

# Demographic Transformation in Defining Malaysian Generations: The Seekers (Pencari), The Builders (Pembina), The Developers (Pemaju), and Generation Z (Generasi Z)

Lai Cheng Tung<sup>1</sup> & Jean Dennis Comeau<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Business & Administration, Wawasan Open University, Penang, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> American Degree Programme, SEGi University, Penang, Malaysia

Correspondence: Lai Cheng Tung, School of Business & Administration, Wawasan Open University, 54 Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, 10050 Penang. Tel: 1-604-2180 431. E-mail: [lctung@wou.edu.my](mailto:lctung@wou.edu.my)

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBS/v4-i4/809 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v4-i4/809>

## Abstract

Generational theory states that people born at a similar time frame in history would experience similar political, social and economic realities. The theory looks for significant historical events and identifies the impact these have on existing social order and value systems. Workforce transformation evolves significantly from era-to-era and from nation-to-nation. Presently, there are three major workforce generational cohort groups: Baby boomers, Gen. X, and Gen. Y that were taken directly from the Western generational theory and widely used across the globe. In consideration for a country such as Malaysia, the identifiable generation cohort groups may be misguided as life events vary across country to country. The example of naming of the terms baby boomers referred to the booming of births in the Western world whereas in Malaysia for that same time period it is impossible to observe a similar boom. This conceptual study attempts to shed light of the demographic reality in Malaysia. The aim of this paper is to show the formulation of labels reflecting the actual generational gaps based on Malaysian socio-economic and demographic transitions over the past 70 years period (from 1940s to present time). The authors of the study have defined and labelled the generations as *the seekers (pencari)*, *the builders (pembina)*, *the developers (pemaju)* and the *Generations Z (Generasi Z)* arising from the workforce transformation and historical facts.

**Keywords:** *workforce transformation, generational theory studies, demographic transition, Malaysian generational studies*

## Introduction

The universally identifiable generational cohort groups, namely Baby Boomers, Gen. X and Gen. Y provide a broad outline that can be useful in trying to encourage intergenerational understanding but these traits are, at best, generalisations. Generational theory was first

popularised in the United States in 1960s and since then it has been picked up quickly by the media in much of the western world. The labelling tags have been widely accepted and used globally. However, these labels and their implications, based alone on the generally accepted generational categories in Western world, might not be completely applicable to all other parts of the world, such as Malaysia. Present day concern in the Western world is the question of an ever increasing older population with small younger generations to replace the workforce (Armstrong-Stassen & Templer, 2005; Young, 2013). This is a global phenomenon; however, there are regional variances in demographic transitions that must be taken into consideration. The generational cohort and their unique differences was popularise by American sociologists whose work has laid the groundwork theory know as the *Strauss-Howe Generational Theory*. The theory is based on two importance premises. The first premise calls upon *socialisation* that suggested that individual's values were formed during their childhood and the early teenage years and that these values stay relatively unchanged throughout their life. The second premise, the *social constructivist theory*, implies that reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups engaged in social interactions. The term 'generation' is therefore defined as a group of people with a set of shared experiences that exhibit a shared worldview and continue to exhibit the characteristics of that worldview as they grow through life. A generation tends to span (approximately) 20 years which represent roughly the time from the birth of a group of people to the time they come of age and start having their own. The concept of western popularise generational labelling such as "Baby Boomers" and "Gen X" and "Gen Y" are widely used throughout Asia and especially in Malaysia. The purpose of this paper is to formulate generational labels based on the Malaysian workforce and demographic transitions over the past 70 years. It is the authors' contention that the present popularised generational labelling as the ones that are observed in the Western cannot have the same implications in the Malaysian context and hence are inaccurate. This paper hopes to shed light on a turning point in development of generational theory and also further validated the authors' previous work on the generational labelling which has defined the Malaysian's generations as the *seekers/pencari* (those born in 1943 to 1960), the *builders/pembina* (those born in 1961- 1981), **the developers/pemaju** (those born in 1982 to 2004) and the *generation Z/generasi Z* (those born after 2005).

### **Present Malaysian Workforce and Generational Cohort**

The present workforce in Malaysia has been going through a major transformation. The number is growing as younger members of society enter the workforce. According to the Labour Force Statistic of 2012, Malaysia has a total labour force of 13 million which is almost equivalent to the total workforce for a country such as Australia (The Times, 2014). Seventy percent of the active workforce now lives in urban areas. The labour force participation rate is recorded 66%. The Labour Force Statistics further imply that the active workforce can be divided into three main age (generations) groups: the older, middle and young age groups. The biggest working group is from the middle age group; these are those who are below 50 years old, which compromises of 51% of the total labour force. The next highest workforce group is from the younger age group (34%); these are those who are in their twenties (or below) and just starting their career paths. The older age group is recorded at about 15% of the total labour force. When comparing the active workforce in 1982, the ratio on the age groups shows some

variation. In 1982, the total workforce was recorded at only 5 millions. The middle age group (who are now reaching retiring age) was recorded to be 40% of the total labour force. Malaysia is well-endowed with natural resources in areas such as agriculture, forestry and minerals. It is an exporter of natural and agricultural resources, the most valuable exported resource being petroleum. At one time, it was the largest producer of tin, rubber and palm oil in the world. The Malaysian economy was originally based on agricultural and labourer intensive industry this has been changed and is no longer applicable. As show in Figure 1, since 1980 the structure of employment in Malaysia has been changing and shifting towards a more services-oriented economy.

