

Theme Ib: Pursuit of National Unity



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Let them burn and we shall clap our hands.” And “if the Buddhists wish to have another barbecue, I will be glad to supply the gasoline and a match

Madame Nhu

¹ <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-35/remembering-of-thich-quang-duc-and-his-self-immolation/>

Criteria for Evaluation

1. Territorial Unity: Governments are able to ensure the integrity of their borders are protected from within and beyond
2. Governments are able to maintain the territorial boundaries of various ethnic communities without inciting riots
3. Whether the masses identify with the policies of the state
4. Whether the policies implemented by governments compromise the distinct identity of various ethnic groups

Ai. Ideology

1. Employment of ideologies that served as a common set of values for the ethnically diverse population to rally around, therefore fostering a common identity that transcended ethno-religious lines, centring more around a national identity.
 - a. Indonesia's Pancasila composed of
 - i. Believe in the one and only God
 - ii. Nationalism
 - iii. Humanitarianism
 - iv. Social Justice
 - v. Democracy

Pancasila was enforced within the Indonesian youth and in government parties under Suharto, serving as a common set of values for the over 1300² ethnic groups in Indonesia and a source of pride due to its uniquely Indonesian composition.

Probe: However, Pancasila was used mostly in Aceh as an attempt to dilute the Aceh culture and population by undertaking a policy of transmigration. Amalgamated in the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) insurgency in 1976

- b. Singapore's shared values
 - i. Nation before community, society above self
 - ii. Family as the basic unity of society
 - iii. Community support and respect for the individual
 - iv. Conflict, not consensus
 - v. Racial and Religious Harmony

The shared values ensured that not only will a racially and religiously diverse Singapore still bare commonalities with each other, but our eastern roots are still preserved in the face of increasing liberal western influences in the form of media.

Probe: However, Muslim Singaporeans still have the propensity to dress, eat and behave similarly to the Muslims in the middle east while isolating themselves from the locals,³ implying that the Muslims are not fully integrated.

- c. The Laotian government sought to inculcate a national identity among its populace regardless of ethnicity. The use of 3 general classifications, Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Sung emphasised the commonality of a Lao nationality. While they are united by a Lao nationality that transcends ethnic differences, they still are permitted to continue their unique cultural practices

Probe: However, the Pathet Lao subjected the Hmong ethnic group to re-education camps and hard physical labour, killing many due to their collaboration with the US to drive the Vietnamese and Laotian communists out of southern Laos

- 2. Governments were not able to achieve national unity due to the employment of ideologies that the populace not only did not resonate with, but also suffered under due to the flawed policies that it created.
 - a. Diem's "Personalism" placed Diem at the apex of a moral hierarchy, justifying the state's pervasive control in the lives of the people. More importantly, it was a justification for authoritarian rule (forcing the Chinese to choose between ROV citizenship and losing their right to do business) and nepotism (Nhu as the leader of Can lao, Luyen as the Ambassador to the UK and Can as in charge of Hue).
 - b. "Burmese Way to Socialism" was meant as a national ideology for the entire Burmese populace to identify with. However, its appeal was undermined as not only did it result in a disastrous attempt at autarky (1.7% growth in the 1980s) due to its closed door and expatriation policies, but the minority did to favour it as evident by at least 24 separatist factions (1980s)
- 3. Governments were able to achieve national unity due to the employment of ideologies that were able to amend and reconcile initial divisions in society by looking past religious and racial differences
 - a. Rukunegara, following the 1969 racial riots,
 - i. Belief In God
 - ii. Loyalty to King and Country
 - iii. Sanctity of the Constitution
 - iv. Rule of Law
 - v. Good Behaviour and Morality, served as a common focus and set of values for the multi-ethnic population instead of respective ones found in different religions which had plunged Malaysia into civil chaos
 - b. Sukarno reconciled religious differences by amending the first principle to remove the Islam-exclusive clause while Suharto reconciled political differences

³ The Straits Times 23 January 1988, Gap between Malays and others a fact of life.

by forcing parties to adopt Pancasila as their political foundation. This enabled Suharto to achieve near total control by bringing political homogeneity and thus compelling the majority of the population to bow to his rule.

