EDUCATION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN MALAYSIA

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No. 5. "The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations" by Harry J. Benda. (The Journal of Southeast Asian History, March, 1962)


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No. 19. "Notes from the Desk of the President" by Karl J. Pelzer. (Newsletter of the Association for Asian Studies, Vol. XII, No. 2, December, 1966)


(continued on page 3 of cover)
Although now well established in the literature of American social science, there is considerable disagreement on the content of "political development". The term may be used to describe the sometimes equally vague processes of "modernization" (or "westernization") in an historical or chronological sense, growing structural-functional differentiation of total social systems, increasing social mobilization, the development of more universal political loyalties, or numerous other phenomena, sometimes even including...
an increasing commitment to western style democracy\(^5\). The literature on political development is proliferating rapidly in the United States\(^6\), but, unhappily, so too is the confusion.

The present essay will not attempt to achieve methodological purity by rigorously defining and applying one particular conceptual model of political development. My goal here is more to present an interpretive essay on the influence of education on the course of political change in Malaysia. "Political development" is therefore used as a working concept involving two related historical processes that occurred in Malaya (and Malaysia\(^7\)) during the 150 years after 1816. Specifically, I am concerned here with the influence of education on (1) the emergence of political elites, both cooperating and contending as viewed from the perspective of the colonial power, and (2) the emergence of a Malayan political loyalty that transcends traditional communal and geographical boundaries.

II

Formal education was launched in Malaya with the founding of the Penang Free School by the Colonial Chaplain of Penang in 1816, and this was followed closely by the creation of Raffles Institution in Singapore in 1823. Missionary education was limited, and officials of the English East India Company\(^8\) were also reluctant to provide more writings, both scholarly and popular, dealing with the general subject of "nation building" in which some aspect of political integration is stressed.

\(^5\) For a general survey of the various meanings of "political development" that differs somewhat from the listing here, see Lucian W. Pye, Aspects of Political Development (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), chap. 2.

\(^6\) In addition to the works cited above there are two series of volumes related to the subject of political development currently being published in the United States. Sponsored by the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council and published by Princeton University Press, seven volumes are projected for the series, of which five are already in print. Little, Brown and Co. (Boston) is also publishing a Comparative Politics Series in paperback, which includes general theoretical works as well as specific country studies. Thus far the only country study of a Southeast Asian state is Jean Grossholtz, The Philippines (1964).

\(^7\) Although the terms Malaya and Malaysia will be used interchangeably here depending upon the time period being considered, it should be apparent that most of the generalizations and observations in this essay are based on the experience of the peninsula. This seems justifiable since Malaya is the heartland of present-day Malaysia and since Singapore, more influenced by the British colonials and overwhelmingly Chinese, presents many unique problems.

\(^8\) The English East India Company governed the settlements in Malaya until its demise in 1858. Except for a brief period early in the nineteenth
than token financial support for educational activities. Even in the FMS, while the growth of education was steady, there was not a dramatic increase until very late in the colonial period, as the following table demonstrates.

**TABLE 1**

**Government and Government-Aided Schools, FMS, 1896-1936.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Enrollment (1,000)</th>
<th>Expenditure (M$ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1,452</td>
<td>103.4</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewed from the perspective of its impact on the course of political development, the creation of Malay College at Kuala Kangsar, Perak in January 1905 was one of the most significant educational events of the colonial era. Malay College drew its inspiration from the kind of thinking revealed in the Macaulay Educational Minute of 1835 and was candidly intended to provide a pool of subordinate century (1805-1830), when it enjoyed the status of a Presidency, the Straits Settlements (at first Penang and then later also Malacca and Singapore) was administered as an appendage of Bengal. Between 1838 and 1867 the three settlements were administered by the India Office and then were transferred to the Colonial Office, where they remained until the Malayan Union of 1946 (which was succeeded by the Federation of 1948) attached Penang and Malacca to the peninsula and Malaysian merdeka (1963) incorporated Singapore into the larger political unit. On the eve of the Japanese occupation in the Second World War Malaya consisted of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States (established in 1896 by a multi-lateral treaty among Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, and Selangor), and the Unfederated Malay States (Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Trengganu). The intensity and extensiveness of British hegemony varied among the three kinds of structures, but the common thread of British rule ran throughout.

