

The State and Modernization Perspectives in Malaysia's Development Planning

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Abstrak

Artikel ini memperkatakan tentang teori modernisasi dalam pembahasan konteks kenegaraan iaitu satu dari beberapa perspektif pembangunan sosio-ekonomi. Perspektif pembangunan yang dijadikan acuan pembangunan adalah perspektif modernisasi, perspektif pergantungan dan perspektif ragam pengeluaran. Pada kebiasaannya pembentukan negara di negara-negara berkembang adalah sebagai perkembangan dari bekas tanah jajahan. Pada kasus Malaysia, di saat mencapai kemerdekaan tugas pemerintah anak negeri adalah untuk memulakan kerja-kerja perancangan pembangunan. Malaysia sebuah negara bekas jajahan British tidak terkecuali dari metod yang diamalkan oleh negara-negara berkembang yang lain. Malaysia memulakan program pembangunan dengan mengikuti perspektif modernisasi. Tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk mendefinisikan perspektif modernisasi, langkah-langkah modernisasi yang dijalankan oleh pemerintah dan impak modernisasi pada kehidupan bangsa.

Kata kunci: perspektif modernisasi, negara,, masyarakat imigran (non-bumiputera), kampong (luar bandar) dan urbanisasi (bandar)

I. INTRODUCTION

The main ideas of development brought by Western colonialism were concerning modernization. In fact, one of the important results of colonialism has been the modernization of Malaysia in politics and government, the economy, and the introduction of Western education and thus the modern form of social organization and structure of society (Wan Hashim, 1983). The modernization brought by colonialism is that process which involves, as explained by Moore (1963, 91-91):

The total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterize the advanced; economically

prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the Western world... In fact, we may ... speak of the progress as industrialization. Industrialization means the extensive use of inanimate sources of power for economic production and all that entails by way of organization, transportation, communication and so on.

Modernization, as reflected by Moore's definition, uses Western society as a model for a modern society, although that also emphasized the importance of industrialization as an index of progress and modernization. However, for successful industrialization and economic development to take place, there need to be an adjustment in the value systems and the social structures of a particular society.

Syed Hussein Alatas (1970, 226) gave a more neutral definition of modernization, when he says:

Modernization is the process by which modern scientific knowledge covering all aspects of human life is introduced at varying degrees, first in the Western civilization, and later diffused to the non-Western world, by different methods and groups with the ultimate purposes of achieving a better and more satisfactory life in the broadest sense of the term, as accepted by the society concerned.

The result of modernization, notwithstanding its aim, may or may not necessarily be the development of a better and more satisfactory life, for its effect can either be negative and destructive or positive and constructive. Although, modernization generally results in the increase of wealth and prosperity it can also create tension, conflict and disorganization, and a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. This was the case in Malaysia, the educational attainment gap between the Malays and the non-Malays was widened as a result of the modernization process.

II. DISCUSSION

In the case of Malaysia, the modernization processes implanted by British colonial rule were only effective in the urban areas because the colonialists seem to have neglected the rural areas. As a result, there was a lack of participation by the indigenous community. Furthermore, there was different responses between the Malays and the non-Malays towards modernization brought by the British.

Clifford (1968, 43) noted the difference responses by Malays and Chinese towards the British economic policy, and he says:

The immigrant groups reacted to the British-inspired economic development, in a very marked and positive way, and even though most of them were totally impecunious on their arrival in Malaya, many of them prospered, often in the face of intense competition from the British. The Malays reacted to the British-inspired capitalism in a passive way, and generally stood aloof from it. They reacted thus because their maximizing differed from those required by the capitalism, and were thus more resistant to the change that such capitalism demanded if economic development was to result from it.

