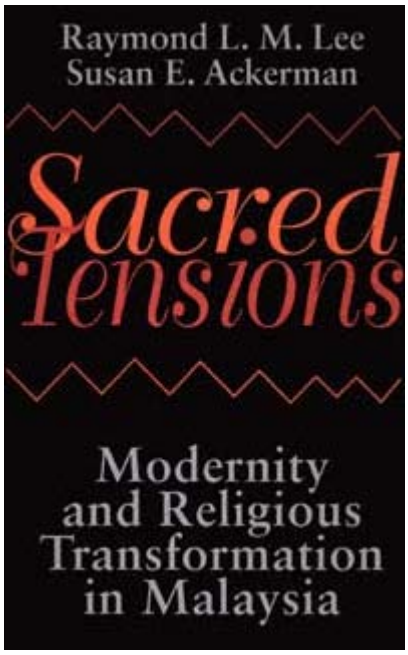

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Sacred Tensions

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Frederick M. Denny, General Editor

Sacred Tensions

Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia

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General Editor's Preface

The fact of religion's persistence in the final decade of the twentieth century would have been surprising to many if not most social, economic, and cultural theorists at midcentury. But religion has not merely persisted; it has undergone extensive global revitalization in charismatic, fundamentalist, and other renewal movements across the range of the world religions and far beyond to new religious movements of many types.

Max Weber's theory of rationalization held, in part, that religious communities would have institutional and programmatic options unknown in earlier times as a result of modernization, technology, and the ability systematically to ensure their own maintenance and preservation independent from, but not unrelated to, other domains of life. Today we live in a world in which modernization has been globalized and people, whether they wish it or not, are inescapably caught up in interrelated economic, cultural, communications, and religious crosscurrents. In the process, religion has become commodified, and, as the authors of this book, Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman, see the matter: "we may speak plausibly of a religious economy in the sense of a shifting supply of and demand for salvationary ideologies within a global context of competitive pluralism."

There is no more appropriate nation for viewing the "sacred tensions" of today's religious world than Malaysia, where four world religionsIslam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianityco-exist in a society and under a government committed to becoming a major player in the great East and Southeast Asian economic and industrial boom of today. There is little published research on the major religious communities of Malaysia viewed together in their mutual relations as well as their oppositions. Although Islam is numerically and politically superior to the other faiths, the laws, customs, and temperament of Malaysia and its ethnic groups provide a certain space and security for the other traditions in ways unknown in other Muslim majority states.

Lee and Ackerman's absorbing and timely study draws on the theoretical tradition of Weberian sociologyespecially the discourses on rationality, secularization, economics, and charismato analyze and interpret their deep knowledge of contemporary Malaysian religious communities. Their book occupies a unique position in this series on comparative religion in that it compares entire traditions as they are represented in one relatively small but diverse and complex modern nation. Each of the religions studied in this book also has extensive global connections: Islam with the Middle East and South Asia, Buddhism with the rest of Southeast Asia as well as China and Japan, Christianity with the West, and Hinduism with India. But as globalism has carried secular ideas as well as science and technology to all corners of the earth, so have this planet's religions also taken up new abodes east and west, north and south. The sacred tensions that Lee and Ackerman discuss here reflect tensions as well as currents in most other parts of the globe as well.

FREDERICK MATHEWSON DENNY

Preface

The end of the second Christian millennium has generated many speculations about new worlds in the making, all seemingly characterized by the prefix *post*, as in *post*modern, *post*industrial, *post*capitalist. Strangely enough, the idea of a *post*religious world has not caught on. Perhaps this anticipates an important development of the approaching third Christian millennium, namely that of the efflorescence of religion in its multiple forms and myriad connections. Social scientists who believed that the modern world with its secular trends would eventually turn religion into an anachronism have been sorely disappointed with their predictions. At no time in modern history has religion been more vibrant and intense than it is at the end of the twentieth century.

What is it about the last few decades of the twentieth century that have produced waves of revivalism in all the world religions? Many explanations are plausible: growing uncertainty about the new millennium, increased awareness of social inequalities, reassertion of ethnic and cultural identities, the limitations of rationalization, increasing disillusionment with modernization, and so on. Religion may not cushion all the trials and tribulations of the twentieth century, but it can provide some glimmer of hope for those whose faith no longer lies in the pursuit of world mastery but rather resides in the recall of spiritual power. In short, charisma is making a comeback at the end of this century. Religious traditions and practices have been revived, reinvented, and given new meanings to recapture the charismatic nucleus eclipsed by centuries of modernization, rationalization, and bureaucratization.

The Western experience of religion has been expansive and exhaustive. Since the Enlightenment and the Western discovery of the reifying powers of positivist thought, religion has become both an instrument of and a response to the wide-ranging explorations of the Western mind. From the relentless efforts of Christian missionaries to the antireligious assertions of cynical philosophers, the Western self has transformed the social meaning of religion in many ways that will have

important consequences in the coming millennium, including the rerouting and colonization of Eastern religions by the Western mind. Buddhism and Hinduism, as discovered and interpreted by the West, are no longer the exclusive religions of ancient civilizations. Unlike Christianity and Islam, which went forth to seek converts, Buddhism and Hinduism were absorbed by Westerners who were dissatisfied with their cultural traditions. In this process of giving and taking, the notion of salvation has ceased to be monolithic and been pluralized instead into strands of truth-seeking without a single or ultimate referent or determining numen.

Many sociologists of religion have attempted to explain these empirical events in relation to rationalization and secularization. There is now a large body of work associated with these two concepts, which have been attributed to the unfinished project of Max Weber on comparative religious systems. His well-known writings on the Protestant ethic, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism were an attempt to flesh out the intricate relationship between economy, society, and religion. Our discussion of the world religions in Malaysia falls partly into this framework because we believe that the work begun by Weber is not yet exhausted and that a comparison of the world religions in a plural society striving toward modernity can shed much light on the cross-societal or cross-cultural meaning of rationalization and secularization.

Malaysia as a crossroad of the world's religions exemplifies many characteristics of religious multiplicity. Modernizing yet traditional, secular yet religious, Malaysia has by no means become so disenchanted that only institutional religion reigns supreme in the interests of the state. In appropriating religious beliefs for political ends, the state cannot fully disengage the personal and spiritual dimensions from all its social programs.

The interaction between religion and social development constitutes a problem that reflects the ambiguities of modernity as outlined in chapter 1, in which we attempt to clarify the processes of rationalization and secularization as they apply to the Asian context of social and religious change. We argue that these two processes are no longer exclusively identified with Western religious systems but must be included in any analysis of Asian modernization as well as analysis of the global spread of specific religious beliefs and actions. To the extent that these directions of development have been globalized, the problem of charisma must also be treated in relation to these two processes. We do not intend to construct a broad theory of rationalization, secu-

larization, and religious change in Asia, a task that is beyond the scope of the present work. We merely adumbrate the relevance of these concepts in an Asian context, more specifically in a Southeast Asian society where religious action is deeply rooted in contested cultural histories and ethnic identities.

In chapter 2 these histories and identities are sketched to provide some understanding of the complex interaction of modernity, religion, and cultural traditions in contemporary Malaysia. Chapters 3 through 6 examine the four world religions with respect to their development in Malaysia. Each of these chapters may be considered self-contained since it deals with specific problems arising from the interface between a religious tradition and modern parameters of action. The central theme of modernity as a protean attitude of world mastery is juxtaposed against the indefatigability of charismatic inspiration as a nonrational aspect of religious experience. This theme is apparent in our discussion of the power of charisma over emerging bourgeois consciousness in the four religious spheres, and it provides the basis for our argument on the rebirth of the gods in the concluding chapter.

However, this rebirth is not uniformly experienced across all the four religions under discussion. More specifically, there is a difference between Islam and the non-Islamic religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity) in structure and expression, which is reflected in the organizational structure of chapters 3 through 6.

Our comparison of Malaysian Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity has taken more than a decade of research to accomplish. We did our research in the Klang Valley, the hub of industrial and political activities in Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, the capital, and Petaling Jaya, its expanding satellite city, were our field sites. Religious developments in these two locations are often perceived as having extensive influence across the country. During our research, we received invaluable help and guidance from colleagues, friends, students, and religious practitioners; they are too numerous to be named here. However, we would like to convey special thanks to Abdullah Alwi, David Bok, David Boler, Alan Ch'ng, Lim Kooi Fong (and his mother), Benny Liow, Ven. Mahinda, Ng Sai Kai, Ooi Chin Aik, Ven. Piyasilo, R. Rajoo, and Victor Wee for sharpening our thoughts on specific issues. We also thank Frederick M. Denny for his encouragement and generous reception of our work. To the editorial staff of the University of South Carolina Press, we would like to express our appreciation for their meticulous advice on improving the readability of the text.

Chapter One
Religion and the Ambiguities of Modernity

A major debate in the sociology of religion concerns the autonomy of religious systems. This debate generally pits a materialistic perspective against one stressing the construction of meaning. On the one hand, an avowedly materialistic approach assumes religious beliefs and actions to be merely the surface expressions of discontent arising from underlying inequalities in the social system. This is most aptly represented by Karl Marx's dictum that religion is the opiate of the masses, an epiphenomenon that reflects fundamental struggles over resources in the social world. Thus the religions of the oppressed not only manifest symbols of salvation but also propound a message of socioeconomic and political deprivation among the disadvantaged throughout the world. This approach seems to be incompatible with the idea that religion comprises an independent power of its own. In the materialistic view, religion cannot be anything more than a type of false consciousness subordinated to a larger system characterized by uneven power distribution.

In contradistinction to this approach, the writings of Max Weber represent a critical effort to emphasize the subtle and complex influences of religious beliefs on economic actions. In his celebrated work on the Protestant ethic, Weber (1958a) endeavored to show that innerworldly asceticism, stemming from the ideas of Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century, provided the impetus for unrelenting work and methodical self-control among their followers, who hoped to secure salvation on earth and in the hereafter. It was this attitude that served as the foundation for the later development of modern capitalism in the West. 1 Similarly, in his comparative religious studies, Weber (1951, 1958b) attempted to evaluate the impact of distinct religious ethics on social and political conditions in the East.

Weber undertook this comparison principally to assess the reasons for the divergent route assumed by the West in its development of modern capitalism. The reasons he sought were often in the realm of ideas, the blueprints for "world images." By arguing for the irreducibility of religion to economics and other material conditions, Weber attributed much autonomy to ideas and, subsequently, ideal interests. 2 This autonomy would allow ideas to become not only the driving force behind various movements but also the eventual organizing framework for the transformation of the social world. It is this transformation, via ideas, that Weber recognized as the dominant trend in Western historya rationalizing force originating from specific ideas but eventually assuming its own momentum under a systematic and somewhat predictable impulse.

Rationalization comprises a central theme in Weber's writings. However, the concept has been characterized as ambiguous because of its multiple meanings. It is this ambiguity that continues to stimulate debate and research on social and cultural change in the West (see Levine 1981, Schluchter 1981, Whimster and Lash 1987). Overall, this body of research tends to reflect a pessimism that suggests the curtailment of individual freedom through the rise of bureaucracies, technocracies, and impersonal organizations and also suggests continuing conflicts between cultures or "value spheres." If rationalization is the master trend of Western history, its apparent irreversibility resembles an iron cage of its own making. This implies that the individual becomes trapped in the systematicity of his desire to gain world mastery through what Weber called the "disenchantment of the world."

Two questions follow: As non-Western countries modernize, following the apparent lead of the West, will they also manifest similar trends of rationalization? Will religious ideas and actions in these countries provide a bulwark against rationalization, or will they merely be compromised by it? These are vital questions at the end of the twentieth century, which seems to be characterized by opposing currents of secularization and fundamentalism, globalization and resistance. In the West, these currents have once again brought into relief the social and cultural relevance of religion (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, Beckford 1992, Bruce 1992, Swatos 1993). In the East, where modernity has yet to achieve maturity, these currents have revitalized religion and religious movements to compound the complexities of social and cultural organization arising from the agendas of modern development.

Before making further comparisons, it would be instructive to clarify Weber's theory of rationalization and its relation to the construction of religious meanings.

The Rationalization of Religion

The meanings of rationality, as specified by Weber, are diverse (see Swidler 1973, Eisen 1978, Muller 1979, Kalberg 1980, Brubaker 1984). Generally we can distinguish between rational and nonrational action as Weber defines them. Action is deemed rational if it is conducted in a deliberate and conscious manner so that certain consequences are anticipated. Rationality also connotes the ability to select from alternatives that result in different outcomes. This leads to Weber's well-known distinction between instrumental (*zweckrational*) and substantive (*wertrational*) rationality. The former refers to the expected realization of particular ends as a result of a certain way of acting; the latter suggests action based on a belief in certain values. Both types of rationality are subjective to the extent that action is consciously planned from the point of view of the actor. 3

This brief summary of rationality does not do justice to Weber's complex analysis, but it is sufficient to elicit the notion of rationality as a type of reflexivity or discursiveness in human action. This is distinguished from nonrational action, which is not always conscious or is in many cases unconscious. A spontaneous emotional outburst is an example of nonrational action, as is conduct based on patterns of habit, such as the unquestioning enactment of particular traditions. Most concrete actions in social life fall between these two poles; thus nonrational action may develop into one or another form of rational action. The reverse, however, is unlikely, since Weber construed a temporal sequence in the development of nonrational action into rational action. Rational action may, on the other hand, devolve into a form of irrationality as an unintended consequence of the increasing technocratization and bureaucratization of social life (see Gronow 1988, Segady 1988).4

The rationalization of religion occurs when ideas concerning the relation between divinity and humanity "gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency" (Weber 1946:51). More important, the process involves the elimination of magic, which in the distant past was synonymous with primitive religion, the practice of which was related mainly to thaumaturgy and the attainment of worldly goods. Magic is seemingly nonrational because it is predicated on both spontaneous behavior and established patterns of rituals. As it becomes rationalized, religion assumes a form that is distinguished from and opposed to magic in terms of the former's well-defined doctrines and moral codes, which provide a calculable route to salvationary goals. Weber's idea of the "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*)

refers precisely to this process of religious rationalization, in which the magical elements are expunged so that religious motivations can be harnessed for the transformation of the ordinary world.

The decline of magic, however, is not the same as its demise. In his monumental study of magic in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, Keith Thomas (1973:206) shows that despite Protestant successes in reducing the popularity of magical beliefs, "the hold of organized religion upon the people was never so complete as to leave no room for rival systems of belief." In effect, he argues that the "Protestants were helping to make a distinction in kind between magic and religion, the one a coercive ritual, the other an intercessionary one. Magic was no longer to be seen as a false religion . . . it was a different sort of activity altogether" (88).

The implication of this argument is that the intensification of religious activities in modernity reflects the reorganization of a cultural or institutional sphere seeking autonomy from other cultural or institutional spheres. For each cultural or institutional sphere follows its own logic, which is ultimately formulated into explicit rules distinct from those of other spheres. A rationalized religion will inevitably come into conflict with other cultural or institutional spheres in the social world.

In medieval Europe, the church owned lands, controlled education, and wielded political influence; it would thus appear to have dominated a large proportion of the social base. While salvationary doctrines formed an important part of religious worldviews, their separation from magic was often blurred to promote the belief in the indispensability of church power. It was the Protestant Reformation that challenged the role of the church as sole dispenser of divine grace, emphasizing instead the belief in man's direct relationship to God. The Reformation created a new cultural sphere that diminished magic, thus enhancing "the conception of an orderly and rational universe, in which effect follows cause in predictable manner" (Keith Thomas 1973:786). From this perspective, religious rationalization entails the tightening of boundaries of a particular cultural or institutional sphere against other spheres in terms of organizational efficiency, normative elaboration, and methodical expression of ideology.

With the advent of industrialization in the eighteenth century and its growth afterward, the social base of the new cultural and institutional sphere that had been created by the Reformation shifted to secular agents whose worldviews encompassed the ethics of scientific progressiveness and individual diligence. Religious rationalization in this

context refers to a fusion of systematic ideas about salvation and scientific attitudes toward the world. It parallels a process of secularization in which the church's access to a social base is minimized and its ecclesiastical authority diminished (see Chaves 1994).

Secularization does not mean the decline of religion per se but rather emphasizes the plausibility of differing religious and nonreligious worldviews, each with its own social base feeding the production of systematic ideologies. The growth of this pluralism is possible because a social system becomes structurally differentiated under secularization so that religion becomes merely one area of social activity among others that are equally or more rationalized.

A consequence of secularization is that religion becomes increasingly influenced by *zweckrational* action. The burgeoning of new religious movements in the West (see Wallis 1984, Barker 1987, Robbins 1988) reflects this process, in which diverse salvationary ideologies are treated as "commodities" in an open market to serve and satisfy individual needs.

What is important about the growing influence of *zweckrational* action, at least in the contemporary West, is its pervasiveness in both the cultural and institutional environment and individual consciousness. This implies that secularization as a whole reduces ecclesiastical control over the material well-being of individuals and the socialization of human values. Freed from such control, individuals are no longer bound to the power of the church. They are free to pursue ends of their own choosing and employ means they perceive as most effective. Rationalization in this context tends to promote the systematization of interests along individualistic and instrumental lines.

The foregoing discussion pertains to developments in the West, where the consequences of industrial progress and cultural modernity are measured largely in terms of advancing *zweckrational* action. Countries in the East that are attempting to emulate the West in industrial and scientific achievements may come to experience varying degrees of rationalization and secularization concomitant with the process of modernization. However, the patterns of rationalization and secularization accompanying modernization in these countries have different social and cultural meanings, which are linked to their postcolonial histories. These meanings maintain identities that are distinct from Western ones, even as the postcolonial societies in the East are exposed to intensive influences of rationalization and secularization. To understand these differences is to compare secular development in the West with that in the East.

Western Secularization, Asian Revitalization

Since the Reformation and Enlightenment, the growth of scientific professionalism and its emphasis on technical reason in expanding secular states have reduced the visibility and influence of clerical power in the West. Secularization has not only deconstructed church authority but also opened the way for full-scale rationalization in which the spheres of the disenchanted world "operate in relative autonomy according to their own laws, satisfying man's needs for calculability of the world to an historically unparalleled degree" (Schluchter 1979:54). After almost two millennia of Christian history, Christianity's eschatology has become sublimated into an impersonal technology geared to worldly control. For Blumenberg (1983:45) this implies a process of secularization *by* eschatology in which the "energy of the eschatological 'state of emergency,' set free, pressed toward self-institutionalization in the world."

Secularization continues to be debated as a Western problematic (see Martin 1978a, Dobbelaere 1981, Bryan S. Wilson 1985, Hadden 1987, Lechner 1991, Wallis and Bruce 1992) because it is often assumed that social differentiation in Western modernity provides a rational basis for power contests between ecclesiastical and civil authorities, something not experienced in many non-Western societies (cf. Schluchter 1979:46). Yet Western colonial penetration of the East has in a way introduced secular trends in many traditional societies (see, for example, Crecilius 1980). But the reproduction of secularization in the East does not necessarily mean the demise of its religious traditions. On the contrary, it implies the importation of new values and ideas that compete with established religions, thus possibly prompting religious revivalisms as nationalist expressions against Western secularization.

In Asia the emergent industrial economies are embedded in societies where magic and shamanism flourish. This vibrant religious life shows no evidence of being submerged in the tide of modernization, secularization, and rationalization. Its capacity to accommodate industrial capitalism should not be underestimated.

Japan, a mature Asian industrial society in which shamanistic folk religion and new religious movements sustain enchantment (see Davis 1980, Reader 1991), exemplifies the ambiguous character of secularism and modernity. South Korea and Taiwan follow a similar direction of cultural and religious development (see Kendall 1985, Jordan and Overmeyer 1986). While technology and animism interact uninhibitedly in everyday life in both the more established and the newly industrializing Asian societies, revitalization of world religions has con-

tributed to the assertion of cultural identities without necessarily following a path of antimodernization (see von der Mehden 1986, Martin 1990).

The heterogeneous religious traditions that prevail in modernizing Asian societies can hardly be described as static. These traditions both initiate change and respond to it in highly specific and contingent ways. In other words, the Western history of secularization (see Hill 1973) is not necessarily replicated in Asia, although we could say that Asian secularization in terms of the increasing power of nonreligious professionals and institutions drives the systematic codification of cultural identities and religious worldviews in the urban middle class. It is this peculiarly middle-class form of social action that can contribute much to deciphering the often bewildering cultural and religious phenomena that accompany modernization in Asia.

For the literate and technically proficient middle class, participation in religion often includes self-conscious reflection. The cultural traditions entangled with religion, as well as the religious beliefs themselves, become objects of reflection. The embeddedness of religion in culture invites identity-making activity as an extension of religious practice, which today has come to rely on sophisticated technical means for its consolidation and propagation.

Middle-class producers of identities may draw upon popular as well as elite cultural elements. In fashioning new identities that accompany religious revivals, the middle-class participant may fit these elements into an ordered intellectualized schema that is reproducible through the print and electronic media. These identities assert an ongoing connection with valued cultural traditions while engaging with Western notions of modernity. Secularization and rationalization in this sense may be seen as an enhancement rather than negation of these traditions. For the emerging middle classes in Asia, participation in religious revivals suggests a voyage of cultural rediscovery within a context of secularization and rationalization (see Babb 1987, Kipp and Rodgers 1987, Jackson 1989, Tambiah 1992).

From a Weberian perspective, the rise of the middle classes in Asia poses a question that challenges the role of rationalization and secularization in reframing religious action. It has been argued that Weber's studies of Chinese and Indian religions were meant largely as a comparative method for exploring the uniqueness of Western civilization in terms of rational and secular development (see Buss 1985). It is likely that this method contained an implicit understanding that Western trends could provide a universal yardstick for interpreting social and religious change in Asia.

Weber did not comment at length on the possibility of such interpretations since he passed away in 1920, when large parts of Asia were still under Western colonial control. He could not have foreseen the march toward modernization in many Asian countries in the postcolonial period; nor could he have anticipated the consequences of Asian rationalization and secularization that did not adhere to Western patterns. The comparison of rationalization and secularization in the East and West cannot be undertaken strictly on a one-to-one basis. For instance, the emergence of new religious movements in the West has been argued to be a consequence of the secularization process (see Bryan S. Wilson 1976). However, the spread of some of these movements to Asia does not necessarily suggest the uniformity of secularization, since the reasons for and results of this spread are very different. As argued above, Asian modernization has produced new middle classes that look to the West for secular and rational inspiration but have not fully forsaken their traditions. Their participation in movements originating in the West may reflect the ambivalent character of Asian rationalization and secularization, in which New Age ideas intermingle freely with shamanistic and magical practices or are not seen as incompatible with them.

This rereading of Weber does not necessarily indicate a refutation or rejection of his comparative studies of the world religions. On the contrary, we argue that Weberian insights on rationalization and secularization have opened up new theoretical vistas for developing analyses of the interpenetration between broad historical patterns and local or particularistic actions. Our empirical treatment of Malaysian Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity provides specific illustrations of the complexities arising from the influences of Western rationalization and secularization and the reformulation of local cultural and religious identities. This approach to Asian modernization and religious change may lead to a more flexible interpretation of rationalization and secularization in which, according to Singer (1985:162), it "will no longer be necessary to assume that non-Western religions are major obstacles to modernization . . . [to] study how the cultural metabolism of tradition and innovation generates persistence and change in diverse societies."

The Globalization of Salvation

The impact of rationalization and secularization on Asian societies experiencing vast modern changes suggests that the phenomena described by these terms are no longer confined to the Western cultural

sphere from which they first arose. The spread of these phenomena has occurred largely because of the initial influences of Western colonialism, followed by the internationalization or globalization of societies in the postcolonial period.

Globalization has become an important theme in many studies of macrosocial change in the late twentieth century because of the vast changes in the modes of travel and media of communication around the world (see Robertson 1992). In the field of religion, local change is no longer considered in isolation from events in other parts of the world. In the case of world religions, changes brought about by rapid modes of travel and advances in communications are global in reach, although the consequences must be examined with respect to local political, cultural, and economic conditions. For this reason, Robertson (1994:133) has expressed difficulty in maintaining a clear distinction between the sacred and the secular. What this implies is that rationalization and secularization on a global scale have reduced all thinking about the construction of religious meaning to a problem of *religious interchange* based on the inevitability of worldwide communication and marketlike interactions.

More specifically, Asian middle-class participation in religious revivals must be seen as one aspect of religious globalization at the end of this century. What is unique about globalization is that both the missionizing and nonmissionizing religions have spread to countries beyond their points of origin. The international electronic and print media have played an important part in the process of ideological dissemination, just as itinerant preachers have increased the effectiveness of missionary work through jet travel and the use of sophisticated audiovisual equipment.

These vast changes in religious patterns can be attributed to the globalization of modernity in the twentieth century. The twin processes of rationalization and secularization undergirding the advancing movement of modernity have contributed increasingly to systemic differentiation, autonomization of cultural spheres, and unrelenting individualization around the world. As a result of these developments, we may speak plausibly of a religious economy in the sense of a shifting supply of and demand for salvationary ideologies within a global context of competitive pluralism.

Within the global religious economy, ideological variety and individual choice have become the central characteristics of a dynamic market dealing in salvationary goods. As Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 108) have expressed it, no single religious organization "can offer the full range of religious services for which there is substantial market

demand. . . . [T]here will be many organized faiths, each specializing in certain segments of the market . . . with a constant flux of new organizations and [a] frequent demise of others."

The opening up of religious markets on a global scale has been possible because of the rapidity of travel and the worldwide linkages in communication, but more significantly these developments have been accompanied by an increasing process of individualization in which the quest for religious meaning is becoming more and more a personal affair. As a consumer in this global market, "the individual confronts a wide assortment of 'religious' representations, traditional religious ones as well as secular new ones, manufactured, packaged, and sold by specialized service agencies, out of which the individual constructs and reconstructs . . . a necessarily precarious private system of ultimate meanings" (Casanova 1992:36).

The decline of church authority in the West has contributed to the growing sense of individual choice in religious practice. It is through the creation of a civil space in secularization that the privatization of religion in the West has become prone to market forces tied ineluctably to the global movements of various religious offerings.

In the 1960s and 1970s, cultural crises in the West opened the floodgates of religious innovation to facilitate local encounters with a variety of esoteric homegrown and Eastern products (Glock and Bellah 1976, Bryan S. Wilson 1976, Ellwood 1979). Yet this privatization of religion had by the 1980s begun to intersect with an increasingly public and collective dimension of religious expression thought to be obsolescent in modernity (Casanova 1992:38). The expansion of the public realm in religion has much to do with the growing emphasis of political performance in a functionally differentiated global society that is likely to result in either an ecumenical attitude toward religious diversity or a fissiparous movement to assert cultural distinctiveness (Peter F. Beyer 1990:393).

In the West, this seemingly contradictory relationship between a voluntary, privatized religious outlook and a recalcitrant public image of religious action suggests the limits to which modernity can structure religious identity in terms of a secularizing worldview. The irony is that globalization, as far as the West is concerned, has sensitized many religious leaders to the necessity of using the public forum to problematize ethical issues. This implies that even as privatized religions are highly marketable in the global sense, they are not an ultimate form determined by the modernization process because this very process also stresses the buildup of collective identities under the label of religious protest or resistance around the world.

In Weberian terms, this constitutes an unintended consequence of modernization because even though both rationalization and secularization have stimulated the growth of privatized religions and religious movements, these two processes have unexpectedly channeled the global organization of religious institutions and movements into ethnic or nationalist activities.

In the East, this tendency toward a more collective definition of religious affiliation has been reinforced by globalization, largely because the experience of privatized religions has been less acute, and therefore existing religious markets are more likely to provide resources for heightening specific cultural identities. In particular, Robertson (1991: 289) has noted that grand narratives are far from extinct in Asia, and they comprise a vital resource for legitimating collective religious identities. This suggests that the pursuit of modernity in the East does not necessarily lead to a fragmentation of religious identities but that rationalization may become a useful tool for the organization of religious identities among specific members located strategically around the world.

Thus the anticipation that the globalization of modernity would likely result in a uniform spread of rational and secular structures throughout the world, individualizing religious identities in a dynamic market of salvationary goods, has proven to be merely wishful thinking, especially in the wake of many recent events that reaffirm the vital function of collective religious identities in modernizing societies (for example, Iran, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, India, and the former Yugoslavia). The West has undoubtedly been an important source of these theoretical ideas concerning modernity, based on its own experiences of religious transformation since the Reformation. But now it has to reckon with an emerging global society so characterized by unyielding pluralism and uncertain multiplicities that the modern religious order can no longer be seen as a "natural" outcome of certain social or cultural processes unique to the West. In this respect, we can say that the problem of charisma has provided an essential perspective on the question of contingency in religious action, a field of inquiry that has not lacked any effort from Weber himself.

The Charismatic Challenge to Modernity

For Weber, the problem of rationalization raises the question of its limitsthat is, the emergence of new value orientations that challenge established social institutions. Rationalization was conceptualized by Weber as influenced by an internal dynamic that is developmental in a

dialectical sense (Schluchter 1981:5). For this reason, Weber (1968: 215ff.) found it necessary to propose the concept of charisma as a nonrational, transformative power in contrast to traditional and legal authorities.

Charisma contradicts the rationalizing tendency of modern societies because it is creative, disruptive, and revolutionary, but at the same time it provides new forces for institution building. Here Weber's theoretical contribution not only juxtaposes the extraordinary against the ordinary but also hints at the inherent nonrational aspects of rationalization: for the meaning of any social order is rooted in a charismatic source that eventuates in its routinization.

Some of Weber's interpreters have argued that the charismatic quality of an individual, while important in its own right, is different from its institutionalized form (Shils 1965, Eisenstadt 1968). Once charisma is routinized, it is diffused throughout the structures of a given system. It is no longer the property of an individual but "inherent in the massive organization of authority" (Shils 1965:206).

In fact, one may speak of the charismatic reification of an impersonal organization, as if it were endowed with the extraordinary power of its human originator. Rationalization, in this case, implies the transference of the awe-inspiring magic of a charismatic individual to the innards of officialdom for the systematic dispensation of power. A greater distance now exists between the charismatic source and the recipients of its power so that the magic that was originally the cause of popular response becomes attenuated, more impersonal, and with the passage of time may even disappear.

On the other hand, certain individual bearers of charisma through their personal qualities and interaction with followers do not, as it were, leave their powers behind in organizations after their demise (see Raymond L. M. Lee 1992). As long as charismatic power is personalized, it will have little likelihood of developing into an institutional form. It is at this juncture that new religious movementsinspired by the special attributes of an individualmay emerge as challenges to established religious institutions. They may also provide new values in contrast to the perceived meaninglessness of a technologized social world.

Furthermore, since secularization implies the decline of religious authority and the autonomization of cultural and institutional spheres, many opportunities exist to fill the vacuum of religious power and to emphasize new cultural values through the founding of charismatic religious movements. This hypothesis is not incongruent with the outlook of neo-Weberians, such as Bryan S. Wilson, who do not equate

secularization with the passing of religion but stress its regeneration in multiple forms.

Thus we would argue that rationalization comprises a processual power that limits the personal growth of charisma, but secularization provides a range of cultural openings that promotes the manufacture of charisma. In each opening, charismatic forces have the potential to create perceptions and actions underlying a new lifestyle. This lifestyle becomes a code for a new global norm when members of a charismatic movement are able to influence others around the world. In other words, we could say that charisma in modernization provides an instance that elicits an antagonism between rationalization and secularization (which hitherto have been treated as complementary processes). This antagonism need not be viewed as an inimical force but rather may be seen as a dialectical one in the unfolding of modernity, as Weber would have conceptualized it.

In Asia the processes of secularization and rationalization have stimulated (and at the same time limited) the growth of charismatic forms of religion among the emerging middle classes. Emotionally expressive styles of spirituality are not incompatible with varying degrees of systematic management and application of technical expertise. Although the rising middle classes in Asia attach great importance to control and discipline, they nevertheless seek intense spiritual experiences as a means to authenticate their cultural identities. It is this search for nonconventional and individually satisfying sources of religious power that ascribes much significance to charisma as a fountain of renewal in many instances of social and religious change.

On the other hand, religious charisma has posed significant threats to various Asian institutions and governments because it has a tendency toward millenarianism that anticipates a movement of derationalization, renewal, and reconstitution of political authority. The Aum Shinrikyo movement in Japan, which made world headlines with its alleged link to a sarin gas attack in a Tokyo subway in March 1995, provides an important example of a charismatic movement in a rapidly secularizing Asian society that is also constrained by rational developments at different institutional and cultural levels. As a result of this incident, many Japanese are debating the degree to which laws dealing with religion should be applied or revised to meet such threats (Inoue 1995:3). Here we are witnessing a case of religious charisma spawned by secularization in postwar Japanese society that can be traced to the weakening of religious (Shinto and Buddhist) authority and traditional social units following the Meiji Restoration (Earhart 1969:244) but is now in the process of being constrained by legal-rational controls that

may have vital implications for various new religious movements operating in Japan and abroad.

To what extent, then, will modernity in Asia be challenged or modified by new values stemming from such charismatic transformations? Or we could reverse this question to ask whether various forms of religious charisma in Asia can effectively withstand the power of legalrational institutions directed against them? In the following chapters, we will attempt some answers by describing and comparing changes between the world religions as practiced in Malaysia, a Southeast Asian country with intense aspirations to achieve modernity within a context of ethnic and religious pluralism.

Chapter Two
Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia

Located on the southeastern edge of the Asian continent, Malaysia comprises a peninsula, formerly known as Malaya, and two states (Sarawak and Sabah) on the island of Borneo in the South China Sea. These were all part of British colonial possessions in the Far East until the end of the World War II. Upon receiving independence in 1957, Malaya became the Federation of Malaya, which was made up of eleven states. In 1963 Malaya became Malaysia after including the two Borneo states in its political boundaries. Since then the country has been ruled by a multiethnic coalition, now known as the National Front, led by the United Malay National Organization. The more populous and developed part is the peninsula, the history of which differs significantly from that of the Borneo states (for a comprehensive history, see Andaya and Andaya 1983).

Malaysia is ethnically diverse, with a population of about fifteen million on the peninsula comprising approximately 55 percent Malays, 34 percent Chinese, 10 percent Indians, and less than one percent of other populations including aborigines (*orang asli*), Europeans, and Eurasians. The religious demography of the peninsula is also complex: about 56 percent are Muslims, 32 percent Buddhist-Taoists, 8 percent Hindus, 2 percent Christians, and 2 percent Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, atheists, or religiously anonymous. 1

We have described the religious history of the Malaysian peninsula in a previous work (Ackerman and Lee 1988). What we are concerned with in the present work is the transformation of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism within the context of modernization in Malaysia. In this chapter we briefly examine the implications of ethnic diversity for religious rationalization, the unique organization of Malaysian religions, and the major issues of religious contestation.

Ethnic Diversity and Religious Rationalization

If religious rationalization is generally construed as the systematic separation of magic from religion (Keith Thomas 1973), it would be reasonable to conjecture that religious rationalization on the Malay peninsula did not occur until the eighteenth century. From the early centuries of the Christian era onward, the royal cults of the god-king in Malaya and elsewhere in the region formed part of a political complex that received legitimation through ideas centering on the possession of divine power (see Coedes 1968, Wheatley 1980). These ideas were disseminated by itinerant Brahmin priests and Buddhist monks from South Asia, whose influences elevated the status of local rulers to incarnations of Hindu deities and Buddhist bodhisattvas.

Legends of these god-kings often described the manifestations of their supernatural powers in a variety of events (see Brown 1970, Wolters 1970). During the early period of Islamization, which occurred around the twelfth century, Persianized ideas of kingship and mysticism, as well as Sufi doctrines, played important roles in legitimating royal authority on the Malay peninsula (see Al-Attas 1963, Milner 1981). Malay rulers reportedly showed great interest in the Islamic doctrines of the perfect man, the saint who comes to possess magical powers as a result of his spiritual achievements (Milner 1981:54). These historical developments, pertaining mainly to the Malay population, suggest that magic was intertwined with religion for the purposes of maintaining political authority and interests.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the non-Malay population was neither socially nor politically significant except for the Portuguese and Dutch whose activities were centered in Melaka. The Portuguese who captured Melaka in 1511 brought with them a Catholicism that condoned magical practices. 2 They ruled Melaka at a time when Catholicism was challenged by the Protestant Reformation in Europe. By the time the Dutch wrested control of Melaka from the Portuguese in 1641, two important events had already occurred in Europe: the Catholic Church had launched the Counter-Reformation, and Calvinism had become an established denomination. These two events were vital to the rationalization of Christianity, particularly in the attenuation of magic. Although the Dutch brought Calvinism to Melaka, they made no serious efforts to establish it as a local religion. They concentrated mainly on providing ministerial services to the employees of the Dutch East Indies Company (Williams 1976:79), and thus the Protestant ethic promoted through Calvinist doctrines did not become a strong influence on local mentalities.

Anglo-American Protestantism was introduced to the peninsula via the Straits Settlements (Melaka, Penang, Singapore) around the early part of the nineteenth century. The consolidation of British colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century, through direct and indirect rule on the peninsula (see Emerson 1964), provided the political and economic supports for the dissemination of Protestant Christianity.

