

## **A Model of Political Reconciliation under Different Ethnicity, Religion and Culture: A Case Study of Thai-Malaysian Citizens in 4 States (Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis)**

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**Abstract:** This research had the objective to study a model of political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis. This qualitative research was conducted by field study, documentary study, observation of social and political behavior of Thai-Malaysian citizens and interview of scholars, president of Thai-Malaysian citizen association, religious leaders, local administrator, community leader and Thai-Malaysian citizens in 4 states. The data was processed by inductive interpretation and logical analysis while the descriptive method was used to report the results. This research indicated that the model of political reconciliation of Thai-Malaysian citizens consisted of political structure giving more opportunities to Thai-Malaysian citizens to play the political roles in every level political and social rights to which Thai-Malaysian citizens were entitle from equal policies, practices and resource distribution of government sufficient amount of political activities in Malaysia which there were only elections in federal state and state levels but not in local or community levels and the culture of political participation according to democracy under strict and standard law enforcement. This model could create political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens.

**Key words:** Conflict, reconciliation, Thai-Malaysian citizen, ethnicity, religion and culture, political activities

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### **INTRODUCTION**

It is normal to have conflict in human society. Once changes in society, economy, politics and natural resources and environment occur, conflict do not always cause problems and disadvantages but the key factors to changes and development, for example, conflict during cold war: once the war was over, the outcome of weaponry development was applied to other usage (Coser, 1956), especially, modern technology such as satellite, mobile phone and field radio for communication, computer, cargo aircraft and passenger aircraft, etc. Furthermore, social conflict also leads to enactment and development of judicial and tribunal proceedings. However, conflict can also cause negative outcomes severely affecting human society and relations and importantly, political rules consisting of political, social, economic and value systems, for example, the political conflict in Thailand in 2011-2014. There are many types and causes of conflict: conflict caused by different values and norms of difference generations, conflict caused by social changes, social conflict due to Foreign influence and civilization, conflict due to political ideology, social conflict between ethnicity and conflict to existing political rules that a group of people, superior in asset, social status and power, might face the conflict once economic

and social changes occur (Dhiravegin, 2010). Malaysia consists of people from various ethnicities (plural society) living together in Malay Peninsula for 100 years. There are differences in ethnicity, religion and culture. The main ethnicities in Malaysia are Malay, Chinese and Indian while Thai-Malaysian, categorized into the group of others (population of approximately 60,000) live in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis which once belonged to Thailand but were lost to England in 1900. Currently, there are many Thais living there and Malaysian government call Thais living in these states as Thai-Malaysian citizen.

Thai-Malaysian citizens have conserved and inherited Thai tradition and culture for more than 117 years, especially, Thai lifestyle such as Thai language, Thai tradition, Thai architecture, Buddhism, etc. Thai-Malaysian tradition and culture are different from those of 3 main ethnicities in Malaysia, yet such difference does not lead to any political conflict. This is different from the issue centered in 3 Southern provinces of Thailand where the issues of ethnicity, religion and culture are used in the ongoing conflict. Therefore, this research aimed to confirm that the differences of ethnicity, religion and culture are not the main cause leading to insolubly violent conflict using a case study of Thai-Malaysian citizens living in the area and emphasizing

the political reconciliation and factors leading to the political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens which can be used a model for further political conflict solution in Thailand.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The qualitative research was conducted by field study, documentary study, observation of social and political behavior of Thai-Malaysian citizens and in-depth interview of scholars, president of Thai-Malaysian citizen association, monks, local administrator, community leader and Thai-Malaysian citizens in 4 states. The qualitative data was secondary data collected from the related documents and primary data from in-depth interview and observation. The data was processed by inductive interpretation and logical analysis while the descriptive method was used to report the results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Models of reconciliation:** There were many ways of political reconciliation: problem avoidance, harmonization, compromising, competition and cooperation. The selection of which depended on the situation, social and political structure and context of each place. The model of political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens consisted of 4 elements.

