The development of Malaysian universities

Exploring characteristics emerging from interaction between Western academic models and traditional and local cultures

Received 3 May 2017
Revised 26 June 2017
Accepted 29 June 2017

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate, in general, what are the contemporary external influences that have been dominant in Malaysian universities and what are the major local traditional practices that are also found in these universities.
Design/methodology/approach – From the literature review, the paper proposes a conceptual framework to explore hybridity in governance and management, programs and curriculum, teaching and learning, and research and service.
Findings – Using the conceptual framework, the paper discusses the Malaysian higher education in terms of Western influence and indigenization of Western models, the background context of Islamic universities and seven possible hybridities compiled from anecdotal evidences.
Originality/value – The conceptual framework and possible hybridities identified in the paper serve to provide the guide to a more systemic empirical investigation to examine the characteristics of Malaysian universities emerging from the interaction between external influence and local cultures. The Malaysian case also potentially contribute in exploring the question, "Are Asian universities different from Western universities?".

Keywords Hybridity, Malaysian universities, Traditional and local cultures
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The development of higher education in the Asian region in the past decade has been quite impressive when compared to other regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States. The rapid expansion of higher education in Asia can be attributed to increasing social demand for higher education brought about by partly population growth, the democratization of secondary education and the growing affluence of many countries. The statistical data shows that the tertiary gross enrollment ratios from 1999 to 2009 have increased from 14 to 28 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, from 19 to 22 percent in Central Asia, and from 9 to 13 percent in South and West Asia (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011). Besides widening access to higher education, many governments are implementing policies to improve educational opportunities

Higher Education Evaluation and Development
Vol. 11 No. 1, 2017
pp. 25-37
Emerald Publishing Limited
2514-5789
DOI 10.1108/HEED-08-2017-004

among the disadvantaged groups in particular the women, rural populations, the poor and the minority groups.

The rapid expansion of higher education and the rising unit cost have caused tremendous fiscal strain on many governments which led them to restructure their higher education systems. The restructuring of higher education in various countries involved the privatization of higher education, the corporatization of public universities, the implementation of student fees and the formation of strategic partnership between public and private sector in the provision of higher education. As higher education systems expand, they become more bureaucratic and regulated so as to ensure the provision of quality higher education. National quality assurance and accreditation agencies were established to ensure greater public accountability and transparency from higher education institutions especially with regard to quality and their performances in the various university ranking tables.

Quite a number of Asian countries are investing heavily on their flagship universities in order to elevate them to world-class status. For examples, China implemented its project 211 and 985; South Korea introduced its "Brain Korea 21", "World-Class University" and "Study Korea" projects; Taiwan initiated the "Excellence Initiatives"; and Japan changed its funding model to strengthen its top 30 universities. In all these projects, substantial resources are channeled to selected universities so that they can become world-class research universities. These countries also invested heavily on research and development (R&D). It was reported that the economies of East/Southeast Asia and South Asia including China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan represented 25 percent of the global R&D total in 2001 but accounted for 34 percent in 2011. China (15 percent) and Japan (10 percent) were the largest R&D performers in this group (National Science Foundation, USA, 2014).

There is no doubt that Asian universities have made tremendous strides in terms of student enrollments as well as the volume and quality of research outputs, but the outcomes of their future developments are yet to be seen. To some, Asian universities are joining the world's leading universities and may soon overtake their Western counterparts (Marginson, 2011; Morgan, 2011), but there are others who predict that Asian universities may hit a "glass ceiling" because they maintain that Asian universities are basically imitative rather than creative. Thus, the inputs of financial and other resources can make progress only so far (Altbach, 2010; Mohrman, 2005). It is interesting to note that both sets of arguments cited culture as the reason for its predicted outcomes. Therefore, it is pertinent to raise the question "Are Asian universities different from those in Western countries?".

Research problem

A comparative study consisting of nine cases has been launched to explore this research question. The nine cases comprise three mainstream universities, three Islamic universities and three Chinese community-based universities to provide a robust sample in capturing the diversity of ethnic/religious influence in Malaysian higher education. Mainstream universities refer to the majority of universities in Malaysia which have strong British and American influence, and the three selected include a public research university, private non-profit university and private for-profit institution owned by a company listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. Two of the three Islamic universities are public universities and the other is private, while all three Chinese community-based are private institutions.

