Higher Education 14 (1985) 477–496
Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., Amsterdam – Printed in the Netherlands

THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA: METROPOLITAN, CROSS-NATIONAL, PERIPHERAL OR NATIONAL?*

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ABSTRACT

This article initially outlines Clark's overall theoretical formulation of viewing higher education institutions in terms of academic organization governed by elements which are unique to the system and a disciplinary logic. These unique attributes have, according to Clark, a cross-national convergence. The article then goes on to demonstrate through an analysis of the origin, growth and development of a study of the Malaysian higher education system that the overall theoretical formulation of Clark has an inherent weakness, as it under-plays the role national policies and environmental imperatives play in determining national higher educational systems. However, Clark's theoretical framework, barring these limitations, does provide a useful tool to systematically study how higher education systems are organized and governed in different cultural milieux. In spite of their wider environmental constraints, specific higher education systems have evolved and retained certain basic features and elements which are cross-national in character.

Introduction

In this article, an initial attempt is made to outline and analyse some of the salient features that Burton Clark (1983) has put forward in his book entitled *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective* in order to identify the basic elements common to all systems of higher education in his cross-national sample. In the study, Clark's contribution to the

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, in Houston, Texas in March, 1984.

** I wish to thank Michael Olivas, Philip Altbach, Gail Kelly, S. Gopinathan, Peter Williams, Vimala Nambiar and Alec Ross for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

theory of higher education is indeed a major one. It deserves further refinement and amplification through case studies in a variety of contexts. He presents a plausible case for viewing higher education institutions in terms of an academic organization governed by elements which are unique to the system and a disciplinary logic, both of which are cross-national. However, Clark's notion of cross-national convergences underplays the role national policies and imperatives will play. To put it in another way, universities cross-nationally are both alike and not alike but they are not alike for similar reasons. In this article it is hoped to demonstrate, through an analysis of the origin, growth and development of Malaysian higher education, how the grafting of the "not alike" dimension is inadequately dealt with by Clark's overall theoretical formulation. A cross-national view of higher education will implicitly set up normative criteria by which universities in developing societies are to be judged. However, universities the world over are powered by different situational specific dynamics and these institutions must respond to these dynamics and "norms" as well.

Secondly, the article goes on to outline briefly the origin, growth and structure of the higher education system in Malaysia. In particular, it deals with the way in which the higher education system is organized and governed in both colonial and post-colonial Malaysia and the specific indigenous socio-political pressures that have brought about radical changes and departures in the system of higher education that was implanted during colonial days. In the last section, it critically examines the system to see whether there is a fit between Clark's claim that there is a cross-national convergence between the structures and processes underlying academic organizations and, in particular, whether such a convergence exists in the Malaysian higher education system.

Clark's Cross-National System

Burton Clark in his study has rightly pointed out that although the emerging serious literature on higher education throughout the world has reasonably enhanced our perspective of the higher education system with richer ideas and facts, this literature leaves much to be desired. In many respects the literature is fragmented and fragile, largely because scholars were, and are more discipline oriented. Study and research in higher education issues were considered to be non-disciplinary in nature. Therefore, attention was only centered on immediate problem areas that higher education faced and for which immediate solutions were to be sought. In his study Clark attempts to improve the state of the art by detailing systematically how higher education is organized and governed. Firstly, he sets forth the basic elements of the higher education system, as seen from an organizational perspective. Secondly, he attempts to show how these features vary across nations, as well as their effects. In order to achieve his main objective,

Clark confronts the common and varied structures and procedures in higher education reported in the existing literature from selected countries. These are largely studies of higher education systems in post-industrial societies like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Japan, Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany and only to a lesser extent studies of developing societies like Poland, Mexico and Thailand. Using these data he creates general categories and then goes on to identify the basic elements in higher education as it operates in this cross-cultural framework.

Clark points out that a cross-cultural comparison is particularly advantageous as it uncovers the unique features and unconscious assumptions that possess our vision when we study only a single country, generally our own. This is largely because, as Clark points out, the "home-town" view – in particular of the American higher education system, which is fundamentally a deviant case – distorts one's perspective of the study of the higher education system. Clark also emphasises that the brute realities of national differences restrain a normative dogma. Therefore, to Clark it makes sense to know what is in place and how the future is thereby figured for others, who are as rational as the Americans, before applying judgements on what ought to be done in higher education at home and abroad.

The culling out of these basic features of the higher education system, according to Clark, will enable us to perceive in depth how the system itself determines action and change. According to Clark, though such an approach will constrain the analyst from imputing the influence of the immediate societal environment on the system, it "is increasingly compelling in social sciences as large sectors split off as major specialities with their own contraints and imperatives" (Ibid: 2). Clark reinforces his argument by using Ralf Dahrendorf's contention that "certain areas of human activity have evolved their own action patterns" (Ibid). In other words, in major specialities a sectoral hegemony has developed. Clark points out that unlike elementary or secondary schooling, science, scholarship and higher education have autonomies. In particular, Clark suggests that "the last century has seen the higher education system mature as a relatively independent sector of modern societies" (Ibid). He contends that it is freer from societal control, including political control. Clark adds that in spite of the current widespread impression that higher education is increasingly interdependent – with other parts of society, and thereby heavily dependent, that there is a virtue in seeing the higher education system as one that has developed its own massive structures and bounded procedures that provide some insulation and strensthened hegemony over certain tasks and functions.

