

The Look East Policy: A Top down Policy Implementation Process and its Impacts

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Abstract: This study examines the Look East Policy (LEP) using the framework of policy implementation. This article examines only Japan as a model for LEP policy implementation. This article argues that LEP is a political agenda that could only be realised with a strong central leadership due to factors including resource scarcity, colonial sentiment, pluralistic and traditional societal norms and political mileage of the ruling party. The top down theoretical framework provides understanding of why LEP was implemented in such a way. Intensive interviews were conducted to thirty respondents from various Malaysian organisations with similar criteria whose employees' experiences included studying, living, working and collaborating with Japanese counterparts. Themes were developed based on sequential observations occurring in transcriptions of narrative interviews. This study shares respondents' opinions and experiences and it reports them without editing. The findings show that the LEP top down policy approach contributes to policy advantages and disadvantages for Malaysia. Advantages are essential and authoritarian in nature, helping to enforce a better work culture and ethics in organisations, individual's lives and a stronger industrialised state.

Key words: Look East policy, implementation, process, impacts, normal transcription

INTRODUCTION

Policy implementation requires a policy to be put into action and to be delivered to a target population within a designated framework and timeframe. Most policy implementations are designed at the top by the ruling government because it is incumbent upon leaders to decide how a nation will develop. Implementation is not always handled in a straight forward or procedurally correct manner. Some procedures may be overridden or waived based on the favour of the Executive or an adversarial debate in parliament. Often times policies evade gate-keeping devices. Although, the judiciary could play a balancing role in reviewing such decisions, it only intervenes if there is a dispute or if a policy is composed of harmful implications that directly affect the public in a timely fashion. The top down policy implementation explores ways of examining how the look East policy was implemented and perceived by a leader who later enforced the policy to citizens.

The practical idea of basing a development model on a successfully developed nation such as Japan inspired Mahathir, the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia (1980-1998), to adopt and implement the Look East Policy. Concurrently he instituted the buy British Last program, an anti Western sentiment driven by Mahathir's patriotic intentions to lead Malaysia away from Western influence and dogma. Mahathir demanded all Malaysians to look east for a better future in tandem with his Vision 2020 agenda. Instead of outlining too many objectives, Mahathir was practical. He

set up two main objectives in the LEP to work hand in hand with his national agenda of Vision 2020.

The first objective was to emulate Japanese work culture and ethics that were fundamental to driving Malaysian society towards development. Inventing new attitudes was necessary to change the people's paradigm from traditional to modern societal ways of thinking. Physical development of a state can easily be crippled if the people's ideals are weak. The people must have the fighting spirit and be willing to endure any form of hardship to make the nation prosperous. The second objective was to strengthen Malaysia-Japanese bilateral relationships through economic co-operation mainly by attracting Japanese capitalists to invest in Malaysia. Investment and financial support would help Malaysia stand tall among other industrialised countries.

Thus, this study examines an implementation process that is highly centralised at the top. It further explores the underlying reasons for such concentrated decisions including resource scarcity, roles of state and non-state actors, pluralistic and traditional societal beliefs, colonial sentiment and political mileage gained by the ruling party that contributed to both the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of this policy overall. Furthermore, examining these efforts within the top down approach provides insight into processes that could be used to improve future policy implementation. Although, this policy is referred frequently as a policy without a blue print, central roles have been played by officials in a few government agencies to realise LEP as a national agenda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research applied a qualitative approach to gather the substantive impacts of LEP rather than assessing the size or scale of people's perceptions through surveys. Participation, observation and intensive interviews were employed. Observations were made on 12 (7 public and 5 private) organisations in Penang, Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor. Of particular interest were their organisational charts, mission and operation statements and actual practices. Thirty people in total voluntarily participated in intensive interviews. The sampling method for selecting the private and public agencies was a non-probability sampling while selecting respondents for intensive interviews was done purposively. A common criteria that all respondents had was their direct experiences with Japanese counterparts: either they formerly were students at the Japanese varsities, formerly or presently living in Japan or working with a Japanese MNC, undergoing on-the-job training or technical skills enhancement in Japan, teachers enrolling in Japanese language learning programs, or government officials who were directly involved in formulating and implementing the LEP.