The aim is to examine in what ways are Asian universities differ from those in the Western countries and why do such differences emerge. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H1. Asian universities are different from Western universities because of hybridization where Western academic models interact with local traditional cultures in different social settings.

H2. Asian universities are not only influenced by global trends in higher education but they are also influenced by Asian values which are embedded in the Islamic, Confucian or Buddhist traditions.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate hybridity in Malaysian universities. Hybridity will refer to the contemporary external influences that have been dominant in Malaysian universities interacting with major local traditional practices that are also found in these universities. The paper will further examine how the traditional values and practices have interacted with more recent external influences in Malaysian universities. More specifically, the paper highlights some of the hybridities that may exist in some of the Malaysian universities.

Literature review

Much has been written about the Western origins of Asian universities. Altbach (1989) states that "In Asia, as in other parts of the Third World, the impact of Western academic models and institutions has been significant from the beginning and it remains important even in the contemporary period" (p. 9). The Western academic models include patterns of institutional governance, the ethos of academic profession, the rhythm of academic life, ideas about science, procedures of examination and assessment, in some cases the language of instruction, and other aspects of higher education. Studies have shown that various models have been imported by many Asian countries during the colonial period including China, Japan and Thailand even though these countries have not been under colonial rule. The French model was imported by former French colonies such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam with the Dutch influence in Indonesia as well as the American influence in the Philippines. The British model was inherited by India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, while the German model had its impact in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Neubauer *et al.*, 2013). It was pointed out that the continuing impact of the West is still very significant throughout Asia as exhibited in the pervasive and subtle influence of the English language, the idea of the university as a meritocratic organization, the importance of scientific research, the notion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Altbach, 1989).

While Asian universities are patterned on Western models, it is also clear that many Asian countries have adapted the model to meet local needs and realities. There has been considerable interplay between foreign influence and Asian realities. As Hawkins (2013) argues, "the so-called modern universities is actually, in some settings (e.g. China and India), and perhaps in many settings, a hybrid of indigenous elements, overlaid with Western forms and elements, resulting in a reindigenized hybrid" (p. 52). He maintains that the strong intellectual traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism were firmly entrenched prior to Western contact and continue to dominate many aspects of social, cultural and educational life in the Asian region. On the same line of argument, the Muslim tradition is paramount in Malaysia and Indonesia while the Roman Catholic tradition is in the Philippines, and so on (Shin, 2013).

Using the indigenization perspective, Marginson (2011) constructed "the Confucian Model" of higher education in East Asia and Singapore. The Confucian systems of higher education consisted of four interrelated features as follows:

(1) a strong nation state which steers and control the development of higher education;

(2) high tertiary participation with a large private sector and household funding;

(3) high stake public examinations; and

(4) strong state support for research.

According to him, the Model is not a simple adaptation of the Western university in East Asia but rather it is an organic hybrid of old and new, and East and West. It has been pointed out that some of the characteristics of the model are related to Asian values, such as

the role played by a strong state presence and centralized governments in pursuing collective well-being (Chan, 2013). The concept of Asian values is defined as to include family solidarity, filial piety, collective good, social harmony, consensus as well as hard work ethics (Tu, 1989).

However, in the era of globalization, much of the recent development of higher education is influenced by global trends such as the massification, marketization, bureaucratization and internationalization of higher education (Lee, 2013). In analyzing the global influences on higher education, some scholars maintain that globalizing practices such as international benchmarking, greater use of English, strive toward world-class university, and transnational higher education might create homogenizing forces to converge Asian universities in line with Western universities, in particular, at the institutional level. As Chan (2013) argues, "it is undeniable that more internationalized institutions in East Asian universities are converging to Western style, particularly those in pursuit of world-class status" (p. 43). His study shows that due to greater internationalization of higher education, Asian universities are again adopting Western practices and standards which often may go against the kind of Asian values that are embedded in these societies.

