

# CHINESE EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

菲律宾与马来西亚  
的华文教育之比较研究

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## Abstract

This paper traces the political and social history that influenced the status and quality of Chinese education in the Philippines and Malaysia. Chinese education in the two countries commenced at the same time and in very similar fashion. The divergence in development can be explained by differences in the policies of the colonial subsequently independent governments. How the Chinese community responded to the policies also accounted for much of the difference.

The unity of the Malaysian Chinese community and its support for Chinese education have been responsible for initially, the survival, and later on, the resurgence of independent schools, which have maintained the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction. The phenomenon of such schools, which are free from government supervision but receive no state financial support, is peculiar and explains the present state of Malaysian Chinese education.

The effect of Chinese education on the political consciousness of the Chinese had been quite different between the two countries. Malaysian Chinese schools were less China-focused than those in the Philippines because of the close surveillance by the British colonial government. This is distinct from the Philippine Chinese schools which were left to the supervision of the Chinese (Kuomintang) government until they were

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nationalized in 1974. The difference in the focus of Chinese education partly explains the relatively significant participation of the Malaysian Chinese in nation building and national politics compared with the Chinese in the Philippines.

### 摘要

本文的要旨是探讨政与治社背景对菲律宾及马来西亚华文教育的地位和质量的影响。这两个国家的华文教育开始于同一个时期及同样的情况。接着不同的发展起因于个别殖民政权及后来独立政府所采取的政策。两地的华人社群的反应也产生了不同的后果。

马来西亚华人对华文教育的热爱与支持促使华文教育早期的生存及后来的复兴。在马来西亚，独立华文学校的存在是一个特殊的现象，并形成目前的马来西亚华文教育的情况。

华文教育对两国华人的政治醒觉有差异的效果。英殖民政权对华教的监视促使华校减轻其对中国“效忠”的立场。相反的，在1974年华校“菲律宾化”之前，菲律宾华校却由台湾国民党政府所监视。两国华文教育不同的立场却导致马菲华人社会对国家建设扮演不同的角色。

### Introduction

Malaysia is the only country outside of "Greater China" where education using Chinese Mandarin as the medium of instruction is available.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the quality of the instruction of the Chinese language and related courses is comparable to that in Mainland China and the territories of Taiwan and Hong Kong. In the Philippines, the Filipinization of Chinese schools brought an official end to the existence of Chinese schools in 1975. Chinese as a medium of instruction ceased but Mandarin continued to be taught as a language course in the curriculum.<sup>2</sup> The term "Chinese schools" in the Philippines refer to schools where the Chinese language is taught and in which the students are mostly ethnic Chinese. The quality of language teaching in these schools has deteriorated to such an alarming extent that most students neither speak nor read well after 13 years of learning the language.

In Malaysia, Mandarin is the main medium of instruction in Chinese primary schools within the national education system. In "national-type" secondary schools within the national system, however, Mandarin is taught only in the "pupils' mother language" class. Nevertheless, some Chinese secondary schools decided against conversion to "national-type" status in 1961 when the Education Act attempted to bring all the schools under a unified system. These schools have come to be known as "independent" Chinese secondary schools. They continue with the use of Mandarin as the medium of instruction but forego official recognition and financial



subsidy. Some of these schools also prepare students to sit for government examinations to gain admission to public universities.

With a Chinese population of 5.6 million in 2000, Malaysia has 1,284 national-type Chinese primary schools, 74 national-type secondary schools that were formerly Chinese schools, and 60 "independent" Chinese secondary schools. The student population is approximately 600,000 in Chinese primary schools, 99,000 in Chinese national-type secondary schools, and 60,000 in the independent schools.<sup>3</sup>

In the Philippines, there are 142 Chinese schools with 92,760 students. All are privately owned and, except for a few provincial schools, offer both primary and secondary levels of instruction. The ethnic Chinese population is probably less than 2 per cent of the country's population of 80 million in the year 2000.

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 that actually began in a similar fashion. The divergence in development since then may be explained by government policies and interference as well as by the response of the Chinese community in these countries. Other factors may include the size of the Chinese community, its status in national politics, and its internal politics and commitment to Chinese education. The paper will examine the effects of China's rise as an economic power in the last two 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 comprising Malays and other indigenous groups, Chinese, Indians and "Others". The proportion of the Chinese population has declined from 35 per cent in 1970 to around 27 per cent in 1991, though in certain areas the proportion is much higher (Chan and Tey 2000). The Philippines population is relatively more homogenous though the people are a mix of races. Malay, the main component, is mixed with Spanish, Chinese, American, and others. "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 metropolis areas.

