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THE CAMPUS AS CRUCIBLE: STUDENT ACTIVISM IN SINGAPORE AND MALAY (SIA)

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Abstract

Malaysian university students tend notoriously toward apathy. Still, an important subset of tertiary students has remained engaged over the years. Students clearly see themselves and are seen by others as occupying a distinctive niche in the polity, whether as comfortably complacent protocitizens or as idealistic prophets of a new order. A focus on the university campus offers a lens on dynamics of political culture, activism, institutional and ideological development, and shifts in priorities as state and society develop. Even when local students have chosen not to engage, understanding why the elites-in-training of a state with such boundless prospects shirk a more activist role tells us much about Singapore, Malaysia, and the hurdles of postcolonial political development. I offer here a brief overview of tertiary student activism in Malay(si)a in the postwar period, followed by a more focused discussion of two specific cases (the Fajar trial of 1954 and Catholic social service activism in the 1980s), then a set of tentative conclusions. While hardly definitive, this account probes the distinctiveness of and changes in student activism, as well as the interplay between the campus and other political institutions.

Biodata

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In January 1951, the British colonial administration in Singapore and Malaya detained thirty-three men and women under Emergency Regulations. The majority of the detainees were "well Straits born and from wealthy upper class families," and fourteen were employed by or students at the newly-formed University of Malaya, then located in Singapore.[1] The so-called "University Case" revealed the infiltration of the communist Anti-British League (ABL) among even English-educated intellectuals. The individuals involved, explained J.D. Higham from the Colonial Office in London, "were in fact an active cell of the Malayan Communist Party and ... were directly responsible for propaganda which was not only 'anti-imperialistic' in tone but definitely subversive and inciting to violence"[2] – and yet the best available case for prosecution (and only for five of the detainees) was possession of seditious publications. The authorities feared even successful prosecution would be a "damp squib," given the "youth, background, absence of any criminal record, and [for several] ... status as undergraduates" of the defendants, while failure to secure a conviction "would have disastrous effect on the morale of the public."[3] Moreover, as Higham mused of these "most dangerous of all the Communists in Singapore,"[4] "The rehabilitation camp at Taiping is clearly unsuitable for men of this intellectual caliber and indeed any deliberate attempt to change their way of thought would probably succeed only in deepening their communist convictions."[5]

The case brought up larger concerns of civil liberties and academic freedom. As the Colonial Office warned Singapore's governor, "repressive measures against 'intellectual' leaders of this type are bound to give rise to suspicions, however unjustified, that the Government is taking advantage of its powers to suppress true liberty of speech and thought."[6] Complaints from the campus were popularly viewed in a different light than those from, for instance, trade unions or even Chinese schools, which were long known for leftist, but generally China-oriented, tendencies.[7] In colonial Malaya as elsewhere, unruly students and lecturers were assumed merely to be exercising their right to speak "the truth as they see it."[8] Hence, lamented one local legislator, "The public, as a rule, does not waste any time or thought on thugs, but … these recent arrests have caused a good deal of uneasiness."[9]

Activists and states in transition

Students' presumed potential may garner them respect disproportionate to their age and experience, yet they remain for the moment still structurally subordinated.[10] Moreover, the university is both a self-contained node and a cog in a much larger political machine. Not least due to this dual affiliation, students may be ambivalent about their political role, especially the appropriateness of off-campus political engagement or partisanship. This ambiguity is thrown into relief when the broader polity is equally riven, as on the eve of independence. Expected to be readying themselves for self-governance, future postcolonial states were not supposed to get *too* brazen or overconfident. Throughout the long process of decolonization – building a coherent nation and sovereign state – the campus remained a crucible for larger political debates, a role it shed as imperatives of political consolidation and modernization rebuffed other priorities.

