

DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the impact of development discourse on the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia since the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. It analyses the nexus between development discourse and the growth of social science themes in Malaysia. This nexus was methodologically tracked using a thematic content study. The paper surveys the articles published by the Akademika Journal of social science and humanities from 1972-2010 with a special focus on the themes of development discourse in Malaysia. The paper interrogates how the development discourse in Malaysia influences the thematic debates in social science? The findings of the paper revealed four major themes that underpinned the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The themes include; (a) Gender and economic development, (b) Climate change and development, (c) State, capital and labour (d) Peasant transformation. The implication of the findings suggests that the Malaysian state's industrial development significantly influences the formation of debates or construction of social science knowledge by Malaysian scholars. The paper's findings further showed the potential of social science knowledge in contributing to the development aspirations of the state through a policy coherence between development and values system of the society. The findings also revealed the relevance of social science knowledge in achieving the sustainable development goals on gender equality, economic growth and promotion of sustainable communities in Malaysia.

Keywords: Development, thematic analysis, knowledge production, Malaysian development, social science

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the impact of development discourse on the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. It explores the evolution of social science knowledge within the context of the state-led modernisation under the rubric of the National Economic Policy (NEP) pursued by the Malaysian state since 1971. These state development aspirations influence the growth of social science themes and scholarly engagements amongst the social science fraternities in Malaysia. This article focuses on the impact of development discourse on scholarly production in the social sciences. It explores the nexus between the development theory and the social science themes by combining a bibliometric approach

and qualitative content study of the *Akademika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*.

The scope of this article is on the themes of development discourse, among many other themes published in the *Akademika Journal*. The article performs a thematic content study of the articles within the context of development theory which ascribes development as a cultural diffusion that is defined in terms of 'catching-up with the West'. This article illustrates that by appropriating the notion of 'symbolic domination' in uncovering the impact of development theory in the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. Thus, symbolic domination underscores the currency of the Eurocentric social science categories or concepts in

the reproduction of development discourse in non-western societies. The article traced this representation through the themes engaged by the Malaysian social scientist during Malaysia's post-colonial development phase.

Following the introduction, this article provides a literature review and conceptual framework. Section two focuses on the methodological approach of the paper. The findings of the paper are presented in the third section of the paper. The final section draws a conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development and Social Science knowledge in Malaysia

The grand narrative of developmentalism is a major phenomenon in the social science discourse in developing countries. Thus, the grand narrative or what von Holdt called the 'master categories' of social science (von Holdt, 2012) are major standpoints that shaped social science epistemic foundation in the global south. For example, Edward Said's pathbreaking work *Orientalism*, and Amin's *Eurocentrism* provided a landmark perspective of what grand narrative could mean for scholarly production in the social sciences (Amin, 1989; Said, 1978). To quote Said, "Orientalism as a discourse, signals the ascendancy of the European culture which has managed to produce the orient politically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-enlightenment period" (Said, 1978, p. 3).

Thus, knowledge imperialism is at the heart of the development of social science knowledge in the post-colonial states. Following Ake (1979), social science knowledge is seen as an ideological instrument for fostering capitalist values, institutions and development in non-western societies. The description of social science as imperialism' (Ake, 1979) was a response to the variegated imperialist knowledge of the social sciences in non-western societies. Thus, the Malaysian scholars were thematically engaged with the question of ideology and worldviews in the growth of social science knowledge in Malaysia. For example, the myth of the lazy native' discourse by Syed Hussein Alatas was an epistemological response

to particular social science construction in Malaysia rooted in the imperialist knowledge production on Malaysian societies (S.H Alatas, 1977).

