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# Leadership: Rejabhad as an Icon and the King of Malaysian Cartoonist

Nor Afian Yusof, Maharam Mamat, Lim Kar Keng, Hamdzun Haron & Nazri Muslim

School of Liberal Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia. Email: affian@ukm.my

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#### **Abstract**

The Malaysian cartooning industry is still young when compared to the cartooning industry in the West and Japan, but its development is still something to be proud of. Malaysia has its own identity and cartoon style even though it has had some influence from the West since before independence. The presence of several local cartoonists after independence opened a new curtain for the Malaysian cartoon industry. The appearance of Rejabhad has colored the cartoon industry with Malaysia's own identity. Rejabhad is an icon to all cartoonists in Malaysia, and he has even been appointed as the King of Cartoonists among art activists and cartoonist because of his stature, charisma and success as a cartoonist who has inspired the local cartoon world. This article will discuss the background of the Malaysian cartoon industry, the concept of leadership in brief, Rejabhad's biography and how he was appointed as the icon and king of Malaysian cartoonists.

Keywords: Leadership, Rejabhad, Icon, Cartoonist, Malaysian

### Introduction

The Malaysian cartooning field is still very young when compared to Japan, Europe and America. But the developments of the cartoon and comic industry can be proud. Today the development of the cartoon and comic industry is booming despite the slight crisis with regard to the identity of Malaysian cartoons and comics. The history of the development of cartoons in Malaysia began as early as the 1930s when newspapers such as Warta Jenaka, Majlis and Utusan Zaman published their editorial cartoons. The publication of these newspapers creates an opportunity for the talents of cartoonists to solidify their ideas and works. Thus, names such as Osman Kangkung, Saidin Yahya and many others were born. The theme of producing cartoons at that time was more focused on creating and nurturing nationalism awareness into the Malays in particular. Political, social and economic issues were widely played at that time to raise the spirit of nationalism and the fate of the Malays during the British colonial rule. The political scenario was seen as threatening the position of the

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Malays with the arrival of many immigrants from China and India who were brought in by the British at that time.

However, the scenario began to change when Malaya gained its independence and in order to preserve racial sensitivities, the government enacted a law called the Printing Machines and Publications Act in the early 1990s to curb political and social issues that were considered sensitive (see Printing Presses and Publication Act, 1984). This policy has indirectly changed the theme and style of the cartoons of the time. No more politically and socially racist cartoons are allowed to be published in newspapers and other printed materials. Even before the act was enforced, the government changed its policy to ease racial tensions when it became independent. The issues that were previously raised during the pre-independence period also changed after the post-independence period. The cartoons that were born after that touched more on the issue of racial unity and were also used as a medium to explain government policies to the people (Mahamood, 2003).

Malaysia's early cartooning industry demands the leadership competence of an organization. This is important to create the direction, vision and objectives of the Malaysia cartooning sector to put oneself in line with the world of cartooning such as in Japan, Hong Kong and the West. There are various associations of cartoons and comics based on streams, styles and publishers. But to have a huge impact on the world of cartooning, the industry needs a large organization or association, which does not limit the types of flow, style and publication. The identity crisis of Malaysian cartoonists is one of the burdens in the effort to elevate the dignity of Malaysian cartoons in the national mold, making this effort less encouraging. The leadership style of some of the associations does not demonstrate a benchmark that can be expected to have the maximum impact, as each is only fighting for its own flow.

At that time Rejabhad was seen as the king of cartoonist Malaysia. He is seen as a leader because of his icon and big name in the Malaysian cartoon industry. Rejabhad does not lead any organization except to be a respected and privileged cartoonist by Gila-Gila, a humor magazine published by Creative Enterprise. Whereas on the concept of leadership, an organization needs to have a leader and a follower. How can Rejabhad be crowned as the king of cartoonist Malaysia? This will be discussed in this article in more depth. Before that, the concept of leadership first will be elaborated.

