

International relations in Malaysia: theories, history, memory, perception, and context

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Abstract

The article makes a preliminary survey of the teaching of international relations (IR) in Malaysia. It starts by describing the origins of the field, and the emergence of an IR epistemic community joining both academia and government. This account is necessarily derived from the experiences of the four most established Malaysian universities distinguished by length of existence and official favor. Subsequently, the survey would describe course content and influences going into their design. The penultimate sections would attempt to place the evolution of Malaysian IR teaching within a historical context. This survey nonetheless concludes that nationalist aspirations continue to remain a secondary influence when compared with intellectual dependence upon the West in the design of IR education in Malaysia.

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1 Introduction

International relations (IR) studies in Malaysia, like those in universities in many parts of the world, are bound by a particular knowledge tradition. This tradition emerges out of the nation's understanding of its history, prevailing ideology, theoretical exposure, and perceptions of those involved in the construction and teaching of IR courses. It runs parallel to the aspirations of the national educational curriculum of the country, as national aspirations to develop viable 'social capital' influence the kind of academic programme that is encouraged to be developed or given sufficient attention. The choices of ideas, concepts, theories, and materials used in the courses are also, consciously or not, bound by a certain historical tradition and memory. The historical experiences of colonization, war, and memory have without doubt made a significant impact in the Malaysian context. Malaysia's knowledge tradition as mediated by those involved in the process of education helps us understand the ontological and epistemological concerns taken up in IR studies.

Although IR courses in Malaysia are generally taught as a subset of the Political Science discipline, the subject also encompasses elements of history, policy, military and war studies, economics, social studies, psychology, geography, environmental studies, and other streams in the social science and humanities. IR in the present era is thus multidisciplinary. It is also influenced by political context, whether liberal or socialist, and specificities of the country in which it is taught. This paper examines these factors as they have impacted on the teaching of IR in Malaysian public universities, with particular reference to the influence of national history, historical memory, and political and theoretical context. The IR programmes under scrutiny are those of Malaysia's premier public universities, namely University of Malaya (UM), University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University Sains Malaysia (USM), and University Utara Malaysia (UUM). Except for UUM, the other three are currently ranked among the top 500 universities in the world in the annual Times Higher Education Survey (THES).

Another caveat should also be lodged concerning the place of Political Science in Malaysian higher education. Political Science, and by extension IR, as degree programmes have less commercial appeal in many private universities and colleges, when compared with Business, Management, Communications, and some Science courses like medicine and

biotechnology. Despite this structural discrimination, some private universities have ironically seen it fit to tailor introductory political science and IR courses to specific Business, Communications, and Management degree courses.¹ These tailored components merely comprise a modest one or two required subjects under each programme. This picture will probably not remain static in the near future. IR courses are expanding in some new public universities like in Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak under dedicated Political Science and other humanities programmes. The Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has been also expanding its regional studies program mainly on ASEAN Studies which naturally involves IR courses. Given their longer histories and more extensive offerings in IR, this article will focus on the main public universities, in particular the UM and the UKM.²

2 The origin and development of IR studies in Malaysia: from the historical to the political science approach

The development of IR courses and programmes is rather new in Malaysia, in line with the development of the universities, which in turn have been affected by the colonial historical baggage of the country and the process of nation building. British colonialism had a tremendous impact not only on the entire education system inherited by the nation, but also on Malaysia's premier university, UM, which was established in 1905 by the British in Singapore. Following independence in 1957, the UM began building up an autonomous campus in Kuala Lumpur, which consolidated its all-rounded curriculum by the mid-1960s. It is interesting to note the strong influence of the western (particularly British and American) tradition in the university, an issue to which this paper returns later.

The IR programme at UM was run for several decades as an IR stream under the Department of History. This was due to the absence of a Political

1 This is practiced at the Malaysian campuses of Monash University (KL Campus), Taylors College, HELP Institute, Curtin University, and Nottingham University.

2 [The author] was a student of the Department of Political Science, UKM attending the IR courses in the 1980s and served as teaching assistant/tutor in 1990. In 1994, he started as an adjunct lecturer at the IR programme in UM and joined the UM as fulltime staff in June 2000. He has served in Monash University (KL campus) during 1999–May 2000 teaching the IR courses. Thus this paper is also based on the kind of experiences and observation on courses and programmes within the last two decades.

Science Department in UM. Johan Saravanamuttu is of the opinion that the 'Political Science' label was not used in UM when it was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1959 due to the sensitivity of the term in the context of that time, and the belief held by some policy-makers that 'political' studies might potentially undermine the nation's interest (Saravanamuttu, 2005, pp. 87–113). While this is debatable, it is also likely that, as a young nation in the initial stages of developing its university capacity, Malaysia was also bound by resource constraints and priorities.

During its formative years, the IR Stream of the History Department did not adopt a political science approach. Instead, syllabi adopted a more historical approach by focusing on courses like International Relations History and Foreign Policy. By the late 1970s, courses like International Law were also introduced. The teaching method of the courses appears to have been more liberal: both historical and political science approaches had been employed by various individuals.³ However, on the whole, the historical approach can be said to have been dominant until the 1980s.

