

EXPLORING PREJUDICIAL ETHNIC ATTITUDES AMONG  
YOUNG MALAYSIAN ADULTS: A CASE STUDY OF MALAY  
AND CHINESE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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by

NG SEN FA

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# **SIKAP ETNIK BERPREJUDIS DI KALANGAN GOLONGAN MUDA MALAYSIA: SATU KAJIAN KES PELAJAR MELAYU DAN CINA DI UNIVERSITI AWAM**

## **ABSTRAK**

*Kajian ini bertujuan menjelaskan sikap perkauman di kalangan pelajar di sebuah universiti awam di Malaysia (n=1551) menggunakan teknik Analisa Faktor Pengesahan dan Permodelan Persamaan Berstruktur. Kajian ini memperkenalkan latar belakang sosial dan sejarah hubungan etnik di Malaysia dalam, dan mencadangkan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi sikap perkauman di Malaysia. Beberapa pembolehubah seperti latar-belakang responden, faktor psiko-sosial dan kaitannya dengan sikap etnik telah dicadangkan dari segi operasi penyelidikan dan dikaji. Seterusnya model bagi menjelaskan interaksi antara pembolehubah dicadangkan. Model-model kajian mencadangkan prejudis golongan muda adalah terdorong oleh tiga faktor yang dikenal-pasti sebagai: (1) membentuk pakatan untuk mempertahankan kepentingan sendiri, (2) kekecewaan darilatar-belakang yang dirasakan, (3) perbezaan nilai dan budaya antara kaum. Analisa antara kumpulan mencadangkan parameter model yang berasingan bagi pelajar Cina dan Melayu, menunjukkan sikap etnik mereka adalah didorong oleh factor yang berbeza. Saiz kumpulan adalah berkaitan dengan keinginan berkawan dengan etnik lain, di mana pelajar Cina diikuti oleh Melayu tidak begitu terdorong untuk berkawan dengan pelajar etnik lain. Sebaliknya kumpulan minoriti melaporkan nilai egalitarian yang lebih tinggi. Kajian ini penting dari segi mencadangkan kaedah penyelidikan dan pembolehubah-pembolehubah baru yang tidak pernah diuji. (182 perkataan).*

# **EXPLORING PREJUDICIAL ETHNIC ATTITUDES AMONG YOUNG MALAYSIAN ADULTS: A CASE STUDY OF MALAY AND CHINESE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to model and explain ethnic attitudes among undergraduates in a public university in Malaysia (n=1551) using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Malaysia's socio-historical background of ethnic relations and theories that explain individual's ethnic attitudes are introduced. The research provides theoretical significance by suggesting new executable variables, introducing multivariate framework situated in the Malaysia context. Various variables and their operationalization such as upbringing backgrounds, psycho-social indicators and their interplay in relation to ethnic attitudes were proposed. The proposed models suggest that Malaysian young adults' prejudiced attitudes are mainly driven by these factors: 1) in-group cohesion to defend one's self-interest, 2) frustration from perceived deprivation and, 3) value-culture conflicts. Multi-group analysis supported unconstrained model paths coefficients for Malays and Chinese students, indicates that each group's ethnic attitudes are qualitatively different. Group size is related to willingness to befriend others of different ethnicity, Chinese and Malay respondents reported significant resistance to multi-ethnic friendships. Conversely, minority groups also reported significant egalitarian values. The insights engendered provide important complementary understanding to other structural factors underlying ethnic relations in Malaysia. (181 words).

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia

This study proposes to develop an instrument to explore prejudicial ethnic attitudes amongst young Malaysian adults in Universiti Sains Malaysia using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The researcher reviewed and identified bivariate and multivariate explanations, including prejudices models and tentatively proposed model(s) which illustrate the “causality paths” of environmental and personality traits as well as their dialectical interactions that lead to negative (prejudicial) ethnic attitudes in the backdrop of the unique Malaysia historical backgrounds. In view of the exploratory nature and level of novelty in this project, the researcher resort to retroductive strategy (Blaike, 2007) to better unravel the nature of prejudicial ethnic attitudes in Malaysia (please see Section 3.3). The finding is expected to shed light on not just conflict resolution and prevention in Malaysia, but also many post-colonialism Afro-Asia countries which face similar societal divide as an impact of transmigration policy by former colonialists. As a result of limited sample sizes for other ethnic groups, the researcher only generated models for the Malays and Chinese.

The first chapter primarily deals with ethnic relations in Malaysia which will provide justifications to the types of prejudicial attitudes to the researcher’s concern.

Observers were worried about Malaysia’s severe Malay<sup>1</sup>-Chinese friction when Malaysia had just gained independence due to power disparity and cultural differences

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the word *Bumiputra* and Malays-Bumiputra are used interchangeably. *Modelling* (British spelling) instead of modeling is used consistently. The word *ethnic* is used consistently in lieu of *racial*, but both *races* and *ethnic groups* are used. *Chinese Malaysians* and *Indians Malaysians* are used instead of *Malaysian Chinese/Indians*, a usage mirrors *African American*. The words *relations* and *attitudes* are more commonly used in plural form.

(Horowitz, 1989). Racial riots broke out in May 1969 mainly in Kuala Lumpur and its vicinities, the government had to declare the country to be in a state of emergency.

