

# Chinese Education in Malaysia under Malaysian Ethnic Politics

Nan Xia<sup>1,2</sup>, Yanan Yang<sup>1,3</sup> & Yok Fee Lee<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> School of International Education, Chengde Medical University, Chengde, China

<sup>3</sup> Social Science Department, Chengde Medical University, Chengde, China

Correspondence: Yok Fee Lee, Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel: 60-3-8946-7083. E-mail: leeyokfee@upm.edu.my

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## Abstract

Malaysia is one of the multi-ethnic, multi-culture and multi-religious countries in Southeast Asia. Malaysia is a classic case where the state has used wide-ranging preferential policies to manage ethnic problems. As a matter of fact, because of the ethnic politics in Malaysia, the ethnic preferential policies affected most domains of this country, including social, political and economic areas, especially Chinese education in Malaysia. The objective of this paper is to examine Chinese education in Malaysia under Malaysian ethnic politics. Data of this article is based on two sources, primary data were collected through interviews and the informants were selected based on purposive sampling and snowball sampling, meanwhile, secondary data were collected from journal articles, newspapers, website pages and online resources. Hence, the authors focused on these qualitative data especially the informants' oral interviews to reach the research objective. Content analysis was used to analyze primary and secondary data. Findings of this study indicate that, there is no doubt that the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is closely related to Malaysian ethnic politics, though it has undergone a thorny way, it is not a problem to maintain the status quo of the Chinese education; however, it is impossible to seek a great breakthrough at the present stage. Nowadays, the development of Chinese education in Malaysia depends to a certain extent on the development of China and it has a positive correlation with the Malaysia-China relationships.

**Keywords:** Chinese education, ethnic politics, preferential policies

## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is one of the multi-ethnic, multi-culture and multi-religious countries in Southeast Asia. Malaysia is a classic case where there is a coexistence of some major ethnic groups with distinct identities and where the state has used wide-ranging preferential policies to manage ethnic problems (Haque, 2003). According to Segawa (2013), Malaysia has a political structure that is based on ethnic politics. As a matter of fact, because of the ethnic politics in Malaysia, the ethnic preferential policies affected most domains of this country, including social, political and economic areas, especially Chinese education in Malaysia.

The development of Chinese education in Malaysia has a long history since the large scale of immigration of Chinese to Malaya beginning in the nineteenth century (Raman & Sua, 2015). It has been almost 200 years since Wufu Shuyuan, which was the first Chinese school in Malaysia established in Penang in 1819 (Curdt-Christiansen & Hancock, 2014). Malaysia is the only country that has a complete Chinese education system of primary school, secondary school and college besides China (Xu & Xu, 2016). However, there have emerged many ethnic preferences in education in Malaysia (Haque, 2003), the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is undoubtedly a hotly contested area, which was lack of support from the ruling coalition government (Thock & Tan, 2016). Though Malaysian government stated that Malaysia respected the political reality of pluralistic society and gave Chinese communities a space to develop its own education, the Chinese communities generally believed that it was unthinkable if there was no long-term continuous resistance movement.

## 2. Methodology

The primary data of this article were collected through in-depth interviews. Totally, sixteen informants were selected and interviewed based on evidence of data saturation. These interviews were conducted from November 2016 to April 2017. In order to make sure that all data are collected with appropriate anonymity and confidentiality, names of the informants were coded with letters and numbers, such as A1, B2, and C2.

Based on this research, these sixteen elites were divided into seven politicians coded as A, five social activists coded as B and four scholars coded as C. These politicians include former Prime Minister of Malaysia, former Deputy Ministers of Higher Education, former Malaysian Ambassador to China, former Education Malaysia Beijing Director and Malaysian Embassy's Education Promotion Counselor and member of the ruling parties of National Front (NF). The social activists include political commentators, cultural worker and so on. Scholars include senior lectures and professors in universities and research institute in Malaysia. These informants have rich experience and knowledge in ethnic politics in Malaysia, which could provide sufficient data for this study.

Meanwhile, content analysis was used to analyze the collected primary data and also the secondary data which were collected from journal articles, newspapers, website pages and online resources.

## 3. Marginalization of Chinese Education in the Colonial Period

The development of Chinese education in Malaysia has a long history since the large scale of immigration of Chinese to Malaya beginning in the nineteenth century (Raman & Sua, 2015). It has been almost 200 years since Wufu Shuyuan, which was the first Chinese school in Malaysia established in Penang in 1819 (Curdt-Christiansen & Hancock, 2014).

In Malaysia, Chinese education in Malaysia began with private schools. At that time, a large number of Chinese immigrants came to Malaya as indentured laborers in the late nineteenth century. Hence, in order to satisfy the basic demand for elementary education, the Chinese immigrants began to set up schools for education. Informant A7 pointed out that:

Because of the early history, the Chinese in Malaysia are relatively lower stratum of society from China; the Chinese immigrants were relatively poor. At the time, every parent came here and hoped that their children would have a better future. Besides, education has always been attached great importance to our Chinese community. The most common phrase among us here is that 'it never has a poor education, even though we are very poor'. Therefore, we always put the highest priority in education and gave children a chance to be educated. So people began to set up vernacular schools take for granted, in addition, there were also some churches and communities to do the same.

In other words, the establishment of the Chinese private school went hand in hand with the formation of Chinese immigrants' settlement in Malaya, and its existence was to meet the needs of the immigrants' children (Thock, 2013, p. 19). What is more, the Chinese private schools were set up not only by the teachers themselves but also the clans, lineages and village committees (Tan, 1997, p. 9).

