-prayers remind them of Ka’abah and the Hajj pilgrimage that make it mandatory for the Muslims to visit the holy Makkah at least once in their lifetime. The yearly Islamic pilgrimage to the Holy city of Makkah is one of the earliest human mobility and one of the most important and most ancient religious pilgrimages in the world.

The Ratio

Even though Malaya is situated far away from Hijaz and the pilgrims can only perform the Hajj in Makkah, the Malays are the biggest group of Muslims from outside the Arabian Peninsula that perform hajj every year. According to Roff (1984), looking at the ratio of Malaya’s population around the 1920s, 6 out of 1,000 people performed the hajj in the holy land. This figure is high compared to Egypt, which is situated very near to the holy land, but only one out of 1,000 of its population.

History of the Hajj in The Malay States

Much research on the Hajj in Malaysia focuses on specific issues such as the Malays preparation for Hajj, the journey itself, the difficulties and challenges experienced at sea and the British response to the Hajj issues. The earliest scholarly study on the Malays Hajj was by Roff (1982). He focused on the aspects of security and cleanliness on the Hajj cruises other than gaining political interests and concludes that it was the issue that compelled the British to intervene in the Hajj activities through surveillance, regulation, and organisational participation. Apart from that, McDonnell’s (1986) study is much more intensive in nature, focusing on various effects of the Hajj rites on the socio-economic aspects of the Malay community from 1860-1981. Eric Tagliacozzo (2013) highlighted the undertaking of the Hajj from Southeast Asia to Arabia from the earliest times to the present. He believes that although records and documents from the colonial period are essential in Hajj research, the ‘lived’ history of the pilgrimage from the inside is much more critical. Most recently, Mahani et al. (2018) argues that the experiences, stories, and memories of the pilgrims, hajj agents, health inspector, port police officer, local inhabitants, and others who were involved directly and indirectly in the hajj enterprise, have never been documented or made known to the public, thus creating a lacuna in our knowledge of the hajj history and heritage.
MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The current study used a qualitative approach which relies on library research. Literary works that deliberate on the hajj history and heritage were referred to.

FINDINGS AND ARGUMENT

Every race or nation in the world will ensure that they possess a unique historical heritage. Malaysians have to preserve our heritage because it becomes a definite proof on the glory days and the excellence of a nation. The conservation efforts of the historical artefacts and national heritage are therefore seen as severe in national and international levels. If heritage is lost or destroyed, it can be foregone and irreplaceable for a long time. The preservation aspects should be given support by all parties to ensure that the government can draft all systematic policies and laws (Abdul Aziz, 2011).

In Malaysia, up-to-date, no one thinks seriously in the conservation of Hajj history and heritage even though history has shown that every year the Malaysian Hajj group is the largest outside the Arab world in Hajj pilgrimage.

The questionnaires did by Utusan Malaysia (2010) concluded that the value and consciousness of Malaysia are still at the lowest stage. The situation indirectly explains that Malaysian societies are not sensitive to the conservation and documentation of Hajj history and heritage.

The network of relationships between the Malays and Hijaz that happened for an extended period should make Malaysia proud with the rich historical Hajj treasury and heritage. Sadly, the writings about the history of Hajj pilgrimage among the Malays are minimal due to the tradition of historical writings in Malaysia which primarily concentrates on the issue of political colonialism and all aspects of migrant groups (Khoo Kay Kim, 1979). Western orientalists and non-Malay writers from various cultural and economic backgrounds sponsored most of the writings. As many of them failed to take advantage of the various sources of the local history in Malay language (Jawi), there was a tendency in neglecting the issue of the relations between the Middle East and the Malays (Aiza Maslan, 2009).

The structure of historical writings on Malaysia changing due to the changing of time. The next generation begins to admire to pioneer the development of Islam in the Malay society. However, the academic writings on the history of Hajj pilgrimage among the Malays are still lack of steam, especially even among the local writers even-though the Western orientalists pave the path in the last few decades.

Sadly, up to this day, the data and information on Hajj are stunted and not adequately documented, and as a result the Hajj history is sidelined as a critical study by researchers. The complete and accurate information and data on the Hajj pilgrimage of the Malays to Makkah in the earlier days or before the First World War is difficult to obtain. This situation is because the Malays had no interests in writing on themselves and their society (McDonnell, 1986). The situation becomes more complicated and confusing as the British administration of the Straits Settlements based in India and Hijaz did not make efforts to determine that citizenship of the Hajj pilgrims from Malaysia and Indonesia apart from putting them under the ‘Jawah’ group. As the Hajj pilgrims from the Malay world sailed together from the ports of Singapore and Penang, the pilgrims from Malaysia were sometimes recorded as the Hajj pilgrims from Indonesia and Thailand.

The lack of resources becomes more serious when all records and data at the Office of Hajj Controller, Penang - the body responsible for managing the Hajj affairs of the Malays, after the Second World War, were not moved to the Hajj Fund Board but kept in a warehouse that was later caught fire and all records burnt. The records on the Hajj passes from 1924 until the Second World War when the Political Intelligence Bureau did all Hajj matters in Singapore were also destroyed during the Emergency. Sadly too, a big chunk of data and documents on Hajj record at the National Archive Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur and its branches in microfilm are also destroyed (McDonnell, 1986).