As a result of different economic standing and reduced majority at the point of Independence (1957) which directly impacted voting (political) power, the Malays felt threatened in their own homeland. At the same time, the 1960s witnessed movements questioning Malays' supremacy led by the Singapore-based People's Action Party (PAP) and subsequently by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) after Singapore's secession. Singapore was then a state of Malaysia from 1963 to 1965. 13 May 1969 racial riot took place after an election campaign that emphasized equal rights for everyone. The police figures revealed 196 deaths, 149 injuries and 753 cases of arson; about 6,000 Kuala Lumpur residents became homeless. Other different figures of casualties had been provided by various sources (Zakaria Haji Ahmad, 2006).

The last decade also reported backlash from the Indian community's dissatisfaction. Sporadic and small-scaled riots took place mainly due to Indian-Malay conflicts, or more specifically, Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Kampung Rawa Incident took place in 1998, it refers to the conflict between Malay and Hindus-Indian villagers in Kampung Rawa, Penang. No casualty or injury was reported for the incident. During 4th-8th March 2001, a riot broke out in Kampung Medan and its surrounding squatter settlements. 6 were killed in the incident, 37 were injured including 34 Indians and 3 Malays. HINDRAF (Hindu Rights Action Force), a conglomerate of 30 Hindu Indian non-governmental organizations; raises many issues concerning the Indian community's dissatisfactions (Hindraf official website, 2010).

Several decades passed since the 13 May Tragedy and Malaysia is cited as one of the most racially harmonious countries in the region (Sriskandarajah, 2005). Amidst this optimistic trend, discontentment and ethnic segregation issues have never been fully reconciled but well tolerated.

## 1.2 Ethnicity, Race and ethnic conflicts

Although they are often used interchangeably in everyday language, for more formal discussions, *ethnicity* and *race* normally assumes the social-cultural versus biological difference in meaning. *Ethnicity* has a cultural connotation and can be understood as a concept of imagined group membership. The *primordial attachment* concept suggests that an individual's strongest, most fundamental attachment is his imagined ethnic group (Geertz, 1963).

Ethnicity is a social construct, which suggests ethnic identity to be socially (re)constructed in the context of social forces and historical development. This socially constructed membership (also known as "imaginary community") is normally the strongest identity over other identifiers such as ideology, social class, gender and age groups (Habtu, 2004). In the same vein, ethnic nationalism is a result of ethnic consciousness development or politicization of an ethnic community (Smith, 1993). Such development is often strengthened and supported by religious or geographical and other cleavages.

In the eyes of observers, an ethnic group is considered a distinct cultural group that shares little or no sense of common ethnic heritage with other groups. Imaginary common ancestry or homeland of origin, shared history, and cultural elements normally "form" an ethnic community (Smith, 1993). Therefore, all Malaysians can be seen as one ethnic entity on top of their respective primordial origin (Malays, Chinese, Indians and "Others"). Ethnicity attachments vary in solidarity in different contexts but common patterns prevail. Around the world, distinctive ethnic gaps often take place between the original settlers and introduced groups, often as a result of colonization, trans-migration projects and the very human nature to form groups as a natural defense of self-

interest. Such in-group<sup>2</sup> versus out-group sentiments can be provoked under certain circumstances. It is tempting to attribute such lack of social cohesion to cultural differences, but the core of the problem extends beyond cultural difference: severe conflicts often took place in relatively homogeneous countries such as Rwanda, Somalia but inter-ethnic harmony can be seen in relatively heterogeneous countries such as Switzerland (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). There is also a common misunderstanding that equates social cohesion to cultural uniformity. In this writing, social cohesion is understood as peaceful multiculturalism or harmonious coexistence of multiple cultures.

Likewise, inequality is not the sole factor of conflict, the interplay of these possible causes to prejudices is not linear and additive in nature but interactive and complex, which only takes effect contingent on other foundational conditions. In many countries, separatist movements are motivated by perceived unfair exploitation in resource-rich states by the central government. Similar situation happens in petroleum-rich states in Malaysia too (Sabah, Terengganu, and Kelantan), petroleum profit was not fully channeled to poverty reduction in these needy states. But this condition is not a salient factor leading to ethnic-state conflict in Malaysia, because state of origin is but a weak identifier in Malaysia, life contentment in poorer rural states can be high. Likewise, diversity, segregation, resource distribution, power contestation, political exploitation on ethnic issues, imagined ethnicity boundaries, value-cultural barriers are all necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict in each and every of them.

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<sup>2</sup>*In-group* and *out-group* are used instead of *ingroup* or *outgroup*. The capitalized "In-Group" refers to the variable tested in this project.



### **1.3 Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in Malaysia**

Contingent on the perspective of an analyst, causes of ethnic conflict can be analyzed in terms of socioeconomic, geographic, political, historical and cultural perspectives. From the sociological perspective alone, it can be analyzed through the lens of conflict, functional-structuralism and symbolic-interactionism perspectives. Ethnic nationalism is a common cause of societal conflict across the world. From the ethnic competition perspective, ethnic relations can be seen as a societal stratification process, originating from conflict and competition that built up over rewards such as resources, status and power. Societal structural patterns are emphasized in the power-conflict hypothesis. Distribution of resources is determined by political control, therefore competition for societal rewards often manifests itself in the form of political contestation, as a result, ethnic-politics become the main arena of social conflict (Habtu, 2004; William, 1994).

