

PRESERVING THE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF THE IRONSMITHS OF PEKAN DARAT BASED ON THEORY OF *MALAKAH* BY IBN KHALDUN¹

(Pelestarian Pertukangan Besi di Pekan Darat Berdasarkan Teori Malakah Ibnu Khaldun)

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Abstract

This paper examines the situation in Pekan Darat with regard to the knowledge and skill of the local blacksmiths. It also discusses the efforts that need to be carried out towards the preservation of the local knowledge based on the theory of *malakah* by Ibn Khaldun; a well-known figure and renowned scholar of civilization, as put forth in his monumental work entitled *Muqaddimah*. This research uses a content analysis approach and investigates the data based on available literature. The findings show that training the younger generation to master the skills of the ironworking, their entrepreneurial knowledge and creative marketing are among the efforts that can be taken to preserve their Malay heritage and local knowledge.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, ironworking, *malakah*, local knowledge, heritage, Pekan Darat

Abstrak

Makalah ini meneliti ilmu kearifan tempatan yang dimiliki golongan “pandai besi” di Pekan Darat. Penulisan ini juga turut membincangkan tentang usaha yang perlu dilakukan ke arah melestarikan warisan ilmu kearifan Melayu ini berdasarkan teori malakah oleh Ibn Khaldun, seorang tokoh tersohor dalam bidang ketamadunan

melalui tulisan monumentalnya yang bertajuk Muqaddimah. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis kandungan berdasarkan penulisan yang ada. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa antara usaha untuk memelihara dan melestarikan warisan kebijaksanaan dan kearifan tempatan warisan Melayu adalah dengan melatih generasi muda agar menguasai ilmu dan kemahiran dalam seni pertukangan besi di samping mereka juga perlu dilatih dengan ilmu pengetahuan keusahawanan dan kreativiti pemasaran barangan.

Kata kunci: Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, seni pertukangan besi, konsep malakah, kearifan tempatan, warisan, Pekan Darat

INTRODUCTION

Pekan Darat, which is situated in Butterworth, Seberang Perai (formerly known as Province Wellesley) was a place well-known for its skilled blacksmiths, known in the past as “pandai besi”. This area was where people from across the Malay Peninsula used to make and trade in iron product and utensils. Furthermore, this area used to be a centre for the production of tools and weapons of war in the 17th Century. After the war ended, blacksmiths in the area began making their living by producing and selling tools for daily use and kitchen utensils. However, the local knowledge and heritage, which once upon a time prevailed in the community is slowly being lost. This is due to the lack of interest among the younger generation of the community to learn and inherit the skills and knowledge of ironworking. Besides this, the local iron production is also facing challenges from products produced in factories and products imported from other countries.

Among the scholars who have discussed the importance of preserving the local heritage and skills was Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun, or Abu Zayd Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami (1332-1406 CE), was a well-known scholar who contributed so much in the field of philosophy, sociology, history and civilization. Thus, he is universally recognized as the father of sociology and sciences of history. He is best known for his book entitled *Al-Muqaddimah* or the *Muqaddimah* (Introduction) (Muhammad Abdullah Enan, 1941; Allen James Fromherz, 2012). Arnold Toynbee mentions, “He (Ibn Khaldun) has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time and place” (Toynbee, 1956: 372).

The main theme of Ibn Khaldun’s monumental work, *Muqaddimah* identifies the facts that contributed to the advancement of human civilization. In this book, Ibn

Khaldun also discusses the making of crafts, which occurs when people reach a high level of civilized life. Ibn Khaldun's thought based on the theory of *malakah* is that acquiring high skills in the fine art of crafts is a display of man's unique creativity.

Thus, this article will discuss about the concept of knowledge and skills (*malakah*) as expressed by Ibn Khaldun in his book *Al-Muqaddimah* concerning the knowledge, skills and expertise in metalworking in the Malay community of the area of Pekan Darat, north of Seberang Perai in Penang, Malaysia. Indeed, the heritage of ironworking in this area needs to be preserved as it has a certain unique characteristic and significant value, especially where the local traditional Malay heritage is concerned. There were skilled blacksmiths in the area, who were highly recognized and respected in the past for their great and unique creations in iron. Nevertheless, as time passed, some of the old and skilled blacksmiths passed away and their knowledge and skill disappeared along with them. If this situation is allowed to continue, we will lose a valuable heritage and it will be extremely detrimental to the heritage of Malay crafts and civilization. Thus, the effort to preserve the Malay local knowledge and heritage of ironworking in Pekan Darat is very important and necessary.

