

THE *PONDOK* AND KELANTAN POLITICS: A FOREIGN RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Generally, the number of *pondoks* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) has been decreasing because of the modern education system today. Islam covers every aspect in life. *Pondok* education system had been the main education institution before modern education system was set up in Malaysia. However, they were replaced by secular schools due to the influence of westernization. Malays have also started to avoid studying in *pondoks* in answering the demands of society especially when the employment is concerned. The role of *pondoks* has been shifted from education to welfare like caring center due to the replacement of young students by the older people. However, although the number of *pondoks* is decreasing throughout Malaysia, there are still many *pondoks* in Kelantan.

At the same time Kelantan is one of the most unique and democratic states in Malaysia in terms of politics. Kelantan is a Malay dominant state (around 95 % are Malays) and the battle between the two biggest Malay parties, UMNO (United Malay National Organization) and PAS (Islamic Party of Malaysia), has been the toughest in Malaysia. The state government has always been changed there. At first the state government was under UMNO. Then it was under PAS. And then it was under UMNO until 1990. After that it has been under PAS until the present. This is the reason for this research to focus on this state and it is especially interesting for a foreign researcher.

It is difficult to understand the uniqueness of Kelantan from the political point of view. We should see more at grassroots level to find that political uniqueness. The hypothesis is that the large number of *pondoks* comes about through the democratic way and the state government is influenced by this phenomenon. The objective of this paper is to show that Islam and democracy, at least in Malaysia, are compatible.