In the past, the main source of racial tension in Malaysia has been attributed to ethnic inequalities and resultant competition among the major ethnic groups, especially between the Malays (the numeric and political majority) and Chinese Malaysian (the economic majority). East Malaysia has a very heterogeneous ethnic composition, and detailed economic standing data is not readily available for each of the two East Malaysia states' diverse ethnic group. Due to different ethnic compositions and relations; it is more appropriate to understand the ethnic relations by focusing on West Malaysia than the whole country in total, East Malaysia is therefore not analyzed in details for this research. In fact, the Chinese-Malays conflict was the reason of the Singapore separation in 1965 following a series of ethnic riots during 1963-1965 in Singapore. The main dissatisfaction was perceived discrimination by the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia and conversely the Malays in Singapore (Lepoer, 1989).

Realizing the social cost of economic inequality, aggressive positive affirmative action following the May 13 Tragedy embodied in the New Economy Policy (NEP) and

other initiatives were launched and had improved the Malays' standing compared with other races in various areas of social-economic achievements, such as in tertiary education admission. NEP and ensuing policies achieved considerable success for Malays and the nation overall. For example, places at local universities increased ten folds from 1966/67 to 1985, the Malays' proportion of places increased too. In 2000, 17.3 percent of all Malays aged over 20 years had some tertiary education, whilst only 16.5 percent of Chinese and 13.0 percent of Indians had tertiary education. In the same vein, during 1970-1995, the proportion of Malay professionals, rose from only 4.9 percent to 33.1 percent (Roslan, 2001). Correspondingly, the Malays' share of capital ownership grew from 2.4 percent in 1970 to around 20 percent in the 1990s (Gomez & Jomo, 1999; Malaysia, 2001). Between 1995 and 1999, mean income growths for both the Bumiputra and rural households were well above the national average (Malaysia, 2001), indicating greater uptake of the Malays in comparison with the others.

In the face of all these progresses and reduced income disparities since 1970, the average Malay income is still below the national mean, especially the Chinese's. In 1990, the Bumiputra had the highest proportion of poverty (20.8 percent), compared with Chinese (5.7 percent), Indians (8.0 percent), or others (18.0 percent). Likewise, the Malays are still lagging behind the Chinese population with regards to professional occupations. The Malays have a far higher proportion of rural work-force and under-represented amongst the professionals. In Malaysia, poverty is associated with the rural and agricultural economy (Ibid).

#### **1.4 Sources of Grievances amongst the Three Main Ethnic Groups**

As a review of all the factors and trends above, it is clear that unhealthy inter-ethnic competition thinking is the main driver of ethnic hostility in Peninsular Malaysia, notably the ethnic competition between Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra.

However, the Indian-Malays tension has increased in the last decade. The Indians are unhappy over a myriad of issues such as negative illustration in literature (*Interlok*), cases of flagellation in prisons, demolition of Hindu temples, conversion to Islam issues and the Indian-Chinese competition in the context of the Bumiputra's preferential status. In November 2007, two political rallies were organized in Kuala Lumpur. The *Bersih* rally and the HINDRAF rally. The *Bersih* rally was organized by a number of NGOs and opposition political parties to request for electoral reform in Malaysia. The HINDRAF (Hindu Rights Action Front) rally was attended mainly by ethnic Indian, demanding equal rights for everyone (Hindraf Official Website, 2010).

In summary, the three main ethnic groups were dissatisfied for the following reasons. These sources of grievances are well-documented in mass media, public discussion (both academic and otherwise) and commonly known among Malaysians. This account is not an emotional outlet of criticism-accusations against anyone but an essential analysis towards the core of research problems (understanding of "causality" paths leading to prejudiced ethnic attitudes). No actual deprivation or discrimination to be validated, proved or disproved; but "social reality" as seen and felt by the community (social actors) is presented here. Reasonably, such feeling can be exaggerated, provoked or ameliorated by various external social forces; subject to changes and not always reasonable (nonetheless very real for the individual / community concerned). For the Bumiputra Malays:

- I. Economic backwardness and perceived "economic threat" of more aggressive "immigrant" non-Bumiputra in their own homeland.
- II. Symbolic threat of cultural dissimilarities amongst different races, for example, the Chinese Malaysians have self-sustaining culture and value system in the form of well-established mass media, vernacular schools, colleges and organizations – can be seen as a stubborn resistance against mainstreaming into the Malaysian-Malays

culture. Symbolic threat (Stephen & Stephen, 2000) will be further expounded under literature review.

- III. Perceived discrimination in private or commercial sectors, in the forms of language requirement, business network and cultural fit as indicated by higher proportion of unemployment and lower mean income (Malaysia, 2001).
- IV. Perceived threat or challenge to their preferential status and traditional values, which can be a reason of Islamic resurgence in the 1970s (Maznah Mohamad, 2005).
- V. Some support pluralism whilst others consider cultural dissimilarity to be an obstacle towards unity and ethnic harmony.