The Chinese in Malaysia are more diverse in the dialects spoken than those in the Philippines. The dialect groups among Malaysian Chinese are Hokkien (35 per cent), Hakka (24 per cent), Cantonese (18 per cent), Teochow (11 per cent), and others such as Hainanese and Hokchiu (Tan, C. B. 2000). On the other hand, 90 per cent of the Chinese in the Philippines are from Minnan or southern Fujian region,

with 70 per cent of them from the Quanzhou area alone.

### **Languages Spoken**

The present generation of Chinese in the Philippines speaks fluent Tagalog (the Philippine national language) or the dialect of the region they live in or came from. Filipino is a common language among those below the age of 30. In Malaysia, Mandarin or the dialects are used as a means of communication (Tan, C.B. 1988). The exception may be some of the *Babas*, a small section of the Chinese living mainly in Malacca and who have adopted certain Malay cultural habits. There is also a component comprising the English-educated (before the National Language policy was implemented in 1977) who are more proficient in English than Chinese and a select few are conversant in Mandarin as well. They tend to mix their dialects with English in daily life. The older-generation Philippine Chinese may intersperse their language with English and Tagalog words while the younger ones tend to inject words in Chinese dialect into Tagalog. The current generation of Malaysian Chinese are educated in *Bahasa Malaysia* or the national language. They tend to be more proficient in this language than in Mandarin or English (张荣辉 Chang Rong Huie 1995). However, they rarely use the national language among themselves.

### **Political Participation**

One major factor in the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is the political role of the Chinese from the colonial period. The relatively large Chinese community has enabled and necessitated an active role in political decision-making. Political participation was prominent and significant during the decolonization period in the years 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 independence, and at the same time negotiated with the Malays to insure a more equitable footing with them on many issues. Politics in the Federation of Malaya (which became Malaysia in 1963) is communal and one of the most important and sensitive issues is that of education.

Malaysia has evolved a unique political system in which different ethnic groups seek consensus through negotiations, compromise and co-operation. The Chinese and Indians share some political power with the Malays in governing the country though the Malays enjoy certain rights and privileges as enshrined in the constitution. The major Chinese political party, the Malaysian Chinese Association



(MCA), was a component of the Alliance Party which became the ruling party just before independence in 1957. The MCA has remained in the ruling coalition, now known as Barisan Nasional (National Front), which has been in power since its formation in the 1970s. Another Chinese-based political party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), is an important opposition party.

Being a small minority, the Chinese have never been active in Philippine politics. They did not play a role in the independence movement,<sup>4</sup> and was not represented in the drafting of any constitution such as the Commonwealth Constitution (of 1935), the constitution ratified in 1973 under President Ferdinand Marcos, and the one drafted after the "People Power" revolution and ratified in 1987. Despite the fact that most ethnic Chinese are citizens, few serve in Congress and only a handful are in government service. In fact, no Chinese have ever served at the level of department or ministry secretary in the government.

### **Citizenship**

An important factor that has a bearing on the political participation of the Chinese in Malaysia and the Philippines is the issue of citizenship. Pre-independence negotiations for rights and privileges among the different ethnic groups in Malaya granted the Chinese and other non-Malay residents the right to citizenship in exchange for the recognition of the special privileges and rights of the Malays. Children of naturalized citizens become citizens by operation of law.

In contrast, until the naturalization process in the Philippines was liberalized in 1975, citizenship through naturalization was a difficult and expensive process, and very few Chinese residents became Filipino nationals. The conditions as provided by the 1935 Commonwealth Constitution were very stringent and at the time of independence in 1946, hardly any Chinese had acquired Filipino citizenship. After the war, possession of Filipino citizenship became important because there was a number of nationalization bills that discriminated against aliens in business. However, only a few could afford the expenses, satisfied the strict requirements or endured the tedious process of naturalization. Many applicants for citizenship had to withdraw their children from attending Chinese schools to signal their intention to become citizens. Still, citizenship had little impact on the integration process and discriminatory state policies did little to alleviate patriotic sentiments toward China. Instead, the Chinese then were alienated from mainstream Filipino society and found relevance in the Chinese nationalism expounded in Chinese schools.

It was only in 1975 when the mass naturalization process, decreed by then

President Marcos under Martial Law, enabled the average Philippine Chinese to acquire Filipino citizenship. By then, most of the Chinese were born in the Philippines, spoke the Filipino language fluently and, in all senses, qualified to be Filipino citizens. With this development, the idea of being Chinese Filipinos was fixed in the consciousness of the majority of the Chinese. Aside from enjoying the much sought after economic rights, Chinese Filipinos were able to vote and to participate in politics.

### **Chinese Schools in the Early Twentieth Century**

Although Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia began in the fifteenth century, it was in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries that the first Chinese schools were built in the Philippines and Malaysia. The development of Chinese schools up to the 1950s was affected by the immigration pattern and state policies during the colonial and post-independence periods.

