



NATIONAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Edited by
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FOREWORD

This collection of press reports, press statements, public debate and the Memoranda by the Chinese and Indian communities of Malaysia on the National Culture is a contribution to a better understanding of the National Culture issue.

Our Joint Memorandum on National Culture presented to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in 1983 is the overwhelming opinion of the Major Organisations of the Chinese community in this country. While it has been publicised in the Chinese-language press, the rest of the public media have not given it a fair hearing. Some have shrouded it in the same old communalistic interpretation.

This regrettable state of affairs can therefore best be improved through public airing of our stand if misunderstanding is to be avoided. We sincerely believe that only then can National Unity be promoted.

From some of the comments by our intellectuals, it would appear that the Chinese Malaysian community was merely making an abstract communalist stand regarding the National Culture.

The Chinese Malaysian Culture Congress held on 27 March 1983 was in response to the effects of the National Culture policy which we

have experienced in recent years. Perhaps some of the issues — and at times unpleasant incidents, over signboards and lion dances — were not sufficiently publicised in the non-Chinese language press. In the Chinese-medium schools and our other cultural activities, we have also met with numerous impediments and discrimination.

These are therefore very real effects of the National Culture Policy, which those who are not involved with vernacular schools or community activities would not otherwise feel.

We fervently believe that our demand for cultural equality and democracy is consistent with international standards of human rights, the provisions of our Federal Constitution, the Rukunegara, and is in the best interest of National Unity.

Khoo Siong Chi

President

Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall

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Introduction

Why has the National Culture Policy — that is supposed to have been formulated at the National Culture Congress in 1971 — only recently created a furore amongst the non-Malay communities? The implications go beyond the justification of this particular policy to the question of the nature of policy formulation itself.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports maintains that the National Culture Policy was conceived in 1971 at the National Culture Congress. A glance at the Ministry's publication of that Congress, *Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*, will reveal that the overwhelming majority of the participants were politicians and academics from the Malay community. The mere handful of non-Malay academics could hardly be considered representatives of the non-Malay communities. A policy as important as the "National Culture" needs to be delicately formulated only after due democratic consultations will *all* the ethnic communities that make up Malaysia. Above all, this should involve the representation of all the guilds and associations and other educational/cultural organisations in the various communities.

When the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports asked for feedback from all the communities for a ten-year review in 1981, the Chinese community responded immediately. A Chinese

Cultural Congress was held on March 27, 1983 at which representatives from all the 13 state organisations of Chinese guilds and associations, the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (UCSCAM), the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM), scholars and experts in the various fields of culture took part. The proceedings and resolutions were subsequently presented in their Joint Memorandum to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Regrettably, this Memorandum has been given little publicity in the English and Malay press and therefore, this collection intends to remedy that fact. The Memorandum by the Indian Associations is also included in the section on 'Documents'.

The Chinese community's Memorandum objects to the present policies on National Culture based on the 'Three Principles' of the 1971 Congress, viz.

- (i) The National Culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region.
- (ii) The suitable elements from the other cultures can be accepted as part of the National Culture.
- (iii) Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture.

The *Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* specifically

stipulates that the second principle must be seen only in the context of (i) and (iii).

The Chinese community has responded vehemently to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports' ten-year review principally because the ten years' experience of this policy has shown that it is heavily laced with Malay-centrism and a tendency toward forced assimilation of the other cultures in this country with hardly any cultural democracy. This trend and instances in the various fields of culture — language, education and the arts — are elaborated in the Appendices of the Joint Memorandum of the Chinese community as well as in some of the press reports. It must be emphasised that in international conventions on cultural policies, assimilation through the imposition of government policy, direct or *indirect* coercion, is considered forced assimilation. See, for example, the World Conference on Cultural Policies at Mexico City, 1982.

The reality — and if one has loftier thoughts, the incomparable beauty — of our country is its rich cultural mix, the diversity of its peoples, languages, religions and ethnicity. It is a terrible shame that this beauty should be spoilt by those who maintain that National Unity or the National Culture can only be forged through the imposition of one main culture. This is in utter contradiction to the spirit and principle of the Rukunegara.

The Chinese community appeals first of all to

the international institutions which amply recognise the principle of 'Unity in Diversity'.

Apart from the international safeguards, the spirit and letter of our Federal Constitution itself guarantees the equality of the cultures of all the ethnic communities in Malaysia.

The Joint Memorandum by the Chinese community puts forward an alternative 'Four Principles' for the formulation of the National Culture:

- (i) The fine elements of the cultures of each ethnic community must form the basis of the National Culture.
- (ii) The guidelines to the establishment of a set of common cultural values are democracy, science, the rule of law and patriotism.
- (iii) The common cultural values must be expressed through the multi-ethnic forms.
- (iv) This process of formulating a national culture must be consistent with the principle of equality of all ethnic groups and the method of democratic consultation.

It calls on the government to respect the rights enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution for each ethnic community to preserve and develop their language, education and culture as well as to assist in their development. Cultural equality must also be reflected in the public media and official institutions and functions. Furthermore, the government must initiate acti-

vities which can promote the interaction of the cultures of the various ethnic communities in order to foster those common values.

The Government's response to the Chinese community's Joint Memorandum has been discouraging in its refusal to review those 'Three Principles' of its National Culture policy or to accept criticism of the policy.

Press reports and statements since July 30, 1983 show clearly that the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports will not entertain any view that questions the rationable of the national culture policy. Only the *implementation* of that policy is open to suggestion.

From the press statements, which are mostly responses to statements by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, these points are stressed:

- * Cultural Pluralism is a fundamental democratic human right.
- * The National Culture policy must be acceptable to *all* our ethnic communities.
- * Integration does not mean Assimilation.
- * In a democracy, individual rights must be safeguarded and it matters little if a citizen is designated "indigenous" or "immigrant", "minority" or "majority".
- * Until our National Culture policy has been decided upon through democratic

consultation, debate on it will never be closed.

The last section of this book highlights debates on various aspects of the national culture. Perhaps another tragedy of culture and intellect in our country is seen in the failure of even some of our intellectuals to distinguish between what constitutes a chauvinist stand and what constitutes a just and democratic right of a people. For too long, this distinction has been befogged by the communalist politics in this land. Until one faces this question squarely and resolves it, we will never be able to solve this most vital of problems in Malaysia. This book is a rare opportunity for the Malaysian Chinese community to reply to arguments against the existence of the Malaysian Chinese school system.

In conclusion, the foundations of our National Culture — if it is to be truly national — must be no less than the essence of *all* the cultures of the ethnic communities which make up Malaysia. Its formulation must be consistent with the principle of equality of all ethnic communities and democratic consultation. As the Prime Minister himself stressed during his recent tour of the country during the Constitutional crisis, the rights and aspirations of *all* the rakyat must be supreme. This, he maintained, is the true spirit, the real practice of democracy.

**DIARY OF EVENTS
AND
PRESS REPORTS**

**A NATIONAL IDENTITY VITAL:
TUN (RAZAK)
CONGRESS MAY DECIDE ON
'FORM OF CULTURE'**

(The Congress on National Culture was held at University Malaya Kuala Lumpur. It was opened by YAB Tun Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia)

"This is the first time the Government is sponsoring such a congress and I am confident that our cultural experts and intellectuals will make full use of it to discuss in depth problems relating to our national culture."

Tun Razak said the rich traditional cultures of the races in Malaysia would be developed to stabilize the growth of the national culture based on traditions in this part of the world.

Co-Chairman Tan Sri Nik Ahmad Kamil said ". . . . It would not only be a tool to form a single nation and unify the races but also to reflect Malaysia's identity abroad"

About 1,000 delegates will debate 60 working papers to be delivered by experts on Malaysian culture during the congress.

"Malaysia's multi-racial society cannot be forgotten in deciding the country's national culture", Tun Abdul Razak told cultural experts and enthusiasts today.

"To the fine rich base of our indigenous cultural heritage we must add beneficial, invigorating elements from other cultures that have come into the country".

"We must always be guided by the aim of welding our various communities and groups into a solid, united nation".

"Since we are a very young nation, it is inevitable that some of our people are still confused, especially over which elements of our indigenous culture should be preserved and which should give way to change".

At the opening ceremony Dato Hamzah bin Abu Samah (Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports), chairman of the congress committee, said: "The search for a national identity . . . must have the support of the people, in the fullness of their spirit and faith. I hope the congress will give a positive and pragmatic contribution to the common effort, by offering a true synthesis of the ideas of all the people in a harmonious, individual, progressive whole".

"The role of the national language as the

language of solidarity is fundamental in our national education system, which is a long-term strategy towards a united Malaysian nation”.

The Straits Times — 18 August 1971

Editorial:

“... If culture is the sum total of a nation's civilising, artistic and spiritual experience, then multi-racial Malaysia has established an outstanding place in the region's cultural history.

But the thought which dominates everyone is how the component parts can be welded into a whole as an integral part of national identity. It is easier said than done. Culture does not lend itself easily to guidance or legislation. . . .

Without pushing the analogy too far, America 150 years ago had no recognisable national culture. . . .”

The Straits Times — 20 May 1979

GHAZALI ON THE BASIS FOR NATION'S CULTURE

A new Malaysian society could only emerge with the acceptance of its indigenous cultural elements as the basis for a national culture, Home Affairs Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie said today.

He said an insight into the national symbols and the Rukunegara would reveal that this basis was already established.

The faster this was realised and accepted, he said, the quicker it would be for a national culture to emerge.

However, he said, attempts by the immigrant races to defend and promote some of their cultural elements which were already extinct in their countries of origin were futile and a waste of time.

"Not only are these elements incongruous to the environment here but their propagation is a hinderance to the emergence of a national culture."

"Their proper place is the museum where they can be exhibited as manifestations of an archaic culture and perhaps also serve as materials for anthropological and sociological research."

"They are no longer functional in their present context and serve only as emotional crutches for the sentimental few."

Speaking at the opening of a seminar on "The Role of Malay Studies in the Development of a National Identity" at the University of Malaya today, he lamented the fact that a national identity has still to emerge.

Tan Sri Ghazali said it would seem that Malaysians never learnt anything from the May 13 incident which among other things had erupted due to a crisis of values resulting from the existence of divergent cultures.

He said one would have thought the incident would hasten the development of a national culture with common Malaysian values.

"Thus Malaysians should no longer be complacent but work together to establish a national culture if another crisis is to be avoided."

He said as a starter the Rukunegara could be used as a basis for the development of a national culture since it transcended racial and religious barriers.

Its meaning, he said, should be fully understood rather than it being recited unintelligibly in schools or to serve as part of wall decoration in offices.

The Minister said for the national culture to be quickly established the indigenous groups must determine what elements from their culture should be used as a basis for the establishment of a national culture.

He said in establishing the basis they must be careful to select only those which are meaningful and useful and had the potentials of developing further.

Once this foundation has been established other cultural elements could be absorbed after having first undergone some changes so as to be compatible with the time and environment.

As an example he quoted the lion dance which with its musical accompaniment, could not be easily accepted as a Malaysian dance form and music.

He said the dance had originated from China where it was now extinct and as such it could not develop further and be accepted by all.

Perhaps, he said, it could be more acceptable in its modified form as a tiger dance accompanied by music from the gong, flute, tabla or gamelan.

Tan Sri Ghazali said the delay in the emergence of a national culture had already placed a wide gap between the cultural and economic development in the country.

He said as a result of the economic and material progress being way ahead of the cultural developments there was the danger of the emergence of sub-cultures challenging some of the traditional values which were in the process of being established.

Without a proper cultural basis, he said, Malaysian are prone to alien cultures now seeping in.

Also without proper safeguards, he said, Malaysian traditional values would be drowned

and would later suffer the fate of being occasionally exhibited as "light entertainment".

Thus, he said, there was a need to hasten the development of a national culture so that "the next generation would inherit something beneficial from us".

Tan Sri Ghazali also stressed the importance of the language in the development of national identity or culture.

He said a common language is necessary as a medium of communication and interaction between members of a common society.

The ability of Bahasa Malaysia to serve this purpose, he said, was now widely accepted and could no longer be challenged.

He said Malaysians must settle down to study this language and understand all its ethics and nuances so as to avoid misunderstanding.

The seminar organised by the Malay Studies Department of University of Malaya and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia was part of the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the establishment of the Malay Studies Department of the University of Malaya.

NATIONAL CULTURE — 10 YEARS' WORK TO BE REVIEWED

The Government is to review all steps taken to forge a national culture, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Datuk Mokhtar Hashim said.

He said all Government agencies, including organisations involved in looking into problems regarding the formation of a national culture, would be asked to put forward their comments.

"We hope this review would bring about the necessary feedback from all parties concerned on the past efforts taken by the Government to forge the development of a national culture," he said.

Replying to Encik Kamaluddin Maamor (BN-Hilir Perak), Datuk Mokhtar said most of the efforts taken over the past 10 years were derived from the resolutions passed at the National Culture Congress held at the University of Malaya in 1971.

He said since these resolutions included other factors like education, other agencies were also involved in implementing them.

Datuk Mokhtar also said under the Fourth Malaysia Plan, a culture complex containing a national theatre, culture garden and a national

art academy has been planned.

He said this would be the centre of activities for the development of Malaysian art and culture.

He added that the various measures taken to forge a national culture had achieved successes like the development of the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in primary schools and also institutions of higher learning.

"The achievements in the arts and cultural aspects cannot be described separately or viewed from the aspect of material or physical proof only, but it is always developing and progressing."

"There is the understanding amongst the various races on values and norms of a Malaysian society and the realisation of a national identity in the different national symbols and ceremonies," he said.

He said this realisation of a national identity can also be found among architects and town planners who were now proposing a more Malaysian character in building.

He added that his Ministry had also set up many organisations and councils at State levels to forge a better understanding among the people as to what a national culture is.

Replying to Encik Alias Ali (BN-Ulu Treng-

ganu), he said the Government has also issued a set of guidelines to local authorities so that future building would reflect a national culture.

He told Encik Tajol Rosli (BN-Grik) that it was difficult for anyone to say exactly when a national culture would be achieved as culture was a growing and developing issue.

Datuk Mokhtar said it was important to realise that a conscious effort is being taken by the Government to bring about the development of a national culture.

Replying to Encik Ikhwan Nasir (BN-Pontian), he said one factor that was hindering the development of a national culture was "overemotional feelings of each race" projected by some people.

The Straits Times — 17 June 1982

GOVERNMENT STUDY OF NATIONAL CULTURE

The Government is doing a study on the implementation of a national culture, Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Mokhtar Hashim said tonight.

"The purpose of the study is to assess how far we have achieved in spreading such a culture since the Cultural Congress in 1971," he said.

The study would help the Government find ways to achieve its objective, he added.

"If necessary we may hold another congress to find out how much we have achieved in the way of implementing the national culture."

Datuk Mokhtar was speaking at a dinner here where he presented prizes to winners of the 1981 Esso-Gapena short story contest here.

Datuk Mokhtar said: "Our problem is not with the national culture policy but with implementing it."

"I hope all Malaysians would contribute their part in realising the national culture concept."

The Straits Times — 9 October 1982

ART, NATIONAL CULTURE AND MALAY IDENTITY

Only characteristics of art which are based on the Malay identity should be accepted as elements of the national culture, Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie said today.

He said the Malay identity must be moulded and developed in all aspects of national culture. In this respect there should be no give-and-take, he said.

Opening a Turkish art exhibition at the Asian art museum in University Malaya here, Tan Sri Ghazali said ancient art works provided an understanding of the history of a particular race.

Historical and cultural effects of the British, Dutch and Japanese occupation of Malaysia should instil in the minds of the people that there would not be any recurrence of such periods.

On Turkish art, Tan Sri Ghazali said that it had links with elements of Islamic culture which was closely related to Malay culture. . .

The Star - 20 November 1982

NO LION DANCE FOR NATIONAL CULTURE: ADIB

The lion dance cannot become part of the national culture, Acting Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Mohamed Adib Adam said.

He told Mr. Lee Lam Thye (DAP-Kuala Lumpur-Bandar) that this was because the lion dance could not be accepted by all the people in the country though it formed an important part of Chinese culture.

Replying to the original question by Datuk Michael Chen (BN-Bruas) he said that the national culture policy was based on three principles.

They must be based on the culture indigenous to this region; the features of other cultures must be suited to the national culture and that Islam must be an important element.

"Based on these three main principles, the national culture will eliminate racial cultures," said Encik Mohamed Adib.

"It is now in the process of evolution and it will comprise the basic culture and the different ways of life of the races in Malaysia," he said.

He said that Malaysia needed to have a liberal attitude towards the country's rich cultural heritage.

He told Datuk Lee Kim Sai (BN-Ulu Selangor) that there were two ways in which cultural practices can become features of the national culture.

One was when such practices became the norms of the people and the other through legislation like the prohibition of polygamous marriages among non-Muslims.

The Star — 21 December 1982

MALAYSIAN LOOK FOR HOTELS SOON

Hotel projects enjoying incentives under the Investment Incentive Act will be required to meet a new standard stressing on elements of Malaysian Identity from January 1.

Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen said that requirements covered the architecture of the buildings, interior decoration,

the dress of the workers and the music provided, besides suitable facilities and services according to the hotel status and class.

The new standard would apply to hotel projects approved after January 1 for extension work or modifications.

For existing hotels, they were encouraged to meet the new standard, he said at the presentation of certificates to participants of a course on hotel and restaurant supervision at the National Productivity Center here. . .

27 March 1983

CHINESE CULTURAL CONGRESS

The Chinese Cultural Congress, organised by the major Chinese organisations in Malaysia, was held at Penang Chinese Town Hall. The congress unanimously accepted the Joint Memorandum on National Culture which was subsequently submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

DON'T QUESTION CULTURE POLICY

The Johore UMNO Youth leader and Deputy Minister for the Federal Territory urged UMNO Youth to oppose "certain groups who are questioning the implementation of national culture based on Bumiputra culture". This, he said, is a "bad sign for breaking the unity of the people".

STAND FIRM ON NATIONAL CULTURE

The UMNO Youth Bureau Chief of Culture, in response to the Memorandum by the Chinese community, urged the government to take a firm stand on National Culture policy as laid down in the 1971 Congress and to implement all aspects of this policy. He questioned the honesty, sincerity and loyalty of the Chinese community in submitting this Memorandum.

NATIONAL CULTURE ISSUE CLOSED

Cultural, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Anwar Ibrahim yesterday said the government will not entertain any view or recommendation that questions the policy on national culture.

He said there should not be any more issues on the national culture policy.

"What is important is for the people to help speed up the implementation of the national culture with dedication, responsibility and sincerity," he said in reply to Mr. Lee Lam Thye (DAP-Kuala Lumpur Bandar) who wanted to know whether the Ministry has received a memorandum on national culture submitted by 15 Chinese organisations.

Encik Anwar said his Ministry had received and studied the recommendation.

"However, even though the Ministry welcomes suggestions and views from any party, it cannot entertain those which question the national culture policy which has already been approved.

... The national culture policy should not be used as an issue to arouse racial sentiments," he said.

Encik Anwar added that the national culture policy would assimilate the various cultures in the country as well as other foreign culture values as long as they are suited to our own values and norms.

Encik Anwar added that his Ministry accepts the concept that the cultural values of the various races should be assimilated in the formulation of the national culture.

To another question by Mr. Chan Kok Kit (DAP-Sungei Besi), Encik Anwar said the question of public hearing on the national culture policy does not arise as the policy has been accepted.

Encik Anwar also hit out at Mr. Sim Kwang Yang (DAP-Bandar Kuching) who had asked whether the Government has put aside certain aspects of the Chinese culture when formulating the national culture policy.

"I feel disappointed that the honourable Member from Bandar Kuching does not fully comprehend the meaning of national culture."

"Aspects of the Malay culture have been accepted as the foundation for the national culture. Aspects of the Chinese and Indian cultures are also accepted," he said.

Encik Anwar also clarified that the status of the national culture is the same as the Islamic religion which is the official religion in the country.

"This means that the policy of national culture cannot be raised," he said.

To another question by Dr. Koh Tsu Koon (BN-Tanjong), Encik Anwar said the confusion over the National Culture Policy arose because certain parties were making a political issue out of the policy.

He added that culture not only encompasses the physical and visible aspects but also the peoples' attitudes.

He also urged politicians to understand the meaning of culture.

New Straits Times — 3 August 1983

ISLAM AND NATIONAL CULTURE — BY ANWAR

Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday Islam is an important factor in the formulation of the national culture policy.

Replying to Haji Mohamad Zain Abdullah (Hamim-Bachok), he said Islam should be viewed as one principle which incorporates all aspects of life.

Encik Anwar stressed that what was important in the implementation of the national culture is the readiness of the people to practise the values laid down in the national culture without any doubt or suspicion.

He said the practice of Islamic teachings is not tied to any institution, programme or activity which is totally labelled Islam.

The Minister said what is needed is for the

people to defend the Malay traditional values which do not conflict with Islamic teachings.

"This attitude should be extended to include the positive aspects of other cultures, Chinese and Indian civilisation and East and West," he said.

To another question by Encik Mohamad Razlan Haji Abdul (BN-Matang) on whether all the races accepted the fact that Islamic values would be the dominant values in the formulation of the national culture, Encik Anwar said not every programme of the Government would be accepted by all.

"However, through information and explanation, the people would understand the national culture policy," he said.

He added that although Islamic values would be the dominant values in the national culture, the policy would not threaten the beliefs of the other races.

He added that although Islamic values would be the dominant values in the national culture, the policy would not threaten the beliefs of other races.

INCLUDE LION DANCE IN NATIONAL CULTURE: LEE

Lion dances should be absorbed into the national culture, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Lee Kim Sai said.

He said that he would arrange meetings between cultural groups and Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim to "thrash out this problem".

However, the issue would take some time to be solved, he said when replying to complaints from the public at the Mobile Complaints Bureau at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce here yesterday.

"From a heart-to-heart talk, we hope to reach an understanding on what constitute the Malaysian culture," he said.

Datuk Lee also said he would ask the Immigration Department why red identity cards were issued so fast to Indonesian immigrants.

Under the law, red identity cards could not be carelessly issued, he said.

On signboards, Datuk Lee urged the State Governments to follow the Federal Government's code to ensure that procedures were standardised.

Under the Federal Territory's code for signboards, other languages could be used as long as the Bahasa Malaysia words were displayed prominently.

Datuk Lee was accompanied by the Director of the Public Complaints Bureau in the Prime Minister's Department, Encik Ibrahim bin Ariffin.

26 September 1983

ANWAR MEETS CHINESE ORGANISATIONS

A delegation of representatives from the 15 main Chinese organisations met the Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, Encik Anwar Ibrahim for a "dialogue" at the Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur.

The Star — 27 September 1983

PLEDGE BY ANWAR ON NATIONAL CULTURE

The Government has no intention to force the assimilation of the different ethnic cultures in its effort to mould a national culture, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Encik Anwar Ibrahim said today.

He assured the Chinese community that their democratic rights to their culture would not be

undermined in the context of the National Culture Policy.

"We are not talking about forced assimilation when we talk about the concept of national culture. If someone says that, he must be joking," he said.

Encik Anwar said the question of the Chinese being denied their freedom to practise their customs and beliefs did not arise.

"It is the Government's principle to allow the evolution of cultural pluralism of different races."

"The basis of the National Culture Policy is very clear. It is not a zero-sum game to accept one culture and deny others," he said during a meeting with 16 Chinese organisations.

The meeting was held to discuss various matters that came about from Encik Anwar's speeches which emphasised Islamic values as part of the national culture.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Lee Kim Sai, who was present at the meeting, urged the government not to use the word "assimilation".

This would instil fear among the Chinese community as they felt they would have to forego their cultural practices, he said.

An official from the United Chinese School

Committees' Association, Mr. Lee Ban Chen, said the fear of the community stemmed from unkept promises of certain leaders.

Before the two-hour meeting ended, Encik Anwar appealed to the leaders present to adopt a positive approach when criticising Government policies.

He said they must bear in mind that Malaysia was a multiracial society and, therefore, not all demands of the various ethnic groups could be entertained by the Government.

The Star — 29 September 1983

ISLAMIC VALUES WON'T SUPPRESS OTHER CULTURES

Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim said last night the incorporation of Islamic values in the national culture was not to eclipse other cultures.

To suppress other cultures was like practising narrow nationalism, and such a practice was inconsistent with Islamic teachings, he said at a ceramah on the incorporation of Islamic values in youth activities at the Mara Institution of Technology.

He said the government was serious about the absorption of Islamic values in the administra-

tion, eradication of poverty and corruption, though such measures were not labelled 'Islamic'.

Encik Anwar also said that his Ministry was monitoring the development of western pop culture, especially on the elements which ran contrary to Islam.

Earlier, Encik Anwar said the country needed young Malaysians who were resilient to continue the changes being made and that would be made by the Government.

This, he said, took time and because of this, the youths should be resilient and be able to contribute towards justice.

Encik Anwar said the younger generation should set a system of values based on the noble Islamic values to defend the principles of the country.

He also said that they should not interpret the Quran themselves and criticise others but should discuss the holy verses with ulamaks and air their views and grouses responsibly.

The Star — 11 October 1983

DON'T PLAY POLITICS ON CULTURE ISSUE, MCA TOLD

UMNO Youth warned the MCA today against turning the National Culture Policy into a political issue.

Chairman of its Labour and Law Bureaux, Encik Nazri Tan Sri Abdul Aziz, said certain MCA members were using the issue for their own political gains.

Encik Nazri was speaking after a signing ceremony between the Federal Territory UMNO Youth and a private firm to stage an exposition here next year.

He said the MCA should "not play politics on this issue or they will have to face the consequences."

He was commenting on the adoption of a resolution by the Perak MCA on Saturday opposing the 'Cultural Assimilation Policy' announced by Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who is also UMNO Youth leader.

Federal Territory MCA chief Tan Koon Swan had also said yesterday that the confidence of the people has been affected by the rise in activities inclining towards religious and cultural extremism.

Mr. Tan, who is also a MCA vice-president added that in the wake of these 'disturbing trends' the Chinese community has become more perplexed and that politically, there were increasing signs of dissatisfaction and insecurity.

Encik Nazri claimed that it was the MCA leaders themselves who instilled fear among the Chinese community over the policy.

He added UMNO had not made any statements which could instil fear in any community regarding the policy.

"The MCA must also consider whether statements made by their leaders on the issue could create fear among the Malays," he said.

He said that turning the matter into a political issue also implied that the Chinese were not united.

He also stressed that UMNO Youth would not compromise on this issue.

Meanwhile, Encik Anwar said that the Government's decision to make Islam the basis of creating the national culture would not be reversed.

He said, however, that the decision was not aimed at rejecting or eliminating the culture of other communities in the country.

The Star — 12 October 1983

LEE: GIVE EQUAL EMPHASIS TO OTHER CULTURES

Government bodies and agencies should give equal emphasis to the assimilation of the cultures of the various races into the national culture, MCA Youth chairman Datuk Lee Kim Sai said today.

He said that prominence should not only be

given to Malay culture and Islam as the main component of the national culture, but also the absorption of the cultures of the other races.

"The importance of the other cultures should not be neglected when forming the national culture," he told reporters after launching the new Rukun Tetangga logo here.

Datuk Lee, who is Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said that Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim had emphasised in discussions with him that he would not tolerate anyone who tried to stop the absorption of the cultures of the other races into the national culture.

He also refuted a newspaper report that he was against the idea of Malay culture and Islam being the main components.

New Straits Times — 15 October 1983

BE FIRM ON NATIONAL CULTURE POLICY: MERDEKA

'*Merdeka*', the Umno's official organ, wants the government to be firm on the National Culture Policy and other principal policies that had been jointly agreed upon.

The editorial in its latest issue reminded that the main objective behind the drafting of natio-

nal policies like the New Economic Policy, the education policy and the policy on culture was to build up and consolidate the foundation for racial unity.

No one could deny that only unity could determine continued stability and progress, it said.

"However, if any quarter was to unhesitatingly amend any policies merely to achieve its narrow objectives, does this not mean that we are forced to formulate new policies each time someone changes his mind?

"Would not this lead us to confusion and destruction?" the publication asked.

It also said that another matter that should be understood by all was the fact that the process of creating a national culture was not one that could be easily projected or moulded.

The publication regarded the actions of some quarters who wanted to raise the matter as a political issue as a sign that there were certain people who were really desperate to exploit the issue.

Quoting the assurances by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Encik Anwar Ibrahim, the publication said the implementation of the National Culture Policy did not prevent the absorption of suitable non-Malay cultural values or the growth of other cultures.

As such, the question of pressure or injustice did not arise, it added.

The Star — 16 October 1983

MIC YOUTH WANTS VIEWS ON NATIONAL CULTURE POLICY

The MIC Youth will meet all Malaysian Indian organisations next month to seek their views on the implementation of the National Culture Policy.

MIC Youth president M. Muthupalaniappan said today that the movement hopes to meet Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Anwar Ibrahim after obtaining the views of the organisations.

He was speaking to reporters after chairing an MIC Youth council meeting at the party headquarters here.

He, however, said that MIC Youth feels the implementation of the policy was unlikely to create any controversies among the Indian community.

This was because Malay culture was similar to Indian culture in many aspects.

"Malay culture is linked to Indian culture in aspects such as language, customs and dances because of historical connections, he said and

cited, as an example, the Indian epic the *Ramayana*.

Mr. Muthupalaniappan pointed out that the epic was a favourite theme for *wayang kulit* shows.

On economic problems facing the Indian community, he said the Government's response to the MIC Youth's suggestions and resolutions had not been encouraging.

"Proposals submitted by the MIC Youth, such as those calling for a bigger share for Indians in State and Federal level government programmes, have not been implemented," he said.

He said the movement's third national convention scheduled to be held on Feb. 26 would "evaluate" what had been implemented by the Government.

New Straits Times -- 17 October 1983

LET'S BURY CULTURAL CHAUVINISM

Deputy Health Minister Datuk K. Pathmanaban today urged the people to bury their "economic and cultural chauvinism" to create lasting unity in our multi-racial country.

"In building a united Malaysia, let us accept the reality that there are various races, religions and cultures in our plural society," he said.

He was speaking at the opening of a one-day civics course jointly organised by the Penang Indian Cultural and Arts Society (PICAS) and the State Information Department at Dewan Sri Pinang.

He said recent debates and discussions with chauvinistic overtones on the formulation of a national culture would only serve to undermine current efforts to search for common identities and aspirations of the people.

"We should instead strive for long-term objectives in searching for common values, ethics and identities which could be our strong foundations in building a prosperous, harmonious and united country.

"Perhaps, true unity among the various races could be achieved in four to ten generations to come if we are truly committed and sincere in our current efforts," he said.

The Deputy Minister said although Malaysia had been independent for 26 years, the country was still searching for strong foundations on which to build the national culture which could unite the people.

However, the problem could be overcome if all peace-loving Malaysians, especially the youth, who would one day inherit the leadership of the country, started searching for common aims, values and ethics and identities for their future benefit.

Quoting the Malay proverb *Yang menang akan jadi arang, yang kalah akan jadi abu*, (the victors will become charcoal, the losers will become ashes), Datuk Pathmanaban warned that if common identities which could unite the people were not found, the people's well-being would be jeopardised.

He said: "We must avoid chauvinism from either the Chinese, Malay, Indian, Iban, Kadazan, Melanau or any other community in the country."

Datuk Pathmanaban who is also MIC national vice-president, urged the Indian community to always regard Malaysia as their only homeland and as such they were collectively responsible with the other races for its lasting prosperity, peace and unity.

New Straits Times — 5 November 1983

CULTURE SHOULDN'T BE MADE POLITICAL ISSUE

Language and culture should not be turned into political issues if the people want to make Malaysia a prosperous, peaceful and happy nation, Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

He said if the question of the national language and the national culture policies were made into political issues giving rise to conflicts they would

benefit those who were against unity and out to create anxiety with the aim of getting cheap publicity.

Encik Anwar was presenting a paper on 'Forging national unity through national culture: Strategy and implementation' at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

About 150 leaders and representatives from the various cultural and language bodies attended the one-day seminar organised by UKM, the National Unity Department and the Culture, Youth and Sports Ministry.

Encik Anwar said it was the responsibility of all quarters—the Ministry, Government agencies, the private sector, institutions of higher learning and individuals — to strive for the creation of a national culture.

The development of a national culture was an important part of the overall national development and, as such, they must understand the policy to avoid conflict and disunity which could affect the development of the country.

It was important to find a common ground which would be the key to achieving the country's objective to develop a national identity.

Encik Anwar said Government efforts to infuse Islamic values into society was in line with the aim of broadening the common ground for all races.

NEED TO REPLACE VERNACULAR SCHOOL SYSTEM

The principle of basic human rights must be upheld in the present school system, a University of Malaya lecturer said today.

Associate Prof. Dr Jomo Sundaram said every child had the right to learn his or her own mother tongue but there was little political will to implement this.

"Such a situation also pleases the elites who do not want to provide educational facilities for vernacular education along with a basic education based on a common language.

"The elites have the economic and political means to obtain exclusive education through overseas studies and private international schools in the country," said Prof. Jomo of the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

"However the vast majority of the people are not given similar facilities even though vernacular education is accepted in principle but not in practice," he said.

Prof. Jomo said in his paper on *POL and the Present Education System* that there should be no grounds for discrimination on linguistic lines.

He said that five per cent of the population

did not have the most basic primary education because they were too poor.

He said the vernacular schooling system inherited from the colonial era continued to segregate school children along linguistic and racial lines.

"Because of this, society today is still divided socially, especially along racial and class lines," he said.

He said a more equal socio-economic and political system could break down such divisions but there was no magic solution.

"Changes must be made to ensure that income disparities are narrowed to provide better education for the poor.