The first Protestant missionary to arrive was a Presbyterian working under the London Missionary Society (LMS), an interdenominational organization of Protestant missionaries (Phoon 1975:430). By 1846 the LMS had redirected its efforts to China and left most of its work in Malaya to independent Protestant missionaries. Catholic missionaries, on the other hand, continued their work in Malaya, chiefly through the Society of Paris Foreign Missions under the supervision of the reformed central church in Rome. Before 1874 most Christian missionaries confined their work to the Straits Settlements, rarely making trips to the peninsula, which at that time was turbulent with civil wars. After 1874, when the British secured treaties with Malay rulers, Christian missionaries began to move inland but were discouraged from proselytizing Malays because one of the terms of those treaties recognized Islam as the religion of the Malays. They had to concentrate their efforts on the non-Malay population, principally the Chinese and Indian immigrants who had flocked to the peninsula for employment in the tin mines and on the rubber estates.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, Catholic and Protestant attempts to Christianize Malays resulted in minimal conversions because of various cultural and political problems (see Dodsworth 1928, Haines 1962, Williams 1976). This implied that the Malays were shielded from the influences of the Protestant ethic, although they were experiencing changes in Islam as a result of successive waves of religious reformism in the Middle East (see Roff 1967). This reformism challenged medieval Islamic conceptions of royal authority and advanced the notion of a polity based on *shari'a* (Islamic law). The effort to delegitimize an Islam replete with magical elements and Hindu accretions may be interpreted as a process of rationalization in Malay society, but one that was estranged from similar events in the Christian world. Even without the influence of the Protestant ethic, religious rationalization was occurring in the Malay world, but its consequences were different from those of the Christian experience, as we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Christian proselytization of the Chinese and Indians during this period was relatively more successful. Despite linguistic and other cultural barriers, Christian missionaries worked steadily to increase the

number of non-Malay converts. The establishment of English-medium mission schools in the Straits Settlements and major towns on the peninsula provided an important institutional means for the transmission of Christian values. These schools offered a strong academic curriculum that attracted many non-Malays whose aspirations to enter prestigious white-collar occupations could be fulfilled only if they had such an education (Loh 1975). Chinese and Indian converts (and nonconverts) who attended these schools were exposed in varying degrees to elements of the Protestant ethic disseminated via the demeanor, discipline, and dictates of the missionary teachers. Non-Malays who did not attend mission schools were unequivocally excluded from a regular inculcation of the Protestant ethic, but this did not imply that they were grossly undisciplined or lacked motivation for achievement. Generally they received little or no influence from worldviews stressing the importance of hard work for salvationary purposes.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the process of religious rationalization was already an established feature of both the Malay and non-Malay communities: in the former it was accelerated by Middle Eastern Islamic reformism; in the latter it was almost synonymous with Christian educational influences. This difference became a source of latent tension between the Malays and non-Malays because it suggested dissimilar values in self-actualization and institution building. The tension was further reinforced by materialistic competition between the two communities. It is at this juncture that we can argue that the process of religious rationalization overlapped with a policy of ethnic differentiation sanctioned by the British colonialists.

The Malays had been Islamized for at least four centuries before the arrival of the British. It was not until the nineteenth century that their religious worldviews underwent important changes as a result of religious changes in the Middle East. Malay students and pilgrims returning from the Middle East brought with them reformist ideas that served as crucibles for cultivating attitudes emphasizing virtuosity and industriousness. Because Malay society was largely feudal and agricultural, these newly acquired values did not immediately gain widespread systematic expression. Moreover, British colonial policy was directed mainly at keeping Malay peasants on the land and rulers under benign control. Consequently, the Protestantization of Islamic values became a source of increasing tension between reform-minded Malays, Malay rulers, and British colonialists.

The complex development of this three-way conflict, however, did not retard the legalization of Malay ethnicity in terms of Islamic identity. The Pangkor treaty of 1874 between the British and the Malay

chiefs of Perak had set the basis for such legalization (Roff 1967: 69). Islam was formally recognized in this treaty as the religion of the Malays, and the Malay rulers were acknowledged to be the religious heads of their respective states. Islamic Protestantism increased Malays' awareness of their relative economic backwardness and accentuated their need to differentiate themselves from the economically aggressive non-Malays. The constitutionalization of Malay ethnicity, at independence in 1957, in terms of Islam (as well as Malay customs and language) legally marked a separation between the Malays and non-Malays.

The situation with the non-Malays was more complex because they did not share a common religion. The Chinese were mainly Buddhists and Taoists, with some Christians and Muslims among them. The Indians were mainly Hindus, with a minority of Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs. It would be erroneous to assume that the economic aggressiveness of the non-Malays was causally and directly related to their religious worldviews. Their seemingly sharp business acumen had more to do with their occupational backgrounds, kinship networks, and trading links than with religious ethics, though the latter played a role in their economic attitudes. In Weberian terms, the business ventures of the non-Malays were organized largely within the ambit of a pariah capitalism. 3

What was significant, though, in Malaya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the large number of Chinese and Indians who gained access to English-medium education provided by the colonial government and churches. More non-Malays than Malays attended the English-language schools (see Loh 1975), which suggests that the former had greater exposure to elements of the Protestant ethic than the latter. The overall effect was that members of the second generation of non-Malays, through their exposure to English-medium education, were psychologically oriented for the transition from pariah to rational capitalism.

The greater degree of Westernization among the Chinese and Indians became a significant factor in the ethnic differentiation between non-Malays and Malays. The new generation of English-educated non-Malays comprised an elite segment of the Malaysian population. They were soon to become captains of industry, leaders of political parties, and stalwarts of the professions. Among the Malays, a minority was selected for English-medium education so that these individuals would receive enough exposure to elements of the Protestant ethic to prepare them for eventual administrative chores in the colonial government (see Khasnor 1984). It was this elite stratum of Malays and non-Malays, infused with varying degrees of the Protestant ethic, who assumed

political leadership of an independent Malaya in 1957. Despite this similar background between the Malay and non-Malay elites, we would argue that non-Malay assertiveness after the early decades of the twentieth century was in some ways an expression of the subtle influences stemming from the religious bricolage of the Protestant and other religious ethics. 4 Aside from its psychological effects, this bricolage was not politicized in the sense of having an explicit legal identification with ethnicity.

The critical factor contributing to ethnic differentiation in Malaya was British colonialism. The extension of British influence, from the founding of Penang in 1786 to the Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore in 1941, marked more than a century of British control and exploitation of physical and human resources in the interests of a colonial capitalism feeding into the rational capitalism of the British homeland (for some historical accounts, see Parkinson 1960, Cowan 1961, Butcher 1979). Strategically, this exploitation required a political intrusion that utilized an ethnic division of labor for the efficient management of peoples and possessions. The colonial political economy drew on and reproduced racial ideologies for the maintenance of British dominance (see Stockwell 1982, Abraham 1983, Hirschman 1986).

In the religious field, British colonialism was instrumental in paving the way for the widespread introduction of Protestantism to the peninsula. Unlike the Portuguese and Dutch, the British were not confined to Melaka but used the Straits Settlements as bases from which to diversify their interests on the peninsula. Protestantism followed on the heels of British penetration into Malaya. It served the interests of colonial capitalism by realigning the attitudes of colonial subjects toward a work ethic that was consonant with imperialist needs. Ethnic differentiation favored non-Malay Protestantization, with the probable effect of reinforcing non-Malays' drive for higher levels of achievement, whereas only a privileged minority of Malays were Protestantized through British-sponsored education. This bifurcation between Malays and non-Malays in Protestantized attitudes cannot alone account for the complexity of ethnic relations in contemporary Malaysia. But it does underscore the differential impact upon Malays and non-Malays of a religious ethic instilled through conversion and education under the cover of colonialism. Naturally, this bifurcation was not contradictory to British pluralist policies, which alleged tolerance of the polyglot customs, lifestyles, and religions of the colonial subjects. Such tolerance was another aspect of political control because it allowed the colonial subjects to remain separate but under the single direction of the British.

The Organization of Malaysian Religions

Any organizational analysis of Malaysian religions must first distinguish between the Islamic and non-Islamic religious fields. It suggests that there is a "real" distinction between Islam and the other religions in terms of cultural and political development, structures, and institutions. The reason for this analytical prerequisite is that religion in contemporary Malaysia is politicized along ethnic lines: Malays are by birth and constitutional fiat Muslims, whereas no such terms apply to the non-Malays, who are thus free to move between religions. Because Malays claim privileged indigenous status, Islam is perceived by the immigrant non-Malays as an exclusive religion. The Malaysian constitution guarantees the freedom of religious practices but confers no special standing on the non-Islamic religions. In the non-Islamic religious field, the identification of ethnicity by religion is less clear; and, more important, adherence to a specific religion does not legally imply access to material privileges.

The distinction between the Islamic and non-Islamic religious fields suggests important differences in religious rationalization in terms of ideological cohesiveness, legal prerogatives, and bureaucratic development. For the Malays, their domination of the Islamic field implies an ethnic monopoly on ideological control. This is achieved by the appointment of state religious functionaries who provide official interpretations of the holy scriptures and wield authority for their dissemination. The exclusiveness of *shari'a* provides a formal boundary against non-Muslims who are bound by a legal injunction against proselytization of Muslims.

Given the exclusiveness of the Islamic field, it is inevitable that its control is maintained through a vast bureaucratic network at both state and federal levels. This means that the administration of Malaysian Islam is highly rationalized with respect to the accounting procedures for the social, economic, and political levels of Muslim lives. The organizational tightness of the Islamic field does not imply that it has a built-in tendency toward developing into a theocracy. On the contrary, the status of Islam as Malaysia's official religion is maintained by a Malay-dominated secular government, not by an Islamic clergy. In other words, the source of Islamic rationalization is secular rather than clerical. This has important implications in terms of state control over religious policies and the role of the Islamic clergy in the political system. In actuality, the Islamic clergy is limited to mosque functionaries and various jurisconsults who are employees of the state and federal government. Functionaries of the Islamic legal system are not, strictly

speaking, members of the Islamic clergy although they are also salaried bureaucrats in the state and federal government. As such, the Islamic clergy and bureaucrats comprise a component of the political establishment. Thus they may contribute in different ways to the rationalization of Islam, but under the auspices of the secular government.

In comparison to Islam, the non-Islamic religions are not so highly rationalized with respect to organizational intricacy and ideological integration. The non-Islamic religious field is diverse, presently comprising Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sikhism, Baha'i, and various new religious movements. It contains ample space for expansion. 5 The open-space metaphor provides an impression of a frontierlike situation of separate cultural spheres that lack a coherence sustained by state political support. Each religion within this field is diverse in ideologies. We may conceptualize the non-Islamic field as a religious arena manifesting plural forms and diverse rates of rationalization.

In ethnic terms, the more advanced rationalization of Islam implies greater bureaucratic control over the notion of Malay ethnicity. To be a Malay is not a mere matter of being born one, or adhering to certain customs, or speaking Malay at home and in public, or having a Muslim name. Malay identity in contemporary Malaysia is inextricably embedded within the multilayered systematization of Islamic practices.6 Although Malays enjoy indigenous status and attendant privileges, they have been increasingly pressured to conform to a growing number of religious rules decreed by the Muslim authorities. The drive toward religious conformity has become so intense that apostasy is now considered a serious religious crime in some states. Non-Malay ethnicities have yet to achieve a similar level of rationalization. The less rationalized condition of the non-Islamic religious field implies less stringent religious controls over ethnic definitions.

The religious definition of ethnicity also relates to the problem of religious centralization. This revolves around the question of how religious beliefs and practices are closely monitored by a single agency of control to produce a uniform pattern of behavior considered exclusive to an ethnic group. The organizational tightness of the Islamic field gives an impression of a highly centralized religion articulating a fundamental aspect of Malay ethnicity. However, Malaysian Islam lacks a central body of administrative control. This is a legacy of the treaties between the British colonialists and Malay rulers, which provided religious sovereignty to each individual ruler.

In present-day Malaysia, the administration of Islam is the exclusive affair of individual states (see Mackeen 1969). In states without hereditary rulers (sultans), such as the former Straits Settlements of Penang

and Melaka, the Federal Territory, and Sabah and Sarawak, the religious headship is assumed by the *Yang Dipertuan Agong*, the titular head of the country, who is elected from the conference of rulers once every five years. The federal government has established its own network of Islamic organizations, but they possess no constitutional power over the state-level Islamic bodies. Although administratively decentralized, Islamic ideology continues to be integrally maintained by a common adherence to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence within the Sunni division of Islam. It is this common ideological background that provides formal and informal channels of communication between state religious administrators. Changes or innovations in Islamic rules in one state may be used as models for administrative modifications in other states.

In comparison, the non-Islamic religions are even less centralized. First, none of them has any political representation, which is necessary for the symbolic centralization of authority. In Islam this representation is achieved by the recognition of the sultan as the religious head of his state. The religious administrators and clerics in the non-Islamic religions wield power only within the confines of their institutions, which have no linkages to the state. An interreligious council formed in 1983 of representatives from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism bears some resemblance to a multiethnic interest group. At best, this council is a symbolic representation, rather than centralization, of non-Muslim efforts to face the perceived threat of Islamic expansionism (see Raymond L. M. Lee 1986, 1988, 1990).

Second, the fragmentation of clerical authority is characteristic of all the non-Islamic religions. Christianity, for example, is divided into several denominations and independent churches. The Christian Federation of Malaysia is an umbrella organization for interdenominational cooperation, but it wields no centralized power for making policies. Similarly, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism are individually not controlled by a single body of clerical authority. In fact, the growing influence of lay activities in all these religions suggests the development of separate power bases in non-Islamic religious institutions. This means that non-Islamic religious rationalization can be attributed not mainly to clerical activities but to the increasing sphere of middle-class lay influence (Ackerman 1993).

The lack of religious centralization suggests a condition favorable to religious fission. Without a strong center controlling religious ideologies and practices, dissatisfied individuals are under minimal constraints from breaking away to form new religious groups. In the Islamic field, however, the tendency toward religious schisms is less

openand in many cases considered an underground phenomenonbecause of government proscriptions of religious alternatives. Despite the decentralized nature of Islamic administration, there is a general consensus supported by government policies concerning the threat of religious fission to the image of Malay-Muslim unity. Cooperation between state and federal Islamic organizations constitutes an effort by both to maintain their authority against challenges by cultic alternatives. The government-sponsored campaign against "deviant" Islam in the 1980s represented a joint endeavor by individual state authorities to regulate and rationalize Islamic practices, especially to reduce the practice of magic.

In the non-Islamic religious field, laissez-faire conditions resulting from decentralized authority and lack of legal restrictions on conversion have increased opportunities for religious fission. Conflict within formal religious organizations, because of doctrinal and personal differences, has led to breakaway groups establishing new followings. We have described this process in our previous work (Ackerman and Lee 1988), emphasizing the lack of governmental interference and concern with doctrinal orthodoxy in the non-Islamic religious field. Because there is no political machinery in this field for controlling religious fission, breakaway groups tend to experience little constraint in setting up alternative organizations and spreading new ideologies. Provided that they have sufficient social and economic support, these groups can effectively resist mainstream pressures and may even grow in popularity.

Contemporary Religious Tensions

Since independence, religious differences between the Malays, Chinese, and Indians have not led to any major conflicts. Nevertheless, much tension remains over three issues: the position of the non-Islamic religions vis-à-vis Islam; the question of secular power in relation to growing fundamentalism, especially in Islam; and the emergence of charismatic leaders and groups that challenge established religions.

The predominance of Islam has raised much apprehension among non-Muslims about the future of their religious traditions, particularly the scope of their rights in continuing the practice of their faiths. There is great concern about widening Islamic activities, even though Islamic conversion among the Chinese and Indians is minimal. The very strong presence of Islam as evidenced by the large number of mosques, frequent religious discussion in the mass media, and the assertion of Islamic identity in the public sphere has become a familiar feature of everyday life. At the same time, this familiarity with the Is-

lamic presence has sustained non-Muslim wariness of Muslim motives and actions.

In 1983 the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism was formed by several Chinese and Indian religious leaders as an instrument of dialogue with the Muslims. In the early 1990s, the Institute for Islamic Understanding was established by the government to promote religious tolerance and to advance non-Muslims' knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices. A newspaper column discussing interreligious issues was published in the mid-1980s, but it was short-lived. All these activities spanning the 1980s and part of the 1990s were largely symbolic attempts to maintain religious harmony while minimizing references to sensitive issues concerning religious rights. The general impact of these symbolic negotiations has been a surface calm, although there is no clear indication whether deep religious suspicions have been totally allayed.

The second problem concerning secularization is the tension between the growing power of political leaders whose association with religion appears to be largely instrumental in scope and the ambitions of fundamentalist religious leaders, particularly in Islam, who are critical of government policies of modernist development. On the one hand, secular values that are consonant with the goals of industrial development are strongly promoted by the Malay political elite. On the other hand, Muslim fundamentalists tend to be dissatisfied with the gradual displacement of Islamic values by Western secular worldviews. In attempting to reduce religious alienation, the Malay political elite has astutely reestablished its public image as an indefatigable defender of Islamic values (see Mauzy and Milne 1984). The government's campaign to maintain Islamic confidence has ranged from public demonstrations of Islamic religiosity to the modernization of Islamic institutions.

The position of the non-Muslims in the challenge to secularization tends to be so vague that it is difficult to say whether they are anti- or prosecularization. What is important to note, though, is that the bargaining power of the non-Muslims is small compared to that of the Muslims. It is therefore not in their interest to assume an open stance on matters related to public policies, except on issues concerning their rights.

However, in meeting the Islamic challenge to secularization, the government has initiated important changes such as an expansion in Islamic bureaucracy and a more stringent enforcement of Islamic laws. These changes have generally been perceived by non-Muslims as evidence of increasing Islamic power and a possible threat to their well-

being. In other words, the issue of secularization is less a concern for the non-Muslims than for the Muslims, but it is in the latter's challenge to secularization that non-Muslims have become organizationally responsive to the expanding apparatus of Islamic power.

Charisma as a third source of religious tension is confined mainly to intrareligious activities, in which the emergence of homegrown or internationally inspired movements led by claimants of special powers or missions may become a threat to respective mainstream organizations in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. For two reasons, it is rare to find charismatic leadership in one religion challenging the established institutions of another religion. First, such challenges concern doctrinal or personal differences within one religion. Second, each religion as a more or less autonomous cultural sphere has generated exclusive issues and problems. But the common denominator of charisma in all the four religions under discussion is its drive toward change and its potential for violent encounters with authorities.

The rise of charismatic groups within Islam has caused the government a great deal of concern. Many of these groups are led by individuals who claim to possess extraordinary powers or to have a special mission, and some of them may be politically ambitious. In 1980 eight sword-wielding Malays under the charismatic leadership of a Kampuchean Muslim refugee were shot dead by security forces when they attacked a police station in Batu Pahat, Johor. In 1985 fourteen Malay villagers from Memali in Kedah were killed by security forces when they attempted to prevent a charismatic leader from being arrested. In an incident that occurred in 1978, violence between iconoclasts from an Islamic charismatic group and Indian guards of a Hindu temple resulted in several deaths among the former. This was the only case of charismatic violence between different religious groups.

However, when charismatic movements in Islam gain a certain degree of rationalizationin terms of a systematic organization of a growing membership, nonviolent strategies that do not invite outright government repression, and the development of international links with monetary supportthey pose a greater threat to the establishment because the institutionalization of charismatic power is more difficult to dislodge than that characterized by a spontaneous outburst. The neutralization of such movements may be accomplished by their absorption into the establishment, in which case the charismatic appeal of the leader either adds lustre to the establishment or becomes overwhelmed by the impersonal nature of hierarchical relations. The case of Anwar Ibrahim, the once charismatic leader of ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) who crossed over to the government in 1982 and became

deputy prime minister in 1993, is an example of the absorption of charisma into the rationalized structures of the Malay establishment.

The charismatic challenge to established religions in the non-Islamic field has different consequences because the political ramifications found in Islam are absent in Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The more marginal status of these religions suggests that there is less political necessity to contain the charismatic elements of the sectarian and cultic alternatives. These alternatives could develop on their own into separate rationalized structures within a non-Islamic tradition, competing with other rationalized structures for membership and resources. The manifestations and implications of non-Islamic charisma will be discussed at length in the chapters to follow.

Chapter Three
Religio in Imperium:
Islam and the Malay State

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, practiced by at least 55 percent of the population. It is also an ethnic identifier that is closely associated with notions of Malay history, customs, and selfhood. Introduced from the Middle East via India more than five centuries ago (see Fatimi 1963, Johns 1961), Islam in Malaysia has undergone many changes from its inception as an emblem of royal mystical power to its modern institutionalized expression of Malay political dominance. As the religion of an ethnic majority, it does not seem to embody the warrior ethic that Weber (1963, 1968) attributed to early Islam, largely because its arrival on the peninsula was facilitated by itinerant missionaries and traders, not by Arab warriors. However, Weber's analysis of patrimonialism in medieval Islam appears to suggest a parallel in the early development of Islamized Malay culture.

Our intention in this chapter is to draw upon on Weber's analysis of Islamic patrimonialism to examine Malay society under the early influence of Islam. This is not to imply that patrimonialism is an essential feature of Islam but to show that its structure of authority does not necessarily conflict with Islamic worldviews.

It can be argued that a patrimonial structure had already existed in Malay society prior to the advent of Islam. The introduction of Islam provided a new form of legitimation to this structure but at the same time imposed new perspectives on social relations to effect potentialities for social change. The Islamization of Malay society did not necessarily change its basic structure of authority; rather it provided alternative ethics that set in motion a process of rationalization closely associated with the delineation of modern Malay ethnicity. To explore the Islamic rationalization of Malay society, we will first examine the structure of authority in pre-Islamic Malay society and the impact of Islam on this structure.

Islam and Malay Patrimonialism

The idea of patrimonialism connotes a centralized authority based on a ruler's claim to personal sources of power maintained by a body of administrators and mercenaries (Weber 1947:34754, 1968:1006ff). Although distanced from the masses by this body of officials and soldiers, the patrimonial ruler projects an image of closeness to his subjects. In the words of Bendix (1966:365), "Patrimonialism appeals to the masses against the privileged status groups; not the warrior-hero but 'the good king,' the 'father of his people,' are its prevailing ideal."

Historically, many patrimonial systems were decentralized, meaning that governing powers were appropriated by certain sections of the administrative staff or the army. Weber (1947:351) noted that the individual who used proceeds from his benefice or fief to govern assumed patrimonial authority that might become hereditary. But in a situation where the vassal or retainer governed on the basis of military benefices that were not hereditary, the administrative organization was described as prebendal.

For Weber, patrimonialism engendered a highly arbitrary structure of authority, "characterized by rapid turnover and instability of personnel, but great stability of social structures" (Turner 1974:81). In other words, fiscal crises often led to the overthrow of patrimonial rulers, whose places were taken over by their mercenary chiefs, who then assumed a similar system of government. Because patrimonialism in Islamic society was strongly predicated on a ruler's utilization of mercenaries or slave armies, political balance between the sultan and the military was often precarious. The political instabilities created by struggles for power tended to suppress the growth of autonomous institutions (Turner 1974:17273).

How do these ideas apply to pre-Islamic Malay society? Considering that Weber's ideas on patrimonialism were derived largely from his comparison of Middle Eastern and European feudalism, it seems questionable whether they are directly relevant to Malay society. However, some justifications can be made for Weber's analysis provided that we clarify the limits of its application. One of these limits concerns the problem of land distribution. Weber's (1947:37381) discussion of classical feudalism focuses on the appropriation of land tracts as fiefs on a hereditary basis, subject to a contract of fealty from the vassal to his lord. This type of feudalism is differentiated from prebendalism, which involves the receipt of benefices of fiscal significance rather than fiefs.

Feudal relations in pre-Islamic Malay society tended to be characterized more by allegiances to the spiritual and military superiority of an overlord than by the establishment of fiefs. Notwithstanding the

scanty evidence prior to the fifteenth century, it can be conjectured that land on the Malay peninsula was not considered a scarce commodity to be distributed as fiefs in return for personal loyalty to the overlord. 1 Even by the mid-nineteenth century, colonial administrators such as Swettenham (1948:136) observed that "land had no value in the Malay states of 1874 and it was the custom for anyone to settle where he pleased on unoccupied and unclaimed land," thus prompting historians like Gullick (1958:113) to remark that "population was the source of [a chief's] wealth (as a tax collector) and therefore of his ability to maintain an armed following as the basis of his power." Malay feudalism differed from the European type principally in that the former lacked a distinct landowning class pledging loyalty to the overlord.

Given these conditions in pre-Islamic Malay society, the structure of patrimonialism can at best be described as prebendal since mainly honorary benefices were bestowed on local chieftains in exchange for tribute and manpower. Even then, the structure of patrimonial authority was largely decentralized because the widespread dispersion of chieftains in the riverine communities ensured that power was not concentrated in the hands of the overlord. Nevertheless, the overlord's authority continued to be perceived as supreme, particularly during the Hindu period (roughly the first to the fourteenth century), when his being was often believed to be fused with the great Hindu gods (see Wheatley 1980, Wolters 1982).

The association of Malay rulers with Hindu deities suggests that each ruler tended to claim his sphere of influence to be universal. Competition among rulers to become primus inter pares has been described by Wolters (1982:16) as a patchwork of overlapping mandalas, or circles of kings. This metaphor connotes several competing spheres of influence within a given region, each expanding and contracting according to the changing circumstances. The mandala structure of authority in pre-Islamic Malay society generally implied an unstable political situation in which wars were often fought over prestige and territory and patrimonial relations shifted endlessly.2

Unlike its counterpart in Europe, the mandala structure in preIslamic Malay society was infused to a great extent with magical elements. It is in this context of an "enchanted patrimonialism" that the transition to an Islamic power structure occurred in Malay society around the fifteenth century. Taking the rise of the Melaka sultanate as the early emergence of an Islamic power structure in the Malay world, we will examine the question concerning the effects of this transition on Malay notions of power relations.

Muslim traders from the Arabian peninsula and India had plied the

trade routes of maritime Southeast Asia since at least the eighth century, but Islam as a socioreligious force in the region did not become significant before the twelfth century. Around the fourteenth to fifteenth century, when Islam became the new religious emblem of the Malay rulers, it was largely a veneer imposed on the pre-Islamic monarchical structure defined by the *kerajaan* (the condition of having a raja, or ruler). Milner (1981:50) sums up the early phase of Islamization by noting that

> the Raja-centered, ceremonial, *kerajaan* stands in strong contrast to the image of an Islamic state as a community of the faithful governed by *shari'a* law. The *kerajaan* also possessed deep roots in pre-Islamic times. It is not just that Indian and animistic elements were, and are, ingredients in Malay kingship, but the fragmentary evidence of pre-Islamic times suggests the Malay ruler's position was little altered by the arrival of the new religion.

The patrimonial relations established by the subjects' identification of the ruler's authority with divinity were reinforced by specific Islamic ideas concerning the cosmic ruler. Islamic *shari'a* did not become a potent instrument for challenging the status of a *kerajaan* empowered by medieval Islamic mysticism until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century, the monistic conception of the Malay god-king was on the decline. The theocentric aspects of Islam, emphasizing a dualism between man and god, began to exert greater influence, to the extent of reshaping royal self-perceptions as revealed in some Malay historical annals.

In the *Hikayat Deli*, not only is the ruler distanced from divine status, but he is merely an intermediary between Allah and his subjects (Milner 1982:108). 3 The dichotomization of the hyphenated god-king is also evident in Gullick's (1987:3334) description of the installation of Sultan Idris of Perak in 1889: "Idris had prepared himself for his installation by a retreat of several days spent 'in fasting and prayer.' The installation itself had included the speaking of a formula by which the ruler was recognized as a temporal representative of divine authority." This shows that by the onset of British colonial rule, the powers of the Malay rulers had been sufficiently demystified to suggest their roles in public life as supervising the invocation of spiritual forces rather than demonstrating their spiritual prowess.

These developments suggest a gradual disenchantment in the patrimonial relations between the ruler and his vassals. Because the ruler was no longer perceived as ontologically equivalent to divinity, his prebendal relations with vassals began to take on an even more materi-

alistic character as spiritual expressions became increasingly confined to the private, symbolic realm (see Gullick 1958:13435, 1987:28485).

In this context of sociopolitical changes, the traditional patrimonial bonds between the ruler and his vassals were overshadowed by a newer, more powerful form of patrimonialism established by the British colonialists. This form of British patrimonialism was more rationalized, conducted through the organs of colonial bureaucracy in which some Malays established significant careers. Increasing colonial bureaucratization facilitated the social mobility of some sections of the Malay community, thus reordering perceptions of traditional Malay patrimonialism.

It was during this period that *shari'a* became defined as critical to the moral governance of the Muslim community. Prior to British colonial rule, "Islamic law failed to attract widespread adherence" (Milner 1981:48). However, all this changed when Islamic reform in the Middle East spread to Malaya. In the early twentieth century, several Malays who had maintained contact with the Middle East agitated for reform through the publication of a periodical, *Al Imam*, in Singapore (Roff 1967:59ff.). They had been closely influenced by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (18491905), the former grand mufti of Egypt, and his disciple Rashid Rida (18651935). These two men, along with others such as al-Afghani and al-Tahtawi, not only attacked the excesses of Sufi mysticism but also "attempted to show that the Islam of the early *umma* [Islamic community] was fundamentally this-worldly, activist and rational and that Islam was not only compatible with modern society but essential for its development" (Turner 1974:147).

These ideas were developed at a time when the Ottoman Empire was in decline and the Muslim world imperiled by the rapid political encroachment of the West. Yet many of these reformists had lived and studied in Europe, and they appeared to have imbibed some Protestant values of Western capitalist society (Turner 1974:148). The emphasis on the return to the basic scriptures to be cleansed of redundant ritualism and misleading mysticism paralleled some aspects of the Protestant ethic and provided an important basis for the development of *shari'a* consciousness.

The impact of this reformism on traditional Malay patrimonialism was considerable. Through new *madrasahs* (religious schools) and publications of newspapers and other literature, Malay radicals (known collectively as *Kaum Muda*, or Youth Faction) in the early decades of the twentieth century were able to launch repeated attacks on the traditional elite and its patrimonial relationships (Roff 1967:75ff.). As proponents of a modernized Islam, the radicals were essentially pro-

moting an individualistic ethic that emphasized the rights of each and every Muslim. Ideationally, these critiques were possible because the theocentrism stemming from Middle Eastern reformism permitted a worldview that attributed activism and responsibility to individuals rather than concentrating them in the hands of god-kings. Now individuals' self-interests were no longer seen as totally subordinate to those of the elite. Politically, these critiques were sustained by radicals living in relatively safe colonial havens such as Singapore and Medan in Sumatra (Milner 1981:6061).

Ironically, the Europeans contributed to the deterioration of the rulers' religious authority even though they did not openly support the radicals. Before colonial rule, Islamic administration was maintained through the imam and mufti (chief jurisconsult), who were involved in a patrimonial network centering on the ruler (Ellen 1983:7980, Gullick 1987:28284). However, at the beginning of colonial rule, British administrators felt the need to systematize the dispensation of Islamic law. Thus the first *kadi* (Islamic magistrate) appointed as a salaried official by the Perak state council in 1879 (Gullick 1987:286) marked the beginning of a gradual bureaucratization of Islam on the peninsula. 4

In the twentieth century, traditional Malay patrimonialism was eclipsed by new power relations originating from bureaucratic structures established by the British colonialists. Not only religion but a whole gamut of social and political interests became bureaucratized, signaling the transformation of Malaynessin precolonial times a function of regional identityinto a supralocal identity, the dynamics of which were fueled by a process of rationalization that continues to run its course.

The Bureaucratization of Malay Ethnicity

The notion of Malay ethnicity as a systematic expression of solidary sentiments in reaction to the encroachment of other ethnic groups did not crystallize until the early part of the twentieth century. Certainly in precolonial Malaya the idea of Malayness was not absent; its meaning was intrinsically related to Malay customs, language, myths, kinship, and so on. The significance of the colonial period for Malay ethnicity lies in the introduction of a foreign bureaucratic machinery that was meant largely for the administration of the colony but in the process of administration provided an organized means for the definition of Malayness in terms of privileges, power, and eventually constitutional standing. To understand how this machinery contributed to a delineation of Malay ethnicity, it is necessary to examine briefly the nature of colonial

educational policies, which contributed in no small way to the development of modern Malay consciousness and social mobility.

In brief, British educational policy toward the Malays from 1875 onward was expectedly paternalistic. Based on their experiences in British India, many administrators in Malaya were not in favor of introducing English education on a wide scale lest it raise Malay aspirations in contradiction to colonial interests. Despite the liberal views of some administrators such as J. P. Rodger and R. J. Wilkinson, British policy stressed the necessity of a four-year primary-school system based on the Malay vernacular. This system initially met with much resistance from many Malays who saw little value in formal education (Stevenson 1975:34).

It was only through the implementation of compulsory education, a system in which Malay parents were fined for their children's truancy, that Malay vernacular education became firmly established in the late nineteenth century (Stevenson 1975:3843). Although the Malay school system expanded rapidly after 1890, it did very little to increase occupational mobility for the bulk of the Malay peasantry. A small number of students went on to become teachers, clerks, orderlies, and policemen, but the rest returned to agricultural and fishing activities (Loh 1975:17).

Within this system, Malay ethnic consciousness became more focused upon the founding of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in 1922. The SITC was established as part of British efforts to reorganize Malay education, its main function being the training of Malay commoners as teachers to meet staff shortages in village schools. As an unintended consequence of a strict monolingual policy at SITC, the three-year training program in Malay fostered a growing nationalist consciousness (Loh 1975:88).

Although English was excluded from the Malay school system, it was the medium of instruction in missionary and government schools in the Straits Settlements and major towns on the peninsula. Most of the students in these schools were Chinese and Indians, with Malays in the minority. But from 1890 onward the British made special efforts to set up English schools and departments within existing schools to train sons of the Malay aristocracy for positions in the colonial bureaucracy (Stevenson 1975:148ff.). There were demands for English education from Malay villagers, but they were largely ignored (Loh 1975:5254).

By 1905 the exclusive Malay College at Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) in Perak had been established to train sons of the Malay nobility for direct recruitment into the Malay Administrative Service (MAS), the Malay wing of the colonial bureaucracy. Initially, both the MCKK and MAS

opened new careers to members of the aristocracy, but after 1920 Malay commoners were admitted to the college and recruited into the MAS (Khasnor 1984:54).

This elitist training created a corps of highly Anglicized Malay officers. Because most of the MAS recruits were aristocrats, their absorption into the colonial bureaucracy seemed to provide a natural extension of their traditional authority. In this way the Malay social structure was left largely undisturbed, but at the same time the new role of administrator turned many Malay officers into marginal men, "caught between the two forces at work in the society, that of Malay culture and Western influence" (Khasnor 1984:190). Despite their marginality, they commanded much respect within the Malay community because of their close association with British colonial power. It was this respect that provided a political platform for their definition of Malay ethnicity after World War II.

As a whole, the social hierarchy in traditional Malay society was not radically changed by colonial educational policies. But within the aristocracy, a new class of men was groomed through the medium of English for tasks beyond their traditional roles. These Malay administrators, with their newly acquired values and special sense of mission, became the chief architects in forging a more integrated conception of Malay ethnicity after World War II. Their status as modern administrators not only enhanced their standing as individuals but also gave them a new perspective on the management of Malay society. Their secular values were meticulously nurtured through a public school ethos developed at the MCKK, which focused on building character and instilling leadership qualities (Stevenson 1975:188).

In the years following the end of World War II, the Malay secular elite established itself as the dominant partner in the ruling coalition. The traditional rulers of individual Malay states continued to be nominally the chief representatives of Islam, but it was the secular politicians who saw the importance of including Islam as a state religion in the drafting of the constitution in 1957 (Ratnam 1965:11920). 5 Since the late 1960s, the bureaucratization of Malay ethnicity has continued in terms of a systematic control by secular authorities over the distribution of privileges and power, particularly in the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the early 1970s. The NEP was launched with the stated aims of eradicating poverty irrespective of race and restructuring Malaysian society to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function. The major thrust of the NEP was a Malay-sponsored drive to gain control of 30 percent of the national wealth, with 1990 as the deadline for achiev-

ing this target. 6 The social and economic consequences of the NEP have been discussed elsewhere (see Mehmet 1988); what needs to be emphasized here is the emergence of a new Malay middle class and its links to an enlarged bureaucratic structure that has vital implications for Malay ethnicity.

To achieve their economic objective, the Malay secular elite realized the need to create a class of Malay entrepreneurs and technocrats to function as instruments of state capitalism. From 1970 onward, Malay special privileges were exercised on an enormous scale: thousands of Malay students gained entry into the local universities; more were sent abroad on government grants; the ranks of the civil service were swelled by more Malay recruits; many Malays quickly obtained licenses and soft loans to start businesses. To direct the allocation of privileges systematically, the government had to expand its bureaucracy to manage and monitor the growth of state capitalism (Mehmet 1988:10). In short, the lifeline of the new Malay middle class comprised a whole range of government and semigovernment agencies that came to serve as the doorway to Malay socioeconomic success. The meaning of Malay ethnicity in the late twentieth century hinged upon the presence of these agencies as institutional regulators of privilege, progress, and possessions.

The creation of a bureaucratic structure for distributing privileges within a context of industrial development implied a parallel need for inculcating new values and ethics commensurate with an industrialized culture. At various intervals during the NEP era, the secular elite renewed efforts to foster a "mental revolution" among the Malays, echoing the rhetoric of some of their illustrious predecessors such as Syed Sheikh Alhady and Za'ba, who had lamented in the 1920s and 1930s on the lack of a Protestant work ethic in Malay society.7 In the early 1980s the prime minister advocated a "look East" policy, exhorting the public to emulate the work ethic of the Japanese and Koreans.8 This campaign to modify the work consciousness of the Malays coincided with a government-sponsored program to expand Islamic institutions and intensify Muslim piety. The secular elite seemed to have realized that the advancement of state capitalism could not be fully achieved unless a new work ethic was introduced and reinforced by a highly Protestantized form of Islam.

This growing trend toward bureaucratization has important implications for the future of Malay ethnicity, particularly in relation to the challenges posed by alternative Islamic groups and movements. First, increasing secular control over Islamic institutions is likely to hasten the decline of traditional religious authority, although the organs of

this control continue to be challenged by elements of the Islamic Party (PAS). 9 This suggests that Islamization as a fundamental component of Malay identity continues to be problematic in the sense that the definition of bureaucratization is intensely contested between secular leaders and those who advocate the predominance of *shari'a*.

Second, the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism has brought into relief the limits of religious innovation in relation to the growth of state power. The Islamic fundamentalist movement of the 1970s, popularly known as *dakwah*, began with the formation of disparate urban groups influenced by worldwide Islamic revivalism but eventually establishing networks throughout the peninsula and among Malay students abroad. Much has been written on the *dakwah* movement and its consequences (see Bakar 1981, Nagata 1984, Zainah 1987, Hussin 1990), but we only need to emphasize here its impact on the bureaucratization of Malay ethnicity.

It is significant to note that *dakwah* became widespread at the height of the NEP in the mid-1970s. During this period, Malay state power increased greatly in terms of control over social and economic opportunities and expression. Greater constraints stemming from increased discipline under a new industrialism predisposed many Malays to seek within Islam some alternatives for voicing their dissatisfaction. This explains the popularity of *dakwah* among many urban, middle-class Malays who were the chief beneficiaries of the NEP and, at the same time, cadres of a new industrial order.

Although *dakwah* was not a unified movement with an integrated set of ideas, the government perceived it as a threat to its authority and sought to control it by various strategies (Barraclough 1983), one of which was direct competition with the movement. By attempting to outdo the *dakwah* groups in ideological dissemination, promotion of puritanism, and organized religious activities, state-sponsored Islamic programs became an essential aspect of the bureaucratic agenda in shaping Malay ethnic identity.

