



Philosophy and Policy, then and Now: Unfolding the Rural Tourism Policy Perspectives in Malaysia

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Keywords: *philosophy, political philosophy, policy evolution, malaysian ecotourism plan, rural tourism.*

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Philosophy and Policy, then and now: Unfolding the Rural Tourism Policy Perspectives in Malaysia

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Abstract- The paper examines the evolution of political philosophers from the time of Plato (428 BC), Ibn Khaldun (1406) and Confucius (479 BC) to the current day political philosophers represented by John Dewey (1952) and Harold Lesswell (1978). The paper further examines how this departure has diluted philosophy from the policy making process, from what used to be an integration of philosophy and policy making to separating the philosophical component from it. This is seen as an issue in modern day policymaking as philosophy is legitimately concerned with the human affair and serves as guidance to humanity. Taking it into the Malaysian context, a snapshot of the Malaysian Ecotourism Plan will be used as an example to further illustrate the absence of philosophy in modern day policy making. This policy is important, as it serves as the backbone to the overall conservation of rural tourism in Malaysia.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The question of why people behave justly is quite uncertain. To some extent people behave because they fear societal punishment, while others are trembling before the notion of divine retribution. Is it possible to seem to behave justly due to the simple fact that there is good in people? The political system has been a central part of every nation's journey in development and growth. In further understanding this, the working definition of the political sciences is the knowledge of and in decision process of the public and civic order (Lass well, 1971). Much debate has been done in various countries talking about the contradictions in public policy and the policy process, or it being an oxymoron. For instance, why is sugar subsidised in Malaysia when obesity is on the rise and is healthy eating is highlighted in the mainstream media? Or a more extreme example, setting out to assassinate people is generally not permitted, neither is setting out to harm, take them prisoner or destroy their shelter and vehicles. But these in a civilised war, where only certain types of people get hurt is acceptable (Shue, 2010).

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This sort of questions motivate political scientist to further question the ideological and political persuasion to understand public problems and to find solutions to them (Birkland, 2005).

The political sphere can come in various dimensions. For instance, a school, a university, nation or even the world, however regardless of the scale, it is crucial to highlight that public policies address issues that are public and not private (Birkland, 2005). The knowhow of policy and its sciences should dedicate its solution of societal problems and other human dimensions within the prescribed space and time configurations or context. This is especially related to those having authority over allocation of valued resources be it wealth, power, skill, enlightenment, affection or well being (Brewer, 1973). Political science is not a new phenomenon. In fact, political science has its ancient roots where it has been governing as early as 500bc in the days of Plato in the West and Confucius in the East. The objective of this paper is to compare examples of classical and modern day distinction and evolution of political sciences, its importance and application in the modern day dimension and how can this knowledge be imparted into the context of rural tourism in Malaysia.

II. EVOLUTION OF POLICIES

The policy science focuses on the relevance of knowledge and in decision making (Lass well, 1971).. The study of public policy is generally seen as an important component of political science (Birkland, 2005). The evolution of human nature has been the highlight of political influence. The history of political philosophy includes many of the greatest most widely works of philosophy (Matravers, 2001). Great classical policy founders like Plato, Ibn Khaldun, and Confucius for instance initiated a point of departure for the evolution of present day policies.

a) Plato

Plato was born in 428 B.C. in Athens to an upper-class family. His father was a descendent of Codrus (the last king of Athens) and mother Perictione of Solon who is an Athenian lawgiver. Plato has shaped the fundamental social and political by rejecting cynical

interpretations of leadership as merely an exercise of power inflicted by self-interest elites (Williamson, 2008). This is coined by two major events. Plato was believed to have written the west's first legal theory. He is also responsible to write the west's first systematic philosophies of ethics and policies (Heinze, 2007). The *Republic*, is the first book by Plato to explicitly highlight about the fundamental idea of societal, or political justice, deriving from an analogous concept of individual justice (Plato, 360 B.C.). The *Republic* also mentioned that there were two major events that took place during the time the book was written. Firstly, the assumption of power by two groups namely the Four Hundred and the Thirty. After the Peloponnesian War, Athens was turned into an oligopolised nation, controlled by the wealthy. He was critical about the fact that the government at that point was very instable and oppressive, and was actively trying to restore democracy (Plato, 360 B.C.). Nonetheless, Plato cares not just about justice *per se*, but rather who and how Athens is controlled (Heinze, 2007). The second major event happened when his mentor, Socrates stood before a jury as he was charged for not recognising the gods of the state, of inventing new deities and for corrupting the youth of Athens. However, during that time amnesty was brought upon political offenders. Nonetheless, Socrates was found guilty of other charges but managed to escape a narrow death sentence (Plato, 360 B.C.)