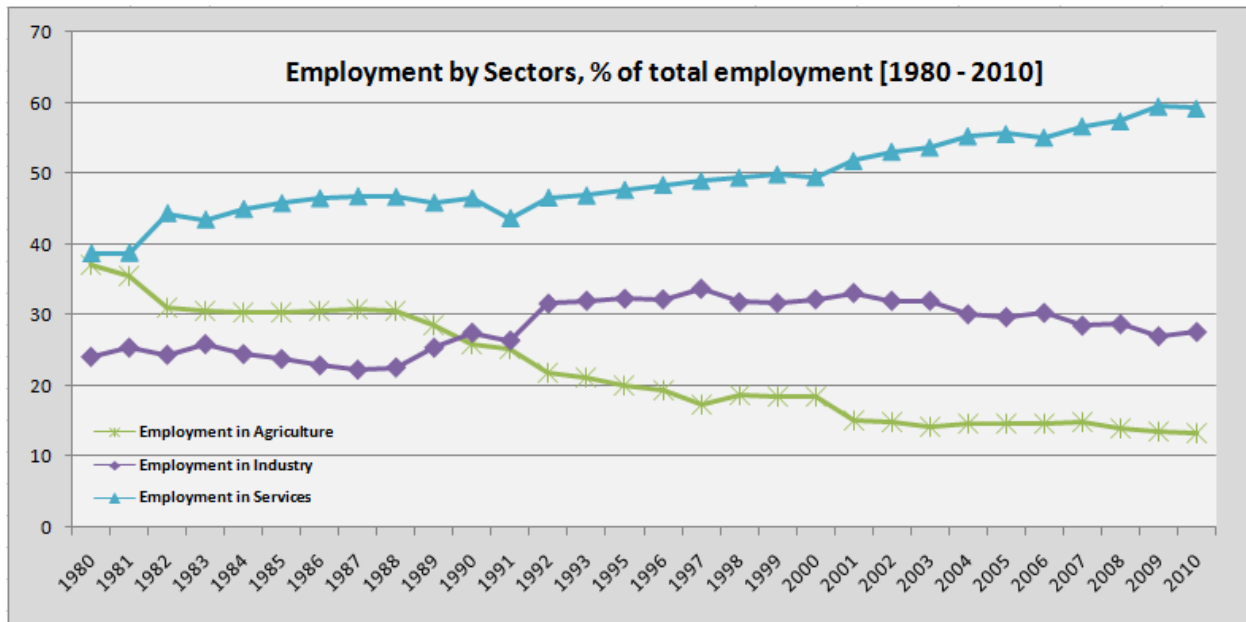


Figure 1 Malaysia Total Employment by Sectors [1980 – 2010] data extracted from Department of Statistics Malaysia via statistics.gov.my

In the last 30 years, the rate of employment in agriculture has been going down progressively in Malaysia. On the contrary, the rate of employment in the industrial and service sectors has been on the rise. By 2010, the services and industrial sectors made up a large portion of the job market available in Malaysia. The services sector reached the highest at 60% while the agricultural sector recorded the lowest of only 13% of the total employment in 2010. Arshad *et al.* (2007) cited that agricultural sector which was the major source of employment for Malaysia in 1950s has been reduced to one of the many sectors in the country’s economy. In the present decade, agriculture accounts for less than one-tenth of the country’s Gross Domestic Product and export earnings. This transition is presented, in detail, in Figure 1 and show the major transition relevant to the fours of the generations identified.

## Demographic Transition

In short the Demographic Transition Theory “refers to the transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates as a country develops from a pre-industrial to an industrialized economic system” (Demographic transition, n.d.). The process is also accompanied by urbanisation, industrialisation and the rise in income (Chesnais, 2011). This process eventually leads to a stable population growth. The process usually follows four states as presented in Figure 2.

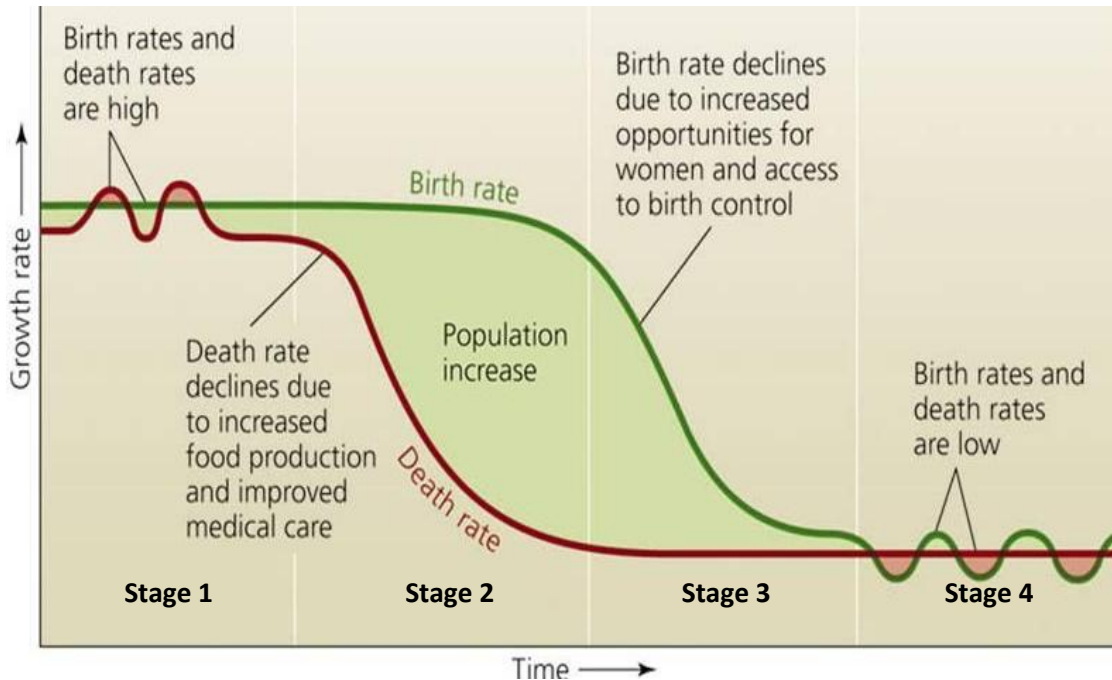


Figure 2 The Demographic Transition extracted from Human Populations, n.d

There is therefore a transition that takes place from Stage 1 to Stage 4. Stage one of the demographic transition model is the most primitive of the stages where there is a high fluctuating birth and death rate. Because of this there is no great population growth. In the second stage, there are constant births rate; however the death rate has gone down. This result in a rise in population due to the fact that more infants are surviving with a better health care, improved sanitation such as water etc, more transport and medical care as well as inventions relating to this. In other words this stage involves a slight modernisation in health care raising people's living standards as well as life expectancy. On going to stage three is where there is a low death rate as well as a declining birth rate therefore leading to a slight increase in population. The reason for the fall in births may be due to family planning, better education, lower infant mortality rate, a more industrialised way of life and the want for more material possessions as well as women in the workforce. The fourth stage explains that there is a stable population without much change because both the death and birth rate are low.

By applying the theory to the Malaysia context, the data for Malaysia indicates that (between 1960 and 2012) there has been a steady decline in death rates. There has also been a constant, but low, decline in birth rates as show in Figure 3.