Such was the case in colonial Malaya and Singapore in the 1950s, leading the colonial authorities to fret so much over a handful of purported communists on campus. The University of Malaya (UM) dates only to 1949, when King Edward VII College of Medicine (established 1905) and Raffles College (established 1929) merged. Located in Singapore, the new university offered English-medium higher education to a tiny percentage of Malayans.[11] In its first decade, Raffles College graduated a total of only 229 students; the Medical College had produced only around 240 doctors – only twenty of them Malay – up through the start of World War II.[12] By 1938, Singaporeans comprised nearly half the students at Raffles College.[13] The first intake of the new university in 1949 included just 645 students, 114 of them women, in faculties of Arts, Science, and Medicine. Those numbers crept upwards, then after a campus opened in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1950s, UM's population expanded more rapidly, as did that of the renamed University of Singapore post-separation.[14]

Among the many states with a tradition of student activism, Malay(sia) (initially including Singapore) represents a particularly intriguing case. The same major debates have divided both students and the citizenry generally: perspectives on the position of Malay and non-Malay languages and cultures, socialism versus the free market, tradeoffs between civil liberties and a strong state, the status of Islam. Even in the nationalist era, students remained divided. As English-educated elites, many were too sheltered and secure with the status quo to prefer drastic change; others adamantly espoused independence.[15] Observers (and students themselves) note the relative paucity of political activism among Malaysian and Singaporean students, or among these publics at all. Regardless, an important subset of students have been far from apathetic and official responses – both "carrots" and "sticks" – indicate that the authorities take student protest to be more than just harmless posturing. A focus on the oft-

overlooked campus offers a lens on dynamics of political culture, institutional and ideological development, and shifts in priorities as state and society come into their own. Even when local students have declined to engage, understanding why the elites-in-training of a state with such boundless prospects shirk a more activist role tells us much about Singapore, Malaysia, and the hurdles of postcolonial political development.

Situating student activism in Singapore and Malaysia

Tertiary students first mobilized significantly in the immediate postwar period. The Carr-Saunders Commission, which recommended the formation of the University of Malaya (UM) in 1948, noted that four years of Japanese occupation and rehabilitation had brought "a new energy and a more emphatic realization of the importance of university education, not merely for training students to fill the highest posts in the country but also to give them the qualities of leadership and disinterested public service which are necessary for the progress of her people."[16] Coupled with this attitude was an invigorated sense in Malaya and Singapore as well as Indonesia that *pemuda* (youth) "had a special duty to set the pace of national revolution."[17] It has been partly to sustain a distinction between "students" and "youth" that from early on, the former have been denied rights of political organization and participation granted other citizens.

Medical students were especially active, forming the core of the ABL cohort described above, although joined by fervent arts students.[18] These students allied with radical Malay journalists and early political parties to press and prepare for independence. Debates over ethnicity, language, the pacing of the political and economic transition, and distribution of power and resources – core dilemmas of the new nation – dominated the agenda. Both campus and government leaders exhorted students to cast aside self-absorption and apathy,

and to help chart a course for Malaya. All the same, even amid the "high tide of idealism and near euphoria [that] flooded the campus" in the early years of the university, most students remained disengaged; more mundane issues of intramural sports teams, fashion, social activities, and student welfare remained of chief concern to all but the most ideologically-oriented.[19] Moreover, the students' English education and relatively homogeneous elite status, not to mention the fact that only about 10 percent were Malay,[20] erected barriers, albeit not insurmountable ones, between them and the broader society. As one student confessed, "Quite embarrassingly, we find ourselves constantly hailed as future leaders of our country ... [but] we find with alarm an increasing influence of the non-English speaking public – the illiterates. We find our hitherto unquestioned leadership challenged."[21]

In 1958, shortly after independence on the peninsula, UM opened a Kuala Lumpur branch. Like their counterpart countries, the Singapore and Malayan campuses soon parted ways with the failure of the Federation of Malaysia in 1965. Students in Singapore had largely identified with Malaya and seen themselves as part of a Malayan nation; a distinct Singapore identity was not really fostered until after separation.[22] Issues of merger, separation, and nation-building were among the chief political debates on campus at the time and sparked some of UM's first open demonstrations.[23] The heyday of protest among Malaysian as well as Singaporean students came only later, though, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Signaling the still-close sense of identification among students from the newly-separated countries was their continued collaboration, as in pro-poor protests in the southern Malaysian state of Johor. By the late 1970s, student organizations in both countries had been reined in with new legislation – laws enforced and reinforced anew in both in response to subsequent flare-ups, most notably in the mid-1980s.[24]

Nanyang University and the University of Singapore merged in 1980 to form the National University of Singapore (NUS). Meanwhile, the campus population in Malaysia (including in new universities added from 1969 on) shifted from 27 percent Malay in 1965 to 70 percent Malay in 1976, and the "truly multiracial" perspective of the past became a marginal one.[25] While student activism revitalized somewhat in the late 1990s in Malaysia, and to a lesser extent, Singapore, most students – like most citizens – eschewed protest. By then, intellectualism for its own sake was deemed less important than technocratic knowledge in a public sphere consumed with modernization and stable "progress" above all.

