

Revisiting The Second Wave Impacts of the Look-East Policy in Malaysia

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Abstract

The Look East Policy (LEP), initiated by Malaysia in 1982, had two primary goals: to enhance workers' ethics, skills, efficiency, and knowledge by adopting positive values from Japan and Korea, and to improve productivity and quality levels. This article evaluates the impact of the second wave of LEP (LEP 2.0) after 40 years, building on the assumption that LEP 2.0 benefits both Japan and Malaysia, similar to the first wave, which primarily targeted Malaysia's growth. The study aims to assess the success of LEP 2.0's implementation and its empowerment over the past four decades. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups involving 13 stakeholders directly connected to LEP. Using thematic analysis of interview transcripts and the Policy Cycle process, the study found that work ethics, cultural factors, Japanese values, and loyalty to employers were key contributors to improved work quality. However, LEP's success in fully embedding Japanese work culture and values in Malaysia was partial. Nonetheless, LEP 2.0 strengthened Malaysia-Japan cooperation and fostered mutual benefits. Overall, the study highlights both achievements and limitations in realizing LEP's objectives.

Keywords: *Look East Policy, Malaysia-Japan, Second Wave, Implementation, Implication.*

Introduction

The Look East Policy (LEP) was officially announced by Mahathir Mohamad on 8 February 1982 during the 5th Joint Annual Conference of MAJECA/JAMECA at Hilton Hotel, Kuala Lumpur (Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia, 2014). LEP is set for Malaysia to follow the example of developed and rapidly growing Eastern Asian countries, especially in the economy. The main objective of LEP implementation is to emulate and instill work culture and ethics from Eastern Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China into Malaysian society. Mahathir Mohamad explained the reasons behind the introduction of LEP:

"I feel a deep sense of shame when I reflect on our lives during the British colonial era. We were forced to call them 'Sir,' a reflection of their domination and condescension toward us. During my studies, I learned about British lifestyles and realized they had grown complacent. Their work ethic declined as they prioritized unions and irrelevant demands, making them unproductive compared to the Japanese. The Japanese, on the other hand, demonstrated exceptional discipline and resilience. In 1961, before I became Prime Minister, I visited Japan while they were rebuilding their country from the devastation of war. What I saw left a profound impression on me: they worked tirelessly and efficiently, focused on restoring their nation. Akio Morita, the founder of SONY, described how Japanese workers were so committed they were willing to accept just a ball of rice with soy sauce as payment. Yet, their dedication, responsibility, and problem-solving skills set them apart. I even witnessed their remarkable approach to problem-solving firsthand. In Japan, I saw two cars involved in an accident. Instead of arguing, the drivers discussed calmly, nodded in agreement, and went on with their day. Contrast this with Malaysia, where a similar incident might lead to a fight. These experiences convinced me that if Malays adopt similar values—discipline, responsibility, and a commitment to excellence—they too can succeed. While the world looked to the West for inspiration at the time, I recognized that the Japanese had surpassed them. By emulating the values and work ethic of Japan and other East Asian countries, we can build a stronger, more successful future for our nation."

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The progress of the Eastern Asian countries in the technology and economy sectors was empowered by their culture and work ethics, a strength that Malaysians should emulate to develop the country. Nevertheless, the emulation needs to be tailored according to the Malaysian mold because not every aspect of Eastern Asian culture is positive. This article discusses the main factors besides ethics and work culture that convinced the government to implement the LEP in 1981.

Previous research reviews (Azmi Al-Alwi 2010, Ahmad Sohaimi 2013; Kartini et al. 2017; Suhana & Kartini 2015; Rahimah et al. 2019; Pandian et al. 2021; Norhelmi 2020; Mohd Afendi & Junaidi 2016) on LEP assessed the objective aspect of the policy's implementation since its introduction in 1982. None of these researchers comprehensively evaluated LEP using the Policy Cycle Theory. This theory provides a framework for policy processes beginning with agenda setting, policy formation, formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The flow helps to explain the creation of the LEP using a top-down approach.

Pandian et al. (2021) assessed the LEP over 35 years, focusing on the implementation aspect, specifically on the objective of implementing work ethics. Pandian also detailed the Malaysia-Japan bilateral relationship during LEP implementation, up to the second wave of LEP during Najib Razak's era. Meanwhile, Norhelmi (2020) wrote about Malaysia-Japan cooperation in defense and regional stability during the second wave of LEP. The Malaysia-Japan relationship had been on hiatus because the matter was not a priority during Abdullah Badawi's and Najib Razak's administrations. He stated that the Malaysia-Japan bilateral relationship allows LEP 2.0 to counter-balance China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and reduces the nation's reliance on China.

