

**THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT:  
A STUDY OF PERCEPTION AMONG FINAL YEAR UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**November 2010**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to my main supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Lim Hong Hai, for his unflinching support and assistance from start to finish. In the course of preparing the thesis, he has seldom overlook opportunities to expose me to the breadth of the field and its fundamental issues. I am also grateful to my co-supervisor, Dr. Andrew Tan Khee Guan, for his valuable guidance, especially on logistic regression. Without their help, this thesis would not have been completed.

I am thankful to the four public universities, namely Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for allowing me to collect data on their students. I really appreciate the kindness of the lecturers and class representatives who helped me to administer my survey questionnaire and to all respondents who answered my questionnaire.

I am indebted to my mother, Madam Chong Gek Mooi, and my late father, Mr. Woo Foo Sum, for their love and support. I also wish to thank all my siblings for their support and understanding during my study. Finally, my sincere thanks also go to my friends, whose support has importantly helped me to complete this thesis.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	One-Way Analysis of Variance
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CUEPACS	Congress of Union of Employees in the Public and Civil Service
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MEF	Malaysian Employers Federation
NEP	New Economic Policy
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PCB	Public Complaint Bureau
PMR	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> , Lower Secondary Assessment
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSD	Public Service Department
PSM	Public Service Motivation
PTD	<i>Pegawai Tadbir dan Diplomatik</i> , Malaysian Administrative and Diplomatic Service
SJK (C)	Chinese Primary School
SJK (T)	Tamil Primary School
SK	National Primary School
SMJK	Chinese Secondary School
SMK	National Secondary School
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> , the Malaysian Certificate of Education
SPSS	Statistical Product and Service Solutions
UIAM	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia
UiTM	Universiti Mara Teknologi Malaysia
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	Universiti Malaya
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
UPSR	<i>Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah</i> , Primary School Evaluation Test
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia

**Daya Tarikan Kerjaya Pkhidmatan Awam: Satu Kajian Persepsi terhadap  
Mahasiswa Tahun Akhir di Semenanjung Malaysia**

**ABSTRAK**

Ketidakpuashatian terhadap prestasi perkhidmatan awam Malaysia telah menimbulkan soal tentang kemampuannya untuk menarik sumber manusia yang diperlukan. Kajian ini menggunakan cara pensampelan secara rawak yang melibatkan pengelompokan dan pelintapan yang meliputi 1,200 orang mahasiswa tahun akhir dari empat buah universiti awam untuk mengkaji daya tarikan perkhidmatan awam terhadap para graduan dan kemampuannya untuk menarik sumber manusia graduan demi menjaminkan kapasiti dan perwakilan.

Selepas mengenalpasti ciri-ciri kerjaya yang penting bagi responden, kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana responden mengkadar daya tarikan ciri-ciri kerjaya ini dalam sektor awam dan ciri-ciri utama yang bertanggungjawab menarik responden ke atau menolak mereka dari perkhidmatan awam. Metodologi regresi logit kemudiannya digunakan untuk menilai kepentingan daya tarikan ciri-ciri kerjaya serta ciri-ciri personal dan ciri-ciri latar belakang responden dalam mempengaruhi pemilihan kerjaya perkhidmatan awam.

Pengkadaran responden terhadap ciri-ciri kerjaya mencadangkan perkhidmatan awam Malaysia mempunyai daya tarikan yang melebihi tahap sederhana. Faktor-faktor tarikan seperti *keselamatan kerjaya, faedah sampingan, permintaan kerja yang rendah*; dan faktor-faktor tolakan seperti *gaji tidak menarik, kurang prospek kenaikan pangkat*, dan

*kerja yang tidak menarik dan mencabarkan*, merupakan faktor-faktor utama yang bertanggungjawab menarik responden ke atau menolak mereka dari perkhidmatan awam Malaysia. Selain dari ciri-ciri kerjaya, terdapat juga faktor-faktor lain yang turut signifikan dalam mempengaruhi pemilihan kerjaya perkhidmatan awam. Faktor-faktor berkenaan adalah penguasaan bahasa, pengkhususan akademik, bangsa, latar belakang keluarga, tempat membesar dan jenis sekolah yang pernah dihadiri.

Kemampuan perkhidmatan awam untuk menarik sumber manusia graduan demi menjamin kapasiti dan perwakilan dikaji dengan menilai kecukupan *tabung responden* (the pool of respondents) yang cenderung memilih kerjaya perkhidmatan awam. Kajian ini mendapati perkhidmatan awam Malaysia mampu menarik sumber manusia graduan melebihi daripada mencukupi kecuali dari kalangan responden Cina. Tabung berkenaan tidak mempunyai responden Cina berkeputusan CGPA tinggi yang cukup untuk perekrutan berdasarkan merit dan perwakilan. Ini adalah kerana wujudnya tanggapan diskriminasi kenaikan pangkat dalam kalangan responden Cina.

Hasil kajian terhadap daya tarikan juga menunjuk ke faktor-faktor melampaui daya tarikan yang mempunyai impact negative ke atas kapasiti dan perwakilan perkhidmatan awam. Faktor-faktor ini melingkungi kemerosotan kualiti pendidikan yang meliputi pengajaran bahasa Inggeris, prestasi akaedmik lelaki yang lebih lemah berbanding dengan perempuan, dan penyisihan daripada merit dalam pelaksanaan perekrutan. Faktor-faktor ini serta kurangnya daya tarikan kerjaya perkhidmatan awam terhadap para graduan Cina perlu diperbetulkan demi mewujudkan satu perkhidmatan awam Malaysia yang lebih berkemampuan dan berperwakilan.



**The Attractiveness of Public Employment:  
A Study of Perception among Final Year University Students  
in Peninsular Malaysia**

**ABSTRACT**

Dissatisfaction with the performance of the Malaysian civil service has called into question the ability of the civil service to attract needed manpower. This study uses a clustered-stratified random sample of 1,200 final year students of four public universities to examine the attractiveness of public employment to graduates and the ability of the civil service to attract graduate manpower for ensuring capacity and representativeness.

