



A Comparative Study of Chinese Education in the Philippines and Malaysia*

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Introduction

Malaysia is the only country outside of Greater China today where education using Chinese Mandarin as the medium of instruction is available.¹ The quality of such instruction of the Chinese language and other Chinese courses has been notably superb, as it is comparable to that of Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. For the Philippines, "Chinese schools"² continue to exist—a distinctive difference from the situation in Thailand and Indonesia. These schools in the Philippines are, for all practical purposes, Filipino schools; except that they cater to the ethnic Chinese and teach Chinese Mandarin as a language course in the curriculum. Using Chinese as a medium of instruction ended with the Filipinization of these schools in 1975. Unlike the Chinese schools in Malaysia, the quality of Chinese language instruction in these schools in the Philippines has deteriorated alarmingly. Most of the students from these schools cannot speak or read the language well even after going through 13 years of learning it.

In Malaysia today, Chinese Mandarin used as the medium of instruction is allowed at the primary level within the Malaysian national

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education system. This is not so for secondary schools within the national system. National-type secondary schools that cater to students of minority ethnic groups (Chinese or Indian) may however offer their vernacular, or what is called "Pupils' Own Language", class. There are nevertheless some Chinese secondary schools that did not convert to the national type in 1961 when the Education Bill required all schools to be under a unified system, and continue to use Chinese as the medium of instruction. These schools, called Independent Chinese Secondary Schools, are not recognized by the government and hence do not receive any government subsidy. Graduates of these schools do not take the government exam and so cannot enter Malaysian universities.

Presently in Malaysia, with a Chinese population of around 5.5 million, there are 1,284 National-Type Chinese Primary Schools, 74 National-Type Secondary Schools that were formerly Chinese schools, and 60 Chinese secondary schools that do not operate within the national education system. Roughly, the student population is 600,000 in Chinese primary schools, 99,000 in Chinese secondary schools in the national system, and 60,000 in Independent Chinese schools.³

In the Philippines, the total number of Chinese schools is 142, serving 92,760 students. All of these schools are privately owned. Except for a few provincial schools, almost all of these schools offer both primary and secondary levels of instruction. The ethnic Chinese population has never been precisely determined, but is said to be less than 2 per cent of the country's population.

The reasons for the significant difference in the quality of Chinese education between the Philippines and Malaysia are quite complex. This paper reviews the century-old Chinese education in these two countries, which actually started out in quite similar fashion. The divergence in development can be explained by the difference in government policies and interference as well as the responses of the Chinese community to them. The latter is dependent on the size of the Chinese community, its status in national politics, and its internal politics and commitment to Chinese education. Lastly, the paper also looks at the effect of China's rise

as an economic power in the last couple of decades on the development of Chinese education in the Philippines and Malaysia.

Ethnic Chinese in the Philippines and Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society, the major ethnic groups being Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Before Singapore became an independent state in 1965, the Chinese made up about half of the Malaysian population, outnumbering the indigenous Malay population. In the last few decades, it has declined from a share of 35 per cent in 1970 to around 27 per cent in 1991 (Chan and Tey, 2000). However, in certain geographical areas—notably Penang, the ethnic Chinese still predominate.

The Philippine population is relatively more homogenous although the people are a mix of races. Malay, the main component, is mixed with Spanish, Chinese, American, and other heritage. “Pure” Chinese are a very small minority—estimated to make up only 1 to 2 per cent of the country’s population, with most of them concentrated in the metropolitan areas.

The Chinese in Malaysia are more diverse in terms of the dialect groups they belong to than those in the Philippines. The dialect groups that make up Malaysian Chinese are: Hokkien (35%), Hakka (24%), Cantonese (18%), Teochow (11%), and a few others such as Hainanese and Hokchiu (Tan, C. B., 2000). On the other hand, 90 per cent of the Chinese in the Philippines can trace their ancestry to the Minnan (southern Fujian) region, with 70 per cent of them from the Quanzhou area.

Languages Spoken

In terms of their spoken languages, the present generation of Chinese in the Philippines speaks very fluent Tagalog (the Philippine national language) or the dialect of the region they live in or originated from (for example, Bisaya or Ilokano). Among the young generation - i.e. those below thirty- conversing in Filipino among themselves is very common. The

Chinese in Malaysia- except for the *peranakans*, Malay-aculturated Chinese who make up a miniscule percentage of Chinese Malaysian-use their own dialect or Mandarin when they converse among themselves (Tan, C.B., 1988). As the *peranakans* are not Muslim, in communal politics, they work more for the interests of the Chinese rather than against them. There is also a minority group of English-educated Chinese (before the implementation of the National Language Policy in 1977) who are more comfortable when speaking English than Chinese. These English-educated Chinese Malaysians do not know Mandarin but can speak their Chinese dialect. Hence they tend to mix their dialect with English in everyday conversation (Tan, C.B. 1988). This way of speaking is very common among the Philippine Chinese, who tend to mix Hokkien dialect, English and Tagalog in everyday conversation. It is not uncommon to notice all three used in one sentence. (In the Philippines, English has been the medium of instruction in private schools and so even among the indigenous Filipinos, very few speak "pure" Filipino.) The observation is that older generation Chinese use the Chinese sentence structure but inject English and Tagalog words while the younger ones use the Tagalog sentence structure and inject the few Chinese dialect words they know in the sentence. The latter therefore conjugate the Chinese dialect words the way they do for Filipino words. Present generation Malaysian Chinese are educated in Bahasa Malaysia. They can read and write in this language very well, in fact usually better than they can in Mandarin or English (Chang, 1995). But ironically it is not used in their everyday conversation among themselves.

Political Participation

One major factor for the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is the political role of the ethnic Chinese since the colonial period. The relatively large size of the Chinese community has made it possible and necessary for them to be active in political decision-making. Such participation was most prominent and significant during the decolonization period, i.e., the period immediately after the Second

World War till August 31, 1957, when independence was declared. During this period, the Chinese had to close ranks with the Malays in demanding earlier independence and at the same time, negotiate with the Malays to ensure a more equitable footing with them on many issues. Since then politics in this country, the Federation of Malaya, which later became the Federation of Malaysia, has been communal. One of the most important issues where political struggle has been intense is the issue of education, which up to this day remains a sensitive one.