The political science approach only became more conspicuous when courses like IR Theory began to be introduced. By 1992, IR studies developed into a separate programme and were eventually established as the Department of International and Strategic Studies in 1999, under the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The department was initially headed by Professor Mohamed Abu Bakar, a Malaysian expert on Islam and IR. His training in IR came from both the UM and the London School of Economics. Currently, the IR and Strategic Studies Department comprises teaching staff who have attended graduate studies in the UK (3), Australia (3), and Malaysia (1). During the initial stages of the Department in the 1970s and 1980s, there were equal numbers of lecturers who received graduate training from the US (2) and Western Europe (2) teaching the IR courses. Currently, the Department also possesses some potential teaching staff following courses of study at the graduate level in the United Kingdom and other countries in Europe.

³ Brief conversations were held with retired and current professors of the History Department. Among them were Professor Dr K.S. Nathan and Professor Dr Redzuan Othman. On the history of the programme, I had the privilege of listening to Professor Mohamed Abu Bakar's brief speeches on several different occasions. Conversations with Datuk Ahmad Mokhtar Selat, who is an IR contract teaching staff member in UM, has been useful as he was also a student in the IR stream like the above-mentioned professors.

Thus far, the preference among the IR lecturers to pursue graduate studies either in the United Kingdom or Australia is noticeable, although one or two have moved out of this ambit. Generally, Malaysia's IR scholars still prefer to study in western countries (namely the UK, Australia, and the United States), despite the end of the Cold War. The image that a western liberal education is superior cannot be easily erased in the minds of Malaysians, and this is mainly due to their colonial heritage. Their decisions are also influenced by the kind of funding assistance offered by the local universities to send their potential lecturers abroad. Although some Malaysian academics have looked East, these appear to prefer places like the International University of Japan, where both western scholarship in English and Caucasian lecturers are easily accessible. Within Southeast Asia, some have looked to well-endowed universities like the National University of Singapore, which are able to offer scholarships. Where overseas scholarships were not available, the best option would be graduate studies in the UM. IR graduates of the UM were often appointed as lecturers in other local universities to teach IR without much fuss, even though they may only hold Masters Degrees. But by 2007, this policy had changed, where only those with a Ph.D. are eligible for appointment as lecturers.

While the Department of International and Strategic Studies at UM has been the main provider of the IR courses there, it must be acknowledged that the Department of Southeast Asian Studies and the Department of East Asian Studies have begun offering IR-type courses as part of their area studies programmes, with a focus on topics such as Southeast Asia or ASEAN relations, and IR in East Asia. Interestingly, these departments are staffed mostly by lecturers who received Masters and Doctoral degrees from within the region (from Malaysia, Japan, and Singapore). These departments too have abandoned the teaching of IR from the highly historical approach of the past, in favor of those more grounded in political science. The latter has been manifested in the widespread application of various theories of regionalism and concepts of comparative politics in the curricula.

The proliferation of the public universities in Malaysia resulted in the establishment of several other government universities. By the early 1970s, two more major universities were established, the USM and UKM. UKM (also translated in English as the National University of Malaysia) came into existence in line with national aspirations to

promote education in the national Malay language. Beginning in 2004, it offers both political science and strategic studies programmes under the umbrella of the School of History, Political, and Strategic Studies. Reprising the situation at UM, its lecturers are also mainly trained in the UK, Australia, US, Canada and Malaysia. For instance, Professor Zakaria Ahmad, a leading scholar in IR and security studies in Malaysia who previously headed both the Department of Political Science and the Strategic and Security Studies Unit at UKM, was trained at MIT in the US. Unsurprisingly, IR courses in UKM have mainly adopted a political science approach in their content and teaching materials, in contrast to the earlier historical approach of the UM. The main reason for this can be attributed to the later establishment of these programmes, and a concurrent worldwide trend towards developing IR, political science and strategic studies.

USM or the Science University came into existence in 1969 and mimicked similar trends in staffing and curricula. The teaching of the IR courses has always been conducted by lecturers belonging to the Department of Political Science. K.J. Ratnam, Johan Saravanamuttu, and Chandra Muzaffar were the key Malaysian scholars who were responsible for the overall development of political science at USM over several decades. Interestingly, both Johan and Chandra are still active academically, engaged in writing and in seminars relating to IR. As a further sign of academic vitality, Chandra had returned to USM, Penang to occupy the Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee Chair of Globalization Studies after many years on the Kuala Lumpur campus. IR courses in USM are taught as one of five Political Science sub-fields along with Malaysian Politics, Comparative Politics, and Political Philosophy (Saravanamuttu, 2005, pp. 87–113). The establishment of these sub-fields concurrently nurtured an intellectual climate for sustaining the political science approach to teaching IR.

The UUM came into existence in the early 1990s, under Mahathir's premiership. Right from the start, its administration decided to embark on a specialized IR programme. IR courses are housed under the School of Law, Government, and International Studies. Among the teaching materials scrutinized for this article, political science approaches in the British tradition are most visible and appear to be dominant in courses offered at UUM, much like in the previous three universities surveyed.