After identifying the job characteristics that are important to respondents, the study examines how respondents rate the attractiveness of these job characteristics in the public sector and which characteristics are mainly responsible for pulling respondents to or pushing them away from public employment. The method of logit regression is then used to assess the importance of the attractiveness of job characteristics as well as respondents' personal and background characteristics in influencing the choice of public employment.

Ratings on job characteristics suggest that the civil service is seen as more than averagely attractive. The pull factors of *job security, fringe benefits, lower job demands;* and the push factors of *unattractive pay, poor promotion prospects, and not interesting*

*and challenging job*, are the main factors responsible in pulling respondents to or pushing them away from the civil service. Other factors besides job characteristics are also significant in influencing the choice of public employment. These are language proficiency, academic major, race, family background, place of growing up and type of school attended

The ability of the civil service to attract graduate manpower for ensuring capacity and representativeness is assessed by examining the adequacy of the pool of respondents who prefer public employment. The study finds that the Malaysian civil service is able to attract more than its fair share of graduate manpower except from Chinese respondents. The pool does not have enough high-CGPA Chinese for merit-based representative recruitment. This is mainly because of perceived discrimination in promotion among Chinese respondents.

The study's findings on attractiveness also point to factors beyond attractiveness that negatively affect the capacity and representativeness of the civil service. These factors include the declining quality of education including in teaching English, the poorer academic performance of males compared to females, and deviations from merit in recruitment. These factors as well as the inadequate attractiveness of public employment to Chinese graduate job seekers need to be corrected in order to achieve a more capable and representative Malaysian civil service.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT: THE ISSUES AND THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The civil service is a major part of modern government. It carries out activities that affect so much of life. This is especially the case in Malaysia because of the large size and role of the civil service. Thus, it is understandable that its performance is of major concern to citizens and other stakeholders.

Central to the performance of the civil service is its ability to secure needed manpower. Success in securing needed manpower for the civil service depends directly on personnel recruitment practices. However, it also depends, and no less importantly, on a prior factor, namely whether the civil service is able to attract enough of the right kinds of applicants from job seekers. Assessing the ability of the civil service to attract job seekers and identifying effective ways to increase the attractiveness of public employment to job seekers are therefore matters of considerable importance.

However, the literature shows that the attractiveness of public employment has been empirically assessed in only some developed countries. In the US, Kilpatrick, Cummings, & Jennings (1964) find that the public sector does not enjoy a positive image and public employment is less attractive to individuals with higher education and

higher social economy status. In Australia, Daniel & Encel (1981: 193) find variations in the image of different departments but also the stereotypical association of the Australian public service with “red tape, bureaucracy, obstructiveness and dilatoriness”. A study of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) countries finds that generally “young people do not rate public employment very highly ..., the public sector is deemed dull, bureaucratic, old fashioned and the prestige of civil service low” (Aijala, 2001: 11). However, in the UK, a later on-line survey finds that 67.4% of the survey respondents stated that they would rather work in the public sector (*Career counselling*, 2010). Finally, in Singapore, an on-line survey asking respondents if they prefer to work in the public or private sector reports that “the private sector is winning by a landslide” (*Singapore jobs*, 2010), even though government jobs in Singapore are among the highest paid in the world.

In Malaysia, the attractiveness of public employment has not been systematically examined. This study is a start. The rest of the chapter examines the civil service, explains why the attractiveness of public employment is important in the Malaysian context and identifies the specific questions that would be examined in this study.

## **1.1 THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE: SIZE AND PERFORMANCE**

This section first looks at the size of the Malaysian civil service. Then performance criteria and standards are briefly discussed before concluding with an evaluation of the performance of the Malaysian civil service.

The introduction of the NEP (New Economic Policy) after the racial violence on May 13, 1969 marked a sharp increase in the re-structuring role of the Malaysian government. The NEP has the twin objectives of eradicating poverty regardless of race and eliminating the identification of race with economic function. The latter objective, with which the NEP has come to be mainly identified, is meant for promoting the participation of *bumiputras* (mainly Malays) in the modern economy and reducing the economic disparity between *bumiputras* and non-*bumiputras* (mainly Chinese and Indians).

The NEP was “public sector-driven” and many “new instruments of government were created” with “generous allocation of resources to carry out their tasks”. The intake of civil servants as well as training programmes for them were vastly expanded to “increase the capability of the civil service and to increase the number of qualified or trained *bumiputra* in the government service” (Abdullah Sanusi Ahmad, Norma Mansor, & Abdul Kuddus Ahmad, 2003: 226). The number of civil servants increased rapidly during the 1970s, at an annual rate of 5 to 6%. When Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister in 1981, he was concerned with the size of the civil service and took steps to curb its growth. From 1982 until Mahathir Mohamad relinquished office in 2003, the number of civil servants increased at an average annual rate of only about 1% (Lim, 2006a: 14; Federation of Malaysia, 2008a: 6). However, civil servants still account for over 10% of the country’s labour force (employed persons) and over 4% of the country’s population, as indicated in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1: Malaysian Population, Labour Force (Employed Persons) and Civil Servants, 1990 – 2007**

