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## Malay Supreme Issues Among Chinese Politics: A Brief Historical View

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### ABSTRACT:

For UMNO, and Malay popular opinion in general, ketuanan Melayu, is a political fact of Malaysian society. ...Thus "Malay special position" in the constitution has become consonant with support for ketuanan Melayu (Lee Hock Guan, 2002). Even today, Malay dominance or what the Malays call, ketuanan Melayu, is more openly discussed in the Malay media than in the English-language media or in the Chinese vernacular media. To the non-Malays it represents an unpalatable, unconscionable and direct declaration of absolute Malay rule. To them, it means a system in which Malay enjoys more rights than other ethnic communities, more rights than even the other bumiputra (Cheah Boon Kheng, 2004).

### Introduction

Malay supremacy is an expression that often resonates in the Malaysian political arena. Malay supremacy means the power/hegemony of the Malays which covers various areas of community life such as politics, economy and culture. This phenomenon actually stems from the political power of the Malays and scholars are more inclined to use the term Malay political hegemony to describe the power of the Malays in the Political Field which shows the Malay political elites of UMNO using this advantage fully to realize the agenda of the Malay struggle. Malay political supremacy carries deep denotations and connotations to its users. The use of this terminology carries different implications among Malays and non-Malays. The Malay community uses it comfortably and proudly. Meanwhile, the non-Malays use it carefully because the pronunciation curve carries

the connotation that acceptance and submission to the fact of comprehensive/complete dominance in Malaysian politics by the Malays supported by UMNO. The level of acceptance of the multiracial community in Malaysia towards Malay political supremacy also varies according to the course of the country's political history. For example, when Abdullah Ahmad gave a lecture entitled issues in Malaysian politics which emphasized the political dominance of the Malays on 30 August 1986 in Singapore, it caused controversy in Malaysia. A warm polemic about the issue of Malay political dominance or supremacy and full of group sentiments has followed. In fact, MCA itself has filed a complaint with the police because it considers the figure's speech to be in violation of the Sedition Act (Chamil, 1988). However, in today's context, Omar's comments, most non-Malays have already accepted the reality of Malay political power.



The author equates "Malay political supremacy" with Malay political hegemony because according to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is the dominance of one group over another group through a leadership based on morals and intellectuals achieved through the use of coercion and consent (Carnoy 1984). In this regard, Malay supremacy which reflects the power of the Malays in Malaysia conforms to Gramsci's conception.

### **The emergence of Malay Political Supremacy**

The Malayan Union plan that was introduced by the British colonialists in 1946 expected the political nationalism of the Malays. The great resistance of the Malays managed to bury the plan. After failing to implement the Malayan Union, the British colonialists had to give in to the demands of the Malays in order to maintain the sovereignty of the Malay King who became the symbol of the political power of the Malays. The British replaced the plan with the Federation of Malaya. When the new constitution contained in the Land Federation Agreement came into effect on February 1, 1948, the Malays were said to have won the first stage in the struggle to establish Power through the constitution. This is because the agreement guarantees the sovereignty of political power and the special position of Malays and tightens the conditions for granting citizenship to non-Malays.

The success of the Malays who were supported by UMNO to gain political dominance in 1948 had such a deep license to the political development in Malaya. Wang Gungwu (1981) argues that the success of the Malay elite who gained political power in terms of the constitution has been in a position that is so difficult to challenge by non-Malays. There is even an opinion that says that the basic elements of "racial bargain"<sup>2</sup> were actually determined in 1946-1948 and not in 1957 (Cham, 1977). While the strict granting of citizenship in the federal agreement forced Tan Cheng Lock to spend 10 years fighting for citizenship based on the jus soli principle for the Chinese (Heng, 1988). In this situation, it is not surprising that Ratnam (1965) concluded that the new constitution aimed to establish a Malay nation. In the 1955 general election, the alliance won 51 of the 52 contested parliamentary seats. With the victory of this Alliance, the British appointed the Reid Constitutional Commission in 1956 to draft a new constitution for the soon to be independent Malaya. With the appointment of

the commission, the second phase of the competition for political power between the Malay elite and the Chinese elite began. The Alliance sent a memorandum to the Commission. Because the memorandum of the Alliance was sent by a political party that was about to hold the reins of government in Malaya, the document was considered the most important by the commission (Ratnam, 1965).