"As an example, the wage system should be based on the work performance and not academic qualifications and status of the applicant," he said.

"However, there is no single all encompassing magic solution to the problems."

The major problems of the vernacular schooling system, he said, should be identified first before a solution could be found.

Among them were the high dropout rate, lack of proper syllabus, basic facilities and trained teachers.

Prof. Jomo said that there was also a need to promote a common language and a common school system for the nation to replace the vernacular system inherited from the colonial days.

"However, just having a common school system is not going to reduce communalism because there are other forces subjecting the children towards communal polarisation."

He said an amicable solution, with guarantees for minority rights to vernacular education, should be found to bring about the integration of the schooling system with Bahasa Malaysia as the main, but not exclusive medium of instruction.

The system should also promote the learning and usage of other languages such as Chinese and Tamil, and develop a common and integrated education for children from all ethnic background, he added.

"A democratic resolution of this problem must recognise the existing inter-race and inter-class differences," he added.

He said the younger people must be made to realise that only through unity could the nation develop its national culture.

He also reminded the people not to be deceived by elements who were out to disrupt national unity using racial cultural and religious issues.

ANWAR: CULTURE POLICY IS CLOSED

The Government and Umno Youth will not bow to pressure on matters concerning the implementation of the National Culture Policy, Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim said today.

"The national cultural policy issue is over and it is unlikely that the Government will bend to pressure on the matter," he said.

He stressed that the policy had been accepted by the people.

Encik Anwar said that although there are many races in this country each with its own culture, it was necessary to develop one National Culture.

Speaking at the three-day seminar on 'The role of Umno Youth in the process of instilling culture in society', which was opened by Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah at Kem Kijang, near here, he said the national culture would also encompass aesthetic and scientific values.

Encik Anwar said the national culture was still a 'hot' issue although the country had been independent for 27 years.

The National Culture Policy would not be ef-

fective if it was not based on the Malay culture, on Islamic values, aspects of other cultures in the country, and on science and technology.

He stressed that Islam should play an important part in the formation of the National Culture Policy.

Kelantan was well-known as a "verandah of Mecca" in the past because it was an important centre for learning the religion and had produced famous Islamic leaders such as "Tok Kenali."

He said that opposition to the policy would not affect its implementation.

"The various Memoranda to the Government opposing the policy would be a small matter if the policy continues to be implemented successfully," he said.

The Star - 5 February 1984

REVIEW POLICY, SAYS KIT SIANG

Non-Umno Cabinet Ministers should take a firm stand and demand the review of the National culture Policy, DAP Secretary-General Lim Kit Siang said today.

Mr. Lim said the policy denied the rightful place for other cultural traditions in the national context.

He was commenting on Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Anwar Ibrahim's statement yesterday that the Government would no longer entertain criticisms on the National Culture Policy.

"This explains why the lion dance, for example, has to face endless problems even for the purpose of Chinese New Year performances, when there should be no hindrances such as police rules and restriction," he said.

He said Encik Anwar's declaration showed the Government's "toughness on the issue."

Mr. Lim urged non-Umno members or the Cabinet to dissociate themselves from the policy publicly.

The Star - 12 February 1984

ANWAR ON CULTURE: TALK YES, CRITICISM NO

The Government is willing to hold talks with anyone on the National Culture Policy but will not entertain any criticisms, Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Anwar Ibrahim said today.

"Such criticisms will be rejected," he told reporters often meeting the Indonesian Education and Culture Minister, Prof. Dr. Nugroho Notosusanto at his office today.

However, Encik Anwar said the government was willing to talk about the implementation of the National Culture Policy with anybody.

He said that the door on public discussion of the policy was not shut but stressed that before such talks could begin "the principle of the policy must be accepted first."

"We are willing to listen to comments about the implementation of the policy and the preservation of our culture. All these can be discussed," he added.

Encik Anwar's recent remark that the National Culture Policy was closed to comments caused a stir.

MCA Youth leader Datuk Lee Kim Sai expressed concern over Encik Anwar's hardline stand. He said he could not understand what the Minister meant by the remarks.

Datuk Lee, who is the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, also said he would seek an early meeting with Encik Anwar to discuss the proposed policy.

The Gerakan called for a dialogue among youth leaders of all Barisan component parties on the issue.

The United Chinese School Committees Association criticised Encik Anwar for making the

statement which it said violated the principles of democracy.

However, Encik Anwar said today that he did not think a meeting with the MCA or a dialogue among Youth leaders was necessary.

He said: "This does not mean I do not want to meet them. I have always been meeting with MCA representatives or other BN members to discuss various issues including the culture policy.

"They can meet me but we don't have to discuss only the culture issue.

Encik Anwar also said that national poverty was an issue which people should pay more attention to.

"Why talk only about our culture policy? To me, national poverty is also an important issue," he said.

He also criticised people who "politicised" the culture issue saying this would only cause a lot of misunderstanding.

Meanwhile, the Gerakan urged Encik Anwar to adopt a more liberal attitude towards the National Culture Policy.

Its Wanita publicity bureau said his statement that the Government would not entertain any more criticisms on this matter was uncalled for.

"The Government should encourage more discussion as the issue affects the way of life of all citizens," it said.

New Straits Times — 18 February 1984

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY: ANWAR HITS OUT AT CRITICS

Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Encik Anwar Ibrahim has hit out at those who still raised issues in connection with the development of communal cultures in the country.

He regretted that such questions were still cropping up even though communal cultures were allowed to develop together with the desirable development of national cultures.

The Minister stressed that the debate on the question of the national culture policy should not be extended.

His statement was issued in response to a statement by the chairman of the United Chinese School Committee Association, Mr. Lim Fong Seng, on Thursday on the National Culture Policy.

Encik Anwar said he regretted the statement "which seemed to distort my stand on the policy by making it appear that I and the Ministry

have not shown respect for the cultural aspirations of other communities."

The Minister said Mr. Lim should not be so narrow in his thinking as to fail to understand national policies and aspirations including the national culture.

The national culture, he said, "advocates indigenous culture as its central philosophy with the inclusion of cultural elements of other groups."

Encik Anwar said a number of leaders of Chinese organisations were still trying to distort his statement to make it appear he was practising an autocratic policy.

He repeated it was a big mistake to think that such outcries and utterances would shake "our confidence in the national culture policy which has been accepted and needs to be implemented with commitment and without compromise."

He was confident that the younger generation in particular would not be trapped by the narrow communal thinking of those who would create an illusionary threat to cause tension for ulterior political motives.

LET NATIONAL CULTURE EVOLVE NATURALLY

A national culture policy should evolve through the natural process of interaction and interchange among the cultures of the various races, and not through domination by a majority group.

A working paper presented at the first Malaysian Indian Cultural Congress here today said the process would have greater viability as it would give the people the freedom to choose what they wished to adopt.

The one-day seminar, attended by about 300 representatives of Indian organisations, was opened by MIC president Datuk S. Samy Vellu.

It was chaired by MIC central committee member, Mr. D.P. Vijandran. The party's deputy president, Mr. S. Subramaniam, was also present.

The paper said the non-bumiputras were being told to accept a cultural policy which stated that:

- * the Malaysian national culture shall be based on the culture of the indigenous peoples;
- * elements of other cultures that are suitable and conformable may be accepted into the national culture; and

- * Islam shall be an important element in the creation of national culture.

This was an attempt by one group to occupy a dominant cultural position.

It said the relationship between the bumiputras and non-bumiputras was not based on conquest or political domination, but on constitutional contract, the terms of which are enshrined in the Federal Constitution and reinforced in Rukunegara.

It said the argument that the country's cultural policy was a result of the consensus reached at the cultural congress in 1971, where the various communities were represented, was false.

"The 1971 cultural congress was not truly representative and the participants were not aware that they were in the process of creating a policy which would be binding for all time."

"In practical terms, the conclusions of the cultural congress were misconceived. For instance, the phrase 'suitable and conformable' is vague and misleading."

"Who is to decide what are suitable elements in non-Malay culture?"

The paper added that it was wrong to argue that the 1971 cultural congress had put an end to questions about the national culture.

"The question of national culture is not, and should not be closed. Meaningful dialogue on the question should be reopened," it added.

The congress later resolved that a truly consensual national cultural policy should be formulated with proper and adequate representation from all communities and cultural groups.

The resolution also urged the government to:

- * Adopt a positive attitude towards the growth of all cultures and to direct funds and facilities to that end.
- * Ensure that the question of national culture be discussed in the liberal spirit of 1957 Federal Constitution and not to allow fanaticism to influence the issue,
- * Identify common core values of all cultures and disseminate them as general principles without associating them with any one particular religion, and
- * To allow Indian cultural performers from other countries to perform in Malaysia without having to face bureaucratic difficulties and red tape.

The congress was closed by Mr. Subramaniam.

DISCUSS CULTURE POLICY FIRST: MIC

The National Culture Policy should be discussed before it is implemented in schools, MIC Youth leader D.P. Vijandran said today.

He said it was "premature" introducing the policy because there were still uncertainties and controversies over the issue.

"It should be first discussed at the highest possible levels and involve members of the Barisan Nasional parties," he told reporters after chairing the MIC Youth Council meeting.

"The component parties should also discuss in detail the contents of the proposed lessons and courses in national culture that are to be introduced in the school curriculum."

He was commenting on a circular from the Director-General of the Education Ministry, Tan Sri Haji Murad Mohamed Noor to all school heads regarding activities that were in conflict with the principles of the National Culture Policy.

Mr. Vijandran also said that the MIC Youth Council had formed eight sub-committees so far to tackle Indian youth problems.

They will deal with publications, finance, sports, education, small businesses, workshops and seminars, public relations and the youth service corps.

Mr. Vijandran said that emphasis would be on the youth service corps which would train the youth, especially in the estates, rural and urban poor areas.

Members of the corps will help to educate and create an awareness among the poor of their rights. They will also man centres to provide tuition for pupils, child-care, legal and medical care.

He said that the MIC Youth has about 100,000 members. There are altogether 250,000 members in the MIC.

New Straits Times - 10 September 1984

USMAN AWANG ON HOW TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL CULTURE

Renowned literary figure Dr. Usman Awang has urged politicians and literary experts in the country to form a new "platform" for launching concentrated efforts to achieve national culture targets.

Dr. Usman said that Malaysian culture was being threatened by Western culture.

He regretted that there were certain section of society who looked down on the national culture and had accepted Western culture instead.

"The time has come for politicians and literary experts in this country to form a new platform to launch greater efforts to achieve the national culture," he said.

He was speaking at "Anak Jiran Tionghua Night," sponsored by the Machang MCA division last night. More than 800 people attended.

It was opened by Deputy Information Minister Kassim Ahmad.

Dr. Usman praised the division for holding the function and urged politicians and literary experts to regard the occasion as a meeting point towards greater co-operation.

He said the different cultures in the country could be a source of cultural wealth for the people.

Meanwhile, in his speech, Encik Kassim Ahmad called on the politicians and literary experts in the country to co-operate closely to forge unity among the people.

He regarded literary experts in this country as "important" in the forging of a united people.

He praised the Machang branch of the MCA for its efforts in organising the function.

NCP ISLAMIC ELEMENTS NOT IN CONFLICT WITH OTHERS

Education Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday that Islamic elements in the National Culture Policy (NCP) as implemented in schools are not in conflict with the religious values of non-Malays.

He said the Islamic elements, among others, urged the people to be honest, hard-working and industrious.

"Surely these values are not in conflict with the religious values of non-Malays," he added.

He was replying to a supplementary question by Opposition whip Mr. Lim Kit Siang who wanted to know whether the inclusion of Islamic principles in the National Culture Policy would be in conflict with the values of the non-Malays.

To another supplementary question from Dr. Koh Tsu Koon (BN-Tanjong), the Education Minister said that there were no feelings of insecurity among those in schools as far as the NCP is concerned.

"However, there are certain quarters outside who have been harping on these so-called fears

of the NCP overwhelming the cultures of the non-Malays.

The recently formed Malaysian Schools Cultural Advisory Council will consist of members of the various races in the country to ensure that the National Culture Policy would not only project Malay culture.

To the original question by the Barisan Nasional MP for Tanjung, Datuk Abdullah said that the members of the council have yet to be appointed.

He said the council would discuss matters relating to the NCP in schools and provide opinions, advice and recommendations to the Education Minister.

He added that the council would also discuss cultural activities in schools and to give its opinion, advice and recommendations to the Education Minister.

Similar councils would also be set up at State level to be chaired by the State Education Directors.

DON'T FORCE NATIONAL CULTURE: SALLEH ABAS

The national culture, which the Government is trying to create, must not be in conflict with the basic provisions of the Constitution, Lord President Tan Sri Datuk Haji Mohamed Salleh Abas said today.

"No law should be passed to compel the people to accept what they do not want," he said.

"Acceptance should be by way of persuasion and participation of the people."

Tan Sri Datuk Haji Salleh was speaking to reporters after delivering his lecture on *'Kebudayaan dan Undang-Undang'* (Culture and the law) at the 14th Tun Seri Lanang open lecture here.

The lecture, organised by the Culture, Youth and Sports Ministry, has been held since 1974.

"National integration is necessary for the progress of the nation and the National Congress on Culture in 1971 decided that one way to achieve this is to create a national culture.

"While we can accept that a national culture is important, we must first of all know what are the elements.

"If the value of the national culture is good, I don't see why the people do not want to accept it."

Earlier in his lecture, Tan Sri Datuk Haji Mohamed Salleh said that the Government could make legislation, provided it did not contravene the Constitution, to ensure that the people follow the national culture.

However, he said the move would be undemocratic and would jeopardise public order and sour relationships between the various races.

He added that legislation could not play a role in the formation and creation of the national culture but it could only ensure that its formation would not clash with the values specified in the Constitution.

Tan Sri Datuk Haji Mohamed Salleh also said the Constitution could be changed but it must not replace its 14 basic values (*jus cogens*) which the people had agreed upon.

PRESS STATEMENTS

OUR CULTURAL POLICY – LISTEN TO WORLD OPINION

The main organisations in the Chinese community have just handed a lengthy Memorandum on "National Culture" to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and to the Prime Minister. While the Chinese-language newspapers have given it wide publicity, the English-language ones have not given it the consideration it deserves. This is perhaps indicative of the Establishment view on Malaysian cultural policy that has predominated in recent years.

Among the Malay-language papers, only "Utusan Malaysia" has bothered to report the contents of the Memorandum. The breast-beating in "Berita Harian's" editorial of March 29 1983 ("Kongres Budaya Cina punya gejala kurang menyenangkan") shows that it is still not prepared to give proper credence and understanding to the views of the Chinese community. It merely exhumes the familiar pronouncements that the Memorandum is "unrealistic at present times"; that it implies "many languages" in language and education policy. The standard scare tactic is also invoked; "... the propagation of these ideas (in the Memorandum) is likely to

give rise to sensitive atmosphere". Finally, the editorial tries to put a lid over the issue by reminding us that the Prime Minister has already spelled out our cultural policy during the conference on the Malay World.

To put the record straight — this present Memorandum by the Chinese community has been prepared in response to a request for submission by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in February 1982. But even so, there is no reason for supposing that in a democracy like Malaysia (whose Constitutional stand on culture, language and education is liberal enough), cultural policy is determined without due consultation with all the peoples. It is also never spelled out clearly for Malaysians why indeed the appeal for cultural diversity is "unrealistic". To correct another common distortion, the Memorandum and even preceding positions by the Chinese community on the issue have always upheld the position of Malay as the national and common language.

The UMNO Youth Bureau Chief of Culture, in response to the Memorandum, has urged the Government to take a firm stand on the National Cultural Policy as laid down in the 1971 Congress and to implement all aspects of this policy (BH, 6.4.83). He casts aspersions on "the sincerity and loyalty of the Chinese community" in submitting this Memorandum. The Johore UMNO Youth leader and Deputy Minister for

the Federal Territory has similarly urged UMNO Youth to oppose "certain groups who are questioning the implementation of national culture based on bumiputra culture" (BH, 4.4.83). This, he maintains, is a "bad sign for breaking the unity of the people".

As has been stressed in the Memorandum, the 1971 Congress on National Culture cannot claim to be representative of all the communities in Malaysia when there were only a handful of Chinese and Indian academics who could not be considered to be representative of the respective communities. The Congress spelled out three principles used by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to "mould" the national culture:

- (i) The Malaysian National Culture must be based on the indigenous (bumiputra) culture of this region.
- (ii) The suitable elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the national culture.
- (iii) Islam is an important component in the moulding of the national culture.

The spirit of the Memorandum is an appeal for Cultural Diversity — that the cultures of the various nationals who make up Malaysia should not be swamped by the attempts of the government to create a National Culture. But before there are more emotional outbursts that seem to follow any attempt at reasoned discussion of

"National Culture" let us for a moment listen to what the international community's opinion is regarding cultural policies. It is a sad reflection on our general cultural level that one needs to fall back on an "authority" in the old pedagogical fashion. Such vital questions of democracy should long have been part of our culture.

By presenting the opinion of the world community on culture and cultural policies, we hope to prove that our stand is not a "partisan" view. We do not deny that the Malaysian tragedy has to date been the exploitation of cultural issues by various political parties for opportunistic reasons. But why do the masses of all our various ethnic communities have to pay for it? How does it detract from the objective position regarding the democratic right of peoples?

The Memorandum by the Chinese Associations has already referred to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to support their appeal for cultural diversity. In fact several Recommendations passed at UNESCO General Conferences can be called to further strengthen this appeal — the Recommendation against Discrimination in Education in 1960; Recommendation concerning the Protection at National Level of the Cultural and Natural Heritage, in 1972; Recommendation on Participation by the People at large in Cultural Life and their Contribution to it, 1976; the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice in 1978.

What was perhaps the most significant international event relating to Culture took place only last year, July/August 1982; viz. The World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City. This Conference at ministerial level was convened by the Director-General of UNESCO. All Member States were invited to send delegates to the Conference but for some reason or other, Malaysia did not send any. Representatives of 126 Member States took part, including the Holy See, the PLO, as did four organisations of the UN, 14 intergovernmental organisations, 52 non-government international organisations and 11 foundations. There were 960 participants in all.

The purpose of the Conference was to review the cultural policies and practices of States since the UNESCO-convened Conference in Venice in 1970. The concepts of culture, the right to culture, cultural democracy, cultural development as an essential dimension of development, the relation between culture and the other areas of social life — all these were considered by the Conference. Their conclusions, declarations and recommendations should be an eye-opener to Malaysians:

ON CULTURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The delegates emphasised peoples' growing awareness of their cultural identity, of their right to be different and of the mutual respect

of cultures one for another, including those of minorities. The Conference was unanimous in recognising and reaffirming with conviction and force the equal dignity of all cultures, rejecting any hierarchy in that area, since nothing could justify discrimination as between "superior cultures" and "inferior cultures". It was also stressed that the foremost cultural right was the right of peoples to self-determination:

"The corollary and affirmation of cultural identity — namely, cultural diversity — far from being a divisive factor, could contribute to enrichment and balance, as was exemplified by many pluri-ethnic countries in the North and the South and by young Third World states that had emerged victorious from their struggles for national liberation and had reduced and transcended the ethnic or regional differences that formerly divided them."

The fundamental and irreducible nature of cultural identity constituted "an inalienable aspect of the human condition and a major cultural right of individuals and of peoples. Cultural identity is the core of individual and collective personality". Delegates insisted that cultural identity could not be defined solely in terms of national identity. They described efforts made in their countries and others to enable cultural minorities to preserve and develop their own identity while at the same time encouraging their integration in national life and their parti-

cipation in it. Many speakers referred to the cultural wealth that could accrue to a nation from the fruitful co-existence of a number of different identities.

The recognition of the equal dignity of all cultures was seen as one of the basic pre-requisites for any cultural relations. This alone could engender that attitude of receptivity, respect and tolerance that was a condition for all freedom and all reciprocity in exchanges. "Neither Impose Nor Submit" was the way in which one delegate defined the active and initial approach appropriate to cultural exchanges. Consequently, the Conference declared that the following principles should govern cultural policies:

1. Every culture represents a unique and irreplaceable body of values since each people's traditions and forms of expression are its most effective means of demonstrating its presence in the world.
2. The assertion of cultural identity therefore contributes to the liberation of peoples. Conversely, any form of domination constitutes a denial or an impairment of that identity.
3. Cultural identity is a treasure that vitalizes mankind's possibilities of self-fulfilment by moving every people and every group to seek nurture in its past, to welcome contributions from outside that are compatible with its own characteristics, and so to continue the

process of its own creation.

4. All cultures form part of the common heritage of mankind. The cultural identity of a people is renewed and enriched through contact with the traditions and values of others. Culture is dialogue, the exchange of ideas and experience and the appreciation of other values and traditions: it withers and dies in isolation.
5. The universal cannot be postulated in the abstract by any single culture: it emerges from the experience of all the world's peoples as each affirms its own identity. Cultural identity and cultural diversity are inseparable.
6. Special characteristics do not hinder, but rather enrich the communion of the universal values that unite peoples. Hence recognition of the presence of a variety of cultural identities wherever various traditions exist side by side constitutes the very essence of cultural pluralism.
7. The international community considers its duty to ensure that the cultural identity of each people is preserved and protected.
8. All of this points to the need for cultural policies that will protect stimulate and enrich each people's identity and cultural heritage, and establish absolute respect for and appreciation of cultural minorities and the other cultures of the world. The neglect or

destruction of the culture of any group is a loss to mankind as a whole.

9. The equality and dignity of all cultures must be recognised, as must the right of each people and cultural community to affirm and preserve its cultural identity and have it respected by others.

ON CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Cultural democracy implies that the cultural rights of minorities should be recognised and guaranteed and that state assistance should be provided to ensure their free development. The conference stressed the close and indissoluble links between culture and freedom. Even if the political authorities were requested to provide technical and financial assistance they should not intervene in cultural matters. It was not their business to determine the content of culture or to lay down guidelines for literature and the arts. In a word, culture should emanate from individuals, groups and associates.

The right to culture is embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also an inalienable right of individuals and communities which is recognised in the constitutional texts of many countries, including Malaysia's. The fundamental importance of freedom of cultural expression is a necessary condition not only for the artist and creative worker but also for the development of a democratic society as well. At

the same time, the access and participation on which the democratisation of culture depends presupposes a minimum of equality. Ultimately, true democratisation of culture must be based on the democratisation of society as a whole, which might require far-reaching changes in economic and social relation since it centred on the development of the creative abilities of all individuals.

The role of the state would then be confined simply to the watchful promotions of spontaneous initiative and activities. The experience of various countries shows that decentralisation fostered the democratisation of culture: "Culture liberates, but is also requires freedom if it is to flourish".

ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Culture and education should be developed symbiotically so that culture can infuse and nourish education, which is by far the best means of transmitting culture and consequently, of promoting and strengthening cultural identity. Delegates laid stress on the need to provide teaching in the mother tongues and national languages of peoples, even if they were minority languages, in order to safeguard cultural identity.

On the question of mother tongue education, the first major international support for the idea emerged at the UNESCO meeting of specialists in 1951. This meeting was of the opinion that

education is best carried out in the mother tongue and recommended that "pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue" and that "the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible". This opinion has since been re-echoed many times by other meetings of experts, commissions and national bodies. For example, the meeting of the UNESCO advisory group of consultants on "The role of Linguistics and Sociolinguistics in Language Education and Policy" in 1972 reiterated the main premises of the 1951 meeting.

CONCLUSION

By referring to the unanimous opinion of the world community, we hope all Malaysians will now realise that our appeal for cultural diversity is nothing more than the exercise of a fundamental democratic right, a right which is itself the most vital component of Culture. We will go even further and maintain that the recognition of equality of all our ethnic communities is the real basis of National Unity.

The 15 Major Chinese Organisations
27 August 1983

I. The Response by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports to the Memorandum Submitted by the Chinese Community Organisations on National Culture.

In response to questions by Members of Parliament and Senators at the parliamentary session on July 29, 1983 and at the Senate on August 12, 1983, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, YB Encik Anwar Ibrahim, expressed the following main points regarding the Memorandum submitted by the Chinese Community Organisations on National Culture:

1. The three principles for the moulding of the national culture passed by the Congress on National Culture in 1971 have been accepted by the Government as policy, and on matters of policy, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports cannot compromise;
2. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports cannot accept any proposal questioning set policies so that it does not become a topic that will raise the tension among the ethnic groups;
3. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is of the opinion that the viewpoints propagated by the Memorandum will lead to the

development of cultural pluralism or cultural parallelism and would hinder the process of integration and assimilation;

4. Of the views expressed in the Memorandum, some are considered appropriate, while many others are thought to symbolise the attitude and opinion of one particular ethnic group on the necessary guidelines and policies regarding our national culture; and
5. Many of the interpretations (on our cultural policy) in the Memorandum are either malicious, or reflect misunderstanding and suspicion of the policy implementers.

II. The National Culture Policy Must be Commonly Accepted by All Ethnic Groups.

At the moment, all the disagreement and arguments on the national culture question have arisen because of the lack of a national culture policy acceptable by all ethnic groups. The preconditions to a National Culture Policy acceptable by all ethnic groups must be that:

1. It is formulated through equitable consultations with all ethnic groups;
2. The cultures of all ethnic groups receive equitable treatment and safeguards for their free development; and
3. The value of the cultures of all ethnic groups and our multicultural characteristics, both of which have been enshrined in the Ruku-

negara, must be recognised as the source of strength of our country.

The Congress on National Culture of 1971 resolved three principles on National Cultures:

1. The Malaysian National Culture must be based on the indigenous (Bumiputra) culture of this region.
2. The suitable elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the national culture.
3. Islam is an important component in the moulding of the national culture.

These three principles are in contradiction with and cannot satisfy our three pre-conditions because:

1. The 1971 Congress is basically a conference of Malay scholars supported by the Government, and did not have the participation of representatives of the major cultural organisations of all ethnic groups;
2. These three principles place an inordinate weight on and reject the equal rights of the cultures of the other ethnic groups;
3. These also exhibit a strong tendency towards forced assimilation, thereby rejecting the principles of free development for all cultures; and
4. The three principles over-emphasise Malay

culture and Islam, while neglecting the multi-culture, multi-ethnic and multi-religious reality of our country.

Because of these shortcomings, the 1971 Congress on National Culture is in reality merely a Congress on the Malay Culture, and the three principles on national culture resolved at that Congress have not stepped out of the narrow confines of racialism. Unfortunately, Y.B. Encik Anwar Ibrahim, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports has stressed that those three principles have been accepted as policy, and that his Ministry cannot compromise on matters of policy.

Such an unreasonable, tough attitude is obviously contrary to the principles of freedom, democracy and open government. In a democracy like ours, such a vital issue of national culture is by no means the sole prerogative of the government in office. Even if they were "matters of policy", should the policy prove to be wrong, the Government has a responsibility to rectify it, let alone the three principles which are products of the 1971 Congress.

What is most dissappointing and regrettable is the reason put forth by the Minister to justify why the Ministry cannot accept criticism: "... so that it does not become a topic that will raise tensions among the ethnic groups." Why is it that the demand for democracy and cultural freedom and constructive propositions on this

objective can become a topic which would stir up racial tension? Such an inappropriate presentation of the issue only serves to twist the nature of the question and suppresses any constructive discussion on the national culture question, wittingly or otherwise.

III. Resolute Opposition to Any Policy of Assimilation

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports considers the view points of the Memorandum as leading to "the development of cultural pluralism or cultural parallelism" which "will hinder the process of integration and assimilation." This is a worrisome expression.

Ours is a country of many ethnic groups, based on the principle of free cultural development. It is therefore necessary to safeguard the parallel existence and free development of the cultures of all our ethnic groups. Any rejection of this reality and principle is a rejection of cultural democracy. This is indeed a very serious matter.

Cultural pluralism and integration are not contradictory. This is because the process of integration is to allow each culture to retain its special characteristics while seeking commonality and national unity. On the other hand, assimilation as a matter of policy, and cultural pluralism are contradictory. This is because in the process of forced assimilation, the assimilated

ethnic group has to give up its cultural characteristics against its will.

Assimilation (as a policy) is opposed in all international forums. The International Symposium on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of National, Ethnic and other Minorities Groups held at Yugoslavia in 1974 sharply criticised assimilation:

"The pursuance of a policy of forced assimilation for minorities violates the fundamental principles of self-determination and equality of nations and the basic human rights enshrined in the Charter of the UN. Moreover, assimilation implies a series of measures of direct or indirect coercion for the purpose of denationalising minorities; negating the rights of individuals of their own identity and thereby the rights of a national and ethnic minority as a whole; and from that point of view, it could be considered to approach the threshold of genocide."

In the interest of national unity and respect for the principles of basic human rights, racial equality and free cultural development, the people of all ethnic groups should seek integration on the basis of culture pluralism, and resolutely oppose any policy aimed at assimilation.

IV. The Stand of the Memorandum is Not For One Ethnic Group

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports

has said that some of the views expressed in the Memorandum are considered appropriate while many others are thought to symbolise the attitude and opinion of one particular ethnic group on the necessary guidelines and policies regarding our national culture.

Although the Memorandum was submitted by the Malaysian Chinese, yet it does not take the stand and views of only one ethnic group. On the contrary, it bases its observations on the social reality that our country is multi-cultural and recommends that we should formulate the national culture in the spirit of the United Nations, Human Rights, Declaration, our own Federal Constitution, the Rukunegara, equality of all ethnic groups and democratic consultation. It suggests using the outstanding elements of the cultures of all ethnic groups to create the essence of the National Culture and use the multi-cultural format, common values and local flavour as its content. Therefore, to consider the Memorandum as "symbolising the attitude and opinion of one particular ethnic group. . ." is to mislead the people into thinking that the Memorandum strives to further the interests of only one particular ethnic group when the contrary is true.

With regard to the suspicion that the Memorandum has made many malicious interpretations, this is a regrettable and big misunderstanding. We feel that the Minister of Culture, Youth

and Sports should draw specific examples to substantiate such a serious accusation, so that we have the opportunity to explain and clarify. Otherwise, the accusation is grossly unjust and only serves to mislead the public. We also urge the Minister to identify those suggestions within the Memorandum which the Ministry regards as appropriate and implement them as soon as possible.

V. Proposed Dialogue Session with the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports

The Joint Memorandum submitted by the 15 major Chinese organisations in Malaysia is a document of great significance and the views of the Memorandum represent the unanimous views of most societies and organisations of the Chinese community. We regret that till this date we have not received any official reply from the Minister.

Since the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports appears not to have adequately understood the true spirit of the Memorandum and has some bias and misunderstanding, we feel that there is a need for a delegation from the Chinese community to have a dialogue with the Minister in the near future. This is to ensure that both sides can accurately interpret each others' views and to promote the understanding with which to build and contribute to the formulation of the National Culture.

The United Chinese School Committees'
Association of Malaysia
10 November 1983

We, the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, view Culture, Youth and Sports Minister, YB Anwar Ibrahim's statement on National Culture in Parliament on November 8, 1983 with increasing disquiet.

YB Menteri made the following points:

1. It is impossible for the formation of a Malaysian National Culture to be derived apart from a basic component — that of Bumiputra culture. The characteristics of our country is different from those of other countries. Malay culture is also unique and therefore it must form the essence of the National Culture.
2. Non-bumiputra cultures can only be seen as adjunct to this basic Bumiputra component in the National Culture. YB Menteri also refers to non-Bumiputra in his statement as "new immigrants".
3. This policy conforms to the Constitutional spirit of the Federation. When Malaysia accepted the special position of the Malays and guaranteed the position of the Rulers, it meant accepting also that the Malay culture would form the basis of the National Culture.
4. This policy does not threaten or affect the

cultures of the other races, for example, they can freely use their own language.

This is our response to the points raised in YB Menteri's statements:

1. The basis of our National Culture cannot be other than all the respective cultures that make up the cultural wealth of this country. To say that any one culture should form the essence of the National Culture is contrary to the spirit of democracy protected in all international forums on culture policies.

YB Menteri justifies his stand on the insistence that the characteristic of our country are different from those of the other countries, that "Malay culture is unique". First of all, it is self-evident that every culture in this earth of ours is unique — in fact that is an essential part of the definition of "culture". What is unique and incomparable about this land of ours is the cultural mix that makes Malaysia the exotic country it is. It is a shame that this beauty should be tarnished by claims of any one ethnic group and talk of superordination or subordination of other cultures.

The issue at hand — the "National Question" — concerns the principle of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination. This principle has been universally recognised to ensure equality of all peoples, not only between nations, but also (as in our case) within

nations to preserve as well as promote the cultures of all peoples, especially minorities.

2. This spirit of cultural democracy is absent in YB Menteri's view that non-Bumiputra cultures can only be seen as "adjuncts" of the central Bumiputra component. YB Menteri further gives his position away when he rather unfortunately refers to non-Bumiputras as "new immigrants".

We would like to ask YB Menteri this: What does the "immigrant" designation mean in terms of rights? Are not bumiputras also immigrants of sorts? Are there not "Bumiputras" who have immigrated to Malaysia only within the present generation when there are even more non-Bumiputras who have been born in this country ever since the last century? For that matter, where does Orang Asli culture feature in all this if one follows the logic of the argument?

The point is, this distinction, this "numbers game", seeing who has been here longest and so on, is inconsequential in international recognition of human and democratic rights. That is why the international community serves to secure the equal rights of minorities whether they be in China, Soviet Union, Singapore, Philippines, Ethiopia, Middle East, Sri Lanka, and so on. It is worth noting here that such fundamental human rights as the right of peoples to self-determination only came about because

of the pre-war and post-war experience of "national chauvinists" in various countries persecuting minorities and "immigrants".

