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TOPIC

RELIGIONS AND VALUES AMONG MALAYSIAN CITIZENS

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Introduction

As a multiethnic country, Malaysia has a lot of diversity. This diversity can range from the customs, languages, and also its culture. One of the diversity Malaysia has is the religion. With the existence of multiple ethnics in Malaysia, it's only natural that diversity regarding religion took place in this country.

Religion in Malaysia

As mentioned before, Malaysia has a lot of diversity in religion. It means that they are several different religions across ethnics in Malaysia. Although the religion can be different from one ethnic to another, there are still several shared customs and similarities.

There are several major religions in Malaysia. According to Malaysia Department of Statistics, currently, those religions are Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, and, Taoism. According to the same source, around 61 percent of the populations are Islam, just below 20 percent of population are Buddha, 9 percent are Christian, about 6 percent are Hindu, and only almost 1.5 percent are Confucianism, Taoism, and other Chinese religion. The rest of the population are either having other religion, unknown, or have no religion.

Islam

In Malaysia, Islam is one of the oldest religions that exist. It is believed that the spread of Islam began in the early 7th century from Arabia to the eastern part of the world. Islam itself was introduced in Malaysia as early as in 12th century AD by traders from India, specifically by Indian Muslim traders. The spread of this religion within Malaysia itself was supported through the rulers and missionaries. The practice of trading and marriage also gave contribution to the spread of Islam in Malaysia.

One of the factors that helped the spread of Islam was The Malay Melaka Sultanate. The Malay Melaka Sultanate played an important part in spread of Islam in the past. During that time, this sultanate made Islam as their official religion. In the following decades, Islam was so widespread and deeply rooted to almost every region in Malaysia. Because of this, the Federal Constitution has made Islam the “religion of the Federation”.

Nowadays, in Malaysia, Islam is the main religions; with more than half of its population is Islam. Just like mentioned before, Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. Quoting from Article 3 - The State Religion, “Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation”, it is clearly stated that Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. However, other religions are also allowed to be practiced.

Islam in Malaysia is held by multiple ethnic groups, though the majority of population that holds Islam is the Malay ethnic group. According to 2010 census, the percentage of Malay Muslim in Malaysia is around 81 percent, while the Indian Muslim and Chinese Muslim are only 0.4 percent and 0.2 percent respectively.

Since the fact that Islam is the major religion in Malaysia, it's only natural that the practice of this religion can be easily seen and found in this country. One of the manifestations of this practice is mosque. A mosque is an ordinary scene in this country, as it can be seen almost in every place. A call for prayer, also known as *adhan*, can be heard five times a day. Another example is that government bodies are closed for two hours every Friday in midday so that Muslim workers can pray in mosques for Friday prayer. Some important events, days, and also celebration can be witnessed throughout the year, such as the month of Ramadhan, Eid al-Fitri, and also *Qurban* during Eid al-Adha.

Buddhism

Buddhism is the next highest religious population after Islam in Malaysia. There are around 5.4 million Buddhist people in Malaysia, it is about 19.2% of all of the citizen in Malaysia of 28.3 million (January 2011 estimates). Ethnic Chinese who follow the Mahayana tradition is the largest of them. The practice among the majority ethnic Chinese who profess themselves as Buddhists is actually a mixture of tradition and Chinese belief and Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhists include ethnic Chinese, Siamese (or Thais), and smaller numbers of Burmese, Indians and Sinhalese. A lot of ethnic groups of Theravadins always build temples in catering mainly to their own original groups, and the style of their own traditions. For instance the ethnic Thais have resident Thai monks, build '*wats*' or Thai-style temples, and conduct Thai Language in their rituals.

A century ago, the Sinhalese or Sri Lankan Buddhist migrated to then Malaya when both Malaya and Ceylon were under British colonial rule. They brought with them Sinhalese

Buddhism with its unique traditions that survive to this day in a few Sri Lankan *viharas* (temples) dotting the country.

Although Malaysia is not a Buddhist country, it is nevertheless contributing immensely to Dharma propagation in the world. Malaysian devotees have contributed in learning institutions in another countries and in the building of a lot of temples. Malaysian communities are reprinting and publishing so many Dharma books for free distribution to Buddhist groups locally and abroad too.

Because of a shortage of Buddhist monks and nuns in Malaysia, the laity has taken up a major role in spear-heading the growth of Buddhism in the country. Laymen and Laywomen are teaching meditation and Dharma actively. Buddhist Youth communities are oftenly and dynamic engage in propagation and Dharma learning.

Some of other international congregations and World Buddhist Conferences have been held in Malaysia in these years, reflective of harmony and tolerance in malaysia's religious.