Year	Population	Labour Force	Positions Filled (Civil Servants) <sup>a</sup>	C. Servants as % of Population	Civil Servants as % of Labour Force
1990	18 102 400 <sup>b</sup>	6 685 000 <sup>e</sup>	910 405	5.0	13.6
1991	18 379 700 <sup>c</sup>	-	913 103	5.0	-
1992	-	7 047 800 <sup>f</sup>	892 939	-	12.7
1993	19 563 700 <sup>d</sup>	7 383 400 <sup>f</sup>	885 939	4.5	12.0
1994	20 111 600 <sup>d</sup>	-	885 984	4.4	-
1995	20 689 300 <sup>d</sup>	7 645 000 <sup>f</sup>	844 954	4.1	11.1
1996	21 169 000 <sup>d</sup>	8 399 200 <sup>f</sup>	852 609	4.0	10.2
1997	-	8 569 200 <sup>f</sup>	843 192	-	9.8
1998	21 475 500 <sup>b</sup>	8 599 600 <sup>f</sup>	840 865	3.9	9.8
1999	-	8 837 800 <sup>f</sup>	963 626	-	10.9
2000	23 274 700 <sup>a</sup>	9 269 200 <sup>f</sup>	979 464	4.2	10.6
2001	23 795 300 <sup>a</sup>	9 357 000 <sup>f</sup>	994 548	4.2	10.6
2002	24 530 000 <sup>a</sup>	9 542 600 <sup>f</sup>	1 026 143	4.2	10.8
2003	25 320 000 <sup>a</sup>	9 869 700 <sup>f</sup>	1 080 886	4.3	11.0
2004	25 720 000 <sup>a</sup>	9 986 600 <sup>f</sup>	1 098 638	4.3	11.0
2005	26 763 255 <sup>a</sup>	10 547 500 <sup>c</sup>	1 118 392	4.2	10.6
2006	26 640 000 <sup>a</sup>	10 275 400 <sup>g</sup>	1 152 467	4.3	11.2
2007	27 341 150 <sup>a</sup>	10 538 100 <sup>g</sup>	1 244 372	4.6	11.8

Sources: <sup>a</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2007b: 7 & 8)  
<sup>b</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2001b: 17)  
<sup>c</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2005c: 20 & 233)  
<sup>d</sup> Federation of Malaysia (1996: 35)  
<sup>e</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2004a: 37)  
<sup>f</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2005a: 37)  
<sup>g</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2009c: 69)

Overall, the number of Malaysian civil servants stood at 1,244,372 at the end of 2007.

The expenditure of the government on federal civil servant emoluments alone increased from RM 17,443 million in 2001 to RM 31,142 million in 2007 (Federation of Malaysia, 2006a: 15; 2008a: 6-8), an increase of 78.5%.<sup>1</sup> Table 1.2 below indicates that civil servant emoluments have always been a big portion of the federal government's

<sup>1</sup> The number of federal civil servants increased from 766,281 in 2001 to 994,713 in 2007, an increase of 29.8%.

operating expenditure; indeed it is the biggest portion of expenditure by object (Federation of Malaysia, 2005c: 276).

**Table 1.2: Federal Government Operating Expenditure and Civil Servant Emoluments, 2001 - 2005**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Fed.Gov. Revenue RM (Million)	79 567	83 515	92 608	99 397	105 856
Fed.Gov. Expenditure RM (Million)	63 757	68 699	75 224	91 298	98 244
Emoluments RM (Million)	17 433	20 242	21 721	23 779	23 137
% Emoluments as F.Gov. Rev.	21.9	24.2	23.5	23.9	21.9
% Emoluments as F.Gov. Exp.	27.3	29.5	28.9	26.1	23.6

Source: Federation of Malaysia (2005c: 275 & 276)

Is public employment in Malaysia high by international standards? Determining the right size of the civil service is a complex matter and precise comparisons among countries are difficult due to different definitions adopted. However, Lucas and Verry, the chief technical advisers in manpower planning to the Economic Planning Unit of the federal government during the preparation of the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991 - 1995), present revealing international comparisons that are reproduced in part in Table 1.3. Malaysia ranked third among the eleven nations and second after Singapore among the nine East and South Asian countries in total government employment relative to total population. The total Malaysian public employment relative to total non-agricultural employment was 17.5%, whereas the total public sector (including public enterprise) employment relative to non-agricultural employment was 23.1%. Both ranked third among the nine East and South Asian countries.

**Table 1.3: Public Sector Employment: International Comparisons**

	Share in Total Non-Agric. Employment (%)			C. Servants as % of Population
	Total Government	Public Enterprise	Total Public	
Malaysia '87	17.5	5.6	23.1	4.3
India '81	15.7	6.6	22.3	1.5
Indonesia '85	23.2	-	-	1.9
Korea '81	13.4	2.5	15.9	3.1
Pakistan '83	11.0	6.7	17.7	1.5
Philippine '83	11.6	1.3	12.9	3.2
Singapore '81	12.2	-	-	5.4
Sri Lanka '80	16.9	28.9	45.6	3.0
Thailand '80	21.7	3.4	25.1	1.9
Africa	33.0	18.7	51.7	1.9
Latin America	24.9	5.5	30.4	4.6

Source: Lucas and Verry (1999: 229)

Lucas and Verry (1999: 229) conclude as follows: “By whichever measure, it seems that Malaysia indeed had a fairly large public sector by Asian standards as of 1987.” A more recent report lends support to Lucas and Verry’s conclusion. In 2003, Malaysia ranked first among six Asian countries in total public employment relative to total population (3.68%), followed by Thailand (2.06%), Philippine (1.81%), Indonesia (1.79%), Laos (1.24%) and Cambodia (1.18%) (as cited in *Sin Chew Daily*, December 23, 2006). These comparisons suffice to show the large size and role of the civil service in Malaysia and to underline the importance of its performance.

There are various criteria for evaluating the performance of the civil service. Lim (2009: 2-3) suggests that responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency are the three basic output criteria from which other commonly used criteria, such as transparency and corruption can be derived. He also ranks the output criteria as follows: “without responsiveness,



effectiveness is worthless at best; and without effectiveness, efficiency is nil as all resources used are simply wasted”. Responsiveness, the most important criterion, is also the most complex. The public consists of various groups who often have different and incompatible interests. To whom and to what extent should civil servants be responsive? Lim therefore underlines the importance of equitable responsiveness or fairness to all groups.

Evaluating civil service performance also faces difficult problems of measurement and standards to be used. However, Lim (2009: 3) argues that it is both appropriate and feasible to evaluate civil service performance by looking at the satisfaction of stakeholders with the civil service because “meeting the expectations of stakeholders is the *raison d’être* of the public service”. The relevant stakeholders are the Malaysian public or various groups within the public, political leaders and foreign investors. This study follows suit.

