DEVELOPING SOCIAL INTEGRATION AT RELIGIOUS HERITAGE SITE AT HARMONY STREET, MELAKA

[1]MOHD HASRUL YUSHAIRI JOHARI, [2]ROZMAN YUSUF, [3]SAIYIDI MOKHTAR MAT RONI, [4]NIK ROZILAINI WAN MOHAMED, [5]MASHITA ABD. JABAR, [6]SHARIFAH ADLINA TUAN SAYED AMRAN

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka
E-mail: hasrul@bdrmelaka.uitm.edu.my

Abstract - This research focused on forming social integration among multi-ethnic visitorsat Harmony Street in Melaka. There were problemswherelack of understanding on the functionality of three religious sites of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism to portray harmonious living among multi ethnic society. 384 questionnaires were distributed to Malaysian visitors who consist of Malay, Chinese and Indian. Visitors were selected based on the experience to two religious sites that do not belong to their own roots. Social integration model was used that tested dimensions of social acceptance, cultural adaptation, cultural appreciation and compromise. It was found that all components of the social integration model registered a good satisfactory result with mean registered well above 4, i.e. visitors do agree in all aspects which relates to national agenda on learning about others that led to unity.

Keywords - Melaka, multi ethnic visitors, religious site, social integration, unity

I.INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Malaysia is a multicultural nation with different ethnic and diverse religions in Southeast Asia [8]. The Malays constitute around 63.0 per cent of the population and the Chinese forming some 25.0 per cent. The rest of the population consists of Indians and other ethnic groups. This study focused on how heritage religious sites cultivate social integration among ethnic. The concept of religion should be carefully treated to avoid misleading interpretations that harm harmonious environment among ethnic[4]. With regards to ethnic relations, many have argued that multicultural living fosters a positive attitude, support for integration and reduce aggression. That situation signifies the attitude of tolerance and acceptance with other group such as living together in a same housing area as well as accepting political leaders who are not elected from their own kind [8].Social integration includes phases of compromising or working together in which intergroup communication increasingly become more complex [8].Likewise, the various groups agreed to create one identity to become one nation [2]. This study exercised theory of social integration as it is deemedfitto measure integration since it focused on bringing people together and understand of each other during visit to religious historical sites.

B. Problem Statement

Religious building demonstrates the ethnic identity through its symbol and devotees activities at the sites. By visiting religious sites, people of different faith became alert on cultural sensitivity, thus deepen level of respect [2].Such ritual of worship and site interpretation at religious building shad enriched visitor knowledge on the ethnic background[7]. However, it is arguable whether or not such activities and cultural representation at religious site improved visitor knowledge on multicultural living at the sites. The problem further amplified when visitors were not given depth explanation of the activity [2]. Symptom of feeling unwelcomed at religious site further exaggerated visitor displeasure thus, affect enjoyment [2]. The trouble related with utilizing religious heritage sites to form social integration maybe escalated by their connection with a specific ethnic group. Additionally, Malaysia's religious place receives less attention among scholars in spite of being popular among attractive locations [2]. This study investigates whether Malaysia's religious and ethnic-centred attractions have the ability to perform social integration. In this aspect, the need to comprehend the perspectives of Malaysians is deemed vital, as they represent the emerging domestic visitor attitude that will shape the eventual fate of integration in the country [2].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Integration

Social integration is the process of creating unity, inclusion and participation at various level of society so that every person from different background have freedom to practice their beliefs without feeling hesitate towards what they did [6].

According to [6], social integration enables people regardless of their personal attributes such as socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, cultural traits, religion, faith and educational background to have equal opportunities, rights, and services.

In a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, awareness on the spirit of brotherhood from different ethnic background is very important. Without proper planning of social integration, a chaotic situation may occur [6].It is because social integration is mingling

around which, visitor tries to learn and adapt about other culture. There were four variables that guide how visitors start to understand about other ethnic sensitivity, i.e. social acceptance, cultural adaptation, cultural appreciation and compromization. Other previous study by [8] focused on some major constructs in integration such as social distance, ethnocentrism and national identity that led to peaceful living.

