Is There an Integrated Society in Urban Neighbourhoods of Klang Valley in Malaysia?

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Abstract
One remarkable point about Malaysia is that it is a multi-ethnic country with Malays being the most dominant race, followed closely by the Chinese and the Indians which can be regarded as the minority group. This paper attempts to address the issues of social integration among these multi-ethnic groups in neighbourhoods of Klang Valley. Social integration can be best understood by the ability of a society that is composed by people of different classes, ethnicity and educational background to resolve conflicts that may occur between them. The levels of integration can be measured by levels of tolerance and interaction among the individuals regardless of their differences that may come in many forms: skin colours, languages, beliefs, cultures, values, class and so on. Thus, the question lies in whether it is possible to have an integrated society when the differences exist. Using the quantitative and qualitative approach, the research examines the way people from different ethnicity perceive their neighbourhoods. It also focuses on the levels of interactions among the multi-ethnic groups and seeks the underlying issues that may prohibit or hinder towards social integration.

Keywords: Social Integration, Neighborhood Development, Multi-racial Society

1. Introduction
When Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya) gained independence from the British in 1957, the nation was underpinned by the colonial policy of “divide and rule”, whereby the native Malay community had been left to remain in its traditional occupation such as paddy farming, whilst the Chinese immigrants were brought to town to work in the tin mines and the Indian immigrants were brought to work at rubber plantations. The British through its decentralization programme has extended the opportunities to the Malays to get employed in administration sector, whilst the non-Malays were banned from this sector. On top of that, the British adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards the non-Malays as they felt that those immigrants from China and India came to Malaya out of their own will and thus making the British as the colonial master shall not bear any responsibility for them. Those measures were seen as pro-Malay policies, employed by the British to appease the Malays who were at that time were showing a rise in nationalism movement (Cheah, 2009).

On top of the ethnic division of labour, the segregation between the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia was made deeper by the British education policy that allows various types of vernacular schools to operate. During British colonization, there were four types of schools: the English-medium, Malay-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools. Each used different mediums of instruction and provided a different syllabus. Except for English-medium school, other vernacular schools catered to only a particular ethnic group, were run by either missionaries, rubber and coffee plantation owners, and local residents’ association. Cheah (2009) feels that the attitudes and policies of the British during its colonization period had over time gradually sown the seeds of ethnic consciousness within each of the three major races in Malaya.

The inter-ethnic relationship in Malaysia somehow improved during the Emergency period due to the common aim and understanding for the need of cooperation between races in order to achieve independence (Sri Rahaya et. al., 2009). A political alliance known as Perikatan which consists of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) represented by the Malay ethnic group, the Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA) representing the Chinese and the Malaysia Indian Congress (MIC) representing the Indians, were formed to free Malaya from colonization.

Today, in modern Malaysia, national unity continues to be the main objective of socio-economic development.