JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

Journal of Islam in Asia

Articles submitted for publication in the *Journal of Islam in Asia* are subject to a process of peer review, in accordance with the normal academic practice.

The Influence of Shi'ism on the Malay Muslims of Malaysia

Pengaruh Fahaman Shi'Ah Ke Atas Orang Islam Di Malaysia

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Abstract

This article aims to make a preliminary and general observation on some of the influences of Shi'ism on the Malay Muslims in Malaysia since post Iranian revolution in 1979 onwards. This research emphasizes on the impact of the Iranian revolution in 1979 on the Malay Muslim society of Malaysia and the effort of some to develop the Shi'ite community in the Malay Sunnite majority. Cases in focus are in the field of education, social and politics. The researcher employed the qualitative method that includes textual analysis of the materials related to Shi'ism, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD) with those who sympathize with the Shiite groups. Among the findings are the Malay sect of Shi'ism emerged officially after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. After the revolution, many Malay students were sent to pursue their studies at the Republic of Iran. This led to the formation of Malay Shi'ites organizations that went in line with the aspiration of the Iranian Revolution. It also to some extent influenced some of the social activities of Malay Muslims of Malaysia.

Keywords: Schism, Shi'ism, Sunnism, Malay, Islam.

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan membuat satu pemerhatian awal dan umum keatas orang-orang Melayu Islam di Malaysia pasca revolusi Iran pada tahun 1979 dan selepasnya. Kajian ini menekankan impak revolusi Iran 1979 ke atas masyarakat Melayu Islam di Malaysia dan usaha sebahagian mereka untuk membentuk komuniti Shi'ah di dalam masyarakat Melayu yang majoritinya Sunni. Kes-kes yang dikaji adalah dalam bidang pendidikan, sosial dan politik. Para pengkaji menggunakan metod kualitatif termasuk analisa tekstual terhadap bahan-bahan yang berkaitan fahaman Shi'ah, temubual dan perbincangan kumpulan berfokus (FGD) dengan kumpulan-kumpulan yang bersimpati dengan fahaman tersebut. Di antara penemuan-penemuan dari kajian ini adalah kumpulan Melayu Shi'ah muncul secara rasmi selepas revolusi Iran 1979. Selepas revolusi

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itu, ramai pelajar-pelajar Melayu Sunni telah dihantar menyambung pengajian mereka di republik Iran. Hal yang demikian menjurus kepada pembentukan organisasi-organisasi yang selari dengan aspirasi revolusi Iran. Dalam beberapa aspek, ia juga mempengaruhi aktiviti-aktiviti sosial orang-orang Melayu Islam di Malaysia.

Kata Kunci: Skete, Shī'ah, Sunni, Melayu, Islam.

Introduction

The south-east Asia region is reputed for having the most population of Muslims in the world that outnumbers the Middle Eastern countries, the birthplace of Islam. Many theories suggested that Islam came to this region as early as the seventh century, the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his Companions. The mainstream belief was the Sunnism[1] (*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*) in which there are at least four major schools of jurisprudence. After enjoying the unity of holding firmly to the Islamic Law and practices, Malay Muslim majority faced the challenges from colonialists who at the same time carry the mission of Evangelization. This took place for almost 500 years which started from the fifteenth century until the middle of twentieth century whereby the Malay Muslims have been divided into countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and others. The colonial powers practiced the separation of religion from administrative affairs of government.

After gaining independence, the population of Malaysia grows and consists of various races such as Malay and Bumiputera (68.6 %), Chinese (23.4%), Indian (7%), and others (1%).[2] The Malay Muslims of

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[1] Sunnism or *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* is the school of theology that was initiated by Abū al-Ḥassan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī (873-936). Formerly he was a follower of the Mu'tazilite and left it there after. He said: "The belief we hold and the religion we follow are holding fast to the Book of our Lord, to the Sunnah of our Prophet, and to the traditions related on the authority of the Companions and the Successors and the *imām* of *ḥadīth*;-to what we hold firmly, professing what Abū 'Abdallāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal professed, and avoiding him who dissents from his beliefs, because he is the excellent *imām* and the perfect leader." One his followers, al-Baghdādī (d.1037) describes the concept of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* in greater detail in his di discussion of the successful sect (*firqah al-nājiyah*). He includes those who follow the Qur'ān, Sunnah, pious predecessors (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), the traditionalists (*muḥaddithīn*), imams of school of Islamic jurisprudence, and others. Abū al-Ḥassan 'Alī al-Ash 'arī, *Kitāb al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, tr. Walter C. Klein, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyanah* (*The Elucidation of Islam's Foundation*), (New Haven: American Oriental Society,1940), p. 49; 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah,1994), pp. 312-316; 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīdah, n.d),pp. 311-313.

[2]Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2014-2016 ,

Malaysia are still maintaining the religion of Islam as enshrined in the Malaysian constitution. Islam makes up 61.3% of the population, and other religions like Buddhism 19.8%, Christianity 9.2%, Hinduism 6.3%, Chinese beliefs and others 3.4%,[3] can be freely practiced as they are also recognised by the constitution. The Malay Muslims subscribe to the mainstream Sunnism and Shafi'ite School of Jurisprudence in daily practice as well as in the *Shari'ah* court systems. The Islamic court works under the jurisdiction of Sultans of the 9 states, and the Agong for the Federation of Malaysia that includes four more states and the Federal Territories (Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya). It runs simultaneously with the Federal civil court system that is inherited from the British legal system. As for the Malay Muslims, there was no major disunity throughout the modern history as they firmly subscribed to Sunnism. It was not until the Iranian Revolution which took place in 1979 when Malay Muslims in Malaysia headed to the brink of religious sectarianism. The endless sectarianism of over than thousand years in Muslim history between the Sunnites and Shi'ites began to seep into the mind of Malay Muslim society of Malaysia. This is evident from several raids and detentions made by the state authorities against the religious teachings, practices and rituals, celebrations that were deemed inconsistent with the country's regulations.[4] Therefore, the objective of this research is to explore the influence of Shi'ism in some activities of Malay Muslims of certain areas of Malaysia.

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http://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=155&bul_id=OW lxdEVoYlJCS0hUZzJyRUcvZEYxZz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ 4TlhUUT09, (accessed on Monday, February 27th 2017).

[3]Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010 https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/ctheme&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJ wRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09 &bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTk1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09 (accessed on Monday, February 27th 2017).

[4] For example, a raid carried out by Department of Islamic Religion of Selangor (JAIS) on 24th of May, 2011. There were around 2000 participants celebrating the commemoration of the birth of Fatimah al-Zahrah, the daughter of the Prophet (PBUH). On 9th September 2013 Religious Department of Perak (JAIPk) detained three individuals for possessing some materials related to the teachings of Shi'ism such as books, pamphlet, compact disk and others in a health clinic in Taiping. They would be tried in the Syariah court. ABNA, "Tiga Individu Bebas dari Tuduhan Memiliki Bahan Berunsur Syiah, http://www.abna.ir/data.asp?lang=15&id=505721 (accessed on 16th of Februari, 2014. See also Celine Fernandez, "Malaysian Shia Muslims Prepare for Trial" http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB100014240527023041737045792594730767138 00 accessed on 17th of December, 2013.

