

The Chinese Minority in Southeast Asia

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The region of Southeast Asia, with a population of more than 250 million, has not only a bewildering variety of cultures and ethnic composition, but is also rich in natural resources. It is also a region of vital importance because of its strategic geographical position. Nations of the region are increasingly asserting themselves in global politics. The growing importance of ASEAN both as an economic and political bloc is particularly noteworthy in the context of an increasing trend towards regionalism. In this framework of development, the Southeast Asian Studies Programme was established at Nanyang University in 1976. Although the programme is primarily aimed at teaching, it also emphasizes research and publication. One of our publication series is the Southeast Asia Research Paper Series.

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Southeast Asia Research Paper Series 1



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The Chinese Minority in Southeast Asia

The Chinese minority in Southeast Asia is a complex and diverse group, with a long history of migration and settlement. This book explores the various factors that have shaped the Chinese minority, including economic, social, and political influences. It also examines the role of the Chinese minority in the development of Southeast Asian countries, and the challenges they face in the future.

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THE CHINESE MINORITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The subject of Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia is a large and complex one. In the first part of my paper, I can only hope to outline who these Chinese minorities are and what their main characteristics are. In the later half, I shall discuss some notable aspects of their relations with indigenous majorities and the problems related to identifying with these majorities in the new nations of Southeast Asia.

It is difficult to talk about the problems of minorities in any country without first knowing who these minorities are, how many there are, in what ways they constitute a community or a number of communities, what they do and what options they perceive themselves to have in the future. For example, the crucial question of the attitudes which minorities have towards majorities cannot be determined unless we can clearly identify the minority groups themselves. Where the Chinese in Southeast Asia are concerned, they seem so obviously a distinct and cohesive community that there have been many writings which assume that all Chinese are alike and we can easily speak of Chinese attitudes as if they are the same everywhere. In fact, this is a gross over-simplification, and while it is convenient to talk about them as though these Chinese were a unified group, and I am not suggesting that they do not have a number of problems in common, it is more relevant to begin with the premise that the Chinese in different countries face different problems, different decisions, and different options.

The apparently simple question of how many Chinese there are in each Southeast Asian country raises, in fact, considerable difficulties. It really is not that easy to define a Chinese in some countries in Southeast Asia. For example, in countries like the Philippines and Thailand, the census figures are quite misleading largely because the Chinese there have, over the centuries, assimilated more successfully than anywhere else. One cannot simply depend upon official figures. It would be necessary to use a number of other criteria in order to determine who are still to be considered part of the Chinese minority and who are not. For example, there are questions of ancestry, there are questions of life style or cultural background, and there are questions of self-identification. Each of these could be used but none of them is that clear-cut and none by itself really satisfactory. In fact it does not help when, in cities like Bangkok and Manila, it is difficult to recognize who are the Chinese and who are not. There are many people in Thailand who are Thai in almost every respect except that one or both parents are Chinese. And I believe this is also true in the Philippines. One certainly cannot always tell a Chinese in Southeast Asia simply by looking at him.

There are many other similar difficulties and we must always remain careful in our estimates about who is or is not Chinese. But despite these difficulties it is possible to establish some approximate figures for working purposes. In Thailand, there are several studies which assume that there are between two to three million people either of Chinese origin or who may be considered members of a Chinese minority. This may be contrasted to census figures which suggest a total of under one million. In the Philippines, official figures refer to about

150,000 to 200,000 alien Chinese whereas if the definition was broadened to include those of mainly Chinese ancestry and those who may still be proud to claim Chinese connections, the figure would be much higher. In other countries, like Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the official figures are more exact. However, for Indonesia, for example, there are no really reliable figures. Most books talk about a Chinese population of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 millions. Perhaps the only reasonably accurate figures of Chinese are in Malaysia and Singapore, though of course in Singapore the Chinese are not minorities. As for Malaysia, the official figure of 35 per cent makes it such a large minority that the problems there do not compare very well with the problems of Chinese elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

In general then the picture is of a minority of about 8 per cent who might be considered Chinese in Thailand and one of less than 3 per cent in Indonesia and in the Philippines. In other countries on the mainland of Southeast Asia, the figures are also not terribly reliable. In Burma, for example, it would be well under 3 per cent, whereas in Cambodia the Chinese population is around 7 per cent and in the two Vietnams together, under 5 per cent. It is well known, of course, that the Chinese are larger in number in South Vietnam than in the North.