As a result of this form of institutional development, Clark says that the power groups within the higher education system have the capacity not only to shape their immediate work environment but also the power to affect the world. In other words, according to Clark, a vast professionalization of academic

activities is involved which receives material and symbolic rewards. When this professionalization converges with bureaucratization in fashioning large organizations, powerful social actors are thereby produced. To Clark, this phenomenon too, prevails in higher education. Therefore, Clark points out that his emphasis will be "an internalist perspective that concentrates on the institutional framework, the regular organization that supports, perpetuates, and indeed helps to create the intellectual momentum" (Ibid: 4). Though Clark recognizes that modern organizational theorists have evolved a framework which has suggested that as far as possible the boundary between an organization and its environment should be dissolved, he still underplays this empirically useful phenomenon. He points out that in higher education the boundaries of the system are so problematic that for him "it makes sense to focus on the capacity of well-located groups to use parts of the system for their own purposes, examining them without much concern about where they sit on the two sides of an arbitrary line" (Ibid: 4).

Using this broad outline and conceptual framework, Clark tries to excavate the higher education system's basic structure. To do this, he embarks upon a cross-national investigation of the higher education system by focussing discussions evolved around "five generic questions" about academic systems in largely post-industrial societies. They focus upon the: arrangement of work; maintenance of beliefs; distribution of authority; integration of systems; and changes. Clark's contention is that the answers to these questions will lead towards systematic answers to issues such as what determines access, how general education can be supported, how higher education can be further democratized and how the integration of teaching and research can be maintained in systems of mass higher education. Clark then narrows down his findings and points out that all these issues are heavily conditioned by the structural bases of the higher education systems pursued in his study. He adds that each of the systems have macro constraints and compulsions that affect action up and down the line of the academic organization. For example, the European chair and the American department shape teaching roles into different moulds. The structure and organization in undergraduate and graduate levels in the U.S.A. makes American student life in its national setting different from that of other countries.

The Malaysian Higher Education System

A. ORIGINS AND EXPANSION

The system of higher education that took root in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia was transplanted from Britain to Malaysia during British colonial rule. Therefore, not surprisingly, the British system of higher education was to a large

extent replicated in the higher education milieu of the country and formed the basis of the higher education system of Malaysia from the beginning. The historical origins and growth of this higher education system can be seen in four specific stages. First, the implantation and development of a higher education system in Malaysia and Singapore before Malaysia's independence in 1957; second, the establishment of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in 1961; third, the establishment and growth of three new national universities and an International Islamic University after 1969; and, finally, the upgrading of the Agricultural and Technical Colleges in 1971 and 1972, respectively, to full university status.

Basically for functional and political reasons, the British colonial state sowed the first seeds of a higher education system into the country in 1905 with the establishment in Singapore of a British-modelled professional medical school, closely linked to the British system. The main function of the medical school was to train locals to serve the health and medical needs of the colonial state. In 1921 it was substantially expanded and restructured and was called the King Edward VII College of Medicine. Dentistry was added in 1929. The College, which was Government financed and controlled, maintained high standards both in its teaching and output of graduates. Because of its high standard it was recognised by the British General Medical Council from 1916 (Carr-Saunders, 1961).

In 1928 the colonial state, in order to commemorate the centenary of the founding of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles, established a second tertiary institution called the Raffles College. According to Lady Raffles (1839: 79) from the beginning Raffles had strong visions of an

> ...institution in the nature of a native college, which shall embrace not only the object of educating the higher classes of the native population, but at the same time affording instruction to the officers of the Company in the native languages and of facilitating our more general researchers into the history, condition and resources of these countries.

The College, though financed by the colonial authorities, was controlled by an independent Council with an adequate number of representatives from the colonial state to steer policy issues that were in the interest of the colonial state. It had a Senate which controlled academic matters. It provided both Malaysians and Singaporeans with a liberal education through an English medium based on the British model and courses in English, history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, education, economics and geography at a diploma level were provided. This was further reinforced by the usage of reading and reference material which were basically British in content and character. These diplomas, though of a very high standard, were not recognised in Britain and other Commonwealth countries. Most of the graduates were absorbed as teachers in the growing urban-biased, English medium schools which were established under the colonial education

system. The small number of Malays, usually from the upper crust of the Malay society, who graduated from the college with a diploma were mainly recruited into the Malay Administrative Service (MAS), a lower echelon of the prestigious and then exclusively European manned Malaysian Civil Service (MCS).