In international forums on cultural policies, it is thus not surprising that emphasis is laid less on the formulation of a country's "National Culture", but more on the safeguards for preserving and developing the cultural identity of the various ethnic groups which make up the country. The absence of such cultural democracy only gives way to chauvinism and the end of democracy.

As we have maintained already, the evolution of a "Malaysian Culture" is desirable if it is the product of a natural process — not and never as a result of government policy. If it is the latter, it precisely falls within the definition of "forced assimilation" as condemned in international forums.

3. The Constitution of our country does no more than guarantee the equality of treatment of all the cultures that make up our country. It does not deal with any "National Culture Policy" as such and in the way which has been implemented recently. Otherwise, why has this issue suddenly come to the fore after nearly thirty years of Independence? It is fundamentally wrong to justify the policy using the Constitutional provision for the "special position of the Malays". That provision was included specially to safeguard

the economic and religious position of the Malays and the position of the Rulers, NOT to be used as the justification for cultural predominance over the other cultures.

4. It has now become customary for the pronouncements on National Culture to end with assurances that the policy does not threaten or affect the cultures of the other ethnic groups. YB Menteri elaborates by saying that we can still freely use our own languages. This is cold comfort. God forbid the day when we would not be allowed to use our mother tongues in this country. It is unfortunate that YB Menteri should use the minimal conditions for guaranteeing the position of the other cultures that make up Malaysia rather than giving us cause for a brighter and promising future. We assure YB Menteri that we are not suffering from paranoid neurosis when we have reservations about the Government's National Culture Policy. What we have seen recently of this policy gives us cause for alarm.

In conclusion, we appeal to YB Menteri to live up to the promise of this unique beauty of the cultural mix which makes up Malaysia. For one who upholds the spirit of democracy, moral transcendence and is Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, one would expect not just tolerance of our cultural plants, but an enthusiastic clarion call to "let a hundred flowers bloom".

From the continuing controversy over the National Culture Policy, it is evident that the various sections of the Chinese community do not see eye-to-eye with the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. Each pronouncement by Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports Encik Anwar Ibrahim on the National Culture policy has been met with increasing disquiet by the Chinese community. The very latest instance gives cause for further anxiety:

On February 3 1984 in Kota Baru, Encik Anwar Ibrahim declared that:

"The national culture policy is closed and it is unlikely that the party and government will bend to pressure on the matter. . . that policy has been accepted by many for over 20 years. . ."

Then referring to the memorandum by the main organisations in the Chinese community among others, he added that:

"The various memoranda to the Government opposing the policy would be a small matter (*sebagai enteng dan perkara kecil*) if the policy continues to be implemented successfully."

This brought immediate protests from, among others, MCA Youth, Gerakan and the United

Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia. To this, Encik Anwar Ibrahim clarified his position on February 11 (after his meeting with the Indonesian Education and Culture Minister) thus:

"The Government is willing to hold talks with anyone on the National Culture policy but will not entertain any criticism. . . such criticism will be rejected."

He further reiterated that the Government was only willing to talk about the implementation of the National Culture policy but before such talks could begin,

" . . . the principle of the policy must be accepted first."

The Chinese Assembly Hall views the Minister's latest statements with increasing concern for the following reasons:

1. It makes a mockery of Democracy

The Government must make up its mind as to whether we are a democratic country or we are not. Our Constitution demands that we are one and as such, the democratic right to criticise is a sacred right of the culture of democracy practised in the world community. There can be no double standards whereby "the rights of the people" are invoked during the Constitutional

crisis but suppressed the moment other issues are debated.

2. The National Culture Policy has not been democratically decided.

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports talks about the "many" who are said to have accepted the national culture policy. In truth, this policy was accepted at the 1971 National Culture Congress which was not represented by members of the non-Malay communities except for a few academicians.

As such, the National Culture policy cannot be considered as closed. Even if the Government claims that the policy has been accepted by the Barisan Cabinet, the fact remains that MCA Youth, Gerkan and more significantly — all the Chinese guilds and associations throughout the country do not accept the "Three Principles" decided at the 1971 Congress.

3. The Memorandum of the Chinese community is not a "small matter"

The sensitivities of the Chinese community aside, such scant regard for the democratic rights and aspirations of the whole Chinese community is alarming in a democratic country, to say the least. The Joint Memorandum on National Culture submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports was signed by 15 major Chinese organisations in the country which can be regarded as representative of the Chinese community.

4. Our Memorandum objects to the principles of the present National Culture Policy.

In the true spirit of democracy and in order to dispel further misunderstanding, the Chinese community calls upon the Government to publicise the Memorandum of the Chinese community, which to date has only been published by the Chinese press but ignored by the English and Malay media. In it our four Principles are as follows:

- * The foundation of our National Culture must be no less than the essence of all the cultures of the ethnic communities in the country.
- * The guidelines to the establishment of a set of common cultural values are democracy, science, the rule of law and patriotism.
- * These common cultural values must be expressed through the various multi-cultural forms.
- * The formulation of the National Culture must be consistent with the principle of equality of all the ethnic communities and democratic consultation.

5. Until our National Culture policy has been democratically decided upon, it will never be closed.

As the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir

stressed during his recent tour of the country in the midst of the Constitutional crisis, the rights and aspirations of all the people must prevail in the end. This, as he correctly pointed out, is the true spirit of democracy.

As long as there is inequality, injustice and intolerance in this world of ours, there will always be criticism and protest. Such is the undying spirit of humankind. Such indeed is the healthy practice of democracy truly demonstrated. And in the present day, true patriotism calls for ever-watchful safeguarding of all the democratic institutions and ideals in our motherland.

**THE NATIONAL
CULTURE DEBATE**

NATIONAL CULTURE AND THE BABA HERITAGE

By Kua Kia Soong

The current exhibition on 'The Baba Heritage' at the Muzium Negara provides a good opportunity for reflecting upon the lessons which this historical cultural phenomenon can teach us today.

The official blessing bestowed on the exhibition by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, has not failed to make non-Malay communities wonder whether this is not after all an extension of the Ministry's concept of the National Culture.

This view that the linguistic assimilation of the Babas is "a step in the right direction" of national integration is also shared by some academics.

The conclusion of the exhibition laments the fact that part of the reason for the plight of the Babas as an "endangered species", so to speak, rests in the fact that they are looked down upon by the rest of the Chinese community in this country.

We should take a closer look at Baba "culture" to try to understand the phenomenon. From what one can make out from the exhibits, a large part of it seems to be the "culture" of the Baba elite.

The exhibition does not tell us how the ordinary Baba lived, his or her cultural norms, or what they did for a living, thus confirming the view of the classical Baba as a tycoon: the four-poster beds, sedan chairs, ornaments, finery and other furnishings.

One is left with the impression that the "ordinary" Baba would be the servants, retainers and the extended family of the Baba tycoon's household.

The other significant feature of Baba "culture" which instantly strikes one is the fact that the Baba elite has a taste for finery and things Chinese. Likewise Baba literature that is exhibited shows translations of old Chinese legends and tales into the Baba patois.

This difference in cultural levels has implications for the differential inclination on the part of the Babas and the non-Baba Chinese community in this country towards the development of their culture or cultures. This point is very relevant in the present debate over the nature of our national culture.

To understand why the Babas are/were looked down on by the rest of the Chinese community, one needs to understand a bit of social history.

During the colonial period, the Baba tycoons were the compradors and strongest allies of the British. Their representation in the Straits Chi-

nese British Association was an ever-present force in our colonial history.

And when we bear in mind that a large section of the vernacular-educated Chinese community in this country were fervently anti-colonial during the time, it qualifies the impression that the Babas are/were disdained by the non-Baba Chinese for communalistic reasons.

We must also not forget that in the heyday of the Baba during the earlier colonial period, it was the Baba who looked down on the *sinkeh*s, or "new guest workers", as the Chinese immigrants were derogatorily referred to. The Babas were also rather loath to allow their children to marry the *sinkeh*s.

The other important political factor to consider is the nature of the communal politics in this country since colonial times. This has revolved around the issue of, among other things, language, education and culture.

The Babas do not feel as strongly about promoting and developing the Chinese language, education and culture as do the vernacular-educated Chinese. Nor do they have the same enthusiasm towards promoting their own culture.

They are thus caught in a web of contradictions of the communal politics in this country. As is well known, a culture is vulnerable to extinction if little effort is put into developing its

language, literature and other modes of transmitting the culture.

Because of the influence of these political and historical factors, it is not proper to tar the non-Baba Chinese community with the same brush; that they look down on the Baba and are responsible for their gradual "extinction".

This is by no means an attempt to whitewash the fact that some sections of the Chinese community still need to be educated with regard to a healthy attitude toward other cultures.

I am simply trying to identify the factors that have put the Baba in this web of contradictions, the resolution of which is not helped by the prescriptions of some academics who seem to miss the fundamental issues involved.

On such academic, Dr. Tan Chee Beng (in his paper at last year's conference organised by the Malaysian Social Science Association) is of the opinion that the linguistic assimilation of the Baba into the Malay culture is the key to achieving integration in this country. His justification is based on the need for:

"The creation of inter ethnic social environment. . . crucial for national integration. . . since Malays are the majority people and hold the edge of political power, and since the Malay civilisation has a historical continuity in this land."

He goes on to suggest that the Chinese in Malaysia should speak Malay among themselves and offers some socio-psychological reasons for why they do not.

This simplistic view is symptomatic of some of our intelligentsia who treat cultures as though they were factors replaceable or dispensable in their "nobler" visions of society.

In the first place, they display a shocking lack of humanistic values essential to cultural policies. In the second place, their views spring from a political naïvete.

But more importantly, their prescription violates some fundamental human rights that are enshrined in international principles pertaining to cultural policies.

It is not surprising therefore, that with such a conception of national integration, Dr. Tan would rather there wasn't a vernacular school system and a Merdeka University.

These institutions are really the expression of the Chinese community in this country to "freely develop their language and culture", a right guaranteed in Article I of the 1966 Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation, adopted by the General Conference of Unesco.

Dr. Tan's enquiry as to why the non-Baba Chinese do not speak Malay among themselves

comes as rather a surprise for one who should know about the function of language in culture and community, its maintenance of identity and sense of values.

This common belief is the reason for the existence of universal rights protecting minorities.

Consequently, intellectuals like Dr. Tan not only do not help to clarify these fundamental issues but instead help to propagate the false notion that national integration can only be achieved through a common language.

It is a reflection of the twisted character of the politics in this country that such a view can pass for commonsense.

Imagine our same intellectuals telling the Spanish-speaking minorities in the US that they should speak English in order to promote national integration there; or that the immigrants in Britain should speak English within their own community in order to promote harmony in Britain.

And what language would they prescribe for the Malays in Singapore — Mandarin or Malay or plain old English?

It is clear from countless existing cases that linguistic assimilation itself is no guarantee for inter-communal harmony. Nor does the case of the Babas bear this out.

There was harmony in pre-colonial society and there still is in social niches in some parts of the country today as long as the influence of state policies is absent or minimal.

In fact, there are countless examples of harmonious relations between peoples of different cultures.

Our intellectuals would no doubt argue that they are merely defending a common language as a "necessary" but not necessarily "sufficient" condition for national integration.

This is just not good enough in the light of the inviolability of cultural rights of peoples. Intellectuals like Dr. Tan do not hide their disapproval of what they see as "cultural revivalism" or "ethnic identification":

"This is especially so in Malaysia where each ethnic group stresses its own language or languages as symbols of identity."

Each and every cultural heritage on this earth of ours must be protected. This is why the right of a people to freely develop its own culture has been universally recognised.

Every culture is equal to the next because the superordination or subordination of one culture over or under another is discriminatory and therefore clearly unjustifiable.

This applies as much to the Baba as to the

Chinese in Malaysia, the Malays in Singapore, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and the immigrant communities in the West.

The current debate over the nature and development of our national culture seems to have overlooked this point.

We have already pointed out that this issue does not arise within the Baba community because of its peculiar character. However, it is instructive to note how the "cultural dilemma" of the Baba was felt and resolved by one of their most well-known members, Lim Boon Kheng.

In one of his reminiscences, he related his experience of shame when asked to translate some Chinese text by an Englishman in England.

It was then that he resolved to learn Mandarin and became one of the biggest contributors to the cause of Chinese vernacular education and culture in this country.

Intellectuals like Dr. Tan do a grave disservice by not only identifying the wrong causes of communal friction, they deny the right of the non-Malay communities to freely develop their language, education and culture.

In fact, in all the international forums, the recognition of cultural diversity, cultural identity and cultural democracy is intended to be the proper basis for national integration and inter-communal understanding.

By contrast, Dr. Tan's view of the national culture is this:

"What are the cultural elements which can best portray the image of Malaysia to non-Malaysian overseas? . . . it is the Malay and other indigenous cultural elements which can best be used to portray the image of Malaysia by virtue of their historical continuity in this land. This is not so with the less Malaysianised aspects of Chinese and Indian cultures."

The basis of our national culture cannot be other than all the respective cultures that make up the cultural wealth of this country. To say that one culture should form the "essence" of the national culture is contrary to the spirit of democracy.

Like the question of assimilation, the evolution of a "Malaysian Culture" is desirable if it is the product of a natural process, not and never as the result of government policy. If it is the latter, it falls precisely within the definition of "forced assimilation" condemned in all international forums.

* *The Star*, 2 March 1984

ON NATIONAL CULTURE AND ETHNICISM

By Tan Chee Beng

Dr. Kua Kia Soong shows how irresponsible a so-called scholar can be. Although his letter is entitled *National Culture and Baba Heritage*, it is actually an unreasonable attack on me and Aliran although the latter is not mentioned specifically.

In his letter, Dr. Kua attributed to me views which were not mine but of his own making. He does this by twisting my arguments and especially taking quotations out of context.

Worse still, he combined phrases and clauses from different sections of my paper to form a quotation which implied a different view. This is most unethical.

One would expect Dr. Kua who has accused others of displaying "a shocking lack of humanistic values" to have at least some honesty in his debate with others.

Dr. Kua referred to my paper "*Acculturation, Assimilation and Integration: The case of the Chinese in Malaysia*," presented in January last year at a Malaysian Social Science Association's Conference.

This paper has been published in *Ethnicity, Class and Development: Malaysia*, edited by Prof. Syed Husin Ali, 1984, pp 189-211.

Dr. Kua said that in my opinion, "the linguis-

tic assimilation of the Malay culture is the key to achieving integration in this country". This is not true, I have never argued for linguistic assimilation and it is most irresponsible for Dr. Kua to portray me as being in favour of it.

What I have argued is that "a crucial factor in achieving integration is to ensure greater social interaction between ethnic groups, while acculturation and assimilation should be left to develop on their own" (Page 207).

I have even shown that while the Baba in Malacca have largely lost their Chinese languages and that the Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan still speak Hokkien, it is the latter that have been more integrated into the multi-ethnic environment in Kelantan due to the greater cross-ethnic social interaction there.

I have never called for a policy of linguistic assimilation. I have pointed out that the acculturation of Peranakan Chinese is due to natural process. On acculturation and integration, let me quote from my paper:

"The achievement and national integration does not depend on the acculturation or assimilation of minorities although certain policies of integration may promote acculturation.

"The crucial task in achieving integration is to reduce ethnicism as an ideology of inter-group relations.

"Since ethnicism has its roots in the political

and economic structures of Malaysian society, it is necessary to re-examine the socio-economic policies in order to achieve national integration."

Dr. Kua quoted the following as my justification for the distorted view on language and integration attributed to me:

"The creation of interethnic social environment. . . crucial for national intergration. . . since the Malays are the majority people and hold the edge of political power, and since the Malay civilisation has a historical continuity in this land."

The first two parts of the quotation are taken from the second section of my paper (Page 195) while the last part is derived from the fourth section (Page 203). How irresponsible.

The first two parts of the quotations is from the sentence "It is therefore obvious that the creation of an inter-ethnic social and environment is crucial for national integration".

It is a statement made after I have compared the nature of social interaction between Chinese and Malays in different parts of the country. Please note that my emphasis is on inter-ethnic social environment and not any form or assimilation.

The third part of the quotation mentioned is most misleading in the context of Dr. Kua's presentation. Here I am stating a social and historical fact, and it is best I quote the whole paragraph from my paper:

"Since Malays are the majority and hold the edge of political power, and since Malay civilisation has historical continuity in this land, the question of integration as far as Chinese Malaysians are concerned is essentially adjustment to Malay culture and to the multi-ethnic environment in general."

"Their dilemma is not the lack of willingness to integrate, but to what extent they expect and are expected to adjust to Malay culture."

"There are moderate and radical Chinese views about integration, likewise with Malays. The final development, if there is one, is the result of the struggle between these various contradictions."

"In a sense, there is no final development for society moves on. The radical Chinese should understand the necessity to compromise just as the radical Malays have to realise that the suppression of ethnic pluralism and minority cultures is neither realistic nor ethical" (page 203).

Coming back to the question of language, again Dr. Kua accused me of suggestion that "the Chinese in Malaysia should speak Malay among themselves."

This is misleading. I have suggested that all Malaysians should accept Bahasa Malaysia as one

of their languages rather than regarding it merely as a language for cross-ethnic communication.

In other words, if the Chinese (of course Malays and others too), especially the English-educated ones like Dr. Kua himself, can accept English as a language of communication among themselves, why not Bahasa Malaysia too?

It is therefore legitimate to explore why, for example, when a Hokkien and a Cantonese meet and neither can speak a common Chinese language well, they generally do not speak Malay which both can speak.

Why is it that among the "non-Peranakan" Chinese it is generally not a norm to speak Malay among themselves but it is acceptable to speak in English?

I offer some reasons and relate the problem to the question of identity and communal problems in Malaysia. It is in this context that I mention "This is especially so in Malaysia where each ethnic group stresses its own language or languages as symbols of identity".

Dr. Kua quoted this statement, again out of context, to portray me as disapproving ethnic identification, a view which is not mine.

Let me stress that I never say that Chinese Malaysians should speak only Malay or even should speak Malay. I only suggest that Malay

should be accepted as one of their languages among themselves.

Nobody can prescribe what particular language two Chinese should speak when they meet each other nor should the Government prohibit the use of non-Malay languages.

I am against any policy of cultural oppression and in my paper I have warned that "a policy of assimilation (my definition) is not realistic in Malaysia and, in fact, will increase ethnicism even to the extent of giving rise to ethnic nationalism" (page 211). I am for cultural pluralism in the context of integration.

I don't see how "intellectuals like Dr. Tan" can be accused of denying "the right of the non-Malay communities to freely develop their language, education and culture". Obviously Dr. Kua cannot accept any non-communal approach to the communal problems in Malaysia because his own approach is communal or chauvinistic.

My discussion on national culture is an attempt to provide a non-communal view. I need not discuss this controversial topic here other than to point out that it is not as simplistic as Dr. Kua had tried to make it to be.

Readers are referred to my article in the *Aliran* monthly (January 1984). This is actually a translation of my speech in Mandarin delivered at the Hokkien Association in Klang last year.

On the question of integration, I have argued that a common medium of social communication is necessary for national integration for it will help to promote a more inter-ethnic environment.

Bahasa Malaysia is the appropriate common language not because it is the language of the Malays but because it not only has a historical continuity in this land but has also been the lingua franca in this part of the world.

Neither Chinese nor Tamil, for instance, can play the kind of role of a common language that Malay can play.

Dr. Kua does not seem to understand what the role of a common language is, and indeed thinks that the idea of a common language violates the "cultural rights of peoples". Having a common language or national language does not mean that other languages should be suppressed.

It is most unfortunate that we still have people like Dr. Kua who continue to question the need of a "common language" or the position of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.

This shows a want of an understanding of Malaysian social history and the complexity of Malaysian society. It also shows the extent of Dr. Kua's "political naivete".

Neither I nor my colleagues in Aliran deny the right of a people to develop their own culture.

We take issues in their own right rather than treating them in narrow communal perspective.

Dr. Kua should not misuse the principle of "inviolability of cultural rights" to propagate his communal thinking. This is no different from a politician who talks about democracy and justice but is himself undemocratic.

If Dr. Kua thinks that the Government has violated the principle of people's cultural rights, then he should spell it out in concrete terms and criticise the Government and not me.

If his argument is valid (not based on narrow chauvinistic view), then I can support him. I am personally not happy, for example, with the performance of the Education Ministry with regards to the POL classes.

On the question of Merdeka University, Dr. Kua has debated with Aliran before. The Aliran view with which I agree is published in its 'The Real Issue: The Merdeka University' (1979).

As to the question of the vernacular school system, I have not discussed this in my paper. Nevertheless if Dr. Kua thinks that the vernacular school system should replace the national educational system, I disagree as this is not in the interest of national integration.

I am not against parents sending their children to vernacular schools. The choice is theirs. However, Dr. Kua and other "cultural purists"

have no right to criticise Chinese who do not send their children to Chinese schools.

It is ironical that there are "cultural purists" who say so much about vernacular education but do not themselves send their children to the vernacular system. It is equally sad that there are some "cultural purists" who accuse others of having so-called "cultural dilemma" without examining their own situation.

Let me remind Dr. Kua that the Baba may have an identity problem in relation to the non-Baba Chinese, but they do not have a "cultural dilemma". It is from the point of view of people like Dr. Kua that the Baba have a cultural dilemma.

If by cultural dilemma Dr. Kua means not having full Chinese culture (whatever it means) or not having Chinese languages and Chinese education, I do not see how Dr. Kua himself can be exempted from such a false view.

The Baba are Chinese even though some non-Baba Chinese may not quite agree. They are proud of their cultural heritage. It is not just the elite Baba who have a taste for "things Chinese", it is the Baba in general.

It is also not the business of Dr. Kua to imply that the Baba should solve their "cultural dilemma" by learning Chinese and promoting Chinese education.

I am sure that the Baba will appreciate that people like Dr. Kua do not further try to make their heritage and their very existence into a communal issue. The Baba are happy not to be put into this kind of limelight.

On "The Baba Heritage" exhibition, it is really up to the museum to reply to Dr. Kua's comments. My impression is that it is not fair to say that the exhibition shows mostly the culture of the Baba elite.

Dr. Kua chooses to see the elite aspects and not the others.

* *The Star*, 10 March 1984.

NATIONAL CULTURE: A JUST DEMAND OR CHAUVINISM?

By: Kua Kia Soong

Dr. Tan Chee Beng's emotional response to my article needs to be answered.

This is the context in which I wrote my "Opinion". I had just seen the Baba Heritage exhibition at Muzium Negara which puts the responsibility for the Baba's "cultural dilemma" or gradual extinction on the non-Baba Chinese community.

Dr. Tan is quoted in the exhibition as an authority on the Baba. I happen to know Dr. Tan's views on the national culture since he had been criticised in the Chinese Press and magazines as well. We are in the midst of this National Culture Policy debate. . . so I wrote my views on it as I have written on many other diverse topics.

My main aim was to bring out the real issue in the debate. I certainly do not need to sink to such base tactics of wilfully misquoting anyone. My mistake lies primarily in putting quotation marks to paraphrase his views on the matter. In this respect, I offer my sincere apologies.

I shall presently illustrate that my paraphrasing of his views is not far from what he really stands for underneath all the abstract declarations. Part of the problem has been brought about because of his elusive stand on these issues

and constant contradictory stands punctuated every once in a while with noble declarations.

Let me illustrate:

Although he maintains that he has never argued for linguistic assimilation and fully supports cultural pluralism, can he clarify what he means by "... the question of integration as far as Chinese Malaysians are concerned is essentially adjustment to Malay culture and to the multi-ethnic environment in general".

Nowhere in his article does he suggest that the Malays should adjust to the multi-ethnic environment. It must be pointed out that if one were to take his quotes on their face value, none of this difference of opinion would have arisen in the first place.

"Dr. Kua accused me of suggesting that the Chinese in Malaysia should speak Malay among themselves," he said.

It seems that Dr. Tan is not blameless as far as quotes are concerned. In my article, I did not put his suggestion in quotes, but no matter. In Dr. Tan's article on "Acculturation, Assimilation, Integration. . ." he also says:

"But I do think that all ethnic groups in Malaysia should accept Malay not merely for communication across ethnic groups but also for in-group communication."

We fail to see any difference between the two statements.

In fact, he himself provides the substantiation for my imputation when he goes on to say:

"Why is it that among the 'non-Peranakan' Chinese, it is generally not a norm to speak Malay among themselves but it is acceptable to speak in English?"

Why does he say this if he does not suggest that the Chinese should speak Malay among themselves? In fact, this paints a very bad image of the Chinese for it suggests that they refuse to speak Malay, a common myth held in communalist rhetoric.

This is also seen in this paragraph, where it is Dr. Tan himself who seems to be putting a communalist slant ". . . why, for example, when a Hokkien and a Cantonese meet and neither can speak a common Chinese dialect well, they generally do not speak Malay which both can speak?"

It sounds a rather implausible situation that two Chinese with no common language between them but can speak Malay should refuse to speak Malay.

Thus, for all his declaration against forced assimilation, the essence of what is involved in "natural assimilation" is not appreciated. If we follow his argument, it logically leads to some

policy of assimilation. In international parlance, any policy on assimilation can only be forced assimilation.

Isn't it meaningless to say that you uphold natural assimilation and cultural pluralism if you go around asking why people don't speak Malay among themselves? It is precisely because this detracts from the fundamental issue involved in cultural pluralism that one does not ask why many middle class Malaysians choose to speak English.

"I don't see how (Dr. Tan) can be accused of denying that right of the non-Malay communities to freely develop their language, education and cultures."

He declares that his stand on Merdeka University is the same as that of Aliran's which is for the suppression of the university. Isn't that the denial of the right of the Chinese community to freely develop their language, education and culture?

When all is said and done, Dr. Tan commits a more serious fault of misrepresentation. He falsely imputes that my stand is that: "(Dr. Kua) . . . thinks that the idea of a common language violates the 'cultural rights of people'."

Where did I say that in my article?

But now that we have finished with this "mis-understanding," let us examine the really im-

portant questions which he does not face squarely.

Dr. Tan not only fails to clarify the fundamental issue involved in the national culture debate, he misrepresents the case of the Chinese community by putting words in my mouth (and theirs).

Take this for example:

"It is most unfortunate that we still have people like Dr. Kua who continue to question the need for a 'common language' or the position of Bahasa Malaysia as the natural language."

Now who is being unethical? Was this ever said or implied in my article?

This "red herring" of the national language continues to be brought up whenever the question arises of the non-Malay communities wanting to maintain their vernacular school system — the Merdeka University issue, cultural pluralism in the national culture. The same argument was brought up by General Templer in the early fifties when the Chinese demanded the same.

Ever since the Merdeka Agreement in 1957, there has been no section of the non-Malay communities which has questioned the status of Malay as the national and common language. And I certainly do not (and did not in my article) question it.

The second instance of obfuscation is seen in this: ". . . if Dr. Kua thinks that the vernacular school system should replace the national system. . ."

Where in my article did I say or imply this?

For is not the whole history of Chinese vernacular schools one of survival? Of fending off State disapproval? How could they ever dream or replacing the national system?

But it seems the obfuscation is not complete without this additional false notion: ". . . Dr. Kua and other 'cultural purists' have no right to criticise Chinese who do not sent their children to Chinese schools." Where is this implied in my article? How could I ever harbour such notions when I myself have never received any Chinese education?

But at least my intellectual honesty and moral responsibility does not prevent me from denying that right to those who choose to. It also happens to be a right that is recognised by the world community.

Before we consider the real issues, permit me to put the record straight and hope this debate does not degenerate into ritual mudslinging: Dr. Tan asks why the criticism is not directed at the Government but at him? The simple reason is that this view is his.

The tragedy of the problem of national unity

in our country is that the difference between what is chauvinistic and what is a just demand has not been clarified. It is a bigger tragedy when some of our more enlightened intellectuals similarly fail to do so and join in the ritual condemnation.

The fundamental issue in the national culture controversy is quite simply this: The Chinese have amply demonstrated that they wish to have cultural equality in the national culture. . . Do they have the right to do so? Do these intellectuals defend their right to do so?

Yes, that much is very simple even though the exact character of communal relations and politics in this country is not — let us not befudge the issue.

Am I chauvinistic if I say they have that right simply because I am Chinese? Then let us use a different case so that one is shorn of any possibility of subjectivism:

Do they defend the right of the Malay community in Singapore to their own vernacular school system; to have their own university if they demand it; to have cultural equality?

While I have no hesitation in saying the Malays in Singapore have my full support in all those rights, Dr. Tan has up to now failed to respond to this extension of their arguments. In fact, are all the demands for cultural equality of minori-

ties everywhere not legitimate, or must they also be seen as "communalistic"?

Another important point is that the recognition of their rights is irrespective of whether the same rights are claimed by the elites, chauvinists or opportunists in their communities. This is a point some of our intellectuals seem incapable of accepting.

International conventions recognise the acceptance of these demands precisely because they are seen as the real non-communal approach to problems of integration.

Egalitarianism is abstract if one makes empty noble declarations but fails when it comes to the concrete issues. "I am against cultural oppression" is a common slogan.

When we think on it, it would be difficult to find anyone outside South Africa today who declares that he or she is for cultural oppression. Therefore, one has to be judged on one's record.

Despite Dr. Tan's peppering us with his quotes of noble intent, when we come to the concrete issue — cultural equality in the national culture, Merdeka University — he falters and argues against these.

On the question of vernacular school system, he is rather more reserved: ". . . I have not discussed this in my paper. . . I am not against

parents sending their childrens to vernacular schools. . ."

Nevertheless, he is less than enthusiastic for it and that is why he harps frequently on POL. One reason can only be because the Chinese vernacular school system is an accepted fact. Imagine what his stand would be if the vernacular schools were only just about to be established like the case of Merdeka University, for the arguments against Merdeka University would also hold for not allowing the former.

The vital point missed is the fact that the Chinese community wants to have their vernacular school system. Do they have the right to do so? When the Chinese community wants to open new independent schools, can they obtain the licence to do so? Let Dr. Tan unreservedly state his stand on this.

The vernacular school system is usually treated with hardly any enthusiasm for the reason that it is "segregationist".

For this reason Dr. Jomo recently also spoke of the need for the replacement of the vernacular school system (Star, 2-1-84). Surely they can appreciate the vast scope for inter-communal co-operation and participation in the economic, political, socio-cultural spheres in the midst of cultural diversity.

The profoundly significant point is that where

there is mass participation in democratic politics once the real basis of national unity has been laid bare, the opportunities for transcending ethnic differences are boundless.

Like all the other rights, Dr. Tan claims he is for cultural pluralism. We find that his view of the national culture is that the national culture would not be the national culture if it was not based on the Malay culture on account of its "historical continuity," etc.

Dr. Tan may not realise it but he has just contradicted his earlier declaration in favour of cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism — in world opinion — is the recognition of the equal importance of each ethnic culture.

If he cannot accept this concept of equality in the national culture, then what is the concept of "Malaysian"? Here again we see that inspite of his quotes against forced assimilation, etc. . . in international opinion, any policy that is aimed at creating this effect is forced assimilation.

Internationally-recognised principles on the matter stress that only by fearlessly respecting cultural equality will true national integration come about because it will then melt any trace of chauvinism.

It is not far-fetched to say that we are all in a cultural dilemma. When I talked about the "cultural dilemma" of the Baba community,

Dr. Tan leapt on me as "... a cultural purist... who accuses others of having so-called 'cultural dilemma' without examining their own situation."

The "cultural dilemma" of the Baba, their gradual "extinction" emblazoned in the Muzium Negara exhibition, was what led to my writing the article in the first place.

There is a dilemma precisely because the culture of the Baba is threatened with extinction.

How could I be accused of being a chauvinist when I stressed "that some sections of the Chinese community still need to be educated with regard to a healthy attitude toward other cultures..."

Did I exclude the Baba from all these cultural heritage that must be protected? I tried to show that the assimilation of the Baba happened when there was little State control or regulation. Such a natural process of assimilation is infinitely preferable.

But the important issue arises over that of the differential attitude of the Baba community and the non-Baba Chinese community toward developing and promoting their vernacular education and culture.

Whereas this is a demand in the latter community, the Baba community is indifferent to this. Firstly, it is a choice for the Baba community

to make but I could scarcely be accused of ill will toward the Baba if I show concern over their gradual extinction.

He does make a meal out of my use of the term "cultural dilemma." When Dr. Mahathir talked about the "Malay dilemma", was he being deprecating towards the Malays?

In fact the Chinese community is also in a "cultural dilemma" over their culture's place in the country. In fact, most minorities in the world are in a "cultural dilemma" and that is why there are instituted rights for the protection of their cultural heritage.

Our whole nation is in a "cultural dilemma", as if that is not plain to see, clouded by the failure of politicians and intellectuals to clarify the real issues in the formulation of the National Culture.

* *The Star*, 20 March 1984.

DEBATE: DON'T USE BASE TACTICS

By: Tan Chee Beng

In my reply to Dr. Kua Kia Soong's letter, I showed how he had wilfully misquoted me and distorted my views (*Starmail*, March 10). In his recent reply, Dr. Kua offered his apologies but excused himself by saying that he was merely trying to paraphrase my views and that he made the mistake of using quotation marks!

Surely there is an overt difference between quoting and paraphrasing. Furthermore it is also unethical to paraphrase in a manner which distorts the original views.

In his reply, Dr. Kua changed his tactic by saying that he would show that his paraphrasing "is not far from what he really stands." Yet he does this by continuing to distort my views.

On national culture, for instance, he tried to portray that my concept of it is more or less like Malay culture and that it is contradictory to the concept of cultural pluralism.

I had actually offered a non-communal view on national culture. I distinguished national culture from ethnic cultures, which should never be suppressed. I had also criticised those who regard national culture as Malay culture.