Having established that there is a fair range of percentages for the Chinese in different countries, it may follow that, where the minorities are really quite small, say under 3 per cent, and where the minorities are between 3 to 10 per cent, there would be different problems and attitudes affecting the Chinese population. And of course, where the population is well over 30 per cent as in Malaysia, there is no comparison with the rest at all. While I believe this is a useful guide to some of the generalisations that one has to make about Chinese minorities throughout the region, this kind of difference in the size of the minority in each country is probably less important than some other differences within the Chinese communities themselves.

Let us say, we have ascertained partly through ancestry, partly through life style and partly through self-identification the approximate numbers of the population of Chinese minorities in each country. We are then faced with the problem of trying to explain why some of these Chinese communities are so divided into separate groups and why the Chinese in each country cannot really be considered as a single community. One of the most notable differences from the very beginning of Chinese migration was expressed in terms of place of origin or by the "dialect" normally used. By this criterion, there were often a number of separate communities in each country. In the past two decades, the sense of community differences along dialect lines has tended to break down, but there are still a number of barriers dividing one group from the others and, particularly in business and certain types of cultural activities, it will be quite wrong to neglect the importance of such speech barriers. The fairly obvious examples are the Teochew group in Thailand who originate from eastern Kwangtung and the Hokkien group from two or three major prefectures on the southeastern coast of Fukien Province who predominate in the Philippines. Another example is the large numbers of Hokkiens in Java as contrasted with other parts of Indonesia where the Hakkas are prominent (especially in West Kalimantan). In Cambodia and South Vietnam, the largest communities are

Cantonese, but throughout the countries of mainland Southeast Asia, there are sizeable Hakka communities. And there is very little doubt that in most of these countries, the differences between these various speech groups remain important if not insuperable. Thus from time to time, when we speak of the Chinese minority in any particular country, we must pause to ascertain which of the speech groups we are primarily thinking of and the extent to which these different speech groups have submerged enough of their differences to be considered as one single Chinese community.

Apart from dialect or regional differences an increasingly important division within these various Chinese communities has been a division based upon education since the turn of the century. One can almost always tell after a short conversation with a Chinese whether he has had a Chinese education or has been educated at a colonial, a Christian mission or an indigenous school. These divisions in educational background may often be used as a guide to the likely range of responses we may expect from that Chinese or that group of Chinese. I shall not dwell on this further here, but this particular division will become more important for the second half of this paper.

Yet another division can be perceived in terms of political sympathies. The most obvious division pointed to by many commentators is that between communist and nationalist sympathisers as revealed in attitudes towards the communist party in China and the Kuomintang, formerly in China, and now in Taiwan. This kind of division, however, is often rather artificial and it is most difficult to be quite sure to which group different individuals belong. Some Chinese are very articulate about their political affiliations and sympathies while others will never be persuaded to reveal them. As a result, while this kind of division interests most people, it is a division which can never be very accurate or meaningful.

All the same, because China looms so large both in the minds of the Chinese and the indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia, the question of political sympathies comes up again and again. The evidence, on the whole, however, suggests that the political affiliations and sympathies of Chinese minorities do not often arise out of their own initiatives but are very much tied up with the question of which of the two Chinese governments each of the Southeast Asian governments recognises. For example Chinese minorities in the Philippines have for the last two decades had very close links with the government in Taiwan. One can also point to the fact that both Taiwan and the Philippines have shared a common bond with the United States in their recent history. But this does not mean to say that all Chinese in the Philippines are for the government in Taiwan and by definition against the government in Peking. Another example is Thailand where the Chinese also have not had much choice. They must either become citizens of Taiwan which Thailand recognises or of Thailand which most Chinese in Thailand try to identify with.