Thus the advent of the Malay secular elite, particularly after World War II, set in motion three trends contributing to the growing rationalization of Malay society: state-sponsored economic and industrial development, an increasing centralization of federal power, and an expanding Islamic bureaucracy. The third trend requires further discussion because it cuts into the heart of contemporary Malay identity. It is in the complex networks of Islamic organizations and institutions that we find the nucleus of a machinery animating various aspects of Malay consciousness. This does not imply that the meaning of Malayness is solely dependent on the existence of religious institutions; rather it

suggests that Islam is so ingrained in Malay ethnicity that any effort to alter its meaning cannot possibly ignore its linkages to the Islamic bureaucracy.

The Contemporary Organization of Islam

Constitutionally, federal and state control of Islamic legislation and administration is separate. Each of the eleven states of the peninsula has its own legal enactment pertaining to the administration of Islamic law (*shari'a*), the first model of such enactment having been drafted in 1952 in the state of Selangor (Hooker 1976:24).

The provisions of these enactments empower the traditional ruler of each state to appoint members of the religious council (*majlis agama*), the Islamic judiciary, functionaries of mosques, and registrars of Muslim marriages and divorce and to direct the Islamic judiciary on matters concerning legal procedures without contravening the substantive law of *shari'a* (*fiqh*). But as noted by Mackeen (1969:36), "the exercise of their authority as heads of the Muslim religion is in actual practice determined by an equally well entrenched infrastructure manned by the traditional *ulama* [scholars] whom the ruler cannot afford to ignore altogether."

The federal parliament has no legal jurisdiction over Islamic legislation and administration in the individual states except in the Federal Territory. 10 Islamic bureaucracy at the federal level is controlled by a religious council through the offices of the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department. A national council for Islamic affairs is also located within the Federal Territory. This council, headed by the prime minister, was formed in 1968 to coordinate the administration of Islam through the participation of representatives from each state, although some states, such as Johor, Kedah, and Pahang, are not involved. The national council cannot interfere directly with Islamic matters at the state level, but it can in its advisory capacity exert limited influence on their course of development.

Federal attempts to centralize various aspects of Islamic adminis tration have led to tensions between the rulers and government-appointed religious functionaries. In the 1960s, federal efforts to standardize astronomical calculations for the beginning of Ramadan (the Muslim month of fasting) met with opposition from various rulers (Baker 1973:175). This issue was raised again in 1983 when the sultan of Johor resisted federal attempts to determine the date of Ramadan (*Star*, 16 June 1983). Despite federal-state differences over Islamic administration, the vastness of the bureaucratic networks that link Islam

with secular authorities suggests that Islam is more than just a symbol of Malay ethnicity. Because of its direct access to state power, Islam has a commanding position over the other religions. It is this position that characterizes the hegemonic nature of some Islamic institutions. These institutions are empowered by the state to survey and regulate the moral behavior and thought of Muslims. The departments of Islamic affairs (*Jabatan Agama Islam*) in every state are the chief instruments of administrative and moral control.

The powers of the enforcement division in these departments are very broad. Generally, officers from this division are authorized to arrest and prosecute Muslims for selling alcohol, not attending Friday prayers, eating and selling food during Ramadan, wife abuse, building mosques without state approval, teaching Islam without a letter of certification, issuing decrees (*fatwa*) without the approval of proper authorities, refusing to pay tithes (*zakat*), embracing Islam without going through the proper channels, blasphemy, and various sexual offenses including *zina* (adultery), *khalwat* (close proximity), and intimacy between reunited couples who are formally divorced (Zulkifli 1988).

Armed with wide-ranging powers, these officers often work with various government departments to gather evidence to use in prosecuting Muslim offenders. Arrests are usually made either on regular patrols or with information received from complaints. The police occasionally provide escort protection for the unarmed officers. In cases of sexual offenses, the officers liaise with hospitals and chemistry departments for medical tests. They also work with the welfare, immigration, road transport, and national registration departments to track down fugitive offenders (Zulkifli 1988).

These links to agencies of governmental control suggest that Islamic religious departments function to enforce Muslim morality as an issue of public concern; the moral public behavior of non-Muslims is not under constant scrutiny by state officials. However, the stringency of moral control varies from state to state, depending on the earnestness of religious bureaucrats and the efficiency of the Islamic legal machinery.

The Reorganization of *Shari'a*

Shari'a courts in colonial Malaya were not totally independent of British control, and they tended to be overshadowed by the civil judiciary. In some states, even the administration of Islamic law came under the control of the British advisors (Ahmad Ibrahim 1978:57). Although there was indeed concern on the part of these advisors for the administration of Islamic law in the Malay states, the lack of efficiency

of *shari'a* courts continued to plague the Islamic legal system. Since legal transactions of any importance were conducted under civil law, there was no felt need to improve the Islamic judiciary, which was restricted to adjudicating family and property issues among Muslims. Traditionally, the *shari'a* system comprised a lower and upper court. The *shari'a* judge was normally appointed by the ruler, who selected any person considered suitable. *Kadis* tend to be appointed from among graduates of Middle Eastern universities, and in general they have little practical training in Islamic law. In one example cited by Haji Salleh (1988:5), a *shari'a* judge admitted that the only practical training he received when he first assumed the post was an oral briefing by his superior officer that lasted less than half an hour. It was a concern for the lack of professionalism in the Islamic judiciary, and myriad problems cited by Haji Salleh (1988)for example, irregularities in *shari'a* procedures, absence of proper legal pronouncements, and resort to shortcuts in court proceedingsthat prompted efforts to upgrade the *shari'a* system from the early 1980s onward.

In terms of training *shari'a* judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, the International Islamic University (IIU, established in 1983) in Petaling Jaya took the lead in introducing diploma and graduate-level programs for advancing the knowledge and practice of Islamic law. In 1985 IIU accepted thirty-one senior members of the Islamic judiciary for further legal instructions; in 1987 it admitted twenty-one lawyers into a graduate program in *shari'a* court proceedings; and in 1988 it launched a new undergraduate degree in *shari'a* (Haji Salleh 1988).

To improve the status of the *shari'a* courts, the government in the late 1980s began restructuring the *shari'a* system into a three-tiered arrangementhigh, lower, and appeal courtssimilar to that of the civil courts (*New Straits Times*, 25 March 1988). In July 1989 the *shari'a* courts in the Federal Territory became administratively independent of the Islamic affairs department. This revamping of judicial administration within the Federal Territory became an important model for emulation in the other states (*New Sunday Times*, 5 August 1990).

In line with these changes, the status of *shari'a* judges has been gradually upgraded to that of the civil court judges in terms of qualifications, rank, and salary (*Star*, 17 May 1990). Under the new arrangement,the *kadi*'s legal authority becomes more sharply defined as he is no longer required to perform other functions such as those of a marriage counselor and ceremonial official (*Star*, 30 June 1989). In the state of Kedah, for example, a marriage counselor is appointed in every district to assist the *kadi* in settling marital disputes, so there is a clear differentia-

tion between the *kadi*'s legal role and the counselor's advisory duties (Sharifah Zaleha 1990:50).

These changes in *shari'a* administration also imply a stricter supervision of legal representation in the Islamic courts. Before the 1980s, non-Muslim lawyers without much training in Islamic law could represent Muslim clients in *shari'a* courts. Since the early 1980s, several states have implemented screening procedures for lawyers wishing to practice in *shari'a* courts (Haji Salleh 1988:14). A consequence of these procedures is the enforced learning of *shari'a* among civil lawyers who practice in the Islamic courts. As suggested by Sharifah Zaleha (1990: 51), this enforced acquisition of Islamic legal knowledge among lawyers is likely to reduce the monopoly of the traditional *ulama* over Islamic knowledge, and in a way it may raise the influence of *shari'a* in the legal profession.

As Islamic jurists seek to improve their legal status in relation to that of civil lawyers, questions concerning the legal relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims are likely to arise. For example, in 1989 the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department sought to amend the state's Islamic administration law of 1952 in order to prosecute non-Muslims who commit *khalwat* with Muslims. However, for non-Muslims such an amendment would raise constitutional problems over their prosecution by a *shari'a* court (*New Straits Times*, 22 April 1989).

Thus the vast changes in *shari'a* administration connote more than a judicial face-lift; in effect they comprise vital strategies in consolidating the practice of Islamic law. Although Sharifah Zaleha (1990:51) argues that Islamic legal institutions, particularly in Kedah, continue to play symbolic rather than practical roles, concerted actions in Islamic law at the national level suggest that Islamic jurists are no longer content with piecemeal reforms. The crowning achievement of these jurists in recent years has been the exertion of their influence in the passing of the Islamic Family Law Act in 1984. This act, which covers marriage, divorce, maintenance of wives and children, and division of property, was intended to provide equitable treatment for Muslim women, especially in cases concerning polygamy. 11 Success in tightening Islamic personal law may lead to future reviews of other aspects of Islamic law as the scope of *shari'a* reform continues to widen.

The scope of this reform is in many ways syncretic in form and content, as Horowitz (1994:262) has shown convincingly with reference to the fact that innovations in the *shari'a* are derived from "ideas and arguments typical of the common law courts." These innovations provide an important baseline for the anticipated creation of a single *shari'a* system considered by the reformers as a leading challenge in

their careers (Horowitz 1994:573). If and when this system becomes a reality, it will suggest a highly uniform body of legal regulations and practices that reflects an interesting compromise between the secular logic of common law and the concreteness of Islamic traditions.

The Islamic Center

The expansion of the Islamic judiciary and bureaucracy has boosted Muslim morale. Many Muslims perceive the restructuring of Islamic institutions as organizational progress concomitant with the social and economic development of the country. In line with this progress, the government expanded the Islamic Center (IC) to coordinate and keep abreast of Islamic activities throughout the country. 12

The IC was originally administered under the auspices of the national mosque, which officially opened in 1965. It had three sectionsQur'anic recitation, research, and missionary workwhich were incorporated into the religious division of the prime minister's department in 1974. In 1980 this division was reorganized to become an important arm of Islamic administration.

The new IC has three basic functions: advisory, missionary, and research. Some of its officials in their advisory capacity occupy positions on various state religious committees and boards. They also attend important gatherings such as the meetings of heads of religious councils, conferences of *kadis* and muftis, and the *majlis syura* (consulting council). The missionary activities are coordinated and conducted by the Institute of Missionary and Islamic Training, which organizes Islamic courses for the general public, *shari'a* instructions for government officers, and the distribution of Islamic publications. The IC is also linked to a religious trust (Malaysian Foundation for Islamic Missionary Work)13 that collects donations, organizes symposia, and promotes international Islamic relations.

The research wing comprises the largest unit in the IC. It is divided into six sections, and its main task is to collect and disseminate information on Islamic activities throughout the country. Some of the functions of these sections parallel those performed by other units, such as providing advice on *shari'a* and organizing courses on Islamic civilization. An important section monitors the development of Islamic cults and movements. Another screens all printed materials on Islam distributed in Malaysia. Its function parallels that of another unit that controls the licensing of publications of the Qur'an. Although the IC is not a legislative body, its overall function reinforces the government's role as a legitimator of Malaysian Islam.

The Expansion of Islamic Finance

On the economic side, the growth of Islamic financial institutions has been gathering momentum since the late 1970s with the support of the federal government. 14 The Malaysian Pilgrims Management and Funds Board (MPMF), formally established in 1962 as a body for centralizing Muslim savings for the hajj, or pilgrimage, is a semigovernment institution under the prime minister's department. Although it retains its original purpose for pilgrims, MPMF has diversified its investments in equity shares, land, buildings, and estates to such an extent that by the end of 1985 its reserves were worth about M$59 million (Radiah 1991:154). Another institution, the Malaysian Islamic Economic Development Foundation, was established by the prime minister in 1976 as a trust. Its primary purpose is to collect donations, which are invested largely in properties, shares, and securities.

Among these multimillion-dollar institutions, the Islamic Bank, which was established in 1983, with more than 30 percent ownership in the hands of the federal government, has emerged as a dynamic banking alternative in the commercial world. In 1990 it had a paid-up capital of more than M$80 million while grossing a profit in excess of M$13 million (*Star*, 31 December 1990). Even though its total assets amount to less than 1 percent of the total commercial bank assets in Malaysia, the Islamic Bank has demonstrated its potential for gaining good returns as a financial institution (Zakariya 1988). Its subsidiary, the Islamic Insurance Company (Syarikat Takaful Malaysia), has also shown remarkable performance by increasing its assets by 59 percent in the third financial year of its operations (Syed Waseem 1991:206). The performance of the Islamic Bank has recently been evaluated (Rodney Wilson 1995, Wong 1995, Radiah 1995), and the general conclusion is that its potential has yet to be fully realized.

Waqf and *Zakat*

Muslim endowments (*waqf*) and tithes (*zakat*), as essential features of Islamic practice, are administered not by a central government body but by individual state religious councils. Each state organizes its administration of *waqf* and *zakat* differently, and several problems of management have been discussed by Aidit (1991, who writes about *zakat*) and Syed Othman (1991, who discusses *waqf*). Generally these problems concern the streamlining of *zakat* collection and distribution (see Abdul Aziz 1993) and the efficient management of *waqf* properties to develop their financial potential.

In the case of *zakat*, in 1986 the Federal Territory adopted improved methods of administration proposed by the Manpower Planning Unit, and this became a model for other states to follow (Aidit 1991:10910). Furthermore, *zakat* is now levied on corporations and businesses owned by Muslims, and in Horowitz's (1994:292) view, the extension of *zakat* to every form of income and asset is gradually transforming it into a tax system resembling the civil one.

Waqf properties, on the other hand, have income-generating potential that requires more specific expertise for their administration, particularly in view of the rapid economic development of the country. As noted by Syed Othman (1991:13536), efforts to develop and manage *waqf* properties are not consistently followed through by all the states. Only a few states have taken a more active role than others in financing development projects on *waqf* lands.

The Development of Islamic Education

As the morality and economy of the Muslim world become increasingly rationalized, the organization of ideology transmission inevitably undergoes important changes, chief of which is the promotion of Islamic studies in educational institutions.

Islamic education has always been central to the maintenance of Malay-Muslim identity. In Kelantan, Islamic education began as early as the sixteenth century, much of its development centering around a collection of small schools known as *pondok* (Abdullah Alwi 1980). By the early twentieth century a new system of Islamic schools, the *madrasah* system, spread throughout the peninsula. Some *madrasahs* came under the control of the state religious councils, which continue to administer them to this day. *Madrasah* students in the present system are exposed to religious and secular curricula in preparation for state religious and national secular examinations. They tend to pursue higher studies in Islam at local universities or Middle Eastern institutions. Upon graduation, they either become religious teachers (*guru agama*) or pursue careers in the Islamic bureaucracy. In the government-run schools, Muslim students are required to attend religious classes as part of the curriculum, but for them, unlike *madrasah* students, there is less emphasis on pursuing religious careers.

Traditionally, many Muslim students who seek religious careers head for Al-Azhar, the famous Muslim institution of higher learning founded in Cairo in the tenth century. But local alternatives in higher Islamic studies have been available since the 1950s. One of the betterknown colleges of Islamic education is Kolej Islam Malaya (KIM),

which was established in 1955. Located in Klang on grounds donated by the sultan of Selangor, KIM started its teaching program with fiftyfive students under the directorship of Haji Ismail Omar, a religious teacher from Johor, and the assistance of two Egyptian scholars from Al-Azhar. One of these scholars, M. A. Rauf, took over as director of KIM in 1956 and was appointed chairman of the Islamic Studies Department (ISD) at the University of Malaya (UM) in 1959 when KIM was partially amalgamated with UM. While KIM offers diploma-level courses for students intending to become religious teachers, the ISD at UM offers undergraduate and graduate degrees. Rauf recruited several foreign Muslims with British qualifications to teach at UM in both Arabic and English (Rauf 1985).

In recent years, the establishment of the Akademi Islam (AI) at UM has broken the monopoly of higher religious training provided by the ISD. Originally established as the Foundation for Higher Islamic Studies in Nilam Puri, Kelantan, in 1965, AI formally came under UM administration in 1981 (Abdullah Alwi 1980:215). AI conducts a two-year matriculation course in Nilam Puri, after which students are transferred to the UM campus to major in Islamic law or theology. A degree in Islamic education is also offered by AI.

Many graduates of Islamic studies seek careers as religious teachers or in the state religious bureaucracies. Competition for these positions has been intensified by the increasing production of Islamic studies graduates from several universities in Malaysia. This trend suggests that in the future the *shari'a* profession and the Islamic bureaucracy may be expanded to accommodate the rising expectations among the growing body of Islamic studies graduates.

The tight intermeshing of Muslim morality, economy, and education suggests that the contemporary meaning of Malay ethnicity is rationally dictated by organizational structures beyond the control of any individual Muslim. The notion of Islamic orthodoxy is therefore central to the maintenance of Malay ethnicity. Yet the burgeoning impact of the Islamic bureaucracy has not totally obliterated innovative trends and forces growing out of charismatic movements. These sources of Islamic heterodoxy in Malay society are important as possible indicators of the limits of religious rationalization.

Charisma and Heterodoxy

In the religious history of the Middle East, many movements considered heterodox have arisen to challenge the religious orthodoxy of the existing states and social orders. Heterodoxy in the history of Islam not

only is concerned with theological disputes but also suggests a conscious opposition to the theologians who provided legitimation to the various caliphates. Some of these movements overthrew dynasties and established their own orthodoxies (see Lewis 1973).

Many new movements that arose were inspired by charismatic leaders with millenarian tendencies. For example, the Shia, a sect originally made up of followers of Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, believe in the power of the Imam. Some Shia also believe in the power of the Mahdi (or the hidden Imam), whose awaited return provides a continuing source of charismatic appeal. These beliefs differentiate Shiite Islam from Sunni Islam, for as Rahman (1966:173) observes, "the Shia do not recognize the fundamental importance of the Ijma or consensus as does Sunni Islam, and its place is taken by the authority of the Imam." Orthodox Sunnis tend to perceive the Shiite Imamate as socially and politically threatening because it attributes supreme authority to the Imam.

However, Shiite leadership is a field of contention characterized by struggles for charismatic recognition. Competition over succession and assertion of personal power in Shiite Islam has produced many schismatic movements such as the Ismaili, Qaramita, Nusayri, Druze, and so on (Rahman 1966:17580). On the other hand, Sunni Islam does not have this built-in tendency toward sectarianization because it lacks a doctrine of the Imamate and a distinct clerical structure. Sunni Islam, with its well-developed legalism, maintains in varying degrees a separation of political and religious authority (Gibb 1975:74, 83), but historically it is the Sunni state that has invariably directed and controlled the actions of the *ulama* (Rahman 1966:151, Turner 1974:11517).

Malaysian Islam, with its overwhelmingly Sunni orientation, does not face any immediate challenge from Shia sympathizers, whose visibility remains low. 15 The range of activities that are considered immediately inimical to Sunni orthodoxy are therefore not closely identified with Shiite causes but rather associated with practices and teachings that in the eyes of the establishment *ulama* are wayward, superstitious, and impure. These activities provide in a sense nonrational alternatives to a rapidly rationalizing Sunni establishment. In other words, the followers of these movements may wittingly or unwittingly expose the limits of Sunni orthodoxy, thereby questioning the bases of its authority.

Sufism, *Tarekats*, and Cults

As described earlier, the pre-Islamic Malay world was rich in magical beliefs, which made it highly receptive to Sufi mystical ideas. By the time Sufism arrived on the peninsula, it had already developed a clear

line of organized authority (cf. Rahman 1966:137). When medieval Sufism and its authority structure were grafted onto Malay society, they were unlikely to have been alien because Malay prebendalism provided a conducive environment for the establishment of Sufi orders (*tarekat*) centering on the personal power of a *shakyh*.

Thus the introduction of organized Sufism promoted different forms of mystical movements that blended well with the political authority of individual rulers. The relationship between Sufi *shakyhs* and sultans in early Malaysian Islam appears to have been bonded by the attraction of the latter to the mystics' charismatic authority. Johns (1961:16) reports that some *shakyhs* "were able to marry the daughters of Indonesian nobility, and thus give their children the prestige of royal blood, in addition to the divine aura of religious charisma." Sufism thus not only was well received but also became integrated with royal authority. Even as recently as the 1950s, many followers of these *shakyhs* were members of the *ulama* and Malay aristocracy. For example, Al-Attas (1963:3335) cites the case of the *shakyh* of the Ahmadiyah order who claimed among his followers the grand muftis of Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Kelantan, and the first Yang Dipertuan Agong. Another *shakyh* he cites belonged to the Naqshbandiyah order and had once been the chief *kadi* of Johor. 16 However, not all present-day *shakyhs* can claim such prestigious connections. Many of them are poor men with largely rural followings (Al-Attas 1963:52, 57).

The position of Sufism in the history of Islam has been further influenced by the legal scholasticism of al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiya during the medieval period. Two streams of Sufism eventually emerged, one associated with orthodox activism and the other with ecstatic rituals (Rahman 1966:195). The moral activism of the former tended to encourage a more open acknowledgment of the importance of *shari'a* and the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*).

The *shakyhs* of orthodox Sufi orders in Malaysia usually do not prescribe the abandonment of *shari'a* (Al-Attas 1963:36). On the other hand, Malaysian Sufi groups that have become targets of government campaigns tend to be associated with ecstatic movements catering to the needs of the masses. Because of their heterodox teachings, many such groups are not regarded by the establishment as genuine *tarekats*, as in the case of Taslim reported by Al-Attas (1963:chapter 8). From its obscure beginnings in Johor in 1946, Taslim was pursued by state religious authorities until it found sanctuary in Penang in 1948. Taslim typifies Sufi cults perceived to be un-Islamic, especially in its secret initiation ceremony, orgiastic rituals, oath of loyalty to the leader, rejection of the Qu'ran and the requirement of five daily prayers, and subscription to a modified monistic doctrine.

In a document prepared by the government, forty-four *tarekats* observed by state authorities between 1971 and 1990 were listed as having contravened the Islamic faith in their teachings and practices. 17 These *tarekats* are generally characterized by a charismatic leadership, secret rituals, and monistic doctrines. The ritualized litany (*zikir*) of *tarekat* members is frowned upon by religious authorities as unhealthy. The secrecy accompanying these ceremonies and the transmission of esoteric teachings have become the sine qua non of heretical labeling. This negative reaction to secret rituals and teachings is reminiscent of Islam's early struggles against the secret teachings of the Gnostics and Manichaeans (see Rahman 1966:88, 99).

The monistic doctrines of some *tarekats*, emphasizing divine omnipresence or immanence in each individual, are condemned by orthodox Sunnis as heretical because monism tends to be associated with the rejection of various Muslim obligations that are vital to the maintenance of Malay identity, such as the five daily prayers, Friday congregation, pilgrimage to Mecca, *zakat*, and fasting during Ramadan.

Unlike the case in the medieval period, when heresy was punishable by death, membership in banned *tarekats* under present-day Malaysian *shari'a* is punishable by a small fine, a short jail sentence, and an order to recant. These punishments are not uniformly implemented in all states since the decentralized nature of Malaysian *shari'a* allows much discretionary judgment among *kadis* meting out penalties to offenders. Some *tarekats* have been declared *haram* (forbidden) by the National Fatwa Committee, but no further punitive action has been taken against them. Generally there is a reluctance by the government to take harsh disciplinary measures against the *tarekats* for fear of inadvertently encouraging the fugitive sect members to assume the status of persecuted martyrs, thus possibly increasing the level of fanaticism and violence in religious conflict. Unless *tarekats* become explicit threats to national security, the general strategy adopted by the authorities appears to be an application of persuasive methods to reform the heretics and, at most, a nominal punishment.

Aside from *tarekats*, there are many devotees of saint cults that tend to be associated with the power of grave shrines (*keramat*). Many graves and legendary sites where saints have performed miracles or participated in significant events are found throughout Malaysia. Until recently, these shrines attracted numerous Muslims and non-Muslims whose belief in *keramat* kept alive many legends of Muslim saints on the peninsula. In the mid-1980s the religious authorities made many efforts to discourage Muslims from visiting these grave shrines. For example, in 1987 the Melaka state religious authorities placed fences

around the grave shrines on the island of Pulau Besar, renowned for its powerful shrines and legendary saints. Some of these shrines were demolished, but they were later rebuilt by devotees (*Star*, 22 July 1987). In 1990, however, a team led by the chief minister of Melaka landed on the island and swiftly destroyed several of the rebuilt shrines (*Star*, 19 February 1990).

The Case of Darul Arqam

The tension between Sunni orthodoxy and unauthorized millenarianism has predisposed some *tarekats* to maintain a chameleonlike identity to impress the religious authorities with their efforts to lead purer Muslim lives but at the same time conceal their heterodox beliefs. An example of such a movement is Darul Arqam, known alternatively as Aurad Muhammadiah. It was founded in the late 1960s by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, and its activities as a *dakwah* reform movement have been described by Nagata (1984:10416) and Hussin (1990: 8589).

Generally the public image of Darul Arqam in the 1970s was that of an exclusive, dedicated, and self-sufficient Islamic movement. Its members, many of whom were middle-class Malay professionals, dressed exclusively in turbans; long, flowing robes; and, for women, loose clothing covering the entire body. The movement managed several agricultural and horticultural projects in five states. It operated a number of small factories manufacturing a variety of consumer products, and a medical clinic that used traditional as well as Western modes of treatment. A network of several schools provided Islamic education to members' children.

Ideologically, the members believed in a strong *umma*, economic independence, and faithful adherence to Islamic principles. In many ways they did not seem to differ radically from other Muslim participants in the *dakwah* revival of the 1970s. However, concealed from the public was the sect's belief in the imminent appearance of the Mahdi. 18 Although this belief was not widely circulated, it nevertheless created tension between Ustaz Ashaari and some followers. This resulted in a split in 1979. But in 1986 Ustaz Ashaari, confident that his movement was firmly established, published a book announcing his belief in the Mahdi. This book was banned immediately by the government, although no punitive action was taken against him and his followers.

Ustaz Ashaari's belief in the Mahdi centers on the person of Sheikh Muhammad Suhaimi, who died in 1925 in Klang. His death, according to Ustaz Ashaari, was merely illusory, for the sheikh is believed to be

alive, living in a forest in Java, awaiting the right moment to appear as the Mahdi. Proof of the sheikh's Mahdihood is claimed to be documented in a book possessed by the sheikh's grandson.

According to this book, the sheikh had personally received instructions from Prophet Muhammad when he was on a pilgrimage in Mecca. On his return to Malaysia he founded the movement, Aurad Muhammadiah. Ustaz Ashaari claims that the sheikh selected him to continue the tradition of Aurad Muhammadiah and to prepare for his coming as the Mahdi. The advent of Sheikh Suhaimi as the Mahdi was predicted to occur in 1988, but when this prophecy failed, Ustaz Ashaari explained it as a postponement of the millennium to 1994 because his followers were still spiritually weak. By 1989 several top-ranking members had departed from the movement after disagreeing with the leader. In 1991 the government set up a committee to investigate and take action against Darul Arqam, as it perceived the movement's activities were directly challenging its authority (*Star*, 30 November 1991).

Three years later, in August 1994, the National Fatwa Council declared that the Arqam movement was unlawful, and its members were told to disband. Ustaz Ashaari, who was living in Thailand at that time, was deported and subsequently detained, along with his wife and aides, by the Malaysian authorities under the Internal Security Act. In late October 1994, Ashaari and his aides publicly confessed that they had deviated from Islamic teachings and had repented. Not long after that, Ashaari was freed, but under the condition of restricted residence (*New Straits Times*, 21 October6 November 1994).

The reformist image of Darul Arqam was successfully cultivated for many years, but its millenarian beliefs could not be concealed indefinitely. This alternation between secrecy and disclosure of millenarian intent provides an important understanding of the nature of Islamic charisma. The idea of a Mahdi who is invisible (*ghaib*) or in hiding conveys a sense of unseen power building to a climatic moment to burst forth in the deliverance of a millenarian promise. Nowhere in the Qur'an is the Mahdi explicitly mentioned except in the numerous Hadith (documented apostolic traditions) compiled over the centuries. Yet the two Hadith compilations regarded as most authentic (*sahih*), Riwayat al-Bukhari and Riwayat Muslim, make no distinct references to the Mahdi. But its numerous references in other Hadith compilations have provided some scholars the occasion to grant them *mutawatir* statusthat is, acceptance as documented traditions with "so many different chains of transmitters that errors in and fabrication of the texts are felt to be virtually impossible" (Juynboll 1969:11). Thus the ambi-

guity of the Islamic world toward Mahdism constrains the formation of a millenarian consensus. The secrecy derived from this ambiguity feeds the charisma of the unseen savior, whose status remains enigmatic.

On the other hand, the public disclosure of the Mahdi's advent propels the belief into an arena of intense debate. For the orthodox Sunni, such a public claim not only threatens their legitimacy but also hastens expectations of impending turmoil. In this context of doubt, fear, and hope, charisma becomes a necessary condition for the maintenance of religious discourse. To deny the Mahdihood of Sheikh Suhaimi, the religious authorities censured Ustaz Ashaari's claims by banning his book. This probably increased the vigilance of Darul Arqam members, who reorganized the movement (see Muhammad Syukri 1992:27578). Through the interplay of accusations and counteraccusations, the issue of the Mahdi was kept alive, and the charismatic sources of social change remained significant. However, the detention of Ustaz Ashaari and the government crackdown on the Arqam movement in 1994 demonstrated publicly the extent to which state power can effectively curtail the expressions of charisma. This episode does not necessarily suggest that charismatic beliefs in the Mahdi are irreversibly crushed; it implies rather that they may continue to function underground in greater secrecy.

The Anti-Hadith Movement

The Hadith, or documents of the apostolic tradition, six of which are regarded as authoritative sources of Islamic belief and practice in addition to the Qu'ran, have over the centuries been defined as legitimators of Muslim conduct, but their infallibility has not always been unequivocally accepted (Rahman 1966:5863, Juynboll 1969:3839).

In early Islam, the Mutazila questioned the reliability of the Hadith, which they claimed were susceptible to human error in their transmission. The acceptability of the Hadith as a source of Islamic conduct continues to generate controversies. In the 1970s an anti-Hadith movement based in Arizona and led by Rashad Khalifah 19 attracted the attention of several Malays, among whom was Kassim Ahmad, the former secretary general of the Malaysian Socialist Party. Allegedly influenced by the writings of Rashad Khalifah, Kassim Ahmad began organizing his thoughts on the Hadith and committing them to print in 1986 in a controversial book entitled *Hadis Satu Penilaian Semula* (Hadith: A Reevaluation)

Arguing that the Qu'ran is complete, authoritative, and transmitted directly from Allah, Kassim Ahmad sees no other text as necessary for

religious guidance. In his opinion, the Hadith as a product of human senses and experiences lack revelational validity and should not be treated as a theological and legal source. Furthermore, he asserts that the Hadith comprise unverifiable teachings that have contributed to Muslim disunity. This disunity occurred because, from the beginning of the Umayyad caliphate to about 800 C.E., the Hadith had been allegedly compiled and documented for political purposes.

Many of these arguments were derived from scholarly sources, but Kassim Ahmad's intention was to use them to authenticate his polemic against the erosion of knowledge and creativity in Muslim society. In his view, the contradictions between the Qu'ran and Hadith, between different Hadith, and between Hadith and science posed serious problems to the advancement of Islamic epistemology. What has made his book highly controversial is his direct criticism of al-Shaf'i's claim that the Hadith are, as a body, internally consistent and do not contradict the Qur'an. His recommendation is to return to the Qur'an and to use it as the sole source of theological and legal formulations. He believes that two to three generations from now, Muslim reformists will seek rapprochement with Western theism and move toward a better understanding of the Qur'an.

Even before his book was published, Kassim Ahmad's views on the Hadith had aroused much antipathy from the *ulama* and religious authorities. His public lectures on the Hadith, scheduled in late 1985, were eventually canceled by the Islamic religious council of Selangor because the authorities did not consider him a religious expert and regarded his views as detrimental to Muslim unity (Sharifah Zaleha 1989:6365). His book was banned by the Ministry of Home Affairs three weeks after its publication in 1986, although he has not been officially declared an apostate (*Star*, 5 January 1991).

In 1988 a booklet written by M. A. Rauf entitled "Irrationality of the Anti-Hadith Heretics" appeared as a defense of the Hadith tradition. This author reasserted the authority of the Hadith on the basis of the integrity of many compilers. He argued that without the Hadith many Qur'anic passages are mere riddles; thus he implied that the Hadith provided essential notes for interpreting the Qur'an. He concluded that those who reject the Hadith are inevitably anti-anti-Qur'anic in religious orientation.

Kassim Ahmad created further controversies in 1995 when he attempted to form a group called Jemaah al-Qur'an Malaysia, which the Islamic Center alleged was linked to the anti-Hadith movement. While Kassim claimed that he had been denied the opportunity to explain his position, muftis throughout the country made a joint statement that an

anti-Hadith view of Islam was equivalent to *murtad*, or an act of apostasy (*Sun*, 8 August 1995, 11 August 1995, 7 September 1995).

The above descriptions of Islamic heterodoxy suggest that the charisma generated by various sects and movements cannot easily be coopted by the government because it is individualized among sect leaders and deceased saints. It is this charisma that is perceived as dangerous because it cannot easily be manipulated by the religious authorities. However, the anti-Hadith movement lacks charisma because it draws strength not so much from particular individuals but from rational arguments that are susceptible to counterarguments. The threat posed by the anti-Hadith movement does not revolve around unbridled charisma but centers on explicit criticisms of the sources of Islamic conduct.

The Fate of Malay-Muslim Identity

In the 1970s and 1980s, the New Economic Policy defined Malay identity. The NEP was not religious in content, but it created an economic and political context that accelerated the rationalization of Islam. This direction of religious development under the aegis of Malay socioeconomic expansionism increased change in two spheres: the Islamic judicial system and Malay cultural values.

The two decades of development under the NEP produced a complex array of power networks within and without the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), consolidating its role as the prime mover of all major economic and political events in Malaysia. Despite various economic and political upheavals of the 1980s, the UMNO wields influence on a greater scale than in the pre-NEP era because it used the NEP successfully to penetrate all major sectors of the economy (see Gomez 1990). The growth of UMNO power characterizes the emergence of a modern Malay polity with significant linkages to non-Malay interest groups and international markets. It is the establishment of a modern polity that provides an understanding of the increasing importance of the *shari'a* courts.

Shari'a during the colonial period and immediately after independence did not possess the relatively elevated status that it now aspires to gain. Neither was there a concerted effort among the *ulama* to strive for a more visible and influential legal system based on Islamic principles. The rather unassuming nature of *shari'a* may be attributed to the overwhelming presence of the civil legal system under British colonial hegemony. Under this hegemony, Malay bureaucrats were trained to manage a modern administrative system that took precedence over

traditional systems of authority. *Shari'a* was confined to specific aspects of Malay social relations that generally did not impinge on the broader policies of the colonial administration. After 1970 the Islamic judiciary made greater efforts to upgrade and strengthen the administration of *shari'a*, coinciding with changes connected to the implementation of the NEP

Generally, the NEP created a wide range of opportunities for different sections of the Malay community. It justified socioeconomic acquisitiveness on the grounds of redressing ethnic imbalances in the economy, thereby enhancing Malay consciousness of greater economic control through a system of special privileges. This system was not shared by the Chinese and Indians, although their economic relations with the Malays were not severed. In the context of these developments, the emergence of Malay entrepreneurship not only uplifted the prestige of a once economically backward community but also provided the conditions for continuing distinctions between ethnic groups.

Shari'a distinguishes the Malays legally from the majority of nonMalays, who as non-Muslims are bound only by the tenets of the civil legal system based on English common law. Yet *shari'a* has less prestige and is administratively less developed than the civil legal system. The era of the NEP therefore provided the context for building Malay entrepreneurship as well as the prestige of *shari'a*. However, this prestige could be gained only through a more efficient and integrated system of courts manned by well-trained and experienced *kadis*. As described earlier, several universities in Malaysia are rapidly producing graduates in *shari'a*, thus increasing its visibility and the rigor of professional training in a field that is no longer taken for granted by Muslims.

If *shari'a* comprises the ascending legal component of Malay identity, it is inevitable that its cultural corollary will be subjected to intense debate and normative speculation. Malay cultural values have always been in the center of the debate over religion and development, especially on the question of Islamic values in capitalist development (see Shaharuddin 1988). The old issues concerning the cultivation of rationalist worldviews and economic individualism, which preoccupied the minds of Malay social reformists of the 1920s and 1930s, have been raised again in response to the moral significance of the NEE The NEP has undoubtedly promoted rationalist values that the Malays have been striving to achieve in their struggle to adopt a mantle of modernity. It was perceived as the principal instrument for putting them on a par with the more economically and socially advanced groups. Their entry into modern markets and their eagerness to industrialize have become important determinants in the reorganization of cultural attitudes.

The rationality and individualism that are concomitant with industrial growth have not hampered the effort to construct an encompassing *shari'a* system. Muslim intellectuals and bureaucrats have not flatly dismissed those values as antagonistic to Islam; rather they see in them some compatibility with the religious drive to establish an effective *shari'a* system (see Sharifah Zaleha 1990). The NEP became the vehicle for inculcating those values that were a sine qua non for the systematization of *shari'a*, but at the same time, it fostered economic aspirations that conflicted with the puritan ethos of the traditional *ulama* who criticized the large-scale importation of Western values.

It is this conflict between what Schluchter (1979:1415) has termed scientific-technological rationalism and metaphysical-ethical rationalism that provides an important perspective on the *dakwah* movement of the 1970s. *Dakwah* as an urban, middle-class phenomenon reflected the tensions created by a hurried drive to achieve technological mastery in a society that was still struggling with the meaning of ethical reform in Islam. What *dakwah* achieved was symbolic: it gave the Malay bourgeoisie a sense of moral identity without actually resolving the contradictions between technological and ethical rationalisms.

In many ways, Malaysian *dakwah* resembled a type of neofundamentalism responding to foreign influences and pressures (see Rahman 1981). The NEP provided an impetus to the gradual development of an Islamic Protestant ethic. It was anticipated that under the NEP, a new rationalized Malay identity would emerge to vanquish once and for all the stereotype of the backward, lazy native. However, the short contact with Western technology nipped modernism in the bud to produce a highly charged reaction to the West in the form of *dakwah*. But this renewed Islamic spirit did not develop in total isolation from Western influences. For the exponents of *dakwah*, many of whom had been trained in the West (Nagata 1984, Zainah 1987), were consciously or unconsciously dependent on the methods of Western positivism to direct criticism against all things outside Islam. For example, their idea of a decadent culture in the West was based on a highly objectivized notion of culture that could not have been produced by an internal, hermeneutical critique.

