

New award for top Malay studies student at NUS

🕒 PUBLISHED JUL 13, 2015, 5:06 PM SGT | UPDATED JUL 13, 2015, 7:57 PM



Toh Ting Wei

SINGAPORE -Prized birds in bamboo cages whistled out melodious tunes to each other, as their owners sat below them, playing Chinese chess.

While this is a sight more commonly associated with Chinese retirees, bird keeping was in fact something which originated from Malay regions, which Ms Nur'Izzah Mohamad Afandi discovered during her research work on Malay heritage on her internship module.

This interest and her studies came together yesterday, when Ms Nur'Izzah, 23, became the first recipient of the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) Prize at the National University of Singapore Commencement ceremony at the University Cultural Centre on Monday afternoon.

Borne out of a \$15,000 gift by the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) to NUS, the new MHF prize comprises of a cash award of \$1,000, and is awarded to the top honours student from the department of Malay studies at National University of Singapore's (NUS) Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

While the award was meant to encourage more research into Malay heritage, it was a happy coincidence for the MHF that Ms Nur'Izzah, who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with second class (upper) honours, has already displayed strong interest in Malay culture.

In a previous internship under the MHF Internship Programme for Online Journalism and Multimedia Publishing, she had produced three articles on several aspects of Malay customs and cultural traditions. Other than the topic of bird keeping, she also explored the topics of traditional Malay medicine and Malay wedding gifts.

She said: "I wanted to pursue Malay studies and become a critical thinker, especially in issues with regards to the Malay community, both in Singapore and beyond it.

"My motivation was to learn, and not learn just for grades alone."

Madam Zuraidah Abdullah, chairman of the MHF, said: "I have read Nur'Izzah's articles, and it is interesting for such stories to be written by a young person. It is good for youth to interpret culture from their own perspective and make it relevant in today's context."

Madam Zuraidah added that the MHF prize was set up with the aim of creating a long term relationship between recipients and the foundation, helping to "create more experts on the history and heritage of our community".

She added: "We want the recipients to recognize that there is such a foundation through this award. And we hope by giving it to them, they too will want to give back to the community, through keeping our culture alive and helping to promote that culture to the majority of Singaporeans."

twtoh@sph.com.sg