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**BUILDING UNITY THROUGH LANGUAGE IN  
MALAYSIA:  
THE ROLE OF CHINESE SCHOOL**

Author: Sirisaranya PAKNINRAT  
Supervisor: Monica Lindberg Falk

## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to study about the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. The research was carried out by exploring the role of Chinese school in order to produce an analytical overview of language and unity in Malaysian Chinese context. The identity issue was also being analyzed to find out how Mandarin language helps to create Chinese identity. The result of research showed that as the disseminator of Mandarin language, Chinese school was being viewed as the custodian of Chinese cultural values and Chinese identity. Mandarin language communicated in school has contributed to the feeling of sharing a common language and has created the sense of unity as language marks group uniqueness. However, dialects still play an important role in the psychological aspect since it was a preferred medium to express inner feeling. Furthermore, research found that dialect backgrounds were being identified at Chinese social gatherings. This implied that Mandarin language affected inclusion and unity of the Malaysian Chinese at meta-ethnic level only. This put unity through Mandarin language of the Malaysian Chinese into a question of artificial creation in pursuit of ethnic interest.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, Mandarin language, mother tongue, dialects, identity, ethnicity, unity, division, inclusion, education, Chinese school, Chinese community

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research is originally inspired by my interest in the differences in the degree of acculturation between the Sino-Thai and the Malaysian Chinese in migrant countries. While the Chinese in Thailand have largely integrated and assimilated themselves in Thai society due to carrot and stick approach in assimilation policy, the Malaysian's policies have resulted in slow integration in which socio-political circumstances have enabled Malaysian Chinese to maintain their Chinese cultures and identities. The strong adherence of Chinese cultures and stronger Chinese identity of the Chinese in Malaysia have motivated me to study about ethnicity and identity of the Malaysian Chinese.

The formulation of my research topic as "Building Unity through Language in Malaysia" is much influenced by literatures on history of Malaysia in general and history of Malaysian Chinese in particular. Literature reviews on the Malaysian Chinese studies found that the issue of language in education is a central theme in the struggle for safeguarding Chinese cultures and strengthening Chinese identity in Malaysia. The importance of language in the Malaysian nation building will be a starting point of this thesis and subsequently narrow down to the discussion about unity in Malaysian Chinese context.

### **Objectives and research questions:**

The focus of this thesis will be on the study about implication of Mandarin language in creating the sense of unity among ethnic Chinese from various dialect backgrounds. In doing so, a case study of Chinese school will be conducted to explore the role of school in order to find out the implication of unity through language in the Malaysian Chinese context. Thus the research question is: *What role does the Chinese school play in building unity among school students? How the school policies affect the inclusion of Chinese ethnicity?* The issue will be explored through the school policy on the usage of Mandarin language in creating more interactions and building the unity among students from various dialect groups.

In addition to this, another question will be posed as: *How does Mandarin language, communicated in school, create identity and unity in the Chinese school and Chinese community?* The question about identity will be posed to observe student's identifications of identity and their attachments to the Chinese community on the basis of language.

In this research, the theory of ethnicity and the theory of identity will be used as analytical tools. The theory of ethnicity provides a theoretical framework on the inclusion and exclusion of ethnicity which can be implied in this research concerning the issue of unity among Chinese ethnicity. Further more, the theory of identity will be used to analyze identity formation of the Malaysian Chinese in order to see a clearer picture of unity among the Chinese in Malaysia.

Since ethnicity is a fact of life in Malaysia, issue of language and unity will always be in a discussion. The research on ethnicity in Malaysia could not be completed without addressing the question of unity and language. This research thus contributes to the study of Malaysian Chinese world for the better understanding of Malaysian multi-ethnic society.

### **Content overview:**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In the introductory chapter, I briefly discussed about framework of the thesis by introducing research questions, explaining research objectives and relevant theories to be used as analytical tools.

In the second chapter, unity construction in Malaysian context will be concentrated by briefly discussing the background of Malaysian plural society, followed by the sub-section of language and unity which will prepare a link for an understanding of the ethnic discrimination issue in Malaysia. Under the sub-section of unity in Malaysian Chinese context, heterogeneous characters of Malaysian Chinese community will be first presented in order to understand the diversity of Chinese community in Malaysia. The relationship between Chinese community and Chinese school will also be traced, followed by the sub-section on the school as a source of unity.

Chapter three will deal with theories and research methods. In this chapter, theory of ethnicity and theory of identity will be discussed in the research context. Research methods used in the thesis will also be elaborated in this chapter.

The forth chapter will look at the empirical data collected during my fieldwork. This section will focus on the personal reflections of the interviewees on the issue of language and unity.

Chapter fifth will deal with my analysis of the primary data and materials gathered during the fieldwork. The concluding remarks of the research will be elaborated on the chapter sixth.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### **Unity in Malaysian Context:**

This chapter aims to illustrate how language came to play an important role in the construction of unity in Malaysia. I first present a sub-section on pluralism in Malaysia in order to provide a historical background about Malaysian plural society. Under the sub-section of language and unity in Malaysia, I show how the construction of national unity brought up the issue of ethnic discrimination elaborated in the subsequent section.

### ***Pluralism in Malaysia***

In 1957, Malaysia achieved independence from the British colonial rule. The newly independent Malaysia comprised of three major groups namely Malays, Chinese and Indian. Nevertheless, a closer look at the divisions of ethnicity in Malaysia could also be expanded to other indigenous groups such as Orang asli (aboriginal people), Kelabits (in Salawak), Kedazan (in Sabah) etc. In regard to these indigenous groups, the term “Bumiputra” (literally “son of soil”) has been used to embrace Malays and other indigenous groups.<sup>1</sup> Malaysia in the aftermath of independence is made up of “citizen” of diverse ethnic groups and cultures, speaking different languages and living within a territory.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it could be stated that ethnic pluralism is a characteristic of the Malaysian state.