For this qualitative method, intensive interviews provided an excellent conversational analysis to capture how people construct their realities and highlight their points of view through description and explanation of their own experiences (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Zimmermann and Wieder, 1970; Coulon, 1995; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). The same list of open-ended descriptive questions was given to all respondents that enabled them to talk about favourable topics without structuring exactly what the responses should be. Free-flowing dialogue and active probing techniques were applied during the interviews. Furthermore, repeated face-to-face encounters were conducted to understand respondents' perspectives on their personal experiences with Japanese organisations and to understand the work ethics and cultures that have been accepted and incorporated into their daily lives. Interview statements were taped and transcribed.

Themes and unifying concepts were developed based on words and recurring conversational topics provided by respondents through statement comparison and analysis. Identifying themes, constructing typologies and relating different pieces of data to each other allowed this research to uncover the variability of factors associated with the look East policy. Informant's stories were cross checked with one another and compared with agency documents such as employee attendance records, achievements, records of programs and training provided by the government for Malaysian students in

Japan. Nevertheless, the results from this research will not be used for generalisation because this method may over or under-represent findings.

The look east policy (past literatures): Studies on the look East policy integrating the Japanese model in Malaysia are quite interesting. Collected themes in previous literature include issues on foreign aid policy, misalignment of Japanese and Malaysian cultures, Japanese financial assistance to Asia and Malaysia and Japanese bilateral relationships with Malaysia before and after LEP implementation. None of these literature reviews applied a qualitative approach of participant observation and narrative interviews to examine personal experiences and opinions on LEP in Malaysia. Although, their findings and discussions were significant and insightful, none was able to explain the process including mechanisms and efforts utilised to implement LEP. The following literature reviews support this finding.

Atarashi (1984) argues that Japan's interest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is genuine, ranging from trading to investments. Looking at ASEAN as new lands for investment is significant for the Japanese economy because efforts to open markets and to expand imports of manufactured goods would reduce trade friction with the United States and the European Community. Also, debt risks and political instability in Southeast Asia cause Japan to focus on the need to revitalise these countries' economics. Japanese technologies and management skills have reached a maturity level which now enables Japan to carry out its production activities in developing countries that would be mutually beneficial. Thus, Atarashi further argues that each country in ASEAN has its own model of the Look East Policy without necessarily needing a blue print for it. Malaysia's LEP was initiated in the 1980s after Nakasone created a strong impression on Mahathir to firmly introduce LEP to help his nation develop rapidly using the Japanese model. Despite criticism of his personal denunciation of LEP, Mahathir led his nation to become a new industrialised country with a Japanese-inspired work culture.

Although, Japan's Foreign Aid policy in international development is massive and substantial compared to most countries, Japan is not yet a leader (Rix, 1989). Japan is doing its best as a financial supporter in shouldering globalisation responsibilities, but criteria to be the world leader must also include the possession of resources and politico-military superiority. Japan is carrying significant financial burdens in dealing with a number of developing countries as well as their needs for aid coupled with their domestic issues and risks. Such

matters may dissuade investors from the West but Japan is able to accept their shortcomings and it continues to be supportive. Therefore, Japan's contribution is effective regionally, particularly in Southeast Asia due to its geopolitical convenience and rich resources. This strategy makes Japan the most reliable partner with Asian values and is seen as less manipulative and perhaps more reliable in fostering and leading regional development accordingly. Concern about international manipulation was one of the reasons that urged Mahathir to reject the financial assistance package from IMF during the Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998 and redirected its financial dependence to Japan.

A few scholars comprehensively expounded the issues of Japanese foreign aid policy, particularly Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program to Malaysia that is prominent and vital for Malaysian development (Furuoka, 2007, 2003) Malaysia is the fourth largest recipient country under this program. Japan is the largest trading partner to Malaysia and its financial aid has benefited Malaysians in many ways including job opportunities, venues for transferring technology and investments of more than USD3.314 billion between the years of 1995-2000. Furthermore, under the New Miyazawa Initiative, the Japanese government provided funds for human development programs to improve knowledge and skills through education. Under the LEP, scholarships are given to Malaysian students to pursue their studies in Japanese varsities. In the HELP II program, engineers are trained in Malaysia first and are later sent to Japan for advanced courses and training. Although, the intention of this policy is a clear way for Japan as to assist in the development, security and prosperity of the international community, the ODA has been criticised by the Japanese because of its increased tax burden on its citizens at home. As a matter of fact, Hook and Zhang (1998) argue that the Japanese government is reviewing its foreign aid policy and would use this instrument strategically to promote its own economic revival.