THE THEORY OF *MALAKAH* ACCORDING TO IBN KHALDUN

Ibn Khaldun is the father of sociology who began discussing the sociological and societal issues (Fuad Baali, 2006:55-57; Fuad Baali, 1997; Mahmud 'Abd al-Maula, 1988:35). Ibn Khaldun developed the concept of *umran* (civilization) and divided it into two: the first one is *umran badawi* (rural civilization) theory that was based on simple life and *umran hadhari* (urban civilization) which refers to urban life.

Robert Simon (2002) viewed the theory of *umran badawi* and *umran hadhari* as an outline of the important and basic theory for the study of human civilization. Starting with *umran badawi*, the simple life, human civilization began to grow until it reached the level of *umran hadhari* and the emergence of a system of orderly government and administration, leading towards the development of production, consumption and distribution of goods and crafts (Robert Simon, 2002:127 & 134).

Ibn Khaldun, in his book *Muqaddimah*, further explains that the crafts produced by people are numerous since so much labour is continually available in civilization. Some of the crafts are necessary and occupy a noble position as they provide essential tools for agriculture, tailoring, carpentry, weaving and so forth (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:319). According to Ibn Khaldun, the oldest of all crafts are those connected to architecture and agriculture as these are to help provide shelter and food, the

main factors in human life, since humans cannot exist without shelter and food (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:319).

The *malakah* (skills) concept is highlighted by Ibn Khaldun and is actually a discussion on local knowledge about specific skills. Ibn Khaldun used this concept to explain the process of preparing a workforce and also in the educational process in general. Ibn Khaldun terms the skills and knowledge of local wisdom “malakah”. With reference to this, Charles Issawi explains, “Ibn Khaldun’s psychology of education is built upon the notion of aptitude or skill (*malakah*)” (Charles Issawi, 1987:17; Muhammad Bilmazuqiyyah, 1989:117).

In terms of the origin of the word, the term *malakah* is an Arabic word that means “the one that is embedded in the nature of the human person” (*sifatun rasikhatun fi al-nafs*) or a specific sense of readiness to accept a particular job skill. (Ibn Khaldun, 2000:319; Ibrahim Mustafa, *et. al*, p. 886; Michelle Zakariya, 1986:26 & 28). *Malakah* meaning “skills” was used by Ibn Khaldun to refer to various aspects of life that cover human physical and spiritual aspects. Among them are skills relating to faith (*malakah imaniyyah*), to the spiritual (*malakah ruhiyyah*), to knowledge (*malakah ilmiyyah*), and to language (*malakah lisaniyyah*) (Ibn Khaldun, 2000; Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, 2008:22 & 23; Muhammad Eid, 1979). In fact, there are places where Ibn Khaldun uses the term to indicate the purpose or nature of a talent for leadership. (Rosenthal, 1958:383)

Ibn Khaldun attempted to choose the most appropriate word to describe the concept of knowledge and skills. In this case, he said that, “*malakah* is knowledge” since the meaning of the term skill or wisdom articulated by him relates to a habit or custom (*malakah*) which involves actions and thoughts. (Ibn Khaldun, 2000:342). Thus, according to him, “the result of work performed on a recurring basis will be firmly embedded (in the mind)” (Ibn Khaldun, 1994:68).

At this point, it is clear that Ibn Khaldun tried to connect the concept of “skills” with the term *malakah*. He further explained that *malakah* has two important features. Firstly, it is something that involves physical activity, and, secondly, it is an action, which has turned into a habit or custom and has become embedded in one’s mind as a result of a training process and repeated acts (Ibn Khaldun, 2000; Muhammad Eid, 1979:33). Therefore, it can be concluded that the term *malakah* refers to skills that have turned into the habit of an individual because of specific, repeated training.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE *MALAKAH* THEORY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVILIZATION

In his discourse, Ibn Khaldun explains that there is a close relationship between the development of a civilization with the progress within the the skills, life culture, political stability, and economic activity of a community. When all the basic needs and necessities have been met, the skills and knowledge of a community will emerge and spread. This is to meet the needs of the community, which begins to develop something of high value (Ibn Khaldun, 1994:69, Ahmad Subhi Mansur, 1998:216).

