

## Challenges in Implementation of National Language Policy for Ethnic Unity in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study discusses the challenges in fostering ethnic unity through the introduction of national language policy in Malaysia. The country is populated by two major ethnic groups, the Malays and Chinese. With diverse dissimilarities in languages and other cultural heritage, both ethnic strive to preserve their languages from being marginalized. When the government propagated the Malay language as the national language, a sense of dissatisfaction arose among the Chinese. The implementation of the policy was an uphill battle for the government. Based on the textual analysis method employed, the finding shows that the major stumbling blocks to the implementation of Malay language as the national language is because the Chinese community is adamant in preserving their language rights.

**Key words:** National language policy, multi-ethnic country, Malay community, Chinese community, Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

The cultural clash among the major ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic country has the potential of ensuing into a serious conflict. The difficulty in fostering unity due to the cornucopia of dissimilarities descended from different civilizations was discussed by Huntington (1996) in the manuscript, the clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order. According to Huntington, the crumble of the Berlin wall after the end of cold war had increased the opportunities of interaction among the world population, resulting in the possibility of cultural clashes occurring more frequently. Even if it has a chance of bearing positive outcomes but it could also lead to conflicts if the cultural elements such as tradition, religion, language and education system are threatened by the society's contradicting heritage. Conflicts might surface if different ethnics that practice diverse traditions have to co-exist within the confines of a similar political territory.

Such a situation can be seen in Malaysia and the efforts to enhance ethnic unity is not an easy feat as the country is populated by diverse communities (Hoffstaedter, 2009) and the two most dominants are the Malays and Chinese. Each ethnic group not only differs physically but also traditions, values and social norms. However, differences in the spiritual aspects that make the matters more complicated as they are abstract in nature hence making it an intricate situation to seek a common ground that could unite them. The situation could turn critical if each community rebuffs the efforts for compromise and neglect the country historical background.

The Malays feel that their status as the original inhabitants was at stake when the Chinese community began to question the national policies based on the Malay cultures endorsed by the government (Mputubwele, 2003) such as the position of Malay language as the national language assigned as a tool of unity for Malaya's. As the indigenous group, the Malays saw the action as a fitting effort in safeguarding the continuation of cultural elements of their native land and similar policy was carried out in many countries (Piller, 2001; Veinguer and Davis, 2007). In fact, they were determined to ensure that the Malay language was accepted as the basis of the national identity. Meanwhile, the Chinese ethnic, even though they were aware of their past immigrant status were unwavering to exercise and ensure that their language and other cultural rights (Perry, 2004) would be preserved unconditionally. This is mainly due to their opinion that the Chinese civilization was more illustrious and superior than other civilizations and economically they claimed to have contributed a lot to the country progress (Ratnam, 1965).

So far, no research has focused specifically on the link between cultural element differences, especially the language and ethnic unity in Malaysia. Studies were more concentrated on challenges faced by ethnic unity and national integration such as ethnic unity crisis in Malaysia by Rahman (1979) and Ratnam (1965) on communalism and the political process in Malaysia. There are also a number of published study debated on ethnic unity problems in Malaysia by Ismail *et al.* (2009), the socio-psychological dimension of ethnic relations in

Malaysia, Yacob (2006) political culture and nation building: Whither Bangsa Malaysia, Puteh (2006) language and nation building: A study of the language policy in Malaysia and Shamsul (2005), the construction and management of pluralism: sharing the Malaysian experience. Therefore, this research will look into the problems of ethnic unity from a new angle which is how cultural elements like language become the stumbling block in fostering ethnic unity in Malaysia. To fulfil the purpose of the study, textual analysis was adopted as the research method.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Ethnic communities and cultures in Malaysia:** Before the arrival of British, Malaya was predominantly populated by the Malay ethnic practicing a set of distinct cultural and civilizational values either in family life, community interactions or the way of governing the Malay Kingdom. However, when the British started to interfere with administration in order to fulfill their economic activities, a larger wave of immigrants from China and Indian was brought into the peninsula to serve as cheap labors in tin mining and plantation, respectively. Due to this when Malaya gained the independence in 1957, the demographic scenario of the country had changed from being a homogeneous society to become a heterogeneous one. This heterogeneity was not only confined to the physical outlook and more importantly it also encompassed the spiritual aspects which includes cultural and civilizational values. This undoubtedly has competed for space for the growth with the original inhabitant of the land which naturally caused conflicts.