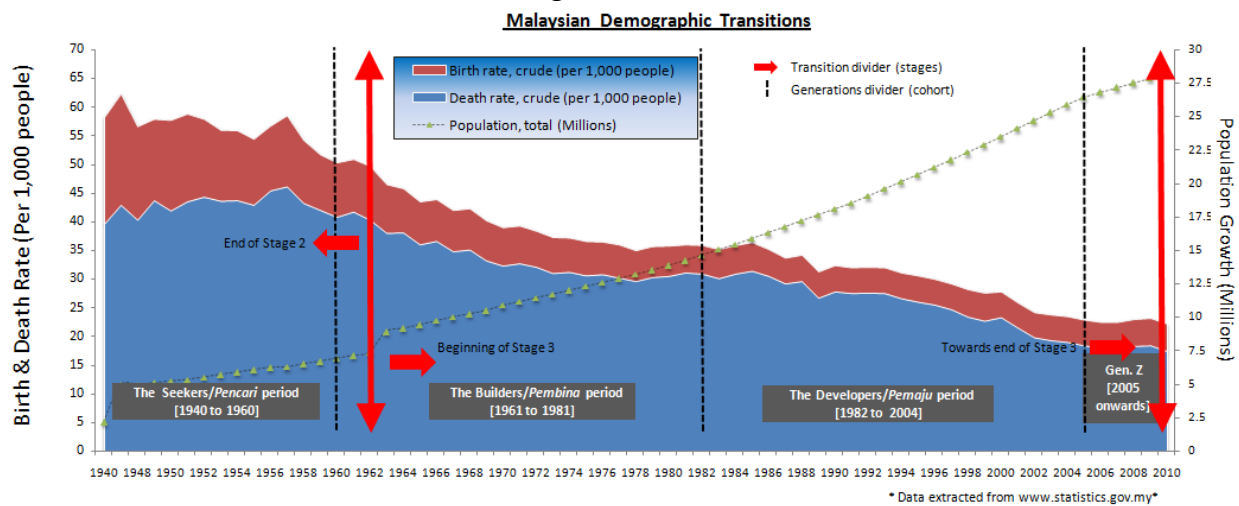


Figure 3 Applying the Demographic Transition Model on Malaysian population (1960 to 2010).  
Data extracted from www.statistics.gov.my

In line with the Demographic Transition Theory, Malaysia appears to be approaching near to the end of the Stage 3. As indicated in Figure 2, the seekers (*pencari*) generation period saw the constant birth rate and death rate as it approached the end of stage 2 according to the theory. The cohort, the builders (*Pembina*) generation, starts at the beginning of Stage 3, with a lower death rate as well as a declining birth rate as it progress to present time crossing to the extent in the developers and Generation Z (*Generasi Z*) eras. It is the authors believe that there are several more years to come before Malaysia moves into Stage 4.

### Malaysian Generational Labels

The precise definition and generational labelling is motivated by the belief that they each shared events and experiences based upon their birth year and the events that influenced their lives. The phrase “baby boom” has been used since the late 19th century and is refers to a noticeable increase in the birth rate post World War II (Beekman, 2011). The Baby boomers grew up during much healthier economic times [in the Western societies, in the period of 1940s to 1960s] and have a more optimistic economic outlook and idealistic visions. They were living the so-called “American dreams”, prosperous and plentiful job opportunities (Codrington, 2011). Compared to the same period in Malaysia (or formerly known as Malaya before Malaysia achieved independence), did not experienced such a population and economic boom. It was the period of *unrest* where Malaysia went from being a British Colony to being invaded by the Japanese in 1942. Japan occupied British Malaya and much of Asia until losing the war in 1945. An anti-colonial movement and a period of unrest, known as the *Emergency*, driven by a desire for self-determination, had been brewing, in Malaysia, since the late forty’s and lasted for a period extending from 1948 and did not rest until 1960 (Soong, 2011).



The term Generation X was first introduced by American Novelist, who wrote the novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* that described dramatic drop in the fertility compared to their parents, as more of them held off on marriage, childrearing and concentrated more on careers – both men and women (Martin and Prince, 2008). A comparison of trends in fertility rate between the USA and Malaysia in 1975, shows a different picture. The fertility rate in the USA indicated a declined in birth rates whilst in Malaysia the birth rates is progressing at a relatively constant state as show in figure 4 (Index Mundi, 2014).

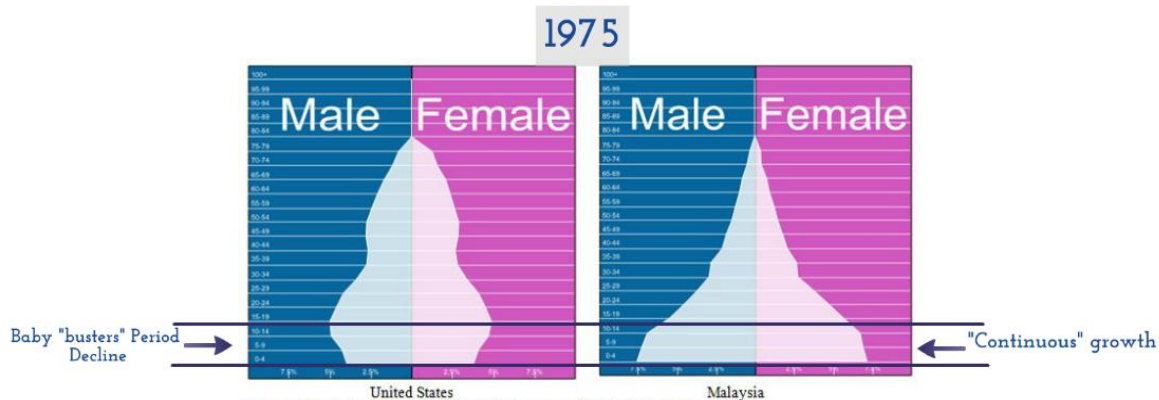


Figure 5: Population pyramids for the United States and Malaysia in 1975

### Generation X .VS. Generation 'B'

Figure 4 Comparison of population pyramids in 197s

The phrase Generation Y [for those who born after 1982 to 2004] is said to have been coined in 1993 by an Advertising company that sought to describe teens of the day (Reed, 2007). In the West, this generation was living in an age of globalisation, capitalism economy and unprecedented diversity and have the most exposure to other cultures compared to preceding generations (Codrington, 2011). The West lived in a prosperous environment with unprecedented access to higher education, urbanisation and progressing in economic growth. In term of the similar age group, the same generation, living in Malaysia, was entering into an era of industrialisation (EH.net, 2010). For the most part, there is an offset of *at least one* or *two* generations between the two countries. This was particularly evident when examining the economy growth for the Baby Boomer generation in the West which is more *similar* to current younger generation (below the age of 30) in Malaysia who are living in the state unprecedented economic growth and prosperity (Comeau and Tung, 2013).

