

MODERNIZATION IN A MALAY PEASANT SOCIETY*

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SINOPSIS

Kertas ini melapurkan satu kajian permulaan tentang proses permodenan dalam masyarakat tani Melayu di Kelantan. Kertas ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bahawa masyarakat tani Melayu yang kuat pegangan ajaran Islamnya, adalah menerima proses-proses permodenan dalam bidang ekonomi dan politik, asalkan proses-proses seumpama itu tidak bertentangan dengan ajaran-ajaran Islam serta nilai-nilai ugama mereka. Dalam hal permodenan dibidang ekonomi, ditunjukkan dalam kertas ini bahawa masyarakat tani Melayu tidak menolaknya sama sekali. Misalnya dalam usaha-usaha pemerintah untuk memperkenalkan rancangan pengayuran, menanam padi dua kali setahun, atau menanam tembakau, sebahagian besar masyarakat tani Melayu melibatkan diri dengan cergas dalam usaha-usaha ini. Dalam lapangan politik pula, mereka melibatkan diri secara langsung dalam parti-parti politik yang menunjukkan minat untuk menyelesaikan masalah masalah Orang Melayu seperti mempunyai kerajaan yang diperintah oleh orang Melayu.

SYNOPSIS

This is a preliminary study of a modernization process in a Malay peasant society in Kelantan. The aim of this paper is to show that Malay peasant who are strong adherents of Islam, are supporters of economic and political modernization, as long as such processes do not work against the principle teachings of Islam and as long they do not touch their religious values. As far as economic modernization is concerned it was shown that Malay peasants have not rejected it in any way. Either in the introduction of irrigation scheme, padi double-cropping or in the planting of tobacco the peasants are actively involved. In the field of politics, the peasants are involved directly with political parties which have shown interest in Malay problems such as having a Malay government.

* This paper is based on my fieldwork research in Kelantan in early 1972 and also my short field trip to the state in the middle of 1973. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology who have encouraged me to produce this paper. My special thanks go to Encik Hood Hj Mohd Salleh who helped me in reading through the draft and who commented on certain issues. However, errors found in this short paper remain my responsibility.

I

Modernization has been understood in different ways by different disciplines of social sciences. As there is no one theory of modernization, a student of modernization problems has many difficulties, in selecting the theories. Furthermore, one modernization theory which fits one country may not fit another.

The concept itself though fashionable is very ambiguous. Modernization is often confused with westernization¹ as it first started in the West. Cultural traits, values and attitudes of Western people are considered as parts of modernization elements. Evidence shows that modernity in the West attacked religion and superstition, family and church, mercantilism and feudalism. As it is often misunderstood, the recipient society having been so tied down to traditionalism, especially the older people, sees everything from the West as corrupt. On the other hand, the youths who tend to be more progressive than their parents, see modernization elements as novel and to be accepted as part of their culture. Within a society, modernization is differently understood by different groups of people.

The process of modernization in a society depends so much on its agents, the modernizers. How the modernizing elite plays its role in the society is important. Its role also depends on its understanding of modernization. In the developing society, the modernizing elite may be a political elite. In such an instance the management of modernizing roles becomes a matter of politics. Apter says that in such a situation, political leaders are forced to alter the hierarchy of power and prestige and to set their sights on some new corporate image of society in which the modernization roles will fit together, make sense and work.²

The elite's understanding of the concept may influence its modernization goal. The goal varies from political leaders as the modernizing elite and the people to be modernized. This depends very much on the attitudes and the motivations for modernization. The modernizer's standard of goals may be so high that the people who are to be modernized think that in such a situation several consequences of modernization may disrupt the existing values. In such circumstances, Apter postulates that individuals may feel the loss of their moral personalities.

1 It is not intended to discuss in this short paper the modernization theories or their critics. For these I shall refer to Apter, D.E., *Politics of Modernization*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1967; Eistentadt, S.N., *Modernization: Protest and Change*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc., 1966; Levy, Marrison, J., *Modernization and Structure of Societies*, New Jersey, Princeton Press, 1960; Lerner, D., *The Passing of Traditional Society*, London, The Free Press, 1964; Singer, Milton, "Beyond Traditional and Modernity in Madras" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1971; Hussein Al-Attas, S., "Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia," *ARCHIVES, European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 1970.

