Ethnic Accommodation and Democracy in Multiethnic Countries: Comparative Study of Malaysia and Singapore

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Abstract:
This study is a comparative analysis of democratic accommodation in multiethnic countries. In this study I analyze two cases of Southeast Asian countries: Malaysia and Singapore. These two neighboring countries have a similar ethnic composition and have been relatively stable over the past several decades. These two cases are suitable for comparative analysis of ethnic accommodation in multiethnic societies, and especially in the comparative investigation of two approaches, the consociational and the integrative approach, which have long been debated. In Malaysia, parties are associated with a particular ethnic group, and these ethnic parties, then collaborate to form a coalition government. Politics in Singapore, on the other, are dominated by one single party, which includes all three major ethnic groups. The Malaysian case can be called a “consociational approach,” which is based on ethnic parties forming a coalition government, whereas Singapore’s method can be called an “integrative approach,” which combines ethnic groups into a large, multiethnic party through institutions. The comparative analysis of these cases focuses on four aspects of each system: ethnic groups, party system, government, and electoral system. Through the analysis, then, it is revealed that the ethnic accommodation and political stability of both cases are based on the limit of civil liberty.

Keywords:
Multiethnic country, Consociational approach, Integrative approach, Malaysia, Singapore
Introduction

This study is an inquiry into democratic accommodation in multiethnic countries. The third wave of democratization began in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War (Huntington 1991). In many developing countries with multiple ethnic groups, however, the democratic transitions of the 1990s led to ethnic conflict and sometimes to outright civil war, the most serious of which occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992–1995 (Kaldor 2001: Ch. 3; Ignatieff 2003; Zahar 2005).

The third wave of democratization began in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War (Huntington 1991). In many developing countries with multiple ethnic groups, however, the democratic transitions of the 1990s led to ethnic conflict and sometimes to outright civil war, the most serious of which occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992–1995 (Kaldor 2001: Ch. 3; Ignatieff 2003; Zahar 2005).

The bad news for political scientists and practitioners who promote adoption of democratic systems was that the Bosnian civil war that started just after the new nation’s first democratic general election. Bosnian civil war is an outstanding case that was resulted from newly introduced free and multiparty competitive election. In Kenya, still in 2007, the general and presidential election resulted in bloody violence among main ethnic groups. Other multiethnic countries, especially in Africa where many countries are multiethnic and also democratized in 1990s failed to consolidate a democratic political system and tumbled into serious ethnic conflict or civil war.

The relation between democratic elections and ethnic conflict is not a coincidence. Analyses of the process culminating in the Bosnian civil war have indicated that the first free election caused the formation of ethnic parties led by ethnocentric leaders, so that the election became a competition between ethnic groups (Mansfield and Snyder 2005; Snyder 2000). Competition between identities has almost no room for compromise because one’s ethnic identity cannot be changed through negotiation; therefore a zero-sum game is almost inevitable. Given this situation, democratic transition or consolidation cannot be attained in multiethnic countries without leading them into ethnic violence or civil war. In other words, how can accommodation between ethnic groups be realized and sustained under liberal democratic political system?

This study attempts a partial answer to this question. I analyze two cases of Southeast Asian countries: Malaysia and Singapore. Both are multiethnic countries that have remained relatively stable over the past several decades. In addition, these two neighboring countries have a similar ethnic composition, which includes three ethnic groups—Malays, Chinese, and Indians—who are completely different from each other in their race, language, religion, history, lifestyle, and so on. The ethnic groups could easily come into serious conflict; indeed, they did experience violent conflict in the 1960s. However, they have had almost no serious ethnic violence in the last few decades, although they have competitive elections.

The two countries use different political approaches to accommodate ethnic
groups in party politics. In Malaysia, parties are associated with a particular ethnic group, and these ethnic parties then collaborate to form a coalition government. Politics in Singapore, on the other, are dominated by one single party, which includes all three major ethnic groups. As I will explain later, the Malaysian case can be called a “consociational approach,” which is based on ethnic parties forming a coalition government, whereas Singapore’s method can be called an “integrative approach,” which combines ethnic groups into a large, multiethnic party through institutions.

Therefore, these two cases are suitable for comparative analysis of ethnic accommodation in multiethnic societies, and especially for the comparative investigation of two approaches, the consociational and the integrative approach, the benefits of which have long been debated. However, in this study, I will not attempt to judge which approach is better for multiethnic accommodation, partially because the two particular cases are not fully representative of these respective approaches. Therefore, I will analyze the mechanisms of inter-ethnic accommodation of these two cases, extract the elements effective for ethnic harmony, and investigate constitutional or institutional possibilities for consolidating democracy in multiethnic countries.

