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## Value-Based Dimensions of National Ethos among Malaysian University Students

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### Abstract

University students are expected to hold views of harmony, bridge the ethnic differences and promote social cohesion which is central to the stability of a nation. There are shared values in the society that can unite individuals and groups together to promote the national ethos among the diverse ethnic citizens. This paper assumed that shared values played an important role in influencing the development of a conscious shared collective social bonding and encouraged a strong national ethos among Malaysian students. As university students play important roles in further developing the country economically and politically, it is very appropriate to study the levels of national ethos among Malaysian students. A total of 514 students from 14 public and private universities of various ethnic groups participated in a national survey using a self-administered questionnaire. Two dimensions of the national ethos emerged from the data, namely nationality, and patriotism, and the students hold positive perceptions of selected values of the country. However, there are differences among the various ethnic groups in their degree of attachment to the two dimensions of the national ethos studied. Overall, the value dimension has a positive and significant relationship and saw the flowering of national ethos among them.

**Keywords:** National Ethos, Shared Values, Nationality, Patriotism, Multi-Ethnic Students

### Introduction

Malaysian society is comprised of various ethnic groups with different cultures, languages, religions and lifestyles. In the academic writings and general discourse, Malaysia is commonly referred to as a multiethnic society rather than a plural society (Embong, 2001). The main component of Malaysia includes Malaysia Peninsular, Sabah and Sarawak. To note, Sabah and Sarawak are normally stated as East Malaysia whereas Malaysia Peninsular was originally referred to as the Malay Land or Malaya. This is because Malaya was only inhabited by the majority of Malays before the colonization period. However, with the coming of British colonial power, Malaya was transformed from a homogenous Malay society into a heterogeneous society that saw an influx of Chinese and Indian migrants. The prevailing Malaysian ethnic diversity is not only characterized by the existence of the various ethnic

groups like Malay, Chinese, Indian, Siamese, Iban, Kadazan-Dusun, Melanau, Bidayuh and other ethnic minorities such as the aborigines, but the recent waves of migration since the 1980s from Indonesia and other ASEAN countries, Indo-Pakistan, Central Asia, Middle East, Africa has converted Malaysia into a super-diversity nation.

A more significant issue in managing a plural, multi-ethnic, and diverse Malaysian society is promoting and ensuring national cohesion in such a society. A strong value dimension with the ethos of the country is one of the able approaches to realizing unity in diversity. This condition is essential in the context of nourishing the economic and political development of the country. Nevertheless, developing a peaceful and harmonious Malaysian society has been a central political agenda since Malaysia gained its independence and will remain to be one of the thrusts of national development in all the Malaysia Development Plans being pursued by the country.

As the incidence of the May 1969 ethnic riots in Kuala Lumpur and other parts of the country shows, Malaysian ethnic diversity has been a source of tension and conflict in society. This ethnic conflict has had long-lasting implications on the governance and development of the country. Proximately after the riots, the government took drastic actions to strengthen national cohesion among the ethnic groups. As indicated by the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), unity is the process of uniting the members of a society and the country through national ideologies, so that the members of the society can build an identity, common values and a sense of belonging (INTAN, 1994).

Thus, the process of state and nation-building requires values to bridge the links between ethnic diversity. Examples of good values in society such as human values, religious values, cultural values, Asian values, universal values, and so forth are common and can be shared among these ethnic groups. These values are products of their religious and local customs. These values have contributed to the process of building one's identity as a 'person' as well as the process of constructing Malaysian as one nation. The dimensions and elements of this value can also be observed to prevail in the context of the 'national ethos'. The national ethos cannot be constructed without the 'values' that bind them together. The value-based dimension of the ethos of the nation in the context of a diverse and multiethnic Malaysian society should provide a unifying strength and play the role of an empowering factor in the organization of an ethnically diverse society. A shared attachment to the distinguishing characters of the country would provide the socio-psychological mechanism for positive intercultural relations among the various ethnic groups of different religious backgrounds, particularly in times of conflict (Noor, 2005).

