

**BEING *NON-BUMIPUTERA*: ETHNIC CHINESE YOUTHS' MODES OF
RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY FORMATION**

An Ethnographic Study of the Impacts of the National Language Act and Quota System Policy at
a Malaysian National Secondary School

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An Ethnographic Study of the Impacts of the National Language Act and Quota System Policy at a Malaysian National Secondary School

Geok Hwa Kee, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2004

This ethnographic study, set against the backdrop of the National Effective School Reform of 1998 and situated within the context of the National Language Act of 1967 and the Quota System Policy of 1970, focuses on the relationship between ethnic Chinese youths' resistance modes and identity formation. The language act and quota system, designed to facilitate national unity and reduce social inequity, actually sharpen racial differences and create internal hegemony. Extensive fieldwork consisting of observations, interviews, and surveys provide empirical data for three central research questions examined. I trace the origins and trends of the language act and quota system to contextualize the empirical evidence and review three sets of empirical scholarships (critical theories, postcolonial studies, and sociolinguistics) to conceptualize research findings.

Facing Malay-centric, teaching practices and disciplinary approaches for the first time, ethnic Chinese students in national high schools exhibit two distinct resistance modes. High achievers downplay ethnic ancestry, accumulate language capital through tutoring, and obey school rules. Low achievers highlight ethnic ancestry, accumulate vocational capital through apprenticeship, and defy school rules. Substantial support and higher expectation from parents contribute to the academic success of male high achievers. Inadequate support and low expectation from parents result in the academic failure of female low achievers. Furthermore, parental belief in the rewards of school success, but distrust toward school personnel contributes to the compliance of high achievers. Parental trust toward school personnel, but disbelief in school rewards leads to the defiance of low achievers.

This ethnographic study provides policymakers and educators with first-hand information to evaluate the national effective school reform. More specifically, it generates intimate insights

into the types of academic challenges and behavioral problems facing students. In addition, this study adds to the youth resistance literature in two ways. First, through its basis in grounded theory methodology, this study develops an empirically relevant and practically applicable conceptual framework to improve educational quality. Second, by weaving together personal narratives and systemic analysis, this study demonstrates a joint analysis from both the micro and macro perspectives through the effective use of social dramas, portraitures, and vignettes to represent data.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF STUDY	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM.....	3
1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
1.4. METHODS, DESIGNS, AND PROCEDURES.....	8
1.4.1. Review of Historical Records and Policy Documents.....	9
1.4.1.1. Historical Context: Granting Citizenship and Guaranteeing Linguistic Continuity through the Accommodation Policy	9
1.4.1.2. Policy Background: Linguistic Assimilation and Poverty Reduction	12
1.4.2. Conducting Ethnographic Fieldwork.....	16
1.4.2.1. Gaining Access and Building Trust.....	17
1.4.2.2. Setting and Participants.....	18
1.4.2.3. Data Collection	19
1.4.2.4. Data Analysis.....	21
1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	22
1.6. INTENDED AUDIENCE, RISK, AND NOVEL REPRESENTATION.....	23
2. CHAPTER TWO: RACE, LANGUAGE, AND NATIONALISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MALAYSIA	25
2.1. INTRODUCTION	25
2.2. SOCIAL CONTRACT IN AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY	29
2.3. CITIZENSHIP VIS-À-VIS MALAY SOVEREIGNTY	30
2.4. ON THE THRESHOLD OF <i>MEDERKA</i> , “INDEPENDENCE”	32
2.5. A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM.....	33
2.6. PRIMORDIAL TIES VIS-À-VIS IMAGINED COMMUNITY	36
2.7. VISION 2020 AND NATIONAL EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM	38
2.8. SUMMARY	42
3. CHAPTER THREE: PARADOXES OF BEING AN ETHNIC ETHNOGRAPHER	46
3.1. INTRODUCTION	46
3.2. STEPPING LIGHTLY IN A LANDMINE FIELD – THE MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN OUTSIDER	47
3.2.1. Gaining Official Fieldwork Permissions	47
3.2.1.1. Avoiding At All Costs the Appearance of Probing “Highly Racially Sensitive Issues” and Using Contact to Expedite Application.....	48
3.2.2. Gaining Access to Classified Documents and Records.....	50
3.2.2.1. Using Gatekeeper to Access Inaccessible Data and Exchanging Information as a Form of Reciprocity.....	50
3.2.3. Eliciting Responses from Informants.....	52

3.2.3.1.	Field Reality One: Learning to Overcome Suspicion, Hostility, and Jealously	52
3.2.3.2.	Field Reality Two: Confiding fear, Sharing Sentiments, and Watching Out for “Spies!”	53
3.3.	KNOWING THE DETAILS AND NUANCES – THE MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN INSIDER	55
3.3.1.	Shadowing Students and Teachers	57
3.3.2.	Interacting with Teachers	59
3.3.3.	Interacting with Students	61
3.3.4.	A Typical Day at <i>FNX</i>	63
4.	CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS	68
4.1.	INTRODUCTION	68
4.2.	RESEARCH DESIGN	68
4.2.1.	Grounded Theory Methodology in Practice	68
4.3.	DATA ANALYSIS	78
4.3.1.	Synopsis - Defining Qualitative Data Analysis and Its Related Concepts	78
4.3.1.1.	The NUD*IST Software - Its Strengths and Limits	79
4.3.1.2.	Qualitative Data Analysis through NUD*IST	80
4.3.2.	Synthesis - Analyzing Qualitative Data through NUD*IST (N6)	82
4.3.2.1.	Data Sources	82
4.3.2.2.	Data Preparation	84
4.3.2.3.	Data Management	85
4.3.2.4.	Data Reduction	86
4.3.2.5.	Data Display	92
5.	CHAPTER FIVE: RETHINKING RESISTANCE	99
5.1.	INTRODUCTION	99
5.2.	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	99
5.2.1.	Schools, Ideology, and Social Reproduction	100
5.2.2.	“Capital,” “Habitus,” and Cultural Reproduction	101
5.2.3.	“Learning to labour” and Cultural Reproduction	102
5.2.4.	“Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities” and a Cultural Ecological Theory of School Performance	102
5.3.	SYNOPSIS AND SUGGESTED THEORETICAL PRIORITIES	104
5.4.	ITERATIVE DATA ANALYSIS	112
5.4.1.	Multi-level Qualitative Data Analysis	112
5.4.1.1.	Micro-and-Macro Integrated	114
5.4.1.2.	Inter-rater Reliability and Validity	117
5.4.1.3.	Coding and Theory Building	117
5.5.	CONCLUDING DOMAINS: PRINCIPLES AND PATTERNS	126
5.5.1.	Resistance Modes and Academic Performances	126
5.5.2.	Capital Accumulation and Identity Formation	127
5.5.3.	Gender and Class Stratification	128
5.5.4.	Ethnicity and Ethnic-stereotypes	128
5.6.	GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RETHINKING “DOMINATION” AND “RESISTANCE”	129

5.6.1.	Implications of the Guiding Theoretical Framework in Rethinking “Domination”	130
5.6.2.	Implications of the Guiding Theoretical Framework in Rethinking “Resistance”	133
5.7.	SUMMARY	134
6.	CHAPTER SIX: RESISTANCE, SCHOOL FAILURE, AND ETHNIC REVIVAL	135
6.1.	INTRODUCTION	135
6.2.	BACKGROUND: <i>KEMPEN PONTENG SIFAR</i> , THE “ZERO SCHOOL TRUANCY CAMPAIGN”	135
6.3.	IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REFORM PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	140
6.4.	IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REFORM PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS	144
6.4.1.	The Roles and Functions of the Principal before the Zero School Truancy Campaign	145
6.4.2.	The Roles and Functions of the Principal after the Zero School Truancy Campaign	150
6.5.	POLICY REALITIES AND PRAGMATIC CONCERNS	153
6.5.1.	Policy Reality One: <i>Pentadbir tidak mengambil tindakan!</i> - “The management does not take any actions!”	154
6.5.2.	Policy Reality Two: <i>Bodohkah? Tak faham BM kah?</i> - “Are you stupid? Don’t you understand Malay?”	157
6.5.3.	Policy Reality Three: “You know the Malays have special rights, don’t you?”	159
6.6.	SUMMARY	162
6.7.	SOCIAL DRAMAS	163
6.7.1.	“We Just Went Shopping For Mother’s Day Gifts”: A Social Drama of Chinese School Truants in Three Acts	165
6.7.2.	“Don’t Trust Your School Son!”: A Social Drama of A Male Indian “Troublemaker” in Three Acts	182
7.	CHAPTER SEVEN: ACCOMMODATION, SCHOOL SUCCESS AND ETHNIC DOWNPLAY	201
7.1.	INTRODUCTION	201
7.2.	BACKGROUND: RACIALIZED TEACHING PRACTICES AND GENDERED DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES	203
7.3.	A COMPOSITE SKETCH: ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS PATTERNS OF HIGH ACHIEVING ETHNIC CHINESE YOUTHS	206
7.3.1.	Achievement Trends: Average Language, Mathematics, and Science Grades ..	208
7.3.2.	The Roles of Parents in the School Success of Ethnic Chinese Youths	211
7.3.2.1.	The Role of Parents in School Choice	212
7.3.2.2.	The Role of Parents in Capital Accumulation	213
7.4.	VIGNETTES	216
7.4.1.	<i>Jen Ni Hua</i> : A Vignette about the Inquisitive Daughter	217
7.4.2.	<i>Fu Gui</i> : A Vignette about the Lost Son	221
7.4.3.	<i>Shu Tong</i> : A Vignette about the Resilient Daughter	224
7.4.4.	<i>Bao Bei</i> : A Vignette about the Precious Son	229
7.5.	SUMMARY	233

8.	CHAPTER EIGHT: GENDER IDENTITY SOCIALIZATION AND ENACTMENT ...	235
8.1.	INTRODUCTION	235
8.2.	“WOMEN ARE HOLDING UP ONE-HALF OF THE SKY” 女子半邊天	237
8.3.	THE FAMILY AS A SITE OF GENDER IDEOLOGIES TRANSMISSION	241
8.4.	COMING OF AGE IN A CASCADE OF “SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE”	244
8.4.1.	“Rank, not Class” 門當戶對 - The Chinese Attitude towards Marriage	244
8.4.2.	“Of the Three Unfilial Acts, the Lack of Progeny is the Greatest of All” 不孝有三無後為大 - The Chinese Attitude towards Sexuality	246
8.5.	“MEN ARE IN CHARGE OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS; WOMEN ARE IN CHARGE OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS”: APPROPRIATE GENDER ROLES AND REGULATE GENDER RELATIONS IN CHINESE FAMILY - 男主內女主外	249
8.6.	THE MASS MEDIA AS AN ARENA OF GENDER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION 251	
8.7.	PORTRAITURE	256
8.7.1.	Gender Identities Enactment: Portraits of High-Achieving, Ethnic Chinese Youths 257	
8.7.1.1.	<i>Tze Chiang: “I Would Rather Marry a Woman with a Body than with a Soul” 不愛靈魂只愛身體</i>	257
8.7.1.2.	<i>Fu Gui: “If A Woman Marries a Chicken, She Should Act Like a Chicken. If She Marries a Dog, She Should Act Like a Dog” 嫁雞隨雞嫁狗隨狗</i>	261
8.7.1.3.	<i>Shu Tong: “Of the Thirty-Six Ways of Dealing with s Social Situation, Running Way is the Best.” 三十六計走為上計</i>	265
8.7.1.4.	<i>Jen Ni Hua: “Pigs under the Same Roof” 家,天,下</i>	269
8.7.2.	Gender Identities Enactment: Portraits of Low-Achieving, Ethnic Chinese Youths 275	
8.7.2.1.	<i>Sweet Li: “An Ignorant Woman is Virtuous” 女子無才便是德</i>	276
8.7.2.2.	<i>Wan Ton Mei: “It Is Better off for Parents To Marry off Their Full-Fledged Daughter than to Keep Her At Home” 女大不中留</i>	281
8.7.2.3.	<i>Willow: “Of the Three Unfilial Acts, the Lack of Progeny is the Greatest of All” 不孝有三無後為大</i>	287
9.	CHAPTER NINE: POLICY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING AND GREATER SOCIAL EQUITY	292
9.1.	INTRODUCTION	292
9.2.	KEY DOMAINS OF ANALYSES.....	293
9.2.1.	Resistance Modes and Academic Performances.....	293
9.2.2.	Capital Accumulation and Identity Formation	295
9.2.3.	Gender and Class Stratification	296
9.2.4.	Ethnicity and Ethnic Stereotypes.....	297
9.3.	IMPLICATIONS OF KEY DOMAINS OF ANALYSES: EXTENDING RESISTANCE THEORY	298
9.3.1.	Two Systems of Internal Hegemony.....	299

9.3.2.	Accommodation as Resistance	300
9.4.	TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING	302
9.4.1.	Characterizing Language Planning in Malaysia	303
9.4.2.	Policy Insights and Recommendations	305
9.4.2.1.	Consider Providing National-Type Chinese Primary Schools with Enough Qualified Malay Language Teachers	305
9.4.2.2.	Consider Developing Innovative Teaching Materials and Supplying National Secondary School with Adequate Textbooks	309
9.4.2.3.	Consider Improving the Educational Quality of National Secondary School through Innovative Teacher Approach and Appropriate Teacher Training.....	310
9.4.2.4.	Consider Reducing Teacher Truancy through Regular Supervision and Substitute Teachers; Reducing Student Truancy through Unbiased Disciplinary Approaches and Multiple Ethnic School Counselors	311
9.5.	TOWARD GREATER ETHNIC INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL EQUITY	312
9.5.1.	Can the National Language Policy Help Ethnic Chinese Youths Form a Malay National Identity?.....	313
9.5.1.1.	Forced Linguistic and Cultural Assimilations	313
9.5.1.2.	Little School-Home-Community Linkage	315
9.5.2.	Are Calls for Language Diversity and Social Equity Calls for Democracy?	316
9.6.	REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	317
APPENDIX A	.....	321
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM: STUDENT SURVEYS 1	.....	321
APPENDIX B	.....	327
REFORMASI SEKOLAH BERKESAN: TINJAUAN PELAJAR 1	.....	327
APPENDIX C	.....	333
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM: STUDENT SURVEYS 2	.....	333
APPENDIX D	.....	343
REFORMASI SEKOLAH BERKESAN: TINJUAN PELAJAR 2	.....	343
APPENDIX E	.....	353
ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENT SURVEYS (SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL)	.....	353
APPENDIX F	.....	359
ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENT SURVEYS (JUNIOR SECONDARY LEVEL)	.....	359
APPENDIX G	.....	364
TEACHER SURVEYS	.....	364
APPENDIX H	.....	374
INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE PRINCIPAL	.....	374
APPENDIX I	.....	380
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENTS	.....	380
APPENDIX J	.....	385
INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH ETHNIC CHINESE PARENTS	.....	385
APPENDIX K	.....	387
A PROPOSAL FOR ACTION RESEARCH: IDENTIFYING COMMON ERRORS IN PARTS OF SPEECH AND IMPROVING THE TEACHING QUALITY OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION WRITING AT THE LOWER SECONDARY LEVEL		387
BIBLIOGRAPHY	.....	393

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Research Questions by Subject Areas and by Data Sources.....	6
Table 2	National Policy toward Ethnic Chinese by Total Population and by Ethnic Chinese Percentage.....	10
Table 3	Major Historical Events and Material Conditions Related to National Education Reforms in Malaysia from 1951 to 1996.....	43
Table 4	Data Systematically Collected from <i>FNX</i> , 2000-2001 (<i>initial fieldwork</i>) and 2002 (<i>subsequent fieldwork</i>).....	70
Table 5	*One-way ANOVA Analysis of Effective School Surveys One.....	73
Table 6	*One-way ANOVA Analysis of Effective School Surveys Two.....	75
Table 7	Demographics of Ethnic Chinese Student Informants for Individual Interviews.....	83
Table 8	Matrix Table Report on Problems Related to Teaching as Defined by Chinese high and low achievers.....	95
Table 9	Matrix Table Report on Problems Related to Learning by Achievement Levels.....	96
Table 10	Node Report on “Problems of Teachers”.....	97
Table 11	Strengths and Limitations of the Theoretical Models and Empirical Works Reviewed	109
Table 12	Nodes Report on “Research Findings”.....	119
Table 13	Synopsis of the Coding Categories Hierarchy.....	122
Table 14	“Hard Core School Truants” Identified by the Student Discipline Governing Board in the Initial Stage (October–December) of the Zero School Truancy Campaign, <i>FNX</i> , 2001	139
Table 15	Degree of Student Support for a Second, Non-Malay School Counselor.....	147
Table 16	Additional Functions of the Principal as the Manager of the Zero School Truancy Campaign, <i>FNX</i> , 2001.....	151
Table 17	The Most Effective Means to Improve Student Discipline, First Effective School Surveys, <i>FNX</i> , 2001.....	160
Table 18	Student Populations by Grade Levels and by Ethnic Breakdowns, <i>FNX</i> , 2001.....	203
Table 19	Demographic Characteristics of *Six Ethnic, Chinese High Achievers, <i>FNX</i> , 2001	207
Table 20	A Comparison of the Language, Mathematics, and Science Grades of the Six Ethnic, Chinese Youths in this chapter with those of Chinese Students in the Science Classes (Form Four Level), <i>FNX</i> , 2000.....	210
Table 21	One-way ANOVA Analysis of Language, Mathematics, and Science Performance by Ethnic Groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian), Science Track Classes, Form Four Level, <i>FNX</i> , 2000	210
Table 22	Matrix Table Report on Parental Support in Schooling by Achievement Levels...	214

Table 23	Trafficking of Girls and Women for Prostitution, 1996-2002	236
Table 24	Reported Cases of Domestic Violence in Malaysia, 1989-2001	239
Table 25	National Achievement Trends by Subjects and by School Types in the Primary School Assessment Test (<i>UPSR</i>), 2000	306
Table 26	Weekly Classroom Teaching Hours for the National Language (Malay), Second Language (English), and Mother Tongue (Chinese or Tamil) by Minutes and by Grade Levels at National and National-Type Primary Schools.....	308
Table 27	Weekly Classroom Teaching Hours for the National Language, Second Language, and Mother Tongue (Native Language) by Minutes and by Grade Levels	314

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The Federation of Malaya (1948-1962).....	27
Figure 2	Malaysia by States (1963 to recent).....	28
Figure 3	Floor Plan of <i>Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)</i> , 2000-2001, Top and Side Views.....	67
Figure 4	Grounded Theory Fieldwork at <i>FNX</i>	77
Figure 5	A Preliminary Index Tree (Taxonomy) for “Problems of Teachers”	93
Figure 6	Revised Index Tree (Taxonomy) for Problems Related to Teaching	94
Figure 7	Synopsis of the Analytical Orientations of the Theorists Reviewed	105
Figure 9	Index Tree System for Overall Research Design.....	121
Figure 10	Guiding Conceptual Framework for Modes of Resistance and Identity Formation of Ethnic Chinese Youths	132
Figure 11	Official Procedures Established for Identifying School Truants.....	138
Figure 12	Planning Process of the Zero School Truancy Campaign at the Systemic or Intergovernmental Level.....	143
Figure 13	The Administrative Structure of the Student Discipline Governing Board <i>before</i> the Zero School Truancy Campaign, <i>FNX</i> , 2001.....	148
Figure 14	The Administrative Structure of the Student Discipline Governing Board <i>after</i> the Zero School Truancy Campaign, <i>FNX</i> , 2001.....	149
Figure 15	Average Language, Mathematics and Science Grades by Ethnic Groups, Academic Track, Four Form Level. <i>FNX</i> , 2000	211
Figure 16	Parental Attendance on School’s Opening Day, Four Form Level, By Tracks, <i>FNX</i> , 2001	215
Figure 17	Chinese Newspaper Clipping about the Quota System in University Admissions	223
Figure 18	Diet Pill Commerical	253
Figure 19	News of Murdered Woman with Questionable Life Style.....	254

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABIM:** Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, the “Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia.” Led by Anwar Ibrahim, the previous deputy prime minister who is at present imprisoned because of sex scandals, the movement began as a student movement at the University of Malaya.
- BA:** Barisan Alternatif, the “Alternative Front,” is an alliance of the four major opposition political parties in Malaysia: the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), the National Justice Party (KeADILan), and the Malaysian People’s Party (PRM). Unlike the national front, the member parties of the alternative coalition are multi-ethnic.
- BM:** Bahasa Malaysia, the national language.
- BN:** Barisan Nasional, the “National Front,” is the current national government in Malaysia that comprises three major political parties: the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysia Indian Congress (MIC). The characteristic of the member parties of the ruling coalition are mono-ethnic in principle.
- DAP:** The Democratic Action Party, an apposition political party largely made up of Chinese in central and northern Malaysia. Headed by Lim Kit Siang, a Chinese politician who is know for being vocal and critical, the DAP traditionally gains its support from Chinese community in small towns. DAP members are critical of the social and economic reforms proposed by the government and have frequently spoken out against government corruption. They argue that any national reforms should be based on meritocracy instead of race. Currently, the party holds seven seats in the parliament.
- JB:** Johor Bahru, the capital city of the State of Johore and the gateway to Singapore.
- KeADILan:** Belittled by the government as the “Mosquitoes Party,” the National Justice Party was established in 1999 in response to the dismissal of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim. Headed by Wan Azizah Ismail, Anwar Ibrahim’s wife, the party calls for Reformasi, “political, social, and economic reforms through peaceful, democratic means.” The party gains its support from all ethnic groups

in the city and in small town, unfortunately, it did not win any seats in the parliament in the 2000 national election.

KL: Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia.

MCA: Malayan (later Malaysian) Chinese Association, a leading Chinese political party made up primarily of Chinese. Together with UMNO and MIC, it forms “the National Front,” an alliance government that has been in power since independence.

MIC: Malayan (later Malaysian) Indian Congress, a leading Indian political party. Together with UMNO and MCA, it forms “the National Front,” an alliance government that has been in power since independence.

NEP: The New Economic Policy, an economic reform policy launched by the government in the early 1970s to restructure the Malaysian society by narrowing the economic disparity between Malays and Chinese, and by eradicating poverty of the Malays through a series of quota system reform.

PAS: Parti Islam Sa-Melayu, the “Pan-Malayan Islamic Party.” Together with KeADILan and PRM, it forms the alternative government named “the Alternative Front.” In the 2000 national election, the party won the electoral support of three northeastern states (Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu) and currently, it has eight seats in the parliament. Originally headed by Niz Aziz, an Islamic fundamentalist, PAS traditionally counts on the support from Malay students at local colleges (teacher training, vocational, or technical colleges) and the residents in the east coast of Malay Peninsular, which is dominated by Malay Muslims. The party advocates the wider use of Islamic law in the civil life of Malaysians.

PMR: Pencapaian Menengah Rendah, “the Secondary School Assessment Test.” At the end of Form Three, which is equivalent to Grade Nine in the U.S., students of national secondary schools take the mandatory test to determine if they will continue their study in the science, social science, or vocational track.

PRM: The Malaysian’s People Party is, at present, the only political party that campaigns on multiculturalism and aims to re-build Malaysia into a “Malaysian Malaysia.” The party has never won any seats in the parliament, but has nonetheless a vocal and longstanding feature of the Malaysia political scene. The party traditionally gains its support from the scholars of the three ethnic groups and claims that it wants to build a new Malaysia that is based on political, economic, and social justice. Because it sees the economic gap between the urban rich and rural poor as a class issue, it has been ridiculed by the government as a communist party.

SPM: Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, “the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education.” At the end of “Form Five,” which is equivalent to grade eleventh in the U.S., students of national secondary schools, especially those of the science track, take the national

exam to determine if they have to continue their study in Lower Six, a college preparatory program, or if they can enter national universities.

- SUARAM:** The Voices of the People in Malaysia. It refers to the “Malaysian Charter on Human Rights,” a non-profit, human rights organization established in 1993 by representatives from 450 NGOs in Malaysia. The members of the charter came from trade unions, women’s groups, consumer groups, environmental protection organizations, academic bodies, people with disability groups, and more interestingly, from community leaders of the three ethnic groups who were once imprisoned or detained without trial under the Sedition Act. The charter advocates for the basic human rights of the three ethnic groups of Malaysians despite rapid changes in the national political scene.
- UMNO:** United Malays National Organization, a powerful Malay political party primarily consists of the Malays. Together with MCA and MIC, it forms “the National Front,” the alliance government that has been in power since the independence of Malaya in 1957.
- UPSR:** Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah, “the Primary School Assessment Test,” a mandatory assessment test administered to students of all three ethnic groups at the end of “Standard Six,” which is equivalent to grade sixth in the US, to measure their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, and to determine if they can directly enter national secondary schools or if they have to enroll in the “Remove Class” (language remedial) programs.

1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic Chinese¹ make up a relatively small minority of the populations of most Southeast Asian countries² (Cambodia, the Philippines, and Laos, one percent each; Indonesia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, three percent each; and Brunei and Thailand, fourteen percent). Singapore and Malaysia, however, are exceptions, with ethnic Chinese comprising seventy-five percent of Singapore's population and twenty-five percent of Malaysia's population. The extent to which these ethnic Chinese are included into or excluded from the evolving political, economic, and social organizations of the host countries depends on the differences seen between the indigenous majority and immigrant minority, the size of the Chinese population, and the nature of the political system.

Except Singapore, which has adopted the "cultural pluralism" policy, two types of national policies towards ethnic Chinese are typical in post-colonial Southeast Asia: (1) if the size of the Chinese population is small and the political system is authoritarian, the government is likely to undertake an "assimilation" policy, and (2) if the size of the Chinese population is large, the government is likely to introduce the "accommodation" policy regardless of the

¹ Western colonial powers considered Chinese who were born in Southeast Asia as their colonial subjects. Likewise, imperial China declared these Chinese as its subjects. After Southeast Asian countries gained their independence and after mainland China turned communist, Chinese began to refer to themselves as *Huaren*, "ethnic Chinese," or *Huayi*, "Chinese descent" to show their political loyalties to the host countries and to differentiate their national status.

² Southeast Asia comprises ten countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Despite the efforts of the governments in these countries in developing national identities and in creating a regional identity through the "Association of Southeast Asian Nations" (ASEAN), Chinese seem to have asserted their "Chineseness" and maintained their ethnic identity as "Chinese."

political system (Suryadinata 1997). Table 1 details the national policies introduced and used by Southeast Asian governments to assimilate or accommodate the ethnic Chinese in their countries.

In Malaysia, “ethnic differences” are defined by the languages spoken, customs practiced, and beliefs professed by the Malay, Chinese, and Indian, the three major ethnic groups (Barth 1969; Ali Husin 1984). In order to carve a unified nation out of diversity, the federal government in 1967 adopted the “linguistic assimilation policy” and designated Malay, the language of the majority, as the national language (Suryadinata 1997). Furthermore, in order to reduce the gaps between the economic advantages of the ethnic Chinese over the Malay majority, the government launched a national economic reform, known as the Quota System Reform in 1970. Although the government claimed that these national actions would facilitate racial harmony and reduce social stratification,³ they have fueled ethnic tensions and deepened social inequalities (Loh 1984; Gullick 1981; Tan 1988).

The National Language Act (1967), which stipulates Malay as the official language of instruction of national secondary schools, has resulted in academic challenges and behavioral problems for ethnic Chinese and Indian students. The Quota System Reform Policy (1970), which specifies a population balance of fifty-five percent Malays to forty-five percent non-Malays in higher education access, has limited their upward mobility because a ratio of seventy-percent Malays to thirty-percent non-Malays in actual national university admissions. As top ethnic Chinese students are unable to attend national universities and two-third of ethnic Chinese students have to attend tutoring classes to deal with the low teaching quality of national secondary schools, animosity and distrust build up the community.

³ As a sociological concept, social stratification refers to a system in which individuals and groups are ranked in such a manner as to create inequality with respect to privileges, power, and prestige. There are several types of social stratification. Among these are social classes, castes, racial groupings, church hierarchies, etc. However, sociologists of education tend to refer the concept to social classes (Prichard & Buxton 1988).

1.2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In order to achieve upward social mobility, a common strategy among ethnic Chinese Malaysian parents is to send their children to study at national secondary schools, where instruction is in Malay, the national language. Thus, upon their graduation from Chinese primary schools, two-thirds of ethnic Chinese children enter Malay instead of Chinese secondary schools (Malaysian Chinese Organizations 1999). Assuming that after their children acquire sufficient Malay language capital, they can enter national universities or study overseas in English-speaking countries, ethnic Chinese parents either internalize or ignore the academic challenges facing their children at national secondary schools and the discriminatory practices in university admissions (Nonini 1997). Thus, having graduated from Chinese primary schools where the language of instruction is Chinese, ethnic Chinese youths face Malay as the language of instruction for the first time. Furthermore, they face the quota system when they apply for national universities and government scholarships.

The low educational quality of national secondary schools and openly discriminatory practices of national university admissions have been widely criticized by the Chinese community, especially those who are Chinese-educated. In order to pacify these Chinese, but more importantly, in order to gain their electoral support for the 1996 national election, the government enacted the Higher Education Act of 1996 and claimed to develop Malaysia into “a regional hub of education excellence” (Yang 2000). Although through the act, universities from the British Commonwealth countries and from the developed Asian countries can set up “twinning programs” in Malaysia, the tuition fees of these programs are equivalent to those of the host countries. Until recently, with the exception of government scholarships, Malaysia has not had student loan programs to fund youths for higher education. Ethnic Chinese parents have

to mortgage their properties and pay high interest rates if they borrow money from the banks. Thus, most parents prefer that their children study at local public universities.

In summary, ethnic Chinese youths who enter national secondary schools are confronted with (1) academic challenges related to the lack of language capital, (2) behavioral problems resulting from the loss of interest in learning, and (3) limited upward social mobility because of their ethnic origin, three problems that have serious implications for their educational and economic advancement. Neither of these problems has been fully examined by local researchers and few effective suggestions have been made toward their amelioration.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This ethnographic study, set against the backdrop of the National Effective School Reform of 1998 and situated within the contexts of the National Language Act of 1967 and the Quota System Policy of 1971, focuses on the relationship between the responses of ethnic Chinese youths toward academic challenges and mobility barriers and the strategies that they use to deal with the challenges and barriers. Although specific questions, having emerged from fieldwork and grounded in my participant observations of ethnic Chinese youths at school, in the community, and at home set the stage for this study, the three key questions that guide this study are: (1) How do the national language and quota system reform policies affect the schooling process and school behaviors of ethnic Chinese youths at national secondary schools? (2) How do they resist the low teaching quality, biased disciplinary approach, and limited upward mobility resulting from the two national reform policies? (3) How do the different modes of resistance relate to the identity formation of ethnic Chinese youths?

To orient the reader, Table 1 maps out the research questions by subject areas and by data sources. Implicit in the academic challenges, behavioral problems, and mobility barriers of ethnic Chinese youths are three subject areas (language and identity, language and culture, and

language and ethnicity) considered by researchers (Coulmas 1994; Kaplan 1994) in sociolinguistics as essential to understanding language policy implementation at the local level.

Table 1 Research Questions by Subject Areas and by Data Sources

Subject Areas	Research Questions	Data Sources	Chapters
<i>Language and identity</i>	<p>(1) Why do some ethnic Chinese youths meet the achievement standards, comply with discipline rules, and downplay their ethnic ancestry?</p> <p>(2) Why do other youths fail to meet the achievement standards, defy discipline rules, and highlight their ethnic ancestry?</p> <p>(3) What do these behavioral modes (compliance or defiance) signify?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School and classroom observations ▪ Individual youth interviews ▪ First and second effective school surveys ▪ Exam records of youths ▪ Discipline records of youths 	4, 5
<i>Language and culture</i>	<p>(4) In what ways does gender affect the schooling process and school experiences of ethnic Chinese youths?</p> <p>(a) How does differential parental support, especially Chinese male preference, affect the academic performances of these youths?</p> <p>(b) How do traditional Chinese gender role expectations affect their school behaviors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Home observations ▪ Individual youth interviews ▪ Parent interviews 	4, 6, 8, 9, 10

	(c) How do parental support and expectations explain gender and class discriminations against female Chinese youths?		
<i>Language and ethnicity</i>	<p>(5) In what ways does ethnicity affect the schooling process and school experiences of ethnic Chinese youths?</p> <p>(a) How does the lack of Malay language capital affect the academic performances of these youths?</p> <p>(b) How does Malay culture alienation affect their school behaviors?</p> <p>(c) How does the quota system in national university admissions affect the life chances of ethnic Chinese youths?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual youth interviews ▪ Parent interviews ▪ Focus group interviews with youths ▪ Chinese student surveys ▪ Human rights reports, Newspaper editorials 	1, 4, 6, 7, 11

1.4. METHODS, DESIGNS, AND PROCEDURES

Ethnographic case study methodology is especially appropriate for this study because it enables me to conduct in-depth observations and to give detailed descriptions of two particular sets of “units” (academic challenges and behavioral problems) of the “institution” (national secondary school) under study (Richards 2003). The observations and descriptions give me the opportunity to generate hypothesis and to build theory about the schooling process and school experiences that may otherwise remain in the “black box” (Adams 1995). Furthermore, focusing on a single case builds a solid foundation for future research that involves multiple cases and comparative methodology. Thus, this ethnography informs a more general policy analysis of national language policies and ethnic integration.

This critical school ethnography requires three types of inquiries. First, in order to situate the ethnography in its broader social, economic, and political contexts, I review existing historical records and policy documents pertaining to the role of language in ethnic cohesion and in national development. As most of the records and documents are written in Malay, it takes time to translate and to make sense out of them. Although the review gives me some insights into language policy implementation from the policy maker perspective, it tells little about the perspective of policy recipients, especially the aspirations of ethnic Chinese minorities to preserve their linguistic heritage. Thus, I supplement the review with newspaper editorials and action plans drafted by local scholars and practitioners to reform the national education system. Second, in order to collect empirical evidence, I carry out extensive fieldwork at *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*, a provincial, national secondary school over two academic years: from July 2000 to October 2001 and from May to August 2002. In initial fieldwork, I explore the different ways in which two groups of ethnic Chinese youths respond to Malay-medium instruction and Malay-centric disciplinary approach. In subsequent fieldwork, I focus on the strategies used by youths to deal with academic challenges, behavioral problems, and mobility barriers. Finally, in order

to give contextual meaning to the empirical evidence generated from fieldwork, I trace the origins and trends of the national language act and the quota system policy and review three sets of empirical scholarships (critical theories, social linguistics, and post-colonial studies) to search for useful ideas and thoughts to conceptualize research findings. The use of “mixed methods” enriches the empirical evidence for the increases the validity and reliability of this study (Moris and Copestake 1993; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

1.4.1. Review of Historical Records and Policy Documents

First, I identified key historical events and material conditions that lead to the rise of Malay nationalism and the revival of Chinese trans-nationalism: (1) the granting of citizenship to Chinese and Indian immigrants, (2) the poverty of the indigenous Malays, (3) the recovery of diplomatic and trading relations with mainland China, and (4) the questioning of national loyalty ethnic Chinese by Malay ruling elites. These sets of events and conditions signified the need to develop a Malaysian national identity which in turn would facilitate national unity and racial harmony. Second, I summarized six major education reports written during the post-colonial period (1945–1955) and independence period (1957–1979) and traced the origins and trends of the current national language policy. More specifically, I compared two national education reform acts that had resulted in virulent debates between Malay and non-Malay citizens: the National Language Act of 1967 and the Higher Education Act of 1996. As the national education reform act became more Malay-centric, opposition from non-Malays became more vociferous.

1.4.1.1. Historical Context: Granting Citizenship and Guaranteeing Linguistic Continuity through the Accommodation Policy

Ethnic Chinese have existed in Southeast Asian countries for over a century. In general, Southeast Asian governments prefer to achieve a high level of ethnic assimilation while ethnic

Chinese tend to resist assimilation. The level of assimilation that any ethnic majorities can legitimately demand of an ethnic minority has remained controversial in the region.

Table 2 National Policy toward Ethnic Chinese by Total Population and by Ethnic Chinese Percentage

National Policy	Country	Total Population in Number	Total Population in Percentage (%)
Accommodation	Brunei	358,098	15%
	Malaysia	23,522,482	25%
Assimilation	Cambodia	13,363,421	1%
	Indonesia	238,452,952	3%
	Laos	6,068,117	1%
	Myanmar	42,720,196	3%
	The Philippines	81,159,644	1.5%
	Thailand	64,865,523	14%
	Vietnam	82,689,518	3%
Cultural Pluralism	Singapore	4,353,893	75%

Source: the World Fact Book of CIA (2004) and Suryadinata (1997)

Malaysia, as is the case with Indonesia, has seen a low level of ethnic Chinese assimilation, partly because the Chinese community is so large and partly because religious differences between ethnic Chinese and indigenous Malays tend to preclude intermarriages (Bolt 2000). The low level of assimilation not only results in Chinese alienation from the “national” (Malay) culture, but also leads some Malays to cast doubts on Chinese loyalty to the Malaysian nation. Through the nationalist discourse, *Ketuanan Melayu*, which means “Malays should own the Malays’ land,” Malay nationalists urge for the unification of Malays against Chinese as the “imaginary enemy” and the assertion of Malays’ “special rights” through national development

policies (Kua 2000). Facing the questioning of Malay nationalists, some Chinese make use of “cross-cultural identity management strategies” which allow them to claim their loyalties to Malaysia on one hand, and their commitment to preserving the linguistic and cultural heritages of the Chinese community on the other hand (Gosling and Lim 1983). Others simply ridicule the paternalistic practice of the Malay ruling elites through the “backstage discourse” (Scott 1990): “the Malays are walking with a crutch.”

The alienation of ethnic Chinese Malaysians from the mainstream culture and skepticism about their loyalty by the government have roots in western colonialism in Southeast Asia in the late eighteenth century, and in the political upheavals in East Asia in the early twentieth century. During the later part of the eighteenth century, the “coolie (slave) trade” following western colonialism in Asia triggered the massive migration of Chinese into Southeast Asia and changed the demographic landscape of the region irrevocably. However, differences in languages, ways of life, and religions had kept the Chinese immigrants separated from the indigenous populations (Provencher 1975). Earlier Chinese immigrants, especially those who accumulated substantial wealth in their host countries, evoked hostility in the local people because they had sharpened the pre-existing contrast between the “haves” and “have-nots” (Bolt 2000). Entrenched stereotyping of and deep-rooted animosity toward ethnic Chinese have triggered racial riots in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, making Southeast Asia one of the regions in the world that is plagued by frequent violent outbreaks between the indigenous and immigrants.

In the early twentieth century, increasing Chinese nationalism and the success of the communist revolution in mainland China also created uneasiness among Southeast Asian governments, who were already questioning the loyalty of their ethnic Chinese citizens. In Malaysia, until recently, ethnic Chinese were not allowed to visit China until they had reached age fifty-five, the retirement age. Up to the early 1990s, any ethnic Chinese students who studied in China or in Taiwan were interviewed by the home ministers during their trips back to Malaysia for seasonal breaks.

After several Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia, had resumed their diplomatic relations with China in the 1980s, the subsequently increased interactions of the local ethnic Chinese with their motherland China not only triggered a revival of interest in Chinese language and culture, but also created tensions between the ethnic Chinese and

indigenous populations (Bolt 2000). China sees these ethnic Chinese peoples as a bridge between China and Southeast Asia that strengthens the economic ties between the two regions. Southeast Asian governments, however, once again raised concerns about the loyalty of their ethnic Chinese citizens in light of this development. In Malaysia, national politics have intensified since the 1980. This intensification involves the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, calling for the construction of an Islamic state, and in demands for greater democratic rights of non-Malays. During the national election in 1996, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the leading political party of the current government, claimed that it would maintain an accommodation policy by granting Malaysian citizenship to ethnic Chinese and by guaranteeing the linguistic and cultural rights of its Chinese citizens. Since independence in 1957, two nation building projects, one educational and one economic, have stood in contrast to this claim of the Malay ruling elites and to the Article 152 of the Federal Constitution which stipulates that:

The national education policy of the Federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with the intention of making Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of peoples other than Malays in the country.

1.4.1.2. Policy Background: Linguistic Assimilation and Poverty Reduction

In 1957, soon after the Federation of Malaya gained its independence from Britain, Malay ruling elites claimed that in order to unify the three ethnic groups comprising the population, the national education system needed to have a common language of instruction. Through the enactment of the Education Ordinance of 1957, the concept of a “national language” first came into the scene of national education reform. As *Tunku Abdul Razak* (1956), the first Education Minister stated (the *Abdul Razak* Education Report of 1956 as cited in Yang 2001),

the ultimate objective of educational policy in this country is to bring together children of all races under a national education system in which the national language is the main medium of instruction.

Known as the incipience of the national language policy, section three of the Education Ordinance of 1957 stipulated,

the intention of making Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of people other than Malays living in the country.

While reflecting the aspirations of non-Malays (ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indian) to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritages, the ordinance induced fear among the Malays of losing the “Malays’ land” to non-Malays. At the dawn of independence (1957), Chinese made up approximately thirty-eight percent of the total populations and Indians, approximately eleven percent. In order to placate the Malays while bargaining for the loosening of conditions for granting citizenship, Chinese and Indian elites agreed on the inclusion of the “Malays’ special rights”⁴ into the Federal Constitution. Additionally, in order to balance the size of Chinese and Indian populations, the Malay ruling elites declared the indigenous people (*Iban, Kadazan*) of two aboriginal states (*Sabah, Sarawak*) in northern Borneo as *Bumiputera*, “sons and daughters of the Malays’ soil,” after the two states joined the federation in 1961 (Malaysian Human Rights Organization 1996).

Despite the “social contract”⁵ between the elites of the three ethnic groups, ethnic tensions between ethnic Malays, Chinese, and Indians continued to escalate (Andaya and Andaya

⁴ Since 1957, Malay ruling elites have been claiming that the Malays have “special rights.” However, they have not yet defined what exactly constitute the Malays’ special rights and how they are related to the status of the Malays as the “sons and daughters of the Malays’ soil.” Thus, the term “special rights” has become a cliché and has been used by ethnic Chinese and Indians to ridicule the Malay ruling elites.

⁵ I initially conceptualized the reciprocal relationships among the three ethnic groups by using Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of “social contract.” As I reviewed the literature, I found out that Southeast Asian experts had also seen the relationships as one form of social contract.

2001; Debernardi 2004). In May 1969, racial riots exploded in central and north Malay Peninsular. The Emergency Council identified the relative poverty of the Malays in comparison to the prosperity of the ethnic Chinese as the major reason behind the riots (Malaysian Human Rights Organization 1996). In the early 1970s, the federal government launched a national economic reform, known as the New Economic Policy, as a remedial action to eradicate poverty in the Malay society. Embodied through a series of quota system reforms, the concept of *Bumiputera*, “Malays, the sons and daughters of the Malays’ soil,” was first introduced to Malays, ethnic Chinese, and ethnic Indians by the Malay ruling elites, who set quotas reserving and preserving employment and investment opportunities for the Malays in both the public and private sectors. Since then, the employment of civil servants in the different sub-sectors of the central and local governments, the bids for lucrative government contracts, stock ownerships in national and transnational corporate, and licenses or permits for small businesses have been reserved exclusively for the Malays (Nonini 1997). In the mid-1970s, the quota system spilled over to higher education access. According to the quota system reform policy, government scholarships for overseas study, and local, public university admissions should be based on a balance of fifty-five percent Malays to forty-five percent non-Malays. In practice, public funding for overseas study is exclusively preserved for Malays and in reality, admissions of students into national universities reflect a balance of seventy percent Malays to thirty percent non-Malays (Malaysian Human Rights Organization 1996). Unfortunately, the quota policy has since elicited resentment from ethnic Chinese and Indians and threatened national unity.⁶ Thus in the late 1970s, in order to unify the three ethnic groups, the federal government declared the “National Ideology” as follows:

Belief in God, loyalty to King and country, upholding the constitution, rule of law, and good behavior and morality.

⁶ Since the implementation of the quota system policy, ethnic Chinese and Indians can no longer expect that they can become civil servants working for the government. Public sector jobs used to be the favorite jobs of ethnic Chinese who see them as “iron bowls.” However, what truly elicits the resentment of ethnic Chinese and Indians is the access to higher education, which has been traditionally seen and historically proven to be the most effective means to move up the social ladder.

In the mid-1980s, through the “Conference of the Malay World,” Malay nationalists claimed Malay Islam as the national culture (Yang 2000). The Congress on National Culture responded to this claim by reiterating their commitment to molding a national culture that is essentially Malay. The enactment of the National Culture Policy in 1985 marked a significant milestone for the Malay ruling elites in speeding up the assimilation of non-Malay youths into the “national” culture. Thus, in addition to enforcing Malay as the language of instruction, administrators at the national secondary schools carry out weekly school assemblies and annual school events emphasizing Malay customs and rituals. At least once a week, non-Malay students attend “values education” classes to cultivate the value of being Malaysians.

Meanwhile, through the powerful Malay Teachers’ Union, Malay nationalists continued to push for Malay as the only official language of instruction in the national education system. In the late-1980s, the Ministry of Education completed conversion of the language of instruction to Malay at national secondary schools and subsequently introduced a national curriculum reform entitled “Integrated Secondary School Curriculum Reform” (1989). This reform began with the integration of living skills into the curricula of both the academic and non-academic tracks and concluded with the replacement of values education with moral education classes. Although widely criticized by non-Malay educators as lowering the educational quality of national secondary schools and Islamizing the national education system, the reform continued until the late 1990s.

While the “melting pot” metaphor proposed by *Amminuddin Baki* (1953), the Father of Modern Malaysian Education, has yet to be realized economic recession hit the Southeast Asian region in 1997 and set the stage for heated debates about national education reform in the new century. As part of the national plan for economic recovery, the “Multi-Super-Corridor Project” was instituted, but failed to attract western investors at it was intended. Although in infrastructure development Malaysia had outperformed its competitors China and India, major western investors such as Microsoft decided to invest in India, citing the English language competency of Indians as the rationale behind this decision. Since the early 2000s, the attitude of the Malaysian government toward the language issue has become more open as evidenced by its moving away from its long-term commitment to upgrading the Malay language to the language of science and technology to mandating English as the language of instruction for mathematics and science subjects throughout the national education system. Positive

stereotyping of ethnic Chinese students as academically successful and economically advanced has contributed to the government's assumption that by replacing the language of instruction from Malay to English for mathematics and science classes, Malay students would become competitive with ethnic Chinese youths. In 2001, Dr. Mahatir, the previous prime minister, argued that English language competency was essential for Malaysian citizens to participate in a new knowledge based economy (Andaya and Andaya 2001). Shortly after, in 2002, the parliament passed the Second Language Amendment Act and mandated English as the language of instruction for mathematics and science subjects of the national education system.

Although English has historically been the language partner of Malay as evidenced by the frequent "code switching" between the two languages in legal, commercial, scientific, and technological fields, this new language reform arouses some concerns from the increasingly informed and critical Malaysian citizens (Pakir 1993; Kaplan 1994; Kaplan and Baldauf 1997). Of the most fervent concern among Malay parents are the impacts of the new language reform on the higher education opportunity and upward social mobility of their sons and daughters. Since independence, the Malaysian government has used Malay, the national language, to foster ethnic cohesion and after the racial riots, the government has employed higher education to facilitate the economic development of the Malays (Singh and Mukerjee 1993).

1.4.2. Conducting Ethnographic Fieldwork

Gaining access to the field site and earning the trust of those who guard classified information are two major hurdles that researchers have to overcome if they wish to conduct fieldwork in Malaysia. Although Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, decision-making authority rests on the prime minister and his cabinet. Any researchers who wish to conduct field research have to go through the tedious procedures of gaining permissions from the central and local government. Furthermore, the Malaysian government is known to disparage critical, personal opinions about national development policies as "folk views" and has responded to any sparks of dissidence through the National Sedition Act of 1970 (Kua 2000).

Eliciting genuine opinions from research participants or local stakeholders can be a frustrating process.

1.4.2.1. Gaining Access and Building Trust

Preparation for fieldwork posed difficulty. Gaining permission to enter the field site was the first hurdle to overcome. Without first gaining permission from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), the central agency, I could not go on to obtain permission from the State Department of Education, the local agency, to conduct my fieldwork at any national secondary schools. Unfortunately EPRD, the sub-sector of the Ministry of Education in charge of issuing permission to “outsiders” and reviewing their proposals, does not specify its policy on its application forms that according to the National Sedition Act of 1970, “ethnicity, language, and culture” are “highly racially sensitive issues” that researchers should avoid at all costs. Thus, foreign researchers have often complained that EPRD explains little, if not at all, as to why they are denied access to the field. My citizenship status as a Malaysian should have been an asset to my application; my ethnic and education backgrounds, however, were liabilities. Without a recommendation letter through a connection I developed through participation in international educational conferences, I would not have gained access to the field⁷.

In addition to gaining access, obtaining data such as national exam records, which have statistics about the performances of the three ethnic groups, was the second hurdle I encountered at this stage of the project. In Malaysia, although it is not difficult to collect statistics that detail government expenditures on construction and facilities, it is difficult to obtain exams records and policy directives. Classified as “highly racially sensitive issues” that may evoke ethnic sentiments, exam records reflect achievement gaps between Malay and non-Malay students and policy directives reveal the social, economic, and political differences between the *Bumiputera*,

⁷ As a member country of ASEAN, Malaysia participated in the “Values Education Project” funded by the World Bank from the early to mid-1990s. In the Comparative and International Education Conference (CIES) in 1996, I attended the session on the values education project and got acquainted with the team leader of the project, who happened to be one of the deputy education ministers from the Malaysian ministry of education.

“Malay” and the *Non-bumiputera*, “non-Malay.” Through networks established with local scholars and practitioners, I obtained exam records and policy directives. I also built a level of rapport with local stakeholders, who were initially reluctant to voice their opinions about the low educational quality of national secondary schools and discriminatory practices in university admissions because they were fearful of violating the sedition act. These steps on my part brought variety and depth to the interactions between my informants and me by facilitating the open exchange of information and opinions.