However, for about half a century, Malaysia developed its unique politics where different ethnic groups—Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other indigenous ethnic groups from East Malaysia—negotiate, compromise and cooperate. The Chinese have been one with the Malays and the other ethnic groups in governing the country although the Malays are expected to enjoy “Special Rights and Privileges”, as enshrined in the Malaysian constitution. The major Chinese political party, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), was part of the Alliance Party, which became the ruling party when Malaya got its independence. It has remained a component of the ruling coalition, after the Alliance expanded to become the Barisan Nasional (National Front), which has been Malaysia’s ruling party since it was formed in the 1970s. There are always a few cabinet ministries headed by ethnic Chinese. Another Chinese-based political party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), is the major opposition party.

In the Philippines, as a small minority, the Chinese have never been active in Philippine politics. They played no major role in the independence movement,⁴ and were not represented in the drafting of any constitution. Of relevance to this paper are: the Commonwealth Constitution of 1935, the one ratified in 1973 under Pres. Ferdinand Marcos, and the more recent one prepared after the People Power revolution and ratified in 1987. Despite the fact that most ethnic Chinese have obtained Filipino citizenship, there are only a couple of ethnic Chinese who are now in Congress and only a handful are in government service. In fact, no Chinese has ever reached the level of department or ministry secretary in the government bureaucracy.

Citizenship

One important factor that differentiated the capability of the Chinese in Malaysia and the Philippines in political participation is the issue of citizenship. In Malaya, this particular issue was resolved during the decolonization period. In the negotiations for rights and privileges among the different ethnic groups in Malaya, the Chinese and other non-Malay residents then were granted citizenship in exchange for the granting to the Malay special privileges and the right to rule. Children of these naturalized citizens became citizens by operation of law.

On the other hand, in the Philippines, until the liberalization of the naturalization process in 1975, very few Chinese residents were Filipino nationals as it was very difficult and expensive to obtain citizenship through the naturalization process. The conditions as provided by the 1935 Commonwealth Constitution were very stringent. At the time of Philippine Independence in 1946, hardly any Chinese had Filipino citizenship. But after the war some Chinese opted to become Filipino citizens because a number of nationalization bills that discriminated against aliens in business and the practice of certain professions were implemented. However, only very few could afford the expense, satisfy the strict requirements and go through the tedious process of naturalization. As a matter of fact, during this era, many applicants for citizenship had to withdraw their children from attending Chinese schools as sending one's children to Chinese schools could be perceived as an issue against their intention to become Filipino citizens. This meant that only wealthy businessmen who could afford the cost and were willing to go through the process could acquire citizenship. Moreover, acquiring citizenship was done for the sake of convenience and did not have much positive impact on the integration process. Instead, the discriminatory policies of the state contributed to the patriotic sentiment of the Chinese toward China. The Chinese in the Philippines remained alienated from the mainstream of Philippine society. They therefore found the Chinese nationalism expounded in Chinese schools relevant. The topic of integration into the mainstream society was not a welcome one.

The mass naturalization process, decreed by then President Marcos under Martial Law in 1975, made it possible for the average Philippine Chinese to acquire Filipino citizenship. By then most of the ethnic Chinese were born in the Philippines, spoke the Filipino language fluently and were in all senses, qualified to be Filipino citizens. With this development, being Chinese Filipinos started to become in the consciousness of the majority of the ethnic Chinese. Aside from gaining economic rights, which was what they sought after, the right to vote and participate in politics became available to them as well.

Chinese Schools Before Nationalization

The development of Chinese schools in the early part of the 20th century reflects the gradual process of Chinese settlement in Southeast Asia. Immigration took place as early as the 15th century from China, but, in both the Philippines and Malaysia, it was not until the turn of the 19th century that the Chinese built their first schools. The development of the Chinese schools up to the fifties resulted from immigration pattern, the policies of the respective colonial masters and later, the policies of the governments of the newly independent countries towards them.

The Early Chinese Schools

The need to establish Chinese schools became evident when the immigrants began to bring in their families. In Malaysia, the first Chinese schools, which were informal “family” or “neighborhood” schools, were established in the second decade of the 19th century in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, the earliest centers of Chinese immigration. It was only in 1904 when the first formal Chinese school, the Chung Hwa Confucian School, was founded in Penang (Tan, L.E., 2000). In the Philippines, the first Chinese school, Anglo-Chinese Academy, was established in 1899, a year after the American occupation started, succeeding the 377 years of Spanish rule. It was built in the compound of the Chinese Consul General,

Tan Kang. The Americans placed much emphasis on the development of education in the Philippines. A significant number of Chinese schools that exist up to this date can trace the date of their establishment to the American occupation period (1898-1946).

The proliferation of Chinese schools in the Philippines was due to the fact that the new colonial regime allowed the existing Chinese immigrants to bring in their families.⁵ The reform movement going on in China at that time by revolutionaries such as Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao also contributed to the rapid increase in the number of Chinese schools (Hsiao, 1998). In Malaya, the 1904-1941 period saw a boom in Chinese education as well. The dedication of some wealthy Hokkien immigrants led by Tan Kah Keh contributed greatly to this development (Yen, 2002).

In both countries, the establishment of the first formal Chinese schools signified the transition of the Chinese from being temporary immigrants to a more permanently settled community. The ratio of Chinese women to men started to increase in the 20th century. In Malaysia the ratio increased from approximately 1 to 5 in the first decade, to 1 to 3 in the thirties, and became more or less balanced only in the sixties (Chan and Tey, 2000). In the Philippines, the census of 1903 showed a female-male ratio of 13 to 1000 for the Chinese. This ratio improved to 1 to 13 in 1918, 1 to 5 in the thirties, 43 to 57 in 1960, and became balanced only in the early seventies (McCarthy, 1975). In both countries, the proportion of Chinese population born in the host countries increased dramatically since the sixties.

