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**National Pride, Race, Language Use in Interracial Communications with Peers: A Case
of Malaysian Youths of 20-25 Years Old**

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Abstract

The study examines national pride among youths between the ages of 20-25 years old in Malaysia and determines whether national pride varies by orientation in self-identification (more in nationality or racial identity terms) and language use in interracial communication with peers. The responses of 375 Malays, 238 Chinese and 77 Indian youths were analyzed. It was found that: (i) Malay and Chinese youths who identify self more in nationality terms had higher levels of national pride than those who identify self more in racial identity terms, (ii) Chinese who used mostly national language in their interracial interaction with peers had higher levels of national pride than their counterparts who used mostly English in interracial communication with peers. There was no significant difference in level of national pride by orientation in self-identification and language use in interracial communication with peers for the Indian samples.

National unity and integration has been and continues to be an important agenda in Malaysia because the country is multiracial and race related issues keep on emerging. One way to enhance unity and integration among Malaysians of difference races, cultures and religions is to strengthen sense of identification and attachment to the country among the people. It is within this context that national pride is seen as imperative socio-political tool in developing the country. Feeling of pride towards the nation is salient for two reasons. One argument is national pride is assumed to be a binding force that promotes better relations among the people of difference races, cultures and religions. The other argument is national pride could serve as a buffer to cultural imperialism threats in the present borderless world. The notion of national pride in a way is related to nationalism, and a discourse on nationalism has been tied to the concept of national identity. In addition to national identity, racial identity and language are important markers of cultural identity. This paper is about level of national pride among youths of 20 to 25 years old and how it is related to orientation in self-identification and language use in communication with peers of difference race.

National Pride

Individuals identify with the nation they belong to and cherish feelings that are more or less nationalistic. The notion on attachment and sense of pride towards the nation serves a number of different purposes such as mobilization of the population, promotion of solidarity and integration (Henderson and McEwen, 2005), and enhancement of collective self-esteem of the nation (Muller-Peters, 1998). Hence, it is important to establish and sustain high level of national pride among the people regardless of socio-demographic background.

Identification with the nation, if it is to be meaningful, has to be accompanied not only by a shared understanding of what that nation represents but also a feeling of pride with the positive characters of the country (Cohen, 2008). Pride in one's nation can be seen in general terms and with specific contents; national pride can express itself in terms of cultural-historical pride and economic-political pride (Muller-Peters, 1998). In the current study, national pride is used to designate the positive affective bond to specific national characters, symbols, and achievement. In discussing the concept of patriotism and nationalism, Meier-Pesti and Kirchler (2003) explicate on instrumental and sentimental attachments to a nation. Instrumental attachment bases on subjective cost and benefit estimations of belonging to a nation, and sentimental attachment is emotional and mirrored in tradition, cultural achievement, and dedication to national symbols.

Globalization and wider opening of national borders through import of foreign cultural products increase vulnerability of national identity and sense of identification to the country. This makes the issue of national pride even more relevant. Proponents of Cultural Imperialism Theory contend that the one-way flow of Western cultural products and the supposedly undesirable, foreign values embodied in those products often challenge or undermine traditional cultural and ideological beliefs in non-Western communities. The negative elements from the foreign products challenge or undermine national values and aspiration (see e.g., Hamelink, 1983; Schiller, 1991).

Identity and Language Use

As mentioned earlier, a discussion on sense of national pride is tied to the concept of national identity. Identity is an important aspect of living with others. Besides national identity, racial identity is an important dimension of cultural identity (Sabatier, 2008). Cultural identity designates both a sociological or demographic classification as well as individual's psychological identification with a particular group (Kim, 2007). People need to identify and associate with groups that they value as very significant and at the same time differentiate self with dissimilar others. Social identity theory and self-categorization theory

posited that each person has a number of group or social identities, and there is a tendency to evaluate one's in-group positively in comparison with relevant out-group (Liu, et al., 2002).

Race and nationality give meaning to individuals, a sense of who they are. Identities matter as it is considered as a capital providing a sense of worth and a source of flexibility (Sabatier, 2008). Race and national identity can be held concurrently or alternately, with differing levels of salience over time and across situation (Liu et al., 2002) and are nurtured and sustained by the actions and discourse of political elites (Henderson & McEwen, 2005). Since race and national identity are important aspects of cultural identity, it is worth examining how the young adults in this multiracial country prefer to identify themselves, that is whether more in terms of national or racial identity.