b) Plato's political view as a philosopher

Plato expresses his philosophy through dialogues (Osborne, 2006). Plato's work has given practitioners the fundamental concepts of freedom, democracy, rules, positivism, individualism, community, morals, politics and government (Heinze, 2007). His work is divided into three parts which means ethics, epistemology and metaphysics (ontology) and was heavily influenced by other philosophers including Heraclitus, Parmenides and Socrates. The Theory of Forms, the foundation of Plato's work (Robjant, 2012, Silverman, 2012) indicates that all things share a common feature in the universe. Therefore, although a ball regardless if it is a basketball or a circle drawn on a blackboard is round, it shares a common feature in the universe, i.e. a Form. This task of metaphysics is to pass beyond the experience in which the world exists, but also to further understand it (Robjant, 2012).

He believes that the virtue of happiness requires knowledge, that is the knowledge of good and evil (Silverman, 2012). He quotes from the *Republic* that

"Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophise, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils [...] nor, I think, will the human race" *Republic*, 473 d-e (Plato 1997, 1100) taken from (Bocancea, 2009).

It was also mentioned that the proposed political analogy adopted was the idea of morality constructed within a community (Plato, 1993). Therefore the philosophy to Plato was reviewed as a dialect in which represents the art of contentious reasoning in order to ever last the validation of true options (Bocancea, 2009). Policies and law in his era did not emerge explicitly from changing issues of social and cultural life, nor did it come from the great deeds and inspiring events from predecessors. Instead, they are simply fabricated in terms of well-established principles and procedures by the artisan (Steinberger, 1989). His method does not always lead to the truth, but is seen as a substitute to truth. Philosophy was therefore used to govern and make politics (and or policies) (Bocancea, 2009).

c) IbnKhaldun

IbnKhaldun (1332–1406), born in Tunis of Spanish-Arabic descent and settled in Egypt in 1382 received education from reputed scholars (Chapra, 2008). He was born to a family that held high rankings in the civil services that had connections to the Spanish culture. His family was also connected to the Hafid dynasty and considered themselves part of a foreign elite. (Bocancea, 2009). The era of the Black Death (1340's) claimed the lives of his family including friends, teachers and members of his society (Chapra, 2008). Ibn Khaldun has been acclaimed as one of the greatest of its kind, created in any time or place where is seen as a system of Muslim jurisprudence and adaptation to Greek philosophy (White, 1959).

d) IbnKhaldun's political views as a philosopher

In his work, he postulates the notion of "everything is a function of man and a human social organisation" This notion of anthropocentrism (White, 1959) was a barrier especially in instilling social responsibility amongst the political elite. He was seen as one of the greatest figures of the fourteenth century where he was known as a tremendously able politician and rhetoric and jurisprudence (Burns, 2006). He talks about the dynamic theory of development where it talks that a development or decline of an economy or society does not depend on a singular factor, but rather an interaction of moral, social, economic, political and historical factors over a period of time (Chapra, 2008) or generational time (Inayatullah, 1998).

Amongst his work, he mixes philosophy, sociology, ethical and economic considerations that are influenced by physical, nonphysical, social and economic environments. The *Muqaddimah*, the first of his seven books highlighted the importance of social organisation of production in order for an adequate livelihood (Boulakia, 1971). In this book, he particularly tried to analyse the closeness in interrelated roles of moral, psychological, political, economical, social, demographic and historical factors over three

generations, or 120 years (Chapra, 2000). He talks about the theory of distribution, the theory of cycles and how his theories forces the government to spend more and to levy more taxes bringing about production cycle (Boulakia, 1971).

IbnKhalidun's critique of philosophy and theology was to distinguish his new science from the aspect of political philosophy and dialectical theology. His analysis, was not static but more dynamic and multidisciplinary (Chapra, 2000). He states that these attempts would not show how people should be governed nor take the path indicating that the Islamic system is correct, but rather undertake a scientific examination of the different types of government that have existed and their relation to human nature (Burns, 2006).

e) *Confucianism*

Confucius (551–479 BC) coined the ideology of Confucianism around 2500 years ago. Confucianism has its influence on political, social and cultural ideologies (Fengyan, 2004, Hang, 2011) with a moral and spiritual base. The Han dynasty 202 BC to 220 AD abandoned Taoism and adopted Confucianism as an official ideology (Hang, 2011). This ideology preaches the notion that harmony and cooperation were preferred over disagreement and competition, and it is believed to be once coexisting with Buddhism and Christianity (Fukuyama, 1995). This form of thinking has been a far-reaching influence and dominating on traditional Chinese culture for years (Fengyan, 2004)

f) *The Confucius' political views as a philosopher*

The general principle for good governance would include strive for peace, ideally unified and peaceful. The doctrine includes the notion of one ruler obtaining dominance over the whole world without fighting to gain territory (Bell, 2006). The notion of 'peace' is not synonym with the absence of violence, but it refers to the united world that is governed by benevolence (Bell, 2006, Lam, 2003).

