

# The Chinese in Malaysia

*Edited by*  
Lee Kam Hing  
*and*  
Tan Chee-Beng

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## Foreword

THIS volume of 14 essays is the first book on the Chinese in Malaysia to be written in English by local scholars of Chinese descent. Only 3 of the 14 contributors no longer reside in Malaysia, but all have been educated and have worked in the country for varying periods of their lives. To say that this is a first may seem strange since there have been many studies on the Chinese in modern and contemporary Malaysia and many are written by Chinese scholars. But there has not been any work *in English* that is wholly about the Chinese since the study published by Victor Purcell in 1948. This fact deserves a brief comment.

The various groups of Chinese in the different parts of British Malaya had, for the past century and a half, attracted attention from traders, travellers, and colonial officials of many nationalities, and most of all from Chinese writers themselves. The outside world, however, is more familiar with the writings of the former group of writers because most of them had published in English, while most Chinese had written largely in Chinese for their own audiences. In any case, no systematic book on the Chinese in Malaya as a whole appeared in either English or Chinese until Purcell's *The Chinese in Malaya*. That was soon after the end of the Second World War, when serious research began to be done on Chinese sojourners or emigrants, first in South-East Asia, and then in North America and elsewhere.

There are many reasons for this growth in interest in the Chinese in South-East Asia. New indigenous nationalisms were emerging, communism was victorious in China, and there was fear that decolonization by Western powers would leave a vacuum for China and international communism to fill. All these posed serious problems of nation-building to local political leaders, bureaucrats, and military experts. The government in China had for decades been speaking of Nanyang Chinese as a common body of their compatriots. The new leaders on the Chinese mainland were expected to continue to do so. This idea of Nanyang was focused on the archipelago region centred on the Malay Peninsula and the greatest concentration of Chinese sojourners in the Nanyang by the turn of the century was in British Malaya. It was no accident that these 'Malayan' Chinese became the centre of considerable attention.

When the concept of the oneness of the Nanyang was replaced by that of South-East Asia soon after 1945, it was not merely a name

change. It was the prelude to a major geopolitical shift that now placed the emphasis on the special nature of newly independent countries setting out to become modern nation-states in the region between the two large polities of China and India. The importance of this configuration was confirmed for the next 30 years by strong contending forces, those of communism centred on China and supported by the Soviet Union, those of political neutralism (in Asia, largely centred on India), and those of capitalism, projected by the Anglo-American alliance in the archipelagic states, and hinged on the Malay Peninsula. It is in that context that one can observe the significance of having, in the early 1950s, some 15 million Chinese living within that area of modernizing states. It is also in that context that we can understand the pressures on these Chinese to make a stark choice, to identify with their homes in mainland China while remaining in countries which would fear and distrust them as potential communists, or to accept their positions as minorities and try to prove their loyalties to their adopted countries.

What they did or did not do for the next four decades aroused much interest, and hundreds of articles and several dozen books were published. The bulk of those written in English and Chinese were about the immigrants turned settlers in what had been British Malaya, now Malaysia and Singapore. But unlike Singapore, on which it is possible to write mainly about the Chinese by simply writing about developments within the city-state, Malaysia has been more difficult to write about where its citizens of Chinese descent are concerned. There is a Malay/bumiputra majority committed to economic policies that were designed to uplift themselves from positions of relative inferiority. There were great sensitivities on subjects that might touch on communal politics during a period of transition. Also, there was no one Chinese community once the umbrella of 'Nanyang Chinese' was removed. That had been an umbrella held up by Chinese nationalism to encourage sojourners to look always to China. When these sojourners decided to settle and not return, other factors came to the fore, including both those which united and those which divided them. This is particularly acute in Malaysia precisely because the Chinese there are neither a small minority as they are in all other countries, nor the majority as are their counterparts in Singapore, the one part of Malaysia that was forced to leave the federation in 1965. There are clearly special problems for those who want to write about the Chinese in Malaysia which scholars in other countries do not have to face.

Nevertheless, efforts both inside and outside the country to build a picture of the new Chinese communities in the complex fabric of the Malaysian states have continued. By 1984, a volume of essays, in Chinese, entitled *The History of Chinese in Malaysia* and edited by Lim Chooi Kwa and Loh Cheng Sun, was published in Kuala Lumpur. All 12 authors were local and at least eight of them were working in Malaysia at the time. It covered a wide number of topics that included specific chapters on politics, economics, society, education, literature, and religion, but it was mainly about the peninsular states. It was weak

in materials on East Malaysia. Also, it included Singapore in at least three chapters and was often uncertain about what to include or leave out about Singapore. What was remarkable about the work was that it was the first attempt by local Chinese to put such a volume together about what was still a rather elusive identity, that of the Malaysian Chinese.

About the time this book appeared, another group of local Chinese scholars, centred on members of two universities, the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, began to plan for a volume on the Chinese in Malaysia to be written in English. Three of them had already contributed chapters to the volume published in Chinese. But they and their colleagues believed that the time had come for a general work in English which would update that of Purcell. Like Purcell, they sought a broader canvas and did not limit themselves to history. The present volume of multidisciplinary essays is the product of that effort. For various reasons, this work has taken much longer and the editors have offered a brief explanation as to why that has been so.

In the meantime, the editors who published the 1984 *History* have enlarged the earlier work and published in 1998 a new three-volume work, *A New History of Malaysian Chinese*, this time with four editors but still led by Lim Chooi Kwa. In this much larger work, the authors compare pre-independence and post-independence history more systematically down to the time of publication. Among the contributors also is one who wrote for the present English work. He is Yen Ching-Hwang and he provides a historical chapter common to both. For the present volume, his is the only chapter that describes itself as historical. The other 13 authors here concentrate on recent developments and seek to help the reader understand some of the major trends of contemporary events which affect the future of the Chinese communities in Malaysia. The authors range widely and there is nothing of significance to these communities which has not been covered fully. It can be described as a worthy successor to Purcell's work.

I have drawn attention to the 26 chapters of the work in Chinese for a particular reason. They are more directly historical than the 14 chapters of this volume but the subjects covered are similar and there are many opportunities for comparisons to be made. What is truly significant is that there is, in the two collections of studies, a degree of convergence of views which would simply not have been possible 50 years ago. At the time Victor Purcell wrote his book, writings in English would have been inspired by colonial or anti-colonial, anti-imperialist concerns, either of which was likely to be openly and more subtly ideological. Among the Chinese in Malaysia themselves, there would have also been voices that spoke in terms of Chinese nationalism, if not international socialism as well. Furthermore, the division between the majority who were Chinese-educated and the more favoured minority who were English-educated was very great, and it was rare for any Chinese to understand or reconcile their divergent points of view.

Today, in these two collections, we can see approaches, attitudes, and conclusions which, while by no means the same, are indeed comparable. On reading the two sets of essays by scholars of different generations, several with quite different educational backgrounds, it is remarkable how well they convey a common grasp of the nation-building realities that Malaysia has had to face for the past three or four decades. They reflect the effect of new national consciousness upon the various Chinese groups and bring out common outlooks that are unique to Malaysian Chinese. This leads me to view the Malaysian experience, in spite of the many stresses and strains that the peoples have encountered, as being a surprisingly unifying one. It is in that context, that of change and evolution towards nationhood, that I commend this volume of contemporary essays, and encourage all those who can read Chinese to compare these studies with those in the three-volume history. Bilingual scholars who study the diasporic Chinese settled in their adopted countries around the world would find the exercise particularly worthwhile.

*Singapore*  
2 August 1999

WANG GUNGWU  
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## Preface

THIS book has taken a long time to complete. It was in 1983 that the idea of preparing a volume on the Chinese in Malaysia was first raised by the editors. As it turned out, the effort required more time than was anticipated, especially as the project was sustained entirely by the enthusiasm of the contributors and the editors who were separated by distance and all burdened by teaching responsibilities. So much has been written about the Chinese in Malaysia, and indeed some of the important studies were undertaken by scholars in this region looking at different areas of the subject. But these are mostly in academic journals which are not easily accessible. Furthermore, some of the more scholarly works are no longer available. The editors, therefore, felt that a publication containing comprehensive but concise essays would be helpful to general and specialist readers. Compiling essays of different topics on the Chinese in Malaysia into one convenient volume is therefore a concern that in part guided the editors.

This book essentially looks at the trend and nature of the localization and participation of the Chinese in Malaysian life. This served as a framework for the different contributors who were otherwise free to use their different disciplinary approaches.

Due to the diversity of topics and the number of writers, the editors have been flexible when striving for a standardization of terms and spellings. Both the Wade-Giles and the modern Pinyin systems are used for Chinese transcriptions. The former is convenient for chapters on the more historical aspect where many known transcriptions, especially of names, have long been in use. All other transcriptions are in Pinyin.

The traditional spelling of certain place names has been retained. These include Johore, Malacca, Penang, and Trengganu. For specific historical situations referred to in the book, Malaya is used while Malaysia applies to the present Federation as well as for general reference which disregards the separate entities before 1963.

The term 'bumiputra' refers to Malays and other indigenous peoples of Malaysia, and this is used without further explanation in the text. Both the labels 'Teochiu' and 'Teochew' are used interchangeably although Teochiu is preferred.

'Malaysian Chinese' is a term generally used in the text although there was a preference by many contributors for 'Chinese Malaysians'. The

former is found in so many existing references that it is retained for consistency. Our hope is that the volume succeeds in showing that there has emerged a community of Malaysians but of Chinese origin which the term Chinese Malaysian emphasizes.

We are indebted to the University of Malaya which allowed us the use of resources and facilities in completing this volume. The editors and many of the contributors have gained from the academic environment in the university. We are particularly grateful to the University Library and its staff.

The Lee Foundation gave us a grant to organize a seminar in 1993. We want to thank its directors.

Finally we want to record our appreciation to Dr Stephen Leong, formerly of the University of Malaya and now at the Institute of International and Strategic Studies, who provided much advice and encouragement on this project. Our thanks go also to Ms Chow Mun Seong, Dr Fujio Hara, Ms Pauline Lee, and Mr Soong Mun Wai who have assisted us in many ways.

A volume of this nature unavoidably has shortcomings and as editors we take full responsibility for them.

*Kuala Lumpur*  
*Hong Kong*  
*July 1999*

LEE KAM HING  
TAN CHEE-BENG



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## Abbreviations

7MP	Seventh Malaysia Plan
ABH	Ang Bin Hoay
ACCCIM	Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Malaya
AMCJA	All Malaya Council of Joint Action
AMCJA-PUTERA	All Malaya Council of Joint Action-Pusat Tenaga Rakyat
ASM	Amalgamated Steel Mills Sdn Bhd
BCIC	Bumiputra Commercial and Industrial Community
Berjaya	Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (Sabah People's Union)
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CBR	crude birth rate
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDR	Crude death rate
CPR	contraceptive prevalence rate
CRGA	Council of Registered Guilds and Associations
CRNI	crude rate of natural increase
Danaharta	Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional Berhad
DAP	Democratic Action Party
Danamodal	Danamodal Nasional Berhad
Donjiaozong	United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association and the United Chinese Schools Committees' Association
EOI	export-oriented industrialization
FTUC	Federation Trade Union Congress
GDP	gross domestic product
Gerakan	Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement)
HRD	human resource development
ICA	Industrial Coordination Act
ICSS	Independent Chinese Secondary Schools
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INA	Indian National Army
ISI	import substitution industrialization

ISRF	Industrial and Social Relations File
JKKK	Jawatan Keselamatan dan Kemajuan Kampung
KLSE	Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange
KMT	Kuomintang
KMTM	Kuomintang Malaya
LTAT	Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera
LUTH	Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji (Pilgrims Management and Fund Board)
MBA	Malaysian Buddhist Association
MBPI	<i>Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence</i>
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MGLU	Malayan General Labour Union
MICCI	Malaysian International Chambers of Commerce and Industry
MMEU	Malay Mining Employees' Union
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPHB	Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad
MRCIA	<i>Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs</i>
MTUC	Malayan Trades Union Congress
MUF	Malay Union File
MUIS	Sabah Islamic Council
NDP	New Development Policy
NECC	National Economic Consultative Council
NEP	New Economic Policy
NFO	numbers forecast operations
NOC	National Operations Council
NPL	non-performing loans
NST	<i>New Straits Times</i>
NUFGW	National Union of Factory and General Workers
NUPW	National Union of Plantation Workers
NV	New Village
PAP	People's Action Party
PAS	Parti Islam Se Malaysia
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah (United Sabah Party)
Perkim	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam (Muslim Welfare Organization)
Pernas	Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (National Corporation)
Petronas	Petroleum Nasional Berhad (National Petroleum Corporation)
PMFTU	Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions
PMIP	Pan Malayan Islamic Party
PNB	Permodalan Nasional Berhad (National Equity Corporation)
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PSF	Pahang Secretariat File
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat

RTU	Registry of Trade Union Files
SAPP	Sabah Progressive Party
SCA	Sabah Chinese Association
SCA	Sarawak Chinese Association
SCBA	Straits Chinese British Association
SCCP	Sabah Chinese Consolidated Party
SEDC	state economic development corporations
SGLU	Singapore General Labour Union
SJK (C)	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (C) (National type Chinese primary school)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SMJK	Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan (National type secondary school)
SMI	small- and medium-scale industries
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel/ Anglican Church
SSF	Selangor Secretariat File
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
TFR	total fertility rate
TOL	temporary occupation licence
UCSCA	United Chinese School Committees' Association (Dongzong)
UCSTA	United Chinese School Teachers' Association (Jiaozong)
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
USIA	United Sabah Islamic Association
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
YBAM	Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia

## Notes on Contributors

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## Introduction

THIS book grew out of the efforts of several scholars who felt that it was time that there was a volume offering a comprehensive survey of the Chinese in Malaysia. Such a volume was to include, as far as is possible, the more recent research findings on the subject. The last time a similar volume appeared was in 1948 when Oxford University Press published Victor Purcell's *The Chinese in Malaya*.

Victor Purcell served in the pre-war Malayan Civil Service where at one point he headed the Chinese Protectorate. On his return to Britain, he joined Cambridge University where he taught Far Eastern history. Drawing upon his experience and knowledge of the community he had worked with, Purcell completed a general study of the Chinese in Malaya. The book contained chapters on early history, aspects of the Chinese in Malaya, and on developments in the period between 1939 and 1946. Six appendices were included, of which one was on the subject of 'The Baba language'. The book stood for over 50 years and still remains a useful reference.

But much has changed within the Chinese community and in the country in the intervening period. Malaya gained independence in 1957 and in 1963 incorporated the two British Borneo states to form Malaysia. The Chinese who were once referred to as *huaqiao* or overseas Chinese are now citizens of a new nation. The idea of being sojourners is replaced by that of a settled community which now regards Malaysia as its home.

This process of transformation has been a long and at times difficult one. The community itself is not homogeneous. The Chinese are divided along dialect, provincial, and educational lines. The different groups have also varying types of economic roles. Then too there were, among them, different orientation in politics.

There were also factors external to the community which the Chinese had to contend with. British colonialism, overseas Chinese nationalism, the Japanese Occupation, and Malay political assertion were important forces which at different periods shaped the response of the community.

This process of transition of the Chinese in Malaysia has attracted the attention of both serious and popular writers. It has become the subject of much research. The Chinese in Malaysia as with the Chinese overseas

elsewhere, are often studied to help understand the broad process of social integration and of multi-culturalism.

Today the focus of interest on the Chinese overseas, particularly of those in Malaysia, is more on their global economic role. During the 1980s and early 1990s, when the East and South-East Asian economies grew spectacularly, some observers argued that Chinese communities in the region, linked by business networks, were a significant factor in this impressive development. Even with the onset of the economic crisis in 1997, interest in the Chinese remains strong because economists and political scientists are assessing the implications the economic downturn have upon the continuing role of the Chinese in the region.

But research attention on the Chinese has been more than just about their economic role, significant though this may be. Even where the Chinese form a very small minority, their involvement and impact on other aspects of life such as in politics and culture have usually been significant. This is especially so in the case of the Chinese in Malaysia. Constituting close to 30 per cent of Malaysia's population, Malaysian Chinese form the largest proportion of ethnic Chinese outside of mainland China, Taiwan, and Singapore. In particular, they have been able to maintain their distinctiveness. Nowhere else outside of China is there a public education system which includes a Chinese language stream. In addition, Chinese is used in state radio and television, and there are more than a dozen vibrant Chinese newspapers with two enjoying growing circulation. More significantly, political parties which are Chinese or Chinese-based participate prominently in the political process. At least four are part of the ruling coalition, while one of the two larger opposition parties is Chinese-led. Chinese participation in politics can, in fact, be traced back to an earlier period. In more recent history, the Chinese were involved in the decolonization process. Young radical Chinese supported the communist-led rebellion against the British in 1948 while the conservatives joined Malay nationalists to negotiate with the British for constitutional change.

Meaningful participation of the Chinese in politics has as much to do with their demographic and social make-up as with their historical experience in Malaysia. During the period of political transition, the size of the Chinese community was significant because no single ethnic group then was a real majority. The indigenous Malays only crossed the 50 per cent mark in the early 1970s to become a numerical majority.

Furthermore, unlike Chinese minorities elsewhere which are often urban dwellers, nearly a third of the Chinese in Malaysia are in rural or semi-rural areas. In these areas are found a significant number of tin-miners, rubber and oil palm estate labourers, fishermen, livestock breeders, and vegetable farmers. Within the urban centres there are the factory workers, the clerks and the professionals, small-time traders, and big merchants. This broad geographical and occupational diversity of the Chinese in Malaysia came to be expressed in the wide range of political and cultural affiliations.

It is evident that since the end of the Second World War, the Chinese

in Malaysia have moved towards greater integration within an evolving Malaysian society. As Tan Chee-Beng explains in his chapter on the socio-cultural diversities and identities of the Chinese in Malaysia, this process of localization had begun very early. It is an adaptation that continues to occur in the different spheres of community life. It is to understand this process of broader localization that scholars currently working on various aspects of the subject were invited to contribute to this volume. The contributors were each asked to consider the nature of adaptation they studied, the extent, and the pace at which this had taken place.

Yen Ching-hwang first looks at the period when localization was still weak. He traces the beginning of large-scale migration of the Chinese into Malaya and describes the social organizations that provided support to the early immigrants in their new environment. Dialect and province associations assumed far greater significance in Malaya than they did in China. New leadership emerged in the migrant community. These leaders came from the class of mine-owners, planters, and merchants. In Malaya, the merchant class became community leaders and played a far more influential role than they did in China. This leadership status of the merchants was affirmed first by the Malays and the British, and then even by the Qing imperial government of China.

Eventually, as Yen argues, the early Chinese came to be drawn to China-linked nationalism. The arrival of reformists and revolutionaries from China stirred political consciousness among the Chinese in Malaya. This nationalism strengthened the desire of the Chinese in Malaya to preserve their cultural identity. It came at a time too when there was concern at the growing 'westernization' and 'baba-ization' of the local Chinese.

The distinction between the Baba and the new immigrants is referred to by Tan Chee-Beng in his chapter on the complexities of Chinese socio-cultural life and identities. Tan discusses the major dialect groups, namely, Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, Hockchiu (Foochow), Kwongsai, Henghua, and Hockchia. He draws attention, too, to the little-known Shanghainese groups found in different urban centres as well as to the Tianjin people found in Sabah. Among the Baba or 'acculturated' Chinese, there are also different groups due to regional influences. There are the Malay-speaking Baba of Malacca, the *peranakan*-type Chinese of Kelantan whose local Hokkien language has Malay and Thai influences, and the *peranakan*-type Chinese in Trengganu who speak the Trengganu Malay dialect fluently, even among themselves too. Elsewhere, Chinese in different parts of the country adjusted to the culture of the majority people of the region. The Chinese in some parts of Sarawak, as Tan points out, speak Iban fluently.

There is also the division between the Chinese-educated and the English-educated groups, and this will remain for some time although a third group which consists of Malay-educated Chinese will assume growing importance. Tan points to educational background as a factor in religious preference. As an example, Chinese Buddhists who are

English- or Malay-educated generally join the Theravada tradition rather than the Mahayana tradition whose members are mainly Chinese educated.

Tan discusses the religious adherence of the Chinese more fully in a separate chapter. He notes that Malaysian Chinese are represented in all major religions in Malaya although the majority still observe some form of traditional Chinese Religion and Buddhism. Traditional religious practices were brought over by the early migrants. Certain deities worshipped by particular dialect groups became more prominent when the communities grew or flourished. The new environment the Chinese settled into has also influenced these practices and one example is the worship of Toa Peh Kong. Tan also points out that some 7.8 per cent of Chinese are Christians, while 0.4 per cent are Muslims.

The diversities referred to by Tan are elaborated in the chapter on demography by Chan Kok Eng and Tey Nai Peng. The authors analyse the changing population size, distribution, and composition of the Chinese in a multi-ethnic setting. According to the writers, the highest concentrations of Chinese are in Penang, Selangor, and Perak while the least concentrations are in Kelantan and Trengganu. The Cantonese, Hainanese, and the Henghua are the most urbanized with more than 80 per cent in towns while the Kwongsai and the Fochow, with only 50.9 and 67.3 per cent respectively, are comparatively the least urbanized. The chapter shows that among the main ethnic groups, the Chinese have the lowest fertility level, mainly a result of late marriage and of contraceptive use among them. Chan and Tey conclude that 'the continuing out-migration and the lowering of fertility among Malaysian Chinese will result in further changes in the composition in the years to come'.

Change is also evident in the economic role of the Chinese. Phang Hooi Eng shows how Chinese economic participation has shifted from the primary commodities sector, where they were once active, to manufacturing and services. Chinese ownership and participation in the corporate sector is discussed in relation to the increased Malay share within the context of affirmative action of the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1971. Chinese equity participation has grown but at a much slower pace than that of the Malays. It is in the small- and medium-size industries, especially in manufacturing, that the Chinese continue to play a major and significant role. Phang concludes that the Chinese have contributed very significantly to the Malaysian economy in both employment and in investment, and they 'have been at the forefront of the country's economic frontiers, adjusting with the times to exploit opportunities by moving into more profitable lines of business'.

Phang's chapter is complemented by the chapter on Chinese business. Here Heng Pek Koon and Sieh Lee Mei Ling describe the response of Chinese businesses beginning from the changing circumstances of colonial rule to the *laissez-faire* years of the early independence period and through to the more state interventionist NEP. The NEP had the twin aims of eradicating poverty and the restructuring of the corporate sector so that Malays would achieve 30 per cent equity participation. Early



Chinese apprehension of the NEP was due to regulations such as the *Industrial Coordination Act* which requires Chinese companies with stipulated capitalization and labour force size to divest part of their equity to the Malays. In addition, government contracts were reserved to bids from Malays only. In response to the NEP, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Chinese business groups formulated new business strategies. The MCA sponsored a co-operative as well as a party-backed holding company while Chinese businessmen on their own cultivated collaborative ties with influential Malay individuals and institutions. The chapter suggests that in the post-NEP period, there is greater liberalization in business. With a return to the *laissez-faire* environment, the present generation of Malay and Chinese business élites are being held together as much by bonds of business alliances as by a stronger Malaysian-centred identity.

Francis Loh provides a different side to the picture of Chinese economic participation. His study deals not with big business but of farmers suffering from shortage of land and other facilities. A large number of these farmers are settlers in new villages (NV) created by the British to combat the communists during the Emergency of 1948. The label NV belies the difficulties of the people where due to population growth, there is a great shortage of land today. Loh provides analysis on ethnicity, class, and political development in the NV. Given the fact that some 90 per cent of NV settlers are Chinese, these communities live in their own Chinese world and this has implications on their self-identification and on ethnic relations. The villagers are not apolitical. Loh shows how NV political participation was transformed from the earlier phase of radical class-based politics to ethnic politics. The villagers have become politically significant to Chinese-based political parties and at different times have supported opposition as well as the ruling National Front. Support goes to parties or leaders who can articulate issues with which villagers identify. With the government's decision not to treat these villages as separate entities and to drop the label NV, Loh concludes that 'the history of the new villages as "New Villages" may have come to an end'.

Equally important was the large Chinese labour class. In Chapter 6, Leong Yee Fong looks at how this group was organized to protect its interests. For a greater part of its history, Chinese labour was linked to left-wing politics. Leong attributes this to colonial neglect and describes how, because of this, the movement came to be influenced by labour militancy and communist agitation. But Chinese leadership and participation in the labour movement gradually weakened. In the post-war years, the Malayan Communist Party shifted from a focus on Chinese labour unrest to actively wooing Malay and Indian allegiance so as to project a multi-racial image. Thus, from 1946 to 1947, a labour movement that was once predominantly Chinese was transformed into one dominated by Indians. This changing character of the movement was also due to measures introduced by the colonial authority aimed at controlling the mobilization of labour.

Leong's chapter offers important insights into the involvement of the labour movement in politics. For a brief period a group of trade unionists, mainly Chinese, was linked to the newly formed Labour Party of Malaya. However, the restrictive Trade Union Ordinance of 1949 effectively curbed and eventually eliminated political trade unionism that was identified with Chinese leadership.

But Chinese participation in politics remains important. Lee Kam Hing and Heng Pek Koon in Chapter 7 recount the significant political role the Chinese have played in the country since large-scale migration began. They explain how the community evolved appropriate approaches in relating to power-wielders, whether they be Malay sultans or British administrators. In the pre-war period, when China-linked nationalism was influential, there were individuals and organizations which were already talking about a more Malaya-oriented political future. It was this group, led by Tan Cheng Lock and later supported by traditional associations and education groups, which joined Malay nationalists in negotiating with the British on constitutional change. Later, having formed the MCA, these Chinese entered into an electoral alliance with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) to contest the first significant municipal election. The Alliance, as the partnership came to be known, gained independence for the country and has been the ruling coalition since then. Expanded into what is now named *Barisan Nasional* (BN), the coalition manages inter-ethnic political co-operation. The more basic interests of the Chinese, such as language, education, and freedom of worship, are protected by the constitution. Not all the Chinese requests are met, given the competing aspirations and expectations within a multi-ethnic society. Some of these unmet demands are taken up by opposition parties, of which the Democratic Action Party (DAP) is the most prominent.

Education has been one issue that troubled the early Alliance and remains a matter demanding political skills from all sides. Malaysia is the only country outside of China where there is a well-developed system of Chinese schools that is largely supported by the state. There are also some 60 independent Chinese-medium secondary schools. Tan Liok Ee points out in Chapter 8 that some 80 per cent of Chinese students at primary level are in Chinese schools. The remainder are in national schools which are Malay-medium. She explains in her chapter the resilience of Chinese schools and argues that they are not only educationally significant but also culturally and politically important to the Chinese. The growth and development of these schools must be seen within the broad social and political transformation of an immigrant society which has moved to become an integral part of an independent nation. Of significance is the fact that some 60,000 of those attending Chinese primary schools are non-Chinese.

As Chinese education developed it became integral to the emergence of Malaysian Chinese literature. Tang Eng Teik in his chapter deals with the subject of *Mahua* literature or literature of Malaysian Chinese written in Chinese. He acknowledges the importance of literary works by

*Chinese in English* and in Malay but argues that Mahua literature represents a larger corpus of materials and one that expresses more fully the experience of the community. But even so, literary works had paid little attention to local concerns for, as Tang points out, the early writers were mainly China-born or China-educated. Only with the appearance of Malaysian-born writers were local themes more fully explored. Tang notes the part played by Chinese newspapers in promoting Mahua literature.

No less important are the performing arts and cultural activities within the Chinese community, as Tan Sooi Beng explains. The Chinese showed early interest in various cultural forms. Communities such as the Straits Chinese took on Malay elements by staging the *bangsawan* (Malay song drama) and Baba plays. Subsequent immigrants brought with them Chinese operas and puppet theatres from China. But these activities declined for a brief period (during the Emergency) because the Chinese cultural groups were monitored by the authorities and in the post-independence period there were competing forms of entertainment. Since the late 1970s, there has been a revival of Chinese opera, lion dance, and music. This was partly in reaction to a more Malay emphasis in the national culture. This revitalization of Chinese forms was further aided by a liberalization of government policies on culture in the 1990s which has led to increased professionalism in the Chinese performing arts. As with education and literature, the performing arts are important expressions of Chinese identity.

Past studies tend to focus only on the Chinese in the peninsula. But in fact, there are significant numbers of Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak. In Sabah they form some 18 per cent of the population while in Sarawak they make up nearly 25 per cent. In many ways, the experience of the Chinese in East Malaysia parallels those in the peninsula. But there are significant differences. In both Sabah and Sarawak, the Chinese play a pivotal role that determines the political balance in state politics to an extent the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia are not able to do now. Partly for this reason, and also because of the peripheral character of the two states, the Chinese can still expand their economic role. In Sarawak, too, there is a significantly large Foochow population. There are, therefore, separate chapters in the book for the two states. Danny Wong Tze-ken looks at the Chinese in Sabah while Daniel Chew examines Sarawak.

The list of topics covered in this book is not exhaustive. Space is the limiting factor. Hopefully, what have been left out may be taken up by others. The hope, too, is that another book might appear in the near future to advance the study of the Chinese in Malaysia which, we trust, this volume has tried to do.

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# 1

## Historical Background

Yen Ching-hwang

### Chinese Immigration and Settlement

CHINESE immigration to Malaysia in the nineteenth century resulted largely from push factors such as the agrarian problems of overpopulation, natural calamities, and landlord exploitation. Tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants, driven by poverty and despair, migrated out of the coastal provinces of China to South-East Asia and America. The pull force was equally strong. European expansion in South-East Asia since the beginning of the sixteenth century and the British advancement in the region with the founding of the first free port in Penang in 1786 marked a new era of Chinese immigration to South-East Asia. British free trade policy in Penang, Singapore, and later in Malacca, greatly attracted Chinese immigrants to this part of the world.

Chinese immigration was not supported by the home government. In fact, the immigrants' departure from China was considered an act against the wishes of the government. It was not until 1893 that the imperial Chinese government lifted its ban on Chinese immigration overseas (Yen, 1985: 249-66; Chuang, 1989: 259-60). Two patterns can be discerned from early Chinese immigration to Malaysia: the kinship-based immigration and the credit-ticket system. Up against many possible adversities—the penalty for breaking the imperial law, the oppressive Chinese mandarins, the hazardous voyage, and the hostile environment in the new country—early Chinese immigrants fell back on kinship ties for mutual support. Once they had established a foothold in business overseas, they recruited relatives and kinsmen for business operations. The other system, the credit-ticket immigration, met the need of tens of thousands of poverty-stricken immigrants. Impoverished and without the support of kinsmen, many prospective Chinese immigrants received the advanced passage provided by labour brokers (known in Chinese as *kheh-t'au*), captains of junks, or labour agencies. Arriving at their destinations, the credit-ticket immigrants (popularly known as coolies) were sent off to mines and plantation estates as labourers. The employers paid the labour brokers the passage money that the immigrants owed, and entered into a written contract with the immigrants for the repayment

of their debts in the form of labour. After working for a fixed period of several years, the credit-ticket immigrants were released from their obligations and were free to choose their own employment. This pattern of immigration was popular and was responsible for bringing the majority of Chinese immigrants to Malaysia before 1911 (CO 275/41).

Behind this credit-ticket system of immigration was a thriving immigrant trade known notoriously in history as 'coolie trade'. The coolie trade, characterized by its inhuman treatment of the coolies during recruitment and transportation, became the dominant pattern of Chinese immigration after 1852. This trade was primarily under the control of foreign immigrant agencies and included British, German, Dutch, American, Spanish, and Portuguese agencies (Wang, 1978: 355-60). Before 1876, there were at least six coolie agencies in the treaty ports along coastal China, supplying coolies bound for Singapore. Three of these agencies were owned by Chinese: they were Hee Kee, Yeong Seng What, and Ty Chaong & Company. The first two were based at Swatow in Guangdong Province and provided Teochew and Hakka immigrants. The third agency operated in Amoy, Fujien Province, and supplied southern Hokkien immigrants. Both Hee Kee and Yeong Seng What had branches in Singapore for receiving coolies, and the surplus were dispatched to Penang for dispersal to the mining states in north-west Malay Peninsula and the plantation estates in north-east Sumatra (Yen, 1986: 7).

The earliest Chinese settlement in Malaysia can be traced back to the time of the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century. Strategically located in the Straits of Malacca, Malacca was a thriving entrepôt for the exchange of products from China, India, and the islands of South-East Asia. It attracted Chinese traders who remained to conduct their business. This small but growing Chinese community played an important role in the foreign trade of the sultanate. The leader of the Chinese community was appointed one of the four port officials, Shahbandar, to help administer the affairs of foreigners (Sandhu, 1961: 5; Sandhu and Wheatley, 1983: 96). Presumably, the Chinese Shahbandar was to control the commercial activities of the Chinese residents, to regulate their behaviour, and to act as agent of the government in dealing with the Chinese population. Most of the Chinese there were southern Hokkiens from Zhangzhou, and did not remain long in one place (Yen, 1993a: 681).

Three patterns of Chinese settlement can be observed during the period from the end of the eighteenth to the first decade of the twentieth century: the urban port settlement, the mining settlement, and the rural agricultural settlement. The urban port settlement began with the small trading community in the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century, but grew rapidly after the British founded Penang in 1786 and then Singapore in 1819. British free trade policy attracted a large number of Chinese from neighbouring states in South-East Asia and from China. Penang and Singapore were relatively uninhabited islands before the British occupation. The urban port setting linked the Chinese settlement

with home ports in China. It was more exposed to outside influence and contact, and enabled the Chinese immigrants to gain new economic opportunities. The urban port settlement also provided opportunities for the immigrants to interact with the Europeans and other non-Chinese residents. Such contacts were useful because they enabled Chinese businessmen to expand their commercial activities (Turnbull, 1972: 10, 32).

Chinese mining settlements began with the gold-mining centre in Bau, Sarawak, in the early nineteenth century. Having come over from the Chinese gold mines in West Kalimantan in the mid-eighteenth century, the Hakka gold miners in Bau increased to about 600 in 1848 (Chew, 1990: 23-5). Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century opened up tin mines in Lukut and Sungei Ujung in Negri Sembilan, Larut in Perak, and Kuala Lumpur in Selangor. Chinese mining settlements were geographically less accessible. This made the settlements relatively closed societies. Members of the mining communities were less mobile in employment. The Hakka miners, in particular, united by a common dialect and strengthened by secret society brotherhood, were tough, clannish, and wary of outsiders.

The Chinese rural agricultural settlement developed later in response to the development of the cash crop industry in the second half of the nineteenth century (P'an, 1950: 40). The growth of pepper and gambier plantations early in Singapore and later in Johore under the *kangchu* system in the nineteenth century represented a major pattern of Chinese agricultural settlement (Coope, 1936: 247-63; Trocki, 1976: 132-55). This pattern was repeated elsewhere in Malaysia such as the Hakka agricultural settlement in Kudat, North Borneo (Sabah), in 1883 (Tregonning, 1959: 132; Han, 1975: 33) and the Foochow agricultural settlements in Sarawak (Lau, 1979: 1-37; Chew, 1990: 143-57).

The rural agricultural settlement was also a relatively closed and less exposed community. In this rural setting, the leaders of the settlement enjoyed greater power and authority than the leaders of the mining settlement. This was partly due to the agriculturists' greater degree of dependence on their leaders who were usually directly responsible for their recruitment in China (Lau, 1979: 1-37).

Social and linguistic background and the nature of Chinese immigration determined the form of early Chinese social organizations. Strong kinship ties in China led to the founding of early kinship organizations (Yen, 1981: 62-3). Linguistic differences and a strong sense of regional identity encouraged immigrants to form their respective dialect associations (Yen, 1986: 35-7). Secret societies were also set up for protection and mutual help. There were obvious overlapping of membership and leadership in these early Chinese social organizations, dialect associations, and secret societies.

Hokkiens were very active in establishing kinship organizations. They founded the earliest Chinese clan association in Malaysia—the Cheah Kongsí of Penang in 1820 (Yen, 1993a: 696)—as well as many other powerful kinship organizations in Penang and Singapore such as the Khoo Kongsí, Yeoh Kongsí, Lim Kongsí, and the Tan Kongsí of

Penang. Most of the early Chinese clan organizations in Malaysia were localized lineages which limited their membership strictly to clansmen from the same village or district in China. Relationships among the members were clearly defined, and traditional obligations to kinsmen and the performing of religious rituals for the founders of the clans in China were also strictly observed (Yen, 1981: 67).

In contrast to the Cantonese and the Hakkas, whose clans were predominantly non-localized lineages, the Hokkiens' clans were mainly localized lineages. This was probably due to factors such as the Hokkien domination of early trade in the Straits Settlements and the nature of the overseas environment. Hokkien domination of the Straits' early trade provided a sound foundation for the rapid growth of the Hokkien population. The continuous expansion of business overseas compelled the Hokkien traders to recruit manpower from China. More and more of their kinsmen were sponsored to come to Malaysia to staff their shops and business enterprises. The overseas environment, whether in urban ports, mining centres, or plantation estates, posed a serious challenge to the new immigrants. In the urban ports where unfamiliar faces were encountered and many unintelligible dialects were spoken, the new immigrants were forced to depend more on kinsmen for economic and emotional support. When the need for kinship support was felt keenly and the number of kinsmen was sufficient to form an organization, a localized lineage organization was established to meet the need (Yen, 1986: 77-8).

The Hakkas, a minority group among the early Chinese, appeared to be very active in founding their dialect associations. They set the first Chinese dialect organization in Malaysia—the Chia-ying Hakka Association of Penang in 1801 (Wu, 1980: 3). The association assumed the name of the Yan-woh Kongsì which has raised some doubts about its ethnic character (Chee, 1971: xxi; Leong, 1981: 40; Yen, 1993c: 108). The Hakkas continued to found some early Chinese dialect associations in Malacca, Penang, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Perak, and Negri Sembilan (Yen, 1993c: 109-10). What made Hakkas most active among Chinese in founding dialect organizations in nineteenth century Malaya was probably the interplay of several factors such as minority insecurity, the nature of the Chinese Kapitan system, strong group cohesion, and an early organizational experience in west Borneo. The Hakkas were a minority group among the Chinese in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore where the population was predominantly made up of Hokkiens and Teochews. Linguistic differences made the early Hakka immigrants in these ports more aware of their minority status, and helped give rise to a sense of insecurity. This insecurity was exacerbated by the nature of the Chinese Kapitan system in early Malaya. Chinese Kapitans were appointed by the British government from the dialect group dominant among the Chinese population, and were given enormous power to control the security and welfare of the Chinese community (Wong, 1964: 9-26). The Kapitans tended to look after their own interests and the interests of their own dialect groups. In addition, they were unlikely to



be able to speak other Chinese dialects. The minority groups thus felt insecure, and could not count on the Kapitans for support in times of need or crisis (Yen, 1993c: 111).

The Hakkas were known to be the latecomers to the scene in south China. They moved from the north to the south through several waves of migration. From north and central China they moved down to the borders of the Kiangsi, Fujien, and Guangdong provinces. Many of them moved further into the eastern and south-eastern parts of Guangdong Province (Lo, 1991: 119-25). The Hakkas were discriminated against in these southern provinces of China, partly because they were the latecomers, and partly because they were in the minority. They had to develop a strong group cohesion in order to cope with the adverse conditions.

The Hakkas' unique organizational experience in the west Borneo gold-fields also contributed to their active founding of dialect associations. The early Hakkas in mid-eighteenth century Borneo were predominantly miners, and they belonged to a tough and well-organized group. They survived and prospered in a hostile environment under the protection of a sophisticated organization, the *kongsí*, which was an economic, social, and political entity (Wang, 1979: 102-5; 1994: 67-83). The best known Hakka *kongsí* organization, under the famous Lo Fang-po, served as the protector of Hakka immigrants on the island of Borneo (Ward, 1954: 358-70; Lo, 1961). Some of these Hakka immigrants shared what they had learned from their experience in Borneo with the Hakka communities in the Straits Settlements (Wynne, 1941: 76-7).

The secret society, a major form of social organization in the early Chinese immigrant communities in Malaysia, was not the preserve of any particular dialect group. The term 'secret society' has a negative and sinister connotation in the present time, but was not so perceived by the Chinese settlers. In fact, secret societies were tolerated by the governments in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states as the *de facto* power structure among the Chinese until 1889 when they were suppressed by the British in the Straits Settlements (Blythe, 1969: 3-4; Yen, 1986: 110-28).

Since the early Chinese immigrants predominantly came from Fujien and Guangdong where the Triad was prevalent (Wakeman, 1972: 1-42; Davis, 1977: 56-71; Lian, 1988: 158-208), they introduced this form of social organization when they arrived in Malaya. The Triad, which was originally politically oriented, developed into a powerful social organization providing protection and mutual assistance. Cutting across kinship and class boundaries, it became a focal point of political action and a formidable challenge to the Confucian socio-economic order during the Ch'ing dynasty in China (Chesneau, 1971: 80-107).

Secret societies existed in port cities like Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, mining centres such as Bau, Lukut, and Larut, and agricultural settlements such as the various *kangkar* in Johore (P'an, 1950: 42; Blythe, 1969: 250-61; Trocki, 1979: 104-5; Mak, 1981: 77-84). Being in a foreign land, the early Chinese secret societies found their original

political aim of overthrowing the Manchus less relevant, but their functions of protection and mutual assistance became more important in a new environment. This required them to be integrated into the social structure of the Chinese communities (Yen, 1986: 110-40).

### Economic Pursuits and Advancement

#### *Entrepôt Trade*

Under the Malacca Sultanate, the Chinese brought in large quantities of Chinese products and exchanged them for Indian textiles and South-East Asian spices, camphor, sandalwood, musk, seed-pearls, batik material, and carpets (Wheatley, 1959: J6; Wheatley, 1961: 313-15). The Chinese set up trading organizations based on family or partnership. Linking Malacca with other South-East Asian ports and the ports of coastal China to form an effective trading network, the Chinese traders were to dominate the trade with South-East Asia.

The entry of the European powers into the region weakened the position of the Chinese traders. However, the Chinese were still able to hold their dominant position in South-East Asian trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was because the European traders were still restricted by the Chinese authorities in their China trade, and the Chinese traders had good commercial contacts in the region (Reid, 1992: 1-2). It was only with British penetration into South-East Asia at the end of the eighteenth century, which greatly altered the pattern of trade, that the dominant position of the Chinese traders were undermined. The founding of Penang and Singapore created new centres for *entrepôt* trading activities, and the British free trade policy revolutionized the concept of trade. The volume of *entrepôt* trade expanded, but the competition became keener. This growing competition undermined the position of the Chinese traders. At the same, British political dominance in the new ports favoured British and European merchants. The founding in Singapore of Guthrie and Company Limited in 1821, Boustead and Company in 1828, John Buttery and Company in Penang and Sandilands Buttery and Company in Singapore in the 1830s, marked the beginning of the British and European dominance in the trade (Allen and Donnithorne, 1957: 53-6). Most of these companies started as agency houses for companies based in London or Europe, but expanded quickly into *entrepôt* trade and later extended into finance, shipping, mining, and plantation (*ibid.*).

The growing dominance of European trade subordinated Chinese traders in the new *entrepôt* trading system. However, a group of Malacca-born Chinese merchants emerged to be integrated into the new system as middlemen. Many of them were probably born of Malay mothers, but maintained much of Chinese manners and customs; and many had received both English and Chinese education in the famous Anglo-Chinese College of Malacca (Song, 1967: 30-1; Harrison, 1979: 129-30). Most of them spoke Malay as well as the Hokkien dialect and

English. This linguistic ability, together with their exposure to Western culture, made them most suited to fill the position of 'middlemen'. Some of them were employed by British or European firms in Singapore and Penang as staff or as business agents serving the trade between the Europeans and the indigenous people (T'wang, 1992: 2). In addition, a small group of enterprising Chinese immigrants newly arrived from China founded companies and was involved actively in the entrepôt trade. They likewise forged a close relationship with British and European companies. The new system of business ties was fundamentally a three-tier structure. The top of the structure was occupied by British and European merchants who imported Western manufactured goods and exported South-East Asian produce. In the middle rung were the Chinese traders who distributed Western goods and collected native produce for export to Europe. Chinese traders also imported Chinese produce and foodstuff and exported island produce to China. At the bottom were the indigenous traders who brought native products to the new ports to exchange with Western and Chinese commodities (Chiang, 1970: 106-24).

The opening of Singapore as a free port forced the Dutch to open up more harbours in the Malay Archipelago as free trading ports (Wong, 1978: 59). With the emergence of these new ports, Chinese traders widened their scope of activities by setting up branches or partnerships. The commodities they traded were more varied and included Chinese foodstuff and domestic items (Wong, 1960: 111). On their return, Chinese junks carried back a variety of the Straits and Archipelago produce.

Chinese entrepôt traders were also more integrated into local and international trading systems. The middlemen role of the Chinese traders in the nineteenth century was important, for the Western manufactured products could not have been effectively distributed without the Chinese, and the Western trade would have been hampered had there been no Chinese compradors.

The Chinese traders greatly benefited from this role. They established firm connections with Western merchants, and a network of collection and distribution activities among the local inhabitants in South-East Asia. They also opened shipping lines to facilitate this operation. Some of them amassed great fortunes from the booming entrepôt trade, and their companies became well-known business establishments in the local Chinese communities. Some big names of Chinese companies in nineteenth century Malaysia and Singapore such as Kim Seng and Company, Lee Cheng Yan & Company, and Kim Cheng and Company were among the most active operators in the entrepôt trade. The founder of Kim Seng and Company, Tan Kim Seng, was born in Malacca and migrated to Singapore to take advantage of the opening of the new port. The company had built up extensive business with several leading European firms in Singapore such as Boustead and Company, and the Borneo Company (Tregonning, 1967: 9). By 1870, it had already set up a network of entrepôt trade, and had branches in Malacca and Shanghai (Chiang, 1970: 258).

*Commercial Agriculture*

A major branch of Chinese economic activities in nineteenth century Malaya was commercial agriculture. To break the Dutch monopoly in the spice trade and to find a stable source of income for the new government, Francis Light, the founder of Penang, encouraged the Chinese settlers to undertake pepper planting (Jackson, 1968: 95). The new venture was essentially a joint European-Chinese enterprise. The European planters financed and controlled large pepper estates, while the Chinese owned small holdings. European planters usually hired Chinese contractors to develop their estates with *sinkheh* (new immigrants) labour. The industry targeted Europe as its main market. But the exclusion of Britain from the European market by the Napoleon regime dealt a severe blow to the Penang planters. At the same time, Penang producers also failed to develop an alternative market in China. The production of pepper declined. However, the industry revived after the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of the European market in 1815. But the revival was short-lived following the sharp fall of pepper prices in London in 1817. In the mid-1820s, the Penang planters began to abandon pepper planting, and after a decade, pepper cultivation almost ceased to exist (Jackson, 1968: 97-100).

Unlike the situation in Penang where pepper planting was a joint European-Chinese enterprise, in Singapore the planting of gambier and pepper was entirely in the hands of the Chinese; and almost 90 per cent of the plantations were controlled by a single Chinese dialect group, the Teochews. With experience in planting, unlimited supply of cheap labour, and the command of dialect and kinship influence as well as the coercive power of the secret society, the Teochew planters had a better chance of success in commercial agriculture than the Chinese in Penang. By 1848, more than 10,000 Teochews were involved in planting and distributing gambier and pepper produce, and they monopolized the trade of these crops in both domestic and international markets. Many of the planters became rich and powerful in the Chinese society in early Singapore (Siah, 1848: 290; Song, 1967: 20; Yen, 1993b: 9-12).

Chinese planters adopted the shifting method of cultivation which promised a quick return. But it exhausted the land quickly. As a result, Chinese planters started to move from Singapore to Johore. Apart from its geographical proximity to Singapore, Johore offered other attractions. It had vast virgin land, its population was small, and its soil was rich in the river valleys. Furthermore, the Malay ruler, the Temenggong, wanted Chinese planters to help develop the state (Trocki, 1979: 88-91).

What accounted for the remarkable success of Chinese commercial agriculture in Johore during this period was the introduction of the *kangchu* system. *Kangchu*, literally 'lord of the river', was the headman who leased the river settlement from the Malay ruler who delegated his authority to the headman with a *surat sungei* (river document). The headman was given administrative and legal powers like a Malay *penghulu* (headman of a village). This *kangchu* system was well suited to

the conditions of nineteenth-century Johore. The *kangchu*, who brought with him capital and labour to develop the settlement, imposed no strain on the state coffers. He was responsible for administering the settlement (known as *kangkar*, literally meaning 'foot of the river'). He paid the rent or taxes of the entire settlement to the state, maintained law and order, constructed and maintained paths, and provided for the upkeep of river communications. To compensate him for his administrative duties, the state also granted him the opium and gambling 'farms', together with other exclusive rights of pawnbroking, selling liquor, slaughtering pigs, and selling pork—all lucrative sources of income for the early Chinese settlers in Malaysia (Coope, 1936: 247-63; Trocki, 1976: 145-52). This system well suited the Chinese planters. Ambitious Chinese planters who had capital and a labour force ran the settlement in their own way. After receiving the authority from the Malay ruler, they ruled their *kangkar* single-handed with the help of assistants. Since most Chinese planters were Teochews, kinship ties provided the foundation of their rule. It was reinforced sometimes by the coercive power of secret societies.

Sugar and tapioca were two other commercial crops that the Chinese were actively involved in. The former was planted mainly in Province Wellesley and Perak in the north of Malaya, while the latter was concentrated in the western part of the Peninsula, including the states of Malacca and Negri Sembilan. Chinese sugar planters had settled in Batu Kawan Island prior to the cession of Province Wellesley to the British in 1800. They opened up sugar estates in the mangrove-covered land and later extended to Bukit Tambun. The industry gained a firm foothold and began to expand during the 1820s and 1830s. By 1841, about 405 hectares of land were under Chinese cultivation which produced 600 to 700 tons of sugar annually (Jackson, 1968: 128-9; Tan, 1981: 24-5). Soon, however, the Chinese expansion was checked due to the arrival of European planters in the 1840s. European planters, consisting of British, French, and Dutch nationals, developed large sugar estates in southern Province Wellesley. With ample supply of capital, superior technology, and cheap Chinese immigrant labour, the Europeans gained the supremacy in sugar planting. By the 1850s they had already wrested control of the thriving industry from the Chinese, and reduced the Chinese planters to smallholders.

The majority of the Chinese sugar planters were Teochews. Outmoded methods and a shortage of capital made the majority of Chinese planters uncompetitive. Those who survived the fierce competition were the innovators. One group, with access to capital from relatives, turned into smallholders and emphasized hard work. Cuts in the costs of production and the wise use of capital ensured their survival. A representative of this group was Kee Lye Huat, a Teochew immigrant whose company, Kee Poh Huat Kongsi in Sungei Bakap, thrived and prospered. Khaw Boo Ann represented the second type of innovators who adopted Western methods of production and management. He employed European superintendents, introduced Western machinery,

and also used political influence to consolidate economic interests. This enabled him to compete successfully with European rivals (Wong, 1964: 81-3; Tan, 1981: 31).

Tapioca production was almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese. The planting of tapioca started in Malacca around the 1850s. The decline in trade and mining activities in Malacca caused the Chinese in the state to look for other economic alternatives. They found tapioca promising for it required smaller sums of capital, assured quick returns, and encountered less competition. It was also an export industry that was less labour-intensive. In 1860 there were an estimated 405 hectares of tapioca estates producing some 2,000 pikuls in Malacca. By the late 1860s, tapioca planting increased tenfold to 4050 hectares. The industry expanded rapidly in the 1870s and early 1880s. This was reflected in the increase of land area held by the tapioca planters. It increased from 8059.50 hectares in 1871 to a phenomenal figure of 37,665 hectares in 1882 (Jackson, 1968: 52-6). Soil exhaustion and increasing government hostility towards the industry forced Chinese planters to shift their planting to Negri Sembilan. By 1888, the estimated land held by the Chinese tapioca planters in Negri Sembilan amounted to 36,450 hectares. The success of the Chinese in the tapioca industry was due to a small group of Chinese capitalists in Malacca. They formed *kongsi*, and owned tapioca concessions and factories which processed tapioca roots into flour, flake, and pearl. Planting was undertaken by Chinese contractors using cheap *sinkheh* labourers (Jackson, 1968: 73-5).

### *The Tin Mining Industry*

Tin mining had existed in Malaya long before the arrival of the Chinese, but the Chinese contribution to the development of this industry was remarkable. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Chinese provided much of the capital and labour. They greatly improved the method of production.

Growing British influence in Malaya after the formation of the Straits Settlements in 1826 created conditions favourable for economic expansion into the Malay states. The Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements had accumulated large sums of capital. At about the same time, the Malay political system in the Western states was in decline. Power fell into the hands of territorial chiefs, *Orang Besar-besar*. The system was further weakened by constant succession disputes (Khoo, 1975: 22-8). In their struggle to preserve their power, the Malay chiefs were drawn into a vicious circle of contest for power, revenue, and territorial expansion. To acquire more power, they had to increase revenue. Keen competition among rivaling Malay chiefs for new revenue led to conflict and mining land being contested because it was a major source of wealth and power.

The first tin mining town with substantial Chinese miners was Lukut in the state of Selangor (later incorporated into Negri Sembilan). As early as 1815, Chinese miners had already arrived in Lukut probably at

the invitation of Raja Busu, a member of the Selangor royal family. Three years later, Chinese miners, estimated to be 200 in number, came under the control of a Chinese Kapitan appointed by the Sultan of Selangor. The number of Chinese miners grew, and the new settlement prospered. But a dispute over tax on tin exports soured the relationship between the Chinese miners and Raja Busu and this ended with the murder of the Raja and the closure of the mine in 1834 (Wong, 1965: 18).

By the 1840s, several tin mining settlements populated by a substantial number of Chinese miners sprang up in Selangor, Perak, Negri Sembilan, and Malacca. In the 1860s these new settlements grew into prosperous mining centres with large Chinese populations. The Chinese population in Larut, Perak, was estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 men in 1862 (*ibid.*: 27). It was largely through their effort that in the two decades between 1874 and 1895, the Malayan tin mining industry reached its peak. At that time, Malaya topped the ranking of world tin producers. It accounted for 55 per cent of the world's tin produce. During this period, despite active involvement of Western companies in tin production, the Chinese remained dominant (*ibid.*: 148-50).

The success of the Chinese in the tin industry was due to a combination of factors: the ample supply of capital from the Straits Settlements, an unlimited source of labour from China, a well-disciplined labour force, cost effective mining methods, and entrepreneurship. Before British intervention, capital for the development of the mining industry came from European and Chinese capitalists in the Straits Settlements. Chinese capitalists such as Chee Yam Chuan, See Boon Tiong, Si Food Kee, and Yeo Hood Ing came principally from Malacca. They made their wealth in trade, real estate, opium, and liquor farms, and accumulated enormous capital for reinvestment. Many of them regarded tin mining as one of the big business enterprises and a potentially important source of wealth. They were actively involved in opening up tin mines in Selangor and Negri Sembilan (Khoo, 1975: 62-4; Chng, 1986: 22-4).

Overpopulation, natural calamities, the effect of the opening of China after the Opium War, and the impact of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) created a huge pool of rural unemployed in southern China. Tens of thousands of poverty-stricken Chinese peasants looked for employment opportunities overseas. However, the ample labour supply did not just work to the advantage of the Chinese. Malay or European miners also had access to the Chinese labour market and could recruit needed workers for their mines. What worked to the advantage of the Chinese miners was their familiarity with Chinese dialects, Chinese customs and practices, and their command of the secret societies. The power of secret societies provided Chinese miners with an additional edge in the competition with the Malay and European tin miners for it helped to regulate and discipline the work-force.

The success of the Chinese was also due to their relatively superior methods of tin production. Prior to the British intervention in Malaya, Chinese tin miners essentially used an open-cast system. They improved

their production methods by adopting superior Western technology. The adoption of the steam pump enabled Chinese miners to mine at greater depths. This resulted in the increase of productivity (Wong, 1965: 56-8).

Overseas Chinese entrepreneurs were the creators and promoters of a modern overseas Chinese enterprise, and they were personally involved in making decisions for the growth, expansion, and sustainability of that enterprise (Yen, 1992a: 14; Yen, 1995a: 247-9). Their ability to use capital, labour, technology, and management skills effectively in the tin-mining industry made them wealthy and powerful in the Chinese communities. Their contribution to the rapid economic development of modern Malaysia was undeniably significant.

### **The Growth of Cultural and Political Identity**

#### *The Origins of Overseas Chinese Nationalism*

Early Chinese immigrants in Malaysia had little interest in politics. Brought up in villages in southern China where the gentry dominated the social and political spheres, ordinary villagers had little participation in the political process. What transformed the political attitude of the early Chinese immigrants was the rise of nationalism among the overseas Chinese. In Malaya this phenomenon was expressed in a strong emotional attachment to the preservation of cultural identity, and concern for the political future of China. The emotional attachment to the home province stemmed primarily from powerful kinship ties and ethnicity.

The Chinese in Malaya also expressed a strong desire to preserve their cultural identity. Nevertheless, this cultural identity was perceived to be threatened by the pervading Western and Malay cultures. The early Chinese immigrants faced various problems. One of these was marriage. Traditional Chinese customs and the government's ban on female emigration prevented Chinese women from migrating to Malaysia on a large scale. This led some early Chinese immigrants to marry local women. This produced a distinctive group of mixed descendants known as Babas and Nyonyas (Tan, 1979: 57-63). At the same time, many of the local-born Chinese were sent to English schools for education. They were exposed to the influence of Western culture, and came to accept Western values and customs. As a result, they placed less emphasis on traditional values and the Chinese way of life. To reverse the trend, Chinese cultural nationalists launched two important movements at the turn of the century. These were the Lo Shan She lecture movement and the Confucian revival movement. The former, which started in Singapore in 1881 and spread to Malacca, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur in 1895, attempted to reassert traditional Chinese values (Yen, 1982: 401-2). Regular lectures were conducted on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month, at which were expounded the Sixteen Sacred Maxims of the Emperor K'ang-hsi. These contained much of the Confucian values of filial piety, loyalty to the clan, propriety



and thrift, law-abiding behaviour, rejection of false doctrines, and exaltation of right learning (Hare, 1894: 92-3; Hsiao, 1967: 186-8). The Confucian revival movement, on the other hand, was launched in Kuala Lumpur in September 1899 and then spread to Singapore, Malacca, Penang, and later to the Dutch East Indies in the early years of the twentieth century. It provided a sharper focus for the reassertion of Confucian values in the South-East Asian Chinese communities (Yen, 1976b: 33-57; Suryadinata, 1978: 33-62; Coppel, 1981: 179-95). The public celebration of Confucius' birthday was encouraged and Confucian schools and Confucian temples were established in an attempt to convert more overseas Chinese to Confucianism (Yen, 1976b: 37).

The efforts of the overseas Chinese cultural nationalists were complemented by the works of the Ch'ing Consul in Singapore. One of the main objectives of the Consulate since its inception in 1877 was to foster overseas Chinese national consciousness. The Ch'ing Consul promoted the study of Chinese literature, patronized Chinese cultural activities, and exalted traditional Chinese values. In 1882, Consul Tso Ping-lung helped organize and launch a literary society in Singapore named Hui Hsien She (The Society for the Meeting of Literary Excellence). He acted as a patron and judge for essay and poetry competitions (Chen, 1967: 115). Tso's successor, Consul-General Huang Tsun-hsien, continued to nurture Chinese cultural identity in the early 1890s. He patronized the Hui Hsien She, and renamed it T'u Nan She which literally means 'the Society for Approaching the South'. Huang also encouraged literary activities by offering awards for the winners of essay competitions. He further patronized the Lo Shan She lecture and the Confucian revival movements, and rewarded filial sons and chaste women for upholding Confucian values (Chen, 1967: 115-6; Yen, 1982: 411).

The Ch'ing Consul also sought to nurture political loyalty towards the dynasty. On auspicious occasions such as the birthdays of the Emperor and the Empress-Dowager, he gathered rich merchants and community leaders at the Consulate to perform a solemn ceremony of allegiance to the throne. On occasions such as the visits of Ch'ing dignitaries, ordinary Chinese were encouraged to welcome the visitors and express loyalty to the dynasty (Yen, 1982: 410).

#### *The Activities of Chinese Reformists and Revolutionaries and Their Impact*

Political events in China at the turn of the twentieth century had an impact on the overseas Chinese communities. The defeat suffered by China in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5 encouraged the reformists such as K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao to rejuvenate the tottering empire through the famous Hundred Days' Reform in 1898. But the failed reform forced K'ang and Liang to flee overseas to seek refuge first in Japan and then in North America. With the support of the Chinese in Canada, K'ang founded the Pao Huang Hui (Emperor Protection

Society) on 20 July 1899 in Vancouver (Ma, 1990: 47-8). On 1 February 1900, K'ang arrived in Singapore to mobilize local support to finance a planned revolt in central China. Before his arrival, there was already a reform movement among the local Chinese communities in support of K'ang's cause. The leaders of this movement were Dr Lim Boon Keng, a Western trained medical practitioner and a newly converted Confucianist, and Khoo Seok Wan, a Chinese scholar (Yen, 1976a: 42-3; Lee, 1990: 98-149). During his 22-month stay in Singapore and Penang, K'ang visited several major cities in Malaya, and gained substantial support from wealthy Chinese merchants including a prominent tin miner from Ipoh, Foo Chee Choon (Lo, 1967: 183-9; Yen, 1976a: 98, 271). K'ang's presence greatly boosted the reformists in the region. An Emperor Protection Society branch was established in Singapore with Khoo Seok Wan as its president, and two Chinese newspapers, *Thien Nan Shin Pao* and *Jit Shin Pao*, were used for the reformist cause (Feng, 1953: 74; Feng, 1965: Vol. 3, 183, Vol. 4, 145; Chen, 1967: 64-5, 75-80). Using modern media and a front organization named Hao Hsueh Hui (Chinese Philomatic Society), the reformists in Malaya and Singapore promoted Chinese nationalism, ideas of progress and reform, and loyalty to the captive Emperor Kuang-hsu (Yen, 1982: 420-3).

Despite set-backs in 1901 as a result of Khoo Seok Wan's defection, the reformists in Malaya and Singapore recovered in 1905 and grew in strength. Their main organ, *Nanyang Tsung Hui Pao* (The Union Times), exerted considerable influence in the local Chinese communities. From 1907 to 1908, it engaged in a heated polemic with the *Chong Shing Yit Pao*, the main organ of the revolutionaries led by Dr Sun Yat-sen. The reformist influence declined markedly after 1909 following the death in 1908 of Emperor Kuang-hsu whom the reformists had vowed to protect (Yen, 1976a: 162-200). Their activities nevertheless had created a new political consciousness among the Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore. However, the more enduring impact was in the area of education. Reformist leaders like K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao believed that modern education was the key to China's modernization. Both had been involved in setting up modern schools in the Chinese communities in Japan and North America. When K'ang was in Singapore and Penang, he helped found a girls' school in Singapore, and opened a normal class in Penang where his followers could be trained and sent to work in these schools. The reformists exerted considerable influence in the modern Chinese schools in the region (Lee, 1958: 31-2).

The Chinese revolutionaries appeared relatively late on the Malayan political scene. Dr Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Chinese revolutionary movement, came to Singapore five months after K'ang's arrival on the island. Following the defeat of the revolutionary uprising in Waichow, Guangdong, at the end of 1900, more Chinese revolutionaries arrived to seek refuge in Malaya. Prominent among them was Yu Lieh, a revolutionary leader of Cantonese origin. Yu laid a solid foundation for further

revolutionary activities in the region. Yu and other early Chinese revolutionaries disguised their identities to carry out underground activities principally among workers and secret society members. Yu was particularly active and founded a Chung Ho T'ang branch in Singapore.<sup>1</sup> Yu travelled widely in Malaya and recruited a number of followers who formed the basis of various Chung Ho T'ang branches in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Perak, Johore, and Seremban (Yen, 1976a: 39-45). Yu spread the revolutionary message quietly. But in a more favourable environment like Kuala Lumpur, he, together with another revolutionary leader, Too Nam, openly preached the idea of republicanism (Ch'an, 1940: 9).

The crushing defeat of China in the First Sino-Japanese War led 18 young Chinese in Malacca to form a political group known as 'The Eighteen Saviours' (Chiu Kuo Shih Pa Yu) in Tongkak in 1897. They pledged to work towards the overthrow of the Manchus in China. Their leader was Sim Hung-pek, a rich young merchant from Malacca (Yen, 1976a: 50). Four years later, in 1901, another small group of local Chinese revolutionaries emerged in Singapore. Its leaders were Tan Chor-nam and Teo Eng-hock, two wealthy young merchants. Both Tan and Teo first embraced the reformist idea of K'ang Yu-wei, and became supporters of Khoo Seok Wan. But their disillusionment with the reformists and the ineptitude of the Manchu government persuaded them to support the revolutionaries. In 1903, both Tan and Teo emerged as converted revolutionaries, and became outspoken critics of the Manchu government. They used the Hsiao Tao Yuan Club (Small Peach Orchard Club) as their meeting place for promoting republicanism and anti-Manchu ideas (Teo, 1933: 7; Tan, 1963: 533-4). In the same year, the expatriate and local Chinese revolutionaries joined forces, and published a revolutionary newspaper named *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* which openly advocated the overthrow of the Manchu government. Both Tan and Teo later became important Chinese revolutionary leaders not only in Singapore and Malaya, but also in other parts of the South-East Asian region.

On 6 April 1906 Sun Yat Sen arrived in Singapore from Europe *en route* to Japan. Sun gathered both expatriate and local Chinese revolutionaries and founded a branch of T'ung Meng Hui (Society of Alliance). Tan Chor-nam and Teo Eng-hock were both elected Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the branch respectively. Sun Yat Sen, accompanied by Tan and other leaders of the Singapore branch, made a quick tour of Malaya to set up more branches. He founded a branch in Kuala Lumpur on 7 August 1906 with Loke Chow-thye as Chairman. The Kuala Lumpur branch attracted many members, and the prominent founding members included veteran Too Nam and his sons and Ch'an Chan-mooi, a wealthy merchant. Sun's mission failed in Ipoh where the reformist influence was strong. He returned to Singapore but sent Tan Chor-nam and Lim Ngee Soon to Penang for the same purpose. A T'ung Meng Hui branch was founded in Penang with Goh Say-eng as the chairman, and Ng Kim-keng as his deputy. In the following two years, T'ung Meng Hui branches were established in

Seremban, Ipoh, Kuala Pilah, Muar, and Kuantan (Yen, 1976a: 92-100).

The founding of T'ung Meng Hui branches in Malaya and Singapore marked a new chapter in the history of Chinese politics in the region. The main task of the Chinese revolutionaries was to raise money to support the planned uprisings in the south and south-west of China. For this purpose, the Chinese revolutionaries mounted propaganda activities in a bid for support. Three major types of propaganda organizations were formed: newspapers, reading clubs, and drama troupes. Newspapers were a powerful medium to transmit the revolutionary message. Apart from the early *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*, the Chinese revolutionaries founded four other newspapers in Malaya and Singapore between 1907 and 1911. These were the *Chong Shing Yit Pao* (Restoration Daily) in August 1907, the *Sun Poo* (The Morning Daily), the *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* (The Glorious Chinese Daily), and the *Nam Ketu Poo* (The Straits Chinese Morning Post). Except for the *Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, which was founded in Penang, all other revolutionary newspapers were published in Singapore. They attacked the Manchu government and engaged in heated polemics with the reformists, and promoted new revolutionary ideas. The Chinese revolutionaries established a score of reading clubs to help propagate the revolutionary message. Newspapers, books, and magazines were made available freely, and were deemed an effective means to reach wider audiences, particularly the poorer section of the Chinese population. There were at least 58 reading clubs set up in Malaya and Singapore. Prominent reading clubs were the Singapore Reading Club, the Tung Teh Reading Club, the K'ai Ming Public Speaking and Reading Club in Singapore, and the Penang Reading Club (or known as the Penang Philomatic Society) in Penang. Some reading clubs intensified their indoctrination programmes by sponsoring public talks given by prominent local revolutionary leaders or visitors. Most of the reading clubs also acted as recruitment centres for the T'ung Meng Hui branches (*ibid.*: 100-22).

The revolutionaries also founded drama troupes to spread their radical messages among the less educated. Drama was one of the oldest forms of entertainment in rural China, and found wide acceptance among the illiterate masses. In November 1907, a drama troupe in Kuala Lumpur performed a play entitled *Hsu Hsi-lin*, which presented the story of a revolutionary martyr in the abortive uprising in Anching, Anhwei Province. This marked the beginning of revolutionary drama performances in Malaya and Singapore. The visit of a revolutionary drama troupe from Hong Kong, Chen Tien Sheng, at the end of 1908, greatly boosted revolutionary drama activities. It received a warm welcome from audiences in large towns in Malaya. Several local drama troupes, with strong affiliations with revolutionary organizations, emerged. Principal troupes were the 'Universal Love Troupe' (Fan Ai Pan) and the 'People's Bell Troupe' (Min To She) in Singapore, 'The Perak Welfare Troupe' in Ipoh, 'The Anti-opium Drama Troupe' (Chen Wu She) in Kuala Lumpur, and the 'Warning to the Age

'Troupe' (Ching Shih Pan) in Penang. All these troupes under the guise of charity performed many popular plays which praised martyrdom and dedication to the revolution, and exposed the corruption and nepotism of the Ch'ing government (*ibid.*: 122-7).

A major obstacle to the revolutionaries was the reformist influence among the local Chinese. The reformists had arrived earlier and were well-entrenched in some social and cultural institutions. To overcome this, the revolutionaries were forced to start night schools and schools in suburban areas. This led to rivalry and confrontation between the two camps which sometimes erupted in violent clashes (*ibid.*: 154-70). The revolutionaries also mounted a large-scale attack on the ideological foundations of their opponents. A full-scale polemic took place in Singapore between the revolutionary organ *Chong Shing Yit Pao* and the reformist *Nanyang Tsung Hui Pao* from September 1907 to October 1908. Wang Ching-wei and Hu Han-min, two distinguished revolutionary leaders, came to the aid of the *Chong Shing Yit Pao*, while Sun Yat Sen contributed a couple of articles to the debate. Reformist literary heavyweights like Ou Chu-chia and Wu Hsien-tzu, two disciples of K'ang Yu-wei, arrived in Singapore to help the *Nanyang Tsung Hui Pao*. The polemic focused on the issues of revolution, a constitutional monarchy, the practicability of a revolution, and the introduction of a parliament (*ibid.*: 186-200). Although none could claim total victory, the polemic helped to clarify some fundamental issues held by the revolutionaries and the reformists.

Between 1909 and 1912, the revolutionaries successfully launched several uprisings in the south and south-west of China. The Chinese in Malaya played a significant role in preparations for the famous 'Canton March 29th Uprising' in 1911. However an internal feud within the Tung Meng Hui caused a sharp decline of revolutionary influence in Malaya and Singapore. A simmering anti-Sun movement world-wide prompted Sun Yat Sen to mobilize his loyal supporters in Penang in preparation for the Canton Revolt. The famous 'Penang Conference' on 13 November 1910 brought Malayan Chinese into the mainstream of the Chinese Revolution (*ibid.*: 227-38). With the outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising on 10 October 1911, the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore contributed substantially to the revolutionary actions in China, particularly the establishment of revolutionary regimes in Guangdong and Fujien (*ibid.*: 238-43).

The activities of the reformists and revolutionaries greatly politicized the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore. The heightened consciousness helped unify the fragmented local Chinese communities. A sense of unity emerged. Traditional ideas of loyalty to emperor, filial piety, and inequality between sexes and age-groups were weakened, while new ideas of altruism, dedication, equality and freedom, unity and democracy gradually took root.

### Changes in the Chinese Community between the Two World Wars

#### *Economic Change*

The most important economic change affecting the Chinese community in Malaya was the rise of the rubber industry. The commercial planting of rubber began prior to 1900. Experimental planting first took place in 1877 in Singapore and Kuala Kangsar, Perak. H. N. Ridley's arrival in November 1888 as Director of Botanical Gardens, Singapore, marked a new beginning. Due to Ridley's efforts and influence, two groups of planters undertook the first commercial experiments. In 1896, a Chinese planter, Tan Chay Yan, planted 16.2 hectares at Bukit Lintang, north-east of Malacca. At about the same time, European planters, the Kindersley brothers, planted about 2 hectares of hevea at the Inch Kenneth coffee estate in Kajang, Selangor (Wu, 1951: 6-8; Jackson, 1968: 211-18; Drabble, 1973: 14-19). Tan in 1896 further developed a large tract of more than 810 hectares in Bukit Asaham, Malacca, into a rubber plantation. Tan was the grandson of Tan Tock Seng, a wealthy Chinese philanthropist in Singapore. Tan's father, Tan Teck Guan, was a wealthy Chinese planter in Malacca.

Tan Chay Yan's commercial venture inspired many Chinese planters in Malaya and Singapore to follow suit. In 1898, Lau Boon Tit planted 21.87 hectares of rubber in his Semenyih Estate in Ulu Langat, Selangor. Another wealthy Chinese planter in Malacca, Cheng Ch'eng-k'uai, developed an estate of more than 405 hectares near Labis, Johore, for the planting of rubber and sago. He also established two rubber estates, Ch'uan Hsing Shan and Ch'uan Ch'eng Shan, in Tenang near Labis, which covered a combined land area of 1215 hectares. In Singapore, several Chinese were also involved in planting rubber, including Dr Lim Boon Keng, a famous medical practitioner and entrepreneur; Teo Eng-hock and Lim Ngee Soon, two Teochew businessmen. But the most important step was taken by Tan Kah Kee in 1906. On hearing of the enormous profit made by Tan Chay Yan who sold his Bukit Asaham estate for \$2,000,000, Tan Kah Kee bought 180,000 rubber seeds from Tan Chay Yan, and planted them in his Fu Shan estate in Singapore (Tan, 1946: Vol. 2, 403-4). This marked the beginning of large-scale commercial rubber planting and the growth of rubber-related industries in Singapore.

What stimulated and sustained the enthusiasm of Chinese and European rubber planters was the rapidly rising price for the commodity. The price of rubber in the London market rose from \$2.36 per kilogram in 1900 to \$5.55 per kilogram in 1906 (Barlow, 1978: 25). Underpinning high prices in the international market was the growing demand for natural rubber (used in the electrical, bicycle, and automobile industries). Rubber was an indispensable raw material for the fast growing new industries. It helped transform the economy of Malaya and linked Chinese society to a major world commodity. Many Chinese planters became wealthy as a result.

The period between 1901 and 1941 saw the rise of Chinese commercial banking. In the 1830s, some British agency houses in the Straits Settlements had already acted as representatives of British banks in Singapore. The opening of a branch office of the Union Bank of Calcutta in Singapore in 1840 marked the beginning of European banking activities in Malaya and Singapore (Lee, 1990: 35). A string of European banks followed suit, including the Chartered Mercantile Bank of India, London, and China which opened a branch in Penang in 1859, the first of its kind in Malaya. But the most important European bank that had close business dealings with the Chinese communities in the region was the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. It established a branch in Singapore in 1877, and another branch in Penang in 1884 (Chee et al., 1983: 352). It had long been active in the trade with China and became the mainstay of economic activities in the Far East. Many Chinese merchants in Hong Kong and on the China coast used its facilities to advance their business operations. The opening of branches in Malaya and Singapore linked the Chinese communities with the fast growing economy on the coast of China. However, many Chinese merchants were reluctant to use Western banking facilities, partly because of the language barrier. The founding of the Kwong Yik Banking Company Limited in Singapore in 1903 marked the beginning of Chinese commercial banking in South-East Asia (Tan, 1953: 114). The name 'Kwong Yik' (romanized in Mandarin as 'Kuang I') was meant to benefit the Cantonese people. It was founded by Wong Ah Fook who was a leader of the Cantonese communities in Johore and Singapore (Yen, 1976a: 274-5). Four years later a second Chinese commercial bank in the Malayan and Singapore region, the Sze Hai Tong Banking Company Limited, was founded by the members of the Teochew community in Singapore (Tan, 1953: 115-16). Wee Song Teng (Huang Shung-t'ing), Tan Teck Joon (Ch'en Teh-jun), and Leow Chia Heng (Liao Cheng-hsing), three prominent Teochew bankers, were among the founders of the bank (P'an, 1950: 137, 160, 181).

In Malaya, the first Chinese commercial bank, the Kwong Yik Banking Corporation Limited of Selangor, was established on 15 July 1913 by a group of Cantonese. Cheong Yeok Choy, a well-known merchant and philanthropist, was elected first Chairman of the Board of Directors. The authorized capital of the bank was \$1,000,000, but the paid-up capital was only \$300,000 (Tan, 1953: 137-8). This bank in Kuala Lumpur was to serve the interests of Cantonese businessmen. It might have had some relations with the Kwong Yik Bank in Singapore which went into receivership in the same year. The second Chinese commercial bank founded in Malaya was the Bank of Malaya Limited of Ipoh (the Chinese name of the bank was Chung Hsing Yin H'ang) established in Ipoh in 1920. The bank went into liquidation in 1930 in the face of the world-wide financial crisis during that time (*ibid.*: 139).

Another Chinese commercial bank in Singapore which had direct influence on the Chinese communities in Malaya was the Ho Hong Bank Limited. It was founded by a wealthy Hokkien merchant, Lim

Peng Siang, together with Lim Boon Keng and Seow Poh Leng in Singapore in 1917. Lim Peng Siang was an outstanding Chinese industrialist, shipowner, and banker. The bank set up many branches in the peninsula including Malacca, Penang, Muar, Batu Pahat, and Seremban. But the bank could not escape the impact of the Depression in the early 1930s. In 1932, Lim Peng Siang resigned from the chairmanship of the bank which was later amalgamated with the Overseas Chinese Bank (Tan, 1953: 119-24).

There were at least seven other Chinese commercial banks which came into existence in Malaya and Singapore in the period between 1903 and 1941. These were the Bank of Communication (1912), the Overseas Chinese Bank Limited (1919), Lee Wah Bank Limited (1920), Batu Pahat Bank Limited (1920), the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (1932), Ban Hin Lee Bank Limited (1935), and the United Chinese Bank Limited (1935). Except for the Batu Pahat Bank and the Ban Hin Lee Bank in Penang, the rest were located in Singapore (Tan, 1953: 124-32; Lee, 1990: 38-9).

A characteristic of these early Chinese banks was their close ties with Chinese dialect communities. This was clearly reflected in the founding of two Kwong Yik banks and the Lee Wah bank by the Cantonese group, the Sze Hai Tong Bank by the Teochew group, and the Ho Hong Bank and the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation by the Hokkiens. This close connection suggests that these banks were intended to serve primarily the interests of a particular dialect group. As time passed, this dialect demarcation gradually blurred and the banks' customers diversified. Since most Chinese commercial banks during this period were communally based, they operated in a slightly different manner from banks governed by Western principles. Loan mortgages were based not on the sound assessment of properties, but on the good faith arising from personal connections in the community. However the fluctuation of commodity prices undermined the viability of the banks and explains the collapse of some of these early Chinese commercial banks in Malaya and Singapore.

The First World War disrupted the import of manufactured goods to South-East Asia and provided an excellent opportunity for the local industry to develop. Some Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements ventured into manufacturing and other related industries, especially rubber and food processing. Some industries had existed in Malaya and Singapore before the First World War. Tin smelting and pineapple canning were among the earliest Chinese industries in the region. In 1893 there were 37 Chinese smelting houses in Perak and 26 in Selangor (Wong, 1965: 156-7). These were old style industries using traditional Chinese methods of operation. The first modern Chinese tin-smelting company was the Seng Kee Smelting Works founded in Penang by Lee Chin Ho in 1898. With capital of \$100,000, this smelting company was equipped with modern furnaces, electrically driven appliances, and a laboratory for testing ore samples (Cushman, 1991: 75-6). It was taken over at the end of 1907 by the Eastern Smelting Company Limited



which was backed by a group of prominent Chinese tin miners in Perak and Penang who invested capital of up to \$1,500,000. It was able to compete with Western-owned smelters, and succeeded in refining substantial tin ore produced in Malaya (Cushman, 1990: 84-5).

The first Chinese-owned pineapple canning factory was probably established in Singapore by Tan Kee Pek, the father of the famous Chinese entrepreneur Tan Kah Kee (Tan, 1946: Vol. 2, 395). Tan Kee Pek owned some pineapple estates in Singapore and Johore. Tan made good profits in the canning industry. By the first decade of the twentieth century, there were more than 10 Chinese-owned pineapple canning factories on the island (Wright, 1908: 504).

The First World War practically devastated the pineapple canning industry by cutting off the lucrative markets in India and Europe, resulting in the closure of many canneries in Malaya and Singapore. But the war created immense opportunities for export of processed rubber. Responding to this, Tan Kah Kee established two rubber processing mills in Singapore between 1916 and 1917. By 1918, there were an estimated 72 rubber processing mills in Malaya and Singapore (Yong, 1987a: 51-2). As demand for rubber rose during the war, the price of processed rubber also rose. The two rubber mills of Tan Kah Kee reported a profit of \$800,000 in 1918. Tan himself admitted he had made \$4,500,000 during wartime, making him one of the richest capitalists in South-East Asia (Tan, 1946: Vol. 2, 411-12; *ibid.*: 52).

The fall in rubber prices after the First World War forced Chinese industrialists to move into rubber-related manufacturing industries. In the forefront was Tan Kah Kee who converted one of his largest rubber mills in Singapore into a rubber factory, a relatively uncharted course of action. His Sumbawa plant turned out a variety of rubber products such as raincoats, tennis balls, rubber umbrellas, sports shoes, rubber boots, sleepers, and toys (Yong, 1987a: 57). In addition, Tan also ventured into the production of tyres and tubes for the growing world motor car market.

Another Chinese-dominated industry in the years between the two world wars was the refining of coconut oil. Modern coconut oil refineries were established in Singapore and Penang where the supply of copra was abundant. Cooking oil was produced for domestic consumption and export. In 1925 there were at least five coconut oil refineries existing in these two ports. Two major refineries in Singapore were owned by Lim Peng Siang, while two in Penang<sup>2</sup> were owned by a Hokkien and a Cantonese respectively (Li, 1930: 95-6).

Other manufacturing industries during this period concentrated on producing biscuits and soap. The three well-known biscuit makers were Ho Ho Biscuit Company, Tan Kah Kee's Globe Biscuits, and Chung Hwa Biscuit Company, all located in Singapore.

Overseas Chinese industries during this period began to change from traditional businesses characterized by family ownership, small-scale operations, and a mixture of unpaid family labour and wage labour (Lim and Gosling, 1983: Vol. 1, 245), to modern management. Some industries

continued to be owned solely by families, but others had already changed to partnerships or joint stock companies. The size of operations expanded, and the management was no longer relied entirely on close family members, but on a mixture of family ties and professional managers. The Ho Hong group of companies sold shares to kinsmen and friends, but Lim Peng Siang and his brothers still controlled the operation of the companies. On the other hand, the Tan Kah Kee company, under the sole ownership of the Tan family, enlarged and diversified its operations and moved into various types of industry. The company broadened its social base in its recruitment of staff. Employees included relatives, kinsmen, fellow districtmen from the T'ang An county, and also those who spoke the same dialect from southern Fujien. Increasingly, merit and professionalism counted in the promotion system (Yen, 1995a: 246-7; Yen, 1998: 6).

### *Political Change*

The inter-war years witnessed a rise in overseas Chinese nationalism. The Chinese in Malaya placed much hope in the new Chinese Republican government to lift the standing of China and to improve their status overseas. But this hope was shattered by the failure of the Second Revolution in 1913, resulting in the Yuan Shih-k'ai dictatorship. Following the failure of the Second Revolution, Dr Sun fled China to seek financial and political support from overseas Chinese. But his approach in attempting to convert the existing Kuomintang branches into branches of the Chinese Revolutionary Party split the Kuomintang and divided the communities. However, Sun Yat-sen and his Chinese Revolutionary Party still retained the loyalty of the majority of the Kuomintang members. The main Kuomintang branches in Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Ipoh, Taiping, Seremban, Muar, Alor Star, and Bentong were all converted into branches of the new party (Yong and McKenna, 1990: 32-4).

Following the May Fourth movement in 1919, the Kuomintang engaged in a process of reorganization and regained its vigour. Reorganization of the fragmented party branches in Malaya and Singapore in 1920 under the new Kuomintang revived Chinese political activities in the region. The main activity in the period between 1920 and 1925 was fund-raising in support of the parent body in China.

The reinvigorated Kuomintang was put to test during the period between 1925 and 1930. Fearing the growing political strength of the local Chinese and their anti-British posture, Sir Laurence Nunns Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, banned the Kuomintang. In August 1925, Kuomintang branches were ordered to dissolve, and their activities were made illegal. Despite this the party grew in strength. Its branches, operating in secret, spread widely, and its membership increased. In 1926, for instance, there were 15 sub-branches of Kuomintang in Selangor in addition to its main branch in Kuala Lumpur. They included the branches in Klang, Kuala Selangor, Batu

Arang, Serendah, Rawang, Rasa, Sungei Besi, and Kuala Kubu. In January 1929, the Kuomintang was estimated to have 10,290 members in Malaya and Singapore, including 240 from Sarawak (Yong, 1987a: 87, 94).

The Kuomintang was revitalized by left-wing elements within the party. A group of pro-communist graduates of the Whampoa Military Academy returned to Malaya and Singapore in 1926 and radicalized Chinese politics. Known to the British authorities as the 'Main School' of the Kuomintang, many of them were Hainanese. They penetrated the lower socio-economic stratum of Chinese society by organizing trade unions and night schools. These were used as vehicles to reach workers and youth. The Left leadership, characterized by its youthful outlook and revolutionary ideas, was prepared to confront the British authorities. The Lefts were deeply implicated in the 'Kereta Ayer Incident' which occurred on 12 March 1927 in Singapore and resulted in six demonstrators being killed by the police (*ibid.*: 85-8).

The domination of the Kuomintang in Malaya by the Left ended as a result of a final split in the alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communists in China on July 1927. In a meeting held in Canton in August of the same year, delegates of the Nanyang (South-East Asia) branch of the Kuomintang adopted a policy of 'cleansing out Communist influence' from the party. The weeding out of communist influence resulted in the victory of the moderates who were mainly the old guards of the party. They focused on politics in China and toned down its anti-British and anti-imperialist rhetoric (*ibid.*: 88-91). But the event sharply divided Left and Right politics in the Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore. At the same time, as the Lefts penetrated trade unions and youth organizations, they gradually shifted their focus from Chinese politics to local issues.

The rise of nationalistic sentiment among the overseas Chinese was due to several events: the outrage against the Japanese in 1915, the anti-Japanese movement in 1919, the Tsinan Incident in 1928, the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and the anti-Japanese and Rescuing China movement between 1937 and 1941. All these agitation targeted Japan which had emerged after the First World War as the most aggressive imperialist power, posing the greatest threat to China. Japan's imposition of 21 demands on the Yuan Shih-k'ai government in February 1915 angered the Chinese, including those living overseas. The Chinese in South-East Asia organized a boycott of Japanese goods and services (Akashi, 1968: 72-3). The intense anti-Japanese sentiment climaxed in demonstrations and riots in Singapore and Penang between 19 and 21 June 1919 in the wake of the famous May Fourth movement. Japanese goods were burned, Japanese shops were looted, and the lives of Japanese nationals in the two cities were threatened. Four people were killed, eight wounded, and over 130 people were arrested in the Singapore riot. The British authorities imposed martial law to restore law and order on the island (Chui, 1965: 13-15). By the 1920s, overseas Chinese nationalism in the form of anti-Japanese sentiment became

a powerful force in Chinese politics in Malaya and Singapore. The anti-Japanese movement reached its peak in the period between 1937 and 1942 when Japan invaded China. Overseas Chinese throughout the world organized to support China's struggle against the Japanese occupation. In this global mobilization of overseas Chinese support, the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore played a significant role. The Chinese in South-East Asia were united under the leadership of Tan Kah Kee, the leader of the Hokkien community in Singapore. The Federation of China Relief Fund Associations of South-East Asia (Nanyang Ch'ou-chen Tsung-hui) was founded to co-ordinate and channel the efforts of more than 45 organizations throughout South-East Asia. Fund-raising was the main thrust of this mobilization. Community leaders of different dialect groups were organized under the Federation of China Relief Fund Associations of South-East Asia (Leong, 1976: 258-9; Hsu and Chua, 1984: 101-20).

The most organized expression of overseas Chinese nationalism was the boycott movement. The overseas Chinese nationalists had used this weapon against the Americans in 1905, and against the Japanese in 1908, 1915, and 1919. Following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 1937, boycott was again used as a weapon to retaliate against the Japanese invasion of China. The boycott movement in Malaya and Singapore took various forms: refusal to buy Japanese goods (including manufactured goods and foodstuff), banning the sale of Japanese goods by Chinese wholesalers and retailers, withdrawing labour from local Japanese companies, denying services to Japanese residents, and rejecting services from Japanese nationals, including dentists and prostitutes. The ban on the sale and distribution of Japanese goods was enforced by so-called 'patriotic elements' who organized themselves into clandestine bodies such as the 'Red Blood Brigade'. This sometimes led to violence (Leong, 1976: 265).

### *Social and Cultural Change*

#### THE RISE OF CHINESE EDUCATION AND THE DIVISION OF CHINESE SOCIETY

The inter-war years also saw the rise of Chinese education in Malaya and Singapore. Modern Chinese schools spread throughout the region in the first decade of the twentieth century as a result of the Manchu push for reform. But the schools were confined to provide primary education, with a curriculum combining traditional subjects such as the 'study of Confucian classics' and 'moral self-cultivation' with modern subjects like history, geography, and English (Yen, 1992b: 290). This curriculum produced students with a strong orientation towards China as well as reverence for the Confucian tradition.

The Chinese government took steps to integrate overseas Chinese into the main stream of Chinese education in China. In the period between 1912 and 1919, there were at least 19 modern Chinese schools founded

in Malaya and Singapore throughout major urban centres in the peninsula. Among them were Foon Yew School (January 1913) in Johore Bahru, Pay Fong School (July 1913) in Malacca, Chung Hwa School (July 1913) in Seremban, Shun Jen School (1914) in Kuala Lumpur, Chung Ling School (February 1917) in Penang, and Nanyang Girls' School (August 1917) in Singapore (Hsu, 1950: 29-32; Tay and Gwee, 1975: 8-10; Tseng, 1993: 252-3). Many of the schools raised funds and built their own premises, and adopted curricula similar to their counterparts in China, dropping traditional subjects such as 'Study of Confucian Classics', and increasing their modern content in keeping with the new spirit of republicanism and modernity (Yen, 1992b: 296-7).

Inspired by the idea of using education for nation building, Tan Kah Kee founded the first Chinese secondary school in the region. Tan donated a large sum of money and gained strong support from a number of leaders from different dialect groups for the proposed project. The school was officially opened on 21 March 1919 with 73 students (Tay and Gwee, 1975: 260-1). At the same time, the Chinese became more aware of the importance of secondary education following the May Fourth movement in 1919. Many Chinese community leaders believed that education could lift the general standard of literacy. Moreover, Chinese education could help retain their cultural identity. As a result, they were prepared to donate money for education, and enthusiastically supported the founding of Chinese secondary schools. Following the establishment of the Chinese High School of Singapore, the Chung Ling High School was founded in Penang in January 1923. It was expanded from the Chung Ling School founded in 1917 by the Chinese Philomatic Society of Penang, an organization closely associated with Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary movement. The leaders of the Society were impressed by the success of the Chinese High School of Singapore, and recognized the pressing need of local Chinese students for higher education. Under the leadership of Koh Seng Lee and Ong Keng Seng, the Chung Ling High School was opened on 20 January 1923, the first of its kind in Malaya. In the 1920s, six other Chinese secondary schools were founded, including famous schools such as the Confucian Middle School (1924) and the Kuen Cheng Girls' High School (1925) in Kuala Lumpur, and the Pay Fong High School (1925) in Malacca. The 1930s saw eight other secondary schools established, two in Singapore and six in Malaya. Most of these only provided three years of lower secondary education. But during the 1930s and early 1940s, many of them expanded to include senior secondary education (Tay and Gwee, 1975: 9-10).

The introduction of secondary education made Chinese education more competitive *vis-à-vis* English education, and more attractive to Chinese parents who wanted a better education for their children. They were no longer satisfied with six years of primary education which was intended to provide the basic minimum of education for a largely illiterate work-force. It also met the need of a group of Chinese parents who had formerly sent their children back to China for secondary education

at enormous cost. More importantly, it assured the continuation and perpetuation of Chinese culture and identity in the Chinese communities in the region. However, it divided Chinese society into English and Chinese educated groups.

#### SPREAD OF LITERACY AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S STATUS

Early reformist and revolutionary activities laid the foundation for the spread of literacy in the Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore. Their propaganda media and organizations such as newspapers, magazines, schools, night classes, and reading clubs invariably promoted literacy among the masses. A number of illiterate workers were attracted to reading clubs and night schools where they improved their reading ability (Yen, 1976a: 112-15, 158-60). The rise of Chinese education during this period increased the opportunity for Chinese children to be educated. The spread of literacy can also be seen from the phenomenal increase in the number of Chinese newspapers and magazines published in the region. A study shows that there were 291 Chinese newspapers and magazines published in Singapore during the inter-war period (1914-1945), compared to 12 in the period between 1881 and 1913, an increase of more than twenty-fold (Wong, 1995: 25). Increased literacy among the Chinese was also reflected in the increased number of Chinese children in schools. In 1924, there were 564 Chinese schools with 27,476 students in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and this number rose to 996 schools with 86,147 students in 1938 (Tan, 1985: 19-20). It is difficult to measure the percentage of literacy among the Chinese population; it appears that the majority of the Chinese population in Malaya and Singapore were still illiterate, though the literacy was improved markedly among the young and the local-born Chinese.

One significant aspect of social change in the Chinese communities during this period was the change of attitude towards women and the improvement of their social status. Women were among the most oppressed groups in traditional Chinese society. They had low social status within the family, clan, and community. They were deprived of the right to inherit properties, to divorce, and to education. Their roles were confined to child-bearing, domestic work, and family responsibilities. The traditional remark that 'women without talents are a virtue' summarized the attitude towards women. However, the rise of the reform movement in China marked a radical change of attitude towards women and women's role in society. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, a top leader of the reform movement, openly advocated education for women and the establishment of girls' schools. In Singapore a group of young educated Chinese élite led by Lim Boon Keng founded the Singapore Chinese Girls' School in April 1899, the first of its kind among the Chinese communities in South-East Asia (Hsu, 1950: 46; Song, 1967: 305-6; Lee, 1990: 67). The school opened in June with seven girls, and the number

increased to 30 two months later. However, the school used English as the medium of instruction, and was primarily established for the young girls of the Straits-born Chinese. It experienced difficulties in finance and enrolment (Song, 1967: 305-6; Lee, 1990: 67). But the first Chinese girls' school using Chinese as the medium of instruction was the Hua Chiao (Overseas Chinese) Girls' School founded in Singapore in 1905 by a Cantonese woman named Huang Tien-hsien. It ceased to exist after 10 years (Hsu, 1950: 46-7). The first Chinese girls' school in Malaya was the Kuen Cheng Girls' School which was established in Kuala Lumpur in September 1908. The school was founded by Madam Wu Hsueh-hua and Mrs Chung Cho-ching (Yoshiko Watanabe, a Japanese national) with the financial support of Cheong Yeok Choy, a wealthy Chinese merchant in Kuala Lumpur (Cheng, 1968: 11).

Political developments in China inspired women's education in the region. A score of girls' schools came into existence during the period between 1911 and 1945, including the Chung Hua Girls' School (September 1911), Ch'ung Fu Girls' School (April 1915), Ch'ung Pen Girls' School (January 1916), Nan Hua Girls' School (June 1917), Nanyang Girls' School (1917), and the Hokkien Girls' School of Penang (March 1920; the school changed its name to Pin Hua Girls' School in 1951). Except for the last school, all the others were established in Singapore (Hsu, 1950: 47-55; Tay and Gwee, 1975: 169). Many founders of these schools were former reformists or revolutionaries who shared a belief that women's education would strengthen China and the Han 'race'. Although not all Chinese parents were persuaded to send their girls to school, the schools nevertheless provided access to education for female Chinese children, and indirectly influenced the attitude of many Chinese towards women and their role in society. This was reflected in the increase of female students in schools, the introduction of junior and senior middle education for girls, the increase of professional women in the work-force, the open discussion of the role of women, and a new male-female relationship in society. More and more Chinese parents were willing to send their daughters to school. In January 1931, the Hokkien Girls' School of Penang was reported to have more than 760 students (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, 20 January 1931, p. 7). The introduction of secondary and teacher training classes also helped change the perception of women's social role. For the first time, women's education opened up a new career path for women. Those who qualified as teachers locally or returned from China with tertiary qualifications became school teachers whose profession was respected in society. The increase in the number of female teachers and female clerks lifted their social status. At the same time, as a result of the impact of the May Fourth movement and the rise of the feminist movement in China in 1920s, the traditional view of women's roles in family and society was challenged and debated in the Chinese media in Malaya and Singapore. By the 1930s, more radical feminist views received increasing exposure in the media. Articles on problems faced by women appeared in a major Chinese newspaper in Singapore which had also enjoyed

wide readership in Malaya (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, June–November 1934). All these discussions helped to improve the image of women, their new social status and roles in family and society.

#### CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND CLASS STRUCTURES

Despite two immigration ordinances in 1928 and 1933 which restricted Chinese male immigrants into Malaya and Singapore, the growth of the Chinese population was rapid. In the two decades from 1911 to 1931, the number of Chinese immigrants remaining in the region was estimated to be 792,615, while the total number of Chinese in Singapore increased from 219,577 in 1911 to 730,133 in 1947, an increase of almost three and a half times in three and a half decades (Freedman, 1957: 25; Ee, 1961: 50; Purcell, 1967: 206). One striking feature of this demographic change was the remarkable improvement of female-male ratio in the Chinese population in the region. In the nineteenth century, Ch'ing government's restriction on female migration resulted in unequal sex ratio for the local Chinese communities. In Perak, for instance, the sex ratio among the Chinese was 1 female to 18.6 males, and about 20 per cent of 4,687 females were involved in prostitution (*Perak Government Gazette*, 1891, Vol. 4, No. 25, p. 723). China's relaxation on female immigration after the turn of the present century improved the ratio markedly. By 1911, the ratio was about one female to four males in Malaya. With the founding of the Chinese Republic in early 1912, the momentum of Chinese female immigration was further increased, and the sex ratio continued to improve. By 1921, the sex ratio among the Chinese in Malaya was 384 females to 1,000 males, about one to three (Yu, 1951: 71; Lin and Chang, 1991: 353). But the most dramatic change was due to the immigration ordinances of 1928 and 1933. These restricted the entry of Chinese male immigrants but not female immigrants. The result was a rapid increase of female immigrants, including a large number of female workers. By 1931, the ratio improved from 513 to 1,000, and by 1947, 833 to 1,000 (*ibid.*: 353–4). This balanced sex ratio helped transform the Chinese communities from a sojourner society into a settler society. More and more families were established. A permanent Chinese society with a distinctive Chinese cultural identity was thus born.

Chinese society was still organized mainly along dialect and kinship lines. But it was increasingly blurred by the rise of new organizations such as alumni associations and cultural bodies. There was a substantial increase in the number of dialect and kinship organizations during this period. For instance, there were only 25 identifiable dialect-based organizations in Singapore in almost a century from 1822 to 1910, while in less than three decades from 1917 to 1945, at least 56 dialect-based organizations were founded (Wu, 1975: Vol. 1, 194–6). Two developments in Chinese social organizations in this period can be discerned: convergent and divergent processes. The convergent process brought together district-based dialect organizations, and converged at the top



under an umbrella organization. Most of the major dialect organizations representing the Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese were established during this period. On the other hand, the divergent process moved downwards forming village-based dialect or kinship organizations. The former reflected the desire for unity and solidarity of the geographically based dialect groups in a rapidly changing environment, while the latter was the result of a rapid Chinese population growth and difficulties in maintaining the unity of district-based dialect organizations. Within the structure of the dialect organization, there was a trend towards democratization. Formerly controlled by one prominent family, many newer dialect organizations were set up. Control of the organization rested with a popularly elected management committee. The founding of the Teochew Poit Ip Association of Singapore and the restructuring of the Hokkien Association of Singapore in 1929 are two examples (Yong, 1977: 14-23; Yen, 1993b: 21-3). Many of them developed closer ties with China. Operating as pressure groups, they were concerned with the well-being of the home districts or provinces in China. The rise of the 'Home Province Rescue Movement' (Chiu-hsiang yun-t'ung) by the Hokkiens in Malaya and Singapore in the early 1930s was evidence of the commitment of the local Hokkiens to the welfare of their countrymen at home.<sup>3</sup> Many dialect organizations also actively supported China's resistance to the Japanese invasion in China. The Hokkien Association of Singapore, under the leadership of Tan Kah Kee, became the focal point for mobilizing the support of overseas Chinese in the region.

During this period there was the rise of alumni associations. An alumni association was a union of ex-students of a school. As most schools founded after 1912 did not restrict enrolment to a particular dialect group, alumni associations cut across dialect and kinship lines. They served as bridges leading to a more united Chinese society. The associations promoted the welfare of alumni as well as alma mater. It organized social and recreational activities for members, fund-raising for the school, and cultural and charitable activities for the community or nation. One of the earliest alumni associations was the Nan Lu Alumni Association in Singapore founded in August 1918. Members were the alumni of the Tao Nan school founded in 1906 in Singapore by the Hokkien community. Apart from social and recreational activities for members, the association was also involved in fund-raising for the founding of the Chinese High School and the Nanyang Girls' High School, and for the relief of flood victims in T'ientsin in China (Lin, 1966: 29). The alumni association became popular and attracted a number of members. In 1930s, there were at least 10 alumni associations in Singapore and 13 in Penang. The 10 associations in Singapore had a combined membership of around 2,000 (Yang, 1984: 99-100).

There was no fundamental change in the class structure of the Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore during this period. The general profile of the class hierarchy of the Chinese society in the nineteenth century continued with some modifications. The merchant class

(*shang*) still occupied the top social stratum, followed in descending order by the educated élite (*shih*), and the worker (*kung*) (Yen, 1986: 141-2). The *shang* class was subdivided into two groups: capitalists and general merchants. The Chinese capitalists were financially affluent and socially powerful, and some of them even exerted political influence either locally or in China. They included exporters and importers, property owners, shipowners, bankers, manufacturers, big plantation owners, tin mining proprietors, and big contractors. The latter consisted of shopkeepers, general traders, and small plantation or factory owners. Although they were economically well off, they commanded less influence and respect in society. The *shih* class was also subdivided into upper and lower groups. The former included professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, government officers, and interpreters; the latter consisted of Chinese school teachers, Chinese newspaper editors and reporters, and clerks in foreign and Chinese firms. The development of English education in this period increased the number of English-educated élite who had received their professional training in medicine, law, or engineering in the United Kingdom or Hong Kong. They had high income and high social status. They enjoyed more prestige and respect than the members of the lower *shang* class in the Chinese communities. On the other hand, the rise of Chinese education and the spread of literacy resulted in a large increase in the number of Chinese school teachers and cultural workers. Some of them also commanded more respect than the shopkeepers and traders.

The *kung* class, which occupied a lower position than the *shih* in the social pyramid, was also subdivided into two groups: artisans and general workers. The former consisted of tailors, carpenters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, mechanics, and cooks; the latter consisted of shop assistants, factory workers, plantation workers, mining workers, and rickshaw pullers. The number of general workers increased because of immigration growth and the development of industry.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy was a class consisting of unemployed workers, beggars, and prostitutes. Their numbers increased in the wake of the Depression in the early 1930s. Without any support from the government, the urban unemployed had to depend partly on the support of clan or dialect organizations, and many were reduced to begging for a living. The Chinese society during this period became more fluid than in the nineteenth century. Both horizontal and vertical social mobility were made easier because of the spread of literacy, the rise of education, and economic development. Rapid economic development during this period provided more jobs and a better means for members of the lower classes to climb up the social ladder.

### Conclusion

This chapter has traced the immigration, settlement, and growth of the Chinese communities in Malaya from the Malacca Sultanate to the eve of the Second World War. It has examined the formation of the

Chinese communities and their structure and functions. Focus has been given to the economic and political activities of the Chinese, and the social and economic changes during the period between the two world wars.

Since the independence of Malaya in 1957 and the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the Chinese communities have responded to rapid political and economic changes. Majority of the Chinese have acquired Malaysian citizenship and are loyal to the new nation. Furthermore, as a result of the rapid political, economic, and social changes in the 1960s, the Chinese communities in Malaysia have been globalized. More and more Chinese send their children overseas to study in Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and they have developed useful cultural and economic links with the outside world. At the same time, the local Chinese economy has also adapted to the new economic policies. Chinese students returned from the West to help restructure traditional Chinese businesses: companies were reformed, restructured, and amalgamated into modern corporations. The result of this development is the rise of modern powerful Chinese conglomerates with natural ties with the region.

Some of the trends in the development of the post-independence period can be traced back to the period before the Second World War. The rise of new plantations, financial, and manufacturing industries in the pre-war era laid the foundation for the rapid economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Overseas Chinese nationalism in the late 1930s paved the way for the rise of local-oriented politics. The politicization of the Chinese communities and the techniques of mass mobilization proved to be valuable in mobilizing support for the local-oriented parties such as the Malayan Chinese Association founded in February 1949. The rise of modern Chinese education, the spread of literacy, and the improvement of women's status between the two World Wars helped lay the groundwork for the development of a better educated, sophisticated, and globalized Chinese society in Malaysia.

1. Chung Ho T'ang originated in Yokohama, Japan, where it was founded as a social club by a group of Chinese workers and members of the lower social class. It was later turned into a revolutionary affiliated organization.

2. Ban Tuck Bee and Sun Ho Lung.

3. Minutes of the Hokkien Association of Selangor, December 1932.

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## 2

# Socio-cultural Diversities and Identities

Tan Chee-Beng

THE Chinese throughout Malaysia identify themselves collectively as 'Chinese', though they are subdivided into various subidentities. This chapter serves as a socio-cultural introduction on the Chinese Malaysians by examining the ethnic labels, dialect group identification, acculturation and identities, language, education as well as religion in relation to the question of identity.

### Labels

In local Chinese writing and in *Huayu* (Mandarin), Chinese Malaysians, who are *huayi* or 'people of Chinese descent', call themselves *Huaren*, literally 'Hua people'. This is quite unlike the pre-independence and especially the pre-Second World War years when the Chinese (except the local-born Straits Chinese) generally regarded themselves as *Huaqiao* or the 'Hua sojourners'. *Qiao* means 'sojourner' in a foreign country who may one day return to their country of origin. Chinese Malaysians today reject the label *Huaqiao*, although there are Chinese from China and especially Taiwan who still refer to the Chinese in non-Chinese land (such as South-East Asia) as *Huaqiao*.

Chinese Malaysians also use *Huaren* rather than *Zhongguoren* when referring to either themselves or Chinese everywhere in the world. The Chinese from China may use *Zhongguoren* to refer to both the citizens of China (and of Taiwan) and Chinese anywhere. However, *Zhongguoren* which literally means 'Zhongguo people' can be confused with the nationals of China (*Zhongguo*). Hence Chinese Malaysians, as do the Chinese elsewhere in South-East Asia, generally avoid using *Zhongguoren* to mean 'Chinese'; *Huaren* is preferred.

In other Chinese languages (generally locally referred to as dialects), Chinese Malaysians refer to themselves as *Teng-lang* (Hokkien), *Tong-yan* (Cantonese), and other terms which are equivalents of *Tangren* ('People of Tang') in *Huayu* although it is not so commonly used nowadays in *Huayu*. The Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and the Tang

Dynasty (AD 618–906) were the two glorious periods of Chinese civilization, and the Chinese (excluding the minorities which today are Chinese citizens) were known to foreigners as the 'Han people' and later as 'Tang people' as well.<sup>1</sup> The term *Hanren* or 'Han people' is still used today to contrast the ethnic Chinese from the national minorities in China.

In South-East Asia, the Chinese, whose ancestors migrated from South China, call themselves *Tangren*. They refer to China as *Tangshan* (Mountains of Tang—the land of Tang) or *Teng-soā* in Hokkien.

In Malay, Chinese Malaysians refer to themselves and are so referred to by Malays as *Orang Cina* (Chinese people), sometimes colloquially as *Orang Cin*. Other indigenous peoples such as the Badeng Kenyah in Sarawak and the Kadazan in Sabah refer to the Chinese as *Kina*.<sup>2</sup> In Malay literature, the term *Tionghoa* or *Tionghua* is also used. *Tionghoa* rather than *Cina* is the accepted label for the Chinese in Indonesia, and the use of *Tionghoa* by writers in Malaysia is due to Indonesian influence. *Tionghoa* is the Hokkien version of *Zhonghua* (in Mandarin, that is standard Chinese) which is one of the various names of the country known to the West as China. The people of *Zhonghua* are called *Zhonghua minzu* or the *Zhonghua* people. In fact the label *Huaren*, which literally means the 'Hua people', is derived from the concept *Zhonghua*. I have suggested that in Malay it is better to call the Chinese *Orang Hua* as this corresponds to the Chinese own usage of *Huaren* (cf. Tan 1992). It also emphasizes local Chinese identity when compared to *Orang Cina* which is also used to refer to the Chinese of China. The label *Tionghoa*, on the other hand, is not known to most laymen in Malaysia. Malay villagers generally are not familiar with this label—they call the Chinese *Orang Cina*.

In English, 'Chinese' is used. While most Chinese in Malaysia commonly refer to themselves as Malaysian Chinese, out of habit I prefer the term 'Chinese Malaysians'. This is in line with the wish of Chinese Malaysians themselves to stress the local identity and Malaysian identity. 'Hua people' may be used too—since this is equivalent to *Huaren* used by the Chinese themselves. However, the term 'overseas Chinese' should not be used when referring to Chinese Malaysians.

### Dialect Groups and Identities

Chinese Malaysians are divided into *fangyanqun*, known in English as 'dialect groups', in Malaysia. The major groups actually speak different Chinese languages rather than dialects, and so they are also often referred to as speech groups (cf. Skinner, 1957: 35). While the labels of the various dialect groups (here I adopt this popular usage) are familiar to scholars and most Malaysians, not all understand the complexity of such identification. Even some younger generation of 'English-speaking' and 'Malay-educated' Chinese are themselves quite confused about certain labels like 'Cantonese' and 'Kongfu' or 'Hainan' and 'Keng-chiu'.



According to the 1991 census, the Chinese made up 4.9 million or 28.28 per cent of the 17.6 million people who reported themselves as citizens of Malaysia (Department of Statistics, 1995a: 39).<sup>3</sup> This comprised Hokkien (34.66 per cent), Hakka (23.47 per cent), Cantonese (18.27 per cent), Teochew (11.31 per cent), Hainanese (3.65 per cent), Hokchiu (4.93 per cent), Kwongsai (1.50 per cent), Henghua (0.57 per cent), Hokchia (0.21 per cent), and others (1.44 per cent) (cf. Department of Statistics, 1995b: 81). The Hokkien numbering 1,597,463 are the most numerous, followed by Hakka (1,081,862), Cantonese (842,105), Teochew (521,218), and others. This overall pattern of distribution with Hokkien as the majority followed by the Hakka, Cantonese, and Teochew is well reflected in the composition of the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia. However, the pattern differs in Sarawak and Sabah. In Sarawak, the majority of the Chinese there are Foochow (149,293) and Hakka (142,743), followed by Hokkien (59,322), Teochew (36,062), Cantonese (27,485), Henghua (14,567), Hainanese (7,898), Other Chinese (7,560), Kwongsai (309), and Hokchia (309), making a total Chinese population of 445,548 persons in 1991 (Department of Statistics, 1995c: 81). Not only do the Foochow form the largest group of Chinese in Sarawak, there are more Henghua too, who are more numerous than the Hainanese. Unlike in Peninsular Malaysia, the Teochew are more numerous than the Cantonese. In Sabah, the Hakka form the majority of the Chinese (113,628), followed by the Cantonese (28,769), Hokkien (26,303), Teochew (10,350), Other Chinese (7,089), Hainanese (6,939), Foochow (4,789), Kwongsai (615), Henghua (459), and Hokchia (199) (Department of Statistics, 1995d: 91). Thus the unique aspect of the composition of the Chinese population in Sabah is that the Hakka form the majority, and even the Cantonese are slightly more numerous than the Hokkien. Note that in the census Hokchiu, Henghua, and Hokchia are listed separately although their ancestors came from Fujian (Hokkien) Province too.

Chinese dialect group labels in Malaysia are derived from the linguistic groups in China, of which three categories are especially important for our consideration, namely Min, Yue, and Gan-Hakka.<sup>4</sup> Min language can be divided into two broad categories, namely *Minbei hua* or northern Min dialects and *Minnan hua* or southern Min dialects. The former are dialects spoken in the northern part of Fujian Province, while the latter are those spoken in the southern part of the province, the eastern part of Guangdong, in the region of Chaozhou, on Hainan Island, and in parts of Leizhou Peninsula.<sup>5</sup>

The term 'Hokkien' as used in Malaysia and Singapore often does not refer to all people whose ancestors originated from Fujian Province. Often it refers specifically to the people (and their dialects) of southern Min (that is southern Fujian), specifically the people whose ancestors originated from the regions of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou and speak the Fujian dialects of the regions. This is mainly due to the fact that immigrants from these regions were the earliest to settle down in the Malay Peninsula and so their descendants form the majority of the Chinese

who can trace their origin to Fujian Province, and so refer to themselves as 'Hokkien' which is 'Fujian' as pronounced in their dialects.

Fujian Province is also called Min, hence Chinese from the province are called Min people. The Hokkiens in Malaysia are actually *Minnan ren* or southern Min people. The category 'Hokkien' is further divided into Hokkien of various types, the labels of which follow the name and the dialect spoken in specific localities (prefecture, district, and village) in southern Fujian. Thus *Yongchun ren* identify themselves as *Eng-Choon lang* (Eng-Choon people) and their Hokkien dialect as *Eng-Choon oe* (Eng-Choon dialect). These are Chinese who can trace their ancestral origin to the subprefecture of Yongchun (*Yongchun zhou*), known today as Yongchun Xian. Yongchun people can further be differentiated into various categories according to their villages of origin. Linguistically, however, all Yongchun people speak the same dialect, notwithstanding which village they originated from. It should be pointed out here that the identification of speech groups and subspeech groups with the administrative units in China is based on the system in the nineteenth century (Qing Dynasty) when large numbers of Chinese migrated to South-East Asia. Then China was made up of provinces and each province was generally divided into *fu* (prefectures), *zhou* (subprefectures), and *xian* (districts). After 1911, the system of *fu* and *zhou* was abolished, and today a province or an autonomous region is directly divided into *xian*.

Other common 'Hokkien' subidentities include Longxi, Zhao'an, Nan'an, Hui'an, Anxi, Jinjiang, and Tong'an.<sup>6</sup> The first two are districts in Zhangzhou prefecture (*Zhangzhou fu*), the others are in Quanzhou prefecture (*Quanzhou fu*). Thus collectively, Longxi people and Zhao'an people are Zhangzhou people, while the others are Quanzhou people. The well-known Hokkien identity called *Xiamen ren* or Xiamen people is derived from the name Xiamen. It is a famous port city known to the West as Amoy. Since Xiamen is an important coastal city, its dialect called *Xiamen hua* (*E-meng oe* in Hokkien) is important and most known to Westerners who often associate Hokkien dialects in Malaysia with Amoy.