In the next section, I will describe the two approaches to political (or institutional) accommodation of multiple ethnic groups. Then, the cases of Malaysia and Singapore will be analyzed individually.

1. The Two Approaches to Accommodation in Multiethnic Countries

The question of how to design constitutional or electoral systems to accommodate multiple ethnic groups in a country has been discussed since the 1960s. Two approaches to constitutional design were presented. One is “the consociational approach” of Arendt Lijphart, which consists of ethnic parties based on vertically integrated ethnic groups and a coalition government accommodating the political elites of each ethnic group horizontally. The other is “the integrative approach” of Donald L. Horowitz, which gives ethnic groups the incentives to cooperate and merge into multiethnic parties through institutional design. Both approaches have been applied in multiethnic developing countries for the purpose of designing new constitutions or electoral laws. In some cases, they have succeeded in moderating ethnic violence and accommodating conflicting ethnic groups; while, in others, they have not succeeded.

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1 The name of this approach is various by authors. In recent work, Horowitz (2014) used the term “centripetalism” like Reilly (2001). Other authors call “incentive-oriented theory” (Reynolds 2011) or “aggregate approach” (Hicken 2008). In this paper, I use “integrative approach” following Sisk (1996).
The debate between these two approaches has continued for a long time, involving many scholars including Lijphart and Horowitz themselves. Here, I briefly introduce the two approaches and then indicate the problems inherent in each.

**The consociational and integrative approaches**

Back in the 1960s, Lijphart (1969) began his investigation of democratic constitutional design in deeply divided societies, calling his model “consociational democracy”. The model was later adapted for comparative analysis of “plural societies” (Lijphart 1977). Initially, it was based mainly on European countries, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria, which have social cleavages based on religion, ideology, and/or language. Subsequently, it was used to analyze other cases, including Third World countries like Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus, Nigeria, and Malaysia’s regime from 1955 to 1969.

The consociational approach seeks to avoid serious conflict between ethnic groups by means of cooperation between political elites representing each ethnic group. In other words, each ethnic group has its own political party and sends its representatives into the legislative body. Major ethnic parties then form a coalition government in the legislature to negotiate and cooperate at the level of government policymaking.

Lijphart indicates four elements of the consociational approach: (1) grand coalition, (2) segmental autonomy, (3) proportionality, and (4) mutual veto. First, as already noted, political elites from each main group constitute the grand coalition government, and they negotiate, compromise, and cooperate within the coalition. Second, these ethnic groups must have a high degree of internal autonomy. Third, to address the concerns of each group, proportional representation and proportional allocation of civil service positions and public funds should be granted. This feature is typically institutionalized as a Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system, and it is preferred to majoritarian or plural electoral systems, which are generally characterized by a disproportionate relation between the percentage of votes that a party receives and the number of seats awarded to that party in the legislative body. Such disproportions undermine a sense of fairness and are likely to cause a conflict between ethnic groups. Fourth, a mutual veto, for the minority group elite in particular, should be granted on vital issues (Lijphart 1977: 25).

Since democratic theory at that time was mainly focused on political participation by general citizens and on competition between political elites, this consociational approach was an epoch-making model when conceived. Lijphart's
contribution to democratic theory was that cooperation among elites is necessary to make democracy work in divided societies.

On the other hand, the integrative approach presented by Horowitz criticizes consociationalism’s representation system based on ethnic parties, and it instead offers incentives for ethnic groups to cooperate with or accommodate each other before or through elections (Horowitz 1985; 1991). The core feature of the integrative approach is the institutional setting of its electoral system. To accommodate ethnic groups, it introduces what Benjamin Reilly called the “preferential vote” (PV) system, which is also known as the “alternative votes” (AV) system in Australia, “supplementary vote” (SV) in Sri Lanka, and “single transferable vote” (STV) in Ireland (Reilly 2001: 18-19).

These electoral systems, in contrast to PR, are basically pluralist or majoritarian ones. AV and SV, in particular, require an absolute majority to win a seat representing a particular constituency. However, these electoral systems require voters to indicate their preference of candidates in order, and not just a single choice. If no candidate wins a majority of first preferences, the votes of the lowest-ranking candidate are delivered to other candidates according to the voters’ second preference. Therefore, candidates must seek not only first-preference votes but also the second-preference votes of persons who back other candidates. This unique mechanism to decide winners gives candidates an incentive to cooperate with each other. If electoral competition is held between candidates of different ethnicities, this mechanism leads to cooperation or accommodation between members of different ethnic groups within the electoral process.

