

POLITICAL CULTURE AND COMMUNALISM IN WEST MALAYSIA

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INTRODUCTION

THE MAY 13 Tragedy¹ in 1969 has reminded us of the depth of communal distrust in West Malaysia. In a government report on this tragedy, the National Operations Council² pointed out:

The eruption of violence on May 13 was the result of an interplay of forces that comprise the country's recent history. These include a generation gap and differences in interpretation of the constitutional structure by the different races in the country, and consequently the growing political encroachment of the immigrant races against certain important provisions of the Constitution which relate to the Malay language and the position of the Malays, principally Articles 152³ and 153;⁴ the incitement, intemperate statements and provocative behaviour of certain racialist party members and supporters during the recent General Elections; the part played by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and secret societies in inciting racial feelings and suspicion; and the anxious, and later desperate, mood of the Malays with a background of Sino-Malay distrust, and recently, just after the General Elections, as a result of racial insults and threats to their future survival and well-being in their own country. [15, p. ix]

This explanation of the tragedy from the viewpoint of the Alliance government is perhaps plausible but in this article, I shall attempt to explain how these forces interacted from the point of view of the political culture and economic position of each race. This means that I shall try to explain how economic circumstances including class division are connected with the three major political cultures within the historical context of West Malaysia.

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MALAYAN POLITICS

A. *Formation of Plural Society in Malaya*

Dr. K. G. Tregonning has pointed out that "Modern Malaya begins early in

¹ The May 13 Tragedy refers to the communal disturbance mainly between the Malays and the Chinese which occurred after the May 10 general election in 1969.

² This council was organized on May 17, 1969, and was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak to control the government operations; it was dissolved on February 17, 1971, after normalization.

³ Article 152 prescribes the Malay language as the official language.

⁴ Article 153 prescribes the special position of the Malays. It includes the special privileges of the Malays in public services, scholarship and licences.

the fifteenth century, with the foundation of Malacca and the acceptance of Islam" [27, p. 1]. The Malay Empire of Malacca was founded in 1402 as part of the Hindu Empire by Iskandar Shah who fled from Palembang under the attack of the Majapahit Empire.⁵ The third ruler of the Malacca Empire converted from Hindu to Islam and was entitled as the Sultan [31, pp. 154-70]. Since then, each Malay state in the Malay peninsula is ruled by a Sultan who is also final authority concerning religious affairs of the state.

Because of its long history prior to the Malacca Sultanate, Malay society has inherited several components of animistic beliefs and Hindu culture [24], but in its principal features, we can say that Malay society is an Islamic society. In 1511 the Malacca Sultanate was conquered by the Portuguese. Later the Malay peninsula was colonized by the Dutch (1641-1824) and finally in the nineteenth century became a colony of the British Empire (1824-1957). Under British rule, new immigrant communities were added and thus emerged the plural society of Malaya.

After the British took over Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819, and Malacca in 1824, a number of the Chinese came down to these ports as laborers and small merchants. In 1833 the British abolished slavery, and the demand for free laborers increased. Around the same time there was a great deal of unrest in southern part of China as a result of the Opium War, forcing a large number of padi farmers to seek new jobs. Under these circumstances, Chinese immigrant laborers (*k'uli*) sought work in several parts of the Southeast Asian colonies. Some of these Chinese came down to Malaya where they were employed as laborers in tin mines in Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan from 1830 to 1860 [32]. By their diligence and hard work, these Chinese laborers took over Malay tin mining within thirty years and established their own clan community (*pang*) and secret societies.

Under this process, the Sultanates of the Malay society and the heads of the Chinese community (Capitan China), while sharing a common desire for political stability, also developed their own individual economic interests. This led to a rivalry between them, and during the 1860s and 1870s, civil wars broke out in the tin mining area of Perak. In 1873, the British colonial government, which ruled Penang, Malacca, and Singapore (the Straits Settlements), intervened in this civil conflict, and in 1874 concluded the Pangkor Engagement⁶ with the Sultan of Perak [17]. By this engagement, the British authorized the Sultan to be the head of the Malay religion (Islam) and the protector of their customs. At the same time the treaty opened the way for the British colonial administration to

⁵ He was the last ruler of the Srivijaya Empire and fled from Palembang to Singapore and then to Malacca. See [31, pp. 108-53].

⁶ This engagement was concluded between Andrew Clark (Governor of the Straits Settlements) and the Sultan of Perak on January 20, 1874 at Pulo (Island) Pangkor. In Article 6, it reads that "the Sultan receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advise must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom." See [3, pp. 288-90].

intervene in Perak affairs through the posting of a British Resident "whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom." By 1888, the British had concluded similar treaties with the Sultanates of Selangor (1894), Jelebu in Negri Sembilan (1887), and Pahang (1888). In 1895 these Sultanates were integrated into the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.). This meant that the British had confined the power of the Sultan to being the head of Islam and protector of Malay customs while general administration was controlled by the British Resident.

