

Research Article

Global Malaysian Studies Network: A Proposal to Australian National University

¹Ahmad Rizal Mohd Yusof, ²Zarina Othman, ³A.B. Shamsul and

⁴Mohamed Abu Bakar Kassim

¹Institute of Occidental Studies,

²Centre for General Studies,

³Institute of Ethnic Studies, National University of Malaysia,

⁴E-MAM Group and Digital Daya Perkasa Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia

Abstract: Problem statement: Global Malaysian Studies Network (GMSN) is an idea proposed to Australian National University (ANU) in setting up its Malaysian Studies. Currently, there are a number of academic institutions which have established its Malaysian Studies. However, there have been problems and restraints where some research institutes have failed to effectively deliver such studies and in turn drives institute to shift to the other studies which promise good students and research funds. With the aim to assist ANU, this study has explored the potential on the development aspect of ANU to look into it particularly. Approach: Through the development of other institutions where information is available on the internet, this study inspects all documents to investigate the problems of other research institutes with regard to their offerings in Malaysian studies to propose a more structured planned strategy for ANU to set up GMSN. Results: There are three elements which appear as the fundamental areas for ANU to establish GMSN; academic, governance and networking. These three elements are crucial in order to develop the GMSN at its initial stage. Conclusion: A combination and integration of academic, governance and networking will position GMSN at ANU as a world class research institute in Malaysian Studies.

Keywords: ANU, GMSN, Malay studies, Malaysian studies

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian Studies are interdisciplinary fields of research and scholarship pertaining to particular geographical area of Malaysia. It is an area study which focuses on the contents of Malaysia. Academic discipline such as anthropology, sociology, linguistic, ethnicity, biology, mathematics, architecture, engineering, medicine and humanities are all fields which have contributed much contents to strengthen the Malaysian Studies. Discoursing about Malaysian Studies has been long gone since the colonial era of Malay Land. Academician, researchers, or even administrators have delved into these areas for many years. It is still being talked about and the essence of the discourse is most likely in the definition of Malaysian Studies in its more broad and deep understanding. For example, Shamsul (2011) has observed the construction of Malaysian Studies through Colonial Knowledge. He has demonstrated very good example of intellectual history of Malaysia and the use of six modalities by British to colonize an epistemological space of Malay people. The colonial knowledge has contributed much effort in designing intellectual history of Malaysia, specifically Malaysian Studies. This is just a 'warm up' point to see Malaysian

Studies in an abstract dimension of academic. Currently Malaysian Studies have widened its scope of understanding in order to enrich study and research through different disciplines of academics.

The interest of Malaysian Studies among researchers, scholars and intellectual from local and foreign countries has increased through the number of conferences, seminars and also round table discussions. Academic programs such as summer schools for Malay Language have been conducted by several institutions around the world. This is to support and motivate young scholars, intellectual and also individuals who are interested to broaden and deepen their understanding towards Malaysian Studies. Research institutes, study centers and also non-academic institutions have been established to support studies and researches in Malaysian Studies. Since the colonial period till the post-colonial era, the establishment of research institutes and study centers related to Malaysian Studies has evolved in big numbers. Britain for example, has established the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1916 (University of London Annual Report and Financial Statement, 2011-2012). SOAS continues to maintain its position as the major national center for the study of programmers concerned with Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It also focuses on Malaysian

Studies which is position as part of Asian Studies. Other institutions such as Oxford University and Cambridge University have their own study centers that focus on Malaysian Studies through Islamic Studies. Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Holland are two research institutes that offer postgraduate programs in Malaysian Studies. Since 1886 and until now, KITLV has provided quite an amount of research funds to scholars and intellectuals who are interested in Malaysian Studies (KITLV Jaarveslag, 2012) and so does it happen to IIAS (International Institute for Asian Studies Annual Report, 2012). Other countries, like Germany, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and America have several study centers and research institutes that focus on Malaysian Studies. In Malaysia, Institute of Malay World and Civilization (ATMA) and Malay Studies Academy (APM) are two academic institutions which conduct research and studies on Malaysia. Other institutes like Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) in National University of Malaysia (UKM) provide opportunities and space for scholars and intellectuals who are interested to further their understanding on Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnics in Malaysia.