On the other hand, there are countries which recognise the People's Republic of China and the Chinese have been expected to choose between being a national of China or a citizen of Indonesia, Laos or Burma (and until recently also of Cambodia). Also, in countries which do not recognize either Taiwan or the People's Republic, no kind of Chinese nationality is available to those of Chinese

origin. The example of Indonesia, of course, is a very special one. For reasons of political alliance at an early stage of the Indonesian revolution, about a third of the Chinese in Indonesia are aliens, that is to say, citizens of the People's Republic of China, while at least another third are citizens of Indonesia whereas the remainder are even to this day stateless. The Indonesian situation has been made even more difficult by complicated and often ambiguous citizenship laws. It would seem, on the whole, that the question of legal identity is more significant to the governments of Southeast Asian countries or to those of China and Taiwan than to the members of the Chinese minority groups themselves. It would thus be possible in some countries to have the members of one family having different nationalities; for example, some being Indonesian, some Chinese and others stateless. In such cases, the bonds of family are likely to override those of legal identity and it would be normal for such families to still operate as families in business and in social and cultural matters.

I have written more fully elsewhere about the limitations of seeing Chinese minority groups in Southeast Asia simply in terms of some of the divisions mentioned above. Each of the differences may be important under some circumstances but no single division will be so important that it would operate to divide one group of Chinese from another group of Chinese in all things. Hence the most important fact to recognise about the Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia is the fact of their variety, their lack of unity, and their tendency to act as fairly discrete groups depending on the circumstances and occasions.

All the same, I have sought at a certain level of abstraction to try and identify broad groups of Chinese in terms of their attitudes towards China, their attitudes towards the indigenous society they live with and in terms of the various Chinese communities they are members of in different parts of the region. At that level of abstraction, I have found it useful for purposes of general analysis to see the Chinese minorities as forming largely three groups in almost all the areas of the region concerned. I have written more fully about this in a number of earlier articles. I shall merely sum up briefly the main reasons why I think these broad groups are meaningful in the context of the minority-majority problems this conference is considering.

Let me begin by summing up the three groups that I have discussed elsewhere. I have simply described them as groups A, B and C. By group A, I refer to most of those Chinese who are clearly orientated towards China either because of the citizenship that they have or by the kinds of activities they engage in. And they may be citizens of either the Republic of China in Taiwan or the People's Republic of China. And they would also include some of the chauvinistic Chinese who may for purposes of business or convenience be actually holding local citizenship in the country they are living in. The second group, group B, are those who generally accept the necessity and possibly the desirability of being loyal to their host countries but who hold back from total commitment to all the ideals and aspirations of those countries. Primarily for economic reasons, this group of Chinese generally prefer to keep their identity as members of a clan and one or other of the several Chinese communities, and I repeat, there may be several varieties of Chinese communities that they may identify with at any one time. The reasons, however, for keeping this identity as a member of a

clan or a community are usually practical rather than sentimental, for it is quite clear in almost any part of Southeast Asia that these family and community ties may be extremely important in business. As for the third group, group C, this consists of several sub-groups of "modernised" or "indigenised" Chinese who each in its own way has decided to identify politically with the host countries. In their minds, and probably in many cases also in their actions, this group would be prepared to live and die for their adopted country. Most of the members of group C would probably have had their education in local native schools, or colonial modernising schools, but it would be wrong to assume that all those or only those who are locally educated would fit into group C. There are many exceptions.

In fact, in my papers, I argue that over the period of the last hundred years, the vast majority of the Chinese in Southeast Asia have always belonged to group B, that is to the group which primarily identifies itself with the local Chinese community, no matter in which part of Southeast Asia that may be. I argue that group A which identifies with China directly and is concerned deeply with the politics and other affairs of China was never very large and has become increasingly small since the end of World War II. Being extremist on the whole, they have attracted attention, gained a great deal of publicity and often made themselves appear a much larger group than they have actually ever been. Similarly with group C, there has always been a small group of that kind even in times of traditional indigenous feudal rule and in colonial times. With nationalism, there have been some increase in numbers in group C that one can notice in almost all countries but this increase has not yet become significant. Again, because they identify with the new nations, they have attracted much attention, a great deal of optimism about the possible future rate of assimilation of Chinese in the region, and have given the impression of being larger in number than they have ever been. In short, despite all the various changes in political and social conditions throughout the past century, the majority of the various Chinese groups in the region are group B Chinese and they have found it most satisfactory to identify first and foremost with their own community, with their own minority group rather than with either the greater Chinese community or with the new Southeast Asian nations since World War II. It is this kind of particularism which has both given Chinese communities, however small each one may be in their own locality, considerable strength and resistance to change and has enabled these communities to survive under very difficult conditions. At the same time, it is this very particularism of the Chinese communities which has made it very difficult for colonial and indigenous ruling classes alike to bring them into the larger imperial or national community and to induce them to give up that Chinese-ness which has always protected them from the larger identity in which they have little confidence.