#### **The Early Chinese Schools**

The first Chinese schools appeared in the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore in the second decade of the nineteenth century as "family" or "neighborhood" schools. It was only in 1904 that the first formal Chinese school, the Chung Hwa Confucian School, was founded in Penang (Tan, L.E. 2000). The 1904-41 period saw a boom in Chinese education. The dedication of some wealthy Hokkien immigrants led by Tan Kah Kee contributed greatly to this development (Yen 2002).

In the Philippines, the first Chinese school, Anglo-Chinese Academy, was established in 1899, a year after American occupation superseded 377 years of Spanish rule, in the compound of the Chinese Consul-General, Tan Kang. A significant number of Chinese schools traced their origin to the American occupation period (1898-1946), when much emphasis was placed on Philippine educational development. The rapid growth of Chinese schools was due to the entry of the families of Chinese immigrants made possible by the new colonial regime.<sup>5</sup> The reform movement in China as advocated by Kang Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao also stimulated rapid growth in the number of Chinese schools (Hsiao 1998).

In both territories, the establishment of formal Chinese schools signified the transition of the Chinese from being a temporary to a permanently settled community. The sex ratio of the Chinese improved in the twentieth century. In the



Malay Peninsula, this ratio improved from one female to every five males in the first decade, one to three in the 1930s, and roughly on par in the 1960s (Chan and Tey 2000). In the Philippines, there was only one female to 13 males among the Chinese in 1918, improving to one to five in the 1930s, 43 to 57 in 1960, and reached parity only in the early 1970s (McCarthy 1974). In both countries, the proportion of local-born Chinese had increased significantly by the 1960s.

The number of Chinese schools increased in both territories after the Second World War. In the Philippines, the number rose from 78 in 1946 and 150 in 1970 (Hsiao 1998). In Malaya there were 1,004 Chinese primary and 15 secondary schools in 1946; these increased to 1,311 and 70 respectively in 1956 (Tan, L.E. 2000). The increase could also be partly due to the communist take-over of China in 1949 which restricted a return to China and, for Malayan Chinese, the option to acquire citizenship from the 1950s also played a role.

### **Orientation of Chinese Schools**

In both territories, colonial treatment of Chinese schools in the period prior to the Second World War was one of non-interference. This was basically because Chinese schools were financially self-reliant. China still recognized Chinese living abroad as nationals under the principle of *jus sanguinis*, and Chinese schools outside China were considered an integral part of its education system (Tan, L.E. 1997). When the Republic of China (ROC) was established in 1911, Kuomintang (KMT) government dispatched officials to supervise Chinese schools in the Philippines (McCarthy 1974).

KMT supervision turned the Chinese schools into an agency of political socialization for the agenda of the government. These schools conducted the ritual of raising the national flag and singing the national anthem of China and followed a curriculum which stressed the importance of being good Chinese citizens. The exaltation of Chinese culture and civilization in the curriculum was also intended to instill a feeling of chauvinism among students (McBeath 1973).<sup>6</sup> Schools with distinct political orientation towards Taiwan and the KMT government were those set up by the KMT or chambers of commerce. Students of religious sectarian schools also received the same political inculcation through the textbooks and rituals. There were a few schools that adopted a different political stance, but opposition by the KMT could assume many forms. The most evident case was that of the Yuyitung brothers, the publisher and the editor of the *Chinese Commercial News*, who did not tow the KMT line. In the early 1970s, through the instigation of

the KMT, they were deported to Taiwan where they were jailed for many years, despite being born and grew up in the Philippines and had never set foot in China or Taiwan (Yuyitung 2000).

### **Host Government Interference**

In Malaya, the British policy of minimal interference towards the Chinese schools, as compared with the direct support given to Malay schools, changed in 1919. Following the May 4th Movement in China in the same year,<sup>7</sup> the Chinese in Malaya held demonstrations against Japanese demands on China. The British colonial government was alarmed and started 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-imperialist materials were banned. However, the focus of the textbooks continued to be China-centred.

After the Second World War, the colonial government continued its control over the Chinese schools in Malaya. In fact, as proposed by the 1950 Barnes Committee Report, vernacular schools were to be phased out to create a unified education system teaching in English and Malay only. The Chinese schools, however, were many in number and spread out to the remotest areas. In 1950, more than 1,300 Chinese schools were 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 so many schools to replace them (Tan, L.E. 1997).

The British also saw the need to support the Chinese education system so as to gain the co-operation of the Chinese for constructive partnership in nation building. Moreover, because the Communist Party of Malaya (MCP) 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 and instituted reforms, particularly in the areas of teachers and textbooks. A full-time teachers' training school was established for Chinese teachers, and syllabuses and textbooks were reformulated to suit local conditions and to nurture a Malayan orientation. 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).



