

Conceptual Understanding of Myths and Legends in Malay History

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ABSTRAK

Teks-teks sejarah Melayu juga kaya dengan cerita dongeng and legenda. Tetapi, banyak sarjana yang mengkaji isi teks itu kerap membuat tanggapan yang salah. Dalam kajian mereka, mereka menetapkan aspek luaran, dan bukannya aspek fungsi dan sejarah pada cerita mitos dan legenda itu. Oleh itu, adalah tujuan rencana ini untuk menerokai pemahaman konsep saya tentang cerita legenda dan mitos dalam teks sejarah klasik Melayu untuk membuktikan adanya kebenaran sejarah yang tersirat di sebalik cerita itu. Untuk tujuan itu, saya telah memilih Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai dan Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa.

Kata kunci: Kosmologi Melayu, Sejarah Melayu, simbol Melayu, tafsir dan ta'wil

ABSTRACT

Malay historical texts are also rich in the mythical and legendary stories. Unfortunately, many scholars who study the content of the texts have always misunderstood them. In their study, they specify on the superficial aspects, instead of functional and historical aspects of the mythical and legendary stories. It is the purpose of this paper to explore my conceptual understanding of mythological and legendary stories in the Malay classical historical texts to prove that there are indeed historical truth embedded within these stories. To do that, Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai and Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa are selected.

Key words: Malay cosmology, Malay history, Malay symbols, tafsir and ta'wil

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about the symbols used and adored by man in ancient times. Regardless of religious or secular man, one must own and adore one particular symbol so that he can hold on his own identity. Oftentimes, the origin of a symbol in particular society was not clearly known whether it was created



out of their convention or born out of nature or something else. Nasr (1991: 88) argued that symbol is not created out of man-made conventions and it is coming from outside of man's perception, understood and formulated through their daily belief and practices. People would rather think that it is an exaggerated comment when Martin Lings (1991: vii) argued that most of the problems of the modern world resulted from ignorance of the answer to the question of "what is symbolism?" But, the truth is that modern people had been neglecting the wisdom of the past and consequently they become ignorant about the metaphysical aspects of their ancestors since these aspects were mostly formulated in the form of symbolic language. Eliade (1971: 3) remarked that, "Obviously, the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language; but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them...". Henderson added (1964: 106), "The ancient history of man is being meaningfully rediscovered today in the symbolic images and myths that have survived ancient man." People who discover these symbolic meanings will eventually be able to live meaningfully and on the other hand if they failed to do so they will be left in uncertainty.

One could possibly say that if we intend to search for myths and legends in Malay history we would most possibly find them. Being so, some scholars who study Malay classical historical texts would accept the that there must be the mythical and legendary contents in the classical Malay historical texts.¹ Their research will focuss to prove the mythical and legendary aspects contained in the texts. Finally, they did not find the important mythical and legendary functions in the text. This is what this paper intends to do. For this purpose three classical Malay history texts have been selected is *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN MALAY HISTORY

Why the authors of *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* had mixed the facts and the fantasies, the history and the myths, the legends and so on in their writings? Are they unable to differentiate between facts and fantasies, between history and myth? Noriah (1993: 20) stresses that Malay authors are indifferent to both history and myth. Both are real and equally important in developing a coherent world which could be trusted by its audiences. Departed from the very essence of the Malays' understanding of the history which included almost every seen and unseen, touch and untouched, coherent and incoherent, they did not differentiate between history and myths. History from one side could most possibly explain the mythologies of the people and likewise the myths from another side could most possibly explain the history of the people.



The skill of blending together myths and history was among the greatest skills the Malay classical authors. This skill was essential since they were to accomplishing the command of a king, the most powerful and the greatest leader in the community. The command of the king as mentioned in *Sejarah Melayu* dan *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* was extra ordinary. The author had to use his skills and not to disregard of whatever appropriate sources available. Above all, it was not so easy to accomplish the king's command and wishes. The author of *Sejarah Melayu* said (Winstedt 1938: 42):

Demikian bunyi titah yang maha mulia itu, “Bahawa beta minta perbuatkan hikayat pada Bendahara, peri peristiwa dan peraturan segala raja-raja Melayu dengan istiadatnya sekali, supaya diketahui oleh segala anak cucu kita yang kemudian daripada kita, diingatkannya oleh mereka itu, syahadan beroleh faedahlah ia daripadanya.

In another instance, the author of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* had also said (Siti Hawa 1998: 1):

Setelah itu maka titah baginda yang maha mulia, junjungkan ke atas jemala fakir, demikian titah yang maha mulia: ‘Bahawa hamba pinta perbuatkan hikayat pada tuan, peri peraturan segala raja-raja Melayu dengan istiadatnya sekali supaya boleh diketahui oleh segala anak cucu kita yang kemudian daripada kita ini, serta dikurniai dengan sejarahnya.

