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**The Dilemma Of The Malays: Rhetorical Analysis Of  
Selected Speeches Of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra,  
The First Prime Minister Of Malaysia, 1957-1970**

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#### Abstract

This paper discusses a study on the texts of speeches delivered by the former Malaysian Premier Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj throughout his tenure from 1957 to 1970. The analyses were performed in order to see his thought that he uttered every year before his audience especially concerning Malay issues. Each speech text from the total of 26 speeches was examined extensively based on Aristotle's concept of rhetorical criticisms, emphasizing on the nature of the evidence provided in the arguments and the valid supporting materials used to support such evidence. The Malay issues in the speech texts were analyzed by taking into consideration Aristotle's rhetorical canons i.e. inventio and dispositio. Briefly, the study found that Tunku's words concerning Malay issues can be categorized into seven themes, namely the backwardness of the Malays, the Malay language and English, the economic imbalance between the people, education programs for the Malays, Malays and Islam, the discontentment as a source of conflict, and the Malays has no intention to dominate others. Further analysis of his speeches showed Tunku's firm stand in charting the future of his people, the Malays, to face challenges and to stay competitive. Thus, from the study it can be concluded that in addressing Malay issues, Tunku has made a clear, organized, focused and consistent stand on his subject matter.

Malaya gained her independent from the British in 1957. Nonetheless the road to independent was never smooth. The Malays (the son of the soil) have to abide by their colony master's stipulation for self-government, which was to award citizenships to the immigrants (the Chinese and Indians) brought into the country by the British at the turn of the twentieth century. The Malays hesitantly agreed with the proviso, and hence on August 31, 1957 the Federation of Malaya was proclaimed an independent country. Later in September 1963 Singapore, Sabah (formerly North Borneo) and Sarawak joined the federation to form a new nation, named Malaysia. The multi-ethnic new nation was very volatile due to the discontentment of some of the Malays towards their new country mates and the dissatisfactions of the non-Malays towards the Malays. Against this sensitive backdrop, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of the country, stood up to deliver his thoughts in his efforts to create a harmonious situation in Malaya and subsequently Malaysia. Nevertheless the discontentment has escalated into racial tensions and consequently explodes into racial bloodshed in 1969. The tragedy, known as the May 13, 1969 racial riot, has led to the resignation of Tunku from his premiership a year later. This paper focused on what has been said by Tunku in his speeches during his reign of power, emphasizing on the way he looked at the Malays and their dilemma.

Who are the Malays

The Malays make the majority of the 27 million population of Malaysia. They are considered as the 'sons of the soil' of the country. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia defines Malay as "a person who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks Malay, and conforms to Malay custom". Accordingly, Article 160 of the Constitutions composed in 1957 defines a Malay as a "Malaysian citizen born to a Malaysian citizen who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, adheres to Malay customs, and is domiciled in Malaysia or Singapore".

Even though the Malays made the majority of the population, economically they were the weakest. This was probably due to the 'Divide and Rule' policy imposed by the British during their reign. The British brought in the laborers from the mainland China to work in the tin mines. Later these Chinese immigrants inhabited the urban areas, working in the tin industry and involved in trading and businesses. The Indian laborers however were brought in from India to work in the rubber plantations own by the British companies and also in building infrastructures such as roads, bridges, and railway lines in the country. On the other hand, the Malays, being the indigenous people were left to live a traditional life in rural areas. They were involved in small scale economic activities such as farming, paddy planting, and fishing. Thus when the British were about to leave, the Chinese has control over a great deal of the wealth of the country, whilst the Malays and Indians were left in an underprivileged condition. This economic inequality amongst races has contributed to the dissatisfaction that later escalated into racial conflicts between the Malays and the immigrants, especially the Chinese.