I had called for the more "extreme" Malays to recognise the reality of cultural pluralism and

not question the loyalty of the non-Malays. Yet Dr. Kua accused me of not having suggested that the Malays should also adjust to the multi-ethnic environment in this country.

Since my paper (under debate) is about Chinese Malaysians, naturally I have more to say about the Chinese. Dr. Kua should be fair about this.

In my reply, I mentioned that Dr. Kua had accused me of suggesting that "the Chinese in Malaysia should speak Malay among themselves." This is my quotation of his words used in his letter.

Yet he blamed me for using the quotation marks, saying that he did not put my suggestion in quotes. He used this to show that I am "not blameless as far as quotes are concerned."

To put the record straight, it is not my suggestion but his. Obviously, I quoted his accusation of me rather than his quotation of my words. So much for Dr. Kua's "intellectual honesty and moral responsibility."

In my last reply, I had clarified about the use of Bahasa Malaysia among Malaysians. Surely it is one thing to say that "all ethnic groups in Malaysia should accept Malay not merely for communication across ethnic groups but also for in-group communication," but another thing to say that the Chinese should speak Malay among

themselves — as paraphrased by Dr. Kua.

Dr. Kua's paraphrasing is misleading as it can mean that the Chinese should speak only Malay and not any Chinese dialect — a view which I never hold and will never support.

I have analysed objectively why Malay has generally not been fully accepted as one of the languages for in-group communication among, for instance, the "non-Peranakan" Chinese.

Nobody is going around "asking why people don't speak Malay among themselves?" Dr. Kua should not try to ethnicise the issue.

In his letter, he criticised those who defend a common language as a "necessary" though not 'sufficient' condition for national integration on the ground of the "inviolability of cultural rights of people."

This leads me to comment that Dr. Kua "thinks that the idea of a common language idea of a common language violates the cultural rights of people".

Furthermore, Dr. Kua has not so far stated clearly his views on national culture and national integration even though he has criticised the views of others.

I have to try hard to gather his stand from his letter. It is therefore understandable that on the question of the vernacular school system, I men-

tioned that "if Dr. Kua thinks that the vernacular school system should replace the national educational system, I disagree as this is not in the interest of national integration."

I never accused Dr. Kua of holding this view. The word "if" is very important and is more of stating my position with regards to the question of the vernacular system.

This is in response to his comment that "Dr. Tan would rather there wasn't a vernacular school system and Merdeka University."

Having myself received Chinese education, I am naturally concerned with the opportunity of learning the mother-tongue. It should, in fact, be the concern of all Malaysians. I see an efficient POL system as crucial for non-Malays to continue to have the opportunity to study Chinese, Tamil and so on.

It is also ridiculous that Dr. Kua should accuse those who do not support the proposed Chinese-medium Merdeka University as violating the cultural rights of the Chinese.

The crucial question is not whether there is a Chinese-medium university, a Tamil-medium university and so on. It is the question of the opportunity to study mother-tongue and how this can be achieved within the context of national integration.

It is Dr. Kua who first brought the question of "common language" into the debate, not me. So how can he accuse me of bringing up "this red herring" of the national language?"

Furthermore, it is most ridiculous for Dr. Kua to equate my criticism of him as criticising the Chinese community as a whole! It is he who has put words in my mouth, but surely I cannot say that he has misrepresented the case of the Chinese community or for that matter the case of Malaysians.

Dr. Kua clarifies that he did not question the status of Malay as the national language. Fine. But surely he must then also recognise the prominent role of the national language in relation to the other languages as well as in the context of national culture.

Here we are not talking about the suppression of minority languages which is a separate question.

On the cultural dilemma of the Baba, Dr. Kua shifted his stand totally by saying that he is showing "concern over their gradual extinction."

Now if he is really concerned with the "extinction" of Baba culture or Baba society, he should call for more understanding of Baba culture rather than implying that they should resolve their "cultural dilemma" by learning Mandarin.

Lastly, if Dr. Kua wants to open up a debate on "common language," "vernacular school systems," and so on, he should first state his own views clearly.

As Dr. Kua himself writes, "Egalitarianism is abstract if one makes empty noble declarations."

National culture is still a controversial issue and should be debated. However, any debate on this or other social issues should be done in an honest and constructive manner without any mudslinging or resorting to the base tactic of distortion or discrediting a person for what he is not.

* *The Star*, 2 April 1984.

NATIONAL CULTURE: THE CASE FOR INTEGRATION

By: Maznah Mohamed/Johan Saravanamuttu

There has been much discussion recently about what should and should not constitute elements in Malaysia's national culture.

We wish to shed light on what we feel are crucial gaps and sources of confusion in the discussion so far. Our primary perspective is one which stresses the inexorable logic and inevitable need for ultimate assimilation among Malaysia's various ethnic groups.

Whatever may be one's philosophical or ideological stance, the fact of Malaysian nationhood and the fact of the accidental or intentional intermingling of diverse cultures in Malaysia today cannot but eventually lead to some form and level of cultural assimilation.

The issue for the various ethnic groups is therefore not one of whether each should or should not assimilate — by which we mean a natural and unforced intermingling of cultural values — but rather the extent to which each group would allow its culture to assimilate with other interacting cultures.

The greater the degree of natural assimilation processes — within accepted and rationally argued political parameters — the greater would be the

opportunity to evolve and forge a truly genuine national culture.

Malaysian nationalism is a highly complex subject. Nevertheless, it is absolutely vital to understand the historical-political context of Malaysian nationhood before one can truly begin to discuss national culture.

At the very least, it is imperative to understand the political forces in contention for national power prior to the birth of the then Malayan nation. At the risk of simplifying history, we may identify two major streams of national political consciousness on the eve of independence.

A popular stream involving the participation of a plethora of mass-based groups represented by PUTERA-AMCJA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat — All-Malaya Council for Joint Action) coalition of forces.

This stream opposed the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement and put forward its own People's Constitution. The coalition was repressed by the British and subsequently disbanded.

A conservative stream headed by the political elites of UMNO, MCA and MIC, was bestowed with the blessings of the departing colonial power, Britain. UMNO won its political credentials in opposition to the Malayan Union of 1946, while its partners MCA and MIC hitched on its band-wagon in the aftermath of the PUTERA-AMCJA break-up.

Thus, it was the conservative political stream which assumed the reins of political power at Independence in 1957 and prescribed the framework for the evolution of national culture.

In the event many of the colonial "non-policies" in perpetuating the segregation of the various ethnic groups were by the newly independent government.

If ethnic polarisation of the various races was the consequence of colonial rule, pluralism, its political counterpart after Independence, became the catchword of the day.

To put it plainly, race has been the basis of governance and political mobilisation in Malaysian politics. Even in the aftermath of the traumatic racial riots of May 1969, the Malaysian ruling elites have chosen to pursue this basic model of politics, albeit with drastic proscription and suppression of political freedoms with respect of ethnic mobilisation.

The overall political model has permeated the entire Malaysian social fabric. In matters cultural, it prescribed that all ethnic communities are to develop separately and equally -- at least in theory -- except two crucial areas -- that of language and education.

Malay becomes the national language since it is the lingua franca of Malaysians. More controversially, education has had to follow certain

overarching national requirements, thereby necessitating a limitation of the role of ethnically-based schooling.

Except for these two largely assimilationist if enforced tendencies in the national policy of the Government, cultural pursuits in other areas have by and large been allowed to flourish unimpeded.

There is, of course, the issue of Islam as the official religion which has meant a diversion of national funds disproportionately to one religious grouping.

However, it is imperative to understand that given the racial basis of power in Malaysian politics, there is absolutely no way a truly national culture based on genuine cross-fertilisation of various cultures was ever to be encouraged.

Rather, the continuous process of inter and intra party bargaining shaped the nature of cultural aspirations in an inherently divisive and delicate balance of ethnic forces.

Had the other stream of political forces in national contention assumed the reins of power, perhaps a more popular and non-racial basis for the evolution of national culture would have been laid.

While this is sheer extrapolation, we may surmise so from the People's Constitution proposed by PUTERA-AMCJA. For example, some of the

provisions included: adoption of Malay as the national language and political rights for all who regarded Malay as their real home including the application of the term "Melayu" to all citizens, the encouragement of the advancement of the Malay community and the institution of the Sultans as constitutional rulers.

However, history took a different course in Malaysia, frustrating this political stream and placing power instead in the hands of the forces we discussed earlier.

At this juncture, it is necessary to identify briefly the advocacy of various positions on national culture today. These positions fall broadly into the following categories:

Pluralism: All cultures are to be allowed to exist separately and equally, harmonious or not. The harmonious version has been termed "unity in diversity".

Acculturation: The subordination of minority cultures into a dominant culture. This approach may be likened to what some have called "forced assimilation"; and

Assimilation: Different cultures blending to form a new culture. Such an approach has also been called the "melting pot" model.

We would suggest that to date the Government has at best pursued the first approach but

has never quite approximated its harmonious version, "unity in diversity".

At worst, the Government has descended to the acculturation approach,² while little or no efforts have been put into paving the way towards assimilation.

Admittedly, the above approaches are ideal-type situations and none of them can exist in reality in pure form.

Furthermore, we must recognise that the historical, political and social context of dynamically evolving societies render such abstractions as mere devices for political thought and action or praxis.

It is with this caveat that we advocate the assimilationist approach for Malaysia in light of the following arguments:

- * Actions and policies that serve to maintain pluralism tend to degenerate into platforms for ethnic chauvinism. This has already occurred in Malaysia and the lip service paid to multi-ethnic policies virtually confirms such an assertion.
- * The historical reality of Malaysia never did nor can it in the ultimate analysis allow for plural politics.

In practice, such politics have sown discord, ethnic mistrust and sparked riots.

Physical, social and political separation among the various communities is intrinsically unhealthy for nationhood.

Such a situation has perpetuated ignorance and prejudice of each other and a concomitant lack of appreciation for the values of respective cultures.

- * The acculturation approach cannot be countenanced simply because it is undemocratic and violates basic human rights. The most obnoxious and vicious versions of this approach ascribe "super-racial" attributes to particular ethnic groups.

Given the above considerations and arguments, measures which allow for natural assimilation but not forced assimilation should be encouraged.

Ideally, all cultures should evolve in a direction in which universally and commonly accepted values prevail. This approach calls for the sharing of all positive cultural practices and beliefs or at least opportunities for mutual appreciation.

In addition, there should be channels whereby people can take part inter-culturally if they so choose instead of the deliberate setting up of socio-political barriers to prevent such social intercourse.

Assimilation can neither be advocated nor can it actually work as long as there exists serious

inequalities, inequities or social malpractices in society.

Policies such as the NEP which have commendable aims of correcting socio-economic inequities so as to disassociate occupations with race should however be implemented without disrupting the natural tendency for cultures to assimilate.

At present, implementation of NEP objectives not only falls short of their intended targets but have in fact exacerbated ethnic tensions by creating a situation which allows for the breeding of misperceptions and distorted consciousness about the true function of culture.

The upshot is that cultural identity, cultural symbols and other cultural paraphernalia have all been obtrusively projected by each ethnic group to be virtually the last vestiges of cultural expression. There has certainly been diversity minus the unity.

In this context, education and language issues have loomed large and have been manifested as the last bastions for cultural freedom. Cultural pursuits have extended into the sphere of what are largely economically based institutions such as schooling.

Schooling has many functions including the reproduction of the status quo in the sense that it rationalises the social division of labour in so-

ciety. However, it has been erroneously perceived and used by ethnic groups to champion and transmit ethnic identities when in fact, such a function is largely peripheral to schooling.

Despite the proliferation of cultural studies like Malay studies, Chinese studies, Islamic studies and the like in our universities today, it has become increasingly evident that these fields do not guarantee economic rewards such as good jobs or even jobs for their graduates.

This is not to question the intrinsic value of arts-oriented studies but simply to point out that the needs of the market place are often diametrically opposed to the cultivation of the humanities and other such-like studies.

The primary contradiction of Malaysian society today is that the technocratic thrust for national growth places a high premium on technical, managerial and practice oriented skills not on humanistic pursuits.

In short, while cultural-humanities studies should be actively encouraged, these should not be confused with the pursuit of achieving desirable economic ends or advancement by a group or community.

Indeed, vernacular schooling or institutes of higher learning that purport to protect and promote linguistic rights may ultimately serve a narrow purpose -- that of ethnic snobbery.

To be truly meaningful, educational reforms at the present time must fundamentally change at the structural level, particularly with respect to curriculum content and distributive systems.

By prolonging and encouraging the struggle for separate and ethnically based schooling systems much needed educational reforms may be conveniently swept under the carpet.

The argument for vernacular education is neither persuasive nor historically justifiable because the basis for the existence of vernacular schools was marred by unequal and antagonistic development in the past.

Colonial neglect as well as policies aimed at resisting the establishment of a national school system for the protection of imperialist interests laid the basis for cultural and political polarisation.

Furthermore, polarisation resulting from separate vernacular schooling mirrored the ethnic division of labour in the market structure of colonial society.

Having had such a bad track record, it is doubtful that vernacular schools set up at the present time can guarantee the long-term interests of the nation nor can they meaningfully contribute to the evolution of the national culture.

However, provisions for the learning of all

languages within the national school system should be seriously instituted. It should not be hampered by the narrow politico-bureaucratic interpretation of the NEP.

* *The Star*, 12 March 1984.

WHITHER NATIONAL CULTURE IN MALAYSIA?

By: Mohd Nasir Hashim/Jomo KS

The problem of "national culture" in Malaysia is far from being resolved, whatever one might wish. Hence, it is not useful to try to pre-empt discussion by imposing one particular perspective, be it official or otherwise.

However, for such discussion to be constructive, it must be honestly, rationally and openly conducted; suppressing such exchanges would be tantamount to sweeping the matter under the carpet — the problem would still remain.

The problem of "national culture" is especially difficult in Malaysia because of our complex history as a nation.

Independence was not won decisively through unified confrontation against the colonial rulers. Instead, the Alliance, a coalition of the local English-educated elite from the three major ethnic groups, was granted Independence by the British to avoid other alternatives.

Hence, unlike the experience of say Indonesia, Independence was not won by a truly national Independence movement in direct conflict with the imperial power.

This is important because, as the history of the Third World has shown us repeatedly, it is

often in the cauldron of protracted popular struggle against the colonial oppressor that the key elements of a new nation are forged.

(The nearest we ever came to forging a popular and broad-based "national liberation" movement was probably in the form of the coalition, led by the late Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, between the Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Putera) and the All-Malayan Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) which drafted the abortive Perlembagaan Rakyat (People's Constitution of 1947).

Hence, for instance in the 1920s, Malay — the language (of an ethnic minority) most widely used in Indonesia (which has a Javanese majority) — came to be accepted as the common language of the Indonesian nation-to-be.

In Malaysia, the status of Malay as the common language of the people has long been accepted; unreasonable measures in implementing the national language policy should not be allowed to detract from this historical fact.

Yet, such acceptance and the promotion of similar common elements did not imply either linguistic or cultural homogeneity in conceptualising the Indonesian nation-to-be.

'*Bineka tunggal ika*' or "unity in diversity" was the fundamental cultural principle accepted in the struggle to create a new Indonesian nation out of its ethnically and culturally diverse or

plural heritage.

The preceding comments are not meant to imply that Indonesian cultural policy today should be emulated, but they are only to emphasise the significance of national history in cultural matters.

The geographical boundaries of Malaysia today have largely been defined by the heritage of British imperialism — the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 demarcated the Indonesian border; the Anglo-Siamese Treaty early this century fixed the border with Thailand; even the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia was at British behest.

In fact, the concept of a Malaysian nation is so weak that the term "nationalism" in the Malaysian context often refers to "ethnicism", relating to the identity and interests of a particular nationality (i.e. ethnic group), rather than to the Malaysian nation as a whole.

The unity of the nation has been so fragile that talk of secession is taken seriously, and after Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan, Sabah and Sarawak ceased to be referred to officially as East Malaysia.

Hence, recognising that Malaysia is still very much a nation in formation, it is all the more important to be mutually tolerant in dealing with sensitive cultural matters.

The well-known official formula on national culture is open to a variety of divergent interpretations, and is — at best — a starting point for discussion, rather than a final statement on the matter.

Ascribing a dominant role for Malay culture and Islam, while grudgingly tolerant of other cultures, it fails to recognise the contradictory and competing tendencies within each cultural heritage.

For instance, the egalitarian and co-operative values of most village cultures contrast sharply with the common obsession in court cultures with pomp, rank and blind loyalty.

Yet Malaysian reality is quite different. Often in form, and especially in content, there is little doubt that our society is very much dominated by what is often referred to as "Western bourgeois" culture.

A quick survey of trends in radio, TV, cinema, magazines, comics, books, clothing, educational preference, food, beverages and various other cultural institutions will only confirm this.

Yet counterposed against feudalism and other autocratic and culturally repressive tendencies, ostensible Western commitments to liberty, freedom and material welfare become quite attractive.

Confronted by this apparent choice, many

young Muslims have sought more positive alternatives in Islam's rich heritage.

Yet limited by officially sanctioned religious interpretations, and increasingly co-opted by officialdom, spokesmen in Malaysia for an Islamic alternative have failed so far to articulate a programme acceptable to the non-Muslim half of the population.

On the other hand, the alienation and discrimination felt by the vast majority of non-Malays has encouraged demands for equality in all spheres of public life.

Some, however, have undermined these otherwise legitimate claims by insisting on virtual cultural segregation in opposition to perceived assimilationist policies.

Segregation certainly pre-empts assimilation, but it also denies opportunities for integration. though of course, for instance, a common language and schooling in themselves are necessary, but not sufficient guarantees of national unity.

Segregation, whether on ethnic or class lines, therefore stands in the way of achieving inter-ethnic harmony, unless of course, we condone the apparent stability of virtually separate development.

Hence, for instance, it is not desirable for school children to be segregated along either ethnic or class lines, eg with vernacular schooling

systems (ostensibly separate but equal) or boarding schools for a privileged few, while the vast majority are economically forced to drop out of schools.

Yet, as long as the official schooling system does not provide adequate facilities for minorities to learn their own languages (which it easily can), they have little choice but to consolidate existing vernacular facilities. Hence vernacular schools should be defended for what they represent viz-a-viz the status quo, rather than as a desirable end in itself.

In recent years, some of those seeking to transcend this cultural morass have advocated the identification and promotion of "common values" shared by diverse cultural (especially religious) traditions.

Despite the intentions of its early advocates, who sought to highlight eternal and universal aspirations of the majority of humanity, this approach has raised new problems with its growing acceptance.

For instance, the existence of slavery, feudalism and emperors in Malay, Chinese and Indian history should not be invoked to legitimise the revival of such regressive and archaic institutions today.

Coercion can, of course, beget great cultural achievements as with the human sacrifice invol-

ved in the construction of Borobudur, the Great Wall of China and the Taj Mahal, but surely in this day and age, with the march of human progress, our criteria for achievement — especially in cultural, and hence human matters — must be inspired by universal and eternal aspirations for freedom and justice.

These are difficult times, and the cultural question is an especially difficult one. Yet, we must come to terms with it.

This task would be made much easier if interlocutors are assured of an open, honest and rational forum, with participants genuinely interested in achieving national unity based on freedom and justice.

Extremists of whatever ilk should not be allowed to dictate the terms of the debate by intimidating others from advocating honest conciliatory perspectives for fear of being denounced as traitors (to the race) or what not, in smear campaigns and the like.

Otherwise, discussion on “national culture” will become increasingly uncivilised as we head towards racial barbarism.

** The Star, 14 March 1984*

NATIONAL CULTURE: MELTING POT SOLUTION WON'T WORK

By: Kua Kia Soong

From the latest contributions by Drs. Hashim/Jomo and Maznah/Saravanamuttu, it is clear that they share Dr. Tan Chee Beng's views; namely, the Chinese vernacular school system is not compatible with the national culture because it is segregationist, etc. Please allow me this opportunity to clarify this important issue because it is vital to come to terms with a problem that must be resolved if we are seriously concerned about national integration. Before we consider the arguments, we should try to set the record straight regarding the development of the Chinese vernacular school system since these intellectuals have misinterpreted this history.

The Chinese vernacular school system is today an accomplished fact. When one considers the odds against which it has battled since the 19th century — chiefly, state disapproval — this is all the more remarkable. Dr. Jomo, for example, gives a wrong impression of this history when he says (*The Star*, Jan 2): "... the vernacular school system inherited from the colonial era continued to segregate school children along linguistic and racial lines. . ."

Similarly, Maznah/Saravanamuttu writes: "Colonial neglect as well as policies aimed at resisting the establishment of a national school system for the protection of imperialist interests

laid the basis for cultural and political polarisation."

It is self-evident that the Chinese vernacular school system came about as a result of colonial rule just as every institution today has its history in colonialism. But these intellectuals give a wrong impression that the vernacular school system was "created" by the colonial power for reasons of divide-and-rule, etc. Consequently, Maznah/Saravanamuttu pass their judgement thus:

"Having had such a bad track record, it is doubtful that vernacular schools set up at the present time can guarantee the long-term interests of the nation nor can they meaningfully contribute to the evolution of the national culture."

What is missing in their exposition is the fact that the Chinese vernacular school system has come about only through blood, sweat and tears and sheer political will of the Chinese community in this country. From the early 20th century, the Chinese school system fought against colonial attempts to impose controls on them, such as the Registration of Schools Ordinance in 1920 and again in 1935. This was mainly because throughout colonial rule, the Chinese schools were one of the strongest bastions of anti-colonialism in Malaya, a fact that is seldom or insufficiently accredited outside the Chinese community.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Chinese schools suffered great loss of lives again because of the anti-imperialist current in the Chinese vernacular-educated sector of the Chinese community. This dark fact of the war years is well-known and amply documented; the Japanese occupiers doled out special cruelty to Chinese school teachers and students.

The rendition of colonial history of Maznah/Saravananattu and Hashim/Jomo is one-dimensional and over-simplistic. While it is true that divide-and-rule was the key instrument of colonial rule, these academicians are either unaware or hope to hide an unpleasant fact that does not fit their theory. But it was only up to a certain point in time (the turn of the 1920s) that the Chinese vernacular schools were allowed to develop on their own. The moment the Chinese schools were seen as a threat to colonial rule, the colonial administration began to lobby for a "unified system of education." The colonial intent was, however, not matched by the means and it was not until the Barnes Report of 1950 that there was a call for the abolition of separate vernacular schools and their replacement with a single National-Type school system. Thus, the proposals by our latter day intellectuals for an "integrated school system" in fact were preceded by the former colonial power.

In contrast to the Barnes Report, the Fenn-Wu Report (Dr. Wu was an UN official) at about

the same time, called for the preservation of and government aid to the vernacular school system. It stressed that the Chinese vernacular school system was totally consistent with the building of a Malaysian national consciousness and called for substantial increase in government subsidies to the Chinese schools. The subsequent Education Ordinance of 1951, as we know, only incorporated the recommendations of the Barnes Report. The POL has its origins in this piece of legislation.

The arguments that have been used by all the recent contributors (Drs. Tan, Hashim/Jomo, Maznah/Saravanamuttu) against the existence of the vernacular school system are nothing new. Although their end visions may be different, the arguments are no different from, for example, that of Gerald Templer's when he dismissed the Chinese community's demands for the preservation of the Chinese vernacular school system in 1954 with the arguments that:

- * The 1952 Education Ordinance already provided for the teaching of Chinese in the National Schools;
- * The Chinese schools seem to inculcate a spirit of separatism from the rest of the Malaysian community;
- * There should be a further half-hour of mother-tongue instruction on an "optional basis" (ie. POL); and
- * To argue that Chinese language and cul-

ture will disappear if Chinese schools disappear shows little faith in the inherent durability of the Chinese language and culture.

Firstly, the "optional" mother tongue instruction in the National schools (POL) would do no more than just that and have little to contribute to the preservation and development of any language and culture. The present shambles of the POL classes is part of the political and social reality. It is easy for us in hind-sight to say "we told you so years ago" but this is beside the point. For we do not see that it is difficult for the government to take in the recommendations of intellectuals like Dr. Tan et al. Hasn't Mr. Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore done more than that? But can we say that his primary motive is the concern for Chinese language, education and culture? In fact his seems to be the pragmatic, market-oriented rationality of Maznah/Saravanan-muttu's.

Apart from the educational, humanistic concerns, there is a question of egalitarian objective that is infinitely plain to see but which has somehow escaped the notice of these intellectuals. I am referring to the international support for the view that education is best carried out in the mother tongue.

Knowing a language well is part of understanding a particular culture — that is not only a truism, we hear this constantly from our poli-

tical leaders and intellectuals. Strangely enough, when the Chinese community tries to implement that principle they are told that it doesn't apply to their language and culture. Similarly, the colonial government seemed incapable of grasping this inconsistency until the 1954 Chinese Memorandum put it bluntly to its face: How would the British feel if the teaching of English was confined to an "optional basis" as it is in this country?

For those who are genuinely concerned for the Malay language and culture, I put it to them again: How would they feel if the teaching of Malay was merely put on an "optional basis," as with POL, in Singapore? I have no hesitation in saying (and I have said it already despite the attempt by Dr. Tan to make it look as if I was against the national language and the speaking of Malay among Malaysians) that not only do I think the Malays in Singapore have the right to their own vernacular school system but the State should provide for it there.

Similarly, when such time arrives for a Malay — language University in Singapore, the Malay community there should be entitled to it. I already posed this stark question in my first article which showed my concern for all ethnic cultures. Why Dr. Tan persists in implying that I am against the Chinese speaking Malay perhaps reveals their own cultural level in the debate.

Thus, on all these counts — linguistic expe-

diency, democratic right, the proper basis for inter-communal understanding — the vernacular school system should not only have the right to exist, it has an invaluable role to play in national integration and the evolution of our national culture. By no means does it contradict or undermine the role of Malay as the national language and common language of all Malaysians. The Chinese schools have long adopted Bahasa and English as compulsory subjects and Chinese educationists were among the earliest during the independence struggle to call for the usage and promotion of the national language. Currently, some teachers from the independent Chinese secondary schools are helping the promotion of trilingual literature with the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka.

Last year, the independent Chinese schools took part in a bilingual poetry reading contest at the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka and on April 6, they also took part in the trilingual (Malay, Chinese, Indian) poetry reading evening at the Dewan. Among the independent Chinese schools, national trilingual elocution contests have become institutionalised. All these activities not only show the fallacy that Chinese vernacular schools are segregationist, they provide examples of the myriad possibilities for cross-system co-operation and fraternising. But we have not even begun to think along these lines since these intellectuals do not want to see the existence of vernacular school systems.

People like Dr. Tan have justified their view of the national culture on the grounds that this is necessary to project a distinctly "Malaysian" aspect to outsiders. That is why they maintain that our national culture must be based on Malay culture for reasons of "historical continuity," etc.

Contrary to this view, when one hears the impressions of foreign visitors to this country, it is always that the exotic mixture of ethnic cultures is what gives Malaysian culture their distinctive quality. And attempts to tamper with the natural evolution of these cultures will not only tarnish the aesthetic worth of our unique "Malaysianness", it will result in the very opposite of integration. This is the context in which the Chinese community presented their memorandum.

We frequently hear Malaysians pay lip service to inter-communal understanding but when it comes down to basics, they maintain that in our case, the non-Malays should adjust to Malay language, education and culture (for reasons of "historical continuity," etc). But isn't this what has generally been the case up to now? The non-Malay communities have adjusted to the extent of learning the Malay language, literature and culture. We can read Malay literature in the vernacular. Yet has anyone ever suggested that — if one was really interested in intercommunal understanding — maybe more Malays should

attempt to understand Chinese and Tamil literature in the vernacular?

In terms of the impact on intercommunal understanding, it would not be wrong to say that if this happened even on a modest scale, the effect would be magical. One is aware of course that there are intellectuals in the Malay community such as Usman Awang and Syed Husin Ali who are paragons of this spirit of intercommunal understanding but it would help if this gesture was given official backing.

Now before this is seized upon for another deviation, let us be clear that this is merely an aside, a hopeful musing. For in reality, the Chinese community is only demanding the equal importance of their language, education and culture in the national culture.

Any talk about the national culture having to have some basic components from only one culture will do the opposite of promoting national integration, and any policy to that effect can only be — as it is defined in world opinion — forced assimilation. The diversity of cultural forms is the natural reflection of the different religious, traditions and customs of the various ethnic communities which make up "Malaysia."

The difference between integration and assimilation is often confused. Integration is generally considered desirable by all parties but assimilation that is implemented as a government

policy ("forced assimilation") is not. It is therefore difficult to place the perspective of Maznah / Saravanamuttu that is "... one which stresses the inexorable logic and inevitable need for ultimate assimilation among Malaysia's various ethnic groups. . . ." The reason for their prescription is based on, among other things, the fact that: "The historical reality of Malaysia never did nor can it in the ultimate analysis allow for plural politics".

This is sheer utopianism. It is the classic "melting pot" solution. The trouble with the melting pot solution is that, as Jessie Jackson said of the American experience, "One half of our population is still unmelted; it's stuck to the bottom of the pot!" He was of course referring to the ethnic minorities; blacks, native Americans and Mexican-Americans. In recent years, the melting pot concept has proven to be nothing more than a beautiful dream.

Have these intellectuals spared a thought for the aspirations of the people in the various non-Malay communities in the realm of culture, religion, education and language? It is surprising that for academicians in the humanities, they take for granted that all people should be interested in are issues that affect their economic position or market demands.

It says a lot about democracy when a handful of "well-intentioned" intellectuals will prescribe against the existence of a vernacular

schools system that has been set up and supported by well over 4,000 Chinese guilds and associations representing the vast majority of the four million or more Chinese in this country. They cannot get away with it simply by insisting that in their noble vision, theirs is "the real non-communal approach to the problems of integration".

* *The Star*, 8 May 1984

DE-SCHOOLING THE VERNACULAR OR DE-VERNACULARISING THE SCHOOL?

By: Maznah Mohamad/Johan Saravanamuttu

The national culture debate has engendered further contention centring around the issue of vernacular schooling.

Dr. Kua Kia Soong (*Starmail*, May 8) points out that we consider vernacular schooling to be segregationist and in the ultimate analysis incompatible with the evolution of a national culture.

While he is fundamentally correct, we would like to demonstrate in this letter that our argument is somewhat more complex and extends beyond this basic point. Dr. Kua's own contention is that vernacular schooling is not only compatible with but directly contributes to the "exotic mixture of ethnic cultures" which, to him, is the epitome of "Malaysianness".

Indeed, we are not at all in disagreement with Dr. Kua that the distinctive quality of Malaysian culture is its polyglot character although we are a bit uneasy about his tourist brochure-like definition of it.

Culture should be defined and appreciated not solely in terms of narrow ethnic symbols but seen as the overall embodiment of life and lifestyles in society.

We do not think that Malaysia's "exotic"

blend of ethnic cultures could nor should remain unchanged for all times in the context of an evolving national culture.

Need it be stressed that our human civilisation has shown that cultural excesses which are socially damaging or odious are eventually stamped out through natural social processes or through decisive political actions.

Examples are legion, viz, the Hindu practice of sati or widow sacrifice, the Chinese practice of feet-binding, female infanticide among pre-Islamic Arabs and slavery in Malay society.

Of course, history does record opposite trends wherein social orders attempt to perpetuate perverse social practices usually in the interests of select social classes.

It need not be debated that in the evolution of Malaysian national culture we would hope for the progressive weeding out of those elements of ethnic culture which are universally and commonly held to be detrimental to society.

With respect to national culture vis-a-vis vernacular schooling in Malaysia, it is doubtlessly clear that the ideal and imperative for "Unity in Diversity" in the Malaysian context is beyond question.

However, we do question the wisdom of pursuing such diversity via one particular avenue — vernacular schools.

As Dr. Ho Seng Ong put it some thirty years ago in his book, *Education for Unity in Malaya*:

"The ideal of 'diversity in unity' is certainly worthy one. No one seriously is suggesting the elimination of the Chinese language nor of Chinese culture when one endorses the national or the regional school open to all races.

"In fact it appears unrealistic to talk about the threat to Chinese ways and life, for the Chinese language and culture and civilisation do not depend on the Chinese in Malaya."

"Chinese is too vast and has a long history to credit to need any protection of her own way of life. . . But it is another matter to wish to continue in Malaya an educational system which emphasises our different racial groups."

"Let us have all the cultural diversity we care to preserve — our customs and our social institutions. But as it is desirable that Malaysians be united into one nation. . . it is also essential that all children attend the national school and not the separate communal school."

Dr. Kua's use of historical and statistical records to justify his present day concern should be set straight. His comments on the antecedent reports and recommendations on vernacular schools (Barnes, Fenn-Wu), as well as their performance must be re-examined in order to objectively appreciate the limitations of the schooling system he advocates.

Dr. Kua considered our judgement of vernacular schools colonial record to be too harsh, citing in their favour the strong anti-imperialist currents of Chinese schools which eventually contributed to the anti-colonial movement.

While we do not dispute this, it needs to be mentioned for the benefit of readers that the political currents of Chinese schools historically were, in actual fact, China-centric and in the early period, heavily steeped in Kuomintang politics.

Malaysian Chinese support for Sun Yat Sen's 1911 revolution has been well documented by scholars such as Victor Purcell.

As a measure of this support, for example, Purcell recorded that some \$2.1 billion were sent to China by the Kuomintang branches in Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines as at June 1928.

While such political currents were noble, it distracted the Chinese school movement from building up a Malayan consciousness.

We hasten to add, however, that such China-centric orientations have evaporated among today's subsequent generations of Chinese Malaysians. For them, they know of no other homeland other than Malaysia.

As for the Barnes and Fenn-Wu reports, we

are afraid that Dr. Kua may have misled readers into thinking that the study commission that culminated in the Barnes Report was the design of the "former colonial power" while the Fenn-Wu study was the product of objective investigation from a neutral party.