In examining the impacts of globalization on education, it is important to note that global forces do not operate only in the economic sphere nor do they originate only from the West. In recent decades, one has witnessed the spread of Islamic resurgence in many Muslim countries, including Malaysia. The intellectual characteristics of this global trend are the fervent belief that society should be organized on the basis of Islamic religion, advocacy for greater political freedom, and a general aversion to Western civilization (Chandra, 1987). These characteristics are quite evident as reflected by the political uprisings in the "Arab Spring" countries and the number of terrorist attacks against Western powers such as the September 11 (2001) and the Bali bombing (2002) incidents. The spread of Islamic revivalism can be attributed to various factors. According to Turner (1991), the fundamentalist revival in Islam is an example of the relativizing effect of globalization. He maintains that Western modernization in either its capitalistic or Marxist forms failed to deliver either material benefits or a coherent system of meanings to the Islamic world. Indeed, rapid industrialization and urbanization appeared to offer only stark inequality between the populace and the politically dominant elite. Islamic revivalism in various Muslim countries marks a rejection of Western modernization and secularism which are embedded in these Islamic countries arising from colonization and globalization.

The Islamic revivalism has impacted on the higher education sector as well. Not only many Islamic universities were established in various Muslim countries, these universities also network and exchange ideas on how to develop the concept of Islamic higher education. For example, in 2010, the Muslim Universities' Vice Chancellors' Forum was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and the theme was "Charting New Directions for Muslim Universities: Must We Subscribe to Western Ideological and Philosophical Constructs?". During that conference, much of the discourse revolved around issues on Islamic education, Islamic higher education and Islamic higher education philosophy (Fauziah and Hafiz, 2012). It was reported that one of the objectives of the conference was to establish cooperation among the Muslim universities to develop higher education differently from the conventional Western style. Therefore, the following research question is timely and very appropriate:

RQ1. Are Asian universities different from Western universities?

The following section proposed a conceptual framework for the research study.

Conceptual framework

The concept of hybridization is commonly used not only in the natural sciences but also in the social sciences in fields such as cultural studies, media studies and studies of globalization.

Hybridization is defined as "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Rowe and Schelling, 1991, p. 231). This principle can be extended to structural forms of social organization, including the universities. In cultural studies, cultural hybridization refers to an amalgam of cross-cultural influences which are blended, patchworked and layered upon one another (Yazdiha, 2010). The notion of cultural hybridity in postcolonial theory is the culture arising out of interactions between "colonizers" and "the colonized". In a communication theory, hybridity is a used as a device for describing the local reception of global media texts as a site of cultural mixture (Kraidy, 2002). This notion is further extended to the studies of cultural globalization where hybridity is taken as a clear product of global and local interactions.

Kraidy (2005) maintains that "since hybridity involves the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles or identities, cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries, is a requisite for hybridity" (p. 5). In the analysis of globalization, the cross-cultural contact occurs through the movement of people, ideas and practices across national borders. Hybridity has emerged as a privileged site for conceptualizing global and local articulations. The interactions between foreign and domestic influences can produce a variety of outcomes. For example, the media-culture industries in regional centers such as Brazil, Mexico and Hong Kong have increasingly indigenized Western genres. A study of the media-culture industries in Hong Kong (Lee, 1991) shows four patterns of indigenization: the parrot pattern refers to a wholesale mimicry of foreign culture by local industries – both in form and content; the *ameba* pattern describes a modified form but a non-changing content such as the adaptation of a foreign movie for local consumption; the coral pattern describes cultural products whose content is changed but whose form is untouched; and the butterfly pattern is a radically hybridization that makes the domestic and foreign indistinguishable.

In the literature on higher education in Asia reviewed above, the hybrid university is often being mentioned. The research question would then be:

RQ2. What does a hybrid university look like?

If hybridization is the interaction between Western academic models and traditional cultures resulting in institutional hybrids, then what are these institutional hybrids in different national settings. A further question would be:

RQ3. Which are the likely sites of hybrid formation in a higher education institution?