I have of course limited myself to those groups of Chinese who are still recognisably Chinese. There are innumerable people who may be described as belonging to a fourth group which consists of those who are for all intents and purposes completely assimilated to the indigenous populations and are only pointed to from time to time as people who were originally Chinese. For our purposes, I think this fourth group can be considered as part of the local population and not be taken into account in any study of contemporary Chinese minorities in the

region. They do not, in practice, form a group although there are numerous individuals who belong to this category in Thailand and in the Philippines and many may also be found in Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam.

One last comment may be made about the main characteristics of Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. This refers to the rather obvious point about so many of the Chinese being traders and merchants. The observation is not incorrect, but it needs some modification. Here it does depend on the size of the minority group, whether it is in a rural area, a city or the country as a whole. Where the populations are under 3 per cent, it is fairly certain that the majority of the Chinese are in business or in the professions and form a fairly autonomous and small middle class of their own which may or may not play an important role in their respective area, city or country. Where the population of Chinese minorities lies between 3 to 10 per cent, the middle class may not be much larger, but a noticeable part of the Chinese population may be doing the work of urban or even rural workers. Because the numbers are still relatively small in comparison with the indigenous population, the working classes of Chinese origin do not play a major role in the policies of the country. The one exception is in Malaysia where, in almost all towns and cities and several rural areas, the Chinese minority is very large. Here the more normal social divisions of any society occur and this would include a large and mainly urban proletariat. And here the political divisions between that proletariat and a now relatively small percentage of merchants and professional classes become significant. The fairly obvious class division leads easily to some degree of political radicalisation.

One last word before I end the first part of this paper. There have been many comments about the disaffected educated Chinese among the minority populations of Southeast Asia. They have been pointed to as the main reason for the political radicalisation that is supposed to have taken place among the Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. Such observations are quite misleading. They derive largely from developments in Singapore where the Chinese form the majority and to a lesser extent in Malaysia where the Chinese minority is also very large. Where the Chinese minorities are under 10 per cent, and especially when they are under 3 per cent, there is no such observable radicalisation among educated Chinese. Under such circumstances, the three groups that I have described above can be usefully applied. Group A is likely to be radical if only because of the political extremism of identifying with a foreign country whether it be Taiwan or China. But this is a small group and even smaller in countries where the Chinese minority is small. As for group C, there is a certain amount of radicalisation there, but the radicalisation is usually due to identification with the immense social problems in developing countries in the region. More often than not, the radicalisation is idealistic and directly linked with the social conditions they want to improve in the countries that they are loyal to. They become radical not because they are Chinese. They become radical because the problems of their adopted countries seem to require radical solutions. But again, as I have emphasized earlier, this is a small group.

The large part of the Chinese remain in group B even in conditions where the minorities are very small. And group B Chinese are not radical. Whether they be largely educated in Chinese or colonial or native national schools or

whether they are illiterate, the fact that their primary loyalty is to the community prevents them from being radical. Because they are protected by their community, because their frustrations are on the whole easily diverted into community affairs and because they do not suffer from serious professional failures as might members of group C Chinese because they can always turn to the family business, or the business supported by the clan and other traditional structures, they are very often the least radical of all Chinese. And despite the smallness of the Chinese minority, whether under 10 per cent or under 3 per cent, the proportion of Chinese in this category remains large.

