

Hantu

in Malay community

ชาวมลายูกับความเชื่อเรื่องผี

โดย: Farok Zakaria

สารสังเขป

“ฮันตู” ในภาษามลายูนั้นมีความหมายเหมือนกับ Ghost (ผี) ในภาษาอังกฤษ ความเชื่อเรื่องผีอยู่ควบคู่กับชาวมลายูมาตั้งแต่แรกเริ่มแล้ว ซึ่งเห็นได้จากธรรมเนียมปฏิบัติที่เกี่ยวข้องกับศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมต่าง ๆ ชาวมลายูเชื่อใน “ฮันตู” และพิธีกรรมทางจิตวิญญาณหลายประเภทที่เกี่ยวข้องกับพลังชั่วร้ายที่มองไม่เห็นในโลกนี้ การเป็นมุสลิมที่มีความเชื่ออิสลามเคร่งครัดไม่ได้จำกัดพวกเขาในการเชื่อเรื่อง “ฮันตู” หรือธาตุวิญญาณใด ๆ แม้ว่าหลักการอิสลามจะไม่เห็นด้วยกับความเชื่อเรื่องผีเลยก็ตาม บทความนี้กล่าวถึงแนวคิดและประเภทของ “ฮันตู” ของชาวมลายู พร้อมทั้งได้ขยายความไปสู่เหตุการณ์ปัจจุบันและความท้าทายทางศาสนาอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: ชาวมลายู ฮันตู ผี คำสอนอิสลาม

Hantu, in Malay is synonymous to Ghost in English. The Malay community has embraced the believe on hantu for as long as they exist, let alone manifesting it in their arts and culture related practices. Malay believes in many types of hantu and spiritual ritual that are related to the existence of unseen evil forces in the world. Being Moslem with strong Islamic believe do not deter them from believing in hantu and the spiritual element although the Islamic principles disapproved the believe in hantu. This paper discusses the concept and types of hantu in the Malay community as well extending it into the current scenario and religious challenges.

Keywords: Malay community, Hantu, Ghost, Islamic teaching

Introduction

“Kelik la gelap doh ni anak weiii...lamo masuk hantu ke!” (literally translated: Please come back to the house, its already approaching dark..I am scared you will be possessed by the hantu or ghost spirits!”. I vividly recalled this saying by my mother to us when we were playing outside the house, as the day approached She will associate the end of the day and falling dark with ghost or in Malay language termed as “hantu”. Hantu is synonymous with the Malay culture and society. It is a believe deep rooted in the Malay culture and community for as long as I can remember. Hantu is a word that scares kids and even adults or the Malay people as a whole. My mother hailed from a village called “Lima Hantu” (literally translated as the ghost lime village) that adopted the word hantu in the naming of the village. This is perhaps due to the location of the village which is close to a river, very dark at night and full of shrubs that is normally associated with the place where ghost dwells. The word hantu is not just familiar to me as Malaysian Malay but to all Malaysian regardless of races in my Islamic country of Malaysia. The Chinese and Indian have their own version of hantus that may vary in their own perspectives. The Chinese practically believed that the ghost of the dead people or the spirit of the dead will return to earth every year and they will prepare food and fruits for offering at the cemetery. The Malays associated hantu with many happenings but still mostly related to the

spirit of the dead. It is believed that those who do not die peacefully and still having unfinished worldly matters or unsettled matters, will return to the real world again as hantu and these hantus will roam in those locations that they left unattended or unsettled during their real life before or when they were alivebefore.

Hantu is also believed to be related to evil spirit and possessed spirit that could enter the human body. Devils and bad spiritual element will possess the human body and caused hysterically related behaviour that turned the possessed person to suffer. Those possessed will shout in tantrum calling someone or just shouting fiercely while sometimes depicting certain animal or human movement portraying that they possessed those spirit related to certain animals.

This paper discusses certain aspects of hantu/ghost in the Malay community while setting the future standing of hantu in the Malay Moslem community.

Definition of hantu in Malay language and community

According to the Malay-English Dictionary Kamus of Dewan Bahasa (2005), Hantu is literally translated as ghost in English. It is considered as an unknown spirit embedded in a dead body which came roaming around in the real world.

