

Representation of Stories Associated with Malay Myths and Legends in Contemporary Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

It appears that stories associated with ancient myths and legends have been featured more often in the mass media around the world including Malaysia. While the significance of mythological tales in the lifestyle of the Malays has been noted by previous scholars, there are, however, limited studies which have examined this topic from the perspective of mass media. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore the representation of stories related to the Malay myths and legends in the Malaysian mass media. The analysis focuses on two well-known Malay mythological tales published in the newspapers for the past 15 years (2000 to 2015) using a content analysis technique. It is found that stories linking to Mahsuri and Raja Bersiong (the Fanged King) have been featured in several local newspapers such as *Berita Harian*, *News Straits Times* and *The Star*. In the case of Mahsuri legend, stories narrating her seven generation curse or 'sumpah' and events in celebrating her seventh generation's wedding were widely reported. Parts of Mahsuri legend often depicted in the articles include stories of her having white blood and the curse uttered by her before she was killed. For Raja Bersiong, narratives of his legend mainly consist of tales of a cruel king who had fangs and a strong thirst for human blood. The link of this raja to the name of a town named 'Baling' and a mysterious castle in Jitra are stated as well. Overall, findings of this paper contribute to the understanding of the representation of Malay tales in contemporary mass media by revealing that, in addition to the narratives, recent developments linked to past mythical figures, events and statements to verify the authenticity of myths and legends, and values have been presented in the newspapers.

Key Words: myth, legend, representation, mass-media

INTRODUCTION

It is observed that stories enthused by ancient mythological tales have been among the popular themes utilized in famous films, drama series, novels, art works and

documentaries during the past decades. One example of the main ancient legendary tales frequently exploited in the popular media particularly films and drama series is a tale linked to Dracula legend. This scenario can be a reflection of the claim made by Muthalib (2009) that myths and legends and their attributes have been featured more and more in the general mass media today. The utilization of themes such as blood thirst and immortality has been on the rise in the mass media particularly in drama series and films. For example, one of the famous Western drama series entitled "Twilight" and the Korean drama series "Blood" have been inspired from these themes. In the Asian region, stories depicting traditional beliefs associating with supernatural beings, superstitious beliefs and mystical elements have been projected widely in the mass media especially on television. These themes are not only evident in Malay films and drama series, but also in documentary programs. Some of the programs which broadcasted these phenomena have been presented from several viewpoints including religions. Overall, evidence from Western and Eastern regions demonstrates that ancient beliefs and sacred tales still play significant roles in the modern societies across the globe either directly or symbolically.

As an Oriental land, the Malay Peninsula is frequently attached to myths and legends. It was attributed with famous myths like the "mountain of gold" and "land of gold" by the early Greek philosopher and first century Indian traders (Simon, Harper, Parkinson, Way, and Watkins, 2010). In fact, the Malay historical literature known as *hikayat* has been criticized because they contained too many myths and legends and lack of historical facts (Taslim, 2012). Not only that, the knowledge regarding Malay civilization greatly relies on mythological tales which narrate the glory of the Malay kingdoms and history of this country are also identifiable in the myths and legends rather than on hard evidence (Omar, Mohammed, Nordin, Johari and Ibrahim, 2010). Besides, myths and legends are among the key components of the Malay culture, tradition and identity. It is evident in the early works (e.g. Maxwell, 1881 and Skeat, 1900) that mystical beliefs including myths and legends play significant roles in guiding the way of life for the Malays. Westerners living in Malaya during the early days of colonial administration were enthralled by supernatural and mystical beliefs associated with Animism strictly observed and practiced by traditional Malays who had embraced Islam (Winzeler, 1983). In fact, for the Malays, these beliefs existed in various components of their life including health and traditional games (Hamzah, 2007). Interestingly, it is argued that contemporary society is becoming fascinated in attributes associated with myths and legends and the portrayal of mythological tales associated with old heroes, kings, evil spirits and witches have become even more alive with the widely utilization of modern technology today (Muthalib, 2009). Among the main reasons for the increasing popularity of mythological elements within contemporary societies can be attributed to the need for narratives including myths is actually part of human nature (Danesi, 2004). This claim is further supported by Groenewald (2006, p.909) who maintains that "human beings have always been mythmakers". Furthermore, Campbell (1988) proposed that mythical thinking is one of the ways for humans to achieve a fulfilling life.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of works that have examined topics in the mythology area particularly related to performing arts, myths and history, rituals and festivals and religious values embedded in myths. Despite the increasing stories associated with Malay myths and legends featuring in contemporary mass media, there is a paucity of studies which have been carried out to explore topics in this area. Therefore, the key aim of this paper is to analyze the representation of tales associated with Malay myths and legends in contemporary mass media. Only stories related to Malay mythological tales featuring in the Malaysian newspapers were examined in this paper. Thus, this paper is only focusing on stories included in the local newspaper as it is one of the main medium of communications in Malaysia. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to investigate how stories of the Malay myths and legends have been