The influence of strong identification with the national ethos in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religion Malaysian society is noticeable, but studies that specifically examined the value-based dimensions as an influence agent on the national ethos among Malaysian students are noticeably lacking. In defining the national ethos, group boundaries and social loyalty to national characters are particularly crucial. Despite the importance of the national ethos to nation-building and integration, empirical evidence on the nature of the value-based dimension of the national ethos among university students has not been duly examined; thus, not clearly and effectively understood. Much social science discourse is based on the unspoken statement that values in the population are a requirement for national cohesion

and the development of a unified national identity. For instance, Kuzio states that 'a cohesive society cannot be constructed without a minimum body of common values, encoded in legislation and the constitution. These values cannot be wholly morally neutral as they inevitably endorse one type of behavior and set of values' (Kuzio, 2001).

What's interesting, the young generation nowadays considers themselves a truly Malaysian nation (Embong, 2001). However, today's young generation is prone to negative influences and is trapped in various forms of social problems that can undermine Malaysian values and identity. Globalization, developments in information, communication, and technology (ICT), social media, Korean pop culture, Western culture, and so forth have brought a new perspective on the values to aspire by the youth in particular. The traditional values of the past generations are eroded, mixed, and modified according to the tastes and needs of today's youth. There is a Malay saying, 'let the children die, but do not the custom,' but it is no longer relevant to today's society. The issue of personal satisfaction is more important. The concerns over material rather than values are getting greater seeks attention from society. The matters that concern the local custom and the value of the nation's tradition are being ignored.

Malaysian society has been observed to have changed in the last four decades and ethnic relations have improved enormously, which saw the rise of strong tendencies toward convergence and new solidarities among them. Nevertheless, the continuous political contestations that create social tensions are also present and their implications for ethno-religious relations misunderstanding cannot be ignored. Racial issues, disputes and the possibility of conflict will arise if ethnic diversity is failed to be managed properly. There was even a claim that ethnic divergence is becoming more serious in Malaysian society, especially among the new generation. Thus, to fulfill this gap, this paper studied and discussed the influence of value-based dimensions on the national ethos among the Malays, Chinese, Indian, Sabahan and Sarawakian university students, and recognized the relationship of dimensions with the level of attachment to the national ethos. The study focused on university students 18 years to 25 years old and was conducted at 14 universities because they made up a large segment of Malaysian society. While our study focused on Malaysia, we believe that the findings are also relevant to our understanding of the relationship between the value-based dimensions and, national ethos in other ethnically divided states.

### **National Ethos Concept**

In general, national ethos refers to the national unique characteristic that ties the local society. Max Weber (1958) argued that the concept of ethos is referred to as a societal relationship that describes and characterizes the societal values and norms in a particular economic system. Accordingly, ethos referred to what people think and reflect or influence on how they behave in a social system (Bar-Tal, 2000). Sumner (2000) then stated that ethos was a characteristic of the whole value of the member of society. Ethos has also been claimed as the basis of the hidden culture (Kluckhohn, 1951). Bateson and Mead (1942) described ethos as the collective emotions that emphasize cultural components as expressed through sentiment and attitude. Similarly, ethos is something that describes the values that underlie certain cultural behaviors (Ossowska, 1973; Epstein, 1978). Meanwhile, McClosky & Zaller (1984) examined the ethos of the Americans and emphasized the two key elements of the common belief and tradition of society, namely capitalism and democracy. For them,

capitalism and democracy are the value elements of the American ethos. They suggest that the ethos of democracy which becomes the trust of the people is that everyone is equal and should enjoy the same opportunities (Oren, 2009). Ethos is "... the characteristic spirit, prevalent tone of sentiment, of a people, or community..." (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2000). Significantly, ethos means ethics, attitude, personality, character and belief in something (Noor et al., 2006). It is this special view of the life of a social group based on nature, values and customs that characterized the society.