The memorandum is said to favor and center the Malays. This is because the "racial bargain" that gives political power to the Malays is also included in the memorandum (Mauzy, 1983). Meanwhile, the Reid Commission is more inclined to give balanced treatment to Malay and non-Malay interests. By doing so, the commission appeared to favor non-Malays (Ratnam, 1965). This situation contributed to the contradiction in the constitutional proposal presented by the Alliance and the commission. To resolve this contradiction, the British appointed a constitutional work team consisting of 3 British representatives, 4 representatives of the sultan and 4 representatives from the Alliance to formulate the 1957 Independence constitution which saw Malay political dominance institutionalized. The words below describe this dominance clearly:

*The constitution of 1957 signified a triumph of post-war Malay nationalism. Among the the major features were: Malay would be the national language ; Islam would be the state religion. While freedom of worship guaranteed to all creeps : the paramount Ruler was required to safeguard the special position of the Malays in respect of such matters as recruitment to the public service, award of government scholarships, Malay land reservation, and the grant of permits for certain types of business activity.*

(Ho, 1988)

With the enshrining of the independence constitution, Malay political power is once again guaranteed in the constitution. This development makes it impossible for non-Malays to challenge that power. In fact, the Malay political elite is said to consider the constitution as a source and tool to achieve political power (Vasil, 1980). With this development, it can be concluded that the 40's and 50's were the level of consolidation and the peak of



the development of Malay political nationalism who wanted to see their political dominance institutionalized.

Although Malay political power or dominance was guaranteed in the Federation Agreement of Malaya and the 1957 Constitution of Independence, but because Tunku Abdul Rahman practiced compromise politics<sup>4</sup> and his desire not to violate the "racial bargain", the fate of the Malays in the economic field was not defended effectively. This is so because Malaysia's economic policy during Tunku's time was non-intervention in the country's economic activities to help the Malays. With such a policy, the Malays' economic position continues to be marginalized in the current of national development. The Malays who are outside the city continue to live in shacks without the defense of Malay economic backwardness is clearly proven because in 1969 Malays only contributed as much as 1.5% of the total share capital in limited companies. While foreign investors, Chinese capitalists, and local Indians contributed 62.1%, 22.8% and 0.9% respectively (Malaysia, 1971).

The backwardness of the Malays in the economic field has begun to receive the attention and defense of some UMNO leaders. For example, even though Tun Abdul Razak faced difficulties in instigating change through party and government channels, he was found to be trying to use channels outside the party for that purpose (Abdul Ghapa & Nik Annuar, 1996). With this development, voices to improve the Malay economy began to be heard in the mid-60s. The organization of the first and second Bumiputera Economic congresses in 1965 and 1968 manifested that desire. The firmness of this demand can be seen through the opinion of one of the working papers at the congress:

*Jikalau Bumiputera tidak ada pertaruhan dalam ekonomi negeri ini, maka tidaklah terjamin bahawa pada masa depan, orang-orang yang bukan Bumi-putera akan dapat menjalankan kegiatan-kegiatan ekonomi mereka dalam aman dan damai.*

(Kongres Ekonomi Bumiputera Pertama, 1965)

The lack of change in the country's economic policy in the 60s clearly shows that the government led by the Tunku failed to perceive and respond to the real forces that mobilized demands in developing the Malay

economy. The power that is the trigger is the development of economic nationalism of the Malays which is getting more and more intense. The continued economic decline of the Malays despite the achievement of independence has been the catalyst for this development. In fact, the Alliance government's failure in this regard contributed to one of the causes of the May 13 Incident (Chee, 1991). This event provides an opportunity for the new leadership of the country to cater to the development of the economic nationalism of the Malays in order to develop their economy.