S.H Alatas, contended that the construction of 'Malay laziness' lacks a foundational understanding of the Malays and their relationship to the Colonial means of production. Alatas, argues that the colonialist prism of construction is based on their relationship with other Malaysian nationalities, such as the Chinese and the Indians, who worked for the colonialist as servants. Whereas the Malays' disdain for working in the leisure parlance of the Colonialist and their disdain to certain work for the whites influenced this construction. Similarly, Ibrahim (1998) challenges the development theory of exploitation from the lived experiences of the Malay peasants. The peasants' rights to *maruah* (dignity) become the essence of the Malay proletarian economy and underlie their notion of justice (*keadilan*), while the peasant resistance to capitalist exploitation in the plantation work underpins the Malay notion of resistance to modernisation. Thus, the notion of 'proletarian moral economy' implies the rights to subsistence and reproduction by the Malay workers.

Thence, Malaysian scholars have engaged with the grand narratives of social science, such as *value-free* knowledge (Abdul Halim Ali, 2009). A value-free social science connotes that it is divorced from its social reality and the locale of its production. This worldview had succeeded in creating a 'heap of sawdust' (Sani, & Othman, 1991) on the Malaysian social science landscape. The Malaysian scenario challenges this worldview through the call for a committed social science (interview with Abdul Rahman Embong, 2016). A committed social science is seen as a socio-scientific activity that transcends absorbing and articulating fact to a strong point of view. This perspective of social science was the leitmotif of the Council of Malaysian Social Science.

Based on the foregoing literature, it can be deduced that the development policy pursuit by the Malaysian state, under the rubric of both the New Economic Policy in 1971 and the New Development Policy in 1991, provided a context for examining the impact of development policy pursuit on the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The resistance

to agricultural modernisation by the peasant farmers, as advanced by Ibrahim (1998), exemplified the interregnum between development and class consciousness of the workers in the agricultural plantations. This signifies a response to politically led modernisation by the Malaysian state. Thus, the role of social science on knowledge production is underpinned by the construction of concepts and categories that explain the impact of development on the Malaysian communities. It can be adduced that social science is engaging with public issues beyond the abstraction of the development policy. Thus, the engagement of Malaysian scholars with the canons of the social science categories, such as the concept of the lazy native by S.H Alatas, and the concept of exploitation by Ibrahim challenges the notion of 'symbolic domination' of social science canons on Malaysian scholars or society. Thus, the foundational text developed by Malaysian scholars and the scholarly production in the *Akademika* journal underpinned a commitment that unravels the development theory based on the experience of the Malaysian subjects. Thus, the citizens were seen as knowing subject rather than an object for discursive representation by the social science canons developed in the west. The themes developed by the Malaysian scholars buttressed the need for a development policy to integrate with community values in order to achieve sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the nexus between development policy and social science knowledge in Malaysia, this article deploys a thematic approach in eliciting data through a combination of qualitative content analysis and a bibliometric approach. Thus, a single journal analysis is a method of bibliometric inquiry that studied research trends of a single journal output, while qualitative content analysis refers to "a subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Qualitative content analysis is applied in the interpretive analysis of textual sources of data in a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). In Malaysia, previous studies on a single journal were conducted by Tiew (1998), titled "A bibliometric study of the

Journal of Malaysian Branch of Royal Asiatic Society (JAMBRAS), 1987-1996, and Kotti (2014), titled "Authorship patterns and collaborative research in Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Sciences", 1996-2012 (Mani, 2014; Wai Sin, 1998).

However, no comprehensive study is conducted on a single journal in the field of social science and humanities in Malaysia, emphasising the content of the journal and its epistemological projections of social science knowledge in Malaysia. In order to fill this scholarly gap, this article focused on *Akademika* Journal of Social Science & Humanities with a special focus on thematic content analysis. *Akademika* Journal of Social Science & Humanities is a bi-monthly journal published by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia UKM-Press. It is committed to the advancement of social science knowledge in the several branches of social science and humanities. The first edition of the journal was published in 1972.