1.4.2.2. Setting and Participants

The geographic location, academic ranking, and student composition of *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)* have made it an ideal site for national reform experiments. To the ethnographer, it is an ideal site for fieldwork as the elitist vision of the “effective school” is contested by local aspirations for change among the ethnics of the three ethnic groups. In contrast to “premier schools,”⁸ most of which are located in the urban areas and are highly respected for their student performances, *FNX* is a “non-premier” national secondary school located in a province named the “New Mountain.” As a provincial, national secondary school, *FNX* has a large student size, middle-of-the-road student performances, and a mix of students, teachers, and administrators from the three major ethnic groups. Of the thirty schools in the same province, *FNX* ranks fifteenth in Malay and English language achievements; twenty-eighth in mathematics and science subject area performance. At first sight, *FNX* looks like one of those neighborhood schools described by educators in the west. The principal explained that in order to expand access to education, the Ministry of Education has set up schools throughout provinces and within walking distance. *FNX* has approximately two thousand and two hundred students (Malays fifty-eight percent, Indians twenty-four percent, Chinese eighteen percent). Most Malay and Indian students come from the *Kampung-kampung bandar*, “slum villages wrapped around the town center,” or

⁸ The terms “premier” and “non-premier” are a good example of the “Manglish” (Creole English) spoken by the English speakers in Malaysia. They carry cultural perceptions that cannot be easily translated. However, to be brief, if a national secondary school is classified as a “premier” school, it is an effective school with high academic performances in national examinations; “non-premier” means “middle-of-the-road” or worse.

government subsidized housing projects. Most Chinese students come from the town center or the *Kampung-kampung bandar Cina*, “Chinese new villages.” In order to maximize the use of the classrooms, *FNX* is divided into two sessions (morning/junior secondary level, afternoon/senior secondary level).

Two groups of ethnic Chinese youths, one subset “high-achievers” and the other; “low-achievers” became the key student participants of this study. I identified the students through the first round of effective school surveys distributed to students at all levels of *FNX* to test the hypothesis generated from my classroom and school observations. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the study, I selected these youths based on the following criteria: (1) academic performances, (2) behavioral records, (3) grade levels, and (4) social class memberships. Additionally, in contrast with other youths at the same grade levels, these youths were friendly, expressive, and outspoken. They befriended with me soon after I arrived at *FNX* and continued to interact with me both inside and outside the school setting throughout my fieldwork. To maintain confidentiality, I have given each youth a pseudonym in the text of this dissertation. As an “ethnic ethnographer,” that is to say, as one who grew up within the ethnic Chinese society in Malaysia, I have the language capital and “*emic*/insider perspective” to discern individual differences between the two groups of youths as they seek to deal with academic challenges and obstacles against their upward social mobility (Spradley and McCurdy 1972; Foley, Levinson et al. 1999).

1.4.2.3. Data Collection

Based on the ethnographic fieldwork carried out at *FNX* from July 2000 to October 2001, and from May to July 2002, I synthesized in this ethnography three types of data crucial to understanding the relationships between ethnic Chinese youth resistance forms and identities formation. These three types of data are as follows. (1) By shadowing students, teachers, and administrators at school, I carried out participant observations and took field notes. (2) By visiting parents and youths at home and during community events, I conducted in-depth interviews and transcribed the interviews verbatim. (3) By distributing surveys to students of the

three ethnic groups, I compared Malay and non-Malay responses to questions regarding school effectiveness and identified recommendations for school improvement. The use of “mixed methods” enriches the empirical evidence for this study.⁹

At *FNX*, I observed students, teachers, and administrators during routine school functions and special school events. I interviewed administrators before school began, talked with teachers at lunch recess, and mingled with students during class recess and after school. In order to capture ethnic Chinese students’ academic challenges, I sat in language classes and on a few occasions, covered English classes where teachers were absent for various reasons (meetings, maternity or sick leaves, deaths of family members, etc.). I carried out my observations following the “symbolic-interaction model”¹⁰ and typed up the classroom and school observations as field notes. Over time, as I built trust with students, I visited them at home and conducted interviews with their parents to understand further the origins and trends of their school behaviors. I conducted the interviews myself in Malay, English, and Chinese as the situation required, and transcribed them verbatim. My language capital in Chinese, English, and Malay helped me conduct and transcribe interviews without having to hire an interpreter. Moreover, in order to capture the socialization process that shaped the ethnic identities of ethnic Chinese youths, I attended cultural events and ethnic festivals in the community and typed up my observations as field notes.

As a final, but important measure in data collection, the “unofficial” Chinese surveys that I distributed to ethnic Chinese youths at the end of the fieldwork elicited detailed, personal responses that could not be obtained otherwise through the “official” Malay surveys. In accordance with the social contract, that is a joint agreement between the administrator and researcher, I had to deliver the student surveys in Malay for the convenience of the administrator to remove any “sensitive issues.” My Chinese student informants, who were fearful of repercussions, pointed out that they had learned to either ignore any surveys or fabricate their responses. Extensive time and attention to trust-building during my fieldwork helped me gain

⁹ Readers who are interested in learning more about the “mixed methods” approach may refer to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Moris and Copestake (1993).

¹⁰ Developed by Berger (1967), the symbolic-interaction model helps the researcher identify multiple layers of meaning submerged in the social interactions between his or her informants.

the trust of a number of ethnic Chinese youths and softened their fears in responding to my questions.¹¹

1.4.2.4. Data Analysis

The use of computer software programs in analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data generated from fieldwork enables me to communicate effectively the process of data analysis, which is an explicit, systematic, and careful interpretation of data (Miles and Huberman 1984; Walcott 1994). In my initial fieldwork, by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), I set up a database to transform, analyze, and display the quantitative data generated from two sets of student surveys. Through the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), I identified the major differences that exist among the responses of the three major ethnic groups of students and between high- and low-achieving students.

By using the NUD*IST (Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing) software, I transformed the field notes and transcripts generated from observations and interview into an accessible format for storing, coding, and analysis. Through the “grounded theory methodology,” I developed coding categories to capture the various types of academic challenges and behavioral problems facing ethnic Chinese students and strategies used by students and parents to ameliorate the problems (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1994). Through the constant comparison method analysis, I reduced data by comparing the incidents applied to each category, by integrating categories based on their underlying properties, by subsuming specific categories under general ones. Over time, I proceeded from an exploratory, open coding to confirmatory, selective coding. Eventually, by using an axial coding technique, I identified the relationships among the coding categories and linked all the coding categories into a coherent coding scheme structured in a hierarchical fashion (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

¹¹ For example, students at different grade levels responded openly that they had learned more from their tutors at the tutoring center than from their teachers at school. It would be hard if not impossible to get this response if the surveys were not designed and carried out in Mandarin as students pointed out, Malay teachers cannot read Mandarin.

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before conducting fieldwork, in order to construct a conceptual framework for the study and to apply for official fieldwork permissions, I reviewed the effective school literature and developed a set of research questions focusing on the problems facing the principal in delivering the policy messages embedded in government circulars or policy directives. After completing fieldwork, as I shifted the research focus from the administrators to students, I reviewed critical theories, social linguistics, and post-colonial studies in order to make sense of the behaviors of two groups of ethnic Chinese youths (high- and low-academic achieving). Although most of the literature was readily available for review, identifying major scholarship and gleaning useful ideas and thoughts to conceptualize research findings were time-consuming. Nonetheless, these mental exercises gave me important insights into the theory building of youth resistance.

Traditional social reproduction theories focus at systemic analysis, hence reducing individuals to passive social subjects. In contrast, interpretive or hermeneutic theories focus on the actions of individuals at the expense of systemic contradictions (Carspecken 1996). Three major theoretical developments in social reproduction took place from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. First, in rethinking social reproduction, there was a shift of focus from the society to the state as the context in which different social groups struggled to transform existing power relations and social inequalities (Althusser 1969). Second, in readdressing social inequalities, there was an interest on the relationship between three sources of domination intrinsic to the social structure: (1) class, (2) gender, and (3) race/ethnicity (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Third, in tackling the limits of traditional, structuralist (Marxist) accounts of social reproduction, there was an emergence of resistance theories that might account for social change and endow social subjects with the potential for transforming actions (Ogbu 1978; Willis 1981). However, these theoretical models and empirical works have left many questions unanswered: (1) How do

the three major sources of social stratification relate to each other? (2) Under what conditions do some social subjects manage to transcend their ethnic backgrounds, class memberships, and/or gender hierarchies and achieve upward social mobility while others fail to do so? (3) In what ways do individual strategies differ among ethnicity, class, and gender? Thus, this study addresses these questions through an analysis of the responses toward and strategies used by two groups of ethnic Chinese youths to deal with the ethnic, gender, and class stratifications resulting from two internal systems of hegemonies: post-colonial, Malaysian society and Diaspora Chinese society.

1.6. INTENDED AUDIENCE, RISK, AND NOVEL REPRESENTATION

Although this dissertation follows the conventions of academic writing, the reader can enjoy and appreciate the day-to-day struggles of local actors through the integrated use of social dramas, portraitures, and vignettes. In addition to my dissertation committee, most of whom are scholars from the west, I hope to reach a spectrum of readers in the east who do not have the luxury of graduate training. There are two reasons behind these strategic and creative novel representations of field realities. First, to avoid being prosecuted or detained by the Malaysian government, it may be safer to present my writings in the form of narratives telling the stories of school reform on the ground, with voices from local actors than to create as my informants put it, a “big” book loaded with rhetoric or jargons. Second, Chinese writers in Malaysia have long learned to share their critical thoughts through literary creations and to brainstorm novel ideas for representation; as a participant in these creative writing groups¹² I believe in broadening the base of representation and in blending empirical description with creative expression to expand the boundary of traditional ethnography. However, the social dramas, portraitures, and vignettes in this study are not “unapologetically partial viewpoints,” post-modernist accounts of field realities

¹² Known as the “New Human Beings,” the creative writing group meets once a week in a book store in the city.

(Banks, Billings and Tice, 1996, p. 291). Blending art and science requires the ethnographer/writer to strike a subtle balance between scholarly responsibility and literary creation. The novel representation is an outcome of careful, systematic analysis of empirical data generated from extensive fieldwork. Lastly, because “linguistic hybridity” appears with particular clarity in post-colonial Southeast Asia (as exemplified by: [1] the “Singlish” or “Manglish” spoken by the English speakers in Singapore and Malaysia, [2] the “Creole” Mandarin spoken by the Chinese speakers in the two countries, or [3] the “Creole” Malay spoken by non-Malay speakers in Malaysia), it is important to document these linguistic transformations through novel representations as they clearly speak back to the “linguistic habitus” imposed by those who are in power (Kaplan 1997; Kraus 1993).

2. CHAPTER TWO: RACE, LANGUAGE, AND NATIONALISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MALAYSIA

2.1. INTRODUCTION

In 1948, Malaysia, known then as the Federation of Malaya, consisted of the nine feudal Malay states of the Malayan Union and three modern states of the Strait Settlements.¹³ The feudal Malay state differed from the modern secular state primarily in the form it was ruled. In the feudal Malay state, the *Sultan*, “king,” held political power and ruled according to Islamic divine law. In the modern secular state, a British governor, appointed by the colonial government, ruled according to secular public policies. In 1955, three ethnic-based political parties¹⁴ formed an alliance known as “the National Front.” In 1957, the alliance won the first national election and became the first elected government of the Federation of Malaya (Tan 1988). In 1961, Singapore, a Strait Settlement, withdrew from the Federation.¹⁵ In 1963, the Federation of Malaya became “Malaysia” after the inclusion of *Sabah* and *Sarawak*, two indigenous states in northern Borneo, into the federation. At that time (1963), the population of five million was made up of fifty percent Malays, thirty-eight percent Chinese, and eleven percent Indian (Chai

¹³ The nine feudal Malay states were *Johore*, *Sembilan*, *Selangor*, *Perak*, *Kedah*, *Perlis*, *Kelantan*, *Terengganu*, and *Pahang*. The Strait Settlements consisted of Singapore, *Malacca*, and *Penang*.

¹⁴ The three ethnic-based political parties are (United Malays National Organization) UMNO, Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).

¹⁵ Readers who are interested in the reasons behind the withdrawal may refer to the “Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew” (1998).

1977). The federal government continued to rule the Federation with secular public policies while the *Sultans* of the nine feudal Malay states were reduced to symbolic figures of authority.

As a new nation state, Malaysia has had a complex and, at times, chaotic political history. Political development since the establishment of the Federation has been characterized by intense, communal politics between the three ethnic-based, political parties (Tan 1988). The two most significant events were citizenship granting against communist revolution (1940s) and ethnic conflicts in response to the rise of Malay nationalism (1960s). Communist revolution in the north and northeast of the Malay Peninsula in post-war, British Malaya prompted the government to quickly amend the constitution to include ethnic Chinese and Indians as citizens. At the same time increasing Malay nationalism was reflected in major policy changes in the social and economic sectors. More recently, the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism through social movements such as *Dakwah*, “the Headwear Movement,” and *ABIM*, “the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement,” have put the federal government in the delicate situation of having to reconcile modernity with Islam (Mehmet 1990). Striking a subtle balance between maintaining the national character of Malaysia as an Islamic state and leading Malaysians into the new millennium as one people who are proud of their national identity (multi-cultural as required by the constitution), is a formidable project.

Figure 1 The Federation of Malaya (1948-1962)



Source: Clutterbuck (1973). Riot and revolution in Singapore and Malaya 1945-1963. London: Faber.

Figure 2 Malaysia by States (1963 to recent)



Source: <http://www.Malaysia-maps.com>

2.2. SOCIAL CONTRACT IN AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY

The establishment of the government for the Federation of Malaya in 1957 restored a form of government prevalent in traditional Muslim societies by retaining the custom of making treaties with the *Sultan*, “king,” of each state (Mehmet 1990). In return, the government was responsible for defending the political status of the *Sultan* and for attending to the interests of his *Rakyat*, “people.” The government, consisting of Malay Chief Ministers and British Advisers from nine Malay states in the Malay Peninsula, was headed by a High Commissioner appointed directly from the British Crown. Consistent with the “social contract” between the ruler and the ruled in the traditional Malay Muslim society, the government, presumably ruled with justice, while the three major ethnic groups maintained their obedience toward and loyalty and respect for the nation-state (Mehmet 1990). An exchange between justices secured by the ruler and loyalty from the ruled makes possible the understanding of policymaking as a practice of social contracting (Mauss 1990). The formation of any social contract is the “objectification” of a particular view of social reality according to Berger and Luckmann (1967).¹⁶ The action derives its meaning both from the “subjective realities” constructed by the social actors involved and the “objective conditions” that prescribe access to resources and the authority to command them. Thus we can see the objectification of aspects of traditional Malay Muslim society in the formation of modern Malaysian politics.

As Anderson (1991) pointed out about Malaysia, “from the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood” (p. 145). The formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 also marked the beginning of an “imagined community” in which the federal government, headed by the elites of the three major ethnic groups, sought to identify a system of symbols that

¹⁶ Levinson and Sutton (1991) elaborate on the concept of policy-making by defining it as a residue of the actions taken by the different social actors and an embodiment of the authority of the ruling power to define and legitimize with some form of official status.

could link their aspirations with those of the ethnics (Ibid). In exchange for a softening of the requirements for granting citizenship, Chinese and Indian elites agreed to the dominance of the Malay elites in the leadership of the federation and accepted a special set of rights for ethnic Malays to be written into the constitution. Entrusted with the power to rule, the federal government was then responsible for the establishment of a national language through which the three ethnic groups could take pride in unity as one people of a new nation-state (Geertz 1973). However, since members of the three leading political parties were English-educated, upper-class members of the three ethnic groups, English remained the official language of the administration, legislature, and judicature until the mid-1950s (Malaysian Chinese Cultural Congress 1983). It was not until 1956 that the federal government officially declared *Bahasa Melayu*, “the language of the Malays,” as the national language (Chai 1977; Mehmet 1990). Thus, a system of symbols¹⁷ was born, Malay in representation, set against a backdrop of feudal Malay states, English colonial legacies, and rising Malay nationalism (Malaysian Chinese Cultural Congress 1983).

2.3. CITIZENSHIP VIS-À-VIS MALAY SOVEREIGNTY

Central to the task of creating a common identity for the three ethnic groups of Malaysians is granting of citizenship. Citizenship granting took on a double significance against the backdrop of Malay nationalism and Chinese communist revolution. The demographic, socio-economic, and political landscape of British Malaya underwent a dramatic change during the British Colonial Period (1826-1940). The colonial government introduced *Coolies*, “menial laborers,” from China and India to provide the labor required for tin mining and rubber tapping along the West coast of the Malay Peninsula (Tan 1988). The influx of foreign menial laborers into the Malay Peninsula induced fear among the Malays of losing their land to ethnic Chinese and

¹⁷ The expression “system of symbols” is a concept in sociolinguistics. It refers to language.

Indians immigrants. These immigrants did not follow the “social contract” that once bound the ruler and the ruled in traditional Malay Muslim societies (Chai 1977; Mehmet 1990).

In the eyes of the Malays, a *Bumiputera*, “a son and daughter of the Malay soil,” is a subject of any of the nine Malay sultans that rule the Malay states. He or she speaks *Bahasa Melayu*, professes Islam, practices *Adat Melayu*, “Malay customs,” and abides by the social contract that structures the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. In contrast, a *non-Bumiputera*, does not speak the Malay language, does not profess Islam, nor practices Malay customary laws. He or she is not a subject of any Malay sultan and hence, does not abide by the social contract that regulates the relations between the ruler and the ruled. Malays, who were in fear of being reduced to a political minority in a land historically known as *Tanah Melayu*, “the land of the Malays,” saw the granting of citizenships to non-Malays as a move of the federal government toward granting immigrants political rights. Coupled with the economic power of non-Malays, the Chinese in particular, citizenships granting meant non-Malay domination of the Malays’ land to the Malays (Chai 1977).

The dichotomy between *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera* defined the boundary between the Malays and non-Malays and accentuated Malay nationalism. Boundary maintenance, as Malay nationalists believed, helps maintain the “Malayness” of the Malays and sustains the ethnic identity of being Malay (Mehmet 1990; Eriksen 1993). The linguistic, cultural, and religious characteristics that differentiate the Malays from non-Malays are subjective, but significant in how Malays define their Malayness (Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993). Likewise, the shared cultural traits among non-Malays are arbitrary traits, but are important to non-Malays in delineating their ethnic identities as Chinese or Indian. Regardless of how subjective these dichotomies are, the significance of subjectivity in ethnic identity formation among the three ethnic groups of Malaysians is important for understanding the state/ethnic group relations in Malaysian society.

In the early 1950s, following the outbreak of communist revolutions in north and northeast Malaya, the federal government declared that the Federation was in an emergency situation. In order to win the loyalty of non-Malays, primarily the ethnic Chinese, who were under the suspicion of supporting communist guerrillas, the federal government amended the constitutional requirements for citizenship. In order to become a citizen, a non-Malay originally had to reside in the Federation for at least fifteen years and had to show that both of his or her

parents were born in Malaya. Under the amended provisions, ethnic Chinese and Indians could apply for citizenship as long as one of the parents was born in the Federation and had resided in the Federation for fifteen years. In exchange for the softening of regulations for citizenship, ethnic Chinese and Indian elites recognized Malay sovereignty over the political landscape of the Federation and accepted the “special rights” of the Malays as part of the constitution of the Federation. From the viewpoints of the ethnic Chinese and Indian masses, this exchange, laid the groundwork for two subsequent, radical policies in education and development: (1) the National Language Policy (1967), and (2) the *Bumiputera*/Quota System Reform Policy (1971).

2.4. ON THE THRESHOLD OF *MEDERKA*, “INDEPENDENCE”

The “dialectics” of nation building reached a peak of intensity with the advent of *Mederka*, “independence,” when the three major ethnic groups shared their enthusiasm for independence, temporarily diminishing the importance of the deep cultural and social boundaries that differentiated a *Bumiputera* from a *non-Bumiputera* (Geertz 1973). However, the lack of a common social identity among the people of the incipient nation remained the most challenging issue facing the federal government on the threshold of independence. From the government’s viewpoint, differences in the lifestyles, languages and religions were major impediments to national unity (Chai 1977). Central to the national project of identity construction was the question “Who are Malaysians?” From the viewpoint of Malay nationalists, however, the questions became: “To whom does Malaya belong?” “Is Malaya for all ‘Malaysians’ including the ethnic Chinese and Indians?” - or, as the name “Malaya” would seem to suggest, are the ethnic Malays, the real citizens, while the ethnic Chinese and Indians are second-class citizens with weaker loyalty toward Malaya, and stronger ties to China and India?

Post-colonial Malaya provided a timely setting for the revival of the linguistic heritage that was suppressed during the colonial domination (Mehmet 1990). Major issues pertaining to

“primordial ties” and national identity such as ethnicity, language, and religion surfaced in public debates. Among the more virulent conflicts was the debate among the three ethnic groups about the language of instruction and the status of the mother tongue¹⁸ in the national education system (Geertz 1973). In general, the linguistic heritage that had been suppressed by the British saw a revival in post-colonial Malaya (Mehmet 1990). Due to the laissez-faire education policy of the British colonial government, however, a mélange of linguistic forms had already flourished under the vernacular schools system (Chai 1977). In any event, language posed a problem for education: if education is indeed “instrumental” in the process of nation building as the federal government claimed (Chai 1977), how do schools transmit the beliefs, norms, and values that are conducive to national integration and racial harmony among such a diverse population? What system of symbols should the federal government use to build the national identity?

2.5. A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM

Gaps in educational attainment and economic development between the poor, indigenous majorities (Malays) and the rich immigrant minorities (Chinese presumably) have been major barriers to national integration and racial harmony throughout the history of Malaysia. According to Malay nationalists, the lack of access to education and limited exposure to modernization in rural Malaya have resulted in the underdevelopment of Malay society (Chai

¹⁸ The term “mother-tongue” is extremely difficult to define. Literally, it means “the language of one’s mother,” or “the language one speaks with one’s mother.” In reality, one may in fact be a native speaker of a language even though one’s mother was not. For example, an individual born to a Tamil-speaking mother in Malaysia will probably learn Straits Malay and/or Straits Chinese on the playground, and *Bahasa Melayu* and English as a second language in the school system. Such an individual may then go abroad to undertake tertiary study in English. She or he may be a “native speaker” of various languages depending on the registers in which the languages are used: for example, for matters of the home and of childhood, Tamil; for matters relating to school subjects or general communication in the community, *Bahasa Melayu*, and for matters of academic specialization, English. Thus, it is impossible to designate that individual’s mother-tongue except in the literal sense, and it is not useful to do so (Ferguson 1992 as cited in Kaplan 1994). It is not a useful term, but it is, nonetheless, one that is widely used (p. 19).

1977; Tan 1988). Under such circumstances, national education reform was seen by the federal government as an imminent way to correct the imbalance in the economic development between the Malays and non-Malays.

A policy framework for national education reform, the Education Ordinance 1957, took shape after the publication of the *Abdul Razak* Report in 1956. Assuming that use of a common language of instruction at national primary and secondary schools would help to break down communal divisions and create a common outlook for national integration, the *Abdul Razak* Committee proposed Malay as the sole language of instruction for the national education system:

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 (Malay) is the main medium of instruction, though we recognise that progress towards this goal cannot be rushed and must be gradual.

Section 12, the Razak Report of 1956

Understandably, the report sparked a storm of protest from ethnic Chinese and Indian communities, who were fearful of losing their languages and cultures with the advent of Malay as the official language of instruction within the national education system (Chai 1977; Malaysian Chinese Cultural Congress 1983).

To placate these fears, elites from the three major groups enacted the Education Ordinance 1957 stating:

The general purpose of the educational policy of the Federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic, and political development as a nation, with the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of people other than Malays living in the country.

Section 3, the Education Ordinance of 1957

In the early 1960s, a re-orienting and re-structuring of the national education system took place after the enactment of the Education Ordinance 1957 (Chai 1977; Tan 1988). A national education system emerged, consisting of two types of schools: (1) national/government-assisted schools, and (2) independent/community-funded schools. At the primary level, “national” primary schools mean Malay primary schools and “national-type” primary schools mean Chinese or Indian primary schools. At “national” primary schools, Malay is the language of instruction; at “national-type” primary schools, the language of instruction is either Mandarin or Tamil. Malay youngsters tend to attend “national” primary schools; Chinese and Indian youngsters tend to attend “national-type” (Chinese or Tamil) primary schools. At the secondary level, a national secondary school differs from an independent secondary school in its instructional language, curriculum design, and social environment. Through the extensive use of the national language (Malay) as the language of instruction, the teaching of good citizenship values through citizenship education, and the mandatory participation of students in extra-curricular activities, national secondary schools presumably develop the moral values and citizenship qualities required for building a cohesive Malaysian nation state (Marimuthu 1990). Independent secondary schools, given that their language of instruction is Mandarin, are no longer seen as part of the national education system and are excluded from government funding¹⁹. In spite of these language differences, English and Malay are compulsory subjects at both the national and the national-type primary schools; and the national and independent secondary schools. Upon his or her graduation from the national secondary school, a Malay youth is bi-lingual (Malay and English) and a Chinese or Indian youth is tri-lingual (Malay, Mandarin, and English; or Malay, Tamil, and English).

There were two perspectives on the Education Ordinance of 1957. The first, a functional perspective embraced by the elites of the three major ethnic groups, saw the ordinance as the only means possible to create a national identity conducive to nation building. National secondary schools, in particular, were seen as “melting pots” where Chinese and Indian youngsters learned to speak the national language and act according to the beliefs, norms, and values of the “national” (Malay) culture (Baki 1981). The second, a conflict perspective, was embraced by the ethnics of the three major ethnic groups. These ethnics saw the ordinance as a

¹⁹ Ever since the British colonial period, there has been only one type of independent secondary school, that is, the Chinese independent secondary school. The Indian community for various reasons has not yet been able to establish its own secondary school system.

powerful form of symbolic ethnicity. The Malays have a saying, *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, “language is the soul of an ethnic group.” Thus, according to this saying, education in the political context of post-colonial Malaya was not only a means for upward social mobility, but also a process that might lead to the continuity or discontinuity of an ethnic group.

In the mid-1960s, Malay nationalists established the “Malay National Language Action Front” and continued to push for the exclusive use of Malay for the national education system. Facing mounting pressure from Malay nationalists, the federal government introduced the National Language Act to the parliament in 1967. If it had been enacted, Malay would have become the only official language of instruction at all levels of the national education system (primary, secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary). However, racial riots erupted in May 1969 and diverted the attention of the parliament. After the riots, in order to placate both the non-Malays and non-Malays, the education minister announced that by 1983 or 1984, the government would complete a more gradual phasing out of English as the language of instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels.

2.6. PRIMORDIAL TIES VIS-À-VIS IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Since the establishment of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, education has been seen by the government as “instrumental” in developing an integrated national identity that will facilitate the upward mobility of the Malays (Chai 1977). To this end, the government has deemed it necessary to emphasize the political identity of the Malays. In particular, to advance the socio-economic status of the Malays, it is necessary to dichotomize Malaysians into *Bumiputera*, “Malays,” and *non-Bumiputera*, “non-Malays.” This dichotomy has amplified feelings of disenfranchisement among non-Malays, who are excluded from the evolving political and social organizations of the country. The incessant, bitter dispute between Malays and non-Malays over the language of instruction and the status of the mother tongue in the national education system

exemplifies the paradoxical role of primordial ties in shaping and re-shaping the state/ethnic group relations (Geertz 1973). The racial, linguistic, and cultural ties that once bound people together have become the foci of resistance among ethnic Chinese and Indians against the cultivation of a symbolically Malay national identity.

Access to education expanded during the post-colonial period (1950s to 1960s), which also saw rapid social changes and economic development. At the same time, the tension between the imagined community ideal and the force of the primordial ties between non-Malays and their ancestral homelands reached a peak in May 1969 when conflicting communal interests erupted into vicious racial riots in *Kuala Lumpur*, the capital city, and in several poor rural states in the north. Approximately two hundred Malaysians were killed, most of them brutally and communications among the three ethnic groups broke down completely (Geertz 1973). The “National Operation Council,” a political body set up to deal with the emergency, urged the federal government to take remedial actions after having identified the following factors as contributing to the riots: (1) the amendments of constitutional provisions on requirements for citizenship, (2) Malay fears of losing their resources to non-Malays, (3) the bitter dispute between Malays and non-Malays over the language of instruction of the national education system, and (4) the economic disadvantage of Malays. To ease Malay fears of losing their land to non-Malays, the federal government, citing the Emergency Ordinance,²⁰ enacted the Internal Security Act. The act prohibited questioning of any constitutional provisions pertaining to the “special rights” of the Malays. Furthermore, in order to improve the socio-economic status of Malays, the federal government launched the Quota System Reform Policy²¹ (Chai 1978; Tan 1988). Lastly, the May 13 1969 Racial Riots demonstrates that the three major ethnic groups would not stay within prescribed ethnic group boundaries and would not succumb to a social, political, and economic order subtly imposed by the state (Milne 1986).

²⁰ According to Hickling (2001), an English lawyer who was involved in drafting the Internal Security Act (ISA), the act was an outgrowth of the Emergency Ordinance, developed in the late 1940s to prevent terrorist activities and organized crime at a time period (1948-1960) where the judicial process was inadequate to prosecute communists or criminals.

²¹ The quota system reform policy is part of a five-year national development plan known as the “New Economic Policy.”

2.7. VISION 2020 AND NATIONAL EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM

In 1989, under the initiative of the prime minister, a national assembly on national development and education took place at the Economic Planning Unit of the prime minister's office. Three major policymaking bodies participated in the assembly: (1) the National Economic Consultative Council, (2) the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, and (3) the Ministry of Education. From the assembly came an ambitious vision of a modern, industrialized Malaysia by the year 2020. Described in a ten-year national development plan, entitled as the "Second Outline Prospective Plan: 1991-2001 (OPP2)," the committee on "Vision 2020" proposed for the continuous implementation of two radical top-down, state-mandated development policies: (1) the Quota System Reform Policy, and (2) the National Language Act. The OPP2 differs from past national development plans in its emphasis on the development of "quality human resources at all levels of the national education system in order to achieve the national development goal of a developed Malaysia by the year 2020" (Pennington 1990).

The education minister called for effective national school reform to improve the quality of national secondary schools, specifically through the implementation of the "Integrated Secondary School Curriculum" and the cultivation of positive school ethos. At about this same time, to develop Malaysia as a regional hub for educational excellence in Southeast Asia, the parliament amended the Education Ordinance of 1957 and passed the Higher Education Act of 1996. Under the act, Malay became the only language of instruction at all levels of the national education system (Malaysian Chinese Organization 1999). Thus the act, though progressive in outlook, remains concerned with the issue of national language (Yang 2001).

The national language shall be the main medium of instruction in all educational institutions in the National Education System except a national-type school established under section 28 or any other educational institution exempted by the Minister from this subsection.

Section 17, 1, the Higher Education Act of 1996

The “National Effective School Reform” foreshadowed the challenging task of reforming national secondary schools. As regional researchers Mohammad (1990) and Kasim (1995) point out, no comprehensive research has been carried out to substantiate the effectiveness of the quota system reform policy in effecting the Malaysian government’s goal to achieving greater equity in educational resources allocation. In spite of this policy, the quality of education differed substantially between urban secondary schools and small town and rural secondary schools. The latter continues to suffer a high dropout rate, an inadequate supply of educational facilities, and a lack of qualified teachers (Selvaratham 1987).

The most fervent opposition against the Higher Education Act of 1996 came from *Dong Jiao Zong*, “the United Chinese School Committees’ Association,” the most influential ethnic Chinese non-governmental organization in Malaysia. In 1999, through *Su Qiu*, “the Malaysian Chinese Organizations’ Election Appeals,” *Dong Jiao Zong* voiced its opposition. Seen as the backbone of the Chinese community, *Dong Jiao Zong* urged the government to address such problems as the lack of classrooms, textbooks, and teachers in national-type (Chinese or Tamil) primary schools and the need for creativity instead of exam-oriented teaching and learning in the national secondary schools. To end discrimination against non-Malays, *Dong Jiao Zong* suggested the gradual phasing out of the preferential admission of Malay students to local, public universities and amendment of the Higher Education Act 1996 to reflect the rights of non-Malay citizens to “learn, use, and develop” their languages as stipulated in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution (Malaysian Chinese Organization 1999).

The prime minister largely ignored *Su Qiu* and referred it to the National Economic Consultative Council for further consideration. As *Chiam*, an educator and a political activist who was involved in the drafting and forwarding of the petition recalled in an informal exchange with me:

You have to be there to understand what it was like not to be able to exercise your rights as a citizen as stipulated in the Constitution. We went to the Prime Minister's Office and asked for the scheduling of a meeting with the Prime Minister. The Office turned us down and said in our faces that 'this is *Malay-sia*!' We were not supposed to touch those "sensitive issues" (race, language, culture, religion). It may be hard for you to imagine all these because you have been away for a while. But, we are the citizens of Malaysia. Chinese fought side by side with Malays for *Mederka*, but people tend to forget about it.

To facilitate my understanding of "what it was like" to confront power face-to-face, *Dong Jiao Zong* invited me as a participant to a conference entitled *Seminar Reformasi Pendidikan Kebangsaan*, "the National Conference on Education Reform." Organized by "the Bureau of Education" of "the Alliance of Alternative Political Parties,"²² and a non-governmental, human rights organization named "the Voices of the People of Malaysia (SUARAM)", the ultimate aim of the conference was to develop a national education reform plan for the 2004 national election. At the conference, I witnessed the fervent resistance of local "social actors" toward the exclusion of local voices from major educational policymaking (Rosen 2001). Seen as "an open, declared form" of resistance against the ruling power (Scott 1990), the conference was put under surveillance by local police for two days. As a conference participant, I experienced first-hand the meaning of being a second-class citizen of a modern "state-nation" (Suryadinata 1997).

During the conference, local social actors engaged in various "hidden forms of resistance" (Scott 1990). Chinese and Indian parents voiced frustration because their children are being deprived the rights to "learn, develop, and use" their "mother tongue" (native languages) at national secondary schools. Malay, Chinese, and Indian teachers reminisced about

²² The Alternative Front was made up of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), the National Justice Party (KeADILan), and the Malaysian People's Party (PRM).

the “good old days” of the colonial vernacular education system²³ when multiculturalism flourished because all three ethnic groups could set up their schools and teach in their own languages. Many people complained about the hypocrisy of the retired deputy education minister who was invited to host the closing ceremony of the conference. According to gossip, the son and daughter of the minister were educated in the United States instead of Malaysia, a hypocritical practice not uncommon among the elites of all three major ethnic groups.

The central message of the conference was the proposal for a new moral order of education to guide the national education system. Chinese and Indian educators argued passionately against the quota system in local university admissions through which students are selected because of ethnicity rather than performance. Malay and Chinese educators differed in their critique of the national secondary education system. Malay educators saw the low achievement and high dropout rates of Malay students at national secondary schools as an issue of “class” and attributed both problems to family poverty. In contrast, Chinese educators saw Chinese low achievers and high school dropouts as matters of “school culture” and attributed these problems to the poor discipline and a lazy school climate of national secondary schools.

Both the petition of *Dong Jiao Zong* and the conference held by *Barisan Alternatif*, “the Alliance of Alternative Political Parties,” represent “open forms of resistance” (Scott 1990). The implicit forms of resistance took place at school. Over the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed the resistance of students against teachers and administrators – and of teachers against administrators – and of teachers against teachers involving a range of covert, subtle forms of resistance. I learned to read between the lines in my exchanges with teachers and was invited to join their “backstage discourse” about concerns over student discipline and classroom teaching (Ibid). I also noticed the careful efforts put forth by students to carve out “social spaces” of resistance in order to unleash their frustrations about not learning enough in the classroom and having to go to “school” (tutoring center) after school (Ibid). On rare occasions did I see any careless outburst of student resistance either through face-to-face, verbal confrontations with teachers during school assemblies or in physical fights between students of different ethnicity.

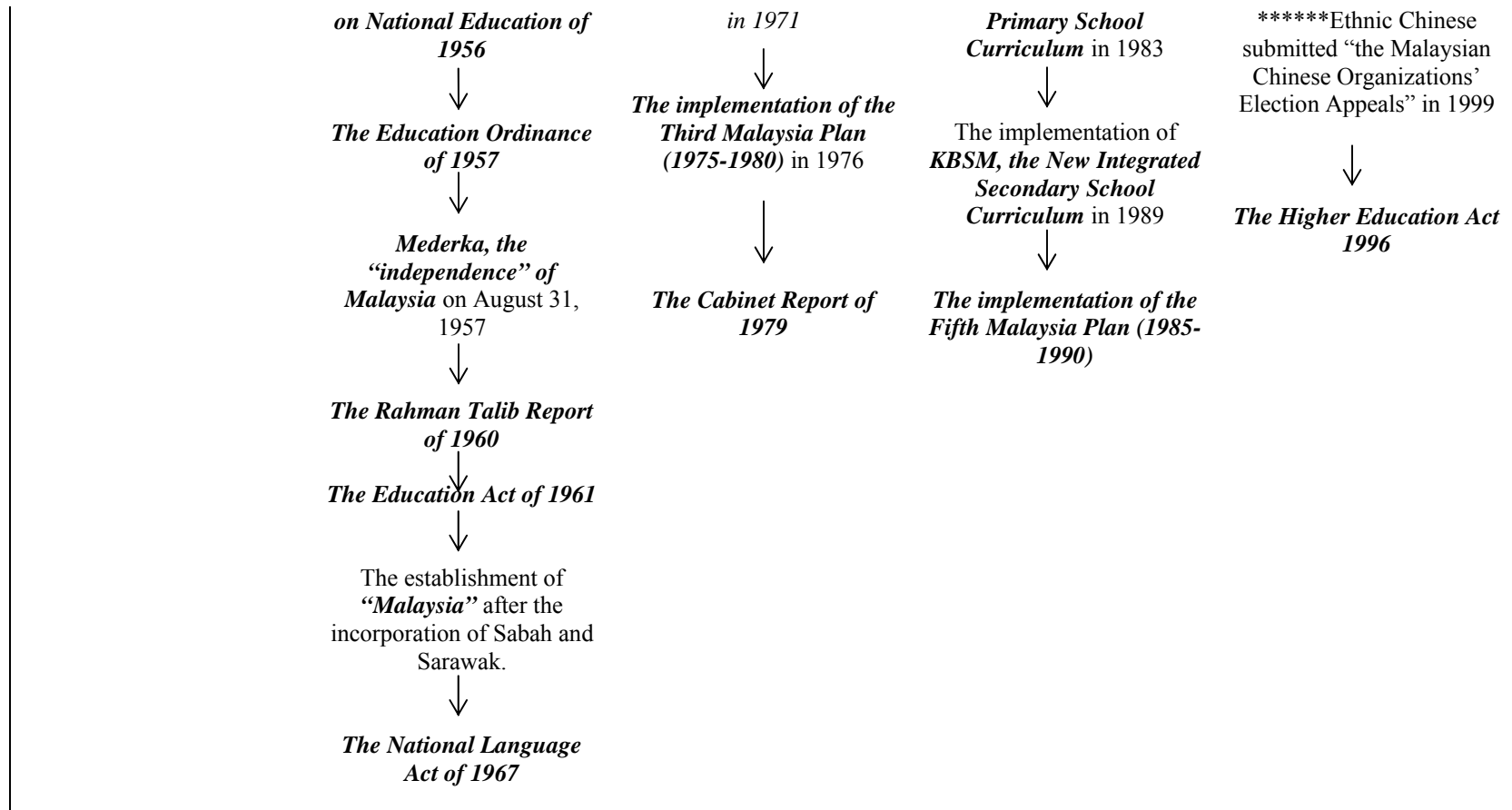
²³ During the British colonial period, the different primary schools set by the three ethnic groups were called the “vernacular schools.”

2.8. SUMMARY

Thus, this chapter provides the readers with the historical background required to understand the origins and trends of the national language and quota system reform policies. I describe the Malaysian nation building history in chronological order and theorize important historical events with concepts drawn from sociolinguistics. Table 3 synthesizes the history of nation building with the development of national education policies.

Table 3 Major Historical Events and Material Conditions Related to National Education Reforms in Malaysia from 1951 to 1996





* The British Colonial Government proposed for the Malayan Union, which comprised nine Malay states and the Straits Settlements of *Malacca* and *Penang* (April, 1946). Under vehement oppositions from the Malays and the lack of support from the non-Malays (Chinese and Indian), the government dismantled the Malayan Union and established the Federation of (British) Malaya (February, 1948). The establishment of the Federation of (British) Malaya implied that the colonial power restored the pattern of its governance prior to the Second World War. The principle of ruling remained the making of treaties with the Sultan, "king," of each state and in return, the colonial government was responsible for defending the political status of the *Sultan* and interests of his *Rakyat*, "people." A High Commissioner, appointed directly from the British Crown, would head the Federal Government, made up by Chief Ministers (Malay) and British Advisers from the nine Malay states.

** The Alliance Party (UMNO, MCA, MIA), also known as the National Front, won the federal elections and became the first elected government in 1955. The ruling elites of the three major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) were bargaining for the loosening of conditions for the granting of citizenships to non-Malays. In response to the loosening of conditions for citizenships granting, the ruling elites agreed with the inclusion of the “special rights” of Malays into the Constitution and recognized Malay as the national language. Two major events took place during this period:

(1) Under incessant pressure from the Malay School Teachers’ Association, the government allowed for the establishment of the Malay National Language Action Front in the mid-1960s. Malay nationalists were eager to speed up the implementation of Malay as the only language of instruction at all levels of the national education system.

(2) The explosion of racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, and north Malaysia on May 13, 1969 after the general elections. The National Operation Council identified the amendments of constitutional provisions on citizenships granting, the fears of the Malays of losing their rights and privileges as *Bumiputera*, the “sons and daughters of the Malays’ soil,” and the bitter dispute over Malay as the national language as the major reasons behind the riots. The government enacted Emergency Ordinance preventing the questioning of any provisions pertaining to citizenships granting, the special position of the Malays, and the preeminent status of Malay as the national language. After the riots, the Education Minister announced for the completion of the phasing out of English as the language of instruction at all levels of the national education system by 1983 or 1984 and the replacement of English with Malay as the only official language of expression for official activities and events.

***The major goals of the NEP are to eradicate poverty and to restructure the Malaysian society. The implementation of the NEP is an attempt of the government to lessen the frustrations of Malays over their economic backwardness.

**** In 1983, Chinese leaders and educators summarized and submitted their concerns over the definition of “national culture” in a report titled “Joint Memorandum on National Culture” to the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports.

*****The increasing interactions between ethnic Chinese and mainland Chinese have again evoked the suspicion of their loyalty to the Malays’ land.

*****Since 1995, Chinese leaders and educators have urged for a national education reform that is based on equity, not racial politics. “The Malaysian Chinese Organizations’ Election Appeals” is a collective voice of the Chinese community asking for the de-centralization and de-regulation of the national education system, specifically the national language policy, and the *Bumiputera*/quota policy - two policies that have created inversed discrimination against ethnic Chinese and Indian students.

3. CHAPTER THREE: PARADOXES OF BEING AN ETHNIC ETHNOGRAPHER

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a sketch of the major issues involved in doing ethnographic fieldwork at a small town, Malaysian high school. My fieldwork proceeded on two levels at once: (1) the etic or outsider perspective, and (2) the emic or insider's perspective. As a series of sketches, it gives the readers insights into my role as an "ethnic ethnographer," carrying out extensive fieldwork at a time and place where overcoming the fear and distrust of my informants was as daunting as juggling between my own creativity and sensitivity (Foley and Levinson et al. 1999). Since the may 1969 racial riots, the Malaysian government has imposed strict control on access to and sharing of information related to three "highly racially sensitive issues" (language, religion, and culture). Since policy documents or historical records pertaining to national education reforms contain discussions about these sensitive issues, they have, ironically, restricted to public access. Together with the internal security act of 1960 and the emergency ordinance of 1970, which allow the government to detain its citizens without trials, Malaysians of the three ethnic groups are reluctant to share their feelings and thoughts about the roles of major national development policies in shaping their life chances. It is against this backdrop that i carried out my fieldwork.

3.2. STEPPING LIGHTLY IN A LANDMINE FIELD – THE MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN OUTSIDER

Doing ethnographic fieldwork in Malaysia was challenging. The initial challenge came from the difficulties in overcoming the fear and distrust of my informants in responding to my questions about the roles of the language and quota system reform policies in shaping their life chances. The internal security act was developed by the government to prevent terrorist activities and organized crime at a time period (1948-1960) when the judicial process was inadequate to prosecute communists or criminals. The emergency ordinance was a swift action taken by the government to prevent the questioning of any constitutional provisions pertaining to citizenship granting, which was also classified as a “highly racially sensitive issue” in the aftermath of the May 13 1969 racial riots (Suaram 1996). Since independence (1957), through the internal security act and the emergency ordinance, the Malaysian government has arrested and detained, without trials, 9542 Malaysians because they “interfered” with its policies on “highly racially sensitive issues” (Kua 1993; Suaram 1996). Under such circumstances, trust became an overwhelmingly critical issue to gaining official permissions for my fieldwork, to gaining access to classified documents and records, and to eliciting responses from my informants.

3.2.1. Gaining Official Fieldwork Permissions

Two life experiences determine my status as an “outsider” even though I am a Malaysian citizen: (1) my ethnic ancestry, and (2) my educational background. Being born, raised, and educated in two Diaspora Chinese communities (Malaysia and Taiwan) during the formative years of my life, I am seen by the Malaysian government as one of the “hard core,” ethnic Chinese who are

reluctant to become “Malay-sian.” Despite my academic achievement, I was unable to get into any Malaysian national universities, but was able to study overseas at a prestigious, Taiwanese national university. Interviewed by the “home minister” (immigration officer) during my winter breaks from Taiwan to Malaysia, simply because most of the ministers were unable to tell the “republic of china” from the “people’s republic of china,” I felt excluded and devastated. These experiences had been helpful in keeping me in perspective especially when I was confronted with the following challenges in the process of gaining field access.

3.2.1.1. Avoiding At All Costs the Appearance of Probing “Highly Racially Sensitive Issues” and Using Contact to Expedite Application

The importance of gaining official fieldwork permissions from both the central and local governments surfaced early in my fieldwork preparation. In my initial contacts with the principals of several small town secondary schools in the Johore state, all principals insisted on “seeing” the official permissions issued by EPRD and JPNJ, the “Johore state department of education.” At the national level, the educational planning and research division (EPRD) reviews research proposals and issues field permissions. At the local level, the state department of education recommends “appropriate” field sites for fieldwork. In addition to following the “official” procedures set up by the central and local governments, the researcher needs to understand that education, especially the language of instruction, is a highly sensitive subject of inquiry.

The long, tiring process of applying for official fieldwork permissions began in august 1999 in Pittsburgh and ended in July 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, commonly known as “KL” by the locals. Overseas communication with EPRD required hours of patience sitting in front of the computer searching for the names and addresses of individuals who could direct my research proposal to the appropriate administrators. In the process of exploring the means to penetrate the bureaucracy of EPRD, I did not realize that a “contact” that i developed a few years ago at the central government was the key to gaining official approval to the field. After a few

rounds of trials and errors, i decided to contact my contact and to solicit his help to expedite my application. My contact, a former administrator in the central bureaucracy, was well informed about the process involved in screening research proposals and criteria used for issuing fieldwork permissions. Thus, I found out that any contacts at the local or central government could be useful in expediting the application process.

With only a verbal promise made to me by my contact, I arrived in KL with the faith that i would eventually gain access to the field. Prior to my field trip to KL, I telephoned my contact and set up an appointment with him at his office. After going through the security check that was imposed upon every visitor to the main administrative building, I arrived at his doorway with a forehead beaded with sweat. Leafing through the research proposal, which was translated into Malay by myself and edited by my high school Malay language teacher, my contact asked “there is nothing ‘sensitive’, ough?” and emphasized that I should avoid at all costs any “highly racially sensitive issues.” In response, I assured him that my research proposal did not contain any criticisms of the issues, but to describe the recent national effective school reform of 1998 through the lens of the management. Pleased with my explanation, my contact wrote a recommendation letter emphasizing my sensitivity to doing field research in Malaysia and reiterating my contribution to an under-researched topic. With the recommendation letter in hand, I arrived at EPRD with the confidence that I would soon obtain my Surat Kebenaran, “permission letter.” Within a week, I obtained official fieldwork approval from the director general of EPRD stating that the department would appreciate the sharing of my research findings after the completion of my fieldwork. With the permission letter from EPRD in hand, i went to the Johore state department of education, filled out a second set of application forms, submitted the research proposal, sought advice from Bahagian Sekolah, the “school division,” for appropriate school site. Again, with less than a week, I obtained permission letter from the deputy head stating that “the state department of education had no problems with my field research in the state of Johore, but would appreciate the sharing of my research findings.” Readers who are interested in doing fieldwork in Malaysian may refer appendices l, m, n and o for examples on cover letter, research proposal, and recommendation letter.

3.2.2. Gaining Access to Classified Documents and Records

In Malaysia, since the May 1969 Racial Riots, there has been tightened control over access to official records and policy documents pertaining to major national development policies. By way of example, national exam records are classified as “highly racially sensitive” records because they may escalate ethnic tensions between the three ethnic groups over the much criticized quota system. Major policy documents pertaining to national education reforms, which were mostly written in British English or Malay, are classified as “highly confidential” documents because they may provoke ethnic sentiments against the imposition of Malay as the national language. As an ethnographer, I used my creativity to access these sensitive records and documents, but guided by the principle that I should in no way compromise my position on the roles language in ethnicity, culture, and identity.