In the 1960s, the independent government of Malaysia embarked on its modernization programs which were geared towards the Malays, especially those who live in the rural areas. In the government's view, more especially that of the Malay ruling party United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the Malay community needed to transform their cultural values in order to be an active participant in the new era of development. The slogan of the youth wing of the party was *revolusi mental* or mental revolution, urging the Malay community to change their attitudes (Senu Abdul Rahman, 1971). In fact, Senu Abdul Rahman initiated the compilation of a book that was intended to be a *modus operandi* of modernizing the Malays. Tun Abdul Razak in his forward address to the book said:

We realized there are a variety of factors which hinders the Malays from participating in the economic and social development. Among the factors are their backward thinking which is caused by lack of knowledge and traditional way of living (Senu Abdul Rahman, 1971:1)

The influence of modernization theory was dominant in the 1960s. The focus of discussion and policy-decision was geared towards the Malays, searching for the root causes of Malay economic backwardness. The root causes of Malay backwardness have been classified into two opposing views, the values system versus the structural argument (Shaharuddin Maaruf, 1988). The main exponent of the value system perspective was Parkinson (1967). Parkinson's views were supported and in fact popularized by some Malay intellectuals. They argued that Malays were

genetically inferior to the Chinese, because of their preference for cousins-marriages, and that the so-called national character of the Malays is mostly negative when compared to the Chinese (Mahathir Mohamad, 1970; Senu Abdul Rahman, 1971).

In the Malaysian case, the notion proposed by the modernization theories could not totally be ignored. Furthermore, the Malay ruling elites seem to consider that the cultural values, attitudes, and modern exposure are lacking in the Malay community. Though the Malays seem to be responsive to economic development and educational attainment as any other ethnic group, but apparently majority of them failed to prove to be excellent in performance. One would agree that in 1960s there were fewer opportunities open to Malays, in the field of economic development and education. But, after 1970 those opportunities were widely created and opened to Malays, but they still could not be attained as desired by the policy. This has led the government to believe that the core problems are still related to cultural values, attitudes, lack of exposure and backward thinking.

In fact, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad believed that the poor performances of the Malays in economic, educational and overall management of activities are due to the backward thinking. He initiated the establishment of Civic Bureau of *Biro Tata Negara* during his tenure as Minister of Education (1974-1977). The main function of this department is to create awareness among the Malays about their plight in Malaysia's rapid economic development. It is also the function of the department to conduct training programs so that Malays could be continuously educated and reminded of the role in the country. Presently, the Civic Bureau is under the control of the Prime Minister's Department. The target audiences of the Civic Bureau's sensitive training are the Malays: students (from grade Five to University); youths; community leaders; public sector officers and private sector executives. The main objectives of the sensitivity training is the boost the morale of the Malays so that they could participate with success and excellence in whatever their enterprise.

The sensitivity training are divided into four sessions. The first session is the lectures. There are five topics of lectures, the topics are:

1. *Perubahan sikap berteraskan sistem nilai* (Attitudinal change based on the value system).
2. *Perjuangan mengangkat martabat bangsa* (The struggle to raise the dignity of the Malay race).

3. *Dasar-dasar negara ke arah kecemerlangan bangsa* (The nation's public policy to make the Malay race excel)
4. *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020)
5. *Motivasi* (Motivation).

The second session is the religious lectures, which were delivered after the dawn prayers (sholat Subuh) and the other one after the evening prayers (sholat Maghrib). The topics of the talks are:

1. *Islam sebagai ad-deen* (Islam as a way of life).
2. *Akhlak Islam* (Islamic morality)
3. *Konsep al-falah* (The concept of success in Islamic perspectives)
4. *Konsep ibadah dalam Islam* (The concept of worship in Islam)
5. *Isu-isu semasa Islam* (Islamic contemporary issues).

The third session is the Group Dynamics, and the fourth session is on self-resilience. Thus from the overview it is clear that the purpose of the training is to develop a sense of belongingness among the Malays and to further strengthen their acceptance of modernity.