In Ibn Khaldun's theory on the development of civilization, the role of crafts and sciences is important in the self-realization of man and his socialization. Ibn Khaldun was of the view that that crafts and sciences are the result of man's ability to think, through which he is distinguished from the animals. Crafts and sciences come after necessities such as his desire for food and shelter. Thus, the refinement and quality of crafts depends on the purpose they are created for, according to the demand, luxury and wealth of the people (Robert Simon, 2002:176).

According to Ibn Khaldun, craft is defined as a skill (*malakah*) as in the Aristotelian sense of *techne*, which is acquired through repetition of an exemplary model act until the practice of a particular act becomes ingrained in the practitioner. Mastering a particular craft begins with the basic knowledge and then increases in complexity. The more accomplished a civilization, the more ample are the crafts in terms of quantity and quality. The accomplishment in crafts has a strong relation with the duration and rootedness of a civilization in urban life. Ibn Khaldun mentions as an example Tunis and Andalusia, where the duration of civilization has led to the perfection of crafts due to the constancy of its repetition over centuries (Ibn Khaldun, 2000; Aziz al-Azmeh, 1982:99).

Ibn Khaldun also stresses that the knowledge and skills among the members within a community will grow and reach maturity in a society residing permanently at one place for a long time. For a skill to become an integral part of society, it should be carried out repeatedly and practiced by several generations. After a few generations, the skills will then have become embedded in the society. Therefore, in order to achieve all these, it requires a society to inhabit a particular area or place for a long period of time (Ibn Khaldun, 1994:114).

Also, Ibn Khaldun categorized education and the learning tradition as among the skills possessed by an urban community, which should be preserved and maintained. Ibn Khaldun also points out that this tradition has to be handed down from one generation to the next through a process that he called *sanad* which means "learned through continuity". Ibn Khaldun stresses that it is important to ensure continuity

in educational training and scientific tradition within a community so that the civilization can survive and become stronger. The new generation has to inherit the qualities of their forebears in their effort to maintain, protect and preserve their civilizational achievements. This effort must be carried out by handing down the knowledge of the earlier generation through effective scientific and educational training to ensure that its continuity is preserved, which will depend very much on some other supporting factors including political stability, creativity, advancement of knowledge and science and so forth (Ibn Khaldun, 2000:342; Zaid Ahmad, in Massimo Campanini (ed.), 2006:116-18).

Nevertheless, Ibn Khaldun also noted that not all civilizations are capable of achieving such levels. Generally, people are not able to maintain the level of expertise and skills when their civilizations begin to decline. Therefore, the decline of a civilization is strongly related to the decline in the skills and expertise within a community. Here, he states that the knowledge of a craft can be good only when it is needed and when there is a strong demand. If the situation in a city suffering from weakness and fatigue becomes apparent as a result of the decline of the civilization and population, the affluence of the city is reduced. People who are experts in a particular field can no longer guarantee their own livelihoods. When there is no one to inherit their skills, the crafts will disappear. This will affect sculptors, goldsmiths, artisans, copiers, and other members who fill the needs of a luxurious lifestyle. The knowledge of crafts will continue to decline as the city experiences a decline (Ibn Khaldun, 1994:72).

THE HISTORY OF IRONWORKING IN THE MALAY CIVILIZATION

In the case of the Malay civilization, the art of metalworking and the use of metal such as iron, silver and gold is said to be a result from the influence of Hindu culture merged with the skills of Thai craftsmen. The art was brought into the Malay Peninsula through Thai traders to the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia, including Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Penang. In the past, Pattani province, especially, in the southern part of Thailand, was well-known as a major centre for the manufacturing of metal products. As a result of this, there is still a lot of metalworking in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia. Besides that, there are also views that the fine arts that flourished in the Malay Peninsula originated in the Srivijaya empire (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2010).

Earlier, the Malays had used metal only as currency but over time, metal was used to make kitchen utensils and weapons. Metal was also used to make items

related to the rites and customs of the Malay community. Metalworking included working with gold, bronze and iron. Metal equipment produced by Malay craftsmen such as traditional weapons, household appliances, jewelry and other goods show fine decorations (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2010). Therefore, the Malay community became well known for ironworking and quality steel products of commercial value (Rizal Othman, 2006).

