

THE ROLE IN POLITICS OF MALAYSIAN OF THAI RACE

Rawikarn Amnuay

Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

The research topic of "The Role in Politics of Malaysian of Thai Race" is a part of a research project on Comparison of Structural Pattern and the People's Involvement in Local Administration in Thailand and Malaysia. The research is aimed to study the role in politics of the Malaysian of Thai race. This research is a qualitative research based on a review of documents from both inside the country and abroad as well as interviews of important sources of information to include the President of the Thai Malaysian Association, leaders of Thai Malaysian communities, and the Malaysian people. The derived information was then analyzed using inductive method, logical analysis, and descriptive narration.

The research found that Malaysian of Thai race as Malaysian and Thai citizen have very little role in politics both in national level and local administration or even civil politics. The people of Thai race are in status of voters or supporters of their favorite political parties only due to their viewpoint of politics and administration as the leader's business and not their own. They do not give precedence to grouping together to carry out political activities. Meanwhile, the discoveries of factors that affect on the Malaysian of Thai race's political roles show that these people pay more attention to religion and culture which they see related to merit and demerit. Economically, Malaysian of Thai race mostly have agricultural profession; so most of them are in the lower middle class who cannot pay more attention to politics than making a living. Socially, the Malaysian of Thai race is considered a minority group of citizen and have very little role in politics; their status is only voters and supporters of their favorite political parties.

In order to improve the political role of Malaysian of Thai race, there should be modern political activities or projects to establish local mainstay, benefit group, and political culture in democracy ways to become a strong civil politics by strengthening intellectual knowledge and common sense in participatory democracy which can lead to creating a public space for strong public gatherings.

Keywords: Political Roles, Malaysian of Thai Race

Introduction

Borders or the emergence of the modern states in Southeast Asia in the late 19th Century to early 20th century (Thongchai Winitkun. 2013: 187-206) have divided people of similar kinship, religion, language, culture and tradition apart which can be seen in the case of Malaysia with a population of about 30 million people. (Malaysia's Population and Social Structure searched on 20 June 2015, http://www.virtualmalaysia.com/our_malaysia) It has been found that information on population and social structure suggest that the population is composed of 50% Malaysian, 24% Chinese, 8% Indian, and the rest of about 10% contains as many as 30 races including Thai race. The condition of the status of indigenous Malays or Orang Melayu as Son of the Soil or Bumiputras has resulted in segmentation in Malaysia society and caused inequalities of race in this pluralism society of Malaysia after the racial riot leading to a large number of injuries and death toll in 1969. For this reason, Malaysia has recognized the importance of creating the unity of the nation with its ethnically different population.

Malaysian of Thai race are southern Thai who have been living in this area for a long time by gradually entering to settle down in the area and eventually became one of the minority groups in the state of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and northern Perak; a group of Malaysian of Thai race also entered Penang State by partial assimilation with the natives. After the loss of this territory to the British empire, this group of Thai became a stopover in Malaysia to date. The Malaysian of Thai race can still preserve the cultural traditions of Thailand which have been long past from their ancestors including the language and religion which are uniquely different from the rest of the Melayu peoples. Malaysian of Thai race is an ethnic group of the same lineage as that of Thai people in Thailand. They are believed to have emigrated into the Melayu soil ever since 300 - 500 years ago when the Siam marched to seize Pahang leaving its followers to settle down scattered in this area. In the days of King Trilokkanat of Ayutthaya, Chai Nakorn city was reestablished when the Siam held on to Malacca during the 1998 - 2003 B.E. and was called Chai Buri. Many people from the northern cities moved into this town resulting in the northern dialect variation of the town name as "Sai Buri". Later, in 2067 B.E., Chai Buri town was colonized by the city of Aceh in northern Sumatra; a big part of the population turned to Islamism but there

had also been many Buddhists as well. Later, during the reign of King Prasat Thong in about 2173 B.E., Chai Buri was taken back to be under Siam rule. Until the early Rattanakosin era, the name of the city was still spelled Sai Buri and subsequently Kedah. In the colonial era, Siam was forced to sign a treaty to give up Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu, and northern Perak to the United Kingdom on 10 March 1908 or approximately 100 years ago. The lost territory from this treaty was the 13th loss, accounting for 52,100 square kilometers. Currently, the Buddhist Malaysian of Thai race still rigidly maintains culture and traditions; there are Thai language schools and Buddhism despite the loss of Siam over such territory. The Siamese people in all four Melayu cities have long been settled down until Malaysia's independence and to date (Thamrongsak Ayu Wattana, 2004).