The author of *Sejarah Melayu* had clearly mentioned “having heard the command, I feel my burden is so heavy...” and the author of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* had also mentioned that how he has to get himself firm in order to carry out his duty “...perkejaplah diri dalam mengusahakan dia”. Obviously, the authors were obliged to carry out their moral responsibility and to fulfil the wish and the vision of the king. Thus, in order to accomplish the heavy burden, they had to manage and manipulate their narrative skills up to the highest literary level (Noriah 1993: 21-22). They also had to hide so as feeling not directly inflict the king's feeling, make the king furious. Only through this approach they could possibly accomplish the task completely and without harming any party involved in the history. Noriah (1993: 22) remarks further, “That is how the author exploiting the techniques of maxims in the system of Malay traditional literature such as symbols, pantun, proverbs which usually contain double meanings.” Literary and art are among the approaches that absorb the explicit meaning into implicit meanings. Errington as quoted by Noriah (1993: 22) explained,

... in the hikayat (unlike their place in historical writing), these events (history) do not stand outside the hikayat as something referred to but rather as material which the hikayat uses, much as it might use a tale of a raja losing his kingdom in a cock fight. Depleted of their historicity, they are absorbed by the hikayat into its own substance, for its own purposed.

Through the approaches of literary and art, the stories were then formulated in form of symbols, myths and legends.² Eliade (1971: 3) added, “Obviously,



the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language; but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them...". In addition Henderson (1964: 106) noted, "The ancient history of man is being meaningfully rediscovered today in the symbolic images and myths that have survived ancient man." Therefore, when we deal with Malay authors, "we are dealing with the conception of an "elite" who interpret contemporary history by means of a myth" (Eliade 1971: 38). Malay authors were not an ordinary group of people and they are, to use Ibn Rushd's classification, the *demonstrative class* of their own period of time. They are capable of strict reasoning and demonstration according to Aristotle's laws of logic.³ Thus their excellent capability should not be overlooked in looking through their ideas of writings.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYTH AND LEGEND IN MALAY HISTORY

Myth means a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view or explain a practice, belief or natural phenomena occurred in the past. It dwelled in Malay society as it settled in other societies as well, ever since they were in animistic lives as Berg (1965: 117) explained, "A picture of the past is a complex of myths, and as such it exists everywhere and in any period of human history." The coming of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam did not make Malays disregard their mythical and legendary stories.⁴ In contrast they were adored and believed as a real substance especially by the peasant Malays (Yusoff Iskandar 1986: 141-142).⁵ In the beginning, most of the historical events were transmitted orally. Through this method of transmission many of the events turned into the mythological folkloric forms and each of the verbal sources displayed its variation. According to Davies (1994: 4) "...myths exist as part of an oral tradition and often exhibit a considerable variation of content and presentation." This is due to the difficulties to retain the historical events in its pure form especially because of the lapse of time. Historical events were then transmitted from one stage to another until finally they established position in mythical forms. Myth therefore is the final stage where the historical events and stories are preserved. Eliade (1971: 43) wrote:

Myth is the last – not the first – stage in the development of a hero. But this only confirms the conclusion reached by many investigators (Caraman and others): the recollection of a historical event or a real personage survives in popular memory for two or three centuries at the utmost. This is because popular memory finds difficulty in retaining individual events and real figures... The historical personage is assimilated to his mythical model (hero, etc.), while the event is identified with the category of mythical actions (fight with a monster, enemy brothers, etc.).⁶



The figures and events in Malay history are well preserved in the form of myths and legends. In order to understand their true meaning, one has to go through deeper observation, contemplating and serious reading.⁷ It was not always easy to understand through theoretical language especially when a person used only a referential reading. Referential reading failed to unveil these aspects of literature and symbolic meaning deep rooted in the Malay archaic literature.

Legend is the story about the personality and the supremacy of the historical figures in Malay history.⁸ Slightly different from myth, Malay legendary story is closer to the historical characteristic in the sense that they are less fantasy (Yusoff Iskandar 1986: 160-161). The heroic figure of Tun Beraim Bapa in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the great figure of Iskandar Zulkarnain, the role of the Prophet Khidr, the superb power of Badang and the bravery of Hang Tuah in *Sejarah Melayu*, the cruelty of the Tusk King and the piety of Syaikh Abdullah and his ability to communicate with the demon in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* are among the legendary stories of the Malay history. In spite of its less fantasy character, legendary stories were then gradually developed into the mythical character especially when connected to the special events experienced by these great figures such as the legend of Alexander the Great and his great campaign to Asia and etc.. Eliade (1971: 43) remarked, "the historical personage is assimilated to his mythical model (hero, etc.), while the event is identified with the category of mythical actions (fight with a monster, enemy brothers, etc.)." In comparison to some other legends in other civilizations, Malay legendary stories were recorded long after its existence in verbal forms. Thus, the longer the stories remained in verbal forms, the merrier the additional spices. Hence, it was quite fair to realize that the legendary stories in classical Malay historical texts were being interwoven with mythical stories. Compare for instance with Charlemagne in Western Middle Ages, whose mythical and legendary stories had already moving around during his lifetime as Cook and Herzman (1983: 191-194) noted:

The political and cultural achievements of Charlemagne are only part of his legacy to the remainder of the Middle Ages; the other major part is his legend. In the years of disintegration that followed his death, he began to take on mythic proportions... the Charlemagne legend was already emerging in the century of his death... The Charlemagne of history and the Charlemagne of legend are two of the most important figures of the Middle Ages.

