

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, POLITICS AND HEALTHCARE IN MALAYSIA

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This special issue of *Kajian Malaysia* is concerned with "Community, identity, politics and healthcare" with a focus on Malaysia. It consists of 11 refereed articles, 7 of which were originally presented at the 7th International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC7) organised by the Malaysian Studies Association at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang in March 2010 while the other 4, though presented elsewhere, have also been included because of their relevance to the overall theme. The three sub-themes of this special issue, while seemingly unconnected, maybe linked to each other through both direct and indirect ways. Community and identity, as analytical constructs and empirical realities, are both of analytical value as well as of practical significance. As analytical constructs and empirical reality, both have become important foci of study and analysis. The community—be they a fishing community, an indigenous community, or other types of small-scale groups of people bound together by shared history, identity and interests including attachment to a locality—is often a site of struggle between the local with multifarious forces, including the various arms of the state and other vested interests. It is at the level of the community that we are able to capture processes of change, such as social mobility, as well as processes of empowerment and stakeholder participation in managing or controlling their lives including their environment.

Besides capturing the processes of change, the community is also a site to observe the dynamics unfolding at the local level where identity, namely collective identity, is manifested and asserted. Communities have identities that are historically constituted and socially constructed, being formed through processes of individuation or assertion of difference. Diversity and difference that have become more accentuated or pronounced under the impact of globalisation provide elements to engender a greater sense of conscientisation among members of the community about their place in the whole scheme of things. The idea of community and identity too may conjure up imagination of collective memories and symbols that may serve as a means of connecting and mobilising people,

making them identify with each other, as well as differentiating themselves from the so-called Others. The same sense of community and identity may propel a group of people to act together as a collective to fight for a common goal through the vehicles of political parties, civil society organisations or other means.

This brings us to the question of politics, both procedural as well as cultural. Politics is about contestations for power by the actors with the state, as well as for power and influence within society. Ethnicity, ethnic identity and politics are closely intertwined especially in a multiethnic country such as Malaysia. To participate in national or mainstream politics, political parties often depend on grassroots support from ethnic, religious or cultural organisations for local mobilisation and voting alignments in any electoral process. At the same time, political struggles also take place in overtly non-political realm, viz. through forms of popular culture such as music, cinema, plays, video clips, cartoons and caricatures, and other genres of artistic expressions. Popular culture in this way lends itself into an important site of struggle, and such struggles and contestations are termed as cultural politics. As can be seen in a number of countries including Malaysia, for political struggles to be effective, political actors have combined both procedural politics as well as cultural politics to further their political ambitions.

It should be emphasised that both procedural and cultural politics are important within any political system particularly in a democracy and a political system that allows both centralisation and devolution of political power and control. A federal system such as the one practiced in Malaysia is regarded as an acceptable political model in a modern democracy because it is supposed to accommodate diversity, democracy and distribution of power not only between the federal and provincial governments, but also because it is supposed to empower the citizenry to make decisions through the ballot box regarding who should have the legitimacy to govern. However, federalism from time to time comes under pressure, contestations and tension, especially if there is a tendency by the ruling elite to concentrate power at the centre and to limit, and even negate the rights and wishes of constituent states and the citizenry for greater democracy and meaningful citizen participation.

In engaging with the challenges of globalisation namely economic liberalisation, the continuous practice of unpopular and non-competitive affirmative action policy not only has resulted in increased income disparity but it also leads to both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic resentments in Malaysia. Ethnic resentments are not only caused by lopsided economic policies and unfair practices, but also due to contestations in the fields of politics, culture and religion. To mitigate this problem, one of the important ways is through wealth creation and a more equitable distribution of wealth and through handling with great sensitivity the

related non-economic issues. For this purpose, while the role of the state is important, joint efforts from individual entrepreneurs or business people of different ethnic groups are necessary to close the divide.

Besides the above, one of the main concerns of modern citizenry is healthcare, a public good which the state should serve as the principal provider. It is important that the state despite pressures of liberalisation, continues to assume the overriding responsibility in providing quality healthcare for the public, while private service providers should play a complementary role. While recognising the heavy investment the private sector has to make to run the healthcare industry, the latter needs to be properly regulated so that it does not only serve the cash-rich or the well-to-do but also gives due considerations to those without sufficient financial means.