It is postulated that hybrid formation would occur in the following domains:

- hybridity in governance and management;
- hybridity in programs and curriculum;
- hybridity in teaching and learning; and
- hybridity in research and service.

Therefore, the research project will examine what a hybrid university would look like in a society that is embedded in the Confucian, Islamic or Buddhist traditions. It will also explore the sites of hybrid formation at the institutional level to identify the various kinds of institutional hybridities that may have emerged.

The Malaysian case

Malaysia is an interesting case because it has not only a strong colonial influence under the British rule, but it is also a Muslim country that is undergoing Islamic resurgence. The rest

of this paper is an analysis of the British legacy and American influences on the Malaysian universities in general and more specifically an analysis of the Islamic universities which can be viewed as a hybrid university.

Western influence

Malaya has been under the British colonial rule before achieving its independence in 1957. The higher education system that developed in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia (after 1963) had its origin from Great Britain. Its first university, University of Malaya, which was established in 1959, was an implantation of a British higher education model (Selvaratnam, 1986). The export of the British model by the colonial master was reported as "If we were going to export universities to our overseas dependencies they would of course be British universities, just as the cars we export there are British cars" (Ashby, 1966, p. 224).

As found in British universities then, the academic activities were organized and revolved around a number of core disciplines that form the body of knowledge that was used in teaching and research. The medium of instruction was English and most of the faculty members were expatriates. The reading and reference materials used were basically European and mainly British in content and character. The authorities of the university included the court, the council, the senate, the faculties, the boards of studies, the boards of selection, the board of student welfare, the guild of graduates and other such bodies. The vice chancellor was appointed by the university council as the principal of academics and executive officer of the university. The council was the governing body of the university and the principal authority in determining broad policies for the whole university. The senate was in charge of academic matters and it was made up solely of academics. The registrar took care of both academic and administrative affairs while the bursar dealt with financial matters (Lee, 1997).

As the years went by, expatriate academics from America and local academics who were trained overseas were hired and soon the American influence was beginning to be felt in University of Malaya as well as in the newer universities[1] that were established in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the Malaysian universities adopted both the semester and credit systems. Continual assessment throughout the course and Grade Point Average were implemented in most of the universities. Some of the universities have schools instead of faculties, and many of the programs are multidisciplinary in approach. The American nomenclature of professor and associate professor became widely used. It can be said that many of the Malaysian universities are a hybrid of British and American model (Lee, 1997).

Indigenization of Western models

In the early years of independence, University of Malaya has a strong academic tradition with autonomy. The main power was located within the university itself, as in the British model. The university was allowed to draw up its course content, award its own degrees, hire its own faculty and admit its own students. This academic autonomy was maintained until the "Universities and University Colleges Act" was passed in 1971. This Act has far implications on the governance and management of Malaysian universities until today.

The Western models of university with their knowledge structure and organizations, their curricula and standards, and their social functions could not meet the needs of a multi-ethnic society and a rapidly developing economy, with a high population growth rate and marked economic inequalities along ethnic lines, as was the case in Malaysia (Selvaratnam, 1986). As many of the academics then were from foreign countries, they were more concerned and preoccupied with their respective academic disciplines, standards and norms from the international academic community instead of addressing socio-political issues that were prevalent in the local communities. Similarly, most of the local academics who had Western training were socialized toward a Western educational perspective, intellectual culture and professional expectations of their respective host countries.

Within the Malaysian universities, a good deal of the teaching and research was not relevant to the societal problems that confronted their immediate environment. In fact, it was the autonomy that the academic community enjoyed which allowed them to identify themselves with the international knowledge system rather than the local issues and problems. In sum, the Western models seemed to be divorced and isolated from the political, socio-economic development of the country. Thus, steps were taken by the Malaysian government to remedy the situation.