Taking a closer look

A detailed discussion of this history is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I will highlight two particular cases – the *Fajar* trial of 1954 and (more briefly) the evolution of Catholic social service activism – that seem especially revealing of the distinctiveness and mutability of student identities and activism, and the interaction between the campus and the wider political terrain.

The Fajar *case*

In response to appeals from left-wing students, in 1952, UM authorities granted permission for the establishment of political clubs on campus. The Socialist Club formed the following February; it remained the sole student political club for several years. Though never very large,[26] the Socialist Club diverted much of UMSU's political energy, especially since some of its leaders also headed UMSU and other organizations.[27] Its English-language journal, *Fajar* (Dawn), launched in March 1953, "assumed the role of the intellectual forum of the left and the anti-colonial movement," with a substantial readership both on campus and off.[28]

Even so, at the time, literacy rates remained low among the general public, especially in English, curtailing the readership of *Fajar* and the potential impact of even relatively incendiary articles.

The cover article of the May 10, 1954 issue, entitled "Aggression in Asia," set off a serious test of university autonomy and academic freedom in the colony.[29] Condemning colonial repression in countries like Malaya, the article was "not in itself very inflammatory."[30] However, copies were found at a Chinese high school that had recently been the scene of tumultuous demonstrations against a new national service policy,[31] leading colonial officials to believe that the Socialist Club may have helped organize those protests.[32] (In fact, UM students had only limited ties with Chinese secondary school students, or later, with Nanyang University students[33] – and the debate over whether UMSU should even condemn the police's use of force against the secondary school students precipitated an internal crisis.[34]) Eight members of the journal's editorial board were arrested and charged under the Sedition Ordinance for publishing or possessing the issue, after sharp debate among colonial officials as to whether prosecution were warranted. As one official pointed out, "When we establish universities in the colonies this is the sort of thing we must expect."[35] On the other hand, the Chancellor of the university (Singapore's Commissioner General), while "very concerned at the feeling aroused in the University by the charges of sedition," asserted that "there is the need to stop these extreme left moves in their initial stage."[36] The Colonial Office declared itself "satisfied on our side that the Editorial Board, headed as it is by a man who was detained for a long period under the Emergency Regulations [James Puthucheary], were determined to see how far they could go in the direction of subversive criticism and persuasion would not have affected them to any degree."[37]

Students and lecturers rallied around the *Fajar* board and against the colonial administration. They contributed funds to enable controversial leftist D.N. Pritt, Q.C. to come from London to defend the Socialist Club students. Assisting Pritt was a young, local lawyer, Lee Kuan Yew. (The following month, the pair also represented the Chinese students detained in the mid-May disturbances.) In the end, the judge dismissed the charges. He argued against a broad construal of "sedition intention," lest "legitimate criticisms may be stifled altogether," and pointed out that the English-language articles in *Fajar* had a "very limited circulation ... among the educated class of the population and these people can think for themselves." Not only did the judge not deem the articles in *Fajar* seditious, but the evidence was insufficient that the accused had even had the issue in their possession.[38] The colonial government was basically satisfied. The students' acquittal presented a convincing sign of British fair play and democracy (but also of the authorities' readiness to prosecute for sedition), and the trial's quick dismissal meant the defense missed out on a chance for political grandstanding. Noted one British official, "an acquittal was the best thing that could have happened and ... a practical demonstration of the working of British justice."[39] The students involved went on with their lives, and *Fajar* was back in circulation as usual in Singapore by early 1955, though banned in peninsular Malaya.[40]