Both these tertiary institutions were developed independently of one another, perhaps deliberately. However, as a result of the recommendation of the Carr-Saunders Commission in 1948, these two institutions were amalgamated on the 8 October 1949 to form the nucleus of the autonomous English medium University of Malaya in Singapore with degree-granting status. This recommendation, which was hailed as liberal and sympathetic to the aspirations of the people of the country (Lim Tay Boh, 1948: iii) was contrary to the decisions taken by the prewar McLean Commission and the immediate postwar Asquith Commission. Both of them had recommended the establishment of a University College linked with the metropolitan-based University of London for an adequate transitional period before a full-fledged University was established – an experiment that had been used in former colonies like Sri Lanka, Nigeria and the West Indies. Initially, the University of Malaya had three faculties, namely Arts, Science and Medicine, including Dentistry and Pharmacy. Over the years Education (1950), Engineering (1955), Law (1957), and Agriculture (1961), were added.

On the eve of Malayan independence, the then Government of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore appointed a Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Aitken, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, to study and make recommendations as to whether or not it was feasible to establish a new university in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur. The main thrust of this proposed University was two-fold. First, it was intended to make provision for an increasing demand for trained manpower both as a result of the implementation of a "Malayanization" policy, i.e., the replacements of expatriates with Malaysians, and the rapid development and expansion of public and private sectors with independence. Second, the proposed university had to meet the increasing demand for University education by the rapidly growing school-leaving and aptly qualified student population. In the light of the Commission's Report (Singapore, 1957) and the recommendation of the Joint Constitutional Committee (Federation of Malaya, 1958) appointed by the two Governments, legislation was passed in November 1958 making provisions for the establishment of two autonomous divisions of equal status of the University of Malaya in each of the two countries. After the legislation came into operation on January 1959, the University of Malaya in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur each had a principal, a Divisional Council and Divisional Senate, while the University of Malaya as a whole was administered by the Vice-Chancellor and a Central Council as well as a degree-granting and coordinating body. It also combined to maintain a common Court and Guild of Graduates. However, each

of the Divisions had a large measure of administrative and academic autonomy in order to pursue independently various means to meet the manpower demands of the respective territories.

The independent Government of the Federation of Malaya in 1960, realizing the absence of an exclusively national university within its own territorial boundary, decided that the autonomous Kuala Lumpur division of the University should become the sole University of Malaya. Similarly, the Government of the Republic of Singapore decided that the Singapore division of the University should become the University of Singapore. It is now known as the National University of Singapore (NUS) after its amalgamation with the Nanyang University in 1980. The necessary legislation was passed by both countries in 1961 to formalize the establishement of two separate universities with effect from 1 January 1962.

Since its inception in 1959 as a division of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, the development of the University of Malaya has been rapid both in terms of student and staff numbers and infrastructure facilities. In terms of student numbers, these rose from 323 in 1959 to 1,341 in 1962. They continued to rise to 2,835 in 1965, 4,560 in 1967, 8,519 in 1973 and in 1985 the total stood at 9,890, which included postgraduate enrolment as well. Since 1973 the University has been not only consolidating its past expansion and growth but has also been moving more and more towards postgraduate studies and advance research. This has now been formalized and was further consolidated with the establishment of an Institute of Advanced Studies in July 1979. The basic aim of this Institute is eventually to provide within the country for the major requirements of the highly trained manpower that is necessary for research, teaching and industry. Thus far, highly-trained Malaysians have more or less exclusively received their qualifications in foreign countries, predominantly the West.

While the University of Malaya was putting down deeper roots and expanding to meet the unprecedented increase in demand for student places in the various disciplines, the then Government of the Federation of Malaya decided that a Higher Education Planning Committee should be established under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education "to review the arrangements in the Federation of Malaya for Higher Education and to make recommendations for the development and improvement of such education in the light of the foreseeable needs and financial resources of the country" (Malaysia, 1967: 163). The Committee, in its Report that was released to the public in 1967, recommended that on a long term basis 20 percent of the relevant age group should be provided with facilities for higher education. Focussing upon this, the Committee recommended (Ibid: 208) that:

1. The Technical College should convert into a College of Technology and enjoy a status comparable to that of a University and courses leading to

professional qualifications in Architecture, Surveying, Town and Country Planning as well as Engineering should be made available;
2. the Faculty of Agriculture should be expanded rapidly;
3. a University College should be established in Penang and be ready to admit students in 1970;
4. in addition to courses in the medium of English, more Arts and Science courses, including courses in Technology, in the medium of the National Language should be offered at both University and College levels as soon as practicable;
5. facilities should also be made available for training of high level manpower in the following fields: 1) Accountancy 2) Library and Archival Science, 3) Veterinary Science, 4) Forestry, 5) Fisheries and, 6) Journalism.

Under these recommendation the first new university to be established was the University of Penang, now known as *Universiti Sains Malaysia* (Science University of Malaysia) at Penang in 1969. It expanded rapidly and in 1971 it took the initiative to offer the first off-campus Academic Programmes in Malaysia. It had an initial student population of 271 in 1970, which rose in 1973 to 1,543 and in 1985 the student number stood at 8,862, which includes the off-campus enrolment.