Hanim & Kartini (2021) discussed how the Malaysia-Japan relationship was strengthened after Mahathir took the helm as the seventh Prime Minister. LEP was seen to be neglected after Mahathir resigned in 2003. Both countries have developed various collaborations and projects during LEP 2.0. Mohd Afendi & Junaidi (2016) explained the ideation process for LEP during Mahathir's early years of running the country as the fourth Prime Minister. Mahathir intends to change Malaysia's role model from Western to Eastern countries and reduce the country's dependency on the West via the introduction of LEP.

Azmi Al 'Alwi (2010) and Rahimah et al. (2019) analyzed LEP's goals, implementations, impacts, and views. This policy aims to achieve rapid national progress while maintaining Eastern values. Aside from reducing Malaysia's reliance on the West, this policy also aims to block negative Western influence and achieve the goals listed in the New Economic Policy (NEP). Next, Ahmad Sohaimi (2013) described LEP's training and education programs and Malaysian students' experience in receiving Japanese education. Cooperation in education and training has been part of Japan's foreign aid programs for Malaysia since the country started participating in international foreign aid programs via the Colombo Plan in 1954. Japan assisted Malaysian students and trainees in obtaining education and training in various fields such as agriculture, fisheries, construction, heavy industry, light industry, communications, public relations, chemistry, transportation, postal, health, atomic energy, management, education, and others.

Kartini et al. (2017) assessed the attitudes of Malaysian workers who attempted to adopt Japanese culture and work ethics. They must practice positive attitudes, including integrity, accountability, and loyalty in performing their duties—which is not easy. The locals are indigenizing the everyday culture instilled in them due to family values and upbringing. Thus, the Japanese culture and work ethics can only be practiced at the manufacturing sites as part of the work regulation. Workers obey them as mandatory rules rather than a living culture of values and identity.

Kartini (2016), Suhana & Kartini (2015), and Khadijah & Lee Poh Ping (2003) discussed the role of LEP in implementing Japanese work culture into Malaysians. Japan is recognized as the most disciplined society as it is a nation developed from the ashes of World War I and II and frequent earthquake and typhoon disasters. Thus, adapting Japanese culture and work ethics may alter the behavior of Malaysians, and instill discipline and integrity into the workforce. Kaizen's principles of knowing your customers, empowering

people, and being transparent are part of the training for Malaysians working in Japanese MNCs to instill Japanese organizational system and culture. This approach encourages local employees and students to inculcate positive culture and practices while working with Japanese companies.

Research Objective

Previous studies discussed LEP implementations based on its primary objective of inculcating Japanese work culture in Malaysia. Minimal discussions and evaluations were made on LEP after 30 years of its introduction or during its second wave until the re-election of Mahathir Mohamad as the seventh Prime Minister (LEP 2.0). This study takes the opportunity to discuss and analyze LEP's implementation aspects, level of success, and the second wave of the program, after almost 40 years of its initiation. The approach to reevaluating LEP is conducted using the Policy Cycle processes coined by Howlett and Ramesh (1998). To date, the LEP has reached more than 40 years of implementation in Malaysia. The implementation of this policy is continuous and has never been declared to be terminated by any Prime Minister. Therefore, this article discusses the current form of Malaysia-Japan relations along with the program designed to empower this policy.

Research Methodology

This article uses qualitative methods, specifically in-person and intensive focus-group interviews conducted with 13 key informants directly involved with LEP implementation in diverse roles. For intensive discussions, the informants consist of the pioneers and initiators of this policy, namely Mahathir Mohamad and a former civil servant; three Diplomatic Officials of various departments; and one Japanese language teacher whose study was funded by the government and currently living in Japan. Meanwhile, seven informants were voluntarily involved in the focus group discussion method, consisting of workers for a Japanese factory, SONY, in Penang. The informants shared three main themes in inculcating Japanese work culture among Malaysian workers; namely education and training, employment, and shared commitment by the Japanese as measures to review the achievement of LEP objectives.