Scholars have questioned this claim of Confucianism's ideology of democracy being contradicting (Hu, 1997, Tan, 2003). For instances scholars postulates that Confucianism as the ideological underpinning of 'oriental despotism', hence dismissing it as anti-democratic (Hu, 1997) and inherently collectivistic, patriarchal and authoritarian (Tan, 2003) but on the other hand also claims that Confucianism is full of humanism and was far from being undemocratic (Hu, 1997). This is due to the fact that Western and Eastern ideologies on democracy are poorly defined and hence would result in a debate of this doctrine (Hu, 1997, Tan, 2003). Tan (2003) postulates that one of the main reasons is that the Western ideologies do not understand the basic philosophies and religious assumptions underlying a particular civilisation.

g) *Modern Day Philosophers and their political views* *John Dewey*

John Dewey (1859-1952) was considered one of the most significant and influential philosophers in the American history and is well known for his interpretation of pragmatism (Cutchin, 2008, Fott, 1991, Glassman and Kang, 2010, Dalton, 1997). He dwells into the metaphysics of his philosophy in particular concerning the areas of nature and continuity, contingency and change, situated sociality and transactions (Cutchin, 2008). He authored 3 major books including *School and Society* (1956), *How we think* (1997) and *Democracy and Education* (1997) (Fallace, 2012).

His philosophy of pragmatism, where was regarded as a distinctive American philosophy, interpreted as an intelligence in action, not isolated and self-reflective, where it involves intelligent criticism and discrimination of values (Boisvert, 1985). It was known as a philosophical position that brings together the concept of determination by examining the consequences of acting upon that concept, and not by striving to grasp a timeless form that concepts partakes (Fott, 1991). The meaning of pragmatic perspective does not develop hierarchically (top-down) from those with knowledge to those who lack knowledge but instead developed through lateral relationship through individuals working together to create dynamic knowledge (Glassman and Kang, 2010). To further emphasis, in 1902 Dewey placed teachers, and non experts at the center of the process of designing classroom-learning experiences. His argument was that only teachers could psychologise the subject matter as they teach. He further states that this is a reinterpretation of the basic concepts and methods that the teacher could deliver, reflecting in an engaging and powerful way of teaching (Smith Iii and Girod, 2003).

In the context of philosophy, Dewey had a different outset of metaphysics as opposed to the previous scholars of pragmatism. He initially shared his stand on anti-foundationalist worldview such as process, pluralism and the critique of enlightenment philosophy. However, in the last 25 years of his life, he had a radical view that strongly critiqued the a priori basis of reality that surrounds the philosophies of materialism and idealism. Branded as a "reluctant metaphysicist", he then realizes that he had ignored 'life as an experience, an emergent happening'. Therefore, the metaphysics for Dewey was to discover a reality called radical empiricism that is forever immediate and emergent, discovered and created, instead of ultimate, abstract or cognitive reality (Cutchin, 2008).

Much of his work has been a reflection to scholars especially in their interpretation of his metaphysics and his approach on pragmatism (Fott, 1991, Berger, 2008, Turnbull, 2006, Regan, 1978, Smith Iii and Girod, 2003, Swanson et al., 2010). For instance,

in the topic of policy Dewey postulates that policies be treated as experiments, with the aim of promoting continual learning and adaptation in response to experience over time (Swanson et al., 2010)

h) *Harold Lasswell*

Harold Lasswell (1902-1978), known as the founding father and a contemporary pioneer (Bell, 1993) of public policy as a field of study that would foster and achieve a commonwealth of human dignity for all (Lasswell, 1971). He believed that democratisation was an on-going process and addressed the challenging process of how to ensure that policy-making is an interaction between knowledge, producers and users. His studies include the contribution of important insights, concepts, methodologies and exemplars where he looked ahead of his time (Bell, 1993, Eulau, 1958). However, his main contribution would be his concern with methodology concept of developmental analysis (Bell, 1993) where the methodological problem is nothing but a connecting statement of value of preference, statement of facts and statement of expectations (Eulau, 1958). In the concept of decision making, W. Bell (1993) mentions that Lasswell quotes three essential ingredients – facts, expectations and values.