Critics and debates

The debates between the two approaches have uncovered some criticisms or problems regarding each one². First, PR, one of the most significant components of the consociational model, helps small parties to obtain seats in the legislature, and can thus result in fragmentation of the party system, which (especially in developing countries) can in turn lead to instability of the parties or the political system. Second, electoral competition between ethnic parties can strengthen people’s sense of ethnic identity and escalate conflicts among ethnic groups. As Rabshka and Shepsle (1972: Ch. 3) indicated, competition between ethnic parties tends to become exceedingly polarized. In fact, ethnic party leaders are inclined to emphasize their ethnic identity to mobilize voters of

² The following criticisms are summarized in my previous article (Kanamaru 2013). The criticisms on the consociational approach are also summarized by Reynolds (2011: 20), Boggards (2006: 121) and Rothchild and Roeder (2005).
their ethnicity (Rothchild 1981). Thus, by nature, competition between ethnic parties will encourage polarization and make harmonizing the interests of ethnic groups more difficult (Wolff 2005: 63-64).

Third, coalitions among ethnic parties are not predictable, and if formed, will be unstable. Horowitz (1991: 139) objects that the consociational approach does not include any mechanisms to lead ethnic elites to cooperate. Particularly in a country that has experienced serious ethnic conflict, sometimes accompanied by violence, cooperating with other ethnic groups could be very difficult.

Fourth, the grand coalition will be fixed and government turnover will be difficult. Huntington’s definition of democratic consolidation emphasizes government turnover through free, fair, and regular elections, known as the “two-turnover hypothesis” (Huntington 1991: 267). Conversely, a consociational approach based on grand coalition government will maintain dominance by a single coalition (Barry 1975). Furthermore, proportional representation can reflect only the demographic component of ethnic groups nationwide. Horowitz (1985: 326) indicates that an election based on PR among ethnic groups is simply an “election as census.”

The integrative approach is also criticized, mainly by supporters of the consociational approach. First, the electoral systems, especially AV and SV, still result in disproportions between votes and seats, since there are variations on the majoritarian system. It can, like other majoritarian and plural systems, overrepresent major parties while smaller parties are underrepresented. This can undermine the legitimacy of the election itself. Second, incentives to cooperate with other ethnic groups cannot necessarily be expected, especially when disputes between ethnic groups are acute. Third, a single-member district system is not effective when the demographic distribution of ethnic groups is geographically separated. If one ethnicity constitutes a majority in a particular constituency, the majority group has no incentive to compromise with other minority groups. If this is the case in many districts across the country, the overall result of parliamentary general elections will be a predictable division across ethnic groups.

Finally, in actual practice, all of the countries that introduced the PV system in order to solve ethnic conflict have not yet achieved this goal. Fiji, which introduced AV in 1997, could not solve its ethnic disputes, and the result of one general election led to an ethnic revolt and a military coup (Reilly 2001: 105-112; Shoup 2008: Ch. 4). Sri Lanka, which introduced the SV system in 1978 (Reilly 2001: 112-124), also failed to establish harmony between ethnic groups and fell into a serious civil war. Not enough countries have adopted PV to permit a full evaluation of the integrative approach.
This study does not argue about which institutional approach will be better, in general, in harmonizing or accommodating ethnic groups at risk of conflict. There are various types of multiethnic countries. We must investigate under what conditions each model possibly works better. In addition, these two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive; their components could be mixed and a “hybrid” system could be elaborated (Wolff 2005). In fact, some actual cases are not ideal types of either approach, but rather, combine elements of each one in their systems.

The cases that I analyze in this study are not complete models of the two approaches. The Malaysian case, which I examine in the next section, was once identified as a consociational model by Lijphart. However, it has some features different from the ideal type. On the other hand, Singapore is similar to the integrative model, but again with certain differences. While presenting these cases in the following sections I will describe four aspects of each system: ethnic groups, party system, government, and electoral system.

2. Malaysia: Coalition between Ethnic Parties

Multiethnic society in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the most diverse multiethnic countries in the world. Two characteristics of Malaysian society must be noted. One is what J. S. Furnivall called “plural society.” He described Malaysian (called British Malaya at that time) society, similar to Indonesia, as “a society in which distinct social orders live side by side, but separately, within the same political unit” (Furnivall 1939: xv). The nation consists of three ethnic groups—Bumiputera, Chinese, and Indians—which are completely different in terms of their race, language, religion, history, and lifestyle. The majority group, Bumiputera (which means “sons of the soil” in the Malay language), is composed mainly of Malay people and includes some minority aboriginal people; Ibans in Sarawak, middle Borneo; and Kadazan/Dusun in Sabah, north Borneo. According to the 2010 census, Bumiputera represent 67.4% of the total population. The Chinese are

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3 Lijphart identified Malaysian politics in 1957-69 as “consociational democracy”. It is difficult to call the polity after 1969 “democracy”. But I will indicate some features of Malaysian politics as consociationalism at the following section.