The process on the construction of cultural 'Other' was initiated by subjective feelings of willingness to try to understand and build the relationship among different ethnic groups. Willingness to study was the evidence that visitor tried to learn by observing the ritual ceremony and cultural practices that was performed by devotees. Hence, by assessing their cultural practices, visitors finally understand cultural traditions[2]. Previous studies by[5]identified that, visitors who went to religious site because of their willingness to get to know about the site. Moreover, religious sites such as cathedrals, temples and mosques are attracting an increasing number of visitors worldwide, not only for their spiritual value but also for recreational, educational and cultural purposes [5].This author found that most respondents often practice social acceptance and cultural appreciation but practiced less compromization and cultural adaptation.

Cultural adaptation was found to be the most challenging part among multiethnic visitors. According to [6] this signified that it is very easy to accept about others but to adapt it in life is not easy. This informs the importance of strategic action for promoting unity. It becomes harder to implement the adaption because there is no alternative or support to bring the culture into our life. [6]believedthat without proper planning of social integration, chaotic situation may occur. Other than that, the author defined it as a universal understanding towards other cultural elements by searching for the differences, similarities and other shared values.

B. Theoretical Underpinning

There were four elements in social integration which were social acceptance, cultural adaptation, cultural appreciation and compromization. Firstly, social acceptance is the ability of people to learn and accept the differences of other ethnic so that they can tolerate in accepting the similarities and also their differences in other groups of people [6]. This is an individual behaviour so that they can fit in with other group behaviour. Social acceptance is an important element in enhancing the people to tolerate with each other. The level of tolerance will be increased when there is opportunity to learn and interact with the other. Ethnic tolerance is defined as an objective and permissive attitude towards other groups of people irrespective of their opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins. Such tolerance is important to build social integration at the sites and to make sure that people at the sites interact with each other and make them felt comfortable to accept others.Next element in integration model is cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation is defined as the process of people who learn and adapt what they have learnt in cultural aspects and the process of a person integrating into a new culture and feeling comfortable within it [6]. Cultural adaptation happens when people adapt each culture at the sites. For instance, they adapted the situation where Chinese performed their prayer at Cheng HoonTeng Temple and did not make any noises and respect their religious ritual activities. Such behavioural discipline (not making noises and respect)was also adapted to other new culture of different ethnics in the area of study. They also practice the aspects to other cultures such as through greetings. Other ethnic also exercised this kind of greetings to show some respect towards other people. In addition, through attending religious ceremony they can create social integration since being presence at religious event encourages them to adapt with the culture, thus respect moreto other people [1].

Next element in social integration model are cultural appreciation. Cultural appreciation is a process of learning about another culture with respect and courtesy. It also refers to a person's behaviour that involves taking something with cultural significance from another culture for their own [6]. This happens when every ethnic appreciate their own culture, ritual practices and religion. Their appreciationswere revealedof feeling proud of their own tradition. They were even proudwhen they were able taught other people from different ethnic background about their unique culture such as languages and traditional costume. Besides, the feeling of becoming volunteer to teach other people about cultures also called as cultural appreciation. They also can display a sense of pride towards the success of other ethnics who represent the country in various fields. The sense of belonging was also became part of cultural appreciation elements. The ethnic feels that that they have the rights to their own cultures, religious rituals and also theirtraditions. They need to keep their own cultures would not be imitate by other groups.

The last element is compromization which is a resolution of differences by adjusting conflicting claims, principles and demands. Compromise develops the desire to form a nation. There was also a view which stated that culture and traditions adaptation factors had become an important marker in tolerance behaviour itself. In a social setting like this, the spirit of tolerance becomes more prominent which leads to the formation of a united and harmonious society. Compromise takes place when the ethnic does not feeling prejudice about other ethnics and also practice the negotiation in solving the issues of ethnicity such as racism issues. They tend to give permission for other ethnic to practice other culturaltradition such as their ritual activities and their customs for example. Other ethnic can also

avoid on giving negative views toward other ethnics to avoid them to feel like they are not useful to the country by appreciating other ethnic contribution in a country's development for example. They also need to take care of other ethnic sensitivities in order to build a good social integration in a country [6].

