

РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ СИНКРЕТИЗМ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В ИСТОРИИ МАЛАЙЗИИ

MALAYZIYA TARIXIDA DINIY SINKRETIZM VA MILLIY O'ZIGA XOSLIKNING SHAKLLANISHI

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM AND THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE HISTORY OF MALAYSIA

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Аннотация. Настоящая статья посвящена эволюции религиозного синкретизма и его влиянию на формирование национальной идентичности в Малайзии на протяжении исторического континуума как от первобытнообщинного строя до постколониального периода. Исследование фокусируется на динамике мультикультурной среды, подкрепленной археологическими свидетельствами включая артефакты из Кота Тампан, Нья и Сунгай Бату, которые иллюстрируют ранние механизмы ассимиляции, миграций и межкультурных обменов. Эти процессы способствовали синтезу анимистических верований с индуизмом, буддизмом и исламом, опосредованному торговыми связями с Индией, Китаем и Ближним Востоком.

В статье детально реконструируется трансформация от родоплеменного общества к ранним государственным образованиям таким как Ганга Негара и Лангасука в I–V вв. н.э., где урбанизация и социальная дифференциация стимулировали религиозный синкретизм. В колониальную эпоху охватывающий период с XVI–XIX вв. этническая диверсификация усилилась за счет притока китайских, индийских и яванских мигрантов, однако традиции толерантности сохранились благодаря религиозной автономии султанов, закрепленной в Договоре Пангора 1874 г. Постнезависимый этап с 1957 г. характеризуется конституционными реформами, Новой экономической политикой и программой Рукунегара, которые консолидировали идентичность на базе умеренного

ислама шафиитского мазхаба, интерконфессионального согласия и малайизации, способствуя снижению социально-экономических диспропорций.

В исследовании методологическая база опирается на принципы историзма, сравнительно-исторический, системный анализ, проблемно-хронологический метод и междисциплинарный подход. Это в свою очередь способствует интегрированию трудов таких специалистов как Majid Z., Higham C., Andaya B. и др. а также архивных источников.

Полученные результаты исследования подчеркивают роль государственных институтов страны как IKIM, SYARAK в частности, внешнеполитических стратегий страны и ее участие в АСЕАН. Особенное внимание следует уделить концепции ZOPFAN и ее роли в обеспечении устойчивой модели мультикультурного сосуществования. Все вышеприведенные факты способствуют тому что в современный период Малайзия позиционируется как страна с развитой государственной системой где главной целью выступает гармония и мир.

Ключевые понятия: Кота Тампан, Сунгай Бату, Саравак, Кедах, полуостров Малакка, Рукун Негара, Малайзия, малайизация.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada Malayziyada diniy sinkretizmning evolyutsiyasi va uning ibtidoiy kommunal tizimdan postkolonial davrgacha bo'lgan tarixiy davomiylilik bo'yicha milliy o'ziga xoslikning shakllanishiga ta'siri o'rganilgan. Tadqiqot Kota Tampan, Nya va Sungai Batudan topilgan arxeologik dalillar, jumladan, assimilyatsiya, migratsiya va madaniyatlararo almashinuvning dastlabki mexanizmlarini ko'rsatuvchi artefaktlar bilan tasdiqlangan ko'p madaniyatli muhit dinamikasiga qaratilgan. Bu jarayonlar Hindiston, Xitoy va Yaqin Sharq bilan savdo aloqalari orqali hinduiylik, buddaviylik va islom bilan animistik qarashlarning sintezini osonlashtirdi.