i) *Expectation*

Lasswell postulates that making decisions diligently means having expectations of the future and (Bell, 1993) that prediction of the future is the rationale behind any decision-maker's agenda, Lasswell has identified that there are three types of decision-making behaviours predicting on three types of level of thoughts (Eulau, 1958, Almond, 1987). The goal-thinker, relating his analysis towards achieving a selection of objectives, the trend-thinker involves the analysis of past trends and the scientific-thinker referring to the analysis of limiting conditions through application of appropriate skill (Eulau, 1958). Lasswell further emphasises that 'knowing the future' is not part of the decision-making process, but he understood that various alternatives might be presented as possibilities for the future. This would be seen as real and that deliberate decision making is inconceivable without some knowledge of predicting the future (Bell, 1993)

j) *Facts*

In the concept of decision making, W. Bell (1993) mentions that Lasswell understood that making a conscious decisions would fall upon having a worldview. A worldview seen as a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Lincon and Guba, 1985), beliefs about how the world really is and how it works including understanding the cause and effect relationship and understanding trends (Bell, 1993). In Lasswell's work, he also commented that cognitive maps of physical and social realities from navigating and manipulating the world would require some knowledge on how realities work.

k) *Values*

The classification of goals or base value included power, wealth, respect, well-being, affection, skill, rectitude, and enlightenment (Almond, 1987) were also understood by Lasswell as a part of decision making and policy making. This was considered the basis towards the guessing the consequences of action while judging the relative goodness or badness of that different consequences (Bell, 1993).

l) *Joining the dots, the old and the new*

Philosophy is not a contemplation, reflection or communication. It is not a contemplation because contemplations are things themselves as seen in creation of a specific concept, not a reflection because philosophy is not needed to reflect on anything, and philosophy does not find refuge in communication (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). The theme of philosophy is broad, and hence indefinite and can be seen from various points of views (Heidegger, 1956). However, May (1992) suggests that:

"We all 'do philosophy' in the ordinary course of our work, no matter how diverse our interests and approach to inquiry"

However, she also suggests that if the person pays more attention to when and how philosophies are used, a more thoughtful outcome can be produced (May, 1992). Hook (1970) has similar thoughts where he mentions that philosophy is legitimately concerned with large problems of human affairs and that philosophers should have a say in issues concerning the public. But most importantly, philosophies are guidance to humanity (Nussbaum, 1998).

In the era of Plato, they established true aristocracy of Greek philosopher-politician regime (Salkever, 2007), whereby ruling to them was a simple fabrication of technical matter of construction or fashioning laws and institutions (Steinberger, 1989). IbnKhaldun and Confucius were also great philosophers and also served as policy makers. This would be a reasonable relationship as philosophical underpinnings would be useful in managing strategies (Mir and Watson, 2000). However, authors have questioned the basic principles of ethics, political philosophy (Ferguson, 2004) that should be within the policy making system (Bell, 1993).

The question now lies in the modern philosophers, and where their stance is in their say of policies. John Dewey believed that the central and continuing issue revolving around philosophy involved the problems of moral choice and that policies were the means as to how all humans must act (Hook, 1970). In the case of Lasswell, he claimed that political philosophy with its rational methods has no better claim than the capacity to set future goals in the area of social science (Easton, 1950). As mentioned earlier, the concept of decision making, W. Bell (1993) mentions that Lasswell quotes three essential ingredients – facts,

expectations and values. It is believed that both Dewey and Lass well are merely 'preaching' about their philosophical underpinnings and thoughts on public policy but none of them were actively involved in the actual constructions of policies.

This shifts from the early days where philosophers and politicians were the same people and

today where political philosophers and policy makers may be two separate individuals. In modern day policies, it is reasonable to assume that some overlap of philosophers and politicians may occur.

Classical Policies

Modern Day Policies

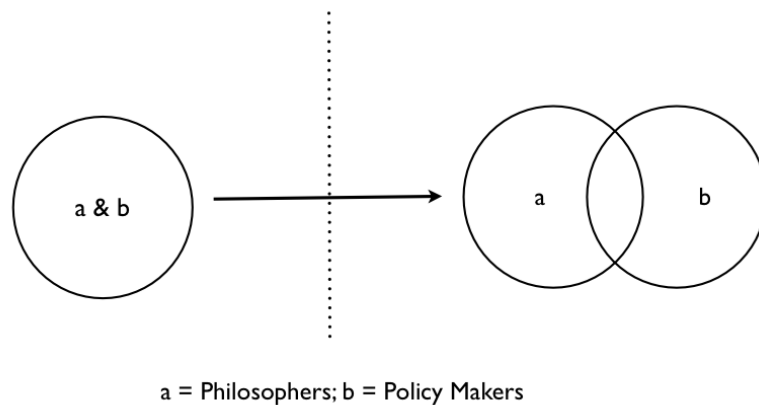


Figure 1 : illustrates the possible linkages and evolution of policies and philosophers, then and now.