Malay community is well known for believing in hantu/ghost. According to the narration by

Nur Farhana on the history of Malay people (FB, 26 June 2022), she quoted that Isabella Bird, (The Golden Chersonese, Oxford University Press), an English traveler during her visit to the Malay peninsula in the 19th century had narrated about the Malays in the state of Perak. Her quotation are as follows:

“the Malays there lived in villagers or Kampung. They were observed to believe in ghost, the traditional healer, bomoh as well as some evil indications such as the tiger soul ghost etc. The Malays also believed in the existence of evil spirit such as pelesit and polong etc. The Malays also called the owl as the burung hantu or “ghost bird”. Evil soul in the form of physical women body without a head could be represented as a ghost who likes to sipped the blood of a woman who just gave birth to a baby. The Malays also believed in the forces and effects of charm/ tangkal worn by many Malays. To her observation, the forces of keris/ dagger used among the males also played an important role in the Malay society at that time”.

According to Sir F. Swettenham in his Stories and Sketches (“The Real Malay”) which was selected and introduced by William Roff, (Oxford University Press) his opinions were quoted as follows:

“to understand the Malays in detail one has to live among them, respect their religion and those elements considered as important in their life.”

Hugh Clifford in his book “The people of the East Coast” discussed about the Malays in the east coast of Malaya mainly Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan where he was the resident in the state of Pahang. Another scholar and traveler in the Malay world is Munshi Abdullah which had also quoted about the behaviours of Malays in the Malay states.

By examining to the above narrations, it clearly indicated that the Malay community has long ago being noted as those people that believe in the existence of ghost. This statement is supported by the production of classical Malay film entitled “Sumpah Orang Minyak” (literally translated as Curse of the Oily Man) released on the 20th April of 1958 by The Malay Film Productions. This film is dedicated to the existence of ghost in the Malay community depicted as the orang minyak (oily black man). This film was produced with the aim of correcting the wrong believes toward ghost or evil spirit in the Malay community. This film tried to lessen the strong believes among Malays on the existence of ghost by indirectly communicating to them that ghost existed but it should not be contradictory to the Islamic believe they held. Directly, this film conveyed the message that the Malays should not believe in ghost. This is true when one of the scene portrayed that the ghost orang minyak is basically a real man who purposely disguised into becoming a ghost by pouring black oil on his body and go around disturbing girls when night fall.

In the millennium, in line with gaining popularity and taking advantage of the ghost themes in the film industries across the globe, there are many films produced in the Malay community based on the story line of hantu such as Hantu Mak Limah, Hantu Kampung Pisang, Waris Jari Hantu etc. I personally have watched the film “Waris Jari Hantu” which relates to the ghost possessing human body of a transwomen in the form of a physical tiger body. In this film, the story lines narrated about a transwoman inherited the evil ghostly spirit in the form of tiger, entangling confusedly in her body in the hour of midnight where she would roamed around the neighbouring locality. The actor Rushdy played the role well and left a real feeling of transwomen possessed by the tiger evil ghost among the viewers. A scary feeling between believing and unbelieving left the viewers enjoying the film well.

The New Strait Times news reporter, Nor Ain Mohamed Radhi on-October 12, 2020 @ 9:41am wrote that The national Museum of Malaysia located in Kuala Lumpur held the exhibition on ghost and had received overwhelming receptions from many viewers amounting to 600,000 visitors. The news is quoted as entitled “NST175: Museum’s ‘ghostly’ show drew 600,000”

Abu Talib Ahmad (2014) wrote a book entitled “Museum, History and Culture in Malaysia” (books. Google.com) He mentioned that it is really difficult to understand the rationale behind the organization of ghost exhibition by

the National museum. Similar exhibition on ghost was then held at Kedah State Museum and Kelantan State Museum which received overwhelming support and attractively popular among the viewers.

In relation to the discussion on Malay hantu culture, there are also strong bonding with Malay cultural rituals and Malay performing arts. The old rituals of Puja Pantai (beach worshipping) in the state of Terengganu was related to the chasing of bad spirit from the land to the sea. The once popular cultural ritual of the Malaccan dwellers, the Mandi Safar is also related to the evil spirit or bad luck that might hit someone and chased out to the sea by bathing at certain beach such as Tanjung Keling, Melaka. This can be viewed in the Youtube video produced on Mandi Safar (Mandi Sapau) Melaka 1960s by Mohd Zain Hussain.