The incident of racial riots shows the urgent need to implement new national policies to overcome various disparities in the country. The Tunku's way of politics, which was considered too compromising and accommodating the demands of the non-Malays, was found to be no longer compatible with the ideals of building a nation-state among the Malays. Malay supremacy which is the core of UMNO's political struggle, which previously had little place in the Tunku's political agenda, has emerged as an important force in determining the policy orientation of the government under the leadership of Tun Razak (Abdul Ghapa & Nik Annuar, 1996). With this development, various political and economic actions aimed at fulfilling the ideals of the Malay struggle have been taken. At the heart of the new dimension in Malaysian politics is a change in the power-sharing structure between multi-ethnic elites. This can be seen in the statement by Ghazali Shafie in August 1969 that the politics of this country has and should remain for some time to come as politics based on bumiputera (Milne & Mauzy, 1982). Even during his appointment as the second Prime Minister on 22 September 1970, Tun Razak insisted:

*Government must follow the wishes and desires of UMNO – and it must implement policies which are determined by UMNO.*

(Funston, 1980)

Malaysia's parliamentary system of government was restored on 23 February 1971, which was 21 months after its independence. The next development saw the Alliance replaced by Barisan Nasional (BN) which has a larger membership. However, UMNO's dominance in BN and the government was more noticeable after 1969. For example, Vasil (1980) thought "the politics of



accommodation was given up once and for all". Mauzy (1993) on the other hand considers power sharing in BN based on "accommodation on essentially Malay terms". While Stephen Chee (1987) described the dominance of UMNO as having led to the dominance of work by UMNO. This control is termed as "party government" and sometimes at the highest level it is difficult to distinguish between the party and the government. Many political scholars consider the Malay political dominance supported by UMNO in this new government order as hegemony. UMNO's hegemony causes political and economic resources to shift to the government machinery and bumiputra elites and this has contributed to the birth of a political structure named the Ethnic Hegemonic State (Ho, 1988).

### Malay-Chinese political relations and competition

Malay-Chinese political relations have been characterized by competition since before Malaysia achieved independence. The fate of history placed the Malays and Chinese on a collision course in the process of nation building. The fact that the Malays have political power, while the Chinese have an advantage in the economic field since the independence of these two ethnic groups always consider the other group to be a challenger to their power. Therefore, ethnic relations between them are always competitive and tense. Even Shamsul (2004) considers that the relationship between the two largest races in Malaysia is always in a state of stable tension.

Although Malaysia has a powerful political model for a pluralistic society, which is an alliance based on coalition politics (condition politics), the fact is that the stability that exists in the country is actually fragile. This tendency is very much in line with the observation made by Lijphart (1977), which is that any balance in a plural country achieved without hegemony is more temporary and will endanger ethnic relations. In this regard, the consociational approach applied by Tunku Abdul Rahman in his administration was found to have failed to serve the demands of the economic nationalism of the UMNO Malay elites which peaked at the end of the 60s. Finally the balance of society sponsored by the power-sharing approach has completely collapsed in the May 13 Event. Malaysia's political order witnessed the emergence of a Malay hegemony situation. This situation manifests a fact that is difficult for the Chinese to accept.

Political contestation ... can operate only as long as Malay political supremacy is guaranteed. Once this supremacy is shaken, the probability is that contestation will not be tolerated. The rules of contestation will either be modified with greater restrictions, or will be suspended altogether

(Norma, 1990)

The emergence of a new order in Malaysian politics supported by UMNO political leaders who are more Malay nationalistic souls are found to be more committed to defending the fate of the Malays through the implementation of public policies centered on filling the agenda of the Malay struggle. The aspirations of the struggle of the Malays towards the achievement of Malay political supremacy/Malay political hegemony which was previously neglected in Tunku's administration has been achieved in Tun Razak's administration. Under public policies that are based on filling the agenda of the Malay struggle, especially the New Economic Policy (NEP), the interests of the Chinese community are increasingly eroded. This is so because with the emergence of Malay political hegemony, the Chinese political elites are increasingly sidelined from the formulation of national public policy. Chinese people actually face the phenomenon of exclusion politics (politics of exclusion) and feel that they are being discriminated against, this situation prompts them to respond by protesting and opposing the country's pro-Malay policies.

Such measures are taken to curb the erosion of interests and deal with the dilemma faced by the Chinese community. However, the actions taken were found to have less of the desired impact because Malay political hegemony has contributed to the political marginalization of the Chinese. This is because the Chinese political elites in BN are unable to change the country's pro-Malay policies and subsequently are unable to divide the fate of the people they represent. While the Chinese opposition political elites can gain the support of the mass Chinese people who oppose the government's affirmative policies, but they do not have the opportunity and power to influence the formulation of national policies. Therefore, these two Chinese political groups are actually in an impasse and a dilemma that can be described as "agony of coalition" and "futility of opposition" (Khoo, 1995).