projected in the modern days. The assessment carried out in this paper explores two well-known tales included in the Malaysian newspapers published from 2000 to 2015 using a content analysis technique. Stories linked to legends of Mahsuri and Raja Bersiong (the Fanged King) have been selected to be examined as they are among the well-known Malay tales and frequently featured in the Malaysian mass media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Myths and Legends

It is not easy to define the term 'myth' as there are many definitions and interpretations adopted by different mythologists in describing this word (Udefi, 2012). 'Myth' can be broadly defined as any traditional historical event (Martins, 2012) while Doungwilai, Hongsuwan and Tularak (2012) claim that a myth can be described as "a traditional story concerning the religious beliefs of a group of people who want to explain their history as well as the relationship between humans and the supernatural" (p.51). Jaja (2014, p.9) has defined 'myth' as "a story which is believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people". Besides the association with traditional and historical tales, some scholars regard myths as sacred tales. For example, Winzeler (2008) argues that myths are perceived as sacred stories as they mostly described the formation of the universe and humans. Bascom (1965) adds that due to their connection to religious beliefs and ritualistic practices, they are regarded as sacred or holy. In terms of content, myths are said to deal with crucial and intimidating topics like life and death and other key aspects of human life (Hutton, Joy, MacDonald, Sherman, Smith and De Vos, 2008). The main characters which often appear in the mythological tales are gods and goddesses, animals and other creatures with human traits (Bascom, 1965). Based on definitions and claims made by scholars in this paragraph, myths can be explained as traditional and sacred stories which have been passed down from generation to generation in order to explain the creations of the cosmos, natural phenomena, man and other vital aspects of human life including religious beliefs and rituals.

Legend is a term which is closely connected and sometimes used interchangeably with legend. 'Legends' can be defined as traditional tales which depict the deeds of heroes and men of a distant past (Fontenrose, 1971), whereas Wills (1993, p.15) describes 'legends' as authentic tales which are said to be originated from historical characters and events which consist of attributes associated with the past and magic and have been passed down orally. Although, legends mainly contain stories involving man as their main characters, this does not mean that elements associated with celestial and supernatural beings are not part of legends (Ogunjimi and Na'Allah, 2005). Rosenberg (1997) points out that it is possible to identify the probable dates of legends as compared to myths because legends normally contained tales of historical figures, and that it is possible to identify the probable dates when these historical individuals live. Furthermore, it is claimed that heroism is one of the chief attributes commonly found in many legends (Ogunjimi and Na'Allah, 2005). Heroes illustrated in legends can be represented by either warriors, kings, creators, patrons or thieves (Fontenrose, 1971).

Malay Myths and Legends

The review of the literature identified that topics related to Malay myths and legends have been studied by academicians and historians for the past decades until now. Among early academic works in this field were written and published by western scholars in 1881 and 1900. It is identified that Westerners living in the Malay Peninsula

during the British occupation observed the presence of ritualistic practices associated with ancient myths. For example, the practice of animal sacrifices and the use of mantras, spells, spirits and magicians (*pawang*) have been reported by Skeat (1990) during his visits to several Malay villages. The existence of numerous spirits in their natural environments which can affect human life and harvest is part of the beliefs of the traditional Malays (Parkinson 1967; Wilder 1968). It is claimed that nature and spirits were the foundation of beliefs of the Malay predecessors and these attributes influenced their lives in every way (Wan Omar et al., 2010). They also found that past beliefs associated with these features have been handed down for generations usually via the elder family members. In fact, some of these traditional beliefs have not disappeared from the lifestyle of contemporary Malays completely (Alwee, 2006). They are still evident through ritualistic practices and festivals celebrated by modern Malays either directly or indirectly.