Christianity

Prior to the Portuguese conquest, the presences of Christianity in Malay Archipelago can be traced back to the 7th century. It is believed that this happened because of the Arab Christian traders from Arabian Peninsula. However, the spread wasn't very widespread, not until the Portuguese came to Melaka to conquer it.

Because of the Portuguese conquest in 1511, Christianity began to spread in Malaysia, and the early Christians were Roman Catholics. After the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1641, the spread grew even faster. Although the spread had gone faster, it was still not as widespread as other religions.

Even nowadays, Christianity is not really as widespread as other religions such as Islam and Buddhism. Even though it's the third largest religion in Malaysia after Islam and Buddhism, the number of people who is a Christian is not really high, not even one tenth of Malaysia population. According to the 2010 census from Malaysia Department of Statistics, the number of people who is a Christian is just above 9 percent, which is quite small compare to the number of people who is a Muslim or a Buddhist.

According to the same census, most of the Christians in Malaysia are come from the indigenous people, or also known as the Bumiputera ethnic group. The percentage of those people is almost at 60 percent. Almost 27 percent of Christians in Malaysia come from the Chinese ethnic group. The number Indian ethnic who is also a Christian in Malaysia is only somewhere around 4 and a half percent. The rest of the numbers come from other ethnic group and non-citizen of Malaysia.

Despite the small numbers of Christians, building such as church, is not really uncommon in Malaysia, though it is much rarer in some states. Some Christian's festivals and celebration also exist in Malaysia. However, there are not many of them, usually the most common festivals and celebrations are only Easter and Christmas.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the next largest religious population after Islam, Buddhism and Christianity in Malaysia. Around 1.7 million Malaysians are Hindus and they make up a total of 6.3% of all of the people in Malaysia.

The most of Malaysian Hindus are located in the western regions of Peninsular Malaysia. According to a 2010 Census, some of the regions with the largest Hindu people are Negeri Sembilan (13.4%), Selangor (11.6%), Perak (10.9%) and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (8.5%).

Hinduism is also a majority religion among the Tamils of Malaysia. Majority of the Tamils who follow this religion make up about 9% of the people in Malaysia. Before Islam took over, Hinduism was influential. People who came from Tamil Nadu came to work on British rubber plantations in Malaysia.

They worship in temples and pay reverence to an all supreme who is imminent and transcendent. In the city areas, temples are dedicated to a single god whereas in the village, the temples are home to multiple gods. Majority of these gods were also brought by immigrants. The temples follow saivite tradition from west India for the worship of Siva.

From a historical point of view, Indians played a significant contribution to religion in Malaysia. More than two thousand years ago, early Indian traders brought Hinduism and Buddhism to Malaysia and Islam some 1400 years later. Approximately the 13th century, Hinduism and Buddhism rose. Beginning 200 years ago, during the British colonial era, the number of Hindus spiked again.

H2ly is the practice of this religion which connected with the cultural identity of Malaysian Indians. National holidays such as Thaipusam and Deepavali are hindu celebrations. The people who convert to another religion stop to be members of the indian group.

Chinese Folk Religion

Chinese folk religion refers to the traditional Chinese religion such as Taoism and Confucianism. There are not many sources that explain the first appearance of this religion in Malaysia. However, it is believed that the religion such as Taoism and Confucianism are brought by the Chinese settlers in Malaysia in the early time.

Nowadays, this kind of religion is not very common among the citizens either. The number of people with this religion is nothing but a fraction, only somewhere about 1.3 percent. The number of people with this religion is dominated by the Chinese ethnic, somewhere around 61 percent. Thirty-seven percent of people with this religion are the indigenous people. The rest of the numbers come from other ethnics and the non-citizen of Malaysia. Even though the number is really small, buildings and worship places still exist. Buildings such as temples can still be found in Malaysia, though rare in number. Despite all those facts, some festivals and celebration exist, like the Chinese New Year, and The Moon Cake Festival.

Conclusion

Malaysia is rich with its history about the ethnics, religions, and also cultures. This country has undergone through a lot of struggle to reach this point. Even though there are a lot of diversity, Malaysia appreciate the diversity it has. In matter of religion, the tolerance in Malaysia is also rather excellence. Despite the fact that the Islam is the dominant religion and also the official religion in Malaysia, other religions also exist without much of a problem. Such manifestation can be seen by the coexistence of people with different religion and also various different places for pray or worship.

Appendix

Picture of a masjid



Picture of a Buddhist temple



Picture of a pagoda



Picture of inside of the church in Kuala Lumpur



Picture of Muslim conducting its prayer



Picture of a Hindu temple



Several pictures of different religions conducting its prayer, from upper left to bottom right,
Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu



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