The future of Malaysian Studies in most of the research institutes and study centers seems to grow fainter from its own track. Undoubtedly, there are still academic activities such as researches; seminars, book projects; teaching and supervising going on and registration of new students still record the same. However, currently, great institution such as SOAS, KITLV, ATMA and the rest have small numbers of student enrolment. This is said to be due to the lack of interest among scholars and intellectuals in Malaysian Studies. Other problems such as bureaucracy, research fund, students, publications and links with other institutions are some major problems of such research institutes and study centers. Some scholars and intellectuals start to shift their interest to other areas like Chinese Studies, Indian Studies or Korean studies. Reasons behind this are because of research fund, great numbers of student and support from other MNCs companies. Until now, there have been no other institutions which anchor the Malaysian Studies per se. The greatest institutions like KITLV, SOAS and ATMA are still in existence and are surviving due to strong support from the government and great history of the establishments.

All of the problems mentioned are worth to note for Australian National University (ANU) who intends to establish the Global Malaysian Studies Network or GMSN. Setting up GMSN is not only for Australian, Malaysian or others but it aims to go beyond the scope for those individuals who wish to broaden and deepen their understanding towards Malaysian Studies. GMSN

will not stand as merely a research institute, but it aims to also regenerate interest from scholars and intellectual around the world on such a study. In realizing this vision and mission, this study wishes to explore important aspects and potential issues on the development of GMSN. It will assist ANU as an outline for the establishment of GMSN. To look into it particularly the following section will focus on the fundamental aspects of GMSN. This would become our material and methods for this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The establishment of GMSN would serve a great role to widen the role of Malaysian Studies in Australia. Currently there are several universities in Australia who offer Malaysian Studies such as Monash University, La Trobe University and others. Setting up GMSN needs more effort and commitment from ANU itself. Support from Malaysian Government would be a bonus for ANU once GMSN is established. The first step for GMSN is to construct pillars of GMSN. This means that GMSN will have a very clear view of its mission and vision towards Malaysian Studies. This is a very important aspect as it will sustain GMSN for the next 10 to 20 years of its establishment. For instance, it is proposed that the mission of GMSN in becoming a one stop research gateway for the Malaysian Studies in the world and it visions to broaden and deepen the knowledge and understanding of the Malaysian Studies through multi-disciplinary approach. The next step is to observe the fundamental aspects of a research institute. This observation is also including our results and discussion for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fundamental aspects of GMSN should comprise 3 major elements:

- Academic
- Governance
- Networking as shown in Fig. 1

These three elements are the core of setting up research institute. Wee first identify factors and issues of weaknesses in other institutions and develop renewed ideas to develop GMSN as the main institute of reference for Malaysian Studies.

Academic: First and foremost, academic will be the core business for GMSN. It will be used as the main strategy to execute and implement Malaysian Studies. To be more specific on this matter, there are five categories of academics that should be implemented at GMSN.

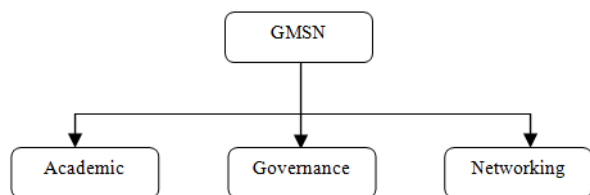


Fig. 1: Fundamental aspect of GMSN

Research: This is the core business of GMSN activities. Potential researches that will be offered to scholars, intellectual and researchers will be related to Malaysian Studies. GMSN should create one special unit. This unit will be responsible to generate funds, evaluation of proposals and consultations. Co-operation with other institutions in Australia, Malaysia or even with the government sectors will secure more research funds. This will increase the number of studies hence it will strengthen the role of GMSN in leading the Malaysian Studies. GMSN would also welcome research attachment for researchers, visiting professors, visiting scholars and other relevant candidates including post-doctoral students. This will help boost GMSN for Malaysian Studies.

Teaching/supervising: As a research institute, GMSN can either offer any subjects to undergraduate and postgraduate studies related to Malaysian studies. This can either be a short or long term program. Summer school for example is the best idea to start with. Then thesis supervision would become more relevant to GMSN. As the research generates new knowledge, the supervision of thesis for postgraduate students at GMSN will widen the academic scope that will provide further in depth understanding of Malaysian Studies at GMSN.

Seminars/conference: Seminars and conferences will be the next step to overwhelm the understanding of Malaysian Studies. Series of seminars should be organized every month. Once in a year or one in two years, GMSN should organize a conference on Malaysian Studies. ICAS and AAS are two good examples for GMSN to collaborate with before organizing the real conference. This is because the huge size of conference will involve time, man-power and the most importantly the financial resources.