In addition, informant A7 added that:

Many people may not know that before the founding of the PRC and during the 1911 Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen period, at that time, a lot of newspapers and magazines was established in order to promote Three Principles of the People. Some schools had also been set up led by the communities of newspapers and magazines. Hence, we developed in that case.

Actually, the development of Chinese schools in Malaya was given a big boost following the success of the 1911 Revolution (Tan & Santhiram, 2010). There were 181 Chinese schools in the Federated Malay States and another 313 in the Straits Settlements till 1920 (Yap, 1992, p. 17)

In short, until 1920, the development of the Chinese schools had met with little interference, and it had not been encouraged and supported by the colonial government. Chinese schools which were a component of the vernacular education during the colonial were neglected by the British government (Thock, 2013, p. 19). Chinese communities tried their best to do their own education which made Chinese education thrived at that time. What is more, the British colonial government played no role at all in setting up Chinese schools except that the state government of Selangor took over the running of two Chinese schools in Kuala Lumpur (Tan, 1997, p. 14).

The Chinese schools at that time were deeply influenced by Chinese political thoughts, especially the May Fourth Movement of 1919 with distinctive anti-colonialism and democratic consciousness, which was not tolerated by the British colonial government. Along with the upsurge of nationalism and the frequent political activity of the Chinese teachers and students, the British colonial government found the Chinese schools were a

threat to its order and rule. In other words, “the Chinese school not only as a troublesome nest of Chinese Nationalists but also as a potential instrument for political sedition” (Loh, 1975). Informant C1 insisted that:

The British colonial government did not want the Chinese education to have the opportunity to develop well or not to develop, what’s worse, it was better to get rid of it. Therefore, they put forward a lot of laws to limit and suppress the Chinese education. They began to introduce laws from 1920, such as the Registration of Schools Ordinance, 1920. Schools those who have ten students are required to register and they must meet the requirements of the colonial government in terms of curriculum and so on. The so-called registration was to see what you have inside the organization and whether there were no other activities.

This marked the end of British neutrality towards vernacular education in general and Chinese education in particular (Wong & Gwee, 1980, p. 3). Though this measure implemented by the British colonial government caused widespread opposition to the Chinese community in Malaysia, it was still enforced eventually. Due to the implementation of the Registration of Schools Ordinance 1920, more than a dozen Chinese schools were canceled registration immediately, according to Dong Zong, there were at least 315 Chinese schools were canceled registration from 1925 to 1928 (Zou, 2014).

In addition, the British colonial government empowered the Assistant Director of Education in the Straits Settlements in 1924 and in the Federated Malay States in 1931 to strengthen the control and supervision of Chinese schools. Actually, this specialized in dealing with Chinese affairs and mainly in political control over the schools. Though the British colonial government introduced the system of grant-in-aid and then began to provide to the Chinese schools in 1924, indeed, it was trifling and not worth mentioning. Despite experienced all kinds of repression at that time; Chinese schools were still flourishing, showing its tenacity and vitality. According to the relevant data and data statistics, there were 1015 Chinese schools, 91,534 pupils and 3985 teachers in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States in 1938 (Tan, 1997, p. 26).

During the Japanese occupation from February 1942 to August 1945, Chinese education in Malaysia experienced the darkest period in the history. These were years of destruction and despair for the Chinese schools. Due to the Japanese War of aggression against China and distinctive anti-Japanese and anti-aggression just position of Chinese immigrants, many Chinese were massacred by the Japanese. Besides, the use of Chinese as a medium of instruction was prohibited and from March 1944 teaching Chinese as a language too was forbidden (Tan, 1997, p. 31).

After Japanese occupation ending in 1945, the Chinese in Malaysia began to struggles to rehabilitate and develop Chinese education all over the country. Accord to the statistic of MU Annual report on education 1946, there were 1105 Chinese schools, 172,101 pupils and 4513 teacher in Malaya up to 1946 (Malayan, 1946). There were several factors that may be considered to contribute to this growth. The Chinese immigrants’ consciousness on education to highlighted and attached great importance to education to cater for the needs of their children just as A3 and A7 said before may be the crucial factor. In addition, Tan (1997) added that some of the demand came from the young Chinese whose education was interrupted by the Japanese Occupation.

However, in In the face of unprecedented anti-colonial struggle and independence requirements, the British colonial government took a hostile attitude to Chinese education that had a strong patriotism and anti-colonial tradition and tried to opportunistic to eliminate. In 1948, the British declared a State of Emergency. Informant B2 said that:

In 1948, the British declared that the Malayan Communist Party was illegal, and declared that Malaysia was in a State of Emergency, which meant that he wanted to eradicate the Communists or his sympathizers, and later he announced a plan called Briggs Plan, which means to drive all the Chinese out of the edge of the village to the village. The British colonial government mainly planned to cut off the Chinese contact with the MCP, and then cut off Chinese contact with the new China.

As many studies of the Emergency have shown, the war between the British and the CPM caused much hardship for many ordinary Chinese who were caught ‘between two millstones’ (Tan, 1997, p. 51). After the Emergency, many school principals, teachers and students were detained or repatriated (Lomperis, 1996). 30 thousands communist activists were jailed and another 15 thousands were deported to China. Many of them were school principals and schoolteachers recruited from China by Chinese schools in Malaya (Ang, 2011, p. 57)

Moreover, informant C1 pointed out that:

In the early stage, the British suspected the Chinese education since 1949, which because of the Communist Party in power in China in 1949. The British thought that the Communist Party was cosmopolitan which

would affect the Chinese in Malaysia. The British became more doubt that people educated by the Chinese education would become the colonial trouble at last, or they may overthrow the colonial government. The British government suppressed the Chinese education with this idea. Many laws were proposed including the Barnes Report.

