

**Political rights:
A Shift or 'Detour' in Nationalism Presence Among Malaysia & Japan's Youth**

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Abstract

The result of the 13th General Election shows that the Barisan Nasional (BN) still manage to gain the necessary mandate although it failed to win the popular votes as the total number of vote that they manage to get is only 47.38 percent despite the opposition coalition (Pakatan Rakyat) manages to get 50.87 percent from the total vote. This had caused the opposition to claim that the Election Commission (EC) are being biased as though the opposition managed to get more votes than BN they still unable to get the total numbers of seat needed to get the mandate to form the government. The opposition coalition accused the EC of malpractice and abusing their power to ensure that BN will stay as the government. Their main allegation lies on the ineffective inedible ink used by the EC as they claimed that it can be easily erase which raised the possibility of phantom voters. The EC are also being accused of practicing gerrymandering in order to ensure that BN will retain the necessary number of seats to form the government. In 2013, GE the Malaysian youth generation or the young voters chose to participate actively in the political arena and some of them were elected as the political representatives. However, the shift of Japan's youth toward the political right and the upsurge of national has become the subject of much debate. With many challenges and new advanced technologies that have driven the youth community to be engaged in the political arena has created a new paradigm of political participation among the youth. This paper will discuss the factors that contribute to the increasing number of political participation among the Malaysia's and Japan's youth that plays very significant role in democracy and and analyses of this scenario have come to proliferate.

Keywords: *political right, democracy, youth and political participation*

Introduction

Political involvement is highly encouraged in democracy which citizens' involvement or engagement is a necessary condition for democratic decision-making as democracy cannot function without some minimum levels of political involvement. It is argued that political participation helps "develop intellectual and moral capacities that are essentially important", which include a sense of sympathy towards others, responsibility for oneself, the skills to work with others, and the powers of understanding.

Political participation reflects the way people with various attitudes utilize their opportunities. Civic involvement is indeed necessary to reach the 'expectation' of democratic ideals. Among activities which the society involves in are the conventional, which is limited to vote casting and political campaign, the unconventional such as protests and women's participation, and the recent civil activities such as volunteering and social engagement. These forms of participation are consistent with the actual civic engagement practices. A case study on Malaysia between 2007-2008 clearly finds that the society was normally engaged in the conventional form of participation such as voting, campaigning and contacting leaders. In that study, factors such as education, occupation and income were found to play important roles in shaping the people's political engagement.

Besides force and coercion, other forms of influence can be used by a ruling class to dominate others. For example, control of the media can influence things such as what shows get aired or cancelled and the degree to which a television station covers or do not cover regarding to news. These limitations are very vital for hegemonic survival of a ruling class in maintaining their influence in power through popularity. Government or a ruling usually uses law to suppress and constraint ideas which are not in line with their political agenda. Deterrent laws are enacted to specifically deter ideas that in contrast with the interest of the ruling party which will be regarded as subversive. Subversiveness is illustrated as an antagonist element towards achieving harmonious society.

Behind the scene

In Malaysia, before PRU-13, government of Malaysia had enacted various deterrent laws which aim is to curb and control the circulation of information through mass media. Printing Press and Publication Act (PPP) is one the example of how the government had regulated the

content of information that should be exposed to the people. Such cliché government policy in securing their hegemonic structure by denying and negative others' ideas' values. The PPP Act require all printed material in Malaysia shall obtain printing license from the Internal Affairs Minister and has to follow all the procedure and guideline that had been laid down in the Act. The guideline is to the extent where it is stated what kind of articles that can and cannot be published to the masses. Further, the license should be renewed annually and the Minister of Internal Affairs has the absolute power, to revoke and terminate the license when they feel necessary. Such wide discretionary power given by the government to the Minister of Internal Affairs is to maintain social stability and also to prevent the sensitive and taboo issues from being discussed publicly to avoid national instability.

