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A Preliminary Study on Factors That Lead Muslim Kedayan to Continue Performing the Synergetic Culture

Ros Aiza Mohd Mokhtar and Che Zarrina Sa’ari

Abstract—Syncretism is a controversial terminology that invites discussion of whether the term should be retained or banned. Agreeing with the views of scholars who aim this terminology to be retained in the repertoire, authors will discuss syncretism between Islam and local culture of Kedayan people in Sabah, Malaysia. This paper will focus on the factors that influence the intention of these people to perform their local culture that is associated with syncretism. The questionnaire consists of 70 variables and was distributed to 40 respondents. The result of study revealed that Kedayan people have high tendency to continue their local culture which is not included in the teaching of their official religion, Islam. Moreover, there is a statistical significant difference between the individual attitude towards the local culture and their level of education. In addition, the results revealed high correlation between attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control with their intention to continue performing their local culture.

Index Terms—Kedayan, local culture, Islam, syncretism.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will begin with a brief explanation on the concept of syncretism and scholars’ views on it either positively or negatively. Definitely, this term has a very wide meaning and develops many forms such as fusion between gods or goddess, fusion between two or more religions, fusion between religion and philosophy etc. Thus, this paper will discuss the syncretism between the official religion of a particular community named Kedayan with their local culture. In order to explore the reasons why Kedayan people are interested in continuing performing their local culture which has always been associated with syncretism, several questions have to be answered. Therefore a set questionnaire was constructed, distributed and analyzed as will be discussed in the content.

II. SYNCRETISM

Syncretism is derived from the Greek word συνεργεία, which means to link, combine and consolidate [1]. The term was first introduced by the Greek moralist and biographer Plutarch (16-120 AD) who reputed the term ‘syncretism’ to denote the phenomenon of how different Cretan tribes became unified when faced with external threats to their survival [2]. The concept of syncretism was widely practiced during Greek paganism where religion, philosophy, culture and beliefs were established by merging the elements among themselves, particularly in the second century AD during Hellenistic [3]. Syncretism in that era involved alliance of the gods in various forms such as parallelism, amalgamation or eclipse [4].

Religious situation in Rome was also diverse, complex and syncretistic [5]. Among the high expression of the Roman syncretism was the marriage of Roman god, Mercury with the Celtic goddess, Rosmerta which implied sharing religion between Roman and Celtic [6]. Syncretism of the modern era began in the day of English publication by Denis Diderot (1713-1784) who wrote Eclecticism and syncretisism, heortanias en conciliatarios. In his article he depicted syncretism as parallelism in a variety of sources [7]. Earlier, in the 17th century, George Calcius Calixtus attempted a rapprochement with Protestant and Catholic denominations [8]. Syncretism later employed negatively to refer to a contamination of one religion by another [9]. Robert Baird is among the scholars who wanted to remove the terminology from the study of religious history. He argued by explaining something as syncretistic in religious history is like not explaining something [10].

Inculturation terminology later was suggested to replace syncretism which would bring a more positive connotation [11]. Some prefer using hybridity rather than syncretism [12] [13], whereas some put demarcation between syncretism and anti-syncretism [14]. Some scholars also suggest steps with a new definition to syncretism because of theology, culture and missionary interest [15]. Martin viewed the understanding of syncretism as a neutral description of religious phenomena as the current academic alternative to its comparative practice [16]. There are more positive definitions offered such as by Colpe (1987). Colpe explained that “syncretistic religions” as “the high points of syncretic processes” [17]. Michael Pye in his later work discusses the difference between syncretism and synthesis, and then summed syncretism as “the conclusion to a process is thereby completed” [18]. Thus, it is not surprised nowadays that syncretism is a phenomenon that is no more or less pejorative in nature, as there was a study that revealed Jewish teenagers as more syncretic compared to others and most of them believe that there is no problem if one practice syncretism [19].

Authors personally view that this terminology should be maintained even if it brings a negative connotation. At the same time, agree with the statement of syncretism is a process. Therefore, it is important concept for discussion in religious context, in order to evaluate the doctrines and practices of a