In 1891 the British introduced in Selangor the Torrens System⁷ of land tenure and then enacted a Land Code and Registration of Titles Regulation. By these regulations, land owned by the Malays was categorized as customary land while other land was allowed to be occupied by non-Malays for agricultural production. Under these circumstances, British planters began to plant coffee in Selangor and Perak but at the end of the nineteenth century they turned to planting rubber.

Rubber in Malaya was first planted in 1877 as an experiment in the Singapore Botanical Garden. By the efforts of Henry Riddley who was director of the botanical garden (first called "Mad Riddley," and later on called "Rubber Riddley"), the planters slowly realized the benefit of rubber cultivation. In 1895, Tan Chay-yan and the Kindersly brothers each started rubber plantations, and after the depression of coffee in 1896 and 1897, the Selangor Planters Association also decided to plant rubber instead of coffee. This shift from coffee to rubber was the result of several factors in addition to those mentioned above. Those include (1) the existence of the British capital accumulated by Agency Houses in London which were seeking investment opportunities, (2) the invention of the tire tube by Dunlop in 1888, and (3) the development of the auto industry in America. The new demand raised the price of rubber from one dollar and thirty cents per pound in 1900 to five dollars and fifty cents in 1910.⁸

Encouraged by this demand and high prices, rubber plantations in Malaya expanded from 50,000 acres in 1905 to 290,000 acres in 1909. Since then, rubber planted areas in Malaya continued to expand to the present date, now making the country the largest rubber producer in the world. During this process, British planters brought into Malaya, South Indians (mostly Tamil) as plantation workers [11]. These immigrants made up a new Indian community in addition to the Malay and the Chinese communities.

Thus Malaya became a typical plural society composed of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. According to the 1921 Census, the population of 2,907,000 was

⁷ The Torrens System of title insurance guarantees that the title shown is in a document maintained in a register of title. The older system maintains evidence of title in public records from which a conclusion may be drawn by an examiner. In the title registration system, the ultimate conclusion itself is registered. This system prevails on the continent and in most of the British Commonwealth countries and is expanding in England. While it has been available in about twenty states of the United States, it has failed to make headway. The system is called registration of title or Torrens title after its originator in the Anglo-American world, Sir Robert Torrens of Australia, who modeled it after the ancient ship-registry system in England [6].

⁸ Dollar is Malayan dollar. Since 1906, one Malayan dollar is two shillings and four pence.

composed of 54.0 per cent Malays, 29.4 per cent Chinese, and 15.1 per cent Indians.

The Malayan plural society was thus formed under the colonial policy of the British to confine the Malay community to Islamic religion, traditional customs, and to a subsistence economy, i.e., mainly padi farming, while bringing in Chinese and Indian immigrant laborers into Malaya for colonial development, especially for tin and rubber production.

B. *British Colonial Administration and Political Movements within Plural Society*

After the formation of the Federated Malay State, the British expanded their control to Johore and appointed a British Adviser in 1895. Then, in 1909, Britain took over from Siam by the Bangkok Treaty the control of the northern states—Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis. In 1914 these five states were combined into the Unfederated Malay States (U.M.S.) under the British Advisers. Thus the British established three types of colonial administration in Malaya—the Straits Settlements under the Governor, the F.M.S. under the Residents, and the U.M.S. under the Advisers. Under this system, the British recruited Malay elites into the Malay Administrative Service and also made use of the powers of the Sultans and Malay aristocrats for indirect rule [8] [2]. In 1927, Hugh Clifford declared that “the position of the rulers is regarded as sacrosanct by the British and that there can be no yielding to the demands of aliens for democracy even though they hold a majority” [5, pp. 174–75]. This was a reaffirmation of the agreement concluded by the Pangkor Engagement in 1874 and this view largely dominated British policy until the end of the Second World War. The British recognized the Malays as “the sons of the soil” while the Chinese and the Indians were regarded as immigrants. This typical “divide and rule” policy of the British kept the three communities isolated from each other except in the case of economic transactions.

Under such circumstances, there emerged in the beginning of this century a kind of political movement in each community.