Actually, many reports and education ordinances (the rules) were proposed during 1950s which was given in the following table (see table 1). Before the Barnes Report, the British colonial appointed the Central Advisory Committee (CAC) to reexamine education policy (Malaya, 1949, p. 28). M. R. Holgate who was Chairman of the CAC presented the first report that was extremely unfavorable to Chinese education to the Legislative Council in 1950. The central theme of this report was to use “the wide extension of English education as the real solution to the problem of interracial education” (Federation, 1950). According to the report, English was the medium of the primary education, the Malay language was also allowed to as the medium, as for secondary schools, English was the medium (Luo, 1985, p. 42). It is worth noting that Chinese education was totally ignored in this report. Moreover, Tan (1997, pp. 48-49) indicated that the report introduced one common language as the medium to integrate and unify Malaysians and suggested that English was the ultimate desirable objective of education policy, which was not immediately possible.

Table 1. Reports and education ordinances proposed during 1950s

Number	Reports / Education Ordinances	Proposer	Year
1	First Report of the CAC on Education	CAC	1950.5
2	Barnes Report	Barnes Committee	1951.1
3	Fenn-Wu Report	William P. Fenn, Wu Teh Yao	1951.6
4	Education Ordinance, 1952	Special Committee on Education	1952
5	White Paper of 1954		1954
6	Razak Report	Tun Abdul Razak	1956.5
7	Education Ordinance, 1957		1957

(Source: Lew, 2006)

In 1950, the British colonial government established the Committee on Malay Education also known as the Barnes Committee to examine the system of Malay education. However, the committee consisted of 9 Malays of the 14 members released the Barnes Report in 1952 which not only discussed about Malay education but also interfered with other vernacular schools beyond their authority. Though it did not recommend that Malay should be the main medium of instruction, it advocated a prominent role to ‘safeguard the position and status of the Malay language’ within the education system (Tan, 1997, p. 57). In fact, the essential spirit of the Barnes Report was to establish the ‘National school’ which use as Malay as the medium to replace the other vernacular (Lew, 2006, p. 52).

There was no doubt that these unfair reports aroused strong opposition from the Chinese communities. In order to gather the power to better maintain the mother tongue education, Jiao Zong which was also known as the United Chinese School Teachers’ Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM) was born at the right moment in the end of 1951. In fact, Jiao Zong was established to fight for the Chinese education and the equal right of the Chinese citizenship in Malaysia (Lew, 2006, p. 11).

Due to the fierce opposition of the Chinese communities, the British colonial government appointed Fenn-Wu committee to deal with the Chinese education, following by the Fenn-Wu Report was released in 1951, which was later after the Barnes Report. This report advocated the government to recognize the status of Chinese schools and to assist its development. However, this report still represented point of view of the British colonial government to deal with Chinese education through a ‘slowly engineered process’ in order to win the Chinese and their cooperation over politically, the Chinese schools will be weeded out eventually (Tan, 1997). In the following, the Special Committee on Education was appointed to endorse the Barnes Report and the Fenn-Wu Report due to their different views on Chinese schools. Report of the Special Committee of September 1951 was released eventually in 1952, though this gave up the above two reports on the surface, it was almost the replica

of the Barnes Report.

Furthermore, the British colonial government enacted the Education Ordinance 1952 in accordance with the Report of the Special Committee of September 1951, which essentially accepted the proposal of the Barnes Report (Kuang, 2013, p. 22). It proposed 'National schools' would be taught in either Malay or English, which presented the government's policy was intended to eliminate the Chinese and Tamil language (Tan, 1997). The Education Ordinance 1952 was strongly criticized and opposed by the Chinese communities, which led to the establishment of Dong Zong (the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia, UCSCAM) in 1954.

What is more, the British colonial government released the Council Paper No. 67 of 1954 also known as the White Paper of 1954 in October 1954, which advocated 'convert' vernacular schools into multiracial schools teaching in English. The plan could not be enforced due to the opposition of the Chinese communities and the Malay society (Kuang, 2013, p. 22). Actually, the Education Ordinance 1952 and the White Paper of 1954 was one of twins, in other words, the former was the education policy, the latter was the administrative measures (Lim, 1986, pp. 39-40). Moreover, Lim angrily added that:

The Barnes Report announced the eradication out of the Chinese education system, the Education Ordinance 1952 gave the death penalty as the verdict, and the Education White Paper 1954 aptly dug a grave for it....(Kua, 1990, p. 69)

A variety of reports and ordinances that were not conducive to the Chinese education promulgated by the British colonial government had aroused dissatisfaction and strong opposition from Chinese and Chinese society, which led to the active resistance of the Chinese. The establishment of Jiao Zong and Dong Zong was the good example to fight for the Chinese education. In addition, after the release of the Education Ordinance 1952, Jiao Zong combined with the other communities to submit the memoranda, statements, declarations and written speeches to safeguard the rights and interests of Chinese Education (Lew, 2006, p. 54).

In 1953, Chinese Education Central Committee was established combined with Jiao Zong, Dong Zong and MCA, which was also known as "Sandajigou" to strive for the fair and equitable rights and status of the Chinese education to the government. By cooperation with a political party, it could be an asset for Chinese educationalists in their dealings with the government (Ang, 2011, p. 66). So till 1957 when the interruption of the cooperation, Dong Jiao Zong and MCA jointly safeguarded the development of Chinese education. Jiao Zong put forward the struggle for Chinese as one of the national Languages for the first time in 1953, which got promise of Tan Cheng Lock who was the president of MCA and listed as MCA's ultimate goal (Zou, 2014, p. 313).