In the analysis of myths associated with royal families in two northern states in Malaysia, Maxwell (1881) found two main types of stories. He claims that myths depicting princesses of the foam and princes of the bamboos are evident in the myths found in the states of Kedah and Perak. For example, as part of the tale associated with Raja Pra-Ong Maha Potisat (or Raja Bersiong) and his wife, it is stated that they got a son who originated from a special bamboo and a daughter from the midst of the foam. Similar observation was identified in the myth describing a tale relating to Nakhoda Kassim and his wife, a white Semang in Perak. This couple also adopted a son and a daughter of the same origin. Maxwell (1881) detected another unique characteristic associated with the colour 'white' which was commonly presented in these traditional tales. For example, in the analysis of myths in the states of Kedah and Perak, tales narrating the white Semang, white river and white animals were detected.

Based on earlier works such as Maxwell (1881) and Skeat (1900), Wessing (1990) claims that there were two types of mythologies commonly narrated in Malaysia and the neighboring region. The first type of tales was classified as Rama type which mostly contains mythological stories depicting the supernatural origin of royal families and their endorsement. On the other hand, myths associated with Dewi Sri mainly involves stories describing the appearances of a goddess who transformed into fertile harvests usually rice (Wessing, 1990). Overall, these elements are representations of Hinduism in the Malay myths and legends. Despite critics from Western scholars, these findings should not be surprising as the Malays were followers of this belief before the coming of Islam. Therefore, despite the conversion to Islam, Malay myths and legends still have traces of their past beliefs.

A number of authors such as Knappert (1980), Othman (2008), and McAmis (2002) have investigated the existence of religious attributes in the Malay myths and legends. Knappert argues that the presence of religious components in mythological tales can provide a better understanding of the cosmology of a particular ethnic group including the Malays. According to McAmis (2002), the Malays are still connected to their past religions particularly Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism via mystical beliefs and customary practices until the present days. Another element often cited in the description of the Malay myths and legends is '*semangat*'. Knappert (1990) explains '*semangat*' as 'the spirit of life'. It is held by the traditional Malays of the presence of this spirit in different natural forms (Larsen, 1996) including paddy. Hui (2003) claims that paddy is frequently perceived to have a positive '*semangat*' or spirit for the Malays.

One of the well-known Malaysian legends, Mahsuri curse has been studied by several scholars. Ismail (2000), who reviews Mahsuri legend together with other interesting tales of Langkawi Island, acknowledged that Mahsuri story is known to all people in Langkawi and for them she represents a symbol of innocence. The people of Langkawi is emotionally attached to her as it is said that she was wrongly accused of the sin she did not commit and was cruelly executed (Ismail, 2000). As part of the description of the history of Kedah, Ismail (2008) includes the tales and events

associated with Mahsuri. Mythological tales and superstitious beliefs associated with Mahsuri prior to her birth, during and after her lifetime, have been depicted as part of the history of the state of Kedah. For example, the stories related to the spirit of *paddy* crying, white blood and burnt rice have been included as well. The curse of Mahsuri has been represented as real occurrences. For instance, Ismail (2000) states that "In the year 1990, the curse expired. Seven generations have passed. Langkawi began to prosper and business started to boom. It has turned into a most sought for holiday resort in the world" (p.102). In the analysis of Langkawi Island, Larsen (2007) argues that the identity of Langkawi Island is intimately connected to Mahsuri due to her strong personality traits. She made this claim as Mahsuri, according to the narrative of her legend, dared to curse the island. According to Larsen (2007), the locals view this as something positive in which they would like to be connected to.

Overall, the review of the literature demonstrates that Malay myths and legends have been studied by both local and foreign scholars since the colonization period until the present days. Tales depicting supernatural and magical elements have drawn academicians to investigate the Malay mythology. The importance of mythological tales and superstitious beliefs has been cited by scholars whereby they claim that these aspects have played significant roles in the lifestyle of the Malays. Attributes associated with the Malay past religious beliefs are widely evident in the Malay myths and legends.