Theoretically a *Xinhua ren* (known in Malaysia as Henghua) is also a Hokkien. However, when one discusses this with a 'Hokkien' in Malaysia and Singapore, he will probably say, 'Yes, Henghua are also Hokkien, but they are different, they are Henghua'. His reply operates at two levels. At one level, he concedes that the Henghua are Hokkien if the identification is based on the provincial origin. However, at the level which the 'Hokkien' operates, the label in Malaysia excludes those who are not of Minnan origin. Xinghua was a prefecture neighbouring Minnan at the northern coastal side. There are two districts in Xinghua, namely Putian and Xianyou. Xinghua people in Malaysia can trace their ancestral places to these two districts.

Hokchiu (Fuzhou in Mandarin) and Hokchia (Fuqing in Mandarin) were once classified as Northern Min people (cf. the dictionary *Cihai*). Today, they are classified linguistically as Mindong or eastern Min. The

city of Fuqing is further north of Putian along the coast of Fujian, and Fuzhou is further north of Fuqing. Both were under the prefecture of Fuzhou which contained 10 districts. The label 'Hokchia' is probably the pronunciation of 'Fuqing' in that dialect.

Most of the Fujian people in Malaysia came from the places mentioned above. There are others who originated from other parts of the province and ethnically identify with the names of their ancestral prefectures and districts. For example, those whose ancestors came from Longyan in southern Fujian identify themselves as Longyan people and they form their own associations in Malaysia.<sup>7</sup> Not all speakers of Min dialects originated from Fujian Province. The Teochew, for example, originated from eastern Guangdong Province in the prefecture of Chaozhou where the famous port city Shantou (popularly known as Swatow) is situated. While a Hokkien may concede that a Henghua or a Hokchia can be considered a Hokkien at the provincial level of identification, he never considers a Teochew as Hokkien, even though linguistically both belong to the same category. A Hokkien and a Hokchiu may belong to a Hokkien association on the principle of locality, but not a Teochew whose ancestral origin is in the prefecture of Chaozhou. The subethnic demarcation between a Teochew and a Hokkien is distinct even though their dialects are mutually intelligible. Teochew can also be divided into a lower level of identification based on their ancestral districts of origin such as Chaoyang, Huilai, Denghai, Puning, and others.

While linguistically Hainan dialects are classified as Southern Min, Hainan people in Malaysia are not Hokkien. Hainan dialects are fairly different from other Min dialects. The Hainanese in Malaysia are popularly known as *Hainan ren* since their ancestors came from the island of Hainan in south China. Nevertheless, they usually identify themselves as *Qiongzhou ren* in Mandarin or *Keng-Chiu lang* in Hainanese and Hokkien (with different accents). This identification is based on the administrative unit called *Qiongzhou fu* or Qiongzhou prefecture which, until it was abolished in 1911, covered the whole of Hainan Island. As *qiong* is a homonym with another word which means 'poor', Hainanese Malaysians prefer to pronounce (in Mandarin) the characters of their speech group as *Qingzhou* rather than *Qiongzhou*, the pronunciation of *qing* being the second tone as in *qiong*.<sup>8</sup> Many Hainanese Malaysians can trace their ancestral origin to the districts of Wenchang, Lehui, and Yazhou, and Chinese Malaysians with the surname Fu are invariably Hainanese.

Related to the Hainanese are people who originated from Leizhou Peninsula. These are the Leizhou people, that is Lui-Chiu in Hokkien. Since the Leizhou people are a very small minority in Malaysia, they are often thought of by other Chinese as Hainanese, and, out of convenience, they often describe themselves as such or 'more or less like Hainanese'.

Cantonese speak the Yue language and in Malaysia identify themselves as well as by others as *Konfu*. The label 'Konfu people' or

*Guangfu ren* in Mandarin is from the abbreviation of *Guangzhou fu* or the prefecture of Guangzhou in Guangdong also known as Yue. Konfu people originated from this prefecture which was well known to the West for its main city, Guangzhou Shi, the earliest port opened to the Europeans. Guangzhou Shi is known to the West as Canton, hence the label Cantonese. The Yue language which the Cantonese speak (known in their dialect as *konfu wa*) is not intelligible to Hokkien speakers, and in the past, Hokkien and Cantonese were rivals in commercial and mining enterprises in Malaysia. The Straits Chinese in the past often erroneously referred to the Cantonese as 'Macau' people. Today, many Baba Chinese in Malacca still use the labels Konfu people and Macau people (*Orang Macau*) interchangeably. Related to the Cantonese are the Kwongsai people, that is, people whose ancestors came from Guangxi Province which is locally transcribed as Kwangsai. Their dialect is different from the *konfu* dialect although Hokkien Chinese who do not speak the two dialects find it very difficult to distinguish the two.

Hakka is the English transcription of *kejia* pronounced in that language. Many Chinese Malaysians who are not Chinese-educated do not realize that Hakka are what they call *Ke ren* or Ke people. The term *ke* means 'guests' and reflects the fact that *Ke ren* or *Kheh* in Hokkien did not originate in South China; they migrated from further north. Today they are mainly distributed in China in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. They are also found in Jiangxi and western Fujian. Hakka dialects are usually grouped together with the Gan dialect spoken mainly around the region of Boyang Lake as Gan-Hakka. Zhan Bohui (1981: 9) divides Hakka dialects into *Yuedong Ke* or the *Kejia* dialects of eastern Guangdong, *Gan'nan Ke* or the *Kejia* dialects south of Gan River in Jiangxi, *Minxi Ke* or the *Kejia* dialects of Western Min (Western Fujian), *Minbei Ke* or the *Kejia* dialects of Northern Min (Northern Fujian), and others.

The Ke people do not trace their ancestral origin to only one province in China. Thus the Hakka who originated from Guangdong can join Guangdong associations together with the Cantonese on the principle of locality. There are also Hakka associations in Malaysia which recruit members on the basis of linguistic and ethnic origin in China, hence Hakka of different ancestral provincial origins can join these associations. Hakka Malaysians of different regional origin in China further identify themselves according to the name of the regions (most of them in Guangdong Province) and speak their dialects of that region, such as Haifeng and Lufeng in the prefecture of Huizhou, Dapu of Chaozhou prefecture or Jiaying (known as Mei Xian since 1912) and others.<sup>9</sup>

There are also a very small minority of Shanghai people (*Shanghai ren*) and Hunan people (*Hunan ren*) scattered in different parts of Malaysia. The former came from Shanghai, while the latter originated from the province of Hunan. Shanghai people speak the Wu language while the language of Hunan people is *Xiang yu* or Xiang language. In Sabah,

there is a community of Tianjin people in Kota Kinabalu (in the region of Jalan Shantung settlement and Jalan Penampang Lama) and in Ulu Kimanis. Both the settlements are popularly known in Sabah as *Shandong cun* or 'Shandong village', and those in Ulu Kimanis village originally came from the 'Shandong village' in Kota Kinabalu. The people are known to the others in Sabah as Shandong people, although they are predominantly of Tianjin origin and identify themselves as *Tianjin ren* or 'Tianjin people'. Only a few families are actually of Shandong origin. Both Tianjin and Shandong people speak northern Mandarin dialects too and so are linguistically distinct from the other Chinese Malaysians whose mother tongues are not Mandarin. There is a Sabah Northern Chinese Association for the Tianjin and Shandong people.<sup>10</sup>

From the above analysis, it is obvious that Chinese Malaysians have various levels of identities. They are divided into dialect groups and subdialect groups. The ethnic identification of Chinese Malaysians is segmentary and the proper level of identity is expressed according to the relevant level of identification. In other words, Chinese form a single ethnic category in relation to other non-Chinese Malaysians. Among themselves, they are segmented in identification at various levels. Hokkien Chinese identify themselves as such in relation to the Cantonese and other dialect groups but among Hokkien they are further segmented into Yongchun (Eng-Choon), Anxi (An-Khoe), and others. Even at this level, it can further be segmented into the lowest level of identification by specifying the ancestral village of origin. Thus an An-Khoe Hokkien may specify that he is An-Khoe O-Khu (Mandarin: Huqiu), that is, he is O-Khu type of An-Khoe Hokkien in contrast to other An-Khoe Hokkien who do not trace their ancestral origin to the village O-Khu.

Dialect group and subdialect group identification is based on the patrilineal principle. If one's father is a Hakka, one is a Hakka even though one's mother is a Teochew or that one speaks only Teochew. All Chinese Malaysians know their speech group identity but not all know their subspeech group identity. Generally the older generation and those who have some Chinese education know their subspeech group identity while only a portion of the English-educated Chinese do. Few Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan identify at levels lower than speech groups, but many Baba in Malacca still proudly specify their subspeech group identity such as 'Eng-choon Hokkien' or 'Lo-Hong (Lufeng) Kheh' and so on. Only the older generation and the Chinese-educated are able to identify at the level of ancestral village; even then, some of the latter are not able to do so. Generally, Baba and other Peranakan-type Chinese as well as the 'English-speaking' Chinese are not able to identify at this level. However, the custom of specifying all levels of identification is kept alive by gravestone inscription for all levels of identity (including the ancestral village level) of the deceased.<sup>11</sup> It can be said that identification at the level of ancestral village is dying out while identification at subdialect group level is also losing ground.

Ethnic-group identification is meaningful only in the presence of diverse groups. In most places of Malaysia, the category of people that identify with an ancestral village usually do not have opposing groups to relate to and so such identification naturally becomes irrelevant.

However, due to intergroup rivalries in the past as well as linguistic and other cultural differences between dialect groups, stereotypes and 'ethnic' jokes of one dialect group against another did exist. Among some older Chinese, there is still some prejudice against other dialect groups especially in matters relating to marriage. A Hokkien grandmother, for example, may prefer her grandson to marry a Hokkien rather than a Cantonese although usually she will not go to the extent of forbidding marriage to a Cantonese. For the younger generation, dialect group identification is not a serious consideration in their choice of mates. Among Hokkien Baba in Malacca, the parents generally prefer their sons and daughters to marry fellow Baba who share the same Baba culture. If a son or daughter wants to marry a non-Baba Chinese, and if the parents are Hokkien Baba, they may prefer him or her to marry a Hokkien. Such a preference is due to their traditional pride in Hokkien identity since most Baba were and are Hokkien.

### **Dialect Groups, Language, and Socio-cultural Features**

The multiple levels of Chinese identification are significant for Chinese social organization in Malaysia. Many Chinese associations are formed on the basis of dialect group and subdialect group identities. Of course, Chinese associations are also formed on the basis of other principles such as kinship and locality, and there is often an overlap between the principle of locality and that of dialect groups or subdialect groups. In practice, it is Chinese as a meta-ethnic category that is used as a principle of mobilizing Chinese interest in relation to other ethnic groups. Today, there is no rivalry between dialect groups, which are actually categories of subethnic identification. While dialect group associations served to mobilize inter-dialect group rivalry in the past, today they cater for certain social and welfare needs rather than for mobilizing solidarity of members in relation to members of other dialect groups. They do serve to organize support for pan-Chinese interests but not for competing with other dialect groups. Nevertheless, subtle competition between dialect groups does exist in the form of pride for a particular dialect group. For example, if a dialect group association can give more scholarships to its members than other dialect groups, then members of that group will feel proud of their association. Even here, it is a matter of identification. While all Chinese Malaysians share some general features of Chinese Malaysian culture, each dialect group also has certain cultural traditions of its own.

In terms of kinship, Chinese observe patrilineal descent and normally patrilocal or neolocal residence at marriage. Yet, within this general framework, the wedding rites of each dialect group differ in details, even though the grooms and brides all put on western-style suits and

wedding gowns. However, with the trend towards simplification of the wedding ceremony the diversity and differences of wedding rites between dialect groups will become less. This is especially so if weddings are reduced to merely a formal civil registration, ancestor worship at home, and dinner at a restaurant. Similarly, Chinese Malaysians share certain rules about funerals, but differ in details, often even in funeral costumes. Chinese Malaysians observe certain festivals but the rites performed differ in details between dialect groups. Furthermore, particular dialect groups observe certain festivals more than others. The worship of the God of Heaven (pai Thi-Kong) on the eve of the ninth day of the first lunar month is a Hokkien custom even though other dialect groups may also observe it. Even certain deities and temples are associated with particular dialect groups. Deities like Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy), Guandi Ye, and Mazu have become pan-Chinese deities, but certain other deities are more confined to certain dialect groups or subdialect groups. Toa Peh Kong, for example, is more popular among the Hokkien, Hakka, and Teochew. Guangze Zunwang, also known as Shengwang Gong, is of Nan'an, Fujian origin and so is essentially a Hokkien deity. Indeed, the temple devoted to this deity in Papar (Sabah) is locally known as 'Hokkien Temple' (*Fujian miao*) even though its actual name is Thin Nam Tong (Tengnan Tang). Deities which originated in certain prefectures and districts in China, and which are still more confined to certain speech groups or subspeech groups, are known in Chinese as *xiangtu shen*, literally 'local deities'.

The traditional identification of dialect groups with occupations is breaking down. Traditionally import and export businesses were mainly operated by Hokkien and Teochew. This is still generally true today partly due to the fact that the Hokkien are the majority among Chinese Malaysians. Everywhere, the Hainanese are still closely associated with coffee-shops and Henghua with bicycle repair shops, while in Sarawak, the latter are also associated with fishing. Shanghai people are identified with dentistry, Hokchiu with transport businesses, and Hakka with Chinese medical trade while the Chinese female workers at construction sites are generally associated with Hakka women. The Cantonese are associated with the occupation of technicians. Han Sin Fong's study (1975: 108) on dialect groups and occupational specialization in Sabah conforms to the general stereotype described above. He reports that import-export and wholesale dealers are mostly Hokkien, grocers are mostly Hokkien and Teochew, blue-collar technical workers and goldsmiths are mostly Cantonese, druggists (proprietors of Chinese medicine shops) and tailors are Hakka, bicycle-shop operators are Henghua, and coffee-shop operators are mostly Hainanese.<sup>12</sup>

The most distinct feature which distinguishes one dialect group from another is their 'dialects'.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the names of Chinese Malaysians, at least their family names, are given in 'dialects' such that one can often tell from his or her family name to which dialect group a Chinese Malaysian belongs. Thus the surname 'Tan' is generally for the Hokkien, 'Tang' for the Teochew, 'Chan' for the Cantonese, and 'Chin' for the Hakka.

All these Chinese share the same surname (same character) which is pronounced 'Chen' in Mandarin. Members of each dialect group speak various dialects, each one depending on their subdialect group identity. There are, for example, various Hokkien dialects. However, there is a process which tends to merge all Hokkien dialects into a version which may be called Malaysian Hokkien. This is due to the intermixing of speakers of different Hokkien dialects such that the younger generation no longer speak 'pure' Yongchun, 'pure' Nan'an, or other Hokkien dialects. To illustrate, my grandfather migrated from Yongchun of Fujian Province and spoke the Yongchun dialect. My father who was local-born spoke fairly 'pure' Yongchun dialect with some mixture of Malay loanwords. However, I do not speak 'pure' Yongchun dialect anymore although while interviewing Chinese Malaysians, I am able to recognize 'pure' Yongchun speakers and some older Yongchun informants can still detect the slight Yongchun accent in me. Like most of the younger generation of Hokkien speakers in Malaysia, my Hokkien may be described as Malaysian Hokkien which generally does not carry any distinct accent of any particular subdialect group. It contains a number of Malay loanwords, such as *kahtwin* (with tones) for 'marry' or *suka* (with tones) for 'like' (for example, *suka chiah* means 'like to eat'). There are also some influences from the dialects of other dialect groups. The Malay linguistic influence is evident too in these other dialects.

The Malaysian Hokkien dialect just described may be called Standard Malaysian Hokkien dialect (SMH). Other than this, there are regional Hokkien dialects which are products of more local influences by Malays and other ethnic groups in Malaysia. The most important of these is Penang Hokkien which is spoken not only in Penang, but also in Kedah and Perlis. In SMH, the Malay loanwords are used interchangeably with Hokkien words. In Penang Hokkien, however, many Malay loanwords have replaced Hokkien words. For instance, the word in Penang Hokkien for stones is *ba-tu* (with fourth and second tones respectively). The style of pronunciation is also somewhat influenced by Thai. Penang Hokkien may be considered a product of Baba culture which in turn was a product of Malay and Thai influences on Chinese culture. In Kelantan, the Peranakan-type Chinese speak a version of Hokkien which may be called Kelantan Peranakan-type Hokkien (KPH). Compared to Penang Hokkien, it is even more influenced by Malay (Kelantan Malay dialect) and Thai dialects in the state. In certain places like Kampung Beklam in Bachok, there is such a mixture of Malay words that the Hokkien component is hardly intelligible to SMH speakers. Many Malay loanwords in this version of Hokkien are derived from Kelantan Malay dialect which is quite different from other Malay dialects, thus making it rather difficult for Hokkien speakers from outside Kelantan to follow the KPH in Kampung Beklam.

The mother tongues of the various dialect groups are their own Chinese 'dialects' (except the Malacca Baba who speak Baba Malay), while Mandarin is a language for all dialect groups and is mostly learnt at school. Mandarin in Malaysia is not the standard Beijing version for



it is heavily influenced by dialects and may be called Malaysian Mandarin. For example *shi* (poems) in standard Mandarin is often pronounced as *si* in Malaysian Mandarin. This is due to Hokkien influences, for in Hokkien dialects there is a lack of the retroflex pronunciations and so /sh/ is modified to /s/. With the use of the standard *pinyin* system of Romanized transcription of Chinese in dictionaries, Chinese Malaysian readers are becoming more and more aware of the proper pronunciation. Nevertheless, even people who are aware of the differences between Malaysian Mandarin and Standard Mandarin continue to speak the Malaysian version. In a way, Malaysian Mandarin has become a Mandarin dialect of its own.

Chinese dialect groups are distributed all over Malaysia, but certain dialect groups tend to dominate in particular regions, hence their 'dialects' become the lingua franca there. Teochew, for example, is widely spoken in Johore Baru, Muar, and Pontian in the state of Johore, Sabak Bernam in Selangor, and Kuala Muda in Kedah. Hokkien is the Chinese lingua franca in most places in Malaysia, especially in Johore, Malacca, most parts of Selangor, Penang, Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu, Kelantan, and Sarawak. In fact, the Hokkien are the majority people in these states except in Sarawak where the Hokkien are the third largest group of Chinese after the Foochow and the Hakka. But Hokkien has become the lingua franca between different speech groups in Sarawak just as Malay is the lingua franca among different ethnic groups in this state. This is because the Hokkien had a longer history of settlement and are more widely distributed, while the Foochow were originally concentrated in Sibiu, and the Hakka have been more rural in settlement. Some 'Hokkien areas' in different parts of the country are in fact dominated by certain Hokkien subdialect groups. For example, it is known that there are many Eng-choon people (Yongchun) in Klang, and Sekinchan (Selangor), Malacca, and Batu Pahat (Johore).

The majority of the Chinese in Negri Sembilan, Perak, Pahang, and Sabah are Hakka and Cantonese. In fact, Cantonese is the Chinese lingua franca in such cities and towns as Ipoh (Perak), Kuala Lumpur, Kuantan (Pahang), Seremban (Negri Sembilan), and Sandakan (Sabah). As Cantonese is so widely spoken in Kuala Lumpur, few people realize that in this city there are slightly more Hokkien than Cantonese (according to the 1991 census) while the Hakka are the third largest group. While Hakka is the second largest dialect group in Peninsular Malaysia, the language is not a lingua franca in most places. This gives the false impression to many Chinese Malaysians that the Hakka are not as numerous as the Cantonese. In general, the Hakka are more spread out throughout Peninsular Malaysia and are more rural based. Hence Hakka is not an important language for business compared to Hokkien and Cantonese. In Sarawak and especially Sabah, the Hakka form the majority of the Chinese, hence the importance of the Hakka language there.

The Hainanese are scattered all over the country but are more numerous in Selangor, Perak, Johore, and Malacca. The minority dialect

groups, comprising Kwongsai, Hokchiu, and Hokchia, are more numerous in Perak, Pahang, and Sarawak. The states with the greatest number of Kwongsai are Pahang and Perak. Hokchiu (Foochow) people are mostly in Perak and Sarawak and they are the second largest dialect group in Sarawak. The towns of Sibü (Sarawak), Sitiawan (Perak), and even Yong Peng (Johore) are known to many Chinese as Hokchiu towns. Sarawak is also the state with the highest number of Henghua, followed by Selangor and Johore. The Hokchia form one of the smallest speech groups and are found mostly in Perak and Johore.

While Mandarin is commonly spoken among Chinese-educated individuals throughout Malaysia, it tends to become more important as everyday speech among Chinese Malaysians in places where there are many dialect groups with significant numbers of people even though one of them may dominate. In Malacca town, Mandarin is widely spoken alongside Hokkien. In Kuala Krai in Kelantan, Mandarin occupies a more important place than 'dialects', and children learn Mandarin by 'picking up' rather than by going to Chinese schools. In Sabah, Mandarin is spoken by almost every Chinese. The Hakka account for 57.05 per cent (113,628 people) of the Chinese in Sabah. Thus, together with Hakka, Mandarin has become an important Chinese lingua franca in the state. Even English-educated Chinese from Peninsular Malaysia who do not speak Mandarin pick up the language fairly easily after working in Sabah for a number of years. This is like non-Cantonese-speaking Chinese picking up Cantonese after living for a few years in Kuala Lumpur or Ipoh.

### Acculturation and the Chinese Malaysians

Chinese Malaysians may be divided into two broad categories, namely, the more acculturated 'Peranakan Chinese' and the so-called 'Pure Chinese'. In Indonesia, the 'pure' Chinese are called *totok* which means 'pure' in Malay (cf. Heidhues, 1974: 39). In Malaysia, there is no special term for the 'pure' Chinese, and I shall use the phrase 'Pure Chinese', bearing in mind that they are not totally unacculturated. They are also influenced by Malay and/or other regional cultures, only less so when compared to the 'Peranakan Chinese'.

Loosely, Peranakan Chinese are Malay-speaking Chinese. There are two main categories. The first category comprises the Baba in Malacca, who also identify themselves as 'Peranakan'. The other category comprises Malay- and Thai-acculturated Chinese in north-east Kelantan (especially in the rural areas) and the Malay-acculturated Chinese in parts of rural Trengganu. These Chinese do not identify themselves as 'Baba' or 'Peranakan', but culturally they may be classified as 'Peranakan Chinese'. Elsewhere I have also referred to them as Peranakan-type Chinese to contrast them from the Baba of Malacca (Tan, 1988a; Tan, 1993).

The origin of Peranakan Chinese is due mainly to the early and long history of contact between the Chinese and the local people, especially

Malays, Indonesians, and Thais. The acculturation was made easier by intermarriage in the early period of the development of Peranakan Chinese communities.

Before the nineteenth century, Chinese settlers married local women because the migration of Chinese women to Malaya began only after the mid-nineteenth century (Lim 1967: 66-7). Intermarriage between the early Chinese settlers and local women is well reported by various writers. Both Lim Boon Keng (1917), himself a Straits Chinese, and Newbold (1839; see 1971: 172) wrote about the intermarriage and the formation of Baba culture. Middlebrook (1933: 153) reported the intermarriage of Chinese with 'Sakai' women and Siamese<sup>3</sup> in Pulai (Ulu Kelantan), Sakai (derogatory) being aborigines in the Malay Peninsula. Gosling (1964: 215-19), who wrote about the Peranakan-type Chinese in Trengganu, mentioned Chinese settlers intermarrying with Malays. A Chinese work of 1820 also reported on Chinese settlers intermarrying with Siamese women in Kelantan (Xie, 1920; See, 1962). In Penang, early Chinese settlers were known to intermarry not only with Malay women but also with Sam-Sam (Teoh, 1957). According to Kobkua (1994), Sam-Sam are Thai-speaking Muslim communities found in Kedah, Perlis, and Perak as well as in some southern Thai provinces. Chinese also intermarried with people from Indonesia. Munshi Abdullah reported in the nineteenth century that Balinese and Bugis female slaves were bought by Chinese and 'men of all races' who 'took them to wife' (Abdullah, 1970: 183-4). It is therefore not surprising that as a result of intermarriage and cultural contact between the minority Chinese settlers and the indigenous people in South-East Asia, the offspring of these settlers were acculturated and even spoke Malay as their first language.

### *The Baba of Malacca*

Baba culture was formed in Malacca before the arrival of the British and the society prospered under British rule in the nineteenth century. We do not know when the acculturated Chinese first identified themselves as 'Baba' or 'Peranakan', but the immigration of a large number of Chinese in the nineteenth century gave rise to a consciousness of distinction between the early Chinese settlers and the immigrants who were known as *sinkheh* or 'new guests'. In other words, Baba identity and Baba society became distinct during the nineteenth century. In fact the label 'Peranakan' is a Malay word meaning 'local-born person' and is still used by the Baba for self-identification even though most other Chinese Malaysians today are also local-born people. In the nineteenth century, Chinese communities may be divided into 'Baba' and 'immigrants'. The immigrants were politically oriented towards China while the Baba were oriented towards Malaya and loyal to the British government. The dominant Chinese businessmen were invariably Baba. It is not surprising that there were 'immigrant Chinese' who married into Baba families (matrilocal residence), and their offspring became Baba. Baba businessmen and leaders could speak English and got on well with

the Europeans. They were recognized as leaders of Chinese communities and, as Freedman (1965: 10) has described, the Baba formed 'a dominant element of Malayan Chinese society'. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Baba had also begun to develop a literature of their own. Baba writers published newspapers and magazines, and wrote poems as well as stories, not only in English but also in romanized Baba-style Malay. Throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, Baba writers also translated many volumes of Chinese works into Baba-style romanized Malay. This literature died out by about the Second World War (cf. Salmon, 1974; Tan 1981). In Indonesia, the Chinese Peranakan published even more works in Malay (cf. Salmon, 1981).

By the twentieth century, the Baba were dominated by the non-Baba Chinese not only numerically but also economically, politically, and socially. With independence, the Baba as a community had lost whatever political influence they had on the government. The role of the Straits Chinese British Associations first formed by the Baba in Singapore in 1900, and later in Malacca (1900) and Penang (1920), was by the time of independence taken over by a new Chinese political party called then as the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). One of the prominent leaders of the MCA was Tan Cheng Lock who was a Baba himself. His political activities were not concerned merely with the Baba but with all Chinese Malaysians. Since the 1940s, many Baba have been slowly absorbed into non-Baba Chinese communities, a reverse of the process which took place in the nineteenth century. An important factor which caused this is the marriage between Baba and non-Baba Chinese. Furthermore, the Baba are regarded by non-Baba Chinese as Malay-like, as they generally speak Malay among themselves. Despite this, the Baba still have to interact intensively with the latter who are the majority.<sup>14</sup>

The centres of Baba communities were Malacca, Singapore, and Penang. The Baba in Singapore were originally migrants from Malacca and so they were culturally similar. Today there is still a small Baba community in Singapore. There were Baba who migrated from Malacca to Penang, but there was relatively less contact between the Baba of the two settlements. There were also Chinese Peranakan who migrated from Sumatra to Penang. However, the so-called 'Penang Baba' community largely evolved out of the local socio-cultural environment where, unlike in Malacca, there were some Thai influences too. Penang became an essentially Chinese settlement not long after it was founded by Francis Light in 1786. The Baba in Penang retained their Hokkien dialect which today has become Penang Hokkien. By the twentieth century, the Penang Baba had merged with the non-Baba Chinese communities. However, the Baba culture has contributed to the present Penang Hokkien culture. Today, those Chinese from Baba families and who are generally English-educated are simply 'Penang Chinese' although some older ones still describe themselves as 'Baba'. Generally the term 'Baba' in Penang is used in the historical sense rather than as a subethnic label.

Today in the Peninsula, only Malacca has a distinct Baba community. They are distributed in both urban and rural areas but are concentrated in the Central Malacca District (Malacca Tengah). In Malacca town, they are mostly in Jalan Tan Cheng Lock (formerly known as Heeren Street), Jalan Gelanggang (formerly known as Jonker Street), Tranquerah, and in the Bandar Hilir area including Praya Lane near the seaside where the Baba live among Portuguese Malaysians. The Baba are also found in housing areas at the outskirts of Malacca town, such as Ujong Pasir, Klebang Besar, Bukit Baru, and Bukit Serindit. In rural areas, they are mostly in Batu Berendam, Bukit Rambai, Pulau Gadong, and Kandang. The Baba can also be found in small numbers in other parts of Malacca such as Jasin, Alor Gajah, Sungai Udang, Masjid Tanah, and elsewhere. There were around 5,000 Baba in Malacca in 1977, about 3 per cent of the total Chinese population in the state (Tan, 1988b: 68).

The most distinct aspect of Baba culture today is their language called Baba Malay. It is a Malay-based creole originally developed from bazaar Malay and it has distinct and systematic linguistic features. It has many Chinese loanwords. There are also Indonesian and English loanwords. This is the everyday language of the Baba although the more English-educated ones also speak English among themselves. There are also Malay influences in dress and food. The older generation of Nyonya (female Baba) still wear the Malay-style dress *sarung* and *kebaya*. Nyonya cooking is a unique combination of Chinese and Malay culinary art but is more Malay-like. Other than language, dress, and food, there is not so much acculturation with Malays. Baba kinship, for example, is a Chinese system. Their kinship terms of address are mostly Hokkien loanwords with some Malay terms. The rule of descent is patrilineal but due to the fact that Chinese immigrants were in the past married into more established Baba families, matrilocal residence was fairly common. Today there are still some Baba who live matrilocally after marriage but the general rule now is patrilocal residence. Each year a few Baba couples still hold weddings in the traditional Chinese style, wearing wedding costumes of the Manchu period. No other Chinese elsewhere in Malaysia or overseas still observe this form of wedding. In terms of religion, Malacca Baba observe the Chinese Religion like the 'pure' Chinese. There are of course a very small community of Christians and followers of other faiths. The Baba observe Chinese festivals and pray to Chinese deities. Of course there are differences in the details of rituals between Baba and non-Baba Chinese, but in general Baba religious beliefs and practices are similar to other non-Baba Chinese, although there are relatively more Baba who worship at the graves of Muslims saints called *keramat*.

*Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan*

Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan are mainly distributed along both sides of the Kelantan River, from around Kampung Tanah Merah in Machang district to the river mouth in Kota Bharu district. They are mostly villagers although some of them live in such towns as Pasir Mas, Wakaf Bharu, and the capital, Kota Bharu. They refer to themselves as *Teng-lang* (Hokkien), that is 'Chinese', and do not call themselves Baba or Peranakan. Malays call them *Cina kampung* or 'village Chinese' while the 'pure Chinese' in this region refer to them as 'Hokkien-Siam' which has the connotation of being 'half Chinese half Siamese'. Some of these non-Peranakan Chinese also refer to the Peranakan-type Chinese as *Poã Teng-Siam*, which literally means 'half Chinese half Siamese'. Non-Peranakan Chinese from elsewhere in Malaysia refer to them as Baba, as they do when they refer to all Chinese that have been acculturated by Malays. This usage of 'Baba' should be distinguished from 'Baba' as an ethnic label as used in Malacca.

The Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan have a long history of interaction not only with the Malays but also with the Thais. They speak their version of Hokkien and Kelantan Malay, while many speak local Thai too. Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan often speak Malay and even Thai among themselves. In fact in Kampung Kulim (near Wakaf Bharu), which is a big Peranakan-type Chinese settlement, many Chinese speak more Thai than Hokkien among themselves. Like the Baba, the cooking and the attire of Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan are influenced by the local Malays. Their cooking is a combination of Malay, Thai, and Chinese. It is common for them to use their fingers to pick up food during meals. Among the Baba in Malacca, not many men wear a sarong regularly but in Kelantan's rural areas both men and women among the Peranakan-type Chinese often wear sarongs. It is also common for both to carry *kain lepas*. This is a long piece of cloth which men use as either a head cloth (*semutar*) or for tying around their waist, while women use it as a scarf. Women also wear the Malay-style blouse called *kebaya*. Peranakan-type Chinese houses in the rural areas are unique. Like traditional Malay and Thai houses, they are built on stilts, yet their architecture is also very Chinese.

Peranakan-type Chinese worship Chinese deities and follow Chinese customs. They also pray at Thai Buddhist temples. Their religion is in fact a combination of the traditional Chinese Religion and Theravada Buddhism of the Thai variant. The Chinese contribute generously to the building and maintenance of Thai temples. Thai monks perform religious rituals not only in Thai temples but also in Chinese homes on such occasions as weddings and funerals. Other than worshipping ancestors and deities at home as well as at Chinese temples, each Peranakan-type Chinese community has its own patron deity, and a grand celebration is observed during the deity's birthday. Such a celebration is called *ang kong su*, literally 'the affairs of the deities'. If there

is no temple in the community, the celebration is held at the house of the 'master of the incense pot' (*lorchu*) who is in charge of the joss-stick burner dedicated to the deity. Each year a new *lorchu* is selected to take care of the burner, hence its custody is rotated among the members of the community. During such a celebration, there are spirit-mediums who perform various religious rites for devotees. In the evening a Thai dance-drama called *menora* or the Malay shadow play called *wayang kulit* may be staged. Religion draws a distinct cultural and social line between Chinese and Malays, but it integrates Peranakan-type Chinese with the Thais for the former shares the religion of the latter although not vice-versa. While there is close interaction between Malays and Chinese, it is even closer between the Chinese and the Thais. Furthermore, there is intermarriage between Chinese and Thais, as there has always been (cf. Tan, 1982).

#### *Peranakan-type Chinese in Trengganu*

Peranakan-type Chinese in Trengganu live among Malays and are found in certain settlements mainly along Trengganu River especially in Pulau Babi (now called Pulau Bahagia), Tirok, and Wakaf Tapai. Like those in Kelantan, they do not identify themselves as either Baba or Peranakan, although Gosling (1964: 203) call them 'Baba' in recognition of the popular usage of the term to apply to all Chinese in Malaya displaying a significant level of cultural and biological 'assimilation'. These Hokkien Chinese are different from those in Kuala Trengganu, the state capital. Gosling's article shows that many Chinese were either acculturated or assimilated by the Malays in the past through intermarriage. Nevertheless, there were also Malay women who married Chinese and were incorporated into Chinese communities (Gosling 1964: 215).

In Tirok, which is 17 kilometres from Kuala Trengganu, the Chinese houses are largely in Malay style. In May 1987 there were 24 Chinese houses (12 at Kemang and 12 at Tirok proper) with only 91 permanent residents. Most of them were rubber tappers on their own smallholdings. The Chinese speak the acculturated version of Hokkien as well as the Trengganu Malay dialect. Their dress in the village is of Malay style, men wear a sarong while women wear both sarong and *kebaya*. Their cooking is also influenced by Malays and they use their fingers rather than chopsticks when eating. There is a Chinese temple in Tirok. The *wayang kulit* used to be staged at the temple compound during religious celebrations. There was even a Chinese *dalang*, that is, a specialist in shadow plays (Lukman Muda, 1976: 68). The Chinese also consult Malay spirit-doctors called *bomoh*. According to Lukman Muda (*ibid.*: 65), there was even a Chinese *bomoh* who had learnt the art from a Malay *bomoh* and cured sickness by reading Koranic verses. On the whole, there are Malay cultural influences here and there on the Peranakan-type Chinese in Trengganu. Nevertheless, they remain Chinese in identity.

*The Orang Yunan*

The Orang Yunan or 'Yunanese' in Trengganu are actually Hui (Muslims in China). The early settlers came from Guangzhou. In the dominant Malay Trengganu, they identified themselves as 'Orang Yunan' to stress their original Muslim status since Malays had heard about the Muslims in Yunan. The Orang Yunan are a small community descended from six persons with the surnames of Dong, Li, Zhang, Liu, Fu, and Xiao. The earliest settlers of the first three surnames, popularly known as Pak Abdullah, Pak Musa, and Pak Ali, came to trade in Kuala Trengganu at the turn of the twentieth century (Tan, 1991). In 1976 there were 120 Orang Yunan in Kuala Trengganu, living in Jalan Air Jernih, Simpang Tok Ku, Kampung China, Jalan Banggol, Gong Kapus, and Batu Buruk (Mansor, 1976: 29). Today there are about 200 people, both old and young.

Because the 'Yunanese' are Muslims and so have to marry Muslims, who in Trengganu are mainly the Malays, they are then in the process of being assimilated into Malay society. The younger generation generally speak Malay and only little Cantonese. They are accepted by the Malays. In fact they are even taken in as members of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the ruling Malay party, and some even hold important positions in the local branch (Mansor, 1976: 59). Both religion (Islam) and the need to intermarry push the Orang Yunan to interact more with the Malays than with the other Chinese. Despite the trend towards assimilation, the 'Yunanese' still interact closely among themselves to maintain the community. This is most obvious during the Hari Raya when the 'Yunanese' visit each other.

*The Pure Chinese and Acculturation*

The 'pure' Chinese are by no means a homogeneous category of people. In some places, such as the Hakka settlement in Pulau of Ulu Kelantan (cf. Carstens, 1980), the Chinese maintain a very traditional culture. But in certain regions, the Chinese are more acculturated in a number of ways with other ethnic groups in Malaysia. For example, the Hokkien in Penang are culturally different in various ways from those in Johore and Malacca. We have seen that the Hokkien culture in Penang had been influenced by the Baba in the past. Thus Chinese women in Penang, Kedah, and Perlis wear sarongs but the non-Baba Chinese women in Johore and Malacca do not do so. We have seen too the uniqueness of Penang Hokkien which is also spoken in Kedah and Perlis. On the whole, the Hokkien in the three states form a Chinese subculture area in contrast to the Hokkien culture in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula. In fact, the Hokkien in Penang often refer to the Hokkien dialect in southern Peninsular Malaysia as 'Singapore Hokkien' since Singapore as the centre of the Straits Settlements in the past was traditionally closer to them. Using the concept of culture area, the Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan and Trengganu obviously form another two distinct areas of Hokkien subculture.



The regional acculturation of Chinese by Malays and other local people depends very much on the extent of social interaction and whether there had been any intermarriage between them. While 'pure' Chinese are also culturally influenced by Malays in a number of ways, such as using Malay loanwords, they are never acculturated to the extent of speaking Malay among themselves. In Johore, the Chinese are not just concentrated in towns but are also distributed in certain rural areas. Interaction between the Chinese and the Malays is more confined to economic relations and is never as intense as in north-east Kelantan. Thus in Johore, Malay influence on Chinese culture is minimal. Other than the Baba in Malacca, greater acculturation of the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia by other ethnic groups is confined to the northern states which border Thailand. This is not only due to the small number of Chinese in Kelantan but also to the presence of a Thai minority in Kelantan, Kedah, and Perlis. As there is no religious barrier between Thais and Chinese and the latter also accept 'Thai Buddhism', intermarriage is easy between them. This in turn influences Chinese culture, through women and socialization. Thus, the wearing of sarongs by Chinese women in these northern states is as much a Thai as a Malay influence on the Chinese.

The situation in East Malaysia is more complicated. The majority of the people there are not Malays and most are not Muslims. In fact, Malaysians in Peninsular Malaysia are used to distinguishing Chinese from Malays physically and vice-versa. But in Sabah and Sarawak, a person from Peninsular Malaysia often cannot tell whether a person is a Chinese, a Kadazan, an Iban, or a Bidayuh. This is especially so in smaller inland towns where individuals of different ethnic groups mix socially. In more inland areas, Chinese interact closely with the 'natives'. In Marudi and Kapit (both in Sarawak), for example, the Chinese interact closely with the Iban and most can speak Iban fluently.

The absence of any significant religious barrier among non-Muslims in East Malaysia promote intermarriage. One often comes across Chinese marrying Iban, Kelabit, Kadazan, and others, especially in rural areas. In Sabah, the intermarriage between Chinese men and Kadazan women is especially common. The offspring of such unions are called 'Sino', a term which is derived from the English label 'Sino-Kadazan'. The identity of a Sino and his or her offspring depends very much on whom they marry as well as the social environment they have been exposed to. If a Sino marries a Kadazan and lives with the Kadazan, then the next generation will be Kadazan. If a Sino marries a Sino, the identity of the next generation depends very much on the ethnic environment in which the children are socialized. If the father is Chinese and the mother is Kadazan, a Sino may carry a Chinese surname, but socially he or she may identify more as a Chinese or a Kadazan depending on how he or she is socialized.

Peranakan Chinese are used to speaking Malay among themselves, while the 'pure' Chinese generally do not.<sup>15</sup> But the 'pure' Chinese range from the fairly acculturated to the least acculturated. The latter

are those who can speak Mandarin and write Chinese characters. Even those who regard themselves as 'pure', and regard the Baba as Malay-like, actually use some Malay loanwords too when they speak Chinese 'dialects'. The different levels of acculturation lead to various models of Chinese Malaysian identities, while making Chinese Malaysians as a whole distinct in contrast to the Chinese in other countries. The common experience of being Malaysian as well as the regional socio-cultural experiences cultivate the Malaysian identity.

### Language and Education

The category *Huaren* or 'Chinese' in Malaysia was formed out of originally different Chinese ethnic groups speaking different languages. With the exception of the Baba of Malacca who speak Baba Malay and English, the mother tongues of almost all Chinese Malaysians are their respective dialects which are really separate languages like Hokkien and Cantonese. The Peranakan-type Chinese of Kelantan and Trengganu speak both Hokkien (albeit acculturated) and the regional Malay dialects at home, and some speak Thai too. There are also some Chinese Malaysians who speak only English at home. Nevertheless almost all Chinese Malaysians, certainly the 'Chinese-educated' ones, regard *Huayu* (Mandarin) as the *mutu* or mother tongue of the Chinese. It is the recognized common language for the Chinese, and most of the Chinese-educated prefer to speak Mandarin although at home they may use their own 'dialects'. Some parents intentionally speak Mandarin to their children in the hope that they will be good in the language. Undoubtedly Mandarin is valued by the 'pure' Chinese as the *mutu* of the Chinese. It is *mutu* in the sense that it is the literate language of the Chinese, and that means being able to read and speak Mandarin and to write the characters. Furthermore, Mandarin is the common language of Chinese everywhere. The economic success of Taiwan and the increasing economic liberalization and modernization in mainland China have also made Mandarin an even more international language, at least in Asia.

Thus linguistically, Chinese Malaysians are rather heterogeneous, no doubt made complex by the division into dialect groups and by the process of acculturation. Furthermore, Chinese Malaysians also speak Malay to Malays and other indigenous groups, while many are also fluent in English. In fact, in the cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang, English is an important intergroup language. While the 'pure' Chinese do not normally speak Malay to fellow Chinese, they do accept English as the common language between Chinese who do not speak Mandarin. In fact, many urban Chinese prefer to speak English in the public sphere. Thus the common languages of the Chinese are really Mandarin, English, as well as the Chinese 'dialects' which have become the Chinese lingua franca of the regions. Of course the Peranakan Chinese have long been used to speaking the relevant Malay dialects as a common language. In addition, the Chinese of the different states and regions in Malaysia also speak the dominant indigenous language of the

region. Thus in Kapit (Sarawak) the Chinese are fluent in Iban, while in Belaga (interior Sarawak) many Chinese can speak Kayan. In Mukah (Sarawak), which is a Melanau area, many Chinese speak Melanau fluently. Of course in Kelantan, the Chinese there use the Kelantan Malay dialect which is rather difficult to understand even for Malay speakers outside that state.

Education is another dimension of internal heterogeneity. The Chinese set up schools wherever they had settled. The British left the Chinese schools in Malaya very much on their own, but after independence, Malay was made the national language of the country. At present, the government schools are all in Malay medium except for the Chinese and Tamil vernacular primary schools. Chinese may be taught as a subject in the Malay-medium schools if the parents of more than 15 students request it. This is the POL (Pupil's Own Language) programme. In addition, there are Chinese independent (that is, private) schools which use Mandarin as the teaching medium while Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) and English are taught as subjects.

Education poses a dilemma to Chinese Malaysians. Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, is important and a compulsory pass is required for school certificates at government schools, as well as for getting government jobs and for admission to state-run colleges and universities. English is important not only as the major international language, but also because it is a language for commerce and even social interaction in the country. At the same time, most Chinese want their children to learn Mandarin because it is regarded as *muyu*. It is also a useful language in the private sector as well as for international communication, including access to international Chinese writings and mass media. Because of the state policy which emphasizes the national language, government schools are seen as offering better opportunities for upward mobility. On the other hand, there is less opportunity to study Mandarin well since the POL programme is weak and Chinese parents are also not convinced of the government's seriousness in providing a good POL programme. Thus the decision to send a child to a Chinese primary school or to a Malay-medium school (with a POL programme) is a real dilemma for Chinese parents who, in making the decision, actually determine the child's future cultural identity. The problem with Chinese primary schools is that most students are weak in Malay, and this affects their performance when they enter the Malay-medium secondary schools. While many Chinese parents enrol their children in Chinese primary schools, most send their children to the Malay-medium secondary schools. Going to Chinese schools to ensure the learning of Mandarin and then entering government secondary schools with the aim of getting state-recognized certificates and thus access to better upward mobility is the present pattern of Chinese adjustment to the educational dilemma. It is by no means satisfactory since many Chinese students cannot adjust well to the secondary school system. At the same time, Chinese students (especially those who also study Mandarin) have rather heavy linguistic burdens—they study Mandarin, Malay, and

English, while they generally also speak at least one and usually more Chinese 'dialects'. In fact from a very young age, Chinese parents have to decide whether to speak only a Chinese dialect (the mother tongue) to their child, or only Mandarin, or a dialect and Mandarin, or a dialect, Mandarin and English!

A small number of Chinese primary school leavers enter Chinese independent schools. These are generally those who feel that they cannot adjust to the Malay-medium government schools due to the use of Malay, or who cannot compete because of poor academic performance, as well as students who prefer to continue to study in Chinese-medium schools. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Chinese independent schools have played an important role in providing education to those who may otherwise drop out from the government schools. They also provide 'educated' manpower for the economy, especially in the private sector. At the same time, many students from the independent schools have been able to further their studies overseas, in Taiwan and elsewhere, and have returned to work as professionals in the private sectors.

Because of the different educational experiences which affect cultural and even political orientation, the Chinese Malaysians have been classified as Chinese-educated and English-educated, and because of the emphasis on Bahasa Malaysia since independence, we have to add another category, the Malay-educated Chinese, which will become more important as students attending the former English schools now study in Malay. I have divided the Chinese-educated into three types (Table 2.1).

These three categories and their trends are as follows (Tan, 1988: 149):

The three major categories of Chinese will then be the Chinese-educated, the Malay-educated, and the English-speaking. The Chinese educated will comprise type 1 and type 3. The type 1 Chinese will be those who have received either Chinese primary education only or both Chinese primary education and secondary private Chinese education and even tertiary education from Taiwan. Chinese-educated type 2 and the English-educated will eventually disappear as the English-medium schools have all been converted into Malay-medium. However there will continue to be an 'English-speaking' category which comprise those 'English-speaking' Chinese who grow up in English-speaking families. The category of the Malay-educated will undoubtedly become more important. However, in contrast to the Chinese-educated, the Malay-educated share the characteristics of the English-educated in having less exposure to the Chinese 'great tradition'. The hitherto Chinese-educated Chinese in contrast to the English-educated Chinese will eventually be replaced by the contrast of the Chinese-educated versus the Malay-educated.

The internal diversities of Chinese Malaysians by education have implications on their cultural identities and even political orientations. Before the Second World War, for instance, the Chinese nationalists who were China-oriented were generally Chinese-educated. The English-educated Straits Chinese (the Baba) were local-oriented and generally pro-British. At the same time, Chinese communal leaders were generally Chinese-educated (cf. Wang 1970). Today, Chinese

TABLE 2.1  
Education and Chinese Identity

<i>Medium of Education</i>	<i>Type of Chinese</i>	<i>Main Characteristics</i>	<i>Trends</i>
Chinese	Chinese-educated type 1	Received Chinese-medium education only	Will persist
	Chinese-educated type 2	Received both Chinese-medium and English-medium education	Will disappear
	Chinese-educated type 3	Received both Chinese-medium and Malay-medium education	Will become more important
English	English-educated type 1	Received English-medium education and socialized in English-speaking family	Will disappear but the category of 'English-speaking' Chinese will persist
	English-educated type 2	Received English-medium education and grew up in Chinese-speaking home environment	Will disappear
	English-educated type 3	Peranakan Chinese who received English-medium education	Will disappear but the category of 'English-speaking' Chinese will persist
Malay	Malay-educated	Comprise the majority who grow up in a Chinese-speaking home environment and a small minority who grow up in a Malay-speaking home environment (Peranakan Chinese) as well as those from English-speaking families.	Will become more important

Source: Tan, 1988c.

Malaysians irrespective of educational background are Malaysian citizens. The English-educated have remained politically prominent. The President of the MCA, Ling Liong Sik, the leading Chinese party in the national coalition, is English-educated, so is Lim Keng Yaik, the President of Gerakan, the other Chinese-based party in the National

Front. Even Lim Kit Siang, the well-known opposition leader, is English-educated although he has learnt to speak fluent Mandarin. The English-oriented can speak 'dialects' but for the purposes of getting political support, even the English-educated have to learn to speak some Mandarin. Of course there are Chinese-educated members, especially Chinese-educated type 2, in the MCA and other Chinese-based political parties, and in the future there will be more Chinese-educated type 3.

In the final analysis, it is the language they speak and read, hence the mass media they are exposed to, which differentiates the Chinese-educated from the English-educated (Tan, 1988a: 148). This is true also of the increasingly important Malay-educated Chinese. The Chinese-educated have more access to, and therefore love of, Chinese literature and publications. They generally see Mandarin as crucial to Chinese identity. The English-educated and Malay-educated, due to their different socializing experiences, do not consider knowing Mandarin as crucial to Chinese identity although they may agree that it is good to know Mandarin. The English-educated are also more exposed to and dependent on English publications which influence their thinking. We should also note that numbers of Chinese school-leavers now read more Malay than Chinese and English.

### Religion

Unlike the Malays who are Muslims, Chinese Malaysians are followers of different faiths, although many do not identify themselves with any particular religion. Nevertheless, the majority of the Chinese observe Chinese Religion: the worship of ancestors, Chinese deities and spirits, as well as spirits of local origin. While there are many Mahayana Buddhist temples, Chinese Malaysian Buddhism co-exists with and in fact is dependent on the very existence of Chinese Religion. Its followers, with few exception, are generally adherents of Chinese Religion too and they worship deities of Taoist, Buddhist, and other Chinese origins. A minority of Chinese are followers of Christianity, Islam, Bahai, Sai Baba, and other faiths. Of these, Christianity and Theravada Buddhism are the most important.

According to the 1991 census, the religious groupings of the Chinese are: Islam, 0.4 per cent; Christianity, 7.8 per cent; Hinduism, 0.2 per cent; Buddhism, 68.3 per cent; Confucianism/Taoism/Other Traditional Religion, 20.2 per cent; Tribal/Folk Religion, 0.1 per cent; Others, 0.3 per cent; No Religion, 2.7 per cent; and Unknown, 0.3 per cent (Department of Statistics, 1995a: 76). It should be noted that only these categories are provided in the census, and it is misleading in the case of Chinese Malaysians who do not have a specific name for their traditional religion which we can call Chinese Religion. Chinese Malaysians merely refer to their traditional religion as *bai shen* or 'worshipping deities'. In Mandarin it is usually referred to as *huaren zongjiao* which means 'Chinese Religion'.

The category 'Chinese Religion' is both diffused and organized, and

there is much diversity. Adherents may worship different Chinese deities and visit different types of temples. There is a wide range of deities and temples. Deities like Guanyin, Dabogong, Mazu, and Guandi Ye are more universal in that they are worshipped as major deities. Even then Dabogong is more identified with the Hokkien, the Hakka, and the Teochew worshippers, while Mazu is worshipped more by Hokkien and Hainanese Chinese, and especially by fishermen. The Hokkien also worship Tiangong, the 'God of Heaven'. Other than these major deities, there are other less 'universal' deities. There are also patron deities worshipped by particular occupational groups. Carpenters and craftsmen worship Lu Ban who was originally a famous carpenter of the third century BC in China. There are *xiangdushen* or *difangshen* (local deities) who are worshipped by people whose ancestors originated from certain specific regions in China. For example, Huat Chu Kong (Fazhu Gong) is popular among the Eng-choon Hokkien. As the deity's surname is Zhang, he is especially popular among the Eng-Choon Hokkien who bear the surname Zhang. Of the deities/spirits of Malaysian origin, Nadugong, who are perceived as of Malay or other local identities, are popularly worshipped as local spirit-guardians.

The wide range of deities does not reflect a haphazard stock of deities. Each has a historical tradition, and the diversity of deities as well as the universality and specificity of worship reflect the internal heterogeneity and structural relationship among the Chinese.

In addition, certain Chinese deities and religious traditions are organized as 'sects'. These are generally 'syncretic', comprising Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist traditions, and some even incorporate certain Christian and Muslim elements. They originated in China but have thrived in Malaysia. For example, Sanyi Jiao, founded by Lin Zhao'en (1517-98) of the Ming Dynasty, organizes various elements of Confucian teaching, Taoism (Taoist philosophy), Taoist Religion, and Buddhism into a single system, hence the term *sanyi* or 'three-in-one' (cf. Franke, 1980). The worshippers are Henghua (Xinghua) people, and it has a temple in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. Zhen Kong Jiao (Religion of the True Void) was founded by Liao Dipin (1827-93) in Jiangxi Province (cf. Luo, 1962). This is also based on *sanjiao* or 'three teachings' (Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist teachings). This sect was known for curing opium addicts, and in Malaysia Zhen Kong Jiao temples once treated many opium addicts through meditation.

Of the 'syncretic' sects which emphasizes *wujiao* or five teachings, namely, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic teachings, Dejiao (Religion of Virtue) is the most important and active (cf. Tan, 1985). Such sects emphasize the worship of the 'five founders' of 'religions'. The doctrines, however, are generally based on the *sanjiao* of the Chinese. In the case of Dejiao, the leaders are mostly businessmen and many are Teochew. This is not surprising since it was started in Chaozhou in southern China in the 1930s.

The other major 'syncretic' sects are Hongwanzihui (Universal Red Swastika Society) (cf. McDougall, 1956; Young, 1990) and Yiguan Dao

(The Way of Pervading Unity). In addition, there are various kinds of *shantang* or 'charity halls', each sect worshipping a particular patron deity, but all emphasizing charity work.

As for Buddhism, Chinese worshippers see Chinese Mahayana Buddhism as a Chinese religious tradition. It is closely linked to Chinese Religion. There are many Chinese Mahayana temples, especially Guanyin temples, which have both Buddhist and other Chinese deities. There are also pure Mahayana Buddhist temples which house only Buddhist deities—these temples give a distinct Mahayana Buddhist identity. In addition, the distinct Buddhist identity is provided by various Mahayana Buddhist associations, such as the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia. Due to such associations, there are now more Buddhist organizations, such as in schools. There are increased Buddhist activities including the chanting of Buddhist scriptures. Buddhist cassette tapes have become popular too.

Unlike Chinese Mahayana Buddhism which uses Chinese, Theravada Buddhism tends to attract those who are literate in English, although there are Chinese-educated Chinese too. The meetings are usually conducted in English although the chanting is in Sinhalese or Thai, depending on the tradition. The major Theravada traditions in Malaysia are Sinhalese and Thai (cf. Liow, 1989). There are temples of these traditions in the major cities, especially Penang and Kuala Lumpur. The famous Buddhist temple in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, is of Sinhalese tradition and the monks are of Sinhalese origin too. There is also a Thai Buddhist temple at Jalang Gasing, Petaling Jaya. While Theravada Buddhism among Chinese Malaysians is more of an urban phenomenon, in north-east Kelantan the rural Chinese also go to the many Thai temples of the Thai residents there.

In the last two decades or so, a Japanese Buddhist tradition has established itself among Chinese Malaysians. This is Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a Mahayana tradition. Today it is found in most major towns and cities in Malaysia. In Mandarin, this type of Buddhism is known as *Rilian Zhengzong Fojiao*. While the worship is conducted in Mandarin, English, or the Chinese dialects, there is considerable Japanese cultural influence. Many Buddhist terms, for example, are of Japanese transcription. Worshippers sit on the floor following the Japanese style. Hence Chinese non-believers who do not know the name of the sect refer to it as worshipping the Japanese gods or the Japanese Buddha. Others describe it as the sect which 'worship the black box' (*bai heixiang*). The black box referred to is the *gohonzon* which is a big black rectangular altar. Its upper portion has two sliding doors which expose a scroll inside when opened. This scroll bears the characters of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, and Buddhist deities. *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, which is in Japanese, is the phrase worshippers chant. It means total devotion to the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra. It is also the name of Nichiren Daishonin who is considered to be the Pure and True Buddha.

The sect was established by Nichiren Daishonin, a Japanese Buddhist



monk of the thirteenth century. The believers trace their sect's history to 28 April 1253 when Nichiren Daishonin was believed to have chanted '*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*', and hence established 'true Buddhism' for the first time and revealed the Law of the Universe (Anon, 1980). Thus, the sect claims to be the true Buddhism. They believe Nichiren Daishonin to be the greatest Buddha whose capacity extends to the infinite past, the present, and the future (Kirimura, 1979). The sect's missionary activities aim at preaching the attainment of absolute happiness by having faith in *gohonzon*. The most important scripture of the sect is the Lotus Sutra and the most important chant is *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*.

According to the 1991 census, 68.3 per cent of the Chinese are Buddhists and 20.2 per cent belong to Confucianism/Taoism/Other Traditional Religion. This latter category may be known as Chinese Religion. Many followers of Chinese Religion also call themselves Buddhists, but Chinese who are solely Buddhist are a minority. Thus a more accurate picture is that the overwhelming majority of Chinese Malaysians are followers of Chinese Religion and these include most who say they have no religion. The 1991 census shows that 88 per cent of the Chinese Malaysians are Buddhists or followers of Confucianism/Taoism/Other Traditional Religion.

Christianity accounts for only 7.8 per cent of the Chinese population. Because of the various Christian missionary activities, people have the impression that many Chinese are Christians. This is not so as the statistics show. The followers are divided into those who follow Chinese sermons and those who follow English sermons. It is common for the major churches of a town to have both English and Chinese sections. In many places like Batu Pahat and Muar in Johore, the Chinese section of the Sunday services is conducted in 'dialects' such as Hokkien or Teochew. Nevertheless, the younger people prefer Mandarin and youth fellowships of the Chinese sections are conducted in Mandarin. The English-educated attend the English section. Some churches also have a Bahasa Malaysia section. Both the English and the Bahasa Malaysia sections are multi-ethnic, generally Chinese and Indian in membership.

Very few Chinese are Muslims (0.4 per cent only). Islam in Malaysia has been so linked to Malay ethnicity that Chinese frown upon their relatives or even any Chinese embracing Islam. The adoption of Muslim names by converts further convinces the Chinese that embracing Islam is throwing away Chinese identity and Chinese descent.<sup>17</sup> Until the 1970s, those Chinese who embraced Islam were mostly those who married Malays, resulting in their children being assimilated by Malays. Thus the general rejection of Islam by Chinese is not so much a rejection of the religion but disapproval of discarding Chinese identity. There is in addition the presence of the conflict of interests in the group relations between Malays and Chinese. Consequently, Chinese Malaysians tend to view negatively those Chinese who embrace Islam.

Since the early 1980s, there have been a significant number of Chinese who have embraced Islam, and this is largely due to the missionary

activities of Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam (Perkim or Muslim Welfare Organization). There are also Chinese Muslim associations which are affiliated with Perkim. Judith Nagata (1978: 108) said that there were about 4,000–5,000 Chinese Muslims throughout West Malaysia, while Lim Hin Fui (1980), quoting figures from Perkim, noted that there were more than 20,000 in the whole country. The former probably derives her figures from the 1970 census which lists 5,342 Chinese Muslims in Peninsular Malaysia. There are two categories of Chinese Muslims. The first category comprises those who intermarry with Malays or other Muslims and their children are usually incorporated into Malay communities. The second category are those who adopt Islam not because of intermarriage and if married, have Chinese or non-Malay wives. These Chinese Muslims are referred to by Malays as *saudara baru* or 'new brothers and sisters'. Even those who intermarry with Malays are not fully recognized as Malays, and are often referred to as *mualaf* which means 'Muslim converts'.

Chinese Muslims do not like to be called *saudara baru* on the grounds that this singles them out as a different type of Muslim and those who seek assimilation naturally reject this label. Chinese Muslims, especially those whose spouses are not Malays, are in a dilemma for they are neither fully accepted as members by the Malays nor by the Chinese. The latter consider them as Malays or at best not quite Chinese, while the former are pleased that these Chinese have become Muslims but are worried that the Chinese will have access to the special privileges provided for Malays. Hence they do not encourage Chinese Muslims to be considered the same as Malays. This dilemma of marginal ethnic status can be seen in a case reported by Lim Hin Fui (1980). According to him, the Chinese Muslims in Klang sought to apply for low-cost government housing through the MCA. The Chinese party suggested that their application should be considered under the quota allocated to Malays. However, UMNO rejected the application of the Chinese Muslims on the grounds that they were Chinese. Here religion is closely linked to the issue of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

In addition to the converts, the 'Yunanese' Chinese in Kuala Trengganu have traditionally, even in China, been Muslims. There are also a few Chinese Muslims elsewhere in Malaysia. The most famous example is the late Haji Ibrahim Ma who first came to Malaya in 1948 as China's consul to Perak. He and his family chose to live in Malaysia and he contributed much to the activities of Perkim. He passed away in 1982.

A minority of Chinese Malaysians follow a diverse number of non-Chinese religions, including the Sai Baba (cf. Ackerman and Lee, 1988) and Bahai. Thus Chinese are by religion quite diverse. Nevertheless, the majority are followers of the traditional Chinese Religion. Most Chinese Malaysians still want a religion which links them to their ancestors, fulfils their religious needs, and at the same time expresses their Chinese identity.

### Conclusion

The Chinese in Malaysia are internally differentiated along the lines of dialect groups, educational background, acculturation, and religion. In this chapter I have shown the significance of dialect groups for subethnic identification and in social organization. The education background orientates the Chinese towards certain areas of participation and identification. Even in religion, the Chinese are marked by heterogeneity. Not only do Chinese follow different religions, but dialect group differences are also reflected in Chinese religious traditions such as in the types of deities worshipped. Literacy in different languages (especially Chinese and English) also differentiates the worshippers into Chinese sections and English sections as in the case of Theravada Buddhism and Christianity, while Chinese Mahayana Buddhism which uses the Chinese language does not attract English- and Malay-educated Chinese. Unlike the Malays who can find unity in Islam, Chinese are socio-culturally more heterogeneous. While Malay politicians use Islam as the major principle of mobilization, Chinese leaders use education. This is not because Chinese are united in education, but because the right to education symbolizes the cultural rights of the Chinese. In the absence of a unifying cultural force, unity is found in the cause which can best symbolize Chinese interests and Chinese identity.

From the perspective of acculturation or cultural change arising from inter-ethnic interaction, Chinese cultures and identities are diverse. There is really no one Chinese culture. At best one can think of models of Chinese culture, such as the Baba model, the Kelantan Peranakan-type Chinese model, the Penang Chinese model, and the 'pure' Chinese model based on Chinese literacy. Chinese in different parts of Malaysia have adapted to the dominant socio-cultural environments of the regions. Their experience of being Malaysian is shaped by both the national institutions (such as politics and education) and their experience of interacting with other Malaysians at the local level.

While Chinese culture in Malaysia has different models due to specific socio-cultural adaptation, yet Chinese Malaysians, due to cultural continuity, share a common cultural past in China and are united by a set of common Chinese traditions. Thus if Chinese Malaysians continue to be interested in the civilization of China and 'things Chinese' such as traditional Chinese values and philosophy, this is because these things are relevant to their cultural continuity, not because they are loyal to China. It is the cultural past and the continuity which give meaning and pride to an ethnic group. From the perspective of ethnic identity and national identity, Chinese Malaysians are both Chinese and Malaysians. Their cultural identity, however, is a combination of traditional Chinese and modern cultural features as well as those elements which are of Malaysian origin.

All Chinese who identify as such in matters of ethnic identification are 'Chinese'. This is despite the fact that he may be a Malay-speaking Baba or a Chinese who can read only English and Malay but not Chinese.

Ethnic identification is subjective, and as long as a Baba considers himself a Chinese he is Chinese. Being Chinese cannot be objectively defined merely in terms of certain static cultural features. Once ethnically identified, the cultural features become relevant to describing that particular kind of identity, such as whether one is a Baba or not. Of course different categories of Chinese will emphasize different cultural features as crucial for an ethnic Chinese identity. The 'pure Chinese', for example, define Chineseness in terms of literacy in Chinese, and Chinese who cannot speak Mandarin are considered not quite (or not real) Chinese. The fact is, in Malaysia, there are different types of Chinese identities, but all of them are both Chinese and Malaysian at the same time. In fact being Chinese in Malaysia is part and parcel of being Malaysian. The experiences of being Chinese and being Malaysian are intertwined. They are Chinese Malaysians.

1. See Sung (1963: 19) and the dictionary *Cihai*, 1979 edition, p. 1956 (first edition published in 1936). In *Pingzhou Ketan*, a work of the Sung Dynasty by Zhuyu, it is mentioned that people of all nations who came to stay in Guangzhou were said to live in Tang. See Zhuyu, *Pingzhou Ketan*, Vol. 2, p. 4, compiled in *Siku Quanshu*, No. 235. *Mingshi* (Ming History), a work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, records that 'the label Tangren (Tang People) is used by foreigners to refer to Chinese; this is so in all nations abroad'. See Zhang Yanyu et. al. (1974), *Mingshi*, Vol. 28, Chapter 324, section on Zhenla, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuji, p. 8395. In *Chibei Outan*, Wang Shizhen (1634-1711), of the Qing Dynasty, mentioned that foreign envoys to China referred to Chinese as either *Hanren* (Han people) or *Tangren* (Tang people). He also mentioned that those who called Chinese *Tangren* included those from Holland, Siam, and other countries. See Wang Shizhen, *Chibei Outan*, Chapter 21, section on *Hanren*, *Tangren*, and *Qinren*, compiled in *Biqi Xiaoshuo Daguang* (1962), Taipei, Vol. 5, p. 4674. From the above, it is obvious that it was the foreigners who first used *Tangren* to refer to the Chinese. The Chinese in South-East Asia have adopted this label to refer to themselves.

2. China had been known to the Indians, Greeks, Romans, and other peoples as *Cina*, *Thin*, *Sinae*, and others. The name was derived from the name Qin of the Qin Dynasty (cf. *Cihai*, p. 3037, under *Zhina*; see also p. 3691 under *Qinren*). *Chibei Outan* (see f.n.1) also mentions the reference to the Chinese as *Qinren*. China was first united in 221 BC under the Qin Dynasty. Thus it is not surprising that Chinese were referred to by other peoples as the Qin people. The English label 'Chinese' and the Malay label '*Cina*' were derived from the name Qin.

3. There has been a drop in the percentage of the Chinese population. According to the 1980 census, the Chinese made up 32 per cent of the 13.7 million people in Malaysia (Department of Statistics, 1983: 226). The estimated population for Malaysia in 1994 was 19.65 million (see *Monthly Statistical Bulletin*, October 1995).

4. For our purpose here, Li Fang-Kuei (1973) broad classification of Chinese languages and dialects in China, first proposed in the 1930s, is useful. See also Zhan (1981).

5. Zhan (1981: 90) suggests that the Min linguistic category be divided into Southern Min, Eastern Min, and Northern Min, and at another level one can further identify Min dialects as spoken in different provinces in China.

6. In Sungai Ayam and Sungai Suluh of Batu Pahat, Johore, the Chinese villagers are mostly Yongchun Hokkien. The older ones, who were China-born, still refer to the Nan'an people (*Lam-Oa-lang* in Hokkien) as *E-lo-lang*, literally meaning 'people down the road'. This was the usage in the ancestral villages in China where the Yongchun people called the Nan'an people thus.

7. For a description of prefectures and districts in Fujian in the nineteenth century, see 'Topography of Fukien' (1842).

8. The character *qiong* in *Qiongzhou ren* is the only standard Mandarin pronunciation today. Its ancient pronunciation is neither *qiong* nor *qing*. See Chen (1960: 173). This edition was compiled after consulting various versions of *Qieyun* available during the Song Dynasty. The first copy of *Qieyun* was compiled by Lu Fayuan of the Sui Dynasty (AD 581-618). This is the first known work on the study of the sound system in Chinese languages. Shen Jianshi, using the system of Bernhard Karlgren, transcribed this ancient form of pronunciation as [g'iwǎng]. See Shen (1977: 979). In another work on Chinese phonology, the pronunciation of the character *qiong* during the Yuan Dynasty was phonetically notated as [K'yǝn]. If this is correct, then the present Southern Min pronunciation of the character is fairly close to the Yuan version of Northern Chinese. See Zhou Deqing (1966: 92). The original work by Zhou was written in 1324.

9. For a description of prefectures and districts in Guangdong in the nineteenth century, see 'Topography of Kwangtung' (1843).

10. I first visited the 'Shandong Village' in Ulu Kimanis in August 1981. Towards the end of May and early June of 1993, I revisited the village and conducted some interviews in both Ulu Kimanis and Kota Kinabalu.

11. Even the Baba in Malacca follow this custom. Those who do not know the details of identification below the dialect group level have to ask other relatives about this. This information is available from the inscriptions on the tombstones of the family's patrilineal ancestors. In Malacca, I found that only a very small minority of Chinese use English inscriptions on tombstones, while bilingual (English and Chinese) inscriptions were fairly common among Chinese Christians. Most Chinese use the Chinese inscriptions. Although I have seen some tombstone inscriptions that give only the dialect-group identity of the deceased, usually both the provincial and subprovincial (*fu, zhou, xian*) identities are provided.

12. For another study of Chinese dialect groups and occupation, see Mak and Lai (1992).

13. In Chinese, the term *fangyan* is used to refer to the languages and dialects of speech groups in contrast to *huayu*. For the sake of convenience, I am using the term 'dialects' here in the sense of *fangyan*, bearing in mind that Hokkien and Cantonese, for example, are different languages rather than dialects. Each linguistic category (for example, Hokkien), however, consists of different but more or less mutually intelligible dialects.

14. For further reading on the development of Baba communities, see Clammer (1980) and Tan (1988b), as well as the references cited in these books.

15. In certain contexts such as at the universities where Chinese students used to speak English to Chinese lecturers as the common language, nowadays there are Chinese students who choose to speak Malay due to their lack of fluency in English.

16. My description here is based on my reading of the various publications of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and talking to a few followers in Selangor and Seremban. I also observed a Nichiren Daishonin meeting in Kuantan (held in Cantonese), and interviewed the leaders of the organization there on 15 November 1980.

17. Converts to Islam adopt a Muslim/Malay name followed by *bin* (son of) or *binti* (daughter of) Abdullah.

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### 3

## Demographic Processes and Changes

Chan Kok Eng and Tey Nai Peng

IN 1991, the Chinese numbered 4.9 million or 28.28 per cent of the country's total enumerated population of 18.4 million<sup>1</sup> (Department of Statistics, 1995). The Chinese have always constituted the largest non-indigenous ethnic community in Malaysia, but through time its relative size has been diminishing (Table 3.1).

For the most part, the demographic features and processes of the Chinese reflect those of the general population's demographic transition.<sup>2</sup> Several researchers (see, for example, Thompson, 1929; and Davis, 1945) believe this phenomenon is interrelated with development. Development is thought to foster and, in turn, is facilitated by demographic processes and behaviour at both group and individual levels, tending towards a lowering of fertility and mortality.

Despite the long-settled character of Chinese settlement in Malaysia, the Chinese still retain their cultural distinctiveness within cosmopolitan Malaysia. The Chinese have also been normally more responsive to socio-economic development than most other groups in the country. Consequently, they differ from other non-Chinese in their geographical distribution, as well as cultural, social, and economic conditions which, in turn, lead to intergroup differences in their demographic characteristics and processes.

This chapter provides a brief demographic analysis of the Chinese in Malaysia since around 1970. We shall examine the changing population size, distribution, and composition of the Chinese in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Since demographic variables and processes influence development processes, and in turn are influenced by development, an understanding of Chinese demographic attributes furnishes invaluable insights into issues affecting both the Chinese and the larger Malaysian population and society.

A more detailed analysis of the changing Chinese population is precluded by space and data constraints.<sup>3</sup> Many complex demographic and development interrelationships affecting the Chinese in particular and

their location within the overall Malaysian population and society await further research and data availability.

### Background to Chinese Population Growth

With the cessation of large-scale immigration in post-independence Malaysia, natural increase became the major determinant of changes in the size and structure of the Malaysian population. Particularly affected by this development were those groups that had formerly been heavily dependent on immigration to boost their numbers. Thus the Chinese population underwent profound changes as increasingly more Chinese became permanently settled in the 1930s and 1940s. By the mid-1950s they were a fairly settled population. Post-independence changes affecting the Chinese population essentially reflect those of a population dependent on natural increase that, in turn, was influenced by various developments within the country.

By 1991, the population of Malaysia had risen to about 1.6 times its 1970 size, or more than twice that of 1957 when the population numbered 7.4 million. As in the past, most of the population lived in Peninsular Malaysia (see Table 3.1).

Although population increase occurred, the rate of increase varied between Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. Between 1980 and 1991, Sabah's average growth rate was 5.5 per cent, followed by Sarawak's 2.5 per cent, and Peninsular Malaysia which had only 2.3 per cent.

Interregional differences in population growth rate broadly mirrored differences in the level and pace of development, and the incidence of in-migration, whether from within Malaysia or from overseas. Natural increases likewise affected important intercensal population change. At the same time it was affected by development, which has an especially strong impact on variations in fertility as mirrored in the different stages of the demographic transition.

In Malaysia, interregional contrasts in demographic transition, especially those of fertility, appear to be associated with the level of development. More advanced fertility transition has taken place in the more

TABLE 3.1  
Chinese Population Distribution and Percentage of the Total Population  
in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, 1970-1991 ('000)

Year	Peninsular Malaysia		Sabah		Sarawak		Total	
	('000)	%	('000)	%	('000)	%	('000)	%
1970	3268.0	35.8	139.2	21.3	293.9	30.1	3719.1	35.6
1980	3653.3	33.8	164.0	16.2	385.2	29.5	4414.5	32.1
1991*	4251.2	28.7	218.2	11.7	475.8	27.7	4945.0	26.9

Source: Department of Statistics (1972, 1983, 1995).

\*Refers to Malaysian citizens only.

highly developed Peninsular Malaysia than in the less developed East Malaysian states. This is shown in the slowing down in the peninsula's population growth rate despite an increasing presence of external immigrants towards the end of the 1980s as the economy of the peninsula made rapid strides (Malaysia, 1996). In terms of ethnic groups, the more urbanized Chinese showed more advanced demographic transition than the other ethnic groups.

It should be noted that mortality levels of the peninsula were already low by the mid-1950s. These continued to drop as conditions improved in the post-independence period. Socio-economic transformations and rising standards of living facilitated improved health and increased life expectancy at all ages. Together with the decreased and low levels of mortality, fertility decline led to a reduction in the rate of natural increase in Peninsular Malaysia as a whole. These developments were in keeping with rapid development, an increase in investment in children's education, and the elimination of gender differences in education in recent cohorts in several East and South-East Asian countries, including Malaysia.

In sharp contrast to Peninsular Malaysia's population increase of 1.6 times since 1970, the population of Sabah has grown by 2.1 times and that of Sarawak by 1.7 times. Much of Sabah's rapid population growth in the 1980s was due to high net immigration and high fertility, and possibly also to reduced mortality through improved health although Sabah's mortality levels still lag behind those of the more developed peninsula.

Even though Chinese population size in Malaysia has risen numerically since the 1950s, this has been offset by a declining population growth rate (a trend which affected the general population as well). Chinese population growth rate has fallen ever since the late 1950s initially because of the effects of a net migration deficit (more Chinese leaving than entering the country). Subsequently, mortality declined and it was eventually followed by sustained and rapid fertility decline since then. By the 1950s, mortality levels had already fallen to impressively low levels in Peninsular Malaysia and eventually also in the East Malaysian territories of Sabah and Sarawak. More rapid fertility decline in the late 1950s, however, helped to narrow the difference between fertility and mortality levels. As fertility decline continued, occurring at a faster rate than mortality, it was inevitable that the Chinese population growth rate would drop, especially in the absence of substantial net immigration (Table 3.2).

Not only did Chinese population growth rate slow down, but it was also dropping at a faster rate than that of the population as a whole, which meant that other non-Chinese groups were less affected by steep fertility declines and by rapid mortality improvements. Since the Chinese were only a numerically small and decreasing minority, it was unable to influence significantly the general trend and pattern of fertility decline, quite unlike, for instance, the Malays who were numerically and proportionally more important in determining the demographic destiny

TABLE 3.2  
Average Annual Rate of Population Growth of Chinese in Peninsular  
Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, 1970-1980 and 1980-1991

	1970-80	1980-91
Peninsular Malaysia	1.6	0.9
Sabah	1.1	2.6
Sarawak	1.9	1.9

Sources: Department of Statistics (1983, 1995).

of the country. Between 1970 and 1991, the Chinese population grew at an average annual rate of 1.8 per cent whereas the total population growth rate averaged 2.4 per cent. In all three territories, Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, it can be observed that there was a similar pattern of both slower and lower Chinese population growth rate *vis-à-vis* that of the total population in each area.

Regional differences in Chinese population growth rate were also evident. Lower Chinese population growth characterized Peninsular Malaysia, and it reflected lower fertility than in the other two territories where Chinese population growth was higher.

In Sabah and Sarawak, the Chinese population increased by some 60 per cent between 1970 and 1991. In contrast, the Chinese population in the peninsula had increased by only about 30 per cent.

### Interregional Differences in Growth

Differences in population growth rate between Peninsular Malaysia and the East Malaysian states mostly reflect sharp spatial development differences and the varying impact in the timing and speed of fertility transition rather than in the net effects of migration except in Sabah since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Factors providing the economic superiority of Peninsular Malaysia over its East Malaysian counterparts included its more rapid and diversified development, the presence of economic core regions, its highly developed transport and communications network, and the development of its rich natural resources. Furthermore, the peninsula experienced more rapid industrial development and urbanization.

Despite the peninsula's higher level of development than its eastern Borneo counterparts, considerable interregional diversity in levels and rates of development exists. Such divergences were also reflected in the variations in average annual intercensal Chinese population growth rates viewed both through time for individual states and between the various states.

It can be observed that generally the rate of growth of the Chinese population had decelerated since 1970, especially in Malacca, Trengganu, and Perlis. However, even a state with a faster growing population like Selangor was not spared by the tendency for its Chinese

population growth to slow down by 1991. In some states, however, there were fairly considerable intercensal fluctuations, such as in Sarawak and Pahang. In Sarawak's case, stronger Chinese population growth occurred between 1980 and 1991 compared to 1970-80, possibly because of the state's more rapid economic development during the 1980s derived from its agricultural and mining sectors (petroleum and gas-related activities) and related downstream activities in manufacturing.

Furthermore, negative intercensal rates of Chinese population growth were experienced for the first time between 1980 and 1991 in two states, Perak and Pahang. Lack of strong economic development and continuing depression in the Chinese-dominated tin industry, a key base in Perak's development, contributed towards the heavy outflow of Chinese from the state. The slower economic growth of Pahang in the 1980s and its strong development emphasis on land development was also not conducive towards increasing Chinese population growth between 1980 and 1991. The Chinese in Malaysia have generally been more inclined to urban-based commercial, services, and industrial activities that were rapidly expanding elsewhere, especially in the neighbouring states of Selangor and Johore.

The Chinese population was unevenly distributed across the states. Selangor, in which is found the country's dominant economic core, the highly industrialized and urbanized Klang Valley, has the biggest Chinese population.

#### *Population Concentration*

The degree to which the Chinese were concentrated in each state can be gauged by an index based on the ratio of the proportion of Chinese in each state's population to the proportion of Chinese in the total national population (Table 3.3). According to the 1991 population census, the highest concentrations of Chinese were found in Penang, followed by Selangor and Perak. Johore and Malacca also had higher concentrations of Chinese relative to the percentage of the Chinese in the total population. The least significant Chinese concentrations were in the Malay-dominated and strongly rural east coast states of Trengganu and Kelantan, whereas slightly higher concentrations were found in the north-western states of Perlis and Kedah, the East Malaysian state of Sabah, and the east central state of Pahang. The degree of Chinese population concentration, by and large, reflected the level of development in the respective states.

Compared to earlier censal years, however, changes had been occurring in the distribution and concentration of the Chinese population by state. In general, the Chinese population concentration index was lowest in the less or slower developing states like Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis but was higher in states with stronger, more industrialized, and urbanized economies, like Selangor.

Between 1957 and 1991, the proportion of Chinese in several states fell, and this was consistent with their proportionate decline in the

TABLE 3.3  
Index of Chinese Population Concentration by State, 1957/60-1991

<i>State</i>	1957/60	1970	1980	1991	<i>Difference</i> 1957/70-1991
Johore	1.16	1.16	1.21	1.32	0.16
Kedah	0.56	0.56	0.59	0.62	0.06
Kelantan	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.01
Malacca	1.14	1.16	1.19	1.27	0.13
Negri Sembilan	1.13	1.12	1.15	1.12	-0.02
Pahang	0.95	0.91	0.82	0.71	-0.24
Penang	1.57	1.65	1.72	1.92	0.35
Perak	1.21	1.25	1.28	1.36	0.14
Perlis	0.48	0.48	0.50	0.45	-0.02
Sabah	0.63	0.62	0.50	0.47	-0.16
Sarawak	0.85	0.88	0.79	0.99	0.14
Selangor	1.32	1.35	1.18	1.37	0.05
Trengganu	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.13	-0.05
Malaysia	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Sources: Department of Statistics (1970, 1980, 1991).

overall population. The states with the greatest declines in the index of centralization were Pahang and Sabah. On the other hand, the states which showed increases in the index of concentration were Penang and Johore. The increased Chinese index of concentration in the former was remarkable in view of the slower population growth of the state which had for several years suffered from net out-migration, and could be attributed to the improved economic prospects as it became more industrialized after 1970. In the latter case, the increased economic development of Johore undoubtedly stimulated the increase in its Chinese population concentration index. It could also be observed that Selangor, despite its remarkable economic growth, did not record as marked an increase in the Chinese index of concentration because of the more dramatic increase of the Malay population through both higher natural increase and strong net immigration into the state.

#### *Rural-Urban Distribution*

The rural-urban distribution of a population is seldom static, but is amenable to the effects of development on the socio-economic organization of society. Since the 1970s, the Malaysian society has rapidly become less traditional, rural, and agrarian. While shifts in the rural-urban distribution have been affecting virtually all groups in the country, the persistence of inter-ethnic differences in historical, cultural, and economic circumstances meant that the rate of urbanization of particular ethnic groups varied. Such geographical differences in distribution have been steadily bridged as a result of the spread of development and government attempts to ease the ethnic economic and spatial com-

partmentalization that had been a persistent feature of Malaysian development. The tendency for ethnic compartmentalization in occupations and residence stems from a number of complex factors. Not the least significant of these was the development of economic dualism and a plural society during British colonial times that had encouraged non-indigenous groups, notably Chinese, to be concentrated in urban centres and the indigenous groups in rural areas. As these inter-ethnic differences are associated with disparities in levels of living, it has become a matter of major concern for post-independence policy and development planners, notably in the wake of the racial disturbances of May 1969. The New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented since the 1970s was a major attempt to promote the socio-economic advancement of the economically less progressive rural-based indigenous groups achieved by, among other means, a relocation from the less buoyant rural sector to the higher income urban sector.

Although the NEP successfully helped to advance Malay urbanization, it also strengthened the urbanization process in the country in general and this accounted for the growth in urban living among the already more highly urbanized Chinese. This can be seen in the rise, between 1970 and 1980, in the percentage of the Chinese who were urban residents which rose from 47.0 per cent to 56.1 per cent in Peninsular Malaysia. However, this increase must be viewed against the increased urbanization in the country during this period, and corresponding increases in the percentage of urban dwellers among the other two major ethnic groups from 14.8 to 25.1 per cent among the Malays and from 34.4 to 40.9 per cent among Indians.

Reflecting the sharp urban preference of the Chinese was their numerical and proportionate dominance in the urban population. In 1970, the Chinese formed 58.8 per cent of total urban dwellers in Peninsular Malaysia compared to the Malays with 37.9 per cent. However, the percentage of Chinese in the urban population had been falling steadily between 1970 and 1980, from 58.8 per cent to 50.3 per cent respectively. In contrast the proportionate share of the Malays in the urban population had increased from 27.6 per cent to 37.9 per cent during the same period. These complementary changes were affected by the rapid pace of development and official efforts at spatial, ethnic, and socio-economic restructuring which had encouraged more rapid urban transition among Malays.<sup>5</sup>

The 1991 census data provided a more contemporary picture of the urban-rural distribution of the ethnic groups despite a lack of comparability with earlier data in 1970 and 1980 because of changes in the census definition of 'urban' areas. Furthermore, the 1991 census reported the population distribution by ethnicity for Malaysia as a whole instead of examining urbanization level by ethnicity for Peninsular Malaysia as was done in the 1970 and 1980 census reports. Nevertheless, the data show that the Chinese formed 40.8 per cent of the total urban population and 13.6 per cent of the rural population in Peninsular Malaysia by 1991 (Table 3.4).

TABLE 3.4  
Population Distribution by Ethnic Group and Stratum  
(Urban and Rural), 1991 (per cent)

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>% of Total Population</i>
All Indigenous	47.4	75.8	61.3
Malays	43.0	58.7	50.7
Other Indigenous	4.4	17.1	10.6
Chinese	40.8	13.6	27.5
Indians	9.8	5.8	7.8
Others	2.1	4.8	3.4
Total Malaysian	100.0	100.0	100.0
Malaysians	96.5	95.0	95.7
Non-Malaysians	3.5	5.0	4.3
Total Population	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Statistics (1995).

Rapid economic development especially towards the later part of the 1980s accelerated the economic transformation of Malaysia in the post-1970s, and gave rise to more urban centres and increased urban living. This, together with the change in the definition of 'urban' areas, led to a marked increase in the area coverage as well as the number of areas listed as 'urban'. In 1991, about three-quarters (75.8 per cent) of the Chinese in Malaysia were recorded as living in urban areas, considerably higher than 43.0 per cent of the Malays (excluding other indigenous groups), and 63.8 per cent of the Indians.

Large-scale net immigration of Chinese before the Second World War fostered the growth of distinct dialect groupings in Malaysia, based on the regional groupings in the provinces of south-eastern China from which most originated. The dialect affiliation has been commonly used to differentiate the Chinese community both by scholars and by administrators, and reflected in various censuses.

In 1991, the major dialect groups were Hokkien (34.7 per cent), Hakka (22 per cent), and Cantonese (20 per cent). Of these three major dialect groups, the Hakkas were the least urbanized (72.6 per cent urban) and this was linked to their historical tendency towards the rural areas, and the mining and cash-cropping economic activities. Nevertheless, the shift towards urban living as the predominant mode of life had become evident by 1991 and their level of urbanization was comparable to that of the Teochews (72.2 per cent), a group well represented in urban centres (Table 3.5B).

In contrast to the Cantonese (83.1 per cent), the numerically predominant Hokkiens were only a little less urbanized (76.4 per cent) although the Hokkiens have traditionally been regarded as being strongly predisposed towards urban living, which was related to their strong commercial and industrial entrepreneurship. Among all the dialect groups, the Kwongsais were the least urbanized (only 50.9 per cent) followed by the Foochows/Hokchius (67.3 per cent).



TABLE 3.5A  
Percentage of Chinese by Dialect Group According to Stratum

	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>% of Total Population</i>
Hokkien	35.0	33.9	34.6
Hakka	22.2	26.2	23.0
Cantonese	20.1	12.7	18.6
Teochew	10.9	13.0	11.2
Hainanese	4.0	2.7	3.5
Kwongsai	1.1	3.0	2.0
Foochow	4.5	6.6	5.0
Henghua	0.6	0.3	0.5
Hokchia	0.2	0.2	0.2
Other Chinese	1.4	1.4	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed from Department of Statistics (1995).

TABLE 3.5B  
Percentage of Chinese by Stratum According to Dialect Group

	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>% of Total Population</i>
Hokkien	76.4	23.6	100.0
Hakka	72.6	27.4	100.0
Cantonese	83.1	16.9	100.0
Teochew	72.2	27.8	100.0
Hainan	82.0	18.0	100.0
Kwongsai	50.9	49.1	100.0
Foochow	67.3	32.7	100.0
Henghua	85.8	14.2	100.0
Hokchia	74.7	25.3	100.0
Other Chinese	75.7	24.3	100.0
Total	75.8	24.2	100.0

Source: Same as Table 3.5A.

It is also remarkable that the Henghuas, a group traditionally noted for their involvement in fishing, had emerged as the most urbanized of the various Chinese dialect groups by 1991, with 85.8 per cent in urban areas.

### Age-Sex Structure

The Chinese age-sex structure has changed significantly since 1970. Their median age rose from about 19 to 25.7 years between 1970 and 1991 (25.3 years for males and 26.1 years for females). The proportion aged 15 and younger declined from 43 per cent to 30 per cent during the same period. In contrast, about 40 per cent of the indigenous population and 34 per cent of Malaysian Indians were below 15 years of age.

The 1991 population census showed that the Chinese males outnumbered their female counterparts by 103 to 100. The ratio for the three broad age groups are 108 for ages 0-14, 103 for ages 15-64, and 75 for ages 65 years and older.

### Factors Affecting Population Change

Chinese population change, inclusive of age and sex composition, is affected by alterations in fertility, mortality, and net migration. Until the Second World War, international migration played an important role in determining the growth of the Chinese population in Malaysia. However, with the enforcement of a strict immigration rule since the war, natural increase was the predominant determinant of population change among Malaysian Chinese until the 1980s. Since then, their population size has been affected by significant outflows. As mortality level in Malaysia has already reached a relatively low level, the scope for further decline is rather limited. Future growth of Malaysian Chinese population will be determined by the course of fertility and, to some extent, international migration as well.

We will begin by looking at changes in the crude birth rate and crude death rate, and the recent trend of international migration. This will be followed by an analysis of the fertility and mortality pattern of the Malaysian Chinese. Determinants of fertility will also be dealt with briefly.

#### *Rate of Natural Increase*

In the immediate post-war period, mortality rates fell sharply for all ethnic groups as a result of medical advances and improved standard of living. This was followed by fertility decline in the 1960s. In Peninsular Malaysia, the crude rate of natural increase (CRNI) of the Chinese declined from 23.9 per thousand population in 1970 to 14.5 in 1990, and there appears to be a turn around in the 1990s.

The crude rate of natural increase has also declined sharply among the Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak, with the latter registering a more rapid pace of decline from a higher level. Unlike Peninsular Malaysia, the CRNI in these two states continued its downward trend in the 1990s.

Table 3.6 shows that the crude birth rate (CBR) of the Chinese has been declining along with other ethnic groups in the country. In Peninsular Malaysia, the CBR for the Chinese declined by 16 per cent during the 1970s, and this accelerated to 22.2 per cent in the 1980s. In contrast, the decline in the CBR of the Malays in Peninsular Malaysia has been much more moderate, falling by 6.9 per cent and 5.7 per cent in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively. The Indian CBR, after a rapid decline from 46 per thousand population in 1957 to 30 per thousand in 1970, had remained almost constant for about 10 years before resuming its downward trend—falling by 21.5 per cent between 1980 and 1990. It is interesting to note that while the Malay CBR con-

TABLE 3.6  
Crude Rate of Natural Increase, Crude Birth Rate, and Crude Death Rate of  
Chinese as Compared to the Malays and Indians, 1970-1994

<i>Year/Period</i>	<i>Crude Rate of Natural Increase of Chinese</i>				
	<i>Peninsular Malaysia</i>	<i>Sabah</i>	<i>Sarawak</i>	<i>Malays</i>	<i>Indians</i>
1970	23.9	25.2	32.9	28.6	22.0
1975	21.3	22.7	26.8	27.8	22.5
1980	19.7	23.3	-	28.3	22.8
1985	17.4	19.6	19.6	32.2	20.4
1990	14.5	19.3	20.1	27.1	17.4
1993	16.1	18.1	20.5	20.0	19.4
1994	15.6	17.0	19.5	26.3	18.5
Percentage change					
1970-80	-17.6	-7.5	-	-1.0	+3.6
1980-90	-26.4	-17.2	-38.9	-4.2	-23.7
1990-94	+7.6	-11.9	-3.0	-3.0	+6.3
Crude birth rate					
1970	30.0	30.8	38.3	36.1	29.6
1975	27.4	27.7	32.2	34.3	30.5
1980	25.2	29.0	-	33.6	29.8
1985	22.5	25.5	26.7	37.2	27.0
1990	19.5	24.4	23.8	31.7	23.4
1993	21.2	22.6	24.3	31.5	25.0
1994	20.6	21.5	23.4	30.8	24.1
Percentage change					
1970-80	-16.0	-5.8	-	-6.9	+0.7
1980-90	-22.6	-15.9	-37.9	-5.7	-21.5
1990-94	+5.6	-11.9	-1.7	-2.8	+3.0
Crude death rate					
1970	6.1	5.6	5.4	7.5	7.6
1975	6.0	5.0	5.4	6.5	8.0
1980	5.4	5.7	-	5.3	7.0
1985	5.2	4.8	3.8	5.1	6.6
1990	5.0	5.1	3.7	4.6	6.1
1993	5.1	4.5	3.8	4.5	5.6
1994	5.0	4.5	3.9	4.5	5.6
Percentage change					
1970-80	-11.5	+1.8	-	-29.3	-7.9
1980-90	-7.4	-10.5	-31.5	-31.2	-21.5
1990-94	0.0	-11.8	+5.1	-2.2	-8.2

*Sources:* Vital statistics, Peninsular Malaysia, various years.

tinued to decline in the 1990s, that of the Chinese and Indians in Peninsular Malaysia registered a slight increase.

The CBR of Chinese in Sabah was rather close to that of their counterparts in Peninsular Malaysia for most of the period under study. However, unlike the latter, the CBR of the Sabah Chinese continued its downward trend in the 1990s. The Sarawak Chinese started out with significantly higher fertility rates than their counterparts in Peninsular

Malaysia and Sabah but have experienced a more rapid decline in the 1990s.

Concomitant with socio-economic development and the implementation of health programmes, mortality level in Malaysia has decreased remarkably for all ethnic groups over the years, as shown in Table 3.6. Despite attaining a relatively low level in 1970, the Chinese continued to register a rather sharp decline in the crude death rate (CDR) of between 20 and 30 per cent during the 1970-90 period. However, the scope for further decline in the CDR is rather limited, particularly with the gradual ageing of the population. In the early 1990s, the CDR of the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia remained unchanged while the Sarawak Chinese registered an increase in CDR.

#### *Estimation of Net Migration*

The difference between the rate of population growth and the crude rate of natural increase provides some indication of net international migration. During the last two intercensal periods (1970-80; 1980-91), the rate of growth of the Chinese population in Peninsular Malaysia was considerably lower than that of their CRNI. This is suggestive of a considerable net outflow of Malaysian Chinese. A study by Noor Laily et al. (1983) estimated a net migration rate of about -6.2 per cent for Chinese males and -5.7 per cent for Chinese females during the 1970-80 intercensal period, the highest among all the ethnic groups. Table 3.7 shows that there was an increase in the outflow of the Chinese population from Peninsular Malaysia during the 1980-91 intercensal period, with an estimated out-migration rate of about 10 per cent, using the 1980 population as the base.

During the 1970-80 intercensal period, the net outflow of the Chinese was heavier for males than for females, but the reverse was true in the following decade. For both sexes, the losses were concentrated in the 15-29 and under 5 age groups. It is believed that many were away

TABLE 3.7  
Estimates of Net Migration of Chinese during the 1970-1980  
and 1980-1991 Intercensal Periods

	1970-80	1970 (P1)	1980 (P2)	P2-P1	B-D	Migrants	Migration Rate
Male		1,659,983	944,912	284,929	387,858	-102,929	-0.06201
Female		1,613,851	1,920,519	306,668	398,999	-92,331	-0.05721
Total		3,273,834	3,865,431	591,597	786,857	-195,260	-0.05964
	1980-91	1980 (P1)	1991 (P2)	P2-P1	B-D	(P2-P1)/(B-D)	
Male		1,944,912	2,145,706	200,794	389,941	-189,147	-0.09725
Female		1,920,519	2,105,263	184,744	387,398	-202,654	-0.10552
Total		3,865,431	4,250,969	385,538	777,538	-391,801	-0.10136

Sources: NPFDB (1983) and authors' own computation.

temporarily either to study or to work. In view of the tightening of the labour market in Malaysia in the last two decades (1970-90), with a heavy influx of foreign workers, the reasons and extent of the outflows of those in the prime working age warrant a detailed study.

The rate of growth of the Chinese population in Sarawak was rather close to the crude rate of natural increase. In Sabah, however, the growth of the Chinese population during the last decade far exceeded their rate of natural increase, a reversal of the situation in the 1970s, when the population growth lagged behind natural increase. This suggests that there may be rather substantial net inflow of Chinese from Peninsular Malaysia. There is also a need for a more detailed study on the migration between Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah.

### Decomposition of the Decline in Crude Birth Rate

The CBR is affected by changes in the age-sex structure of the population, marital structure, and marital fertility. Therefore it does not reflect accurately the change in fertility over time. The high fertility rate of the post-war period has resulted in an increase in the proportion of population in the reproductive age groups since the 1970s. The percentage of Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia aged 15-49 years increased from 22.3 per cent in 1970 to 25 per cent in 1980 and 26.9 per cent in 1991. Had marital structure and marital fertility remained constant, the CBR would have risen. The relative contribution of each of the three factors to the observed changes in the CBR is assessed by way of decomposition, a technique developed by Kitigawa (1955) and modified by Retherford and Cho (1973). The results are summarized in Table 3.8.

Between 1970 and 1980, the decline of -5.3 births per thousand

TABLE 3.8  
Decomposition of Change in the Crude Birth Rate of  
Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970-1990

			<i>Changes in Crude Birth Rate due to:</i>		
<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>Difference</i>			
30.5	25.2	-5.3	Age-sex structure	4.4	(85%)
			Marital structure	-2.0	(-39%)
			Marital fertility	-7.7	(-76%)
			Total	-5.3	(-100%)
			<i>Changes in Crude Birth Rate due to:</i>		
<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>Difference</i>			
22.5	19.5	-3.0	Age-sex structure	1.6	(+28%)
			Marital structure	-3.5	(-61%)
			Marital fertility	-3.8	(-67%)
			Total	-5.7	(-100%)

Sources: NPFDB (undated) and authors' own computation.

population was largely brought about by marital fertility changes, greater modern contraception usage, and to a lesser extent, marriage postponement. If other things had remained constant, a change in age-sex structure would have seen an increase of the CBR of the Malaysian Chinese rather than a decline over this period. In the following decade, changes in the marital structure were almost as important as decline in marital fertility in explaining the 22.6 per cent decline in the CBR. However, the effect of the change in the age-sex structure in CBR had become less pronounced in the 1990s as the population matured.

#### *Changes in the Level of Fertility*

The total fertility rate, which takes the age-sex structure into account, is a more refined measure of fertility than the CBR. Data show that while Chinese CBR in Peninsular Malaysia declined by some 35 per cent during the two decades between 1970 and 1990, their total fertility rate fell more steeply, by 51 per cent.

The age pattern of fertility among the Chinese has undergone significant changes. While the fertility level has declined for each age group, the fall has been more rapid among the younger and older women (Table 3.9). Between 1970 and 1994, the age specific fertility rate of the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia declined as follows: 15-19 years (60 per cent), 20-24 years (55 per cent), 25-29 years (30 per cent), 30-34 years (35 per cent), 35-39 years (58 per cent), 40-44 years (83 per cent), and 45-49 years (91 per cent). Marriage and childbearing postponement can explain the sharp decline in fertility among young Chinese women. Reduced fertility among older women was the result of earlier termination of childbearing.

It is interesting to note that between 1987 and 1988, the Malaysian Chinese, as with other Chinese populations elsewhere, registered a rather sharp increase in births, from 83,350 to 102,110. A significant

TABLE 3.9  
Age-specific Fertility Rate and Total Fertility Rate  
of Chinese (selected years)

<i>Age Group</i>	1970	1975	1980	1985	1988	1990	1993	1994
15-19	25	24	25	13	9	9	10	10
20-24	190	141	161	108	92	75	93	85
25-29	280	231	243	198	201	164	196	195
30-34	222	170	163	146	159	135	146	149
35-39	136	97	69	61	65	58	61	57
40-44	59	37	22	12	12	10	10	10
45-49	11	5	4	1	1	1	1	1
TFR	4615	3525	3435	2695	2695	2260	2585	2535

Source: Vital statistics, Peninsular Malaysia and various years

increase in the number of births among Malaysian Chinese occurred in nearly all districts. This is not surprising as the Chinese regarded the year 1988 as a doubly auspicious year and there is a strong age digital preference for the number eight, which sounds like the Chinese word for 'prosperity'. The temporary nature of the rise in fertility is seen by the sharp fall in the number of births, to 77,055, in 1989. However, since 1990, there has been an increase in the level of fertility among women in the prime reproductive age group (see Tables 3.9-3.11). It is interesting to note that such turn around occurred following an accelerated decline in the total fertility rate (TFR)<sup>6</sup> in the 1980s, falling by 33 per cent as against 26 per cent in the previous decade. Moreover, the reversal in the trend of the CBR was not merely the result of age-sex structural change, but rather a real increase in fertility among the Chinese. On the basis of this recent trend, it appears unlikely that the fertility level of the Chinese will dip below replacement level in the near future.

Tables 3.10 and 3.11 show that between 1970 and 1991, the total marital fertility rate of the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia fell by 33.7 per cent, somewhat more gradual than the decline in total fertility rate. This reaffirms the above findings that part of the fertility decline was attributed to marriage postponement among the Chinese.

Ethnic fertility differentials in Malaysia have been rather extensively documented and analyzed. Most of these studies have dealt with the trends and patterns as well as factors affecting the fertility level of each ethnic group.

Among the main ethnic groups in Malaysia, the fertility level of the Chinese has been the lowest in the country. Inter-ethnic fertility differentials appear to be widening, particularly among the Malays and non-Malays between 1970 and 1994 (Table 3.12). In 1994, Malay fertility was significantly higher than that of the Chinese and the Indians within each age group. Govindasamy and Da Vanzo (1992) attributed the ethnic fertility differentials to the effects of the NEP implemented since the 1970s and the promulgation of the National Population Policy in 1983. They argued that the non-Malays responded negatively to the

TABLE 3.10  
Age-specific Marital Fertility Rate and Total Marital Fertility Rate  
of Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970, 1980, and 1991

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1991</i>
15-19	431	500	356
20-24	476	405	304
25-29	362	307	256
30-34	252	178	165
35-39	151	71	67
40-44	67	22	12
45-49	13	4	1
TMFR	8760	7440	5810

Note: Computed by dividing the age-specific marital fertility rate by the proportion married.

TABLE 3.11  
Changes in Age-specific Fertility Rate and Age-specific Marital Fertility Rate

Age Group	Age-specific Fertility Rate			Age-specific Marital Fertility Rate	
	1970-1980 (1970 = 100)	1980-1990 (1980 = 100)	1990-1994 (1990 = 100)	1970-1980 (1970 = 100)	1980-1991 (1980 = 100)
15-19	100	36	111	116	71
20-24	85	47	113	85	75
25-29	84	70	119	85	83
30-34	73	83	110	71	93
35-39	51	84	98	47	94
40-44	37	45	100	33	55
45-49	36	25	100	31	25
TFR	73	67	112	85	78

Source: Same as Tables 3.6 and 3.7



TABLE 3.12  
Age-specific Fertility Rate and Total Fertility Rate by Ethnicity  
in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970 and 1994

<i>Year/Age Group</i>	<i>All Races</i>	<i>Malays</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Indians</i>
1970				
15-19	54	71	25	68
20-24	226	243	190	270
25-29	265	257	280	254
30-34	219	222	222	198
35-39	140	148	136	115
40-44	56	57	59	44
45-49	13	15	11	8
TFR	4,865	5,065	4,615	4,785
1994				
15-19	19	21	10	26
20-24	129	147	85	133
25-29	214	236	195	190
30-34	171	197	149	129
35-39	100	139	57	54
40-44	37	60	10	11
45-49	4	7	1	1
TFR	3,369	4,028	2,532	2,719

Sources: Vital statistics, Peninsular Malaysia, 1970 and 1994.

implementation of these policies, while the Malay fertility desires responded positively. The Chinese are the most urbanized and are exposed to modern ideas. Besides rising age at marriage, the traditional norm for large families has also given way to small families.

The changing norms in favour of smaller families among the Chinese can be observed by the sharp decrease in higher order births. In 1970, fifth and higher order births made up some 32 per cent of the Chinese births, but this had decreased to 8.5 per cent in 1990. In contrast, as many as 29 per cent of the Malay births in 1990 were fifth or higher order. The proportion of higher order births among the Indians is only slightly higher than that of the Chinese (Table 3.13).

#### *Factors Affecting Fertility Decline*

Rapid fertility decline among Malaysian Chinese has been brought about by the spectacular socio-economic development in the country, mediated through postponement in age at marriage, and contraceptive use. Since the launching of the National Population and Family Development Programme in 1966, several national fertility surveys have been conducted to provide the necessary data for in-depth study of the determination of fertility and family planning practice.

Past studies have identified several key factors such as education, ethnicity, urbanization, employment of women, and family income affecting fertility and its proximate determinants, that is age at marriage and

TABLE 3.13  
Distribution of Births by Birth Order of the Chinese (1970, 1980, 1990)  
and of the Malays and Indians (1990)

Birth Order	Chinese			Malays	Indians
	1970	1980	1990	1990	1990
First	22.2	31.2	30.7	21.5	29.9
Second	18.5	26.2	28.0	19.1	25.4
Third	15.7	18.6	20.9	17.3	18.7
Fourth	12.0	11.3	11.9	13.5	11.5
Fifth	9.0	6.0	5.2	10.1	7.0
Sixth	6.9	3.0	2.0	6.8	3.7
Seventh	5.5	1.6	0.8	4.6	1.9
Eighth and above	10.2	2.1	0.5	7.1	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Vital statistics, Peninsular Malaysia, 1970, 1980, and 1990.

contraceptive use. Overall, age at marriage has been rising steadily over the years, and contraceptive prevalence rate has increased from 8 per cent in 1966 to some 50 per cent, a level that continues to the present day.

Applying Bongaarts' model for analysing the proximate determinants of fertility (1978), the fertility inhibiting effects of non-marriage, contraception, and breastfeeding can be estimated. Using the 1984 Malaysian Population and Family Survey, Tey et al. (1988) estimated that the fertility inhibiting effects of these three factors have reduced Chinese fertility by about 2 births, 8.8 births, and less than half a birth respectively. These estimates clearly demonstrate the significant impact of contraception in bringing about the sharp decline in the fertility level of the Malaysian Chinese.

Table 3.14 shows some of the correlates of fertility and its proximate determinants for the Chinese in Malaysia. In all the household surveys, mean number of children ever born is strongly negatively correlated with educational level of the women (and that of their husbands), while age at marriage is positively correlated with their educational level. In contrast, urbanization tends to have a much smaller effect. This may be due to increased mobility of the population and the modernization of the rural sector.

The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia increased from about 51 per cent in 1974 to some 64 per cent by 1984, and has remained around that level since then. There is relatively little variation in CPR across educational groups and between urban and rural residents. This could be explained by the fact that contraceptive services are readily available in all areas in the country. The small effect of the educational factor is probably explained by the differences in age structure—women with little or no schooling tend to be older than the better educated women and hence

TABLE 3.14  
 Chinese Women Aged 15-49 Years: Mean Number of Children Ever Born, Mean Age at First Marriage, and Contraceptive Prevalence Rate by Educational Level and Place of Residence

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Peninsular Malaysia</i>	<i>Sabah</i>	<i>Sarawak</i>
Mean number of children ever born			
All women	3.0	2.5	3.6
Educational level			
No schooling	5.1	*	4.5
Primary	3.3	2.8	3.7
Lower Secondary	2.5	2.2	2.8
Secondary	1.8	*	*
Place of residence			
Urban	2.8	2.3	3.4
Rural	3.3	2.6	3.7
Mean age at first marriage			
All Women	22.7	22.2	20.3
Education level			
No schooling	21.7	*	18.8
Primary	22.1	21.3	19.6
Lower secondary	22.7	23.0	21.2
Secondary	24.5	*	*
Place of residence			
Urban	22.9	-	-
Rural	22.4	-	-
Contraceptive prevalence rate			
All women	63.5	71.6	72.9
Education level			
No schooling	58.1	-	-
Primary	63.3	-	-
Lower secondary	68.4	-	-
Secondary	61.8	-	-
Place of residence			
Urban	63.1	-	-
Rural	64.1	-	-

Sources: NPFDB (1992a, 1992b, 1992c).

were using contraception upon completing their family size. According to the 1988 Malaysian Family Life Survey, 17 per cent of Chinese women had unmet needs for contraception for purposes of birth limitation, and another 11 per cent for birth spacing (National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), 1992a). In 1989, the extent of unmet needs for contraception was estimated at 32 per cent among Chinese women in Sabah and 28 per cent among their counterparts in Sarawak (NPFDB, 1992b, 1992c).

It is interesting to note that both Sabah and Sarawak Chinese had a higher CPR than their counterparts in Peninsular Malaysia. The CPR of the Chinese is higher than that of the other ethnic groups, particularly

the Malays, with a CPR of about 45 per cent in 1988. Even then, a sizeable proportion of the Malays are relying on traditional methods of contraception.

The singulate mean age at first marriage of Chinese males increased from 27.3 in 1970 to 28.1 in 1991, while that of their female counterparts increased from 24.2 years to 26.1 years during the same period. Looking at the proportion who had ever married, it is clear that more and more are remaining single in each age group, particularly among the younger ones, and this is true for both sexes in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak (Tables 3.15 and 3.16). As such, the changes in the marital structure are likely to contribute to fertility decline, net of the effects of marital fertility and age-sex composition.

### Summary and Conclusion

The Chinese constitute the largest non-indigenous population in Malaysia as a result of their large-scale immigration in the early part of the present century. However, following the enforcement of a strict immigration ruling after the Second World War, the Chinese had become a fairly settled population by the mid-1950s with natural increase as the main determinant of population change. Nevertheless, the Chinese remain rather different from the other ethnic groups in terms of geographical distribution, as well as socio-cultural and economic behaviour.

While the Chinese population in Malaysia grew from 3.7 million in 1970 to 4.4 million in 1980 and 4.9 million in 1991, their proportionate share declined rather sharply from 35.6 per cent in 1970 to 32.1 per cent in 1980 and 26.9 per cent (or 28.0 per cent of Malaysians) in 1991. The changes in the ethnic structure of the population are the results of

TABLE 3.15  
Peninsular Malaysia: Percentage of Chinese Ever Married by Age and Gender, and Singulate Mean Age at Marriage, 1970, 1980, and 1991

Age Group	Males				Females			
	1970	1980	1991	% change 1970-91	1970	1980	1991	% change 1970-91
15-19	1.7	0.5	0.8	-52.9	6.0	4.6	2.5	-58.3
20-24	13.7	12.2	8.0	-41.6	40.3	36.8	24.8	-38.5
25-29	55.1	48.6	37.1	-32.7	48.6	71.7	64.4	18.1
30-34	81.1	78.4	68.4	-15.7	90.5	86.8	83.2	-8.1
35-39	90.1	89.5	83.8	-7.0	94.3	92.4	89.3	-5.3
40-44	93.5	92.7	90.5	-3.2	96.6	94.2	92.0	-4.8
45-49	94.5	93.9	93.8	-0.7	97.6	95.4	94.2	-3.5
50-54	95.0	94.7	95.1	0.1	95.7	96.6	95.7	-
SMAM	27.3	28.0	28.1	2.9	24.2	24.9	26.1	+7.9

Sources: Department of Statistics (1983, 1995).

TABLE 3.16

Sabah and Sarawak: Percentage of Chinese Ever Married by Age and Gender, and Singulate Mean Age at Marriage, 1970, 1980, and 1991

Age Group	Males				Females			
	1970	1980	1991	% change 1970-91	1970	1980	1991	% change 1970-91
Sabah								
15-19	0.9	0.8	0.0	-100.0	7.2	5.4	4.8	-33.3
20-24	13.9	12.8	6.8	-51.1	44.6	37.7	19.8	-56.1
25-29	52.4	48.0	34.8	-33.6	82.6	74.1	64.6	-21.8
30-34	78.0	49.4	62.6	-19.7	92.0	89.1	87.8	-4.6
Sarawak								
15-19	1.5	1.0	1.5	-	8.1	5.4	2.8	-65.4
20-24	22.3	19.2	15.0	-32.7	47.0	37.7	32.4	-31.1
25-29	62.4	59.4	50.0	-20.0	80.1	74.1	75.0	-6.4
30-34	84.3	95.9	79.7	-5.5	91.1	89.1	88.7	-2.6

Source: NPFDB (1992b, 1992c).

different paces of demographic transition. The Chinese being more urbanized and exposed to modernization tend to have a smaller family size compared to the Malays, and to a lesser extent, the Indians.

The Chinese are found to be concentrated in the more developed states such as Selangor and Penang. In 1991, about 76 per cent of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia were in urban areas, making up 39 per cent of the urban population. In Peninsular Malaysia, the Chinese made up about 58.8 per cent of the urban population in 1970 but this had fallen to 50.3 per cent in 1980. To a large extent, the changing ethnic composition of urban centres can be attributed to the New Economic Policy (now National Development Policy) implemented since 1971. The policy has been instrumental in the restructuring of the Malaysian society, particularly in advancing Malay urbanization.

The growth of the Chinese population since the 1970s has been largely the result of natural increase, which has been declining sharply from 23.9 per thousand population in 1970 to 14.5 per thousand population in the 1990s. As the mortality level of the Chinese declined to a rather low level of around 6 per thousand population by the 1970s, the course of population growth among the Chinese has been and will continue to be influenced by fertility trends. Between 1970 and 1990, the Chinese CBR declined by about 38 per cent in both Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak and about 21.7 per cent in Sabah. In contrast, there was a decline of 12.6 per cent and 20.8 per cent among Malays and Indians respectively during the same period. Data show that changes in the marital structure (marriage postponement and non-marriage) in the 1970s and 1980s have become almost as important as decline in marital fertility in explaining the lower CBR of the Malaysian Chinese.

The total fertility rate (TFR), a more refined measure, shows that the

fertility of Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia has declined by some 50 per cent, from about 4.6 births per woman in 1970 to 2.3 in 1990. Fertility decline has been most pronounced among younger women and older women, the former due to marriage postponement and the latter the result of earlier termination of childbearing. The changing norms in favour of smaller families among the Chinese can also be observed by the sharp decrease in higher order births. However, it is interesting to note that there has been a turn around of the long-term trends since 1990, with TFR increasing to about 2.5–2.6 children in 1993 and 1994. The reversal in the trend, however, may be due to cohort effects of postponement in marriage and family formation.

The decline in the fertility level among the Chinese can be attributed to a host of socio-economic factors which include improvement in the educational level, increased female participation in the formal sector of the economy, and urbanization. All these changes influenced the level of fertility through marriage postponement and greater use of modern contraception. The singulate mean age at marriage of the Chinese males increased from 27.3 years in 1970 to 28.1 years in 1991, while that of their female counterparts increased from 24.2 years to 26.1 years during the same period. Almost two-thirds of Chinese women are currently using a contraceptive method.