The constitution of 1957 has set out secular and multi-ethnic nation which provided for special status of the Malays and safeguarded the rights of non-Malays.<sup>3</sup> The need to respond to the demand of different communities and maintaining an inter-ethnic balance was a challenge to nation building. From the early years of the independence, homogeneity has been regarded by the Malay nationalist as a necessary prerequisite for the formation of a stable and unified nation in the ethnically diverse Malaysian society.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Zakaria Haji and Kadir Suzaina (2005), “ Ethnic Conflict, Prevention and Management: The Malaysian Case”, in Snitwongse Kusuma and Thompson Scott W., *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p.45

<sup>2</sup> Cheah Boon Khen (2005), Ethnicity in the Making of Malaysia in Wang Gungwu, *Nation-Building- Five Southeast Asian Histories*: Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 95

<sup>3</sup> Lee Kam Hing (2005), Writing Malaysia’s Contemporary History in Wang Gungwu, *Nation-Building- Five Southeast Asian Histories*: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p. 173

In order to overcome ethnic diversity, education has been used as a means to facilitate ethnic integration. Ibrahim Saad has stated the importance of education in the process of national integration as the following, “education was to be used as a means to breakdown “the primordial attachments towards one’s own racial language, cultural and religious groups” and to shift the attachments “towards the new nation and (give) rise to a new national identity”.<sup>4</sup>

The education is therefore being viewed as a tool for nation building. Since the national independence, various committees have submitted reports to suggest the system of education. The issue of language as a medium of instruction in school provoked lots of debates from educationalists in Malaysia.

### ***Language and Unity in Malaysia***

Since education is viewed as a vehicle for the nation building, education policies had been reviewed with the objective of creating public school system as an engine towards the construction of national unity. Brown stated that public education in Malaysia is promoted as nation building tool, seeking to inculcate a sense of Malaysian-ness and patriotism.<sup>5</sup> As language plays a key role in education, the issue of imposing Malay language as a medium of instruction in the school appeared to be a problematic one which provoked debates from minority communities.

The importance of language in creating unity in Malaysia was explicitly stated by Prime Minister Mahatir in 1983 who announced that Malaysian “unity and stability should be built on one language, that is the Malay language”.<sup>6</sup> The Article 152 of the Constitution in the post-independence specified that Malay shall be the National Language.<sup>7</sup> Since before and after independence various policies have been implemented by the government with the intention to have Malay language as the medium of national education.

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<sup>4</sup> Saad Ibrahim (1980), *Competing Identities in a Plural Society: The Case of Peninsular Malaysia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Brown Graham (2005), “ *Making ethnic citizens: The politics and practice of education in Malaysia*”, Oxford, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, p.1

<sup>6</sup> Carsten Sharon A.(2005), “*Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds*”, Singapore, Singapore University Press, p. 153

<sup>7</sup> Tan Chee Beng (1988), “Nation Building and Being Chinese in a Southeast Asian state: Malaysia” in Cushman Jennifer W. and Wang Gungwu, *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II*, Hong Kong University Press, p. 140



The first educational ordinance came into effect in 1952 after the submission of Barnes Report in 1951 aimed at creation of national public school system on bilingualism in which Malay and English be recognized as the sole languages of education after independence. The report also suggested the Chinese and the Indians to give up their vernacular schools. However, under political pressure, the Razak Committee was set up in 1956 to review the education policy. The report proposed that the vernacular schools were to be allowed at the primary and secondary levels but common curriculum should be instituted.<sup>8</sup> This was accepted and came into effect under the Education Ordinance 1957. However, later reviews of education policy had restricted mother tongue education at only primary level in which the exiting Chinese secondary schools were left with no financial support from the government.

The limitation of the use and teaching of mother tongue education had provoked responses from the minority's communities especially the Chinese. The Chinese were against the emphasis of the Malay language in education system with the contention that it was an assimilation policy. Chinese viewed the right to language and education in mother tongue as their cultural rights which guaranteed under Malaysian constitution provision for multiracial society.

The Malaysian legislative actions concerning the medium of language in national education system indicated that nationalist Malays considered language issue to be a main barrier of national integration. Therefore, the Malaysian experience has manifested that medium of instruction in education has been one of the important factors to be considered in the construction of unity in Malaysia.

### ***Ethnic discrimination in Malaysia***

Addressing the issue of ethnic pluralism in Malaysia could not avoid the discussion about ethnic discrimination. This sub-section aims to examine how ethnic discrimination in the sphere of education has strengthened unity among the Malaysian Chinese in order to safeguard their interests in the field of education.

In discussing the issue of ethnic discrimination in Malaysia, one needs to mention about the consequence of ethnic riot in May 1969 which led to the introduction of affirmative action for the Malays under New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. After the 1969 riot, Malaysian government viewed national integration and unity as the foremost objective to achieve national stability. The New Economic

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 5

Policy aimed to advance economic growth with equity by correcting economic imbalances and eliminating the economic participation identification with ethnicity.<sup>9</sup>

In order to achieve the NEP goal, education plays an important role. In helping increase Malay participation in economy, education is a means to improve skill, knowledge in different fields. Various ethnic preferential policies and programs were introduced including ethnic quota to increase Malay enrollment in higher education.<sup>10</sup> The state rationale on imposing quota system in admission at the tertiary level was that the ethnic preferential programs was not only necessary for upgrading Malays labor force but also crucial for the promotion of national unity.<sup>11</sup>

However, the implementation of ethnic preferential treatment in education witnessed a reverse scenario. The fact that non-Malays were deprived of equal educational opportunities made them feel that their language and culture were discriminated against. This had negative impact on the ethnic integration since racial polarization and inter-ethnic tensions have increased.

An implementation of ethnic preferential policy in education had led to an emphasis on the self reliance as the only way in which non-Malays can safeguard their interests. The quota system means that good results in public examinations can no longer guarantee admission to tertiary institutions nor jobs in the public sector<sup>12</sup> It is on this stand that minorities had been united to protect their interest whether be the support for the existence of the Chinese private secondary School (Independent Chinese Secondary Schools) or the proposal to establish a Chinese University supported by community itself.

### **Unity in Malaysian Chinese Context:**

In this section, I attempt to show how unity was constructed among the Chinese in Malaysia. The heterogeneous characters of Malaysian Chinese community will be first presented in order to provide background knowledge about Chinese

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<sup>9</sup> Faaland Just et al. (1990), “ *Growth and Ethnic Inequality: Malaysia’s New Economic Policy*”, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 262-65

<sup>10</sup> Lee Hock Guan (2006), “Globalization and Ethnic Integration in Malaysian Education” in Saw Swee-Hock and Kesavapany K., *Malaysia – Recent Trends and Challenges*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 231

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 231

<sup>12</sup> Tan Liok Ee (1989), “Chinese Independent Schools in West Malaysia: Varying Responses to Changing Demands” in Cushman Jennifer W. and Wang Gungwu, *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II*, Hong Kong University Press, p. 64

community in Malaysia. Subsequently the relationship between Chinese community and Chinese schools will be discussed to ground a comprehensive understanding of a sub-section on school as a source of unity.