In the Philippines, however, the American colonial government (1898-1946) left Chinese schools very much on their own and they "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). Whereas the Chinese school syllabi and textbooks were changed in preparation for independence, the Chinese education system in the Philippines remained unchanged and continued to come under the direct supervision of the Chinese Consulate-General and later on under that of the Chinese Embassy. Since the number of the Chinese schools was small, they were not considered a threat to national security and hence were never an item in the agenda of the Commonwealth government when it prepared for the country's independence. Instead, after the Second World War, the Philippines and China signed a Treaty of Amity in 1947 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 for the Nationalist Chinese Embassy to oversee these schools.

The accommodating attitude of the American colonial government also resulted in many Chinese schools being established without official recognition. Even the first Chinese school, Anglo-Chinese School, which was established in 1899, sought recognition only in 1915 when it adopted the English curriculum of the national education system (in addition to the existing Chinese curriculum). Thus began the double-curriculum system of Chinese schools in which students followed simultaneously an English curriculum under the Department of Education of the Philippine government and a separate Chinese curriculum under the supervision of the Chinese government through the Consulate-General or Embassy. This meant that many subjects were taught twice, once in English and again in Chinese.

By 1935, most Chinese schools were registered with the Philippine Commonwealth government as this enabled their graduates to proceed to local universities and colleges. However, a few continued to operate without government recognition, a situation that was ignored until 1955 when a report alleged communist infiltration in Chinese schools. Still, the official registration of Chinese schools did little to improve textbook supervision for lack of competent inspectors. Also, despite the growing threat of the *Hukbalahap* communist movement, the government found the strong anti-Communist stance of Chinese schools reassuring and felt that supervision was not imperative.

The effect of the dominance of Chinese schools by the KMT government undermined the sense of loyalty to the host country among Filipino Chinese in the

1950s and 1960s. Instead, control and supervision by Taiwan's KTM government instilled among Chinese school students a strong sense of Chinese nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Another factor that weakened the allegiance of Filipino Chinese to the Philippines was their uncertain political status and low social standing then. Unlike Malayan Chinese who could opt for citizenship before the independence of Malaya, the Chinese in the Philippines were still regarded as aliens, despite the fact that most were born in the country. This reinforced the need among the Chinese for a China-focused educational curriculum involving the learning of Chinese cultural values, civics, history and geography, as a preparation for education in China in case they had to return to China or Taiwan.

Differences in the policies of the British and American colonial governments, and later on the independent governments in these two countries, had a very different effect on the political consciousness of the two Chinese communities. In Malaysia, the national language (国语) refers to the Malay language and "my country/motherland" (我国 / 祖国) refers to Malaysia, not China. In the Philippines, the Chinese for a long time held the view that "motherland" was China and national language was Mandarin.<sup>9</sup>

### **Nationalization of Chinese Schools**

After the Second World War, nationalism surfaced throughout Southeast Asia and Chinese education was looked upon with disfavour in most countries. It was during this period that Chinese education in Thailand and Indonesia was prohibited.

#### **The Philippines**

From 1955, the issue of Chinese education shifted from the control of the schools to their nationalization. Under the 1973 Constitution, Presidential Decree 176 on April 16, 1973 ordered the phasing out of all alien schools within four years. Chinese schools became known as "former Chinese schools". The time devoted to Chinese curriculum was reduced from 160 minutes for grade one and two and as much as 200 minutes per day for senior high school classes, to just 120 minutes per day for all levels. The subject matter allowed was devoted only to the Chinese language. Ownership and administration of these "Chinese" schools were Filipinized and a maximum ratio of alien students was limited to one-third.

The proposal to nationalize the Chinese schools elicited protests from the Chinese schools and the Chinese Embassy. They stressed the functions of the



schools in education, provision of employment to Filipino teachers, and high standards in English.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese Embassy cited the Treaty of Amity signed in 1947 but which, with the 1974 mass naturalization of the Chinese, was no longer applicable.

Even before the Filipinization of the Chinese schools, there had been debates on the direction and focus of these schools within the Chinese community. A few Chinese schools became Filipino schools to avoid the control of Taiwan. The major issue was the curricular focus on China which, while accepted by the older generation, was questioned by students most of whom were born and raised in the Philippines and ignorant of China and Chinese society in the Mainland or Taiwan. The curricular emphasis on China was imposed by the Taiwan government and beyond the control of the schools and students. Hence from in the mid-1960s, Jesuit-run Chinese schools opted to become Filipino schools and severed their links to the education system of the ROC. Students were still largely Chinese, but the new status of these schools began to attract some Filipinos. The Chinese curriculum consisted only of Mandarin language and some elements of Chinese culture. Textbooks were oriented to Philippine settings and political propaganda of the KMT was eliminated.