3.2.2.1. Using Gatekeeper to Access Inaccessible Data and Exchanging Information as a Form of Reciprocity

Knowing who had what and how to gain access to it was the very first hurdle that I had to overcome in my fieldwork. Accessing data that were inaccessible otherwise through the “official” route, but were indispensable to my understanding of why the language of instruction was crucial to reforming the national education system, was the second hurdle to my fieldwork. At the National Library and at the National Archive, I was instructed by the administrators to apply for permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to gain access to data pertaining to national development. Having experienced the amount of time and effort required to apply for official permission, I initiated contact with *Dong Jiao Zong*, “the United Chinese School Committee’s Association of Malaysia,” to find out if there were any relevant documents or records available at its information center. Assuming that my ethnic ancestry as a Chinese would

help facilitate my access to the database, I went through the informal “screening” procedures not knowing that I would be walking on a fine line between gaining access to desperately needed information and having to identify my position on the issue of language of instruction. Due to its resistance to the language reform policy, its position on the quota system, and its proposal for decentralized national education system, *Dong Jiao Zong* has historically been seen by the Malaysian government as “unpatriotic.” “The administrators at the National Library and National Archive told me that unless I had permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, I could not use their database,” I said. Being empathetic toward my situation, the manager replied, “Humph, you are not the only person who came to us for help. A few Japanese scholars came to us because they could not get permissions from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Tell me what you need. I will try my best.”

Compared to the manager, the deputy head of the educational planning and research department was cautious and to a certain extent, suspicious of my request. “You are a *Foon Yew* graduate aren’t you?” The deputy head asked. “Yes, I am,” I responded. Having identified my educational background, I was pressed by the deputy head to clarify my position on the textbooks used by Chinese independent secondary schools. As the most effective school in the Malaysian Chinese independent secondary school system, *Foon Yew* uses English textbooks for its math and science subjects and thus, poses a challenge to *Dong Jiao Zong*’s position on curriculum and language.

Foon Yew is still using English textbooks for math and science, isn’t it?” The deputy head asked. In response, I explained “When I was studying at *Foon Yew*, students in the science track level used English textbooks for math and science, *but* they learned the curriculum content through Chinese. As you know, humph, many *Foon Yew* graduates enter *Nanyang*, ‘Nanyang Technological University,’ or *Shin Da*, ‘National University of Singapore.’ Both universities use English textbooks and the language of instruction is English. Ugh....there was a *need* for students in the science track to get used to English textbooks.

The pause and tremor in my voice hinted at my reluctance to get involved in the dispute between *Dong Jiao Zong* and *Foon Yew* over school curriculum and instruction language. The emphasis on the “need” to adapt the language policy of *Dong Jiao Zong* to local needs was reflective of my position on policy implementation on the ground. Throughout the screening

procedure, the deputy head argued adamantly that students learn better in their native languages. In response, I told the deputy head that “I am sorry, but I know little about the relationship between language and learning. However, with your help, I mean, by giving me access to your database, I can learn more about it. I will be happy to share with you my research findings.” Having understood that reciprocity is a common practice of the Chinese Malaysian society, I successfully gained access to the documents and records available at *Dong Jiao Zong* by resorting to information exchange. In total, I obtained six nation education reports, one national education development plan, two major national education policies, and three proposals released by *Dong Jiao Zong* to reform the national education system.

3.2.3. Eliciting Responses from Informants

I am fluent in Chinese, English, Malay, and the three most popular Chinese dialects in Southeast Asia (Cantonese, Hokkian, Teochew). Although being multilingual had made it easier for me to break the ice in initial contact, my status as an outsider had made some teachers uneasy. Below, I will elaborate on two field realities that emerged in my initial fieldwork that tell the importance of overcoming the negative emotions of teachers and in reaching genuine exchanges.

3.2.3.1. Field Reality One: Learning to Overcome Suspicion, Hostility, and Jealously

During the first few months of my fieldwork, students and teachers made various speculations about my presence at school. Most of the time, students thought I was a reporter from one of the local newspapers investigating the various learning and behavioral problems at national secondary schools. Some teachers thought I was a *Cikgu BI Baru*, “new English teacher” while others thought I was an administrator from *KL* evaluating their teaching performances. As an urban Chinese who was interested in a small town high school, I was questioned by a few teachers, both male and female; Malay and non-Malay, about the legality of my fieldwork. “You

are sure you have the permission, ugh?” A suspicious female Malay teacher bugged me several times for the permission letters although I had repeatedly told her that the principal had a duplicate of my fieldwork permissions. Another female Malay teacher who was hostile in her comments about my presence at school said “What good does she do for our school? She would exploit us and make a fortune out of her research. She would go to Singapore, look for a teaching job, and ask for \$10,000 or \$20,000 for her salary!” And yet, according to an insecure male Chinese teacher, my dissertation study was at its best an academic exercise that helped boost my self-esteem as a woman! Although I had been careful in cultivating my public etiquette, I finally confronted the male Chinese teacher and experienced the thrill, or the sense of “elation” as Scott (1990) described. However, it is fair to say that without the official permissions, my presence at *FNX* would have been opposed by teachers who were suspicious, hostile, or jealous about my status as highly educated, female Chinese.

In the eyes of students, I was “different.” As students frequently commented, because of my physical appearance, especially my pale-looking face, i was “out of place.” The most frequently questions asked by students included: “Who are you?” “What are you doing here?” “Why are you here?” “How long will you be here?” The most blatant examples of my difference were reflected in the comments made by a few female Indian students about my skin tone: “are you local? You are pretty. You have very ‘white’ skin!” Or “the weather in the US must be very cold. Your skin is ‘white.’” Less blatant, but in no way less poignant, comments were the subtle sarcastic questions posed by several young female Malay teachers regarding the “freedom” that i enjoyed as a Chinese woman: “your parents must be very open-minded, ugh? Chinese women can enjoy life. As Malays, we can’t. We have to get married, have children, and stay with our families.”

3.2.3.2. Field Reality Two: Confiding fear, Sharing Sentiments, and Watching Out for “Spies!”

Over time, as my presence at school became part of the scene and less intimidating, students and teachers became more open about their concerns and less threatened to voice their opinions. I was sometimes shocked by the level of frankness exhibited by teachers and students when they voiced their opinions. A few female Malay teachers confided to me that “some teachers were reluctant to talk with you or respond to your surveys because they were afraid that you might tell the administrators what they said or who they were. You know that infamous ‘SSB’, don’t you?” *SSB* is an annual evaluation system that determines the scale of the monthly salary increase of teachers by evaluating their classroom teaching performance and school improvement participation. Based on my participant observations, I am confident to say that *SSB* did discourage teachers from voicing their opinions.

Most female Malay teachers were empathetic and patient after I explained to them that I was simply trying to understand the meaning and experience of being a teacher at *FNX*. In my exchange with the teachers, they frequently stopped and asked *Boleh faham tak?* “do you understand?” Some teachers even paused during our conversations and asked if I could follow the strands of our exchange. Others openly expressed their concerns about the *Laporan*, “report,” that I was writing might expose the problems of *FNX* to the world. *Malu lah jikalau masalah-masalah sekolah ini terkenal tahu in America Syarikat!* “Shame on us if people in the US find out all the problems that we have had at this school!” In response, I assured these teachers that in my dissertation I would use pseudonyms to represent my field site and informants.

To put the teachers at ease, I often suggested to them that we could talk at a “hidden” corner to the left of the library. As for those who for various reasons were reluctant to go to the library, I talked with them at their desks or at a long table in the middle of the office that was used for various purposes. Teachers who chose to talk with me at their desks or at the long table were cautious in their voicing opinions. Most emphasized *Ini hanya pada pendapat saya*, “this is only my personal opinion.” A few teachers who were being sarcastic of the *Pentadbir*, “administrators,” told me that our exchanges would somehow travel to the administrators because there were “spies” eavesdropping to our conversations.

Most teachers were also cautious about the idea of tape recording. As soon as I brought up the idea of tape-recording, a female Malay teacher exclaimed *Tak sedap lah!* “unpleasant, please don’t do it.” “You can always come back to me and ask me anything that you miss or

don't understand. I promise!" In response, I expressed my gratitude to her offer and assured her that her comments would stay anonymous. Some teachers seemed to be uneasy when I took notes during our conversations. With no tape-recording and notes-taking, I had to resort to "head notes" to keep track of my exchanges with the teachers. At the end of the day, i sat at my desk and rummaged through my head notes for all the conversations that i had had with the teachers.

3.3. KNOWING THE DETAILS AND NUANCES – THE MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN INSIDER

Ethnographic fieldwork required me to spend an extended period of time at *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*, thus allowing me to build a level of trust with administrators, teachers, and students that facilitated genuine exchanges. I learned to tell the difference between the "public" and "hidden" transcripts and to read between the lines (Scott 1990). Further, I learned to use "gatekeepers" to locate and sample informants (Whyte 1955; Bernard 1994).

By way of example, at *FNX*, administrators, teachers, and students faced the infusion of state politics in their daily functions. However, fearful of repercussions, students were reluctant to voice their opinions, teachers were afraid of speaking their minds, and the administrators were more symbolic than functional. As the highest authority of *FNX*, the principal acted as my gatekeeper and solicited the support of teachers for my fieldwork. Since the teaching body was comprised mostly of young, female Malay women who were expected to be modest in their attires shy in their manner, and compliant with the power and authority of the school head, the request of the principal was more symbolic than functional.

“Hidden and Public Transcripts”

While conducting his fieldwork in rural/small town Malaysia, Scott (1990) noticed that the rich and poor behave differently in the presence and absence of each other. He became interested in studying the relationship between the power and powerless, and its implications for domination and subordination. Through the metaphor “stage performance,” Scott characterized the behaviors of the power and powerless and identified interest as the “theatrical imperative” that results in such behaviors. Furthermore, as Scott observed, the greater the gap between the power and powerless, “the thicker the mask” that is at play (p. 3).

On stage, the subordinate tends to adopt a strategic pose; the dominant tends to dramatize his control. Thus, the subordinate discourse that takes place in the face of the dominant is the “public transcript.” The discourse that takes place off stage or outside the power-laden situation is the “hidden transcript.” A “hidden transcript” can be a gesture, speech, or practice that *confirm*, *contradict*, or *inflect* what appears in the “public transcript.” It is a disguised, low-profile, and undisclosed form of resistance. The dominant who cannot openly show his control, also develops a “hidden transcript” by justifying his control through privileges.

Thus, in order to get to the stories behind the scene, I shadowed students, teachers, and administrators during the school hours and interviewed them through three different languages (Chinese, English, and Malay). As a result of snow-ball sampling, I found three retired lecturers from a local teacher training college who were willing to share with me their concerns in teaching and in learning. I took pictures of students in annual school events, extra-curricular activities, and their day-to-day interactions.

On a hot and humid afternoon, before a violent tropical thunderstorm set in, while I was lingering in front of the luxurious assembly hall built by the World Bank, two female Malay

students who had probably never seen a camera before asked me what the “device” was that I had had in hand. As a demonstration, I took a few photographs of them standing in front of the mosque that is located to the right of the assembly hall. In the dim twilight of the tropical sunset, a male Malay student borrowed my camera and took a few photographs of their friends playing *Bola Sepak*, “a traditional game played by Malay adolescents by kicking a small cane ball with their knees,” in a field next to the low-income flats located across from school.

More interestingly, however, was the openness of students in sharing the ethnic sentiments that had overshadowed the interactions between Malay and non-Malay students. Under the quota system reform policy, students from the three major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) stereotype and discriminate against each other. As Bumiputera, “the sons and daughters of the Malays’ soil,” Malay students suffered from the social stigma of being “incompetent” because they were the so-called “quotas” protected by the different affirmative action programs at school. As Peranakan Cina, “Chinese descendents,” and Peranakan India, “Indian descendents,” Chinese and Indian students experienced discrimination at school because they did not profess Islam, or were simply less proficient in their command of Malay. The labeling and discrimination between the three groups of students surfaced in my observations of the group interactions between students from these three ethnic groups. On one hand, Chinese and Indian students labeled Malay students as the “quotas” protected by the quota system; on the other hand, Malay students labeled Chinese students as Kongsì Kelab, “street gangsters,” who were fueling fights at school and Indian students as Kek Ren, “the slippery, cunning Indians,” who were good at “twisting and turning” facts.

3.3.1. Shadowing Students and Teachers

Having spent an extended period of time at *FNX*, I was able to observe the behaviors of my informants in a variety of social settings. The power of ethnographic presence was breathtaking in my day-to-day interactions with students, teachers, and administrators. To create the opportunities to interact with ethnic Chinese students from both the academic and non-academic tracks, I volunteered as an assistant to the student counselor and acted as a mentor to the Chinese

students club. To equip myself with better listening skills, I attended training workshops on adolescent psychology and listened to the various learning and behavioral problems facing Chinese students. To show my support, i went on field trips with the Chinese students club. In March 2001, i followed the Chinese debate team, which was made up of two groups of Chinese students from the junior and secondary levels, to downtown Johor Bahru for a Chinese debate contest organized by the Hokkien council, a local Chinese non-profit organization keen on expanding the use of Chinese. In July 2001, i accompanied the Chinese students club to a secondary school located in a small town in northwest Johor Bahru for a Chinese improvisational speech contest held by the district education office. As i walked into the assembly hall where the contest took place, a Chinese male student exclaimed “you follow us everywhere! You are like our shadow!”

In addition to attending weekly assemblies and monthly faculty meetings, I listened to and talked with teachers during class recess or after school, all in the attempt to glean their perspectives in school improvement. As one of the senior female Malay teachers commented: Rajin ugh awak? Datang ke sekolah tiap-tiap hari! “You are industrious, aren’t you? You come to school every day!” There were numerous occasions in which I could have tape recorded verbatim without the awareness of teachers, their opinions about the management. I did not do so because I felt indebted to the trust they had shown in me.

To contextualize the behaviors of students as observed at school with their social and economic backgrounds, I expanded my fieldwork to the town center where students hung out after school and to squatter villages where poor students from *FNX* resided. At least once a week, i lingered at the town center and read the various advertisements put out by the factories in a nearby export processing zone in order to attract students to become their obedient, dexterous workers. I rode on local public buses with the school counselor and shared her laughs and tears in being a counselor in small town Malaysia where teachers and parents believed that caning students in weekly assemblies or simply expelling them from school was more effective than counseling. Every morning, I left home at the crack of dawn when the sky was still full of stars. Every evening, I left *FNX* at sunset and was showered in the loud evening prayer coming out from the mosque at school. I was immersed in the sensations of doing fieldwork in tropical Southeast Asia. I wished for the monsoon to come soon and refresh my mind with its cool, spitting rain.

3.3.2. Interacting with Teachers

Except for a few who were educated or trained in the US, most female Malay teachers were shy and reticent. Some avoided eye contact with me even if we sat across from each other at lunch. Most teachers hid the contours of their bodies in *Baju Kurong*, “traditional, long loose blouses and skirts,” and covered their heads with *Kain Tudung*, “Islamic head-wears.” To put the teachers at ease, I had to be *Halus*, “gentle,” in my manner and soft-spoken in my talking. Talking with female Malay teachers required substantial patience because in addition to dealing with their shyness, I had to identify the “subtext” submerged in our conversations. To these teachers, I was after all an outsider who learned to appreciate the art of reading between the lines and to figure out what was being insinuated, but not elaborated in our exchanges. As for male Malay teachers, most of whom distanced themselves from female teachers in daily school functions and more so at special school events, I respected the physical distance that they kept from me. After all, in contrast to the gendered bodies as clearly demarcated in the Malay Muslim world, I am an embodiment of a culture (Chinese) that has historically been seen as foreign and as undesirable to the Malays’ soil. I readily admit that I disagree with the distance that men keep from women in the Malay Muslim world.

“We Need People Like You!”

The head of the math and science subjects is a male Malay *Haji*, “a Malay man who has fulfilled his pilgrimage to Mecca,” who wears a white cap on his head and carries a *Rottan*, “bamboo cane” in his hand. As one of the discipline masters, *Tuan Haji Selamat* is known to be an Islamic fundamentalist to ethnic Chinese students at *FNX*. By way of example, in his class, he prohibits male and female students from sitting next to each other. If he finds them doing so, he will give students a lengthy lecture on the merits of gender segregation. Although i hardly

appreciate his gender segregation practice, i have to admit that *Tuan Haji Selamat* is the only male teacher at school who seems to have appreciated my fieldwork and have commented on the difficulties involved in getting a doctorate degree in the U.S. As little as I know, *Tuan Haji Selamat* is actually a member of “pas,” the Islamic fundamentalist party (PAS) which took over three rural, northeastern states (*Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu*) in the 2000 national election. One early Friday afternoon, after Malay students and teachers had left for the mosque in town for their prayers, *Tuan Haji Selamat*, who was working at his desk in the subject head office, invited me into the office. “Come in, please,” he said. As he smiled, his stained upper-teeth indicated to me that he has probably been a smoker for years. “So, don’t you have to go to the mosque?” I asked. “i have to finish the mock exam report on math,” he replied. “Just like you, I am committed to work,” *Tuan Haji Selamat* continued. “You know, I used to be in UMNO, but now i am in pas. UMNO has become too corrupted for me to stay. We need someone like you. You know pas, don’t you?” Shocked by his openness and flattered by his recruitment, I responded saying i would be interested in finding out more about PAS after I graduate.

Field note, August 18, 2001

In contrast with female Malay teachers, female Chinese teachers at FNX were outspoken and outgoing. My ethnic ancestry as a Chinese might have made these teachers feel that they could share with me about their concerns and issues in classroom teaching and in school discipline to an extent that they could not share with their Malay colleagues or the Malay administrators. My status as an independent researcher might have also assured these teachers that i was an outsider who could be more “objective” in my analysis of the role of the language reform policy in teaching/learning. To some male Chinese teachers, however, I was just a naïve Chinese woman who attempted to boost my self-esteem through my research. A senior male Chinese teacher who taught math and science subjects seemed to have taken great joy in his mockery of my fieldwork: “so, what do you hope to get out of your study? Do you feel better about yourself because of your study?” Lastly, in contrast to female Chinese teachers, female

Indian teachers believed that to teach/learn in the national language is part of the game of being a Malaysian. As a young, female Indian teacher said: “this is Malay-sia. We live here, so we have to accept that Bahasa Melayu, “the language of the Malays,” is our national language.” Rarely did i hear any critical comments from female Indian teachers about the impacts of the language reform policy on teaching/learning.

3.3.3. Interacting with Students

Whereas most teachers assumed that I was a new English teacher at *FNX*, most students wondered if I was a nosey reporter who, after mining for stories behind the scenes, would write a report about *FNX* and expose the faults of the administrators and teachers. After I asked them a few questions about classroom teaching and school discipline, students often asked me “are you reporter?” Overall, students from all three ethnic groups were receptive to my presence at school. Whereas most Malay students thought I was the new English teacher, most Chinese and Indian students thought I was the second school counselor. After they found out my status as an independent researcher, students were curious as to why I chose *FNX* as my field site. In response, I told them that *FNX* has a student population that is ethnically in proportion to the Malaysian society at large. Further, *FNX* faces the same problems that have troubled other small town national secondary schools, which include the lacks of self-motivation and self-discipline. In general, Malay students rarely took the initiative to talk with me about their learning problems or shared with me the various issues in lives. The lacks of initiative and sharing were due partly to my limited Malay language competency and, partly, my ethnic ancestry as a Chinese. Chinese students, and to a certain extent, Indian students, were more enthusiastic in talking with me about their learning problems and life challenges.

To Chinese and Indian students who claimed that they had experienced discriminations at *FNX*, I was an outsider who could do more than just listening to them. In my meeting with the principal I could bring these students some justice by reporting to him about the various discriminations that took place. Although discriminations could take different forms, they seemed to have happened more often to “bad” (low achieving) students than “good” (high

achieving) students. As several drop-outs to be Chinese students told me: “some teachers told us that we are Bodoh, “stupid,” simply because we didn’t do well on exams or we couldn’t respond to the questions of teachers in class. Our Malay is not good. We could not argue against the teachers or express our frustrations.”

A group of female Chinese students at the form five level (equivalent to the eleventh grade in the us) disclosed their anger at a racist, female Malay discipline teacher:

She even told us that we Are Kurang Ajar, ‘uneducated.’ We didn’t know what it meant when we were at form one, but as we grew older, we understand that it is very insulting to be called Kurang Ajar! We can’t go to the university anyway because there is the quota system. We are just waiting for Surat Berhenti, ‘school leaving letter,’ from the principal saying that we have stayed at school until form five. So, we can start looking for a job in Singapore.

Having felt that their complaints about teachers were ignored by the principal, a group of Chinese students in one of the Kelas Harapan, “classes with hope,” grieved: “all we have asked for is to have teachers come into the classroom and teach. Can you ask the principal to send us some teachers?” Furthermore, a group of Indian students in the vocational/technical track complained: “the disciplinary actions are not fair. Indian students always Kenal Buang Sekolah, ‘get expelled from school,’ if they are involved in any fights with Malay students. The last fight, you remember the fight ugh? The Malay student stays in school. The Indian student *Kenal Buang Sekolah!*”

And yet, another group of female Indian students at the form five level told me bluntly that they were disillusioned at the national secondary education system. “Can you imagine what kind of future Malaysia has? We will go to private colleges. After form five, all Indian students go to private colleges. They don’t want to go to form six because they don’t know if they can go to government universities after form six. Why waste our time?”

As my conversations with Chinese and Indian students were mostly carried out in Chinese and English, it dawned on me that for Chinese and Indian students, Malay was only a

“language of instruction” that is mostly used in the classroom. Outside the classroom, non-Malay students use Chinese and English to communicate with each other.

3.3.4. A Typical Day at *FNX*

Due to distance, I spent approximately three hours commuting back-and-forth from home to school every day. If there were no traffic jams, I arrived at *FNX* between 8:00-8:30 am. If there were traffic jams, I got to *FNX* one- or two-hour later. On the way to *FNX*, I passed by the orderly, middle-class suburbs one after another, but more disturbing to my eyes were the shabby, wooden houses of squatter villages snaking along the highways. The recent national census showed that if poverty is defined as disposable income under US\$1.00 per day, approximately sixteen percent of Malaysians fall below the national poverty line. In estimates by number of persons in each ethnic category, Malays are fifty-six percent, Chinese are eighteen percent, and Indians are thirty-three percent of the poor (Pennington 1999). Fueled with dreams of triumphing over poverty and of searching for a “better” life, many Malaysians take on two or three jobs. In order to keep up with their hectic work schedule, they ride on motorcycles and compete with cars and trucks rattling along the crowded highways. From time to time, on the way to school, I witnessed tragic traffic accidents. The weariness in commuting several hours back-and-forth between home and school, however, did not stop me from continuing my fieldwork. I was deeply immersed in my fieldwork at *FNX*. I especially enjoyed the warmth and kindness of small town people. There was the warm Macik, “elderly woman,” who rode on the bus with me every morning and told any passengers who sat next to her that I was the Cikgu Bi Baru, “new English teacher.” And then, there was the kind bus driver who dropped me off in front of the school instead of following the official route because he thought I was a student teacher from the local teachers training college. Furthermore, there was the Chinese bus conductor who was concerned with my safety at a place he considered as “predominantly Malay” and urged me to watch out for “strangers.”

As usual, Astaka Ilmia, “the knowledge pavilion,” was my first stop after I got to *FNX*. Built by the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) to provide students with a place to read, write,

or recreate if they came to school early or if they stayed up late for extra-curricular activities, the pavilion was used by the principal and discipline teachers as a place to assemble students who were late for school. My purpose of stopping by the pavilion was to see if there were students writing reflection essays to explain the reasons behind their tardiness. Overall, male Malay students seemed to be late for school more often than male non-Malay students. When i asked them why they were late for school, most male Malay students said they overslept and missed the bus!

At least once a week, during school hours, i would stop by the open field behind the low-income flats located across from school to see if there were students smoking behind the bushes. Next, i would stop by Kebayaan, “the food stand,” located to the right of the school to see if there were students eating there to skip school assemblies. In these settings, students tended to avoid me when i approached them. A few male Malay and Indian students told me that *Ajak-Mengajak Dari Kawan*, “peer pressure” was the reason behind their truancy.

Fan Niu Xiao at a Glance

Categorized as Sekolah Luar Bandar, “an outskirt school,” *FNX* is approximately two-hour away from downtown Johor Bahru, the capital of the Johore State. Located within a small town named Taman Mawar, “the rose garden,” at first glance, *FNX* looks like one of those neighborhood schools described by educators in the west. According to the principal, in order to expand access to education, the ministry of education has set up schools within walking distance throughout rural/small town Malaysia. Ironically, because of its geographic location, *FNX* serves students of the three ethnic groups from two other small towns. In my initial fieldwork, *FNX* had 2447 students (Malays 1429/59%, Chinese 454/19%, Indians 556/22%). The student size had gone beyond its capacity, thus resulting in various management problems, most notably, student discipline. Like other national secondary schools, in order to maximize the use of the classrooms, school hours are made up of two sessions: (1) morning, and (2) afternoon. The morning session consists of students from three senior secondary levels: (1) form five (eleventh

grade), (2) form four (tenth grade), and (3) form three (ninth grade). The afternoon session comprises two “remove classes” (language remedial programs) and two junior secondary levels: (4) form two (eighth grade), and (5) form one (seventh grade).

There are approximately one hundred teachers. Sixty teachers teach in the morning session/senior secondary level; forty teachers teach in the afternoon session/junior secondary level. Female Malay teachers comprise ninety-five percent of the teaching force. They teach and head the two major subject areas of the social science curriculum, including (1) the national language and other languages, and (2) humanities and social science. Male teachers of the three ethnic groups teach and head the math and science curriculum, including (3) mathematics and science, and (4) vocational and technical education. Thus, despite the feminization of the teaching force, there is a clear division of labor that is based on gender. The gendered division of labor spills over to the management. The top four administrative positions are primarily made up of men: (1) the principal (male), (2) assistant principal one (female), (3) assistant principal two (male), and (4) afternoon supervisor (male). Less important administrative positions such as the secretary, bookkeeper, and her assistants are mainly made up of women. Although extra-curricular activities are led by male as well as female teachers, male teachers tend to lead outdoor activities; female teachers, indoor activities. The division of labor at *FNX* is reflective of that at national secondary schools at large. Besides the “official” division of labor, in major school events, female teachers receive “special tasks” such as decorating the event site and preparing for the refreshment. However, they rarely question the appropriation of the tasks.

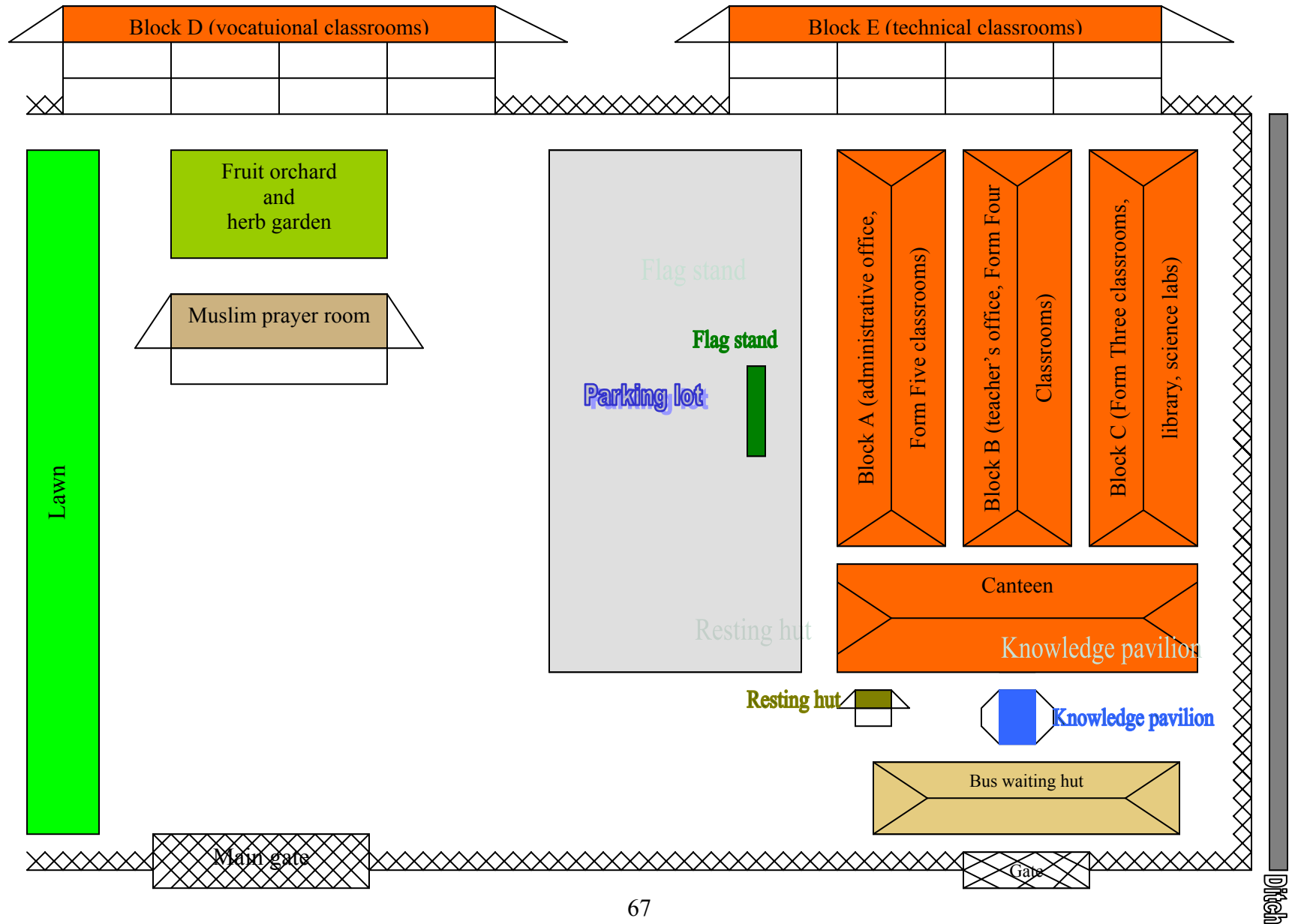
After Ataska Ilmu, I would stop by the counseling center to see if there were students waiting for “counseling.” In the eyes of Chinese students, I was a Da Jie Jie, “big sister,” who understood the turbulence of adolescent years. Having volunteered as the assistant school counselor, I listened to Chinese students as they described the various problems facing them in learning and interacted with the most forbidden groups of students at school. Identified by Malay discipline teachers as “problem students,” these male and female Chinese students were

subsequently labeled as “hard cores” by the teachers because of their repeated tardiness or truancies.

After the counseling center, I would stop by the main office to find out about the major events of the day. I would then go to the school canteen and wait for the recesses. I watched the students as they flocked into the canteen and lined up along the male or female paths to get to the food counter. At the meantime, school prefects of both gender and of three ethnic groups stationed at different corners of the canteen to maintain order. Male students tend to stay to the right of the canteen; female students, to the left. Besides gender segregation, students of the three ethnic groups seemed to mingle only with peers of the same ethnic group.

After the recess, I would walk around the campus and look for students who were doing outdoor projects. Sometimes, I would walk into classrooms where there was teacher absenteeism and Bercerita-Cerita, “chit-chat,” with students about different things. I would then go back to the main office and talk with the principal about his action plans of the day or week. Occasionally, I would have lunch with the principal or I would go to the canteen by myself and talk with teachers who were having lunch at the teachers’ lounge. If there was a meeting in the afternoon, I would attend the meeting or I would go back to the counseling center and look for students who were waiting for counseling. Figure 3, a floor plan of *FNX* from the top view, may give the readers a general sense of the distribution of school buildings and their functions, and the different places described earlier in the text.

Figure 3 Floor Plan of *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*, 2000-2001, Top and Side Views



4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves two purposes: (1) to demonstrate the use of grounded theory methodology in ethnographic fieldwork, and (2) to explicate, step by step, the procedures involved in conducting qualitative data analysis through the NUD*IST software. The purpose of this chapter is not to describe the origins and trends of “grounded theory methodology” (Glaser and Strauss 1967), nor does it mean to identify the strengths and limits of the NUD*IST software. I assume that the readers have already acquainted themselves with literature about this methodology and will refer to this literature for further information.

4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.2.1. Grounded Theory Methodology in Practice

Rarely does an ethnographer complete his or her ethnography in a short periods of time because ethnographic fieldwork entails “deep immersion” in the subject matter under investigation

(Malinowski 1961). To capture the “native’s point of view,” I conducted fieldwork from July 2000 to October 2001 (initial fieldwork) and from May to July 2002 (subsequent fieldwork) at *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*, a “non-premier” (middle-of-the-road) secondary school in a Malaysian small town. Over the course of my fieldwork, having gained the trust of administrators, teachers, students, and parents, I made participant observations, administered open-ended surveys, and conducted in-depth interviews. Through networks established with local scholars and practitioners, I gained access to restricted records and classified documents. None of these research activities could have been achieved without staying in the field for an extended period of time.

At its first glance, Table 4 may appear to be a mere inventory of the various types of data (qualitative and quantitative) generated from my fieldwork. However, the table carries two important messages. Firstly, as an “ethnic ethnographer” (Foley, Levinson et al. 1999), I deployed whatever tools that were necessary to access the relevant, empirical materials available in the field. My choice of practice is pragmatic and strategic because field research is “multi-method in focus” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Secondly, my informants were both males and females and from three distinct ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian). Successful communication and meaningful interactions with these informants require the “linguistic habitus” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and “cultural knowledge” (Spradley and McCurdy 1972) of an ethnic ethnographer. Thus, depending on the languages used by my informants, I designed and implemented the interview protocols and survey questionnaires in either Malay, Chinese, or English. Readers who are interested in the protocols and questionnaires may refer to Appendix A for details.

Table 4 Data Systematically Collected from *FNX*, 2000-2001 (*initial fieldwork*) and 2002 (*subsequent fieldwork*)

year	data	*ethnicity			**language			analysis
		M	C	I	M	C	E	
2000	Interviews (individual)							NUD*IST
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retired administrator, the Malaysian Examination Council Principal, <i>FNX</i> 	1	1				X X	
	Surveys							SPSS, NUD*IST
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Effective School Surveys 1, <i>FNX</i> 				X			
	***Reports and policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Advisory on Education Report of 1950 The Barnes Report on Malay Education of 1951 The Fenn Wu Report on Chinese Education of 1951 The Federal Education Act of 1952 The Abdul Razak Report on National Education of 1956 The Education Ordinance of 1957 The Rahman Talib Report of 1960 The Education Act of 1961 The Cabinet Report of 1979 The Education Bill of 1990 The Higher Education Act of 1996 							A summary of the reports and policies is annotated in NUD*IST
		M	C	I	M	C	E	
2001	Interviews (individual, group)							NUD*IST
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistant principal 1 (academic affairs), <i>FNX</i> Assistant principal 2 (student affairs) Retired lecturer, the <i>Temenggong Ibrahim</i> Teacher Training College Senior lecturer, the Faculty of Education, University Technology Malaysia (UTM) Focus Group Interview with High Achievers (senior secondary level) Focus Group Interview with Low Achievers (senior secondary level) 	1 1	1	1	X X		X X	
			1					
			5			X		
			5			X		

	<i>Surveys</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Effective School Surveys 2 ▪ Teacher Surveys ▪ Student Teacher Surveys (UTM) 				X		X X	SPSS, NUD*IST
	<i>Documents and Records</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Discipline ▪ Teacher Attendance ▪ The Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education (<i>SPM</i>), 1997-2000 ▪ The Evaluation of Junior Secondary Education (<i>PMR</i>), 1995-2000 ▪ The Zero School Truancy Campaign ▪ The Language Town Project 				X X X X X X			Annotated in NUD*IST
	<i>Meeting Minutes</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quarterly faculty meetings ▪ Yearly PTA meetings 	4 2					X X	Annotated in NUD*IST
	<i>Selected Newspaper Clippings</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i> ▪ <i>Sin Chew Jit Poh</i> ▪ The Star ▪ The New Straits Time ▪ <i>Berita Harian</i> 					X X	X X	Annotated in NUD*IST
	<i>Selected Caricatures and Photos</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Sport's Day ▪ The Teacher's Day ▪ School Opening Day ▪ The Patriotic Month (August) ▪ Chinese Debates Contest, <i>Hok Kien</i> Council ▪ Chinese Improvised Speech Contest, District Education Department, <i>Johor Bahru</i> ▪ A Snapshot of School Truants 							Annotated in NUD*IST
		M	C	I	M	C	E	
2002	<i>Interviews (individual)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High Achievers ▪ Parents of high achievers ▪ Low Achievers ▪ Parents of Low Achievers ▪ Chinese Language Teachers ▪ English Language Teacher 		6 5 3 2 3 1			X X X X X X		NUD*IST

*M=Malay, C=Chinese, I=Indian. The numbers in the columns indicate the numbers of informants interviewed or surveyed.

**M=Malay, C=Chinese, E=English. The sign “X” simply indicates the language spoken or written by the informants during interviews or surveys. In their daily functions, these informants may use more than one language.

***I obtained all classified documents through the Malaysian Chinese School Council. Before independence (August 31, 1957), national education policy was referred to as an “ordinance” by the Alliance Government. After independence, national education policy was referred to as an “act” or “bill.”

One might have assumed that as an ethnic ethnographer, I approached the field from an insider’s perspective. However, I entered the field with two naïve assumptions – I assumed that: (1) under the “National Effective School Reform,” the administrators of *FNX* would have followed the directives from the central government in developing its school improvement programs, and (2) the programs would have been carried out with little or no resistance from teachers, students, and parents. These assumptions turned out to be wrong. During our first interview in 2000, the principal emphasized that the cultivation of a conducive, schooling environment has been his priority in school improvement. In my observation, however, the cultivation of an environment conducive to learning and to discipline seemed to be a matter of ongoing compromise between state ideologies and local interests. Moreover, after being immersed in the field for a few months, I distributed the first “Effective School Surveys” to students of the three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian) in the academic and non-academic tracks and in both the junior secondary and senior secondary levels to find out how they evaluated the effectiveness of *FNX* and what they suggested for school improvement. Through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), I conducted the one-way ANOVA analysis of their responses. Table 5 summarizes the preliminary findings of the first “Effective School Surveys” after the students responses were grouped, tested, and cross-tabulated.

Table 5 *One-way ANOVA Analysis of Effective School Surveys One

FACTORS RELATED TO CULTIVATING A CONDUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT				
<i>Learning</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Overall academic performance	3	4.816	308	.003
Overall difficulty levels of learning	3	35.104	309	.000
Difficulty level of Malay	3	8.696	305	.000
Difficulty level of English	3	12.174	308	.000
Difficulty level of Religious or Moral Education	3	5.947	152	.001
Difficulty level of History	3	4.701	302	.003
<i>Teaching</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Competent in content knowledge	3	19.567	308	.000
Skill in teaching	3	10.264	306	.000
High expectations of students	3	4.297	306	.005
<i>Management</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
FNX is overall effective	3	17.257	307	.000
Curriculum is relevant to student needs	3	6.736	311	.000
Basic skills acquisition is emphasized	3	9.767	311	.000
Student progress is regularly monitored	3	6.481	310	.000
Students are provided after-class tutoring	3	14.571	312	.000
<i>School improvement</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
School should emphasize more about academic achievement	3	7.665	281	.000

*The total number of students responding to this survey is 319. Malay students make up about 55.2% (179), Chinese students 22.2% (72), and Indian students 21% (68).

**The mean difference is significant at the 0.5 level.

Table 6 summarizes the findings of the second effective school surveys, which were distributed to the three ethnic groups of students approximately a year after the first surveys. As with the first effective school surveys, there are statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) among the three ethnic groups of students in four major categories (learning, teaching, school management, and school improvement). Note that the purpose of comparing the two sets of surveys is to highlight the mixed methods approach used in my fieldwork, rather than to argue for the reliability of my survey questionnaires. It is also noteworthy that the surveys did not yield details about how non-Malay students react towards the language reform policy or insights into how they act under the quota system policy. Lacking these ethnographic details, this research does not meet the full criteria for an ethnographic study.

Table 6 *One-way ANOVA Analysis of Effective School Surveys Two

FACTORS RELATED TO CULTIVATING A CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT				
<i>Learning</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Malay students should perform better because Malay is the language of instruction	3	46.521	468	.000
Malay students should perform better because of state-funded, after-school tutoring in math	3	9.624	448	.000
Malay students should perform better because of state-funded, after-school tutoring in science	3	12.517	449	.000
Chinese students do not perform well because of language barrier	3	4.363	473	.005
Chinese students will perform better if Mandarin is the language of instruction	3	48.886	461	.000
Indian students do not perform well because they have language barrier	3	4.490	471	.004
Indian students will perform better if the language of instruction is Tamil	3	11.382	460	.000
Additional drilling is needed to facilitate learning	3	8.906	462	.000
Overall students learn little from school	3	5.818	476	.001
Overall students learn more from tutoring centers	3	7.885	462	.000
Low parental expectations contribute to the low student achievement of FNX	3	12.594	472	.000
<i>Teaching</i>				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Teachers are not serious in their teaching	3	9.011	473	.000
Teachers do not pay attention to different learning styles	3	7.158	467	.000
Teachers are not concerned with different paces	3	7.526	472	.000
Teachers do not have knowledge about adolescent psychology	3	6.968	316	.000

Teachers are insensitive towards the cultural upbringing of non-Malay students	3	12.374	312	.000
Management				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
FNX has bad student discipline because there are no non-Malay school counselors	3	5.330	317	.001
FNX has bad student discipline because there are no full-time discipline masters	3	5.388	316	.001
FNX has bad student discipline because there are few parent-teacher meetings	3	5.316	317	.001
FNX has bad student discipline because of bad peer influence	3	4.389	317	.005
FNX has bad student discipline because of out-dated discipline rules	3	7.261	315	.000
FNX has bad student discipline because there is a lack of principal leadership	3	9.169	477	.000
School improvement				
Source	df	F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Counseling will help improve student discipline	3	6.290	317	.000
School suspension school may improve student discipline	3	7.390	317	.000
Canning students during school assembly may improve discipline	3	5.590	317	.001

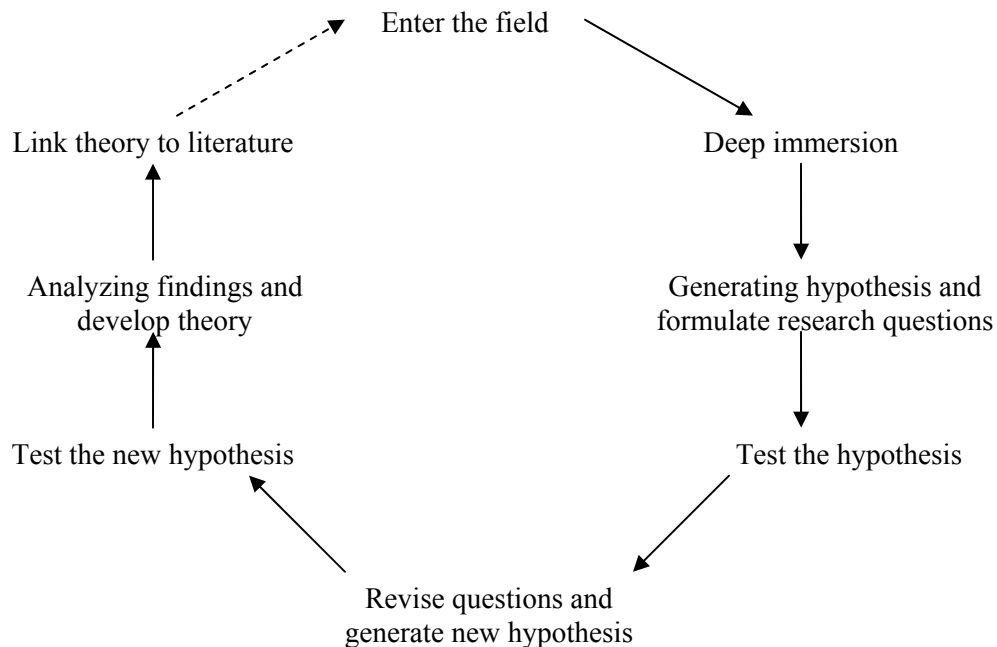
*The total number of students responding to this survey is 478. Malay students make up about 52.7% (255), Chinese students 22.1% (107), and Indian students 24% (116).

**The mean difference is significant at the 0.5 level.

By building on the findings of the two effective school surveys, I conducted group and individual interviews with two groups of non-elite Chinese students (high- and low-achieving). I “triangulated” the interviews with observations made through fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992; Moris and Copestake 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Triangulating data sources allowed me to compare incidents that were related to the same phenomena under study as they were collected at the different points during my fieldwork temporal cycle

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1992; Moris and Copestake 1993). In this respect, the data collection process followed the “grounded theory methodology” of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Overall, researchers who have adopted this methodology use their data in one or the two of the following ways: (1) to generate theory from systematically collected data, or (2) to examine existing theories using such data in order to build on these theories. Whatever theory building approach the researcher selects, he or she has to analyze data through an explicit system of data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1994). As a final note, researchers who have used the grounded theory methodology review literature relevant to their research as they systematically collect and analyze data. The reasons for doing so are to sharpen the focus of study, to improve research design, and to link research findings to related literature. Diagram 4 characterizes the grounded theory methodology embedded in the ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out at *FNX*.

Figure 4 Grounded Theory Fieldwork at *FNX*



4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

4.3.1. Synopsis - Defining Qualitative Data Analysis and Its Related Concepts

Whereas quantitative research is a “theory-testing, deductive approach,” qualitative research is a “theory-building, inductive approach” (Walcott 1994; Newman and Benz 1998). The quantitative researcher begins with theory, formulates the hypothesis, collect data to test the theory, and draw conclusion based on the theory. In contrast, the qualitative researcher begins with data. He or she analyzes the data, formulates the hypothesis, tests the hypothesis, and builds the theory. Two sets of meanings and experiences have combined to give form and shape to qualitative research. (1) In their most rudimentary forms, qualitative data are raw experiences converted into words and then, words are compiled into texts. Therefore, qualitative data are unstructured and not immediately available for analyses. (2) In order to reveal the underlying properties of qualitative data, the researcher is engaged in a transformation process that includes “data preparation,” “data reduction,” “data management,” and “data display” (Richards and Richards 1991; Miles and Huberman 1994). Unfortunately, the less structured nature of qualitative research has led to the misconception that qualitative research findings are less convincing compared to those of quantitative research (Miles and Huberman 1994; Walcott 1994).

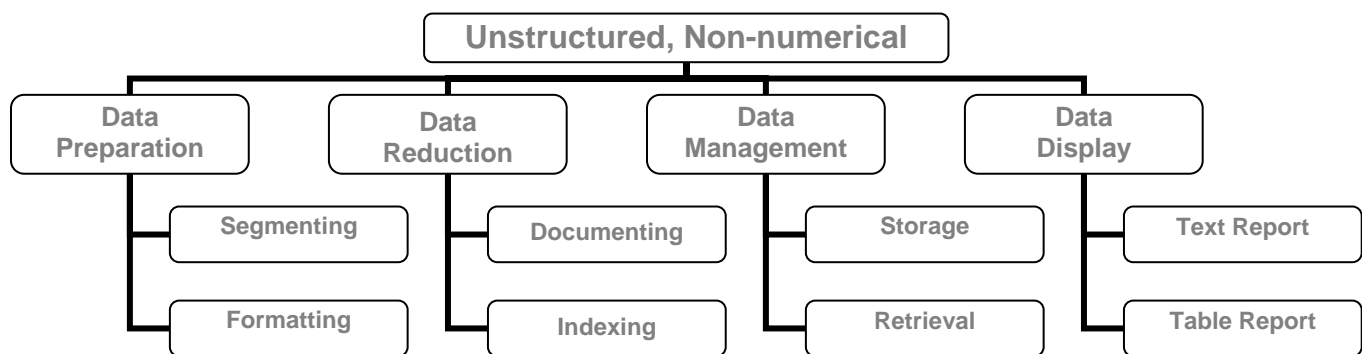
4.3.1.1. The NUD*IST Software - Its Strengths and Limits

NUD*IST, an abbreviation for “non-numerical, unstructured data indexing, searching, and theorizing,” is a computer software program known for its capacity to explicate the thinking process involved in analyzing and in theorizing large quantities of qualitative data (Richards and Richards 1992; Tak, Nield et al. 1999 as cited in Withers 2004). Figure 5 is a somewhat simplified representation of the analytical procedures and theorizing process involved in qualitative data analysis although it captures some of the subtleties involved. Note that the analytical procedures and theorizing process described above in terms of the NUD*IST software can be generalized to qualitative data analysis in general.

Although NUD*IST has been criticized for imposing a hierarchical, tree-structured classificatory system upon the user’s data, it is at present the most efficient software in conducting qualitative data analysis (Tak, Nield et al. 1999). Based on my experiences in using and teaching software for different types of research, NUD*IST shows the following strengths and limitations. Conceptually, the NUD*IST software opens up different ways of examining qualitative data, thus allowing me to transcend the limited vision of binary oppositions as resulted from the use of traditional social or cultural theories. Technically, it makes explicit the procedures involved in reducing, managing, and displaying qualitative data, thus enabling me to de-mystify qualitative research. Shortly speaking, NUD*IST enables me to convince the readers that my research findings are a sensible outcome of an explicit, systematic method of analysis. However, due to its limited linguistic capacity, the NUD*IST software cannot analyze data generated through other languages, thus limiting itself to only English-speaking users unless the researcher is willing to translate his or her data into English. As exemplified by this study, it took me months to translate into English all data gathered through Malay and Mandarin before importing them into NUD*IST for analysis. Further, users who have had background knowledge about qualitative research seem to fare better from the software than those who do not. As most users may soon find out, although qualitative data analysis is an iterative process of coding, of

doing content analysis, and of building taxonomies, the process can go indefinitely unless they know what they want to gain or achieve from such analysis.

