The Governance of a Multi-Ethnic Nation: Its Secrets to Success

Wendy Yee Mei Tien¹ and Maya Khemlani David²

¹Section for Co-Curricular, External Faculty Electives and TITAS, University Malaya
²Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia

Abstract. The governance of a multi-ethnic country spells many challenges and difficulties. Tunku Abdul Rahman, or more popularly known as the Father of Independence in Malaysia nonetheless has managed to overcome all these challenges and difficulties in uniting the people to bring his country to independence in 1957. This paper aims to identify the secrets of his success based on several documents such as his speeches made during his reign as the Prime Minister (PM), his personal recollection of events after retiring as the PM and people’s (his close aides) opinions of him. These documents were analyzed qualitatively using NVivo V.9. Based on the results of the analysis, it is clear that Tunku’s approach was based on his firm grassroots actions and beliefs of celebrating unity in diversity.

Keywords: Political governance, Multi-ethnic society, Leadership.

1. Introduction

Looking at the history on the formation of the Independent Malaya and later Malaysia, the road to independence was not easy. The people came from different ethnic backgrounds, different parts of the world, different cultures, and had different languages, religions, socio economic backgrounds, interests, needs and want. But how did Tunku Abdul Rahman (henceforth also referred to as Tunku), manage to unite all these rainbow of differences and made independence a reality?

2. Nation Building

Tunku’s greatest achievement lay not in what he managed to get out of the British but in the crafting of a formula to manage race relations that made independence and subsequent nation building possible. There were two mechanisms in his formula. Firstly, Tunku identified a suitable vehicle to win independence and to form the government. Although Tunku did not conceive the idea of the Alliance coalition (Parti Perikatan consist of UMNO, MCA-Malaysia Chinese Association and MIC-Malaysia Indian Congress), but it was he who recognized its potential and nurtured the coalition until it acquired the strength and the authority to lead the country to independence. The initial role of the Alliance in the battle for independence was fought on behalf of the Malays but when Tunku took over, he had to unite both Malays and non-Malays with him; managing both the external challenge, the British, and also the internal challenge; the management of the Malay and Non Malay population.

Secondly, Tunku established the proper ground rules for the management of race relations. He emphasized the reality of interdependence among the different races and argued that the races stood to do better together than each on their own. From this flowed his idea for the collective sharing of power and responsibility. Although battled with critics, from both Malays as well as non-Malays, Tunku continued to manifest this view in the structure and work culture of the Alliance. Tunku institutionalized the reality of this interdependence among the races through each of his victories. Acceptance of this interdependence meant acceptance of the reality of a plural society. Tunku got the Malays to accept the transition from “Tanah Melayu untuk Melayu” (the Malay land for the Malays only) to “Tanah Melayu untuk semua rakyat berbilang kaum” (the Malay land for citizens of all races). By doing so, he changed the fundamental views and ideas of nation building especially among the Malays; from one nation for one race to one nation for multiple races.

3. Research

The main obj for a multi-ethni successfully bring

4. Methodol

To identify 'President of the some of his persc about him. Seve findings obtained
The texts use Ideas: Building N 1993), "Challeng Independence" (I and "As a Matte from these books each of these arti building and unit;
These selecte on unity. From t Tunku managed were coded and v category. Hence, In addition, ' speeches. The v secrets in achievi in the texts. This all the occurrence investigation.

5. Results ar

5.1. Categori
Based on the success stories in the analyses were
• “Actions”
• “Fairness”
• “Leader fi
• “Leadersh
• “Recogni
• “National ‘Actions’ in ‘Fairness’ refers
place in this cour the similar categ and his beliefs ix and contribution call for nation as “National iden