

'Rewrite history textbooks'

> Don says they do not present complete picture, more research needed

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HISTORIAN Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr Khoo Kay Khim says local textbooks do not present a complete picture of the country's history as they were not written by history experts but people with insufficient knowledge in the field.

"If we ask them (authors of history textbooks) which Chinese dialect group was the first to open up Yong Peng in Johor, I believe none of them know. The answer is Foochow," he said.

One would be required to do a lot of research in order to write a history textbook, as it cannot be written based on hearsay, and the input must be based on factual information verified by research, he said.

Khoo told *Sin Chew Daily* this when asked to comment on Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's announcement on Saturday that history would be made a must-pass SPM subject in 2013 and that it would also be a core subject in primary school starting 2014.

He agreed with the move to make history a must-pass subject but said the textbooks used in schools have to be rewritten.

"Students must understand the subject in order to get a pass. This will enhance the students' knowledge of history."

He believed that by studying history and knowing the past, students would have a better understanding of the present situation.

As such, he said, the content of history textbooks should have connection to the current situation in Malaysia so that students feel that history bears a close bearing on their lives.

"Teachers must understand history in order to make their students understand the subject, instead of asking them to learn by heart," he said.

No one would be interested in studying history if it means memorising everything in the text, he said.

He said history teachers with in-depth knowledge would be more engaging with their students, thus arousing their interest in the subject.

Khoo said history is based on fact and should not be distorted to serve the agenda of a certain individual or political party.

He noted that politicians nowadays like to tell "history lies" to achieve their aim of instilling fear in the people. This is all the more reason for the people to learn the real history and facts.

"It has been said the British brought Chinese to this country, when in fact it was the rich towkays here who brought them in."

He said politicians and people have argued over history and undermined racial harmony because they do not have full knowledge of it.

In an interview with *China Press*, Khoo said he did not see any problem with terms such as "pendatang," "May 13 incident" and "communists" appearing in history textbooks as long as they are presented in the right context.

On the use of the word "pendatang" in textbooks, which the Chinese community has objected to, he said: "It is appropriate to describe the pioneer Chinese migrants who came to settle in Malaya as *pendatang* (outsiders), but the term is no longer suitable to describe those who obtained citizenship after *Mederka*."

He said the history books do not make this clear, resulting in arguments over the term "pendatang."