## The Politics of Malay Supremacy: Between Perceptions and Chinese Community Responses

Malay political supremacy was strengthened after 1969, but the percolation of the supremacy's political agenda was found to have peaked in the era of the administration of Dr. Mahathir. This is so because the figure is a leader with Malay nationalism. UMNO's political hegemony which is reinforced by the centralization of power in the hands of Dr. Mahathir has caused the Chinese political elites in the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition to lose their bargaining power while fighting for the interests of the Chinese community. This bitter political reality was realized by them and they began to change their volume in defending the fate of the Chinese community. This change seems to be learned from the effects of political disputes between MCA-UMNO. When Dr. Ling Liong Sik and Lee Kim Sai just took over the leadership of MCA in 1986, they began to show volume in the party's struggle. For example, in his inaugural speech at the MCA general assembly in September 1986, Dr. Ling stated that the MCA would not allow the erosion of the position of the Chinese to continue in this country (Chamil, 1988).

While the deputy Dr. Ling, Lee Kim Sai who is also the Selangor State MCA chairman let the Selangor MCA convention pass a resolution on 2 November 1986 which declared that all the main races in Malaysia, namely the Malays, Indians, and Chinese are made up of immigrants. The volume of MCA echoed again in 1987 after the scandal of the Depository Cooperatives, most of whose victims were Chinese. In order to defend the plight of these groups, MCA made an insistence with threats that if the government refused to help, the party would leave BN (Chamil, 1988). Even Dr. Ling himself took a 6-week "travel leave" abroad in 1988 to show the party's dissatisfaction with the government led by Dr. Mahathir. However, MCA's volume began to fade by 1990.

The change in the attitude of MCA and Gerakan leaders is closely related to the change in the style and pattern of Dr. Mahathir by 1990. The figure began to introduce liberalization and accommodation in the management and administration of his government. This new development is related to the results of the 1990 general election which saw the emergence of an alliance of parties. Opposition to challenge BN's power. This has prompted Dr. Mahathir to enhance those efforts in the

early 90s. The policies of national development and nation-building have undergone a rather drastic change. One of the directions of change is that government policies are found to be more accommodating to the demands and demands of the Chinese community. In this regard, Milne & Mauzy (1999) opined that the government's willingness to accommodate those demands and demands was in fact aimed at dealing with the loss of Chinese votes experienced by BN in the 1990 general election.

In the meantime, the administration of Dr. Mahathir showed that the Chinese political parties in BN, especially MCA and Gerakan suffered a loss of political legitimacy. Due to the hegemony of UMNO and the centralization of power in the hands of DR. Mahathir, these two politics have actually lost their role as a political party. This is so because they are unable to function as protectors of the interests and political rights of the Chinese people. As an alternative, they only try to look after the welfare of the community they represent. For example Dr. Ling launched the Langkawi Project to improve the education standards of the Chinese community: Ong Ka Ting, on the other hand, expressed the importance of learning through the Lifelong Learning Campaign after he received the leadership of MCA on 23 May 2003.

The leaders of MCA and Gerakan know that they cannot restore the political legitimacy of the party through political vehicles, instead they have identified providing services to the Chinese community as a way out to deal with the problem of eroding their relevance and legitimacy as a political party. This awareness prompts each MCA and Gerakan Member of Parliament to set up a service center in their parliamentary constituency to help the people who are mostly Chinese to solve their various daily problems. In fact, MCA has established a complaint and service center at the national level, which is called the MCA Central Complaints Bureau. Under the management of Michael Chong, this bureau became so famous and popular with the visits of not only so many Chinese, but also Malays and Indians. However, the readiness and effectiveness of the two parties in providing regular services cannot replace its role as a genuine political party.

However, the perception and response of the mass Chinese community towards this politics of UMNO



supremacy? This tendency can be seen by reviewing the role played by Chinese NGOs or referred to as Huantuan in Chinese society in responding to Malay hegemony. Crouch (2001) in discussing the effects of affirmative policies stated that "The non-Malay communities have accepted Malay domination as the price to be paid for security and the opportunity to maintain their own identities". If this statement can be accepted, then the Malaysian Chinese community certainly does not face the problem of maintaining their identity. But the truth is that the Chinese are facing a series of lawsuits eroding their identity. They perceive it as a result of Malay cultural hegemony and this further prompts them to do various responses.