Myths and legends are the specialty of the Malay authors. Their stories might be originated from verbal sources and considering the level of thought of the Malays during the 15th and 16th centuries, composing a historical text by mixing myths and legends is acceptable since the stories were long ago accepted as historical materials and the Malay peasants put their loyalty to the king high above their critical faculty (Maxwell 1881: 409). Hence, whatever stories narrated to them about their kings will easily be accepted. The existence of the myths and legends in Malay society is matched to the intellectual circumstances



during that time (Yusoff Iskandar 1986: 163-164). The Malays were living close to the nature and so sensitive towards the continual changes of the nature. This would make them easily accepted that their kings were also originated from the nature.

THE PURPOSE OF MYTH AND LEGEND

Mythical and legendary stories, regardless of whether verbal or written not formulated without any purpose. At least its classical purpose “is to demonstrate to the reader or listener that there is a more fundamental meaning to the text than its apparent one” (Liszka 1989: 1). According to Campbell (1968: 4-6), mythology has at least four major functions: first, to reconcile waking consciousness to the “mysterium tremendum et fascinans” (awe inspiring mystery and even bewitched) of this universe as it is; second, to render an interpretive total image of the same, as known to contemporary consciousness, third, to enforce a moral order on a person so that he will be shaped according to his social group and finally, the most vital and critical function of mythology is to foster the centering and unfolding of the individual in integrity in accordance with the mysterious phenomenon around his life, the universe (the macrocosm), his culture (mesocosm) and himself (microcosm). These functions of myths and legends are very common in the classical Malay historical texts. The authors of the Malay classical historical texts had certainly composed the texts mindfully. They should have a clear intention and beneficial purposes by inserting the mythical and legendary stories. The ideas by Yusoff Iskandar (1986: 164) was supported by De Jong statement who said (1964: 236): “Can we go a step farther and try to understand the Malay Annals not only on the basis of its author’s outlook, but also of his aims and purpose? The story of Iskandar Zulkarnain, for instance, has its own purpose as the narration of him was not only to recount his greatness. Instead, it was to recount the greatness of the Malay royal families claimed to be descended from him. The least that Malays could benefit from the story of Iskandar Zulkarnain is to realize the sacredness of royal families, their protectors and guardians. Yusoff Iskandar (1986: 145) added:

Through this style of writing and motive in the Malay traditional society, they could understand how great and higher status of the descendants of the (Malaccan) Malay kings which directly or indirectly connected to the great figures of genies, cow and Batala...

Sejarah Melayu narrated the story of Iskandar Dzulkarnain married to Puteri Syahrul Bariah and the marriage ceremony was performed by the Prophet Khidr. From their marriage, a prince named Raja Suran or Shulan was born. Raja Chulan, the descendant of Raja Suran, married to Mahtabul Bahri, a princess of the king of underwater world and begot Nila Pahlawan, Krisyna Pendita and Nila Utama. *Sejarah Melayu* maintained that the Malay royal families and its



kingships came from these descendants of Iskandar Dzulkarnain and therefore they should be regarded as the holiest and greatest people. For the Malays, only the greatest people could be able to guard and protect them. Thus, the description of the origin of the Malay kings through this myth was more importantly to glorify the kings rather than to explain and narrate the historical facts per se (Yusoff Iskandar 1986: 145).

The authors of the Malay history had recorded the true stories and historical facts. However, they had used an indirect method through which the mythical and legendary stories preserved. Eliade (1971: xiv) remarked, "But this "history" of the Cosmos and of human society is a "sacred history", preserved and transmitted through myths."⁹ Through this way, they had made the Malay classical historical texts among the great books of the Malay civilization and will not easily be forgotten comparable to the epic of *Mahabharata*¹⁰ and *Ramayana*¹¹ in which the Indian histories were preserved. Hsu Yun Tsiao (1986: 51) remarked, "This is similar to the ancient history of India which is composed in *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*" Both *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* contained the laws and the principles of conducts but presented in the form of the life stories of legendary great men.¹² Mixed with the mythical and legendary stories both epics had successfully played their role within Indian society. Similarly, the great books of the Malay history were presented in the form of mythical and legendary stories of great noble men whose life stories had inspired and exemplified by the Malays.

UNDERSTANDING MYTH AND LEGEND IN MALAY HISTORY

For Indian epics and Malay classical historical texts we must not look at them on the surface of the texts and judge the authors' standpoints superficially. We must look further and deeper in order to discover their hidden and realistic meanings. To do so, we need appropriate and proper strategies that involve a process of meaning analysis to clarify the ambiguities of the text. Christians have been suggested to unveil the meaning of Bible through four strategies: firstly, treated literally when possible, i.e., as an account of historical events happened; secondly, allegorically when literal meaning is absurd or contrary to Christian principles or theology, thirdly, both literally and allegorically when a specific purpose for allegorical interpretation is indicated and finally, where the passages are obscure, they should be understood as stimulants to the thought (Liszka 1989: 1-11). Whereas in Islamic perspective, this aspect of clarifying the ambiguities was emphasized especially with regard to the theory and the practice of exegesis of the Qur'an or *tafsir*. The verses of the Qur'an are divided into two major categories; *muhkamat* and *mutasyabihat*. Allah Almighty mentioned in the Qur'an, chapter Ali 'Imran 3: 7, (meaning):



He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book; in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning - *muhkamat*); they are the foundation of the Book: others are not of well-established meaning (*mutasyabihat*). But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning. Seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its true meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding (ulul albab).