GLOBALISATION, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MEMORIES

The above are some of the ideas and issues that form the cornerstone of the debate in this volume. This special issue opens with Abdul Rahman's article that takes a wide-ranging view and perspective with regard to the lively debate on the question of culture, identity and globalisation. Entitled *The question of culture, identity and globalisation: An unending debate*, the article argues that cultural identity is at the essence of contemporary imagination just as much as globalisation and its consequences. Taking note that this field of study is not only vast and fertile, but also challenging conceptually, methodologically, theoretically and empirically, the article suggests that scholars not only have to be empirically grounded but, very importantly, they need to have a good grasp of theory and the theoretical debates. On the subject of globalisation and identity, while scholars and students should be familiar with the various contending schools of thought, they need to adopt a critical attitude to interrogate the concepts and theories and try to see beyond them. The article argues further that we need to look out for and capture not only those processes and conditions that can readily be explained in terms of homogenisation, heterogenisation or even hybridisation as commonly found in the globalisation literature, but also to extend and deepen our imagination to capture the unpredictable and the unexpected consequences of globalisation. By doing this, the article suggests, we will allow ourselves greater leeway and agility in our research and analysis that will enrich our corpus of knowledge of societies and communities namely their culture and identity, two elements which have become the infinite source for the contemporary imagination in this highly globalised world.

Rahman's article is followed by two articles on Orang Asli. The first article is by Lye Tuck-Po, entitled *A history of Orang Asli studies: Landmarks and generations*, and the second article by Rusalina Idrus, entitled *The discourse of protection and the Orang Asli in Malaysia*. The first section of the volume ends with Ngo Sheau Shi's article *The Shaw Brothers' Wuxia pian: An early identity and business-cultural connection for the Chinese in Malaya*.

Lye Tuck-Po's paper is a comprehensive albeit brief survey of the literatures on the subject of the Orang Asli, focusing on 204 literatures on the Orang Asli dating back from as early as the British Malaya in 1874 to the present. The article shows that researchers with different backgrounds and skills have recorded the history and memories of the Orang Asli with different perceptions and by using different approaches. During this long period, one can notice changes in focus and interests of studies by different generations of researchers. The earliest records of Orang Asli were mainly in the forms of artefacts collected by British visitors. A new systematic style of writing began in the late 19th century by professionally trained researchers that marked the beginning of the classification of the studies of Orang Asli according to history, ethnography and linguistics. At this point in time, journals and dictionaries concerning Orang Asli were published. Moving forward into the 20th century, a few landmark studies were carried out by foreign professional researchers that have positive impacts on the Orang Asli community. In the 1960s and 1970s, home-grown studies by local students on the Orang Asli began to emerge, with their focus on newer themes such as law, tourism, education, Islamisation and development. In the past 30 years, a new generation of researchers, including those from the Orang Asli themselves, have undertaken ethnographic study mainly on the consequences of development that have encroached into their livelihood. Lye herself belongs to this generation who works on the environmental and developmental issues and Orang Asli.

After the survey of the literature on the Orang Asli, the following article focuses on the issue of laws that have effectively made the Orang Asli as wards of the state. It has been argued that globalisation has created winners and losers, and among them are communities such as the Orang Asli in Malaysia who are still struggling with the issue of underdevelopment. Rusalina's paper argues that "the Orang Asli are trapped between a protectionist law that positions them as wards of the state with limited autonomy, rights, and control over their resources, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the post-independence policy of hyper-development, under which they are deemed to be failed subjects. The Orang Asli's perceived failure to fit into the majority's model of development feeds into a vicious cycle, which reinforces the idea of the Orang Asli as needing guidance and protection and, thus, further entrenches their position as wards of the state." The Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954, which was supposed to protect the Orang Asli

has instead made them powerless, with the powerful state dictating almost every aspect of their life, from the colonial period until today. Using a historical approach, the author examines the formulation of the Act over time. At the outset, from a romantic perspective, British administrators treated the Orang Asli as subject for scientific inquiries and perceived them as so-called "noble savages" who needed protection from the negative impact of culture contact and capitalist expansion into their area. However, the Orang Asli turned to become subject of security during the Emergency Period, 1948–1960, to protect them from communist infiltration. This protection system for the Orang Asli led to the formulation of the Act. However, as shown above, this Act has also been seen as a stumbling block to the further development of the Orang Asli's socio-economic status. In the 1970s and 1980s, Islamisation of the Orang Asli has become a main concern as the Department of Orang Asli Development failed to protect the rights of the Orang Asli. The Act also failed to protect them from disadvantages during the modernization period of the 1990s. The paternalistic view adopted by the state prevents them from understanding the way of life of the Orang Asli; in fact, the Orang Asli is often blamed for failing to change if they cannot meet the expectations of the state.