During the last two intercensal periods, the rate of growth of the Chinese population in Peninsular Malaysia was considerably lower than that of their crude rate of natural increase. Between 1980 and 1991, the out-migration rate of Chinese from Peninsular Malaysia is estimated at 1 per cent, with the losses concentrated at ages 15–29 years. Hence, apart from the declining fertility trend, the increased emigration of Chinese since the 1980s also has a significant effect on the growth and composition of the population. Even allowing for the fact that some are away temporarily either to study or to work, the data suggest that the continuing out-migration and the lowering of fertility among the Chinese will result in further changes in the composition in the years to come.

1. In 1991, because of the increasing influx of foreigners, an attempt was made to differentiate the census population into Malaysian citizens and non-Malaysian citizens (Department of Statistics, 1995). The gross (unadjusted) total population, inclusive of 0.75 million non-citizens, was 17.56 million whereas the adjusted total was 18.38 million, of whom 0.81 million were non-citizens (Department of Statistics, 1995).

2. Demographic transition is the shift from initially both high fertility and mortality to eventually low fertility and mortality. Economic development is generally believed to favour the mechanisms responsible for the decline in both mortality and fertility (Thompson, 1929; Davis, 1945; Notestein, 1953).

3. For example, the *1991 General Report of the Population Census* has information for various ethnic groups and subgroups by stratum but not by respective states or in the Federal Territory.

4. Sabah was affected by considerable immigration from neighbouring Kalimantan and southern Philippines in the 1980s (Department of Statistics, 1995).

5. In fact, the proportion of Malays was already increasing in the pre-New Economic

Policy era before 1970, as evident in that they constituted only 21 per cent of total urban residents in 1957 (Kok, 1988).

6. TFR is obtained by summing the age-specific fertility rate and then multiplied by 5. TFR is the number of children a woman would produce in her lifetime subject to the prevailing fertility level.

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## 4

# The Economic Role of the Chinese in Malaysia

Phang Hooi Eng

### Introduction

MALAYSIA launched its economic plan for the period 1996–2000 after enjoying eight consecutive years of high economic growth of above 8 per cent per annum. In a multiracial society, where the Chinese are one of the three main ethnic groups, it is interesting to evaluate the contribution of the Chinese towards the economic health of the country. To do so, the chapter begins by tracing the growth of the Chinese population in Malaysia in comparison with the other ethnic groups so as to provide a perspective on the relative endowment of human resources for the economic effort of the various ethnic groups in general and the Chinese in particular. This chapter then goes on to consider the pattern and structure of Chinese employment in the various economic sectors as well as the capacities in which they served in those sectors so as to provide an assessment of their role in the shaping of the economic structure of the country and the direction of growth. In this connection, the pattern of income distribution in the country would also be affected and is therefore discussed. The contribution of the Chinese towards the corporate wealth of the country and their role in small businesses is considered next as most of the Chinese companies that have achieved outstanding success in the economic and business spheres have had humble beginnings. The chapter ends with a consideration of a few examples of Chinese companies which have been at the forefront of economic growth so as to demonstrate the main economic strategy adopted by the Chinese in general in their contribution towards the economic growth of the country.

### Distribution of Population

The population of Peninsular Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya) more than doubled from 2.7 million in 1911 to 5.5 million in 1914 (Purcell, 1956). In 1911, the indigenous people, known also as *bumi-putras*, accounted for 49.2 per cent of the total Malayan population



while Chinese and Indians had shares of 35 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. By 1941, the population comprised 2.3 million bumiputras (41 per cent share), 2.4 million Chinese (43 per cent share), and 770,000 Indians (14 per cent share). Purcell (1956) records that at the time of writing (that is, 1955), the Chinese in Malaya and British Borneo numbered 3 million. Other records (Ginsburg, 1958) show that the Chinese in Malaya had increased from 1.2 million in 1921 to 1.7 million in 1931 and 2.6 million in 1947. According to the various population censuses, the Chinese population in Peninsular Malaysia increased from 2.3 million in 1957 to 3.1 million in 1970. With the inclusion of the Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak, the number increased from 3.4 million in 1965 to 4.4 million in 1980 and 5.02 million in 1991. However, the bumiputra population increased more rapidly from 2.3 million in 1941 to 3.1 million in 1957. Since then they have remained the most dominant community in Malaysia, increasing from 4.7 million in 1970 to 6.7 million in 1980 and 10.73 million in 1991. With the slow-down in the growth rate of the Chinese, their share of the total Malaysian population declined from 43 per cent in 1941 to 37 per cent in 1957 and 28.28 per cent in 1991 (Table 4.1). Similarly, the share of the Indians declined from 14 per cent in 1941 to 11 per cent in 1957 and 8 per cent in 1991. On the other hand, the share of the bumiputras remained more or less constant in the 1970s and 1980s at about 50 per cent. With the inclusion of 'other bumiputras' comprising mainly Dusuns, Kadazans, Bajaus, Muruts, Ibans, Bidayuhs, Melanaus, and other bumiputras from Sabah and Sarawak in the 1991 census, the total number of bumiputras constituted 60 per cent of Malaysian citizens while non-Malaysians numbered 0.8 million in 1991 or 4.3 per cent of the total population in Malaysia.

Estimates from the Seventh Malaysia Plan (7MP) indicate that the total population in Malaysia increased at an average annual rate of 2.7 per cent during the period 1991-5 to reach 19.38 million in 1995. It is estimated to slow down marginally to 2.3 per cent per annum during the period of the 7MP (1995-2000) to reach 21.52 million by the year 2000. The bumiputra population increased by 2.7 per cent from 10.73 million in 1991 to 11.50 million in 1995 and is estimated to reach 13.61 million by 2000. The Chinese population grew by 1.3 per cent from 5.02 million in 1991 to 5.29 million in 1995 and is estimated to reach only 5.6 million by the year 2000. Thus the share of the bumiputras in the total Malaysian population would have risen above 60 per cent in the year 2000 while the share of the Chinese and Indians would have declined to less than 26.02 per cent and 7.48 per cent respectively.

In the early years, the Chinese were mainly involved in tin mining and commerce. Hence, the Chinese were the dominant ethnic group mainly in the tin-rich state of Perak and in the two main commercial centres in Penang and Selangor. However, by 1970 there were more Chinese than bumiputras only in Penang and Selangor. This was mainly on account of the declining share of the Chinese in tin mining. In 1920, the Chinese owned 64 per cent of the tin mines while Europeans owned

TABLE 4.1  
Number and Distribution of Population by Ethnic Group

Year	Bumiputras		Chinese		Indians		Total	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	Total %
1911	1,328,000	49.20	945,000	35.00	378,000	14.00	2,700,000	100
1921	1,569,000	54.00	856,000	29.40	439,000	15.10	2,907,000	100
1931	1,864,000	49.20	1,285,000	33.90	571,000	15.10	3,788,000	100
1941	2,255,000	41.00	2,365,000	43.00	770,000	14.00	5,500,000	100
1947	2,428,000	49.50	1,885,000	38.40	531,000	10.80	4,908,000	100
1957	3,125,474	49.78	2,333,756	37.17	696,186	11.09	6,278,758	100
1970	4,663,284	53.11	3,117,896	35.51	933,250	10.63	8,780,728	100
1980	6,738,092	49.02	4,414,588	32.12	1,175,076	8.55	13,745,241	100
1991*	10,730,000	60.45	5,020,000	28.28	1,410,000	7.94	17,750,000	100
1995*	11,500,000	61.66	5,290,000	27.30	1,500,000	7.74	19,380,000	100
2000*	13,610,000	63.24	5,600,000	26.02	1,610,000	7.48	21,520,000	100

Sources: Department of Statistics (1957, 1970, 1980); Malaysia (1996); Purcell (1956).

\*Refers to Malaysia, comprising the states in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. For all other years, data are for Peninsular Malaysia.

36 per cent. But with the introduction of tin dredges the equation changed. In 1938, European ownership increased to 67 per cent while the Chinese share declined to 33 per cent. In 1957, 23 per cent of the 2.3 million Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia lived in Perak while 21 per cent (489,000) lived in Selangor, 17 per cent (393,000) in Johore, and 14 per cent (327,000) in Penang. By 1970 there were more Chinese in Selangor (754,000 or 24 per cent) than in Perak (662,000 or 21 per cent) but Johore with 501,000 Chinese (16 per cent) and Penang with 435,000 Chinese (14 per cent) remained the third and fourth most popular states of residence for them. With the achievement of city status by Kuala Lumpur on 1 February 1974, the 1980 census listed Kuala Lumpur as a separate state from Selangor. Even though the combined Chinese population in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur had increased to 1.1 million and was larger than the bumiputra population (991,000), there were more Chinese (507,487) than bumiputras (320,040) in Kuala Lumpur but not in Selangor. By 1991 there were more Chinese (557,000) than bumiputras (457,000) in Kuala Lumpur but the total bumiputra population (1.5 million) in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur exceeded the Chinese population (1.3 million). The only other state where the Chinese had outnumbered the bumiputras was Perak, but by 1991 there were more bumiputras (898,000) than Chinese (707,000). More than two-thirds of the Chinese live in Selangor (including Kuala Lumpur), Perak, Johore, and Penang while three-quarters of the bumiputras live in Johore, Selangor (including Kuala Lumpur), Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, and Pahang (Table 4.2). This concentration of the Chinese in the four largely urban states of Selangor, Perak, Penang, and Johore, and the concentration of the bumiputras in the two largely urban states of Johore and Selangor and the three largely agricultural states of Kedah, Kelantan, and Pahang were mainly a reflection of the occupational structure of the various ethnic groups and their involvement in the different economic sectors.

### **The Chinese in the Economic and Occupational Structure of the Country**

In the early years Malaysia, then known as Malaya, was mainly an agricultural economy with most of its population engaged in tin mining, rubber tapping, rice growing, and fishing. As early as 1871, there were already 12,000 Chinese miners in Selangor (Purcell, 1956) and by 1882 the number had increased to 50,000. In 1888, the population in Pahang comprised 50,000 bumiputras and a few hundred Chinese while in 1891 Perak had a population of 215,000, of whom 100,000 were bumiputras and 90,000 were Chinese. Tin mining remained largely in Chinese hands until the introduction of tin dredges by the British mining companies. In 1920, the Chinese owned 64 per cent of the tin mines in the Federated Malay States (FMS) of Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan while the Europeans owned 36 per cent. In the tin industry alone, in the FMS, there were 209 Chinese owners and managers. The

TABLE 4.2  
Regional Distribution of Population by State, 1957-1991

State	Bumiputras					Chinese					Indians					Total		
	1957	1970	1980	1991	1957	1970	1980	1991	1957	1970	1980	1991	1957	1970	1980	1991	1960	1991
Johore	444,618	679,525	898,499	1,052,213	392,568	501,284	628,937	759,184	70,948	85,321	103,328	139,778	926,850	1,271,794	1,638,229	2,105,699	100	100
(%)	48	53	55	50	42	39	38	36	8	7	6	7	100	100	100	100	100	100
Kedah	475,563	672,117	802,429	1,006,900	144,057	184,046	208,428	225,882	67,094	80,823	86,612	100,245	701,964	952,421	1,116,140	1,357,484	100	100
(%)	68	71	72	74	21	19	19	17	10	8	8	7	100	100	100	100	100	100
Kelantan	463,118	632,486	830,337	1,104,324	28,861	38,626	47,911	54,421	5,665	5,804	6,716	5,944	505,522	684,312	893,753	1,182,585	100	100
(%)	92	92	93	93	6	6	5	5	1	1	1	1	100	100	100	100	100	100
Malacca	143,128	208,809	249,273	299,059	120,759	159,704	176,673	176,128	23,266	31,747	35,361	37,032	291,211	403,061	464,754	522,231	100	100
(%)	49	52	54	57	41	40	38	34	8	8	8	7	100	100	100	100	100	100
Negeri Sembilan	151,408	217,612	264,968	366,700	150,055	182,950	209,743	211,071	54,399	77,608	97,121	116,480	364,524	480,053	573,578	711,745	100	100
(%)	42	45	46	52	41	38	37	30	15	16	17	16	100	100	100	100	100	100
Pahang	179,088	307,842	532,112	734,737	108,226	157,516	209,631	199,681	21,838	36,822	55,360	64,006	313,058	503,031	798,782	1,049,165	100	100
(%)	57	61	67	70	35	31	26	19	7	7	7	6	100	100	100	100	100	100
Perak	484,530	672,069	312,520	898,207	539,334	662,319	521,455	706,504	178,623	222,585	109,384	268,590	1,221,446	1,561,184	954,638	1,960,690	100	100
(%)	40	43	33	46	44	42	55	36	15	14	11	13	100	100	100	100	100	100
Perlis	71,272	95,669	808,184	155,813	15,771	19,871	737,234	23,167	1,539	2,487	255,595	3,534	90,885	120,996	1,805,198	188,166	100	100
(%)	78	79	45	83	17	16	41	12	2	2	14	2	100	100	100	100	100	100
Penang	165,092	236,907	116,802	420,745	327,240	435,323	23,765	551,129	69,035	89,395	4,231	120,166	572,100	773,327	148,276	1,099,014	100	100
(%)	29	31	79	38	57	56	16	50	12	12	3	11	100	100	100	100	100	100
Selangor	291,411	561,037	671,063	1,057,467	488,657	753,915	567,474	758,397	201,048	297,830	269,386	383,665	1,012,929	1,625,625	1,515,536	2,338,871	100	100
(%)	29	35	44	45	48	46	37	32	20	18	18	16	100	100	100	100	100	100
Trengganu	256,246	379,211	510,065	752,573	18,228	22,396	26,693	28,887	2,731	2,828	2,675	2,615	278,269	404,924	540,627	788,698	100	100
(%)	92	94	94	95	7	6	5	4	1	1	1	0	100	100	100	100	100	100
W.P.	320,040	457,491	507,487	556,618	507,487	556,618	507,487	556,618	140,166	137,993	140,166	137,993	977,102	1,171,039	1,171,039	1,171,039	100	100
(%)	33	39	33	39	52	48	52	48	14	12	14	12	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sabah	163,996	123,810	163,996	123,810	163,996	123,810	163,996	123,810	5,613	9,310	5,613	9,310	1,011,046	1,398,873	1,011,046	1,398,873	100	100
(%)	16	9	16	9	16	16	16	16	1	1	1	1	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sarawak	257,804	360,415	257,804	360,415	257,804	360,415	257,804	360,415	3,328	4,608	3,328	4,608	1,307,582	1,700,019	1,307,582	1,700,019	100	100
(%)	20	21	20	21	29	28	29	28	0	0	0	0	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	3,125,474	4,663,284	6,738,092	8,790,454	2,333,756	3,117,898	4,414,588	4,944,954	696,186	933,250	1,175,076	1,393,966	6,278,758	13,745,241	17,574,279	21,574,279	100	100
(%)	50	53	49	50	37	36	32	28	11	11	9	8	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Department of Statistics (1957, 1970, 1980, 1991).

majority of the labourers were also Chinese. However, within a few years of the introduction of tin dredging, the Chinese share of the tin mines declined to one-third while the British share increased to two-thirds. In 1931 the tin industry employed 61,992 Chinese men, 8,712 Chinese women, 4,622 Indians (including 546 women), and 543 bumiputras (478 men and 65 women). By 1953, the Chinese owned 600 of the 740 tin mines but although they provided only 40 per cent of the tin produced (Ginsburg, 1958: 263), these mines employed more than half of the total labour in the tin mining sector which continued to be the main source of employment for Chinese labour.

Before rubber gained prominence in the world market, the Chinese had established gambier, pepper, tapioca, sugar-cane, and coffee estates in the Straits Settlements, Johore, Negri Sembilan, Selangor, and Perak (Lim C.Y., 1967: 115). Then when British entrepreneurs wanted to develop the rubber plantation industry, the Chinese provided the labour needed to clear the jungles, construct roads, and work on the plantations. Although the number of Chinese employed in the agriculture sector was one-third the number of Malays thus employed in 1957, the contribution of the Chinese was the most significant. They owned and operated most of the non-European commercial enterprises throughout Malaya and were second in terms of volume of capital investment (Ginsburg, 1958: 244). They were most active not only as estate owners, smallholders, and rubber tappers, but also as processors and middlemen who were involved in rubber packing, grading, milling, transport, storage, insurance, and sale of rubber to overseas buyers. Some of the Chinese who owned gambier, pepper, or coffee estates had converted their estates to rubber production but most of these estates were smallholdings. In the 1950s, the Chinese owned about one-half of the total number of rubber estates in Malaya but only 4 of the 54 rubber estates exceeding 2025 hectares belonged to the Chinese while 48 of them belonged to Europeans. More than 80 per cent of the rubber estates owned by the Chinese were smallholdings of less than 202.5 hectares. Hence in total, the Chinese-owned rubber estates accounted for only 23 per cent of the total planted hectareage. The Chinese who did not own smallholdings or estates were employed as tappers while the Indians were mainly employed as resident estate labour. In comparison, one-half of the Malays in the rubber industry were smallholders while the remaining half were employed in weeding and casual maintenance work (D. Lim, 1973: 54).

Many of the Chinese were also employed as managers and supervisors in the various types of plantations. Official statistics show that in 1957 the Chinese were the largest group employed as plantation managers and supervisors, with more than 2,500 of them compared with fewer than 500 Malays and fewer than 2,000 Indians. By 1970, the number of Chinese employed thus had doubled to almost 5,000 but in total the number of Chinese employed in agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing had declined from 310,000 in 1957 to 301,000. The primacy of the Chinese in the commercial activities of the agriculture sector is

shown in the preponderance of the Chinese in vegetable gardening, poultry and livestock rearing, forestry, and other areas of agriculture, especially in the timber and pineapple industry. The Chinese were the sole people who worked in smallholdings producing pineapples for export to the United Kingdom. In 1937, there were more than 24,300 hectares of pineapples planted by the Chinese and these supplied 90 per cent of the United Kingdom's imports of canned pineapples. However, with the resettlement of the Chinese in new villages after the war, these pineapple farms practically disappeared and by 1946 there were only 810 hectares under pineapple cultivation.

While the Chinese contributed the most to commercial agriculture and were also the principal vegetable gardeners supplying the urban centres with fresh produce (Ginsburg, 1958: 244), they were relatively less important in coconut cultivation and rice planting compared with the Malays. The rice planting sector in the FMS employed 78,000 Malays, 2,000 Indians, and 1,000 Chinese. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the contribution of the Chinese to the development of the agriculture sector. Data from Ginsburg (1958: 260) show that the Chinese were the dominant group in most of the agriculture subsectors except for coconut cultivation and rice planting where they accounted for only 8 per cent of employment. The important contribution of the Chinese to the development of the agriculture sector in Malaysia is highlighted when one evaluates these employment statistics against the fact that only 12 per cent of the total Chinese population in 1957 were involved in agriculture compared with 24 per cent for the Malays. In addition, the fact that the tin industry had given the Malaysian economy its first big push during the nineteenth century and the cultivation of rubber spread development across the country further emphasizes the important role of the Chinese in the economic development of Malaysia (Spinanger, 1986: 8).

The Chinese played a dominant role in the fishing industry in the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia but they were a minority in the East Coast. In the early years, there were 9,000 bumiputras and 7,000 Chinese in the fishing industry in the FMS, 9,000 bumiputras and 6,000 Chinese in the Straits Settlements, and mostly bumiputras in the Unfederated Malay States. There were no Chinese fishermen in Kelantan and Trengganu. By 1981, there were 54,538 bumiputra fishermen with 26,388 in the West Coast and 28,150 in the East Coast (Table 4.3). On the other hand, Chinese fishermen were located mainly in the West Coast, where they accounted for one-half of the total number of fishermen. Similarly, almost all of the 2,303 Indian and other fishermen were also located in the West Coast. However, by 1992, the number of registered Malaysian fishermen in Peninsular Malaysia declined considerably. On the West Coast there were 16,019 bumiputras, 18,960 Chinese, and 433 Indian and other fishermen while on the East Coast there were 19,429 bumiputras, 2,134 Chinese, and 10 Indian and other fishermen.

At the time of independence in 1957, there were 2.3 million Malayan

TABLE 4.3  
Number of Registered Fishermen by Ethnic Group in Peninsular Malaysia

Ethnic Group	West Coast		East Coast		Total	
	1981	1992	1981	1992	1981	1992
Bumiputra	26,388	16,019	28,150	19,429	54,538	35,448
Chinese	28,331	18,960	1,753	2,134	30,084	21,094
Indian	609	433	-	7	609	440
Others	1,669	3	25	3	1,694	6
Total	56,997	35,415	29,928	21,573	86,925	56,988

Source: Ministry of Agriculture (1981 and 1992).

citizens employed in the various sectors. This comprised slightly more than 1 million bumiputras who accounted for about 45 per cent of total employment while the Chinese numbered 869,000 or 37 per cent and the Indians numbered 344,000 or 15 per cent of total employment. Almost three-quarters (749,319 or 72 per cent) of the bumiputras were employed in agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing, and the processing of agricultural products while 9 per cent or 88,000 were in government services. These two sectors were dominated by the bumiputras who accounted for more than 50 per cent of the number employed. The Chinese, on the other hand, had ventured into other fields besides the traditional tin mines and rubber plantations. They were more dispersed among the various sectors with more than 85 per cent of them being employed in five main sectors, namely, agriculture and the processing of agricultural products (310,422 or 36 per cent), commerce or wholesale and retail trade (127,096 or 15 per cent), finance, insurance, real estate, and business services (114,510 or 13 per cent), manufacturing (97,502 or 11 per cent), and other services especially personal and recreation services (96,854 or 11 per cent). Although the mining and quarrying sector employed only 40,000 Chinese, the latter accounted for about 68 per cent of the total employment in the sector while the bumiputras and Indians accounted for 18 per cent (10,312) and 12 per cent (6,809) respectively. The Chinese were the principal middlemen and generally dominated the services industry. Employment of the Chinese was highest in six sectors: manufacturing (32,589 or 72 per cent of total employment in the sector), commerce or wholesale and retail trade (127,096 or 65 per cent), finance, insurance, real estate, and business services (114,510 or 65 per cent), other services (96,854 or 52 per cent), construction (32,589 or 48 per cent), and transport, storage, and communication (29,162 or 39 per cent).

The above pattern of employment composition by ethnic groups remained almost the same in 1970 with total employment increasing marginally to 2.8 million comprising 1.4 million bumiputras (51 per cent share), 1 million Chinese (37 per cent share), and 298,000 Indians (11 per cent share). However, in the public utilities sector (that is, electricity, gas, and water), employment of bumiputras (8,000)

increased significantly compared with Indians (5,000) so that the bumiputra share of total employment in the sector increased from 33 per cent in 1957 to 47 per cent in 1970 while the Indian share declined from 33 per cent in 1957 to 29 per cent in 1970. Similarly, in the transport, storage, and communication sector, employment of bumiputras increased by 89 per cent to 51,000 thus increasing the bumiputra share of employment in the sector to 43 per cent compared with 40 per cent for the Chinese. Hence the Chinese contribution by 1970 was mainly in six sectors comprising mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction, commerce, finance, and other services, while the bumiputra contribution increased to four sectors comprising agriculture and the processing of agricultural products, government services, public utilities, and transport, storage, and communication.

In 1980, the pattern of employment remained more or less the same as in 1970 but there was a significant increase in the employment of bumiputra workers especially in the provision of education and health services. Hence the Chinese were no longer the largest ethnic group employed in the 'other services' sector. Their employment in this sector increased marginally from 148,000 in 1970 to 164,000 in 1980 compared with the significant increase of the bumiputras from 113,000 to 199,000 for the same period. The education and health services employed 142,000 bumiputras compared with 58,000 Chinese but the Chinese accounted for more than 50 per cent of the number employed in repair services, miscellaneous personal services, and amusement and recreational services. However, by 1990 their leading position was maintained only in the repair and miscellaneous personal services as after 1980 the number of Chinese employed in the 'other services' sector declined in absolute terms and was at its lowest in 1985 with only 76,000 employed compared with a consistent increase in the employment of bumiputras from 199,000 in 1980 to 209,000 in 1985. The private sector was badly hit by the global economic recession in 1985. Consequently, the number of Chinese who accepted jobs in the government sector increased more than four times from 43,000 in 1980 to 199,000 in 1985. The mining and quarrying sector was also badly affected. The number of Chinese employed there declined by about 50 per cent from 26,000 in 1980 to 17,000 in 1985. This situation is in stark contrast to that faced by the bumiputras for whom employment increased by more than 40 per cent in the agriculture, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, government services, and other services sectors. In addition, their employment more than doubled in the construction, public utilities, transport, storage, and communication, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants as well as in the financial sector.

By 1990, the employment of bumiputras increased in all sectors except the mining and quarrying sector. The number of bumiputras employed in the agricultural sector continued to increase up to 1990 when 1,405,000 were employed but thereafter declined as more and more were attracted to other sectors especially transport, storage, and communication and government as well as other services. Nevertheless,



the agricultural sector was dominated by bumiputras, who accounted for more than 75 per cent of its total employment, while the Chinese share continued to decline to 15.5 per cent in 1985 and 15.3 per cent in 1991 (as per the 1991 census). Before the launching of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, the Chinese were the main employees in five main sectors, namely, mining and quarrying (66 per cent), manufacturing (66 per cent), construction (72 per cent), wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants (67 per cent), and finance, insurance, real estate, and business services (53 per cent). With more rapid growth in the bumiputra population as well as various measures implemented by the Government under the NEP, the Chinese share in almost all sectors declined while the bumiputra share increased. By 1990 the bumiputras were dominant in all sectors except the construction, commercial, and financial sectors where the Chinese still had a small lead over the bumiputras. This pattern remained unchanged in 1995. The public utilities, government, and other services sectors have remained the stronghold of the bumiputras who have maintained a share of at least 66 per cent since 1985, whereas the Chinese have consistently accounted for not more than one-quarter of the total employment in these sectors.

Throughout the whole period of study, the Chinese contribution to total employment in the country has always been slightly above their share of the labour force and their unemployment rate has always been lower than the national rate. Compared with the pre-independence period, the Chinese have gradually shifted their economic focus from the primary commodities sector to the manufacturing and services sectors. At the time of independence in 1957, more than one-third of the Chinese were employed in the agricultural sector, but over time more and more of the Chinese have ventured into the faster growing sectors especially manufacturing and the commercial sectors. By 1990 these two sectors had provided employment to more than half of the Chinese labour force. Up to 1980, the agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, finance, and other services sectors had each provided employment for more than 10 per cent of the Chinese labour force but only at the height of the global recession in 1985 was the government sector able to attract more than 10 per cent of the Chinese workers. Since then, only the manufacturing and commercial sectors have been able to attract an increasing proportion of the Chinese. At the time of independence, these two sectors respectively employed 11 per cent and 15 per cent of the Chinese workers but over time their shares have consistently increased so that by 1995 they each employed 22 per cent and 32 per cent of the Chinese labour force. Although the Chinese continued to provide significant labour inputs to the construction and finance sectors, the total employment generated by these two sectors accounted for less than 16 per cent of the total number of Chinese employed. In terms of employment, the Chinese contribution to the Malaysian economy may therefore be said to have shifted from the agriculture and mining sectors to the commerce, construction, and finance sectors. In the commerce sector, the Chinese owned more than 80 per cent of the

wholesale establishments during the period 1990-5. However, the majority of these establishments were relatively small. In 1995, for example, the total monthly sales from Chinese wholesale establishments accounted for 77 per cent of total revenue from the wholesale business but on average, the sales per establishment for the Chinese were below the national average, being only RM 111,181 compared with RM 116,667 for the Indians, RM 276,023 for joint ventures, RM 216,442 for foreigners, and RM 117,040 for the national average but it was higher than the average for bumiputra establishments (RM 99,471). The Chinese were, however, more active in the retail business. Nevertheless, the Chinese share in the ownership of retail establishments declined from 62 per cent in 1990 to 55 per cent in 1995. Unlike the wholesale sector, Chinese-owned establishments in the retail sector were on average bigger than those of the other ethnic groups. The average value of sales per establishment was RM 32,000 compared with RM 14,926 for the bumiputra establishments, RM 18,579 for Indians, RM 96,095 for joint ventures, RM 32,374 for foreigners, and RM 25,514 for the national average. Chinese retail outlets accounted for 68 per cent of the total monthly retail sales in 1995 even though in terms of number they accounted for 55 per cent of the country's total number of retail stores.

It should, however, be noted that this discussion is based on data derived from different sources. Data for 1957, 1970, and 1980 were for Peninsular Malaysia and were from the respective *Population and Housing Census* whereas data for 1985, 1990, and 1995 were for Malaysia and were drawn from the various Malaysia Plan documents. Hence they are not exactly comparable. The latest census data for Malaysia was for the year 1991 and a comparison of the census data for 1991 with the Sixth Malaysia Plan (6MP) data for 1990 suggests that the figures from the Malaysia Plan documents are considerably higher than the census data. The census data show that employment in the agriculture sector had in general declined from 1,382,000 in 1980 to 1,291,000 in 1991. This decline was obvious especially for the bumiputras, Chinese, and Indians but it had increased for the 'others' from 12,000 in 1980 to 65,000 in 1991. Data from the Malaysia Plan documents, however, indicated an average annual rate of increase of 2.9 per cent for the agriculture sector from 1,382,000 in 1980 to 1,838,000 in 1990 (Table 4.4), with employment of bumiputras and Chinese increasing to 1,405,000 and 295,000 respectively. Overall, the census data for Malaysian citizens, however, showed a slower rate of increase in employment of 3.7 per cent compared with the Malaysia Plan rate of 5.7 per cent.

In the 7MP, the figures were revised so that non-citizens who had previously been included in the bumiputra, Chinese, and Indian categories were now included in 'others'. The 7MP data (Table 4.5) shows that the shares of the bumiputras, Chinese, and Indians in the agriculture sector continued to decline from 1990 to 1995 and are projected to decline further by the year 2000. Contrary to the projection in the 6MP, the 7MP shows that by 1995 the Chinese were dominant only

TABLE 4.4  
Employment by Sector and Ethnic Group, 1957-1995

Sector	Burmese					Chinese					Indians					Others					Total					
	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	
Agriculture, forestry, livestock & fishing	749	951	938	1405	1387	310	301	295	300	300	175	142	152	123	121	11	12	12	12	13	15	1243	1406	1382	1838	1822
Mining & quarrying	10	21	14	19	21	40	56	26	15	16	7	7	5	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	58	85	45	39	41
Manufacturing	27	78	235	649	915	96	173	251	476	565	10	14	65	157	211	1	1	3	8	9	135	264	512	1290	1699	
Construction	22	17	57	184	242	31	56	109	213	267	12	5	13	26	34	1	1	4	4	5	68	78	181	427	548	
Electricity, gas & water	4	3	3	32	34	3	3	3	6	6	4	5	1	8	8	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	17	6	46	48
Transport, storage & communications	27	51	56	155	191	29	47	62	93	107	16	20	19	36	46	3	1	2	1	2	1	75	119	141	285	345
Wholesale & retail trade, hotels & restaurants	32	57	149	475	661	127	168	305	609	831	33	25	42	83	105	3	1	3	10	15	195	251	498	1239	1612	
Finance, insurance, real estate & bus services	29	12	27	95	116	115	20	36	110	127	30	5	9	24	28	3	1	3	3	3	3	177	38	72	231	273
Government services	88	100	321	580	599	18	17	43	215	222	24	21	45	89	77	30	6	3	6	5	5	167	144	412	850	872
Other services	50	119	199	251	330	97	148	164	92	122	33	44	47	30	38	7	3	3	2	2	2	187	314	414	875	492
Total Employed	1019	1435	2034	5825	4485	809	990	1327	2504	2645	344	286	405	563	671	60	27	27	27	51	55	2319	2736	3793	6621	7752
Labour Force	67	87	258	493	4714	1035	122	83	3	3	7.1	22	33	27	33	3	3	3	3	3	3	135	2071	2716	7047	8114
Unemployment rate	4.5	6.5	7.3	4.3	5.3	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5

Ethnic Composition by Sector (%)

Sector	Burmese					Chinese					Indians					Others					Total				
	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995	1957	1970	1980	1990	1995
Agriculture, forestry, livestock & fishing	60.2	67.6	67.9	76.4	76.1	24.9	21.4	20.3	16.1	16.5	14.1	10.1	11.0	6.7	6.6	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mining & quarrying	17.2	24.7	31.1	48.7	51.2	69.9	65.9	57.8	30.5	39.0	12.1	8.2	11.1	10.3	7.3	1.7	1.2	0.0	2.6	2.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Manufacturing	20.0	28.8	42.6	50.3	53.9	72.6	65.5	45.5	36.9	33.3	7.4	5.3	11.4	12.2	12.4	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Construction	32.4	31.8	31.5	43.1	44.2	49.5	71.8	60.2	49.9	48.7	17.6	6.4	7.2	6.1	6.2	1.5	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Electricity, gas & water	33.3	47.1	50.0	64.6	70.8	25.0	17.6	16.7	10.0	12.5	33.3	29.4	16.7	17.4	16.7	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Transport, storage & communications	36.0	42.8	41.8	54.4	55.4	38.7	39.3	44.0	32.6	31.0	10.0	8.4	10.0	6.9	6.5	6.5	1.5	0.4	0.5	0.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Wholesale & retail trade, hotels & restaurants	18.4	22.7	29.9	38.3	41.0	65.1	66.9	50.0	47.6	46.5	16.9	13.2	12.5	19.4	10.3	1.7	2.6	1.4	1.3	1.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Finance, insurance, real estate & bus services	18.4	31.6	37.5	41.1	42.5	63.0	52.8	50.0	47.6	46.5	10.8	11.8	10.4	15.4	8.0	7.7	3.0	0.7	0.5	0.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Government services	26.7	37.9	48.1	66.9	67.1	51.9	47.1	39.6	24.5	24.8	17.6	14.0	11.4	8.0	7.7	3.7	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Other services	44.8	52.4	53.6	57.8	57.8	37.5	36.2	35.0	33.0	33.0	14.8	10.7	10.7	8.5	8.7	2.4	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Labour Force	49.6	52.3	58.1	58.1	58.1	36.3	33.3	32.7	32.8	32.8	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unemployment	49.6	49.6	49.6	49.6	49.6	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Continued

TABLE 4.4 (continued)

Sector	Peninsular Malaysia				Sabah				Sarawak				Others				Total								
	1957	1979	1980	1991	1957	1979	1980	1991	1957	1979	1980	1991	1957	1979	1980	1991	1957	1979	1980	1991					
Agriculture, forestry, livestock & fishing	72.09	66.27	46.12	36.73	31.06	35.87	30.40	21.10	13.52	11.71	49.65	37.53	30.69	18.03	18.33	48.00	44.44	31.58	2727	53.59	51.39	36.44	31.29	23.50	
Mining & quarrying	0.96	1.46	0.69	0.50	0.47	4.60	5.66	3.96	0.69	0.62	2.03	2.45	1.23	0.71	0.45	1.87	4.00	0.00	1.96	1.82	2.50	3.11	1.19	0.59	0.53
Manufacturing	2.60	5.30	11.25	16.97	20.49	11.28	17.47	18.91	21.81	11.05	2.91	4.90	15.56	27.89	31.45	11.87	4.00	11.11	15.69	16.56	5.82	9.65	14.55	19.48	21.82
Construction	2.12	1.18	2.80	4.81	5.42	3.80	5.66	8.21	9.76	10.42	3.49	1.75	3.21	4.62	5.07	1.87	0.00	3.70	7.84	9.09	2.93	2.83	4.77	6.45	7.97
Electricity, gas & water	0.38	0.15	0.15	0.84	0.76	0.15	0.80	0.66	0.27	0.25	1.16	1.75	0.25	1.42	1.19	1.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.62	0.16	0.69	0.62
Transport, storage & communications	2.60	3.55	2.90	4.05	4.28	3.34	4.75	4.67	4.26	4.18	4.65	6.99	4.69	6.89	6.86	5.00	4.00	3.70	3.92	3.82	3.23	4.35	3.72	4.30	4.45
Wholesale & retail trade, hotels & restaurants	3.08	3.97	7.13	12.42	14.80	14.61	16.97	22.98	30.66	32.44	9.59	8.74	10.37	15.10	15.65	5.00	4.00	11.11	19.61	27.27	8.41	9.17	13.13	18.71	20.79
Finance, insurance, real estate & bus services	2.79	0.84	1.15	2.48	2.60	13.23	2.02	2.71	5.04	4.96	8.72	1.75	2.22	4.26	4.17	5.00	4.00	3.70	5.88	5.45	7.63	3.39	1.90	3.89	3.52
Government services	8.47	6.97	15.78	14.64	12.74	2.07	1.72	3.24	9.85	8.67	6.98	7.84	11.11	12.26	11.48	10.00	24.00	11.11	11.76	0.09	7.20	5.26	10.86	12.84	11.25
Other services	4.81	8.29	9.78	6.56	7.19	11.16	14.95	12.56	4.22	4.76	9.97	15.38	11.60	5.33	5.66	11.67	12.00	11.11	3.92	3.64	8.06	11.48	10.91	5.66	6.15
Total Employed	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

\* Less than 500 persons.

† Peninsular Malaysia only.

Sources: Department of Statistics (1957, 1970, 1980, 1991); Malaysia (1976, 1989, 1991).

TABLE 4.5  
Employment by Sector and Ethnic Group, 1990, 1995, and 2000 ('000)

Sector	1990						1995						2000																			
	Bumiputera		Chinese		Others <sup>1</sup>		Bumiputera		Chinese		Others <sup>1</sup>		Bumiputera		Chinese		Others <sup>1</sup>															
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%														
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock & Fishing	1179.9	33.4	251.6	11.6	131.9	23.1	174.6	42.9	1738	26	837.2	21.4	175.7	7.3	92.9	3.4	272.9	36.5	1428.7	18	730.4	14.8	116.6	5.1	72.5	9.8	248.2	33.2	1107.7	13.1		
Mining & Quarrying	67.9	0.6	12.1	0.6	7.4	0.6	2.3	0.8	37	0.8	23.8	0.6	8.5	0.4	4.7	0.7	3.7	0.5	40.7	0.5	27.9	0.6	7.4	0.3	4.7	0.6	4.5	0.6	44.5	0.5		
Manufacturing	619.1	17.3	303	21.2	148.9	25.7	42	15.2	133	19.9	1038	25	634	26.4	242.1	36.5	173.5	19.4	2051.6	25.9	1401	29	733.2	27.7	308.1	41	144	19.3	2046.3	28.9		
Construction	46	0.1	37.9	1.1	11	4.7	1	0.4	50.6	1.1	50.6	1.1	30.9	11.8	6.7	100	0.9	34.3	0.4	34.3	0.7	34.3	1.1	11.7	1.5	5.5	0.7	14.9	0.2			
Electricity, Gas & Water	34.9	0.1	4.2	0.1	24.5	4.3	33.7	8.3	424	6.3	252.3	6.1	201.8	11.7	33	5	92.3	13	659.4	8.3	36.3	7.1	33.4	1.2	39.8	5.3	125.9	16.9	845.4	9.3		
Transport, Storage & Communications	70.2	0.2	10	0.2	37	0.8	1.4	0.3	47	0.7	51.1	1.2	6.5	0.3	7.8	1.2	5.7	0.5	69.1	0.9	64.1	1.3	7.6	0.3	8	1.1	4.3	0.6	4.4	0.9		
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Health & Recreation	148	4.2	92.9	4.1	45.1	7.9	36	13	302	4.5	203.6	5.1	118.2	4.9	48.2	7.3	18.2	2.6	395.2	5	290	5.9	147.5	5.8	50.2	6.8	18.2	2.6	506.9	5.6		
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	49	0.1	36.8	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3	53.3	14.9	5.3
Other Services <sup>2</sup>	106.2	3	128.7	5.3	25.5	4.5	5.6	1.4	258	5.9	171.5	4.1	160.9	6.7	36.3	5.5	9.8	1.4	378.5	4.8	241.9	4.9	183	6.9	43.6	5.9	10.5	1.4	479	5.3		
Total Employed	3533.4	100	2175	100	570.6	100	407	100	6668	100	4144.9	100	2199.4	100	662.6	100	708.5	100	7915.4	100	4927.5	100	2850	100	742	100	746.7	100	9666.2	100		
Labour Force	3751	100	2278.9	100	600.1	100	414.2	100	7942.2	100	4319.6	100	2401.5	100	677.2	100	711.7	100	8146	100	5125.8	100	2891	100	760.2	100	750.1	100	9327.1	100		
Unemployment	217.6	5.8	101.9	4.4	29.5	4.9	1.4	0.4	35.6	0.5	35.6	0.8	1.4	0.2	1.4	0.2	1.4	0.2	224.6	0.3	198.3	4.1	38.2	1.4	18.2	2.4	8	0.8	266.9	7.1		
Unemployment Rate	61.1	16.2	28.6	13.2	5.1	8.8	2.2	0.6	4.3	0.6	8.6	1.9	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	2.8	0.4	3.9	0.8	13.4	4.9	2.4	3.2	1.3	2.8	3.2			

Source: Malaysia (1996).

<sup>1</sup>Figures have been revised owing to reclassification of non-citizens under the category of 'Others'. Non-citizens were previously included under Bumiputras, Chinese, and Indians.

<sup>2</sup>Includes non-citizens.

<sup>3</sup>Includes public, private, and community services.

in the construction and commerce sectors where their share of sectoral employment was 43 per cent and 51 per cent respectively compared with the bumiputra share of 38 per cent and 37 per cent. In the financial and business services sector, the Chinese and bumiputra shares were 43 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. It is projected that by the year 2000 Chinese employment would be dominant only in the commercial sector, namely, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, as shown in Table 4.5.

Comparing the 1980 and 1991 census data, the number of bumiputras employed in the agriculture sector had declined, but in the mining and quarrying sector they increased from 14,000 to 19,000 while the number of Indians and Chinese employed declined by 12,000, of whom 11,000 were Chinese. In all the remaining sectors, employment of all ethnic groups increased. However, comparing the three main ethnic groups (bumiputra, Chinese, and Indian) the increase was most significant for the bumiputras as their employment had more than doubled in the 11 years since 1980 so that by 1991, the Chinese were dominant only in the construction and commerce sectors though they had equal share with the bumiputras in the financial sector. Estimates for the 7MP show that in 1995, the Chinese had the biggest share of the employment market only in the wholesale and retail trade, and in the hotels and restaurants sectors. This situation is expected to remain the same even up to the year 2000.

This shift by the Chinese from the primary commodities sector to the construction and commerce sectors is also reflected in the occupational structure of the ethnic groups in Malaysia (Table 4.6). The professional and technical workers category has always been dominated by the bumiputras whose number more than doubled every 10 years. Up to 1970, there were only a few thousand more bumiputras than Chinese in the professional and technical workers' group but by 1980 the number of bumiputra professionals had more than doubled from 59,000 in 1970 to 144,000 while the number of Chinese professionals had increased from 50,000 to only 88,000 during the same period. This trend was maintained so that by 1990 there were 355,000 bumiputra professionals and 171,000 Chinese professionals. Throughout the period since independence the three main groups which accounted for this vast increase in the number of professionals were the teachers, architects, engineers, technologists, and surveyors as well as medical, dental, veterinary, and related workers. The Chinese were dominant in only two of the professional occupations, namely, accounting and auditing (9,443 Chinese, 5,451 bumiputras) and photography (8,436 Chinese, 5,645 bumiputras). This trend of an increasing share of employment of bumiputras and a declining share of the Chinese in the professional and technical occupations was maintained so that by 1995 there were 524,000 bumiputras and 214,000 Chinese who accounted for 64 per cent and 26 per cent respectively of the total number of professional and technical employees. The faster growth in the employment of bumiputra professionals and technical workers is largely the result of the

TABLE 4.6  
Employment by Occupation and Main Ethnic Groups, 1957-2000 ('000)

Occupation	Bumiputera					Chinese					Indians					Total				
	1957	1970	1980	1990	2000	1957	1970	1980	1990	2000	1957	1970	1980	1990	2000	1957	1970	1980	1990	2000
Professional & Technical (%)	26.9	39.3	144.1	354.8	729.6	25.0	50.5	88.1	178.5	243.3	7.2	16.3	25.9	44.9	79.0	65.7	129.4	261.9	586.4	1,097.1
Teachers & Nurses (%)	41.0	45.8	55.0	60.5	66.5	38.1	39.0	31.6	29.1	24.0	11.0	12.6	9.9	7.7	7.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Administrative & Managerial (%)	49.2	55.3	99.7	68.5	75.4	36.0	23.5	31.2	24.6	41.8	3.5	8.1	10.6	14.2	24.1	39.6	77.2	128.4	221.8	358.6
General (%)	4.3	4.7	9.9	47.1	122.4	15.3	13.2	24.5	101.9	138.7	3.0	1.5	2.4	6.5	17.1	24.5	29.3	38.2	143.8	290.1
Other (%)	17.5	23.2	25.9	28.7	42.2	62.3	65.0	64.2	62.2	47.8	12.2	19.7	30.5	56.0	62.6	41.5	131.3	304.5	452.6	933.8
Sales (%)	27.1	35.7	50.4	52.4	62.2	46.2	48.1	38.8	38.6	30.0	19.9	14.8	10.0	8.8	6.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Services (%)	29.0	22.8	104.2	229.8	669.2	120.4	157.1	223.4	449.3	669.2	30.6	24.9	28.3	52.6	62.5	182.3	236.7	357.3	768.9	1,042.6
Agricultural Services (%)	39.7	43.8	56.9	409.6	721.6	41.1	88.2	66.2	58.4	45.0	16.8	10.5	7.9	6.8	6.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Producers (%)	62.1	68.9	69.9	69.1	61.8	24.1	21.0	18.3	13.8	11.6	1.3	0.8	10.9	7.3	7.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (%)	1,023.7	1,435.0	1,940.9	3,533.3	4,927.5	772.0	990.0	1,278.2	2,175.0	2,650.0	113.0	286.2	393.1	570.6	742.0	2,164.9	2,758.4	3,631.3	6,046.9	9,266.2
	47.3	52.4	52.9	52.9	54.4	35.7	36.2	34.8	32.5	29.2	14.5	15.5	10.6	8.5	8.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Department of Statistics (1957, 1970, 1980); Malaysia (1996).

Government's education and training programme. The enrolment of bumiputra students in economics and management courses in the local universities increased from 7,188 or 16.6 per cent of the total number of students in local universities in 1990 to 12,700 or 20.5 per cent in 1995, whereas the number of non-bumiputra students pursuing the same courses only increased from 3,623 or 8.4 per cent to 6,320 or 10.2 per cent during the same period. For technical courses, the number of bumiputra students increased from 3,835 in 1990 to 5,500 in 1995 while the increase for non-bumiputra students was from 2,264 to 3,300. Of the 50,600 Malaysian students abroad in 1995, 39.5 per cent or 20,000 were government-sponsored students of whom 87.8 per cent were bumiputra students, most of whom were pursuing degree-level courses in professional and technical subjects. Despite the dominance of the bumiputras in the professional and technical occupations, however, there are probably more Chinese in the main professions. Certainly the Chinese have accounted for more than 50 per cent of the members registered with eight professional bodies comprising architects, engineers, surveyors, doctors, dental surgeons, veterinarians, accountants, and lawyers. The number of Chinese members increased from 17,400 in 1985 to 22,641 in 1990 and 30,636 in 1995, accounting for 61.2 per cent, 55.9 per cent, and 52.4 per cent respectively of the total number of registered professionals. In comparison, the bumiputra professionals numbered 6,300 (22.2 per cent of total) in 1985, 11,753 (29 per cent of total) in 1990, and 19,344 (33.1 per cent of total) in 1995. This trend of a rising share of the bumiputras and a declining share of the Chinese in the professional and technical occupations is likely to persist. By the year 2000, it is estimated that there will be 730,000 bumiputras and 263,000 Chinese, who will account for 67 per cent and 24 per cent respectively of total employment in the professional and technical group.

In the administrative and managerial occupations, there were almost three times as many Chinese as there were bumiputras, but after 1970 the gap narrowed considerably. The number of bumiputra administrative and managerial workers increased marginally from 4,290 in 1957 to 4,709 in 1970 but with the implementation of the NEP they increased significantly and at a faster pace to 9,896 in 1980 and 47,100 in 1991. On the other hand, the number of Chinese employed in these occupations decreased from 15,275 in 1957 to 13,199 in 1970 but thereafter the downward trend was reversed and the number increased to 24,495 and 101,900 in 1980 and 1990, respectively. Throughout the period of study, the administrative and managerial posts in the public sector were dominated by the bumiputras while the Chinese had a greater presence in the private sector. By 1990, managerial posts in the private sector accounted for 98.5 per cent of the Chinese administrative and managerial workers and 88.5 per cent of the bumiputras in the group. Data from the 7MP show that the number of Chinese and bumiputras employed in administrative and managerial occupations increased to 116,900 (or 54.7 per cent share) and 77,100 (or 36.1 per cent share) respectively in 1995. By the year 2000, it is projected that there will be



138,700 Chinese and 122,400 bumiputras employed in administrative and managerial jobs.

The Chinese also contributed the most in the area of providing sales services. They were the biggest ethnic group employed in all aspects of sales services, including wholesale and retail trade, insurance, and petty traders and hawkers. In 1957, there were 28,981 bumiputras and 120,382 Chinese employed in sales but by 1991 the number had increased to 191,250 bumiputras and 332,934 Chinese. In 1995, there were 323,800 bumiputras (or 36.2 per cent share) and 464,200 Chinese sales workers (51.9 per cent share). It is projected that by the year 2000, there will be an equal number of Chinese and bumiputra sales workers, each numbering 469,200 or 45 per cent share of the total employed in the industry.

In all the remaining occupations, there were more bumiputras than Chinese. The bumiputras were most dominant in the agricultural sector. In 1957, this sector provided jobs to almost three-quarters of the bumiputra, 40 per cent of the Chinese, and 49 per cent of the Indian communities. As the economy progressed in its developmental path away from primary commodities to the manufacturing sector, the proportion of the bumiputra, Chinese, and Indian communities deployed in agricultural services declined sharply to 24 per cent, 11 per cent, and 19 per cent respectively in 1991. In 1957, the sector employed 745,000 bumiputras or 2.5 times the number of Chinese employed (291,000). By 1991 this ratio had increased to five, with 977,000 bumiputras and 189,000 Chinese employed. Data from the 7MP shows that in 1990 the sector employed 1,305,600 bumiputras (or a 69 per cent share in the sector's employment) and 261,800 Chinese (14 per cent share) but by 1995 there were 1,049,300 bumiputras (63 per cent share) and 214,000 Chinese (13 per cent share). The sector is expected to shrink further so that by the year 2000, it is estimated to employ only 918,900 bumiputras (62 per cent share) and 172,500 Chinese (12 per cent share). In general, there were more bumiputras than Chinese in the services and production related occupations but the Chinese contributed the most in the managerial and entrepreneurial posts as well as in jobs requiring skills in the construction industry (for example bricklayers, carpenters), manufacturing (such as tool makers, cabinet makers, shoemakers, plumbers, jewellery and precious metal makers) and other services (for example tailors, hairdressers).

Overall, the Chinese have contributed mainly to private sector enterprise while their involvement in the public sector is very low. The majority have been employed in the private sector, especially in jobs requiring managerial, business and professional, or technical skills, mainly in the construction and commercial sectors. This trend is likely to persist as a comparison of the employment of Chinese and bumiputra youths, namely those in the 15-24 age group, also reveals the same pattern. For the period 1990-5, the proportion of Chinese youths employed in the construction, commerce, finance, and other services sectors was higher than the average for all youths in the country. In

terms of occupations, a relatively higher proportion of Chinese youths were employed as administrative and managerial workers and especially clerical, sales, and related workers, when compared with the distribution of employment for the country's youths. In contrast, there was a relatively higher proportion of bumiputra youths employed in the agriculture, manufacturing, and transport, storage, and communication sectors, working mainly in occupations in the professional and technical, agriculture, and production workers categories. This difference in the involvement of the Chinese in the economic and occupational structure of the country is also reflected in the income distribution trends among the various ethnic groups.

### Income Distribution Trends Among the Ethnic Groups

The economic success of Malaysia is evident in its achievement of a high economic growth rate exceeding 8 per cent per annum from 1988 to 1996 (except for 1992 when growth was 7.6 per cent). Real GDP growth moderated to 7.7 per cent in 1997 due to the economic crisis that hit both currency and equity markets in practically all countries in the South-East Asian region. In the early years before 1970, data from various sources (D. Lim, 54-7: 141) show that at the time of independence in 1957 the Chinese earned more than the other ethnic groups, mainly because they were engaged in the more productive sectors in the economy. Table 4.7 shows that the average monthly household income per head for the Chinese was RM 394 as compared to RM 172 for the Malays and RM 304 for the Indians. As Table 4.4 shows, the Chinese were dominant in the industries where the returns were much higher. The Chinese were dominant in the commerce, mining, manufacturing, and construction industries where the income per worker was at least

TABLE 4.7  
Monthly Household Income by Ethnic Group in  
Peninsular Malaysia, 1970-1997 (RM)

<i>Ethnic Group</i>		1970	1975	1984	1987	1990	1995	1997
Bumiputras	Mean	172	492	852	868	940	1604	2038
	Median	120	327	581	612	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Chinese	Mean	394	938	1502	1430	1631	2890	3737
	Median	268	620	1024	1021	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Indians	Mean	304	756	1094	1089	1209	2140	2896
	Median	194	521	770	799	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Others	Mean	813	1904	2454	2886	1105 <sup>1</sup>	1744 <sup>1</sup>	2625 <sup>1</sup>
	Median	250	550	1145	672	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
All Groups	Mean	264	693	1095	1074	1169	2008	2607
	Median	166	436	723	738	n.a.	1346	1682

Sources: Malaysia (1984, 1989, 1996, 1998).

<sup>1</sup>For citizens in this group, the mean income is RM 955 in 1990, RM 1,274 in 1995, and RM 1,680 in 1997.

RM 3,200 per annum compared with the Malays who were dominant in the agriculture, fishing, and the public sector, earning not more than RM 3,000 per annum.

The mean monthly household income of all ethnic groups in the country increased from RM 264 in 1970 to RM 693 in 1975 and by 1984 it had exceeded RM 1,000, well above the definition employed for poverty line income, namely, RM 425 per month for a household size of 4.6 in Peninsular Malaysia, RM 601 per month for a household size of 4.9 in Sabah, and RM 516 per month for a household size of 4.8 in Sarawak. However, the level of income differed considerably between the different ethnic groups as well as within the groups. Table 4.7 shows that both the mean and median monthly household income of the Chinese were second to the others in the early years up to 1987 but thereafter the mean monthly income of the Chinese was the highest of the various groups. The mean monthly income of the Chinese increased almost five times from RM 394 in 1970 to RM 1,502 in 1984 but declined during the global recession to RM 1,430 in 1987, after which it increased to RM 1,631 in 1990, RM 2,890 in 1995, and RM 3,737 in 1997. In general, the income of the bumiputras was the lowest as the ratio of the mean monthly household income of the various groups to the bumiputra household generally exceeded unity, but this gap has been gradually reduced over time. The ratio of the mean monthly household income of the Chinese to the bumiputras declined from 2.29 in 1970 to 1.66 in 1987 but thereafter it increased slightly to 1.74 in 1990, 1.80 in 1995, and 1.83 in 1997. The increased disparity was mainly a reflection of the differential in the income growth of the top 20 per cent and the bottom 40 per cent of households. Within the middle 40 per cent of households, the growth in income of bumiputras and Chinese was almost similar. The disparity ratio for the Indian households compared with the bumiputra households also declined from 1.77 in 1970 to 1.25 in 1987, but thereafter it increased to 1.29 in 1990, 1.35 in 1995, and 1.42 in 1997 owing to the faster growth in income of Indian households. For the 'others', this ratio declined significantly from 4.73 in 1970 to 2.88 in 1984 but increased to 3.33 in 1987. For 1990 and 1995, this disparity ratio declined to 1.18 and 1.09 respectively, but increased to 1.29 in 1997 if the mean income of non-citizens is considered. However, for citizens, the ratio declined to 1.01 in 1990, 0.80 in 1995, and 0.82 in 1997.

This pattern of income disparity remains the same even if the median household incomes were compared. However, for all ethnic groups the income disparity between the rich and the poor measured by the ratio of the mean to median household income widened further up to 1979 (Table 4.8), demonstrating that the economic growth in the country tended to favour the rich as the rich tended to get richer and the poor poorer. But from 1979 to 1987 the ratio declined, reflecting the benefits of increased educational opportunities for the bumiputras. With rapid growth in the manufacturing and services sectors since the late 1980s and the slow-down in the agricultural sector, the income inequality in

TABLE 4.8  
Disparity Ratio<sup>1</sup> by Ethnic Group in Peninsular Malaysia, 1970-1987

	1970	1979	1984	1987
Bumiputra	1.43	1.50	1.47	1.42
Chinese	1.47	1.51	1.47	1.40
Indian	1.56	1.45	1.42	1.38
Others	3.25	3.46	2.14	4.29
All Races	1.59	1.59	1.51	1.46

Source: Malaysia (1984).

<sup>1</sup>Disparity ratio is the ratio of the mean to median monthly household income.

the country widened in the 1990s due mainly to the difference in the growth rates of the rural and urban sectors.

### Ownership, Control, and Participation in the Corporate Sector

The active involvement of the Chinese at the frontiers of growth in the economy and the obvious achievements of the more outstanding Chinese entrepreneurs had given the impression that the Chinese controlled much of the national economy. However, data from the Post-Enumeration Survey of the 1970 Population Census revealed that the Chinese owned only 22.5 per cent of the share capital of limited companies while the bumiputras owned 2.4 per cent in 1970 and 4.3 per cent in 1971 and foreign interests owned 63.3 per cent and 62 per cent in 1970 and 1971, respectively.

With the launching of the NEP in 1971, various policies and measures were implemented with the aim of poverty alleviation and the eventual elimination of identification of race with economic function. In effect, the Government had adopted the approach of economic trusteeship to achieve these goals. This strategy involved '(1) decisions about budget and resource allocations and investment priorities (which) are made non-competitively by rules and procedures set by trustees, and (2) control over resources is separated from their ownership, and vested with the trustees' (Mehmet 1986: 6). These trustees comprised two groups, namely, a small group of political decision-makers who determined the goals and objectives while the second group comprised civil or public service staff who implemented and monitored the various programmes designed in the trusteeship. The government had set up various trust agencies to mobilize the savings of the Muslim and bumiputra communities and to channel these funds into corporate investments held in trust for the bumiputras for eventual transfer to them. In this respect, institutions such as the Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN) and the Amanah Saham Bumiputra (ASB) were set up to encourage savings from bumiputras by guaranteeing them savings returns that were above market rates. At the same time, institutions such as the Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji (LUTH or the Islamic Pilgrims Management

and Fund Board) and the Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera (Armed Forces Fund Board or LTAT) were also able to mobilize the compulsory savings of the Muslim pilgrims and the armed forces for investment in the corporate sector. Trust agencies such as Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB or the National Equity Corporation), Petroliaam Nasional Berhad (Petronas or the National Petroleum Corporation), the Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (or Pernas), and the various State Economic Development Corporations (SEDC) held equity in various corporations and eventually these companies would be transferred to bumiputra individuals as and when identified under the Transfer Scheme of Government Equity to bumiputras. In line with the policy of expanding bumiputra control and ownership in the corporate sector, the government continued its practice of allocating a portion of new issues of corporate equity to bumiputra investors as well as providing more opportunities for bumiputra investors through the privatization and Bumiputra Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC) programmes.

By 1980, the Malaysian ownership of the share capital of limited companies had increased to 57 per cent from 36.7 per cent in 1970 (Table 4.9). The bumiputra share had increased to 12.5 per cent in 1980, with the share of bumiputra individuals rising from 1.6 per cent in 1970 to 5.8 per cent in 1980 while the non-bumiputra share had increased to 44.6 per cent. At the end of the NEP in 1990, Malaysian ownership had increased to 74.6 per cent, exceeding the NEP target of 70 per cent. The bumiputra share had risen to 19.3 per cent while the Chinese share was 45.5 per cent and the foreign share had declined from 63.3 per cent in 1970 to 43 per cent in 1980 and 25.4 per cent in 1990. By 1995, there were 6.2 million bumiputra investors in ASB, ASN, and other unit trust funds with investments worth RM 25.7 billion, so that bumiputra ownership of corporate equity at par value increased by 12.1 per cent to reach RM 37 billion, or 20.6 per cent of total equity in the corporate sector. This was largely due to the 16.8 per cent growth in the ownership of corporate equity by bumiputra individuals who were able to more than double their investments from RM 15.3 billion in 1990 to RM 33.4 billion in 1995.

On the other hand, Chinese ownership of corporate equity increased at a lower average annual rate of 8.3 per cent from RM 49.3 billion in 1990 to RM 73.6 billion in 1995, or a reduced share of 40.9 per cent of total corporate equity. This was mainly due to the faster growth of the bumiputra share and the foreign acquisition of corporate wealth. In order to attract foreign direct investment, regulations pertaining to corporate ownership were relaxed and the foreign share of corporate equity increased at an average annual rate of 12.6 per cent to reach a value of RM 49.8 billion or an increased share of 27.7 per cent of total corporate equity. While the bumiputra share of 19.3 per cent in 1990 and 20.6 per cent in 1995 seems to have fallen short of the NEP wealth restructuring target of 30:40:30 (for the bumiputra: other Malaysians: foreign share of corporate wealth), the bumiputra share is likely to have been understated owing to definitional problems in the official data because nominee

TABLE 4.9  
 Malaysia: Ownership of Share Capital (at par value) of Limited Companies, 1970-1995

Ownership Group	1970	%	1980	%	1985	%	1988	%	1990	%	1995	%
Malaysian residents	1,952.1	36.7	18,493.4	57.0	42,851	54.9	52,895	54.1	80,851.9	74.6	129,999.5	72.3
Bumiputra individuals and trust agencies	125.6	2.4	4,050.5	12.5	14,903	19.1	18,990	19.4	20,877.5	19.3	36,981.2	20.6
Bumiputra individuals	84.4	1.6	1,880.1	5.8	9,103	11.9	12,690	13	15,322.0	14.2	33,353.2	18.6
Trust agencies	41.2	0.8	2,170.4	6.7	5,880	7.4	6,300	6.4	5,555.5	5.1	3,628.0	2.0
Other Malaysian residents	1,826.5	24.3	14,442.9	44.6	27,948	36.5	33,905	34.7	50,754.0	46.8	78,026.9	43.4
Chinese	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26,033	33.4	31,757	32.5	49,296.5	45.5	73,552.7	40.9
Indians	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	928	1.2	1,142	1.2	1,068.0	1.0	2,723.1	1.5
Others	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	987	1.3	1,026	1	389.5	0.3	1,751.1	1.0
Nominee companies	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5,585	7.2	7,924	8.1	9,220.4	8.5	14,991.4	8.3
Foreign residents	3,377.1	63.3	13,927.0	43.0	20,298	26	24,158	24.7	27,525.5	25.4	49,792.7	27.7
Total	6,564.1	100.0	32,420.4	100.0	77,894	100.0	97,735	100.0	108,377.4	100.0	179,792.2	100.0

Sources: Malaysia (1973, 1984, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1998).

companies are included in the share of 'other Malaysians' but a 'significant proportion of such companies are owned by Bumiputras' (Mehmet, 1986: 103). In addition, Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Berhad was reclassified from trust agency to public corporation; otherwise, the bumiputra share of corporate equity would have been 20.3 per cent even in 1990 and the total bumiputra share in the wealth restructuring policy objective has been very much on target.

The increased share of Malaysian residents and all ethnic groups was achieved through enlarging the corporate pie. In value terms, Malaysian equity in limited companies had increased from RM 2.5 billion in 1971 to RM 18.5 billion in 1980, RM 80.9 billion in 1990, and RM 130 billion in 1995. The bumiputra share had increased from RM 280 million in 1971 to RM 4,051 million in 1980, RM 20,878 million in 1990, and RM 36,981 million in 1995 while the non-bumiputra share had increased from RM 2,233 million in 1971 to RM 14,443 million in 1980, RM 50,754 million in 1990, and RM 78,027 million in 1995. Chinese equity is estimated to have risen from RM 1.2 billion in 1970 to RM 49.3 billion in 1990 and RM 73.6 billion in 1995. Nevertheless, the Chinese share of total corporate equity declined from 45.5 per cent in 1990 to 40.9 per cent in 1995 because the foreign and bumiputra share of the corporate wealth increased faster when the Government liberalized the equity rules in order to attract more foreign investment and encourage more joint ventures with large bumiputra companies.

The financial contribution of the Chinese to the corporate sector was not only in equity participation but also in the provision of loans and working capital. Data on this are not available but an indication of the order of magnitude may be derived from data on equity and loans in manufacturing projects approved by the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA). Published data does not provide the ethnic share, only the bumiputra, non-bumiputra, and foreign share, but the non-bumiputra share is assumed to be mainly Chinese. Table 4.10 shows that the equity participation of the non-bumiputras exceeded the bumiputra share only from 1992 to 1996. Data on local sourcing of loans do not distinguish between the bumiputra and the non-bumiputra sources but it is estimated that loan financing is likely to be mainly from non-bumiputras. Hence, inclusion of the financial contribution through loans suggests that Chinese investment in the various manufacturing projects is much higher than that suggested by merely considering the equity composition.

### **Chinese Participation in Small-scale Enterprises**

While the Chinese have been successful in running big enterprises, they have also been active in small enterprises in various industries. In fact, most of the big success stories were carefully nurtured and grew from humble beginnings as small enterprises. Data on small businesses are often scattered and anecdotal but the 1990 Census of Small Scale Enterprises confirmed that the non-bumiputras (mainly Chinese) were

TABLE 4.10  
Local and Foreign Participation in Manufacturing Projects Approved, 1980-1999 (January-February)

	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 Jan.-Feb.
Number	459	625	906	973	874	686	870	898	782	759	844	86
Capital investment (RMm)	2,103	5,687	28,168	30,818	27,775	13,753	22,951	20,869	34,258	25,821	26,406	1,156
Local (RMm)	1,373	4,728	10,539	13,763	10,003	7,466	11,612	11,726	17,201	14,348	13,323	265
Foreign (RMm)	730	959	17,629	17,055	17,772	6,287	11,339	9,144	17,056	11,473	13,083	891
Total equity (RMm)	751	1,824	9,679	9,679	8,663	4,851	7,789	6,524	12,185	8,185	6,956	209
Local equity	503	1,499	3,451	3,606	2,808	2,408	3,679	3,331	5,972	4,471	4,000	108
Bumiputra	304	906	1,593	1,490	811	1,060	1,437	1,548	1,587	1,991	1,538	43
Non-bumiputra	200	506	1,522	1,246	976	1,314	1,659	1,716	4,285	1,909	1,378	65
Public corporation	-	86	335	869	1,022	35	583	67	100	571	1,084	-
Foreign equity	248	325	6,228	6,073	5,854	2,443	4,110	3,193	6,213	3,714	2,956	101
Loan (RMm)	1,352	3,863	18,489	21,139	19,113	8,901	15,163	14,345	22,073	17,636	19,450	947
Local	870	3,229	7,088	10,158	7,195	5,057	7,934	8,394	11,229	9,876	9,323	157
Foreign	482	634	11,401	10,982	11,918	3,844	7,229	5,951	10,844	7,759	10,127	791

Source: MIDA.



more active, accounting for 64 per cent of the more than 12,000 small-scale enterprises covered in the census. The non-bumiputras were more involved in the larger of the small-scale enterprises as they accounted for 60 per cent of the enterprises with shareholders' funds below RM 50,000, 80 per cent of companies with shareholders funds of between RM 51,000 and RM 100,000, and 73 per cent of companies with shareholders funds above RM 100,000 and below RM 500,000. They were also more enterprising and began their small businesses ahead of the Malays as the Census found that more of the non-bumiputras had also been in business for a longer period of time. The share of non-bumiputras in businesses less than four years old was 58 per cent, four to eight years 61 per cent, and more than eight years, 70 per cent. While there were more non-bumiputras than bumiputras in all the industries covered by the census, the share of the non-bumiputras was highest, exceeding 80 per cent, in four industries, namely, paper and paper products (80 per cent), chemicals, petroleum, rubber and plastic products (83 per cent), basic metal (92 per cent), and machinery (82 per cent). In terms of regional distribution, the non-bumiputra enterprises were more predominant in all states except Perlis, Trengganu, and Kelantan.

The contribution of the Chinese goes beyond what is revealed by the number or percentage participation in each of the economic sectors, industries, or occupations. Their contribution to entrepreneurship is also evident in the success with which they have pioneered many new industries, new investment, and business ventures, both in the domestic economy as well as overseas (Naisbitt, 1995). John Naisbitt, in discussing the economic success of the Chinese in Malaysia, had ascribed a large part of their success to their business acumen in forming business associations with the 'economic trustees' who held the keys that would unlock the gateways to business opportunities: 'With no political power themselves, they would link up with those in power in order to achieve their commercial goals' (Naisbitt, 1995: 14). Through the use of such strategic alliances, the Chinese were able to forge ahead into new areas of growth. Many of the Chinese companies have in fact been the path leaders in their respective fields in Malaysia. They were also the pioneers in reverse investment, extending their business connections overseas to tap the global supplies of resources as well as the cater to the world market.

The Chinese were the chief middlemen and shopkeepers. They established trading links with other countries in efforts to market their goods. Big Chinese companies like the Kuok Group, for example, established trading links with companies in the major trading cities of Hamburg, Paris, London, and New York to market a diversified range of manufactured products. Not only is the Kuok Group one of the largest sugar traders in the world, it is also a world market leader in the trading of edible oils and grains and it is Malaysia's biggest producer of polypropylene bags. Other big Chinese conglomerates which were pioneers in the manufacturing sector include the Lion Group and the Hong Leong Group. The Lion Group set up the first steel-making plant in

Malaysia through the formation of Amalgamated Steel Mills Sdn. Bhd. in 1977 and was also the first company in Malaysia to be granted approval to manufacture flat steel products. The Hong Leong Group, however, was the leading manufacturer of ceramic tiles. Besides their heavy involvement in many different industries, both the Lion and Hong Leong Groups were the pioneers in becoming integrated marketing and manufacturing companies which manufacture, distribute and market their products both in the domestic and the export markets. More importantly, together with Royal Selangor, they were also the pioneers who were able to develop their own brand names both for the domestic and export markets even before the authorities woke up to the economic value of successful brand names and provided incentives for developing such brand names.

Besides the manufacturing sector, the Chinese were also the local pioneers in the infrastructure and power industry in Malaysia. The YTL Corporation Bhd. was the first independent power producer licensee and has already exported its technology and expertise to countries such as South Africa, Chile, Australia, China and neighbouring countries like Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Other Chinese companies like the Kuok Group have invested in industrial infrastructure projects including major toll roads and industrial estates in Thailand, deep sea wharves in Thailand and China, and a harbour tunnel project and air cargo terminal in Hong Kong.

Finally, the Chinese have also been outstanding in the hotel and recreation and the retail and wholesale industries. Besides the Shangri-La chain of luxury hotels, belonging to the Kuok Group, other hotels and resort-related activities are also owned mainly by Chinese companies. Genting Berhad, for example, was incorporated in 1968 to operate a hotel and casino and develop an integrated tourist complex. Both the Lion and Hong Leong groups have set up retail chains of department stores and supermarkets. While Hong Leong is the largest publisher and printer of Chinese dailies and magazines in Malaysia, the Kuok Group has even acquired a 30 per cent share of Television Broadcasts, Hong Kong's dominant TV station, and a 34.9 per cent share of the *South China Morning Post* in 1993.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the economic role of the Chinese in Malaysia has been a substantial one. Although the Chinese form only one-third of the total population of Malaysia, they have contributed beyond that proportion, be it in terms of employment or investment. Many of them have been the captains of industry and the Chinese have shown flexibility in moving from less profitable and sunset ventures to businesses with good potential. Throughout the period of study, the Chinese have been at the forefront of the country's economic frontiers, moving with the times to exploit opportunities for moving into more profitable lines of business. Even before the government had put in place incentives for encouraging

Malaysians to invest beyond the national boundaries, the Chinese had already ventured into those fields which could help them expand their business. They had already effected the paradigm shift in their mind-set towards becoming global players in the economic and business world. Hence many Chinese companies have diversified to form conglomerates with business interests spanning many countries and multiple sectors, especially manufacturing, trading, real estate, financial services and the media. The economic strategy adopted by the Chinese is best expressed in the words of Robert Kuok, who said this of his company: 'To prosper, a company should grow and change with the times. The Kuok Group must always look for new areas linked to its strengths in which to expand.'

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## The Chinese Business Community in Peninsular Malaysia, 1957–1999

Heng Pek Koon and Sieh Lee Mei Ling

THE Chinese business community in Peninsular Malaysia has clearly been a major force in the emergence of Malaysia as one of the most successful economies in South-East Asia in the last two decades.<sup>1</sup> Although the role of the Chinese in the Malaysian economy has been widely recognized, the nature of Chinese business activities in the country has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, particularly since the initiation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the globalization of the Malaysian economy. While the changes emanating from the domestic and international environment have forced substantial modifications in Chinese business practices, the essential internal organization and operations of Chinese businesses based upon family firms have remained remarkably constant.

### **Chinese Economic Performance: An Analytical Framework**

An analytical framework of the evolution of Chinese businesses in Malaysia needs to encompass not only such broad political and economic explanatory factors as the roles of state institutions, public policies, bumiputra (Malay) capital, and foreign investments, but also the role played by Chinese ethnicity and culture. Scholars studying the phenomenon of successful Chinese entrepreneurship in South-East and East Asia have recently focused on the salience of this factor.<sup>2</sup> Gordon Redding, for example, has argued that Confucian values have substantially shaped present-day Chinese business behaviour and practices. He has even contended that the Chinese family firm itself can be regarded as a cultural artefact and 'a creature of Chinese traditions' (Redding, 1993: 143). Others have studied the informal Chinese business network which has emerged in the region, one held together by ethnic and cultural bonds (Hamilton, 1991: 5–6; Sender, 1991: 29). Run virtually exclusively for the benefit of the Chinese business community in South-

East and East Asia, this network circulates information on market conditions, business opportunities, pricing and sourcing, and the credit worthiness of fellow entrepreneurs.

It is argued here that Chinese culture only partially accounts for the efficacy of Chinese economic performance in Malaysia. While it is true that Confucian values have provided the synergy and dynamism of the Chinese family-based business, patronage from the Malay-dominated state and partnerships with bumiputra and foreign concerns have been equally important to the growth of Chinese entrepreneurship in Malaysia, particularly at the level of big business.

The Chinese business environment in Malaysia is analysed at three levels: (a) the domestic environment, particularly the relationship between the Malay-dominated state and Chinese businesses, and the linkages between Chinese and Malay entrepreneurs; (b) the international environment, especially the relationship between Chinese and foreign capital within the context of political and economic change, as exemplified by the process of decolonization and independence in Malaysia and the integration of the Malaysian economy into the capitalist global economy; and (c) the internal environment of Chinese corporate culture, including Chinese business values and practices, as well as the responses of the Chinese business community to opportunities and challenges arising from the domestic and international environment.

The themes outlined above are developed chronologically to provide a historical perspective of the Chinese economic role during the four landmark periods of political and economic change in Malaysia: (a) the final phase of British colonialism marked by decolonization and Malayan independence, 1945-57; (b) *laissez-faire* capitalism during the Tunku Abdul Rahman Administration, 1957-69; (c) state interventionism during the NEP period, 1970-91; and (d) economic deregulation during the New Development Policy (NDP) period, 1991 to the present.

### **The Chinese Business Community and the Colonial State**

A small but significant Chinese mercantile presence preceded the arrival of the British in Malaya. Chinese traders from the south-east Chinese province of Fujian had settled in Malacca since the end of the fifteenth century to participate in the lucrative maritime trade centred on the Malacca Sultanate. The Chinese trading community thrived and expanded under Portuguese and Dutch rule but it was British colonial rule that opened up opportunities for mass immigration and settlement in the Straits Settlements (established in 1826) and the Malay states, which came under British control at different stages beginning in 1874.

The relationship between Chinese economic activities and the colonial rulers was mutually beneficial. British policies facilitated the flow of Chinese immigrant labour, but the initiatives in mobilizing and organizing pioneering work came from the Chinese themselves. Chinese ven-

ture capital which financed the earliest commercial cash crops of the colonial economy—pepper, gambier, and sugar—originated from the established Chinese mercantile community in the Straits Settlements. Subsequent Chinese enterprises in tin mining and rubber cultivation were likewise established by Chinese capital and labour.<sup>3</sup>

Chinese economic activities, although diverse and widespread, by no means dominated the colonial economy. While it is true that the Chinese economic role overshadowed that of Malays, who were mainly subsistence rice farmers and rubber smallholders, and Indians, who were mainly rubber plantation workers, Chinese capital was eclipsed by Western, primarily British, capital. At the same time, only a minority of Chinese were self-employed small proprietors, and even fewer were affluent capitalists. The large majority of the Chinese work-force were lowly paid wage earners employed in tin mines, rubber plantations, and unskilled urban sector jobs. At the end of the colonial era, Chinese business activities were concentrated mainly in the production of tin and rubber, haulage and transportation, rice milling, food processing, light small-scale manufacturing, and the distributive and service trades.

The concentration of Chinese capital in the commercial, as opposed to the agricultural, sector stemmed from two major factors. Colonial policy, as reflected in the Malay Reservations Enactment of 1913, restricted Chinese access to agricultural pursuits, particularly rice farming (Lim, 1977: 103–16). At the same time, few Chinese were inclined to tie up their savings in agricultural land, as it was more profitable to invest in commercial enterprises with opportunities for quick turnover. The retail and distributive trade, which entailed minimal start-up capital, presented the greatest opportunities for self-employment and upward mobility for wage earners with sufficient savings.

In his ground-breaking study of ownership and control in the colonial economy, James Puthuchery stated: 'There is a popular view, widely held, that the Chinese control commerce. This is false' (Puthuchery, 1979: xiv). He gave the following breakdown for foreign (largely British) and Chinese economic activities for the period 1953–55: foreign capital controlled approximately 65–75 per cent of the export trade and 60–70 per cent of import trade; foreign companies owned 75 per cent of import agency houses against 10 per cent owned by Chinese; foreign companies produced 60 per cent of tin output against 40 per cent mined by Chinese; and foreign companies controlled 75 per cent of large plantations (mainly rubber). However, smallholding (mainly rubber) cultivation was controlled entirely by local capital: out of a total of about 1.11 million hectares under cultivation, Malay, Chinese, and Indian smallholders owned approximately 0.75, 0.32 and 0.04 million hectares respectively (Puthuchery, 1979: xiii–xvii).

Only in light manufacturing and the distributive trades did Chinese capital exceed the share of foreign capital. Far from dominating the colonial economy, Chinese entrepreneurs served mainly as middlemen and compradores of British economic interests.

The first generation of Chinese capitalists in Malaya were dependent

on colonial patronage to accumulate wealth, but the relationship between Chinese capital and the colonial state was mutually beneficial. These capitalists were the successful bidders on opportunities to obtain monopoly rights to collect taxes on opium, alcohol, gambling, and other goods and services sought by the Chinese work-force in tin mines and plantations. They paid large fees, or rents, to the authorities for the rights to operate these 'revenue farms' (also called 'excise farms'), and the successful bidders were known as 'revenue farmers'. From 1850 to 1910 when the revenue farm system was abolished, rents obtained from farming out the collection of taxes to Chinese merchants constituted an important source of revenue for the colonial government (Trocki, 1990: 70-8). At the same time, the revenue farmers, particularly those operating opium concessions, functioned as the major arm of the colonial government in administering Chinese community affairs. For their services, the most influential revenue farmers were recognized as *Kapitan China* (Chinese captain), a title which bestowed the highest leadership status within the Chinese community.

The first generation of Chinese capitalists were also invariably leaders of *kongsi* (workers' associations), secret societies, dialect associations, and other Chinese socio-economic groupings. These men included Cheang Hong Lim, Seah Eu Chin, Tan Kim Cheng, and Tan Seng Poh of Singapore, Chin Ah Yam and Chang Keng Kwee of Perak, as well as Yap Ah Loy, Yap Kwan Seng, and Loke Yew of Selangor (Yen, 1986). It was their institutional control of Chinese economic activities that made their financial and jurisdictional services so crucial to the colonial government until the end of the nineteenth century.

The largest Chinese fortunes during the colonial period were founded on tin mining and rubber planting. Yap Ah Loy, Yap Kwan Seng, and Loke Yew grew rich from pioneering the tin mining industry in Selangor. Other prominent Chinese tin miners included Chang Pi Shih, Khoo Thean Teik, Foo Tye Sin, Ong Boon Teik, and Koh Siang Tat (Ampalavanar Brown, 1994: 82). Chinese entrepreneurs who were instrumental in developing the rubber industry included Tan Kah Kee, Tan Lark Sye, and Lee Kong Chian of Singapore, Tan Chay Yan of Malacca, and Cheong Yeok Choy of Kuala Lumpur.

After 1900, the need for long-term financing in the rubber industry galvanized Chinese ventures in modern banking. Between 1903 and 1932, 15 Chinese banks were established in the Straits Settlements and Malaya (ibid: 160). The founding of these banks in turn generated a major source of capital for Chinese business expansion and diversification from commodity-based production to light manufacturing, food processing, shipping, transportation, property development, and other industries. The first Chinese banks were established by dialect group leaders primarily to benefit their own dialect groups. For example, key Hokkien entrepreneurs in Singapore, led by Lee Kong Chian, Tan Kah Kee, Lim Boon Keng, Lim Peng Siang, Tan Ean Khiam, Lim Ngee Soon, and Tan Tiong Seng, founded the three major banks serving the Hokkien community in the Straits Settlements and Malaya: the Chinese



Commercial Bank, Overseas Chinese Bank, and Ho Hong Bank. The Teochew-based Sze Hai Tong Bank was founded by a group of Singapore Teochew capitalists led by Low Peng Yam. In 1932, the three Hokkien banks merged into the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) which became a financial key to Chinese economic expansion and diversification, not only in Malaya but throughout South-East Asia (ibid: 161-72).

### Chinese Corporate Culture during the Colonial Period

The relationship between Chinese culture and Chinese business practices and management styles was clearly evident during the colonial period. The Chinese civilizing system, generally known as Confucianism, encompasses the set of social and moral values which have determined Chinese family patterns, social relationships, attitudes towards the state, educational practices, and other fundamental features of Chinese life in China through the centuries. As Redding explained: 'Directly Confucian ideals, and especially familism as a central tenet, are still well enough embedded in the minds of most overseas Chinese to make Confucianism the most apposite single-word label for the values which govern most of their social behaviour' (Redding, 1993: 2).

The Confucian heritage both shaped Chinese organizational structures such as the Chinese family firm, Chinese guilds, and associations, and also facilitated transactions within the Chinese business community. During the nineteenth century, secret societies, kinship groups, and dialect-based associations mobilized labour and capital for pioneer work, serving at the same time as networking instruments for their members to gather and exchange information about market conditions and business opportunities.

Chinese business activities based on networks of personalistic ties were, and still are, buttressed by the Confucian moral precepts of *guanxi* and *xinyong*. *Guanxi*, usually defined as social relationships, or the networks of useful personal relationships, stems from the Confucian emphasis on the need to maintain harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships. The moral underpinnings of *xinyong*—which stands for trustworthiness and creditworthiness in Chinese corporate culture, that is, one's ability to meet business and financial obligations—are the Confucian values of *li* (propriety or gentlemanly conduct) and *jen* (benevolence or human heartedness).<sup>4</sup> From colonial times until the present day, *guanxi* and *xinyong* have served as intangible Chinese factors of production, that is, 'cultural capital' which has been as essential as capital, labour, land, and other inputs (such as thrift, hard work, and discipline) for running a Chinese business.

After the nineteenth century, when rapid inflows of Chinese female immigrants transformed a predominantly male and transient population into a settled community, family-based firms replaced the male-dominated secret societies, guilds, and associations as the driving force

of Chinese economic life. China-born parents instilled Confucian values of familism—filial piety, respect for paternal authority, diligence, and subordination of the individual to the greater need of the family—in their children. While Chinese immigration flows into Malaysia have ceased since 1957, the Confucian-based socialization process has continued to the present, particularly within the majority Chinese-educated and Chinese-speaking population.

The strengths of the Chinese family as a corporate organization, as identified by business management specialists, include the following: strong identification with the goals of the boss (usually the founding patriarch), compliance by diligent subordinates, long lasting and stable employer–employee relationships, low transaction costs in economic exchanges, reliability of networks and linkages, intensity of managerial commitment, and strategic flexibility and adaptability to a changing business environment (Redding, 1993: 205–25; Chen, 1995: 85–94).

### The Colonial Business Environment

The colonial business environment, one characterized by a lack of local competition and underdeveloped legal, administrative, financial, and communications infrastructures, was highly conducive to the growth of Chinese business. Chinese entrepreneurs used their nation-wide network of guilds and associations to facilitate and regulate business transactions. After 1906, Qing Government officials encouraged the formation of Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Singapore and Malaya to promote both Chinese commerce and Chinese nationalism within the *Huaqiao* (overseas Chinese) population in South-East Asia. Chinese entrepreneurs relied primarily on these pan-dialect institutions to mobilize capital, exchange market information, identify new market niches, and adjudicate business disputes (Heng, 1988: 19–20).

British policies, by keeping Malays tied down to subsistence rice farming and other agricultural pursuits, retarded the growth of a Malay entrepreneurial class. By contrast, the Chinese middleman role in mineral extraction, cash crop cultivation, and the distributive trade greatly assisted British exploitation of the colonial economy. Chinese entrepreneurs performed a wide range of intermediary services sought by domestic producers and consumers on the one hand, and by international buyers and suppliers on the other. They helped finance, collect, process, and transport export commodities for domestic producers. They distributed, on behalf of foreign sellers, manufactured goods and products to the most distant parts of the country.

Although Chinese traders charged high interest rates on loans to Malay peasant clients, the rates were perceived by Chinese lenders to be commensurate with the high risk of lending unsecured loans. Chinese traders often constituted the sole source of financing for the majority of rural Malays who lacked the collateral to secure lower interest loans from formal financial houses. At the same time, these entrepreneurs contributed significantly to the growth of the rural economy by circulating

goods, credit, and services which were largely unavailable to Malay households at the time.

Although the British authorities eventually consolidated their administrative and legal reach throughout the country, Chinese entrepreneurs continued to rely on their networks to carry out business transactions. When the colonial era drew to a close, Chinese business had acquired such dynamic momentum that the Malay-dominated Alliance government did not succeed in their efforts to close the Chinese-Malay income gap until after 1970.

### **Chinese Business in the Period of *Laissez-Faire* Capitalism, 1957-1969**

The domestic and international environment in the decade after independence continued to be highly conducive to Chinese business interests. The Alliance coalition government led by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was committed to an economic regime based on *laissez-faire* capitalism and open competition, and sought to stimulate growth through import substitution industrialization (ISI). While British capital continued to dominate the mining, plantation, import-export, and financial sectors, the end of colonial rule inevitably loosened their economic hold, thus opening up unprecedented opportunities for Chinese investments. To better understand why free market economics prevailed during this period, one needs to turn the discussion to the role played by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) leadership in the Alliance government.

#### **The MCA Leadership and Free Market Economics**

Even before independence, the MCA had played a key role in shaping national economic policies which greatly benefited Chinese business interests. It was formed in 1949 to mobilize conservative Chinese opinion against the Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) revolutionary bid for power and its natural constituency was the Chinese business community (*ibid.*: Chapter 4). From the early 1950s until 1969, while clearly politically subordinate to the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in the Alliance coalition, MCA leaders wielded more economic clout than UMNO leaders. This occurred primarily because the first generation of UMNO leaders, drawn mainly from landed aristocratic and bureaucratic backgrounds, lacked hands-on business experience and practical knowledge of the workings of domestic and international markets. The UMNO leadership thus depended on the MCA to provide economic leadership.

MCA's key role in shaping national economic policies was already evident in the country's first federal election in 1955 when party leaders successfully persuaded UMNO to drop a slate of state-interventionist pro-Malay affirmative action policies from the Alliance election manifesto.

The UMNO election memorandum contained several proposals

aimed at advancing Malay welfare which were even more far-reaching than those implemented under the NEP. It declared that only state-owned co-operatives should be allowed to process, transport, and market Malay agricultural produce, and that 'all other private undertakings should be abolished by law'. It also recommended 'drastic and direct Government involvement' in education, agriculture, industry, trade, and commerce to ensure 'rapid and active [Malay] participation in the economic life of the country' (ibid: 209). Measures outlining preferential treatment for Malays in gaining scholarships and access to educational institutions, acquiring business licences and bank loans, and securing private sector employment opportunities were likewise proposed.

The MCA nipped the bud of Malay economic nationalism at this juncture by deploying several arguments. First, it stated that a curtailment of Chinese business interests would not alleviate Malay poverty because it was British, not Chinese, capital that dominated the Malayan economy. Second, it pointed out that the fledgling Alliance could not afford to alienate the Chinese vote since it needed to win the election as a credible multiracial coalition in order to convince the British to hand over power. Last, but not least, the MCA wooed UMNO compliance by bearing most of the election costs (ibid: 164-5).

The MCA-inspired Alliance election pledges were drawn up by Tun H. S. Lee and Tun Leong Yew Koh who were both wealthy tin miners. H. S. Lee was then president of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Malaya (ACCCIM), formed in 1947 to co-ordinate all Chinese economic activities in the country. The MCA position was strongly committed to free enterprise and open competition. However, it accepted a limited form of state interventionism to safeguard the constitutional special rights of Malays. For example, Malays would benefit from state action in more licences in forestry, sawmilling, tin mining, rubber, and other agricultural produce enterprises; more education and training centres; and more loans for operating businesses such as hotels, restaurants, petrol kiosks, and public transportation—provided non-Malay interests were unharmed. The conditionality of Malay special rights—that they should not be granted at the expense of Chinese interests—was the objective MCA leaders had in mind when they insisted on the inclusion of Article 153 (a) in the country's independence constitution. The article reads: 'Nothing in this Article shall empower Parliament to restrict business or trade solely for the purpose of reservation for Malays.'

It was Tun Tan Siew Sin (MCA president from 1961 to 1974), more than any other MCA leader involved in the independence talks with UMNO and the British authorities, who had pressed for that constitutional safeguard for Chinese business interests (ibid: 235-6). After independence, he, more than any other Chinese leader up to the present time, was pivotal in protecting and advancing Chinese business interests.

Tan Siew Sin's political clout stemmed primarily from a strong, personal relationship with Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, who appointed him Minister of Commerce and Industry from 1957-9, and

Minister of Finance from 1959, a position he held till his retirement from politics in 1974. Tan prevailed on the Tunku to implement a limited Malay special rights policy. The clearest manifestation of Tan's political clout was his role in the dismissal of Agricultural Minister Abdul Aziz Ishak in early 1963. Deeply frustrated and disappointed by the Alliance's feeble championing of Malay special rights, Aziz Ishak had proposed a radical plan to set up state-operated milling co-operatives to help Malay farmers lessen their dependence on Chinese rice millers and distributors. The MCA vociferously condemned Aziz Ishak's moves, and Tan prevailed on the Tunku to remove Aziz from his position.

The Tunku's justification of his action was supported by the Chinese but it deeply angered the faction of Malay economic nationalists within UMNO who had supported Aziz Ishak. He stated: 'he [Aziz] has confiscated all the licences of Chinese rice millers in northern Perak and Province Wellesley with which to win Malays. But this way of doing things was wrong: it was like the adage "robbing Peter to pay Paul"' (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1977: 243). Tunku Abdul Rahman's liberal inclinations and commitment to the principle of fair play, therefore, kept the forces of Malay economic nationalism at bay.

The workings of the free market and open competition brought unprecedented opportunities for Chinese business expansion and diversification. Under the ISI policies monitored by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, headed by MCA leaders, Chinese businesses, including small and medium-scale enterprises, made significant gains in almost every economic sector. In 1970, on the eve of the NEP, Chinese economic assets made up 52.8 per cent of total fixed assets in the construction sector, 43.3 per cent in the transportation sector, and 30.4 per cent in the commercial sector. However, a relatively small number of foreign multinational companies still dominated the manufacturing, mining, and agricultural sectors. In terms of fixed assets in the corporate industrial sector, the Chinese share of total values of fixed assets was only 26.2 per cent compared to the foreign ownership share of 57.2 per cent, but the Malay and Indian share accounted for only 1 per cent. The Chinese share of non-corporate fixed assets exceeded 92 per cent, but the value of assets accounted for by the non-corporate sector was small, making up only 12.6 per cent of the nation's total fixed assets. Chinese ownership of total hectareage in the corporate agricultural sector (mainly rubber and oil palm) was 25.9 per cent, compared to the foreign share of 70.8 per cent (Malaysia, 1973: 11).

An MCA report prepared in 1970 provided further evidence of the gains made by Chinese businesses in the urban sector. In the construction industry, for projects valued at RM 100,000 or more,<sup>5</sup> Chinese firms accounted for 88.5 per cent of fixed assets, and 84.7 per cent of the value of construction output. In addition, they employed 89.6 per cent of the work-force. In the commercial sector, Chinese firms accounted for 66 per cent of total turnover in wholesale and 81 per cent of retail trade, and employed 62 per cent and 76 per cent of the wholesale and retail work-force respectively. In the manufacturing sector, Chinese

firms accounted for 32.5 per cent of total fixed assets, compared to 51 per cent and 0.9 per cent owned by foreign and Malay firms respectively. Chinese firms absorbed 57 per cent of all full-time paid labour, while foreign firms took in 33 per cent of the total. Chinese workers made up 61.3 per cent of the full-time labour, while Malays accounted for 28.7 per cent of the total (Lew, 1974).

Tunku Abdul Rahman's efforts to improve Malay welfare were largely confined to rural projects, beginning with the setting up of the Ministry of Rural and National Development headed by then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein. The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) and the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA or Council of Trust for the Indigenous People) were also established to promote agrarian-based Malay economic activities. Many Malays benefited greatly from Razak's massive rural development programmes and a nascent Malay entrepreneur class did emerge. However, the new Malay capitalists were mainly 'rentier capitalists' who relied heavily on Chinese partners to carry out the actual tasks of fulfilling contracts and other business obligations. According to Shamsul A. B., most of the Malay new rich (*orang kaya baru*) were UMNO politicians who got the tenders and contracts for rural development projects but who subcontracted the work to Chinese entrepreneurs for a percentage of profits earned (Shamsul 1996: 9). It was during the 1960s that such 'Ali-Baba' business alliances emerged, a phenomenon which is discussed in greater depth further on.

In the absence of an aggressive and multisectoral Malay special rights strategy, Chinese income levels inevitably increased faster than Malay levels. By 1970, income and sectoral imbalances between Malays and non-Malays had become acute. The poverty incidence among Malay households was 65 per cent, compared to 26 per cent for Chinese households. Malay monthly mean household income was RM 172, and per capita Malay income per month was RM 34, compared to the Chinese figures of RM 394 and RM 68 respectively (Malaysia, 1971: 5). Finally, in terms of ownership of corporate equity in the country, foreign capital dominated with its 63.3 per cent share; the Chinese, Malay, and Indian share was 27.2 per cent, 2.4 per cent, and 1.1 per cent respectively, and 6 per cent was listed separately as equity owned by nominee companies and third company minority holdings (Malaysia, 1976: 184).

Alliance policies during this period essentially reflected the different priorities placed by Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tan Siew Sin on Malay and Chinese interests. While the Prime Minister gave top priority to the advancement of Malay cultural rights, his Finance Minister saw the promotion of Chinese business interests as being integral to his growth policies for Malaysia. What ensued was a 'trade-off' between the two men: while the Tunku conceded to Tan's championing of Chinese economic interests, Tan supported UMNO's initiatives to elevate the status of Malay culture and language, as seen in his endorsement of the 1961 Education Act and the 1967 National Language Bill.

By the mid-1960s, however, angry voices were clamouring for the removal of both these leaders. The Tunku was subject to increasingly hostile criticism from UMNO economic nationalists, in particular, Mahathir Mohamad (Khoo, 1996: 17-48). Tan Siew Sin was condemned not only by Chinese opposition leaders, Chinese educationists, and the Chinese press, but also by his own party rank and file, for failing to protect Chinese political and cultural rights. The 'accommodationist centre' in Malaysian politics fell apart during the 1969 general election when both UMNO and MCA suffered unprecedented electoral losses, the former to the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP, later known as PAS), and the latter to the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) or the Malaysian People's Movement. On 13 May, rioting broke out between Malays and Chinese, bringing in its wake changes that radically altered the relationship of the Malaysian state and Chinese business.

### Chinese Big Business during the Alliance Period

The liberal economic climate of the Alliance period fostered the robust growth of Malaysian Sino-capitalism and many small Chinese family businesses were transformed into large conglomerates. The ingredients for success were the cultivation of state patronage, utilization of foreign capital and technology, and continued reliance on *guanxi* and *xinyong* business networking.

Compared to the NEP period, although Malay patronage was not crucial to Chinese business success, Chinese entrepreneurs who actively brought in Malay patrons/partners into their businesses did exceedingly well. While the MCA leadership performed the function of keeping the forces of Malay economic nationalism at bay, the actual gatekeepers to business opportunities were Malay senior bureaucrats who allocated licences, dispensed permits and awarded contracts. Malay royal patronage was also important. Before the Mahathir Administration passed legislation in 1993 to curb royal prerogatives, the sultans, in their positions as the constitutional heads of state legislatures, actively sought to influence state policies to benefit their clients, particularly decisions pertaining to land use and sales (Singh, 1995: 197-205).

The meteoric rise of Tan Sri Robert Kuok Hock Nien vividly illustrates the manner in which a small family business transformed itself into the largest Malaysian Chinese multinational corporation to date, one with corporate headquarters located in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Hong Kong, and a global reach spanning 16 countries at the time of writing.<sup>6</sup> The Kuok Group is engaged in a widely diverse range of activities: commodity trading (particularly sugar), financial services, hotel ownership and management (represented by its flagship Shangri-La chain), property development, plantations, vegetable oil refining, shipping, manufacturing (primarily packaging of food products), retail sales, mass media, and entertainment.

Kuok demonstrated a remarkable knack for political networking

among the Malay power élite at least 10 years before the rest of the Chinese business community was compelled by the NEP to establish similar linkages with Malay political patrons. He was among the first Chinese entrepreneurs to co-opt Malays as substantive business partners and as minority shareholders. He also skilfully utilized foreign capital and technology to expand and upgrade his business. When he established his first large-scale enterprise in Malaysia in 1959 (Malayan Sugar Manufacturing), he turned to two Japanese concerns, Nissin Sugar Manufacturing and Mitsui Bussan Kaisha. His major partner in international sugar trading was French (Sudden)—Kuok's 30 per cent owned Sudden Kerry International handled up to 60 per cent of global sugar transactions in the early 1990s (Friedland, 1991: 4). More recently, he set up a joint venture with American-owned Coca-Cola to establish bottling plants in China.

Although English-educated, Robert Kuok has attributed his success to having conducted business in accordance with Confucian business ethics. He recalled his childhood socialization in Confucian business values in the following words: 'As children, we learned about moral values—mainly Confucian. As father was a businessman, terms such as "business integrity", "honour", "your word's your bond" were often used by the elders and sank into our minds' (Studwell, 1994: 30).

Other Malaysian Sino-capitalists who dominated the corporate scene during this period—such as Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong (Genting Berhad), Tan Sri Quek Leng Chan (Hong Leong Group), Tan Sri Lee Loy Seng (Kuala Lumpur Kepong), Datuk Teo Soo Cheng (See Hoy Chan Group), and Tan Sri Loh Boon Siew (Oriental Holdings)—followed business strategies similar to those taken by Kuok.<sup>7</sup> Compared to these men, Kuok owed his business success during this period more to Malay patronage and foreign joint ventures than to institutional ties with Chinese Chambers of Commerce, guilds, and associations. However, while most Malaysian Sino-capitalists intensified their ties with Malay politicians and business partners after the NEP was implemented, Kuok's Malay political and business connections became increasingly less vital to his overall business position as his offshore investments expanded more rapidly than his domestic operations.

### **Chinese Business in the Interventionist NEP State, 1970–1990**

In September 1970, Tun Abdul Razak, who replaced the Tunku as Prime Minister, reintroduced parliamentary democracy after a 21-month period of emergency rule under the UMNO-led National Operations Council. The Alliance coalition was replaced by the expanded Barisan Nasional (BN or National Front) government. Constitutional amendments were introduced that resulted in the concentration of power in the UMNO leadership and to limit the parameters of public discourse on racially salient issues, particularly the subject of Malay and Chinese rights (Means, 1991: 14–6).



The main concern of the Razak Administration, as well as the succeeding Hussein Onn Administration, was to implement UMNO's long overdue objective of redressing the problem of Malay economic weakness through state interventionist measures embodied in the NEP.

The NEP's implementation and the loss of Chinese influence at the power centre inevitably made the domestic environment much more difficult for Chinese business interests. Although the avowed objective of the NEP was to rebuild national unity in the wake of the racial rioting, the NEP's reliance on state intervention to advance Malay economic welfare was essentially detrimental to Chinese interests. Malay income levels were to be raised within the NEP's 20-year time frame, mainly through a 'two-pronged' approach: reduction of poverty irrespective of race and restructuring of Malaysian society to eliminate identification of race with economic function (Malaysia, 1971: 1). Although a quarter of Chinese households still lived below the government-designated poverty line in 1971 (and an even larger proportion of Indian households), the NEP was more concerned with reducing Malay rural poverty. Its restructuring objective sought to expand Malay employment in the urban sector, and to raise the Malay share of corporate equity from 2.4 per cent to 30 per cent by 1990. The Chinese share would be allowed to grow more slowly from 27.2 per cent to 40 per cent, and the foreign share would be reduced to 30 per cent. (Malaysia, 1976: 184). Although social restructuring would take place within the context of a 'just and progressive Malaysian society in a rapidly expanding economy so no one [would] experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity',<sup>8</sup> the Chinese were understandably deeply worried that the NEP would negatively impact on their economic interests. However, by 1991 when the NEP drew to a close, both the Malay and Chinese political and business leadership appeared essentially satisfied with its results.

#### *Malay Economic Gains under the NEP*

Quite remarkably, the NEP's highly ambitious goals of sectoral employment and income restructuring were achieved with little political or economic instability. This occurred because redistribution did fortuitously take place within the context of a steadily expanding economy. Growing at an average annual rate of 8.9 per cent from 1988 to 1996, and with per capita income in terms of purchasing power parity rising from US\$9,470 in 1995 (Malaysia, 1996: 5), Malaysia became one of South-East Asia's strongest economies by the late 1980s. While a privileged coterie of politically well-connected Malays and non-Malays acquired large fortunes (Gomez, 1994), most Malaysians (with the exception of unskilled Indian labour) made more modest economic gains.

The economic progress of the Malays in the corporate sector has been impressive indeed. New bumiputra enterprises grew very rapidly and many were able to obtain listing on the stock exchange within an incredibly short period of only three to four years, as compared to a

much longer gestation period (up to 20 years) of the best performing Chinese businesses (Sieh, 1994: 1). In almost every economic sector, bumiputra participation in every sense, including employment, ownership, and management, grew significantly (Sieh, 1992: 112-21). Malay employment in the urban sector even exceeded targets set by the NEP. For example, the percentage of Malays employed in the secondary sector (manufacturing, construction, utilities, transportation, and mining) grew from 12.1 per cent in 1970 to 30.5 per cent in 1990, surpassing the 26.8 per cent target. The figures for the tertiary sector (wholesale and retail trade, finance, government, and other services) were 21.7 per cent in 1970, an achieved goal of 40.5 per cent 1990, compared to the targeted goal of 35.8 per cent (Malaysia, 1991a: 49).

Similarly impressive gains were obtained in equity restructuring, particularly in the plantation and mining sectors where large state-run enterprises led by Perbadanan Nasional (Pernas or National Trading Corporation) dramatically increased Malay equity holdings through acquisitions and take-overs of British agency houses. By mid-1984, it was estimated that equity held by Malay trust companies and individual bumiputra in the commercial banking sector had grown to 75 per cent. Malay-controlled public sector investments in heavy manufacturing, in partnership with foreign joint venture capital, likewise surpassed Chinese investments (Heng, 1992: 130-1).

The Gerakan Party claimed that the bumiputra equity target had been reached as early as 1986: 'Our own rough estimate shows corporate share ownership by bumiputras far exceeds the 30 per cent target in plantation agriculture (45 per cent) and mining (50 per cent) while it is more than double the target in the banking and finance sectors' (*Malaysian Business*, 16 October 1986). However, official statistics released in 1991 claimed a Malay equity ownership proportion of 20.3 per cent, some 10 per cent short of the NEP target (Malaysia, 1991a: 49). The non-Malay (mostly Chinese) share was 46.2 per cent (higher than the targeted rate of 40 per cent), and the foreign share was 25.1 per cent (lower than the targeted rate of 30 per cent). A separate category, listed as 'nominee companies', owned the remaining 8.4 per cent share. The official figures have been disputed by Chinese leaders who, rightly or wrongly, believe that most of the percentage owned by nominee companies should count towards the Malay share since these companies serve mainly as vehicles to preserve the anonymity of politically sensitive identities of powerful UMNO leaders.<sup>9</sup>

### **The NEP's Impact on Chinese Businesses**

The impact of the NEP fell unevenly on different socio-economic groups within the Chinese community. The biggest casualties were the Chinese urban and rural working class. The Chinese New Village population, which by 1989 had reached 1.8 million, making up one-third of the rural population, derived minimal benefit from poverty eradication policies which were targeted primarily at improving the lot of Malay rice

farmers, and rubber and oil palm smallholders (Loh, 1988: 269-72; MCA, 1989: 24). Chinese entrepreneurs made progress as a group, although the biggest winners were the large conglomerates owned by 'new money' Sino-capitalists. Chinese-owned businesses struggled to compete in a narrowing market even while the economy was expanding. They faced increasingly severe Malay competition in sectors where they have traditionally been strong: construction, transportation, and distribution. In the wholesale and retail trade, for example, the number of Malay-owned firms increased by 10 times and their turnover by almost 40 times for the period 1971-81; in contrast, Chinese-owned firms managed to increase their numbers by less than three times and their turn over by only five times (Malaysia, 1986: 114-5).

Chinese small businesses, however, were protected from public and private sector bumiputra competition to some extent, 'because they belonged to the tight nexus between Chinese customers, retailers and wholesalers' (Jesudason, 1989: 163). They were buttressed by the purchasing power of the predominantly Chinese Malaysian middle class, by the organizational and financial resources of a well-developed Chinese business network, and by cost-effective business practices of the Chinese family firm.

The fundamental shift in the relationship between the state and Chinese capital forced Chinese enterprises to make business and operational adjustments. The greatest loss in business opportunities occurred in the public sector where almost all contracts supplying goods and services to government agencies were awarded to newly established bumiputra firms. Thus, for Chinese businesses to grow, the private sector had to expand at a very rapid rate so that Chinese firms that had been displaced in the public sector could remain in business. But a host of new difficulties also emerged in the private sector. Licences in printing, petrol service stations, air and shipping transportation, logging, sawmilling, mining, rubber dealing, timber export and vehicle import, banking and finance, telecommunications, as well as other activities supervised or controlled by the state, were either solely or predominantly reserved for Malays (ACCCIM, 1978; Jesudason, 1989: 132). At the same time, there was widespread perception that Malay government officials responsible for approving business permits and licences were inflexible and uncooperative in their dealings with the Chinese business community.

Official statistics released in 1991 revealed the remarkable fact that Chinese businesses had done well despite the unfavourable climate of the NEP. While the mean monthly Malay household income period rose from RM 172 to RM 931 during the NEP period, the Chinese figures rose from RM 394 to RM 1,582 (Malaysia, 1991a: 45). As seen above, the non-Malay (almost entirely Chinese) share of corporate equity grew from 32.3 per cent in 1979 to 46.2 per cent in 1990, exceeding the NEP target of 40 per cent.

*Chinese Corporate Responses to the NEP*

To better understand how Chinese businesses surmounted the obstacles embodied by the NEP, one needs first to look more closely at the nature of these challenges, then at the manner in which they were overcome.

The greatest impediments to Chinese business posed by the state were NEP regulations and policies which overtly favoured Malay interests. The Industrial Coordination Act (ICA) enacted in 1975 was widely regarded by Chinese business interests as the most draconian of all NEP measures. It required non-Malay manufacturing firms with more than RM 100,000 in shareholders' funds and employing more than 25 workers to divest at least 30 per cent of their equity to Malay shareholders. The number of Malays in their work-force had to reflect the Malay proportion in the country's population, a figure understood to be at least 50 per cent (Jesudason, 1989: 135-7). Although the ICA was amended in 1977—due to successful lobbying by foreign and Chinese business interests represented in the Malaysian International Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MICCI), the predominantly Chinese Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM), and the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ACCCIM)—the changes made still fell far short of Chinese expectations (ACCCIM, 1978). Under the new conditions, firms with more than RM 250,000 in shareholders' funds and employing more than 25 workers had to obtain manufacturing licences, and firms with more than RM 500,000 in fixed investments had to comply with the 30 per cent bumiputra equity restructuring.

The NEP state created and empowered hundreds of public enterprises to acquire economic resources on behalf of Malays. Apart from public sector competition, Chinese businesses also faced competition from private sector bumiputra concerns. Foreign investments sought by the state also narrowed the scope of Chinese business opportunities, particularly in highly capitalized and technology-intensive projects, as exemplified by the 'Made-in-Malaysia' automobile joint venture between Heavy Industry Corporation of Malaysia (HICOM) and Mitsubishi Motor Corporation of Japan.

Foreign capital was vital in several ways to the Malaysian state in achieving its NEP goals. In laying the foundations for economic growth based on export-oriented industrialization (EOI), foreign capital contributed, first, to the goal of employment restructuring. Low-skilled and low-paid assembly line jobs in Western and Japanese factories generated the emergence of a Malay urban work-force. Second, equity restructuring was achieved to a significant degree at the expense of foreign, especially British, capital. When the NEP ended, the share of foreign-owned corporate equity in Malaysia had been sharply reduced to 25.1 per cent from the 1970 level of 63.3 per cent. Third, foreign investors provided an alternative, and larger, source of investments to local Chinese capital. State collaboration with foreign capital was thus regarded as an 'ethnic bypass' strategy: a means to decrease Malay dependence on Chinese

business and to reduce the Chinese hold over the Malaysian economy (Jesudason 1989, 167; Jomo, 1994: 100).

While Chinese entrepreneurs might justifiably argue that state policies which gave preferential treatment to foreign investors discriminated against them, such policies were, in fact, essential to Malaysia's industrialization. Malaysian Sino-capitalists lacked the capital, and more important, the technology and management techniques necessary to develop capital- and technology-intensive industries. The primary objective of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's 'Look East' policy, which favoured Japanese and Korean investments in Malaysia, was to jump-start Malaysia's heavy industrialization programmes (Machado, 1987). Chinese business interests nevertheless suffered as they were systematically 'bypassed' in the awarding of contracts pertaining to state projects, even if their bids came in substantially lower than those submitted by Malay competitors with Japanese and Korean joint venture partners.

How then did the Chinese business community respond to the myriad challenges posed by the NEP? There were two different coping strategies; one reflected the strategy urged by the MCA, and the other was the response of the Chinese business community at large.<sup>10</sup> The MCA leadership argued for internal change: a reform of the traditional Chinese family-based business itself. The majority of Chinese businesses rejected this remedy. Instead, they used the resources of their family firms to transform perceived liabilities posed by the NEP state into business assets. Chinese entrepreneurs who chose this route followed in the footsteps of successful pre-NEP Sino-capitalists such as Robert Kuok, who skilfully engaged the state, private sector bumiputra business, and foreign capital in a collaborative, and not competitive-adversarial relationship. While it was the family-based businesses that came up with the winning strategies, an MCA-led initiative commanded attention at the start of the NEP.

#### *The MCA-led Chinese Corporatization Movement*

The MCA-led corporatization movement initiated in the mid-1970s, in seeking to reform traditional Chinese business practices, was a revolutionary attempt to change the landscape of Chinese business in Malaysia. As discussed earlier, the MCA had effectively represented Chinese business interests when party leaders exercised influence in the Alliance ruling coalition. Having lost the ability to advance Chinese business interests from within the corridors of power, the MCA sought to mobilize popular support by actively involving itself in the corporate affairs of the Chinese community.

The party's primary objective was to reform traditional Chinese business practices. Party leaders argued that Chinese enterprises were too small and undercapitalized to withstand competition from large state enterprises such as the state economic development corporations (SEDCs), Pernas, and Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB, or National

Equity Corporation) that were aggressively acquiring assets on behalf of Malays. In the early 1970s, for example, 77 per cent of Chinese firms in the manufacturing sector were small family-owned sole proprietorships or partnerships. Fixed assets of Chinese manufacturing businesses averaged RM 148,000 per firm, compared to an average of RM 1.26 million for foreign firms (Lew, 1974). Leaders such as Lew Sip Hon and Neo Yee Pan urged Chinese businessmen to 'break away from their traditional family business practices and collectively effect the formation of big corporations' in order to withstand competition from businesses operated by a 'vast government machinery' (Neo, 1974).

In 1975, MCA president Tan Sri Lee San Choon established Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad (MPHB) to launch its Chinese corporatization campaign (Gale, 1985). The largest block of shares in MPHB was owned by the MCA Youth Cooperative Society (Koperatif Serbaguna Malaysia, or KSM) which had been running highly successful plantation and real estate projects in Johore for several years. Lee San Choon, while serving as the MCA Youth head, had been instrumental in building up the fortunes of KSM. He also supervised the formation of several party-owned investment holding companies at the state level, including Matang Holdings in Johore, Aik Hua Holdings in Selangor, Panwa Holdings in Pahang, and Peak Hua Holdings in Perak.

The MCA leadership similarly sought to revolutionize the role played by Chinese guilds and associations in Malaysia by advocating their transformation from traditional mutual aid organizations into modern corporate entities. The party leadership believed that mobilizing the physical assets and manpower resources of over 4,000 Chinese guilds and associations would appreciably consolidate the Chinese position in the face of state-sponsored Malay competition. At the MCA's urging, several Chinese dialect associations formed holding companies to conduct business on behalf of their members. These included Ka Yin Holdings owned by the Hakka Federation of Ka Yin Associations, Hok Lian Holdings owned by the Hokkien Association, and Grand United Development Berhad owned by the Hainanese Keng Chew Association in Selangor. More importantly, the largest and most influential Chinese business association in Malaysia, the ACCCIM, also incorporated its own holding company, UNICO.

With the exception of MPHB, which experienced a dramatic but short-lived business success, none of the holding companies emerged as significant corporate players in Malaysia. By the mid-1980s, the MCA-led corporatization movement had all but fizzled out (Gomez, 1994: 175-230).

The MCA strategy was flawed in several respects. Not surprisingly, there was little support from Chinese business circles for a concept aimed at undermining the very foundation of Chinese corporate culture itself: the Chinese family firm. Overt MCA involvement in business turned out to be a highly ill-advised strategy for corporate success. And finally, the 'communally-based pooled resources' approach of the MCA

provoked hostility and antagonism from powerful Malay interest groups, especially the UMNO Youth (Heng, 1992: 134-41).