In fact, when Dr. Mahathir Mohamad became the fourth Prime Minister (1981 – 2003), Mahathir introduced two crucial policies with regard to correct “Malaysian thinking” in particular the Malays. The two policies were “Look East Policy” and “The Inculcation of Islamic Values”. The *Dasar Pandang ke Timur* (Look East Policy) is meant for the Malaysians to emulate the work ethics of the Japanese. In this program, many Malaysian youth are sent to study in Japan and there were numerous short courses attended by Malaysian in Japan. The purpose of the visits is to study Japanese way of life and the way Japanese manage their business, education, and other related values. In the *Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam* (The Inculcation of Islamic Values) the aim is to make Islam compatible to modernity and development (Chandra Muzaffar, 1989). In short, the underlying assumptions of the Malay elite were the modernization theory and the beliefs in the values and arguments forwarded by the modernization thinkers (Norhashimah Mohd. Yassin, 1994).

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's thinking about the backwardness of the Malays was portrayed in the *Malay Dilemma* (1970). One of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's arguments among others, stresses the importance of heredity as the cause of Malay economic

backwardness. However, he does indicate that the major factor in explaining the differences of performances in economic and educational attainment between the Malays and the non-Malays are the cultural experiences which each ethnic group has undergone. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's main criticism was towards the neo-colonial government led by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra who ignored this situation and left the Malays on their own to face the competition of the non-Malays on unequal terms.

Syed Hussein Alatas, professor in sociology and an academic in the Department of Malay Studies, University of Singapore, responded to the two books which were written by politicians. *Revolusi Mental* was compiled in the late 1960s but published as a book in 1971. *The Malay Dilemma* written by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad as a response to the May 13, 1969 incidents. It was published and printed in Singapore. As it was published the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra banned the book and only in 1981 Dr. Mahathir Mohamad himself lifted the banned. Syed Hussein Alatas refuted the arguments forwarded by Senu Abdul Rahman and Mahathir Mohamad in *Siapa Yang Salah Di Sekitar Peribadi Melayu* (1972). He argued that for the centuries the Malays have been exploited economically by their feudal rulers. This, according to him, retarded the growth of the 'spirit of capitalism' among the Malays in the Malay Peninsula. For example, in the 19th century, the rural Malays were always loath to accumulate too much wealth because it invited confiscation by either the Sultans or the local chief (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1972).

On the other hand, the "spirit of capitalism" is present among the Chinese and other minority groups. This is also true among the Arab Muslims, the Indian Muslims, Benggali Muslims, and others who migrated to Malaysia (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1977). Another important factor beside the 'spirit of capitalism' is the 'immigrant ethos' that existed among the minorities mentioned above. The 'immigrant ethos' is the powerful incentive to migrate for reasons such as poverty that forced them to acquire the habits of drive and hard work.

For the Chinese, they had to struggle under conditions of hardship to acquire wealth. If they did not struggle under such condition their survival and security in the new environment would not have brought any success. Failure meant a return to seas, back to the dead-end-street of the society they had fled. The Malays, on the other hand, lived in the security of their homeland. They had not

developed in a struggling alien environment as the Chinese and other immigrants had (Mahathir Mohamad, 1970; Wan Hashim, 1983; Muhammad Haji Muhd. Taib, 1993).

Another important finding on Malay economic backwardness is that the poor Malays have been exploited by other Malays and by Chinese middlemen. The Malays peasants are exploited by the absentee landlords many of them whom are Malay government servants, politicians or businessmen. Swift (1067) in his study has noted that among the Malay peasants there is a concentration of wealth especially of the landholdings. This implies that among the Malay peasants there is a concentration of wealth in the hands of a small minority.

In the urban areas, the concentration of wealth is in the hands of Chinese millionaires and owners of big enterprises, and also the Malays from the political and bureaucratic elite who hold one or two dozen directorships in government-owned companies, statutory bodies or private firms (Wan Hashim, 1983). The rationale behind this is that there are not enough Malays of comparable caliber to hold the positions in order to be on equal terms with the Chinese.

III. SUMMARY

The preceding discussion has pointed out that there exists an inequality in the sharing of the country's wealth between the Malays and the Chinese. It seems that the Chinese are much better socially and economically in terms of the share of the country's wealth. There also exists an economic concentration in the hands of a few Chinese and a few Malays, both in the urban and in the rural sector.

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