In the following year, the National University of Malaysia (now known as *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*) was established. Its student numbers too rose rapidly, from 169 in 1970 to 1,481 in 1973 and to 10,220 in 1985. In 1984, yet another new University, the *Universiti Utara Malaysia* (University of North Malaysia), was established in Kedah, the home state of the country's Prime Minister. Its student enrolment stood at 604 in 1985. In addition, an International Islamic University commenced its first session in July 1983. The purpose of this University is to strengthen cooperation and friendship between Islamic intellectuals, provide facilities for Islamic studies and train skilled manpower for development within the framework of Islamic principles. The mediums of instruction are Arabic and English. The philosophical basis of this new University fundamentally contradicts and departs from the dominant western belief system that assumes that the existing body of academic knowledge is universal and cross-national in character. The stress in this University is on the philosophical assumptions and beliefs of Islam regarding knowledge.

A School of Agriculture was opened in 1931 for training agricultural assistants to work in the Agricultural Department. When the school re-opened after World War II, the colonial government decided to raise its status to a College of Agriculture, offering a three-year Diploma Course that provided training in the science and practice of tropical agriculture with special reference to local crops and conditions (Wong Hoy Kee and Te Tiang Hong, 1971: 161).

Similarly, a Technical College was started in 1925 with the purpose of training middle-level technical personnel to man the Colonial States' Public Work Department, the Railways, the Survey Department and other related public utility service departments. In the years 1971 and 1972 both these institutions were respectively upgraded to University status. In 1985 their student numbers, both at the diploma and degree level, stood at 8,412 for the *Universiti Pertanian Malaysia* (Agricultural University of Malaysia) and 7,472 for the *Universiti Teknologi Malaysia* (University Technology Malaysia).

Malaysia, which had only one university in 1969, saw four new universities added by 1972. Five middle-level tertiary institutions were established. The MARA Institute of Technology opened in 1967 to train *bumiputras* (Malays and other indigenous groups) in middle-level management and technological positions. The Ungku Omar Polytechnic was established in 1969 to train Malaysians for middle-level technical manpower of which the country was badly in need. The Tunku Abdul Rahman College was established in 1969 to meet the higher education demands of predominantly Chinese students who were not able to get access to higher education in the limited number of institutions. In addition, two polytechnics at Kuantan and Batu Pahat were established, to train technicians at artificate level.

B. STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION AND ACADEMIC BELIEFS AND VALUES

As indicated earlier in this article, in the absence of any semblance of an indigenous system of higher education in the country, the higher education system that was implanted and which developed in the country was British. This system was foreign to the non-European socio-cultural traditions of the people – except for a small group of English educated and Western trained elites – of the country. The system was a transplant of the British system of higher education. This was in line with the recommendation of the McLean Commission of 1939, which emphasised that as in Great Britain, in Malaysia too a strong academic tradition should be developed and university education and academic life should not be controlled by the state. This tradition, it was believed, was the day in which freedom of development was to be best secured and the necessary freedom of thought guaranteed (Colonial Office, 1939: 93). Thus according to Ashby (1966: 224):

> Underlying British enterprise in providing higher education for her people overseas was one massive assumption: that the pattern of university appropriate for Manchester, Exeter and Hull was *ipso facto* appropriate for Ibadan, Kampala and Singapore. If we were going to export universities to our overseas dependencies they would of course be British universities, just as the cars we export there are British cars. As the cars, so with universities: we willingly made minor modifications to suit the climate, but we proposed no radical change in design: and we did not regard it as our business to enquire whether French or American models

> might be more suitable. This assumption – it is almost an axiom – ran through a great deal of the official thinking which proceeded the Asquith report; it was accepted without question by the Asquith Commission; and, until recently, it lay hidden in the foundations of all universities in the new Commonwealth countries.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the University of Malaya and the other universities that were established well after the country's independence were modelled and structured along the lines of universities in the metropolitan centre. In all this, the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies (Colonial Office, 1954: 30–34) set up in 1946 in London with representatives from British and colonial university institutions played an important and vital role in moulding these universities into the British pattern. Like in the metropolitan universities, the academic activities were organized and made to revolve around core disciplines which formed the body of knowledge that was used in teaching and research (Clark, op. cit.: 12). These Malaysian universities were formally organized like their metropolitan counterparts to perform and reflect on the metropolitan-generated body of knowledge and academic opinions. The three main functions (Selvaratnam, 1980: 121) were: firstly, they are a reservoir and transmitter of knowledge, modelled along the liberal western pattern. As in other national systems, including the British, teaching tends to be the predominant feature of the Malaysian higher education institutions. Secondly, the system pinpointed that through the technology of research and teaching in the various disciplines, the universities are supported to enhance the "advancement" nationally and internationally of its material foundation, i.e., the conceptualization of knowledge (Clark, op. cit.: 12). In other words, as Clark points out, the discipline mode of organization that higher education systems had adopted has over time and space rendered them basically meta-national and international (Ibid: 29). And thirdly, they formally prepared and provided the society with the necessary high-level manpower of a reasonably high calibre. In other words, there are dual aims: to produce liberally educated "all-rounders" who could serve the growing public services, private sectors and the teaching profession, and to produce a core of professionals, i.e., men with a rigorous and specialized training in medicine, dentistry, engineering, accountancy, etc. to meet the growing needs of the country.