# Significant of the study.

A leader is an individual who can influence other individuals in an organization. Something interesting in leadership is the existence of a leader in an organization that has its own structure by creating a leader-follower relationship to achieve excellence. This concept is a basic concept for leadership. Hollander (2013), defines leadership as a process of influence between the leader and followers. Although leaders have power, the power of influence depends more on persuasion and coercion. The leadership process often involves a two-way influence relationship and the main purpose is to achieve common goals.

In talking about leadership, Hau (2005) has outlined some of the main factors of an effective leader. Among them are inspiring, simple, humane, maintaining dignity and visionaries. Rejabhab is not the leader of an appointed organization and has followers under his organization. He is a cartoonist who has been picked up by other art enthusiasts and local cartoon art fans as an icon whose leadership values can be emulated.

Therefore, in this article, the character of Rejabhad as the king of Malaysian cartoonists has been raised to provide general knowledge to the public, especially cartoon fans in

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Malaysia. Rejabhad has left his legacy as a Malaysian cartoonist icon that can be proud of. Even though cartooning technology is becoming more modern, the fundamentals are based on the art of cartooning that was pioneered before independence. Malaysian cartoon identity has its own characteristics and identity. This image and identity should be maintained even though the cartoon industry has changed the landscape and has more advanced technology. This is Rejabhad's own dream to see the Malaysian cartoon industry stand up and progress with its own identity and not from foreign influence.

Hence, from this spirit, this article is written to open the eyes of Malaysian cartoonists, so that they do not forget their own identity. Although today's world of cartooning is increasingly global and there is no dividing line from influences and styles from outside, the current cartoonists should be able to maintain the authenticity of Malaysian cartoon identity as expected by Rejabhad.

In addition, the importance of this study is also to highlight the leadership icon of Rejabhad as the King of Cartoonists of Malaysia even though he is not a leader of any association or organization. He was appointed as the King of Cartoonists of Malaysia by other cartoonist and his own fans based on his passion, charisma and leadership style. He was also made an inspiration and icon by other cartoonists in his work in maintaining the identity of Malaysian-style cartoons. And this article is also expected to inspire a new generation of local cartoonists to advance themselves. Exemplify Rejabhad and his glorious success works.

# **Leadership Concept**

Leadership is defined in many forms and is so complex to parse. Leadership is a process that can influence the activities of a group of people in an organization towards the determination and achievement of organizational goals. (Stogdill 1958, quoted by Ramaiah, 1999). While Bass and Bass (2009) is of the view that leadership is a persuasive process. In contrast to Fiedler (1967), who saw leadership as a pattern of behavior that directed and coordinated activities within the group. Hau (2005) defines leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable a person to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization in which they are members.

Ramaiah (1999) states the meaning of leadership as a phenomenon of human processes using the skills of common sense and its potential which involves one's ability, ability, wisdom to rule, direct, encourage or influence. While Weihrich (2005) defined leadership as influence, art or the process of influencing people so that they would fight willingly and passionately towards the achievement of group goals. In contrast to Reed (1976) who formulated leadership was a way of influencing human behavior so that the struggle could be carried out according to the wishes of the leader.

According to some of the above statement, we can conclude that the leadership needs two different parties and their needs each other. The first is the leader or the leader himself, the second is the member or followers. In this context, leadership involves at least two individuals, one of whom is the leader and the other is the follower. This is a simple concept in explain what it means to be leadership. Leadership also requires an organization and every organization needs its vision and mission. A leader is an individual who is the head of an organization, and his job is to assist in the pursuit of a predetermined direction of the organization. The success of an organization is judged by how successful it is to achieve the goals and objectives set. It all depends on the style and pattern of leadership of a leader or leader.