Maqolada milodiy I-V asrlarda qabila jamiyatidan Ganga Negara va Langkasuka kabi dastlabki davlat shakllanishiga o'tish batafsil bayon etilgan, bu yerda urbanizatsiya va ijtimoiy tabaqalanish diniy sinkretizmni rag'batlantirgan. Mustamlakachilik davrida, XVI-XIX asrlar oralig'ida, xitoylik, hind va yavalik migrantlarning oqimi bilan etnik xilma-xillik kuchaydi, ammo 1874-yilgi Pangora shartnomasida mustahkamlangan sultonlarning diniy avtonomiyasi tufayli bag'rikenglik an'analari saqlanib qoldi. 1957-yildan beri mustaqillikdan keyingi davr konstitutsiyaviy islohotlar, Yangi iqtisodiy siyosat va mo'tadil shofitiy mazhabi, dinlararo uyg'unlik va malaylashtirish asosida o'ziga xoslikni mustahkamlagan va ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy tafovutlarni kamaytirishga yordam bergan Rukunegara dasturi bilan tavsiflanadi.

Tadqiqotning metodologik asosi tarixiylik, qiyosiy tarixiy va tizimli tahlil, muammo-xronologik usul va fanlararo yondashuv tamoyillariga asoslangan. Bu esa o'z navbatida, Majid Z., Higham C., Andaya B. va boshqalar kabi

mutaxassislarning asarlarini, shuningdek, arxiv manbalarini integratsiyalashga yordam beradi.

Tadqiqot natijalari mamlakatning IKIM va SYARAK kabi davlat institutlarining rolini, mamlakatning tashqi siyosat strategiyalarini va ASEANdagi ishtirokini ta'kidlaydi. ZOPFAN konsepsiyasiga va uning ko'p madaniyatli birga yashashning barqaror modelini ta'minlashdagi rolga alohida e'tibor qaratish lozim. Yuqoridagi barcha omillar Malayziyaning hozirgi paytda uyg'unlik va tinchlik asosiy maqsadlar bo'lgan rivojlangan davlat tizimiga ega mamlakat sifatidagi mavqeiga hissa qo'shadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Kota Tampan, Sungai Batu, Saravak, Kedah, Malayziya yarim oroli, Rukun Negara, Malaysia, malaylashtirish.

Abstract. This article examines the evolution of religious syncretism and its influence on the formation of national identity in Malaysia across a historical continuum from the primitive communal system to the postcolonial period. The study draws on archaeological evidence from Kota Tampan, Nya, and Sungai Batu, including artifacts that illustrate the initial mechanisms of assimilation, migration, and intercultural exchange, highlighting the dynamics of Malaysia's multicultural environment. These processes were further facilitated through trade relations with India, China, and the Middle East, enabling the synthesis of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic elements with animistic beliefs.

The article reconstructs in detail the transformation from a tribal society to early state formations such as Ganga Negara and Langkasuka in the 1st–5th centuries CE, where urbanization and social differentiation stimulated religious syncretism. During the colonial period, between the 16th and 19th centuries, ethnic diversity increased due to the influx of Chinese, Indian, and Javanese migrants; however, the traditions of tolerance were preserved thanks to the religious autonomy of the sultans, reinforced by the Pangkor Treaty of 1874. The post-independence period since 1957 has been characterized by constitutional reforms, the New Economic Policy, and the Rukunegara Program, which consolidated identity based on moderate Shafi'i Islam, interfaith harmony, and Malayization, helping to reduce socioeconomic disparities.

The methodological foundation of the study is based on the principles of historicity, comparative-historical and systematic analysis, the problem-chronological approach, and an interdisciplinary perspective. This, in turn, facilitates the integration of works by specialists such as Majid Z., Higham C., Andaya B., and others, as well as archival sources.

The findings of the study highlight the role of state institutions such as the IKIM and SYARAK, the country's foreign policy strategies, and its participation in ASEAN. Particular attention is drawn to the ZOPFAN concept and its role in ensuring a sustainable model of multicultural coexistence. All of these factors contribute to Malaysia's current status as a developed nation characterized by harmony and peace as central objectives.

Key concepts: Kota Tampan, Sungai Batu, Sarawak, Kedah, Malay Peninsula, Rukun Negara, Malaysia, Malayization.

INTRODUCTION

The examination of a scientific topic related to national or religious characteristics should begin with an analysis of the historical process, which allows us to trace the formation of cultural traditions, values, and habits. The historical context provides an understanding of the evolution of social and religious institutions, their interaction and influence on contemporary practices, creating a basis for objective and comprehensive research.