A systematic criterion for the selection of articles was followed. The article adopted Adebowale selection criteria while conducting a study on a scholarly journal in Africa. His study adopted the following criteria a; multi-disciplinary Journal in editorial policy, an African centered Journal, bilingual given that there are two dominant languages in Africa, that are English and French, quarterly four issues in a year, outstanding and consistent enough to be cited in the bibliographic database (Adebowale, 2001). These benchmarks adopted by Adebowale provide a glimpse of selecting a journal for bibliometric study in the social sciences. Given that the objective of this article is to explore the impact of development discourse on social science knowledge in Malaysia, the topic is multi-disciplinary in nature that cut across sociology, political science and economic policy. Therefore, this study adopted the following criteria for the journal selection:

1. Multi-disciplinary Journal of Malaysian Social Sciences & Humanities
2. Journal with an outstanding history of documenting the journey of social sciences in Malaysia
3. Journal with a substantial number of articles in English
4. Journal that features outstanding social science scholars in Malaysia

5. Journal that spans important periods of Malaysian development (especially after the National Economic Policy).
6. Journal indexed in the Malaysian citation index and other indexes.

Based on the above criteria, the *Akademika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* was chosen. The selection of *Akademika* journal is informed by the fact that it is one of the social science-centric journals in Malaysia. It spans an important period of Malaysian history, especially the period of New Economic Policy and New Development Policy (1971-1991). The journal has buttressed major themes that shaped the trajectories of Malaysian social evolution. This includes ethnic relations, peasantry, development, modernisation, national question, environment, gender and women, and most crucial epistemological issue related to the growth of social science in Malaysia. In this article, purposive sampling of the themes identified in the journal was adopted. The author sorted out relevant articles from the general set of articles published from 1972-2010, as indicated in Table 1.

Within this period, the journal has published four hundred and eighteen articles (418). The author read

Table 1 Total Articles Published by *Akademika*, 1972-2010s

1.	Total No. of Articles Published	418	100%
2.	Selected No. of Articles for analysis	130	31%
3.	Major classified themes	16	100%
4.	Selected themes for analysis	4	25%

(Source: the author)

the contents of each of these articles and grouped them under various themes. The grouping of the articles is also influenced by the analytical guiding frame of the study rooted in the interpretivist paradigm. Table 2 below shows the total number of articles/major themes that featured in the *Akademika Journal* since its evolution. From 1972 -2010 the journal has published 418 articles. This paper utilised 130 articles for its analysis which constitutes 31% of the total articles, and the articles were classified into 16 themes. The paper focuses on four themes that fit within the scope of development discourse. This represents 25% of the total articles published.

The above table depicted the classification of themes based on the authors' classification. The journal

Table 2 Classification of Major themes 1972-2010

S/N	Major Themes in <i>Akademika</i>	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Class & Ethnic Relations in Malaysia	19	4.54%
2.	Gender & Economic Development	10	2.39%
3.	Climate Change & Development	54	12.91%
4.	Education	23	5.50%
5.	Malaysian Historiography	19	4.54%
6.	Sociology of Knowledge	16	3.82%
7.	State, Capital & Labour	32	7.65%
8.	Literature/ Islamic Civilization	18	4.30%
9.	Malaysian Politics	9	2.15%
10.	Peasant Transformation	17	4.06%
11.	State, Capital and Land question	17	4.06%
12.	Social Science in Malaysia	13	3.11%
13.	Settlements	16	3.82%
14.	Language Studies	29	6.93%
15.	Asia/South east Asia	28	6.69%
16.	Others	114	27.27%
17.	Total	418	100%

(Source: *Akademika Journal of social science and Humanities*)

Table 3 Selected themes for analysis

S/N	Theme	Significance
1.	Gender & Economic Development	Features marginalisation of women in society, political space and in the workplaces. This shows that as Malaysian society embraces development, the position of women in the development process becomes important. This has relevance to 5 th Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality.
2.	Climate Change & Development	As Malaysia pursues industrial development, issues of climate change, conservation of natural resources became important themes in the development of its productive forces. This underscores the relevance of sustainable development. This is relevant for sustainable environment as contained in the indicators of the 8 th Sustainable Development Goal on economic growth and decent work.
3.	State, Capital & Labour	The state pursuit of economic development poses questions on state, capital and labour contradictions. The theme shows the impact of capital investment on the exploitation of the working class, as well as the nexus between development and indigenous communities (Orang Asli). This theme is also important for the 8 th Sustainable Development Goal on economic development and decent work.
4.	Peasant Transformation	The development process in Malaysia has transformed the Malay peasants significantly. The development poses a challenge between tradition and modernity among the Malay peasants. It shows that development permeates the cultural values of the Malay peasants. This theme is crucial to achieving sustainable communities.