Among the Malays, Syed Sheik Al-Hadi, who studied under the leader of Wahhāb Movement in Cairo, Sheikh Mohammed Abduh, published “Al-iman” in 1906 and provoked the reformation of the Islamic religion, pan-Islamism, and the national awakening of the Malay people [23]. This movement was followed by young Malay intellectuals who had studied at the Al-Azhar University and who sought to inspire the spirit of modernization among the Malay people. However, by the 1920s this effort had weakened considerably. In 1926, English-educated Malays organized the Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (KMS) for the economic advancement of the Malays. This movement was supported by the upper class in the Malay community. At the same time, in 1926, Malay-educated Malays organized a nationalist movement under the influence of Sukarno and worked for the economic betterment of lower class Malays and the integration of the Malay peoples in Indonesia and Malaya. This movement was formed in

the same spirit as that of the National Party of Indonesia, but was oppressed by the British and forced underground. In 1937, it was reorganized as the Kesatuan Malayu Muda (KMM) and provoked the anti-British and anti-Malay despotism. As represented by the KMS and the KMM, the political movement in the Malay society developed along two lines. One movement called for the gradual modernization of the Malay society. It drew its support mainly from the English-educated Malay elites and the upper class Malays. The other movement called for a radical change in Malayan society, and was supported mainly by Malay-educated radical Malays who were especially influenced by Indonesian nationalism. These two movements were essentially Malay movements and had little connection with the other two communities in Malaya.

After Sun Yat-sen visited Singapore in 1905, the Chinese community in Malaya formed a branch of the Chinese Revolutionary League in Singapore, followed by foundation of similar branches in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Penang [18]. These branches were later reorganized as branches of the Kuomintang and the Three Peoples' Principles (*Sanmin chui*) of Sun Yat-sen penetrated into the Chinese community. The racial identification of the Chinese living in Malaya was awakened, and Chinese as well as English education was encouraged.

Meanwhile, Chinese school teachers and laborers formed in 1927 the Nanyang Communist Party, renamed the Malayan Communist Party in 1930. Being a party founded on ideological principles, the MCP tried to recruit Malays and Indians into the All-Malayan Races Liberation League during the 1930s. However, it did not succeed in the task, and its movement remained Chinese dominated.

In this way, there existed two political movements in the Chinese community. One was the Kuomintang movement mainly supported by the economically well-off and English-educated Chinese elites, and the other a Communist movement supported mainly by the laborers and Chinese radicals educated in Chinese language. These movements also had little connection with the other races in Malaya.

The Indian community also developed several associations for the advancement of their interests—Young Men's Indian Association led by M. K. Ramachandran in 1922, the Malayan Indian Association led by G. V. Thayer in 1932, and the Central Indian Association of Malaya formed in 1936 [16]. After Nehru's visit to Malaya in 1938, the Indian community supported the independence movement in India. But the Indian community also retained its immigrant features, and while connected with the Indian nationalist movement, had little connection with the other two races in Malaya.

In this way, we can see that the political movements within each community had little connection with each other, and further that these movements resulted in strengthening the racial identity of each community.

During this period, the rubber and tin industries continued to develop while in rice farming there was little development. The rubber acreage expanded from 2,328,000 acres in 1922 to 3,464,000 acres in 1940. This acreage was divided into estates and small-holdings. According to figures in 1932 [13, p. 331],

ownership of rubber estates was broken down into Europeans (1,398,000 acres), Chinese (480,000 acres), Indians (58,000 acres), and Malays (13,000 acres). Small-holdings were divided into Malay and Chinese. This meant that there was a hierarchical pattern of ownership of rubber cultivated land according to race.

After the introduction of the dredge in 1912 by the Europeans, the tin industry was monopolized by the Europeans and the Chinese. In 1930 the European-owned dredging produced 24,700 tons and the Chinese-owned gravel-pumping produced 28,200 tons [32, p. 400].

Beyond these two modern industries, the traditional padi planting was monopolized by the Malays and acreage of the padi land did expand slightly from 725,000 acres in 1932 to 785,000 acres in 1940. This meant that under British rule, export-oriented rubber and tin industries developed while the traditional sectors remained stagnant. The economic disparity among the races enlarged.

Here we can conclude that during the first half of this century, economic disparity among the races was enlarged and at the same time each race developed its own identity through their own individual political movements. The only communication and interaction among races took place among the English-educated elites of each race as administrators and nominated councillors in the British administration. The Chinese worked as economic middlemen for the Malay padi farmers and the rubber cultivators of small-holdings, but this kind of economic activity did not develop a common will or mutually shared sense of nationhood.

C. *The Second World War and the Independence of Federation of Malaya*

On December 8, 1941, Japanese troops landed at Kota Baharu and by February 1942 had occupied Singapore. From then until Japan's surrender in August 1945, Malaya was under the Japanese military occupation. During these years, Japanese military administration oppressed the Chinese people [1, pp. 61-89], and made use of the Malay people, including imprisoned leaders of KMM, for Japanese interests. On the other hand, the Chinese-dominated MCP organized the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army to cooperate with the British in resisting the occupying forces. Because of this different experience during the Japanese occupation, the gap between the Malays and the Chinese was further widened.

