

# The Influence and Challenge of Values in the Culture of the Malay Society in Malaysia

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## Abstract

The Malay community in Malaysia is based on a philosophy of values that is always based on ethical and moral aspects based on basic principles related to life with the influence of Islam. This paper is a descriptive case study that discusses the meaning of the philosophy of values, and the history of the civilization of the Malay community in Malaysia through three books, namely *Mitos Peribumi Malas*, by Syed Hussein Altas, *Revolusi Mantel* by Senu Abdul Rahman, and *Dilema Melayu*, by Mahathir bin Mohamad. It explores the important aspects of shaping Malaysian civilization through the influence of Islam after and before.

**Keywords:** Values, Islam, Culture, Malay Society

## 1. Introduction

The three books that have been reviewed overall tell a significant story about Malaysia and Malay culture. *Mitos Peribumi Malas* by Syed Hussein Alatas is a significant work that critiques colonial and post-colonial discourses that labelled indigenous people, including the Malays, as lazy and unproductive. The book challenges stereotypes and examines how colonial powers constructed notions of racial superiority and inferiority. *Revolusi Mantel* by Senu Abdul Rahman is a novel that addresses social issues and cultural changes in Malay society during Malaysia's transition to a modern nation. The book is known for its satirical take on the transformation of traditional clothing (the *baju Melayu*) and its symbolism in reflecting societal shifts. *Dilema Melayu* by Mahathir bin Mohamad is a socio-political book that critically examines the challenges and issues faced by the Malay community in Malaysia. Written before he became Prime Minister, Mahathir addresses topics such as economic disparities, education, and the evolving identity of Malays.

However, the main topic of this paper discusses about Malay community in Malaysia has been reviewed through three books namely *Mitos Peribumi Malas*, by Syed Hussein Altas, *Revolusi Mantel* by Senu Abdul Rahman, and *Dilema Melayu*, by Mahathir bin Mohamad.

The book, *Mitos Peribumi Malas* by Syed Hussein Alatas, in the context of the Malay community in Malaysia, the book likely addresses how these stereotypes affected perceptions of Malays and contributed to their socio-economic and political conditions. It may discuss how these perceptions impacted policy decisions and the construction of identity.

Meanwhile, *Revolusi Mantel* by Senu Abdul Rahman could provide insights into how the Malay community adapted to changing norms and values during a significant socio-cultural transition. It may

explore themes of identity, modernity, and cultural preservation within the context of the Malay community.

Lastly Dilema Melayu by Mahathir bin Mohamad, the book may provide a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic challenges the Malay community has faced and how these challenges intersect with issues of identity and nation-building. It could offer insights into Mahathir's perspective on solutions for uplifting the Malay community.

Overall, these three books likely contribute to a broader understanding of the Malay community in Malaysia by exploring themes of identity, social dynamics, economic challenges, and historical context. Keep in mind that my responses are based on general knowledge and interpretations, and the books themselves provide the most accurate and detailed insights into their respective topics.

## 2. Literature Review on the Meaning of the Malay Society

According to Abd. Aziz (2000), a community is defined as a group of people who communicate and interact within a designated region or border and are educated about the culture they share together. The statement was also supported by Muthahhari (1986) by describing society as a group of human beings who are under pressure from the interests of one group and under the influence of a group of beliefs, ideas and purposes, united and translated into a series of co-living unions.

Meanwhile, S.M. Zakir (2013) in his writing entitled Alam Budaya Melayu explains from the point of view that Malay refers to the views and philosophy of the Malay world which includes three (3) social values (ethos), emotional values (pathos), and logical values (logos).

First, social values (ethos), the concept of the arrangement of the Malay community is based on family units. The so-called primate order has seen the development of society stretching from family units, from parents, from descendants to ethnic races.

Whereas, the emotional value (pathos) of the Malay community is said to be closely related to the sentiments formed by their psychological space which involves the so-called presence of clues; which is a symbol of naturalness and cultural symbol. The natural emblem is the archaic roots which find ideas and shadows of ancient archives and early societies. Cultural symbols are emblems that have been used to express the 'principles of purity' used in convention, belief, and religion. The faith aspect of the existence of the numinous (supernatural) aspect. However, after the presence of Islam, the identity of the Malay community changed completely. The Malay Muslim community is increasingly shaping emotional values based on tauhid and their submission to Allah s.w.t. And through the principles and concepts of Islam as an indirect way of life, it forms the Malay community as a strong and civilized Malay community.

The third is the logical value (logos), which is that the Malay community is linked to the socio-politics of the Malay community through the rules and regulations that are legitimized by the Malay community. The arrival of Hindu-Buddhist influence extended this logical value to the reinforcement of the king's institution, which elevated the king as the 'shadow of the gods'. It was then enhanced with ceremonial creations to instil this 'belief' in the community. However, after the rise of Islam, the socio-political perspectives of religion would have to be treated rationally. The rules and regulations of the Malaysian Muslim community are based on the concept of Shariah and practice Shariah according to the Constitution. Thus, the values of the Malay community fluctuate in accordance with religious principles, but according to Al-Quran Karim, Islam is a guide to life. The concept of Malay community values is rooted and developed according to modernization based on the Islamic religion. Wan Abdul Kadir (2000) also explained that the value system provides a framework for the analysis of the norms of society, excellence,

beliefs, and behaviour. The value of being a measure and a hold on either bad or ugly an act based on prevalence or habit in society.