The use of iron encouraged local craftsmen to produce items with a variety of uses. The strength and creativity of blacksmiths is proven through their forging techniques and fine engraving to produce a weapon or dagger. The craftsmen's creativity in producing outstanding ironwork with attractive motifs shows the uniqueness of the craftsmanship and heritage of the Malays. The goods produced show the skills and capabilities of the local blacksmiths in creating forms, motifs and patterns that reflect the harmony and discipline of a civilization. Among the types of crafts and goods made of metal are betel boxes, incense containers, daggers, spears, knives, machetes, cutters, rubber tapping knives and so on.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND HERITAGE AMONG BLACKSMITHS IN THE NORTHERN AREA OF SEBERANG PERAI

Malay artisanship and knowledge can be seen from the production of items created by the people that lived in the Malay World. Based on anthropological research, the Malay world stretched as far as Madagascar in the west, Taiwan in the east, Indochina in the north, down to the Indonesian islands in the south. This entire area has cultural similarities in terms of language, tools, beliefs, social structure and physical features (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2010:xvii; Mohd Taib Osman in Safiah Nik Abdul Karim, (ed.), 1984:241).

Ironworking in Haji Murshid Street, Pekan Darat in northern part of Seberang Perai, is the heritage of its Malay community, demonstrating the local knowledge of a diligent and intelligent community. These were the great blacksmiths who were highly respected. Their skills in forging iron and steel were passed down over hundreds of years. The making of various metal items in this village has been carried out on a large scale since 1841 by the residents of this area. These were also the traditional Malay entrepreneurs who were famous in Penang and also in Peninsular Malaysia as the "skilled blacksmiths" since the pre-independence period.

For these reasons, Kampung Benuan was known in the past as a village of "pandai besi" which could be translated as "skilled blacksmiths". The village is located in Pekan Darat, in the northern part of Seberang Perai, Penang. The term "Benuan"

comes from the word “banduan” (prisoner). During the colonial period, this area was very near to the British headquarters at Butterworth Air Base. The British had brought in a large number of Indian prisoners and confined them in this area, which was located not far from their base. As a result, the site is referred to as “Kampung Benuan”, or “Prisoner Village”.

Most of the residents in this village are said to have come from Pattani, Thailand. They had migrated to Kedah and served as blacksmiths to the Sultan of Kedah. When Siam invaded Kedah in 1821, many of the royal blacksmiths fled to Seberang Perai to find protection and shelter (Mohd Isa Othman, 1999). Some of them had come to this area and set up new settlements. When they settled in this village, they continued with their ironworking.

Therefore, workshops were built in the village for making iron crafts. Among the earliest blacksmiths in the village was Tok Salle or Tok Salleh from Pattani, Thailand, who had previously settled in Kedah. He is said to have served as the royal blacksmith for the Sultan of Kedah. When Siam invaded Kedah in 1821, he fled and settled in Pekan Darat, North of Seberang Perai. He and his wife are said to have been the earliest individuals from Pattani, Thailand, who settled within the area of Jalan Haji Murshid (Haji Murshid Street). He continued his work in steel craftsmanship in this village. Most of the residents in the village are said to be the descendants of Tok Salle. They are all still doing ironworking until this day.

Up to the present time, there are still some skilled blacksmiths, who have workshops on Jalan Haji Murshid in Kampung Benuan, and they are the seventh generation of Tok Salle’s descendants. As such, it can be estimated that ironworking on Jalan Haji Murshid has been ongoing for over a hundred years. At one time, during its heyday, the village had over 20 blacksmith workshops. In addition, it was noted that if anyone walked through this area, they would be able to hear the noise of the blacksmiths at all times from morning until night.

Haji Abdul Rahim bin Hussin, a 63-year-old man, was one of the renowned blacksmiths with over 40 years of experience in ironworking on Jalan Haji Murshid. He has a metal workshop and several assistants. Ironworking gave huge returns to him, and his father long time before, until he could afford to buy a few acres of paddy fields. However, due to his advancing age, he is no longer active in ironworking. Nevertheless, the experience and craftsmanship that he possesses have not been passed down to anyone because there is no one from the younger generation who is interested in inheriting this skill.

Another well-known blacksmith on Jalan Haji Murshid is Mr. Majid, who has been involved in ironworking for nearly 30 years. There is a metal workshop built next to his house. The *Metro* newspaper featured Mr. Majid as an operator of a

blacksmith workshop in 2004, and a television station has also featured him in connection with the ironworking industry in the village. He has now become old and has vision problems. As a result, he no longer practices his skills. In his youth, he learned ironworking by observing and assisting senior blacksmiths, including Haji Abdul Rahim Hussin. From there, he gained experience through unofficial training and by observing the work of skilled blacksmiths in the area.