4 Kato (1990) indicated that the ethnic classifications of “European,” “Chinese,” “Malays and other aboriginal people,” and “Tamil and other Indian people” were first used in the 1891 census, and that official ethnic group classifications of European, Malay, Chinese, and Indian have been in place since the 1911 census.

5 Within the Bumiputera group, the breakdown includes 63.1% Malays, 30.3% Ibans, and 24.5% Kadazan/Dusun. Some people claim membership in more than one ethnic
the second-largest ethnic group at 24.6%, followed by Indians with 7.3% and others at 0.7% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, *Census 2010*). These ethnic groups in Malaysia, as Furnivall observed, are not combined but mixed; i.e., they live in the same society, but in clearly distinguishable groups.

The other important characteristic of Malaysian society is the power relation between Malays and Chinese. Malays make up a large majority of the nation’s population, but Chinese are economically more affluent on average. **Table 1** shows the average income of each ethnic group. We can see that there remains a large income gap between Malays and Chinese, even though overall income levels have grown over time. **Table 2** reveals the class composition of each ethnic community. It shows that in 1970, most Bumiputeras were engaged in agriculture while most Chinese were in the working and middle classes. The class structure had changed substantially by 1990, but still most Bumiputeras were in the agricultural class whereas 40% of Chinese were middle-class. Although the situation improved through the 1980s and 1990s, thanks to nationwide economic development, the differential is still present. In sum, Malays have political power while the Chinese have economic power.

**Table 1: Average income of ethnic groups** (Malaysian Ringgit: RM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1984</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jesudason 1989: Ch. 4, Table 4-10.

**Table 2: Class composition of communities, 1970 and 1990** (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bumiputera</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Crouch 1996: 185, Table 4.

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group; hence, the sum of the percentages could exceed 100 percent.
Ethnic party system

Malaysian politics is based on ethnic parties. Three ethnic groups in Malaysia have formed their own ethnic parties. The largest party, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), is formed of Malays. UMNO was founded in 1946 in reaction to the British colonial government’s plan for Malayan union, which proposed giving the same citizenship to Chinese as to Malays. The Malays opposed this proposal and sought to keep their traditional Muslim king (the Sultan) as head of state. Then, to maintain the special position of the Malay people, Tun Dato Ong formed a Malay ethnic party. After the UMNO was created, Indians’ party the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) was formed in 1947. As supposed by the name, the MIC was a local branch of the Indian National Congress.

The Chinese have formed the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949. At first, the Chinese people had little concern with politics because they were divided into English-educated elite groups and Chinese-educated grassroots groups. In addition, grassroots Chinese were divided into smaller subgroups on the basis of the region from which they came. Moreover, these Chinese-educated people had simultaneously maintained Chinese nationality. However, the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 caused the Chinese people in Malaya to become united, and the British governor encouraged the English-educated Chinese to mobilize the Chinese masses as an ethnic group (Crouch 1996: Ch. 3; Chin 2002: 215-218).

Figure 1: Malaysian parties in government

These ethnic parties form a coalition, which was called the Alliance before 1969 and is now Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front in Malay). The coalition has dominated parliament, winning more than two-thirds of the seats in each election. Most
of the opposition parties are also ethnically based. One of the two largest opposition groups, the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), is a Muslim party, and most of the Muslims in Malaysia are Malays. The other, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), is officially multiethnic, but in actuality, almost all its supporters are Chinese.

**Coalition formation by ethnic parties**

Then, how did these ethnic parties form a coalition? The first coalition between the UMNO and MCA was formed in 1952 for a Kuala Lumpur municipal election. Together they won 9 seats out of 12, suggesting that a coalition of ethnic parties could win elections. In 1955 the MIC joined the coalition, which was named the Alliance. The electoral success of the Alliance was remarkable. In 1955, the Alliance won all nine seats in Johor state’s Assembly election, seven of nine in Muar city, and two of three in Malacca’s municipal election (Kaneko 2001: 61-62; Crouch 1996: 17-18). The formation of such a multiethnic coalition was promoted by the colonial government in the context of the Cold War. Especially after the formation of communist China, politics in Southeast Asian countries was threatened by communists. In Malaya, the British government helped the parties of the Alliance to stand against the Malaya Communist Party.