**The Malay culture:** The Malay kingdom came into existence around 3500 years ago and was originally formed by the various sub-ethnic groups of the Malay tribe. During the Neolithic era (circa 2500 years ago), the Malays from the Yunan region descended upon the territories of the Malay Peninsula and Southeast Asia, known as the Proto-Malays, Ancient-Malays or Aboriginal-Malays. They are the ancestors of the Polynesian Malays and this tribe was responsible in forming the Malay lineage throughout the Southeast Asian archipelago currently occupying Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines. The kinsmen then formed their own sub-ethnics which are distinguished as Batak, Minangkabau, Aceh, Rawa, Mendahiling, Siak, Jambi, Palembang, Sunda, Jawa, Madura, Bali, Bajau, Dayak, Iban, Dusun, Brunei, Lanun, Bugis, Boyan, Riau, Tagalog Pampago, Bisaya, Melayu, Petani, Samsan and others (EnsaiKlopedia Sejarah dan

Kebudayaan Melayu in 1994). In Malaysia, they are simply referred to as the Malay community that are the native inhabitants of the sacred Malay realm. Their status was reaffirmed when the British colonial masters named the territory as the lands of the Malays, establishing their status as the traditional dwellers of the region (Kratz, 2009; Wah, 1982).

The Malay culture was founded based upon their traditional and geographical settings. Abdullah Alwi claims that the traditional system was in existence even before the arrival of Islam which was introduced by the Deutro-Malay clan. The whole Malay kinsfolk from every religion and ethnicity had assimilated the cultural and traditional elements into their lives. However, the customs differ between the communities such as the Iban tribe who continues to retain the traditional system in every aspect of their life, compared to other ethnics that adopt a different judiciary system (Jensen, 1974).

The traditional system is categorized into two aspects, the first one is known as tradition; customary elements that cater to the pattern of conducts and way of life that have been infused in their life for long periods of time. Secondly, tradition revolves around an accepted way of life that could undergo changes or transformations to suit changing the environment. As this type of tradition is viewed as an element that is not permanent in nature and can be adapted, it is therefore categorized as customs and rites. However, the study will focus on the first aspect that is tradition related to the manners. It is categorized as social norms that are composed of ethics and moral codes founded upon social values (Kratz, 2009; Abdullah *et al.*, 2010). It is this tradition that influences the Malays when they interact among themselves or when they interact with other non-Malay communities. Based on research by Wah (1982), the Malays' conducts and actions while interacting internally or externally were based upon highly-steeped virtues embedded in every creature bred with a Malay soul-always willing to compromise, respect and conflict shy. It is this type of demeanour that makes a Malay leader highly trusted to be granted with the mandate of governing the multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaya or Malaysia. The personality is further nurtured by Malaya's ideal geographical setting as the land is bestowed with a mild climate which is well-protected from natural disasters such as flooding, famine and cruel monarchs, leaders and administrators (Rahman, 1977; Winstedt, 1925).

**The Chinese culture:** The Chinese community in Malaysia follows a specific type of culture that does not exactly mirror to the one practiced by the mainland Chinese. The differences in environment, interaction with

non-Chinese communities and their merchant status that is not a highly-valued trait among the traditional mainland Chinese community have somewhat aspired them to form their own unique culture, known as the Chinese traders' culture (Gungwu, 1991). However, there still exist some similarities between the traditional Chinese culture and the cultures of other Chinese living in other places, like in Malaysia such as the elements of language, education and family ties.