Malaysia gained its independence from the British empire in 1957. Presently, it is successful in economically development and has stepped up to be one of developing countries ready to be a developed one in the near future. However, racial difference in Malaysia has always been an issue; various ethnic groups are trying to empower themselves and increase their role in social and politics in an attempt to step above the other groups. Nowadays, this Siamese group of population is Malaysian citizen but ethnically Thai; they rigidly preserve the Thai identity. However, being a minority group in Malaysia, they are somehow deprived of certain rights but these Thai tried to negotiate with the Malaysian Government. For this reason, the role in politics of Malaysian of Thai race caught attention of the researcher to study the situation and political factors which can be a case study and important information for policy makers to strengthen the relationship between the countries.

Research Objectives

1. To study the role in politics of Malaysian of Thai race
2. To study the factors that affect the role in politics of Malaysian of Thai race
3. To study the guidelines on development of role in politics of Malaysian of Thai race

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research: a study of relevant documents as well as books, articles, researches and electronic media. It is a study of Malaysian of Thai race's political role and its affecting factors done by in-depth interview and observation without participation. The data collection consists of information from the major sources who were the President and members of Siam Association, community leaders, and Malaysian of Thai race people.

Data analysis is done by collecting the information derived from the in-depth interview and observation without participation and testing for validity by triangulation to verify the accuracy, completeness, reliability, and detail of the data so that it can annotate the research objectives. Then, it is read and interpreted to create an inductive summary.

Research Result

1. Role in Politics of Malaysian of Thai Race

Thai race population in Malaysia is an original ethnic group in the area with a status as Malaysian citizen of Thai descendant who are Buddhist, while the majority of Malaysian are Melayu ethnic and Islam. This made the Malaysian of Thai race a minority group in Malaysia but it has been certified as Bumiputras like the Melayu people with some limitations in rights.

The role in politics of Malaysian of Thai race is very little involvement: their status is voters which is a civic duty, supporters of their favorite political parties, and representative of the parties in local meetings.

2. Factors Affecting the Role in Politics of Malaysian of Thai Race

2.1 Economic Aspect

Most of the Malaysian of Thai race are in agricultural professions: they grow rubber plantation, tobacco, rice, vegetables, raise livestock, and others depending on the local terrain. There is a minor group who serve in local government while the new generations prefer to be employed with companies in the city so most of them are middle class. Malaysian of Thai race receive welfare similar to other Malaysian population; farmers with lower income are supported from the Government in the form of raw materials, agricultural machinery, and technical advice. This made the Malaysian of Thai race very little involved economically due to their status as primary producers who have to be more interested in making a living than taking part in politics.

2.2 Social Aspect

Malaysian of Thai race encourage their children to be educated by attending extra tutorial classes because they believe that education will improve their quality of life. Most of the youth are educated in Chinese schools. Malaysian of Thai race tend to be helpful during troublesome times, which is uniquely a Thai way. They do not pay much attention to a clear pattern of social roles but rather integrate in Association of Siamese in Kelantan which was formed by progressive Thai with the goal to create a social organization for Thai community development and political negotiation which have been least featured by Malaysian of Thai race.

2.3 Political Aspect

Malaysian of Thai race pay most attention to the rights to become Amno Party members because it is a political party of the Melayu people that have been ruling the country for a long time. Members of Amno Party receive rights and benefits such as budget allocation for local development, application for permission to organize local activities. Since the political competition in policy against the ethnic Thai population, the Malaysian Government has responded by establishing a lawful organization of Buddhist Thai which lead to the Malaysian Thai Association and the Association of Thai Kelantan who have been fighting to protect the benefits of its ethnic group. The Government also reserves a position in Legislative Assembly for a Thai representative. The rest of Malaysian of Thai race's political involvement only concerns voting under civic duty, representing politician in community level, and civil politics which only concerns the Thai regarding lifestyles and culture only.