Eventually a bloody racial unrest erupted on May 13, 1969. The black episode in the nation history has prompted the government to take affirmative actions aimed to balance the economic situation in the country and to eradicate poverty amongst the population. Since the economic imbalance between the Malays as the natives and the immigrants (Chinese and Indians) has been identified as the main reason that triggered the bloody riot, actions were taken by the government to accord the Malays with more economic opportunities. This move was considered as in line with the privileges of the

Malays as provided in the constitution. However to some, this attempt has added advantage to the Malay supremacy, stipulated in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. As a matter of fact Article 153 is actually a continuation of preceding laws made by the British to protect the indigenous peoples from being overwhelmed by the immigration of Chinese and Indian workers into Malaya.

The speaker

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj was born on 8 February 1903, in Alor Star, Kedah, a state in the northern part of the peninsular. He was the seventh son of the Ruler of Kedah, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah. Tunku received his early education in a Malay and English School in Alor Star. Then he was sent to a Siamese school in Bangkok. Later in 1920, he went to St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, England to read history and law. He graduated in 1925 with a B.A. Degree. He then joined the Inner Temple, in London, but his studies were interrupted. He returned to Kedah in 1931, and joined the Kedah State Civil Service. He served as a District Officer in a few districts in the state (Kuala Nerang, then Langkawi, Sungai Patani, and finally in Kulim). In 1948, Tunku became the Chairman of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) party of Kedah. Later he returned to London to complete his law studies and was called to the Bar of the Inner Temple. On his return to Malaya in 1949 he was appointed as a Deputy Public Prosecutor. In 1951, he succeeded Dato' Sir Onn bin Jaafar as the President of UMNO. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1955, the Federation's first elections to the Federal Legislative Council were held. The Alliance (consists of UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress) won 51 out of 52 seats. A new government was formed and Tunku became the first Chief Minister. On 31 December 1955, Tunku headed a delegation from the Alliance to London for talks with the British Government on the future constitution of the Federation. On 31<sup>th</sup> August 1957, Malaya became independent and Tunku became her first Prime Minister. Tunku passed away at the age of 87 on 7 December 1990 and was laid to rest at the Royal Mausoleum, Langgar, Kedah (Soong, 2001).

**Table 1: Chronology of events during Tunku's reign of power**

<b>1957</b>	Malaya declared independent on 31/8/1957.
<b>1959</b>	General Election. Landslide victory to the Alliance.
<b>1960</b>	Islam made official religion of Malaya.
<b>1961</b>	Malaya hosted First International Quran Recital Competition.
<b>1963</b>	Malaya joined by Sarawak, Sabah and Singapore to form Malaysia on 16/9/1963. Tunku Abdul Rahman became the first Prime Minister.
<b>1963-6</b>	Indonesian Confrontation campaign against Malaysia.
<b>1964</b>	General Election. Landslide victory to the Alliance.
<b>1965</b>	Singapore left Malaysia and becomes republic on 9/8/1965.
<b>1967</b>	ASEAN formed on 8/8/1967.
<b>1969</b>	General Election. The Alliance's majority was significantly reduced. Racial tension culminates in May 13 Riot. Emergency rule in Malaysia. Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) formed and Tunku became the first Secretary General.
<b>1970</b>	Tunku resigns on 22/9/1970 and succeeds by Tun Abdul Razak.

### Method Of Analysis

Twenty six of Tunku's speeches on Malay issues delivered during his tenure were analyzed for the purpose of this study. The analysis was based on the Aristotelian method of analysis. According to Aristotle (in Roberts, 1984), there are five canons of rhetoric; namely invention, disposition, style, memory and delivery. Thonssen, Baird and Braden (1985) stressed that these canons of rhetoric constitute the basic pattern of all theoretical and critical investigations into the art and practice of public speaking. Under the canon of invention, researchers normally focused their study on the substance of a speech. As defined by Thonssen (1981.), invention is "...the finding or discovering of material pertinent to the cause". Zulkifli Abdul Hamid (1985) in his Ph.D. dissertation concluded that invention is "...the process of investigating and analyzing the subject of speeches, the continuous process of searching for ideas, proofs, forms of support, the lines of argument, and establishing speaker's credibility and ethos". Under this canon, it is necessary to examine the three types of proof that rhetoricians have always delighted in analyzing. The three types of proof are ethos, pathos and logos (Aristotle, in Roberts 1984). This paper will only focus on logos, i.e. the logical appeal in the speech. In examining logos, researchers could examine what was actually said by the speaker, what kinds of evidence the speaker used to support his claims and how the speaker arranged his/her line of arguments. Nevertheless, the focus of this paper is to look into what was said by the speaker regarding the Malays and issues surrounding them during the early stage of the formation of their sovereign country. Table 2 provides information on the twenty six speeches used as the artifacts in the study.