Figure 5 Qualitative Data Analysis through NUD*IST



4.3.1.2. Qualitative Data Analysis through NUD*IST

Facing a universe of non-numerical, unstructured data, the researcher has to first process his or her data according to the format recognized by the NUD*IST software. In the NUD*IST sense, a raw datum, after it is being transformed into a word document, is made up of three major parts: (1) the header, (2) body text, and (3) sub-headers. A header contains the important references of the document, including the date, time, and place where the event takes place and frequently, the people who are involved in the event. A body text simply refers to the content knowledge that

makes up a document, and a sub-header specifies the topic submerged in a text unit. Next, the researcher has to chunk out data into text units that are large enough to make sense of when they are taken out of the context (Richards and Richards 1991). A text unit can be a word, a sentence (phrase), or a paragraph (passage). There is a potential problem in segmenting data based on an arbitrarily set unit of analysis, that is, once taken out of context, the word, sentence or paragraph may lose its meanings.

After processing his or data, the researcher imports them into the software for analysis. Once imported into NUD*IST, data are stored in the “document system” (Richards and Richards 1991). By providing the annotations - “on-line” or “off-line,” the document system helps the researcher keep track of his or her data. On-line documents are text-based materials (observation fieldnotes, interview transcripts, survey responses), whereas off-line documents are non text-based materials (sketches, photos, video clippings). Storing and retrieving data are actually two-side of the same coin. A good storage system helps the researcher back up his or her data, differentiate the document system from the indexing system, and ease the task of retrieval. Although some users have complained about the tedious task of formatting data, once imported into NUD*IST, the software eases the tasks of “sorting through” data and “lifting information” from them (Bernard 1995; Gahan and Hannibal 1998). So, the researcher can compare data for their underlying properties and organize them according to the classification system developed. As a hierarchical, classificatory scheme with general topics branching into more specific topics, the “index system” helps the researcher sort through data and lift information from them (Richards and Richards 1991). Lifting information from data and linking them to the index categories developed make up the task of indexing, or coding. In its most simple sense, coding refers to the act of attaching a label to a text unit to help identify the concept contained in it. Since a text unit may contain multiple concepts, it may be attached with multiple labels.

As part of an on-going process of analysis, the researcher may be interested in identifying the relationships between the indexing categories. In NUD*IST, such relationships are represented through the index tree or through the coding report. The researcher may cross-tabulate the different tree nodes and examine the patterns emerged from the table report, or cross-reference the nodes and explore their linkages in the text report. Although Nud*st allows fine grained exploration of data, the researcher has to decide the level of complexity that he or she wants to achieve. Teasing out and shifting around the categories or sub-categories of the

index system can go on indefinitely, but at some point, the researcher has to settle on an index system with the recognition that it only approximates the meanings or meaningful relations submerged in the data that it represents (Spradley 1980).

4.3.2. Synthesis - Analyzing Qualitative Data through NUD*IST (N6)

4.3.2.1. Data Sources

To refresh the readers' memory, I generated two major types of data (qualitative, quantitative) through a systematic data collection process spanning over seventeen months (Jul. 00 – Oct. 01, May to Jul. 02) and consisting of two stages of fieldwork (initial fieldwork, subsequent fieldwork). As briefly described earlier in a sub-section titled "Grounded Theory Methodology in Practice," I conducted statistical analyses of the quantitative data generated from two sets of survey responses ("Effective School Surveys" 1 and 2). In this sub-section, I will walk the readers through the process of qualitative data analysis with examples drawn from two sets of empirical materials (individual and group interviews) collected from the field and transformed into data (transcripts) useful for conducting content analysis. Based on the languages spoken by my informants, some of whom might be bi-lingual or tri-lingual, the interviews were designed and conducted in three different languages (Malay, Chinese, English). However, in order to use NUD*IST to analyze these interviews, I translated all transcripts into English.

Throughout fieldwork, I had had informal exchanges with non-elite Chinese students on daily basis because as one student put it, "we spoke the same language [Mandarin, standard Chinese]." Although some high achievers pointed out the differences in our Mandarin (Taiwanese vis-à-vis. Malaysian), speaking the same language did help break the ice in our initial contact and facilitate subsequent exchanges. Two groups of non-elite Chinese students (high achievers, low achievers) stood out as being articulate and expressive in sharing their ideas and thoughts with me. Table 7 shows the demographic characteristics of these students. Thus, besides the individual exchanges that took place at the school canteen before or after school,

group exchanges took place when the teachers were absent from their classroom teaching. Early on, when the exchanges were short and diffused, I jotted down the topics emerged in my calendar shortly after each exchange. However, as time passed by, when the exchanges became longer and elaborated, it was harder to jot down the topics. I would be reluctant to rummage through my head notes when it came to the time for analysis. Through the trust built with non-elite Chinese students, I obtained their consents and tape-recorded a few selected group exchanges and home visits. I transcribed verbatim and translated into English all the individual and group exchanges. Although group exchanges tended to last two to three hours and individual exchanges, one to two hours, the length of the transcripts varied greatly. Some group transcripts turned out to be twenty-five to thirty pages in length; others, fifteen to twenty pages. As for individual transcripts, they varied from ten to fifteen pages, or five to ten pages in length.

Table 7 Demographics of Ethnic Chinese Student Informants for Individual Interviews

*Name	Age	Grade level	Gender
<i>Sweet Li</i>	15	Form 2	Female
<i>Wan Ton Mei</i>	15	Form 2	Female
<i>Factory Mei</i>	15	Form 2	Female
<i>Willow</i>	18	Form 5	Female
<i>Fu Gui</i>	16	Form 4	Male
<i>Bao Bei</i>	16	Form 4	Male
<i>Tze Chiang</i>	17	Form 4	Male
<i>Big Head</i>	16	Form 4	Male
<i>Shu Tong</i>	16	Form 4	Female
<i>Jen Ni Hua</i>	16	Form 4	Female
N=10, Females=6, Males=4			

*I selected the pseudonyms based on the personality of each informant.

4.3.2.2. Data Preparation

Before importing the transcripts into NUD*IST for analyses, I “cleaned” them. By “cleaning,” I meant removing all the effects (boldness, italics, underlines, or capitals) added to the texts and replacing all the informants’ names with pseudonyms. Next, I segmented the transcripts by dividing up the text body into passages and by spacing each passage, both at the beginning and at the end, to separate it from the previous and following passages. Since each passage was made up of multiple questions and responses between non-elite Chinese students and me, I broke down the passages into phrases by, again, spacing each phrase at the beginning and end to differentiate it from the previous and following phrase. Chunking out the text body into passages and breaking down the passages into phrases not only eased the task of reading, but also allowed me to set the passages and phrases as the “units of analyses” in NUD*IST. Since each phrase or passage contains more than one idea or thought, it may be indexed/coded by more than one indexing/coding category. Setting the phrases as the smallest units of analyses and using the passages to contextualize the messages submerged in the phrases were an informed decision. The phrases were large enough to capture the reactions of non-elite Chinese students toward the links between language and ethnicity, language and culture, and language and identity. As for the passages, they provided the social or cultural context in which the reactions took shape. For future reference, I added a header to indicate the time, date, and place in which an interview took place, marked the beginning of each reference with an asterisk, and spaced the end to ease reading. For retrieval, I interspersed sub-headers between passages to highlight the topics submerged in each passage. Drawn from a focus interview with a group of non-elite Chinese high achievers, below is an example of the header added to the interview transcript. It would be ridiculous to think that I did not read the interview while I prepared it for NUD*IST analysis. As I transcribed, translated, and cleaned the interview, I went through the content of and context in which the exchanges took place. Getting oneself familiarized with data is essential to doing qualitative research. Reading and re-reading the interview helped me sort through the exchanges in ways that would facilitate the lifting of information.

Example (1)

```
+++++
+++Document Header:
*Focus group interview
*Chinese high achievers (2 females, 3 males)
*Place: Classroom (5S1), Block A, FNX
*Date: June 4, 2001
*Time: 11:00am – 1:00pm
+++++
```

4.3.2.3. Data Management

Once imported into NUD*IST, the focus group interview, like other data, was stored in the “document system” and could be retrieved by scrolling up or down the menu bar and by reading the header. All together, I imported twenty fieldnotes, thirty-six interview transcripts (individual and group), and two sets of teacher survey responses into the software. Further, I annotated through NUD*IST a summary of classified policy documents, two sets of student survey responses, ten caricatures, one-hundred fifty photos taken during important school events, and fifteen local newspaper clippings (Malay, Chinese, and English). Table 3.1.1.1 details the various types of qualitative data imported into and annotated through the NUD*IST software. The following examples illustrate the retrievals of both the “on-line” (interview) and “off-line” (photos) documents for analysis and for annotation. The term “on-line” means that the interview is available for analysis. On the contrary, the term “off-line” indicates that the photos are not available for analysis.

Example (2)

```

+++++
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Focus group 3 – Chinese high achievers
+++ Document Header:
*Focus group interview
*Chinese high achievers (2 females, 3 males)
*Place: Classroom (5S1), Block A, FNX
*Date: June 4, 2001
*Time: 11:00am – 1:00pm
+++++

```

Example (3)

```

+++++
+++ OFF-LINE DOCUMENT: The Patriotic Month
+++ Document Header:
*Photos
*Place: Assembly hall, canteen, classrooms (Block A, B, and C), FNX
*Date: August, 2000 and August, 2001
+++++

```

4.3.2.4. Data Reduction

Having retrieved the interview transcripts, I carefully examined them in order to identify the ideas or topics submerged in each phrase or passage. The examples as follows illustrate how I identified ideas and topics related to issues in teaching and in learning.

Example (4)

```

+++++
B1: She doesn't know anything.

```

B3: She came to our school this year and became the department chair. We didn't know why. At first, when we asked her questions, she said she would check. However, the next day, she forgot! The second time, she brought in an old reference book. She was even lazy to jot down the notes for us. She made photocopies for us, and we just pasted them on our notebooks.

B5: As a matter of fact, she had already bound them into one book. She could have just brought it to the class instead of photocopying it.

B3: I don't understand. Why didn't she just tell us where we could get the reference book? Instead, she asked us to copy and paste. We all had to paste the photocopies on our "Nota" (notebooks in Malay) beautifully and we pasted on and on. Eventually, the whole class got upset.

G1: We kept pasting until we couldn't paste anymore. Our notebooks couldn't hold the photocopies. The nails fell off and the book fell apart.

B3: She was boring.

K: Do you have to pay for the photocopies?

B3: Ya, we had to pay the school for the photocopies.

G2: We did the "Nota" and the principal signed on them and that's it!

G1: Why did we have to copy and paste the reference book? We could just have bought it and underlined the major points. But, do you know why? She wanted us to do it so she could show it to the State Department of Education. When we were at Form Three, we were just copying and pasting all the time. Who cared what we were doing?

+++++

In the example given above, male and female Chinese high achievers, whose names were replaced by B1, B3, B5, G1, and G2, pointed out that their history teacher, who did not seem to possess the content knowledge required for teaching, turned to the reference book for help. Unfortunately, not only did making photocopies of the reference book not help with the learning of students, it had increased their schooling expenses. Besides the lack of content knowledge of teachers, the lack of supervision of administrators seemed to have emerged as a second topic. However, as the readers may find out through the following examples, the high achievers did not follow up on the second topic, but the first.

Example (5)

+++++

G1: I also feel that she is a little bit lazy in terms of teaching. She isn't systematic. She is leaping here and there, so we all get "Xien" (bored in Mandarin)..

G2: When she teaches, she only follows the reference books published by "Pelangi" (a local publisher that publishes reference books for national exams). She follows only the reference books. That's it!

Boys: Ya.

B3: She only reads from the books. They are all like her. We can't depend on teachers at school.

G2: We all go for tutoring after school.

K: Did she simply copy from the reference books to the blackboard?

B1: It is just a waste of our time! It is better if she asks us to copy ourselves. This is the way they teach.

All boys: This is the way they teach.

G1: They are very reluctant to teach.

Boys: To analyze what they have to teach.

G1: Sometimes when we asked her questions, she looked stunned! Maybe she hadn't thought of the questions before. She is just unsystematic. She made it to the half way and she said "Oh, it looks like we talked about it before."

+++++

Again, "the lack of content knowledge of teachers" emerged as a topic from the passage given above. However, as different from the previous passage, the high achievers elaborated on the topic by pointing out that the use of reference book alone did not help with their learning unless their teacher was prepared for the class and was organized in her teaching.

Example (6)

+++++

K: Have you encountered any situations where a teacher couldn't respond to your questions?

Boys and Girls: Yes!

G1: The teacher who used to teach us “Add Math.”
 K: How did he get away from it?
 G1: “I would check it when I go home” or “I would tell you tomorrow.”
 (Boys repeated the examples given by G1)
 K: Did he or she look it up?
 Boys and Girls: No!
 B3: There were no follow-ups
 K: Did you pursue for the answer the next day?
 G1: Yes, we did, but we were getting tired of it. I mean with this kind of attitude, we gave up after a while.
 K: Did your math teacher acknowledge that he didn’t know solve the problem?
 B2: No, he didn’t acknowledge it. He only said that he had forgotten about it.
 ++++++

In the example given above, the high achievers again described the same phenomena that they had observed on their history and chemistry teachers, (1) the reluctance to acknowledge one’s lack of knowledge, and (2) the use of reference books to make up for one’s inadequacy. Having noticed the same phenomena, I developed a preliminary “tree node” (coding category), titled as “problems of teachers,” in the “index tree” (coding system) and coded the passage. As I continued to exam other passages, I compared the ideas or topics submerged in them with those submerged in the example given above, and identified the similarities and differences between them. The analysis that I had conducted so far comprised the so-called “comparing incidents applicable to each category” in the “constant comparisons method” (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Having developed the preliminary tree node to capture and articulate the common “thread” (ideas or topics) running through the passages, I proceeded to exam new passages. If the same ideas or topics were found, I placed them under the same coding category. If few phrases or passages expressed similar, but not the same ideas or topics, I developed a more general, inclusive category to include them or revised the preliminary coding category to accommodate them. By way of example, a common thread - “we cannot rely on our teachers at school” ran through the narratives of none-elite Chinese high achievers. Having placed passages expressing the same topic under the general category “problems of teachers,” I looked for the different forms through which the problems of teachers took shape and the various ways in which students

overcame the problems. Thus, having repeatedly noticed the reluctance of teachers to acknowledge their inadequacies, I decided to develop a “child node” (specific category) titled as “the saint on the stage” under the “parent node” (general category) titled as “problems of teachers.” Further, I decided to integrate a tentative category titled as “the fear of losing face” with the new category developed. Such decisions involved the deliberation on my part as a qualitative researcher and comprised the data reduction strategies commonly used in qualitative research.

It is important to point out that any given passages may carry more than one idea or topic. In Example (5), the female chemistry teacher did not have content knowledge as well as teaching skills. In addition to being coded as “the lack of content knowledge,” the passage was coded as “the lack of teaching skills,” too.

Having provided the readers with examples of the different problems of teachers, I would like to explore the various ways in which non-elite Chinese students overcame their learning problems. As summed up by G2, a female high achiever, “we all go to tutoring centers,” high achievers seemed to have made up for their learning at Omega, the largest tutoring center in the city. Drawn from individual interviews, the following examples showed that tutoring fees had become an indispensable household expense. Further, male priority seemed to be a sub-set of topic found among the examples.

Example (7)

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Student case 7 – Shu Dong

+++ Retrieval for this document: 1 unit out of 638, = 0.16%

++ Text units 68-68

Mother: If she has to go for tutoring at Omega for every subject, we can't afford it. She has siblings. Now, my second son also goes for English tutoring class. It is not that it is good or bad, he at least improves-loh! He doesn't learn anything from school. He at least improves-loh! We know if the teacher is teaching correctly. We have a little bit of foundation. Sometimes we check his and her assignments. If it is wrong and his or her teacher still ticked it as right, we know something is wrong.

+++++

Example (8)

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Student case 8 – Fu Gui

+++ Retrieval for this document: 2 units out of 163, = 1.2%

++ Text units 61-61

Mother: He “start” (she means started) going to tutoring center when he got to Form 4.

++ Text unit 121-121

Mother: Tutoring, I let him go for Malay and Biology tutoring classes at Omega. I tutored her sister myself. When he asked for tutoring, I suggested him to go to Add-Math tutoring class, but he told me he was still okay. However, this year, he told me that it was too late. It was too late for Add-Math. Probably, he knows that his father doesn’t work and even if he works, the money he makes isn’t enough. Sometimes, we fight for money at home. It affects him.

+++++

Example (9)

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Student case 9 – Zhao Hong

+++ Retrieval for this document: 3 units out of 243, = 1.2%

++ Text units 11-11:

Mother: It is still okay (she meant she can still meet the financial requirement for tutoring classes) as long as the fees aren’t unreasonable. He has a younger brother and a sister. We told him “If you can make it, study here (Malaysia) for three years. You can save the money for the future.” What should I say, he can do it in the most money saving way.

++ Text units 30-30

Mother: Definitely Omega. He has all five subjects at Omega.

++ Text units 34-34

Mother: English, Malay, Chemistry, Add-Math, and Physics. He told us that he isn’t interested in Bio (she meant Biology).

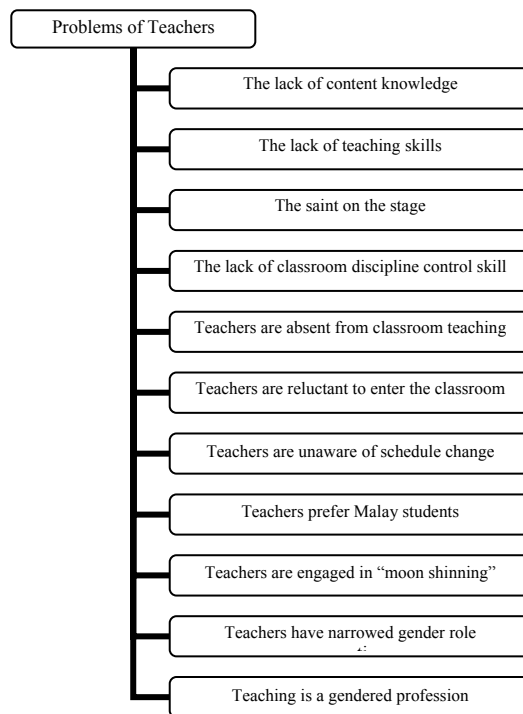
+++++

Lastly, there were cases in which I created some tentative categories thinking that they would capture and articulate the topics submerged in some passages, but later, had to set them aside because they explained little for other passages. Although some researchers argued that these categories should be preserved because the ideas or topics were still in existence, I found it more useful to keep them in the index tree as “free nodes” for future research.

4.3.2.5. Data Display

Depending on their word choice, qualitative researchers have phrased coding scheme and coding categories in different ways. For example, to Richards and Richards (1991), the coding scheme is an “index tree” and coding categories are “index tree nodes.” To Spradley (1980), the coding scheme is a “taxonomy” and coding categories are “taxonomies.” It is important to point out to the readers that regardless of word choice, within an index system, there should be a hierarchy of “parent nodes” (taxonomy), and “children nodes” (taxonomies), thus the parent node may be one of the children nodes of another parent node, etc. Figure 5 exemplifies a preliminary index tree or taxonomy developed from the analysis of two types of interviews (group and individual) with non-elite Chinese students. Titled as “problems related to teaching,” the index tree/taxonomy derives from a hierarchy of tree nodes/taxonomies that accounts for the social or cultural phenomena under investigation for this ethnographic study. In building the index tree/taxonomy and its sub-sets of tree nodes/taxonomies, I had to consider if the sub-categories belong to the same “domain” and relate to each other as a whole (Spradley 1980). In other words, if the sub-categories were similar enough that they could be grouped together or they should be divided up because there were enough differences. Further, I had to ask if there was a larger, more inclusive domain that might include as a sub-set the categories under investigation.

Figure 5 A Preliminary Index Tree (Taxonomy) for “Problems of Teachers”



As discussed earlier, the decision to preserve, integrate, or discard certain categories comprises the practice of “delimiting theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967). A “table report” generated from a “matrix search” (cross-tabulation) that explores the relationships between teacher problems and achievement levels may help explain how I carried out the approach. As the readers may notice, in Table 8, several sub-categories has “0” (no) text units coded under them. These sub-categories are “teachers are absent from classroom teaching,” “teachers are

unaware of schedule change,” and “teachers are engaged in moon shining.” Initially thought to be able to explain a significant portion of the interviews, the sub-categories were subsequently put together under an inclusive category titled “the lack of professional ethics.” Further, after comparing the properties of “teachers are reluctant to enter the classroom” with those of “teachers are absent from classroom teaching,” “teachers are unaware of schedule change,” and “teachers are engaged in moon shining,” I decided to incorporate the category into “the lack of professional ethics.” Also thought to be able to account for more data than they did were two sub-categories titled “the saint on the stage” and “the lack of classroom discipline control”; both sub-categories were integrated into the inclusive category “the lack of teaching skills.” Lastly, two categories - “teachers prefer Malay students” and “teachers have narrowed gender role perceptions” were combined into a single category titled “the imposition of Malay norms and values” after they were found carrying the same property, i.e. imposing upon non-elite Chinese students Malay gender ideology. Figure 6 shows the revised index tree (taxonomy).

Figure 6 Revised Index Tree (Taxonomy) for Problems Related to Teaching

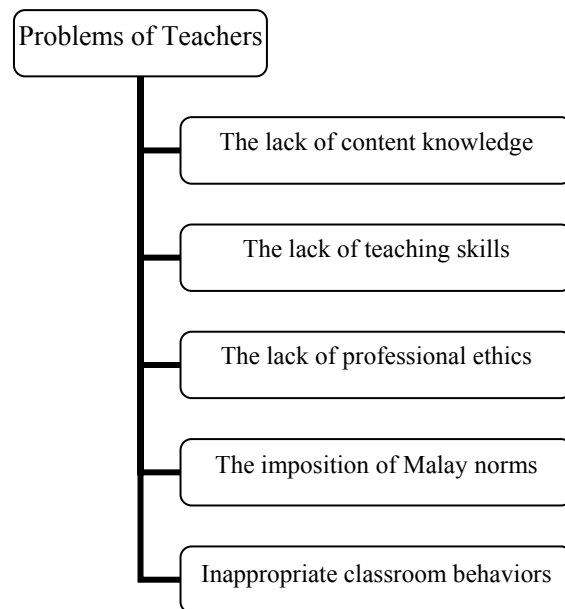


Table 8 Matrix Table Report on Problems Related to Teaching as Defined by Chinese high and low achievers

Matrix Node: (N 17) //Node Searches/ <<Node Search 4>>

Operator: INTERSECT

Description: Search for (MATRIX INTERSECT (1 2 2 1 1 1) (1 2 2 3 2)). No restriction

Operator: INTERSECT

Rows: (1 2 2 1 1 1) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Classroom Teaching or Learning/Teachers/Problems

Columns: (1 2 2 3 2) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Demographics/Achievement

Data: Number of text-units coded

Problems of teachers	High achievers	Low achievers
The lack of content knowledge	24	1
The lack of teaching skills	26	10
The saint on the stage	4	0
The lack of classroom discipline control	7	0
Teachers are absent from classroom teaching	0	1
Teachers are reluctant to enter the classroom	3	3
Teachers are unaware of schedule change	0	4
Teachers are engaged in "moon shinning"	3	0
Teachers have narrowed gender role perceptions	0	3
Teaching is a gendered profession	2	0
Teachers prefer Malay students	9	4
Teachers do not care about their teaching	26	3
Teachers exhibit inappropriate classroom behaviors	14	4

Table 9 is another example on how theory is being developed from data. "Learning book knowledge" and "rote memorization" were subsumed under the category "teaching is exam-centered" after they were found carrying similar messages. "Going to Chinese primary school"

was incorporated into “the language of instruction” for the same reason. Lastly, “Malay students are quotas” and “students progress automatically from Form 3 to Form 4” were both integrated into the category “the quota system” after they were found referring to the impact of the Quota Policy on the advancement of students from junior to senior secondary level.

Table 9 Matrix Table Report on Problems Related to Learning by Achievement Levels

Matrix Node: (N 18) //Node Searches/ <<Node Search 5>>

Operator: INTERSECT

Description: Search for (MATRIX INTERSECT (1 2 2 1 2 2) (1 2 2 3 2)). No restriction

Rows: (1 2 2 1 2 2) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Classroom Teaching or Learning/Students/Problems

Columns: (1 2 2 3 2) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Demographics/Achievement

Data: Number of text-units coded

Problems of students	High achievers	Low achievers
The language of instruction	14	3
Going to Chinese primary schools	2	1
Teaching is exam-centered	3	0
Learning book knowledge	8	0
Rote memorization	10	0
The curriculum is Malay-centric	2	5
The lack of respect of Malay teachers	0	1
Work after school	0	2
Malay students are “quotas”	3	0
Students progress automatically from Form 3 to Form 4	0	1

Table 10, which approximates the “nodes report” generated from NUD*IST, summarizes the delimiting of theory carried out on the theoretical category “problems of teachers.” The

numerical address before each node (category or sub-category) indicates its place in the index tree. Like the numerical address, the sign “/” represents the hierarchical order of each node in the tree-structured, index system. The definition following each node title indicates the ideas or topics found in data. Although qualitative data analysis is an iterative process of coding, of doing content analysis, and of building taxonomies, at some point, the researcher has to write up his or her research findings. Research findings may take the form of theory development or theory refinement. Once the researcher has exhausted reducing data (integrate or eliminate categories), or exploring the linkages between categories, he or she is in the position of writing up findings.

Table 10 Node Report on “Problems of Teachers”

QSR N6 Full version, revision 6.0.

Licensee: University of Pittsburgh

PROJECT: Dissertation Writing Project, User Geok Hwa Kee, 3:30pm, March 1, 2004.

REPORT ON NODES FROM (1 2 2 1 1 1) '~~/Problems'

Depth: ALL

Restriction on coding data: NONE

(1 2 2 1 1 1) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems

**Description:

As an educator, I cannot take classroom teaching or learning for granted. In addition to the language of instruction, teachers play a crucial role in the academic success or failure of students.

(1 2 2 1 1 1 1) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems/The lack of content knowledge

**Description:

Chinese students, whether they are high- or low-achievers, often comment on the lack of content knowledge of Malay teachers in math and science.

(1 2 2 1 1 2) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems/The lack of teaching skills

****Description:**

In addition to being criticized for not having the content knowledge required for teaching, Malay teachers seem to have problems in delivering knowledge.

(1 2 2 1 1 3) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems/The lack of professional ethics

****Description:**

As pointed out by Chinese students, some teachers are engaged in “moon shinning,” i.e. soliciting students to attend the private tutoring centers they run; others only attend to the needs of Malay students. And yet, some are absent from their classroom teaching at all.

(1 2 2 1 1 4) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems/The imposition of Malay norms and values

****Description:**

Both high- and low-achieving Chinese students pointed out that some Malay teachers discourage male and female non-Malay students sitting next to each other in class; others expect non-Malay students to remember all the names of prophets shown in the history textbook. And yet, some expect non-Malay students to obey to the teacher’s teaching even if there mistakes.

(1 2 2 1 1 5) /Shaping Argument against the National Language Policy/Support/Qualitative Data Analysis/Identifying Major Issues in Teaching and Learning/Teachers/Problems/Inappropriate classroom behaviors

****Description:**

Either high- or low-achievers pointed out that some Malay teachers slap the faces of non-Malay students with erasers, or pulled their ears as “punishments” for not being able to respond to the questions asked. Others, especially male teachers, tell dirty jokes in class.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: RETHINKING RESISTANCE

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The preliminary observation of data generated from fieldwork suggests the need to introduce critical theories to examine the social phenomena under study. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first summarize the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies selected from critical theories and discuss their relative strengths and limitations in conceptualizing social reproduction and its relationship with school and family. Second, I will identify the key domains of analyses that have emerged from the constant comparison method analysis of three types of qualitative data (field notes, interviews, surveys). As a result of these analysis and synthesis strategies, I will articulate the theoretical framework for rethinking domination and resistance.

5.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Traditional social reproduction theories focus on systemic analysis and thus reduce individuals to passive social subjects. In contrast, interpretive or hermeneutic theories focus on the actions of

individuals at the expense of systemic contradictions (Carspecken 1996). The result has been the lack of micro-and-macro-linkage in analyzing the relationship between social system and social actions. Three major theoretical developments in social reproduction that took place from the early 1970s to the late 1980s bridge this dichotomy. First, in rethinking social reproduction, focus shifted from society to the state as the context in which different social groups struggle to transform existing power relations and social inequalities. Second, in readdressing social inequalities, interest arose in the relationships among three sources of domination intrinsic to the social structure: (1) class, (2) gender, and (3) race/ethnicity. Third, in tackling the limits of traditional, structuralist (Marxist) accounts of social reproduction, resistance theories emerged that might account for social change and endow social subjects with the potential for transforming actions (Morrow 1995). Below, I provide a synopsis of two theoretical frameworks and two empirical studies selected from the theoretical advancements described above. Next, I synthesize the limitations and strengths of the theoretical models and empirical evidence presented by researchers for rethinking resistance.

5.2.1. Schools, Ideology, and Social Reproduction

Althusser (1969) argues that the social reproduction of capitalist, industrialized societies best take place through school. As a social site, schools not only impart the knowledge and skills required to produce a society's workforce, but also cultivate the appropriate attitude and behavior conducive to maintain productive social relations in the workplace. To maintain its control over the working class, the ruling class rules by force or by ideology. Ruling by force relies on repressive apparatuses (the defense ministry or the legal system) and measures (laws or policies). Ruling by ideology depends on eliciting consent from state-owned or state-related apparatuses (the mass media or the education system) (Morrow and Torres 1995; Giroux 2001). Ruling by ideology is especially true at school where the ruling class appropriates various apparatuses and measures to impose upon administrators, teachers, and students the life styles that it desires

(Ibid). School, with its daily routines and special events, embody the ideology of the ruling class and signifies the interplay between power and domination.

5.2.2. “Capital,” “Habitus,” and Cultural Reproduction

Two major concepts define the cultural reproduction theory of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). First, both theorists argue that the nature of reproduction in capitalist societies is different from traditional societies. In traditional societies, kinship maps and mediates the relationship between the social structure and social actors. In capitalist societies, especially in western developed countries, “capital” orchestrates the relationship. Whether traditional or capitalist, however, if a society is male-dominated and is characterized by gender inequality, women tend to acquire and accumulate less capital than men do and therefore have less capacity to exercise control over their lives. Three types of “capital” (economic, social, and cultural), as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest, have resulted in the differential capacity of the social actor to exercise control over his or her social life. Although in most cases, it would be easier for the social actor to convert his or her economic capital into “symbolic capital” (social and cultural) than vice versa, it is harder for women than men to do so because women lack capital investment to begin with (Collins 1993; Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun 1993; Galfarsoro 1998). Second, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) point out, social life is a constant interaction among structures, dispositions, and actions. “Habitus” originally links to the notion of social class, refers to a set of dispositions and resources that allow individuals to improvise strategies in a variety of social settings in order to deal with societal constraints. Individuals in subordinate positions tend to be equipped with the knowledge and skills or motivation and strategies that reproduce existing inequalities instead of expanding their life chances. Family and school play a crucial role in producing and reproducing “habitus” (Ibid).

5.2.3. “Learning to labour” and Cultural Reproduction

The publication of Paul Willis’ “Learning to Labour” (1981) marks a milestone in re-conceptualizing the reproduction of social inequalities and in using ethnographic fieldwork as a methodology. Through an extensive, ethnographic study of twelve anti-school male adolescents in Britain whom he called “the lads,” Paul Willis uses resistance theories to illuminate the basic contradictions among school, family, and community. Ultimately, he argues that the adolescents in his study are not forced, but rather choose to fail school. In doing so, he points out that ironically, adolescents reproduce existing social inequalities through their own anti-school culture. The male adolescents in Willis’ study build their anti-school culture by drawing on the “cultural themes” of their parents’ working class, shop floor culture. Based on a feeling of superiority over teachers and over other students at school, the adolescents disrupt classroom teaching and think that they can “get away” with whatever they do, while in reality they have thwarted their only means of achieving upward social mobility. In contrast to Bowles & Gintis (1976), whose “correspondence principle” suggests that schools teach different hidden curricula to children who came from different social classes, the male adolescents in Willis’ study exercise agency and reproduce social inequalities (Morrow and Torres 1995; Giroux 2001).

5.2.4. “Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities” and a Cultural Ecological Theory of School Performance

Though controversial, John Ogbu’s (1978, 1986, and 2003) conceptualization about the low motivation and academic challenges of Black minority groups in the U.S. has a great impact on educational research related to domination and resistance. Ogbu contends that major theories on

African American underachievement have been inadequate. Specifically, he argues that lower teacher expectations and Black cultural deprivation do not explain the impact of racial stratification on the academic performance of African American students. In the late 1970s, Ogbu proposed a “cultural-ecological model” to explain this group’s underachievement. Three minority sub-groups emerged in this model: (1) the autonomous minority, (2) the immigrant minority, and (3) the caste-like minority.

Although categorized as “minority,” the autonomous minority group has been less subordinated socially, economically, and politically than the caste-like minority. The size of the autonomous group also tends to be relatively small compared to other minority sub-groups, for example, the Jewish people in the U.S. Also known as the “voluntary minority,” the immigrant minority group leaves their home countries for economic betterment. The members of this group tend to carry an instrumental attitude that drives them to achieve at least the upper boundaries of social mobility placed on them by the majority society, for example, the various groups of Asian immigrants (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) in the U.S. Finally, as Ogbu refers to as the “involuntary minority,” the caste-like minority group comes to the United States as slaves or prisoners. Therefore, they tend to distrust the social system and dismiss the majority group standard of success, for example, African Americans. According to this model, African American students have been systematically prevented from taking full advantage of the American education system because they are given an inferior education to begin with. Furthermore, although African Americans occupy the bottom hierarchy of a caste-like society, they are expected to work as hard as White Americans for fewer rewards. Under such conditions, African American students prefer other means of attainment and abandon their efforts earlier than White American students do (Ogbu and Simons 1998; Harpalani and Gunn 2003).

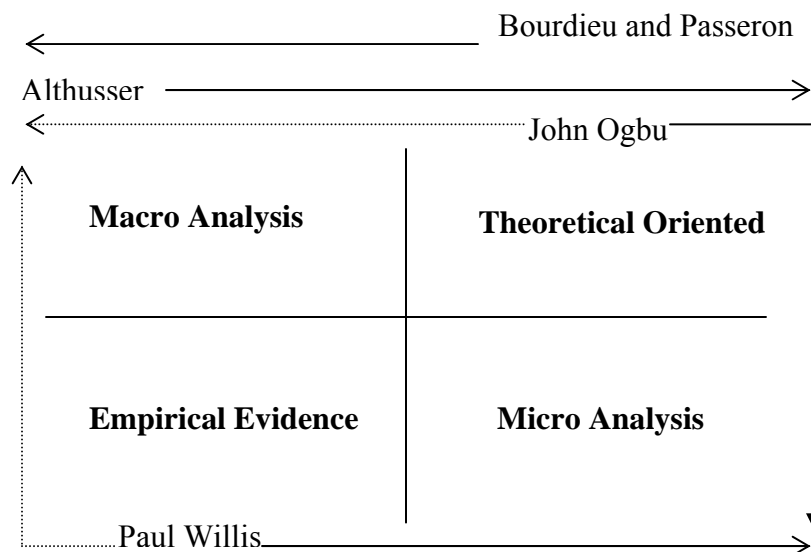
5.3. SYNOPSIS AND SUGGESTED THEORETICAL PRIORITIES

In general, although Althusser (1969) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have made theoretical advancements by locating the origins of domination and by identifying the elements of resistance, they do not support their arguments with broad empirical evidence. Furthermore, although these theorists seek to re-conceptualize the relationship between structural constraints and social actions, they do not examine the relationship directly; instead, they focus on the various modes of domination (Posteone, LiPuma, and Calhoun 1993; Morrow and Torres 1995). In the U.K., Paul Willis (1981) argues in his ground-breaking work “Learning to Labour” that the male youths in his study are actively involved in reproducing social inequalities through their own anti-school culture. This re-conceptualization of social reproduction has received some empirical support, but has had low generalizability (Morrow and Torres 1995). In the U.S., John Ogbu (1978) argues in his seminal work “Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities and Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance” that African American students generate attitudes and behaviors that are not conducive to achieving school success through their anti-White-imitating culture. This conceptualization of minority student underachievement has also received some empirical support, but such support has been inconsistent (Cross and Trueba as cited in Harpalani and Gunn 2003).

Figure 7 encapsulates the orientations of the theorists reviewed above (readers who are interested in the specific strengths and limitations of the theoretical models and empirical works reviewed are referred to Table 11). Having focused on the process of schooling as a source of domination, Althusser (Ibid) is oriented toward theory building and systemic analysis. Although Bourdieu and Passeron (Ibid) have identified the link between social system and social actions, they focus on internalized competency and enduring orientations. Both conceptions are essential

elements of systemic contradiction. Thus, Bourdieu and Passeron (Ibid) are oriented toward macro analysis. Although Willis (Ibid) has provided his analysis of the lads' behaviors with some empirical support, he does not relate his analysis to the social system that elicits such behaviors and does not examine further the relationship between societal constraints and individual actions. Thus, he is oriented toward micro analysis and empirical evidence. Having focused on the attitudes and behaviors of African American youths, Ogbu (Ibid) focuses on micro analysis and provides his analysis with some empirical support. Unlike Willis, however, Ogbu theorizes the social phenomena under study and develop a conceptual framework to explain the schooling attitudes and school behaviors of African American youths.

Figure 7 Synopsis of the Analytical Orientations of the Theorists Reviewed



However, the theories and empirical studies have left many questions unanswered. Most notably: (1) little is known about the conditions under which some minority students manage to transcend their class memberships or ethnic backgrounds and achieve upward social mobility

while others fail to do so, (2) although some studies have explored strategies used by minority students to deal with racial stratification, little is known about the ways such strategies differ among gender and class. Thus, this study extends resistance theory in two ways. First, by re-conceptualizing the relationship between structural constraints and individual actions through the strategies used by two groups of ethnic Chinese youths to deal with academic challenges and mobility barriers, this study exemplifies a joint analysis from both the macro and micro perspectives. Second, more specifically, this study contributes to resistance theory by investigating further how the intersection of gender and class hierarchies creates a powerful set of dilemmas. My research illustrates how female ethnic Chinese youths exercise agency to overcome parental preference for sons, a deep-rooted, internal orientation of the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian society.

Table 11 Strengths and Limitations of the Theoretical Models and Empirical Works Reviewed

Theorist	Theory and Concepts	Strengths	Limitations
Althusser (1969)	School, ideology, and social reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The understanding of school as an ideological state apparatus and discipline as an oppressive measure is a theoretical advancement compared to the traditional, structuralist (Marxist) accounts of schooling (Morrow and Torres 1995; Giroux 2001). 	<p>(1) Althusser may need to support his understanding of school and schooling with empirical evidence (Morrow and Torres 1995; Giroux 2001).</p> <p>(2) School is not a social site marked by the interplay between the social structure and social actors. The individuals within school are reduced into role bearers (Ibid).</p>
Bourdieu and Passeron (1977)	Capital, habitus, and cultural reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ By identifying the link between capital, habitus, and cultural reproduction, Bourdieu and Passeron conceptualize the 	In spite of their attempt to conceptualize social life without reducing to one level (objectivism) or another (subjectivism),

		relationship between the social system and social action without reducing the conceptualization to one level of another (Collins 1993; LiPuma 1993; Galfarsoro 1998).	<p>Bourdieu and Passeron may have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) overlooked the role of self-reflection in modifying one's competency, disposition, and orientation to problem solving; (2) reduced class into a homogenous entity by arguing for internalized competency, subjective disposition, and enduring orientation. <p>Thus, individual actions are reflective of class-based thinking modes and behavioral patterns (Posteone, LiPuma, and Calhoun 1993).</p>
Willis (1981)	Anti-school culture and cultural reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Through the use of ethnographic investigations in integrating case study analysis with systemic analysis, Willis provides the readers with a new model, the “cultural production model” to study social 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) A class-based, cultural model that is specific to Britain and is hard to generalize to other countries (Morrow and Torres 1995).

		<p>inequalities. Furthermore, it provoked the rethinking about the relationships between structure, agency, and culture and moved beyond the polarization between structure and agency (Giroux 2001).</p>	
Ogbu (1978, 1986, 1991, 1998)	<p>Voluntary and involuntary minorities and cultural-ecological theory of school performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ogbu moves the theory on African American underachievement from intellectual inferiority to a greater focus on American racism (Harpalani and Gunn 2003). 	<p>Although Ogbu's theoretical model generates extensive discussion, he is criticized for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) being determinist in his analysis of the experiences of minority groups (Trueba as cited in Harpalani and Gunn 2003); (2) failing to demonstrate the relationship between structural factors and behavioral patterns (Cross as cited in Harpalani and Gunn 2003).

5.4. ITERATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5.4.1. Multi-level Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves a repetitive cycle of asking and answering questions; of articulating the concepts, patterns, or themes substantiated by the data; and of constructing an interpretive framework that is meaningful. There are two broad aspects of ethnographic data analysis: (1) quantitative content analysis in which the researcher counts the frequencies of words and identifies the patterns emerging from coding as embedded in metrically defined units; (2) qualitative content analysis in which the researcher allows concepts or themes to emerge from data and develops an interpretive framework to theorize them (Reinharz 1992).

Designed to analyze non-numerical, unstructured data and to help conceptualize research findings, the Nud*ist software facilitated the analysis of three types of data for this study: (1) field notes taken during or after participant observations of two groups of ethnic Chinese students in the classrooms, on the school compound, and at home, (2) transcripts translated and transcribed verbatim from interviews with ethnic Chinese students and parents, and (3) responses translated from the Chinese student surveys distributed to Chinese students at all levels of the school.²⁴ Having transformed the three types of qualitative data into the format required by Nud*ist, I imported them into the software for “constant comparison method analysis.” Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparison method analysis is a

²⁴ To maximize the use of the infrastructure and facility, here are two sessions at *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*: (1) morning and (2) afternoon sessions. The morning session comprises the language remedial classes, form one (seventh grade), and form two (eight grade). The afternoon session comprises form three (ninth grade), form four (tenth grade), and form five (eleventh grade).

qualitative data analysis method that involves the following procedures: comparing events applicable to each category, subsuming specific categories under general ones, linking all categories in a hierarchical fashion to reflect their relationships, delimiting theory, and writing theory. Delimiting theory refers to the process of reducing categories, thus revealing the conceptual framework underlying data. Writing theory takes place when no further reduction of categories seems possible. At this point, the researcher articulates the conceptual framework underlying data and elaborates it with the highest level of abstraction as possible. Using grounded theory methodology, I coded the three types of data listed above according to the conceptual categories that I discerned among this data, comparing the properties of each coding category and consolidating these categories as I proceeded. In total, I conducted three levels of analyses during the coding process: (1) micro analysis, (2) macro analysis, and (3) macro-micro analysis.

In order to analyze data at the micro level, I began the analysis by identifying the common topics of concerns among Chinese youths in learning and in behavior. During this analysis, two general, linked sets of behavioral patterns emerged. High-achieving ethnic Chinese youths meet the achievement standards, obey discipline rules, and downplay ethnic ancestry. Low-achieving ethnic Chinese youths fail to meet the achievement standards, defy discipline rules, and highlight their ethnic ancestry. In order to investigate these behavioral patterns further, I re-coded the individual and group interviews with youths and identified “challenges in classroom learning” as the specific topic of concern among low- and high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths in academic performance. Initially, I identified eleven categories for this topic, but subsequently reduced them into four categories²⁵. All of these categories suggested teacher incompetence including the lack of relevant content knowledge, innovative teaching approaches, classroom control techniques, and professional ethics. Field notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses that contained any negative instances or statements about classroom teaching/learning were coded with one of the four categories described above. The second specific topic of concern among Chinese youths was “issues of school discipline.” I identified two categories for this topic and both categories suggested teacher bias including the labeling of male low-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths as street gangsters, which led to the intensive

²⁵ Readers who are interested in finding out more about the data reduction procedures are referred to Chapter Four for details.

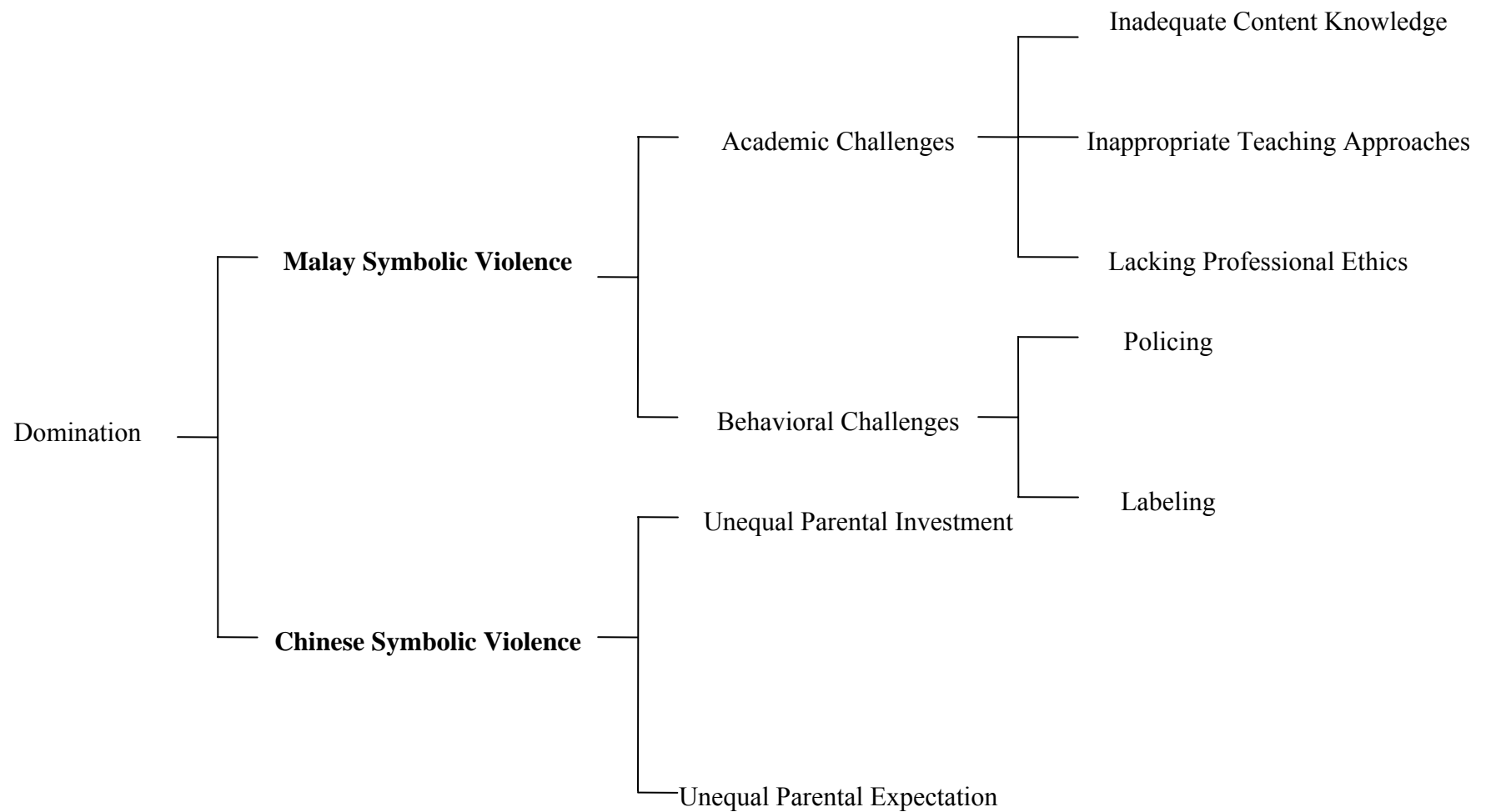
policing of these youths on the school compound, and the labeling of female low-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths as “loose” (promiscuous) girls, which led to the humiliation of these youths in front of peers or other youths.