In 1963, the Malaysian Federation was formed, including the new states of Borneo and Singapore. The merger with Singapore, which is ruled by a multiethnic but Chinese-majority party, the People’s Action Party (as we will see at the next section), created difficulties in maintaining harmony between the Alliance, led by the Malay-dominated UMNO, and the PAP. Only two years later Singapore broke off from Malaysia. After the separation of Singapore, the PAP formed the Democratic Action Party (DAP) in Malaysia. The DAP, like the PAP, was a multiethnic party; however, most of its supporters were Chinese. It competed not only with the UMNO but also with the MCA, undermining ethnically balanced politics in Malaysia. The first election after the separation, in 1969, saw heated ethnic conflict between the UMNO-led coalition and the Chinese-supported DAP. Although, the DAP was too small to beat the Alliance, it could appeal to Chinese ethnic communalism on the basis of the discontent with that ethnic minority’s disadvantage. The DAP won only 13 seats, but it helped to reduce the Alliance’s number of seats from 89 to 66. A “declaration of victory” by the DAP supporters set off Malaysia’s most serious ethnic rioting in May 1969, killing hundreds of victims and causing the government to declare a state of emergency and shut down the parliament.

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6 It was officially reported that 196 people were killed in this riot which include 143
When parliamentary politics restarted in 1971, the UMNO-led Alliance government announced a New Economic Policy (NEP), intended to improve the social and economic position of Malays through rural and agricultural development and affirmative action. Rural development activity by the government is advantageous for the Malay people, since the Chinese and Indians live mainly in urban areas. Affirmative actions include ethnic quotas for college entrance and public-sector employment. Even in the private economic sector, the NEP set percentage goals for capital ownership by ethnicity; specifically, it aimed to have 30 percent capital ownership by Bumiputera in 1990, compared to only 1.9 percent in 1970. The NEP’s implementation became possible when the Alliance joined with other parties to form the BN grand coalition.  

Table 3: Ownership of Share Capital (at par value) of Limited Companies, 1970, 1990, 1995 (percentages): Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership group</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bumiputera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumiputera individuals and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutions</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust agencies</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bumiputera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominee Companies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-80; Seventh Malaysia Plan, 1996-2000  

Plurality system and gerrymandering

The coalition government formed by ethnic parties in multiethnic Malaysia seems to be a model of the consociational approach. However, the electoral system is quite different from the one recommended by Lijphart. One of the significant elements of consociational approach is the PR system because it can make minority Chinese and 25 Malays (Crouch 1996: 24).

7 Parties newly joining the coalition were the Gerekan, a Chinese-based party in Penang; the People’s Progressive Party in Perak; the Muslim party, PAS; and local parties in Borneo.
representation possible. However, a single-member district plurality (SMD) system has been adopted in Malaysia.

Then, why is the representation of each ethnic group possible under a plurality system in Malaysia? The minority representation can be realized by a sort of gerrymandering. The size of electoral districts varies considerably, and the redrawing of districts occurs frequently (Chin 2002: 212). As seen in Table 4, the largest constituency was 4.5 times as large as the smallest constituency as of 2004 (Brown 2007: 76). Under the strong control of the coalition government, seats of parliament are allocated carefully through gerrymandering. In addition, clientelistic electoral strategy called “money politics” gives advantage to the BN to win much support (Chin 2002: 217-218). Clientelism in Malaysia had been accelerated under the NEP which aimed rural area development and affirmative action for Bumiputera.

| Table 4: Distribution of constituency size in West Malaysia, 1986, 1995, and 2004 |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Year                | 1986     | 1995     | 2004*    |
| Largest constituency | 81,005   | 85,954   | 104,185  |
| Smallest constituency | 23,979   | 21,719   | 23,061   |
| Ratio               | 3.38     | 3.96     | 4.52     |

Note: *excluding Putrajaya. Source: Brown, 2007: 76.