9 Extracted from the various Annual Reports of the FMS for the years listed.

10 "We now come to the gist of the matter. We have a fund to be employed as government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of [India] ... The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it? ... The intellectual improvement of those ... who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of ... English ... [or] Arabic and Sanscrit ... I have never found one among [the Orientalists of the
administrative talent drawn from the "Raja and higher classes" of Malaya. At Malay College there was a conscious attempt to transplant into a tropical Asian environment the English public school, complete with playing fields, a headmaster, prefects, the high table and all of the other trappings of an aristocratic English boarding school. The long-range goal of such a school, according to the recognized authority on Malay language and literature, R.J. Wilkinson, who was Inspector of Schools at the time of the creation of Malay College, should be to produce

a vigorous and intelligent race of young men who will be in touch with modern progress but not out of touch with old traditions; who will be liberally educated but not educated out of sympathy with their own families and people; who will be manly and not effeminate, strong minded but not strong willed, acknowledging a duty to others instead of being a law unto themselves and who will be fit to do something in the world instead of settling down into fops, spendthrifts, or drones.

Not only did Malay College teach exclusively in the medium of English, but by the time of graduation its students had been thoroughly socialized into an upper class English cultural environment, which was, of course, the very goal of the original Macaulay educational policies. Some personal reflections by Old Boys of Malay College, though lengthy, provide an excellent insight into the nature of the socialization process at the school.

Class III ... was handled by Mr. Hargreaves [the first headmaster] himself. He was indeed a master of method, who had an uncanny insight into the psychology and temperament of each individual student. As if by magic, he would keep us all abreast in our work. We had to move as a team. If any lagged behind he

Committee] ... who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ... We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them ... our own language ... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect ..." Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute supporting the Anglicists on the Committee of Public Instruction, 1834.

11 When the Malay Administrative Service was created in 1910 all candidates were recruited from the students of Malay College, a practice that continued until 1921. Although the Malay College monopoly of the MAS was formally broken in 1921 when it began to share its role with other schools, it continued to be tied into MAS recruitment and training schemes until 1941.

made it our duty to help him along. Without our appreciating it then the headmaster was sowing the early seeds of co-operative effort so valuable to us in later years. Somehow he instilled into us self-discipline in work and in conduct so necessary in character building... He rounded off corners, and gave us the necessary polish for life.\(^\text{13}\)

Another Old Boy, the Captain of a junior college team (the “Moderates”), recalling one of the greatest football matches ever played at Malay College, recounts the following experience:

The fame of the “Moderates” soon spread. Our Headmaster was so confident of us that eventually he pitted us against the formidable Perak State Eleven captained by the great international footballer, Mr. Hartley. The team included only one Asian — Mr. P.C. Lesslar, who was then considered the fleetest forward in the country. It was a titanic struggle. We threw all our skill and effort into this game and played like little devils. We succeeded in forcing a draw with the redoubtable State XI by one all. Wasn’t our Headmaster a very proud man after that? The names of the team will ever remain fresh in my memory. The team never broke up until the time came for us to leave College... Those were glorious and unforgettable days in College when we learned hard and played hard, inspired by great teachers who gave us, among other things, all that was best of the traditions of English education.\(^\text{14}\)

Finally, an Old Boy, in the quotation below, recalls his feelings as graduation was drawing near in the spring of 1915.