The British restored a military administration in Malaya in September 1945, and in October declared the formation of a new type of administration, the Malayan Union [12, Chapter 3]. As a result of this policy the Straits Settlements (except Singapore), F.M.S., and U.M.S. were integrated into a new union which was then made a Crown Colony. It gave common citizenship to all races. This was a departure from the traditional British colonial policy in Malaya which was implied in the Pangkor Engagement in 1874 and reaffirmed by the policy declaration of Hugh Clifford in 1927. Realizing the implication of the British decision, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, a district officer in Johore, organized the Malay League of Johore to protest the transfer of powers to the Crown [10, pp. 62-99]. He opposed the endowment of citizenship to non-Malays and demanded protec-

tion of the special position of the Malays. The movement gained majority support of the Malays, and in March 1946, the League was reorganized into the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). The UMNO expanded its movement against the Malayan Union supported by ex-officers of the British colonial administration.

Compared to Malay political activity, the Chinese and the Indians showed little response to the Malayan Union and only Tan Cheng Lock, one of the leaders of the Chinese community, supported the Union [25, pp. 34-61]. Under these circumstances, the British abandoned the Union and established the Federation of Malaya in February 1948. The new Federation was composed of eleven states, nine of which were Sultanate states, and was based on the principles of limitation of the endowment of citizenship to the non-Malays and the protection of the Sultanate system and the special position of the Malays. In reaction to this, a number of non-Malays organized the All-Malayan Council of Joint Action to protest the new Federation and were joined by the Malays of Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat—an anti-Imperialist and pro-Indonesian organization. However the Council gained little support and so its efforts were not far-reaching.

In June 1948, the Malayan Communist Party began anti-British military actions along the strategy outlined by the International Communism Asian Youth Conference at Calcutta. The British colonial government immediately declared a state of emergency, and took military actions against the MCP. It required twelve years to suppress the military movement of the MCP, at a cost of 1,700 million dollars and 11,000 victims.

In the meantime, the political consciousness for independence emerged among the upper classes of each community, and as indicated below, finally led to the formation of the Alliance Party in 1955 and the Independence in 1957.

The MCP was composed mainly of the Chinese, and thus the British and Malays were a little suspicious of the Chinese since it was felt that their sentiments were favorable to Communism. Because of this environment, the "have" classes of the Chinese felt the necessity to organize their own association to differentiate themselves from Communist ideology. Thus in 1949 the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was formed under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock. The success of the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 resulted in the settling down in Malaya of many Chinese who mainly supported the MCA. In 1952, facing the election of Kuala Lumpur municipality, the UMNO and MCA joined together and won nine out of eleven seats. The other two seats were taken by the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and an independent member. The IMP was formed in 1952 by Dato Onn bin Ja'afar after his idea to open the membership of UMNO to non-Malays was rejected. After the election, since he could not win support of non-Malays he dissolved IMP and organized Party Negara, advocating the communal interest of the Malays. The path of Dato Onn from UMNO to IMP and then to Party Negara has symbolized the difficulties of communal politics in Malaya.

After the Kuala Lumpur municipality election in 1952, the UMNO-MCA coalition fought several local elections in 1952 and 1953 and won a total of

ninety-four seats out of a possible one hundred twenty-four. Based on these victories, the UMNO-MCA coalition formed the Alliance Party joining with the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). The MIC was formed by Indian elites in 1946 in order to protect the interests of the Indian community. In 1955, the Alliance Party won the Federal Legislative Council election by obtaining fifty-one of the fifty-two seats.

The Alliance Party represented the common interest of the upper class and English-educated elites of each community. But at the same time internal differences over policies and the selection of electoral candidates indicated that the communal conflict of interests were also part of the internal politics of the party. Thus while the UMNO maintained their dominance, the MCA worked hard to increase its bargaining role in the affairs of the party. In the 1955 election, the UMNO nominated thirty-five candidates (thirty-four winning election) compared to fifteen MCA candidates (all of whom won election). In spite of this internal competition, the landslide victory of the Alliance paved the way for the Independence led by the party in 1957.

The sole opposition member to win a seat in the 1955 election was a member of the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP). The PMIP was formed in 1955 to advocate an Islamic state in Malaya and was supported by the Malay-educated Malays, who were mainly religious teachers and padi farmers in the states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and Perak. They have been little influenced by the West and sought to maintain the traditional way of the Malays and the Islamic religion.