The ardent proponents of this reform were administrators of Xavier School. These were Jesuit priests who escaped from Mainland China in the 1950s. They were able to infuse a broader and more objective perspective aimed at integrating the Chinese into the Philippine society, and at the same time rejected the effort of the KMT "to extend the internecine KMT-Communist antagonisms ... to the emigrant enclaves in Southeast Asian cities" (McCarthy 1974). Such a viewpoint had actually been raised in 1958 by the *Chinese Commercial News* when it criticized Chinese education in the Philippines as detached from Philippine society and cared only about Chinese nationalism (*Chinese Commercial News* 1958, quoted in McBeath 1973). The paper was critical of the Chinese education system then as being chauvinistic and contributing little to society. The Chinese community viewed it more as a criticism against the KMT, rather than as a policy issue.

## Malaya

In Malaya, the "nationalization" process of the Chinese schools occurred earlier. During the period of decolonization (1946-1957), the country's education policy underwent a process of overhaul to adjust to the tide of nationalism that was sweeping through the region in the push for independence. In 1961, the pre-war

education systems were brought under a unified national system, with the aim to "foster a national consciousness among the various racial and religious groups of Malaysia" (Wong and Ee 1975). The unified system envisaged free and compulsory primary education and a common curriculum with a uniform national perspective. Adoption of this system was facilitated by the textbooks and syllabus reform made in the 1920s.

The commitment and unity of the Chinese community in Malaya played an important role in the struggle for the right to learn its mother language. Trouble brewed up when the Barnes Report of 1950 proposed the abolition of vernacular schools. The Report triggered a strong reaction in the Chinese community and brought together 1,400 associations (社团) to discuss this official decision. The result was the formation of the United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association (教总 *Jiaozong*). A few years later, the United Chinese Schools Committees Association (董总 *Dongzong*), an association of the board of directors of Chinese schools, was formed. In the 1950s, the Chinese, through these two associations and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), worked to safeguard Chinese education and culture in independent Malaya. Together they fought for the right of education in the mother tongue (母语), or Mandarin,<sup>11</sup> and demanded that the Chinese language be one of the official languages of Malaya. They succeeded in making Chinese primary education as an official component of the national education system by compromising to drop the demand to make Mandarin an official language of Malaya.

The 1961 Education Act did not allow the use of Chinese as a medium of instruction under the unified system of secondary education which would benefit from full financial support from the government. Hence schools that insisted on being Chinese schools and retained the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction would operate outside the national education system and without any government support. This dilemma resulted in the first major conflict between *Jiaozong* and the MCA which, as part of the Alliance, supported the position of the national government (Kua 1999).

Since then, *Jiaozong* and *Dongzong* have been extremely dedicated to promoting the many causes of Chinese education in Malaysia as well as maintaining the quality of the Chinese schools. Generally known inseparably as *Dongjiaozong*, both enjoy the overwhelming support of the Chinese community, often including the MCA. At the initial stage of the struggle of this combined body on behalf of Chinese education, the MCA had contributed to bringing these organizations - teachers and management - of the Chinese schools into the mainstream of inter-ethnic bargains.



However, there were also 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 Chinese culture and education as part of the Malaysian multi-ethnic culture, at times it considers the position of the *Dongjiaozong* rigid and uncompromising. However, because of the influence of these nation-wide organizations among the Chinese, the MCA has lent its support on most occasions. The strong support of the Chinese community for *Dongjiaozong* was demonstrated in 1969 when MCA lost in the elections due to its lukewarm support for the proposal for a Chinese university to be known as Merdeka University (Kua 1999).

## **Post-Nationalization: Adjustments and Developments**

### **Adjustments in the Philippines**

In the Philippines, Chinese schools have adjusted well to their nationalization. The liberalization of the naturalization process made it easy for them to fulfill the requirements of Filipino ownership and administration and two-thirds Filipino enrollment. Many of these schools had to delete the word "Chinese" in their names. To keep their English acronyms, many replaced the word with another starting with the letter "c". Philippine Chinese High School was changed to Philippine Cultural High School, and Iloilo Chinese Commercial High School to Iloilo Central Commercial High School. Ironically, Chinese-sounding transcriptions of names 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 the Hokkien dialect.

Filipinization limits the teaching of Chinese language to two class periods of one hour each. However, most Chinese schools would teach language for one hour and a "combination" course of Chinese history, geography, and culture for the other. The time allotted was exceeded in most cases. Some opt to have two "combination" courses, with one devoted to mathematics to as to enable the Chinese to maintain their competitive edge. A few still maintain a "double-curriculum" structure by devoting the afternoons entirely to the study of Chinese courses.