In sum, the development of Chinese education in Malaysia during the colonial periods faced the changing attitudes and policies of colonial government. Though before World War II, the colonial government had no clear educational policy (Kua, 2015, p. 82), Chinese education was neglected and got no support from the colonial government, and Chinese schools faced a certain degree of supervision and control. Chinese education at that time was deeply influenced by China. Many of the teachers were from China, in addition, the text books were imported from China. By using this resource, the Chinese education can develop.

With the implementation of National school by the British colonial government step by step, the development of Chinese education faced the constraint of all kinds of unfavorable reports and ordinances. The Chinese schools found themselves paradoxically confronted by the threat of exclusion from the national system (Tan, 1997, p. 42). Therefore, the main agents were born in the form of non-governmental organizations under this structure. Jiao Zong and Dong Zong led the Chinese communities to safeguard the development of Chinese education facing the constraint of the rule. Moreover, they combined the political party MCA to jointly fight for the equal rights of Chinese education. In a word, before independence of Malaysia, the Chinese education was marginalized by the British colonial government under the circumstance of emphasizing English language. Along with striving for independence, the Chinese education faced with new problems and challenges.

#### **4. Compromise of Chinese Education for the Independence**

In order to win the first Federal election held in July 1955, the Malacca meeting was held between the Alliance and Jiao Zong on 12 January 1955. This historic meeting resulted in a pact between the Alliance and Jiao Zong.

First, the Alliance agreed that, if it came into power, it would amend those provisions in the Education Ordinance and the 1954 White Paper which threatened the existence of Chinese schools. If necessary, it would also rewrite education policy. Second, the Tunku agreed that the Alliance would provide an extra \$2 million in aid for the Chinese schools to assist them in their expansion. Third, the Alliance election manifesto would pledge that the party's policy was not to destroy the schools, language, and culture of any

race. Fourth, the teachers agreed that ‘this question of Chinese becoming one of the official languages would not be brought up again until after the Federal election’ (Tan, 1997, p.158).

In this meeting, Lim Lian Geok put forward that the Chinese language as one of the official languages, in order to smooth campaign publicity and win the election, finally Lim compromised and the both sides agreed to not to bring up this issue temporarily before the election. During that time, the spirit of sacrifice for the Independence can be seen from Lim’s speech to the UCSTAM General meeting in December 1956:

At this point, the most important principle we must hold on to is the attainment of Independence. Absolutely everything must be decided on the basis that it does not harm Independence. This means that if something we are fighting for may disadvantage the Independence struggle, then we must cope with them in the spirit of tolerance (Zong, 1987, pp. 181-182).

However, afterwards the Alliance went back on his word, what is more, it claimed that the Chinese community had allowed not discussing the language issue, and it further instructed that the Chinese community used official language to exchange citizenship (Lew, 2006, p. 69).

With the victory of the election, the Alliance appointed Abdul Razak Hussein as the Minister of Education to form a committee to ‘examine the present Education policy of the Federation of Malaya’ and ‘establish a national system of education’. Followed by the Razak Report was released in 1956. Though in order to maintain the unity of the three ethnic groups (the Malays, Chinese and Indians) to the British colonial government for independence, Razak Report made some adjustments and showed the enlightened side to education, such as, proposed the existing vernacular schools and established the ‘national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole’ and so on. Nevertheless, it envisaged ‘the ultimate objective’ of educational policy in paragraph 12, chapter II, which led to the foreshadowing for the following education disputes.

We believe further that the ultimate objective of educational policy in this country must be to bring together the children of all races under a national educational system in which the national language is the main medium of instruction, though we recognize that progress towards this goal cannot be rushed and must be gradual.

Sandajigou negotiated with Razak on ‘the ultimate objective’ of educational policy in paragraph 12, chapter II and Razak admitted guarantee that this ultimate objective would not appear in Education Ordinance 1957. The crisis of the Chinese education had also been temporarily alleviated. In addition, the Chinese primary schools were formally accepted as parts of the national education system (Thock, 2016). However, the Alliance still encouraged the Chinese schools to aid by the government and convert into English secondary schools. In fact, the Razak Report and Education Ordinance 1957 are the products of the compromise of the two major ethnic groups (Malaya and Chinese) (Lew, 2006, p. 57). They are more like political products made for the independence of Malaya (Hou, 2002).

In sum, during this period, the most important thing was striving for the independence; the issue of Chinese education was relatively put into the secondary consideration. Finally, non-Malays were given the assurance of citizenship and limited political role in exchange of their acceptance of the special position of Malays in politics, education, and language (Means, 1986, pp. 100-101). Though the Chinese communities maintained its education as usual, it finally made sacrifices for independence. After Malaysia achieving its independence, facing the national unity problem which was the first utmost task need to tackle by the new leaders, UMNO-Malay dominate state began to implement various education policies to unite its citizens of different races and develop a sense of national identity (Thock, 2013, p. 23). Hence, the development of Chinese education entered into another thorny stage and began to fight with the new policies implemented by the new government.

### **5. Struggle and Development of Chinese Education under Nation-Building Process and the Implementation of Language Policy**

After independence, in order to solve the nation building problem, the UMNO which was guided by Malay nationalism launched a series of policies that were in favor of the Malays. The Malaysian state which was dominated by the UMNO has pursued a process of nation-building that emphasized Bumiputera-defined identities centered on Malay culture (Loh, 2002). Therefore, political, economic, cultural and educational rights and interests of the Chinese ethnic groups were increasingly eroded.

Informant B4 pointed out that “after the independence, the government felt that this education cannot follow a common education system and policy without a mainstream (the Malay), which set the national education policy at that time”. Informant B1 agreed with informant B4, furthermore, he added that “the Malay leadership elites have a long-term goal, i.e. to hope the Malay as a single language in the country, or even willing to accept

English as a single language of our country to some extent, and without the need for the existence of Chinese education or the Indian education, which is a long-term goal”.