2.4 Cultural Aspect

Malaysian of Thai race possess cultural traditions and lifestyles similar to Thai people in Thailand including the language, religion, and cultural traditions. Malaysian of Thai race live together as a community with a temple functioning as a center for both religious and cultural traditions. Malaysian of Thai race's culture in Malaysia is consistent with rural lifestyle and religious practices. They have to encounter obstacles posted by the majority amongst Muslim cultural administration and ethnical diversity but can still adapt and maintain Thai identity as well as impart cultural wisdom related to religion and rituals to the younger generations so they know their origin and are able to adjust to live with other ethnics especially the Malaysian of Chinese race. Role in culture of the Malaysian of Thai race is considerably profuse in language, religion, and traditions. These are well accepted by the Malaysian Government as long as they are expressed in a manner that do not impact the Melayu culture and Islam. The Malaysian of Thai race's important role is in expressing their opinions in cultural activities organizing whenever there are meetings which are mostly held at the temple.

Discussion

The result of this research shows that the Malaysian of Thai race have very little involvement in politics; their status is only voters, which is a civic duty, supporters of favorite political parties, to follow the laws of the state strictly, and representing the political party in community level. This can be a result of the Malaysian of Thai race's perception of politics as irrelevant matters. Voting is a very important political process for democracy as it expresses a form of political involvement where the people are entitled to take part in public political activities. This is consistent with the study done by Mibreath and Geol (1977) which had reviewed relevant literature relating to political involvement. This study considers the people's voting as an expression of loyalty to the political system and their own will since it is a mechanism that can designate the directions of the government or administration with immediate results. The Thai Malaysian voters conduct the vote with conscious mind in civic duty while they consider roles in religion and culture as more important matter relating to merit and demerit. For this reason, their role in culture is more apparent. Economic status can also result in a better involvement in politics; those with low income pay more attention to earning a living than being involved in politics, while those who have a better economic status tend to be more involved in politics (Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, 2006). This is also consistent with the conclusion made by Anusorn Mekbutr (2006) that the integration process of the state against the Thai ethnic resulted in adjustment in both economic, social, political, and personal expressions. It can be seen that the Malaysian of Thai race adjust themselves economically to cope with the government policy and the opportunity given to the Bumiputras. These are all based on various factors to include intellectual capability which, in general, improves with the new generations. Obviously, education allows the new generations to adjust to the government educational policy especially knowledge in Melayu language and culture. In political aspect, it is found that the Malaysian of Thai race are involved in politics by accepting the policy and conditions made by ruling political party, which is based basically on the needs of the participants.

3. Guidelines on Development of Role in Politics of Malaysian of Thai Race

Due to the fact that the Malaysian of Thai race are involved in politics in a very low level, it is necessary that there are modern political programs to create local mainstay, benefit group, and creation of democratic political culture to become a strong civil politics by promoting intellectual knowledge and consciousness among the people in participatory democracy as well as establishing public space for the people's strong gatherings.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Utilizing the Research Results

1. The Malaysian of Thai race's role in politics is considerably low. Their major role is voting. It is evident that the people's involvement levels depend heavily on the political system, the nature of society, and the economic system.

2. The Malaysian of Thai race pay more attention to cultural matters due to their perception of religion and culture as important merit and demerit factors. This demonstrates the uniqueness of the Thai living among Muslim culture and Islamization as Malaysian citizen who can maintain their identity in ethnic, religion, culture, traditions and at the same time respect the society's conditions which can be taken as a case study for Thailand regarding management of the country's minority groups.

Bibliography

Milbrath, L. W. (1971). **Political participation**. New York: University of Buffalo Press.

Pornchai Naksithong. (2008). **Malaysia's Population and Social Structure**. searched on 20 June 2015, http://www.virtualmalaysia.com/our_malaysia.

Thamrongsak Ayuwattana. (2547). **Thai People in Malaysia**. Bangkok: Bannakit.

Thongchai Winitkun. (2556). **Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation**. Bangkok: Torch Publishing Project in association with Read Journal.

Wanpichit Srisuk. (2552). **The Social Role and Participation in Development of Thai People in Kelantan State, Malaysia**. Bangkok: The Thailand Research Fund.