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The relations between Chinese minorities and indigenous majorities depend to some extent on the size of the Chinese minorities. Interaction between the minorities and the majorities are related to contact, opportunities for contact and the necessity to have contact. When a Chinese minority is as high as 35 per cent, there must necessarily be high concentrations of Chinese in cities and towns and these high concentrations are themselves sources of intergroup and in particular intercommunal tensions. This is certainly the case in Malaysia. Where Chinese minorities are between 3 and 10 per cent of the population, it is possible to have one large concentration as in Bangkok, Pnom Penh and Saigon-Cholon. But even there the numbers are not large enough to make this single concentration threatening to the political system. Single concentrations of that kind are relatively easy to control. Outside of these single concentrations, the Chinese disperse largely as small traders and in certain relatively low posture occupations, but in most places such people would appear to provide necessary services rather than become threats to the livelihood of the indigenous peoples.

As for countries where the Chinese minorities are less than 3 per cent, the likelihood of any large concentration becomes far less. While there are many Chinese in cities like Jakarta, Manila and Rangoon, in none of them are they large enough to pose any kind of threat to the politics of the cities themselves. In short, where the population is less than 3 per cent, the Chinese minorities are dispersed widely throughout the country in small numbers in every town they can reach. Ironically, this does not necessarily make them unobtrusive but can produce the opposite effect. Such Chinese can still appear disproportionately well off as compared with the indigenous population of their small town. The reason for this is that the dispersal is a dispersal of rather specialised talents in the best lines of business and in the best and most respectable professions, leading to an overall picture of Chinese domination of the best things the country has. This then becomes a source of tension.

Let me not, however, overstate this objective factor of numbers. There are obvious differences between Chinese and various indigenous peoples at many levels. The obvious speech differences, life style differences, differences in customs, festivals and other fairly obvious social activities need not detain us. Deeper than that are the differences in thought patterns, values and attitudes towards work and profit, and even attitudes towards education, material advancement and social mobility. And not least, there is the factor of ethnic difference with the various biases and prejudices concerning intelligence, health and even moral purity

which follow from deep-seated racial prejudice. The whole spectrum of differences can be so great that it is sometimes difficult to trace those common factors which do, from time to time, bring the Chinese and indigenous peoples together. On this point, the most striking factor in the eyes of many observers has been the apparent readiness of Chinese minorities to assimilate rather quickly in communities which practise the Buddhist faith or different denominations of the Christian faith as contrasted with the much more serious barriers which divide Chinese minorities from those indigenous peoples who embrace the Islamic faith. This has been the subject of many studies and it is a point which no one can afford to ignore.

Nevertheless, if the interactions between Chinese minorities and indigenous majorities are seen historically over several centuries, I would suggest that cultural and ethnic differences in themselves are secondary. Far more important are those activities which lead to economic competition, especially when they bring into prominence the values and attitudes which make that economic competition loaded in favour of the Chinese against the indigenous peoples. Over the centuries, it has been these factors which have made those interactions between Chinese and indigenous peoples particularly difficult. If each of the Chinese communities in each of the modern countries is examined more closely, it would be found that on the whole, intermarriage has been relatively easy except where the Chinese communities have become very large. Also, except in cities where there is a high concentration of Chinese, intergroup relations in terms of partnerships which are associated with political alliances have always been possible. No major cultural or ethnic difference has stood in the way of a wide range of interactions between Chinese and the indigenous peoples. Only in one set of activities has there been very little progress over the centuries. This is in trade and related occupations, including artisans who dominate certain lines of business. Where this is concerned, it seems quite clear that over the centuries, the Chinese minorities have never ceased to outdo the indigenous peoples. Only in the short period when European traders came to dominate the region can it be said that the Chinese had to take second place and that only largely because of the political and military power the Western traders were able to command.

Let me not suggest that race, religion and politics are not important in aggravating the differences between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples. I believe they all are. But I believe also that as long as the Chinese predominate in economic fields, it is that which is the primary factor in separating them from the indigenous peoples. On the one hand, that same preponderance makes the Chinese useful to indigenous ruling elites in particular ways and this in turn ensures that they do not hope to be given any other form of power which would make them dangerous to the polity. On the other hand, given that economic preponderance and the obvious advantages the Chinese have over the indigenous peoples in economic competition, very few Chinese see any advantage in giving up any of those values and institutions which perpetuate that economic dominance. In short, the very reason that brought the Chinese to Southeast Asia, the quest for wealth and security and a certain degree of respectability, makes it virtually impossible for most of them to move into, or to be allowed to move into, fields controlled by the indigenous peoples themselves.