Although racial and national identity are different aspects of cultural identity, the relationship is not necessarily antagonistic to each other. In fact, one can have a strong sense of racial identity and at the same time has a strong sense of national identity (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). The role of racial and national identity in nation building is still debated, and there is a lack of consensus in the literature on this issue. Integrationists' perspective of race relations is build on the premise of the primacy of individual identity, a universalized vision of citizenship, and mutual accommodation (Kim, 2007). Despite this, maintaining cultural identity is important particularly to those with high identification with a cultural group. In the context of minority-majority relations, it has been found that the more minority group people identify with their cultural group, the more likely they are to consider it important to preserve their own culture (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006).

Kim (2007) posited that issues pertaining to cultural identity will continue to be a salient and politicized phenomenon, and the identity polemics is the contention and struggles of between pluralistic and integrative side and the pluralistic and separatist side. In the context of nation building and national integration, some have argued that identification to nation should be the super-ordinate category of social/cultural identity. Identification with a nation has to be accompanied by a shared understanding of what that nation represents (Henderson and McEwen, 2005). The collective dimension of national identity attempts to resolve who we are as a citizen of a nation, what it is that unites the members of the nation and distinguishes it from others.

Related to race is the issue of the position of languages of the various ethno-linguistic groups as language is an important marker of identity. The national language policy and the use of the national language as the medium of instruction in government schools and public universities are meant to foster national identity and unity. While *Bahasa Malaysia* is the official language and is widely spoken in many communication situations particularly among the Malays, Malaysians of all races have a choice in the language they want to use in intra and interracial communication. However, it is unclear if language use among the various race groups is related to national pride. David and Mei Tien (2009) reported that some have argued that the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* would help inculcate a sense of belonging for all citizens irrespective of race. While this is highly probable, the relationship of language use with national pride is still unclear. Use of national language as an indicator of national pride among the young adults of different race has not been adequately examined.

Context and Research Question

Given that national pride is an important socio-political tool in managing a multiracial Malaysia, it is relevant and important to ask how youths of 20 to 25 years old fair in national pride. The advances made in communication technology, the influx of foreign programming and democratization of communication and information, in which the youths are impacted more by these developments, pose a challenge in enhancing sense of national pride among

the youths. Since national pride is tied to national identity, it is worthy to examine whether national pride is reflected in the way the young identify themselves and the language they used in cross-race communication with peers. There is a lack of empirical evidence on this issue. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to fill the information gap. Specifically, the objective of the present analysis is to answer the following research questions:

- (i) How do Malay, Chinese and Indian youths of 20 to 25 years old prefer to identify themselves (self-identification orientation, either more in national or racial identity terms)?
- (ii) Is there a significant difference in level of national pride of Malay, Chinese and Indian youths of 20 to 25 years between those who identify self more in national than racial identity terms?
- (iii) Is there a significant difference in level of national pride of Malay, Chinese and Indian youths of 20 to 25 years between those who used mostly *Bahasa Malaysia* in interracial communication with peers than those who mostly used language other than *Bahasa Malaysia*?

METHODS

Sample

The sample of this study was composed of 375 Malays, 238 Chinese, and 77 Indians youth. A sample size of 690 was considered adequate. The mean age was 21.8 years ($SD = 1.56$). In terms of gender composition, 47.2% were males and 52.8% were females. The data was collected over a period of four months, from October 2007 through early January 2008. Overall, the sample closely approximated race ratio in the country, with males and females quite evenly represented. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the samples in terms of gender age, highest educational attainment, location of residence, and language spoken at home.

Table 1. Profile of Samples on Selected Variables

Variable	Malay (n=375)	Chinese (n=238)	Indian (n=77)
Gender			
Male	46.6	36.5	58.4
Female	53.4	63.5	41.6
Age (year)			
Mean	21.8	21.6	22.0
Standard deviation	1.48	1.47	2.74
Range	20 - 25	20 - 25	20 - 25
Highest Educational Attainment			
Completed secondary	63.8	52.5	74.0
Completed tertiary	36.2	47.5	26.0
Location of Residence			
Urban	47.3	48.5	45.9
Suburban	52.7	51.5	54.1
Language Widely Spoken at Home			
Bahasa Malaysia	98.9	2.0	22.5
English	1.8	9.4	19.5
Chinese	-	83.9	-
Tamil	-	-	58.4

Note. Figures are percentage, except for age.