METHOD

The analysis of the representation of stories associated with Malay myths and legends in the Malaysian newspapers was examined using a content analysis method. Neuendorf (2002) argues that content analysis has been regarded as one of the fastest growing methods in the field of social science. It is a method which can be used to analyze communication messages (Madenoglu and Uysal, 2012). This particular tool can be adopted to assess different forms of communication such as textual, oral and graphic (Cole, 1988; cited in Elo and Kyngas, 2007). Most often, content analysis is employed in order to study textual materials (Vitouladiti, 2014). Textual contents which can be studied through this method include "words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message" (Newmann, 2003, p.219).

Berelson (1952, p.18) describes content analysis as a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." Hsieh and Shanon (2005) defined content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of the text data through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p.1278). The definitions put forward by Berelson (1952) and Hsieh and Shanon (2005) demonstrate that this method can be used to study both manifest and latent contents of the communication media.

Historically, the use of this scientific method has started growing since the early 1920s, particularly in the fields such as political science, psychology and communication (Stepchenkova, Kirilenko and Morrison, 2009). Harwood and Garry (2003) claim that initially in the 19th century, content analysis was utilized to examine selected communication contents like songs, articles featuring in the newspapers and magazines, advertisement and political speeches (cited in Elo and Kyngas, 2007). Similarly, Jenkins (1999) has stated that this analysis tool is often used in the analysis of written or visual contents such as booklets, newspapers, magazines, brochures, advertisements and websites.

Hence, content analysis is regarded as the right method to be utilized in the analysis of the stories associated with Malay myths and legends represented in the local newspapers. This is because; historically this method has been adopted in the

assessment of communication media particularly printed messages. However, nowadays with the advance of technology, this analysis tool is also used in the analysis of on-line communication content. As both printed and on-line newspapers are important to communicate messages to the Malaysian public, the analysis in this paper was carried out in both mediums.

This paper analyses the representation of stories associated with Malay myths and legends represented in the specific mass media that is the newspapers. In general, mass media is a powerful tool as a form of communication between the federal government and its citizens as it is mainly done through these means (Azlan, Rahim, Basri and Hasim, 2012). Indeed, the mass media can be a vehicle to alter various areas of the society including socio-politic, economic and culture (Hamzah, 2009). As part of the mass media, Feeney (2014) argues that one form of information source required in all fields of studies is the newspapers. It is claimed that newspaper is still one of the significant modes of communication which is frequently adopted to convey the agendas of the government including policies and other issues to the Malaysian public (Azlan et al., 2012). Therefore, due to the importance of newspaper in the context of Malaysia, this communication is selected to be analyzed in the assessment of Malay myths and legends.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings of this paper identified that stories related to the two well-known myths and legends have appeared in several local newspapers from 2000 to October 2015. The key stories associated with Mahsuri legend and the tale of Raja Bersiong will be presented in this section.

Mahsuri Legend

One of the main tales which appeared in the local newspapers since the year 2000 was stories associated with Mahsuri legend. Stories relating to Mahsuri were reported quite widely in the local newspapers during two occasions. Tales connecting to Mahsuri and her descendants were presented in the year 2000 as part of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Langkawi Development Authority also known as LADA (*The New Straits Times*, 01 June, 2000). The name Wan Aishah (also known as the Thai name Sirintra Yayee) came into the limelight after she was introduced as the seventh generation of Mahsuri by the Kedah Historical Society and Kedah Museum. She and her family were brought to Langkawi Island from Phuket to symbolically mark the lifting of Mahsuri's curse or '*sumpah*' (*The Star Online*, 26 April, 2010). She was well-received by the local people as people are curious with the girl who is closely connected to Langkawi Island. As Mahsuri descendants, she and her family members were invited to stay on the island and were offered many benefits such as a piece of land and a house which is located near Mahsuri's Mausoleum (*The Star Online*, 01 June, 2000).