(Source: Authors Compilation)

featured 16 major themes covering areas of social science and humanities. This article focuses on the themes of development discourse in Malaysia, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the four major themes that constitute the focus of this article. These themes were selected because of their relevance to the article's objective of exploring the impact of development discourse in the construction of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The four themes underscore the relevance of state-led modernisation through industrial development on the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia.

KEY FINDINGS

The objective of this article is to explore the nexus between development discourse and the evolution of themes in the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The following themes were identified as the key findings of the article.

Gender and Economic Development

The theme on gender and development underpins the growth of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The subject areas covered under women & gender issues articulate the gender disparity strongly and marginalisation of women in the society, workplaces, and political spaces in Malaysia. Other articles include role conflict faced by women, women political participation and the democratisation process in Malaysia. For example, the article on women workers in the manufacturing industry examined job stereotyping, which places women in unsecured jobs, occupational hazards, and poor wages compared to their male counterparts.

Further articles covered role conflict faced by women in the profession, where their position as professionals and as mothers made it inconceivable to meet their role expectations. The role of credit in alleviating poverty among women is also examined. Women were argued to be more susceptible to poverty. It contends that credit schemes should target women

because they have the potential to sustain it. Power relations between men and women are also studied as the reason for the prevalence of AIDs among women in Malaysia. — Lack of income, wealth, and power make women unable to protect themselves from AIDs (Mohamed, 2002, p. 1).

Additionally, women's exploitation through job sub-contracting was also examined. Women home-based-subcontracting in the garment industry has rendered a reserved army of labour among the Chinese women in Kuala Lumpur. However, it is contended that these women are neither valued nor cost, at worst, they remained disposable, flexible, and cheap (Lo-Ludher, 2003. P. 1). Gender roles within religious communities were uncovered. One article unpacks the gender roles among the Sikh communities in Malaysia. Despite the Sikh claim to gender equality, in practice, Sikh women in Malaysia suffered from men's prejudices and are being stereotyped. It is noteworthy that gendered segregation has been extended to occupational positions. Abu Bakar's (2006) submission on education and occupational segregation by gender contends that in terms of work distribution, women are still seen to be concentrated in the clerical and service type jobs, while the male is concentrated in all types of jobs (Abu Bakar, 2006, p.1).

Climate Change and Development

The theme of climate change is also featured in the production of social science journey in Malaysia. Social science research in Malaysia also uncovers discussions on climate change arising from the development trajectory in Malaysia. Environment and climate change-related themes appeared to be the dominant issues in Malaysia. From 1972-2010, almost 54 articles covered issues related to environment and climate change in Malaysia. The themes specifically addressed issues related to; (i) flood, (ii) air pollution, (iii) forestry, and conservation of natural resources.

The themes on flood examined heavy rainfall flood that occurred in Kelantan during the 2nd through the 6th of January 1967. The themes discussed the meteorological, hydrological, and economic implications of the situation. It argues that — local weather phenomenon in the tropic is largely influenced by the atmospheric condition far beyond

the immediate locality where the phenomenon is observed. In this case, they are influenced by pressure conditions from China/Siberia (Sani, 1974, p. 1).

Similarly, themes around air pollution and its corresponding impact featured prominently under the climate and environmental studies in Malaysia. This theme focused on issues of environmental challenges such as air pollution and urbanisation, air pollution dispersion, the relationship between visibility and pollution in the Klang Valley, visibility in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, and air quality degradation in Malaysia. What is pertinent in this theme was the way and manner in which growing industrial development and urbanisation is deteriorating the environment. It is noted that — the growth of urbanisation and industrial development within and around Kuala Lumpur- and Petaling Jaya -coupled with the absence of any form of smoke control measures, has probably been the major contributing factor (Sani, 1979, p. 1).