Both countries experienced a wave of increase in student enrollment after the Second World War. In the Philippines, the number of Chinese schools increased from 58 in 1935 to 78 in 1946 and 150 in 1970 (Hsiao 1998) while in Malaya it rose from 15 in 1946 to 32 in 1950 and 70 in 1956. (Tan, L.E., 2000) The take-over of China by the Communist Party meant that going back to China was restricted. For the Malayan Chinese, L.E. Tan (2000) believes that the acquisition of citizenship in 1953, which provided a feeling of permanency among the Chinese from the sojourners' mentality before that, also played a role.

Orientation of the Pre-Nationalization Chinese Schools

In both the Philippines and Malaya, the colonial policy towards the Chinese schools in the first decades of their establishment had been non-interference. This was basically because the Chinese schools were financially self-reliant. China, on her part, “recognized Chinese living abroad as nationals under the principle of *jus sanguinis*, and considered the Chinese schools outside China to be an integral part of its education system.” (Tan, L.E., 1997) With the setting up of the new Republic of China in 1911, supervision, particularly with respect to Kuomintang (KMT) ideology, was done by the government in Nanjing, which sent delegates to perform such functions (McCarthy, 1975).

Due to this kind of supervision, the Chinese schools became a strong agency of political socialization for the agenda of the Chinese government then. This was manifested in the rituals, e.g., flag ceremony during which the flags of the host country and of China were raised or lowered and their national anthems sung, and in the curriculum which prepared the students to be good citizens of China. The curriculum also exalted Chinese culture and civilization, thus instilling in the students the feeling of cultural chauvinism. (McBeath, 1973)⁶ These practices were required for all Chinese schools. But the ones with stronger political orientation (towards Taiwan and the KMT government) were those set up by the KMT and by the chambers of commerce all over the country. Students of religious sectarian schools also received the same political inculcation through the textbooks and the rituals. There were a few schools and institutions where the political platform was different. Chastisement by the KMT came in many forms for these. The most evident case was that of the Yuyitung brother of the Philippines. They were the publisher and the editor of the *Chinese Commercial News* that did not want to toe the KMT line. Through the instigation of the KMT, in the early seventies they, even though they were born and grew up in the Philippines and had never set foot in China or Taiwan, were deported to Taiwan and were jailed there for many years.

Host Country Government Interference

The non-interference policy of the British government in Malaysia towards the Chinese schools, as compared with the supervision and support it gave to Malay schools, changed in 1919. That year, a month after the May 4th Movement in China,⁷ the ethnic Chinese in Malaya held strong and violent anti-Japanese demonstrations. The British colonial government was alarmed and started to assert its control and surveillance over the Chinese schools. A bill requiring all schools and teachers to register with the Education Department was passed in 1920. Textbooks were examined and those containing KMT propaganda and anti-imperialism materials were banned. However, the focus of the textbooks continued to be China-centered.

After the Second World War, the British colonial government continued its control over the Chinese schools in Malaya. In fact, as proposed by the 1950 Barnes Committee Report, it wanted to phase out the vernacular schools and have instead a unified education system teaching only in English and Malay. However, the Chinese schools were many in number and spread out to the remotest areas. In 1950, there were more than 1300 of them, hiring 6,240 teachers and catering to 216,465 students. This extensive operation of the Chinese schools posed a constraint to the British who could not possibly establish that many schools to replace them (Tan, L.E., 1997).

The British also saw the need to support the Chinese education system so as to be able to get the support of the Chinese for constructive partnership in nation building. Moreover, because the Communist Party of Malaya was gaining strength at that time, the British government believed that providing the Chinese the proper education would keep them in the mainstream ideology. The British therefore decided to give more subsidy to the Chinese schools but instituted reforms, particularly in the areas of teachers and textbooks. A full-time training school was established to train the Chinese teachers so that they would have the necessary Malayan orientation. Syllabi and textbooks were reformulated and rewritten to suit

the local setting and orient the Chinese to the Malayan society. Therefore, "it was, ironically, the British who initiated the transformation of the Chinese schools from being remnants of a *huaqiao* (or overseas Chinese) past to becoming schools that could serve to produce future Malayan citizens." (Tan, L.E., 1997, p.5)

In the Philippines, however, the American colonial government, during the whole of its half-a-century occupation (1898-1946), adopted a very *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Chinese schools. This was in fact the attitude it had towards private education in general, as private schools lessened its education burden. Left to their own, the Chinese schools "pursued the objective of cultivating the 'national consciousness' of the young Chinese and preparing those who might one day wish to go back to China to make a living." (See, 1985) Unlike the case of Malaya where syllabus and textbooks were changed in preparation for independence, there was no revamp in the Chinese education system in the Philippines. It was under the direct supervision of the Chinese Consulate General in the beginning, and later, under that of the Chinese Embassy. Perhaps because the number of Chinese schools was not big, the Philippine government did not feel that they posed a threat to national security. Therefore they were never an item in the agenda of the Commonwealth government as it prepared for the country's independence. Instead, after World War II, in 1947, the Philippines and China signed a Treaty of Amity that allowed the two sides to freely establish schools in each other's territories for the education of their children. The treaty set up the basic legal structure for the Philippine Chinese schools system and provided that the Nationalist Chinese Embassy would oversee these schools.

The accommodating attitude of the American colonial government also resulted in many Chinese schools being established without seeking recognition by the government. Even the first Chinese school, Anglo-Chinese School, sought recognition only in 1915 when it, in addition to the Chinese curriculum, also adopted the English curriculum of the national education system. Thus started the double-curriculum system of Chinese schools in which students took up simultaneously an English curriculum

under the Department of Education of the Philippine government and a separate full Chinese curriculum under the supervision of the Chinese government through the Consulate General or Embassy. This means a duplication of many subjects, such as mathematics and science, as they were studied once in English and another time in Chinese.

By 1935, most Chinese schools were registered with the Philippine Commonwealth Government as this enabled their graduates to proceed to universities and colleges in the country. However, a small number continued to operate without government recognition. The noncompliance problem of a few was ignored until 1955 when the government was prompted by a report of alleged communist infiltration in Chinese schools. Other than demanding registration of all Chinese schools with the government, however, not much was done in the area of textbook supervision. The Philippine government admitted that it could not afford to hire inspectors who knew the language to do the job. Also, perhaps because the Philippine government, faced with the growing *Hukbalahap* communist movement, found the strong anti-Communist stance of most of the Chinese schools consistent with its political orientation and so did not feel that supervision was imperative.