The issue did not end there, however. For one thing, the nature of *Fajar* itself represented a trend in developing Malayan national consciousness, but also, the trial helped restructure the political fortunes of the organized left. *Fajar* had a self-conscious mission as a key organ of the left. The journal fit within a literary movement centered at UM (best represented in the literary magazines, *The Cauldron* and *New Cauldron*), seeking to develop a new national culture. Other left-wing magazines, most of them banned, also appeared on campus, so *Fajar*

was not a lone voice.[41] The anticommunist Emergency (1948-60) was a period of literary revival in comparatively-liberal Singapore with the suppression of Malay radicalism on the peninsula. Brokered by radical journalists like *Utusan Melayu*'s A. Samad Ismail (detained along with the students in 1951), cultural critics united to undermine the British policy of dividing the Malay bureaucratic elite from the masses with a program of "Art for Society." These writers tended toward socially-conscious poems, short stories, and "pen-friends" associations; censorship curbed outright polemics.[42]

A. Samad Ismail brought English-speaking left-wing students, including from the Socialist Club, into contact with the Malay-language literary left.[43] The students' writings to some extent echoed the Malay radicals' approach – for instance, the poems and short stories of socialist student leader Wang Gungwu. Most importantly, these students recognized that while they wrote in English, they needed to take a critical eye to the limits of a culture imposed "from on high" by the intelligentsia and to the place of western elements in a Malayan identity.[44] These discussions of Malayan identity were "explicitly political" and came at a time when the authorities were especially wary of the politicization of students (and quick to deny left-wing students' request to form a Malayan Students' Party[45]). They were also coincident with an upsurge of militant Chinese secondary school student activism that culminated with the momentous riots of the Hock Lee Bus Company strike in May 1955.[46] The government's crackdown was thus not so inscrutable, seen in context.

All the same, left-wing university students were not viewed with quite the same opprobrium as other radicals, reflecting both the geographic encapsulation of the campus and a commitment to academic freedom, at least among the English-educated. Most notably, perhaps in light of the controversy surrounding the detention without trial of some of the

same students in 1951, these intellectual activists were deemed deserving of trial. In addition, the judge's decision implied that publications in English merited less careful scrutiny than those in other languages; people who could read English could also think for themselves. The British presented this incident as a test case in university autonomy and wanted to show their commitment to the intellectual enterprise. In doing so, they created martyrs on the left by putting the students through the ordeal of a trial. Their ultimate acquittal seemed a vindication of the students' right as Asians and as intellectuals to critique British and American policy (the subject of the article at the heart of the case) and of the sanctity of the university as a source of sociopolitical commentary. These principles have been invoked ever after, albeit with diminishing success.

The *Fajar* trial proved even more momentous in an unpredictable way. Lee Kuan Yew's defense of the UM and Chinese secondary school students presented him "with splendid anti-Government and anti-Progressive Party notoriety, and a mass support which was very highly organised if not always easy to manage."[47] Lee found himself and "his idealists" backed not only by government service and Chinese trade unions, but also by ex-detainees from the English-speaking ABL, the UM Socialist Club and campus leftists, and key individuals with influence "in the unruly Chinese Middle Schools."[48] Both Chinese secondary school students and left-wing university students campaigned actively for Lee's People's Action Party (PAP) in the 1955 legislative assembly elections – *Fajar* was even available for sale at rallies.[49] With such support, Lee built up his political base. His party fared well in 1955 and won every election thereafter.

One interpretation suggests the outgoing British knew what they were doing: aware that the students and whoever championed them would earn substantial public (especially left-wing)

support, they chose to give Lee an edge, deeming him more tractable or less leftist than his rivals – and without demonizing their own system, given the court's verdict, in the process.[50] In fact, though, the opportunistic PAP soon came to court even the far left. If the incident did represent a back-door British strategy to install a moderate, the effort thus backfired, at least in the short term! Regardless, the incident still highlights the place of the campus in setting the timbre of national political debates and legitimating both particular perspectives and the individuals who defend them.

Catholic social service activism

The rise of students' social service activism embodies a very different connection between campus and society. This case exemplifies the strengthening of religious rather than just ethnic or national identities, the expansion of community service work as an outlet for political energy among a comparatively depoliticized population, and the repositioning of the student body vis-à-vis society. Social service activism began early on in UM, but took on a more ideological bent over time. These initiatives had long been framed by students as a way of "giving back" to society in exchange for the chance to pursue higher education – for instance, a "Be with the People" campaign of the late 1950s;[51] UMSU's Student Pioneer Corps in 1969 (restyled as the Teaching Force in 1971);[52] or the Malaysian National Student Service Corps (NSSC) of the 1970s. Explained a student from the NSSC, "Students no longer confine themselves to their ivory towers, remaining isolated from the less educated and less privileged masses ... We students know that we must identify with the masses, help them solve their problems, and champion their causes."[53] Community service programs picked up steam with the Muslim and Christian revivals starting in the 1970s,[54] justified increasingly in