The general public often regard corruption and unsatisfactory service delivery as significant performance deficits of the civil service. Government corruption has long been seen as worrisome in Malaysia. According to both rank and score in Transparency International’s CPI (Corruption Perception Index), no improvement has been made in political and bureaucratic corruption for the country since 1995, the year the CPI was first introduced (Lim, 2009: 12; *Sin Chew Daily*, November 18, 2009). Public dissatisfaction with the delivery of public services is indicated by the volume of complaints received by the PCB (Public Complaints Bureau). As shown in Table 1.4,

public complaints shot up to more than seven thousand cases in 2008, suggesting increasing public dissatisfaction.

**Table 1.4: Complaints Received by PCB (Public Complaint Bureau), 1996 - 2008**

Year	Total Number of Complaints
1996	3 847 <sup>a</sup>
1997	3 697 <sup>a</sup>
1998	3 621 <sup>a</sup>
1999	3 564 <sup>a</sup>
2000	3 721 <sup>a</sup>
2001	2 769 <sup>b</sup>
2002	4 202 <sup>b</sup>
2003	4 069 <sup>b</sup>
2004	2 792 <sup>b</sup>
2005	2 707 <sup>b</sup>
2006	3 397 <sup>b</sup>
2007	5 347 <sup>b</sup>
2008*	7 351 <sup>b</sup>

\*Complaints received by PCB from 1 January to 30 November 2008

Sources: <sup>a</sup> *Nanyang Siang Pau* (May 25, 2001)

<sup>b</sup> Federation of Malaysia (2008b)

The ability of the police in ensuring a safe living environment has also been widely questioned. A paper published in the Journal of the Kuala Lumpur Royal Malaysian Police College in 2005 (as cited in *Roaring forties: crime rate in Malaysia*, 2009) indicates that the crime rate in Malaysia has worsened more than 300% since 1991.

In the Malaysian multiracial context, equitable responsiveness to all racial groups is an important criterion of performance. The perceived lack of civil service responsiveness to under-represented groups has raised concerns with the shortage of non-Malays in the

civil service. The MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) has shown concern over the trend since the 1980s (Lim, 2002: 13). In the 2001 Kampung Medan incident, the mainly Malay police force was seen to be blatantly biased in handling the outbreak of interracial violence between Malays and Indians. This seems to have awakened the country's leaders to the dangers of a non-representative bureaucracy (Lim, 2007b: 45).

Foreign investors also see service delivery and corruption as the main weaknesses of the civil service. On various international rankings, the government's performance rating did not seem to improve. Malaysia ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in *the World Competitiveness Yearbook 2006*; 25<sup>th</sup> in *the World Bank's Doing Business 2007*, and 26<sup>th</sup> in *the Global Competitiveness Report 2006 - 2007* (*New Straits Times*, January 13, 2007). These reports identified "red tape" as a factor impeding Malaysia's ability to better compete in the global market. According to *the Global Competitiveness Report 2008 - 2009* (2009: 230), the three most problematic factors seen by business executives for doing business in Malaysia were inefficient government bureaucracy, corruption, and crime and theft.

The country's bureaucratic and political leaders have also frequently expressed dissatisfaction with civil service performance. According to the then Chief Secretary to the Government, Abdul Halim Ali, some public officials failed to make correct decisions, delayed in giving responses to the public and tend to use their discretion wrongly resulting in complaints by the public (*Utusan Malaysia*, May 24, 2001). Two former holders of the same post have also questioned the performance of civil servants, including those at management levels (Lim, 2007b: 47-48). The Secretary-General of CUEPACS (Congress of Union of Employees in the Public and Civil Service, the

umbrella civil service union) has urged the government to find a better way to promote its department heads because some of them failed to execute their responsibilities and thus are “not qualified to hold the posts” (*Utusan Malaysia*, April 23, 2001).

Public statements by political leaders about poor service delivery and the need for improvement are no less frequent. For example, former Minister of International Trade and Industry, Rafidah Aziz, has strongly criticized red tape and the poor attitude of bureaucrats as obstacles to the progress of the private sector (*Sin Chew Daily*, April 23, 2006). Political leaders have also complained about inadequate civil service performance in advising them on policy matters. To cite an example, Rais Yatim (2006 as cited in Lim, 2009) has observed that “many of their (senior officials’) considered opinions and findings have proven to be off-target, especially in the area of public interests”. As will be shown shortly, this has raised concerns about the policy capacity of the country’s senior civil servants.

The above discussion indicates that the civil service has failed to meet the expectations or standards of its various stakeholders on various performance criteria. The performance of the civil service therefore needs to be improved. The performance of the civil service depends on many factors; its improvement is therefore a large and complex undertaking. Lim (2007b, 2009) identifies three main factors responsible for performance deficits in the Malaysian civil service: inadequate capacity, inadequate representativeness and inadequate public control or accountability. The first and second factors concern civil servants, while the last factor of inadequate accountability extends to ruling politicians as well. This study is motivated by the need to improve the capacity

and representativeness of the civil service or its personnel. The capacity and representativeness of Malaysian civil servants are regarded as problematic and are further discussed in the next two sections. This will provide the necessary background for explaining – and justifying – the objectives of the study.

## **1.2 THE CAPACITY OF THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE: PERSONNEL QUANTITY AND QUALITY**

Building effective capacity means more than but includes continuous effort in attracting and recruiting adequate human resources. The adequacy of personnel in terms of quantity and quality are two important factors that affect the performance of any organization. Some news reports might suggest that the government faces little difficulty in attracting applicants, especially during periods of recession. However, as indicated in Table 1.5, the civil service has been facing shortage of manpower since 1990. The shortage has remained at over 15% of posts in recent years.

