

## INAUGURAL EDITORIAL

There has been neither any formal attempt to define the scope of "Malaysian Chinese Studies" nor any serious effort to develop it into a respectable academic discipline. To date, Huazi Resource and Research Centre (HRRC) is the sole academic body in Malaysia engaged in the study of the Malaysian Chinese and treating the promotion of such study as its primary function. In 1995 HRRC embarked on the planning and preparatory work for the publication of the Journal of Malaysian Chinese Studies (JMCS), intended as a vehicle to promote research and exchanges in this field. The publication of the first issue of the journal is a fitting occasion for me to introduce HRRC to the readers and to explain to them our notions of Malaysian Chinese studies and some related concepts.

The idea of establishing a resource cum research institution was first mooted at the National Cultural Convention of the Malaysian Chinese Associations in Penang in 1983. As a move to concretize the idea, HRRC was set up in January 1985 in Kuala Lumpur under the aegis of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall. Since its establishment HRRC has been active in data collection, publication, and organizing seminars through which it has been able to assemble scholars and experts in the various fields to discuss problems and issues confronting the Chinese community in Malaysia. Such endeavours, however, could hardly conceal the fact that HRRC, as an academic body, was anomalous in orientation and deficient in organization. In July 1993, HRRC, as a move to broaden its representation and support base, applied to the Registrar of Companies for reconstitution into an independent, nonprofit organization based on a membership system and governed by a board of directors elected by members at the general meeting. The change heralds a new start for HRRC. It has also clearly defined the status of HRRC as an academic research organization committed mainly to Malaysian Chinese Studies. However, HRRC as an infant academic body still has a long way to go.

The object of study of Malaysian Chinese Studies is discernibly the Malaysian Chinese, both their society and culture. Hence, Malaysian Chinese Studies focuses



on a specific group of people and is multidisciplinary as it draws upon the perspectives of the social sciences and the humanities.

Malaysian Chinese are simultaneously Malaysian nationals and ethnic Chinese identifying themselves with both the Malaysian nation and the Chinese ethnic group. In the multiethnic Malaysian society it is possible, and even common, for one's national and ethnic identities to coexist without being at variance. Indeed, the Malaysian national philosophy, Rukunegara, formulated in 1970, has affirmed cultural diversity as a source of national strength.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, a host of factors had driven the Chinese in the coastal regions of South China to emigrate in large numbers to Southeast Asia. Through hard work in many different sectors and success in weathering the vicissitudes, these early Chinese immigrants had laid the foundations for the present Chinese community. They had also contributed towards the fight for Malaysia's independence and its economic development. Today, as the new millennium is dawning, the five million odd ethnic Chinese in Malaysia are a dynamic force and unsparingly working in unison with other ethnic groups to scale new heights in the country's development and to actualize Vision 2020.

Early Chinese immigrants in Malaysia had brought with them their native culture. Through nearly two centuries of interaction and cross fertilization with the Western and other ethnic cultures, this Chinese immigrant culture has eventually evolved into the present Malaysian Chinese culture with its distinctiveness and embodying other indigenous Malaysian cultural traits. Indeed, the Malaysian Chinese culture, while founded on the original Chinese culture, is a product out of adaptation to the local environment and a protracted process of acculturation with other local cultures. In terms of cultural development process and product, Malaysian Chinese culture thus forms an integral part of the Malaysian national culture. But its origin suggests that the Malaysian Chinese culture also shares many commonalities with the ethnic Chinese cultures in China and other countries. And in this information age interaction among these variants of Chinese culture could generate positive and mutually beneficial influences.

In recent years, the Malaysian Chinese have exhibited tremendous zeal in the reform and development of their ethnic culture, as indicated by the cooperative efforts between the Federation of Chinese Associations, Malaysia, and other leading Chinese associations in drawing up "The General Guidelines on the Cultural Tasks



Ahead” and organizing “The Cultural Reform Convention”. But this formidable task must be supported by academic research. In this regard, HRRC as an academic body shall have an important role to play.

Scholars the world over have evinced considerable interest in the history and current and future developments in the Malaysian Chinese community. The results of their work in this area are remarkable. It is, however, unfortunate that research on the Malaysian Chinese does not bring about an independent discipline and has, in general, been subsumed under Malaysian Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, Overseas Chinese Studies, or Chinese Studies. We have yet to develop the relevant theory and methodology for upgrading Malaysian Chinese Studies into an independent well-conceptualized area study. Until now, scholars interested in the study of the Malaysian Chinese do not have a specific forum for effective academic exchanges and interaction. We hope that publication of the JMCS will in some way make an improvement to the present situation of many deficiencies.

We have in the process of preparing the first issue of the JMCS written to scholars in many parts of the world to explain the rationale of our project and invite them to contribute articles. Their responses have been enthusiastic. We hope that subsequent issues of the journal will receive even greater support from scholars in the field. We are positive that with hard work from the various quarters Malaysian Chinese Studies will develop steadily and in the fullness of time become institutionalized with its own distinctiveness.

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