m) Rural Tourism Policies in Malaysia

Malaysia has always placed rural development as their forefront of its development plan. In the 7th Malaysian plan, the government highlighted the importance of community participation in tourism. Also highlighted in the 9th Malaysian plan were to create opportunities for farmers to expand and diversify agricultural products such as agro tourism (Kunasekaran et al., 2011). Nonetheless, the success and the sustainability of it depends on the role of the government and its agencies in formulating policies, shape practices and deliver services (Baum and Szivas, 2008).

Research has found that despite all these policies, conservation enactments and legislations and efforts to conserve the environment are in place, recent studies have shown that it is still evident that the concerns regarding the protection and conservation of these areas remain a topic amongst scholars (Corpuz, 2008, Jakobsen et al., 2007, Praveena et al., 2012, Teh et al., 2005, Teh and Cabanban, 2007). Also a similar study postulates that there is serious attention that needs to be focused on the policies surrounding tourism and ecotourism in order to mitigate further environmental impact (Siow et al., 2012).

In the Malaysian rural tourism context, policies pertaining to conservation of environmental impacts would be The National Ecotourism Plan. This plan, drafted by The Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism and World Wide Fun for Nature (WWF) in 1996 sets as

abackbone towards rural tourism policies in Malaysia. The aim of this plan is to assist the Government both at Federal and State level in the development of Malaysia's ecotourism potentials, with the effective tools for conserving of the natural and cultural heritage of the country while providing socio-economic benefits to the local communities (Chin, 2010).

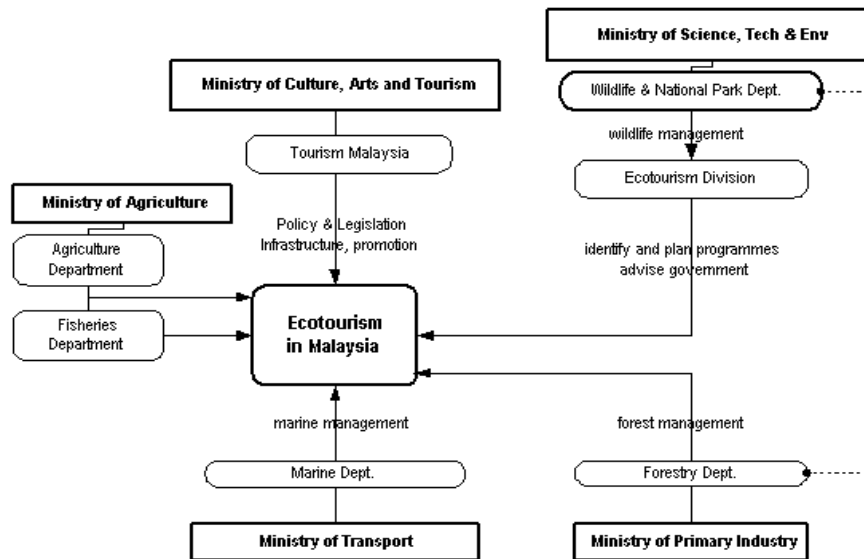


Figure 2 : The engagement of ministries and department in the formulation of the Malaysian Ecotourism Plan (Mohamed, 2002)

Figure 2: shows the organisation in which the policy was formulated. At first glance, it is seen that no philosophers or political philosophers were present in the making of this policy. However, it is unknown at this juncture if philosophers were consulted or were within the policy makers themselves. Nonetheless, it is imperative that philosophy be taken into account as it serves as a practical guide to humanity (Nussbaum, 1998, Hook, 1970) and democracy (Plato, 2003, Bell, 2006, Tan, 2003).

III. CONCLUSION

Plato's philosophy was influenced heavily by Socrates (Plato, 2003), George W. Bush's philosophy was heavily influenced by Jesus Christ (Persons, 2004). As philosophy involves the problem of moral choice and policy (Hook, 1970), philosophy should not be isolated from the policy making process. While philosophy can mean different things in different disciplines (May, 1992) the rural tourism industry in Malaysia is no exception. This is because this industry touches on three major dimensions which are economic, social and environmental situations while addressing tourism policies (Blancas et al., 2011). Therefore practical guides to ethics, humanity and democracy must be part of the system.

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