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English Articles

Reports

Non-Western Modernization: Modernization Experience in Malaysia During the Era of Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad (1981 – 2003)

Pemodenan Bukan Barat: Pengalaman Pemodenan di Malaysia Ketika Era Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad (1981-2003)

Alparslan Onbasi* and Esra Polat Onbasi**

Abstract

The concept of non-Western modernization is an alternative modernization model in which non-Western societies blend their own culture and values with the science and technology of the West. It is a local, alternative, and plural reading of modernity. Tradition has an important place in this reading. According to non-Western modernization theory, societies can modernize to the extent that tradition is accepted, not to the extent that it is rejected. In this study, the non-Western modernization policies of Mahathir bin Mohamad, the fourth prime minister of Malaysia, called the "Bapa Permodenan Malaysia" (father of Malaysian modernization), are explained. He served as Malaysia's democratically elected prime minister for 22 years from 1981 to 2003 and later from 2018 to 2020 for a cumulative total of 24 years, making him the country's longest-serving prime minister. He made Malaysia a modern country by synthesizing Islamic and Asian values with modernization policies. In this context, his modernization policies will be examined and how successful they were will be shown.

Keywords: Non-Western Modernization, Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad, Islam, Asian Values.

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Abstrak

Konsep pemodenan bukan Barat adalah model pemodenan alternatif di mana masyarakat bukan Barat menggabungkan budaya dan nilai mereka sendiri dengan sains dan teknologi Barat. Ia adalah bacaan kemodenan tempatan, alternatif dan jamak. Tradisi mempunyai tempat yang penting dalam bacaan ini. Menurut teori pemodenan bukan Barat, masyarakat boleh memodenkan setakat tradisi diterima, bukan setakat ditolak. Dalam kajian ini, dasar pemodenan bukan Barat Mahathir bin Mohamad, perdana menteri Malaysia keempat, yang dipanggil "Bapa Permodenan Malaysia" dijelaskan. Beliau berkhidmat sebagai perdana menteri Malaysia yang dipilih secara demokrasi selama 22 tahun dari 1981 hingga 2003 dan kemudian dari 2018 hingga 2020 untuk jumlah kumulatif 24 tahun, menjadikannya perdana menteri paling lama berkhidmat di negara ini. Beliau menjadikan Malaysia sebuah negara moden dengan mensintesis nilai Islam dan Asia dengan dasar pemodenan. Dalam konteks ini, dasar pemodenannya akan diteliti dan sejauh mana kejayaannya akan ditunjukkan.

Kata Kunci: Pemodenan Bukan Barat, Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad, Islam, Nilai Asia.

Introduction

Modernization primarily involves enhancing the economic and political capacities of a society: it boosts economic capabilities through industrialization and enhances political capacities through bureaucratization and it is the process of the restructuring of society considering new discoveries and innovations. The shift from preindustrial to industrial society is marked by the "widespread rationalization across all aspects of society," leading to a transition from traditional, often religious values to rational-legal values in economic, political, and social domains. Traditional characters of a culture's political and economic institutions with modernization are reshaped.[1]

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[1] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-modernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change In 43 Societies*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) 84; Ahmad N. Amir & Abdi O. Shuriye & Ahmad F.

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Modernization results from social, economic, and political changes that occurred in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. These changes later spread to other European countries, South America, Asia, and Africa.[2] Modernization, according to Alain Touraine, characterizes "modernity in action".[3] According to Marshall Berman, modernization refers to the processes in which human beings live in a constant state of becoming, a mode of vital experience.[4] Modernization theory is based on the idea of human progress, which emerged in the Enlightenment era with the belief that technological progress would give humanity increasing control over nature.[5] Until the seventeenth century, it was used as a term expressing the developments in secularism and rational thought and getting rid of the superstitious belief system.[6] However, this concept became a concept reaching the same level with Western countries after the seventeenth century, especially meant reaching the technological and scientific level of the West.[7]

From a different perspective, modernization is a multifaceted process. To extend, at the intellectual level, it is the tremendous increase in man's knowledge of his environment and the reflection of this increased knowledge in literacy, mass media, and education. Demographically, it is the rapid growth of the urban population versus the rural population. Economically, it is the increase in the welfare level of the society and the decrease in economic inequalities. [8] In economic terms, it refers to industrialization, urbanization, and technological transformation in agriculture. From a social perspective, it is the dissolution of traditional social ties and the coming to the fore of individuality. From a political perspective, it is the rationalization of

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Ismail, "Muhammad Abduh Contributions to Modernity", *Asian Journal of Management Science and Education*, 1, no.1 (2012): 64.

[2] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, 11.

[3] Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity*, (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 44.

[4] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (Canada: Penguin Books,2002), 23.

[5] Ronald Inglehart & Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2005),16.