The non-Bumiputra:

- I. Perceived negligence by the government in educational support (especially in the vernacular school funding), business and economy (especially for the non-Bumiputras from low and average income brackets); which get in their way of getting ahead of others, such as in securing scholarship, university and public sector admissions.
- II. Corruption, bribery, inefficiency and administrative scandals against the government are always associated with the political majority (Malays), leading to stereotyped imagery of the "greedy Malays" and "clutch mentality" – which is actually public administration issues than ethnic ones.
- III. Indiscriminate affirmative in every sector, such as suspicions of inflated grades for the Bumiputras and unfair promotion which improves the Malays' status in short term but hurts long-term nation-building.
- IV. Being the cultural minority, they consider discriminatory policies rather than cultural dissimilarity to be the main reason of dissatisfaction.

- V. According to Ramasamy (1993), the non-Bumiputras in Malaysia agreed to support the government's efforts in affirmative action, as it was perceived to be a time-bound program. However, some Bumiputras feel that the privileges should be infinitely extended. Meanwhile the socio-economically advantaged Bumiputra, whether by means of their own effort, preferential treatment or parental background, receive continuous privileged rights and assistance. The non-Bumiputras view this situation as the cause of ethnic polarizations. This confusion is partly explained by diffusion of the meaning "Malays' supremacy" to encapsulate "affirmative action", which arguably are the same concept.
- VI. A higher portion of non-Bumiputra, especially the urban Chinese supports opposition party *Pakatan Rakyat* which primarily differentiates herself from the long-established *Barisan Nasional* for the stance on abolition of preferential status. Non-Bumiputras consider *Barisan Nasional's* ethnic politics objectives (defending each ethnic's rights) to be contradictory to real meaningful integration. Ethnic politics is often accused of exploiting ethnic tension or fears. For example, once ethnic equality is achieved the three main ethnic parties from *Barisan Nasional* become dysfunctional and obsolete. However, supporters of *Barisan Nasional* consider the tested and proven working relation: negotiated power sharing and good will still work as each group understands issue from different perspectives.

The cognitive dissonance and understanding over the issues between the two groups gives important implications for this research. Since the Bumiputra population is the main beneficiary from the positive discrimination and is also the cultural majority, it is hypothesized that the Malays and non-Bumiputra probably exhibit *different* prejudiced views in relation to the status quo. The two groups are prejudiced, but differently, and for different reasons: e.g. ego-defense, indignation or contempt. The study by Smith, Stones and Naidoo (2003) concluded that the Whites in South Africa

who lost their privileged status, to be less tolerant to their colored and black counterparts. Another related study by Dolby (2000) showed that the Whites in South Africa experienced fear of being marginalized as a compensation of mistreatment of the Blacks in the past. Along the same line, another study by Duckitt and Mphuthing (1998) showed that the majority who enjoys more power and advantage is the least likely to see the need to change. This project attempts to infer and test the respondents' ethnic views (prejudicial views if they are negative) based on such backgrounds of structural differences.

### **1.5 Ethnic Relations in Malaysia from Socio-Economic Perspective**

Ethnic relations in Malaysia from the socio-economic standpoint mainly focus on ethnic feelings, ego, attitudes and prejudices in relation to ethnic inequalities and power competition after economic resources. Indicators of socio-economic standing are such as education levels, wealth and occupations.

Malaysia had achieved outstanding progresses since independence in 1957. For more than two decades, the Malaysian economy grew at more than 8 percent yearly prior to the Asian financial crisis in 1997. From 1987 till 2002, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at constant prices almost doubled from RM 4834 to RM 8942. The growth is mirrored by economic structural transformation: agricultural employment dropped to only 15 percent in 2000 from slightly more than 50 percent in 1970 while manufacturing employment increased from 8 percent to 29 percent at the same time. From 1970 to 2000, the population proportion lived in urban areas, rose from 28 percent to 62 percent. In the Malaysia context, rural residence is directly linked to poverty (Tey, 2007), a pattern contrasted with the American urban poor.

An important indicator of modernization uptake is the tertiary education rate. According to Tey (2006), for the 1976-80 cohort, the Chinese females are the most

educated (around 35 percent), followed by the Chinese males (about 31 percent), Malay females (22 percent) and Malay males (19 percent). The Indian males (19 percent) and Indian females (19 percent) are the least educated as measured by tertiary education rates. Referring to Tey (2006)'s data from national census, cohort trending ranging from 1946 to 1980 indicates the following trends:

- I. The females overtook the males since the 1971 cohort. The Malay females gained marked uptakes as the main beneficiary of the more aggressive affirmative assistance since 1970.
- II. Tertiary education rates actually improved across all races in spite of the NEP's implementation since 1970.
- III. The females are trending upwards with an exponential pattern whilst the males' is linear in nature.
- IV. The exponential growth pattern for the non-Bumiputra makes evident that the 1950-60 cohorts was the most adversely impacted by positive affirmative action in 1970 insofar as tertiary education opportunities are concerned, notably the females. However, the trend is counterbalanced by a rapid uptake by the younger generations. This observation is in congruence with findings from Pong (1993, 1995, 1997) using 1988/1989 Malaysian Family Life Survey dataset. She further added that lower income groups of the ethnic minorities were the worst impacted by NEP.
- V. Deprived educational opportunities of non-Bumiputra mothers did not slow down the young generations' education. Proliferation of institutions of higher learning in the 1990s just before the government expanded the number of public universities probably compensated the educational adversity faced by older non-Bumiputras in public universities.