With regard to the verses in which their meanings are well established (*muhkamat*), Muslim scholars had suggested an exegesis or *tafsir* approach. The *tafsir* was usually implemented either through utilizing the same source, i.e. the Qur'an itself, or the *hadith* or by reasoning. While for the verses in which their meanings are not well established (*mutashabihat*), some Muslim scholars had suggested a "*ta'wil*" approach, "*a symbolic interpretation*"¹³ through the diversion of the meaning into another possible related meaning contained in other related sources (Ibn Kathir 1998: 326). Both *tafsir* and *ta'wil* are among the most possible approaches that could possibly be used in order to understand the mythological and legendary contents of the classical Malay historical texts.¹⁴ In addition and due to the nature of interpolation of the Islamic and non-Islamic characters in the Malay historical texts, particularly the animistic and Hindu-Buddhism characters, this study had to utilize a broader sources and approaches not limited only from the Islamic perspectives.¹⁵ Certain stories which obviously connected to the legacy of the Indian thought should therefore be seen from the Indian cosmological perspectives.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF MYTH AND LEGEND IN MALAY HISTORY

Myths and legends transcend throughout periods of time. They survive in different forms but its conceptual understandings are not usually changed and their characteristics are generally universal. Take for instance, the story of Raja Chulan descended to the sea and the emergence of his three princes on Bukit Siguntang of Mahameru. In terms of Hindu concept of cosmology, this story symbolizes the archetype of the chaos and the cosmos. Mount Mahameru was essential in Hinduism, a holy place where gods Vishnu and Shiva descended from the sky, "...Mount Meru rises at the center of the world, and above it shines the polestar. The idea of the symbolism of the center, the sacred Mountain, where heaven and earth meet is situated at the center of the world" (Eliade, 1971: 12-17).¹⁶ The sea symbolizes the "unknown sea on which no navigator has dared to venture", and also can be understood as the underworld, the world of the dead and it assimilated to the chaos. Raja Chulan's princes returned back from the chaos to the cosmos at Mount Mahameru, the "sacred mountain" where heaven and earth meet, situated at the center of the world.¹⁷ From them then



descended the Malay kings, one after another ruled the kingdom. This story represents a primordial act of divine creation, from chaos to cosmos in which this transformation is very essential before every territory ready to be occupied, inhabited or utilized as lebensraum (Eliade 1971: 9-36).

The author of *Sejarah Melayu* is a Muslim, so did the authors of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. The question arose, why he inclined towards promoting the Indian or Hindu cosmology of Mount Meru? There are two possible explanations. The idea of Mount Mahameru as the symbolism of the center where heaven and earth meet is universal. Conceptually, this idea might also be understood through Islamic perspective especially in regard to the idea of Kaaba as the center of the universe, the highest point on earth, because “the polestar proves that ... it lies over against the center of heaven” and the idea of Mount Qaf in Sufi cosmology (Eliade 1971: 15). The Qur’an (Ali ‘Imran 3: 96) emphasized the role of Kaaba as a guidance for all kinds of being, (meaning) “The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Mecca; full of blessing (*mubarakan*) and of guidance (*wa hudan*) for all kinds of beings.” While in Sufi cosmology, the idea of Mount Qaf as the center of the universe was also prevalent. In his *Hikayat Tujuh Petala Langit dan Tujuh Petala Bumi*, Nuruddin Al-Raniri (n.d: 119-120) mentioned “the whole universe is about to shake, thus Allah upholds it with Mount Qaf. And all of the mountains are the nerves of Mount Qaf.” Corbin (1964: 2) said “The mountain of Qaf is the cosmic mountain constituted from summit to summit, valley to valley, by the celestial Spheres that are enclosed one inside the other.” This idea of Mount Qaf was not actually the physical mountainous setting, rather it was a spiritual setting where man could possibly be able to transform his “normal self” into “superior self.” The normal self is what stays in front of Mount Qaf and the superior self is what stays beyond it. Thus, this idea reminds us about the Indian concept of Mount Meru where the Heaven and earth meet. Meanwhile, the idea of the sea which at first glance signified the world of chaos in Indian cosmology was also comparable to the idea of sea and water in Islamic cosmology. Sea in Islamic cosmology and as seen from the Quranic perspective signified the Heaven and earth. This duality symbolizes the Waters of the Unmanifest and the waters of Manifestation (Lings 1991: 60-70).

When we referred to the “unknown sea” from where the princes of Raja Sulan originated in *Sejarah Melayu*, it was comparable to the Waters of the Unmanifest. Having experienced the sea of the Unmanifested, they had successfully gained the mercy by reaching the Mount of Mahameru.¹⁸ While the waters of Manifestation in Islamic cosmology signified the Mercy of Allah and although from one aspect the water had the ability of destruction, from another important aspect it was a life giving for the mankind (Lings 1991: 67-68). The Qur’an (al-Ra’d 13: 17) mentioned (meaning), “He sendeth down water from heaven, so that valleys are in flood with it, each according to its capacity.” The purification of the body including the ablution before prayer



through the utilization of water symbolizes the most essential function of the water as a medium to reach the Mercy of Allah. Comparable to the Indian and Chinese cosmologies as discussed previously, the function of water as the medium of the purification to reach the highest level of the merciful was also prevalent. For the author of *Sejarah Melayu*, there is nothing wrong to use the subsequently universal idea which is also conceptually comparable to the Islamic perspective.