Overall, IR studies in Malaysia can be said to have departed from its initial historical approach in both teaching and research. For many years,

the UM's IR stream adopted a historical approach to the teaching by introducing courses like 'International Relations History' and 'Foreign Policy of Great Powers'. Between the 1980s and 1990s, there was a transition towards the political science approach in teaching. This saw the inception of courses like 'Introduction to International Relations', 'Comparative Regionalism', 'Theory and Method of International Relations', 'Foreign Policy', 'Conflict Analysis', and 'International Political Economy'. Similar pedagogical transitions were also repeated in all the other main universities. Despite these changes, historical analysis as a mode of inquiry prevails in most dissertations written by students of IR.

3 The contemporary epistemic community of IR studies in Malaysia

It is interesting to note that the four universities which dominate the teaching of IR in Malaysia – UM, UKM, USM, and UUM – also constitute a semi-official *national* IR epistemic community that is borne out by the frequency and density of their ties with bodies within the Malaysian government.

Consider for instance the use of the terms 'strategic studies' and 'defence studies' in naming degree-granting programmes. The UM has named its IR degree programme as IR and Strategic Studies.⁴ There is also a Masters programme known as the Master in Strategic and Defence Studies. In addition, UM also offers a postgraduate Diploma in Strategic and Defence Studies programme. This is managed by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences under a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Malaysian Ministry of Defence. It allows UM and the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College to cooperate in running the advanced Diploma for mid-career and senior military officers. This programme was started in 1995 and it involves more than 30 overseas officers as well.⁵ The Asia Europe Institute (AEI) which is also based in the UM currently offers IR courses under their Masters in

4 Known as 'Ijazah Pengajian Antarabangsa dan Strategik' under the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UM.

5 See Handbook no. 14, 2008, UM-MTAT Diploma in Strategic and Defence Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. This writer served as the programme coordinator for 2006 and 2007, being appointed by the Faculty to do so. He also teaches the entire course on Strategic and Defence Studies.

ASEAN Studies programme. This institute is developing research and teaching to enhance Asia–Europe relations.

At the UKM, the IR programme is named the Strategic and IR Programme, although the name of the degree is still Bachelor of Social Science (Political Science). In addition, there are post-graduate programmes which conduct IR courses under degree programmes known as the Masters in Political Science, Masters in Security and Strategic Studies, and Masters of Social Science in Strategy and Diplomacy. UKM also has two external programmes at the Masters level. One, the Master in Security and Strategic Studies, is linked with the Malaysian Armed Forces' Defence College, Ministry of Defence. The other, the Master of Social Science in Strategy and Diplomacy, is conducted jointly with the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IDFR Annual Report, 2007, p. 73).

UUM differs from the others by naming its degree an International Affairs Management Degree. This is consonant with the university's declared purpose, when it was established by the Malaysian government, to develop management studies in particular. Again, this reflects the influence of the government's development agenda in steering the priorities of national public universities.

The setting up of a National Defence University (NDU) is another significant step by the government in trying to centralize some of the functions of the military colleges and its joint graduate programmes with public universities. Although the NDU is already functioning for 2 years, it has yet to play the role that is expected by the IR and strategic studies communities. Its recruitment of teaching staff is still an ongoing process and it will take several years before it realizes its full potential.

Other epistemic centers worth mentioning are the think tanks. The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), the Malaysian Institute of Maritime Affairs (MIMA), the Malaysian Strategic and Research Centre (MSRC), and STRATAD Asia-Pacific are worth mentioning. There is also the Malaysian International Affairs Forum which occasionally organizes seminars on foreign policy and IR-related topics. Most think tanks in Malaysia are involved in research, publications, and conferencing, and many of them are connected, whether through personal ties or institutional links, with elements within the Malaysian government. In one way or another, these institutions help the proliferation of IR studies, although think tanks do not offer courses or degree

programmes, and tend to focus very much on contemporary and policy-related issues. Generally, Malaysian think tanks organize conferences and policy-related projects. Normally, invitations are sent to IR scholars at the universities, except for strictly closed door meetings. On some occasions, IR scholars are invited to present papers or deliver talks. Some are invited for Track Two meetings on security and foreign policy issues. The annual Asia Pacific Roundtable or the East Asian Congress organized by ISIS Malaysia are good examples. MIMA adopts similar practices, including research collaboration. These activities and networking have enhanced IR as a field of studies since the late 1980s. The exposure to well known international scholars through think tanks can be said to have induced improvements in both the research standards and publications of Malaysian IR scholars.

4 Similarities in IR course content across Malaysian universities: assessments of some recent curricular developments

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned evolution in standards, there remains a continued trend of dependence upon British universities in designing course content. Virtually all the four main universities mount the following kinds of courses:

1. Introduction to International Relations/International Politics;
2. Research Methods in International Relations;
3. International Relations Theory;
4. Foreign Policy (general, of great powers, Southeast Asia or Malaysia);
5. International Political Economy;
6. Conflict Analysis/Conflict Management/International Conflict;
7. International Organization;
8. International Law;
9. Comparative Regionalism/Globalization and Regionalism;
10. International Security/Introduction to Strategic Studies/Modern Strategy;
11. Diplomacy;
12. Non-State Actors.