[6] Myron Weiner, *Modernization the dynamics of Growth*, (London: Basic Books, 1966),5.

[7] Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, (New York: Free Press,1958), 438.

[8] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies,* (London: Yale University Press, 1968), 33-34 ; Daniel Lerner, 49.

bureaucracy and authority. Culturally, it is the dominance of scientific knowledge and the increase in secularization.[9]As can be seen, modernization is a concept related to the increase of industrialization, urbanization, education, and welfare in a society.[10]

On the other hand, the issue of which direction of modernization should proceed is controversial. According to some classical modernization theorists such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Daniel Lerner, Georg Simmel, and Auguste Comte, all societies make a gradual transition from traditional to modern to modernization and similarly experience this process. It is assumed that this transition is completed by the adoption of Western institutions, values, and behaviours. In this context since the modernization model developed in the West is a historical reality and example, non-Western societies will also go through the same process as the West and become copies of Western societies.[11] From the point of this understanding, the West is perceived as inherently endowed with unique virtues and superior to the East.[12] In addition, August Comte systematized this with his famous law of three states as follows. During the archaic tribal period, societies were guided by mythologies and legends; Then, in the traditional period, we move to the stage guided by metaphysical rationalism; Finally, positivism/secularism dominates in the modern period. This progress is a necessary process for every society, like the immutable laws of matter. Accordingly, for non-Western societies to reach the Western level of development, they need to put their modernization processes into the same pattern as in Europe.[13] However, it can be said that human beings cannot operate in every field simultaneously and in the same way. For this reason, no civilization can develop in the same way as others.[14] Every culture has different historical processes, so not every society's

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[9] Barbara Ingham, "The Meaning of Development: Interactions Between "new" and "old" Ideas", *World Development,* 21, no.11 (1993):1806.

[10] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*,84.

[11] Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society, Modernizing the Middle East*, (New York: Free Press, 1964),136.

[12] Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), 1-2.

[13] Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy,* translated from French by John Harriet Martineau, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),157-159-160-171-178.

[14] René Guénon, *East and West*, translated from French, by Martin Lings, (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001), 12.

experience of modernization can be the same. Therefore, the only way to modernize is not to go through the same processes as the West.[15] Thus, it becomes clear that there is no single modernization process that every society should follow. The experience of modernization is special, and every society must modernize in its own way.[16] As a result of this critical approach, the non-Western modernization theory emerged, which enables non-Western societies to realize their modernization experiences with their own traditional dynamics.[17]

Non-Western Modernization

Modernization theory, which is dominant in American sociology, dates to World War II. It emerged in the 1950s and 1960s depending on the restructuring and interpretation of the world after World War II. Modernization theory assumes that underdeveloped societies will reach a Western-type level of development by imitating and following developed societies. Additionally, this theory conceptualized development as a gradual transition from tradition to modernity. This transition will be achieved at the economic level by the introduction of the market and foreign investments, at the social level by the adoption of appropriate Western institutions, values, and behaviors, and at the political level by the implementation of parliamentary democracy.[18] The theory was shaped within the framework of the views of Talcott Parsons, one of the most important thinkers of American sociology of the period. He put forward an evolution scheme based on the modern America of the period and saw Western values as the basic dynamics of the modernization of societies. According to him, what societies that want to modernize should do is follow the path opened by America, the representative of universal and modern values, by benefiting from the knowledge it offers. [19]

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[15] Dominic Sachsenmaier, Jens Riedel, and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, R*eflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations*, (Boston: Brill, 2002),27.
[16] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2.
[17] Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation,* (United Kingdom: Polity Press 2008), 9-10.
[18] Gordon Marshall, *Dictionary of Sociology,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 155.
[19] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, (London: Routledge,1991), 29; David Harrison, *The Sociology of Modernization and Development,* (London: Routledge Press, 1988), 39.

It is useful to look at the ideas of leading thinkers of the theory such as Marion J. Levy, Neil J. Smelser and Daniel Lerner. Among these thinkers, Levy and Smelser are students of Parsons. Levy divided societies into two as traditional and modern and explained the difference between modern society and non-modern society as follows. In non-modern societies, specialization and interdependence in organizations are low. There is little interest in market and money affairs. The relationship type is traditional and family values are at the forefront. It is possible to provide mutual goods and services between rural and urban areas. In modern societies, specialization and interdependence in the organization are high. The relationship between the market and money is strong. There is weakness in the family structure and bureaucracy and institutionalization have developed.[20] Another theorist, Smelser, emphasizes that for societies to modernize, profound changes must occur within them. These changes entail: Political realm: Transitioning from simple tribal or village authority to systems comprising elections, political parties, representation, and bureaucratic officials. Educational domain: Decreasing the number of illiterate individuals. Religious sphere: Preferring secular belief systems over tradition and religions. Family sphere: Decreasing the prevalence of extensive kinship units and the weakening of hierarchical systems determined by birth, alongside geographical and societal mobility.[21]

The theory advocates Daniel Lerner particularly emphasizes the positivist and rational aspects of the process of modernization. According to him, the secular societal changes that facilitated the modernization of the Western world serve as an example for non-modernized societies. Therefore, in the process of modernization, non-Western societies must undergo the same process as the West and become replicas of Western societies. In other words, according to him, Western modernization is universal, and other societies, regardless of

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[20] Marion J. Levy, *Social Patterns and Problems of Modernization in Readings on Social Change*, ed. Wilbert E. Moore & R. Cook, *Readings on Social Change*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 196-201.