As mentioned earlier, there were marked economic inequalities along ethnic lines. The inequitable distribution of income, which was closely linked to the inequality of educational opportunities, became a prominent political issue among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. The Malay ruling class realized that the economic imbalances along ethnic lines between the Bumiputras and non-Bumiputras, if remained uncorrected, would lead to intense political and social conflicts. Thus, the Malay-led government took concrete steps to restructure the Malaysian society by providing educational opportunities to the Bumiputras. Education, and in particular higher education, is viewed as an instrument for social mobility as well as social cohesion. In 1971, the "Universities and University Colleges Act" (Malaysia, 1971) was passed and this Act provided a common legislative and regulatory framework for all universities in Malaysia.

The indigenization of the Western models is reflected in a number of key features in this legislative framework. First, the autonomy of the universities are curtailed and the higher education system becomes a strong state-coordinated system. The Act ensured that no new faculty or course may be introduced at any of the universities without prior consultation with the Minister of Education. Second, the medium of instruction was converted from English to Bahasa Malaysia which is the national language. The usage of the national language accompanied by the emphasis on a curriculum that is relevant to the local socio-economic and cultural needs gave the impetus to the development of an indigenous knowledge culture. Third, an ethnic quota system for student admission to the public universities, which was based on the racial composition of the population, was implemented. In order to effectively coordinate the implementation of this policy, the Ministry of Education established a Central Processing Unit for Universities which deals with all the selection of students for admission to the public universities. As observed by Selvaratnam (1988):

> The implementation of this tightly controlled process of selection and admission into the country's universities eroded one of the deep-rooted and jealously guarded academic traditions of university autonomy, that is, the practice of allowing each university to determine its own admission policy and criteria (p. 184).

The government's justification for this policy was to widen access to higher education in congruent with the needs, aspirations, and expectations of the people, and more importantly to the Bumiputra community on whose support the ruling regime relies heavily.

With the implementation of the ethnic quota policy, many students from the minority groups (Chinese and Indians) experienced difficulties in gaining admission into the public universities even though they were qualified to be admitted. To overcome this bottleneck, an influential and economically affluent group from the Chinese community wanted to establish the *Merdeka* University in the 1970s but it was turned down by the Malay-led government (Selvaratnam, 1986). This university was supposed to cater for the excess demand for higher education among the Chinese whose traditional Confucian values place high aspirations for education and the medium of instruction was supposed to be Chinese. However, the political conditions at that time did not favor the establishment of such a university. Thus, it was not until two decades later before the Chinese community was allowed to set up their own higher education institutions to meet the demands mainly, but not exclusively, of those Chinese-medium students of Chinese Independent secondary

schools who for various reasons could not further their education in the public universities. Some of the higher education institutions that are supported by the Chinese community include the Southern University College which was established in 1990, New Era College in 1997 and Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman in 2002.

These community-funded "Chinese Universities" in Malaysia have their roots in the tradition of Chinese education which aims at perpetuating the culture of the Chinese community lest it lost its cultural roots (Mok, 2015). Its niche function is to study and research on local Chinese culture and history with special attention on inter-ethnic relations and issues that concern social harmony and national unity. It is posited that this is one type of higher education institutions in Malaysia where various kinds of institutional hybridities are likely to emerge.

Islamic universities

Unlike other countries such as Indonesia, Islamic higher education in Malaysia is a recent phenomenon. While the Indonesian's Institutions of Islamic Higher Education were established as early as in the 1940s as natural extensions of the widely spread *madrasahs* (traditional Islamic schools) and *pesantrens* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) (Fu'ad and Jamhari, 2003), the first Islamic university in Malaysia was established in 1983 and this is the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). A few other Islamic higher education institutions were established even later such as the Selangor International Islamic University College in 1995 and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) in 1998.

The establishment of these Islamic higher education institutions can be attributed to the Islamic resurgence that was spreading across the world in the 1970s and 1980s. The IIUM was in fact an initiative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It was an international effort to establish a higher education institution based on Islamic principles. In the Islamization of knowledge, Islamic values are inculcated into all the disciplines. Representatives from eight OIC countries[2] sit in the Board of Governors of this university. The medium of instruction are English and Arabic and the university admits a great number of international students from Muslim countries. The more recent USIM is a public university established by the Ministry of Education to cater mostly to students who attended *sekolah agama* (Islamic religious schools). The focus of this university is on Islamic studies and the development of good character. The Selangor International Islamic University College is a private institution which was established by the Selangor State Islamic Religious Council with the aim of producing Islamic professionals who can lead society as well as develop the Islamic knowledge.