The Chinese community is an ethnic founded profoundly upon one cultural identity, traditionally preserved from the Chinese value systems derived from Chinese heritage and civilization. The most important elements are the ethics system, language, culture and education. The assimilation of philosophy, kinship and Son of Heaven belief had influenced the people into heavy emphasis upon a deeply-rooted racial sentiment akin among the Chinese population. Their character, conduct and actions are also influenced by their environmental setting. With an avalanche of calamities that kept befalling the community such as floods, droughts, threats of Emperor's brutality, high-density populations and unrests caused by tribal and dialect differences, especially in the Southern part of China had resulted in a strong ethnic sentiment held by the Southern Chinese community (Victor, 1967). The same Chinese communities that are currently inhabiting in other adopted countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia. In fact, the same sentiments are still prevalent even among who have embraced the religions of the local.

The actions are more discernible when they interact among themselves or when they communicate with people from other ethnic groups. To ensure that their culture is preserved, the Chinese would form educational institutions as the agent of establishment and custodian of the Chinese heritage, especially when they immigrate to new territories. Their allegiance towards their traditional language is based upon the conviction that the Chinese's cultural and traditional values that are far superior compared to the civilization of non-Chinese communities. It is the same traditional values that have guided them in their interaction with the Malay communities since the time they set foot in the Malay Peninsula in 3 AD until now. Historically, their migration to Malaya was not just based upon the aim of amassing wealth but also with the purpose of expanding their traditional elements at the occupied territories. From there, the expansion and establishment of the Mandarin language was reinforced through the Chinese vernacular education system.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Challenges on establishing Malay language as the national language:** Generally, a culture is built upon the combination of elements such as religion, language, traditions, education, economy, politics, social and arts which can be considered as the backbone of a culture. However, this study will only focus on the aspect of language by analyzing the Malay and Chinese ethnic communities' struggle in preserving their mother tongue languages.

Language is the main elements of a culture that reflects one ethnic's identity. It not only functions as a communication tool at the intra-ethnic level but also capable of articulating the internal values of an ethnic community (Edwards, 1985; Jepson, 2010). Through the nexus between language and the wisdom, language could reveal an ethnic's true conscience or virtues. This is reflected in the Malay saying, Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa, Bahasa Menunjukkan Bangsa (language is the soul of an ethnic while language reflects the true nature of an ethnic).

The link between language and soul was well studied by Sapir as it is the melting pot that combines a community with its surroundings and traditions which forms the foundation of an ethnic. Language sometimes is referred to as the mirror to the soul of an ethnic as it is through language that the fundamental nature of an ethnic are exposed. For the Malay community, its cultural developments encompass the aspects of religion, traditions, budi, public relations, bond with the creator and virtues. The understanding and disclosure of the elements are revealed through its literary and figurative language like proverbs, metaphors and idioms.

For proponents of integration like Deutsch (1966), the process of nation building is an important method to foster national integration and solidarity as a way to guarantee the stability and continuous development of a nation. For new multi-ethnic countries like Malaysia, most nationalists are keen upon the idea of establishing a common culture to represent a national identity. One of the means is through the execution of language and education policies. For the Malays, the position of Malay language as the national and official language is not due to any extreme or irrational motive but it is based on the reality and socio-political history that has established the position of the language as the lingua franca of this region since the 13th century. It was widely employed in administration, judiciary, literary and the teachings of Islam by Malay-Islamic kingdoms of the bygone era. It was also the means of communication in trade and social development between regions of the Malay Archipelago

(Puteh, 2006). It is this awareness that led to the efforts to establish Malay language as the national language of the new nation by leaders of political parties like United Malays National Organization (UMNO) or as vocally expressed by left-wing leaders of Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM), Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS).