**Administrative structure:** The administrative structure creating the political reconciliation was the one giving equal opportunities to Thai-Malaysian citizens with ethnicity, religion and culture different from the majority of the population to play political roles in federal and state administration such as foundation of political party, holding position in political party, holding political position, election right exercise, etc.

**Political and social rights:** The equality of political rights creating the political reconciliation was holding political position and election right exercise. Thai-Malaysian citizens were able to exercise all political rights, they could hold almost political positions: house representatives, senators, ministers, deputy prime minister, except prime minister, the highest position of the country. Furthermore, the equality of political rights creating the political reconciliation was rights on benefits from policies, practices and resource distribution of government such as civil service right, land sales, investment, etc. Thai-Malaysian citizens were entitled to them as Bumiputra like Malay citizens, considered more than Chinese-Malaysian and Indian Malaysian citizens.

**Political activities:** The number and nature of political activities creating political reconciliation were sufficient amount of activities. There were only 2 levels of political elections: federal and state but not in local or community levels. Too many levels of election could cause disharmony due to different political ideology, benefit usurpation and independence from state.

**Political and social culture:** The political and social culture creating the political reconciliation was political participation according to, democracy and non-violence of other people's right. The government, however, must apply strict and standard law enforcement to every ethnicity, religion and culture. The model of political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis is presented Fig. 1.

The different of ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis did not create any political conflict as they were entitled to the right on holding political positions except prime minister, the highest position of the country. Therefore, once the state or national election occurred, they could apply for the position and holding position in political party despite different political ideology, ethnicity and religion could lead to conflict. Sripen (2008) said that causes of conflict between people, groups and countries were from the following issues: economy, political ideology, ethnicity, religion and benefit. Dhiravegin (2010) said that the major conflict was political, religious and ethnic conflict. However, due to similar culture and nature of Thai-Malaysian citizens to Thai citizens living in Thailand and other countries around the world: peaceful, respectful, cheerful, generous, gentle, forgetful, patient, kind, modest and grateful, Thai citizens tended to avoid conflict with others and adapt themselves to the society. Therefore, Thai-Malaysian citizens in 4 states have been accepted by other Malaysian citizens, especially, Malay.

The key factors leading to political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens were: the good culture and nature of Thai-Malaysian citizens who tended to avoid conflict with others and adapt themselves to the society, making them accepted by other Malaysian citizens, especially, Malay and the adherence to tradition and culture not affecting other ethnicities such as Thai language, Thai traditional activities: Songkran and Loy Krathong in which could be participated by every ethnicity, religion and culture. These factors were consistent to the research conducted by Mekboot (2006) that the adaptation of Thai-Malaysian citizens to state's policy and opportunity for Bumiputra status depended on many factors: social