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Hau (2005) during a study entitled Gender Differences in perceived Leadership Effectiveness in Hong Kong identified and outlined several effective leadership qualities that can be used as a guide: -

- i. Inspiring
- ii. Performance oriented
- iii. Quick decision-making
- iv. Visionaries
- v. Integrity
- vi. Good governing efficiency
- vii. Be diplomatic
- viii. Can work together
- ix. Willing to sacrifice
- x. Simple
- xi. Humane
- xii. Have autonomy
- xiii. According to the procedure
- xiv. Autocratic
- xv. Maintaining dignity

Hau (2005) clearly shows that several qualities of a leader need to be present simultaneously to ensure the effectiveness of the leadership. What is discussed in this article is how the pattern or style of leadership was shown by Rejabhad until he was crowned the King of Cartoonists of Malaysia.

### **Definition of Cartoons**

Trefil (1990) states that the word cartoon comes from the Italian 'cartone' which means paper. Originally a cartoon was a designation for a sketch on 'a lot' paper (stout paper) as a design plan for canvas or wall painting. Meanwhile, Mahamood (2004) states that cartoons are a form that is deliberately added or reduced to show humor or humor and even entertainment. Gombrich (1992) stated that cartoons can be viewed as caricatures or 'mock potraits'. An English cartoonist, on the other hand, described cartoons as drawings that depict openly or symbolically in the form of jokes. It may be that there is text and dialogue or may not be, and can also consist of more than one panel. Low (1976). Noerhadi and Heraty (1989) simplified the definition of cartoons as a form of humorous notion in visual imagery.

While editorial cartoons can be referred to as a form of political or societal illustration presented by caricature or not (Low, 1976). This definition was further simplified by Seymour-Ure (1996) by stating that editorial cartoons are a large framework in newspapers that touch on social and political matters in the form of commentary. A website, Wikipedia, refers to editorial cartoons as 'political cartoons' that discuss current political and social issues.

It can be concluded that cartoons are an illustration that is deliberately exaggerated or diminished in the form of its characters which is used as entertainment material and jokes in visual form. While editorial cartoons are more of a material used to produce criticism, commentary and innuendo on current societal and political issues (Yusof, 2008).

# **Malaysian Cartoon Industry**

Revealing the history of the Malaysian cartoon industry actually leads us to recall the past during the pre-independence era with the existence of newspaper publications as early as the 1930s. The cartoons published in the newspapers of that time talked about the current

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political and social issues that aroused the spirit of Malay nationalism as well as entertainment material containing humor and criticism, but after independence was achieved, the role of cartoons as a source of entertainment in the form of humor was diminished. This was due to the birth of films and aristocratic stages that took over the role of the new entertainment media as well as the mood of the society at that time. However, the birth of these aristocratic films and stage actually gave a new breath and bud to the country's cartoon world when it was published in Singapore that also held cartoon columns and portrait drawings of the artists of the time. Therefore, it creates space for upcoming cartoonists to showcase their talents. A film magazine that covers a lot of released films Shaw Brothers and Cathay Keris seem to be quite popular with the public at once gave a new impact to the world of Malaysian cartoons during that era.

The occasion was best used by local cartoonists at the time to create a name. Many of the big names of the cartoonist world were born including Rejabhad, Lat, Mishar, Rossem, Hussain Saad and others. Rejabhad, who was very interested in cartoons, was actually a soldier under the Malay Army, while Rossem was from the Forest Police force. Many cartoonists of that time came from diverse backgrounds. The influence of cartoons in Malaysia has taken some influence from Beano, Dandy and Topper magazines brought in from England. Looking at the entry of outdoor humor magazines, several local magazines such as Bambino, Rina, Salina, Bujang, Ha Hu Hum and others in the 1970s and 1980s were born to balance and empower local cartoons and comics. In that era there were also more humor magazines on the market and among the most popular to this day are Gila-Gila published on April 1, 1078 and Gelihati in a relatively short distance of time. Gila-Gila magazine has exploded on the market. His first print of 10,000 copies was exhausted in just a few days and the publication of the following months continued to increase many times. The emergence of Gila-Gila clearly brings a new dimension not only to the world of local publications, but also to the cartoon industry as a whole.