3. Singapore: Integrating into Multiethnic Parties

**Multiethnic society in Singapore**

Singapore has the same three main ethnic groups as Malaysia, but the proportions are significantly different. According to the country’s 2010 census, the Chinese represented 74.1% of the population, Malays 13.4%, Indians 9.2%, and others 3.3% (Department of Statistics Singapore, Statistics of Singapore, 2010). The economic gap between ethnic groups, especially between Chinese and Malays, exists also in Singapore. Income level of Chinese is much higher than Malays as shown in Table 5. The income level seems to reflect education level. The percentage of Chinese university graduate is much higher than Malays (Table 6). Singapore, like Malaysia, had struggled for a long time to accommodate and integrate these ethnic groups into one nation.
Table 5: Monthly Household Income from Work, 2010 (Singapore Dollar)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>7,326</td>
<td>5,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>4,575</td>
<td>3,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>7,664</td>
<td>5,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,214</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 6: Education levels by Ethnicity, 2010 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below secondary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, the management strategy of multi-ethnic society is different from Malaysia. Singapore government under the People’s Action Party (PAP) has managed the ethnic groups to integrate into one nation, “Singaporean”. One of the most frequently used slogan of the PAP, “Singaporean Singapore” represents the ethnic accommodation strategy of the PAP government. The difference of ethnic management strategy between Singapore and Malaysia was one of the most significant reasons to separate these nations in 1965. The government has strictly prohibited ethnic assertion in public since it is “sensitive issue”. The authority dissolved most of the area where minority ethnic groups live (Malay in particular) in order to redevelop urban areas and housing estates. As will be seen later, public housing policy regulates the percentage of the dwellers by ethnic groups.

One-party dominance by People’s Action Party

The most outstanding character of Singapore party politics is one-party dominance by the PAP, which has had a governing role since 1959 when Singapore was granted self-government under British colonial control. Since 1968 when the opposition Barisan Socialis boycotted general election, the PAP has held almost all the seats in parliament, as shown in Table 7.
Table 7: The PAP’s electoral performance, 1968–2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General election</th>
<th>Total number of parliamentary seats</th>
<th>Number of seats won by PAP</th>
<th>PAP’s share of parliamentary seats (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>97.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


One party dominant system can be maintained not only because the PAP succeeded tangible economic development, but also because some restrictions were imposed on political activity especially to opposition parties. Singapore, in contrast to Malaysia, strictly prohibits ethnic political groups or ethnic parties. The Societies Act requires any association or voluntary group with more than ten members to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The authority does not permit any ethnic groups and parties to exist. Today there are 35 political parties, none of which are based on ethnic identification. The PAP itself is a multiethnic party with its members, MPs and cabinet members from all ethnic groups. It has often accused opposition candidates as “ethnic chauvinists” or “communalists” when the opposition candidates criticized the PAP government at election campaigns.

From 1968 to 1980, when the PAP held all seats in parliament, Malays constituted from 12.0% to 15.5% of the members while Indians represented 10.7% to 13.8%, as shown in Table 8. These percentages of MPs by ethnicity are close to the total percentage of each ethnic population. This could be possible since the PAP has been a multiethnic party. The percentages declined somewhat in the 1980s, when opposition parties could win a little of seats but subsequently it rose again.
Table 8: Minority representation in Singapore’s parliament, 1968–2001 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of General election</th>
<th>Malay MPs</th>
<th>Indian and Other MPs</th>
<th>Non-Chinese MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Introduction of GRC system

As in Malaysia, general elections in Singapore were held using an SMD plural system before the constitution, and the electoral laws were amended in 1988, introducing the unique Group Representative Constituencies (GRC) system just before the 1988 general election. Initially called the “Team MPs system” at the beginning, the GRC system asks voters to cast their votes for a team of candidates formed by a party. The team that wins a plurality of votes takes all the seats in that constituency (Tan 2013: 28). The GRC system took effect gradually: in 1988, approximately half of the seats in parliament were elected by GRC and the remaining seats by SMD; in 1991, when the next general election was held, GRC was used for 60 of the 81 total seats, and in 1997, it was used for 74 of 83 seats, or nearly 90 percent. For the most recent general election, held in 2011, constituencies included 12 SMDs and 15 GRC areas, each of which elected four, five, or six MPs out of 87 total seats (Tan 2013: 28).

The stated purpose of the GRC system was “to ensure the representation in Parliament of Members from the Malay, Indian, and other minority communities” (Article 39A(1), Singapore Constitution). Therefore, a GRC candidate team must include at least one member from Malay, Indian, or other minority communities. In this sense, GRC can be a sort of quota system to ensure ethnic-minority MPs.

While reforming its electoral system, Singapore also dispersed its ethnic groups geographically through public housing policy. The Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP), enacted in 1989, is regulated according to the ethnicity of the composition of dwellers in
public housing complexes which are called HDB flats (HDB means Housing Development Board). The EIP stipulates desirable percentages of ethnicity, from the neighborhood level to specific apartment complexes. Since almost 85 percent of Singapore's citizens live in HDB flats, this policy effectively dispersed voters geographically by ethnicity.

