

Chair was initially meant for all natives: VC

DE 6.3.2011 Pg 7

FOLLOWING is the final part of our special focus on the Kadazandusun Chair at Universiti Malaysia Sabah following recent queries from members of the community as to its objectives and results.

The first part of the interview last week featured the Chair's holder Dr Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan. Here we include the views of UMS Vice Chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr Kamaruddin Ampon.

DE: When was the Kadazandusun Chair set up? Whose idea was it, and what was the purpose/objective/intention and specific focus/priority? How much allocation was provided for its initiation and running cost and from where is the money coming from? Is the university satisfied with what the Chair has achieved so far?

VC: Each university be it local or abroad is synonymous with establishing a Professorship Chair in specific areas through the appointments of their renowned academicians who are experienced in their respective fields.

In this regard, Universiti Malaysia Sabah strives to promote its country and people to adopt this approach to elevate education in the country, especially in Sabah.

Initially, UMS planned to establish a "Chair of Sabah Indigenous Studies". The idea was aimed at carrying out studies and research on cultural practices of (all) the indigenous communities in the State, as introduced by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak through the "Chair of Dayak Studies".

Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, the then Chief Minister of Sabah, inspired the establishment of the "Chair of Sabah Indigenous Studies" in 1999, but then changed it to a "Kadazandusun Chair" in view of the fact that the Kadazandusun are the largest ethnic group in Sabah.

The Kadazandusun Chair is an academic chair established to carry out studies and research on the Kadazandusun towards progress and unity and the close



Prof Kamaruzaman and Dr Jacqueline seen at a launching of a conference hosted by the Kadazandusun Chair in Dec 2005

ties among the other ethnic groups in Sabah.

The establishment of the Chair was approved by the University's Board of Directors through the provision of Clause 6(1)g of the UMS Constitution, with a con-

tribution of RM2 million from the State Government.

After undergoing several procedures and processes such as drafting of the Regulations and Guidelines on the appointment of the Kadazandusun Chair,

a recruitment exercise was done where the vacancy was advertised in the local newspapers in December 2001.

The selection committee comprised a team as specified under Clause 23(1) of the University's Constitution.

Candidates eligible to be considered for filling this position must be from among academicians especially senior professors or senior researchers from a university or institution of higher learning regardless of gender, race and nationality.

In addition, academicians who are well known and prominent in related fields would also be considered to fill this vacancy.

If the candidates are not composed of such academicians, they must be of someone who is considered to be qualified and fulfill the criteria on professorship appointment according to the resolution and recommendations by the selection committee.

These criterion are emphasised to ensure the selected candidate is able to achieve the objectives of the establishment of this Chair.

The setting up of this Chair is to obtain specialised services from professors or well-known individuals in the field of ethnographic studies particularly those related to the affairs of the Kadazandusun community in Sabah.

Aside that it is a channel in conducting research that could be used by all authorities concerned to develop the socioeconomic status and establish a study relating to the Kadazandusun community. Consequently, appointed candidates holding this Chair should meet the criteria set and recommended by the Selection Committee and approved by the University's Board of Directors.

After evaluating and consideration done on all the applications, the Selection Committee appointed Dr Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan as the Chair's holder effective January 2003.

She was subsequently appointed an Associate Professor and entrusted to hold office for the next two years. Should she display excellent performance and service and in good health, the university would consider extending her appointment.

Among her achievements since assuming this position included conducting 11 researches on the Kadazandusun community and the study of several other indigenous groups in the State.

Dr Jacqueline was also involved with 10 consultations related to ethnicity and culture since her appointment in 2003.

She has also written a book, six internationally peer-reviewed journal articles, 13 chapters in academic books and 3 proceedings.

She has also written 16 seminar/conference papers that have yet to be published and was involved in the preparation of 5 modules for workshops.

All these are related to the Kadazandusun community as well as other ethnic groups in Sabah. Currently, there are two books, several international peer-reviewed articles, chapters in books and proceedings that are now undergoing their final stages.

Besides conducting research and doing academic publications, Dr Jacqueline also participated in 37 conferences at national and international levels.

She has also organised six conferences including the "Borneo Research Council 9th Biennial International Conference" in 2008 apart from 13 seminars that were held at the School of Social Sciences.

While holding the Chair, she has supervised 16 postgraduate students and 52 undergraduate thesis students.

At the same time, she teaches the subject "Borneo Ethnography and Ethnomusicology" at the School of Social Sciences even though those holding this Chair are not involved in the teaching of undergraduate subjects.

Through other researchers, publications and academic activities, she has uplifted the image of the Kadazandusuns and other Sabah natives to the world.

Apart from the achievements mentioned, Dr Jacqueline is also the Vice President of the Borneo Research Council, a member of the ICTM Study Group on Southeast Asian Performing Arts that is the thinkers of Unesco that relates to the culture of Southeast Asia.

She is also a committee member of the "Pakar Pendaftaran Warisan" (Adat) or the Experts on Heritage Registration, Department of National Heritage as an editorial council on most of the publications on research journals.