### ***Diversification of the Chinese community in Malaysia***

Above the meta-ethnic divisions, racial diversification could also be accounted among Chinese who are the largest minority group in Malaysia. According to the 2000 census, the total population of Malaysia is 23.27 million in which the Chinese made up of 26.0 percent.<sup>13</sup> The Chinese population is therefore presented a significant number of the total Malaysian populations.

Although, the Chinese forms a single ethnic category in relation to other ethnics in Malaysia, they are heterogeneous groups divided along dialects such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hainanese, and others. Siow noted that internal divisions among the Chinese in Malaysia have been the cultural-linguistic (dialect).<sup>14</sup> Malaysia accounted 5,500 Chinese clans, guilds, associations and chambers of commerce.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese in Malaysia are not only separated along the dialects usages differed from the place of ascentral origin in China, education that they have received has also been used to classify the Chinese in Malaysia. There are divisions of Mandarin educated and English educated Chinese.

However, it is argued that dialect divisions had decreased as Chinese becomes citizen of a country and increasingly educated in languages other than their dialects. Carstens in his study on the Pulai Hakka Chinese Malaysian community, noted that there is a decrease in dialect divisions which replaced by an enhanced identity as Chinese which reflecting their tie to the local area, the home community in Malaysia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia

<sup>14</sup> Siow quoted in Gosling Peter L.A. (1983), "Changing Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia – An Introductory Review" in Gosling Peter L.A. & Lim Linda Y.C., *The Chinese in Southeast Asia-Volume 2 Identity, Culture & Politics*, Singppore, Maruzen Asia Pte. Ltd., p 5

<sup>15</sup> Tan Teong Jin, Ho Wah Foon, Tan Joo Lan (2005), "*The Chinese Malaysian Contribution*": Kula Lumpur, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, p. 213

<sup>16</sup> Carsten quoted in Gosling Peter L.A. ((1983), "Changing Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia – An Introductory Review" in Gosling Peter L.A. & Lim Linda Y.C., *The Chinese in Southeast Asia-Volume 2 Identity, Culture & Politics*, Singppore, Maruzen Asia Pte. Ltd., p 5

Furthermore, Mandarin has played a role in decreasing these divisions. Tan Chee Beng stated that although all the Chinese in Malaysia have their own Chinese dialects as mother tongue, Mandarin is the language for all dialect groups and is mostly learnt at school.<sup>17</sup> The Malaysian Chinese views the learning of Mandarin as a marker of Chinese identity and preservation of Chinese cultures. In 1980s, there were campaigns for speaking more Mandarin (huayu) and less dialect (fangyan) for the Chinese unity. Some Chinese educationists even argued that the Chinese speak different dialects had hindered Chinese unity.<sup>18</sup> Tan Liok Ee, a prominent Malaysian Chinese scholar has elaborated on the importance of Chinese education for the Chinese community that right to education symbolizes the cultural rights of the Chinese. He further states that in the absence of unifying cultural force, unity is found in the cause which can best symbolize Chinese interest and Chinese identity.<sup>19</sup> Mandarin language has therefore played a vital role in preserving Chinese cultures and being a source of unity among the Malaysian Chinese.

### ***Relationship between Chinese community and Chinese school***

Analyzing the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among Malaysian Chinese could not be completed without the study of relationship between Chinese community and Chinese school. This is because there is a systematic relationship between school and Mandarin language on the one hand; and school as a source of unity on the other hand.

Studies of the historical development of the Chinese school in Malaysia have indicated close relationship between Chinese community and Chinese school. The fact that the British colonial authorities did not support educational facilities for the children of the immigrant had in turned brought about cooperation of Chinese from various communities to support the establishment and continuation of the Chinese school. After independence, struggles for the survival of Chinese school in the midst

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<sup>17</sup> Tan Chee-Beng (2000), "Socio-cultural Diversities and Identities" in Lee Kan Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, *Chinese in Malaysia*: Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press. p. 46

<sup>18</sup> Tan Chee Beng (1988), "Nation Building and Being Chinese in a Southeast Asian state: Malaysia" in Jennifer W. Cushman and Wang Gungwu, *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II*, Hong Kong University Press, p. 143

<sup>19</sup> Tan Chee-Beng (2000), "Socio-cultural Diversities and Identities" in Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, *Chinese in Malaysia*: Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press. p. 65

of various educational ordinances aiming to limit mother tongue education have been used by the politician to mobilize Chinese interests and perhaps to a larger extent develop a sense of unity among the Malaysian Chinese.

From the first Chinese school on the peninsular dated back in 1815<sup>20</sup>, today there are 1,287 government-funded national type Chinese primary schools. The government approval and support of the mother tongue education at primary level was a result of the compromises among community leaders on the eve of the independence. Furthermore, there are also 60 privately run independent Chinese Secondary Schools and three private institutions of higher learning using Mandarin as their main medium of instruction.<sup>21</sup> The continuing existence of the Independent Chinese Secondary School and the establishment of three private tertiary institutions which were not receiving any support from the government have best indicated the Chinese schools as a community project which mainly supported by the local resources involving local leaders and organizations.

It could be argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between the Chinese community and the Chinese school in Malaysia. Professor A.B. Shamsul once stated that the Chinese school could be perceived as the custodian of Chinese language and culture, thus Chineseness.<sup>22</sup> Therefore the Chinese school besides being disseminator of the Mandarin language, it was also being viewed as a cultural institution bringing about unity through the sharing of a common Chinese language, cultures and traditions.

### ***Chinese school as a source of unity***

This sub-section will further elaborate the relationship between Chinese community and Chinese school by looking at how Chinese school became a source of unity among Malaysian Chinese community.

As mention above, historically, the establishment of Chinese school in Malaysia had taken root as community projects. A clearer picture of the Chinese

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<sup>20</sup> Kua Kia Soong (1985), *The Chinese School of Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, United Chinese School Committees Association, p. 1

<sup>21</sup> Tan Teong Jin, Ho Wah Foon, Tan Joo Lan (2005), "Education, Language, Culture and Community" in *The Chinese Malaysian Contribution*, Kuala Lumpur, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, p. 236

<sup>22</sup> Shaumsul A.B. (1997), "Identity Contestation in Malaysia : A Comparative Commentary on 'Malayness' and 'Chineseness'", *Akademika* 55 (July) 1999, p. 17

school as a source of unity among Malaysian Chinese community could be seen in the post colonial era. Carstens stated that in negotiation leading to independence, the future status of Chinese language and Chinese education became central issues that united the Chinese.<sup>23</sup>

The resurgent interest in Chinese language and Chinese education increased in 1970 when the English medium schools were converted to Malay medium schools therefore narrowed down the choice of Malaysian Chinese to enroll either in Malay or Chinese schools. In tandem with inequality in educational opportunity after the introduction of affirmation action under the NEP, Malaysia, witnessed a return of the middle class Chinese to vernacular Chinese schools. This has impacted the expanding support of Chinese schools.