Unlike Malaysia, the Philippines does not have a community-based organization similar to *Dongjiaozong*. Hence the response to problems and major crises was not uniform. For example, in the revision of textbooks to meet the needs of Filipinization, rather than having one standard set of textbooks, four different

ones were used. Two of these were prepared by the *de facto* Taiwanese embassy, another by the Philippine Cultural High School, which later set up its Chinese language research centre. Jesuit-Chinese schools texts were prepared by Xavier School, when it decided to opt out of the Taiwan-controlled education system in the 1960s, and well before the Filipinization law was implemented.

### **Deterioration of Philippine Chinese Education**

Despite efforts to prop up the Chinese curriculum in the face of Filipinization, the standard of Chinese education has fast deteriorated. The decline started in the 1960s and was not due entirely to the Filipinization process (Gan 1993). The trend towards social assimilation would have led inevitably to this deterioration, and accelerated by Filipinization. Since the 1960s, the practice of hiring Filipino *yayas*, or child caregivers, by the increasingly prosperous Chinese community created a direct means of Filipino influence on Chinese children. Where both the parents are working and are fluent in Tagalog, the language becomes the *lingua franca* of the family. Children may acquire some knowledge of the Hokkien dialect from their parents or relatives, but Mandarin is just a foreign language. On the other hand, the method of teaching Mandarin has remained unchanged for decades and in most cases is taught as a first language. The absence of a conducive environment to use, and the difficulty of learning, Mandarin, instill a lack of interest in and a dislike for the language.

### **Adjustments in Malaysia**

In comparison, Malaysia has a much larger Chinese community representing a vibrant speech community for the use of Mandarin and dialects. The diversity of dialect groups and the use of Mandarin in Chinese schools render communication in Mandarin a matter of choice. The incentive to learn Mandarin in Malaysia is not just its popularity but also of its importance as a cultural symbol of ethnic identity.

The nationalization of Chinese secondary schools has not diminished the undying effort of the Chinese community to push for the continuation of Chinese education beyond the primary level. In this respect, the role of the Independent Chinese Schools in secondary Chinese education is of particular significance.



## Independent Chinese Secondary Schools

The 1961 Talib Report, which unifies the Malaysian education system and provides free education to grade school students, resulted in the creation of national schools and national-type schools where Malay is the medium of instruction. Malay (before 1977 English as well) is used as the medium of instruction in national schools, but the mother tongue of an ethnic group may be taught when there is a demand from at least 15 students in the class. Chinese as a medium of instruction is provided for only at the primary level. Many Chinese secondary schools were converted into National-Type Secondary Schools and Chinese is taught as a separate subject. Schools that chose not to convert to "national-type" status remain as "Independent Chinese Secondary Schools" (ICSS's). They are outside the national education system and do not qualify for government subsidies but have the right to use Chinese as the medium of instruction. In 1961, 54 Chinese secondary schools converted into national-type schools and 60 remain independent. Essentially under the care and supervision of *Dongjiaozong*, these independent schools are found in several states in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

### Initial Difficulties

In the initial period in the 1960s, the ICSS's which opted to remain independent of government support and supervision confronted many problems that threatened their very existence. They suffered from a severe decline in standard caused by the lack of financial support and the need to accommodate students who were over-aged or had failed the government examinations and thereby had lost the opportunity to continue their education. The Chinese community led by *Dongjiaozong* made concerted efforts to revive confidence in the ICSS's in the early 1970s with arguments that these schools could complete the education in Chinese culture introduced at the primary level and, with Malay and English in their curriculum, to promote the multi-ethnic orientation of Malaysian culture. The fact that students in these schools generally excel in mathematics and science was also emphasized. To maintain their standard and to seek accreditation abroad, an examination called the Unified Examination was instituted in 1975. Subsequently, some ICSS's also prepare students to take the examinations in government schools and thus to allow students to acquire qualifications for entry into state universities.

## Revival

Since the early 1980s, the ICSS's have experienced a revival of popularity when enrollment rose from 15,900 in 1970 to 36,633 in 1983 (Tan, L.E. 1988). Several factors have contributed to this change. Foremost among them were the solidarity and financial support of the Chinese community and efforts of *Dongjiaozong* to improve the standard of these schools. *Dongjiaozong* has also succeeded to win recognition for the Unified Examination Certificate from various foreign universities as entry requirements in under-graduate studies.

The implementation of the National Language policy in 1977 to replace English as the medium of instruction provided an added incentive for enrollment in the ICSS's. Increased enrollment was also due to the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which limited the opportunities of Chinese graduates from national-type and national secondary schools for entry into national universities. Development in China since the late 1970s has also contributed to the revival of the ICSS's as China's opening up has increased the pool of resources from which these schools can get their teachers as well as enhanced the importance of literacy in Chinese.