However, after GE13, this Act had been amended and several provisions had been reconstructed to fulfill the demands of the public. The amendment of this Act is the condition that the license shall be renewed annually, had been deleted (Printing Press and Publication Act). And the most significance amendment in this Act is that every decision made by the Minister of Internal Affairs regarding termination or revocation of printing and publication license can be challenged in court. Something which never happened before where the decision of termination or revocation of license rested on the executive branch of the government and decision is absolute. As we can see, government had tried both approaches in securing its hegemonic survival in our country. The first method, which occurred before PRU-13, is where the government inflicts forces and punishment to deter any subversive idea from emerging into the society's thought. However, this approach had created vast number of criticism and the hegemony of the government is potentially diminished if they are reluctant to make changes in this issue. Like what have been mentioned earlier, in order to get consent by the majority and also to maintain the hegemony, the concept of reward and persuasion can be used. For now, the government had resorted to persuade and reconcile with the masses and starts to listen to their demands to obtain more support from the masses.

The educational institutions are a part of the system of ideological hegemony in which individuals were socialised into maintaining the status quo. Gramsci in his book clearly stated that learning is not something that comes easily for the majority of young people. In order to transform this situation, the educational system had to be confronted and changed dramatically. Quoting Gramsci in his book; "If our aim is to produce a new stratum of intellectuals from a social group which has not traditionally developed the appropriate

attitudes, then we have unprecedented difficulties to overcome” (Gramsci, 1971:43). A learner had to be active and not a “passive and mechanical recipient”. The relationship between the pupil’s psychology and the educational forms must always be “active and creative, just as the relation of the worker to his tools is active and creative” (Gramsci 1977: 42).

Therefore, hegemony is obtained through process by which “educative pressure” is imposed to single individuals so as to obtain their consent and their collaboration. Education can be a perfect political instrument to maintain the hegemony of a particular class of people. By inserting such ideas and thought into national curriculum, one can shape the mindset and how the future generation will think and act. Such political blueprint of inserting dogmas and ideas into one’s mind had long been practice by imperial power and colonial ruler. Looking at Malaysian context, during the Japanese occupation in Tanah Melayu, the establishment of Japanese-base school for the masses showed on how this particular colonial ruler use education as an apparatus in transmitting their dogmas and ideas to the masses, in order to maintain their hegemony in Tanah Melayu. The syllabus and curricular had been shaped as to persuade people to give their “consent” to the new colonial ruler. The insertion of this dogmas and ideas were through class syllabus, school anthem, language, and uniform as to persuade people to accept their ideas, thus abide and obey by their ruling policy.

The ruling government is trying their best to form a conscience of the way of thinking or idea in the mind of the society by conveying the message that the government is a legitimate entity and also, they have the credibility to lead the country. This idea is strengthened by trying to scare off the society with the flaws of the opposition parties through act and consequences. The implication is the society will abide to the government’s power as a legitimate ruling entity. This act which is against to the ‘norms of politic’ is going to budge the peace and stability of the nation. At the higher education level on the other hand, the existence of University and University College Act (UCA 2012: Section 15) too can be taken as an instrument by the government to maintain influence and domination towards the society.

Before the latest amendment of this Act, student’ political rights and freedom of education is limited and the freedom of academic is in the discretionary of the Students’ Affair of the institution. The uprising of the tertiary students is a reaction of claiming their rights to politic and education in order to ensure a dynamic and progressive education system. Prior to that, the mass demands the government to repeal the act that is seemed to be

irrelevant in a democratic society. In the light of 2010, the government in the beginning did not want to tolerate and students is strictly bounded by the law of AUKU which prohibit students from joining any activity related to politics whether in or outside campus. The UKM4 case is the best example in showing that the government forbids any element that damages the position of government's hegemony in the society. In this case, 4 students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaya (UKM) was expelled from the university on the basis that they joined the opposition party and became an agent during the state election for the Ijok parliament ([2011] 6 MLJ 507). The issue of freedom of politics was then featured during the trial which was like a wakeup call to the students where they then realized that they should be given the freedom to be involved in politics whether in the government's party or the oppositions'.