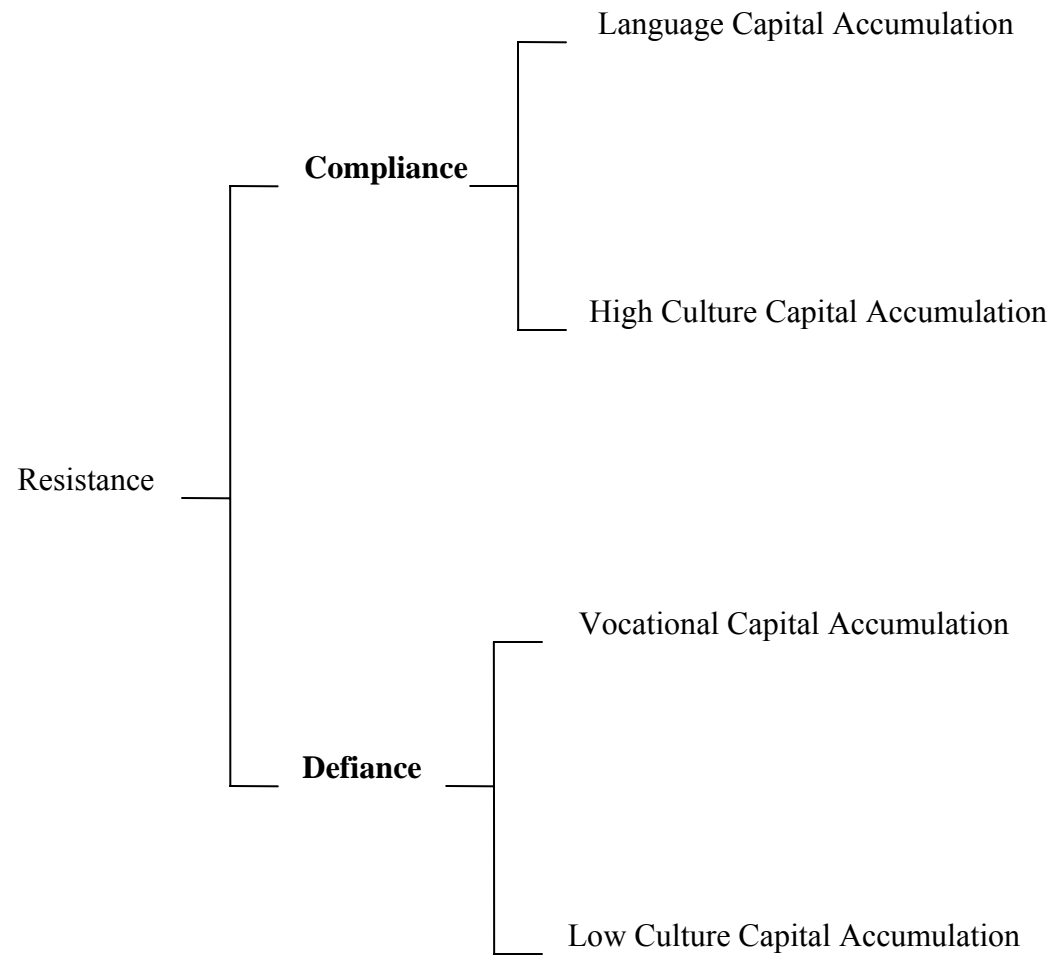
In order to analyze data at the macro level, I first reconstructed the historical backgrounds and material conditions that had escalated Malay nationalism on one hand and had triggered Chinese trans-nationalism on the other hand. Two historical events and two material conditions were identified as leading to the rise of Malay nationalism and revival of Chinese trans-nationalism: (1) the granting of citizenships to Chinese and Indian immigrants, (2) the poverty of the indigenous Malays, (3) the recovery of diplomatic and trading relations with mainland China, and (4) the questioning of Malay ruling elites toward ethnic Chinese loyalty to the Malays’ land. Both sets of events and conditions represented the need to develop a Malaysian national identity which in turn would facilitate national unity and racial harmony. Second, I summarized six major education reports written during the post-colonial period (1945–1955) and post-independence period (1957–1979) and traced the origins and trends of the national language policy. More specifically, I compared two national education reform acts that had resulted in virulent debates between Malay and non-Malay citizens: (1) the National Language Act 1967 and (2) the Higher Education Act 1996. I discovered that as the national education reform act became more Malay-centric, the opposition from non-Malays became more intense.

5.4.1.1. Micro-and-Macro Integrated

In order to establish the micro-and-macro linkage, I drew ideas and thoughts from post-colonial studies, socio-linguistics, and critical theories to conceptualize domination and resistance. I coded and re-coded data using a coding scheme that was built on the theoretical advancements made in these three sets of literature (see Figure 8). I elaborated the coding scheme through an iterative process of content analysis, coding, and building taxonomies (Spradley 1980; Reinharz 1992; Miles and Huberman 1994). Under such circumstances, I strengthened the theory building about ethnic Chinese youth resistance by conducting systematic analysis of qualitative, empirical evidence generated from extensive fieldwork.

Figure 8 Synopsis of the Coding Scheme





5.4.1.2. Inter-rater Reliability and Validity

Finally, in order to ensure the reliability of coding, I recruited and trained two coders to code the data through the Nud*ist software. I selected the coders based on the following criteria: (1) they had complimentary research skills; one coder was skilled in quantitative data analysis and the other coder, in qualitative data analysis and (2) they had no background knowledge about the research topic and carried no a-priori conceptions about the social or cultural phenomena that they examined. After the coders coded the data, I discussed with them how they developed and defined the coding categories. Next, I identified the similarities and differences between the two sets of coding categories by examining the definition of each coding category and by comparing each response coded by the coders. Eventually, I compared the coding categories developed by the coders with the coding categories that I developed to ensure that the conceptual framework constructed was reliable.

5.4.1.3. Coding and Theory Building

Theory building, in contrast to theory testing, requires systematic and thorough attention to the behaviors of and interactions among social actors within a particular social or cultural context. In order to build theory, the researcher generates data pertaining to these phenomena through observations, interviews, or surveys. He or she reduces them by identifying conceptual categories, by integrating categories based on their underlying properties, and by allowing relationships among categories to emerge without imposing preconceived ideas or thoughts (Strauss and Cobin 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994; Dey 1999). As the researcher becomes more engaged in data analysis, the process of data reduction involves increasingly finer distinctions as the researcher's conceptualizations more and more closely account for the data (Miles 1983). Although Nud*ist allows fine grained exploration of data, the researcher has to

decide on the level of complexity that he or she wants to achieve. Teasing out and shifting around categories and sub-categories of the initial “taxonomy” (conceptual framework) can go on indefinitely (Spradley 1980). At some point, the researcher has to settle on a final taxonomy with the recognition that it only approximates the meanings or meaningful relations embedded in the data that it represents.

Traditionally known as the “taxonomy” or metaphorically known as an “index tree” in the Nud*ist software, the conceptual or interpretive framework is loaded with meanings and is represented in a hierarchical fashion (Spradley 1980; Richards and Richards 1991). Made up of a hierarchy of “parent nodes” (primary categories) and “children nodes” (sub-categories) that are constantly being re-defined and re-arranged, the index tree (taxonomy) reflects the process of theory building. Table 12 approximates a section “research findings” of the node list from the coding categories report. The data associated with each nodes was retrieved from the reduction of field notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses via the Nud*ist software. The numerical address before each node title (coding category title) represents the place of such node in an index system (coding scheme) organized in a hierarchical, tree-structured fashion. Each node title represents a particular topic as it emerged from data. Through an iterative process of coding, content analysis, and building and re-building taxonomies, I revised each node title and definition in order to reflect my increasingly refined understanding. In this coding report, each topic deals with large units of social behaviors and relations as they were systematically observed through fieldwork (Prichard 1973). In addition to the numerical address, the sign (“/”) represents the layers of analysis, i.e. the hierarchical sub-categories that I conducted for the data. Because of the quality of my instrument, I was able to conduct a fine level of analysis on the field notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses. However, since the node list is hard to make sense of, especially to readers who are not familiar with the various text or table reports generated from the Nud*ist software, I include figure 9 and table 13 as follows to facilitate understanding.

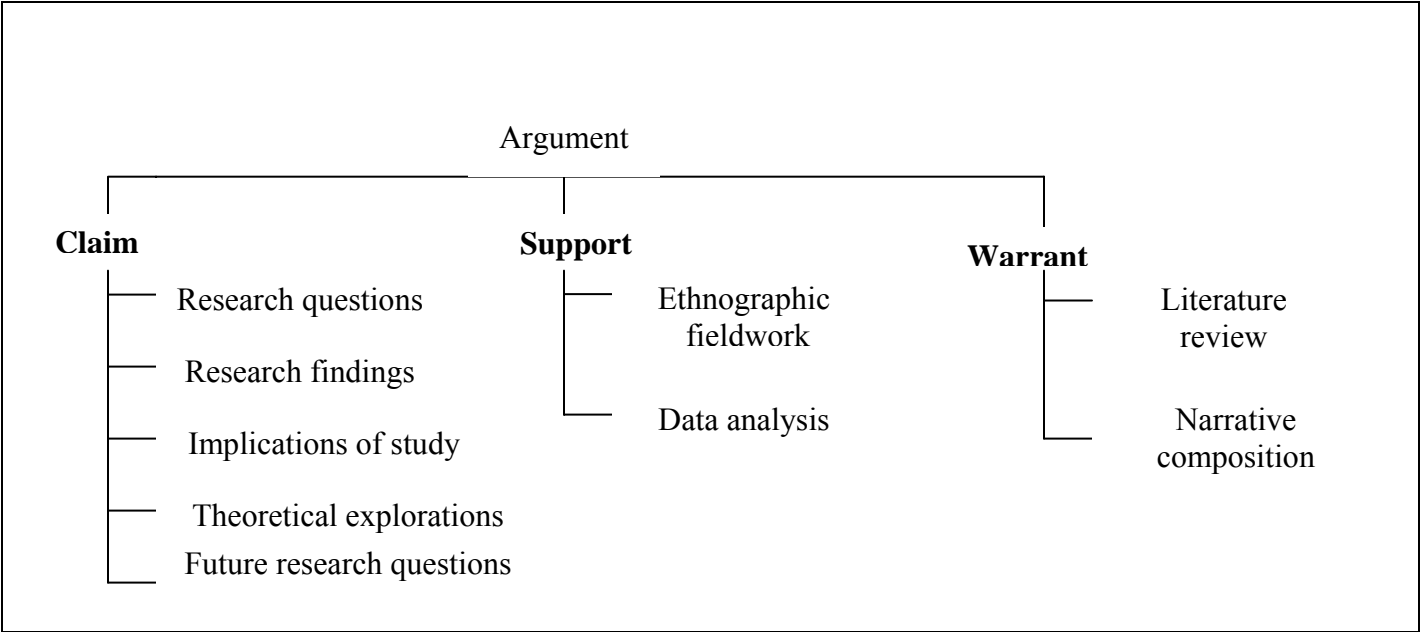
Table 12 Nodes Report on “Research Findings”

QSR N6 Full version, revision 6.0	
Licensee:	University of Pittsburgh
PROJECT:	Dissertation writing – Nudist analysis, User Geok Hwa Kee, 4:05pm, July 7, 2004
REPORT ON NODES	
Depth: (1 1 2) Research findings	
Restriction on coding data: NONE	
(1 1 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings
(1 1 2 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination
(1 1 2 1 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Malay symbolic violence
(1 1 2 1 1 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Malay symbolic violence/Challenges in classroom learning
(1 1 2 1 1 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Malay symbolic violence/Issues in school discipline
(1 1 2 1 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Diaspora Chinese symbolic violence
(1 1 2 1 2 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Diaspora Chinese symbolic violence/Traditional gender ideology
(1 1 2 1 2 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Domination/Diaspora Chinese symbolic violence/Unequal parental expectations
(1 1 2 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance
(1 1 2 2 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Compliance
(1 1 2 2 1 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Compliance/Language capital accumulation
(1 1 2 2 1 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Compliance/High culture capital accumulation

(1 1 2 2 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Defiance
(1 1 2 2 2 1)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Defiance/Vocational capital accumulation
(1 1 2 2 2 2)	/Shaping argument against the National Language Policy/Claim/Research findings/Resistance/Defiance/Low culture capital accumulation

The category “research findings” belongs to a larger index tree system that I developed to trace the origins and trends of this ethnographic project. Figure 9 represents the larger, more inclusive index tree system that indicates the place of the research findings category in the overall research design. In order to contextualize the final analysis, which substantiates my argument against the national language and quota system reform policies, I used three categories to reflect the hypothesis used to formulate research questions, the fieldwork carried out to collect empirical evidence, and the literature reviewed to substantiate research findings. These categories posit a close fit between “claim, support, and warrant,” three major elements in the analysis of policy argument (Dunn 1994). A claim is a thesis statement of an argument. In order to convince the readers that my claim is sound, I provide factual evidence (figures) or motivational appeals (values). A warrant is a guarantee of reliability. In order to ensure the readers that there is a sound relationship between my claim and support, I review related literature and craft narratives to establish the micro (person) and macro (system) linkage.

Figure 9 Index Tree System for Overall Research Design



Last of all, with ideas and thoughts drawn from the critical theories, socio-linguistics, and post-colonial theories, I use the collected command on all the sub-categories belonging to a parent category in order to build a theoretical framework for ethnic Chinese youth resistance. Table 13 represents three levels of the coding scheme through three categories: (1) first, (2) second, and (3) third and defines the meaning of each coding category according to its coding order.

Table 13 Synopsis of the Coding Categories Hierarchy

First Level Categories	Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Fourth Level Categories	Synopsis
Domination				Post-colonial Malaya experiences various forms of internal oppressions as experienced by other post-colonies, most notably, the institutionalization of Malay hegemony and racial stratification through major national development policies.
	Malay Symbolic Violence			Closely related to the historical process of nation building, this concept refers to the imposition of a “cultural arbitrary,” e.g. an officially sanctioned standard language upon individuals or groups who do not possess the linguistic competence. In the Malayan context, the formulation, enactment, and implementation of the national language policy have resulted in the imposition of Malay as the national language upon non-Malays, who do not have the linguistic competence to perform at school or at work according to the linguistic norms favored by the national language.
		Academic Challenges		
			Inadequate Content Knowledge	Chinese students, whether high- or low-achieving, frequently comment on the lack of content knowledge of Malay teachers in mathematics,

				science, and English language subjects.
			Inappropriate Teaching Approaches	In addition to being criticized for not having the content knowledge required for classroom teaching, Malay teachers seem to be lack of teaching approaches. They do not how to deliver knowledge in an effective way.
			Lacking professional ethics	As pointed out by both high- and low-achieving Chinese youths, some Malay teachers have solicited students to the tutoring classes that they run while others only attend to the needs of Malay students. And yet, some are absent from their classroom at all.
		Behavioral Challenges		
			Policing of Male Chinese Youths	Being labeled as street gangsters, low-achieving male Chinese youths reported on the intensive policing of Malay discipline teachers on school compound.
			Labeling of Female Chinese Youths	Being labeled as loose girls, low-achieving female Chinese youths reported on the humiliation of Malay discipline teachers in front of peers and other groups of youths.
	Chinese Symbolic Violence			Diaspora Chinese society in Malaysia witnesses the reproduction of male preference as a form of internal oppression. Under such condition, women from lower-middle class families tend to experience both gender and class discriminations in their education and career aspirations.
		Unequal Parental Investment		In general, non-elite Chinese Malaysian parents tend to expect their sons to become “professionals” in the technical field (doctors, lawyers, or engineers) and their daughters, nurses, bookkeepers, or teachers. In order to facilitate the

				career aspirations of their sons, Chinese parents tend to pull together family resources to invest their economic capital in sons, not daughters.
		Unequal Parental Expectations		Rooted in Confucianism, traditional Chinese gender ideology confines the roles of women to filial daughters, obedient wives, and dedicated mothers. As a consequence, parents tend to expect much less from daughters than sons.
Resistance				Post-colonial Malaya experiences various forms of local struggles as experienced by other post-colonies. “Resistance,” in this context, is a way of carving out a “social space” to affirm Chinese norms and values, so it can co-exist with Malay norms and values.
	Compliance			High-achieving Chinese youths obey school discipline rules by coming to school on time, by attending classes, and by following the hair and dress codes. They downplay their ethnic background and stay quiet about the exclusion of non-Malay cultures in major school events or activities. They accommodate to the discrimination of Malay administrators by attending Chinese language classes after regular school hours and support school improvement programs despite the exclusion of Chinese students from these programs at large.
		Language Capital Accumulation		In preparation for the national exams or for overseas study in English-speaking countries, after school, high-achieving Chinese youths accumulate Malay or English at private tutoring centers.
		High Culture Capital Accumulation		In response to the community’s efforts in preserving and developing Chinese culture, high-achieving Chinese youths participate in collegiate

				debates or improvised speech contests held by regional dialect clans or associations.
	Defiance			“Resistance,” in the context of this study, refers to the informal, unorganized oppositional behaviors of non-elite Chinese students that challenge the ethics of Malay discipline teachers, which include: (1) the favoritism of Malay students, and (2) the stereotypes of Chinese students in school discipline.
		Vocational Capital Accumulation		In preparation for the job market, low-achieving Chinese youths acquire vocational or technical skills through apprenticeships in small businesses run by local Chinese. In general, male youths tend to become apprentices at motorcycle repair shops while female youths tend to become apprentices at beauty salons.
		Low Culture Capital Accumulation		As a gesture of supporting the efforts of the community in upholding Chinese culture, after school, male low-achieving Chinese youths learn dragon or lion dances while female youths learn traditional Chinese dances with regional dialect clans.

5.5. CONCLUDING DOMAINS: PRINCIPLES AND PATTERNS

5.5.1. Resistance Modes and Academic Performances

Successful academic performance and constructive social interaction at *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)* require Malay linguistic competence and cultural capital because instructional discourse is carried out in the Malay language and social exchanges are enacted through Malay customs. Lacking Malay linguistic competence and cultural capital, ethnic Chinese youths draw on the knowledge and skills acquired through Chinese primary schools and/or attitudes and behaviors cultivated through Diaspora Chinese families to learn and interact at *FNX*. Although there are individual variations, two dominant behavioral patterns (compliance and defiance) emerged from the observations of the two groups of ethnic Chinese youths in this study. High-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths meet the achievement standards, obey disciplinary rules, and downplay their ethnic ancestry. In contrast, low-achieving youths fail to meet achievement standards, defy disciplinary rules, and highlight their ethnic ancestry. Neither high nor low achievers exhibit any formal or organized forms of resistance to challenge school authority, whether the oppressive management of Malay administrators or the problematic teaching practices of Malay teachers. The performances and behaviors of the two groups of ethnic Chinese youths reflect the “mixed messages” sent out by parents about academic performance and upward mobility (Ogbu and Simons 1998). Parents of high achievers distrust school, but believe that school success leads to economic advancement. As a consequence, these high achieving youths compensate for Malay teacher incompetence and tardiness by attending language, mathematic, and science tutoring classes. Through constant drilling, they hope that they can pass the entrance exams of national

universities with flying colors. Parents of low achievers trust school, but do not believe that their children can succeed in school and therefore cannot enjoy the social and economic rewards of the education system. As a result, these youths defy classroom or school rules, cut classes or skip school, and drop out of school. By becoming apprentices at bakeries, beauty salons, motor-cycle repair shops, restaurants, ... , these youths eventually work at the various small businesses run by ethnic Chinese and reproduce the class hierarchy of the Diaspora Chinese society in Malaysia.

5.5.2. Capital Accumulation and Identity Formation

As described above, in order to expand their chances for economic success in life, low-achieving Chinese youths acquire vocational capital through apprenticeships with Chinese small businesses while high-achieving youths accumulate language capital through language, mathematic, and science tutoring programs run by Chinese educators. Thus, Diaspora Chinese identities are formed out of the different capital accumulation strategies used by youth to deal with academic challenges and mobility barriers. Furthermore, despite the efforts of the Malaysian government in molding a national identity that is Malay in character, this study shows that the two groups of ethnic Chinese youths at *FNX* develop “bi-ethnicity” (Chinese and Malay, or Chinese and English) because of job market requirements, higher education opportunities, and community solidarity efforts (Kaplan 1994; Suryadinata 1997). Although identifying themselves as “Malaysians” when interacting with Malays in matters of government rules and regulations, ethnic Chinese youths identify more with Chinese language and culture because jobs available at the private sector, which are largely made up of small businesses run by Chinese, require Chinese instead of Malay language competence. Furthermore, these youths place higher value on English than on Malay because overseas education in the west and in the developed countries in Asia requires English language competence. In response to community efforts to preserve linguistic and cultural heritages, high achievers participate in after school collegiate debates or improvised speech contests. These “high” cultural events are held by dialect clans which have

upheld Chinese language and culture since the British colonial period (Suryadinata 1997). Low-achievers also take part in cultural events held by dialect clans, but they tend to participate in “low” cultural events such as dragon or lion dances.

5.5.3. Gender and Class Stratification

Unequal levels of parental support and differential expectations for academic performance and for careers characterize the different school experiences of female and male ethnic Chinese youths. Female ethnic Chinese youths who come from lower-middle class and less-educated families face limited life choices as their parents continue to convert their economic capital into the social capital of sons and discourage daughters from pursuing higher education. Therefore, the existing social stratification of the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian society is reproduced through the different life chances available to youths based on their gender and class origins. In order to succeed in school, female ethnic Chinese youths who come from upper-middle and more-educated families suppress their negative feelings about male preference in order to reduce the impact of gender on learning motivations and career aspirations. The gender and class hierarchies of the Diaspora Chinese society are reproduced through the socialization at home, one of the “three pillars” of culture, where male youths are encouraged to become professionals in technical fields, and female youths are taught to be filial daughters, obedient wives, and dedicated mothers (Suryadinata 1997).

5.5.4. Ethnicity and Ethnic-stereotypes

Ethnic Chinese low-achievers complain that they are being policed and labeled by Malay discipline teachers as members of the *Kongsi Kelab* - the “Chinese gangster club,” or *Bo Shia* -

the “loose (promiscuous) girls ring.” To avoid being policed and labeled as street gangsters or loose girls, high-achieving youths conform to discipline rules by coming to school on time, by attending classes, by following the hair and dress codes, and by being respectful toward their teachers. Their behaviors reflect the positive stereotype made by Malay teachers and administrators of Chinese high achievers as *Halus*, “gentle,” and *Rajin*, “diligent,” and their parents are less interested in making money and hence are less *Kia Shu*, “aggressive.” Low achievers, on the other hand, continue to defy discipline rules by coming to school late, by cutting classes, by disobeying hair and dress codes, and by talking back to their teachers. Their behaviors unfortunately reinforce the negative stereotype made by Malay discipline teachers that Chinese low achievers are *Kasar*, “rude,” and *Bodoh*, “stupid,” and their parents are only interested in making money and hence, are aggressive. Thus, *Halus* and *Kasar* are two class “habitus” used by Malay discipline teachers to describe the school behaviors of Chinese youths.

5.6. GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RETHINKING “DOMINATION” AND “RESISTANCE”

Figure 10 characterizes the theoretical/conceptual framework elaborated through exploring the relationships among the coding categories, through linking the categories into a coherent scheme, and through integrating the four key analytical domains into the framework.

5.6.1. Implications of the Guiding Theoretical Framework in Rethinking “Domination”

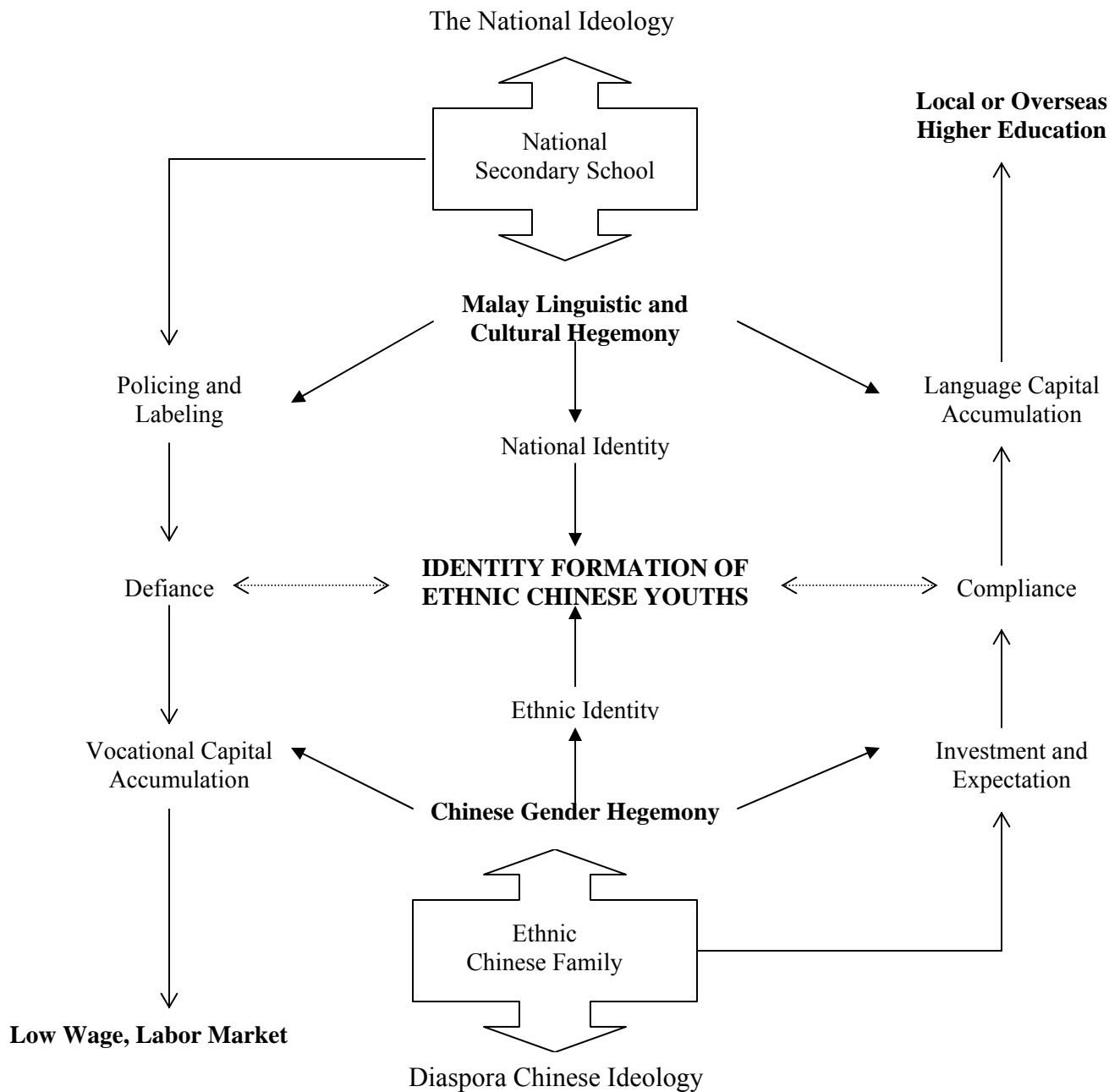
Domination takes different forms. In the context of this study, domination refers to linguistic assimilation, ideological imposition, and cultural transmission. Malay has ascended as the national language as a result of the national language policy and the suppression of any discussions about the policy through the Sedition Act – two actions that assured linguistic hegemony. As Malay nationalists took over the battle for nationhood, Malay as the national language has been legitimized through the national education system, maintained its hegemony and has been set out as a basis for the subsequent cultural contour of the new Malaysian state. “Symbolic violence,” a major concept closely related to the production and reproduction of language through the education system and the historical process of nation building, refers to the imposition of a cultural arbitrary officially sanctioned language imposed upon individuals or groups who do not possess the language competence to perform according to the linguistic norms required by the official language (Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun 1993).

As a national secondary school, or as the ethnic Chinese say “a Malay high school,” *FNX* imposes upon non-Malay students, the *Rukun Negara*, “national ideology,” as defined by Malay nationalists. In accordance with the stated ideology – “belief in God [Allah], loyalty to king and country, upholding the constitution, rule of law, good behavior and morality” – *FNX* transmits this ideology through the following school functions: (1) the incorporation of Islamic prayer into the opening or closing ceremony of major school events, (2) the display of Koranic verses on the walls of school buildings, (3) the raising of national flag and singing of the national anthem in weekly assemblies, (4) the separation of male and female students in classroom seating arrangements, (5) the imposition of Islamic dietary codes for food served at the school canteen, and finally, through (6) mandatory religious and moral education classes for all students.

On a parallel level, domination takes the form of the transmission of traditional, cultural norms and values in the ethnic Chinese community. As with other Diaspora Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the Chinese Malaysian community imposes traditional gender

ideologies upon Chinese children and adolescents. In the tightly knit community where every member is hammered into his or her slot in the social hierarchy, an effective way to transcend limited upward social mobility is to accumulate capital. There are three types of capital: (cultural, social, and economic), but in most cases, it is easier to convert economic capital into social capital rather than vice versa. The unequal, parental distribution of economic capital (e.g. investment in higher education) favoring sons rather than daughters has kept Chinese girls and women from acquiring social capital (e.g. higher education and better pay jobs) in order to achieve upward social mobility. As a consequence, it is harder for girls and women to exert control over their lives, and even harder for them to exercise agency for the needed change of social status.

Figure 10 Guiding Conceptual Framework for Modes of Resistance and Identity Formation of Ethnic Chinese Youths



5.6.2. Implications of the Guiding Theoretical Framework in Rethinking “Resistance”

Thinking they are making a well-calculated decision, the parents of the two groups of ethnic Chinese youths in this study sent them to study at *FNX* with the hope that they could accumulate Malay language capital and move up the social ladder. In practice, such decision turns out to be poorly informed as evidenced by the academic challenges and upward mobility barriers facing these youths. In order to compensate for Malay teacher incompetence, high-achieving youths accumulate language capital (Malay and English) and plan to pursue elusive entry into higher education after high school. Depending on their parents’ financial status, some of these youths plan to continue their education at local public universities while others plan for overseas higher education in the west. Low achievers, being policed and labeled as street gangsters or promiscuous girls, defy the discrimination and stereotypes from Malay administrators and teachers by walking out of the weekly assemblies. Lacking parental support in schooling, they eventually drop out of school and join the job market by working for Chinese small businesses.

Historically, “accommodation without resistance” is a common strategy used by immigrant minorities in Southeast Asia to negotiate successfully for multiple cultural identities without having to assimilate into the indigenous majority culture (Suryadinata 1997). Since the independence of Malaysia in 1957, accommodation without resistance has been the cultural politics undertaken by ethnic Chinese in order to deal with social inequality and internal hegemony. Although broadly interpreted as ethnic Chinese responses to Malay nationalist intimidation toward their core cultural norms and values, resistance may take on the disguise of accommodation (Ibid). In becoming Malaysian citizens, most ethnic Chinese accommodate to the mainstream Malay ways of life while affirming their culture through the “three pillars” of Chinese culture (Chinese schools, clans or associations, and Chinese mass media) (Ibid). Although the two groups of ethnic Chinese youths in this study exhibit two dominant types of behaviors (accommodation and defiance) that are similar to the cultural politics of the ethnic Chinese community as a whole, the strategies that they have improvised and employed are not only class-based, but also gender-based.

5.7. SUMMARY

To sum up, two sets of experiences have combined to give meanings to the articulation and elaboration of theory about ethnic Chinese youth resistance. First, I review related theoretical models and empirical works and identify the need of micro-and-macro linkage in research. Second, I systematically analyze data through the constant comparison method analysis and address the need of micro-and-macro linkage through identifying the major sources of domination and key elements of resistance. In the following chapters (six, seven, and eight), I show the readers the use of the guiding theoretical framework in understanding the interplay of ethnicity, gender, and class in two sets of interrelated social phenomena: (1) school behavior and academic performance, and (2) strategy used and identity formation.

6. CHAPTER SIX: RESISTANCE, SCHOOL FAILURE, AND ETHNIC REVIVAL

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the responses of students and teachers toward the “Zero School Truancy Campaign,” a prime example of Malaysian school reforms. First, I provide the origin of the campaign and the procedures involved in carrying out the related school improvement programs. Second, I compare the issues and concerns about the program implementation from the perspectives of both the administration and those administered. Finally, through two social dramas, I take the readers to *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)* to experience the chaotic lack of student discipline in day-to-day school functions, especially how ethnicity and ethno stereotypes intersect and affect on the school behaviors of two groups of non-Malay students and their identity formations.

6.2. BACKGROUND: *KEMPEN PONTENG SIFAR*, THE “ZERO SCHOOL TRUANCY CAMPAIGN”

The Zero School Truancy Campaign is a key element of the National Effective School Reform, which aims to create a safe and orderly school environment (Unit of Student Affairs 2001). The Campaign came from *Program Integrated Negeri Tangani Anti Sosial*, the “Integrated State Program against Anti-Social Sentiments,” an earlier initiative of the State Department of Education of Johore to alleviate anti-social sentiments among school truants or school drop outs (Unit of Student Affairs 1997). The opening statement of the Campaign is as follows:

Our national education is in a process of reform. Assuming that school is an important site for human development, the State Department of Education wants to address the concern of the public regarding the increasing number of students who engage in juvenile delinquency or exhibit anti-social sentiments. To mention just a few, students may engage in juvenile delinquency through drug dealing, fighting, smoking, stealing, or joining gangster clubs. They may exhibit anti-social sentiments through embracing a negative attitude toward self, family, society, or using words and expressions that degrade the Islamic faith. The Human Development Sector believes that the task of human development is a continuous effort to raise the standard of student discipline through character building and through the cultivation of traditional values and religious morals. All these efforts aim to improve the overall quality of education.

Source: Human Development Sector, the Johore State Department of Education (Unit of Student Affairs 2001b)

The final goal of the campaign is to prevent school truants and school drop-outs from becoming juvenile delinquents or social deviants as adults. In order to turn the reform programs designed for the Zero School Truancy Campaign into an important instrument for tackling school truancy and its related social problems, the state department of education calls for “cooperative and systematic management between administrators and teachers” at the school level (Unit of Student Affairs 2001b).

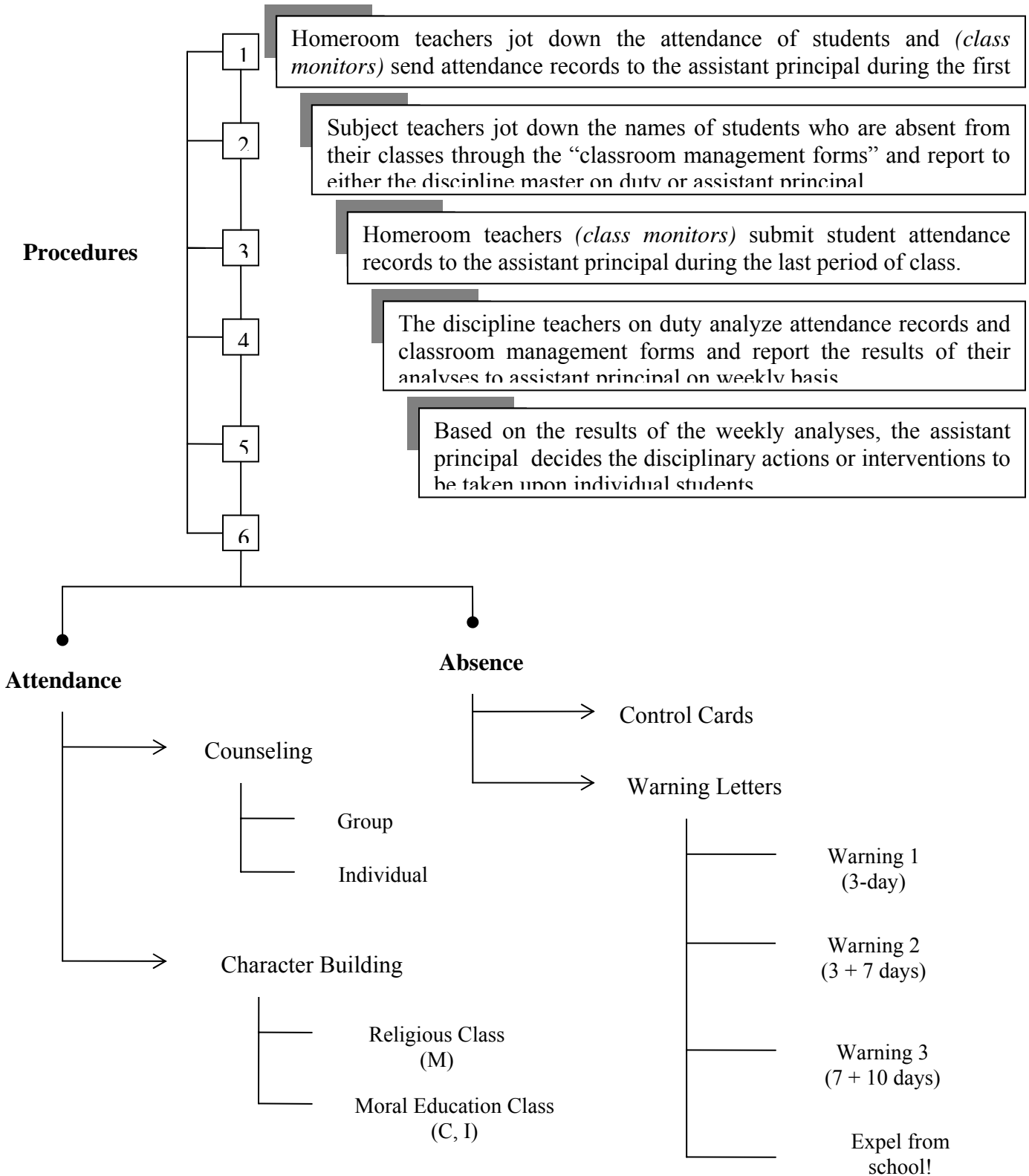
At *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)*, the principal carries out the cooperative and systematic management of the campaign in the following order. First, he delegates the authority to choose reform programs to the assistant principal²⁶, who is officially titled *Penolong Kanan Hal Ehwal Murid* (PKHEM), the “right hand of the principal who is in charge of student affairs.” Based on the programs proposed during the principal assistantship training workshops, the assistant

²⁶ In Malaysia, the school management comprises the principal, assistant principals, and afternoon supervisors. Known to teachers and students as “assistant principal one” and “assistant principal two,” and to the principal as his or her “left hand” and “right hand,” the two assistant principals assist the principal in planning for curriculum and student affairs.

principal can decide if he wants to adopt and adapt for his school two of the following reform programs: (1) *Sistem Kad Kawalan*, the “Control Card System,” (2) *Program Pembangunan Insan*, the “Character Building Program,” or (3) *Program Integrasi Kaum*, the “Integration of Ethnic Groups Program.” Second, after choosing the reform programs, the assistant principal delegates the task of planning to *Lembaga Disiplin*, the “Student Discipline Governing Board.” Before delivering state mandates to the teachers at school, the principal and assistant principal call for a meeting with the student discipline governing board to discuss the details and nuances involved in carrying out the two reform programs choices. Next, the principal and assistant principal call for faculty meetings in both sessions²⁷ to announce the reform programs chosen and to explain the “official procedures” established to identify school truants (see Diagram 11) (Unit of Student Affairs 2001a).

²⁷ In order to maximize the use of school buildings and facilities, the government divides national secondary schools into two sessions: (1) morning session /senior secondary level (grade tenth to eleventh), and (2) afternoon session/senior secondary level (grade seventh to ninth).

Figure 11 Official Procedures Established for Identifying School Truants



Designed as an operating manual, the official procedures help the principal and assistant principal define the roles and functions of the student discipline governing board in carrying out the chosen reform programs. The board, consisting of the discipline masters, discipline teachers, school counselors, head teacher of the school prefect board, and school prefects, are expected to follow through the procedures and to cooperate with the management. In the initial stage of the campaign, the student discipline governing board identifies the *Kelompok Yang Rajin Ponteng*, “hard core school truants” and distributes control cards to their homeroom teachers (see Table 14). In practice, however, as the procedures are adapted at *FNX*, class monitors, as discipline teachers comment, act as the “spear carriers”- delivering attendance records to the assistant principal *before* and *after* school, collecting the classroom management forms from the subject teachers of the day, and reminding every subject teacher of his or her duty in taking student attendance.

Table 14 “Hard Core School Truants” Identified by the Student Discipline Governing Board in the Initial Stage (October–December) of the Zero School Truancy Campaign, *FNX*, 2001

<i>Grade Levels</i>	<i>Malay N=1680</i>	<i>Chinese N=437</i>	<i>Indian N=485</i>
• Form One	21	3	3
• Form Two	41	1	4
• Form Three	25	10	14
• Form Four	46	8	13
• Form Five	34	5	11
Total number of school truants	167	27	45
Percentage by total number of students	25%	6%	9%

The ultimate purpose of setting up the operating manual would seem to be to hold the principal accountable for implementing the zero school truancy campaign. If so, putting the principal back at the center of inquiry and understanding where they are positioned at the new administrative structure of student discipline makes the implementation model proposed by the state department of education, not less an issue, but less ambiguous to the all the school personnel involved. Under the zero school truancy campaign, the term “reform” refers not to a total overhaul, but to a partial revision of the organization of the student discipline governing board to include teachers as an important component of the implementation process. However, before doing so, I would like to compare the implementation of school reform programs related to the zero school truancy campaign from the perspective of the administration with that of the administered (see sections 6.3 and 6.4). After making the comparison, I will focus on the changes in the roles and functions of the principal before and after the campaign (see subsections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2).

6.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REFORM PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

At the system level, the *Johore* state department of education assumes a top-down implementation model (see Figure 12). Assuming that in the process of planning for the control card system program, the principal would develop skills to systematically manage the student discipline governing board and to facilitate better communication between board members and teachers of the three ethnic groups, the state department of education clearly embraces a structural perspective of school management²⁸. Without an understanding of how a human individual first begins to develop his or her personal identity during adolescence and how

²⁸ Readers who are interested in learning more about the various perspectives involved in school management are referred to Dalin (1998). *School development theories and strategies: an international handbook*. New York, New York: The international learning cooperative.

language plays a vital role in structuring personal identity²⁹, the state department of education imposes Malay-centric norms and values upon non-Malay students. In doing so, they may have assumed that through the character-building program school truants would embrace a positive attitude toward self, family, and society. Furthermore, non-Malay school truants are expected to develop a “national” (Malay-Islam) character that is consistent with ideals of Malaysian citizenship.

In understanding the implementation model proposed by the state department of education, it is helpful for the readers to see the reform programs under the Zero School Truancy Campaign as a means of assimilating “marginal” students into the “ideal” - “national” (Malay-Islam) culture³⁰. At the national level, the national culture, promulgated in the “National Philosophy of Education” (1990), identifies the final goal of the national education system as the cultivation of students who are “intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God [Allah]” (Ministry of Education Malaysia 1990).

“Marginal” students, in the terms of the Zero School Truancy Campaign, are defined as students who are “marginalized” geographically, socio-culturally, and politically. Geographically, *FNX* is located on the periphery of *Johore Bahru*, the capital city, and is classified as *Sekolah Luar Bandar*, “school which is located on outskirts of the city” by the state department of education. Students of *FNX* came from Malay ghetto villages, Chinese small towns, or subsidized housing projects that have a mix of poor Malays, Indians, and illegal Indonesian immigrants. Since the Asian Economic Crisis in the late 1990s, the incidence of poverty in the state of *Johore* increased from two percent to four percent between 1995 and 1999. Increasing poverty has fueled ethnic tensions between poor Malays and Indians in these ghetto villages and has resulted in raging criminal activities in low-income housing projects (Kua 2001).

²⁹ Readers who are interested in learning more about how language affects identity development are referred to Erikson (1959). Youth and American identity. In C. Lemert (Ed.), Social theory: The multicultural and classic readings (pp. 355-357). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

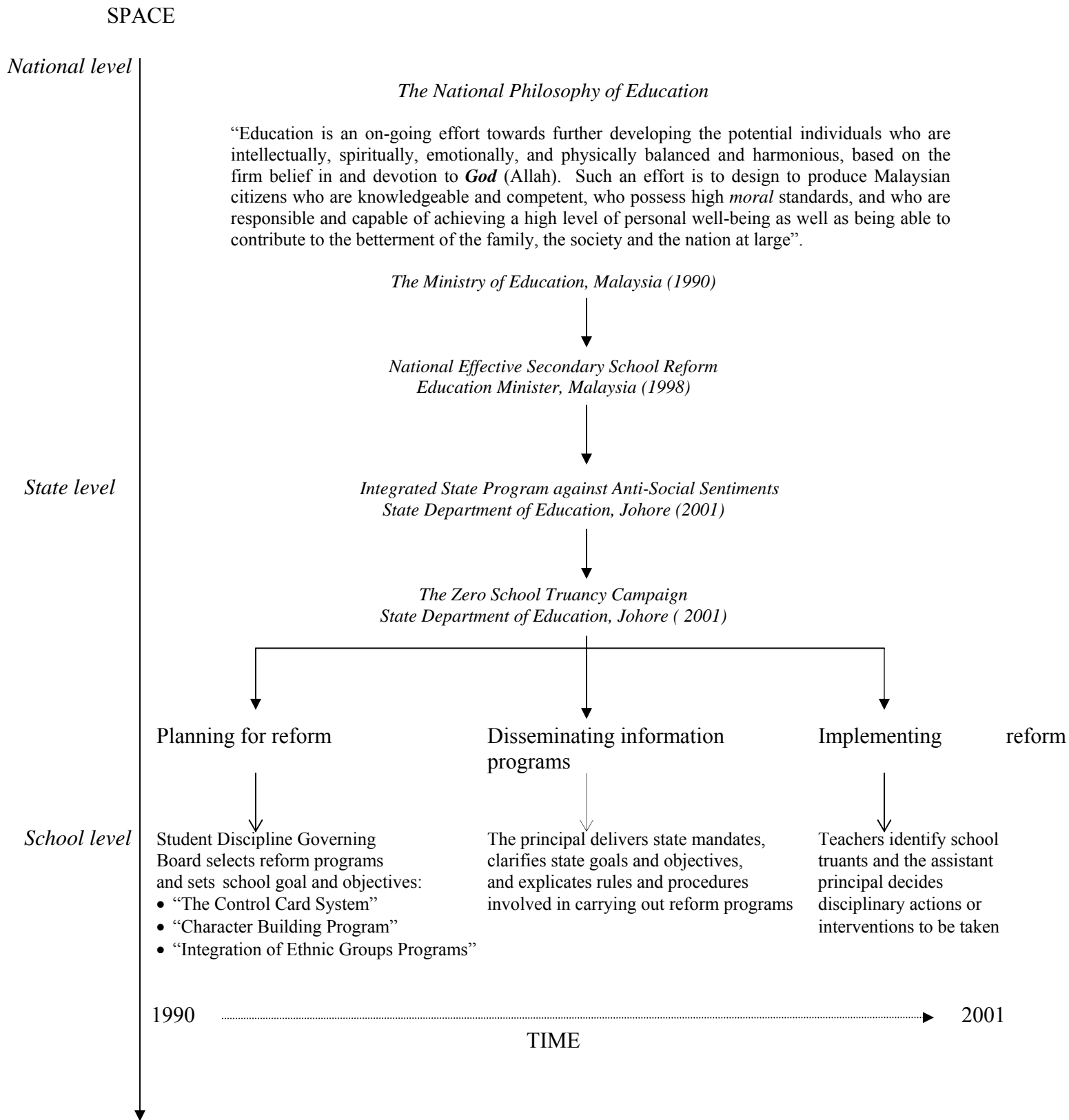
³⁰ The Malaysian Chinese Culture Congress, made up the Chinese School Council and other non-profit organizations, submitted a "Joint Memorandum on National Culture" to the government in 1983 to express its concern of the government's definition of the national culture as the Malay culture. As expected, the memorandum was not taken well by the government and the congress leaders were accused for igniting “highly racially sensitive issues.”

Socio-culturally, parents of “marginalized” students are factory workers, petty traders, street vendors, or migrant workers who can barely articulate their expectations for their children’s education. A metaphor shared among teachers on schooling likens *FNX* to a “factory” reproducing cheap laborers for the factories in the industrial area nearby. As teachers frequently commented, “parents of students at *FNX* mostly came from *SES yang rendah*, the ‘lower-middle stratum of the socio-economic hierarchy,’ and are busy *cari duit*, ‘looking for money.’” As a implementation agency at the local level, *FNX* is a site of “cultural transmission”³¹ of the zero school truancy campaign. The degree of success of the transmission of the “national” (Malay-Islam) culture is closely related to the extent to which the reform programs under the campaign can overcome the class “habitus” of students. Tacitly inherited from parents and acquired through early childhood, “habitus,” according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), are dispositions or “cultural capital” of students that form the basis for their assimilation into school culture. The lack of appropriate cultural capital for assimilation into the national culture has left non-Malay students feel alienated.

Politically, as a school community, *FNX* is made up of a student population that is roughly proportional to the ethnic ratio of small town Malaysian society: sixty-five percent Malays to fifteen percent Chinese to twenty percent Indians. Since the majority of students and teachers of *FNX* are Malays, they have a greater say in decisions made within the zero school truancy campaign and about the improvement of student discipline in general. For example, in addition to exerting control over school truants through control cards and modifying behavior through character building, most of whom are actually Malays; Malay teachers believe that corporeal punishment would help improve school attendance. In the first effective school surveys that I distributed to students of the three ethnic groups, Malay students, like Malay teachers, saw canning as the most effective means to reduce school truancy and urged the administrators to can students in weekly school assemblies. More strikingly to me, however, is the apathy of non-Malay students and teachers toward the domination of the “national” (Malay-Islam) culture in daily school functions.

³¹ Readers who are interested in the concept of cultural transmission are referred to Spindler (1974). *Education and cultural process: toward an anthropology of education*. New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Figure 12 Planning Process of the Zero School Truancy Campaign at the Systemic or Intergovernmental Level



6.4. IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL REFORM PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS

At the school level, delineating the position and ethnicity of the individual members of the student discipline governing board reveals not only a bureaucratic hierarchy that is marked by clear lines of authority and a definite set of duties, but also the effect of the Quota System Reform Policy on membership. According to the quota system, the ethnic ratio of the administrators of any given public institution, including the national secondary schools, should be fifty-five percent Malays to forty-five percent non-Malays (Yang 2001). At *FNX*, the ratio appears to be eighty-one percent Malays to twenty-seven percent non-Malays reflecting a twofold surplus of the official ratio. Thus, ethnicity is a salient factor in shaping and reshaping the organizational culture of the student discipline governing board and in the development of a school identity that is conducive to creating local ownership of the zero school truancy campaign.

In order to understand the changes that took place in the management of student discipline at *FNX* during the zero school truancy campaign, I mapped the organization of the student discipline governing board *before* (see Figure 13) and *after* (see Figure 14) the campaign. The most significant difference is the inclusion of teachers into the planning of the reform programs. Mapping the organization of the student discipline governing board also helps me to identify the various ways that the different board members interpret the “artifacts” (reform programs) of the zero school truancy campaign. It also alerts me to the “symbols” (ethnicity, class, gender) that are shared across the different ethnic groups of *FNX* (Yanow 1996). Finally, mapping the organization of the student discipline governing board helps me to compare the traditional roles and functions of the principal and assistant principal in the management of student discipline with their emerging roles and functions in planning for the zero school truancy campaign.