**Table 2:** Selected speeches presented by Tunku (1957-1970), where he touched on Malay issues.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Function or Event</i>	<i>Venue</i>
1.	21/9/1957	Convocation of University of Malaya	Kuala Lumpur
2.	26/9/1957	AGM of Central Welfare Council	Kuala Lumpur
3.	14/5/1958	Official Opening of STAR	Ipoh
4.	20/4/1958	Aidilfitri Message over Radio Malaya	Kuala Lumpur
5.	17/10/1958	Birthday of Prophet Muhammad	Kuala Lumpur
6.	4/10/1959	Merdeka Banquet	Penang
7.	16/8/1959	Party Political Broadcast over Radio Malaya	Kuala Lumpur
8.	17/12/1960	Assembly of Selangor Foo Chow Assoc.	Kuala Lumpur
9.	6/5/1961	Assembly of Malacca UMNO	Malacca
10.	16/10/1961	Dewan Rakyat (Parliament)	Kuala Lumpur
11.	7/6/1962	Tribute to Dato' Ong Yoke Lin	Kuala Lumpur
12.	11/12/1963	Dewan Rakyat (Parliament)	Kuala Lumpur
13.	6/9/1964	UMNO General Assembly	Kuala Lumpur
14.	20/9/1964	Federation House of Singapore	Singapore
15.	9/2/1965	Opening of Utusan Melayu Building	Kuala Lumpur
16.	21/8/1965	Speech over Radio Sabah	Kota Kinabalu
17.	21/10/1966	Penang Free School Speech Day Ceremony	Penang
18.	30/10/1966	State Banquet in honour of US President	Kuala Lumpur
19.	11/5/1967	Opening of 11 May Movement, UMNO Women Wing	Kuala Lumpur
20.	7/9/1968	Bumiputera (Sons of the Soil) Economic	Kuala Lumpur

		Congress	
21.	27/3/1968	Tea Party to Welcome New Members to Alliance	Kuala Lumpur
22.	7/3/1969	Opening of MCA Central General Assembly	Kuala Lumpur
23.	31/8/1969	Merdeka Day Speech	Kuala Lumpur
24.	30/3/1970	First Meeting of National Goodwill Council	Kuala Lumpur
25.	3/7/1970	Official Visit to Kulim, Kedah	Kulim
26.	15/8/1970	Open Day of Kolej Islam Malaya	Kuala Lumpur

### The Substance Of The Speeches

This part deals with what was actually said by the speaker regarding the Malays. After analyzing all the 26 speeches delivered by Tunku from 1957 to 1970, it was found that Malay matters in the speeches can be categorized into seven themes. The themes are:

1. the backwardness of the Malays

In his speech on 20/4/1958 Tunku said “When compared with the other races, it is obvious the Malays still lag behind in achieving what the others have already attained. This was no secret to the Colonial government, yet no step was taken to equalize the position of the Malays, because that was its aim and policy.” This was definitely due to the ‘divide and rule’ policy practiced by the British. The British planned the backwardness of the Malays so that they were less educated than the immigrants. Thus, there was no evidence of any Anglo-Malay school ever established in the country. On the other hand, there were quite a number of Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Tamil schools founded and operated in the urban areas to cater for the children of the Chinese and Indian immigrants. This effort was to make sure that the immigrants were educated and later could take over the trades and administration from the British should the colony master need to leave the colony. Furthermore the immigrants at that time were still loyal to their motherland and even sent part of their income to their family back home. They did not possess any sort of loyalty to the Rulers (Sultans) of the Malay States. On the other hand, the British believed that the Malays as the natives should not be given opportunities to gain access to modern education system since they were scared that educated natives will know their rights and strive for autonomy. Furthermore the British has had a bad experience with the uprising of the Indians under Mahatma Gandhi in India. As a result the British has designed an education system for the Malays whereby only the children of the royalties and the nobles could get access to, and leaving the great majority of the natives to get as minimum education as possible. Tunku addressed this inequality in education in one of his speech when he lamented,

*“If we examine the position closely, we will find that the Malays are still far behind in many fields. The main factor creating this situation is that there are very few people with high education among the Malays. So, being convinced of this, all our efforts are being concentrated on improving this perplexing situation...”*

The racial disintegration was obviously the product of the British policy. Racial polarization in Malaya was inevitable. This racial segregation was inherited from the British, as explained by Tunku in his speech on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1968. He said,

*“For hundreds of years we have been made to regard ourselves as Malays, Chinese, Indians and so on - educated as such and grouped as such in all social and other activities from schools to clubs”.*

In consequence the British should be held responsible for the growth of discontentment amongst various races in the newly formed country, which further add fuel to the volatility of the composition, just like a time bomb waiting to blast.

2. the Malay language and English

In his speech delivered on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1957, barely a month after independent, the speaker stressed that “...It has been agreed that the national system of education in this country must aim to make Malay the national language of the country. This is a language commonly spoken by the Malayan people no matter what may have been their race of origin...” A year later on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1958, the speaker further emphasized “I would like to stress the fact that the Malay language (as stated in the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya) will remain and will be the only national language; we have made no compromise in this matter.” On the same sentiment, later in his speech delivered on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966 Tunku reiterated that,

*“Although it is provided in the Constitution that Malay should be the national language, the English language which had long been need in these territories of Malaysia when we were under the British rule, must continue. However much we like to introduce our national language as the sole language of this country, the fact remains that the qualification to higher education has still to be through the English medium of instruction, and without English schooling it is not possible for anyone to obtain entry into higher places of learning, whether at home or abroad. Even our own universities at home are still compelled to use the English language as the medium of instruction...”*

It was very clear at that time that the people of Malaysia need to be at least bilingual. They need to master the Malay language since it is the national language, and at the same time they need to be proficient in English since English is a language for education and business. However there were certain quarters in Malaysia at that time belittling the national language saying that they have no future even if they master the language. To them the language will never be able to take them anywhere. Thus they were more comfortable to communicate in their mother tongue or learn the language of the world, i.e. English. Conversely they were certain quarter who refused to learn English language, regarding the language belongs to the colonialists and the non-believers. Tunku was trying very hard to convince his audience to change their beliefs. To him the citizen of Malaysia must master their national language. In line with this premise, later in the same speech he recapitulated,

*“Those who are opposed to the National Language are not true Malaysians, for if they are true Malaysians they must realize that all independent countries must have a language of their own. If they want to enjoy the prestige and glory of being independent they must value the sovereignty and independence of their country.”*

3. the economic imbalance between the people

Tunku inherited the helm of Malaya from the British. During British occupation, due to their “Divide and Rule’ policy, the gap between the rich and the poor were very significant. Not only there were economic divides between races, but also within races. These divides has further lead to disparity between the people that eventually escalated into discontentment between different races in the young nation. Tunku realized this phenomenon and addressed it in his speech delivered on 21 September 1957. In the speech he said,

*“There is we feel still a very wide gap in the life of the people in this country. Those who are rich are very rich and those who are poor are very poor. There are also those who are hail and hearty but there are also those who are sick destitute...”*

Nonetheless the economic imbalance was not effectively dealt with by Tunku’s administration. Twelve years after this speech, on 13 May 1969, the discontentment has exploded into a bloody racial riot between the Malays and the Chinese.