Mahsuri's descendant, Wan Aishah was featured again in the Malaysian newspaper in 2010. This time, several newspapers reported stories related to her wedding ceremony. Firstly, her marriage which took place in her hometown, Kampung Tambon, Kemala was reported in the Malaysian newspapers. Her solemnization and wedding ceremonies were detailed out. *The Star Online* dated April 26 claims that her wedding reception was a grand ceremony attended by 700 guests served by the traditional Malay Phuket cuisine. An event to celebrate the marriage of Mahsuri's seventh generation was organized on Langkawi Island and this joyous occasion was reported by several newspapers such as *Berita Harian*, *News Straits Times* and *Metro*. It is stated in the newspapers that international tourists along with local people were invited to attend the wedding reception (*Berita Harian*, 9 May, 2010).

As part of the description of Mahsuri's descendant, personal information relating to Wan Aishah is included. According to the author, Normala Hamzah in the *The Star Online* dated 23 April, 2010, this girl was found when she was only 12 years old. Wan Aishah had attended the Islamic University of Malaysia for a year and then she went back to Thailand to study communication in Bangkok University. One aspect frequently mentioned in various newspapers is related to her beauty. It is said that Wan Aishah inherited the beauty of Mahsuri, her ancestor (*The Star Online*, 23 April, 2010). Besides words describing her beauty, there are visual images of Wan Aishah included in various newspapers as part of the effort to showcase her beauty. It is claimed in several newspapers that she inherited her beauty from her famous ancestor, Mahsuri. In describing her wedding, the information related to her husband and how the couple met was incorporated. The historical background on how Wan Aishah was found and became well-known to the Malaysian general public is presented as well.

In reporting about Mahsuri's descendant, several parts of the legendary tale are included in the newspapers. Tales relating to her curse are most frequently included in the newspapers. One article claims that a wedding reception was held for Wan Aishah as it is believed that the curse that Langkawi would remain barren for seven generations would only be lifted after Wan Aishah's birth, as she is presumably Mahsuri's seventh generation (*Berita Harian*, 7 May, 2010). It is claimed by another that the curse placed on Langkawi Island by her ancestor seven generations ago had ended when she was found (*The Star Online*, 23 April, 2010). However, one newspaper published in the year 2000 quoted several parts and versions of Mahsuri legend. For instance, the author acknowledges the existence of several versions of this legend, however she maintains that most versions contained the tale of white blood. It is held that "white blood spouted from Mahsuri's body when stabbed with her own keris, signifying her innocence" (*The New Straits Times*, 01 June, 2000). Nevertheless, another article claims that Mahsuri's last words were the famous part of her legend. Until now the words she uttered before dying are often quoted and represent one of the prominent parts in many plays. Mahsuri supposedly said that she was wrongly accused and she cursed that Langkawi Island would be barren for seven generations (*Utusan Online*, 31 May, 2014).

Overall, the analysis of the representation of Mahsuri in the local newspapers during the past 15 years found that recent developments related to this legend have been emphasized, particularly in the event to symbolically lift the curse of Langkawi with the birth of Wan Aishah and her wedding ceremony. Indirectly, these findings reflect that the tourism officials and people in Langkawi may still believe that Mahsuri was a genuine historical figure which existed in the past and her curse was real as well. Benefits and events organized for Mahsuri's descendants particularly to Wan Aishah, reflect that Mahsuri's legend has a significant impact on the island's tourism development as Langkawi is also referred as the 'island of legend'. This can demonstrate to the Malaysian public and potential tourists that Langkawi has broken free from the curse and the presence of Mahsuri's descendants provides a tangible evidence for this famous legend. Moreover, as represented in the newspaper articles published approximately 15 years, stories depicting Mahsuri legend sort of demonstrate that the general public in Malaysia believe this historical figure, events related to her and the curse uttered by her were real occurrences. In fact, it appears that the officials in Malaysia are somewhat certain that Wan Aishah is the seventh generation of Mahsuri. In terms of the narratives of this legend, two main parts which have been emphasized in the newspapers include stories of her curse and white blood. The presence of white blood in Mahsuri legend is a reflection of a universal value to showcase her purity and that she was wrongly accused due to jealousy. This is consistent to a statement made by Ismail (2000) which maintains that Mahsuri's white blood symbolizes her innocence. Furthermore, this finding supports the claim made by Maxwell (1881) that element associated with white is common in the Malay myths and

legends. This element of white in Mahsuri's blood shows a connection to the Malay supernatural and superstitious beliefs commonly depicted in their myths and legends. Thus, this finding is not surprising as scholars such as Ismail (2000) and Ismail (2008) have described the history and story of Mahsuri full of magical and superstitious beliefs even prior to her birth.