Khadijah (2004) and Ding (2004) criticize that LEP has been far from successful in turning Malaysians toward Japanese values of strong work ethics including punctuality, consensus and loyalty. The only Japanese's value that accepted well among Malaysians was the karaoke. Malaysians find that the Japanese model too robust and difficult to be implemented easily. Many Malaysians are lacking those qualities and are hampered by old fatalistic mindsets. In addition, the Japanese models of business practices related to trade relations, such as the sogo shosha principle and the gakubatsu bond are difficult to achieve in a multiethnic

superstitious society; in-house unions and system operation preferences are viewed as unfit for Malaysians.

Furthermore Malaysians, argue that a pro-Japan orientation does not help to promote indigenous participation in entrepreneurial activities. For instance, out of 1200 students sent to Japan, only 12 managed to be successful in entrepreneurship (Furuoka, 2007). The above authors speculate that even without a formal policy of looking east, Japan would still have invested in Malaysia as new markets of supply and demand that would reciprocally benefit Japan and its counterparts. It is all about capitalism, money and nothing more.

Despite these unaccomplished goals of LEP, Japanese investors' high degree of pragmatism has encouraged Japan to support Asia even when Asia was at its most vulnerable financial crisis in 1997-1998. Furthermore, Japanese rescue packages managed to empower Asia, particularly Malaysia, to rally after the crisis and to ensure that human capital development would be sustainable for the foreseeable future. For example, a loan of \$137 million enabled 1,400 Malaysians to study in Japan during the crisis of 1998-1999 and another injection of \$75 million was allocated for scholarships for Malaysians enrolled in engineering and science courses provided under the Japanese Higher Education Loan Fund II (Furuoka, 2007). In fact, Japanese MNCs have demonstrated a long-term commitment to Malaysian subsidiaries over decades including Sony, Hitachi and Matsushita-Panasonic. Continuous Japanese investments in Malaysia have enhanced the nation in several ways including job opportunities, urban development, human capital development and the bilateral balance of power between Japan and Malaysia.

A top down policy approach (processes and mechanisms):

Policy analysis can be considered as an art and a craft as a science that applies skills to create a policy. Skills such as gathering, organizing, identifying and communicating information are vital strategies to understand an issue before an alternate solution is designed to resolve it. Furthermore, a sensible technical skill would help an analyst to assess better the planning for implementation and implications of such framework. The favourable assessment of alternative solution is the cost benefit analysis to measure the feasibility of adoption. However, in a powerful centralized state, the regimes will seek to implement a policy by simple directive. A common reason for such simple directive implementation is for the state to limit the damage or to promote a practical necessity way to serve the people better. In reviewing reasons for adopting a policy, there is no value or economic efficiency that could provide a sufficient basis for most public decision making. Additionally, understanding the

processes of how a policy is adopted and implemented would be beneficial to assess the choice and criteria for a specific policy proposal.

Howlett and Ramesh (1995) posit that a policy cycle is composed of five distinct yet interconnected stages. The first stage is agenda setting that identifies competing issues and potential problems to be considered by policy makers. Here persuasive arguments are necessary along with strong policy objectives and evidence that will ensure an issue will be put on the political agenda, discussed and passed. The second stage is policy formulation that requires policy makers to formulate ways to resolve identified issues. Designing formulas may include weighing costs and benefits and identifying capacities, skills and capabilities. The third stage in decision making requires a collective and majority support that chooses among the competing formulas, including expected and unexpected advantages and disadvantages composing in each formula. Indicators are key factors in ensuring which formulas are accepted and implemented.

The fourth stage is the implementation stage. At this stage, policy makers must put a policy into action. To accomplish the policy's objective, enforcement across all possible venues and entities must be used. The implementation stage requires both public and private agencies to carry out and to deliver the policy. Additionally, this stage is also concerned with the process of implementation including top down, bottom up and middle interventions that commonly involve reinterpretation of actual policy goals that later affect the implementation flow and hybrid models of collaborated implementation where actors are required to join forces. The fifth stage is the evaluation stage that assesses whether or not a policy is able to achieve its actual stated goal and whether the policy is a success or failure. A policy can be evaluated from many vantage points including comparative incremental development or improvement over years of human development rather than a simply pass or fail measurement. Most scholars agree on the common evaluation indicators such as inputs, outputs, performance comparisons, costs and the process or procedures in delivering the policy or program (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995; Mayne and Hudson, 1992; Joe *et al.*, 1992; May, 1992; Dennis, 1987; DeLeon, 1983).