With the exception of a few leading Chinese tycoons like plantation magnate Lee Loy Seng who briefly served as company director, MPHB failed conspicuously to attract the support of Chinese business leaders. However, backed initially by the investments of some 80,000 families who owned the controlling block (40 per cent) of KSM shares in MPHB (*Asiatweek*, 22 June 1986), MCA leader Tan Koon Swan rapidly transformed the company into the largest Chinese-owned conglomerate listed in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) in the early 1980s. He achieved this feat primarily through a complicated series of mergers and acquisitions that left MPHB overleveraged and thus highly vulnerable in a recession.

The fortunes of MPHB were so closely tied to the vicissitudes of MCA politics that it inevitably fell victim to a highly acrimonious 20-month-long leadership struggle between Tan Koon Swan and Neo Yee Pan for the top party position. During that period, a seriously divided and highly demoralized company management (also largely recruited from senior party ranks) was unable to provide needed corporate leadership.

While Tan Koon Swan was responsible for the company's early rapid success, he was equally responsible for its demise. Under Tan, MPHB had grown too quickly and had relied too heavily on bank loans to finance asset acquisitions. Tan was also believed to have feathered his nest at the expense of MPHB, channelling some RM 23 million of MPHB funds in an attempt to save Pan-Electric, a Singapore-listed company which he owned (Gomez, 1994: 209). Tan's sharp business practices finally landed him on the wrong side of the law in Singapore. He was indicted and jailed for criminal breach of trust in December 1985, ironically only a few weeks after defeating Neo to become MCA president.

In 1986 and 1987, MPHB declared losses which amounted to the largest ever for any local firm (*Asiatweek*, 22 June 1986; *FEER*, 21 May 1987). The company's political character inevitably undermined its effectiveness as a business concern. MPHB, like the other MCA-inspired communally based economic instruments owned by Chinese associations, was regarded by many Malays with some misgivings. They felt that the MCA's overt campaign to mobilize Chinese economic resources along ethnic lines, if successful, would surely impede the NEP's objectives. Having been bested by MCA president Tan Siew Sin for more than a decade, Malay economic nationalists were no longer prepared to tolerate further MCA obstruction of their goals. UMNO Youth led the Malay opposition to MPHB, successfully preventing it from acquiring strategic assets, as exemplified by the company's failed attempt to take over United Malayan Banking Berhad, then the country's third largest bank.

Despite MCA assurances that it wanted to engage the state in a

co-operative, and not adversarial relationship—a claim which it sought to substantiate by establishing a joint venture real estate development project with one of UMNO's investment arms, Pemodalan Bersatu Berhad—the party failed to overcome UMNO's antagonism, not only toward MPHB, but also toward other Chinese-based holding companies. Executives of these companies complained that when they applied for business permits and licences, they often met unsympathetic, if not hostile, reception from Malay bureaucrats (*Star*, 30 July 1984).

### Chinese Private Sector Responses: Collaborative Initiatives with the NEP State

Unable to apply institutional pressures on the state, either through their political parties or business interests groups, Chinese entrepreneurs were left to their own devices in dealing with the NEP. They saw they had little to gain by supporting the MCA-led corporatization movement, because the MCA had become politically marginalized and because the new holding companies had little intrinsic appeal. They chose instead to cultivate collaborative and productive ties with Malay institutions and individuals. While almost all Chinese entrepreneurs continued to count on *guanxi* relationships to advance their interests, the new breed of NEP Sino-capitalists got ahead by rigorous cultivation of state patronage, judicious courtship of bumiputra business partners, and reliance on foreign capital and technology transfers.

The Chinese entrepreneurs who did well under the NEP were those who had quickly and shrewdly discerned that the policy also worked to their advantage. Instead of regarding the ICA's bumiputra restructuring requirements as a business impediment, these entrepreneurs used that provision to their advantage by bringing into their businesses politically well-connected Malay patrons/partners with the clout to advance their business objectives, especially the difficult goal of clearing the bureaucratic hurdle to obtain public listings for their companies. UMNO leaders, senior bureaucrats, top military brass, and members of royal families who participated in Chinese businesses as minority shareholders and who served as company directors opened doors to licences, permits, franchises, contracts, and other business opportunities regulated by the state.

The NEP had made available a vast new pool of Malay capital which Chinese entrepreneurs could tap into when forming joint ventures. Four major sources of Malay capital were: state agencies such as Pernas, PNB, UDA (Urban Development Authority) and the SEDCs; UMNO-controlled corporations, such as Fleet Holdings; institutional funds such as Lembaga Urusan Tabung Haji (LUTH, or Islamic Pilgrims Management and Fund Board) and Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera (Armed Forces Fund Board); and private sector capital held by the new class of Malay millionaires such as Daim Zainuddin, Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah, Azman Hashim, and Rashid Hussain, as well as royal entrepreneurs such as Tunku Imran ibni Tuanku Ja'afar of Negri Sembilan.



Different perceptions and approaches towards the NEP account for the existence of three groups of Sino-capitalists—'old money', 'new money' and 'declining money'—within the Chinese business community today. Chinese tycoons representing the first group of 'old money'—businesses that were established before the NEP but grew even bigger during the NEP—included Tan Sri Robert Kuok (Perlis Plantations, Federal Flour Mills, and Shangri-La Hotels Malaysia), Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong (Genting), Datuk Quek Leng Chan (Hong Leong Industries and Hume Industries Malaysia), and Tan Sri Loh Boon Siew (Oriental Holdings Berhad). Prominent members of the second group, Chinese 'new money'—businesses that emerged during the NEP—included Tan Sri William Cheng Heng Jem (Amalgamated Steel Mills), Datuk Loy Hean Heong (MBf Holdings), Tan Sri Khoo Kay Peng (MUI), Tan Sri Vincent Tan Chee Yioun (Berjaya), Datuk Lim Thian Kiat (Kamunting), Tan Sri Dato' Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL Corporation), Dick Chan Teik Huat (Metroplex), and Tan Sri Teh Hong Piow (Public Bank).<sup>11</sup>

Compared to the 'old money' entrepreneurs, the relationship of the new Chinese tycoons with UMNO leaders was generally more intense and complex. Apart from being more dependent on Malay political patronage, the investments of these tycoons were more closely integrated with Malay capital, an interdependent and complementary relationship which in turn has advanced the wealth of both Chinese and Malay partners (Searle, 1994: 235–75). At the same time, the heavier dependence of these Chinese tycoons on Malay patrons meant that their fortunes were likewise more vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of their political and business patrons. For example, when Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah failed in his challenge to displace Mahathir as UMNO president in April 1987, his departure from UMNO politics led to a decline in the fortunes of Razaleigh ally Khoo Kay Peng.

The third group, the 'declining money' group consisted of fortunes that were founded during the pre-war period but had stagnated or declined during the NEP period. They included some of the country's oldest family firms built by tin magnates and rubber tycoons such as Low Yat, Loke Yew, Cheong Yeok Choy, Tun H. S. Lee, Tan Chay Yan, and Lau Pak Khuan. Unlike the NEP 'new money' Chinese tycoons, the heirs who inherited fortunes built by their fathers or grandfathers either chose not to, or failed to, adapt effectively to the new political and business climate of the NEP. Deterred by the requirement to dilute their capital and management base with Malay inputs, many chose to forsake corporate growth in order to retain complete control and ownership of their businesses.

Below the level of Chinese big business, the ICA requirement to set aside a 30 per cent equity share for Malay shareholders in businesses with more than RM 250,000 in shareholders' funds likewise prompted many smaller Chinese entrepreneurs to remain small. They preferred to incorporate many separate small companies to escape the strictures of the NEP rather than consolidate their businesses into a large operation

which would come under the purview of the ICA. In 1985, the ICA was amended to exempt companies with RM 1 million in shareholders' funds and 50 full-time workers from having to apply for manufacturing licences from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Malaysia, 1986: 215). By 1990, the exemption level was raised to RM 2.5 million in shareholders' funds and 75 full-time workers (MCA, 1990: 25). This windfall enabled many Chinese entrepreneurs who wanted full control over their businesses to transform their enterprises into medium-sized companies.

### *Sino-Malay Business Alliances*

The forging of Sino-Malay business alliances lay at the heart of Chinese business success during the NEP. Ranging from the tokenism of 'Ali-Baba' relationships to genuine partnerships, the Sino-Malay business alliance enabled Chinese entrepreneurs to establish productive and collaborative relationships with Malay entrepreneurs.

In the pre-NEP period of open competition, Chinese entrepreneurs had little need for the services of Malay patrons/partners to expand their businesses. The notable exception, however, were Chinese businesses looking to expand in rural development projects and land resettlement schemes which targeted Malays for special treatment. In 1959, the Ministry of Rural and National Development headed by Tun Razak was established to provide infrastructure facilities to rural Malays. The richly funded rural development programmes of the 1960s were 'meant to buy rural votes for UMNO, who was facing fierce opposition from Parti Islam and the Socialist Party' (Shamsul, 1996: 8). UMNO leaders who obtained contracts for projects almost invariably subcontracted the work to Chinese contractors. These 'Ali-Baba' business alliances were arrangements where the Malay partners (Ali) received generous fees for securing business deals but remained sleeping partners. The Chinese partners (Baba) made policy decisions and controlled business operations.

While such arrangements between the Chinese entrepreneurs and Malay 'rentier capitalists' have persisted, they have become less common as more Malays have gained experience and confidence in running businesses. Since the late 1980s, more and more Sino-Malay joint ventures have Malay partners who play active and meaningful roles in the businesses. This is particularly evident in the business alliances formed between 'new money' Sino-capitalists and the new class of Malay millionaires, the 'UMNO-putera' with powerful connections at the highest levels of UMNO.

The dynamics of 'new money' Sino-Malay business alliances—such as that between Vincent Tan and Daim Zainuddin, between Daim and Lim Thian Kiat, and between Quek Leng Chan, Halim Saad, Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah, and Rashid Hussain—are far more complex than the 'Ali-Baba' relationships of the 1960s. The NEP generation of UMNO-putera are savvy entrepreneurs and successful risk-takers.

Taking full advantage of the extraordinary opportunities offered by the state, they have built business empires independently of their Chinese business partners (*FEER*, 21 December 1995).

The integration of Chinese capital with Malay capital from state, UMNO, and private sector sources, has produced a new Sino-Malay corporate culture, one which has enabled both parties to prosper and benefit from a constantly changing mix of arrangements. In his insightful study of the relationship between new Chinese business groups, the NEP state, and bumiputra business groups, Peter Searle observed that the distinction made between Malay 'Ali' rentier capitalists from the Chinese 'Baba' entrepreneurs no longer holds. Individuals from both groups now occupy various points along the spectrum. Vincent Tan, for example, has exhibited rentier-like behaviour in the course of his growth, and Malay capitalists like Daim Zainuddin, Wan Azmi, and Rashid Hussain are clearly successful entrepreneurs on their own terms (Searle, 1994: 275-6).

#### *Chinese Businesses and Foreign Investments*

While the domestic growth of Chinese conglomerates has been facilitated by business alliances with carefully selected Malay partners, their transformation into multinationals with a regional, and in some cases global, reach was achieved through joint ventures with foreign investors. While the state wooed foreign capital primarily to benefit Malay concerns, Chinese businesses also benefited from the influx of foreign investors to Malaysia.

As seen earlier, ties between Chinese capital and foreign investments were forged during the colonial period when Chinese entrepreneurs provided supportive functions that fed into the bigger, economically more productive activities of foreign enterprises in Malaya. The business interlinkages between foreign capital and Chinese businesses, both backward as subcontractors or suppliers, as well as forward as wholesalers and retailers, were vital to the economic success of both parties. Any decline in foreign investments would have certainly slowed down Chinese economic expansion since Chinese businesses had become heavily dependent on the business generated by British agency houses and other large foreign concerns. In many cases, British agency houses were *de facto* financiers of Chinese middlemen. In the distributive trade, for example, long credit periods given to Chinese wholesalers in turn enabled them to grant extended credit to a country-wide network of retailers.

While there was no overt policy or directive to discourage these business relationships after the NEP was implemented, foreign investors came under considerable pressure to divert business to bumiputra firms, and to hire bumiputra personnel at the expense of Chinese applicants who, in several cases, were better qualified for the job. To ensure an adequate market for the newly established bumiputra businesses, rules and regulations were introduced aimed implicitly at breaking the

long-established linkages between foreign investments and Chinese business in the country (Sieh, 1994: 13). Contracts had to be awarded to bumiputra contractors and foreign firms were asked to purchase from bumiputra suppliers.

However, generous tax breaks, well-developed free trade zones, and a large pool of cheap labour were strong enough incentives to overcome perceived drawbacks of the NEP within foreign investment circles. Fuelled by foreign capital and technology, the manufacturing sector expanded rapidly, rising from a 13.9 per cent share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1970 to 19.1 per cent in 1985. Exports of manufactures grew by 14.3 per cent per annum, overtaking the value of agricultural exports after 1982 and mineral exports after 1984 to become the largest contributor to export earnings. The increase in manufacture export revenues came mainly from electrical machinery, home appliances, computer devices, textiles, clothing, and footwear (Malaysia, 1986: 11, 50).

Despite efforts by the NEP state to divert business from foreign investors away from Chinese enterprises to Malay concerns, foreign firms continued to rely primarily on small- and medium-sized Chinese enterprises to carry out subcontracting and marketing jobs. This was largely because most bumiputra firms had yet to acquire the experience, skills, and networks to perform such tasks, especially in urban centres where consumer purchasing power remain predominantly Chinese.

#### *Liberalizing the NEP 1986-1990*

The emphasis on EOI both widened and deepened the linkages between the Malaysian economy and the global economy, but the resulting integration made the country more vulnerable to recessionary pressures from the international economy. Thus, when economic growth slowed down in the United States and Europe in 1984, demand for Malaysian manufactured exports and primary commodities weakened. In 1985, Malaysia experienced an unprecedented negative GDP growth rate of -1 per cent (Malaysia, 1989: 13). The recession, which resulted in a sharp decline in foreign investments and public revenues, forced the UMNO leadership to rethink the NEP. At the same time, the inefficiency of state enterprises, already a cause of concern in a more buoyant economy, became critical.

Heavy public sector expenditure had been pivotal in sustaining the rapid growth of the economy from 1975 to 1985. Public investments constituted about 40 per cent of total investments in the early 1970s, increasing to 50 per cent in 1982. By 1985, it had grown to 55 per cent, thus exceeding the proportion of private investments in the economy. Recessionary pressures forced a RM 7.9 billion reduction in public spending, 40 per cent below the 1984 peak of RM 12.6 billion. The shortfall in public revenues could not be made up by private funds since both foreign and local private investments had dropped during the recession. Gross private capital formation, averaging RM 11.8 billion

per annum during the 1981-5 period, contracted to RM 9.8 in 1986 (*Bank Negara Annual Reports*, cited in MCA, 1990: 27-8).

Faced with the country's worst economic crisis since independence, the government could no longer afford the luxury of subsidizing losses incurred by NEP-mandated state enterprises, and by private sector bumiputra entrepreneurs who accounted for around 40 per cent of declared bankruptcies during the recession (Malaysia, 1991a: 48). Nearly all of Malaysia's 13 SEDCs had suffered losses since the mid-1970s. In 1984, their aggregate losses (RM 346.8 million) from 125 subsidiary firms exceeded the aggregate profits from 103 subsidiary firms (Jesudason, 1989: 100). Lack of public accountability and corruption also resulted in a number of large-scale financial scandals, the worst being the Bank Rakyat and Bank Bumiputra Finance scandals.

Inability to finance projects from public revenues and foreign investments forced the UMNO leadership to reconsider the role of Chinese private sector capital and entrepreneurial capacity. In the mid-1980s Chinese discontent with the NEP had become acute, and Chinese political leaders—both in government and the opposition—as well as business and education leaders stepped up their criticisms of the NEP.

A contracting economy inevitably exacerbated racial tensions. The Malays began to fear that the NEP targets would not be met while the Chinese grew even more pessimistic about their future prospects in the country. During the 1985-7 recession, Chinese capital flight and outmigration increased significantly, caused as much by hard-nosed economic calculations as by socio-political alienation arising from the NEP (Heng, 1992: 131-2). Malaysian Chinese money moved out primarily to seek higher profit margins from more lucrative overseas enterprises, but Chinese capital flight and the 'brain drain' were also caused by the impact of the NEP. A MCA report captured the deep pessimism of the Chinese community during this period:

The Malaysian Chinese and other non-Malays are fearful that the era ahead will see for them and their children even more diminished opportunities. It appears that the restructuring of Malaysian society and the building up of a Malaysian nation are to be through the sacrifices borne solely by the non-Malays, even at the cost of their cultural identities. ... The spirit of the non-Malay communities is low, its mood dark ... [the] inevitable result could well be that the interaction between the Malay and non-Malay communities will be further limited, giving rise to a siege mentality, with racial conflicts as the outcome and national unity as the casualty (MCA, 1988: 3-4).

While Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's decision to liberalize the NEP stemmed primarily from his concern to recover investor confidence, both foreign and local, in the Malaysian economy, the pressure exerted by the MCA leadership helped nudge the Prime Minister toward that decision. The recession coincided with a leadership change in the MCA, resulting in the abandonment of its ill-fated corporatization movement. When Dato Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik succeeded Tan Koon Swan as party president, he sold off the MCA's shares in MPHB to

Kamunting Corporation, a family business managed by 'new money' entrepreneur Lim Thian Kiat.

After disengaging the MCA from controversial business activities, Ling focused his attention on getting the NEP liberalized. He contended that widespread 'deviations', that is, overzealous implementation of NEP policies, had unconstitutionally impinged on the legitimate rights of non-Malays as guaranteed by Article 153 (a) of the Malaysian Constitution, and by the safeguard written into the Second Malaysia Plan that 'no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation' from NEP policies (MCA, 1988: 10). The party set up an in-house think tank (Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research, or INSAP) to draw up a post-1990 blueprint to replace the NEP. In December 1988, due in no small part to Ling's lobbying efforts, Mahathir convened a 150-member multiracial body, the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC), to make recommendations on the post-NEP policy.<sup>12</sup>

Business growth strategies proposed by the MCA in the NECC came from recommendations forwarded by Chinese business leaders and academics, notably businessman Yong Poh Kon, and Fong Chan Onn and Lim Teck Ghee from the University of Malaya. They urged the following: rationalization and privatization of the public sector; development of human resources through greater state funding of educational institutions, especially for non-Malays; upgrading and deepening of the industrialization process; development of science and technology, particularly in new sunrise industries such as genetic engineering, biotechnology, and information technology; expansion of the services sector in areas such as risk management, financial and commodities trading, reinsurance, research and consultancy, telecommunications, and information services; promotion of small and medium scale enterprises; and development of the New Village economy through infrastructure development and greater access to land (MCA, 1989: 11-26).

The MCA blueprint emphasized that the new policy should, first and foremost, be based on inter-ethnic consensus, and be guided by the objective of overcoming the 'racial divisiveness and acrimony stirred up by deviations and shortcomings of the past'. The government was advised to minimize its role in the economy, for state interventionism had created 'structural and institutional bottlenecks that have stifled economic efficiency and growth'. The document also highlighted the need for greater deregulation in Malaysia:

The rapid changes taking place in the global economy required the government to allocate its resources efficiently and to reward productivity and excellence if the country is to remain competitive. In the post-1990 period, policies of state intervention and restructuring have to be replaced by new policies that reward risk, hard work and enterprise, irrespective of race (MCA, 1989:1).

It finally urged a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities in areas where Chinese were under-represented: in tertiary education, in

civil service employment, in land settlement, in cultural and religious expression, and in political representation (MCA, 1989: 9).

In June 1985, Mahathir announced the first of a series of new guidelines which removed the more onerous constraints of the NEP faced by non-Malays. His immediate priority was to stop the decline in foreign investments, which had dropped precipitously in 1984 and 1985, falling from a 30 per cent share of total investment in manufacturing in 1980 to 22.7 per cent and 17.8 per cent respectively (Jesudason, 1989: 186). The initial amendments, allowing foreigners to retain up to 80 per cent equity ownership for firms exporting 80 per cent or more of production, did not spur the desired inflow of foreign capital. In December 1985, the government further relaxed the ICA to stimulate local Chinese investments in manufacturing. The new amendment gave firms automatic approval if shareholders' funds were below RM 2.5 million and 30 per cent of equity had been reserved for Malays. The equity requirement was waived for firms with shareholders' funds of less than RM 1.5 million. Mahathir finally decided in September 1986 to let foreign firms retain 100 per cent equity ownership if they exported 50 per cent or more of their production or sold at least 50 per cent or more of their product to the country's free trade zones. Foreign firms producing for the domestic market were also exempt from the ICA if they employed at least 350 full-time workers reflecting the racial composition of the population. This last round of liberalization succeeded in renewing foreign investors' interest in Malaysia. In the first six months of 1987, the proportion of foreign paid-up capital in the manufacturing sector rose from 28 per cent to 47.2 per cent (Jesudason, 1989: 188-9). For the period 1988-90, the GDP growth rate averaged 9.1 per cent per annum, the highest recorded since independence (Malaysia, 1991b: 8).

### Vision 2020 and the New Development Policy

Mahathir's Vision 2020 blueprint for economic development, and the promulgation of the NDP in mid-1991 to replace the NEP, marked a new departure in the relationship between the state and Chinese business. The NDP, which contains several key recommendations outlined in the NECC's report (Dasar Ekonomik untuk Pembangunan Negara, or DEPAN), is appreciably more supportive of Chinese economic interests than the NEP.<sup>13</sup> Although the new policy unequivocally upholds the principle of Malay special rights, it eschews numerical targets and emphasizes growth and income-raising policies over income distribution policies. It approached the subject of poverty eradication, social restructuring, and human resource development in a more even-handed manner than the NEP, and highlighted the need to narrow both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic income gaps.

The fundamental difference between the NEP and the NDP is the latter's return to greater *laissez-faire* market principles. Mahathir's Vision 2020, which seeks to transform Malaysia into a fully industrialized nation by the year 2020, is based more on 'trickle-down' economics

than state regulation of market forces. Mahathir had become a convert to the virtues of free enterprise, an outlook which close confidant and First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin helped to encourage (Khoo, 1995: Chapter 4). To attain the goals of Vision 2020, the Malaysian economy would need to grow by an annual average rate of 7 per cent in the first decade of the NDP (1991–2000), as compared to the 6.7 per cent rate achieved during the NEP (1971–1990) (Malaysia, 1991a: 21).

Mahathir was fully cognizant of the fact that his goal could only be attained through rapid expansion of Malaysia's export market. He thus acted decisively and swiftly to accelerate Malaysia's integration into the global economy by liberalizing the NEP. He also sought to reduce wastage and inefficiencies in public sector enterprises by privatizing state concerns. Unlike the NEP which was primarily public-sector driven, the NDP is seeking to create more opportunities for bumiputra businesses through greater reliance on private sector initiatives (*ibid.*: 4, 17). Privatization of state concerns was first announced in 1983, and guidelines for their implementation were published in 1985. However, divestment of state assets was sharply accelerated only with the announcement of the Privatization Masterplan in 1991, the same year that Vision 2020 and the NDP were launched (Jomo, 1995: Chapter 2).

Deregulation and privatization, greater reliance on private initiatives, and sharper focus on human resource development were among the more important NDP reforms benefiting Chinese businesses, both big and small. While the state's privatization programme's priority was to put assets into the hands of private sector bumiputra concerns, Chinese entrepreneurs also profited, both as minority partners in Malay-run firms that won privatization tenders and, more commonly, as subcontractors.

The NDP is also seeking to promote and upgrade small- and medium-scale industries (SMIs), a sector dominated by Chinese capital, to widen and strengthen the country's industrial base by achieving greater value added and linkages, both vertical and horizontal, especially in basic metal, petroleum, and transport equipment as well as non-metallic mineral, rubber, and timber-based industries. State support for this is apparent in official projections for a near doubling of SMI contributions to value added and labour absorption rates within a decade from the start of the NDP (Malaysia, 1991a: 132–3).

Human resource development (HRD) is being undertaken to upgrade Malaysia's capacity for research and development in order to lessen its dependence on traditional growth subsectors, primarily textiles, electrical, and electronics (*ibid.*: 132). Strong official endorsement for HRD has improved Chinese access to higher education. Of particular value is the government's continued support of privately run colleges that have 'twinning' programmes with overseas universities that are heavily subscribed by Chinese students. Although these institutions were established by Chinese entrepreneurs—for example, Kolej



Damansara Utama was set up by the Teo family's See Hoy Chan Group and Sunway College by Datuk Jeffrey Cheah's Sungei Way Holdings—during the NEP period to help Chinese students overcome the problem of sharply decreased access to the country's universities, the importance of these institutions has received greater official recognition. This is evident in significantly higher state disbursements for Chinese education interests. For example, under the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5), the MCA-sponsored Tunku Abdul Rahman College benefited from a tenfold increase in outlay (a total of RM 20 million) compared to the period of the Fifth Malaysia Plan, and the allocation for state-run Chinese primary schools was doubled to RM 40 million. Unlike the NEP, the NDP has actively sought to tap the full potential of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurial and professional skills that have played such a vital role in the country's economic development.

### **New Allies of Chinese Business: The Malay Capitalist Class**

When the NEP drew to a close, a new Malay professional and entrepreneurial class with strong ties to the UMNO had emerged. The new Malay capitalist class has increasingly come to regard the Malaysian state more as competitor than protector. The biggest beneficiaries of the NEP, the UMNO-putera, now want deregulation, seeing in the divestment of state resources a rich source of business opportunities.

The alliance of common interests between Malay and Chinese capitalists first became evident when the country's political and business élites engaged the state in a debate pertaining to the post-NEP policy in the late 1980s. Several prominent members of the new class of highly successful, self-confident Malay professionals and entrepreneurs, like their Chinese business partners, wanted a more resilient private sector, decreased public sector involvement in the economy, and growth and income-raising policies over income redistribution policies. They argued that privatization would alleviate the problems of inefficiency, lack of competition and lack of professionalism besetting state enterprises. For example, Datuk Dr Kamal Salih, then head of the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER), wrote a report in 1988 calling for a doubling of Malaysia's per capita income within a decade from 1990, based on growth-oriented policies which emphasized competition, not state interventionism (Kamal Salih, 1988). Leading Malay banker Datuk Malek Merican likewise called for policies that would foster growth, competition, profit maximization, and self-reliance. He also argued, much to the approval of Chinese business leaders, that the NEP was a basic cause in the slow-down of economic growth because 'the advantage given to the bumiputras had caused non-bumiputra Malaysians and foreigners to shy away from investing in the country' (*Star*, 28 March 1987). While both arguments—that privatization would result in a more efficient and competitive economy, and that the NEP

was a basic cause in the economic slow-down—did not accurately reflect the real state of affairs, they were actively advocated by Chinese business interests that wanted a liberalization of the NEP.

During the NECC discussions, the moderate political outlook and liberal economic convictions represented by Kamal Salih, who served as the NECC rapporteur, and Malek Merican swayed the balance against the more ambivalent attitudes held by some UMNO members on the council. When key council members such as Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie and Datuk Abdullah Badawi supported the moderate position, a Sino-Malay consensus emerged. One of the NECC's most significant achievements, at least from the Chinese perspective, was the NDP's inclusion of its recommendation to de-emphasize share ownership proportions by race and to exclude numerical targets altogether in the new policy.

Malay capitalist support enabled the leading Chinese representatives in the NECC to beat back the Malay hardliners' demand to raise the Malay equity target to reflect the Malay proportion of the population, that is, at least a 50 per cent share.<sup>14</sup> Instead of focusing on restructuring and redistribution, the NECC concluded that the new policy should concentrate on creating absolute wealth, upgrading the quality of bumiputra entrepreneurship, and lessening Malay dependence on government subsidies and protection.

### Chinese Business in the 1990s

The NEP effected permanent changes in the corporate landscape of Malaysia. It redistributed economic resources more equitably along ethnic lines and ended the domination of foreign capital. It also forced Chinese businesses to adjust their corporate practices to meet the challenge of heavily discriminatory NEP policies.

The MCA-led communally based corporatization movement, which sought internal reforms aimed at modernizing traditional family-based business practices, fizzled out due to resistance from the Chinese business community. Successful adjustments were made by the majority of Chinese entrepreneurs who accommodated both public and private sector Malay competition without sacrificing control and management of their businesses. Instead of viewing state enterprises, bumiputra businesses, and foreign investments in an adversarial light, these entrepreneurs skilfully forged mutually beneficial and productive business alliances with all three groups.

It may even be argued that the NEP state has made Chinese businesses even more competitive and resilient. State actions aimed at easing out British capital, while primarily benefiting Malay interests, none the less created more space for Chinese businesses to grow, particularly in sectors other than plantation and mineral extraction. Public spending on NEP projects also made available a larger pool of capital for business expansion, especially for Chinese entrepreneurs who subcontracted for state enterprises and private sector Malay businesses. The separation of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange from the Singapore

Stock Exchange in 1973 made available a larger pool of locally generated and locally controlled capital for corporate expansion, and created greater opportunities for public listings of Malaysian companies, both Malay and Chinese. Finally, increased competition from Malay and foreign firms has forced Chinese businesses, especially small and medium-scale firms, to cut costs, and thus to become more resilient and more competitive.

The impact of the NEP on Chinese business practices is most clearly evident in the manner in which the networks of personalistic *guanxi* ties have been refined and extended to incorporate new patrons and partners from non-Chinese business circles. At the same time, the incorporation of these new elements has not fundamentally changed the traditional nature of Chinese business structure and business practices. Malaysian Chinese businesses still display many features that have been identified as belonging to a universal Chinese corporate culture. These characteristics include: a close overlap of ownership, control, and family; centralized decision making with a heavy reliance on one dominant executive; a paternalistic organizational climate; mostly small-scale and relatively simple organizational structure; normally focused on one product or market; typically very sensitive to cost and financial efficiency; and highly adaptable to the external environment (Redding, 1993: 205-6).

The largest Malaysian Chinese MNC, the Kuok Group, for example, has remained unmistakably a traditional Chinese family business. It is a paternalistic organization with decision-making powers concentrated in Robert Kuok, who relies on a carefully selected small 'inner circle' of loyal family members and trusted friends to oversee the day-to-day management of subsidiary operations. The corporate culture of the Kuok Group, like almost all other Chinese family enterprises in (and outside) Malaysia, incorporates many practices derived from Chinese customs and beliefs. Western management techniques are almost universally buttressed by *feng shui* (geomancy) and astrological beliefs to ensure corporate success (Heng, 1997: 172-3).

Compared to the pre-NEP period, Chinese businesses have nevertheless become more dependent on Malay patronage and capital. Sino-Malay business alliances are now more complex and more interdependent than the 'Ali-Baba' relationship of the 1960s. Malays are no longer inevitably minority shareholders and sleeping partners. On the contrary, it is not uncommon for the post-NEP generation of Malay capitalists today to invite Chinese entrepreneurs into their businesses as minority shareholders.

Large Chinese family businesses have universally become more dependent on external borrowings and sales of shares rather than internally generated funds for business diversification. Successful expansion has also resulted in greater reliance on non-family professional managers to oversee business operations. These changes have, in some cases, diluted the authoritarian management style of an owner-entrepreneur corporate culture.

The transformation of Malay businessmen from 'rentier capitalists'

into successful risk-takers and substantive entrepreneurs running their own companies has prompted scholars to re-evaluate their roles in economic development. As Ruth McVey has forcefully argued, indigenous business élites in Malaysia (and elsewhere in South-East Asia) have in the last two decades changed from 'parasites to promoters'. The economic metamorphosis of indigenous business élites has likewise been accompanied by a transformation of 'developmental authoritarian' states to more economically liberal regimes committed to free trade, economic deregulation, and market reforms (McVey, 1992: 21-7).

Growing equality of the Sino-Malay business partnership has likewise produced a re-evaluation of Chinese entrepreneurship in a similarly positive light. In the past, the 'outsider' status of Chinese entrepreneurs and their dependence on indigenous patrons for business favours led them to be cast as 'pariah' entrepreneurs. However, given their pivotal role behind the rapid economic development of the country, Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs should no longer be regarded as 'pariahs' but as 'paragons' and exemplifiers of dynamic entrepreneurial leadership (*ibid.*: 18-21).

The changes in Chinese corporate culture have been caused not only by pressures from the Malaysian political and economic environment, but also from the global environment. Initiatives co-ordinated by the United States to establish a global free trade regime, as exemplified by the final round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks, the formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, and the 2020 timetable of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum to dismantle trade barriers in the region have all provided impetus to participating states like Malaysia to accelerate economic deregulation and liberalization.

The ascendancy of the capitalist global economy, facilitated by China's embrace of free market reforms and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, was highly beneficial to Chinese business interests in Malaysia right until the onset of the Asian financial crisis in July 1997. When the Malaysian state turned to EOI to promote economic growth during the 1970s, it inevitably became more vulnerable to global market forces. This was evident during the recession of the mid-1980s when Malaysia was forced to liberalize the NEP to regain its competitiveness in the global market, both as an exporter of goods and services, and as an importer of foreign investments. The rolling back of state interventionism in turn greatly boosted private sector Chinese business interests.

Rapid integration of Malaysia into the global economy provided tremendous opportunities for Malaysian Chinese business growth in external markets until late 1997. During the 1960s, Malaysian Chinese-controlled MNCs like the Kuok Group were quite rare. But numerous such conglomerates have since emerged, built on joint ventures with both Malay and foreign partners. The most prominent of these include companies controlled by tycoons such as Quek Leng Chan (Hong Leong Group), Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL Corporation), William Cheng

(Amalgamated Steel Mills), Vincent Tan (Berjaya Group), and Tiong Hiew King (Rimbunan Hijau). The efforts represented by these Malaysian Sino-capitalists are establishing a legacy in South-East Asia that has contributed markedly to strengthening the management and economic integration of that region, both intra-regionally and with the global economy.

The utilization of *guanxi* connections, Chinese language and social skills by Malaysian Sino-capitalists to gain entry into the China market illustrates, yet again, the salience of Chinese culture in their corporate practices. The cultural dimension of Chinese business structures and practices which have produced economic networks transcending not only countries but regions has led scholars studying the globalization process to argue for a new theory of the international division of labour. James Mittelman, for example, has contended that since Chinese culture has created a Chinese transnational division of labour in Eastern Asia—a phenomenon which originated in the flow of migration from mainland China to neighbouring territories and South-East Asia—the role of culture should be counted as a determinant in the international division of labour theory which so far has incorporated solely economically salient factors such as wage levels and foreign investment incentives (Mittelman, 1995: 290). With China emerging as the regional economic powerhouse of the twenty-first century, the linkages built by Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs will undoubtedly play a key role in facilitating the expansion of trading ties between China and Malaysia.

The most significant impact of Chinese entrepreneurship in Malaysia might well lie in its positive contributions to the process of nation building in a society more known for ethnic divisiveness than inter-ethnic unity. However, increasing integration of Chinese and Malay business interests has forged unprecedentedly strong bonds of class interests, especially at the level of big business. At the same time, the pressures of globalization and the need to act in an increasingly internationalized business world have imposed forms and behaviour that have eroded both Chinese and Malay exclusivity. As has been observed, economic forces have brought together Chinese and Malay business élites into a common, cosmopolitan *nouveau riche* consumer style culture, one which is almost universally shared by other business élites of our global village (McVey, 1992: 26).

It is the shared ambition of both Chinese and Malay political and business élites to excel in the business world that lies behind the NDP's strong commitment to national unity. For the BN government, national unity remains its 'ultimate goal of socio-economic development because a united society is fundamental to the promotion of social and political stability and sustained development' (Malaysia, 1991a: 3). While the common English-educated Westernized backgrounds of the UMNO and MCA élites served as the basis for multiracial political co-operation during the Alliance years, the second generation of Malay and Chinese élites is held together as much by linkages of business as by common educational and cultural experiences. In addition, they share a

commitment to a stronger Malaysian-centred identity, one that gives practical application to Prime Minister Mahathir's aspiration to create a 'Bangsa Malaysia' (Malaysian nation), a concept which discourages any manifestation of exclusivity, be it economic nationalism, racial chauvinism, or religious fundamentalism (*New Straits Times*, 2 March 1991).

### **The Asian Financial Crisis and the Malaysian Economy**

Up until the onset of the Asian financial crisis in July 1997, the Malaysian business community had benefited greatly from the economic deregulation and liberalization of the previous decade. But economic liberalization as a step towards merging into and benefiting from the globalized environment has proved a double-edged sword. One of the dangers of 'borderless' global trading and investment is the reality that governments are increasingly less able to insulate their domestic economies from externally generated pressures. The new masters of the global financial markets are the international financiers, currency traders, and fund managers who maximize profits by responding quickly to perceived changes in local conditions and switching massive amounts of money in and out of regional markets. For example, the average daily turnover in global trading of currencies in 1998 amounted to some US\$1.5 trillion, compared to an average of about US\$195 billion in 1986 (*International Herald Tribune*, 17 February 1999). Such financial transactions have grown far in excess of the requirements for transacting real assets such as for raw materials, components, and goods that move across borders.

The collapse of the Thai baht in July 1997 set off a financial crisis in neighbouring South-East Asian economies as currencies and stock markets plunged sharply, with some losing over three-quarters of their value within six months. Financial analysts have postulated several reasons for the loss of investor confidence in the region. These include: overvalued currencies; worsening current account deficits; excessive foreign and domestic borrowings; overinvestment in prestigious but unproductive projects; failure to exercise fiscal discipline or to impose strict controls over banks and financial institutions; lack of transparency; and corrupt business practices. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse the validity of Mahathir's oft-repeated claim that Malaysia's economic woes were caused essentially by foreign currency traders and investors who 'purposely devalue the ringgit through ways created by them to attain personal power and personal gains' (*Star*, 12 August 1998). Rather, this concluding section examines the impact of the financial crisis on the Malaysian business community in the country, and on Chinese businesses in particular.

Since the onset of the crisis, the country's financial and commercial institutions were at risk of being crippled by non-performing loans in an economy that was contracting sharply in the face of mass withdrawals of foreign funds and concerted attacks by currency speculators against the

value of the Malaysian ringgit. Capitalization of the KLSE shrank to RM 256.4 billion by July 1998, marking a sharp decline of RM 487 billion from its 1 July 1997 level (*New Straits Times*, 12 August 1998). The value of the Malaysian ringgit depreciated sharply against the dollar, falling from its pre-crisis value of RM 2.50 to the American dollar to an all-time low of RM 4.88 on 7 January 1998. Real output declined by 6.7 per cent, the worst contraction since independence; and per capita income in nominal terms dropped to RM 11,835 in 1998 from RM 12,051 in 1997 (Bank Negara Malaysia, 1999: 1, 8).

While all economic sectors suffered from the financial crisis, some were hit harder than others. The construction sector experienced the sharpest downturn, with value added contracting by 24.5 per cent in 1998, compared to a growth of 9.5 per cent in 1997. Manufacturing output dropped by 10.2 per cent, the first decline since 1985, and the agricultural sector slipped by 4 per cent in 1998. On the other hand, value added in the mining sector increased by 0.8 per cent, reflecting higher crude oil and gas output, as well as tin production. The services sector (defined as utilities; transport and communications; finance, insurance, real estate and business services; and government services), which contributed a 48.8 per cent share of GDP and 47.5 per cent share of total employment in 1998, slowed to a growth rate of 1.5 per cent in 1998, compared to 8 per cent in 1997 (*ibid*: 17–30). The banking system was so weakened by the problem of non-performing loans (NPLs) that the government (through Danaharta) acquired by June 1999 RM 33.6 billion of NPLs to enable banks to focus on the business of lending. At the same time, an additional sum of RM 6.2 billion was spent (through Danamodal) to recapitalize 10 financial institutions (Sulaiman Mahbob, 9 June 1999).

Unlike other countries badly hit by the crisis (Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea), Malaysia did not seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) but implemented measures on its own to restore economic stability. Then Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim instituted IMF-style tight monetary and fiscal policies which included an 18 per cent cut in government spending, suspension of costly infrastructure projects, higher interest rates, and restructuring of the banking sector. However, by mid-1998, when real output and aggregate demand fell even more sharply than anticipated, counter-cyclical measures were introduced to avoid a recession–deflation spiral. Fiscal and monetary policies were eased, interest rates were lowered, and government spending was increased. On 1 September 1998, Malaysia imposed selective currency controls to eliminate excessive speculation both on the ringgit and on the KLSE. The ringgit was pegged at RM 3.80 to the American dollar. Foreign portfolio short-term capital was prohibited from leaving the country for at least one year, but that requirement was eased on 4 February 1999 when principal capital and profits were permitted repatriation subject to a graduated exit tax (*Star*, 5 February 1999).

On 2 September 1998, the day after currency controls were imposed,

Mahathir removed Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. Although Mahathir stated that he dismissed Anwar for moral reasons, and not over differences on economic policies, it was believed by some that Anwar was sacked because he had endorsed IMF-style policies of tight spending and higher interest rates, and had opposed the disbursement of public funds to bail out ailing corporations owned by politically well-connected tycoons (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 1998; *International Herald Tribune*, 9 September 1998). While Anwar tended to adopt a *laissez-faire* view of letting the recession weed out inefficient corporations, a stand that was lauded by foreign investors, Mahathir smelled a Western plot to ruin Malaysia's economy and stymie his 'Vision 2020'. In his opinion, the machinations of American-dominated international speculative capital that had caused the financial crisis represented a new insidious attempt at re-colonizing Third World countries: 'The West will use their economic power against us. They have enough money to buy us. If we fight each other, we'll be re-colonized again' (quoted in *FEER*, 13 May 1999).

Although the combative Prime Minister often portrayed foreign short-term capital in a negative light, it was clear that the Malaysian government and the private sector business interests in the country continued to regard foreign capital as vital to economic recovery. But since the onset of the crisis until early 1999, the economic and political climate in Malaysia appeared fraught with risks and uncertainties for foreign investors.

On the economic front, the imposition of currency controls and a levy on the expatriation of profits from short-term investments were, not surprisingly, highly unpopular with foreign currency traders and investment fund managers. Financial analysts also felt that the Malaysian government was not doing enough to promote corporate transparency and accountability. State-sanctioned injections of fresh capital into a number of high profile but financially troubled companies owned by prominent bumiputra entrepreneurs—such as the purchase of a 32 per cent stake in Renong Berhad (controlled by Tan Sri Halim Saad) by United Engineers Malaysia Berhad; the acquisition of Konsortium Perkalan Berhad (controlled by Mirzan Mahathir) by Petronas, the state oil company; and the utilization of government funds (estimated at RM 6 billion) to take over problem loans at state-owned Bank Bumiputra before it was merged with Commerce Asset Holding—were regarded as costly bail outs (see *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 1998, 9 March 1998, 9 February 1999; *International Herald Tribune*, 15 December 1998).

On the other hand, foreign investors welcomed the formation of a National Economic Council headed by First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, and the formulation of a comprehensive National Economic Recovery Plan to expedite economic recovery. In particular, the establishment of three agencies to restructure corporate debt and strengthen the banking sector—the Corporate Debt Restructuring Committee



(CDRC), Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional Berhad (Danaharta), and Danamodal Nasional Berhad (Danamodal)—were well received.

On the political front, the social disturbances sparked by Anwar Ibrahim's controversial dismissal and detention dominated the attention not only of all Malaysians but also of the international business community and the world media. In the last few months of 1998, as thousands of Anwar's supporters staged mass rallies and demonstrations to push for *reformasi* (that is, reform and greater political openness), there was serious concern that political unrest could seriously impede economic recovery.

However, by April 1999, the political and economic tide had turned for the Mahathir Administration. The Reformasi movement had failed to ignite into a conflagration such as that which had ended Suharto's 32 years of power in neighbouring Indonesia, and the economy was showing signs of recovery. Although the Reformasi movement had drawn considerable Malay support, especially from Islamic groups traditionally opposed to Mahathir's concept of a secular Malaysian state, as well as from non-fundamentalist Malay elements that were critical of Mahathir's authoritarian inclinations, its failure to attract a nation-wide multiracial following impeded its emergence as a viable alternative to the ruling BN government. In early April 1999, the Reformasi movement was registered as a new political party, Parti Keadilan Nasional (National Justice Party), one that was committed to participate in electoral politics in an orderly manner. With the ending of street demonstrations, political issues went to the back burner, and the problem of economic reconstruction once again came to the forefront.

Most fortuitously for the Mahathir Administration, the recession bottomed out at the same time that the Reformasi movement lost its militant edge. In mid-April, both the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) released figures which indicated that the worst of the Asian financial crisis was over. Stock markets and currencies sharply rebounded and regional economies were on the mend. The Malaysian economy had stopped shrinking—together with others in the region—and was forecast to grow moderately in 1999: by 0.7, 0.9, and 2.0 per cent according to the ADB, IMF, and Bank Negara (Central Bank) respectively (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 1–2, 20, and 21 April 1999). In addition, the country's current account posted a surplus of RM 36.8 billion in 1998, up sharply from a RM 15.8 billion deficit in 1997 (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 17 May 1999).

The return of foreign investor confidence in Malaysia was clearly reflected in the decision by leading international ratings agencies—S&P, Moody's, and Fitch—to upgrade Malaysia's credit-worthiness (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 1–2 and 27 April 1999). More significantly, the capital controls that were anathema to the international business community in late 1998 gained mainstream support. International finance officials and economic gurus, searching for new tools to avert future economic crises, increasingly came to favour capital controls as useful

mechanisms to regulate more orderly flows of capital across national borders. Among the many voices heard in the vindication of Mahathir's once heretical position was IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus who praised Malaysia for taking advantage of capital controls to restructure its banking sector (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 1999).

What then has been the impact of the financial crisis on business patterns and relationships, especially those that were established during the NEP? And how has the crisis affected the Chinese corporate landscape? While it may be several years yet before one can assess the full impact of the crisis on the Malaysian economy, a number of consequences are already discernible at the time of writing (July 1999).

The most striking feature to date has been that while the 1998 recession has been the worst since independence, its economic and social impact has been less severe than the recession in 1985. Malaysia has exhibited unexpected resilience in the face of the crisis, and the downturn has been far from devastating for the average Malaysian (see, for example, Thomas Fuller's report in the *International Herald Tribune*, 5 February 1999).

Generally speaking, the Malaysian middle class and lower-income, urban-based labour force engaged in manufacturing and services have been harder hit by the financial crisis than those in the agricultural sector. The sharp plunge in share market prices and the sharp devaluation of the ringgit have eroded incomes derived mainly from the urban economy such as manufacturing (especially industries dependent on imported components), property development, distributive trades, and financial and banking services. By contrast, agriculturists and smallholders, particularly those located in FELDA oil palm plantations, have fared better. Since Malays still comprise the majority of the rural population, the financial turmoil experienced by the urban sector has not caused any significant erosion of UMNO's traditional Malay rural support. The level of decline in Malay support for UMNO, if any, which will only become evident in the next general election, is expected to stem principally from political discontent generated by Mahathir's sacking of Anwar Ibrahim.

The country's affluence before the crisis, as reflected in 12 years of uninterrupted expansion averaging 7.8 per cent per annum (Bank Negara Malaysia, 1999: 1), has cushioned the impact of the financial crisis. In a comparison of the recessions of 1985 and 1998, Bank Negara concluded that stronger economic fundamentals—such as lower fiscal deficit, lower external debt, and a stronger banking system—made the country more resilient in 1998, even while the contraction was more severe. In 1985, more banking institutions experienced large losses arising from imprudent lending, poor management and, in some instances, fraud, as in the case of less regulated and illegal deposit-taking co-operatives. Non-performing loans rose to 30.1 per cent at the end of 1988 based on a 12-month classification, as opposed to 12.6 per cent under a 6-month classification at the end of 1998 (*ibid.*: 32–8).

Political resilience and continued racial tranquility have undoubtedly

favoured economic recovery. Given Malaysia's potentially tenuous multiracial social equilibrium—which manifested serious tensions during the 1985 recession—it was remarkable that the political and social unrest generated by the Reformasi movement did not ignite fears of racial conflict. Much of the positive change in Malay-Chinese relations can be credited to the successful restructuring of socio-economic imbalances under the NEP. As seen earlier, the Chinese initially were deeply dissatisfied with the NEP. The economic downturn in 1985 sharply exacerbated Chinese insecurity and political disaffection, thus causing racial polarization, as well as increased outflows of Chinese private sector capital and outmigration of manpower. The resilience of inter-ethnic relations since the onset of the 1997 financial crisis suggests that the NEP was both a necessary and a timely policy.

Over a 20-year period, Chinese capital was invested in Malay enterprises, and state assets were transferred to private sector groups headed by Malay entrepreneurs who, in many cases, worked closely with Chinese business partners. Income distribution and employment opportunities were restructured so that many more Malays benefited from higher-paying, urban-based occupations. Most importantly, the emergence of a Malay middle class has created a confident Malay economic élite. At the same time, Malays from lower-income groups no longer feel unduly aggrieved by Chinese business activities or unfairly deprived of economic opportunities.

Increased interdependence in business relations between Malays and Chinese forged by the NEP has formed the basis for the prevailing stability in inter-ethnic relations. The BN leadership's efforts to enhance inter-ethnic unity during the financial crisis are best exemplified by the 'Love Malaysia, Buy Malaysia' campaign. By appealing to patriotic sentiments across racial lines to support local enterprises, the campaign sought not only to attain its economic objective of reducing the country's dependence on costly imported products, but also its political objective of fostering the spirit of *Bangsa Malaysia* among Malays and non-Malays.

### **The Impact of the 1997 Financial Crisis on Chinese Business**

Highly geared companies, particularly the 'high-flyers' that expanded and diversified their corporate activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s through heavy borrowings, made in part on the strength of their political connections to the UMNO top leadership, have been most vulnerable during the financial crisis. Many of these companies are Malay-owned but several are also owned by Chinese entrepreneurs, notably Vincent Tan (Berjaya Group), Jeffrey Cheah (Sungei Way Holdings), Tong Kooi Ong (Phileo Allied), Lee Kim Yew (Country Heights), Teong Teck Leng (Kuala Lumpur Industries), and Ting Pek Khiang (Ekran). Unless they receive fresh infusions of capital or enter into corporate restructuring with new partners, many of these over-leveraged

'NEP high-flyers' will be much weakened by the economic downturn. However, surprisingly, few Chinese businesses have collapsed. The most notable failure has been that of Soh Chee Wen who, in earlier days, controlled eight listed companies on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 20 April 1999).<sup>15</sup>

Who among the NEP-spawned corporate giants will survive or fall may ultimately depend on the strength of their political connections to the country's highest political office holders. Prime Minister Mahathir has made clear his resolve to use state funds to support ailing businesses deemed essential to 'national development'. While financially troubled state enterprises and private sector bumiputra-owned companies are widely believed to come under this category, a few Chinese corporations have also been accorded such financial assistance. For example, Vincent Tan's Berjaya Group received a RM 300 million soft loan from the government to proceed with its monorail project in Kuala Lumpur (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 1998).

UMNO political patronage continues to remain important to the fortunes of Chinese big business. Equally important, however, is access to the 'right' UMNO patron. In the same way that Chinese entrepreneurs (notably Khoo Kay Peng) aligned with then Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah were weakened by his failure to unseat Mahathir in 1987, those aligned with ousted Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim would surely seek to strengthen their standing with both Mahathir and Daim. Until Anwar's fall from power, Chinese entrepreneurs who were close to him did well from his rising fortunes. With his departure from office, those reported to have been caught on the wrong side of the political divide—businessmen such as Tong Kooi Ong (Phileo Allied)—have become more vulnerable. So far, only one high profile Chinese entrepreneur has lost control of his company due to the Mahathir-Anwar fight. Lim Thian Kiat, who took over Multi-Purpose Holdings from the MCA in 1989, is reported to have sold the company to Chan Chin Cheung, a director and previous owner of Renong. (Chan sold Renong to Halim Saad in 1990.) Lim's corporate fortunes took a turn for the worse when a director in a Multi-Purpose sister company, S. Nallakaruppan, was indicted and jailed on criminal charges that were related to Anwar's detention and sentencing (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 12-13 March 1999).

While almost all companies will undoubtedly suffer from the economic contraction, those best equipped to weather the crisis are the ones that relied on a prudent mix of borrowings and profit retention to finance corporate growth during the boom years of the previous decade. A significant proportion of such companies come from the ranks of Chinese 'old money', represented by listed companies from the Kuok Group, the Genting Group, and the Loy Seng Group (Kuala Lumpur Kepong). Many more unlisted, low profile but cash-rich, family-run enterprises are expected to weather the recession equally well.

Chinese companies engaged in major agricultural commodities production and export, such as palm oil, rubber, and cocoa, have fared

better than most during the recession due to favourable transactions conducted in US dollars. Others that manufacture for the export market, especially items such as computer chips, industrial, and consumer electronic goods, have likewise remained buoyant (*International Herald Tribune*, 5 February 1999). Backed by cash reserves and other assets not mortgaged to creditors, these businesses have the best chances of weathering the recession.

In the case of small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), the government established a RM 1.5 billion fund to help them ride out the economic downturn. Although the majority of SMEs are still Chinese-owned, the government, keenly aware of the vital role played by SMEs in propping up activities in all economic sectors, has disbursed funds in an even-handed manner. By August 1998, 83 per cent (some RM 700 million) of the aid earmarked for SMEs in the food processing sector had been disbursed to Chinese-owned SMEs.<sup>17</sup> However, if economic recovery proceeds too slowly, such measures are unlikely to restore health to SMEs, particularly those that operate principally as suppliers and contractors to financially insolvent big businesses.

To date, the financial crisis has not produced any fundamental changes in the Chinese corporate landscape. Family-operated enterprises continue to dominate the landscape, and Chinese entrepreneurs still seek out bumiputra partners and shareholders. Although the recession is likely to result in a sharply diminished pool of viable Malay business partners, Chinese entrepreneurs will still need to collaborate with politically well-connected Malays. The post-financial crisis Chinese corporate landscape is unlikely to differ fundamentally from the one created by the NEP. New players and new fortunes may replace existing ones, but like the successful businessmen of the NEP years, the new generation of Chinese entrepreneurs will gain their fortunes in the new century by forging mutually beneficial partnerships with bumiputra businessmen and also with foreign partners as globalization proceeds. Important though such collaborationist business ties may be, it is the prudently managed companies that will stand out above the rest.

### Conclusion

The social and political bonds which bound the Alliance leaders between 1957 and 1969 failed to hold the nation together during the racial riots of May 1969 because they were conspicuously absent at the grass-roots level. The NEP implemented between 1970 and 1991 addressed the underlying causes of racial tension by widening and deepening economic interdependence between Malays and Chinese, particularly in the urban economy. While the impact of the financial crisis has so far proved these bonds to be durable, the business ties which presently cement the nation's political and business élites need to be extended downwards to reach Chinese and Malay small businesses. Beyond the consolidation of class ties at the grass roots of Malay and Chinese commercial interests, the state has also to accommodate the socio-economic groups that have

not shared in the prosperity of the NEP years. With growth slowed down by the financial crisis, the heretofore impressive economic accomplishments of the Sino-Malay business élites, with their self-confident mood of inter-ethnic bonhomie, will surely falter if existing or widening intra-ethnic income inequalities are not reversed, legitimate demands of workers and less privileged groups not met, and, equally important, calls for a less constrained political system left unheeded.

1. According to the latest available census figures released in 1995, Chinese formed 29.4 per cent of the population in Peninsular Malaysia compared to 57.4 per cent for Malays and 9.5 per cent for Indians. See Department of Statistics (1995: 40).

2. See, for example, Hamilton, 1991; Menkhoff, 1993; Redding, 1993; Weidenbaum and Hughes, 1995.

3. For historical studies dealing with the economic role of Chinese in Malaysia, see, for example, Jackson (1968); Lee (1978); Trocki (1979); Wong (1965); Yip (1969); and Drabble (1973).

4. For a discussion of the importance of *guanxi* and *xinyong* in Chinese business relationships, see, for example, Menkhoff (1993: 131-47); and Barton (1983). Barton used the term *nyuyong*, the Cantonese form of *xinyong*.

5. Until the Asian financial crisis, which began in July 1997, the Malaysian ringgit was valued at around RM 2.50 to the American dollar.

6. For a close-up study of the political, economic, and cultural factors behind Robert Kuok's business success, see Heng (1997b).

7. For more details on the business careers of some of these men, see, for example, Heng (1997); and Yoshihara Kunio (1988: 201-12).

8. This safeguard was written into the Second Malaysia Plan (pp. v-vi) by Tan Sri Thong Yaw Hong who was then Director-General of the Economic Planning Unit, a division in the Prime Minister's Department that had a key role in the formulation of the NEP. See Heng (1997a: 265-7).

9. Several MCA and Chinese business leaders made this point to the authors in interviews conducted in the summer of 1991.

10. For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Heng (1992).

11. For background information on some of these entrepreneurs, see Hara Fujio (1991); and Searle (1994: chapter 9).

12. In early October 1988, Dr Ling announced his decision to take an extended unpaid leave from his Cabinet duties. The timing of his departure was precipitated by UMNO's exclusion of the MCA from discussions convened by the party to examine the NEP's replacement policy. Determined to push for a Chinese voice, Ling insisted on the establishment of a multiracial consultative committee by staging, in effect, a *de facto* boycott of the Cabinet (Interview, Ling Liong Sik, 1 May 1996).

13. For a closer analysis of the NDP and DEPAN, see Jomo (1994: Chapters 2 and 4); and Heng (1997a).

14. Interview, Yong Poh Kon, 23 July 1991; see also, Mauzy (1991: 7).

15. Information obtained at a dialogue session between MCA president Dr Ling Liong Sik and English-speaking party members held at the MCA headquarters on 12 August 1998.

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## The Emergence and Demise of the Chinese Labour Movement in Colonial Malaya, 1920-1960

Leong Yee Fong

### **The Socio-economic Position of Chinese Labour**

The emergence and demise of the Chinese labour movement in colonial Malaya carries with it two assumptions which have an important bearing on the evolution of Malaysian labour history and the current trade union situation in Malaysia. First, it is significant to note that it was immigrant Chinese labour that launched an organized labour movement that, in turn, developed into a conflict between Chinese labour and the government. The movement, both radical and politically oriented in nature, was completely at variance with the government policy of promoting economic trade unionism that could be accommodated within the framework of a burgeoning colonial export economy. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) became a chief agent of change and development in the dynamics of the Chinese labour struggle for basic workers' rights, and Chinese labour in this respect was an instrument for the enhancement of communist authoritarianism in Malaya. Secondly, while the role of Chinese labour was instrumental in the rise of an organized labour movement in colonial Malaya, Chinese labour leadership of the movement could not be sustained during the post-Japanese occupation period as the MCP itself began to focus its strategic measures on the organization of Indian labour in the hope of transforming the labour movement into a multiracial struggle. The demise of the Chinese labour movement became inescapable when the colonial government itself began to employ measures to contain political trade unionism and to utilize Indian labour leadership to build up a passive and moderate labour movement that could be supportive of government policies aimed at sustaining a robust capitalistic economy. It is intended in this chapter to explore these two assumptions and to analyse the dynamics of change and development in the Malayan labour situation during the colonial era.

Labourers constituted the dominant section of the Chinese immigrant

population in colonial Malaya and stood in glaring contrast to the small minority of merchant-capitalists and entrepreneurs.<sup>1</sup> Colonial administrators had on many occasions highly praised their value and contributions to the growth of the Malayan export colonial economy but, ironically, allowed considerable laxity to employers to devise their own systems of recruitment and employment in accordance with the vicissitudes of the Malayan economy. Although the Labour Codes of 1912 and 1923 provided for the protection of Chinese labourers, they were in practice applied only to Indian labourers.<sup>2</sup> Chinese labourers remained largely outside official supervision and were left to make their own adjustments and to struggle for their own basic labour rights.

As employers could always rely on a continuous supply, Chinese labour possessed little value and bargaining power. Collective bargaining was virtually unknown and organizational consciousness was low except for the guild organizations catering for the urban-centred craftsmen. Illiteracy, speech-group divisions, and lack of uniformity in employment conditions in effect contributed to the general absence of labour unity and consciousness. The contract system of employment, in particular, made it almost impossible for labour to redress their grievances as employers, on the one hand, disclaimed any responsibility for their welfare and, on the other hand, had neither the capacity nor the intention to attend to their interests. Labourers were very much at the mercy of contractors whose powers of recruitment and dismissal provided them with a position from which they could subject the labourers to all kinds of abuses.

### **Manifestations of Labour Consciousness in the 1920s**

Around the 1920s changes began to take place in the socio-economic environment of the labourers. The declining role of the triad societies, the abolition of indentured labour in 1914, the opportunities stimulated by an expanding colonial economy, and the increasing pace of urbanization in the Federated Malay States (FMS) had considerably enhanced the social and occupational mobility of labourers. The development of Chinese education, especially night schools for the adult working class, had also made them more conscious of their downtrodden position and, at the same time, more susceptible to the influence of labour developments in China where Sun Yat Sen had proclaimed a programme for labour reform which included the abolition of contract labour system and demands for higher wages and improvements in working conditions. Skilled workers in the urban centres were also exposed to the more radical influences of anarchism, communism, and nationalism. The Political Intelligence Bureau, in this respect, had reported frequently the influx of Bolshevik propaganda which carried with it excerpts on labour rights and the women's emancipation movement (*MBPI*, April 1922, CO 273/516).

At the same time, it was known that left-wing Kuomintang (KMT) agitators whose political aspirations were allied with those of the All

China Federation of Trade Unions (an organization under the control of the Chinese Communist Party) had begun to focus their attention on the political development of trade unionism. The movement was centred on the organization of a network of night schools which served as a basis for political indoctrination and the development of militant trade unionism.

Generally, the labour organizations that emerged were nothing more than small labour unions mostly made up of the Hailam dialect group and dominated by rubber tappers, factory workers, domestic servants, water-carriers, seamen, and mechanics. The initial stimulus that prompted their identification with these unions was probably the hope for better protection and leadership especially when the existing guilds were too employer-centred and inadequate in promoting their interests. The majority of these were, at one time, associated with the Cheong Lo Wui, a mutual benefit and co-operative society which functioned in the nature of triad societies (*MBPI*, May 1927, CO 273/535). Accustomed to clandestine traditions and tactics of the Cheong Lo Wui, it was relatively easy for them to transfer their allegiance to the illegal unions. To a certain extent, it could also be explained in terms of their following the lead taken by the Kheng Ngai (Hailam) Revolutionary Alliance in China in organizing workers in Hainan and in supporting the left-wing KMT.

#### **The Depression and Its Impact on Labour**

The Depression that swept through Malaya in 1930 affected the position of wage-labourers more than any other section of the population. Labour-intensive industries, particularly rubber and tin mining, hitherto accustomed to expansion and prosperity, found themselves saddled with a labour surplus. Working conditions deteriorated further and abuses, particularly related to the labour contract system, were accentuated. The colonial government did little to alleviate the distress of the unemployed beyond that of imposing restrictions on labour immigration or assisting in labour repatriation much in the same way as removing an unwanted commodity.

Despite all the traumatic consequences on Chinese labour, the Depression, nevertheless, had a significant impact on subsequent labour developments. The quota system on labour immigration had the effect of building up a local reservoir of Chinese labourers who were becoming more acquainted with the intricacies of the Malayan employment system and its inherent abuses while the exemption of female immigrants from the quota invariably produced a more family-centred labour force (*Straits Settlements Annual Report*, 1931). Labour consciousness, without doubt, was enhanced with a more settled labour force that had become less amenable to the restrictive controls of contractors and employers.

It was also becoming apparent that Chinese labour during the Depression had become a target for communist agitation. The MCP saw in the Depression an opportune moment to intensify its activities among the industrial workers. In an attempt to recruit the 'progressive'

workers into its front organization, the Malayan General Labour Union (MGLU), the party focused its vigorous propaganda campaign on the grievances of the workers. The unemployment issue was fully exploited on such occasions as Communist International Unemployment Day and Communist Unemployment Week (*MRC A (FMS)*, February 1931, CO 717/81). The workers were exhorted to struggle for the establishment of government-sponsored unemployment relief camps, the provision of unemployment insurance, and the eradication of unremunerative labour. All the same they were exhorted to establish 'the governing power of the peasants and labourers so that unemployment may be avoided' (*MRC A (FMS)*, March 1931, CO 717/81).

The MCP, on the whole, was relatively unsuccessful in mobilizing a concerted labour movement. Nevertheless, the efforts of the MCP were not completely without any influence. Significantly, the slump conditions seemed to have made it possible for the party to reach a minority of non-Hailam workers who had hitherto remained outside communist influence. As early as mid-1931 a report by the MGLU showed that a few of its branches included a minority of non-Hailams. Illustrative of this was the Singapore General Labour Union which reported a membership of 60 per cent Hailams, 30 per cent Cantonese, Hakkas, and Hokkiens, and the rest made up of Indians (*MRC A*, No. 16, December 1931, CO 273/572). The party, in this respect, had made a modest break-through in the communist-backed labour movement. It opened the way for the building up of a core of non-Hailam cadres that could be deployed for organizational work among a multi-speech group labour force in the estates, mines, and factories.

### **Labour Unrest between 1934 and 1937**

The period of economic revival following the Depression saw the outbreak of labour unrest. It began with the craft workers in the towns, followed by building and factory labourers in Singapore and Johore, and culminating with the factory, mining, and estate labourers in Selangor. It is difficult to attribute the unrest, during the initial stage, to the work of communist agitation. It was more of spontaneous reaction to rising prices, increasing production, and decreasing unemployment, static wages that lagged behind the price increases, and the cumulative effects of the Depression period on the labourers' standard of living. The demands, in most cases, were centred on the restoration of pre-Depression wage rates, improvements in working conditions, workmen's compensation, maternity benefits, provision of educational facilities, and in a few cases, recognition of union organizations. It was for this reason that officials from the Chinese Secretariat persistently advised against repressive action by the police. The High Commissioner, Sir Shenton Thomas, had also critically remarked that the underlying cause of the unrest was the slump mentality and intransigence of employers.

While there was little doubt that socio-economic grievances provided

the setting for the rising momentum of labour unrest, it was the MCP's organizational drive and direction that turned it into a more systematic and organized movement in 1937. Based on the evidence unravelled by the police, it was alleged that following the Representative Conference of the party in September 1936, the MCP had decided on building up a string of vocational unions in Selangor (Moorish, n.d.). In line with this strategy, a North Central Command was set up in Kuala Lumpur. Several top communist cadres were transferred to Selangor to organize the Command with the aim of organizing the coal workers, the rubber tappers, and the factory workers into labour unions (*ibid.*).

Chen Han, a high ranking Hailam cadre, was dispatched from Singapore to organize the Northern Command. He became chairman of the Western Section of the Command and was connected primarily with the organization of the coal workers at the Malayan Collieries in Batu Arang. His arrival at the Collieries coincided with the outbreak of labour unrest in November 1936 and he was successful in exploiting the grievances of the workers to form the Coal Workers' Union.<sup>3</sup> Among the rubber tappers in Kajang, Ulu Langat, and Negri Sembilan, Chiu Tong, a Cantonese cadre, was detailed for organizational work and he succeeded in establishing the Selangor Rubber Workers' Union with a majority of Hakka labourers. Meanwhile, among the pineapple cutters in Klang, Phang Seow Lin, a Teochew cadre and chairman of the Batu Laut division of the MCP, was actively involved in recruiting the labourers into the Pineapple Cutters Benevolent Association while Boh Chin, chairman of the Klang division, was responsible for organizing the factory labourers in Klang.

By March 1937 when the estate tappers in Selangor had been considerably stirred up by the spate of strikes, the communist cadres were reported to have established a Strike Committee to co-ordinate a large-scale strike among the estate tappers. The aims were twofold: to compel the employers to settle all the outstanding issues and to press for the official recognition of the Selangor Rubber Workers' Union (*ibid.*). Some of the issues concerned here were related to the definition of a work task, the payment of a minimum wage of \$1.00, maternity benefits, the application of the Labour Code, employment security, and improvements of living conditions.

The Strike Committee purportedly issued the order to strike on 7 March 1937. Coal workers at Batu Arang also rallied in support of the Chinese estate tappers on 24 March. A force of between 600 and 800 workers, organized by the Coal Workers Strike Committee, demanded the release of all tappers detained by the police. Armed pickets were set up while measures were taken to block all access to the mine. Even a 'prison' was set up to hold workers considered 'traitorous' to the Committee. Notices exhorting the workers to strike a blow at the capitalists were put up and for nearly three days a state of imperium in imperio had been established at the Collieries (Dickinson, 1937).

The police, in summing up the situation, attributed the whole set-up to the work of communist agitators who were planning to use the

Collieries strike as a test of strength. The Deputy Commissioner of Police, in this respect, described the situation in the following terms (ibid.):

the Strike Committee at Batu Arang was in liaison with and acting under the guidance of the unlawful Union of Rubber Workers of Negri Sembilan and Selangor ... and that it was the intention so to develop the situation at Batu Arang that, by the paralysis of essential services in the Federated Malay States and of the greater part of the tin mining industry, Government would be forced into conceding the extortionate demands of the strikers. On success at Batu Arang, therefore depended the success of the whole strike movement with all the chaos and danger that would have implied in the FMS. The organization behind the whole movement was under Communist influence.

### Communist Agitation Behind the Strikes in Singapore, 1939-1940

Although the estate tappers strikes' collapsed in March 1937 and normalcy seemed to have returned to the Chinese labour scene, this was no more than a lull before the storm. Employers made no attempts to improve labour conditions especially the role of the labour contractor which had been the root cause of the 1937 labour unrest. The only attempt to resolve the problem of the contractor was at the Malayan Collieries which began to experiment with a direct system of labour employment (Grice, 1938).

On the part of the government, a senior Protectorate official was appointed to prepare a report on conditions and methods of Chinese employment. It was decided to make more frequent inspection visits to acquaint officials with the problems and to report on conditions of employment in the estates, mines, and factories. A Chinese Advisory Board was established to advise the government on Chinese labour matters and plans were made to enact trade union legislation in view of the growth of many *de facto* labour organizations.

All in all, employers still maintained a complacent attitude which, in reality, stemmed from their own strong conviction that there was nothing basically wrong with the existing employment system. Government officials, after their initial flurry of concern over Chinese labour, began to drift into a state of tardiness and hesitation and, in fact by 1940, they were becoming more concerned with isolating communist influence from Chinese labour than with finding solutions to labour grievances. The enactment of the trade union law, for example, was intended more for the prevention of trade unions from coming under communist influence than for the purpose of fostering responsible union leadership (SS Legislative Council Proceedings, 1939, B 141).

Under these circumstances, Chinese labour could not have become less susceptible to communist manipulation in the period following the 1937 strikes. On the contrary, communist influence was significantly enhanced by two developments. First, the formation of the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Movement in July 1937 when Chinese



labour, especially in the urban centres, became more conscious through the formation of relief fund associations which eventually combined in them the functions of trade unionism. The MCP, working through its front organization, the Anti-Enemy Backing-up Society (AEBUS) was able to exert its influence over many of the associations through the appointment of its better educated members into the committees (CO 273/662). The second was the recurrence of economic recession in 1938 which saw many of the concessions won by the labourers in the 1937 strikes eroded by their employers. Estate tappers, for example, had their daily wages slashed from eighty cents to sixty cents. By the end of 1939 when economic conditions in Malaya had improved, employers had failed, however, to return to the pre-recession wage levels despite the sharp rise of commodity prices that resulted from war time demands. The failure of wages to register an increase in the light of the soaring cost of living had become, as in the case of 1937, a major grievance issue of labour. Communist agitators, without doubt, found in this labour situation a fertile ground for agitation and manipulation.

The focal point of communist agitation at the end of 1939 was not in the Malay states but in Singapore where the Singapore General Labour Union (SGLU) was inciting the workers to strike and organizing them into red labour unions. The first wave of unrest was connected with the MCP's intention to break the Singapore Mechanics Engineering Association and to reorganize the members into a new mechanics union which would be affiliated to the SGLU (CO 273/662). To force the issue, the SGLU sparked off a series of strikes in the Chinese engineering firms, the Harbour Board, an important quasi-government corporation which was then engaged in vital work for the British Admiralty, the General Hospital, and the Harbour Board's power station. The Harbour Board strike, in this case, was significant in that any concession won from the Port Trust Authorities would have considerably enhanced the position of the SGLU over the mechanics in Singapore (Yeo, 1973: 207-8).

No sooner had the Harbour Board strike subsided when a new wave of strikes erupted affecting mainly the rubber factory workers whose economic role during the war period was vital in speeding up the delivery of rubber to Britain. A prolonged strike would have undermined government efforts in maximizing war time production to support British war efforts. The MCP, in this respect, pointed out that 'this is the most opportune moment for our party to organize the workers of all classes together because of their high revolutionary feeling and of their gradual distrust in yellow organization leadership'.<sup>4</sup> Evidence showing a communist influence behind the factory strikes came in the wake of a police raid on the Tai Thong Rubber Factory on 11 June 1940. Found in the workers' quarters were several SGLU documents of a 'seditious and anti-British nature', a number of photographs of Lenin, and a photograph of the 'Workers Committee' of the factory (CO 273/666).

The colonial government viewed the strikes with great alarm. Practically every rubber factory and godown had stopped work. The

strikes had also spread to the pineapple factories. The situation was made all the more disturbing by Special Branch reports that Japanese-directed agents from Formosa had penetrated communist-controlled anti-Japanese organizations in Malaya. In this connection, persistent rumours had been circulated that the Japanese had a hand in agitating the strikes in the rubber and pineapple factories—a rumour which seemed all the more convincing in view of the fact that Chinese labourers employed in Japanese packing plants, shipping godowns, and in the only Japanese owned rubber factory were totally unaffected by the unrest (*ibid.*). Against this background, stern measures were taken to curb the strikes. The rubber and tin industries were gazetted as essential services and regulations banning all strikes in designated industries were also gazetted (Stenson, 1970: 48). At the same time, all communist agitators and suspects were rounded up. By July 1940 it was reported that no less than 201 leading SGLU agitators had been arrested on banishment warrants.

### The Japanese Occupation

The Japanese Occupation of Malaya between February 1942 and August 1945 can be considered as a watershed in Malayan labour history. It shattered the old colonial system of free immigration into Malaya and accelerated the trend towards the permanent settlement of the immigrant population. It brought about an abrupt end to the labour movement that had hitherto been characterized by unrest and strikes. MCP labour agitation and organizational activities came to a virtual standstill. The labour situation was in a state of chaos and confusion. Following the collapse of the colonial economy, there was a large-scale dislocation of labour distribution. This was manifested in the widespread dispersal of the labour force, especially when many of the workers were diverted into agricultural production to meet the increasing shortage of food or were mobilized to meet the manpower needs of wartime Japanese military and strategic projects.

From the point of view of their impact on the postwar trade union movement, the Occupation years produced a new generation of politically motivated leaders who were desirous of bringing about a new political and social order in postwar Malaya. Imbued with the wartime experiences of the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, the Indian Independence League, and the Indian National Army, they could no longer accommodate themselves to a passive political existence upon the return of the British in September 1945. Inevitably, when the colonial government chose to ignore them politically, they had little alternative but to turn to the mobilization of labour. Trade unionism became a vehicle for the projection of their political image especially at a time when the absence of prohibitive laws permitted the proliferation of all types of societies in postwar Malaya. Labour militancy and political trade unionism became the order of the day. The MCP, operating openly for the first time, was able to capitalize on the situation, but, ironically it

was also the MCP's attempt to build up a multiracial labour movement that spelled the beginning of the demise of the Chinese labour movement in colonial Malaya.

### **The Immediate Post-war Years, 1945-1948**

The influence of the communist leadership reached its peak between 1945 and 1948. MCP popularity rested not only on its role in championing the anti-Japanese cause but also on its ability to command the allegiance of labour. In this respect, the militant leadership of the MCP had temporarily displaced the pre-war Chinese community leaders whose collaboration with the Japanese regime had undermined their credibility as the spokesmen of the overseas Chinese.<sup>5</sup> In its bid for political preeminence, the MCP relied mainly on its front organization, the Pan Malayan General Labour Union, which was later renamed the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). The PMFTU emerged as a popular force among Chinese labourers because of its leadership that stemmed from Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army personnel who were regarded as heroes of the anti-Japanese struggle during the Occupation period. It was also due to the fact that within the context of postwar economic shortages, inflation, and low wages, the PMFTU provided the only source of leadership that had the capacity to realize the aspirations of the workers.

The PMFTU differed fundamentally from its pre-war body, the Malayan General Labour Union, in that it operated openly within the constraints imposed by the colonial government. As it could harness substantial funds from its General Labour Union affiliates (GLU), the PMFTU was able to provide secretarial service and funding for union organizations and strikes (Yeo, 1973: 207-8). Basically it functioned as an umbrella organization overseeing a network of GLUs at the state and district levels, each of which commanded the allegiance of numerous labour organizations that had emerged after the war (*ibid.*). As the majority of the PMFTU leaders were political organizers rather than labour leaders, it was inevitable that they advocated a form of political trade unionism emphasizing the right of workers to fight for economic advancement through political agitation. Within a short span of time, they were able to generate lower-level leaders from the ranks of labour and to absorb them into the GLUs, thus transforming the labour movement into a more coherent force.

During the initial stage of the PMFTU existence, it was successful in agitating massive and violent general strikes that comprised a large majority of Chinese workers. However, after this initial show of strength, there was little involvement of Chinese labour in militant demonstrations and strikes. On the contrary, the Chinese were overshadowed by Indian labour militancy. For the greater part of 1946 and 1947, Chinese labour strikes were very much localized becoming more in the nature of token strikes rather than a concerted struggle for the betterment of their socio-economic existence.

### The Shift in MCP's Labour Strategy

Ironically, the turning point of the Chinese labour movement was due to a change in the political basis of the communist-sponsored trade union movement. In an attempt to embark on a constitutional struggle for political concessions from the Malayan Union Government, MCP labour strategy had begun to veer towards acquiring Indian labour support. Post-war MCP labour strategy in this respect constituted a marked change from its prewar emphasis in exploiting Chinese labour unrest and in acquiring the political support of the Chinese. The MCP, realizing the fallacy of its pre-war strategy in failing to build up a multiracial party, began to project itself as a party organization that represented the interests of all races in Malaya. The main theme of its propaganda became 'an all racial struggle for liberation from the British in which Malays, Indians, and Chinese were to work towards a common political goal'.

In building up a multiracial front, it became obvious that Chinese support was taken for granted. The winning over of Malay peasant support and Indian labour allegiance became a matter of paramount importance to the party. However, from the very beginning, the MCP failed to influence the Malay peasantry largely because it had overestimated its popularity when, in fact, its domination and arbitrary authority over Malay rural areas had alienated the Malay peasants.<sup>6</sup> To give the party a multiracial semblance, it became a matter of political expediency to mobilize the Indian working class in order to reduce its image as a purely Chinese political organization. Thus, in the course of 1946 and 1947, a predominantly Chinese labour movement was gradually transformed into an Indian-dominated labour movement under GLU leadership.

MCP's new labour orientation was also, to a great extent, dictated by the need to harness the increasing militancy of Indian labour. The necessity of forging a Sino-Indian labour alliance was facilitated by the rise of a militant group of Indian labour organizers whose wartime participation in the Malaya-based Indian National Army (INA) had elevated their self-importance as leaders of a disgruntled labour community. Their wartime experience invariably found expression in the organization of Indian labour unions. Most of the organizers were locally born youths who shared little of the docility of the older generation of immigrant labourers. They were generally labelled as agitators by employers and government officials as they advocated not only labour reform but also the politics of Dravidian nationalism.

Unlike former MPAJA labour organizers who were alienated from the traditional Chinese community leaders, the Indian labour leadership was more acceptable to the rest of the Indian community. The upper crust of Indian society, for example, supported the political and social ideals of the INA labour organizers and looked upon the Indian labour strikes as a struggle for greater freedom from colonial domination and for the emancipation of the working class. N. Raghavan, a former chairman of

the Central Indian Association of Malaya and who was associated with the large-scale Indian labour strikes in Klang in 1941, categorically supported the labour cause at the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in early 1947 (*Indian Daily Mail*, 10 April 1947). In commenting on the upsurge of Indian labour strikes, he proclaimed that

the war years had taught him (the labourer) his own vital importance to the country and the transitory nature of foreign domination. He therefore organized for the fight for Freedom and Democracy. The extensive nature of the strikes that has become a common feature of post-war Malaya indicates that labour will no more put up with exploitation, and the war against colonialism has already commenced (*Indian Daily Mail*, 10 April 1947).

Raghavan's opinion reflected the nationalist aspirations of Indian community leaders in general at a time when India was moving towards independence. This was particularly true after Indian morale was boosted by the visit of Pandit Nehru to Malaya in March 1946 and the assurance given by the Supreme Allied Command that Indians who had collaborated with the Japanese regime in Malaya would be leniently treated (MUF 66/1946).

The question of mobilizing Indian labour became increasingly imperative when Indian professionals who had provided top-level leadership in the pre-war Indian associations began to build up a closer rapport with the lower-level labour leaders. The lead was taken by a former minister of Subhas Chandra Bose's Provisional Government, John Thivy,<sup>7</sup> who felt that Indian labour should be diverted from the communist-controlled GLUs. Taking into account the national awakening of the Indian community in Malaya, he advocated strongly the need for a new communal association dealing with issues pertaining to the local Indian community. His aim was to reconcile the élitist leadership of the prewar Indian associations with the newly emergent labour unions. As such he envisaged the setting up of a labour section within his proposed organization to harness the potential support of Indian labour interests.

The MCP was willing to concede to the formation of a pan-Malayan Indian organization but saw in the formation of the labour section a potential source of rivalry to the GLUs. Invariably, in reaction, the GLUs began to swing sharply towards Indian labour mobilization when a large majority of the Indian labour leaders were absorbed into GLU leadership. S. Mohan, for example, was made chairman of the Selangor GLU, P. Veerasenan, the vice-president of the Singapore GLU, A. M. Samy, the vice-president of the Kedah GLU, and finally, S. A. Ganapathy was made the president of the PMFTU in early 1947. With this change in the composition of the GLU leadership, it became increasingly apparent in the course of 1947 that Indian labour issues occupied the centre stage of the Malayan labour movement.

In retrospect, the GLUs directly contributed to the emergence of a more coherent and concerted Indian labour movement that was sustained long after the suppression of the GLUs in June 1948 when the Emergency was declared. For the vast majority of the Chinese workers

in the estates, the Indian labour issues had little relevance to them. On the contrary they worked against the interests of Chinese contract estate workers in that their wage gains were undermined by the Indian demands for parity of pay. In June 1947, for example, when there was a temporary downturn of rubber prices, the United Planting Association of Malaya declared unilaterally a reduction of 20 per cent of the Chinese contract labourers' wages (SSF 46/1947). The reduction of Chinese wages was, in this case, criticized as a calculated move 'to shake off the demand of the Indian estate workers for a 100 per cent wage increase (*Democrat*, 1 June 1947)'. In the long run, as Indian unionists continued to dominate the labour movement during the Emergency period, Chinese labourers tended to develop a distrust towards trade unions that were Indian-dominated.

### **Kuomintang Resurgence, Secret Societies, and GLU Violence**

MCP mobilization of Indian labour was not the only factor that alienated Chinese labour from the GLUs. Equally important was the reaction of Chinese employers, merchants, and labour contractors who had, hitherto, been the main targets of MPAJA intimidation and GLU militancy. As the majority of them were pro-KMT, it was often the case that they were singled out for attack and criticism on grounds of political ideology and labour exploitation. Invariably, they supported the revival of KMT branches in Malaya and its youth organization, the San Min Chu-i Youth Corps.

To counteract the GLUs, pro-KMT employers were known to have associated themselves with secret societies, which, in the absence of any prohibitive laws, were able to flourish openly. Among these societies were the Ang Bin Hoay (ABH) in northern Malaya and the Wah Kee in Selangor. The ABH was antagonistic to the GLUs largely because the latter competed with the ABH for control of the Chinese worker population. The Wah Kee, on the other hand, was dominant in Selangor and operated under the guise of registered social clubs and mutual help associations (Dobree, p. 9). Available evidence shows that KMT members in Malaya joined these societies as individuals and some, in fact, held positions as office-bearers (ACA 10/1947). In this respect, the British Commissioner for Labour reported that some employers had used secret societies to counteract the formation of trade unions and to dominate their employees. The secret societies, in other words, catered to the psychological and social needs of employers to maintain their position as employers (ACA 10/1947).

It became clear that in the course of 1946, the development of GLUs assumed a new dimension within the context of MCP-KMT rivalry. GLUs had become the targets of secret society violence, and Chinese National Day celebrations (Double-Tenth) seemed to be occasions when violent clashes occurred between the secret societies and the GLUs. A case in point was in October 1946 when the ABH launched a

series of attacks on GLU offices and members in the districts of Sitiawan-Dinding, Simpang Ampat, and Taiping, all of which were ABH strongholds in northern Malaya. In a letter to 'Compatriots of Various Nationalities in Malaya Regarding the Sitiawan Incident' issued by the Perak Federation of Trade Unions (PFTU), Chinese workers were exhorted to protect their trade unions from the 'cunning, shameless and murderous (ABH) elements' (RTU 128/1946). Significantly, the PFTU also insinuated that the KMT was the instigating force behind the whole episode.

The GLUs did not initiate any immediate retaliation against the ABH as the MCP was still persistent in striving for the legalization of the GLU-led labour movement. However, when it became apparent that the colonial authorities were bent on the total suppression of the GLUs and the development of an alternative labour movement that was more amenable to government control, the GLUs were turned into instruments for carrying out the 'people's revolutionary war' and the preparation of the masses for independence (McLane, 1946: 35; Hyde, n.d.). The 'revolutionary war' was not only aimed at the colonial administration but also at the pro-KMT Chinese and secret society elements. In the ensuing industrial action between April and June 1948, strikes and labour violence were geared towards the disruption of the colonial economy rather than the struggle for better working conditions and wages. GLU-led trade unionism had degenerated into a lawless and destructive movement which, in turn, completely shattered Chinese confidence in the merits of organized labour. Intimidation was rampant, propaganda was widespread, and MCP 'killer squads' were on the move carrying out a campaign of terror compelling labourers to strike (Blythe, 1949). At the same time, assassination and murders were carried out against pro-KMT shopkeepers, estate owners, labour contractors, and secret society elements who were described as 'tools of the imperialists' and 'enemies of the revolution' (PSF A-28.45; RTU 32/1946).

There is little doubt that the political orientation of the GLUs was at variance with the interests of Chinese labourers. Rivalry with the KMT and the secret societies, as well as the industrial violence that preceded the communist armed insurrection in June 1948, only served to further alienate Chinese labour support for GLU leadership. Even Indian labour unions had become less amenable to GLU domination and were no longer willing to submit themselves to the political goals of the GLUs. Mutual co-operation had given way to suspicion and distrust, and Indian labour unions affiliated to the GLUs began to dissociate themselves from the GLUs and to form independent unions of their own in early 1948. Illustrative of this was the breakup of the Federation of Rubber Workers' Union in Kedah when branch unions at a representatives' conference resolved to withdraw from the Federation and to reorganize themselves into a new union known as Kedah and Perlis Estate Indian Workers' Union.

The immediate effect of industrial violence was that the government reacted by amending the Trade Unions Ordinance to put an end to the

PMFTU and its state Federations. The MCP was outlawed and a state of Emergency was declared on 16 June 1948. As a result, the hitherto militant union movement was totally emasculated in the absence of any leadership. This was manifested in the marked decline of registered unions and membership. At the beginning of 1948, there were 289 unions with a membership of 198,713 but by the end of the year only 161 survived with a membership of 70,037 (Federation of Malaya, 1948: 4). The majority of the unions that remained precariously were government employees' unions and a few Indian-dominated unions that had succeeded in resisting communist infiltration.

For the majority of the Chinese workers, the conditions arising from the Emergency were traumatic. As most of the insurgents were Chinese, employers developed an attitude of distrust of Chinese employees and tended to replace them with Indians or Malays resulting in a temporary dislocation of the Chinese labour force. The government, in fact, had passed an Indigenous Malay Labour's Ordinance to encourage the employment of Malays.<sup>8</sup> Caught in the web of GLU intimidation and government suppression, Chinese workers became indifferent or antagonistic towards trade unionism. Trade unionism came to be associated with anti-government political subversion when workers discovered that involvement with trade unionism invited police surveillance. As a result, there was a significant withdrawal of the Chinese from unions that had formerly been dominated by Chinese leadership. Cases in point were the Penang Harbour Workers Association and the Malayan Colliery Workers' Association which virtually disappeared after the declaration of the Emergency (RTU 11/1946).

### **Colonial Policy and the Beginning of 'New Trade Unionism'**

For the rest of the colonial period until independence in 1957, colonial trade union policy was shaped by the communist armed insurrection. The process of promoting a Malayan trade union movement following the collapse of the GLUs was dictated by considerations that were subordinated to the larger aim of counteracting the insurgency. Official opinion, in this respect, was reflected in the short-term departmental policy on the formation or revival of trade unions that had collapsed amidst the confusion of the Emergency.

That, in view of the known intention of the terrorists to endeavour to use the unions and their funds for their own aims, whenever the question of registering a union arises, the Registrar of Unions will give careful consideration of the conditions obtaining in the area concerned in order to satisfy himself whether or not the union is likely to be used for unlawful purposes or purposes inconsistent with its rules and objects. That, in general, the organization of unions in the present circumstances should be proceeded cautiously and in consonance with Government's determination to deny the terrorists all possible means of intensifying or prolonging the present insurrection (ISRF 130/1951).



During the course of the Emergency, it became clear that colonial trade union policy was designed to satisfy three main objectives. First, in order to build up a network of trade unions that were amenable to government control, trade unions were required to divest themselves of any form of political participation. What was required was the development of economic unionism that was distinct from political unionism pursued by the GLUs. Trade union laws on the use of union funds were considerably tightened and it was stipulated that union funds could not be used to support any political organization or any political candidate (CO 717/522976/157). Secondly, it was imperative that trade unions should be formed on an industrial basis with membership drawn from similar trades, industries, or occupations. General unions based on various trades or industries were disallowed to prevent the possibility of being used as tools by interested parties to undermine the economic stability of the country (*ibid.*). Finally, it was deemed essential that trade unions should reflect the multi-ethnic composition of the Malayan workforce. This was intended to put an end to the practice of establishing unions that represented the respective interests of various ethnic groups.

From the very beginning, the new trade union policy affected the Chinese labour class more than the Indians. Government labour officers were suspicious of Chinese labour organizations. The Commissioner for Labour, for example, categorically maintained that 'nothing should be done to encourage Chinese workers to join unions until the Chinese bandits have been exterminated' (Gamba, 1962: 368). The Chinese were allowed to join existing unions which were in most cases dominated by Indian leadership but applications for the formation or resuscitation of Chinese unions were turned down. The reason normally given for any rejection was that they were either likely to be used for unlawful purposes or that it was the policy of the government to promote multiracial unionism.

During the entire period of the Emergency, attempts to organize Chinese unions were met with stern government reaction. They were discouraged, refused registration, or suppressed through amendments to the Trade Unions Ordinance. In the early 1950s when the newly formed Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) attempted to organize Chinese estate workers, the chairman of the Labour Subcommittee was told that the formation of trade unions on a communal basis or as part of a political organization was strictly prohibited (ISRF 151/1952). The MCA was allowed to carry out activities confined to helping the unorganized Chinese workers to understand the aims and purposes of trade unionism. Chinese labourers could, if they wanted to become unionized, join existing unions of plantation workers. Thus, without the leadership that could only have come from political organizations, Chinese trade unionism practically drifted into a state of oblivion. While the majority of the Chinese withdrew from trade unions for fear of being branded as communist subversive elements, even trade guilds which were once considered as politically harmless organizations became nothing more than

recreational centres where members congregated to read newspapers or to play mahjong (Labour (Federation of Malaya) 442/1954).

In contrast to the Chinese, there were occasions when open encouragement was given to the organization of Indian workers. This was clearly contrary to the trade union policy directive that the organization of trade unions should neither be discouraged nor stimulated. The waterfront labourers, received the assistance of the Trade Union Adviser's Department to organize two labour unions in May 1951 at a time when the Emergency had reached a critical stage. The contention here was that while there was no certainty that attempts would not be made by outside elements to influence them, it was thought to be more dangerous to have unorganized and discontented workers suffering from frustration because of the absence of any legal machinery to resolve their grievances (ISRF 130/1951).

In the case of Indian estate workers, the process of unionization was, in fact, accelerated to counteract the influence of communist propaganda. In early 1949, it was reported by the Director of Intelligence that the MCP's Propaganda Bureau had directed its party cadres to infiltrate existing Indian estate unions and to incite the labourers to organize themselves against the management (McHugh, 1949: 29). As communist agents were known to move freely in estates and mines, the colonial authorities were convinced that the best way to counteract the communist offensive was to prevail upon the existing Indian estate unions to extend their influence to unorganized labour in certain designated areas of communist disturbance.

The case was best exemplified in the district of Tanjong Malim in the extreme south of Perak (ISRF 121/1952). From the point of view of trade unionism, Tanjong Malim was at one time a stronghold of the PMFTU but since the declaration of the Emergency, it had become a 'no man's land' in that neither the Perak Estate Employees' Union had extended its influence from the north nor the Plantation Workers' Union of Malaya from the south. By 1950, Tanjong Malim had become a hotbed of communist subversion and the urgency of the situation required that the government impress upon the organizers of both unions the need to extend their sphere of operations to this district. At the same time, the government also encouraged the existing Indian estate unions to amalgamate into a national union. The aim behind the move was to consolidate the trade union movement in the rubber industry and to lay the foundation for the eventual establishment of a joint consultative machinery.

What was even more significant was that the colonial government gave its support and encouragement to a group of Indian trade unionists in forming a Malayan Trades Union Congress (MTUC) to co-ordinate the activities of all trade unions in Malaya. The majority of these unionists were Indians from the plantations and public employees' unions. Among them were P. P. Narayanan of the Negri Sembilan Plantation Workers Union (which subsequently became the National Union of Plantation Workers Union), M. P. Rajagopal from the Railway Men's

Union, and V. M. N. Menon, secretary of the Malaya Estate Staff Association. They were English-educated, moderate in their views and, most important of all, supported the government's campaign against communism. A few of them were nominated as labour representatives in the Federal Legislature serving as spokesmen on labour issues. It was therefore not surprising that the colonial government depended on this group for the rebuilding of a moderate and non-government trade union movement.

### **Chinese Trade Unionism and Labour Leadership, 1955-1957**

Chinese trade unionism had, hitherto, depended very much on the availability of outside political leadership, and in the absence of this factor during the initial stage of the Emergency, it remained in a state of doldrums. However, by the beginning of 1955, there were signs that Chinese labour was beginning to show willingness of greater involvement in trade unionism and, not surprisingly, the gradual resurgence was associated with the emergence of a minority group of militant and radical trade unionists whose interests were tied up closely with the newly formed Labour Party of Malaya. Their interest in trade unionism did not stem from the desire to improve the position of Chinese labour but from 'the desire to harness the unaffiliated potential of Chinese labouring classes to political party or personal ambitions' (PSF A-17). In attempting to broaden the base of the Labour Party, they succeeded in establishing themselves as secretaries or advisers to Chinese dominated trade unions between 1955 and 1957.

Among this group were Ooi Thiam Siew, Tan Thuan Boon, Kwa Boo Sun, Yin Choo Hun, and V. David, all of whom were English-educated and of middle-class origins. Ooi Thiam Siew, secretary of the Malayan Mining Employees' Union (MMEU), was also an electoral candidate of the Labour Party in the 1955 federal elections. Kwa Boo Sun, an economic adviser of the MMEU, was known to have established close contacts with left-wing trade unionists in Singapore. Tan Thuan Boon, another Labour Party candidate in the 1955 elections, was mainly concerned with building up a Chinese rubber worker's union to rival that of the Indian-dominated National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW). V. David, a Labour Party leader in Selangor, was mainly concerned with the mobilization of factory workers, and, though an Indian, was often regarded as a champion of the Chinese workers' cause (Leong, 1990: 462).

There were two main factors that stimulated the Malayan Chinese unionists to seek political power through the trade union movement. In the first place, they were inspired by the political success that political parties in Singapore had achieved with the support of the labouring class. In Malaya where the Labour Party was dependent on mass support that could only have come from the workers, the government's relaxation of the restrictions on trade unions holding political funds and

the impending federal elections in 1955 must have provided them with the immediate impetus to draw organized labour into the sphere of politics in the hope of uniting the whole labour movement under their auspices.

The Malayan trade unionists were also influenced by the dynamism of the Singapore trade union movement in 1954 and 1955. This was manifested in their connections with a group of radical unions such as the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union (SFSWU), the Singapore Bus Workers' Union, the Malayan Textile Mill Workers' Union, the Naval Base Union, and the Singapore Harbour Board Labourers' Union. These unions were collectively known as the Middle Road group by virtue of the fact that they had their headquarters in Middle Road in Singapore (PSF A-17). Middle Road was the hub of Singapore trade union radicalism, being the headquarters of the most militant anti-colonial labour union, the SFSWU. Formed in April 1955 and led by Lim Chin Siong, a former student agitator, it was patterned after the former Singapore Federation of Trade Unions in that it was an umbrella organization representing workers of diverse trades and industries (Lee, 1961: 18)<sup>9</sup>. In Malaya, a similar union organization was formed on the same basis as the SFSWU. This was the National Union of Factory and General Workers (NUFGW) which functioned as an omnibus union catering for workers from a variety of trades and industries. In 1956, the NUGFW, inspired by the militancy and success of the Singapore industrial actions, carried out no less than 24 strikes and obtained for its members increases in wages and improved working conditions.

In the 1955 federal elections, the Labour Party candidates were badly trounced by the Alliance Party whose leaders were working closely with the colonial government on terms relating to the independence of Malaya. Labour Party members attributed the defeat to the lack of organized labour support and blamed this on the attitude and stand of the Indian leadership in the MTUC. The MTUC leadership, it should be noted, had always maintained its stand on political neutrality and its attitude was best epitomized in the words of P. P. Narayanan, the President of the MTUC, who insisted that 'politics and the trade union movement could not mix except to the detriment of the latter' (PSF A-17). The MTUC, in this respect, was condemned and alleged to be no more than a communal organization monopolized by Indians for the sole benefit of Indian workers and particularly those in the plantation industry. Consequently, an attempt was made to set up a rival organization—the Federation Trade Union Congress (FTUC) — 'to prevent clique control of the trade union movement' and to provide political support for the Labour Party of Malaya (PSF A-17). It was evident that the main reason for this Chinese move was to break the Indian domination of the trade union movement.

In furtherance of the FTUC objective, a delegation of Chinese unionists was given the task of studying the possibility of developing closer relations with the Singapore unions. The delegation, which had discussions with the SFSWU, returned with the idea of forming a larger pan-

Malayan federation with the Singapore unions included in the scheme. A small committee was set up to draft the rules and regulations but for reasons which are not clear, the plan suddenly stalled and then fizzled out. The plan to establish a rival trade union organization to the MTUC also did not materialize. It was possible that the Chinese unionists had realized that the formation of FTUC at this stage was rather premature and that it would not serve as a counterweight to the MTUC without a hard-core of Chinese unions to form the nucleus of the organization. Instead, the Chinese unionists concentrated on the formation and development of Chinese trade unions.

In building up a network of Chinese unions to challenge the supremacy of the Indian leadership, Ooi Thiam Siew concentrated on union membership in the mining sector where he succeeded in becoming the secretary of the Malayan Mining Employees Union with the assistance of Kwa Boo Sun, the Research Publicity Secretary of the Union. The underlying militancy of his leadership style led to an increase in Chinese membership. In January 1956, the Union had a membership of 4,187 Malays, 3,700 Chinese, and 2,959 Indians but by March 1957, the Chinese had increased to 8,147 as compared to 4,665 Indians and 6,672 Malays (RTU 92/1954). As a counterweight to the Indian-dominated NUPW which came into existence in December 1954, Tan Thuan Boon established the Pan-Malayan Rubber Workers' Union in February 1956. The Union was intended to cover Chinese rubber workers in both the production and manufacturing side of the industry and who resided mostly in New Villages and worked in smallholdings and non-European estates (RTU 10/1956). From the very beginning, it was designed to be an alternative union to the NUPW. The NUPW, according to Tan, was a communal organization; its members were mostly Indians; its executives and branch officers were almost all Indians and the languages used in meetings and correspondence were English and Tamil. For this reason, Tan claimed that Chinese rubber workers had avoided the NUPW, and that the Pan-Malayan Rubber Workers' Union was formed to cater to the Chinese workers in the New Villages (RTU 10/1956).

In the meantime, the Malayan Chinese unionists went on with the formation of Chinese unions in the commercial, clerical, and transport sectors, some of which were more in the nature of general unions. In Perak and Selangor there was the Commercial Employees' Union comprising largely shop assistants and clerks while in Penang, Tan Phock Kin, the secretary-general of the Labour Party of Malaya inaugurated a Union of General Workers with himself as the secretary. At the same time, Tan Thuan Boon was largely responsible for consolidating the local unions of transport workers into the National Union of Transport Workers.

The resurgence of Chinese trade unionism was looked upon with suspicion. Omnibus unions were grim reminders of communist manipulation of labour in the immediate post-war years. The Trade Union Ordinance, hitherto, had forbidden federations of trade unions representing a wide variety of trades and occupations but not general unions

which kept within the confines of legality by being a single unified unit instead of a federation. Omnibus unions were considered easy for undesirable elements to penetrate and to control the unions because, without a bond of common interest among the members drawn from various trades, the rank and file exerted no influence on the type of leadership desired. Being controlled by paid union officials who were closely associated with an increasingly militant Labour Party in 1956, they were regarded a security risk to the Department of Defence and Internal Security (PSF A-9). The Labour Party from which many of the union officials and militant unionists were drawn had also increasingly assumed a left-wing political orientation. The Selangor Division of the Labour Party led by Tan Thuan Boon had called upon the government to recognize the MCP and to rescind the Emergency Regulations. The demands of the Labour Party, in effect, supported the aspirations of the MCP Manifesto of September 1957 which exhorted the government to end the Emergency on terms favourable to the MCP (PSF A-9).

The political implications that surrounded the resurgence of Chinese trade unionism on the eve of Malaya's independence brought to light the inadequacy of the existing Trade Union Ordinance in dealing with the problem of subversion. The omnibus unions had to be checked; the influence of professional union officials had to be reduced; and the powers of the Registrar of Trade Unions had to be strengthened. Significantly when the Trade Unions Ordinance came up for review, the task was not given to the Trade Unions Registry or the Labour Department but to a special working committee on counter-subversion set up by the Department of Internal Defence and Security. The chairman of this committee was none other than Guy C. Madoc, the Director of Intelligence.<sup>10</sup>

The Committee came out with a series of recommendations that were designed to curb the effervescence of Chinese political trade unionism, especially to prevent political organizations from interfering in trade union affairs. The recommendations covered three broad areas: the trade union structure, the composition and leadership of trade unions, and the functions and powers of the Trade Union Registry. Among the recommendations made by the Committee were:

1. A trade union should be restricted to persons employed in similar trades or occupations or in a single industry. The intention here was to supplement Section 58 of the Ordinance which referred directly to the PMFTU and other federations of trade unions.
2. All office bearers should be required to have had a minimum of three years actual experience in the occupation or trade represented by the union. This was to make it more difficult for subversive elements or political opportunists to penetrate a union.
3. Paid officials should not be permitted to have a vote or to take executive action except under the direction and control of the executive committee. Paid officials other than the general secretary should not be eligible for membership in the executive committee.
4. Office bearers and paid officials should be Malayan Citizens

except in the case of associations which by their nature were required to represent overseas interests. In cases where a political fund had been established, all office bearers should be Malayan citizens.

5. All negotiations in respect of trade disputes should be carried out in the Federation and no person who was not normally resident in the Federation should take part in such negotiations without the approval of the minister. This was to prevent Singapore unionists from exerting their influence in Federation labour affairs.

6. The registrar should be given adequate powers to ensure that the correct procedure was followed when calling a strike. Such powers should include the authority to challenge a ballot and to prosecute individuals in the event of falsification of the ballot or failure to comply with laid down procedures.

7. The High Commissioner-in-council should have the power to dissolve a union immediately.

8. The Supreme Court should be eliminated from the appeal procedure in cases where registration of a trade union was either refused or cancelled leaving the final appeal to the minister or to the High Commissioner-in-council.

9. The Registrar could refuse or cancel a union where it was likely to be used for any purpose prejudicial to or incompatible with peace, welfare or good order in the Federation (PSF A-17).

The recommendations became the basis of the 1959 restrictive Trade Unions Ordinance. In effect, political trade unionism which came to be identified with Chinese labour and leadership was eradicated from the trade union scene. Militant trade unionism was eschewed in the interest of combating communist subversion and any show of militancy was regarded as an attempt to undermine the country's political and economic stability. The Alliance Government in this respect was more interested in supporting capital investments than in the interests of wages and labour conditions. As a measure to eliminate militant unions that were not aligned with the objectives of the Government, all existing trade unions had to go through a process of re-registration to remove undesirable labour unions from the movement. Registration for the Chinese-dominated Pan-Malayan Rubber Workers' Union which was originally intended to challenge the Indian-dominated NUPW was dismissed on the grounds that it was considered subversive; union officials of the NUFGW were arrested and its union banned, and the Malayan Mining Employees' Union was deregistered (Todd and Jomo, 1988: 104). It could therefore be said that the Registrar of Trade Unions was equipped with arbitrary powers to determine what he considered as militant pro-communist unions. It was clear that trade unions without any recourse to judicial appeal were at the mercy of the executive officials of the government.

While any attempt to revive Chinese trade unionism after 1959 appeared to be remote, the trade union movement as a whole was so circumscribed that it was no longer able to project its role in determining the course of industrial relations within a developing economy. Labour

had become subservient to capital and the state in the interests of promoting national economic development and it had to work within the legalities laid down by the government. What was significantly worse was that even economic trade unionism that the government had promoted since the outbreak of the communist armed insurrection in 1948 was severely curbed. The trade union movement, and Chinese unionism in particular, received another blow when rival trade unions within the same trade or industry were disallowed. The voluntary system of industrial relations was also brought into question as the government began to swing towards compulsory arbitration (M. Ali Raza, 1969: 355-71). The Indonesian confrontation beginning in 1963 and the ensuing declaration of the second Emergency in 1964 provided the occasion for the enforcement of a series of Essential Regulations in 1965. Although the principle of compulsory arbitration was regarded as a temporary measure, it nevertheless became a permanent feature in the subsequent Industrial Relations Act 1967. In this respect, it can be concluded that the authoritarianism of the MCP in shaping trade unions was replaced by an equally authoritarian and repressive force in the form of the government. In dealing a severe blow on the political trade unionism of Chinese labour, government trade union policy in promoting multiracial economic trade unionism had reduced the Malayan trade unionism into a passive force. Throughout its course of development, labour was no more than a pawn in the forces of conflict.

### Epilogue

Over the two decades (from 1970 to 1990), the Malaysian government was committed to the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was geared towards redressing the economic imbalance between the bumiputras (Malays) and the non-bumiputras (Chinese, Indians, others) and the removal of identification of race with occupation. The economic programme was centred on the task of fostering rapid industrialization—a process which was geared towards the building up of a group of Malay capitalists and also a Malay labouring class. The basis of the programme was, however, not only dependent on stimulating foreign capital investments but also on encouraging the growth of Malay capital formation, both of which necessitated conditions of cheap labour and a submissive labour movement.

Malaysian labour legislation continued to prevent any possible resurgence of trade union militancy which might affect the economic climate of the country. While any ethnic compartmentalization in the growth of trade unionism was strictly forbidden, the government was faced with the prospect of a growing multi-ethnic and unified trade unionism led by a newly emerged class of Malay trade unionists that owed its origins to the NEP policy itself. Invariably, it was not surprising that the government should view the prevalence of national unions as not conducive for sustained economic growth and expansion. The reasons given were, first, that Malaysian industries operated at varying levels of development



and sophistication, and, secondly, the pressure exerted by national unions in securing wage level improvements was considered 'inimical to the continued growth and viability of our small, medium-sized and newly established industries' (M. Ali Raza, 1969). The existing question no longer hinged on the elimination of militant Chinese trade unionism but on the best possible way of checking the forces of national trade unionism. Thus, instead of fostering national trade unionism on the basis of similar trades and industries, the government came out with the concept of in-house unions requiring the formation of separate unions for each company or enterprise irrespective of trade or industry.

The implementation of the in-house union concept is relatively at its infant stage and it is too early to assess its impact. Nevertheless, it can be surmised that its implementation will bring about the fragmentation of the Malaysian trade union movement. What it amounts to is that the multiplicity of what were once ethnic-based unions will have been replaced by a multiplicity of multi-ethnic unions that are only capable of working in close liaison with capital for their own survival.

1. In 1931, at a time when Malaya was in the midst of the Depression, Chinese labourers were estimated to be around 63 per cent of the total economically occupied population in the Malay States while the business class constituted no more than 1.5 per cent.

2. See Farmer (1960: 114-29) for a detailed discussion of the Labour Codes of 1912 and 1923.

3. Information on communist cadres behind the strike is based on the list of names given by Morrish in his report.

4. The quotation here is part of a document produced by the Protector of Chinese at a Federal Council Meeting in 1940 in conjunction with the passing of the Trade Unions Bill (Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 1940, B 60-1).

5. While some of the MCP leaders could have been ideologically motivated by the desire to bring about a new order, many of them could be categorized as opportunists exploiting the situation for their own ends.

6. Malay fears of Chinese domination were rife and the Sino-Malay clashes between May 1945 and March 1946 in Johore, Negri Sembilan, lower Perak, and Pahang only served to strengthen Malay fears of Chinese domination.

7. John Thivy was the founder member of the present Malaysian Indian Congress.

8. The employers, for example, exerted pressure on the government to use the Indian Immigration Fund to finance the recruitment of Malay labourers into the rubber industry in early 1948.

9. Lim Chin Siong had close connections with the MCP and he was later discovered to be a communist front leader. Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger*, 1961, p. 18.

10. Guy C. Madoc at one time served in the anti-communist section of the Special Branch.

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# The Chinese in the Malaysian Political System

Lee Kam Hing and Heng Pek Koon

## Introduction

THE Chinese have always played a significant political role in Malaysia beginning from the mid-nineteenth century when large-scale immigration to the Malay states began. Chinese political involvement during the pre-colonial and colonial period was made possible by a number of factors, the major ones being the prevailing instability of the nineteenth-century Malay political system, a growing economic role played by the Chinese, the relatively large size of the community, and the British colonial presence which tolerated some Chinese participation in public life.

Chinese political life in the country has gone through distinct phases. In periods of social and political uncertainties, the Chinese have sought and secured a more active role to protect their interests. But as conditions became settled or when other variables changed, their public roles became more limited or curtailed. Certainly the period in which the Chinese were politically most visible and influential was the immediate post-war years when the transition to independence created an unprecedented opportunity for Chinese political expression. An essential party to the decolonization process, the Chinese joined Malay nationalists to gain independence. Through this process, Chinese leaders created for themselves a role in government that had an appearance of power parity. They exercised influence particularly over the country's financial and commercial life. However, once Malay political power was consolidated in the period after 1969, Chinese influence in the ruling coalition became markedly reduced. The diminished Chinese position may also be explained by the proportionate decline of the Chinese population *vis-à-vis* the Malays, from 37 per cent of the population at the time of independence in 1957 to 30 per cent in 1991 (Department of Statistics, 1995: Vol. 1, p. 44).

Whether as part of the ruling coalition or in opposition, the Chinese and Chinese-based political parties have sought to represent the community's bedrock interests: rights of full citizenship, opportunity for eco-

conomic advancement, preservation of the Chinese language and Chinese schools, and outlets for public cultural expression. The pursuit of these objectives reflects not only a desire to take full part in the Malaysian polity, but also a deeply felt need to preserve a cultural legacy inherited from their ancestors in China.

The situation of the Chinese in Malaysia, even during times of ebbing political fortunes, differs fundamentally from the experience of other Chinese minority communities in South-East Asia. Caught between the repression of colonialism and the forces of local nationalism, these smaller and more vulnerable Chinese minorities were forced to search for less obtrusive public roles. They have avoided drawing attention to themselves in the hope of being left alone to pursue their economic livelihood.

### **Chinese Political Participation during the Colonial Period**

Towards the mid-nineteenth century, the large-scale entry of Chinese into the tin-rich Malay states of Perak and Selangor aggravated the conditions of political instability there. Chinese miners fighting over mining land became entangled in local Malay politics, particularly over succession disputes. Competing Chinese secret societies allied themselves with rival Malay sides. In some mining districts, secret society leaders were appointed as *Kapitan Cina* by Malay allies to help keep law and order. The ensuing conflict led to British intervention in the Malay states. With the establishment of British power in the Malay states, the political role of the Chinese was gradually curtailed. The British, not prepared to tolerate a parallel system of Chinese political and economic influence in the areas settled primarily by Chinese immigrants, banned secret societies in 1890 and ended the *Kapitan Cina* system, first in Selangor in 1902, and shortly after in Perak. The revenue farm system, an important source of capital that sustained the power of many Chinese secret society leaders, was gradually phased out.<sup>1</sup>

Leadership of the Chinese in Malaya came to be exercised by successful miners, merchants, and entrepreneurs. Chinese immigrant communities, freed from the constraints of Confucian-based governance, developed new criteria of leadership status. Wealth was widely regarded as a measure of success, and rich merchants now assumed leadership roles. Thus, whether as heads of the community's various guilds and associations, as *Kapitan China* in the Malay states, or as representatives in British-sponsored councils, the leaders of the Chinese were invariably merchants (Yen, 1986; Wang, 1991: 208-22). Given the size and economic importance of the Chinese community, its leaders were consulted on matters affecting the community's welfare and livelihood. The colonial administration legitimized leadership status within the Chinese community by appointing leading merchants to state and local councils, Chinese Advisory Boards, consultative bodies, and to business organizations that regulated economic activities, particularly in the tin and rubber industries.

There was a desire on the part of the Chinese immigrants to maintain a social and cultural distinctiveness from their Malay host environment. Wealthy merchants headed voluntary associations such as school boards, dialect, clan, and district associations. Chinese Chambers of Commerce were set up in urban centres (Singapore in 1907, Penang and Selangor in 1910) to facilitate networking and collaborative ventures among Chinese entrepreneurs. The Chinese associations looked after the welfare needs of the poorer segments of the community and helped start Chinese schools. Many wealthy merchants, with little education themselves, were concerned to establish schools to promote the teaching of the Chinese language within the community at large.<sup>2</sup>

Always regarding themselves as transient settlers, the majority of Chinese immigrants in the period before the First World War remained sentimentally attached to China, which they regarded as their homeland and to where they hoped to return. They were therefore concerned with the tumultuous political events that were unfolding in China. Indeed, events in China at the turn of the century sparked a new China-oriented political consciousness among the Chinese in Malaysia. This became more pronounced following the visits to Malaya of pro-Manchu officials, Kang Youwei's reformists, and Sun Yat Sen's revolutionaries, all of whom came seeking moral and financial support from the Chinese in South-East Asia. Branches of the Kuomintang Party (Kuomintang Malaya, or KMTM) were formed in the country. Pro-China sentiments grew stronger after Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, and China itself, in 1937. A fund was launched to raise money from both the rich and the poor to help China. These activities enhanced the sense of involvement and identification with events in China.

However, even in the inter-war years, there were already Chinese who wanted to work towards a Malayan-centred political future for the community in Malaya. Nationalist stirrings elsewhere in Asia were beginning to have some impact on Malaya. Malay political consciousness was on the rise, as evidenced by the growth of radical and religious organizations within the Malay community.<sup>3</sup> Thus political discussion among some Chinese political élites began to focus on issues affecting them in Malaya. New groups were formed and old associations reoriented to help define a relevant role and identity for the Chinese in the fast changing and uncertain Malayan environment of the 1920s and 1930s.