[21] Richard P. Appelbaum, *Theories of Social Change*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1981), 33-34; Peter Preston, *Development Theory: An Introduction to the Analysis of Complex Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell,2002), 175.

their race, color, language, or religion, can only modernize by passing through the stages experienced by the West.[22]

As seen, according to modernization theorists, underdeveloped or developing societies are considered traditional societies, and the modernization of these societies is only possible through abandoning traditional values and adopting Western societies as a model. However, these claims of modernization theorists are not substantiated and have been criticized by many thinkers. As a counterargument to these claims, the theory of non-Western modernity has emerged. Non-Western modernization theory is a theory that non-Western societies produce their modernization experiences by building on their own social dynamics.[23] Non-Western modernization aims to offer an alternative modernization theory to Western classical modernization. This modernization theory is the alternative version of modernization. In this version, tradition has an important place, and modernization and tradition do not have to reject each other. For example, Daniel Brown argues that modernity and tradition do not necessarily have to reject each other, and that new values can be formed by mixing the two.[24] Likewise, according to Reinhard Bendix, traditional elements can continue their existence within modern social structures.[25] American sociologist Robert Neelly Bellah argues that in the process of modernization, there is no need to completely eliminate traditional elements from culture. According to him, it is even possible to benefit from these cultural elements.[26] Moreover, Joseph R. Gusfield argues that traditional and modern forms are not always in conflict. He asserts that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive systems, so processes of modernization do not necessarily weaken traditions.[27]Another thinker who opposes the idea that the modernization of non-Western societies is possible only by abandoning

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[22] Daniel Lerner,43-47.

[23] Nilüfer Göle, *Melez Desenler: İslam ve Modernlik Üzerine* , (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2002), 161-162 ; Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation,*12-13.

[24] Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

[25] David Harrison, 44.

[26] Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Aspects of Modernization in Turkey and Japan", *American Journal of Sociology,* 64, no.1 (1958):1-5.

[27] Joseph R. Gusfield, "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change", *American Journal of Sociology*, 72, no. 4 (1967): 355.

traditional values and taking Western societies as a model is Barrington Moore. He rejects the view that modernizing societies go through essentially the same process and talks about the existence of different alternatives instead of a single Western model for the development of non-Western societies. According to him, it is a historical mistake to claim that the change that occurs in one society will also occur in another society. Each country experiences its own realities within historical conditions, therefore each country will achieve development with its own position and institutions.[28] Cyril Edwin Black also, claims that the modernization of societies is not like each other and that they produce different modernization results according to the cultural structures of the societies. [29] American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington also claims that non-Western societies can modernize with their own dynamics without abandoning their own culture and without completely adopting Western values, institutions, and practices. Thus, we understand that if non-Western societies are to modernize, they can do this by their own methods, not by accepting Western values. Some countries have tried this method and succeeded. For example, Malaysia[30], a Southeast Asian country, is a modern economically developed country without accepting Western cultural values.[31]

Mahathir's Modernization Policies

Malaysia, which gained independence in 1957 after being under colonial rule for many years, felt the need to produce a modernization

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[28] David Harrison, 49-50.

[29] Cyril Edwin Black, *Dynamics of Modernization*, (New York: Harper,1966),47-48.

[30] The idea that as modern institutions become functional in non-Western societies, society, and individuals will inevitably become secularized, as is generally argued by modernization theorists, is not true of all non-Western societies. In the case of Malaysia, the functionalization of modern institutions has not led to the secularization of society and individuals. On the contrary, Malaysia has preserved its culture despite successfully implementing democracy, a Western value in its administrative sense. According to Mahathir, accepting certain aspects of a foreign culture does not separate Malays from their own culture. For example, just because Malays wear jackets, speak English, and practice democracy instead of feudalism does not mean they are non-European. See, Hng Hung Young, *CEO MALAYSIA Strategy in Nation-Building*, (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications,1998), 95.