In explaining the meaning of the national ethos, Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2001) equate the concept of the national ethos with the nation's moral demand. Similarly, Donnelly (2000) claimed that ethos is both the formal expression of the authorities' aim to employ a certain amount of power to condition people to think and act acceptably and the informal expressions of the members emerging from the social interaction that tend to reflect the dominant assumptions, beliefs and norms. Hence, the ethos that is learned formally and defined by the authorities may often depart significantly from the ethos that emerged from the intentions, interactions and conduct of the public. Thus, national ethos can be regarded as the stated wishes of those who command the authority within a nation and individuals within the country are committed to what is considered natural, proper and right. National ethos can be considered a major part of collective cultural rights, and every ethnic group should be independent in deciding what category of national ethos is essential for sustaining its communal memory and evolving its identity (Al-Haj, 2005). Ismail (2015) defines the national ethos as a unique characteristic of local society that binds an individual to another and binds an individual to their beloved country. With a national ethos in one's life, it can reflect the national sentiment underlying the nation's platform (Ismail, 2015).

In developing a truly distinct and uniform ethos, the values and beliefs of those in the powers must reflect and support those of the public. When respect for those in authority is significantly declining, the difference between formal and informal ethos will be more obvious. While the perception of the public may differ and depart from that required by the government, some level of similarity must be recognized. This is because the way people express their attachment to the ethos of their country can have a very significant intercultural relation and performs an individual responsibility in a multicultural country. Thus, the establishment of the national ethos is vital to be considered lightly. As pointed out by Meier-Pesti & Kirchler (2003), since a nation is a large category, people develop their social representation of their nation and perceive the nation as an imagined community. The self-perception and social representation of the nation show how people feel close to their nation and have a high identity.

As stated by Bar-Tal (2000), the national ethos is regarded as a form of enduring community trust, shared by most members of the community and focused specifically on the future of society. Oren (2009) further develops the concept of national ethos as presented by Bar-Tal (2000) by looking at people's beliefs in three main elements, namely certain beliefs, attitudes and values. The national ethos is formed when society is bound to one another and shares the same values (Etzioni, 2009). Noor et al (2006) strongly argued that the importance of establishing an ethos is to ensure a sense of unity and harmony in ethnic relations, especially in the context of a multiethnic Malaysian society. Similarly, national ethos refers to the special values, traditions, identities and visions of the future (or destiny) of a nation (Etzioni, 2009).



Oren (2009) further argued that the national ethos is "... a particular configuration of central societal beliefs, attitudes and values, that are enduring and shared by most members of society and that focus on the society's present and future...". According to Oren, these forms of belief can be categorized into prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive community belief refers to values, norms and goals that people want to achieve such as security, democracy and peace. Whereas the descriptive community belief refers to past experiences or current circumstances through which society is engaged. For example, the Malaysian multiethnic society considers the May 13, 1969 tragedy as a black history to be avoided and unity is the core of peace in the society.

This paper assumed and argued that the value dimension and consciousness of the national ethos enable to fostering of mutual respect and understanding in times of normal and problematic situations regarding national cohesion and issues of inter-ethnic relations. An attachment to the national ethos strengthens civic responsibility. The Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad who presented the national ethos as envisioned in the Vision 2020 as a devotion to the nation says:

"Building a nation out of diverse people with differing historical, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds is something more than just fostering consensus on the basic character of a state or nation. It involves the fostering of (1) shared historical experiences, (2) shared values, (3) a feeling of common identity, (4) shared destiny that transcends ethnic bounds without undermining ethnic identity, (5) loyalty, (6) commitment, and (7) an emotional attachment to the nation, and the flowering of distinctly national ethos" (Mohamad, 1992).

Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad saw that the Malaysian nation could be formed through the adoption of the national ethos. The national ethos of Malaysian society must consider the forms of ethnic relations that have been embedded in our multiethnic society over the years. It is this form of relationship that determines the nation-building process (Noor et al., 2006). Accordingly, constructing a collective value and identity for diverse people is the key principle of national cohesion. Creating a civic collective identity is a pre-condition for a harmonious multiethnic society (Soen, 2002) as well.