Today, many local cartoon and comic humor magazines are on the market born from the evolution of cartooning as early as the 70s and 80s. Although some seem to lose their local identity by vilifying and irritating foreign works such as Japan and America.

## **Biography of Rejabhad**

His real name is Rejab bin Had. Born on 23 August 1939 in Permatang Pauh, Penang. As a child, he aspired to become a writer, but his ambitions changed to cartoonists after leaving the school bench. This is not surprising because from an early age Rejabhad did follow cartoons and was endowed with drawing talent. When he went out with his mother to the store to buy groceries, Rejabhad would stop by the store to read the comics published in the newspaper.

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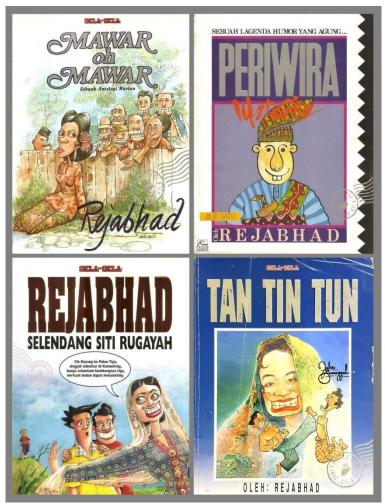
Visual 1: Rejabhad

Source: https://thevocket.com/

Upon completion of schooling, Rejabhad entered military service and was placed under the Malay regiment. Three months before entering the army, his cartoon work was published in a magazine entitled The Film Court owned by the late Tan Sri P. Ramlee in July 1958 when he was 19 years old. Since then, he began to be active in the production of cartoons despite being busy with his duties as a soldier. Realising his talent, several military officers also encouraged him to work. The result is that most of Rejabhad's work revolves around his life and experience as a soldier. Among his popular works is Perwira Mat Gila which was published in Gila-Gila magazine.

After retiring from military service, he continued his teenage ambitions to become a cartoonist when he accepted Gila-Gila's offer as a full-time cartoonist. His income as a cartoonist exceeded his income while serving in the army, but he continued to live a modest life as before. For him, it is not income that is the measure and reason for his work, but talent, interest and responsibility that cause him to continue to work until the end of his life. This is the principle that Rejabhad holds as a cartoonist so that he is known as the King of Malaysian Cartoonist

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Visual 2: Among the cartoons produced by Rejabhad.

Source: https://senivisual2.blogspot.com/

Rejabhad who is more affectionately called by the name of Pak Jab uses the original principle of producing cartoons that serve as a tool to criticize an issue. However, the principle is used prudently and not excessively. The cartoons produced by Rejabhad have messages, remarks and criticism that are quite gentle. This principle is held by him in presenting his work so that it can be well received by all parties. For Pak Jab, there is no need to criticize an issue that is too spicy, it is enough to simply reprimand that whoever eats chili tastes spicy.

Born before independence, he was known for his rather traditional and classic cartoon style with criticisms and reprimands related to current issues. What is very interesting about Rejabhad's work is that his philosophical use of dialogue makes his work so unique. According to certain sources, Rejabhad while serving as a soldier helped the government's efforts to expel the communists from the countryside by producing cartoon works in Chinese that talked about the situation of Malaya and the communists at that time. The work was heavily printed and later dropped using airplanes in areas inhabited by the communists. This was made as a war of nerves against the communists at that time. In addition, Rejabhad and several other cartoonists have poured their work on anti-drug campaigns organized by the government. Such was the influence of cartoons and cartoonists back then.

Pak Jab is always invited to attend cartoon seminars and workshops to teach and guide the new generation of cartoonists. He is also highly respected for his willingness to share his experience and knowledge. A lot of knowledge and experience shared by Pak Jab with the

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new generation of cartoonists who have just emerged. Well known that Pak Jab has many students and some of the famous likes Lat, Juragan and Rossem and so many others. They were all born from Pak Jab's vast experience. Therefore, he deserves to be called the King of Cartoonist, Malaysia or 'Penghulu' Cartoon Malaysia. His influence and cartoon style which reflects and dignifies the national morals should be remembered and praised.