[31] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 96- 115-182-195.

tour outside of Western modernity to rebuild the country.[32] During this period, Islam was seen as the best option to distinguish Malaysian modernization from Western modernization; because Islam had a strong influence on the formation of the Malay worldview and culture and as a means of resisting modern colonial oppression, especially in the intellectual and political sphere.[33]

Malaysia's modernization process started with the "New Economic Policy" initiated in the early 1970s to create its own style. With this policy, industrial development and social restoration strategies were created under the state's leadership. However, the real breakthrough in Malaysia's modernization began during the reign of Malaysia's fourth prime minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad.[34] He is known as the father of Malaysian modernization because of his success in modernizing Malaysia in his own way.[35] He wanted Malaysia to modernize as quickly as possible.[36] Thus, he introduced two important policies to the public; the "Look East Policy" and the inculcation of "Islamic Values".[37] These policies he introduced were both contrary to Western values and aimed at increasing local economic growth.[38]

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[32] Izzati Aziz, "Rethinking Modernity: The Construction of Modern Malaysian Society", *JOMEC Journal*, 16, (2021): 96.

[33] Alparslan Onbasi, (2021, March). The Effect of Islamic Tradition on Resist Colonial Mind-Set in Malaysia, Paper Presented at Seminar Contemporary Islam in the Malay World: Relationship between Malay Ethnicity and Islamic Religiosity Revisited, Organized by IIIT East and Southeast Asia Office Kuala Lumpur, 2-3.

[34] Teik, Khoo Boo, *Malaysian Politics and its Discontents*, (London; Zed Books, 2003), 24; Joel S. Kahn, "Anthropology and Modernity", *Current Anthropology*, 42, no. 5 (2001): 652-653.

[35] Khairul Azman Mohamad Suhaimya & Nurul Aimi Razalib & Lutfan Jaesc & Muhamad Helmy Sabtu, "Development of Nation State of Malaysia Based on Mahathir Mohamad's Leadership Model Framework", *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education,* 12, no.2 (2021): 736.

[36] Syed Husin Ali, *The Malays Their Problems and Future,* (Malaysia: The other press, 2008), 141.

[37] Abdul Rahman Abdul Aziz, "The State and Modernization Perspectives Development Planning", *Demokrasi,* 6, no.2 (2005): 6.

[38] S.Sigit, "Malaysia, and Mahathir in The Global Challenge", *Faculty of Social and Political Science of the University of Pelita Harapan*, 12, no. 23 (2020):43-44.

Look East Policy

Mahathir's Look East Policy aimed to transform the mindset of Malaysian society, encouraging them to achieve success like their East Asian neighbors, Japan, and South Korea. This policy was unveiled by Mahathir on 8 February 1982, during the 5th Joint Annual Conference of the Malaysia-Japan Economic Association (MAJECA) and Japan-Malaysia Economic Association (JAMECA) at the Hilton Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Essentially, the policy proposed that the government conduct analysis and research to identify values, work ethic, and positive examples from Japan and Korea.[39] It specifically aimed to encourage Malaysians to learn Japanese business ethics, business management techniques, and technology. In addition, establishing investment and trade cooperation with Japan and South Korea was among the goals of this policy.[40] The main reason why Mahathir brought Malaysia closer to its East Asian neighbors with his Look East policy is that Western societies see their own values, political and economic systems as superior to other societies and try to impose their own systems on non-Western societies. For Mahathir, who opposes this understanding, "European values are European values; Asian values are universal values." As Asian and Muslim civilizations begin to emphasize the universal importance of their cultures, Westerners will begin to appreciate this connection and see the virtues of a pluralistic world.[41]

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[39] Khadijah Md Khalid & Ayame Suzuki & Jason Loh Seong Wei, "Three decades of Malaysia-Japan Relations (1981-2011): Crossed interests and missed opportunities", *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 4, no.1 (2015): 79-80; Faridah Binti Jaafar & Saiyid Radzuwan & Soijah Likin & Nazarudin Zainun, International Economic Relations under Mahathir's Period, *International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research,* January 2018, 343-345; Sivamurugan Pandian & Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Paramjit Singh Jamir Singh & Saiyid Radzuwan Syed Sopi, " Look East Policy After 35 Years From Social Sciences Perspectives: A New Paradigm for Japan-Malaysia Relations 1982-2017", *Cogent Social Sciences,* 7, no.1 (2021): 2.

[40] R.S.Milne & Diane K.Mauzy, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir,* (London: Routledge, 2002), 55; Khadijah Md. Khalid, *Malaysia-Japan Relations: Explaining the Root Causes for the Pro-Japan Orientation of Malaysia in the Post-1981 Period*, (London: University London Press, 1999),309 ; Noureddine Rashid & Hüsamettin İnaç, "Malezya'nın Ekonomik Kalkınmasının Temel Parametreleri", *Holistic Economics*, 1, no.1, (2022): 43.

[41] Mahathir Mohamad & Shintaro Ishihara, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1995), 75; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order,* 41.