The course of time has not fundamentally changed this basic pattern in the relationship between Chinese and indigenous people. While cultural and ethnic differences continue to contribute to the margin of economic difference, the fundamental source of frustration and potential conflict still lies today in the economic gap between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples. Until today, some of the main causes of group conflicts involving Chinese minorities and the failure of various attempts to eliminate some of these causes, both stem largely from the range of business activities dominated by the Chinese minorities. Where there has been great tension as in some cities in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, the element of ethnic difference comes in only when economic difference has made the Chinese more conspicuous, given them solidarity in their prosperity and given them standards of living which are clearly higher than those of the average indigenous family.

This has led to a number of different approaches towards reducing this Chinese dominance. The first and possibly the most common has been to limit the range of activities open to Chinese enterprise. Where this approach has been effectively controlled, the Chinese entrepreneurs tend to become more specialised and even more dominant in the areas permitted them. Where this approach has been poorly administered or where the range of businesses has been too narrow, then the Chinese tend to be more adroit at evading restrictions and more willing to use corrupt and unlawful means to protect and increase their wealth and, ultimately, to ensure their security and survival in an increasingly hostile atmosphere. Another approach has been for governments to set up public bodies to enter the fields where the Chinese are regarded as having too strong a control. This is probably most effective when sections of the Chinese business community most experienced in these fields are themselves drawn into the public sector as executive staff or associates if not actually as partners. Accompanying both approaches has been the encouragement of indigenous entrepreneurship, either through directly helping, or even financing and advising indigenous enterprises or by intensive training of new generations of modern traders and business executives. Direct help has been chancy and there have been many failures; training programmes are for the long haul but are much more likely eventually to produce the desired result.

There is, however, one assumption underlying these approaches which I believe to be erroneous. This is the assumption that most Chinese are traders and businessmen at heart and want no more than to be traders. This may be true of first generation migrants and many of the poorer Chinese who could find no other way of achieving upward social mobility than the small-scale trading. But this is simply not true of most Chinese settlers of two or more generations who have achieved something like middle-class status. They are more likely to aspire to administrative, professional, educational and cultural fields which give them the social respectability most of them do want. If such Chinese were encouraged to diversify into non-business fields at the same time as indigenous peoples are induced to seek business successes, this will also play an important part in integrating the communities and improving relations between minority and majority peoples. It would certainly be far more helpful than pressuring all Chinese into the business corner and intensifying their image as "economic animals."

Here is where I believe that education at all levels, and in particular at the university level, may be able to do what direct pressure on Chinese businesses has failed to do. The Chinese communities' main reason for remaining communal is because they believe that they can only survive through their business and that their business can only survive through their being communal. That circle of reasoning can be broken. It can be broken if adequate opportunities are provided to induce the younger generation of Chinese to move into non-business fields more freely. This is something more and more young Chinese would wish to do if they had the opportunity. There are very few Chinese who wish to have wealth for its own sake. Certainly, younger generations of Chinese wish to escape the tyranny of mere profit making. But when they have no choice, they turn to it in greater numbers; and, it also appears, the harder it is to make a profit, the better some Chinese seem to become at it. Whereas there is ample evidence in all the countries of Southeast Asia to show that when the Chinese are encouraged to move towards non-business activities they do so provided that, by so doing, they can hope to achieve a degree of upward social mobility. It is the social mobility of respectability, the security of not having to be wealthy, which the younger generation of Chinese has lacked for the past two decades.

I recognise that this is easier said than done. There must obviously continue to be pressure upon indigenous peoples to venture into economic occupations. Many Chinese will continue to remain in business and will continue to do well in business. But with encouragement to share their businesses with indigenous peoples, with the prospect of becoming secure without the need of total dependence upon the protection of their own minority community, the Chinese will come to realise that sharing is not only desirable but also feasible. And, as the younger generation prefers to go into non-entrepreneurial occupations and the new generations of indigenous peoples seek to move out into the business world, new levels of cooperation both in economic and non-economic fields may become possible.