Rejabhad is also the first local cartoonist to ever get a private driver's service in Malaysia but he prefers to walk and take the LRT as well as other public transportation. This is because he wanted to observe the situation around the community and then cultivate it in the form of his cartoon work. Every time he walks, Pak Jab will bring along his camera and a booklet for him to record the situation he sees. He was once offered to act with the famous joke group Scenario for an episode related to the soldier. In fact, his cartoons were once asked by a producer to be filmed and made into a series of joke stories for television broadcasts but unfortunately until now the proposal was only a suggestion until he breathed his last breath on 14 November 2002 when he was 63 years old due to heart disease.

He is known as the King of Malaysian Cartoonist and has been given freedom by Creative Enterprise to work throughout his life with Gila-Gila megazine. In fact, he was appointed as the main adviser of the cartoon company. There are too many contributions that Rejabhad has given to the world of Malaysian cartoons especially. All his services and contributions that never know the meaning of pain and fatigue should be appreciated and praised. Perhaps his struggle based on cartoons and the world of cartoons is less remembered by the Malaysian community today because most of them have a negative and primitive mentality towards a career as a cartoonist. But the fact is that the struggle of cartoonists and other fighters is the same, the difference is that cartoonists use their brains to produce ideas as well as ink and paper to deliver their work. Cartoons should actually be seen in terms of their social function towards society which plays an important role as a moderate critic and an effective rebuke. Look at the influence of cartoons and comics abroad, how important cartoons are as media that can bring changes to society's awareness and attitudes.

The late Pak Jab has left us a legacy of the world of cartoons in a unique and distinctive national mold and his leadership as a respected cartoonist to the extent that he was dubbed the King of Malaysian Cartoonist. His stature and abilities should be used as an example and role model for the new generation of cartoonists so that they can dignify the local style more than the foreign style. In order to become famous and respected, a cartoonist needs to have his own style and not be adapted from other styles especially from outside Malaysia itself.

# How is Rejabhad seen as the King of Malaysian Cartoonist?

Everyone knows that the late Rejabhad is known as the King of Malaysian Cartoonist, especially to cartoonists and activists in this field, both old and new venture into the world of Malaysian cartooning. Due to his dedication to work and championing the country's cartoon world until the end of his life, he was dubbed the King of Malaysian Cartoonist. However, not only that, Pak Jab has been seen as a mentor to many of the great cartoonists nowadays, among them are Dato' Lat, Rossem, Imuda, Juragan and many others. Their success today is actually a counterpoint to the tireless efforts made by Rejabhad in giving a lot of tutoring. In fact, he was also used as a source of inspiration in the work of most cartoonists.

# PERIWIRA MAT GILA OLEH REJAB HAD



Visual 3: Perwira Mat Gila, among Rejabhad's successful cartoon published in Gila-Gila magazine

Rejabhad's leadership is not seen from how he governs an organization. This is because Pak Jab is not a leader or leader in the true sense of the word if we understand the concept of leadership. Rejabhad is seen only as an icon or symbol of the success of a cartoonist who sparks the hope, inspiration and vision of other cartoonists in upholding the Malaysian cartoon industry. However, through this research finding, Rejabhad has good leadership qualities even though he was not directly appointed as a leader. His talents, determination, persistence, commitment and privilege have made him free to work for as long as possible or for as long as possible.