Before the commencement of the nation building process in Malaya, history has showcased that the Malay community are the natives of the land now recognized as Malaysia (Milner, 1982). Based on the status and their position as the majority race of the nation, the accordance of Malay language as the national language is justified. In fact, the act was similar to the action taken by the government of United States of America in crowning English as the nation's primary lingua franca as the Anglo-Saxons were the first effective settlers in the territory (Huntington, 1996). However, the intention to reinforce Malay language as the language of unity has faced numerous challenges from the time it was proposed during the pre-Independence days to the present day. Historically, the status of the Malay language as the basis of Malay identity and the language of unity was threatened ever since the country was colonized by the British.

With the intention of enriching the British Empire by pillaging the natural resources of Malaya, the need to hire cheap labour from Southern China and Southern Indian was realised through the Kangchu and Kangany systems. As a result, the landscape of the Malay homeland was forever transformed from being a Malay-based community to that of a multi-ethnic society (Furnivall, 1948). In the early 20th century, the Malay community with a population of 1,962,021 had overnight, became the minority in their own homeland in contrast with the non-Malay community that had escalated to 1,709,392 Chinese and 624,009 Indians. The same situation took place in the straits settlement of Singapore and Penang where there were more immigrants compared to the Malay community, turning the states into Chinese-dominated territories. The establishment of the Chinese language, education system and traditions alienated the Malay language's position even further as the native language (Emerson, 1970).

The call for the Malay language to be established as the major language of communication was threatened when the British government began to enact policies that went against the interests of Malaysia. Through their divide and rule policy, the British government segregated the different ethnic communities according to the fields of education, residential areas and occupation (Furnivall, 1948). The main objective was to grant easy

access towards ensuring that their efforts in plundering the mineral-wealthy land of its riches were not met with any resistance and relieved its administration from any prospect of ethnic strains. Hence, each community was consented with the freedom to retain their language, culture and traditions. Meanwhile, the British laissez faire policy in the education sector and the instilling of language and educational syllabus were left to the different ethnics to implement without any objection from the colonial masters. The British settlers had started to build English schools that were mainly governed by Christian missionaries, since 19th century with the objectives of spreading the teachings of Christianity or developing Western education.

British occupation in Malaya for 130 years (1824-1942 and 1945-1957) had not only threatened the native Malays' status as the indigenous residents but had also challenged the status of the Malay language as the national language which continues to plague the community until today. The threat was made worse when the Chinese community and other non-Malay communities were persistent with their claim to retain the superiority and splendour of their language through the vernacular education system that was established during the British rule. Other than, the non-Malay communities' indifference, the move to establish the Malay language as the national language was also threatened by the status and dominance of English as the language of academia and international relations. Even though, it received the consent of the present government, the stand was seen by Malay language custodians and Malay nationalists as improper. The actions were perceived as attempts to sideline the traditional language that has been institutionalized for centuries (Puteh, 2006). The following discussion will look into the reaction of the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese ethnic in pledging their rights to preserve the use of Mandarin in the education system and the campaign of enforcing the use English language in the national education system that has resulted in the marginalization of Malay language as the language of unity.

**The struggles by non-Malay communities:** After the independence of Malaya in 1957, the most significant change witnessed was in the composition of the population that was originally mono-ethnic had transformed into a multi-ethnic society.

The efforts to preserve their language, education and culture, especially by the Chinese community had begun since the 1950's. To the Chinese, conserving the language is vital as it is akin to preserving the linguistic traditions of mainland China and to continue safeguarding a sacred

language of heaven that began its glorious history that could be dated to 5000 years ago (Chi-Yun, 1957). The reinforcement of the Mandarin language was implemented through the Chinese vernacular education system which was established in the country since the 19th century and it was regarded as the stronghold in the efforts to defend their language, heritage and identity. When they were granted with the Malaya's citizenship through the Chinese scholar society's efforts, Dongjiaozong, their efforts to empower the Mandarin language through the establishment of Chinese vernacular schools were made easier once they were granted equal rights as citizens of Malaya as they no longer faced any prejudice as immigrants. From there, the multi-language and multi-cultural concept was protected as the means to continue upholding and safeguarding the language and heritage of the Chinese. In fact, they regarded the government's attempts of establishing a unified education system that implemented Malay language as the medium of instruction as Malay-motivated and a threat to the survival of the Chinese language and culture.