Each stage in this policy cycle is comprehensive and each needs to be examined thoroughly. For the purpose of this research, the implementation stage will focus on the LEP policy. Interestingly the implementation processes for LEP helped to determine the outcome. Being introduced in 1981, the objectives of LEP were to emulate the Japanese work culture and ethics and to strengthen Malaysia-Japanese bilateral relationships. However, the

policy had no clear blueprint for achieving these objectives. The first objective was to change the traditional and fatalistic mindset of Malaysians that were too pessimistic and passive. In order to change a traditional society into a modern industrialised one, Tun Mahathir thought that promoting Japanese work culture and ethics would lead the nation onto the right path of modern civilisation with strong values. Simultaneously improving bilateral relations would reward both countries with strong consistent and continuous economic collaborations either through direct investment or financial assistance programs.

Starting with agenda setting, an issue that emerged from society was the stigma that Malaysians harbour passive and traditional attitudes that could dampen the national agenda towards industrialisation. In his book, *The Malay Dilemma*, Mahathir attested to his views on the fatalistic mindset of the indigenous people. Mahathir called for a necessary paradigm shift to begin the process. Capitalising on the well-established feudalistic patron client relationship between the elite and citizens, Mahathir governed with the presumption that the leader decides, the people will follow. Tun Mahathir was well known of his authoritarian "I do it my way" thinking, believing that his words superseded all others. Thus, LEP was a direct firm instruction from the executive level to all citizens in both public and private sectors. Although, LEP was a reflection of Mahathir's anti-colonial sentiments through his buy British last campaign, his inspiring leadership in positioning the nation on a track towards modernisation was timely and right.

The formula of LEP was straight forward, requiring all people to adopt the Japanese work culture and ethics. The same encouragement was cultivated to the private sectors. Mahathir's mandates ensured that the more rapidly many people and organisations learned the Japanese work culture and ethic, the faster the policy could create an industrialised society. Thus, Japanese' work systems of operation and organisations such as sogo shosha, 5S, kaizen, kanban and Just-In-Time (JIT) were rapidly introduced to all sectors. The enforcement was well received and was coupled with supports from Japanese ODA, the HELP I and II programs, training and workshops and sending workers and students to Japan for secondary and tertiary education.

Majone and Wildavsky (1995) view the policy implementation process as constantly changing according to forces such as resources, preferences, politics and actors. The process is also open to manipulation and influences that shape and change the policy program. Therefore, a policy will be successful if the players are skilled, the target group is small, the problem area is

tractable and the funds are sufficient. Following this logic, the implementation process of LEP had a strong political root that led most government and private sectors to shape the operational activities in their organisations. Moreover government budget allocations were easily appropriated to all programs related to LEP, particularly education, research and development, collaboration programs and incentive packages for investors especially from Japan. This political preference brought tremendous change to the bureaucratic systems, education, work ethics and societal cultures. In fact, throughout, the 1980s and 1990 Japanese movies for all ages dominated most of the television programs and subscriptions were free. The tempo of these movies is now more Korean than Japanese but this phenomenon is no different from the LEP that was designed to look east for inspiration including to Korea. However, as fast as Samsung products in the global market, the Korean movies offer subliminal stories to youngsters.

Furthermore, Majone and Wildavsky (1995) argue that the implementation process can be divided into two models: the planning model and the interaction model. The former posits that implementation is an extension of organisational design in that policy is planned and it is determined to execute a plan into action. The latter cites policy as constantly changing and actions must be coupled with changes simultaneously. Changes in policy input alter policy outcomes. Clearly LEP is a policy that does not fit into the implementation model because it was meant to be executed without further changes or modification to its actual objectives. LEP is a planning model that calls for policy actors and executors to simply implement it without further ado.