Meanwhile Ghulam Sarwar (2004) in his article entitled “Panggung Inu: Essays on Traditional Malay Theatre” mentioned about the Semah Angin. Semah Angin is basically the ritual of driving away possessing spirits responsible for illness (hantu penyakit); (b) curing illnesses connected with angin ...vows (melepaskan niat) and for purposes of saluting or paying homage to the teachers (sembah guru)” He added that. “The Semah Angin ritual and the Sembah Guru” by the Kelantanese in their Makyong, Menora and Main Puteri performances are real exhibits related to spiritual elements

“

In Islam, the believe and the act of worshipping hantu is considered a big sins parallel to the act of believing in many gods. This is considered as a big sin almost unforgiven in the hereafter by the almighty unless sincere full repentance are sought to the almighty Allah.

”

Siti Hajar Aznam (2016) presented a paper entitled. “Ulek Mayang: Spirits Of The Sea--Representation of Malay Visual and Performing Arts In Animation” in the IIDEX conference 2016. Universiti Teknologi MARA. The well known Terengganu Ulik Mayang dance performance also manifested the relationship of spiritual possession to the human body that can be healed through the shaman’s act of chasing the unwanted spirit by the use of young coconut shoot and reading certain mantras.

Mohtar bin Haji Muhammad Dom (1978) published a book on “Bomoh dan hantu” in the “Siri kebudayaan kita” to illustrate the relationships between shamanism and ghost. Bomoh in Malay or shaman is associated with the person that are able to unwind or heal the evil spirit of demon and hantu possessing a human body by uttering certain mantra, hence chasing the evil spirit out of the body.

Currently, these practices have also gone through the Islamization process whereby external evil spirit are healed by the “Rukeyah” religious cleric called Ustaz that uses Quranic verses or certain Islamic religious related Doa/prayer asking directly from the almighty god to heal and chase the unwanted evil spirit spelled by some enemies out of the body of the affected person. A published book related to this can be found in “Rukeyah dan Pengobatan Alternatif” (2021) by Hafidz Muftisany (1books.google.co.th).

Types of hantu

Below are some of the hantus that are commonly known and found in the Malay world

1. Hantu raya

Hantu raya is one of the common hantu in Malay culture, It is a huge hantu that has hairy ugly look with red eyes and disturb everyone that are psychologically weak. It is believed that

this hantu are still roaming around in the Malay community, hanging in the air and flying from one place to the other. This hantu is depicted as having huge size with long hair, red eyes and hairy dark body skin.

2. Hantu kopek lanjut

This kind of hantu is characterized by the long hanging breast alike old women breast. This hantu is normally found walking or hanging around on tree branches showing of their long breast and long hair. This hantu is sometimes is believed to be connected to the incident of disappearance of small kids while playing at the field vicinity close to the jungle. It was believed that hantu raya hide the kids underneath her long breast and that makes the kids suddenly and unknowingly disappear from the field. Kids are always being made scarred of this hantu kopek lanjut.

3. Hantu pocong

From the name itself, the origin of this hantu is from the dead body covered in white cloth and tied at both end of the human body. It appears like those corpses hopping from one point to another in the white covered tied cloth. This hantu appears during midnight until dawn. Sometimes, those walking alone at night are disturbed by these hantus hanging on the tree trunk or viewed hopping.

4. Hantu toyol

This kind of hantu is related to a small sized boy alike physical feature with bald head and big stomach. They are normally seen walking around and disturbing others while stealing cash money placed in the lockers of the house. Hantu toyol is well known for stealing money whereby it was believed that these toyol are owned by the human guardian and they are



Figure 1: "NST175: Museum's 'ghostly'show drew 600,000"

directed to steal money by their guardian. This hantu is being cursed for their stealing behaviour. It was believed that if the money is tied with a rubber band and sealed in a steel container, this hantu could not performed their stealing act.