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Within the scope of the Look East Policy, an education agreement covering industrial and technical training was signed between Korea and Malaysia. The first group of 53 people was sent to Korea at the beginning of 1983 to receive training provided by Hyundai company. By 1993, the Malaysian Government sent approximately 294 trainees to Korea for short-term courses. Additionally, the Korean language was offered to Malaysian students as an elective course in higher education institutions such as the University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia and MARA University Institute. Students also had the opportunity to go to Korea for exchange programs or summer courses with the support of the Korea Foundation, the Korea Research Foundation, and some Korean companies.[42] Additionally, under this policy, many Malaysian young people were sent to Japan for education through the Overseas Technical Scholarship Association program. In this context, a Japanese language education center was established at the University of Malaya to prepare Malaysian students for Japanese language courses.[43]

Under the Look East Policy, some changes were planned to improve the organizational structure and employee behavior in the public sector. In this context, the Japanese-style time management system was taken as an example and the timecard (Punch Card System) was introduced in government offices, courthouses, and other public institutions to record the hours employees came to and went from work to make employees more disciplined and committed to their duties. This way, employees who did not come to work or arrived late could be identified and punished. In addition, morning meetings were encouraged in public institutions before starting work. More importantly, an open office system was planned to be implemented to reduce discrimination between civil servants and other employees.[44] Within the framework of these policies, the Japanese hygiene policy known as 5S was tried to be implemented. The meanings of 5S are as follows; *Seiri* (isolation):

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[42] Evaely Sabet Saribu Raja and In-Won Hwang," The Second Wave of Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP): Bringing New Continuity, Change, and Challenges," *East Asian Studies*, 36, no.1 (2017):173-208.

[43] Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *Japan and Malaysian Development: In the Shadow of the Rising Sun,* in *Japanese Cultural Images in Malaysia: Implications of the "Look East" Policy* by Wendy A. Simit, (London: Routledge, 1994), 336 ; Frank Kiong, The Look East Policy: Its Impact in Promoting Japanese Management Techniques to Manufacturing Firms in Malaysia, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Stirling United Kingdom, 2000, 193.

[44] Chamil Wariya. *Dasar Luar Era Mahathir*, (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1989): 72-73.

isolating or removing unnecessary items from the workplace. *Seiton* (arrange as required): to keep necessary items in an orderly manner and ready for use. *Seiso* (cleanliness): to clean machines and appliances so that they are free of dust. *Seiketsu* (hygiene maintenance): to maintain a constantly improving standard of maintenance and organization of the workplace. *Shitsuku* (training employees to follow the rules) to train employees to always follow the rules of organization and cleanliness.[45] Also, Mahathir implemented the Modified Budgeting System to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending and ensure the proper allocation of resources. Additionally, he introduced Quality Control Circles to enhance employee performance and quality by encouraging improvements in work processes, as well as Total Quality Management to foster overall quality in operations. The main purpose of these administrative reforms was to ensure that Malaysia's public sector developed industrially and that the country had quality civil servants and workers.[46]

Under the Look East policy, Mahathir, who followed modern technology in Japan, collaborated with Japanese companies in the automotive industry, such as Mitsubishi, Toyota, Honda, and Kawasaki, to help produce Malaysia's national car, popularly known as PROTON.[47] Since Malaysia was the first country in Southeast Asia to have a National Car, PROTON's presence became a symbol of Malaysia's progress at that time. Additionally, large quantities of PROTON were produced to be sold to neighboring countries. Also, to strengthen the country in terms of infrastructure, he built and implemented the project of public vehicles such as Mass Rapid Transit and Light Rail Transit and trains connecting many major cities in the Malay Peninsula.[48] He also initiated and

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[45] Nor Azlina Endut & Rohaini Amin, "The Implementation of the Look East Policy and its Impact on the Community Development in Malaysia: An Analysis," *Akademika Isu Khas*, 9, no.1(2021):45; Mohd Norhasni Mohd Asaad& Rohaizah Saad& Rushami Zien Yusoff, "5s, Kaizen and Organization Performance: Examining the Relationship and Level of Implementation Using Rasch Model in Malaysian Automotive Company", *International Academic Research Journal of Business and Technology*,1 no.2 (2015): 215.
[46] Mashitah Mohd Udin& Rusdi Omar & Kamarul Azman Khamis & Kamarul Zaman Hj Yusoff, "Tun Dr Mahathir's Leadership Patterns and the Success Story of Malaysia", *Test Engineering and Management,* 82, (2020): 1290-129.
[47] Takakazu Ogawa,*40 Years of Look East Policy (1982-2022*), (Tokyo: Japan Malaysia Association, 2022), 36.
[48] S.Sigit, 44.

completed Malaysia's mega projects such as the North-South Expressway and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. As part of his projects to boost the communications industries, he established the Multimedia Super Corridor, a local version of Silicon Valley, south of Kuala Lumpur.[49] Mahathir also built the Petronas Twin Towers to support the country's economic growth, accelerate national development, and enhance global competitiveness.[50]

As can be seen, Mahathir shifted Malaysia's policies from the West to the East with his Look East Policy, thus creating an alternative to the West, which sees its own values, and political and economic systems as superior to other societies.