2 Apter, D., *op.cit.* 1967, p. 63.

Thus in such an intriguing situation, we find it rather hard to give a definition of modernization. In many cases, modernization is understood by scholars as the development and application of modern science.³ In agricultural society, the application of scientific methods such as using machines, fertilizers and adopting a well organized marketing system, is heading towards modernization. The object of modernization here is therefore to increase the social product with fair shares for all. Such a phenomenon which is usually termed as economic modernization is imperative in a new nation.⁴ Commercialization and industrialization are also good examples. Thus Apter considers modernization as a special case of development which he defines as a particular form of social change. Development and modernization are two separate phenomena as terms of decreasing conceptual generality.

II

Kelantan, a state predominantly occupied by Malays, is situated in the northern part of the east coast of peninsula Malaysia. According to the 1970 census, 92.8 percent of the population are Malays, that is 637,012 out of the total population of 686,266. In the last few decades Kelantan has been and still is in the process of social and economic changes. As a new nation Malaysia is modernizing itself. It has first to modernize its economic sector. This programme is implemented through its First Five Year Plan (1966-1970). The aims are spelled out in six out of ten objectives of this plan.⁵ Its main aim is to increase its wealth by enlarging its productive capacity. Nevertheless, this change went at a slow pace in Kelantan compared to the other states on the west coast. One of the factors contributing to this slowness is the fact that Kelantan is geographically isolated from the more developed states on the west coast. Another is the attitude and structure of the society. Traditional attitudes act as barriers to change. An examination of the political situation in the state, since Malaya achieved independence, would further throw light on this problem.

Since 1959, Kelantan has been controlled by the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), a party strongly opposed (before it joined the coalition government in 1972) to the Alliance government. Since then Kelantan has been known to be a stronghold of the PMIP. The driving force behind the party comes from religion. As most of the supporters are conservative Malay Muslims largely drawn from religious school, the writer tends to

3 For further discussion see Hussein Al-Attas, S., *op.cit.*

4 Apter, D., *op.cit.* p. vii.

5 See: *First Malaysian Plan (1966-1970)*, Government Printers, Kuala Lumpur, 1965. Also, *Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975*, Government Printers, Kuala Lumpur, 1971.

agree with Milne that they distrust progress, and they set a low value on material prosperity.⁶ Also, to use Manning Nash's words "Kelantan not only is the stronghold of the PMIP, it is a sort of incubator to fundamentalist, traditional Islamic education given chiefly through religious boarding schools (pondok) scattered near the urban concentrations".⁷ Thus Kelantanese are reputed to be the most devout and fanatical Muslims of the country.

In the urban areas such as Kota Bahru, Pasir Mas and Pasir Puteh, the Malays are actively taking part in business. In Kota Bahru many textile and bookshops belong to the Malays. But big electrical appliance shops, hotels and theatres belong to non-Malays. The market is predominantly operated by Malays, as are the taxis and trishaws. Although the number of Malays involved in business in Kelantan is large, economically they cannot be considered as advanced. Their slowness has been explained in term of their isolation and their political government, as has been claimed by one writer. He claims that Kelantan "being isolated and overwhelmingly Malay and also because of the retarding influence of an ingrained and narrow version of Islam which the people have long and devoutly adhered to; (they) therefore support the politically backward and ideologically obscurantist PMIP to resist modernization and development which the Alliance,, stand for and promote."⁸

The demand for economic progress is no less important among the Malays in Kelantan than social and political modernization. Economic changes have successfully been introduced since the time of the British. The introduction of cash crop and commercialization which benefited most non-Malays in the west coast of the peninsula of Malaysia were also felt by the Malays in Kelantan. The economic changes indicated above are more acceptable to the Malays than the introduction of a banking system and the social welfare lottery by the present government. The former did not transform the traditional political order. Also, it did not touch the religious values of the Malays.

In understanding the latter's problem, i.e. the political problem, it should be realised that religion and politics are indivisible among the Malay Muslims. This phenomenon is clearer in Kelantan than anywhere else in Malaysia. It reflects the desire of religious elites to have their own *hukumah* (government). They worry about the present political situation: what does a law (Islamic) mean to a Muslim society if there is no *hukumah*? And how is the *hukumah* to be built? They responded that it must

6 Milne, R.S., *Government and Politics in Malaya*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967, p. 93.

7 Nash, Manning, "The Market Arena for Change in Kelantan, Malaya" *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 70, No. 5, Oct. 1968. p. 944.