Despite LEP being a planning model, it lacks the statutory legal mandate to the public. It is not unusual to see the executive power simply execute a new policy without much discussion or intervention at the parliamentary level. Malaysia practices a constitutional monarchy. It is very common in Malaysia for most policies to be introduced to public without legal mandates because a policy does not require a constitutional approval to be implemented. Diffusion of power between the executive and legislative branches makes it easy for the executive to decide and instruct the legislature to deliver the action. As a result, gridlock is basically absent in parliament. Nevertheless, parliamentary debates and approvals are necessary on some issues dealing with amending legal statutes at the federal and state levels. For instance, the practices of royal prerogative, privilege and immunity (an issue on rule of immunity to royal family and members was stirring due to an incident of a brutal assault

and battery of a hockey player in Johor. The son of King of Johor, Tengku Majid Idris Iskandar was charged of this brutal assault and battery to a commoner, a hockey player. Such incident open up to many more charges to other royal members that involved in many felonies that had been swept under the carpet for so many years. See details at <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/15/news/15iht-may1.html?pagewanted=print> (accessed on July 18th 2013). In his biography of Mahathir Mohammad, Malaysian Maverick, Barry Wain speaks about how the Sultans of the nine states had “sometimes played politics, leveraged their positions for financial gain and indulged in fairytale-like extravagance at the public expense.” Although, the Sultans were “not meant to engage in commerce, they were actually so deeply involved that they were resented by the business community”) applied to royal family were a significant debate in the parliament. Ultimately parliament amended, the law and removed the royal prerogative that for so long put the royal family and its members above the law. The amendment was enacted in 1993, making the royal family and its members subject to the law.

For LEP to escape parliamentary debates with absolute approval from the cabinet was a matter of political preference. Subjecting LEP to cabinet debates may have hindered this policy from immediate implementation, as its critics worried about the cultural adaptability and acceptability of the people. Sometimes details can prolong and slow the process of implementation. Adversarial debates could have further delayed this policy. Thus, Mahathir’s authoritative action in this matter was particularly swift and strategically pragmatic. The impetus for Malaysians to change their traditional mindset through education and training was the right avenue for understanding and sustaining the Japanese work culture and ethic. Such an incremental approach to learning a new work culture and ethic has been an efficient intervention for every citizen.

As a result LEP was implemented and promoted to both public and private sectors. The implementation process was not complex or cumbersome because of a strong concentration of power at the centre that simply dispersed its instructions in a mandatory manner. The executive branch was responsible for policy enforcement and all government agencies were obligated to implement it in a straight forward, unchallenged manner. Public and private sector businesses were expected to incorporate LEP’s two-fold objectives into their operating plans, although there is no proper blue print for implementation. Moreover Mahathir, as an authoritarian leader, chose LEP as his top priority and allocated a

budget with the objective of mobilising Malaysian resources towards an industrialised society by 2020.

Factors for a top down implementation approach: The Look East Policy (LEP) is a straightforward policy that endures for reasons beyond its implementation decision and political preference. The establishment and introduction of LEP in the early 1980s was more towards a national agenda rather than a blueprint for society. Mahathir patriotically implemented LEP believing that national development could be achieved within the East rather than a one-sided view of western modernisation. With LEP Mahathir called on the entire nation to move forward. Preparing the nation with Japanese work culture and ethics would incentivise Japanese investors by minimising the risk of dealing with a complex plural society like Malaysia.

The first factor is the political mileage. Mahathir's political preference created advantages for himself, his administration and his political parties, UMNO and Barisan. Mahathir is still the iconic advisor in Malaysian politics and economy. Although, Mahathir is no longer the Prime Minister, both of his successors, Abdullah Badawi and Najib are from the same political party and share his ideology. Barisan is still the ruling party although its power and influence receded significantly with the loss of 2/3 majority seats in Parliament to the opposition parties in the 2013 general election. Regardless of who rules the government, the LEP will remain intact without revision.

LEP has proven to encourage the economic growth and was of significant assistance during the Asian financial crisis. The rescue packages from Japan ensured that human capital development would be sustainable for the foreseeable future. For example, a loan of \$137 million enabled 1,400 Malaysians to study in Japan during the crisis of 1998-1999 and another injection of \$75 million was allocated for scholarships for Malaysians enrolled in engineering and science courses provided under the Japanese Higher Education Loan Fund II (Furuoka, 2007). Moreover, Furuoka (2003) note that Japanese investments are vital and positively growing in Malaysia: from 1995 to March 2000 Japan invested a total of USD3.314 billion to Malaysia; in 2008 USD1.6 billion underwrote 60 approved projects and between January and September 2009, the investment increased from USD 1.6-1.87 billion, making Japan the largest Foreign investor in a country. Most Japanese investments are concentrated in manufacturing electronic products, non metallic mineral products, petroleum-based products, chemical products, transportation equipment and metal fabricated products

(Saraswathi *et al.*, 2009). Progressively larger investments from Japan show the element of trust in Malaysia's ability to reward Japan profitably in return.