Table 1. List of Informants

Informant	Position/Organisation
Informant 1	Mahathir Mohamad, Pioneer of LEP (Former Prime Minister)
Informant 2	Former Civil Servant (Prime Minister's Office)
Informant 3	Diplomatic Official
Informant 4	Diplomatic Official (MIDA)
Informant 5	Diplomatic Official (MITI)
Informant 6	Japanese language teacher (Former student)
Informant 7	SONY worker (Engineer)
Informant 8	SONY worker (Manager)
Informant 9	SONY worker (Technician)
Informant 10	SONY worker (Operator)
Informant 11	SONY worker (Operator)
Informant 12	SONY worker (Clerk)
Informant 13	SONY worker (Administrator)

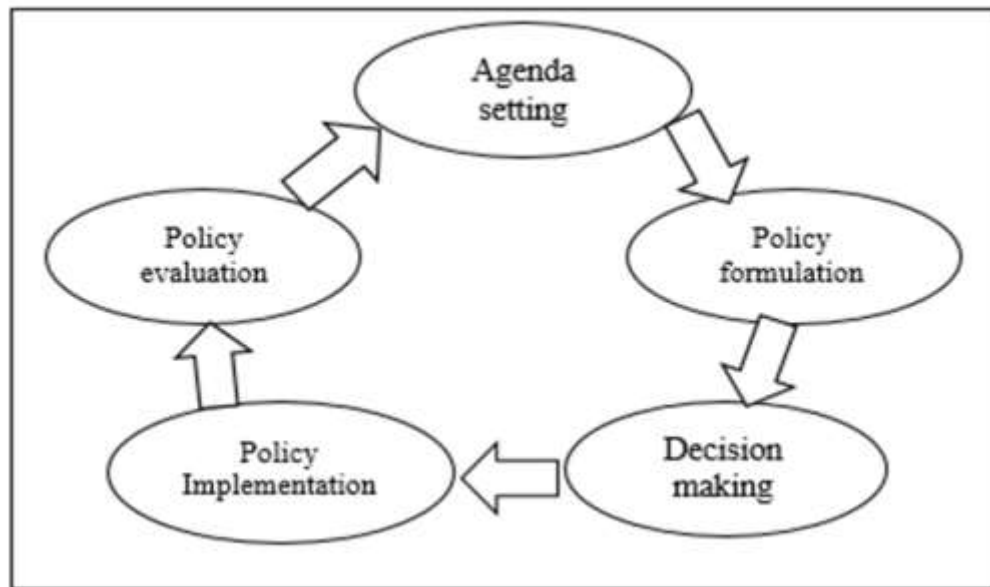
The Policy Cycle Process

This article utilizes the Policy Cycle process to assess LEP achievement. Howlett and Ramesh (1995) stated that the Policy Cycle process is divided into five stages: Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation, Decision Making, Policy Implementation, and Policy Evaluation. Agenda Setting refers to the act of choosing from various emerging issues, and the government needs to focus on the central issues (Dunn, 2003). Policy Formulation refers to identifying suitable strategies, formulas, and mechanisms to choose the government's

relevant policy. Decision Making refers to the decision by the government whether or not any action on the issues needs to be taken (Shafritz & Russell, 2013).

This model is used to assess LEP and its achievements based on the policy cycle, which justifies the requirement for continuously reviewing and finding ways to improve a policy. The improvement of this policy cycle will yield intervention strategies for the second wave of LEP.

Figure 1. Policy Cycle Process



Source: Howlett and Ramesh (1998)

Results

Internalizing Japanese Ethics and Work Culture

Malaysia implemented LEP to emulate Japanese ethics and work culture, which was one factor in turning around the devastated country due to the Second World War to become a technology powerhouse. Kartini et al. (2017) stated that implementing this policy aims to inculcate Japanese ethics and work culture among Malaysian workers, mainly from an industrial standpoint. Mahathir Mohamad hoped that Malaysians would be able to follow the Japanese work culture to propel Malaysia to become a developed country (Suhana & Kartini, 2015).

This article lists good values and culture to be inculcated, primarily maintaining cleanliness, taking care of others, being shamed of failure, loyalty to employers and organizations, and hard work and perseverance. History has proven that Japanese work culture and values propelled them to be a prosperous nation, and their positive work culture and values are the reasons behind the implementation of LEP in Malaysia. Despite the resource scarcity and shortage of cheap labor, Japan can produce high-quality products in high volumes by utilizing an excellent work culture and progressing for decades despite severe destruction during the Second World War (Ahmad Sohaimi, 2011).

From the interviews conducted, Japanese work culture values time. Punctuality is an essential aspect of the Japanese in performing their tasks. If they need to start working at 8.00, they will arrive at the workplace either on time or five to ten minutes early. Japanese workers also value the productivity and quality of their products. For example, workers in the industrial and manufacturing sectors need to follow all instructions and procedures to ensure the quality of the products produced. Aside from that, loyalty to employers is

part of Japanese work culture. They are loyal to their employees and current jobs, and it is not easy for them to change their profession. This culture is embedded in informants working for the SONY company.