Secondly, Nila Pahlawan, Krisyna Pendita and Nila Utama are the princes of Raja Sulan who emerged from the Mount Mahameru and they were most probably Hindu in origin, therefore according to the author of *Sejarah Melayu* they are entitled to be treated as Hindus.¹⁹ Their sacredness was according to Hinduism and not according to Islam. In terms of Hindu perspective, they are divine in nature and therefore the genealogy of the Malay kings descended from these three princes being the holiest and divinely royal families. According to Hinduism, this idea is obviously should be accepted. But when we come to discuss the idea of the *islamization* of the Malay kings, it should be considered as already been *naskh* or abrogated by the new idea of Islam. Islam introduced a more prominent idea, the idea that the Malay kings are the descendants of the Prophet Adam and Eve, and they are the chosen people of God to carry the burden of a vicegerent or a caliph. This idea will hopefully be discussed further in the next discussion on the concept of man in Malay history.

The historical concept of myths and legends could also be understood by comparing them with the actual historical events. Hsu Yun Tsiao (1986: 49) argued that ever since he was studying the history of the Malay Archipelago, and comparing it with the history of China and India, it was found out that the stories of fairies and myths in *Sejarah Melayu* did contain historical values. The story of Iskandar Zulkarnain and Raja Shulan for instance, according to Hsu Yun Tsiao (1986: 51) is a description of a history from a real story recorded on the stone inscription in Tanjore, India, the history of Cola King, Sri Rajendra attacked Malaya in 1017-1024 (Wilkinson 1935: 8-16). The mythical and legendary stories were therefore repeating this historic event and preserving it from being forgotten in the text. The story of Bath, a *chiri* reader who, according to the *Sejarah Melayu* was born out of the white cow's vomit, also contained some historical explanations. Bath's duty is to read the *chiri*, a mantra during the coronation of a king and also to lead the marriage ceremony of the king.

Now, this myth must at least contain some religious and historical explanations. In terms of religious explanation, this myth must be understood symbolically, since the white cow was also being associated with the divine symbol of Hinduism. Strangely and of course expressing his Islamic tendency, the author mentioned that the creation of Bath from the foam of white cow's vomit is because of the Will of God (*dengan takdir Allah Ta'ala*). Historically, Bath was not only a name of a particular person, instead according to Maxwell (1881: 90), "Bhat is the usual name in India for a bard or encomiast, and in



Gujarat a distinct tribe bearing the name of Bhat, and claiming a semi-divine origin.” The similar role of Bath in India was also discovered in *Sejarah Melayu* as further Maxwell (1881: 90) remarked, “...exercised in former days the very functions ascribed by the Malay annalist to the Bhat of his story, namely, the recitation of laudatory verses and the compilation of genealogies.” This fact must at least gave some historical expressions of Bhat and his origin which is connected with the vomit of a white cow might symbolically explained his semi-divine origin of Hinduism and also his important role in exercising the coronation and marriage ceremonies of the kings. This aspect of the role of Bath and the *chiri* will be dealt later on the concept of man in Malay history. In the meantime, based on the possibility that the name of Bath might refer to an important person who was brought from India by the royal family purposely for the coronation and the marriage ceremonies, we had certainly sensed the historical aspect of Bath.

Other historical events related to the Malay history were also being preserved by the Malay authors through mythical understanding. The account of Merah Silau or Silu who converted to Islam with the name of Sultan Malikul Saleh in *Hikayat Raja Pasai* was finally discovered as true particularly with the discovery of his gravestones by J. P. Morquette (Djajaningrat 1965: 77). The event of his conversion into Islam was undeniably expressed through mythical form such as the story of his circumcision and his ability to read the whole Qur’an within a night without being taught (Hill 1960: 118). Meanwhile, the places mentioned in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* were finally discovered to match the actual location of places around Kedah. The archaeological discoveries also proved that the mount of Jerai and some other mountains such as Bukit Lada, Bukit Jambul, Bukit Tunjang and Gunong Keriang were originally islands as recorded in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Again, the figure of Merong Mahawangsa himself was also a historical figure. Although according to the archaeological research the events related to him were far earlier than it was reported in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, he was evidently existed in history (Wales 1940: 1-7 & Braddell 1989: 108). The stories of him and the *islamization* of Sultan Malikul Saleh in *Hikayat Raja Pasai* were mixed with the mythical and legendary narration. Because of that, historians have to reconsider these aspects since they might possibly contain some essential historical values. These historical values might be preserved in the mythical symbolic forms and it might be possible that later archaeological discoveries would come forth to offer further explanations.