This study employs qualitative methodology in which textual analysis has been applied on the materials that are related to the topic such as written, audio-visuals, manuscripts, and others. Moreover, interview method has also been conducted on those who are inclined towards Shi'ite teachings and people who live together with them. Additionally, some of the officers of states' religious department have also been interviewed. The following discussion will be focussing on the influence of Shi'ism on some of the aspects of Malay Muslims living in Malaysia. The discussion is divided into Shi'ism of pre-revolution and post revolution of the Iranian Republic in 1979.

1. The existence of pre-Revolution Shi'ism in the Malay World

The Arabic word *Sh, ī, ', t* and derivations that also appear in the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet, means followers, adherents, faction, party, group and others. The term Shi'ism technically refers to the followers of the fourth rightly guided caliph, cousin and son in law of the Prophet (PBUH), 'Ali b. Abī Tālib (d. 42AH).[5] 200 years after his death, from a very simple idea of mere followers of 'Ali, Shi'ism evolved into schisms and their doctrines differ from one another. Among major schisms of Shi'ism are the Zaydites, Isma'ilites (sevener), twelver Shi'ites (Ja'farites) and others. They split into many other sects that differ from each other in their doctrines, teachings, practices and others.[6]

Considerable research has been conducted in tracing the existence of the sect of Shi'ism in the classical Malay world. Scholars such as Abdullah Ishak,[7] Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah,[8] Azra,[9] Mohd Shamsuddin Harun & Nazmul Fahmi Kamaruzzaman,[10] and others undertook the re-

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[5] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥassan al-Nubakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-Shī'ah*, (Istanbul: matba'ah al-dawlah,1931), pp. 2-3.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Abdullah Ishak, *Islam di Nusantara*, (Petaling Jaya: Al-Rahmaniah.1990)

[8] Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Umat Islam di Nusantara*: (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1990).

[9] Azyumardi Azra, *Islam di Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Mizan, 1994); Azyumardi Azra, "Syiah di Indonesia: Antara Mitos dan Realitas", in *Syiah dan Politik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Mizan, 2000).

[10] Mohd Shamsuddin Harun & Nazmul Fahimi Kamaruzzaman, "Kemunculan Budaya Syiah di Alam Melayu: Satu Kajian Awal", dalam *Prosiding Nadwah Ulama Nusantara (NUN) IV: Ulama Pemacu Transformasi Negara*,25-26 November 2011, (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2011), pp.305-314.

search on this issue. Prior to these efforts, T.W Arnold,[11] S.Q Fatimi,[12] al-Attas,[13] Hasjmy,[14] touched on the issues of inception of Shi'ism in their research and also on theories of the coming of Islam to the Malay world. It appeared that there was no concrete theory from these scholars to prove the existence of the Shi'ite community in the Malay world of classical period. The nearest Shi'ite community that can be traced is in Ayutthaya (Bangkok) as early as 16th Century.[15]

Modern writers like Zailan,[16] Faizal,[17] Majid,[18] Alattas,[19] Falarti[20] and others made every effort to link the existence of Shi'ites community with the aspect of Persian cultural influences on Malay culture. The feast on the tenth day of Muharram and the half month of Sha'ban, the name of a herbal linked to the name of 'Ali and Fatimah,[21] the singing group called '*Boria*'[22] and others were associated with the Shi'ites' teachings

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[11] TW Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, 2nd ed., (New Delhi: Adam publishers & Distributors,2002).

[12] S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute Ltd. 1963).

[13] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Paper presented at the IVth IAHA Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 1968.

[14] A. Hasjmy, (ed), *Sejarah Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Indonesia,* (Bandung, 1981), pp.157- 158, 521-522.

[15] Julispong Chularatana, "The Shi'ite Muslims in Thailand from Ayutthaya Period to the Present", *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, Special Issue 16, 2008, pp. 37-58.

[16] Wan Zailan and Ahmad Zuhdi, "Kontribusi Salman al-Farisi dan Kebudayaan Persia dalam Pemikiran Islam", *Toleransi*, vol.1, No.1, Januari, 2009, pp.1-16.

[17] Mohd Faizal Musa, "Malaysian Shi'ites lonely struggle", https://www.scribd.com/document/238123318/Mohd-Faizal-Musa-the-Malaysian-Shiites-Lonely-Struggle-Web> (accessed on March 3rd 2017).

[18] Majid Daneshgar, "The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards", *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. VII, No.2, Spring 2014, pp.191-229.

[19] Syed Farid al-Attas, "Muslim Sectarianism and the Amman Message," in G25, *Breaking the Silence: Voices of Moderation*, (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish. 2016), pp.158-170.

[20] Maziar Mozaffari-Falarti, "Critical Study of theories surrounding the historic arrival of a popular Shiite festival in Contemporary Sunni Malaysia", Paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology on 29th October, 2004.

[21] Anonymous interview held on April 29th, 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[22] Maziar Mozaffari-Falarti, "Critical Study of theories surrounding the historic arrival of a popular Shiite festival in Contemporary Sunni Malaysia", A Paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology on 29th October, 2004.

and practices. Azra[23] however opines that those theories are lacking scientific data such as artefacts, tombs, stone inscription, documents and manuscript and others to prove the existence of Shi'ite ruler and community in this region. He[24] concluded that there was no evidence to show Shi'ite settlement in this region from the existing historical facts. However, most of the researchers agreed that not only the Persian culture which includes Shi'ites, but also Arab, Indian, Chinese, and other cultures exerted influence on the Malay Muslims in the South-east Asia.

There are some Shi'ite families that came to Malaysia in the late 19th century such as the Ismā'īlites that include the sects of Aga Khan, Bohrah, and others.[25] Some families of Aga Khan who came from India lived and earned their living by doing textile business and they are known by the name of Peer Bhai in the Kelang Valley. The same goes to the Bohrah, who came from India and run fabrics and garments, based their businesses in cities including Kuala Lumpur and Kelang.[26] Like other countries in this world, Bahaism (Bahā'iyyah) that separated from the Twelver Shi'ites, emerged and was recognized as a new religion in Malaysia.[27]

2. Post-Revolution Shi'ism in the Malaysian Muslim Society

Research has also been done on the existence of Shi'ite community of the post-revolution in Malaysia. Unlike the classical period, majority of researchers agreed that the Shi'ite community exist in the modern era of Malay Muslim society of Malaysia. Obviously, it took place after the Iranian revolution that has drawn the attention of many people that a *mullah*-led revolution could defeat the US-backed Pahlavi regime. Some of the Muslims, who were still mourning for the downfall of the Ottoman caliphate in Turkey by a secularist Ataturk (d. 1938), were obsessed with the victory of Iranian revolution and its leader. Khomeini (d. 1989), the leader-cum-cleric became the centre of attention for a decade. Apparently, the obsession about the Iranian revolution and its leader led to some of the Malays pursuing their interests in obtaining knowledge about Shi'ism. They were searching for the factors that led to the victory of the

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[23] Azyumardi Azra, *Islam di Nusantara Jaringan Global dan Lokal*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Mizan. 1994); Azyumardi Azra, "Syiah di Indonesia: Antara Mitos dan Realitas", in *Syiah dan Politik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Mizan. 2000)
[24] Ibid.
[25] Anonymous interview held on April 29th, 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.
[26] Anonymous interview held on April 29th, 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.
[27] http://www.bahai.org.my/ (Accessed on October 13th 2016).

traditional Shi'ites against Shah (1953-1979) and Qajar dynasty (1795-1925) that has being long into existence. This led to the existence of Malay Shi'ite groups[28] among the Sunnite majority. They envisaged the framework of Iranian revolution as a model to be exemplified.[29] Consequently, they exert some influences on the social lives of Malay Muslims such as on the aspects of educational pursuit, organizational and political activities, and others.