At the beginning of June, 1915 when I came to realize that the end of my school career was drawing very near, I became conscious of a feeling of sadness. The thought that very soon I would part for the last time with the College and its happy corporate life, in the activities of which I had been closely associated for several years, goaded my heart. Memories of many happy days at the College surged up in my breast. Over the years, I had made many friends, some of whom had already left the College to seek their livelihood in the world. Now I was about to follow in their footsteps. So, one bright morning in the month of June, 1915, with a feeling of an unpleasant lump in my throat, I went around to bid farewell to the masters and my friends in the College, before boarding the train, on the first leg of my journey back home. Thus closed a chapter in my life, a chapter

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 9.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., pp. 10-11.
crowded with many happy memories which have remained fresh in my mind, undimmed and undiminished by the lapse of a full half a century.\textsuperscript{15}

Until postwar years there was a direct and formal connection between Malay College, the Malay Administrative Service, and the elite administrative cadre of the Federation, the Malayan Civil Service. Until 1953 almost the only avenue of recruitment for local persons into the MCS was by promotion from the junior administrative service, and Malay College was the chief source of talent for the MAS. Thus, it is not surprising that even a cursory examination of any Civil Service List from the time of accelerated Malayanization (1956) onward reveals a large number of Malay College Old Boys in the senior ranks.

Moreover, while their presence is most apparent in the Civil Service, many graduates of the College can be found among the political elite (the best known today is Tun Abdul Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister) and about one-half of the sultans ruling today are also Malay College Old Boys. While the College has by no means monopolized the field of secondary education in Malaya, and in fact in purely numerical terms it has produced only a small minority of the peninsula’s graduates, Malay College has generally set the tone for the moderate politics and gentlemanly nationalism of Malaysia almost unique in Southeast Asia.

Post-secondary education came late to Malaya and thus exerted relatively less influence on the course of political development than did secondary education. Medical training was available at King Edward College of Medicine after 1915 and courses leading to a diploma were offered at Raffles College after 1928, but it was not until 1949 — with the merging of these two institutions — that Malaya had its own university. The University of Malaya (the original campus of which was located on the island of Singapore) opened a branch at Kuala Lumpur in 1958, and this branch, adopting and retaining the original name of the parent, became a fully autonomous university in 1962. At the same time the Singapore institution was renamed the University of Singapore. That the importance of the university as a channel of elite recruitment is rapidly growing can be seen in the following tabulation of the 257 indigenous MCS officers on the 1962 \textit{Staff List}. Column one represents the older officers, largely drawn from the Malay College-MAS tradition, who are now retiring and are being replaced by the younger officers of column two, some of whom

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 23-24.
attended Malay College but many of whom also underwent an educational experience at a Malayan or other Commonwealth university.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels of Recruitment, MCS Officers, 1962 (by percentages)</th>
<th>Superscale Officers (n= 53)</th>
<th>Timescale Officers (n= 204)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion from MAS</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct from universities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion from state services</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion from other services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether considering secondary or post-secondary education, it is apparent that the language of political socialization of the governing elite in Malaya has been English and that these English-language secondary schools have played a dominant role in shaping the general configurations of Malaysian politics from colonial days to the present time. In addition to the bureaucratic elite, which is drawn entirely from the English stream of education, it is apparent from the following table that the political elite on the eve of the creation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 was also heavily indebted to the English stream of education as a source of recruits.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons holding both cabinet and party posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernacular and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


III

If the English stream of education has produced the governing elites, the vernacular streams have been most responsible for generating the mass support for any contending elite, and, in several cases, for the elite themselves. This is particularly true in the case of the Chinese. The Chinese were willing to educate themselves, and — as the following table dramatically demonstrates — British colonial officials, always mindful of London’s demands for administrative economies, were content to let them assume their own educational burdens. As a result, until very recent times Chinese schools have been markedly China-oriented. In addition, the general quality of Chinese education has been unusually low. Despite a larger number of schools and a greater enrollment Chinese education was much inferior to English education, and, at the primary level, Chinese schools were probably even inferior to Malay and Indian schools.

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Government Schools</th>
<th>Government-Aided Schools</th>
<th>Enrollment (1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries any literate Chinese was regarded as qualified to teach; pedagogic techniques were those used in the village schools of old China, where rote memory was accepted as education; physical conditions, while varying greatly depending upon the clientele, were generally very unsatisfactory and sometimes deplorable; teachers’ pay was pitifully low; each school was managed by a school committee that often took an active hand in the substantive as well as the administrative side of school operations; the subjects of study were almost always Chinese and never Malayan; and, finally, even within the same areas of Malaya each dialect group maintained its own particular school conducted in the medium of the mother tongue.