In a broader sense, the historical concept of myths and legends could also be obtained through deeper understanding of the religious and cultural meaning in the form of ritual and rites. Ritual is a ceremony that is always performed in the same way in order to mark an important religious or social occasion. Rite is a ceremony that is always performed in the same way usually for religious purposes. According to Zimmer (quoted by Campbell 1968: 625) “They are



symbols through which a transcendent reality is mirrored. They are so many metaphors reflecting and implying something which, though thus variously expressed, is ineffable, though thus rendered multiform, remains unscrutable.” The acts described in the myths and legends might represent one of the most important events occurred long ago. People were then repeating the acts through ritual and rites (Corbin 1969: 277-281). Thus, the historical event from now on became meaningful since it is being repeated and modelled by people in the present and the future.²⁰ This is an aspect of “primitive” ontological conception which also prevailed throughout the writing of the Malay authors. This conception as explained by Eliade (1971: 34) “...an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is “meaningless,” i.e., it lacks reality.”²¹ The idea of archetypes and repetition also appeared in *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. The story of Iskandar Zulkarnain married to the Princess of Raja Kida Hindi in *Sejarah Melayu*, the heroic figure of Tun Beraim Bapa in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, and the momentous journey of Syaikh Abdullah with the chief of demon in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* are among the stories explained the archetypes of the realities and repetition existed in the cosmos. Therefore, these aspects must be carefully observed in order to extract its true understanding which is closely related to the belief and metaphysical realms as noted Eliade by (1971: 3):

If one goes to the trouble of penetrating the authentic meaning of an archaic myth or symbol, one cannot but observe that this meaning shows a recognition of a certain situation in the cosmos and that, consequently, it implies a metaphysical position.

The account on the marriage ceremony of Iskandar Zulkarnain had its distinguished meaning. First, take the meaning of his name in Arabic “*Dhulqarnayn*”, or “a man with two horns”. It was mentioned in the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (1998: 99) that this name was given to him because of his triumph over two great kingdoms, *al-mashariq wa al-magharib* – the kingdoms of the east and the west. Second, take the Princess Shahrul Bariyyah his bride, the daughter of Raja Kida Hindi, the great king of the east. Third, take the role of the Prophet Khidr, who performed the marriage ceremony between him and Princess Shahrul Bariyyah. Based on these three points, it could possibly be understood that the ceremony was the acts performed by the great king and hero of the history and some of them even had the divine representation especially the role of the Prophet Khidr. Iskandar Zulkarnain was indeed considered by Muslim as a great pious person “*kana ‘abdan nasihan liLlahi*”, *he is a servant and a sincere adviser of Allah to people*” (Ibn Kathir 1998: 99). Thus his act is a divine model and it was very significant so that it should be repeated again by the author of *Sejarah Melayu*. Meanwhile, his marriage to the princess of the great king of the east is modelling his title as the conqueror of the east and the west, and the presence of



the Prophet Khidr symbolized the divine approval of his campaign especially to spread the goodness on this universe.²²

The story of Tun Beraim Bapa in both *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and *Sejarah Melayu* explained to us that he is indeed repeating an act performed by a human hero in undated times. Such heroic story then appeared again in the character of Badang in *Sejarah Melayu*. Their heroics and superb powers were most probably being narrated in order to show the repetition of the acts of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him). The heroic stories of the companion of the prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) were well known to the Malay authors through the earlier works such as *Hikayat Hamzah* and *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah*. These two *hikayats* must have been learned intimately by the Malay authors since the early period of the *islamization* of the Malay world. The heroic character of Amir Hamzah, Ali, Hasan and Husain must at least be affectionately admired by them and was then repeated again in their writings in form of legendary stories.

The journey of Syaikh Abdullah with the chief of demon is comparable to the journey of the Prophet Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*) with Angel Gibrael and the journey of the Prophet Moses with the Prophet Khidr. The story of Syaikh Abdullah therefore repeated the archetype of the stories of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*²³ and the didactic journey of the Prophet Moses with the Prophet Khidr (narrated in the Qur'an, Surah al-Kahfi, 18: 60-82) since according to Eliade (1971: 22), "...all religious acts are held to have been founded by gods, civilizing heroes, or mythical ancestors...". Although the character of the demon in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* as comparison to the character of the Angel of Gibrael in the story of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* and the Prophet Khidr in the story of the journey of Prophet Moses are totally in contrast, the idea that Syaikh Abdullah acquiring his learning experiences is clearly embodied in both stories. This event repeated an act performed by the hero of Islam in early days of Islam. The stories about the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) and other prophets were long ago scattered around the Malay world since the early advent of Islam. *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah*, which mentioned in *Sejarah Melayu* also contained the story about the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him). This story according to Voorhoeve was adapted from *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* (Brakel 1975: 16). Similarly, the story of Prophet Khidr was also recorded in the first chapter of *Sejarah Melayu*. Thus, the influence of this *Hikayat* on the authors of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* was quite justifiable.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is always a clear line drawn between what was "historical" and "non-historical" in Malay historical texts. Many historians claimed that they had



dealt with the “historical” aspects of the texts in their so-called “proper” historical writings. They unfortunately neglected the “non-historical” aspects and rejected them because of the mythological and legendary contents. This study however proves that what was claimed to be “non-historical” aspects represented by the mythological and legendary stories and are indeed embedded within them historical values. To prove this contention one must understand the process of the *Indianization* and the *Islamization* of the Malay world and understand the mythological and legendary aspects of the Malay history.