Now we turn to a different community, the Chinese community in Malaya and then Malaysia. Sheau Shi's paper approaches the study of Chinese immigrants identity in Malaya and later Malaysian Chinese by examining the role of *Wuxia pian* (martial arts films) produced by the Shaw Brothers' films. The paper describes the entrepreneurial spirit of the Shaw Brothers who expended their cinema enterprise from Shanghai to Hong Kong and also to Malaya. They spotted the niche for silent film industry, especially in the rural area of Malaya to meet the needs and demands of Chinese immigrants in the then growing economy in British Malaya who were detached from their homeland culture and tradition. The type of silent martial arts films produced by the Shaw Brothers were significant entertainment for the majority of illiterate Chinese immigrants. These films serve to unite them as they generally speak different dialects. There were mutual influences over the type of film production as film companies responded to the choice of the Chinese immigrants. As such, the films were purposely produced to bring forth familiar images of ancient China, Chinese traditional patriarchal values, and morality. These do not only bring comfort to Chinese immigrants but also serve as a bonding agent that tie them close to their homeland. Unconsciously, all these elements help to construct the cultural identity of the Chinese immigrants and later Malaysian Chinese. Moreover, *Wuxia pian* also carry a symbol of "Chineseness" that is trans-regional and also trans-national.

COASTAL COMMUNITY, MOBILITY AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION

Two articles in this volume engage directly with issues related to the coastal community, one in Kuala Terengganu on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, while the other in Langkawi Island, on the north western part of the Peninsula. While both focus on the fishing community and its empowerment, the questions investigated and discussed are rather different. The article by Nor Hayati Sa'at entitled *Social mobility among the coastal community: A case study in Kuala Terengganu* shows that the coastal community is far from being homogenous. While the majority still consists of the fishing community, there are other groups such as labourers, shopkeepers, teachers, government officers and others too. The article shows that while the fishing industry is very important to provide food for the society, the fishing community is dwindling as more and more of the younger generation have set their sights and ambitions elsewhere, thanks to the opportunities that have been opened up for them. This article addresses the issue of social mobility within the community, namely the factors that serve as the driving force propelling the community, and the outcome, namely the emerging stratification. It argues that social mobility is a process of change or movement involving an individual or a group of people from one position to another, involving either mobility between generations or within generation. This article maintains that no one single factor can fully explain social mobility, thus a multicausal or multifactor approach is necessary. The study on the coastal community in Kuala Terengganu involves a survey of 300 heads of households as well as interviews and observation. Based on an analysis of four generations of the fisher folk (the respondent, his father and grandfather, as well as the respondent's children), the article shows that a major transformation has taken place in this coastal community. It shows that the community is dynamic, as mobility has taken place along four different patterns. For upward inter-generational social mobility, a combination of contributory factors namely education has been instrumental. Nevertheless, education alone while necessary is not a sufficient condition to enable the members of the community to effect change. It also requires economic and sociocultural factors, and the important role of the state in planning and implementing development programmes and projects.

The other article on the fishing community is entitled *Engaging the local community in participatory resource management through learning: The experience from Langkawi Island, Malaysia* by Sharina Abdul Halim et al. which addresses the vexing question of natural resource conservation through local community participation. Raising the fundamental question of how we should conduct the preservation of natural areas—whether through the so-called pristine approach of the early environmentalism that calls for the eviction of resident communities, or by adopting a new paradigm that involves local community

participation in sustainable resource management—the authors show that by adopting the latter approach, we can ensure sustainable conservation of the ecosystem and at the same time, ensure the livelihood of the community to flourish, thus ensuring social justice. However, to ensure effective local community participation, their understanding, attitudes, consciousness and behaviour have to be raised, and this has to be done through what the authors call "transformative learning." The article explores the ways in which involving and engaging local fisher folks and responsible agencies of Langkawi Island in the north of Peninsular Malaysia, have proven to be beneficial in terms of encouraging the process of transformative learning (reflection, awareness and action). The article shows that the local fishing community has been working together with local authorities to manage natural resources, ensuring carrying capacity of the area and improving the socio-economic conditions of the local community. These activities are in-line with the geopark components and have the potential to strike a balance between conservation and development. This study argues that through active local participation in resource management, it would allow the people to learn and such learning outcomes can lead to concrete actions on the ground to ensure sustainable development.