Huantuan's initial response in this regard can be traced back to 1983 when a number of Chinese NGOs with representatives of about 700 people who attended the first Chinese Cultural Congress in Penang to approve the Joint Memorandum on National Culture rejected the principles of the formation of the National Cultural Policy (DKK) which was enacted by the government in 1971. As an alternative they suggested the formation of DKK should be based on the cultural pluralism found in Malaysia. The memorandum was then submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports on 30 March 1983. The organization of the congress was actually closely related to the cultural dilemma faced by the Chinese community at that time. The hegemony of Malay culture introduced in the implementation of DKK is said to threaten the cultural independence and subsequently the identity of the Chinese in this country. This worry and concern dominates the soul of the Chinese people. The organization of the congress has strengthened that feeling and successfully produced a Cultural Awareness Movement among the Chinese. This development saw the Chinese community begin to realize that they need to act collectively in order to preserve their culture. With this awareness, a series of struggles with the theme of resistance and rescue took place in Chinese society and lasted until the early 1990s. The organization of the congress is also a starting point for a new phase in the Chinese NGO movement in Malaysia. The meeting succeeded in forming a parent organization called 15 Huantuan in the Chinese community which saw it become a unifying force for the struggle and mobilization of energy in the Chinese association to preserve the rights and interests of the Chinese in Malaysia.

What is even more important is that the organization initiated the establishment of the Malaysian Chinese Resource and Research Center (MCRRC) or also known as Huazi14 in 1985. The establishment of the MCRRC received a very encouraging response from the Chinese community. A total of about 160 scholars and professionals of Chinese descent have joined the center as consultants or voluntary researchers. Although MCRRC is a resource and research center, its subsequent development shows that the body acts as a "think tank" for the Chinese community in Malaysia. As a result of the dilemmas and crises that are increasingly pressing the Chinese people, the scholars at MCRRC tried and planned a suitable strategy for the Huantuan struggle in order to deal with the problem. In this regard, the MCRRC succeeded in drafting an important demand document called the 1985 Malaysian Chinese Organizations Declaration (PBPCM). PBPCM is a document of demands that is drafted theoretically only and therefore lacks an implementing body to realize its demands. This situation prompted the researchers at MCRRC to recommend to 15 Huantuan to form a Civil Rights Committee (CRC) in order to carry out this important task. 15 Huantuan agreed to the recommendation and established the CRC on December 28, 1985. The CRC was an authoritative and influential body in Chinese society in the 1980s and early 90s as it was composed of leaders of major associations and also Chinese scholars who respected The CRC is led by a chairman, Khoo Seorang Chi from Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (Dewan Perhimpunan Cina Selangor-DPCS), deputy chairman, Lim Fong Seng from Dongzong, vice chairman, Sim Mow Yu from Jiazong and secretary, Lau Sik Thong from Dongzong. In an effort to fulfill the entrusted task, the CRC presented 9 main goals for the first stage of its struggle at the beginning of 1986. The main goals were:

1. Abolish the distinction between "Bumiputera" and "Non-Bumiputera" and oppose economic policies that overemphasize the interests of Bumiputera,
2. Strictly curb the entry of illegal immigrants in order to maintain and preserve the safety of the community,
3. The demarcation of constituencies should be based on democratic and fair principles, namely "one person, one vote" so that constituencies have almost the same number of voters,



4. The formation of cultural policy must acknowledge and accept the pluralistic characteristics of our society,
5. Fair treatment should be given to all types of schools and languages of each race,
6. The establishment of a clean and efficient administrative machinery, and combating the practice of corruption firmly,
7. Develop new Chinese villages comprehensively and include them in the national development plan,
8. Accelerate the processing of citizenship applications that meet the requirements,
9. Review acts that violate human rights.