This imported staple has been supplemented in recent years by courses such as 'Environment and IR' and 'North-South Relations'. Courses titled 'Regionalism' or 'Globalisation' are particularly new with the rise of the phenomenon in the mainstream academic discourse since the early 1990s. This was also in line with the developments in mainstream western IR literature focusing on this particular theme, against the backdrop of the post-Uruguay Round failures on trade liberalization of GATT/WTO and the strengthening of regionalism thereafter in Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific. Similar developments have taken place in sub-regions in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. The Gulf States have also started exploring the idea of regional free trade during the 1990s. These developments had an impact on IR courses, reflected in the introduction of separate courses on regionalism and globalization. In UM, the analysis of this phenomenon is introduced mostly in the course titled 'Comparative Regionalism'. In other Malaysian universities, the subject is treated generically under globalization. Departments of Southeast Asian Studies and East Asian Studies too offer courses on regionalism based on area studies in the UM. The AEI in the UM too has developed postgraduate (Masters) courses on regionalism and globalization in recent years. Case studies and other references to ASEAN and East Asia are, however, quite pronounced in these courses.

Aside from British influence, Malaysia's historical experiences, foreign policy, diplomacy, and national perception have also vied for influence on the tailoring and teaching of such IR courses on regionalism. This is the consequence of having former senior diplomats roped in as instructors in the teaching programme. It is important to point out here that Malaysia under the premiership of Mahathir bin Mohamad championed the cause of East Asian regionalism. Furthermore, the country is an important player in ASEM (the Asia–Europe Meeting). The setting up of the comparative regional studies via the AEI was an idea mooted by the government. It runs parallel to Malaysia's close relations with Europe and the West, although politically Malaysian leaders are brave to use condemnatory metaphors occasionally when they perceive an attack on Muslim states from the West. Despite this acrimonious foreign policy feature, Malaysia is highly committed towards developing the academic and think tank sectors that can contribute towards better inter-civilizational dialogue and understanding. In UKM, for example, an Occidental Research Institute (IKON) was established after 11

September 2001 with the hope of contributing towards developing better understanding of the West. A Civilizational Dialogue Center was also established in UM in the mid-1990s. These think tank dialogue processes deal in one way or another with IR themes and courses.

4.1 Course materials: the formation of ideas, concepts, theories and the impact of history and memory

Despite the pedagogical aspirations towards localizing the teaching syllabi in IR, the types and volumes of course material reveal an entrenched dependence upon the West. US publishers are one evident source of domination. Although some books are currently published locally by Pearson, Macmillan, Thomson, and Prentice-Hall, the source of the knowledge is generally either American or British academics. Materials published by local academics on issues concerning the region are occasionally used, but not extensively, in IR courses. While students often look for texts in the national language (*Bahasa Malaysia*), those which are available are mainly the ones translated from English, or written by local scholars who use the concepts and theories already available in texts that come from the US or UK. The use of *Bahasa Malaysia* has yet to alter the content of teaching in a significant way. The conceptual content and cases used have been similar. The IR sector has remained 'international' in terms of the practice of referencing among Malaysian lecturers of scholarly publications by American, UK, and Australian academics. The core IR courses in UM, UKM, USM, and UUM use the following texts:

Scott Burchill *et al.* (2001) *Theories of International Relations*. New York: St Martin Press.

Paul R. Viotti (1999) *International Relations Theory*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

James Dougherty and Pfadstzgraff (1990) *Contending Theories of International Relations*. New York: Harper and Row.

K.J. Holsti (1992) *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Daniel S. Papp (1992) *Contemporary International Relations*. New York: Macmillan.

Martin Griffith (1999) *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations*. London: Routledge.

- Charles W. Kelley and Eugene R. Witt Kopf (1993) *World Politics: Trends and Transformation*. New York: St Martin Press.
- Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon C. Powerhouse (2006) *International Relations*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Andrew Heywood (1992) *Political Ideologies*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Robert Gilpin (1987) *The Political Economy of International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (eds) (1995) *Regionalism in World Politics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Joseph Frankel (1963) *The Making of Foreign Policy*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Roy Macridis (1972) *Foreign Policy in World Politics*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds) (1997) *The Globalisation of World Politics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- David N. Balaam and Michael Veseth (2001) *Introduction to International Politics*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- John Baylis *et al.* (1975) *Cotemporary Strategy: Theory and Policy*. London: Croom Helm.
- Peter Paret (ed.) (1986) *Makers of Modern Strategy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Barry Buzan (1991) *People, States and Fear*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Kenneth Waltz (1959) *Man, The State and War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Inis Claude (1956) *Swords into Plowshares*. New York: Random House.
- Ken Booth and Russell Trood (eds) (1999) *Strategic Culture in the Asia Pacific*. London: Macmillan Press.

From the above list, it is also obvious that the key ideas for the teaching of IR, be it from a conceptual, theoretical, or historical approach, come from the stories and analysis told by the victors of World Wars I, II, and the Cold War. There is little consideration for a Soviet or Communist perspective. The impact of this academic tradition can be overwhelming, submerging, to an extent, the strength of certain historical memories and

perceptions that might otherwise figure more prominently within the local academic environment.