In August 1957, the Federation of Malaya achieved independence from the British and formed a new government led by the Alliance Party under the premiership of Tengku Abdul Rahman who had been the president of the UMNO since 1952 and president of the Alliance since 1955. The Constitution of the Federation ensured that the religion of the state was Islam, that the Malay language would be the sole official language within ten years (in 1967), and that the special position of the Malays should be protected. These principles were the result of the compromise among UMNO, MCA, and MIC.

The Alliance government implemented the First Five-year Plan beginning in 1956, aiming at agricultural and rural development for the Malays. In August 1959, the first election of the House of Representatives was held. The Alliance won seventy-four out of one hundred and four seats. The main opposition parties were the PMIP with thirteen seats, the Socialist Front (SF) with eight seats, and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) with four seats. At the state level, the PMIP won a majority in the state legislative assembly of Kelantan and Trengganu. In Kelantan, the PMIP has been running the state government up to the present. But, in Trengganu, the Alliance took over the PMIP government in the next election held in 1964.

The newly emerged SF opposition party was formed by the coalition of the Parti Rakyat (PR) and the Labor Party of Malaya (LPM) in 1958. The Parti Rakyat is a Malay political organization formed in 1956 and led by Ahmad

Boestamam⁹ which advocated the abolishment of colonialism and Malay despotism. It drew its support from radical intellectuals and farmers. The LPM is a non-Malay political organization formed in 1952 which advocated the establishment of a democratic society in Malaya. It was supported by middle and lower ranking public servants. Social ideals and a common interest in the same classes of each community made it possible to form the SF, but it was not so easy to overcome the communal sentiments within the Front and so it split in 1966.

The PPP, formed in 1953, was a non-Malay local organization in Perak, led by the Seenivasagam brothers.¹⁰ It called for an equality between Malays and non-Malays—in language, citizenship, and education.

Referring to the results of the 1959 election, we can say that Malayan politics was composed mainly of rivalries among the Alliance, the PMIP, and the SF. This meant that the upper class of each community supported the Alliance while the lower class of the non-Malay community supported the SF. The PMIP was supported by some portion of the Malays.

D. *Formation of Malaysia and Thereafter*

The British declared that the state of emergency, which had lasted twelve years, was to be officially over in 1960. By that time the influence of the MCP had decreased within the Malayan political scene. But when Singapore became a dominion in 1959, the activities of the Communist-influenced trade unions had increased. Under this situation, in May 1961, Tengku Abdul Rahman proposed the formation of Malaysia, integrating the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, British North Borneo, Brunei, and Sarawak into one nation. After two years of twists and turns the new federation emerged in September 1963, without Brunei which remained under the British protection [9]. But, within two years, the State of Singapore separated from the federation and became independent Republic of Singapore in August 1965 [7]. This development makes it possible to interpret the formation of Malaysia as the result of anti-Communism policy shared by the Alliance, the People's Action Party (PAP), and the British Government. In another words, "it aims at creating a rural landowning class and an urban capitalist class, which together with the bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, teachers and other professional men, will form the backbone of a loyal and conservative middle class. This is expected to be the answer to the revolutionary movements of Indonesia, whether nationalist or communist" [30, p. 21]. But, in spite of the shared interest of anti-Communism, ideas concerning nation-building held by the central Alliance government and the PAP government of the State of Singapore were different. The former intended to pursue previous pro-Malay policies while the latter claimed equality of all the races. In a situa-

⁹ Born November 30, 1920, he is a journalist, a founding member in 1945 of the Malay Nationalist Party, the leader of the Parti Rakyat in 1955, and chairman of the Socialist Front.

¹⁰ These two brothers were born in Ipoh. Both of them are advocates and solicitors and were the founders of the PPP.

tion where there existed economic disparity among the races, relative advantage was given to the Chinese. This might have contributed to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.

During these two years, a general election was held in West Malaysia in April 1964 [21]. Facing the Confrontation Policy of Sukarno, the Alliance fought the election asking the populace for loyalty to the new nation of Malaysia, and won the election getting eighty-nine out of one hundred and four seats. The PMIP and SF obtained only nine and two seats respectively. The PAP, which also contested a number of seats for the first time, obtained only one in spite of running eleven candidates. The result permitted the Alliance government to take a firm stand on internal affairs as well as against the Confrontation Policy of Sukarno.

By 1966, the Alliance government had overcome two major crises—separation of Singapore and the Confrontation. It launched the First Malaysia Plan in 1966 in order to reduce economic disparity both among the races and the regions of Malaysia. But, in spite of the efforts of the Alliance government, the plan achieved limited success because of the decline of the prices of rubber and tin. Thus, the economic situation of Malaya was not very bright during this period and there was an increase in unemployment. Also, in September 1967, the Malay language became the official language and thus the discontent among the non-Malays deepened.