The Japanese are also very hardworking in performing the work entrusted to them. They work long hours to ensure that they can perform the tasks properly. This hardworking culture makes them feel ashamed if they return home earlier than their workmates. Recording attendance is a Japanese culture that needs to be imitated as it ensures a worker's diligence and trustworthiness. Punch card is a method to record employees' attendance and ensure that they comply with the designated working period. The punch card system to record employees' attendance in Government premises in Malaysia started in line with LEP implementation, which has evolved into the modern online login/logout or fingerprint system.

The Japanese emphasize a high level of discipline in every line of work, which is instilled in their work culture to ensure that every worker abides by the instructions given. The Japanese also practice teamwork, where they will strive together to achieve their organization's goals. All individuals will cooperate to contribute ideas and expertise in developing their organization. Team building can be nurtured via training programs provided by the organization to its employees, who are ready to commit to the organization's requirements to achieve its goals. The Japanese government showed exemplary commitment and welcomed Malaysia's efforts in introducing LEP in 1982. Giving appreciation is also a positive trait practiced by the Japanese in the workplace and daily life. Cleanliness is a trait and value practiced by Japanese society. This practice has made Japan well-known for caring for the environment and hygiene. They practice cleanliness from all aspects—starting from personal, family, and community levels. This practice is nurtured at a young age and performed by everyone in the society. It is common for an employer to collect garbage around them and be responsible for it.

Friendship and networking are positive cultures practiced by the Japanese. They respect and value their friends (Sarah & Wan Shahrazad, 2020). An informant studying and working in Japan for several years still keeps in touch with her Japanese friends. The Japanese are also very honest and transparent in performing their tasks, which translates to integrity and accountability in the management and administration sectors. This positive value prevents people from committing fraud or breach of trust. The Japanese are also well-known for their feeling of shame. The definition of shame for the Japanese is different from that of Malaysians. Mahathir Mohamad explained the difference below:

“We try to learn the Japanese values, an example that I frequently mention is the feeling of shame. Due to this feeling of shame, a person may lock himself in their house or even take his own life. When a Japanese does something bad or fails in an endeavor, they will commit suicide. Producing low-quality jobs can lead to disgrace and committing suicide. The Malays have a different concept of shame. If a person is involved in a scandal and gets caught or does not wear his clothes, he feels ashamed. These issues do not make the Japanese feel ashamed. They are okay to bathe naked with the whole family without feeling ashamed. They will be ashamed if they do something frowned upon or produce low-quality work. If they got into a war and lost, they felt ashamed and committed suicide. We see that this feeling of shame is a lifestyle unique to the Japanese”.

Japanese feelings of shame are apparent in performing their tasks and responsibilities. They may take their own lives if they cannot perform a task or produce low-quality results. To avoid the issue, they will carry out their duties diligently. Aside from that, they are also very compassionate in their work and daily lives. This understanding and caring attitude will result in positive relationships and mutual respect with other people, regardless of social strata or status.

The coercive regimentation of discipline and human dignity for more than four hundred years of the feudal Tokugawa era (1600-1868) defined the Japanese identity and attitude (Hendra, 2017), beginning with values instilled in the families for generations to come (Huffman, 2008). Although Japanese communities are primarily atheists, they follow Taoism which teaches the value of appreciating the balance of life between humans and non-humans.

*Instilling Japanese Culture in Education and Training Sectors***Table 2. Instilling Japanese Culture in the Education and Training Sector**

Informants	Education
	Theme
Informant 1 (LEP Pioneer)	<i>"The truth is, it is still expensive if we [send the students] to the West; that is why I proposed establishing a Japanese university in Malaysia. My idea is to develop a real Japanese institute that teaches using the Japanese Language and instills Japanese cultures".</i>
Informant 2 (Former Civil Servant)	<i>"When the program started [in] 1982, the government was severe, and they allocated lots of funding for the Look East program. This Look East program includes sending our students to [Japanese] university to get their first degree there. They spent four years there (in Japan) and two years here (for preparation purposes)".</i>
Informant 11 (SONY Worker)	<i>"The external courses provided are based on related sectors. For example, I attended a Team Building Course in Langkawi. Trainers for the course were special trainers from the Management Business Company, who are well-versed with management-related matters...."</i>
Informant 12 (SONY Worker)	<i>"Quality. Referring to the question, we went to Japan to obtain [quality] training."</i>

Education and training are core elements in instilling Japanese culture among Malaysians. Programs introduced by the government in the education sector, for example, sponsorship to further study at the undergraduate, master, and doctorate levels, are among the government's endeavors to instill Japanese work culture in the country. The government sent students to further their studies in Science & Technology or Engineering fields in Japan not only for academic knowledge but with the intention that the students will be able to emulate Japanese work culture through their experience living in the country. Although not all elements of the Japanese culture are appropriate to be absorbed and practiced by Malaysian students who hail from different cultures and lifestyles, they should imitate the positive values to improve themselves and the nation (Kartini, 2017).