Islamic Values

The most comprehensive and impactful Islam policy in Malaysian history is credited to the Mahathir Administration as the longest serving in post-colonial Malaysian history. Mahathir's main goal in Islam policy was to make Islam in Malaysia synonymous with economic progress and modernization.[51]

As is commonly stated, "being Malay is synonymous with being Muslim." [52] In this context, in a study conducted at the University of Malaya in 2006, more than 70 percent of Malays define themselves as Muslim first, then as Malaysian, and then as Malay. Therefore, Islam has become the determining factor in Malay identity.[53] For Mahathir, who knew the importance of Islam for the Malay community, three things were necessary for Malaysia to attain advanced modern status: money, technology, and moral values. Moral values were critical in the fight

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[49] Barry Wain, *Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189.

[50] Choy Yee Keong, " Behind Malaysia's "Miracle": A Veblenian Perspective on Mahathir's Era of Economic Modernization", *Journal of Economic Issues*, 40, no.4 (2006): 865- 864.

[51] Osman Bakar, "Identifying the Islam Policies of the Predecessors of the Najib Administration: Has He Abandoned Tradition", *ICR Journal,*2, no.4 (2011): 725.

[52] Kevin Tan & Tiong Min Yeo & Kiat Seng Lee, *Constitutional Law in Malaysia and Singapore,* (Singapore: Malayan Law Journal Pte,1991), 686.

[53] Elmira Akhmetova, "Islam and Politics in Malaysia since 1957", J*ournal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 9, no.2 (2019): 8.

against Westernization.[54] Mahathir explains what it means to be an advanced modern nation:

> *we had to define what we meant by "developed country." Does the term refer simply to a per capita income of at least US$16,000, or does it also imply stability and solid cultural values? All these factors have to be considered, but it is clear that wealth alone does not constitute development. No country is really developed, for instance, if it has money but no technology.... Nor is a country developed, in our sense of the word, if it has money and technology but lacks firm moral values. Many Western societies, for example, are morally decadent. There is diminishing respect for the institutions of the family and marriage, and some even permit same-gender marriages. To us, that is not development. You must maintain cultural and moral values. We do not want to be just a rich country.[55]*

As seen in the example above, the basic principle of the government under Mahathir was to modernize without sacrificing Islamic and moral values. Positioning Islam as a force of development, he encouraged the adoption of Islamic values in the modernization policies he created after becoming prime minister and drew attention to the cultural-intellectual power provided by Islam.[56] In this context, Mahathir implemented the "*Dasar Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam dalam Pentadbiran*" (Islamic Values Inculcation Policy) to instill Islamic values in public administration. This policy aimed to integrate Islamic values such as excellence in all work (*al-itqan*), development (*al-tajdid*), and innovation (*al-ibda*) into society and improve the quality of work and productivity

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[54] Christopher A. Furlow, "Malaysian Modernities: Cultural Politics and the Construction of Muslim Technoscientific Identities", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 82, no. 1 (2009):203.

[55] Mahathir Mohamad & Shintaro Ishihara, 20; Majid Daneshgar & Peter Riddell & Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'ān* and science in Malaysia, *The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation,* in *Intersections of Qur'an and Science in Contemporary Malaysia by* Christopher A. Furlow, (London: Routledge, 2016), 244.

[56] Amy L. Freedman, "Political Viability, Contestation and Power: Islam and Politics in Indonesia and Malaysia", *Politics and Religion*, 2, no.1 (2009): 106.

required for modernization.[57] In addition, this policy aimed to eliminate the biggest obstacles to Malaysia's development; bad elements such as communism, poverty, corruption, ignorance, etc., which always threaten the unity and solidarity efforts of the people. When evaluated objectively, these Islamic values that are planned to be implemented for Malaysia to achieve its advanced modern status are values that can be adopted and practiced by all Malaysians, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and there is no single reason to deny that these values based on the Islamic religion are generally suitable for the development of Malaysian society.[58] Moreover, Islam has appealed to all of humanity since the day it emerged and has created a strong bond of brotherhood among the members of a multi-ethnic society, the like of which has never been seen or can be seen in any other religion.[59]