Hence, in the field of education, the objectives of Malaysia’s national language policy were to create a national identity and to facilitate national integration through the use of the Malay language (Paauw, 2009). Due to the mono-lingual national education policy implemented by the government to shape the Malay-dominated nation, the Chinese education was facing the impact of a series of national education policies and decrees (Thock, 2016).

In 1960, the Rahman Talib Report was published in the name of reviewing the implementation of education policy. Actually, national education policy as specified in article 3 of Education Ordinance 1957 had been tampered with and replaced by ‘the ultimate objective’ of paragraph 12 of the Razak Report (Kuang, 2013, p. 24). Moreover, it proposed that the Chinese secondary schools must convert their main teaching medium to English or Malay in order to continue to aid from government.

In addition, Education Act 1961 was enacted and passed by the Alliance government based on the Rahman Talib Report. This is the symbol of mono-lingual policy that began to implement by the Alliance government (Zou, 2014, p. 313), besides, the survival and development of Chinese education was facing an unprecedented and severe test. Article 21 (No. 2) empowered MOE to convert any national-type primary school into a Malay-medium national primary school at its discretion (Ang, 2011, p. 80). In other words, the Education Minister was empowered to convert all Chinese and Tamil primary schools to Malay schools at a suitable time. Moreover, facing the choice of being converted to national-type secondary schools or becoming financially independent as private schools, 54 out of the 69 Chinese secondary schools were converted by hook or by crook to national-type secondary schools. That was due to the government’s coercive and persuasive measures and partly due to the need for government assistance to solve the financial and staffing difficulties that had been plaguing these schools (Ang, 2011, p. 80).

The conversion of Chinese schools resulted in the development of Chinese education at least decades behind, moreover, the independent Chinese secondary schools was facing plight of student shortages. At that time, Dong Jiao Zong stood in the position of maintaining national education to resist. However, the alliance suppressed the leaders of Jiao Zong and stripped Lim Lian Geok’s teaching permit and soon after, revoked his citizenship under the pretext of “disloyal and disaffected towards the Federation of Malaya” (Ang, 2011, p. 82). What is more, Yan Yuan Zhang who was the Jiao Zong’s advisor was forbidden by law from entering Malaya indefinitely.

Ten years after the independence in 1967, the National Language Act aimed at excluding other languages was enacted in Malaysian parliamentary house, which made Bahasa Malaysia became the sole national and official language in Malaysia (Xu, 2004, p. 26). Moreover, the Alliance government intended to cut off the Chinese secondary school students’ path of studying abroad, which was also the direct reason for running the Merdeka University of Dong Jiao Zong. Informant C2 pointed out that:

In the late 1960s, our country banned going for further studies abroad without Malaysian Certification of Education. However, this certification was tested by the Malay, which was a great lethality for many Chinese children. Though thanks to Nanyang University at that time (established in the late of 1950s), many Chinese could go there for studies, after the implementation of this policy, people even had no way to study there. So we engaged in a Merdeka University of our own to solve this problem.

Informant A3 and B3 agreed with C2’s view of point, in addition, B3 added that “the implementation of this policy means that the government intended the non-converted Chinese secondary school live and die its own, however, they never thought ‘the greater the oppression, the greater the resistance’, we used social movement to support our Chinese education. For example, we rouse money from fundraising dinners and so on”. Finally, through various fundraising campaigns, about two million ringgit was collected by May 1969 (Ang, 2011, p. 87).

May 13 riot marked a watershed in Malaysian political development; the policies of almost all aspect including the political, economic, cultural and educational areas were in favor of the Malays. The elites in UMNO have implemented various state policies that cater to Malay interests (Thock, 2013). Furthermore, in pursuing the goal of nation-building, the government adopted ethnically based education, language, and cultural policies with a view to integrate various ethnic groups under the dominant Malay language and culture (Haque, 2003, p. 255).

The Majid Ismail Report 1971 recommended university admission based on racial quotas rather than merit (Abraham, 1999). In fact, since the implementation of “Quota system” since 1970s, the number of Malay students in universities and university colleges of Malaysia had far exceeded its demographic percentage, which caused general dissatisfaction of non-Malay students and parents (Zou, 2014, p. 315). However, there was reasonable reason for its existence. Informant A4 was in favor of the Quota and he argued that “because we are

the first group in the country, so the privilege should have been given to Malay". Informant C4 agreed with A4, he (C4) said "quota is based on the demographic percentage", furthermore, he announced that:

so because of this, the places for the Chinese are limited, is not by merit, but based on race, this is good for the nation, if by merit, the Chinese they are more clever, they will fill the universities, and if this happen, then the social will become imbalance, the economic become imbalance, at the end it will create the civil war.

In 1971, the Alliance government enacted the Universities and University Colleges Act. What is more, the government established two universities (National University of Malaysia and Islamic University) mostly for Malays with a certain portion of admission allocated to non-Malays (Means, 1986, p. 107). However, comparison with the rejection of the Merdeka University and the establishment of Islamic University, the government's unfair policy on Chinese education is unambiguous. Obviously, the failure of the proposal for the Merdeka University was mainly due to its violation of the language policy of Malaysia, which was based on the supremacy of the Malay language as the national language of the country (Thock & Tan, 2014).

Actually, Malaysian national education policy was inherited from the British colonial mono-lingual policy in suppression of the languages and educations of the people of all races. In the 1960s, it focused on the conversion of Chinese schools and blocked the found of the University of the Chinese in 1970s. Though it was strongly resisted by the civil society led by Dong Jiao Zong, the Malaysian authorities were still implementing and forcing the Chinese education to continue to suffer a variety of blows and setbacks (Zou, 2014).