Emergence of the Malay Shi'ites community

In 1982, some scholars and academics were officially invited to visit the newly established Republic of Iran. Some academics from local universities were part of the delegation which was financially sponsored by the government of the Republic of Iran. The official invitation was also extended to some of the prominent Malay scholars of the Association of Malaysian 'Ulama' (*Persatuan Ulama' Malaysia*-PUM) as well as non-governmental organizations such as ABIM (the Islamic Youth Association of Malaysia), Darul Arqam and others. Assari b. Mohammad (d. 2010), the leader of Darul Arqam related his travelling experience to the Republic of Iran in his book.[30] The official invitations were also made by the Iranian Republic for the following couple of years to Muslim academics and scholars of Malaysia.

These invitations came simultaneously with the efforts of some of the Malays who were searching for the factors that led to the victory of the traditional Shi'ites movement against the US-backed dynasty. This led to the formation of some of the Malay Sunnite groups, who make the framework of Iranian revolution and its leaders especially Khomeini as a model to be followed.[31] Unlike the Bohrah and Peer Bhai that were of Indian origin, recent studies show that there are two main Malay groups of Shi'ites in Malaysia; the Ahl al-Bayt Council and the Council of Malaysian Shi'ite, both of whom are of twelver Shi'ites.[32]

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[28] Such personalities were Norman Basha, Zainal bin Talib, Mahadi Asab, Syed Hassan Al-Attas, Mustafa bin Safar and Syed Mokhtar Al-Haddad. Christoph Marcinkowski, "Aspects of Shi'ism in Contemporary Southeast Asian", *The Muslim World*, Vol.98, January 2008, pp. 36-71.

[29] Anonymous interview held on April 29th, 2011, Kuala Lumpur.

[30] Asaari Muhammad, *Bahaya Syiah*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbitan Shoutul Arqam, 1987), pp.1-8.

[31] Anonymous interview held on April 29th 2011, Kuala Lumpur.

[32] Anonymous interview and focus group discussions held on June 1st -2nd , 2011, Kuala Lumpur.

Some researchers argue that the Malay Shi'ites groups are also involved under the patronage of the foundation of the *Ahlul Bayt* World Assembly (ABWA-*al-majma' al-'alamī li ahl al-bayt*) of Tehran.[33] Another foundation that was established for the same purpose is the Ecumenical Society of Tehran (*Majma' al-Taqrib*), also known as the World Assembly of the Proximity of Islamic School of Thoughts (WAPIST) that aims at reconciling between various sects of Islamic world. It is likely that this organization also exists in Malaysia. Both of them are civil organizations that come under direct control of the spiritual leader (*rahbar*) of the Iranian Republic.[34]

The Malay followers of Twelver Shi'ism claimed that they were the passionate followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* or family of the house of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). Although the Qur'anic concept of the *ahl al-bayt*[35] mainly refers to the wives of the Prophet, his children and some of cousins and paternal uncle, the Shi'ites confined them to only four personalities; 'Alī (d. 42AH), Fāṭimah (d. 11AH), al-Hassan (d. 50AH) and al-Hussayn (d. 61AH).[36] They believed that there was a slight difference between Shi'ites and *Ahl al-Bayt*. The former are those who follow and love the family of the house of the Prophet (PBUH), and the latter is the descendant of the house of the Prophet (PBUH) through Fatimah and 'Alī's linage that is inclusive of the Imāms of Twelver Shi'ites. Their descendants are known with the title of *Syed, Habib* and *Sharifah* in the Malay Archipelago.[37] In the inadequate of scientific fact, the Malay followers of Shi'ism believed that the ideology of Shi'ism was developed in the archipelago due to the mission made by the *Ahl al-Bayt*.[38] Thus, they practiced the Ja'fariyyah, a school of Jurisprudence that was said to have

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[33] Wilfried Buchta, "Tehran's Ecumenical Society (Majma' al-taqrīb): A veritable Ecumenical Revival or A Trojan Horse of Iran), in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (Leiden, Brill, 2001), pp.333-353.

[34] Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest: Evaluating the Islamic Republic of Iran's Public Diplomacy Strategies, Unpublished PhD thesis of the International Islamic University, 2014.pp.

[35] Al-Qur'an, 33:33.

[36] Lujnah al-ta'lif Muassasah al-Balagh, *Ahl al-bayt: Maqamahum, manhajahum, masarahuhum*, (Tehran: Al-Balagh foundation, 1986). The website of al-Balagh foundation can also be visited at the https://www.al-islam.org/organization/al-balagh-foundation-0 (accessed on Nov.18th 2016).

[37] Anonymous interview held on July 14th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[38] Anonymous interview held on April 29th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

been founded by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148AH), the sixth Imām of twelver Shi'ism, as claimed by his followers.[39]

The notion of a narrowed understanding of the *ahl al-bayt* who came to disseminate Islam, however contradicted with the research made by scholars like al-Attas,[40] Mahayudin[41] and Anna.[42] They suggested that Ba'Alawiyyah's family of Yemen were the ones that came to propagate Islam to people of this region and later Islamized them. Ba'Alawiyyah's family subscribed to Sunnism and practised Shafi'ites school of jurisprudence and propagated such belief to the Malay world.[43] The family of Ba 'Alawiyyah is of different group from the Shi'ite Nusayriyyah or 'Alawiyyah of Syria that was initiated by Muḥammad Ibn Nusayr al-Namīrī al-Bakrī (d. 270/883) who swore allegiance to al-Ḥassan 'Askarī (d. 232/874), the eleventh Imām of Twelver Shi'ism.[44]

Apart from the admiration of the victory of the Iranian revolution, one of the followers believed that the unity among the Shi'ites was stronger than that of the Sunnites.[45] There were several factors that contributed to the success of the Shi'ites of Iran, one of which was the hierarchy of their traditional scholarship that implied their authority in religious knowledge. The terms *Ayatollah 'Uzma, Ayatollah, Hujjatullah, Hujjatulislam* and others occupied the highest hierarchy of scholarship.