The main texts and materials coming from the western tradition are often lacking in terms of a balanced perspective about the Cold War. For example, the causes of the Cold War are very often painted from the US perspective rather than that of the USSR or China. This fits very well with the national agenda of anti-communism in Malaysia. In this sense, official perceptions and narrations of national history run parallel with, and welcome, the use of teaching materials from the West. In fact, original materials of Karl Marx or Lenin are difficult to find in Malaysian universities; on one occasion, they were even banned from inclusion in the teaching process. However, this changed over time. By the early 1980s, a course on 'Radical Political Theory' had been introduced in UKM. The course focused mainly on Marxism. Subsequently, it was taken off the shelf when the McGill University-trained professor retired. Currently, Marxism, Critical Theory, and their supplementary literature are occupying a marginal role in most curricula. Some lecturers do not even consider these angles useful for IR learning. The interest in explaining IR from any neo-Marxist perspective seems lacking in Malaysia today in spite of the clamor of the anti-globalization movement at summits of the WTO or Group of Eight. It is quite telling that the original writings of Karl Marx are placed in the 'red spot' section in some Malaysian libraries; this means that access to them is limited only to reading, and the materials cannot be photocopied.

Although Japan is sometimes positively held up as a model for inducing Malaysian nationalism, scholarly and teaching materials in use have failed to highlight the contributions of the Japanese. For example, the image of Japan's role in World War Two is portrayed in IR teaching materials in the same light as that of fascist Germany and Italy. On the other hand, a course on Malaysian History, or Southeast Asian history, may not paint the Japanese as fascist, again depending on the lecturer's training and background. Leaders like Mahathir, who abhor colonialism, describe the strengths of the Japanese as an example of how the East could outperform the West (Mahathir, 1999, p. 16). Recent funding and support from certain Japanese foundations for the Department of East Asian Studies in the UM have opened up avenues for journals and books from Japan to enter into resource rooms and libraries. Incidentally, the best works of western scholarship are also bought by the existing Japan Studies Centers in Malaysia.

In courses like 'Malaysia's Foreign Policy', one can at least find evidence of the use of texts written by local scholars. Selected speeches of Foreign Ministers or Prime Ministers are used as reference materials. Local senior scholars' publications in the form of articles and books are also used in the teaching and learning process. The memoirs of Tan Sri Ghazalie Shafie and his compiled speeches from the 1960s, when he served as the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are also widely used. Books by Mahathir and his compiled speeches are also popular as references for courses on both 'Malaysia's Foreign Policy' and 'Regionalism'. Nonetheless, when it comes down to explaining generic concepts and theories, the western IR texts mentioned above remain a dominant source in understanding foreign policy.

The referencing of journals and Internet sources is another dimension to take note of in the teaching of IR courses. Malaysian institutions and scholars generally subscribe to the main western journals either in print or web versions. *Foreign Affairs* (US), *Survival* (UK), *Pacific Affairs* (Canada), *Asian Survey* (US), *The Roundtable* (UK), *Adelphi Papers* (UK), *Asian Affairs* (US), *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Singapore), and *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore) are popular. Occasionally, articles published in locally produced international journals like the *Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* of the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR, which is connected to the Malaysian ministry of foreign affairs) are also recommended or distributed to students. The writings of great scholars from the West such as Samuel Huntington, Joseph Nye, Lawrence Freedman, Michael Howard, Richard Haass, Francis Fukuyama, and others are well received when they appear in western journals. It is also interesting to note that articles by Lee Kuan Yew and Kishore Mahbubani also get good coverage when published in western journals, although the use of their articles in the teaching process of IR courses can be less relevant when compared with well-established western scholars.

It is safe to argue that publications from American, British, and Australian scholars are well received in Malaysia in the teaching process. The knowledge formation and dispensing process is very much dominated by the British and American traditions. However, from a methodological point of view, the British tradition is more influential for postgraduate research purposes. As most IR scholars receive training from the UK, US, and Australia, the tradition of using the sources

coming from these countries is likely to remain strong. However, it is also interesting to note that there are one or two IR scholars who have spent either sabbaticals, or brief research periods, in Communist states like Vietnam or China in recent years. While this mode of information exchange has yet to alter in a dominant way the main materials being used in courses, students do obtain some alternative accounts of IR from the communist perspective, say for example, on the Vietnam War, Vietnamese foreign policy, or the scenarios in the Indochinese states in general.

5 History, memory, and perception: contextualizing non-Malaysian and Malaysian influences on the IR discourse in Malaysia

Despite the preceding sketches of western intellectual dominance, Malaysian leaders, politicians, and most citizens are fully aware of the country's colonial history and military conflicts. This history forms the psychological backdrop against which university IR teaching takes place, and as mentioned earlier, particular sections of teaching materials largely serve to reinforce and elaborate this narrative. A summary of the accepted historical narrative is presented in this section to fill in the context for understanding the earlier-mentioned evolution in IR education.