8 Kessler, C.S., Islam, Society and Political Behaviour: Some Comparative implication of the Malay Case, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Mach 1972.

be based on the principles of Islam. The spirit of *jihad* (literally meaning war) is ushered into the Muslim society. But *jihad* is not necessarily through blood-shed, it can be through democracy. To the writer, this amounts to one thing—that is Islam promotes nationalism.⁹

The Islamic principles in the *hukumah* represented by the PMIP government are, however rather vague. Thus, Milne wrote, “The party claims that if it came into power it would base its economic policy on the principles of Islam, but that the exact method of applying the principles would have to be worked out.”¹⁰ Although parts of the economic programme may be radical, as the party supported some kinds of nationalization, “..... socially it is profoundly conservative.”¹¹ The party advocates a strict interpretation of Islam. In this sense there is a contradiction of economic modernization within the ruling government.

The Malays always wish to have their own government. Partly through nationalism, independence was achieved. The next step was to see that the state or country was based on Islamic principles. Such a goal was advocated by the PMIP elite. The PMIP elites have the staunch support of the Malay conservative Muslims in the rural areas. Thus we can conclude that the social approval of followers that legitimates leadership is distinct from the respect they may have for the leader's abilities.¹²

In the field of economic and political modernization we can say that the Malays are supporters of both. But, as we have seen, their goal of modernization varies from that of the modernizers. They will modernize themselves to the extent that they can cope with and to the extent of their ability. It is rather fatuous for the modernizers to advocate the using of tractors if their fields are very small. Furthermore the demand for consumption goods and their children's education are more urgent. So if ever they have money they would spend it for these first rather than paying for tractor services. In this respect, the writer observed that the richer farmers are more adaptable to using machines than the poor farmers.

The modernizers do not have to change the attitudes, values and motivation of those to be modernized, as has always been advocated. The farmers do not have to be revolutionized mentally, but the modernizers have to seek other factors which are more obvious. If an economic change increases his productivity, any rational Malay farmer is in favour of it. But, if the average padi farm in Kemubu is only two acres, however hard a farmer tries to keep up with progress and modernization, he will not be able to reach the goal expected by the modernizer. To conclude that the

9 For this discussion see Roff, W.R., *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1967.

10 Milne, op.cit.

11 Milne, op.cit.

12 Blau, Peter, M. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964. p. 202.

attitudes and values of the Malay hinder change and progress, without understanding other variables such as factors of production, is just putting the cart before the horse. Thus, if a farmer cannot increase his yield because the land is limited, the employment of mechanization and fertilizers alone will not help him much. Also, in such a situation, mechanization and fertilizers do not enter into the farmer's calculation.

But any innovation which touches the question of religion such as interest is accepted slowly by the rural Malays, or it may be totally rejected. On the other hand, a project which does not touch their religious beliefs is more acceptable. The four irrigation schemes—Kemubu, Pasir Mas, Lemal and Salor—are welcomed by the people and, the introduction of double-cropping for padi is not rejected in any way. The conflict only arises in a few places, for some farmers prefer to grow tobacco in the second padi season. This upsets the double-cropping system for other farmers, as tobacco does not need as much water as padi does. The rural people accommodate to the above mentioned introductions rather easily. One instance is the introduction of a cash-crop tobacco recently. Firstly, tobacco gives more cash to him compared with the income from padi. The net return for an averaged-size farm family for tobacco and padi in Melor, Bukit Tanah and Bukit Abal helps to support this argument.

TABLE I
INCOME FROM TOBACCO AND PADI

Average net return for:	Melor	Buk. Tanah	Buk. Abal.
Tobacco: (1,000 plants, i.e. 0.14 acre) per season	\$278	\$277.63	\$237.04
Padi: (1 acre) per season	\$232.96	\$193.11	\$251.05

From the above figures we see that the income from tobacco growing can be increased by planting more plants per farm family, that is if sufficient labour is available. This increase is easier than for padi, because the additional land required for 1,000 plants is only 0.14 acre. Secondly, tobacco takes a shorter period to grow than padi. It takes about 100 days (roughly three months) from planting to harvesting.