LEP may not be the main factor for Japanese investors to investment here, but the policy reflects the seriousness of the Malaysian government in pursuing its bilateral relationships with Japan. The advantages of cheap and skilled workers, incentive packages, stable political and social conditions, respect and hospitality of the host country fascinate Japanese investors and keep their economic favour and faith in Malaysia. Malaysia's increasingly Japanese-oriented and educated workers will sustain and enhance this bona fide bilateral co-operation for years to come. As Japanese work ethics and culture embed into the culture, the domino effect will produce organisations and communities that will encourage Malaysians to work for Japanese companies.

The second factor is resource scarcity including skills, knowledge and capital. Access to all three types of resources is limited to most developing countries including Malaysia, especially in the post-independence years. For Malaysia, achieving independence was a huge task made more difficult due to limited resource mobilisation. The post-independence context carried a strong colonial influence in the form of the parliamentary governing system. Following independence the third factor of colonial sentiment seemed to be diminished or missing with nationalism still at its peak. Ideas of nationalism were used forcefully to fulfil an agenda that required a new model of strong determination to rebuild a nation that was destroyed to ashes and to succeed. Japan was the best example of a nation that had been both destroyed and rebuilt. Malaysia needed an inspiring story to show that development must be earned through determination and hard work. Furthermore, channelling the government to look east was strategically deliberate to guide Malaysians toward a framework that shares some similarities of eastern values such as collective action, hierarchical loyalty, family values and belief systems that become guiding principles of life in a multiethnic society. The fourth factor is a plural society that is pushing for a strong leadership within the nation. Formerly the indigenous Malay, Chinese and Indian populations used to be economically profiled based on ethnicity. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was designed in the early 1970s to eradicate poverty and to restructure the economy away from ethnic profiling. Indigenous Malays were known as an agrarian society, the Chinese were labelled economic tycoons and the Indians represented the rubber plantations owned by the British. The set plan for 30% Malays ownership and participation was a target of this

restructuring policy. Harding argued that the pursuit of special privileges came to be seen as justified and essential to the creation of equality because the rationale of positive discrimination is itself based on the concept of equality that is to impose equality on already unequal groups simply perpetuates inequality. As a way to integrate all ethnics and to transform the nation into a modern industrialised country, a centralised policy such as NEP was meant to bridge the economic gap.

However, NEP was criticised for creating a new elite group composed of each ethnic group with benefits were circling around them (Jesudason, 1989; Gomez and Jomo, 1997). The pocket of poverty is still prominent and it appears more so in the rural areas where the indigenous Malays Chinese and Indians intermingle. The term poverty is applied across ethnic lines though the percentage of their populations differs significantly. Thus, following to the ethnically identified bases in the economic sectors, LEP was designed to supplement what was missing in the NEP. LEP is absent of ethnic identification, aspiring to turn the once traditional country into a modern industrialised society. The Japanese work ethics and culture are loaded with pragmatism and professionalism in which all are accountable. In fact, Japan's example of discipline and loyalty could assist Malaysia in igniting feelings of nationalism that would unite its people and propel them into a modern industrialised society.

The fifth factor is the political mileage to the ruling party. LEP marked the most favourable policy that identified Barisan Nasional with the success of development among other Asian nations. In fact, Mahathir Mohamed was deemed a third world hero to developing countries for his ability to stand against western dogma. LEP was Mahathir's idea of nationalism and development that triggered a decline in the western predominance. Although, Mahathir has retired and voting patterns have favoured Pakatan Rakyat in the 2008 and 2013 elections, Barisan Nasional is still the ruling party. Voters considered BN's overall achievements including education, industries, health provision, public services and human capital as the basis for their support despite accusations of fraud during election years. Though the struggles against corruption and nepotism are on-going, one could not simply reject what was done in the past for the development of this nation. LEP has assisted Malaysia towards a better state and living conditions because of Japan's multi-million dollar assistance programs and investments. The themes from the findings express the benefits of pleasant work ethics and culture

that are presently practised by individuals in public and private sectors as voluntarily shared in their experiences, opinions and emotions towards LEP.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes from the findings: Most respondents expressed agreement with the application of Japanese work culture and ethics into their work places. In no particular order, the most frequent words used to describe the Japanese work culture and ethics were precise, good, excellent, practical, organised, punctual, productive, standard operating procedure, integrity and honesty, a great discipline, easy to understand, inspiring, details and critical, environmentally balance and meticulous. A few respondents expressed concerns about the details and meticulous Japanese ways of executing tasks that could trigger unpleasant encounters, possibly curbing the eagerness of their partners to work with them. Respondents were informed that their perspectives were recorded as solely descriptive data. Themes reflected the perceptions of those persons interviewed and were not verified further.