For her contributions in academic research especially those relating to the Kadazan-Dusun community, she has received numerous recognitions including the Prestigious Adjunct Research Fellow in Anthropology from Monash University, Australia.

Overall, she is indeed directly involved with the natives of this state through her community services and the cultural practices of the Kadazan-Dusuns.

See Page 8

Chair meant for research: VC

From Page 7

Dr Jacqueline, in fact, should be enjoying a form of payment from the fund, which amounts to two million ringgit from the State Government.

However, the University decided to keep the fund in view of the fact that Dr Jacqueline is staff of UMS. Her salary is paid by the university and the said fund that is in the university's keeping is intact.

However, the interest gained through this fund can be used to pay for any research and conferences or seminars that are related to the Kadazandusun Chair that she has held in line with what have been enshrined in the Regulations and Guidelines of the Kadazandusun Chair in UMS.

Interestingly, Dr Jacqueline does not use the money for research purposes but solicit external grants such as from the Ministry of Higher Education. UMS is proud with her efforts and initiatives taken which is very commendable and should be emulated by other researchers.

DE: The general public perception was that the Chair has not contributed enough to the Kadazandusun community. The issue of declining use of the Kadazandusun mother tongue among the younger generation of Kadazandusun are among issues that have cropped up. Did the Chair do anything in response to the Dewan Bahasa Pustaka report on this?

VC: The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in its previous reports mentioned that many of the younger generations of the Kadazandusun do not know how to converse in their own mother tongue. UMS places emphasis on this matter. However, it is not under the purview of the Kadazan-Dusun Chair, as has been said earlier, the role of the Chair is more to academia meant for research and studies on the practice and culture of the Kadazandusun and the natives of Sabah. To improve the command of the Kadazandusun language, the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language, UMS offers a Kadazandusun Language Programme. We have a number of qualified language teachers who are on hand to offer their services in giving the best teaching to the students.

DE: What is the university's response to recent statements

by Kadazandusun leaders on the Chair? Do you agree that since the Chair carries the name of the Kadazandusun community, they have the right to comment on any of its activities. There was also a call for a review of the Chair's objectives so that the Kadazandusun community can better appreciate it.

VC: We at the university are open to any suggestion. Maybe suggestions could further improve our achievements thus far. We can always meet and discuss openly for the good of our heritage.

Furthermore, I believe many are still in doubt about the existence of this Chair. Through these discussions, we will be able to understand better and in more detail. Many activities and studies have been done so far but may be due to lack of publicity, many still do not know the development of this Chair.

Many still do not understand the actual functions of this Chair and assume that it is no more than a Cultural Association. As I have mentioned earlier, this is an Academic Chair that involves research work and comprehensive studies.

UMS will continue to monitor the Chair every year to ensure its smooth running and meet its objectives. At the same time, the Ministry of Higher Education monitors all the Academic Chairs of all public institutions in Malaysia including the Kadazandusun Chair.

DE: Has the university received any feedback from the Kadazandusun community on the Chair?

VC: In all the activities carried out by Dr Jacqueline, the response from the public has been very encouraging.

In fact, while the research is done, community leaders such as Village Heads and the Chairman of Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) were directly involved with the people of the areas involved.

These include conducting research on "The Ethnographic and Cultural Mapping" in Tambunan. This research is important for the future generations. Recognising the importance of these research and the contributions of the Chair, various improvements will be designed to ensure that they would remain relevant and act as a reference to

the community in future.

Among them, we intend to create a research archive of the Kadazandusun Chair, which will be used as a source of reference for the native community in Sabah.

DE: Being a Kadazandusun yourself, what is your personal view of the Kadazandusun Chair, its works, contributions and on the comments made on the Chair?

VC: As a Kadazandusun, I am happy with the approach adopted by the holder of this Chair in UMS.

She has conducted several researches on not only the Kadazandusun community but also other native communities in Sabah. Through these research and studies, we not only would be able to preserve the authenticity of our culture but also preserve the customs and traditions through the findings of each study done.

I was made to understand, too, that our culture was the focus of attention when researchers on the customs of the natives, in particular the Kadazandusuns, in Sabah were presented and deliberated to the outside world.

This is an achievement and pride for us all.

DE: Mother tongue is very important to an ethnic group and part of its culture, as it is its identity that makes it different from the other ethnic group.

VC: I strongly agree. Indeed, the mother tongue is a symbol of identity for each race. It is not only the pride of a nation but it also fosters traditional cultural customs that ensures the customs of our ancestors are preserved and will not be lost with time.

I personally would like to appeal to our younger generations not to forget the fundamental matter of learning their respective mother tongues.

The strength of a community in this era actually lies in the younger generations who will continue these cultural practices and pass them to future generations. When you have begun with the teaching of languages, it would then be easier to understand and learn about their customs and traditions.

In fact, research has found that when we have mastered our mother tongue, we would be able to command other languages even easier.