religious than secular terms – although UM's Muslim Students' Union had already started recruiting students for short-term community development projects as of the early 1960s.[55] The early 1980s saw a minor renaissance of student activism, especially around human rights and social justice issues.[56] This development coincided with the rise of NGOs in the region, in line with an ascendant neoliberal ethos of self-help, which significantly redirected political engagement. Catholic student groups were particularly implicated. Encouraged by select lecturers and informed by liberation theology (transmitted largely via the Philippines), Catholic students approached issues of justice and human rights through a lens of social and theological analysis. As far back as 1955, UM's Catholic Students' Society (CSS) attempted "to provoke student thought on contemporary social, economic and religious problems" through its newspaper, *The Challenge*.[57] The group was one of the first to form at UM – and a Medical College Student Christian Movement had been established even earlier, in 1948.[58] Their successor organizations combined study sessions and service activities, generally including some sort of extended immersion experience. The students involved were or could become highly conscientized and socially progressive, even if most lost their commitment once they graduated.[59] Simultaneously, Muslim students were focusing increasingly on a specifically religious identity, as well, so this development did not necessarily mitigate social cleavages on campus so much as divert them. Over time, however, the bent of CSS and counterpart organizations changed. Escalating numbers of students entered from the charismatic movement, their focus more spiritual than social. Plus, after a number of church workers were detained in 1986-87 in Singapore and Malaysia,[60] the church began to pull back from its association with the poor and to look increasingly inward. More progressive Catholic students splintered off or graduated.[61]

This sort of activism represented an apparent shift in the class system and the place of the campus in the broader polity. These student activists did not style themselves as elites or even as intellectuals. By the 1980s, although still only a small minority of the population pursued higher education, being a student no longer carried the same status as before. While their activism was inspired by critical analysis of social issues, this analysis was informed by religious texts rather than more esoteric philosophies – the domain of their clergy rather than their professors. Moreover, movement adherents were expected to contribute to society on the basis of their identity as Christians, not as students. Such activism is predicated upon a key change from the past: no longer are university students an English-educated elite, fundamentally separate from the mass of society, but nearly all speak the dominant language (English in Singapore, Malay in Malaysia). The campus could thus no longer be protected by the government, as in the early postwar era, as a hotbed of radical ideas obscured from the public by a convenient barrier of language. Faith-based social service activism seems both to reflect and to have helped promote a devaluation of intellectualism in favor of a more utilitarian approach to making ends meet.

Key themes and trends

The foregoing account is not intended to be definitive, but rather, to (re)open a seldom-heeded field of inquiry – to take student activism seriously as a mode of political engagement and possible bellwether or facilitator of broader political trends. All the same, the discussion above offers insight into when and why students mobilize, the ways in which students and the campus fit in with other citizens and institutions, and the interplay between student activism and broader political development.

When and why students mobilize

Trends over time of which students protest in Singapore and Malaysia seem inconsistent. Initially, students with secure future prospects mobilized (since all students then had such prospects); by the 1980s, the most common reason given for why students did not do so, apart from prevailing laws, was their careerist focus. Moreover, while students today purportedly are loath to engage for fear of expulsion or sabotage of their careers, surely the same should apply for poor, rural Malays who entered Malaysian universities with state support as of the 1970s – and it does not. In fact, iconic leader Syed Hamid Ali suggested in 1972 that the government was "not bothered by the small elite from the upper classes who had made up the undergraduate population" in the past, but was far more perturbed by the more politically aware students entering from the lower classes and rural areas.[62] In other words, students' relative dependence on the state for scholarships or jobs, worry about their chances of employment after graduation, and lack of social and family safety nets present convenient, but unconvincing, explanations for trends in student mobilization. This finding is hardly new, however contrary to common explanations; as Emmerson found nearly four decades ago, "an excess of aspirations over opportunities seems to contribute to student unrest only when other variables point in the same direction."[63]