In the same vein, the introduction of Geo-tourism as a special tourism product has also triggered the popularisation of knowledge-based tourism, which promotes a higher-income economy, with a lower impact on natural resources (Komoo, 2010, p. 9). This is an attempt towards achieving a sustainable community in Malaysia and conservation of its natural environment. Thus, the theme shows the emancipatory role of social science knowledge towards sustainable development through a paradigm shift from excessive commodification of natural resources in Malaysia that contribute to environmental hazards such as deforestation. The theme underlies the relevance of a geo-park model as a tool for regional sustainable development. For example, the Langkawi Geo-park was illustrated as a success story of the Geo-park model in Malaysia.

State, Capital and Labour

The third focused theme that emerged from the bibliometric findings is the theme on the impact of state led modernisation on capital and labour relations. Thus, in the course of the state pursuit of political modernisation. The development paradigm is consequential on capital, land and Labour in Malaysia. It featured key development in State, capital, land & labour contradictions in Malaysia. This theme

is apparent in how Malaysians' economic policies, especially the successive development plan, led to New Economic Policy influenced citizenship question. For instance, the articles on manufacturing in Malaysia unpacked the growth of investment, nature of ownership, and control in the manufacturing sector. It stressed that Malaysians owned a substantial part of foreign-owned firms. Whereas, foreign capital dominates the major portion of the values of sales and value-added. It further reveals that capital extraction of surplus values in the plantation labour has engendered serious industrial unrest by the workers, while the traditional trade unions behave indifferently to the flight of workers in the sector. Similarly, foreign investment in Malaysia through Japanese investment has further accentuated a labour regime that exploits women workers. Thus, Japanese employment relations with its paternalistic orientation towards women were transposed to Malaysia industrial relations.

Despite the unwholesome character of capital towards labour. The state practices towards indigenous communities, the Orang Asli, were also examined. Thus, the laws governing the Orang Asli settlements vis-à-vis land ownership appear to be prejudicial to the citizen status of Orang Asli. It thus noted that government policy towards Orang Asli is highly paternalistic, as portrayed in the aboriginal ordinance. It shows that government policies on land acquisition by the Orang Asli are incongruent to the citizenship status of Orang Asli. The submission demands that the Orang Asli status as Bumiputra should be established, noting that their conversion to Islam or otherwise should not influence their status as Bumiputra.

Furthermore, state practices on land settlements and politics of development in west Malaysia were also of interest under this theme. The contribution under this subject traces the evolution of various policies related to land settlements scheme in West Malaysia. It revealed that the pre-independence settlements from 1945-1957 were concerned with checkmating the flow of people for subsistence agriculture to take an active part in the rubber plantation. However, the aftermath of May 1969 riot had influenced the content of subsequent settlement policies in Malaysia. Thus, the NEP period paid emphasis on regional development

disparities rather than land settlements. — The emphasis shifts from the land for the landless to an attempt to tackle the question of regional disparities because most of the East Coast states (Kelantan, Terengganu, & Pahang) have a relatively small share of national income and were also identified as Malay states.

Peasant Transformation

Ibrahim (1998) postulated the notion of moral economy in the literature as discussed above. The concept of the Malay peasantry emerged from the key findings. Thus, the development paradigm pursued by the state posed an important question for social science in Malaysia. The scholarly concern is on the labour question in the process of capitalist transformation in Malaysia. The discourse is anchored on the social transformation undergone by the Malay peasantry. This theme explores the social transformation undergone by the Malay peasantry owing to cultural modernisation and economic development in Malaysia. The theme featured two prominent development in the Malay peasantry; modernisation and decline of traditional values in Malay peasant society, as well as the main economic activities of Malay peasant society.