There were two expressions of this newly emerging Malayan-centred political awareness. The first stream consisted of left-wing groups that argued for early independence and the creation of a socialist state. Claiming to be multiracial, their support, however, came largely from young Chinese, mainly from Chinese schools, who had been alienated by colonial policies that offered them few educational prospects and scant employment opportunities. Not surprisingly, many of the disaffected came under the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideas disseminated by the Communist Party of China (CCP) which was then competing strongly against the Kuomintang for influence among the Malayan

Chinese. In 1927, a local communist organization, the Nanyang Communist Party, was formed. It was renamed the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1930. While the MCP maintained an obvious China-orientation through its links with the CCP, its leadership desired to establish a multiracial Malayan communist state. It was its indigenous agenda that rendered the MCP a more 'Malayan' party than the KMTM and other Chinese organizations led largely by Chinese-educated leaders.

The second nascent Malayan-centred political movement was led by a group of mainly English-educated Straits-born Chinese. The most influential organization within this stream was the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) founded first in Singapore in 1900, with branches established subsequently in Malacca and in Penang. Representing the interests of English-educated professionals and merchants in the Straits Settlements, the SCBA was among the first to urge Chinese in Malaya to identify politically with Malaya. Key members within this group had established large rubber, banking, shipping, and manufacturing interests, and had enjoyed business connections with British firms (Soh, 1960: 29-55). They also served in representative bodies such as the Chinese Advisory Boards, the Legislative Councils, and the State Councils. While co-operating closely with the British, leaders such as Tan Cheng Lock called for self-rule and for policies aimed at fostering a common Malayan-centred loyalty among the various ethnic groups in the country (Tregonning, 1979). They argued that the Chinese, who had established strong roots in their adopted homeland, had a valid claim to be citizens in a future independent nation.

### Decolonization and Independence

The outbreak of war in 1942 interrupted political discussions in Malaya as the Japanese Army occupied the country for the next three and a half years. During this period the Chinese community suffered most. The Japanese singled out the Chinese for particularly harsh treatment because of the latter's anti-Japanese activities in the pre-war period. Several thousand were executed during the *sook-ching* (clean-up) campaign while community leaders in different states were forced to raise millions of dollars as ransom money to the Japanese administration (Kratoska, 1998: 92-103).

In those difficult and dangerous times, some Chinese took to armed resistance against the Japanese. The most effective movement was the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), the military wing of the MCP. Made up of an estimated 7,000 fighters and armed by the British, the MPAJA withdrew to the jungle to conduct guerrilla warfare. There was some contact between Allied forces and the MPAJA in efforts to co-ordinate the campaign against the Japanese. The MPAJA also received help from Chinese squatters, many of whom had moved from urban centres to settle along the fringes of the jungle during the pre-war economic recession. The resistance of the MPAJA

enhanced the standing of Chinese left-wing groups within the Chinese community.

By contrast, the prestige of the merchant class was damaged during this period. Some wealthy businessmen had fled the country just before the war. Among these were Tan Cheng Lock and a number of other Straits-born Chinese who sought refuge in India. While in India they formed the Overseas Chinese Association to draw up plans for the future of the Chinese in anticipation of the liberation of Malaya. Many who remained behind co-operated with the Japanese and were labelled as collaborators. During this period the activities of the traditional associations were proscribed by the Japanese authorities, thus limiting their ability to carry out welfare assistance.

When the war ended, the British announced proposals to set up the Malayan Union as a new administrative structure within which decolonization would gradually take place. Malay rejection of these proposals profoundly changed the political environment, and the Chinese were compelled to accept a modified political arrangement that was far less accommodating to their interests.

The Malayan Union proposals of 1946 sought to strip all powers, both nominal and real, held by the Malay rulers. It also recommended equal citizenship rights for Malays and Chinese. Not surprisingly, the proposals provoked hostile reaction from the Malays and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was formed to mobilize Malay opposition. UMNO's effective campaign against the Malayan Union forced its abandonment and its replacement by the Federation of Malaya in 1948. The new constitutional arrangement was negotiated principally between the British, UMNO, and the Malay rulers. The character of the Federation was thus more markedly Malay. It safeguarded the constitutional status of the sultans in the Malay states, highlighted the special position of the Malays, and imposed stricter citizenship conditions on non-Malays.

The drastically changed post-war environment elicited two opposing strategies from Chinese leaders in dealing with the British. The radical leaders advocated a revolutionary course while the conservative leaders proposed a moderate negotiating approach. But both radicals and conservatives urged for independence, or at least self-government, at the earliest possible date. Most Chinese, in varying degrees and for different reasons, believed that the British had never been sympathetic to their political positions and aspirations. Consequently, both groups failed to display strong backing for the Malayan Union, despite the fact that all Chinese in the country stood to gain from its liberal citizenship terms, as well as from its more egalitarian social and political configuration. Instead, they saw the Malayan Union as a British attempt to reimpose and perpetuate colonial control. When UMNO succeeded in defeating the Malayan Union, both groups belatedly and unsuccessfully worked to regain the liberal citizenship provisions and other political rights offered by the Malayan Union.

In the immediate post-war period, Chinese left-wing groups were the



more influential of the two political streams. The MPAJA emerged from the jungle following the Japanese surrender with enhanced prestige in the eyes of the Chinese. For a few weeks until the return of the British, it was the dominant political force in the country. It set up People's Committees in almost 70 per cent of small towns and villages, and in the urban centres where it had imposed its authority (Cheah, 1983: 167). But it carried out retaliatory acts which had serious repercussions on inter-ethnic relations. Taking upon itself the task of arresting and summarily punishing those accused of collaborating with the Japanese, the MPAJA exacted retribution from segments of the Malay population. Malay retaliation sparked serious inter-ethnic violence in many parts of the country, resulting in unprecedentedly heavy casualties.

When the British Military Administration reimposed colonial control over the country after September 1945, it quickly moved to neutralize the communists with whom it co-operated during the war. The MPAJA was persuaded to disband and to hand in all weapons on the understanding that the communists would have a role in the political process. Accepting this offer, Chinese left-wing groups concentrated on expanding their influence in the trade union movement. However, their campaign for higher wages and improved labour conditions brought them into collision course with the British who were determined to protect their interests in the rubber and the tin mining industries.

The Chinese conservative leadership was galvanized into action when the Federation of Malaya proposals, which seriously disadvantaged Chinese interests, were mooted. Chinese business interests organized in the Chinese Chambers of Commerce turned to Tan to lead an anti-Federation campaign. In December 1946, Tan helped found the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA), an umbrella body that included both conservative and left-wing Chinese-dominated organizations, as well three radical Malay parties. Tan saw Malay participation in the AMCJA as essential to resolving constitutional differences between Malays and Chinese.

However, this first instance of Malay-Chinese political dialogue was both ineffective and short-lived. The AMCJA was unable to overcome the ideological and ethnic divide between conservative Chinese leaders from the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and traditional associations on the one hand, and radical Malay leaders from the Malayan Nationalist Party (MNP) on the other. In particular, the conservative Chinese representatives in the AMCJA strongly objected to the MNP demand that Malayan citizens be called 'Melayu' for fear of losing the 'racial individuality, culture and independence' of Chinese in Malaya (Heng, 1988: 52).

The political standing of the Chinese was seriously compromised when the MCP launched an armed rebellion against the British in June 1948, a few months after the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated (Stubbs, 1989). Euphemistically referred to as the Emergency, the insurrection was the MCP's reaction to a series of measures aimed at excluding communist participation from mainstream political life. At the

height of the insurgency, an estimated 10,000 armed MCP guerrillas retreated to former MPAJA jungle bases to fight the British. Inter-ethnic relations, already badly strained by the racial violence of the immediate post-war period, worsened as Chinese and Malays fought on opposite sides of the conflict (Stubbs, 1989). MCP members and their supporters in the jungle were predominantly Chinese while local security forces were primarily Malay. Although the rebellion was against the British, the MCP did not have the support of the Malay population at large. Instead, the Malay leadership questioned the loyalty of the entire Chinese population toward their adopted motherland.

The outbreak of the rebellion marginalized the more radical and dynamic elements within the Chinese leadership. To help fight the communists, the British restored conservative merchants to leadership positions. Although traditional Chinese associations had been revived at the end of the war, the British saw the urgency of creating a political party to garner Chinese support. For their part, conservative Chinese realized that a moderate Chinese leadership acceptable to the British and the Malays was essential for securing a legitimate political role for the Chinese. They saw that the communist insurgency might so damage Chinese interests that the community could be marginalized entirely from the political process at a time when decolonization was imminent. At the same time, Chinese merchants and capitalists, whose tin mines and rubber estates were targets of MCP attacks, did not relish the prospect of a communist victory. Community leaders who had strong ties with the KMT, such as Leong Yew Koh and Lee Hau Shik, had watched with anxiety at communist advances in China. With so much political and economic interests at stake, the conservative leadership, backed actively by the British, formed the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in February 1949 (Heng, 1988: 54-9).

Three groups of conservative-minded Chinese leaders co-operated in setting up the MCA: English-educated professionals, many of whom were Straits-born; leaders of Chinese guilds and associations; and Chinese educationists. The first group was important not only because of their wealth and education but also because of their links to the British and to the English-educated Malay leadership. The leaders of guilds and associations, for their part, connected the MCA to the broader Chinese community. The third group, the Chinese educationists, were key players in shaping Chinese political opinion. They commanded widespread respect within the community because of their uncompromising stand in advancing the cause of Chinese education and culture in Malaya. They strongly insisted on the MCA giving top priority to the issues of Chinese education and culture. In this, they were backed by the English-educated who agreed that Chinese language and education were essential in defining and preserving the identity of the community (Tan, 1988).

Thus, at a crucial juncture in the political history of Malaysia, the MCA was formed to provide a leadership that not only represented a significant section of the Chinese population but one which was also

acceptable to the British and the Malays. The minority Western-educated leadership within the party was able to persuade the British authorities that there were enough Chinese in the country who were not only loyal but also equally committed to the same political goals held by conservative Malay leaders. The Chinese-educated leadership, backed by significant Chinese grass-roots support, demonstrated to the British and the Malays that the MCA was a credible mass-based Chinese party.

At this crucial historical juncture on the eve of Malaya's independence, the MCA played a key role in safeguarding Chinese political and economic interests. The party, for instance, helped register thousands of Chinese as citizens, thus making them legitimate participants of the political process. It also raised money to help resettle half a million Chinese in some 550 New Villages across the country. Proceeds collected from the running of a lucrative lottery were used to support welfare programmes and to provide better facilities in many of the New Villages. In addition, the party provided legal assistance to hundreds of Chinese who had been arbitrarily arrested by the British as communist sympathizers. Such assistance saved many from being deported to China.

The arbitrary arrests of Chinese reflected the British, and also Malay, assumption that most Chinese either actively or passively backed the MCP rebellion. Unfortunately, this assumption was given credibility by reports that hundreds of Chinese youths chose to return to China rather than serve in the security forces when called to enlist in the anti-MCP mobilization campaign. However, this assumption is untenable because countless Chinese were persecuted by the MCP, and several hundred MCA members were assassinated by communist guerrillas in the course of their work among the New Villagers. MCA-sponsored home guard units in northern Perak protected tin mines and fought the communists. By giving effective leadership during the Emergency, the MCA demonstrated that the majority of Chinese were not involved in the rebellion, and were instead willing to co-operate in the restoration of order and stability.

### **Independence: The MCA in the Alliance Government**

Local elections in 1952, as provided for under the Federation of Malaya Agreement, convinced the MCA that it had to work closely with a Malay political party in order to achieve electoral success. Party leader Tan Cheng Lock had previously worked with Malay leaders, first in the AMCJA and, subsequently, with Dato Onn Jaafar in the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) formed in January 1949. The British authorities, which held inter-ethnic political co-operation as a prerequisite to the transfer of power, established the CLC as a multiracial consultative body to improve race relations in wake of the MCP insurrection. Dato Onn, the leading Malay representative in the CLC, soon came to accept the need for a non-communal approach in Malayan politics. In 1951, Onn founded the multiracial Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). Although Tan and many prominent Chinese attended the

inauguration of Onn's party, it was not the IMP that the MCA chose as its political partner. While some top-ranking MCA leaders individually endorsed the idea of electoral co-operation with the IMP, the MCA as a whole did not support it (Vasil, 1971: 56). Under the leadership of Selangor party stalwarts, Lee Hau Shik and Ong Yoke Lin, the MCA chose instead to forge an electoral alliance with the communally based UMNO to contest the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal election.

The resounding UMNO-MCA electoral victory dealt a fatal blow to the IMP. It also transformed the UMNO-MCA alliance from an *ad hoc* electoral marriage of convenience into a long-lasting coalition for managing inter-ethnic politics in the country. Joined by the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), the Alliance won 51 out of 52 seats during the country's first federal election in 1955. Entrusted with the mandate of the Malayan people, the Alliance proceeded to negotiate for constitutional changes. Self-government was granted in 1955 and independence was finally attained in August 1957 (Ratnam, 1965).

The constitution drawn up for the new nation, under the direction of the Reid Commission, was a compromise which reflected the plethora of competing demands from the various ethnic communities. Of the scores of constitutional proposals submitted by various political parties and interest groups, the British authorities paid the greatest attention to the memorandum submitted by the Alliance. The final document drawn up after several rounds of negotiations between the British, the Alliance leadership, and the Malay rulers strongly favoured Malay interests. Malay was made the national language, Islam the religion of the state, and the constitutional position of the sultans was safeguarded. The constitution also provided for Malay special privileges in the form of generous quotas in public service, greater access to scholarships and placements in educational institutions, as well as increased participation in the commercial sector (Federation of Malaya, 1957).

These terms, not surprisingly, were regarded as too pro-Malay by the Chinese community, and even by many MCA leaders and supporters. The Chinese were upset by the ascendancy of Malay cultural features as the dominant symbols of the new nation. In contrast, the position of the Chinese language and Chinese secondary schools was not granted official recognition. The Chinese were also politically disadvantaged by the electoral arrangements for the post-independence period. Although forming nearly 38 per cent of the population at the time of independence, Chinese-majority seats in the new Parliament counted for considerably less than a third of the total constituencies, a discrepancy caused by weightage favouring Malay-dominated rural seats. In addition, Chinese representation in the ruling Cabinet was proportionately smaller than Malay representation (Rachagan, 1979).

Leading conservative Chinese figures mobilized a short-lived and futile campaign to oppose the constitutional deal worked out within the Alliance. Dissatisfaction coalesced around the Council of Registered

Guilds and Associations (CRGA) led by Lau Pak Khuan, a Chinese miner and leader of the Kwangtung Association. The CRGA sought equal citizenship rights, the recognition of Chinese as an official language, and equal treatment of Chinese and non-Chinese secondary education. The CRGA, together with other Chinese guilds, submitted their constitutional recommendations to the British government. In 1956, it sent a delegation to London to argue its case with British officials. But both Whitehall and UMNO refused to deal with the CRGA despite its representation of important sections of the Chinese community. When it was sidelined by the British and UMNO, some groups within the movement had no other choice but to turn to the MCA once again as a forum to pursue their objectives (Heng, 1988: 237-46).

MCA leaders assured their members that UMNO under Tunku Abdul Rahman could be trusted to interpret and implement the terms of the constitution fairly. Stressing the necessity of Chinese acceptance of the constitutional deal negotiated with the moderate leadership of UMNO, Tan Cheng Lock warned of the existence of Malays outside of UMNO whose communal demands were more extreme. Party leaders further emphasized that relaxation of citizenship conditions, accompanied by increased enfranchisement of the Chinese, was a major gain obtained by the MCA on behalf of the Chinese community.

The priority of the MCA leaders was the attainment of independence. They were confident that existing disagreements with UMNO could be resolved over time. But, as seen further on, the Chinese had unrealistically high expectations of what they wanted from UMNO in the period after independence. Generally trusting each other, the leaders of the Alliance component parties were anxious to present a united front to the British. With a shared westernized background and outlook, their co-operation in the independence movement had drawn them closer. MCA support for UMNO during the independence negotiations was crucial to the attainment of independence, for the British had insisted on the condition of viable multiracial co-operation as a prerequisite to Malayan self-rule.

What had started as an informal arrangement of electoral convenience evolved into a long-lasting format of multiracial co-operation. The Alliance arrangement facilitated consultation at the elite level while allowing its component members to mobilize support along ethnic lines. In the early years, the MCA supplied financial resources to contest elections while UMNO excelled in organizational capability. At the federal level of government, an implicit accord was reached whereby MCA leaders had control of trade and finance in Cabinet portfolios to safeguard Chinese economic interests, while political power was exercised by UMNO leaders. In all, it was an arrangement that allowed Chinese, through the MCA, to play a pivotal role in the independence process and to participate actively in the country's political and economic life after independence.

### The Emergence of Chinese-based Opposition Parties

Once independence was attained, tensions in inter-ethnic relations, which had been submerged by the urgency of presenting a multiracial united front to the British, resurfaced. In the years after independence, the majority of the Chinese became dissatisfied with the weakness of their political position. Blaming the MCA for this state of affairs, many expressed their disenchantment by voting against the Alliance. Chinese-based opposition parties successfully capitalized on this discontent and succeeded in winning urban seats where the Chinese vote was dominant.

Observers have seen a vicious cycle to the electoral erosion of the MCA. The party lost the support of the Chinese because it was deemed ineffective. Its electoral decline further weakened its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* UMNO, thus rendering it even more ineffective in representing Chinese interests. Nevertheless, the MCA managed to hold on to its share of seats, especially in semi-rural areas where its candidates were voted into power not by Chinese but by pro-UMNO Malay voters. Wishing to preserve the multiracial character of the Alliance government, UMNO leaders bolstered the electoral fortunes of the MCA by allowing it to contest in several Malay-dominated constituencies where pro-UMNO sentiments were strong.

However, UMNO itself was under pressure from Malay economic nationalists who were unhappy with the lack of progress in Malay economic advancement. Despite the introduction of new programmes to benefit Malay welfare, Malays still had a significantly lower per capita income and a higher unemployment rate than the Chinese. As late as 1979, the mean monthly household income was RM 513 for Malays, RM 776 for Indians, and RM 1,094 for the Chinese (Malaysia, 1981: 56). In the field of business and in the number of qualified professionals, Malays also lagged behind. Malay cultural nationalists were dismayed that English, and not Malay, was widely used in both government and private sectors. Malay religious leaders were acutely disappointed that Islamic laws were not introduced. The erosion of UMNO's support base was evident in the state elections of 1959 when the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), with its more uncompromising articulation of Malay and Muslim aspirations, captured control of two state governments (Kessler, 1978; Funston, 1980).

The challenge mounted by the PMIP to UMNO on the eve of the 1959 parliamentary elections placed the Alliance under severe stress. The MCA, fearing further losses in the impending elections, demanded to contest a third of the parliamentary seats, as well as for a review of the Education Ordinance of 1957 which denied official recognition and funding for Chinese secondary schools. Prime Minister and UMNO president, Tunku Abdul Rahman, when faced with what he considered an ultimatum from the MCA, refused to concede on both points. The MCA, deeply divided over the crisis, backed down. Party president Lim Chong Eu, who had made the demands to UMNO with the support of Chinese association leaders and Chinese educationists,

resigned shortly after the incident. After a short interim, Tan Siew Sin, who had a closer working relationship with the Tunku, took over as party president (Means, 1976: 212-18). But Siew Sin, an English-educated Malacca Baba who spoke little Chinese and who was widely perceived to be less committed to the cause of Chinese education than either his father Tan Cheng Lock or Lim Chong Eu, had little support from the Chinese-educated.

As the Tunku's close confidant and as Finance Minister from 1961 to 1974, Siew Sin wielded more clout in government than any other Chinese leader before or since his time. He was instrumental in persuading the Tunku to uphold a policy which gave the Malays political dominance while allowing the Chinese unimpeded access to economic opportunities. As Finance Minister, he ensured that Malay affirmative action regulations were gradual and minimal. However, his apparent neglect of Chinese cultural interests, particularly Chinese education and language, cost the MCA the support of the Chinese electorate. In particular, his endorsement of the 1961 Education Act and the 1967 National Language Act drew near unanimous protestations from the Chinese community, including the influential Chinese press, Chinese guilds and associations, and Chinese educationists organized in the Dongjiaozong (United Chinese School Teachers and School Committees Association).

A majority of the Chinese voters turned to Chinese-based opposition parties to articulate their grievances. The earliest opposition party to attract substantial Chinese protest vote was the Labour Party formed in 1954. Until it was banned in 1966, the left-leaning party attracted the more communally oriented Chinese voters through its championing of Chinese issues, particularly the cause of Chinese education and language.

The Labour Party started as small, unconnected organizations in different states which merged in 1954. The party was initially a genuine non-communal party espousing a moderate socialist programme. The leadership was made up largely of English-educated professionals and leaders of the trade union movement who, at that period, were acceptable to the British authorities. But the party failed at the beginning to gain popular support. This changed in 1956 when large numbers of Chinese, disappointed with the MCA's position on the Reid constitutional proposals, shifted their support to the Labour Party. While supporting Malay as the official language, the Labour party also called for multilingualism and for equal rights for all citizens (Vasil, 1971: 93-166).

The party became particularly strong in Penang where widespread disenchantment with the MCA enabled it to win control of the Georgetown Municipal Council in elections held in December 1956. The party held control of the Council until 1966. More significantly, the Labour Party in Penang, Selangor, and Perak came under the influence of left-wing Chinese-educated activists. The party's identification with Chinese political causes became more marked following the split in

the MCA in 1959. In the general elections of that year, it won 6 parliamentary and 13 state assembly seats in largely urban, Chinese-dominated constituencies. The rise of radical leaders tilted the party further to the left, giving rise to government allegations that it had been infiltrated by MCP members (Vasil, 1971: 131, 156-8). At the same time, it successfully increased its support from among the urban working class, particularly hawkers and petty traders.

The Perak, later People's, Progressive Party (PPP) was another party that gained prominence through the articulation of Chinese political interests. The PPP was less ideologically committed to left-wing causes than the Labour Party. Its support base was limited to the Kinta region, a predominantly Chinese tin-mining area that suffered a serious economic downturn in the late 1950s due to falling tin prices. Founded in 1952 by two Ceylonese Tamil brothers, S. P. and D. R. Seenivasagam, the PPP worked with the Alliance in the 1954 Ipoh Town Council election. But the relationship fell apart over disagreements on a range of policy issues. In the 1955 election it lost the two seats it contested. However, D. R. Seenivasagam's standing among the Chinese rose in 1956 when he defended Chinese school students arrested for demonstrating against the Razak Education Report which ended government funding for privately run Chinese secondary schools. Campaigning for the recognition of Chinese education and multilingualism, D. R. Seenivasagam won the Ipoh by-election in November 1957. In December 1958, the party won control of the Ipoh Town Council which it held until 1974. However, efforts to broaden its support outside of Perak were unsuccessful (*ibid.*: 222-51).

A third Chinese-based opposition party was the United Democratic Party (UDP), a small party formed in April 1962 by Lim Chong Eu and other MCA dissidents who left with him in 1959 to fight for Chinese issues outside the MCA. Although largely Chinese-based, the UDP sought to gain a broad multi-ethnic support base. In 1963, Dato Zainal Abidin bin Haji Abas, a former colleague of Dato Onn Jaafar, was elected party president. In the 1964 election, the UDP won a few seats, mainly in Penang. All its successful candidates were Chinese. Realizing that all Chinese-based opposition parties campaigned on similar issues, Lim subsequently sought to create alliances with other opposition groups to avoid splitting the opposition vote, a move that paid handsome dividends in the 1969 election.

In the 1964 election, a Singapore-based party, the People's Action Party (PAP), entered the peninsular political scene. The PAP, in a loose coalition with several Chinese-based opposition groups, fielded 15 candidates in Peninsular Malaysia but won only the Bangsar seat, a predominantly Chinese middle-class constituency. When Singapore withdrew from Malaysia in August 1965, the Malaysian PAP became the Democratic Action Party (DAP) which has since functioned as the major opposition party. Dedicated to achieving a 'free democratic and socialist Malaysia, based on the principles of racial equality and social and economic justice' (Means, 1991: 4), the DAP laid claim to



multiracial and socialist credentials. But its advocacy of egalitarian principles under the 'Malaysian Malaysia' slogan—that Malays and non-Malays be accorded equal political, cultural, and economic rights—appealed mainly to Chinese voters (Ong, 1979: 137–75).

The last major Chinese-based political party to make its debut was the *Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* (Malaysian People's Movement). Formed in 1968 as a result of Lim Chong Eu's efforts to unite like-minded opposition leaders from trade union, professional, and academic backgrounds to contest the 1969 general elections, the *Gerakan* has been more committed than other Chinese-based parties in its pursuit of a multi-ethnic integrationist approach to Malaysian politics.

### **The Inter-ethnic Political Crisis of 1969 and the New Economic Policy**

Under Tan Siew Sin, the MCA rapidly lost the support of large sections of the Chinese. In the 1969 general election, the party suffered severe electoral set-backs, losing control of the Penang state government and all parliamentary seats in Perak, the state with the largest Chinese population. It managed to win only 13 parliamentary seats, compared to 27 in the previous election (Vasil, 1972: 85). Stung by the rejection of Chinese voters and by criticisms from UMNO leaders of the party's poor performance, Tan pulled the party out of the government, though not from the Alliance. The MCA leader justified his action on the grounds that his party no longer held the mandate to represent the Chinese community in government. However, Siew Sin's action threatened the Alliance's survival as the mechanism for inter-ethnic co-operation and fuelled fears of its replacement by a system where the government would be controlled entirely by Malays, and the opposition dominated by Chinese.

The victory parade organized by the DAP in Kuala Lumpur fanned racial tensions to near breaking point. On the day of the MCA's withdrawal, inter-ethnic violence broke out. Several days of rioting followed. During that time, some 6,000 residents in the Kuala Lumpur area, about 90 per cent of whom were Chinese, lost both home and property. Official statistics claimed a death toll of 178, a figure which non-government sources considered too low (Slimming, 1969: 48). The traumatic experience of the riots revealed to the Chinese the indisputable fact of Malay superior power backed up by military and police forces overwhelmingly dominated by Malays. The hard lesson learnt was that in a showdown, the Chinese lacked the means to impose their will on any issue of fundamental concern to Malays. This realization, in the aftermath of the race riots, resulted in a lowering of Chinese expectations and a gradual acceptance of their politically weakened position in a Malay-dominated state.

In the wake of the political crisis, a state of emergency was declared and Parliament was suspended for 21 months. During this period, the UMNO leadership established a National Operations Council (NOC),

headed by Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, to restore order in the country. Tun Razak, who had served as Minister for Rural Development, was more deeply committed to the advancement of Malay welfare than the Tunku.

The NOC restored parliamentary rule but instituted several changes aimed at removing the root causes behind the 1969 communal violence (Vasil, 1970). The new institutions and constitutional changes introduced after 1969 inexorably shifted the political balance in favour of the Malays. The appearance of power-sharing among the races was retained but Malay political dominance was clearly emphasized. The ruling coalition, renamed the Barisan Nasional (BN or National Front), was enlarged from 3 to 14 component members. Backed by a Malay-dominated bureaucracy and armed forces, UMNO consolidated its hold over the new political arrangement (Lee and Ong, 1987: 122-46).

The changed political environment saw a rapid decline in MCA influence. It was no longer the sole party representing the Chinese in government, and any threat of its withdrawal would not have the same destabilizing political effect as before. When Tan Siew Sin resigned as Finance Minister in 1974, the party lost the last of its economic portfolios which had been instrumental in advancing Chinese business interests during the 1960s.

The consolidation of UMNO authority was achieved primarily through constitutional amendments in 1971 which severely limited the parameters of political debate. These amendments prohibited any act, speech, or publication on 'fundamental issues' that would incite racial animosity, including the issues of Malay special rights, non-Malay citizenship rights, the position of Islam as the religion of the state, and the status of Malay as the sole national language. But it was the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) that brought about a fundamental transformation to the Malaysian polity.

The NEP had a two-pronged strategy: first, to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, irrespective of race; and second, to accelerate the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalances, and to eliminate the identification of economic function with race. Attainment of the second objective was to be measured chiefly in terms of numerical targets set for Malay and non-Malay ownership of corporate equity: within a twenty-year period (1971-91), the Malay share was to increase from 2.4 per cent to 30 per cent, the non-Malay (Chinese) share from 34.3 per cent to 40 per cent, and the foreign share to drop from 63.3 per cent to 30 per cent (Malaysia, 1976: 86). The NEP's ambitious programme of economic and social restructuring sought to create a viable Malay commercial and industrial community. However, the UMNO leadership assured non-Malays that the NEP's implementation would not deprive any group of its legitimate political rights and access to economic opportunities (Malaysia, 1971: 6).

During the NEP period, a new education policy was also introduced to convert schools and universities into entirely Malay-medium institutions. The use of Malay was broadened but that of English was greatly

reduced. Entry quotas and establishment of training colleges ensured greatly improved Malay access to higher education. In 1971, Malay-Muslim culture was declared the basis of a national culture. Elements from other cultures would be accepted as part of Malaysian national culture only if deemed suitable by the authorities.

Not surprisingly, the Chinese were much dismayed at the erosion of their position, particularly in the economic sphere. Compared to the *laissez-faire* economic environment of the pre-NEP period, business activities became more regulated, and large Chinese companies were required to restructure to allow for Malay equity participation. Licences and contracts were largely reserved for Malays or state-backed Malay enterprises. The Industrial Coordination Act, introduced in 1975, as well as the Capital Issues Committee and the Foreign Investments Committee were major instruments in restructuring corporate ownership and control. By 1985, for example, 73.5 per cent of licences in logging and 63.9 per cent in road transport were held by Malays, sectors once dominated by the Chinese (see Chapter 4). The Chinese faced restricted job and promotion prospects, particularly in the public sector. In education, the enrolment of Chinese in the local universities fell sharply. The persistent concern of the Chinese-educated was the lack of official recognition of Chinese-medium secondary schools.

These social and economic changes took place amidst a trend of Islamic resurgence during the 1970s and early 1980s. Leaders from Parti Islam SeMalaysia (known today as PAS), as well as some Muslim leaders associated closely with UMNO, called for the implementation of *syariah* law and the transformation of Malaysia into an Islamic state. Most Chinese regarded such demands as unconstitutional for Malaysia was established as a secular state. When Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad succeeded Tun Hussein Onn as Prime Minister in 1981, a number of Islamic-oriented public policies were introduced. These included the establishment of Islamic banking and insurance practices, and the setting up of the International Islamic University in 1983. Not surprisingly, the resurgence of Islamic piety within Malay society and the introduction of Islamic elements in public policies caused the Chinese to become more concerned about their political status and cultural identity.

### **Chinese Responses to the Post-1969 Economic and Social Restructuring**

The fundamental economic and social transformations brought about by the NEP forced the Chinese to seek effective responses to their changed environment. Chinese leaders saw only two courses: either to encourage greater communal solidarity or to adopt a more multiracial approach in their relationship with Malays. Both approaches have been manifest in Chinese political behaviour in the country, and both will persist into the future. Adherence to one or the other has depended, and will continue to depend, on the situation and on individual leadership styles.

The initial and instinctive response was to emphasize greater solidarity within the community. Believing that Malay political power was achieved because of unified and disciplined Malay political support for UMNO, many Chinese leaders sought to promote Chinese unity to defend Chinese interests. Most of them, particularly those in the MCA, realized the necessity of promoting Chinese political cohesion without alienating UMNO at the same time. They did not want Malays to misconstrue their efforts at building Chinese solidarity as confrontational opposition politics for fear of provoking a Malay backlash similar to that of May 1969.

In 1973, a group of young Chinese activists launched the Chinese Unity Movement to forge a strong communally based organization to bargain effectively with the Malays. They also wooed the support of Chinese association leaders, as well as Chinese educationists, who had previously backed the MCA (Loh, 1982). At the same time, MCA President Tan Siew Sin launched a reform campaign to reorganize the party and to revitalize its standing within the Chinese community. A major reform attempted to address the long-standing problem posed by the control exercised by local businessmen over MCA branches which lacked the grass-roots support to win elections. In 1971, the party constitution invested the president with powers to revamp the party and to create a more dynamic leadership that was responsive to grass-roots needs. Among the president's new powers was the authority to appoint the chairmen of state branches, and to expel party dissidents to maintain party discipline.

As part of the MCA strategy to broaden its appeal and to consolidate Chinese political unity, Tan approached the DAP on possible cooperation between the two parties. The DAP leadership, which was then also re-examining its options for dealing with the altered political environment, decided against working with the MCA. However, several DAP leaders who disagreed with the party line crossed over to the MCA. Among these were Walter Loh, Richard Ho, and Goh Hock Guan. Upon Goh Hock Guan's departure, Lim Kit Siang took over his post as party Secretary General.

On the economic front, Chinese leaders also initiated a communally based strategy to defend Chinese business interests (Heng, 1992). The rapid expansion of Malay corporate interests threatened to reduce non-Malay stakes in almost every economic sector. Chinese business was especially worried as government-backed enterprises such as Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (Pernas or National Corporation), Urban Development Authority (UDA), and the state economic development corporations (SEDC) steadily acquired commanding stakes in the country's banking, mining, plantations, and trading sectors.

Leaders of Chinese guilds and associations turned to their organizations to mobilize resources and to modernize traditional Chinese business networking practices to survive the new competition from state-backed enterprises. The premier Chinese business interest group in the country, the Associated Chinese Chambers of Industry and Commerce, in-

corporated UNICO as its investment arm. The Hakka Federation of Ka Yin Associations established Ka Yin Holdings, the Hokkien Association formed Hok Lian Holdings, and the Hainanese Federation formed the Grand United Holdings.

In 1975, the MCA established Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad (MPHB) as a communally based corporate strategy to raise capital from the Chinese community to invest in key economic sectors (Gale, 1985). For the MCA, the MPHB was both a catalyst and model to help modernize traditional family business practices. Although party leaders endorsed the corporatization movement within the Chinese association network as an appropriate response to new Malay competition, they believed that commercial undertakings by dialect associations would have the undesirable effect of keeping the Chinese divided along dialect lines. They also felt that the associations did not have sufficient corporate skills and resources to match the new Malay economic institutions. Since Malay economic expansion under the NEP was contingent on UMNO political patronage, the MCA hoped to convince Chinese businesses that they, too, needed the MCA as their political patron to mobilize their resources. The MPHB was thus launched as the party's economic arm, both to promote Chinese business interests and to enhance its political influence within the community.

But Chinese attempts at political and economic solidarity met with disapproval, even hostility, from Malays who did not wish the Chinese to challenge the new power equilibrium. While UMNO desired a Chinese coalition partner that was respected by the Chinese, it did not want one that commanded strong popular support based on forceful representation of Chinese communal issues. The post-1969 political environment left no room for a return of the Alliance structure which had seemingly permitted the MCA to enjoy power parity with UMNO.

In the light of these developments, some Chinese leaders saw little advantage in highlighting Chinese political solidarity. Instead, they opted for a non-communal approach where the interests of all ethnic groups would be fought for without discrimination. The Gerakan, the DAP, and the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) were the leading parties that decided on such a multiracial strategy. But the dilemma for these parties has been their inability to break out of their largely Chinese mould, both in terms of membership and in articulation of issues. In fact, the Chinese character of these parties has become even more pronounced since the 1970s due to an increase in Mandarin-speaking members, although their leaders still remain largely English-educated. Even in the Gerakan, more than half of its current members are Mandarin-speaking. But then again all Chinese who aspire to be party leaders status need to be fluent in Chinese (Mandarin), English, and Malay in order to mediate effectively between the grass roots and the élites of the different racial groups in the country. The Chinese-led multiracial political movement has failed to gain momentum also because the non-Chinese still prefer to be represented by their respective communal parties, particularly UMNO and MIC.

### Chinese Political Participation in the Post-1969 Period

The Chinese in Malaysia participate in the political process through the electoral process and through their representation in the country's executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Between 1957 and 1998, Malaysia has held nine general elections and, except for the period when Parliament was suspended following the May 1969 riots, has retained the essential institutions and processes of parliamentary democracy that were provided for by the constitution at the time of independence. The durability of the Malaysian political system stems primarily from the recognition by Malay and Chinese political élites that preservation of Malay political primacy and maintenance of non-Malay legitimate interests are equally vital to the continuation of Malay-Chinese political co-operation.

Chinese political interests in the post-1969 period have been represented by four major parties. Three are based in Peninsular Malaysia (the MCA, the Gerakan, and the DAP), and one in Sarawak (the SUPP). At the time of writing, the political strength of these parties, as indicated by the number of parliamentary seats gained in the 1995 elections, shows the following breakdown: MCA 30, DAP 9, Gerakan 7, and SUPP 7 seats (*Star*, 7 June 1995).

In the past, the Sarawak Chinese Association and the Sabah Chinese Association both tried to play the role of the MCA in state politics. For a time, they won enough seats to gain positions in the state governments. However, neither has since survived. In Sabah, the Chinese switched their allegiance to the multiracial Parti Berjaya and in the mid-1980s, to the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS or United Sabah Party). In 1994 a number of Chinese left PBS to form the Liberal Democratic Party which has become a partner of the Barisan Nasional state government.

In Peninsular Malaysia, differences between the three Chinese-based parties are more imagined than real. The fact that the political distance between parties is not too wide is evidenced by the ease with which members have crossed over from one party to the other. The direction, however, has usually been from the DAP to either the MCA or the Gerakan. Even though the three parties adopt different postures, they are all seen as essentially Chinese organizations espousing Chinese causes. All three advocate political, social, and economic integration of the Chinese in Malaysia. They all encourage the Chinese to become an inseparable part of the new Malaysian society. Nevertheless, they are anxious that the Chinese be able to maintain a measure of their cultural distinctiveness. As such, all these parties support Chinese education and the use of Mandarin and Chinese dialects. Chinese educationists, particularly from the Dongjiaozong, have co-operated at different times with all three Chinese-based parties in Peninsular Malaysia. In October 1987 they joined leaders of the MCA, the Gerakan, and the DAP at a meeting at the Thean Hou Temple to oppose moves by the Education

Ministry to appoint non-Mandarin speaking teachers as senior administrators in Chinese schools.

With a claimed membership of 737,965 in 1998, the MCA is the largest Chinese party (Malaysian Chinese Association, 1998: 10). It has also remained expressedly Chinese despite declining support over the years. The party continues to draw significant support from Chinese in rural and semi-rural areas where problems of land tenure and inadequate basic amenities have been more pressing than the larger issues of education and language. Voters accept that the MCA and, to an extent, the Gerakan are more likely to bring development to their areas than the opposition. Since land and some infrastructure development projects come under state jurisdiction, the MCA has performed far better in state elections than in parliamentary elections. MCA support in urban areas is weaker than the DAP's. Some support comes from small businessmen and hawkers who rely on the party to obtain licences and trading approvals. Some Chinese businessmen continue to use the MCA to network with UMNO officials and Malay bureaucrats in the hope of advancing their business interests.

But the MCA's success in influencing government policies is limited. It is too weak to ensure that all Chinese concerns are met. However, the party is still significant enough to safeguard Chinese interests on a number of core issues, particularly that of continued state funding for Chinese-medium primary education. MCA leaders have, on a number of occasions, succeeded in fending off attempts by some Malay hardliners to further dilute Chinese cultural interests within the private confines of BN meetings. But they have been unable to publicize whatever concessions they have gained since any backlash from Malay radical groups would only serve to weaken UMNO's standing within the Malay community. The MCA is thus left with seemingly little achievement to convince the Chinese as to why it deserves their support.

Lacking the benefits of patronage which the UMNO leadership has so shrewdly used to placate dissidents and to maintain party discipline, the MCA has been seriously weakened by internecine party struggle over the years. The infighting that most severely damaged party unity occurred in 1959, and from mid-1983 to 1985. In the first instance, differences between factions led by party president Lim Chong Eu and Tan Siew Sin over demands made to UMNO on the eve of the general elections led to mass defections by Lim and his supporters. In 1983, after party Lee San Choon stepped down from office, a protracted and bitter leadership struggle between rival contenders Tan Koon Swan and Neo Yee Pan left a debilitated and disunited party in its wake. The party enjoyed two periods of stability, under the leadership of Tan Siew Sin (1961 to 1976) and Lee San Choon (1976 to 1983). Tan Siew Sin exercised the most stable and lasting leadership but even he in the end faced challenges from young reformists from the Chinese Unity Movement.

MCA influence in the government has declined since 1969 also because successive party leaders, who joined the Cabinet since that time,

have been junior to the UMNO leadership. Whereas Tan Cheng Lock and Tan Siew Sin belonged to the same generation in terms of age and political experience as their Malay counterparts such as Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak, subsequent MCA leaders including Lee San Choon and Ling Liong Sik have lacked the political status of Dato Hussein Onn and Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Still, it is only the MCA which has the organization, the resources, and, as the sole communally based Chinese-based party, the sentimental support of the community to undertake any major programme to advance Chinese interests in Malaysia. In the late 1970s, party president Lee San Choon launched several highly publicized projects to address Chinese concerns. These included the development of Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) College to widen tertiary education opportunities for Chinese; the setting up of Kojadi, a savings scheme offering loans and scholarships for lower income party members; the establishment of Multi-Purpose Holdings; and the Malaysian Chinese Cultural Council to promote Chinese cultural activities. The party also built a new multi-storeyed headquarters and bought an English-language newspaper, *The Star*, and a Chinese daily, *Tong Bao*.

These projects gained high visibility for the party and served as important symbols to attract support. They have created a needed sense of direction for the party, especially during periods between elections. Lacking UMNO's formidable patronage resources to reward key supporters, the party has also relied on the perks generated from these projects to buy party loyalty. TAR College, which receives partial state funding, has been the party's most significant contribution to Chinese education interests. Since it opened in 1975, some 60,000 Chinese students have graduated from its three schools (Arts and Science, Technology, and Business Studies) (Malaysian Chinese Association, July–November 1998: 4). By contrast, the party's efforts to spearhead a communally based corporatization movement through the MPHIB ended in failure. When the company became insolvent in 1986, due to recessionary conditions, as well as due to a number of unsound investment strategies made by party leader Tan Koon Swan, the party was forced to sell off its stake in the company.

The Gerakan has strived for a less communal approach to Malaysian politics. But it has been unable to shake off its image as a Chinese-based party, especially when it has openly welcomed dissidents from the MCA and the DAP. The Gerakan has yet to succeed in expanding beyond its Chinese electoral base located in Penang. The party has not successfully courted non-Chinese support, partly because of its lack of appeal for the non-Chinese, but also because it has refrained from encroaching on the ethnic constituencies of the other component members of the Barisan Nasional, specifically UMNO and MIC. The post of Chief Minister in Penang has been held by the Gerakan since 1971. By contrast, its main rival, the MCA, has not succeeded in forming or heading a state government. Despite repeated efforts by the DAP to unseat the



Gerakan, the Chinese in Penang have continued to vote the Gerakan into power.

The SUPP is supported mostly by the Chinese in Sarawak. The party has been able to play a very influential role in the politics of Sarawak since, unlike Peninsular Malaysia, no single ethnic group predominates there (Chin, 1997). The Partai Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PPBB), a very close ally of UMNO and the dominant force in the state ruling coalition, draws its support from the small Melanau and Malay Muslim communities. Having had to rely on SUPP backing to buttress its position in the ruling coalition, PPBB has rewarded its Chinese partner with one of the three offices of Deputy Chief Minister of the state, as well as one of the two offices of mayor of Kuching. Such access to power has enabled the SUPP's constituency, particularly the Foochow community group, to gain a wide range of economic opportunities in the state, including lucrative timber concessions on a scale that is the envy of Peninsular Chinese businessmen.

The DAP, one of the longest surviving opposition parties in Asia, is the only party that is truly pan-Malaysian for it has contested elections in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as in Sabah and Sarawak, unlike other parties in the country. Being in the opposition, the DAP has been able to articulate Chinese issues in a more forceful manner than the MCA and the Gerakan. It has won over Chinese protest votes by chiding Chinese government parties as being too timid and too tied to UMNO's apron strings. However, by adopting the competitive and confrontational mode of opposition politics associated with Western democracy, the combative DAP leaders have not endeared themselves to Malays whose political culture, until the political turmoil during 1998-9 caused by the dismissal and subsequent arrest of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, has valued accommodation and consensus. Since the 1970s, though, the DAP has taken up broad national concerns such as corruption and the erosion of democratic liberties, which concern Malaysians from all racial backgrounds. While such championing of inter-ethnic issues has taken some of the sharp communal edges off the DAP posture, it is still widely seen as a Chinese party by Malays.

It has been suggested that the DAP has been politically useful to the ruling coalition, especially to UMNO. The UMNO, confident that the DAP has no chance of coming to power, has been quite happy to let the DAP serve as a political safety valve through which non-Malay political frustration can be released. At the same time, DAP electoral gains have trimmed the representational influence of both the MCA and the Gerakan, thus making the latter two parties even more dependent on UMNO patronage. Finally, the DAP's strident articulation of Chinese issues has helped strengthen Malay political support for the UMNO.

All Chinese-based parties, including the DAP, understand they cannot succeed without Malay allies given the country's Malay-dominated political framework. In the pre-NEP period, the Labour Party, then the strongest Chinese-based opposition party, maintained a loose, but

ultimately unsuccessful alliance with the Malay-based Parti Rakyat (People's Party) in the Socialist Front. In 1990, the DAP entered into an electoral pact with Semangat 46, a party formed by UMNO dissidents in 1986. Semangat 46 itself was allied with the Islamic-based PAS. The co-operation between DAP and the two Malay parties created a multi-racial opposition coalition that represented a credible alternative to the BN. However, this second attempt at political co-operation between Chinese and Malay opposition groups was even more short-lived than the Socialist Front. It collapsed soon after its failure to capture power in the 1990 elections.

### Major Trends in Chinese Political Participation

Forming just under a third of the Malaysian population, and exercising considerable economic influence in the country, the Chinese have participated significantly in the country's political system since independence. The community has its own political parties, at least five of which participate as members of the ruling coalition, both at the federal and the state levels. The largest opposition party in the country is the Chinese-based DAP. While Chinese representation in the country's executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government is proportionately less than their total number in the country's population, they have none the less been adequately represented. At the time of writing, there are six Chinese Cabinet Ministers, one State Chief Minister, two State Deputy Chief Ministers, and numerous representatives serving in state legislative and executive committees. The 1995 parliamentary elections returned 57 Chinese representatives out of a total of 192 members to the Dewan Rakyat (*Star*, 7 June 1995). In addition, Chinese judges serve with distinction in the country's judiciary system, and Chinese civil servants constitute an essential part of the Malaysian bureaucracy. It is only in the armed forces that Chinese representation falls conspicuously short of their proportionate numbers in the country's population.

The UMNO-dominated Alliance and BN coalitions have served as the principal mechanism in mediating inter-ethnic politics since 1957. Despite the imperfections and authoritarian tendencies of the system, enough Malaysians still regard the BN coalition as the most appropriate arrangement for maintaining political stability in a polity where ethnic divisions still run deep. While most Chinese would like to see a more pluralistic system, which allows for greater interest articulation by non-governmental organizations and other interest groups, they realize that the existing political framework is unlikely to change any time soon. As long as the system continues to be controlled by the moderate, secular UMNO leadership, the Chinese have little reason for wanting it replaced. The inter-ethnic coalition has become the bedrock of Malaysian politics; any challenge to it would dramatically increase racial tensions and threaten national stability.

The coalition arrangement has greatly benefited UMNO interests. Not only has it ensured Malay political predominance, but UMNO itself

has also benefited electorally from the non-Malay votes commanded by its BN partners. For example, the pro-MCA vote has been crucial to keeping UMNO candidates in power in constituencies where the Malay vote has been keenly contested by PAS. In 1988, the momentum of the new Semangat 46's challenge to Mahathir was checked when the Chinese voted for the UMNO candidate in the Johore constituency of Parit Raja. In 1998, deep political fissures within the Malay community, caused by Mahathir's sacking of his deputy, have rendered the Chinese vote even more important to the electoral fortunes of Malay leaders, both within and outside UMNO.

In Sabah and Sarawak where no ethnic groups are in the majority, the Chinese voters have been decisive in influencing election results. In Sabah, they have been crucial to the electoral victories of Berjaya and, subsequently, the PBS state government. In Sarawak, the Chinese-supported SUPP, previously a powerful left-wing opposition, has contributed to political stability since joining the BN state government.

Chinese political representation in the Alliance and BN governments has served Chinese education interests, although Chinese educationists and Chinese-based opposition parties are keenly disappointed with what has been obtained. More importantly, Chinese education remains an integral part of the national school system. Nowhere else outside of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong is there a Chinese-medium education stream that is part of the public school system. In 1995, more than 600,000 children, making up 21 per cent of the total student enrolment, were in state-supported Chinese primary schools (Tan, 1997: 1). Over the last decade, close to 80 per cent of Chinese have sent their children to Chinese primary schools. The success and popularity of these schools are reflected in the increased intake of non-Chinese students. In 1994, for example, some 35,000 Malay students were enrolled in Chinese primary schools (Ministry of Education, 1995). While there are no state-supported Chinese secondary schools, the government allows some 60 private schools to operate. After almost two decades of lobbying the government, the Dongjiaozong finally received permission in 1997 to operate New Era College in Selangor. The college, which uses Mandarin as the major language of instruction, provides higher education opportunities for the Chinese-educated, and trains teachers for independent Chinese secondary schools. Apart from a well-established network of Chinese schools, the community is served by nearly half a dozen widely circulated Chinese newspapers, and a host of Chinese TV and radio programmes aired on state and private stations.

Fundamental demographic changes have taken place within the community since independence. Today more than 90 per cent of Chinese are born in Malaysia. As the post-independence generations have gone through the Malaysian-oriented national education system, which has used Malay as the main medium of instruction since 1970, the number of Malay-speaking Chinese have increased dramatically. However, an identifiable Malay-speaking Chinese population has not emerged since the Chinese still habitually communicate with each other in Chinese and,

to a lesser extent, in English. It is also too early at present to evaluate the political orientation of the Malay-educated Chinese. It is clear, however, that the influence of Chinese- and English-educated Chinese will continue to dominate since the majority of Chinese parents still send their children to Chinese-medium primary schools, and, for those who can afford it, to English-medium tertiary institutions overseas. Fluency in Chinese and English is still valued; English remains the premier language for international communication, and the economic growth of China and Taiwan has enhanced the usage of Chinese as a regional business language.

A second demographic change has been the decline in the Chinese birth rate compared to Malays. By the year 2020, the Chinese are estimated to form about 18 per cent of the total population. A third demographic change has been the increasing urbanization of the Malay population. The nation's capital, Kuala Lumpur, was predominantly Chinese at the time of independence, but Malays form nearly half its current inhabitants. The latter two trends have already affected electoral patterns: there were fewer urban constituencies with Chinese-majority voters in the 1995 elections. With the decline in Chinese population, Chinese political influence is expected to diminish even further.

Having weak political influence is not new to the Chinese in Malaysia as that situation prevailed during the pre-colonial and colonial period. Then, as now, the Chinese have focused their energy and ambition in the economic sphere, and many have been well rewarded by their hard work. The economic environment, particularly in the period between 1957 and 1969, provided unrestricted opportunities for Chinese business advancement. Restrictions placed on non-Malay business activities after 1969 resulted in a greater Chinese focus on manufacturing and high-technology industries where there are less NEP encumbrances. Manufacturing is the largest export earner in the country today having overtaken palm oil and rubber, and an estimated 80 per cent of the small- and medium-size industries are Chinese-owned. At the same time, the Chinese have maintained their dominant position in the distributive trade and the construction industry.

Despite their diminished influence after 1969, Chinese-based political parties have remained useful to Chinese business interests, as illustrated by the mandarin oranges controversy of 1985. In that year, the Ministry of Trade and Industry awarded to Satria Utara Enterprise Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of the state-sponsored Pernas, the sole permit to import mandarin oranges for the Chinese New Year. This led to strong protests from the traditional importers who were Chinese and the matter was resolved through representation by the Chinese-based parties in the coalition. Smaller Chinese businesses, more than big Chinese corporations, continue to turn to their political leaders to gain access to Malay business and political circles, and to resolve their problems with the bureaucracy.

Larger Chinese businesses prefer to cultivate political links directly with powerful Malay patrons. Leading tycoons of the pre-NEP period,

such as Lim Goh Tong (Genting), Lee Loy Seng (Consolidated Plantations), Loh Boon Siew (Oriental Holdings), Robert Kuok (Perlis Plantations, Federal Flour Mills and Shangri-La Hotels), and Quek Leng Chan (Hong Leong) expanded their businesses by working directly with influential Malay politicians and bureaucrats. The businesses of these entrepreneurs have continued to flourish through the NEP period (Heng, 1997: 273-6).

During the NEP years, a new generation of Chinese tycoons made their fortunes by establishing even closer business ties with politically well-connected Malay partners. These include Khoo Kay Peng (Malayan United Industries), Teh Hong Piow (Public Bank), Vincent Tan Chee Yioun (Berjaya), William Cheng (the Lion Corporation), Lim Thian Kiat (Kamunting Corporation), Jeffrey Cheah (Sungei Way Holdings), Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL Corporation), and Tong Kooi Ong (Phileo Allied). The NEP generation of Chinese tycoons gained a reputation for corporate daring as they took over and transformed older companies into high profile, widely diversified enterprises (Cheong, 1995). What distinguishes some of these companies from the earlier ones is their greater dependence on Malay political patronage and, in some cases, Malay financial support, as well as a propensity for high risk-taking, the consequences of which are discussed further on.

In Sabah and Sarawak where Chinese political influence within the state ruling coalitions is stronger, Chinese entrepreneurs have enjoyed greater economic access, particularly in the timber industry. The majority have also been able to expand their businesses without having to rely as heavily on Malay patronage as their counterparts in the Peninsula, with the notable exception of Sarawak's Ting Pek Khiing (Ekran). Leading Chinese entrepreneurs in Sabah include Datuk Lan Gek Poh of Hap Seng Consolidated and Malaysian Mosaic, and Joseph Lee of CASH. In Sarawak, Tiong Hiew King of Rimbunan Hijau is among the most successful tycoons. Dialect ties in business networking, especially among the Foochows, have remained more important in East Malaysia than in the peninsula. The career of Ling Beng Siew, founder of Hock Hua Bank, well illustrates the efficacy of dialect networking in Chinese business circles in East Malaysia.

The political and economic climate in Malaysia has been more accommodative of Chinese interests since 1987 when Mahathir liberalized and deregulated state involvement in the economy to pull the country out of the recession. In 1991, the NEP was replaced by the New Development Policy (NDP). Although the NDP continues to uphold the principle of Malay special rights, unlike the NEP it eschews numerical targets and emphasizes growth- and income-raising policies over income redistribution programmes (Malaysia, 1991: 4). While the NDP's emphasis on privatization and deregulation has been aimed primarily at creating a dynamic bumiputra commercial and industrial class, Chinese business interests have benefited from the large inflows of foreign investments in the period between 1987 and mid-1997. Previously marginalized groups such as the Chinese-educated have

benefited particularly from large investments from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Toh, 1994: 109-30).

The relaxation of onerous NEP constraints on Chinese business has also greatly benefited Chinese education interests. In order to achieve the high growth rates required to transform Malaysia into a fully industrialized nation by the year 2020, the country's leadership has stressed the importance of upgrading human resources in Malaysia. Thus, privately sponsored tertiary education has expanded rapidly, especially in the establishment of twinning arrangements of private colleges with foreign universities. Chinese students who have less access to state-funded scholarships have benefited especially from this more affordable means of higher education. Student enrolment in private colleges more than doubled between 1986 and 1990, from 15,000 to 35,600 (Malaysia, 1991b: 166-7). Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-95), state funding for Chinese primary schools was doubled, and the MCA-sponsored TAR College received a tenfold increase in government funding (Ling, 1995: 38). Equally significant has been the new tolerance for Chinese culture and language. Since the late 1980s, Chinese cultural elements in public performances have increased, and Chinese-language programmes in the country's mass media, which is largely state-controlled, have enjoyed wider exposure.

In his 1991 landmark 'Vision 2020' speech introducing his ambition for Malaysia to become a fully industrialized nation by the year 2020, Mahathir declared he sought a 'nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one "Bangsa Malaysia"' (*New Straits Times*, 2 March 1991). The Chinese were particularly struck by the multiculturalist 'Bangsa Malaysia' concept, for Malay leaders had previously employed the word *bangsa* within an exclusivist Malay nationalist context to denote Malay race or Malay nation (*Bangsa Melayu*). By including non-Malays within the *bangsa* concept, Mahathir was breaking from the chauvinistic conventions of Malay political and economic nationalism. While cynics within the Chinese community may dismiss Mahathir's sentiments as mere rhetoric, optimists hope that his endorsement of multiculturalism will result in a greater political and economic role for Chinese in Malaysia.

The MCA, the only communally based Chinese party in the country, has been reshaping its appeal within a more multiracial perspective to make itself more relevant to the post-independence generations of local-born Malaysian Chinese. In 1993, party president Ling Liong Sik introduced a 'One Heart, One Vision' theme to encourage Malaysian Chinese to be more multiracial in their cultural identification. As more Chinese become literate in Malay, and as Malays, Chinese, and Indians increasingly share their cultures, as evidenced by the Malaysian diet and participation in each other's festivals, Malaysians have 'not become less Malay, or less Indian or less Chinese but [they] have all become more Malaysian' (Malaysian Chinese Association, 1993: 9). The TAR College, founded by the party, currently has a significant portion of

non-Chinese students. In 1993, the party launched the Langkawi Project, a programme aimed at providing educational assistance to primary school students from all racial backgrounds in rural areas. In 1995, it liberalized membership rules to allow any Malaysian with one parent who is Chinese to join the party.

Despite such gestures in the direction of multiculturalism by Chinese leaders, it is highly unlikely that the Chinese would accept a dilution in their cultural identity. As in the case of the Malay and the Indian communities, language, religion, and other cultural practices serve as key identifiers of ethnic identity. Within the Chinese community, business networking has traditionally relied on the maintenance of distinctives that are Chinese. For this reason, as well as other non-economic factors, traditional Chinese cultural practices and religious beliefs remain important to the community. In Malaysia, Islam has not been considered as part of that Chinese distinctive identity. This may explain why significant Chinese conversion to Islam has not occurred. The 1991 census reported a total of 15,000 Chinese Muslims in the country, or 0.4 per cent of the Chinese population (Department of Statistics, 1995: 76). The resurgence of Islamic faith within Malay society has been a source of Chinese concern. Most Chinese fear that measures towards greater Islamization of the Malaysian polity, particularly those promoted by the PAS-controlled state government in Kelantan to institute *syariah* law in the state, would negatively affect their political and economic role in the country.

The younger generation of Chinese who are politically more idealistic are increasingly drawn to non-government organizations and social movements. They work with like-minded social activists from other racial groups to alleviate social conditions for the underprivileged, and to raise awareness on issues of global concern such as the environment, nuclear non-proliferation, and human rights. By expressing their concerns from a non-racial perspective, these organizations have generally transcended narrow ethnic preoccupations. There are increasingly more Chinese participating in NGOs such as consumer organizations, environmental protection movements, and legal aid associations.

### **The Impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on the Malaysian Political System**

The decade of impressive economic growth which Malaysia enjoyed since 1988 came abruptly to an end in July 1997 when the collapse of the Thai baht led to a sudden loss of foreign investors' confidence in the region's economies. The massive withdrawal of short-term funds from Malaysia has brought about the country's worst financial crisis since independence (see chapter on the Chinese business community). Plagued by a sharply devalued Malaysian ringgit, and massive losses in company share prices, many Malaysian companies have found themselves on the brink of financial insolvency.

Malaysian political leaders have learnt a painful lesson from the financial

crisis: that globalization (that is, integration of the Malaysian economy into the global capitalist system) is a double-edged sword that can both reward and punish. While the process of globalization has brought large flows of foreign investments into the country, creating jobs and accelerating economic development, it has also rendered the Malaysian state vulnerable to the manipulation of foreign investors and currency traders. Economic deregulation in this borderless electronic age has allowed foreign capital to leave the country almost instantaneously, rendering the government ill-prepared to deal with the social and political consequences of higher unemployment, rising inflation, and other socially destabilizing effects of a disrupted economy. In Indonesia, the impact of the financial crisis was so severe that it caused widespread social unrest and inter-ethnic violence directed mainly at the minority Chinese business community. Student demonstrations and mass protests, supported by the small but influential middle class, and subsequently the army, finally forced President Suharto to resign in May 1998 after 32 years in power.

Unlike Indonesia, the financial crisis in Malaysia has not produced a political crisis, nor has it caused inter-ethnic tensions. A key explanation for the absence of racial polarization is the success of the NEP in significantly narrowing the income gap between Chinese and Malays. The social restructuring since 1970 has created a new class of Malay professionals and entrepreneurs whose economic fortunes have become closely intertwined with Chinese business interests. Absolute poverty among the Malay rural population has been almost eradicated. Income redistribution has also enabled some 6 million Malays from all income groups to become shareholders in the state-run unit trust, Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB or National Equity Corporation) (*New Straits Times*, 23 June 1998). As Malay and Chinese business interests converge in a widening network of economic relationships based on joint ventures and work place interaction as employers and employees, creditors and clients, the ethnic divide between the two communities has dramatically narrowed. At the same time, lower-income Malays have so widely benefited from the NEP's income-raising programmes that the sense of economic deprivation that generated anti-Chinese sentiments in 1969 has so far been absent since the onset of the financial crisis.

Companies owned by both Malays and Chinese that have borrowed beyond the limits of prudence are not expected to survive the economic downturn without financial assistance from the state. The government for its part has extended help not only to politically well-connected Malay entrepreneurs such as Halim Saad, Tajudin Ramli, and Mirzan Mahathir, but also to Chinese businessmen, such as Vincent Tan, who enjoy close ties with the UMNO leadership (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 May 1998). The silver lining of the financial crisis has been the resilience of inter-ethnic co-operation. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese felt aggrieved by the special treatment enjoyed by Malays under the NEP. However, the financial crisis has demonstrated that it has been due to the NEP that political stability has endured in Malaysia.



### Conclusion

From the first trading and mining settlements right up to the present period, the Chinese in Malaysia, living under various political regimes, have developed appropriate responses to successive groups of power wielders. The extent to which they have been successful has depended on the nature of the political environment, the size of the Chinese community, and the economic roles they have played. Where there had been a weakened indigenous political system, as in the early nineteenth-century Malay states, the Chinese exercised some power in the political system through their secret societies. In states where Malay power was stable, or where colonial authority had been consolidated, Chinese political representation was channelled through their leaders, the Kapitan Chinas, who sat on Malay-dominated and, subsequently, British-controlled consultative bodies. But even in such situations, the views and concerns of the Chinese, because of their relatively large size and their strategic economic role, were always seriously considered by the authorities. The Japanese Occupation in Malaya temporarily disrupted British colonial rule and made possible, for a very brief period (between the surrender of the Japanese and the reimposition of British colonial rule), the emergence of the Chinese-based MCP as the ascendant political force in the country. The transition years towards self-rule saw the loss of communist influence and the re-emergence of conservative Chinese leaders. During this period, Chinese leaders founded Malaya-centred political parties and participated actively in the decolonization process as partners of Malay nationalists.

It is tempting to place today's Chinese leaders in the image of the Kapitan China of the traditional Malay states, or as British-sponsored community leaders of colonial Malaya. There are certainly parallels, but the differences are much more significant. The modern Malaysian political system, one modelled on the parliamentary system, allows Chinese political parties to mobilize and to articulate Chinese interests, albeit within limits set by UMNO leaders. Almost all Chinese are enfranchised and empowered with rights provided by the Malaysian constitution.

Not only have Chinese parties been meaningful in representing Chinese interests, but they have also been instrumental in mobilizing Chinese votes in support of UMNO leaders in electoral constituencies where the Malay opposition has been strong. While Malay political leaders have consolidated their dominance over the Malaysian political system, they none the less require non-Malay support to exercise power as national leaders. Most importantly, Chinese co-operation in the Malaysian political system is central to the maintenance of political stability and inter-ethnic harmony.

In the economic sector, Chinese entrepreneurs have developed enduring business relations within Malay political and economic circles, especially since the implementation of the NEP. Malays value Chinese business partners for their entrepreneurial skills, their well-established domestic distribution networks, and for their international business

contacts, particularly with other ethnic Chinese businessmen in South-East Asia, Taiwan, and China.

Social and economic restructuring under the NEP have corrected the major income and occupation imbalances between Malays and Chinese that gave rise to racial tensions in the past. During the 1970s and 1980s, nearly all Chinese had to make difficult and often painful adjustments to the NEP. However, that adjustment has produced a more resilient Malaysian polity. Increased Malay membership in the country's middle class has strengthened class interests across racial lines. The lack of racial polarization and racial politicking since the onset of the financial crisis attest to the new level of interracial harmony in Malaysia today. As the country enters the twenty-first century, Malaysian Chinese and their leaders will continue to co-operate actively with the moderate, secular, and business-friendly leadership of UMNO in ensuring the continuation of multiracial political co-operation and economic growth in the country.

1. Major historical studies on Chinese social, economic, and political activities in Malaya include Purcell (1967), Blythe (1969), Mak (1981), Trocki (1979), Jackson (1968), Jackson (1961), and Yen (1986).

2. See Tan (1997: 8-41); and Loh (1975).

3. For studies on the emergence and development of Malay nationalism, see Roff (1967); and Milner (1994).

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## Chinese Schools in Malaysia: A Case of Cultural Resilience

Tan Liok Ee

### Introduction

THE Chinese schools in Malaysia<sup>1</sup> are an unusual example of educational institutions which began as schools serving a migrant community, but were able to evolve into a vibrant part of the educational system of a multi-ethnic nation. Chinese schools were established by Chinese migrants wherever they settled in significant numbers in various parts of the world, particularly in South-East Asia.<sup>2</sup> However, only in Malaysia have such schools survived to this day, retaining their identity as Chinese schools because they continue to teach essentially in Mandarin and to cater predominantly to ethnic Chinese children.<sup>3</sup> The 1992 Minority Rights Group Report on the Chinese in South-East Asia noted that 'Malaysia has Southeast Asia's most comprehensive Chinese-language system of education' (Minority Rights Group, 1992: 19). In a region where Chinese schools have been forced to close, and where even reading material in the language is, in some places, prohibited, the Malaysian situation is exceptional. Even in Singapore where ethnic Chinese comprise more than 75 per cent of the population, schools teaching entirely in Mandarin no longer exist today though Chinese as a language is taught more extensively than ever before.

In 1995, there were 592,184 pupils studying in 1,287 Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) (henceforth SJK (C)) or national-type Chinese primary schools in Malaysia. These schools use Mandarin as the medium of instruction, are an integral part of the national system, receive state funds, and provide free education to 21 per cent of the total primary school enrolment.<sup>4</sup> At the secondary level, there were 59,773 pupils studying in 60 Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (henceforth ICSS) in 1995 (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 1 July 1996). The ICSS teach mainly, but not totally, in Mandarin. They are not part of the national system and therefore are not funded by money from the state. In addition, there are 74 former Chinese secondary schools, usually known as Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan (henceforth SMJK) or national-type secondary schools, which are part of the national system.

Fifty-four of these, in Peninsular Malaysia, were absorbed into the national system after the passing of the 1961 Education Act. These schools changed their medium of instruction to English in the 1960s and, starting from 1977, changed to teaching in Malay. But the SMJK, which have continued to teach Chinese as a language within the curriculum, besides retaining some of their historical characteristics, are still considered by many people to be 'Chinese schools'. Students in the ICSS pay fees, but not those in the government secondary schools, including the SMJK.

The Chinese schools of Malaysia have, in other words, survived both by being absorbed within the national school system as well as by providing a significant alternative outside the national system. Many of the Chinese schools that exist in Malaysia today can trace a continuous history from their dates of foundation to the present, with the oldest among them almost a century old. One example is the SRJK (C) Tong Sian in Penang which was founded in 1897 as a charitable school for poor children (Lin, 1982: R 25). The first Chinese schools were, in fact, established in the Straits Settlements in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, but most of these early schools cannot be traced today. During this long history, the Chinese schools have faced several crises and today they still face many problems. Yet, as a whole, they have remained resilient.

This chapter is an attempt to explain this resilience. It argues that a unique mix of inter-related demographic, socio-cultural, economic, and political factors enabled the Chinese schools to negotiate the terms for their survival through different phases of their history. Each section of this chapter highlights, in turn, a particular dimension in this complex of factors to bring out the dynamics of the symbiotic relationship between the Chinese schools and the Chinese community. In essence the argument is that to understand the resilience of the Chinese schools, the history of their growth and development must be located within the major social and political transformation of the Chinese from an immigrant society to an integral part of an independent nation.

### **The Demographic Dimension**

The Chinese comprise a more significant minority in Malaysia (37 per cent in 1957, 28.28 per cent in 1991) than elsewhere in South-East Asia, with the obvious exception of Singapore.<sup>5</sup> However, while the size of the Chinese population should be kept in mind as an important consideration, it does not by itself explain why a whole system of Chinese schools was established nor why these schools should have proved to be so resilient. Demographically, what was more important was the transformation of a transient and predominantly male population into a settled and permanent community. As more Chinese children were born locally, there was an obvious need to provide an education for them.

However, the colonial state in British Malaya did not take on the responsibility of providing educational facilities for the children of

Chinese or of Indian immigrants. The British pursued a minimalist policy in education with direct state involvement restricted basically to the provision of free primary schools for the Malay population and the training of teachers for the Malay schools. English schools were established largely through private initiatives or by Christian missionary organizations, while employers of Indian workers were required by law to provide some form of schooling for their workers' children. The Chinese were left to rely on their own initiatives if they wanted their children to be educated at all, and especially in their own language and culture.<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese responded to this situation by setting up their own community-funded schools, drawing on a long tradition of local self-reliance in education which can be traced historically to China. Studies of education during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) have shown that in China, too, the state played little part in helping to meet the widespread demand for a basic education from the general populace. This demand had, for centuries, been met through the family or through small neighbourhood schools organized at local community levels in the form of *sishu* or *yixue*. *Sishu* were small teaching units of 20 to 30 pupils, taught by a single teacher, which might be set up by a family, a clan, or a village committee, or perhaps by the teacher himself. *Yixue* were similar to the *sishu* except that they were set up by village or local communities as charitable or free schools to take care of poorer students.<sup>7</sup> This tradition of self-reliance in education was transplanted by Chinese immigrants to the Malayan peninsula when they found the colonial government indifferent to their children's educational needs.

The first Chinese schools were found in the three Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, the earliest centres of Chinese immigration. In 1815, when there were barely 1,000 Chinese living in Malacca, there were reported to be three small Chinese schools there.<sup>8</sup> The earliest Chinese school in Penang, the Wufu Shuyuan, is believed to have been established in 1819.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese population on Penang island in 1820 was estimated to be 8,595. There were three small Chinese schools in Singapore in 1829 when the Chinese living there were less than 8,000 (Buckley, 1965: 206; Song, 1967: 26). These early schools have left no historical records but are generally believed to have resembled the *sishu* in China.<sup>10</sup> Two well-known examples of *yixue* were the Chongwen Ge founded in 1849 in Singapore and the Nanhua Yixue founded in Penang in 1888.<sup>11</sup> By 1884, there were 52 Chinese schools in Penang, 51 in Singapore, and 12 in Malacca.<sup>12</sup> In 1881, the Chinese population in Penang was 67,354 while that of Singapore and Malacca were 86,766 and 19,741 respectively (Purcell, 1980: 232-4).

A new phase in the history of Chinese education in Malaya began with the advent of the twentieth century. Initially the impetus came from the visits of Kang Youwei and Sun Yat Sen to Malaya during the first decade of the twentieth century. Both Kang and Sun emphasized the importance of education to China's modernization efforts and called on their supporters to establish 'new-style' Chinese schools to replace



the outdated *sishu* and *yixue*. The first 'new-style' Chinese school, the Chung Hwa Confucian School, was founded in Penang in 1904.<sup>13</sup> Following swiftly in the footsteps of the Chung Hwa School in Penang, 'new-style' schools were set up in other towns having large concentrations of Chinese. The Confucian School was established in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, in 1906; the Yuk Choy School in Ipoh, Perak, in 1907; the Pay Fong School in Malacca, and the Foon Yew School in Johore Baru, both in 1913. It was in the towns, too, that the establishment of girls' schools began; for example the Kuen Cheng Girls' School in 1908 in Kuala Lumpur, the Perak Girls' School in 1914 in Ipoh, and the Fukien Girls' School in Penang in 1920.<sup>14</sup>

This spurt in the growth of Chinese schools that began in the first decade of the twentieth century was sustained throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Table 8.1 shows the steady increase in the number of Chinese schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States from 1921, the first year in which all Chinese schools were required to register with the colonial authorities, up to 1938, the last year for which official figures are available before the Japanese invasion.<sup>15</sup> The main factor spurring this growth in the number and enrolment of the schools was the increase in the number of Chinese children being born locally as the Chinese population began to take on the features of a more settled and permanent community.

The 1911 census shows that 23.5 per cent of the Chinese living in the

TABLE 8.1  
Chinese Schools, Pupils, and Teachers in the Straits Settlements  
and the Federated Malay States, 1921-1938

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
1921	252	n.a.	589
1922	391	n.a.	980
1923	537	n.a.	1,362
1924	564	27,476	1,257
1925	643	33,662	1,390
1926	657	36,380	1,483
1927	665	40,760	1,637
1928	696	43,961	1,806
1929	711	46,911	1,900
1930	716	46,367	1,980
1931	657	39,662	1,867
1932	669	41,858	1,929
1933	731	47,123	2,021
1934	766	54,618	2,371
1935	824	62,014	2,730
1936	860	70,483	3,058
1937	933	79,993	3,415
1938	1,015	91,534	3,985

Source: Yung (1967: 72-3).

Straits Settlements were local born. For the peninsula as a whole, according to T. E. Smith, the 1921 census indicated that 'the Chinese had already gone some way towards becoming a permanently settled community'. This was reflected in the birth registration figures as well as in the spread of Chinese settlements from the towns into the rural areas.<sup>16</sup> With this change, Chinese schools were established not only in the main cities, but also in smaller urban centres, villages, and outlying rural areas. By 1931, according to the *Annual Report on Education*, there were 'facilities for the primary vernacular education of Chinese boys in all villages of any size and schools of 20 or even fewer students are maintained by the Chinese community so that no one may be denied instruction' (Straits Settlements, 1931: 26).

The spread of Chinese schools outward from the main towns to outlying districts can be seen in Penang between 1897 and 1939. Of 17 schools which were founded before 1920, 15 were located on the island and only 2 in Province Wellesley. Between 1920 and 1928, another 18 schools were founded. Of these 5 were located within the town, 6 were in rural locations on the island, while another 6 were in Province Wellesley. In the 1930s, 17 more schools were founded; 10 in Province Wellesley and 7 on the island, of which 4 were in the urban centre and 3 in rural locations (Lin, 1982: R1-67).

In the 1930s, restrictions on male immigration and fewer constraints on female immigrants led more Chinese women to settle in Malaya. A more balanced sex ratio in turn resulted in an increasing number of children being born locally and a progressively increasing proportion of local-born Chinese (Tables 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4). Though this was neither officially recognized nor acknowledged at that time, T. E. Smith was of the view that by the 1930s it was already quite clear that the vast majority of the Chinese population were no longer 'mere sojourners' (Smith, 1965: 179). The increasing number of Chinese schools and their rapidly growing enrolments was an effect, as well as an indicator, of this greater sense of permanency.

By 1938, the Chinese primary schools with a total enrolment of 86,147 students were the largest component of the education system of Malaya. At a total of 996 schools, there were more students and teachers in Chinese primary schools than in Malay, English, or Tamil primary

TABLE 8.2  
Sex Ratio of Chinese Population in Peninsular Malaysia, 1911-1957

Year	Females per 1,000 Males
1916	215
1921	371
1931	486
1947	815
1957	926

Source: Hirschman (1974: 12).

TABLE 8.3  
Chinese Children Below Fifteen Years of Age, Malaya, 1921-1957

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Chinese Children Below Age 15</i>
1921	230,211
1931	434,021
1947	747,452
1957	1,129,926

*Sources:* Nathan (1922); Vlieland (1932); Del Tufo (1949); Fell (1960).

TABLE 8.4  
Proportion of Chinese Population Born in Peninsular Malaysia,  
Including Singapore, 1921-1957

<i>Year</i>	<i>% of Total Chinese Population</i>
1921	20.9
1931	29.9
1947	63.5
1957	75.5

*Source:* Hirschman (1974: 10).

schools (Table 8.5). However, secondary education was still in its infancy though a start had been made. Up till 1938, only 36 Chinese schools had secondary classes with a total of enrolment of no more than 3,200 pupils (Straits Settlements, 1931). Many of those who sought an education beyond the primary level were sent to China where some secondary and even tertiary institutions had been established, especially for the children of Chinese emigrants.

The Japanese invasion and occupation brought all this to a temporary halt with almost all the Chinese schools closed for the entire duration of the occupation. The few which were allowed to open had to teach in Japanese.<sup>17</sup> As soon as the occupation ended, there was a rush to reopen

TABLE 8.5  
Number of Schools, Pupils, and Teachers in All Primary  
Schools in Malaya, 1938

<i>Medium</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
Malay	788	56,904	2,810
English	271	41,917	2,350
Chinese	996	86,147	3,556
Tamil	607	26,271	864

*Source:* Ministry of Education (1968).

*Note:* The total number of Chinese schools provided in this source differs from that in Table 8.1.

the Chinese schools which were flooded with pupils eager to catch up on the education they had missed as a result of the war. By November 1946, total enrolment in the Chinese schools had reached 172,000, a 55 per cent increase over 1941 figures (Malayan Union, 1946: 26). The demand for schooling continued unabated for the next decade reflecting the effects of the demographic transformation taking place since the 1920s. The Chinese population was now growing almost entirely from its own birth-rate. The first post-war census in 1947 showed that 63.5 per cent of the Chinese living in Malaya were local-born. By 1957, this had increased to 75.5 per cent (see Table 8.4). The number of Chinese children below 15 years increased from 747,452 in 1947 to 1,129,926 in 1957 (see Table 8.3). This created a massive demand for education which was met mainly by the Chinese primary schools where enrolment increased from 158,037 in 1946 to 342,194 in 1957 (Table 8.6).

The 1950s also saw a dramatic expansion of Chinese secondary education. In 1946, there was a total secondary enrolment of just 4,508, accommodated in 15 Chinese schools which had secondary classes. By 1957, this had increased more than tenfold to 49,536 pupils in 60 secondary schools, while the number of teachers employed in secondary schools increased from 194 in 1946 to 1,060 in 1957 (Table 8.7). Just as in the pre-war years, the resources for this growth of the Chinese schools, both primary and secondary, came largely from the Chinese themselves. In a confidential report on the Chinese schools despatched to the Colonial Office in 1955, the High Commissioner of the Federation, Sir Donald MacGillivray, acknowledged that the Chinese had been 'left largely to their own resources' because the government 'was not in a position to meet all the educational needs of post-war Malaya'. The greater part of the state's resources, MacGillivray explained, had been absorbed in meeting the 'new insistent demand for education on the part of the Malays'.<sup>18</sup>

TABLE 8.6  
Chinese Primary Schools, Pupils, and Teachers, 1946-1957

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
1946	1,004	158,037	4,064
1947	1,379	190,349	5,179
1948	1,362	185,670	5,328
1949	1,336	198,126	5,348
1950	1,317	210,336	5,865
1951	1,168	198,840	5,942
1952	1,199	229,803	5,565
1953	1,211	236,041	6,282
1954	1,231	232,818	6,458
1955	1,265	255,158	6,642
1956	1,311	279,549	7,380
1957	1,333	342,194	8,521

*Sources:* Malayan Union (1946-7); Federation of Malaya (1948-57).

TABLE 8.7  
Chinese Secondary Schools, Pupils, and Teachers, 1946-1957

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
1946	15	4,508	194
1947	22	3,194	201
1948	11	3,474	220
1949	27	4,450	265
1950	32	6,159	380
1951	38	7,503	426
1952	47	11,378	462
1953	46	14,840	455
1954	53	18,306	503
1955	55	23,397	964
1956	70	40,330	1,037
1957	60	49,536	1,060

*Sources:* Same as in Table 8.6.

*Note:* Number of schools includes both institutions in which secondary classes were conducted and institutions which were separate secondary schools.

The rapid expansion of enrolments in both primary and secondary Chinese schools after 1947 reflected the growing demand for education from the post-war baby boom. But it was due also to another major transformation taking place in the 1950s. Within the constitutional framework of the Federation of Malaya, promulgated in 1948, a significant number of Chinese qualified to become citizens. The 1948 provisions, together with amendments introduced after 1952, enabled more than 1 million Chinese to obtain citizenship by 1953 (Ratnam, 1965: 92).<sup>19</sup> The acquisition of citizenship signified, politically, the definitive stage in the transformation of the Chinese from an immigrant society to a permanent and integral component of a multi-ethnic nation that was moving rapidly towards political independence. In this context, it became imperative for the Chinese to establish more secondary schools so that children graduating from the Chinese primary schools could continue with their education locally. Travel to and from China had, in any case, become severely restricted after the Emergency began in 1948 and after the Communist Party victory in mainland China in 1949.

These developments also led to the realization that a university was needed for the many young Chinese who would otherwise have no access to tertiary education. In 1953, the idea of a Chinese university to cater for students from Chinese secondary schools in the region was mooted. A frenetic campaign to collect funds climaxed with the opening of the Nanyang University in Singapore in March 1956 (Xingjiapo Nanyang Wenhua Chuban She, 1956; Tan, 1973). On the eve of Merdeka, therefore, spurred by demographic and political changes, a full-fledged system of Chinese primary and secondary schools, as well as a Chinese university, had already been established.

### The Socio-cultural Dimension

The demographic dimension is essential to an understanding of how the Chinese schools grew in tandem with the main stages in the change in character of the Chinese population. But it cannot explain why there was so much commitment to the schools' continuous growth and development. A second, and equally important, factor is the fact that the vast majority of the schools were initiated and funded by the Chinese themselves. The schools thus had deep roots within the local communities which they served.

In a study of Chinese contributions to the development of education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States from 1900 to 1941, Yung Yuet Ling has argued that a traditional respect for education was further enhanced by a keen awareness among Chinese immigrants that education was the only means by which their children could be assured of better employment and a path to social mobility (Yung, 1967: 120-1). This matrix of values attached to education led many Straits Chinese to send their children to English schools which provided the best channel for upward mobility in a British colony. The Straits Chinese not only initiated English schools, they even spearheaded the beginning of tertiary education (*ibid.*: Chapter 4).

However, as Yung has rightly pointed out, it was the Chinese schools which attracted far more enthusiastic and widespread support. As migrants in a foreign land where they were treated as aliens, most Chinese were anxious that their children should not lose their linguistic and cultural heritage. The people who invested their time, energy, and money in founding and running the Chinese schools were, as Yung has suggested, motivated by a simple pride in their culture and the desire to have their children educated in their own language and culture (*ibid.*: 120-1). Such sentiments can be found in the histories of most of the schools. In addition, there was a general belief that it was through education that a person acquired a sense of morality. The founding statements of the earliest Chinese schools, for example, expressed concern that young Chinese should 'learn to follow the moral path' and be taught 'to uphold the righteous path of the ancient sages'.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese schools were therefore manifestations of the moral, cultural, as well as economic values which the Chinese attached to an education for their children.

Unlike the English schools which were to be found mainly in towns or urban centres, Chinese schools were established in towns as well as small villages, indeed wherever there was a group of children who needed an education and some people prepared to donate some money and devote their time to the project. Most of the schools had humble beginnings and grew practically classroom by classroom as more children enrolled and as the financial resources of the local community increased. When the number of pupils increased, an additional teacher would be employed. When more money was available, the school might get a permanent home and as the need arose additional classrooms would be added.

The Chio Min School in Kulim, Kedah, began in 1918 with only seven pupils in a shophouse. By 1930, the enrolment had increased to 70 and the school had moved into new premises built on a piece of land bought for the school. Similarly, the Khoon Aik School in Kangar, Perlis, was housed in a rented shophouse when its first classes started in 1921. In 1926, the school moved into a residential house which had been converted to accommodate four classrooms, a school hall, and a teachers' room. The first Chinese school in Sungei Patani, the Sin Min School, began with 10 pupils and one teacher in an *atap* house in 1911. Six years later, in 1917, the school moved to a two-storey building. In 1941, the school acquired five neighbouring shophouses to accommodate its enrolment which had grown to 400. The same pattern of gradual growth and expansion is described in the histories of all the schools, whether big or small, rural or urban.<sup>21</sup>

In states with large concentrations of Chinese, different clans or dialect groups often established schools specifically for their own children. The Khoos and the Tans in Penang, for example, established their own clan schools, the Sin Kang and the Eng Chuan schools which were founded in 1906 and 1917 respectively. The Kong Min School was founded by the Guangzhou Tingzhou Huiguan in 1909; the Aik Hwa School was started in 1913 by the Hainanese; the Han Chiang School by the Teochews in 1919; and the Sum Sun School by the Hockchius in 1928. A similar pattern of schools which centred on regional, dialect or surname groupings, or organizations when they were first founded can also be found in other states.<sup>22</sup>

The Chinese schools were community projects, drawing mainly on local resources and involving local leaders and organizations. They were not run as commercial or profit-making ventures and more often than not faced financial difficulties. It was not unusual to find, in the school histories, reports of schools which had to close for a year or two due to financial problems, opening again when the necessary funds became available. During the depression in the 1930s, the number of schools dropped from 716 in 1930 to 657 in 1931, recovering slightly in 1932 with a total of 669 (see Table 8.1).

Money was usually raised through annual donations or the collection of monthly dues for recurrent expenditure and from periodic fund-raising campaigns for capital expenditure on land, buildings, and other physical facilities. There were local variants, for example, where some schools in Johore were supported by a cess which the local rubber or rice dealers' association collected from their members. Teachers, principals, parents, and even the pupils were all required to help in raising money to keep their schools going. Occasionally, teachers had to go without pay while local leaders went around to collect donations to replenish the school's depleted coffers.<sup>23</sup>

The tradition of everyone pitching in to raise money in support of Chinese education has persisted since the early twentieth century. It was most dramatically demonstrated at critical junctures, for example, during the fund-raising campaign on behalf of the Nanyang University. All

levels of Chinese society, from rich businessmen to trishaw-pullers to bar-girls, and various types of Chinese organizations launched activities in support of the proposed university (Xingjiapo Nanyang Wenhua Chuban She, 1956; Tan, 1973). Similarly in the early 1970s, barbers, taxi-drivers, hawkers, and shopkeepers, responding to the call to resuscitate flagging interest in the ICSS, contributed their earnings to demonstrate their support for the campaign.<sup>24</sup> Also in the 1970s, at the height of the movement to support the founding of the Merdeka University as a Chinese university in Malaysia, a *yiren yiyuan*, or a dollar a person, campaign was conducted to demonstrate widespread Chinese backing for the proposal.<sup>25</sup>

Such collections from a broad base of supporters may have been an effective way to take the cause of Chinese education to the grass roots but they were never in themselves sufficient to maintain the schools, especially the larger ones in the towns. Wealthy individuals were always called upon to play a prominent and crucial role as the major benefactors who donated large sums of money. The most generous among them would become members of a school's board of governors, which in turn would nominate a smaller management committee to run the school. Among Chinese immigrants who had come in search of a better life, wealth was the main criterion of success. But wealth alone did not bestow social status and respectability. Philanthropic contributions to causes seen as helping the less fortunate or benefiting the community as a whole was one way in which a successful merchant or trader became a respected leader (Wan, 1967; Wang, 1992).

Given the special moral and cultural significance of the Chinese schools, donations to the schools was one of the most favoured forms of philanthropic contributions by wealthy Chinese. To be a *dongshi*, or a member of the board of governors of a school, enhanced a man's social standing and leadership status, and provided some room for patronage. The management of the schools, including the hiring and firing of staff, lay within the *dongshi*'s control. But the *dongshi* also bore the responsibility, socially and morally, of finding the resources to keep their schools going. This meant being prepared to dip regularly into one's pockets and to go round pressurizing one's friends and peers to part with their money during fund-raising campaigns. This burden became more formidable in the 1950s as the schools grew in numbers and in size and as teachers expected better working conditions.

Unlike the *dongshi*, the teachers were not rich. They were, in fact, a poorly paid group who were dependent on the *dongshi* of their respective schools for their livelihood. The ignominious plight of the teachers in the Chinese schools is well captured in this quotation from the 1952 *Annual Report on Education* (Federation of Malaya, 1952: 9):

The teachers in Chinese schools have always been insecure as wage earners in this country, with the inevitable shifts and straits and lack of professional dignity and social status which have made them poor itinerants, packing bag and baggage for the annual mass migration to other jobs in other schools.



However, as an educated élite in a society which placed a high value on education, the teachers were opinion leaders in their communities. As a literate and articulate group, the school teachers were an important force in Chinese politics in Malaya after 1951 when the movement to defend the Chinese schools began.

### The Political Dimension

The decade from 1951 to 1961 was a critical turning point in the history of the Chinese schools in Peninsular Malaysia. The colonial government took a new approach to education policy as part of its decolonization strategy for post-war Malaya. The new emphasis on multiracial schools as agents of integration and the promotion of English as a common language sparked off fears among the Chinese that the intention of the British was to force the Chinese schools to close down or to convert them into English schools. In response, a movement was launched to save the Chinese schools.<sup>26</sup>

It appears ironical, with historical hindsight, that the survival of Chinese education was most threatened at a point in time when the schools were expanding rapidly to accommodate the post-war baby boom and education in Chinese was maturing beyond the primary into the secondary, and even tertiary, levels. Yet it was precisely this paradox, together with the conjuncture of the controversy over education policy with the first electoral experiments, the Emergency, and the rapid movement towards political independence, that proved to be the salvation of the Chinese schools. This section highlights how and why the enmeshing of several political factors, between 1951 and 1961, worked to provide a negotiating space for the long-term survival of the Chinese schools (Tan, 1996).

The controversy over the essential features of a national education policy that could foster national unity and promote inter-racial harmony began with the release of the Barnes and Fenn-Wu Reports in 1951. The Barnes Report recommended an end to the system of separate vernacular schools for different ethnic groups and proposed instead a single system of primary schools teaching in English and Malay. The Report claimed that a new sense of social unity was possible only if the Chinese and Indians were prepared to relinquish their attachment to their own languages and cultures (Federation of Malaya, 1951a: 23). A diametrically opposed approach was proposed by the Fenn-Wu Report which argued against the 'restrictive imposition of one or two languages' and recommended instead that the various communities should be permitted to retain their own languages and cultures (Federation of Malaya, 1951b: 4-6).

To the Chinese, the Barnes Report sounded like the death knell for the Chinese schools. The Report's recommendations were perceived as reflecting British and Malay views that Chinese schools were unacceptable within the Malayan education system. The *dongshi* and the teachers

of the Chinese schools began to organize themselves immediately after the release of the Barnes Report to fight for the survival of the Chinese schools as a legitimate part of the future Malayan national system of education.

The movement to defend Chinese education launched Dongjiaozong as a new force in Chinese politics in Malaya. Dongjiaozong is the Chinese acronym commonly used to refer jointly to the United Chinese School Teachers' Association or UCSTA and the United Chinese School Committees' Association or UCSCA. The UCSTA, referred to in Chinese usually as Jiaozong, is the national grouping of Chinese school teachers associations at state, district, and town levels, while the UCSCA, or Dongzong in Chinese, is the national grouping for Chinese School Committees at state levels. The Dongjiaozong position began as a protest against colonial policy, but soon evolved into an alternative vision of a multi-ethnic nation in which the diverse languages and cultures of its peoples could find a home.<sup>27</sup>

Through the struggle for the survival of the Chinese schools, the UCSTA's leader, Lim Lian Geok, emerged in the 1950s as one of the most articulate and prominent spokesmen for Chinese rights in Malaya.<sup>28</sup> The colonial government's attempt to promote English as the main medium of instruction in the Malayan education system was attacked by the UCSTA as imperialistic and undemocratic. This projected the Chinese education issue as part of an anti-colonial struggle and located the issue of the survival of the Chinese schools within the rubric of the legitimate rights of an ethnic minority within a multiracial society. Such a message had tremendous appeal to a wide range of Chinese, especially the Chinese-educated, who had always felt discriminated against under colonial rule in terms of opportunities for social mobility.

The Chinese education movement was launched in November 1952, when representatives of Chinese school teachers and *dongshi* from all the states in the Federation met together for the first time. They were joined by leaders of the then Malayan, later Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). Despite his own lack of knowledge of the Chinese language, Tan Cheng Lock, the president of the MCA, recognized the survival of the Chinese language and schools to be important issues politically. He committed the MCA to supporting the teachers and *dongshi* in their opposition to colonial education policy as stated in the 1952 Education Ordinance. Beginning from November 1952, MCA leaders worked closely with Dongjiaozong leaders on the Chinese education issue, a relationship that was maintained until July 1959.

As the MCA's political co-operation with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) developed from a loose electoral pact into a formal coalition in the form of the Alliance, the Chinese schools problem became one of the issues which MCA leaders brought into negotiations with UMNO. Through the MCA, Dongjiaozong leaders were drawn into the centre of the inter-ethnic bargains being conducted within the Alliance as it pushed for political independence. On the eve

of the first federal elections scheduled for July 1955, UMNO and Dongjiaozong leaders met in Tan Cheng Lock's house in Malacca to hammer out a compromise on the related issues of language and education. In the bargain negotiated at this meeting, UMNO leaders, led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, pledged that if elected they would 'see to it that the Chinese were given a chance to preserve their schools, language and culture'. In exchange, UCSTA leaders, led by Lim Lian Geok, promised not to bring up the question of Chinese as an official language till after the July elections.<sup>29</sup>

The formula agreed upon at the Malacca meeting in January 1955 was incorporated into the Alliance Election Manifesto for the 1955 elections which pledged not to destroy the schools, languages, and cultures of the various races. After the Alliance won the 1955 elections, an Education Committee, headed by then Dato Abdul Razak Hussein the Minister of Education, was immediately appointed to formulate a new education policy. The Alliance's electoral pledge was incorporated into the Razak Committee's terms of reference. MCA leaders continued to work closely with Dongjiaozong leaders throughout the crucial period in which the Razak Committee formulated its proposals and the 1957 Education Ordinance was drafted to give effect to the new policy.

It was the historic compromise struck at the Malacca meeting that won a place for the Chinese primary schools within the national system of education. This compromise was possible because the UMNO leaders recognized the need to come to terms with Chinese leaders on the Chinese schools' issue. Politically, it was imperative for UMNO to accommodate some Chinese demands if the Alliance was to win over Chinese voters and prove itself acceptable to both Malays and non-Malays. The Alliance would then be in a better position to win political independence from the British. Another consideration was the magnitude of the problem. By 1956, there were 1,381 Chinese primary and secondary schools with a total enrolment of 319,879 pupils and 8,417 teachers. These numbers indicate the massive dislocation that would result from any decision to close the schools or force an unpopular change in the medium of instruction. Economic considerations, too, pointed to the wisdom of accepting the Chinese schools, at least in the short term. The Alliance's electoral pledge was to ensure a place in school for all children of school-going age. To achieve this target the most practical step was to conserve funds for new schools, while absorbing those already in existence. The Razak Report recommended the practical approach of strengthening and expanding the existing primary schools in order to attain the target of a place in school for every child between six to seven years of age by 1960.<sup>30</sup>

From the point of view of Dongjiaozong leaders, striking a bargain with Alliance leaders, who were most likely to inherit the reins of government from the British, was the best way to safeguard the future of the Chinese schools. *Dongjiaozong* leaders were aware that in the context of the Emergency, the spectre of communist infiltration could easily be used against the Chinese schools. Any eruption of violence or even

disorder in the schools could have provided a good reason to close them down. The Dongjiaozong leaders had, since 1951, steered a careful path between vocal opposition to colonial policy and quiet co-operation with British officials in effecting several major changes in the Chinese schools. For example, the UCSTA had worked closely with the Education Department to produce new textbooks based on a Malaya-centred curriculum to replace textbooks imported from China. Beginning from 1953, most of the Chinese primary schools entered into a new scheme which increased government aid to, and control over, the schools.

In 1957, the Chinese primary schools were accepted into the national system together with schools teaching in Malay, Tamil, and English on the basis of the Razak Report's recommendation that a common curriculum was the most important step towards integrating the existing schools into a national system. However, the status of secondary schools teaching in Chinese remained uncertain. The Razak Report specifically allowed secondary schools to teach in different languages, but required schools entering into the national system to prepare their students for two new public examinations. The language in which these public examinations were to be conducted became the critical issue. Dongjiaozong leaders wanted the examinations to be conducted in Chinese, but UMNO leaders insisted that public examinations should only be conducted in the official languages of the country.

Between 1956 and 1957, attempts to resolve the examinations issue, and the related problem of accepting Chinese secondary schools within the national system, were delayed by, and became entangled with, negotiations on the Merdeka Constitution. During this critical period, open confrontation was avoided as all sides refrained from pushing their demands to the hilt. The main reason for exercising restraint was the common objective of wanting an end to British rule. But a resolution of the issue had to be found after Merdeka in August 1957.

Confrontation became unavoidable when UMNO leaders remained uncompromising on the examinations issue and the terms for Chinese secondary schools to join the national system. A new MCA leadership headed by Lim Chong Eu, who was elected president in March 1958, attempted to push for a resolution before the 1959 general elections. But the political scenario of early 1959 was quite different from that of 1955 when the Malacca meeting was convened. First, UMNO leaders were facing mounting criticism from the party's own rank and file, especially Malay school teachers, for being too soft on the issue of making Malay the sole medium of instruction and too slow in establishing Malay secondary schools. Secondly, the new MCA leaders adopted the strategy of organizing a show of support for their position by holding a meeting of 1,200 representatives from 747 Chinese organizations to endorse a statement on 'The General Demands of the Malayan Chinese Community on Chinese Education'. This tactic antagonized the Tunku who was already uneasy with and distanced from the new MCA leadership. Furthermore, the MCA was simultaneously demanding a resolu-

tion on the Chinese secondary schools' issue and an allocation of at least a third of the seats to be contested by the Alliance in the 1959 elections.

After the Alliance lost control of the Kelantan and Trengganu state governments in state level contests which were held before the parliamentary elections, UMNO leaders became far too concerned about the party's support from the Malay electorate to consider any further concessions to the MCA. Months of tension between UMNO and the MCA finally erupted in a political crisis in June 1959. Negotiations on the issue of the Chinese secondary schools, which had been proceeding behind the scenes between Lim Chong Eu the MCA president and Dato Razak the Minister of Education, came to an abrupt end.

The resolution of the June 1959 crisis decimated the MCA as many of its leaders, who could not accept UMNO's terms for keeping the MCA within the Alliance, left the party. UMNO's position within the Alliance, on the other hand, was strengthened. After the elections, the Talib Committee was appointed to review implementation of the education policy. The Talib Report of 1960 and its companion legislation, the 1961 Education Act, stated unequivocally that all secondary schools within the national system must teach in one of the two official languages of the country, English or Malay. All national secondary schools must also prepare their students for public examinations to be conducted only in English or Malay (Federation of Malaya, 1960: Paras 17-20, 173-4, and 183-7).

To gain acceptance into the national system, therefore, Chinese secondary schools had to stop teaching in Chinese and convert to schools teaching in English in order to receive full government aid. Schools which refused to comply with these conditions would receive no state funds and had to become private or independent schools outside the national system. After the 1961 Education Act was passed, the Alliance government made a concerted attempt to convince Chinese secondary schools to join the national system. The Chinese education movement, already weakened by lack of support from the MCA after June 1959, was further subdued after the government silenced Lim Lian Geok by revoking his citizenship as well as his licence to teach (UCSTA Secretariat, 1989). In the end, 54 of the 70 Chinese secondary schools then existing decided to fall in line with official policy, while the other 16 rejected the government's terms of aid and became independent Chinese secondary schools.

However, the Chinese primary schools remained within the national system and continued to receive government aid. As all primary education within the national system became free after the 1961 Act, Chinese primary school students have since then enjoyed the benefit of not paying any fees. However, Clause 21 (b) of the 1961 Education Act of 1961 empowered the Minister of Education to require schools not teaching in the national language to do so, as and when such a move was thought necessary. In 1970, this clause was invoked to convert all the English primary schools into Malay-medium schools. Fears that the same power could be used to effect a similar conversion of the Chinese

primary schools were a constant source of political tension over the next two decades. In 1987, for example, the promotion of about 100 Chinese, but non-Mandarin speaking, teachers to senior positions in Chinese schools within the national system was perceived by supporters of the schools, and Dongjiaozong leaders, to be a government attempt to 'change the character of the Chinese schools'. This issue fuelled a political atmosphere already highly charged with tensions within UMNO and among the component parties of the ruling Barisan Nasional.<sup>31</sup> The escalating racial tension was defused after the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, launched 'Operation Lalang' on 27 October. A total of 119 persons were detained under the Internal Security Act, among whom were Lim Fong Seng, President of the UCSCA; Sim Mow Yu, President of the UCSTA; Twang Pik King, headmaster of an ICSS; and Kua Kia Soong and Ong Tin Kim who were closely associated with the UCSCA.<sup>32</sup>

Thus Chinese education has always struck a sensitive nerve in communal politics in Malaysia. The political dimension has been, and will probably remain, critical in defining the boundaries within which Chinese schools are allowed to continue to function. The terms of survival for the Chinese schools, as defined in the Education Act of 1961, remained unaltered until a new Education Bill was passed in December 1995. Within this new Bill, there is no clause empowering the Minister to convert national-type primary schools into national schools teaching in Malay. The Chinese primary schools therefore appear to have a more secure position within the national system. However, the 1995 Education Bill states that Malay should be the main medium of instruction within the national system. Whether this means that the majority of the schools must use Malay, which is already the case, or that all schools will be required to ultimately teach mainly in Malay is presumably open to interpretation. In addition, the new Act also requires all schools to conform to a national curriculum and to prepare their pupils for prescribed examinations (Malaysia, Education Bill, 1995: Sections 16-19).

The 1961 Education Act, which remained in force for 24 years, drew a clear distinction between schools within the national system which were supported by state funds and schools outside the national system which received no government funds, but were relatively free of state control. This distinction has now been abolished by the Education Bill of 1995 which emplaces all schools, except for those specially set up for expatriate children, within the national system.<sup>33</sup> Inclusion within the national system does not, however, mean that all schools will now receive financial support from the state. Rather, as explained by the Minister of Education when he presented the Bill in Parliament, the main objective is to provide the state with more control over the private schools.<sup>34</sup>

The 1995 Education Bill, therefore, sets a different kind of framework for the ICSS which had since 1961 functioned relatively free of direct state control. Now technically part of the national system, the ICSS may come under any regulation issued by the Ministry to all private schools.

But other private schools, unlike the ICSS, do not teach in Chinese and are run as commercial enterprises, not community funded institutions with a long history of support from within Chinese society. The Minister of Education has given his assurances, both in Parliament and during meetings with Chinese leaders outside Parliament, that the new Bill will not change the *status quo* as far as the ICSS are concerned. This implies that the ICSS will be allowed to continue teaching mainly in Chinese. The Minister has also given his assurance that the UCSCA will be allowed to continue conducting the two major examinations it has been organizing for students of the ICSS since the 1970s (Malaysia, 1995: ruangan 60-1). These oral assurances were, however, not written into the Bill itself. The new Education Bill gives the Minister of Education the power to waive, or impose, many of its specific provisions. But this, in fact, may open up a wider range of issues for future political disputes or negotiations.

### The 'Alternative Education' Dimension

This final section highlights another dimension in the balance between the vulnerabilities and the resilience of the Chinese schools. These schools have always been able to sustain a sizeable and consistent share of total enrolment. But there have been times when they have suffered declining enrolments. And, there have also been times when they have absorbed an additional margin of students indicating that they were either increasingly preferred as an alternative or met some specific needs not provided for by other types of schools. These shifts in the pattern of enrolment in the Chinese primary and secondary schools reflect changing assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese schools relative to other schools.

Historically the Chinese schools were established to meet the special cultural and educational needs of a migrant society which were either ignored or dismissed by the colonial authorities. Access to English schools was difficult because the English schools were to be found only in major towns, took in limited numbers, and charged higher fees. By comparison, Chinese schools were to be found almost everywhere, charging lower fees, and sometimes providing fee reductions for poor pupils. They were therefore the most obvious choice for the vast majority of Chinese parents for practical reasons as much as for reasons of cultural attachment. Not surprisingly, therefore, enrolment in the Chinese primary schools since the beginning of this century indicates that they have consistently attracted a solid majority of Chinese children. As noted earlier in this chapter, enrolments in Chinese primary schools in Peninsular Malaysia increased dramatically in the first post-war decade, from 190,349 in 1947 to 342,194 in 1957.

However, immediately after 1957 there was a period of declining enrolments in the Chinese primary schools. The total enrolment of the SRJK (C) fell from 342,194 in 1957 to 339,829 in 1963, and remained around the 340,000 figure for the next three years. The shift clearly was

towards the English primary schools whose total enrolment increased from 160,589 in 1957 to 292,212 in 1967, increasing further to 330,256 by 1969. This shift can also be seen from the drop in the SRJK (C) share of the total primary school enrolment from 42 per cent in 1947 to 27 per cent in 1969 while that of the English primary schools rose from 12.6 per cent in 1947 to 23.6 per cent in 1969. The increased enrolment in the English primary schools reflected the higher value attached to an English education in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, English education had become more accessible as the number of English primary schools had increased from 197 in 1947 to 517 in 1966.<sup>35</sup>

There was an immediate reversal of this trend after 1970 when, in the first major policy change after the 1969 racial riots, the Minister of Education ordered all English primary schools to convert into Malay schools under the provisions of Clause 21 (b) of the 1961 Education Act. From 1971 to 1978, enrolment in the SRJK (C) in Peninsular Malaysia rose steadily from 413,270 to 498,311, reaching a total of 501,910 by 1984 (Jiaozung Jiaoyu Yanjiu Zhongxin, 1987).<sup>36</sup> Between 1971 and 1978 the number of Chinese children in SRJK (C) in Peninsular Malaysia rose from 409,980 to 486,710, while those enrolled in the former English primary schools fell from 113,843 to 64,916 (Malaysia, 1979: table facing p. 16). Apart from reflecting a reassessment of the relative value of a Chinese primary education against one in Malay, a combination of heightened ethnic consciousness and increased interest in the rediscovery of one's linguistic and cultural roots contributed to the swing back to the Chinese primary schools in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>37</sup> This trend has been sustained into the early 1990s. In 1994, out of a total of 619,964 Chinese children enrolled in primary schools throughout Malaysia, 551,622 or 89 per cent were enrolled in Chinese primary schools (Ng, 1994: Table 6).

There have also been interesting shifts of interest in the Chinese secondary schools in the past few decades. Many of the 54 Chinese secondary schools which converted into SMJKs in 1961 were allowed to and did set up private branches to absorb those students who could not be admitted into the SMJKs. The national secondary system then was able to absorb only 30 per cent of all primary school graduates. Throughout the early 1960s, the Chinese secondary schools outside the national system, including private branches of the SMJKs, served as a buffer. They provided a necessary alternative to students not offered a place in the SMJKs and students who were considered over-aged, as well as employment to teaching staff whose qualifications did not meet the necessary specifications for admission into government service. Not surprisingly, therefore, total enrolment in Chinese secondary schools outside the national system remained substantial throughout the early 1960s (Table 8.8).

Enrolment began to shrink only after secondary education within the national system became widely available after the secondary schools entrance examination was abolished in 1964. More national secondary schools were built in the 1960s and fees were no longer charged.



TABLE 8.8  
Enrolment in Private/Independent Chinese Secondary Schools in  
Peninsular Malaysia, 1962-1992

<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>
1962	34,400
1964	35,500
1966	26,100
1968	19,500
1970	15,900
1972	18,500
1974	22,000
1976	28,000
1978	29,700
1980	34,400
1982	36,200
1983	45,890
1984	48,246
1985	48,995
1986	49,099
1987	48,943
1988	49,567
1989	52,155
1990	54,690
1991	55,514
1992	58,465

*Sources:* Chai (1977: Table 6); Malaixiya Dongjiaozong Quanguo Duzhong Gongweihui (194: 37).

Enrolments in the Chinese secondary schools dropped steadily as the need for alternatives outside the national system eased after 1965. Table 8.9 which shows enrolment in the first year of study in Chinese secondary schools outside the national system, relative to the final year enrolment in SRJK (C) the year before, shows the steady decrease in the Chinese schools' share of secondary students from 51.9 per cent in 1958 to 8.3 per cent in 1970.

There was renewed interest in Chinese secondary schools in the mid-1970s as indicated in a rise in their total enrolment. This, as in the case of the rise in enrolment in the Chinese primary schools, was due to policy changes in the aftermath of the 1969 racial riots. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was launched in 1971 to remedy social and economic problems diagnosed as the underlying causes of the May 13 racial riots in 1969. Implementation of the NEP restricted non-Malay admission into tertiary institutions and set ethnic quotas for recruitment and promotion to higher level jobs in the public sector. Most non-Malays felt discriminated against.

As more Chinese failed to find a place in the local universities due to the imposition of an ethnic quota in tertiary institutions, there was a

TABLE 8.9  
 Percentage of SRJK(C) Students Entering Chinese Secondary Schools,  
 Peninsular Malaysia, 1958-1970

Year	Students Enrolled in First Year of Chinese Secondary Schools	Students Enrolled in Last Year of SRJK (C) the Year Before	Percentage Entering Chinese Secondary Schools
1958	12,395	23,900	51.9
1959	13,776	30,975	44.5
1960	18,118	36,940	49.0
1961	19,279	46,428	41.5
1962	13,089	62,736	20.9
1963	13,532	61,187	22.1
1964	10,998	54,523	20.2
1965	4,915	52,728	9.3
1966	3,890	49,992	7.8
1967	3,950	49,708	7.9
1968	3,621	48,774	7.4
1969	3,564	50,826	7.0
1970	4,309	51,697	8.3

Source: Jiaozong jiaoyu zhongxin (1987: 902).

Notes: 1. Figures after 1961 exclude the Chinese secondary schools which converted to teaching in English to enter the national system.

2. These figures can be taken to indicate the trend amongst Chinese students as the vast majority of students in both the SJJK (C) and the Chinese secondary schools are Chinese.

3. It should be noted that according to a study of attrition rates conducted in 1970, based on a sample of youths aged between 10 and 14, an estimated 19 per cent of students in the final year of primary school do not enter secondary school at all. See Ministry of Education (1973: 80).

reassessment of the relative value of an education in the national system in comparison to continuing secondary schooling in the Chinese medium. Furthermore, by 1977, all secondary schools within the national system, including the SMJKs, began to teach in Malay. In contrast, the ICSS had been revitalized by a new UCSCA leadership which tried to draw all Chinese secondary schools outside the national system together into a consolidated system in order to compete more effectively with the schools which had joined the national system. The branches of the SMJKs which had survived through the doldrums of the 1960s were drawn into the UCSCA fold as its leaders began to revamp old curricula, produce new textbooks and, most importantly, obtain international recognition for the examinations organized specially for ICSS students. Based on their results in the UCSCA examinations, ICSS students were able to qualify for entry into universities in Singapore, Taiwan, Hongkong, as well as the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The ICSS thus became an attractive alternative to many Chinese who were frustrated by or disenchanted with state policies.<sup>38</sup>

In 1970, enrolment in the Chinese secondary schools was at its lowest at 15,900. By 1980, this had rebounded to 34,400 and by 1992 total enrolment in the ICSS had reached 58,465 (see Table 8.8). The reasons for this renaissance of the ICSS point to a mix of political, social, and cultural factors as well as utilitarian considerations which were accentuated by government policies in the 1970s and 1980s. Available information on the ICSS in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that their appeal lies not just in providing a secondary education in Chinese, but also in their ability to meet the diverse needs of a broad spectrum of students.<sup>39</sup> The fluctuations of interest and enrolment, in both Chinese primary and secondary schools in the past, indicate the significance of changing perceptions of their relative value as educational institutions in comparison to other available alternatives. This points both to the vulnerability of the Chinese schools as well as to one of the reasons for their resilience. They have, so far, been able to maintain a niche because they have provided alternatives that meet the changing educational needs and demands of a significant proportion of Malaysian Chinese.

1. The 11 states on the peninsula which constituted the Federation of Malaya (first formed in 1948 and became independent in 1957) were joined by Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore when Malaysia was formed in 1963. Singapore left Malaysia in 1965. This chapter is based on research on the Chinese schools in Peninsular Malaysia but general points on policy and developments after the 1970s can be taken to apply also to Sabah and Sarawak.

2. See Chen (1992) for an attempt at a world-wide survey.

3. Throughout this chapter, the term 'Chinese schools' will refer to schools which use the Chinese language as the main medium of instruction. However, it should be kept in mind that in Malaysia, as in many other parts of South-East Asia, some schools which do not or no longer use Chinese as the medium of instruction may still be looked upon as 'Chinese schools'.

4. The total primary school enrolment in Malaysia in 1995 was 2,802,677. Figures from Ministry of Education (1995).

5. Definitions and identifications of who are or are not 'Chinese' vary, making it difficult to estimate with accuracy the size of the Chinese population in different South-East Asian countries. The 1992 Minority Rights Report on the Chinese of South-East Asia estimated that in 1990 ethnic Chinese comprised approximately 3 per cent of the population in Indonesia, 2-4 per cent in the Philippines, 8 per cent in Thailand, and 25 per cent in Brunei.

6. For a survey of pre-war colonial education policy, see Loh (1975).

7. See Chen (1966); Borthwick (1983); and Rawski (1979) for three different perspectives on education in Qing dynasty China.

8. The number of Chinese living in Malacca in 1817 was estimated at 1,006 out of a total population of 19,647; see Purcell (1980: 232). Report on three Chinese schools from William Milne, *Protestant Mission to China*, Malacca, 1820, as cited in Lee (1957: 1).

9. Kuang (1954: 17). Kuang, however, provides no evidence in support of this date. In another article (Kuang, 1951), Kuang stated that the date on one of the pillars in the association building which housed the Wufu Shuyuan indicated that the building was put up in 1863. This, of course, does not necessarily indicate that the school itself had not been founded earlier.

10. The first phase in the history of the Chinese schools in Malaya and Singapore, roughly corresponding to the nineteenth century, is often referred to as the *sishu* phase. See Xu Suwo (1950: Chapter 1) and Tan (1984: 221-36).