Table 3. Instilling Japanese Culture in Work Sectors

Informants	Work
	Theme
Informant 4 (Diplomatic Officer)	<i>"They are very strict. When you enter the factory, they have everything properly labelled, and you need to follow [the instructions], for example, where and how to place your shoes (including their orientation). They are immaculate. Their factory is very strict regarding safety—you must walk on the designated path and cannot venture into the machine area".</i>
Informant 5 (Diplomatic Officer)	<i>"When I was there for a two-week trip, they appreciated guests. After a meeting with all these industrialists, they will walk you to the gate and wait until your car leaves the compound. As the agency responsible for investment promotion for the country (MIDA), this is a good way to make your guests feel welcome, and I have been practising this with my guests".</i>

Informant 6 (Former Japanese Student)	<i>"We did work [in Japan]. Malaysian students were encouraged to work part-time [in the factories] to practice what we learned in class".</i>
Informant 7 (SONY Worker)	<i>"When the company started, they gathered all staff and asked us to exercise. After the exercise, our manager explained what we should and should not do. He explained everything during the briefing. They also gave us words of encouragement to boost our work commitment".</i>
Informant 8 (SONY Worker)	<i>"They always talked about production problems and asked us about the sources of the problems. They are always on time. There will be [in the factory] at 8 o'clock sharp, and sometimes we are still at home. Because they are the boss, we needed to come earlier than them. They are very punctual concerning time. Another thing is in terms of cleanliness".</i>

The process of adapting Japanese work culture to Malaysians also takes place in the working sector. Aside from living and studying in Japan, several Malaysian students also worked part-time there, enabling them to understand the Japanese work culture better. Similarly, Malaysians who work under Japanese multinational companies in Malaysia can adapt to the Japanese work culture. Japanese enforce their work culture here in Malaysia and implement the same rules for all employees. All employees need to be disciplined and comply with regulations and instructions set.

Table 4. Instilling Japanese Work Culture via Japan Commitment

Informant	Theme
	Japan Commitment
Informant 2 (Former Civil Servant)	<i>"When we were sent to Japan, we were required to live with adopted families. On the next day, after we woke up, we needed to go to the field to remove weeds".</i>
Informant 3 (Diplomatic Officer)	<i>"Then the Government agreed to set up Ambang Asuban Jepun (Preparatory Program to Enter Japanese Universities). I think that was a wise idea for the country at the time. The Japanese themselves established the program at the University of Malaya. The teachers came from Japan, and this portrayed the commitment of the Japanese government to conduct the program. Design for the buildings was done by the Japanese".</i>
Informant 4 (Diplomatic Officer)	<i>"Because we (MIDA) have an office there [Japan], we have visited the country several times. Our office established connections and relations with chambers of commerce and industry associations. So every time we go there, they will conduct a mini-seminar, and many Japanese investors attended the programs".</i>
Informant 6 (Former Student)	<i>"To help us master the Japanese Language, the university, with help from the embassy, will assign foster family [for the students]. We will live with them during the summer holiday. Some students developed good, long-lasting relationships with their foster families".</i>

Informant 8 (SONY Worker)	<i>"In terms of remuneration, when I was a staff under Production, they would give us some incentive when we achieved a target."</i>
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The Japanese also contributed to the implementation of LEP. They felt proud and ecstatic knowing that Malaysia regards Japan as a role model in developing the country. The Japanese government was very committed to ensuring the success of the Ambang Asuhan Jepun (AAJ) program at the University of Malaya and was willing to provide funds, contribute to developing the program, and send Japanese teachers to the center. The Japanese government also helped coordinate a foster program for Malaysians to further their studies in their country. While our students were there, they were given foster families as a strategy to expose the students to the actual atmosphere, lifestyle, and culture of the Japanese people. This program provides exposure to the students to understand the sociocultural aspects of the Japanese people.

