

UPM defends paper on Malay maritime history

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PETALING JAYA: A local university has hit back at allegations on social media that a paper by its scholars on Malay maritime history had misrepresented historical facts, saying that the publication had been reviewed by external experts.

Universiti Putra Malaysia also said that differences in opinion about academic work should be discussed in a professional manner instead of on social media.

“UPM remains committed to maintaining the dignity of higher education as well as to pursue integrity in scholarly research activities and academic publications,” it said in a statement yesterday.

The paper in question was published in the journal, “The Jongs

and The Galleys: Traditional Ships of The Past Malay Maritime Civilisation”, last November.

In a Facebook post, historian Serge Jardin, who has written a number of books on Malaysian history, took to Facebook to single out alleged errors in the paper.

One was that of a vessel identified as a Malay Jong, a type of sailing ship originating from Indonesia which was widely used by Malay sailors in the past.

Jardin claimed that the ship was in fact a Foochow Pole Junk, a type of cargo vessel originating from China.

He also claimed that the ship’s picture was not from the Maritime Museum of Jakarta as claimed by the authors, but from the Royal Museums of Greenwich, England.

Jardin also claimed that the use of the term “galley”, a type of ship

driven by oars, to refer to a vessel named *Mendam Berah* in the Malay epic *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, is out of place.

“Galley was never used by local mariners during the Malacca Sultanate period. Most South-East Asian navy started adopting galleys in their fleet after the advent of Portuguese-Ottoman to SEA.

“The galley, *Mendam Berahi*, of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (seventeenth century) is an anachronism,” he wrote added.

Another academic, Prof James Chin of the University of Tasmania, has also criticised the paper and journal.

“Two academics published in a fake academic journal claiming Chinese junk to be Malay in origin....From a top Malaysian research university,” Chin, who is Professor of Asian Studies, wrote in a Facebook post.

In response, UPM said the publication had undergone a blind peer review process where it was sent to external reviewers to verify its findings.

“It should also be considered that the field of social sciences and humanities is open to interpretation from various parties.

“UPM remains committed to pursuing integrity in scholarly research activities and academic publications,” it said.

Another academic, Prof Dr Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi of UCSI University, has hit back at Jardin’s “unprofessional remarks” on Facebook.

“There is a significant difference between a personal Facebook commentary and a professional public-based commentary,” said Tajuddin, who is Professor of Architecture at the Tan Sri Omar Centre for Science,

Technology and Innovation Policy Studies.

“Facebook is essentially a diary of unchecked and uncontrolled expressions of ideas and emotions,” Tajuddin said.

“An academic work is a ‘working-truth’ that needs to go through a review process, get published, and get comments by other academics and this is how knowledge about a subject grows,” he said.

He stressed that the most appropriate way for an academic to respond was to either privately contact the author or editor of the paper or to share their professional commentary through appropriate media channels.

He added that Serge’s ridicule of UPM and its peer review process due to a single case was unfair to the university’s other scholars.