

MALAY POLITICAL HEGEMONY AND THE RESPONSE OF MALAYSIAN
CHINESE : A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS
AND GUILDS (HUATUAN), 1969 –1999

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role and influence of the Chinese associations and guilds which are known as Huatuan in response to the Malay political hegemony in Malaysia. Malay political hegemony which was entrenched after the riots of 13 May 1969 witnessed the full control of the Malay political elites over various sectors in the country and subsequently resulted in the encroachment of Chinese rights and interests. The failure of Chinese political parties to function as guardian of Chinese interests under Malay hegemony has given rise to the ascendancy of Huatuan as a political actor in Malaysia. The predicament and dilemmas of Chinese community is analysed under the framework of ethnic competition and conflicts. Whereas the political role and influence of Huatuan is examined by elucidating its mobilisation as interest group. The result of this study suggests, firstly, the struggle of Huatuan is instigated by the demands of equal rights because the implementation of public policies which emphasized the Malay agendas seem to have undermined the civil rights of the non-Malays. Secondly, the ascendancy of Huatuan as a political group which is able to deliver impact on the position of UMNO/BN has caused the state to co-opt and control or to undermine the Huatuan movement. Thirdly, actions against Huatuan has created fragmentation and contestation which resulted in the formation of pressure groups and compromise groups in the movement. These actions ostensibly aimed to marginalize those Huatuan which are using pressure in their interest articulations. However, this aim has not been successfully materialised as these organisations, such as Dongjiaozong which acted as a staunch guardian of Chinese interests, continue to gain the mass support of its community. Fourthly, the Huatuan movement which was communal in nature in the beginning has transformed into a non-communal interest group and developed as a civic movement which demands for democratic and civil rights. This tendency is manifested in the Suqiu Appeal. And finally, the Huatuan movement has successfully played its role as an interest group through the involvement in politics by pursuing the Chinese interest as a whole and as such, it is able to make certain contributions in the process of the formation of civil society in Malaysia.

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