As with the GRC, the stated purpose of the EIP was to harmonize ethnic communities and integrate ethnic groups as one national citizenry, in this case by establishing ethnically mixed dwellings. Therefore, the GRC and EIP represent government policies designed to combine ethnic communities politically and geographically, eliminate ethnic politics, and integrate the people into one nation. However, these policies seem to be designed for making the electoral system and the geographic characteristics of constituencies politically favorable for the PAP. As shown in Table 7, the PAP lost its complete domination of parliamentary seats in the 1980s. Although the loss may seem to be negligible, the number of votes cast for the PAP was gradually decreasing. It was natural for the PAP government to reform the electoral system in a way that would be disadvantageous for opposition parties.

Some evidence can be presented that the aim of the GRC system was more than ensuring ethnic minority seats. First, the initial stated purpose of GRC was to create local self-governing units (Tan 2007: 56-57), but this official goal of the new scheme was changed soon after it was announced. Second, as shown in Table 8, the percentage of ethnic minority representation has not changed significantly since the GRC system was introduced (Tan 2007: 62). Even before its introduction, ethnic minorities were not underrepresented.

It can be said that the GRC is a double-edged sword for the PAP, since it will be a big defeat should the PAP lose one or more group constituencies. Nonetheless, the GRC can be more advantageous for the PAP. Third, “anchor” candidates, or very strong candidates who can attract many votes and lead their team to victory, are expected to give an advantage to the PAP. Ministers of the PAP government, including the Prime Minister and former PMs, can be anchor candidates. By forming a team together with weaker newcomers, they enable these new candidates to win seats. Since PAP has been in power for so long and has many present and former ministers, it has a sizable advantage here. For this reason, it can be presumed that the PAP envisioned gaining electoral advantage from the GRS system in its endeavors to continue its one-party rule (Hicken, 2008).
4. Comparing the Cases and Approaches

The cases of Malaysia and Singapore illustrate different approaches to ethnic accommodation, even though the two are relatively similar multiethnic societies. This concluding section compares the two approaches.

The Malaysian consociational approach

Malaysian politics is strongly characterized by coalition government consisting of three ethnic parties and NEP that is a kind of affirmative action for indigenous Malays and other aboriginal groups. As Lijphart (1977: 150-153) indicated, at least until 1969 Malaysian politics had features that fit the model of consociational democracy, and the country retains some characteristics common to the consociational approach. First, the most significant feature is that the party politics of Malaysia is generally based on ethnic parties. The coalition government, in particular, is composed of three ethnic parties that have a long history dating back to the 1940s. The integrative approach, on the contrary, resists the creation of ethnic parties in favor of multiethnic parties. Second, a coalition government has been formed by the main ethnic parties and continues in place today. Before 1969, this coalition government was called the Alliance and contained the UMNO, MCA, and MIC; after the racial riots of 1969, multiethnic coalition government was maintained under the name of BN, incorporating other small parties. Third, having consolidated this multiethnic coalition, the ruling parties are fixed and have dominated parliament. Since independence, coalition parties have always won more than two-thirds of parliamentary seats and never lost control of the government. This long period of dominance by the BN illustrates one problem with the consociational approach indicated by its critics.

Although Malaysian politics has some characteristics common to the consociational model, there are some differences, most notably in its electoral system. The consociational model includes the PR system, which can efficiently transfer ethnic proportions into the party system in parliament. However, Malaysia has instead used an SMD, plural system. Plural or majoritarian systems, theoretically, do not reflect ethnic cleavages since they tend to result in a gap between the percentages of votes and seats under the winner-takes-all principle. This proportionality problem, in general, benefits larger parties and is unfavorable to minority groups. In Malaysia, parliamentary seats are secured for minority ethnic groups through gerrymandering or redrawing electoral districts. This means, in effect, that Malaysian consociationalism is realized by undemocratic or authoritarian means.
The Singaporean integrative approach

Compared with Malaysia’s approach to ethnic accommodation, Singapore’s is quite different. First, party politics in Singapore is based on non-ethnic or multiethnic parties. The governing party, the PAP, is multiethnic and the government is quite eager to attenuate ethnicity in politics. It changed the electoral system from SMD to GRC as well as dispersing ethnic communities through the EIP. Second, the government has been formed by a single party rather than a coalition of ethnic parties. As the ruling PAP is multiethnic, ministers in government are also of various ethnicities. This arrangement is readily achievable since the PAP has been so dominant in parliamentary politics, winning a vast majority of seats. If the PAP were a single ethnic party and excluded other ethnic groups from government, it would be difficult to maintain a one-party dominant regime and stabilize politics in Singapore.