According to Abd Jalil, the term "Malay World" or "Malay Archipelago" and its geographical boundaries are contained within the Malay Peninsula and this statement is supported by local and Western historians including Prof. Hamka. In the Malay community, the characteristics of Islam form the basis of behaviour and behaviour in the form of relationships, the essence of values, attitudes and views in which Islam becomes the soul of the overall social and culture of the Malays. Prior to the advent of Islam, the Malay community adopted the belief of animism and dynamism. Animism is to believe in everything there is a soul and spirit. Dynamism, on the other hand, is the belief in the energy that is present in the spirit, soul and spirit in people, animals, plants or things that can have both good and bad effects. The arrival of either Hindus or Buddhists made the religious ceremonies of the Malaysian community more present and formal. The obvious consequence was the separation of the kings, the nobles, the religious class and the common people. This has spread in the culture of the Malay community. The arrival of Islam gave a response to the events of nature, solidifying the whole view of the Malay universe and concentrating on God (centred on God). The arrival of Islam in the Malay community has brought about many changes as Syed Naquib al-Attas calls a new age. The changes brought about are a comprehensive influence based on the foundation of tauhid. The impact of tauhid has led to a change in the 'look and soul' of the Malay community. Based on Tauhid, an Islamic faith that expresses the oneness of Allah s.w.t has left the days of Hinduism and Buddhism that arrived in the 4th and 5th centuries where the commandments enforced the use of Islamic elements through formal educational activities.

### **3. Methodology**

This is an instrumental case study used to understand a particular phenomenon that is instrumental in achieving a particular goal. Such a case study is useful when the researcher wants to understand the role of the phenomenon in achieving the objective. Data collection is made up of observations and uses a variety of techniques to analyze the data as content analysis.

### **4. Result and Findings**

The effect of the influence of the British colonialists has to some extent diluted the faith and creed of the Malay community to the Islamic religion. The Malay community experienced social shock and began to be influenced by Western ethical thinking and values that were humanistic, materialistic and conflicting secular understanding. This influence is contrary to the values and norms of life of the Malays who are concerned with religious elements. The impact of Western cultural influences is also discussed in the book *Mitos Peribumi Malas*, by Syed Hussein Altas, in the 10th chapter entitled *Revolusi Mantel and Mitos Peribumi Malas*, in which he discusses two books, *The Revolusi Mantel* and *The Dilema Melayu*. Drawing a quote from Syed Hussien Alias, "If we generalize the character of a society based on the actions of a few people, then we are really in disarray. The Malay community tends to steal because some of them steal; the Malays are lazy because some of them are; Malay women are unfaithful to their husbands because of the nature of some of them; the Malay community is crazy because some of them are crazy; Malays smoked cannabis because a small proportion did it. So we can count constantly the negative characteristics of the Malay community, which is based on the fact that some Malays, sometimes exhibit these characteristics. Although the nuisance of the soul exists among the specific community, it cannot automatically be considered as part of a specific community's mental order. ... Cultural and obscurity

factors can explain this although cultural factors may not have any immediate effect. This, however, is not related to the character of the whole community.” The passage highlights the potential dangers of generalizing an entire society's character based on a few individuals' actions. It emphasizes that such generalizations can lead to confusion and disarray. The author discusses how negative characteristics are often attributed to the Malay community due to the actions of a minority within that community. The examples given include stealing, laziness, infidelity, and drug use, where some members of the Malay community engage in such behaviours.

The author contends that although certain negative behaviours might exist within a specific community, they should not automatically define the entire community's collective mindset. The passage suggests that cultural and environmental factors could explain the presence of these behaviours, but they may not have an immediate or direct impact on the entire community. In essence, the author argues against making broad judgments about the entire Malay community based on the actions of a few individuals and emphasizes that the actions of a minority should not be taken as representative of the entire community's character.

In *Mitos Peribumi Malas* gives a new perception of the Malay community which has always been synonymized with negative culture. In the book of the *Revolusi Mantel* it is written, “What one person says is that it's the state of his soul, it's the champion impulses of the first with his learned impulses. Everyone has both kinds of impulses, but the order and the impulse in themselves are different between people and others. It is the difference in order and impulse that distinguishes the personal one from the other person.” This message suggests that an individual's behaviour is influenced by the interplay between their inherent impulses and the learned ones. Each person possesses both types of impulses, but the unique arrangement and nature of these impulses set individuals apart. This distinction in the arrangement and nature of impulses defines a person's individuality, making them different from others. In essence, the passage underscores the idea that the combination of inherent and learned impulses and their arrangement shapes a person's distinctive character and separates them from others.