However not every farmer is involved in tobacco growing, for some areas, as has scientifically been proved by the Malayan Tobacco Company, are not suitable for the plants. In addition to that the Malayan Tobacco

13 Figures released by Mr. John A. Dixon, an economist attached to the Kemubu Scheme. The writer would like to thank him for his help.

Company imposes a quota to independent growers, because this company does not want the supply of tobacco to exceed the demand. Also, the Malayan Tobacco Company prefers quality rather than quantity. However, the excess supply which cannot be absorbed by the Malayan Tobacco Company can be sold to Chinese companies operating on the same lines. They however offer lower prices. Sometimes, they offer as low as 15 cents a *kati* of green tobacco leaves. Nevertheless, only those who get quotas from the Malayan Tobacco Company grow tobacco during padi off-seasons. There are farmers who do not obtain quotas who grow tobacco, hoping that the Malayan Tobacco Company independent growers will not reach the required quotas, thus enabling them to sell their produce.

Whether it is the introduction of the credit system or tobacco growing the Malays who get the advantage in Kelantan are the upper class and a few upper middle class (including some wealthy *hajis* and religious teachers). These are the people who are in constant contact with the bank credit officers and the Malayan Tobacco Company's local managers. On top of that, since the securities to get loan almost double and sometimes more than double the amount of loans applied for, only the economically established people will reap the benefit. On the other hand, the peasants will not benefit from such projects.

It seems to the writer that most of the Malay peasants have to resort to padi planting. For it is only through the introduction of irrigation schemes that the peasants have tasted the fruits of the national economic development. Even then in the four irrigation schemes, about 40% of the farmers operate on rented land.

TABLE II
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA OF THE FOUR IRRIGATION SCHEMES--

	Kemubu	Lemal	Pasir Mas	Salor
Land Owner	64%	56%	58%	64%
Renting	36%	44%	42%	36%
Illiteracy	63%	57%	54%	56%
Population	120,000	60,000	20,000	16,000
Padi growers	47,000	23,000	5,000	4,000

The introduction of double cropping, in most cases, does not make the padi growers in Kelantan become rich. Their harvests do not reach the expected target. The government's target to increase the farmer's average income to \$300 a month is an ambitious one which may be based on a political calculation. From the socio-economic survey in Kemubu

14 Figures by the Kemubu Scheme, Kelantan, 1972.

Scheme¹⁵ an average farmer operates on two acres of *sawah* (padi field). This roughly will give about \$1,000 gross income per year if double cropping is practised. We have to realise that almost all padi growers in the four schemes are members of the *Syarikat Kerjasama* (Cooperative Society) and the Farmer's Association. These two organizations help their members by giving loans to padi growers of \$80 an acre per season. Thus we have to deduct about \$160 for the first cropping, and since in the second cropping the soil requires less fertiliser, the farmer needs about \$60 an acre. In the second season he only needs about \$120. This will leave him about \$720 of income per year which is about \$60 a month. In calculating this income we have not considered that about 40% of the farmers operate on rented land. Most rented land is paid on 'bagi dua' term, which is 50% of the total yield. This will mean the total income will be halved.

It should be mentioned here that the loans given by the Farmers' Association and Cooperative Society are not in cash, but in term of seeds, fertilizers and tractor services. As soon as the padi is harvested, the produce is bought by these two organizations. After the deduction has been made the farmers receive the balance. It should be noted also that during the planting season farmers need cash to meet day-to-day expenditure and their children's education. Since the Farmers' Association and Cooperative Society do not provide other loans, the farmers still continue to seek loans from middle men, in which they have to repay the loans with interest immediately after harvesting. So after harvesting many padi growers only manage to pay their debts, sometimes their yield do not cover the debts. Although outwardly the introduction of these institutions helps Malays the economic position of the Malay padi growers does not improve. In fact in many cases such systems add more complicated problems to most farmers. In the final calculation, even with other subsidiary activities, it is almost impossible for farmers in the Kemubu Area to earn \$300 a month.

Turning to the coastal areas, we find the majority of the Malays are fishermen. They too are not able to get much benefit from economically induced change, as in the introduction of the bank credit system. The problems here are not much different from those problems faced by padi growers. They are not able to get loans because they do not have security. Thus only a few wealthy people grasp this chance. They buy modern diesel engine boats and employ their own men. In times of difficulty fishermen have to resort to these wealthy people for loans. Such comment as "yang kaya bertambah kaya dan yang miskin bertambah miskin" (the rich become richer and the poor become poorer), is all-too-obvious here.