Raja Bersiong (the Fanged King)

The analysis of the newspapers over the last 15 years found that stories linked to the legend of Raja Bersiong appeared in several articles published in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2015. The article published in 2008 was written in Malay and provided a long description of the legend which was included as part of the promotion of a play involving this tale. It is claimed that this new performance will provide a new perspective of this ancient legend. Details of the legend from the start to the end are depicted in this newspaper have been presented in *Utusan Online* dated 21 January 2008. The descriptions in this article start with the cruelty of the king name Raja Ong Maha Perita Deria who killed his own people every day in order to take their blood and use it in his meals. It all started with the incident that the king had eaten a spinach dish which contained the blood of the cook. The cook's blood dropped into the dish when he accidentally cut his hand while cooking. Since then, the king always wanted blood in his meals. This king was willing to kill his people due to his strong thirst for human blood. As a result of this, his own people and a neighboring king, named Raja Kampar fought against him. He then ran away leaving his state. It is added in this article that local people in Baling, inherited this legend orally from their ancestors for generations now. It is claimed that the name Baling, a district in the state of Kedah originated from the act of this legendary king who threw away his fangs. It is said that while on the run, Raja Bersiong had to stop at several places because he experienced toothache and extreme discomfort of his fangs. Because of the strong pain, he had to remove his fangs and toss them away. The name of the district of "Baling" literally means "throw" derived from the act of Raja Bersiong (*Utusan Online*, 21 Jan, 2008).

Another newspaper article published in 2011 discusses the presence of social justice in myths. As part of discussing justice and the abuse of power, the author uses the legend associated with Fanged King as an example. Similar to previous article published in 2008, quite a comprehensive tale is represented as well. For instance, it is stated in the article that

Long ago there was a very cruel Raja. He treated his subjects viciously and was feared and hated. It is said that he had fangs instead of teeth....When the food was served, the Raja exclaimed that this was the best spinach he ever eaten. He called the cook and asked her what she did differently. Out of fear she admitted that the only different to the dish was the addition of blood. The Raja then ordered that blood be put into all his meals. Eventually, his appetite for blood grew and grew, and soon people were being slaughtered just to save his appetite

(*The Star Online*, 28 July, 2011).

Although the article published in 2008 was written in Malay and the one in 2011 was published in English, the tales represented in both newspapers are quite similar. Both quotes mentioned the king was cruel and had fangs, claim that his thirst for human blood started with a tasty spinach meal with contained the cook's blood and was prepared to kill his own people for blood. However, there are some differences between the quotes in the articles published in 2008 and 2011. As an example, it is stated in the first article that the cook who accidentally dropped blood in Raja Bersiong's meal was a male but in the second article the cook was a female. The first article also mentioned how his people and the neighboring king rebelled and defeated the cruel Raja Bersiong. The link of this king to a town named Baling was also included. In the second article

published in 2011, the name of the hero who defeated the Fanged King was not stated clearly. It is claimed that "The cruel reign of the raja degenerated into one of abject terror. Naturally, a hero appeared and he fought the Raja. The hero had magical powers and he used it to turn himself into a tiger which then devoured the evil ruler" (*The Star Online*, 28 July, 2011).

One of the elements which was ingrained in the tale of Raja Bersiong is that "there is a sense of social justice to be found in our myths, which means it is within our collective psyche to stand up against injustice and cruelty. The legend of Raja Bersiong is mainly about how the abuse of power will eventually lead to one's downfall" (*The Star Online*, 28 July, 2011). As directly manifested in the second article, values are among key attributes of myths and legends including the tale of Fanged King. It is depicted in this tale that those who are cruel will face negative consequences. However, the author of this article claims that in real life, the situation is not as simple as it appeared in the legendary tales.