**Table 1.5: Number of Vacancies in Public Sector, 1990 - 2007**

Year	No. of Vacancies	No. of Vacancies		% of Vacancies Not Filled
		Filled	Not Filled	
1990	1 066 406	910 405	156 001	14.6
1991	1 077 938	913 103	164 835	15.3
1992	1 056 554	892 939	163 615	15.5
1993	1 069 632	885 939	183 693	17.2
1994	1 042 866	885 984	156 882	15.0
1995	1 055 231	844 954	210 277	19.9
1996	1 087 444	852 609	234 835	21.6
1997	1 108 958	843 192	265 766	24.0
1998	1 123 057	840 865	282 192	25.1
1999	1 135 552	963 626	171 926	15.1
2000	1 153 788	979 464	174 324	15.1
2001	1 189 950	994 548	195 402	16.4
2002	1 231 981	1 026 143	205 838	16.7
2003	1 295 199	1 080 886	214 313	16.6
2004	1 320 337	1 098 638	221 699	16.8
2005	1 360 207	1 118 392	241 815	17.8
2006	1 394 739	1 152 567	242 172	17.4
2007	1 529 841	1 244 372	285 469	18.7

Sources: Federation of Malaysia (2007b: 8; 2008a: 6)

Table 1.6 below shows shortage of manpower in various fields or services of the civil service in 2003 - 2005. Except for the police, all the areas or services have shown a shortage of 10% or more. A few services, namely finance, the legal service and the armed forces have a shortage of 30% or more. Overall, there was a shortage of almost 20% in 2005. According to a survey, many younger generation Malaysians are “not prepared to go into the civil service” because they are looking for “opportunities and challenge” (*The Sun*, June 3, 2001b).

**Table 1.6: Percentage of Vacancies Filled in Public Sector According to Scheme of Services in 2003 - 2005**

No	Classification of Services	% of Vacancies Filled		
		2003	2004	2005
1	Transportation/ <i>Pengangkutan</i>	83.5	80.7	79.4
2	Talent and Art/ <i>Bakat dan Seni</i>	83.5	71.0	72.4
3	Science/ <i>Sains</i>	83.5	79.5	86.4
4	Education/ <i>Pendidikan</i>	88.1	92.9	86.7
5	Economic/ <i>Ekonomi</i>	83.5	78.6	78.5
6	Information System/ <i>Sistem Maklumat</i>	83.5	69.3	83.1
7	Agriculture/ <i>Pertanian</i>	83.5	82.1	81.6
8	Engineering/ <i>Kejuruteraan</i>	83.3	84.8	82.7
9	Safety/ <i>Keselamatan</i>	83.7	82.5	84.6
10	Legal/ <i>Perundangan</i>	83.5	65.7	67.8
11	Malaysian Administrative & Diplomatic Service/ <i>PTD</i>	90.1	78.6	90.0
12	Administration/ <i>Pentadbiran</i>	84.9	82.5	84.4
13	Research/ <i>Penyelidikan</i>	83.5	79.5	83.2
14	Social/ <i>Sosial</i>	83.5	74.1	83.6
15	Healthcare/ <i>Perubatan</i>	81.0	81.1	82.4
16	Finance/ <i>Kewangan</i>	83.5	68.9	70.1
17	Police/ <i>Polis</i>	97.9	96.9	96.6
18	Armed Forces/ <i>Tentera</i>	63.8	66.8	67.8
Average		83.5	83.2	82.2

Sources: Federation of Malaysia (2004b: 16; 2005b: 4; 2006a: 4)

The problem is not only shortage in terms of quantity. The quality of civil servants holding positions in the civil service has also been questioned. As stated by Abdullah Ahmad, then group editor-in-chief of the New Straits Times Press, in an address to civil servants, many believe or fear that the Malaysian bureaucracy is filled with “second-raters” or worse (*New Straits Times*, March 8, 2003). The quality of personnel has direct effects on performance. Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad once noted that state financial officers should be trained in book keeping methods for improving government accounts (*The Star*, May 30, 2000). More seriously, doubts have been raised about the knowledge and analytical skill of senior civil servants or their ability to contribute to

effective policy-making. Former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has lamented that “without the brightest minds conceptualising, adapting and driving public policies, good governance would remain an elusive ideal” (*New Straits Times*, June 23, 2000). The present Prime Minister, Najib Razak, has also stated (when he was Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s deputy) that the civil service was “not good enough” and had to “renew and reinvent itself in line with changing needs and expectations of leaders and the public”. He has called for a new breed of civil servants who possess strong analytical capabilities and the ability to generate well thought-out policy options (*New Straits Times*, September 13, 2005).

The above discussion indicates that the Malaysian civil service has been facing some difficulty in filling its positions and in filling them with quality personnel. Overcoming this problem depends on the ability of the civil service to attract the needed applicants. This leads directly to the general question examined in this study, namely – the attractiveness of public employment in Malaysia. As will be discussed in the next section, this question is also important for making the Malaysian civil service more representative of the country’s population.

### **1.3 THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE: RACE AND GENDER**

The large size and scope of the civil service has also raised concerns about its representativeness or whether it is sufficiently representative of all social groups. This



section first explains the importance of representative bureaucracy. It then examines the representativeness of the Malaysian bureaucracy in terms of race and gender and discusses the concerns arising therefrom.

The importance of representative bureaucracy has been more precisely defined in recent years with the distinction between *passive* and *active* representation made by Mosher (1968: 13). Passive representation refers to the mere presence of civil servants of various social groups. A passively representative bureaucracy, i.e. one that reflects the demographic composition of the society or population it serves, has “symbolic” importance. It promotes the legitimacy of the bureaucracy (and the government) in that diverse groups would have a greater sense of identification and being fairly served when civil servants are visibly and sufficiently diverse.

Active representation occurs when civil servants press for the interests and desires of their own social group and act in ways that increase substantive benefits for their social group. As Nachmias and Rosenbloom (1973: 595) point out, “one of the major problems confronting anyone who attempts to deal with the concept of representative bureaucracy lies in discerning the relationship between passive and active representation.” Various studies in America have established the occurrence of active representation by showing that greater passive representation of racial minorities and women leads to greater substantive benefits for these social groups. Thus Meier (1993) finds active representation by Latino school principals and teachers in Florida school districts. Selden (1997) finds active representation by African American, Hispanic, and Asian America county supervisors in district offices of the Farmers Home Administration.

Wilkins and Keiser (2001) find active representation by female supervisors in child support agencies. Meier and Nicholson-Crotty (2002) find active representation by female police officers in the 60 largest metropolitan counties in the United States.