Southeast Asia is a region with a rich historical and cultural heritage, whose roots go back to the primitive communal period. Archaeological research, including the work of scholars such as Majid Z., Tjia H., and Hung H., highlights the uniqueness of the region as an area conducive to life and assimilation processes over a long period of time. In particular, the archaeological site of Kota Tampan in the state of Perak is known for its finds of stone tools dating back to the Upper Palaeolithic period, which testify to the high degree of adaptation of ancient communities to their environment (Majid Z., 1988:40).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some aspects of this topic have been explored in the works of contemporary scholars such as Rogozhina NG, Mujani WK, Rozali EA, Zakaria NJ, and Gunaratna R. However, it should be noted that they considered different directions under different topics and vectors, analyzing them through the prism of historical, political, and economic perspectives.

METHODS

The research methods used are the principles of historicism, comparative and systematic analysis, problem-chronological, comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches, which made it possible to explore the topic.

RESULTS

This article summarizes the historical dynamics of religious syncretism and the formation of Malaysian national identity from the Paleolithic to the postcolonial

period. It demonstrates how the archaeological finds of Kota Tampan and Sungai Batu confirm early processes of cultural synthesis, while subsequent Islamization, colonial policies, and institutional reforms from 1957 to 1971 cemented a model of moderate Islam and interfaith harmony. The work presents a systematic literature review useful for comparative studies of tolerance in Southeast Asia.

DISCUSSION

According to Majid Z's research, «Kota Tampan» demonstrates the presence of complex stone-working technologies, indicating the advanced skills of prehistoric communities. These findings confirm that the region was not only habitable due to its favorable climate and abundant natural resources, but also served as an important hub for cultural and technological innovation.

The tropical climate, abundant water resources, and diversity of flora and fauna created a favorable environment for hunting, gathering, and early agriculture. In his study, Tjia H (Tjia, H., 2001:227) notes that stable climatic conditions during the Pleistocene period allowed the region to become a «springboard» for early migrations of «Homo sapiens» from Africa to Asia.

Furthermore, the geographical location of Southeast Asia, including its peninsulas and islands, facilitated contacts between different population groups. This created conditions for the exchange of knowledge, technologies, and cultural practices, as highlighted in the works of Hung H. (Hung H., 2017:633), which analyzes the role of the region as a crossroads of migration routes.

Assimilation processes in Southeast Asia during the primitive communal period were driven by intense contacts between different ethnic and cultural groups. Archaeological evidence, including finds at Kota Tampan and other sites such as the Niah Caves located in Sarvak, evidence of a mixture of technologies and cultural traditions. For example, stone tools found at Kota Tampan bear similarities to artifacts from southern China and Australia, indicating migratory and cultural connections (Majid Z., 1982:43).

These processes of assimilation contributed to the formation of complex social structures and cultural diversity. Tjia X. (Tjia, X., 2001:133) emphasizes that Southeast Asia was not only a place of physical survival but also a «melting pot» of cultures where interactions took place between indigenous groups and migrants, laying the foundation for the future multi-ethnic character of the region.

In the 1st century CE, the Malay Peninsula began to experience the disintegration of the primitive communal system, which led to the formation of early state formations, urbanization, and cultural transformation.

In particular, the disintegration of the clan system was accompanied by increasing social stratification. For example, Wheatley P. examined archaeological finds, including ceramics, metal tools, and jewelry, which attest to the emergence of elite groups that controlled resources and trade routes. These groups likely consisted of local chieftains and merchants who accumulated wealth through the development of maritime trade with India, China, and other regions. Social division manifested itself in the differentiation of housing, with the elite living in fortified settlements, while the rest of the population occupied simpler houses (Wheatley P., 1961:333).