Confrontations were imminent when the Barnes Report commissioned by the British was tabled in 1951 as one of the main proposals called for the abolishment of the vernacular education system and to replace them with a national education system that adopts the English and Malay languages as the national languages. As the second-largest non-Malay ethnic in the country, the Chinese community put up a strong defiance against the threats towards their language and culture that resulted in the founding of Dongzong in 1951 and Jiazhong in 1954 associations. For example, the Chinese associations had sent a memorandum to the British government where they aired their consent to the Fenn-Wu Report. A memorandum was also sent to the President of the United Nations in 1954 to appeal for some consideration to be accorded to the language and education policies of Malaya that were deemed unfair to them. In fact, the Barnes and Razak Reports were strongly criticized by the Jiazhong president, Lim Lian Geok who claimed that both reports were discriminating the status of the Mandarin language in Malaya.

Dongjiaozong which was an association formed by Chinese scholars had worked hard to protect the Mandarin language and safeguard the continuation of the Chinese vernacular education system in the national education system by providing suggestions in the government's Rahman Talib Report and Education Act in 1961. Secondly, they also struggled to uphold the status of the Mandarin language as the government's official language during the preparation of the National Language Act in 1967. Through Dongjiaozong, the Chinese

community also proposed to establish a Chinese-medium university known as Merdeka University as a way to continue preserving the Chinese language and culture. To ensure the survival of the Mandarin language, the medium of instruction in Chinese private schools (Duzhong) was updated to guarantee that the Chinese's identity was not threatened.

In the 1970's, there was a revival in the number of new private Chinese schools after they were neglected during the 1960's. Dongjiaozong played a big part in instigating certain issues like the Article 21 (2) of the Education Act 1961, the 3R reading, writing and arithmetic issue which failed to be implemented during the 1960's. All of these Dongjiaozong's efforts not only received full support from the Chinese community but also became important issues for political parties that relied on the Chinese community's support for their survival. Therefore, political parties like Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Democratic Action Party (DAP) could not ignore the importance of the Mandarin language as championed by Dongjiaozong. For instance, under Tan Cheng Lock's leadership, MCA had openly supported Dongjiaozong's exploits which was portrayed in his speech at the Jiazhong Congress:

People do not become more civilized by losing contact with their own roots. A man's native speech is like his shadow, inseparable from his personality culturally they must be independent and must maintain a very strong intellectual and spiritual life of their own. At this critical juncture in the history of the growth and development of Chinese education and culture in Malaya. Its cause has the full support of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA)'

This had led to language issues being politicized by certain quarters that were eager to gain political mileage that could translate into electoral votes from the Chinese community (Puteh, 2006). Therefore, when political pacts or allies with the government or among opposition parties are formed involving Chinese parties, the effort to establish Malay language as the national language became a thorny situation as political survival was deemed to be more important and language issues became a secondary matter. In fact, Dongjiaozong had sponsored a few Chinese scholars to join the Gerakan Party, one of the ruling government's component parties.

As a result during every election, the Chinese education system was often politicized which in turn fired up the Malay political parties to rally calls upon the Malay community on the importance of safeguarding their heritage.

With a strong will to conserve their traditional language through the vernacular education system, the government's effort in establishing the Malay language as the national language as proclaimed in Act 152 (1) Federal Constitution was at stake. The issue which was determined during the pre-independent period was already pronounced in the Razak Report, even though it received a backlash from Jiazong leaders. This had led to some researchers to remark that the language and education policies decided through political pacts would not withstand if the government did not put its foot down in establishing the status of Malay language as the national language and medium of instruction in the education system. In fact, during the pre-independent period, matters stated in the Education Ordinance 1952 was in fact sterner than the Razak Report, especially on the issue of institutionalizing Malay language as the official language and medium of instruction.