Instead of attributing the substantive effects simply to active representation, Lim (2006b) attempts to identify the various “sources of substantive effects” or simply reasons why civil servants increase substantive benefits for their social groups. Some of these reasons lie in individual civil servants and are called “direct” sources of substantive effects, as they lead civil servants to behave in ways that directly increase benefits for their social group. This behaviour of civil servants is what scholars call active representation.<sup>2</sup> Lim goes on to argue that civil servants from a given social group can also indirectly increase benefits for their social group through their effects on the behaviour of civil servants from other social groups and of potential clients from their own social group. These effects constitute indirect sources of substantive effects.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lim identifies three direct sources of substantive effects: partiality, shared values and beliefs, and empathic understanding. Partiality leads civil servants to provide more substantive benefits to members of their social group than to equally eligible members of other social groups. Even when civil servants are not partial towards their own social group, the values and beliefs that they share with their social group lead them to articulate the interests of their social groups as decision inputs for others and to take these interests into proper account in their own decisions and actions. Empathic understanding leads civil servants to do the same even when they do not or no longer share the values and beliefs of their social group.

<sup>3</sup> Civil servants from a given social group affect other civil servants through check, restraint and resocialization. These effects moderate the partiality of other civil servants and make them less biased against the given social group. The effects of civil servants on their social group are demand inducement and co-production inducement, i.e. civil servants can stimulate more application or service demand from members of their social group and stimulate clients from their social group to make the effort or behavioural changes that some programmes need in order to improve outputs and especially subsequent outcomes for clients (Lim, 2006b: 194-197).

Based on the above discussion, representation in the bureaucracy can have symbolic as well as substantive effects for social groups. Hence, having a representative bureaucracy is essential for ensuring equitable responsiveness to all social groups. Securing a representative bureaucracy in the circumstances prevailing in some countries may require passing over better qualified candidates in favour of less qualified ones. However, it is generally believed that considerations of equity are more important. Thus the bureaucracy should be made representative, “its possible compromise of merit criteria notwithstanding” (Lim, 2006b: 203).

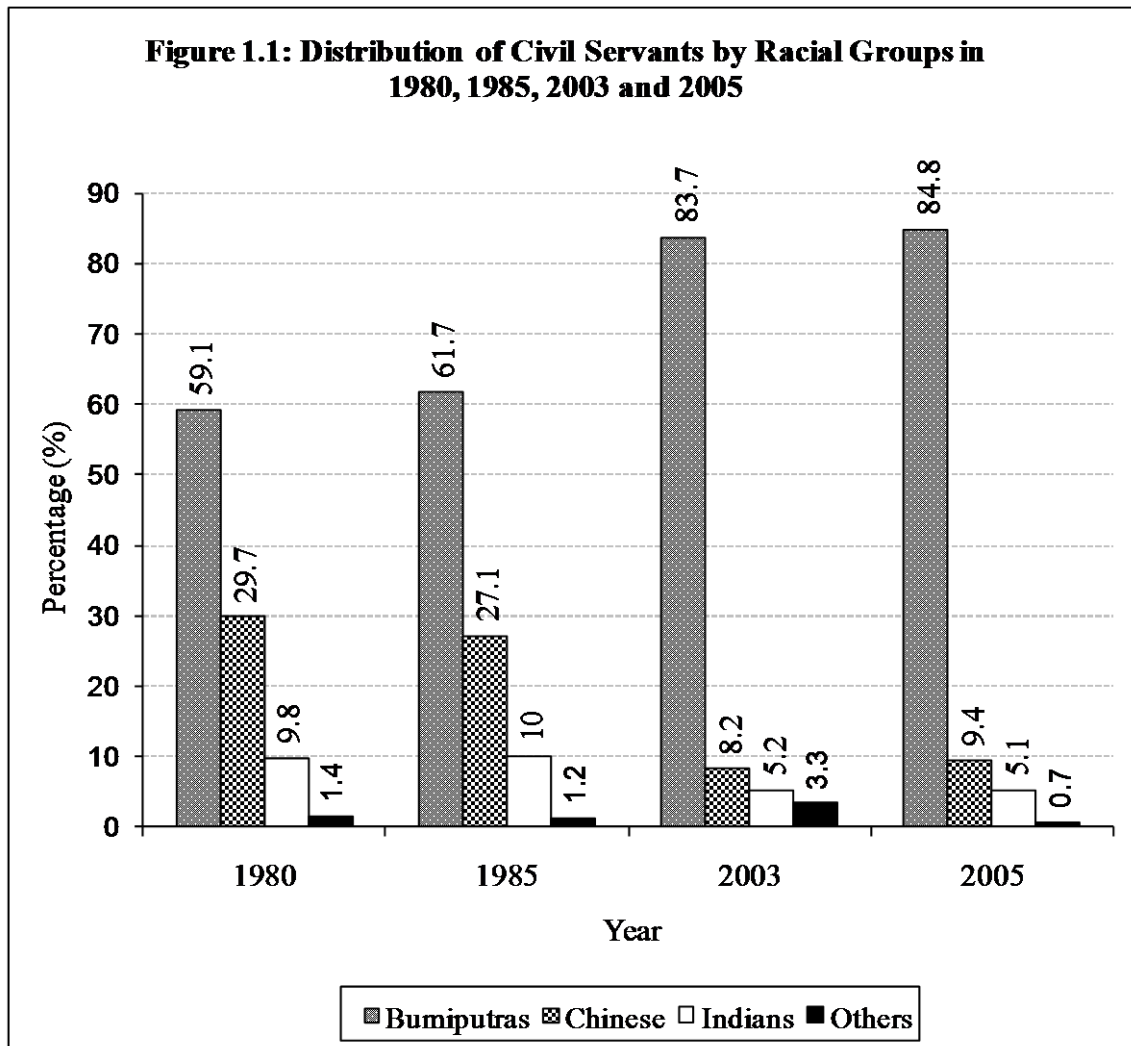
In countries like Malaysia, where race is highly salient, the representativeness of the bureaucracy is likely to have important effects on the responsiveness of the bureaucracy to the various races. A representative civil service is therefore important for ensuring equitable responsiveness to all races. However, the civil service has long been dominated by *bumiputras*, specifically Malays.<sup>4</sup>