The economic basis of these changes was the development of agriculture and trade. Research Higham K. demonstrates that the introduction of irrigation agriculture, particularly rice cultivation, contributed to increased productivity and population concentration in certain areas. Port cities such as Kedah and Langkasuka began to emerge as trading centers, exchanging spices, gems, and textiles. These cities became not only economic but also cultural hubs, attracting migrants and traders from India, China, and the Middle East (Higham C., 2014:288).

First century CE and subsequent centuries was a key stage in the region's transformation. Archaeological excavations at Sungai Batu in Kedah have uncovered the remains of port structures and warehouses dating from the second to fourth centuries CE, indicating intensive trade activity.

In particular, this contributed to the emergence of other economic centres in Ancient Kedah such as Pengkalan Bujang and Kampung Sungai Mas, which eventually developed into entrepôts after the 5th century CE (Khaw N. et al., 2021: 39). These cities served as a link between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, ensuring the exchange of goods and ideas. Port cities such as Tambralinga and Langkasuka are mentioned in Chinese chronicles (in texts from the Han Dynasty), confirming their importance in regional trade. Urbanization was accompanied by the development of handicrafts, including the production of ceramics, jewelry, and textiles. These crafts, as noted in the research Miksic J, testify to the specialization of labor, which is a sign of the transition from the clan system to early state structures (Miksic J., 2013:19-115). These cities became not only economic but also cultural

hubs, including Malays, Indians, and Chinese, laying the foundation for the multi-ethnic character of the region.

This process of cultural synthesis was particularly evident in the religious sphere. As Jacq-Hergoualc M. notes, the Malay Peninsula in the 1st century AD was a zone of active interaction between indigenous animistic beliefs (characteristic of primitive communities and including the cult of nature spirits and ancestors) and Hindu and Buddhist traditions that penetrated through trade networks. This symbiosis led to the formation of syncretic cults and the transformation of local spiritual practices. Archaeological evidence, in particular Buddhist statues and the remains of Hindu temples in Kedah and Lembang Buyang dating from the 2nd to 5th centuries AD, materially confirm this religious transition associated with the intensification of trade contacts with India (Jacq H.,2018: 280).

Hinduism and Buddhism were adopted primarily by the elite (officials, merchants, etc.), who used these religions to legitimize their power. For example, the rulers of early states such as Kedah adopted Hindu titles such as «raja» and built temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu, suggesting their adoption of Hinduism. Buddhism, particularly in its Mahayana form, also gained ground, as evidenced by inscriptions and iconography found in the Langkasuki region (Higham C., 2014:298). Also, Indian traders and monks traveling along sea routes brought with them religious texts, iconography and rituals, which were confirmed by Chinese chronicles, such as the «Records on the Western Regions» (Xuanzang,2025 etc.), the chronicles mention Buddhist communities on the Malay Peninsula as early as the 3rd century CE (Wheatley P., 1961:333). These contacts promoted a cultural assimilation in which local animistic practices were combined with new religious teachings, creating a unique syncretism (Jacq H.,2018:299). These religious changes contributed to the formation of a new cultural identity based on the synthesis of local and Indian traditions.

By the 3rd–4th centuries CE, early states such as Ganga Negara began to form on the Malay Peninsula located in Kedah and Langkasuka. These states had features of centralized governance, including taxation, military structures, and religious institutions. Chinese and Indian sources describe these states as prosperous trading centers with a developed social organization (Miksic, 2013:19-115). The formation of statehood was accompanied by the development of a script based on the Indian Pallava* alphabet, which was used to record trade agreements and religious texts. Archaeological finds, such as inscriptions in Kedah, attest to the use of

Pallava for administrative purposes, which contributed to the standardization of trade and legal norms (Higham C., 2014:298). These norms regulated the trade of spices, metals, and textiles, as well as social relations, including inheritance, marriage, and religious practices, which strengthened the social structure of early societies.