ETHNICITY, POLITICS AND HEALTHCARE

Five articles address the question of ethnicity, politics, culture and healthcare in different ways and from different persuasions. The first article is by Chin Yee Whah, entitled *Towards inter-ethnic business development and national unity in Malaysia* which attempts to capture changes in the business communities, notably a shift from the practice of intra-ethnic business partnership in pre-NEP (New Economic Policy) and NEP eras to inter-ethnic business partnership in post-NEP era. The paper argues that inter-ethnic partnership is an important platform for everyday socioeconomic interaction, sharing of knowledge, collective wealth creation and wealth distribution across different ethnic groups amongst the middle class in Malaysia. Investigating Chinese-Bumiputera partnerships in small and medium enterprises, particularly in the manufacturing sector, in the economic liberalisation of post-NEP Malaysia, the paper shows how and why Chinese-Bumiputera partnerships in the construction sector have succeeded. In a way, this new development could help to reduce income inequality within intra-ethnic groups and across inter-ethnic groups. The paper provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the argument, and theorises that inter-ethnic business partnership can serve as a model for national unity, especially at the middle level. The development of this model is timely in the context of the implementation of the New Economic Model that emphasises, among other, inclusiveness, equitable access and higher income.

The joint paper by Arnold Puyok and Tony Paridi Bagang entitled *Ethnicity, culture and indigenous leadership in modern politics: The case of the Kadazandusun in Sabah, East Malaysia* deals with politics proper, that is, by addressing Sabah politics, highlighting that ethnic identity, cultural unity/"disunity" and the Huguan Siou leadership as three major internal factors that have shaped and are reshaping the Kadazandusun politics in Sabah, alongside an external factor, the entry of Peninsular-based communal party politics. The article argues that Sabahans, especially the Kadazandusun, the largest ethnic group in Sabah place a very strong emphasis on their distinct ethnic identity, an issue that has been used as a means to achieve political gain by some political elites, which remain a crucial component in the political survival of the Kadazandusuns. The issue of ethnic identity is clearly related to conflicts between political elites and their involvement with distinct cultural associations. Joseph Pairin Kitingan was president of the Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) and Mark Koding was president of the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA), and each leader has distinctive emphasis on the term "Kadazan" and "Dusun" to represent the largest indigenous people of Sabah. Pairin being the Huguan Siou (Paramount Leader) has extraordinary power and is regarded as a warrior by the Kadazandusuns and managed to gain support for himself and he changed the name of KCA to KDCA (Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association), a new ethnic label, to include the Dusun ethnic as one big "family" of the Kadazandusuns to further garner support for his party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS). PBS has won successive state elections in 1985, 1986, 1990 and 1994. However, PBS lost its Chinese and Muslim support since the mid 1990s due to the entry of the Peninsular-based political parties, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) that encouraged communal politics. Moreover, PBS also lost its Kadazandusun support to two other Kadazandusun-based parties, the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO) and Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS). Though a political divide exists at the elite level, the grassroots Kadazandusun remain united, especially during festive seasons. They perceive the disunity among the Kadazandusun as caused by the lack of unity among the political elites.