In 1985, the Minister of Education announced the integrated School Programme (Projek Sekolah Integrasi) implemented by the government, which aimed to promote the national unity and reduce the racial polarization through bringing together students of all ethnic groups (Lew, 2006, p. 84). Informant A6 stated that his proposal was rejected by the Chinese educationist and he asserted that the Chinese educationist's action was not good for politics. Besides, he pointed out:

The problem with every Chinese Education is that it separates the children, Chinese children separates from the other children, the ideal thing to have is one national school where the teaching is in the national language, but the Chinese language will be taught as a subject, for if the Chinese students want to learn Chinese. But that has not been accepted by the Chinese communities here, even when we want to put the schools together on one campus, that also is rejected by Chinese educationist, they want to be completely separated from the national school, which is not good for politics.

Furthermore, he insisted this using his own experience:

I was an educationist during the time when Malaysia was under British rule, I went to English school where we have Chinese, Malays, Indians, everybody is there, and I develop good friendship with people of different races, but here because the Malay school to national school, they don't meet Chinese students so when they grow up, they do not have good Chinese friends, the same thing with the Chinese students.

Informant A1 and C4 agreed with A6's points of view, and they said that separate schools were bad for the national unity. Informant C4 pointed out that:

Because we have this unity problem, many of us believe unity start in the school, so the government under Mahathir proposed to create Projek Sekolah Integrasi, so our young children, Chinese young, the India young, the Malay young should go to one school, so that the students can mixed together, you have a common playground, common football field, common canting, so that can mix, the purpose is just unity, so why DongZong must oppose, this is ethnic politics, ethnic politics they scare their own shadow, influence education.....

Informant A1 added that "only in Malaysia that children of country go to separate schools, they cannot become real Malaysian". So these schools established to maintain and propagate ethnic cultures are generally regarded as the root causes of racial polarization within the school system in Malaysia (Thock & Tan, 2014, p. 6). Anyway, due to fearing that the character of the Chinese primary schools would be changed and lost, the integrated School Programme was rejected by the Chinese educationists led by Dong Jiao Zong.

The Mahathir Mohamad-led BN government imposed a series of Malay-dominated policies in the 1980s to enhance the Malay language and cultural legacy in Malaysia and to expand the assimilation process (Ang, 2011, p. 143). The Chinese educationists respond firmly to safeguard the character of the Chinese schools and tried very hard for the basic human rights of Chinese language, education and culture. The most representative were the Alliance of Three pledged the slogan of "Join BN, Rectify BN" in 1982 and the establishment of alliances with the Chinese Guilds and Associations which was also known as the 15-Huatuan Alliance. The struggle to

maintain the Chinese education paid the price eventually, 107 political activists including Dongzong Chairman Lim Fong Seng, Jiaozong Chairman Sim Mow Yu, Jiaozong Vice Chairman Thuang Pik King and Kua Kia Soong from the Chinese Resource and Research Centre were detained under the Internal Security Act in late October, 1987.

In the early 1990s, with the rapid economic growth, there had been a very prosperous situation in Malaysia; meantime, the long-standing racial problems gradually fade. Dr. Mahathir promulgated Vision 2020 in February 1991 and took some more open measures. In particular, the Mahathir-led UMNO began to demonstrate more flexibility towards the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese, in respect of their language, education, religion, and cultural heritage (Thock, 2013, p. 26). Though the government's growing willingness to accommodate the Chinese is that it wished to recoup a loss in Chinese votes at the 1990 general election (Milne & Mauzy, 1999, p. 96). Chinese language departments of the Southern College was allowed to open, Chinese community-funded colleges like New Era College and Han Chiang College were also allowed to set up, in addition, the government between Malaysia and China signed MOU on Education Cooperation in 1997, etc. which brought opportunities for the development of Chinese education in Malaysia to a certain extent.

Nevertheless, Education Act 1996 replaced the 1961 Education Act and was implemented in 1998, which caused panic of Chinese communities and worry on Chinese education. According to Education Act 1996,

the above policy is to be executed through a national system of education which provides for the national language to be the main medium of instruction, a National Curriculum and common examinations....

Although the phrase "ultimate objective" most criticized by the Chinese communities did not appear in this act, the spirit and method of implementation of "ultimate objective" were obvious (Lew, 2006, p. 64). The Education Act of 1996 had acknowledged "ultimate objective" in the preamble of their document (Thock, 2013, p. 25). In other words, the "ultimate objective" had turned into "current objective" (Zou, 2014, p. 317). However, since this period, both of the Chinese primary schools and independent Chinese secondary schools developed rapidly, which caused great dissatisfaction of the government. The Malaysian government thought the development of the Chinese education contrary to national unity, under this circumstance, Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 came out to intensify the implementation of mono-lingual policy. Dong Zong insisted that the Chinese education are facing the survival crisis and will be marginalized and die out by Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (UCSCAM, 2012).

In sum, Chinese education in Malaysia experienced different periods, i.e. the suppression of British colonial period, the destruction of Japanese rule, the compromise for the independence and the struggle under nation-building process and the implementation of mono-lingual policy. In other words, the development of Chinese schools and Chinese education in Malaysia has undergone a thorny pathway (Thock, 2013, p. 20). The development of the Chinese education are facing the constraint of various rules (education reports and education act), meantime, the Chinese communities used all kinds of resources (fundraising from Chinese communities, government funding) to safeguard the Chinese education in Malaysia. However, the Chinese community and the government have also expressed different voices about Chinese education in Malaysia.

