The Chinese in Malaysia

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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4 Jalan Pemaju U1/15, Seksyen U1, 40150 Shah Alam,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
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Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Buenos Aires Calcutta
Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul
Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi Paris São Paulo Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw
with associated companies in Berlin Ibadan
Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries
Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press, New York

First published 2000

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The Chinese in Malaysia/edited by Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng.
p. cm.— (South-East Asian social science monographs)
Includes bibliographical
references and index.
ISBN 983 56 0056 2
1. Chinese—Malaysia—History. I. Lee, Kam Hing.
II. Tan, Chee-Beng. III. Series.
DS595.2.C5 C497 1999
959.5'004951—dc21
99–35906
CIP
Typeset by Indah Photosetting Centre Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia
Printed by Printmate Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur
Published by Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd. (008974-T)
under licence from Oxford University Press

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-imperlalist 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

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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

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	*Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*
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
MRCA	*Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs*
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	*New Straits Times*
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	Petroliam 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

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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 Foochow, 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.

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

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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 Kongsi of Penang in 1820 (Yen, 1993a: 696)—as well as many other powerful kinship organizations in Penang and Singapore such as the Khoo Kongsi, Yeoh Kongsi, Lim Kongsi, and the Tan Kongsi of