Youth Organisations’ Participation in the Nation Building of Malaysia

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The third sector (civil society) lies between the state (first sector: politics) and the market (second sector: economy). Research on the importance of the third sector on economic and social development is negligible. The hitherto lack of interest from mainstream economists can be explained in terms of the complexity of the third sector, difficulties of quantifying its impact, and the fact that the impact of changes within the third sector can only be ascertained over a long period of time. To date, studies concerning civil society and philanthropy in Malaysia are rare in comparison with other areas of studies.

However, the third sector has gained attention in recent years in relation to its contribution to national development. The investigation of the Malaysian third sector, especially youth organisations, is timely because of the growing government and public concern for youth in Malaysia. On the one hand, it is important to note that young people are the major category of population in Malaysia; they comprise about 60 percent of the total population. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note the difference in the Malaysian definition of ‘Youth’ and its consequences. Youth in Malaysia is defined as people aged between 15 to 40 years old. Recently, the pressure on making government more transparent under the new political leadership has also made it more feasible to undertake research on this subject. In addition, various other issues such as social, economic and political dependency and those related to political liberalisation or democratisation in this borderless world also increase the significance of this investigation in Malaysia. This research on the political economy of Malaysian youth organisations will hopefully contribute to the process of nation-building besides enriching our body of knowledge on youth.

The interaction between youth organisations, political parties and government will be evaluated historically to establish the significance of the political and economic linkages between them and the interrelationships between individuals in these organisations. The investigation will examine these relationships from the emergence of youth organisations in the early 1900s to the present. The study will also focus on the specific contribution of these organisations to the national good but will also address the issue of the career development and personal success of individual personalities.

One of the crucial methodological issue that needs to be addressed in order to handle source material is that the material related for this research is widely scattered and primarily comprises newspaper, official and unofficial reports, and ‘grey’ information. It is another focus of this paper to discuss the reliability of information and its relevance to national development while seeking ways and means to validate and analyse this valuable yet less easily managed kind of information.