The Impact

Referring to the Policy Cycle process, the success of LEP can be measured via the policy objectives' achievements in terms of structural and cultural changes. Discussion on the results of this study will review the overall outcome of the LEP implementation via its two main objectives, namely instilling Japanese work culture (Training and Education) and increasing the production rate (Industrialisation). Mechanisms such as 5S (Seiri =Sort, Seiton = Organize, Seiso = Shine, Seiketsu = Standardize, and Shitsuke= Sustain), use of name tags, Just In Time (JIT), Kaizen principle (know your customer, let it flow, empower people, & be transparent), Sogo Soshia (integrity, loyalty and trustworthy), punch card, desk file, and local bill payment on time are successful structural changes implemented by the public and private sectors (Suhana & Kartini 2013; Kartini 2017; Lee 2004; Plenert 2003). These structural changes had widely taken place during the early implementation of the policy. Now, almost all agencies practice the structural changes introduced by LEP.

However, local people are hesitant to change their customs, attitudes, and work culture. The reason is that instilling the Japanese work culture is only feasible in the workplace rather than at home or in their daily lives. Malaysians will return to practicing their everyday culture and lifestyle when they return home. We can only implement these cultures in the workplace.

Aside from that, it is normal for the Japanese to go out for karaoke sessions after working hours. However, in Malaysia, normally people go to karaoke sessions to catch up with friends rather than to have a break from long working hours (Hanim & Kartini, 2021). Japanese are very particular about maintaining cleanliness, and Malaysians can learn a trick or two from them in this regard. The cleanliness of public toilets in Malaysia still necessitates improvement, and litter can be found everywhere in the country. We also do not fully practice the other positive Japanese cultures, primarily work values and culture. The pioneer of LEP acknowledges this issue as in the statements below:

"We saw that some of the students sent to Japan inculcated their work ethics, although some of them did not do so. Even better, some of them fully inculcated the Japanese work ethics—hard working, conscious of quality, and ashamed of not achieving targets. However, I think there is a tiny minority that absorbed [the whole Japanese work ethic], but a majority of them still inculcated some of the Japanese work ethics. Those we sent to Japan did not bring any issues to the country. Compared to those sent to Europe or the United States, they absorbed the Western lifestyles and values, making various demands [to the government]. Those sent to Japan [do not have such mentality, instead they] work hard and become successful".

Students who further their studies in Japan are more likely to adapt to Japanese work culture after they return home and work in Malaysia. The Vice President of LNG Trading and Marketing (Gas and New Technology) PETRONAS acknowledged that it was easier for former students who studied and lived in Japan to adopt the Japanese work culture, namely perseverance, discipline, mutual respect, and meticulousness, as compared to those who do not (Berita Harian Online, 2021). It is hard to instill Japanese work culture into Malaysians because they are accustomed to the existing culture and practices. Also, the

focus of the Malaysian Government on Science & Technology and Engineering fields needs to be aligned with the LEP implementation. To understand the culture and practice of Japanese society, the government should prioritize Social Sciences fields such as Anthropology and Sociology. Learning cultural values and ethics would improve Malaysians' understanding of Japanese people compared to learning technology without knowing the people who build the technology. The government must formulate strategies to reshape and align the local culture with Japanese ethics and culture.

Within these 40 years, the LEP program benefited nearly 28,000 Malaysians directly as they pursued their studies in Japan and learned about Japanese technology and work ethics, which became one of the thrusts for industrialization in the country (Berita Harian Online, 2021). The impacts of LEP and the second wave of LEP which contribute to our nation's economic growth can be witnessed in the industrial sector. Malaysia obtained endless support from Japanese investors via consistent FDIs, including for the oil and gas (O&G) sector. Japanese companies provided exemplary commitment since the first day of the Malaysian O&G company establishment. The 'first drop of oil' was bought by Japanese companies. Until now, Japan has been consistent in buying liquefied natural gas (LNG) produced by Malaysia (Berita Harian Online, 2021).

Trade and investment are progressive under the LEP program, bringing closer bilateral ties between the two governments. Currently, around 1,500 Japanese companies are operating in Malaysia, creating 340,000 employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector alone (Astro Awani Online, 2021). As the largest investor in Malaysia for 2019, Japan has broadened its focus from the traditional manufacturing of electronics goods to the high value-added manufacturing sector, such as manufacturing medical devices and the services sector. Its guide includes the services sector's digital, halal, and logistic industries.