The unique features of Islamic education are to bring back religion into the curricula and to infuse the Islamic revelation with scientific knowledge. The focus is on Islamic studies. As Syed Naquib Al-Attas (1991) stated that the concept, content and process of Islamic education is based on revealed truth, particularly on the reality and concept of God. Islamic pedagogies focus on the integration of *Naqli* (revealed knowledge) and *Aqli* (human knowledge) with the aim of transforming society. In Islamic higher education, the emphasis is on the holistic development of the individual. In Islam, the ultimate aim of education is more than securing an earning activity but to realize the complete submission to Allah, and equipping oneself with balanced development of his or her spirit, intellect, feelings and body (Gulam, 2000). To put it succinctly, Islamic higher education is to mould the souls as well as inform the intellect. Thus, the curricula tend to emphasize ethics, morals, values and soft skills and the graduates would be religious-focused instead of skilled-focus. The Islamic higher education philosophy is to acquire knowledge for the common good and promote widespread of knowledge sharing (*dakwah*) which is quite contrary to the concept of commercialization of R&D through patents and licenses. In other words, the outputs of any R&D effort should benefit the "bottom billion" and not just for commercialization. Thus the Islamic universities would be another site for hybrid formation in the higher education sector in Malaysia.

Possible hybridities

The following is a list of possible hybridities that may be found in various higher education institutions in the Malaysian context. This list is compiled from anecdotal evidences which need to be proven through systemic empirical investigation. Moreover, each of the possible hybridities lies in a continuum with the dichotomies at the extreme ends but the manifestation of each hybridity can occur anywhere along the continuum in a particular setting. The list is neither exhaustive nor is it arranged in any particular order of importance:

(1) Religious influence: while the principle of secularism is commonly practised in Western countries, it is not the case in many Asian countries which see themselves as Muslim countries, Buddhist countries, Hindu countries or others. The separation of the state from religious institutions is very clear cut in Western countries, whereas many countries in the Asian region have a national or state religion. In many instances, the strong religious influences have penetrated many social institutions including the universities. Taking the Islamic universities in Malaysia and the Buddhist universities in Thailand as examples, religious studies are very much part and parcel of the university curricula. However, there are variations of the degree of religious influence along the continuum. For instance, there are pure secular private universities in Malaysia which do not have a mosque in its campus; there are also secular public universities which feature a mosque in the campus; and then the Islamic universities where the mosque plays a central role in the university campus. As a Muslim country, Malaysia has been legislated that all its universities must teach Malaysian Studies (including Islamic and Asian civilizations), Islamic Studies (for Muslim students) and Moral Education (for non-Muslim students). The rationale for this ruling is to establish a Malaysian education identity (Lee, 2004).

(2) Architectural identity: while most of the Malaysian university campuses have modern architectural buildings, it is not the case in the Islamic universities and "Chinese" universities. For example, the Chancellery building of USIM sported a central dome which is a typical feature of Islamic architecture that dates back to the Ottoman empire in the fifteenth century. On the other hand, UTAR has combined traditional Chinese design with modern architecture. The Ling Liong Sik Hall in UTAR campus in Kampar has a large sweeping roof which has a sweeping curvature that rises at the corners of the roof. Both these universities mark their unique identities in the architectural form of the central building found in their campuses.

(3) Research methodology: the scientific inquiry is well understood to be a methodology commonly used to seek for truth in the natural world. It is a way of investigating things with proposed explanations for the observations. The scientist is free to identify and define his research problem and ask his research questions and then he would use the scientific method to investigate the problem. However, it is not the same in the study of Islamic theology. The starting point is to accept the revealed truth as presented in the theological texts. Islamic studies consist of using various pedagogical approaches to study *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tasawaf* (Islamic mysticism), *tafsir* (Quaranic exegesis) and *akhlak* (ethics) (Fu'ad and Jamhari, 2003) but not to question the basic premises of the religion.