#### 4. education programs for the Malays

Realizing how backward the Malays were, Tunku stressed on the importance of the native especially in the rural areas to be given opportunities to obtain formal education. During the British era the Malays as natives were given very little opportunity in education. Generally the British education policy for the Malays is just to make them ‘able to read and slightly better than their parents’. In line with this fact, his administration has embarked on formulating education policies to get the Malays an access to education, firstly at the elementary, then followed by secondary, and lastly the tertiary levels. This can be evidenced from his speech presented on 14 May 1958, where Tunku said,

*“This education policy provides the opportunity for Malay children from the kampongs [villages] to obtain secondary and technical education. In colonial days comparable institutions were located in the large towns; now we are bringing the schools to the very doors of the kampongs.”*

In the same speech he further reiterated “If we look back we find that the decline of the Malays in the past was due to the lack of interest by our forbears in the whole field of education...”

Thus, Tunku’s administration has introduced policies in order to tackle education problems amongst the people especially the Malays. In this endeavour Tunku explained,

*“The Education Committee led by Dato’ Abdul Razak laid down an education policy, and it put forward recommendations to establish secondary schools so that Malays would no longer be denied education. If there was no building or accommodation for the boys then they could learn under the trees. This policy was aimed at giving the boys in the kampongs education right up to secondary education.”*

On the similar concern in his speech presented on 20 April 1958, the speaker said,

*“It can be done by giving the Malays a useful education so that they will be free to earn a livelihood and carve for themselves careers, by becoming lawyers, engineers and so forth, or else working with mining companies, etc.”*

He later explained his plan, “The first stage is one of giving as much education as possible to Malay children, whether in towns or villages, whether rich or poor, and education which will enable them to go for higher studies so that they can obtain degrees in the fields of medicine, engineering, etc.”

#### 5. Malays and Islam

The Malays hold steadfastly to Islam. Malaysian Constitution defines Malay as a Muslim. Therefore, constitutionally Malay will lose his/her Malay special rights and privileges should he/she converts to other religion. On the other hand, if non-Malay converts to Islam, he/she would be regarded as and treated as Malay. In most cases he/she will be awarded with Malay rights. In his speech delivered on 20 April 1958, Tunku touched on the bond between the Malays and Islam, the religion that they hold on to stalwartly. He said,

*“If a man whose ancestors are Malay should forsake Islam and embrace Christianity or such like he will simultaneously lose his Malay nationality, according to the present-day definition. On the other hand if a person is Chinese or Siamese and embraces Islam we do not look upon him as Siamese or Chinese but as Malay.”*

#### 6. the discontentment as a source of conflict

The backwardness of the sons of the soil in economic and development sectors has led to discontentment. The Malays have to accept their fate that they were left unattended by the former ruler (the British) in their own land and seeing others (the immigrants brought in by the British from India and China) prosper before their eyes. At the same time the Malays have to accept the proposal by the British to recognize the immigrants and award citizenship to them, as a condition for independent. This catch twenty-two situation has really put them in a dilemma. On one end they have the colonial master’s proposal to take the immigrants as their country-mates, and on the other end is their opportunity to be free from the British occupation. If they accept the proposal, they will gain their independence, but has to share their country with the immigrants who are better of than them in terms of economic stand and education. If they reject the proposal, they will never get the chance to govern their own country and has to bow to the colonial master. Worst still, the Malays had been under the Western colonization for more than 400 years, starting with the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511. In the end, the Malays accepted the proposal but with a condition that there must be a level playing field. The Malays must have some special rights and privileges in education and economic sectors. The British and the leaders of the immigrants somehow agreed with the terms. But not for long when the dissatisfaction resurfaced again. The tense situation has prompted the then Chief Minister, Tunku to address in his speech on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1959. He said,

*“On the other side there is political thoughts abound in this country that one particular community is favoured in preference to the others, e.g. the others think that the Malays are favoured and enjoy all the amenities and privileges that are denied to others, and that such amenities and privileges should be shared equally.”*

Nonetheless, later in the speech he further explained “Unfortunately the Malays rather than try to better them selves have started to play on the issues of the advantage the

others have over us.” This statement explains why after being given supports and subsidies by the government, most of the Malays are still lag behind, even until today.