Moreover, the pragmatic of national government in restricting Chinese education such as limiting financial support for Chinese primary schools and refusing to recognize the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools, have resulted in the vast support for the continuation of Chinese schools. Tan Liok Ee has elaborated that whereas in the past, schools had primarily depended on donation from wealthy Chinese businessmen, by 1970s, mass fund-raising campaigns were promoted which resulted in increasing grassroots support for Chinese schools.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, it could be stated that the existence and the continuation of Chinese schools in Malaysia are the result of large support from the Chinese community. The fact that Chinese school is seen as a source of unity reflected in the words of Carstens that the expanding support of the Chinese education is signaled the creation of new coalitions and connections among Malaysian Chinese from diverse social backgrounds.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Carstens Sharon A. (2005), “ *Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds*”, Singapore, Singapore University Press, P.165

<sup>24</sup> Tan Liok Ee (1992), quoted in Carstens Sharon A., “ *Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese World*”, Singapore, Singapore University Press, p 165

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 164

### 3. THEORIES AND RESEARCH METHODS

#### Theory of Ethnicity:

The theoretical apparatus of the theory of ethnicity has underpinned this research. The relevance of language in the theory of ethnicity was that language is the basis of ethnic classification and marker of ethnic group. Gay Taylor and Steve Spencer has accorded the importance of language in relation to unity that languages are central to our internal identity as well as our sense of belonging<sup>26</sup>

In order to understand the term ethnicity, there is a need to clarify what constitute the core elements of ethnicity. Broadly, two approaches have attempted to explain ethnicity. First is the so called, “primordialist”, propounded by socialist theorists such as Edward Shils (1957), Clifford Geertz (1963) which noted that the attachment of one ethnic community is attributed to individual by the biological inheritance such as language, religion, custom, myth or legend etc. The approach implied ethnicity as cultural identity which derived from a cultural interpretation of descent.

On the other hand, “instrumentalist”, accorded ethnicity as a social, political and cultural resource for different interest and status groups.<sup>27</sup> Cohen states that ethnicity is the result of intensive interaction between ethnic grouping which involves a dynamic rearrangement of relation and of custom, and is not the outcome of cultural conservatism or continuity.<sup>28</sup> This approach implied that ethnic groups are the structure of social action in which interest groups emerge in the pursuit of certain interest.

The theory of ethnicity implied that language constitutes the core elements of ethnicity. Language has affected the inclusion or exclusion of individual to certain ethnic group. In the case of the Malaysian Chinese, language plays an important role in one’s attachment to the community. Therefore in order to understand the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among Malaysian Chinese, the theory of ethnicity will be used as an analytical tool.

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<sup>26</sup> Taylor Gary & Spencer Steve (2004), “ *Social Identities: Multidisciplinary Approaches*”, London, Routledge, p 3

<sup>27</sup> John Hutchison & Smith Anthony D.(1996), “*Ethnicity*”, Oxford University Press, p. 8

<sup>28</sup> Abner Cohen (1969), “*Custom and Politics in Urban Africa*”, Berkeley, University of California Press, p.198-201

### **Theory of Identity:**

The study of ethnicity could not be separated from the theory of identity. According to the Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought, the word, “identity” derived from the Latin root *idem*, implying sameness and continuity.<sup>29</sup> Identity is marked by difference as one could differentiate oneself only in relation to the others. Identity is a concept which embodies our sense of uniqueness as individual beings and as member of groups sharing values and beliefs.<sup>30</sup> Based on this definition, identity could be simply defined as a sense of personal location as an individual and a sense of belonging in the society. Identity could be multiples since individual lives within a large number of different institutions such as families, schools, companies, political groups, etc.

Two approaches have underpinned the discussion on the dimensions of identity. On the one hand, essentialist based its claims about belongingness where identity is seen as fixed and unchanging.<sup>31</sup> Essentialist perceives group’s uniqueness as biological or natural which involves tracing our roots through the assertion of binding kinship relationships.<sup>32</sup> Identity is seen as a unified notion. On the other hand, the social constructionist challenges the idea that identity is given naturally and suggests that identity is produced purely by acts of individual will.<sup>33</sup> To social constructionist identities are thus fluid and fragmented which can be reconstructed in new social and cultural condition.

However, it should be noted that two approaches should be taken into account when observing identity formation. Person identity is formed by physical and biological qualities that mark group boundary. However, the constructionist view of identity must be also taken into consideration when analyzing identity formation. This is because individual plays different roles in the society such as being a mother,

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<sup>29</sup> Outhwaite William Outhwaite & Bottomore Tom (1993), “*The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*” Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, p.270

<sup>30</sup> Taylor Gary and Spencer Steve (2004), “*Social Identities: Multidisciplinary Approaches*”, London, Routledge, p 1

<sup>31</sup> Woodward Kathryn (1997), “*Identity and Difference*”, London, Sage Publication, p. 13

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.28

<sup>33</sup> Calhoun Craig (1995), “*Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference*”, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, p. 198



teacher, employee, party member etc. In this research, the theory of identity will be used to analyze students' identities and their attachments to the school as well as to the Chinese community.

### **Research Methods:**

Initially, the formulation of my research topic was influenced by Tan Chee Beng's literature on the usage of Mandarin language to achieve unity among the Chinese in Malaysia. In his article on Nation-Building and Being Chinese in Malaysia, Tan Chee Beng stated that there is a relationship between nation building and Chinese identity in Malaysia by tracing how Mandarin language has been used to mobilize the unity among Malaysian Chinese.

Furthermore, Tan Liok Ee's literature on the role of Chinese school has also laid background for this research. Tan Liok Ee has underlined the importance of the Chinese school in maintaining Chinese cultural resilience. He stated that the existence of Chinese schools and the continuation in teaching their students through the medium of Mandarin language is the major contributing factor to the emergence of an imagined pan-Malaysian "Chinese" identity". His literature has partly piloted this study but rather than focusing mainly on the issue of identity, I have captured my interest in the role of Chinese school in building unity among school students.