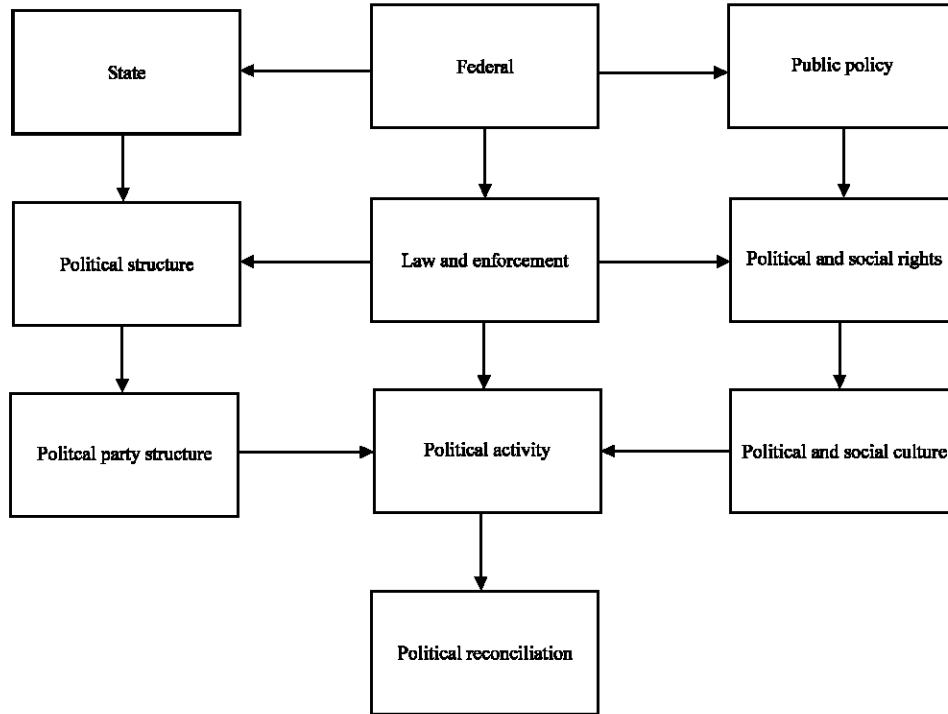


Fig. 1: Model of political reconciliation

knowledge and skills of new generations gained from education that they adapted themselves to state's educational policies, Malay language and culture in particular and Thai-Malaysian citizens participated in politics by accepting the policies and conditions of the administrating political party.

Another key factor leading to political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens was the policies of Malaysian government which meet the requirements of Thai-Malaysian citizens regarding Thai traditional conservation and acceptance of Bumiputra status. It was consistent to the research conducted by Abdurrahman Japakiya *et al.* that the equality policy on income distribution and economic and social gap reduction by implementing new economic policy in 1970 played an important role which led to the national success in multiculturalism and ethnicity management: national survival, administrative structure, local administration and recognition of Malaysian citizen. The success of Malaysia might set an example of multiculturalism and ethnicity management. Political rights were also a key factor leading to political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens who had more political rights than other non-Malay ethnicities (Chinese-Malaysian and Indian Malaysian citizens) making them able to hold almost political positions:

house representatives, senators, ministers, deputy prime minister, except prime minister, the highest position of the country. Therefore, they could equally participate in every level of election. This was consistent to the concept of Dahrendorf (1968) that the conflict was caused by social inequality and authority inequality and the research conducted by Saniva (2007) that the middle way of Buddhism applied by Thai-Malaysian Buddhists was the great success as they were entitled to many rights in politics, economy and society like Malay.

The last key factors leading to political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens was political rights. Even though Malaysia faced delicate ethnic issues, Bumiputra status of Thai-Malaysian citizens created political reconciliation and equality to Malay. They were entitled to many rights including holding political position, civil service, land sales, investment, etc. This was consistent to the research conducted by Surasit (2012) regarding the communicative model for promoting of reconciliation and the research conducted by Thanasthit (2013) that reconciliation caused social equality and acceptance.

## SUGGESTIONS

**Suggestion for research implementation:** The research indicated that a key factor leading to political

reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens was political rights. Thai government in order to create reconciliation, should prioritize the equality and of ethnicity in the society, regardless of skin color and ideology. The research indicated that Malaysia applied strict law enforcement for social and political matters, resulting in few cases. Importantly, political movement was not allowed, resulting no civil commotion and riot. Therefore, Thailand should apply strict law enforcement and standard to every group and promote the political participation under the laws according to, democracy and non-violence of other people's right. The research indicated that the sufficient amount and nature of political activities create reconciliation. For example, there were only 2 levels of political elections: federal and state but not in local or community levels like in Thailand. Too many levels of election could cause disharmony due to different political ideology, benefit usurpation and independence from state. Therefore, the number of election in Thailand should be reduced such as expansion of office holding and merger of duplicate administrations or position.

**Suggestion for further research:** The research of model of political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture in 3 Southern Provinces of Thailand should be conducted. The research of Thai political conflict regarding factor, nature and solution should be conducted. The research to determine reconciliation policy based on different ethnicity, religion, culture and political ideology under the conditions of equality, respect and acceptance should be conducted.

## CONCLUSION

**Research objective:** To study a model of political reconciliation under different ethnicity, religion and culture of Thai-Malaysian citizens in Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis.

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