From the 7th and 8th centuries, the development of maritime trade increased the Malay Peninsula's contacts with Arab merchants, who played a key role in the spread of Islam. By the 13th century, Islam had become the dominant religion in port cities like Malacca, thanks to trade networks linking the region with the Middle East, India, and China (Andaya B., Andaya L., 2017:46). The Malacca Sultanate (1402–1511) became a key center of Islamization, where the adoption of Islam by local elites and merchants facilitated integration into Muslim trade networks, reducing transaction costs (Reid A.,2008:1450-1680). Islam did not displace animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions, but integrated them. For example, the cult of nature spirits has survived in local rituals, such as the veneration of sacred trees, even among Muslim communities (Higham C.,2014:380). The process of “Malayization” allowed ethnic groups, including the Javanese and Bugis (Andaya B., Andaya L., 2017:47), assimilate into Malay culture through the adoption of Islam and the Malay language, forming a unified identity.

Since the 16th century, the Malay Peninsula has been under the influence of European colonization, beginning with the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, followed by Dutch expansion in 1641 and British expansion in 1824. Despite the colonial presence, Islam remained the dominant religion, supported by local sultans, as enshrined in the 1874 Treaty of Pangora, which left religious matters under their control (Roff W.,1967:50). The colonial policy of disengagement intensified ethnic divisions, but did not lead to religious conflicts, thanks to a tolerant tradition rooted in syncretism.

During this period, Malay Creole communities emerged, particularly in port cities such as Penang, where intermarriage between Portuguese and Malays fostered cultural synthesis (Hirschman C., 1986:335-355). Chinese and Indian migrants who settled in Malacca and Penang also integrated through trade and marriage, forming the Peranakan ethnic group (Clammer J.,1979:50) “Straits Chinese” or “China Kampung” (Yow CH.,2016:836-850) which live V Kelantan, They saved elements Chinese cultures , but adapted Malay language And customs (Kim K., 1981:99-103). Indian traders, mainly Tamils, Malayalees, and Telugus, also

integrated into Malay society through trade links. Their influence is noticeable in Malay cuisine (for example, curry dishes) and architecture, where Indian elements are combined with local traditions. The Indian community, which makes up about 10% of the Malaysian population, retains its religious traditions (mainly Hinduism), but has adapted the Malay language and local customs, which contributes to cultural rapprochement (Raji MNA et al., 2017:221-231). Javanese immigrants who arrived in Malaysia in the 19th and 20th centuries also demonstrated cultural assimilation. Due to the similarities between their religion (Islam) and language, the Javanese easily integrated into Malay society while preserving elements of their culture, such as music, dance, and batik. Marriages between Javanese and Malays accelerated the assimilation process, strengthening social ties through shared values such as gotong royong which literally means mutual aid and their religious practices (Sunarti L., Fadeli T., 2018:5-12).

In the early 1950s, national liberation movements intensified in Southeast Asia, becoming a key factor in the region's decolonization. Under pressure from the anti-colonial struggle, European powers were forced to grant independence to their former possessions, in this context the Federation of Malaya. achieved sovereignty on August 31, 1957. Thus, the region-wide rise of liberation movements in the 1950s led to the collapse of the colonial system in Southeast Asia and the establishment of independent states, including Malaysia.

Malaysia's independence in August 1957 marked a turning point in the history of the Malay Peninsula, ushering in a nation-building process aimed at consolidating a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, economic modernization, and strengthening state sovereignty. These processes were driven by the need to overcome colonial legacies, including ethnic divisions and economic dependence on the export of raw materials such as rubber, palm oil, and others. Political reforms, economic programs, and sociocultural initiatives that followed independence shaped a unique model of Malaysian statehood based on the principles of multicultural unity and moderate Islam (Andaya B., 2017:46-47).

Malaysia's independence initiated legal reforms aimed at creating a stable political system. In 1957, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia was adopted, enshrining a federal system, a constitutional monarchy, and democratic government. The Constitution established a unique model of governance in which the Supreme Ruler, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Jayakumar S., 1976:149) "is elected from among the sultans of nine states for a five-year term, ensuring a balance between

traditional authority and democratic institutions. In Article 3 (1) of the Federal constitutions Malaysia it says "Islam is religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation" (Information resource) which means Islam is declared the state religion, but with a guarantee of freedom of religion for non-Muslim minorities throughout the Federation, reflecting the multi-ethnic nature of the society.