The representation of *bumiputras* has greatly increased in the civil service as a whole as well as in the various services since the start of the NEP (Lucas and Verry, 1999: 233-234; Lim, 2002 & 2007a). Figure 1.1 shows the breakdown of civil servants by *bumiputras* and other races in various years from 1980 to 2005, the year in which this study was begun. As indicated in Figure 1.1, the percentage of *bumiputras* increased from 59.1% in 1980 to 84.8% in 2005. The representation of non-*bumiputras* has been

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<sup>4</sup> Malay overrepresentation is considerably higher at the federal level and at the state level within Peninsular Malaysia. Other *bumiputras* are largely concentrated in the state civil services of Sabah and Sarawak as they prefer to serve in their own states (Lim, 2002: 11-12; Abdullah Sanusi Ahmad et al., 2003: 83).

sharply reduced as a result. The representation of Indians has been almost halved from 9.8% in 1980 to 5.1% in 2005. Chinese representation has fallen even more drastically from 29.7% to 9.4% over the same period: the percentage of Chinese in 2005 is only a third of what it was in 1980.



Sources: a. *The Sun Weekend* (December 4-5, 2004c)  
 b. *Utusan Malaysia* (March 24, 2006)

Table 1.7 below provides more information on the racial composition of the Malaysian civil service in June 2005. It breaks down *bumiputras* into Malays and non-Malay *bumiputras*. It also classifies civil servants into the three service groups or levels introduced in 1992, namely Top Management Group, Management and Professional Group, and Support Group. From the table, it can be seen that the 84.8% of *bumiputras* consists of 77.0% Malays and 7.8% other *bumiputras*. The percentage of Malays also increases with level. For Chinese and Indians, the percentage is constant for all levels. For other *bumiputras* and Others, the percentage decreases with level.

**Table 1.7: Breakdown of Officers by Services and Race on 30 June 2005 <sup>a</sup>**

Race	Service Group							
	Top Mgt Grp		Mgt & Prof Grp		Support Grp		Total	
	N <sup>b</sup>	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Malays	1 370	84.0	155 871	81.7	535 495	75.8	629 736	77.0
Chinese	151	9.3	17 896	9.4	66 248	9.4	84 295	9.4
Indians	83	5.1	9 777	5.1	36 194	5.1	46 054	5.1
<i>Bumiputras</i>	23	1.4	6 156	3.2	63 649	9.0	69 828	7.8
Others	5	0.3	1 203	0.6	5 129	0.7	6 337	0.7
Total	1 632	100.1	190 903	100	706 715	100	899 250	100

<sup>a</sup> The numbers exclude the police and armed forces.

<sup>b</sup> In all tables in this thesis, N = Number

Source: Written answer from then Prime Minister's Parliamentary Secretary Mohd Johari bin Baharum to Munusamy a/l Mareemuthu's oral question in the Senate on December 7, 2005 (*Pemberitahuan pertanyaan Dewan Negara*, 2006).

Table 1.8 follows Lim (2007b: 41) in using a simple index to show the over-representation or under-representation of various racial groups in the civil service. Overall, Malays are over-represented to the tune of 1.44 times their population share.

Malay over-representation also increases with level, i.e. from the Support Group (1.42) to the Management and Professional Group (1.53) to the Top Management Group (1.57). This is at the expense of other races. All non-Malay races, including other *bumiputras*, are significantly under-represented, both overall and in each of the three service groups.

**Table 1.8: Index of Representation<sup>5</sup> by Race in the Malaysian Bureaucracy: 2005**

Race	Service Group			Total
	Top Mgt Group	Mgt & Prof Group	Support Group	
Malays	1.57	1.53	1.42	1.44
Chinese	0.35	0.36	0.36	0.36
Indian	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.69
<i>Bumiputras</i>	0.12	0.27	0.77	0.66
Others	0.25	0.51	0.59	0.57

Source: Lim (2007b: 41)

The above examination of the composition of the civil service in 2005 clearly shows that the over-representation of *bumiputras* is entirely due to the over-representation of Malays alone. Furthermore, the increase in Malay over-representation with level indicates that Malay domination in the civil service is even higher than what is suggested by their overall percentage.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The index is computed by dividing a racial group's percentage in the civil service (as indicated in Table 1.7) by its percentage in the country's population (2000 census). An index of more than 1.0 means over representation and vice versa.

<sup>6</sup> Recently released figures (*The Sun*, September 2, 2008) show that the bureaucracy has become even more unrepresentative in recent years.

Senior positions in the civil service are also overwhelmingly held by Malays. According to N. Siva Subramaniam, President of CUEPACS, only one of the 160 senior education district officers was Chinese in 2001 (*The Sun*, June 3, 2001c). There had only been one Chinese in the post of principal matron (the highest post in nursing) since the 50s (*The Sun Weekend*, December 4-5, 2004a). Government websites in 2003 showed that only 2 of the 21 posts of Secretary-General (the top post in a Ministry); and only 3 of the 41 posts of Deputy Secretary-General were held by non-Malays (Lim, 2006a). In 2006, the then Higher Education Minister, Mustapa Mohammed, revealed that there was only one non-Malay dean among 20 in University Malaya and in most of the other universities there was none (*The Star*, August 30, 2006).

From time to time, various non-Malay parties have called for a more representative civil service. The 2001 Kampung Medan incident, as noted earlier, heightened its importance. After the incident, then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has acknowledged the need for a “sufficiently representative” (although not proportionally representative) bureaucracy (*New Straits Times*, May 20, 2001).

The reasons for non-*bumiputra* under-representation have also attracted public attention. The discussion of these reasons has continued after this study was started in 2005. This discussion is also examined below, as it further clarifies as well as enhances the relevance of the questions related to representativeness addressed in this study.