The period of *Indianization* of the Malay world is revolutionary. In this period, the animistic beliefs of the Malays were transformed into a new organized religious belief in which two great Indian religions, i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism, awarded the Malays with the mythological and legendary stories to be contemplated as a truth. However, these beliefs could only be subscribed by certain groups of people, i.e. the nobles and superiors, among them especially the religious sages and members of the royal family. The masses subscribe to their ancient animistic beliefs. Indian mythological and legendary stories were scattered within the thought of the selected Malays until the emergence of Islam. Islam, however, did not entirely dispose Indian mythological and legendary stories. When Islam came, these stories had been transformed from the oral and spoken to the writing tradition established by the Malay Muslims. Thus, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and other Buddhist texts were transformed into writing and it was through these traditions that partly contributed to the formation of the Malay historical views represented by the mythological and legendary stories.

Considering the vast number of mythological and legendary stories contain in their historical texts, the Malays were indeed own their unique concept of history. This fact convincingly led us to believe that the Malays are indeed the people of a great civilization. Their classical historical texts should be regarded as among the great works of the world.

ENDNOTES

1. Ismail Hussein described this tendency as ‘*putting the cart before the horse*’, i.e. before an attempt has been made to study and understand each individual text in culture, one already makes a general historical survey of the literature. See further Ismail Hussein, “The Study of Traditional Malay Literature”, 12.
2. According to Martin Lings, most of the problems of the modern world resulted from ignorance of the answer to the question of “what is symbolism?” Similarly, the misconception on the Malay history was mostly resulted from the failure to understand the symbolic meaning of the myths and legends contained in the classical Malay historical texts. For Lings account on the topic of symbols see further Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype; A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, 1991. “*The symbol*, said Nasr, *is not based on man-made conventions. It is an aspect of the ontological reality of things and as such is independent of man’s perception of it.*” Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 88.



3. Man according to Ibn Rushd's classification are three categories; first, *the demonstrative class*, which is capable of strict reasoning and demonstration. Second, *the dialectical class*, which is satisfied with the plausible opinions general to thoughtful people; and third, *the rhetorical class*, who are persuaded simply by what they are told and whose views cannot stand up to criticism. See further Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-Maqal*, translated by George F. Hourani, *Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, (London: Lucas and Co., 1961), 50-59. See also Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God Creative Mythology*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 142.
4. At this stage Maier had wrongly remarked, "So far, the Malays had never been able to distinguish between reason, the only ground of truthful knowledge, and imagination, the ground for deceptive and arbitrary ignorance." See further Maier, *In the Center of Authority*, 41. The meaning of "reason" according to the ancient Malays was indeed different compared to the modern understanding and likewise, the word "imagination" was also differently conceived. Henry Cobin says, "...if we usually speak of the imaginary as the unreal, the utopian, this must contain the symptom of something". He added, "...one must avoid confusing with the imagination that modern man identifies with "fantasy" and that, according to him, produces only the "imaginary." From the cosmological perspective, reason and imagination are interrelated and therefore both work together to achieve the truth. See further Henry Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," (1964). The article could be retrieved from <http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm> (accessed 23 August 2005).
5. In terms of Ibn Rushd's classification above, these peasant Malays are *the rhetorical class*, the people who are persuaded simply by what they are told and whose views cannot stand up to criticism.
6. Among the vital function of mythology is to reconcile the mysterious events occurred in this universe to human experience so that people could easily understand and memorize them. See further Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God Creative Mythology*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 4.
7. These aspects of Malay history are "esoteric" in features, and since then they could only be understood by a particular group of people. Modern man could not understand them by solely utilizing modern approaches. Moreover the symbolization of myth and legend in Malay society was in fact depended upon the dominant civilizations. The ignorance about these dominant civilizations will certainly brought to the misunderstanding about the relationship between myth and Malay history. The account on the relationship between symbols, culture, religion and civilization was discussed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 1-18. (The book was translated into Malay language, see *Pengenalan Doktrin Kosmologi Islam*, translated by Baharudin Ahmad and Osman Bakar, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993). In another instance Nasr says, "Esotericism cannot be judged by exoteric standards, it has its own logic which no external approach can ever hope to master." See further Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities in Islam*, 60.
8. "Legend" comes from the Latin adjective *legenda*, "for reading, to be read," which referred only to written stories, not to traditional stories transmitted orally from



generation to generation. This restriction also applied to the English word *legend* when it was first used in the late 14th century in reference to written accounts of saints' lives, but ever since the 15th century *legend* has been used to refer to traditional stories as well. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Entering word "*legend*".