(4) Interpersonal relationships: the interpersonal relationships among colleagues and those between faculty members and students can be quite different in various settings. In many of the Western university settings, collegial relationships are commonly found among the academics but in the Malaysian campuses the

interpersonal relationships can be quite hierarchical. For example, the dean of a faculty can actually direct a junior academic to collect data for the dean's research project without any due acknowledgment. In the case of faculty and student relationship, it is usually quite informal in a Western setting where they address each other by their first names, but that is not the case in the Malaysian setting for not only the relationship can be quite formal, there is also the tendency for the relationship to develop into a long and loyal relationship such as those relationships between a guru or master and the disciples that were commonly found in traditional educational settings.

(5) Individualism vs collectivism: this dichotomy is usually found in how the academics carry out their work and how their work is being assessed. In the Western context the scholarship of the individual is of paramount importance as reflected by the research and publications of that particular academic. More often than not, the performance of the academics are reviewed and assessed by their peers in their respective discipline. However, in the Malaysian context, the Asian value of collectivism is reflected in some of the common practices among the academicians. The number of co-authorships is much higher among Malaysian academics than their Western counterparts. Very often, the number of co-authors in a particular publication can be more than two. Furthermore, the assessment and evaluation of academic performances is sometimes carried out by bureaucrats rather than academics.

(6) Merit-based structures vs relational (network-friendship) structures: another dichotomy is found in the ways of how people are recruited and promoted. The Western approach is to use merit-based criteria in such areas such as hiring, promotion, retention, student recruitment and so on. This applies to people such as students, faculty members as well as university leaderships. However, in the Asian context, much has been written about the importance of personal relations (what Chinese call *guanxi* or relationship) in getting access to opportunities and resources. In the Malaysian campus life, ethnic origins, personal relations and sometimes political affiliation play a very important part on who gets appointed or promoted. While merit-based structures allow for increased academic freedom, freedom of inquiry, competition, mobility and collaboration, relational and network-based traditions can enhance job opportunities, promotion prospects, research access, leadership position, and many aspects of university life (Hawkins, 2013).

(7) Freedom of Expression vs politically constrained expression: a central feature of the Western academic model is the notion of academic freedom in both teaching and research. While freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth, freedom in teaching is fundamental to the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the students to freedom in learning. However, in the Asian context including the Malaysian context, the academic freedom of academics is very often curbed by political interference in university affairs (Hawkins, 2013).

Conclusion and way forward

What have presented in the above sections is the conceptual framework for the research project on "Hybridity in Malaysian Universities" including a list of possible hybridities that may be found in various types of Malaysian universities. Anecdotal evidence across the three types of universities outlined in the conceptual framework underlined the possible hybridities that were the result of interaction with contemporary external influence and

local traditional and culture in Malaysia. Further work on the research project would involve collecting empirical data to test the posited hypotheses. It is proposed that these data would be collected from a sample of nine universities consisting of three mainstream universities, three Islamic universities and three Chinese universities. Data will be collected using a variety of methods including:

- official documents analysis (including websites);
- in-depth interviews of informants from high level management, mid-level management, academics and students in selected universities;
- in-depth interviews of MoE officials; and
- expert workshops with stakeholders and resource persons.

The data collection will focus on hybrid formation in various aspects of university life such as governance and management, programs and curriculum, teaching and learning as well as research and service.

The data collected will be analyzed based on a common research framework developed and shared by the cross-country comparative study research team. The research findings from various case-studies will be further analyzed so as to theorize how and why hybridization occurs in Asian universities.

Acknowledgment

This paper is based on a larger research project entitled "East-West-Islamic Tradition and the Development of Hybrid Universities in Malaysia" led by Morshidi Sirat and Chang Da Wan, with co-researchers Molly Lee, Hazri Jamil, Munir Shuib, Guat Guan Toh and Nur Rafidah Asyikin Idris. The funding of the project is from Universiti Sains Malaysia under Research University Grant: 1001/CIPPTN/816264.

Notes

1. These universities included Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), International Islamic Universities Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), and others.
2. These eight governments are Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

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