Because of the strong dominance of the KMT government over the Chinese schools of the Philippines in the fifties and sixties, the Chinese in the Philippines had lesser sense of loyalty to the host country compared to their counterparts in Malaya. The students in the Philippine Chinese schools were instilled a very strong Chinese political nationalism by Taiwan's Kuomintang government, which had almost full control and supervision over these schools.⁸ Another factor why the Philippine Chinese did not have much sense of loyalty and allegiance to their host country was because of their uncertain political status and low social standing at that time. Unlike their Malayan counterparts who were granted citizenship before the independence of Malaya, they were still considered aliens, despite the fact that most were born in the Philippines. This also reinforced the desire of the Chinese community leaders in the Philippines for a very China-focused Chinese curriculum, which involved learning Chinese

cultural values, civics, history and geography, as it would prepare the Chinese for education in China just in case they were forced to go back to China or Taiwan.

The differences in the policies of the British and American colonial governments in Malaya and the Philippines respectively, and subsequently the independent governments, had their corresponding effects on the political consciousness of the Chinese in the two countries. In Malaysia, due to the supervision of the syllabus of the Chinese schools, national language (*guo-yu*) to the ethnic Chinese refers to the Malay language and motherland (*zu-guo* or *wo-guo*) refers to Malaysia, not China. In the Philippines, for a long time, for many Chinese, motherland or homeland among the ethnic Chinese referred to China while national language referred to Chinese Mandarin.⁹

Nationalization of Chinese Schools

After the Second World War, the political development of nationalism became widespread throughout Southeast Asia. Naturally the issue of Chinese education in countries in the region became a heated one. In fact, it was during this period when Chinese education in Thailand and Indonesia ceased to continue.

The Philippines

In the Philippines, the approach towards Chinese education since 1955 shifted from increase in control of the schools to their nationalization. Eventually, the 1973 Constitution prohibited the ownership and operation of alien schools. Presidential Decree 176 on April 16, 1973 ordered the phasing out of all alien schools within four years. The status of Chinese schools was changed to "former Chinese schools". The time devoted to Chinese curriculum, which used to be 160 minutes for grade one and two and reached up to 200 minutes per day for senior high school classes, was reduced to 120 minutes per day, devoted only to the teaching of Chinese

language arts. Filipinization of these "Chinese" schools included ownership and administration. Also, a maximum ratio of alien students was specified at one-third. Because the naturalization process was liberalized in 1974, the Chinese schools had no problems meeting these requirements.

The move to nationalize the Chinese schools naturally elicited defensive measures from the Chinese schools and the Chinese Embassy. The litany from the schools involved their functions in education, provision of employment to Filipino teachers, their high standards in English as well,¹⁰ etc. The Chinese Embassy would also cite the Treaty of Amity signed in 1947 which, with the 1974 mass naturalization of the Chinese, was no longer applicable.

Even before the Filipinization of the Chinese education in the Philippines, there were already debates on the direction and focus of the Chinese schools within the country's Chinese community. A few Chinese schools even decided to become Filipino schools and gain independence from the control of Taiwan. The major issue was the strong focus on China of the curriculum and schools. This had been easily accepted by the older generation Chinese, although the students did not see much relevance of the Chinese studies courses in their everyday life since most of them were born and raised in the Philippines and had very little idea of China and the Chinese society, either in China or Taiwan. This impracticality problem felt by the students was not articulated because they had no role in the curriculum design, which was imposed by the Taiwan government. In fact, not even the schools themselves could influence the curriculum. Hence in the mid-sixties, the Jesuit-run Chinese schools decided to break away from the existing system. Led by Xavier School, these schools applied to become Filipino schools and not to be accredited in the education system of the Republic of China. The students continued to be ethnic Chinese, although the new status of these schools attracted some Filipinos to enroll, too. The Chinese curriculum included only Mandarin language and some elements of Chinese culture. In-house textbooks oriented to Philippine settings were prepared. These textbooks eliminated the KMT political propaganda which had been very dominant in the textbooks imposed by Taiwan.

The strong proponents of this reform were administrators of Xavier School, Jesuit priests who escaped from mainland China in the fifties because of the Communist take-over. Since they did not emerge from within the country's Chinese education system, they had a broader and more objective perspective. They aimed for the Chinese to become integrated into the Philippine society, and therefore felt that the effort of the KMT "to extend the internecine KMT-Communist antagonisms ...to the emigrant enclaves in Southeast Asian cities" was against this process. (McCarthy, 1974) Such a viewpoint had actually been expressed in 1958 by the *Chinese Commercial News* when it criticized the Chinese education in the Philippines to be very detached from Philippine society and caring only about Chinese nationalism (*Chinese Commercial News*, 1958, found in McBeath, 1973). The newspaper also charged the Chinese education system then to be chauvinistic and that it did not contribute to the Philippine society. Despite the practical perspective of this viewpoint, the Chinese community then took it more as a criticism against the Kuomintang, rather than as a policy issue, which was expected, given the general political stance of the newspaper. Moreover, at that time, the integrationist view was not popular at all.

Malaya

In Malaya, the nationalization process of the Chinese schools occurred earlier. During the period of decolonization (1946-1957), the country's education policy went through a whole overhaul process, adjusting to the tide of nationalism that was going on in the region and preparing the country for its independence. In 1961, the pre-war education systems were adjusted into one unified national system, with the aim of "fostering a national consciousness among the various racial and religious groups of Malaysia." (Wong & Ee, 1975) Under the unified system, where primary education was made compulsory and provided free of charge, a common curriculum with the same national perspective was adopted. Following a common curriculum with the same national perspective was not difficult to do as the textbooks and syllabus reform had been made

since the 1920s. Chinese as a medium of instruction was allowed within the national primary schools system, but not for secondary schools. Hence, ethnic group secondary schools were converted to National-Type Secondary Schools, where the teaching of the ethnic vernacular, Chinese or Indian, was allowed only if there was a demand from at least 15 students.