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[39] Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor. See also Ahmad Zuhdi Ismail, *Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq: Pemikirannya tentang Konsep Ketuhanan*, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2006), pp. x-xi. Ja'far is said to have been one of the teachers of Imam Malik (died d.179H / 795M) and al-Shafi'i (died 204H / 820M). However, the claim is quite difficult to be proved as Imām Mālik never mentioned Ja'far and his ideas on Shiism in his writings, and Imām al-Shāfi'ī was born in 150AH, two years after the death of Ja'far.

[40] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, (Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press, 2011), pp.73-74.

[41] Mahyudin Haji Yahaya, *Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press,1984), pp.5-6.

[42] Anne K. Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp.12-24.

[43] Mohd Faizal Musa, "The Malaysian Shi'a: A Prelimanary Study of Their History, Oppression and Denied Rights", *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol.Vi, no.4, Autmn 2013, p.417.

[44] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥassan al-Nūbakhtī, *Kitāb Firaq al-Shī'ah*, (Istanbul, Maṭba'ah al-dawlah, 1931), p.78; Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects*, (Syracuse: Syaracuse University Press, 1988), pp.255-279; see also Meir M.Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayrī-Alawi Religion:An Enquiry into Its Theology and Liturgy*, (Leiden: Brill.2002).

[45] Anonymous interview held on July 14th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

These levels qualified them to become the source of reference (*marja'taqlid*) in religious knowledge and to lead the society in social and political aspects. This advancement has attracted the professional and educated groups to join Shi'ism in Malaysia.[46]

Unlike the hierarchy of scholarship of Shi'ites, such concept is absent among the Sunnites, thus it has led to many serious problems such as the absence of leadership in political field. Hence, according to one of the followers, the Sunnites could not face the challenges of secularised western people and their ideologies.[47] One of the followers therefore, conceded that the Shi'ite political system was more credible than that of the Sunnites'. Besides, another reason of admiration is the uniqueness of Shi'ites political system that the traditional scholars were the ones who actively involved and led the people. Moreover, it was the traditional political system that imbued with Islamic scholarships that succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy leadership and replacing the western political system with the Islamic one.[48] Thus, the leader of the revolution, Khomeini and his ideology became the centre of attention and admiration to the Malay Shi'ite groups.

Khomeinism

In the traditional Shi'ite understanding, an Islamic government (*al-ḥukūmah al-Islāmiyyah*) cannot be established and some of the religious tenets cannot be implemented during the occultation (*ghayb*) of the awaited Imām (*al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*). However, this stand had changed during the tenure of Khomeini as the deputy Imam as well as the spiritual leader under the concept of guardianship of the jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*).[49] It is to centralize the leadership (*wilayat*) under one supreme leader who is a credible jurist (*al-faqih*). Among the special characteristics of a jurist is knowledgeable in Islamic Law and having justice in his character and of high spiritual level.

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[46] Anonymous interview held on July 14th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[47] Anonymous interview held on July 14th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[48] Anonymous interview held on July 14th 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[49] Imad Salamey and Zanoubia Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol.12, No.2, June 2011, pp.197-212. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, (London: I.B. Tauris,1993); Said Amir Arjomand, "Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran", in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (Leiden, Brill, 2001), p.308.

Under the concept of guardianship of the jurist, in contrast with the classical concept, in order to establish an Islamic state, Khomeini believed that the Shi'ites were not required to wait for the appearance of the awaited Imam.[50] Hence, the supreme leader who at the same time the deputy (nā'ib al-Imam), is responsible to manage the administration of the followers and this world as he could communicate with the awaited Imam.[51] The commands of the deputy Imam were also binding as he was capable of communicating and receiving directions from the awaited Imam.[52] Therefore, each command of the supreme leader could not be refuted and criticised for it was actually the order of the awaited Imam. In other words, the concept of guardianship of jurist contradicted to the classical concept of individual or decentralized immolation (marja'iyyah) practiced by the Shi'ites.[53]

This populism is associated with the leader of revolution and it is to be known as Khomeinism. Given the political idea of Khomeinism, it is a pre-requisite to change the corrupt monarchy system into a theocratic country in which the supreme leader has an absolute power over the President, Parliament, armed forces, civil institutions and the Assembly of Religious Experts of the country.[54]

One of the salient features of Khomeinism is the mission to export the revolution to the Shi'ites of the rest of the Muslim world. In other words, it is an effort to disseminate Islam and establish an Islamic state in accordance with one of the Shi'ite theology (usul), the Imamate. Apart from Imamate, Khomeini's theory of guardianship of the jurist should

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[50] Imam Khomeini, *Al-Hukumah al-Islamiyyah*, tr. Razali Nawawi, *Al-Hukumah Islamiyyah*, (Bangi: ABIM,1983), pp.14-17

[51] Ahmad al-Katib, *The Development of Shiite political thought*, (London: Al-Shura Publishing House for Research and Information, n.d); Said Amir Arjomand, "Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran", in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende*, The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p.308.

[52] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, (New Haven, Yale: University Press. 1985), pp.197-205. See also Ahmad al-Katib, *The Development of Shiite political thought*, pp.403-409.

[53] Imad Salamey and Zanoubia Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*,vol.12, No.2,June 2011,pp.197-212.

[54] Said Amir Arjomand,"Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran", pp.301-332; Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest, pp.35-43.

also be propagated to the rest of Muslims in the world.[55] For this purpose, the supreme leader has appointed his direct representatives in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and other countries.[56] Financially, the efforts would be sponsored by semi-public religious foundations such as the Alavi Foundation, Martyrs Foundation, Pilgrimage Foundation, Housing Foundation, and Foundation for War Refugees, and Foundation for Imam Khomeini's Publication. They owned "as much as half that of the budget of central government."[57] These foundations came under absolute control of the Supreme leader. It is believed that most of the activities come under the policy of 'exporting revolution' outside the Iranian republic and were sponsored by these foundations.

Unlike the Malay Sunnites who believed that the terminology of *Imam* has no political implication, the Malay Shi'ites of Malaysia on the other hand subscribed to the same concept of the awaited Imam as the supreme political leader while the deputy or spiritual leader (*murshid al-'ām*) is an immediate leader of the Muslim countries. Apart from the concept of source of reference (*marja' taqlīd*), the concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih* was also accepted without criticism and objection by the Shi'ite followers of Malaysia.[58] Consequently, the twelver Shi'ites in Malaysia put their loyalty to one common leader and that is the supreme leader (*rohbar*) of the Iranian Republic.

The Influence of Shi'ism on Various Aspects of Malaysian Muslim Society

The direct influence of Iranian Revolution could be traced in the Malay society. The following discussion attempts to highlight the influence of Iranian Revolution on Malay institution and organization, and their educational lifestyle. One of such organizations is PAS that represents the Islamic movement and politics. Another aspect that is discussed is the educational lifestyle of Malay society.

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[55] Said Amir Arjomand, "Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran", p.306.

[56] Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest, p.10.

[57] Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2008),p.178.