Many generational studies have been conducted in the US (or in other Western contexts) and there are very limited studies that have really focused on the Asian societal contexts. Even studies conducted on generational theory very often borrowed the same western labelling (i.e. Gen X and Gen Y) without examining their relevance to the Asian experience during the same time period. In order to understand the implications of the notion of ‘generations’ it may be more logical to study generational cohorts in their proper and unique context, reflecting their own realities, rather than taking it directly from the totally different social context of the western world. Comeau and Tung (2013) have made an initial study and proposed a set of new

generational labels that reflect the past, the present and the future conditions that represent the true reality of Malaysian’ generations. Table 1 below is the proposed generational labels.

**Table 1 Malaysia Generational Labels.**

<b>The Seekers (Pencari)</b> (Born 1943 – 1960)	<b>The Builders (Pembina)</b> (Born 1961 – 1981)	<b>The Developers (Pemaju)</b> (Born 1982 – 2004)	<b>Generation Z (Generasi Z)</b> (Born 2005 onwards)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Born in a period of conflict, hardship, struggle and seeking for Independence</li> <li>2. The Emergency 1947 – 1960</li> <li>3. World War II</li> <li>4. Independence in 1957</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developments in education</li> <li>2. New Economic Policy (1971) aimed at economic restructuring</li> <li>3. Beginning of industrialisation and urbanisation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unprecedented access to higher education</li> <li>2. Urbanisation/towards modernisation (vision 2020)</li> <li>3. Economic growth, income and consumption improved</li> <li>4. TV/Internet is a norm</li> <li>5. Transformation in employment (from agricultural to industry to services)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most educated and urbanised.</li> <li>2. Higher income / higher consumption</li> <li>3. Exploit/travel to the world</li> <li>4. Population will start to balance out; more intense competition for jobs</li> </ol>
<p>Why <b>Seeker (Pencari)</b>? – They are the groups who witnessed Japanese occupation and British colonialism and desperately in sought independence and survival.</p>	<p>Why <b>Builder (Pembina)</b>? – They witness the <i>beginning</i> of a development towards a new era in industrialisation, economic self control, education development and progression in becoming an independent and developed nation. They provided the pathways for the</p>	<p>Why <b>Developer (Pemaju)</b>? – They grow up in a much more prosperous environment with better job opportunity and advancement in technology. They are [will be] the groups who will helps in advancing the country into a develop nation by the year 2020 [Vision 2020].</p>	<p>Why <b>Generation Z (Generasi Z)</b>? – They are growing up in a highly globalised world. The world is flattening out and that generation across space begin to look <i>alike</i>. This generation, in Malaysia, are highly connected, having had lifelong use of communication and</p>

	modernisation.		media technology sharing with others the nickname <i>digital native</i> . But other substantial differences and challenges arise between this generation and the previous generation.
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### Social and Historical Descriptors of Malaysian Generation Labels

For generational labelling to have contextual meaning, it is empirical to make comparison between Malaysian generations as proposed by the Generational theory. The descriptors and terms used to define the western generations are defined between generations and not across countries. This type of comparison, between generations, is what gives the western labels their pertinence and meaning historically and socially. In light of this argument, the following are the social and historical descriptors for the formulation of generational labels reflected in the factual generational gaps based on Malaysian workforce and demographic transitions over these four identified generations during a period of 70 years (from 1940s to present time).

#### ***The Seekers (Pencari) - Malaysian who born in between 1943 to 1960***

This generation was born in an era where agricultural and employments in the primary sector of the economy were the most important sources of incomes and can be defined as a subsistence economy. Although according to Sukirmo (2004) prior to independence the Malaysian economy was relatively strong as compared to other Asian countries. This was due to the development of two resource industries; rubber and tin with the gradual addition of palm oil. The level of per capita incomes at the time of independence was the third highest in Asia, after Japan and Singapore. However, these industries were mainly controlled by large European companies, especially British companies. Along with these main industries the economy was largely dependent on agriculture. In 1957 the industrial sector only contributed to 6.3 percent of the GDP and this was mainly due to 3.0 percent from rubber processing and 3.3 percent from other manufacturing. There were a number of small local private producers, mainly Chinese (Chinese who had migrated to Malaysia), along with the big corporations owned by European companies. World War II, had adversely affected the development of the rubber, tin and palm oil industries, the British again took control of its colony in Southeast Asia, and attempts were made to revive these industries. The tin mining industries were encouraged to revive their activities and tin exports started to rise again. Many rubber trees had become unproductive and efforts were made to revitalise the rubber industries. The revival of these two industries contributed significantly to the development of Malaysia between the ends of the World War II up until to Malaysia independence in 1957.



In term of education, this generation grow up in unstructured education systems due to the fact that Malaysia was on the midst of independence. The Education system during that period of time was not fully government supported nor was it every parent's intention to send their children on to vernacular schools. Typically, vernacular schools required some marginal amount of fees. The majority of the Malaysian populations were still living in rural areas [*kampong*] obtained their livelihoods through a subsistence economy mainly based on fishing and agricultural field of works. According to United Nation statistical record (2012), by 1960 it was recorded less than 30 percent of the Malaysian population was living in urban areas. During the British colonial period, large numbers of immigrants from China and India arrived in Malaya. The Chinese and Indian communities had then established their vernacular schools with school curricula and teachers from China and India respectively. It was not until the 1950s, that proposals for the development of a national education system were made. These were known as the Barnes and Ordinance Report (mainly favoured by the ethnics Malays) the Fenn-Wu Report (favoured by the ethnics Chinese and Indians), and the Razak Report (a compromise amongst previous ethnics-based reports). In 1956, it was recorded that the Razak Report was first adopted by the Malayan government as the education framework for independent Malaya that called for a national school system consisting of four medium schools (Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil) at the primary level, and a uniform national curriculum regardless of the medium of instruction at the secondary level (Tan, 2005). In the early years of independence, Malay medium schools were renamed as national national-type schools. Many existing Chinese, Tamil and mission schools accepted government funding and were allowed to retain their medium of instructions *on the condition* that they adopt the national curriculum. Most of the schools of that period accepted the change, and those that rejected became known as Independent (private) schools. During this generation, the recorded enrolment in primary school was relatively low and some were unrecorded. The same trends took place with secondary education with much lower enrolments for this generation partially due to the social and economy hardship. In term of the higher education, there is no publicly funded University that was built on Malaysia soil during that period. Higher education required travelling overseas which require substantial amount of financial support, hence, only the wealthy children were able to afford a higher education.