This can be seen as the government is abusing their power by showing negative repercussions if their hegemony is to be challenged. However, 'permission' is still failed to be obtained in a whole and the government's hegemony in the tertiary students is fading. That is why in the year 2012, an amendment had been done towards that particular Act by allowing students to be a part of any political party and they are also allowed to join in any of their activities. Regardless the amendments, activities which are political, in the campus are strictly off limits. Their reason for this is to obtain 'permission' from the mass through 'persuasion', which is by 'rewarding' their demands. This closure is continued even after the 2013 election where it can be seen that the government's effort to win the heart of the students by for example, providing a slot of "Sudut Pidato" to give the students opportunity to communicate and express their ideas in a right medium. This freedom is however is subjected to the discretionary of the Students' Affair where each orator has to hand in their speech script to them to get approval. Pertaining to that matter, educationally, it can be said that the government is trying their best to maintain their hegemony position by listening to the demands made by the mass and granting it as minimal as they can to maintain hegemony in the students' society.

While in August 2009, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan has lost for the first time in the elections after LDP has been the dominant party for over half-a century. This has brought to the winning position to the new opposition party, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Some scholars opined similar situations facing the similar situation as Japan except Malaysia. In the the 2008 General Election, the ruling party of Malaysia, known as the

National Front (Barisan Nasional), led by the conservative party United Malays National Organization (UMNO), has lost considerable ground to the new opposition, the People's Pact (Pakatan Rakyat). National Front has lost two-third majority in the Parliament and five states has been under the ruling of Pakatan Rakyat. This research project seeks to answer the question of the reason behind the latest loss of dominance of old political parties in both Japan and Malaysia and taking into account the "new opposition" factor. This research project also seeks to discuss thoroughly the "new opposition" factor in Malaysia and Japan, since 1990s. Many studies did not directly study the rise of new opposition and their appeal to the voters of both countries, judging from their victories in 2008/2009. Thus, this research will study on these factor on how the existence of the new opposition in the contemporary political system.

Conclusion

The role of the opposition in a dominant party country is difficult to interpret. Left politics in Malaysia, previously defined as fighting for independence then adopted a more radical ideology that threatened national security. Compare this with Japan when the bombings of Hiroshiam and Nagasaki brought it to its knees, the Japanese opposition is usually easily defined and labelled. Japan, with its homogenous society and its *uchi* and *sato* attitude allowed their leaders to shape the political culture according to their formula. The SCAP at the time, though successful in introducing democracy in Japan's political system, failed to force Japan to adopt the Western model. This situation is different in Malaysia, which adopted the Westminster system and applied in full, even though there is some local variance. However, both countries went through different experiences. Communal issues are often used by opposition parties to threaten dominant party positions, while the opposition in Japan used economic issues to win popularity. The next chapter discusses the link between elections and political parties, and how democracy entered modern political culture and give birth to a more rational opposition.

According to the the consensus of the speakers at this Feb. 22 2006 Asia Program event was that nationalism among Japanese youth is no more extensive than among other age groups, and that this is not a rising trend. Put in its historical context, this is the fifth time since World War II that there has been concern of about rising nationalism in Japan, and at no time in the past have any of these concerns been realized. However, what is new today is that Japanese politicians are much less constrained by the bureaucracy, and they also feel the need to cater to a wider audience and adopt a more populist approach. Furthermore, nationalism

amongst Japan's near neighbors, China and South Korea, is growing. Thus, there is always the danger of some small event triggering an overreaction, which would escalate into a "nightmare" scenario that no one would want.

Daqing Yang led off the discussion with some excellent polling data, noting that love of country has remained fairly constant over the past few decades at a little over 50 percent. In an NHK poll in 2000, more young people said they knew little about World War II than a similar poll conducted in 1980. He also said the polls indicate young people in their twenties have more in common with people in their seventies than they do with their parents' generation. The only polling data which indicated a significant shift in attitude is toward China: a higher percentage of Japanese, including youth, have a lower opinion of China because of the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 and anti-Chinese demonstrations against Japan in recent years. There is also no doubt that the end of the Cold War, unease over the rise of China, and the economic uncertainty of the 1990s have combined to give Japanese youth an increased sense of anxiety, which has created an opportunity to focus on nationalism. However, this has also had the effect of distancing Japanese youth from politics: the young tend to be the least likely to vote.