[58] Wan Zailan and Ahmad Zuhdi, "Kontribusi Salman al-Farisi dan Kebudayaan Persia dalam Pemikiran Islam", *Toleransi*, vol.1, No.1, Januari,2009, p.10; Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

Islamic Movements and Politics

The effort to make an official contact with the Shi'ites has been initiated by one of the Malay-based political parties of Malaysia, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). PAS originated from a unit of religious scholars to deal with the Islamic religious affairs in the party of United Malay National Orgnization (UMNO).[59] Due to dissatisfaction of some policies of the party, Ahmad Fuad Hassan who led the religious unit, withdrew from UMNO and established the Association of All-Muslim religious scholars of Malaya (Persatuan Ulama' Se-Malaya) on August 23rd 1951. After a few months, on November 24th, 1951 the name was changed into Association of Pan-Islam of Malaya (Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya) so as to involve in politics and participate in the general election of Malaya.[60] The name of the association again changed to Pan-Malayan Islamic Party when it was registered to the registration office on May 31st, 1955.[61] The first President was Haji Ahmad Fuad Hassan (1951-1953) followed by Dr. Hj. Abbas bin Hj. Alias (1953-1956). Then, Dr. Burhanuddin bin Hj. Mohd Nor al-Hilmi (1956-1969) and Dato' Asri bin Hj. Muda (1969-1982) became the third and fourth President, respectively.

During the tenure of the fourth President, one of the top leaders of PAS confessed that he has already become a member of the Ecumenical Council (*Majma' Taqrib*) of Tehran that was under the tutelage of spiritual leader of the Iranian Republic, Khomeini as early as 1980, during which the Iraq-Iran war took place.[62] Since then, he attended the council regularly.[63] Furthermore, the Central Youth Wing of PAS (Dewan Pemuda Pas Pusat-DPPP) has also taken the lead by sending some members that include Subky Latif (d.2020) (the secretary), Abu Bakar Chik (d.2015), Suhaimi Haji Ahmad, Harun Taib (d.2014) and others to visit

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[59] Dato' Asri Muda, (1993) *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus, Bangi*: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.p.37.

[60] http://perlis.pas.org.my/v1/index.php/sejarah-parti-islam-semalaysia-pas/ (accessed on March 8th 2017)

[61] Dewan Pemuda PAS Wilayah Persekutuan, Sejarah Penubuhan PAS, https://dppwp.wordpress.com/intro/pas-tuntutan-awal-terhadap-perlembagaan-negara-selepas-1955/ (accessed on March 8th 2017)

[62] Abdul Hadi Awang, "Penjelasan Isu Syria-Aleppo," Terengganu Kini https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=terengganukini (accessed on March 1st 2017).

[63] Abdul Hadi Awang, "Penjelasan Isu Syria-Aleppo," Terengganu Kini https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=terengganukini (accessed on March 1st 2017).

the Iranian Republic in early 1982.[64] Mustafa Ali (the Head of DPPP), Mohd. Rosdi Ariff and Mohamad Sabu had once again visited the Iranian Republic officially in June 1982 thereafter.[65] It is said that this effort was done without the knowledge and consent of Dato' Hj. Asri Muda (d. 1992), the fourth President of PAS. He came to know about the visit and training course on Shi'ism in Iran, to which he did not agree, through one of the members of DPPP.[66]

One of the main issues of the visit was to observe the effectiveness of the concept of *wilāyāt al-faqīh* (guardianship of the jurist) that was practiced by the Republic. One of the former Vice Presidents of PAS, Datuk Hj. Nakhaei Ahmad[67] confessed that he was the one who drafted a concept paper about the General Spiritual Leader (*murshid al-'am*) and the Council of religious scholars (*Majlis Shura al-'ulama'*). All these posts were actually inspired by the structure of an organization of the newly established Iranian Republic. He, however, insisted that although they look structurally the same, the contents were different, and PAS actually rejected Shi'ite' teachings and doctrines inside the party.[68]

One of the former Deputy President of PAS, Mohamad Sabu claimed that the delegation of DPPP visited the Republic of Iran in 1982 was to study the concept of guardianship of the jurist, workforce unit (*unit 'amal*), and others. He reiterated that all of the ideas originated from the Republic of Iran and they were the one who proposed the slogan of the party 'leadership of religious scholars' (*kepimpinan ulama'*), the workforce unit (*unit 'amal*), its theme song, and others to the Party.[69] During the annual general meeting of DPPP in 1982, the youth wing headed by Mustafa Ali organised its meeting separately in Bukit Mertajam, Perak, and a different place with the main annual general meeting which took place in the Balai Seminar of Dewan Bahasa dan

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[64]https://idrisahmad.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/sejarah-kepimpinan-%E2%80%98ulama%E2%80%99-dalam-pas/ accessed on 29th Sept. 2016. http://subkylatif.blogspot.my/2005/06/konsep-kepimpinan-ulama-bukan-semua.html (accessed on Sept. 29th 2016).

[65]http://peraktoday.com.my/2013/10/bekas-naib-presiden-pas-sahkan-konsep-kepimpinan-ulama-dari-iran/ (accessed on March 1st 2017).

[66] Dato' Asri Muda, *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus*, p.114.

[67] Nakhaei Ahmad personally rejected the doctrines and teachings of Shiism as evident from his writings such as "Syiah di IPT", *Dakwah*,Jan/Feb 2014, pp.26-27.

[68] *The Malaysian Insider*, Bekas Naib Presiden PAS Sahkan Kepimpinan Ulamak dari Iran, http://peraktoday.com.my/2013/10/bekas-naib-presiden-pas-sahkan-konsep-kepimpinan-ulama-dari-iran/ (accessed on March 1st 2017).

[69] Ibid.

Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur. The resolutions of DPPP's meeting that were unknown by the President were brought to the main annual general meeting in Kuala Lumpur.[70]

The President mentioned in his '*Memoir*' that the method of revolution of Iranian republic was not suitable with the nature of Malaysian people as they were of plural societies and religions.[71]   His disagreement on the DPPP's visit to the republic of Iran, the extreme attitude shown by some of the leaders and followers to which he could not control, and some other matters led him and thirteen others to step down from his tenure as a President and important positions of PAS respectively on October 23rd, 1982.[72] He was succeeded by Haji Yusof Rawa (1982-1989). Dato' Asri and thirteen individuals established a new political party, Hizbul Muslimin of Malaysia (HAMIM) thereafter. [73]

The DPPP's proposal was brought to the supreme committee of PAS (*Jawatan kuasa Agung* PAS) and was approved thereafter. The special annual general meeting was convened to amend the Constitution of PAS. Consequently, the amendment of constitution was done in order to form the Council of Religious Scholars (*Majlis Syura Ulamak*-MSU) and appoint the spiritual leader (*murshid al-'am*) in its annual general meeting that was held on April 29th, 1983.[74] The creation of the post of PAS's spiritual leader seemed to have followed the structure of the post of Shi'ite' spiritual leader (*rohbar*), and the MSU seemed to have followed the Guardian Council under the concept of guardianship of the jurist of the Iranian government.