(DPCS, 1986)

The launch of PBPCM and the setting of 9 main goals of the struggle opened a new dimension to the involvement of Chinese NGOs in Malaysian politics. According to Ho Khai Leong (1988), PBPCM is "a massive and ambitious agenda of political reform" for the Chinese community in particular and Malaysia in general. While the CRC body is considered as "an apolitical movement of reform and social conscience" (Ho, 1988). In this regard PBPCM can be considered as a political declaration that expresses the heart and request for the Chinese in Malaysia. Therefore, the document was well received by the Chinese community. With the demands of PBPCM and the 9 main goals, the CRC is already involved in Malaysian politics. This is because the CRC had to shoulder the responsibility of introducing the contents of the PBPCM and the 9 main goals through political vehicles to the people, especially the Chinese community throughout the country. In this regard, the patron association 15 Huantuan gave enough freedom to the CRC through a meeting resolution on April 13, 1986 to enable it to try to create a new alternative in the 1986 general election. This new development has provided the basis for the emergence of the idea of a Two Line System in the arena Malaysian politics. Based on those seeds, the CRC initiated the political system (Kua, 1990). The birth of the idea of the Two Line System is closely related to the response of CRC leaders and activists to the centralization of power in the hands of UMNO. The deputy chairman of CRC, Lim Fong Seng in a seminar organized by DPCS on 11 July 1986 opined that such centralization of power contributed to the abuse of power

and scandals that resulted in the country being hit by an economic, political, and social crisis.

Furthermore, the centralization of power has produced two political myths in Malaysia, namely that the UMNO (Malay) government cannot be challenged and that BN is the only power capable of ruling the country (Thock, 1994). According to the Huantuan figure, the existence of these two political myths causes the practice of democracy in Malaysia to lose its meaning. Therefore in the opinion of the leader, the struggle of the Two Front System aims to establish a perfect democratic system, which shows that the ruling party will show a more democratic and liberal attitude, then the wishes and demands of the people will be more respected. Awareness of the implications of BN's power supported by UMNO's supremacy/hegemony prompts Huantuan leaders and activists to try to curb it. They see the Two-Line System as the only superior strategy to break the two political myths above. Only by curbing the hegemony of UMNO can the problem of the erosion of the rights and interests of the Chinese community be overcome. Accordingly, they seem to be determined in the direction of the struggle and act to mobilize the mass Chinese community in that direction. This can be seen in Lim Fong Seng's words which read: "...Chinese are ready to take their destiny in their own hands and bring about change. By voting against Barisan ... we can at best replace Barisan with a new coalition," (Asiaweek, 27.7.1986). The culmination of all mobilization and mobilization was the participation of a total of 27 Chinese NGO leaders and activists led by Lim Fong Seng himself into the DAP party on 18 August 1990 in order to realize the Two Line System. The voices of Chinese NGOs echoed again ahead of the 1999 general election with the launch of the Malaysian Chinese Associations Election Appeal document or better known as Suqiu on 16 August 1999. Although Suqiu was only submitted by 11 major organizations of the Chinese community, its launch was well received which is good from Huantuan all over the country. For example, before the general election, until 21 October 1999, there were 2,095 Chinese NGOs that recognized and signed the document (Sin Chew Daily, 17.8.2000). However, ACCCIM and the pro-government Confederation of Chinese Organizations of Malaysia (GPCM) only endorsed the document but refused to sign it. The stance of the two organizations received criticism and condemnation from