- VI. Malay males' education uptake had slowed down since the 1971-75 cohorts and leveled off, indicating uptake saturation.
- VII. In general, the females are fast overtaking their male counterparts at an accelerated rate; the males' growth has slowed down, mainly driven by the trend of the Malay male population, which is the numeric majority.
- VIII. Both higher educational attainment and subsequent career further reduced the Chinese Malaysians' fertility.
- IX. Pong (1993) further found the following trends for birth cohorts born between 1940 and 1969 (pre-NEP): for the Malays, gender and socioeconomic differences narrowed over time for secondary school achievement; for the non-Malays, inequality in some cases worsened. The results revealed a social structural, rather than a cultural, explanation for inter-ethnic differences in educational achievements for the time period.

Generally, admission into tertiary education is no longer an issue as private and public tertiary institutions proliferate rapidly since the 1990s to the point of saturation which alleviated competition tension greatly. However, places in certain professional courses in key universities are still highly contested.

Rapid economic growth in Malaysia has created opportunities and livelihoods for everyone. Prosperous economic performance especially during the 1990s is believed to have cushioned the impact of ethnic contestation. The trend is also observable in the region such as in Singapore and in Thailand. Indonesia and the Philippines provided somber contrasts to the peacefulness in Malaysia. Anti-Chinese pogrom broke up in Indonesia, in May 1998 after economic crisis 1997; Chinese's properties and business were looted. Mobsters put up signs such as "*Milik Pribumi*" ("Owned by native Indonesians"). More than 1,500 people were killed, and even a possibility of 5,000 deaths was suggested (Purdey, 2006). Ethnic violence also took



place during economic recession in Western Europe (Zick, Pettigrew & Wagner, 2008). Moreover, study by Kunovich (2004, 2002) to test group threat theory found that both economic status and proportion of immigrants to be predictors of racism attitudes: social structural factors such as economic condition have a stronger effect in Western Europe than in East Europe. Other factors such as taking pride in a nation's democracy institution reduces hostility towards immigrants in European countries (Heyder & Schmidt, as cited in Zick et al., 2008). Higher proportion of immigrants brings about more interactions and under some circumstances actually increased acceptance (Wagner, Christ, Pettigrew & Wolf, 2006).

Sriskandarajah (2005) studied three fast developing countries that experienced strategic alliance and negotiation among the major ethnic groups over economic redistribution issues. He postulated that economic development per se will not preclude ethno-political conflict. Both perceived and real inter-ethnic inequalities in access to important economic and political resources lead to ethno-political mobilization in each country, mainly driven by their ethnic grievances over unfair resource distribution. Sriskandarajah's observation is agreeable with psychological studies that emphasize "perceived" deprivation rather than actual discrimination to be the true cause of ethnic hostility. For example, Kempen and Ozuekren (1998); Semyonov, Rajman, Yom Tov and Schmidt (2004) found out that anti-minority (more prejudiced) Caucasians consistently over-predict the proportion of African American in their residential areas, and the "perceived proportion" and actual proportion in an area were actually unrelated. This partially explains why researches on proportion of immigrants and prejudiced views have been inconsistent. Another interesting observation in Malaysia is that the wealthiest states (West Coast) in Malaysia happened to be the least racially harmonious follows by East Coast (Kelantan, Terengganu) and East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak). Although the relation is probably spurious as racial compositions are

different (West Coast has higher proportions of non-Bumiputras), it can be suspected that higher racial competition in more affluent states suggests that modernization does not always reduce ethnic tension, other factors such as "perceived" disparity and deprivation in economic growth can exacerbate ethnic tension, a phenomenon known as "the rage of the potentially rich" (Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeuddin, 2005).

Globally, and on a national level, an opposite pattern is observed, according to Snodgrass (1995), multi-ethnic countries are unlikely to be the fastest growing economies; they are over-represented among the poor or slow-growing economies. The pattern indirectly implies the social cost of multi-ethnicity against better economic performance.

Ethnic inequalities has been reduced but not eliminated. The Chinese were still over-represented in the professionals such as accountants, architects and engineers. The same is also true for Indians in the professions of veterinarians, doctors, lawyers and dentists, exceeding their respective population proportion compared to the Bumiputras (Balasubramaniam, 2006; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2000; Ramasamy, 1993).

At the same time, massive and pervasive pro-Bumiputra policies since four decades (1970) have created a new Malays middle class (Yao, 2003). Their views, values at large impact profoundly on the future of Malaysia's prospect in ethnic relationships.

Other related economic topics are such as marginalization against certain ethnic minorities, inequality, deprivation, work place and wage discrimination, consumer discrimination.

## 1.6 Ethnic Relations in Malaysia from Political Perspective

Ethnic relations in Malaysia from political perspective mainly focuses on power contestation, negotiated resource (re)distribution, conflicts, motives of ethnic politics and political economy (Gomez & Jomo, 1999; Horowitz, 1989). Although the Malaysian politics is generally considered stable, discussion of ethnic issue is still regarded as sensitive for its strong political connotation. Ethnic issue pierces across every sphere of any Malaysian's life, to understand Malaysia is to understand ethnic prejudice. The core of Malaysian ethnic issue, arguably, is the ethnic-politics in Malaysia.