Elsewhere in this writing, two Societies (*Majma'*) have been mentioned; *Majma' al-'ālami li ahl al-bayt* (ABWA), and *Majma' al-Taqrīb* (Ecumenical Society). Although they have existed during the tenure of Khomeini, these societies were officially re-launched in 1990 upon the instruction of newly appointed supreme leader 'Ali Khamene'i. According to Buchta, one of the objectives of ABWA is "to gain control

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[70] Dato' Asri Muda, *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus,* pp.114.

[71] Dato' Asri Muda, *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus,* pp.114.

[72] Dato' Asri Muda, *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus,* pp.120-121.

[73] Dato' Asri Muda, *Memoir Politik Asri: Meniti Arus,* pp.115-116.

[74]   Ust.   Idris   Ahmad,   Sejarah   Kepimpinan   'Ulama'   dalam   PAS, https://idrisahmad.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/sejarah-kepimpinan-%E2%80%98ulama%E2%80%99-dalam-pas/ (accessed on Sept. 29th 2016). Subky Abdul Latif, Konsep Kepmpinan Ulama Bukan Semua Ahli PAS Ulama Bukan Semua Ahli Ilmu Ulama, http://subkylatif.blogspot.my/2005/06/konsep-kepimpinan-ulama-bukan-semua.html (accessed on Sept. 29th 2016).

over the political, social and religious affairs of the Shi'i communities throughout the world in order to centralize them under the leadership of the Iranian *walī-ye faqīh* 'Alī Khāmene'ī".[75]

On the other hand, the Tehran Ecumenical Society was established to reconcile the conflict between the Sunnites and Shi'ites that has never come to an end for more than a millennium. The former consists of the schools such as the Hanafites, Malikites, Shafiites, Hanbalites. The Shi'ites groups are the Ja'farites and Zaydites. Furthermore, the Ibadites, one of the moderate groups of Kharijites, are also allowed to take part. The board of directors of the Society consisted of twenty-four members from Iran and abroad, one of them was the top member of PAS to represent the Sunnites, probably to the South-East Asia region.[76] Despite all these facts, PAS has denied any influence of Shiite doctrines in the party and had sacked eight members for subscribing to Shi'ism.[77]

The same goes to the Association of Religious Scholars of Malaysia (Persatuan Ulamak se Malaysia-PUM) which was established on 1974.[78] PUM was neither governmental organization nor political party. It was headed by its first Chairman Hj. Nik Mahyuddin bin Hj. Musa (1974-1981), followed by Ustaz Ahmad Awang (1982-1999) and Ustaz Abdul Ghani Samsudin (1999-2003) respectively.[79]

Some of PUM members were also the members of PAS is said to have had an influence on the National Council of Fatwa of Malaysia

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[75] Wilfried Buchta, "Tehran's Ecumenical Society (Majma' al-taqrīb): A veritable Ecumenical Revival or A Trojan Horse of Iran?", in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001) p.351.

[76] Wilfried Buchta, "Tehran's Ecumenical Society (Majma' al-Taqrīb): A veritable Ecumenical Revival or A Trojan Horse of Iran?", in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (Leiden: Brill,2001), p.340.

[77] Ust. Idris Ahmad, Sejarah Kepimpinan 'Ulama' Dalam Pas, https://idrisahmad.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/sejarah-kepimpinan-%E2%80%98ulama%E2%80%99-dalam-pas/ (accessed on Sept 29th 2016). Konsep Kepimpinan Ulama, Bukan Semua ahli PAS Ulama, Bukan Semua Ahli Ilmu Ulama http://subkylatif.blogspot.my/2005/06/konsep-kepimpinan-ulama-bukan-semua.html (accessed on Sept 29th 2016)

[78] Persatuan Ulama Malaysia, https://pum.org.my/?page_id=7 (accessed on March 10th 2017).

[79] Abdul Ghani was succeeded by Dato' Md Salleh Ahmad (2003-2007) and Dato' Sheikh Haji Abdul Halim bin Abd Kadir (2007-) respectively. https://ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persatuan_Ulama_Malaysia see also http://pum.org.my/ahli-jawatankuasa/ (accessed on March 10th 2017).

(*Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan Malaysia*). It is said that after returning from visiting the Republic, some of them had exerted influence on the Malaysian government to consider three groups of Shi'ism as part of Islamic schools of Jurisprudence in 1984. They were the Zaydites, Ja'farites and Twelver Shi'ites.[80] Hence, the Malay Shi'ites were legally approved and free to practice the teachings in their daily lives. Therefore, the effort of propagating the Shi'ism to the Malay Sunnite majority was intensified by the followers.

The Influence of Shi'ism in Education.

Some of the academics of local universities have taken the initiative to study the origin of Shi'ism and its teachings that were never taught in the writings of classical Malay scholars. This subject was also given less attention in the secondary and higher level of education that covers the syllabus of Islamic studies of institutions of higher learning of Malaysia. Consequently, in order to obtain some original reading materials in Arabic and English, several academicians visited the Embassy of the Republic of Iran, whereas some relied on translation books in Malay language that were obtained from Indonesia. The translated version of books obtained such as, *Nahj al-Balaghah*,[81] *al-Murāja'at* (Sunni-Shiite dialogue), *Peshawar Nights*, *Thumma ihtadaytu*,[82] *Ahl al-Bayt*[83] and others were distributed to students of local universities. Some other books that were brought from Indonesia to be distributed to the followers are *Inilah al-khulafa' al-Rasyidin Rasul*,[84] *Antologi Islam*,[85] *Tokoh-tokoh terkemuka Ahlul-Bait Nabi*,[86] *Shalat Ahli Makrifat, Ali Zainal Abidin* and others.[87]

After the ruling of 1984, it is said that there was a group of first batch young Malays were sent by PAS as an initial program to pursue

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[80] Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

[81] Abul Hasan al-Musawi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*, tr. O. Hashem, *Nahjul Balaghah*, (Jakarta: Penerbit YAPI. 1990).

[82] Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi, *Thumma Ihtadaytu*, tr. Syed Husein Shahab, *Akhirnya Ku Temukan Kebenaran*, (Petaling Jaya: N.P.1991)

[83] Lujnah al-ta'lif Muassasah al-Balagh, *Ahl al-bayt: Maqamahum, manhajahum, masarahuhum*, (Tehran: Al-Balagh foundation, 1986)

[84] Written by Khair Izzah, a mass market paperback.

[85] Tim Digital Islamic Library Project, *Antologi Islam*, (Jakarta: Al-Huda, n.d)

[86] Ali Muhammad Ali, *Tokoh-tokoh terkemuka Ahlul-Bait Nabi*,14 vol., (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Jiwa Sdn.Bhd. 2000)

[87]Inilah daftar 63 penerbit dab Buku-Buku Syiah di Indonesia, http://www.syiahindonesia.com/2015/02/inilah-daftar-63-penerbit-dan-buku-buku-syiah-di-indonesia.html (accessed on Nov. 28th 2016).

their studies in Shi'ism in the Republic of Iran. One of the researchers discovered that there were six students from certain religious school in Malacca had been sent to one of the universities in the city of Qum of Iran to fathom the teachings and practices of Shi'ism. Also, there were ten students studied in one of the religious schools of Johor had been sent to Pakistan to pursue for their religious teaching of Shi'ism.[88] Not only the organization, many families who were inclined towards Shi'ism also have sent their children to the Republic as no restriction of visa imposed by the Malaysian government. A good diplomatic relation between both governments is still maintained to present day. Students as young as seventeen years old were sent to study in the Shi'ite traditional and modern educational system in cities like Qum, Tehran, and others.