Thus in the nation building process of Malaysia, the function of a national language is important to foster solidarity and patriotism among the multi-racial society. The enactment of Malay language as the national language was not an isolated issue but has strong links to education as it is the medium of instruction in the national schools (Puteh, 2006). Dongjiaozong's unrelenting struggle to preserve the status of the Mandarin language through the Chinese education system continues until these days, making the government's aim to fulfil the national aspiration trickier as they have to encounter endless parochial demands from the Chinese community. Hence, in order to ensure that the process of nation building is realized, testimonial must reflect upon the nation's indigenous ethnic or the community that form the majority compared to ethno-centric minority. To harmonize the relations between ethnics, the issue should not be seen as domineering or discriminating by the immigrant ethnics as the government had always been fair in ensuring that the non-Malay communities' interest were in no way jeopardized as stated in the 11th paragraph of the Razak Report:

We feel that it is crucial to instil the spirit of patriotism in schools across the nation and in order to realize this, we propose that the education system adopt the same syllabus, even though different languages are used as the medium of instruction

From the caption mentioned before, it is not too much to assume that one of the major obstacles in the efforts of establishing Malay language as the national language was due to Dongjiaozong's endless efforts to safeguard the position of Mandarin through its vernacular education

system. The ethnic protest was also evidently played out in the Chinese dailies as observed by Teo Kok Seong (Berita Harian, 25 Oktober 2009):

The Chinese dailies, just like other vernacular dailies placed more importance on racial issues that matter most to their ethnic-based readership and subscribers. As only Chinese readers read them, the situation has made Chinese dailies to be more vocal in voicing their demands that they sideline the important matters of race, national and nation solidarity. However, the distressing fact is that whenever major dailies that use Malay and English that are understood by the majority of Malaysians highlights the Malays' sentiments, they are quick to be labelled as racists. If the Chinese dailies were more responsible, they should take on a pro-active role in fostering better ties among the Chinese as Malaysian nationals and not to boost their Chinese ethnocentric sentiments which are axised upon the Hong Kong, China and Taiwan traditions. In my opinion, the Chinese has this attitude where they feel that they are more superior than the Malays, hence they find it difficult to embrace anything that is Malay-based to employ including using the Malay language

**The emphasize on the use of English as the language of science and technology:** The importance of English language as the lingua franca of international communication and its dominance in science and technology fields are undeniable. For developing and developed nations, especially for plural societies in commonwealth nations, the use of English was more dominant as the scenario witnessed in India and Africa. However, the usage of English as the official language would not simply translate into economic success for a country. Most countries that adopt their native tongue as the national and official language like Japan, France, German, Korea and Israel experience better economic success compared to nations that adopt English as their national language like Kenya, the Philippines, South Africa and India.

Even though, the government's efforts of establishing English language as a language of science and technology was seen as a way that could hinder the reinforcement of the Malay language as national language, the view is debatable. This is because the government's noble intention is to improve the Malay community's achievements in certain fields and not to ignore or undermine the position of the language as the national language (<http://bicarakapar2.wordpress.com>).

With differences in culture and civilization, the perception of the Malays and non-Malays towards the implementation of English in the Teaching of Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) was also different. The Malays were adamant in defying the implementation of ETeMS as it clearly went against the national language policy. This is because Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, the agency which is responsible in safeguarding the language has successfully translated a huge number of scientific and technological terms and jargons into Malay language with the help of linguists and experts from various fields. In fact, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, a university that uses Malay language in every aspect of its teaching and learning process has been successful in producing quality graduates in various fields of study. This shows that the National Education Policy is hugely successful in implementing Malay language in the nation's education ([www.prihatin.net.com](http://www.prihatin.net.com)).