As a balancing force to ethnic inequalities, Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia requires the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong's* the obligation for protecting the privileges of the Bumiputras. This privileged status is often interpreted as affirmative action that benefits the Bumiputras. Implemented in the form of NEP (1970-1990), National Development Policy (1990-2000), and National Vision Policy (2000-2010), these policies are broadly referred to as NEP (as in present tense) (Zakaria Haji Ahmad, 2006). Discussing the repeal of Article 153 publicly is prohibited by law. The *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malays' supremacy) status is a legacy of the British colonization intended to safeguard the local Malays from being overpowered by immigrant Chinese and Indians. At the point of Independence, the Chinese and Indians were in general richer urban residents, whilst the local Malays were more likely to be manual workers and poorer. The special rights are also grounded on the basis of *Social Contract*, in which the immigrants were granted citizenships, thus reducing the Malays to be a lesser majority; in exchange, the Malays were granted special rights and privileges as codified by Article 153 (Quek, 2004).

Implementation of positive affirmative action has been criticized for the following reasons: (1) it is racial-based and not deprivation-based; (2) the contentious calculation of Bumiputra-held economic equity and university admission quota (which excludes

UiTM and UIA), as well as differentiated admission routes to university (STPM and matriculation) (Cohen, 2000).

Non-Bumiputras feel discriminated. Indian Malaysians feel neglected in the midst of Chinese-Malays competition (Hindraf Official Website, 2010). Indians suffer disproportionate poverty rate and lag behind in many aspects and feel not empowered as a result of limited political power. The Indian Malaysians' predicament suggests positive affirmative action in Malaysia is not solely welfare-driven but at least partially politically-motivated. A much criticized aspect is that the aborigines from Peninsular Malaysia (*Orang Asli*), the poorest ethnic groups (80 percent lived below poverty line as in 1997) are not included as Bumiputra under the constitution (Colin, 2004). This fact further lends credence to the statement that "affirmative action" in Malaysia is more political than social. Further, statistics on Non-Malays Bumiputras are not provided. This obscures the genuine achievement of the Malays Bumiputra as the two groups are diverse and not-comparable in terms of religion, cultures, socio-economic status and do not identify themselves as a single ethnic group.

Overall, the government is relaxing on hard-line affirmative action. In April 2009 Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak exempted 27 minor sub-sectors from the 30 percent Bumiputra equity requirement. A poll conducted by *Merdeka Centre* indicated that 71 percent of Malaysians agreed with the statement that "*race-based affirmative action policy is obsolete and must be replaced with a merit-based policy*", 65 percent of Malays, 83 percent of Chinese and 89 percent of Indian respondents agreed that race-based affirmative action should be terminated (Merdeka Centre, 2006). Another research by Merdeka Centre cited in Independent Online (2008) and Radio Australia (2008) stated that Malaysians have "*outgrown racial politics*". No further methodology details of these two studies are available, the researcher would caution not to jump at a conclusion without examining the questionnaire item and procedure employed. The

results, if indeed valid, can be explained by locally-born non-Bumiputra's estrangement from their ancestral countries. They are born and loyal to Malaysia; concept such as *Social Contract* is remote and only vaguely cognizable; unlike the older generation.

Ethnic politics does not necessarily lead to conflicts. Ethnic politics is prohibited in Uganda but encouraged in Ethiopia (Habtu, 2004). Both countries are not peaceful, but Habtu described Ethiopia's ethnic territories and ethnic secession policy to be fragile and dangerous experiment for political stability as an assessment of the policy after one decade (Ibid). In general, declining ethnic politics can be seen as a positive trend because in a society where every issue is framed ethnically, any discussion will provoke ethnic rivalry within the society (Balasubramaniam, 2006). Along this line of thought, ethnic politics and radicalized thinking will perpetuate ethnic sentiments.

In summary, ethnic politic tension in Malaysia revolves primarily about tension and frustration over achievement gap among races, differentiated treatments and privileges to help the Bumiputra. As a concluding note, positive discrimination policies had successfully reduced ethnic inequalities, but at the expense of alienated non-Bumiputra. Meanwhile, in the 2000s, Malaysia had witnessed resurgence of politically-driven ethnic sentiments, a trend mirrors by the increasing popularity of opposing coalition, which mainly differentiates themselves from the long-established ruling *Barisan Nasional* by advancing absolute meritocracy. The last decade has seen fluctuating popularity swaying between the two competing coalitions in every alternate election in which *Barisan Nasional* still manages to stay in power but with diminishing majority overall.

### **1.7 Ethnic Relations in Malaysia from Cultural-Anthropology Perspective**

A few key ideas from anthropological perspectives are briefly summarized under this section. Writings from this perspective often discuss topics such as post-colonization

envisioning of nation-building and social classes (Abdul Rahman Embong, 1999, 2007; Loh, 2002), national integration and social cohesion (Shamsul, 2010), ethnic and religious identity and its transformation, for instances, Islamic resurgence movement and inter-ethnic competition (Abdul Rahman Embong, 1999, 2007; Ahmad Fadhel Yousif, 2009; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2001; Ibrahim Saad, 1980; Maznah Mohamad, 2005; Shamsul, 1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2010). Lastly, the assimilation versus multiculturalism debate is presented under this section too.