The Traditional Educational System

After completing their studies, they are actively teaching and practicing the Shi'ite doctrines at the resource centres. These resource centres are known by the term *Maktabah* (resource centre)*, Husayniyyah* (small place of gathering) and *Hawzah* (seminary).[89] There are more than 70 centres throughout Malaysia, such as *Hawzah* al-Rida in Gombak, Selangor; *Hawzah* al-Kazim in Pendang, Kedah; *Hawzah* in Taman Semabok Perdana, Melaka; resource centre and *hawzah* in Larkin, Johor; *Maktabah* Sohibuzzaman in Ipoh, *Maktabah* Amirul Mukminin in Taiping, Perak and others. It is said that the number of resource centre is increasing from time to time.[90]

The main seminary is the *Hawzah ar-Ridha* that is located in Seri Gombak, Selangor. It was led by a graduate of one of the Iranian universities of Iran. He was said to have been one of the members of the first group sent by one of the political parties of Malaysia to pursue their studies to the Iranian Republic. Currently, he is the leader of the Malay Shi'ites of Malaysia namely the Council of *Ahlul Bayt* of Malaysia. Among the activities of this seminary are teaching classes on the doctrines and practices of Shi'ism, organizing series of talks to the followers, commemorating and celebrating some important events in the Shi'ite

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[88] Che Mat b. Che Min, "Gerakan Syiah dan Pengaruhnya di Malaysia", in Brunei Darussalam, *Ajaran Sesat: Kemunculannya, Bahayanya, Pemulihannya*", (Brunei: Pusat Dakwah, 1994), p.98; Mohd Faizal Musa, "The Malaysian Shi'a: A Prelimanary Study of Their History, Oppression and Denied Rights*", Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol.vi, no.4, Autmn 2013, pp.428.

[89] Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

[90] Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

calendar, such as the 'Ashura i.e. to commemorate the martyrdom of Ḥussayn (d. 61AH /680CE) in Karbala' on the 10th of Muharram, the birth of the awaited Mahdi on the 15th of Sha'ban, the birth of Fatimah al-Zahra' (d.11AH/ 632CE) on the 20th of Jamad al-akhir and others.[91]

There was a seminary located in Taman Semabok Perdana, a village located in Melaka. It was led by a person who claimed that before undergoing a study program in Iran, he just relied on the translation version of Indonesian language books on Shi'ism. He claimed that he obtained a true picture of Islam in the Iranian republic and not from the teachings of the Sunnites of Malaysia. He was also among the earlier group that was sent to pursue his studies in Iran. By claiming that most of the companions of Prophet Muhammad were hypocrites (*munāfiq*), Islam that was brought and taught by the *ahl al-bayt* was the correct one. He sometimes led the congregational prayers of the Sunnites under the doctrine of *taqiyyah* (dissimulation), an act of hiding one's true faith and portraying the faith of the majority of people.[92] Besides, he also organised classes that consisted of more than sixty people to discuss the teachings of Shi'ism regularly in the seminary. Fearing that the seminary would be raided by the authority, the location of the seminary was not advertised to the public.[93] A visit in early 2016 revealed that the seminary was already moved from Taman Semabok Perdana to other secret location.

Some reports said that there were 4 seminaries operating in Johor.[94] From the observation made, one of them was in Larkin, a suburb near downtown of Johor Bharu.[95] It was led by a person who claimed to have obtained a degree from one of the Iranian universities, and was actively teaching and practicing the Shiite doctrines to people in the community. Some of the teaching sessions attracted more than 500 people that include the local people, Pakistani workers, Iranian and Iraqian students and others. The teachings were about the concept of *Ahl al-bayt*,

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[91] Anonymous interview held on August 16th 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

[92] Anonymous interview and focused group discussion held on February 8th 2013 in Semabok Perdana, Malacca.

[93] Anonymous interview and focused group discussion held on February 8th 2013 in Semabok Perdana, Malacca.

[94] Portal Ikatan Islam & Melayu, "Bahaya Syiah: ISMA atur siri jelajah seluruh negara", http://www.ismaweb.net/2011/09/bahaya-syiah-isma-atur-siri-jelajah-seluruh-negara/ (accessed on Oct 6th 2016).

[95] Anonymous interview held on March 9th 2013 at Larkin Johore.

leadership in the light of Sunnites and Shi'ites, the legitimacy of *khalīfah*, *imāmah* and so on.[96]

There are also seminaries in Perak, Kedah, and other states of Malaysia. In the state of Kedah the seminary of al-Kazim was led by Abdullah Hassan who obtained his education in India.[97] This seminary attracted many students, also offered many books on Shi'ism that can be studied, one of which was *Biḥār al-anwar* by Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d.1698). As mentioned elsewhere, there were resource centres in Taiping and other places of Perak that provide books, booklet, and pamphlets about Shi'ism to the followers.

The Modern Educational System

In 2011, one of the followers implied that there was a plan to establish a private educational institution in which Shi'ism would be taught to the Malay students of Malaysia. It is said that this institution would employ modern technologies in its teaching methodologies, such as an online virtual teaching that includes tele-video lecturing and conferencing and so on.[98] The quest to pursue knowledge about Shi'ism led the Malay Shi'ites to make a contact with international counterpart.[99] One of the institutions that would meet this purpose is the Jamia al-Mustafa International University (MIU) of Qom, Iran.[100] Unlike other Iranian local universities, this educational institution is administered and financially sponsored directly under the spiritual leader of Iranian republic. Among the objectives of this university is to disseminate Islam which refers to the version of Islam that has been declared as the ideology of Iranian republic officially. Besides, another objective of the JMIU is to disseminate Shi'i Islam to Muslim students overseas.[101] The objective of the university is to offer subjects of Shi'ism directly from the experts of Twelver

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[96] Anonymous interview held on March 9th 2013 at Larkin Johore.

[97]   http://syiahmalaysia.blogspot.com/2012/10/ketua-pengganas-syiah-di-kedah.html. (Accessed on July 31st, 2013).

[98] Anonymous interview held on March 9th 2013 at Larkin Johore.

[99] Anonymous interview and focused group discussions on June 1st -2nd 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

[100]   https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jamia-Al-Mustafa-International-University-Qom-Iran/306291109486812?ref=br_rs   ;   http://en.miu.ac.ir/; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Mustafa_International_University (accessed on March 9th 2017)

[101] Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest: Evaluating the Islamic Republic of Iran's Public Diplomacy Strategies, Unpublished PhD thesis of the International Islamic University, Malaysia, 2014.pp.35-43.