6.4.1. The Roles and Functions of the Principal before the Zero School Truancy Campaign

Traditionally, the principal chairs the student discipline governing board and makes the final decision about whether the school should expel or retain a student. According to the School Discipline Regulations (1959), the principal should hold a “hearing” before he expels any student (Ministry of Education 1989). In practice, the principal may expel a student after the assistant principal two has issued three warning letters to the parents or guardians of the student. Once expelled, the student has to re-apply through the state department of education to be re-admitted to school. Except for meeting with the board members once a month and patrolling the school compound three times a day, the principal rarely has any face-to-face interactions with students or teachers. In the morning session (senior secondary level/form three to form five), the assistant principal two, who is in charge of student affairs, supervises the discipline masters, the school counselor, and the head teacher of the school prefect board for any disciplinary actions or interventions that they have taken. The discipline masters hold the master discipline record which notes any school rules individual students violate. Regardless of the rules violated, the assistant principal has to issue three warning letters to the parents or guardians before he reports the student to the principal and recommends further disciplinary actions or interventions. In the afternoon session (junior secondary level/form one to form two and the “Remove” Classes [language remedial programs]), the afternoon supervisor directs the discipline masters, the assistant afternoon supervisor, and the head teacher of school prefects on any disciplinary actions undertaken. The assistant afternoon supervisor holds the master discipline records and, presumably, has the authority to “discipline” (i.e. cane) students.

The Committee of Annual Evaluation at *FNX* is comprised of the assistant principal one, assistant principal two, department heads, and subject heads. This committee recommends candidates for discipline masters to the principal at the beginning of the school year and evaluates their performances with him at the end of the school year. In addition to discipline masters, there are discipline teachers who rotate on a weekly basis and help the discipline masters to maintain student order during daily class recesses and weekly school assemblies.

Because of its large student size (2602 in total), *FNX* is classified as a “Grade A” school by the state department of education and is therefore entitled to have additional full-time school counselors to help the discipline masters deal with students who have continuously exhibited behavioral problems. According to the School Discipline Regulations of 1959, there should be one counselor for every five hundred students. The principal of *FNX* could apply for two additional school counselors, one Chinese and one Indian, to help the discipline masters deal with Chinese and Indian students with behavioral problems. However, because of the lack of understanding of the roles and functions of a school counselor, neither the principals nor the student discipline governing board see the need to apply for a second, non-Malay school counselor. Based on her insights in interacting with Indian students, a female Indian teacher spells out the need of a second, non-Malay school counselor as follows:

I would like to do something for the Indian students here, especially those at the form one and form two levels. I can tell that they are very rebellious. They lost interest in learning after they enter secondary school. I would like to do motivation camps. The *Penyelua Petang*, “afternoon supervisor,” is also an Indian. I think he will agree. Last year, there was a very rebellious Indian girl in my class. Finally, she ran away from home. I feel that I could have done something for her.

Female Indian teacher, FNX

In the first effective schools surveys that I distributed to students at the senior secondary level (form three to form five), students of all three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) saw the need of a second, non-Malay school counselor who has either Mandarin or Tamil language competence to deal with non-Malay school truants (see Table15).

Table 15 Degree of Student Support for a Second, Non-Malay School Counselor

Support for Second School Counselor				
	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mode
Malay	169	*4.4	1.11	5
Chinese	69	*4	1.25	5
Indian	64	4.2	1.22	5

(**p<.005)

Effective School Surveys One, FNX, 2001

The mean value comes from a five-point scale in which students rank the degree of their agreement or disagreement based on a one to five order (one represents agree and five represents strongly agree). The preliminary results show that all three ethnic groups of students agree with the idea of hiring a second, non-Malay school counselor to help the discipline masters and school counselor maintain school discipline.

Figure 13 The Administrative Structure of the Student Discipline Governing Board *before* the Zero School Truancy Campaign, FNX, 2001

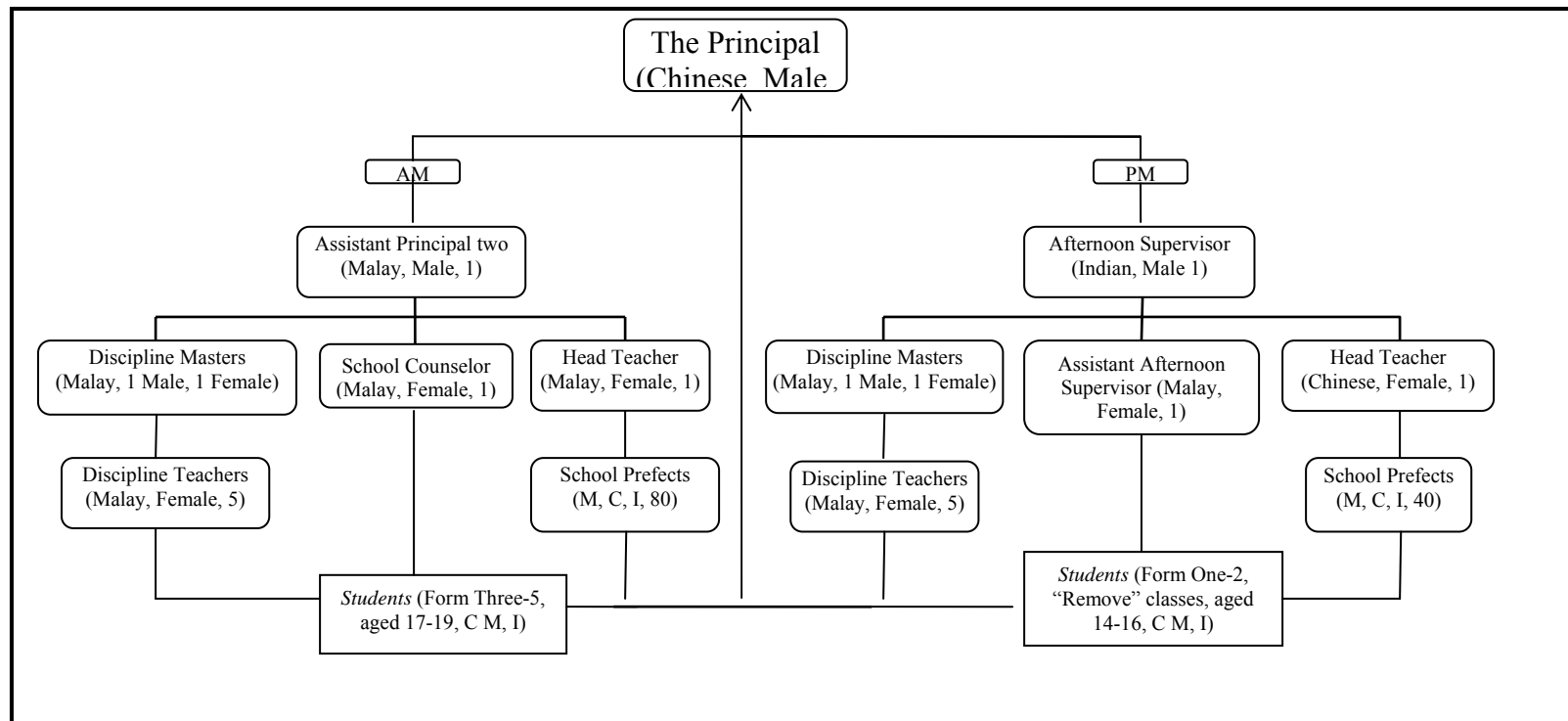
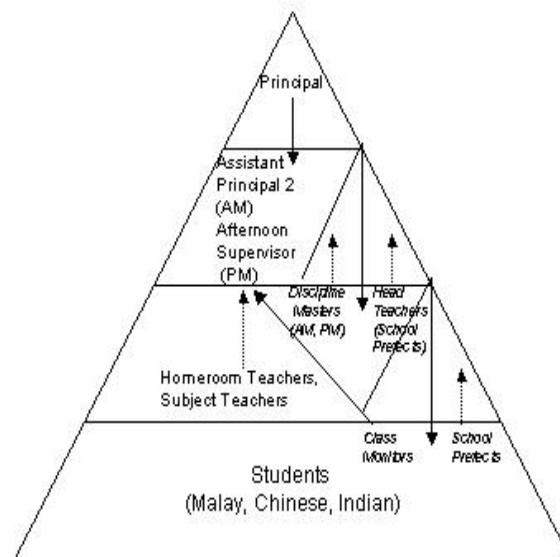


Figure 14 The Administrative Structure of the Student Discipline Governing Board *after* the
Zero School Truancy Campaign, *FNX*, 2001



In addition to holding individual and group counseling sessions for students who exhibit behavioral problems, the school counselor is responsible for organizing and disseminating information about three annual school improvement programs funded by the state department of education: (1) *Kemp Motivasi*, “Motivation Camps,” (2) *Kemp Perlantikan Ketua-Ketua Pemimpin Pelajar*, “Student Leadership Camps,” and (3) *Perkampungan PMR Dan SPM*, the “Assemblies for National Examinations – the Lower Secondary School Assessment Test and the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education.” However, the programs are not available to all three ethnic groups of students. The motivation camps, which are held twice a year, target Malay students at the form three (ninth grade) and five (eleventh grade) levels who show low learning motivation. The student leadership camps, which are held once a year, give leadership training to class monitors at all levels of the school and school prefects of all three ethnic groups. The assemblies for national examinations are available only to Malay students at the form three and form five levels, the grade levels at which they have to take the national examinations. The principal hosts the opening ceremonies of all three programs and gives public recognition for students and teachers who have supported school improvement programs and participated in annual school events.

6.4.2. The Roles and Functions of the Principal after the Zero School Truancy Campaign

With the advent of the zero school truancy campaign, the principal has been expected by the state department of education to undertake additional administrative/managerial, educational/instructional, and social/cultural functions (Student Affairs Unit 2001b). The following table summarizes the additional responsibilities of the principal.

Table 16 Additional Functions of the Principal as the Manager of the Zero School Truancy Campaign, *FNX*, 2001

Administrative/ managerial	Educational/ instructional	Social/cultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delegate decision-making authority to assistant principal two and the task of planning to the Student discipline governing board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compare and contrast the official goals and objectives established by the State Department of Education with the goals and objectives deemed as feasible by the Student Discipline Governing Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give moral support or provide personal incentives to the Student Discipline Governing Board for their collaboration with the management.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve student school attendance and identify additional resources or funding if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliver state mandates and reiterate school goals and objectives to teachers and students during the monthly faculty meetings and weekly school assemblies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resolve conflicts between individuals or groups when necessary.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that the assistant principal two, the Student discipline governing board, teachers, and students follow the procedures of the Campaign. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop an appreciation of the beliefs, norms, and values of the three ethnic groups of teachers and students and lay the groundwork for an open, two-way communication.

Source: "Operating Manual," Student Affairs Unit, Human Development Sector, the Johore State Department of Education (2001b)

As a symbol of power and authority, the current principal of *FNX* is a male Chinese who holds the opening and closing ceremonies of weekly school functions and annual school events with Malay customs and rituals. Even so, he is criticized by Malay teachers as being too soft in dealing with students who violate school rules. By understanding the values and norms reflected in these ceremonies, the principal may be able to understand better the myth of Malay-style leadership imposed upon him as a school head and thus exercise his roles and functions more effectively. As Levi-Strauss (1995) points out, “myths” enable human individuals to articulate and to come to terms with the basic contradictions of human existence - in this case, the competing expectations toward the principal’s roles and functions in improving school attendance. Thus, at *FNX*, a female Malay discipline teacher likens the principal’s leadership functions to those of a ship captain: *Disiplin pelajar kita masih boleh, tetapi tak boleh biar! Kalau ‘captain’ tak jaga, habis kapalnya!* - “Our student discipline is still okay, but we cannot ignore it. If the captain (the principal) does not care, the ship will sink!” In my day-to-day, informal exchanges with Malay teachers, including the head teacher of the school prefect board and the school counselor, many of them commented on the attitude of the principal as *Terlalu Lembut*, “too soft,” and maintained that he did not know how to be *Teguh*, “firm or tough,” with school truants. *Disiplin di sekolah ini masih boleh tahan, misanya pengetua tak tegas!* “Student discipline at this school is still okay, the problem is: the principal is not firm!” The female Malay teacher who heads the school prefect board in the morning session told me. The male Malay discipline master held the same view: *Pengetua tak mengganggu tegas. Beli peluang, naik kepalanya!* “The principal does not know how to be firm. He gives students too many opportunities and they all rise to his head! (i.e. they all take advantage of him!)” Under such conditions, the Chinese principal needs to know how to reconcile the Malay-style leadership as expected of him and the leadership style he aspires to undertake.

As the *Pengetua*, the “school head,” the principal also needs to understand the various factions of power within the different levels of the organization of the student discipline governing board and exercise his leadership tactfully. The process of setting school goals and objectives for the zero school truancy campaign, the principal must understand, is an on-going negotiation around the interests of these various power groups. The distribution of power within the bureaucratic hierarchy determines whose goals and objectives are given priority in the

campaign. By stating “if the head runs, the tail will follow”, the assistant afternoon supervisor indicates how important it is for the principal to understand and use his power and authority to solicit support from the student discipline governing board in order for the campaign to be carried out successfully.

I don't know what will happen to this school. If the head runs, the tail will follow! PKHEM (assistant principal two) said ‘I am the second man’. He is the only person who *Bergerak*, “is moving” [taking actions]. I think he is fed up! There is no post-mortem [investigation or follow-up]. The teachers don't go into the classrooms. He should come down, but he sits in his office.

Assistant afternoon supervisor, FNX

In summary, the roles and functions of the principal have taken on multiple significance with the advent of the zero school truancy campaign because: (1) the state department of education assumes a linear, rational model of implementation to reduce school truancy, (2) the administrators of *FNX* continues its rigid, bureaucratic school management style, and (3) the leadership style as expected of the principal by Malay teachers disagrees with the leadership style as aspired by the principal himself.

6.5. POLICY REALITIES AND PRAGMATIC CONCERNS

After all, is it possible to improve student attendance of national secondary schools in the *Johore* state as it is written in the operating manual of the zero school truancy campaign? The following policy realities may give the readers a better sense of the degree of feasibility in carrying out the control card system and character building programs at *FNX*.

6.5.1. Policy Reality One: *Pentadbir tidak mengambil tindakan!* - “The management does not take any actions!”

During my fieldwork at *FNX*, it was not uncommon to see students roaming the low-income housing projects across from the school or to hear students commenting on how school truants smoked cigarettes, inhaled glues or abused drugs in a nearby deserted field.

Ayah saya ada kawan di balai polis. Dia pun buat laporan, tetapi pentadbir tidak mengambil tindakan! Selama-lamanya kita pun tidak mau 'report'! Ada ramai pelajar yang mengisap rokok dan membawa pil yang putih di kebayan. Pagi-pagi mereka sudah berada di sana. Pukul tujuh lebih, 'first drink'!

My father has some friends at the local police station. He reported the drug abuse problems of students from this school to the police several times, but the administrators did not take any action! As time passed by, he did not want to report anymore. Many students smoke cigarettes or bring ‘white pills’ to *Kebayan*, the “food court,” next to the school. They are there early in the morning, a little bit after seven o'clock, to get their ‘first drink’ [first dose of drugs]!

Female Malay student, Form Five, FNX

In comparing *FNX* with *JJ2*, a non-premier, national secondary school in a Chinese small town, a female Indian teacher summarized the “standard” behaviors expected of teachers and the “appropriate” actions taken by the management in handling teacher discipline:

At *JJ2*, the principal, ‘HEM’ (assistant principal two), and ‘PK1’ (assistant principal one) are always rounding [patrolling] the school: if they see you don’t go into the class [wonder around school compound], they will give you a long lecture! Of course, they don’t do it in front of other people [students and teachers]. They will talk to you in the office. If the students are caught roaming around the school without any permissions, they will be caned!

Like the state department of education, the administrators at *FNX* assume that by: (1) reiterating the roles and functions of the student discipline governing board in carrying out the

campaign in meetings, (2) explaining the official procedures set up to carry out the reform programs to teachers and students, and by (3) entrusting teachers with the responsibilities of taking student attendance during school hours, the zero school truancy campaign can be realized without any problems. In practice, as pointed out by students and teachers, the lack of interest among the principal and assistant principal in monitoring classroom teaching has resulted in rampant school truancy. The most commonly heard comment is: *Pentadbir tidak mengambil tindakan!* “The management does not take any actions!” In particular, this comment refers to the principal and his assistants’ failure to act on teacher tardiness. As a male Malay teacher commented, *Cikgu pun cuba ponteng sebab pentadbir tidak mengambil tindakan!* - “Teachers also try to skip classes because the management takes no actions!”

During the initial meetings, discipline masters from both sessions (morning/senior secondary level and afternoon/junior secondary level) urged the principal and his assistants to include the monitoring and supervision of teachers as part of their plan to carry out the zero school truancy campaign. As illustrated by the following accounts, the absence of teachers from their classrooms surfaced as “the issue” in the exchange between the principals and discipline masters: *Cikgu relief tak masuk kelas! Mereka tak tau budak-budak yang ponteng* - “Substitute teachers don’t go into the classes. They don’t know if students skip classes,” the female Malay discipline teacher in the morning session complained. The male Malay discipline master echoed: *Masalahnya cikgu yang tak masuk kelas!* - “The problem is teachers don’t go into classes!” The female Malay afternoon supervisor chimed in: *Kita (cikgu) yang beli ruang! Bagilah kad kawalan bagi cikgu. Pemantuan guru sendiri* - “We (teachers) allow students to skip class or school. Why don’t we give control cards to teachers as a way to monitor teacher attendance?”

Monitoring of teacher attendance at FNX is the duty of *Pentadbir*, the “management,” which includes: (1) the principal, (2) assistant principals one and two, and (3) the department heads in the following subject areas: (a) language, (b) social studies, (c) mathematics and science, and (4) vocational/technical training. The department heads monitor daily teacher attendance by referring to the attendance records kept at the main office. Based on the records, the department heads assign the *Cikgu Relief*, “substitute teachers,” to classes where the teachers are absent for various reasons. According to my observations, there were eight to ten teachers absent from their classroom teaching on any given school days (Monday through Friday). As a consequence, it was not uncommon to see students roaming around the school compound during

school hours, wandering from one classroom to another to look for their friends, skipping school by jumping over the *Pagar*, “iron fence,” next to the basketball court, or crawling under a hole in the iron fence at the back of *Bengkel*, the “vocational/technical training workshops.” As a senior, male Malay teacher who used to be one of the discipline masters complained: “Something has got to be done! We have so many *Kursus*, “in-service training workshops for teachers,” and ‘MC’ (maternity leaves)! *Pentadbir*, “the management,” should have planned for it earlier!” Another senior, male Chinese teacher who used to be one of the discipline masters sarcastically stated:

They (the management) are very proud of themselves! At the beginning of the school year, when the state (state department of education) asked *PKI*, “assistant principal one, in charge of academic affairs,” if we needed relief teachers, she said ‘no’! It all boils down to the management! Those people who are good at ‘polishing apples’ get promoted! They took us off at the last minute. You know who I am talking about, don’t you? When *Zaim* (the name of a male Malay teacher) and I were in charge (in charge of student discipline), we stayed up late at school. My wife would bring food and water to us. Now, they (new discipline teachers) leave before one o’clock!

However, in response to my question about teacher tardiness, the department heads attributed the problem to the inaction of the principal and his assistants. Discipline masters and teachers at the senior secondary level also saw the principal and his assistants as solely responsible for the monitoring of teacher attendance.

Rosilah dan saya ‘round round’. Kita tak ada kuasa memasti cikgu masuk kelas. Tetapi tak ada ‘post-mortem’! Pengetua cantikan sini, cantikan sana, mungkin dia ada pandanganya. Kita ada tugas yang lain. Kalau kita tak masuk kelas. Cikgu tak ada kelas pun tak masuk kelas!

Rosilah and I went around (patrolled) the school several times a day. We don’t have the authority to force the teachers to enter the classes. The principal beautifies this and that, probably he has his own view in improving the school; however, there is no ‘post-mortem’ (investigation). We have other duties. If we don’t enter our classes, teachers skip their classroom teaching, too!

Female Malay discipline teacher, FNX

6.5.2. Policy Reality Two: *Bodohkah? Tak faham BM kah?* - “Are you stupid? Don’t you understand Malay?”

Shortage of language capital (difficulty with the Malay language) among non-Malay students is also implicated in the school truancy. Over the course of my fieldwork, Malay teachers and discipline masters frequently yelled at non-Malay students: *Bodohkah? Tak faham BM kah?* “Are you stupid? Don’t you understand Malay?” The following two accounts exemplify how non-Malay students feel about humiliation at the hands of Malay teachers and discipline masters:

Teachers should try to understand their students more. In this school, most teachers don’t try to understand their students. Sometimes they don’t even listen to our explanations. They just come to the conclusion that we are wrong because we are raised in the wrong way!

Female Chinese student, FNX

If I feel like I don’t want to come to school, I simply don’t come. Just talk with my mom. My mom and I are like friends. The other day, she came to school for my report card, my class teacher and *Puan Osmerah* (assistant principal one) talked to her as if they know me well. *Oh, Katherine, dia suka design!* “Oh, Katherine, she likes interior design!” *Jamaluddin* (assistant principal two) told me that I have better stay at home. He said in that way it is easier for him to write on my *Surat Berhenti*, “school leaving letter.” If I come to school, I would sleep in class and teachers would report me to the discipline masters. Teachers at this school don’t smile. They make us feel like we are doing something wrong all the time! If teachers truly cared about us, we would have felt touched.

Female Chinese school truant identified as one of the “hard cores”, Form Five, FNX

From the viewpoint of non-Malay teachers and students, the lack of Malay language capital is a major reason behind the school truancy of non-Malay students. As non-Malay school truants tell me, they are frequently mocked by their Malay classmates for being *Kasar*, “bad-mannered,” or humiliated by Malay teachers for being *Bodoh*, “stupid.” These characterizations

result more from lack of qualified Malay language teachers in national-type (Chinese or Indian) primary schools than the lack of character or moral cultivation of non-Malay students. As a male Chinese student from one of the “classes with hope” told me, “I found coming to school a waste of time. I can’t catch up (I don’t understand)! Teachers often do not show up and my parents don’t believe what I say.” As the following account illustrates, there is a gap between the difficulty levels of the Malay language at the primary and secondary levels:

The whole system is a hypocrite. The problem is there, but they [the Malay ruling elites] don’t want to talk about it. It is always classified as a ‘sensitive issue.’ There is a big gap between *BM* [the teaching of the Malay language] at the primary and secondary schools. *BM* at secondary school is very difficult even at form one. Teachers nowadays are lazy. They can’t even write lesson plans! They are not the subject teachers, but they have to teach. The Malay teacher is picking up Mandarin, but the students don’t learn anything. Language learning needs the environment. Just like *Kampung* [rural] Malays, they can’t speak English. Students have to find a way to let their anger out, so they vandalize school properties or burn down the school. Language is a well-known fact, but people don’t want to look at it. Teachers tend to humiliate students instead of educating them.

Senior lecturer, Faculty of Education, the University of Technology Malaysia

The lack of Malay language competency and the hegemony of Malay-Islam customs have also contributed to the alienation of non-Malay students in school improvement programs or annual school events. When I asked non-Malay students why they were absent from school events or why they were not supportive of school improvement programs, Chinese students often responded with ridicule:

I used to come to school, but I couldn’t find anything that is not Malay. They (Malay administrators, teachers, and students) were disorganized. I felt like an orphan. After a while, I told myself it would be better to stay at home and sleep than coming to school. It is a waste of time!

Male Chinese student, Form Three, FNX

We participated in the leadership camp once. We couldn’t sleep. They (Malay students) talked with each other and prayed as a group all night long. Malay girls said they saw *Hantu*, “ghosts,” in the toilet. They (Malay camp leaders and school counselor) were disorganized. They didn’t do anything. They just let them talk whole night!

Female Chinese student, Science Class, Form Four, FNX

Having felt that they were disoriented by Malay-centric management and were imposed upon Malay-Islam customs, ethnic Chinese students decided not to take part in school activities.

6.5.3. Policy Reality Three: “You know the Malays have special rights, don’t you?”

Non-Malay students and teachers at *FNX* experienced the influence of the national ideology through the myths, symbols, and rituals at daily school functions or annual school events (Chinese Culture Congress 1983). The myths lie in the assumptions that students obey the power and authority of the administrators in settling disciplinary disputes and trust the integrity of the student discipline governing board in handling disciplinary cases. The symbols are found among the gender segregation practices imposed upon non-Malay male and female students in their classroom seating arrangements, during weekly school assemblies, and daily accesses to the school canteen. In the classrooms and during school assemblies, male and female students are discouraged from sitting next to each other. They have to access the school canteen through *Lorong Lelaki*, “the male queue,” or *Lorong Perempuan*, “the female queue.” Furthermore, the daily ritualistic prayers of Malay students during certain school hours, the recitals of Koranic verses during special school events, and the imposition of “moral education” classes upon Chinese and Indian students, suggest to non-Malay students that the final goals of the zero school truancy campaign is to assimilate non-Malay students into the “national” (Malay-Islam) culture. State mandates of reform programs embody the beliefs, norms, and values of Malays (Chinese Culture Congress 1983). Several female Chinese students described how they experienced the imposition of Malay-Islam oriented seating arrangements in their classrooms:

We were in the ‘remove’ class [language remedial program]. There were so many of us. We did not have any enough chairs or desks. One time, one of the Chinese girls in our class sat next to an Indian boy because she could not find any seats. The teacher came into the classroom. He was upset when he saw the Chinese girl and Indian boy sitting next to each other. Instead of teaching us *BM*, he gave the whole class a lesson on how inappropriate it was for boys and girls to sit next to each other!

Female Chinese students, Form Five, FNX

Shocked by my observations of the *Ketuaanan Melayu*, “Malaynization” of the school identity through the various Malay-centric myths, symbols, and rituals, the principal reminded me that the Malays own the rights to do whatever they want to do on the Malays’ land: “you know the Malays have special rights, don’t you?” When I asked him why school truancy was rampant at *FNX*, the principal attributed the problem to the laziness of school truants themselves:

“Students nowadays are lazy. They can’t read or write. All they tell you is the teaching of teachers is boring! I talked with Chinese students in the science class. They don’t think that it is hard to learn Malay. The Rose Garden is an industrial area. Students work at the factory at night. They come to school and sleep in class.”

Principal, FNX

As I continued to probe the principal for ways to improve student attendance at *FNX*, he said the most effective way to reduce school truancy would be to make sure that any actions undertaken by discipline masters or teachers to discipline school truants were educational. The principal’s response disagreed with the responses made by Malay students, whom he had just reminded me of their special rights. As the following table shows, Malay students assume that corporeal punishment is the most effective means to improve student discipline.

Table 17 The Most Effective Means to Improve Student Discipline, First Effective School Surveys, *FNX*, 2001

Canning Students in The Main Office				
	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mode
Malay	169	*3.4	1.45	5
Chinese	55	*2.6	1.35	2
Indian	64	3	1.46	4

(* $p < .005$)

Thus, reaction to the zero school truancy campaign differs among the three ethnic groups of students at *FNX*. In its principals' training programs in the state of *Johore*, the state department of education highlighted *Permuafakaan*, "consensus building," as a major means to achieve "systematic and coordinated" management of student discipline (Unit of Student Affairs 2001b). In order to achieve "consensus building," the principal should: (1) explain related rules and regulations and clarify school goal and objectives to all the school personnel involved, and (2) ensure that there is no disagreement between teachers and the student discipline governing board with regard to the reform programs chosen to reduce school truancy.

From the viewpoint of non-Malay students, "consensus building" measures fail to facilitate systematic management of student discipline or elicit the collaboration of students and teacher to reduce school truancy. The lack of "systematic and coordinated" management of student discipline reflects two long-standing, unresolved issues: (1) a prevailing distrust among non-Malay students in the integrity of the student discipline governing board, comprises largely Malay teachers and students, in handling disciplinary cases, and (2) the insensitivity of Malay teachers toward the cultural upbringings of non-Malay students. For example, at *FNX*, *Ajak-mengajak*, "taunting," or *Tolak-menolak*, "pushing," between a few male students could often escalate into a full-fledged fight involving dozens of students or result in a long-term conflict among the three ethnic groups of students. At least once per semester over the course of my fieldwork at *FNX*, a physical fight would take place between Malay and Indian students on or off the school compound requiring the intervention of local police. However, the common feeling among non-Malay students is exemplified in the following complaint made by a male Indian student about what would happen if he and a Malay student got into a physical fight - that he, but not the Malay student, would be expelled: *Kita bukan budak Melayu. Kita yang kenal buang!* - "We are not the Malays. We are the ones who get expelled from school!"

6.6. SUMMARY

As research shows (Dalin 1998), teachers are key to the success of education reforms. Modifying the student discipline governing board to include teachers as part of the official force to tackle school truancy may not facilitate any collaboration between the management and teachers to improve school attendance. There are two reasons behind this conclusion. First, the delegation of decision-making to the assistant principal, the task of planning to the student discipline governing board, and the responsibility of student attendance monitoring to the teachers require a certain level of trust between the principal and teachers at *FNX*. Second, understanding how discipline masters and classroom teachers see their place in the zero school truancy campaign may help the principal develop ways to help them identify their own locus of control. Instead of approaching the implementation of the campaign with the linear, rational model assumed by the state department of education, this understanding may help the principal to see implementation through various lenses.

In the following section (6.5), through two social dramas, I will take the readers to the school to experience first-hand the interplay of ethnicity and ethno stereotypes and its effects on the school behaviors of two groups of non-Malay students and their identity formations.

6.7. SOCIAL DRAMAS

The basic structure of a drama is a three-act play made up of the “invisible three acts” reflecting the needs, obstacles, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the needs of people involved in a conflict situation (Spencer 2002). Compared to situations of harmony, conflict situations are more likely to be dramatic, and hence, more attuned to social dramas (Turner 1974). Manifested as eruptions of tensions between persons or groups, conflict refers to the disharmony of a social structure. Social dramas are especially useful for the study of a “structure,” that is to say, the order of a social system that is in disharmony (Marvin 1968; Turner 1974). In order to restore the social order, the leader may first take some remedial actions, which can be formal or informal, or institutionalized or ad hoc. If the actions undertaken by the leader cannot restore the social order, he may resort to force in order to suppress the opposing persons or groups. If all things fail, the leader may have to recognize the conflicts or a regression to the crises may occur (Turner 1974). In the two sub-sections (6.5.1 and 6.5.2) below, the readers may experience the needs, obstacles, and dissatisfaction of the needs of students, teachers, and parents through two social dramas about school attendance and about school rules.

I have two things to clarify. Although the two social dramas presented below largely reflect the conventions in playwriting, I weaved into the dramas two socio-linguistic devices (“code switching” and “language creolization”) to reflect the various creolized languages spoken by Malaysians of three ethnic groups in real life situations (e.g. “Creole Chinese,” “Creole Malay,” and “Manglish”). Since the social dramas build on the participant observations that I carried out in the classrooms and on school compound, the characters depicted in the dramas are as much composite sketches as they are people who struggle on day-to-day basis to cope with various life challenges like the readers. Summoning the “ur-play” buried deep down in my mind and set it down in the form of texts is as much a process of creation as reflection. An “ur-play,”

according to Spencer (2002), is the play that the playwright wants to write. Thus, the play written is an approximation to what the playwright wants to write. As a novice in playwriting, I am overwhelmed by the excitement of writing a play itself, not to mention the fear of not knowing where my adventure would lead me to.

6.7.1. “We Just Went Shopping For Mother’s Day Gifts”: A Social Drama of Chinese School Truants in Three Acts

ACT 1
AFTERMATH OF TRUANCY

SCENE 1
WHEN THE PARENTS MET

(CAST: Sweet Li’s parents [Chinese], Wan Ton Mei’s mother [Chinese], Hui Ni’s mother [Chinese], Puan [Mrs.] Adibah [a female Malay discipline master], and Encik [Mr.] Sellapan [an Indian afternoon school supervisor].)

SCENE 2
BEFORE THE PARENTS MET

(CAST: Sweet Li [a female Chinese school truant], a female Chinese school prefect, and Kee [a female ethnic Chinese ethnographer].)



ACT 2
A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE TRUANCY

SCENE 1
THE FIGHT

(CAST: Hui Ni, Mei Huan, and Sweet Li [female Chinese students].)

SCENE 2
INDIAN MOM’S COMPLAINT

(CAST: Sweet Li’s mother [Chinese], a female Indian student and her mother, and Encik Sellapan.)



ACT 3
A few months AFTER THE TRUANCY

SCENE 1
YOU HAVE BETTER BE PRETTY!

(CAST: Hui Ni, Mei Huan, Sweet Li [female Chinese students] and Cik [Miss] Buruk, [a female Malay teacher teaching Geography].)

SCENE 2:
I CAN’T STAND BULLIES!

(CAST: Sweet Li and her parents [Chinese], homeroom teacher [female Malay], Encik Sellapan, Puan Adibah.)

ACT ONE:

AFTERMATH OF SCHOOL TRUANCY

Identified as a “hardcore” by the Malay discipline masters, Sweet Li negotiated her personal identity through organizing school truancy, through fighting against bullies, and through talking back to teachers, parents, and administrators. Informed by individual communal values, but vested more with personal interests, teachers, parents, and administrators reacted to Sweet Li in different ways. Administrators attempted to resolve the conflict between the parents brought on by the school truancy by referring to cultural differences. Parents attributed Sweet Li’s academic challenges and discipline problems to her bad temper. Lastly, teachers belittled the academic challenges and discipline problems facing Sweet Li to her social class membership and ethnic background.

Readers’ Notes

“MEND THE FOLD AFTER A SHEEP IS LOST!”

THE ART OF WAR

During the “Warring States Period” (475-221 BC), the State of Chu was weak. The emperor, who indulged himself in luxury and pleasure, rarely attended to state affairs. Zhuang Xin, a conscientious minister, warned the king of his excessive indulgence and the potential loss of his kingdom to other states. Instead of listening to Zhuang Xin, the emperor accused him for cursing his kingdom and for igniting resentment among his people. Foreseeing the extinction of Chu, Zhuang Xin left Chu for Zhao. The king of Chu went into exile after the state of Qin invaded Chu. He sent his men for Zhuang Xin and sought his advice. “What should I do?” The king asked. “It is not too late for you to mend the sheepfold after you found out that a sheep was

missing,” Zhuang Xin replied. As the idiom suggested, it is never too late for one to learn from mistakes and to take remedial actions. During the following parent-teacher meeting, did the teachers and parents come up with any remedial actions to help the school truants learn from their mistakes?

SCENE ONE: WHEN THE PARENTS MET

In response to the request of Sweet Li’s father, *Encik Sellapan* called for a meeting of the parents of the Chinese students (five altogether) who skipped school for Mother’s Day gifts. Except for the parents of Qui Wen and Jin Shen, all parents showed up for the meeting. The air pressure was low. A monsoon was moving in. In the left wing of the teachers’ office, Sweet Li’s father bickered loudly with Wan Ton Mei’s mother in the presence of *Encik Sellapan* and *Puan Adibah*.

SWEET LI’S FATHER: Why did you help my daughter skip school?

WAN TON MEI’S MOTHER: Wait for a minute! Your daughter was the one who organized the truancy! I was just being kind. It was late. I was concerned with her safety, so I gave her a ride home from my place.

SWEET LI’S FATHER: Oh, ya? My daughter lost her interest in schooling after she mingled with Wan Ton Mei!

WAN TON MEI’S MOTHER: Excuse me! My daughter may not like learning, but she is quiet. If she doesn’t come to school, she just stays at home.

SWEET LI’S FATHER: Oh, ya? At least, I make sure that Sweet Li comes to school everyday. There are so many *Bu Shan Bu Si De Ren*, “men who cajole girls or young women into prostitution,” out there.

WAN TON MEI'S MOTHER: Won Ton Mei told me that students are often fighting against each other at school! You call it a safe place!?

SWEET LI'S FATHER: Compared to Masai, this school is better. Students at Masai fight everyday!

WAN TON MEI'S MOTHER: Oh, ya? They (she eyed at the female Malay discipline master) discriminate against Chinese students! Ask your daughter about it! Who *Kenal Buang*, "get expelled from school"?

SWEET LI'S FATHER: No! The teachers treat everyone in the same way. Now I know, Sweet Li *Shi Gen Wan Ton Mei Xue Hua De!* "Sweet Li learned how to act against school from Wan Ton Mei!"

WAN TON MEI'S MOTHER: Wan Ton Mei doesn't say anything bad about the teachers. She just said she doesn't understand what the teachers teach in the class. Your daughter is the one who always complains about the teachers. She said the teachers are unfair.

SWEET LI'S FATHER: I told Encik Sellapan. Just cane her if she doesn't listen to the teachers!

ENCIK SELLAPAN: I have been telling them, *Tin Hua Lah!* "Be a good girl!-lah!"
Ever since Sweet Li and Wan Ton Mei got into *Peralihan*, the "remove class."
(*Encik Sellapan* shrugged his shoulders)

SWEET LI'S FATHER: Just cane her if she doesn't listen to you!

ENCIK SELLAPAN: Sweet Li is a big girl now. I can't cane her all the time. Talk to her-lah!
(*Encik Sellapan* shook his head and sighed)

Readers' Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH

SWEET LI'S PARENTS

According to Sweet Li, her father works in Singapore. Judging from his education level (a Form Three graduate) and work schedule (overtime shifts), Sweet Li's father may well be a migrant worker working at one of the electronic factories. Sweet Li's mother sells houses. Although Sweet Li cannot specify her mother's occupation, her description of what her mother does whenever there is an empty house reveals to me that she may well be an estate broker: "Whenever my mother sees an empty house, she hangs a sign board on the front gate saying 'contact Mrs. Huang' and leaves her hand-phone number on it."

Both parents seem to do well. In addition to having a *Wira* (the name of a national car in the upscale end of the national car line), the family has a *Kawasaki* (the brand name of a Japanese motorcycle that is popular in Malaysia) and a one-storey townhouse in a newly established residential estate in the suburbs. The motorcycle, owing to its agility, is used primarily by Sweet Li's father to dodge the heavy traffic jam that takes place twice a day (morning and evening) across the bridge connecting Woodland, a northern township in Singapore where the immigration office is located, and *Johor Bahru*, the capital city of the State of *Johor*, known as the southern gateway to Singapore. The car, owing to its safety, is mostly driven by Sweet Li's mother for her business trips and family leisure. Every weekend, the family dines out at a local restaurant. When asked if her parents talk with her or her siblings when they dine out, Sweet Li replied with a firm "No!" "My mother talked about her work and my father, his. We were just watching TV," Sweet Li said.

SWEET LI'S MOTHER: I told you. It is useless to cane her. She doesn't listen to us. Just let her work because she doesn't like to go to school anyway. She can learn how to *Pon Chai*, "wait table." My friends told me, "Why don't you let your daughter come to our restaurant? We will teach her how to *Pon Chai*. She will also learn how to do the dishes and mop the floor."

SWEET LI'S FATHER: There are so many *Bu San Bu Si De Ren* at the restaurant. Sweet Li may *Xue Hua*, "become bad!" You pay her to do the housework! When you don't pay her, she doesn't do it.

SWEET LI'S MOTHER: She is always asking for money. I give her fifty ringgit each time she does the housework. I gave her money when she went to *Pasar Malam*, the "night market" with me, but as soon as I turned my head away from her, she spent all the money buying CDs. She asked for more money and said she wanted to buy clothes. I gave her another fifty ringgit. She spent more than one hundred ringgit at *Pasar Malam*!

PUAN ADIBAH: Why do you give her so much pocket money? She is just a child. If you had followed our way of doing things, there would not be so many problems. We have to suspend them for two weeks. You have to sign on *Aku Janji*, "I swear to be good."

ENCIK SELLAPAN: As long as we know the school truancy, we have to do something about it. We cannot just let it go.

Readers' Notes

"THREE SHOEMAKERS MAKE A ZHU GE LIANG!"

THE ART OF WAR

In Chinese history, "the three kingdoms period" (220-280 AD) was a period known for the art of war. Also known as Kuon Ming, Zhu Ge Liang was a legendary figure in the period that was known for his outstanding strategic planning. This Chinese idiom suggests the

importance of teamwork in planning. Two weeks before the school truancy took place, the five Chinese school truants gathered together and planned for their school truancy. What went wrong in their planning?

SCENE TWO: BEFORE THE PARENTS MET

In the hallway of Block B, Sweet Li begged me to talk to her father, who had threatened her the weekend before that he would stop her schooling. At the teachers' office, Sweet Li's parents were waiting to meet the parents of other school truants. Intrigued by my exchange with Sweet Li, a nerd-looking, female Chinese student stopped and listened to us on her way to the canteen.

SWEET LI: What are you looking at ugh? Go away!

(Sweet Li towered over the girl and raised her fist in front of her face.)

SWEET LI: I knew it. Just like what I had expected. He pulled my hair and hit my head against the wall. I sat on the floor. I almost passed out. He went to the back and looked for a wire. The next thing I knew he was chasing me around the house with the wire that he had found. I ran to the car porch and he went after me. We circled the car a few rounds. At last, he gave up, but he yelled at me: "I won't let you go to school anymore!"

(Sweet Li's forehead was beaded with sweat. She was gasping when she talked.)

KEE: Slow down. Can we back up a little bit? How did your father find out you skipped school?

SWEET LI: I left earlier because if I went home late, my father would be looking for me. They (other school truants) stayed behind and ate at the food court. I took the taxi, but I ran into *Jam*, "traffic jam." There were always *Jam* from *J.B.* to *Masai*. When I arrived at *Masai*, it was already 7:30pm. I took another taxi and got to Wan Ton Mei's house

around 7:40pm. Wan Ton Mei was still at the mall. Her mother was at home. I knew it was late, so I asked Wan Ton Mei's mother to give me a ride. When we got to the corner of the street, my father saw us. He was looking for me on his motorcycle.

KEE: What time was it? Was it over 8:00pm?

SWEET LI: No, it was 7:45pm. My father saw us, so I got off the car and ran all the way home! He saw the car and ran after it, but she got away! He rode back to the corner of the street and waited for Wan Ton Mei's mother to show up.

KEE: Wan Ton Mei's mother gave you a ride home, but she did not drop you off at your house?

SWEET LI: I told her not to.

KEE: When you planned for the trip, did you think of the consequences?

SWEET LI: We thought everything was at our fingertips. We did not expect all these problems.

KEE: So, you assumed that as long as you went to the Water Front mall quietly and came back on time, no one would know anything?

SWEET LI: We thought so.

KEE: Is that possible? No one would know you skipped school?

SWEET LI: We thought everything would be fine. We did not expect all these problems. We had been talking about it for two weeks. Jin Shen walked into the classroom and yelled "it is Mother's Day! May 13 is Mother's Day!" We should buy something for our mothers." Wan Ton Mei suggested City Square mall, but it was too big! Then, Qui Wen proposed for the Water Front mall. I supported the idea because I had never been to the Water Front mall. We thought Friday would be a good day to skip school because we did not have to come to school until 2:00pm. We would have more time to change. We would change at Wan Ton Mei's place because her mother was more open-minded.

KEE: Did you all (boys and girls) meet at Wan Ton Mei's place?

SWEET LI: No, just the girls. Jin Shen met us at the mall. I brought my clothes with me and went to Wan Ton Mei's place. Qui Wen's sister gave Hui Ni a ride. They went to Wan Ton Mei's place together.

Readers' Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH

SWEET LI'S PARENTS AND HER "LOOSE GIRL RING"

"Can we be friends?" On a hot, humid Friday afternoon, while I was enjoying the *Ice Kacang*, "shredded ice topped with heavy syrup, canned milk, and sweet corns," at the school canteen, Sweet Li, with her sweat-beaded forehead, approached and asked me if we could become friends. Unlike other female Chinese students at school, who were shy and discreet, Sweet Li was outgoing and outspoken. In our first exchange, she criticized the tactic employed by Malay discipline masters to keep track of female Chinese students. Identified by Puan Adibah, the Malay assistant afternoon supervisor, as a "hardcore", Sweet Li explained to me how the tactic of "marking" worked at *FNX*. "I am 'marked'. When you are 'marked', you are in trouble. She looks for your trouble everyday. She picks on your uniform, hair, and nails even if you just walk by her." Sweet Li did not attribute her marking as a "hardcore" to several low-achieving female Chinese students whom she befriended at school. For example, Wan Ton Mei, a female Chinese student in the same circle, was known for mingling with street gangsters and was once, according to Encik Sellapan, the Indian afternoon supervisor, taken by them to an empty apartment in the low-income housing project across from the school for sexual abuse.

ACT TWO: A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE TRUANCY

It was one of those afternoons in early November, the monsoon rushed in and out quickly and cooled off the earth with a sweep of heavy downpour. To the right of the front gate, at the *Pondok*, “a small, rectangular hut with a pointy blue-tiled roof,” Sweet Li, Mei Huan, and Hui Ni left their school bags on the stone benches before they left for the restroom, which was located at the end of the school. When the girls came back from the restroom, they found out that their school bags on the dirt floor, soiled and dampened. An Indian girl sat on the stone benches where the girls left their school bags and threw the books of the girls onto the ground.

SCENE ONE: THE FIGHT

SWEET LI: *Nak buat apa?* - “What do you think you are doing?”

(Feeling offended, Sweet Li approached the Indian girl, grabbed her arms, and yelled in her face.)

INDIAN GIRL: (Speaking in Tamil)

(With her eyes wide open, the Indian girl yelled back at Sweet Li in Tamil and pushed her onto the soaking wet earth!)

SWEET LI: *Nak lawan-kah?* - “Are you picking for a fight?”

(Irritated by her, Sweet Li pushed back the Indian girl.)

A fight takes place! ✕?◎✱☹️👉 “**PLAK!**” **WUP** **CLICK** **WU, WUP**

SWEET LI: *Ingat mata besar-kah? Mata Cureng!* - “What are you staring at? You think you have big eyes, don’t you? You have crossed eyes!”

(Sweet Li yelled into the Indian girl’s face and slapped her with the right palm! The Indian girl cried out loud! Mei Huan pulled Sweet Li aside, but it was too late! The Indian girl fought back and pulled Sweet Li’s hair! In return, Sweet Li grabbed the corner of the Indian girl’s left eye! The Indian girl cried out loud!)

INDIAN GIRL: Wow! Wow! Wow!

SCENE TWO: INDIAN MOM’S COMPLAINT

The next day, the mother of the Indian girl came to school and filed a complaint against Sweet Li. *Encik Sellapan*, the Indian afternoon supervisor, rang Sweet Li’s mother and asked her to stop by school. In the left wing of the teachers’ room, the mother of the Indian girl confronted Sweet Li and her mother in Malay:

INDIAN MOM: *Nak jadi ‘Sam Sen’ kah? Kalau dia sekarang boleh guna tangannya, dia akan guna pisau lain kali!* - “You are going to join the street gang, aren’t you!? If you could use your hands now, you would use a knife next time!”

SWEET LI’S MOTHER: (Silent and embarrassed.)

INDIAN MOM: (Speaking in Tamil)

(The mother of the Indian girl continued to speak to *Encik Sellapan* in Tamil, but she decided to drop her complaint against Sweet Li.)

Encik Sellapan: *Tak boleh! Kita mesti gantungnya!* – “No! We can’t let her go. Since you came to us, we have to do something. We have to suspend her from school!”
(*Encik Sellapan* refused to let Sweet Li go and suspended Sweet Li for two weeks. In addition to being suspended from school, Sweet Li earned the title “hardcore.” As a

“hardcore,” she was “marked” by *Puan Adibah*, the assistant afternoon supervisor, and was constantly picked on for her hair, attire, and conduct at school.)



ACT THREE: A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE TRUANCY

Cik Buruk strolled into the classroom and dropped a mountain of paper on her desk. Plash! The friction of the paper sounded like a bed of soundly slept leaves stirred up by *Macik*, “elderly woman,” who enjoyed more in chewing the betel nuts in her mouth than in cleaning up the dry leaves that choked the ditches and flooded the hallways. *Cik Buruk* woke up a male Malay student, the class monitor, who was sitting across from her. He stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and called the class for the greeting.

Readers’ Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH

CIK BURUK, “MISS UGLY”

Cik Buruk was a geography teacher teaching at the junior secondary level (equivalent to grade 7th to 9th in the US). She graduated from a local teacher training college. Rumors said that she was born in disgrace. She was the daughter of a Chinese adolescent who worked as a domestic helper in a rich Chinese family and was adopted by a Malay family after abandoned by her mother. For some reasons, she seemed to have problems keeping her hair tucked tight under her headscarf. Strands of hair sneaked out from both sides of her headscarf dangling as the day went by. Her palms, shimmered with white chalk from writing on the blackboard, powdered her

cheeks with patches of white whenever she pulled, flipped, and tugged her hair into her headscarf. Unlike other single female Malay teachers at school, who covered their heads with a square shawl, plain or printed with the gaudy *Bunga Raya*, the “national flower,” *Cik Buruk* had a full fledged, white headscarf that reached all the way down to her waist even on the school’s sports day. As for her *Baju Kurong*, “traditional, female Malay clothing comprises a long, loose over-blouse and a skirt worn by,” it was either white or black.

SCENE ONE: “YOU HAVE BETTER BE PRETTY!”

CLASS MONITOR: *Satu, dua, tiga! Selamat petang cikgu!* - “One, two three! Good afternoon teacher!”

CIK BURUK: *Selamat petang.* Class monitor, help me distribute the quizzes. Class, I want you to correct the mistakes in your last quiz.
(*Aduh, penatlah!* - “Oh! It is exhausting!” Shouldn’t the monsoon be here? Look at those Chinese girls, don’t they have any shame? How could they show their thighs and arms to the boys? Our way is better. Look at Sweet Li, what does she have on her wrist? Chinese are superstitious! Humph, Mei Huan just raised her hand.)

CIK BURUK: Yes, Mei Huan, what do you want?
(This girl and her buddy Sweet Li are always looking for trouble!)

MEI HUAN: I did not get my exam.
(She lowered her head as soon as she finished speaking.)

CIK BURUK: I said revise your exams!
(She must be lying! These Chinese girls do not have any morals.)

MEI HUAN: We could not revise because we did not get our exams back.
(Her voice died out gradually.)

CIK BURUK: You must have gotten back your exams. How could you not know where they are?