The members of the committee headed by L.J. Barnes (who was the Director of Social Training at the University of Oxford) comprised nine Malays and five Europeans.

The Fenn-Wu report on the other hand, was the work of two educators, Dr. William Fenn, United States Associate Executive Secretary of the Board of Trustees of higher Learning in Nationalist China, and Dr. Wu Teh-Yao, a United Nations official from Taiwan.

The Barnes Report was a study on Malay education while the Fenn-Wu Report was on Chinese education. Clearly, each had their biases, and it was unlikely then, that an independent and objective evaluation of the educational situation in Malaya would have issued from either report.

This is not to say that the reports were valueless. Aside from ethnic concerns, both were equally forthright in pleading for increased government expenditure on improving schooling facilities, teacher training, learning materials, curriculum content and overall access to proper schooling.

There are aspects of the reports that both politicians and bureaucrats alike have chosen to ignore, and, it would appear, so too Dr. Kua.

More pages in the two reports were actually devoted to outlining the above-mentioned proposals than on the question of language itself. However, it is evident that none of those suggestions for improving both Malay and Chinese vernacular schools were ever seriously considered or implemented.

Twenty years later, in 1973, the Education Ministry came out with the Dropout Study Report which clearly indicated the dismal failure of vernacular schools in producing successful school leavers.

The data showed that it was the English medium schools that produced achievers and were more dependable in guaranteeing social mobility.

Dr. Kua's contention of the superiority of mother tongue instruction in aiding academic performance is easily refuted in the Malaysian case at least. But first let us examine his questionable citation of statistics before we provide the Malaysian evidence from the Dropout Study.

Dr. Kua claimed that some Singapore and Hong Kong studies found that only 10 per cent of Chinese pupils schooled in English finished their secondary education with any competence

in handling the English Language. This may be true, but it would be useful to know of their overall academic performance.

How did they fare in other subjects such as mathematics, science and the arts?

Second, if these statistics refer to Singapore, they must be somewhat antiquated since by most accounts Chinese Singaporeans appear to have little difficulty with English today.

Moreover, the virtual elimination of vernacular education in Singapore today as reflected in its one per cent enrolment level gives the lie to Dr. Kua's hypothetical problem.

This is not to support the high-handed social engineering policies of the Singapore government but merely to point out that academic competence is not merely a function of language proficiency, and language proficiency is never the exclusive claim of native speakers.

Otherwise, could Dr. Kua and ourselves be competently conducting this exchange in English — a non-mother tongue language for us all?

On Dr. Kua's contention of the superiority of mother tongue instruction, its relationship with academic performance is still highly questionable. It does not seem to hold in the Malaysian case.

From the 1973 Dropout Study, it was found

that among youths born in 1956, 29 per cent of Malays, 22.7 per cent of Chinese and 16.9 per cent of Indians who attended Standard Six dropped out of vernacular schools without entering secondary schooling.

In contrast, only six per cent of those children coming out of English medium primary schools failed to enter secondary schools. Among all ethnic groups schooled in the English medium, 2.7 per cent of Malays, 8.7 per cent of Chinese and 7.5 per cent of Indians did not enter secondary schools.

The issue of uneven academic performance among Malaysia's diverse schooling population appears to be less a question of English versus mother tongue education than of one of good schools versus poor schools. In the words of the study:

"English medium schools appear to be the best as compared with vernacular schools not because the English language is a superior language of instruction. It is because English schools command the best of resources. Many historical, demographic and economic factors have contributed to this — tradition, expectation of advantage, urban location, ability of teachers."

The unfortunate fate of our education system until today has been its persistent gravitation towards non-economic solutions for an economic problem.

Statistics are by no means proof of ultimate truth, but it is clear from the Malaysian case that diametrically opposite conclusions from Dr. Kua's can be drawn about the efficiency of mother-tongue education.

We agree that it is Dr. Kua's basic right to support and promote vernacular schools, but in the light of the foregoing statistics, how can he suggest that mother tongue education is the answer to the present poor performance of school-going children?

Just to demonstrate further, the use of Bahasa Malaysia per se cannot account for the present high enrolment of bumiputra students in higher and tertiary education. It is hardly disputable that wide-ranging reforms from the quota system right down to re-allocation of resources have in fact been the more crucial factors.

However, Dr. Kua's advocacy of vernacular schooling goes beyond its dubious role in improving academic performance. As we noted earlier, he has strenuously argued that it contributes to the Malaysian way of life and culture.

When the preservation and promotion of culture can occur through social institutions other than schooling, it is indeed highly significant that such a large number of Chinese Malaysians continue to patronise vernacular schools — 600,000 in primary and 45,000 in secondary schools, as stated by one contributor.

There was actually a drastic decline in Chinese medium schools for about 10 years after Independence (the enrolment rate was only 1.4 per cent compared with 8.3 per cent in English medium schools, three per cent in Malay medium and 4.6 per cent in Tamil medium schools). However, enrolments seem to have progressively climbed again over the recent years.

We feel that what needs to be addressed here is why these figures remain so large in the face of the institution of the national school system in full force since 1962.

Are the reasons perhaps to be found in the limited alternative opportunities and channels for upward mobility among Chinese within the present educational system? If so, let us call a spade and not introduce the red herring of vernacular school as a means to promote Chinese culture.

Proponents of vernacular schooling should be cognizant of the fact that there is ultimately no escaping the logic for a separate development not just culturally but in all its socio-economic manifestations.

In practical terms, for vernacular schooling to survive effectively, it would have to have a complete system of its own to accommodate the various channelling stages; successful primary school leavers need secondary schools, successful secondary school leavers need tertiary institu-

tions and successful graduates need a labour market that is aligned with the vernacular schooling system.

Colonial schooling was a perfect example of separate development with different labour markets catering to different categories of school leavers.

The English medium graduates entered the modern capitalist sector and the professions, the Chinese medium graduates went mainly into the petty business sector and Malay school leavers found their way into the lower rungs of government jobs and into religious teaching.

Next to the English medium schools, Chinese schools were the most successful in terms of their end economic payoffs. There was a large enough urban and petty business sector, thriving on patron-client labour relations and able to absorb these graduates.

Within the context of present day development, it is unlikely that vernacular schools can survive effectively with or without state support and recognition unless a totally separate development continues to be envisaged and instituted. This would represent a return to the previous plural model.

In championing the right of a large number of Chinese by his advocacy of vernacular education, we wonder if Dr. Kua has not forgotten the simi-

lar needs of smaller minorities of Malaysian such as Eurasians, Ceylonese, Sikhs, etc, as well as children of mixed parentage whose plight should be equally severe by his own argument.

Malaysian readers need not be reminded that the many Chinese dialect groups — Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, etc. — for whom Mandarin, the Chinese medium of instruction is not a true mother-tongue, are ironically in the same position as those other minorities.

This merely demonstrates that Dr. Kua's mother-tongue principle cannot be carried out *ad infinitum*.

This leads us to Dr. Kua's calculated taunt about the status of the Malay language in Singapore and his ready support for even a Malay language university there.

Our simple answer as to whether Malays in Singapore should be supported for their right to a vernacular education, is, "No" unless they can show, as Dr. Kua has not done, that vernacular schooling per se can contribute to their overall socio-economic interest.

Clearly, vernacular schools or a university will hardly serve the interests of Singapore Malays as long as the economic structure has no place for the products of such schools and universities.

We recognise that it is imperative to respect the political will of the Chinese community as

reflected in the more than half-a-million enrolment in the Chinese medium primary schools.

Furthermore, the Government, having given recognition to those schools, should extend full and equal opportunities and resources to them to enable the pupils of those schools to compete equally with other schools in their transition to secondary education.

The curriculum of all primary schools should reflect the need for integration at secondary and tertiary levels in contrast to the present curriculum which may be "national" in form but not truly integrative in spirit.

If genuine reforms can be instituted, then the need for a communally biased secondary education will cease to become pressing for all communities.

This process of integrating the curriculum at the primary level should be effected in a non-coercive and non-discriminatory manner, which, unfortunately is not occurring now.

For example, the deliberate oversight in not preparing 3R materials in the vernacular stands out as a measure to limit the role of primary vernacular education.

In such a coercive and discriminatory atmosphere, it is easy to understand the *raison d'être* of independent vernacular schools. Perhaps the

present independent vernacular schools are serving the function of absorbing the victimised schools leavers of an uneven primary school system.

Uneven and discriminatory policies carried forward into secondary education is also reflected in the relegated status of POL and its appalling state of implementation. For that matter, English language teaching is equally depressing despite the obvious need for it.

For example, the move to spend some \$12 million to employ British teachers to coach Malay students in TOEFL exams is totally wasteful and is shocking admission of the failure of the present school system to incorporate it in its present set-up.

In concluding, we urge the proponents of vernacular schooling to consider whether such a schooling can indeed act as an efficacious and beneficial alternative to the much flawed national school system today.

Beside its elitist and hierarchical structure national education has been far from successful in burying atavistic and primordial conceptions.

On the other hand, neither does Dr. Kua nor the will of 4,000 Chinese guilds demonstrate that vernacular schooling provides the solution.

* *The Star*, 28 May 1984.

VERNACULAR SCHOOLS: MYTHS AND MYSTIFICATION

By: Kua Kia Soong

I would like to commend Maznah/Saravannamuttu for at least facing the issue that had been raised in the course of the National Culture debate. However, Maznah/Saravannamuttu's (henceforth referred to as M/S) arguments contain some myths about the Chinese vernacular school system and mystify the issue at hand.

First of all, vernacular schools as a RIGHT of an ethnic community is sapped of any legitimate political worth by those who maintain that they "cannot see how these could be compatible with national integration."

Thus, an ethnic community's democratic right, such as the support for their vernacular schools, has been put into the same class as "those elements of ethnic culture which are universally and commonly held to be detrimental to society" which must be "weeded out" or stamped out through (perhaps) "decisive political actions."

The lengthy quote from Dr. Ho Seng Ong against the existence of the Chinese vernacular schools really leaves me cold since his argument is no less askewed:

"... it appears unrealistic to talk about the threat to Chinese ways and life, for the Chinese language and culture and civilisation do not

depend on the Chinese in Malaya."

This is a serious misunderstanding. The Chinese language and culture we are talking about refer to that of the Chinese Malaysian people (*ma hua wen hua* or *kebudayaan rakyat keturunan Cina*), which is an entirely different concept from the culture of the Chinese from mainland China (*zhong guo wen hua*), just as much as Malay culture in this country is distinct from the Malay culture of Indonesia.

But a more fundamental misconception concerns their attitude to culture itself. When the international community recognises the rights and demands of ethnic minorities in all countries, it is the recognition that their individual cultures are to be enjoyed:

"Culture therefore covers artistic creation. . . as well as the ways in which a society and its members express their feeling for beauty and harmony and their vision of the world."

While this may similarly sound "tourist brochure-like," at least it is intended to convey the idea that culture is not an onerous burden that ethnic minorities carry with them wherever they may be.

As for Dr. Ho Seng Ong's opinion that the Chinese vernacular school system serves to "emphasise our different racial groups", one can only draw his attention to the fact that in interna-

tional opinion, this "commonsensical" argument does not hold water.

The reason why the rights of minorities are safeguarded everywhere by the world community is precisely because the guarantee of their rights is recognised as the proper basis for national integration.

Otherwise one would look foolishly reactionary if we told blacks and immigrants and other ethnic minorities that they should not shout too loud about their rights as they clamber out of the simmering melting pot.

The Chinese vernacular school system merely reflects the existence of different racial groups in our country. Otherwise this reality of our pluralism can be interpreted (ridiculously) to mean that our different ethnic names, temples, churches, etc. all "serve to emphasise our different racial groups" and should not exist.

Cultural diversity and cultural democracy are precisely considered the real basis for national integration in international opinion because acceptance of this principle will better promote intercommunal understanding.

Another myth and mystification is the stock argument that was used even during colonial times for denying many Chinese Malaysians not only their vernacular schools but also citizenship rights; namely, that "(such China-centric orien-

tations) . . . distracted the Chinese school movements from building up a Malayan consciousness."

This is no doubt the reason why M/S had opined in their first article that because of this "poor record," the Chinese vernacular schools did not deserve to exist.

It is quite astounding that anyone should find anything to fault the Chinese Malaysans who expressed passionate feelings towards politics in China during the early 20th century.

Similarly, it was natural and commendable that Indian Malaysans at the time were also caught up with the nationalist movement in India. But let us not forget that the Malay nationalists in this country were just as passionately caught up with the political movements and revolution in thought in Indonesia.

I personally do not find anything to fault this historical and natural development of nationalist consciousness.

Would M/S not admit that if it had not been for the political and historical changes in all these countries outside Malaya, our own subsequent development would have been drastically different?

But if M/S's logic is applied generally, it would be to cast doubt on the Pan-Arab orientation of our Government's foreign relations. Nobody can

fault the Malays in this country for their Arab affiliations because it is a natural response.

If the intention of pointing out the "China-centrism" of the Chinese Malaysians at the time is to cast doubt on their loyalty, the burden of proof surely lies with M/S to show just what they did which was "un-Malayan".

It must be remembered that as late as 1950, only 500,000 Chinese had Malaysian citizenship. This represented merely one-fifth of the total Chinese Malaysian population even though by 1947, the Census of Population revealed that more than three-fifths of the Chinese Malaysian population were local-born.

And what about the thousands of Chinese Malaysians who laid down their lives in the defence of the country against the Japanese? Is it not bordering on callousness to even speculate that they could have been disloyal?

This myth of the "disloyal Chinese Malaysian" was also the creation of the colonial power, but after the reality of the anti-Japanese resistance, the British were forced to swallow this myth in the post-war settlement. As history unfurled however, the just demand for equal citizenship and civil rights was not realised.

If M/S would care to examine the political platforms of the various parties in Malaya during the post-war period, they would find that many

Chinese-based political parties were among the earliest to demand Independence.

When one studies the 1955 elections in Malaya, for example, one can plainly see that the Alliance at the time had to pay ample heed to the aspirations of the Chinese community since they were recognised as a force to be reckoned with by the colonial power.

Consequently, the Alliance platform at the election, called "Menuju Ke arah Kemerdekaan," is almost unrecognisable today. It pledged:

"To allow vernacular schools their normal expansion, that is, to encourage rather than destroy the schools, languages, or cultures of the people living in this country."

Coming to the Barnes and Fenn-Wu Reports, M/S are of the opinion that the Barnes Report has virtues that must be extolled (increased government expenditure, facilities, curriculum reforms, etc.) while politicians and bureaucrats — including me — have chosen to focus on the ethnic concerns.

But let us look at the two reports in a proper perspective: Drs. Fenn and Wu were invited to study the Chinese vernacular school system. In this instance, it made sense that they might at least understand the problems of the Chinese vernacular schools since some others who are not Chinese-vernacular-educated would certainly

not be suitable. The fact that they belonged to bodies outside the country (the UN and the US) is not unimportant for the sake of objectivity.

On the other hand, as M/S have divulged, the Barnes committee comprised of nine Malays and five Europeans. Now, if the committee had been set up to look into all the education systems in this country, no doubt the Chinese community would have cried foul since it did not have a single Chinese or Indian.

But no, the non-Malay communities did not protest about the ethnic composition of the Barnes committee. This was simply because the committee had been set up for the expressed purpose of enquiring into "the adequacy or otherwise of the educational facilities available for Malays." It made sense that Malays should be amply represented in it.

The subsequent howls of protest from the Chinese community upon the publication of the Barnes Report in 1951 was over the fact that the Barnes committee had gone beyond its terms of reference in proposing the abolition of the vernacular schools.

Imagine M/S, that you were in the Chinese vernacular school system at the time, would you then be extolling all the other wonderful "non-ethnic" proposals of the Barnes Report when it had just signed the death warrant of your education system?

My advocacy of mother-tongue instruction as an egalitarian method of allowing educational opportunity must be read together with its other justifications, that is, as the cultural aspiration of an ethnic people, and their democratic right to do so.

I have backed up my contention that mother-tongue is the most effective method of education from international expert opinion based on evidence from all over the world.

The first major international support for the idea was at the Unesco meeting of specialists in 1951. This meeting endorsed this view and recommended that "pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother-tongue," and that, "the use of the mother-tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible".

The opinion was subsequently re-echoed time and time again by other meetings of experts. Their sober conclusion was that:

"If education through the school system is not designed simply to replenish the ranks of the educated elite, it is obvious that something will have to be done for the large majority who have no opportunity of going to schools, who drop out of the school system before they have had a chance to master the magic second language. This is why education in the mother-tongue cannot be neglected — for the majority of the popu-

lation, it will be the only passport to literacy.

And just what does the 1973 Dropout Study Report cited by M/S show? They claim that it "clearly indicated the dismal failure of vernacular schools in producing successful school-leavers", and that "it was the English medium schools that produced achievers and were more dependable in guaranteeing social mobility."

I take it that M/S equate "successful school-leavers" with the "guarantee of social mobility." To this, the conclusion from the Unesco meeting that I have just quoted is answer enough.

No, I am certainly not measuring "successful school-leavers" in the way that Mr. Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore argues that the Chinese-medium schools have met their fate because of their "market-value".

All that can be said is that in a society that relies almost completely upon Western investment for its development, and a political system that provides all the support for serving foreign investors, I am hardly surprised that English-medium schools in Singapore are more dependable for guaranteeing social mobility.

But this is the crucial issue. The vernacular schools have the right to exist in any society if it is the demand and aspiration of the ethnic people in that society.

In the case of Singapore, if it is true that no

form of coercion, direct or indirect, was used to deter enrolment in Chinese schools, then the issue does not arise. But let us not forget that Chinese schools had never been given the chance to compete on equal grounds, all part of the social engineering that M/S also frown upon.

Therefore, the attempt to ridicule the demand for Chinese vernacular school system by the Chinese community in this country by saying, "What about the Ceylonese, Sikhs, Eurasians, etc", is unnecessary because its premise is based upon whether it is a demand of any of these communities.

But why shouldn't the Sikhs, the Ceylonese et al be entitled to their vernacular schools if they demand it?

As for Eurasians, it depends on whether their cultures are distinct or merely multilingual.

I have brought up the question of the Malay community in Singapore for comparison because they are no small minority and any democratically-minded person would see no reason why they should not be entitled to their vernacular school system or even a university if they should ask for it.

But to this question, M/S's position is an unequivocal "No, unless they can show, as Dr. Kua has not done, that vernacular schooling per se can contribute to their overall socio-economic interest."

I am really surprised that M/S take the status quo in Singapore for granted when they qualify their stand thus: ". . . as long as the economic structure has no place for the products of schools and universities. . ."

Is there a necessary relation between the economic system and the medium of instruction? I suppose they have been consistent vis-a-vis their stand on the vernacular school system in this country, which nobody could fail to see was my motive for the analogy. But the pragmatist argument that they put forward can be quickly dismissed when one considers the case of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and China, all of whose economic destinies have not depended upon the "market value" of an English-medium education system.

In fact, any society that is genuinely interested in pursuing an independent economic course would sneeze at such pragmatist arguments.

When I cited studies done in Singapore and Hong Kong which showed that only about 10 per cent of Chinese pupils schooled in English finished their secondary education with any competence in handling the English language, I did not mean that only 10 per cent can speak English.

Clearly almost all Singaporeans can speak some English, just as almost all Malaysians can speak some Malay. But only a top stratum end

up conversant and imbued with the culture of the second language.

It is also common knowledge that this top stratum live in an environment in which the English language is more commonly used than is the case for the majority of the population.

I was therefore only trying to show two things: that from an egalitarian point of view, those who can really handle the English language are only a minority; that the vast majority of these "non-achievers" would perform better if their linguistic environment was in the mother-tongue.

To come back to the 1973 Dropout Study. According to M/S, it disproves "(my) contention of the superiority of mother-tongue instruction, its relationship with academic performance is still highly questionable".

As soon as they had said that, they seemed to absolve me by admitting that it is more a question of the better-off English schools than inferior mother-tongue instruction.

But there is a patently simple reason for the higher drop out rate in vernacular schools compared to English schools that I am surprised M/S did not even consider, namely, children who go to vernacular schools tend to be from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

Desperate economic conditions both account

for the decision to drop out and affect adversely their academic performance.

The old argument that we heard during the Nanyang and Merdeka University controversies makes another gallant entry — that the labour market does not exist for graduates from the vernacular school system.

This economistic slant to the question of the support for the vernacular schools by the Chinese community is combined with a cynical view of the contribution it could make to Chinese Malaysian culture as well as to the National Culture by M/S:

“Are the reasons perhaps to be found in the limited alternative opportunities and channels for upward mobility among Chinese within the present education-system? If so, let us call a spade a spade and not introduce the red herring of vernacular schools as a means to promote Chinese culture.”

First of all, even if this cynical view was true, the crucial issue is still whether or not the Chinese community has the democratic right to their vernacular schools.

The facts are, however, as the students who continued to enrol at Nanyang University showed, market rationality is not the only consideration among pupils and parents in the vernacular schools system.

They enrolled at Nanyang in full awareness that the market was tilted in favour of English graduates. They did this because they cared about the development of their children in the sphere of culture and the acquisition of knowledge.

Ultimately, we can never use numbers to be the arbiter of truth since even when enrolment in the Chinese vernacular schools is on the upswing (like now), people like M/S give a cynical interpretation. When enrolment is down to one per cent, it is seized upon as proof against the vernacular schools.

As I pointed out, we are only concerned with those who choose to study in the vernacular school system. Are we then to conclude that since the cynical interpretation does not hold water, Chinese school pupils must either be irrational, brainwashed, or just plain chauvinistic?

I would like to conclude by reminding M/S and others who pursue this line of argument that in all the international conventions on cultural policies, the rights of minorities and the like, these cynical considerations are nowhere to be found in the agenda.

The fundamental problem is M/S do not hide their disapproval of cultural pluralism since this to them implies a return to the colonial set-up. They really need to stretch their imagination a little if they want to be in the mainstream of

international opinion on democratic rights and cultural policies.

Here is just a snippet from the 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies:

"The assertion of cultural identity therefore contributes to the liberation of people. Conversely, any form of domination constitutes a denial or an impairment of that identity. . . The universal cannot be postulated in the abstract by any single culture: it emerges from the experience of all the world's people as each affirms its own identity. Cultural identity and cultural diversity are inseparable".

It is inverted logic when the support for this democratic principle is placed on par with "atavistic and primordial conceptions" by M/S. In the end, M/S will have to face an unpleasant fact. Their disapproval of pluralism and belief that assimilation must prevail stands opposed to the wish of the Chinese (and Indian) community in this country.

How do they envisage this problem should be solved — by recognising that these communities have the democratic right to their vernacular schools and cultures, or by "decisive political actions" that we saw in the case of Merdeka University? Much as M/S and the other contributors would hope for one, there is no "middle way".

* *TheStar*, 11 June 1984

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED SCHOOL SYSTEM

By: Jomo K.S.

On Jan. 2, *The Star* published a report of a speech made by one of us which contained some small but misleading and confusing inaccuracies. On March 14, *The Star* published our (invited) article, "Whither National Culture in Malaysia?", without change, for which we are appreciative.

On March 20, *The Star* published an article by Dr. Kua Kia Soong entitled "National Culture: A just demand or chauvinism?" which misrepresented a view attributed to one of us.

The letter of clarification in response to this was published in *The Star* (May 7) with significant editorial and typographical changes which distorted the spirit of the letter, rendering it petty and personal.

On May 8, *The Star* published an article by Dr. Kua entitled "National Culture: Melting pot solution won't work" which again misrepresented our position on various issues.

Before we go on to set the record straight once again, we would like to emphasise that there are serious limitations involved in engaging in public polemics over very important and sensitive issues in our restricted media, where a full airing of views and arguments is not possible, and apparent attempts to do so could actually

serve other ends. Nevertheless, in so far as we have been involved, we will respond, as in this case.

In his latest letter (May 8), Dr. Kua claims that by saying that "the vernacular school system inherited from the colonial era continued to segregate school-children along linguistic and racial lines", one gives "a wrong impression that the vernacular school system was 'created' by the colonial power for reasons of divide-and-rule, etc."

Surely, Dr. Kua can distinguish between the historical fact described in our statement and the casual relationship in the impression wrongly attributed by him to us.

In fact, in other writings (including a paper delivered at the CAP conference in November last year), we discussed the reasons for the growth of Chinese vernacular schooling, which distinguished it from other schooling systems which emerged during the colonial period.

For example, the racist persecution of the Chinese community during the Japanese Occupation can be attributed to a variety of factors — including the strong Chinese support for the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army, the support of overseas Chinese communities for anti-Japanese struggles after the Japanese invasion of China, Japanese efforts to sponsor Indonesian and Indian struggles against the European colo-

nial powers — and not simply to one factor (anti-imperialism among the Chinese-educated), as Dr. Kua suggests.

If our rendition of colonial history is “one-dimensional and over simplistic,” as Dr. Kua alleges, this has to be demonstrated, and not simply asserted; otherwise, one cannot escape the conclusion that it is Dr. Kua’s misrepresentations of our views which are really “one-dimensional and over-simplistic”.

Dr. Kua stoops to his lowest when he tries to identify our advocacy of a more egalitarian and integrated educational system (in far more equitable and democratic circumstances) with proposals made by colonialists.

It would not be difficult to resort to similar tactics to discredit Dr. Kua’s views, for instance, by showing the similarity of his position to that of apartheid advocates in South Africa, Zionist apologists, or segregationists in the US (eg. the ideology of “separate but equal”), but we trust that readers will be able to evaluate the merit — or otherwise — of the different positions articulated without being influenced by such rhetorical devices.

As for the view that education is best carried out in the mother tongue, the views are much more varied than Dr. Kua cares to admit.

Advocacy of his perspective on this basis is

problematic since it raises the question of which is the real mother tongue of a Chinese child in Malaysia since most Chinese in Malaysia are descendants of emigrants from various provinces in southern China, whose first dialect is not Mandarin, while Hong Kong offers an example of a Chinese schooling system not based on Mandarin.

Also, there is a great deal of evidence of the difficulty of learning languages like Chinese, which lack alphabets. This does not, of course, mean that Chinese should not be taught or learnt, but only that this line of reasoning has serious problems.

Dr. Kua also alleges that he and his colleagues "have not even begun to think (of the myriad possibilities for cross-system co-operation and fraternising) since (we) do not want to see the existence of vernacular school systems", after citing several recent examples of what are presumably instances of such co-operation and fraternising.

First, as was reiterated in the letter of May 7, while we do believe that "it is not desirable for schoolchildren to be segregated along either ethnic or class lines . . . as long as the official schooling system does not provide adequate facilities for minorities to learn their own languages (which it easily can), they have little choice but to consolidate existing vernacular facilities. Hence, vernacular schools should be defended

for what they represent viz-a-viz the status quo, rather than as a desirable end in itself."

Also, at the risk of being immodest, if Dr. Kua had checked with those involved, he would have found that we in INSAN (the Institute for Social Analysis) have been both organisationally and personally involved — albeit modestly — in most of the activities he cites so approvingly.

Surely, Dr. Kua can find a better excuse for not having "even begun to think (of the myriad possibilities for cross-system co-operation and fraternising)", rather than to blame it on a small bunch of people, whom he regrets as inconsequential and irrelevant in any case.

There is little doubt in our minds that the contribution of many (teachers and pupils) in the Chinese schools to the anti-colonial (and other) struggles has indeed been great, and regretably much ignored — as Dr. Kua correctly points out — outside the Chinese community.

Nevertheless we should never treat the Chinese community or even the Chinese-educated in a homogeneous monolithic fashion, as Huang Chih Lien and Tien Chu Kang have so eloquently reminded us in their classic works on the Chinese community in Malaya and Sarawak.

We should also recognise that linguistic, cultural, occupational and class differences have stood in the way of various attempts to forge a

progressive and truly national popular movement in this country since early attempts in the forties.

This has enabled various colonial and post-colonial elites to bargain for privileges for themselves, often ostensibly on behalf of the ethnic groups they purport to represent.

* *The Star*, 15 June 1984.

ON RIGHTS, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

By: C.J. Chiu

My admiration for Dr. Kua Kia Soong's polemical skills increases with every letter he writes to *The Star* on the debate on language, education and cultural policy.

Unfortunately, polemicists often engage in sophistry and the marshalling of such terms as "democracy" and "rights" on their side.

That Dr. Kua has succeeded in getting away with sophistry, especially after the latest round of letters testifies to his considerable debating skills.

It is all the more important, therefore, to examine this sophistry so that we might have a dispassionate discussion of the issue in question — the appropriate educational and cultural policy in the specific historical, political and geographical circumstances of this country — in which appeals to abstract principles all too often generate more heat than light.

I recall that in the beginning Dr. Kua appealed to certain positions adopted at a Unesco conference, namely, the absolute equality of and respect for all cultures, as a justification for his posture.

To the extent that one of its intentions is to forbid the use of force in the settling of cultural conflicts, this position is beyond reproach.

Additionally, insofar as the intention is to prevent the extinction of one people or their culture by another on the ground of the alleged cultural superiority of the latter, this position must receive the support of all right thinking people.

However, let us consider how much use this position really is as a basis for cultural policy in any given multi-ethnic situation.

It is well-known that the introduction of formal education or of an effective system of modern medicine has wreaked havoc with, say, the cultures of the Orang Asli of this country for instance, by disrupting their prior patterns of social organisation and earlier demographic patterns.

Absolute respect for Orang Asli cultures, taken to the logical conclusion, would compel us not to introduce formal education or indeed other elements of "modern civilisation". Would Dr. Kua consider this to be proper?

Likewise, there are cultures in which female infanticide is still practised. Does it follow that one is to do nothing in the face of such a barbaric custom?

We are also familiar with multi-cultural situations in which one culture believes it possesses certain god-given truths to which all other cultures must subject themselves.

How would one oppose in a principled way that form of cultural arrogance and yet maintain absolute respect for all cultures, including that one which falsely claims superiority for itself?

Dr. Kua has also wagged an accusing finger at "progressive intelligentsia" for their "prescriptive mentality" or, in his words, "knowing what is best for the masses". He implies by this that the "masses" know best and the "progressive intelligentsia" should hearken to that.

This is bunkum, and Dr. Kua knows it.

For instance, the Chinese "masses" in China continue to harbour a predilection for male offspring. Were Dr. Kua to advocate a more enlightened attitude regarding the gender of off spring, would he not then be guilty of "knowing what is best for the masses"?

In the case of independent Chinese schools, Dr. Kua backs up his views by referring to the support given by "over 4,000 Chinese guilds and associations representing the vast majority of the . . . Chinese in this country".

Would he change his views if only 50 guilds and associations supported vernacular education? Does truth depend on numbers?

Or consider that Umno's policies are supported by the majority of Malays. But Dr. Kua would be right to argue that this in no way means those policies are correct.

The point is if prescription is a sin, Dr. Kua is as guilty of it as those he accuses. In fact, as Dr. Kua would well understand, if it is arrogant to prescribe to the "masses", it is opportunistic to pander to them.

A corresponding point is that in any genuine democracy majority views would hold sway but minority dissent would be stringently guaranteed, and not abused as "undemocratic".

The word "rights" has been thrown around a good deal by Dr. Kua. Let me suggest that possession of "rights" does not necessitate its fulfilment under any and all circumstances.

Specifically, there can be situations in which it may be legitimate and prudent for "rights" not to be exercised indiscriminately, and in such situations it would be proper to try and persuade people of the same.

For instance, one has the "right" to report the truth.

However, in our country, if one knows of a potentially explosive incident, for example, some drunk Chinese Malaysians throwing pork into the grounds of a mosque, it would surely be right for this "right" not to be exercised.

Similarly, it is undeniable that women have the "right" to control their fertility — as Dr. Kua accurately stated in a separate letter to *The Star*. Yet, there may be situations in which this

"right" has to be overridden however distasteful that might be to all "democratic" souls.

A case in point is, again, China and its current policy of one child families, in which stern, even draconian, measures are being undertaken to ensure as far as possible the success of this policy.

This is extremely distasteful and has reportedly led to untoward results such as an increase in female infanticide.

But can that country realistically afford a population increase of some 15 million annually, which would be the case without an attempt at drastically reducing the masses' fertility? Which person cannot sympathise with the present Chinese authorities' predicament?

Yet it is precisely a predicament which no facile championing of women's rights can offer a way out.

Dr. Kua's support for the "right" of Malay Singaporeans to their own vernacular schools, even a university is disingenuous, to say the least.

It is obvious that the exercise of such a "right" in the current context of Singapore (and that is the relevant context, not some altered Singapore) would be one sure means of further condemning the Singapore Malay population to backwardness and disadvantage vis-a-vis the dominant Chinese majority.

Lest Dr. Kua accuses me of having no respect for "rights", I hasten to state categorically that my meaning is this: "rights" acquire their content only in specific and concrete socio-historical circumstances.

Further, "rights" can be exercised or not exercised, or, in extremely special circumstances, be suspended, even overridden, as in war-time.

Moreover, if "rights" are exercised, there is in many instances no one absolutely correct way of doing so. In brief, we have choices as to how we exercise our "rights". No one who believes in human freedom to choose can disagree with this and I take it Dr. Kua includes himself among us.

Consider the existence of Chinese independent schools in this country. It is surely undeniable that their strength has as much, if not more, to do with the still considerable economic clout of the Chinese as with their "rights" to such schools.

The contrast to this is the virtual non-existence of equivalent Tamil schools. What value then the rights of Tamil-speaking Indians?

I am also surprised that someone of Dr. Kua's theoretical persuasion should have given the interpretation of Malayan and Malaysian history that he did.