In order formally to organize and implement these main functions, the University of Malaya, as recommended by the Carr-Saunders Commission, was structured and organized as an autonomous body on a British provincial University model (Silcok, 1964: 9). The British model divided its administrative structure into two parts: academic and non-academic matters. As in Britain, the authorities of the universities were the Court, the Council, the Senate, the Faculties, the Institutions, the Boards of Studies, the Boards of Selection, the Board of Student Welfare, the Guild of Graduates and such other bodies as may

be prescribed by statutes as authorities of the universities. Following the British pattern, the Vice-Chancellor was appointed by the University Council as the principal academic and executive officer of the University. He is supported, as in British universities, by senior administrators, including a Registrar who takes care of academic and administrative affairs and a Bursar who deals with financial matters. The Council is the governing body of the university and it is the principal authority in that it determines the broad policies of the whole university, except in relation to academic matters which are solely under the jurisdiction of the Senate, which is made up solely of academics.

The newer universities that were established subsequently in Malaysia adopted broadly similar structures. Since there was no encouragement for the development and growth of an indigenously generated fabric of academic knowledge which was related to the Malaysian socio-cultural and historical environment and its future development, academic knowledge in the form of core disciplines that formed the basis of the university curricula was also Western in origin, predominantly British. These disciplines came with a value system that was crystallized in a British academic milieu where free enquiry was enshrined. Neither was there in Malaysia a sufficiently large local community of academic scholars. Therefore, initially the University of Malaya and also the other new universities, were manned by large numbers of expatriate academics who were, in Clark's term, heavily individualistic and discipline-oriented. As Clark points out, discipline rather than the institution tended to become the dominant force in their working lives (Clark, op cit.: 30). They therefore lacked a commitment to the academic organization as a whole as well as to national issues. Their favourite doctrine was freedom of research, teaching and learning in their respective disciplines (Ibid.: 105). They wanted to pursue their work in line with their own adjustments of metropole models and international, particularly British, standards (Ibid.: 249). Initially, a large proportion of them came from British and Commonwealth universities but, subsequently, under various aid programmes, expatriate academics from America also came to play an important role in the transmission and perpetuation of a predominantly American-oriented fabric of knowledge and research. They had an influence on recruitment and assessment of students. Thus, the exclusively British character and structure began to be replaced by new features. However, in the last two decades, the academic community has been rapidly and effectively replaced by a Malaysian academic community, but one which is basically trained and oriented in a western academic, belief and value system. Therefore, not surprisingly, they have to a considerable extent continued to perpetuate the same beliefs about theory, methodology, techniques and problems.

In spite of the fact that the University of Malaya and the other universities are financed from public funds, they were given considerable autonomy. The main power was located within the University itself and, as in the British model,

the diffusion of authority was from the top. Each university was allowed to draw up its course content, award its own degrees and hire its own faculty (Ibid: 107–134). Up till today the University of Malaya's medical degrees are patterned and structured in such a way in order for the degree to continue to be recognized by the British General Medical Council. This autonomy was maintained and ensured by legislation.

In other words, the Western model of higher education, in particular the British model, permeated and dominated the whole higher education system of Malaysia: its knowledge structure and organizations, its curricula and standards and its social functions. They were further embodied and guaranteed again by suitable Acts of Parliament. This system could not foster a local academic tradition and belief and knowledge system that could come to terms with the fundamental issues facing a multi-ethnic and fast developing country like Malaysia with its rapid population growth and marked economic inequalities along ethnic lines.

C. A PERIPHERAL MODEL

The architects of this higher education system – both the colonial policy makers and the Western-educated elites – had wanted it to be a replica of the British higher education system at its best, with its autonomous status interest, and took pride in maintaining and perpetuating this system in spite of the fact that attempts were made on several occasions at political levels to make inroads into the university's autonomy. This conviction was reinforced even as late as 1967 when the Higher Education Planning Committee in its report (1967: 265) stressed that "Universities, to be worthy of that name, should be allowed complete antonomy in internal administration and full freedom in all academic matters."

However, in reality the system that ultimately did take root and establish itself over the years was not able to reflect this utopian vision because of a combination of factors, such as inequalities in wealth along ethnic lines, power and resources. Neither did the academic system, because of its preoccupation with values of autonomy, standards and norms of the international academic community, come to terms with the fundamental issues a multi-ethnic and developing country like Malaysia faced as it built expertise in this area. As indicated earlier, the western training which most of the Malaysian academics acquired socialized them towards a western educational perspective, the intellectual direction, scientific and methodological paradigms, work habits and professional expectations of their respective "host" countries. In Clark's terms, the academic community is a scientific community. It shares distinctive intellectual tasks and related codes of conduct with its fellow physicists, economists and historians in spite of the fact that they occupy different cultural houses. Clark

emphasises that "A paradigm is what the members of a scientific community share, and conversely, a scientific community consists of men who share a paradigm" (Ibid.: 76). In the core disciplines there is a "common vocabulary" and symbols. Judgements on quality of performance in disciplines are made across the borders of the institutions and across national systems (Ibid.: 246). In Clark's terms, the Malaysian higher education system is part of an international knowledge system.