15 *Socio-economic Study of Padi Farms in the Kemubu Area of Kelantan, 1968* by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative Malaysia, October 1969.

It was, at one time, a common view that Malays are indifferent towards change in the method of cultivation and the method of catching fish. This result in small income. In the writer's opinion such a view is no longer tenable, since the Malays as seen in most parts of Kelantan have already employed modern methods, and fertilizers, irrigation systems and better seeds are being used, at least in the growing of padi and tobacco.

They try to improve their economic position and easily accommodate to change, but they can go no further. How else could they improve themselves? Can one say that they are not economically conscious? Many writers have looked into the economic structure of the society and their attitudes for the answers to these questions. Because their economic attitudes are related to religion, Swift remarks, "A marked fatalism, presented in religious forms, is also conspicuous among Malay economic attitudes. The Malay is very prone, after receiving a setback, to give up striving, and say that he has no luck, that it is the will of God."¹⁶

The Malay relates his success or failure as God's will. Also, one has to understand Malay values and attitudes. The Malay explains that everything is related to God for the purpose of consoling himself psychologically. It is here that his spiritual life plays a great deal in helping him out of this mundane problem. After much frustration, he is still happy facing his gloomy future. We seldom hear of a Malay taking drastic and insensible action against God's will (such as suicide) because of lack success in his career. This is what Siegel refers to as the power of *akal* (reasoning) versus *nafsu* (instinct)¹⁷. In such a situation the Malay peasant being a strong adherent of Islam, will resort to *akal*. He will perform more *ibadah* (religious duty). By doing so he is consoled spiritually and hopes that God will be in his favour the next time.

III

Either in an urban area or a rural society, every individual occupies a number of social positions. His social positions bring him into contact with incumbents of other social positions. The roles are not played in isolation and each role has its appropriate audience. Thus an individual whose demands on others are fair relative to the great contribution he makes to their welfare, earns his approval. In this way they earn respect. Those who are respected are placed higher up than others. This is true in the sense that the emergent leaders are more apt to be liked by the rest if the initiative they take in social interaction are accompanied by a high rate of response from others.

16 Swift, M.G. *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, London, The Athlone Press, 1965, p. 29.

17 Siegel, James, T. *The Rope of God*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969.

The stability of leadership depends on the social approval of followers. Stable leadership rests on legitimate power over others. To achieve power over others requires not only furnishing services that make them dependent but also remaining independent of any services they might offer in return.¹⁸

Religious leaders in Kelantan may be termed *expressive-leaders* in the sense that they provide an integrative power. They are expected to know what the followers are up to. But with rapid changes taking place in the society the demand on religious leaders in this case do not meet such expectations. In such an instance, the rural Malays have to look for a new type of leadership. Their inabilities in new fields contribute to their decline. The decline of religious leaders in Kelantan also means the decline of PMIP elites. Thus in the Tumpat by-election held recently, although the PMIP still maintained its seat the majority went down tremendously. It must be realised that Tumpat is one of the PMIP's strongholds. This small majority amounts to this—that is the PMIP cannot depend on religious elites alone for its survival. A new outlook in the party should be worked out. Sympathisers of the party feel that a new recruitment should be made for instance by taking more secular leaders into the party's organization. But the present PMIP leaders who in the main are conservative religious elites, are essentially inimical to this idea. Religious schools can be their source of supply of new leaders. By changing the content of religious education, the PMIP will receive new blood in its organization.

IV

In this paper the writer has applied Apter's framework in looking at modernization. However the term modernization is used rather loosely here. The writer has limited his discussion to two aspects, namely the economic and political. As far as economic modernization is concerned it was shown that Malay peasants have not rejected it in any way. Either in the introduction of irrigation scheme, padi double-cropping or in the planting of tobacco the peasants are actively involved. Nevertheless, they have not benefited much from the introduction of bank credit and other such facilities. In the field of politics, the peasants are involved directly with political parties which have shown interest in Malay problems such as having a Malay government. The political leaders provide an integrative function but they cannot cope with rapid changes taking place in the society. Being mainly religious leaders, they are not able to play new roles. In this respect it was observed that the peasants are not dependent on the political leaders, but that the political leaders are more dependent on peasants to maintain their positions.

18 Blau, *op it* pp. 200-203.