The general election of May 1969 was held in this atmosphere of tension [22, pp. 203–26] [29]. As a result of the election, the Alliance Party's representation decreased from eighty-nine to sixty-six. The main sufferer was the MCA whose representation decreased from twenty-seven to thirteen. In contrast, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the successor of the PAP, increased its representation from one to thirteen and PPP, from two to four. Also a new party, Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (GRM)¹¹ won eight seats. This meant that the support of the non-Malays, especially that of the Chinese, had shifted from the MCA to the DAP, PPP, and the GRM.

Unfortunately, after this election, the racial disturbance broke out in Kuala Lumpur mainly between the Malays and the Chinese. This has come to be called the May 13 Tragedy and claimed several victims from all the races. Following the disturbance, the Parliament was suspended and the country was placed under the control of the National Operations Council (NOC), led by the deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak in order to settle the disturbance. The government under the NOC began to implement new economic policies: government intervention in the industrial development; industrialization in the rural areas; and discharge of non-citizens within two years [14].

¹¹ GRM was formed in 1968 by former members of the United Democratic Party and the Labor Party of Malaya, and by intellectuals to promote racial harmony. Internal conflict after the election of May 10, 1969, caused it to split in August 1971. The principal member of this Party is Lim Chong-ya, who was the president of the United Democratic Party and now the Chief Minister of State of Penang.

Tun Razak took over the premiership in succession to Tengku Abdul Rahman in September 1970. On August 31, 1970, in a speech on Independence Day, the King exhorted the nation that (1) belief in God, (2) loyalty to the King and country, (3) support of the Constitution, (4) sovereignty of law, and (5) good behavior and morality should be the *Rukunegara* (national ideology).¹² In March 1971, the resumed parliament approved an amendment to the Constitution, with one hundred and twenty-five in favor, and seventeen in opposition coming from DAP and PPP members. This amendment prohibits the criticism of (1) the status of the Sultan, (2) Islam as the state religion, (3) the Malay language as the official language, (4) the special position of the Malays, and (5) citizenship regulations.

Recent political events since the May 13 Tragedy indicate that the Alliance government is pursuing firmly the policy of Malay-oriented nation-building with a pro-Malay economic policy, expecting the adjustment by the non-Malays. In the following sections, I would like to examine the meaning and perspective of this policy within the context of economic disparity and the political culture of each race.¹³

II. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

From the composition of the gross national product in 1970, it is apparent that the Malaysian economy still depends on primary products—mainly rubber, tin, rice, and timber—which account for 36.6 per cent of the G.N.P. The manufacturing industry which had been encouraged since the independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1957 accounts only for 12 per cent of the G.N.P. The remainder was accounted for by the tertiary industry.

Looking at ownership and control of each industry, it is possible to estimate the economic situation of each race. In the rubber sector, the 4,335,000 acres of rubber lands of West Malaysia in 1970 were divided into estates (38.7 per cent) and small-holdings (61.3 per cent). The shares of the acreage between the estates and small-holdings reversed during the last ten years as many European estates have been sold mainly to the Chinese. Roughly speaking, the Europeans and the Chinese each owned about 50 per cent of the estates while the small-holdings were evenly shared by the Chinese and the Malays. The average holdings of the European estates, the Chinese estates, the Chinese small-holdings and the Malay small-holdings are 2,500 acres, 500 acres, 15 acres and 5 acres respectively. From these figures, we can see a kind of hierarchical system of ownership by race with the Europeans on top, and then Chinese, followed by the Malays. Also rubber replanting policy has been more favorable to the estate owners than to holders of very small plots, most of whom are Malays. Because the lives of these small-holders depend on these small acres of rubber land, they have not

¹² The former Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman uttered these five principles of *Rukunegara* in his farewell speech on August 30, 1970. The next day, the King gave this statement [26, Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, 1971].

¹³ Concerning the political process of Malay, see [20] and [28].

been able to apply for replanting while they also have had no opportunities of gaining cash income other than from rubber planting. Also, it should be noted that the marketing of rubber is handled mainly by the Europeans and the Chinese.

Concerning tin, this industry is monopolized by the Europeans and the Chinese who have shared its profits during the last half a century.

Rice farming has been monopolized by the Malays for the last several centuries. However, the colonial government gave little attention to the development of padi agriculture. The Alliance government has been making efforts to encourage its development with the construction of irrigation and drainage, and also with several kinds of financial and technical assistance. A landlord-tenant system of land ownership prevails in the main padi areas and according to figures of the 1960 Agricultural Census, the average acreage of padi farms was around 4 acres. The annual income per acre of padi land is around one fourth of that of rubber.¹⁴ Also, the marketing of rice is under the control of the Chinese as rice-millers. It should be added that during war time, the Japanese military administration forced the Chinese to plant rice and now there are some Chinese padi farmers, especially in Tanjong Karang of Selangor.