Publication: There should be a special unit at GMSN that will monitor the publications and collection of data with regard to Malaysian Studies. This will include records for books, articles, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations, videos, music, images, manuscripts, standards, maps and more. This unit will observe all collection in the library, in Australia or in any libraries in the world. Publication unit will also be

responsible to publish books, articles in journals, data paper, monographs and book reviews. It will act as catalyzer for GMSN.

Public advocacy: Taking the lead in Malaysian Studies, GMSN will be responsible to act as a middle man to Australians specifically to non-academics group of people such as businessmen, government servants, public and community to have a clear and accurate knowledge of Malaysia. Explanation for particular issues in Malaysia such as ethnicity, politics, economics and Islam are very important for GMSN to deliver to those groups. At least it can increase the level of understanding for non-academic groups of people on Malaysia and any other talked about issues on the mass media. The role of GMSN is very important to balance the public awareness not only in Australia but to other western countries about Malaysian and its contents.

Governance: To begin with, GMSN should operationalise based on two categories, academician and administrative staff. Academic staff will include all scholars, intellectuals and young researchers. In the beginning, GMSN can import scholars and intellectuals from ANU. Then others can join later according to the needs and expansion size. The director must be someone from academic. This is very important as he/she can drive GMSN and bring the GMSN at the right track of Malaysian Studies. GMSN should also consider the permanent and temporary staff (on contract basis). Permanent academic staff might stay for a longer period of time and contribute to GMSN. But for other scholars and intellectuals in Malaysian studies, they may spend around three, six, nine or a year in GMSN. Temporary academic staff can namely circulate twice or thrice a year. A renowned figure in Malay or Malaysian studies should be brought into GMSN. With this strategy, it can increase the status of GMSN like any other institutes such as KITLV, SOAS and ATMA. Administration Staff and so do the supportive staff are two important aspects of GMSN. They will be needed to deal with management of ANU and other governance matters including bureaucracy aspects. Somehow or rather, organization for this staff would be as follows.

Networking: The lack in networking seems to be a concern among many research institutes are this has been examined particularly and the failure of achieving their mission is due to the lack of collaborations with other institutions. It is important to emphasize that most networks can operate more than one function. As GMSN will become the global player for Malaysian Studies, there are 6 functions suggested by Mendizabal (2006a) for GMSN to look into and start to execute it once establishment process is completed. Research will be the core for GMSN in setting up its network through