However, using the English language was not a new experience for non-Malay communities like the Chinese and Indians. They were the ones who enrolled in the schools which were opened by the British in Malaya which was later followed by the upper crust of society and elites. In reality, the English schools were set up for the non-Malays and the elite Malays (Abdul Rahim, 2002). Hence even though, the Chinese were unhappy with the ETeMS' implementation, it was not with the aim of preserving Malay language as the language of education but was with the purpose of safeguarding the position of the Mandarin language. In fact when they need to communicate with the Malay community or when they put up advertisements at their business premises, the language of choice is either Mandarin or English.

For left-wing Malay nationalists, they not only rejected Mandarin but they also refused to accept any attempt to endorse English in the same position as Malay language. The objection was not due to anti-British sentiments but was an effort to re-establish local traditions and culture (Ratnam, 1965). This does not mean the interests of the non-Malay communities were overlooked. This was evident in the call made by Syed Nasir who encouraged the development of the Mandarin and Tamil and rejected any attempt to marginalize them (The Straits Times, September, 1965) as long as did not pose any threat to the supremacy of Malay language. For instance, he had worked hard to increase the number of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka members, print school text books, translate Malay articles into English (Vory, 1975). The call to the Malaysian society was to accept Malay language as the official language of Malaysia so that when the Chinese and other non-Malay ethnics respect the status of the language, it is also seen as a way of

expressing their undivided loyalty to the nation (The Straits Times, 24 May, 1965). However, the move backfired as the Chinese community persisted in protecting their language and education system. They not only rejected the usage of Malay in their business signage but continued to use signboards in Mandarin without any Malay translation, especially in urban areas. The defiance was led by none other than the political secretary of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Tan Siew Sin who continued using signage in Mandarin around his offices to the point that they had to be translated into Malay (The Straits Times, 18-20 October, 1966).

The cultural conflicts that continue to haunt the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia have led to different perspectives in implementing the use of English. The Malays are adamant in preserving the use of Malay as the language of unity while the Chinese community is persistent in their efforts to reinforce the use of Mandarin. The clashes between the different ethnics that inherit diverse tradition and civilization elements have made the efforts to establish Malay language as the language of unity more difficult to realize.

## CONCLUSION

One of the defining factors that made it almost impossible to inculcate unity amongst the ethnic communities in Malaysia, especially in the aspect of language is due to the dissimilarities in the heritage. With differences in traditions and culture, each community is unyielding in their endless attempts to preserve their language. As the indigenous dwellers of the region, the Malays view their claim as justified as it is a language of the Malay realm that has been used since the early days of the Malay sultanate era. As for the Chinese, their relentless reverence towards the issue is mainly due to their belief that the language is a traditional heritage of a superior Chinese civilization that must be preserved at all costs. With the differences in expressions, actions and sentiments that keep surfacing in their aspirations to defend their heritage, the ensuing conflicts do not appear to subside any time soon, making it a more complicated affair to establish Malay language as the national language.

To reduce ethnic conflicts and foster harmonious racial ties in the country, every ethnic must strive towards augmenting their understanding and respect of each other's heritage. By forging better ties, any racial strain or feeling of dissatisfaction between ethnics can be rooted out. However, in the government's aspiration to enact a national policy to integrate the plural society of Malaysia, every ethnic must reflect on the history of Malaya. This way, each party will recognize why the government is

persistent in sanctioning the position of Malay language as the national language. However, the government has not marginalized the Chinese by ensuring that the community are allowed to continue upholding their language, culture and education system without facing any restriction. To maintain racial harmony, the non-Malay ethnics, especially the Chinese must come to concessions in acknowledging the position of Malay language as the rudiments of national integration. This thorny and sensitive issue will be easier to conquer if they attempted to understand, appreciate and openly accept the history of ethnic relations in Malaya that has not ceased transforming into the position it is today.

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