Parts of what is now Malaysia had been colonized by the Portuguese, Dutch, and the British in different historical periods starting with Malacca in 1511. The British arrival in Malaya broadened colonization, extending from the Straits Settlements (Malacca, Penang, and Singapore) into the Malay states in peninsular Malaya. Sabah and Sarawak were also acquired under the British umbrella. With the Japanese invasion during World War II, Britain was defeated and temporarily lost power in Malaya until 1945 (Hack, 2001). Within this period, a new armed struggle began in Malaya, involving what was known as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, which later became a leftist struggle for independence under the umbrella of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). Britain ultimately recovered Malaya because of the United States' involvement in World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war. Britain returned to Malaya after the formal surrender of the

Japanese was arranged in Singapore. Subsequently, the British found themselves engaging in the struggle with the CPM during the 'Malayan Emergency' until it handed over sovereign authority to an independent Malayan government in 1957 (Short, 1975).

The memories of both the colonial experience and the Japanese Occupation contributed significantly to the struggle for independence. Many indigenous writings, including those of Mahathir, often acknowledge the positive dimensions of the Japanese interlude in instilling nationalism. Malays were allowed to assume the reins of administration where the British once monopolized them. Japanese authorities also encouraged mobilization among the Malay youth under the spirit of 'Asia for Asians'. In 1946, not long after the British returned to power, the Malays began their protest against London's plan for introducing the Malayan Union which they saw as a precursor for the reduction of the traditional Malay rulers' sovereignty. This struggle eventually forced the British to recognize that it was important to unite the people of all races in Malaya before independence could be granted. This was the only way to place the new nation on a firm footing for governing itself. During the 1950s, the formation of the Alliance Party (Parti Perikatan) involving three ethnic-based political parties (UMNO, MCA, and MIC) facilitated its active participation in elections. By 31 August 1957, the constitutional process was ready, and Tunku Abdul Rahman along with the other Alliance leaders, were on stage to announce independence.

Although independence was granted in 1957, the new Malaya was still dependent upon the British and Commonwealth forces for security. The Malayan armed forces were not fully ready. Tunku and the British later planned the expansion of Malaya into Malaysia in the early 1960s. Malaysia was officially declared in existence on 16 September 1963, comprising Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. Brunei refused to join although it had shown interest earlier (Noordin Sopiee, 1976). During 1963–65, Malaysia experienced a severe military threat from Indonesia popularly known as '*Konfrontasi*'. Once again, the Malaysian leaders were fully dependent upon the British and Commonwealth forces, which included the Australians, to fight the Indonesians. The rise of General Suharto altered the direction of *Konfrontasi* in a positive way. Therefore, Malaysia normalized its relations with Indonesia in 1966. Yet Malaysia was still dependent upon countries such as Britain, Australia, and the United States to ensure that the new nation received full support and

endorsement at the United Nations (Boyce, 1968). With the support of key western nations and the backing of developing countries like India, nations in Africa, and several Middle Eastern states, Malaysia was fully endorsed as a newly expanded sovereign entity.

The British decision to withdraw militarily from Asia by the early 1970s affected Malaysia's foreign policy orientation towards the West. The decision made by Britain to withdraw its troops from the Malaysia–Singapore area sent negative signals. There was a major concern as to how Malaysia could defend itself in the wake of the recently ended communist insurgency, Indonesia's *Konfrontasi*, and also the large-scale domestic racial riots of May 1969. Although Malaysia was successful in negotiating for the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) in 1970, the parties involved in this agreement provided no guarantee in defending Malaysia. The Malaysian leaders who were involved in the negotiation process were quite frustrated with the British and Australian attitudes. The announcement of the FPDA had coincided with an environment where Malaysia suffered severe inter-ethnic strife following the elections in 1969. Malaysian government action to restore order after the 13 May 1969 incident was not supported by Britain and Australia. The latter refused to provide any form of military assistance to Malaysia for this purpose.

This left a negative impression among the Malaysian leaders and eventually left Malaysia with no choice but to adopt a more neutral foreign policy, which took the form of ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality) announced in Kuala Lumpur under the auspices of the new regional organization, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which had been formed in 1967. In 1974, Prime Minister Razak visited Peking and normalized relations with communist China in the hope that the PRC would stop supporting the activities of the CPM. Besides normalizing the relationship with the Communist bloc, Malaysia's foreign policy orientation too moved towards ASEAN and the NAM (non-alignment movement) of developing countries, as part of its adaptation to new circumstances in the changing world of the 1970s. It was important to reorient Malaysia's foreign policy and position in the world to address the security challenges emanating from the Cold War, especially given the experience of the Vietnam War within Southeast Asia itself. The crisis in Indochina was perceived by Malaysia as an important security challenge as its effects were

conspicuous by the late 1970s in the form of a massive outflow of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. The western countries were not adequately helpful in resolving many of the problems faced by Malaysia. Malaysia's Prime Minister from 1981 until 2003, Mahathir bin Mohamad, believed that the colonial attitude still persisted in the international order, and that it was important to look for Asian models. The leaning towards East Asia was entrenched during the Mahathir administration under its 'Look East' foreign policy in the early 1980s (Balakrishnan, 2003, pp. 1–20).