Thus, the interface between the Malay peasantry and modernisation values is unpacked by the submission on modernisation and Malay peasant society' (Taib, 1973, p. 15). It suggests that based on extensive study of Malay peasantry, the Malay peasantry avowedly supports modernisation in their socio-economic life, so long as it did not endanger the tenets of their Islamic faith. It shows that the Malay peasants were active in cultivating tobacco and are also politically active in supporting parties that identify with their Islamic identity. However, they reject innovations that go contrary to the dictates of their religion, the Islamic faith, such as interest associated with credit schemes in agricultural production. This resonates with the notion of *murū'ah* as advanced by Ibrahim (1998) in the literature.

It is noteworthy that Malay peasant's resistance to the modernisation project is currently undergoing serious erosion. It led to the decline of key traditional institutions in Malaysia. Worth mentioning is the decline of values of mutual help and group solidarity

ideologies that have been long identified with the Malay peasantry. These values have been eroded as a result of profound cultural change in Malay society and occasioned by cultural permeation with other values, and government projects of modernisation of Malay peasantry. For example, it was keenly noted that group solidarity is displaced by individualism among the peasants.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above key findings, the epistemic culture of colonial knowledge is rooted in 'colonial archives' which contain codified and stratified societies into developed, underdeveloped, modern, and traditional. Thus, the concept of 'heap of sawdust' (Sani & Othman, 1991) is an illustration of the historical journey of knowledge formation in Malaysia, underpinned by the colonial epistemological order, which beclouded the knowledge formation based on colonial precepts. Hence, the post-colonial scholarship inherited this kind of non-reflexive social science tradition in Malaysia. Moreover, the findings suggest the commitment of social science fraternities in Malaysia to substantive public issues affecting the Malaysian communities. The themes on the environment, labour and gender signify the importance attached by the Malaysian scholars on the implication of development on the productive forces of the society (land, labour, and environment). Thus, the development pursuit of the Malaysian state should not be at the expense of citizens and their ecology.

Similarly, the findings of the paper signify the role of values in development. It shows that the Malaysian communities contested the development paradigm on account of its incompatibility with community values. As a result, the article abstracted this development within the concept of articulation paradigm. Articulation presupposes an interface between traditional values and modernising values. Thus, this analytical position is a key contribution in understanding the role of social sciences on development praxis in Malaysia. Therefore, the symbolic domination of the epistemic culture of the western social science, or what Sani & Othman (1991) called 'heap of sawdust' in the Malaysian social science landscape implies the role of 'ideology' and

'power' (Wodak & Mayer, 2001) in the production of social science knowledge in Malaysia. The concepts of ideology and power played a significant role in establishing the symbolic domination of the powerful discourse. Ideology and power have great epistemological implications as they imbued certain traits and connotations in the knowledge formation in the post-colonial states. The work of Syed Hussein Alatas, the myth of the lazy native, challenges how colonial ideology inscribed certain descriptions of the natives, beneath which is to justify colonial subjugation of the Malay society. Ideology is central in the production of meaning, to such an extent of given the meaning a normative connotation (Wodak & Mayer, 2001).

The notion of the Heap of sawdust further shows the power of colonial epistemological order in dominating the knowledge discourses in the periphery through the popularisation of a particular research tradition rooted in empiricism. This knowledge tradition produced a self-alienated discourse to such an extent that post-colonial knowledge production is disconnected from its rich knowledge tradition. The implication of the findings calls for a renewed commitment towards theoretical and applied social science knowledge in Malaysia through the use of 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) that link social science discourse with substantive public issues confronting Malaysian society. The thematic findings of this paper suggest the following, social science knowledge would be relevant for the economic development of Malaysia. Thus, the themes identified showed that as the Malaysian state struggle to industrialise. The industrialisation process has posed key developmental challenges that need to be addressed for inclusive, sustainable development in Malaysia. Furthermore, the themes identified by this paper, such as gender and economic development, climate change, and state, capital and labour, remain ever relevant for Malaysia's drive to achieve the agenda 2030 of the SDGs.

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