The Alliance government's industrialization policy has encouraged the establishment of pioneer firms by private (local and foreign) capital. Because of this policy, most of the newly formed pioneer companies are owned by Chinese and foreign capitalists. In the face of this situation, after the May 13 Tragedy, the government began to intervene in the industrialization program for the sake of promoting Malay participation in this sector.

A large portion of government employees have been Malays. Traditionally, the ruling elite of the Sultanate system was comprised of the royal family, nobles and territorial chiefs. During the British period, Malay elites were recruited as the second rank officers by the Malay Administrative Service. The Chinese remained as immigrants with little connection with the government until the end of the war. After the war, the Chinese settled in Malaya and entered the civil service. As the result, there are now many Chinese government officers. However, the quota system in the public service protecting the special position of Malays has been observed with a large portion of government offices left for the Malays. Nevertheless, it can be added that there is a fairly large number of Chinese officers in Division I¹⁵ of the civil service when compared to Malay officers of the same rank [14, pp. 22-23].

Finally, the commerce and trading sectors have been monopolized by the Europeans and the Chinese. Of course, in the rural areas, there are many Malay shopkeepers, but the scale of their business is comparably smaller than that of the Chinese.

In conclusion it can be said that the Malays are mainly rice farmers and owners

¹⁴ This comparison was based on the figures in [4, p. 116].

¹⁵ Malaysian civil servants are classified into four divisions, with Division I representing the top-rank officers.

of rubber small-holdings while upper class Malays are traditional ruling elites and senior government officers and landlords. The Chinese have been engaging in every kind of profession and have attained a considerable amount of wealth, but within the community a class division has developed while clan ties are gradually dissolving. As a community, the Chinese are richer than the Malays. Many Indians are rubber plantation workers, railway men, and road construction workers while their elites are senior government officers and members of particular professions.

III. POLITICAL CULTURE

The term political culture is a rather new and ambiguous concept of comparative political studies which has developed during the last two decades in the United States. According to one definition, "the political culture of a society consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place" [19, p. 513]. In this section, I would like to delineate the basic value orientations of each race which are relevant to political actions, especially in terms of class division.

The Malays have constructed their Islamic community during the last several centuries after the Malacca Sultanate. Under the British colonial control, the authority of Sultan was confined to that as the head of the Islamic religion and the protector of the Malay customs. Because of this historical background, the basic value orientations of the Malays are based on Islam and loyalty to the Sultan. These orientations are well preserved among the rural Malays and religious leaders, and crystallized into the political action of the PMIP. In the twentieth century, there emerged the English-educated Malays who rose up as government officers in the British colonial administration. They understood the backwardness of the Malays and organized the KMS in the 1920s, and the UMNO after the war. Because of the hierarchical nature of the Malay community, they became the new elites, as opposed to the traditional elites who are nobles and chiefs. They have been bred and trained under the British, and after the war came into politics after serving as senior government officers. Basically, they have retained the value orientations of the Malay community, while also being influenced by modern ideas gained through British education. In addition, they are able to compete with the other races through their political power. Many Malays know their weak position in relation to the Chinese and so have placed their hopes for the future in the hands of these new elites.

Considering the nature of plural society and the necessity of modernization, the political action of the UMNO is most relevant to the real situation of contemporary Malaya, and so they have received a great deal of support among the Malays. But, after the May 13 Tragedy, the UMNO-controlled government pushed forward the pro-Malay policy to strengthen the Malay identity. Since then, the UMNO and the PMIP seem to have become the twins of Malay

politics.¹⁶ This means that the former has come to depend more on the basic value orientations of the Malay community while the latter has tried to accept the fundamental ideas of modernization. This is possible because, in spite of the economic disparity among them, Malays as a group are quite conscious of other races. And so the social dynamics in the Malay community are working towards unity rather than separation along the class division. In this situation, Islam and the loyalty to the Sultan play a crucial role as the basis for unity.

However, it must be added that there are minority groups within Malay society which subscribe to socialist ideas. They have articulated their views through the KMM and Parti Rakyat, since renamed Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia. These movements were originally led by intellectuals who tried to connect the idea of equality in the Islamic religion with modern socialist theory. But, Malaysian Islam was too conservative to accommodate such ideas. In addition, socialist ideology in the historical context of Malaya has been advocated mainly by non-Malays. Thus, the movement has not received much support from the Malays. In 1957, the Parti Rakyat cooperated with the Labor Party of Malaya to form the Socialist Front, but the Front did not work well and split within ten years in 1966. This meant that deep communal sentiments penetrated into the movement of the Socialist Front, and neither the parties nor the socialist ideology could bridge the gap.