In a contrary opinion, Khadijah, Lee and Zielinski view the Japanese model as unfit for use in most public agencies in Malaysia (Ping, 2004) agencies are likely to utilise the 5S (5S is referred to Seiri (sorting), Seiton (arranging), Seiso (cleaning-up), Seiketsu (unvarying) and Shisuke (practicing always) each is equivalently translated into Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language) that has an equivalent meaning to word selected in English that places in each bracket at <http://www.jupem.gov.my/wp-includes/files/5s/pengenalan/apa%20itu%205s.pdf> (accessed online March 15th 2013). Kaizen, kanban system and JIT (Just-In-Time) in their daily operation and two of several key performance indices used to evaluate workers are discipline and accountability. While many private agencies express their independent model of operation, most of them are applying the 5S when it comes to managing files and documents. The JIT system is a solid operating system that has been used by other western companies including IBM and Hewlett-Packard, albeit by different names such as direct flow manufacturing and output with zero stock. Similarly, the kanban system is applied in a way that would increase productivity and quality. Other aspects such as loyalty and honesty are also included in their main emphasis. Most private and public sectors agreed that these values reflect the east principle and Japanese elements are prominent and work well with organisational objectives and operations.

Furthermore, most respondents share a similar opinion that the 5S, kanban and JIT systems have helped them manage their daily routine better than having an individual way of operating agency tasks or no guideline at all. For the 5S method, documents and files are updated every 6-12 months, making files systematic and easy to review and access at any time. In fact, waste is reduced tremendously and at a few operational stages redundancy and waste are eliminated completely. Moreover, Japanese work ethics emphasise respect, courtesy, discipline and efficient services to clients. Governmental or public sectors applying the 5S method include the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Human Resources, Department of Public Registration, Department of Public Services, Ministry of Women, Welfare and Rural Development, Department of National Treasury and hospitals. Similarly, private sectors including heavy industries such as Perodua, Proton and many local entrepreneurs also subscribe to this method.

The kanban system allows for each process in multiple stages to be checked and if there is a defect in a process, a person responsible for that particular task or station will be held accountable. A worker must fix the problem quickly in order to avoid the process from continuing to make a mistake at a different level of operation. In addition to the JIT system, it allows the manufacturing companies to streamline their entire operation and to maximise the use of resources with zero waste. With storage for possible future orders, it also encourages the industry to operate efficiently according to recorded orders for products. The supply of products is provided by confirmed demands from clients. Such practice works well in a few local manufacturing companies such as Perodua and Proton-DRB Hicom.

Additionally, from individuals' experiences and standpoints, most respondents reveal that they keep the discipline, punctuality and accountability in their personal lives and ensure that these values are cultivated within their family and children. A few respondents express that the Japanese work ethics are something to strive for and to most Malay respondents these values conform with the high standards of the Islamic way of life. In fact when, it comes to respect, hygiene and honesty the Japanese managers and officers are the role models. Some respondents that have lived in Japan for many years express that the Japanese values seem to blend well with their own attitudes and actions. Many Malays have learned to keep self-disciplined, organised and punctual practices when making appointments or attending meetings. They like to be detailed in executing their daily tasks, learning about the risks, finding solutions to avoid

any unprofitable risks, or trying to overcome possible disadvantages at work. Japanese people appreciate standardised procedures in all processes and the same appreciation is applied by most respondents and agencies in maintaining rules and regulations and in following procedures strictly to avoid defects or damage.

A few respondents shared their adherence to tidiness principles to the extent of placing their shoes facing outward in Japanese fashion to facilitate ease of movement. Others kept the Japanese protocol of buying and selling items where a total quantity of items scanned is delineated for the customer together with the total amount. Written receipts are coupled with verbal confirmation of the exact amount of money a teller receives from a customer, putting the exact amount beside the machine, counting the change and confirming to a customer the total amount and change that the teller is rendering. Such details are designed to eliminate confusion between both teller and customer that sometimes occur when the exact amount of money that is given or received is in question. Malays studying in Japan have reported some life changing experiences that have inspired the younger generation to pursue honesty and good moral behaviour, particularly teachers of high school science and Japanese language curricula.