Dakwah was finally coopted by the government, which successfully rationalized Islamic piety in terms of organization and ideology. In other words, religious symbols were employed in the service of political legitimation. At the same time, the religious functionaries attempted to nurture this piety within the context of building an ethical system articulated as a well-organized and integrated *shari'a*. Secular politicians and religious functionaries are similarly opposed to all forms of Islamic heterodoxy. However, they tend to diverge on the

question of the future of Malay cultural values. For the secularists, Islamic ethical rationalism must be carefully tailored to the technological rationalism of the state without causing any extreme imbalances. For the religious functionaries, *ulama*, and traditionalists, all cultural values must be rooted first and foremost in the ethical underpinnings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Unless both sides arrive at a compromise to lessen the conflict between ethical and technological rationalisms, the question of Malay cultural values will remain problematic and the outcome will be determined by the amount of political influence wielded by different groups on both sides of the divide.

Chapter Four
In Search of Nirvana:
Reformism and Charisma in Buddhist Revitalization

Buddhist revitalization is occurring within a context in which Chinese popular religion and mysticism coexist with Buddhism and are not clearly distinct from it. Many Chinese who identify themselves as Buddhist are also practitioners of popular shamanic religion. Relations between these syncretic Buddhists and their deities are pervaded by a world image described by Weber (1951:200) as a "magic garden" where man, nature, and divinity form a unified cosmos. Even in the modern disenchanted world of capitalist enterprise and technology, the magical cosmos of Chinese religion continues to thrive as a compelling reality for the majority of its practitioners.

The coexistence of an enchanted world alongside practical rationalism associated with capitalist development has given rise to an implicitly dualistic worldview. Science and rational economic organization have provided alternative forms of meaning to the magical cosmos. What had been unreflective participation in a unified cosmos has become increasingly self-conscious, thus generating tensions within the monistic worldview itself. It is in the juxtaposition of enchanted and disenchanted worlds that we find the emergence of two distinctive directions of religious development among Chinese Buddhists. First, a mysticism that is highly self-conscious about the use of concepts and practices condemned by educated elites as primitive is taking root among syncretic Buddhists. This mysticism can best be described as a modern magical conduit facilitating ideological elaboration that attempts to align the enchanted and disenchanted worlds.

Second, a growing awareness and interest in Buddhist doctrine among younger, well-educated Buddhists is also spreading to syncretic

Buddhists who are immersed in Chinese mystical traditions. Doctrinally oriented Buddhist revitalization involves appropriation of techniques and forms of organization associated with the capitalist economy. Rational organization and transmission of charisma interact in Malaysian Buddhist revitalization and develop in relation to cultural and social differences within the Chinese community. To understand this interaction, we need to describe the structure of the Malaysian Chinese community with its distinctive Buddhist constituencies, from which multiple religious paths have emerged.

Chinese Cultural Complexity in Malaysia

The Chinese who migrated to colonial Malaya from the maritime provinces of south China, especially Guangdong and Fujian, were a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous group of people. Although they shared a common written language, they spoke mutually unintelligible dialects and represented distinctive subcultures. This linguistic and cultural diversity was reflected in occupational and community organization among Chinese immigrants. The broader scope for economic opportunity, social mobility, and English education in colonial Malaya greatly increased the fluidity of Chinese identity. Under such conditions, the economic and cultural lines of cleavage among Chinese immigrants multiplied.

Mass Chinese migration to Malaya after 1800 took place under the auspices of British capital and administration. British commercial development, particularly in tin mining, stimulated migration of Chinese entrepreneurs and laborers (Purcell 1967:194208). These immigrants played a dynamic part in commodity production for the world market and in the making of the colonial capitalist economy that became the foundation of modern Malaysia. As the tin industry became more mechanized and less labor intensive, Chinese immigrants found other economic roles. Limited access to land and alternative wage employment motivated many Chinese to turn to self-employment as small-scale producers, traders, and fishermen. These enterprises were often organized along kinship lines. Through kinship and other ties, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs often obtained sponsorship from bigger Chinese merchants to become agents in areas remote from commercial centers.

Organizational resources brought from China furthered the economic interests of entrepreneurs and the Chinese community in Malaya as a whole. Two types of traditional organizationthe secret society and the voluntary association (*hui guan*)dominated Chinese

community life (see Heng 1983, 1988). The British colonial administration banned secret societies in 1889 as they were often implicated in criminal activities and political disorder. Voluntary associations of all kinds then became the most common form of community organization.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Chinese established modern political organizations in response to new pressures that exceeded the traditional voluntary associations' capacity for action in the public arena (Heng 1983, 1988). The nationalist movement in China exerted strong influence on the overseas Chinese, especially those residing in Malaya. Political organizers from China were active in setting up Kuomintang lodges and Communist cells in Malaya. The Kuomintang Malaya (KMTM), established in 1912, and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), officially launched in 1930, were the foremost expressions of the China-oriented political culture that predominated among the Chinese in Malaya until after World War II. Another modern organization, the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), formed in 1900 in Singapore and Melaka and in 1920 in Penang, represented an entirely different political culture, which was English-oriented and elitist in outlook. 1

The English-speaking section of the Chinese community increased in size and influence after World War II, when English education became more widely available and Malaya moved toward independence. The superior economic prospects of the English-speaking Chinese in the expanding postwar economy enhanced their prestige. English-speaking Chinese professionals became a significant reference group. The model of Chinese identity they represented strongly attracted upwardly mobile Chinese. By the 1960s a growing proportion of Malaysian Chinese favored English over Chinese education, and Chinese schools faced declining enrollments (Liok Ee Tan 1992:193).

The postwar trend toward Anglicization was arrested after the 1969 ethnic riots. The assertion of Malay hegemony following the riots signaled the decline of English-medium education. The Malay language was declared the sole medium of secondary and tertiary education in government institutions. However, vernacular primary school education in Chinese and Tamil was maintained within the framework of a Malay-dominated educational system.

Malay education was oriented toward civil service employment, which offered few opportunities for the Chinese. On the other hand, Chinese education fitted students for entrepreneurship or employment in small- and medium-scale firms in the Chinese-dominated private sector of the economy. In response to these considerations, the enrollment trends in Chinese schools in the 1960s were reversed in the 1970s.

Resinification during the 1970s and 1980s generated new forms of Chinese identity, as described by Chee Beng Tan (1988a). These forms of identity, based on linguistic and cultural orientation, emerged from permutations of languages of education and languages of socialization. Chinese socialization is distinguished by the use of English, Malay, or Chinese dialects at home. Partial or complete education in English, Malay, or Mandarin, combined with language of socialization, has produced a highly fragmenting linguistic and cultural complexity among Malaysian Chinese. Although Malaysian Chinese who were educated in the 1980s are proficient in Malay, their primary linguistic orientation is either English or Mandarin. Except for the Baba or Peranakan Chinese, for whom Malay is a first language (Chee Beng Tan 1988b), the majority of the Chinese do not use Malay as a language of communication among themselves.

Linguistic orientation among Malaysian Chinese is accompanied by corresponding cultural commitments. Chinese who prefer to communicate in Mandarin and other Chinese dialects differ from English-speaking Chinese with respect to values, worldviews, and mass media exposure (Chee Beng Tan 1988a:14748). Through access to Chinese writings, Chinese speakers become knowledgeable about philosophy, painting, music, and other aspects of Chinese elite culture. English-speaking Chinese, on the other hand, are more familiar with Western literature and cultural forms.

Despite these linguistic and cultural divisions, both the Chinese-speaking and English-speaking Malaysian Chinese are aware that they share a common destiny as non-Malays and non-Muslims in a Malay-dominated nation. As more than 90 percent of the Chinese identify themselves as Buddhist, they have a sense of belonging to a vague but common religious community.

Awareness of Buddhism as a significant component of Chinese identity has grown steadily since the early 1970s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, following the implementation of the NEP, large numbers of Malaysian Chinese migrated to the West, lured by the hope of better educational and employment opportunities for their children. The possibility of migration to English-speaking countries has shaped the consciousness of Malaysian Chinese in important ways, one of which is that they have become international rather than national in outlook. Through their overseas social networks, the Chinese have become aware of the popularity of Buddhism and meditation among Westerners. Malaysian Chinese Buddhists have also learned about the differences between Asian and Western approaches to the practice of Buddhism. Those who have traveled to Western countries and visited their

Buddhist centers have discovered that meditation and intellectual study are the focus of Western Buddhism, whereas in Asia devotional practices predominate. Some Malaysian Buddhists now feel the need to visit Western Buddhist centers for higher levels of teaching and also to discover ways to upgrade local Buddhist practice.

The globalization of consciousness and identity among Malaysian Chinese is facilitated by the complexity of Chinese culture. Buddhist organizations in Malaysia reflect the differentiation that has occurred within Chinese society and culture. These organizations tend to be linguistically distinct, catering to Chinese who speak Mandarin and/or local Chinese dialects or to English-speaking Chinese. Irrespective of linguistic orientation, Malaysian Buddhist organizations are eager to invite Buddhist speakers from abroad to give public lectures. The high international profile of Buddhism is a source of prestige and pride for both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking Buddhists.

Increasing interest in Buddhism is accompanied by moves to transform nominal Buddhists, who comprise the majority of the Chinese community, into knowledgeable and committed Buddhists. This revitalization process especially involves education and organization. The mobilization of the Buddhist laity to create a well-defined Buddhist identity is an important aspect of the growth of Buddhist reformism in Malaysia.

Buddhist Organization and Reformism

The introduction of Buddhism to the Malay peninsula during the first five centuries C.E. is closely associated with Indianization and early state formation. Precolonial Buddhism reflected the interests and patronage of the royal courts, which adopted Indian religious ritual, aesthetic forms, and statecraft (see Wheatley 1961, 1964). From the late twelfth century through the fifteenth century, Islam spread gradually through the Indonesian archipelago, and by the end of the fifteenth century the Malay rulers of the Indianized maritime trading states had all converted to Islam.

Buddhism reappeared on the peninsula with the influx of immigrant Chinese laborers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Chinese immigrants were eclectically engaged in diverse religious practices drawn from Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and folk traditions that included divination and spirit mediumship (see Elliott 1955). Unlike the Hindu-Buddhist cults adopted by the Malay rulers of the Indianized states, modern Buddhism developed without state patronage. As a result, state regulation of doctrinal matters, monastic discipline,

and practice is absent. In its practices, modern Malaysian Buddhism tends to be heterogeneous. However, sectarian differences are of little consequence to many nominal Buddhists who attend temples mainly to fulfill traditional obligations or individual needs. Besides, the majority of Buddhist temples do not emphasize the teaching of Buddhist doctrine.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the emergence of a Chinese middle class began to strongly influence the course of reformation and innovation in Buddhism to meet the changing needs of the Chinese community. The reformist impulse to mobilize the laity to study Buddhist doctrines and texts took concrete form when the Penang Buddhist Association (PBA) was officially organized in 1925. A group of Buddhist laymen decided that a study and research association was needed to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about Buddhist teachings. The organization also sought to provide rational understanding and demystification of Buddhist teachings. To this end, it criticized the folk practices prevalent at local temples and insisted that Chinese customs be clearly distinguished from canonical Buddhism (Liow 1989:76).

The PBA's activities were by no means confined to intellectual pursuits. Much energy was directed toward fund-raising, land acquisition, construction of buildings, and welfare work. By 1939 it had accumulated sufficient wealth and property to fund an impressive range of philanthropic activities. In terms of innovation, PBA produced its own marriage rite (which was later discontinued) and encouraged hymn singing. These two activities represented PBA's effort to take on social functions similar to those of Christian churches, which enjoyed much prestige in colonial Malaya (Liow 1989:7678).

Although PBA is Mahayana in orientation, its commitment to reformism predisposed it toward ecumenism and nonsectarianism. 2 In this respect the character of PBA's reformism differs from the sectarian stance of Sinhalese Theravada reformism described by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:20240). The attitudes of Sinhalese monks toward Mahayana Buddhism have been gradually modified in Malaysia. For example, some Sinhalese Theravada temples in Malaysia have incorporated Mahayana elements such as Kuan Yin images. Similarly, Thai Theravada temples in Malaysia readily adopt Mahayana elements to accommodate Chinese devotees.3 On the other hand, Theravada organizations oriented to Myanmar (formerly Burma) tend to be more exclusive in serving devotees seeking instruction in *vipassana* (insight) meditation.

While temple-centered Buddhism predominated during the prewar period, lay-oriented associational Buddhism initiated by the PBA was a definitive trend from the 1950s onward. In the postwar period, as Malaya prepared for independence, the Chinese came to regard themselves as a permanently domiciled community. Voluntary associations became even more important to the local Chinese. Lay Buddhist associations increased markedly, and reformist monks were active in teaching and publishing for the laity. The two most influential reformist monks arrived in Malaya in the early 1950s. Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda, a Sinhalese monk, won a devoted following among English-speaking Buddhists through his commitment to Buddhist education. Ven. Zhu Mo, a reformist monk from China and a direct disciple of Dharma Master T'ai Hsua well-known Buddhist reformer in China whose career has been described in detail by Welch (1967)played a central role in promoting textual study and meditation among the Chinese-educated laity (Ng 1990:20, 2728).

Ven. Dhammananda arrived in Malaya from Sri Lanka in 1952 to work as a missionary and to serve as the chief monk of a Sinhalese Buddhist temple (the Brickfields Vihara) in Kuala Lumpur. Initially his work focused on the rural Chinese. Later it shifted to the urban middleclass Chinese. Not only did he lecture regularly to Chinese audiences at the Mahayana-based Hoeh Beng Temple in Kuala Lumpur, but he also became one of its trustees. In the 1960s, Ven. Dhammananda devoted himself to missionary work among well-educated English-speaking Chinese. Having obtained an M.A. degree in Indian philosophy from Benares Hindu University in 1949, he was admirably qualified for this mission and easily earned the respect of many middle-class Chinese professionals. His success in attracting a large Chinese following dramatically changed the ethnic character of the Brickfields Vihara. The Sinhalese-based Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, which controls the temple, agreed to share the premises with the Buddhist Missionary Society (BMS), founded by Ven. Dhammananda in 1961 and comprising mainly English-speaking Chinese (Ng 1990).

As an organization devoted to the study and propagation of Buddhism, the BMS has been active in disseminating Buddhist teachings mainly to urban Chinese in the Klang Valley. It has expended much effort in communicating a rational understanding of Buddhism to its members through correspondence courses and publications. Buddhist correspondence courses in English were started in 1967, and by 1989 more than two thousand people had taken them. A Malay version was offered in 1989 for the benefit of the younger generation of Buddhists,

who were mainly educated in Malay and lacked proficiency in English (Ng 1990:5859).

Like that of Ven. Dhammananda, Ven. Zhu Mo's contribution to Buddhist reformism was organizational and educational. He worked to organize the Mahayana Buddhist temples and associations throughout Malaysia under an umbrella group known as the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA), serving as its president from 1959 until 1972. In 1970 he founded the Malaysian Buddhist Institute in Penang, which offers training in the study of Mahayana sutras in Chinese through lectures and correspondence courses. He has popularized awareness of canonical Mahayana Buddhism through his writings, which often appear in Chinese magazines and newspapers. As an exponent of Chinese high culture, he has won worldwide acclaim for this attainments in poetry, painting, and calligraphy (Ng 1990:2023).

From the 1950s to 1980, a new Buddhist youth constituency emerged that utilized English as its medium of religious instruction. The PBA Youth Circle, founded in 1955 by an American Buddhist monk, Ven. Dr. Sumangalo, was the first effort to organize Buddhist youths. By 1958 Buddhist youth groups joined together as the Malaya Buddhist Youth Fellowship (MBYF), but it disintegrated after 1965 (Ng 1990:4244). In the 1960s the Buddhist youth movement received an infusion of inspiration from Ven. Ananda Mangala, who came from Sri Lanka. After becoming the resident monk at Seck Kia Eenh Temple (the Melaka Buddhist Association) in 1963, he energetically promoted a vision of Buddhism revitalized by the systematic organization and mobilization of youths. The Buddhist Youth Seminar and Workcamp, which he organized in 1963, provided a model for other monks who later became involved with the youth movement (Ng 1990:29). Ven. Ananda Mangala's work was evidenced in the establishment of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM) in 1970. The founders, who represented seventeen Buddhist youth groups, decided to replace the defunct MBYF with a more serious organization devoted to doctrinal and leadership training. It was during this period that Islamic resurgence and Christian evangelism received much public attention and increased the apprehension of Buddhist youths. There were efforts to intensify Buddhist education and training in meditation for the laity. The Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Center (MBMC), established in Penang in 1968, and the monks and lay teachers trained there played a significant role in introducing *vipassana* meditation to university students and young professionals in the 1970s and 1980s.

The popularity of meditation among campus Buddhists became evident in the mid-1980s. Santisukarama, a meditation retreat in Johor,

founded by Ven. Sujivo (a local Chinese monk trained in *vipassana* meditation) in 1982, has attracted many university students to its program. In 1982 only 4 people came to Ven. Sujivo's hermitage, but by 1990 about 750 had participated in his program of meditation. 4 Those who had benefited from this training set up a center in suburban Petaling Jaya in the Klang Valley to continue practicing *vipassana* meditation during weekends and holidays. The increasing interest in *vipassana* meditation among lay Buddhists has led to the establishment of another center in Petaling Jaya, the Selangor Vipassana Meditation Center (SVMC), which caters to beginners as well as to advanced meditators. Those who have never attended a meditation retreat can receive basic instructions at SVMC that are structured and paced for people with heavy domestic and professional commitments.

In the 1970s, when few university students ventured into meditation, the teachers were laymen whose knowledge and experience of Buddhist meditation were limited. But in less than a decade, the MBMC-trained teachers' capacity to offer advanced meditation instruction changed the level of interest in and understanding of Buddhism, particularly among English-speaking Chinese. However, Mandarinspeaking Chinese youths have not been excluded from this increasing trend toward meditative practices. They have been attracted mainly by the influence of Ven. Chi Chern, a disciple of Ven. Zhu Mo who has now emerged as an important speaker and meditation teacher on the campus Buddhist circuits. As a Mandarin-speaking, Taiwan-trained monk familiar with *anapanasati* meditation techniques, he has trained many lay Buddhists to disseminate these practices through a network of informal meditation groups. Trained in the study of Mahayana and Theravada texts, Ven. Chi Chern is well regarded by both the Mahayana and Theravada constituencies within the YBAM, of which he was elected president in 1990.

Aside from these forms of meditation promoted by reformist monks, established Mahayana and Theravada temples, such as the Kek Lok Si temple in Penang and the Brickfields Vihara, have encouraged the lay public to participate in their annual novitiate program to experience prolonged meditation and monastic discipline. Participants in this program spend a fortnight in the temple, living the monastic life in isolation from their circles of friends and relatives. Although few participants actually treat this program as a first step to monkhood, most volunteer to experience spiritual enrichment and to achieve some merit in this life.

A parallel to the novitiate program, though not stressing monastic isolation and vocation, were the campus youth training camps

conducted from the late 1970s until 1985 by Ven. Piyasilo under the auspices of the YBAM. Ven. Piyasilo, a local monk ordained in Thailand, intended for his training camps, known as Dharma Preachers' Training Courses (DPTC), to produce knowledgeable lay leaders capable of lecturing on basic Theravada Buddhist doctrine (FOBM 1986:28). Upon the termination of the DPTC camps, Ven. Piyasilo introduced the National Dharma Interaction course series as a nonsectarian program to improve the professional skills of Buddhist youth leaders. In this program he emphasized the application of mass communication and information technology to Buddhist missionary work.

In their concern with mobilizing local Buddhists, reformist organizations have stressed rational knowledge in the form of textual study, systematic meditation, and technical skills. Members of these organizations place their confidence in rational knowledge and action to attain their socially oriented goals, namely a doctrinally well-informed laity and a unified local Buddhist community. However, these goals are far from realized because the underlying reformist strategies have been complicated by linguistic and sectarian differences. There is no central coordinating and regulatory body, like the Buddhist *sangha* council in Thailand, that oversees Buddhist activities in Malaysia. Each Buddhist temple or organization has its own patrons and sources of funding, which are quite independent of other Buddhist bodies. Nevertheless, the MBA "considers itself to be the representative of the local Buddhist community on the basis of its name and status as the first national organization established in this country" (Ng 1990:70). The MBA, which is dominated by older Mahayana monks, coordinates mainly Chinese Mahayana temples and various lay associations, but it does not epitomize the strongly laicized character of Malaysian Buddhism or its cultural and linguistic diversity.

In 1976 the YBAM, as the foremost Buddhist youth organization, proposed the formation of a Malaysian Buddhist Federation to promote the interests of all Buddhist groups. It received much support from various Buddhist organizations dominated by English-speaking Chinese (Ng 1990:71). But by the mid-1990s the proposal was still an idea that had received insufficient support from the MBA. The YBAM, like the MBA, is dominated by Mandarin-speaking Chinese whose role in Buddhist reformism became more prominent by the mid1980s, when English declined as a major language of communication in schools, universities, and government institutions. Although it is nonsectarian in policy, the predominance of Mandarin speakers in the YBAM suggests that Mahayana influence assumes some precedence in the organization. This implies that although Buddhist cooperation is

promoted by nonsectarianism, the goals of reformism are still shaped by groups that trace their origins to either the Mahayana or Theravada tradition. The linguistic differences associated with the two traditions do not necessarily imply irreconcilable rivalries, but they do suggest that reformist activities are not monolithically determined by a homogeneous Chinese culture. On the contrary, they reflect the previously noted diversity in cultural outlook in the Chinese community.

Although Buddhist unity at the national level continues to be an elusive goal for the reformists, they have been successful in their efforts to attain a more proximate goal: strengthening relationships between the Chinese- and English-speaking sections of the youth movement. English-speaking Buddhist groups that cater to university graduates have attempted to establish links with informal Buddhist alumni networks comprising Chinese-speaking graduates. As the formation of these alumni groups is a very recent development, formal organizational structures are still only in their infancy. The Buddhist Gem Fellowship, working with other Buddhist reformist and youth organizations, is hoping to consolidate these linkages through its intercollege programs.

At the national level, there have been attempts to promote nonsectarianism through a unified celebration of Wesak, the annual commemoration of the birth, enlightenment, and passing of Sakyamuni Buddha. Because it is the only public Buddhist holiday in Malaysia, Wesak is the occasion for a demonstration of symbolic Buddhist unity. The celebrations in Kuala Lumpur are organized by an ad hoc committee. The highlight of the celebrations is a grand procession of elaborately decorated floats, each built by the participating temples and lay associations that represent the principal Buddhist traditionsTheravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The procession is conspicuously attended by Chinese politicians and extensively covered by the mass media. Throughout the decade of the 1980s, the official character of Wesak was increasingly accentuated. The expanding scale of the procession has contributed to the rising public profile and awareness of Buddhist identity, nurtured by the process of revitalization.

As emphasized earlier, this revitalization has occurred within a laicized religious arena. Lay leadership is a basic factor that conditions Buddhist organizations in Malaysia. As a confident commercial community endowed with capital and technical skills, Chinese Buddhists value entrepreneurship and professional competence rather than world renunciation. It is therefore not surprising that the Buddhist clergy in Malaysia is small. The senior members of this clergy are elderly and mostly of foreign origin. There are probably fewer than twenty monks and nuns under the age of fifty. The importation of clergy from abroad

is no longer an option for Malaysian Buddhists. Since independence in 1957, it has been government policy to encourage recruitment and training of local clergy. But the difficulties in attracting local Chinese youths to monastic vocations have motivated lay Buddhist associations to train their members for leadership roles.

The future of Buddhist development in Malaysia lies largely in the hands of the laity. While middle-class Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking Chinese professionals are spearheading the reformist movement, their emphasis on textual study and meditation represents a rationalized attempt to revitalize Buddhist identity in a population that is still involved in cultivating Weber's "magic garden." This implies that reformism faces strong competition from the power and attraction of Buddhist charisma found in bodhisattva devotion, 5 Tibetan tantrism, and forest asceticism. Each of these sources of Buddhist charisma has contributed to the process of revitalization, but not in the way envisaged by the reformists. The charismatic appeal of these power sources requires understanding for an appreciation of the diverse influences affecting Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia today.

Kuan Yin Devotion

Despite the trend toward a doctrinally informed and rationally organized Buddhist community, many nonsectarian reformists and tantrists have reaffirmed the significance of bodhisattva devotion, chiefly to the feminine bodhisattva, Kuan Yin. For these Buddhists, devotion to Kuan Yin is practiced not only for personal fulfillment but also as a potent source of charisma for revitalizing Buddhism. Some details concerning Kuan Yin devotion are necessary to provide a clearer picture of an important source of charisma among Chinese Buddhists.

Avalokitesvara, known to the Chinese as Kuan Yin, became one of the most popular bodhisattvas worshipped by Buddhists in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia. The worship of Kuan Yin is based on textual traditions that embody the doctrine of salvation through faith. The two textual traditions concerning Kuan Yin's role as a savior were identified by Ch'en (1973:6) as chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra, and the Pure Land Sutra. The Lotus Sutra tradition describes Kuan Yin as perpetually preoccupied with the condition of suffering beings, particularly those threatened by fire, water, demons, fetters, and sword. The Pure Land Sutra teaches the doctrine of rebirth in the Western Paradise, ruled by Amitabha Buddha, who has vowed to save all beings who have absolute faith in him. The compassionate activity of Kuan Yin as Amitabha's chief assis-

tant is emphasized. Amitabha remains forever in his celestial realm but sends Kuan Yin to the human world on his behalf to rescue suffering beings.

The quality of compassion that Avalokitesvara represents in these traditions was conceptualized in feminine terms by the Chinese. They gradually feminized Avalokitesvara, who is portrayed in Indian Buddhism as unmistakably male. In China, until the tenth century, Avalokitesvara was represented in masculine form. Kuan Yin's gender transformation, which began during the Tang (618907 C.E.) and Sung (9601279 C.E.) dynasties, was influenced by the popularity of tantric Buddhism in China (Ch'en 1973:7). The concept of a white-robed female Kuan Yin emerged from the translation of Ta Jih Ching, a tantric text introduced in China in the mid-eighth century (Maspero 1981: 16768). The presence of the feminine element in Mahayana Buddhism is believed to be a symbolic expression of enlightenment in the conjunction of masculine and feminine forms of the bodhisattva.

Masculine deities paired with feminine consorts are a standard feature of the Tibetan tradition, in which Tara, the consort of Avalokitesvara, is the focus of one of the most popular cults (see Stephen Beyer 1973). Avalokitesvara's consort, known as White Tara in Tibet, provided the prototype for the feminine form of Kuan Yin as the bodhisattva in white garments who brings children. This image was a standard motif in Chinese religious paintings after the tenth century.

The feminine Kuan Yin assumes a multiplicity of forms in Chinese iconography and worship. Generally Kuan Yin is represented in either the sitting or standing posture. The seated image expresses the serenity and calm of enlightenment, while the standing figure depicts compassion in action. This iconography indicates the availability of Kuan Yin's compassion and saving power and her eternal activity of bringing enlightenment to all beings (Kuan Ming 1985:4748). Several of these forms of Kuan Yin are associated with the legend of Miao Shan, a Chinese princess said to have lived toward the end of the Chou dynasty (circa third century B.C.E.). Part of this legend relates to Kuan Yin's role of ministering to the suffering ghosts in hell in the Hungry Ghost Festival, as analyzed by Weller (1987). In addition to this festival, three other annual festivals linked to the Miao Shan legend are commemorated on the nineteenth day of the second, sixth, and ninth lunar months. Kuan Yin devotees celebrate these festivals at temples by making offerings, setting birds and animals free, observing a vegetarian diet, performing charitable acts, and strictly observing the Buddhist precepts.

The extent of Kuan Yin's influence among the Chinese has been well documented (Tay 1976, Sangren 1983). It is particularly strong in

Chinese immigrant communities in Southeast Asia, where lineage organization has been supplanted by a plethora of voluntary associations oriented to the needs of urban life. Under conditions of migrant life, the ancestral cult rooted in lineage-based agrarian communities became attentuated, and its place was assumed by voluntary and various Buddhist associations (Topley 1961, Nyce 1971, Baity 1975, Sangren 1983). The cult of Kuan Yin expanded as patrilineal principles of social organization were increasingly subordinated to impersonal market relations in overseas Chinese communities. Under conditions of immigration to Southeast Asia, individualistic enterprise rather than dependence on corporate kinship groups became fundamental to survival and adaptation. A universalistic kinship idiom incorporating worshippers into the broader community of Kuan Yin's children, irrespective of status, was offered as an alternative to patrilineal kinship ideology and the ancestral cult.

Kuan Yin is worshipped by many Malaysian Chinese in numerous Buddhist and Taoist temples throughout the country. She is believed to respond to the supplications of any being in distress, but it is her special concern for the welfare of women and children that is emphasized by her devotees. Their greater familiarity with Kuan Yin than with Sakyamuni Buddha is reflected in the altar arrangements, in which a Kuan Yin image is prominently displayed with or without a Sakyamuni Buddha image. Domestic worship of Kuan Yin for protection and immediate relief from suffering usually precedes formal instruction in the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha.

Whereas Mahayana Buddhism's emphasis on mass salvation promotes Kuan Yin worship, Theravada reformism tends not to encourage it. But in the past decade Theravada attitudes toward Kuan Yin devotion have apparently changed. Two Sinhalese Theravada temples in Kuala Lumpur have installed Kuan Yin shrines in recent years. In 1991 two Theravada monks who teach *vipassana* meditation made favorable references to Kuan Yin devotion in public talks given in English to well-educated urban Chinese. 6 This shift in attitude among Theravada monks may be attributed to their temples' dependence on Chinese patronage. The intensification of Kuan Yin devotion during the 1980s offered an important model to Chinese devotees at various Theravada temples, a phenomenon the monks could not ignore.

For the devotees of Mahayana Buddhist temples, the worship of Kuan Yin is almost intrinsic to the daily routine. Those Mahayana temples dedicated specifically to Kuan Yin are run by monks or nuns who conduct sutra chanting. No spirit mediums are permitted to operate on their premises, and only vegetarian offerings to Kuan Yin are accepted.

However, the folk Taoist temples dedicated to Kuan Yin contrast sharply with the Buddhist type. These temples are often makeshift huts or storefront arrangements managed by spirit mediums. They include Kuan Yin images among those of other deities, and meat offerings are not always prohibited. Vegetarian consciousness among Kuan Yin devotees in Malaysia has been growing since the late 1980s. Observance of a vegetarian diet on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month has become widespread among Kuan Yin devotees. Many new restaurants specializing in innovative vegetarian cuisine have opened during this period. Some of the cooks say that they have experienced vivid dreams in which new vegetarian recipes were revealed to them by Kuan Yin.

The popular worship of Kuan Yin among Mahayana Buddhists serves as a bridge to Tibetan tantric Buddhism. Avalokitesvara, also known as Chenrezig in Tibetan, is the patron deity of Tibet, and his mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, is constantly recited by Tibetan Buddhists from all walks of life. For many Chinese Mahayana Buddhists, devotion to Avalokitesvara/Kuan Yin is the starting point of interest in Tibetan tantrism. In approaching Chinese devotees, Tibetan monks (lamas) give much emphasis to the worship of Kuan Yin.

The Popularization of Tibetan Tantrism

A revival of tantrism among Chinese Buddhists that began in the mid-1970s has contributed to greater awareness of Buddhism within various sections of the middle class. Tibetan tantric Buddhism (or Vajrayana Buddhism), distinctive for its use of mystical gestures (mudras), diagrams (mandalas), and incantations (mantras), spread to China during the Tang Dynasty and also to Japan around the eighth century. Three separate tantric traditionsTibetan, Chinese, and Japanesedeveloped and attracted followings in China at different times. When tantric influences, both native and foreign, declined almost to the point of disappearance after 1911, some Chinese Buddhist devotees reimported tantrism from Tibet and Japan (Welch 1968:17374). Tibetan refugees from Chinese-occupied Tibet have played a prominent role in the recent tantric revival among overseas Chinese.

The lamas in exile who propagate tantrism give lectures on basic Buddhist teachings and emphasize compassion as the foundation of Buddhist ethics. They conduct colorful and impressive rituals. The principal patrons of Tibetan lamas and organizers of Vajrayana Buddhist centers tend to be Chinese businessmen who seek health, prosperity, and protection through rituals that are believed to transform

psychic and cosmic energies. The lamas who perform these rituals and give initiations and teachings in tantric practice are regarded by their supporters as possessing highly developed powers. While Tibetan tantrism is popular in business circles, it has had little or no impact within campus Buddhist associations.

The businessmen who are generally traditional, syncretic Mahayana Buddhists relate readily to the lamas' focus on compassion and devotion to Avalokitesvara/Kuan Yin. Close links to the worship of Kuan Yin have no doubt contributed to the particular appeal of two Tibetan sects in Malaysia, Karma Kagyu and Gelugpa. The leaders of these sects, the Gyalwa Karmapa of the Karma Kagyu and the Dalai Lama of the Gelugpa, are both believed to be incarnations of Avalokitesvara. The Karma Kagyu system of incarnational authority provided a model for the Gelugpa reformist institutionalization of the office of the Dalai Lama (Michael 1982:21). Through the offices of the Gyalwa Karmapa and the Dalai Lama, these sects offer a direct channel to Kuan Yin. Local Kuan Yin devotees perceive Tibetan Buddhism as an extension and elaboration of the already familiar worship of the compassionate bodhisattva.

The Karma Kagyu sect, which is the most widespread and best-organized form of Tibetan tantrism in Malaysia, had successfully founded monasteries and centers outside of Tibet long before its introduction to Malaysia in 1976. The Second, Third and Fourth Karmapas founded numerous monasteries in Mongolia and northern China, and Tibetan migrants carried the Karma Kagyu tradition with them to Sikkim. The Tibetan-speaking rulers of Sikkim built Karma Kagyu monasteries, of which the Rumtek Monastery, built in 1740, has become prominent in the international propagation of the sect. When the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa escaped from Chinese-occupied Tibet to Sikkim in 1959, he chose the Rumtek Monastery to be his seat in exile (Cho Yang 1991:4647). The sect has subsequently established hundreds of centers throughout the world, attracting more European and American students than any other Tibetan sect. The international popularity of Karma Kagyu may be attributed to the inclusion of all the major Buddhist traditions in its teachings.

The introduction of Tibetan tantrism to Malaysia began with a group of Malaysians who attended a Buddhist ritual in Kathmandu in 1975 and met the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, whom they invited to visit Malaysia (Ng 1990:66). The Karmapa's visit to Malaysia in October 1975 led to the formation of the Karma Kagyu Dharma Society in Kuala Lumpur and centers throughout Malaysia. The other Tibetan Buddhist sects (Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, and Gelugpa) are also represented by

centers in Malaysia, but Karma Kagyu appears to have the most extensive network of centers and enjoys strong support from businessmen. Through these centers, Tibetan lamas transmit teachings that are perceived by many followers as immediate sources of knowledge and power. Although these teachings reflect the distinctive tradition of each sect, the Tibetan lamas as a whole adopt an inclusive, nonsectarian approach to build a constituency among Kuan Yin devotees and other Buddhists who are not greatly concerned about sectarian differences.

The belief in the complementarity of diverse spiritual practices is inherent in Tibetan Buddhism, which incorporates all the major schools of Buddhism. 7 Tibetan Buddhists deny that Buddhism can be identified with any single approach to attainment of spiritual experience, taking pride in the numerous methods of practice available to them. In the Tibetan tradition three major approaches or levels of teaching are relied upon for the purification of the mind and attainment of enlightenment. First, the Hinayana (Theravada) approach, or "outer teaching," involves renunciation of defilements and emotional conflicts and contemplation of the numberless rounds of rebirth, which generates desire for nirvana. The practitioner of the "outer teaching" removes himself or herself from the environment that creates desire, or contemplates the unsatisfactoriness of desire.

Second, through the Mahayana approach, or "inner teaching," the practitioner tries to realize the nature of samsara (phenomenal existence) rather than renouncing it. Contemplation is the means of realizing that everything experienced internally and externally is emptiness (*sunyata*). The third approach, Vajrayana, or tantrism, the "secret teaching," encourages neither renunciation nor purification. Mental defilements are faced directly with the ultimate aim of realizing their emptiness, as in Mahayana.

The distinction between Mahayana and tantrism is methodological rather than philosophical. Both emphasize the philosophical doctrine of the identity of the absolute (*paramartha*) and the phenomenal (*vyavahara*) world when it is apprehended through direct spiritual experience. Tantric "psycho-experimental" methods "flout traditional, exoteric orthodoxy" in putting experiment above conventional morality (Bharati 1975:18, 21). Tantric texts acknowledge that while their methods are so powerful as to enable an adept to attain enlightenment in only one lifetime, they are nevertheless regarded as highly unconventional and possibly dangerous (see Mullin and Richards 1983). The aim of tantric methodsritual, visualization of deities, and recitations of mantrasis to transform mental defilements. These practices are merely pedagogical devices, not ends in themselves. Tantric methods

are alleged to be more powerful because they deal with delusions directly. Delusions are not disparaged or repressed in tantric practice but are used pragmatically in the process of consciousness expansion.

To deal with emotions directly, tantric practitioners visualize deities whom they regard as ideal images to be employed for self-development. As the symbolic embodiment of certain psychic materials in the mind of the practitioner, they are created or generated by the mind itself. Such tantric symbols are called wisdom (*jñana*) deities. Their purpose is to grant spiritual rather than worldly boons. After having generated these deities, the tantric practitioner absorbs the visualizations and then views the wisdom deities as transparent and insubstantial. The deities are gradually absorbed back into the seed syllable (the source of a mantra) from which they were generated, then dissolved into emptiness. Perception of the world is radically transformed by cleansing the mind through this practice of deity yoga.

When the deity is dissolved, the tantric adept has successfully worked through the emotions it represented. Once the meanings of the symbols employed in deity yoga are realized, the adept need not rely on them further. Upon reaching a certain stage of understanding, the adept can dispense with rituals, mantras, and visualizations. Though these practices can be transcended, their importance should not be underestimated. Hence much of the activity of Vajrayana Buddhist groups is ceremonial in nature.

The concept of transmission is central to the rituals mediated by Tibetan lamas for Malaysian tantric groups. Transmission, or communication of esoteric knowledge and power, can occur on one of three levelsthe outer, inner, or secret level. What is secret in Vajrayana teaching is not deliberately kept hidden from the tantric adept; rather it is the adept's veils and obscurations (mental impediments) that limit his or her capacity to receive what the lama transmits. There are various instruments of transmissionprayer, chanting, discursive instructions, visualizations, mantras, and mandalas. Transmission through any of these instruments can be received on any of the three levels. Blessings and initiations are common ritual contexts for transmission. In a major blessing ritual, the Red Crown Ceremony, 8 transmission occurs at the moment the crown is placed on the head of the lama. The level on which the participants receive the transmission depends on the degree of their individual spiritual development and mental receptivity. Among the manifestations of transmission that adepts have reported experiencing are sensations of body heat, loss of muscular control, and visual and/or auditory phenomena.