It is difficult to say that Singapore’s case fits the integrative approach since its electoral system differs from that advocated by the integrative approach. The integrative model recommends use of PV systems like the AV method used in Australia, but in Singapore the GRC system has been used since 1988. But both electoral systems aim to form (or give incentives to form) multiethnic parties, excluding ethnic competition from elections, by institutional means. In this sense, the case of Singapore can be seen as an integrative approach.

On the other hand, one-party dominance is a common factor in both Malaysia and Singapore. In Malaysia, the Alliance or BN has consistently held more than two-thirds of parliamentary seats and has continued to control the government without interruption. In Singapore as well, the PAP has had an absolute majority in parliament. In both cases, the governing party or coalition has stayed in power for decades since the country’s independence. Although this one-party dominance leads to a stable polity, undemocratic or authoritarian means of governing have been used in both cases. Particularly in Singapore, strict prohibitions of party or political group formation and limitations on freedom of speech, press, and political movement have been criticized. Institutions to accommodate or integrate ethnic groups can also be realized by means of the PAP’s free hand in pushing legislation through parliament. The GRC system is an efficient way to integrate minority ethnic groups into a party, but it could be a convenient creation helping the PAP to win seats and maintain its ruling position.

The cases of Malaysia and Singapore indicate that political accommodation of ethnic groups and establishment of stability in a multiethnic society can be achieved, although the limitations imposed on democracy and civil liberties by the somewhat authoritarian regimes in these Southeast Asian countries are still problematic.
Concluding Remarks

As summarized in the last section, cases of Malaysia and Singapore have some elements that fit consociational and integrative model, and others not. Approaching in different ways, the two Southeast Asian countries could accommodate ethnic groups which had conflicted before, and realize a political stability for decades. However, the ethnic accommodation and political stability of the cases could be realized on the basis of limited civil liberty and one-party dominant regime. In Malaysia, gerrymandering and clientelistic electoral strategy enabled the BN dominance and its long-term administration together with NEP which gave advantage to Bumiputeras. In Singapore as well, the PAP dominant regime has maintained by means of limiting civil liberty like freedom of association, press, speech and so forth, together with the geographical dissolution of ethnic groups by the EIP. The electoral reform of the GRC in Singapore is typical. The GRC aimed officially to secure minority ethnic seats, but it was also advantageous for the PAP to win seats and maintain its political dominance.

Malaysia and Singapore, therefore, have been identified in the gray zone between democracy and authoritarianism. They were called as a democracy with adjectives like “semi-democracy” (Crouch 1993; Case 1993), "quasi-democracy" (Zakaria 1989; 1997) or “modified democracy” (Crouch 1992), while they identified as an authoritarianism with adjectives like “semi-authoritarianism” (Carothers 1997; Ottaway 2003), “soft authoritarianism” (Means 1996) or “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Democratization or democratic consolidation is difficult to be consistent with accommodating ethnic groups in multiethnic countries. The difficulty is shown in these Southeast Asian cases. Analyzing the numerous cases, Mansfield and Snyder (2005) indicated the risk of (civil) war in democratizing countries and concluded “sequencing tactics that should reduce the risk of external war for democratizing countries should also reduce their risk of internal war” (Mansfield and Snyder 2005 : 274). According to the “sequence theory”, they recommend international society “to encourage a country to move forward with democratization step-by-step, by establishing the institutional preconditions for effective administration before explaining the scope of mass political participation” (Mansfield and Snyder 2005 : 273). In this sense, Malaysia and Singapore cases have succeeded in the first step but not yet finished. They referred to these cases:

Where voters and nascent mass parties include strong voices of moderation, and where a number of the preconditions of democracy are already in place, as
in Singapore and perhaps Malaysia, the best approach may be gradually to circumscribe the powers of the residual forces that are resistant to a full democratic transition. (Mansfield and Snyder 2005 : 280)

A symptom is shown in Malaysia. In the 1999 general election, several opposition parties, including the DAP and PAS created an opposition coalition named the Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front) (Khoo 2001: 45-46). The coalition was formed in the 2001 and 2008 general election as well. In 2013, opposition parties once again formed a coalition, the Pukatan Rakyat (PR or People’s Alliance). The PR succeeded to win more than one-third of seats by more than 50 percent of the votes. They could defeat the absolute majority of the BN. The opposition coalition is not yet consolidated but it can be the next step to the democratization of Malaysia. In Singapore, on the other, an opposition team could win a GRC for the first time in the 2011 general election. The opposition seats are still only six (five member GRC and one SMD) out of 87 total seats, but it can be a step forward to more democratization.

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