Anthropologists argue that ethnic identities and relationships are contingent upon interactive dynamics with other ethnic groups who are brought into context for various reasons such as migration, urbanization, employment opportunities and colonial administration. Ethnic identities in Malaysia's context can be understood from the perspective of urbanization and modernization; they are formed reactively, resultant from response and interaction with other "ethnic" groups. Ethnic competition is therefore understood as real and imaginary advantages and disadvantages felt by each group and the strategies to address the issues in relation to other ethnic groups (Tan, 2001; Yao, 2003). This is best illustrated through a study by Brinkerhoff and Jacob (1994) in Suriname, a country that resembles Malaysia in political background: racially-compromised, consociation democracy. They suggested that the Hindus and Muslims in Suriname cooperated and accommodated each other, had more positive social distance as a result of political alliance. Is this related to the "non-Bumiputra" and "Bumiputra" separation in Malaysia? Maybe to a certain extent, but it should always be reminded, only experimental design enables conclusion of causality.

Ethnicity is seen as an imposed social construct, a politicized element, a perpetuated group consciousness to enhance and perpetuate power status quo (Gurin, Miller & Gurin, 1980). Although the vernacular school system has been instrumental in the formation and consolidation of ethnic identity and other social labels such as

"Malayness", "Chineseness" and "Indianness", no empirical linkage between aggressive racism, explicit prejudice and schooling backgrounds have been established through empirical proofs. National unity is not uniformity of culture (Shamsul, 2010). The researcher proposes that functional and peaceful multiculturalism signify national unity and social cohesion.

Important terms should be properly interpreted. A few concepts such as "unity", "nationalism" are severely distorted and tainted with overt ethnicity negativity. When used in the Malaysia context, "unity" either means forced assimilation into a single culture or "unity" in defending one's race against "invasion" of other races. Sadly, either way does not solve problems, and actually provoke ethnic sentiments. Another egregious example is the term "prejudice", which means taking into account irrelevant factors in decision. For example, in employment decision, work efficiency is the relevant factor whilst gender, age, ethnicity are irrelevant factors.

One of the earlier and influential writing was written by former Prime Minister Dr. Tun Mahathir Mohd, in his book *The Malays Dilemma*, he attributed backwardness of the Malay race to natural abundance and peace in *Tanah Melayu* (Malays Land) which sustains the feeble-minded and the weak society members; and limited gene pool crossover due to inbreeding; a situation in sharp contrast to the invader-colonialists, the Chinese and Indians who experienced famine, political strife and other challenges in order to survival (Mahathir, 1970). The sensitive nature of the contents caused early setback in Dr Mahathir's political career. Yao (2003) interpreted this notion as a feeling of intruded peace and harmony in the face of immigrants' dynamism and competitiveness in contrast to the culturally-static and complacent Malays .

Dr Mahathir's ideas had profound and long-lasting repercussion in the society. Malay nationalists support positive affirmative policies to achieve justice by countering the harm inflicted. This subtle yet different interpretation provides alternative ground in

addition to the Social Contract reasoning. According to Mahathir (1970, p.75): "*The Malays are not proud of the privilege of being protected by law like cripples. They would like to get rid of these privileges if they can, but they have to let pride takes second place to the facts of life.*"

In the 2006 UMNO General Assembly, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak said that the Malays Agenda has no time limit, because "four centuries of colonialist oppression of the Malays could not be undone in a few decades" (The Star Online, 2006, November 14). According to Yao (2003), the more competitive Chinese-others are the cause of Malays' lack by comparison, the solution is by equalizing with achievements of the immigrants; and not about promoting a more superior position for Malays. In this sense, any racialized policy is to remedy the harms done to the Malays by the colonialist and their policy: bringing in immigrants (Yao, 2003).

These different lines of reasoning can be summarized as, (1) affirmative redemption (a temporary measure to redeem past damages), (2) power balance and ethnic ego motivated by political competition to preserve the preferential status as codified by the constitution. However, in reality, these two lines of thought are often inseparably intertwined and inter-dependent. Malays' preferential status itself is a multiple dimensional construct which include at least these meanings: (1) birth rights entitled as a result of *Social Contract* exchanges, (2) permanent iconic status as the original settlers, such as the Maori in New Zealand, (3) time-bound affirmative action. These meanings are often confused and inseparable even to the experts.

A few authors such as Maznah Mohamad (2005), Shamsul (2001a, 2001b) and Yao (2003) observed that economic participation and resurgence of Islamic revivalist movement had replaced the royalty and Malay language as the main thrusts of Malay identity during the 1990s. For example, the obsession with "pecuniary gains" and its



conflict with morality and religious ideas led many religious Malays rural populace to pay their attention to PAS (*Parti Islam SeMalaysia*) (Ibid).

Still another school of ethnic researchers examine the extent of ethnic cultural exchange or cultural consolidation, four categories were described: (1) segregation, (2) accommodation, (3) acculturation and (4) amalgamation (Shamsul, 2007). These four categories describe four varying stages of cultural integration. However, it can be argued that cultural integration and religious affiliation have failed to explain most severe conflicts in the world such as the case of Rwanda. This idea is risky if misquoted and misinterpreted to support brute force assimilation on the minorities against their will. This theory bears similarity to diversity management models credited under psychologist Berry (1997) as follows.