the Chinese mass community because they said they did not take into account the wishes, aspirations and interests of the community. Chairman of the Suqiu Committee, Quek Suan Hiang considers the Suqiu as a document that spans centuries, is macro, and comprehensive (Sin Chew Daily, 17.8.1999). Compared to previous NGO request/insistence documents, Suqiu was found to be more complete, comprehensive, and futuristic in nature. According to Jawatan Kuasa Suqiu's media statement on 12.12.2000, "...its contents include issues of national unity, environmental protection, political reform, equitable economic distribution, human rights, justice, anti-corruption, multi-racial culture and education, rights women and others, it is actually a vision for all the people and it is centered on a Malaysian society in the 21st century that is prosperous, fair and progressive" (Suqiu Committee, 2002). The target of his appeal and demand revolves around 17 main points with details to 83 items and the goal of his struggle can only be achieved with continuous efforts in the long term. Suqiu presented from the perspective of all Malaysians could not avoid his struggle from being linked to requests/demands for the exclusive interests of the Chinese community. Quek Suan Hiang who spoke on the day of Suqiu's launch called on Huatuan leadership from all over the country to support and join him in order to overcome the problems that have plagued Chinese society (Sin Chew Daily, 17.8.1999). Meanwhile, the Far Eastern Economic Review (10.8.2000) in its report also opined that although Suqiu was presented through a non-communal tone, the demand was aimed at ending the practice of discrimination against the Malaysian Chinese community. Therefore, it can be concluded that the launch of Suqiu shows a perception of the Chinese community towards their position which is perceived as not having received fair and equitable treatment from the government. Suqiu actually inherited the tradition of making requests/demands in the Huatuan struggle towards protecting the interests of the Chinese community in particular and Malaysians in general. Most Chinese NGO leaders and activists consider the document to be a continuation of the PBPCM that was submitted in 1985. Suqiu also maintains the spirit of the PBPCM which is based on the demands of democratic and civil rights. The significant difference between Suqiu and PBPCM is that the document does not express political ideas to curb Malay political

supremacy/hegemony. On the other hand, Suqiu emphasizes its role as a lobby group and this sees its struggle more in line with the NGO model in civil society. The history of the Huatuan movement in Malaysia shows that Chinese associations have a tradition in making requests and demands. What is the underlying cause of such an act? This tendency is closely related to the Chinese people's perception of their subordinate position compared to the Malays and this has caused them to be given a biased treatment for independence again. Therefore it can be concluded that this is the cause that prompts them to mobilize energy through Chinese NGOs to improve their position and fate. This trend can be seen through the articulation of interests by these leading NGOs of the Chinese community:

*Dongjiaozong emerged to play a prominent role in Malaysia politics because its leaders in the early fifties persuasively articulated and alternative vision of a democratic multi-ethnic nation in which there could be space for minority languages and cultures. From this alternative vision, Dongjiaozong leaders have challenged the legitimacy of state policies on language, education and culture because these conflict with the ideals of a fair and just society.*

(Tan, 1992)

The struggle carried out by Chinese NGOs such as Dongjiao Zong manifests a fact of conflict in the direction of nation building in Malaysia between the Chinese community and the government. The Chinese see nation building based on civionationalism, which is nationalism that promotes nation building based on giving equal rights to all citizens in a country regardless of descent, race, and religious beliefs. While the Malay UMNO political elites are trying to build the desired nation (nation of intent) based on ethno nationalism, i.e. the power of nationalism is generated by considerations of race or ethnicity. This situation shows that even though Malaysia has been independent for a long time, the issue of nation building continues to be a matter of competition and contention.

## Conclusion

Malay-Chinese political relations which were characterized by competition and conflict in the early stages of independence have undergone many changes in the course of Malaysian history. Malay political power and dominance embodied in the form of Malay



supremacy was first institutionalized in the 1957 Independence constitution through the granting of a special position to the Malays. It seems that the Chinese community, both the political elites in BN and the opposition parties, as well as the mass Chinese community, initially found it difficult to accept the reality of political power. Such a perception has pushed these two groups to fight for the rights and interests of the Chinese quite loudly until the 80s. This can be seen through their efforts, especially from Chinese NGOs to curb Malay UMNO supremacy or hegemony. However, in the 90s, the voices of restraint from the Chinese political parties that are components of BN were no longer heard. The political elites in MCA and Gerakan seem to have given up and resigned to their more subordinate political position compared to their friends from UMNO. The voices of the struggle towards equal rights are only chanted and worked on by the Chinese NGO movement from the lobbyists and DAP. This new development trend is the result of the Chinese perception that Malay supremacy or hegemony cannot be challenged or constrained by them. Another factor that contributes to this tendency is that most Chinese people, especially the political elites and businessmen have been able to adapt and some are even able to benefit from the country's administration which relies on the politics of Malay supremacy. The constraints and pressure experienced in the early days of the implementation of the New Economic Policy no longer affect them. However, the mass Chinese community still considers their efforts to maintain their identity threatened by some of the government's public policies, such as the implementation of Vision Schools and the Teaching & Learning of Mathematics and Science in English. Therefore, it can be concluded that Chinese NGOs will continue to submit suqiu-suqiu in the future as long as their perception does not change.

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