## Malaysia's New Economic Policy

At this point a digression to explain the New Economic Policy (NEP) in Malaysia and its effect on the ethnic Chinese is necessary. Introduced in 1971, its policy goals were to equalize economic opportunities and to alleviate poverty. Politically it tried to concretize the concept of "Malay supremacy" as enshrined in the constitution, thus assuaging the discontent of the Malays regarding their generally lower social and economic position compared with the non-Malays. However, the policy emphasizes the distinction between *Bumiputras* (Malays and other the indigenous peoples) and non-*Bumiputras*. Employment and education opportunities were based on a quota system in favour of the Bumiputras in a controversial redistribution of resources and growth benefits along ethnic lines. The distinctive racial bias of the programme created some resentment among the non-Malays. Critics claim that it was the elite Malays and non-Malays with connection who have benefited more from the policy than the poor Malays (Cheah 2002) and instills among the middle-class Malays a dependence mentality.

To some extent the sense of injustice felt by the non-Malays was tempered by the rapid economic growth of the Malaysian economy in the 1980s and 1990s that



allowed them to gain substantial benefits from business. But the adverse effects on opportunities for higher education were keenly felt by the non-Malays. Very often entry to the university was denied on the basis of the quota system, despite the possession of academic records superior to those who managed to fill the quota.<sup>12</sup>

## Tertiary Level Chinese Education

### Malaysia

Malaya had its first Chinese university, the Nanyang University, in Singapore in 1953.<sup>13</sup> Since the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965, having a Chinese university in Malaysia has been the desire of the Chinese community. First, the graduates of the ICSS's are not recognized by the government and have no access to public universities in Malaysia. Second, opportunities of eligible candidates from national schools are limited by the quota system.

In 1969, the Chinese community proposed to establish an independent university to be called Merdeka University. The proposal and fund raising on a "one person one dollar" (一人一元) campaign received widespread support of the community. The proposal, however, failed to win government approval. *Dongjiaozong* continues to push for a Chinese-medium university even while it puts in place alternative solutions to the problem of lack of higher education opportunities for the Chinese. It has worked for the recognition of its Unified Examination Certificate of ICSS's by foreign universities. Accreditation has been obtained from universities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Singapore, which are more "Chinese" in their orientation, and also from several universities in United States, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

The Chinese community has also established private colleges that are not subject to the quota system. These colleges establish "twinning" programmes that allow students to qualify for the degrees of foreign colleges and universities. Three such colleges were established in the 1990s, namely, the New Era College sponsored by *Dongjiaozong* in the Kuala Lumpur area, Southern College in the south and Han Jiang College in Penang and dependent on the financial support of the Chinese community. In 1969, MCA itself had set up the Tunku Abdul Rahman College to provide educational opportunities to the Chinese high school graduates as well as those of other races. Its present enrollment exceeds 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 numerous private colleges and universities.

Heeding this new policy, the MCA established the Tunku Abdul Rahman University in June 2002. This "Chinese" university accepts students who possess either the certified examinations of the government or those of the ICSS's. 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 department. Members of the MCA feel that such a university is a good compromise for the proposed Merdeka University, though a section of the Chinese community may beg to differ.

### **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.

The Chiang Kai-shek School, a KMT-backed institution established in 1915, became a college in 1965 when it offered tertiary level education aimed at providing Chinese-medium courses on teachers training. Experts from Taiwan were hired to teach these courses. The demand for such courses was so small that by the 1980s, this college shifted to teaching popular courses such as commerce and computer science which are taught in English. Only one course, in the bachelor of science in education and dealing with Chinese literature, is related to Chinese studies. Enrollment of the college is less than 1,200 students, of whom about 250 graduate each 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 occupied just four years instead of six years before (three junior high and three senior high). Chiang Kai-shek College offered a two-year college course in Chinese Language as an attempt to enable students to finish the usual six years of Chinese education provided by the old curriculum. Most high school graduates, however, are more concerned with pursuing a regular college course and few were interested to spend two more years to "complete" their Chinese



education. The course was consequently terminated after a few years. 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.

Students at the college level of Cebu Chinese Eastern College are mostly indigenous Filipinos. There is absolutely no demand for Chinese-related courses. High school graduates from the Eastern College and other "Chinese" schools prefer to attend the more prestigious and mainstream universities run by the state or sectarian groups. With its lower tuition fee, the college caters to the poorer section of indigenous Filipinos.

### **Emerging Problems in Chinese Education**

The development of Chinese education in the Philippines and Malaysia has largely been conditioned by official policies. Current social circumstances are giving rise to specific problems in the Chinese schools.