(How could she argue against me? I spent the whole day yesterday correcting the quizzes. Chinese just do not trust us.)

MEI HUAN: But, weeeeeeeee

(Mei Huan was stunned. She turned around and whispered into Sweet Li's ears.)

MEI HUAN: I told her that we didn't get our quizzes back, but she didn't believe us.

SWEET LI: We told you that we did not get our exams back. We could not revise. What did you want us to do?

(Sweet Li raised her voice.)

CIK BURUK: Since you hide your exams, you have to find them.

(Here came her buddy! Liars! These Chinese girls are good at nothing, but *Cakap Kasar!* "Rude!")

SWEET LI: "If we hid our exams, why did we bother to look for them?"

(She talked back in a louder volume!)

CIK BURUK: "I don't care!"

(I know who you are. You got expelled from your previous school because you lied.)

MEI HUAN: Let's forget about it. Even the real Malays couldn't put up with her!

(As usual, Mei Huan managed to put out the fire between *Cik Buruk* and Sweet Li by hinting at the secret lied beneath her headscarf.)

(Sweet Li slept at her desk. The ceiling fans were spinning like the wheels of a tri-shaw peddled by an old Chinese coolie.)

CIK BURUK: Your parents would get the *Amalan!* "Warning letter."

(*Cik Buruk* continued to circle the classroom. When she reached Sweet Li, she re-ignited the fire by whispering into Sweet Li's ears.)

SWEET LI: You have a bad breath!
(Sweet Li sprang from her desk and burst into a ball of fire.)

CIK BURUK: Your ears smell!
(How could she challenge me? I am the teacher!)

SWEET LI: Oh! I can't stand it! You need to brush your teeth!
(Her voice pierced through the walls of the classroom.)

CIK BURUK: You know, it is fine to me that you have poor academic performance, but you have better be pretty. You aren't pretty and your academic performance is poor. Men won't give you money to spend! If you are pretty, men will give you money to spend.
(Her lips curled up and she walked away.)

SWEET LI: You know what, you aren't pretty either.
(Her voice trembled.)

CIK BURUK: No, I am not pretty, but I have a job. I am the *Bumiputera!* - "Sons and daughters of the Malay soil."
(*Cik Buruk* rolled her eyes and shrugged her shoulders.)

SWEET LI: No, you are not! Look at your skin color!
(The class burst into a laugh.)

CIK BURUK: (Speechless. Her face was red and her lips trembled.)

SCENE TWO: I CAN'T STAND BULLIES!

SWEET LI says: I think it is easier to be a bad person than to be a good person. Good people are miserable. Bad people like to bully good people. Very few people dare to speak out. People are timid. They put up a lot. I cannot stand people who simply let

themselves get bullied by others. I don't want to get bullied. I will stand up and speak out for myself!

SWEET LI'S MOTHER says: I think she (*Cik Buruk*) meant well. She just wanted to stimulate her, but she used the wrong method. I think she meant "I am not pretty, but I can teach. I can make a living." Sweet Li is not pretty and is not studying hard. She does not have a future. Furthermore, she has bad temper. I had bad temper when I was at her age. When I got angry, I just said whatever came into my mind.

SWEET LI responds: She is not pretty either.

SWEET LI'S MOTHER says: She is Malay. She can get a job even if she is not pretty.

SWEET LI'S FATHER asks: How old is she?

SWEET LI responds: She is in her mid-thirties.

SWEET LI'S FATHER says: She is old enough not to understand that she should not say anything without giving it a second thought. You must have provoked her! Just remember what I told you before.

SWEET LI responds: Yes, I remember.

SWEET LI'S FATHER says: You have to endure. As long as you can endure and finish your study, you can do anything you want. If you give up your study because of your teacher, you are stupid.

ENCIK SELLAPAN says: Be a good girl-lah!

PUAN ADIBAH says: If you could follow our way, things would be better.

THE HOMEROOM TEACHER says: She came from a working-class family. Her parents do not care about her study. Like other Chinese parents, they are only interested in making money.

AUDIENCE: Claps.

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THE END

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THANK YOU

6.7.2. “Don’t Trust Your School Son!”: A Social Drama of A Male Indian “Troublemaker” in Three Acts

Act 1
AFTERMATH OF “GOPI KENAL TUMBUK!”
(MALAY: “GOPI WAS BEATEN UP!”)

SCENE 1
AT THE SCHOOL CANTEEN

(CAST: Jun [a female Malay school counselor], Niza [a female Malay teacher teaching English], Subash [a male Indian student], Rosilah [a female Malay discipline master]).

SCENE 2
ACTIONS AND PLANS OF THE PRINCIPAL

(CAST: Kak Adams [a female Malay bookkeeper], Kak Osmerah [a female Malay assistant principal 1], Mr. Lee [a male Chinese principal]).

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Act 2
“MARI PUAN JUN! GOPI KENAL TUMBUK!”
(MALAY: HURRY UP MRS. JUN!
GOPI WAS BEATEN UP!”)

SCENE 1
AT THE KNOWLEDGE PAVILION

(CAST: Gopal [a male Indian student], Jun, Devan and Gopi (two male Indian students who are brothers), Mr. Lee, Subash and his father).

SCENE 2
AT THE PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE

(CAST: Jun, Devan, Gopi, Kak [sister] Osmerah [a female Malay bookkeeper]).

∞

Act 3
A YEAR AFTER “GOPI KENAL TUMBUK!”

SCENE 1
RECONVENED WITH PUAN ROSILAH

(CAST: Rosilah [a female Malay discipline master], Kee [a female Chinese ethnographer]).

SCENE 2
WHO HAS THE SAY? (CAST: Rosilah, Subash, Jun, Mr. Lim).

ACT ONE: AFTERMATH OF “*GOPI KENAL TUMBUK*” (MALAY: “GOPI WAS BEATEN UP!”)

The accounts and recounts of *Jun* and *Niza* about *Subash* and *Rosilah* capture the nature of the melodrama: the outcry of *Subash* against outdated classroom or school rules and the adherence of *Rosilah* to hold students accountable through crime and punishment.

Reader’s Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH
SUBASH, NIZA, AND JUN

Subash

As a rich Indian boy who had recently transferred from Saint Joseph, an all boys’ school in downtown Johor Bahru to *FNX*, a co-ed national secondary school in the outskirts of the city, Subash was enrolled in the vocational/technical stream at the Form 5 level. As a Brahmin, Subash showed off his social status by wearing expensive accessories, e.g., contact lenses, sun glasses, bangles, watches, etc., to school. As a consequence, male students, Malays or Indians, extorted him for money and teachers “marked” him as a snobbish, pompous Indian boy from the city. A female Indian girl who had a crush on Subash once told me that “Subash looked awkward at this school” and hinted to me that he should not have transferred to *FNX*.

I wondered from time to time how different Subash did look and in what ways he did not fit into *FNX*. I found out after I ran into Subash a few weeks after “Gopi kenal tumbuk!” (Malay: “Gopi was beaten up!”) Compared to other male Indian students at school, Subash looked lighter and taller. Except for his skin tone and height, he looked just like other male Indian students at school. Subash had curly hair and a pair of big, dark brown eyes. The major difference between Subash and other male Indian students was his proficiency in English.

Unlike other male Indian students, who tended to talk with me in broken Malay, with a mix of simple English expressions, e.g., hi, yes, no, etc., Subash was able to talk with me clearly in English. In some ways, his critique of the management of student discipline also struck me as not only critical, but also analytical.

Niza

Known as “Miss New York” by non-Malay students in the morning session (senior secondary level), Niza was proud of her overseas education and training in Teaching English as a Second Foreign Language (TESOL) in the US. As the cream of the crop of her age cohort, Niza was fully funded by the Malaysian government for her undergraduate study at a state University in New York.

Compared to other female Malay teachers at *FNX*, who were shy and reticent, Niza was outgoing and talkative. Being chosen as a representative of the district of Johor Bahru (JB) to participate in a state wide English debate among English teachers in the State of Johore, Niza had a strong sense of pride of her language proficiency. Several Chinese high achievers in the science stream also commented on her bragging about fluency of her spoken English in class. The principal seemed to like Niza because she was subtle. Instead of speaking to power face-to-face like Rosilah did, Niza sought for an alternative route to move up her career ladder. She would pursue a graduate degree in Information Management and Technology at a local, public university in early 2002. Niza saw herself as an “old book” after teaching for 6 years at *FNX*. She felt drained by students who had to be “spoon-fed” (Niza’s word) in learning.

Jun

Jun, the school counselor, a recent graduate from the Faculty of Education, University Technology Malaysia (UTM), was a teacher teaching physical education at national primary schools before she became interested in counseling students at national secondary schools. As a certified school counselor, Jun went through professional training and education in school counseling. However, she planned to transfer to a “Premier School” (star school) in urban JB, where students were motivated in learning and parental expectations were high, in early 2002.

SCENE ONE: AT THE SCHOOL CANTEEN

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Bus 223A of the *Maju*, "developed," bus line was chilling as usual. The bus driver cranked up the air-conditioner as if he were trying to defeat the heat of the equator. As usual, the bus driver dropped me off the shoulder of the road across from an arid field behind a row of flats across from the school. As I get off the bus, the sun greeted my presence with a stroke of its suffocating heat. I was anxious to get to school. Walking under the vicious sun of the tropics could be debilitating even if it was just a 10-minute walk from where I got off to school.

As usual, the clink-clank of dishes at the canteen during recess outperformed the crying of the cicada in the trees. The whole school seemed to be infatuated by the *Summon*, "legal letter," of *Kapal Singh*, the lawyer of *Subash*. As I walked into the teachers' lounge, I could hear female Malay teachers whispering to each other in a tone so low, yet harsh, that it sounded like dry leaves rubbing against each other. As I was sipping the lukewarm *Teh Tarik*, "Assam tea from India mixed with sugar and concentrated milk," my forehead was beaded with sweat stemming from my eagerness to learn about the development of a social drama that took place the weekend before - *Gopi kenal tumbuk!*, "Gopi got beaten up!"

Niza and *Jun* came into the lounge for lunch and saw me at my usual spot. As usual, *Jun* had *Goreng Ayam*, "deep fried chicken parts," as her main dish, *Goreng Pisang*, "deep fried banana," as her dessert, and a glass of *Ais Limau*, "lime juice sweetened with sugar and topped with shredded ice," to go with her meal. *Jun* ate with her right palm. *Niza*, however, ate with utensils. She had *Nasi Lemak*, "long-grained rice boiled with coconut milk and served with peanuts, cucumber, and spicy condiment on the side," and *Teh Tarik*. It did not take us long to join the crowd. As *Jun* and I tried to catch up on the melodrama that took place a week ago, *Niza* interrupted us by claiming that she knew who *he* was.

NIZA: I know who *he* is.

JUN: You don't know anything about *him*.

NIZA: *He* was in my class, a good-looking Indian boy who speaks English well!

JUN: *He* stopped by the counseling center early this year because “*Dia budak bandar*” (Malay: “He is a city boy”). *He* felt isolated. “*Pengetua*” (Malay: the principal) and I have just obtained his discipline records from Saint Joseph. “*Dia kenal buang sekolah!*” (Malay: “He was expelled from Saint Joseph!”)

NIZA: “*Kenapa kita sentiasa ambil budak-budak yang kenal buang!?*” (“Why do we always take kids who are expelled from school!?”) You know Rozilah, don't you, Kee?

KEE: Yeah, I know her. Students gave her a knick-name.

NIZA: What is the nickname?

KEE: Oh, I thought you know it. You know the knick-name, Jun, don't you?

JUN: Rozilah was the only *Guru disiplin*, “discipline teacher,” patrolling the school compound. The male teachers were just sitting at their office and wait! “*Budak-budak kita nakal!*” (“Our students are naughty!”) They called her “Godzilla”. “*Rozilah tekan Subash di depan koperasi*” (“Rozilah ‘threatened’ Subash in front of the vending center.”) Subash's father is now suing Rozilah for ‘harassing’ his son!

NIZA: “*Kita memang tau Rozilah punya bengkok-bengkok, tetapi kalau Subash tak ada masalah, buat apa Rozilah tekannya!?*” (“We already knew Rozilah's personal problems, but if Subash behaved himself, why did Rozilah bother to pull his neck-tie!?”) You know Rozilah, don't you, Kee? “*Dia tekan sahaja!*” (“She was only showing off her power!”)

KEE: Is that usual for Rozilah?

JUN: Subash must have provoked her! Rozilah told him not to wear contact lenses that are colored, but he didn't listen to her. He even wore bangles to school! When I told him not to wear silver bangles to school, he talked back! “Indians wear bangles. It is our culture.” Subash just likes to show-off.

NIZA: Rozilah must have caught him wearing colored contact lenses and silver bangles. He must have talked back. She was upset. *Dia tali lehernya* (“She pulled his neck-tie.”)

Reader’s Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH ROSILAH AND KAPAL SINGH

Rosilah

Known as the discipline master with bug eyes or more commonly as “Godzilla” because of her bulky body, Rosilah was a female Malay teacher teaching English at the senior secondary level. Throughout my fieldwork I saw her patrolling the school compound either with a cane or with her discipline record. While teachers commented on her diligence as a discipline master, students complained about her absence from classroom teaching.

Rosilah went to a local teacher training college in the early 1970s when the language of instruction was English at the national education system (primary, secondary, and tertiary). The principal did not seem to like Rosilah because she was confrontational. She had face-to-face confrontations with students who violated classroom or school rules. She was also easily aggravated by students who challenged her authority. Rosilah did not hesitate to speak to power. She filed a complaint to the District Education Office against the lack of management of student discipline of the principal. The deputy head of the District Education Office told Rosilah that since the principal had 101 percent control over his school, the Office would not intervene with the management of student discipline at *FNX*.

Kapal Singh

Known for his campaign for the preservation of Tamil language and culture, Kapal Singh was once detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) due to his campaign. At present, he is a legal consultant of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). He also serves on the Parliament fighting for the rights of Indian Malaysians as he claimed. In the most recent debates (Jun, 2002)

on the language of instruction at national primary and secondary schools, Kapal Singh seemed to have agreed with the government and gone for English as the language of instruction.

SCENE TWO: ACTIONS AND PLANS OF THE PRINCIPAL

Late in the afternoon, I stopped by the main office and overheard the exchange between *Kak*, “sister,” Adams, the head of the bookkeepers, and *Kak* Osmerah, the assistant principal, about the reactions of the principal. According to *Kak* Adams, the principal had had sunken face and dim eyes since the advent of the “summon”:

KAK ADAMS: “*Kasihannya pengetua! Matanya pun tak bercerah!*”

(“The poor school head! His face sank and his eyes were dim after the letter of Kapal Singh arrived!”)

KAK OSMERAH: “*Masaalahnya dia tak percaya sekolah!*” (“The problem came from *he* (Subash) does not trust school!”)

(I debated with myself whether I should talk with the principal. I was strolling back and forth in front of the office of the principal until he saw me. As usual, the principal was welcoming: “Come, come *Cik*, ‘Miss,’ Keel!” I went into the office of the principal and sat at his desk. The nuisance brought on by the *Summon*, “legal letter,” seemed to be great as the principal described his dilemma in dealing with the twist and turns of the social drama.)

PRINCIPAL: If *she* (Rosilah) had followed the procedures correctly! I cannot do anything. I have to wait for *Jabatan*, “the State Department of Education.” *Encik*, “Mr.,” Hatta will come tomorrow and talk about *it* (the legal complaint against Rosilah). I have

to lower my dignity when I talked with *him* (Subash's father). I do not think that the contact lenses are big deals. Just tell him (Subash) to change his contact lenses back to translucent. But, Rozilah, I don't know about her inner self. She is impulsive!

KEE: *Kak* Adam said you received a *Summon* from Kapal Singh?

PRINCIPAL: I wanted to investigate the case this morning, but he (Subash) refused to talk. His father came and took him out of the school. When Tuan, "Sir," Jamaluddin (the assistant principal in charge of student affairs) asked him (Subash's father) what had happened, he said 'talk to my lawyer'. His clerk sent in the *Summon* from Kapal Singh. *Tuan* Jamaluddin was very angry. He showed me the letter.

KEE: What do you plan to do?

PRINCIPAL: I cannot do anything! I have to consult *JPNJ*, "the State Department of Education," before I responded to Kapal Singh! A *Pegawai*, "officer," from *PPD*, "the District Education Office," called me. *PPD* was more concerned with the complaint against Rozilah. Subash's father can always refer back to Rozilah. He said I did not take any actions against Rozilah. He filed a police report against Rosilah and wrote a complaint letter about me to *JPNJ*. *JPNJ* instructed *PPD* to investigate. *PPD* wanted me to write a report, but I did not have time to do it.

KEE: What do you plan to do with *Puan*, "Mrs.," Rosilah?

PRINCIPAL: I have no choice. I have to put her on something else next year.

ACT TWO: *MARI PUAN JUN! GOPI KENALTUMBUK!* - “HURRY UP MRS. JUN! GOPI
WAS BEATEN UP!”

SCENE ONE: AT THE KNOWLEDGE PAVILION

It was a pleasant Friday afternoon. The Monsoon washed away the heat in the morning. By noon, Malay students and teachers from the morning session (Form 3 to 5) had already left for their prayers at the mosques, either in their villages or housing areas. Chinese or Indian students either went home, left for work, or took a bus to Omega, the most organized tutoring center in downtown Johor Bahru. Students from the afternoon session had yet to arrive. I ventured to the *Ataska Ilimia*, “the “Knowledge Pavilion,” and then, strolled back to the school canteen looking for students to talk with. I was lucky enough to find a pair of female Indian twins and two of their peers who were playing a traditional game based on a Tamil nursery rhyme. I joined the girls for the game even though I was not able to sing along with them. Jun, the school counselor, was on her lunch break and decided to join us. Gopal, a male Indian student from the technical class interrupted the game by yelling:

GOPAL: *Mari Puan Jun! Gopi kenal tumbuk!* (“Hurry up Mrs. Jun! Gopi got beaten up!”)

(When Jun and I arrived at the scene, which was the *Pondok Perhentian Bus*, a “humble, tin-roofed hut to the left of the front gate,” Subash’s father was speaking harshly in Tamil to Devan and Gopi.)

SUBASH’S FATHER: (Speaking in Tamil. He left right after Jun and I arrived.)

DEVAN: (Silent, but looked stunned.)

GOPI: (Silent, but looked humiliated.)

(Jun sent Gopal for the principal. The principal arrived with half-open eyes as if he had just awakened from a deep, sound sleep. Puan (Mrs.) Foong, a female Chinese used to grudge to me that it was already hard for her to get anything done on Fridays. It became harder when the principal closed his door and took a nap in the afternoon. The principal asked Jun and all the boys to go to his office. Kee followed Jun and the boys to the office of the principal.)

SCENE TWO: AT THE PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE

I traced the origins and development of *Gopi kenal tumbuk!*, “Gopi got beaten up!” by listening to the recounts of the Indian boys of what triggered the social drama and the accounts of the principal of what should be done to resolve the conflict between the boys and their parents.

Devan nodded his head while Gopi, his younger brother, told the principal what took place at four semi-technical class in the morning. According to Gopi, it all began with Subash. Asokumaran, Devan, Ghana, and Gopi, four Indian school prefects who were on duty asked Subash, a male Indian student who had recently transferred from an urban national secondary school to *FNX*, to leave the classroom. To avoid theft, all students at *FNX*, as required by the discipline masters and supervised by the school prefects, left their classrooms during class recess. Subash refused to leave.

GOPI: *“Subash tidak keluar dari kelas waktu rehat pagi ini. Devan menarik tangannya. Subash mengangkat kerusi dan berlaku kekecohan!”* (“Subash stayed in the classroom during recess. Devan took Subash’s hands and asked him to leave. Subash felt offended. He held up a chair and threw it at Devan. Devan fought back. Subash fell on the floor.”)

DEVAN: (Nodded his head.)

(In the afternoon, when Asokumaran, Devan, Ghana, and Gopi were waiting for Subash to settle the dispute, Subash, Subash’s father, and his personal secretary showed up at the “Pondok Perhentian Bus.” Confusing Gopi as Devan, Subash’s father slapped Gopi on his face. When the principal asked the boys why they did not report the fight to the Encik

(Mr.) Basar or Puan (Madame) Rosilah, two discipline masters in the morning session, Gopi responded in Malay: “*Tiada, kita nak ‘settle’ sendiri.*”

GOPI: “No, we would like to settle ourselves.”

MR. LIM: “If you had followed the procedures, you are causing me trouble!”

(The principal was not happy about the “settlement.” He blamed the boys for not thinking about the consequences following the settlement. Meanwhile, *Kak* Adams, a senior bookkeeper at the main office, walked into the office and delivered the registration records of students to the principal.)

MR. LIM: We have to settle the dispute through *Permuafakan*, “consensus building,” (a “standard” procedure for conflict resolution as expected of the principals at national secondary schools.)

(The principal decided to call for a meeting for the parents from both sides. He found the phone numbers. Gopi’s father seemed to have agreed to stop by the office of the principal the following Monday. Subash’s father seemed to have turned down the principal’s proposal.)

GOPI: “Please don’t complicate the matter. Please don’t make it difficult for my parents!”

(As the principal was making the phone call to parents in Malay, Gopi begged him not to complicate the argument, “*Jangan membesarkan, susah pak and mak kita!*” The principal did not respond to Gopi. He called and asked Gopi’s father to stop by school the following Monday morning.)

MR. LIM: I am in a dilemma. I have to be answerable to the students and their parents. You trespassed on the school compound. You came through the *Pagar*, “the iron fence.” The Indian boy is sitting in front of me. He said you *Tumbuk*, “hit,” him. If you had followed the procedures! I am angry at them, too!

(The principal continued to persuade Subash’s father to come to school. It seemed that Subash’s father gave the principal a hard time.)

MR. LIM: What do you think, *Cik Kee*? They have trespassed on the school compound without consulting me. I had better ask *PPD*. I cannot take any actions myself!

(Feeling offended, the principal looked at *Cik Kee* and made the comments.)

Reader's Notes

CHARACTER SKETCH

DEVAN, GOPI, AND GOPAL

Devan and Gopi

Devan and Gopi are two Indian brothers; both are high achievers in the science stream at the senior secondary level. Devan was in 5 Science 1 and Gopi was in 5 Science 2. Both brothers served as school prefects on the Student Discipline Governing Board and participated in the Judo Club for their extra-curricular activities.

Gopal

A polite male Indian student in the vocational/technical stream at the Form 4 level who greeted every teacher he ran into on campus. Gopal worked at “Koperasi,” the vending center during recess. I used to confuse his identical twin brother as him until I found out that students who worked at the vending center wore shirts that were in vanilla to differentiate themselves from students in general.

MR. LIM: “Humph....it is already three o’clock....can you take Gopi to the clinic located in the center of the town?”

(The principal asked Jun, the school counselor, to take Gopi to the town clinic for a physical examination. The principal decided to seek guidance from the District Education Office on how to settle the argument. With tightly focused attention, the principal jotted down several names and phone numbers of the officials that he could contact. The principal made the phone calls immediately, but he was not able to contact any officials. As he was looking up at the clock on the wall, the principal asked Jun to do him a favor. “*Hum.....dah pukul tiga....bolehkah Puan bersama-sama dengan Gopi ke klinik di pusat bandar?*” Kee stayed at the principal’s office until Jun and Gopi returned from their trip to the center of the town.)

ASOKUMARAN: (Silent.)

DEVAN: (Silent.)

GHANA: (Silent.)

(The boys avoided eye contact with *Cik* Kee as if they were embarrassed by their confession of what took place earlier that day.)

JUN:

(Jun not only took Gopi to the clinic for physical exams, but also the police station to file a criminal report against Subash’s father.)

MR. LIM: We need more teachers like Puan Jun.

(Fully aware of her role only to listen, not to intervene with the actions or inactions taken by the principal, Kee smiled and nodded her head.)

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ACT THREE: A YEAR AFTER “GOPI KENAL TUMBUK!”

SCENE ONE: RECONVENED WITH PUAN ROSILAH

A year had passed since I last saw *Rosilah*. Sitting on a couch with a bamboo frame and stuffed with polyester cushions, she looked content. In the teachers' room, all the ceiling fans were spinning like propellers, but the room was filled with hot air. It could not be better for *Rosilah*. She was no longer the discipline master, but she seemed to have acted like one when I saw her dragging two Malay boys into the office earlier.

KEE: *Apa khabar?* - "How are you?"

ROSILAH: *Khabar baik!* - "I am fine."

(She continued to elaborate on her life after she stopped being the discipline master.)

ROSILAH: "Those rascals at the "remove classes," they are just playing, shouting, or running. They are easier to deal with. You whack them and they will listen. Look at my youngest son. He is different from his brother. I don't have to worry about his brother. But him, he just started form one. He came home and played until mid-night. I whacked him after I found out that he did not do his homework!"

(It was intriguing to see how Rosilah justified her role as a teacher after she was taken off the Student Discipline Governing Board. Still, staggering in my mind was the question: How did a fight between a few male Indian students evolve to antagonize school and family or evoke the ethnic sentiments between the three races: Mr. Lim, the principal (Chinese), *Rosilah* (Malay), and Subash (Indian)? As I was trying to piece together the whole story by rummaging through the remnants of my memory, two vignettes of my journal caught my attention: one recorded faithfully the origins and development of the fight; and the other, my reflections on the roles and functions of the school counselor.)

Readers' Notes

IN THE FIRST WEEK

On Friday morning, during recess, a physical fight took place at 4ST in Block A: Asokumaran, Devan, Ghana, and Gopi, four school prefects who were on duty, asked Subash to leave the classroom. According to school rules, students could not stay in the classrooms during recess. Subash refused to leave. Devan took his hands and asked him to leave. Subash was upset. He threw a chair at Devan. Devan fought back and pushed Subash to the wall. Subash fell on the ground. The boys did not report the fight to “PK Hem” (the second assistant principal, in charge of student affairs) or to the discipline masters. Instead, they decided to “settle” the dispute themselves. They agreed to meet after school.

In the afternoon, Subash, his father, and the secretary came to school. They met the boys at “Pondok Perhentian Bus”, a humble tin-roofed hut where students could shade themselves from sun and rain when they were waiting for buses. Subash’s father slapped Gopi on his face, instead of Devan. The school counselor sent Gopal to inform the principal about the slapping. Subash, his father and the secretary left before the principal arrived at the scene. The principal traced the origins and development of the dispute. He called for “Permuafakan” (consensus-building), a meeting of parents from both sides to settle the dispute on the following Monday. Gopi’s father agreed to attend the meeting, but Subash’s father refused. The principal then called “PPD” and “JPNJ” and asked for directions on how to handle the slapping. He also asked the school counselor to take Gopi for medical exams at a clinic in the center of the town.

IN THE SECOND WEEK

Gopi’s father came to school on Monday morning, but Subash’s father did not. The principal received a “*Summon*,” a legal letter from Kapal Singh, a legal consultant of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), suing Rozilah, a female Malay discipline master in the

morning session, for harassing Subash. “JPNJ” (Malay: the State Department of Education) received the same letter. The principal called “JPNJ.” “JPNJ” directed him to “PPD” (Malay: District Education Office). “PPD” asked the principal to write a report. To compile the report, the principal asked Rozilah to write a report explaining, when, where, why and how did she “harass” Subash. He documented Subash’ discipline problems through the *observations* made by his homeroom teacher, the *counseling records* written by the school counselor, and the *discipline records* held by the discipline masters. The principal also asked the school counselor to file a police report against Subash’s father and obtained Subash’s discipline records from Saint Joseph, his previous school. On Monday, the principal also mailed the report to “PPD”. “PPD” forwarded the report to “JPNJ”. “JPNJ” reported the case to the Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur.

IN THE THIRD WEEK

On Wednesday afternoon, an education officer from “JPNJ” came to school to investigate the alleged “harassment.” He talked with the principal. The officer reported the alleged “harassment” to the Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur. The principal was waiting for further instructions from the Ministry.

SCENE TWO: WHO HAS THE SAY ABOUT THE “SUMMON” OF *KAPAL SINGH*?

SUBASH says: My dad said “Son, don’t trust your school! Just tell me everything. I will help you!” We are like friends. I told him how Rosilah harassed me at school, but Mr. Lim was afraid of the Malays. He could not control them. My dad said he would take care of the problem. The principal had to listen to him. What time was this? Why couldn’t I wear contact lenses? The school counselor, she did not understand what was counseling. In Singapore, they (school counselors) were really professional. Here she just told me that I had to respect the teachers. I had to listen to them. I should not do

this. I should not do that. She did all the talking. I was just listening. Why couldn't I wear contact lenses? My optometrist said contact lenses were better for my eyes. I told Rosilah I would change them, but as you know, contact lenses were expensive. I could not just throw away them. She pulled my neck tie in front of Koperasi, "vending center." Mr. Lim passed by and stopped her.

ROSILAH says: He (Subash) had no respect for me at all! I gave him several chances, but still he wore colored contact lenses. I wanted to write down his name, but he said his father told him not to be afraid of me. Kapal Singh just addressed the "Summon" to him and cc to *JPNP*, "the State Department of Education." He did not have to inform *JPNP*. He (the principal) was just a coward! He was difficult to work with. He did not listen to me. He made all the decisions himself. You attended the meetings of the Student Discipline Governing Board, didn't you? Even if I raised my concern, they (the management) did not listen to me.

JUN says: He was a good looking Indian boy. I noticed that he had curly eye lashes when I counseled him. He (Subash) transferred to the school early in the year. He was from the city. He had a hard time adjusting to the school. He told me that students picked on him. Unlike other Indian students at school, he was very close to his father. He told him everything. I told him not to wear bangles to school, but he said it was Indian culture. Mr. Lim did not know anything. I would leave the school next year and Rosilah would be transferred to the afternoon session. You knew the problem, didn't you? He did not listen to us. He made all the decisions himself.

MR. LIM says: Subash's father complained to me before this thing happened. I had to tell him that Rosilah meant well, but she used the wrong approach. As the head of the school, I could decide what actions I would take to punish Rosilah. I did not have to listen to him.

AUDIENCE: Claps.

Readers' Notes

THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

After all, if the role of the powerful Student Discipline Governing Board was to coordinate the efforts from both home and school to help students conform to norms and values leading to good student discipline, the role of the school counselor was to help school and parents cope with the resistance of students, which could take various shapes or forms. I assumed that as the only school counselor at *FNX*, Jun helped discipline masters and teachers deal with the resistance of students against school or classroom rules. Much to my surprise, however, she resorted to “*Malukah?*” (Malay: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”), i.e. using shame and guilt as a tactic of counseling students who violated classroom or school rules. The tactic of using shame and guilt seemed to have worked well with Malay students as they were the only group of students who were referred to the counseling center by the discipline masters or teachers. Rarely did Jun counsel non-Malay students. The lack of exposure to non-Malay students plus the lack of initiatives of Jun herself to interact with them made her ignorant of the reasons behind the patterns of resistance of Chinese and Indian students.

Jun shared with me a few significant cases that took place at *FNX* during my fieldwork. Once in a while, she would ask me about the ways of Chinese students. Jun lacked insights as to why there was a lack of participation of Chinese students in school improvement programs/projects, the annual motivation and leadership camps most notably.



THE END



THANK YOU

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: ACCOMMODATION, SCHOOL SUCCESS AND ETHNIC DOWNPLAY

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese who go to independent secondary schools do not have *Chien To*, “future.” They can’t even read the electricity or water bills. This is Malaysia! They had better know how to read Malay. As long as they (children and youths) can listen to and speak in Chinese, going to Chinese primary school is enough.

This response is typical of the ethnic Chinese parents in Malaysia when asked why they send their children to national (Malay) secondary schools. Employed by ethnic Chinese parents to improve the economic and social prospects of their children, the language capital accumulation strategy, as illustrated by the quote above, is an artifact of the internalization of discrimination and stereotypes. Introduced into British Malaya (1826-1940) as coolies, first-generation, ethnic Chinese accepted and internalized discrimination and stereotypes as some of the conditions of survival on the Malays’ soil. Because of these conditions and language barriers, they remained culturally marginalized. Through hard work and support from Diaspora Chinese networks, second-generation, ethnic Chinese thrived economically in the Federation of Malaya, but remained culturally and linguistically isolated, identifying more with the Diaspora community than the Federation. Through Chinese primary school, one of the “three pillars” of Chinese

culture, third-generation, ethnic Chinese continue to learn Chinese language (Suryadinata 1997). However, in order to survive and advance themselves given the challenges brought on by the language and quota reform policies, they enter Malay rather than Chinese secondary schools.

This chapter ties together the roles of the language and quota system reform policies in shaping the school behaviors and academic performances of six high achieving, ethnic Chinese youths. First, I describe the racialized and gendered school experiences of these youths and summarize how these experiences affect their school behaviors. Next, I characterize the ways in which they achieve academically and identify the reasons behind their school successes. Finally, through vignettes, I present the ways in which these youths typically respond to ethnic stereotypes and gender stratification and identify individual variations to these dominant modes of response.

The evidence for the findings of this chapter derives from five sources: (1) field notes taken during fieldwork, (2) verbatim transcripts of interviews that I conducted and translated into English, (3) surveys administered to ethnic Chinese students at *FNX*, (4) grade reports obtained from teachers, and (5) parental attendance records obtained from the principal. As a *Sekolah Luar Bandar*, “outskirts school,” *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)* is approximately two hours away from downtown *Johor Bahru*, the state capital and is located within a small town named *Taman Mawar*, “the rose garden.” According to the principal, in order to expand access to education, the ministry of education has set up schools throughout small towns and within walking distance of residential areas. As an ethnographer, I visited *FNX* on a daily basis and shadowed ethnic Chinese youths over their school day making a point to attend and record social activities and special events. Although the visits varied in length, I jotted down the activities and events in my calendar and re-constructed the scenes and participants in my journal at the end of the day.

Table 18 Student Populations by Grade Levels and by Ethnic Breakdowns, *FNX*, 2001

Grade Levels		Ethnic breakdowns				Total
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Other	
Form Five	11	218	53	52	3	326
Form Four	10	230	96	87	1	414
Form Three	9	242	82	79	10	413
Form Two	8	313	89	66	5	473
Form One	7	330	85	130	2	547
Remove Class		0	47	26	0	73
Total		1333	452	440	21	2246

7.2. **BACKGROUND: RACIALIZED TEACHING PRACTICES AND GENDERED DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES**

At national secondary schools, ethnic Chinese youths face racialized teaching practices and gender-biased, disciplinary approaches. For example, as a means to discourage Chinese students from learning their mother tongue, the Malay administrators from *FNX* exclude Chinese language classes from the regular school hours each year by claiming that there are no classrooms available for such classes. As a consequence, ethnic Chinese students who want to learn Chinese language have to stay late after school. Because of transportation problems or safety concerns, many ethnic Chinese students simply give up taking Chinese language classes. Moreover, assuming that the physical presence of parents at school is symbolic of their support, Malay administrators tend to stereotype ethnic Chinese parents as being *Kia Shu*, “fearful of lagging behind,” financially and more concerned with earning money than supporting the school. Although some parents fit this ethnic stereotype, many ethnic Chinese parents do not attend

school events or participate in school improvement programs because of language barrier and feelings of cultural alienation.

At different points in our interactions, the ethnic Chinese youths in this study also described Malay teachers as indifferent to their questions, but willing to give out verbal cues to Malay students that they would learn more about the content of the monthly exams through the *Tuition Kampung*, “village tutoring program.” Assuming that all Malay students are poor and therefore cannot afford for private tutoring, the village tutoring program is one of the several remedial programs funded by the *Johore* State Department of Education to help “poor” Malay students improve mathematics and science performances. Facing differential treatment, ethnic Chinese youths suppress their negative feelings (e.g. animosity, jealousy, etc.) and seek help from private tutoring centers to improve their academic performance. In maintaining student discipline, male Malay discipline teachers label low-achieving, male Chinese youths as members of the *Kongsi Kelab*, “gangsters club.” Likewise, female Malay discipline teachers attribute the school failure of low-achieving, female Chinese youths to their sexuality and label them as members of the *Bo Shia*, “loose (promiscuous) girls ring.” Facing these biased disciplinary approaches, ethnic Chinese youths take part in extra-curricular activities and interact with Malay and Indian students to avoid being labeled as street gangsters.

Separation by sex is observation during school events, and generally males and females are discouraged from mingling together. Even in routine school functions, including weekly assemblies, class recesses, and faculty members, male and female Malay teachers rarely sit next to or talk with each other. Even married couples do not sit side-by-side. At the school canteen, male and female students of the three ethnic groups have to approach the food counter through the *Lorong Lelaki*, “male lane,” and *Lorong Perempuan*, “female lane.” Extra-curricular activities also provide insight into the gender-based divisions. Although there are two types of extra-curricular activities (uniformed and non-uniformed), both have male and female subdivisions. Non-Malay students can easily tell the gender of the participants of each subdivision by the name that it carries. Although teachers and administrators claim that students of all three ethnic groups and of both genders have equal opportunities to undertake leadership roles, male Malay students tend to become the leaders and female students tend to be their assistants.

Except for one female Malay teacher who veils herself from the head to toe, most female Malay teachers cover their heads with *Kain Tudung*, the Islamic head scarves, and wear *Baju Kurong*, the traditional, female Malay clothing made up of a long straight blouse and a long skirt, to “hide” their bodies. Like their teachers, female Malay students wear *Baju Kurong* to hide their bodies and cover their heads with *Mini Kain Tudung*, the mini head scarves. Both the *Baju Kurong* and *Kain Tudung* symbolize the strict control of female sexuality. As *Puan Rosini*, the female English subject head explains, women who expose their hair and skin risk arousing men’s sexual fantasies. As a consequence, Malay girls and women are encouraged to cover their limbs and hide their hair. Although female, non-Malay teachers do not abide by the same strict dress codes, they are required to wear skirts that reach their knees and to button their shirts up to the neck. As for female non-Malay students, they have to wear the national school uniforms, which are made up of a white shirt and a knee-high blue dress. Over the course of my fieldwork, a few female, ethnic Chinese students who wore *Baju Kurong* to cover their plump bodies were frequently pressured by female Malay discipline teachers to put on the head scarves too. Having felt that their ethnic identities were contested, these students refused to put on the head scarves and gave up wearing *Baju Kurong*. Except for annual school events, in which they wear a *Sarong*, the traditional male, Malay clothing made up of a long shirt and pair of long pants, and a *Songkok*, the traditional, black male Malay head dress, male Malay teachers tend to dress in western attires during school days. Both Malay and non-Malay students wear national school uniforms, which consist of a white shirt and a pair of dark green pants.

At *FNX*, the division of labor is based on gender. This gender-based division of labor is especially evident in the assignment of administrative personnel. The most prestigious administrative positions of the management are held exclusively by men; less prestigious, but by no means less important positions are comprised of only women. Female Malay teachers comprise about ninety-five percent of the teaching force. They teach and head language and humanity classes. Although male teachers comprise a small number of the teaching force and management, they teach mathematics and science classes, and make important decisions regarding school improvement.

In addition to the “official” division of labor, students and teachers of both sexes receive “special tasks” during school events. However, they rarely question these duties. For example, female teachers and students are often in charge of decorating the event site, preparing the

refreshments, and entertaining. Male teachers and students, on the other hand, help move the furniture or equipment required for the events and act as the hosts of ceremonies.

7.3. A COMPOSITE SKETCH: ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS PATTERNS OF HIGH ACHIEVING ETHNIC CHINESE YOUTHS

In this section, I will first characterize the achievement trends of the six ethnic Chinese youths in this chapter and second, examine the roles of parents in their school success. Six ethnic Chinese youths from the academic track outshine other youths by being friendly, articulate, and critical. These youths share similar demographic characteristics (see Table 19). All identify themselves as “middle-class” Chinese. As Prichard and Buxton (1988) point out, class memberships are more accurate through the identification made by the informants than the researcher. More interesting to me, however, are the details and nuances that emerged over time as the youths described their school experiences. These details and nuances not only shed light on the shared concerns and issues of “successful” youths in learning and in behavior, but also in life choices. Having shadowed the youths at school for an extended period, I visited them at home and interviewed their parents. In addition to showing my interest in the youths’ lives, the visits and interviews help contextualize the school behaviors of youths, especially the various ways in which they respond to discrimination and stereotyping. As a follow-up of the visits and interviews, I distributed Chinese student surveys to the youths and solicited their feelings and thoughts about the roles of race/ethnicity and gender in shaping their overall school experiences.

Through a one-way ANOVA analysis, I analyzed the grade reports to provide the background information crucial to understand the academic performance of youths. Through the constant comparison method analysis, I analyzed my field notes, interviews, and surveys to enrich the narratives of these youths. Although there are individual variations, the dominant, behavioral patterns exhibited by ethnic Chinese youths include: (1) to alleviate the effects of

ethnicity on their motivations and aspirations, male youths downplay their ethnic ancestry; to reduce the impacts of gender, female youths downplay male preference, (2) in order to expand their chances for success in life, both male and female youths accumulate Malay language capital at tutoring centers and explore alternative routes for higher education, and (3) to avoid being labeled as members of the *Kongsi Kelab*, “Chinese gangster club,” or *Bo Shia*, “loose (promiscuous) girls ring,” male and female youths conform to school rules and participate in extra-curricular activities to show that they do not interact with Chinese gangsters or loose girls.

Table 19 Demographic Characteristics of *Six Ethnic, Chinese High Achievers, *FNX*, 2001

Name	Gender	Age	Languages spoken at home	Parents occupation	Parents education	Number of siblings
Shu Tong	Female	17	Mandarin and <i>Hokchiew</i>	Father (ship-yard mechanic); mother (bookkeeper)	Father (senior secondary school); mother (junior secondary school)	3
<i>Fu Gui</i>	Male	17	Mandarin and <i>Teochew</i>	Father (out of job); mother (kindergarten teacher)	Father (primary school); mother (senior secondary school)	2
<i>Jen Ni Hua</i>	Female	17	Mandarin and <i>Hokkien</i>	Father (education administrator); mother (school principal)	Father (university); mother (same)	2
<i>Shi Yen</i>	Male	17	Mandarin and <i>Cantonese</i>	Father (factory foreman); mother (homemaker)	Father (junior secondary school); mother (primary school)	3
<i>Tze Chiang</i>	Male	18	Mandarin and <i>Hokkien</i>	Father (traditional herbal doctor); mother (foot-	Father (junior secondary school); mother (same)	2

				massage therapist)		
<i>Chao Hong</i>	Male	17	Mandarin and Teochew	Small business owners (state lottery)	Father (senior secondary school); mother (same)	4

**All six youths are third generation Chinese Malaysians who were born and raised in Malaysia*

7.3.1. Achievement Trends: Average Language, Mathematics, and Science Grades

Early on in my fieldwork, when I consulted the principal about recruiting the respondents for the first effective school surveys, he recommended the science classes (the academic track). According to the principal, science class students would be able to answer my survey questions better than their peers because they have a better command of the Malay language. The geographic location of the science classes reflects the respect bestowed to its students compared to those of the vocational or technical classes. Located on the fourth floors of blocks A and B, the heart of *FNX*, science classes are shielded from the noises made by students who roam around school compound during school hours. *Jen Ni Hua*, *Shu Tong*, *Fu Gui*, *Tze Chiang*, *Si Yen*, and *Bao Bei* are six high-achieving, ethnic Chinese students in the science classes at the form four level (equivalent to the tenth grade in the US). *Phoenix*, a Chinese language teacher who has interacted intensively with these youths, considers *Jen Ni Hua* and *Shu Tong* as the most likely to pass *SPM*, the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education, with flying colors. Although all six youths excel in their *PMR*, the Lower Secondary Education Assessment Test, *Shu Tong* has outperformed her peers by getting five A1s and has continued to outperform her peers after getting into the academic track. Table 7.2.1.1 shows that *Shu Tong* has outshone her peers in Malay language, advanced mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Administered to students at the end of the form three level (equivalent to ninth grade in the US), *PMR* evaluates students in the following subject areas: (1) Malay language, (2) English language, (3) mathematics, (4) science, (5) history, (6) geography, and (7) living skills. The highest grade that a student can attain for a

subject area is A1 (75-100 points). After A1, there are A2 (70-74 points), B3 (65-69 points), B4 (60-64 points), C5 (55-59 points), C6 (50-54 points), P7 (44-49 points), P8 (40-44 points), and F9 (0-39 points). The grading system originated from the British “O’s level” and “A’s level” examinations. During the British colonial period (1787-1955), the colonial government used the exams to identify candidates for the University of Malaya or for higher education institutions in the British common-wealth countries. Up to the late 1970s, the exams were administered in English. However, beginning in the mid-1980s, all students have to take the exams in Malay regardless of their native languages. Without individual diligence and parental support, it would be hard if not impossible for non-Malay students to attain As in any national examinations (*PMR, SPM*).

Because of their outstanding performance, all six youths were recruited into the academic track for their senior secondary education. They have continued to perform above the achievement standards of Chinese students in the same track and have exhibited strong orientations toward mathematics and science. Table 20 shows that except for *Bao Bei, Shu Tong, Fu Gui, Jen Ni Hua*, and *Shi Yen* have outperformed even other Chinese students in the academic track in mathematics, advanced mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. In order to further contextualize the academic performances of the five youths in this chapter with those of Malay and Indian students at the same grade level and in the same track, I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on major languages, mathematics, and science subjects. Summarized in Table 21, the findings of the analysis show that except for biology, significant differences exist between the average grades of Malay, Chinese, and Indian students in language, mathematics, and science subjects. Figure 15 details the average language, mathematics, and science grades of the three ethnic groups and shows their achievement patterns. At *FNX*, Chinese students seem to have outperformed Malay and Indian students in mathematics and science subjects while Indian students seem to have outperformed Malay and Chinese students in language subjects.

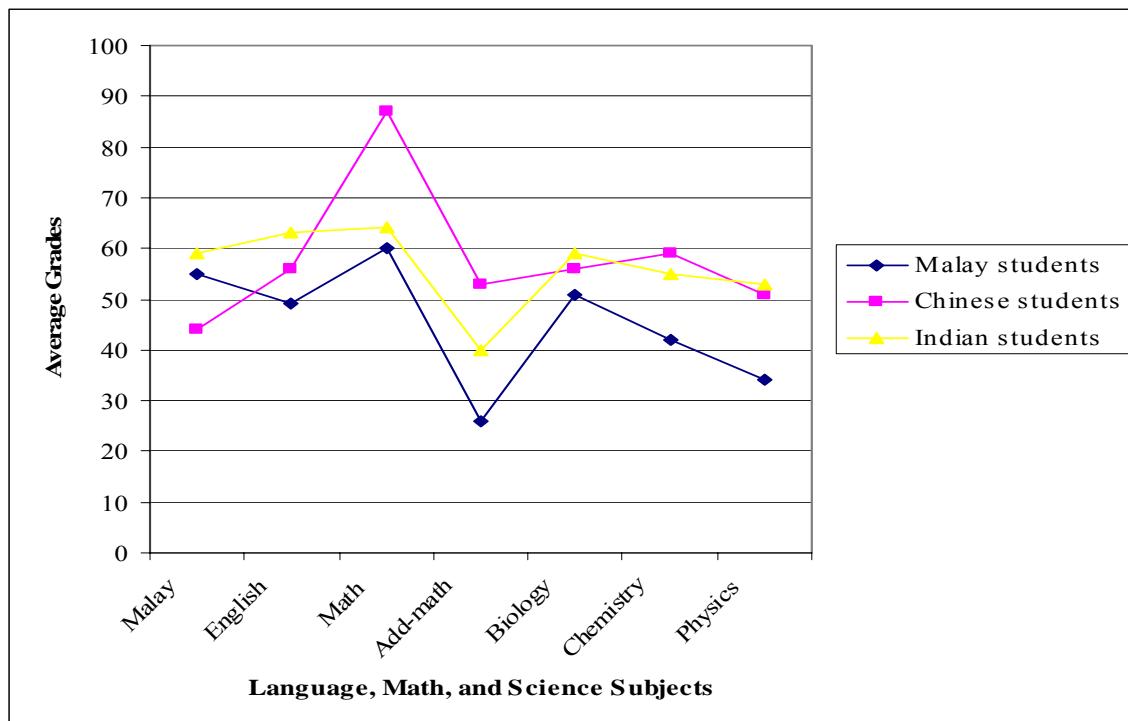
Table 20 A Comparison of the Language, Mathematics, and Science Grades of the Six Ethnic, Chinese Youths in this chapter with those of Chinese Students in the Science Classes (Form Four Level), *FNX*, 2000

Name	Gender	Malay	English	Math	Add-Math	Biology	Chemistry	Physics	Chinese
<i>Shu Tong</i>	Female	67	63	91	80	70	88	77	67
<i>Fu Gui</i>	Male	56	69	99	71	82	77	65	61
<i>Jen Ni Hua</i>	Female	60	67	86	71	65	67	71	59
<i>Shi Yen</i>	Male	51	40	99	57	52	48	60	N/A
<i>Tze Chiang</i>	Male	46	64	79	55	53	48	40	N/A
<i>Bao Bei</i>	Male	40	50	85	47	29	38	40	N/A
Chinese students		44	56	87	53	56	59	51	

Table 21 One-way ANOVA Analysis of Language, Mathematics, and Science Performance by Ethnic Groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian), Science Track Classes, Form Four Level, *FNX*, 2000

Subject Areas	df	F	df	Sig
	<i>Between groups</i>		<i>Within groups</i>	
Malay	2	8.788	57	.000
English	2	12.372	57	.000
Mathematics	2	18.891	56	.000
Advanced mathematics	2	16.667	57	.000
Biology	2	2.739	57	.073
Chemistry	2	7.108	57	.002
Physics	2	10.191	57	.000

Figure 15 Average Language, Mathematics and Science Grades by Ethnic Groups, Academic Track, Four Form Level. *FNX*, 2000



7.3.2. The Roles of Parents in the School Success of Ethnic Chinese Youths

The six ethnic, Chinese youths in this chapter follow the “two golden rules” set by their parents: (1) going to Chinese primary school for culture, but going to Malay secondary school for the sake of future, and (2) getting good grades at school, but exploring alternative opportunities for higher education. These rules tie together the school behaviors and achievement patterns of these youths and their parents’ belief systems.