Given the importance of the national ethos in a multiethnic Malaysian society and the influence of value on national cohesion as deliberated above, the present study, discussed a research question; what is the value and intensity of the national ethos among Malaysian university students? The findings of the study will inform the value and intensity of the national ethos, and the influence of value dimensions in promoting a strong attachment to the national ethos and national cohesion.

### **Methodology**

The paper employed a survey design as it attempted to assess the influence of value on national ethos among Malaysian university students towards national cohesion. The dependent variable of concern in this paper is the value dimension of the national ethos. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the students through an online survey. The survey took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete.

Table 1

*Demographic profile of the respondents (N= 514)*

| <b>Attribute</b>    | <b>Information</b>    | <b>%</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Ethnic              | Malay                 | 63.2     |
|                     | Chinese               | 18.3     |
|                     | Sabahan               | 8.2      |
|                     | Indian                | 5.1      |
|                     | Sarawakian            | 3.5      |
|                     | Others                | 1.8      |
| Gender              | Male                  | 32.9     |
|                     | Female                | 67.1     |
| Religion            | Islam                 | 71.6     |
|                     | Buddha                | 14.6     |
|                     | Christian             | 7.8      |
|                     | Hindu                 | 3.7      |
|                     | Animism               | 0.4      |
|                     | Sikhism               | 0.2      |
|                     | Others                | 1.8      |
| Discipline of study | Art & Social Sciences | 66.1     |
|                     | Hard sciences         | 18.9     |
|                     | Professional          | 12.1     |
|                     | Technical             | 2.9      |

A random sample of 514 students in 14 public and private universities in Malaysia participated in the study. A proportioned stratified random sampling was used in selecting the samples. An effort was made so that the samples adequately represented the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Sabahan and Sarawakian student population in the country. From this total sample of students, Indian youth samples constitute about 5.1%, while the Malay and Chinese samples constitute 63.2% and 18.3%, respectively. The Sabahan students constitute about 8.2% and Sarawakian students constitute about 3.5%. The other category founds about 1.8%. The samples were also stratified by the discipline of studies so that hard sciences, technical, professional as well as art and social sciences students were adequately represented. About 66.1% of the respondents were from art and social sciences discipline and another 18.9% from hard sciences, 12.1% of the respondents were from professional discipline and 2.9% from technical discipline. A majority of the samples were females, which is 67.1%, and 32.9% were males. The Muslim respondents constituted 71.6% of the samples, while the Buddhists were 14.6%, Christians were 7.8%, Hindus was 3.7%, Animism was 0.4% and Sikhism was 0.2%. The other category of religion was 1.8%. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the samples.

The instrument of national ethos was measured by asking the respondents to indicate their agreement from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree' to all the 16 items developed for the study in two national ethos values, namely nationality and patriotism. Two items were about shared historical experience, two items related to shared values, two items focused on the shared sense of belonging together, four items on shared destiny, two items on shared

emotional attachment, two items on commitment and last two items measure the loyalty that surpasses ethnic boundaries without declining the ethnic identity. Then, the study's findings were analyzed using the frequency percentage to determine the level of intensity of the respondents for each dimension measured.

### National Ethos Value on Nationality

Four dimensions of the national ethos value on nationality can be observed from the data, namely (1) shared sense of belonging together, (2) shared historical experience, (3) shared values and (4) shared future/destiny. Tables 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d summarize the distribution of respondents on their value of nationality to the four dimensions of the national ethos.