11. See Tan (1984: Vol. 2, pp. 260-70; 307-9) for accounts of these two schools.
12. *1884 Annual Report of the Straits Settlements*, as cited in Lee (1957): 1.
13. See Tan's account of the early history of the school and the text of the school's founding constitution (1984: Vol. 2, pp. 260-70).
14. These examples were drawn from the respective schools' publications which were collected during research for my Ph.D. thesis. Useful collections of school histories are Lin (1982); Tay and Gwee (1975); and Wang (1961).
15. Registration of Chinese schools began after the 1920 Registration of Schools Ordinance was passed. For discussions of the reasons for this ordinance and Chinese opposition to it, see Yung (1967); and Lee (1957: Chapters 4 and 5).
16. Smith (1965: 174-85) provides a succinct discussion of the demographic transformation taking place in the first four decades of the twentieth century.
17. See Akashi Yoji (1976: 1-46); Akashi Yoji (1970: 61-89); and Tay and Gwee (1975: 20-2) for an account of the Chinese schools during the occupation drawn from various school magazines.
18. 'Despatch from the High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies', Federation of Malaya: *The Chinese Schools*, 2 March 1955, CO 1030/266, Public Records Office, London.
19. For discussions of constitutional provisions for citizenship for the Chinese see also Visu Sinnadurai (1978: 69-100). For Chinese responses to the citizenship provisions see Cheah (1978: 95-122); and Wong (1981).
20. See text of foundation plaque of an early Chinese school in Singapore and the founding constitution of the Nanhua Yixue in Penang reproduced in Tan (1987: 223, 224-7).
21. The above examples were selected from the short histories of several Chinese schools in Kedah, Negri Sembilan, Johore, Kelantan, and Trengganu in Director of Education File 69/51, Arkib Negara Malaysia. They reflect the general pattern that can be discerned from the more comprehensive collections of school histories cited in note 14 above.
22. The Penang examples, and a similar pattern in other states, can be seen from the school histories in Lin (1992).
23. For more detailed discussions of financial problems faced by the schools see Yung (1967: 141-4); and Tay (1986: 90-179).
24. This campaign began in Perak but soon spread into Selangor and other states. See accounts in Huawen Duli Zhongxue Gongweihui (1976); and Dongzong Chuban Zu (1983: Vol. 3).
25. Dongjiaozong leaders travelled to different states, speaking at forums to explain the objective of setting up the university and how the legal case being pursued against the government's refusal to allow such a university was a test of the constitutional rights of the Chinese. See Visu Sinnadurai (1986: 46-58) for a discussion of the constitutional issues. See Duli Daxue Youxian Gongsi (1979); Merdeka University Berhad (1978); Aliran (1979); and Yahaya Ismail (1978) for different perspectives on the Merdeka University.
26. See Tan (1990: 201-36); and Fennel (1968), for discussions of post-war education policy.
27. See Tan (1992) for a short historical survey of Dongjiaozong in Malaysian politics. For compilations of speeches, pamphlets, documents, reports produced by the two organizations, see Dongzong Chuban Zu (1983); and Jiaozong Jiaoyu Yanjiu Zhongxin (1987).
28. See Lim (1990) for Lim's own account of his involvement in the major events of the Chinese education movement.
29. The minutes of the 12 January 1955 meeting are reproduced as Appendix 5 in Tan (1996). See also Lim (1988: Vol. 1, pp. 108-18).
30. Federation of Malaya (1956: Para 13 (b)). The section of the Alliance's Election Manifesto for the July 1955 elections that dealt with education is reproduced as Appendix 6 in Tan (1996).
31. For a succinct and balanced report see Suhaini Aznam (1987).

32. See *Star*, 28 October 1987 for the launching of 'Operation Lalang' and Committee Against Repression in the Pacific and Asia (1988) for more details.
33. See Section 16 of the 1995 Education Bill.
34. See Malaysia, 'Penyata Resmi Parlimen: Dewan Rakyat', Parlimen Kesembilan, Penggal Pertama, December 1995, for debate on the 1995 Education Bill.
35. All figures pertain only to Peninsular Malaysia. See Jiaozong Jiaoyu Yanjiu Zhongxin (1987: 882-3); and Ministry of Education (1968).
36. *Ibid.* See also Malaysia (1979: table facing page 16).
37. See Syed Husin Ali (1984) for discussions on various effects of the NEP.
38. See Dongzong Chuban Xiaozu (1983) for reports by UCSCA officials on various aspects of ICSS development. For a brief discussion of the Chinese secondary schools in the 1970s and early 1980s, see Tan (1988: 67-74).
39. See Dongzong Chuban Xiaozu (1984); and Dongjiaozong Quanguo Huawen Duzhong Gongweihui (1992) for information on the ICSS in the early 1980s and 1990s respectively.

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## Chinese New Villages: Ethnic Identity and Politics

Francis Loh Kok Wah

### Introduction

IN early November 1990, Malaysian Prime Minister Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced that the 'New Villages' (NVs), which were first set up in 1950-2, from this time on would be known simply as villages. The government, he clarified, did not wish the 452 new villages with their 2 million residents to continue to 'have a separate identity'. It wanted them to be considered as 'normal villages' (*Star*, 11 November 1990). Then Minister of Housing and Local Government, Lee Kim Sai, under whose portfolio the new villages fell, further stated that the term 'new villages' carried a stigma. Yet they no longer needed special attention from the security point of view. This was the reason for the name change.

In the following months, a debate of sorts over the name change and its implications occurred. In response to the opposition Democratic Action Party's (DAP) claim that neglect of the new villages would further set in, government politicians and officials argued the reverse. Lee Kim Sai and Ting Chew Peh, who replaced Lee as the new Housing and Local Government Minister, clarified that the new villages which came under the jurisdiction of local authorities would continue to be managed by the Ministry, while new villages in the rural areas would come under the Ministry of Rural Development. There would be ample allocations for development, too. Ting disputed the fact that the new villages had been neglected. He correctly claimed that about '90 per cent of the new villages have basic facilities and services'. It was essentially a question of improving their quality. To this end, Ting's Ministry had been allocated funds under the 'Clean and Beautify Programme' to improve building facilities as well as to provide the new villages with 'rubbish bins, flush toilets, bus stands, plants and signboards'. And to enhance these development efforts, his Ministry would ensure that Jawatankuasa Keselamatan dan Kemajuan Kampung (JKKKs or Village Security and Development Committees) were set up in the former new villages, as were for the other estimated 19,000 traditional villages.

Within a year of Mahathir's announcement, Ting proudly announced that the new names for 108 former new villages had been approved while 270 other proposals were pending approval. Only 74 of the other 452 new villages had not submitted their proposals. Meanwhile, then Director-General of the Department of Local Government, Lim Cheng Tatt, suggested that the redesignation of the new village as an ordinary village would erase its distinction as a Chinese settlement and so facilitate integration. For with improved facilities, Malays and Indians would be attracted to stay in them as had begun to occur in places like Sungei Way, he clarified (*Star*, 11 and 17 November 1990; *NST*, 20 and 23 October 1991). It appeared that the government was hoping to revive the unsuccessful and short-lived effort to transform the NVs into multi-ethnic *Kampung-kampung* Muhibbah in the mid-1970s.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Mahathir's announcement and the name change were related to a more substantive issue. In mid-1986, the Deputy Prime Minister had announced a Cabinet plan to grant 60-year leases to all new villages; villagers with 30-year leases which had expired would have their leases extended for another 30 years. Anxious villagers, whose original 30-year leases granted in the early 1950s were expiring, had appealed to the Chinese-based political parties for help, and the parties in turn had lobbied the government. As land is a state matter under the federal constitution, the co-operation of the state governments was sought.<sup>2</sup> Predictably, the state governments moved slowly on the matter. The heads of the Department of Lands and Mines were requested to collect data on the NVs in their respective states. The information collected indicated that there remained 399 NVs<sup>3</sup> distributed throughout the peninsular states with the exception of Perlis. The memorandum estimated the existence of 98,340 lots totalling 20,224 hectares. Of these lots, 83,600 were already issued with either an approved application, a semi-permanent title or a permanent title, and another 9,990 with temporary occupation licences (TOLs). Yet another 1,918 lots were occupied without any form of document. It was unclear, however, what percentage of those in the first category with approved applications or titles had arrangements for 30-year or 60-year leases.

Following a meeting of the National Land Council in late 1988, the state governments formally agreed to the federal government's proposal for the extension of leases. Over the next few years, the state governments began to effect the necessary changes. However, many poor villagers were unable to settle the land premium due, prior to issuance of new titles or extensions, for their lots. Where the NVs were located in rural areas and the premium rates for the lots affordable to the villagers, as in Kedah's case, the necessary transactions were effected within a year. But where NVs bordered on urban centres and the premium rates for the lots were unaffordable, the extensions were delayed. For instance, it was only after the Penang state government had slashed the premium rate considerably that extensions were effected after two years. In the case of Machang Bubok NV, for example, the original premium of

RM 15,000 to RM 20,000 was finally reduced to RM 2,000 to RM 4,000 per lot. The state government generously facilitated payment of the premium by instalments over a six-year period as well. At any rate, the federal government claimed that its policy had been effectively implemented by late 1990 (*Star*, 9 February, 5 September, 11 November 1990). It was on the heels of this major breakthrough in co-operation with the state governments that the Prime Minister announced his name change move. Presumably he intended to signal that there was no longer any need for the NVs to demand special attention from the government.

As a result of this name change, the Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-5 does not provide special allocations, as in previous plans, for new village development. But it acknowledges that some residents in 'areas formerly known as the new villages' are among the 143,100 hardcore poor households and that they would 'be given opportunities, wherever feasible, to expand their area to avoid overcrowding and to enhance employment generating opportunities'.<sup>4</sup>

Whether the new villages will be adequately provided for under the new arrangements will be discussed later. The fact is they continued to be considered distinct, at least in the early 1990s, despite the name change and new administrative arrangements. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), a component party of the ruling coalition, for instance, recognized this fact. Accordingly, it launched its so-called 'Langkawi Project' in 1993 which was oriented towards improving educational standards in the former new villages.<sup>5</sup> The Cabinet itself agreed to provide financial assistance to help the MCA set up kindergartens so as to give NV children an early start in education, and to help them develop a better grasp of the national language. The MCA hoped these efforts would help to curb the high drop-out rates among secondary school age youths (*Star*, 28 May 1993).

The above discussion outlines the third time NVs have captured the attention of the nation.

### The New Villages

#### *The Emergency*

The first time NVs made their appearance was during the Emergency from 1948-60, when the British colonial government compelled a total of 1.2 million rural dwellers, about one-seventh of the Malayan population then, to move into about 600 new settlements. Of these, an estimated 650,000 people (32 per cent Malays, 45 per cent Chinese, 18 per cent Indians, and 5 per cent Javanese and others) were 'regrouped' in rubber estates, tin mines, and around existing towns. Another 572,917 people (85 per cent Chinese, 9 per cent Malays, 4 per cent Indians, and 1 per cent others) were resettled into 480 NVs, often miles from their original homes. Almost half of these NVs were established in Perak and Johore. In these two states, and in Pahang and Selangor, some 63 per

cent of the NVs were to be found, accounting for 84.6 per cent of the total NV population (Table 9.1).<sup>6</sup>

This regroupment and resettlement process formed the backbone of the counter-insurgency plan to fight the communists. Under the Briggs Plan, these regroupment areas and NVs were placed behind barbed-wire and under security guard. Dusk-to-dawn curfews, food rationing, body searches, and periodic arrests rudely interrupted the residents' lives. As a result of the Plan and other restrictive measures, the ties between the communist guerrillas and their rural supporters were severed. Ultimately, the communists were forced to the Thai-Malayan border and the Emergency was officially brought to an end in January 1960.<sup>7</sup> Since then, the regroupment areas have been dismantled. Despite the removal of the barbed-wire and curfew and the withdrawal of the security forces, most of the NVs continued to exist.

#### *The Deteriorating Condition of New Villages*

The second occasion when the new villages captured the attention of the nation was a brief but perhaps more positive interlude. In the aftermath of its poor showing in the 1969 elections and the Kuala Lumpur communal riots which followed, the MCA underwent some soul searching. In 1971, an MCA reform movement was launched. About the same time, security problems developed in the vicinity of some NVs in central Perak. Ironically, the anti-Communist operations conducted near the NVs highlighted their socio-economic problems. The press wrote of the 'shabby and dilapidated' homes 'bordering on the squalid'. 'Illegal farming', 'land hunger' and 'lack of tenure' were highlighted. The

TABLE 9.1  
Distribution of New Villages in Peninsular Malaysia

	<i>Number of NVs</i>		<i>Population of NVs</i>	
	<i>1954</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1954</i>	<i>1970</i>
Perak	129	150	206,900	340,230
Johore	94	92	130,613	216,441
Pahang	77	48	50,233	81,281
Selangor	49	42	97,346	166,271
Negri Sembilan	39	41	30,294	56,578
Kedah	44	35	22,522	55,133
Kelantan	18	22	12,560	23,595
Malacca	17	20	9,555	18,013
Penang	8	8	10,717	16,725
Federal Territory	-	4	-	47,231
Trengganu	4	3	1,495	1,357
Perlis	1	-	682	-
Total	480	465	572,917	1,023,035

Source: Sandhu (1964: 157-83); Ministry of Housing and Local Government (1972).

villagers were described as a people 'who had been forgotten for over a decade' (*New Nation*, 27 September 1971; *Straits Times*, 3-5 November 1971). The new villages had turned old.

With the new publicity given to the new villages, the MCA reform movement directed its attention to the new villages as well. A Perak Task Force was initiated and took to grass-roots mobilization among the Perak NVs. Neglected for years, the new villagers very likely glimpsed the potential of improving their conditions through MCA-led political action; after some hesitation, they responded enthusiastically to the task force. A year later, however, intra-MCA battles culminated in the disbandment of the task force and the expulsion of its leaders from the MCA.<sup>8</sup>

But if the task force accomplished few tangible benefits for the new villagers, it did help to articulate their grievances. These were grievances and needs common to new villages in the country—more agricultural and housing land and permanent titles for the land, more employment opportunities, better roads, drains, utilities and other services, and improved educational opportunities for children. Above all, they required increased and sustained government efforts to upgrade the lives of a considerably large poverty group then still experiencing routine hardship and deteriorating living conditions.

Why had these NVs deteriorated? An investigation of the origins of the squatter communities which were resettled, and of the resettlement process which was essentially guided by security considerations, sheds light on the deterioration of the NVs in the post-Emergency period.

#### *Squatter Communities in the Pre-war Period*

Long before the Emergency, the 'new villagers' had been mostly cultivators and agriculturists farming on forest reserves, state land, and disused mining land. Most had started as tin mine and rubber estate/small-holding labourers forced by periodic unemployment, due to fluctuations of commodity prices, to turn to the land.<sup>9</sup> The colonial government even encouraged them and granted them TOLs. Thus emerged the 'agricultural squatters', a term used to describe agriculturists who did not own the land which they farmed.<sup>10</sup> Encouraged by the government and egged on by increasing immigration (especially of women, hence resulting in the emergence of families among the immigrant population beginning from the 1930s), squatter communities gradually emerged and assumed a sense of permanency. Indeed, market gardening coupled with livestock rearing became quite profitable and, therefore, increasingly attractive (Loh, 1988: 27-35; Del Tufo, 1948: 104; Lim, 1977: 204ff).

Thus, the squatter problem actually predated the Japanese Occupation though of course these squatter agricultural communities expanded during and immediately after the war. Just prior to resettlement in the late 1940s, about half a million people could be found in these communities. At that point, the colonial authorities ignored the situation, despite the fact that the squatters were cultivating land in forest reserves, state land, and disused mining and estate land illegally.

The authorities had realized that these communities served 'as reservoirs for casual labour' and helped 'in producing foodstuffs over and above their own needs' (Federation of Malaya, 1949).

#### *Resettlement as a Security Measure*

Resettlement, of course, changed all that. With the outbreak of the Emergency the authorities began to view the squatters as a 'security problem'.<sup>11</sup> Thus they compelled the rural dwellers to abandon their land, homes, crops, livestock, and property. Consequently, the vast majority of these villagers had to turn to non-agricultural occupations.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately, resettlement coincided with the Korean War (1950-1) boom. The increase in prices for rubber and tin spurred on production and provided jobs for many villagers displaced from cash-cropping. Between 1950 and 1952, the population of wage-earners in the NVs engaged in the rubber and tin industries rose from 25 to 53 per cent. As expected, the boom did not last. With the end of the Korean War, tin and rubber prices started falling. An acute problem of unemployment began to set in (Stubbs, 1974).

The essence of the problem was the lack of access to agricultural land. Writing in 1954, Paul Markandan observed that the residents were 'transplanted ... to small plots of land scarcely a fraction of those they had before' (Markandan, 1954). An official survey of the NVs, the Corry Report 1954, sheds light on the problem of inadequate agricultural land. Although most of the squatters were agriculturists, the Corry Report 1954 noted that only those squatters who previously 'owned land' or were considered as 'full-time farmers' were given agricultural land. The total hectareage of agricultural land earmarked for them amounted to only 19 359 hectares.<sup>13</sup>

The Corry Report 1954 further noted that a year earlier it had been recommended that the authorities set aside some additional 10 530 hectares so that about a quarter hectare plot could be allocated to each family of wage earners for subsistence farming, due to the fall in rubber prices. By 1954, however, after only 2835 hectares had been acquired, the Corry Report suggested that the amount of land still due to be acquired was 'unrealistically large' and so recommended a re-examination of the whole matter. The Report reasoned that since 'many members of non-farming families cultivate sizeable plots inside and outside the villages, and as mining land and undeveloped agricultural land can be used temporarily for vegetable growing in an emergency without recourse to acquisition, it is considered that but a fraction of this sum is really required' (Corry, 1954: 24).

There is no evidence to indicate how much land was ultimately acquired. At any rate, such land was not allocated to the villagers. They were held as 'village agricultural reserves' for temporary use by so-called 'non-farming families' when a slump in tin and rubber prices threatened their livelihood.

This extended discussion of the villagers' lack of access to agricultural

land is important because several popular accounts of resettlement have erroneously asserted that about 1 hectare of agricultural land were provided for the new villagers.<sup>14</sup> In actual fact, a majority of the resettled villagers were not allocated such land. Consequently, it was noted in the Labour Department's report in June 1953 that unemployment was rife in the NVs. The high rates of unemployment in the NVs were described as 'statistics of the greatest potential danger' (Department of Labour, 1953). Indeed, because of inaccessibility to land and the lack of alternative employment opportunities, the economic viability of the NVs was threatened just a few years after their establishment.

The \$100 million the colonial authorities expended for resettlement does not belie these problems of land hunger and lack of alternative employment opportunities in the NVs. For the most part, the \$100 million had been spent by a) acquiring land to establish NVs (basically for dwelling and not agricultural land); b) preparing these sites and providing basic amenities; and c) distributing building grants and subsistence allowances to help the squatters tide over the first few months after resettlement (Stubbs, 1974: 45ff).

Thus, although most of the NVs were provided with some drains, roads, schools, police stations, and other kinds of physical infrastructure, the economic viability of the NVs remained threatened. In fact, such provisions were also inadequate, principally because the funds for such purposes were reduced and gradually stopped after the Korean War boom. For instance, a researcher has commented that although all roads were supposed to have drainage ditches to prevent floods and to be concrete-lined to prevent erosion and deterioration, in actuality, few communities were provided with their full complement of drains due to shortage of time and funds (Humphrey, 1971: 211).

With regard to health and medical services, Short (1975: 399) noted:

... in the New Villages focused attention on the absence of government commitment to the extent that in April 1952, the Malayan branch of the British Medical Association called the New Villages, with their threat of epidemics, a new risk to public health, condemned the gross inadequacy of medical services and alleged that resettlement had been unsupported by any medical plan and had little or no regard for health.

Thus apart from inadequate agricultural land or alternative employment opportunities for the villagers, the infrastructural development of the NVs was also left incomplete. Not surprisingly, their physical condition deteriorated rapidly.

The Corry Report 1954, conducted just two years after resettlement had been declared completed, concluded that 'there was no chance of complete self-sufficiency for the New Villages' (Corry, 1954: 15, 39-42). Hence, despite awareness of the problem, little effort was made to improve the situation. Under the circumstances, we are forced to conclude that the resettlement process was fundamentally conducted as a military operation. The long-term well-being of the resettled squatters was only of secondary importance to the authorities. The major problem

of land hunger, already evident in pre-war times, was left unresolved. To this were added new problems associated with the lack of alternative employment opportunities, inadequate amenities, and social services and, until 1960, the harsh inconvenience of living behind barbed wire, under curfew and security guard (Short, 1975: 399-404; Humphrey, 1971: 211ff). The NVs were all but forgotten by the authorities (as well as by researchers) during the 1960s. Consequently, conditions in the NVs rapidly deteriorated and the NVs turned old.

### **Rediscovery of the New Villages: Deteriorating Conditions**

Spurred on by the publicity given to the NVs as a result of security operations in Perak in the early 1970s, researchers too 'rediscovered' the NVs. What follows is a survey of the NVs, as significant for the data gathered as for the fact that the studies were conducted at all. After an overview of the distribution and population growth of the NVs, the survey highlights five major problems faced by the majority of the NVs in the 1970s: lack of access to land, low income levels, inadequate educational opportunities, housing and overcrowding, and the lack of social facilities and physical amenities.

In 1972, a Ministry of Housing and Local Government study<sup>15</sup> estimated that there were 465 NVs throughout the country. In them resided 1.023 million people (77.6 per cent Chinese, 18.7 per cent Malays, and 3.6 per cent Indians and others). Hence, between 1950-70, the population of these NVs increased by approximately 100 per cent, accounting for almost 10 per cent of the 10.4 million people recorded in the 1970 census.<sup>16</sup>

As at the time of resettlement, the majority of the NVs were concentrated in the states of Perak, Johore, and Selangor (including the Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory). In 1970, these three states accounted for 62.1 per cent of the NVs with over 75 per cent of the total NV population. Table 9.1 gives the distribution of NVs, by state, and their population in 1954 and 1970.

These NVs may be divided according to their population size. Table 9.2 indicates that in 1970, 9 per cent (42 of 465 NVs) had more than 5,000 residents each, including nine which had more than 10,000 inhabitants each. Included among the latter was Jinjang (population 27,468 in 1970) located in the Federal Territory, which was the largest NV in the country. A second group totalling 38.5 per cent (179 of 465 NVs) had fewer than 1,000 residents each, while a third group totalling 50 per cent (232 of 465 NVs) had some 1,000 to 4,999 dwellers each. The details for 12 other NVs (3 per cent) were unavailable.

Using a classification system proposed by the Ministry of National Unity when it conducted a study of NVs in Malacca and Perak in 1973 (Ministry of National Unity, 1973: 7), those NVs with more than 5,000 people each might be regarded as 'urbanized villages', that is, they were located near urban areas. They experienced in-migration and registered



TABLE 9.2  
New Villages in Peninsular Malaysia by Population Size, 1970

State	Population								
	Total	Unknown	Fewer than 1000	1000-1999	2000-2999	3000-4999	5000-5999	Over 10000	Total
Kedah	35	-	17	10	4	2	2	-	55,133
Penang	8	-	2	1	3	2	-	-	16,725
Perak	150	11	55	25	21	21	14	3	340,230
Selangor and Federal Territory	46	1	6	8	9	10	8	4	213,502
Negri Sembilan	41	-	23	8	5	4	1	-	56,578
Malacca	20	-	12	7	-	1	-	-	18,013
Johore	92	-	30	20	20	15	5	2	216,441
Pahang	48	-	17	18	5	5	3	-	81,281
Trengganu	3	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	1,357
Kelantan	22	-	14	6	1	1	-	-	23,595
Total	465	12	179	103	68	61	33	9	1,023,035

Source: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1974: 32).

high population growth rates, in most cases exceeding 100 per cent. Those NVs whose population ranged from 1,000 to 4,999 residents might be considered 'readily accessible villages' (or 'intermediate villages'), that is, not too close to urban areas yet not too remote from them either. Such NVs, too, registered some population growth, but not exceeding 100 per cent. The 179 NVs with fewer than 1,000 residents each might be considered 'small remote villages'. Such NVs experienced out-migration and registered drops in their population.<sup>17</sup> The opportunities for earning a reasonable livelihood were better in the urbanized villages and worse in the small remote villages. The differences in opportunities explain why the population of a particular NV had either increased or decreased after the Emergency. Whichever the case, most NVs experienced serious socio-economic problems throughout the 1960s.

#### *Access to Agricultural Land*

For 20 years after the initial resettlement, the problem of land hunger was left unresolved. By 1970, it had been grossly exacerbated by high population increases within the readily accessible and urbanized NVs. The Ministry of National Unity alluded to this severe landlessness in its report published in 1973. It estimated that about half (48.5 per cent) of all new villagers surveyed in Perak and Malacca were engaged in agricultural activities. But only 29 per cent 'had access' to land. And of this latter group, 34.3 per cent were farming it illegally, that is without

permanent titles or even TOLs. Besides, almost half (49 per cent) having access to land were working small and uneconomical plots, averaging 1.2 hectares (*ibid.*: 34-8).<sup>18</sup>

These findings are mostly corroborated by those from four other studies of specific NVs. In a study of Air Keroh NV in Malacca, it was found that whereas 90 per cent of the villagers were engaged in market-gardening and another 5 per cent of them in rubber tapping, yet 22 per cent of them did not own any agricultural land. Of those gardeners who did, the average plot size was about 1-1.5 hectares per family; 76 per cent had plots less than 1.2 hectares in size (Selvaraj, 1976: 15). In another Malacca NV, Tiang Dua, it was found that although 90 per cent of the adult working population were involved in the rubber industry, 63.3 per cent of them were landless and working as tappers (George, 1976: 15).

In a study of Kuala Kuang NV in Perak, it was discovered that 56 per cent of those economically active were agriculturists, yet only half of them owned land. And 42.1 per cent of these people, in turn, owned plots of less than 1.2 hectares each (Tham, 1976: 46-7). And in Simpang Lima NV in Perak, although 83 per cent of the gainfully employed were involved in agricultural activities, 15 per cent of them were landless and an additional 23 per cent owned less than 1.2 hectares of land each (Cheng, 1970: 52).

This need for land was recognized by the Prime Minister's Department in 1976 when a study it conducted noted that 'villagers have constantly voiced the desire for more land' and that 'there is no unused land left'. The Third Malaysia Plan 1976-80 acknowledged this problem of land shortage and declared that 'special efforts' would be taken to alleviate it. In the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-5, the government expressed its intention 'to provide security of tenure' to the new villagers.<sup>19</sup> But land is a state matter and requires the agreement of state governments.

#### *Average Incomes*

Due to the shortage of agricultural land and in the case of 88.4 per cent of the NVs (the remote and intermediate villages) alternative opportunities in the vicinity, unemployment and underemployment were significant. For example, a 1976 survey of NVs in Perak found 18 per cent of working-age population unemployed (Perak SEPU, 1976).<sup>20</sup> The shortage of jobs locally forced large numbers of youngsters from these villages to engage in migratory, seasonal contract labour work. For instance, in Sanchun, the NV she studied, Strauch discovered that 'more than 40 per cent of the families interviewed include absentee members. Moreover, more than one-quarter of the households include one or more persons whose spouses work and spend long periods elsewhere but who are obviously still intimately connected to Sanchun through their conjugal ties' (Strauch, 1981: 81).

In a study of Sungei Ruan NV in Pahang, Khoo and Voon, two

University of Malaya geographers, reported that 49 out of 81 households interviewed had one or more members of the household involved in out-migration from the village. They further commented that such 'out-migration has increased as the need to supplement family income becomes a matter of urgency. This is especially so for those households which possessed little or no rubber land at all' (Khoo and Voon, 1975: 405). And the Ministry of National Unity survey in 1973 reported that 13.7 per cent of the sampled Perak NV population above 20 years old, and 12.9 per cent of that in Malacca NVs, were living outside. The pattern continued into the 1980s when the youngsters reportedly travelled as far as Taiwan and Japan, sometimes illegally, in search of jobs.

The landlessness and the lack of other employment opportunities were reflected in the income distribution pattern. The Ministry of National Unity survey in 1973 found 94.7 per cent of its interviewees earning less than RM 200 per month. In 1976, almost 72 per cent of the households in Perak NVs had a monthly income below RM 300, while over 70 per cent of the new village households surveyed in Malacca in 1978 also earned below RM 300 per month. The Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986-90 (Malaysia, 1986: 91) reported that a government survey conducted in 1983 showed that only 37 per cent of the NV households interviewed had an average cash income exceeding \$400 per month, while another 38 per cent earned an income of between RM 200-400 per month.

#### *Educational Level*

Up to the early 1980s, the prospects of higher income employment through better education for new village children were not bright. The drop-out rates for children of school-going age were very high, especially in the remote and intermediate NVs. More than half of them had only primary schooling while the number attending any form of post-secondary school training was very low indeed. The Ministry of National Unity survey in 1973 found that some 35 per cent of the children of school-going age (between 7 to 19 years of age) were not attending school. Studies of Kuala Kuang NV in Perak, of Tiang Baru NV in Malacca, and of Val D'Or and Jawi NVs in Seberang Perai, Penang indicate similarly high drop-out rates (Jeremiah, 1974: 54-5; George, 1976: 34; Tham, 1976: 27ff).<sup>21</sup> There are two major reasons for this. First, non-attendance is attributed to poverty and the need to work at an early age to supplement household incomes. The absence of secondary schools in the vicinity of the remote and intermediate NVs increases the educational expenses involved. But the second reason is equally pertinent and involves the urbanized villages as well.

All the studies also reported that NV children faced much difficulty in the transition from their national-type primary school (where the medium of instruction is Chinese) to the national secondary school (where the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia). A major survey of Perak NVs conducted by the Gerakan Party in 1985 indicated that the

drop-out problem was still acute, and for the same two reasons, some 10 years later (Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, 1986).

#### *Housing, Amenities, and Services*

Housing infrastructure and amenities are inadequate, too. The tremendous increase in population in the urbanized and, to a lesser extent, the intermediate new villages was not matched by corresponding expansion of the village boundaries. The result was housing shortages and overcrowding. At the same time, new villagers have not benefited from government low-cost housing schemes either, themselves not very extensive. Faced with a housing shortage, the villagers have habitually added 'illegal extensions to their homes, or built 'illegal houses' wherever they have found land. Alternatively, they moved out of the new villages (Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia 1986).

A related problem is the issue of permanent titles. For example, 65 per cent of all the house and shop lots in the 137 Perak NVs surveyed in an Alliance Party study in 1971, possessed only TOLs (Alliance, 1971: 15). Strauch's study of Sanchun in 1972 noted that only 12.4 per cent of the houses in her NV held permanent titles (Strauch, 1981: 79). A State Legislative Assemblyman in Pahang estimated in 1981 that in five NVs in his constituency, no more than 15 per cent (or 300 of 1790) of households possessed permanent titles to the land on which their houses stood (NST, 29 August 1981). Overall, according to official government records, out of 121,545 house lots counted in NVs in 1977, only 57,408 (or less than 45 per cent) permanent titles or approved applications (the last stage before issue of permanent titles) had been issued by August 1977 (Khoo, 1979: 236). Additionally, the original permanent titles issued for 30 years to new villages were nearing expiration by the early 1980s and, at that point, without assurances from state governments of renewal.

Since most of the available infrastructure and amenities were installed haphazardly in the 1950s and then neglected during the 1960s, there was also much to complain about in this area. Although conditions were better in the more urbanized NVs, none the less, roads were typically damaged and left unrepaired. Drainage was poor and health facilities hardly available.<sup>22</sup> However, there has been some systematic effort to upgrade the amenities and services provided to the NVs since the early 1970s, a point to be discussed later.

#### *Bureaucratic Entanglements and Paltry Allocations*

One would think that as large a poverty group as the new villages would have been given every assistance by the authorities to upgrade their standard of living after independence. The reverse seems to have been true. The NVs were badly neglected for at least the first 20 years after they had been established. Bureaucratic entanglements and an absence of government commitment explain much of the neglect.

To begin with, despite their rural and agricultural character, the new

villages did not benefit from rural development funds. The reason is appallingly simple. Many of them were classified as 'urbanized settlements' merely because of their population sizes.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, some 460 new villages had to share the paltry allocation of approximately RM 1.5 million annually from 1965 onwards. Rural development funds averaging RM 500 million annually (from 1959 to 1964) simply bypassed them altogether.

Compounding the problem, the introduction of the Local Council Ordinance 1952 transformed the NVs into local council areas ineligible for outright government funds (Nyce, 1973: 137-41). Matching grants for capital works projects were available. But the villages were too poor to raise funds beyond bare administrative requirements; hence there was no matching grant.

Yet another consideration was the prevailing administrative structure. With the end of the Emergency, the Assistant Resettlement Officers, who used to be resident in the NVs, were removed. Consequently, there were no officers at the district, let alone the state and federal levels, specifically concerned with the care and development of the NVs. The only form of linkage between the NVs and the State Secretariat was through an Assistant Secretary in charge of local government. The District Officers, theoretically in charge, were over-burdened with work and, for this reason alone, had little time for the NVs. In fact, again theoretically, the NVs could also request for funds from the state through the District Officer. But this was given low priority.<sup>24</sup>

And finally, the situation in the NVs was further complicated with the suspension of local elections in 1964, and the abolition of local councils after that. These moves were consistent with the government's understanding that the major factor causing the deterioration of conditions in the NVs was the inefficiency of the LCs manned by locally elected officials.

In actual fact, conditions in the NVs deteriorated because they were not viable as independent economic units. Coupled with this was a lack of development aid and administrative neglect by district, state, and federal officials. Conditions continued deteriorating after local elections were suspended and the local authorities were taken over by the state government. If anything, these latter two changes worsened the situation. Political parties, which up until 1964 were active in the NVs, began to neglect the grass roots as well once local elections were suspended. Less subjected to external party controls, the local officials began to use their positions in the LCs to further their own interests. By the end of the 1960s, petty corruption in the councils had become rife (Malaysia, 1970: 107-12, 252-6).

Hence, the suspension of elections and the abolition of local councils did not redress the situation. And since the authorities neither injected substantial funds to the NVs nor addressed themselves to the question of their own inefficiencies or the viability of the NVs as independent economic units, conditions deteriorated.

### Rediscovery of the New Villages: New Initiatives

In December 1971, a new minister was appointed to the Prime Minister's Department and placed in charge of NVs, the first time since the end of the Emergency that NVs were given such attention at the highest level of government. However, when later in the year the government created a 'special fund' of RM 3.5 million for the NVs (*Straits Times*, 13 November 1972), it was not clear which minister should distribute the money—the new minister in charge of NVs, the Minister of Rural and National Development, or the Minister of Technology, Research and Local Government. Nor was it clear whether the new minister would also be involved in formulating a master plan for future NV development, apart from implementing projects. Rejecting the new minister's repeated calls for a 'master plan' for new villages, the Prime Minister finally clarified that the former's role was restricted to coordinating NV improvement (*Straits Times*, 18 May, 16 August 1972). There was, therefore, much confusion over ministerial responsibility for the NVs in the early 1970s. Subsequently, charge of the NVs was passed to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, itself renamed the Ministry of Housing and Village Development in the early 1990s.

With the enactment of the Local Government Act 1976, the former local councils were absorbed into larger District Councils.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the total number of local authorities was reduced from 327 to 14 municipal councils and, as of 1980, 68 district councils (Malaysia, 1981: 388). These larger local authority units, in turn, were given more powers to engage in development activities under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976. These administrative changes emplaced the NVs into larger administrative units with, presumably, easier access to the top.

Meanwhile, funds were specifically allocated for the development of new villages as well. Twelve million ringgit was made available in the Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan. The Third Malaysia Plan, which comprehensively incorporated the NVs into the five-year development plans for the first time, budgeted RM 19 million. For the Fourth Malaysia Plan, RM 26.5 million (reduced from the original allocation of RM 30 million) was made available. Still another RM 25.3 million was allocated under the Fifth Malaysia Plan.<sup>26</sup> In the main, these funds were used to provide and improve amenities and services in the NVs. According to the Fourth Malaysia Plan, an estimated 83.4 per cent of houses in NVs were served with piped water, 91.9 per cent with electricity and 45.6 per cent with modern sanitation by the end of 1980 (Malaysia, 1981: 357). A 1983 government survey reported further improvements: 87 per cent of the new villages had piped water, 93 per cent had electricity, 86 per cent were equipped with community halls, 92 per cent with primary schools, and 80 per cent with public telephones. A subsequent 1985 study cited still more improvements and further added that 67 per cent of the NV possessed tarred roads

and 63 per cent possessed cemented drains (Malaysia, 1986: 96; *NST*, 26 September 1985; *Star*, 21 October 1989).

Still unresolved were the other problems mentioned above, including landlessness, and for the urbanized and intermediate villages, overcrowding and inadequate housing, too. Despite official pronouncements to make available more agricultural land and to expand the boundaries of NVs to accommodate overcrowding, there is no evidence that these were done. In the early 1990s, certain villagers were even relocated from their homes, as well as from the agricultural land which they were cultivating, often illegally, to make way for 'development' projects—the creation of a new town, a housing development scheme, or an industrial park (*Star*, 3 February, 4 June 1990; *Malay Mail*, 25 June 1991).

Explaining the lack of success in resolving landlessness and the related issue of permanent titles, Dato Michael Chen, a former Minister of Housing and Local Government, clarified in 1977 that the ministry in charge of NV development essentially functioned as a co-ordinating and funding body rather than as a body with full powers to execute plans. For land is a state policy matter under the Federal Constitution and the co-operation of the various state governments is necessary.<sup>27</sup> And this co-operation, Lim Keng Yaik, the first Minister in charge of NVs elaborated further, had often not been forthcoming since not all state governments were equally attentive to NV problems. For this reason, Lim Keng Yaik thought it a mistake to have moved the NV portfolio out of the Prime Minister's Department where it had originally been located. This had led to non-implementation of plans that were related to the question of land and reduced effectiveness on the part of the Minister.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the appointment of a Minister, the introduction of administrative changes and infusion of funds appear to have resolved only some, not all, of the problems confronting the new villages. The urbanized villages which had access to alternative employment opportunities fared better than the remote and intermediate villages. In their time, the British also provided substantial funds to the NVs for amenities and services, but failed to address and resolve the problems of landlessness and limited employment opportunities. Failure to do just that, despite the improvement in facilities provided, ultimately led to a deterioration of overall conditions in the NVs during the 1960s.

### **An Ethnic Chinese World of Everyday Experiences**

Thus far, the discussion of NVs has been conducted at a macro-level with little consideration of how the villagers themselves view their predicament and how they act to resolve it. In this section, focus will be given to just these concerns.<sup>29</sup>

The NVs are essentially ethnic Chinese enclaves in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Except for the few police officers and their families, invariably Malays, who live in a fenced-up portion at the entrance to the NVs, more than 80 per cent of the residents are Chinese. Clearly delineated and separated from Malays living in neighbouring kampongs and/or

Indians living on labour lines in the estates (if any), the Chinese villager has few opportunities to be in touch with people from other ethnic groups if he or she does not venture out of his residential setting.

Moreover, insofar as the villager works in the vicinity, tending to his own rubber smallholding or agricultural plot on a family basis, not only does he not interact with non-Chinese co-workers, but those few non-Chinese he runs into are largely from the local bureaucracy. Not being employed by others, he tends to associate problems arising from his efforts to find a livelihood (especially if he is cultivating on state or forest reserve land illegally) with these officers, who are mainly Malays. Sometimes, however, problems also arise when confronting the middlemen, invariably Chinese. Others who are not involved in agricultural pursuits, but who are similarly self-employed, like the petty traders (market stall keepers, street vendors), artisans (carpenters, tailors, bicycle repairmen), taxi drivers, and others, essentially serve fellow Chinese. Since some of them, like taxi drivers and petty traders, are unlicensed, they run into occasional problems with the authorities, including the police.

Those who seek employment in the vicinity, be it in the tin mines, estates, construction sites, or informal sector manufacturing or service enterprises, usually have as their fellow workers other ethnic Chinese. Frustrations arising out of their work situations are largely attributed to the employers, also Chinese. Opportunities to interact with non-Chinese workers are also minimal. It is only those residents of urbanized villages on the outskirts of larger towns like Ipoh, Taiping, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Malacca, or in Seberang Perai, who are employed in industrial estates, construction sites, transport companies, supermarkets, hotels, and other business concerns, and occasionally the public sector, who have as their fellow workers some non-Chinese. However, few villagers have such opportunities. Still less do they have the opportunity to get together with non-Chinese colleagues in a union to fight for their common rights as workers, whatever ethnic group their employer might be.

In general, the first and second types of work situations apply to most new villagers. Hence, in the work place most villagers work alongside other Chinese, often from their own NVs. The few Malays with whom they occasionally come into contact are members of the local bureaucracy or police.

Outside of work, most of the villagers' leisure time is spent with their families and friends. These friends are usually neighbours or former classmates from the local national-type Chinese primary school. Much of this leisure time is spent chit-chatting among themselves in each other's homes (especially for the women) or in the coffee shops (in the case of men), gambling, playing games (largely the youth), shopping, and going to the occasional Chinese movie. Otherwise, there are the Chinese programmes on the radio to listen to or the Cantonese or Mandarin television/video serials to follow. Several times a year, the villagers get together with relatives and neighbours to celebrate festivals



such as the Chinese New Year, or the Eighth Moon Festival. Similar gatherings also occur when births, weddings, or deaths occur. On all these occasions, various Chinese rites and rituals are conducted.

In some of the larger NVs, especially the urbanized villages, certain Chinese associations like the voluntary and cultural organizations sponsor some economic but principally cultural cum religious activities. By and large, however, the premises of these organizations are used for gambling and relaxation, particularly reading. Most of them stock some reading materials (magazines and tabloids) and subscribe to the vernacular dailies. These publications highlight activities and issues concerning Chinese Malaysians, but also provide more coverage than do the other local magazines and newspapers of events in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The formal voluntary organizations like the Old Pupils' Association, the Parent-Teachers Association, and for the local élite, the Village Committee, the School Management Committee, the Temple Committee, and the Cemetery Maintenance Committee, all are ethnically homogeneous in membership. Likewise, the local branches of the political parties are naturally mono-ethnic in membership. This is true not only of the MCA, but also of those other political parties which claim to be multi-ethnic. In fact, all parties have also played up ethnic issues.

Thus the primary socialization process resulting from interaction among family members and friends reinforces the ethnic consciousness of Chinese villagers residing in the ethnically homogeneous new village. The school and the social and cultural organizations, in drawing on members from a particular ethnic group but also through their activities, further re-emphasize this ethnic dimension of the villagers' total consciousness. There is what may be termed a class dimension in the membership and activities of some of the political parties. But because they also bring together only Chinese members, at best the net effect is promotion of class considerations as a part of the total consciousness of the villagers without, however, transcending the ethnic dimension. At worst, as a result of playing up ethnic issues, it gives greater political saliency to ethnicity in the villagers' total consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Shifting Political Identities*

It is clear that the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) received some support from some of the villagers during the Emergency as they did during the Japanese Occupation period, too. With the proscription of the MCP and its militant unions in June 1948, open radical class-based activities ceased and opportunities for the further promotion of class consciousness were limited. At the same time, as repressive laws were introduced, fear also crept in. Consequently, open expression of support for the MCP diminished.

The political vacuum which resulted was filled by the MCA. During the 1950s, the MCA was the most active, and for a while the sole, political party in the new villages. Its leaders were appointed to, and

dominated, the village committees which played important roles in helping the colonial authorities to maintain law and order and, to a lesser extent, provide various amenities and facilities for the villagers. The party itself also raised and provided considerable funds for the development of the NVs. Yet most villagers distanced themselves from the party (Nyce, 1973: 174-6; Siaw, 1983: 146-51; Loh, 1988: Chapter 6). As the MCA worked closely with the authorities, which were viewed by ordinary villagers as having caused much disruption to their lives, support for the MCA was denied. Such distancing themselves from the MCA gained the villagers the reputation of being a politically apathetic lot lacking in civic consciousness and even, perhaps, a sense of community spirit.

This could not be further from the truth for, by the late 1950s and during the 1960s, once opposition parties like the Socialist Front and, in Perak, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) as well began establishing branches in the NVs, much excitement over political and community affairs re-emerged.<sup>31</sup> As the village committees were converted into local councils and formal local elections introduced, much excitement was generated. In many areas, local government fell into the hands of the opposition parties, too. An investigation of the activities of the opposition parties reveals that they were closely associated with the everyday problems of the poorer villagers, who were the majority. Not only did the Socialist Front and the PPP champion these villagers' demands, such as for land, more employment opportunities, and improved amenities as in Perak, but they also initiated self-help building projects, distribution of food and clothes for the needy, adult education night classes, and others (Nyce, 1973: 142-3; Loh, 1988: 215-21). Such activities attracted much participation among the poorer villagers and generated conflict between supporters of these parties and those of the MCA. This conflict climaxed in the 1969 general elections when the MCA was dealt a humiliating defeat at the state and federal levels.

The defeat of the MCA was attributed by its party leaders and the government to the manipulation of ethnic sentiments by the opposition parties. For this reason, the poor uneducated rural Chinese masses, including those in the NVs, had to be given proper political instruction. In the aftermath of the 1969 racial riots, after Parliament was reconvened and the MCA had emerged from its period of soul searching to launch the Reform Movement and the Perak Task Force, attention was directed to the problems of the new villagers. Soon the Task Force received popular support.

This appeared to be a complete reversal of attitudes among the Perak villagers, occurring as it did in an opposition party's stronghold. It appeared as though the MCA's analysis of the villagers' political naivete was vindicated. In fact, it was not the villagers, but the MCA, which had undergone change. For the party underwent internal reforms. New leaders emerged and new activities—including the Task Force effort—were initiated. By reaching down to the NVs, the Task Force leaders became more aware of the villagers' problems, which they soon cham-

pioned. In return, the villagers rendered their support to these leaders, attended their political education classes and eventually became MCA members, too. When these leaders were expelled from the party, the villagers protested and demonstrated. This episode in the early 1970s indicates that support even for the MCA was forthcoming insofar as party leaders were prepared to reach down to the NVs to champion the villagers' demands (Strauch, 1981: Chapter 7; Loh, 1982: 35-63).

Since then there has not occurred the same kind of excitement over party politics among the new villages. No particular preference or identification with a single political party, whether government or opposition, can be discerned. The pattern that appears to have emerged is a preference for the opposition DAP at the parliamentary level (where their grievances may then get an airing), and for a government party (be it the MCA or the Gerakan) at the state level (so that their local development demands might be facilitated since the authorities largely ignore representation by opposition assemblymen). This phenomenon of 'vote-splitting' might also be related to the absence of any party willing to sponsor the needs of the new villagers in a sustained and comprehensive fashion as had the PPP and the Socialist Front in the 1960s, and the MCA Task Force in the early 1970s.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Local Issues in New Village Politics*

What can such shifts in party affiliation tell us of the political culture of the new villagers? First, it appears that they are primarily concerned with issues that are related to their personal as well as their village community's welfare.

Yet conditions in the villages had been deteriorating, or at least not progressing in tandem with national developments. Indeed, the villagers are well aware of the problems outlined earlier. The ability of the villagers to make ends meet, and in some cases to get rich, is largely a testimony to their ingenuity and industry, self-reliance as well as mutual-help efforts (Lim, 1990). Therefore, there is much local enthusiasm for activities and programmes organized by outside politicians if these are geared towards the resolution of NV problems.

Sponsorship of these issues which the villagers consider important contributes towards the legitimization of such would-be leaders. With legitimacy, support is gained. This is evident in the success of the Socialist Front and the PPP in the 1960s. The two parties had highlighted the villagers' problems, championed them openly and conducted various kinds of self-help programmes in the NVs. For the same reason, the MCA's Task Force was also successful in the early 1970s despite the fact that the MCA had neglected them for an extended period of time. The relative lack of interest in party politics and preference for any one of them today also attests to this argument. It indicates there is a general concern with local socio-economic issues as well as that, in the absence of legitimate patrons, the villagers are not prepared to identify enthusiastically with any of the existing political parties.

Concern for local issues does not necessarily imply disinterest in national and international political issues. For, if and when those legitimate leaders attempt to mobilize villagers over national political issues, these leaders often succeed as well. Hence in the 1960s, through the leadership of the Socialist Front, the villagers made efforts to understand, and then opposed, issues such as the American presence in Vietnam and the workings of the capitalist system. Likewise, the villagers became equally concerned about the need for Chinese unity behind the MCA in the early 1970s, when nudged on in that direction by the MCA Task Force leaders once the latter were accepted as legitimate.

In summary, villagers are politically aware. They are not 'mobilized' easily. They render their support selectively to those would-be leaders whom they consider legitimate. Legitimacy may be gained through patronage of issues the villagers consider important which are, by and large, local ones related to the villagers' and the village's welfare. But legitimate leaders may also mobilize villagers to get involved in national political issues.

### *Rising Ethnic Consciousness*

What are the conclusions to be drawn from the above comments with regard to the villagers' political consciousness and identity?

To be sure, the everyday world of the new villagers is very much determined by ethnic considerations. And this colours the dissatisfaction stemming from the villagers' daily work and non-work experiences. But support for the PPP, the Socialist Front, and the MCA Task Force occurred not because of ethnic identification with the parties, but because of their sponsorship of local socio-economic issues. However, as a result of activities sponsored by, say, the Socialist Front (and not because of dissatisfactions arising from the work situation), some measure of radical class consciousness was also promoted. For example, the welfare programmes directed towards the needs of the NV poor, the night classes where illiterate villagers were taught the 3-Rs but also leftist ideology, the dances and songs which depicted the lives and problems of the poor all facilitated the coming together of villagers similarly neglected and economically exploited. Through study and activities, friendships and even games, some measure of common class sentiments was promoted.

Given time, more interaction with non-Chinese in these political activities, and the use of cultural idioms other than those which were exclusively Chinese, the villagers might have been able to transcend, for political purposes, their ethnic Chinese world of everyday (residential, work, and non-work related) experiences. Identification of the state simply as a Malay one might also have been transcended. But that was not to be as the Socialist Front became defunct. Moreover, even at the height of the Front's activism in the late 1960s, both dimensions of class as well as ethnicity coexisted, probably in tension, in the villagers' total consciousness. And not only did ethnically determined realities impinge

on the political efforts of the Socialist Front but, in the end, it was forced to depend on Chinese members, the Chinese language, and Chinese cultural images in order to mobilize support. Whereas in mono-ethnic settings such cultural bases were used to the advantage of those promoting class consciousness, in the context of multi-ethnic Malaysia, however, it resulted in noticeable tension with 'the others', namely Malays. It further prevented Malays from readily identifying with the party. Finally, rising Chinese-Malay tensions contributed towards the break-up of the Socialist Front in the late 1960s (Vasil, 1971: Chapter 5; Muhammad Ikmal Said, 1992: 256, 271-4).

The demise of the Socialist Front resulted in a new political vacuum in the new villages in many parts of Malaysia. Later during the 1970s, many of the multiracial political parties which espoused social democracy, like the PPP, were also transformed into mono-ethnic entities, either because of the demands arising from their involvement in the new ruling coalition or because of the need to make the most of a situation where political participation was becoming institutionalized along ethnic lines.<sup>33</sup>

At the NV level, social and political organizations, which through their activities previously promoted class (though not exclusively) consciousness, are now completely absent. There is no counterpoint to the villagers' everyday experiences which are ethnically determined. When set within the context of deepening ethnic tensions throughout the country during the 1970s and 1980s, local social and political activities simply reinforce that ethnicity. Hence ethnicity now characterizes the political identity of the villagers as well. Thus, while the villagers remain primarily concerned with local issues, nevertheless support for extra-village ethnic issues is also forthcoming despite the fact that the mobilizers might not yet have established themselves as legitimate leaders.

This marks an important break from the pre-1970 period. First of all, there is no longer class politics. More importantly, it appears that the villagers have developed increasing identification as members of an imagined Malaysian Chinese community (which they perceive to be besieged by a Malay government with its array of pro-Malay policies). No longer are they simply members of a particular NV Chinese community. Accordingly, recognized leaders of this imagined Malaysian Chinese community are readily accepted by the new villagers as their leaders too, despite the fact that the latter might not have addressed their local issues, nor possess social networks which reach down to these new villages. These developments suggest that the powerful influences of ethnic politics originating from outside the villages have encapsulated the new villages as well.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

The NVs are related to a very important episode in Malaysian history, the Emergency. This study elaborated on the origins of the NVs and the nature of the resettlement process in which security considerations took precedence. The subsequent neglect of the NVs in the post-independence

period and their rediscovery in the early 1970s, ironically because of a new security problem in the Kinta area, was also discussed. An evaluation of the government's new initiatives was also conducted.

The study also noted that the NVs were originally identified with radical class-based politics associated with the MCP and, subsequently, the legal opposition parties like the Socialist Front and the PPP. As a result of the new efforts of the Perak Task Force and the Reform Movement in the early 1970s, the NVs became associated with the government party, the MCA, too. Following the dismantling of the short-lived Task Force and Reform Movement, some support shifted to the opposition DAP as well.

The more crucial development, however, was the replacement of that earlier phase of radical class-based politics by ethnic politics. This marked an important break with the Emergency and the pre-1970 period and brought the NVs in line with national political trends, such as rising ethnic consciousness.

A related move towards integration of the NVs was the Prime Minister's declaration in 1990 to redesignate the NVs as ordinary villages, some 40 years after their creation. The backdrop to this name change was the belated policy granting 60-year leases to the NVs, consequently removing much anxiety among villagers. Coupled to this was improvement in the provision of amenities and services to the NVs by the late 1980s.

Although there remained outstanding issues, especially lack of access to agricultural land and alternative employment opportunities, these problems were presumably resolved by the mid-1990s, by which time the country had experienced five to six years of rapid economic growth throughout the early 1990s. Among other things, this growth was characterized by rapid industrialization, labour shortages, and rising real incomes. In this regard, the unemployment and underemployment problems, and low income levels characterizing the NVs were presumably resolved. Meanwhile the MCA's Langkawi Project also helped to improve education standards in the NVs and to curb the high drop-out rates. Most problems were resolved, therefore, without resorting to a master plan, as had been advocated by the political parties.

The Prime Minister's declaration to rename the NVs in 1990 was perhaps premature. However, as a result of the rapid growth in the 1990s, conditions in most NVs improved considerably by the mid-1990s. And since NV politics, too, have assumed the characteristics of ethnic politics as they have for Malaysian politics as a whole, the history of the new villages as 'New Villages' may have come to an end.

1. This goal was enunciated in the Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980 (Malaysia, 1976: 175). See also *Straits Times*, 25 May 1972.

2. According to Lim Keng Yaik, such a policy had been agreed upon by the federal and state governments as early as 1972 when he was the first minister in charge of NVs (*Star*, 30 June 1986).

3. This figure most surely excludes the large NVs which fell under the charge of local authorities. It is significant that the Ministry of Housing and Local Government maintained that there remained 452 NVs. See, for instance, *Star* 10 August 1991.

4. These references may be found in the Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995 (Malaysia, 1991: 12, 45).

5. According to MCA chief Dato Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, the Langkawi Project seeks to: promote an attitudinal change among the rural Chinese regarding education; set up resource centres and kindergartens as aids to achieve improvement; initiate income-generating activities, especially among the women; and open channels of exchange and interaction between new villages and other groups and organizations. See *NST*, 20 and 21 May 1993; and *Star*, 28 May 1993.

6. These figures are from Kernial S. Sandhu (1964: 157-83). Various other sets of figures on the number of NVs and the total number of people resettled also exist. Sandhu's figures are the lowest and probably the most reliable. For a list of these varying sets of figures see Hamzah Sendut (1966: 58-70).

7. The two best accounts of the Emergency are Short (1975); and Stubbs (1989).

8. I have discussed MCA's soul searching which resulted in the formation of the MCA Reform Movement, the Perak Task Force, the intra-MCA conflict which ensued, and also the 'rediscovery' of the NVs in Loh (1982). See also Strauch (1981).

9. On the effect of these fluctuations on labour in the tin mines, see Loh (1988: 18-28, 36-8); see also Yip Yat Hoong (1969: 167ff, 202ff). For related effects on labour in the rubber sector, see Parmer (1960).

10. I have discussed this point at length in Loh (1988: Chapter 1). See also Short (1975: 174ff, 203ff).

11. See Loh (1988: 106ff); Stubbs (1989: 98-107).

12. Between 1950 and 1952, the percentage of agriculturists in the NVs dropped from 60 to 27 per cent. More than one-third of all the vegetable gardens in the peninsula, principally in Perak and Johore, were forcibly abandoned. The national hectareage under food crops (excluding rice) fell from 39 219.8 to 27 319.7 hectares between 1948 and 1951. Similarly affected was the production of livestock. Over the same period, the import of vegetables rose by over 100 per cent (Malaysia, 195: 3-4, 11-3, and 69; Malaysia, 1952: 10-11).

13. Up to 1954, permanent land titles had been issued to only 29 applicants. Another 1,570 had their applications approved but had yet to receive their titles. A further 2,900 had also been issued with TOLs. This indicates that many of those who were allocated agricultural land were also farming without either TOLs or permanent titles, that is, illegally. See Corry (1954: 24).

14. See, for instance, N. Barber (1971: 92-3); O'Ballance (1966: 119); and Clutterbuck (1967: 61).

15. 'List of NVs in Peninsular Malaysia 1970' (mimeo). Data was obtained from the 1970 Census.

16. A subsequent study by the same ministry estimated that in 1983 the NV population had increased to 1.7 million, distributed among 452 NVs (cited in *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 21 September 1985).

17. The ministry's classification system coincided with that used by Corry (1954). Based on their economic viability, which in turn was based on their location, Corry classified the NVs as 'permanent', 'intermediate', and 'supposedly temporary', that is, 'expected to disappear with the end of the Emergency'.

18. On illegal farming in the Kinta District in the 1960s, see Loh (1988: 192-8).

19. There is no mention of the NVs in the original Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75 (Malaysia, 1971). The major concern of that plan was the New Economic Policy. However, probably influenced by the publicity given to the NVs in the early 1970s, a belated 'special programme to improve conditions in the NVs' was included in the *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75* (Malaysia, 1973: 7). The NVs were incorporated into the five-year plans for the first time in the Third Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1976: 47). See also Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-1985 (Malaysia, 1981: 41-2, 387-8).

20. A recent study has investigated how the residents in three Perak NVs overcome

poverty by adopting various strategies to adapt to external changes at various stages of the villagers' life cycle. Among these are increasing the area of land farmed, switching occupations, engaging in income-generating activities in the home, and outmigration of family members. Through these strategies, additional income is generated. See Lim (1990).

21. See also Alliance Headquarters Survey (1971: 10).

22. See Malaysia (1970).

23. Considering the NVs as 'urban areas' because the population was more than 1,000 residents was clearly inaccurate and misleading. Though the estimated 9 per cent of NVs in the immediate outskirts of large towns could be justifiably regarded as such, the vast majority of the NVs would more accurately be defined as rural. A better criterion for classifying settlements would be the employment structure of the settlement concerned. In a survey of 'urban areas' with 1,000 to 2,000 residents, half of which were NVs, Jones, a geographer, showed that these settlements were basically made up of agriculturists. See Jones (1965: 53, 62).

24. These points were forcibly made in the study by a District Officer. See Ahmad Ithnin (1973: 36-8).

25. On the technicalities involved, see Cheema and S. Ahmad Hussein (1978).

26. It was also estimated that RM21.6 million was made available under the Sixth Malaysia Plan.

27. See 'Interview with Michael Chen, former Minister of Housing and Village Development', in *Malay Mail*, 18 August 1977. See also *Nadi Insan*, No. 14, June 1980, pp. 4-7.

28. See Lim Keng Yaik (1977).

29. Initial fieldwork in Kinta, Perak, was carried out in 1977-8. Since then I have made many more visits to the area. This brief description of social relations is based on my fieldwork experiences. For some case studies of new villages, see Nyce (1973); Cheng (1976); Tham (1976); Strauch (1981); and Siaw (1983).

30. Class and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive dimensions of social consciousness. They are found coexisting within a society as well as within the consciousness of individuals, though at any one time or situation one might be more salient than the other. Under the circumstances it is not incompatible to maintain a class as well as an ethnic identity at the same time. See, for instance, Thompson (1963).

31. On these parties see Vasil (1971).

32. These shifts in party affiliation that I have outlined actually occurred in at least the three Kinta NVs I investigated, as they probably did in NVs elsewhere in the country. Moreover, many individuals themselves have undergone such shifts in their political affiliation over the past 40 years.

33. Vasil (1971: 36) was the first to observe the transformation of multi-ethnic to mono-ethnic parties. On increasing institutionalization along lines, see Chandra Muzaffar (1984).

34. This theme is developed in Loh (1984); see also Strauch (1981: 13-23).

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# 10

## The Religions of the Chinese in Malaysia

Tan Chee-Beng

### Introduction

MALAYSIA is a land of diverse religions. The world religions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam are found here. Most Chinese Malaysians still observe their traditional Chinese Religion, but Chinese members can be found in all the major world religions as well as in other faiths such as Bahai and the Satya Sai Baba movement. Only the ethnically specific beliefs and practices like traditional Iban and Orang Asli religions have no Chinese followers. Even then there may be some Chinese individuals who are involved in certain non-Chinese animistic rites which they find useful.

This great diversity of religious affiliation reflects the attitude of the Chinese in matters religious. The Chinese religious world-view is non-exclusive and it is not so difficult for a Chinese to accept another religion which is not ethnically defined. While Chinese Malaysian parents object to their children becoming Muslims due to the fear of assimilation by Malays, who are the majority people and are Muslims, there is generally not so much opposition to them joining other religions. Nevertheless, the exclusive views of some Christian groups do cause the converts to have a tense relationship with their non-Christian family members.

According to the 1991 census, the religious groupings of the Chinese numbering 4,609,049 are—Islam: 0.4 per cent, Christianity: 7.8 per cent, Hinduism: 0.2 per cent, Buddhism: 68.3 per cent, Confucianism/Taoism/Other Traditional Religions: 20.2 per cent, Tribal/folk religion: 0.1 per cent, Others: 0.3 per cent, No Religion: 2.7 per cent, and Unknown: 0.3 per cent (Malaysia, 1995: 111). It should be noted that only these categories are provided in the census, and it is misleading in the case of Chinese Malaysians who do not have a specific name for their 'traditional' religion which we can call Chinese Religion. Chinese Malaysians, refer to their 'traditional' religious affiliation as *baishen*, that is, 'worshipping deities', or *baifo*, that is, 'worshipping Buddha/Bodhisattvas' in the case of those who wish to emphasize the Buddhist components.

### Chinese Religion

Chinese Religion in Malaysia refers to the complex set of beliefs and practices which Chinese Malaysians have inherited from the religious traditions of China as well as their local innovations and the incorporation of some local religious beliefs and practices into their religious system. This label is appropriate since Chinese Malaysians have used *huaren zongjiao* ('Chinese religion') as a contrast to other religious traditions. Furthermore, Chinese Religion in Malaysia combines Chinese folk religion (also often described as popular religion) with elements of Taoist and Buddhist traditions as well as Confucian ethics.

In recent years, some Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore have promoted the use of *daojiao* or 'Taoist religion' as a specific label for the Chinese religious complex. This is also an effort to revitalize Taoism, and to form Taoist associations. In the strict sense, Taoism, unlike Chinese Buddhism, does not exist as a separate Chinese religion in Malaysia (Tan, 1983: 233). There are Taoist priests in major towns throughout Malaysia. Each speech group has its own Taoist priests, called *sai-kong* in Hokkien and *nam-mo-lo* in Cantonese. The Taoist priests in Malaysia are 'home Taoist priests', who may be married with families. They may run their own Taoist temples and train disciples. According to Wu Mun Yu (1993/4: 26), the Cantonese Taoists in Kuala Lumpur form a common body called Zhaoyuan Tang to co-ordinate activities and safeguard common interests as well as authorize qualified priests to recruit disciples. At the time of her research, the organization had 23 members.

While Taoist priests may perform public rites called *jiao* at temples or on such occasions as the Hungry Ghosts Festival, their main role is in conducting funeral rites for Chinese Religionists (for lack of a good term). Thus they have a good network with funeral undertakers. In addition, they are knowledgeable in Chinese religious matters and so Chinese Religionists can consult them for advice or employ them for specific religious rituals. Some of them are well known for exorcising evils. Overall, Taoist priests, as well as spirit-mediums called *tongji* (*tangki* in Hokkien), are important Chinese religious specialists who contribute to the preservation and promotion of Chinese religious knowledge and rites. They are also specialists who can write *fu* (charm papers) which are popularly sought after by Chinese Religionists for treating sickness and for keeping at home, usually at the entrances and at the altars.

We can consider the Taoist traditions in Malaysia as part of the larger complex of Chinese Religion. Interestingly, Wu found that the Taoist priests she knew generally worship popular Chinese deities, like Guandi and Guanyin, at home (Wu, 1993/4: 18). However, in the historical development of Taoist religion in China, it was quick to incorporate popular folk beliefs into its orbit, and scholars have also talked of folk Taoism (*minjian daojiao*). It is, therefore, not unreasonable for Chinese worshippers to refer to their religious tradition as *daojiao* if a specific

label is preferred. Some worshippers simply refer to it as 'Buddhism' but this can be confused with the separate, distinct Chinese Buddhism. The attempt at forming Taoist associations reflects the ongoing process of interpreting and elaborating religion. It is also an attempt to organize Chinese Religion in a more formal way.

Chinese Religion may not be as institutionally organized as Christianity and Islam, but it is certainly not disorganized. As we shall see, it has its own logic and symbolic order. While there is no standard 'holy book' which provides a coherent and comprehensive religious ideology and ethics, many Chinese deities are actually associated with ethical teaching, while Confucian ethics are generally regarded by worshippers and organized religious groups as important. There are also religious books, including the *tongshu* (Chinese almanac), about beliefs and moral life.

In addition, many aspects of traditional Chinese world-views are religious in expression, such as the belief in five elements (*wuxing*, comprising metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) and geomancy (*feng shui*), the latter especially with regard to burial sites. Many Chinese consult the *tongshu* for ritual information such as a suitable date for a wedding or for building a house. Chinese Religion should be understood in this larger context of complexity and diversity. From the point of view of individual worshippers, religious participation involves worshipping at home and in temples. The worship is primarily concerned with propitiating for peace, security, and prosperity as well as for specific ritual needs such as healing the sick and appeasing the dead. At the same time, Chinese Religion is part and parcel of local Chinese communal life.

#### *Deities, Religious Life, and Identities*

The category 'Chinese Religion' is both diffused and institutional (Yang, 1961), and there is much diversity among worshippers. They may worship different Chinese deities and visit various types of temples, but they all participate in this overall complex of Chinese Religion. They are not exclusive in terms of the deities they worship and the temples they visit. There is indeed a wide range of *shen* (deities) and temples for the worshippers to choose from. There are 'universal' deities which are worshipped by most Chinese Religionists, namely, Guanyin, Guandi Ye, Mazu, and Dabogong. Of these, Guanyin and Guandi Ye may be considered the most 'universal' of them all, not only among Chinese Malaysians but also among Chinese worshippers world-wide. Originally Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara of Buddhism from India, Guanyin (popularly known in English as the Goddess of Mercy) in the female form is the most important goddess of the Chinese. She is a goddess of many roles and is also important at funeral and post-funeral rites, for she is believed to guide the deceased to the Western Paradise (Buddhist paradise). This is a good example of an aspect of the Pure Land School of Buddhism becoming part and parcel of Chinese Religion, fitting into other indigenous beliefs and practices of the Chinese.

Guandi (more affectionately as Guandi Ye) originated from the

deification of a famous Chinese warrior by the name of Guan Yu (? – AD 219). He was deified for his loyalty (*zhong*) and righteousness (*yi*). Often described in English as the God of War, Guandi Ye has become associated with wealth, hence his popularity with businessmen. The significance of Guandi in Chinese religious thinking can also be seen in his incorporation as a Buddhist deity in Chinese Buddhism, in which he appears as Hufa Qielan Pusa or Qielan Bodhisattva, the Guardian of Dharma. In Buddhism, there are various guardian gods of Buddhist temples (*qielan*), and Guandi is one of them, of Chinese rather than Indian origin. In fact, Guandi has attained a very high status in Chinese Religion. In Dejiao, he is even worshipped as the Jade Emperor, having succeeded the divine throne of the old one still regarded as the supreme deity by the Chinese masses. His full title in this religious organization is Xuanmin Gao Shangdi Yuhuang Da Tianzun or 'The Most High God Jade Emperor, the Heavenly Honoured One' (Tan, 1985: 7–8).

Chinese gender perceptions are reflected in the worship of Guanyin as goddess and Guandi as god. As a Bodhisattva, Guanyin symbolizes *daci dabei* or unlimited love and compassion. Chinese worshippers associate Chinese female virtues with Guanyin. The custom of asking deities to adopt children in the hope of getting divine protection and blessings is still common in Malaysia. This is done at a chosen temple of a particular deity (usually a local communal temple) where offerings are given and a son or a daughter is offered to the deity as a *qizi*, that is 'adopted child' of the deity. The adopted child is obliged to go to the temple annually, usually on the deity's 'birthday', to give offerings to the deity, and, of course, when necessary, such as when he or she is often sick. Parents who want a daughter adopted by a deity usually go to Guanyin rather than Guandi; the latter is considered more appropriate for a boy in the hope that he will acquire the masculine quality of bravery and, of course, the god's virtue of righteousness. Guandi is considered too masculine for girls while Guanyin is too feminine for boys. This gender identification operates for the purpose of adoption by deities, and this contrast is between Guanyin and Guandi, not so much with other gods and goddesses. As communal deities and family patron deities, both Guanyin and Guandi, like other patron deities, fulfil multiple needs of worshippers. The Chinese do not perceive their gods in terms of gender inequality: one cannot say male deities are more powerful or important than female deities. In fact, female deities figure prominently in Chinese religion. For example, the images of Zhusheng Niangniang, the goddess of birth, can be seen in many Chinese temples, although Chinese worshippers can also pray to such higher goddesses as Guanyin and Mazu for children, sons in particular.

Mazu is also a goddess and a very important one after Guanyin. Unlike Guanyin, Mazu was of indigenous origin and a myth traces her to Putian of Fujian Province. Rendered in English as the Goddess of Sailors, a version of her hagiography traces her to a filial young woman by the name of Lin Moniang of the Song Dynasty. After her young death, it was believed that she saved people in distress at sea and so she

was worshipped as a goddess of the sea. The Mazu cult became important not only in Fujian but also in Guangdong.<sup>1</sup> It was also accepted and encouraged by the imperial governments. Mazu was bestowed various titles, but the most popular one used to this day is 'Tianhou Shengmu' or 'Heavenly Queen the Holy Mother', popularly referred to as 'Tianhou' or the 'Heavenly Queen'. The indigenous cult was so popular that it was also incorporated into the Taoist religion.

The worship of Mazu is also important outside mainland China, especially in Taiwan and South-East Asia. The history of its spread to South-East Asia is directly linked to Chinese migration in the nineteenth century. Because of her role as goddess of the sea, migrants worshipped her for a safe journey and even brought her images on board. On arrival in South-East Asia, shrines were built to house her images. Many big Mazu temples in Malaysia and Singapore had their origin in such small shrines built by the early immigrants. In Malaysia, Mazu is popularly worshipped by the Hokkien and the Hainanese. In fact, many Hainanese associations had their origins as Mazu temples and today it is still common to see Hainanese associations having Mazu altars. Mazu is an important communal deity, and in Kelantan and Trengganu where the Chinese minority comprises mainly Hokkien and a proportionally high concentration of Hainanese, Mazu worship is so important that most Chinese households in Kelantan worship her, while the main communal temples are Mazu temples (Tan, 1982: 26-52). Her 'birthday', celebrated on the 23rd day of the third lunar month is an important occasion of communal religious celebration. As Mazu is believed to bear the surname of Lin (Lim in Hokkien), she is also worshipped as the patron deity in Lin 'clan' associations. Thus the temple of Mazu in Batu Pahat, Johore, called Tianhou Gong, is also the ancestral hall of the Lin Association.

Dabogong is unique in his label in South-East Asia. This is the Chinese earth god, known by the title of Fude Zhengshen in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. In China, he is popularly called Tudi Gong ('Earth God') but in South-East Asia he is popularly referred to as Dabogong ('Grand Uncle God'). He is another popular patron deity, both at communal temples and at home, especially among the Hokkien, Teochew, and Hakka. It is common to see Dabogong altars in the living rooms of Chinese worshippers in Malaysia. In fact, in Pulau Ketam, off Port Klang, for instance, almost all the families (predominantly Teochew) worship Dabogong. The worshippers pray to him for all kinds of blessings but, like Guandi Ye, he is also associated with wealth. Thus both Guandi and Dabogong are the main gods of wealth worshipped in Malaysia. In Kelantan, due to the influence of the Teochew in Thailand, Dabogong is popularly called Pun-thau-kong among the Hokkien and Teochew, which literally means 'god of local territory'.

There are a host of other less universal but powerful deities such as Xuantian Shangdi, the Monkey God called Qitian Dasheng, Nezha, Jigong, and Jiu Huangye or 'Nine Imperial Gods'. These deities are



popularly invoked during spirit-medium sessions, for they are 'known' for using their supernatural power to exorcise evils, heal sickness, and give divine protection. Xuantian Shangdi is popularly called Shiong-te Kong by the Hokkiens and his temples (temples which honour him as *zhushen*, that is, main deity or patron deity) can be found in different parts of Malaysia. Qitian Dasheng is made popular by the classic Chinese story *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West) in which his power and his ability to transform are well described. The belief in his ability to transform and to subdue undoubtedly makes him a popular deity in spirit-medium sessions. Nezha has been known as Child God in English for his image is that of a child; nevertheless, he is a powerful deity, and the Chinese reading public is familiar with the many myths about him. Jigong is popular mainly because of the myths about his playfulness, ability to trick and win and, above all, his support of the poor and the weak against the rich and the powerful. Thus in English he has been called the Vagabond Buddha (De Bernardi, 1987). In Dejjiao, he is an important deity, especially for the Ji Group (Tan, 1985). The identities of the Nine Imperial deities are still not clear although there have been some writings about them (cf. Choo, 1968: 123-5; Heinze, 1981: 151-71; Cheu, 1988). Their 'birthday' is celebrated in the ninth lunar month from the first to the ninth day, during which time the devotees observe vegetarianism. During this period, the temples of Jiu Huangye are full of religious activities and shamanistic cults including fire-walking. A distinct feature of the Jiu Huangye celebration is that during the days of the celebration, the spirit-mediums and those directly involved in the celebration wear white clothes.

There are also many temples which honour the Taoist deity Yuhuang Dadi, the Jade Emperor. Zhang Tianshi (founder of the Wudoumi Dao Taoist Sect) is popularly honoured by spirit-mediums and Taoist priests, but he is not widely worshipped by the Chinese masses. Similarly, the ancient high Taoist deities of Sanqing (Three Pure Ones), comprising Yuanshi Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun, and Daode Tianzun, are not usually worshipped by the ordinary people, but they are important at funeral rites conducted by Taoist priests who display paintings of their images. Even the deified Laozi with the title Taishang Laojun is not so commonly worshipped. He is also an important deity in organized 'syncretic' religious organizations such as Dejjiao which is usually described in English as the Moral Uplifting Associations. The Eight Taoist Immortals (Ba Xian) are popularly known by the Chinese worshippers and they are often used as religious motifs and painted on temple walls. In Dejjiao associations, however, they are popularly worshipped, among whom Lūzu (that is, Lū Chunyang) is the most important. Many divine messages obtained through *fujū* or planchette divination (involving two mediums holding a Y-shaped willow stick and writing characters with the pointed end on a tray of sand, the movement of which is believed to be caused by the deity invoked) are attributed to Lūzu.

Some deities are associated with certain Chinese dialect groups.

Shuiwei Niangniang is worshipped in temples established by the Hainanese, while the worship of Wangye is popular among the Hokkien. Wangye is associated with dealing with epidemics, hence his popularity with the early Chinese immigrants who held religious processions in honour of him, the most well-known one being the *wangkang* procession in Malacca (Tan, 1990: 5-27). Victor Purcell was correct in his view that Wangye worship was of 'very long standing in Malaya' from the very early days (Purcell, 1967: 124). While the *wangkang* procession is no longer held today, the worship of Wangye (known as Ong Yeh in Hokkien) is still important in Malacca and Kelantan.<sup>2</sup> It is also important in Taiwan where majority of the people are of Fujian origin (Katz, 1990: 95-209).

In relation to Chinese deities and specific Chinese identities, there are many *xiangtu shen* or *difang shen* ('local deities' referring to deities of particular local origins in China) which are worshipped by Chinese whose ancestors came from certain localities in China, hence the spread of these deities to Malaysia and Singapore. For example, Fazhu Gong (Hokkien: Huat Chu Kong) is popularly worshipped by the Hokkien of Yongchun (Hokkien: Eng Choon) origin. As the deity, whose image has a dark face and long hair, is believed to bear the surname Zhang (hence Zhanggong Shengjun), he is even worshipped at home as patron deity of those Eng Choon Hokkien whose surname is Zhang (or Teo in the Hokkien romanization in Malaysia). In Sekinchan, Selangor, where there are many Eng Choon people, there is even a big temple (Tianfu Gong or Temple of Heavenly Blessing) wherein Fazhu Gong is regarded as the communal patron deity. There are other deities associated with 'local' identities, such as Qingshui Zushi associated with the Hokkien of Anxi origin, Sanshan Guowang associated with the Hakka, and Jinhua Furen (Madam Golden Flower) associated with the Cantonese.

Another important locality deity of the Hokkien is Guangze Zunwang who is respectfully called Shengwang or Shengwang Gong (the Holy King). He is associated with Nan'an of Fujian, hence he is of special significance to the Hokkien from that place. In Kuching, Sarawak, there is an important Guangze Zunwang temple called Fengshan Si (Phoenix Mountain Temple) at Wayang Road. In Papar, Sabah, the temple in honour of this deity is locally referred to as the Hokkien Temple although the actual name of the temple is Tengen Tang. In Kampung Tirok, Trengganu, where there is a small Chinese community living in the midst of Malay communities, the village temple is that of Guangze Zunwang.

There are countless Chinese deities, including those whose worship has become rare today. For example, the legendary Chinese creator of the universe, Pangu, is worshipped in the Fazhu Gong temple in Sekinchan. In Penang, there is a City God temple. Some minor deities which 'migrated' with the Chinese immigrants to South-East Asia have already or almost disappeared due to their irrelevance in the modern setting. For example, it is rare to find the God of Wells today in Malaysia. I did find one in the backyard of a family hotel in Malacca, where an altar at the well honoured the well god.

While the Chinese deities worshipped in Malaysia are predominantly from China, there are some which are of local Malaysian or South-East Asian origin. The famous Zheng He (Admiral Cheng Ho), who conducted several voyages from China to South-East Asia and West Asia during the Ming Dynasty, has been deified as Sanbaogong (Hokkien: Sā Poh Kong) in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, even though he was a Muslim.

The Chinese have a long tradition of deifying heroes and sages. Of the few Chinese pioneers and heroes in Malaysia who have been deified, the most well-known are Xian Shiye and Si Shiye, referred to collectively as Xian Si Shiye. They were sworn brothers of Yap Ah Loy, the Chinese pioneer of Kuala Lumpur, now regarded by Chinese Malaysians as a pioneer sage. According to a temple publication (Yang, 1959), Xian Shiye was the Chinese Kapitan of Seremban, Sheng Mingli. He was honoured in Seremban after his death, and in 1864 Yap Ah Loy arranged for his tablet to be installed and worshipped in a small hut in Kuala Lumpur. In 1883, a temple initiated by Yap Ah Loy was built for worshipping Xian Shiye and Si Shiye. Today, this temple, called Xian Si Shiye Miao, is an important temple in Kuala Lumpur. It is also visited by tourists interested in the history of Kuala Lumpur. The identity of Si Shiye is not clear although the temple document mentions that he was Zhong Lai (Yang, 1959). Choo Chin Tow suggests that he might be Yap Ah Loy's close friend nicknamed A Si (literally Number 4) (Choo, 1968: 137). He fought for Yap Ah Loy and after his death, Yap Ah Loy arranged for him to be honoured.

Both Xian Shiye and Si Shiye were killed during the civil wars of the pioneer days. Yap Ah Loy had personal reasons to honour his 'brothers', but such deification must have been useful for the symbolic consolidation of his own power and authority as the Chinese pioneer 'ruler' of Kuala Lumpur. This is a good example of how 'heroes' are honoured after death and eventually elevated to the status of deities. Hagiography was developed to describe the miraculous power and deeds of the deified heroes. Xian Shiye was credited with helping Yap Ah Loy to win his various wars. The cult must have provided Yap Ah Loy's men the religious legitimization and psychological support in their suppression of rivals for Yap Ah Loy. The cult has remained important, and to this day the procession of Xian Si Shiye on the 28th day of the first lunar month remains important in praying for communal peace and blessing. As is common in other Chinese temples, other deities like Guanyin, Guandi, and Jinhua Niangniang (Madam Golden Flower) are worshipped in Xian Si Shiye Temple too. From its simple origin of honouring the deceased heroes, the honouring of Xian Si Shiye has developed into a full-fledged temple having communal significance. Yap Ah Loy is also honoured in this temple.

The most significant innovation and transformation of local deities, however, are those of Nadugong, known in Hokkien as Da-tok-kong. These may be regarded as local spirit guardians or, in many instances, local territorial deities or Malaysian earth gods. The belief is derived from the Chinese concept of earth deities as well as the incorporation of

Malay *keramat* beliefs. There are two kinds of *keramat*, namely, Muslim saints propitiated as *keramat* and sacred spots (such as an unusual anthill) seen as abodes of guardian spirits. Chinese Malaysian worshippers have many small shrines in the wild, at construction sites, and under huge trees, which take the place of the many earth god (Tudigong) shrines in Taiwan and mainland China. These Nadugong shrines are for the worship of Tang-Fan Tudi or 'Chinese and Local Earth God', the word *fan* actually refers to non-Chinese in contrast to *tang* which is Chinese. *Fan* can refer to Malay or other Malaysian/South-East Asian non-Chinese identities. As Malays are the majority people in Malaysia or the local people with whom the early Chinese immigrants first came into contact, the *fan* component is often associated with Malay and, therefore, Muslim identity. Hence, Chinese worshippers take care not to offer food containing pork or lard to Nadugong. However, especially in Penang, Kedah, and Perlis, there are Nadugong perceived as of Thai identity and hence Muslim food taboos need not be observed. Over the years, some Nadugong have been perceived as purely Chinese in identity which the Hokkien call Teng-lang Da-tok or 'Chinese Datok', that is, Chinese Nadugong. An example is Lin Tianlai Nadugong of Kuala Kurau, Perak.

The term 'Da-tok' is derived from the Malay word *datuk*, which means 'grandfather' but which the Malays also use to address *keramat*. The word *kong* (*gong*) is Chinese, meaning 'grandfather' too, and is also a Chinese honorific for deities. Thus Nadugong is derived from both Malay and Chinese words having similar meanings, and it reflects the double identities of the deity. The cult of Nadugong was closely associated with the pioneering experience of Chinese immigrants. Today, Nadugong have become important local deities/spirits which bless construction sites or the opening up of new lands for development. They are also popularly prayed to by the ordinary people for acquiring wealth, such as winning lotteries. Guandi Ye is the God of Wealth of businessmen, but Nadugong is the source of hope for wealth, not only for small businessmen but for the very poor people, too. Low in rank, Nadugong are often approached by worshippers, just as the earth gods in China were close to the ordinary people.

Chinese Religion is polytheistic. The deities are not a haphazard collection of gods and goddesses. They are loosely organized in Chinese thinking into a hierarchical relationship. This is clearly expressed in the sequence of worship at home. The first and fifteenth of each lunar month are days when family worship is conducted in the morning and evening, involving the burning of joss sticks and candles. On other days, an evening worship is sufficient, usually before dinner time. This is usually done by a female in the family. She lights joss sticks for all the altars at home. She then goes to the front veranda of the house and raises the joss sticks towards the sky. This is an offering to the God of Heaven called Tī-kong by the Hokkien, and usually interpreted as the Taoist deity Yuhuang the Jade Emperor, the 'emperor' of all deities. There is no altar

of the Tiangong (Ti-kong) at home, and after worshipping this supreme deity, the worshipper places one joss stick (may be more, but in odd numbers, being the *yang* principle) at the small altar installed at the left<sup>3</sup> side of the front of the house, which may be at a wall or a pole.<sup>4</sup> This is the altar for the Tianguan or 'Heaven Sphere Official' and the altar usually bears the characters 'Tianguan *cifu*' or 'the Heaven Sphere Official gives blessing'. Together with his counterparts, the Diguan (Earth Sphere Official) and Shuiguan (Water Sphere Official), the duties of the three spheres (*sanjie* or in Hokkien *samkai*) have to do with supervising human moral behaviour.

After placing joss stick(s) at the altar of Tianguan, the worshipper goes to the altars in the living room. She places a joss stick in the incense pot for the patron deity. If there are other deities honoured in the family, these images are placed at the stage left of the patron deity, and the correct number of joss sticks (one each) are placed in the incense pot, too, for these deities. If there are altars of ancestors, these are placed to the stage right of the patron deity. Two joss sticks (that is, even numbers, being the *Yin* principle) are offered to the ancestors. If there is a Kitchen God altar in the kitchen, a joss stick is offered there first before the ancestors are offered theirs. If the wandering ghosts are prayed to, such as during the Hungry Ghosts Festival, they are offered joss sticks only after the deities and ancestors in the house have been prayed to. The Hokkien call the ghosts politely as 'good brothers' (*hou hiā-ti*). In modern housing estates, there may be no convenient place at the back of the house to pray to the ghosts, and so people may pray to them at the roadside in the front of the house. In Chinese religious thinking, cultural principles are merely guidelines which can be modified for practical purposes. The description here shows the loose hierarchy in the supernatural world, from the God of Heaven to the other deities, ancestors, and ghosts. The Chinese supernatural world consists of man dealing with deities, ancestors, and ghosts. The ghosts are the uncared-for souls of those without descendants and those who have died of 'bad deaths', such as death caused by accidents or murders.

The patron deity, the deity chosen as the main deity honoured at home or in a temple, is always worshipped first before other deities, except the God of Heaven, who must be worshipped first in all religious rites. Even when only altars of ancestors are installed at home (that is, no altars of deities), the worship of the ancestors always begins with offering joss sticks to the God of Heaven first. The patron deity's altar is always installed in the central position, flanked by those of other deities. The stage left side is for deity of rank higher than the one installed at the stage right side. In a reasonably big temple, the central position is occupied by the altar and offering table for the patron deity. Further to the left are the altar and offering table for the deity whose status is higher than the one installed at the right side. It does not matter if the patron deity is of lower rank than those at his or her left and right sides for the deity occupies the central position by virtue of being the *zhushen*

or 'patron deity' of the temple. Thus in a Dabogong temple, the central position is for the altar of Dabogong.

*Temples: Organization and Functions*

In each Chinese settlement or town, there is usually a communal temple, more in the case of a big town or city. Unlike private temples which are mostly owned by spirit-mediums, a communal temple is one participated in by all Chinese worshippers in a community or by the worshippers of a particular dialect group. It is a temple which represents different sections (dialect groups) of a local Chinese community. Often it is dominated by the majority dialect group. In the history of Chinese settlements, communal temples not only served social and religious functions, but political functions too. For example, Cheng Hoon Teng, the earliest temple in Malaysia, was the administrative centre of the Malacca Chinese community. The 'Teng Choo' or presidents of the temple were also the political leaders of the Chinese in Malacca (Yen, 1986: 10-16).

A communal temple is managed by a management committee which reflects the communal ownership and identities. In addition, there are one or more religious affairs committees which are in charge of specific religious ceremonies. For example, in Bukit Rambai, a village in Malacca, the Dabogong temple has an elected management committee. In addition, there are two religious affairs committees, one in charge of the Dabogong's 'birthday' celebrations on the second day of the second lunar month as well as those for Qingming. The other is for organizing the Hungry Ghosts Festival during the seventh lunar month (Tan, 1990). Unlike the management committee, the religious affairs committee is 'elected' by divination: names are submitted to the deity for selection. The chairman of the committee is called *luzhu*, that is *lorchu* in Hokkien, which means 'master of the incense pot'. The other committee members are called *toujia* (*thau-ke* in Hokkien) which in Malaysia and Singapore is the address for the owner of a shop, and this reflects the important roles of businessmen in temple committees. Where a community does not have a temple, a patron god's 'birthday' can still be celebrated communally, and a religious affairs committee is formed for this purpose. The *luzhu* keeps the patron deity's incense pot at his home during the year he is elected *luzhu*. This reflects the origin of the term, the one who takes care of the incense pot.

The deities' 'birthdays' (*shendan*) are the occasions of temple festivals, but the one for a community's patron deity is the most important. A religious procession is usually organized and communal participation can be observed. The area covered by the procession shows the territory 'ruled' by the temple or by the patron deity, so to speak. The ritual territory is often bigger than an administrative territory. For example, in a rural area, the ritual community may extend to beyond the village where a temple is located, and the household heads of this ritual community (not just those in the core village) have the right to put forth

their names for divination to be selected to serve in the religious affairs committee. In actual fact, people expect the more well-off or prestigious persons to volunteer for selection. As to the celebration of the deities' birthdays, a temple may celebrate a number of them, but the grandest celebration is for the patron deity. It is therefore not uncommon to see a list of the deities' birthdays (dates) posted on a temple wall. Most of the dates are standard in that they are based on the dates recognized by tradition, such that they are observed by Chinese worshippers everywhere, whether in Malaysia, Taiwan, or elsewhere. Thus Fude Zhengshen's birthday is on the second day of the second lunar month and that of Mazu on the 23rd day of the third lunar month. The 'birthday' dates of some deities are not so standard. For example, Guandi's 'birthday' may be celebrated on the 13th day of the first lunar month or on the 13th day of the fifth lunar month. Guanyin has three 'birthdays', as many worshippers put it, on 19th day of the second lunar month (supposedly her birth), the 19th day of the sixth lunar month (her day of enlightenment), and on the 19th day of the ninth lunar month (the day she joined the monastery). However, most worshippers do not know why there are three 'birthdays' for Guanyin.

Chinese worshippers worship both at home (if altars are installed) and at temples. Usually they go to temples during major Chinese festivals, temple festivals (mainly deities' birthdays), and when they feel the need, such as to consult about marriage or health matters. Most temples provide facilities for simple divination which can be conducted by the worshippers themselves, such as the divination blocks (for dropping onto the floor after prayer to determine a 'yes' or 'no' answer), and the bamboo containers containing numbered bamboo sticks for the *qian* (*chiam* in Hokkien) divination. In the case of the latter, a worshipper kneels in front of the altar, puts forth his or her request to the deity, and then shakes the bamboo container until a stick falls out. The divined stick (*qian*) is taken to the counter in the temple, where an assistant will give a small piece of printed paper which matches the number on the bamboo stick. The paper contains some verses for the worshipper to interpret the answer to his or her request. If necessary, the temple assistant can be requested to help to interpret the message. If a worshipper prefers verbal consultation, he or she can visit a temple which has *tongji* (spirit-medium) service, where the consultation can be made through the medium. However, *qian* divination is better for private matters.

#### *Festivals and Religious Life*

The religious life of Chinese worshippers is guided by major festivals. Chinese festivals are major occasions for worshipping deities and ancestors, and even ghosts. In a Chinese family which observes Chinese Religion, its religious life is regulated by the festivals. Chinese New Year is the grandest of them all. Deities, ancestors, and ghosts are worshipped on the eve of the new year, followed by the reunion dinner,

which usually is late lunch after all the worshipping is done, and the family eats the food which had been offered. Thus it is not just the reunion of the living but also between the living and the dead through partaking of the food. Those families which do not have altars do not worship at home, and so the reunion dinner comprises food cooked for the living only and so the dinner can be in the evening if they so choose. However, some older people may worship at a temple. In fact, during major festivals, Chinese worshippers worship both at home and at a temple. The Chinese New Year is celebrated for 15 days. The evening of the last day is called in Hokkien, Chap Goh Mei or the 'Fifteenth Night'. Children carry lanterns on Chap Goh Mei evening, while nowadays Chinese restaurants do brisk business on this evening. The Chinese in Penang have a long tradition of celebrating Chap Goh Mei by having processions. There is also the custom of women throwing oranges into a river to wish for a good husband (Tan, 1986: 48-51). For the Hokkien, the ninth day of the Chinese New Year period is the 'birthday' of Tiangong and it is celebrated on a grand scale on the eve of the ninth day, when an offering table is arranged just outside the front entrance or front yard of the house to give sumptuous offerings to the God of Heaven. Prominent among the offerings are two sugarcane plants which symbolize sweetness and blessings in life. Those who have their wishes fulfilled during the year are religiously obliged to give offerings to the God of Heaven on this occasion.

Other than the Chinese New Year, the next most important festival for Chinese worshippers is the Zhongyuan or the 'Hungry Ghosts Festival' on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, although the Cantonese observe this on the 14th (Wong, 1967). Not only is there worship at home, there is communal worship too. The worship and communal celebration last from the beginning of the month to the 15th day. The actual dates may differ from family to family and community to community. This is also the occasion for staging Chinese operas at a temple compound or in a selected public area. The festival is for worshipping ancestors and especially the wandering ghosts. It is a time for communal worship for peace, security, and prosperity.

Qingming festival is also important. It is the Chinese All Souls' Day when the dead are remembered and worshipped both at home and at the cemeteries. This is one Chinese festival which always falls on 5 April according to the solar calendar, but the visit to the graveyard is usually on the weekend closest and preceding 5 April, and for most states in Malaysia this is Sunday although in some states such as in Kelantan and Trengganu, it is on Friday. This is for practical convenience, especially to enable those who work out of town to return to visit the graves of their relatives.

The other Chinese festivals are celebrated on a smaller scale. The 'Fifth Moon Festival' (Duanwu Jie) involves simple family worship, an important item of offering being the dumplings (*zongzi*) which are specifically made for this occasion. This festival has now acquired non-



religious and even inter-ethnic significance through the promotion of the dragon boat race which is also a Chinese tradition associated with this festival. The Moon Cake Festival (Zhongqiu Jie) falls on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. Those who worship ancestors offer moon cakes to them, but religiously it has become even less significant than the Fifth Moon Festival. Nevertheless, it has become an important occasion for young people to organize parties and for children to play with lanterns in the evening. The eighth lunar month is considered by Chinese Malaysians as the auspicious month for weddings, which are avoided during the seventh lunar month as it is considered inauspicious because of the Guei Jie or 'Ghost Festival'.

The last significant Chinese festival in the Chinese calendar year is Dong Jie which falls on the winter solstice (*dongzhi*) around the 22nd of December. On this occasion, *tangyuan* (boiled glutinous rice balls served in sugar solution) are made. The traditional belief is that when one eats *tangyuan* on this occasion, one is a year older, really indicating the coming to an end of a year. Those who worship ancestors offer the rice balls to them. For those who worship deities at home, the 24th day of the 12th lunar month is significant for it is believed that early in the morning on this day the deities led by the Kitchen God leave for Heaven to give their annual reports about the family. Thus on the eve, offerings are given to the deities, and offerings which are sweet in taste are significant, for they symbolize the hope of the humans that the deities will have good things to say about them.

While in the past ancestor worship was an inseparable aspect of Chinese Religion, today much has changed. Not all Chinese Religionists worship ancestors at home and the younger people prefer to install ancestral tablets at a temple or at a clan association, where they need visit only a few times a year. Those who worship ancestors at home have to do so regularly at the altar where the ancestors' photographs and/or names of ancestors (and their deceased wives) written on paper are installed as focus of worship. There are also many families which do not install regular altars but 'invite' (*chhiã* in Hokkien) ancestors to come on occasions when they are to be worshipped, such as during Chinese festivals. A temporary offering table is set up for such an occasion, on which is placed temporary joss-stick holders, candlesticks, and offerings. This style of worshipping ancestors at home, which I have called the 'invitation system', is popular among the Baba who distinguish this from *piara abu*, which refers to installing altars for ancestors (Tan, 1988: 150-4).

#### *Organized Religious Groups*

The worship of Chinese deities and the observance of religious traditions are also organized by formal religious groups which I shall call 'sects' in the neutral sense. These groups are generally 'syncretic',<sup>5</sup> comprising Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist traditions, and some even

incorporate superficially certain Christian and Muslim elements. They originated in China but have thrived in Malaysia and Singapore. For example, Sanyi Jiao founded by Lin Zhao'en (1517-98) of the Ming Dynasty organizes various elements of Confucian teaching, Taoism (Taoist Philosophy), Taoist Religion, and Buddhism into a single system, hence the name *sanyi* or 'Three-in-one' (Franke, 1980: 6-24). In Malaysia, the worshippers are Henghua (Xinghua) people, and in Kuala Lumpur, there is a temple in Brickfields. Zhen Kong Jiao ('Religion of the True Void') was founded by Liao Dipin (1827-93) in Jiangxi Province (Luo, 1962). This is also based on *sanjiao* or 'three teachings' (Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist teachings). This sect was known for curing opium addicts, and in Malaysia there was a time when its temples treated many opium addicts through meditation, especially before the Second War World.

Of the 'syncretic' sects which emphasize *wujiao* or five teachings, namely, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim teachings, Dejiao (Religion of Virtue) is the most important and active (Tan, 1985). Such sects emphasize the worship of the five 'founders' (*jiaozhu*) of 'religions', namely Confucius, Laozi, Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Prophet Mohammad. The doctrines, however, are generally based on the *sanjiao* of the Chinese. In the case of Dejiao, the associations were mostly established by Teochew businessmen and today many members are still Teochew. This is not surprising since it was started in the Teochew homeland, that is, Chaozhou in southern China, in the 1930s. The other major 'syncretic' sects are Hongwanzihui (Universal Red Swastika Society) and Yiguan Dao (The Way of Pervading Unity) (Tan, 1995b: 150).

There are other types of religious organizations. Marjorie Topley, for example, has written about vegetarian halls which were important places where unmarried women lived (Topley, 1954: 51-67). There are still vegetarian halls in Malaysia and Singapore although we have no recent description about them. More significant are the many and various kinds of *shantang* or 'philanthropic halls', where each type emphasizes worshipping a particular patron deity, although all stress doing charity. Although called 'philanthropic halls', these may be regarded as religious organizations which have been doing charity work as the focus of religious teaching and practice, rather than as ordinary Chinese associations with religious elements. An important patron deity for many *shantang* in Malaysia is Song Dafeng (Tan, 1985: 50). His hagiography traces him to the Song Dynasty, hence he is usually referred to as Song Dafeng rather than merely as Dafeng. Born in Fujian province, he became a monk and did many charity deeds. He is regarded as a Bodhisattva and an inspiration to doing charity. For example, he is the patron deity of Chin Seon Kok (Zhen Shan Ge), a big *shantang* in Bagan Serai in north-western Perak. He is also the patron deity of Sarawak Yunnan Shantang, a very important *shantang* in Kuching.

### Buddhism

Chinese Buddhism (originally developed in China) is a distinct religious tradition in Malaysia, despite its close link with Chinese Religion. There are many Chinese temples, especially Guanyin temples, which have both Buddhist and other Chinese deities. However, there are also 'pure' Mahayana Buddhist temples which house Buddhist deities; in some cases there may be a separate small altar for Dabogong, or a shrine of Nadugong outside the temple, usually at the front right corner. These Buddhist temples have a distinct Chinese Mahayana identity. Such temples can be found in cities and major towns such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang (where Kek Lok Si (Wong, 1963) is very famous), Ipoh, Cameron Highlands, Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan (where the big grand Puji Si is also a major tourist attraction), and elsewhere.

A Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temple is usually quite big and spacious when compared to most Chinese temples. It is called *si* and not *miao*, which usually refers to the temples of Chinese folk religion. There are many images, usually big ones, of Buddhist Bodhisattvas. At the centre of the main hall, there are usually three huge images. Because of the influential Pure Land tradition of Buddhism, the three images are usually Bodhisattva Emitufo (Amitabha), flanked by Bodhisattva Guanyin on his left, and Bodhisattva Dashizhi (Mahasthamaputra) on his right. Unlike the Theravada tradition, the image of Buddha is not necessarily the most prominent image placed in the central altar. An example of such a Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temple is Puh To Sze (Putuo Si) in Kota Kinabalu. In this temple, the statue of Buddha is installed in the room directly at the back of the three main statues of the front hall. However, at the temple of the Sandakan (Sabah) Buddhist Association in Sandakan, the statue of Sakyamuni Buddha is placed on the principal altar, flanked by the statue of Bodhisattva Yaoshi Liuli Guang Rulai to his left and the statue of Amitabha to his right (this is based on observation during my visit in August 1981).

The distinct Chinese Buddhist identity is also provided by various Buddhist associations. As far back as 1925, the Penang Buddhist Association was already established (Leong, K. K., 1984: 98). However, the most important Buddhist associations are the two umbrella societies (*zonghui*), namely, the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA or Malaixiya Fojiao Zonghui) and the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM or Malaixiya Foqing Zonghui), which brought Buddhist associations into affiliation with them. MBA was formed in 1959 at Kek Lok Si in Penang while YBAM was established in 1970, also in Penang (Nagata, 1995; Tan, 1983). In an issue of *Eastern Horizon* (Volume 4, no. 1, 1997), for example, YBAM introduces itself as uniting 'more than 270 Buddhist organizations representing both Theravada and Mahayana traditions throughout Malaysia'. Due to the promotion of these associations, there are now more organized Buddhist organizations, such as in schools and universities. There are more Buddhist activities, especially Buddhist talks and chanting of Buddhist

scriptures, reflecting the greater concern with understanding Buddhist teachings and knowing how to chant and meditate, and not just worshipping. In fact, Buddhist cassette tapes have become popular, too. As Susan E. Ackerman has observed (1993: 137), *dharma* education (Buddhist teachings) has become the focus of Buddhist reformism.

In this regard, YBAM has played a very important part through its activities at the local, regional, and national levels, especially through organizing Buddhist talks and publications. It publishes the very successful Chinese journal called *Fojiao Wenzhai (Buddhist Digest)* as well as the English journal *Eastern Horizon*. There is also *Berita YBAM* newsletter for its members. Despite the Malay title, this is bilingual in English and Chinese. In addition, it publishes with the Young Buddhist Foundation of Malaysia (an organization initiated by YBAM) a quarterly news magazine called *Dharma Digest Malaysia*. As the leaders of YBAM are educated young people, most of whom know the three main languages in Malaysia, namely Chinese, English, and Malay, they are able to bridge the linguistic gap between the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition and the other Buddhist traditions in the country. In fact, the publications of YBAM reflect the concern and dialogue with the different Buddhist traditions (Chinese Buddhism, Sinhalese, Thai, Tibetan, and others). Buddhist works by Western scholars are published or reprinted too in, for instance, *Buddhist Digest*. In fact, although YBAM is closely linked to the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist temples and associations, it has Ven. Dhammananda, the prominent monk of Theravada tradition, as one of the religious patrons.

Malaysia is really a meeting point of different Buddhist traditions. Other than Chinese Mahayana Buddhism which is very much influenced by the Pure Land School (*Jingtu zong*), various Theravada Buddhist traditions have many Chinese followers too, especially from the English-educated or those orientated towards English-speaking. The meetings are mostly conducted in English although chanting is in Sinhalese or Thai, depending on the tradition. The major Theravada traditions in Malaysia are Sinhalese (of Sri Lanka origin) and Thai. In Penang, there is a Burmese tradition, too (Low, 1989: 57-85). There are temples of these Theravada traditions in major cities, especially Penang and Kuala Lumpur. The famous Theravada Buddhist temple at Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, is of Sinhalese tradition and the monks are of Sinhalese origin, too. The followers are Chinese and Indians. The use of English in the Theravada tradition is necessary for the foreign monks to communicate to the multilingual audience, while it promotes inter-ethnic participation. The Chinese Mahayana tradition has a historical Chinese tradition using Chinese texts and discourse, hence it is difficult for those who do not know sufficient Chinese, especially Mandarin, to join the meetings.

The Thai tradition is important too, and there are monks who come from Thailand. There are Thai Buddhist temples with their Thai-style architecture. One example is found at Jalan Gasing in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. While Theravada Buddhism among Malaysian Chinese is

generally an urban phenomenon, in north-east Kelantan many Chinese also go to and sponsor the many Thai temples of the local Thai. The Peranakan-type Chinese members of the local Buddhist associations, who are more used to speaking and reading Malay (especially the younger ones) than English or Chinese, have also promoted Buddhist writings and singing in Malay.

There are other Mahayana traditions, too. There are followers of Tibetan Buddhism (Tantric tradition). According to Raymond Lee, since the late 1970s, 'many itinerant Tibetan lama from the four Vajrayana sects (Kagyü, Gelud, Sakya, and Nyingma) based either in India or the West have made numerous trips to advise and perform for Malaysian devotees' (Lee, 1993: 44). In these two decades, a Japanese Buddhist tradition has established itself among Chinese Malaysians. This is Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a Mahayana tradition introduced from Japan. It is quite mission-oriented and today its branches are found in most towns and cities of Malaysia. Known in Chinese as Rilian Zhengzong Fojiao, the group's worship is conducted in Chinese dialects, Mandarin, or English. There are Japanese elements. For example, many Buddhist terms are of Japanese transcription and worshippers sit on the floor. Hence, Chinese non-believers who do not know the name of the sect refer to it as worshipping Japanese gods or Japanese Buddha. Others describe it as the sect which 'worships the black box' (*bai heixiang*). The black box referred to is the *gohonzon*, which is a big black rectangular altar. Its upper portion has two sliding doors which expose a scroll inside when opened. This scroll bears the characters *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*, referring to the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, and Buddhist deities. *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*, which is in Japanese, is what the worshippers chant. It means total devotion to the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra. It is also the name of Nichiren Daishonin, who is considered to be the Pure and True Buddha.<sup>6</sup> Today most of the followers are affiliated with the Buddhist organization called Soka Gakkai.

There is a revitalization of Buddhism in Malaysia. Academicians should not be too quick to attribute this to a reaction to ethnic tension and Islamic revival. The educated Chinese have long been advocating the intelligentsia's religious views, that is to emphasize teachings rather than rituals. This concern with a more organized system of religious teaching is a reason why some young Chinese, not happy with the 'magical' Chinese Religion, find Christianity attractive; nowadays, a small number find Islam meaningful too. For most Chinese, a more organized Buddhism is the answer. Even within Buddhism, there have been calls to emphasize Buddhist teachings. Huang Yinwen has expressed regret that the Chinese attitude towards Buddhism tends to be concerned primarily with chanting and funeral rites and not with teaching and he proposes ways to reform this (Huang, 1982: 182-200). Back in 1963, Teo Eng Soon, who was President of the University of Malaya Buddhist Society from 1959 to 1961, expressed the need to get rid of 'superstitions and the host of other nonsense' for the survival of

Buddhism (Teoh, 1963: 33, 52). While it is problematic to judge the behaviour of believers as superstitious, Teo's view shows the concern for Buddhist reform even in the 1950s and 1960s. The ethnic paradigm easily leads some scholars to fail to see, in the words of Trevor Ling, 'Buddhist efforts to make known the teaching of the Buddha, and its practical application to life in modern society today' (Ling, 1992: 327).

The systematic teaching of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism began with the arrival of Buddhist monks from China, who settled down in Malaysia. Ven. Zhu Mo, Ven. Bo Yuan, and Ven. Seet Kim Beng have played important roles in promoting Chinese Mahayana Buddhist teachings in Malaysia. Ven. Bo Yuan is in charge of Hubin Jingshe in Kuala Lumpur and he is also a well-known Chinese artist. Ven. Seet Kim Beng has served as the Vice-President of the Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism since its formation. Both Ven. Seet Kim Beng and Ven. Bo Yuan have been active in the MBA, having served as President and Vice-President respectively.

Ven. Zhu Mo (born in 1913) has been the most prominent Chinese Mahayana Buddhist monk in Malaysia. He studied under the famous modern Chinese Buddhist master Tai Xu of the famous Minnan Buddhist Institute in Fujian. One of his contemporaries at the Institute was Yin Shun who became a prominent monk in Taiwan, and whose writing is influential in modern Chinese Buddhism. After visiting Bangkok in 1954, Zhu Mo was invited by Phoy Tay Institute, the well-known Buddhist organization in Penang, to serve there. He had also taught at Phoy Tay High School, the only secondary school founded by the Buddhists in Malaysia (Leong K. H., 1984: 71). Zhu Mo founded Triple Wisdom Hall which was completed in 1965. In 1959, he contributed to the formation of the then Malayan Buddhist Association, of which he was President for 12 years. Leong Kok Hing describes the formation of MBA as 'the first attempt to unite all Mandarin-speaking Mahayana temples, organizations, sangha and laymen into a national body' (Ibid.: 72). The magazine *Wujin Deng* (Everlasting Light) which Zhu Mo founded in Macau became the official publication of MBA. Ven. Zhu Mo also founded the Malaysian Buddhist Institute.

For the English-educated Chinese and Buddhists of other ethnic origins, the leading monk is Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera of the Theravada temple in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. Born in Sri Lanka in 1919, Ven. Dhammananda came to Malaya in 1952 at the invitation of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society which was founded in 1894, the oldest Buddhist society in Malaysia. He promoted Buddhism of the Theravada tradition from the Buddhist Vihara at Brickfields, and in 1962, he founded the Buddhist Missionary Society. He has also founded Paramadhamma Institute, Monks Training Centre, and the annual noviciate programme at the Brickfields Vihara. He gives talks all over the country, including at institutions of higher learning. His Buddhist writings are widely read by Buddhists in Malaysia, many of whom are Chinese.

Despite the diverse Buddhist traditions, the Chinese Buddhists do not

draw a rigid boundary between Buddhist traditions. Some Buddhist leaders, including those in the YBAM and in university Buddhist organizations, have promoted a non-denominational approach to Buddhism. The different traditions do find a common celebration, the Wesak (in May) which honours Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. Wesak is now a national public holiday in Malaysia. As it is celebrated by Buddhists of all traditions, the religious processions organized by some major temples and Buddhist organizations are very grand. Unlike Chinese folk religion, which is basically a religion of local communities, Buddhist religious celebrations and activities can be organized nationally involving nation-wide participation by all Buddhists.

About 68.3 per cent of the Chinese are Buddhists and 20.2 per cent belong to 'Confucianism/Taoism/other traditional religion'. This latter category may be known as Chinese Religion. Many followers of Chinese Religion also label themselves 'Buddhists'. Thus a more accurate picture is that the overwhelming majority of Chinese Malaysians are followers of Chinese Religion. Thus the 1991 census shows that 88 per cent of Chinese Malaysians are Buddhists and followers of Chinese Religion. Over the years, increasing numbers of Chinese Malaysians have called themselves 'Buddhists', and this reflects the attitude of the younger generation who are more concerned with Buddhist teachings, and many of them involve themselves in various Buddhist societies. A smaller but perhaps increasing number of young Chinese are turning to other religions, notably Christianity.

### Christianity

Christianity accounts for only 7.8 per cent of the Chinese population. Because of the various Christian activities, people have the impression that there are many Chinese Christians in Malaysia. This is not so, as the statistics show, but the Chinese Christian population is growing due to the increase of young converts from schools and colleges. The Christians are heterogeneous by denominations, and Chinese Christians are further divided into those who join Chinese-medium congregations and those who join English congregations. It is common for the major churches of a town to have both English and Chinese sections. In many places, such as Batu Pahat and Muar in Johore, the Sunday services of the Chinese section are conducted in dialects such as Hokkien or Teochew. Nevertheless, the younger people prefer *Huayu* (Mandarin) and in fact the youth sessions of the Chinese section are generally conducted in *Huayu*.

The 'English-educated' attend the English services. The English congregation is multi-ethnic, generally Chinese (the majority) and Indian in membership since Malays in Malaysia are by definition Muslims. In East Malaysia, though, there are Christians of many ethnic origins. Some churches even have a Malay section too. In fact, the use of Malay among the Christians in Singapore and Malaysia began with catering to the Malay-speaking Baba congregation. In 1843, the Straits Chinese

Church was established by Rev. Benjamin Peach Keasberry in Prinsep Street in Singapore (Song, 1923: 58). This was the Malay chapel of the Baba. Partly due to the effort of prominent Baba lay preachers such as Song Ong Siang, many Baba in Singapore today are Christians. However, the Baba in Malacca observe their traditional Chinese religion closely, and not many are Christians. Nevertheless, in 1938, the Straits Chinese Methodist Church was founded by Low Kway Song, a Baba from Singapore. In February 1939, the first Sunday worship was held. The Straits Chinese Methodist Church was incorporated into Wesley Methodist Church in 1953, and this church always has had some Baba Christians (Tan, 1988: 146).

There are many Christian denominations. In Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough (1992), different church groups are described: Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Mission, Presbyterian Church, Christian Brethren, Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mar Thomas Church, The Assemblies of God, Baptist Church, Lutheran Church, Evangelical Free Church, and the Later Rain Church. Chinese members can be found in all kinds of churches. Of the churches, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest in Malaysia, comprising just over half of the Christian population (Roxborough, 1992a: 1). It is also the oldest church denomination, which began with the arrival of the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century. The Anglican and the Christian Brethren were also early in their establishment in Malaysia. The latter mostly use the name Gospel Hall or Gospel Centre, and are characterized by the use of lay preachers rather than a hierarchy of clergy (Lee, 1992: 108). Christians of this denomination are active in such evangelical organizations as the Varsity Christian Fellowship, the Graduates Christian Fellowship, the Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and the Teachers' Christian Fellowship (Ibid.: 109), all of which have significant numbers of Chinese members.

There are other church groups including branches of the Unification Church of Reverend Sun Myung Moon and the more recent New Testament Church (NTC), which are largely not recognized by the established churches mentioned above. The former is originally of South Korean origin and is well known (the members are often referred to as Moonies). The latter has its headquarters in Taiwan and is quite exclusive in its view that it represents the true church which preaches the 'full gospel of Blood, Water and Holy Spirit'. The sect began in 1963 in Taiwan and in the same year it was established in Malaysia too. The founder, known as Sister Kong Duen-ye, was regarded as a Prophetess. A mountain in the south-east of Kaoshiung was named Holy Mount Zion, which is the followers' site of pilgrimage.<sup>7</sup> There are now NTC followers in various parts of Malaysia.

Another active church group is the Seventh-day Adventists, popularly known as the SDA. In Sarawak, there are also Chinese members in the Sidang Injil Borneo (popularly known as SIB) or the Borneo Evangelical Church, which was originally established by an Australian mission among the non-Muslim indigenous peoples in Sarawak. Today, many



non-Muslim indigenous peoples, especially the Lun Bawang and the Kelabit, are SIB followers.

While the earlier established churches were mostly started by Western missionaries and even catered for Europeans, Chinese preachers and lay members were quite early, too, in spreading Christianity and establishing churches among Chinese settlers. In fact, the use of locally trained preachers by Western missions was quite important in recruiting Chinese. For example, when the Anglican Mission was established in Kuching, Sarawak, in 1848, it soon recruited Chinese members. Rev. F. T. McDougall who headed the new mission provided medical help for Chinese 'refugees' from Dutch Borneo, treating the sick in a temporary hospital. He took 13 Chinese children into his Home School to be brought up as Christians. By 1851, two of the four Chinese he baptized were from the hospital. He was assisted by a Chinese Christian schoolmaster named Ayoon who was sent from Singapore (Saunders, 1992: 50-1). Singapore was then the centre of Western Christian missionaries. This experience of humble beginnings through the efforts of Western missionaries assisted by some locals and providing welfare and educational services was common of many early mission works among the Chinese. The mission schools established by Catholic and Protestant denominations throughout the country, especially in the cities, provided quality education and were instrumental in increasing the number of Christian believers.

While many of the early Chinese Christians were converted through Western missionary efforts, many of the Chinese-speaking congregations actually grew out of the arrival of Chinese immigrants who were already Christians in China. For example, the Baptist missions had begun in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1836, and the Baptist congregation was established in Alor Setar in 1938 by the immigrants from Guangzhou and Shantou (Swatow), who formed the Overseas-Chinese (Swatow) Baptist Church (Hwang, 1992: 243-50). There were also some Chinese preachers who came to South-East Asia. By 1949, when the communist government came to power in China, there was an influx of both Western and Chinese preachers of various denominations to Malaysia and Singapore. The Chinese churches were also helped by the prestige of the well-known Chinese evangelist from China, Song Shangjie (1901-44) or John Sung who was a tremendous inspiration to Chinese-speaking congregations in China and South-East Asia. He visited Malaya and Singapore in 1935 and 1938, drawing huge crowds wherever he preached (Liu, 1995: 225, 293). His publications and books about him have remained popular among Chinese-reading Christians in Malaysia and elsewhere. After 1949, Taiwan became the important source of Chinese Christian publications and preaching.