Prior to 1960, the population was recorded to be below 7 million in total. There is no reliable statistics on births and deaths for the pre-independence period. In general, the fertility rates for this generation period (in 1957) were relatively high, for instance, the fertility rate for ethnic Malays was 6.04, 7.33 for the Chinese and 7.95 for the Indians. Although fertility rates were relatively high for all races, the infant mortality saw a high percentage of death rates, which in between 1950 to 1955 was recorded as high as 96.4. Prior to World War II, population growth was characterised by large-scale immigration of Chinese and Indians. While the Chinese were attracted by employment opportunities in the tin mines and in commerce, the Indians were recruited to work in the rapidly expanding rubber industry. During the early part of this period immigration ceased and natural increase began to play a dominant role in population growth. The crude birth rate declined from about 46 live births per 1,000 populations in the late 1950s to about 39 in the mid-1960s. The fertility transition has not been uniform across the various ethnic groups. The total fertility rate among the Chinese and Indians had already declined

relatively sharply before the launching of the National Family Planning Program in 1967. Between 1957 and 1967, the total fertility rate for the Chinese fell from 7.2 children per woman to 5.0 and that for the Indians fell from 7.7 to 6.1 (Tey, 2007). At the end of the seekers period the population of Malaysia was a little under 8 million.

This generation lived through the *Emergency Era* that took place from 1948 to 1960. To give a brief description of the Emergency, it was an armed conflict driven on one side by fractions of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). On the other side were the British along with other western countries. It may be viewed as an attempt by western countries to eradicate the mounting communist influence in Asia. In parallel it may be viewed as part of the British attempt to dampen the anti-colonial movement that had started brewing in the 1930s. Soong (2011) noted that the intensify workers struggle had started prior to 1930 with the progressive unionisation of the workers who were mostly from the immigrant Chinese and Indians and some local Malays. Measures were taken by the colonial government to restrict the unionisation process. It was recorded that during the 1930's depression period, the conditions for the worker's has become worsen. It was at this time that the CPM was formed. It can be summarised that by the late 40's there were four fractions: (1) the unionization mostly by non-Malay workers, (2) the British Colonial state, (3) the Malay peasantry and (4) a new educated Malay Intelligentsia.

After the withdrawal of the Japanese after post World War II, the Malaya economy was in distress. There were high levels of unemployment, low wages, inflation, labour unrest with large numbers of strikes. As the British administration took harsh measure against the protest the protesters who have become increasingly militant. The Emergency was the colonial government's term for armed conflict. It's was a guerrilla war fought between Commonwealth armed forces and the Malayan Notational Liberation Army, the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party. During this period, in 1951, a political coalition, known as the Alliance Party, was formed between The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The Alliance Party is credited for having brought about independence. It won the first election in 1955 in what was then the British protectorate of the Federation of Malaya. The Emergency came to an end in 1960. The intensity of the conflict was only exceeded by the Vietnam War of the Sixties (Soong, 2011).

### ***The Builders (Pembina) - Malaysian who born in 1961 to 1982***

Until the early 1970s the agricultural sector remained the most important sector in the economy. At the time of independence the majority of the population was engaged in agricultural actives. The government of the newly independent state invested heavily in agriculture in order to improve the peoples well being. Sukirmo (2004) noted that at the time, 52% of the labour force was in agriculture and 25% of the labour force was engaged in industry-based activities such as rubber production and processing. This generation grow up in a new era in term progression in the economy, education, industrialisation, and urbanisation. According to Ariff (1991), prior to establishing the New Economic Policy in 70s, Malaysia predominantly was relying heavily on rubber and tin production. The new policy provided a programme of import substitution and manufacturing consumer goods for the domestic market. By the mid-

1970s, manufacturing goods such as electronics, electrical products, textiles, clothing and food manufactures were all making export gains. Essentially, the New Economic Policy also provided a blueprint for an active policy to raise the ethnic Malay participation in business. The Malaysian Government at that time was aided in its development of natural resources by oil production; between 1973 and 1977, total government revenue more than doubled, and the share of oil revenue increased from 1.5% to 11.4%. In addition, during the 1970s, free-trade zones were created to attract foreign investment in particular and help in boosting economy progression. The unemployment rate was recorded 6.5% in 1970 and reached 7% in the late 70's. The industrial sector progressed from the late 1960s and early 1970s, where urban area started to grow faster than the agricultural sector thus growing disparities between rural and urban areas. By the mid 1970's the agricultural sector only accounted for 12.2 percent of the GDP. This does not mean that agriculture was not growing, not just as rapidly as the non-agricultural sectors. A study on total factor productivity (TFP) in Malaysian agriculture indicated that the growth rate of TFP was at its highest per year during the period of 1961 to 1970. According to United Nation (2012), the urbanisation process continued and by the early part of 1980 it was recorded that less than half the population (42%) were living in urban areas. By early 1980, the employment of labour force in agriculture sector was at 34 percent, employment in industry and services related sector was on the raise which both sectors recorded at 24 percent and 38 percent, respectively. The GDP, according to index Mundi (2014), by 1981, was almost two and one half times greater than it was in 1960 (812). This generation grew up in a relatively improved economy compared to the previous generation and began a new era of the building up of the country.

During this generation, the enrolment in primary school was relatively low. In the mid-70's it was as low as 8.1% but with the development of the public education system enrolment grew to 23.4 percent in 1980. The same trends took place with secondary education with much lower enrolments for this generation relatively to the next generation. This is the period where the New Economic Policy focused on national unity and restructuring the Malaysian society to eliminate the identification of race with economic and geographical location. The medium of instruction of instruction from English to Malay was converted in stages which were beginning in 1970 and by the 1983 it became the medium of instruction at the tertiary level. In 1980, the Malaysian Certificate of Education examination was conducted in Malay language only. The Curriculum Development Centre was established in 1973 to evaluate, review and develop the school curriculum in line with national goals. Then, the late 1970s, a Cabinet Committee Report recommended several new approaches and strategies to further consolidate, strengthen and expand the national system of education. In 1980s, several recommendations of this Review Committee were implemented to bring about greater democratisation in educational opportunities and reduce the imbalances between the rural and urban areas. Tertiary education was still in the beginning stages where in 1961, the first public funded university campus was built in Kuala Lumpur. It was permanently located on a 309 hectare lot of land and remained with the name (University of Malaya). Following that the USM [Universiti Sains Malaysia] was established in 1969 as the second public funded university in Malaysia. It was first known as Universiti Pulau Pinang. In 1970s, three more publicly funded universities were established in different location of the country, Selangor and Johor. Universiti Putra Malaysia

(formerly known as Universiti Pertanian Malaysia or Agricultural University of Malaysia) located in central Peninsular Malaysia in the state of Selangor, close to the capital city, Kuala Lumpur. While Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National university of Malaysia) was born from the aspirations of the nationalists to uphold the Malay Language as a language of knowledge, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (also known as University of Technology Malaysia or UTM, located on Johor) is one of the oldest public engineering and technological university in Malaysia that began as a technical College in 1960 and upgraded to university status from 1975.

