

# [Liu Zhewei's column] Islam is not rigid



**Liu Zhewei**

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*Islam itself is a beautiful religion, but to turn Islam into a religion that belongs only to Muslims is not in line with the original teachings. (File photo: Perspective Malaysia)*

For Islam, the main references are the Qur'an and Sunnah (the tradition and practice of the Prophet Muhammad), and these sources of reference are considered sacred, the Qur'an itself is sacred, and Muhammad is a prophet of the Islamic religion. However, if it is not possible to judge events purely from these two sources, the third primary source can be referred to the Ijma. The Covenant is for the Religious Division to seek consensus on specific issues, and apparently this source is judged on the basis of people, not sacred.

To what extent should Islamic scholars define and advise on a particular case? Muslims believe that the Quran and the traditions and practices of the Prophet can provide principles for all things that happen in the world, however, when it comes to specific issues or events, more specific interpretations may be required.

Since it is a human judgment, this also leads to explanations that can be very conservative and rigid, but at the same time can be very enlightened. For example, the interpretation of jihad means a holy struggle, simply put, the defense of Islam.

In religion, believers can fight against those who are enemies of Islam, and this includes waging physical war. However, what is the definition of defending Islam? And what is the definition of confrontation? Let me give you an example, Al-Qaeda, defined as extremist at the world level or Al-Ma'unah at the Malaysian level, which is strongly opposed in Malaysia and the world because of the involvement of extremist and physical violence. But in terms of nonviolent interpretation, some experts in Malaysia also narrow the questions and definitions, such as whether Muslims are allowed to attend the Bon Odori, whether non-Muslims can salute Muslims (Assalamualaikum) or vice versa, and whether it is allowed to congratulate someone on Merry Christmas.



*The Shah South Japan Bon Dance Festival, which has been held for more than 30 years, has been provoked by the controversy of "containing religious elements". (File photo: Perspective Malaysia)*

In Malaysia, we often hear the terms conservative Islam and liberal Islam. In my class, an international student told me that there is no conservative or liberal Islam, because Islam is the only one. In that sense, he was right. Islam should not be defined as too extreme, like jihad taken out of context. Of course, experts can associate it with a narrow definition, based on their own arguments, but is this what we want? Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, does not define and practice Islam in a narrow way.

Even when it comes to countries that I have personally contacted, such as Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, people from these countries are surprised by the level of interpretation provided by Malaysian experts. Indonesia may be considered a religiously enlightened country and not suitable for comparison, but even if the above Middle Eastern countries are perceived as more conservative than Malaysia, on many issues, on the contrary, Malaysia's approach is more conservative or, in my own terms, more extreme.



What kind of Islam are these experts trying to preach? Islam itself is a beautiful religion, but turning Islam into a religion that belongs only to Muslims is not in line with the original doctrine that Islam should be a religion that all people can freely access, not further distance Muslims from non-Muslims. The most commonly heard excuse is to challenge faith and belief (Iman), such as the Bonomai Festival, the Malaysian whisky "Timah" case, etc., rather than under the banner of "protection", why not to study why faith is fragile and really easy to influence? Or those who intend to strengthen their arguments use the wishes of a small group of Muslims as an excuse. If the problem arises in fragile faiths, then these religious divisions should seek to strengthen the convictions of their adherents rather than placing the blame on non-Muslims.



*Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, does not define and practice Islam in a narrow way. (Photo: EA Novosti)*

For example, although I teach at an Islamic University, eating and drinking on campus during Ramadan is not a big problem. Of course, as a matter of politeness, I try not to do this in public or in front of Muslims, but many times, especially when I accidentally drink water during online lessons, after all, my water glass is in the place where the camera can see, which is not a problem at all and will not be a problem. My students and colleagues knew it wasn't a big deal for me to go to dinner. Maybe my university has a large number of international students and lecturers, and this does not necessarily reduce the local extremes. Simply put, Muslim religious beliefs and beliefs are not and should not be easily challenged just because a non-Muslim has made a Muslim taboo.

For the late Niez, he did many things that might be considered by extremist Muslims to be outside Allah worship (syirik). For example, the Chinese New Year lion dance nodded the lion's head, wished non-Muslims a holiday, allowed non-Muslims to quote Muslim teachings such as the Quran or Hadis (I remember he once said that he thought Muslims should be proud, not condemn these quotations as insults to religion, because Islam should provide a place for others, not just focus on Muslims themselves) and so on.

Did the late Niez deviate from religion? He was a devout Muslim until the moment of his death. Unfortunately, these acts are often automatically and easily considered as deviant from religion, even though these activities have no religious element and do not affect Muslims' deviance from religion. In the case of the Japanese Bon Dance Festival, some activities have shifted from religious to cultural events over time, and whether religious elements that have been around for centuries and thousands of years should still be considered their argument.

In short, these Islamic experts and religious divisions should re-examine what kind of image of Islam they want to create in the eyes of Malaysia's non-Muslims, and continue to see things in an excessively narrow definition, or show the beautiful side of Islam. Don't forget, strong twisted melons are not sweet.


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