When students mobilize should also be indicated by political opportunity structures, or the openings and constraints posed by the prevailing political environment. It would seem that students should have a longer time horizon than other citizens, but a more stunted vision of the past; perhaps more limited access to information (ever-rising internet access notwithstanding); less experience with collective action; and a relatively provincial view of the campus as their immediate community and polity. Moreover, if students conceive of

themselves (as many appear to do) as protocitizens, observers, or just somehow specialized and perhaps disempowered citizens, they may interpret opportunities and frame mobilization differently from others. Most obviously: the world looks very different from the vantage point of a campus newspaper than that of a city paper. Issues of student welfare loom larger than developments in the world at large, presumed allegiances are far more localized, and the prevailing calendar is an academic one. This skewed perspective may help to account, for instance, for why Malayan students deemed the forward march of socialism so plausible in the 1950s, or why seldom-enforced laws seem so daunting to them now.

Students and the campus in a broader context

While students still see themselves as in some ways distinctive among political actors, they no longer identify as or are seen as so coherent and exclusive a class as previously. Indeed, students in Singapore and Malaysia tend now to be treated not as a smart, elite vanguard, but as innocent youth in need of protection, earning not kudos for speaking truth to power, but a slap on the wrist for talking back. In some ways, the campus has come full-circle, returning to the prewar climate, when "students were politically unconscious and the college authorities exercised a dominant and paternalistic influence on student life."[64] While even in the early 1950s, a colonial judge could deem educated individuals able to evaluate information and make up their own minds, university students today are presumed especially gullible and their commitment to their studies, especially fragile. Early on, many national leaders were less-educated than those in the university; this disparity is no longer the case, no doubt shifting leaders' perspectives. Even so, this patronizing approach is hardly new. One Malaysian state chief minister explained in 1966 (echoing a view dominant also in Singapore), "The University of Malaya, after all, is a government institution. The undergraduates should not

abuse the privilege they enjoy of studying in it. Their duty is to attend lectures, train for their chosen profession and learn, at the same time, to be good citizens."[65]

By now, too, there are other institutions to perform the political tasks students might otherwise feel compelled to take on themselves; in Southeast Asia, students have tended to "provide a source of leadership when no other political force offers it," then retreat when the political environment is stable.[66] Yeo Kim Wah argues that undergraduates in the early postwar period, especially radical ones, were "essentially performing a function of the English-educated intelligentsia in Malaya. They had the aptitude, knowledge and intellect to wrestle with the national issues at a time of momentous changes in the country."[67] By now, poorly-informed, lacking training in critical thinking, and prone to believe pronouncements of their immaturity and conservatism, few students themselves would consider undergraduates suited to assume such roles. They would rather expect "adults" – particularly professional politicians – to perform the intellectual and creative functions assumed by students at an earlier stage of Malayan political development.

At the same time, while subject to laws specific to itself and more restrictive than for the rest of society, the campus still provides an environment in which students at least have the opportunity to engage in intellectual pursuits in a way not available to others. Importantly, too, with the development of new forms of political engagement – most notably the proliferation of NGOs – students have increasingly allied with off-campus groups, mobilizing around the same issues and with comparable perspectives and strategies. Like other activists, students today may thus see in civil society more scope for influence than in formal politics, with possible ramifications for their long-term orientation toward the state.

The campus continues to occupy a privileged position, however, on account of the tradition of university autonomy at least as much as the purported qualities of students themselves. For instance, when the Carr-Saunders Commission deliberated after the war where to relocate UM on the peninsula, they expressed reservations regarding Kuala Lumpur as "essentially an administrative centre dominated by Government. In Kuala Lumpur the University might appear to be, even if it were not, only another department of Government. We are anxious that the University should both be and appear to be genuinely autonomous."[68] By 1957, another commission, this one headed by R.S. Aitken, had decided two campuses were needed, one in Singapore, and the other to be located on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.[69] That decision on location may have proved critical. However, the Malaysian government does leave more space for the university than for other institutions, both because of principles of university autonomy (however shakily supported), and because students are so often deemed ultimately non-threatening or able to be safely contained on campus.