During this period the total fertility rates drop substantially from 6.23 in 1960 to 3.93 in 1980. The drop also saw in the infant mortality rates, which drop by 64.1 to 31.9 equivalents to 2:1 ratio. The Malaysian government at this time had launched a National Family Planning Program in order to reduce the fertility rate. In 1962, Family Planning Associations (FPA) was set up in all states of Peninsular Malaysia. The first clinic to deliver contraceptive services started in 1967. Until the early 1960s, family planning was not incorporated into development plans. Malaysia was perceived to be relatively under populated and the government then did not see population growth as an obstacle to development. However, emerging economic problems of unemployment and growing awareness of the long-run social, economic, and health implications of the high rate of population growth spurred the Malaysian government to change its stand on family planning (Tey, 2007). From 1961 to 1981, the population nearly doubled to 13,136.1 (Index Mundi, 2014). Chong (2005) noted that the Malaysia's New Economic Policy from 1971 to 1991 along with the Nations Development Policy of 1991, has largely contributed to the development of a new large middle class.

In term of political environment at that era, the Alliance Party which was created in the early 50's went on to gain popular support, at the National level, up to Federal election of 1969. In the election of 1969 popular support for the Alliance party fell. As a result riots erupted, mainly in Kuala Lumpur, due to the tensions between the Malays and the Chinese. This resulted in declaration of national emergency with the suspension of Parliament and the establishment of the National Operations Council. The result of the national emergency was followed by the resignation of Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister and the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) to ease the increasing tensions between races. It may be considered that at this point existing ethnic and economic tensions (such as the tensions brought about by ethnic inequalities) became institutionalised within the political system. The Alliance Party was replaced by the Barisan Nasional (BN) Party which was a coalition of the three parties that formed the Alliance plus a number of smaller parties. The goal of the New Economic Policy (NEP) was achieving socio-economic goals alongside pursuing economic growth objectives as a way of creating harmony and unity in a nation with many ethnic and religious groups. This set the theme for the future in electoral politics. With Barisan Nasional (BN) party obtaining the majority of votes and Seats in Parliament up to and including the 1982 election. This cohort seems to have remained relatively stable in their political adherence. Politics in Malaysian appear to be unchanged during this period and seem to be following the same trend that was previously established. Barisan Nasional (BN) party continued to obtain the majority of Seats in Parliament as well as the majority of votes. In the 2004 elections Barisan Nasional (BN) party

won 90% of the Parliamentary Seats. Barisan Nasional (BN) party also obtained 63.8% of the popular vote.

### ***The Developers (Pemaju) - Malaysian who born in 1983 to 2004***

According to Sukirno (2004) this period is known as the *Golden Years of Malaysian Development*. Malaysia began a transition from being reliant on mining and agriculture to an economy that depends more on manufacturing. Since the 1980s, the predominantly agricultural-based Malaysian economy began a transition towards a more multi-sector. High levels of investment, heavy industries flourished and in a matter of years, Malaysian exports became the country's primary growth engine. Malaysia consistently achieved more than 7% GDP growth along with low inflation in the 1980s and the 1990s. The unemployment rate declined to 3 percent. The rapid growth in industry was due to the expansion in manufacturing of electrical and electronic products. During this period of time, the employment of total labour force in agriculture went from 31.2 percent to only 14.6 percent. Employment in the industrial sector peaked at 33.7 percent in the late 90s. In 1988, for the first time, the manufacturing sector became the leading growth sector when its share of the GDP surpassed that of agriculture at 18.6%. Transformation in employment continued and the proportion of jobs in the manufacturing industry went down to 30.1 percent in 2004. This was not caused by a decline in manufacturing but by an increase of opportunities in the services-based sector which rose to 55.3 percent in 2004 (Index Mundi, 2014). Women participation in the workforce was relatively low in 1950, only 20 percent of female were employed in the workforce. However, the women involvement improved to 44 percent 1980s and grew to over 47 percent in 2000 (United Nations Country Team Malaysia, 2011). It was during this period that the country observed a major transition in urban and rural population. The majority were now living in urban areas compare to the previous generation. In 1991, it was recorded that 50.7 percent of the population were living in urban areas. The progression continued to reach over 60 percent in the early 2000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). According to World Bank record, by the year of 2004, it was recorded that a little over 66 percent of the population were living in urban areas. The GDP per capita as an indicator of the Standard of Living has tremendously improved since 1980s. By the year 2004, the GDP in this has more than doubled again and reached 4386. To get a better idea of this increase, it was almost twice the improvement recorded for Thailand and three times that of Indonesia (Index Mundi, 2014). This generation saw its spending power, as determined by the GDP per person employed, more than double as compared to the previous generations; being at 10,728 (1990 constant international dollars) to 21,400 in 2004. This generation grew in a relatively comfortable economy and had better standard of living compared to their previous two generations.

This generation enjoyed the benefits of the improvements in the education system which saw the proportion grow to 56.4% in student enrolment at primary education level in late 1980s. Enrolment continued to rise at reached a peak at 74% in 2004. A major education reform, the New Primary School Curriculum, was introduced in 1983 and by 1989 the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum was implemented. The national philosophy of education was formulated in 1988 which further reinforced the direction and goals of education across Malaysia. The Vision



2020 initiated in the early 1990s may be perceived as Malaysia's first step into the Information Age and a globalise world. To achieve the vision, the country needs to build a world class education system where in 1996 a new Education Act has replaced the outdated Act of 1961 to regulate the expansion of education. Of paramount importance was the enactment of the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 which made provision for the establishment of privately run tertiary institutions. In the earlier part of the 1980's as few as 4% were enrolled in a university. The proportion of this cohort who enrolled in university grew gradually during this period with a more drastic change beginning in early 2000 and reached 32% by 2004. As the first born of this generation age and move on with other things, the new cohorts moving into university education is the greatest number yet in the history of Malaysia. Enrolments reached over 40% in 2011. Another important factor that is taking place, in the field of education for this generation, is that women are now occupying and furthering tertiary education more than men. During this generation, there were 6 times less girls going to school than boys. However, the scenario has since then changed and at the present the *developers (pemaju)* generation especially in higher education; the ratio of women to men graduating from university is 60 to 40 (Ng, 2011).