Shi'ite scholars of Iran. It was said that the university would be established somewhere along the Ampang Road of Kuala Lumpur.[102]

After some observations, the respective institution probably can also be known as Amin Research and Cultural Centre (ARCC), a business company registered with the Company Commission of Malaysia.[103] Some of the centre's activities are publishing some books on the subject of Sociology and Anthropology and has its own library. Moreover, the ARCC has also made memorandum of understanding (MOU) with some local universities of Malaysia. It is not a full-fledged university that opens its places and facilities for students, but rather a research and cultural centre that facilitates to introduce Iranian republic to the Malaysians. It is known as 'MIU's Representation Office in Malaysia'.[104]

According to Bani Kamal,[105] ARCC is part of educational planning which was planned by Cultural Revolution Headquarters (CRH- *Sitād e Inqilāb e Farhangī*) that was established in late 1979 by Khomeini. One of the objectives of CRH is to purge the Iranian educational system especially the higher educational institutions from the influence of western ideas and intellectualism. Besides, it also aimed at "designing different disciplines, chalking out future action plans for universities on the basis of the Islamic culture, selection and training of competent, committed, aware teachers, and other affairs related to the Islamic educational revolution". [106]

Since the ARCC is not an educational institution that offers formal education to the public, the chance for some of the Shi'ites of Malaysia to further their studies on Shi'ism in this country is slim. Thus, the effort of pursuing education among the Malays is still going on nowadays. According to one of the followers in Malacca, he has to study Shi'ism on his own by reading the translation books from the Indonesian language. In order to fulfil his ambition to fathom knowledge about Shi'ism, he has sent his young son to study in Iran. The son who has just

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[102] Anonymous interview held on March 9th 2013 at Larkin Johore.

[103] It is located at the address Jalan 4, Taman Ampang Utama, 68000 Ampang, Selangor,   Malaysia. https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Amin_Research_and_Cultural_Centre_(ARCC) (accessed on September 6th 2016).

[104] Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest, p. 55.

[105] Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest, pp.35-43.

[106] Rouhulah Khomeini, *Saḥīfih Imām,* (Tehran: Foundation for Collection and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Thoughts and Ideas, vol. 12, 1999. p. 431, as quoted from Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, Soft Power and National Interest, p. 38.

completed his form five of schooling is now pursuing education in Iran.[107]

It can be assumed that although the development of Shi'ite educational system in Malaysia is not so rigorous, the effort towards fathoming the teaching of Shi'ism has been continuously done by sending students to the republic of Iran. Interestingly, some of the Malaysians have already attended MIU[108] as the citizens of Malaysia are free to travel and study in the republic of Iran regardless of Shi'ites or Sunnites without any restrictions from the Malaysian government.

Other influences

The Malay Shi'ites have their own programs and festivities that are celebrated throughout the year. One of the activities that coincided with the Malay tradition is the commemoration of the death of al-Hussayn b. 'Ali on the tenth of Muharram at Karbala'. During the commemoration of al-Hussayn, the followers will mourn and express the act of regret by repeatedly touching the knuckle on one's chest. To date, the act of injuring oneself as practiced in other countries like Iran and Pakistan has not been observed in Malaysia. The Malay Sunnites, however, celebrate the tenth day of Muharram by fasting and serving foods to the public.

The commemoration of birth of the twelfth Imam on the 15th of Sha'ban also coincides with the Malay traditions of reciting the chapter 36 (*Yāsīn*) of the Qur'an. This practice is based on some weak (*ḍa'īf*) traditions of the Prophet. A celebration of the birth of Fātimah al-Zahra on 1st Dhu al-Qa'idah was scarcely known by the Malays. On the celebration of Fatimah's birthday, the ceremony would involve the public regardless of their religions, denomination, and race.[109]

Conclusion

There was influence of Shi'ism in classical and modern Malay world. Some of the cultural influences can be seen in the classical period.

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[107] Anonymous interview held on July 26th, 2016 in Kampong Duyong, Malacca. See also Hamzah Jantan, W Mohd Azam, Amilah binti Awang Abdul Rahman, "A Preliminary Survey of Issues of Shiism in Malaysia With Special Reference to the State of Malacca", *Al-Itqān: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies*, vol.2, no. 2, 2018, pp. 99-127.

[108] One of the respondents attended some lectures in MIU. See also http://en.alumni.miu.ac.ir/index.aspx?siteid=4 (Accessed on 9th March 2017).

[109] Anonymous interview held on August 16th, 2011, at Gombak, Selangor.

In the modern period**,** the Malay community who follows Shi'ism exists in Malaysia as an impact of the Iranian revolution that took place in 1979. The Iranian people were seen as representing the undeveloped and weak Muslim country that managed to overthrow the US-backed government of Iran. Thus, in order to know the secret of the success, the interest to delve inside the teaching of Shi'ism grew rigorously among the Malays. Consequently, one of the Malay Muslim ethnic-based parties, PAS, which is also an Islamic movement, took the first step to foster a relationship with the true Shi'ism-based government. Hence, the relationship marked a new era whereby some of the Shi'ite doctrines, practices and politics were introduced to the modern Sunnite Malay of Malaysia. Therefore, PAS, to some extent contributed to the emergence of Malay Shi'ite minority community in the Sunnite majority of Malaysia.

As a religious minority group, the Malay Shi'ites followers have their own plans and strategies. The strategies in politics and education are inevitable for the survival of minority group. Although according to Serajul Islam,[110] one of the attributes of religious minority group is response to the differential treatment especially by the majority, the Malaysian government do not put any discrimination in politics and educational system against religious minority groups. The Malay Shi'ite followers seem to succeed in their planning as they also involved in the national political arena of Malaysia under the officially registered and qualified party to participate in the general election of Malaysia.

Their planning in education has also succeeded as Malaysians are free to travel in doing trade and business, pursuing education, holiday spree and others in the republic of Iran. No policy of the Malaysian government to curb its people from doing so because of good diplomatic relationship between both countries. Thus, from the observation made, some of the Malaysians have studied and graduated from MIU. The ARCC has also helped some students to study in the Iranian universities, and to facilitate some of the local universities' members to jointly organize seminars and conferences with the Iranian universities.

Elsewhere in the writing, it has mentioned two court systems practiced by the Malaysian government; Civil and Syariah court. Syariah courts which are under the Sultans and States' authority are catered only for the Muslims. As majority of Malay Muslim is of the Sunnism, Malaysian government has issued a legal verdict in prohibiting other schools

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[110] Syed Serajul Islam, *The Politics of Islamic Identity in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Thomson Learning, 2005). p.4.

that include Shi'ism. This issuance has been commencing since 1996 through the National Council of legal ruling. This ruling abrogated the earlier 1984's ruling of approval of Shi'ism to be practiced in Malaysia. Thus, Shi'ism becomes an illegal movement and cannot be taught and disseminated in Malaysia. However, the ruling does not prohibit any individual to believe in Shi'ism.

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