Table 2a

#### *Nationality values to shared destiny or future dimension by ethnicity*

| Dimension                       | Items   | Malay | Sabahan | Sarawakian | Chinese | Indian |
|---------------------------------|---|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------|
| <b>Shared destiny or future</b> | Will not leave the country, regardless of whatever happened to the country  | 64.9% | 50%     | 44.4%      | 31.9%   | 57.7%  |
|                                 | Family well-being   | 83.7% | 78.6%   | 72.2%      | 60.6%   | 80.8%  |
|                                 | Critical of the action taken by the government, but support the issues related to the national problem faced by the country | 91.4% | 90.5%   | 88.9%      | 81.9%   | 80.8%  |
|                                 | Willingness to volunteer in defending the country when under threat   | 86.8% | 88.1%   | 94.4%      | 67%     | 88.5%  |

Overall, the data revealed that the respondents had positive perceptions and attitudes toward the selected characteristics of the country. As shown in Table 2a, many of the respondents fell into the moderate and high degree of dimension toward the shared future/destiny. They supported the issues related to the national problem faced by the country, but at the same time, they are still critical of the action taken by the government. Most of the respondents highly supported volunteering in defending the country whenever under threat and the Chinese students are relatively lower than the others. In short, they shared the social representation of the nation. However, the majority of Malays and Indians will not leave the country regardless of whatever happens to the country. The Malays, Indians and Sabahan respondents also have a high social belief that their family well-being is adequately addressed by the country. The results on family well-being showed that the percentage of the Malays, Indians and Sabahan respondents is relatively higher than the Chinese ethnic group. Findings of this dimension showed that the Malay and Sabahan respondents score more strongly as regards sharing the future or destiny, followed by the Sarawakian and Indians and a relatively lower percentage with the Chinese respondents.

Based on the findings of the national ethos value on nationality, respondents have shown positive intensity in sharing several life aspects. In terms of shared destiny, they are seen as



quite concerned about the current issues that occurred in the country. They are also seen as interested in discussing related issues faced by the country and showing their support for the discussion. However, in some issues, the respondents are questioning the action taken by the government to solve or tackle those related issues. This situation illustrated that they followed closely anything that happened in society and showed a clear picture that they shared the same spirit to see a better life in the future. Thus, this portrays a good indicator of high political literacy and contradicted what has been reported in Utusan Online (2018) which claims that Malaysians are still not reaching the level of political literacy expected. On the other hand, the study conducted by Muslim et al (2016) showed that more than 70% of the total youth respondents indicated their understanding of sharing the country's future and had a positive outlook on Malaysia's future as a developed country where they will live in peace and harmony as well as become a matured Malaysian nation.

Table 2b

*Nationality value to a shared sense of belonging together dimension by ethnicity*

| <b>Dimension</b>                              | <b>Items</b>  | <b>Malay</b> | <b>Sabahan</b> | <b>Sarawakian</b> | <b>Chinese</b> | <b>Indian</b> |
|---|---|--------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Shared the sense of belonging together</b> | Proud that the country is a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious | 91.4%        | 97.6%          | 94.4%             | 91.5%          | 92.3%         |
|   | Accept Islam as the official religion of the country                      | 98.2%        | 88.1%          | 94.4%             | 74.5%          | 80.8%         |

The finding in Table 2b suggests that the respondents readily recognize Malaysia as an Islamic country and share the same feeling of being proud that Malaysia is a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious country. Although the degree of nationality value to the shared future/destiny was favorable, there was a relatively slight variation among the ethnic groups in their degree of nationality value to the shared sense of belonging together.

In the context of sharing a sense of belonging, most of the respondents have accepted and recognized social reality in the country, which is a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious society. They are also proud of the diversity in Malaysia. They also accepted and recognized Islam as an official religion with a slight variation with other ethnic groups and, especially with some of the Chinese groups. Their acceptance and recognition not only reflected their level of maturity but also indicated a strong attachment to the construction of Malaysian sentiment. This finding supported the study by Ismail (2015) which emphasized educated youth groups who have been going through a meaningful experience of living together and sharing many things in the society that ultimately evoked a sense of belonging. Research conducted by Muslim et al (2016) revealed that over 80% of the total youth surveyed indicated that they had a high sense of belonging. Most of the youths recognized Malaysia belongs to all ethnic groups, accepted Malaysia as an Islamic state and the concept of Malay hegemony, and shared consciousness in maintaining the country's good name. This means Malaysian youths have had a high level of awareness about the importance of living together in a multiethnic environment. The sense of belonging is not only appropriate to be embraced in Malaysia's multiethnic society but is considered the heart of societal harmony and promotes a greater social cohesion (Muslim et al., 2016). These developments can be a

benchmark for the youth's willingness to cooperate and involves the participation of our diverse ethnic groups to develop the country in the future.