However, the inductive approach has been used in this thesis since the research aims at analyzing the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among the Chinese from various dialect backgrounds. The role of Chinese school is being explored to find out this implication. It is for this reason that I have selected explorative method in conducting this research. Moreover, the sub-unit has been embedded under one research topic. In this research, the sub-unit is the identity issue of Chinese students from various dialect backgrounds. The sub-unit will be joined together under one research topic on "Building unity through language: The role of Chinese School".

### ***Site selection***

Since my research aims to analyze the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among Malaysian Chinese, the role of Chinese school is being explored. I have chosen one Independent Chinese Secondary school to be my case study. In Malaysia, all of the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools have not received any funding and assistance from the Malaysian government. Yet schools

have been supported by the Chinese community. The Independent Chinese Secondary School has Mandarin as a medium of instruction and communication in the school.

In this research, I have chosen the Confucian Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur to be my case study. I came to know Confucian Secondary School from the recommendation of Mr. Lee Yok Fee, a lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Social Science, Tunku Abdul Rahman University. The Confucian Secondary School was categorized as Independent Chinese Secondary School and it was the second modern Chinese School ever constructed by the Chinese community in Malaysia. The school commemorated 100 years of its establishment in the year 2006. Considering the fact that school has passed through several stages along the development of the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur, Confucian Secondary School, is therefore a choice to be a case study in this research.

### ***Source selection***

This research is primarily the result of fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The primary data of the research derived from transcriptions of interview with school headmaster and school students. The secondary data used in this research obtained mainly from different materials on Malaysian Chinese Studies.

During the fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, I had conducted one session of interview with school headmaster and six sessions of interviews with school students. I used semi-structure interview to obtain interviewee's reflections on the issue. In conducting interviews with school students, I used non-randomized selection to select my participants. Some criteria were set to select my respondents. These six students are secondary school students. This is because the complexity of questions required reflection in which age and maturity of students are important factors to ensure that my participants have understood the issue. Secondly, all of my participants come from different dialect backgrounds presenting in the school. This is because the intention of the thesis is to explore the implication of Mandarin language in creating unity among school students. Therefore there is a need to interview students having different dialect backgrounds in order to observe points of view of each dialect representatives in the school. However, it should be noted that all of my respondents were participating in the interview on the voluntary basis.

### ***Ethical considerations***

In conducting this research, cares have been taken to follow ethical considerations. The letter stated student status as a Master student of Lund University

and exchange student of National University of Malaysia (Kebangsaan University) was used to introduce myself. The written documents have been granted permission to use them before incorporating in the thesis. All of the respondents agreed to give an interview on the voluntary basis. Since the participants are school students, a request to conduct the interview was made to the school headmaster. Each interviewee is informed about the purpose of research. Permissions were obtained before recorded each interview. Besides, all participants were guaranteed of the anonymity.

### ***Limitations of the study***

Limitations of the study lie firstly on the fact that research on Chinese ethnicity in Malaysia is considered as a sensitive political oriented issue in which expression is limited under Internal Security Act stated that any person could be detained without any trial. The data derived from the interview with school headmaster who involved in political struggles were sometime appeared to be ambiguous since it has some political strand. This has affected the analysis on the role of Chinese school in creating unity among Chinese students because the data derived from the interview with school headmaster were used mainly for the analysis in this part. Secondly, the secondary data in this research were obtained mostly from the literatures of Malaysian Chinese scholars and Malaysian Chinese related institutes which can be bias information. Lastly, all of my respondents were male in which their answers could impact the result of the research since gender plays an important role in the study of ethnicity and identity. These limitations have implication on the validity of the research. The results and conclusion represent only findings from sampling groups of a particular geographical location which could yield different results in other locations.

## **4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The information in this chapter was gathered during my fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur in November 2006. The first section will present data collected from interview with the Confucian Secondary School Headmaster. The interview with school headmaster aims mainly to explore the role of Chinese school in building a sense of unity among students. The role of Chinese school was examined under questions on the objective of establishment of the school as well as questions on the reason for imposing Mandarin as a medium of instruction and communication in school compound and forbidden the usage of dialects.

The second section deals with data derived from six sessions of interviews with school students. The interviews with school students were conducted to find out how does the Mandarin language, communicated in school, create identity and unity in the Chinese school and Chinese community. Apart from questions about their opinions on the role of language in bringing the sense of unity among them, questions about identity have been posed to observe their identifications of identity on the basis of language.

### **Interview with the School Headmaster:**

#### *Role of Chinese School*

In the interview with school headmaster, objectives of establishment of the school were first being questioned in order to provide information for the analysis of the role of Chinese school. The school headmaster elaborated that objectives of establishment of the school were to promote Chinese cultural values and to ensure that new generations of the Chinese descendants have inherited good virtue of the Chinese cultures. He further stated that original objectives of the setting up of the school still adhere until today.

Questions about reasons for imposing Mandarin as a medium of instruction and communication in the school compound were also being interrogated. The school headmaster responded that school imposes Mandarin as a medium of instruction and communication inside the school because it is the most effective means of communication. He further elaborated that generally students have two barriers to overcome, firstly, language barrier and secondly, knowledge barrier, and the usage of mother tongue to acquire knowledge will make students have fewer barriers to overcome. Moreover, the school headmaster also pointed out the second reason for imposing Mandarin as a medium of communication in the school compound by stating that mother tongue is the means of communication that carries our sentiment, our thought and our psychological needs which are important for the development of students. Therefore the usage of language alien to them will create some barriers in which accumulation of these negative psychological factors are no good to students.

Since the school headmaster regarded Mandarin as the mother tongue to all students, another question was posed as how does he consider Mandarin as a mother tongue when there are many dialects spoken at home. The school headmaster clarified this point that all Chinese dialects whether be Cantonese, Hokkien or Hainanese have the same language strand. Therefore it is not something very different and Mandarin

is not another language. Moreover, though the Malaysian Chinese speaks dialects at home, they have single written language that is Mandarin.

The questions about the role of Chinese school in creating unity among students were asked. The school headmaster gave some reflections about the role of Chinese school that as the disseminator of Mandarin language, school plays important role in building unity among students from various dialect backgrounds. The usage of Mandarin is not purely for the communication purpose but also means to create the sense of belonging in the school community. The school forbids students to speak dialects inside the school compound because this will create more opportunity to make use of Mandarin language. Through various activities organized by the school, more interactions among students have been stimulated in which the share of common language creates the sense of unity among students.