Initiations, also known as empowerments, are typically the focus of ritual experience for Malaysian tantric groups. Through initiations, the tantric adept is guided by a lama from the mundane into the sacred realm through a process of identification with a particular deity or aspects of that deity. Only the lama can transmit the mantras that evoke the psychic energies of the deities and the discursive instructions for visualizing and making offerings to them. In receiving this transmission, the tantric adept becomes the deity into whose practice he or she is initiated. As a result of initiation, the adept is purified of certain mental defilements and also attains esoteric knowledge and power. There are no definite limits to the number of initiations an adept can undergo, as each initiation confers specific kinds of purification and power.

Striking parallels between tantric initiation, shamanism, and the mystery cults of classical antiquity have been noted (Eliade 1969:118, 202). The process of dying to the mundane world and being reborn into transcendental levels of existence through transmission of esoteric knowledge is enacted through these rituals. Tantric initiations represent increasing degrees of knowledge and salvation empirically available to the adept. The charisma of gnosis as the underlying content of Buddhist salvation is directly experienced in the series of initiatory deaths and transformations mediated by lamas.

These experiences are comprehensible and meaningful to syncretic Buddhists as well as to university-educated seekers of higher consciousness influenced by the human potential movement. Syncretic Buddhists can easily bridge the conceptual distance from possession by a deity to psychic transformation into a deity. Interiorization of ecstatic performance appears as a logical progression in their understanding of Buddhism. On the other hand, more intellectually oriented Buddhists may view initiation into the practice of deity yoga as a satisfying methodology of personal development.

In contrast to these ecstatic spiritual experiences produced by ritual activity, Tibetan Buddhism is also presented in a demystified way by young, Westernized, English-speaking lamas who have spent most of their lives outside Tibet. Several of these lamas have undergone traditional Tibetan monastic training, followed by study in Western universities. Such lamas are occasionally invited to give lectures at Malaysian Vajrayana centers. In their lectures, Buddhism is presented as a rational body of mental technology quite similar to Western psychotherapy. It is explained as an attempt to overcome unconscious tendencies, and meditation is the method of accomplishing this. The practice of meditation, as described by these lamas, allows any kind of materials to

manifest in consciousness. Through this process one can work through karma (the mental imprints of past thoughts and actions) and eventually attain enlightenment.

In Malaysia, the rationalization of tantrism has developed only to a limited extent, while the charismatic aspects continue to predominate. The majority of lamas sponsored by Vajrayana centers in Malaysia devote most of their time to performance of initiations, healing, exorcism, protective rituals, and personal consultation. Their appeal to Malaysian Buddhists is reinforced by local beliefs and practices that give precedence to mystical experiences and deity devotion, as in Kuan Yin worship. However, these lamas have acknowledged that the devotional and rational levels of Vajrayana are merely different starting points to the same transcendental goal. 9

The Pursuit of Ascetic Purity and Insight Knowledge

The charismatic sources in Kuan Yin devotion and Tibetan tantrism tend to be externally identified as blessings from the compassionate bodhisattva and lamas, respectively. For many Malaysian Buddhists, Kuan Yin and Tibetan lamas are embodiments of extraordinary power that can be accessed through prayer and personal requests. The inner cultivation of spiritual strength for higher knowledge relates more to a personal quest for liberation not generally found in these two forms of Buddhist veneration practiced by Malaysian Chinese. However, the focus on personal development of charisma for both worldly and higher purposes has recently influenced many Buddhists through the popularization of forest asceticism (*duthanga*) and insight meditation (*vipassana*).

According to Tambiah (1984:25859), the Thai *duthanga* tradition promoted by Achaan Mun and his disciples features both a "rationalist pole of unswerving renunciation and liberation [and a] tantric, ritualist pole of pursuing trance experience and supernatural powers." Contemporary exponents of Achaan Mun's revival of the *duthanga* tradition have inspired many Malaysian Buddhists to support forest monks and promote asceticism among the laity.

These developments are clearly seen in the spiritual career of Achaan Yantra, a young Thai *duthanga* monk believed to be a saint (*arahant*) endowed with extraordinary powers. His association with Malaysian Buddhists goes back to the mid-1980s, when some of them met him in Singapore and trained with him for varying lengths of time. According to his official biography,10 he had been a lay ascetic for four

years before seeking ordination as a monk in response to an ecstatic vision in which he committed himself to the development of Buddhism. Upon the attainment of *jhanas* (absorptions or trance experiences), he proceeded to insight meditation through the practice of "mindfulness of breathing" (*anapanasati*) under the guidance of the respected and influential reformist forest monk Buddhadasa. 11 He was believed to have become an enlightened *arahant* while imprisoned in Myanmar during a walking pilgrimage in the early 1980s. He has a large following in Thailand and receives widespread coverage in the Thai mass media. After becoming a monk, he deemphasized the use of psychic powers, focusing instead on the reformist teachings of Buddhadasa. Nevertheless, many Buddhists continue to respond to him as a charismatic teacher.

The appeal of forest ascetics like Achaan Yantra has also developed as an extension of the *vipassana*, or insight meditation, movement. Many younger Buddhists believe that academic knowledge of Buddhism without direct spiritual experience attained through meditation is insufficient to inspire faith and commitment, as purely intellectual Buddhism can become merely another form of secular knowledge. However, insight meditation as a mode of direct spiritual experience is an exclusive Buddhist activity that is new to the Malaysian laity, though it is practiced widely among the laity in Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. In Malaysia it is the younger monks who are identified with the lay meditation movement. These monks teach *vipassana* meditation in their forest hermitages and are held in high esteem by many university students and young professionals who are eager to develop spiritual insight through participation in meditation retreats.

Despite this enthusiasm to cultivate a type of inner, personal charisma through *vipassana* meditation and emulation of the forest ascetics, members of the Buddhist youth movement have experienced some disorientation because of the competing views of the Myanmar and Thai Theravada and the Chinese Mahayana traditions. The assumption that *vipassana, samatha* (one-pointed concentration), and *anapanasati* are mutually exclusive forms of meditation is generally communicated by teachers of the Myanmar tradition.12 In Myanmar, as Houtman (1992:1314) explains, *samatha* meditation is identified with the attainment of psychic power, occultism, and millenarianism. *Vipassana* meditation, on the other hand, was initially promoted by King Mindon and later by the postcolonial Myanmar government led by U Nu as a rational method of Buddhist practice appropriate for laymen seeking mental peace through the application of scientific methods. Similarly, Thai Buddhist reformists described by Jackson (1989) also

view *vipassana* meditation as scientific and *samatha* meditation as encouraging superstition. However, Thai traditionalist movements as exemplified by the Dhammakaai movement formally endorse the practice of *vipassana* but in actuality focus almost entirely on *samatha* and the acquisition of psychic experiences.

In Malaysia some members of the *vipassana* meditation movement have been critical of the meditation methods taught by other Buddhist groups. Methods that involve an exclusive or even partial focus on concentration or the employment of imagery, mantras, or rituals have been discouraged by these adepts of *vipassana*. Some of them have distanced themselves from a Thai Theravada temple supporting the traditionalist Dhammakaai movement to form their own center, following closely the techniques promoted by Myanmar meditation teachers.

Despite these differences, the technique of observation of breathing (*anapanasati*) is central to *vipassana* and *samatha* meditation. It is believed that in mindfully observing the breath's rise and fall, the meditator gains direct insight into the characteristics of existenceimpermanence, suffering, and absence of an abiding self. For the followers of the Myanmar *vipassana* movement, the technique of *anapanasati* is focused on the movement of the abdomen. They claim that inhalation and exhalation are more clearly distinct when observed at the abdomen rather than at the nostrils. However, *vipassana* meditation as taught by some Thai forest ascetics such as Buddhadasa focuses on nostril breathing, as is also the case with Chinese Mahayana monks who teach Ch'an (Zen) meditation. Furthermore, these ascetics and monks employ the same breathing technique to develop both samatha and vipassana, which are seen as related stages of a single process of meditation. In Malaysia, Buddhists who have practiced intensive meditation under the guidance of Thai forest ascetics tend not to take too seriously the Myanmar separation between *samatha* and *vipassana* meditation. They prefer to conceptualize *samatha* and *vipassana* meditation as an integrated approach to inner spiritual development based on the Pali Canon. 13 Each of the various competing traditions of meditation claims canonical authority. In most cases, these claims are justified as canonical Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts refer to diverse techniques and conditions that have led various disciples of the Buddha's doctrine to transcendental knowledge and final salvation.

The body of canonical Buddhist texts is so vast that only a limited portion of them can be studied and assimilated within one lifetime. Buddhist teachers, out of pragmatic considerations, tend to specialize in particular textual traditions and techniques. Thus numerous paths to enlightenment have emerged throughout Buddhist history, and

these have become socially objectified to varying degrees. Alternatives limited to the lifetime of the founder can be regarded as cultic movements, while those resulting in enduring traditions of thought and practice develop into formally organized schools or sects. Reformists initially trained by Theravada teachers tend to be particularly apprehensive of the diversification of Buddhist views and practice. Syncretically inclined Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists, on the other hand, are less likely to be disturbed by the heterogeneity of Malaysian Buddhism. They are open to chanting, *vipassana* meditation, tantric deity yoga, and any other method of spiritual experience for which teachers are available.

Despite these differences, the underlying goal of meditation sought by both reformist and syncretic Buddhists is the personal development of charisma as an interiorized source of power for mundane and transcendental purposes. For the reformists, though, concern with mastery of the self and the social world has emphasized a gradual development of independence in meditation. Accompanying this development is the individual acquisition of rational knowledge, which includes textual knowledge and meditative techniques. On the other hand, syncretists also seek to master the self and the world, but they give priority to the acquisition of esoteric knowledge, which requires the constant mediation of teachers regarded as possessing extraordinary powers. This oscillation between independent and mediated spiritual practice reflects both sectarian differences and the plurality of Buddhist knowledge and experience sought by members of the growing Chinese middle class, for which salvation is not only a spiritual aspiration but also a social one rooted in the changing circumstances of their domicile in Malaysia.

Directions in the Formation of Chinese Buddhist Identity

The revitalization of Malaysian Buddhism bears the imprint of the preoccupations of educated, middle-class Chinese lay Buddhists. Mandarin and English speakers in the Chinese community have generally differing orientations to the sectarian diversity and reformist activity in Buddhism. But while English-speaking Chinese tend to gravitate toward Theravada reformist groups and Mandarin speakers toward Mahayana-inspired movements, this difference is not necessarily maintained in every sphere of Buddhist activity. Tibetan tantrism, for example, holds much fascination for many English-speaking Chinese, just as many Mandarin speakers in the youth movement are attracted to the *vipassana* meditation centers of English-speaking ascetics.

What is common to these seekers of spiritual knowledge and power is their individualistic orientation in the pursuit of rational reformism and charismatic gnosis. It is this orientation that impels them to seek direct spiritual experience as well as mastery of the physical and social world. The pursuit of these two goals tends to be characteristic of the educated middle class. Their striving for truth entails both an individual drive to attain gnosis as the inner condition of liberation and a preoccupation with organizational arrangements for protecting a distinctive religious space. The tension between world mastery and mysticism is strongly suggested in the unique juxtaposition of professionalism and salvation striving that typifies the practical activity of the middle-class Buddhist laity in Malaysia.

Emerging from this tension is the movement among younger Buddhists to establish more systematic and distinctive values to differentiate their religion from the popular syncretic Buddhism practiced by many traditional Chinese. From a Weberian perspective, ethical rationalization is a central theme of this Buddhist reformism. This process of rationalization increases Buddhist consciousness of the high value of scriptural studies but does not necessarily reduce the concern for thaumaturgy. What this implies is that the reconstruction of Buddhist identity within a self-conscious conceptual framework entails the legitimation of thaumaturgy through Buddhist symbolism, along with infusion of ethical content into the rituals. The intention to practice compassion toward other sentient beings purifies what were formerly self-interested manipulative acts within a popular religious complex. These concerns with ethical purification and modern Buddhist identity reflect the influence of Sinhalese missionaries who pioneered Buddhist reformism in Malaysia.

At present, reformists believe that increasing awareness of canonical Buddhism is necessary for an effectively organized Buddhist community capable of establishing a firm boundary between Buddhism and other religions. It is in the mobilizing and organizing aspects of reformist activities that an externalized, public Buddhist identity is espoused. Thus there is much encouragement among lay Buddhists to directly approach canonical texts without the continued mediation of a religious expert. In their view, there is no need for secret transmission of esoteric knowledge as experienced in tantrism. Even among Vajrayana Buddhists, whose outlooks are generally shaped by a charismatic orientation, the rationalized dimension of identity formation is not entirely submerged. This development may be attributed to the reformist activities of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which first appeared in the fourteenth century and is continued in this century by the present Dalai Lama. 14

The complex interplay between rationalized reformism and charismatic experience has occurred within a growing laicized religious arena. The laity is eager to apply professional and technical skills to organize Buddhism for purposive action in the fields of education, propagation, welfare work, and building projects. However, the attempt to master the social world through rational organization does not imply an abandonment of the intrinsic soteriological goal of Buddhism. On the contrary, lay emphasis on the study of Buddhist texts and the practice of meditation suggests an intensified cultivation of the means to the charismatic gnosis that leads to salvation.

The laicized character of Buddhism in Malaysia is of crucial significance to the problem posed by the plurality of forms of knowledge in Buddhist revitalization. The monks and laity alike acknowledge that it is the lay Buddhists who possess the know-how to establish and manage Buddhist organizations and to effectively undertake social action. Lay Buddhists also aspire to a level of practice previously exclusive to monks. Their capacity to acquire professional skills as well as the technology of mental cultivation makes possible an orientation toward both world mastery and salvation. The increased expertise of the middleclass Buddhist laity entails wider, individualized access to supramundane experience, which was originally a monopoly of the Buddhist clergy. Through its increasing religious knowledge, technical skills, and access to sources of funding, the middle-class Buddhist laity now possesses a greater wherewithal than the shrinking clergy to shape the parameters of a revitalized Buddhist identity.

In this development toward an increasingly laicized definition of Buddhist identity, the issue of the reconciliation between rationalization and charismatic experience becomes even more crucial. First, the rational-technical expertise of Buddhist professionals has become indispensable in the organization of religious interests and representation in a political system dominated by Muslims. Since most of these professionals are Chinese, their efforts to strengthen the institutional basis of Buddhism would also be seen as congruent with the process of ethnic revitalization. Surrounded by a growing Malay-Muslim middle class and an intensified Christian evangelism aimed chiefly at the Chinese middle class, Buddhist professionals would naturally feel an urgency to fortify their work to affirm their religious identity. The continuing effort to build a Buddhist federation as a national religious body suggests an ongoing attempt to integrate Buddhist identity in response to the changing needs of the Chinese community.

Second, the laity's proposal to organize a *sangha* council to monitor monastic discipline suggests its concern about the decentralized nature of monastic control. That this initiative should come from the laity

rather than from the clergy reflects the growing trend toward lay Buddhist leadership. However, this does not imply increasing competition between the laity and clergy. Rather, clergy members are merely regarded as a type of professional, specializing in the techniques of salvation and dependent for their well-being in organizational Buddhism on the technical expertise and financial support of the middle-class laity.

In other words, the laity does not always attribute charismatic qualities to the clergy. Especially among Theravada reformists and *vipassana* meditators, charisma is perceived as an individual striving to be internally developed. A monk may provide guidance, but ultimately the layperson's spiritual endeavors are his or her own sources of charisma. As the precursors of organizational Buddhism, the laity wields the necessary technical skills for administering religious activities. It is these skills that will determine the future management of charisma in the presentation of an integrated and resolute Buddhist identity.

Photo Section

Masjid Jamek, Kuala Lumpur's oldest mosque

Muslim women dressed according to a religious tradition that requires them to cover their bodies completely while in public

A participant in Kavati, an annual penance procession in which Hindu devotees carry wooden or metal arches mounted on their shoulders, often attached to sharp hooks dug into their skin

An urban shrine of the type most often used by formerly rural Hindus who have migrated to the large cities but continue to worship village deities

A Hindu priest leading the procession at Navarattiri, a nine-day festival during which personal requests for educational success are made privately at temple *pujas* on the last night that is dedicated to the goddess Sarasvati

Urban Hindus practicing meditation in a *satsang*, or collective gathering, in pursuit of higher knowledge

A Buddhist procession on Wesak, the annual commemoration of the birth, enlightenment, and passing of Sakyamuni Buddha

A Buddhist monk performing an altar ritual on Wesak, the only public Buddhist holiday in Malaysia and thus the occasion for a symbolic demonstration of Buddhist unity

Buddhist devotees queuing to be blessed by a Tibetan lama

Tibetan lamas performing a fire ritual

Chapter Five
The Lance and the Lotus:
Passion and Devotion in the Hindu Quest

Historians of Southeast Asia have noted that India's contacts with the Malaysian peninsula can be traced to pre-Christian times, but trading and cultural activities increased during the early centuries of the Christian, or common, era (see Wheatley 1961, Hall 1964, Coedes 1968). It was during this period that Hindu ideas became absorbed into the cultural fabric of the Malay kingdoms. The legitimation of these kingdoms required the importation of Brahmin priests from India to perform consecratory rites and to introduce Hindu thought and practices for the purpose of maintaining a semblance of high culture among Southeast Asian aristocrats.

Thus the Hinduism that was introduced to Southeast Asia at that time was of the "great tradition." The non-Indian recipients were tutored in Sanskrit and exposed varyingly to the Vedas, Puranas, and Dharmasastras (Coedes 1968:254). Knowledge from these classical sources was disseminated by high-caste priests and remained largely within the royal circles. In contrast to this Hinduism of precolonial Malaya, the Hinduism that came to the Malaysian peninsula during the nineteenth century was mostly characterized by elements of the "little tradition." Hinduism in contemporary Malaysia is practiced mainly within the Indian community and reflects a coherence unique to its sociopolitical circumstances. In this chapter, the complex development of Hinduism in the postwar period will be discussed in relation to Indian migration, status mobility, and Tamil cultural identity.

The Second Coming of Hinduism

From the latter half of the nineteenth century until the eve of World War II, "the modern Indian migrant [to Malaya] . . . was chiefly an

unlettered labourer coming into the country to work for a pittance on some plantation or government project," according to Sandhu (1969: 3132). Most of these laborers originated from South India, particularly Tamil Nadu, which had also been a principal point of contact during the early period of Indianization. Between 1840 and 1940 about four million Indians arrived in colonial Malaya; they were mostly lowcaste Tamils and untouchables (Sandhu 1969:15961).

There were at least two reasons for this relatively large movement of Indians into Malaya. First, the harsh conditions of agricultural production in South India almost reduced many farm laborers to the status of slaves. Higher-caste non-Brahmins who did not suffer these conditions found difficulty in securing employment in a system monopolized by Brahmins (see Irschick 1969). Second, the expansion of commercial estates and related infrastructures in colonial Malaya increased the demand for cheap labor. Under the *kangani* method of labor recruitment, which relied on the estate foreman's ability to get workers from his home village, many low-caste Indians and peasants were brought to Malaya.

Commercial and professional migrants were largely non-Tamils or Tamils of higher castes, the majority of whom were petty traders and shopkeepers. Only a minority were wealthy merchants and financiers with large capital. Among the migrants who entered the colonial clerical services, few were South Indian Tamils, in contrast to the large number of English-speaking Malayalis from Kerala and Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) Tamils (Sandhu 1969:12123).

This highly complex pattern of Indian migration brought together Indians of different regional castes (*jatis*), a process that created ambiguities in the mutual ranking of castes. In the relative absence of Brahmins in Malaya, the Brahminical model of caste, emphasizing *varna,* failed to become dominant and was relegated "from a demonstrable reality to a vague ideal" (Jain 1970:346). 1 But lack of a Brahmin presence did not preclude a general distinction between Indians from non-Brahmin *jatis* and those considered untouchables.

This division between higher caste (*uyarntajati*) and lower caste (*talntajati*) is maintained through endogamous marriage arrangements, occupational differentiation, caste organizations, and exclusive access to ritual knowledge (see Rajakrishnan 1984, Mearns 1987). Each of these factors alone is by no means a strict determinant of caste position and relations, although it exercises sufficient influence on the perception and practice of matters relating to caste. The fluidity of caste determination may be attributed to the lack of rigid, hierarchical interdependencies between members of *jatis.* This fluidity is sustained by a market economy in which Indians can freely interact with non-

Indians whose attitudes are clearly not shaped by caste categories and ideologies.

This sketch of Indian migration and caste provides a background for understanding the complex patterns of Hindu beliefs and practices in contemporary Malaysia. Generally speaking, we may say that Malaysian Hinduism is strongly characterized by the worship of village and guardian deities. Many of these deities (*gramadevata*) are identified with particular villages in Tamil Nadu and are not always known outside them (Kinsley 1986:197). However, the reputation of some *gramadevata* transcends village boundaries; an example is Mariyamman, who is widely worshipped in various parts of South India (Whitehead 1921). Although Mariyamman is principally a village goddess, she has become a major deity for both the *uyarntajati* and *talntajati* in Malaysia. The difference is that the former, because of their higher socioeconomic standing, are able to worship Mariyamman in grander settings than the latter, who confine their worship to shack temples.

The male guardian deities of village goddesses, such as Munisvaran, Muniyanti, Munadiyan, Karuppan, and Madurai Viran, are worshipped in their own right mainly but not exclusively by the lower castes. These lower deities usually exhibit fierce, violent characteristics and accept blood sacrifices. While their primary role is the protection of the goddesses and residential boundaries, some of them (particularly Munisvaran) have assumed an independent status; they are worshipped in their own temples and sometimes even identified with a Sanskritic god such as Siva (Lee and Rajoo 1987:400). This development reflects the upward mobility of the lower castes, but it also suggests a strong belief in the indispensability of the deities' powers, a belief that transcends caste boundaries, as demonstrated by Aveling (1978:181), who reported the presence of Brahmins at crisis shrines in Penang that are dedicated to Muniyanti.

On the other hand, the Sanskritic deities, which include Siva, Sakti, Vishnu, Murukan, and Ganesh, are usually housed in large, elaborate temples supported by the higher castes. For example, two of the larger Hindu temples in Kuala Lumpur dedicated to Murukan are owned by the Chettiars and Sri Lankan Tamils. An important distinction in the caste support of temples and particular deities lies in the claim that the purity of the higher Sanskritic gods is maintained by their avoidance of meats and intoxicants. Thus there are no blood sacrifices or meat offerings in the higher-caste temples. These temples have become models of emulation for lower castes aspiring to higher status. There is a tendency for lower-caste members moving up the socioeconomic scale to terminate blood sacrifices and meat offerings in their temples. 2

These changes have been observed in the worship of the goddess Mariyamman. However, animal sacrifices are made to her guardian deities. 3

There are few local-born Brahmin priests. Unlike the lineage Atisaiva priests observed by Fuller (1984) in Madurai (Tamil Nadu), the Brahmin priests employed in the higher-caste temples are either *kurukkal* priests hired from India or local Smarta Brahmins. The role of the latter is traditionally that of a domestic ritual specialist (*purohit*) trained in Vedic and Puranic rites (Singer 1972:90). Because of the shortage of Hindu priests in Malaysia, Smarta Brahmins have been recruited as temple ritual specialists. The younger generation of Smarta Brahmins is generally not interested in this line of work because the rewards and prestige of a temple priest are not considered comparable to those of a secular professional.

The non-Brahmin *pantaram* priests are lower in status than the Brahmin priests. Because of their limited knowledge of temple rituals, they usually play a secondary role in large temples. The lowest-ranking priests are the *pujaris*, who are not hereditary priests but are usually individuals of low socioeconomic and caste status. Many of them are employed on an ad hoc basis and may even serve as part-time spirit mediums and temple keepers. Their low ritual status does not always earn them high respect, as illustrated in a case reported by Wiebe and Mariappen (1978:137) in which a plantation *pujari* was reprimanded by devotees for having dirt under his fingernails.

In South India, the celebration of Hindu festivals tends to be organized in relation to the religious specificities of regional, village, and caste groupings (see Whitehead 1921, Moffat 1979, Welborn and Yocum 1982). In Malaysia, the regional dimension plays a less important role than that of temples sponsoring the festivals. The organization of these temples reflects to a large extent the socioeconomic and political standing of various groupings. Because festivals are organized mainly by temple committees, the level of their grandeur suggests the relative rank and power of the groupings in control of particular temples.

The *bhakti* (devotional) movements that became popular in the postwar period have attracted many English-speaking, middle-class Indian devotees. Centering on the charisma of a living guru or the memory of one who has passed on, these movements quickly found many adherents who were drawn to their simple messages of love and devotion without any accompaniment of elaborate and complex rituals. Many of these movements, such as the Divine Life Society and Ramakrishna Mission, originated in India. But in the 1970s some neo-Hindu move-

ments that had been successfully established in the West, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and Divine Light Mission, became sources of religious inspiration for many young Malaysian Indians.

An important contribution of these movements to the Hindu revival in Malaysia was their introduction of English translations of various Hindu scriptures to a generation of Malaysian Indians without literacy in Sanskrit or Tamil. Consequently, their exposure to translated scriptures not only increased scriptural study but also invigorated efforts in missionary work in estates and various rural areas where poorer Indians lived. This dimension of Hindu piety reveals an important transformation of Malaysian Hinduism: the gradual alienation of younger Indians from temple rituals and their gravitation toward a more expressive form of Hinduism, which they define as more consonant with their identity needs.

Rural and Urban Hinduism

The general impression that there is a difference between rural and urban Hinduism is derived from the pattern of caste distribution in Malaysia. Overall, the lower castes tend to congregate in the rural areas, whereas the higher castes are concentrated in the urban areas. This difference is mainly a result of Indian labor migration and occupational differentiation in colonial Malaya.

One would infer from this that worship of the lower deities and performance of blood sacrifices are prevalent in the rural areas, while the more ornate oblations to the higher deities are characteristic of urban Hinduism. But in reality, the rural-urban distinction in Hindu practices is more complex. It is complicated by the problem of rural-to-urban mobility, in which large numbers of Indian laborers leave the estates for the cities, a phenomenon that has rapidly changed the character of urban Malaysia in the postwar years. 4

Unlike their kinsmen in village India, many of whom had been tied to the land at one time or another through debt bondage, the estate Indians in Malaysia are mainly wage laborers who owe no loyalty to their employers once their contracts have expired. Their movement to the cities usually follows a pattern of chain migration in which the rural migrant, upon settling in the city, summons his kin from the estates.5 An implication of this migration pattern is that lower-caste Hinduism practiced in the estates is transferred on a widening scale to the urban areas, so that gradually the separation between lower- and highercaste Hinduism loses its unambiguous spatial distinction and must be

described chiefly with reference to the rapidity of Sanskritization. The postwar social mobility of lower-caste, estate Indians has been instrumental in urbanizing the worship of lower, village Hindu deities.

The Process of Sanskritization

At this juncture it is necessary to explain the meaning of Sanskritization in order to provide a clearer perspective on the rural-urban continuum of Hindu practices. The concept of Sanskritization was originally used by Srinivas (1952) in his study of the Coorgs of South India. Srinivas used this concept as one of social mobility, to show what happens when a lower caste attempts to claim equal status with a higher caste in terms of changes in lifestyle, diet, beliefs, and rituals. The complexities underlying the concept were elaborated in other works (Srinivas 1956, 1967, 1968). Basically, Sanskritization involves a type of cultural imitation by upwardly mobile groups seeking recognition from higher, Sanskritized castes that may withhold the desired privileges should they feel their structural position threatened. In cases in which upwardly mobile groups are economically or politically powerful, resistance to their adoption of a Sanskritic lifestyle may be minimal.

Ideally speaking, Sanskritic Hinduism is characterized by a large body of sacred literature such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Agamas. Sanskritic rituals are normally prescribed and performed by Brahmin priests or those who claim high ritual status. This means that these priests must have a working knowledge of Sanskrit and be able to recite mantras and stotras (sacred incantations in words and verses, respectively) in Sanskrit. In South Indian temples dedicated to the higher deities, the priests are required to be familiar with the authoritative texts for performing complex rituals. These texts are traditionally divided into the Sakta Agamas, Pancaratra Agamas, and Siva Agamas. Most of them are written in Sanskrit (some in the Grantha script, a special Tamil script for transliterating Sanskrit) with Tamil translations and commentaries (Diehl 1956).

In Malaysia, the influence of Sanskritic Hinduism is most widely observed in the urban areas. *Kurukkal* and Brahmin priests, with varying levels of training in Sanskritic rituals, are employed mainly by the large urban temples, which generally have the economic means to pay their salaries and to import them from India whenever the need arises. 6

Worship (*puja*) at these temples is performed at least three times a day. These daily rituals are collectively known as *nittiya pucaikal*, being divided into morning, noon, and evening worship. Each worship consists of four ritual categories: cleansing the deity's image with special

items, dressing and garlanding the image, burning incense and waving lights before the image, and offering vegetarian food to the deity. Throughout the *puja*, the priest chants Sanskrit mantras, rings a bell, and scatters flowers. At the end of the *puja*, he offers a lamp and *prasadam* (food leavings) to the worshippers. *Arccanai*, or private blessings, are performed for individual worshippers by the priest after the *puja*. For a small fee, the worshipper gives a tray of fruit items and his name and zodiac sign to the priest, who chants in Sanskrit before the image.

Aside from these daily rituals, grand ceremonies are performed either to consecrate a new temple or to renew the sacrosanct status of a temple once every twelve years. These ceremonies may last for as long as forty-five days and are usually presided over by a group of *kurukkal* priests, many of whom are invited from India to conduct the rituals. Because of their extravagance, the ceremonies cost tens of thousands of dollars and are affordable only for the large urban temples.

In a survey of a hundred Hindu temples in Kuala Lumpur, 7 it was found that only forty-six had been consecrated, and more than half this number were larger temples. The other consecrated temples were medium-sized ones controlled by small groups of individuals. Although consecrated, these latter temples lacked the economic wherewithal to conduct renewal ceremonies every twelve years. Thus Sanskritization on the basis of these ceremonies and agamic worship marks the level of sanctity of a temple.

The relative absence of *kurukkal* priests in the rural areas implies that the Sanskritic rules of temple worship cannot be closely followed. The non-Sanskritic votive behavior of rural Indians is directed mainly toward the guardian deities who are worshipped in shack temples erected on estate grounds. Nevertheless, there are large concrete temples in estates built with money contributed by Indian workers and estates managers for the worship of higher deities. But many of them remain unconsecrated, possessing only an ornate exterior without concomitant Sanskritic status.

Unable to attract *kurukkal* priests, these rural temples have to rely on the services of a *pujari* or a *pantaram* priest, neither of whom is sufficiently qualified to conduct Sanskritic rituals. In fact, most *pujaris* are estate workers who look after the temple premises on a part-time basis. Typically, *pujaris* have no systematic training in the Agamas, and whatever ritual knowledge they possess comes from their fathers, observation of other priests, and popular manuals containing various mantras and stotras. Some of them participate in blood sacrifices and possession seances, practices that are considered anathema to Brahmin priests.

This contrast between urban and rural Hinduism emphasizes the more advanced level of Sanskritic practices in the former. However, Sanskritization is occurring in the latter on two levels. First, the movement of rural temples to urban areas, as part of the rural-to-urban mobility, generally results in attempts by rural migrants to seek wider recognition of the lower deities through grander temple reconstruction and ritual refurbishment. This movement does not necessarily imply an actual shifting of rural temples to urban sites. Rather, non-Sanskritic worship of the lower deities comprises part of the ideological and conceptual baggage of the rural migrants. Whenever the opportunity arises, these migrants construct small temples with minimum facilities for worshipping the deities of their choice. Most of them are dedicated to village gods and goddesses.

In the Hindu temple survey (Ganesh 1985), thirty-five out of a hundred temples were found to be dedicated to village goddesses (*devi*), and twenty-seven to Munisvaran; that is, more than 60 percent of the sample were temples for worshipping the lower deities. Eighteen of the thirty-five *devi* temples and fifteen of the twenty-seven Munisvaran temples had not been consecrated at the time of the survey. These data suggest that village deities tend to enjoy widespread popularity in the urban areas and that their devotees conscientiously seek financial support to upgrade the temples' status through expensive consecration ceremonies. Because these ceremonies require Brahminical expertise, it is likely that the devotees engage *kurukkal* priests for a large fee to perform the necessary rites for status elevation.

Although some Brahmin priests may be economically motivated to perform consecration ceremonies at smaller temples dedicated to village deities, hardly any become resident priests at these temples. Generally these temples are run by *pujaris* with limited ritual knowledge. Many Chinese are attracted to this type of Hindu temple because of the personal services provided by the *pujari*. It is this form of non-Indian support that provides an important economic resource for upgrading the urban shack temples. Yet these financial contributions can improve only the physical exterior of the temples, not the ritual standing of the *pujaris*. Unless a *pujari*'s claims are consistent with his breadth of Sanskritic ritual knowledge, his attempts at Sanskritization are not likely to be successful.

The second level of Sanskritization in rural Hinduism concerns the influence of specific Hindu organizations in setting new standards of religious learning and practice. These organizations tend to emphasize bhakti, or devotion, as the most effective path to salvation, drawing upon Sanskritic sources such as the Bhagavad Gita for transmitting

messages of universal love and cooperation. Because most of these organizations are run by middle-class, English-speaking Indians, the Sanskritic messages are often fused with Protestant values that promote a virtuous lifestyle emphasizing hard work, honesty, decency, and sobriety.

In attempting to advance the religious literacy of estate workers, these organizations experiment with certain democratic ideals concerning equality through religious education and practice. The *bhajan*, a spiritual gathering for experiencing proximity to the divine through devotional hymns, has been introduced by urbanites to estate workers as an alternative to the hierarchical forms of worship found in temples. This type of Sanskritic Hinduism promoted by the bhakti movements has produced a leveling effect in religious behavior because it deemphasizes priestly presence and ritual hierarchies.

We may argue that Sanskritization connotes a rationalized process of status enhancement in the sense that changes in religious behavior and mores are consciously and systematically adopted in this process for the accomplishment of certain ends. Sanskritic Hinduism, as practiced by the higher castes in large urban temples, provides an important symbol of identification with the "great tradition" of India. For many estate workers and rural migrants, Sanskritic Hinduism symbolizes upward mobility in a market economy.

While Sanskritization connotes an increasing dominance of Sanskritic materials, in actuality the direction of this process is determined by the locally dominant groups, which exercise a more significant influence over the mode of cultural imitation than the abstract ideas of the *varna* system. In cases where the dominant groups are not fully Sanskritized, or if they resist Sanskritization, cultural imitation by upwardly mobile groups implies a process of de-Sanskritization.

De-Sanskritization has two levels of meaning. First, it may suggest Tamilization as a conscious denial and rejection of Sanskritic influences in Tamil culture. Tamilization is often associated with the politics of Tamil Nadu, especially the anti-Sanskrit and anti-Brahmin ideologies of the Dravidian movement (see Hardgrave 1965, Irschick 1969, Barnett 1976). It is an attempt by Tamil nationalists to invigorate Tamil identity through a renewed understanding of their culture and history.

In Malaysia, where Tamils comprise more than 80 percent of the Indian community, the growth of Tamil nationalism was precipitated by E. V. Ramasamy Naicker's visit to Malaya in 1929 (Arasaratnam 1970:127). As the founder of the Self-Respect League in Madras, Ramasamy was perceived by many Tamils in Malaya as a cultural hero resisting Aryan domination in India. His first visit heightened Tamil

consciousness, resulting in the establishment of Tamil reformist organizations, drama groups, and newspapers. His second visit, in 1954, helped to revive Tamil nationalism in the postwar years. Tamil identity remains strong in Malaysia, and its religious expression is found in the activities of the Tamil Saivite organizations.

The other meaning of de-Sanskritization has more to do with the revival of certain forms of village Hinduism that accentuate the display of charismatic power. The popularity of some of these forms of Hinduism suggests that nonrational factorsfor example, emotional outbursts and spirit possessionmay play an important role in the manifestation of charismatic power. In these events the Sanskritic model may not be given much attention; rather priority is given to the display of charismatic power as a sign of spiritual development. The case of Thaipusam illustrates this process of de-Sanskritization in the urban context.

Thaipusam:
The Reinvention of Tradition

Of the twenty-odd religious festivals celebrated by Malaysian Indians (Arasaratnam 1966), Thaipusam is considered the most popular, colorful, and visually captivating. This festival is celebrated in honor of Murukan, probably the most widely worshipped deity in South India and elsewhere in the world where Tamil communities are found. As a deity who is associated with hunting, war, and knowledge, Murukan has been recognized as the patron god of various Tamil communities such as the Nattukottai Chettiars. These communities are usually involved in sponsoring Murukan-related festivals.

Yet the history of Murukan cuts a winding path through Vedic and post-Vedic mythologies, first as Skanda-Kumara in Sanskrit literature and later as Skanda-Murukan in various Tamil poems and epics (Clothey 1978:chapter 3). The appearance of Murukan in Tamil literature was evident by the fourth or fifth century C.E., largely as a result of religious interchanges initiated by northern mendicants and dynastic elements moving south (Clothey 1978:62). The fusion of the Sanskritic character of Murukan with Tamil motifs does not necessarily imply a process of de-Sanskritization. Rather, a complex blend of northern and southern motifs represents the character of Murukan in the modern era.

In Tamil Nadu, Palani is the main pilgrimage center for Murukan devotees (Clothey 1978:118). It is here that the largest crowds gather for three festivals dedicated to Murukan: Thaipusam in January and February, Pankuni Uttiram in March and April, and Vaikasi Visakam in May and June. In Malaysia these three festivals are celebrated by

most Tamil Hindus, but the most extravagant is Thaipusam, celebrated at the Subrahmanyam shrine in Batu Caves, Kuala Lumpur. 8

According to a temple official, Thaipusam was celebrated for the first time in Batu Caves in 1892. The shrine had been built by Thamboosamy Pillai, a leading figure in the Tamil community at that time. Since that year, the shrine has been a major pilgrimage and worship center for Murukan devotees in Malaysia. Each year the media report an increasing number of devotees, pilgrims, and tourists attending the Thaipusam festival in Batu Caves, a figure that now exceeds half a million people. There are two reasons Thaipusam in Batu Caves has become a major cultural and religious event. First, the shrine is part of a complex of temples controlled by the Sri Maha Mariyamman Devastanam, which is alleged to be the wealthiest and most influential Hindu temple committee in Malaysia. As the node of many public Hindu activities, the committee has sought to promote Thaipusam for cultural and religious reasons. Second, Batu Caves is a legendary source of supernatural power. It is a limestone outcrop about two miles in circumference and is located about five miles north of the city center. It contains at least five caves of varying sizes that have been transformed into Hindu shrines, cultural galleries, and recreational sites. The central shrine, dedicated to Murukan, is found in the largest cave; it rises more than three hundred feet above the ground and is reached by an ascent of 272 concrete steps. As a piece of high ground in a city built on a flat estuary surrounded by distant hills, Batu Caves is indeed an ideal location (and easily accessible) for the worship of Murukan as a popular South Indian hill deity.