Within the scope of the Islamic Values Inculcation Policy, eleven values that can be implemented by those working in public service have been adopted. These values are reliability, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, sincerity, morality, dedication, cleanliness, moderation, gratitude to God, and diligence.[60] To understand whether these common universal values, which can be accepted by all people, are successful, the government sent questionnaires to 974 participants working in administrative and legal bodies of government departments from January to May 1993. The general conclusion drawn from the participants, 801 of whom were Muslims and 173 were non-Muslims, is that both categories of participants think that the implementation of the

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[57] Wan Liz Ozman Wan Omar, *Pengurusan Islam abad ke-21: Revolusi Pengurusan Untuk Keunggulan Sektor Awam dan Korporat,* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors, 19961), 1-15 ; Che Asniza Osman, "21st Century Malaysia Islamic Values in Management and The Challenges Ahead", *Gading Jilid*, 1, no. 8 (2003):176-177.
[58] https://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/Dasar/10DASAR_PENERAPAN_NILAI.pdf
[59] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism,* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC,1993), 101.
[60] Mohd. Noor Bin Deris, "Dasar Penerapan Nilai Nilai Islam: Satu Penilaian Semasa", *Jurnal Syariah*, 5,no.1 (1999): 93; Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor& Ahmad Termizi Abdullah& Abdul Karim Ali & Mohamad Fauzi Zakaria, "Historical development of Islamic institutions: A case of the Malaysian Government", *African Journal of Business Management*, 6 no.8 (2012): 2767; Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, "Konsep Islam Hadhari dan Pelaksanaanya", Hadhari Islamic Discourse Working Paper, organized by the Malaysian Islamic Development Department, on May 19-20, 2004,4.

Islamic Values Inculcation Policy in the government administration is very important. In this regard, according to a research report published by *Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia[61]* (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia) among Muslim officers, these positive effects included a greater sense of sincerity in the performance of their duties, improved relationships with others, and greater cooperation with colleagues. For non-Muslim officers, the benefits were seen as increased responsibility in their duties, greater respect for their superiors, stronger connections with the public, better cooperation with peers, and a deeper appreciation for the rewards and opportunities provided.[62]

Mahathir firmly believed that Islamic values are inherently universal and beneficial for all people, which led him to claim that the policy he implemented was successful. As the most significant evidence of this success, he pointed to the "peace and stability" the country experienced during his more than twenty years in power and noted that it had "developed and grown like never before."[63]

According to Mahathir, the "Islamization" of Malaysia will facilitate its modernization of Malaysia because Islam, when properly understood and practiced, offers a path to enlightenment, harmony, and peace. Therefore, the fundamental teachings and practices of Islam contribute to the success of the Malaysian nation. He explained his thoughts on this issue as follows:

> *If we are going to meet the challenges of the 21st Century, we should pause now and take stock. And having done that calmly and dispassionately we should then set out to plan for our future; not the next year, not the next decade, but the whole*

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[61] The Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) was established on 18 February 1992 as a non-profit organization to spread and develop the true understanding of Islam, which is the basis and foundation of the development and progress of Islamic civilization and the world. IKIM was officially opened on 3 July 1992 by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. See, https://www.ikim.gov.my/wp-newest/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Pelan-Strategik-Edisi-Kemaskini.pdf

[62] Mohd. Noor Bin Deris,95 ; Abdul Monir Yaacob "Penerapan Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Pentadbiran Kerajaan: Satu Penilaian", Working Paper of the Seminar on Appreciation of Islamic Values in Administration at the National Level, Kuala Lumpur, 29-30 April 1994.

[63] Mahathir Mohamad, A Doctor in the House: The Memoirs of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, (Malaysia: MPH Publishing, 2011), 479.

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century and more for that is how long it will take to achieve any degree of success. First of all, we must go back to the true teachings of Islam, to the al-Quran and the Hadith. These teachings had converted the ignorant desert Arabs into brave and talented people who were able to build in less than 100 years a huge empire extending from Spain in the West to China in the East, to build the greatest civilization the world had ever seen. If Islam could do these for the jahiliah, the ignorant ones, there is no reason why it cannot do the same for us now. We are not as ignorant as those feuding Arab tribes.[64]

According to Mahathir who emphasizes that the Islamic religion brings wisdom to societies and improves them, there should be a synthesis of Islam and modern methods of study and research. This synthesis will inspire both Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslim academics must master all modern disciplines and fully understand them. But this is only the first prerequisite. They must then integrate the new knowledge into the corpus of the Islamic heritage by reinterpreting and adapting it according to the worldview and values of Islam.[65] Accordingly, he aimed for Malaysian young people who were sent to Japan for education within the framework of modernization policies to study Japan and to harmonize Islam with modernity and development with the data obtained.[66] Again, within the framework of this policy, Mahathir opened the International Islamic University of Malaysia. He also gave importance to Islamic banking and Islamic insurance activities and expanded the powers of the Malaysian Islamic Development Department.[67] Additionally, internationally recognized

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[64] Sven Schottmann, Mahathir's Islam: *Mahathir Mohamad on Religion and Modernity in Malaysia,* (United States: University Hawaii Press, 2018),1- 53-132.