The Chinese came down to Malaya in large numbers during the last century as immigrant laborers, and constructed a society based on family and regional ties. They observed traditional Chinese religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—in which ancestor worship plays a central role. Such backgrounds contributed to the tendency among the Chinese immigrants to work hard and to improve the economic status of their families through hard work. In the early days of immigration, the expectation to return to China provided an added incentive to accumulate wealth. However, only a small proportion did return to China. Today a major proportion of the present Chinese population in Malaysia were born in Malaya. The ethic of ancestor worship still continues to be important while upward mobility in the society is mainly through economic achievement. These values form the core of the political actions of the MCA, the leaders of the MCA being mainly the wealthy and English-educated Chinese. The MCA leaders have continually sought a compromise with the UMNO leaders in order to protect their vested interests.

However, there are also countervailing forces at work in Chinese society. As has already been pointed out in the first section, the Kuomintang and the Communist movements were led and supported mainly by the Chinese. The former movement awakened Chinese national identity and the Chinese supported this

¹⁶ It was indicated after the talks between Tun Razak and Datuk Asri on September 5, 1972, that the Alliance and PAS (PMIP changed its name to Partai Islam in June 1971) have agreed to form coalition governments at the state and federal levels [26, Sept. 6, 1972].

movement through monetary contribution as well as direct participation. The Communist movement in Malaya has been dominated by the Chinese and its support followed the class division existing in Chinese society in Malaya. Thus, its membership consists mainly of Chinese laborers and farmers. After the war, the MCP fought a guerrilla war against the British colonial government for several years and is now still active in the jungles on the Malaysian border with Thailand.

The socialist movement, as distinct from Communism, developed as a Chinese-led movement after the war and the LPM and the present DAP are the leading political parties representing the socialist ideology. The acceptance of the Communist and socialist ideologies by the Chinese is an indication that the Chinese have been secularized and modernized, and that they perceive the class division of the society.

From the above observations, it becomes clear that the Chinese have kept the basic value orientation of ancestor worship, the family and regional ties, and the upward mobility through economic success. Also it can be perceived that their political support has followed class divisions. The upper and middle class Chinese supported the MCA while laborers supported the socialist or the Communist movement. As a reflection of the class division, the upper class Chinese in grasp of the political leadership in the MCA have been trying to compromise with the Malay elites to protect their class interest. On the other hand, working class Chinese have shown their displeasure against such efforts by shifting their political support to the DAP.

Indian society is also divided according to class lines. The upper class comprising professionals and traders organized the MIC in an effort to protect their class interests through participation in the Alliance. The majority of the Indian population are the rubber plantation and construction workers who protect their interests by forming trade unions. To a certain extent, they have cooperated with Chinese laborers by supporting the DAP. But, as a group, Indians form only a small portion of the whole population. Considering that Indian laborers retain most of their immigrant features, their influence on Malayan politics is rather limited.

In conclusion, it can be said that Malayan politics revolves around communalism and class struggle within each community as well as within the society embracing such communities. While the polity as a whole can be seen as being divided into communal groups, each community has its own internal divisions according to class lines. The class division is more marked in the Chinese and Indian communities than in the Malay community.

However, among the upper class as a whole, there is a unity of interest and a tendency for the non-Malay elites to seek a compromise with the Malays in political power in order to protect their own interests. The conservatism of the non-Malay upper class and their accommodating attitude towards Malay interests and demands is interpreted by the non-Malay working class as a sign of Malay domination. As a result, their radicalism along class lines tends also to be anti-

Malay in orientation. And this interrelationship between these two forces—communalism and class struggle—is the fundamental feature making for the complexity of Malayan politics.

CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVE

In this article, I have tried to trace the historical background of the communalism in the Malayan politics. I have indicated that (1) the core of the Malay society was formed in the period of the Malacca Sultanate and was reinforced by the British colonialism; (2) the plural society in Malaya was also shaped by British colonialism; (3) each community in the plural society kept its identity through the "divide and rule" policy of the British and the communal political movements; and (4) after the war, Malayan politics revolved around communal conflicts and the class struggle.

The May 13 Tragedy was an incident where the class struggle was fought as a communal conflict in the Malayan political context. Because of this, Prime Minister Tun Razak has been trying to reinforce the unity of the Malay society by a national ideology (*Rukunegara*) as well as by the new economic policy for the Malays. As a sober and firm statesman, he will continue this policy and will expect the non-Malays to compromise as much as possible. However, because of the class division and the anti-Malay feelings of the non-Malay laborers, it is not so easy for him to gain support for this policy.

Malaysian politics in the foreseeable future will thus continue to move round the interplay of the communal interests and the class struggle.

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