In this period the population almost doubled again from the previous generation to reach over 23 million in 2004 (Index mundi, 2014). The previous generation saw the decline in birth rate. However, in the early 80's, the Malaysian government had embarked in an economic industrialisation program for the country. The need for a large workforce and bigger domestic market, the Malaysian government made a new family planning program in the hope of increasing the fertility rate. However, with the rapid modernisation and industrialisation the program had *little effect* even though there was a slight increase amounts the Malays (4.82 in 1985). The decline continued for the rest of the ethnics' population. The total fertility rates continued to drop from 3.73 in 1980 to 3.18 in 2000. The population continued to grow but changes started to occur in the dependency ratios. During 1960's, the young dependency ratio was relatively high which recorded as high as 88.9 and rose to 92.3 in 1964 before it progressively stated to decline. Although the dependency ratio continues to show a young dependency rate, the total dependency ratio has change from 95 to 58 from 1960 to 2004 [a significantly drop in the ratio] and continues to decrease to 53.5 as recorded in 2011 (Index Mundi, 2014). During the course of this time the dependency ratio becomes more balanced which naturally entails a greater number of participants contributing to the economy but however still focused on the needs of the younger generation.

Chong (2005) noted that the middle class continued to grow in this period especially census data in 2002 shown that ethnic income disparities have narrowed. However, the increase income of the bottom 40 percent has increased up to 1990 but has since remained constant. In term of political arena, a significant number of voters of this cohort do not necessarily follow the same voting patterns as the previous generation. Those born in 1982 and in 1992 became, in turn, the new groups of voters and eligible to vote in the 2008 and 2013 elections respectively. For the first time in its history Barisan National Party (BN) lost its two third parliamentary majorities in the 2008 election and the popular vote was just over 50%. Two social events are said to have happened on this generation period. One of the social event was



the majority of Chinese voters have moved away from Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) to support the Democratic Action Party (DAP) opposition party. The second recorded event was quite a number of Malays voters had switched their support from United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) opposition party. The same trend continued during the 2013 election and for the first time in its history Barisan National Party (BN) received less than 50 percent of the popular vote. It is estimated that this result is largely due to first time voters where the majority of the first time voters were highly educated and in the middle-income or high income group. (Chong, 2013).

### ***The Generation Z (Generasi Z) - Malaysian who born in 2005 onward***

This generation were born in a world with one of the world's *lowest unemployment rates* at around 3 percent (Trading Economics, 2014). The employment in agriculture is now not the prominent source of employment. Employment has shifted to the service sector which has grown from 55.3 percent in 2005 to 59.2 percent in 2010 (Index mundi, 2014). Presently, the Malaysian government has drawn up the framework for a New Economic Model to propel Malaysia from a middle-income to a high-income economy based on innovation, creativity and high value sources of growth. The Malaysian government strategies are to further develop the service sector of the economy to increase the number of opportunities in this sector. Under the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011 to 2015), the services sector is expected to grow at 7.2% annually until 2015, raising its contribution to GDP to 61% by the end of the Plan period (Malaysia Investment Development Authority, 2014). Workforce participation has, in the past, been dominated by the male, but since the early 2000s women's participation in the workforce has been on a continued rise. The interesting fact as this generation grows up the male participation has flattened out and that female participation has continued to rise thus a gradual narrowing of the gap. However, one crucial hypothetical question that arises is the possibly of creating employment opportunities for this generation who will be entering the workforce in the near future. As this generation enters the workforce will there be sufficient jobs to meet the employment demand? Although at present the unemployment rate is relatively low but as this generation enters the workforce, in *great numbers*, along with the great number of the previous generation who will be at the most in their early 40's, the demands for jobs will be high. Hypothetically, the *competition* in the job market could be higher than it was for the previous generations. The World Bank report suggested that from 2005 onward the majority of the population has been living in urban areas and by 2010 it was recorded 73.4 percent are urban dwellers. By the time this group of cohort's starts to enter the workforce it is projected that a little over 80 percent will be living in urban areas. In the year 2011, the GDP per capita of standard of living had continuously continued to rise and had reached 5345 (Index mundi, 2014). However, the indication provided by the GDP does not necessarily mean a continuous improvement in the standard of living. According to the 2012 Household Income Survey found the average monthly income of Malaysian households risen from RM4, 025 in 2009 to RM5000 in 2012, an increase of 7.2 per cent annually. However the Malaysian Mental Health Association noted increased frustration of urban living, work pressure, monetary issues, lost of the cushioning effect of the extended family. The rising cost of living and high expectations of urban living often see both parents working. This means greater frustration experienced by both parents who are working especially with increasing cost of living and living beyond one's means, leading to financial ruin. Children who was born in this

generation are more and more being looked after in day care centres than was the case with previous generations who were cared for by members of the family. Other contemporary issues such as the need for control government spending, and cutting on Government subsidies in petrol, sugar, electricity, has resulted in an increase in the cost of living. Is it possible that the continued prosperity that took place during the previous generation [such as the developers] may not be the reality facing this new generation? The declining value of the Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) against the British Pound (£), the US Dollar (\$) and the Chinese Renminbi (CN¥), has created an increase in the cost of imported food products. In addition, the Malaysian government plans to implement a new Goods and Services Tax which will have further implications on the cost of living. In terms of education, this generation will benefit the most for the primary education system and the proportion of enrolment attained 69% in 2010. Enrolments in secondary education stabilised in the early 2000 and remain pretty constant to 2011. Contrary to the cohorts of the previous generation, a higher education seems to be becoming the norm as this generation comes of age. If education is an indicator of gender equality then this generation will experience the greatest transformation in that area. The difference, in terms of gender in primary and secondary school enrolment that was evident for the *builders (Pembina)* and the early years of the *developers (Pemaju)* is now insignificant (Index Mundi, 2014). However, due to the large number of children in this age group there will be an increased demand for educational services at the elementary level which will gradually spread to the University level.

During this period the population has continued to grow to reach a little over 29 million in 2012. However, there is a substantial difference in the rate of population growth compared to previous generations. During this time period, the population has only grown by 6 million (since 2004) in comparison of 10 million or more grown as observed from previous **two** generations (Index Mundi, 2014). According to recent statistical data, the fertility rate in 2013 is 2.6 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, n.d.). Thus, this generation is living in families with the least number of siblings in Malaysian history. Even with a lower birth date, this generation, however, will see the biggest number of cohorts in Malaysian history. In 2005, there were 7,752,900 children in between the ages of 0 and 14. By 2025, when this generation have reached reaches the age of 18 – 28, they will represent approximately 20 percent of the population and along with the latter born cohorts of the previous generation who would have reached the age of 40; in total they will form approximately 35 percent of the population (Population Pyramid, n.d.). Furthermore, this is the first generation that will begin to experience a shift in the balance of young/ old dependency ratios compared to previous generations. There is still a persistent young dependency ratio of 51.2 and an old dependency ratio of 6.6 as recorded in 2011 (Index Mundi, 2014). However, if the trend continues this will be the first generation to experience a larger proportion of a working age group rather than a high dependency population ratio. Being the largest working age group in the history of the country, the question remains that whether the future jobs market can meet the demand of these large groups of available workforce? Other new challenges may however arise for this new generation. The transformation of the social structure has had other consequences. Roslan (2012) posited that while inter-ethnic inequalities have also been greatly reduced it has also resulted in larger intra Malay disparities.