Surely, history is not only the result of acts of

commission but also of omission, of unintended consequences. And the educational separatism that existed in British Malaya was as much a result of omission as of commission.

Ironically, for Dr. Kua to begin his history from the 1920s is a gross act of omission — of all that happened before which resulted in the situation of the 20s.

Further, Dr. Kua would claim for the Chinese schools the bulk of the credit for this country's anti-colonial movement prior to the Japanese occupation.

He says that "throughout colonial rule, the Chinese schools were one of the strongest bastions of anti-colonialism in Malaya, a fact that is seldom or insufficiently accredited outside the Chinese community". This is surely not entirely honest.

It is well-known that the Chinese political movement of the 20s and 30s in Malaya often concerned themselves more with events in China than in Malaya.

For instance, progressive historians (though not of course, Dr. Kua) could plausibly argue that the boycott of Japanese goods by the Chinese in Malaya in the late 20s actually strengthened British colonialism in this country and hurt the day-to-day material interests of Malaysians.

Cheap Japanese textiles had been flooding into Malaya so much so that they commanded the lion's share of the Malayan market.

The anti-Japanese boycott, coupled with the import restrictions imposed by the British, reversed that situation. (This is quite apart from whether the boycott served to educate the Chinese to their economic and political strength and was a natural expression of solidarity between an emigrant people and their country of origin.)

As for the brutal treatment meted out by the Japanese to Chinese school teachers and students in Malaya, it is again disingenuous for Dr. Kua to attribute this simplistically to the "anti-imperialist current in the Chinese vernacular educated sector of the Chinese community".

The immediate reason had to do with the activities of that sector in support of China's resistance to Japanese imperial designs on China rather than mainly with their anti-British views.

In other words, the anti-imperialist sentiments of Chinese-educated Malaysians were complex in constitution and consequence — as was true also of the sentiments of the Malays against foreign domination.

As we know, anti-British Malay youths were, at first, actively courted by the Japanese and they responded positively, if naively.

If indeed the version of colonial history by Dr. Kua's detractors is "one-dimensional and over-simplistic" as he claims, this would surely be a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Dr. Kua being no less unaware or hoping to hide an unpleasant fact that does not fit (his) theory.

Dr. Kua also subscribes to the view that "education is best carried out in the mother tongue". That view may or may not be true — I leave it to others to decide.

Nonetheless, two comments have to be made:

- 1) Generations of Malaysians and Malaysians were educated in English and don't seem any the worse for it — Dr. Kua himself being a case in point.
- 2) Even if it were true that a child is best educated in its mother tongue, the system of vernacular schools this seems to imply need not be the best in terms of promoting healthy inter-racial relationships among our children.

It is, in other words, an open question to be considered with an open mind, taking into account the overall socio-historical context, not just the educational one. But, of course, Dr. Kua has already made up his mind on this.

As to whether knowing a language well is a necessary part of understanding a culture, that

too is not the truism which Dr. Kua makes it out to be.

If one were to try and understand the culture of, say, a non-literate people, then, yes, knowledge of the language would be indispensable.

On the other hand, this isn't necessarily the case with literate cultures. To be sure, one cannot be a scholar of Russian or French culture without a thorough knowledge of those languages, in both their contemporary and historical forms.

However, a sufficient number of translations exist in, say, English, so that it's possible for a person knowing only English to come to an understanding of the literary culture of turn-of-the-century Russia or pre-Revolutionary France.

To the extent that the literary culture (and by this I mean the whole range of literary output) of a particular period captures the ethos of that period, it becomes possible to understand the culture of that period.

This leads us to the thorny question: What is culture?

Unfortunately, neither Dr. Kua nor those he castigates discussed this. But without some agreement as to the meaning of the term "culture", what hope can there be for any agreement on cultural policy?

Without going into an academic discussion of the term, I take it to mean some combination of the following:

- 1) broadly, a people's way of life as expressed in their social relationships and their material artefacts;
- 2) an ordered set of values reflective of their orientation to the world, both material and spiritual;
- 3) the artistic output of a people – including works of art, music, literature, architecture – broadly speaking, taste, or as it is sometimes called, "high" culture.

All these elements change, more or less rapidly, over time. What then do we mean when we speak of Malay culture or Chinese culture? Is there something essential that persists through all changes so that one can point to it and identify it as quintessentially Malay or Chinese?

To be more precise, what is it that the Chinese culture of today shares with the Chinese culture of Chin Shih Huang Ti's time such that both can be said to be Chinese culture?

Or are we falling victim to a nominalistic trap, that is, because both sets of people are called Chinese, occupying a certain space called China, then they must share a culture called Chinese culture when, in reality, they share very little? The trap is to mistake the name for the reality:

a common name, but not necessarily a common reality.

Indeed, the language itself has changed so much that an ordinary educated Chinese of today would not be able to read the literature of the time, just as an ordinary educated English person of today would not be able to read Chaucer. . . easily.

The point of this too-pedantic digression is that the commonality perhaps lies in a certain ethos which, despite changes, remains a recognisably distinct one. And if that is so, language may not even be an important part of culture.

Consider the fact that the Brooklyn Jews of today's New York speak English, not Yiddish. Yet they maintain certain practices and possess a certain ethos which are very much related to those which they brought with them from Europe at the turn of the century when they migrated to the US.

Unfortunately, they all too often tend to mistake that ethos which they brought with them as quintessentially Jewish, rather than a certain way of being Jewish that was determined by the circumstances of turn-of-century Europe. This form of thinking is called reification or fetishism, as Dr. Kua would know.

Similarly, Polish Americans in New York speak English and participate in mainstream

White Anglo-Saxon Protestant-based American culture. Yet they retain a distinct self-identification.

I am not suggesting that the "melting pot" works, and here I quite agree with Dr. Kua. However, it should be pointed out that the "melting pot" theory in the US, where it originated, had more to do with economics than culture: that a meritocracy based on freedom of opportunity would ensure all a place in the (American) sun. The failure of that system is what is being referred to by Jesse Jackson, whom Dr. Kua quotes.

Based on the foregoing, I would have been happy to have accepted the AMCJA-PUTERA proposal in 1947/48 for one nationality (bangsa) to be called "Melayu" and one language (bahasa) which was to be Malay.

We are now a long way from those days and a similar proposal now for a "satu bangsa, satu bahasa" policy would not be acceptable to any side. Why?

It is because while the Malays today generally accept a "satu bahasa" but not a "satu bangsa" policy, Chinese Malaysians in general accept the "satu bangsa, satu bahasa" slogan — but take it to mean that since there are "tiga bangsa" there should be "tiga bahasa".

This leads us to the question of the national or common language.

Dr. Kua is less than honest when he portrays the Chinese as having accepted the national/common language willingly, quote: "Chinese educationist were among the earliest during the independence struggle to call for the usage and promotion of the national language". Has he so easily forgotten the bitter history of the 50s and 60s on this matter?

If Chinese (and other non-Malays) now accept the position of Bahasa Malaysia, that acceptance owes not a little to government action in the post - 1969 period. That is sad but true, whether or not Dr. Kua wishes to recognise the fact.

There are, however, certain connotations implied by acceptance of a national language - of any national language - the most important of which is that other languages cannot expect to be co-equal with it (although this is not the same as implying or sanctioning the suppression of other languages).

If these connotations are not accepted - and I am not clear that Dr. Kua does accept them - we would have a "national language" as in Singapore's case: in name but not in reality.

An acceptance of the national language and all that it entails need not be detrimental to inter-communal understanding provided certain conditions are met. In the cultural sphere, an absolute minimum would be cultural (including religious) tolerance and an extensive programme

of translation of the full range of Chinese and Tamil literary works into Bahasa Malaysia.

Yes, I believe Malay Malaysians should acquaint themselves with Chinese and Tamil literature, as Dr. Kua so strongly insists, but there is no absolute necessity that this be in the vernacular.

Similarly, Chinese Malaysians should acquaint themselves with Malay literature and culture (I am not as sanguine as Dr. Kua as to the degree of acquaintance that Chinese Malaysian have) — at least to the point of getting Malay names correct.

Dr. Nasir Hashim should be addressed as Dr. Nasir, not Dr. Hashim, as Dr. Kua dubs him. Maznah Mohamed is a woman, and her name is Maznah not Mohamed, which is her father's name. Thankfully, most Chinese Malaysians do know this elementary fact. Dr. Soong — sorry, I mean Dr. Kua — should take note.

* *The Star*, 2 June 1984.

LET'S WORK TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL

By: A. Kamil

Congratulations are in order for *The Star* for having performed an important public service in carrying the extended discussion on culture and education.

The participants — Dr. Kua Kia Soong, Dr. Tan Chee Beng, Maznah Mohammed and J. Saravanamuttu, Drs. Mohamed Nasir Hashim and K.S. Jomo, and C.J. Chiu — are also to be congratulated for having provided much illumination.

That they all hold strong views and feelings regarding their respective positions is only to be expected. That they have some fundamental differences is also obvious.

What might not be so obvious is that they also share certain fundamental principles which have unfortunately been obscured in the heat of debate.

While they strongly disagree over the long-term role of vernacular education in our country, it is clear each and every one of them upholds the principle that the only acceptable and just way forward in the development of a national culture lies in cultural tolerance, mutual cultural interaction and genuine respect for minority rights.

As Maznah Mohammed and J. Saravanamuttu

put it, "the ideal and imperative for "Unity in Diversity" in the Malaysian context is beyond question".

In a similar spirit, Dr. Kua states: "Integration is generally considered desirable by all parties but assimilation that is implemented as a government policy (forced assimilation) is not."

Similarly, there is agreement that the national common language should be enriched and developed and its use made more widespread.

And even though C.J. Chiu and Dr. Kua, for example, sharply differ over the role of minority languages, neither they nor the others in the debate deny that there is indeed an enduring role for these languages and dialects -- of which there are literally dozens in this country.

All welcome the recent moves on the part of the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka to begin translating literature in minority languages into the national language, moves which accord such literature their rightful place in our national heritage. As Dr. Kua has stated in is connection: "Currently, some teachers from the independent Chinese secondary schools are helping in the promotion of trilingual literature with the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka."

However, it needs pointing out at this juncture that largely absent from this debate was one party with the power to influence or force its

eventual outcome. I mean, of course, the Government. No government spokesman has said, or dared to say a word.

Over the years, various governments have effectively dictated choices to minorities concerned about their cultural rights by consistently making a mockery of the implicit guarantees in the Constitution and the National Education Act.

Many otherwise open-minded non-Malays have therefore been faced with little choice but to render some degree of support for education in their own mother tongue.

(This is not to deny that there are chauvinists among such supporters, though, of course, no one ethnic community has a monopoly on chauvinism.)

By the tone of its spokesmen's pronouncements on national culture, not to mention the chosen methods of implementation, the Government has furthered the cause of segregation rather than integration.

Even with the entry of Encik Anwar Ibrahim — on whose shoulders so many hopes were placed by some quarters at one time — into the Barisan Nasional Government, there has been no noticeable change.

There is no point in talking of national culture if the conditions for its development and growth

are absent. This is because culture, unlike laws, cannot be legislated into existence. Nor can it be imposed from above. Is it not obvious that a national culture can only develop out of a popular desire for one?

Yet, in so far as it possesses the power to do so, it is up to the Government to start promoting that desire and create the conditions in which real choices can be made and cultural interaction is fostered in an environment of tolerance, understanding, knowledge and mutual respect.

By contrast, there can be little cultural interaction or progress towards national integration in the present state of acrimony and mutual distrust.

That is one reason why a sustained and genuine commitment to the teaching of Pupils' Own Languages in the national schools is a pre-requisite.

Additionally, the teaching and learning of the cultural and historical traditions of the various ethnic groups in this country is an increasingly urgent necessity and must be part and parcel of the national school curriculum.

Only thus could the national school system hope to serve the needs and aspirations of all, and be seen to be doing so -- no unimportant matter in a multi-ethnic society.

It is unrealistic and unacceptable to ask minority communities to integrate while separatism and elitism increasingly become the order of the day in the majority community.

But perhaps all this is wishful thinking. Perhaps it is naive to expect the present Barisan Nasional politicians to remove their blinkers and put principles – and genuine national interests – before careers. Perhaps the chauvinists in the Chinese community are right after all.

Nevertheless it might not be too much to ask the various parties in the thoughtful debate in your columns to act on their areas of agreement and campaign vigorously for the realisation of a noble objective, namely, a single school system which is based upon a common language but yet is able to serve the different and varied needs and aspirations of all ethnic groups.

To end this letter, and perhaps this debate, let me suggest to your readers that Malays and Chinese, Indians and other minorities could feel comfortable and would perceive their legitimate ethnic interests as securely protected in such a reformed national school system.

** The Star, 16 June 1984.*

EXERCISING THE RIGHT TO VERNACULAR EDUCATION

By: Ang Hiok Gai

The interesting discussion on the issue of culture and vernacular school system has now been brought to sense — no more emotional and personal attacks. The relevant issues on rights to vernacular education, language and culture have surfaced once again.

C.J. Chiu's letter, "On rights, culture and education" (*Starmail*, June 2), though full of arguments, is not free from sophistry which Chiu attributes to Dr. Kua Kia Soong.

For the sake of meaningful discussion, it is necessary to state clearly here that the central issue of the discussion debate hinges on the democratic right of the Chinese community to vernacular education and the exercise of this right.

To confuse the exercise of this right, Chiu seems to suggest the suppression of rights is, in special circumstances, the necessary and rightful way out. Chiu elaborates on this by referring to:

" China and its current policy of one-child families, in which stern, even draconian, measures are being undertaken to ensure as far as possible the success of this policy. . . Which person cannot sympathise with the present Chinese authorities' predicament?"

What makes Chiu think that the women are not able to decide for themselves how many children they want? In the first place, are they given the right to decide for themselves? In many a case, it is the authorities who decide what they consider "best" for the people and ignore their wishes.

I am of the opinion that women, just as much as men, are able and sensible enough to decide the best for themselves and their community. Just like the right of the Chinese community to choose the vernacular school system of themselves, the women's right of choice should be respected.

Is it not Chiu's own presumption, like the elite everywhere, that the masses are backward and know not what is good for them?

In exercising this right, the Chinese community by no means deprives others of their rights to (vernacular) education. Further, the Chinese community is not as backward as to retain the teaching of the ancient barbaric aspects of Chinese culture which the masses today have rejected.

Feed-binding, etc, were products of the old Chinese elite, not the masses. Applying the same principle to the other communities, like the Malaysian Indians, why should they not have a choice to exercise their right to vernacular education? In any event, they should take it upon

themselves to choose or not to choose to exercise this right. In the event that they choose to exercise this right, their decision should be respected.

It is important to understand that a "right" ceases to be a right when it impinges on other's rights as Chiu has correctly stated, that "rights" are not to be exercised indiscriminately. However, Chiu has not raised the central issue of the discussion — a community's right to vernacular education. Chiu's omission makes me wonder if Chiu recognises it as a right.

Secondly, while discussing rights, Chiu missed out a very important principle, that is, ultimately the people are the ones who decide how to exercise or not to exercise their rights themselves, and not by others on their behalf.

Instead of delving into this important principle, Chiu has highlighted the irrelevant issue that "if 'rights' are exercised, there is, in many instances, no one absolutely correct way of doing so".

We must be careful not to overstep this sacred principle and imply that people should leave the exercise of their rights to others. In any case, it is also vital that people should be given access to information which is necessary for making better decisions.

Chiu's polemic on rights has been carried out

in a way as if it were not the usual case that people are often denied the rights to information and to participate in the decision-making process.

As a consequence, untold sufferings have been placed upon them in the name of "progress", "modernisation", "national interest", and "national integration".

The cultural violation of the original inhabitants in Irian Jaya by the propagation of a superior Indonesian culture is a case in point. It is clear that we should not impose formal education upon the Orang Asli in Malaysia in the name of "modern civilisation" but leave it to them to decide.

The question we should ask is not whether "we have choices as to how we exercise our 'rights'," but rather ask if people are given a choice to exercise their rights.

Lastly, the reasoning that human rights are subordinate or subject to some "abstract" socio-economic interests is simply absurd and can only amount to the disregard and disrespect for humanity.

Although the issue of language and culture has been discussed a great deal, the confusion about the relationship between language and culture still needs to be put straight.

No amount of academic discussion is required

to show that language forms an inseparable part of culture. It is commonsense knowledge that language performs the vital functions of communication, expression and transmission.

Without using language, how on earth could culture be expressed and transmitted, let alone flourish? This is true for the Malay, Indian and Chinese Malaysian cultures. They simply could not exist without language. Failure to understand this has led Chiu to conclude that "language may not be an important part of culture".

We could understand a culture through other languages as Chiu has shown. Therefore, it follows that it is not difficult for us to understand the Malay, Indian and Chinese Malaysian cultures through our respective mother tongues.

Therefore, mother tongue education does not hinder the development of national culture and integration! On the other hand, it could play a role in enhancing understanding, tolerance and respect for the cultures of all the ethnic groups thereby contributing to national culture and integration.

Nevertheless, there is a clear-cut difference between understanding and development of a culture. The latter requires its inseparable language. Chiu has not grasped this.

Some writers have bandied about the "fact" that Mandarin, the Chinese medium of instruc-

tion, is not a true mother tongue for the different Chinese dialect groups, namely Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Hainanese and Foochow.

This is rather incorrect and inaccurate for, despite speaking different dialects, the Chinese have accepted and do use the written form of Mandarin. In addition, many speak Mandarin as their mother tongue. Is it not the same with the different Malay dialect groups as well? At any rate, we must be reminded it is a distraction from our discussion on the right to a vernacular school system which the Chinese community demands.

It is presumptuous to suggest that the vernacular school system is segregationist. The participation of the Chinese independent schools in the recent bilingual and trilingual poetry reading events at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka is enough to testify against the lie that they are segregationist.

Moreover, the undertaking by the Chinese scholars/writers to translate the Chinese Malaysian (Ma Hua) literature into Bahasa Malaysia is a testimony of the efforts to bridge the understanding on Ma Hua literature among Malaysians.

On the contrary, students from different ethnic backgrounds studying at the same school and university are not immune from the segregatio-

nist attitude under the present influence of communalism.

One reason for this could be the kind of education the students receive. Education which emphasises mutual understanding, respect and equality is conducive for integration and should be encouraged.

It is not true that a separate school system breeds segregation. Neither is the common school a necessary condition for national integration..

This therefore counters the proposition forwarded by Drs. Nasir/Jomo that "a common language and schooling in themselves are necessary, but not sufficient guarantees of national unity". (*Starmail*, March 14).

At first glance, this proposition appears plausible. A further look at it reveals its wrong approach to the problem. It is obvious that Drs. Nasir/Jomo see that some forms of interaction are required for integration.

Total insulation certainly denies opportunities for integration. But the vernacular school system is not to promote this. Instead, to highlight the form of interaction without exploring into the necessary bases for interaction is rather inadequate and counter-productive.

I put forward here that the pre-condition for any meaningful interaction is the mutual respect of each other's rights and equality.

Those who do not recognise interaction on an equal basis and mutual respect as the pre-condition would not understand the significance of the recognition of a community's right to vernacular education as *sine qua non*. Thus, incessant talk of any form of interaction would be futile. Failing to understand this pre-condition, Chiu could only counterpose that "the system of vernacular schools. . . need not be the best in terms of promoting healthy inter-racial relationships among our children".

* *The Star*, 18 June 1984.

PRODUCING EDUCATED MALAYSIANS

By: Maznah Mohamad/Johan Saravanamuttu

It is heartening to note that Dr. Kua Kia Soong (*Starmail*, June 11) has finally addressed the economic basis of the vernacular schools issue. Briefly, the lines of his argument run like this:

Vernacular schooling is anchored on a basic right of minorities backed by international opinion. Furthermore, mother tongue education is the most efficacious manner of educating ethnic minorities as well as a fundamental avenue for cultural expression.

He has now added that those attending vernacular schools tend to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds since the elitist national school system militates against their entry or success in that system.

The overall argument at first glance is persuasive until one views it from the perspective of nationhood or the generation of a national culture defined in the broadest terms.

We have shown that separate education for ethnic communities entails separate socio-economic development leading ultimately to the perpetuation of a plural and unintegrated society. This is indeed that prevailing mould of Malaysian society today.

We would like to see this changed by gearing schooling instead towards its primary role of producing literate, competent, learned, efficacious — in a word — educated Malaysians. Schooling should not be distorted or misdirected to cultivate ethnic values.

Contrary to Dr. Kua's accusation, it is not we but he who is cynical about the positive and integrative role of education.

Another contributor, C.J. Chiu, has shown conclusively that not all rights could nor should be encouraged and that for collectively laudable and universally accepted social objectives, some rights need to be curtailed. (*Starmail*, June 2).

We, furthermore, have demonstrated that minority rights can be instituted to absurd degrees if one took into account the umpteen ethnic minorities existing in Malaysian society.

Dr. Kua is not consistent in arguing that rights have to be endorsed only if they are demanded. Consider, for example, marginalised groups like the Orang Asli or other uneducated and illiterate groups in Malaysia.

Do they have no rights because they cannot voice them effectively?

Our difference with Dr. Kua on the question of rights is that we, unlike him, are concerned with fundamental rights as opposed to those that reinforce ethnicity.

In the context of education, the fundamental rights of minorities to a good education is clearly better achieved through the national school system than through the institution of a plethora of inevitably ill-facilitated ethnic schools.

Dr. Kua has touched upon a key issue in mentioning that vernacular schools may indeed cater to the lower socio-economic rungs of our society. If this be so, is it not more logical to approach the problem by correcting the overall socio-economic bias (and elitism, we would readily admit) of the whole schooling system, inclusive of the vernacular?

It begs the question of whether we should go on supporting vernacular schooling when the source of inequality lies in the more profound area of schooling in general.

The irony is that the further promotion of vernacular schooling would exacerbate rather than alleviate the existing inequalities of our schooling system.

Finally, Dr. Kua's apparent liberalism over the orientation of Malaysian communities in the past and today towards external loyalties and affiliations — be it Arabic, Indonesian, Chinese (China) or Indian (subcontinent) — is once again only persuasive if we are not interested in promoting national culture and integration.

Certainly, it constitutes a right for Malaysians to have affiliations all the way to Timbuktu, but

we, for one, would like to see that Malaysians are concerned about international issues which have less ethnic overtones than those that tend to fire their primordial affinities. Would't Dr. Kua?

If not, and if the views of eloquently articulated by Dr. Kua represent those of the prevailing Malaysian mentality, then, we are afraid this letter will possibly be an Epitaph to the Probable Demise of Malaysian Nationhood.

* *The Star*, 26 June 1984.

DO VERNACULAR SCHOOLS HAVE A RIGHT TO EXIST?

By: Kua Kia Soong

We have already been acquainted with the argument against vernacular schools that places them in the order of things like foot-binding, female infanticide and widow-sacrifice.

The vernacular schools' right to exist — based on the Federal Constitution, Rukunegara and international conventions — is questioned by C.J Chiu on the ground that:

“... possession of a right does not necessitate its fulfilment under any and all circumstances.” (*Star*, 2.6.84).

Is not such a discussion of rights situated in the cob-webbed ivory tower of Hobbes' and Locke's hypothetical “state of nature”? Any student of political philosophy will know that since the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment, these hypothetical questions were not only solved by the same philosophers in their heads, they were also solved in the real world.

Thus, democratic theorists like J.S. Mill have defined rights in this way: “The rights of any individual are limited by the rights of others.”

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen already declared in 1789: “Political liberty consists in the power of doing

whatever does not injure another. The exercise of the natural rights of every man has no other limits than those which are necessary to secure to every other man the free exercise of the same rights. . ."

When the nature of rights is framed in this context, it is not difficult to judge whether the existence of the vernacular schools limits the rights of other Malaysians.

What is so abstract about the basic human right that have been invoked to justify the existence of vernacular schools?

These rights are basic precisely because they are not intended to be applied unscrupulously, as C.J. Chiu tries to make out that I (and the Chinese community) am doing.

They concern only such rights as: the freedom of expression, association, assembly or movement; the right to education; women's right of choice and the like. Human rights are universal, paramount and readily transformable into positive rights.

The vernacular schools' right to exist can therefore be found in Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

"Everyone has the right to education. . . education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the

strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom; . . . it shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. . .

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

Freedom, as we are all aware, is already limited by laws; for example, the freedom of movement is limited by trespass laws on privately-owned land. But to trivialise J.S. Mill's defence of individual freedom to all individual actions is to trivialise many cases of violation of human rights. One such case is the right of the Chinese community to their vernacular schools.

By invoking "situations in which it may be legitimate and prudent for rights not to be exercised indiscriminately," if Chiu is not simply appealing to abstract principles, are we to take it to mean these conditions prevail at any time to "over-ride" the vernacular schools' right to exist?

Certainly, rights may be suspended in times of war, emergency or "explosive situations." But if Chiu is not to be arguing for unaccountable "decisive governmental actions," universal human rights do exist to attempt to limit the power of the State even in times of emergency to safeguard the rights to life; not to be tortured; degrading or inhuman treatment.

Now, if we are to follow Chiu's method of looking at "the appropriate educational and cultural policy in the specified historical, political and geographical circumstances of this country," two crucial questions for all democratic souls to answer are:

- (i) Whether our present situation remotely approaches that of war, emergency or "explosive situation"; and
- (ii) Whether the existence of the vernacular schools will "aid the enemy", threaten law and order, or inflame an explosive situation.

As in the order of rights, the burden of proof in the light of these conditions lies with those who argue against the existence of vernacular schools.

In truth, Chiu can only argue against vernacular schools from the angle of melting-pot theorists. But there is another situation when, it seems, rights, must be suspended. This is seen in his verdict on whether Malays in the current context of Singapore have the right to their own vernacular schools: "(This) would be one sure means of further condemning the Singapore Malay population to backwardness and disadvantage vis-a-vis the dominant Chinese majority."

Here we see that the argument against "indiscriminate exercise of rights" based on vulgar

economism (as it is called in social science) and market rationality is vieing for a place with war, emergency and "explosive situations".

Is there no end to warped thinking? Vulgar economism has been imported to the political question of rights:

"...their strength has as much, if not more, to do with the still considerable economic clout of the Chinese as with their 'right' to such schools. . . The contrast to this is the virtual non-existence of equivalent Tamil schools. What value then the rights of Tamil-speaking Indians?"

In the first place, it is the old familiar tune that the vernacular schools are "creations" of the Chinese elite in this country, while the Chinese masses shecpishly follow.

The evidence is unfortunately stacked against this old record and intellectuals who have so little faith in the masses. Regarding the Tamils in this country, if Chiu is interested in the value of their rights, he should join them in their demands for decent Tamil vernacular schools.

It is truly remarkable that one who abhors invoking abstract principles should be philosophising about the "problem of truth" and "relativism" in relation to a simple question of whether the Chinese vernacular schools have a right to exist.

Chiu offers some examples to show how any "right-thinking" person could possibly fail to see the "correctness" of the elite/intellectual in every case: introducing "civilisation" to the Orang Asli; curbing "female infanticide" in some cultures; the predilection of Chinese masses for male offspring; the right of women to control their own fertility.

As in every case, the undemocratic spirit is an affliction of the elite. For it is precisely the underlying assumption by the elite that the "masses" are all backward. This is like trying to interpret history in a way that gives the credit for the existence of democracy to the elite as well.

The *process* of democracy pales the "elite-masses relativism" into irrelevance for the latter is an inversion of the problem. Democracy has come about in the modern world precisely because the masses have won rights which for years immemorial had been the prerogative of the elite. We could say that in this case, the philosophical question of "truth" was solved *politically*.

The democratic spirit compels us to pay heed to the wishes and aspirations of the masses. The question for all democrats to solve is therefore not "Whose truth?" but "How must the democratic decision prevail?"

It is for this purpose that the institutions exist

to ensure that this principle is carried out. That is why the vote, compromise, consultation, accountability, freedom to information, etc., exist to ensure the office-bearers and the masses come to some agreement.

Consequently, if office-bearers (not even intellectuals) feel that a particular policy is correct, it is their duty to ensure that they can get the willing support of the masses. They certainly have no right to railroad their wishes over the people.

Seen in this light, minorities like the Orang Asli have democratic human rights too. They must first be consulted and their willing support engage before any "enlightened" policy is implemented to affect their livelihood.

The democratic process of consultation and, if there is no unanimity, then the ballot is the vital factor that seems to have escaped the consideration of Chiu. Otherwise this is what is known as cultural imperialism.

This is, therefore, my reply to his other posers. Even if I disagreed with the preferences of parents for more children and male offspring, my first thought is how I can win them over to my view. Otherwise it is the bureaucratic/elite syndrome all over again.

As for female infanticide, the taking away of life does not qualify as a right and laws exist to handle that problem.

"Isn't it opportunistic to pander to the masses?" the question is posed to me. This depends on what one's motives are, but such a question already betrays a patronising attitude towards the masses.

Anyone can see whether it is opportunism to support the dominant view or to support the oppressed. Chiu gets full marks for saying that minority dissent is stringently guaranteed in any democracy. Doesn't "dissent" mean disaffection with the ruling policy, not support for it?

"Does truth depend on numbers?" This is further posed after I had cited 4,000 (practically all) Chinese guilds and associations as having supported the vernacular schools.

Certainly, numbers matter if no unanimity has emerged in the democratic consultation and compromise. That is why universal suffrage was such a historic development. The vote exists because the literati and feudal classes could not be counted on for pronouncing what was "truth".

I am afraid one could hardly qualify as a intellectual if one is unfamiliar with how decisions and policies and arbitrated in a democracy.

This perhaps brings out the point I have made before: In our democracy, there is no special niche for intellectuals — whatever they uphold falls either with the ruling view or the oppressed.

There is no "Milky Way" along which intellectuals can claim privilege.

I have rarely heard such pathetic capitulationism as this: "... progressive historians ... could plausibly argue that the boycott of Japanese goods by the Chinese in Malaya in the late 20s actually strengthened British colonialism in this country and hurt the day-to-day material interest of Malaysians."

Historians who proffer such an interpretation could hardly be called "progressive". This incredulous argument is like saying the whole world should not be boycotting South African and Rhodesian goods since it is depriving the world's masses of cheap fruits, coal, uranium and diamonds. Or that the anti-Zionist boycott of Israeli products could hurt the material interests of pro-Palestinian people the world over.

Thankfully, most people know their priorities and do not fall for such disgracefully capitulationism. What kind of "Malayan consciousness" could have allowed the Japanese to invade and occupy our country under the claim that "real progressives" should have been anti-British instead?

Throughout the history of the Second World War, only the very dubious political groups advocated such a policy in the face of German and Japanese fascism/imperialism. To say this is bunkum sounds almost too generous.

A truly "progressive historian" would have commended all who had resisted the Japanese imperialists and who had laid down their lives for the motherland.

Instead, Chiu gives us the "objective" interpretation that "the anti-imperialist sentiments of Chinese-educated Malaysians were complex in constitution and consequence" and the cynical interpretation that "the immediate reason had to do with the activities of that sector in support of China's resistance to Japanese imperial designs on China rather than mainly with their anti-British views."

This kind of flabby interpretation of history is no different from the sort that interprets the heroic resistance of the Malays against British intervention at the turn of the century as not "principled anti-imperialism, merely feudal xenophobia."

Clearly, such "complex, objective" interpretation belongs not to the school of progressive historians but the discredited compromise of capitulationists.

Chiu even ladled oodles of vulgar economism to the "melting pot" theory, which he claims, had more to do with economics than culture." It seems, in his book, there is no such thing as ideology.

Sociologists — whether progressive, immovable or backward — who have studied the melting pot

theory of the United States will tell you that the idea behind this ideology and myth is that: From the society of various diverse cultures would emerge a homogenised national society with a single set of shared cultural values, normative expectations, and behaviour.

Every immigrant, it was expected, would assimilate to the uniform WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) way of life. The way in which this ideology was born and institutionalised indeed has a lot to do with particular sections of the new immigrants who had economic interests. But this economic factor is subsidiary to the ideology that the "melting pot" served.

Whereas this melting pot ideology has been recognised by even middle-of-the-road sociologists and anthropologists as a myth, Chiu does not even venture an opinion. The plain fact is that if he was truly progressive, he would unreservedly hail the resistance to the assimilationist tendencies of the melting pot by the blacks, Spanish Americans and other minorities in the US. But then it would embarrass his own "melting pot" view of culture in general.

This view is that "... language may not even be an important part of culture." What is being suggested is that all cultures other than say, English, should not "reify" or "fetishise" their own cultures and languages because of the "commonality that lies in a certain ethos."

This kind of philistinism would cause many an artist to keel over with disbelief. It's like asking the English to read Shakespeare in Chinese. But then, does it mean that the language that is to be the universal common medium will be one that has most "market value"?

Language is not merely an "ingredient" of culture; it is the foundation for all cultural activities, a symbolic representation of a culture. A culture crystallises into meanings only through its linguistic symbols.

When we examine the common language of this country, it becomes clear that the assimilationist tendency is at the back of Chiu's proposals.

To begin with, his research work seems dubious: "I would have been happy to have accepted the AMCJA-PUTERA proposal in 1947/1948 for one nationality (bangsa) to be called "Melayu" and one language (bahasa) which was to be Malay."

I looked up the "Peoples' Constitutional Proposals' of the AMCJA-PUTERA coalition and what did I find?

Point 1: "Automatic citizenship for all persons born in Malaya. Citizenship rights in any other country should be renounced for 'Melayu' citizenship. . ."

Point 4: "Malay shall be the official language but usage of other language should be permitted."

Chiu's sleight-of-pen is costly for present day Malaysian. "Melayu" citizenship is surely conceptually and intrinsically different from "satu bangsa" that it is slanted. To interpret the fourth point as a "satu bahasa" slogan is perhaps the reason why the Chinese community disagrees with the official (and Chiu's) interpretation.