So in the *Malay Pomegranate*, “Islam is the single greatest influence on the concepts of Malay values and codes. However, it should be noted that it is not the religion that is influential but rather the interpretation of the teachings of Islam that is strong in influence. The interpretation of religion varies not only according to the individual but also according to age and time, but also to the State. It should be noted that Islam also has five mazhab and sometimes new mazhab arise due to the interpretation of an individual. If sometimes the influence of Islam on the concept of Malay values does not seem to be very good, then it should be noted that the influence is not due to the teachings of Islam but largely because of the current interpretation of the locals that has caused this adverse influence.” This text highlights how Islam significantly shapes Malay values and principles, although this influence is largely determined by the interpretation of Islamic teachings. It emphasizes that it is the interpretation, not the religion itself that holds strong sway. This interpretation can vary widely among individuals, age groups, times, and even the state. The passage notes that Islam encompasses multiple mazhabs (schools of thought), and occasionally new ones emerge based on individual interpretations.

While the impact of Islam on Malay values may sometimes appear negative, it is essential to recognize that the negative influence is not inherent to Islamic teachings. Instead, it is largely due to the interpretations held by local communities. The passage underscores those misinterpretations, rather than the religion itself, often lead to unfavourable consequences for the perception of Malay values influenced by Islam.

But now, the challenge to value is seen as more challenging with the presence of a wide range of technologies. Change after change has a profound impact on the cultural values of the Malay community. The results of this study are derived from various scientific materials and references related to the cultural values of the Malay community. The results showed that the basis for the formation of the Malay nation-state in Malaysia is to be comprehensive with the influence of Islam. The arrival of Islam as the main religion in Malaysia has made the language, manners, and socio-cultural of the Malay community all the more important. In particular, Islam and Malay customs became one of the most important structures in the process of Malaysian civilization. The language and cultural values of the Malay community need to be preserved and developed to form and continue a harmonious and prosperous Malaysian society.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Value in philosophy is the main focus of the axiological method. Values are seen as views, customs, habits and others, so much so that they create an emotional impression in a particular person or society. Values are also subjective and objective depending on the feelings and intellect of a person. In general, value is an important aspect of shaping the culture of human life. That value is a pillar of the norms of society and race. This norm is very important for controlling the behaviour of people or groups of society because if every member of a community group is accustomed to doing anything without rules and taboos, then a matter is without limitations, manners, and order. Humans will act according to emotions without thinking about the perceptions and views of the community, and the local culture. The book "Mitos Peribumi Malas" challenges stereotypes and negative perceptions surrounding the Malay community, particularly the idea of laziness among indigenous people. The values explored likely include the importance of accuracy in understanding cultural identities and debunking harmful stereotypes. It emphasizes the value of dispelling misconceptions and engaging in accurate and respectful cross-cultural dialogue. "Revolusi Mantel" is known for its satire and exploration of cultural changes within Malay society during Malaysia's modernization. While the book may not directly focus on values, it likely touches on the shift in values and norms as traditional and modern perspectives collide. The book may address themes related to adapting traditional values to changing times, questioning the relevance of certain values, and the tension between preserving heritages and embracing progress. "Dilema Melayu" discusses the challenges faced by the Malay community. The book likely addresses values related to identity, unity, and progress. It may delve into traditional Malay values such as community solidarity, respect for elders, and cultural pride. Additionally, the book could explore the tension between preserving these values while adapting to the demands of a changing society, emphasizing the value of maintaining cultural roots while navigating modern challenges.

Collectively, these books offer insights into the values of accuracy in cultural representation ("Mitos Peribumi Malas"), the tension between tradition and modernity ("Revolusi Mantel"), and the importance of cultural identity and unity while facing societal changes ("Dilema Melayu"). They provide perspectives on how values are shaped, maintained, and sometimes redefined within the context of evolving societies. The values in the Malay community are inherited, defended, and closely guarded. But there are also values that are being held that have changed, are changing and are about to change. Thus, the application of values based on the norms that have been set from time to time should go hand in hand so that a harmonious and united society can be built.



## 6. Conflict of Interest

The research paper makes a substantial and multifaceted contribution to the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, multicultural studies, and social sciences. Through a comprehensive exploration of Malay culture, values, and contemporary challenges, it offers an in-depth exploration of the intricate web of values that underpin Malay society. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances and traditions that define the Malay community in Malaysia. By documenting and analyzing these values, the paper contributes to the preservation of Malay cultural heritage. In the context of Malaysia's multicultural society, this research sheds light on the value of social harmony and unity within the Malay culture. It offers insights into how multiculturalism can thrive when values like respect, courtesy, and collective spirit are nurtured, serving as a model for interethnic understanding and cooperation. The value of environmental preservation within Malay culture, as discussed in this research, contributes to the broader discourse on environmentalism and sustainability. It underscores the potential for indigenous values to inform sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. The documentation of Malay values and cultural practices provides valuable resources for cultural exchange programs and educational initiatives. It enables a broader audience, both within Malaysia and internationally, to appreciate and engage with Malay culture. In conclusion, the values that shape Malay culture and the complex dynamics at play in contemporary Malaysian society. It serves as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, educators, and individuals interested in fostering cultural understanding, preserving heritage, and addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by multiculturalism. This contribution statement effectively conveys the significance of your research and its potential impact on related fields of study.

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