9. Our simple thought might not be able to understand the relationship between the events in history with the symbolic mythologies used by ancient authors. The creative thought however will enable us to see the "archetypal, natural or elementary ideas" concealed in these mythologies. See further Joseph Campbell, *The Mask of God Creative Mythology*, 8-9.
10. *Mahabharata* has as its centre the legendary history of the war between two sets of cousins, one side, the Pandavas, aided and abetted by (Lord) Krishna. In many ways, it acts as a key source of historical consciousness for (Hindu) Indians. See further Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, "Hinduism," in *Myth and History*, edited by Jean Holm and John Bowker, (New York: Pinter Publishers, 1994), 71.
11. *Ramayana* tells the story of Rama, his birth, marriage and banishment into the forest, accompanied by his wife, Sita, and his loyal half-brother, Laksamana. See further Ibid..
12. Many a moral and spiritual problem may present formidable difficulties, when considered in abstraction. These epics had presented and illustrated without abstraction a proper application of the laws of the *Smritis* to concrete situations in life through the stories of great men. See further T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*, (Bombay: Chetana Pvt. Ltd., 1984), 33-35.
13. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *ta'wil* is the "*science of the elite*," a symbolic interpretation stands above the common religious law as it is meant for all men. See further Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 268.
14. *Ta'wil* however is more appropriate to be used since most of the mythological parts of the Malay historical texts (to use Cobin's statement), "*speak under the veil of symbols, so that the Sages shall meditate and reflect upon this secret and thus raise themselves to a higher rank in Real Knowledge*". See further Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, translated by W. R. Trask, (New York: Pantheon, 1960), 314, and as quoted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 268.
15. The Islamic tolerance however has made possible for many Indian concepts of history to survive within these classical Malay historical texts. Not only that, the Indian concepts of history had also played an important role in the texts. This fact is proven when finally the classical Malay historical texts were found to be making no great distinction between history and myth or *itihasa* and *purana*. *Itihasa* is used in some modern Indian languages as the word for 'history' and *purana* is frequently rendered as 'myth'. Indian were always taking them together and called them *itihaspurana*. See further Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, "Hinduism," in *Myth and History*, edited by Jean Holm and John Bowker, 71. Two great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are *Itihasa*s. While there were at least eighteen *Puranas* including the most popular *Bhagavata-purana*. See further Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*, 33-36.



16. In Chinese cyclic myth, in which the teaching of Buddha interpolated with the teaching of Confucianism, the existence of the symbolic cosmic mountain was also prevailed. In the story of *The Journey to the West*, Tripitaka, Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy and the Dragon Horse crossed the Sacred Water surrounding the Holy Mountain of the Western Paradise and the Buddha of the Infinite rewarded them with the five thousand and forty-eight scrolls of the Great Vehicle of the True Tripitaka. Their journey is comparable to the journey of Raja Chulan's princes who came back from chaos of the sea to the harmonic meeting of heaven and earth or cosmos. For the account on *The Journey to the West* and the essential of the cosmic mountain in Chinese mythology see further Robert Shanmu Chen, *A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Cyclic Myths*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 103-110.
17. The symbol of mountain as the meeting point of heaven and earth was also prevailed in other civilizations such as the old Sumerian, Egyptian and Polynesian. For this account see further Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, 76-103. There was also the concept of sacred mountain in Buddhism described through the figure of "Avalokitesvara" discovered in Ceylon. "Avalokitesvara" means "the Lord that looketh down" and its discovery proved that Buddhism was also linked between the Heaven and earth through the symbolization of the mountain. See further Coomaraswamy, *Mahayana Buddhist Images From Ceylon and Java*, 287.
18. Al-Qur'an in Surah al-Ra'd chapter 13, verse 17 also described how after the flood has gone the scum like froth was cast out, while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Comparable to the story of Raja Sulan's princes, they were the "good or the divine spirit" who remain on the earth purposely to spread the goodness to their people. According to Lings, the idea of the emergence of the divine spirit in relation to the sea and water is also prevalent in Christian cosmology as described in Genesis, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." See further Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype; A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, 69.
19. Similarly, when the author of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* referred to the war between Hanuman and Seri Rama which basically contained in the Indian epic of *Ramayana* and some other characters of Indian epic including the Buddhist epic of *Kartha Sarit Sagara*, he is indeed referred to them as Hindus and Buddhists.
20. The history or the sirah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) is among the best model for the Muslim. Since from the Muslim point of view he is the symbol of perfection of both the human person and human society, his life events are the most essential events to be modeled and followed. See further Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities in Islam*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 72.
21. The personification of Jesus, Buddha and Krishna is meaningless if certain aspects of their lives on earth were not being taken as models for imitation by Christians and Hindus. See further Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype; A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, 47.
22. The story of prophet Khidr in the Qur'an was also illustrated in a way that his actions of tearing down a wall and boring a hole in a ship were meaningless and harmful. But once their inner nature was revealed their validity became clear. Thus, in this aspect his actions were esoteric in nature and could not be understood if seen only from the surface. Similarly, his presence in *Sejarah Melayu* should also be seen from an esoteric perspective. See further Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and*

Realities in Islam, 59-60. See also Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Ralph Manheim, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 53-77.

23. This story was narrated in the Qur'an, Surah al-Isra' 17: 1 and also in the *hadith*. The Literary imitations of the legendary journey of Prophet Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*) during *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* is not a new trend for the Muslim writers including the author of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Since 10 and 11th century A.D, there was already a treatise by Abul 'Ala al-Ma'ari entitled *Risalat al-Ghufran* or *Treatise on Pardon* in which it imitates the Nocturnal Journey or *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* of Prophet Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*). The most suprising case is Dante's celebrated work *Divine Comedy* which also imitating the journey of *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*. See further Miguel Asin Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1968), 54-67.

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