Procedure

The data analyzed were part of a larger survey on youth media use and attitude towards the country. The data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire, written in *Bahasa Malaysia*, was administered on individual or group basis and in different social settings— in residential areas and universities. The university respondents were recruited from three randomly selected institutions of higher learning. For the university student sample, the questionnaires were administered in groups, ranging from 10 to 20 students per group. Questionnaires were administered during classes with the consent of the instructors of the selected courses, and participation was on voluntary basis. For the non-university student sample, the respondents were recruited from residential places. Their participation was also on voluntary basis, and the questionnaire was administered on individual basis at identified locations. The respondents were given ample time to fill in the questionnaire and encouraged to ask if they have any question for clarification. The time taken to fill the questionnaire ranged from 20 to 30 minutes. All the respondents worked on the questionnaire independently after they were given instruction on how to fill in the questionnaire.

Measures

National pride was measured using nine 5-point Likert items. The respondents were asked to indicate how strongly agree/disagree they are with the items. The scale essentially measures strength of pride in socio-political achievement and pride in national culture and history. Some examples of the items are “I accept Malaysia with undivided loyalty,” “I am proud of the country which is made up of various race and ethnic groups,” “I am proud of the cooperative spirit achieved among the various race groups,” “I fully accept Vision 2020,” “I am proud of the national cultural policy aimed at fostering national identity,” “The monarchy system is essential for national unity,” “I will sacrifice my life and belongings if the country were under threat,” “I am proud that our *Rukun Negara* is a foundation for national integration.” All the items loaded on one factor. The Eigen value of the scale was 6.14 and the variance explained by the factor was 51.36. The scale carries a reliability coefficient of .89.

Orientation in self-identification was measured with a single question asking the respondents how they would like to identify themselves with a response option of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian Malay, Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indian, or Malaysian. The respondents were asked to report the language they widely used in communication with peers of difference race with a response option of mostly in *Bahasa Malaysia* or mostly in language other than *Bahasa Malaysia*. Respondents’ gender, year of birth, highest educational attainment, and location of residence with a response option of urban or sub-urban, and language spoken and widely used at home were also ascertained.

Analysis Strategies

Prior to test of mean difference, data exploratory analysis was performed to check for data entry error and normality in distribution. A factor analysis and reliability test was also performed on the national pride scale constructed for the study. T-test was used to determine whether the mean difference on national pride score by self-identification orientation and language commonly used in communication with peers of difference race was statistically significant at 0.05 level.

RESULTS

The present analysis attempted to examine if level of national pride among the 20-25 years youth varies by race and language use in peers’ interracial communication. Therefore, the analysis was disaggregated by race. The first research question raised in the present study

is, “How do the youth aged 20-25 years identify self, whether more in racial or nationality terms?” Table 2 presents the results of the analysis. Given the choice on how they would identify themselves, the results clearly showed that a majority of the Malay and Chinese respondents prefer to identify self more in racial identity than nationality ($\chi^2 = 26.52$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). Unlike the Indian respondents, a majority of them identify self more in nationality terms.

Table 2. Orientation in Self-Identification

Identify self more in terms of ...	Malay (n=375)	Chinese (n=238)	Indian (n=77)
Racial identity	69.2	63.0	35.8
National identity	30.8	37.0	64.2

Note. Figures are percentage. $\chi^2 = 26.52$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$

The subsequent research question posed in the study is, “Do level of national pride among the 20-25 years youth varies by orientation of self identification?” In general the respondents showed quite a strong sense of national pride (means ranged from 3.54 to 4.32 out of maximum 5), particularly the Malay samples. T-test of mean difference on national pride scores between the respondents who primarily define self more in terms of nationality than racial identity showed significant difference for the Malay ($t = 2.150$, $df = 373$, $p < .05$) and the Chinese samples ($t = 2.004$, $df = 253$, $p < .05$) but not the Indian sample, as shown in Table 3. The national pride means are significantly higher for the Malays and Chinese who identify self more in terms of nationality ($M_{\text{Malay}} = 4.32$ and $M_{\text{Chinese}} = 3.26$) compared to those who identify self more in terms of racial identity ($M_{\text{Malay}} = 4.17$ and $M_{\text{Chinese}} = 3.08$). But, in the case of the Indian samples, no significant difference was observed in national pride means between the respondents with different orientation in self-identification.

Table 3. National Pride Mean Scores by Orientation in Self-Identification

Identify self more in terms of ...	Malay (n=375)	Chinese (n=238)	Indian (n=77)
Racial identity	4.17 (.471)	3.08 (.661)	3.54 (.632)
National identity	4.32 (.512)	3.26 (.680)	3.80 (.815)
t-value	2.150	2.004	1.826
df	373	253	75
p value	.032	.046	.072

Note. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Although the language widely spoken at home is the language of their race group, the Chinese and the Indian samples seem to use language that fits their purpose. They either use *Bahasa Malaysia* or English in their interethnic interactions. As shown in Table 4, a large majority of the Malay samples predominantly use *Bahasa Malaysia* in their interactions with friend of dissimilar race.