The tale associated with Raja Bersiong (or the Fanged King) was also featured in several local newspapers in 2009, 2010 and 2015 in relation to the discovery of a mysterious castle in a place called Bukit Tinggi, Jitra in the state of Kedah. It is believed that the fortress might be connected to that particular raja. Locals claim the mysterious castle belongs to the Fanged Raja when he ran away from his kingdom in Baling to Jitra (*Berita Harian*, 10 May, 2010). The condition of the castle was reported in two separate articles published on November 29, 2009 and May 10, 2010. The article mentioned that tourists have been visiting the castle and the surrounding area ever since it had been cleaned. Besides the narrative of the legend and the mysterious castle, other places and attractions linked to the raja were also mentioned in these newspaper articles.

However, there are articles published in the local newspapers recently which denied the allegation that this castle belonged to the legendary king, Raja Bersiong. It is reported in *The Malay Mail Online* dated October 18, 2015 that the Chairman of the Malaysian Historical Society, Kedah branch, Datuk Dr. Wan Samsudin Mohd Yusof claims that the 100 years old castle located in Bukit Tinggi does not belong to Raja Bersiong as alleged by the public. On the other hand, he says that the abandoned castle belongs to Tunku Dhiauddin Ibni Sultan Zainal Rashid or commonly known as Tunku Kudin who was sacked as the crown prince of Kedah during the administration of his elder brother, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah who reigned from 1854 to 1879. He maintained that although various sites and objects such as a grave, a flag pole and a Malay dagger found in Kedah have been linked to him, Raja Bersiong was only a mythical king mentioned in the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (*The Malay Mail*, 18 Oct, 2015). Several other newspapers also featured similar article on October 18.

Overall, the representation of this in two local newspapers contained long narratives of Raja Bersiong tale as this fascinating legend includes stories of a human being who possesses extraordinary features, fangs and darker traits like the thirst for human blood and cruelty. Partly, this ancient legend can be a representation of the Malay past beliefs associated with Hinduism. This finding is supported by Falarti (2013) who maintains that drinking blood and cannibalism were components of ritualistic practices linked to obscure Hinduism. This finding is a reflection of claims proposed by scholars such as Skeat (1900), McAmis (2002), and Knappert (1980) of the presence of past beliefs associated with Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism which are apparent in the Malay myths and legends including the legend of Raja Bersiong. Besides, it is evident that this particular legend is not very much different from the Dracula legend as both tales involved a thirst for human blood. Moral value is another aspect identifiable within the representation of Raja Bersiong either directly and symbolically. The narratives of this legend included in the local newspapers are already ingrained with the social value that it is the law of the nature that cruelty will be punished. However, one author of the local newspaper directly points out this specific value and compared it to the real life in modern days.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed how stories associated with Malay myths and legends have been represented in the Malaysian newspapers for approximately 15 years by focusing on two traditional tales, Mahsuri and Raja Bersiong. Findings of this paper revealed that recent events related to Mahsuri legend have been depicted fairly extensive in the local newspapers in 2000 and 2010. Stories surrounding Mahsuri's seventh generation and the lifting of her curse were reported in various Malaysian newspapers in the year 2000. In 2010, there were local newspaper articles featuring the wedding ceremonies of Mahsuri's seventh generation, Wan Alshah in her hometown in Phuket and the celebration in Langkawi. The two parts of her original tale highlighted in the newspaper are stories related to her white blood and the curse spoken by her before dying. In terms of Raja Bersiong, stories associated with his legend have been portrayed in the newspapers from 2008 to 2015. The two articles featured long narratives of his legend. The key attributes of Raja Bersiong legend presented in contemporary articles involved stories of a cruel king who grew fangs and a tale depicting a strong thirst for human blood in his meals. The tie of this raja to the name of a town 'Baling' is also mentioned. However, the articles published in 2009, 2010 and 2015 focused more on the connection and rejection between the fanged king with a mysterious castle. In the assessment of both of these tales, it is uncovered that stories narrating the recent developments associated with Mahsuri and Raja Bersiong received more coverage from the local newspapers while the original tales of myths and legends have been overshadowed. Traces of past beliefs and values are evident either directly or symbolically in the representation of stories associated with the Malay myths and legends in the newspapers over the years.

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