

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**STRATEGISING
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN MALAYSIA'S
FOREIGN POLICY:
FROM THE MALAYSIAN MULTINATIONAL
CORPORATIONS PERSPECTIVES**

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ABSTRACT

The study would like to suggest for constructing the ideas on Malaysian cultural diplomacy, how it evolves, what are the benefits in building our national external image and branding, and what are the possible challenges and opportunities it would take into. In line with the globalised practice of the 21st century, the cultural definition and roles in foreign policy seems to be increasingly prominent with the emergence of terminologies such as “soft power”, “public diplomacy” and “cultural diplomacy”, indeed soft power elements in a foreign policy can be proven with the application of cultural means through operations, dialogues and appeals for convince in contrast to the use of hard powers via military and political interventions. Most nations are applying soft power approach in propagating peace and mitigating conflicts especially through cultural diplomacy. However, in Malaysian perspective, cultural diplomacy is still a new area that has not been ventured into its foreign policy. Deploying culture in the foreign policy is important as it manifests on arts, distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour and way of life or particular people or nation, whereas diplomacy involved dialogues and interaction between the states. Diplomacy is the means of mediating the state’s internal business and the international settings. Thus, foreign policy and home affairs are interrelated and inseparable; one could not function independently without the other, yet decisions and conditions developed by domestic political authority could give an impact to the national agenda and conducts abroad. Besides, positive progress of the nation’s development, political and economic stability, and concerns over security interests in the international fora indicated Malaysia’s foreign policy reputation, as well as the national image, branding, and credibility in the international community. Findings of the study also try to probe roles and functions of the multinational corporation (MNCs) in promoting Malaysia through their interactions with foreign consumers and clients. Hence, this study also would suggest on how the non-state actors could play their role and task in disseminating Malaysia’s cultural diplomacy to the interests and attentions of foreign public and clients.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the first decades of 21st century, the cultural definition and roles in foreign policy seems to be increasingly prominent with the emergence of terminologies such as “soft power”, “public diplomacy” and “cultural diplomacy”, indeed soft power elements in a foreign policy can be proven with the application of cultural means through operations, dialogues and appeals for convince, in contrast to the use of hard powers via military and political interventions (Maaß, 2013). As for Malaysia, the national’s diplomacy orientation also began to shift in promoting cultural aspects such as foods, arts, and performances overseas, despite limitations of not concretely underlined in the foreign policy and the use of hard power approach (Karim, 2016). Therefore, this study is proposed to further understand on how Malaysia could portrays its cultural and heritage strengths through initiatives undertaken by its multinational corporations (MNCs) and to be deployed in developing diplomatic exchanges, simultaneously to propagate better cultural understanding between Malaysia and other countries, by underlining the problems, explore and answer the problems by inquiring research questions, and undertake the research process based on the research objectives.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In recent trends of the international system, most nations are applying soft power approach in propagating peace and mitigating conflicts especially through cultural diplomacy. In Malaysia, cultural diplomacy is still a new area that has not been ventured into its foreign policy (Md Raziap, 2016; Karim, 2016). Unlike other countries in ASEAN such as Vietnam and Indonesia, Malaysia has not developed its own division of cultural diplomacy under the foreign policy ministry. Although the practical elements of cultural diplomacy was already adopted since Malaysia’s independence by various government agencies and non-state institutions, Malaysia’s cultural programs are