Table 2c

*Nationality value to shared historical experience dimension by ethnicity*

| Dimension                            | Items   | Malay | Sabahan | Sarawakian | Chinese | Indian |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------|
| <b>Shared historical experiences</b> | 2018 Election is the foundation of a new Malaysia formation | 40.6% | 52.4%   | 44.4%      | 53.2%   | 80.8%  |
|                                      | Ethnic disputes must be avoided                             | 95.4% | 97.6%   | 94.4%      | 88.3%   | 96.2%  |

Similarly, the study revealed that the respondents had a satisfactory identity with selected historical experiences of the country. They had a collective memory of the May 13 riot incident. However, the Indians score the highest acceptance of the 2018 election as the foundation of a new era in Malaysia. As shown in Table 2c the ethnic disputes must be avoided as agreed and intensely by all respondents, irrespective of ethnic origins.

This study also found most of the respondents shared the same feeling about a communal historical experience. They always support avoiding any ethnic disputes for the sake of harmonious Malaysia and maintaining political stability in the country. Most of the respondents admitted that May 13, 1969 tragedy was a black history for the country which should be avoided. It means these students have a high level of awareness about the country's historical background even though they never had a personal experience like what was experienced by the previous generation. The awareness not only made them responsive and aware of the history but also it can serve as a basis for inculcating social cohesion towards the formation of a strong nation (Muslim et al., 2016).

Table 2d

*Nationality value to shared values dimension by ethnicity*

| Dimension            | Items  | Malay | Sabahan | Sarawakian | Chinese | Indian |
|----------------------|--|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------|
| <b>Shared values</b> | Power sharing among various ethnics ensured political stability in the country | 51.7% | 83.3%   | 72.2%      | 76.6%   | 84.6%  |
|                      | Accept the democracy system practiced in the country                           | 79.7% | 85.7%   | 83.3%      | 81.9%   | 88.5%  |

Based on Table 2d, all the ethnics shared acceptance of the democratic system is practiced in the country. However, the majority of the respondents, relatively an exception for the Malays, supported the sharing of power among the various ethnic groups in ensuring political stability in Malaysia. The findings showed that the percentage of the Indian and Sabahan respondents was higher than that of the Chinese, Malay and Sarawakian respondents suggesting that the Indian and Sabahan respondents are more strongly attached to the shared values dimension of nationality.

The findings indicate that the respondents shared similar values among the multiethnic group. Most of them accepted the democratic system practiced in this beloved country. They know their right to vote, to choose the leaders, to express their opinion, to have freedom of movement, to join any organizations and so forth. They are also alert to the importance of democratic implementation in pursuing justice and the rights of the people. According to Muslim et al (2016), over 75% of youths in Malaysia show a high appreciation of democratic values. A good awareness of the democratic value will lead to political stability and thus be able to maintain social cohesion and guarantee the stability of the country. National ethos has contributed to the identity of university students. These shared elements formed a basis of social practice in the life of multiethnic society, especially among today's youth (Muslim et al., 2016). Thus, the attachment to the national ethos will generate sentiments and spirit that will influence an individual's inclination and attitude to be more nationalistic which positively contributes to social cohesion and thus ensure harmony in the whole society.

### National Ethos Value on Patriotism

Three dimensions of the national ethos value of patriotism emerged can be observed in the data, namely (1) loyalty, (2) commitment, and (3) emotional attachment to the country. Tables 3a, 3b and 3c reveal the distribution of the responses of respondents on their value of patriotism to the three dimensions of the national ethos.