Chiu can play Mark Anthony with an audience that can't talk back but not on this occasion. The fact that the Chinese Malaysians have accepted the national/common language willingly is questioned: "Has (Dr. Kua) so easily forgotten the bitter history of the 50s and 60s in this matter?"

The uninitiated would fall for this rhetoric without question. But let us examine the 50s and 60s.

During the 50s and 60s, the question of whether English and Malay would be the only official languages and whether Chinese and Tamil could also qualify as official languages was the issue.

This was despite the fact that the national/common language had been accepted by the Chinese and Indian communities, a conception that seems continually to be beyond many intellectuals' capacity to grasp.

But looking at it historically, I do not see why the attempts by the Chinese community then to have Chinese recognised as another official language should be seen as either peculiar or "un-Malaysian."

As I have pointed out this paradox before: If Mr. Lee Kuan Yew can accept the principle (in theory even if not in practice) of four official languages in Singapore, why cannot our progressive intellectuals here?

But the 60s also saw the furore over the Rahman-Talib Report when the Chinese community reacted to the policy that would do away with vernacular schools.

Again, it had nothing to do with the Chinese Malaysians rejecting the status of Malay as the national/common language. This is the mystification of the issue including the erroneous interpretation that: "If Chinese (and other non-Malays) now accept the position of Bahasa Malaysia, the acceptance owes not a little to government action in the post-1969 period."

This is sad not only because it is untrue but also because this prescription "so happens" to be congruent with Government policy.

Before I leave this polemic, I need to thank Chiu for pointing out my negligent reference to Dr. Nasir. But it was unworthy of an intellectual to commit daylight fraudery: I did not refer to

Maznah Mohamed by her father's name. At least I'm sure Chiu could be generous enough to given me credit for getting my own name right, which, because I'm a Chinese Malaysian, my surname comes first.

* *The Star*, 4 August 1984.

**MEMORANDA ON
NATIONAL CULTURE**

**JOINT MEMORANDUM ON
NATIONAL CULTURE
SUBMITTED TO
THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
YOUTH AND SPORTS**

**BY
THE MAJOR CHINESE ORGANISATIONS
IN MALAYSIA, 1983.**

- * The Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall,
- * Penang Chinese Town Hall
- * The Perak Chinese Association,
- * The Federation of Chinese Association, Johor State,
- * Trengganu Chinese Assembly Hall,
- * Kelantan Chinese Assembly Hall,
- * Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall,
- * The Federation of Chinese Associations, Sarawak,
- * United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia,
- * United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia
- * Pahang Chinese Chamber of Commerce,
- * Malacca Chinese Chamber of Commerce,
- * Kedah Chinese Chamber of Commerce,
- * Perlis Chinese Chamber of Commerce,
- * Sabah United Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

This memorandum and all its appendices were accepted unanimously at the Culture Congress organised by the major Chinese organisations in Malaysia at the Penang Chinese Town Hall on 27 March, 1983.

JOINT MEMORANDUM ON NATIONAL CULTURE SUBMITTED BY THE MAJOR CHINESE ORGANISATIONS IN MALAYSIA.

I. Introduction

- 1.1 In response to the appeal by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, we, representing the Chinese community organisations listed above, submit this Memorandum to present the basic views of the Chinese community on the question of national culture. We are making the presentation along broad principles for the consideration of the Government in its review of the relevant policies.
- 1.2 Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country; it is multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural. In order to achieve national unity, it is necessary to first acknowledge and accept this fundamental characteristic of our society: existence of diversity of religion and culture among its people. However, the present national policies on language, education and culture are heavily tainted with communalism and tend towards forced assimilation. The policies have been formulated only from the perspective and stand-point of only one ethnic community. This contradiction between the Malay-centric policies and the multi-

faceted dimension of our society is the core of the problem.

- 1.3 It is our view that the foundation for the discussion of the national culture question lies in the spirit and principles of the United Nations Human Rights' Declaration, our Federal Constitution, Rukunegara, ethnic equality and democratic consultation. It is only with this foundation that the basic right of every ethnic group to inherit and develop its own culture will not be violated whereby each group can truly and mutually respect the cultural tradition of another. Because the present national policies on language, education and culture and the three principles used by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to mould a national culture are not built on the foundations cited above, their continuation will not only fail to achieve the objective of national unity, but will deepen the unhealthy trend in ethnic polarisation.

II. The Objective Foundation and Special Characteristic of National Culture

- 2.1 In general, culture has been regarded as the product of the material and spiritual wealth created in the historical development of mankind. In short, it refers to the way of life of mankind. Therefore, the

people of all ethnic groups and their own culture form a unified, non-separable flesh and blood relationship.

- 2.2 Since culture is mankind's way of life, national culture is the way of life of the nationals of Malaysia. In view of the diversity of our people and culture, the national way of life must necessarily be the sum of the ways of life of all our ethnic groups. Therefore, the objective basis of our national culture cannot be the culture of one ethnic group, but must be the culture of all ethnic groups, just as laid down in the Rukunegara: "The Malaysian nation is indeed unique in having rich and diverse cultural traditions and practices. We aspire to a society in which this diversity can be an asset and a source of strength." The moulding of our national culture must follow the natural law in cultural development, allowing the spontaneous interaction of our various local cultures and discarding negative and pernicious values. This effort should be supplemented by the absorption of the richness of other foreign cultures to establish a set of common cultural values. The process of moulding a national culture must not have too much artificial intervention, based on the subjective will of one ethnic group.

- 2.3 The Malay, Malaysian-Chinese and Malay-

sian-Indian cultures, having undergone a long period of evolution in the objective environment of our society, are already distinct from the Indonesian, Chinese and Indian cultures, in both form and content. Not only have they inherited the wealth of their original cultures, but they have also become inseparable components of our national culture through mutual interaction, enrichment and absorption. In other words, they all possess local colour.

2.4 In our view, the present national culture must contain the following three basic elements:

- (i) diversity in cultural forms;
- (ii) a set of common values; and
- (iii) local colour

The diversity in cultural forms is the natural reflection of the different religious practices, ways of life and cultural traditions of our multi-racial society. It enhances the spectrum and richness of our national culture and should be regarded as a source of strength and not weakness. The set of common values must be guided by science, democracy, the rule of law and patriotism. Common values and local colour materialise primarily in the content of the culture. It is the content which should receive the greatest attention in moulding a national culture. Malay culture

is of course local. However, local 'colour' is not to be equated solely with Malay culture since the cultures of the Malaysian-Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Dayaks and others are all local cultures.

III. The Objectives of Moulding the National Culture

- 3.1 The principal objective of moulding the national culture and value system must be to mobilise the fine elements in the cultures of all ethnic groups to resist the racial extremists within the country and the negative influence of the pernicious aspects of culture. At the same time, the mobilisation must also develop the human and material resources to assist in propelling national production and construction.
- 3.2 Based on the reality of the multi-racial nature of our society, another important objective should be the fostering of national unity through the establishment of a set of common national cultural values. However, this objective can only be achieved on the basis of racial equality and democratic principles.

IV. Our Objections to the Present Policies on National Culture

- 4.1 We oppose the present policies on national

culture, language and education and the three principles used by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to mould the national culture, i.e:

- (i) The Malaysian national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region;
- (ii) The suitable elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the national culture; and
- (iii) Islam is an important component in the moulding of national culture.

Our opposition is founded on the following:

- 4.1.1 the process of letting the scholars and politicians of one ethnic group to unilaterally formulate policies with such profound and far reaching consequences under the auspices of the Government is not consistent with the principle that the national culture must be moulded through democratic consultation;
- 4.1.2 while stressing the importance of Islam and the Malay culture, these principles deny the significant role that should be played by the cultures and religions of the non-Malays. This is contrary to the

principle of equality and uninhibited development of the cultures of all ethnic groups;

- 4.1.3 they exhibit the close-minded philosophy of a cultural development centering on the Malays, rather than a liberal attitude of promoting the interaction with and absorption of other non-Malay and foreign cultures;
- 4.1.4 they neglect the active philosophic content of culture, especially the guiding thoughts of a common value system;
- 4.1.5 they contradict the correct stand inscribed in the Rukunegara, i.e., the respect for an uninhibited development and the acceptance of the values of the respective cultures of all ethnic groups as well as the perspective that the cultural diversity of our country is in fact a source of strength for the nation; and
- 4.1.6 they indicate the tendency towards using the power of administration to force assimilation, an action not acceptable to the non-Malays.

- 4.2 Some people classify the cultures of the various ethnic groups in the country into

local (or Bumiputera) culture and immigrant (or non-Malay) culture. In particular, local culture refers specifically to the Malay culture. This perspective of taking only the Malays as bumiputera and the non-Malays as outsiders has the intention of denying an equal status to the non-Malay cultures. However, since we have achieved Independence hand in hand and have equal status as the citizens of this country, there should not be any distinction between the "Bumiputeras" and the "Immigrants". Such artificial differentiation will form the philosophical root for racial discrimination, destroy national unity and result in highly undesirable racial polarisation.

- 4.3 Some Malay chauvinists think that the only way to unite the various ethnic groups is through one language and one culture. They also feel that many languages and cultures will lead to disunity among the people. This thinking is obviously wrong. Economic, social and political factors are more important to the unity of a people or nation. In other words, economic oppression, social injustice and political differences can make a mono-lingual and mono-cultural people or nation sink into deep internal strife. On the other hand a just socio-economic system and common political beliefs can unite a people or

nation of different languages and cultures. Therefore, we can conclude that one language and one culture is not the most decisive factor in the unity of a people or nation. In a multi-ethnic nation, if policies of forced assimilation are carried out on language and culture, it will result in racial disharmony, threatening the very basis of national unity.

- 4.4 Malay-centrists emphasize the historical background of the Malacca Sultanate and therefore oppose the principle of racial and cultural equality. They are of the opinion that the Malacca Sultanate was a Malay political entity with its own administrative, economic and cultural system, and that Malaysia has been born out of this background. Therefore, so they maintain, the Malay culture has better claim to be the prime basis of the national culture.

We do not deny the existence of the Malacca Sultanate and the continuity of the Malay Sultanate System but neither can anyone deny the legitimate existence of the other ethnic groups and their contribution to national construction. Malaysia was formed according to the 1957 Federal Constitution; in terms of a political system, we are no longer a feudal kingdom, but a country founded on Constitutional Monarchy; in terms of the sys-

tem of administration, legislation and economy, it is basically a continuation of the British and not the Malay system; and in terms of the system of culture, multi-culture has long replaced the earlier Malay mono-culture.

In the Malaysia of today, not only do the systems of politics, administration, legislation, economy and culture bear fundamental differences from those under the Malacca Sultanate, but the expanse of territory (including Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak) and the composition of population by ethnicity have also undergone great changes. Thus, it is inappropriate to use the characteristics of the Malacca Sultanate to represent the national characteristics of our country today. Rather, it is more accurate to use those of Independent Malaysia. The more controversial aspect of the national culture question is how to deal with the relationship between the cultures of the various ethnic groups. We must of course review the problem from a historical perspective. Nevertheless, if it is still considered that the realities of the 15th and 16th Centuries are more important than the realities of 20th Century Malaysia, the ordering of importance would have been inappropriately reversed.

4.5 Supposing the historical background of the

15th and 16th Century is indeed allowed to be used to reject the principle of equality for the culture of all the ethnic groups the following serious consequences would be inevitable:

- (a) with the denial of equality in the cultural field, the principle of equality will similarly be denied in the political, economic and social scenes;
- (b) cultural chauvinism will rise with unequal treatment accorded to the cultures of the difference community groups; and
- (c) the racist and assimilationist tendencies of Government policies on culture will be reinforced.

V. The Basic Principle of Moulding a National Culture

- 5.1 The fine elements in the culture of each ethnic community must form the foundation of the national culture.

The moulding of the Malaysian national culture must be built on the foundation provided by the fine elements of the culture of all ethnic groups. The official attitude should be one of receptiveness and adoption of the essence of these local cultures while accommodating the refined elements of foreign cultures. A blind rejection of the culture of any ethnic

group in the country or those of foreign origin would lead to a loss of vitality of the national culture.

- 5.2 The guidelines for the establishment of a set of common cultural values are science, democracy, rule of law and patriotism.**

The moulding of the national culture should stress on content and not form. The act of overemphasising the form of culture of any one single ethnic community will lead not only to discontent among other ethnic groups, but also have no positive bearing on the moulding of the national culture. The fount of our national culture should be based on the common cultural values of national awareness, patriotism, science, democracy and the rule of law.

- 5.3 The common cultural values must be expressed through the multi-ethnic forms.**

The common cultural values must be expressed through the unique forms of each ethnic group, without ruling out the possibility of combined forms of expression. Any attempt to make use of the political superiority of one ethnic group to constrain and obstruct the development of the language and culture of other ethnic groups is undemocratic and would destroy national unity.

- .4 The process of moulding the national culture should be consistent with the principle of equality of all ethnic groups and the method of democratic consultation.

The true spirit of democracy when expressed in ethnic relationship should be racial equality, mutual respect and tolerance. Thus, the process of moulding national culture should involve the major community groups using democratic consultation from a position of equality to arrive at a common understanding. It should not involve the imposition of the will of one ethnic group upon others through legislation or administrative dictates. This is because the bond of language and culture is an intrinsic part of an ethnic group. Therefore, the continuity of the culture of each ethnic group must be respected, and any attempt to do otherwise will only destroy national unity.

VI. Conclusion

- 6.1 The foundation of any discussion on our national culture must be based on the United Nations Human Rights Declaration, our Federal Constitution, Rukunegara, racial equality and the principle of democratic consultation.
- 6.2 The cultures of the ethnic communities in the country are the objective foundation of our national culture. The moulding of

our national culture should be based on the spontaneous interaction among the various cultures of the ethnic groups; the adoption of the essence and the discarding of negative and pernicious values, supplemented by the richness of other foreign cultures in order to build a set of common cultural values. In the process of moulding a national culture, there must not be too much artificial intervention but rather, reliance on the natural laws of cultural development.

- 6.3 The multi-cultural forms, a set of common values and local colour are the three basic elements of our national culture.
- 6.4 The objectives of moulding the national culture are to foster non-pernicious thoughts and common values, enhance national unity and propel the production and construction of the nation.
- 6.5 The present national policies on language, culture and education, including the three principles used by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports for moulding the national culture, contain a strong sense of Malay-centrism and a tendency towards forced assimilation. This is contrary to the spirit of racial equality, democratic consultation, and that of our Federal Constitution and Rukunegara. They are

also detrimental to the objective of national unity.

- 6.6 The proponents of Malay-centrism reject the principle of racial equality and thus strengthen the racialist and assimilationist tendencies of present Government policies.
- 6.7 The four principles to mould the national culture should be:
- (a) the fine elements of the culture of each ethnic community must form the foundation of the national culture;
 - (b) the guidelines to the establishment of a set of common cultural values are science, democracy, rule of law and patriotism;
 - (c) the common cultural values must be expressed through the multi-ethnic format; and
 - (d) the process of moulding the national culture should be consistent with the principle of equality of all ethnic groups and the method of democratic consultation.

VII. Our Demands and Proposals

- 7.1 The Government must respect the rights enshrined in our Constitution for each

ethnic community to preserve and develop its language, education and culture, as well as assist in their development.

More specifically, these are:

- 7.1.1 The Government should abolish all legislative measures unfavourable to the existence and development of the language, education and culture of all ethnic groups, and ensure the Constitutional right of all ethnic groups to freely study, use and develop their language and education;
- 7.1.2 The Government should assist the development of Chinese Primary Schools, Chinese Independent Secondary Schools, National Type Secondary Schools, Chinese language classes in National Type Primary Schools and the Chinese Studies Department of the University of Malaya; set up Chinese Studies Departments in other universities and colleges and permit the establishment of private universities.
- 7.1.3 The Government must treat the activities of all cultural organisations in an even handed manner with no favour shown in the provision of financial and other assis-

tance in relation to the ethnic base of the organisation;

- 7.1.4. In the various cultural activities sponsored by the Government, be they publications, performances, exhibitions, processions, workshops, cultural festivals, competitions, literary or performing arts awards and foreign tours of cultural troupes, equal opportunity must be accorded to the artistes of all ethnic groups, in order to reflect the respect for the multi-racial characteristics and values of our country;
- 7.1.5 In portraying the national culture, the nationally-owned public media should not over-emphasize the Malay culture while neglecting those of the ethnic groups;
- 7.1.6 In the Radio and Television Malaysia programme, "*Hari Ini Dalam Sejarah*", there should also be the portrayal of the historic events and figures of non-Malays, so as to reflect the multi-racial historical realities of our country.
- 7.1.7 In moulding the national image, the special multi-racial characteristics of our society must be reflected.

- 7.1.8 In the naming of buildings, areas, places and roads, the multi-racial aspect of the nation must also be expressed.

- 7.2 The Government must undertake initiatives to promote the interaction of the cultures of the various ethnic groups, so as to foster the formation of common cultural values.

More specifically,

- 7.2.1 the Government should organise many forms of cultural activities to promote the interaction of various cultures, including combined exhibitions, performances, discussions and others;
- 7.2.2 the Government should encourage and assist the translation of the outstanding literary works of all the ethnic groups into one another's languages;
- 7.2.3 there should be a broad spectrum of coverage of the cultures, ways of life and the habits and customs of all the ethnic groups in the textbooks and mass media;
- 7.2.4 there should be an intensification of the research and discussion of the cultures of all ethnic groups in

the institutions of higher learning in the country, with the aim of addressing the problems of integrating the different cultures and the formation of common cultural values;

- 7.2.5 the Government should set up a multi-ethnic Civilization Relics Gallery and a Historical Material Reference Room for the purpose of collecting books, documents and historical objects belonging to the civilization of all ethnic groups.
- 7.2.6 the Government, including the National Museum and National Archives should gather valuable books, historical objects, objects of arts and crafts of all ethnic groups, and set up historical data and reference rooms to exhibit these collections;
- 7.2.7 the National Library as well as the libraries at all levels of Governments should collect a wide range of books in all the languages of the ethnic groups;
- 7.2.8 the National Gallery should gather the fine pieces of art of all ethnic groups for exhibition; and
- 7.2.9 the State Governments must de-

vote equal attention to the preservation of the historical sites and buildings of all ethnic groups.

7.3 The Government should strongly encourage cultural activities of all types with a healthy content and prohibit all activities which propagate negative and pernicious values.

7.4 All official functions and ceremonies must respect the cultural traditions, religious beliefs and customs of all the ethnic groups.

7.5 All the discussions and conventions sponsored by the Government on national culture must invite the participation by the representatives of the cultural and religious organisations of all the people. Such discussions and conventions should be held for the provision of references to the Government and people alike, without any resolutions aimed at forcing the people to forego particular cultural forms or values.

7.6 We appeal to the Government to appoint representatives from the major Chinese cultural and educational organizations and Chinese scholars who are experts in Chinese culture to be members of the National Consultation Committee on Cul-

ture in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and other cultural statutory bodies.

APPENDIX I:

LANGUAGE & EDUCATION

I. Introduction

- 1.1 Language, education and culture bear a very intimate inter-relation. The present national policy on culture is built on the foundation of the national policies on language and education and is an extension of these policies. Therefore, an understanding of the true nature of the national policy on culture can only be achieved from an examination of the process of formulation of the national policies on languages and education.
- 1.2 Since 1969, racial polarisation has become a serious social phenomenon in our society. Quite apart from its political, economic and social roots, racial polarisation has also been caused by the dissatisfaction of the non-Malays towards the present national policies on language, education and culture. In order to promote national

unity, the Government has an obligation to undertake a thorough and comprehensive review of the national policies on language, education and culture so as to satisfy the wishes and demands of every ethnic group.

- 1.3 In defining Malay as the National Language, Clause 152 of our Constitution concurrently guarantees the right to learn, use and develop the language of all ethnic groups, thus reflecting the Agreement among the people of all ethnic groups before Independence. If the Constitutional right to learn, use and develop the languages of all ethnic groups is violated, this is tantamount to a unilateral breach of the pre-Independence Agreement and will threaten the basis of unity among all the ethnic groups in this country.
- 1.4 The statement "Language is the soul of an ethnic group" is applicable not only to the Malays, but also to the Chinese and other ethnic groups. Furthermore, it is well established by the leading education experts all over the world that education in one's mother tongue is the most direct and effective way of education. Based on the above, we must reiterate the importance of the Chinese language to the education and culture of the Malaysian citizens of Chinese origin. We firmly

believe that the co-existence of the languages of all the ethnic groups with the National language, the existence of several sub-systems of schools founded on mother tongue as the medium of instruction within the national education system and the equal acceptance of the cultures of all the ethnic groups as the foundation of the national culture are feasible and consistent with the multi-ethnic nature of our country. The acceptance of all these premises would enhance national unity.

- 1.5 The purpose of our Government in propagating the "Look East" policy is to encourage the learning of the industrious and disciplined work attitudes of such Eastern nations as Japan and South Korea. In fact, industry, and discipline are precisely two of the attributes belonging to the bulk of the citizens educated in the Malaysian Chinese schools. These attributes have enabled them to be high achievers in the scholastic, professional, industrial and commercial fields. These attributes have also enabled them to make outstanding contributions to national construction in their role as blue collar workers. In the light of the "Look East" spirit and the values inculcated by the local Chinese Schools, the Government should reaffirm the value and role of Chinese education in our country and

strongly support its development.

- 1.6 Just at the Islamic culture is the root of the Malays, the Chinese culture is the root of the Chinese citizens in this country. Once the cultural roots of the Malaysian Chinese are severed, the loss in nourishment from the essence of their own cultural roots would result in a cultural identity crisis. The Government of Singapore under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is deeply troubled by the cultural identity crisis experienced by the younger generation brought up under the Western value system. The promotion of Chinese traditional values represents an attempt to overcome this crisis. In Malaysia, the Islamic culture, Chinese culture and Indian culture are all magnificent cultures of the world and should be treasured. In order to ensure that the people of all ethnic groups can be nourished by their respective cultures so as to avert any possibility of a cultural identity crisis, the Government should implement more liberal policies on language, education and culture.
- 1.7 In a country such as Malaysia, it is only by treasuring the cultural roots of every ethnic group through the application of the principle of democracy and equality, respect for our Constitution and basic human rights that the diverging views on

national language, education and culture can be resolved in a fair and reasonable manner. The foundation of national unity can then be strengthened in this process.

II. National Policy on Language

- 2.1 During the period of British colonial rule, English was the language of the British colonial government and the privileged class; it was also the official language used in administration, legislature and judicature. Thus, as a language, it was a class above other languages which were used only by the masses. Not only were other languages subordinated in use, but they were also barred from their rightful development. For instance, Malay education was developed only up to the stage of primary school.
- 2.2 Before Independence, the anti-colonial struggle waged by the people of all races forced the colonial government into accepting Malay as the National Language. However, the colonial government made Malay and English the dual official languages as a means of circumventing the National Language to maintain the status of English in official use on the one hand and a means to continue the suppression of the rightful role of Chinese and Tamil

on the other. This dual official language policy was also a double-edged sword to split the unity of the people of the various ethnic groups.

2.3 In the struggle for Independence, Malaysian citizens of Chinese and Indian origins accepted Malay as the national and common language after receiving assurances that their mother tongues could be learned, used and developed freely. However, they continued to ask for the inclusion of Chinese and Tamil as the joint official languages with Malay and English as a sign of equality.

2.4 The persistent demand and the overwhelming wishes of the Chinese and Indians in this country for the inclusion of Chinese and Tamil as two of the official languages can be seen in "Three Principal Demands on Language and Education by the Citizen of Chinese Origin" (Memorandum On Chinese Education In The Federation of Malaya) in 1954; the "Four Major Demands on the Content of the Constitution by the Citizens of Chinese Origin" (Confidential Memorandum To The Reid Constitutional Commission by the Pan-Malayan Federation of Chinese Association) in 1956; and the "Joint Declaration by the United Chinese Teachers Association and the Indian Teachers Asso-

ciation" also in 1956.

- 2.5 This dispute on the inclusion of Chinese and Tamil as official languages continued until the National Language Bill in 1967. Under this Act, English lost its status as an official language leaving Malay as the only official language. The citizens of Chinese and Indian origins were very disappointed and dissatisfied.
- 2.6 In the 1969 general election, the dispute over the official language issue became even more intense. After the May 13 incident, the issue of official language was considered one of the "sensitive" issues with the amendment of the 1948 Sedition Act.
- 2.7 In recent years, the State and Local Governments have initiated many regulations restricting the use of Chinese or the size of Chinese characters on advertisement billboards, name plaques of corporations, decorative arches, school buses, etc. There have even been instances of the forced removal of the name plaques of Chinese shops with potentially severe repercussions. These rules and regulations are not only against their definition in the Constitution but are also an insult to the integrity of the citizens of Chinese origin.

III. National Policy on Education

- 3.1 Our education policy has been developed as a leftover of the British colonial policy. Throughout most of the 19th century, the British colonial government was not concerned with the education of our people, but focused on maintaining law and order and exploitation of our tin and rubber resources. It was only at the turn of the 20th century that education in four separate media of instruction — Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil — began to be developed. Nevertheless, the development of schools teaching in English received the undivided attention of the colonial government at the expense of those in other languages.
- 3.2 During the Japanese rule, the education system of the nation received unprecedented destruction and deprivation. The Chinese school system in particular was most severely mutilated, to the extent that many teachers and pupils were executed. After the Second World War, the British colonial rulers returned to reconstruct some of the severely damaged or destroyed schools as part of their effort to develop an education system favourable to colonial rule.
- 3.3 After the War, the Chinese schools, which went through more than three years of

dark ages, were redeveloped under the unceasing efforts of the Malaysian Chinese. By 1954, Nanyang University, the institution of higher learning in Chinese for both Malaya and Singapore, was founded, symbolising the evolution of the Malayan Chinese Schools into a complete system from primary to tertiary level.

3.4 Because Chinese education in our country contained a strong tradition of anti-colonialism, it could not be tolerated by the British colonial government. The 1952 Education Act accepted the proposals contained in the Barnes Report and declared that schools using Chinese and Tamil as the medium of instruction would be replaced by schools with English and Malay as the medium of instruction, totally disregarding the findings of the United Nations-sponsored Fern-Wu Report which emphasised the importance of Chinese education and recommended assistance for its development. In the end, the 1952 Education Act was not effectively implemented due to strong opposition and financial constraints.

3.5 The 1956 Razak Report was more liberal, emphasizing "a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their culture, social,

economic and political development as a nation having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country."

- 3.6 The 1961 Education Act accepted the proposals of the Rahman Talib Report, and made big strides towards "the ultimate objective". The direction of the education policy of our country became crystal clear. Regarding the secondary schools, the Report proposed: "For the sake of national unity, the objective must be to eliminate communal secondary schools from the national system of assisted schools and to ensure that pupils of all races shall attend both national and national-types secondary schools." In that circumstance, the Chinese secondary schools were forced to accept the change into national-type schools or to forego subsidies and become independent schools. Regarding the primary schools, the 1961 Education Act provided Clause 21(2) which empowers the Minister of Education with the discretion to convert the national-type schools to national schools at a suitable time. This has been staunchly opposed by the Malaysian Chinese society.
- 3.7 During the 1969 election, the demands by

the Malaysian Chinese and Indians on language and education became the campaign platform of the opposition parties which were more Chinese based. As a result, these opposition parties won handsomely while the Chinese candidates of the ruling party lost heavily, reflecting the dissatisfaction of the Malaysian Chinese with the national policies on language and education. The major demands included the acceptance of Chinese and Tamil as two of the official languages, retention of the education system with four different media of instruction and the setting up of the Merdeka University.

- 3.8 1969 was an important watershed in the education policy of Malaysia, since the education policy after the formulation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) must serve the objectives of the NEP. In 1971, the Majid Ismail Report was published. It proposed that the admission of students into the local universities should be in accordance with ethnic proportion of the Malaysian population and not the academic results of the students. This marked the beginning of the "quota" system. In reality, the proportion of Malay students in the universities and colleges far exceeded the proportion of Malays in total population (53.7% in 1970, 71.3% in 1975 and 73.3% in 1980; source: *Third*

Malaysian Plan and *Fourth Malaysian Plan*). This has sparked off widespread discontent among the non-Malay students and their parents. The Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) was passed in 1971. From the judicial judgement on the case of Merdeka University Bhd versus the Government, it became clear that the formation of a private university with a non-Malay language as the medium of instruction is impossible under the UUCA. Thus, by 1982, apart from the national-type Chinese and Tamil primary schools, the "ultimate objective" in Razak's Report had been achieved.

IV. The Present Status of Chinese Education

4.1 Chinese Primary Schools

- 4.1.1 The Chinese primary schools were bursting at the seams in the 1970s. According to the 1979 Cabinet Report, 78% (409,980) of the pupils of Chinese descent studied in Chinese primary schools in 1971. By 1978, the proportion had increased to 87.8% (486,710). This shows that the great bulk of the Malaysian Chinese parents choose an education in the mother language as the medium of instruction for their offsprings.

- 4.1.2 Between 1971-78, the allocation by the Government to all types of primary schools totalled \$263 million. However, despite a ratio of 3:4 when the number of Chinese school students was compared to the number of pupils enrolled in the national schools, the Chinese primary schools received an allocation of only \$18 million, or 7% of total allocation. This lopsided allocation vividly illustrates the ghastly discrimination against Chinese primary schools.
- 4.1.3 With the increase in population and the rise of new residential areas, there are many areas with a heavy concentration of Malaysian Chinese. However, the Government has not built new Chinese primary schools to accommodate the offsprings of these citizens, resulting in cramped conditions in many existing Chinese primary schools. Some of these schools are so overcrowded that there is no more room for further enrolment. The implementation of the 3R system which sets a target of 30 pupils per class has worsened the problem since present Chinese school average 50 pupils per class.

4.1.4 In terms of teacher training, the Ministry of Education has no long term plan for the teaching resource requirement of the Chinese primary schools. As a result, the problem of shortage of qualified teachers and the corresponding increased reliance on temporary teachers has worsened. Apart from this, using Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction and preparing the inclusion of "Islamic civilisation" as a compulsory subject for the Chinese school teachers undergoing training are unreasonable steps.

4.1.5 The Malaysian Chinese society has not been comfortable with the implementation of the 3R system. They wonder if its implementation may not lead to a change in the basic character of the Chinese primary schools and have raised four common demands:

- (a) all teaching and reference materials for the Chinese primary schools, other than Bahasa Malaysia and English, must be written and edited in Chinese as before;
- (b) other than Bahasa Malaysia

and English, the medium of instruction and examination must be in Chinese, as before;

- (c) the humanities, moral and music lessons must reflect the character of Chinese culture; and
- (d) the number of hours devoted to the teaching of English must be increased.

4.2 Independent Chinese Secondary Schools

4.2.1 Since the implementation of the 1961 Education Act, the Chinese secondary schools that refused to accept conversion to national-type schools have lost their subsidies and become independent schools. Since then, the independent schools have weathered more than 20 years of difficulties through the unceasing support of the Malaysian Chinese. Not only have they stood their ground, but they have also grown and matured. At present, there are 60 independent Chinese secondary schools in the nation. The number of students has grown from 15,890 in 1970 to 25,047 in 1975 and 44,600 in 1982. Undoubtedly, the indepen-

dent Chinese schools have trained many outstanding pupils for the nation and contributed to the education of the country.

4.2.2 It has been estimated that the Malaysian Chinese society needs to spend between \$200 — \$300 to subsidise the education of each pupil in the independent Chinese schools per year. In other words, the Malaysian Chinese society must provide more than \$10 million in funds each year to maintain the 60 independent schools. This persistent effort to sponsor Chinese education in Malaysia is ample evidence of the resolution of the Malaysian Chinese in maintaining and developing their education in the mother tongue.

4.2.3 The Government has not only failed to help the development of independent Chinese schools, but has actually created many obstacles for them. For example, the Government has refused to approve the establishment of new schools or branches of existing independent schools; replaced permanent permits with temporary permits that require yearly renewal; delayed and obstructed the approach

for teaching permits.

4.3 The Chinese Studies Department of the University of Malaya

4.3.1 The Chinese Studies Department of the University of Malaya was formed in 1963 for the purpose of teaching and propagating the Chinese language and culture. Its courses are subdivided into the Classics and Modern Literature. The Classics Division was set up for those who passed Chinese as a subject in the Higher School Certificate examination or received a credit in Chinese as a subject in MCE examination. Its focus is on research into the Classics and on the Chinese language. The Modern Literature Division was set up for those with only a rudimentary knowledge of the language but who wish to learn the language for every day use and for research into Chinese Literature. The Modern Literature Division uses Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction while some subjects in Classics are also taught in Bahasa Malaysia.

4.3.2 From 1977, the number of students majoring or double majoring

in Classics has shown an increasing trend (10 in 77/78, eight in 78/79, eight in 79/80, 20 in 80/81 and 42 in 81/82). The increase in the last two academic years has been particularly significant. Nevertheless, the overall development of the Department and its present status are not satisfactory, especially with regard to the source of students, the range of subjects offered and the provision of scholarships and half-pay leave to teachers on further training courses.

4.4 Pupils' Own Language Classes.

Although the Education Act specifies that classes in the mother language of pupils can be started in any national primary or secondary school at the request of 15 parents, yet the Government has neglected the teaching resources, textbooks, teaching materials and the time allocated for instruction. As a result, the mother language classes are very poor and ineffective.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Since Independence, the complete system of Chinese education from primary school to university has been transformed into one of neglected primary schools and

independent secondary schools that are not permitted to develop further. Moreover, Clause 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act can do away with the Chinese primary schools at any time. This is one of the roots of discontentment among the Malaysian Chinese.