The universities, I believe, can play this role quite well. They can provide the opportunities to induce indigenous peoples to go into business or into occupations which serve large economic organizations while at the same time they could provide opportunities for young generations of Chinese to seek satisfaction in non-economic fields. This may include political fields, but it will also include the large area of cultural activities in each of these new nations from which the Chinese have been on the whole discouraged, if not disqualified. The tragedy is, in some countries, that all non-business occupations are so poorly paid and economically so disadvantaged that the Chinese, in search of material security, become reluctant to move away from the safety of their traditional occupations. When all is uncertain, they fall back on those very communal and kinship ties which protect them and which also ensure that they continue to remain economically dominant.

The task, in short, is an immense one. What I have been able to outline above is but a beginning to ask different questions and to pose different aims in our effort to understand the problem. Where universities can lead the way is to stop people from the old habits of seeking scapegoats, placing the blame

for all disasters upon minority groups who are obviously successful in their ways. Where universities can contribute is in energetic and rigorous efforts to define the problem more and more clearly, to train generations more willing to test each proposition more carefully, to encourage new generations to be innovative, to be daring, to be willing to experiment with new ways of solving old problems. There is no question that the problem of Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia is a difficult one. It is time that people stop falling back again and again on the same old remedies. Where universities can contribute is to involve the educated people of each country to seek through common effort basic solutions to the problems that they have in common inherited. New generations must be made to see that the problems are not merely technical ones and certainly not simple ones of praise and blame, but highly complex social and cultural problems which involve the combined skills of large numbers of people.

It is far from clear, of course, that the countries of Southeast Asia have the time to depend upon long-term solutions through education. I shall be the first to admit that too many urgent problems await answers which universities in themselves cannot provide. Yet it seems to me that universities are excellent places for preparing for the long-term solution. They must not be constantly harrassed about delivering the goods today. They must be encouraged and supported in a continuous effort to seek a better life for all for tomorrow. And minority-majority problems and the conflicts which these problems often generate are clearly obstacles to the prospects of that better life for all.

As you can see, I still expect great things from universities. I expect it not because I think that universities in the abstract can achieve so much. I expect it because they seem to me one of the few potentially progressive institutions for new countries to make use of in order to clear the ground for future development. For minority-majority problems, the university can do at least the following in the short term. Firstly, it can educate people about the nature of culture, of ethnic differences, of the role of prejudice and hatred as obstacles to progress. Secondly, it can transform responses, partly through transferring the skills of one group to another, partly by changing the life style and the cultural emphases of one group to that of another, and partly by opening up new values for trial and experiment, for final adoption when proved to be sound and helpful. Thirdly, the university can provide an atmosphere for different kinds of people to live together, study together and reduce the elements which divide people and channelise those energies which encourage people to find their commonality. Fourthly, the university is one of the few institutions today which may still be in a position to encourage new kinds of difference, the kinds of difference which produce quality, qualities of mind, qualities of character and personality, qualities of individuality which remove the conventional differences on which group conflicts thrive.

I may seem to have come a long way from talking about Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia to a possibly idyllic picture of what universities can do. I have done so not because Chinese minorities are that important or because I think universities are the only institutions which can do so much good. I have

done so merely because the topic of my paper has led me to the heart of many questions which trouble everybody in Southeast Asia if not in all the developing countries of the world. These are very deep problems which were not caused by Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia nor can they be solved by ill treating Chinese minorities or by fattening such minorities. They are problems so widely pervasive in all societies in Southeast Asia that one must perforce look at some of the long-range implications of leaving these problems continuously unsolved. And I have led you to the subject of universities largely because we are talking about universities at this conference and we are gathered in one of the new universities of our region and we are moved by all the attempts to keep our universities viable, dynamic, progressive. I am thus led much further than simply the question of Chinese minorities to suggest that solving this question of Chinese minorities is related to solving a whole range of questions about our region. And to suggest that our universities should be well placed to keep looking for the solutions we all need. In fact, if the universities can really take the lead in pointing to some of the most basic questions faced by this region and showing the way as to how they can be solved, then I am sure that the problem of the Chinese minorities would be shown to be really what it should be, a minor problem of social and cultural adjustment.

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