The strong commitment and unity of the Chinese community in Malaya played an important role in the struggle for the teaching of the Chinese language. The struggle started in 1950 when the Barnes Report proposed the abolition of separate vernacular schools. The Report triggered a strong reaction from the Chinese community. It brought together all 1400 associations (*shetuans*) to discuss this government legislation. The discussion ended with the formation of the United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association (*Jiaozong* in Chinese). A few years later, the United Chinese Schools Committees Association (*Dongzong*), an association of the managers of Chinese schools, was formed. In the decade of the fifties, the Chinese, through these two associations and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), struggled to safeguard Chinese education and culture in Independent Malaya. Together they fought for the principle of education in mother tongue (*mu-yu*), referring to Mandarin,¹¹ and demanded that the Chinese language be one of the official languages of Malaya. They succeeded in having Chinese primary education officially made part of the national education system by compromising to drop the demand to make Mandarin an official language of Malaya.

The Chinese community was not as successful with their secondary schools. The 1961 Education Act did not allow the use of Chinese as a medium of instruction, if they were to be part of the unified system and to avail of full financial support from the government. Hence those that insisted on being Chinese schools such that they retained the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction, would not be part of the national education system and could not receive any government support. This dilemma resulted in the first major conflict between the United Chinese Teachers' Association and the MCA political party, which, as part of the Alliance, supported the position of the national government (Kua, 1999).

Since then up till the present, the *Jiaozong* and the *Dongzong* have been extremely strong in promoting the many causes of Chinese education in Malaysia as well as maintaining the quality of the Chinese schools. The two together, called the *Dongjiaozong*, generally has the overwhelming support of the Chinese community, including MCA. At the initial stage of the struggle of the *Dongjiaozong* on behalf of the Chinese schools, it was the MCA that brought these two organizations—teachers and management—of the Chinese schools into the mainstream of inter-ethnic bargains. Together they undertook the Chinese Education Movement.

However, as seen earlier, there have been instances of intra-community conflicts on the Chinese education issue between the education sector and MCA. Although the stand of the MCA is also to preserve the Chinese culture and education as part of Malaysian multi-ethnic culture, at times it considers the position of the *Dongjiaozong* too extreme and uncompromising. However, because of the influence of this joint education organization in the Chinese community, in most occasions, the MCA has lent its support to the *Dongjiaozong*. The strong support of the Chinese community for the position of the *Dongjiaozong* was demonstrated in 1969 when MCA lost in the elections due to its lukewarm support for the Chinese community's proposal for a Chinese university, Merdeka University (Kua, 1999).

Post-Nationalization: Adjustments and Developments

Adjustments in the Philippines

In the Philippines, in general, the Chinese schools adjusted smoothly to their nationalization. The liberalization of the naturalization process made it easy for them to fulfill the requirements of ownership and administration by Filipinos, and two-thirds Filipino enrollment. Many of these schools had to change their names to take out the word "Chinese". To keep their English acronyms, the word "Chinese" in

their names was changed to a word starting with the letter "c". For example, Philippine Chinese High School was changed to Philippine Cultural High School while Iloilo Chinese Commercial High School to Iloilo Central Commercial High School. Ironically, Chinese transcriptions, which actually sound very Chinese, were allowed. Hence Anglo-Chinese School, the oldest Chinese school in the Philippines, changed its name to Tiong Se School, a transcription of its Chinese name in Hokkien dialect.

Filipinization also means that the number of hours Chinese can be taught is limited to two class periods of one hour each, both to be devoted to the teaching of Chinese Language Arts. However, most Chinese schools which follow this two-hour allocation teach language arts for one hour and for the other hour, a "combination" course. The "combination" course includes Chinese history, geography, and culture. This allotted time limit was exceeded in most cases. Some have two "combination" courses, the other one devoted to mathematics, an area in which the Chinese want to maintain their competitive edge. A few still maintain a "double-curriculum" by devoting the afternoons entirely to the study of Chinese courses; however, it is far less complete than the one of the pre-nationalization period.

Unlike in Malaysia, the Chinese education system in the Philippines does not have a community leader like the *Dongjiaozong*. Hence the response to problems and major crisis like its Filipinization was not uniform. For example, on the issue of revising textbooks, there was no one set of textbooks that all were willing to adopt. There have been at least four sets of textbooks. Two were prepared by the *de facto* Taiwanese embassy. Another was prepared by the Philippine Cultural High School, which later set up its Chinese language research center. Jesuit-Chinese schools use the set prepared by Xavier School, when it decided not to be with the Taiwan-controlled Chinese education system in the sixties, years before the Filipinization law was implemented.

Deterioration of Philippine Chinese Education

Despite all the efforts to prop up the Chinese curriculum in the face of Filipinization, the standards of Chinese education in the Philippines have deteriorated very much. The decline cannot be attributed entirely to the Filipinization process, but was said to have started since the sixties (Gan, 1993). It was the result of the natural social assimilation process, whereas the Filipinization of Chinese schools only accelerated it. The social phenomenon of hiring maids to take care of children was the most direct means of Filipino influence on them. In the sixties, due to emerging economic prosperity and the transformation of the Chinese families, the phenomenon of entrusting children to the care of Filipino “yayas”, or child caregivers, became a very prevalent practice. Mothers usually join the fathers in taking care of the business, or have jobs of their own. For many, the children’s first language became Tagalog, in which the parents are also fluent. Hence Tagalog became the lingua franca at home. Some Hokkien may be picked up from the parents or other relatives, but Mandarin is as foreign to these young people as any other language. On the other hand, for decades, schools did not make any adjustment in the method of teaching Mandarin, which in most cases uses the first language approach. The lack of environment for speaking the language and the difficulty of learning it created not just a lack of interest, but even great disgust towards it.

Adjustments in Malaysia

In comparison, Malaysia has a much bigger Chinese community, which provides a speech community for speaking Chinese. Moreover, because there are many Chinese dialect groups, an easier way for communication is to use Mandarin. Hence, the incentive to learn Mandarin is greater in Malaysia because it is much more popular and useful.

Despite the nationalization of Chinese secondary schools, the unity and undying effort of the Chinese community pushed for the continuation

of Chinese education beyond the primary level. Below is a discussion of Malaysian Independent Chinese Schools that carry on secondary Chinese education despite its prohibition within the national system.