Student activism and political development

Up until the 1970s, the campus was known for generating critical perspectives on state and society. Socialist students in the 1950s, for example, were taken so seriously because they had clout not only among future leaders (their classmates), but also among the general public. The curbing of the campus in the 1970s, coupled especially in Malaysia with the decline in meritocracy with preferential policies and the increasing partisanship of campus appointments, has had a long-term effect on the quality of political debate. These changes have particularly discouraged critical thinking and marginalized the intellectual voice. Conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the harsher provisions of prevailing laws are rarely invoked and few activists seem to have felt personally hobbled by them.[70] Many of the

current generation disdain politics and decline to get involved on account of such diffuse factors as deference to elders, peer pressure, lack of knowledge of their rights, cynicism, or lack of spare time as well as restrictive laws, even if their level of political awareness is high.[71] One prominent former activist scoffs, "we use repressive laws as an excuse for non-activism."[72] Still, even if the legal framework really does allow a fair degree of latitude in practice, it leaves students reluctant to take chances and the campus less a node for generation of innovative insights into state and society than before. In this sense, the crackdown on the campus has not just repressed students per se, but has significantly emasculated an important political institution, stunting political possibilities by cutting off channels for generation of new ideas, critical commentary on the state and its leaders, and training of engaged citizens.

Overall, Singapore and Malaysia both present limited prospects for successful reform by students or others. Students may still raise hoary cries of academic freedom and university autonomy in calling for restoration of civil liberties on campus, but they are unlikely to make much headway unless they can break through the paternalistic atmosphere of contemporary politics. On a more fundamental level, too, these students have found their niche whittled away. Rather than being praised as future leaders and the source of great new ideas, students "have become opposition groups" in the university and society,[73] forcing a reevaluation of their roles, allegiances, priorities, and likely allies. This reorientation is not unique to postwar Singapore and Malaysia, but it is well-represented there, and renders the contributions of student protest both difficult to assess and crucial to examine.

Notes

1 Telegram no. 29, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to Secretary of State for the Colonies (SS), London, 11 Jan 1951; and telegram no. 104, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to SS, London, 5 Feb 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7. See also Yeo Kim Wah, "Student Politics in University of Malaya, 1949-51," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1992).

2 Minute by J.D. Higham, 9 July 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

3 Telegram no. 514, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to SS, London, 29 June 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

4 Savingram no. 1207, from Governor Gimson of Singapore, to SS, London, 24 Aug 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

5 Minute by J.D. Higham, 9 July 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

6 Telegram no. 699, from SS, London, to F. Gimson, Singapore, 13 July 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

7 Stanley Spector, "Students and Politics in Singapore," *Far Eastern Survey* 25, no. 5 (1956), Tan Liok Ee, *The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya 1945-1961* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997).

8 Yeo, "Student Politics," 376.

9 Remarks by C.C. Tan, extract from Colony of Singapore Proceedings of Legislative Council, 16 Feb 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

10 On this contrast: Philip G. Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World: Themes and Variations* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982), 160.

11 A second university – private, Chinese-medium Nanyang University – was established in 1956.

Philip Fook Seng Loh, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 116-17.

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GUIDE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Paper structure

Each paper should have an introduction which states the objective(s) of the study and the issues to be discussed. This is followed by the main body of the paper which consists of the analytical and discursive part, including analysis and discussion of the findings. The paper ends with a conclusion which addresses the questions raised by the paper. A list of references should be at the end of the paper. All notes should be placed as end-notes.

Abstract

Each paper must be accompanied with an abstract of about 100 to 150 words, followed by not more than five keywords placed at the bottom of the abstract.

Biodata

The paper should provide a brief biodata of the author, indicating his/her position, institutional affiliation, current research focus, and publications.

Formatting

The paper title and author's name should be on page 1, followed by the abstract and author's biodata on page 2. A table of contents and list of illustrations (if any) should be on pages 3 and 4.

The length of each paper is between 6000 to 10,000 words. The text of each paper (including references and notes) should use 1.5 spacing, Times New Roman, font 12.

Use all capital letters (bold) for section headings, and bold italics (title case) for section sub-headings. If there is more than one sub-heading, use the roman numeral (i, ii, iii, and so on) to differentiate them. If each sub-heading has further sub-sub-headings, use the alphabet (a, b, c and so on) and italicise them.

All illustrations such as tables, charts and graphs should be numbered accordingly. Use title case (bold) for the title of each illustration. All tables, charts and graphs should indicate the source (in italics) at the bottom.

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