Despite admiration for the Japanese values of integrity and discipline, a few respondents expressed their dislike for that system. Several respondents voice their dissatisfaction in dealing with their Japanese counterparts when a series of encounters with them showed that acknowledgement is only recognised to their boss or superior. Eye contact is only for superiors and no courtesy is shown to lower ranked employees even when they are meeting at the same table. Japanese vertical and hierarchical society is rigid and arrogant. Furthermore, Japanese counterparts' extremely meticulous attitudes in striving for a risk-free business may run cross grain with respondents and demoralise more than inspire their feelings toward Japanese work culture. Such reactions to personal encounters bring bias to bear against employers. Meticulous and detailed attitudes are vital for Japanese investors when assessing all possible risks to ensure their investment and capital are moving toward their vision as capitalists. By providing capital, the Japanese hope to establish a reciprocal relationship wherein Malaysia will provide labour based on Japanese work ethics.

Additionally, a few non-Malay respondents were reluctant towards LEP. They expressed Chinese-Japanese sentiments that prevented them from embracing all of the Japanese ethics and work culture. Some felt that Chinese Confucian principles were superior to Japanese ways. The nurturing bonsai culture in the Japanese way reflects

subordinations and an effort to limit the growth and control of any form of potential. Orders and following orders in Japanese way of delivering tasks to employees are similar pruning technique in the art of bonsai that restraint their ability and capacity to reach to their full potential. Such opinions were shared throughout their story of their work experiences. Interestingly most Japanese MNCs have numbers of Chinese employees that hold high positions in their organisations in Malaysia. Most of them have positive experiences with their Japanese managers and superiors and they believe that they deliver their job according to Japanese work culture and ethics without compromising their own beliefs or cultural heritage.

A final criticism from most respondents regarding the Japanese culture is the absent of open kimono policy towards technology transfer. The discipline and work ethics are exceptional but the trust is not yet at the same platform. Perrons argues that the open kimono policy contributes to excellent innovation and market accelerations among three small groups of companies including Intel, Microsoft and Cisco. The trust and power are achievable through the platform leaderships of each company that is willing to share and reveal detail financial data and high proprietary technical information in order to achieve mutual advantageous goals. However, most respondents' experienced that their Japanese counterparts were unlikely to share the inner working information of a project.

Hence, most important information were delivered or conversed in Japanese language where most participants were ignorant. In another incident, a respondent spoke about his previous working experience as an engineer in Japan. He is Japanese proficient and he was prevented from attending a meeting on a new technology application at his plant because of his knowledge in Japanese language could give advantages and disadvantages to the company. He believed that his language proficient would allow him to understand the new technology and he assumed that the Japanese company refused to share the ideas and technical information because he is not Japanese. Maintaining confidentiality of new technology is a company's privilege but refusing to share and to build mutual advantageous objectives would slow down the entire development objective for Malaysia. Even when, there was a claim of technology transfer, the technology was almost out dated or obsolete.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, the implementation process for a policy is unlikely to be debated in the parliament. A policy

inspired by the Prime Minister will be favourable and be placed in the agenda setting without much ado. The policy also will be supported by his administrations. LEP was a unique implementation case for Malaysia because it was able to duck all the bureaucratic procedures and escaped the parliamentary voting system. The implementation of LEP marks the transition for Malaysia to move forward with a model for industrialisation and modernisation. Its elements of discipline and integrity are strong and affecting Malaysians in diverse ways. The Japanese work culture and ethics are acceptable in this plural society with operating systems and processes working tremendously well in private and public agencies. Discipline, integrity and accountability are great equalizers that erase the ethnic boundaries. It is the work ethic and culture that are able to express their values without racism. For social cohesion, adopting Japanese work ethics and culture reduce work tension in an organisation because each employee is subject to the organisation's assessment tool that evaluates unique contributions without ethnic profiling. In a plural society, LEP as the external element is able to create a condition that balances competing multiethnic values by applying universal virtues that are uncontested by all involved. The 30 years of policy implementation of LEP shows a strong foundation of trust and confidence in the Japanese work ethic and culture, ensuring that the practice will thrive.

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