The Presbyterian Church in Malaysia is a good case to examine the development of Chinese-speaking congregations in Malaysia and Singapore. As John Roxborough has written (1992b: 83), due to an understanding between the Presbyterians and the Methodists, the Presbyterian Church was concentrated in the southern states of Johore

while the Methodists focused their activities in the northern states of then Malaya. In Sarawak, it was the White Rajah government which 'advised' different Christian missions to operate in different regions to reduce competition among the missions and ensure a wider area of 'colonization', hence the pattern of types of mission in different parts of Sarawak today. The Chinese in Johore were mainly Hokkien and Teochew, hence the use of these dialects, especially Hokkien. For example, in Batu Pahat, Jiu'en Tang or Grace Church in English, is a Presbyterian Church. It has Chinese and English sections, both managed separately. In the 1960s, the pastor was from Taiwan. He preached in Hokkien. The elders and deacons prayed or preached in Hokkien or Teochew depending on their dialect groups. The two dialects were mutually intelligible. However, the Chinese youth section used Mandarin, as preferred by the Chinese-educated young people. The Chinese and the English sections hardly interacted.

Overall, the Chinese section had, and still has, more Chinese cultural orientation. Roxborough noted the weakness of Presbyterianism in Malaysia and he commented that in Malaysia 'this is a church which for much of its history has rejected the idea of being Presbyterian in favour of wishing to be Chinese' (Roxborough, 1992b: 101). This is an interesting comment. It seems to me that, at least from my observation in the 1960s, the leadership and management style of the Chinese section were very similar to those of Chinese associations. The leaders were largely prominent Chinese businessmen who had their own supporters based on the well-known Chinese principle of *guanxi* (individual-oriented social network): loyalty and co-operation are not based on overall group interests but on the nature of relationship to individuals, hence the formation of factions.<sup>5</sup> It is thus not surprising to read Roxborough's comment that annual meetings alternated lengthy procedures with excellent meals, and conflict was always painful (Roxborough, 1992b: 103).

The Methodist Church of the Foochow (Fuzhou) Chinese in Sibul is an interesting case of a Christian church which grew out of a community of Chinese Christians brought from China. It is also a case of a history of Chinese settlement which was closely linked to the Methodist Church. The settlement of the Foochow Chinese in Sibul is credited to Wong Nai Siong who arranged for 1,118 people from China to settle in Sibul in three batches between 1901 and 1902. Two-thirds of them were already Christians. In 1902, Bishop Warne in Singapore appointed Pastor B. F. West to supervise church organization among the new settlers. He appointed Ting Ching Sing (who was a pastor in Gutian, China) and Lau Wee Kee (who was a pastor in Minqing, China) to work with the settlers in Sibul. This was the beginning of the Methodist Church in Sibul. By 1903, the Singapore Annual General Conference appointed the American Rev. James Hoover (1872-1935) to administer the missionary work in Sibul. The Anglo-Chinese School was established and this has remained an important Methodist school until today. By 1904 Wong Nai Siong left Sibul for good and the Rajah appointed Rev. Hoover to administer the Foochow Chinese (Sarawak Chinese Cultural Association,

1992: 198-9). To this day the older Foochow-Chinese of Sibü remember him fondly, crediting him for the early development of the Foochow community while Wong Nai Siong was credited with arranging the migration.

Today, the Foochow are the largest Chinese dialect group in Sarawak. The Methodist faith and the church have remained important to most of them. A number of the well-off Foochows are logging *towkay* (bosses) in Sarawak and they employ many Foochow professionals and workers. From my observation of the Putai logging camp in interior Baleh in 1991, the church even sent a preacher to hold Sunday services and preach to the workers in remote timber camps. This is an example of how a church is so well organized that it reaches to all its followers and would-be converts.

The Methodist Church was also involved in the settlement and economic development of the Foochows in Sitiawan, Perak, in 1903. Initially, 365 settlers were settled there on 1012.50 hectares of land. Although only around 60 of them were Christians, many were converted later (Hunt, 1992: 342). Thus, Sibü and Sitiawan became the major centres of Chinese Methodists in Malaysia and Singapore (Hwa and Hunt, 1992: 158).

There are other examples of Christian groups involved in early Chinese settlement. A less successful effort was that in Titi of Jelebu, Negri Sembilan, where a converted pioneer settler, Siow Kon Chia, tried to Christianize the new settlers. Siow was converted to the Roman Catholic faith while working as a labourer in Sungai Ujong. The Roman Catholic missionaries gave him financial assistance, and he became successful economically. In order to get labour supply for his mines, he encouraged his clansmen from his home village in Huizhou in Guangdong Province to migrate to Titi, and this was supported by the church, which hoped to Christianize the migrants. Unlike the Foochow settlers in Sibü, the Hakka-speaking migrants from Huizhou were not yet Christians, and most of them did not want to convert. In 1905, Siow financed the building of a church in Titi, and continued his effort to convert his relatives. He even gave plots of his land to encourage conversion. While the effort to Christianize the whole clan was not successful, a Roman Catholic congregation was nevertheless established (Siaw, 1983: 21-7).

Some churches were established among the Chinese after the war. The Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore, for example, grew out of Lutheran missionary work among the Chinese from the early 1950s (Chang, 1992: 251). It was at a time when the missionaries had to leave China after 1949, while the British authorities in then Malaya encouraged missionaries to work in the so-called New Villages which the government had created as a strategy to fight the communists. Most of the people resettled in the New Villages were Chinese. The Tamil Lutherans had also encouraged mission work among the Chinese. The British government obviously viewed Christian missionary work in the New Villages as providing the ideological front to fight the communists.

The churches made full use of the situation, and the Council of Churches in Malaya (later known as the Council of Churches in Malaysia or CCM) set up a New Village Co-ordinating Committee in 1952. The success of the missionaries can be seen in Roxborough's account: 'By the end of 1959 some 450 villages were open to evangelistic work. There were 220 missionaries, representing eight missions, working in 333 New Villages, and six other bodies not in the CCM. The co-ordinating committee met bi-monthly in Kuala Lumpur' (Roxborough, 1992c: 292). One of the evangelists, Ray Nyce, who did his research in the course of his evangelistic duties from 1957-61, wrote an early book on the New Villages (Nyce, 1973).

Christian churches are very well organized from the grass roots to the regional, national, and international levels. For example, the established Protestant churches in Sabah are organized under the Sabah Christian Church which in turn is affiliated with the CCM, and this is linked with other Asian churches under the Asian Council of Churches whose headquarters is now in Hong Kong. At the global level, delegates are sent to the World Council of Churches. In Malaysia, most Christian churches, Protestant and Catholic, are in turn 'unified' under the Christian Federation of Malaysia which was registered in 1986 (Roxborough, 1992c: 289). As Chinese form the majority of the non-Muslim population in Malaysia, their membership is prominent in Christian churches even in multi-ethnic congregations, with the exception of non-Chinese vernacular churches (such as the Tamil churches).

Compared to Islam, Chinese Malaysians find it easier and more acceptable to convert to Christianity, mainly because a Chinese Christian still remains a Chinese culturally. He or she only has to give up certain aspects of Chinese culture which are seen as in conflict with the teachings of Christianity, such as worshipping ancestors. As many Chinese families today do not pray to deities or ancestors at home, conversion to Christianity involves even less cultural adjustment. There are differences in exclusive views between Christian groups, between the Protestant and the Catholics and between individual Christians. Some Protestant groups are very exclusive in their religious views and so they are not tolerant of many details, such as eating food which has been offered to ancestors, or attending Chinese funerals and so on. The Catholics are generally less rigid in their Christian interpretations and some even accept practices of honouring ancestors without actually worshipping them. However, since the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, there has been an increase in Christian charismatic movements among both Catholics and Protestants (Ackerman and Lee, 1988: 72-7), and this is usually accompanied by a less compromising attitude towards non-Christian elements.

Generally, Chinese Christians do not find it difficult to observe most Chinese festivals although some may attach more importance to Christmas than to Chinese New Year. The churches have even made adjustment to observe Chinese 'cultures'. For example, the Presbyterian churches in Johore hold special Chinese New Year service on the first

day of the New Year. This replaces the non-Christian Chinese worship of deities and ancestors on the eve of the New Year. Other than religious matters, Chinese Christians and those who are not Christians celebrate the Chinese New Year together, including giving the red packets containing money (*hongbao*) to children and exchanging oranges and gifts. As to other festivals, the Christians make adjustments accordingly. For example, most Chinese Christians observe Qingming too. They visit graveyards but instead of offering food and joss sticks, they offer flowers; and for the deceased Christian ancestors, they pray in the Christian way. They eat *zongzi* during the Fifth Moon Festival and moon cakes during the Moon Cake Festival but without worshipping ancestors. However, they do not observe the Hungry Ghosts Festival since the nature of the festival makes it impossible for Christians to adjust and indigenize their faith to the related Chinese beliefs of the afterworld.

In the case of weddings, other than performing the church wedding, many Chinese Christians retain some aspects of Chinese wedding rites which they find meaningful and acceptable. For example, the tea ceremony (in which the newly-weds offer tea to the elders) is often retained as it teaches respect to the elders, and serves to introduce the bride and groom to their new relatives, thus integrating them into the new kinship networks. Those Christians who retain this rite see it as in line with Christian beliefs, and as Chinese they value the teaching of respecting elders. Thus Christianity as practised by Chinese Malaysians has various indigenized elements arising from the interaction of Christian and Chinese cultural principles.

### Islam

Very few Chinese are Muslims (0.4 per cent). Islam in Malaysia has been so linked to Malay ethnicity that Chinese frown upon their relatives or even on any Chinese embracing Islam. The adoption of Muslim names by converts further convinces the Chinese that embracing Islam is throwing away Chinese identity and Chinese descent.<sup>9</sup> Until recently, those Chinese who embraced Islam were mostly those who married Malays, resulting in their children being assimilated by the latter. Thus, the general rejection of Islam by Chinese Malaysians is not so much a rejection of the religion but disapproval of discarding Chinese identity. This is made worse by the fluctuating conflict of interests in the group relations between Malays and Chinese. Consequently, Malaysian Chinese tend to view negatively those Chinese who embrace Islam as trying to win the favour of Malays or trying to gain access to certain privileges enjoyed by Malays.

In the last two decades, there have been more Chinese who have embraced Islam, and this is largely due to the missionary activities of Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam (Perkim) or Muslim Welfare Organization. There are also Chinese Muslim associations which are affiliated with Perkim. The exact population of Chinese Muslims is not certain. Judith

Nagata (1978: 108) noted that there were about 4,000 to 5,000 throughout Peninsular Malaysia, while Lim Hin Fui, quoting figures from Perkim, said that there were more than 20,000 in the whole country (Lim, 1980: 56). The former probably derived her figures from the 1970 census which lists 5,342 Chinese who were Muslims in Peninsular Malaysia. The 1991 census shows a big increase in the number of Chinese Muslim, totalling 17,117 which is 0.4 per cent of the Chinese population of 4,609,049 surveyed (Malaysia, 1995: 111).

There are two categories of Chinese Muslim converts. The first comprises those who intermarry with Malays or other Muslims, and their children are usually incorporated into the Malay community. The second category are those who adopt Islam not because of intermarriage and, if married, have Chinese or non-Malay wives. These Chinese Muslims are referred to by Malays as *saudara baru* or 'new brothers and sisters'. Even those who intermarry with Malays are not fully recognized as Malays, and are often referred to as *mualaf*, which means 'Chinese converts'. As far as I know, Chinese Muslims do not like to be called *saudara baru* on the grounds that this singles them out as a different type of Muslim and those who seek assimilation naturally reject this label. Chinese Muslims, especially those whose spouses are not Malays, are in a dilemma for they may be neither fully accepted as members by Malays nor by Chinese. The latter consider them as Malays or not quite Chinese, while the former are pleased that these Chinese have become Muslims but do not necessarily encourage them to be regarded as Malays for fear that they will have access to special privileges provided in the Constitution for Malays and other 'sons of the soil'.

The dilemma of marginal or border zone ethnic status can be seen in a case reported by Lim Hin Fui (1980). According to him, the Chinese Muslims in Klang who used their Muslim names to apply for low-cost government housing through the dominant Chinese party, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), were turned away by the party, which argued that their application should be considered under the quota allocated to Malays. However, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the ruling Malay party, rejected the application of the Chinese Muslims on the grounds that they were Chinese. We see here that religion is closely linked to the problems of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

In addition to the converts, there are in Kuala Trengganu the 'Orang Yunan' who were already Muslims even before their migration from China. There are also a few families of such Chinese Muslims (originally Hui in China) elsewhere in Malaysia. The best known example is the late Haji Ibrahim Ma who first came to the Malaya in 1948 as China's consul to Perak. He and his family chose to remain and he contributed much to the activities of Perkim. He passed away in 1982.

Unlike the case of Chinese Christians, not much is known about how Chinese Muslims relate to various aspects of Chinese culture. Because of the association of Islam with Malay ethnicity in Malaysia and because of their status as converts, the Chinese Muslims feel the need and the

pressure to conform closely to Islamic rules, which are often read as including Malay cultural practices too. As such, Chinese Muslims feel unsure or inhibited to exhibit Chinese cultural expressions for fear of being seen as un-Islamic. Indeed, Chinese converts often adopt Malay-style dress or other attire seen as Islamic. Those whose ancestors were Hui (Muslims in China) are more confident, but the 'Orang Yunan' are very sensitive about possible feelings of the Malays and most of them have intermarried with Malays anyway. It is thus not surprising that in recent years it is the few 'Hui' Muslims in Kuala Lumpur, who identify themselves distinctively as Chinese, who have come out openly to the mass media to show that Chinese Muslims can also celebrate Chinese New Year and explain how they themselves celebrate it. Overall, like the Malays, the major celebration of Chinese Muslims is the festival at the end of the Muslim fasting month which is called Hari Raya ('the big day') in Malay.

### Conclusion

The multi-religious identity of Malaysia is reflected by the Chinese population which is diverse by religion. Of these, Chinese Religion and Chinese Buddhism are the most important, not only because most Chinese Malaysians belong to these categories but also because they represent continuity with Chinese 'culture' and civilization. From the perspective of followers, there is no boundary between Chinese Religion and Chinese Buddhism, although in terms of organization and temples as well as historical traditions, there are distinct differences. Other religions such as Christianity and Islam are not of Chinese tradition, and so Chinese followers of these faiths do have to make conscious efforts to adjust their Chinese cultural life to their religions and vice-versa. We have seen that the Christians have, by and large, made these adjustments very well, and becoming Christian does not threaten Chinese ethnicity. Even Chinese Christian congregations, not just Chinese Religion and Chinese Buddhism, have historical links with China, as we have seen.

After 1949, the links with mainland China were cut off, and Taiwan as well as to some extent Hong Kong have been the sources of Chinese Christian cultural links. Taiwan has been more important, mainly because of the Hokkien dialect and Mandarin which are the main Chinese dialects used in Malaysia and Singapore. Chinese-reading Christians, for example, read Christian books in Chinese including Chinese translations of English works, and many of these are, understandably, published in Taiwan. Similarly, many Buddhist publications in Chinese as well as those on various aspects of Chinese Religion are published in Taiwan. Furthermore, there are famous monks in Taiwan who are invited to give talks and conduct blessing ceremonies in Malaysia. With the participation of more educated young people and with Buddhist organizations becoming more organized and better funded, more religious exchanges with Taiwan have been made possible and at greater frequency. Of course with increasing globalization, Chinese

Buddhists and Christians have also established their global networks. The end of the Cold War has further made it possible for Chinese Religionists to visit famous religious sites in China and even offer some religious donations to help revitalize some relevant ancestral halls, temples, and religious ceremonies. There are no national boundaries in matters religious.

Within the country, there is freedom of belief in Malaysia. Non-Muslims are free to observe their religions. However, there has been some 'deviations' in the implementation of government policies, especially in the 1980s. Non-Muslim religious groups find it difficult to get approval to acquire land for building temples or churches as well as for burial sites. Some Muslims also criticize the Chinese worship of Nadugong as insulting Islam because of the Malay/Muslim images worshipped. Non-Muslim religious groups felt the need to work together to urge the government to rectify the unfair implementation practices as well as to have dialogues with Muslim groups. Thus in 1983, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) was established. As Muslim groups do not participate in this council, it has become an organization for the non-Muslim religious groups to articulate their common interests in dealing with the state. It also promotes inter-religious dialogues. Significantly, in 1984, it organized a major inter-faith seminar in which all major religions in the country, including Islam, were represented. The proceedings were published in the same year (Tunku Abdul Rahman et al., 1984). Given the concern of the non-Muslims, it is significant that in the 'Foreword' of the publication the King wrote, 'I take this opportunity to assure my non-Muslim subjects that they will not be discriminated against in any way, in the practice of their religion' (Tunku Abdul Rahman et al., 1984: v).

Interestingly, Chinese Religion, the religion of the majority of Chinese Malaysians, is not represented in the MCCBCHS, or presumably it is represented by Buddhism. This reflects the nature of Chinese Religion, which is a religion of individuals and local communities. While there are organized sects of Chinese Religion, the 'religion' as a whole is not organized nationally nor as a distinct institution. If there is representation to be made to the state, this is done through Chinese associations, political parties, and leaders of the temples themselves. As a religion of local communities, Chinese Religion is closely linked to local social organization and leadership, and is politically significant to local Chinese politicians, who are expected to attend major religious functions and even serve as 'advisors' (*guten*) of temple committees or those of specific sects. Despite the increase in the number of Christians and Buddhists over the years (for example, compare the census data since 1931), Chinese Religion will continue to be important not only for individuals who identify themselves as *baishen* or *baifo*, but also for the organization and identities of local Chinese communities. Most Malaysian Chinese still prefer a religion which links them to their ancestors and



fulfils their religious needs, which at the same time expresses Chinese identity.

1. For descriptions of Mazu myths and the development of the cult, see, for example, Li (1979); and Soo (1990).
2. On Wangye worship in Kelantan, see Tan (1982).
3. In the Chinese religious context, left refers to the left side of a person standing at the main entrance of a house and facing outside the house. Unless otherwise understood or specified, the left and right in this chapter refer to this stage left and stage right.
4. In modern houses, it may be inconvenient to install the altar at the stage left side, in which case a family would install it at the right side of the house, although the rule is that it should be on the left side, which in the ritual context is the superior side.
5. Syncretic here refers to a religious organization having elements from different traditions but is not necessarily a combination of the different traditions itself.
6. I observed a Nichiren Daishonin meeting in Kuantan, Pahang (conducted in Cantonese) and interviewed the leaders of the organization there on 15 November 1980. I also talked to a few followers in Seremban and Selangor. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism was established by Nichiren Daishonin, a Japanese monk of the thirteenth century. The followers traced the sect's history to 28 April 1253 when Nichiren Daishonin was believed to have chanted *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and hence established 'true Buddhism' for the first time and revealed the Law of the Universe (see 'Gosho Study: Fasten Our Faith', *Eastern Aurora*, 37, February, 1980, p. 4). Thus the sect claims to represent true Buddhism and Nichiren Daishonin is believed to be the greatest Buddha whose capacity extends to the infinite past, the present and the future (see Yasuji Kirimura, 'Nichiren Daishonin's Life', in *Seikyo Times*, June 1979, p. 53). The sect's missionary activities aim at preaching the attainment of absolute happiness by having faith in *gohonzon*. The most important scripture of the sect is the Lotus Sutra and the most important chant is *Nam-myō-renge-kyō*.
7. I have confirmed the information here about the church with a knowledgeable New Testament Church follower.
8. The description of the Presbyterian Church is based on my knowledge of the church in the 1960s.
9. All converts to Islam adopt a Muslim/Malay name followed by *bin* (son of) or *binti* (daughter of) Abdullah.

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APPENDIX 10.1  
 List Of Chinese Characters

- A Si 阿四  
 Bo Yuan 伯圆  
 Chin Seon Kok 振善阁  
 Dabogong 大伯公  
 Daode Tianzun 道德天尊  
 Dashizhi 大势至  
 Dejiao 德教  
*difang shen* 地方神  
 Dong Jie 冬节  
*dongzhi* 冬至  
 Fazhu Gong 法主公  
 Fude Zhenshen 福德正神  
*fuji* 扶乩  
 Guangze Zunwang 广泽尊王  
 Gutian 古田  
*hou-hiā-ti* 好兄弟  
 Hubin Jingshe 湖滨精舍  
 Hufa Qielan Pusa  
   护法伽蓝菩萨  
*jiao* 醮  
 Jigong 济公  
 Jiu'en Tang 教恩堂  
 Jiu Huangye 九皇爷  
 Lau Wee Kee 刘霄基  
 Lin Moniang 林默娘  
 Lin Tianlai Nadugong  
   林天来囉啤公  
 Lingbao Tianjun 灵宝天尊  
*lorchu (luzhu)* 炉主  
 Lü Chunyang 吕纯阳  
 Lūzu 吕祖  
 Mazu 妈祖  
 Minqing 闽清  
 Nadugong 拿督公  
*nam-mo-lo* 南呒佬  
*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*  
   南无妙法莲花经  
 Pangu 盘古  
 Phor Tay Institute 菩提学院  
 Puh To Sze 普陀寺  
 Puji Si 普济寺  
 Pun-thau-kong 本头公  
*qian* 签  
 Qingshui Zushi 清水祖师  
*qizi* 契子  
 Rilian Zhengzong 日莲正宗  
*sai-kong* 师公  
 Sanbaogong 三保公  
*sanjie* 三界  
 Sanshan Guowang 三山国王  
 Sarawak Yunnan Shantang  
   砂朥越云南善堂  
 Seet Kim Beng 释金明  
*shantang* 善堂  
 Sheng Mingli 盛明利  
 Shiong-te-kong 上帝公  
 Shuiwei Niangniang 水尾娘娘  
 Song Dafeng 宋大峰  
 Song Shangjie 宋尚节  
 Tai Xu 太虚  
 Tang-Fan Tudi 唐番土地  
 Teng-lang Da-tok 唐人拿督  
 Tengnan Tang 腾南堂  
*thau-ke* 头家  
 Ting Ching Sing 陈真信  
*tongji (tang-ki)* 童乩  
 Triple Wisdom Hall 三慧讲堂  
 Wangye 王爷  
 Wong Nai Siong 黄乃裳  
*Wujin Deng* 无尽灯  
 Xian Si Shiye 仙四师爷  
*xiangtu shen* 乡土神  
 Xuanmin Gao Shangdi Yuhuang  
   Da Tianzun  
   玄炁高上帝玉皇大天尊  
 Xuantian Shangdi 玄天上帝  
 Yaoshi Liuli Guang Rulai  
   药师琉璃光如来  
 Yap Ah Loy 叶亚来  
 Yin Shun 印顺  
 Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊  
 Zhanggong Shengjun 张公圣君  
 Zhaoyuan Tang 昭元堂  
 Zhong Lai 钟来  
 Zhongyuan 中元  
 Zhu Mo 竺摩  
*zhushen* 主神  
 Zhusheng Niangniang 注生娘娘

## The Chinese Performing Arts and Cultural Activities in Malaysia<sup>1</sup>

Tan Sooi Beng

### Introduction

THE Chinese performing arts in Malaysia are varied. They include the Chinese opera, puppet theatre, and percussion dominated ensembles which are performed to honour deities in the Chinese pantheon. The Thai *menora* and Malay *ronggeng* are also staged during the celebrations of deified Muslim saints known as Da-tok-kong, particularly in Penang. Choral ensembles, military-style brass bands, harmonica bands, dance and drama ensembles, Western-style and Chinese orchestras, and *don-dang sayang* groups provide entertainment. The lion dance is performed at festive occasions and business-related ceremonies, to receive dignitaries as well as to entertain guests. Various types of martial arts such as *gongfu*, *wushu*, and *taiji* also exist. Popular music sung in Mandarin and regional dialects can be heard over the radio and television and is readily accessible through cassette tapes, compact discs, videos, and laser discs.

This paper looks at the trends in the development of the Chinese performing arts in Malaysia from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until the 1990s. It relates musical form and cultural content to socio-cultural and political transformations. It shows that the Chinese in Malaysia are constantly creating and re-creating their culture and identity as they adapt to the environment. The variety in the performing arts expresses the multiplicity in Chinese identity.

I have focused mainly on mainstream Chinese and Baba genres. This paper does not discuss non-Chinese forms, such as the Western drama, orchestra, and choir, which the Chinese also participate in. Singaporean troupes and performers are mentioned in the text as Singapore was previously part of colonial Malaya and played an important role in the development and dissemination of the Chinese performing arts. There continues to exist a constant exchange of musical styles and performers between the two countries in the 1990s.

### Growth of the Performing Arts before the Second World War

#### *Theatrical and Musical Activities of the Straits Chinese*

In the early twentieth century, the Straits Chinese formed their own musical and theatrical clubs which promoted syncretic forms incorporating Malay and Western elements. These clubs survived on the patronage of the rich Baba as well as on annual subscriptions and concerts. Practices were held at the residences of members. Performances were usually staged at theatre halls and amusement parks to collect money for charity.

These amateur clubs often presented stories from the Malay opera or *bangsawan* of which the Babas were great fans. When the Babas of Penang performed a Malay *bangsawan* play called *Princess Nilam Chahaya* at the Anglo-Chinese School Union Building in May 1918 to collect money for the China Flood Fund, a review article commented that even 'the Malay professionals present' admitted that 'the piece ... was fairly well performed' (*Straits Echo*, 28 May 1918). Other plays staged included *Jula Juli Bintang Tiga*, *Nyai Dasima*, and *A Merchant of Bagdad* by the Penang Nyo Nya Bangsawan (Tan Sooi Beng, 1993b) and *Gunufifah* by the Straits Chinese Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society of Singapore (*Times of Malaya*, 8 April, 14 April 1930).

The amateur clubs also presented their own plays which were centred around the stereotyped Baba household wherein rich husbands squandered money, stepmothers were strict, and mothers-in-law ill treated their daughters-in-law. Often men played women's roles. The distinctive feature of these plays, often referred to as *wayang peranakan*, is that Baba Malay was the main language used. Troupes which were good performed in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang where the Straits Chinese lived. One such troupe was the Oleh Oleh Party of Singapore (founded by Ong Guan Bok) which performed the comedy *Gong Knia Sai* (The Foolish Groom) and the moralistic story *The Prodigal Son* at the Wembley Park Hall, Penang in 1938 (*Straits Echo*, 15 April 1938). In 1940, it performed *Two Faithful Friends*, *Diamond Cut Diamond*, *Haunted House* and *Jealousy* at the Royal Theatre, Malacca, in aid of the Malayan Patriotic Fund (*Malacca Guardian*, 15 April 1940). The Merrilads of Singapore staged *The Fortune Teller* at the Drury Lane Theatre Hall, Penang, in aid of the Chung Ling High School in 1928 (*Straits Echo*, 7 April 1928).

Amateur clubs which encouraged the singing of *dondang sayang* were also set up by the Baba. *Dondang sayang* is an elaborate form of Malay poetry or *pantun* singing. Singers try to outwit each other using *pantun* to debate topics of interest to the Baba such as love, good deeds, business, fruits, or the sea. Again, the distinctive feature is that Baba Malay is used. The singers are accompanied by a violin, a harmonium, two Malay *rebana* and a Malay gong.<sup>2</sup> The Gunong Sayang Association of Singapore, which was set up in 1910, played an important role in

disseminating *dondang sayang* in the towns of Malaya. Members of the association not only performed *dondang sayang* but published collections of *dondang sayang pantun* such as *Panton Dondang Sayang Baba Baba Pranakan* which was compiled by Koh Hoon Teck and published in 1911 (cf. Tan, 1993: 45). Famous *dondang sayang* singers such as Gwee Peng Kwee were recorded by gramophone companies during the pre-Second World War period (Thomas, 1986).

Musical groups such as the Sunbeam Musical Party, Springdale Minstrels, Moonlight Minstrels, Golden Bell Minstrels, Mayfair Musical Party, and Gaylads which promoted other syncretic forms of Malay and Western songs also mushroomed, particularly in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore (*Straits Echo*, 28 July, 1931; *Times of Malaya*, 23 August 1934). These musical groups performed *kroncong* and Malay folk tunes in Baba Malay and minstrel songs in English in between acts of *wayang peranakan* plays and at special concerts and exhibitions.

The Straits Chinese were ardent exponents of *kroncong*, which originated in Batavia and comprises love songs which are sung to the accompaniment of the violin, flute, guitar, ukulele, banjo or mandolin, cello, and double bass. These songs were popularized in Malaya by Indonesian singers such as Dinah, Amelia, Doli, and Ahmad C. B. who performed in *bangsawan* shows in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Gramophone companies in Malaya such as Chap Singa recorded and disseminated songs by these *kroncong* singers. These companies promoted *kroncong* by organizing special stage shows and competitions at the amusement parks (Tan Sooi Beng, 1997).<sup>4</sup>

The Straits Chinese musical groups also performed Malay folk songs. It was reported that during the Chap Goh Mei celebrations in Penang in the 1920s and early 1930s, musical parties and 'gay minstrels' such as the Bintang Soeray Party and The Music and Recreation Party toured the town in motor cars and buses which were 'tastefully decorated and brilliantly lighted' playing 'kroncong and popular Malay airs' (*Times of Malaya*, 3 March 1926; *Straits Echo*, 18 February 1927, 26 January 1933). On the eve of Chinese New Year, these 'musicians [would] make short house-to-house visits ... for payment'. They played 'all sorts of musical airs such as Ta-ra-ra-Boom-d-ay, Bechrai Kasay, Track-tack-tack' (*Straits Echo*, 26 January 1933).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the Straits Chinese were influenced by the minstrel singers of the United States. Like the minstrel singers, members of Straits Chinese musical groups wore top hats, tail coats, and fancy trousers. They sang minstrel type songs which were accompanied by the violin, guitar, piccolo, banjo, and mandolin (*Straits Echo*, 22 April 1933). The saxophone, drum, and double bass were often included (*Malacca Guardian*, 6 February 1939).

Many of these Baba performances were so popular that performers were awarded medals by their fans. The Oleh Oleh Party received gold medals at their performances in Penang (*Straits Echo*, 15 April 1938) while the Malacca Amateurs received medals for their performance of the *Princess of Malacca* (*Malacca Guardian*, 25 November 1940).



Troupes which were excellent were also broadcasted. The Singapore Station of the British Malaya Broadcasting Co. broadcasted 'sketches such as *Belum Kahwin* (Before Marriage), *kroncong*, *rumba* and *blues*' presented by the *Oleh Oleh Party*. 'Mr. Ong Guan Bok, founder, prima donna and stage director ... was named the *Mei Lan Fang* of Malaya!' (*Malacca Guardian*, 14 November 1938).

The English-educated Straits Chinese élite also set up societies which promoted English literature, music, and plays. For instance, Lim Boon Keng established the Chinese Philomatic Society in 1897 which 'brought together a number of young men and some of the older folks for the regular study of English literature, Western music and the Chinese language.... A section of this society took up violin under the late Mr. Salzmann' (*Straits Echo*, 15 May 1935). The Amateur Drawing Association, Mutual Improvement Association, and Straits Chinese Reading Club presented 'selected scenes of Shakespeare'. The Straits Chinese Recreation Club presented a farce *A Race for a Dinner* in 1904 to collect money for repairing the roof of the club (*Straits Times*, 2 June 1932).

#### *Cultural Activities of the Chinese Immigrants*

##### CHINESE OPERA, PUPPET THEATRE, AND *KO-TAI*

In the mid-nineteenth century when large numbers of Chinese migrated to Malaya in search of employment and economic opportunities, various Chinese social and cultural institutions appeared on the Malayan scene. Unlike the *Baba* who created their own syncretic forms, these Chinese immigrants (*sinkheh*) brought with them their own music, dance, theatre, and martial arts. The Chinese immigrants adhered closely to, and were influenced by, cultural developments in China. In his book *Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* written in 1879, V. D. Vaughan commented that he witnessed Chinese theatrical performances which consisted of 'endless processions of soldiers, relieved occasionally by single combats of the most ludicrous nature. The dresses [were] gorgeous, long silk gowns covered with designs of dragons, flowers and quaint devices worked with gold thread.' Vaughan also noted that 'there [were] exhibitions of puppets or marionettes which [were] decked out like living actors, and [went] through the same plays' (Vaughan, 1971: 6). Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, Hainanese, and Shanghainese operas were staged in Malaya.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, troupes were brought in from China. These troupes performed in different parts of Malaya where Chinese immigrants resided.<sup>6</sup> They were professional, as the performers received income solely from the opera. They were paid professional fees by the proprietor and they lived and travelled together with the troupe. Children sometimes as young as 9-10 years of age were apprenticed to the proprietors of the troupes who brought them to Malaya (Ow, 1958). The owner of the Dong Kek Co. brought an

original group of players from China in the early twentieth century (Newell, 1961). The proprietor of the Sin Sai Hong Chinese Opera Co. of Singapore emigrated to Malaya and established his own opera company at the turn of the century (Perris, 1978). Many of the proprietors and performers never went back to China. Troupe proprietors also trained their own children as well as recruited child actors and actresses born in Malaya who were 'sold' to the local troupes because of extreme poverty. After apprenticeship, they were given monthly salaries.<sup>7</sup> Before immigration became restricted in the 1930s, there was close contact between players in China and Malaya and star performers were employed directly from China. Professional troupes from China continued to tour the country prior to the Second World War.

Even though they used different dialects, the various types of Chinese opera and puppet theatre groups shared many similar characteristics and functions. They performed on makeshift stages set up in open spaces or in temple grounds.<sup>8</sup> They used the same character types, which were identified by their facial features, colour, material, and decorations of costume and headwear. For instance, clowns had a white patch around the nose and red was worn by good characters of high rank. Stage emperors wore high golden head-dresses. Black beards portrayed middle age, grey showed someone verging on old age while white portrayed the very old.<sup>9</sup> The musical accompaniment was provided by basically two ensembles: the military ensemble (gongs, drums, percussion) and the civil ensemble (strings and wind). Although the exact instruments used in Teochew, Hokkien, and Cantonese operas varied, tune types were associated with certain dramatic situations.

Opera stories focused on the life and deeds of emperors, generals, and the aristocracy of China; romantic love between the scholar and the beauty; fairies and demons; and the conquests of barbaric tribes. Some of the popular Chinese opera stories were drawn from the novels *Sanguo Yanyi* (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms) and *Shuihu Zhuan* (The Water Margin) or folk tales such as Sam Pek Eng Tai and Madam White Snake. Whatever the story, the central ethos of opera was of a rigidly stratified society. Each person had to act according to his social position. Standards of social behaviour such as refinement, patience, bravery, devotion to duty, and moral virtue were extolled.

Besides entertaining the immigrants and imparting knowledge about social behaviour, the Chinese opera and puppet theatre were also performed as offerings to celebrate the birthdays of Chinese deities at temple festivals as well as during major festivals such as the seventh month Phor Tor (Hungry Ghosts) festival. At such festivals, the staging of an opera was always a community affair. It was as much an occasion for social gathering as it was an offering. During the performance, people moved about freely, chatted with their friends, or even ate at side stalls. The opera was a social and religious event. Women would dress up to attend, especially in rural villages. These troupes were paid by the temple association or by the community itself (*Straits Echo*, 21 September 1925, 18 September 1933; *Straits Times*, 1 and 31 August 1932).

The development of amusement parks such as the Hollywood Park, Great Eastern Park, and Fairyland in Kuala Lumpur, Fun and Frolic Park and Wembley Park in Penang, the Malacca City Park in Malacca, and the Great World Amusement Park in Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s helped to stimulate the development of the Chinese performing arts (*Straits Times*, 23 February, 13 April 1933).<sup>10</sup> The amusement park was a place where different types of entertainment such as theatrical performances, movies,<sup>11</sup> *ronggeng* parties, joy ride cars, dance halls,<sup>12</sup> and gambling stalls could be found. The urban community could also listen to gramophone records or live concerts broadcast by private British radio stations at the amusement parks.

For the Chinese community in towns, local opera troupes and troupes from China such as the Ritz Cantonese Opera, Sit Kok Sin Cantonese Opera, Foong Sen Nin Cantonese Opera, Eng Siew Choon Teochew Opera, Sua Gaik Hiang Teochew Opera, Keong Hoe Shanghai Opera, Sin Sai Thean Yean Hockchew Opera, and Nam Sin Kiot Sia Hylam Opera performed regularly at the amusement parks (*Straits Echo*, 10 February 1932; *Times of Malaya*, 21 September 1932, 12 September 1936, 1, 14, 18 July 1938). Popular opera artists such as Chung Yoke Siem and Teh Ke Thoe who had toured the United States and Australia were featured (*Times of Malaya*, 13 September 1932). To see the shows, one had to pay 15, 25, or 35 cents. If one could not afford it, one could watch from the sides.

Modern stage shows or *ko-tai* were also staged at the amusement parks. Catering to the urban Chinese in the 1930s, the *ko-tai* consisted of all-night performances of popular songs. To provide variety, excerpts of more serious Chinese plays such as *Jia* adapted from Ba Qin's novel *Family*, and *Lei Yu*, adapted from Cao Yu's novel *The Thunderstorm* were sometimes interspersed with popular songs (Tan Sooi Beng, 1984b). The *ko-tai* disseminated Chinese popular music which was also recorded by gramophone companies such as His Masters Voice, Columbia, and Pathe. Some of the troupes included Keat's Magical and Vaudeville Show which featured 'hula-hula dancing and magical arts', Cherry Blossom Music and Operatic Show which attracted 'capacity houses' with its 'excellent performance and beautiful girls', 'modern orchestra, singing and dancing' at the Fun and Frolic Park and the Mui-Fa Dancing and Singing Party at the Olympia Park (*Straits Echo*, 20 November 1933, 5 February 1934; *Times of Malaya*, 13 September, 1932).

Since its inception, the *ko-tai* had always been part of modern entertainment. In the pre-Second World War period, it appealed to the younger set and was an alternative to traditional entertainment like the Chinese opera. Songs by famous Chinese stars based in Shanghai (such as Zhou Xuan, Bai Guang, Li Xiang Lan, Yao Li, and Wu Ying Yin) which were considered popular at that time (but which are regarded as 'classics' today) were sung. These songs were often performed in jazz style and incorporated new dance rhythms such as the rumba and the tango. Performers were clad in the fashionable cheongsam, samfoo, or

even Western attire: pants and shirt for the men, blouse and skirt for the women. Such attire was completely different from the traditional Chinese costumes worn in the operas. The *ko-tai* was not associated with religious festivals then. As for the opera troupes, the *ko-tai* too was financed by a proprietor and managed by a manager (sometimes the proprietor himself).

#### CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF AMATEUR ORGANIZATIONS

While professional opera and *ko-tai* troupes toured the towns of Malaya, amateur cultural organizations, martial arts, and lion dance associations were set up in individual towns. These organizations were first organized as part of Chinese voluntary associations which took care of the needs of the Chinese immigrants. Later, other amateur cultural clubs attached to Chinese schools, old pupils' (alumni) associations, political parties, and religious groups were formed.

Compared to the Chinese opera and *ko-tai*, these amateur clubs depended on annual dues from members as well as donations from rich patrons and the public whenever performances were organized. Participants took part in these cultural activities as hobbies and were not full-time performers.

These Chinese cultural organizations provided places for Chinese immigrants to socialize, to entertain one another, to learn new cultural skills, and to take part in healthy physical training. For instance, Chinese immigrants used to get together after work on an *ad hoc* basis to improvise opera tunes as well as Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Khek folk tunes from the provinces where they originated. Known as *difang yinyue* (regional music), these ensembles usually consisted of bowed fiddles (*erhu*, *yehu*), plucked lutes (*pipa*, *yueqin*), transverse and vertical flutes (*dizi*, *xiao*), mouth organ (*sheng*) and percussion (*gu*, *luo*, *bo*, *ling*). It was reported that regular musical practices were held at the Penang Chinese Ladies Chin Woo Association, the Toi Sun Union, and other clubs (*Straits Echo*, 16 March 1935). Over time, the standard of performances must have improved. Consequently, in the 1930s, some of the groups such as the Hu Yew Seah Orchestra were even invited to play live concerts for private radio stations (*Straits Echo*, 13 November 1936).

Another popular club activity was martial arts. The immigrants got together to practise *taiji* or *gongfu*. Included among the activities of martial arts associations was the lion dance which was performed to bring good luck during Chinese festivities and at ceremonies marking the launch of new businesses. Members of lion dance clubs had to build up their body stamina to carry the lion head and to perform intricate movements. The northern lion was more realistic in form with fur on its body, tail, and feet. It liked to play around like a real animal and was known to perform acrobatics such as jumping on tables or walking on balls and see-saws. The southern lion was more abstract in form, colourful, and aggressive. The body consisted of a long piece of cloth, which

was painted black, red, white, green, and blue, with small bells attached to it. It had to climb up poles or jump up to consume the green vegetable to which the red packet (containing monetary donations) was attached.

In the big towns such as Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, drama societies were also set up by teachers and journalists who had migrated to Malaya. Many of the members were students. They performed one-act plays written by famous Chinese playwrights and sometimes plays written by members of their own societies (Ang, 1973). During the 1911 revolution period, drama troupes such as Fan Ai Pan (Altruistic Troupe), Nin To She (The Association of the Bell People), The Perak Welfare Troupe in Ipoh, Chen Wu She (the Anti-Opium Drama Troupe) in Kuala Lumpur, and the Ching Shih Pan (Troupe of Warning of the Age) in Penang were launched to propagate anti-Manchu sentiments and to promote a spirit of nationalism and reformism. Donations for these activities were also collected (Yen, 1976: 124-5). It was reported that during one of the plays, 'an opium smoker actually had his queue cut off on the stage in the course of the plot just to give the necessary impetus when during the early days of the Chinese Republic, there were many local *towkays* who could not decide as to whether they should part forever with their 'precious tow-changs' (*Straits Echo*, 16 March 1935). By the 1930s, local plays such as *Amongst the Green Trees* were written portraying the suffering of the Chinese as a result of unemployment during the recession. With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, about 30 drama groups were set up in Malaya and Singapore under the umbrella of The Amateur Theatre Society to educate the Chinese about the war, to promote patriotism to China, and to collect donations for war victims (Ang, 1973).

Amateur associations which promoted Chinese opera were also popular. In these associations, members learnt to perform the opera and to sing and play opera tunes from professional opera actors and actresses. The Perak Chinese Amateur Dramatic Association, which was started in 1903 in Ipoh, was patronized by tin miners of Ipoh such as the late Datuk Chung Wing Fatt who helped the association to buy expensive costumes (*Star*, 26 January 1987). Amateur clubs allowed respectable members of society to sing opera tunes without the stigma usually attached to professional actors and actresses. Other activities of Chinese amateur cultural associations included dancing, particularly the various folk and classical dances of China.

Besides promoting friendship and entertainment, these amateur clubs also played important roles in fund-raising for specific purposes. The Perak Chinese Amateur Dramatic Association staged Chinese operas to collect money in aid of the Anglo-Chinese School Building Fund, 'to provide relief to clerks thrown out of employment as a result of the depression', and to help flood victims of Canton (*Times of Malaya*, 28 March 1913, 18 June 1932; *Star*, 26 January 1987). The Penang Mutual Improvement Association or Kwong Hock Khu staged Chinese

dramas in aid of the Raffles College Fund, the Red Cross, and the China Flood Relief Fund (*Straits Echo*, 16 March 1935).

### **The Search for New Directions in the Chinese Performing Arts, 1945-1970**

With the onset of the Japanese Occupation in 1942, most performance activities came to a standstill. As thousands of urban dwellers fled to the countryside to escape Japanese repression and food shortages, Straits Chinese and Chinese amateur cultural associations were closed. Since communication between China and Malaya was interrupted, opera troupes from China stopped touring Malaya. Most local troupes were closed while a few performed for the Japanese, for which apparently they were not paid. There was a general decline in the Chinese operatic performances in Malaya.

#### *Decline of Straits Chinese Cultural Activities: Opera and Ko-tai*

Despite the end of the Occupation in 1945, Baba cultural activities, the Chinese opera, and the *ko-tai*, continued to decline as Malaya experienced a breakdown of political and economic stability due to food shortages, widespread unemployment, and labour unrest. The 12-year communist insurrection against the British beginning in 1948 contributed to the further decline of the Chinese performing arts. During the Emergency, the British imposed censorship on all performances. Before performances could be staged, permission had first to be obtained. Police checks on actors and audiences occurred frequently. Compared to the pre-war period when the troupes were only required to obtain licences from the Sanitary Board and to pay a nominal sum of money for each performance, the situation during the Emergency was indeed restrictive.

Although the Emergency did not officially come to an end until 1960, the communists were essentially defeated by the mid-1950s. However, the return of more peaceful times did not see the revival of the Chinese performing arts. The Chinese opera continued to decline in the 1950s and 1960s. It was reported that audiences at amusement park theatre halls were small in number and consisted mainly of housewives who brought their children, grandmothers, domestic servants, and a handful of businessmen and their wives who came to watch their favourite actors and actresses. Each troupe could only stay at a park for a week because of the lack of patronage (Ow, 1958: Chapter 6). Due to financial difficulties, many troupes had to close down. They could not earn enough to support their performers.<sup>13</sup>

Chinese opera troupes could not survive as they could not attract new recruits. It was common knowledge that opera performers could no longer survive on acting alone. Apprenticeship was difficult. The seven to eight years of training required were long, demanding, and financially not rewarding.<sup>14</sup> A child apprentice was not allowed to go home and

could only meet with his/her family three or four times a year. Consequently, many troupes began to rely on members of their own family for actors and actresses (Perris, 1978; *Star*, 17 August 1997).

With the change of regime in China in 1949, the Malayan government prohibited cultural exchanges. Troupes and star performers from China were no longer allowed to tour Malaya as they used to before the war. Although there were some troupes which came from Hong Kong and Taiwan to perform in the amusement parks, there was a shortage of new scripts and performances to emulate.

Moreover, Chinese opera had to compete with new forms of entertainment such as the movies, radio, nightclubs, and later television and discos as well. The Chinese opera became an anachronism for the younger generation who could no longer understand or appreciate the stylized language, symbolism, and feudal stories used by the opera troupes.

With the closure of the amusement parks themselves in the late 1960s due to poor business, the opera troupes were reduced to doing irregular performances in villages and small towns mainly for temple celebrations and festivals. Chinese operas were performed only to appease and honour the deities. Audiences consisted of the very old and the very young.

Even the *ko-tai* could not compete with the new types of entertainment made available. The younger generation preferred to visit nightclubs, listen to the radio, or watch movies and television. With the introduction of cheap cassettes and tape recorders in the 1960s, popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan (featuring songs by singers such as Lin Dai, Bai Lei, and Zeng Xiu Yi) was disseminated in Malaysia and attracted the attention of the young. As the amusement parks closed down, the *ko-tai* singers who used to perform at the parks were retrenched and had to turn to other ways of earning a living.

#### *Amateur Cultural Organizations: Art for the People versus Art for Art's Sake*

Although the Chinese opera and the *ko-tai* had declined, the Chinese cultural associations, ironically, consolidated during the 1950s and 1960s. This was because Chinese cultural associations played important social functions, such as providing opportunities for Chinese youths (especially lower) class youths to socialize, to meet others with similar interests, to learn to play musical instruments without having to pay exorbitant fees, and to gain experience in organizing musical and social activities.

However, a split along political lines occurred. These cultural associations identified themselves either as organizations promoting 'art for the people' or 'art for art's sake'. In general, those groups which advocated 'art for the people' promoted art which portrayed social reality with the aim of inculcating political and social values among the performers as well as among the audiences. Music, dance, and drama depicting the lives of plantation workers, fishermen, and the working class were

composed and presented by these groups to raise the social consciousness of the audience.

These groups were generally 'left' in orientation and comprised student drama and dance clubs, old boys' (alumni) associations, and workers' cultural troupes. They were influenced by the new cultural forms in China such as the dance-theatre, *The East is Red*. They also promoted folk dances related to some aspect of work, such as rice planting, tea-picking, and fishing, or depicting the lives of the minority groups in China which were more easily understood by the audience and technically less demanding for the dancer. Dance and music were emphasized as these forms were more accessible to the performers and audiences.

Although dance and music scores continued to be imported from China, local groups began composing their own dances and music with Malaysian content too. They promoted group effort and collective conceptualization and production of dance-theatre and music works. These works were often based on fieldwork where dancers spent time in pineapple plantations or fishing villages to obtain a first-hand account of everyday life. After fieldwork, the dance-theatre was conceived, discussed, and criticized by the group. This was a long process. Music was then composed to accompany the dance. For most 'art for the people' groups, the process of creation was more important than the aesthetic product (Chua, 1984).

On the other hand, those who advocated 'art for art's sake' viewed art essentially as a form of artistic and aesthetic activity. The 'art for art's sake' groups were dominated by teachers and choreographers who conceptualized and choreographed the creative pieces. These groups wanted to promote interest in the arts among the public and to raise the quality of the Chinese performing arts. Many of the groups were led by musicians and dancers who were trained in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Britain. Music groups such as the Penang Philharmonic Society (formed in 1961 by Khaw Guan Liang, a returnee from Hong Kong) and the Penang Arts Chorus (formed in 1965 by a group of cultural enthusiasts) featured soloists and choirs singing art songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan which were light-hearted, optimistic, and often based on love. Themes on patriotism and development were emphasized by local art song composers such as Khaw Guan Liang (*Star*, 10 April 1986; *NST*, 15 April 1985).

The 'art for art's sake' groups also promoted and organized singing and instrumental competitions to raise the standard of performances. For instance, the annual Malaysian Arts Song Singing Competition was first started in 1967 (*NST*, 15 April 1985). A Chinese drama competition which was open to all Malaysians and Singaporeans was started in the 1960s and was sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of Culture (Ang, 1973).

Despite the differences between the 'art for art's sake' and the 'art for the people' groups, both sides promoted 'healthy culture' (*jiankang wenhua*) as opposed to 'yellow culture' (*huangse wenhua*) and started composing their own creative compositions. Debate about the direction of the Chinese performing arts occurred between the two groups.



In the 1960s, both groups adopted the modern Chinese orchestra which had become the national orchestra of China, and which had been popularized in Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>15</sup> Chinese musicians from Malaysia who had studied in Hong Kong were influenced by the new sounds of the modern Chinese orchestra which combined both Western and Chinese instruments, tone colour, intonation, and texture. The musicians brought the scores, tapes, and recordings of new pieces back to Malaysia. Chinese associations previously performing *difang yinyue* began to add new improved instruments imported from Hong Kong and called themselves *huayue tuan* for the first time. Using scores imported from China and Hong Kong, they began to play the repertoire of the modern Chinese orchestra. The Dejiao Hui (Moral Uplifting Society) in Alor Setar started its *huayue tuan* in 1964, the Penang Philharmonic Society in 1971, and the Jit Sin Secondary School Chinese Musical Instrument Society in Seberang Perai was initiated in 1968. New and larger sounds like the ones heard on the records and tapes from China and Hong Kong were reproduced. This stirred excitement among many Chinese who were attracted to join the orchestras.

By the late 1970s, the political distinction between Chinese cultural groups became less important. Many of the 'art for the people' organizations found it increasingly difficult to function. It was hard to organize performances as police permits were required and difficult to acquire. Synopses of dance, drama, and musical pieces, and the names of performers had to be submitted to, and approved by, the police before each performance. Often police permits were only given at the last minute or on the eve of the performances, making it very difficult for the organizers to print the programmes and to publicize the concerts adequately. There were occasions when shows had to be cancelled because the number of musical and dance pieces allowed to be performed had been cut by half or more, or because other items were deemed 'subversive' by the authorities. Many groups tried to overcome this problem by preparing twice the number of songs, dances, and musical pieces for each performance.

Some cultural activists of the 'art for the people' organizations were also arrested in the early 1970s because of their alleged political ties with the underground Communist Party of Malaya. For example, some performers of the Chinese Language Societies in the University of Malaya and the University of Science Malaysia were arrested for alleged links with the underground Communist Party of Malaya. The crackdown and harsh political climate persuaded some individuals to join the 'art for art's sake' associations instead. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the cultural revolution in China itself and the new influence of video culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan on the younger generation, both of which led to a general decline in leftist influences, some 'art for the people' groups were transformed into 'art for art's sake' associations.

### Ethnic Consciousness and Revival of the Performing Arts in the 1970s and 1980s

The Chinese performing arts experienced a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. This was mainly a result of the rise of ethnic consciousness and the implementation of new policies by the government following the 1969 racial riots. As a result of the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1971, an affirmative programme in favour of the bumiputra, the Malaysian Chinese became even more aware of their separate identity. Traditional cultural emblems such as the Chinese opera, lion dance, *huayue tuan*, and other Chinese performing arts experienced a revival. Chinese cultural distinctiveness was stressed (Tan Sooi Beng, 1988).

Furthermore, the national culture policy, which was perceived by the Chinese cultural groups as assimilationist, also facilitated the coming together of members of different groups in a common effort to revive the Chinese arts and to assert their identity. To many, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's statement in 1982 that 'unity and stability should be built and nurtured through one culture, that is the national culture based on the culture of the indigenous people of Malaysia' (NST, 19 December 1982) was assimilationist and would lead to the demise of those cultures the government identified as 'non-indigenous'.

Consequently, the number of Chinese operatic performances increased considerably, especially during major Chinese festivals such as the Phor Tor (The Hungry Ghosts Festival). As local troupes were few in number and most of them did not live up to the expectations of the older opera audience, entire Teochew opera troupes were 'imported' from Thailand, while individual Hong Kong actors and actresses were contracted to perform with local Cantonese troupes. Troupes from Singapore were also brought into Malaysia. They were wealthier and could afford new and lavish costumes which audiences looked for. In fact, imported troupes were always regarded as being of a higher status; their performances, therefore, were seen as 'more appropriate' offerings to the deities (Tan Sooi Beng, 1980, 1988).

Contemporary devices were introduced by local opera troupes to cater to the changing tastes and interests of the young and to attract them to the opera. The Cantonese opera added Western instruments such as the saxophone, violin, and guitar to its Chinese ensemble. The glove puppet theatre often included the bass guitar. The Hokkien opera offered one- to two-hour renditions of Western and Chinese popular songs by Western-attired singers, accompanied by electric bands, before the opera proper began. Innovations introduced into the Hokkien opera included using colloquial dialect, expanding comedy sequences and fighting scenes, and dressing up the stars in flashy costumes.<sup>16</sup>

In the northern states of Penang, Kedah, and Perlis, the *ko-tai* was given a new lease of life in the 1970s by an entrepreneur and performer called Lau Ping. By declaring that the purpose of the *ko-tai* was purely one of entertaining the deities (and, by extension, the public), Lau Ping set about introducing the latest popular songs and comic sketches

portraying urban social issues. In effect, Lau Ping's troupe linked the modern theatre form to religious festivals for the first time. Consequently, the *ko-tai* which was performed during religious festivals began attracting large crowds, particularly the young. In turn, the audiences for the opera which alternated with the *ko-tai* during these festivals (as in the case of the Phor Tor celebration) also increased in number (Tan Sooi Beng, 1984b).

With large crowds of Chinese gathered, Chinese politicians, educationists, and cultural activists naturally turned up at the Chinese festivals, especially the Phor Tor. The celebrations became occasions for them to address the perennial issues of Chinese education and culture. Ostensibly involved in raising funds for Chinese schools and other charitable projects (such as the Lam Wah Ee Hospital), they would also highlight the plight of Chinese schools, which received minimal government financial support, and the predicament of Chinese culture in Malaysia, which was excluded from consideration as part of official national culture. Although public rallies and meetings to discuss these issues would rarely be allowed by the government, the issues of Chinese education and culture were raised repeatedly and openly amidst the *ko-tai* and opera performance in various parts of Penang during the seventh lunar month<sup>17</sup> (Tan Sooi Beng, 1988).

A greater sense of Chinese identity and unity was evident. Consequently, cultural groups which were different in political orientation began to highlight common objectives: 'healthy culture' as opposed to 'yellow culture' (especially since Hong Kong Cantonese serials and Cantopop had become popular); Chinese culture generally; and close ties among their members. These cultural groups often shared scores and musicians and even put on joint productions. Such joint productions provided the opportunity for members of different cultural groups to interact, especially during the period of preparation for the concert when practices were held almost every day.

Performances staged by Chinese cultural associations in the 1970s and 1980s were seen by some as celebrations of ethnicity. Audiences comprised only Chinese. Mandarin was used as the sole language of communication. Performances were always well attended even though they were not spectacular events. Performers did not wear expensive or glamorous costumes, while musicians wore normal attire. Mistakes frequently appeared as new members who were still not adept in the instruments were allowed to perform. Dancers sometimes slipped and forgot their steps. But the audience, apparently, did not expect a polished performance. They came more to support the efforts of the youths who were promoting Chinese culture. They also came to enjoy an evening of Chinese music and dances put together through self-help effort despite the lack of government support. Those who could afford gave generous donations to help maintain the orchestras and the dancers. By buying tickets, audiences also contributed to social welfare and building fund projects of hospitals and schools. But above all, they came together to express their solidarity and identity.<sup>18</sup>

Aware of the need for local relevance, the Chinese cultural groups consciously incorporated Malay and Indian folk music and dances as well as Malaysian themes into their drama performances. Although the Chinese orchestra's repertoire reflected the contemporary trends in mainland Chinese music, local pieces also emerged. Some folk-songs such as 'Tanah Air Ku', 'Air Didik', and 'Inang Cina' (arranged by Lee Soo Sheng of Alor Star) and new compositions incorporating local dance rhythms like the Malay dance based on the *ronggeng* rhythm (by Saw Yeong Chin of Penang) were played. Conscious efforts were made to learn Malay, Indian, and Indonesian dances. Sketches with local social themes such as growing materialism and increasing consumerism in Malaysian society were promoted. For example, Qiong Qing's play *Lucky Draw*, performed in Penang in 1981, satirizes the consumer penchant for this kind of competition. A poor city dweller drinks soft drinks, and eats instant noodles every day in order to collect enough tokens to take part in the lucky draw of a supermarket. What did he win in the end? Gastritis!

Chinese cultural activists also organized their own competitions to improve the standard of Chinese culture. The annual Singapore-Malaysian Art Song Competition selected representatives for the South-East Asian Art Song Contest held in Hong Kong (*NST*, 15 April 1985; *Star*, 10 April 1986). Chinese cultural organizations jointly organized the first Festival of Dance in 1978, which was actually a dance competition. Discussions about the direction of Chinese dance in Malaysia were also held. Since then, a dance competition has been held annually at different venues in Malaysia (Chua, 1993).

National lion dance competitions were organized by the Malaysian Federation of Chinese Martial Arts Associations. When the first competition was held in 1983, 39 troupes took part. In 1984, 102 troupes challenged one another. By 1986, 300 troupes from different states competed for honours (*Star*, 22 January 1986).

State-wide associations like the Penang Chinese Martial Arts Association (with about 40 lion and dragon dance troupes as members) were also formed in order to promote the sharing of musicians, performers, and skills. Such organizations offer the troupes some form of protection against unnecessary harassment by the authorities, especially when applying for performance permits. When necessary, a state-wide organization could protest more effectively, too. For example, in 1985, the Penang Chinese Martial Arts Association pulled out about 40 troupes and boycotted the Chingay procession at the Pesta Pulau Pinang (Penang Festival) when its representative was not included in the Pesta subcommittee, subsequent to which various restrictions were imposed in the performance of the lion dance (*NST*, 27 December 1985). Likewise, when then Home Affairs Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie declared that the lion dance be changed to a 'tiger dance' ('the tiger, unlike the lion is found in Malaysia') accompanied by music from the gong, flute, *tabla*, or gamelan, a widespread protest rose from martial arts associations and

Chinese cultural organizations in various parts of the country (Ghazalie Shafie 1979: 7).<sup>19</sup>

### **Cultural Liberalization, Transnationalism, Professionalism, and Commercialization in the 1990s**

Compared to the 1970s and early 1980s, the question of national culture seems to create less controversy and has become less politicized in the 1990s. In fact, there appears to have been a liberalization of government policies towards non-Malay language, education, and culture in the 1990s (Loh, 1997). There are more Chinese language programmes on privatized television channels and the satellite network ASTRO. Cultural performances during National Day celebrations, Visit Malaysia campaigns, and the Malaysian Festival of Arts feature multi-ethnic dances and music. Tourism brochures promote them, too, to attract more tourists. Mahathir himself has campaigned for a Bangsa Malaysia which emphasizes multiculturalism. In realizing a Bangsa Malaysia, he clarified that one 'does not have to give up one's culture, religion or language' (*Star*, 11 September 1995).

Additionally, with the development of new types of communication such as satellite television, internet, video, karaoke, and compact and laser discs, a type of Chinese transnational culture has spread quickly and dominated most parts of Malaysia in the 1990s as it has in other parts of the world. Video serial programmes such as 'The Last Sakura and Bodyguards—Jade Dolls' and video clips featuring popular songs by transnational stars such as Alan Tam and Jackie Cheung from Hong Kong and Deng Li Jun from Taiwan mesmerize audiences.<sup>20</sup> Live pop and rock concerts which feature these transnational stars attract thousands of youths. Although Chinese video serials and video clips of pop stars were already available in the late 1970s and 1980s, it is in the 1990s that Chinese transnational culture has spread rapidly in Malaysia. This is mainly a result of mass advertising campaigns, diverse catalogues, and the setting up of distribution outlets by transnational companies throughout the world. Satellite broadcasts, internet information, and video equipment have also become more readily accessible in the 1990s. In fact, Malaysia has become a major producer of Chinese transnational culture. Malaysian companies like HVD Entertainment and Solid Gold produce and distribute video serials in Malaysia and overseas. Cantonese serials such as 'Juara—The Champion' (with scenes of Proton Saga cars in Kuala Lumpur) shown on Malaysian television,<sup>21</sup> and recordings of pop songs by Malaysian singers such as Eric Moo and Wu Qi Xian are popular in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore as well as in other parts of the world where there are large Chinese communities. Malaysian Chinese participate in a new 'travelling' transnational culture which is shared by Chinese all over the world (Yang, 1997).

It is within such a context of cultural liberalization and transnationalism

that we discuss developments in the Chinese performing arts in the 1990s.

### *Responses to Modernity and Transnationalism*

The Chinese opera and puppet theatre continue to be performed in temple rituals and major festivals because the deities must be appeased and thanked, especially by businessmen. As there are few local Chinese professional opera troupes, foreign opera troupes continue to be imported as before. However, as the younger generation are attracted to Chinese transnational culture, *ko-tai* which present pop songs and karaoke sessions are often staged. Youths are drawn to the religious festivals as they can now sing the latest Chinese hits from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and other parts of the world by participating in the karaoke sessions. Sometimes, when Chinese opera and *ko-tai* troupes are not available, video clips of Chinese opera stories followed by those of transnational pop stars and other movies are shown during religious festivals.

There has also occurred a renewed interest and a general revival of Chinese 'tradition', especially among a growing middle class of English- and Malay-educated professionals, businessmen, and educators who are responding to modernity<sup>22</sup> and the global transnational culture dominating the country. By returning to the past and to tradition, cultural enthusiasts in Malaysia are often looking for the roots they have lost and are asserting their identity.

The formation of the Kuala Lumpur Chinese Opera Club (KLCOC) in 1993 under the direction of Madam Choi Him Heong, a professional Chinese opera actress, is a case in point. Members comprise secretaries, housewives, business executives, and other professionals between 20 and 50 years. Most did not know much about the opera when they first joined. Most are English-educated and cannot read or write Mandarin. They learn by rote and depend on romanized versions of the scripts of plays performed. In order to attract the English-educated younger generation as well as the non-Chinese audiences, this group presents excerpts from well-known operas in Chinese, English, or Malay in their performances. It also offers well-known legends from Malaysia such as Princess Hang Li Po. During performances, projection screens which provide translations of the dialogue are displayed. Demonstrations which educate audiences about make-up, music, symbolism of movements, and costumes are held. The KLCOC performs in shopping complexes as well so that it can reach a wider audience (*Star*, 1 March 1996, 23 February 1997; *NST*, 16 March 1995).

Music centres which teach the playing of Chinese musical instruments have also been set up. Parents from middle-class families who do not know Mandarin often send their children to these centres to learn Chinese musical instruments such as the *guzheng*, *pipa*, *yangqin*, or the *erhu*.

The Peranakan community has also reasserted its distinctive identity.

In recent times, a series of exhibitions and seminars have been held. In December 1988, the Peranakan community in Penang organized a Minggu Warisan Peranakan including a seminar on the Heritage of the Peranakan Cina. In December 1989, Malacca hosted the 1989 Baba Convention. The 1990 Convention was held in Singapore. In December 1991, Penang again organized the Baba Convention (Tan Chee Beng, 1993: Preface, Pakir, 1991).<sup>23</sup> Discussions on Nyonya cooking, crafts, embroidery, and *wayang* were held at these conventions. The Gunong Sayang Association of Singapore was invited to stage a comedy skit *Ang Potu* in Penang in 1991. *Dondang sayang* and other songs were sung by veteran singers during interludes (*Star*, 6 March 1991). Peranakan culture is also featured in modern theatre such as Stella Kon's *Emily of Emerald Hill*—a drama about the life of a Nyonya matriarch—under the direction of Chin San Sooi. Weekly television series based on the daily lives of the Peranakan family, such as *Kadir dan Kini*, were also shown on television in the late 1980s and early 1990s (*NST* 22 and 24 June 1986).

*Professionalism and New Malaysian  
Compositions in Music and Dance*

In the 1990s, Chinese cultural groups have emphasized that the promotion and preservation of the Chinese performing arts must go hand in hand with upgrading the standard of performances. Improving the quality of performances will also raise the status of the Chinese performing arts and attract bigger audiences in Malaysia. For instance, the DA MA ensemble (or Malaysian Chinese Ensemble) was formed in 1993 by Khor Seng Chew (who was trained in England as a guitarist) comprising key players from various cultural organizations in Kuala Lumpur. Many of the players are professionals who teach and perform Chinese music full time. The group plays challenging pieces which are not performed by other cultural associations that have to cater to musicians with different levels of skills. DA MA also tries to popularize Chinese music to non-Mandarin speaking Chinese and non-Chinese audiences by playing at alternative venues such as restaurants and hotels, as well as at temples and concert halls (*Star*, 4 May, 22 July 1994).

Efforts have also been made to promote and upgrade the level of music performance in music centres and associations through the introduction of examinations on Chinese musical instruments. The Malaysian Institute of Art in Kuala Lumpur was the first to initiate such examinations in Malaysia. Each year lecturers from the Xi'an Conservatory of Music in China examine Malaysian students who play the *erhu*, *dizi*, *guzheng*, *yangqin* and *pipa* at the Institute. The examinations also help to 'standardise the music syllabus and teaching materials' (*Star*, 6 August 1993).

Chinese cultural groups which emphasize professionalism also realize that in order to attract bigger audiences, they have to be less dependent on China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan for new compositions. DA MA has

expanded the boundaries of Chinese music by experimenting with Western chamber musicians (The Penang Trio), classical Indian instrumentalist (Samuel Das), and jazz fusion musicians (Lewis Pragasam and John Kaizan Neptune). DA MA has also commissioned local composers to compose for them (*NST*, 14 July 1994; *Star*, 22 July 1994). Other Chinese orchestras play Malay folk-songs such as 'Burung Kakak Tua', 'Kenek-kenek Udang', 'Usik', 'Chan Mali Chan', and 'Potong Padi'. 'Potong Padi' combines the Malay *kompang* with Chinese instruments.

Chinese dance groups are also stressing professionalism in the 1990s. They explore new ways to express their feelings and ideas through Chinese, Malay, and other non-Chinese sources. New choreographers, especially those who have been trained overseas, combine ballet, modern, and Chinese dance to create new works with Malaysian themes. Choo Tee Kuang (who started the Penang Dance Station) used modern and Chinese dance movements to explore the pressures of city life on man in 'A World in a City'. Leong Wai Kein of the Kwangsi Association of Kuala Lumpur has combined Chinese, Malay, and modern dance movements and music in 'The Romantic Batik'. Mew Chang Tsing, also of the Kwangsi Association, employs ballet, modern, and Chinese dance in 'Really?' to make a statement about environmental destruction. In her piece 'But I'm Pregnant', Mew makes a statement about abandoned babies, incest, and rape (*Star*, 27 September 1992, 29 July 1994; *NST*, 14 July 1990, 23 June 1994). The Kwangsi Association has also invited non-Mandarin speaking and even non-Chinese choreographers to work with them. Marion de Cruz of the Five Arts Centre choreographed the dance 'Untitled' based on a poem by the Indonesian poet Taufiq Ismail and set to Balinese music for the Kwangsi Association (*NST*, 24 September 1992).<sup>24</sup>

Both Chinese music and dance performances have been able to attract audiences among Chinese and non-Chinese in the 1990s. This is because of the development of professionalism, alternative performance venues, and innovation in new compositions which combine Chinese, Malay, and Western elements and themes. More importantly, audiences do not need to know Mandarin to appreciate music and dance.

Although new local compositions are being created and staged, Chinese performing artists continue to be inspired by music and dance troupes from China which have been allowed to tour Malaysia in recent times with the establishment of ties between China and Malaysia. Concerts which are of high quality have helped to raise the status of Chinese music and dance and have stimulated interest among the Chinese community in Malaysia. As a result, more youths have been encouraged to actively learn and master Chinese instruments and dance.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Spectacles and Packaged Pastiche Forms*

As a result of linking tourism with the arts and combining both under the portfolio of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, many art forms, including the Chinese performing arts, have been encouraged by



the Ministry to attract tourists. Packaged pastiche art forms have been developed and have become the staples for the tourism industry and state-related ceremonies. The Chinese New Year Open House organized by the hotels of Penang at the Khoo Kongsi in 1993 is an example of this pastiche packaging. Tourists and guests were greeted by a spectacle of 60 drummers lining the street leading to the Khoo Kongsi, followed by a cultural show featuring Chinese lion and dragon dances, music, dance, and acrobatic acts. Present, too, were a Chinese calligrapher, a clog maker, a coconut carver, a fortune teller, and some hawkers stalls (*Star*, 12 February 1993).

Additionally, certain 'traditional' art forms which are patronized by the élites and which receive sponsorship from the government have been re-created grandiosely and often in great contrast to their earlier forms. State groups compete to create the largest lion dance troupes consisting of over 100 hundred lions or the longest dragons for performances at stadiums during Chinese New Year or other functions. Big versions of the 24 Season Drums perform during the annual Chingay Festival organized by the state government of Penang to attract tourists to the state. These drum ensembles consist of over 100 big drums which provide booming sounds imitating the movement of the sky and earth. These are accompanied by spectacular techniques and kung fu movements (*Nanyang Siang Pao*, 23 December 1996).

In 1997, the biggest drum in the world measuring 3.3 metres in diameter and 2.1 metres in height and weighing 950 kilograms was created and used in performances in various parts of Malaysia. The drum's size surpassed the largest listed in the Guinness Book of Records.<sup>26</sup> Made by Malaysians in Kuala Lumpur with the help of a master drummer from China, this drum was too large to move into the hall in some towns where performances were to take place and had to be placed outside. The concerts also featured the Zhangzhou drummers of China and were organized by Kenn Kenn Centre of Culture and Education, Malaysia Youth Council, Young Malaysians Movement, and Malaysia Xiang Lian Youth Association with the co-operation of the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry and the Youth and Sports Ministry (*Star*, 19 and 29 August 1997).

### Conclusion

Heterogeneity in the Chinese performing arts expresses the varieties of Chinese identity which are re-created and changed as the Chinese interact and respond to their environment in Malaysia. In the early twentieth century, the Baba set up their own clubs which presented *wayang peranakan*, *dondang sayang*, *kroncong*, Malay folk songs, and minstrel songs. The Chinese immigrants, who did not have to deal then with the British or the Malays, continued to have links with China and were influenced by cultural developments there. Chinese opera and *ko-tai* troupes toured Malaya and provided entertainment. The Chinese immigrants also started their own cultural associations and performed

music, dance, and drama which had continuities with those of China.

During the post-war and post-independence era, with the severing of ties with China (which had turned communist) and as the Chinese inhabitants became Malaysian citizens, more local compositions, particularly in music and dance, were created. However, the Chinese were still inspired and influenced by the arts of China and, more directly, those of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Just as in those places, culture was influenced by political orientations and considerations. So too in Malaysia, cultural associations were split into groups characterized as advocating 'art for art's sake' or 'art for the people'. Nevertheless, the search for a Malaysian Chinese cultural identity stimulated debates between the two groups. This period also saw the decline of the Chinese opera, the *ko-tai*, and the Baba cultural activities which could not compete with new forms of popular entertainment that had emerged.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as a result of heightening ethnic consciousness brought about by the introduction of the NEP and in particular the National Culture Policy, which was interpreted by many Chinese groups as an attempt by the government to curb non-Malay cultures and to assimilate the Chinese, cultural groups began to consolidate and to stress their culture as symbols of ethnicity. There was a revival of Chinese opera, *ko-tai*, lion dance, and Chinese music and dance promoted by cultural associations.

In the 1990s, with the liberalization of cultural policies and the depoliticization of the question of national culture, Chinese cultural groups have concentrated on upgrading the quality of performances to raise the status of the performing arts. Professional groups in music and dance have emerged. These groups realize that in order to be relevant, they have to assert their own Malaysian Chinese identity. Consequently, they are less dependent on China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan for new compositions in music and dance. Local dancers and composers try to incorporate Malay, Indian, and other non-Chinese elements and techniques into their works.

Finally, there appears to be a new Chinese transnational identity emerging in Malaysia with the influx of Chinese transnational culture disseminated through new forms of communication such as satellite television, the internet, video, and laser discs. Malaysian Chinese watch Chinese language videos and television programmes and listen to pop artists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia whose songs are also distributed to other parts of the world. At the same time, middle-class and elite Chinese are recreating 'traditional' culture in the form of pastiche packages and spectacles as they respond to this Chinese transnational culture, modernity, and the tourism industry.

1. I would like to thank the following musicians whom I interviewed: Ooi Ah Bee of the Guat Poh Hong Puppet Theatre; Khaw Guan Liang, adviser to the Chinese Orchestra and Choir and conductor of the Philharmonic Society, Penang; Lee Soo Sheng, Vice President

of Keat Hwa Association and conductor of the De Jiao Hui Chinese Orchestra, Alor Star; Leow Kooi Hua, member of the Philharmonic Society, Penang and Han Chiang Old Pupils' Association, Penang; Ng Su Kung, conductor of the Jit Sin Old Boy's Association Chinese Orchestra, Butterworth, Penang; Saw Yeong Chin, conductor of the Philharmonic Chinese Orchestra, Penang; Tan Yeow Teik, member of the Hui Yin Se, Penang; Committee members of Pei Fong Old Boys' Association, Malacca; Tung Gark Hong, Vocal Instructress of the Philharmonic Society, Penang; Baba Gwee Thian Hock, member of Gunung Sayang Association and producer of *wayang peranakan*, Singapore; and Baba William Tan, *dondang sayang* singer and *wayang peranakan* performer, Singapore. I also thank Loh Kok Wah, Tan Chee-Beng, and Tan Liok Ee for their critical comments.

2. It is interesting to note that Malay *ronggeng* groups are often invited to perform at Baba weddings and to honour Da-tok-kong (see above) in Penang. These *ronggeng* groups often include Baba singers. *Dondang sayang*, *kroncong*, *asli*, *joget*, *masri*, and *zapin* songs are performed.

3. *Kroncong* is believed to have originated in the sixteenth-century music of the Portuguese colonies in the Moluccas and Batavia (Kornhauser, 1978). They were first sung by lower-class Eurasians called 'crocodiles' who wandered around the towns of Batavia at night to serenade women. Their songs were accompanied by the ukulele and the small guitar. In the late nineteenth century, the *kroncong* was incorporated into the *komedi stambul* of Surabaya. Other instruments such as the violin, guitar, and tambourine were added. *Kroncong* was introduced into *bangsawan* performances in Malaya in the early twentieth century. The form was popular among both Malays and Peranakan. By the 1930s, the modern idiom and instrumentation of *kroncong* became fixed. The ensemble comprised one or two singers, melodic instruments (violin, flute, guitar), rhythmic instruments (cello, ukulele and banjo or mandolin), and the double bass.

4. Recording companies which were active in Malaya in the early twentieth century included His Masters' Voice (The Gramophone Co.), Columbia, Pathe, Odeon, Chap Kuching, and Chap Singa. Chap Kuching and Chap Singa were both local recording companies set up by local dealers of The Gramophone Co. These recording companies recorded songs popularized through the *bangsawan* stage. Performers were brought to Singapore where they were recorded. The wax matrices were then sent to India for processing. For a detailed account of the recording companies and recordings made prior to the Second World War, see Tan Sooi Beng (1997).

5. Songs performed by the Oleh Oleh Party in Penang included 'Lagu Sri Katong, Lagu Ayer Debar, Lagu Dedok Tersenyum, Stamboul Solo, Swa Sway, I am Happy when you are Happy, Kronchong Ayer Laut, Lagu Bunga Kermeia, Jazz Babies and Lagu Naga Mas, and Spanish Dance' (*Straits Echo*, 17 April 1933).

6. See Mackerras (1975) for a history of the development of Chinese opera in China. The Chinese opera was performed both for the entertainment of ordinary people as well as for the aristocracy.

7. As was the system commonly practised in China, the parents of child apprentices received a certain sum of money as advances from the proprietor of the troupe. This was a loan deductible from the children's wages. The apprenticeship usually lasted five to eight years. During that period of time, the proprietor dressed, fed, clothed, and taught the child. The parents were only allowed to see their children three to four days each year and the children were not allowed to go home. According to Ow (1958: 63-90), in the 1950s, parents received \$200 to \$500 as advances and child apprentices were paid \$10-15 a month. The proprietor deducted \$5 from this to pay for the loan to the parents.

8. Opera performances were also held at permanent theatre halls set up in big towns such as Singapore. Prominent theatres in Singapore included the Lai Chun Yuen which occupied a three-storey shophouse built in 1897 at Smith Street. Other theatres were the Heng Wai Sun and the Heng Seng Peng built before 1893 at Wayang Street (The National Archives, 1988: 28-30).

9. See Tan Sooi Beng (1984a), Scott (1978), and Arlington (1966) for details of the symbolism and intricacies of facial features, colour of costumes, headwear, musical ensemble, and music in Chinese opera, and puppet theatre.

10. For a review of urban entertainment in Malaya in the early twentieth century, see Tan Sooi Beng (1993b: Chapter 2).
11. Movies such as *Ai Chua Pek Chua* (The Righteous Snake) and Chinese talkies such as *The Romance of the Opera* were often screened (*Times of Malaya*, 20 October 1926, 1 December 1931).
12. Young Chinese men could engage in 'taxi dancing' or dance the latest dances with dance hostesses by buying coupons at the cabaret or dance halls situated in the amusement parks. Sometimes, 'lessons were given by experienced male teachers from Shanghai to learn the latest tango, rumba, waltz, blues, and foxtrot' at the dance halls (*Straits Echo*, 6 September 1934).
13. Opera troupes comprised 35-100 members. In 1958, it was estimated that the average takings per day at the amusement park were \$150 to \$500 while street shows ranged from \$500 to \$1,500 per contract of two days. The salaries of performers varied from \$10 to \$2000 a month depending on the status of the individual. Performers from Hong Kong were paid high salaries for the few months they were brought in, but they had to provide their own costumes and make-up. Instrumentalists were paid \$100 to \$300 a month (Ow, 1958).
14. In the 1950s, child apprentices (usually three to nine years of age) received approximately \$10 to \$15 a month (\$5 was returned to the proprietor to pay for the sum of money given to the parents initially). They received no medical benefits (Ow, 1958). They learnt the art of the opera during the day and played small parts at night. They were usually kept on as actors on completion of the apprenticeship (Cheng, 1951).
15. The modern Chinese orchestra was known as *minzu yuedui* (national orchestra) in China, *zhongyue tuan* (Chinese orchestra) in Hong Kong, *guoyue tuan* (Chinese orchestra) in Taiwan. See Tan Sooi Beng (1992a) for a detailed account of the modern Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.
16. From interviews conducted, the impression and judgement of an opera troupe depended on the new and flashy costumes of the performers, the young and pretty actresses, and restraint from including indigenous elements and colloquial language. It is, however, ironic that local opera troupes have to include indigenous elements and colloquial language so that the younger audience can follow the plot.
17. In other parts of Malaysia, for example in Ipoh, Perak, where there is also a large Chinese population, 'thousand people dinners' (*qianren yan*) were held for the same purpose of collecting funds for Chinese schools. They also served as occasions to remind people of the importance of supporting Chinese education and schools.
18. This section is based on personal involvement in a Chinese *huayue tuan* in Penang and participation in activities, rehearsals, and performances of the association in the early 1980s.
19. The Persatuan Perayaan Tiong Guan (Celebration of Tiong Guan Committee, Tiong Guan = Ghost Festival) which was established in Penang in 1979 is another example of a state-wide organization. It was set up to render assistance to the 120-odd areas which celebrated the festival when they applied for government permits from the Health Department, Police, Fire Brigade, Building Department, and Engineering Department. In 1980, when a security deposit of RM 1,000 was required for each area by the Land Office, the Committee acted as the guarantor for all areas. The association also organized fund-raising campaigns for educational and philanthropic activities. Since 1979, the Committee has raised funds for the Lam Wah Ee Hospital, the Chinese Assembly Hall, and Chinese national-type primary schools such as Hun Bin Primary School (Tan Sooi Beng, 1988).
20. It should be noted that global consumer culture which is controlled by big corporations based in the United States, Europe, and Japan such as EMI and Sony is also prevalent in Malaysia. The Chinese in Malaysia also listen to the music and watch the videos of Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Celine Dion among others.
21. It is interesting to note that these Chinese television serials are popular with other ethnic groups in Malaysia such as the Malays and Indians. Malay subtitles appear on all Chinese television programmes. The titles of such shows which appear before or after the programmes are in English or Malay. Newspapers print the names of such shows in English or Malay on their television programme pages.

22. This is also the case among middle-class Malays (Kahn, 1992; Tan Sooi Beng, 1993b).

23. In Singapore, there has been a revival of the *wayang peranakan* and *dondang sayang* since the late 1980s. Plays such as *Pilih Menantu* (Choosing a Daughter-in-law, 1984), *Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih* (Let Bygones be Bygones, 1984), *Laki Tua Bini Muda* (The Old Husband and the Young Wife, 1985), *Menyesal* (Regrets, 1986), *Tak Sangka* (Unsuspected, 1990), and *Nasib* (Fate, 1992) have been staged (Tan Chee Beng, 1993: 54).

24. Even lion dance makers have created a new lion called the Singa Batik which performed for the Prime Minister of Malaysia at Sungei Besi in 1997 (NST, 8 February 1997).

25. It must be emphasized that although fusions in form and content have taken place, many groups still perform Chinese repertoire from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

26. It is interesting to note that the longest dragon (in sculpture form) in the world was built in Nirvana Memorial Park in Semenyih. This dragon (33 metres long) also beat the current record in the Guinness Book of Records (Star, 19 August 1997).

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## Malaysian Literature in Chinese: A Survey

Tang Eng Teik

### Introduction

MALAYSIAN Chinese literature is expressed through three languages: Malay, English, and Chinese. But the bulk of writings are in Chinese, and some 200 writers have been identified and studied by scholars. The focus of this chapter is Mahua literature (Malaysian Chinese literature) in Chinese.

Mahua literature can be traced back to the nineteenth century. The first Chinese newspaper, *China Monthly Magazine* (*Cha Shisu Meiyue Tongji Zhuan*), was published in Malacca in 1815. Chinese newspapers regularly include literary supplements known as *fukan*. With the establishment of the *China Monthly Magazine*, creative writing started. Six more Chinese newspapers were established in Singapore/Malaya in the nineteenth century. These were

1. *The Universal Gazette*, established 1828/1829 in Malacca.
2. *Lat Pau*, established 1881 in Singapore.
3. *Sing Po*, established 1890 in Singapore.
4. *Thien Nan Shin Poe*, established 1898 in Singapore.
5. *The Penang Sin Poe*, established 1896 in Penang.

Classical Chinese was then the medium of all written communication. After the May 4 Movement in China in 1919, colloquial language was adopted in schools and the media in China. Malaya and Singapore followed suit. The *New People's Daily* (*Xin Guomin Ribao*), established in Singapore in October, was the first to publish articles in colloquial Chinese.

### Pre-war Period

The history of Malayan Chinese literature before the Second World War has been divided into four periods. The first is the Period of Sprouting (1920-5) during which a number of Chinese newspapers in Singapore had literary supplements. Essays written in the modern language began to replace those in the traditional style. Most writers in this



period produced no more than three articles a year. The quality of literary works was not high. Their works carried themes attacking feudalism and military aggression while at the same time promoting respect for science and democracy.

The beginning of the second phase, the Period of Leafing (1925-31), in Malayan Chinese literature was marked by the issuance of *South Wind* (*Nan Feng*) by the *New People's Daily* in July 1925. This was the first ever literary supplement written entirely in the colloquial language. New literary supplements issued by Chinese newspapers in Singapore and Penang cultivated a large group of writers. On 3 October 1925, *New People's Daily* issued *Poetry World* (*Shige Shijie*), a supplement entirely devoted to poetry. It contained a large number of new style and classical style poems. Another literary supplement devoted to new style poetry, *Poetry*, was launched by the *South-Sea Times* (*Nanyang Shibao*) of Penang in October 1927.

Noted writers during the Period of Leafing included Tan Yunshan, Zeng Sheng Ti, Chen Lianqing, Lin Cantian, Wang Gekong, Wen Zichuan, Zhang Zinyan, Lin Shanshan, and Xu Jie. What was most striking was that Chen Lianqing, the editor of *Coconut Grove* (*Ye Lin*) of *Lat Pau* (*Le Bao*) was already trying to introduce a literature that reflected social life in the 'South-Sea' (Nanyang).

The third phase was the Period of Blight (1932-6). This period was affected by the economic depression and the British curtailment of literary publications which led to the decline of Malayan Chinese literature. Literary supplements were banned. There was a retreat by writers into humour and a preference to produce light-hearted works. Interestingly, the quality of writers who emerged during this period improved significantly.

The most outstanding writers were Lin Cantian, Wang Gekong, Qiu Shizhen, Chen Baiying, Chen Jieyi (also known as Dongfeng Bingding), Li Bingren, Li Runhu, Shen Xiahun (also known as Yi Jin), Zeng Aidi, Zhang Tianbai, and Hong Sisi. The economic depression in Malaya, and the Japanese invasion of China were common themes in the writings.

In the Period of Flowering (1937-42), the subjects of writing were anti-aggression and the appeal to all overseas Chinese to save China. Chinese literature, especially in poetry and drama, made remarkable progress.

On 7 July 1937, war broke out between Japan and China. The writers in Malaya were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Chinese resistance to the war. During this time, the Malayan authorities lifted curbs on the writers. These were the main developments that revitalized Malayan Chinese literature.

Many outstanding poets emerged during this Period of Flowering. They included Dongfang Bingding, Ying Zi, Feng Jiaoyi, Wu Bing, Jing Hai, Peng Qing, Liu Si, Ye Qing, Xi Ling, Tao Mu, Ye Huo, Li Yunlang, Qing Cai, and Lu Di. Apart from these, there were many talented story writers, essayists, and playwrights such as Huang Bai Di, Wang Junshi, Lao Lei, Yin Zhiyang (also known as Jin Zhimang),

Shang Shangguan Zhi (also known as Wei Yun after the First World War), Jin Ding, Yu Dafu, Tie Kang, Ye Ni (also known as Wu Tian), Sun Liubing, Zhang Yiqian, Liu Lang, Zhu Xu, Lin Chen, and Hu Yizhi.

### Japanese Occupation Period

Mahua literature produced during the Japanese Occupation was unique in nature. It consisted of three main types. These were:

1. Literature of the subdued people or *shun min wenxue*;
2. Underground literature or *dixia wenxue*;
3. Literature of the exiles or *luwang wenxue*.

During the Japanese Occupation, the military administration established Chinese newspapers in major towns. Few, if any, Mahua writers contributed to these Japanese-sponsored Chinese newspapers. The few writers who did send their work usually carried pro-Japanese themes. Hence these works are described as literature of the subdued people.

The Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), a resistance movement, also issued several underground newspapers. Occasionally, some members of MPAJA wrote poems to express their feelings, which were published in these newspapers. These newspapers are no longer in existence but some of the poems were later quoted in articles published in literary supplements after the Second World War. These poems form part of the works that are described as underground literature.

Many noted Mahua writers fled Singapore and Malaya during the war. Some continued to produce creative works. These were later published and considered as literature of the exiles. The majority of these works were poems in the classical style, especially those by Yu Dafu, a famous writer.

After the Second World War, Wen Zichuan, Zheng Ziyu, Li Bingren, Xie Yunsheng, Lin Xudian, Fang Xiu, Chen Songxi, Zhang Jia, Lian, Wang Kangling, and Yao Mengtong managed to trace most of the works by Yu. Apart from Yu, Li Tiemin and Dong Kede also left some poems in the classical style.

Chen Jiageng, better known as Tan Kah Kee, a prominent leader of the Chinese community in South-East Asia before the Second World War, wrote a two-volume autobiography, *Memoir of an Overseas Chinese in the South Sea (Nanqiao Huiyi Lu)*, which was published in Singapore in 1946. It is a chronicle of his 40 years of experiences as well as a record of the important role played by the South-East Asian Chinese in supporting China's resistance against the Japanese. It also narrates how he promoted education in Singapore and Malaya. His autobiography represents one of the most important works in Chinese writings during the Japanese Occupation. However, Chen Jiageng's literary effort is an important contribution to history rather than to literature.

### Immediate Post-war Period

In the 1940s, some 82 different periodicals were published. Most of these periodicals did not survive for long. The only exception was *Below the Wind* (*Feng Xia*) which first appeared in December 1945 and lasted until June 1948.

The journals published during the 1940s can be classified into 10 categories: (a) literary journals; (b) journals of general interest; (c) academic journals; (d) official organs of associations; (e) news magazines; (f) movie news; (g) magazines on entertainment; (h) pictorials; (i) journals of religious organizations; and (j) magazines on news and development about certain towns in Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, known as 'news from home town' (*xiang xun*). Most of the periodicals were published in Singapore.

After the Second World War, Chinese newspapers reappeared. Most Chinese newspapers carried literary supplements which published works written by local writers. From September to November 1945, Chinese newspapers resumed publication. *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (*Xingzhou Ribao*, established in 1929) and the *Union Times* (*Zong Hui Bao*, established in 1906) were published in a combined edition on 8 September. *Nanyang Siang Pau* (*Nanyang Shangbao*, established in 1923) resumed publication on the same day. Moreover, six tabloids known as 'small press' (*xiaobao*) in Chinese also appeared in Singapore.

In Penang, *Sing Pin Jih Poh* (*Xingbing Ribao*, established in 1939) resumed publication on 22 October 1945 while *Kwong Wah Jit Poh* (*Guanghua Ribao*, established in 1910) reappeared on February 1946. *Modern Daily News* (*Xiandai Ribao*, established in 1936) was published on 15 August 1945.

In Ipoh, two Chinese newspapers reappeared. During the 1940s, Chinese newspapers were established even in small towns like Muar, Taiping, Seremban, and Malacca. However, these regional newspapers were relatively unimportant in the promotion of Mahua literature.

In Kuala Lumpur, the first Chinese newspaper to appear after the Second World War was *Min Sheng Pau* (*Minsheng Bao*) established by Lin Shaozhong and Lin Fangsheng on 26 August 1945. This newspaper was followed by *Combatant's Friend* (*Zhanyou Bao*) established on 8 December 1945. It was the official organ of the Association of Ex-Comrades of the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army.

Apart from *Min Sheng Pau* and *Combatant's Friend*, in Kuala Lumpur, *The China Press* (*Zhongguo Bao*) was established by H. S. Lee (also known as Col. Sir Hau-shik Lee, Li Xiaoshi) on 1 February 1946.

In November 1946, Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jiageng, 1874-1961) founded *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* (*Nanqiao Ribao*). Hu Yuzhi, a noted writer from China, was in charge of financial and editorial policies. The *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* soon became one of the most popular Chinese newspapers, but it was closed down by the British authorities in September 1950 because of its radical political stand.

In the immediate post-war period, a group of Malayan Chinese writers

called for the establishment of a Malayan identity in local Chinese literature. To them, immigrant literature of the previous period had served its purpose and should therefore give way to a literature fully identified with the people and the country here. This literary debate lasted several months.

The debate was started by an article of Zhou Rong published on 26 December 1947 in *Combatant's Friend*. The concept of local identity was, in fact, first suggested by Duan Nanguì, the editor of *Lat Pau*, as early as 1926. The consciousness of local identity was no doubt heightened by the war and by the Malayan people's demand for self-government. By 1947, 60 per cent of the non-Malay population were local-born.

From the debate it was evident that for many Malayan Chinese writers, the cultural and emotional links with China were still strong. There were those who referred to Malayan Chinese writers' dual duties. These were duty towards Malaya and towards China. Some of them even suggested that there should not be any difference between Mahua literature and Chinese literature. One of them, Tie Ge, while advocating Malayan literature, held that local writers have duties towards both China and Malaya.

Except for Xi Qiao and Wen Renjun, most of the practising writers in the 1940s were born and educated in China. This included Zhou Rong, the most articulate and radical exponent of local identity. However, most of the writers who participated in the debate soon left Malaya or Singapore by the beginning of the 1950s. Some were deported by the British colonial government.

That local identity should be the guiding principle soon became the foundation of Mahua literature. The most dynamic genre was poetry. Most of the poets active before the war had disappeared from the literary scene. Three poets died of illness (Ye Qing in late 1939; Feng Jiaoyi in 1940; and Jing Hai in late 1941 or 1942); two poets went back to China around 1941 (Peng Qing and Ying Zi). Qing Cai was killed during the Japanese Occupation; Dongfang Bingding returned to Guangdong around 1945; and two poets stopped writing (Li Yunlang and Lu Di). Tao Mu, Xi Ling, and Ye Huo resumed writing for a short period and then stopped. Tao Mu and Xi Ling returned to China around 1950. Ye Huo stayed in Kuala Lumpur, but did not resume his literary career. After the Second World War, only Liu Si continued to be active. The prolific poets of this period were very young men who began to publish their poems after the war. The most outstanding ones were Tie Ge, Mi Jun, and Ding Jiarui (real name Xu Zhizheng, born 1916).

The poetic style used by the new writers was similar to that of the pre-war poets. The influence of Ai Qing, Tian Jian, and Vladimir Mayakovsky was evident in the poetry of this period. Although there was no technical innovation during this period, there was a change in the poets' focus. There was an effort to establish a local identity. However, the emotional ties with China were still very strong. The poets were torn between two countries—China and Malaya. A sense of identity crisis was evident in some of their verses.

It is evident that the poets were searching for the best form to express

their experiences. But most works were weak, imitative, and generally slipshod in technique. They were characterized by bombastic language, declamatory lapses, repetition, and prosaicness. The predominant feature was one of unbridled emotionalism. However, despite these shortcomings, the poets of the 1940s were important for the bridging role they played in the history of Mahua poetry.

A true history of literature cannot confine itself to works of enduring literary quality. It must also deal with a number of works which, though of passing literary significance, retain a measure of importance for the understanding of the development of Mahua literature. It should note the continuity of Mahua poetry and the workings of the imagination in the Chinese community.

The Mahua poets were, at this time, strongly influenced by the proletarian poetry of China. Their poems resemble those of Ai Qing (1910–1996), Tian Jian (born 1914), and Guo Moruo (1892–1978). The Mahua poets were also acquainted with the works of Walt Whitman and Aleksandr Pushkin, for in their poems the names of these two poets were often mentioned. Too often Mahua poems were raw expressions of emotion and sentiment rather than approached with artistry. Their topical interest and emotional appeal are lost when read in a later age. The Mayakovskian form of poetry seemed to be very popular in the Mahua literary circle. Many poets such as Tie Ge, Liu Si, Du Bian (real name: Su Zhongren, born 1914), Ling Zuo, and Guang Dao, employed this poetic form to express the explosive, tormented feelings of the age. It must be pointed out, however, that the Mayakovskian form of poetry was already introduced in Mahua literature before the war by Tao Liu, Ye Qing, Peng Qing, Fang Ai, and Yu Yuan.

One interesting poem from the technical point of view is Mi Jun's *Not Saying 'Tolong' Any More* (*Bu Jiao Dulong*). He wrote this 'poem for recitation' on the model of Chinese traditional 'comic dialogue' (*xiangsheng*). The language and style were original and lively.

Mahua poetry in the 1940s was a literature of social realism. There were no personal lyrics; only verses with a social theme. The poets tried to use poetry to fight what they saw as political oppression and economic injustice. In Malaya, the people had begun to agitate for independence. One example of this type of poetry is a long poem written jointly by four poets: Ding Jiarui, Mo Qing, Yan Qun, and Ruo Ye, entitled *Let Out Your Angry Roar Singapore* (*Nu Houba, Xinjiapo*).

In 1947, Tie Ge wrote *To the Rescue of Vietnam* (*Yuanjiu Yuenan*), which was published in *Min Sheng Pau* on 7 February 1947. This poem appealed to all the oppressed peoples of the colonized countries to go to the rescue of Vietnam which was described as the vanguard in the freeing of the oppressed races.

Liu Si, another poet, sympathized with the freedom fighters in Indonesia. He condemned the British authorities in Singapore for sending the air force against the revolutionaries of Indonesia. His poem, *Expression of Justice* (*Zhengyi de Biaoxian*), praises the officers who refused to obey the order.

Fearing censorship, many poets shunned specific political issues of the time. However, there were exceptions. In a poem entitled *The Flag (Qi)*, published in *Min Sheng Pau* on 8 September 1945, Xi Ling lauded the bravery of the MPAJA. Another poem under a similar title, *I Love the People's Flag (Wo Ai Renmin Qi)* by Hai Lang published on 5 December 1947 in *Combatant's Friend*, praised the Malayan flag proposed by the All Malaya Council of Joint Action and the Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (AMCJA-PUTERA).

The Anti-Federation Agreement movement during 1947 is reflected in Tie Ge's *Put it into the Museum (Fang Jin Chengliequan Li Qu)* and Ding Jiarui's *Declaration to London (Xiang Lundun Xuan Gao)*. Tie Ge's poem suggests that the Federation Agreement should be rejected and placed in the museum. Ding's poem depicts the situation of the general strike in Malaya in October 1947. In this poem, the whole of Malaya is compared to an empty city. The poem extols the strength of all the people in Malaya. It ends with the following lines:

Respectable Mr. Attlee,  
You must withdraw the Amendment;  
You must introduce a democratic constitution!

Social and economic injustice were recurring themes in the poetry of the period. Da Li's *The Neighbour* and Er Shen's *Lamentation (Gelin Er Shen de Yuange)* were about the common people's suffering caused by the depressed economic conditions immediately after the Second World War. The plight of the working class was indeed a very common theme. One example is the poem *Blacksmith (Tiegong)* by Shan Waishan. The poem relates the sad story of a blacksmith whose wife is sick but could not afford to visit a doctor as the whole family was living in semi-starvation. The poem concludes with a fierce statement of protest against social injustice. In another poem entitled *A-Fu*, Shan describes a similar situation of a trishaw driver's family.

One positive aspect of Mahua poetry was the attempt by the poets to include other ethnic groups in their writings. The poets expressed sympathy for and friendship with the non-Chinese peoples of Malaya. Mi Jun's *The Old Indian (Yindu Laoren)* attempts to depict the character of other ethnic groups. In this particular poem Mi Jun sympathized with the poor Indian watchman at the goldsmith shop. In the poem entitled *The Indian and His Goats (Ji'ning Ren He Yang)* Ding Jiarui reflects on the life of poor Indian cowherds. *Gei Gan Niu de Ji'ning Ren* by Chen Beimeng also reveals the poet's sympathy for the poor Indian cowherds whom he considered as being as unfortunate as the cows. However, the two titles indicate that the poets were quite ignorant about the culture of other ethnic groups. *Ji'ning Ren* or *keling* itself are terms very offensive to the Indians in Malaya.

Goodwill was extended to the Malays. Mi Jun's *Ronggeng Dance (Tiao Longling)* expressed the poet's desire for inter-ethnic friendship and goodwill among the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. In the poem entitled *The Night Train (Ye Che)*, he expresses the people's desire for democracy.

He appealed to all people who were suffering to unite and to struggle for a common cause. However, the poem also reveals his doubts as to who would really become the masters of the land when he says,

Therefore in my heart there is a question of history:  
The land will belong to whom, and who'll be the masters of this land?

Mi Jun's poems, in fact, show his identity crisis. In *Ronggeng Dance*, he states that he is a native son of the land. But in another poem entitled *Accusation (Kongsu)*, he states that he is a Chinese citizen forced into exile by the reactionaries of China. In another poem entitled *Gifts (Litou)* he writes of going back to China. Although born in Malaya, Mi Jun was educated in China. He was obviously torn between two countries, China and Malaya.

Tie Ge, too, experienced a similar identity crisis. In an essay entitled 'The Uniqueness of Literature, Responsibility and Other Matters' published in *Min Sheng Pau* on 18 February 1948, he stated that the Malayan Chinese society had the dual duties of supporting the democratic movement in China as well as self-government in Malaya.

Expressions of identity crisis in the writings are not surprising considering the background of writers of the time. Of the 49 writers active between 1945 and 1948 listed in Ma Lun's directory (1984), 42 were either born or educated in China.

Among the prolific poets of the time such as Tie Ge, Mi Jun, Ding Jiarui, and Liu Si, only Mi Jun was born in Malaya. The identity crisis of the poets might also have been due to the social conditions of the time. From 1945 until the early 1950s, there was the issue of citizenship in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. At that time, dual nationality was possible. Under the Federation citizenship law of 1952, those born or naturalized in the former Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca could become federal citizens and still retain British nationality.

Apart from poetry, the other important literary genre of Mahua literature immediately after the Second World War was fiction. In fiction writings, short stories were predominant. According to Goh Thean Chye (1975), only five novels were published at that time: *Stormy Condition in the South Island (Nan Dao Fengyun)* by Xu Duan; *Young Airmen (Shaonian Hangkongbing)* by Sha Ping; and three novels by Ma Ning (real name Huang Zhenshu, born 1909): *The Diehard Element (Wan'gu Fenzi)*; *The General Who Turns Back (Jiangjun Xiang Hou Zhuan)*; and *Changes in the Xiang Island (Xiang Dao Yanyun)*.

Only Xu Duan's work was published in Malaya. The other four novels were published in Hong Kong.

Sha Ping was the pen-name of Hu Yuzhi. *The Young Airman* was serialized in *Below The Wind* (no. 2, 10 December 1945, to no. 39, 31 August 1946) and published as a book in Hong Kong in 1949. This novel is about the dream of a young man in Sumatra and of how he went back to China to serve in the air force to defend China. It can be considered 'immigrant literature'.

Apart from the three novels, Ma Ning also published a novel entitled

*Breeze from Coconut Trees, Rain on Banana Leaves* (Ye Feng Jiao Yu) which was published in 1946 in Hong Kong. Ma Ning went back to China before the Second World War. He returned to Malaya in June 1946 and then moved back to China in 1948. His stay in Malaya was too short for him to have produced his works here. Therefore his writings belong to Chinese, and not Mahua, literature.

Immediately after the Second World War, three novellas were published: *On South China Sea* (Qizhou Yang Shang) by Han Meng (real name: Chen Junshan); *Revenge* (Fu Chou) by Qiu Tian; and *Miss Xiuzi* (Xiuzi Guniang) by Yao Zhi

*On South China Sea*, published in 1950, is about the tragic life of Tang Fanzai and his two younger brothers before the Second World War. Oppressed in China, Tang Fanzai borrowed money to buy a ticket to travel to the South Seas. As the ship was leaving, Tang Fanzai lowered a rope to help a friend from his village who did not have a ticket. His action was discovered and he was beaten to death by the crew. It is a touching novel which also exposes the exploitation of common people, especially women, by government officers in the southern Chinese provinces.

Yao Zhi arrived in Singapore in 1947 to become *Nanyang Siang Pau's* editor of supplements. His novel entitled *Miss Xiuzi* was serialized in the supplement *Leisure Time* (Shang Yu) in February and March 1949. The background is Burma during the war. It relates the tragic love story between a young Chinese army officer and a Japanese girl. The novel became very popular and was published in book form in May 1949 and successfully went into several reprints. This novel was written in 1945 when Yao Zhi was still in China. He revised it after his arrival in Singapore. Therefore it could not be regarded as truly Mahua literature.

The novel which really reflects local conditions is the work entitled *Revenge* by Qiu Tian. Qiu Tian, also known as Qiu Shizhen, was already a well-known writer before the Second World War. *Revenge* relates how Wu Chou, a character in the novel, took his revenge. Wu Chou was betrayed by his friend Yang Xiong, and his whole family was slaughtered by the Japanese. After the end of the war, he killed the traitor.

Other than the novels referred to, all the fiction works immediately after the Second World War were short stories, most of which had some connection with the war. They can be divided into two categories. The first category is about the life of the common people during the Japanese Occupation. The second category is about their lives as affected by the war.

Short stories dealing with the Japanese Occupation focused on the resistance movement. *The Lingering Sadness* (Yu Ai) by Lin Cantian (1904-72) tells how some British prisoners of war were tortured and killed by Japanese soldiers. *Curing the Victim* (Xisheng Zhe de Zhiliao) by Yin Zhiyang (real name Chen Shuying, died 1988) describes the spirit of humanity of an anti-Japanese fighter. Miao Xiu, a noted novelist, also wrote two short stories with the Japanese Occupation as the background: *Red Mist* (Hong Wu), and *On The Way* (Zai Lu Shang). *Red Mist*



describes the landing of the Japanese army in Singapore and of conflict with anti-Japanese elements. *On The Way* describes how a group of Japanese soldiers were ambushed in a valley. *The Autobiography Of A Spy* (*Yige Jiandie de Zishu*) by Liu Leng (real name Liu Jintian, died 1970) related how the Japanese military authorities tricked young men who applied for jobs in a shipping firm to become spies for the Japanese.

Short stories using the Japanese Occupation as background were not very common. The most popular short stories were about the life of the common people after the war. These short stories can be divided into three categories: (a) the life of the people who lost their relatives/lovers during the war; (b) stories of opportunities as a result of the war situation; (c) the sufferings of the people due to the depressed post-war economy.

During the war, there were opportunists who became rich. The short stories entitled *Uncle Jinfu* (*Jinfu Bo*) by Bai Han (real name Xie Yaohui, born 1919) and *Biography of A-O* (*A-O Zhuan*) by Chong Yang describe how such opportunists became rich.

Since there were those who profited from the war, there were those who looked forward to another war. *Dream* (*Meng*) by Shi Ding Ting (real name Chen Qiufang, born 1927) relates the story of a hooligan who dreamed that there was an outbreak of another world war.

Most of the characters described in the post-war short stories lost loved ones or relatives during the war. While the writers did not show how the war had really shattered their happiness, readers can discern that their continuing sufferings, including poverty, were caused by the terrible war. Therefore, these short stories can be termed 'fiction of the wounded' or *shanghen xiaoshuo*. There are at least eight short stories which can be classified under this category: *In the Rural Area* (*Shanba*) by Xiao Cun (real name Li Junzhe, born 1930); *The Bride from China* (*Guo Fan Xinniangu*) by Han Meng; *Happiness of Love* (*Aiqing De Kuaile*) by Qiu Tian; *Poverty* (*Ru Mo*) by Bai Han (real name Xie Yaohui, born 1919); *Withering* (*Diaoling*) by Ye Nong; *The Returned Sojourner* (*Gui Qiao*) by Yang Jia (real name Yang Jiaju, born 1917); and *The Lonely Souls* (*Jimo de Linghun*) by Liu Leng.

The post-war economic difficulties are reflected in the short stories entitled *The Thief* (*Zei*) by Liu Leng; *Elixir of Youth* (*Qingchun Su*) by Miao Xiu; *Miscarriage* (*Liuchan*) by Bai Han; and *Killing the Wife* (*Sha Qi*) also by Bai Han.

*The Thief* deals with the tragic life of Chen Sheng, a proofreader in a Chinese newspaper. His meagre income was hardly enough to support his family. At the same time, the price of goods kept rising. One day his friend advised him to do black-market business by obtaining supplies from an army camp. When he tried to get supplies from the camp, he was discovered and was shot dead as he tried to run away.

*Elixir of Youth* relates the story of a mechanic who had premature grey hair. When the Japanese were looking for youths to build the railway in Thailand, he was not selected because he looked too old. After the war, he was unemployed because potential employers considered

him too old. Finally, he dyed his hair but he was always made fun of by young men.

The short stories which reflect the sufferings of the lower class are *Miscarriage* and *Killing the Wife*. In *Miscarriage*, Shen Yafa was unemployed for a long time. The family was supported by his wife who worked in a factory. They owed money to many shops. In this poor family, Yafa's wife and his mother always quarrelled over petty matters. One day, when Yafa found that his wife was having a violent quarrel with his mother, he was very furious and consequently beat his wife who was then pregnant. His wife suffered a miscarriage.

*Killing the Wife* is a tragic story of an ice-water hawker. This was a common occupation for many unemployed and uneducated Chinese in Malaya. He was arrested one day by the police for not having a licence. Unable to pay the fine, he was jailed for two weeks. On his way home after his release, he met his wife by chance and discovered that she had become a streetwalker. Unable to control his anger, he beat his wife. Ashamed, his wife committed suicide.

There were also short stories which reflected broad social problems such as superstition, ignorance, poverty, and class differences. The more well-known ones are *Division (Fen)* by Xia Lin; *The Photograph Which Could Not Be Displayed (Gua Bu Shang De Xiangpian)* by Li Tian; *Competition (Dou)* by Mi Jun; *The Kungfu Master (Guoshu Shi)*, *The Bantian Fairy (Bantian Niang Niang)*, and *Mooncake Festival (Zhong Qiu)* all by Xiao Cun; and *The Health Inspector (Weisheng Guan)* by Shi Ting.

The Chinese community was at that time also concerned with the fight for independence, race relations, and their identity. Short stories which reflected these issues are *Conflict (Chong)* by Xia Lin; *The Pahang River Flows Quietly (Jing Jing De Pengheng He)* also by Xia Lin; *The Return of the Sojourner* by Yang Jia; and *Flying* by Han Meng.

The fight for independence was the most important development in the late 1940s. But this theme was considered politically sensitive at that time and Mahua literature avoided it. The short story that touched on this theme is *Conflict*, which is about a Malay sailor who helped the Indonesian freedom fighters in their war against the Dutch. At the end of the story, the Malay sailor is arrested by the Dutch.

*The Pahang River Flows Quietly* has Jinjiang village as its background. It describes how the Malay and the Chinese communities were caught in some misunderstanding. But there was no solution offered by the writer.

*The Return of the Sojourner* deals with the problem of identity crisis in the Chinese community. In it Lu Qitao intended to go back to China at the end of the war, but before he could do that, he met a young man who had just arrived from his village in China. He informed the young man that the latter's family was killed during the Japanese Occupation. With this the young man decided to remain in Malaya.

In *Flying*, He Jinyu, a schoolgirl born in Singapore, wanted to go to China. Many young Chinese school students at this time went to China

to continue their studies. Jinyu left without informing her parents. On reaching Hong Kong, the China-bound ship aborted the remaining part of the journey. Jinyu, forced to stay with her uncle, was taken back to Singapore by her parents who were informed about what had happened. In Singapore, her mother suggested that she should get married. She again ran away and stayed with her cousin. Eventually, on her cousin's advice, she became a teacher in a rural area.

People like Lu Qitao became permanent residents in Malaya because of changing circumstances. He Jinyu chose to be a citizen of a new nation when she realized her mistake. In *Withering*, the older generation, like Acheng the narrator and the narrator's aunt, see life as full of sadness and loneliness because they could not really forget China at all. For A-Fang, a girl born in Singapore, China was merely a vague and abstract concept. Only the land where she was born is her home.

Jinyu required time and experience to discover her real identity. However, the worker Yahan in *Strong Current (Ji Chao)* overcame this identity crisis much earlier. During the Japanese Occupation, he joined the struggle to defend Malaya. When the war ended, he became an activist to fight for the workers.

Not all the short stories dealt directly with political issues although most fiction of the 1940s generally reflected the social conditions of the Chinese community. Humanism was an important element in all the works discussed.

In the 1940s, another literary genre in Mahua literature was essays. The outstanding essay writers were Qiu Fengren and Kuang Guoxiang. Their essays, following the tradition of Lu Xun, were social critiques. Kuang's essays described life in Penang. Each of these writers had his own style of writing.

### Political Transition

Political events in Malaya in 1948 had a strong impact on the development of Mahua literature. A state of Emergency was declared in Malaya on 15 July 1948. With this, the colonial authorities carried out a policy of repression against all left-wing or suspected radical activists in the country. Nearly all the leading poets and fiction writers left Malaya either at the end of 1948 or 1949, leading to, for a short while, a marked decline in the output of literature. But it was also during this period that there emerged a generation of writers with a sense of new identity in a new nation. The Mahua writers' new consciousness fulfilled what had been advocated by the pioneers of the 1920s.

At this time, there were some 14 Chinese newspapers were published in the peninsula and in Singapore; all carried literary supplements: *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Kwong Wah Jit Poh*, *Sing Pin Jih Poh*, *Kin Kwok Daily News*, *China Press*, *Nanfong Evening Post (Nanfong Wanbao)*, *Yi Shi Bao*, *Lien Pang Daily News (Lianbang Ribao)*, *Zhong Sheng Bao*, *Sin Mah Jit Poh (Xing Ma Ribao)*, *Malayan Thung Pau (Malaiya Tong Bao)*, and the *Tiger Press (Hu Bao)*.

*Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, which belonged to Tan Kah Kee, was banned by the British authorities in September 1950. In the following month, on 16 October, *Nanfang Evening Post* (*Nanfang Wanbao*) was established by *Nanyang Siang Pau*. This evening newspaper was in circulation until May 1963. In the early 1950s, *Nanfang Evening Post* played a leading role in promoting Mahua literature. The chief editor of this evening newspaper was Zeng Tiechen (real name Zeng Guangxun), an outstanding writer. Under Zeng's leadership, this evening paper issued four supplements: *Comprehensive Supplement* (*Zonghe*), *Coffee House* (*Kafei Zuo*), *All Night Long* (*Buye Tian*), and *Oasis* (*Luzhou*). *Oasis*, a very important literary supplement in the early 1950s, was edited by Yao Zi, a leading novelist, from 1950 until March 1953. This literary supplement published many excellent essays, short stories, and poems by young local writers. Zhou Can (real name Zhou Guocan), a talented student-poet, made his debut in this supplement. Other noted writers who contributed to this literary supplement included Yao Zi himself, Yue Zigen (Wei Beihua), Wang Ge (born 1922), Lu Bing, Yun Bin (real name Zhang Youqun, born 1934), Chen Chunde (later known as Yun Lifeng, born 1933), Yi Ping (real name Zhang Yidong, born 1926), and Len Zhiye.

Wei Beihua's poem entitled *Stone Lion* (*Shi Shizi*), published in December 1952, was one of the early modernist poems in Mahua literature. Short stories and essays in this supplement were later published in book form and were generally well received. These included a collection of short stories, *Dusk Over Suzhou River* (*Suzhou He Zhi Ye*), and three anthologies of essays: *My Life As A Teacher* (*Wode Jiaoxue Shenghuo*), *Love of Fire* (*Huo Zhi Lian Ke*), and *Spring Time* (*Dang Chuntian Daolaide Shihon*).