5. Hantu orang minyak

Hantu orang minyak is portrayed physically as an oily black strong man that goes around the village raping young virgin girls. Normally, this hantu only appeared at night where they glided into the room through the windows and disturbed sleeping girls by raping them. This kind of hantu can be best viewed in the P-Ramlee classical film of Sumpah Orang Minyak produced by Malay Film production Ltd. in 1958.

6. Hantu saka

This kind of hantu is related to the inherited evil spirit in the form of hantu (hereditary tiger spirit), passed from the possessing ancestors to the living current generation namely to their son or daughters. In those old days, many hantu believers own some spiritual figure alike that guarded their soul, wellbeing and assets. This spiritual figure is called hantu saka. It is then passed to the next generation by inheritance, transferring them to those (normally) daughters to take the responsibility of taking care of the saka in terms of feeding food and offering puja for them. Puja is the act of worshipping the saka by offering certain material such as chicken meat or blood for the saka to continue living. This

situation can be viewed clearly in the film entitled “Waris Jari Hantu” (Ghost Finger’s Heir) produced in 2007 by the producer Shuhaimi Baba. In this film a transwoman was the receiver of the saka whereby she will change her human physical body and appear as a tiger when night fall.

7. Hantu kubur

Hantu kubur is related to the dead corpses which can be found lingering around the cemetery regardless of religion. These kind of hantus are physically seen and found walking on the street with their feet unseen and not touching the ground or hanging on a tree trunk. In the Malay world, there is no such event related to the celebration of the dead people like Obon Dori in Japan or the Halloween in America because anything related to the graves are regarded as unpleasant yet respectably sacred in the Malay community

Other beliefs related to hantu

Many other believes such as taboo, worship and rituals are related to hantu. In the Malay community, cultural ritual of bomoh, performing arts and daily do’s and don’t’s are closely related to hantu. Young kids are always being scarred by their parents about hantu such as forcing them to sleep at early hours so that hantu will not come to disturb or not letting them to go out from the house at night because they will meet hantu and so on. Believe on hantu is closely related to the “inner wind” (angin) in someone’s body or disturbances to one’s psychological mind.

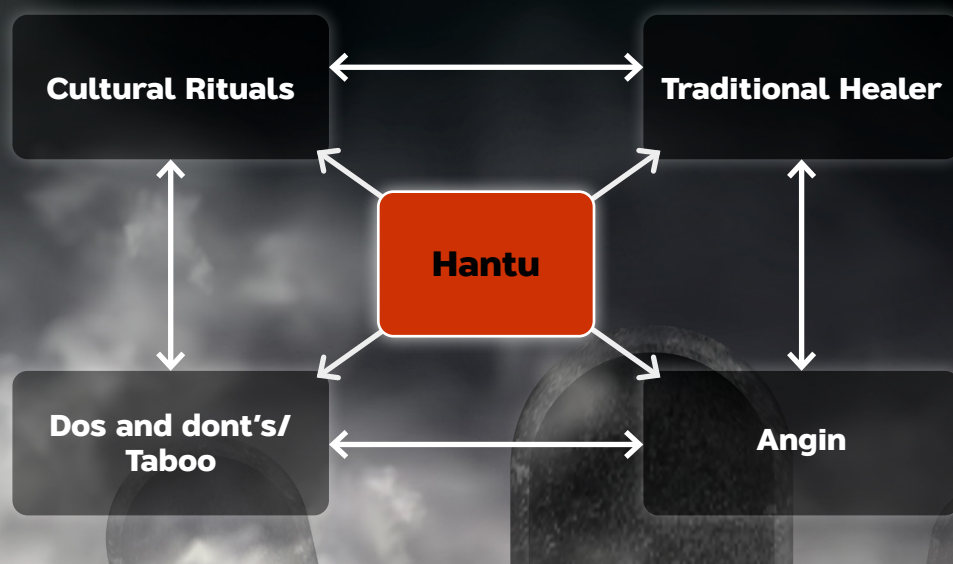


Figure 2 Illustration on the relationship of ghost and other cultural practices in the Malay society

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between ghost and other elements and cultural practices in the Malay society, namely:

- i. Cultural rituals
- ii. Do's and don'ts or taboo in the society
- iii. Traditional healer or bomoh
- iv. The wind or angin or spiritual soul of an individual

All these elements are related to each other and will have the ability to distract one's soul or spirit that can later cause illnesses to the individuals. It is observed that there are some rituals in Malay culture that are closely related to ghost and spirits as listed below

- i. sprinkling saffron rice,
- ii. offering cooked yellow glutinous rice or "pulut Kuning" with grilled chicken,
- iii. placing salt in front of the house for chasing evil spirit

The above are some examples of internalizing and manifesting the existence of hantu and unseen spirits in the Malay community, be it in Malaysia or Southern Thailand.