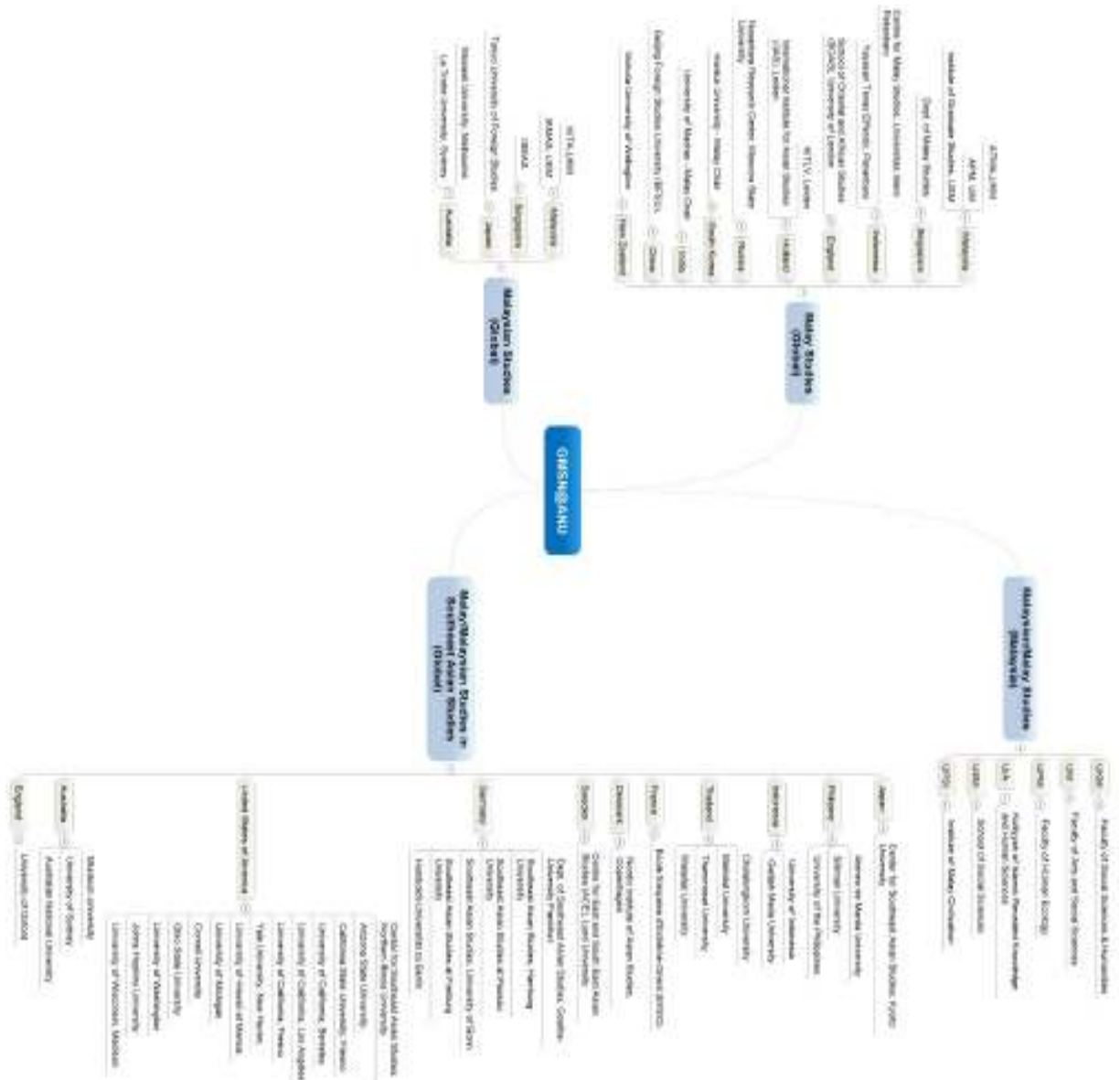


Fig. 2: Potential network of GMSN

several institutions and centers around the world. The six functions are filter, amplify, invest or provide, convene, community building and facilitate (Mendizabal, 2006b).

Filter: This function allows unmanageable amounts of information to be organized and used in a productive way. In short, filtering the networks means to see potential institutions and centers for Malaysian studies. But luckily, we have prepared a complete list for potential network of GMSN (Fig. 2).

Amplify: Amplifying can serve several roles. It can be used to disseminate a message or idea; it can involve a communication processes (which involves two-way

relations); and it can be used to manage others. In this context GMSN will lead all of institutions in order to have research collaborations and other purposes.

Invest/provide: Investing networks offer a channel to provide members with the resources they need to carry out their main activities. So here, GMSN can offer any research institutes or centers to co-operate in conducting research. Besides that, a big amount of research fund should be allocated. This is to maintain a two-way relation with other institutes.

Convene: Convening networks bring together different individuals and groups. In the case of research, a convening network would bring researchers together to

plan and carry out research; it could, for instance, convene researchers from different nationalities or disciplines.

Build communities: Community building activities promote and sustain the values and standards of a network of individuals or groups. These networks can work towards the formation of informal neighborhood groups, formal research communities and even inactive members of network.

Facilitate: Facilitating functions help members carry out their activities more efficiently and effectively. In the case of research networks, these might include organizing conferences and meetings, publishing working papers and policy briefs and providing mentoring to researchers or key individuals.

With these six functions GMSN will step into the new dimension of area which other institutions do not operate. This could guarantee GMSN to become the lead for Malaysian Studies in a very short period of time.

CONCLUSION

With the discussion above and taking note of all factors taken into consideration, we strongly believe and have great trust that GMSN will become more successful than other institutes, mainly in Malaysian

Studies. Combination of three elements, academic, governance and networking will increase the role and responsibility to GMSN as the leading research institute on Malaysian Studies. Implementation each and every single point from this proposal will guarantee the best recommendation for ANU to set up GMSN and become the world class institute of research in Malaysian Studies.

REFERENCES

- International Institute for Asian Studies Annual Report, 2012. Leiden University Press, Leiden.
- KITLV Jaarveslag, 2012. KITLV Press, Leiden.
- Mendizabal, E., 2006a. Understanding Networks: The Functions of Research Policy Networks. Overseas Development Institute, London.
- Mendizabal, E., 2006b. Why Public Policies should be Based on Evidence? Experiences from London. Overseas Development Institute, London.
- Shamsul, A.B., 2011. Ilmu Kolonial' dalam Pembentukan Sejarah Intelektual Malaysia: Sebuah Pandangan. Siri Kertas Kajian Etnik UKM, Bangi.
- University of London Annual Report and Financial Statement, 2011-2012. UCL Press, London, pp: 15-16.