Independent Schools

The 1961 Talib Report, which unifies the Malaysian education system into one and provides free education to grade school students, resulted in three types of high schools today. One is where Malay as a medium of instruction enrolled in mostly by ethnic Malays. The second is the National-Type High Schools for ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indians. Malay (before 1977, could be either Malay or English) is used as the medium of instruction in these schools, but a course on the vernacular of the ethnic group may be taught as long as there is a demand from at least 15 students in one class. The third type of high schools is those that did not want to conform to the National-Type High School: the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (ICSS). They are not part of the national education system and receive no subsidy. However they continue to use the language of the ethnic group as the medium of instruction. In 1961 out of the 70 Chinese high schools, 54 conformed to the National-Type system and 16 became Independent Schools. Essentially under the care and supervision of the *Dongjiaozong*, these independent schools are present in all 11 states of Malaysia.

Initial Difficulties

Initially, in the sixties, these Chinese schools which chose to be independent of government support and supervision, confronted many problems, to the extent that even their existence became questionable. They suffered a severe decline in standard. The lack of financial support from the government was one reason. But the decline was also because some of the National-Type Secondary Schools for Chinese decided to become Independent Schools as they wanted to accommodate students who were over-aged and those who did not pass the government exams

for elementary graduating students. However, a concerted effort to revive confidence in the Independent Schools was made in the early seventies by the Chinese community led by the *Dongjiaozong*, which argued strongly for these schools. The main argument was that only the Independent Schools could complete the education of Chinese culture introduced by the Chinese primary schools and, with Malay and English in their curriculum, promote the multi-ethnic orientation of the Malaysian culture. The fact that students in the Independent Schools generally excel in math and science was also pointed out. To ensure high standards and seek accreditation abroad, an examination for graduating students from Independent Schools called the Unified Examination was instituted, the first one being taken in 1975. The schools also offer services such as tutoring and preparing students who may want to take the exams given by the government for high school graduating students. This means that students who take the government exams as well have to do two curricula: the Unified Examination Certificate curriculum (in Chinese) and the Government PMR/SPM curriculum (in Malay).

Renewal

The last twenty-some years saw a renewal of the Independent Schools, which occurred since the early eighties. Enrollment rose from 15,900 in 1970 to 36,633 in 1983 (Tan, L.E., 1985). Presently, There are now more such secondary schools (60) than the National-Type Secondary Schools (Chinese) (50).

Several factors contributed to this change. Foremost was the solidarity of the Chinese community. The Chinese associations (*shetuans*) gave financial support to ensure the survival of the Independent Schools while the working committee of the *Dongjiaozong* worked aggressively to improve the standard. The Unified Examination Certificate established in 1975 enabled the *Dongjiaozong* to work for the recognition of Independent Schools graduates to universities in many universities abroad.

The implementation of the National Language policy in 1977 also improved the enrollment of the Independent Schools. All English secondary schools were converted into National Schools, where the medium of instruction had to be Malay. This policy led many Chinese parents to shift their children to Independent Chinese Secondary Schools. National-Type Primary Schools (Chinese) also experienced a significant increase in enrollment as they prepare students for the Chinese-medium education of ICSS.

The increase in enrollment in ICSS was also due to the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which limits the opportunities of ethnic Chinese graduates from National-Type and National Secondary Schools for entry to national universities. Development in China since the last seventies has also contributed to the revival of the ICSS. China's opening up increases the pool of resources from which these schools can get their teachers while the emergence of China's economy increases the importance of literacy in Chinese.

Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP)

At this point a digression to explain the New Economic Policy in Malaysia and its effect on the ethnic Chinese is necessary. This policy, which to this day is still being implemented, was introduced in 1971 during the start of the government headed by Tun Razak. The policy's goal of equality and poverty alleviation was indisputable. Through this policy the government wanted to equalize opportunities, i.e., lessening the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and hence eradicate poverty. Politically it tried to concretize the concept of "Malay supremacy" which is enshrined in the constitution, thus assuaging the discontent the Malays had regarding their generally lower social and economic position over the non-Malays. However, the policy emphasizes the distinction between the *bumiputras* (indigenous Malay) and non-*bumiputras*. It creates a quota system (affirmative action) for employment and education opportunities for the Malays and limits the exploitation of natural resources to them. In

this way, the NEP intensifies the ethnic politics since the redistribution of resources and growth benefits are now along ethnic division (Malays vs. non-Malays). The argument was that the redistribution effect would be towards greater equality as proportionately more non-Malays are in the higher economic classes. However, this result would have been achieved more effectively and with less repercussion on ethnic divisiveness had the discrimination been along economic class. The very distinctive racial divide of the program has created resentment among the non-Malays as the program openly discriminates against them by giving the Malays more economic and social opportunities. Critics have said that it has been the elite Malays and non-Malays with connection who have benefited more from the policy than the poor Malays (Cheah, 2002; Jayasuriya & Rosser, 2001), and for the middle-class Malays, the program instilled in them a subsidy or dependence mentality. Moreover, the interpretation of the quota system by government institutions in many aspects (for example, promotion of faculty in universities) can create even greater unfavorable bias against the Chinese.

To some extent the sense of injustice felt by the non-Malays has somehow been tempered by the coincidental economic growth of the Malaysian economy in the eighties and nineties that allowed them to gain substantial benefits from business. But the effect on opportunity for higher education is very much felt by the non-Malays. Very often they cannot enter a university or course of their choice despite good grades because of the quota system. They very much resent the fact that the academic records of many of the Malays who fill the quota are poorer than theirs.¹²

Tertiary Level Chinese Schools

In Malaysia

Malaya had its first Chinese university, the Nanyang University in Singapore, in 1953.¹³ Since the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965, having a Chinese university in Malaysia has been the desire of the

Chinese community. With other developments in recent history, the need to have one grew even stronger. First, the graduates of the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools are not recognized by the government and so cannot enter universities in Malaysia. Second, even for those who graduated from secondary schools within the national system, the New Economic Policy has affected their opportunities for higher education.