III. METHODOLOGY

The total number of tourists visited Melaka was 16.794 million in 2017 as compared to 16.282 million in previous year, a significant increase of 3% [9]. Majority contributors were among Malaysian visitors (domestic) which registered 11,049 million. While foreigners only recorded 5.745 million in 2017 (Tourism Promotion Division, 2017). Among the five main sources of foreign tourists were from ASEAN countries, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Western Asia and Caribbean group. Visitors from China and Singapore were identified to have a frequent visit to the State.Since the nation issue of unity is the main objective, only Malaysian visitors were included in the study.

The composition of the multiracial group in Malaysia was targeted to Malay, Chinese and Indian who made up the largest ethnic group and are regarded as the main player of unity in the country. The highest ethnic group in Malaysia is Malay (50.1%), Chinese 22.6%, Indian 6.7% and the rest 11.8% belong to non-Malay Bumiputera and other indigenous groups [10].

In this study, the focus was at Harmony Street in Melaka. This was because there were three different religious buildings situated at the same row of street, i.e. Kampung Kling Mosque (situated in TukangBesi Street), Cheng HoonTeng Temple (located along Tokong Street) and Sri PoyyathaVinayagar Moorthy Temple (at TukangEmas street). The religious buildings were built nearby to each other. The buildings has been stood at the location for more than 300 years, thus became the symbol of harmonious living at the heritage quarter. For this reason, the combination of these different streets was declaredto be known as the Harmony Street that signified great tolerance among multiethnic society. This has attracted the attention of tourists to visit the area [3].Respondents were approached from different ethnici.e. Malay, Chinese and Indian who visit the sites.

About 384 questionnaires have been distributed to the visitors. The allocation of the questionnaire to each ethnic group was 50.1% (Malay), 22.6% (Chinese) and 6.7% (Indian). The questionnaire were distributed during daytime since the religious site and its surrounding area tend to receive less or almost no visitors during night time. Distribution of questionnaire was also conducted at other sites nearby the Harmony Street as it was generally assumed that probably there were other visitors who have finished their visit to the sites before the researchers arrived. The selection of visitors was made based on their experience to the religious site that does not belong to their origins, e.g. for Malay visitors, they were asked about their opinion on Indian and Chinese sites. The Indian visitors were approached to gain information on their understanding about Malay and Chinese culture. While Malay mosque and Indian temple were the sites for Chinese visitors. It was important to identify this pattern so that rich information could be garnered. The questionnaire utilized dichotomous answer, i.e. yes and no for selecting religious site. For visitors who only selected one site, they were excluded in the sample. The respondents were given ten to fifteen minutes to answer the questionnaire and they were assisted by the researchers for any questions. Questions were scaled ranged from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

IV.ANALYSIS

In sum, most of the visitors who visit the Harmony Street was Malay, 19.7% (who visited Chinese and Indian temple), followed by Chinese 17.4% (who learnt about traces of Malay & Indian culture) and Indian registered 9.1%. The rest 53.8% did not comply to the requirement of visiting sites other than their own root. Most of the respondents were and mostly male (54.2%) who were between the age of 21-29 years old (51%). Majority of visitors travelled along with their friends (47.1%), family (39.1%) and solo traveller (13.1%). In addition, most of the respondents who visited this religious heritage site were first time travellers (47.9%).