Table 4. Language Commonly Used in Interracial Communication with Friends

Language	Malay (n=375)	Chinese (n=238)	Indian (n=77)
Bahasa Malaysia	92.3	48.6	51.9
Other than Bahasa Malaysia	7.7	51.4	48.1

Note. Figures are percentage.

The last question raised in the present analysis is, “Would language commonly use in interethnic communication with peers is in any way related to national pride.” Table 5 presents the results of t-test on the national pride means between the respondents who used mostly *Bahasa Malaysia* and those who mostly used a language other than *Bahasa Malaysia*. The results showed no significant difference for the Malay and Indian samples in the level of national pride between those who used mostly *Bahasa Malaysia* ($M_{\text{Malay}} = 4.22$ and $M_{\text{Chinese}} = 3.30$) with those who used other languages particularly English in interethnic interaction with friends ($M_{\text{Malay}} = 4.08$ and $M_{\text{Chinese}} = 3.04$), but not the Chinese sample ($M_{\text{Mostly used Bahasa Malaysia}} = 3.30$, $M_{\text{Mostly used other language}} = 3.04$, $t = 3.122$, $df = 253$, $\rho < .05$).

Table 5. National Pride Mean Scores by Language Widely Used in Interracial Communication with Friends

Language	Malay (n=375)	Chinese (n=238)	Indian (n=77)
Mostly in Bahasa Malaysia	4.22 (.551)	3.30 (.682)	3.75 (.741)
Mostly in language other than Bahasa Malaysia	4.08 (.445)	3.04 (.655)	3.76 (.739)
t-value	1.343	3.122	.124
df	373	253	75
ρ value	.180	.002	.902

Note. Figures in prentices are standard deviations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present analysis provides insights into the connection of identity and language used with national pride. In is not surprising to find that racial identity is an important aspect of social identity for most of the respondents. A majority of the Malay and Chinese respondents prefer to identify themselves first or more in terms of racial identity than national identity. But the Indians seem the opposite-- a majority prefers to identify self more in terms of national identity. The findings not only corroborated findings of past studies on the saliency of racial identity in Malaysia, but suggest that race remain an important dimension of identity despite the policies and efforts taken by the government to promote national integration via common identification by super-ordinate identity and language use. The choice of language spoken at home substantiates the primacy of racial language in cultural identification in this country.

While a majority of the respondents use mostly their respective race’s language in intra-racial communication, in interethnic interactions with friends the Chinese and Indian respondents opt for English language when applicable. This finding should not be interpreted as suggesting that the non-Malays have unfavorable attitude to the national language. Perhaps they were being pragmatic in their language use; moreover many other factors such as competency and ability might explain for the language choice.

Orientation in self-identification whether more in terms of racial or national identity is significantly related to national pride for the Malay and Chinese respondents but not the Indian youth. The Malay and Chinese youth who identify more in national identity terms shows a higher level of national pride compared with those who identify self more in racial identity. The reason for a non-significant difference found in the Indian samples could be because for the Indians, being the minority race with least political and economic power compared with the Malays and the Chinese, identification by nationality is more appealing. This explanation is in line with the social dominance theory which posited that hierarchy-attenuating ideologies will appeal more to minority or low status groups than to the majority or high status groups (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006).

Interestingly, comparative analysis of national pride by language use in interethnic interaction with friends show significant difference only for the Chinese samples but not the Malay and Indian samples, suggesting that language choice and use in interethnic communication is a significant indicator of national pride for the Chinese. The Chinese respondents who interact with their Malay or Indian friends mostly in national language seem to have greater pride towards the country. The reason for this finding is not known.

While admitting the weaknesses in the conception and measurement of national pride and imperfection of the sampling procedure of the present study, all in all it can be concluded that race is an important aspect of social, cultural identity despite the Bangsa Malaysia concept and more recently, the One Malaysia ideology. More studies need to be carried out to find when and how race influences social and political phenomenon such as national pride, and the contribution of racial identity in explaining the variance in national pride, if race matters. The pattern of findings in the present study suggests that while racial identity is important it is the perception of the race groups that explains the differences in attitude and feeling towards the nation rather than race itself. Additionally, the connection of language use with national pride might not be very straight forward. Therefore, more contextual variables need to be included in the study on role of race and language use in national pride in order to gain a better understanding of the subject.

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