The influence of hantu in Malay community

The believe toward hantu in the Malay community has some repercussions especially in terms of their spiritual well being. These are some on the influences:

- i. Malays become obsessed to animism, that believe in the forces of nature and ghost
- ii. Malays become occupied with events such as preparation of certain festivals related to chasing of ghost and worshipping ghost
- iii. Malay Moslems are found to be losing their Islamic faith because all these hantu believes are considered as syirik/ the act of

believing in multi existence of godly power which is strongly prohibited and considered as big sin Islam, unforgiven by the almighty god.

iv. Unnecessary expenses spent on this hantu matters such as paying the bomoh to chase hantu, spending a huge amount of money in making a feast to serve the hantu and other acts that can incur extra expenditures for the unknown spirit.

Hantu and Islamic religion

In Islam, the believe and the act of worshipping hantu is considered a big sins parallel to the act of believing in many gods. This is considered as a big sin almost unforgiven in the hereafter by the almighty unless sincere full repentance are sought to the almighty Allah. The real fact in Islam is that spirit do exist in the form of jin, be it Islamic jin or kafir jin. Moslem believes in both but they are not allowed to worship them since the only one to worship is Allah the almighty, the most powerful and the creator of the universe.

The future of hantu belief in Malay community

The believe of hantu in the current state of Malay community is still alive and kicking. It is still widely believed. practiced and worshipped despite the prohibition by the Islamic hukum and perspectives. Many still have strong belonging towards the concept of hantu. The production of thrilled hantu movies and dramas on this



Figure 3 Beras kunyit or turmeric rice



Figure 4 Pulut kuning / Yellow glutinous rice and barbequed chicken

specific subject is growing day by day and well received by larger audience despite the warnings given by the Islamic clerics on this matter.

Unless and until regulations or law being enforced and implemented in the Malay community, the believe towards hantu will still be widely embraced and believed.

Conclusion

The story of a boy being scared about the story of hantu, the mushrooming of hantu related film productions, the discussion and exhibition of hantu are some indications to this modern world that the believe in hantu is still strongly embedded in the heart of Malay Moslem people regardless of the strict prohibition on the issue

of Syirik in Islam. It will remain relevant unless certain laws, regulation and punishment are enforced and imposed to this community so as to delete the word hantu in the Malay world. As a Malay, I probably would say hantu will remain as the flavor or scent of Malay community amidst and alongside the Islamic religion held tight in everyone's heart. ●

References

- Abu Talib Ahmad (2014). Museum, History and Culture in Malaysia.(books. Google.com)
- Ghulam Sarwar (2004). Panggung Inu: Essays on Traditional Malay Theatre. UniPress, Centre for the Arts, National University of Singapore. https://ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumpah_Orang_Minyak
- Isabella Bird, The Golden Chersonese, Oxford University Press
- Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (2005). Kuala Lumpur. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
- Muhammad Dom (1978). Bomoh dan hantu. Siri kebudayaan kita. Kuala Lumpur. Federal Publication
- Nur Farhana Facebook. Kisah Sejarah Melayu Group Facebook, Admin: Muhammad Mubarak FB.
- Siti Hajar Aznam (2016). Ulek Mayang: Spirits Of The Sea -- Representation of Malay Visual and Performing Arts In Animation . IINDEX conference2016
- The New Strait Times. “ NST175: Museum’s ‘ghostly’ show drew 600,000” reported by Nor Ain Mohamed Radhi, October 12, 2020
- Youtube video produced on Mandi Safar (Mandi Sapau) Melaka 1960s by Mohd Zain Hussain.