[65] Teik, Khoo Boo, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad,* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995),169.

[66] Abdul Rahman Abdul Aziz, "The State and Modernization Perspectives Development Planning", *Demokrasi,* 6, no.2 (2005): 6; Manjurul Hossain Reza & Nilufar Yasmin, "Development of Malaysia under the Leadership of Mahathir Mohamad: Turned Malaysia into a Rich Country", *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 1, no.5 (2019): 503; Fumitaka Furuoka, "Malaysia-Japan Relations under the Mahathir Administration: Case Studies of the "Look East" Policy and Japanese Investment in Malaysia", *Asian Survey,* 3, no.47 (2007): 513.

[67] Norshahril Satt, *Islam in Southeast Asia* in *Competing Discourses Among Malaysian Muftis: Still a Case of Arabization?* by Norshahril Satt, (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018),41-42-43.

institutions such as the Islamic Economics Foundation, Asia Pacific Mosque Council, Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding and Islamic Thought and History Institution, Islamic Thought and Civilization Institute, Islamic Studies program, and Malaysian Islamic University College have also been launched.[68]

Mahathir showed that with these modernization policies, a modern state with Islamic and Asian culture would be formed. Also, it has shown that Islam is modern, dynamic, and suitable for today's needs and that Islam is not a backward religion.[69] The best example of this is the decrease in poverty in the country. After independence in 1957, almost half of Malaysian people were extremely poor. However, with the modernization policy implemented in Malaysia, Malaysia's economic growth became resilient with a growth rate of 7.6 percent in the period 1970-2012. Compared to the region, this growth rate is one of the highest growth rates. Durable economic growth in Malaysia was supported by strong investment activity, with the average investment-to-GDP ratio reaching around 30 percent during the 1970-1990 period. High and sustainable growth, supported by strong investment activities, created new employment and business opportunities. As a result, the unemployment rate fell from 7.4 percent in 1970 to approximately 3.0 percent in 2012. Compared to other countries, the unemployment rate in Malaysia is relatively low compared to regional economies. The unemployment rate in Malaysia is lower than in many developed countries. For example, in 2012, unemployment rates in OECD countries and high-income countries were around 8.0 percent; this was more than double that in Malaysia.[70] Additionally, despite facing challenges such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, Malaysia has maintained an upward economic trajectory, averaging a growth rate of 5.4% since 2010.[71] Based on this, it can be said that the modernization of Malaysia

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[68] Mehmet Özay," Malezya'da Din-Devlet İlişkisine Kısa Bir Bakış: Dr. Mahathir Mohamad Dönemi İslamlaştırma Politikaları ve Yansımaları," *Tarih Kültür ve Sanat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2, no.1(2013): 120.

[69] Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, "The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline through Islam", *Pacific Affairs,* 56, no. 4 (1983): 636.

[70] https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2020-02/Malaysia_Success_Story_In_Poverty_Eradication.pdf

[71]https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/overview ; Endi Haryono & Patrick Ziegenhain, "Mahathir Mohamad in Public Policy and Politics of Malaysia", *Popilasi,* 30, no. 2 (2022): 126; Mohamed Ariff & Syarisa Yanti Abubakar, "The

has progressed positively because of the policies implemented by Mahathir. We can say that this situation shows the idea that "non-Western modernization" is possible.

As can be seen, Mahathir was inspired by the industrialization experiences of Japan and South Korea, and at the same time preserved Malaysia's culture and values, putting Malaysia on the path of rapid industrialization and economic development and turning it into a modern country. This process that Malaysia has gone through with Mahatir's policies in the context of non-Western modernization constitutes an important example in terms of showing the feasibility and success potential of non-Western modernization.

Conclusion

According to some modernization theorists, for non-Western societies to reach the level of development of the West, they must put their modernization processes into the same pattern as in Europe. According to this approach, the modernization processes of all societies should be similar. However, every society has different dynamics, and it is very difficult to experience similar processes. Therefore, non-Western modernization theory emerged as an alternative to this theory. According to this theory, non-Western societies do not have to follow Western societies in the modernization process. Moreover, they can modernize while preserving their own culture and values. Malaysia, which tried this model and was successful, became an example that showed that it is possible to have modern, contemporary institutions without breaking away from tradition. Malaysia's fourth prime minister, Mahathir, who is known as the pioneer of modernization in Malaysia, showed that modernization is possible without compromising Islamic and moral values with the modernization policies he implemented in the context of non-Western modernization.

As seen in the Malaysian example, there is no single path for non-Western societies. They can produce local and national alternative modernization methods in line with their own traditions, culture, and beliefs, without following the modernization process of the West or accepting the culture and values of the West.

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