Is this so? In reality the Malaysian system is in the periphery of this system. This is because the western educational model and its "intellectual centres" provide the impetus as well as function as the pinnacle for the Malaysian academic system (Altbach, 1982: 46). In this relationship, the centre is the producer and the periphery the consumer. In Malaysia, for example,

> the teaching of the social sciences suffers from an "unfavourable balance of intellectual payments". It imports many more knowledge products from the West then it exports. Malaysia is beholden to the Western industrialized nations for social scientific books and journals in anthropology, communications, political science, psychology, sociology, etc. and also for knowledge for applied research findings and often the results of research about the country and society itself. Further, knowledge and information are generally channeled through the Western nations and therefore filtered through their publishing houses, journals and academic institutions before reaching academics in the country. In short, in the teaching of social sciences, Malaysia finds itself in a classic position of dependency vis-a-vis industrialized nations (Abdul Halim Otham and Abu Hassan Othman, 1980: 180–181).

Therefore, the Malaysian higher education system is on the side of the spectrum which is peripheral. The system has produced very little that is original and is thus not on the forefront of the knowledge production and disseminating industry as the Western higher education system is. This is largely because the system utilizes a curriculum in its teaching and research of the paradigms and methodology they use in the metropole as its prime reference point. Therefore, there is in the Malaysian pattern of knowledge acquisition and production an inherent distortion. For example, teaching and research in economics in Malaysia, particularly the neo-classical brand, has come under continuous and severe criticism, largely because of the limited success this brand of economics has achieved in the redistribution of income in the country despite the impressive economic growth rates that Malaysia has achieved since its independence. This phenomenon has now become rather deep rooted. Perhaps with the development of an endogenous and creative intellectual community the country might be able to free itself from this form of intellectual dependency, which is not able to generate the relevant knowledge to solve some of the crucial problems the country faces.

D. TOWARDS A NATIONAL MODEL?

We have seen that there is a broad fit between Clark's basic conceptualization of the basic elements of the higher education system as seen from an organizational perspective and Malaysian academic institutions. This was largely because Malaysian universities were originally a transplant of British provincial university models. Subsequently, what were considered to be useful and relevant features of the American model, like the credit and semester system, were grafted onto them. However, despite the fact that by and large there is an underlying element that cuts across the systems, Clark has failed to see that in an uneven capitalist world system, universities in Third World countries like Malaysia and Thailand are peripheral in character. It is also a model which was not able to come to terms with basic national issues, like income imbalances along ethnic lines, national unity, national aspirations, and to harness change for the well-being of their respective societies. On the other hand, Malaysian academic institutions were divorced and isolated from the main trend of the country's economic, cultural and social development process. This was to be changed considerably with the major post-colonial dilemma that faced the newly independent Malaysian multi-ethnic nation: namely, the creation of a multi-ethnic Malaysian nation, which at the same time recognised and through deliberate government intervention acted for the legitimate aspirations and demands of the politically dominant but economically backward *bumiputra* population while not depriving and eliminating the non-Malay population.

The event that acted as a catalyst for the politically dominant *bumiputra* community to resolve this dilemma and bring about the desired political changes was the communal violence of an unprecendented nature that took place on May 13, 1963. The aftermath of this event saw the suspension of parliamentary democracy, and the country put under control of a National Operations Council (NOC) (Selvaratnam, 1974: 1–24). The May 13 inter-ethnic violence can be said to be a watershed in the history of the country, for the country subsequently witnessed radical departures in the country's political, economic, cultural and education policies. The NOC appointed a Committee to study the campus life of students of the University of Malaya. In its report, the Committee emphasized that:

> It is a fact that the present Constitution of the University of Malaya was largely a reproduction of the Constitution of the University of Malaya 1949, recommended by the Carr-Saunders Commission, which in turn was more or less based on the English University model. Though it had the status of a national university, the Constitution itself was very much a legacy of the colonial era. The provisions in the Constitution did not reflect the national character of the University. (NOC, 1971: 10).

The Committee emphasised that nothing was stated in the constitution or in any

of the university statutes and Acts about fostering national culture, national values, national consciousness and national unity (Ibid.). It further highlighted the point that, in a sense, the University did not have a clearly-defined policy as to how it should function as a national University of Malaya (Ibid.). Immediate steps were therefore taken to accelerate development of higher education in order to increase access through the establishment of *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (National University of Malaysia). This university was also to meet the country's growing national aspirations and respond to national needs.

A Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 was passed. This new Act was conceived within a broader national framework of constitutional and policy reform which was considered to be more appropriate for a "fragile" multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, in which disparate aspirations of the population, particularly of the majority *bumiputra* community, had to be met. In the forefront of this new policy was the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was spelled out in the government's comprehensive and ambitious Second Malaysia Five-Year Plan. The Plan shifted the country's previous emphasis from mere growth to an egalitarian growth–distribution policy in order to create a united, socially just, economically equitable and progressive Malaysian nation. The main strategy of the plan was "a two pronged, NEP for development" which would first reduce and eventually eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of ethnic identity. Second, the NEP aimed to correct the prevailing economic imbalances by restructuring Malaysian society and thus ultimately eliminating the present economic specialization along ethnic lines. The Plan stated explicitly that the Government, in order to achieve the targets set in the NEP, would devise and influence policies that would reflect on all levels of the multi-ethnic composition of the country. The NEP specifically aimed to reduce the existing income imbalance and control of wealth in the modern sector by reducing *bumiputra* participation in traditional low-income activities, and by increasing the *bumiputra* role in the urban sector.

Under the provisions of the Universities and University Colleges Act, no higher educational institution with the status of a University can be established in the country unless the *Yang diPertuan Agong* (the King) is satisfied that its establishment is expedient to the national interest (Laws of Malaysia, 1971: 6–7). In Malaysia's case, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the country's major Malay party as well as the senior and dominant partner in the ruling National Front government, will have the decisive and final say. This was clearly demonstrated when an influential and economically affluent group of Chinese, backed by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), wanted to establish the *Merdeka University* (Independence University). This university was to serve as a non-profit making body to meet the demands of those students who have no opportunity to pursue higher education in government-financed

and controlled local universities and to help the Government shoulder some of the responsibility in education (Aliran, 1979). Any institution of university status, when established as a body corporate, should ensure that its constitution conforms to the provisions of the model constitution which is a schedule of the above 1971 Act. In other words, this provision was incorporated to standardize the broad internal organization and administrative structure of Malaysian universities. In other words, political and administrative control of the universities by the state was legalized.

When the Universities and University Colleges Act was legalized for operation the Minister of Education was made responsible for the general policy direction of higher education and the administration of the various articles of the Act. In 1972, a Higher Education Advisory Council was established to advise the Minister. The prerogative of the University Council to appoint the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors was now vested in the hands of the Government and the Minister of Education in particular. Deans and Heads of Departments, who were till then being elected, were now being appointed by the Vice-Chancellors of the respective universities. The 1975 amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 provided for more heads of government departments or their representatives to serve as members of the Councils of all the Universities and this further strengthened the Government's link and control of the country's universities. Thus, the Government was to a considerable extent able to ensure that the country's universities confirmed to the national policies and also to monitor and coordinate the overall university development in conformity with the NEP and the related higher education policies of the country. The philosophy behind this was the brute reality that education should be in harmony with the national aspirations of the country, particularly when the Government finances each of the country's universities to the tune of more than 90 per cent of their annual recurrent budget. This cost to the Government has escalated during the course of this decade. Therefore, it is difficult to ascribe any significant degree of autonomy to universities, *de jure* or *de facto* (Ministry of Education, 1980: 5). On the other hand, the Government's justification was that it had to modify the structure of its educational institutions and gear their operations in the direction congruent with the needs and expectations of the people. In spite of these constitutional amendments and the considerable curtailment on the autonomy of the universities, the Government assured the universities that they "can pursue their own academic ways so long as they do not contradict the national objectives" (Ibid.). In Clark's terms, perhaps the reason for this cautious restraint by the Government might be two-fold. Firstly, the arcane-knowledge of the basic units is difficult for higher-ups to penetrate (Clark, op. cit.: 177). Secondly, if too heavy-handed, it would lead to a demoralization of the academic system and its standards and ultimately to severe migration of this useful talent (Ibid.: 178).

The official justification for the introduction of these changes and for moving the system towards a strong state coordinated system is that:

> The new philosophy of the Universities in Malaysia therefore departs from the ivory tower concept of yesterday. While it may be time that innovative ideas and a critical examination of the Government's policies and performances may contribute towards change, the NEP places the major responsibility on the Government and its machinery (universities included) to steer the direction of development towards the targets as set under the NEP. In short, the Universities are expected to play a role not merely as agents for change, but also as *agents of change* (Ministry of Education, op. cit.: 7).

This new Act and the philosophy behind the NEP precipitated a whole process of transformation in the higher education system from a metropolitan/peripheral model towards a national model. However, it still remained peripheral in many aspects of its knowledge acquisition and dissemination. In other words, the higher education system went through a process of indigenization in its form and character to meet nation aspirations. This was further accelerated through the gradual introduction of Bahasa Malaysia (the National Malay language) as the medium of instruction. The basic elements in the higher education system which in Clark's terms are cross-national in character began to deviate and change towards more situation-specific features: in this case a national model in its structure and organization.