In 1969, the Chinese community proposed to have an independent university, named Merdeka University. The reaction for it was very positive among the ethnic Chinese. The enthusiasm and support did not come from the community leaders alone. Fund raising for it with the “*yi ren yi yuan*” (one person one dollar) campaign received the support of the whole community, including ordinary wage-earners.

The proposal, however, was not approved by the government. Till this day the *Dongjiaozong* continues to push for a Chinese-medium university even while it put in place alternative solutions to solve this problem of lack of higher education opportunities for the Chinese. It has worked for the recognition of its Unified Examination Certificate by universities abroad where the graduates of the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools can continue higher education. Accreditation has been obtained not only from universities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Singapore, which are more “Chinese” in their orientation, but also from several universities in United States, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

For those who cannot afford to study abroad, the Chinese community has worked for the establishment of private colleges that are not subject to the quota system and to allow the enrollment of Independent Schools graduates. These colleges establish sandwich programs with colleges and universities abroad, which in many cases are the institutions that grant the degrees. Among these colleges, it is important to mention two politically significant ones. One is the New Era College set up by the *Dongjiaozong* a decade ago with the help of the MCA. Using Chinese as the medium of instruction, the school has as its target students the graduates of the Independent Schools. The other is the Tunku Abdul Rahman College which was established by the MCA in 1969. Although its objective was

also to provide educational opportunities to the Chinese high school graduates who could not get into universities, its diversity of courses has attracted students of all races. Its present enrollment is over 34,000.

Fully aware of the social implications of the situation brought about by the implementation of the NEP, the Malaysian government has adopted a rather accommodating and compromising attitude. Making higher education accessible within the country to those who cannot enter the national universities also reduces brain drain and saves the country precious foreign exchange. In fact, in 1996, the government undertook a liberalization policy in education, allowing the setting up of more private colleges and universities.

Heeding this new policy, the MCA proposed to upgrade the Tunku Abdul Rahman College to university status. The Ministry of Education approved the establishment of the University of Tunku Abdul Rahman but with the retention of the college as it is. Opened only in June 2002, this "Chinese" university accepts students who passed either the certified exams of the government or those of the Independent Schools. With five faculties and one institute, it offers business, computer, medicine, engineering and liberal arts courses. The latter includes Chinese studies, taught in Chinese, as a major course. Members of the MCA feel that such a university is a good compromise for the proposed Merdeka University. However, the *Dongjiaozong* is still not satisfied with this compromise and continues to push for a Chinese university where Chinese will be used as the medium of instruction for all curricula.

In the Philippines

In the Philippines, two Chinese institutions, Chiang Kai-shek College in Manila and Chinese Eastern College in Cebu City, offer tertiary education. The latter never succeeded in offering Chinese courses.

Chiang Kai-shek School, a KMT-backed institution, was established in 1915. In 1965 it became a college by offering tertiary level education aimed to provide Chinese-medium courses on teachers

training with experts from Taiwan. The demand for such courses was so small that by the eighties, this college shifted to offer mostly popular courses such as commerce and computer science which are taught in English. Only one course, bachelor of science in education, major in Chinese literature, is related to Chinese studies, since the literature subjects are taught in Chinese. Enrollment of the college is small—the total does not exceed 1200 students, and the number of graduates approximates 250 per year.

In 1976, following the nationalization of the “Chinese” schools, Chiang Kai-shek College attempted to fill the gap between the Chinese curriculum of the Taiwan government and the shorter curriculum of the Philippine government. Secondary Chinese education became just four years instead of the six years (three junior high and three senior high) before. Chiang Kai-shek College offered a two-year college course in Chinese Language Arts as an attempt to enable students to finish the usual six years of Chinese education provided by the old curriculum. However, most high school graduates are more concerned about pursuing a regular college course, not many were interested in spending two more years to “complete” their Chinese education. After just a few years’ of existence, the course was terminated.

Students of Chiang Kai-shek are mostly ethnic Chinese who find the location in Chinatown convenient. The other reason for attending this school is the socialization aspect. Some conservative parents send their children there so that they do not end up marrying Filipinos. On the other hand, the students at the college level of Cebu Chinese Eastern College are mostly indigenous Filipinos. No Chinese-related courses are offered. High school graduates from the college or other “Chinese” schools prefer to attend the more prestigious and mainstream universities run by the state or sectarian groups. With lower tuition rates at this college, it caters to indigenous Filipinos who cannot meet the financial requirement of the sectarian or other proprietary schools.

Other Problems of Chinese Education

We have looked at the development of Chinese education in the Philippines and Malaysia given the social and policy circumstances each encountered. This section discusses more specific problems Chinese schools in both countries face.

Urbanization of the Chinese

In both the Philippines and Malaysia, rural-urban migration of the ethnic Chinese has created the problem of congestion in the urban schools while schools outside of the big cities suffer a lack of students. In Malaysia, the increase in the number of students in urban schools is more significant (although the average number in these schools is still less than those in the Philippines), since there is an unstated policy that the government will not allow more Chinese National-Type Primary Schools to be established (Tan LE., n.d.). The number has been the same since 1961 despite the increase in population. In the Philippines, more schools in the urban areas have been established but many schools in the provinces have closed down or turned into ordinary schools for Chinese and Filipinos. In some which tried to preserve the “Chinese” characteristic, Hokkien, deemed more practical in the Philippine-Chinese setting, is taught as their Chinese course.

Teachers

Both countries have the problem of sourcing teachers, but the reason behind it is very different. In Malaysia, the government-recognized secondary schools attended by Chinese are entitled to offer the Chinese language course, but the lack of competent teachers for such a course has been a perennial problem. The irony is that since graduates of Independent Schools who naturally have very good command of the language cannot enter the regular universities for teachers’ training, they cannot be hired by the Chinese primary and secondary (National-Type) schools to teach the Chinese course.

In the Philippines, it is not necessary to possess a degree in education to teach Chinese. (For courses taught in English or Filipino, it is a requirement.) Hence most Chinese language teachers do not have knowledge of the proper pedagogy to teach, much less the skills to motivate students to learn. Moreover, it is not possible to produce Chinese teachers within the Philippine system of Chinese education because of its inadequacy and low standard. In the eighties and nineties only a very negligible number continue Chinese education abroad. The solution was to import teachers, initially from Taiwan, and lately, from China. The problem with such a solution is that these foreign teachers do not understand the culture of Chinese-Filipino children. In fact they cannot even communicate with the students since for most of the students, their first language is Filipino. Although there are now more who go to China to learn Mandarin, the course they take is short and with their limited background, what they achieve is limited as well. Also, the goal most of these students have is to gain greater fluency to be able to do business with China and not to teach when they come back.