- 5.2 The present national policies on language and education possess a strong sense of racism and tendency towards language assimilation. These are threatening features and unacceptable to the Malaysian Chinese society. Even though our Federal Constitution has bestowed the right to all the ethnic groups to learn, use and develop their respective languages freely, the Government has restricted the free use of these languages through legislation, regulation and administration. Examples include the regulations on the use of non-Malay languages in advertisement, the medium of instruction in teaching training and in the universities.
- 5.3 If the Government does not accurately assess the discontentment of the Malaysian Chinese toward policies on language and education, and continues to use the power of legislation and administration to impose national policies on culture unacceptable to the Malaysian Chinese citizens, this will be against the wishes

of the Malaysian Chinese and against the interest of national unity.

- 5.4 The Government should undertake a comprehensive review of its policies on language, education and culture to show respect for the multi-racial realities of our country and to establish a liberal attitude in Government.

VI. Our Demands and Proposals

- 6.1 The Government should abolish Clause 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act to ensure that the existence of Chinese education will not be threatened, and to fulfil the assurance by our Prime Minister that the implementation of the 3R system will not lead to a change in character of the Chinese primary schools. Concurrently, the Government should ensure that equal treatment be accorded to the primary schools of all media of instruction, be it funding, school construction, teacher training, provision of equipment and others.
- 6.2 The Government must recognise the contribution made by the independent Chinese schools towards national education and the value of their existence; assist in their development through funding, teacher training, school construction, provision of

equipment and others; permit the establishment of branches by existing independent schools or the opening of new ones; and allow the admission into local universities for the graduates of the independent schools.

- 6.3 The Government should allow the founding of private universities in order to moderate the pressure arising from insufficient number of places at local universities as well as to train more professionals for national construction.
- 6.4 Admission into the Chinese Studies Department of the University of Malaya should be open to graduates of Chinese independent schools with comparable qualifications. In addition, the Government should be fair toward the development of that Department; the award of scholarships; the provision of half-pay leave to teachers seeking further education and the employment of graduates from this Department.
- 6.5 The Government should make the mother language of pupils a compulsory subject; include its instruction in the core teaching hours and provide standardised textbooks, sufficient teaching materials and qualified teachers.
- 6.6 Other than in official use, the Government

should respect the Constitutional right of the people of all ethnic groups to learn, use and develop freely their respective languages in all spheres of activities. It should refrain from using the power of legislation and administration to impose constraints.

- 6.7 The admission into all the local universities must not be based on quotas, but must be based on the merits of the students and their economic background; the hiring and promotion of teachers and administrators must be based on academic qualifications, seniority and effort rather than on ethnic origin.

APPENDIX II: LITERATURE

I. Malaysian Chinese Literature

- 1.1 Ever since its inception in 1919, Malaysian Chinese literature has always placed an emphasis on local realities. By the early 1930s, it had established the theoretical basis for writing as "Malayans". In the 1950s, in consonance with the drive for Merdeka, the Malaysian Chinese literary circle injected the spirit of patriotism and propagated that writings should encourage the patriotism of the people as their contribution towards achieving the

ideal of an independent, peaceful and democratic Malaya.

1.2 As Malaya became independent and Malaysia was formed, the Malaysian Chinese writers not only continued their fine tradition of writing as patriots to exhort their readers to seek virtue but also began to promote the interaction between Malay and Chinese literature. In order to fulfill the demands of the new historical era, they focussed on promoting mutual understanding, friendship and unity among the people of different ethnic origins, as well as construction of the nation through a united effort and a set of common values.

1.3 Since Malaysian Chinese literature has always striven to serve the Malaysian people and has been written within the local context, it is undoubtedly a component of national literature. It is Malaysian literature by any standards. The attempt to deny its status as part of Malaysian literature is to deny the national awareness of the Malaysian citizens of Chinese origin and to deny the status of the Malaysian Chinese as citizens.

II. Our Concept of "National Literature".

2.1 To Malaysian citizens, "nation" refers to

"Malaysia". Both terms refer to the same concept. This is common knowledge. However, according to the definition of "national literature" by some quarters, "nation" and "Malaysia" differ. This is because they declare that any writings other than in Bahasa Malaysia cannot be considered literature of the nation, but Malaysian literature. In this context, "nation" and "Malaysian" have become diametrically opposed concepts. From the viewpoint of logic, this distinction is ridiculous. Politically, this distinction denies the national status of citizens who write in languages other than Bahasa Malaysia.

- 2.2 Tagore never wrote in the national language of India (Hindi). His writings were almost exclusively written in his own mother tongue — Bengali. Nevertheless, no one has ever denied that his writings are part of the national treasure of India. His song *Janaganamana* was even chosen as India's national anthem. The representative literary work of Dr Jose Rizal of the Philippines, *Noli Me Tangere*, was also not written in the national language of Philippines. He wrote it in Spanish but it has become the compulsory reading material for all university students in the Philippines. From these two examples, it is evident that if "national literature" in our

multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country is defined from the narrow angle of the Malay language, it means the denial and disavowal of some of the literary treasures of our country.

- 2.3 Using only one particular language to define "national literature" will have other shortcomings. For example, whatever writings in the chosen language, even those with yellow and pernicious contents, will still be regarded as "national literature". This is clearly a corollary that any sensible and honest politician, artist and citizen cannot agree.
- 2.4 Based on the above consideration, we feel that if it is necessary to use the concept "national literature", it must be defined as follows:

Any writing, irrespective of whether it is written in the language of any of the ethnic groups or in English should be regarded as national literature as long as it is written by a patriotic Malaysian citizen; it reflects the ways of life, thoughts and emotions of our people; exhorts our people to the good and fosters a common national effort toward progress and development.

III. Our Opinion of the Present Policies in the Literary Field

- 3.1 The present policies administered in the literary field have been formulated on the basis of the resolutions passed at the 1971 National Culture Convention. These policies contain strong elements of Malay-centrism. They consider only Malay literature as national literature and provide it with plenty of encouragement and financial support. On the other hand, the literary works in other languages are left to their own fate. Such policies totally deny the equal status of the literary works in the other languages and seriously undermine the principles of democracy and cultural equality. They have also hindered the development of the literary works of all ethnic communities in Malaysia resulting in great loss to the national literature.

IV. Our Demands

- 4.1 The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports must accord equal treatment to the financing of the literary activities of all the ethnic groups.
- 4.2 National literary awards must be extended to writings in the other languages of Malaysia and not limited to those written in the Malay language. If it is difficult

to judge the writings in different languages together, then separate sections for Malay, Chinese, Tamil, English and other literatures should be set up.

- 4.3 The Literary Consultative Committee set up by the Government must include the established writers of all ethnic groups so that it is able to reflect accurately the kind and direction of the literary activities of all ethnic groups.
- 4.4 The national delegates to literary conventions locally and abroad must be represented by writers of all ethnic groups so as to reflect the multi-racial and multi-cultural character of our country.
- 4.5 The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka should publish writings of our people in languages other than Malay. It should also engage specialists to translate the outstanding works in different languages into our other local languages to foster the interaction and mutual understanding among the different ethnic groups and their cultures in the country.

APPENDIX III: THE ARTS

I. The Character and Direction of the Malaysian Arts.

1.1 The arts of the different ethnic groups in our country bear a mutually reinforcing and stimulating impact on one another to enrich the culture of our country even though the roots and process of development of each differ. This observation applies equally to the performing arts (plays, dances, etc.), listening arts (music and songs) or visual arts (painting, calligraphy, sculpture, design, etc.). Therefore, the correct direction in developing the arts of our nation must be to enhance the interaction between artists of the different ethnic groups on the basis of mutual respect, without disregarding the possibility of seeking inspiration from outside the country.

1.2 Art created by our different ethnic groups possess many inherently common features despite differences in the form of expression. The commonalities exist because our different ethnic groups have been living in a common environment and works of art are expressions and reflections of the thoughts and emotions of our lives. In particular, the commonalities have emerged out of the patriotism

of the artists in seeking to express the lives and thoughts of the people, their desires to encourage the seeking of virtue and striving for national construction. It is also such commonalities which have distinguished Malay art from the Indonesian art, Malaysian Chinese art from Chinese art and Malaysian Indian art from Indian art. A disregard or a denial of these commonalities will inevitably exclude the works of art of some of our ethnic groups from the realm of Malaysian Art.

- 1.3 The special forms of artistic expression of an ethnic group are not a constraint on the development of art. The history of art has vividly shown that by encouraging the use of unique forms of expression of our different ethnic groups together with interaction among the works of art and cultures of these groups, the artists can integrate divergent forms of expression and character into their own new forms of expression. This process of mutual learning is in fact a major motive force in the development of culture. Blind attempts to erase the ethnic character of art and denial of the value of other forms of expression while stressing the policy of nurturing only one culture will stifle the development of art in Malaysia including Malay art and also undermine national unity.

1.4 The creation of art is a highly complex activity of the brain. An artist needs to apply his untiring effort to study in depth the works of art of a wide range of countries and ethnic groups. It is only then that he can sift through and absorb features from these works of art that are consistent with his intended content, enhance his own expression and create his own distinctive appeal. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use the power of administration to interfere with the creation of art. Neither is it appropriate to arbitrarily dissect the art of our ethnic groups into their various forms of expression and mix them up into a "rojak" type of art.

1.5 Other than promoting works of art reflecting local realities, the various ethnic groups in this country have also preserved some of the traditional forms of art such as Indian traditional dances, the lion dance and martial arts of the Chinese and the like. Such types of art must be allowed to develop freely or even influence other ethnic groups as long as they are basically good and serve to entertain and inspire the people.

II. Our Views on the Present Government Policies

2.1 The present Government policies in the

fields of music and dances were formulated on the basis of the narrow conclusions of the 1971 "National Culture Convention". The said convention did not have representative delegations from the Malaysian Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Dayaks and other ethnic communities. The whole process of establishing conclusions in such an unrepresentative convention is not consistent with the principles and spirit of racial equality, mutual respect and democratic consultations.

- 2.2 On the one hand, the Government has adopted fairly open and liberal attitudes towards the learning and spread of Western art. On the other, it completely neglects the traditional art of the non-Malay ethnic groups in this country. Worse, it frequently imposes unreasonable restraints and discrimination on these other ethnic art forms. These actions have retarded the development of the arts of the non-Malays and have undermined national unity.

III. Our Demands

- 3.1 The Government should adopt an open-minded and even attitude towards the promotion and development of the art of all the ethnic communities. Specifically:

- 3.1.1 the Government must provide all

types of facilities, materials and opportunities for the performance, exhibition and creation of the arts of all ethnic groups which have a healthy content;

3.1.2 the official media should frequently introduce the arts of all the ethnic groups through regular cultural festivals and sponsor the performances by the organisations of all ethnic communities;

3.1.3. the Government must set up centres of research into the arts of all ethnic groups and hire experts to research for, systematise and analyse these works of art and publish the findings of the research in all languages; and

3.1.4 set up faculties of the arts of all ethnic groups in the local universities and colleges for the purpose of teaching and research. These centres must be open to the students of all ethnic origins with scholarships to fund their studies locally and abroad.

3.2 The Government should provide incentives to encourage the sponsorship of artistic activities by community organisations and private enterprises.

- 3.3 The arts of all ethnic groups must be represented in official functions so as to reflect the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural character of our country. It is proposed that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports should set up a troupe of traditional cultural dancers representing all ethnic groups for performance at official functions.
- 3.4 The Government should encourage the development of artistic works with a healthy content to resist the pernicious effect of unhealthy cultures.
- 3.5 The Government must not limit the forms of expression of art from the viewpoint of only one religion and one culture. In terms of design and form, buildings and constructions must fulfill the dual purpose of practical usage and reflect the multi-cultural basis of the nation, showing respect for the special character of different religions, cultures and morals.
- 3.6 The Government should liberalise its regulation in granting performance permits, including permits for the lion dance to be performed in private and in public. Outstanding foreign artists and troupes should also be allowed to perform in our country.

APPENDIX IV: RELIGION

(Presented by Malaysian Buddhist Youth Association)

The Malaysian Buddhist Youth Association (MBYA) is of the opinion that the policy on National Culture should reflect the multi-racial and multi-religious characteristics of Malaysia. From the angle of religion, MBYA puts forward the following recommendations for the consideration of the various ministries concerned.

I. Ministry of Education

1. In the syllabus for schools and colleges, the word "agama" or "ugama" should not mean Islam alone. It should refer to all religions as defined in the dictionary.
2. In implementing moral education in schools, the moral teachings of various religions as practised in Malaysia, particularly common moral values, should be taught to all pupils in schools.
3. The civilizations and cultures of other religions should be taught together with Islamic Civilization in the institutions of higher learning.
4. The liberal establishment of clubs of various beliefs should be encouraged in secondary schools.

II. Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)

5. MCYS gives particular emphasis to missionary training for Islamic youths in Malaysia. Such training programmes should also be given to youths from other religions.
6. MCYS should grant financial assistance to all religious youth clubs.
7. Elements of other religions as practised in Malaysia should also be incorporated into the National Culture.

III. Ministry of Information

8. RTM should allocate more time to programmes on other religions in Malaysia besides Islam.
9. Lectures on other religions should be broadcast at both district and national levels as is the case with Islam (Dakwah). This will bring about mutual understanding and respect between citizens of various religions.

IV. Ministry of Home Affairs

10. Restrictions placed on the entry of religious missionaries from abroad into Malaysia should be relaxed, in line with the freedom to preach and embrace all religions as enshrined in our Constitution.

V. Prime Minister's Department

11. The proposed Moral Laws are likely to encroach upon the basic human rights of an individual in a modern democratic society. Moral education should not be carried out via the enforcement of laws. The government should instead grant financial assistance to the various religious bodies in this country to encourage them to carry out moral training and guidance activities among their followers. In this way, positive moral attitudes will be cultivated and formed more effectively.
12. The drafting of laws to control the moral behaviour of a section of the citizenry will not necessarily be accepted by the rest. On the contrary, such an action may give rise to mental uneasiness or other bad effects. In such a situation, it might be better to allow the status quo to continue.

Declaration of the Cultural Congress of the Major Chinese Organisations in Malaysia.

We, 15 organizations representing the Chinese community in Malaysia held a Cultural Congress in Penang on 27th March 1983. We discussed in great depth the question of Malaysian Chinese Culture and National Culture, drawing on principles embodied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Federal Constitution, and taking into account the objective

conditions in our country, government policies and opinions from all sides.

We unanimously agreed that:

1. The basic characteristics of our national culture are: the existence of multi-faceted cultural forms, the sharing of common values and local traits.
2. The fine elements in the culture of each ethnic community form the foundation of the national culture.
3. The guidelines to the establishment of a set of common cultural values are science, democracy, rule of law and patriotism.
4. The moulding of the National Culture should be based upon the principle of equality among all our ethnic groups and through democratic consultation. In this process, emphasis should be on the natural laws of cultural development without too much artificial intervention.
5. The process of moulding the National Culture should be one of spontaneous interaction among our various cultures; the adoption of their essence and the discarding of negative and pernicious values, supplemented by the richness of other foreign cultures to build a set of common cultural values.

6. The government should give equal treatment and support to the cultures of the various communities and strongly encourage interaction among the cultures.

Based on the above, we have prepared a Memorandum on National Culture, together with four appendices on (a) language and education, (b) literature, (c) the arts, and (d) religion, for submission to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

We call upon all the Chinese guilds and associations and all citizens of Chinese origin in the country, especially the intellectuals and those in the education and cultural circles, sparing no effort to substantiate and propagate the views expressed in these five documents. We should unite and strive towards accomplishing these aims through constitutional means and the democratic process.

We also welcome the views and comments of the other communities on this document and we hope we can have exchanges of views regarding a common perspective on the concept of National Culture, National Literature, National Arts and Religions.

Resolution of the Cultural Congress

1. This Congress calls upon the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to take serious

note and to give just consideration to the basic views, stand, demands and proposals of the Chinese community on the question of national culture as reflected in this memorandum which was unanimously approved by the aforesaid Congress; to show respect for the Chinese community and its culture as one of the major cultural groups in our country.

2. This Congress calls upon the Barisan Nasional Government to pay full attention to the widespread feelings of dissatisfaction, particularly among non-Malays, and its harmful effect on national unity and social peace that are a direct result of the implementation of national policies on language, education and culture which are Malay-centric and tend towards forced assimilation. The government must seek ways and means to contain the growing trend towards racial polarisation in order to ensure harmony and unity among the various ethnic groups for the interest of national development.
3. This Congress calls upon the Barisan Nasional Government to implement democratic, progressive and liberal policies on language, education and culture, which are fair to all ethnic groups, in order to bring about genuine unity among the races and overall development of our country.
4. This Congress calls upon the Chinese com-

munity, including the Chinese organisations and Chinese-based political parties, to unite and co-operate in striving for the common interest of the Malaysian Chinese in the fields of language, education and culture.

5. This Congress calls upon the Chinese community, particularly the cultural and educational bodies as well as intellectuals, to continue studying in depth and to make known to as many the principles, views and stand enshrined in this Memorandum on National Culture, in order that its views on culture may be consolidated and its influence extended in both scope and depth.
6. This Congress calls upon the Chinese community, while examining the contents of its own culture and appreciating its positive and negative components to further strengthen its own understanding of the cultures of other ethnic groups in our country in order to encourage the interaction between Chinese culture and that of other ethnic groups thereby contributing to the national culture, especially in the field of common cultural values.
7. This Congress calls upon the Barisan Nasional Government to take concrete steps towards encouraging the interaction between the cultures of the various ethnic groups in our country. The Ministry of Culture,

Youth and Sports must set up various ethnic cultural study units and immediately carry out activities that will bring about interaction between the cultures of all the ethnic groups.

**MEMORANDUM ON NATIONAL CULTURE
SUBMITTED BY THE 10 MAJOR INDIAN
ASSOCIATIONS OF MALAYSIA TO THE
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND
SPORTS, APRIL 1984.**

1. Introduction

In response to the request by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports for submission of views on the formation of a Malaysian National Culture, we, representing various Indian cultural, social and religious organisations, submit this Memorandum which reflects the basic Malaysian Indian viewpoint on National Culture. The signatories to this joint Memorandum are listed in Appendix A.

2. The Objective of the Memorandum

The objective of this Memorandum is to provide a representative view of the Malaysian Indian community on the concept and evolution of National Culture so that the Government would be better informed when initiating policies connected with it. The Memorandum is being sub-

mitted because we are alarmed and greatly concerned by the various statements and pronouncements on National Culture made by politicians, politicized academicians and irresponsible government servants.

3. Concept of Culture

Culture is the sum total of the way of life of a people and their creative expression manifested in such forms as literature, drama, art, music, dance and folk traditions. Culture is the result of evolution, not of dictate. History is full of examples where attempts to create culture artificially not only failed but resulted in bloody social upheavals. This has particular significance for plural societies like Malaysia where various cultures have taken historical roots and have come to exist side by side. In this context, any attempt to create a supraculture (National Culture) artificially, in complete disregard of the existing cultural plurality, is to court trouble. This is especially so if the attempt is to raise the status of one of the cultures to become the supraculture. It is not difficult to understand the reactions of the other cultures, for culture is something that is close and dear to everybody's heart.

In a culturally plural environment, the development of a common culture (National Culture) is best left to evolve over time. This evolution may be guided by policies stressing common values found in the existing cultures but never

by trying to eradicate or relegate the other cultures in favour of any one culture.

4. National Culture in the Malaysian Context

By definition, National Culture in the Malaysian context must reflect the salient features of all the cultures in the country combined with positive elements from other cultures. The culture of any one ethnic group cannot be the basis of National Culture. It is being postulated that Malay Culture shall be the basis of National Culture. This cannot be accepted for two reasons at least. First, the word "basis" is highly misleading for it has yet to be defined in operational terms. On the one hand it can be interpreted to mean the whole of Malay Culture while on the other, it could signify only specific features of that culture. Second, it ignores certain fundamental differences between the diverse cultures in Malaysia.

Islam is the basis of Malay Culture. If Malay culture is to become the basis of National Culture, then it follows that Islam will be the basis of National Culture and because Islam is such an all-embracing religion, it also follows that the National Culture in such a context will have little or no room for the other cultures. Obviously such a situation cannot be accepted by the other communities in the country whose cultures are based on different religious beliefs and norms. Therefore, the postulate that Malay Cul-

ture should be the basis of National Culture, in the final analysis, will lead to the Islamization of the country in which the cultures of other communities cannot really survive for long. Consequently the Malay – Islamic culture approach to the 'formation' of National Culture cannot be accepted by us. There is need to seek other approaches. To us, the National Culture must reflect the cultures of all the communities in the country. It must be liberal and inclusive, not narrow and exclusive. We must seek out the common values and belief-systems of each of the cultures and integrate them to provide the backbone for the National Culture. An essential element of the National Culture should be mutual respect for the various sub-cultures in the country and for other cultures. It is important to bear in mind that the world is turning into a global village. It would be futile to imagine that any culture can maintain its pristine 'purity' for long. This is particularly true today when we are moving rapidly into an era of 'future shock' of which communicational satellites are an obvious sign.

5. National Culture and National Unity

In the Malaysian context, culture has an important role to play in fostering national unity. However, the objective of National Culture should be "Unity, not Uniformity". Here we are in complete agreement with the Rukunegara when it says: "We are dedicated to ensuring

the existence and growth of a liberal society in which the members are free to practise and profess their own religions, customs and cultures consistent with the requirement of national unity." (Social and cultural practices in Malaysian society, 2nd Series, Lembaga Perpaduan Negara, Page VI.) But now the emphasis of the government appears to be shifting from the concept of cultural unity to cultural uniformity, with rejection of important strands of culture found in Malaysian society in favour of Malay Culture. This is not only politically and socially dangerous but is also totally inimical to the development of true national unity.

6. Understanding And Agreement Reached by The Communities on the Concept of National Culture

The understanding on National Culture when Merdeka was won was that the religions, customs and cultures of the various communities in the country would be accepted, respected and assisted to develop and flourish and, under no circumstances, would they be endangered by any group in power. This understanding is reflected in our Constitution which provides the same protection:

Article 3:

(1) Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised in peace

and harmony in any part of the Federation.

Article 11:

(1) Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and to propagate it.

In view of these Constitutional provisions, recent trends in Government policy on matters of culture are regrettable because they clearly deviate from the basic rights on culture promised to the other communities at the time of Independence. The attempt to define National Culture on the basis of the proceedings of the National Cultural Congress of 1971 completely negates the historical understanding on culture reached by the different communities. The deliberations of that Congress cannot be accepted, as they neither represent nor reflect the views of the majority of the people in Malaysia. Following the Congress, significant cultural policy guidelines have come to be accepted by the Government for defining and developing the National Culture. For example, National Culture is being solely equated with Malay Culture based on Islam. This is a clear negation of the historical understanding on culture reached by the communities at the time of Merdeka.

7. Islamic State

A particularly disturbing element is that there are politicians, government servants, acade-

micians and religious leaders who have already decided for themselves the future status of Malaysia as an Islamic State. Consequently their concept of National Culture is one of Islamic Culture alone. In their concept the cultural values of the other communities have little or no relevance. They are prepared to ride roughshod over the sentiments and sensitivities of the other communities. The influence of this group is by no means small. It is being felt in a number of ways, viz:

- * pressurising non-Muslims to wear Malay/Muslim attire
- * showing little or no concern/respect for the cultural practices of others
- * creating obstacles for others to develop their cultures, religions and languages
- * discriminating on the basis of religion
- * condoning Islamic extremism
- * ridiculing other religions
- * laying down standards of personal behaviour and morality for others
- * pushing Islamic indoctrination
- * propagating the slogan of one language, one religion, one race
- * supporting cultural assimilation rather than integration, or "Unity in Diversity".

While we accept the special position of Islam in the country and the honour accorded to it in

the Constitution, we cannot accept the conversion of Malaysia into an Islamic State for it is inimical to the very concept of cultural and ethnic pluralism which is the foundation of Malaysian society. Article 3 of the Constitution is in harmony with this view.

8. Malaysian Literature

Another disturbing factor is the definition of Malaysian Literature. It is being advocated by some irresponsible Malay academicians that only writings in Bahasa Malaysia can qualify as Malaysian Literature. This is a very narrow and unacceptable view of what should constitute Malaysian Literature. The test should not be the language in which it is written but the theme and the content. Many of the writings on Malaysia by our ex-colonial masters form an important part of our literature. Similarly a lot is being written today on significant aspects of Malaysian life in Tamil, Chinese and other languages. These must be accepted as part of Malaysian Literature. To deny them this status is to negate the very basis of Malaysian society and the meaning of literature.

9. Policy Guideline for Fostering the Growth of a National Culture

So far the Memorandum has devoted attention to what National Culture should and should not be. This final part is concerned with recom-

mending some important policy guidelines for adoption by the Government in order to foster the growth and development of a true National Culture.

9.1 Definition of National Culture

National Culture must be defined in terms of a set of common values, norms, and beliefs found in the cultures of the various communities in Malaysia, combined with positive elements from other cultures. It cannot be equated solely with Malay or Islamic culture. Neither can Malay culture form the basis of National Culture.

9.2 Evolution of National Culture

The pace of development of the National Culture should not be forced. It should be allowed to evolve. To force the pace artificially will only serve to create stress and strain. However, certain progressive policies, as contained in this Memorandum can be adopted as a guide for the development of National Culture.

9.3 De-emphasize Religion

There is a need to de-emphasize the religious component of culture and emphasize the other components, such as language, art and music. In a plural society the non-religious components of culture are more likely

to serve the cause of unity than the religious components.

9.4 Check Religious Extremism

To some extent the actions of the Government have promoted religious extremism in this country. The Government must rise above sectarian policies and, in the national interest, check, without fear or favour, all forms of religious extremism.

9.5 Declare Islamic State as Not in the National Interest

The Government must come out openly and declare that the establishment of an Islamic State is not in the national interest and therefore will not be pursued by the Government. This will allay the fears of many people.

9.6 Encourage Studies of Comparative Cultures and Religions

Studies of comparative religions and cultures should be included in the curriculum at all levels from the school to University. Through such studies mutual respect for each other's religions and cultures can be inculcated and eventually a set of common values can be identified and subscribed to by all Malaysians.

9.7 Adopt Cross-Cultural Approach to Malaysian Literature

Malaysian Literature should not be nar-

rowly defined in terms of Malay language or Malay Culture. The correct approach to Malaysian Literature is a cross-cultural one, with emphasis on content. Writings in Malay, Chinese, Indian and other languages, provided they deal with Malaysian themes and aspirations, must be accepted and encouraged as part of Malaysian Literature.

9.8 Give Positive Encouragement and Support to All Cultures

The special position of Bahasa Malaysia and Islam has been accepted by all Malaysians. At the same time, the Constitution protects the languages and cultures of the other communities in the country. It is important for the Government to pay more than lip service to this constitutional provision. The Government must demonstrate its good faith towards the other communities in concrete terms. While the Government continues to expend large proportions of the tax-payer's money on the growth and development of Malay culture, it cannot be said that it has shown any real interest in the other cultures. For the development of a true National Culture, the Government must not be discriminatory in its cultural policies.

9.9 Specific Concerns of the Indian Community

As far as the Indian community is concerned, the Government needs to direct its atten-

tion to the following:

9.9.1 Improve Tamil Schools

Language is a core component of any culture. Similarly schools play a major role in preserving and strengthening a culture. The state of Tamil schools is well known to the Government (Murad Report). Yet the Government continues to turn a blind eye to this problem. If the Government is sincere to the cause it professes, it must take firm and concrete steps to improve the Tamil schools, especially as they are the only schools that are accessible to many pupils in the plantations. Numerous reports have already been submitted to the Government on this issue, with little effect.

9.9.2 Improve P.O.L. Classes

The problem associated with P.O.L. (Pupils' Own Language) classes are again well known to the Government. Many reports have been submitted by Indian organisations to the education authorities on this matter. It cannot be said that the Government, up to now, has been really sincere in trying to resolve this problem. The constitutional provision for the learning of other languages is meaningless unless the Government can provide the facilities for such learning. The Government has a responsibility to ensure that Indians have real opportunities to study

Tamil up to University level. They are entitled to this under the Constitution.

9.9.3 Remove Obstacles to Religious and Cultural Growth

The Government is not providing adequate funds for the religious and cultural growth of the Indian community. On the contrary it creates various administrative obstacles to self-help measures in this area. For example, there are restrictions on religious and cultural troupes from India accepting invitations from local groups to come to Malaysia. For a meaningful development of their cultural and spiritual lives, Malaysian Indian look towards the older civilizations like India, just as Malays turn to Indonesia and the Middle East for their cultural growth. The Malaysian Indians too need occasional external inspiration and stimuli. The Government must not be discriminatory in this area. If it cannot help, let it not create obstacles. This problem applies to other religions and cultures as well. For example, Christians in Malaysia have the same difficulties in trying to bring preachers and priests from outside. The Government's attitude to other cultures seems to be one governed by fear. Fear cannot provide the basis for a healthy growth of National Culture. We are alarmed at the subtle ways in which the other religions and cultures are being discriminated against and

in fact being suppressed. The Constitutional protection provided to the other communities must be in evidence not only on paper but also in practice.

Article 12:

- 1) . . there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, descent or place of birth:—
 - (a) in the administration of any educational institution maintained by a public authority, and in particular, the admission of pupils or students or the payment of fees: or
 - (b) in providing out of the funds of a public authority financial aid for the maintenance of or education of pupils or students in any educational institution (whether or not maintained by a public authority and whether within or outside the Federation).
- 2) Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law. . . .
- 3) No person shall be required to receive

instruction in or to take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own.

9.9.4 Check Attempts to Force Cultural Uniformity

There are many instances where over-zealous Government servants and Malay extremists are forcing the norms of Malay and Islamic culture on Malaysian Indians. Indian ladies have been told not to wear the saree to certain functions. Indian school children have been forced to wear certain types of attire to reflect Malay and Islamic culture. Some of them have even been asked to attend Ugama classes on Islam even though they are Hindus. Indians and others have been subjected to Islamic indoctrination, even at Government training workshops where Islamic religious values and beliefs have been presented as superior to other religions and cultures. This is a dangerous trend and the Government must be firm in checking it. Attempts to impose one's religion and culture on others is fraught with danger, especially in a plural society and it should be avoided at all costs.

9.9.5 Inculcate Respect for all Religions and Cultures

One of the characteristics of Malaysian

society that has been admired historically by the international community is its mutual respect and tolerance of one another's religions and cultures. This has been our strength. It must be maintained. Of late there have been instances where certain extremist groups have been making fun of the Hindu religion. The Hindu religion has been presented by this group in derogatory terms. Apart from religion there have been instances where little concern has been shown for the cultural practices of Indians. For example, at Government functions beef has been served, quite often without any alternative dishes. Indians respect the cultural norms of other Malaysians with regard to food. We see no reason why this should not be reciprocated. At public functions food that is culturally acceptable to all Malaysian ethnic groups should be served.

9.9.6 Provide Meaningful Opportunities for All Religions and Cultures to Grow and Develop

As stated earlier, the Government must not practise discriminatory policies in matters of religion and culture. While accepting the special position of Islam and Bahasa Malaysia in the country, the constitutional protection given to other religions and cultures must always be kept in mind. It is not enough for the Government to say that they allow other religions and cultures to exist. It must

demonstrate its good faith by providing meaningful opportunities for the other religions and cultures to grow and develop. Such opportunities, as far as the Indian community is concerned, should include the following:

- i) more allocation of land and financial assistance to Hindu temples and cultural institutions.
- ii) increased opportunities in RTM to broadcast messages and discourses on Hindu religion and culture.
- iii) increased time in RTM for Indian programmes.
- iv) more liberal entry for religious and cultural troupes from outside for the cultural benefit of the Malaysian Indian community.
- v) increased Indian cultural participation in local and overseas presentations of "Malaysian Culture".
- vi) more effective opportunities for the teaching and learning of Tamil up to College and University levels.
- vii) acceptance of writings in Tamil with Malaysian background as "Malaysian Literature"; provision of financial assistance to encourage such writings.
- viii) increased opportunities for other Malaysians to learn Tamil and to know more

about Hindu religion and Indian culture. Effort should be made by the Government to encourage cross-cultural studies so that the different communities in Malaysia can understand one another better.

- ix) eradication of administrative policy restrictions and discrimination against Indian religion and culture.
- x) greater recognition of the historical contributions of Malaysian Indians. Programmes such as "Hari Ini Dalam Sejarah" should reflect this.
- xi) a fair share of names of streets and public places to reflect the Malaysian Indian contribution to our country.

10. Conclusion

This Memorandum is being submitted because of our deep concern for the future of our country. The Memorandum is explicit and frank because nothing will be gained by hiding reality. We firmly believe that the cultural policy of the Government should serve to unite and not divide Malaysians. A liberal approach to National Culture is called for because culture, by definition, ought to appeal and bring out the best in human nature. This can only occur in a liberal and enlightened environment. Hopefully, the Malaysian Government will provide the leadership for such a development.

Signed by:

1. Pergabungan Tamil Malaysia
2. Persatuan Dravidian Malaysia
3. Majlis Kelab Bell Belia Tamil
4. Majlis Belia Hindu Malaysia
5. Persatuan Penulis-Penulis Tamil Malaysia
6. Kesatuan Kebangsaan Sek. Tamil Malaysia.
7. Malaysia Hindu Sangam
8. Persatuan Kesenian Tamil Malaysia
9. Persatuan Kesusasteraan Tamil
10. Persatuan Artis-Artis Tamil Malaysia

Naskah Pemeliharaan
Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

26 MAR 1986

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24 MAY 1988