One of the transformational moments occurred in 1963, when the Federation of Malaysia was formed, comprising Malaya, Sarvak, Sabah and Singapore, which expanded the country's territorial and economic potential (Means G., 1996:115). However, in 1965, Singapore seceded from the Federation due to political and ethnic differences, which highlighted the challenges of integration in a multi-ethnic state (Lau A., 1991:241-255). These events prompted the Malaysian government to intensify efforts at consolidation in all spheres of life, including strengthening federal authority and developing legal mechanisms for managing interethnic relations.

Malaysia's gradual constitutional reforms laid the foundation for economic and social transformation by creating a stable legal framework that regulated the distribution of resources and the political representation of ethnic groups.

Since 1956, Malaysia has implemented five-year development plans aimed at diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on tin and rubber exports. The First Five-Year Plan (1956–1960) emphasized infrastructure and agricultural development, which contributed to employment growth and urbanization (Huby C., 1982:299-310), however, as Jomo K. notes (Jomo K., 2013:287-290) "the continued dependence on raw material exports and inter-ethnic inequality in access to economic resources remained key challenges," which led to the adoption of the "New Economic Policy" (hereinafter NEP), introduced after the racial riots of May 13, 1969, which revealed deep inter-ethnic inequality between the Malays, Chinese and Indians (Cleary M., 1994:102-103). The NEP had two main goals: first, to reduce poverty; second, to restructure society to eliminate economic imbalances between ethnic groups. The program provided citizens with privileges in education, employment, and access to government contracts, which contributed to the growth of the Malay middle class (Faaland J., Parkinson J., 1990:50). According to the reports of the National Archives of Malaysia, by 1990 the proportion of the population living in poverty had decreased from 49.3% in 1970 to 16.5% (Muhamad S., 1996:31).

Economic development was accompanied by sociocultural integration aimed at creating a unified national identity in a multi-ethnic society. According to Article 152 of the Constitution, Bahasa Malay “Bahasa Malaysia” was approved as the national language, which became an instrument of unification (Information resource). At the same time, the rights of other ethnic groups to use their languages were preserved. For example, currently 134 languages are used in Malaysia, of which 112 are considered indigenous languages and 22 are non-indigenous languages. This indicates the support of the «linguistic rights» of citizens, which contributes to interethnic harmony (Sharipova G., 2024:65).

In 1970, Malaysia introduced the «National Ideological Program of Malaysia» - «Rukunegara» or «the principle of the state», which was one of the main concepts of the country. In particular, the education system became a key mechanism in the formation of the country’s national identity. For example, to promote this «Rukunegara» program, a mandatory morning lesson on «national principles» was introduced into the education system (Korkut M., 2020:34), aimed at developing patriotism and acceptance of the multiculturalism of society. A study by Krauss S. showed that these lessons were very successful (Krauss S. E. et al., 2013:100), since the national values of Malaysia were associated with such basic principles of the state ideology as: faith in God; loyalty to the king and country; the supremacy of the Constitution; the rule of law; politeness and morality (Rukunegara., 1970:17-18).

The ideas embodied in the Rukunegara concept became the starting point for promoting religious tolerance and contributed to the strengthening of national value systems. The concepts of «Adat» and «Kara Khidup», considered universally binding principles in Islam, would later be introduced into the country’s education system.

“Adat” – in Malaysia, it is a syncretic system of customary law that combines pre-Muslim animistic beliefs, Islamic norms, and local cultural traditions, as confirmed by the ethnographic research of Hooker M. and Karim W.J. (Hooker M., 1992:16).