7. the Malays has no intention to dominate others

As discussed earlier, the dissatisfaction in the hearts of the people of Malaya in the early years of self-government was due to the economic imbalance and political squabbling. Whilst the Malays were not satisfied because of the smaller economic cake allocated to them, they still had a vast control over the political decision of the country. This is due to their majority in number in certain states especially in the northern and eastern parts of the peninsular. Nonetheless, the Chinese, even though they controlled the economic activities and had a bigger access to the wealth of the country, has less political say. Thus, the discontentment in these two powerful domains had lead to a very precarious situation of the newly formed nation-state. Consequently, the Chinese had accused the Malays of trying to dominate other races in terms of political decisions. The Malays however through their political leaders in the Coalition, tried to deny the accusation in the name of unity. In the confused situation, Tunku stood up to reconcile the two antagonistic races. As evidenced in a speech delivered on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1965 Tunku said,

*“If it were really the intention of the Malays to dominate the other races, we could have made peace with Indonesia at all cost, and this would ensure the majority of the Malays by 105 million.”*

At that time Malaysia and Indonesia were involved in a serious arm confrontation. This was due to Indonesia’s resistance to the formation of a new nation named Malaysia, from a confederation of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo (Sabah) on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1963. As a matter of fact, the natives of Malaysia and Indonesia came from the same root and were regarded as Malays. Should these two predominantly Malay nations be united, the Malays will definitely outnumber other races in the region and politically control the whole Southeast Asia. But anyhow, as stressed by Tunku the Malays of Malaysia were not voracious of power and had no intention to dominate other country mates. They subscribed to the spirit of unity and upheld power sharing, even with the minorities.

#### Conclusion

From the speeches of Tunku, one tend to understand the dilemma of the Malays in the early days of independent. Apparently same like other races in this world, the Malays wanted to establish a free and a sovereign nation. On the other hand they have to pay a hefty price for their freedom from their colony master that is to grant citizenship to the Chinese and Indians, brought in by the British. For too long they have been suppressed by the British, being left in the villages to live their traditional lives, the Malays were so backward and so impoverished. They were uneducated and have no strength. The ‘divide and rule policy’ implemented by the British has segregated the Malays from their Chinese and Indian country mates. The Malays in the villages (and the Indians in the rubber estates) were economically weak, as compared to the Chinese who stayed in the towns and cities. Obviously more businesses and education opportunities can be found in the towns and urban areas as compared to the villages and rural areas. So the Malays were very apprehensive about their future days, what if after the independent their lives will never be better. This trepidation has lead to discontentment towards their immigrant country mates. Eventually the discontentment later culminated into a violent racial riots.

From the rhetorical analysis however it can be concluded that the speaker while addressing Malay issues showed a very consistent stand. This can be evident from his statements, claims and arguments. Additionally, the analysis showed that Tunku has a very clear, organized and focused thought on the matters surrounding the Malays, their past, their bleak future and their dilemma. These notions had served as his underlying considerations in planning for the future of his nation, Malaysia. Nevertheless, Tunku was forced to resign following the racial clash of 1969. He was held responsible by certain quarters in his own Malay party (the United Malay National Organization) for the disturbance due to his weak policy in handling the discontentment of the Malays. In addition, Tunku was accused by his ambitious party comrades of being too indulgent to the non-Malays. And in consequence, due to the sentiment, the nation has lost a brilliant and tolerant statesman who has charted the path to Malayan independent.

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