For respondent's reaction of their experience at the site, based on the mean score, it was identified that most of them accepted the legitimacy and traditions of the culture of their friends from other religion which was ranked first. This has made them understand about others, hence improve tolerance between ethnic, mean 4.0833. In terms of cultural adaptation, they learnt new language, understand about other religions and understand history. It was also notified that they tend to less likely to understand the rules in the prayer's chamber. This was significant as the writings at the prayer hall were in their own Arab calligraphy, Chinese strokes and Indian writing. Praying recitation was made in a language they did not understand. Even if this was a situation that puzzled them, the visitors found that they could communicate harmoniously by asking the devotees or the person who belong to the ethnic group to explain any of the ritual activities. Proud with other religion and culture was in its second rank in terms of cultural appreciation. For compromise, majority respondents felt that they were able to negotiate about ethnic issues, mean score 4.87.

Social Acceptance	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	Ranking
Accept the legitimacy and traditions	6	11	5	173	188	1	4.3854	1
Able to practice religious tolerance	5	11	67	169	131	1	4.0833	2
Accept point of view from other ethnic	12	17	50	190	114	1	3.9974	3
Consider other ethnic sensitivities	3	6	165	192	17	1	3.5729	4
Cultural Adaptation	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	Ranking
Learn the new language	2	6	9	189	177	1	4.4036	1
Understand about other religion	2	4	19	195	163	1	4.3516	2
Learn about other history	6	9	38	171	159	1	4.2344	3
Know the practices of ritual	2	4	163	190	24	1	3.6146	4
Understand other ethnic attire		4	161	211	7	1	3.5911	5
Understand the rules while in prayer chamber	2	5	175	196	5	1	3.5286	6
Cultural Appreciation	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	Ranking
Communicate harmoniously		1	8	193	181	1	4.6927	1
Proud with other religion and cultural	3	2	19	196	163	1	4.5885	2
Appreciate other cultural uniqueness	4	4	23	187	165	1	4.5651	3
Compromise	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	Ranking
Negotiate about ethnic issue	2	1	25	186	169	1	4.6016	1
Permitted to join other religious and cultural activities		6	192	180	5	1	3.7292	2

CONCLUSION

The willingness to learn about other culture among Malaysian visitors were strengthened by the data that they tend to learn the ritual, cultural, traditional attire and customs between three different religions of Malay, Chinese and Indian. The bonding between three three distinct ethnics signified that they accept other religion and cultures in the context of religious tolerance by considering other ethnic sensitivities and their agreement to accept the legitimacy of the culture and traditions of other religion.

Based on the result, all components of the social integration model registered a good satisfactory result with mean registered well above 4, i.e. visitors do agree in all aspects which relates to national agenda on learning about others that led to unity. In addition, it is also relevant to note that several respondents disappointed with their limited opportunity to join religious activities. This was due to perhaps, some of the religious restrictions such as wearing proper clothes that cover whole body to and took ablution to perform Muslim ritual activities (e.g. entering mosque prayer hall, to perform prayer or holding the quran, muslim holy scripture). Nevertheless, there were outfits prepared for them, some kinds of a robe or long gown that cover whole body, but they were only allowed to observe and admire the architectural design of the mosque structure. Even though some of them did not understand the calligraphy or some writing strokes, they could figure it out by asking the ethnic himself. But, the level of explanation was limited to the capability of the knowledge of that person. Therefore, some respondents recommended that those inscriptions or carving in traditional writing be translated to a language that they could understand the content.

It was also recommended that the religious heritage site provide a site guide or person in charge who will assist the respondents to understand about the history, cultures and religion so that the respondents could understand the ethnic dilemma, sentiment and concerns. Even there were some information boards located but, the limited content sometimes did not answer some of the self-raised questions about the mystery of the architectural design, ritual activities and sound of prayer reverberating at historical religious sites. Melaka government needs to emphasize the promotion of social integration religious heritage sites. Since the religious historical sites at Harmony street are declared as national heritage under National Heritage Act 2006, hence allowing the structures merely for ritual activities and visitor gaze would no longer be the image in today's transmodernity world where visitors seek to find the reason and meaning of everything they find and see.

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