As such, it can be said that most of the village's blacksmiths learned through some kind of informal apprenticeship in workshops in this area. The ironworking products from this area are delicate, intricate and meticulously-crafted items, especially the home decoration items. Meanwhile, the manufacture of huge or rough tools does not require great care in the process, compared to the production of wrought items. Manufacturing utensils for daily use is also not very complicated as most items are huge and do not feature subtle patterns that require skill and patience to produce. Among such items are various types of knives, betel leaf boxes, daggers, spears, knives, machetes, cutters and rubber tapping knives.

The great skills of blacksmiths in forging a variety of equipment of high artistic value qualifies them to be called "skilled blacksmiths" or "masters" in Javanese (Norhayati Abu Bakar, 1995; Rizal Othman, 2006). Among the great blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid are Mr. Md Taib bin Saad, who passed away in 1990, and Haji Salleh bin Tahir. They were highly-skilled individuals who were also shamans to



Figure 1 The inside view of one of the iron workshops in Pekan Darat.

whom the local community often referred. The *penyepuh air* or container that is used to douse the hot iron is believed to cure particular diseases primarily associated with evil spirits. Therefore, the water used for dousing the iron is sometimes in demand by the local shamans. These cases coincide with the views of Syed Ahmad Jamal, who believes that eventually the Malays came to believe that art objects are have magical powers (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2010).

Normally, in the workshop, there are some tools for forging iron, which can be found in the furnace area. For example, the anvil, where the iron is struck. Blowers serve to channel air to fan the fire (Sheppard M., 1980, translated by Azah Aziz). A place for water for dousing is also available near the iron furnace and anvil. Furthermore, handles for knives and so on are also produced. The metal items also need to be ground down and sharpened.

The traditional practice was that prior to the opening of the workshop at dawn, the owner of the workshop would perform a simple ceremony and read some mantras because it was believed that every iron workshop has its own guardian. This practice was inherited from their ancestors from Thailand, and who are known for such rituals and beliefs.



Figure 2 Rubber tapping knives produced by the blacksmiths in Pekan Darat.



Figure 3 “Penyepuh” water.

During the time when rubber production increased in Malaysia, there was a high demand for rubber tapping knives. Thus, blacksmiths worked day and night to complete orders for such tools. Blacksmiths in the past had a lucrative income, so that some of them could afford to buy a Raleigh bicycle which served as an indication that they were well-off and had a sound financial income.



Figure 4 The anvil used by the blacksmith in making iron equipment.

IRON-FORGING

They blacksmiths of Jalan Haji Murshid had their heyday in the 1960s. There were more than 20 workshops that operated day and night. Before starting work in the morning, the owner of the workshop would conduct a small ceremony to honor the spirit and keeper. When there was a new workshop to be opened, a shaman would perform a ritual known using *sintok limau* (a mixture of wild cinnamon root and lime) and *tepung tawar* (a rice flour mixture for ritual use). Rice coloured with turmeric, and betel leaves would be placed on the furnace and the anvil.

To start forging, the metal should be heated and broken into smaller pieces. It is then formed into a block which will be cut to the desired size. Next, the steel is heated again and hit repeatedly. This is repeated until such a point when the blade shape begins to form and the tool is ground down and completed. This is done to smoothen and sharpen the tool or weapon that is produced. A buffing process will be carried out immediately after the item is forged and completely shaped. Then, the tool should be immersed in water, and this process is done repeatedly.

The next morning before proceeding with his work, a blacksmith will clean up all the remnants of scrap iron. The scrap iron is usually placed at a corner near the furnace area. The scrap is in demand among shamans, who either get it for free or for a small charge from the owner of the workshop.

METAL ITEMS CREATED BY THE SKILLED BLACKSMITHS

Malay cultural tradition does not distinguish between decorative items and items for everyday use. Hence, there is art everywhere, including in daily-use items, weapons and other equipment (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2010:xv). Art in Malay civilization is closely related to the appreciation of nature and the natural environment in the Malay World. In this case, beauty in art is something that is evident from the perfection of its creation (Beg, MAJ, 1977). Among the blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid Street, Pekan Darat, there are a variety of tools in the form of either fine art or tools for daily use which are created with intricacy and produced meticulously by the blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid, Pekan Darat. Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah* mentions that the crafts and sciences that are the result of human creation suggest the ability to think (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:314). Ibn Khaldun was also of the view that crafts are usually firmly rooted only where a sedentary culture is strong and of long duration. Thus “all crafts are customs and colours of civilization” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:315). The statements of Ibn Khaldun are very much relevant to the real situation in the blacksmith area in Pekan Darat.