While Dudden asserted that without youth and nationalism, there would be no modern Japan. She referred back to the 19th century Meiji Era to note that most of those leaders were in their twenties when they started planning to build Japan into a "modern" nation. She also asserted that in the early 1870s, these leaders carefully planned to take over Korea. They succeeded in doing so in 1910, and then Japanese leaders tried to use similar tactics to conquer China in the 1930s. Dudden advanced the interesting theory that Japanese foreign policy toward China is almost always first "practiced" on Korea. Returning to the topic of Japanese youth, she mentioned that they refer to themselves as the "super-flat" generation. Everything is on the surface; there is no deep meaning to anything, including history. Dudden then moved to a discussion of the politics of apology, asserting that from 1965, the time of normalization between Japan and South Korea, until 1995, there was an official "apology era" which allowed Japan to make "hollow" apologies to South Korea in order to advance political and economic relations. However, these apologies paid no real attention to the victims. Since 1995, these victim groups, such as Korea's sex slaves, have become more politically active. This has produced a backlash, where the Japanese assert that they have apologized enough and are never appreciated, and the victims of Japanese aggression charge Japan with insincere

apologies. She said the backlash in Japan often leads to a distortion in history, most exemplified by the popular right-wing cartoonist and novelist Yoshinori Kobayashi, who, Dudden asserted, twists history to appeal to emotions for personal financial gain. Kobayashi's attitude toward the sex slaves, for example, is that they made ten times more money than the average Japanese soldier, thereby benefiting from the war, so why would anyone need to apologize to them?

However Berger mentioned that there is a certain crisis among Japanese youth. He noted that the economic downturn in Japan in the 1990s was the longest among advanced nations since the depression of the 1930s. Berger stated that concern about rising nationalism has been a constant since World War II, and actually the current concern is the fifth over the last fifty years. Berger said such occurrences always follow the same number of steps. First is an international event (such as North Korea firing a missile over Japan in 1998) which galvanizes concern within Japan. The next step is that people on the right begin to agitate for a revival of patriotism in Japan, and a stronger defense posture. When the right does this, the center and left resist. The result is some adjustment and change, but not all that much. Yet the situation today, especially in the area of Japanese domestic politics, differs somewhat from before. The power of the bureaucracy is weakening, for example, and changes in the Japanese electoral system are producing more populist politicians, who feel they have to appeal to broader audiences. At the same time, there are changes in the domestic political systems in South Korea and China, not simply trumped-up emotionalism, but grass roots nationalism. When such South Korean or Chinese nationalism comes face-to-face with apology fatigue in Japan, where the Japanese feel that the more they apologize, the more they get "spat upon," the results could be troubling. One horrible event, such as the killing of a Chinese tourist by a Japanese fanatic, could set off an escalating political crisis.

Thus, Nakayama agreed that among Japanese youth, those under 30, there is a sense of rising frustration regarding foreign criticism. On the other hand, right-wing flag-raising nationalism leaves a majority of the population, including the youth, absolutely cold. He asserted that the problems of the graduates of the 1990s were not just about economics, but involved a lack of a sense of identity as well. He noted the U.S. has its Declaration of Independence and its Constitution, but in Japan, "there is little to connect us to our past." Therefore, the Yasukuni Shrine, the source of so much international controversy when the prime minister visits there, is in Nakayama's opinion the strongest symbol to connect the

Japanese people to their past. He continued that the Yasukuni Shrine is, as a political symbol, more about who the Japanese are than any conscious anti-Korean or anti-Chinese statement. Picking up on Dr. Dudden's remarks about Yoshinori Kobayashi, Nakayama said he's like Rush Limbaugh or Bill O'Reilly in the U.S. Most Japanese youth pay little attention to Kobayashi. Nakayama concluded by asserting that he doubted the current nationalistic trend in Japan has much momentum, and felt that while some sentiment for it exists, there is no real political infrastructure to sustain it.

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