However, the most interesting point of interview was his reflection that although the usage of Mandarin as a medium of communication in the school has largely contributed to strengthen Chinese identity and created the sense of unity among students, it is not a policy to homogenize Chinese of various dialect backgrounds. To him, dialects play its role but the promotion of the usage of Mandarin language has been done to ensure that the first mission of the school in acting as an institution helping to preserve the Chinese cultures is being fulfilled.

### **Interview with the students:**

#### *Language and Unity*

In the interview with school students, questions about languages spoken at home and school were asked. Five interviewees answered that they always communicate in Mandarin inside the school compound. Only one interviewee revealed that he only speaks Mandarin in the classroom and communicates in Cantonese after the class hours. However, all of them responded that they always speak their dialects at home.

After that different questions were asked to observe their opinions about how Mandarin language assists them to interact more with the others. Students responded that Mandarin language plays an important role in stimulating interactions among them through participations in group works or school activities. One of them revealed that even though he always speaks his dialect in the school after class hours, when it comes to group works or school activities, he will strictly communicate in Mandarin.

However, an interesting point of the answer in this part was the fact deriving from one interviewee that the usage of Mandarin helps to increase more interactions among students inside the school only. Outside the school compound, it is Cantonese that will help them to interact more with the others because the majority of the Chinese in Kuala Lumpur are Cantonese in which Cantonese dialect is being used to communicate among the Chinese in Kuala Lumpur.

The following question was that how does Mandarin language create the sense of unity among them. Amongst six interviews that I had conducted, two participants expressed their reflections that the share of common Mandarin language inside the school is an important factor that make them feel belong to the school community. Further elaboration to this was that good command of Mandarin language has been a factor to differentiate themselves from students of other schools. The master of the usage of Mandarin language has also strengthened the Chinese identity and the sense of unity came as a result of sharing common language among the school members.

However, three of my participants showed their opinions that it was activities organized by the school such as camps, group works and sports that create the sense of unity among them rather than the usage of Mandarin language. Various explanations were elaborated by them, yet the answers were directed to the same direction that language alone could not be a cause of unity without activities that bring them together. To them, activities organized by the school create more interactions and lead to more communications. One participant was of the view that both language and school activities have contributed to build the sense of unity because both have to go in tandem in order to formulate strong feeling of attachment to the school community.

### *Identity*

Questions about identity were asked to students in order to observe their identifications of identity. All of my respondents identified themselves as Malaysian Chinese. One of my participants who are from Cantonese dialect revealed that he usually asks about the sub-clan that his friends were belonged including dialects spoken by them. But this does not mean to make any division; it is only for communicating purpose.

However, he stated that his identification to the Chinese community is different according to the situation. He usually identifies himself as a Chinese in relation to other ethnics but when it comes to social events or social gatherings of the

Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur, he usually represents his Cantonese background.

Another respondent from Hakka dialect background identified himself as Malaysian Chinese. He pointed out that his good command of Mandarin language makes him feel belong to the school community. He usually communicates in Mandarin with others in the school. He further stated that being Chinese should be able to master the usage of Mandarin. However, he revealed that he always speaks dialect with his family members and friends who are from Hakka dialect. He also elaborated that when it comes to the expression of inner feeling, he prefers to speak his dialect.

Other respondents also identified themselves as Malaysian Chinese. Further elaborations on their identity identifications had the same direction that they always identify themselves as Malaysian Chinese whenever questions of identity were posed by the non-Chinese. Some explanations to these identifications were that Malaysia is their birth place and their homes. Moreover, some of them stated that the usage of Mandarin language in the school have made them feel belong to the Chinese community because they share something in common that is the Mandarin language. However, they revealed that their dialect backgrounds have never been undermined. They always participate in their clan associations and present their backgrounds.

### **Main Results:**

Interview questions were designed to reveal respondent's reflections on the role of Chinese school in creating unity and observing identity formation among school students.

First, according to the interview with school headmaster, the main objective of the establishment and existence of the Chinese School was to promote Chinese traditions and Chinese cultural values. The school has imposed Mandarin as a medium of instruction and communication for the purpose of effectiveness in education as Mandarin according to him is a mother tongue of the Chinese. The School headmaster was of the view that education in mother tongue that is Mandarin is necessary for the development of students since language carries a psychological sentiment.

Unity was also one dimension that school integrated in the academic curriculum. Wide range of school activities were organized for the purpose of building the sense of unity among students. Over the issue of language and unity, the

school imposes Mandarin as a means of communication because this will bring more opportunity to all students to communicate and therefore bringing about the sense of unity among students through the sharing of the same medium of communication. However, the school has no intention to homogenize the Chinese community.

Secondly, on the issue of language and unity, students responded that they mostly speak Mandarin inside the school compound but dialects still remain to be spoken at home among their family members and friends who are from the same dialect background.

In regard to the usage of Mandarin language in stimulating interactions among students, two of my respondents stated that Mandarin communicated in the school helps to stimulate interactions among them through school activities such as scout camps and clubs etc. However, another three participants were of the views that school activities play a leading role in building the sense of unity among them while the last participant pointed out that the sharing of Mandarin language and participations in school activities are both contributed to create the sense of unity in the school community.

However, Mandarin language in tandem with organized activities can only create a sense of belonging and unity in the school community. Outside the school compound, it is Cantonese dialect that helps them to communicate and interact more with the others because Cantonese is a majority population of Kuala Lumpur.

Lastly, on the question of identity, all of my participants identified themselves as Malaysian Chinese. Besides reasoning that Malaysia is their country of birth and their homes, the knowledge of Mandarin has partly contributed to this direction of identifications since it is the language of communication between various dialects in official and business purpose. However, dialects remain to be spoken at home and among peers of the same dialect background.

## **5. ANALYSIS**

This chapter deals with the analysis of information gathered during the fieldwork. In the analysis of data and materials, research questions serve as the principle guidelines. The ultimate objective of the analysis is to analyze the role of Chinese school in order to produce a narrative explanation on the implication of language in creating unity among Malaysian Chinese.



### ***Role of Chinese School:***

Primary data derived from the interview with school headmaster in this research leads to the explanation on the role of Chinese school as the custodian of Chinese traditions and cultural values. The answer derived from questions on the objectives of establishment of the school that the main purpose of setting up the school were to promote Chinese traditions and inherit Chinese cultural values to younger generation clearly indicated the role of Chinese school as the Chinese cultural custodian. The result obtained from the fieldwork confirmed the role of Chinese school described in Shamsul's literature on debating about identity in Malaysia which stated that the Chinese school could be perceived as the custodian of Chinese language and culture, thus Chineseness.<sup>34</sup>

As the custodian of the Chinese cultural values and Chinese identity, the Chinese school plays an important role in building unity among school students. The school headmaster stated the purpose of imposing Mandarin language as the medium of instruction and communication in the school that the usage of mother tongue in education will help lessen barrier in acquiring knowledge. Moreover, he stressed that language carried our sentiments, our thoughts which necessary for the development of students.