According to the leadership characteristics stated by Hau (2005) at the beginning of this article, Rejabhad deserves to be called the King of Malaysian Cartoonist. This is because there are a number of leadership qualities that are seen in him based on his life history which has contributed a lot to the country. Among the contributions that should be appreciated is how the efforts of Pak Jab produced cartoons as a form of Chinese-language pamphlet to help the government eliminate the communists. The cartoon pamphlet was spread by plane in the

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forests where the communists were expected to be located. In addition, Pak Jab was asked by the government to produce cartoons to combat the drug symptoms that were so alarming at the time. From that point on, how cartoons have a great influence in making the youth aware that the dangers of drug abuse and Pak Jab is indirectly recognized by his leadership qualities.

According to Hau (2005), among other leadership qualities of the deceased is that he provides inspiration and motivation to both new and old cartoonist. He is also used as a point of reference for many famous cartoonists such as Dato' Lat and so on. The deceased tirelessly provided insight and guidance until the end of his life. He has attended many seminars and workshops in providing guidance and education to young cartoonists throughout his life. This is an undeniable fact. His visionary nature, where he wants to see the world of Malaysian cartoons in the mold and national identity is highlighted, shows another quality or leadership characteristic that he has where he actively becomes a mentor in producing more talented young cartoonists. So many names were born who are now respected cartoonists today. Apart from that, the leadership characteristics that he has in him is a simple attitude that has been practiced since long ago.

The most memorable example is at the time of the age best of all, PaK JAB has its own personal driver. However because of his simple attitude, he prefers to walk alone and ride in a public transportation from driving. The noble and humble attitude that he practiced was not at all change or raise a sense of ego in oneself when one is at the peak of success.

Today, he has left a trail along with the services that should be remembered by the younger generation, especially the young cartoonists today. Even in the context of real leadership, Pak Jab is not a leader but his superior leadership style and characteristics are inherent in him even though he is seen only as an inspiring icon.

# Conclusion

Rejabhad's honesty, sincerity and determination to see more local cartoonists born to color the national cartoon arena and dignify the identity of local cartoons can be seen from his efforts to provide guidance to the new generation of cartoonists. It can be said that most of the country's cartoonists around the 50s to 2000 have received instruction and guidance from Rejabhad. Until he breathed his last, Rejabhad continued to provide guidance, knowledge and experience.

He is the one who is called the King of Malaysian Cartoonist and an icon to most of the famous cartoonists today. His loss is very difficult to replace. Although he is not a leader in an actual organization, the leadership characteristics are evident in him and he is rightly called the King of Malaysian Cartoonist because of his several contributions that cannot be forgotten as well as his knowledge and expertise in upholding the world of Malaysian cartoons in the national mold. The reality is that his name was raised by cartoonists as the King of Cartoonist which he never even asked for. He is an icon to the Malaysia cartoons industry who shows the characteristics of leadership even if not outwardly.

In general, the contribution to this research can be seen in several aspects. Among them is the contribution to art-related knowledge, especially the knowledge of cartooning in Malaysia. With the availability of this article can gather a collection of readings, knowledge and references to future research. Second, is the contribution of information related to the Malaysian cartooning industry to the younger generation for them to appreciate the legacy left by the early cartoonists in Malaysia. This is because research and information related to the cartooning industry in Malaysia is very limited. Third, a contribution to the historical

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archive of the Malaysian cartooning industry where this article can be referred to in adding the bibliography and biography of a famous king of cartoonist in Malaysia. The fourth contribution is how this article can shape the identity of new cartoonists in their work. Rejabhad gave a lot of advice, work with your own identity instead of trying to imitate the influence of cartoons from the outside. Malaysia has its own cartoon identity and it needs to be lifted as an image in the local cartooning industry.

Pak jab's last message to the new generation of Malaysian cartoonists,

"Cartoonists should be more careful in adapting each foreign style, because everyone knows that the success of a certain cartoon depends on the acceptance of the community. Local cartoonists should promote our own culture rather than promoting other foreign styles and cultures." (quoted from jiwatempatan.blogspot.com)

'Al-Fatihah' for the late Rejabhad.

# **Corresponding Author**

Dr. Nor Afian Yusof

School of Liberal Studies (Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti),

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor.

Email: affian@ukm.edu.my

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