Probe: In Aceh where elections of governor and regents required Suharto's approval, this marginalising indigenous candidates and preventing them from participating in formal politics. A key reason for the GAM insurgency

Aii. Education

1. Education was used to emphasise national heroes and symbols, evoking nationalist pride in all its citizens as heroes representing the population, regardless of race or religion were glorified.
 - a. Sukarno used the Battle of Surabaya to emphasise his role as a player in the struggle for Independence while Suharto used it to emphasise the military's role in fighting for Indonesia. Indonesia's gallant struggle for independence and acts of heroism during these events served as a common point for the over 1300 ethnic groups in Indonesia to rally around and take pride in
 - b. The Institute of History was set up to highlight and increase knowledge of patriotic Vietnamese, such as the Trung sisters who led a revolt against the Han Dynasty and Tran Hing Dao who led a heavily outnumbered Vietnamese forces to defeat Mongol invasions. A recurring theme of resistance against foreign aggression during the Indochina war against colonial France
2. The employment of language policies in schools established a common platform of communication which facilitates interracial interaction. This ensures that in countries with a significant majority, there would be no segregation due to communication barriers
 - a. In Singapore, English is used as the medium of instruction in schools and the country's lingua franca. By easing and ensuring constant interaction between children of different stocks, harmonious coexistence is promoted as misunderstandings are prevented. They will grow up to be more tolerant of each other having spend a majority of their childhood intermingling.
 - b. Indonesia's Pendidikan Karakter (Character Education) saw employment of Bahasa Indonesia to conduct public education, a government attempt to facilitate communication amongst a heavily diverse population (1300 ethnic groups). Successful as over 90% was able to converse in it.

Probe: However this was at the expense of minorities such as the 1967 "Basic Policy for the Solution of the Chinese Problem" which close down all but one (Harian Indonesia) newspapers and banned the Chinese script from public display.

3. Education policies only exacerbated divisive religious and racial sentiments, resulting in disillusionment from those religions and races marginalised and a fracture along religious and racial lines.
 - a. 1967 saw Malay become the national language and a compulsory subject. 1987 saw all primary and secondary English schools converting to the Malay medium. However, vernacular schools were allowed. This not only resulted in dropouts

(2/3 children in Orang Asli villages), but divisive effects extended to limited interaction and exacerbating the communal hue of Malaysian society.

- b. Sarit used the “carrot and stick” method towards Islamic Pondocks in South Thailand, funding them as long as they taught the Thai language stipulated by MOE or faced forced closure. However, the Muslims regarded government efforts as an attempt to inculcate their children with conflicting values and moved underground instead of complying, laying the ground for 2 decades of separatist violence.⁴

Aiii. Religion

1. Devised policies build around the religious identities of the populace, their adoption of common religious customs made the population able to identify with the government’s policies, aiding in national unity
 - a. Suharnouk leveraged on Theravada Buddhism by using key Buddhist principles in his Sangkrum’s ideology apart from anti-corruption and Khmer nationalism. Furthermore, by adopting traditional Buddhism, it won the allegiance of rural priests who commanded influence.
 - b. Sarit build his 1957-1963 “Benevolent Paternalism” around Buddhism, making it a main feature of his regime, funding many religious schools, promised development in Northern Thailand which was dominated by Buddhist monks, thus gaining their’s, and the populace who looked up to them support.
2. Religious policies employed undermined the religions of minority populace by privileging the customs of one religion over the other, resulting in a more fractious and divisive populace around religious lines.
 - a. 1961 State Religion Bill saw U Nu making Buddhism the state religion of Burma. Another 1961 policy banned the slaughter of cows and consumption of beef. U Nu angered the non-buddhist minority.
 - b. Diem has been biased towards Catholics politically and economically. Evident during the 1963 Buddhist Crisis when Buddhist were prohibited from displaying Buddhist flags during Vesak celebrations in Hue. A few days later, Catholics were allowed to fly religious flags. Visceral scenes like self immolating monks fuelled public dissent towards Diem, fragmenting the population by religious lines

Micro-comparison: Both U Nu and Diem discriminated against a segment of the population that is almost as large as or is the majority. Accelerating their downfall as their rule is not opposed by a fairly rural fraction like in other cases, but a large percentage.

Bi. Accommodationist

1. Accommodationist policies employed became a signal for ethnic groups to take matters into their own hands by trying to accentuate their respective identities which resulted in a more fractious populace by ethnic lines

⁴ Liow, J. (2004). *The Pondok Schools of Southern Thailand: Bastion of Islamic Education or Hotbed of Militancy?* . S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

- a. After the disastrous state religious bill, U Nu, in an attempt to alleviate pressure, sought to accommodate to the Shans by conceding to their demands for quasi-autonomous state. However, this success galvanised other ethnic minorities to demand for the same.
- b. The social contract in Malaysia accepted the status quo of Bumiputera's political primacy and economic prowess of the Chinese. While many Malays felt that their interests have been pushed back to accommodate the Chinese, the non-Malays felt discriminated. May 1961 riots are evidence of how a fragile social contract was broken to when Gerakan and other Chinese-majority party attained greater power in the election.

Probe: However, Malay able to solve