## **6. Discussion on Chinese Education in Malaysia**

Arguably, Malaysia is the only country that has a complete Chinese education system besides China (Xu & Xu, 2016). The development of Chinese education in Malaysia is closely related to Malaysian ethnic politics just like the author discussed above. Though Malaysian government stated that Malaysia respected the political reality of pluralistic society and gave Chinese communities a space to development its own education, the Chinese communities generally believed that it was unthinkable if there was no long-term continuous resistance movement. Besides, there are many different voices on Chinese education in Malaysia worth paying attention to and thinking about.

Firstly, there is the controversy on the existence of Chinese education in Malaysia. All the informants including the politicians, elites and scholars acknowledge the fact of the existence of Chinese education in Malaysia; in addition, they also believe that Malaysia is the only country that has the complete Chinese education system except China. Just as informant A6 who was the former Prime Minister said that "Malaysia is the only country in Southeast Asia even now in the rest of the world where Chinese education is approved by government and supported by government". Informant A1 agreed with Informant A6, he (A1) pointed out that thanks to the agreement between the parties that Chinese education can exist till now, furthermore, he added that:

Chinese education is very strong because there is also an agreement between the parties, just like the return, they gave the Malay some dominant, then the Malay also agreed that the Chinese education can continue,

this is the part of the social contract between political parties, this is an agreement we understand, so that's why you see the Chinese school is very strong here, some are supported by the government, some find their own funding...

Informant A2, A5, A6 and B2 agreed to the above statements, moreover, A2 pointed out that "Though the Malay language shall be the national language, the Federal Constitution stipulates that vernacular language can be taught and learnt". It can be seen from the Article 152 in Federal Constitution:

- (a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and
- (b) nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation.

However, informant A7, B3, B4 and C3 insisted that Chinese education in Malaysia was a kind of social movement and the development of Chinese education was mainly depended on the strength of the Chinese and their self-reliance. Just as Informant said that:

Malaysian Chinese insist on mother tongue education, that is, Chinese education. From the outset, this was a social movement depended on the power of the Chinese. Whether in the period of colonial government or the independent period or the UMNO-dominate regime, this is a social movement, the Chinese community contributed money and labor because this social movement can move the heart of the Chinese communities. Moreover, we all believe that in order to live with dignity and have the root of the culture; the Chinese must have the Chinese education.

Informant A7 added that "Because of the political factors, our desire for self-reliance is stronger; self-reliance also gave birth to the spirit of our hard work, so our Chinese educations here are doing well." Hence, the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is undoubtedly a hotly contested area, primarily because of the strong stand adopted by the Malay nationalists against the vernacular school system as well as the lack of support from the ruling coalition government (Thock, 2014).

Furthermore, some politicians like informant A6 stated that "there is no a time to close down Chinese school, they will continue like today", informant B1 and B3 did not agree with what A6 said, they indicated that the Chinese primary schools in more than half a century has been and still are facing constant crises of being uprooted. The announcement of the Malay politicians has been interpreted as a strategy to realize an ethnic Malay nation by slowly replacing and eliminating Chinese primary schools (Eng, 2005, p. 187). In addition, informant B1 pointed out that:

From the beginning of independence in 1957, the elites of the Malay leaderships had had a goal for a long time, i.e. to eliminate Chinese education in Malaysia. The Chinese education in Malaysia has 200 years of history, so it has its social foundation. Thus, they can't put it into practice and they have no way to destroy or clear out the Chinese education. They can only allow it to exist, here what the meaning of existence is that the Chinese education can only maintain the status quo and cannot be further developed. In other words, they don't allow increasing the Chinese schools and for the existing Chinese schools can only maintain the status quo.

Moreover, informant B1 and B3 believed that due to the political and economic power of the Chinese, instead of deny or rush to kill the Chinese education, the government will let it die slowly. They hope to use time for the completion of the goal". Though, some Malay politicians and intellectuals even go to the extent of urging the government to close down these schools (Lim, 1987). Informant B1 and B3 insisted that the Chinese education in Malaysia could only maintain the current scale and the status quo and survive without any further development and expansion.

Secondly, Chinese education in Malaysia intertwines with nation-building and national unity of Malaysia. There are some people in Malaysia asserted that the Chinese education in Malaysia was the stumbling block of national unity. Informant A2 said that:

There will be some extremists, who discuss the closure of the Chinese education. They advised to close the Chinese primary schools and independent Chinese secondary schools because they have always believed that Chinese education is the stumbling block of national unity. The extremists said that Chinese education was the stumbling block of national unity because they insisted that the Chinese did not combine with other ethnic groups.

Informant A6 and C4 suggested that all the vernacular schools should be in one campus to deal with the unity

problem. Some extremists even question the loyalty of Chinese education and the Chinese. Just as informant C4 said that “many of us believe unity start in the school, the country must set unity, you are Malaysian, although you are Chinese blood, you are born here, you are the subject of the country, you are the citizen of the country, let’s unite, your loyalty should be here”. In a word, it is most unfortunate that the Malay nationalists and the ruling coalition government have chosen to see the vernacular school system “as a threat to the country’s national building process instead of an asset that could enrich the cultural diversity of the country” (Thock, 2014, p. 10).

Meantime, there are some people especially the Chinese educationists who are not in favor of the above point of view. Informant A5 pointed out that “the problem in Malaysia is that we normally mix education and unity,” In addition, he further commented that:

To me, education is education, unity is unity, they are related but they are not the same. When you speak about education, you talk about quality education, when you talk about unity, you talk about how people interact and understand other. We cannot confuse each other. Education is about quality, you must allow the parents to have a choice, unity is important, but unity is not equal to uniformity, you can have diversity, you can have different stream, different school, but people still understand each other, interact with each other and we can live peacefully and harmoniously.