Ooi Kee Beng's paper, *Towards a federalism that suits Malaysia's diversity* contends that a heterogeneous nation like Malaysia needs to revive the virtues of federalism that could facilitate and accommodate the nation's cultural and socio-economic diversity. Arguing that the way in which Malaysia came into being made its diversity not only inevitable but also permanent, the paper maintains that the Alliance Model formed in the 1950s already had weaknesses at the outset that became more apparent in the new scenario following the March 2008 general elections. The old communal-based One Coalition System has to find its new relevance after 2008 given that Malaysian society has significantly changed over the last half century. First, an educated class has emerged and reacted strongly

against the corrupt practices of centralism of the ruling party, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and its allies. Second, old discourses of race and religion have become less influential for the younger generation. Third, a Malay-led party championing a multiracial platform appears to be the choice for the modern society of Malaysia, which has blurred the racial lines in politics. Fourth, from the embryonic opposition coalition in the 1990s, a two-coalition system has now emerged after 2008. Following severe losses suffered by UMNO's smaller allies and the loss of four states in the northern region of the peninsula, the paper contends that, "an idea now spreading is that decentralisation of power based on different parties controlling different states is possible, and perhaps even probable." Conversely, voters in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak did not change their voting habit in 2008 but the recent state election in April 2011 in Sarawak shows that the Chinese voted for change against the *Barisan Nasional* (BN). The new balance of power that the BN found in Sarawak in the 2008 general elections could be eroded in the coming general elections if the virtues of federalism are not put in place.

Soon Chuan Yean's article, *The contest for moral politics: Interrogating the cultural politics of Malaysian cultural groups* is a different genre, focusing on cultural politics. The paper asserts that besides political parties and institutions, other groups formed by the civil society are equally important in changing the political landscape in Malaysia before and after the 2008 general elections. Of late, two major categories of cultural politics have manifested in Malaysian politics. The first category is the top down "legitimacy" state view manifested in different forms such as *Islam Hadhari* (Progressive Islam) promulgated by the former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and the current 1Malaysia campaign propagated by Prime Minister Najib Razak. The 1Malaysia campaign prioritises unity within diversity and is perceived as "a product of the commoditisation of morality and ethnicity." Against these "myths" are different forms of political moralities articulated from bottom up by diverse cultural groups. Soon describes at length three cultural groups that have played important roles in promoting cultural politics in the aftermath of the 2008 general elections. First, Zunar the multifaceted cartoonist, as an individual agency has created a space for alternative politics through his political cartoons that flow into everyday lives of ordinary people via the mainstream media. Second, cultural projects such as the production of 15Malaysia short films by Pete Teo which contest against the 1Malaysia concept by expressing many versions of Malaysia. Another film, *10 years before the independence*, a historical documentary by Fahmi Reza provides an alternative to the understanding of Malaysia's real history. A different project, the visual art performances by a group of young artists called Lost Generation Space (LGS) attempts to exert an alternative voice illustrating people's local history. Third, visual art works were used by LGS to send out messages of moral warnings to showcase a demise of moral politics, especially among BN

politicians. All these indicate that cultural politics is here to stay and interacts directly or indirectly with conventional institutional politics.

The last paper in this section and in the whole volume is the one on the political economy of healthcare in the context of healthcare privatisation, by Por Heong Hong entitled *The "Frankenstein" of industrial development: Differentiation and interest groups within the healthcare industry*. The paper explores group politics in the healthcare industry, which has become more dynamic and complicated since the last two decades. Placing the analysis on the changes of healthcare industry in the perspective of industrial development following a series of the Malaysian healthcare liberalisation and privatisation, the paper contends that a new social stratum, medical and paramedical groups have emerged in the healthcare industry. These professional groups, it is argued, do not fit well in the narrow construct of the "new middle class" by social scientists that have ignored the dynamism of differentiation within the healthcare sector. The paper shows that these professional groups, via their professional bodies, have turned political since the country's independence and become stronger in their political character as evident in a series of professional groups-state contestations in the 1990s. The article also draws attention to a new social stratification in the healthcare industry that shows a shift from race-based contention in pre-Independence period to non-race based, professional groups contention in post NEP period.

CONCLUSION

All the papers in this special issue, though seemingly rather disparate, do connect with each other in various ways. They reflect the current thinking and research on the subject of globalisation, community, identity, politics and healthcare among Malaysian scholars. This collection of essays in a humble way not only contributes to the rich corpus of knowledge on Malaysian studies but also provides some new empirical case studies that resonate with the general discourse on human and community development, indigenous rights, political democratisation and empowerment, inter-ethnic unity and development, as well as privatisation and liberalisation that is taking place in different parts of the globe. It is hoped that the theoretical perspectives offered in some of the articles as well as the empirical findings in several of the case studies will provoke further thoughts on the subject and open up new research possibilities and endeavour.