Japan also assisted Malaysia in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic by contributing personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies. The Japanese government also supported the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) to help ASEAN countries develop the capacity to tackle contagious diseases. Japan donated US\$60 million and committed another US\$300 million to support the development and global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines (Astro Awani Online, 2021).

Second Wave and the Mutual Benefit

The Second Wave of LEP started after 30 years of its commencement under the leadership of the sixth Prime Minister, Najib Razak. During the 31st JAMECA-MAJECA Conference, Najib announced that LEP would be continued and redeveloped according to current needs (Malaysian Insider Online, 2012). In general, LEP implementation has resulted in sustainable development, and the government felt that it is appropriate for the program to continue. For the Second Wave, the government will focus on high-growth areas, namely health, education, and tourism.

During Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Malaysia on 25th July 2013, Najib announced that Malaysia and Japan agreed to commit to strengthening the Second Wave of LEP that will not be limited to training and education but will also aim at having more economically related sectors (Malaysian Insider Online, 2012) including investment, trade, green technology, infrastructure development, Islamic finance, and halal industry. In the second phase, the main focus will be on new technology, skills development in utilizing the latest technology, managing ecosystems using safe, reliable, and renewable energy, and modernizing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Astro Awani Online, 2013). The term LEP 2.0 was explicitly and widely used when Mahathir Mohamad was reappointed as the Prime Minister after winning the May 2018 election. LEP has reinforced the nation's requirements in various sectors by strengthening education, human capital, industrial, and high technology programs.

Through LEP 2.0, Mahathir Mohamad strengthened the education sector by analyzing the Japanese education system from preschool to higher education. He believes that the Japanese culture and values contribute to the development of their nation, and Malaysia can imitate these factors. To ensure LEP 2.0 success, the scope of the policy was broadened and diversified through various approaches, including

knowledge and expertise sharing, to accelerate Malaysia's adoption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0). Three potential industries highlighted in LEP 2.0 are the halal, education, and tourism industries. The halal sector involves the cooperation between Malaysia-Japan which presents the opportunity to promote halal services (e.g., tourism) and products (e.g., food) from this country (Berita Harian Online, 2013). Aside from continuing the existing policies, the halal industry introduced is unique because it focuses on strategic target areas according to the current needs and technology.

LEP 2.0 focuses on mutual benefit cooperation, which means any agreed-upon cooperation needs to benefit both parties. Based on a Department of Statistics Malaysia report, in 2018, Japan recorded the third-highest figure for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for Malaysia, with RM5.0 billion after Hong Kong and the USA. In 2019, Japan recorded the highest FDI for Malaysia, with RM10.4 billion (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). About 1,500 Japanese companies are operating and contributing to the industrialization of Malaysia. In 2020, around 40 percent of Malaysia's exports were donated by the Electric and Electronics (E&E) sector, a sector that was traditionally the focus of FDI among Japanese companies.

LEP celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022. Various accomplishments have been achieved by this program during the said period, including sending 26,000 Malaysians to Japan to study and obtain training (Bernama, 2022). Participants of these programs were able to contribute greatly to the development of the country in various sectors and assist in improving the two-way Malaysia-Japan relationship. In 2022, both Malaysia and Japan agreed to improve bilateral relations between companies and venture capitalists in both countries, fostering a foundation for bilateral business dealings. Japan External Trade Organizations (JETRO) vowed to support business matching in the green sector through J-Bridge, a business platform for international open innovation creation between Japanese companies, startups, and digital companies with their Malaysian counterparts (MIDA, 2022).

The goal of JETRO is to encourage collaboration with accelerators, such as the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), Sunway iLabs, and NEXEA, as well as foster a process of information sharing and support. Many Japanese firms are interested in assisting Malaysia to achieve net zero, and JETRO is contributing to coming out with a report on the main Malaysian firms involved in this sector. In this regard, PETRONAS and three Japanese companies initiated a research study to collect and store CO₂ in Malaysia. Decarbonization is one of the important business activities for Japanese firms since both Japan and Malaysia aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

The examples given verified that the Malaysia-Japan collaboration has always been strengthened based on the current requirements. Taking into account globalization and rapid technological change, it is crucial to renew Malaysia-Japan cooperation so that both countries can benefit from the interaction, especially from an economic viewpoint. Strategic collaborations can be conducted in various fields including disaster management, aging society, digital economy, science, technology, and innovation as well as green growth. Changes in the LEP collaboration scopes over these past 40 years are crucial in ensuring they are relevant to the requirements of both countries.