Berry (1997) described four types of acculturation models: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. These four models have two dimensions: (1) to what extent the ethnic culture or identity is maintained and, (2) positive relationship with other groups. Integration is the ideal type in which the minority culture is maintained and positive relationship is built. Forced assimilative measures inflict humiliation (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Sam & Berry, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), whilst natural assimilation takes many years of formation. Natural assimilation takes more lines of generation, such as the Chinese and Indians in the Philippines, Indonesia and Kelantan. Examples of natural assimilations in Malaysia can refer to some lesser known minority Creole communities found in Malacca, Penang and Kelantan; they are facing cultural extinctions in Malaysia. These unique groups include but not limited to the Malacca Portuguese, the Baba Malays and the *Peranakan Hokkien* who are largely concentrated in Malacca, the Kelantan Hokkien (resultant from intermarriage between Hokkien and Thai), the Cocos Malays, the Chitties and the Chavacanos (Murugiah, 2004).

The researcher argues that (1) value integration should precede cultural integration; (2) a more relevant factor to be focused is "perceived" economic threat and racial ego which are both "imagined construct" just like ethnicity itself. Therefore, abundance thinking as opposed to sum-zero thinking is more valid an explanation than cultural integration. For cultures only reflect living styles imitation such as food, costume and other material cultures, but it does not explain perceived unfairness and threats among the major races. Natural assimilation takes hundreds and thousands of years whilst forced assimilation, a form of ethno-centrism and social dominance against the minorities, always cause conflicts (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Sam & Berry, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

### **1.8 Ethnic Attitudes, Prejudices and Stereotypes**

"Intergroup relations represent in their enormous scope one of the most difficult and complex knots of problems which we confront in our times (Tajfei, H,1982, p1)" Intergroup behavior or relations is defined by Sherif and Sherif (1979, p9), as "Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification, we have an instance of intergroup behavior." In other words, the individuals in a group react in a way being influenced by the stance or values of a group they belong to. The field of social psychology is determined to find out generality of basic psychological principles across a variety of settings. However, some psychologists place more emphasis on situational uniqueness by arguing that "classic, laboratory social psychology has generally ignored individual differences, choosing to consider subjects as equivalent black boxes or as two-legged (generally white) rats from the same strain (Helmreich, 1975, p.551)." Recently the nature of differences across group is increasingly being

recognized. The notion of what is true of one group is also true for another group is being rejected (Gergen, 1985).

Three main concepts at the heart of intergroup negativity are prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Prejudice is negative affective or emotional response to a particular group or people resulting from intolerant, unfair and unfavorable attitudes towards that group (Brewer & Kremer, 1985). Examples of prejudices are anger, uncomfortable reactions and indignation because of someone's race, or gender. Discrimination refers to specific unfair reactions toward members of a group. It refers to action rather than negative feelings. Examples of discrimination are hates crimes against minorities (Herek, 1989). Stereotypes are beliefs, both positive or negative, about group members' characteristics (Jussim, Coleman & Lerch, 1987). Prejudice in the context of ethnicity is called racism. According to The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1969), racism is "any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person because of his or her color." This definition actually encompasses all three concepts mentioned above: prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes, it can also happen on individual or institutional levels. Causes of ethnic negativity can be reviewed from different angles or emphasis: historical and economic emphasis, socio-cultural emphasis, psychodynamic emphasis and phenomenological emphasis (Deaux, Dane & Wrightsman, 1993) which has been covered in previous sections. The psychodynamic review will be covered under Chapter 2. Psychodynamic analysis stresses on more durable personality characteristics while phenomenological analysis stresses an individual's perception or interpretation of what happen. Examples of phenomenological variables are upbringing and schooling experience that influence attitudes towards other groups (Ibid).

## **1.9 Formulating the Statement of Problems and Justifications**

The first chapter can be understood as the general discussion of research problems as Chapter 1 deals with conceptual confusions and backgrounds of the issues; including but not limited to long-standing issues such as the pluralism / multiculturalism versus segregation debate: does pluralism always bring about segregation? Does segregation always cause conflicts? Is segregation synonymous to disunity? As a young and dynamic society, how does the younger generation think of these issues? How about the future trending of ethnic relations? These are some of the main questions to be answered by researchers for ethnic relations and prejudice. The fundamental difficulty in reviewing such reports is clear: social studies must be understood in their social context, by omitting a confounding predictor, the interpretation is biased (such as comparing ethnic relations between East and West Malaysia).

These unresolved questions span from geographical (e.g. effects of residential segregation), ethnic politics, sociological (cultural divisions) to psychological (types of prejudices and the individuals' inborn traits). In order to draw a manageable boundary to the research, the researcher chose to study individuals as research units, based on the belief that each individual responds uniquely to structural, cultural and other external factors, as individual has the free will of choice based on their awareness. Hard determinism encourages labeling, stereotypes and other sweeping conclusion contrary to the very nature of the research: to dispel any prejudiced views. Further, modelling macro data has its own constraints and the issue of validity can be compromised, not an ideal consequence for such a sensitive topic.

Laboratory psychology provides strong causality association but findings are detached from social reality; whilst mere historical-comparative analysis is susceptible to armchair contemplation which provides weak conclusive suggestions. This project does not strive to reconcile such disparity inherent in social psychology but only