Despite the shift to a more neutral foreign policy position in the 1970s and greater attention to the developing world and Asia, it is also the case that British colonialism left behind some positive impressions of the West. This underlying familiarity and sense of goodwill is reflected in the choice of primarily western teaching materials, as described in the previous sections, and in key elements of the accepted historical narrative. Thus, it is often repeated that Malaysia's struggle for independence took the form of diplomacy rather than the violent conflict witnessed in Indonesia. The more powerful Commonwealth member states – principally, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada – had also provided help in building the strength of the Malaysian armed forces and provided a ready security umbrella during *Konfrontasi*. On the diplomatic front, most of Malaysia's senior diplomats in the early days were trained in the UK and Australia. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister, was seen as a leader with a pro-West foreign policy orientation. Malaysia's academic tradition too was dependent upon western intellectual trends. The Colombo Plan for aid among Commonwealth countries encouraged a massive flow of Malaysian students to the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada for tertiary education. Slightly less than a thousand Malaysian students received either full or partial scholarship for covering the cost of education in Australia and Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently, the United States also began to attract a substantial share of the Malaysian students going abroad.

The consequence of such ties and positive attitudes towards the West was an entrenched negative impression of the socialist world, again reflected in the content of educational materials. The Malayan Emergency during 1948–60, and later the smaller scale operations by remnant Communist rebels in the border areas, was also a key factor accounting for this perception. The government established a strong

counter-insurgency strategy to ward off the communist threat. The Communists were regarded as terrorists. Malaysia was also a part of the US grand plan to curb communism. American Peace Corps volunteers were sent to Malaysia. The Asia Foundation, an education agency for promoting liberal values, distributed free books from the US to Malaysian universities, to propagate liberalism and democracy. Scholars were also sent annually to the US under Fulbright scholarships and other visiting fellowships. These programmes are still in operation today. In recent years, Fulbright scholars have been stationed in Malaysian universities almost annually. Since 11 September 2001, these scholars and others have been active in delivering talks and lectures on the liberal tradition, explaining America and its policy to the rest of the world so that the hatred towards the West can be mitigated, if not eliminated. UKM, for example, has been hosting and encouraging these scholars.

To sum up this section, it can be said that the Malaysian IR and strategic studies scholars are trained in the UK, the United States, and Australia. One of the main reasons is the historical link created by the Colombo Plan, followed by other sources of funding that made places available in western universities. It must be remembered that the dominance of the West was not only brought about through military means, but also via economic assistance, educational support, and the maximum use of propaganda in the name of public diplomacy. It can be argued that the character of the Malaysian educational system today is very much influenced by this Cold War mindset. Even with the end of the Cold War, Malaysian universities continue to benchmark their programmes against western universities. The number of memoranda of understanding signed in various fields with western universities is staggering. To cite one recent example, the UM started a collaborative teaching project with Harvard University in 2008, under which students from UM and Harvard will attend lectures or seminars hosted by faculty members. The IR lecturers play a significant role in this programme by organizing and delivering the lecture series.

5.1 Theories, concepts, and themes in IR courses: the impact of history, memory, and perception

It is appropriate at this point to introduce a subsection surveying the conceptual legacies of the western influence in the framing of concepts in

the classroom. The main courses that introduce IR studies in Malaysia's leading universities are often known as 'International Relations', 'Introduction to International Relations', or 'International Relations Theory'. The term international politics is slowly waning although texts titled 'International Politics' or 'World Politics' are still being used. The focus of the core introductory courses tends to be both theoretical and issue-based. The theories introduced, such as Realism, Idealism (Utopianism/Liberalism), Critical Theory, Constructivism, Post-Modernism, and Post-Structuralism, duplicate those of western IR teaching. However, since the introductory IR course often caters for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, normally only one course at each level of study is highly theoretical. Typically, theories and concepts are introduced in less than 4 weeks of the 14 weeks that the course runs. The second year students have to attend a specific course on IR theory. This course on International Relations Theory covers almost all of the major western theoretical traditions in the discipline as mentioned above.

At the undergraduate level, the 'International Relations Theory' course employs the case study approach to illustrating theories. Lecture themes such as Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Balance of Power, or the Cold War do include conceptual and theoretical materials. While the fundamental theory of realism is inevitable in the discourse and the teaching of the course, lecturers are fully aware of contending theories and try to foster this awareness among their students. Courses at the undergraduate level, however, do not cover theory extensively. Theories introduced are meant for the students to grasp the mere basics, so as to enhance the foundation of the course. The course on 'Theory and Methods' in UM focuses on the major theories, whereas IR Methods courses in other public universities provide more emphasis on generic social science research methods. At Masters level, in contrast, discussions of theory can be lengthy, as lecturers have more opportunities to lecture at different speeds and depths in the course on 'International Relations Theory', and can capture the debate between the various schools of thought.

Introductory IR courses in Malaysian universities adopt some core themes that provide an overarching background for the various other courses in the entire IR programme. These themes include the evolution of international society, the concept of power, foreign policy and instruments, international organizations (the League of Nations and the UN),

regionalism in world politics, human rights, and globalization (*Buku Panduan Pelajar UM*, 2007). Similar themes can be found in the core IR courses of all the main universities. A sizable portion of the content is similar across universities, as the major texts used (as discussed in the earlier section on instructional materials) are often the same. This has a significant bearing on the conceptual tools used by the teaching staff in Malaysian universities.