In order to explain the above statement in relation to the role of Chinese school in building the sense of unity among school students, the reference to the theory of ethnicity should be made. Language is one of the core elements of ethnicity. The share of common language marks the inclusion of individual in a certain ethnic group. The inclusion in this context could mean the unity. The statement of the school headmaster that the usage of Mandarin language helps lessen barriers in education and that Mandarin language carries our sentiments could be explained in this case that Mandarin language is the core element of the inclusion of Chinese students in the school community. His expression could translate in this context that language contributes to the formation of unity. The Chinese school as the disseminator of Mandarin language therefore plays an important role in building the unity among students by creating a share of common language.

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<sup>34</sup> Shaumsul A.B. (1997), " *Identity Contestation in Malaysia : A Comparative Commentary on 'Malayness' and ' Chineseness'*", *Akademika* 55 (July) 1999, p. 17

A related question on how the school policies affect the inclusion of ethnicity could be explored in the reflection of the school headmaster on forbidden of dialect to be spoken in the school compound. The school headmaster was of the view that the forbidden of dialect usage inside the school aims at creating more opportunity to make use of Mandarin and stimulates interactions among students which will also result in building the sense of belonging as language carries psychological mode of actions. This could mean that school policy on imposing Mandarin to be a language of communication inside the school helps to include Chinese students of various dialect backgrounds to one single community.

The instrumentalist approach of ethnicity could be assisted in analyzing the effect of school policies on the inclusion of Chinese. The forbidden of dialects to be spoken in the school compound could be understood as a process of rearrangement of custom in pursuit of ethnic interest. In this case language has been used as a tool to build the sense of unity by constructing the reality that Mandarin language is the mother tongue. Although the school headmaster clarified this point that dialects and Mandarin language have the same language strand in which according to him is not different language. However, in my opinion, Mandarin language and dialects perform different functions. While Mandarin is a language using for official and business purpose, dialect is being spoken at home and carries more psychological sentiments. James A. Banks states that language and dialect are not the same. A language is an idealized model of communication; it is an abstraction and exists in the minds of grammarians and others who study language while dialects is a real speech and grammatical system used for communication and exists in the empirical world.<sup>35</sup>

However, the school headmaster revealed that the implementation of school policy on forbidden dialects to be spoken in the school compound has been done without any intention to wipe out dialects and homogenize the Chinese community. This statement of the school headmaster could lead to the analysis that dialect which is the primordial tie or an outcome of continuity still remains as a truth for the inclusion of Chinese at the intra-ethnic level.

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<sup>35</sup> Banks James A. (2001), *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundation, Curriculum, and Teaching*, Seattle, Pearson Education Inc., p. 277

### *Language and Unity*

The analysis in this part aims to explain how Mandarin language communicated in the school, creates identity and unity in the Chinese school and Chinese community. The data supporting the analysis of this sub-section derived mainly from the interviews with school students.

The interviews with school students found that dialects are always spoken at home and among peers of the same dialect backgrounds and they feel more comfortable to communicate in their dialects. However, school activities such as camp, sport, group work help to create the sense of unity among them. Moreover, Mandarin language communicated inside the school makes them feel belong to the school community because it differentiates themselves from students of other schools. One of my respondents revealed that he strictly speaks Mandarin language when he does school activities since it is the medium of communication sharing by everyone. Thus it could be argued that the school activities and the sharing of Mandarin language as a medium of communication serve as a unifying force in the school community. The findings about the usage of Mandarin language in creating the sense of unity among school students confirmed Max Weber analysis on language and ethnicity that common language is conducive to feelings of ethnic affinity but it must be admitted that palpable differences in dialect and differences in religion do not exclude sentiments of common ethnicity.<sup>36</sup>

However, one of my participants revealed that the sharing of Mandarin as a medium of communication can only stimulate interactions and building the sense of unity only inside the school. Outside the school compound, it was the Cantonese dialect that helps to create more interactions with the others since Cantonese is a majority of the Chinese in Kuala Lumpur and therefore Cantonese dialect is being widely spoken in the city. The ability to speak Cantonese could also indicate that they are from Kuala Lumpur. The fact derived from this participant clearly showed that Mandarin as a mother tongue was a reality constructed in pursuit of ethnic unity. The widely usage of Cantonese dialect in Kuala Lumpur indicated that local dialect plays important role in the inclusion of the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur.

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<sup>36</sup> Weber Max (1978) quoted in “The Origin of Ethnic groups” in John Hutchinson and Smith Anthony D., *Ethnicity*, Oxford University Press, p. 36

## ***Identity***

According to James A. Banks, the fundamental role of the language and dialect is group communication. Language is of overarching importance because it is the fundamental medium through which ethnicity is transmitted and cultural identity is formed.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the Malaysian Chinese, Mandarin language is being used to strengthen the Chinese identity. Chinese educationist stressed that mother tongue which in this case refers to Mandarin language is the soul of Chinese identity.<sup>38</sup> The question on how Mandarin language helps to create Chinese identity is being explored through the interviews with school students.

In the interviews with school students on the question of identity, all of my respondents chose to identify themselves as Malaysian Chinese and reasoning that Mandarin language as a medium of communication in the school has partly contributed to this reflection. Therefore it could be argued that the share of the sameness in Mandarin language though being constructed assists in identity formation.

Nevertheless when further questioning as what it means to be Malaysian Chinese in the internal sense found that respondents could not express their reflections. This provoked skeptical about the usage of Mandarin language in assisting to strengthen Chinese identity. The essentialist approach of identity has therefore taken into consideration in analyzing identity formation of Chinese school students. The essentialist approach of identity implies that our sense of uniqueness as individual being and as member of groups is biological and natural which involves tracing our root through kinship relationship. The fact that students could not express the meaning of Malaysian Chinese and a revealing that they prefer to speak dialects in order to express their inner feelings and always represent their dialect backgrounds in the Chinese social gatherings have complied with essentialist approach of identity that dialect which is the quality inherited from the descent still plays a role in the construction of Chinese identity at the individual level.