The Government's control of the institutions of higher education in the country was further strengthened when Parliament passed the Constitution (Amendment) Bill of 1971. Under the provision of this new Bill the higher education institutions were required to admit more *bumiputra* students to provide them greater opportunities in order to redress the then existing economic imbalance between the *bumiputra* and *non-bumiputra.* In order to effectively administer and implement the requirements stipulated in this Bill, the Government established a Unit *Pusat Universiti-Universiti* (Central University Admissions Unit) in order to ensure that the selection into the universities by means of a quota system is effectively implemented. This policy implementation eroded one of the deep-rooted traditions of the universities, i.e., admission into them was by the criterion of merit. However, this unprecedented departure certainly helped to change the ethnic mix of the student population in Malaysian universities. Further to strengthen national integration and unity through education, universities were required to convert their medium of instruction in stages from English to *Bahasa Malaysia* – the country's sole official language – by the academic year beginning 1983. The usage of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of instruction has to some extent given an initiative and hopeful impetus to the development of an indigenous knowledge culture (Gopinathan, 1984).

In consonance with this explicitly national-oriented and directed policy from the government, the University of Malaya and other universities in the

country have, as in Britain, moved firmly towards a *de facto* national system (Clark, op. cit.: 128). We saw the administrative structure being induced to change considerably. It has moved away from a relatively autonomous system to a state-controlled system. The academic community began to adapt itself rather quickly to these changes, too. It is changing fast from a universal to national perspectives in its orientation. Therefore, all the universities over the last decade have devised and implemented various courses and research programmes which are more relevant to the needs of the country. The universities and their academics, both in social and applied and problem-oriented research, particularly emphasise finding local solutions to local problems. This suggests that official and allied interest groups were able to override the traditionally strong power and privileges of academic organizations (Ibid.: 142). Clearly, with pressure from outside and particularly with political pressure, Malaysian universities, which are essentially state-financed, could not go it alone.

Reflection on Clark's "Cross-National Convergence"

In our examination of the Malaysian higher education system, we did note that Malaysian universities as academic organizations have several of the unique features, basic elements and patterns which Clark found and outlined in his cross-national study. Malaysian universities are basically teaching institutions. They are organized to revolve around core disciplines such as economics or history which form the body of knowledge that was used in teaching and research. Therefore, discipline, and to a lesser extent the academic organization as a whole, tended to become the dominant force in the working life of the academics. The academic community was heavily individualistic and discipline-oriented. They shared this with various other academic communities across the Malaysian national boundary. This feature was further reinforced by the fact that academics too held the view that, cross-culturally, they shared distinctive intellectual tasks and related codes of conduct with their fellow academics in their respective disciplines. In other words, Clark is right in saying that there is a cross-national convergence in certain basic elements of academic organizations. This also made universities to some extent meta-national and international. This was largely because Malaysian universities were transplants of British models.

However, in our closer examination and analysis of the Malaysian higher education system, we saw that the basic elements that we outlined above to a considerable extent inhibited our academic institutions from being relevant and nationally-oriented. Therefore, they were unable to fully integrate themselves into the national developmental milieu. Political expediency necessitated the state's direct intervention, in order to precipitate drastic changes in the structure and organization of Malaysian universities so as to enable the universities not

only to reflect national interests but also to cope with it in terms of the universities' relevance to the national interest. Perhaps a cross-national analysis like Clark's can only be indulged in if the various higher education systems compared have basically the same deep-rootedness in their own cultures and traditions as well as financial autonomy. However, when we look at universities the world over, particularly in the Third world countries, though they too are organizations specifically created and charged to achieve similar goals like universities in post-industrial societies, we see that they are not like them for various situation-specific reasons and dynamics. This was demonstrated by the Malaysian case analysis as well. In particular, we see that the Malaysian universities were not only unable to retain and further reinforce some of their grafted and cherished features and elements but they were more fundamentally unable to devise norms more suitable to their own context. The new circumstances caused by the state's intervention see them moving towards a distinctive national model, despite the peripheral nature of the higher education system. In other words, in the Malaysian higher education system there is a divergence away from the British model instead of a convergence.

This is largely because universities in Malaysia are heavily dependent on the provision of resources from the state to discharge their goals. Therefore, though academic organizations are indeed unique structures they are part and parcel of their environment. Thus, in order to understand them we cannot see them in isolation or as a relatively autonomous sector of modern society. Instead we have to see and understand them as a phenomenon interdependent with other parts of society and primarily within the boundaries of the society. In the Malaysian case, the very body politic of the society has played a crucial role in contributing to a divergence of academic organization from retaining action patterns that have been evolved over time and which are cross-national in nature. The environmental pressure documented for the Malaysian case makes Clark's contention that power groups within the higher education system have the capacity not only to produce powerful actors who can shape their immediate work environment but also the power to affect the world, in my view, untenable.

In conclusion, the main methodological and theoretical contention of Clark that universities, because of their speciality and evolution into distinctive action patterns, have developed a sectorial hegemony in the society they are rooted in does not seem to be a useful model for a study of academic organizations in the Third World countries, and Malaysia in particular. However, Clark's study has certainly helped to highlight systematically how higher education, when organized and governed in different cultural milieux, have evolved certain basic features and elements which are cross-national in character. This, in turn, has certainly in the Malaysian case helped us to see how these basic elements change due to environmental pressure.

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