In courses like ‘Comparative Regionalism’ or ‘Globalisation’, theory is introduced in the early weeks, mostly with a discussion of liberal theories and the International Political Economy (IPE) dimension of concepts related to regionalism and globalization. The rest of the course revolves around empirical cases of regional initiatives. Here one witnesses the tendency to focus extensively on Southeast Asia/ASEAN, East Asia, South Asia, and Asia-Pacific regionalism, with the European Union and North America possibly included for comparative purposes. The course on IPE for example, introduces the mercantilist, the liberal, the Marxist structural, and dependency theories. This is followed by the usual IPE themes such as international economic institutions, North–South dynamics and other important issues and problems in the global economy. The course on ‘International Security’ focuses on theory very briefly, highlighting the contending theories that could explain the nature of IR and security. Theories explaining the Cold War and post-Cold war security order serve as the main focus. The rest of the course is highly empirical. This is very much in the train of what one might expect to find in a UK or American-mounted IPE course.

It is thus possible to argue that the impact of the national memories of war and history, as sketched earlier, appear to be a positive coincidence with the mindsets of the West, since Malaysia has shared many common historical experiences with the West. For example, both fought against the Japanese in Malaya and subsequently against communism.

Having said that, it is also equally important to note that Malaysia’s own struggle for independence, the rise of nationalism, the communist threat, and its frustrations with the West have also separately shaped *some* of the themes in the IR courses. The inclusion of themes like the developing world, NAM, dependency theories, and colonization can be seen as good examples of this local tinge. There is a tendency for courses being taught to adopt ideas and theories that echo the Malaysian national discourse, as reproduced through contemporary literature and

media. For example, we can see some echoes of Mahathir's strident emphasis on the developing world and Asian regionalism in IR courses that take up these issues. Courses like 'Regionalism' and 'Globalisation' adopt a sympathetic approach towards the developing world to which Malaysia belongs, and one can see that IPE theories favoring the developing world gain considerable prominence in Malaysian teaching. With the end of the Cold War, the communist threat is also no longer a problem for Malaysia. Cooperation with Russia, China, and Vietnam has overwhelmingly increased. The perception has changed towards the communist world. The rapid economic growth experienced in recent decades has altered the direction of IR for Malaysia. The attitude towards cooperating with all parts of the world, including Cuba, can be witnessed in both official and academic discourses.

Conclusion

This article has been a modest attempt to explore the intellectual tradition of IR Studies in Malaysia. The extent to which the national and regional historical experiences, memory, and perceptions affect the teaching of the IR courses in Malaysian public universities is noticeable. The narration of key historical events, such as Malaysian independence and the struggle against the communists, in IR courses is largely consistent with understandings in the broader realm of public discourse and official views. One can also see an overlap between the contemporary concerns and attitudes of the governmental sphere and those of many individuals teaching IR, since individuals from academia, the think tank world, and officialdom have opportunities for interaction and socialization through linkages in the IR epistemic community. The latter can be described as comprising both practitioners and scholars.

Another major influence on IR teaching emerges from an examination of the knowledge tradition in which it is embedded. One can see that ideas, concepts, and theories are generally coined by western scholars. To what extent Malaysian scholars supply additional, and original, value to the discourses of IR remains to be seen. Malaysia is a small country. Its ties with the West have remained intact, bound by the very early linkages of scholarship and training provided by the West, namely the United Kingdom, Australia, and the US. This tradition of knowledge remains supreme to date and shapes epistemology in the understanding

of the discipline. Although there are some locally trained IR lecturers, they too follow in the pedagogical footsteps of the senior academics, while supplementing the syllabi with more current materials. The British tradition is more prevalent, especially when we analyse the methodologies adopted in IR studies, since there are, on the whole, more academics sent to the UK to pursue postgraduate studies.

In this sense, the teaching of IR courses in Malaysia has yet to depart from the mainstream of knowledge produced or introduced by the main schools in the liberal West. The globalization of knowledge and the revolution in the communications sector propelled by the developed states helped sustain this tradition, whether consciously or otherwise. Malaysia is no exception in this light of academic dependency within Southeast Asia. Indonesia, for example, has translated a few of the main IR and strategic studies texts for local uses. Occasionally, such translated materials are found in Malaysia, although they are not that popular. As Malaysian universities compete in terms of ranking and recognition globally, pressures for employing ever more materials from the top western universities will increase. There is already a trend now of bringing in more foreign scholars to be stationed in local universities. The American Fulbright scholars are already popular in the domestic scene, as they move around providing lectures and public talks. Malaysian universities have hired scholars from the UK, US, Australia, and even India, on temporary contracts or on a short-term fellowship basis for teaching IR courses. Although the assertiveness of East Asia is increasingly evident in the international order, the teaching of IR courses however remains nested within the western ambit. The main schools of IR thought in the West are also the staple of classroom teaching in Malaysian universities.

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