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Transforming Malaysia

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Transforming Malaysia

Dominant and Competing Paradigms

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xiii
1 Introduction <i>Anthony Milner, Abdul Rahman Embong and Tham Siew Yean</i>	1
2 Race and Its Competing Paradigms: A Historical Review <i>Anthony Milner and Helen Ting</i>	18
3 Knowledge Construction, the <i>Rakyat</i> Paradigm and Malaysia's Social Cohesion <i>Abdul Rahman Embong</i>	59
4 Race Paradigm and Nation-Building in Malaysia <i>Helen Ting</i>	82
5 Race-Based Paradigm in Poverty Eradication and Income Distribution Analysis and Policy <i>Ragayah Haji Mat Zin</i>	111
6 Foreign Workers in Malaysia in the Post-Independence Era: Race Paradigm in State Policy, Academic Writings and Public Discourse <i>Azizah Kassim</i>	143
7 Trade Policy Formulation in Malaysia: Navigating between the Economic and Race Paradigms <i>Tham Siew Yean</i>	178

8	National Security Conceptions and Foreign Policy Behaviour: Transcending the Dominant Race Paradigm? <i>K.S. Nathan</i>	202
	<i>Index</i>	224

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

5.1	Peninsular Malaysia: Population by Ethnic Groups ('000)	114
6.1	Five Major Source Countries (2001–10)	149
6.2	Foreign Workers (FW), Economic Growth and Policy Measures (1970–2010)	151
6.3	Rationales for Changes in Policy Measures and Instruments (1992–2011)	154
6.4	Recent Changes in Policy Measures	157
7.1	Import and Excise Duties for Imports from ASEAN and Non-ASEAN Countries (2010)	191
7.2	Tariff Reductions in Auto; Auto Components and Parts in Malaysia, under the MJEPA	192

Figures

6.1	Increase in Foreign Population in Peninsula Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak (1970–2010)	146
6.2	Number of Foreign Workers in Malaysia, 1993–2019	148

PREFACE

Seeking to become a high income, developed and united country by 2020, Malaysia seems trapped. It is still viewed as a state searching for a nation — a country deeply divided into ethnic or racial blocs which do not share a national vision. Malaysia's challenge is enormous, as this volume explains. But it is also a challenge of ideas rather than straightforward social fact. The racial structure of Malaysia is in a critical way ideologically created — a paradigm — and the task of building a united nation state and national economy is one that cannot be left entirely to specialists in economics and political institutions.

As can be seen in the run up to, and the aftermath of the 13th general election held on 5 May 2013, the race paradigm has been raised sharply to the fore again as a weapon of mobilization, including by the right wing elements in the ruling UMNO and their supporters. The relevance of the debate on the race paradigm — which is the central theme in this volume — is immediately apparent in these developments. This volume examines the manner in which Malaysia's race paradigm was formulated and promulgated, and achieved dominance. It notes as well the presence and competition — and failure — of other societal paradigms, and then goes on to test whether or not the dominant paradigm is losing influence in specific practical areas of Malaysian life.

The volume focuses on ideas, but recognizes too that paradigms are formulated and contested in a political and economic context. The history of ideas has been neglected in Malaysian studies — and yet, in certain ways, it can help open up new possibilities. The mere reminder that the current Malaysian configuration is a construct — and has been challenged in the past — can be liberating. Examining the race paradigm in process, and in practice — also helps to identify ways in which it might be qualified or

modified in the future, when economic and political imperatives seem to demand structural challenge.

This volume is the latest in the series of books emerging from IKMAS's collaborative projects under the auspices of the Pok Rafeah chair, and is in line with IKMAS overall framework of globalization and social transformation. It may be recalled that the first chairholder, Professor J.H. Mittelman, who was at IKMAS in 1997 and 1999 collaborated with IKMAS Fellows to produce the book *Capturing Globalization*, edited by J.H. Mittelman and Norani Othman (2001). The second collaboration — with Professor Joan Nelson who occupied the Pok Rafeah chair from 2006 to 2007 — resulted in the publication of another book entitled, *Globalization and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*, edited by Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meeran, and Abdul Rahman Embong. This book was jointly published in 2008 by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore and IKMAS, Bangi, and won the “Best Co-published Work” award from the ASEAN Book Publishers Association in 2009. It is our hope that the present volume, will provoke serious rethinking and reflections about the kind of paradigm Malaysia needs to guide policy-making and socio-political action to engage with globalization and promote social cohesion. Our objective for Malaysia must be to partake successfully in the process of globalization and transform the country into a competitive high-income nation.

Anthony Milner, Abdul Rahman Embong and Tham Siew Yean
9 September 2013

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