Yao Zi left *Nanfang Evening Post* in January 1954, and this partly led to the paper's decline. In the 1950s, *Nanyang Siang Pau* continued to issue many supplements, including *Peace* (*Heping*) and *Sunday Literature* (*Xingqi Wenyi*) which were literary supplements. Noted writers who contributed to these supplements included Zhi Qing (real name Ge Qingfan, 1909-88) and Tao Yan (real name Tao Huayi, born 1916). There were many outstanding short stories published in the supplement *Peace*. At the end of 1950, three collections of short stories chosen from this supplement were published in book form by *Nanyang Siang Pau*: *Beautiful Dream* (*Hua Yibande Meng*), *Ling Ling*, and *The Faded Heaven* (*Tula Sede Tiantang*). All these were edited by Zeng Tiechen.

On 10 October 1953, *Nanyang Siang Pau* issued another literary supplement, *The Road of the Century* (*Shiji Lu*), edited by Yao Zi, which appeared three times a week. Writers who contributed to this supplement included Xie Ke (real name She Kequan, born 1931), Yin Qin, Wei Beihua, Liu Yichang (real name Liu Tongyi, born 1918), Yao Zi (other pen-names used: He Fu, Xiang Yang Ge, Huang Huai, Ou Yang Bi, Tang Xi, and Fu Jian), Yang Shoumo (Xing Ying, 1912-67), Lu Bing, and Miao Xiu.

After Yao Zi left *Nanyang Siang Pau*, a new literary supplement,

*Culture (Wenfeng)*, was established on 18 January 1954 with Xing Ying as the editor. *Culture* slowly took over the leading role played by *Oasis* and *The Road of the Century* in promoting Malayan Chinese literature. It was edited by Xing Ying from 1954 until August 1958. Xing Ying was acknowledged as the most dedicated editor of the literary supplement after the war. This supplement nurtured many young writers who became important writers in the following decades. Ma Yang (real name Jiang Mingyuan, born 1937) published his poem *Ya Ying* in March 1958. Other young poets who contributed to this supplement included Zhou Can, Du Hong (real name Zheng Yaben, born 1936), Zhong Qi (real name Zhong Yingqi, died 1970), Peng Longfei, Lao Long, Luo Lin (real name Lin Shui, born 1938), Pao Di (real name Huang Rushi, 1940-68), and Gao Qing (real name Guo Zhu Zhen (now Dato Kerk Choo Ting), born 1941).

Although *Leisure Time of Nanyang Siang Pau* was a supplement of general interest, it also published literary works. Huang Huai's famous novel, *Kafede Youhuo*, was first serialized in this supplement in December 1950. *Yanwang Ditch (Yanwang Gou)*, another work of fiction by Huang Huai, was also serialized in this supplement, from July to August 1953. Yin Qin also serialized her novel, *The Black Widow (Hei Guafu)*, in this supplement in January 1953, while Cao Xi's (born 1911) novel, *The Spring (Chun Nong)* appeared in the June 1953 issue. Zhi Qing's historical novel, *The Biography of Zhuge Liang (Zhuge Liang Zhuan)*, came out in this supplement in January 1954. Short stories such as *The Mist Upon a Mountain Town (Wuqi Mi Meng Le Zhege Shan Cheng)* by Yun Bin were also published. Noted essayists in the 1950s who contributed to this supplement included Wu Cha (real name Chen Boping), Shandong Lao, Jin Cun, Yi Teng (real name Wang Kaijin, 1912-76), Ma Moxi (real name Mu Junwu, 1918-71), Lian Shisheng (also known as Zi Yun, 1907-73), Jinbang Jushi, Kang Ruyue (real name Lin Lianyu, 1901-85), and Wen Huailang (born 1908). Li Kuong (real name Zheng Jianbo, born 1927) published his poems regularly in this supplement from 29 December 1958 until 1960. During this period, many young poets who imitated his style published their poems in *Leisure Time* in a special column under the title 'New Poetry Arena' (*Xin Shi Tan*). These young poets included Chen Shineng (born 1940), Xiao Ai (real name Lai Nanguang), Tuanmu Hong (real name Huang Aimin, 1939-76), Chen Longyu (born 1961), and Sha Fei.

Nanyang Siang Pau Press even assumed the role of publisher of local journals and creative works. It took advantage of the economic recovery in the early 1950s to publish literary works for the local market. From 1950 until 19 May 1955, it published over 100 books by local writers, including short stories, travelogues, essays, poetry, and translations. The good response to these local works was partly due to the fact that publications from China were banned.

Apart from the publication of books, Nanyang Siang Pau Press also issued the following journals: *Saturday Review (Xingqi Liu)*, *South Sea Monthly (Nanyang Yue Bao)*, two journals of general interest, and a

literary monthly, *Literary Parade* (*Wenyi Hanglie*). Short stories were usually published in *Saturday Review*.

*Literature* (*Wenyi*) of *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, edited by Fang Xiu, also played an important role in this period. Poets who contributed to this supplement included Fan Beiling (real name Luo Hongrui, born 1930), Zhong Qi, Cao Mang, Liu Qiyu (born 1938), and Gao Qing. Another literary supplement of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* was *Youth's Garden* (*Qingnian Yuandi*) which mainly carried creative works of new writers including poems by Chen Longyu, Luo Lin, and Liu Ge, also known as Bai Yao (real name Liu Guojian, born 1934).

*Kwong Wah Jit Poh*, *Sing Pin Jih Poh*, *The China Press*, *Lien Pang Daily News* (*Lianbang Ribao*, which ran from 1 August 1952 to 31 June 1953), and *Tiger Press* (*Hu Bao*, 10 August 1959–31 May 1961) also issued literary supplements, but they were relatively unimportant compared to that of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*.

*South Sea Monthly* was issued by Nanyang Siang Pau Press. Twenty-three issues were published, with the last one appearing in April 1952. Many distinguished scholars and writers including Chiu Bian Ming (Zhou Bianming, a linguist), Huang Zunsheng (an educationist), Xu Yunqiao (a historian), and Tan Yeok Siong (Chen Yusong) contributed articles to this journal. Creative writers such as Yao Zi, Chong Yang (Xu Xu), Miao Xiu, and Bai Han also wrote for this journal. Essayists such as Lian Shisheng, Yang Shoumo, Zeng Tiechen, Xie Bingying (real name Xie Minggang, born 1906), Wen Zichuan (real name Wen Yushu, 1911–86), Chen Zhenxia, Xie Songshan (1891–1965), Ma Junwu (Ma Moxi), Xu Minmon, Fang Xiu, and Zeng Mengbi (real name Zeng Ruixiong, 1903–77) had their works published in this journal.

One interesting development in the 1950s was that beginning from 1953, many Chinese secondary schools also produced literary journals. There were at least nine literary journals published by the Chinese secondary schools containing articles by students and invited writers.

Important journals in the 1950s were *South Sea Monthly* (*Nanyang Yue Bao*), *Nanyang Youth* (*Nanyang Qingnian*), *Desert Wind* (*Shamo Feng*), *Literary Press* (*Wenyi Bao*), *Chao Foon* (*Jiao Feng*), and *Student Weekly* (*Xuesheng Zhoubao*).

*Nanyang Youth* was started by the Secondary School Teachers' Association of Singapore on 7 April 1953. Twenty-three issues were published with the last one appearing on 25 May 1954. Contributors to this journal included Ma Moxi, Chong Yang, Zheng Ziyu (born 1916), Yun Lifeng, Lian Shisheng, Diao Wenmei, Zhou Can, and Meng Zhongji.

*Desert Wind* was produced by students of Chung Ling High School from January 1954. Ten issues were published; the last one appeared on 20 July 1955. Noted writers such as Xiao Yaotian (real name Xiao Gongwei, 1912–90), Fang Beifang (real name Fang Zuobin, born 1918), Yun Bin, Bing Mei (real name Yang Zhizhen, born 1931), Yi Teng, Wen Ding (real name Shen Shikun, born 1935), and Huang

Zhilian contributed. This journal stood out as one of the leading literary journals published by students during the decade.

*Chao Foon* was a literary monthly started on 10 November 1955 and continued until March 1999. Noted contributors have included Ma Moxi, Xiao Yaotian, Shandong Lao, Chong Yang, Zeng Tiechen, Cao Xi, Sha Feng, also known as Yuan Shangcao (real name Gu Dexian, born 1922), Fang Tian (real name Zhang Haiwen, 1930-78), Mei Jing (real name Zeng Songhua, born 1932), Yao Tuo (real name Yao Tianping), and Huangfu Guang.

*The Student Weekly* was started on 27 July 1956. It continued until October 1984 when the last issue (No. 1070) appeared. This students' journal nurtured many young writers who later became important creative writers in Mahua literature.

Two important cultural movements during the mid-1950s determined the direction of the development of Mahua literature. The first was the Anti-Yellow Culture movement (1953-6) aimed against publications containing stories of sex and violence. This movement was triggered off by the tragic murder of a schoolgirl in Singapore. Zhuang Yuzhen, aged 16, was raped and murdered in October 1953. This aroused public concern and anger in the Chinese community. The murder case was discussed in the press. It was generally thought that the cause of this crime was the negative influence of yellow culture on young people.

On 24 October 1953, students in Chung Cheng High School (Zhong Zheng Zhongxue) organized a seminar to discuss the crime and the danger posed by yellow culture. A booklet for that special occasion entitled 'Special Issue on Resisting Yellow Culture' (*Dizhi Huangse Wenhua Teji*) was published.

Many Chinese secondary school students in Singapore also organized seminars on yellow culture. They published songs against yellow culture and distributed anti-yellow culture bookmarks. Whenever they had any stage performance for the public, they always included a sketch with anti-yellow culture as the main theme. The evening performance usually ended with the public burning of magazines with stories on murder and terror, articles on humour and sex, tabloids about entertainment, scandals and sex, and books on sex by Hong Kong writers. The students' Anti-Yellow Culture Movement was supported by most of the daily newspapers, especially journals for the younger generation.

The Anti-Yellow Culture Movement from 1953 to 1956 stimulated serious cultural and literary activities. The public was encouraged to read serious literature and journals published locally. Many serious journals were published after the Anti-Yellow Culture movement was launched. As the campaign continued, it was used by radical writers and student activists to highlight the corrupting influence of colonial culture. At the same time, political activists sought to inculcate political consciousness through the Anti-Yellow Culture movement.

The second movement was inspired by the independence movement. On 18 March 1956, the Cultural Association of Singapore (Xinjiapo Wenhua Xiehui), in response to the people's demand for independence,

organized a congress attended by representatives from many important cultural organizations. After the meeting, the participants issued 'The Declaration of All Singapore Cultural Organization in Response to the Demand for Independence' (*Quan Xing Wenhua jie Xiangying Duli Dahui Yundong Dahui Xuanyan*).

The Declaration appealed to all cultural organizations to promote patriotic culture in order to defeat colonial culture and yellow culture. It stated that creative arts should become the instruments to unite the people regardless of differences in race and social class. All must work together for independence.

Many writers also published articles in 1956 expressing their views on patriotic culture. Ma Fen, one of the writers, stated that as the country was moving along the road to independence, creative writers must realize that art should not be negative, pornographic, separated from reality, or neglectful of the masses. Therefore, literature must reflect the life of workers, farmers, and the common people.

Du Hong, a student-poet, also participated in the discussion. He pointed out that patriotic literature should possess at least two main concrete elements: (a) to strengthen the people's national consciousness, and to enhance the unity of various races; (b) to reflect the sufferings of the people and to stimulate the people's spirit of patriotism. In order to popularize patriotic literature among all social classes, patriotic writers must use plain, simple language—the language of the masses.

Li Heng, another writer, suggested that the Chinese should regard Malaya as their own country.

It became clear that the movement was, in fact, the Malayan writers' continued search for a new and distinctive identity. A national identity for the Chinese was still feeble in the 1940s while the Malayan Chinese writers' cultural and emotional links with China were still strong.

### Transition to Independence

The recovery of the Malayan economy in the early 1950s was a very significant factor in the development of Mahua literature during the period. The outbreak of the Korean War (1950–3) on 25 June 1950 was followed by a boom period from 1953–7. With the increase in purchasing power, the Chinese community in Malaya was able to support additional Chinese newspapers and the publication of more journals and books.

There were also important developments in Malayan Chinese politics. On 27 February 1949, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was formed. At the same time two China-centred political parties in Malaya, Guomindang and the China Democratic League (*Zhongguo Minzhu Tongmeng*) were proscribed by the authorities in May 1949. The Chinese in Malaya from thence came to play a significant role in Malayan politics.

Another event which affected the Malayan Chinese world-view was



the banning of the China-oriented *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* in September 1950. After that newspaper was banned, the Chinese-educated in Malaya and Singapore had no choice but to read other Chinese newspapers which were more Malaya-oriented.

The founding of Nanyang University (Nanyang Daxue or Nan Da) in 1956 as a pan-Malayan Chinese educational institution had a great impact on the development of Malayan Chinese culture. The establishment of Nanyang University, the first Chinese language university outside China, played an important role in raising the intellectual standard of local Chinese culture. Over the next decade, more than 20 scholarly journals were produced by Nanyang University. In the 1950s, there were at least five prolific poets who were Nanyang University undergraduates: Zhou Can, Huang Yingliang, Du Hong, Sha Fei, and Tang Yong.

The Patriotic Movement (1956-9) launched in the same year that Nanyang University was founded also greatly influenced Mahua literature including the development of poetry. The ideas expounded in the Patriotic Movement greatly influenced Mahua literature from the mid-1950s until the early 1960s. After the movement was launched, patriotism immediately became a central and continuous element in poetry. Most of the young poets were willing to grapple with political themes. As a result, Malayan Chinese poetry after 1956 was more consistent in addressing itself to socio-political issues than in the earlier part of the decade.

In the 1950s, there were three main groups of poets active in the literary circle: (a) the established poets; (b) the new immigrant poets; and (c) the new generation of poets.

The first group of established poets included those who were already active in Malaya before the Second World War but were overshadowed in the 1940s by more radical and dynamic poets. The most noted ones in this group were: Liu Si, Xu Xu, Lu Bing, Wen Zichuen, Bai He, Yi Jin, and Chen Baiying.

Liu Si was already active in the 1940s, and in the 1950s he continued his career as a poet. Xu Xu had published some of his poems in the 1940s, but he was more prominent in the early 1950s.

The arrival of established poets among new immigrants was another factor which we must consider. Many writers from China, including poets, emigrated to Malaya and Singapore after the Second World War. After the Chinese Communist Party took over mainland China, many Chinese intellectuals managed to enter Malaya and Singapore via Hong Kong and Taiwan to work as secondary school teachers, newspaper editors, and editors of publishing firms.

Among the poets who arrived after the war, only four poets: Li Kuang, Li Rulin, Chang Fu, and Chen Rongzi published their works in the 1950s. On the other hand, Huang Ya, who produced a collection of poetry in Hong Kong before he came to Malaya, stopped writing poetry and published only fiction. Liu Ge, who used another pen-name (Bai

Yao) in the 1960s, was one of the pioneers of modernist poetry in that decade. However, he only played a marginal role in the development of poetry in the 1950s.

In the 1950s, the most important group of poets, and the largest number, were very young writers who were either born and educated in Malaya and Singapore or who came to this region during their early childhood. The more prolific ones were Wei Beihua, Zhou Can, Huang Yingliang, Wang Ge, Lao Long, Gao Ning, Chen Longyu, Jing Xing (real name Gong Peiyun, born 1941), Luo Ling (real name Lin Shui, born 1938), Sha Fei, Yan Dong, Wu An (real name Qiu Liji, born 1937), and Tian Ke (real name Tian Yingcheng, born 1940). Apart from the names mentioned above, other poets who began to publish their works included Lin Qiong (real name Lin Jinla, born 1930), Pao Di, Gao Qing, and Liu Qiyu.

Most of the established poets and the new immigrant poets were influenced by 'formalist poetry', or *gelushi*, of China. This type of poetry was developed by Xu Zhimo (1895-1931), Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), Zhu Xiang (1904-33), and Bian Zhilin (born 1910) in China. This group of poets, known as the formalists, had been strongly influenced by Western literature. They first imitated Western poetic forms and later evolved a unique style of their own. Generally speaking, three main characteristics can be discerned in their works: (a) in terms of rhetoric, the sentences were carefully constructed and polished to achieve beauty in form; (b) they were very strict with the use of rhyme in order to add beauty of sound to the poems; (c) the form was usually very neat and well-arranged. It was always presented in a manner where most of the poems were square in shape. The form gave this poetic style the derogatory term 'bean curd form' (*doufugan ti*).

Bai He, Chen Baiying, Wen Zichuan, Chang Fu, and Li Kuang's poems were written in the style of *gelushi*.

The contents of their poems were not as radical as those of the poets of the 1940s. They wrote about love, loneliness, departure, longing for lost love, and other themes.

The poets who really expressed the aspiration of the people of the period belonged to the third group of poets, who began to publish their works at a young age. With the exception of Wang Ge, almost all the other young poets first published their poems before they were 30 years old: Wei Beihua at 27 (1950); Zhong Qi at 24 (1952); Huang Yingliang at 19 (1952); Ma Yang at 19 (1956); Zhou Can at 18 (1952); Lao Long at 18 (1953); Du Hong and Jian Shi at 18 (1954); Wu An at 17 (1954); and Tian Ke at 16 (1956). It is, therefore, not surprising that there was a large number of student-poets among them.

It was Wei Beihua who imported symbolism into the Malayan Chinese poetry. In his poems, private symbols, richly suggestive in their reference, were used effectively. In fact, all his poems are very rich in symbolism.

In 1953, Zhou Can began to use personal symbols in the poem entitled *Pursuing A Dream* (*Xun Meng Qu*), published in *Nanyang Youth*

(no. 15, 15 July 1953). He used vivid images effectively in another poem, *Youth (Qingchun)*, which was published under another pen-name (Luwei) on 15 March 1954 in *Culture*. However, his use of personal symbols, as in *Dance of the Trees (Shu Zhi Wu)*, was awkward.

Most of the young poets were greatly influenced by Chinese poetry of the late 1920s and the 1930s. The formalists poets' influence can be clearly discerned in the works of Wei Beihua, Jian Shi, Wang Ge, Tian Ke, and Chen Longyu. Du Hong and Ma Yang were obviously influenced by Ai Qing. Bing Xin's influence on Zhou Can and Huang Yingliang is even more evident.

Zhou Can and Huang Yingliang introduced a type of poem with only one short stanza known as a 'mini-poem' (*xiao shi*). Mini-poems had appeared in China since the 1920s pioneered by those who were either influenced by Japanese haiku or the collection of short lyrics, *Stray Birds*, by the Indian poet Ravindranath Tagore (1861-1941). The most outstanding Chinese composer of mini-poems was the poetess Bing Xin who was an admirer of Tagore. She imitated Tagore's poetic form and produced two collections of short verses, *The Myriad Stars (Fan Xing)* in 1921 and *Spring Waters (Chun Shui)* in 1922. In Malaya, *Stray Birds* in Chinese translation and Bing Xin's two collections of mini-poems inspired Zhou Can and Huang Yingliang to try this new poetic form.

Du Hong, Ma Yang, and Luo Ling attempted to model some of their poems on Chinese folk songs. Ma Yang's *The Villagers' Songs (Shan Min Qu)* is a good example of this experiment. Most critics of that period agreed that *The Villagers' Songs*, which described village life in Malaya, was quite successful. Ma Yang, who hailed from Kluang, Johore, also wrote two narrative poems based on Malay folk-tales.

Generally speaking, the poetry of the young generation of poets in the 1950s was based on social realism. Most of the poems were loaded with social messages. The poor and downtrodden members of society were frequently depicted in their poetry, which also extolled freedom and inter-ethnic friendship.

The most important fiction writers in this period were Miao Xiu, Li Rulin, Wei Yun, Xu Xu, Fang Beifang, Diao Wenmei, Yao Zi (also known as Huang Huai), Yuan Shangcao (also known as Sha Feng), Yao Tuo, Zhao Rong, and Zi Qing.

Zi Qing was the only writer who specialized in historical fiction. Unfortunately, all her historical characters were drawn from Chinese history.

The fiction writers who arrived in Malaya and Singapore after the Second World War, such as Li Rulin, Yao Zi, and Yao Tuo, continued to use China as the background of their works. These writings are, therefore, the 'overseas edition' of Chinese literature. Other writers such as Miao Xiu, Wei Yun, and Fang Beifang wrote about life in Malaya. Their works reflected the problems faced by the Chinese community, especially the lower class in Malaya and Singapore.

Several younger fiction writers emerged in the 1950s. Among the

most significant was Yun Pin, who was still studying in secondary school (Chung Ling High School of Penang). However, he ceased writing after three collections of his short stories were published.

Prose writings (essays) were also quite popular in the 1950s. Shongdong Lao, Bai He, Wu Cha, and Bing Mei wrote their social critiques following Lu Xun's style, 'miscellaneous essays' (*zawen*). However, the authorities were vigilant towards this form of essay. One of the noted miscellaneous essay writers, Bing Mei, was deported by the British authorities in 1957.

Essays in the form of *belles-lettres* were also quite significant. Noted writers such as Wang Ge, Miao Mang, Xing Ying, Lian Shisheng, Yuan Shangcao, Wei Yun, Lin Chao, and Wei Beihua described the life of the people and the situation of pre-independent Malaya.

### Post-independence Period

In the post-independence period, there emerged several young writers. Most of them came from the rural areas and they used this background to describe life in the villages. More than the older writers, they wrote about their own daily lives and their personal feelings.

By the end of the 1950s, a new literature outside China using Chinese as its medium had already been firmly established in Malaya. In this new literature, we find four basic genres: poetry, fiction, essays, and drama.

In Mahua literature, the weakest form was drama. In the 1950s, only about 10 collections of one-act plays were published. Among the playwrights were Li Xingke, Ye Tahen (1905-82), and Guan Xinyi (born 1927). In any society, the writing of plays can flourish only if there is a vigorous theatre movement. In Malaya and Singapore, the political climate was not conducive to this. Opportunities for the performance of plays were also quite limited. As a result, there were very few enthusiasts to promote drama in the Chinese language.

As Mahua literature continued to develop, a distinctive rather than a tributary branch of Chinese literature emerged. In the 1960s, the most remarkable aspect to note about Mahua literature was the intensification of a new national identity and a search for new aesthetics.

As in the past, Chinese newspapers and journals continued to promote Mahua literature. In Singapore, the leading Chinese newspapers were *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. Since 31 August 1958, *Nanyang Siang Pau* has published a Malayan edition in Kuala Lumpur. In 1967, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* also published a Malayan edition in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. Both Singapore and Malayan editions of the newspapers continued to have literary supplements.

In the 1960s, *Malayan Thung Pau* also issued on Sundays a literary supplement: *Morning Bell (Chen Zhong)*. Between May 1967 and December 1967, several literary debates were published. Chen Jiu and Ri Jun attacked modernist poetry while Zuo Qian and Gui Yar defended modernism.

The Chinese newspapers in Sarawak and Sabah were important in

promoting literature in Chinese in these states. There were several Chinese newspapers in Sarawak: *Chinese Daily News* (*Zhonghua Ribao*, established 1 July 1945 in Kuching), *See Hua Daily News* (*Shi Hua Ribao*, established 1952 in Sibu), *Miri Daily News* (*Meili Ribao*, established 8 June 1957 in Miri), *International Times* (*Guoji Shi Bao*, established 1 October 1960 in Kuching), *Hua Lian Daily* (*Hua Lian Ribao*, established 1963 in Miri), *Malaysia Daily News* (*Malaixiya Ribao*, established December 1968), *Ta Chung Daily* (*Dazhong Ribao*, Kuching based), *Borneo Daily News* (*Poluozhou Ribao*, Sibu based), *Sarawak Siang Pao* (*Shaluoyue Shangbao*, Sibu based), and *Brilliant Lamp Daily News* (*Ming Deng Bao*, Sibu based). *See Hua Daily News* was in circulation in the main towns of Sarawak as well as Sabah.

In Sabah, there were seven Chinese newspapers in the 1960s. *Overseas Chinese Daily* (*Huaqiao Ribao*, established 1936 in Kota Kinabalu), *Api Siang Pau* (*Yapi Shangbao*, established July 1954 in Kota Kinabalu), *Sabah Times* (*Shabai Shibao*, established 1963), *Sandakan Jih Pao* (*Shandagen Ribao*, established 1960 in Sandakan), *Kinabalu Daily News* (*Shenshan Ribao*, established 1968 in Sandakan), and *Tawau Daily* (*Douhu Ribao*, established 1963 in Tawau). The first evening newspaper of Sabah, *Kinabalu Observer* (*Shenshan Guancha Bao*), was established in 1960.

*Leisure Time of Nanyang Siang Pau*, although mainly publishing articles of general interest, also published creative works by Li Kuang, Zi Yun, You Cao, Bi Cheng, Jie Lun, Fang Beifang, and others.

*Youth's Literature* (*Qingnian Wenyi*) of *Nanyang Siang Pau* was established in July 1960 and edited by Xing Ying. It received the support of many creative writers. Poets who contributed to this supplement included Cao Mang, Yuan Dian (real name Lin Youzhang, born 1940), Pao Di, Ai Cao, Jing Xing, Gao Qing, and Li Fanyu (real name Li Dabei, born 1941). Xing Ying died in February 1967. Since August 1967, this literary supplement has been edited by Li Sao (real name Liang Mingguang, born 1931) who also used another pen-name, Wanyan Ji. After Li Sao took over the editorship, the supplement became an arena for modernist literature. Modernist poets who contributed to this supplement included Ai Wen (real name Zheng Naiji, born 1943), and Li Cang (real name Li Youcheng, born 1948).

In February 1967, a new weekly literary supplement of *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *Literature* (*Wenyi*), was published. It was also edited by Li Sao. Malaysian modernist poets who contributed to this supplement included Li Cang, Xu Hong (real name Xu Yaming), Zhang Jingyun (born 1940), Mei Shuzhen (born 1949), and Lu Lang.

*Youth's Garden* (*Qingnian Yuandi*) was an important literary supplement in the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. It published literary works submitted by young writers. Contributors included Zhong Qi, Xu Yang (real name Yang Baoquan), Lin Qiong, Jin Miao (real name Huang Jinsheng, born 1939), Li Shouzhong (born 1939), Lin Fang (real name Silong, born 1942), and Lin Lu (real name Ding Shanxiang, born 1941). On 27 August 1965, Lin Fang, a modernist poet, published an interesting article entitled 'On Modernism' (*Xiandaizhuyi*) in this supplement.

Several interesting new literary supplements appeared in *Kwong Wah Jit Poh* during this decade: *Youth's Literature* (*Qingnian Wenyi*), *Hai Tian*, and *Silver Star* (*Ying Xing*). Many young writers supported both *Youth's Literature* and *Hai Tian*. *Silver Star*, a very remarkable literary supplement, was edited by a group of young modernist poets in Penang. The first issue appeared on 2 September 1963. It was a literary supplement for poetry only. Occasionally, essays on literary polemics and literary theories were also published. Poets who contributed to this supplement included Zhou Huan (real name Zhou Huanhuan, born 1940), Mai Liufang, Qiu Ying (real name Huang Yunlu), Lan Lui, Di Yu (real name Lin Tiancheng), Qiao Jing, Lan Yan, Sha He (real name Zheng Chengquan, born 1946), Mai Xiu (real name Zheng Wenshui, born 1944), and Wang Runhua (born 1941). Despite many interruptions, *Silver Star* continued to appear until 3 January 1966 when the last issue (No. 30) was published. After that, the modernist poets published their creative works in *Youth's Literature*.

There were several very important political changes in the 1960s which influenced the development of Mahua literature. These included the end of the Emergency in 1960, the confrontation with Indonesia, the formation of Malaysia, and the split with Singapore in 1965. With the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, the mass media was split, resulting in the two countries printing and circulating their own books, journals, and newspapers. Malaysians and Singaporeans began to develop their own literature independently of each other as access to literary publications and information on the literary activities on either side of the causeway became difficult to obtain.

Apart from the political changes, there were two factors which affected the development of Mahua literature. The first was the change in the medium of instruction of Chinese secondary schools. Between the years 1958 and 1969, most of the secondary schools were converted into national type secondary schools which used English as the medium of instruction except when teaching Chinese language and Chinese literature. This led to a gradual decline in the demand for Chinese books in the Malaysian book market. Most Chinese book stores had to rely on sale of stationery instead of books.

The other factor was the competition from books and magazines imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan. After the communists took over mainland China, Hong Kong gradually became a supplier of reading materials to Chinese all over the world outside China and Taiwan. Chinese magazines, classical literature, and romance stories written by Hong Kong writers became very popular in Malaysia. This undermined the efforts of local writers' writings and serious literary books. Their readership was thus significantly reduced.

In Taiwan, Chinese literature had also developed independently since 1949. These literary works also began to enter the Malaysian book market in the 1960s. Faced with keen competition from Hong Kong and Taiwan, local Mahua literature received very poor response from the

local readers. As a result, very few publishers were willing to publish works by local writers.

The most important development in Mahua literature during this period was the emergence of modernism. There were at least five factors responsible for it. First, nearly all the prolific poets were very young and, therefore, receptive to change. Stylistic changes from the traditional to the modernist mode were already found in the work of some of the poets. The second factor was fear of government censorship. Such censorship made it difficult for writers to continue the tradition based on the ideology of proletarian realism. Third, there was a real need for technical innovation, especially in poetry writing, because most of the committed poems written in the mid-1960s were lacking in aesthetic quality. Fourth, Malaysia and Taiwan had developed cultural links through education. Thus, the modernist style that had already emerged in Taiwan found its way here. The fifth factor was the encouragement provided by the editors of *Chao Foon Monthly* and *Student Weekly* to poets inclined towards modernism.

*Chao Foon* was started in November 1955. In 1959, Huang Ya, the chief editor of the *Student Weekly of China* (*Zhongguo Xuesheng Zhoubao*), arrived from Hong Kong and became the new editor of *Chao Foon*. He promoted modernist literature.

The *Student Weekly*, established in July 1956, was also important in promoting modernism in Mahua literature. Its editor was Bai Yao, a history graduate of Taiwan University. He came to Malaya in 1957 and was involved in editing the *Student Weekly* as well as *Chao Foon*. He was one of the earliest modernist poets. His poems showed some degree of experimental boldness, although they lacked craftsmanship.

In 1959, Chao Foon Publishers brought out an anthology of poetry under the title *The Beautiful V Shape* (*Meide V Xing*). Works of many leading Taiwanese modernist poets like Yu Guangzhong, Luo Men, Zhou Mengdie, Ye Shan, and Qiong Hong were included. Local poets like Bai Yao, Zhou Huan, and Leng Yanqiu also contributed their poems to this collection.

The involvement of Chao Foon Publisher's editors in literature was not confined to publication. They sponsored picnics for young writers during which discussions on literature were held. Under the influence of these editors, a group of young writers began publishing new literary journals. *New Tide* (*Xin Chao*) was published on 5 May 1962. *Wasteland* (*Huang Yuan*) appeared on 15 May 1962, and *Hai Tian* was started in May 1962. *The Silver Stars* (*Ying Xing*) was first issued in October 1962. The period between March 1959 and April 1962 can be considered as the germination stage of the modernist literature.

The second stage of development began with the launching of *The New Tide*, which published modernist as well as traditional writings. Although *Hai Tian's* literary works still included writings in the conventional literary styles, the didactic element was virtually absent. This indicates that the young writers believed that literature should be strictly

apolitical. Some of the members of the *Hai Tian* group like Yao Cao and Chen Huihua slowly changed their writings to the modernist style after the mid-1960s.

Among the four literary journals established by the young writers, two concentrated solely on the promotion of modernist literature. The poems of the young modernist poets, such as Di Yu, were intensely personal in nature. Di Yu expressed his deep sense of frustration and alienation, differing from traditional Mahua poets whose preoccupations were social, political, and cultural. Another young poet's (Qiu Ying) work was characterized by a reflective and intensely personal voice. It should be noted that a radical change in content was just one aspect of modernism in Mahua poetry. The more important aspect of modernist poetry was its technical innovations.

In 1965, the *Student Weekly* started to issue a poetry page every month. Edited by Zhou Huan, it encouraged contributions from many young modernist poets.

During this decade, as more and more Malaysian students pursued their higher studies in Taiwan, some of the literary enthusiasts among them also tried to develop modernist poetry in Taiwan. In 1966, the Constellation Poetry Society (Xingzuo Shishe) was established in Taiwan. Since its inception, the society has published anthologies of modernist poetry of all its members.

Being more imitative, these works by the Malaysian students were invariably indistinguishable from those of the Taiwanese poets. Some of the student-poets in Taiwan also sent their modernist poems to literary supplements and journals in Malaysia. Hence the modernist movement in Malaysia was greatly enhanced.

In Sabah and Sarawak, the modernist influence was weak. The only noted poet writing in the new style was Fang Bingda (real name Liu Guide, born 1944 in Kuching, Sarawak). He took up the new style as early as 1962. He founded The Constellation Poetry Society in Sarawak in 1971.

Although modernism had aroused opposition in the 1960s among Mahua writers, enthusiasts of modernist poetry had already succeeded in entrenching themselves in the Mahua literary field by the end of the decade. Three essential strands bound together the disparate groups of individual modernist poets: the rejection of any overt message or teaching in art; the need to free verse from traditional forms; and the emphasis on beauty as the highest goal of poetry. Consequently, the emergence of modernism in the 1960s revolutionized the language and form of Mahua literature. As a conscious attempt to search for new aesthetics in literature, the modernist movement in Malaysian Chinese literature should be regarded as a *felix culpa*, a necessary and fruitful revolt. However, the main weakness of the modernist writers of that period was their limited and superficial understanding of the true spirit of modernism. Thus, they were still unable to fashion meaningful works out of the raw material of real Malaysian experience.

The positive effects of the modernist movement were marred by some



evidently negative consequences. For instance, it caused disharmony among Mahua writers. The modernist movement represented a break with the past and with tradition, a violent break unparalleled in the history of Mahua literature. The modernist poets attacked and questioned traditional attitudes and cherished preoccupations. This soon caused equally strong reactions from many non-modernist writers. Disagreements over aesthetic views became personal, and mutual hostility developed between the two factions. The acrimony between the traditional group (known as the realist writers) and the modernists (known as the modernist writers) continued until the mid-1970s.

Another negative aspect was the limited and superficial understanding of the true spirit of modernism among Malaysian followers of the 1960s. With their naive enthusiasm for stylistic innovation, they produced works that were very much below par in quality. Even the writings of noted modernist poets seem merely quaint and pale by present-day standards.

Prejudice against social and political verse in Mahua literary circles also originated from the modernist movement. This resulted in the complete denial of the legitimate position of committed poetry in literature. The forerunners of modernism in Mahua literature failed to realize that any subject which appeals to the poet's passion and imagination should be valid as the basis of a universal and lasting poem. In the 1960s, poets belonging to the realist group did not produce poetry of very high aesthetic quality merely because their writings were overtly dialectic. But the fact remains that committed poets can also produce good, even great, art. Moreover, critics also neglect the fact that in a time of pessimism or loss of faith, only the writers with a social conscience can produce true literature for that age. The adverse effects of the modernist movement persisted until the end of the 1970s.

The flourishing literary activity in the Chinese community in the 1960s faced new challenges following the May 1969 riots. After the racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, new economic and cultural issues were confronted. These were issues which made modernist poets realize that they could no longer continue to be like the great Chinese poet Li Bai dreaming of roaming in the ancient Chinese city of Chang'an drinking wine. Most modernist writers began to abandon non-involved and alienated modes of expression. They realized for the first time that the realist writers' preoccupation with social issues was, after all, valid. Moreover, Taiwanese writers whom they admired so much had already begun to employ simple and lucid literary language in their writings by the mid-1970s. This mode of literary expression was soon adopted by the Malaysian modernist writers. At the same time, the realist writers realized that in order to produce artistic works, they had to use language in a more imaginative way. As a result, they were ready to learn the writing form from the modernist writers. Soon, the two groups of writers found that they had very little to quarrel about. Both groups turned their attention to the problems faced by the Chinese community, such as education, culture, poverty, and incompetent political leadership.

### Conclusion

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mahua literature, comprised largely of short stories, poetry, and essay writings, continued to be produced. But the volume has remained small and the quality rather mixed. Without a wide readership as well as official recognition, publishers are reluctant to publish too many works by local writers. Yet there will be Mahua literature and it will be developed, slow though this may be. Its development will rest on the Chinese-educated whose numbers will be sustained by the Chinese-medium school system in the country. Chinese newspapers will be expected to promote Mahua literature, a role they have faithfully assumed over the years.

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# The Chinese in Sarawak: An Overview

Daniel Chew

## Introduction

THE Chinese are an important ethnic community in Sarawak, comprising almost 30 per cent of the state's 1.9 million people. The community has played an important role in the state's historical, socio-economic, and political development. The story of the Chinese in Sarawak is very much a history of Chinese immigration to the region. It is a story of the push factors of migration because of poverty and strife in China and the lure of economic opportunity in the Nanyang. The prevailing circumstances of Sarawak have made the historical experiences of the Chinese somewhat unique in according it a rural, agrarian character. Most of the Chinese who migrated to Sarawak from the mid-1800s onwards worked on the land as farmers or as traders in the countryside, while smaller numbers worked as labourers in the coal mines and oil fields. The Chinese owe their presence in part to the Brooke dynastic family which ruled Sarawak from 1841 to 1941. The Brookes ruled Sarawak not unlike other metropolitan powers which colonized South-East Asia. The Brookes believed the Chinese could play a role in opening up the state, and undertook initiatives to attract them to come. But prior to the arrival of the Brookes, the Chinese have been coming to Borneo for centuries to trade with the indigenous people. There was even a self-governing *kongsi* in Bau, Sarawak, the antecedent of similar forms of Chinese social and political organizations in Borneo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, it was the arrival of the Brookes and their century of rule in Sarawak which laid the conditions for large-scale immigration of the Chinese.

The Brookes explicitly encouraged the Chinese to play a pioneering role in Sarawak: to farm the land, trade with the indigenous inhabitants, and work as wage labour on the coal mines and oil fields (Chew, 1990). The second White Rajah, Charles Brooke (1868–1917), made a number of initiatives in particular to welcome the Chinese to Sarawak, such as setting up a Foochow agricultural settlement in the Rejang at the beginning of the twentieth century. But even without the active encourage-

ment of the Brookes, the Chinese on their own were moving into Sarawak in search of economic opportunities as their predecessors had done before. Sarawak was underpopulated and underdeveloped but this was not a deterrent. Farming and trading were two occupations which the Chinese were very much involved in, and this was due to necessity rather than choice. Sarawak did not have plantations, estates, or big mines which needed large pools of labour. With the nature of occupations which the Chinese found themselves in, the rural character of the Chinese took root even though the Chinese can also be found in the cities and towns.

Through immigration and natural population increase, the Chinese have become the second largest ethnic group after the Dayak. The Chinese are a heterogeneous group historically divided along speech group and occupational lines. These differences in speech groups and occupations are important in defining the social structure of the Chinese. As one of many ethnic groups in Sarawak, it has been necessary for the Chinese to interact with other ethnic communities at the social, economic, and political levels. Sarawak has been a component state of Malaysia since 1963. This chapter will describe and analyze the social structure and social relations of the Chinese in Sarawak. But with historical experiences different from the rest of Malaysia before 1963, the year the Malaysian Federation was created, the undercurrents of regionalism had a pulling effect and this impacted upon the Chinese community.

### Social Structure

Long-standing Chinese trading and settlement patterns have existed in the territory now known as Sarawak from at least the seventh century (Chin, 1981: 13-14). However, the contemporary presence of the Chinese can be dated back to the nineteenth century with the beginning of Brooke rule in 1841. Chinese migration, beginning slowly, but accelerating in the first half of the twentieth century, helped to transform the demography, landscape, and economy of Sarawak. The Chinese responded to the opportunities which opened up with Brooke rule. As the Brookes acquired the various river basins from the Brunei overlords and made conditions safe for trade and settlement, the Chinese followed suit, settling in the riverine towns of Kuching, Sibul, Marudi, and Simanggang (now Sri Aman) and spreading themselves up-river either to trade or farm (Pringle, 1970; Chew, 1990). In the 1880s, through a series of land incentives, Charles Brooke attracted the Chinese to take up gambier and pepper planting in the territory.

It was trade, especially rural trade, which was essential to the early Sarawak economy and contributed to the Brooke coffers. Trade was an activity in which the Chinese were to excel and this encouraged them to move into the various riverine basins to set themselves up in the bazaars and as itinerant traders plying the rivers. Kuching, as the Brooke capital, became the most important town for attracting the Chinese to set up

their trading operations and base. The Hokkiens, Chao-anns, and Teochews were the three speech groups which were to play an active mercantile role in Kuching and the rest of Sarawak. Hokkien and Chao-ann traders in Kuching controlled the nineteenth-century export trade in sago and jungle products. They were rivalled by the Teochews who dealt with foodstuffs, a traditional Teochew monopoly linked to networks in Singapore, Thailand, and Swatow. The Hokkien traders had their own links to Singapore.

From Kuching, the Chinese were to fan out to the many riverine basins of Sarawak in search of trading opportunities, obtaining jungle and maritime products collected by the local inhabitants and selling to them outside goods such as porcelain, salt, and cloth. The Hokkiens moved from Kuching to towns and districts like Lingga, Pusa, Limbang, Baram, Mukah, Kapit, and Kanowit. The Chao-anns spread out to the coastal towns of Dalat, Balingian, Niah, and Sibuti. The Teochews could be found in Simanggang, Debak, Betong, and Bintulu. The spreading out of Chinese traders throughout the length and breadth of Sarawak was actively encouraged by wealthy patron traders in Kuching who supported small-time traders along dialect group lines by extending credit and goods supplies. The Kuching traders, in turn, were controlled by their counterparts in Singapore in a similar way. The control of trade was pervasive and extensive, stretching from the native longhouse in the interior right up to Singapore. The ubiquitous itinerant boat trader in Sarawak visiting the remote longhouses obtained his stocks from a bazaar trader in one of the towns dotted along the rivers. The bazaar trader, in turn, acquired his goods from Kuching. The Kuching trader obtained his supplies from Singapore. The flow of goods and credit was strictly in dialect group control.

Occupational specialization in trade had its social and political ramifications. Hokkien, Chao-ann, and Teochew merchants who became wealthy turned into power brokers and established close links with the Brookes (Lockard, 1987: 65-74). By the mid-nineteenth century, prominent Hokkien, Teochew, and Chao-ann leaders in Kuching were Ong Ewe Hai, Law Kian Huat, and Chan Ah Koh respectively. Ong (1830-89), a Singapore-born Hokkien, started off in life as a petty trader and then built up his own company. China-born Law financed pepper and gambier plantations, important cash crops in the nineteenth century. Chan, also China-born, started off with a small goods shop and expanded it to a trading business. Through a patron-client relationship, these community leaders helped to sponsor the migration of many members of their own dialect groups to Sarawak. In fact, this was to be a common method of chain migration which led to the spreading out of the Chinese throughout Sarawak.

By the 1890s, a second generation of Chinese leaders emerged in Kuching. Most influential among them was Ong Tiang Swee (1864-1950), son of Ong Ewe Hai, who came to dominate Chinese community life well into the first half of the twentieth century. Ong played a major role in virtually every Chinese institution, such as the

Kuching Chinese Chamber of Commerce. He was also the Kapitan China General or paramount Chinese leader of Sarawak (Lockard, 1987: 124).

As the Chinese population expanded, voluntary associations catering to different dialect groups grew in Kuching, especially between 1900 and 1941. Kuching was the town with the most significant concentration of the Chinese with economic and political clout. A pan-Chinese grouping, the Kuching Chinese Chamber of Commerce, emerged in the late nineteenth century as an attempt to unite the Kuching Chinese, serve Chinese interests, and act as an intermediary between the Chinese and the Brooke government. This influential body was dominated by Hokkien leader Ong Tiang Swee, with Teochew and Chao-ann leaders playing second fiddle. While the community leaders could get together at the apex of this pan-Chinese grouping, for the rest of the Chinese, it was the voluntary associations which they turned to for their everyday affairs and social relations.

In post-1945 Sarawak, Chinese businessmen from the Hokkien and the Teochew groups provided much of the impetus and leadership for political activity initiated by the newly established political parties, including the initially multi-ethnic Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP). However, other dialect groups in the post-war period such as the Hakkas and the Foochows were to pose a challenge to the Hokkiens and the Teochews.

While the Hokkiens, Chao-anns, and Teochews came to be traditionally identified with trade, the Hakkas were a predominantly rural dialect group engaged in pepper and gambier planting in the nineteenth century. Even before the arrival of the Brookes, the Hakkas were mining gold in Bau and established an autonomous *kongsi* set-up in Bau which was a threat to James Brooke in nearby Kuching. When Brooke defeated the Hakkas in the Kuching-Bau war of 1857, the Hakkas lost the economic independence they had previously enjoyed.

The *kongsi* established by the Hakkas was a frontier institution which enjoyed its own political autonomy and economic independence, pooling together resources in the arduous task of extracting gold ore. The *kongsi* was a successful institution well suited to the pioneering conditions of Bau. James Brooke was not prepared to tolerate the independence of the Bau *kongsi*, which he regarded as coming within his domain when he acquired the Sarawak River basin in 1841 from the Sultan of Brunei. Conflict between the autonomous Bau *kongsi* and James Brooke was inevitable. This led to the Kuching-Bau war of 1857, more conventionally known as the 'Chinese Rebellion'. The Bau Hakkas attacked Kuching with the aim of driving out James Brooke, but he survived the attack and, with the help of native allies, defeated the attackers.

From their erstwhile economic activity of mining, the Hakkas switched to farming, an occupation which is still carried on by the community. Occupational specialization and the control of trade in the hands of other dialect groups meant that the Hakkas had to confine themselves to agriculture. The Hakkas are today concentrated in the Kuching, Sri Aman, and Miri Divisions.

The next group, the Foochows, although a relatively late arrival in Sarawak, is one of the most dynamic speech groups. The group's arrival had its origin in Charles Brooke's encouragement and incentives to the Foochows to be pioneer farmers in the Rejang River basin at the beginning of the twentieth century. Foochow pioneer Wong Nai Siong, who subsequently became a folk legend although he did not stay long in Sibu, initiated and led the original Foochow settlements. The pioneering Foochows faced great difficulties in establishing their settlements, especially the expectations to create a 'rice bowl' in Sarawak. The Foochows did not understand rice growing methods, or appreciate the difficulties of coming to terms with the jungle environment. A more intractable problem was cultural differences with their Iban neighbours, especially the Iban attitude to cultivation and land usage according to *adat* or customary law.

The Foochows were a closely knit community united by a common Methodist faith and a resilience in wanting to overcome their difficulties and problems. This determination was to become a defining characteristic of the Foochows which was to later lead the speech group into making significant inroads in the economy and politics.

Originally supposed to plant rice and help transform the Rejang River basin into a rice bowl, the Foochows quickly switched to rubber when it became an attractive cash crop. The Foochows are reputed to be insular, dynamic, and economically aggressive, traits which have earned them the envy and mistrust of other speech and ethnic groups. After the Second World War, the Foochows pioneered the lucrative timber logging industry. Other industries they are engaged in are the import and export trade, and the financial, banking, property and manufacturing industries. The Foochows are a geographically and economically mobile group, having diversified from their agrarian roots in the lower Rejang basin. Some Foochow-owned companies have become prominent in national and regional business. Timber companies from Sibu have gone into Papua New Guinea and the Pacific islands since the 1970s, and even as far afield as Latin America.

There are other speech groups in Sarawak, again historically associated with occupational specialization. The Henghuas were traditionally fishermen, but are also linked to the bicycle trade. The Hainanese were associated with the catering and coffee shop trades. There is a concentration of Cantonese in the Kanowit district although they can also be found in the main towns. The Cantonese and the Hakkas formed the backbone of the labour force required to perform the hard work on the Miri oil fields at the beginning of the twentieth century (Chew, 1990).

The largest speech groups in Sarawak today are the Foochows and the Hakkas, and this is a feature not found in the other Malaysian states. Deliberate Brooke policies of encouraging the Chinese to be farmers were responsible for the predominance of these two communities in Sarawak. Another Brooke policy of encouraging the Chinese to be traders encouraged the Hokkiens and the Teochews to be the next major dialect groups. Kuching, as the seat of Brooke government, was the



capital from which the Chinese were to exercise their social and political influence although Sibü and Miri were to later emerge as rival centres.

Similar to the experience of Chinese elsewhere in Malaysia and the region, speech group affinity has characterized Chinese social structure in Sarawak, as attested by the proliferation of voluntary associations and dialect schools, especially in Kuching, in the first half of the twentieth century. Formal voluntary organizations constituted an important form of organizational life for the Chinese and continue to this day. Statistics compiled by Lam (1989) on Chinese voluntary associations in Sarawak indicate that speech group particularism is thriving and strong. According to Lam, in 1988, there were 54 kinship organizations, 93 locality or geographical associations, and over 200 occupational guilds.

Over time, especially after the Second World War, the occupational structure of the Chinese has changed drastically. Trade is no longer the monopoly of the Hokkiens, Chao-anns, and Teochews. Other dialect groups have broken the monopoly. But the Hakkas and Foochows, like their ancestors before them, still form the bulk of farmers due to their agrarian origins. Education, in Mandarin, English, and Malay, and marriages across speech groups have helped to break down dialect group differences. Political consciousness and activity have also been responsible in fostering a pan-Chinese feeling. With the rapid urbanization and modernization of Sarawak, new economic opportunities other than the traditional occupations of trading and farming have widened economic and occupational choices for the Chinese. The Chinese can be found in many diverse areas of the economy as entrepreneurs, professionals, white collar workers, blue collar workers, and farmers. Although the Chinese are generally perceived to be an economically dominant group, the obverse is also true as there are Chinese, too, who are struggling farmers. In fact, the Chinese are a plural society segmented by speech group, occupation, and class. The pluralistic nature of the Chinese community can be further examined by their intra- and inter-ethnic social relations.

### Social Relations

Intra- and inter-ethnic social relations are discussed at two levels, personal and institutional. We begin by discussing social interactions at the personal level. During the early waves of Chinese migration in the nineteenth century when Chinese women were scarce, Chinese men intermarried with the Dayak women. When Chinese society stabilized with the arrival of Chinese women there was less need to look for spouses outside the community. Inter-marriage, nevertheless, is a trend which still continues to the present.

In the rural areas where the Chinese form a distinct minority, inter-ethnic ties are unimpeded, particularly where opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction and understanding are greater. Although a certain degree of acculturation has taken place among the rural Chinese, especially among those who have intermarried, by and large the

community has retained its ethnic Chinese identity. This is perhaps due to the Brooke legacy of encouraging the Chinese to retain their identity and discouraging them from assimilating with the indigenous people (Pringle, 1970: 296–300).

Any child of mixed descent had to belong to one ethnic group or the other. He could not be Sino-Dayak for instance. One of the unwritten Brooke edicts which aimed at discouraging mixed identities was the rule that the Chinese could not live among the Dayaks. This was to discourage the Chinese rural traders from setting up shop among the Dayaks or living among them. Although such a ruling was not always enforceable because of administrative and practical considerations, such Brooke policies had the unconscious effect of maintaining separate identities.

Even in the main urban centres like Kuching, opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction are present and bazaar Malay is widely spoken across ethnic groups. The present younger generation of Chinese can speak and read Malay as a result of the national education policy. At a personal level, although the Chinese would generally interact with other Chinese and relate to their dialect group, occupational, or regional associations, they are also aware of the necessity of interacting with persons of other ethnic groups. Through a long period of cultural contact not marred by communal violence, many examples of cross-cultural exchanges in food, customs, languages, and religious practices can be found. Chang (1989) has cited examples of Chinese reverence and respect for Malay *keramat* (saints) in Chinese temples.

A manifestation of social relations cutting across ethnic boundaries is the open house concept during Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, and Hari Gawai when it is not uncommon for Malays or Dayaks to visit Chinese homes and vice-versa. The Chinese host, if expecting Malay guests, is sensitive to the need to have *halal* food (that conform to Islamic teachings) and orders such food accordingly. The open house idea during festive seasons is, of course, not confined only to certain occasions during the year nor to the present. Sarawak is well known for the hospitality accorded to visitors and strangers. In the past, numerous colonial administrators and travellers commented on the legendary hospitality accorded to them whenever they visited longhouses, a practice which is still prevalent. Chinese traders used to frequently visit and stay in Dayak longhouses although official Brooke edicts discouraged them from doing so.

Chinese and indigenous people interact at the institutional level, such as at schools and places of work. Mission schools started by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, which traditionally used to be one of the main providers of education in Sarawak, have been institutions for inter-ethnic relations. Mission schools in the towns, whose core enrolment is Chinese, have attracted substantial numbers of indigenous students. Many of the present bumiputra leaders of the state received their education in mission schools and have publicly acknowledged the usefulness of the secular education they received. Notable among the post-war generation of political leaders is the present Chief Minister of Sarawak, Tan Sri Datuk Patinggi Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud who was

educated in St Joseph's School, Kuching. Inter-ethnic friendships forged in school form the basis of useful old boy networks in later life.

Social interaction at work can be illustrated at the business level. At the economic level, social ties have reinforced economic relationships, especially in trade where economic symbiosis was historically practised between the Chinese trader and his indigenous customer. There was a complementary relationship, with each needing the other (Pringle, 1970; Chew, 1990). While this relationship still continues, especially in the rural areas, at the more complex and lucrative level of timber logging, successful partnerships have been forged between Chinese timber entrepreneurs and bumiputra politicians and businessmen. Control of, and access to, timber wealth has been one avenue to political power which has benefited Chinese and bumiputra alike. The Chinese timber tycoons, mainly Foochow, see the usefulness of political connections which are necessary to maintain and enhance their personal wealth. This phenomenon is best exemplified by the exposé of 'money politics' in the run up to the 1987 state elections which pitted the supporters of Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud against the supporters of Taib Mahmud's uncle, Tun Datuk Patinggi Haji Abdul Rahman Yakub, former Chief Minister and Governor. In the fierce electioneering campaign, timber concessions held by supporters of both camps were revealed in the local press (*Sarawak Tribune*, 11 April 1987; *People's Mirror*, 12 April 1987; *New Straits Times*, 12 April 1987), including the nominees' names. The political parties and their supporters spent millions of ringgit in the election campaign (Leigh, 1991: 192). The spending of such money was deemed necessary in order to enhance economic interests and maintain political links.

While Chinese-bumiputra élite co-operation at the economic level is carried out and both groups recognize a congruence of objectives, the timber logging operations have met with resistance from the interior communities most affected by the logging. In the mid-1980s, the Penans, Kayans, and others staged blockades of the timber camps and temporarily succeeded in hampering timber-cutting operations. This explosive situation can be seen as more of an economic problem involving the indigenous people's customary rights to land, their cultural attitudes to resource management, and the intricate relationship between timber wealth and politics. The point to be made is that diametrically opposed economic and cultural attitudes can be a basis for ethnic tension. And indeed this was the case in the mid-1920s in Binatang when the Foochows' indiscriminate clearing of seemingly unclaimed land brought them into sharp conflict with the Ibans who claimed customary ownership of the land.

Intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations may perhaps be best observed at the institutional level of political activity where political parties compete for the support of the Chinese as well as that of other ethnic groups. When mass party politics were introduced in Sarawak in the late 1950s there was keen competition for the support of the Chinese. Kuching, the state capital where the Hokkiens were dominant in the

community, provided the leadership and impetus for the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), one of Sarawak's first political parties. The party also garnered the support of the rural Hakkas. A formidable alliance was forged between the wealthy Hokkien and Chao-ann leadership and the rural Hakka base. A conservative Sarawak Chinese Association (SCA), modelled after the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), was an alliance of the English-educated Chinese, mainly the Teochews in Kuching, with wealthy Foochow backers in Sibü. Speech group differences among the Chinese were thus transferred to the political arena. The SCA was in government from 1963 until 1970, while SUPP was an opposition party. When SUPP became a government coalition partner in 1970, SCA suffered a setback but the Foochows were not left out of politics. They joined SUPP and in later years, in the 1980s, managed to wrest control of the party from the Kuching-based leaders.

The Chinese-controlled SUPP, as one of the earliest political parties in Sarawak, provided a political platform for ethnic Chinese who were influenced by radical ideology and a resurgent pride in China after the aftermath of the 1949 communist revolution. Chinese-oriented organizations infiltrated SUPP and intended to use it as a communist united front strategy. The opposition to the incorporation of Sarawak into Malaysia provided the Chinese with an impetus towards political opposition. A radical expression of this culminated in the exodus of about 1,000 Sarawak Chinese youths across the Indonesian border to train with Indonesian volunteers in insurgency tactics when Indonesia launched its Confrontation against Malaysia (van der Kroef, 1966: 66). Chinese militant activity and opposition to Malaysia were aroused by fears of uncertainty and discrimination against the Chinese. SUPP was the beneficiary of the expression of these fears and indeed the party actively campaigned against the entry of Sarawak into Malaysia (Chin, 1996: 80-1).

An important political difference among the Chinese which has surfaced at the forefront of political activity is the gulf between the Chinese- and the English-educated groups (Chin, 1981: 94). The Chinese schools, run by the voluntary associations, introduced Mandarin in the 1930s, and on the eve of the Second World War there was a network of Chinese urban and rural schools throughout Sarawak. As distinct from the Chinese schools, the missionary schools provided a secular English education. There were wide ideological differences between the Chinese- and the English-educated Chinese. The limited employment opportunities for the Chinese-educated in the post-war period, and opposition to Malaysia, provided a hot-bed for left-wing politics to flourish. The Chinese-educated were a source of support for SUPP. The English-educated, although a minority, enjoyed better job prospects and were generally supportive of Sarawak being part of Malaysia.

While SUPP was initially opposed to the entry of Sarawak into Malaysia, the SCA was staunchly pro-Malaysia. In the early years of

Malaysia, the SCA was a partner of the state's Alliance government while SUPP, despite its strong electoral support among the Chinese, remained in opposition. SUPP enjoyed mass base support, especially among Kuching's Hokkiens and the rural Hakkas. It enjoyed some Dayak support, too. Indeed, political parties in Sarawak have shown a tendency not to be exclusively ethnic in appeal and can attract support across ethnic lines. The intense competition between SUPP and SCA extended to the major Chinese voluntary associations and Chinese schools where control of these institutions was fought for.

A critical turning point for SUPP was in 1970 when it became a power broker, a role it has continued to play. This is indeed a sharp departure from its anti-Malaysia stand. The support enjoyed by SUPP in the 1970 state election catapulted the party to prominence when it entered into a dramatic government coalition arrangement with the Malay/Melanau-controlled Parti Bumiputra. The 1970 election results created an impasse when it was uncertain who would control the reins of government. Sarawak politics is characterized by negotiations and brokerage among competing parties. The 1970 election results could have resulted in a number of permutations. SUPP could have aligned itself with the Iban-majority Sarawak National Party (SNAP) to form the next government and, indeed, serious negotiations were taking place while it (SUPP) was also discussing terms with Parti Bumiputra. Realpolitik thinking, however, prevailed as the SUPP leadership realized that the arrangement with SNAP would alienate the Federal government with dire consequences for the party and state if there was no Malay and Melanau representation in government. This persuaded SUPP to join with Parti Bumiputra instead.

One of the conditions requested by SUPP when it became a state government coalition partner was the disbandment of SCA. With the eminence of SUPP as a government coalition partner came a jockeying for political influence and patronage in the party between the Hokkiens and the Hakkas in Kuching and the Foochows in Sibu. It was only natural that the Foochows, with their new-found wealth from timber, would pose a challenge to established Kuching Hokkien-Hakka leadership.

The entry of the Peninsula-based opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) into Sarawak politics in 1978 gave the Chinese an opportunity to exercise their anti-establishment feelings. The DAP in Sarawak was generally unsuccessful in the state elections until 1996 when it ousted the then SUPP President and Deputy Chief Minister, Tan Sri Dr Wong Soon Kai. The DAP's lack of success in making significant inroads among the Chinese over the years may be explained by the Chinese preference to have a Chinese-controlled SUPP in the state government to represent Chinese interests.

Political factors have helped shape Chinese identity in Sarawak. The political creation of Malaysia caused the Chinese to assert their ethnic identity. When first mooted, the Federation of Malaysia proposal was opposed by many Chinese who feared the loss of their rights and identity, and this was manifested in the strong support for the anti-Malaysia

SUPP (Teng and Ngieng, 1990: 70-1). The Chinese felt insecure under Malaysia, and this sense of insecurity continued during the first years of the Federation. Besides supporting SUPP, many Chinese threw in their lot behind SNAP when the Iban-led party, campaigning for state nationalism, was expelled from the state's Alliance government in 1966 and became an opposition party espousing state rights. When the SUPP leadership formed a coalition government with Parti Bumiputra in 1970, it posed a challenge for the party to shift from its stand of being initially anti-Malaysia to one of being a power broker in state politics. In the years since then, the party has proved itself to be adept in playing this brokerage role, especially in the 1987 and 1991 state elections with the Chinese giving solid support to SUPP when the coalition party partners led by Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud faced strong opposition. This high level of support for Taib Mahmud by SUPP could be due to a heightened sense of ethnic consciousness, especially when ethnic issues like Dayak nationalism began to be championed by the then opposition Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS), an Iban-based party which was a breakaway faction of SNAP. The Chinese are increasingly looking to the élite of the community as defenders of Chinese interests, and the political arena is seen as important for the protection of Chinese ethnic identity.

Splits in indigenous party politics in the mid-1980s when Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud had an open quarrel with his uncle, Abdul Rahman Yakub, and the intense jockeying for support by the two protagonists created an opportunity for the Chinese to play the role of kingmaker in Sarawak politics as they had done in 1970. The SUPP chose to throw its lot behind Abdul Taib Mahmud. The Chief Minister narrowly escaped a putsch to overthrow him in February 1987 in the so-called Ming Court Hotel affair in Kuala Lumpur when disenchanted State Assembly members signed no confidence letters in Abdul Taib Mahmud. In the state general elections which were called shortly afterwards, Abdul Taib Mahmud retained control of the government with the help of SUPP, capturing 55 per cent of the votes (28 seats), while the opposition parties of PDBS and PERMAS (Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak), led by Abdul Rahman Yakub, obtained 32 per cent of the votes (20 seats). With PBDS eventually becoming a partner in the state coalition government and the demise of PERMAS, opposition politics weakened. From the manoeuvres of 1970 when SUPP became a part of government and gave the Chinese significant representation in government, the Chinese have exercised a brokering role in state politics that cannot be ignored, and this is recognized by the other political parties.

### Conclusion

The Chinese constitute an important minority group in the state's and nation's multi-cultural fabric, playing an important political and economic role. Past and present generations of the Chinese such as the miners, traders, labourers, entrepreneurs, and professionals have helped

to build Sarawak into what it is today. As Sarawak progressed from being under the dynastic rule of the White Rajahs to colonial rule and finally attaining independence within Malaysia, so have the Chinese moved along from their immigrant and sojourning origins to being citizens of Malaysia. As citizens of Malaysia the Chinese are conscious of their Chinese Malaysian identity and also their distinctiveness as an ethnic group among the many in Sarawak. They are a minority group conscious of the need to preserve and protect their identity against the backdrop of political and social change.

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## The Chinese in Sabah: An Overview

Danny Wong Tze-Ken

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

IN 1991, the Chinese community formed 15.5 per cent of the population in Sabah. This is a decline when compared to figures in 1960 when the Chinese in Sabah constituted 23 per cent of the state's population (Jones, 1966 Department of Statistics, 1995). Nevertheless, they remain the largest non-indigenous group in the state. Even as their percentage declines in relation to other ethnic groups, the Chinese in Sabah continue to be an integral component of the social mosaic of this state. Since their arrival in the late nineteenth century, the Chinese in Sabah have played a major part in the development of the state. In the field of politics, the Chinese in Sabah are a cohesive political force. The community has provided the state with two chief ministers.

There are a number of distinctive features about the Chinese in Sabah. Only in Sabah do the Hakka form the largest dialect group among the Chinese and their dialect the lingua franca of the Chinese community. Such features have no parallel in other parts of Malaysia or South-East Asia. Second, only in Sabah is there a northern Chinese community whose presence was perhaps the only one in the whole of South-East Asia during the pre-Second World War period. Third, the Chinese in Sabah were one of the few groups in South-East Asia who staged an uprising against the Japanese Army during the Second World War. Fourth, despite being heavily politicized, there was no Chinese-led communist movement in Sabah. Finally, there is a very large number of Christians among the Chinese in Sabah, where they form about 30 per cent of the total Chinese population.

Historically, Sabah was part of the Brunei and Sulu sultanates until 1878 when the North Borneo Chartered Company established Western rule in the territory. From 1881 to 1942, the Chartered Company ruled the state. Between January 1942 to August 1945, the Japanese Army occupied Sabah. During the Japanese rule, the Chinese in Jesselton staged an uprising against the Japanese. After the war, Sabah was administered by the British Military Administration (September 1945 to



July 1946) before being declared a crown colony. In September 1963, Sabah joined Malaysia, and became the third largest state in the Federation.

### Chinese Immigration to Sabah

Links between the territory that makes up present-day Sabah (Borneo) and China can be dated back to as early as the Han Dynasty in China.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, such links were limited to occasional trade missions by the Chinese to this part of the world which they called 'Nanyang' or South Seas, and rarely did the Chinese settle in large numbers.<sup>3</sup> Speculations of possible early Chinese influence in the Sabah territory<sup>4</sup> are supported by several features in the state. The name of the longest river in Sabah, the Kinabatangan River, and the highest mountain, Kinabalu, have the word 'Kina'. 'Kina' is the Kadazan version of 'Cina' ('Cina' means Chinese in some Bornean languages including the Dusun, Bajau, and also the Malay language). Then there is the physical resemblance of the Kadazan-Dusun ethnic group to the Chinese. There are, however, no sources to support the theory of very early Chinese settlement in Sabah.

Spencer St. John, an English traveller who visited the west coast of Sabah in 1859, reported several encounters with indigenous people who could speak either fluent Teochew or the Hokkien dialects. Most of them claimed to be descendants of Chinese who were petty traders plying between Labuan and the mainland (St John, 1862: 311). Most of the Chinese who arrived from Labuan came from the Straits Settlements, especially Singapore. This trend of arrival persisted until several years after the establishment of the Chartered Company rule. Thus, the Hokkiens and the Teochew continued to be prominent until the Chartered Company brought in other dialect groups.

The Chartered Company discovered that one of the most immediate problems it faced was the need to have labour to develop the territory's resources. The indigenous population in Sabah was considered to be too few and unsuited to meet the challenges of a commercial economy (Oades, 1961: 39). In 1881, the number of indigenous people in Sabah was estimated to be between 60,000 and 100,000.<sup>5</sup> Thus, to forge ahead with its development policy and to bring profit to the Company, immigration was encouraged. Guided by the successes of other British colonial possessions such as Singapore and the Malay states where there were sizeable Chinese communities, the Chartered Company officials looked to China as the source of immigrants. The idea was supported by most Chartered Company officials including Alfred Dent, the Chairman, and William Hood Treacher, the first governor of the state (Treacher, 1890: 27).

William Crocker, who succeeded Treacher in 1887, was also in favour of encouraging Chinese immigration to Sabah. He wrote, 'You may not only secure the development of the country ... but a paying population who will in time provide a revenue in the excess of the cost of government'

(Crocker, 1887: 5). Crocker was referring not only to the industrious characteristics of the Chinese, but also to their vices and habits, particularly relating to opium smoking, gambling, and drinking habits, from which the government could extract a dependable revenue through duties and taxes. Almost immediately, an immigration scheme to bring in Chinese immigrants to the state was put into operation. And since then until the Second World War, Chinese immigration was a significant feature in the development of the state.

Between 1881 and 1941, Chinese were brought into the state by the Chartered Company through at least three major immigration schemes (Wong, 1998: 14–21, 54–61, 85–90). The first scheme was implemented between 1882 and 1886 under the newly appointed Commissioner of Immigration, Sir Walter Medhurst. Between 1883 and 1886, no fewer than five ship-loads of Chinese were brought into Sabah. However, most of those who arrived through this scheme were shopkeepers and artisans who found themselves unable to make a living in an unexplored and undeveloped territory. Most were Cantonese, though there were also some Hakkas. Even though the scheme failed to achieve its goal to bring in labourers, it helped to establish Sabah as a new destination for Chinese emigration.

Between 1881 and 1900, most of the Chinese who came to Sabah via Hong Kong were Cantonese and Hakkas. Those who arrived from other British colonies in South-East Asia and the Philippines were either Hokkiens or Teochews, many of whom were merchants and petty traders. Others were employed as supporting staff by the Chartered Company administration. A significant number of Hokkiens and Teochews had received English education in the Straits Settlements before coming to Sabah. This gave them a head start, compared to other dialect groups, for entry into the government services. This trend continued until the 1920s when more Hakkas, having benefited from an English education, especially in the various mission schools, entered the government service.

The second major immigration scheme was a Basel Church–Chartered Company scheme first implemented in 1912.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese who came under this scheme were predominantly Hakka Christians. Under the agreement, the new immigrants were given land to work. This led to the emergence of a community of smallholders. The new arrivals were settled along the Tuaran Road and Kudat.

The third scheme was the Free Passage Scheme to attract Chinese settlers for agricultural activities (Table 14.1). Under this scheme, introduced in 1921, Chinese settlers were encouraged to send for their relatives and friends from China. The passage was paid by the Chartered Company. Upon their arrival, the new settlers were given land. The popularity of this scheme, however, depended very much on the price of rubber and other crops. The number of new entries under the scheme declined when commodity prices were low, and shot up whenever there was a boom. The granting of land to the new immigrants resulted in the

TABLE 14.1  
Total Chinese Arrivals in Sabah under the Free Passage  
Scheme versus the Self-sponsored, 1921-1940

Year	Free Passage Scheme	Self-sponsored
1921	18	-NA-
1922	4	-NA-
1923	200	-NA-
1924	530	-NA-
1925	204	-NA-
1926	317	-NA-
1927	886	-NA-
1928	1,278	2,724
1929	1,067	2,967
1930	1,157	2,882
1931	395	1,519
1932	92	1,086
1933	187	2,315
1934	643	3,307
1935	667	3,837
1936	395	4,577
1937	493	7,912
1938	345	3,342
1939	263	1,992
1940	373	2,472
Total	9,514	40,932

Source: *North Borneo Annual and Administrative Reports* (1921-1940).

opening of new areas previously undeveloped. One such place was the area around Appas Road in Tawau that eventually become an important agricultural area (*British North Borneo Herald*, 16 November 1928).

The beneficiaries of the scheme were Hakka settlers who brought their womenfolk and other relatives. One of the most remarkable consequences of the Free Passage Scheme was the increase in Chinese female immigrants into the state (Table 14.2). The increase of female immigrants improved the gender ratio of the Chinese from 367 females per 1,000 males in 1921 to 565 females per 1,000 males in 1931 (Jones, 1966: 51).

Other minor schemes included those that led to the entry of northern Chinese who were brought into Sabah in 1913 from Hebei Province in northern China. Due to their northern origins, and the proximity of Hebei to Shantung province, the community is commonly known as the Shantung community (cf. Hall, 1953; Tan, 1997). Then there were other Chinese who were brought into Sabah for specific projects, such as the building of railways. Between 1895 and 1912, hundreds of Chinese, mainly Hakkas, were brought in as contract labourers to build the railway from Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu) to Melalap.

Although there were various immigration schemes, many of the

TABLE 14.2  
Number of Chinese Females in Sabah by  
Dialect Group, 1921-1951

<i>Dialect Group</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1931</i>	<i>1951</i>
Hakka	6,168	11,330	20,610
Cantonese	2,413	3,621	4,995
Hokkien	1,213	1,735	3,074
Teochew	424	710	1,562
Hailam	124	333	1,347

*Source:* Jones (1953: 112).

Chinese who arrived in Sabah in fact came on their own accord. They came in search of employment on the estates or other construction projects. Others arrived to join their relatives.

The Chinese community experienced a very rapid population growth. Between 1901 and 1951, the number of Chinese increased from 13,897 to 74,374 (Table 14.3).

Demographically, the Chinese were divided quite evenly during the pre-war days between those in urban and rural areas. Until 1960, about half of the Chinese population lived in rural areas. Almost half of the Chinese in Sabah resided in the two districts of Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu) and Sandakan; about 65 per cent of the Chinese population were concentrated in the four main urban centres of the state and their vicinities, namely, Jesselton, Sandakan, Kudat, and Tawau (Lee, 1965b: 63).

When the Chinese arrived in Sabah, they moved to different areas according to the nature of their arrivals and vocations (*ibid.*: 65). Most of the Cantonese settled in the towns as merchants and artisans, some worked as coolies in the various estates. The Teochews and the Hokkiens first came as petty traders. These first three dialect groups were described by Lee Yong Leng (1965b) as the 'backbone of the Chinese commercial population'. The Hakkas, who were brought in

TABLE 14.3  
Growth of Chinese Population, 1891-1951

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Chinese</i>	<i>% Increase</i>	<i>% of Total Population</i>
1891	7,156	-NA-	-NA-
1901	13,897	94.00	-NA-
1911	27,801	100.05	16.1
1921	39,256	41.20	15.0
1931	50,056	27.50	18.0
1951	74,374	48.60	22.3

*Sources:* Jones (1953: 112); Lee (1965b: 63).

*Note:* The figures collected in the 1891 and 1901 censuses are thought to be inconclusive. See Jones (1966: 20).

mainly as agriculturists, pioneers, and coolies in the estates, settled predominantly in rural areas. The Hailam (Hainanese) dialect group was mainly engaged in the food service industry as well as bicycle shop operators.<sup>7</sup>

### Links with China

The early Sabah Chinese maintained links with their ancestral land, or at the least with Hong Kong. These links were expressed in three forms, namely, national sentiment, business connections, and family ties. Most of the Chinese maintained strong ties with their families in China. Many, especially the indentured labourers or self-sponsored immigrants, were sojourners with the intention to return to China or Hong Kong after amassing sufficient wealth. Even those who chose to settle, like the Hakka Christians who had faced persecution during the Manchu rule, continued ties with their ancestral land. There were also the cultural ties through Chinese education. Chinese schools in Sabah were modelled after those in China. In the 1930s, links were strengthened by the growing number of Chinese youths who went to study in secondary schools and universities in Hong Kong and China.

In business, many Chinese businesses in Sandakan were connected to businesses in China or Hong Kong. The frequent trips made by the local Chinese businessmen to those two places underlined this point. Fung Ming Shan's Fung Ming Shan & Co., Wong Sow Chuan's Sun Kwong Loong & Co., the Kwan family-owned Man Woo Loong & Co. and Lam Man Ching's Kwong Luen Shing & Co. maintained strong links with business circles in Hong Kong. Lam Man Ching, for instance, was known to be the front man of a business consortium in Hong Kong.

Even though most of the early Chinese who came to Sabah were forced to leave China because of economic hardship, natural calamities, and religious and political persecution, they nevertheless remained attached to China. This is seen in their involvements in events in China. During the height of the anti-Manchu campaign for instance, many Hakkas from Sabah returned to China to join the Hui Zhou Uprising of 1900.<sup>8</sup> There were anti-Manchu organizations in Sabah, such as reading clubs in the major towns. There were also leaders of Chinese nationalist movements operating in Sabah. Lam Man Ching, the Kapitan China, for instance, was the local leader of the Tung Meng Hui in Sandakan (Hakka Association of Sandakan, 1986: 43).

In 1916, a Chinese consulate was opened in Jesselton. Sia Tian Bao, a Chinese official sent to Sabah as the supervisor for the newly arrived northern Chinese, was appointed the first Consul General. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, a total of eight Chinese consuls were stationed in Sabah. From 1916 to 1931, the consulate was situated in Jesselton, but this was later moved to Sandakan. The presence of a Chinese consul had strong influence over the Chinese in Sabah, most of whom were recent immigrants. First, it served to remind the Chinese of

their ancestral land; and secondly, it was a centre for overseeing the welfare of the Chinese in Sabah who, apart from a few naturalized citizens, were all considered as Chinese nationals.

Just before the Second World War, the Chinese in Sabah numbered about 65,000.<sup>9</sup> As with Chinese elsewhere in South-East Asia, the Chinese in Sabah reacted strongly against Japanese military encroachment in China in the 1930s. Such feeling heightened after the Double-Seven Incident that marked the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese in Sabah responded by boycotting all forms of Japanese-related activities, especially trade.

The reactions of the Chinese in Sabah were strongly influenced by the part played by two local Chinese newspapers which carried strong anti-Japanese propaganda. In Jesselton, Lee Nyuk Lin started his *Overseas Chinese Daily (Huaqiao Ribao)* in 1936. This was followed two years later by Chong Wai Cho of Sandakan who published a paper with a similar title to Lee's. Both Lee and Chong relied on Chinese radio broadcasts from the wartime capital of Zhongqing, and published news on war progress in China. They disseminated anti-Japanese slogans and cartoons.<sup>10</sup> The sense of nationalism of the Chinese immigrants towards China during the Sino-Japanese conflict was also influenced by local Chinese leaders who campaigned for the China Relief Fund. The Chinese in Sabah contributed generously towards the various funds (including the China Relief Fund) set up to help the Chinese war efforts. Beyond this, some younger ones returned to China to serve in the Chinese Army.

The links between the Chinese in Sabah and China declined sharply not long after the Second World War when the Communist Party of China gained power in China in 1949. The colonial government tightened its control over Chinese immigration to Sabah, and travel between Sabah and China slowed down by the early 1950s. Only some elderly people were allowed to visit their relatives in China, as were those who returned for medical treatment. The situation changed only after the fall of the Communist bloc in Europe and the end of the Cold War.

### Economic Activities

When Medhurst was appointed the first Commissioner of Immigration, he was given two tasks. The first task was to bring in suitable Chinese labourers; Medhurst's other task was to attract Chinese capital for the development of the state. Medhurst's immigration scheme was generally considered a failure in terms of attracting labourers, but he was more successful in his second endeavour. This laid the foundation of future Chinese involvement in the state's economy. The Chinese arrivals had a two-fold involvement, namely, as small-stake capitalists and as employees in the various sectors of the state's economy.

The early Chinese enterprises in Sabah were mainly in commerce and farming, with some involved in the extraction of natural resources such as timber and mining. With half of the Chinese living in the urban

areas, making up almost 80 per cent of the major towns' total population, the Chinese dominated commerce. In suburban or rural areas where they were a minority, the Chinese were involved in small retail businesses.

The Chinese participation in the extraction of gold started in 1884 in the Segama River basin. From that year until 1890, there were about 500 Chinese miners panning for gold along the various tributaries of the river (Tregonning, 1965: 96). A group of about 1,000 Cantonese also worked at the coalfield at Silimponon River near Tawau from 1906 to 1940.<sup>11</sup> Mining exploration also attracted the Chinese to Sandakan and Tawau. In the process, this encouraged other forms of economic activities, including transportation and supply of food.

Prior to the Second World War, the Chinese made up a substantial number of estate workers. In 1890, there were 8,000 Chinese working in the 80 tobacco estates during the brief tobacco boom in Sabah. In 1907, a total of 4,856 out of the 10,467 workers in the 30 estates in Sabah were Chinese (Lee, 1965b: 33). However, subsequent immigration saw fewer Chinese working in estates. Instead, most moved to other fields, including government-sponsored land settlements. By the third decade of the twentieth century, there was an increase in the number of Chinese who, upon their arrival in Sabah, took up land for agricultural purposes. Sizeable Chinese smallholders emerged as a result of this development. In 1919, Chinese smallholders planted 3069 hectares out of 19 334.3 hectares of rubber in Sabah, making up about one-sixth of the total production (British North Borneo, 1919). The number of Chinese smallholders continued to increase after the introduction of the Free Passage Immigration Scheme (1921-40), when more Chinese applied for land faster than the land ranger could process them. New agriculture areas were opened as a result of this development (*British North Borneo Herald*, 16 November 1928). Most Chinese-owned rubber holdings were concentrated on the west coast where the land is more fertile than in the east. In Kudat and Tawau, Chinese smallholders were most active in coconut planting. The majority of the Chinese smallholders were Hakkas. Most of them were Christians, a result of the Government-Basel Mission initiated immigration programmes. Chinese participation in agricultural activities continued to be strong even after the Second World War. This is evident in the number of the Chinese rural dwellers who made up almost 65 per cent of the total Chinese population in the 1960s (Lee, 1965b: 80).

The participation of the Chinese businessmen of Sabah in the state's economy took two forms, namely, commerce and the operating of government economic concessions. The early Chinese businessmen were mainly Hokkien and Teochew petty traders. As towns began to develop, Chinese merchants who, in many instances, represented business interests in Hong Kong, China, and the Straits Settlements began to make their presence felt in Sabah. In Sandakan, companies such as the Man Woo Loong & Co., Fung Ming Shan & Co., Sun Kwong Loong & Co., Kwong Luen Shing, Kim Eng Watt & Co., Yong Soon & Co., Kwong Teo Hin & Co., and Sun Kwong Lung & Co., were all

engaged in retail, wholesale, insurance, shipping, and forwarding services. Sun Kwong Loon & Co., owned by Wong Sow Chuan, also operated the Sandakan Hotel and S.S. *Man Shing*, one of the bigger ships plying the coast of Sabah. On the west coast and at Kudat, Kwong Hiap Hing & Co., Tay Bee Yong Brothers, Goh Kim Swee & Co., and Yuat Fong Brothers were the main business houses. There were others such as Chee Swee Cheng and Cheah Loon Ghee, both Straits Chinese, who were big landowners. Chee, who was originally from Malacca, was also the owner of a large brick kiln, while Penang-born Cheah was the owner of Jesselton Hotel. Most of these business houses were also, at one point or another, holders of the Chartered Company's revenue farms.

Several of the Chinese *towkay* were also involved in the timber industry. Two companies, Kim Eng Watt Co. and Shing Kee Co., both of Sandakan had been working in Sabah long before any timber monopoly scheme was introduced by the Chartered Company. It was the timber *towkay* who greatly prospered, and they became prominent in the state's economy and politics.

The economic structure of Sabah in the post-war period and during the Malaysia phase remained similar to that of the Chartered Company rule. Reliance on natural resources such as timber and mining continued to be the mainstay of the economy. For the Chinese, however, there were significant changes. These included changes in the occupational pattern of the Chinese. There were also the challenges posed by the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

By the 1950s, the occupational pattern of the Chinese had altered significantly from the pre-Second World War dialect group identification. The most visible change was among the Hakkas who were predominant in agriculture and were rural-based during the Chartered Company administration. Han Sin Fong, in his survey on the occupational pattern of the Chinese in Sabah, detected a major shift among the Hakkas in Kota Kinabalu and its vicinity in 1970 where fewer Hakkas were engaged in agriculture-based activities. Instead, the Hakkas began to dominate other economic activities which thus far had been the domain of other dialect groups. These included druggists (pharmacists), watch-smiths/shop proprietors, photo studio proprietors, goldsmiths, bookstore operators, hardware store operators, travel agents, tailors, and opticians (Han, 1975: 104-5). The Hakkas were also dominant in the Western-oriented white-collar clerical occupation (*ibid.*: 108). This trend had emerged since the 1920s when the Hakkas began dominating the support staff of the civil services.

In 1991, the Hakkas still constituted the largest number of rural dwellers with 19,906 out of a total of 34,140 Chinese living in rural areas. They were also the largest dialect group among the town folks—with 38,607 out of a total of 69,859 (Department of Statistics, 1991). This represented a significant transformation from being a people dependent on a rural-based agriculture economy to a community that engaged in all forms of economic activities. This change was possible because among all the Chinese dialect groups, the Hakkas in Sabah,



many of whom were Christians, were more receptive to Western education. The transformation is also significant as the Hakkas started at a much lower take-off point than the other dialect groups.

The Chinese economic activities also experienced major changes. Chinese participation in the estate and government services showed a marked decline following the end of the Second World War. In 1907, half of the estate workers in Sabah were Chinese, but the figure has since declined. By 1976, there were only 577 Chinese working in the estates, barely 1 per cent of the total estate population. The Chinese had been dominant in the civil services prior to the war, but their number dropped to 742 in 1986, or 4 per cent of the total government servants (Pang, 1989: 111).

Overall, there has been a marked decline in Chinese representation in all sectors of the state's economy since 1960. This decline has been attributed to the implementation of the NEP. Apart from the effects of the NEP, the declining percentage in Chinese participation is also due to the decreasing percentage in the total Chinese population. In 1970, the Chinese population was 139,509, forming 21.3 per cent of the total population. In 1980, the number of Chinese had increased to 153,981 but the percentage had declined to 16.2 per cent. By 1991, while the number of Chinese had grown to 199,140, the percentage had dropped further to 15.5 per cent of the total population of the state.

Despite the decline in the percentage of representation in all sectors, the Chinese share of the economy is still significant (Table 14.4). James Chin estimated that the Chinese business community is still holding about 70 per cent of the state's economy (Chin, 1994: 910). While it is difficult to determine the actual equity held by the Chinese in Sabah, their domination of the business sector and strong representation within the professional circles have been noted.

While the Chinese representation in the professional groups has fallen against other ethnic groups, their percentage within the community has actually increased. In 1991, the number of Chinese working as professionals and in technical and related works, was 8,065, representing 4 per cent of the Chinese population (compared to 1.5 per cent in 1960). A breakdown of the figure shows that within the Chinese

TABLE 14.4  
Occupational Changes between Chinese and *Pribumi*, 1970 and 1980

Sector	<i>Pribumi</i>				Chinese			
	1970	%	1980	%	1970	%	1980	%
Agriculture	100,850	80	182,022	93	8,879	7	12,629	6
Manufacturing	1,675	24	11,467	68	4,511	64	4,050	24
Industry	3,711	44	8,727	68	3,371	39	3,537	27
Services	23,158	45	69,824	65	21,409	41	34,038	32

Source: Pang (1989: 123).

community in 1991, teachers formed 1.83 per cent compared to 0.8 per cent in 1960, medical and veterinary related work were 0.49 per cent compared to 0.05 per cent in 1960, and engineers, architects, and surveyors represented 0.7 per cent compared to 0.02 per cent in 1960.<sup>12</sup>

### Leadership and Politics

The Chinese in Sabah are strongly tied to their respective dialect associations. However, little documentation is available regarding the existence of dialect associations in Sabah, particularly for the first 10 years of Chartered Company rule. In 1886, the Hakka community in Sandakan officially started a dialect association called the Ngo Cheng Hui Guan (The City of Ngo Cheng Association, after the centre of Hui Zhou County in Guangdong Province, where many of the founders of the association came from).<sup>13</sup> The Hokkiens started their association in 1888. This was followed a year later by the Teochew Association, officially named Ngee Ann Hui Guan. In 1887, a Guangdong Association was set up to unite all the dialect groups from Guangdong Province. In 1902, the Hainanese started their association. The dialect associations acted as a form of local leadership. Each association has its own places of worship where members congregate. They opened their own schools, offering the curriculum in their respective dialects. Dialect differences among the Chinese leadership and the role of dialect associations were recognized by the Chartered Company Administration. In appointing representation from the Chinese community in the various public bodies such as the Gold Committee at Segama River basin (1886) and the Chinese Advisory Board (1890), the Chartered Company wrote to the respective dialect groups.<sup>14</sup>

Another source of Chinese leadership was the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which was first formed in Sandakan in 1891. This was followed by Jesselton in 1908, and in 10 other major towns subsequently. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce soon superseded the dialect associations as the main leadership for the Chinese community. The Chartered Company acknowledged the importance of the Chinese merchant class as leaders of the Chinese community, and almost all appointments subsequently of Chinese to state institutions were made through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

The Kapitan China was another institution of leadership. The first Kapitan China appointed by the Chartered Company was in Sandakan in 1883. He was Fung Ming Shan, a Tung Kwan Cantonese and owner of Fung Ming Shan & Co. Fung was succeeded by Koh Kim Hing, a Hokkien and owner of Kim Eng Watt & Co., and in turn, was succeeded by Chan To Pin, a Teochew and owner of Kwong Teo Hing & Co. In 1915, Lam Man Ching, a Bao An Hakka and owner of Kwong Luen Shing & Co., was appointed Kapitan China. He was the last Kapitan China for pre-war Sandakan. He held the position until his death in 1943. On the west coast, Wong Thiam Chuan, a Hokkien trader, was

made Kapitan China in 1911. No new Kapitan China was appointed for the west coast after the death of Wong. There were efforts by Chinese in various towns to appoint Kapitan China, but the Chartered Company restricted the appointment of Kapitan to only two, one for the west and the other for the east coast.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the early Chinese business activities in Sabah during the early stage of Chartered Company rule had been confined to Sandakan and Kudat. This was because the region is nearer to Hong Kong, and Sandakan was the seat of the Chartered Company government. Furthermore, the Chartered Company did not establish their rule on the west coast region until 1897.

In 1912, the Chartered Company appointed Lim Swee Cheng, a businessman from Sandakan, to the newly formed State Legislative Council to represent the Asian community. Lim was succeeded in 1914 by Kwang Tze Ying, a Cantonese who was, in turn, succeeded in 1915 by Lo Tian Cheok, a Hakka Christian merchant from Kudat. Lo was to become the longest serving Chinese representative in the Legislative Council. He served until 1926. Three years prior to that, the Chartered Company appointed a second member representing the Chinese community. After that time, there were always two Chinese members in the Legislative Council to represent the Chinese of the east and west coasts respectively.

There were several features distinguishing Chinese leadership. First, there was the element of dialect representation, an important point recognized by both the Chartered Company Administration and the Chinese community. Secondly, there was the east-west factor that had to be taken into account. Thirdly, and perhaps the most important, is the fact that almost all the Chinese leaders were businessmen. And many, especially those holding appointments as Kapitan China or as members of the State Legislative Council, were also well educated. In his study on the role of Chinese businessmen in the community leadership of Sabah, Edwin Lee suggested that among the criteria in appointing Chinese to the state bodies, being conversant in English was taken into account (Lee, 1976: 45).

There were, however, some exceptions to the businessmen-type leadership. These were those who had strong ties with the Chartered Company Administration. Generally, they were senior government servants, including doctors, chief clerks, and deputy assistant district officers. This group of leaders did not command the kind of following and support among the Chinese community as enjoyed by the business-based leaders. However, they remained an important component of the Chinese community and acted as go-between for the community and the Chartered Company Administration. Among those in this group were Li Tet Phui (Jesselton); Lau Lai (Jesselton); Hiew Syn Yong (Jesselton); Stephen Tann (Tawau); Ng Seah Wah (Sandakan); Kong Su En (Sandakan); and Seah Quee Boon (Kudat).

The pre-Second World War Chinese leadership suffered greatly during the Japanese Occupation. On the west coast, the Japanese arrested

and killed most of the Chinese leaders of Jesselton as a retribution against the Chinese for their part in the 9 October 1943 uprising there. The Chinese leaders of Sandakan also suffered a similar fate. On 27 May 1945, the Japanese executed 30 of the Chinese leaders of that town. This resulted in a leadership vacuum during the immediate post-war years. It took several years before a new crop of leaders emerged to head the Chinese community during the transition from colony to a state of the Malaysia Federation.

### Party Politics

Sabah had its first taste of party politics just two years preceding its entry into Malaysian Federation. Prior to this, participation in local politics had been limited to the State Legislative Council, and later through the Members System. The Chinese community was well represented in the two systems. Between 1946 and 1963, the Chinese in Sabah were represented by Lee Thau Sang of Jesselton and Khoo Siak Chiew of Sandakan. Lee was a Hakka, while Khoo was a Teochew. The two were businessmen, and English-educated. When Lee Thau Sang died in 1959, his position in the Legislative Council was taken over by Pang Tet Tshung, another Hakka from Jesselton. As in the Chartered Company days, the Chinese representatives were nominated by their respective local leadership institutions, namely, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

When the idea of Malaysia was put forward in 1961, the Chinese leaders in Sabah were unsure of the implications. The prospect of being part of a greater Malaya was not viewed favourably by the Chinese in Sabah. The sceptical view on the part of the Chinese was evident in the various attempts to form Chinese political parties which initially opposed the Malaysian Federation scheme. There were at least two major Chinese-led parties which took the anti-Malaysia line. There was first the United Party led by Khoo Siak Chiew and Pang Tet Tshung. The second was the Sabah National Party led by Kwan Yui Ming a Sandakan Cantonese businessman.

After 1962, the issue was no longer a question of whether Sabah should be in Malaysia, but rather the need to fight for greater concessions for the Chinese community. The various Chinese leaders joined to form a single party called the Sabah Chinese Association (SCA; formerly known as North Borneo Chinese Association) in 1962. They succeeded in extracting some guarantees over the two issues of Chinese education and language. In return for accepting the Malaysia idea, the Federation guaranteed the continued existence of Chinese vernacular schools. In the case of official language, though the Chinese language was not accepted, the Chinese leaders obtained a promise that English be used as an official language along with Malay for the first 10 years after independence. The SCA was also able to obtain a waiver of the Malay language test for those aged 45 and above when applying for Malaysian citizenship (Lee, 1976: 223-7).

When Malaysia was formed on 16 September 1963, the Chinese community was represented in the state Cabinet by Khoo Siak Chiew, who was made a Deputy Chief Minister. Pang Tet Tshung was appointed Minister for Finance. Chinese business was safeguarded, including timber concessions, and there were stringent immigration laws governing entry of peninsular Malaysians.

Briefly, in the 1960s, a Chinese was appointed Chief Minister. In 1964, a political row broke out between the head of state, Tun Mustapha Harun and Donald Stephens (later Fuad Stephens), the Chief Minister and leader of the United Party of Kadazan Organizations (UPKO). Mustapha, the leader of the mainly Muslim United Sabah National Organization (USNO), sought a return to active politics. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, intervened. He appointed a compromise candidate to head the Cabinet and had Tun Mustapha remain as head of state. Stephens was dispatched to Australia as the Malaysian High Commissioner. The Tunku's choice was Peter Lo Su Yin, a New Zealand-trained lawyer from Sandakan. Peter Lo, who is a Hakka, was from the Sabah Chinese Association.

In 1967, Sabah had its first state elections. The SCA continued to be part of the much reduced Sabah Alliance. Earlier, differences between USNO and UPKO had resulted in the Donald Stephens-led Kadazan-Dusun party to withdraw from the coalition. USNO won 14 seats compared to 12 by UPKO. USNO, together with the three seats won by the SCA, formed the government.

Most Chinese soon became unhappy with the Mustapha administration. Several of Mustapha's policies clearly alienated the Chinese. First, there was the race-based quota system modelled after the Federal Government practice. Under the system, bumiputras were given preferential treatment. This was naturally resented by the Chinese in Sabah who had long dominated the civil services and the economy. Closely related to this issue was Mustapha's zeal in propagating Islam in Sabah. An organization named United Sabah Islamic Association (USIA) was formed in 1969 to carry out mass conversion activities in Sabah (Rooney, 1981: 213). The Mustapha administration also did not renew the visa of foreign Christian missionaries in Sabah. At that time, the total percentage of Chinese in Sabah who were Christians stood at 30 per cent. Mustapha's policy turned a considerable segment of the Chinese away from USNO and its allies.

Chinese dissatisfaction against Mustapha was expressed in the 1976 state elections when they threw their support firmly behind the newly formed Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (Berjaya or Sabah People's Union) led by Fuad Stephens. The six Chinese majority constituencies went to Berjaya (cf. Puthuchear, 1985: 4). The Chinese votes helped Berjaya, a multiracial party, to form the state government. Several Chinese leaders were appointed as ministers. One consequence of the 1976 election results was the defeat of the SCA, which had been the sole Chinese party since 1963. The defeat also meant the phasing out of the 1963-era Chinese leaders such as Pang Tet Tshung and Peter Lo. Even though

the SCA re-emerged as the Sabah Chinese Consolidated Party (SCCP) in the 1981 and 1985 state elections, the party was no longer attractive to the Chinese community, who opted for Chinese representation through multiracial political parties.<sup>16</sup>

Under the Berjaya government, the Chinese in Sabah fared better, especially in the sphere of business. The Chinese community again supported the party in the 1981 elections. In that election, all Chinese majority seats remained with Berjaya. Soon afterwards, however, Chinese support for the party began to slip. The Chinese had become disillusioned with some of Berjaya's policies, which in many ways were seen as resembling USNO's discriminatory policies against the Chinese. These measures further added to the dissatisfaction among the Chinese towards Berjaya.

In 1985, the Berjaya government under Datuk Harris Salleh called for a snap election. In that election however, Kadazan nationalism re-emerged. Chinese support went to the Kadazan-Dusun dominated Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS or United Sabah Party). As in previous elections, the Chinese votes proved to be crucial in deciding the direction of state politics. Even though 40 per cent of Chinese support went to Berjaya, the party won only the seat of Karamunting (Sandakan). All other Chinese seats went to Chinese leaders of PBS. These included Chau Tet On, Yong Teck Lee, Wong Phin Chung, and Tan Kit Sher. The Berjaya candidate for Karamunting, Lau Phui Keong, soon crossed over to PBS, allowing the new party to have all the Chinese seats. Under the PBS government, the Chinese community was given a fairly large representation at the Cabinet level. Chau Tet On was appointed Minister of Communication and Works and, later, as one of the three Deputy Chief Ministers; and Tan Kit Sher was made Minister of Manpower and Environmental Development.

Chinese support for the PBS remained strong throughout the entire nine years of PBS rule. The party retained all Chinese majority seats in the 1990 elections. In that election, PBS maintained its strength by winning 36 out of a possible 48 seats in the State Assembly elections. Not long afterwards, its relationship with the Chinese became strained. Even though a multiracial party, the PBS is seen very much as a Kadazan-Dusun dominated party. Thus, many decisions were perceived by the Chinese to have favoured the Kadazan community. Many Chinese also realized that the state's economy was not doing well throughout the nine years of PBS rule. This was attributed to PBS' strained relationship with the Federal Government, despite being a member of the National Front (Barisan Nasional or BN).<sup>17</sup> Many Chinese leaders in the PBS were also not happy with the Chief Minister, Joseph Pairin Kittingan, for not consulting top party leaders over major decisions.

On 10 January 1994, the PBS-led government dissolved the State Legislative Council. The decision to call for an election two years before the PBS state government's term expired was prompted by the

PBS leaders' need to boost support for the party in the face of challenges from the peninsula-based parties. Three years earlier the peninsula-based United Malays National Organization (UMNO) entered Sabah in an effort to help reorganize USNO, the only Muslim-based political party. The move came as a reaction to the abrupt withdrawal of PBS from the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional in the 1990 national general elections.

For the Chinese in Sabah, the 1994 election campaign offered an opportunity to reflect on the direction to be taken by the community. For many, it was apparent that due to the strained federal-state relationship, Sabah's economy under the Kadazan-led PBS government suffered. This had affected Chinese businessmen. However, even though there was hope for improved economic development under an UMNO-led BN government, there were strong reservations among the Chinese. To most Chinese in Sabah, UMNO is a direct transformation from USNO, the party which had caused much unease among the Chinese. The Chinese feared a return to the days of a Mustapha-led USNO Government (1968-76), when Chinese interests were greatly disadvantaged. In the wider context, as in previous state elections, the Chinese continued to be a factor in deciding the elections. In 1994, Chinese constituted 20 per cent of the voters in the state, and 8 of the 48 contested constituencies were considered Chinese-based.

The BN wooed Chinese support. First, the BN promised strong economic development for the state, from which the Chinese would gain. It pledged support for Chinese education in the state, an unprecedented step on the part of the Federal government. An allocation of RM 30 million was promised to Chinese schools (Gomez and Jomo, 1997: 132). In 1994, there were 9 Chinese independent secondary schools and more than 100 Chinese primary schools in the state. For years, the Chinese community in Sabah had maintained these schools on their own with occasional aid from the state governments, including the PBS.

The shift in Chinese support toward the BN, however, came mainly with the exodus of Chinese leaders from the PBS. Led by Yong Teck Lee, the Deputy Chief Minister and Deputy President of PBS, the Chinese members in the PBS formed a new party, the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP). The party was immediately accepted into the BN, and was allocated seven seats to contest in the elections. The PBS put up eight Chinese candidates to contest in all the Chinese majority constituencies.

The PBS won the elections with a simple majority of two seats. In the contest for the Chinese-majority constituencies, the PBS retained four seats, while the SAPP won three. The results in the Chinese constituencies proved to be crucial to the outcome of the state political scene. It reflected a serious split in the Chinese position for the first time since 1963, and marked the end of Chinese political cohesiveness.

The PBS majority disappeared with the defection of several leaders. Three Kadazan-based parties emerged, led by Kadazan leaders who

defected. And, like the SAPP, they were all accepted into the BN. The PBS was reduced to six seats in the state legislative assembly, allowing the BN to form the next government.

Though the Chinese under SAPP had only five seats (after accepting two PBS defectors), Yong Teck Lee was appointed one of the three deputy chief ministers. As promised, the new BN government honoured most of its pledges by making more allocations for development and the maintaining of Chinese schools.

In the wider context, a split in Chinese unity was unavoidable. Apart from support for the PBS and the SAPP, there were other Chinese parties, including the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) which won one seat, and the Sabah Liberal Democratic Party, which gained one seat. All are BN members. The Chinese, being politically fragmented, may now no longer be able to play the role of kingmaker in future Sabah politics.

### Cultural and Religious Development

There are five major Chinese dialect groups and a few small ones in Sabah (Table 14.5). In 1991, the five major groups were the Hakka (57.05 per cent), Cantonese (14.4 per cent), Hokkiens (13.2 per cent), Teochew (5.20 per cent), and Hailam (3.4 per cent). Those included in the minority groups were the northern Chinese and the Foochow (2.4 per cent) (Department of Statistics, 1995). The growth of the Foochow community is a recent development. Most of the Foochows in Sabah have come from the town of Sibu in Sarawak, arriving in large numbers since the 1970s. Initially, most of them were involved in the timber industry. Recently they have gone into construction and other businesses. Their sizeable presence in Sabah led to the setting up of the Methodist Church in Kota Kinabalu in 1987 as many of the Sibu Foochow are Methodist. The Foochows have also set up their own association.

TABLE 14.5  
Chinese Population in Sabah by Dialect Group, 1911-1991

<i>Chinese</i>	1911	1921	1931	1951	1960	1970	1980	1991	
Hakka	-NA-	18,153	27,424	44,505	57,338	79,574	90,478	113,628	
Cantonese	-NA-	12,268	12,831	11,833	15,251	20,723	19,184	28,769	
Hokkien	-NA-	4,022	4,634	7,336	11,924	17,418	24,604	26,303	
Teochew	-NA-	2,480	2,511	3,948	5,991	7,687	7,990	10,350	
Hailam	-NA-	1,294	1,589	3,571	5,270	6,419	5,082	6,939	
Others	-NA-	1,039	1,067	3,181	8,768	7,688	6,642	13,151	
Total		27,801	39,256	50,056	74,374	104,542	139,509	153,981	199,140

Source: Jones (1962); Department of Statistics (1972: 95); Department of Statistics (1995: 91)

Note: No breakdown according to dialect group was available in the 1911 census.



Apart from cultural activities, the various associations also provide welfare services to their members, including the management of burial grounds. The dialect associations also maintain their own places of worship. In Sandakan, the oldest Chinese temple in Sabah, the San Sheng Kung built in 1887, is shared by the various dialect groups from Guangdong. The Hakkas have set up Tan Kung Chu Miao and Pan Ku Sheng Wang Miao, while the Hokkiens' Fung Shan Temple is still thriving after a century.

Closely associated with the dialect associations are the Chinese schools. During the Chartered Company administration, Chinese schools were considered as private, and there was no government funding.<sup>18</sup> These Chinese schools depended entirely on the Chinese community. The Chinese in Sabah looked to Chinese education as one of the means to preserve their cultural identity. Efforts to promote Chinese education were also undertaken by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which financially assisted the schools. These included the Sandakan Chung Hwa, Jesselton Chung Hwa, the Hwa Shang School in Putatan, and a score of other schools. Occasionally, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce also helped some schools sponsored by dialect associations when the latter could no longer maintain their schools.

Together with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in various towns, the dialect associations started almost all the Chinese primary and secondary schools. There are now more than 100 Chinese primary and nine secondary schools in Sabah. While the former are funded by the government, the nine secondary schools are run by the various dialect associations. The Hakkas, for instance, opened the Sabah Tshung Tshin School and the Tenom Tshung Tsin School, while the Hokkien Association sponsored the Kian Kok Middle School.

In Sabah, many Chinese attended Christian mission schools, many of which offered English language education. It is believed that in 1940, 3,000 out of 3,918 students in the 52 mission schools were Chinese. Of the 52 schools, 27 were run by the Roman Catholics, while the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG or Anglican Church) had 8, and the Basel Church, 17 (George, 1987: 29).

In the area of religion, the Chinese in Sabah can be divided into two main groups. There are first, the Buddhist and practitioners of Chinese Religion; and secondly, the Christians. The first group form more than 66 per cent of the total number of Chinese. At the same time, a relatively high number of Chinese are Christians. In 1991, the total number of Christian Chinese was 58,787, making up 26.5 per cent of the Chinese in Sabah. The figure represented an increase of 21,288 compared to a decade earlier. Given the total Chinese population growth of 29.32 per cent, from 153,981 (1980) to 199,140 (1991), the increase in the number of Christian Chinese from 37,499 (1980) to 58,787 (1991) (Department of Statistics, 1980 and 1991) is an increase of 56.76 per cent. The significant growth in the number of Christian Chinese is more than the rate of natural increase.

Upon their arrival in Sabah, the Chinese set up their own places of

worship. There is no breakdown of the Chinese in the pre-war censuses according to Religion. Most Chinese practised one form or another of Chinese Religion. This includes the worship of ancestors, the various Chinese deities, and at times, some elements of Mahayana Buddhism. Even though Buddhists are listed as the largest religious group among the Chinese in Sabah, the figure should not be taken at its face value. The belief system of the Chinese community makes little distinction between Buddhism and Chinese popular religion. It is more likely that those who professed to be Buddhists are practitioners of traditional Chinese Religion. Buddhism, as opposed to Chinese popular religion (which also include some elements of Buddhism), was not firmly established until the 1980s with the building of two Buddhist temples of Pu To Shi in Kota Kinabalu and Pu Ji Shi in Sandakan. Since then, there has been a steady growth in the number of Buddhists in Sabah. Almost all of the Buddhists in the state are Chinese.

Another form of Chinese popular religion known as the Dejiao Association was introduced to Sabah in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The association, which is also known as the Society for the Uplifting of Morals, was first introduced in Tawau in 1976. Later, it was extended to Sandakan in 1978 and Kota Kinabalu in 1981.<sup>19</sup> After two decades, the Dejiao Association has gained quite a following. Even though no exact statistics are available, it is believed that the association has more than 5,000 followers.

Chinese Christians, who were recruited through the various Christian missions, started their own churches. The first to do so was the Basel mission that opened a church in Kudat in 1883. The Basel Church is essentially Hakka and continues to grow in areas where Hakka settlements can be found. In 1941, there were 14 Basel churches in the whole of Sabah. The Basel Church was also the first Chinese church to run their missions and schools without foreign assistance. Started as a Swiss-based mission, the church has, since 1925, stood on its own (Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, 1983: 21). The SPG started as a Chinese-based church in Sabah. So serious was it in reaching out to the Chinese that it sent one of its clergy to Guangdong to learn Hakka in 1889 before taking up appointment at St James' Church in Kudat (Anglican Church, 1987: 70). Its local clergy are all Chinese. By 1941, there were seven SPG churches in Sabah: in Jesselton, Sandakan, Tawau, Kudat, Beaufort, Lahad Datu, and Tuaran. The Catholic Church in Sabah also has a sizeable Chinese membership, though it represents a smaller percentage than the SPG or the Basel Church, both of which are almost 99 per cent Chinese.

The number of Chinese in Sabah who profess Islam is small. Despite the various efforts by USIA, and later MUIS (Sabah Islamic Council) under the Berjaya government,<sup>20</sup> the total number of Chinese Muslims in Sabah stood at 3,284 in 1991. Even though the number had doubled compared to the 1980 census (which reported a total of 1,445), it only represents 1.6 per cent of the total Chinese population in the state (Department of Statistics, 1980 and 1991).

Culturally, there are several occasions in the year when Chinese festivals are celebrated. These include the Chinese New Year Dragon-Lion dance demonstrations held in all major towns and the Dragon Boat Race. The former has been a common feature since the end of the Second World War, while the Dragon Boat Festival was started in 1987. Apart from fostering inter-dialect activities, the two events have also helped to demonstrate to others the richness of Chinese culture as well as a show of Chinese solidarity.

### Race Relations

There is a relatively high degree of inter-ethnic marriages between the Chinese and other indigenous people. This is mainly due to the fact that a sizeable number of the indigenous people are non-Muslim. Many of the Chinese married to people from other ethnic groups were those who lived in areas close to the indigenous majority area. This is most apparent in the case of a group of northern Chinese from Hebei Province. Upon their arrival in 1913, the group settled in the Reservoir Road (Jalan Air Kolam) area of Kota Kinabalu adjacent to the Kadazan heartland of Penampang. Today, many of their descendants still carry Chinese surnames, but practise some form of Kadazan customs. Many speak Kadazan fluently (Pugh-Kittingan, 1989: 361).

There are others who have assimilated into the Kadazan or other indigenous groups. They practise not only the custom and the religion of the indigenous groups, but have also indigenized their Chinese names (Regis, 1989: 420).

In 1951, a new category of people called the Sino-Native was listed for the first time in the census taken in that year. The figure represented the number of people with mixed Chinese-indigenous parentage in Sabah. That year, the figure was 6,468. The number increased to 7,438 in 1960, and to 10,345 in 1970. By 1991, there were 22,245 people in Sabah listed as Sino-Native.<sup>21</sup> While it is clear that the increase in the number was mainly a result of natural growth, it cannot be denied that there was also a steady number of inter-ethnic marriages between the Chinese and the indigenous population.

The offspring of the intermarriages between Chinese and the indigenous population can claim to be bumiputra, thus allowing them to enjoy the preferential treatment accorded under the Federal Constitution and the NEP. Such treatment includes the purchase of low-premium native land and various government-initiated trust funds such as the Amanah Saham Nasional/Bumiputera. Under the 1952 Interpretation (Definition of Native) Ordinance (Sabah Cap. 64), the State Government issued certificates conferring 'indigenous' (bumiputra) status on people who could prove their indigenous ancestralship. Given the entitlement of privileges to holders of such certificates, some non-bumiputra Chinese took the opportunity to acquire such certificates by means that were sometimes questionable. Thus, there were instances where a China-born Chinese acquired bumiputra status by merely obtaining a 'Anak Negeri'

certificate. The abuse of this certificate resulted in the suspension of the programme in 1982 (Regis, 1989: 420).

### Conclusion

The Chinese in Sabah have come a long way since their arrival in Sabah in the late nineteenth century. First brought in to provide labour for the development of the territory, the Chinese underwent a transformation from being sojourners to settlers and, later, citizens of their adopted country. In Sabah, such a transformation also came with a strong sense of belonging to the state.

Several Chartered Company's policies greatly influenced the outlook of the Chinese in Sabah. The granting of land to Chinese settlers led to a large number of the Chinese community owning land. Also, the Chartered Company, recognizing the importance of the Chinese community to the development of the state, did not implement any preferential treatment for the indigenous people. This allowed the Chinese, who were more advanced in education, to become predominant in most sectors of the economy as well as in government service. The Jesselton uprising against the Japanese Army in 1943 by the Chinese in collaboration with other ethnic groups helped reinforce the sense of being a community that is an integral part of the state.

1. The early works on the Chinese in Sabah include Purcell (1980: 357-82); Fortier (1964); Tregonning (1965); and Lee (1965). Works produced in the 1970s include Han (1976); and Lee (1976). Works in the 1990s include *The Hakhas in Sabah* (1990); Niew (1993); Seah Soo Lin, *The Chinese in Beaufort*, Kota Kinabalu, 1995 [in Chinese]; Tan (1996); and Wong (1998). Apart from books, local Chinese newspapers also carry articles on the Chinese in Sabah. There are also many historical notes on the various Chinese-based organizations published by the respective associations and churches.

2. Tu-Yuan, as recorded in the *Han Shu Ti-La Chih* (The Geographical Gazette of the Han Dynasty), is believed by some to be Borneo. See Han (1975: 20).

3. For historical links between China and South-East Asia, see Wang (1958) on the early history of Chinese trade in the South China Sea.

4. For a detailed discussion on early Chinese links with Borneo, see Han (1975: 20-31).

5. It is difficult to give an exact figure of the total indigenous population of Sabah for 1881 as no census was taken. The census of 1891 gave 67,062 as the total population for the whole state, but it was an incomplete census as many indigenous people were left out. The figure 100,000 could also be an overestimation. See Lee (1965b: 45).

6. For details of the agreement, see correspondence of 'Governor to Chairman, British North Borneo Chartered Company', 31 March 1913, COS74/746.

7. Like Lee Yong Leng, Han Sin Fong's study also provided a similar pattern of association between the dialect groups and occupational patterns among the Chinese in Sabah.

8. 'Testimony of Chiang Yu-Erh to Hong Kong British Police' in 'Black to Chamberlain', 21 November 1900, CO 129/301 [46]. Chiang was a Manchu agent who had followed the Hakka leaders of Sandakan summoned back to China prior to the uprising.

9. No population census was taken for 1941, the year designated as a census year. The total of 65,000 is an estimated figure based on the same population growth percentage of 27.51 per cent between 1921 and 1931.

10. 'Information Officer, Sandakan to Government Secretary', 2 September 1941, Secretariat File, No. 1473.
11. For a detailed study on the Chinese involvement in coal mining at Silimpopon, see Goodlet (1972: 275-9).
12. See data compared between Jones (1962) and *Population and Housing Census in Malaysia 1991: Sabah*.
13. In 1896, as more Hakkas from other counties joined the association, the name was changed to Yan Foh Hui Guan which reflected its primary concern for the welfare of its members. In 1960, the association changed its name to Hakka Association of Sandakan. See Hakka Association of Sandakan (1986: 20-1).
14. At the time the Segama Gold Committee and the Chinese Advisory Board in Sandakan were first convened, only the Hakkas had their association. Nevertheless, other dialect groups, namely, the Cantonese, the Hokkiens, and the Teochews were also invited, most probably through some form of informal dialect organizations.
15. Such instances arose in the town of Beaufort in 1915, Tawau in 1929, and Tenom in 1930. See various correspondence on the matter in Secretariat File, No. 1261.
16. The SCCP won a state seat in the 1981 and 1986 elections. In both cases, the candidate opted to join the winning parties.
17. The Federal-State strained relations were cited as the main reason for the Chinese to support Yong Teck Lee's newly formed Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP). See Chin (1994: 910).
18. There were a few exceptions. In the 1930s, two Chinese schools, namely, Chan Fook's school in Beaufort and Tsen En Fook's Ping Ming School in Jesselton, were given annual grants by the government on the grounds that the schools had included English language in their curriculum.
19. For a study on the development of Dejiao in Sabah and Malaysia, see Tan (1985).
20. During Tun Mustapha's administration (1967-76), USIA claimed to have converted 75,000 to Islam, whereas Harris Salleh's Berjaya was reported to have succeeded in adding 32,112 to that number over the period from 1976 to 1985. See Means (1991: 41, 155).
21. *Population Census Report, 1960 and 1970*; Department of Statistics (1995). The category was absent in the 1980 Census as the broader term *pribumi* was used to represent all indigenous people in the state.

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