“Kara hidup” – is one of the divisions of “adat”, characterized by wearing religious clothing (for example, covering the head with a scarf) and observing proper Malay Muslim etiquette of speech and behavior in society. In the future, the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM, 1992) will be created in the country, designed to study Islam in a scientific aspect (Zain A. E. M. et al., 2022:42), «Center studies

Sharia Islamic rights And politics» (Centre for the Study of Shari’ah, Law and Politics – S of ARAK), in which Islamic right will be study v quality national rights that unite civil, Islamic laws And laws indigenous peoples countries (Zubaidah Ismail S., 2015:70).

Religion played a central role in shaping identity. Islam, as the state religion, became the foundation of Malay identity, but a moderate approach based on the Shafi’i school allowed for the integration of non-Muslim minorities (Buddhists, Hindus, Christians), who constituted about 40% of the population (Ismail S., 2015:69). For example, in the state of Penang, mosques, Hindu temples and Christian churches coexist, which is reflected in Georgetown’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Azizan M. A. et al., 2020:020277-2).

As researchers Mauzy D. and Milne R. note, the consolidation of Malaysian statehood by the mid-1960s created the basis for its transformation into a key regional actor (Mauzy D., 2002:171). For example, in 1967, the country became a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN, which strengthened its regional influence and promoted cooperation on security and economic development (Frost F., 1990:20).

The non-aligned policy proclaimed by the first prime minister of the independent Federation of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, allowed Malaysia to balance between the West and the socialist bloc, providing diplomatic flexibility in the context of the Cold War (Roknifard J., 2021:71).

The introduction of the concept of the “Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality” – ZOPFAN in 1971 within ASEAN underscored Malaysia’s desire for regional stability and prevention of external interference (Hanggi H., 1991:13). These initiatives strengthened Malaysia’s international standing, which facilitated the influx of foreign investment and economic growth. Combined with a peaceful foreign policy, this created conditions for domestic stability and harmonious coexistence among the country’s numerous religious groups.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to note that the historical development of a multicultural environment in Malaysia represents a unique process conditioned by historically geographical, social, and political factors that have shaped a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society over millennia. Archaeological evidence, such as finds in

Kota Tampan and Nya, confirms that Southeast Asia has served as a crossroads of migration routes since the prehistoric period, facilitating cultural assimilation and technological innovation. These early processes laid the foundation for the formation of complex social structures, in the form of increased cultural syncretism (Wheatley P., 1961:333).

The arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism in the 1st–5th centuries, followed by Islam in the 13th century through trade networks with India, China, and the Middle East, contributed to the development of religious tolerance based on the integration of animistic traditions with new beliefs. The Malacca Sultanate in the 15th–16th centuries became a key center of “Malayization” uniting ethnic groups through Islam and the Malay language, which created a stable model of interfaith coexistence in the future. The colonial period, which lasted from the 16th to the 19th centuries, despite the intensification of ethnic division, did not destroy this tolerance, thanks to the preservation of the religious autonomy of the sultans, enshrined in the Treaty of Pangora in 1874 (Roff M., 1967:317).

After independence in 1957, Malaysia developed an effective model of nation-building, enshrined in the Federal Constitution, which declared Islam the state religion but guaranteed religious freedom for non-Muslim minorities. As a logical extension of this, the New Economic Policy reduced inter-ethnic inequality, fostering the growth of the Malay middle class and economic stability, as documented by National Archives records. Initiatives such as the Rukunegara, Adat, and Kara Hidup programs strengthened national identity through education and religious etiquette, while maintaining multicultural unity (Krauss S. et al., 2013:98). The creation of institutions such as IKIM and SYARAK underscores the state’s commitment to studying and promoting moderate Islam as the basis for social harmony.

Malaysia’s foreign policy, including its membership in ASEAN and the ZOPFAN concept, has strengthened its role as a regional actor, promoting stability and economic growth. Malaysia exemplifies a successful example of a multicultural society, where government policies, rooted in moderate Islam and principles of tolerance, ensure the coexistence of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic groups. This historical journey, from primitive societies to the modern state, highlights the role of social and political factors in the development of interfaith relations, making Malaysia a model of multicultural harmony in Southeast Asia.

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