Figure 5 Knife hilt and sheath produced by the blacksmiths in Pekan Darat.

The appreciation of nature is evident in the artful production of various items for daily use. This includes style, patterns, symbolism, colour and so forth. Most of the items produced are household items and kitchen utensils such as coconut graters, cutters, various types of knives, including sharp knives, slaughter knives, machetes, choppers, and so on. In addition, the village blacksmiths are also capable of making weapons such as a spears, daggers, and swords, as well as the tools used for certain jobs such as rubber tappers' knives, hoes and many others (Rizal Othman, 2006). This is in line with Ibn Khaldun's view that "crafts can be improved and increase only when many people demand them" (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:316).

In addition to their forging skills, the blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid are also highly skilled in making knife hilts and sheathes decorated with carvings. Hilts are often decorated with bird heads, horseshoe and many other designs. To make the sheath, the blacksmiths will engrave wood carefully in the form of the blade so that it is not too tight or loose. This is evidence that clearly demonstrates the skills of the blacksmiths in the area (Rizal Othman, 2006).

PRESERVING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF IRONWORKING BASED ON *MALAKAH* THEORY

Based on Ibn Khaldun's theory in his book *Al-Muqaddimah*, it can be said that skills are powerful tools to achieve a better life and become more affluent. In connection with these facts, knowledge is achieved through repetitive action until it becomes a skill, which is so unique and special that it is rarely owned by other human beings.

Crafts require knowledge and thought and are more complex compared to agriculture (Aziz al-Azmeh, 1982:97). According to Ibn Khaldun, crafts require teachers even though some crafts are simple and others are complex. Ordinary crafts must be learned first because they are necessities and are always in demand. The perfection in the skill of making crafts can be achieved in the course of time and over generations. Thus, a certain amount of time is required in learning the making of these crafts. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:314)

Concerning the knowledge and skills in manufacturing iron objects, we must bear in mind the statement of Ibn Khaldun stressing that any skills possessed by someone will become extinct if these skills are not supported by a strong demand from the community. Finally, the skills will no longer be inherited by the next generation and will eventually disappear. This is the real phenomenon the blacksmith community in Pekan Darat is facing, where younger generation shows no interest in the skills, knowledge and heritage of ironworking. There are fewer than five workshops still in operation today while other workshops are closed and abandoned. It will not be surprising if one day all the workshops there will merely be storehouses without any knocking or grinding sounds and all the skills possessed by the old generation will become extinct over time.

This situation is also mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*: "crafts can be improved when they are needed, and if they are in demand with many people" (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:317). If there is no demand, the master of a particular craft will be no longer assured of making a living from it, and thus these crafts will gradually disappear when he dies and leaves no successor (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:317). Moreover, Ibn Khaldun also mentions that, "if a particular craft is in demand and there are buyers for it, then the craft corresponds with the type of goods which are in great demand and can be sold" (Ibn Khaldun, 1967:316). Thus, the quality and quantity of crafts is very much dependent on the demand, with the consequence that civilizations on the wane are characterized by the diminution of their crafts (Aziz al-Azmeh, 1982:99; Ahmad Subhi Mansur, 1998:217)

Since among the challenges faced by many entrepreneurs in Pekan Darat is the lack of young people who want to inherit the knowledge of ironworking, most of

the workshops have been closed and the remaining five workshops which are still in existence today are operating in dilapidated conditions. Conditions and working environments that are not conducive, exhausting, old machinery and equipment and poor returns have kept young people from venturing into this job, as they prefer to work in the nearby factories. In addition, the attitude of some blacksmiths who are slow to complete customers' orders have also resulted in a reduced in demand for goods and give a bad image to the industry.

In accordance with the above matter, it appears that the major challenges faced by the blacksmiths of Pekan Darat revolve around the problem of no interest among the younger generation, of funding and equipment. These challenges are similar to those frequently mentioned in any studies on traditional crafts (Ahmad Tajuddin Ali and Hassan Abdul Rahman, 1990; Jamaluddin Sulaiman, 1990). Although there is a high demand for common tools such as rubber tapping knives, butcher knives, machetes, cutters and other equipment, large-scale production to meet the demand from the market cannot be carried out due to lack of workers and funds.