Table 3a

#### *Patriotism value to the loyalty dimension by ethnicity*

| Dimension | Items                                     | Malay | Sabahan | Sarawakian | Chinese | Indian |
|-----------|---|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------|
| Loyalty   | Support the changes from GST to SST       | 16.3% | 31%     | 27.8%      | 27.7%   | 34.6%  |
|           | Support the action against the corruption | 95.1% | 88.1%   | 94.4%      | 80.9%   | 92.3%  |

Based on the findings, there are some strong values shared by the respondents. They shared the same values against corruption and pride when Malaysian achievement is recognized internationally. As we know, corruption is the country's number one enemy. As stressed by Alatas (2015), corruption is related to the refusal of public interest to achieve personal goals which involve violations of the norms of duty and welfare, accompanied by confidentiality, treason, fraud and irresponsible neglect of any consequence suffered by the society. These university students have shown maturity in assessing the good and bad value for the country's future. This data is in line with the progress of civic values demanded by contemporary Malaysian society to create a transparent, just and equitable social life. Corrupted activities will bring a devastating effect on society and the country as the economic development of a country can be stunted, weakened the functioning of the organization, eroded the public trust and deteriorated the government administration (Adnan & Ismail, 2013). The existence of such civic consciousness is a good indicator for the younger generation who are the backbones of the country's future. This shows that they shared a high value of loyalty to the country regardless of ethnic group and social differences.

Table 3a shows that they supported the action taken by the government against corruption, but they declined to support the changes from Goods and Service Tax (GST) to Sales Tax and Service Tax (SST). This shows that their patriotism and loyalty toward the country do not mean that they have to support government policy that is detrimental to them and society.

Table 3b

*Patriotism value to commitment dimension by ethnicity*

| <b>Dimension</b>  | <b>Items</b>                                     | <b>Malay</b> | <b>Sabahan</b> | <b>Sarawakian</b> | <b>Chinese</b> | <b>Indian</b> |
|-------------------|--|--------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Commitment</b> | Give priority to the Malaysian-made products     | 71.1%        | 50%            | 55.6%             | 53.2%          | 53.8%         |
|                   | The support that the PTPTN loan should be repaid | 64%          | 73.8%          | 72.2%             | 81.9%          | 73.1%         |

As shown in Table 3b, many of the respondents scored their responses in the high and moderate category of attachment patriotism value to commitment. A majority of the Malays and the Chinese group were clearly in the high category. The Malays supported the Malaysian-made products of the country, whereas the Chinese supported that National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN) loan should be repaid. This result suggests that the Malay and Chinese respondents have a positively stronger sense of commitment to the country.

Besides, the respondents show a positive commitment value to the country, particularly among the Malays and Chinese. Commitment is a very abstract value and can be interpreted in different understandings. Furthermore, commitment to the country usually requires self-sacrifice in many situations. For example, buying Malaysian-made products should be given priority but some people also think of imported products that perhaps have better quality and are branded and that Malaysian-made products have limited choices. Likewise, some students had to sacrifice their monthly salary or other incomes to repay the PTPTN loan. However, if the individuals can support such commitments, then this will constitute a national ethos, which is involved in an act of sacrificing for the beloved country.

Table 3c revealed that the patriotism value to the emotional attachment to the country. All the ethnic groups showed pride when a Malaysian's achievement is recognized internationally. A majority of the Malays, Sabahan and Sarawakian students personally felt being offensive if the Malaysian image is not respected by the others. Nevertheless, Chinese and Indian were relatively in the moderate category.

