

TAR UC students show loyalty to nation despite financial ‘prejudice’

By Dr Pamela Yong

This fortnight marks the celebrations of Independence and the formation of our motherland, Malaysia. On 31st August 1957, Malaya attained independence from the British crown and it will be another six years before Malaysia was formed on 16th September 1963 (together with Sabah and Sarawak). Therefore, it is apt to talk about nationalism.

Nationalism is defined by loyalty to country, doing what’s right for the country and in its noblest form, the willingness to sacrifice one’s life for the nation. Not many are willing to take nationalism to that last step. For many, the ultimate sacrifice of one’s life is too high a price to pay, paradoxically due to the value of kinship – adults making this sacrifice means leaving their family unfended, while children are great values to families for biological, economic and filial productivity. Hence, all Malaysian parents pray to ensure the protection of their children from harm.

That is why kinship and nationalism are on opposite poles. Brunel University’s Charles Stafford encapsulated this in his paper, “Good Sons and Virtuous Mothers: Kinship and Chinese nationalism in Taiwan”, where he examined the relationship between Chinese families and the state over nationalism. He underlined two Chinese sayings, *A Man Who Is A Bad Son Is Not A Person* (坏男不算人 / huai nan bu suan ren) and *A Good Man Does Not Become A Soldier* (好男不当兵 / hao nan bu dang bing).

Are Malaysian Chinese now changing their belief values towards nationalism and kinship? One trend revealed recently suggests so. When Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu responded in Parliament on July 18 to a question from Kampar MP, Su Kiong Siong, who asked whether there were plans or programmes by the government to encourage youths, particularly those who are aged 18 who are now eligible to vote, to join the Territorial Army (Wataniah) to raise their sense of nationalism and love of nation, he specifically congratulated Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) as many of its students had joined the Wataniah.

According to the Hansard, the Defence Minister said the targeted intake of Wataniah from 2016 to 2023 is a ratio of 1:1 with regulars, providing a National Defence Force of 160,000 with 80,000 Wataniah. Currently, there are 48,297 Wataniah and this requires an additional 31,703 to achieve the strategic national defence objective. He outlined that Wataniah’s role is to supplement regulars in enhancing force projection for strategic defence of the realm or at war; stand ready for immediate mobilisation to aid the regulars in internal security operations, and to aid civil authorities during emergencies and natural disasters. The Armed Forces and Wataniah also carries

out 320 annual activities nationwide to enhance and promote social engagements with communities in every state.

In the Malaysian Armed Forces today, the Defence Minister said with exception of the Royal Malay Regiment which is reserved for Malays since Independence, all other branches of the armed services are open to all races. He then specially congratulated TAR UC where many youths had joined the Wataniah.

Local media missed the significance of this. Among Malaysia's 651 institutions of higher learning, polytechnics and community colleges today, the Defence Minister singled out TAR UC to congratulate. Although the Defence Minister did not give specifics as to the numbers, this is a huge deal for an institution which is 95% Chinese, where culturally, kinship to Chinese means *A Good Man Does Not Become A Soldier* (好男不当兵 / hao nan bu dang bing).

Chinese youths joining Wataniah are certainly a new, wonderful and exciting trend. Psychographically, it shows that Chinese youths today, and their parents, have accepted that being Malaysians includes embracing Nationalism and the need to sacrifice for the country.

Even though parents may see little chance of their children being involved in war, as Malaysia has never been on a war footing since Konfrontasi ended (20 January 1963 – 11 August 1966) and the Lahad Datu Standoff in 2011 involving armed Sulu militants, the National Defence Policy nevertheless spells out clearly how vital Wataniah ranks are. Whereas the 80,000 regulars will form the bulwark against foreign enemies, Wataniah's role is to supplement National defence. Therefore, while Wataniah are not regulars, they are soldiers who will have to face combat when the clarion call sounds.

In light of the disclosure that Chinese are joining Wataniah, it is perhaps time for all Malaysians to see this as proof that the Chinese are now willing to lay down their lives for our nation, Malaysia. Therefore, please stop questioning Chinese loyalty to country and stop using terms like "Pendatang" because today, the third and fourth generations of Malaysian Chinese sees Malaysia as our home. We have no country but Malaysia, and our love of country is exemplified by the sacrifice that Chinese youths today are willing to make.

Even more illuminating, Chinese youths in TARUC are embracing Nationalism even while this institution is being orphaned by the Federal Government. Case in point is the mind boggling move by Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng to deliberately ignore a long-standing agreement by the Government of Malaysia to provide matching grants to Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) and, in Budget 2019 last October, allocated just RM5.5 million in development fund to TAR UC. For the record, TARUC received RM60 million, RM51 million, and RM30 million in the previous three federal budgets respectively.

TARUC pride itself on its mission to make tertiary education accessible to ALL Malaysians. And its fees are relatively, on an overall ball park, about 40% cheaper than other private institutions of higher learning (IPTS). It is able to provide such low tuition fees due partly to prudent and frugal spending as well as the grant from the government. More importantly, TAR UC came to life at a point where it was much needed as the non-Bumiputera fell short on options to public universities.

Unbeknownst perhaps, TARUC in itself was born espousing that spirit of nationalism by stepping up and providing education for all Malaysians heeding the clarion call to build a nation with its human capital development purpose. With pride and nationalism, we celebrate and shall celebrate Merdeka and Malaysia together.

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