Although there were certain parties that promised and expressed willingness several times to help the blacksmiths, this promise has not yet been fulfilled, even until now. The problem of funding and lack of technology enhancement among the blacksmiths of Pekan Darat cannot be overcome if there is no full commitment from the blacksmiths themselves, government agencies and other institutions related to it. Therefore, the use of modern equipment can be channeled through the assistance to the parties concerned with helping those blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid so that their iron craft production can be doubled and they can promote their products on a wider scale. A centre to train some future generation with the relevant skills, needs to be built and created so that it will in turn act as a marketing centre for items produced. This should thus allow iron workshop operators to expand their products' markets and open up more job opportunities if the demand for their products increases.

Besides that, in order to preserve the local knowledge and skill of the blacksmiths in Pekan Darat, this study suggests a new branding and promotion of the forged iron products such as knives, cutters, and the like, since this is the local heritage that made Pekan Darat famous in the past. Authorities, particularly the Malaysian Handicraft Corporation, Majlis Amanah Rakyat Malaysia (MARA) and related agencies must assist active blacksmiths and help them to commercialize their products. It is recommended that metal equipment produced in the area to be labelled with the name of "Pekan Darat" as a unique brand in order to return the history and nostalgia of the industry that once thrived there. The production of forged iron tools must be diversified and not only focus on the knife, cutters and rubber tappers' knives. Other

metal equipment such as hoes, spurs, coconut splitters, axes, machetes, sickle blades and so on should be encouraged. In the production of all such tools, priority should be given to quality so that buyers will feel that it is worthwhile to buy forged iron tools of the brand “Pekan Darat” due to their quality and durability.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the idea and views of Ibn Khaldun, it is clear that matters relating to the needs of a larger market and demand are very important to guarantee the survival of the art of ironworking on Jalan Haji Murshid, Pekan Darat. If there is no demand, there will be no effort to produce. If this situation is allowed to continue, it will make the rich heritage of ironworking be lost after the death of the great and skilled blacksmiths. This will be a big loss to local heritage.

The high-value skills and local wisdom among the older generation of blacksmiths on Jalan Haji Murshid need to be transferred to the next generation. In this case, young people need to be made aware of and injected with a passion to learn this unique local knowledge. The use of modern equipment and techniques to produce iron products is needed to attract the attention of the new generation to get involved in this craft. The conditions they have seen at this point have made the younger generation feel less interested to venture into ironworking. In this case, Ibn Khaldun has mentioned in his *Muqaddimah* that dexterity in skills or craftsmanship is not necessarily inherited but can be mastered by those who have a strong interest and persevere in its training.

Indeed, the ironworking heritage which was the community’s pride in the past needs to be rehabilitated and preserved. Therefore, proactive steps must be taken to rescue and preserve the remaining workers and employers in the area so that it can benefit both the ironworking heritage and the local community. Even though the area is just a small site which may be modest in appearance, it is still worthy of conservation and can attract visitors to come and experience the making of local crafts. Besides that, it will provide socio-economic advantages for the local community and will be part of a transfer of knowledge from the past to future generations.

Thus, it is suggested that an effort to address these problems and commercialization of products needs to be made. In addition, certain measures to preserve the heritage of ironworking should be seriously considered and pursued. Related parties can give a new ray of hope to the enterprise and heritage of craftsmanship in Pekan Darat. It is hoped that the Malay heritage and skills, which have high artistic value, will no longer be considered as a non-competitive industry that is dimming and will become

extinct one day. It is also hoped that this research will have a fruitful outcome for the community of Pekan Darat.

May this writing pave the way for more research, either theoretically or empirically, in the effort to preserve the local knowledge and heritage of the Malay community of Pekan Darat, who possess a valuable skill and experience in ironworking. This researcher believes that the investigation on this issue is worth the trouble if we would like to understand the situation and factors that cause the changes and challenges to ironworking in that specific community and how it once shaped the economy and the community of that particular area.

NOTE

1. This paper was presented at the Seminar Warisan Nusantara dan Bicara Kraf Universiti Malaysia Sabah, by Suhaila Abdullah, Mohd Nizam Sahad & Associate Professor Dr Che Zarrina Sa'ari, on 2011.

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