Table 3c

*Patriotism value of the emotional attachment to the country dimension by ethnicity*

| Dimension                                  | Items  | Malay | Sabahan | Sarawakian | Chinese | Indian |
|--|--|-------|---------|------------|---------|--------|
| <b>Emotional attachment to the country</b> | Being offensive if the image of the country is not respected       | 94.2% | 90.5%   | 94.4%      | 68.1%   | 76.9%  |
|  | Proud when a Malaysian's achievement is recognized internationally | 95.7% | 97.6%   | 100%       | 88.3%   | 84.6%  |

The pride in Malaysian achievements is a good indicator of their emotional attachment to the beloved country. For instance, all Malaysians regardless of ethnic groups or age differences will feel proud and show their support for the achievement of Datuk Lee Chong Wei, Datuk Nicol David and our football team, especially at the international level. Such feeling and recognition can be a powerful benchmark for the nation-building process in a multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious society as it indicates a strong emotional attachment to the country. This form of social attraction and bonding can unite people, although in principle they do not come into face-to-face interaction with one another or even know each other. This is the national ethos that binds an individual to one another and binds an individual to their beloved country (Ismail, 2015).

### Conclusion

The paper provides insight into the sense of value-based dimension to the national ethos among the university students in the country and the influence of national ethos value in nurturing attachment with the national ethos of the country. The construct of value-based dimensions to the national ethos is multi-dimensional. Six dimensions emerged from the two values of nationality and patriotism, namely shared future or destiny, shared the sense of belonging together, shared historical experiences and shared values as well as shared loyalty, commitment and emotional attachment to the country dimension. It was argued earlier that a strong value of nationality and patriotism to national ethos is fundamental to national cohesion and stability in this multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious country. A strong value of national ethos is viewed as an amalgamating and integrating strength. The study showed that the university students surveyed are not undecided in their perceptions and attitudes toward the selected value dimension of the country. They identify the core socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of the country, that provide the basis for a common or collective national identity.

On the shared value of nationality, under the sense of belonging dimension, the respondents readily accepted that Malaysia is an Islamic country with Islam being the official religion. They also support that they have a social obligation in confirming a peaceful, harmonious and developing pluralistic Malaysian society, despite the cultural and sociological differences and contradictions across the ethnic groups. More notably, they shared the same future or destiny when they see the country as having a good future and caring for the well-being of their family. In this value, the respondents would question the action taken by the government,



but at the time, they supported the issues related to the national problems faced by the country and were willing to volunteer in defending the country when under threat. The respondents also shared the historical experience and values dimension of national ethos when they perceived some of the major historical events in the country such as the racial riot and the 2018 general election encountered as shared collective memory. They also readily supported that power-sharing among the ethnic-based political parties to ensure stability and accepted the democratic system practiced by the governance as a unique characteristic of the country.

While on the shared value of patriotism on commitment dimension, the respondents readily supported the product of the country, such as the Malaysian-made products and accepted that the PTPTN loan should be repaid. They also shared the loyalty dimensions when they supported actions taken by the government which aimed against corruption in the country. However, all the ethnic groups declined to support changes made by the government concerning GST to SST, and thus, courage in rejecting a policy that is deemed detrimental to the nation. Finally, the Malaysian university students shared the value of emotional attachment to the country in the sense of showing offensive when the Malaysian image is being belittled. They also take pride whenever a Malaysian's achievement is being recognized internationally.

To summarize, the feeling of values on nationality and patriotism, which is the building block for unity in a diverse society, is shared by the majority of Malaysian university students. The building and strengthening of the national ethos among the ethnic groups will reduce potential conflicts arising out of issues and disputes prevailing between the ethnic groups can be reduced. However, the government need should deliberately plan and implemented further actions to ensure that such a level of national building attained is sustained and enhanced. Elements of values that made up the national ethos deserved special attention by the government and society in ensuring greater national cohesion and stability of the nation. Such values need to be developed, strengthened and shared by the Malaysian population.

It can be said that the national ethos is a non-static sentiment, dynamic and can change according to circumstances and environment. To understand the possibility of the level of national ethos to be strengthening or spiraling downward, this study should be the basis of a longitudinal study to monitor the state of national ethos in Malaysia. What taking place should be studied, as the issues and disputes raised would be able to explain the factors determining such patterns of observations. National ethos needs to be sustained and strengthened if Malaysian national cohesion is to be our shared national agenda.

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