In light of the political arena, since the creation of the Alliance party and later the BN political coalition, this party has been in power since independence. However, for the first time, in 2008 this coalition did not obtain a 2/3 majority in parliament and in 2013. In fact, this coalition has lost the popular vote. In contrast to the political tradition that have existed since independence and in the light of the election results of 2008 and 2013 for this generation the political scene seems to have taken a new turn. This new generation may come of age in atmosphere of social class politics rather than of ethnically defined politics. There are strong indications of the breakup of the cushioning effect of the traditional family as there are indications of a transformation taking place in voting behaviour and voting alliances. Along with these changes the question of traditional values may need to be examined. Sporadic and unstructured interviews, conducted by the authors, indicate and this generation may not hold as strongly to traditional values and practices in for example in spiritual belief, parental authority and family ties. The younger cohorts of the previous generation (living in small families) claim that they now have access, through the media and educational institutions, to alternative choices that were not available to their parents who dependent on traditional practices for stability. New forms of solidarity seem to be developing based on common interest shared between the young. These new solidarities may seem to be reinforced by the use of social media which allow for a great degree of interaction and an intensive degree of shared opinions and information.

### **Conclusion**

The generational labels of the Western world might not show the complete picture for other parts of the world. The question of an ever-increasing older population, lower birth rate and small younger generation as show in the analysis above discussion, are not immediate issues for a country like Malaysia. There are differences in young and old dependency ratio in Malaysia, which show a completely different picture then in western countries. Taking the example from the United States, according to the demographic transition theory the United States presently is progressing into Stage 4. However, Malaysia appears to be in the midst of Stage 3. The population distributions in both of these countries also show a wide variation where the dependency ratio in the United States was recorded at 50 and the dependency ratio in Malaysia was at 53. Although the ratios for each country are relatively at the same level and similar, the distinction is in the *nature of the dependency*. In the United States, there is a slightly more balanced dependency distribution between young (30) and old (20). The dependency ratio in Malaysia is due to a high proportion of younger population than the older population (in the ratio of 8 (Old) to 46 (Young)) compared to the United States which has a much bigger old population (Comeau and Tung, 2013). The data computed from the population pyramid also suggested that to get to the stage of increasing older population, with lesser younger people going into the workforce, as is happening in the Western world, for example in the United States, it would take another 25 years *or more* to come. For generational labelling to have contextual meaning, it is empirical to make comparison between Malaysian generations as proposed by the Generational theory. The descriptors and terms used to define the western generations are defined between generations and not across countries. This type of comparison, between generations, is what gives the western labels their pertinence and

meaning historically and socially. It is what contributes to a better understanding of cross generational cooperation and or conflict, in general, as well as in the workplace.

Over the past seventy years, in Malaysia, development and progression in economic growth has brought in tremendous social changes in many aspects from its demographic profile to shifting of workforce population. As demonstrated by Strauss and Howe (1992) similarity within a generation are attributed to social change. Based on the way the generations lived experiences that shaped that generation in regard to values, belief and attitudes. Taking the generational theory into Malaysia context, each generation has experienced a *unique* transition. In this paper it has been demonstrated that each generation has experienced tangible distinct realities that sometimes show radical differences in the life of the people. The *Seekers (Pencari)* generation living through a period of economic dependence and armed conflict before its independence to a period of peaceful coexistence, economic transformation and growth during the *Builders (Pembina)* generations. Although the *Builders (Pembina)* were born in an era of rural subsistence and low education, but during the *Developers (pemaju)* period this generation has experienced unprecedented urbanisation and access to higher education. *Generation Z (Generasi Z)* will witnessing a period of economic prosperity that is *unequal* to their past generations. Major changes have occurred in gender equality, a new transformation in dependency ratios will occur, social class structure is changing, and the population is still growing with an increased demand for goods and services. Along with the changes in education, employment structure, a middle class also come voting behaviours that no longer looks like the traditional loyalties previously established political alliances are being transformed from the pervious ethnic based alliances to more uniform social class alliances. Urbanisations, economic transformation, education opportunities, population growth, have been agents of transformation that have affected each one of the generations in specific ways. Generational theory has clearly demonstrated that cohorts socialised in different time periods, under the specific circumstances of their own time period, have experienced transformations in basic values when compared to the previous, or their following generation along with transformations in values attitudes, towards life, work, family, and others.

In short, in this paper we have shed light on the development of generational theory based on the Malaysian context and validated on the generational labelling which has defined the Malaysian's generations as *the seekers (pencari)*, *the builders (pembina)*, *the developers (pemaju)* and *the Generation Z (generasi Z)*. Strauss and Howe (1992) summarise that history creates generations and generations create history. The cycle draws forward energy from each generation's need to redefine the social role of each new phase of life it enters. It has already been demonstrated that the social, economic, educational and technological differences that arise between the West and Malaysia may sometimes be very wide and that generation labels examined only in the context of years of birth (Comeau and Tung, 2013) may be problematic. The defined Malaysian generation labels suggested by the authors are open, and for the large part, still in conceptual stages. The labelling convention are not fixed but are rather authors' attempt to place generational cohorts in time frames that reflect the evolution in term of historical context that is unique to Malaysia. The labelling was put together in an attempt to create dialogue and establish the legitimate variables to define the intergenerational

differences that are important social categorisations which had taken place in Malaysia. This defining provided a better clarity of the true portrait of Malaysian's generations who are (who will be) in the workforce.

This paper, however, does provide a critical analysis of the concept of generational application in Malaysia, more specifically, defining the corresponding generational labelling taking it from a Malaysia perspective. This paper also provides a more realistic understanding as to how these new defined generations changed through the decades. The authors may have a theoretical basis for defining the notion of generational in the Malaysia context, but presently there is little empirical evidence to help define by the specific values and attitudes. Generational theory does state that there are wide differences between generations. The impact of the changes observed in the Malaysian context would warrant further more empirical validation understanding intergenerational attitudes and value in the workplace continues to be a major issue and a focus of study in order to understand worker conflict, human resource management and productivity in the workplace. The authors, of the present study, contend that the realities that are reflected in the defined Malaysian generational labels will also determine values and attitudes that cannot be unquestionably attributed to the same generational cohorts based on observation made in the western world. This theoretical framework is the first study and analysis ever done in Malaysia and aims at bringing further insight into people oriented management practices.

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