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<sup>37</sup> Banks James A.(2001), "*Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundation, Curriculum, and Teaching*", Seattle, Pearson Education Inc., p. 279

<sup>38</sup> Tan Chee Beng ((1988), "Nation Building and Being Chinese in a Southeast Asian state: Malaysia" in Cushman Jennifer W. and Wang Gungwu, *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II*, Hong Kong University Press, p. 143

Therefore it could be argued that Mandarin language helps to construct the Chinese identity which is evident from the identifications of school students as Malaysian Chinese in relation to other ethnics in Malaysia. In this case, Mandarin helps to create Chinese identity by constructing the truth that the sharing of common Mandarin language is the uniqueness of group members. Furthermore different identifications of school students could comply with Carstens argument that contemporary Malaysian Chinese identities are multiple, diverse and constantly shifting, both in official discourse and in the daily experiences of particular individual.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Language and Unity in Malaysian Chinese context***

Gathering of primary and secondary data led to explanations for the implication of language in creating unity in Malaysian Chinese context that language involves construction of unity at two different levels. Mandarin is being used to construct the ethnic identity and building the sense of unity by including Chinese of various dialect backgrounds as a group member in relation to other ethnics. Therefore, at the meta-ethnic level, Mandarin language plays an important role in strengthening the Chinese identity and unity

At the intra-ethnic level, dialect still plays an important role in the psychological aspect of inner attachment to the clan backgrounds. Though the question on how dialects create divisions at the intra ethnic-level is not the area of this research. The attachment of the Malaysian Chinese towards their dialect backgrounds and the continue usage of dialects have some implications to reflect about the persistence of divisions among Chinese in Malaysia along the dialects.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Since education has been viewed as a tool for promoting national integration, language came to play an important role in the construction of unity and nation building in Malaysia. This is because language plays a key role in education. The effort to establish a single education system with Bahasa Melayu as a medium of instruction in the school and the limitation of the usage of mother tongue in education clearly indicated the importance of language issue in Malaysian nation building

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<sup>39</sup> Carstens Sharon A. (2005), *“Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds”*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, p. 202

project. Therefore it could be stated that in Malaysian context, the share of common language in education system is a means to achieve national unity.

In regard to the Malaysian Chinese, Mandarin language is seen as a Chinese cultural tradition and has been used as a mobilizing force for the inclusion of ethnic Chinese from various dialect backgrounds. The research found that Mandarin is used as a core to define Malaysian Chinese identity. Although the Chinese in Malaysia are heterogeneous groups divided along dialects usages, the findings from this research showed that the sharing of Mandarin as a medium of communication in official and business purposes has partly contributed the Chinese in Malaysia to mark themselves as a single ethnic group in relation to other ethnics.

The widely usage of Mandarin in official and business purposes is credited to the Chinese school. As the custodian of Chinese cultures and Chinese traditions, the Chinese school plays a crucial role in disseminating Mandarin language in Malaysia. Mandarin as a compulsory language to be communicated in the Chinese school has contributed to the inclusion of Chinese students from diverse dialects backgrounds into school community as Mandarin is a signifier of the group uniqueness. The Chinese school has stimulated interactions among students through various school activities in which Mandarin imposed as a means of communication in the school has created more opportunity to share the common language. The unity of the students is therefore spurred at the school community.

However, it should be noted that dialects still affect psychological aspect of the inner attachment to the sub-clan which makes skeptical about divisions of the Chinese ethnicity in Malaysia. The validity of the Mandarin language as a source of unity among the Malaysian Chinese is therefore being put into question. Is the unity through Mandarin language an artificial creation of the Malaysian Chinese?

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## **APPENDIX 1: List of Interview questions**

### **Interview questions (School Headmaster)**

#### **Building Unity through Language in Malaysia:**

#### **The Role of Chinese School**

##### **Interview Questions: School Headmaster**

1. Can you tell me the brief history about the establishment of the school?
2. What is the main objective of the establishment of the school?
3. Why has Mandarin been imposed as a medium of the school instruction?
4. What does the school expect from imposing the regulation of speaking Mandarin in the school premises?
5. What difference it would have been if they have used Bahasa of English medium instead of Mandarin?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages in using Mandarin as a medium of instruction?
7. Who are the majority students from the school? (Are they from any particular dialect or Are they from a certain background?)
8. Are there any difficulties to learn Mandarin from any particular dialects? How has the school assisted them?
9. Do the students here have any special ambition for the future?
10. How has the school embedded the idea of unity in the school curriculum? How does it translate into school regulation?
11. Has there any activities with the purpose of building unity among the student under the usage of Mandarin language?

## **APPENDIX 2: List of interview questions**

### **Interview questions (School students)**

#### **Building Unity through Language in Malaysia:**

#### **The Role of Chinese School**

##### **Interview Question: Students**

##### **Question A:**

1. What have made you decided to study in this school?
2. How do you like your school?
3. Do you strictly speak Mandarin in the school premises? What do you think about the rule of the school that imposes Mandarin as a medium of communication?
4. How has speaking Mandarin assisted you to know more friends?
5. In what way speaking Mandarin make you feel uneasy to talk to others? (If any)
6. Do you usually participate in school activities?
7. Has there any division among various groups in the participation of school activities? Why? What is the barrier of these divisions?
8. Do you have any stories about using Mandarin or not being able to use Mandarin?
9. How do you perceive your school?
10. How have the school activities created the sense of unity among all of you?
11. In your opinion, how has the school regulation on speaking Mandarin in the school premises contribute to the unity amongst students?

## **Question B**

1. How do you identify yourself?
2. What does it mean to be Malaysian Chinese?
3. What language do you speak at home? Do you usually speak Mandarin at home?
4. Who are your best friends? Are they from your dialects?
5. Do you have any preference of making friends with people from your dialect or any particular dialect?
6. What language do you speak with your friends in the school? Do you speak with them differently outside the school?
7. If you friends are from other dialect, what language do you speak with them inside the school and outside the school?
8. What would you like to do in the future?
9. How do you intend to use your knowledge of Mandarin?
10. Are you planning to work in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong or any Chinese companies?
11. What are the advantages of being Mandarin speaker?
12. How has Mandarin language speaking in the school made you feel belong to the school community?
13. How has your ability in speaking Mandarin made you feel belong to the Chinese community as a whole?
14. Has your attachment to the school and Chinese community decided differently?  
(How do you justify your membership at school and at the Chinese Community?)
15. How has Chinese culture helped you to realize your Chineseness? (How has the Chinese culture helped strengthen your Chinese Identity?)
16. What you do think about the idea of brining the Chinese of various dialects unite together under the Mandarin language?