Informant A2 agreed with what A5 said, in addition, he added that:

What we have been emphasizing is that we use vernacular language in Chinese education, that’s because that we think that our learning ability is the best when we taught by our own mother language. There is no doubt that the Chinese safeguard the Chinese education, however, they will not force the Malay to study in the Chinese schools, the Chinese din non and will not go to offend the Malays. The Chinese education can attract many non-Chinese to study due to the success and value of the Chinese education.

Informant B3 and B5 fully agreed with A2, they both acknowledged the value of the Chinese education, moreover, they pointed out that in addition to maintaining the function of inheriting ethnic culture, the Chinese education also undertakes the task of training talents for the country. Besides, informant B3 added that:

We are sure that the Chinese education is neither racialism nor parochialism; on the contrary, the Chinese education is to promote prosperity and progress of Malaysia, moreover, it will promote the human civilization and globalization. There is a slogan called localization put after the globalization. Only by localizing can the Chinese education be confident and internationalized.

Thirdly, Chinese education in Malaysia intertwines with politics, in other words, it became the game between the government and communities and people especially the Chinese educationists who are in favor of the Chinese education. Informant A5 said that “we have 20 public universities; all 20 vice chancellors are Malay, that’s not politics, that’s education, so it’s intertwined”. Informant A2 further pointed out that “Education cannot be politicized; moreover, education cannot be used as a bargaining chip for political negotiations, but in reality it is always happening. Take the recognition of Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) for independent Chinese secondary schools for example, many of other countries recognize UEC, but the issue is still in negotiation in Malaysia”.

Another example is given by informant B3, he added that:

In 1968, the Chinese communities wanted to establish the Merdeka University; unfortunately it was rejected by the government, which made it become a political issue in the following 1969 general election. As a result, when to vote, we did not supported the party who opposed the Merdeka University, on the contrary we supported them who were in favor of the Merdeka University, hence, the opposition party achieved an overwhelming victory in that election.

Thus, due to the particularity of Chinese education in Malaysia, many of the problems of Chinese education must be solved by following the political path, which even made Chinese education has become a prominent political issue in the previous general elections (Lew, 2006, p. 33). Furthermore, Thock (2013) pointed out that the building of new Chinese primary schools in Malaysia is essentially always based on political consideration. In addition, he further elucidated that:

In the general election of 1999, the BN coalition government announced that Education Ministry has approved the building 6 new Chinese primary schools or popularly known as SJK(C) and the relocation of 13 such schools to urban towns in Malaysia. This announcement was seen by many political analysts as a strategy to woo Chinese votes as the BN was faced with possibility of losing Malay supports due to the snacking of Anwar Ibrahim as the Deputy Premier in 1998. When the BN coalition was comfortable with

support of the electorates, as in the general election of 2004, there was no such concession given to Chinese schools. But, the general election of 2008 again witnessed the government's announcement of building 6 new Chinese primary schools and relocation of 13 such schools in order to garner the votes of the Chinese community in the wake of BN coalition facing serious challenges posed by the opposition front lead by Anwar Ibrahim (Thock, 2013, pp. 27-28).

Therefore, the Chinese education in Malaysia is closely linked and intertwines with politics. Chinese education became a political issue during campaigns in general elections or by-election, which was used as a tool for the government to get votes. To a certain extent, benefit game between the government and the Chinese communities determine the development of Chinese education in Malaysia.

Fourthly, the development of Chinese education in Malaysia depends to a certain extent on the development of China and it has a positive correlation with the Malaysia-China relationships. The rise of China will have a positive influence on Chinese Education in Malaysia. Informant A7 said that:

Now the main driving force is the rise of China's economy. Chinese has become an important language of economic and trade and more and more attention has been paid to all ethnic groups in Malaysia, which causes more and more non-Chinese people to learn Chinese. The good relationship between Malaysia and China will certainly have a positive impact on the Chinese education in Malaysia. There will be more need for the people who know the Chinese well, including not only the Chinese but also other ethnic groups. So this will indirectly cause other ethnic groups to learn Chinese to be able to get the opportunity to work. In other words, the good relationships between the two countries led the development of economy, and the development of economy will promote the needs of Chinese education.

In other words, with the rise of China and elevation of commercial value of Chinese language, Chinese schools and education in Malaysia today is capable in providing extra assets to students of all races (Thock, 2013, p. 42). Informant B1 and B2 agreed with A7's opinion, they also indicated that the key to the development of Chinese education relies on the influence of the rise of China. In addition, informant B2 further pointed out that:

The rise of China caused an increase in the value of Chinese language, besides the use value, the Chinese also has the economic value. Due to the rise of China and the good relationships between Malaysia and China, our government cannot be very arbitrary and brutal to deal with Chinese education. So the rise of China plays a more positive role on Chinese education. The rise of China and the powerful force of China will make the existence and survival of Chinese education more reasonable.

In short, there is no doubt that the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is closely related to Malaysian ethnic politics, though it has undergone a thorny way, the Chinese education in Malaysia has formed a relative comprehensive Chinese language system. It must be said that this is a miracle. Arguably, the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is inseparable from the efforts of the Chinese. Though the development of Chinese education in Malaysia is under the implementation of mono-lingual policy and lack of support from the ruling coalition government like some scholars said, it cannot deny the government's funding, promises and action in order to get the vote. To be honest, it is not a problem to maintain the status quo of the Chinese education; however, it is impossible to seek a great breakthrough at the present stage. From the above discussions, it may conclude that to some extent the development of Chinese education depends on the attitude of UMNO and the influence of the rise of China.

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