The power of this tangential rock is also related to a local Malay legend that characterizes Batu Caves as the remains of a cursed ship that was turned into rock by the power of God. According to this myth, the ship's captain was a poor Malay peasant who had left home to seek his fortune. He gained high status upon marrying a princess, but he refused to recognize his impoverished mother when he returned home. Because of his unfilial behavior, his mother cursed him and his ship. In a storm, he turned into an eagle, and his ship became stone. Neither the Tamil hill motif nor the Malay legend has coalesced into a syncretic myth, but each suggests the foreboding power of a natural rock formation.

Thaipusam marks the conjoining of the star, pusam, and the full moon of the Tamil month of Thai. In terms of Murukan's mythic career, it represents his conquest of passions and malevolence (Clothey 1978: 142). The festival is most noted for the extravagant displays of penance, particularly the carrying of *kavati*, wooden or metal arches mounted on

the shoulders of devotees and often attached to sharp hooks dug into their skin.

The roots of the ritualistic ordeal can be found in the myth associated with the demon Itampan, who was defeated by Murukan and later became his loyal disciple (Clothey 1978:119, Shulman 1980:48). According to the myth, Itampan had survived Murukan's slaughter of the Cur demons and spent his time performing *sraddha* rites for his departed companions. The sage Agastya was impressed by Itampan's behavior and thought he was sufficiently reliable to carry two hills to Potikai, the abode of Siva. Using the staff of Brahma as a pole and snakes as ropes, Itampan carried the hills like a *kavati* until he reached Palani. He rested his burden there, but when he attempted to lift the hills again, he discovered that they were stuck to the ground. To trace the cause of this problem, he climbed one of the hills, only to encounter the youthful Murukan, who claimed the hills as his own. The fight that ensued resulted in Itampan's demise, but Murukan restored the demon to life upon the pleading of Agastya and the demon's wife. The ever grateful Itampan became Murukan's faithful servant and requested that whoever offered vows to his master be blessed. *Kavati* carriers are therefore thought to be reenacting Itampan's submission to Murukan.

The celebration of Thaipusam in Kuala Lumpur begins with important religious ceremonies at the Sri Maha Mariyamman temple. Though these ceremonies are an important ritual prelude to *kavati*, they do not receive as much media attention as the acts of penance at Batu Caves. The predawn performance of the *visesa puja* at the temple on the first day of Thaipusam may be described as Sanskritic because it is conducted by a Brahmin priest who, following agamic rules, anoints and garlands the image of Murukan and chants mantras and waves lamps before it.

The celebration always begins at the Mariyamman temple because it is believed that at that time of the year Murukan makes a sacred journey to his mountain home (in this case, Batu Caves) from the abode of his mother, Sakti. Mariyamman is considered by many Tamils to be a manifestation of Sakti. At the conclusion of the *puja*, the images of Murukan and his consorts, Valli and Devasena, are mounted on a silver chariot drawn by two bulls and led in a procession to Batu Caves. When the procession arrives at the caves, the images are installed at a prayer hall, but the lance (*vel*) of Murukan, representing his authority and power, is carried into the cave shrine.

The Sanskritic aspects of Thaipusam are largely confined to the temple *pujas*. The celebration becomes less Sanskritic once its focus is shifted to Batu Caves, where the presiding priests are the non-Brahmin

pantarams and the majority of the crowd non-Brahmin devotees. The *pantarams*' role at Thaipusam is mainly limited to performing *arccanai* for devotees. Generally they do not attend to the penitents bearing *kavati*. This is a role assumed by individual spiritual advisors whose authority lies outside the priestly tradition. These advisors are typically *pujaris* or laymen with ample experience in *kavati* preparation but little or no formal training in Sanskritic rituals. They constitute a source of religious instruction that is not consistently Sanskritic in content.

Since there are no explicit Sanskritic prescriptions for *kavati* preparation, the question can be asked whether it is meaningful to speak of a process of de-Sanskritization at Thaipusam. There may be some Sanskritic elements in *kavati*, but they certainly do not comprise a highly systematized body of practical rules to be followed rigidly by each and every penitent. In recent years non-Sanskritic elements thought to be characteristic of village Hinduism, such as frenzied possession by guardian deities, have become more visible at Thaipusam. In this sense, we may speak of de-Sanskritization as the gradual dominance of plebeian forms of penance. The question of the extent to which *kavati* has developed in a non-Sanskritic direction can be answered only through a close examination of the different stages of vow fulfillment.

One of the primary goals of the penitents involved in *kavati* is the discharge of votive obligations to Murukan. But they can accomplish this only in a physical and mental state of purity brought about by abstinence (*viratam*). For several weeks the penitents distance themselves from other people and train their thoughts on Murukan in order to attain the consciousness they require for discharging their spiritual obligations. This preparation for *kavati* is not only for purposes of ritual purification but also for elevating the status of a penitent to that of a temporary renunciant (*sannyasi*).

Most penitents strive to maintain a state of purity by adhering to a vegetarian diet, using a separate set of cooking utensils to prevent contamination by other people, and abstaining from sexual relations. However, the period of abstinence varies from one week to forty-eight days, depending on the magnitude of a penitent's vow and the spiritual advisor's instructions. During this period, the spiritual advisor may prescribe various methods to condition the penitent's body and mind to a state of readiness for trance. Among them are fasting, chanting the 108 names of Murukan, maintaining silence, offering regular prayers, and sleeping on a cold, hard floor. But the most effective technique used by many advisors involves collective socialization into trance. After several days of abstinence, penitents under the tutelage of an advisor are gathered in his home for collective chanting and singing.

During these sessions, a spiritual bond develops between the penitents that facilitates their receptivity to the advisor's manipulations, one of these being the massaging of the forehead at the point between the eyes. The achievement of trance in these sessions is the climax of a program of mental conditioning, enabling the penitents to carry *kavati* in an altered state of consciousness.

Socialization into trance is considered an important requirement for *kavati* because it symbolizes the death of the old sell just as the demonic self of Itampan was destroyed by Murukan. All penitents are expected to die this symbolic death; otherwise their *kavati* is meaningless. Their revival at the end of *kavati* is akin to Itampan's resurrection, a symbol of rebirth imbued with the power of Murukan's grace.

There is a question as to whether or not trance is non-Sanskritic. According to Staal (1963:219), references to trance and possession can be traced to the Rig-veda; he says that "the Brahman is the trembling Vedic seer who is possessed by inspiring gods." From his viewpoint, trance and possession must be regarded as part of the Sanskritic tradition. But Staal's refutation of the anthropological treatment of possession as non-Sanskritic cannot be accepted in toto unless we ask who are the gods who possess the seer. In the case of penitents preparing for *kavati*, there has yet to be a recorded instance of possession by Murukan, a Sanskritic god. Even Itampan, a demon, has not been known to possess penitents. His reputation at Thaipusam is limited to that of a spiritual guide to penitents entering the cave.

Possession at Thaipusam is claimed mainly by individuals seized by the spirits of guardian deities who have no Sanskritic status. Thus we can argue that if trance and possession are allegedly Sanskritic in origin, their expressions at Thaipusam have over the years become less Sanskritic as more penitents identify *kavati* with guardian deities and compete in acts of self-mortification.

The three guardian deities most often associated with possession at Thaipusam are Muniyanti, Munisvaran, and Madurai Viran. Penitents possessed by the first two deities usually wear colorful turbans or headbands, smoke cigars, wave knives, carry whips, and strut and shout aggressively. Those possessed by the third deity perform feats such as walking on large knives held by their supporters. In recent years, possession by these deities has resulted in more challenging forms of self-mortification, such as pulling a chariot connected with ropes to hooks embedded in a penitent's back. Even penitents who experience trance without possession have become more ostentatious in their acts of self-mortification, such as piercing their cheeks with skewers measuring up to six feet in length.

There are other features of *kavati* that are strongly linked to Tamil culture or lack Sanskritic influence. The temple sells flour lamps (*mavilakku*) as votive offerings, and Fuller (1988:31) has identified flour lamps as a "standard offering for village goddesses but never for Sanskritic ones." Limes and oranges are hooked onto penitents' bodies as cooling agents; this is a distinctively Tamil ritual practice (Beck 1969). Milk offerings in little pots hung on *kavati* arches or on penitents' bodies are characteristic of Tamil ritual behavior (Ferro-Luzzi 1981:717). Chants of Murukan for trance induction are often adapted to songs from Tamil movies.

Despite the predominance of Tamil elements in *kavati*, some Sanskritic motifs continue to find a place in Thaipusam. The motif linking Murukan to the sun in early Sanskritic literature (Clothey 1978:48) is manifested most vividly in sun worship (*suryanamaskaram*) by some penitents. Equally important is the Sanskritic motif of Murukan as a god of fertility. 9 Penitents whose wish for children has been granted are required to carry *karumpu kavati*. For this type of *kavati*, a child with a shaved head is placed in a cloth tied to the center of a long cane. The father holds the front end of the cane, the mother the rear end, and together they carry their child up 272 steps to show their gratitude to Murukan. But these motifs have been overshadowed by non-Sanskritic votive expressions, especially the ostentatious displays of possession and penance. The increased number of male penitents possessed by ferocious guardian deities and female penitents possessed by village goddesses suggests that Thaipusam is no longer treated as an exclusive Murukan festival but has become instead an occasion for non-Sanskritic deities to make a grand appearance.

Temple officials have over the years disparaged possession behavior and various types of exhibitionism at Thaipusam, but they claim that it is beyond their capabilities to impose strict rules on *kavati*-bearing in a crowd exceeding half a million people. The debate over *kavati* and other forms of self-mortification has continued for several decades. It is a debate that pits Hindu modernists who criticize baroque acts of penance against Hindu traditionalists who regard *kavati* as an indispensable act of vow fulfillment. Among the traditionalists are some members of the Tamil elite who believe that *kavati* cannot be obliterated without causing irreparable damage to the ethos of Thaipusam (*New Straits Times*, 29 December 1987, 3 February 1988).

Thaipusam has become a major Hindu festival with loose ritual boundaries; thus it openly invites innovations without reprisals and serves as an avenue for the redefinition of an important aspect of the local Hindu tradition. The question that follows is why this redefinition

is oriented toward Tamil village Hinduism. A large proportion of the penitents are Tamils from the lower-ranking groups. De-Sanskritization in this context does not refer explicitly to a devaluation of Murukan's status or an expunging of Sanskritic elements from his personality. Rather it is a process of elevating the status of non-Sanskritic village deities through an emphasis on their powers as symbolically represented by violent possession and the display of whips and knives. In one respect, this emphasis on the powers of guardian deities may have been facilitated by the lower-ranking groups' identification with Itampan, the demon-turned-devotee without deified status. Possession by guardian deities may be interpreted as a type of role generalization in which the character of Itampan merges with the characters of the lower gods.

In another respect, Thaipusam generates an enormous amount of revenue from donations and from rents collected from shops erected on the temple's grounds during the festival. Any attempt to impose strict sanctions on *kavati* may diminish the size of the crowd and the income-generating potential of the festival. An implicitly liberal attitude toward *kavati* permits the coexistence of both the religious and the commercial aspects of the festival and indirectly encourages broad innovations in self-mortification rites.

Even as this trend toward de-Sanskritization is occurring in popular festivals such as Thaipusam, efforts to modify or exclude the Sanskritic elements of the "great tradition" have been observed in various modern Hindu organizations and movements. These efforts are important to the extent that they are reshaping Hindu practices in relation to subethnic identities.

The Agora of Modern Salvation

The nineteenth-century reinterpretation of Hinduism, sometimes referred to as the Hindu Renaissance, can be traced to the early days of the British Raj in India and represents a confrontation of Eastern and Western ideas. The context of this confrontation has been succinctly summarized by King (1978:85): "Thus, the cultural colonialism of the British provoked the cultural chauvinism of the Indians; the alienation of Western people from their own cultural tradition was compensated by their over-enthusiastic adaptation of an alien culture. For the Western convert the image of 'Indian spirituality, Western materialism' answered a personal need; for the Indian it provided a focus for the shaping of a growing sense of Indian identity which, in turn, fed the demand for political independence."

Bharati (1970:269, 272, 287) noted that the "parlance of the Hindu Renaissance deemphasizes ritual, caste, and 'superstitions'" with a "decisively *anti*-Sanskritic trend among the apologists," heightened by the "newly established dignity of an empirical, social, and autonomous individual." Among the various promoters of this renaissance, Bharati (1970:278) identified the modern English-speaking sadhus (holy men) as a highly influential group of religious teachers. The source of their religious inspiration can be found chiefly in their interpretations of the monistic ideals of the Vedanta.

The anti-Sanskritic trend described by Bharati involves a reduced cognizance of Sanskrit as a medium of spiritual learning rather than a total rejection of Sanskritic materials. But in South India, this trend reflects the resurgence of Dravidian nationalism, an expression of which emphasizes the literary and devotional preeminence of the Tamil-based Saiva Siddhanta.

The circumstances surrounding the rise of Dravidian nationalism in the late nineteenth century and its intricate developments in the early twentieth century (see Hardgrave 1965, Irschick 1969, Suntharalingam 1974, Barnett 1976) do not concern us here. Generally the anti-Sanskritic trend is an aspect of the conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in South India. In religious terms, the acclaimed preeminence of Saiva Siddhanta may be considered a type of calculated elevation of non-Brahminical spiritual acumen since the major figures of medieval Saiva Siddhanta were non-Brahmins.

The Quest for Tamil Spiritualism

It is important here to draw some general connections between Saiva Siddhanta, Vedanta, Tamil, and Sanskrit in order to make sense of the development of neo-Hinduism in Malaysia and the impact of the West on the Hindu Renaissance. The Aryan penetration of South India, resulting in the interaction of Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic cultures, produced a religious system that for many centuries utilized Sanskrit as a liturgical vehicle. The major body of revelational works in Aryan culture was the four Vedas, to which have been added the twenty-eight Agamas, which are reputedly as old as the Vedas (if not older) and arguably Tamil in origin (Ponniah 1962:7). Despite their alleged South Indian roots, the Agamas were composed in Sanskrit.

It was not until the thirteenth century that the first systematic statement on Tamil Saivism, written in Tamil, was produced by Meykantar Tevar. The thrust of this work, the Sivajñanabodham, was directed at the discovery of truth contained in the four Vedas and twenty-eight

Agamas through a translation and interpretation of twelve aphorisms (sutra) found in the Raurava Agama. Meykantar's student Arulnandi subsequently composed the Sivajñanasiddhi, which was a critical review of Indian metaphysics and an exposition of Siddhanta logic and epistemology. These two medieval works, together with the Sivaprakasa, by Umapati Sivacariyar (a well-known medieval priest at Cidambaram Temple), and the eighteenth-century commentary on these works by Sivajñana Swamikal form the central corpus of contemporary Siddhanta philosophy (Piet 1952).

The medieval period in which the Tamil Siddhanta took shape was the era of the powerful Chola empire, the organization of which has been described by Stein (1980:22) as segmentarythat is, it was made up of "parts of the many cultural regions into which medieval India was partitioned." It was in this segmentary political system that princes of various localities supported Tamil Saivite monks and philosophers in their literary debates with the followers of the Advaita Vedanta school, which was developed by Sankara, a Malayali Brahmin who lived in the eighth century (Lorenzen 1983:156). This school was undoubtedly influenced by the Sanskritic contents of the Upanishads (Piet 1952:3). 10

In this struggle to advance a pristine Tamil philosophy, non-Brahmins took an important lead in breaking away from the Sanskritic tradition. Thus renowned philosophers of that period, such as Meykantar, Marai, and Sekkilar, were non-Brahmin Vellalas (Stein 1980:235, 341). The implication of this development was that the Saiva Siddhanta movement challenged the Brahminical and Sanskritic control of religious knowledge so that "after the thirteenth century, the notion that Sanskrit and its Brahman adepts were the sole custodians of a high tradition while Tamil . . . and non-Brahmans were to be the custodians of folk traditions could no longer be explicitly sustained" (Stein 1980:7).

The Tamil adherents of Saiva Siddhanta proposed the doctrine of *tripadartha* in contrast to Vedantic monism. Instead of accepting the idea that divine and human identity can be merged through the removal of ignorance, they argued that reality comprises *pati* (god), *pasu* (soul), and *pasa* (worldly bonds). The bulk of Siddhanta philosophy focuses on unraveling the relationships between these three states of reality. The theism or dualism advocated by these philosophers had actually been central to the poems and hymns of the earlier Saivite saints, whose works were compiled between the seventh and tenth centuries, during the Pallava dynasty. These works, known collectively as the twelve Tirumurai, contain the poems, hymns, and biographies of several Tamil saints, of which the Tevaram hymnals of Sambanthar, Appar, and Sundarar are best known. The devotional themes of the Tirumurai

served an important function in maintaining the alliance between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, which, according to Stein (1980:87), was a critical condition for the survival of the segmentary state from the Pallava to the Chola period.

Devotionalism continues to be a crucial ingredient of the neo-Hindu movement in Malaysia, although it no longer serves the function of maintaining medieval alliances. To understand the position of this movement vis-à-vis other Hindu organizations, we need to relate it briefly to the growth of cultural nationalism in colonial Malaya.

The Growth of Devotional Movements

Following E. V. Ramasamy Naicker's visit to Malaya in 1929, the activities of local Tamil nationalists were coordinated under the direction of the Tamil Reform Association (TRA). Although the TRA was not a religious organization, its anti-Brahmin and anti-Sanskrit programs provided an implicit model for the promotion of Saiva Siddhanta. As the impetus behind a social reform movement, the TRA advocated the banning of *kavati* and firewalking at Hindu festivals. Its members made strenuous efforts to influence the government to impose bans on these practices but failed because popular Hindu opinion was against them (Arasaratnam 1970:174).

The impact of the TRA on Hinduism was not significant, but even as it faded into obscurity after the war, its successors quickly established niches in the Indian community to maintain the momentum of Tamil cultural revivalism. Among its successors, the Malayan Tamil Pannai (MTP) attained high public visibility. This movement was founded in 1948 in Kuala Lumpur by a Tamil from Melaka and a Tamil lawyer from Madras. Its major activities focused on the promotion of Tamil language and literature and the public exhibition of Tamil arts. Although the MTP was not explicitly religious in its orientation, it nevertheless promoted the devotional and mystical writings of South Indian poets (Palaniappan 1966).

These cultural developments must be seen in the context of South Indian politics in the 1950s. When C. N. Annadurai left the Dravidian movement in Madras in 1949 to form his own party, the Dravida Munetram Kalakam (DMK), he attracted many Tamil scholars to it because of his earlier prominence in journalism and the arts (Barnett 1976). This new political membership contributed to a renaissance of Tamil literature in the 1950s that also spread to colonial Malaya.

By the 1960s the Tamil political parties, weakened by internal dissensions, could no longer provide a continuing source of cultural

inspiration to Tamils in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the nationalism implanted earlier became a seedbed for the development and promotion of Tamil Saivism. The person who was partly responsible for raising Saivite consciousness was Ramanathan Chettiar, a professional moneylender from Madras who had migrated to Malaya in 1947. He was also known as a scholar of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and had been active in the Saiva Mahajana Sangam in Madras. In 1954, at the height of the Tamil cultural revival, Ramanathan's students formed the Arul Nerik Tiru Kuttam (ANTK) to disseminate Saiva Siddhanta teachings.

Another such organization, the Tiruvarul Tava Nerik Manram (TTNM), was established in 1962. Unlike ANTK members, who concentrated their work among middle-class Indians, TTNM organized religious classes and devotional meetings largely for lower-class urban Indians. The TTNM members believed strongly that lower-class Indian youths were most susceptible to proselytization by other religions and therefore required immediate attention in order to prevent mass conversions. Some members of the TTNM separated to form the Appar Tiru Nerik Kalakam in the mid-1960s, but they were essentially doing the same work as the TTNM.

These three organizations were based in Kuala Lumpur, but only the ANTK had sufficient resources to spread its influence to other major towns in Malaysia. Despite their socioeconomic differences, all three organizations pursued the common goal of imparting Saiva Siddhanta teachings in the Tamil vernacular.

Although the visibility of these organizations declined in the 1980s, the impetus for maintaining interest in Saiva Siddhanta was not lost. Other Hindu organizations were established to reinvigorate Saivite practices and learning. Among them were the Malaysian Hindu Dharma Mamandram (MHDM) and the Saiva Siddhanta Manram (SSM). The MHDM was founded in 1981 by a retired army officer. Its Tamil text, the Arulkalanjiyam, was compiled over a ten-year period by its founder, who selected hymns from multiple sources, several of which were Sanskritic and Vedantic in origin, such as the Sundaryalahari by Sankara, the Bhagavad Gita, and various works by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. A major portion of this text, however, is based on the Tirumurai.

Formed in 1980, the SSM was inspired by the Saiva Siddhanta Church of Hawaii (SSCH). The SSCH was founded in 1957 by an American monk whose monastic name is Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniya and who had received training at the Natha Sampradaya in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The Natha Sampradaya traces its origins to Satguru Nandinatha and Tirumular, the latter of whom was a well-known poet-philosopher of the fifth century. SSCH disseminates Saivite teachings

mainly through the Gurudeva's Holy Bible of the Saivite Hindu Religion, which comprises translations from Tirumular's Tirumantiram (the tenth Tirumurai) and the Tirukkural, a long ethical tract written in verse by the Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar around the beginning of the common era. After 1984 SSM became independent of SSCH, but it continues to include Siddhantic materials in its courses on Hinduism.

The dissemination of Siddhantic theory and devotion by these organizations is complemented by the work of several groups that promote Siddhanta through yoga exercises (*asana*). References to *asana* can be found in the Upanishads. However, there are more allusions to it in the Mahabharata and the Puranas (Eliade 1969:53). Thus the Sanskritic sources of these practices are in no way seen as contradictory to the Saivite teachings of various Tamil ascetics who regularly visit Malaysia. For example, the International Babaji Yoga Sangam, founded by Yogi Ramaiah who often comes to Malaysia, emphasizes the practice of Saivite devotionalism and asana. Based in Arizona, this organization has a branch in Malaysia with a growing membership.

Across the doctrinal divide, the popularity of Vedanta philosophy is firmly entrenched in several organizations that adhere more or less to Sankara's monistic Advaita Vedanta. Sankara's disciples internationalized his teachings many centuries after his death, moving beyond the Indian centers in Badri, Dwaraka, Srngeri, and Puri to various parts of the world through several well-known organizations. In Malaysia, Advaita philosophy has been disseminated principally through organizations connected to the three southern orders of the Dasanami sect, namely Bharati, Sarasvati, and Puri. For example, the Pure Life Society (PLS), founded in 1949, has roots in the Bharati order. The Divine Life Society (DLS), established in 1953, is directly linked to the Sarasvati order.

Other Vedantic organizations that are not of Dasanami origins include the Gita Ashram (GA), the International Society for Krsna Consciousness (ISKCON), and the Divine Light Mission (DLM). The GA was established in Malaysia in 1966 by Swami Har Harji Maharaj of Jodhpur, North India. Its activities are focused on *bhajans* and the study of the Bhagavad Gita. ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, was founded in New York in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupad and went on to achieve international fame. Its activities in the West have been widely researched (see Judah 1974, Rochford 1985, Shinn 1987). A branch of ISKCON was formed in Malaysia in 1979. The DLM became a household name in the West in the 1970s (see Messer 1976, Downton 1979, Price 1979). Upon the death of its founder in 1966, one of his sons, Guru Maharaj Ji, assumed leadership of the movement and won the hearts of many young Westerners with his

Vedantic philosophy. A branch of the DLM was organized in Malaysia in 1978. Generally, DLM members practice meditation in pursuit of higher knowledge, which they share with others in *satsangs* (collective gatherings).

However, there are some Hindu organizations that attempt to draw religious inspiration from both Vedantic and Siddhantic teachings. One of these organizations is the Malaysian Hindu Sangam (MHS), which was formed in 1965 by a group of Indian professionals, civil servants, teachers, and businessmen who saw the need to arrest the decline of interest in Hinduism among Indian youths. By the 1970s the MHS was able to expand its program of religious instruction to rural plantations as well as offer religious training to teachers in Tamil schools and to *pantaram* priests. It also recruited religious scholars from India and arranged for local Indians to be trained there so that they would be exposed to Vedantic and Siddhantic sources of Hinduism. Today the MHS is a nationally influential Hindu body that continues to pursue religious reform through an assimilatory approach to the various Hindu schools of thought.

The MHS and various Vedantic and Siddhantic organizations share a commitment to the *bhakti* ideology. Adherence to this ideology not only simplifies a devotee's approach to religion by removing the participation of priests and ritual technicians but also invites an all-embracing attitude that facilitates personal ecstatic experiences. The linguistic medium for expressing these experiences is English. Bharati (1970) discusses this use of English as a major characteristic of the Hindu Renaissance. In Malaysia, Tamil schools have become fewer in number, and Tamil has no status as an official language. This has contributed to a decline in Tamil literacy. English-speaking Indians of the postindependence generations are therefore more attracted to the *bhakti* movements that are influenced by the Hindu Renaissance than to the vernacular movements influenced by Tamil nationalism of the 1950s.

As participants in the *bhakti* movements, younger Malaysian Indians are drawn to the charisma of various gurus and spiritual leaders. This charisma is not perceived by the government as threatening because it largely involves individualized instruction for personal transformation, not social revolution. Indeed, the essence of the *bhakti* movements seems to be the promotion of a type of individualism as a condition of spiritual enlightenment. In a milieu of competing neo-Hindu groups, each seeker can match spiritual wants and experiences to the goals of a specific organizationor, more precisely, to the authority of a guru or spiritual leader. Thus salvation is not necessarily a luxury assured by one's religion of birth or the faithful observation of traditional rituals;

rather it must be sought and strenuously cultivated through the good graces of a spiritual intermediary or guru.

The Renewal of Tamil Hindu Identity

As described above, the developments in Malaysian Hinduism suggest that the Sanskritic mode of religious expression is not predominant. This is because South Indian Tamils comprise the majority subethnic group in the Indian community, and their adherence to Tamil culture remains strong. However, we can say that Sanskritization as an expression of status mobility has not been totally overshadowed by the revival of Saiva Siddhanta teachings and practices. Sanskritization continues to provide an important route to status recognition, particularly among lower-status Hindus who aspire to upgrade the social standing of their temples and deities. But it is the continuing concern over the future of Tamil identity that shapes the development of Malaysian Hinduism today.

The history of Indian migration to Malaysia has shown that the early immigrants were mainly from the lower strata of South Indian society. But in the 1920s and 1930s, when the Indians began organizing themselves, community leadership was dominated first by Sri Lankan Tamils and Malayalis and later by North Indians (Stenson 1980:4547). Only after World War II did the South Indian Tamils gain political power in the Malaysian Indian community (Arasaratnam 1970, Ampalavanar 1981). The political assertion of South Indian Tamils in the postwar period symbolized the ascendancy of an Indian subethnic group that was once considered depressed and backward. This power is reflected in the transformation of Mariyamman, a South Indian village deity, into one with high agamic status.

Today the Sri Maha Mariyamman temple in Kuala Lumpur, devoted to this goddess, is reputed to be the wealthiest Hindu temple in Malaysia. It has become a prestigious center of Hindu worship that draws enormous crowds during festive celebrations. As a Sanskritized deity, Mariyamman symbolizes not only the transformation of religious rank but also the Tamil struggle to win and maintain political power and prestige.

This struggle to assert an ethnic identity within religious boundaries has also been expressed in the organization of a one-day education pilgrimage (*kalvi yathirai*), held for the first time in August 1995 at the Batu Caves Subrahmanyam shrine and allegedly attended by about a hundred thousand devotees (*Sun Magazine*, 1 September 1995). Jointly organized by the Sri Maha Mariyamman temple and the Sri Murugan Center, the pilgrimage symbolized Tamil aspirations to attain cultural

respectability through educational achievements blessed by spiritual power. Traditionally, personal requests for educational success are made privately at temple *pujas* or to Sarasvati (the goddess of wisdom) during the Navarattiri festival. This pilgrimage represents an important innovation in Malaysian Hinduism because it is an organization on a grand scale not only for the fulfillment of a secular goal but also for the strengthening of requests to Murukan (or Subrahmanyam) for educational success among Malaysian Tamils.

Within this context of political change, Saiva Siddhanta has played a pivotal role in systematizing the doctrinal aspects of Tamil Saivism. It has provided an apologetic for the Tamil intelligentsia to assert its independence from Vedantic influences. There is much pride in revitalizing a religious philosophy thought to be indigenous to Tamil Nadu. Thus the ongoing textual reinterpretation of Hinduism is framed within the debate on the differences between Saiva Siddhanta and Vedantic philosophy, the former with its pluralistic *tripadartha* doctrine against the monism of Advaita Vedanta.

The irony of this development is that English has become an important medium in the dissemination of Saiva Siddhanta. Younger Tamils from the postindependence generations, many of whom cannot read or write in Tamil, rely on English as a medium of religious instruction. Many of them are subtly influenced by an outlook that juxtaposes Eastern spirituality with Western materialism. This is because English translations and exegeses of Hindu texts connote a Western fascination with Indian spirituality. Furthermore, these younger Tamils are impressed by itinerant Indian gurus who are accompanied by Western disciples.

Many of these Tamils are from the middle class, the ascendancy of which in the postwar years has posed an identity problem for them by giving them the status of a cosmopolitan, achievement-oriented group while they remain an ethnic minority with a rich past, though they lack the authentication of Tamil education. In this context of increasing class mobility juxtaposed with declining Tamil education, the religious dimension of Tamil cultural identity becomes even more critical because knowledge of spiritual matters does not necessarily require Tamil literacy but may be obtained from individuals who communicate mostly in English.

The transmission of Siddhantic knowledge to the younger Tamils has not fallen within the responsibilities of older family members but rather has been assumed by the neo-Hindu organizations, particularly those led by charismatic gurus. The gurus' yogic knowledge is often perceived by their followers as a source of charisma. However, there is

another type of charisma that stems from deity possession. This charisma is expressed in various acts of self-mortification, as experienced by penitents in festivals like Thaipusam, to demonstrate immunity to bodily pain because of a special bond with specific deities. Thus these two types of charisma provide a continuing basis for the assertion of Tamil Hindu identity without complete disenchantment.

There are two reasons that the charismatic presence in Malaysian Hinduism cannot be dismissed as a minor or passing phase in the religious development of an ethnically conscious community. First, there is no central organization in Malaysia that represents all practitioners of Hinduism. There are many Hindu temples, organizations, and movements, each independent of the others. Although there is an important relationship between Hinduism and Tamil identity, this link has yet to be rationally articulated through the activities and sponsorship of a single influential religious body. The multiple groups within Tamil Hinduism suggest that rationalization of Hindu identity, if it is occurring, is not sustained by a unified outlook on organization, doctrines, and developmental goals. The charismatic presence becomes an even more critical influence on the practice of Hinduism in a religiously decentralized environment in which identity expressions are not restricted to the dictates of an umbrella organization.

Second, even as a salvationary religion, Hinduism is not fully divorced from magical ideas (Weber 1958b:16667). The reason for its peculiar mixture of magic and ascetic aspirations can be found in what Weber believed to be a lack of correspondence between the ethics and means of salvation. Unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, which developed its ethical approach to salvation into an empirical principle emphasizing world mastery (Weber 1958a), Hinduism is preoccupied more with the problem of human mortality and its transcendence than the ethical question of sinfulness (Schluchter 1979:2931). Given this emphasis on transcendence and immanence, practitioners of Hindu principles are more likely to be sensitive to charisma as a unique power source for achieving spiritual goals.

Thus the charismatic appeal of gurus and the manifestation of charisma in deity possession are not necessarily perceived by Hindus as antithetical to the attainment of salvation. On the contrary, charisma may even be considered a vital revelational source for the rational organization of Hindu activities. Among Malaysian Hindus, this source may become a significant determinant in the organization and expression of Tamil identity.

Chapter Six
The Empowerment of Marginality:
From Rational Knowledge to Organized Ecstasy in Christianity

Juxtaposed with Christianity's loss of influence in the centers of Western culture is its expansive vigor in the postcolonial periphery. Christian missions as agencies of Western enculturation in colonial societies were infused with the Enlightenment paradigm of universal rationality and progress. However, decolonization in the aftermath of World War II compelled a rethinking of Christian mission. Christianity could no longer be unproblematically identified with Western civilization because its institutional decline had privileged the emergence of indigenized Christianity characterized by intense spiritual experiences.

In Malaysia, the colonial character of Christianity before World War II reflected the control of foreign missionaries over Christian religious and educational institutions. In the postwar period, Christianity has been gradually indigenizing in response to its declining institutional power and the increasing interest in ecstatic experiences and thaumaturgy promoted by the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement. It is these experiences, alternatively known as "power encounters," that are valued by many Malaysian Christians as a verification of religious authenticity.

Unlike Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, which have clear-cut links with specific ethnic identities, Christian identity in Malaysia lacks an unambiguous correspondence with the cultural claims of particular ethnic groups. Christianity in Malaysia cuts across the boundaries separating Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, and the *orang asli*, or aborigines. It is the transcultural character of Malaysian Christianity that has made possible the ostensible role of subjective experience in the organization of religious identity within a socially plural framework.

This chapter concerns the emergent relationship between experiential knowledge and organizational complexity in the formation of an indigenous Christian identity. The analysis of the transformation of local Christian experience is necessary for understanding the direction of renewal and reform among the Christian denominations and movements in contemporary Malaysia. This transformation has occurred gradually over four centuries, beginning with the arrival of the European powers and their cultural impact on the indigenous population and the Asian immigrants.

Colonialism and Christian Mission

Christian evangelism accompanied European penetration of the Malaysian peninsula. The Roman Catholics, the earliest of the Christian missionaries, arrived in the wake of the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511 (see Texeira 1961). The Portuguese crown sponsored the missionaries who followed, as church and state, infused with opposition to Islam, were united in the pursuit of trade and converts in Asia. The Muslim merchants who controlled the Indian Ocean trade routes were the chief rivals of the Portuguese for supremacy in the spice trade. Propagation of the Catholic faith was considered an effective means of subjugating Muslim commercial power in key harbors where the Portuguese sought to establish naval bases and trading posts; it was also regarded as a fitting symbol of the empire they aspired to build.

Continuous conflict between the Portuguese and Muslim merchants created implacable Malay antagonism toward Christianity. The protracted warfare between Portuguese-ruled Melaka and neighboring Muslim states heightened animosity between Muslims and Christians. Portuguese Catholic missionaries in Melaka succeeded in converting only the Eurasians. Despite the Portuguese missionaries' failure to evangelize the Malays, Melaka rapidly developed into a Catholic city. Catholic institutions proliferated there, and Melaka had become a major center of missionary activities in Asia by the late sixteenth century.

Dutch pressure on the Portuguese, which began in the late sixteenth century, culminated in the final Dutch siege of Melaka in June 1640 and was followed by the Portuguese surrender in January 1641. At the time of Melaka's fall to the Dutch after 130 years of Portuguese rule, its Catholic community had grown to twenty thousand and was served by nineteen churches and chapels, including a cathedral (Felix G. Lee 1963:44). Although the Dutch lost no time in dismantling Melaka's Roman Catholic establishment, some of the Eurasians continued to

practice the Catholic faith in the surrounding jungles (Texeira 1961: 101). The Eurasians maintained their Portuguese-Catholic identity by absorbing non-Catholic Eurasian families through intermarriage and by perpetuating their own language, a creolized form of sixteenth-century Portuguese known as *lingua do Christam*.

Although the Dutch East India Company encouraged promotion of Calvinist Christianity in the areas under its influence, no significant missionary work was carried out in Melaka (Williams 1976:79). The Dutch Reformed Church's clergy was concerned mainly with ministering to the company's employees. Despite its lack of missionary zeal, some Eurasians converted to Calvinism. Nevertheless, the Dutch Reformed Church did not survive the retreat of Dutch commercial and political power from the Malaysian peninsula in 1824 when the British took control of Melaka.

The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, proved itself resilient to the political decline of Portugal in maritime Asia. Rome formulated a new policy toward missionary work by bringing the missions directly under the control of a central organization known as the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (SCPF). The Catholic missions' ties with particular colonial and commercial powers were severed, and their relationship with Rome was correspondingly strengthened (Williams 1976:81).

The new era of Catholic missions on the peninsula was initiated by the work of French priests in Ayuthia, then the capital of Siam, about 1662 (Felix G. Lee 1963:45). An outbreak of persecution in Siam in 1779 resulted in the expulsion of the missionaries, who then moved southward along the peninsula to continue their work. Under the leadership of a French missionary, a small Catholic community from Siam and Melaka moved to Penang in 1786, when the island became a possession of the British crown. The governor provided a building for the use of the mission. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, other French missionaries came to Penang in search of a new site for the Asian seminary that had been transferred from Ayuthia.

The British authorities in Penang supported the French missionaries' proposal to set up the seminary, which was established in 1809 as the College General and served as a place for the French missionaries to train native priests for countries throughout Asia (Felix G. Lee 1963: 47). The Society of Paris Foreign Missions, an arm of the SCPF, gained influence on the Malaysian peninsula at the expense of the Portuguese missions during the nineteenth century. In 1888 Rome recognized the authority of the Paris Foreign Missions over the entire peninsula, including Singapore. The Portuguese were, however, allowed to main-

tain control over their churches and parishes in Melaka and Singapore within the organizational structure dominated by the Paris Foreign Missions (Williams 1976:99).

Protestant missionaries became active on the peninsula after the eighteenth century. The London Missionary Society (LMS), which pioneered Protestant evangelism on the peninsula, directed its efforts toward the Malay and Chinese communities in the Straits Settlements from 1815 until 1846. In 1846 the LMS decided to abandon its work in the Straits Settlements to take advantage of the opening of China (see Haines 1962). This new direction in the work of the LMS resulted in less Protestant missionary activity on the Malaysian peninsula from 1846 through 1881. During this period, the Roman Catholic missionaries continued to evangelize in Singapore and on the peninsula.

Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, rarely expanded their activities beyond the Straits Settlements of Penang, Melaka, and Singapore before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chaotic conditions in the Malay states, which were torn by civil war, discouraged the missionaries from venturing further into the interior. British intervention in the Malay states and subsequent establishment of protectorates broadened the field for missionary enterprise. However, the treaties between the British and Malay rulers limited Christian evangelization to the non-Malay immigrant population. The British colonial administration, which by 1874 had committed itself to the policy of upholding the status of Islam in the Malay states as part of the strategy of indirect rule, unofficially discouraged any missionary work among the Malays.

Christian missionaries, responding to the new opportunities provided by British intervention in the Malay states, founded churches and schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the larger towns that developed on the west coast of the peninsula. Evangelization was directed mainly toward the urban population, which was made up of Chinese and Indian immigrants. Some Christian evangelism was carried out among the aborigines. During the nineteenth century, Catholic missionaries established small missions for aborigines in fringe jungle areas (Williams 1976). The Methodists began a mission in Perak and Pahang in the 1930s. Christian evangelization of aborigines was politically sensitive throughout the colonial period (see Means and Means 1981).

The diversity of languages and dialects among the immigrant groups compelled the missionaries to structure their work along ethnic and linguistic lines. Catholic and Protestant missionaries alike allocated separate personnel and facilities to cater to the particular needs of the

various immigrant groups. The linguistic specialization of missionary work led to the institutionalization of ethnolinguistically distinct sections within the Christian churches. Speakers of Chinese dialects and Tamil generally attended separate branches of the same church. Only the English-speaking sections of the churches were multiethnic. 1

Christian Power as Rational Knowledge

Through its institutional base in the field of education, the power of Christianity was most directly expressed to the immigrant non-Malay population. The concentration of Christian evangelization through English-medium schools located in the Straits Settlements and large towns in the Western Malay states led to the formation of middle-class, English-speaking sections within the churches. The Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists in particular viewed the English school as an important means for propagating Christianity (Loh 1975:56).

Missionaries from these churches contributed to the expansion of English education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fulfillment of the gospel commission to go forth and make disciples of all nations, Western European and North American Christian missionaries equipped themselves with the technical skills of mundane secular occupations (see Rooney 1981). A knowledge of medicine, carpentry, printing, pedagogy, and languages was considered indispensable for effective missionary work. At this time demand for English-educated white-collar workers in the growing European-dominated commercial sector and the colonial bureaucracy had become pressing. The colonial authorities welcomed the development of English-medium schools and assisted them with grants and occasionally donations of land (Loh 1975:62).

As mission school education provided access to prestigious white-collar jobs, middle-class families or those who aspired to attain middle-class status eagerly sent their children to these schools. Christian schools offered a strong academic curriculum within which religious indoctrination was secondary. Generally the missionaries sought to introduce students to Christian values indirectly rather than to proselytize aggressively among them (Loh 1975:62).

Through their role in educating the urban elite, the mission schools enjoyed widespread influence that far exceeded mere baptism statistics. Some degree of familiarity with Christian teachings and values was common among the English-educated middle class, though only a minority of the mission school students actually converted to Christianity. Christian converts recruited through mission schools were con-

sidered an aspiring elite group in colonial society. Christian education as a channel of upward social mobility transmitted a rationalized version of Christianity consonant with a scientific worldview and a commitment to material progress. The attainments of Western civilization were indirectly presented to the students as the logical consequence of ethical orientations that developed within a Christian milieu.

Along with a rigorous academic curriculum and Bible studies, the mission schools propagated the Protestant ethic of world mastery. Whether or not mission school students chose to convert to Christianity, they internalized systematic work habits and the capacity to undertake tasks energetically and efficiently. This ethic of active asceticism prepared the students to assume a variety of occupational roles in the emerging colonial capitalist economy. 2 Intense personal experiences of spiritual power and thaumaturgical practices were not promoted by the mainstream Christian missionaries associated with colonial educational institutions. Pentecostal Christianity, which emphasized these elements, was also introduced during the colonial period but had little appeal.

The departure of the missionaries, followed by government takeover of the mission schools during the postcolonial period, did not diminish the value placed on practical rationalism in conduct. The ethic of active asceticism became autonomous from Christian educational institutions. The postcolonial nation-state's commitment to technological development and economic growth generated an ongoing effort to inculcate rational behavior through secular schools. Discipline and hard work were viewed by the governing elite as prerequisites for achieving material progress and social order.

In the postcolonial era, practical activity directed toward control of the external world is a definitive feature not only of secular institutions but most significantly of other religions that seek to provide alternatives to Christianity. Ascetic activism as a mode of salvation striving has been embraced by diverse types of religious reformist and renewal movements. This broad diffusion of the Protestant ethic has contributed to ideological competition between Christians and non-Christians. The occurrence of this competition in the context of decolonization hastened the erosion of the institutional strength of Christianity in Malaysia. As Christian institutions declined, subjective spiritual experience became a major preoccupation among Christians.3

Among Christians in postcolonial Malaysia, the growing demand for ecstatic encounters with the Holy Spirit cuts across the boundaries separating the different denominations, independent churches, and fringe groups. What began as a peripheral style of spirituality among

marginalized social groups in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century was gradually transformed after the 1960s into a middle-class interdenominational charismatic movement (see Bloch-Hoell 1964, Nichol 1966, Gromacki 1967, Hamilton 1975).

This middle-class spiritual expressionism is so joined with active asceticism that a dual orientation toward ecstatic experience and world mastery shapes the development of contemporary Christianity in Malaysia. To understand how a marginalized spiritual expression became a central Christian trend, it is necessary to examine the social features of the post-Christian West and the emerging sense of crisis among Christians today.

The Crisis in Christianity

The triumph and exhaustion of Enlightenment thought constituted the conditions under which Christian missions flourished in the nineteenth century and which they experienced as unprecedented crisis in the second half of the twentieth century. Nineteenth-century confidence in Western civilization and its technological achievements imbued the classical age of missions with crusading energy and enthusiasm (see Warren 1967). In the wake of decolonization, missionary confidence receded as an internal critique of Western civilization came to permeate Christian theology and missiology after the 1960s.

The significance of this cultural critique is comprehensible only in relation to the legacy of Enlightenment thought in Christianity. 4 The Enlightenment project of the progressive universalization of human reason and the conquest of nature exerted enormous influence on Christian thought and practice during the past three centuries. Whether they endorsed or resisted this project, Christians were unable to escape the conceptual categories of Enlightenment thought, one consequence of which was that religion became relegated to the private domain of values. Its position in the public governance of human affairs was overshadowed by an emerging culture that defined itself as centered upon scientific rationality. Yet even as religious faith became opposed to reason, the Enlightenment philosophy of progress was transformed by Christians into the idea of the imminent global triumph of Christianity in reforming the world, eradicating poverty, and restoring justice (Bosch 1991:26971).

Definition of Christian mission as the propagation of Christianity through science and rational knowledge reflects the strength of Enlightenment influence.5 It was this model of Christian mission that found its way into the colonial schools under the control of Christian

missionaries. Colonial subjects who were educated in these schools gradually came to identify the progress of Christianity with the advancing culture of the West.

However, decolonization disclosed the limits of this model of Christian mission. Christianity as the institutional carrier of the practical rationality promoted by Western modernity became redundant when postcolonial nation-states appropriated the modernizing mission. Nationalism brought about the separation of modernization from the Christian mission-school system and also reinvigorated indigenous religions. The categories of Enlightenment thought were incorporated into nationalist ideologies and the discourses of renewal movements.

Although Christian missionaries achieved notable success in evangelizing nonliterate peoples, they underestimated the power of postcolonial nationalism to reconstitute Enlightenment thought for its own ends. Nationalism's dissolution of the foundations of classical Christian mission and its connection with non-Christian religious revitalization have reversed the direction of the mission field. The current mission field is characterized by many post-Christians in the West who demonstrate a greater receptivity to Eastern religions than non-Westerners had to Christianity during the colonial era (see Roszak 1975, Haddon 1975, Glasser and McGavran 1983, Groothius 1986).

The Asian-influenced mysticisms embraced by the countercultural movements of the 1960s have been absorbed into mainstream bourgeois culture, contributing to a shift in Western religious orientation away from theocentric dualism toward cosmocentric monism. By the mid-1980s bourgeois mysticism in the United States had developed a distinctive public identity as the New Age Movement (NAM), a mixed movement of spiritual seekers experimenting with a multiplicity of approaches to "wholeness" (Miller 1990), including meditation, natural healing, spirit mediumship, and esoteric therapies to unlock the full human potential for higher consciousness. NAM's understanding of salvation as a process of personal growth and empowerment may be seen as a sublimation of Western dissatisfaction with industrialism into a cosmic humanism (Miller 1990).

Christian responses to the changing religious culture in the West and to postcolonial preoccupation with national identity in the non-Western periphery have led to a redelineation of boundaries (see Martin 1978b, Gilbert 1980, Bruce 1990). Liberals affirm and accommodate themselves to the postcolonial situation by expanding and loosening their boundaries. Conservatives adopt a strategy of resistance expressed in the narrowing and tightening of boundaries. 6 They tend to emphasize an unambiguous definition of orthodoxy and its defense

and promote a model of Christian mission directed toward proclaiming the gospel and organizing new churches. Liberals, however, give priority to social justice, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue rather than to doctrinal issues and single-minded evangelism (Glasser and McGavran 1983). 7

Currents of conservatism and liberalism mingle contentiously as Catholics and Protestants seek an experiential Christianity that can withstand the fragmentation and disenchantment pervading advanced industrial societies. This effort to redefine boundaries has crystallized in the momentous appearance of the charismatic movement, which has evoked much enthusiasm as well as intense opposition. On the one hand, this movement has provided a basis for more inclusive boundaries among Protestant evangelicals as well as between Protestants and Catholics (see Hollenweger 1972, Hocken 1981, Synan 1986). The tendency toward inclusiveness can be traced to the movement's emergence during the countercultural explosion of the 1960s and its expansion alongside New Age cosmic humanism in the 1980s. On the other hand, it has encountered strong resistance from Protestants and Catholics alike. Those who oppose the movement tend to deplore the emotionalism and anti-intellectualism associated with it.

Despite strong opposition, supporters of the movement have contributed significantly to the formation of a new and more vigorous American evangelical coalition that is missionary in outlook (Marsden 1987). Similarly, the Catholic charismatics have breathed new life into the Catholic Church (Bord and Faulkner 1983). In Latin America they have successfully reorganized the Catholic Church into lay-led Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) oriented toward social justice and human rights (Chordas 1980). Through this reorganization, the Catholic Church has been able to respond effectively to the evangelical Protestant expansion in Latin America (Martin 1990).

The widespread influence of the charismatic movement in the post-Christian era, defined by the rejection of Enlightenment values and their replacement by a NAM-directed cosmic humanism, suggests that the crisis of Christian mission is also a crisis of the credibility of scientific rationality. In many non-Western societies that became independent from Western colonialism after World War II, the pursuit of modernity was determined principally by secular governments that saw little reason to indefatigably seek religious authentication for their social and political goals. In other words, the rational power of Christian mission in the postcolonial era has lost its traditional referent and can rejuvenate itself only under a new religious paradigm.

It is in this context of religious change that the charismatic model of Christian mission, liberated from Enlightenment rationalism and colonial domination, has aligned itself to the postliterate and media-saturated culture of the advanced industrial societies and the emerging media cultures of the newly modernizing non-Western world. We are now witnessing the end of a chapter of Christian mission that had sought for several centuries to promote reason as the mirror of divinity, and the emergence of a new chapter that perceives unlimited potential in the creative powers of human experience and consciousness.

Institutional Decline and Indigenous Leadership

With the breakup of the Enlightenment model of Christian mission and the emergence of experiential movements in the West, the role of the church in non-Western societies has come under a tremendous strain of readjustment from that bequeathed by the traditional missionaries to one informed by charismatic enthusiasm and emotionally recharged evangelism.

In Malaysia, Christians have been affected significantly by the paradigm shift in Christian mission, particularly in the context of its postwar institutional decline. The postcolonial thrust of a secularizing nationalism and the persistent calls for indigenous leadership in a diverse mission field have created a religious marginality amid local Christians' fervor for determining their own future. Two trends have emerged that define the workings of the new mission field in Malaysia: the diminution of Christian institutional influence and the sprouting of a local lay leadership that is becoming highly influential through its decentered networks.

With the passing of the colonial era, Christian organizations in Malaysia no longer enjoy the privileges extended to them by the colonial administration. Soon after independence, the mission schools were absorbed into the public educational system. Thus entirely secularized, the schools no longer afforded opportunities for evangelism or indirect transmission of Christian values. Their loss of influence in education dramatically reduced the prestige Christians had enjoyed during the colonial period. Furthermore, Christian institutional expansion was arrested through the restriction of access to land. Faced with this situation, many newer churches were forced to occupy commercial premises on a temporary basis.

Despite this condition of institutional marginality, Christians have continued to grow in numbers. The Protestants have registered an

annual growth rate of 7.1 percent compared to the Catholics' 3.5 percent (Johnstone 1993). Since the majority of Protestants (77.3 percent) are affiliated with evangelical churches (Johnstone 1993), it may be surmised that this growth rate reflects evangelical vigor and the rise of a religious leadership that is sensitive to the demands of a postcolonial situation.

Throughout the colonial period, the Christian missions were essentially foreign in character. French, British, and American missionary organizations financed and controlled the major institutions through which Christianity was propagated on the peninsula. Although the College General had been in operation in Penang since the beginning of the nineteenth century, few local priests had been ordained. The first indigenous priest was not ordained until 1911, and from 1920 to 1950 only thirty-six were ordained (Williams 1976:107).

Similarly, in the case of the Protestant churches, the Asian clergy exercised little authority before World War II. Treated as subordinates of the foreign missionaries, the local Christian leaders were rarely included in policy formulation, which remained the exclusive domain of the foreign personnel. The Asian clergy felt subordinated to the foreign missionaries' prerogatives but at the same time recognized their dependence on the financial support, expertise, and direction the missionaries provided.

The Japanese internment of foreign missionaries during World War II created a vacuum in church leadership that enabled Asians to assume some authority for the first time. During their internment, the foreign missionaries became acutely aware of the importance of indigenous church leadership and made plans to establish an interdenominational seminary in Singapore after the war. Accelerated efforts to indigenize Christian leadership took effect after the Japanese occupation ended and preparations for independence began.

Nevertheless, the churches continued to face a severe lack of indigenous personnel as the colonial era drew to a close in 1957. At the same time, relentless pressure for indigenization of church leadership continued. Attainment of independence was followed by imposition of strict conditions on the issuing of visas to foreign missionaries. Many of these visas were issued with the understanding that the sponsoring Christian organization would train local citizens to fill the positions of the departing missionaries. However, the shortage of locally trained clergy persisted in the years after independence. Local seminaries established in response to the need for indigenous leadership were not able to provide sufficient numbers of trained staff for the churches.

It was in this unsettled period of institutional marginality that the quest for a more flexible and resolute leadership was intensified. The challenge of Islamization, particularly in the 1970s and the 1980s (see chapter 3), and the diversity of Christian organizations with their hierarchical structures made this quest even more urgent. In line with the paradigm shift in Western Christian mission, a new leadership emerging from the lay ministry that catered to local demands for healing and various spiritual experiences gradually came to be identified with the evangelical Protestants.

Compared with mainline Protestants and Catholics, evangelical Protestants tend to demonstrate a greater capacity for dynamic response to isolation from institutional resources and centers of influence. Evangelical emphasis on scriptural authority and lay ministry, rather than ecclesiastical tradition and an ordained clergy, has proven to be an advantage in weathering the difficulties encountered by other denominations in the postcolonial era (Roxborogh 1992:25, Hwa and Hunt 1992: 184). Evangelicals devote much of their resources to training local lay leaders to organize Bible study and prayer groups, in addition to grooming individuals to use sophisticated marketing and management techniques for missionary work (Nagata 1994a:12). From the perspectives of various evangelical organizations, these informal groups are regarded as potential churches in a new mission field (see Montgomery 1989, Neighbor 1990).

The New Mission Field

In their encounter with post-Christian societies in the West and postcolonial political establishments in the non-Western periphery, evangelical Protestants tend to draw a parallel between the early Christian community's struggles and their own endeavor to assert the exclusive truth of the Gospels within a socially plural environment.

The New Testament model of community formation is being revived in response to the perceived stagnancy of established Christian institutions in impersonal mass societies (Neighbor 1990). Evangelism entails transformation of the local community into a Christian community. In view of this understanding, evangelical Protestant activists insist that Christian teachings and worship are not to be confined to official church premises but are to be increasingly practiced within the diverse informal contexts that constitute the fabric of everyday life.

The Christian community emerges from networks of participating groups that provide sites for religious identity formation. Local

identities and meaningful interpersonal relationships have become problematic in the non-Western periphery as well as in the Western centers with the acceleration of global urbanization. The church and mission activities of these informal groups involve definition of boundaries, which makes possible the production of local Christian identities and communities encapsulated within impersonal macrosocial structures.

These groups have the capacity to carry out worship as well as missionary work in the classical sense of "preaching the gospel where it [has] never been preached before" (Montgomery 1989:90). A small, intimate group of family members, neighbors, friends, or workmates meeting for Bible study and prayer can conduct the activities essential to both church and mission at the local level with minimum resources. Three evangelical organizations have pioneered this new mission field, namely the Navigators, the DAWN movement, and the Assemblies of God.

The Navigators, an international evangelical movement based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and active in ninety countries (including Malaysia), employs informal group organization in training lay Christian evangelists. The loose organization and relatively small membership of the Navigators (about four hundred on the peninsula and two hundred in the Borneo states) allows for flexible movement and training. The organization conducts training courses twice a year, and these have been attended by members of both evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations. In addition to maintaining working relationships with these denominations, the Navigators cooperates with parachurch organizations such as the Scripture Union, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, and Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Through these organizational networks, Navigator training seminars have propagated a model of church as mission developed in the 1930s by Dawson Trotman in the United States.

As founder of the Navigators, Trotman (19061956) conceptualized the church as a group of ministering disciples fully participating in all aspects of Christian life. Completion of the great commission, according to Matthew 28:19, to make disciples of all peoples was the means to realizing Trotman's idea of the church (Foster 1983:76). This vision, which stressed the importance of personal evangelism on a one-to-one and small-group basis, underlies the worldwide mission of the Navigators. 8

In 1961 the leadership of the Navigators in the United States adopted a work style that accentuated the businesslike character of the organization (Bok 1991:6). The Navigators began to give increasing importance

to professional expertise to achieve greater efficiency. The Navigators leadership in Malaysia, which is predominantly Chinese in ethnic background, English-speaking, and university educated, responded enthusiastically to this professionalized approach to mission. Management skills were developed and employed throughout the international Navigator organization from 1961 to 1971.

The Navigators in Malaysia maintains a core staff that directs the formation of informal group networks. In its avoidance of bureaucratic hierarchy and insistence on individual access to the guidance of the Holy Spirit through study and meditation on the Word of God, the Navigators can be regarded as a type of charismatic movement. Yet its members are wary of the more spectacular charisms of the spirit, such as glossolalia, prophecy, exorcism, and healing, that often preoccupy Christians who unreservedly identify themselves with the charismatic movement.

The Navigators model of the church as evangelizing believers has been adopted by the DAWN movement. DAWN, an acronym for Discipling a Whole Nation, is an international evangelical movement based in Pasadena, California. It has professionalized missionary work to an even greater degree than that achieved by the Navigators. DAWN's starting point is the setting of quantitative goals, which are to be statistically monitored. This highly rationalized approach to world evangelism, however, does not preclude acceptance of charismatic ecstasy as a valid route to Christian discipleship.

DAWN's general policy is to maintain openness to the possibility of working with Pentecostal churches and the charismatic movement. Like the Navigators, the DAWN movement seeks to complete the great commission by forming local churches within every kind of community in the world. The multiplication of local churches to enable people to hear the message of salvation from members of their own community is the movement's essential strategy for world evangelization (Montgomery 1989:45).

The DAWN movement, along with other evangelical missionary organizations, has set the goal of completing the project of world evangelization by the year 2000 (Montgomery 1989:61). A perception of the present as the end of time, in which the great commission must finally be fulfilled as a prerequisite to the return of Christ and the arrival of the millennium, is a distinctive feature of DAWN's missionary enterprise. The millenarian dimension of this mission is intimately related to the ecstatic experiences that are considered signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit spoken of throughout the New Testament in eschatological terms (Boer 1961:149).

The Assemblies of God (AOG), one of the fastest-growing and most influential Pentecostal denominations in the world, is actively involved in the DAWN movement's project of world evangelization (Montgomery 1989). Although AOG's twenty-thousand-strong membership, comprising 231 congregations in Malaysia, constitutes only 3.7 percent of the evangelical Protestant population (Johnstone 1993), this denomination is making an important contribution to the project of mobilizing Protestant churches for cooperative nationwide evangelism.

In Malaysia AOG is working with a broad range of Protestant denominations coordinated by the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship on a nationwide evangelization project. This project involves establishing Protestant churches in the midst of small communities throughout the country by employing a strategy based on informal group interaction. AOG's own flexible form of organization is well suited to the work style adopted by this project. AOG combines formal ecclesiastical structures headed by ordained clergy with home-based group networks organized by lay leaders. The lay leaders are trained in institutes run by AOG churches that are concerned with local evangelism and overseas missions.

AOG as a whole church is committed to missionary work. Every member is expected to be an evangelist within his or her own social sphere. Service to the church's many specialized ministries, focused on evangelism in relation to particular age, sex, occupational, linguistic, and ethnic groups, is strongly encouraged as the best means to both individual and community-level Christian growth. AOG members express their commitment by devoting their free time to these ministries and donating generously to support missions. AOG strongly emphasizes funding missionary activities on a systematic, ongoing basis through tithes and pledges. It juxtaposes a carefully structured and technically sophisticated pedagogy with receptivity to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by ecstatic experiences. Newcomers to AOG worship services are often impressed by the capacity for simultaneous expression of emotional warmth, spiritual power, up-to-date technology, and businesslike efficiency.

This new mission field pioneered by evangelical Protestants with a high sense of commitment and professionalism is complemented by a growing spiritual enthusiasm, fed by the charismatic movement, among the laity. This movement gained popularity in Malaysia in the mid-1970s, a time when the full implications of Christian institutional decline had become painfully apparent (see Ackerman and Lee 1988, Northcott 1990).

The charismatic movement provided a locus of meaning for the indigenization of Christianity in its emphasis on individual attainment of

spiritual power and the practice of thaumaturgy. The movement's primary appeal is to the thaumaturgical needs ignored or denied by rationalized Christianity. Middle-class English-speaking laymen of various ethnic backgrounds lead the movement and shape its class and cultural orientation. The movement has a strong constituency among people who are English-educated and living in urban areas.

For most Malaysian charismatics, experiencing the "infilling of the Holy Spirit" not only symbolizes union with divine forces but also represents attainment of spiritual power to solve pressing problems of everyday life (see Ackerman 1980, 1984). This sense of personal power is expressed in participants' claims of having better control over every aspect of their lives since experiencing spirit baptism.

Charismatic ideology allows the diagnosis of spirit possession to be combined with or distinguished from secular categories of physical and mental illness; thus prayer and exorcism are regarded as complementary to medical treatment. Charismatic thaumaturgy tends to address itself to the same situations as folk healing, but it does so in the name of Christianity and implicitly recognizes the relative validity of scientific knowledge in mental and physical healing. This flexible approach to thaumaturgy is consistent with Malaysian Christians' aspirations to a modern lifestyle.

Charismatic expertise in spiritual healing has made a positive impression on many members of Catholic and Protestant churches. The popularity of charismatic thaumaturgy among Christian laymen has created strong pressure on the mainline churches. Christian laymen commonly believe that demonstrations of control over malignant forces are necessary for maintenance of faith, and they expect their churches to cater to this need. On the other hand, some members of the clergy disdain charismatic thaumaturgy as emotional theatrics but are unable to ignore the widespread demand for this form of pastoral care.

Incorporation of thaumaturgy into mainline churches entails realignment of authority relations between clergy and laity, particularly in the Catholic Church. The perennial lack of trained clergy in Malaysia constrains the churches' ability to provide intensive and personalized thaumaturgical services. Few clergy have sufficient time or energy to be involved in spiritual healing. For this reason, lay participation in thaumaturgy encouraged by the charismatic movement fosters a type of partnership between clergy and laity. Some laymen are active in healing work under the clergy's supervision, while others may perform thaumaturgy independently.

This preoccupation with thaumaturgy in the charismatic movement has prompted critics to argue that the laity's attention has been diverted from more substantial doctrinal matters. Despite the emergence

of tensions between rationalized and charismatic Christianity, the movement has nevertheless facilitated the adoption of new approaches to local-level Christian organization. Through the charismatic movement, Christianity is reconstituting itself in informal institutional settings and providing laymen with broad scope to exercise the spiritual power and leadership needed to rekindle enthusiasm among many demoralized Christians.

These rapid developments in evangelism and the charismatic movement suggest that the postcolonial decline of institutional Christianity has not dampened or limited the receptivity of many non-Malays to the Christian message. On the contrary, indigenized Christianity of the kind that emerged in the mid-1970s is a practical religion based on individualized spiritual experiences rather than institutional power. Indigenization has become an effective grassroots strategy for circumventing many problems of the postcolonial era and for manifesting the vitality of early, or apostolic, Christianity. It has provided Christians with a culturally meaningful approach to developing lay leadership that is now closely identified with the future of Christian mission.

The Laity and Identity of Mission

The reshaping of missionary endeavor through intense lay participation in evangelism and charismatic worship has attained an impressive degree of dynamism that adherents of other religions view as a serious challenge. Various non-Muslims in Malaysia have become aware of themselves as potential targets of evangelical Protestant activity. While Muslims are legally protected from such proselytization, they have come to learn about Christian missionary strategies and are taking notice of the rapid growth of Christianity among non-Muslims. Muslim missionaries are apparently prepared to emulate the methods of their Christian counterparts to propagate Islam. An evangelical Protestant missionary in Malawi, East Africa, observed that the Muslims there had started a project that resembled the DAWN approach (Montgomery 1989:87).

In Malaysia there is a growing Muslim consciousness that Christian methods could be studied with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of Islamic missionary work through the application of professional knowledge (Ghazali 1990:2425, 1994:4650). The emergence of broadbased activist organizations among Christians in the mid-1980s has been attributed to non-Muslim fears of the possibility of the full implementation of Islamic *shari'a* (Ghazali 1994:6, 10). It is these fears that have partly motivated Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangeli-

cal Protestants to work together under an umbrella organization, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM).

Interdenominational cooperation fostered by the CFM has strengthened the lay-oriented approach to the mission of the Catholic Church endorsed by the Second Vatican Council's reforms in the mid-1960s (Newman 1966). This direction of development within the Catholic Church is concretely expressed in movements that emerged in the late 1960s that seek to mobilize the initiative and spontaneity of the laity through their direct engagement with the Holy Spirit and Bible study (see Ackerman 1993). These movements are distinctive innovations within the Catholic sacerdotal tradition. The emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) and adoption of informal group strategy in the restructuring of the Catholic Church as a network of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) have significantly enhanced lay participation.

In comparing themselves to the active evangelical Protestant laity, many Catholic laypeople have perceived the need to improve their scriptural knowledge and methods of organization as well as to increase their commitment to the church's mission, which is now understood to involve the whole church. Responsibility for this mission is not vested exclusively in the clergy and religious orders specially dedicated to missionary work. While the sacramental life of the church is defined as priest-centered, the mission to universalize the mediation that leads to salvation requires a fully committed laity, from the perspective of the Second Vatican Council's reforms. Members of the Catholic laity have therefore admonished themselves for complacency in leaving the maintenance and propagation of the sacramental version of Christianity to the clergy. In accordance with the Second Vatican Council, the laity is now identified as the source of revitalization within the Catholic Church.

Liberation theology and empowerment of the grassroots, participative church government at the parish level, and the CCR are the dominant currents in the internal renewal process of the Catholic Church. These changes have not only deemphasized clerical hierarchy and traditional structures, which in the first place have been adversely affected by postcolonial institutional decline, but have also created a new sphere of lay evangelism that attempts to respond to the Protestant challenge on the new mission field. To meet this challenge, the Catholic Church, in fulfilling the Vatican-sponsored decade of evangelism, launched a campaign in 1993 to train laypeople as evangelists. Bible knowledge among the Catholic laity is now more strongly emphasized. In some parishes laypeople are expected to bring their Bibles to church, as Protestants do. Bible study classes have been organized

by priests who perceived the need to equalize the Catholic laity's scriptural foundation with that of their Protestant counterparts. For the older generation of Catholics, this marks a sharp departure from traditional church practice.

The role of the middle-class lay professional has become more prominent since the renewal process in the Catholic Church is only marginally contributing to the reproduction of the Catholic clergy. Because religious vocations are not attractive to the laity, the Catholic Church has experienced difficulties in enlarging the size of its clergy. As a result, professionally qualified laypeople are gradually filling the leadership vacuum, thus contributing to an even more important working relationship between them and the clergy. This development is associated with an unmistakable tendency toward democratization and deemphasis on hierarchy.

The growing importance of lay professionals in carrying out the Catholic Church's mission parallels the professionalization of evangelical Protestant missionary activity described earlier. Accountancy, pedagogy, and management and computer skills have become indispensable in organizing the diversified Catholic mission activities catering to various interest groups such as families, single adults, youths, and so on. Among the Catholic laity, there exists the perception that evangelical Protestant groups have achieved a high level of technical sophistication in their approach to mission. This has encouraged them and some sections of the clergy to seek and apply professional expertise to a greater extent to increase efficiency in the various activities associated with the church's mission.

To this end, the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) serves as a model for members of mainline Christian denominations that aspire to assert a more effective Christian presence in Malaysia. NECF, a component of CFM, is an umbrella organization that brings together a diverse range of evangelicals, many of whom are highly qualified middle-class professionals. NECF members are well known and respected for their expertise, commitment, and activism. They include both lay and ordained evangelicals representing a wide spectrum of Protestant groups ranging from evangelical denominations and nondenominational parachurch organizations to mainline denominations affiliated with the World Council of Churches. The majority of the evangelical denominations represented in NECF are charismatic, while some members of the noncharismatic evangelical affiliates describe themselves as open to charismatic experience.

The organization's leadership, which includes a large proportion of professionals and academics, places great importance on research as

the basis of mission strategy. Statistical and legal expertise, along with the ability to carry out social surveys and to collect other forms of data concerning local and international contexts of missionary work, have contributed much to NECF's success in coordinating its missionary projects. Through NECF's interdenominationally oriented evangelicalism, increasing awareness of and commitment to Christian mission is emerging across traditional institutional boundaries within the Christian community in Malaysia.

Professionally managed missionary activity focused on the Holy Spirit and ecstatic styles of worship strongly appeals to Catholics and Protestants alike. This highly effective response to the postcolonial mission field, pioneered by evangelical Protestants, now commands respect and attention from the Catholic Church and from liberal Protestant denominations. Through this emerging combination of professionalism and personal religious experience, Malaysian Christians have reconstructed, defended, and enlarged their domain of the sacred, which has been buffeted by resurgent world religions and a reduction in institutional resources. Middle-class lay professionals who are committed to evangelism have demonstrated that they can work successfully outside established institutional structures because of their technical knowledge, their capacity to create wide-ranging social networks, and their well-defined concept of mission. The dynamism of this kind of lay Christian leadership in postcolonial Malaysia has made Christianity a potent social force despite its marginal minority position within the overall social structure.

Mobilization of the laity to heighten subjective religious experience and to renew efforts to evangelize the whole of humanity involves a convergence among Christians of sharply differing theological views, traditions, and institutional forms. This convergence is of a highly pragmatic character. Methods, strategies, styles of worship, and individualized spiritual experience are gradually taking precedence over institutionalized theological divisions within the Malaysian Christian community. Subordination of doctrinal issues to development of an activist, contextualized Christianity is occurring through professionalized lay evangelism and the charismatic movement, which have proved to be significant sources of Christian revitalization.

Chapter Seven
Rebirth of the Gods

Religion did not disappear as Malaysia modernized. On the contrary, the processes of rationalization and secularization reinforced religious expressions, giving them new meanings and organization. The notion of the sacred took on more political meanings and cultural identities became inseparable from religious practice. The emergence of the middle classes in the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities gave rise to a greater preoccupation with cultural identity, partly because of their need to assert ethnic distinctiveness in the midst of increasing socioeconomic competition and partly because the road to high status was paved with various uncertainties marked by moral, material, and power issues.

On the one hand, the assertion of ethnic and cultural identities gave free rein to traditional religious expression. Increased attendance at mosques, temples, and churches was matched by a growing demand for clerical services, especially in the non-Islamic field, where the pool of clergy was small. On the other hand, rising middle-class aspirations created new needs and perceptions of salvationary goals that could be met only by participation of the new bourgeoisie in new religious movements or by their intense spiritual experiences involving charismatic power. The macrocosm of the world religions provided the space in which the microcosms of Malaysian Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity could innovate and achieve particular characteristics with regard to the nature of state intervention, the varieties of charismatic power, and the dissemination of marketed ideologies.

Religion and the State

Unlike some countries in Asia that have centralized government agencies for the administration of religion (for example, Indonesia maintains a ministry of religion; see Mahadi 1987), Malaysia has no

such agency. Malaysian Islam is administered separately from the non-Islamic religions. Each of the eleven states on the Malaysian peninsula has its own Islamic council and department. In a formal sense, the federal government has no jurisdiction over the activities of these councils and departments. The non-Islamic religions are more decentralized since neither the Christians, Buddhists, nor Hindus are individually or collectively subjected to a single body of religious authority. In each of the non-Islamic religions, there are many decision-making bodies working either jointly with or separately from other groups.

Given this very diverse and flexible situation of religious administration, it is vital to ask how state control of religious activities is possible. To a certain extent, the religious situation in Malaysia parallels that in the United States, where religious pluralism is not regulated by a central government body. However, Pfeifer (1974:10) contends that in the United States religious marginality is not a function of theological heterodoxy but of tension between religious and secular interests. The public definition of religious deviance in the United States has more to do with specific power issues that may or may not involve the state, but in any event it is not necessarily rooted in theological disagreements (see Shupe and Bromley 1980). On the other hand, in Malaysian Islam the nature of religious control rests upon the state's perception of threats stemming from both secular and theological sources. For example, the banning of Darul Arqam and arrest of its leader was considered necessary because the movement's growing membership and resources, together with its subscription to millenarian doctrines, threatened the religious authority of the Sunni establishment as well as the secular authority of the government.

The Malaysian state has at its disposal several religious and legal means to control or terminate the activities of Islamic groups that seem to undermine its authority. The National Fatwa Council comprises an important religious body that is empowered to make decrees concerning the legitimacy or illegitimacy of particular Islamic groups. On the legal side, the Internal Security Act could be utilized to declare specific Islamic groups as threats to national security. In 1985 amendments were made to the penal code to allow the civil authorities to take punitive action against any person considered a religious offender; if found guilty, such an individual could be imprisoned for two to five years (*Star*, 9 April 1985).

However, the government has not resorted to using coercive measures on a regular basis to control Islamic activities. Instead, the general tendency is to coopt and rehabilitate Islamic groups thought to be antagonistic to state interests. There seems to be an implicit policy in

reducing splits within the Islamic *umma*, particularly in avoiding the regular use of punitive methods in neutralizing the Islamic opposition.

The rise of the Malay-Muslim bourgeoisie in recent years has not only raised their aspirations but also increased their awareness of social and political inequalities, which may have contributed to growing religious activism. Rather than alienating these Muslim activists, the governing Malay elite (many of whom are also members of the Muslim bourgeoisie) capitalized on common class and cultural identities to mitigate factionalism within the Muslim community. Thus the case of Anwar Ibrahim, who shed his role as leader of the Islamic youth movement in 1982 to become deputy prime minister in 1993, and the case of Ustaz Ashaari, the leader of Darul Arqam who made a public confession after his arrest and urged his followers to return to the *umma*, are major instances of the ameliorative approach used by the authorities to meet problems raised by Islamic activism.

Compared to the more violent confrontations between government and Muslim activists in the Middle East (see Esposito 1992), the co-optative strategy of the Malaysian state tends to provide a seemingly more effective approach to maintaining Muslim unity. This does not necessarily suggest that coercion is avoided at all costs; rather, because of a large non-Muslim presence in Malaysia, the Muslims perceive an urgency to prevent violent fragmentations among themselves, which could come to be seen by the non-Muslims as advantageous to their position. For this reason, the degree of coercion used to control Islamic activism is carefully applied in order that it not be seen as excessive or detrimental to the integrity of the *umma*. As Nagata (1994b) points out, this form of religious control "requires a substantial measure of authoritarianism in practice, but of a different order than that of an Islamic state."

Part of this control includes legislation to increase religious conformity. For instance, various state religious councils have passed laws to curb apostasy among Muslims. In 1989 the state of Pahang amended its Islamic laws to include mandatory caning of apostates and a hefty fine, imprisonment, and caning for Muslims who are involved in propagating other religions (*Star*, 14 March 1989). In 1987 the states of Selangor and Pahang introduced legislation for prosecuting Muslim women caught wearing revealing clothes in public (*New Straits Times*, 1213 November 1987).

In dealing with the non-Muslims, the government faces a different set of problems. Islamic law and the actions of Islamic regulative bodies are confined only to the Islamic field and cannot be legally applied to the conduct of non-Muslims. This situation has resulted in ambiguities concerning specific relationships between Muslims and non-

Muslims, particularly in cases of conversion and of *khalwat* (close proximity) between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the first instance, there is no law against converting to Islam. However, problems may arise when a minor (anyone under the age of eighteen) converts to Islam, especially in cases in which the parents' consent has not been obtained. In 1991 the state of Pahang passed a law to enable any convert to Islam to extend this conversion to his or her children under eighteen and to unambiguously allow any individual eighteen or older to convert (*Star*, 29 November 1991). This legislation is likely to provide a model for other states to follow in clarifying the conditions for conversion to Islam. In the second case, the problem of illicit intimacy between a Muslim and non-Muslim has raised the question of whether the non-Muslim offender is just as liable to Islamic prosecution as the Muslim offender. Because of non-Muslim immunity to Islamic law, an attempt was made in 1982 to introduce a morals law under civil legislation as a counterpart to the Islamic *khalwat* law, but it failed to materialize because of widespread disagreement (*Star*, 14 December 1982). In 1989 the state of Selangor attempted to amend its Islamic laws to include prosecution of non-Muslim *khalwat* offenders (*New Straits Times*, 22 April 1989).