Besides tangible evidence such as records and documents, people’s stories, memories and experiences also form a body of knowledge that contributes to the understanding of Hajj history and heritage in Malaysia. Izrin (2012), in his work, for example, claimed that locals strongly remember Penang's Hajj legacy. The hajj stories of those directly or indirectly involved in the Hajj enterprise and exercise in Penang do not only form part of their memory of their Hajj experiences but also importantly provide crucial information that enables the mapping of important buildings and businesses on Acheen Street about the Hajj. The intangible evidence and information on the Hajj pilgrimage within individual collections perish due to to the death of the possessor. Thus, a pro-active action should be taken in order to conserve them. Hajj is a spiritual and psychological journey, where feelings and emotions are mixed between joy and sadness, longing and nostalgia, far away from home, family and friends, winning and suffering, hope in Allah’s mercy and mixed human feelings. Efforts must, therefore, be made to dig all those memories by using oral history methods so that Hajj history and heritage can be transcribed and documented for extensive spread of information and at the same time to make it easy for references by all researchers. It is highly recommended that the interviews be stored in an archive where its future use would be assured.

Jan Vansina, the eminent African historian mentioned that “without oral traditions we would know very little about the past of large parts of the world, and we would not know them from the inside” (Vansina, 1985). The benefits from oral history are supported by Eriq Tagliacozzo who regards “the histories of some places and some events require the
intervention of living memory, otherwise large parts of the human story would forever be lost”. Historian and anthropologists begins to use oral history as an important source to ensure local and individual history are properly equipped and kept. Even though the records and documentation of the colonial era on Hajj are extensive but they are not similar to the Hajj researchers who lived ‘from the inside’. The collections of the oral history of the Hajj open up opportunities to the society to know more and explore further into an exclusive space on an individual’s experience in religion (Tagliacozzo, 2013).

The weakness of the primary, secondary and oral source of documentation on Hajj in Malaysia resulted in the lack of valuable social history and religion of the society. Proactive efforts must therefore be done by the National Archive of Malaysian in the efforts to preserve history and heritage of Hajj in Malaysia from lost or oblivion. The National Archive of Singapore is forefront in this aspect in preserving the oldest oral history tapes of interviews with Southeast Asian pilgrims as part of the archives’ collection.

The primary, secondary and oral history data on Hajj must be properly and systematically collected and documented. Historical documentaries are seen as a new medium not only in attracting interests and focus of the society on Hajj history on preserving the history and heritage of Hajj but also in commercializing by broadcasting bodies as done by the History Channel aired through Astro. The historical legacy and heritage are vital assets that should be properly protected and guarded to become source of reference and display for the next generation and also to overseas tourists. The history and heritage of Hajj is seen to have huge potential to assist in strengthen the tourism industry based on heritage in Malaysia. In Penang, especially around Lebuh Acheh, are kept a variety of historical treasures, heritage and Hajj remnants that suits its location as the biggest centre of Hajj congregation in northern Malaya until 1970s which is also known as the ‘Second Jeddah’.

Sadly, even though listed as a UNESCO heritage since 2008, Lebuh Acheh now ‘sinks’ together with the era of past glory without giving big impacts in strengthening heritage based tourism industry in Malaysia. The question is how Lebuh Acheh, rich in Hajj history and heritage could be upgraded in its potentials to strength tourism industry based on heritage in Malaysia. Lebuh Acheh should be given a new ‘life’ as the heritage could give added value to tourism to enable tourists to see the Hajj historical heritage since the days of Hajj cruises. In other words, the tourists who visit Lebuh Acheh will feel the glorious phenomenal of Lebuh Acheh or the Second Jeddah and at the same time strengthen the local and national economy.

The development of the new Hajj Gallery around Lebuh Acheh by Penang Islamic Foundation, officiated in 2015, should be strengthened and upgraded to Hajj Museum with tangible data and information that are systematically documented as the existing gallery is empty and without historical value. The said location should be turned into one of the important heritage for Malaysia’s tourism industry. The steps taken by Singapore government to make Istana Kampong Gelam near Masjid Sultan as a centre of Singapore Hajj assembly in the era of sea shipping as an interactive museum for the heritage of Singapore Malays including the Hajj history should be emulated for building tourism industry based on heritage in Malaysia. The area, gazetted as the Malay Cultural Center, now becomes a tourism attraction in Singapore.

However, in realizing the effort, it is almost certain that big challenges and obstacles are to be confronted. Among the challenges faced in preserving the Hajj history and heritage are the collections of oral history during the era of Hajj shipping as many Hajj pilgrims involved have died. Other problems on the Hajj pilgrimage include remembering and telling the past experiences due to age factor. There are also cases that a small group of Hajj pilgrims interviewed fails or refuses to share the experiences during the process of interview due to nerve racking. Another point that needs to given attention in using oral history is the issue of transfer of rights. In oral history interview, an agreement regarding the use of the interview is made either in writing or verbally which guarantees the interviewer the rights for the evaluation and the interviewee the anonymity of his or her data. Thus, it is very important for the interviewer in assuring that an interview be archived only if the interviewee has explicitly given permission. No doubt, the archiving of life history interviews is a very difficult venture, in which a large amount of energy is spent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the efforts to conserve Hajj history and heritage in Malaysia need cooperation and commitment from all sectors especially the National Archive of Malaysia, Department of Museum Malaysia, Heritage Department of Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Malaysia and other Malaysian ministries in charge of national integration, culture, arts, and heritage. The significance of this study is to identify the important challenges in the conservation of hajj history and heritage in Malaysia. Subsequently, this will provide useful information gathered from the data and document analysis, which can assist in the formulation and planning of new strategies related to the conservation of the hajj history and heritage in Malaysia. Besides that, the study also identified that the history and heritage of Hajj have tremendous potential to assist in strengthening the tourism industry based on heritage in Malaysia.
LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

More research should focus on conservation of hajj history and heritage in Malaysia due to the limitation of such kind of study. The oral history projects should be carried out to document experiences of those involved in the hajj exercise in Malaysia, especially during the sea transportation era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Universiti Sains Malaysia for the financial and technical support for this study through the research grant 304/PHUMANITI/6316206.

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