#### **Urbanization of the Chinese**

In both countries, rural-urban migration of the Chinese has led to congestions in urban schools and declining enrollment in rural areas. In Malaysia, the situation is more serious as there is an unstated policy that the government will not approve new Chinese primary schools (Tan, L.E. 2002). The number has remained stagnant since 1961 despite the increase in population. In the Philippines, new schools have been established in the urban areas but many have closed down in the provinces or turned into ordinary schools for Chinese and Filipinos. In some cases, in order to preserve the "Chinese" characteristic, Hokkien, deemed more practical in the Philippine-Chinese setting, is taught as a Chinese course.

#### **Teachers**

Both countries face the problem of the availability and quality of teachers, though for different reasons. In Malaysia, the policy of teaching the mother tongue in national secondary schools exists in theory rather than in practice, as the lack of competent teachers is a perennial problem. This is further exacerbated by the fact

that few graduates of ICSS's are admitted into teachers' training colleges.

In the Philippines, it is impossible to produce Chinese-language teachers because of the inadequacy and low standard of Chinese education. The majority of the teachers are therefore wanting in pedagogic knowledge as few have pursued Chinese education abroad in the 1980s and 1990s. Teachers, initially from Taiwan, and lately from China, have been brought in. They are generally ignorant of the culture of Chinese-Filipino and have problems communicating with the students whose first language is Filipino. An increasing number of students is learning Mandarin in China but enroll only in short courses to acquire greater fluency for business rather than teaching purposes.

To address the deterioration of Chinese education in the country, several concerned Chinese have 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 conducting teacher training. It advocates the teaching of the Chinese language not as the students' first language but rather as a second language. Although some Chinese are proficient in the Hokkien dialect, Mandarin is certainly a foreign language to all of them. The Center also pushes for the use of *Hanyu Pinyin* (汉语拼音) rather than the traditional *Guoyin* (国音) or phonetization.

### **Utilitarian Value of Chinese Education**

The Chinese community invariably points to the preservation of the Chinese culture as the reason for Chinese schools. To parents and the students, however, learning their cultural heritage may be important, but this goal is secondary to the opportunities (in terms of further education and employment) Chinese education offers. This explains the popularity of English schools in Malaysia before they were abolished. 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 two decades the importance of Chinese studies has increased with the opening up of China. The success of China's economy also means availability of jobs and investments in which knowledge of Mandarin is useful. In Southeast Asia, growing economic relations are seen in the rapid increase in trade and investment in the past decade and, more recently, the establishment of an ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (Palanca 2001). In view of these developments, emerging emphasis on learning the Chinese language is evident in this region. This emphasis comes not



only from parents but also from various governments. Closed for decades, Chinese schools have reopened in Thailand and Indonesia on government initiatives.

In 2001, Philippine President Arroyo issued a memo encouraging universities and colleges to offer Mandarin as a foreign language. Four universities are offering basic level courses on the language and more have signified their intention to do so. At the Ateneo de Manila University where all college students are required to take one out of six or seven foreign languages on offer, the number opting for Mandarin has increased noticeably in the past five years. Some continue to learn the language after graduation by joining language schools in China. High school and even grade school students may also enroll for Chinese language courses during summer months in the Mainland or Taiwan.

In Malaysia where there is more exposure to Mandarin and where specialization is possible within its education system, the increase in emphasis can be seen in the enlarged enrollment in ICSS's. A growing number of Malay and Indian pupils is enrolled in Chinese primary schools. As stated earlier, the government has also adopted a more liberal approach to issues on Chinese education. Indeed, it has relaxed its strict emphasis on the Malay language and is placing more emphasis in English.

Another positive development regarding Chinese education in Malaysia is that the position of the Chinese primary schools within the national education system is now secure under the 1995 Education Bill whereby the Minister of Education will no longer enjoys the discretion to convert them into national primary Schools. With the rapid expansion in bilateral engagements both politically and economically, it is certain that a knowledge of the Chinese language and culture will help to improve these relations further and to contribute to national development.

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### **Notes**

- 1 In Singapore where the 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 This is distinctly different from the situation in Thailand and Indonesia where all Chinese schools ceased to exist after the Second World War.
- 3 Number for Chinese students in government secondary schools from *The Star* (Malaysia, 24 May 2003), others 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 exercised close supervision over them.
- 7 The May 4th Movement of 1919 started with the incident of demonstrations of workers and students in China against 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. It is the official language in schools and in many community functions. The mother tongues of the Chinese are various dialects such as Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese.
- 12 Based on discussions with some Chinese in Malaysia.
- 13 This university was closed in 1980 as the Singapore government suspected communist infiltration.

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