LEP After 40 Years: Continuity, Relevance and Future

LEP is an open-ended policy implying that its implementation has been continuous until now, and no declaration has been made on the policy's termination. LEP has already reached its 40th year of implementation in 2022. Through LEP 2.0, Malaysia-Japan relations are once again tightly knotted with various collaborations in the pipelines for both countries. LEP 2.0 gives a very good picture of Malaysia-Japan cooperation, especially in the specific highlighted areas. LEP 2.0 is the continued cooperation with Japan in the aspects of education and industry while making additions to areas that are a priority in the development of the country in line with the development of technology.

The change in the attitude and structural change that is taking place in Malaysia today in the employment aspect, whether in the public or private sector, should be seen as a positive change to this policy in achieving the policy's objectives. A change of attitude, for example, is still seen as capable of being implemented by some Malaysians even though it has not been successfully implemented in the entire work culture of

Malaysians. This change should be seen as a positive development in the effort to change the attitude, culture, and paradigm of Malaysians (Berita Harian Online, 2022).

Although this policy has not succeeded in achieving the objective of changing the culture of Malaysian society like that of Japanese society, the work culture of Malaysian society can be changed little by little and it will take a long time to change the lifestyle that has been practiced for a long time. This attitude change is not easy to implement in a short time. Thus, the LEP needs to be continued. The implementation of LEP after 40 years is seen as a wise step taken by the government because this policy is still relevant to implement.

Empowering and strengthening LEP is the best plan to continue this policy. It is important to implement changes to areas of focus as well as cooperation programs to ensure the policy's relevance with current technological advancement. Since the initiation of the policy 40 years ago, Japan continues to be a perfect role model for the development of the country via various initiatives and programs conducted.

In conclusion, LEP has contributed greatly to both economic and infrastructure developments of the country via the two-way collaboration between Malaysia and Japan, especially in the field of education and training as described by Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia. Students sent to Japan were able to adapt to Japanese culture and work ethics when they were working in Malaysian firms. Although the practiced culture and work ethics may not be 100% identical to their Japanese counterparts, however, they are still advantageous in improving the overall work ethics in the country.

Apart from that, Malaysians who are working in Japanese multinational companies such as SONY also practice Japanese work culture. The training that they receive prepares them to be more disciplined, willing to work hard, improve their time management and compliance with instructions, and strive hard to achieve their firms' goals. JETRO plans to improve the Malaysia-Japan firm's collaboration post-pandemic, especially in new growth areas. Firms from both countries managed to establish close ties in overcoming various strifes during the COVID-19 endemic phase (MIDA, 2022). Trade and investment between the two allies continue to strengthen, creating new business opportunities for both countries, especially in the fields of smart manufacturing, food products, and carbon neutral agenda. It is evident that although LEP was started more than 40 years ago, its implementation needs to be continued since various reforms and improvements have been made to the program to ensure that it stays relevant and beneficial to both countries.

Malaysia-Japan relations via the LEP managed to create mutual benefits for both countries. Although in its nascent period, the program seems to only benefit Malaysia, it is also beneficial to Japan in the long run. Undoubtedly LEP has paved the way for a tighter and mutual relationship between the two Asian countries.

Conclusion

Overall, cleanliness, friendship/networking, honesty/transparency, feelings of shame, and compassion are the factors aside from the work culture that contribute to the success of LEP implementation in the country. Mahathir Mohamad's mission to encourage Malaysians to emulate Japanese values, ethics, and lifestyles to become part of the Malaysian culture has come a long way. Although it is difficult to change the attitudes and culture of Malaysians due to different socialization processes and upbringing, the Japanese culture can help improve our organizational system and productivity. It should be noted that Japanese society's cultural regimentation began over 400 years ago via coercive solid values and discipline instilled from every corner of life through formal and informal education and socialization. Hopefully, LEP will be able to provide a new worldview in terms of ethics and productive work culture. Therefore, the Second Wave of LEP boosts Malaysia with economic acceleration fit in the IR4.0, moving beyond cultural diplomacy.

The current Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim announced LEP after 40 years in 2023, expanding the scope and cooperation with Eastern Asian countries, namely Japan, South Korea, and China. China is one of the giants of today's economy and Malaysia should emulate its formula to succeed. To ensure LEP's relevance after 4 decades, it is important to broaden its scope to include more countries and execute critical projects

to spur strategic collaborations and fast-track the country's development agenda. Japan is a significant strategic partner for Malaysia, and we need to emulate Japanese ethics and technological advances. China is also a giant in this regard, they have various foreign direct investment (FDI) projects in progress or in the pipeline to be conducted in the country.

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