In most countries, entry requirements need to be relaxed for educationally disadvantaged minorities. Thus civil service capacity needs to be sacrificed to secure a representative

civil service. In Malaysia, however, it is widely believed that the bureaucracy is not representative because of the policy of racial preference, i.e. for *bumiputras* and especially Malays in both recruitment and promotion. Formal quotas are widely supposed to exist for certain important services. However, Means has long pointed out that “hiring practices, not formal quotas” have proved more important: “As more Malays have acquired education and qualifications ..., the natural proclivity of the government, particularly after the NEP, has been to fill the positions with Malays if at all possible” (Means, 1986: 105).

Racial preference compromises merit criteria and capacity and hence the effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service. Esman (1972: 75), an American professor who served as Razak’s adviser on administrative reform from 1966 to 1968, has observed that administrative careers were “denied to many talented non-Malays” and that the country “paid a price in reduced administrative effectiveness”. Although the educational achievements of Malays have improved since Esman wrote, Lim (2009: 19) argues that racial preference and compromise of merit continues to exact a non-trivial price in capacity and performance, as preference for Malays is for the largest racial group and occurs in virtually all parts and levels of the civil service. Sole or greater emphasis on merit would thus enhance both representativeness and capacity.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sunway Group corporate adviser Ramon Navaratnam and historian Khoo Khay Kim have called for reverse discrimination or affirmative action for non-Malays to increase their representation in the civil service (*New Straits Times*, April 29, 2003). However, Lim (2009: 33-34) sees reverse discrimination and its compromise of merit as neither desirable nor necessary for the stated purpose.



However, in recent years many civil service leaders have denied racial preference and maintained that the civil service is entirely based on merit. The Director-General of the PSD (Public Service Department), Jamaluddin Ahmad Damanhuri (*The Sun*, June 3, 2001c) has proclaimed as follows: “The government applications are considered based on qualifications and requirements and equal opportunities are given to all who qualify.” Similar statements that the civil service is race-blind and that recruitment is fully based on merit have also been made by the Chief Secretary to the Government, Mohd Sidek Hassan (*The Star*, January 17, 2008) and one of the Ministers in the Prime Minister’s Department (*The Sun*, September 2, 2008).

Instead, it is argued that Chinese and Indians are under-represented because of their lack of interest in civil service jobs. The then Secretary of the PSC (Public Service Commission), Luey Puteh, explains that the drastic drop of non-Malays in the civil service (as indicated in Figure 1.1) “was due to the retirement of the post-*Merdeka* (i.e. post-independence) batch of (non-*bumiputra*) civil servants, who were not being replaced.” The Secretary added that there was nothing the PSC could do because of the small number of non-Malays applying for government jobs (*New Straits Times*, July 26, 2005a).

As support, application figures for recent years have been released (Table 1.9). Although the number of applicants from all racial groups has increased, Malays consistently account for about 80%, Chinese 1-2% (except for 2004), Indians 2-3%, and “Others” (mostly other *bumiputras*) about 13%. These figures are used to show that Chinese and Indians applicants are not enough for making the civil service more representative. Even

non-Malay political leaders like Bernard Giluk Dompok (Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department) and Ong Tee Keat (then Transport Minister and MCA President) have admitted there were still too few Chinese and Indians applying for government jobs (*The Sun*, September 2, 2008; *Sin Chew Daily*, December 21, 2008).

**Table 1.9: Public Service Applicants: 2004 – 2008**

Race	2004		2006		2007		2008 (Jan-Jun)		2008
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Malays	264 885	79.5	535 766	82.5	631 264	82.7	666 979	83.7	827 540
Chinese	11 369	3.4	11 988	1.8	12 875	1.7	12 111	1.5	17 443
Indians	9 340	2.8	16 801	2.6	18 553	2.4	17 798	2.3	24 815
Others	47 827	14.3	84 810	13.1	100 826	13.2	99 727	12.5	NA
Total	333 421	100	649 365	100	763 518	100	796 615	100	869 798 + NA

Sources: a. *New Straits Times* (July 26, 2005a; February 19, 2009)  
b. *The Sun* (September 2, 2008)

However, Lim (2009: 21) points out that it is actual numbers rather than percentages that are important. Table 1.10 (reproduced from Lim 2009: 21) shows that the number of applicants from all racial groups and its success rate. It is obvious that the number of applicants is very high but the success rate (%S) is low.

**Table 1.10: Percent of Successful Public Service Applicants: 2004 - 2008**

Race	2004		2006		2007		2008 (Jan-Jun)		2008	
	N	%S	N	%S	N	%S	N	%S	N	%S
Malays	4 187	1.6	22 618	4.2	31 675	5.0	20 937	3.1	41 117	5.0
Chinese	841	7.4	1 045	8.7	1 326	10.3	780	6.4	2 286	13.1
Indians	568	6.1	1 150	6.8	1 188	6.4	938	5.3	2 367	9.5
Others	806	1.7	3 352	4.0	4 273	4.2	2 736	2.7	NA	NA
Total	6 402	1.9	28 165	4.3	38 462	5.0	25 391	3.2	NA	NA

Sources: a. *New Straits Times* (July 26, 2005a; February 19, 2009)

b. *The Sun* (September 2, 2008)

From the table, even when the success rate reached a high for the full year of 2008, the intakes (success rates) for Malays, Chinese and Indians were only 5%, 13.1% and 9.5% respectively. Lim (2009: 21) points out that even for “Chinese and Indians, applicants exceed intake by about 8 and 10 times respectively.” He then argues that “while it is still possible for applicants to be inadequate for some kinds of professional skills that are highly remunerated in the private sector, the above shows that there is no serious shortage of formally (or paper) qualified applicants to the civil service, even from Chinese and Indians.” The worry about applicants can hence “only apply, if at all, to quality and not quantity.” To examine whether it is insufficient quality or qualifications that has prevented the recruitment of Chinese and Indian applicants in greater numbers, Lim (2009:33) also notes, requires access to data on applicants of all races that only the recruiting authorities possess.

The “official” argument of inadequate non-Malay applications has raised another question. Why are non-Malay applications low or at least much lower than Malay