To address the deterioration of Chinese education in the country, a few wealthy Chinese donated funds to establish the Philippine Chinese Education Research Center (PCERC) in 1991. It does research on Chinese education: reforming the method used, developing suitable materials, and doing teacher's training. It pushes for reorienting the method of teaching Chinese language from the assumption that Chinese is the students' first language to teaching it as a second language. Tagalog or English is usually the first language of Chinese Filipinos. Although some are exposed to the Hokkien dialect to a certain extent, Mandarin is certainly a foreign language to all of them. The Center also pushes for the use of *Hanyu Pinyin* rather than the traditional *Guoyin* for phonetization.

Utilitarian Value of Chinese Education

Chinese communities invariably point to the preservation of Chinese culture as the reason for sustaining Chinese schools. To parents and students, learning their cultural heritage may be important, but this goal is secondary to the opportunities and advantages Chinese education can open in terms of further education and employment. This explains the popularity of English schools in Malaysia when they were available. By the same token, the lack of interest in Chinese education among Chinese students in the Philippines can be explained by their perception of its lack of relevance to their future.

In the last couple of decades the importance of Chinese studies has increased with the opening up of China, which now engages in cultural and economic exchanges with almost every country in the world. Moreover the success of China's economy also means availability of jobs and investments wherein knowledge of Mandarin is useful. In the Southeast Asian region, vibrant and growing economic relations can be observed in rapid increase in trade and investment in the past decade and, more recently, the establishment of an ASEAN-China free trade area (Palanca, 2001).

Because of these developments, emerging emphasis on learning the Chinese language can be seen in this region. The importance is not only seen through parents demanding more of it for their children. Initiatives have also come from the governments, which now recognize the importance and benefits of learning the language. In Thailand and Indonesia, Chinese schools have reopened after being closed for decades, on the initiative of governments which give it their full support.

Two years ago, Philippine President Arroyo issued a memo encouraging universities and colleges to offer Chinese Mandarin as a foreign language. So far only four universities offer basic level courses on the language although more have signified their intention to do so. At the Ateneo de Manila University where all college students are required to

take one foreign language course, with six to seven languages to choose from, the number of students opting for Chinese Mandarin has been observed to increase noticeably in the past five years. Many continue learning the language after graduation by going to language schools in China. High school and even grade school students also get additional study of the Chinese language during summer months in China or Taiwan.

In Malaysia where there is more exposure to Mandarin and specializing in it is possible within its education system, the increase in emphasis can be seen in the increase in enrollment in Independent Schools. Also, an increasing number of Malay and Indian families send their children to Chinese primary schools. Change can also be seen in the Malaysian government which adopted the "Look East" policy (i.e., more ties with China, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN countries) as part of its vision of achieving "developed country" status by 2020. The government has gradually adopted a more lenient attitude towards the Chinese and the issue of Chinese education. As has been discussed, it allowed the opening of the University of Tunku Abdul Rahman, where a course in Chinese studies course is offered. (The University of Malaya also has a Chinese Studies Department and offers such a course.) The government has even relaxed its strict emphasis on the Malay language and instead is placing more emphasis in learning English.

Another positive development regarding Chinese education in Malaysia is that the position of the Chinese primary schools within the government education system is now secure with the 1995 Education Bill. In this bill, the Minister of Education no longer has the power to convert Chinese Primary Schools to National Primary Schools. The global trend and new policies of the Malaysian government mean more engagement with China, both politically and economically. It is felt that, when equipped with knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, their citizens, particularly the ethnic Chinese, can help in improving Malaysia's relations with China, thus contributing to national development.

Notes

- 1 Even in Singapore where ethnic Chinese make up 75 per cent of the population, the education system is primarily English-based although there is great emphasis on Chinese language learning.
- 2 Officially there are no more Chinese schools in the Philippines. The term “Chinese schools” is used throughout this essay to refer to schools where the Chinese language is taught and the students are mostly if not all ethnic Chinese.
- 3 The number of Chinese students in government secondary schools was cited from *Star* (Malaysia, 24 May 2003), while others were extrapolated from Kua (1999).
- 4 The Philippine Chinese were however active in the fight against the Japanese during the Second World War.
- 5 The Exclusion Act implemented in the Philippines at the start of the American regime excluded further inflow of new immigrants but allowed families of migrants to join them.
- 6 Although McBeath’s study was on the Philippines, it can be extended to cover Malayan Chinese schools at least up to 1920, before the British government implemented close supervision over them.
- 7 The May 4th Movement of 1919 started with the incident of demonstrations of workers and students in China against the Japan for its continued control of the Shandong Peninsula as provided in the Treaty of Versailles. The movement became an intellectual revolution calling for changes in China’s traditional society.
- 8 The situation was ideal for the Taiwanese government, which “ever since 1949...had been fighting for its life. It has sought moral support and investments for its economic development from the Overseas Chinese—an objective of life-and-death importance. Its leaders, accordingly, have tried to maintain and use the Chinese schools as anti-Communist strongholds. Appointments of administrators, screening of teachers, and the writing of textbooks have been geared to serve these political aims.” (McCarthy 1974)
- 9 To be politically correct and to avoid confusion, the use of these terms are in general avoided in newspapers and other organs published in the Philippines today.
- 10 A few Chinese schools, particularly the sectarian, did in fact provide good English education, as they were partially supported by foreign (mostly American) missions and hence had missionaries to teach the English courses. The attention given to English courses was at par with that given to Chinese courses.
- 11 Strictly speaking, Mandarin is not the mother tongue of the Malayan Chinese, who came from Fujian and Guangdong. The mother tongues are among others, Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese.
- 12 Based on discussions with some Chinese in Malaysia.
- 13 This university was closed in the sixties when the Singapore government suspected communist infiltration.

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