All these cases suggest that the Muslim legislature has yet to introduce and implement a comprehensive and satisfactory set of regulations governing relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that Islamic legal administration is decentralized. No one state can apply its regulations concerning Muslim-non-Muslim relationships in other states. The Muslim legislature itself is limited by the scope of its jurisdiction and may need to work with the civil legislature if it is to accomplish the goal of equitable legal treatment for Muslims and non-Muslims. Presently the two legal systems are separate, and they have yet to arrive at an interface to calibrate specific legal arrangements for Muslim-non-Muslim relationships, although this could happen in the future, given the increasing interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims at the economic, political, and cultural levels.

Despite these problems, non-Muslims still need to rely on the power of the Malay state to resolve some of their religious conflicts. For example, in late 1994, following the banning of Darul Arqam, the inspector general of police, a Malay, told the press that he had received many letters from non-Muslims requesting that the police investigate non-Muslim "deviationist" groups in the country. However, he hinted at the sensitive issues involved in addressing this problem; specific non-Muslim groups could not be labeled deviant by the National Fatwa Council, and advice from the appropriate religious authorities had to

be sought without being construed as discriminatory to the interests of the non-Muslims (*New Sunday Times*, 6 November 1994).

In a sense, the task of identifying so-called deviationist groups among the non-Muslims is a less vital assignment for the enforcement and legislative agencies of the Malay state, primarily because the non-Islamic religions are less politically organized than Islam. This does not imply that the state is uninterested in or oblivious to developments in Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. As long as the non-Islamic religions are not politically active in the sense of posing a threat to the Malay state, there is minimal state intervention in their affairs. Because the Internal Security Act and penal code amendments concerning religious offenses are available to the state as aspects of civil legislation to be enacted in times of crisis, there is no pressing need for the government to create special religious laws to control non-Muslim activism should such arise. On the other hand, the existence of article 11 of the Malaysian Constitution, which guarantees the practice of religious freedom, provides legal space for non-Muslims to defend themselves against any possible state encroachment.

Thus the complexity of the legal system in dealing with Muslim and non-Muslim affairs reflects the particular intricacies of rationalization and secularization in Malaysia. The legal system (both civil and *shari'a*) epitomizes the ineluctable process of rationalization described by Weber. Yet this system, while conformist and punitive in its own way, is characterized by a flexibility missing in other Muslim societies because the historical conditions that caused its bifurcations were largely secular in spirit. British colonial administration, which determined the decentralized nature of Islamic legal practice and prioritized the development of a civil system without partiality to any religion, sowed the seeds of a secular government that embodies an Islamic outlook but is not theocratic in practice and is receptive to religious pluralism. The power of the Malaysian state is secular, and rationalization in Islam and the non-Islamic religions is not an autonomous process but is tied to the goals and policies of the Malay bourgeois elite. For this reason, the state's perception of religious challenges lies less in the rationalized structures of religious institutions than in the possibility of religious activism rooted in charismatic power.

The Fate of Charisma

Charisma is not necessarily a power that is always embodied in particular individuals; it could be conceptualized as insulated within the structure of a religion or religious groups and movements. As Raymond L. M. Lee (1992) has noted, the initial perception of charismatic

power in an individual may eventually come to rest in a structure whose edifice conceals that power but nevertheless nurtures it as though it were immortal. Under these circumstances, deindividualized charismatic power could be manipulated for different purposes (see Glassman 1975).

In Malaysia, Islamic charisma lies dormant within the vast structure of religious institutions, legalities, and doctrines practiced by more than half its population. It is triggered by specific individuals or groups that attempt to locate local millenarian beliefs within the context of Islamic Mahdism in order to initiate radical changes in Muslim society. Some of this charisma may have been derived from pre-Islamic indigenous beliefs in mystical powers that could allegedly be cultivated through proper spiritual training. Syncretized charisma rooted in Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs has made sporadic appearances in Malay society either as a type of defense against non-Malay encroachments or as a power-driven manifestation of particular individuals with or without political ambitions.

At the end of World War II, after the Japanese surrender in Malaya, increased tensions between Malays and Chinese led to several incidents of ethnic violence involving Malay use of syncretized charisma for defensive purposes (Stockwell 1979:14661). Since then, there have been a few isolated cases of violence involving Islamic groups utilizing charisma for challenging Malay-Muslim authority. Because of their smallness and limited resources, these groups were no match for the government forces. Mystical Islamic groups that continue to thrive on syncretized charisma have become less visible and more secretive since the government began a campaign against Islamic deviationists in the 1980s. Among these groups, the Darul Arqam movement has shown itself to be the most formidable; it was able to withstand government pressure for more than two decades before it was outlawed. Compared to the other mystical and millenarian groups in Malaysian Islam, Darul Arqam had greater resources in terms of money, manpower, and organization. The charisma of its leadership attracted many followers from the Malay middle class. The movement had within its ranks many well-educated Malays, including intellectuals, doctors, civil servants, and other professionals. It was the large middle-class composition of Darul Arqam that posed a serious threat to the government. This raises the question of the fate of charisma in Islam as it penetrates the ranks of the Malay middle class.

The rationalization of Islam within the context of secular development in Malaysia is leading to rapid disenchantment of religious practices within the public sphere of the Malay-Muslim community. Paradoxically, rationalization and secularization have increased the

Malays' sense of fulfilling their mission to modernize, but only at the cost of spiritual alienation, which provides fertile ground for charismatic intervention. When the Darul Arqam leadership was able to reenchant large sections of the Malay middle class with a millenarian message reinforced by charismatic power, it contradicted the project of modernization so avidly pursued by the new Malay bourgeoisie and its representatives in the government. As a result, the power of the state had to be summoned to vanquish the charisma of the Darul Arqam leadership.

Contrastingly, charisma in the non-Islamic religions, which has also influenced the religious orientation of many middle-class non-Malays, is not considered as great a threat to the government as the syncretized charisma in Islam. The principal reason for this is that because the nonIslamic religions lack constitutional status as official religions, they have no opportunity to make political claims; thus any charisma emanating from the non-Islamic religions cannot exert as strong a political influence as Islamic charisma. This official lack of status in the nonIslamic religious field suggests that the manifestations of charismatic power in Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism are confined largely to the private sphere. Non-Muslim middle-class participation in charismatic religions is not necessarily perceived by the government to endanger the integrity of any cultural identity unless there are complaints from within a specific non-Muslim religious community. The definition of non-Muslim religious deviance associated with the display of charismatic power is therefore an intrareligious group affair rather than an event monitored and directly acted upon by the government.

This brief comparison of Islamic and non-Islamic charisma in Malaysia suggests that charismatic activities have not retreated before the twin processes of rationalization and secularization. On the contrary, these processes seem to run parallel to charismatic activities as though both were autonomous phenomena. Alternatively, rationalization and secularization could be construed as providing charisma. The evidence offered here pertains to intense middle-class involvement in charismatic activities in all the major religions, suggesting that within the class that is supposed to spearhead modernization there are individuals whose religious motivations are charismatically inspired rather than rationally driven.

Government control of religious charisma has proven to be publicly feasible, especially in the case of Islamic charisma. But this in no way reflects a situation of unmitigated repression, for Islamic charisma is either co-opted and absorbed by the vast religious machinery of the government or it goes underground as the life force of secret cultic move-

ments without surfacing to challenge the political establishment. On the other hand, there seems to be less cultural and political reason for non-Islamic charisma to confront government authority or to disappear from public view. In any case, the inspiration for Islamic and nonIslamic charisma not only originates locally but also is sustained by global religious networks feeding into Malaysia.

The Market of the Millennium

The second half of the twentieth century may be seen to represent an era of almost unrestrained global religious activities. This implies that no single religious or cultural community can make irrevocable claims concerning the pristine or unadulterated nature of its beliefs and practices. Thanks to international jet travel and to mass communication via the electronic media, charisma today, far from being considered a primitive form of religious expression, is exported and "marketed" around the world as a relatively respectable, fashionable, and even sophisticated deliverance of the human spirit.

In this context of increased global communication, Malaysia stands at a crossroads of commercial growth, technological extravagance, and, not least of all, religious sumptuousness. What this means is that even as Malaysia becomes a member of the global village, its religious beliefs and practices come under the influence of innovative changes in religious communities around the world. Religious resurgences in Malaysian Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism have not occurred independently of global revitalization in the world religions. The local content of the resurgences may be considered unique, but the form assumed by the revivalist movements is undoubtedly influenced by worldwide developments in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Islam in Malaysia has always been closely linked to religious developments in the Muslim communities of the Middle East and India. The two waves of Islamic revivalism among the Malays, one occurring in the 1920s and 1930s and the other in the 1970s and 1980s, have not been wholly indigenous movements but may be attributed to broad external influence. In the first instance, returning pilgrims and students from the Middle East exposed to Islamic reformism of the early twentieth century organized movements of resistance to Malay traditionalism (see Roff 1967). In the second, the widely disseminated writings of Middle Eastern and Indian Muslim fundamentalists, foreign revivalist movements, international Islamic organizations, political events in the Middle East, and exposure of the large number of Malay-Muslim

students abroad to Islamic activism in the United Kingdom and United States all contributed to the intensification of *dakwah* in Malaysia (see Bakar 1991).

More specifically, international Islamic bodies such as the Muslim World League, the World Supreme Council of Mosques, and the Regional Islamic Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific provide global networks for feeding information or lending material and ideological support to many Malaysian Muslims. These networks comprise a type of exclusive "market" that enhances the exchange of religious data and promotes religious solidarity based on the beliefs, doctrines, and symbols of a common source of identity.

Like Islam, Christianity has wide global networks that promote the "packaging, administration, and marketing of transcendental meaning in an ideologically plural, laicized society" (Ackerman 1993:136). During the colonial period, Christian missionaries provided the major means of disseminating Christian teachings around the world. In the postcolonial period, it was the Second Vatican Council (19621965) that expanded the scope of lay activity in Catholic circles and thereby increased opportunities for the laity to actively promote and sponsor spiritual movements in all parts of the world. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which has become an important aspect of Malaysian Christianity, reflects some of the consequences of that critical religious development (see Bord and Faulkner 1983). The Protestants' missionary activities in Malaysia did not end after colonialism came to a close; intensification of missionary activities during the postcolonial period was facilitated by the internationalization of various Protestant organizations. Even though the entry of foreign missionaries was restricted after Malaysian independence, the local clergy and laity continued to maintain contacts with developments in Protestant churches and organizations in other parts of the world. Since the 1970s, many itinerant evangelical preachers from different Protestant denominations in the West have introduced innovative styles of worship and healing in Malaysian churches.

Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia has also been influenced by developments in other Buddhist societies. The rise of lay Buddhist associations in Malaysia has shifted the control of ideologies and information from the clergy to many middle-class professionals whose cosmopolitanism has broadened the range of local exposure to Buddhist developments elsewhere. In particular, the growing popularity of Tibetan Vajrayana centers managed by mostly middle-class laymen has linked many Malaysian Buddhists to religious events in Tibetan centers in India and the West. Performances of exotic Tibetan Buddhist rituals, once

confined to Tibetan communities, are now available to devotees worldwide, including those in Malaysia.

Similarly, the vast body of Hindu knowledge and practice that was once the exclusive property of spiritualists in India has been made available to global devotees. In Malaysia, some of this knowledge had been disseminated to the Malay royalty during the Indianized period (see Coedes 1968). But in the latter part of the twentieth century, it is the many neo-Hindu organizations spread around the world that have inspired a renewed search for cosmic meanings. At the same time, the increased presence of Hindu spiritualists and itinerant gurus has widened the demand for spiritual knowledge. These developments have provided an important source for the transmission of various styles of Hinduism to Malaysian Indians who fervently seek their cultural roots for identity reaffirmation.

This comparison of late-twentieth-century developments in the world religions suggests that they thrive in a global salvationary market that has attracted many middle-class, well-educated professionals seeking a route to continued enchantment within the secular context of their everyday lives. In a sense, the market of the millennium is also the salvationary grounds of the international bourgeoisie. Given its professional training, sophisticated technical know-how, and worldwide networks, it is not surprising that religious revivalisms are the opiate not only of the masses but also of this bourgeoisie.

The rising middle classes in Malaysia, irrespective of ethnicity, have become absorbed into the intricate organizational networks that pervade all the world religions in their continued transformation into electronic arenas of salvation. Yet the economic and cultural ideologies derived from nonrational sources create an ongoing tension between disenchantment and charisma. As agents of modernization, the middle classes promote industry, technology, and bureaucratic administration. However, these forms of instrumental activity are disconnected from meaningful images of the world and the self. Herein lies the paradox of middle-class consciousness.

The middle classes within each of the ethnic communities we have described are notably active as organizers of and participants in religious innovations. This stratum comprises entrepreneurial, bureaucratic, professional, technical, and clerical groups with diverse cultural backgrounds. On the one hand, their possession of technical skills and specialization in nonmanual work contribute to a systematization of empirical knowledge regarded as crucial to the success of modernization in Malaysia. On the other hand, the diverse religious activities pursued by many middle-class individuals tend to be directed toward

charismatic experiences from which meaningful images of the world and the self are constructed.

The paradoxical activity of striving to master the physical and social environments through the application of empirical knowledge while simultaneously creating worldviews fashioned from charismatic experiences expresses middle-class ambivalence. In producing and inhabiting a technologized world, middle-class individuals come to crave personalized, transcendental encounters. To the extent that these valued subjective states become shared experiences, they can provide a basis for constructing private enclaves where meanings and identities are generated and maintained. This world-building activity is furthered by the cultural and technical resources that middle-class individuals command.

These individuals occupy the social space where tensions between rational technology and subjective experience are most acute. Possession of technical expertise is accompanied by intense desire to transcend it. Deploying technology to serve ideals is a means of transcending the confining routines that make technological power possible. In that an arbitrary relationship exists between ideals and the technical means for promoting them, the way is open for syncretic resolutions of the tensions arising from within the middle classes.

Syncretism is a practical strategy for managing ambivalence. Desire and will connect disparate elements of social life, juxtaposing oppositions and contradictions within eclectic ideological constructions that enable individuals to position themselves flexibly in relation to the attractions and discontents of modernity. Syncretism collapses boundaries and contingently fuses autonomous social and cultural spheres in the absence of logically necessary connections. It expresses a refusal to exclude. Binding commitments and fixed positions are avoided. Options are kept open so that individuals may negotiate the complexities of religious innovations.

It is the unique position of the middle classes in the global religious market that allows them to draw upon the resources offered by international networks for syncretizing salvationary ideologies with local experiences. The wide range of religious activities that we have described for Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians suggests the unfolding syncretic processes that fuse global religious cultures with local cultural identities to occasion specific transformations of the world religions. In that sense, the globalization of religious markets has given many middle-class Malaysians and the people they influence the opportunity to witness the rebirth of the gods at the end of the twentieth century.

Rebirth of the Gods

Nietzsche's pronouncement of God's demise and Weber's observation of a disenchanted world overtaken by mechanized bureaucracies and scientized regimes were in all likelihood premature statements on the fading of religion into the realms of secular control and commodity markets. At the end of the twentieth century, religion shows no signs of disappearing. On the contrary, it appears to be even more vibrant than before and poses an undying challenge to the forces of disenchantment that momentarily transformed the old gods into the abstract structures of modern society.

These old gods have been reawakened at the end of this century and have taken on new forms to reclaim what they lost during the West's imagined pursuit of world mastery. In the words of Swatos (1983:334), "the demystification of the 1960's excised the last bits of pre-modern enchantment, and the latter decades of this century are in turn witness to a new phenomenon: the manufacture of 'transcendent experiences.'"

That God or gods can reenergize human activity through "transcendent experiences" at the end of this century speaks well for human recognition of the limits of rationalization and secularization, particularly in the West. For some Western sociologists, this recognition has always been present, although it was not intensively given public accord when the belief in the power of reason was ascendent. For example, Tiryakian (1992:83) argues that "from the Enlightenment on the cultural sphere has had a variety of new ways of viewing the world as magical and enchanted." For him, romanticism is a powerful instance of reenchantment in the history of Western modernity, providing "throughout the nineteenth century and into the present age [the] themes of the fantastic, the imaginary, the grotesque, the mythic, and a particular fascination with the demonic and 'darkness'" (85).

In the East, however, the problem of disenchantment was not central to social experience until the colonial era, when the introduction of Western education, administration, science, and technology reorganized indigenous beliefs toward the magical and spiritual realms. These beliefs, at least in Malaysia, did not vanish or become repressed into the nether regions of the unconscious. They were transformed or reworked into the structures of organized religion, even as these structures became more bureaucratized and distant from personalized involvements. In short, charisma was not crushed out of existence by organized religion but continued to thrive as an embodiment of personal power in various movements within established religions.

The tension between organized religion and charisma is a global phenomenon. The former tends to be rationalized and is often perceived to be under the control of secular power. The latter is innovative and potentially threatening to secular power. It is the flame that keeps the gods from being absorbed into secular structures or pushed into oblivion forever. In Malaysia, the career of charisma in the world religions has been erraticpowerful and dominant in some, esoteric and under stress in othersbut nevertheless a source of religious fervor and a perennial challenge to religious authority. For this reason, state control of religion has been critical to the maintenance of secular order, particularly in the case of Islam. The rise of the middle classes in Malaysia and their attraction to charismatic movements via international religious organizations and networks have made it even more imperative for the state to monitor what has come to be seen as the "excesses of the spirit," especially in the case of millenarian Islamic movements.

It is ironic that the middle classes in Malaysia are now enthusiastically turning to charismatic beliefs and actions that in some cases originated in Asia but acquired significant prestige and attracted serious attention only when exported to the West, especially in the 1960s. In the West, many alienated members of the middle classes who resisted the established authorities through countercultural movements in the 1960s became converts to the new Asian religions. Reexportation of these religions to Asia, particularly as neo-Christian, neo-Buddhist, and neo-Hindu movements, has given charisma global meaning not witnessed in other centuries. As Melton (1993:111) puts it, "A more global model should be developed that, first of all, sees North America and the West as participants both in the almost universal growth of religion around the world and in the immense diffusion of the older religions from their traditional geographical bases."

In the age of jet travel and electronic communications, the processes of reenchantment are guaranteed a global mass audience. In a sense, the flowering of this new spiritual fellowship around the world may be attributed to the processes of secularization from which many instances of global contact have been made possible. More specifically, it is in the notion of the "second secularization" (Robertson 1989:68), which addresses the issue of the relativization of particular religious forms within the context of a global-human condition, that we can properly locate the rapid spread of the new religious movements and the global rediscovery of charisma as an antidote to the stultifying and alienating consequences of rationalization.

It is also in the growing consciousness of global-human predicaments that fundamentalist responses seem to have arisen with respect

to the specific social and cultural contexts in which these predicaments are interpreted (Robertson 1989:69). For Shupe and Hadden (1989: 11112), fundamentalist responses have become global in the sense that there is a convergence in the trend toward reclamation of sacred traditions and identification of symbols of evil all over the world. This trend is well documented in the important study by Kepel (1994) of the resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in various parts of the world. Under these conditions of global fundamentalism, we may speak of a reenchantment that draws upon the sacred vestiges of the past, and in that way charisma is reinvented upon the power resources of tradition. It is the past and its perceived traditions that have become an all-powerful medium in this age of global electronic communication to bolster the spiritual outlook thought to have been buried by the processes of modernization.

In Malaysia, the premodern past is too recent to be forgotten, and modernization has not matured to the point of totally underwriting religion as a separate and not so relevant aspect of everyday life. At the same time, because of Malaysia's strategic location in the global religious market, Malaysian practices of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism are not divorced from religious developments elsewhere in the world. In this respect, global fundamentalism has influenced all aspects of religious practices among Malaysians, although particular religious responses are also couched in the context of ethnic and cultural assertions in the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities. It is this interface of global fundamentalism, charisma, ethnicity, and the push toward a modern, secular image in nation building that has transformed the world religions in Malaysia into vibrant arenas of cultural change. These are the arenas in which God or gods have comfortably found niches to inspire once again the human search for meaning within the framework of shifting social and cultural identities.

Notes

Chapter 1
Religion and the Ambiguities of Modernity

1. It is erroneous to assume that Weber had attributed a direct causal relationship between the Protestant ethic and the rise of rational capitalism in the West, as vulgar Weberians and their critics seem to assert. Weber (1958a:183) had announced that "it is not, of course, my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history." The link Weber posited between Protestantism and capitalism was much more subtle: that the former was a necessary but not fully sufficient condition for the emergence of modern capitalism. Instead of using a direct cause-effect approach, Weber preferred to speak of this link as an "elective affinity" (see Howe 1978).

2. According to Weber (1946:280), ideas differ from ideal interests because "not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct." In other words, ideas provide the general organizing frameworks for the expression of particular values deemed important as ends in themselves.

3. However, there is an objective component in *zweckrational* action (but not in *wertrational* action) because it is possible to discriminate on a technical basis between adequate and inadequate means. This requires, in most cases, the judgment of a neutral observer rather than that of the actor himself.

4. Weber was never clear about the difference between nonrationality and irrationality. But we could surmise from his writings that while nonrationality implies spontaneity and lack of conscious planning, irrationality connotes an absence of logical control or parsimony in social processes. Weber's belief in the inevitability of irrationality in rationalization suggests his "serious worry about the petrification of cultural values and the loss of genuine meaning in modern culture" (Gronow 1988:328).

Chapter 2
Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia

1. These statistics were derived from the 1980 general census. Data from the 1991 census were not publicly available when this book was written. The figures given here pertain to the population on the peninsula and do not include that in Sabah and Sarawak, which total over two million. The ethnic and

religious composition of the Borneo states is vastly different from that of the peninsula. This book is concerned only with religious change on the peninsula.

2. The Catholic Church in medieval times functioned not only as an institutional intermediary between man and God but also as "a repository of supernatural power which could be dispensed to the faithful to help them in their daily problems" (Keith Thomas 1973:35). It was during the Counter-Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century that the Catholic Church attempted to "clean up its own act, put more emphasis on moral behavior, eliminate many of the political abuses of the clergy, and in fact become a good deal more 'Protestant' in its attitudes" (Collins 1986:59). It was in this context that the Catholic Church made efforts to reduce the significance of miracles and magic.

3. Weber (1946:66) defined pariah capitalism as unique to the marginal situation of trading groups such as the Jews and Parsees. This type of capitalism is distinguished from modern rational capitalism in that the former lacks the organizational prerequisites of owner-labor relations and the systematic accounting procedures of production.

4. According to Weber (1958a:109ff.), the Protestant ethic was predicated in large measure on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which holds that a person's salvation is dependent on God's grace. The development of an inner-worldly asceticism could be traced to the Calvinist's motivation for perfection in this world as a means of receiving God's grace. The doctrine of predestination also exists in Buddhism and Hinduism, but it differs in these religions from the Calvinist version in the belief that a person can make a choice in his or her path to salvation through merit-making activities. A mixture of these two ethics may produce a highly systematized instrumentality that is seen as a sort of hard-driven assertiveness.

5. We do not include the *orang asli* religions in this discussion because they do not comprise the systematized and organized arrangements characteristic of the urban religious groups. The religious worldviews of the *orang asli* are undoubtedly systematic and logical in their own right, but they are not always clearly demarcated from the routine assumptions of daily living in *orang asli* societies. The urban religious groups, on the other hand, maintain exclusive institutional status: they impact on the lives of their members but at the same time comprise autonomous cultural spheres that are essential to the impersonal basis of the rationalization process.

6. Some previous studies of Malay ethnicity have stressed its variability and the contingent nature of ethnic identification (cf. Nagata 1974). We concur with the results of these studies but emphasize the necessity for understanding the bureaucratization of Malay ethnicityin this case, the administrative manipulations of Islamas a contrast to the organization of non-Malay ethnicities.

Chapter 3
Religio in Imperium:
Islam and the Malay State

1. The sparse population and low level of productivity contributed to a general absence of land rent and taxes on subsistence agriculture (Sadka 1968:385).

2. The use of mercenary forces to maintain this authority was probably not

uncharacteristic of that period. Even as late as the eighteenth century, mercenaries were used to settle power disputes. For example, in the Tuhfat al-Nafis, a history of Malay-Bugis relations in the kingdom of Johor, it is recorded that Sultan Sulaiman employed the services of Bugis mercenaries to dislodge a Minangkabau usurper from the throne of his murdered father (Matheson 1975:13).

3. The Hikayat Deli concerns the history of a East Sumatran sultanate that existed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Milner (1982:72), the manuscript, consisting of 196 typed pages of Romanized Malay, was probably composed in the nineteenth century and handed to a Dutch scholar by the sultan of Deli in 1923.

4. An exception was the state of Kelantan, which, since the reign of Sultan Muhammad I (d. 1837), had established a well-organized Islamic judiciary. According to Abdullah Alwi (1980:17), the Islamic legal system in Kelantan "had no parallel in pre-colonial Malay states with the exception of Johor."

5. Article 3(1) of the Malaysian Constitution states that "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation."

6. Even though this target had not been reached by the mid-1980s, efforts to accomplish this goal are likely to continue after 1990.

7. Syed Sheik Alhady was a Melaka Malay who traveled in the Middle East at the turn of the century. He had worked as a *shari'a* lawyer but was best known as a journalist and literary figure. Among his works, *Ugama Islam dan Akal* (Islam and Reason) stands out as a highly Protestantized piece of writing that emphasizes a rational and individualistic approach to religion. Za'ba was the nom de plume of Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, a Malay teacher at the MCKK in 1918. He was a respected writer who chided the Malays for their backward, feudal values and saw hope in their progress through economic competition (see Roff 1967, Shaharuddin 1988).

8. There are at least two reasons for the prime minister's apparent admiration for the Japanese and Koreans. First, both nationalities have vast investment and business interests in Malaysia. Second, it was necessary to demonstrate to Malaysians that Western economic progress was not the only model available for emulation.

9. It is not our intention to discuss the history and development of PAS; this has been done elsewhere (see Funston 1980). What needs to be noted here is that even though PAS has not been able to achieve political power at the federal level, it managed to control the state government of Kelantan for almost twenty years before its ouster by the federal government in 1978. But in the 1990 elections it recaptured the state government of Kelantan.

10. The Federal Territory was officially established in February 1974 and includes the city of Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas. Since early 1984 the Federal Territory has been expanded to include Janda Baik in Pahang and Labuan in Sabah. The Yang Dipertuan Agong is the head of Islam in the Federal Territory.

11. The controversy over Muslim polygamy centers on the economic and moral problems associated with the alleged male prerogative of marrying up to

four wives. Some Muslim reformists have argued that polygamy is not a male right enshrined in the Qur'an but rather a conditional practice that connotes equitable treatment of wives (*Star*, 16 August 1990). The Islamic Family Law Act supposedly ensures stricter provisions for Muslim men wanting to marry more than one wife and at the same time raises Muslim women's consciousness about their rights (*Star*, 15 August 1990).

12. Information on the Islamic Center is based on a project paper by Rohani (1986) and some data gathered by Raymond L. M. Lee in 1991.

13. Islamic missionary work in Malaysia is also conducted by a government assisted group, PERKIM (Muslim Welfare Association of Malaysia), which has been described elsewhere (Nagata 1984:16874).

14. These institutions are distinguished from secular ones by their strict adherence to *shari'a* principles in commercial activities, such as the prohibition of usury and interest (*riba*). *Riba* is replaced by the principles of *mudaraba* (profit sharing) and *musharaka* (equity participation). Since 1993 three commercial banks have opened counters offering Interest-Free Banking Schemes (IFBS; see Wong 1995) in an apparent effort to attract Muslim customers who prefer Islamic banking. The success and future of IFBS in commercial banks have yet to be assessed.

15. In 1993 the government identified about three hundred students and lecturers in two universities who were allegedly Shia followers (*Star*, 25 February 1993).

16. The Naqshbandiyah, revived in India by the reformist Ahmad Sirhindi in the seventeenth century, appeals to the elite and takes a stern attitude toward extravagant forms of trance, dancing, and music (Rahman 1966:164). The Ahmadiyah is also an orthodox order, but care must be taken to distinguish between this order, founded by the Moroccan Ahmad bin Idris in the early nineteenth century, and two other orders with the same name: the Ahmadiyah (or Badawiyah) of the Egyptian Ahmad al-Badawi, founded in the thirteenth century, and the Ahmadiyah (or Qadiani) of the Pakistani Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founded in the late nineteenth century.

17. *Senarai ajaran/tarikat yang dikesan menyeleweng di Malaysia* (List of Deviant Tarekats in Malaysia), Islamic Affairs Division, Prime Minister's Department (not dated).

18. Except for Nagata (1984:115), who briefly mentioned Darul Arqam's millenarian tendencies, other researchers seemed unaware of the Mahdist belief in the movement, which had been concealed from the public for a long time. The information on Darul Arqam reported here was obtained mainly from a book written by a member who left the movement in 1990 (Mohamed Rushdi Yusof 1990).

19. Rashad Khalifah was trained as an engineer but later became the leader of a Muslim movement in Arizona. In the early 1980s he published several books, among them *The Computer Speaks: God's Message to the World*. The message of his movement focuses on the priority of the Qur'an over the Hadith since the latter is not considered revelational in nature.

Chapter 4
In Search of Nirvana:
Reformism and Charisma in Buddhist Revitalization

1. Unlike the KMTM and CPM, which were connected to movements based in China, the SCBA was indifferent to China and strongly pro-British in its political stance. The SCBA represented an Anglophile mercantile elite, but because it was numerically insignificant, it was isolated culturally and politically from the mainstream of the Chinese community.

2. Mahayana reformism in pre-Communist China, as described by Welch (1967), promoted ecumenical ideals, as did the PBA. This form of reformism was inspired by appreciation for the diversity and wealth of Buddhist traditions. In Malaysia both Mahayana and Theravada monks are invited to give lectures. The Buddhist festival of Wesak is celebrated in accordance with the practice of Theravada countries, and equal importance is given to the birthday celebrations of the Mahayana bodhisattvas and cosmic buddhas (Liow 1989:76).

3. Thai Theravada temples in Malaysia are generally not reformist in orientation. Local Thai monks all belong to the Mahanikaya sect, which is regarded in Thailand as more traditionalist than the reformist Thammayutika sect.

4. These figures were estimated by the president of the Buddhist Gem Fellowship in an interview (22 July 1991).

5. *Bodhisattva* is a Sanskrit and Pali word that refers to an enlightened being who chooses to forego nirvana in order to provide spiritual assistance to sentient beings who are suffering in this world.

6. Based on our personal observations.

7. The description of Tibetan tantrism that follows is based on lectures and talks presented by various visiting lamas in Malaysia between 1990 and 1992, particularly those given by Ven. Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche.

8. The Golden Red Vajra Crown Ceremony is an example of a Karma Kagyu ritual of personal empowerment. This ceremony was conducted in Malaysia in 1985 and 1990. Viewing the crown at this ceremony is alleged to remove obstacles and mitigate problems of daily living. In Tibet this ceremony is believed to be held once every ten years, but since 1959 the crown has been displayed to Buddhists in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. The ceremony is conducted by the Gyalwa Karmapa or the heads of the most important Karma Kagyu monasteries.

9. The lamas apply different levels of Vajrayana understanding to different audiences. They tend to communicate a more intellectualized version of Vajrayana to Western audiences while teaching Asian adepts a more devotional approach. Some Malaysian Buddhists who seek a more theoretical understanding of Vajrayana have traveled to the West to receive advanced teachings not given in their home country.

10. Some details of Achaan Yantra's biography were displayed at the Brickfields Vihara during his visit there in June 1990. Other information on his background was obtained in interviews with one of his Malaysian disciples.

11. Buddhadasa, who pioneered Buddhist ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, was the first Thai monk to engage in serious study of Zen Buddhism; he introduced it to Theravada Buddhists.

12. The international career of Myanmar *vipassana* meditation can be attributed to its leading teacher, Mahasi Sayadaw. This movement has many adherents in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and the United States. Despite its worldwide popularity, Mahasi Sayadaw's approach to meditation has been criticized by traditionalist monks (see Mahasi Sayadaw 1979).

13. The Pali Canon, also known as the Tipitika, comprises the Vinaya concerning monastic discipline, the Sutta discourses of the Buddha, and the Abhidhamma, which deals with metaphysical speculations. It forms the basis of doctrine and practice for the Theravada school of Buddhism.

14. The Gelugpa sect originated as a reform movement to strengthen monastic discipline and scholarship (Michael 1982:2223). Tsongkapa (13571419), the founder of this sect, synthesized the theoretical concepts and ritual traditions established by the other sects. This was accomplished within a strict disciplinary framework that stressed ethics, logic, and debate. The Dalai Lama has continued Tsongkapa's reformist approach in formulating a rational presentation of tantrism for international dissemination.

Chapter 5
The Lance and the Lotus:
Passion and Devotion in the Hindu Quest

1. There are presently no more than two hundred Brahmin families living in Malaysia (Rajakrishnan 1984:95). No Brahmins have ever migrated to seek employment in the estates. Generally they came to colonial Malaya either as professionals or to serve as temple priests in the cities. Ideally speaking, the *varna* system differentiates caste in the descending categories of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra.

2. Fuller (1988:21) has felicitously described meat-eating deities as "fallen" vegetarians rather than "raised" demons. Their movement into the higher bracket of the Hindu pantheon, as reflecting lower-caste status aspiration, may be construed as their attempt to become "restored" vegetarians.

3. The sacrificial acts are performed away from the main shrine of the temple. At the same time, a curtain is drawn in front of the image of the goddess, or the door of her shrine is closed. For discussion of the complexities concerning offerings to Mariyamman, see Younger (1980:495) and Fuller (1988:26).

4. In statistical terms, Indians, representing about 16 percent of the population of Kuala Lumpur in 1970, comprised 15 percent of the total migrants to the city's district (Sidhu and Jones 1981:136). Although no particulars were given regarding the Indian migrants' backgrounds, it can be inferred that a large percentage came from rural estates because slightly more than 50 percent of Indian migrants to Kuala Lumpur came from areas other than state capital districts (Sidhu and Jones 1981:135). It can be inferred further that this flow from the estates to the cities has increased since 1970.

5. Rajoo (1985:77), in a study of an urban Indian squatter settlement, showed that 74 percent of the settlers were from the estates and had come to the city in search of better jobs. The size of this settlement had more than quadrupled in two decades, largely because of the influx of migrants from the estates.

6. These priests receive training in the Agamas, which may take as long as seven years. Most of them wear the sacred thread (*punal*), which is swung over the left shoulder. The number of threads worn indicates the grade of the priest: three for a bachelor, six for a married man, nine for one who has fathered a child, and twelve for one known as a *gurupatham*, who has the right to perform any *puja*. They earn about M$200 to M$300 per month but receive large commissions for performing special rituals within the temple or ceremonies outside.

7. There are actually more than a hundred Hindu temples in the Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area. In 1984 the Malaysian Hindu Sangam conducted a survey of ninety temples, partly in response to government concern over the construction of illegal temples and partly to gather information for its own programs. This information was made available to Ganesh (1985), who gathered data on ten additional temples.

8. Subrahmanyam is one of the many names of Murukan. It suggests his Brahminical roots since it means "having the quality of Brahman" (Clothey 1978:213, n.12).

9. In the third book of the Mahabharata, Skanda, in his battle with Indra, suffers a blow on his right side caused by the latter's thunderbolt. But from the wound emerge the lance-bearing Visakha and a multitude of children to serve in Skanda's army. Henceforth Skanda is known as a father, and persons who want to have children are encouraged to worship him (Clothey 1978:52).

10. Advaita Vedanta philosophy subscribes to the belief in one reality or the nondualistic identity of man with that reality. Later Vedantic schools that digressed from this theory included Ramanujan's visistadvaita (eleventh century), Nimbarka's dvaitadvaita (fourteenth century), and Chaitanya's bhedabheda (fifteenth century), all of which dealt with the complex issue of ultimate identity and phenomenal difference.

Chapter 6
The Empowerment of Marginality:
From Rational Knowledge to Organized Ecstasy in Christianity

1. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in Malaysia. Its present membership exceeds 150,000 and accounts for 80 percent of the Christian population. Among the Protestants, who account for 19.4 percent of the Christians, the Methodists are the largest denomination, comprising 42 percent of the Protestants; while the next largest denominations, the Anglicans and Seventh Day Adventists, represent 17.5 percent and 7 percent respectively. Pentecostal denominations account for about 9 percent of the Protestants

(C. D. Thomas 1978). In ethnic terms, church growth is most significant among the Chinese Christians, whose numbers multiplied sixfold between 1931 and 1970; they have replaced the Indian Christians as the largest Christian group on the peninsula (Sidhu and Jones 1981:255). For more recent statistics on church growth, see Chan (1992).

2. Ascetic Protestantism called for the pursuit of monastic ideals within mundane occupations (Weber 1958a:121). The religious demand for internalized discipline and sustained activity in the world epitomized what Weber saw as a revolutionary cultural innovation pioneered by Calvinism. It was the methodical control over the entirety of personal life that Weber identified as the source of the "enormous expansive power" of Calvinism to motivate individuals to strive for salvation through diligence in performance of secular tasks.

3. The increasingly subjective character of Christianity has broadened the appeal of mysticism. "The modern educated classes," as viewed by Troeltsch (1960:798), "understand nothing but mysticism." He sees mysticism as a consequence of "the atomistic individualism of modern civilization in general," which is accompanied by increasing constraints on individualism in nonreligious spheres of life (799). Individualism continues to be a central ideology of advanced capitalist society, even as loss of individual autonomy becomes a pervasive experience in modern life.

4. According to Bosch (1991), there are at least seven characteristics of Enlightenment thought: (1) the apotheosis of reason, which asserts the actualization of human reason as the motor of history; (2) a differentiation between subject and object that enables the human mind to transform nature into an object of analysis; (3) rational knowledge in the service of unfettered freedom, which results in the laws of cause and effect; (4) the idea of progress, which was thought to be universal in scope; (5) the factual and value-free character of scientific knowledge; (6) unquestioned confidence in the solvability of all problems; and (7) the atomization of humankind into emancipated and autonomous individuals.

5. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1699, exemplified just such a concept of mission. In establishing libraries and schools and distributing Christian literature, it identified itself with knowledge and education in the service of social upliftment.

6. The categories "liberal" and "conservative" crosscut the Catholic and Protestant divide as well as denominational labels among Protestants.

7. The World Council of Churches is the most prominent representative of the liberal Protestant agenda. Liberation theology and a model of Christian mission focused on the dismantling of oppressive structures are consistent with the WCC's orientation.

8. The Navigators tend to deemphasize the necessity of ordained clergy, pointing out that the New Testament does not distinguish between lay and ordained Christians.

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