7.3.2.1. The Role of Parents in School Choice

Except for *Tze Chiang*, all youths began their secondary education at *FNX* at the form one level (equivalent to the seventh grade in the US). Like many Chinese students who go to Chinese primary schools, *Tze Chiang* is strong in mathematics and science subjects, but is weak in language subjects. He failed the Malay language in his *UPSR*, “Primary School Assessment Test” and went to the “remove class” (language remedial class) for a year to catch up his Malay. All six youths went to the same Chinese primary school located in a small town a few miles away from *FNX*. Upon completion of primary schooling, all six youths took the entrance exam of *Foon Yew (FY)*, a prestigious Chinese independent secondary school in the capital city and passed the exam with flying colors. Because of their exceptional performance, *Fu Gui* and *Shu Tong* were awarded with one year of scholarship in the form of textbook loans and tuition remissions. However, none of the youths went to *FY*. Having internalized their parents’ beliefs, all six youths cited distance, tuition, and concerns about the future as the major reasons why they chose to enter national secondary school.

Since *FY* is far from the small towns, where most ethnic Chinese live in Malaysia, students who go there have to spend long hours commuting between school and home every day. Furthermore, since *FY* is an “independent” secondary school and is not funded by the government, students have to pay tuition fees every month. If the youths in this study had chosen to go to *FY*, they would have had to commute between home and school on a daily basis and to pay for monthly tuition fees. In contrast, scattered throughout small town Malaysia, national secondary schools provide youths of the three major ethnic groups with free secondary education. Most important of all is the belief of ethnic Chinese parents that *FY* graduates *Mei Chien To*, “do not have a future.” Except for Malay and English language classes, students at *FY* learn mathematics and science subjects through Chinese. Up to the late 1980s, the curriculum of Chinese independent schools catered for the college entrance exams in Taiwan, the only country that accepted their graduates. However, beginning in the early 1990s, after two national

universities and several polytechnics in Singapore admitted *FY* graduates ethnic Chinese parents began to compare the life chances provided by Chinese independent schools with Malay national secondary schools. For example, *Shu Tong's* father regretted not sending *Shu Tong* to *FY*.

Now that I look back, I have spent as much money in her and her brother's tutoring classes as the tuition fees charged by *Foon Yew*. I regret not letting her go there, but who would have thought that Singapore would take *Foon Yew* graduates.

Fu Gui's mother showed a similar sense of regret when she shared with me her frustrations in applying for scholarships for *Fu Gui*. To avoid embarrassing the parents of the ethnic Chinese youths in this study, I did not pursue the topic further. However, based on the various strategies that they used to expand the life chances of youths, it is fair to say that parents did regret sending youths to *FNX*.

7.3.2.2. The Role of Parents in Capital Accumulation

In Malaysia, soaring inflation rates have made double incomes a necessity for middle-class Chinese families. The youths in this chapter come from middle-middle and lower-middle class families where both parents need to work in order to pay for basic living costs. However, regardless of work demands, the youths' parents monitor their take-home assignments, ask about the progress that they made, and review their grade reports. Furthermore, their parents send them to Omega, the largest tutoring center in the city, to: (1) accumulate Malay language capital, and (2) drill for good grades. All youths in this chapter go to Omega for tutoring classes in major language, mathematics, and science subjects. The drilling exercises of Omega, which include weekly quizzes, monthly tests, and mock exams, are especially appealing to ethnic Chinese parents because they help their sons and daughters attain good grades in national exams. As shown in Table 22, data from the interviews with high- and low-achieving youths suggests that the parents of high achievers are more supportive in schooling than those of low achievers.

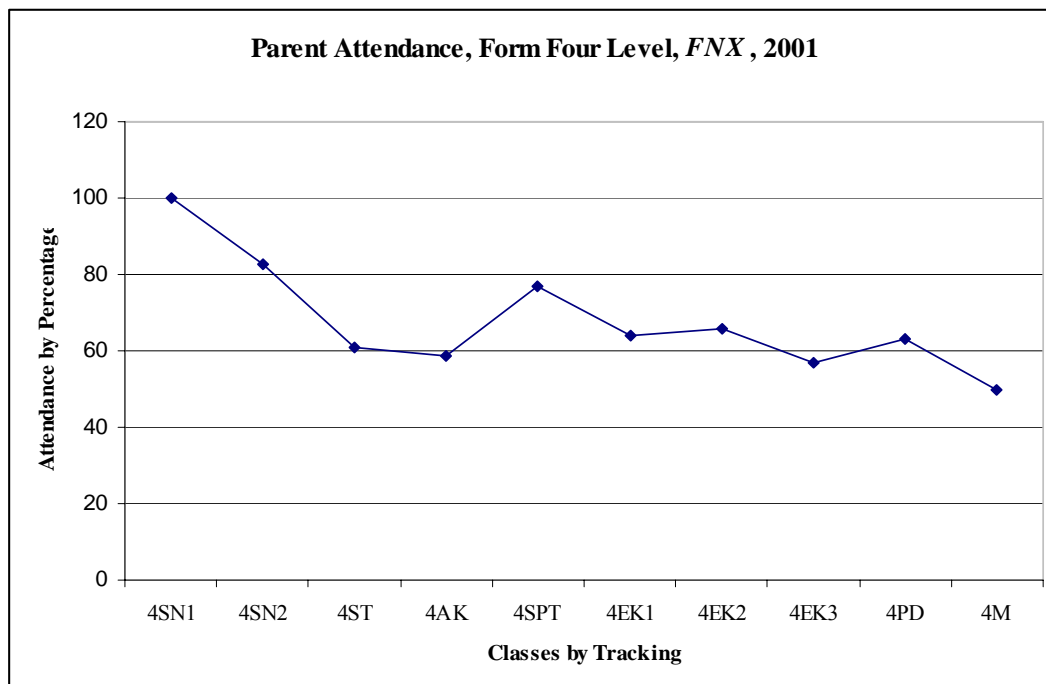
Table 22 Matrix Table Report on Parental Support in Schooling by Achievement Levels

Types of Parental Support	High Achievers	Low Achievers
Encourage youths to excel at school	14	1
Ask youths about progress made	3	0
Send youths to collective tutoring classes at Omega	9	0
Buy youths reference books	1	0
Respond to youths' learning interests	9	1
Help identify alternative routes to higher education	2	0

Source: Individual, in-depth interviews with high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths

The parental attendance record on school's opening day confirms the youth interview findings and reflects differential parental support in schooling. Figure 16 shows that parental attendance of the science classes (academic track) is higher than that of the vocational or technical classes (non-academic track).

Figure 16 Parental Attendance on School's Opening Day, Four Form Level, By Tracks,
FNX, 2001



**SN*: Science class; *ST*: Semi-technical class, *AK*: Account class, *SPT*: Semi-business-technical class,
EK: economy class, *PD*: Business class, *M*: Class with hopes.

7.4. VIGNETTES

Although vignettes have different meanings and uses, a common view held by writers is that they are short and focused. In sociological research, researchers use vignettes as a complimentary method to capture social phenomena that are not tapped by other research methods (Hazel 1995 and Highes 1998 as cited in Barter and Renold 2001). In this study, vignettes are short, tightly focused literary sketches in which I use scenarios to elicit the responses (beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions) of ethnic Chinese youths toward sensitive topics and to derive cultural norms from these responses. The four vignettes presented below share the following sensitive topics: (1) ethnic ancestry, (2) quota system, and (3) gender roles. Since ethnic ancestry is a sensitive topic among youths as evidenced by their deliberate downplay of it at school, I use vignettes to probe ethnic Chinese youths' perceptions about their own physical appearances. The second sensitive topic among ethnic Chinese youths is the quota system. Here, I use vignettes to probe their attitudes toward the quota system, which reflect their beliefs toward the reward provided by the national education system. Occasionally, the readers may notice youths' outbursts toward the quota system, which also reveal their attitudes toward social inequality. Pressured to succeed on an unequal basis and overwhelmed by the fear of getting into the technical fields, female ethnic Chinese youths adjust or change their career goals while male youths simply give up their career plans. Implicit in the youths' career aspirations are traditional Chinese gender roles as imposed on them by their parents.

There are challenges, however, in weaving multiple lines of stories into the same set of narratives, the vignettes, so to speak. First, choosing a form of representation that can contain different story lines requires creativity. Second, identifying the topics that run through the vignettes and where they converge requires careful, systematic analysis. By drawing on mostly from focus group interviews conducted on- or off-campus with youths, I use vignettes to

explicate the three topics described above. In addition, I blend in exposition, a creative writing technique, to enrich the content of the vignettes and make use of asterisks as a narrative convention to encapsulate supplemental information and to provide visual breaks.

7.4.1. *Jen Ni Hua*: A Vignette about the Inquisitive Daughter

The gaze of adults does not intimidate *Jen Ni Hua*. When she talks, she looks straight into my eyes. Her long, slanted eyes are inquisitive, but not aggressive. When I asked *Jen Ni Hua* to choose a physical feature that best reflects her ethnic ancestry, she pointed to her eyes. In compliance with the hair code set by the school, she ties her long, coarse hair into a pony tail with a black or navy blue ribbon. Most of the time, *Jen Ni Hua* listens with compassion, but sometimes, she interrupts our exchanges with a passionate argument about her position on certain sensitive issues, especially those related to school choice and career aspiration. The following account, illustrates how *Jen Ni Hua* interrupted a focus group exchange about school choice that was taking place on campus:

Students from *Foon Yew* have only two choices: Singapore or Taiwan. We have three choices: Malaysia, Singapore, or the west. Of course, we know we cannot ask too much from government universities.

As observed during my fieldwork, school choice is a sensitive topic among the high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths in this study. In addition to feeling disengaged from classroom learning and alienated from school activities, they feel ambivalent about their future. Like most of the high-achieving ethnic Chinese youths whom I encountered at *FNX*, *Jen Ni Hua* cites the opportunity to enter local, public university as the major reason behind her school choice. However, she is candid about her lack of confidence in the teaching of Malay teachers and the need for after-school tutoring.

There is only one sentence: we cannot rely on those Malay teachers! Every year, the Chinese newspaper says it beautifully; students from a certain school get how many A's. Let me tell you, those students are mostly from conforming secondary schools³², they rely on themselves!

Throughout my formal or informal exchanges with the youths in this study, it was not difficult to pinpoint self-conflicting accounts as those illustrated above. Such accounts reflect the deeper, inner psyche or a state of mind that is put out of place by the mixed messages sent out by parents. As described in an earlier sub-section, because of their belief in the merit system, ethnic Chinese parents send their sons and daughters to national secondary schools. However, once they enter national secondary schools, ethnic Chinese youths are encouraged to seek after-school help because their parents distrust the teaching quality of national secondary schools.

Like many female Chinese adolescents, *Jen Ni Hua* has a pale complexion and a slightly plump body due to lack of exercise. At least twice a week, *Jen Ni Hua* goes to Omega, the largest tutoring center in downtown *Johor Bahru*, for collective tutoring classes in mathematics, advanced mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. Once a week she has personal piano lessons at home. *Jen Ni Hua* has been taking piano lessons since she was five-year old. There was a smirk on her face when she explained to me why she is taking piano lessons. "My mother said I should not count on men. If I could not find a job, I could at least teach piano to survive." As the headmistress of a suburban, Chinese primary school, *Jen Ni Hua's* mother brings in more income than her husband. However, she seems to be struggling between gender role advancement and gender ideology fulfillment.³³ *Jen Ni Hua's* mother is bitter about having to play the roles of being both a provider and a caretaker.

My mother always complains about how hard it is to be a career woman and a housewife at the same time. Every morning, at the crack of dawn, she goes to school. Under the mid-day sun, she brings home a big pile of paper and continues to work until dinnertime. In between work, she steals some time to cook and clean. Although my father washes and irons his own uniforms, my mother has to do the laundry for the rest of the family. She has been talking about hiring an

³² Conforming secondary schools are Chinese secondary schools which have adopted the curriculum of national secondary schools and have received partial funding from the government. However, the language of instruction in such schools is still Chinese. Readers who are interested in the different types of secondary schools in Malaysia are referred to chapter nine, the concluding chapter, for details.

³³ I borrow the concepts from Prichard and Buxton (1988) to characterize the role conflicts experienced by *Jen Ni Hua's* mother as she struggles to meet the expectations of traditional gender roles and to exceed these perceptions to achieve self-realization.

Indonesian maid, but the problem is: we do not have a room for the maid to do her prayers five times a day!

Witnessing the struggle of her mother, *Jen Ni Hua* argues that in her life marriage should come second to career - a point that I will come back to when I discuss the gender enactment of ethnic Chinese youths in the next chapter. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on how career choice as a common sensitive topic shared among youths is an outcome of the limited upward mobility brought on by the quota system and how *Jen Ni Hua*, like other youths in this study, changes her career aspiration over time by comparing concrete examples drawn from life with the abstract belief system held by her parents.

In Malaysia, since the early 1990s, there has been an influx of domestic helpers from the poorer Southeast Asian countries. Although they are more expensive, Filipino maids are, in general, in greater demand than Indonesian maids because of their English competency. Since the 1997 Asian economic crisis, Indonesian maids have become more popular because they are cheaper than the Filipino maids. A Filipino maid can cost up to several hundred U.S. dollars per month while an Indonesian maid costs one hundred U.S. dollar at the most. The introduction of Filipino and Indonesian maids have helped reduce the childcare and housekeeping burden of working Chinese mothers and hence is welcomed by the Chinese community. Nonetheless, any Chinese families who wish to hire Indonesian maids are required, by law, to reserve them a prayer room in the household. In practice, few families can afford to do so. Even if they could afford to, few families would follow the law. Many families simply give up the idea of hiring Indonesian maids because of privacy. By way of example, *Phoenix*, a Chinese language teacher at *FNX*, claimed that even if she was willing to bring in Islam into the family, she was reluctant to compromise the privacy of the family.

Early in our acquaintance, *Jen Ni Hua* wanted to become an educator. "Teaching is a stable job because it is a government job. Even if you encounter economic crisis and all the

companies go bankrupt, you don't have any problems. You are still teaching." On a few occasions, she even told me that she would like to become someone like me, a phenomenon that I would rather attribute to a sense of righteousness that was shared between us than to the role model that I provided. In my second visit to *Fan Niu Xiao*, however, *Jen Ni Hua* changed her mind and wanted to become a medical doctor. She planned to go into politics because as she observed most Chinese political or social activists were either doctors or lawyers.

As you know, the Malays have "special rights." They can enter the government universities with much lower performance than the Chinese do. Chinese in Malaysia, as compared to those in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Taiwan, have to work much harder in order to get into the universities. After thirty years, there should be some changes. After all, Chinese are the backbones of the economy of this country. The government had better listen to its "provider." People tend to listen to doctors and lawyers. I want to become a doctor.

As I found out through further exchanges with *Jen Ni Hua* that corruption among educational administrators and racism among educators had resulted in the changes in her career aspiration. Although *Jen Ni Hua's* father has overcome Malay language barrier and has become a civil servant for the current government, he has yet learned to adapt himself to the organizational culture of his work place.

At the dinner table, my father talks about how senior administrators of the *Johore* State Department of Education abuse their power and use public facilities for personal pleasure. "Hey, Lim, come and join us in *Tioman* Island! I can put you in a five-star hotel!" (*Jen Ni Hua* mimics the voice of a corrupt administrator.) My mother, on the other hand, complains about the lack of government fund allocation to improving her school. The lack of funding to expand classroom size and to renovate school facilities has increased her workload. Although her official title is a school principal, she feels like she has spent more in raising funds from the Chinese community than in being an instructional leader.

In an off-campus, focus group exchange about Malay teachers and their teaching attitudes, *Jen Ni Hua* responded with rage to the overt bragging of some Malay teachers at school about the "special rights" of the Malays:

Do you know Norma? She is the teacher who runs the *Koperasi*, "vending center." She tells Malay students that they have "special rights," so they can do anything at school. I often think that if we really want racial harmony, there shouldn't be any special rights! I understand that you (the government) can't fulfill the need of everybody, but at least you have to make sure that all three ethnic groups are treated equally for basic needs. Some Malays don't seem to understand that why the three ethnic groups can't get along well. There should be fairness!

Although *Jen Ni Hua* is furious about the unequal treatment of Malay and non-Malay students at school and is passionate about the changes that should take place within the larger Malaysian society, she attributes the academic failure and behavioral problems of ethnic Chinese students to the lack of parenting skills: “Chinese parents are only interested in making money. They don’t have time to supervise the performance and behavior of their children. Therefore, Chinese students fail their exams and skip school.” This account exemplifies another self-conflicting account that is brought on by her disrupted psyche. Furthermore, it contradicts an earlier account that she has made to contest the labeling of ethnic Chinese students in the non-academic track as “bad” students:

If I chose to go into the arts stream, I would be dead! As you can tell, teachers don’t like students in the non-academic track. They (teachers) think that they (students) are ‘bad’ students and refuse to go into the ‘bad’ classes. As a matter of fact, they (non-academic track students) aren’t. The fact is there aren’t enough teachers who can teach the non-academic track. There aren’t enough ‘talented’ (competent or qualified) teachers. As a consequence, everybody (administrators, teachers, and students in academic track) see the non-academic track as “bad” classes. I think it is wrong! You can’t compare science classes with economics classes. We learn different subjects. You can’t say science classes are ‘good’ and economics classes are ‘bad’.

To sum up, *Jen Ni Hua* is inquisitive and righteous although at times, she can be self-conflicting and confrontational.

7.4.2. ***Fu Gui***: A Vignette about the Lost Son

Fu Gui’s physical appearance and academic performance have earned him the title “the most sought-after, male Chinese youth” at school. He has a fair complexion, a head of short, slightly waved hair, and a moustache. There was a smirk on *Fu Gui*’s face when he confided to me that he knew how to survive and thrive at Malay high school. His insight into the social order of *FNX* explains his compliance to school rules “on-stage” and defiance to social inequality “off-stage.” At first sight, *Fu Gui* looks and acts like he comes from a well-to-do family. In reality,

the habitual unemployment of his father left his mother solely responsible for the basic needs of the family. Intensive labor, long working hours, and low pay are the “excuses” that *Fu Gui*’s father make to avoid working:

I thought of divorce, but the Presbyterian Church discouraged it. I suggested my husband to attend church because he might be able to get a job through the church’s network, but he refused it. He was afraid of losing face in front of acquaintances and friends. Everyday, he sleeps until noon and then, he stops by my mother-in-law’s place and stays there until midnight. Even if he is at home, he hardly helps out with the house chores. He either watches TV or reads magazines. I told my mother-in-law not to give him money, but she did not listen to me.

Because “money is tight,” *Fu Gui*’s mother encourages *Fu Gui* to explore alternative routes to access higher education: “I took him to Singapore to apply for the ASEAN³⁴ scholarships, but he failed the oral exam. We also tried *Ngee Ang* Polytechnics, but as you know, Singapore does not recognize the mathematics and science standards of the Malays.” Although compared to other male, high-achieving Chinese youths, *Fu Gui* attained the highest grades in Malay, English, mathematics, advanced-mathematics, biology, and chemistry in the trial exams held by school, still he was pessimistic about getting into the national universities in Malaysia. *Fu Gui*’s pessimism is not without basis. The following newspaper clipping (see Figure 17) exemplifies how top ethnic Chinese youths cannot get into local, public universities because of the quota system (readers may notice the use of the word “only” as an understatement of the situation). Regardless of the complaints made by ethnic Chinese parents and the negotiations made by ethnic Chinese political leaders, every year, more than five hundred top Chinese students are turned down by government universities who maintain that there are not enough seats available. Although the Malay education minister encourages ethnic Chinese youths to apply for teacher training colleges, the encouragement does not go anyway. It should not be difficult for the education minister to understand why top ethnic Chinese youths are reluctant to enter teacher training colleges. After all the hurdles that these youths have to overcome, they expect greater economic and social rewards. Why would any top ethnic Chinese youths enter teacher training colleges since teaching is a low-pay and low-prestige job?

³⁴ The full name of ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is a coalition created to facilitate the socio-economic development of the countries in the region, most of which are developing countries. I see the coalition as a regional identity.

Figure 17 Chinese Newspaper Clipping about the Quota System in University Admissions



More than 500 High-Achieving Chinese Students are Turned Down by Local Universities!

“Like you, I am also interested in learning why more than 500 high achieving Chinese students cannot get into local universities,” the Chinese deputy education minister told our correspondent in *Kuala Lumpur*. Each year, out of the 130,000 Malaysian students who apply for local universities, approximately 30,000 students successfully get into one of the following local universities: *Universiti of Malaya, Putera University, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Mara Teknological Universiti, Universiti Sains Malaysia, International Islamic University, and Trengganu Universiti*. Last year, **only** 500 high-achieving, Chinese students were turned down for their applications. Of the 500 Chinese students who were rejected, 25 got 10A1s, 58 got 9A1s, 80 got 8A1s, 79 got 7A1s, 57 got 6A1s, and 60 got 5A1s. This year, more than 500 high-achieving Chinese students are rejected by these universities. When asked why these students are turned down, the director general of the higher education department explained there are not enough quotas for non-Malay students. “If they wish, these high achieving Chinese students can appeal to the universities two weeks after they publish their student admissions,” the director said. He also urged Chinese students to apply for teacher training colleges.

Sin Chew Jit Poh, April 29, 2001

At school, *Fu Gui* is the vice president of the Chinese student club. At church, he is a junior youth counselor. However, *Fu Gui*’s grades plummeted in the second half of his Form Four (tenth grade) year. If his mother had found out that he dated a Chinese girl from the vocational class (non-academic track), she would have rightfully attributed his school failure to this relationship. Instead, *Fu Gui*’s mother attributed *Fu Gui*’s loss of interest in learning to his

indulgence in computer games. In order to reward *Fu Gui* for his outstanding performance in the secondary school assessment test, *Fu Gui*'s maternal uncle had bought him a personal computer. According to his mother, *Fu Gui* has since spent more time "fidgeting" in front of his computer than preparing for his school work: "It was hard to wake him up the next morning. Finally, I moved the computer to my room or he would stay up late emailing to friends or chatting with someone."

Earlier in our acquaintance, *Fu Gui* told me that he wanted to become a computer-music composer. Through his participation in the church's band, *Fu Gui* has developed some interest in music. *Fu Gui* believes that by combining his computer skills with his music interest, he could become a successful computer-music composer. However, in my second visit to *FNX*, *Fu Gui* no longer knew what he wanted to do after he graduated from high school.

In summary, the pressure to succeed seems to be greater for *Fu Gui* than for other male, high-achieving ethnic Chinese youths. The pressure, to a large part, comes from his mother's expectations. Unfortunately, facing mounting pressure to succeed largely because of a negative father role model, *Fu Gui* seems to be lost.

7.4.3. ***Shu Tong***: A Vignette about the Resilient Daughter

The silver pin on *Shu Tong*'s dark green necktie symbolizes her status as a well-behaved, high-achieving student. Besides being a school prefect, *Shu Tong* is the vice president of the Chinese students club. When asked to describe a physical attribute that makes her look or feel least Chinese, *Shu Tong* pointed to her skin tone. Indeed, at first sight, *Shu Tong* looks like an Indian girl because she has a dark brown complexion and a head of very curly hair. In contrast to *Jen Ni Hua*, who has a pair of slanted eyes, *Shu Tong* has a pair of big, brown eyes. However, when she talks, she either avoids eye contact or prunts to avoid confrontation. Her avoidance may have come from the male preference at home - a fact that *Shu Tong* has learned to deal with through avoidance. Like many descendents of interethnic marriages, *Shu Tong* could not find a racial or ethnic label that best describes her ethnic ancestry. Although at *FNX*, the official label for ethnic minority is "the other," it refers to Filipino or Indonesian immigrants, or the indigenous people in inland Malay Peninsular or two eastern Malaysian states in northern

Borneo. The term “the other” connotes the exclusion of certain ethnic minority groups from the political, social, and economic organizations of the country and concurrently, the rights and benefits of being citizens. For example, Filipino immigrants are considered as “other,” but interestingly, Indonesian immigrants are not labeled as “other” even for those who enter Malaysia illegally. As rumors suggest, it is a strategy of the Malay ruling elites to increase the size of the Malay population in order to outnumber that of the non-Malays. Over the course of my fieldwork, including *Shu Tong*, I encountered three female Chinese youths who are the daughters of interethnic married couples. *Katherine*, whose father is an Irish English, identifies herself as a Chinese even though she has green eyes and reddish brown hair. *Kenchana*, whose father is an Indian, identifies herself as an Indian Chinese, which largely her physical features.

Although I was irritated by *Shu Tong*’s prunting strategy, in a “race talk” that took place off campus, I was impressed by her openness about the prevalence of “extreme” Malay teachers at school. Since racial discrimination is a sensitive topic, most high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths avoid identifying racist Malay teachers or describing their discriminatory behaviors. In order to elicit the youths’ views on ethnicity, I frequently acted as a naïve outsider who was ignorant about the discrimination and stereotype that took place at school.

She (a female, Malay discipline teacher who heads the school prefect board in the morning session) has fooled you! After all, you are an outsider who is studying about our school. Maybe you haven’t noticed it, we are students and we have had in-depth interactions with her. She hardly listens to us. She just wants to please *PKHEM*, “the second assistant principal who is in charge of student affairs.” She looks down upon Chinese students who work after school and labels them as *Kongsi Kelab*, “gangster club,” or *Bo Shia*, “loose girls ring.” She even urges *PKHEM* to expel them.

In my exchange with the “extreme” female, Malay discipline teacher described by *Shu Tong*, she did bring up a few times her concern for ethnic Chinese students who work after school and liken them to illegal child labor. In response, I told her that it might not be a bad idea for ethnic Chinese students to acquire some vocational or technical skills if they found that they could not succeed at school.

In the Lower Secondary Education Assessment Test, a standardized measure of school success, and a trial exam of the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education, *Shu Tong* outperformed her peers in mathematics and science subjects. At school, Chinese teachers and students often comment on her academic achievement and assume that she will be the one who

brings honor to the Chinese community. During my initial fieldwork, *Shu Tong* planned to enter the University of Malaya and to become a medical doctor. A year later, in my second visit to *FNX*, however, she wanted to study in Russia and to become a pharmacist. *Shu Tong* claimed that her father has prepared some money for her to study overseas. Acting as her career counselor, *Shu Tong's* father advised *Shu Tong* to “climb up the social ladder through the corporate world.” Because of the quota reform policy, which results in a ratio of seventy-percent Malays to thirty-percent non-Malays in national university intakes, it is fair to say that only top ethnic Chinese students can enter the universities. The matriculation programs, more commonly known as the “Lower- and Upper-Six Programs,” serve as an alternative route for ethnic Chinese youths who wish to enter local universities. Upon the completion of the programs, these youths can re-apply for admissions into local universities. However, as *Shu Tong's* father pointed out, “even if you manage to get into the university, you can’t get into the ‘popular programs’ (technical field).” Thus, instead of competing for the few slots allocated to ethnic Chinese youths in the medical school, it would be more pragmatic for *Shu Tong* to go into the pharmacy school.

The “subtle” shift in *Shu Tong's* career choice is another example of the mixed messages sent out by the parents of the ethnic Chinese youths in this study. To say it is a “subtle” shift is to understate its implications. There is a gap between the abstract belief of parents that school success is crucial to achieving upward social mobility and their blatant distrust toward the national education system. A preference for sons also characterizes the expectations of ethnic Chinese parents toward the career aspirations of sons and daughters. *Shu Tong's* mother was adamant in her response to my question about the allocation of financial resources to the education of her children, “if necessary, the money should go to her younger brother.” Using role models in the community as examples, ethnic Chinese parents tend to support male youths in their schooling and encourage them to become professionals in the technical fields (doctors, engineers, and lawyers). Although female, ethnic Chinese youths want to become professionals like male youths do, they tend to acquire little parental encouragement and support.

Like many Chinese youths who are interested in pursuing higher education, *Shu Tong* explores her career interests by attending workshops held by local or foreign private universities. However, she was afraid of choosing a career path that she is not interested in and is not motivated to hold on to the job. Instead of helping students understand their talents or identify

their career interests, the school counselor organizes military-like “leadership” camps to cultivate youth leaders to maintain student discipline.

Phoenix, the Chinese language teacher, eyed *Jun*, the female Malay school counselor who sat by herself during the coffee break during the monthly faculty meeting and whispered into my ears: “Well, she is middle-of-the-road compared to those we have had before. At least she does not gossip about the students whom she counsels. The last counselor used to motivate students in weekly school assemblies, but she does not do it.” Although the vendor cranked up the ceiling fans, the school canteen was boiling in the afternoon. Throughout my observations at the counseling center, *Jun* counseled students by making them feel shameful for misbehaving. Her “counseling” seems to be the same tactic used by discipline masters to “discipline” students. As for those who sought for career counseling, the best they could get from *Jun* were a few leaflets about local public universities. I asked a few Chinese seniors if they used the counseling center for career counseling. Their responses were unanimously negative: “What for? She does not know anything anyway,” one student said. “She knows. She just keeps the information for Malay students,” the other student refuted.

Field notes, June 6, 2001

As more and more ethnic Chinese youths are interested in pursuing a university degree in order to meet the job market requirement, the call of the Chinese community for expanding the access to local higher education institutions has become louder. In order to develop Malaysia into a hub of educational excellence of the Southeast Asian region, but more so, to win the electoral support of the Chinese community, the prime minister and his cabinet enacted the Higher Education Act of 1996 (Yang 2001). Through the act, local or foreign private universities can set up branch campuses in Malaysia. However, due to the lack of qualified teaching force and in order to reduce tuition fees, these universities prefer to set up “twinning programs,” through which students can spend their freshman and sophomore years in Malaysia

and junior and senior years in the countries where the universities originate. Since 1996, hundreds, if not thousands of twinning programs have mushroomed in urban Malaysia. The quality of these programs varies because the government has yet to come up with criteria to evaluate the teaching quality and to certify the degree or diploma programs. The following field notes, taken shortly after my field trip to central Malaysia for a conference held by the educational bureau of the opposition political parties, provide a window into the common Chinese view of the Higher Education Act of 1996.

In the annual fund-raising banquet of *Xin Hua Hua Xiao*, the “New China National-Type Primary School,” the host called the names of students as they went on the stage to receive recognition for their achievements in the Primary Education Assessment Test. According to *Chiam*, the deputy director of the Research and Planning Division of the Independent Chinese School Council, these students must have gotten three As in their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in the test. Monetary awards are a common practice of the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian community to recognize the school success of its youngsters and youths. *Chiam* eyed the participants of the banquet and said: “the center and north are full of Chinese new villages like this. These people are not poor vegetable or pig farmers. They own big lots of farms that they can always sell if necessary. Now, because there are all kinds of twinning programs, they are happy.” *Chiam*’s insights came from his personal experience. Born and raised in a Chinese new village, he went to Chinese primary school, graduated from a conforming secondary school, and went to a Taiwanese university. His father sold the vegetable farm inherited from his grandfather in order to pay for *Chiam* and his siblings’ overseas higher education costs. “It has taken our government more than three decades to realize that instead of letting Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States make the money, it could keep it by making some small changes. There is nothing altruistic about the act. Higher education is a multi-million business. *Dong Jiao Zong*, the Independent Chinese School Council, has been applying for permission for the Mederka University for god knows, how many years!” *Chiam* sighed. “We have the land, teaching force, and students, but not the license.”

Field notes, August 31, 2001

In 2002, a year after my fieldwork, the Malaysia Chinese Association (MCA), which is the current Chinese ruling party, obtained the official permission to establish the *Tunku Abdul Rahman* University, the first Chinese-owned, private university. Shortly afterward, Malay nationalists began to push for the implementation of the quota system at the university. At the time of this writing, the Malaysian government has not made its decision. To appease the Chinese community more so to win its electoral support in the national election in 2004, the government would not want to apply the quota policy to the *Tunku Abdul Rahman* University. However, since the university does not have medical or pharmacist school, *Shu Tong* still has to go overseas to pursue her degree. To sum up, although *Shu Tong* is timid, she is flexible and pragmatic. She explores alternative opportunities for higher education, researches the market, and modifies her career plan accordingly from physician to pharmacist to avoid aiming too high.

7.4.4. ***Bao Bei***: A Vignette about the Precious Son

FNX rewards students who conform to discipline rules. The pressure to conform seems to be greater to students in the science classes (academic track) than to those in the vocational or technical classes (non-academic track). The school prefect board is a student discipline governing infrastructure that is largely comprised of academic students. *Bao Bei* not only conforms to school rules, but also joins the school prefect board to help maintain the pressure to conform. As *Ng*, *Bao Bei*'s mother explained to me, becoming a school prefect helps prove to the universities that her son has participated in an extra-curricular activity and has interacted with students from different ethnic backgrounds. Everyday, he monitors student behaviors in the classroom, at the school canteen, and in the hallway, and reports students who misbehave to the head teacher of the school prefect board.

Early in our acquaintance, *Bao Bei* wanted to become a physician. Later, he changed his mind and wanted to become a chemical engineer. Lastly, during my home visit in 2002, *Bao Bei* told me that he no longer knew what he wanted to do after high school. *Bao Bei*'s behaviors

might have stemmed from his parents' pressure to maintain a tension between individual and collective interests. Like many women in the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian society, *Ng* is engaged in a social drama that glorifies male lineage on stage. She exercises her influence in major family decisions off stage. On one hand, she encourages *Bao Bei* to excel in school and clings to the slim hope that he may get into the national university. On the other hand, she urges him to "use" his eyes and to watch out the merit system. The following quote, extracted from the interview that I carried out during the home visit, illustrates the gap between the performances of *Ng* on- and off-stage:

I told him to use his eyes. He has to analyze (social situations) by himself. He has to understand what is good or bad. Everything has two-side: the front and back. We hope that students can apply for universities based on their academic performance. It is a kind of 'dedication' (payback) to the country. As a matter of fact, if a country wants to get developed and to be prosperous, it (university admission) should be based on academic performance. It is better. Just like what *Mahatir* (the previous Malaysian prime minister) said 'they (the Malays) are walking with a crutch. They cannot get rid of it.

Anxious to keep *Bao Bei* at her side, *Ng* downplays higher education as just a threshold to adulthood and wants *Bao Bei* to accept the "unpopular programs" (education, literature, philosophy) if unfortunately, he was assigned into one.

If that's what he is interested in, but if the government "arranges" (places) him to another program, we still think that he should go to the program and think about what he wants to do after he graduates. If everyone wants to get into the popular programs, what will happen to the unpopular programs!? University education is just a beginning. If he is interested in continuing his study, after he graduates, he can pursue it or he can have other plans. He is just a child. If we don't give him the idea, he may leave home and may never come back to Malaysia!

As I found out later, *Bao Bei's* maternal uncle, who left Malaysia for higher education at *Bao Bei's* age, would rather be an illegal alien in the U.S. than to be a "second-class citizen" in Malaysia. *Ng's* eyes turned red as she cited the cliché "blood is thicker than anything" and described her brother's skepticism about in Chinese affluence and influence in Malaysia:

I have a brother in the U.S. When he was at his (*Ng* eyed *Bao Bei*) age, he went to the U.S. for his school (university education). He has never been back to Malaysia since then. Maybe it was because of the May 13 Racial Riots, but he already went to the college there. He doesn't believe us. Even when we visited him, he didn't believe that we (ethnic Chinese in Malaysia) are already prosperous and we aren't oppressed. He said 'if you don't believe it, you can go to the museum in Washington D.C. You will see them (documentation of racial oppression). My younger

brother also visited him and told him that we don't live like what he thinks, but he doesn't believe him.

However, when I asked her to rank the usefulness of Chinese, English, and Malay, *Ng* ranked English as the most useful language and Malay as the least useful language. As she admitted, Malay is only useful in Malaysia simply because the Malays make up the majority of the consumers of Chinese small businesses. During my visit to the family, much to my surprise, I saw the Malays purchasing lottery tickets from *Bao Bei's* parents. Although in Malaysia, most Malay Muslims are "Sunni," under the current Malay Islamic law, they are prohibited from gambling, including buying lottery tickets. Like *Shu Tong's* father, *Ng* cited the globalized economy as the reason behind the need to learn and master English: "He needs to use it (English) when he starts working. Even if you know Malay, when you go to Singapore, people don't understand you. It doesn't work there."

As the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education examination approaches, *Bao Bei* looks stressed out. If he fails the exam, he cannot become a chemical engineer. Since the exam is cumulative in its content, *Bao Bei* has to review every subject that he has taken since he got into the science track. More importantly, however, he has to have a good grasp of Malay, the national language. Since 1996, after the parliament passed the higher education act, youths of the three ethnic groups have to obtain at least a C for Malay, the national language, in order to get their high school diploma. The constant drilling, in the forms of weekly quizzes, monthly tests, and trial exams, at the tutoring center should have made *Bao Bei* feel confident about his performance, but still, he asked me a few times for ways to boost the efficiency of his exam preparation. Although exam preparation in the current Chinese Malaysian society, unlike that of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, does not trigger panic attacks or suicidal attempts, the drive to succeed is equally intense. To succeed means to pass the national exam. This involves taking individual subject tests in an over-crowded room for three to four hours per day for several days. The pressure to earn a top score affects ethnic Chinese Malaysians as well. Every year, out of the 130,000 Malaysian youths who are qualified through the national exam to apply for local universities, only 30,000 youths successfully get into one of the seven public universities.

The national exam system creates an elitism that favors youths from families with a higher living standard or with better educated parents. By way of example, *Bao Bei's* parents, who run a lucrative *To To*, "lottery shop," can afford to pay for his expensive tutoring classes at

Omega. The lottery shop, which is a rectangular, two-storey townhouse, has an open area on the first floor for business and a three-bedroom apartment on the second floor for residence. Its clientele consists of Malay, Indian, and Indonesian factory workers who work for the different light or heavy industries in the export processing zone (EPZ) nearby. Since selling lottery tickets is lucrative, it is difficult to obtain government license to set up a *To To* shop. Only Chinese who have connection with the leaders of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) get the license.

Like other suburbs throughout the country, *Taman Mawar*, “the rose garden,” comprises endless blocks of houses that can be divided into bungalow, semi-detached, attached homes, and flats reflecting the different tiers of the Malaysian social hierarchy. Like education and employment, there are quotas reserved only for *Bumiputera* in housing. To fulfill its social contract with the government, estate developers are expected to sell the upscale units (bungalow, semi-detached homes) at a discounted (lower) price to the Malays and to preserve at least fifty-five percent of the low-scale units (attached homes, flats) to them as well. Each suburb is a small town. At the town center, there is a shopping mall for recreation, a farmer’s market for grocery, and a mosque to serve the spiritual needs of the Malay Muslims. Interspersed here and there, or around the town center, are rows of two-storey townhouses where residents can run small businesses to meet the needs of the diverse, local populations. The ethnic group economic specialization is common in even recently developed suburbs. In *Taman Mawar*, a suburb known to be predominantly Malay, the three ethnic groups seem to fit into the niches in businesses which they have traditionally been part of. By way of example, Chinese tend to run grocery shops, known as “mini-marts” to the locals, Indians tend to run barber shops, and Malays who used to be street vendors are now running their own coffee shops.

Field notes, December, 2000

With his future well charted out by his parents, *Bao Bei* needs just to get his high school diploma. However, his fear for the national exam, which requires substantial rote memorization of facts and figures, has consumed much of his energy. Furthermore, contrary to *Ng's* assumption, *Bao Bei* has a specific career aspiration that requires the specialization in an area of study. However, admission quota has taken a double toll on *Bao Bei*, who in addition to feeling inadequate, feel unfair. Drawn from his insights as a school prefect, *Bao Bei* talked about teacher tardiness in a focus group interview held off-campus.

“It is a nightmare to students if she (*Puan Rosilah*) is your English teacher! If it is a two-period class, she may come into the classroom when there are only fifteen minutes left. She may talk about student discipline cases at school or she may only read from the books! They [teachers] are all the same. We can't depend on them!”

However, when I probed *Bao Bei* for his suggestions to reduce the inequality brought on by the quota system, he shrugged his shoulder and said “it should be fair, but I am used to it.” To sum up, having internalized his mother's belief, *Bao Bei* accommodates to teacher tardiness by accumulating language capital at the tutoring center. Facing gendered disciplinary approach, he complies with school rules by reporting the transgression of students.

7.5. SUMMARY

Juggling between two systems of beliefs, contrary to each other, high achievers learn that their parents have to put on a “mask” on stage and off stage because of the unequal power relations between *Bumiputera* and *non-Bumiputera*. On stage, ethnic Chinese parents want youths to respect teachers and to conform to schools. Off stage, they send youths to tutoring centers and encourage them to bend the rules if necessary because “the fittest survives.” Implicit in the cross-cultural management strategies of ethnic Chinese parents are the internalization of inequality. Having internalized the cross-cultural management strategies of their parents, the six

ethnic Chinese youths are well behaved, respectful, and helpful at school. They follow school disciplines, complete assignments on time, and obey classroom rules. Although in general these youths do not care about Malay teachers for their teaching abilities and behaviors, they greet them in the hallway or at the canteen. Extracted directly from the interview, the following quote illustrates the mixed messages given by the parents of the youths in this study:

That's why I said even though we sent her to school, she has to learn what is happening out there. Even if UTM (the University Technology of Malaysia) has bias against our race or disadvantages, it is like, if you can't beat them, you join them temporarily. That's the way it works. You have to survive. You can't give up even if you know that it isn't good there...(inaudible because the rooster was making its afternoon call) For anything, if you can't beat them, join them temporarily for survival. We don't have the choice.

Interview with Shu Tong's father, May 15, 2002

However, regardless of their parents' advice, the high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths in this study exhibit a sense of social justice that is only seen on Chinese-educated, young Chinese adults. They are supportive of the ethos articulated by the *Shu Qiu*, the Chinese Election Appeal of 1995, which re-instates the constitutional rights of the Chinese community to preserve their language and culture. They despise the excuse used by Malay administrators to discourage non-Malay students from taking their mother tongue classes. They circulate newspaper clippings to raise the consciousness of other Chinese youths, low achievers especially, to preserving Chinese language and culture.

8. CHAPTER EIGHT: GENDER IDENTITY SOCIALIZATION AND ENACTMENT

8.1. INTRODUCTION

On any given school days, if I walked into the so-called *Kelas Harapan*, “classes with hopes,” I would have seen boys and girls of the three ethnic groups chatting in groups instead of attending to their teachers. At *Fan Niu Xiao*, students tended to form friendships groups according to race/ethnicity, gender, and class. *Hairdresser Mei*, *Special Ed Mei*, and *Smart Mei* were three ethnic Chinese girls with whom I frequently talked during class recesses or in classes where teachers were absent. It seemed odd to me that *Smart Mei*, a high achiever, would mingle with *Hairdresser Mei* and *Special Ed Mei*, but as I found out later, ethnic Chinese adolescents sometimes formed friendships based on mutual interests. One day the girls looked stressed and exchanged murmurs. As I approached the group, I saw *Hairdresser Mei* holding *Sin Jiu Jit Poh*, one of the leading Chinese newspapers. “What’s up?” I asked *Hairdresser Mei*. “Two Chinese girls from *Masai* ran away from home,” she replied. “Huh?” I exclaimed. Named after the small town it was located, *Masai* was a national secondary school infamous for its poor student discipline. It was hardly surprising to me that the girls ran away from home. Given lack of parental support and discrimination from Malay teachers, ethnic Chinese girls had little if no guidance and support at home or school. More surprising to me, however, were the exposure of

personal information, skewed portrayal of the girls, and partial coverage of the run-away incident. The skewed portrayal of the girls and partial coverage of their run-away seemed to have misled *Hairdresser Mei*, *Special Ed Mei*, and *Smart Mei*. When I asked for them why they thought the girls had run away, *Hairdresser Mei*, *Special Ed Mei*, and *Smart Mei* responded in chorus: “The girls must be “rebellious” and they must have been cajoled by *Gu Ye Zai*. *Gu Ye Zai*, a Cantonese saying, refers to young Chinese men who cajole young women into prostitution and act as their pimps. On the upper right corner of the newspaper, the girls’ parents, one of coverage of their run-away seemed to have misled *Hairdresser Mei*, *Special Ed Mei*, and *Smart Mei*. When I asked for them why they thought the girls had run away, *Hairdresser Mei*, *Special Ed Mei*, and *Smart Mei* responded in chorus: “The girls must be whom was a street vendor and the other, a factory worker, looked worried. On the lower right corner, the girls, smiling in their school uniforms, looked happy. Between the two sets of pictures, there was an account of the incident including the names, ages, heights, and weights of the girls, their parents’ pleas for help from the public, and their family phone numbers.

Table 23 Trafficking of Girls and Women for Prostitution, 1996-2002

Year	Number of police arrests
1996	1314
1997	2250
1998	2176
1999	3310
2000	3601
2001	4132
2002	2734
Total	19517

(Adapted from the “*Aliran Monthly*,” 2002)

8.2. “WOMEN ARE HOLDING UP ONE-HALF OF THE SKY” 女子半邊天

- FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT GENDER EQUITY

In Malaysia, public discourse on social equalities rarely refers to the various discrimination and exploitation experienced by girls and women. Concerns and issues raised by women's groups about the needs and interests of girls and women of the three ethnic groups are often belittled as “women's issues” by the so-called “old boys networks” of male government ministers, parliament members, or cabinet members. Women gained full suffrage in 1957, when Malaysia, then known as the Federation of Malaya gained its independence from Great Britain. Having the rights to vote and to stand for election should have increased political opportunities for women enabling them to create policies to improve their social, economic, and political status. However, since 1957, women have been underrepresented in the political process. They rarely become government ministers, parliament members, or cabinet members. Of all the political parties that took part in the national election in 1999, only ten percent of their female members were nominated to run for office. This figure falls below the average rate of female nomination (fifteen percent) for Southeast Asian countries in similar stages of economic development (Suaram 1996). Moreover, the number of women appointed by the prime minister to become cabinet members was reduced from three in 1995 to two in 1999. Entrenched gender biases, rooted in the traditional gender ideologies of the three ethnic groups, continue to reinforce stereotypes of men as rational and objective and women as emotional and subjective. Women, according to these stereotypes, do not have the organizational knowledge and managerial skills required to govern even if they were elected. Defending the civil rights of girls and women as Malaysian citizens and lobbying for their interests have been constant struggles for female government ministers, parliament members, cabinet members, and women's advocacy groups.

Since independence (1957), girls and women of the three major ethnic groups have made significant progress in attaining education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. In the

2000 - 2001 school years, the net enrollment rate of female children at the primary level was ninety-eight percent, while the net enrollment rate of female adolescents at the secondary level was sixty-six percent (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2003). At the tertiary level, women comprised more than half of the student population at national universities. According to the Second Outline Prospective Plan (OPP2 1991-2000), the government should provide girls and women with the education and training required for their participation in the increasingly demanding job market. However, a breakdown of the employment distribution by gender and by sectors showed that women were largely unskilled laborers employed in the manufacturing and service sectors (Ahmad 1998). Despite its stated commitment to lessen discrimination and violence towards girls and women, as put forth in the seventh Malaysia Plan (1996 - 2001), the second most important national development plan, the Malaysian government has not yet developed any specific plans or allocated any public funds to realize this commitment. Moreover, despite the National Council on Women's Groups' establishment of the "Women's Agenda for Change" (1999), illiteracy, vocational/technical education, child care, domestic violence, or labor exploitation have rarely become part of the government's national development agenda.

Three factors have contributed to the continuous discrimination toward girls and women in the Malaysian society. First, traditional gender ideologies, rooted in the cultures of the three major ethnic groups, continue to mold girls and women into subservient daughters, self-sacrificing wives, and filial daughters-in-law. Second, the lack of public resources and family support continues to discourage girls and women from reporting discriminatory practices and abusive social situations. Third, the prevailing double standards about the conduct of men and women continue to stigmatize girls and women who are victims of rapes, trafficking, or violence as the "fallen girls or women" who rip the fabric of the family, community, and society (Suaram 1996).

A significant breakthrough took place in the early 2000s. The parliament, under incessant pressure from the National Council on Women's Groups, established the Women's Affairs and Family Development (WAFD) Unit. Since its founding in 2001, the WAFD Unit, in collaboration with women's groups made by up women from different ethnic backgrounds and social classes has pushed for the amendments of three existing national policies related to the civil rights of girls and women: the Women and Girls Protection Act of 1973, the Domestic

Violence Act of 1994, and the Guardianship of Women and Infants Act of 1999. At the time of its founding, the unit had also succeeded in pushing the government to formulate and enact the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Act of 2001. Despite the efforts of the WAFD Unit, double standards in the sexual conduct of men and women have kept the trafficking and prostitution of girls and women a thriving industry. In small town or big cities, men can buy girls and women in the legal “red light zone.” The lack of sensitivity of the police force, made up primarily by Malay men, has continued to keep girls and women from reporting their ordeals. As long as men of the three ethnic groups continue to see domestic violence as a “family matter” induced by girls and women who have failed to fulfill their duties as daughters and wives, it remains the lowest priority of the government in setting national development goals. In *Kelantan* and *Trengganu*, two northeastern states run by the Islamic fundamentalist party, the discrepancy between civil and religious laws has attenuated the strength of the legal acts and penal codes against domestic violence. The lack of public awareness and cooperation of employers continue to keep women from reporting sexual harassment at workplace. Lastly, as long as *Malulah*, “embarrassment and shame,” continues to be a dominant mechanism of social control, girls and women of the three ethnic groups continue to experience social inequalities. Despite the prevalence of double income families, women tend to get lower wages compared to men. Low wages coupled with the lack of child care continue to keep women away from gaining the custody of their children after separation or divorce.

Table 24 Reported Cases of Domestic Violence in Malaysia, 1989-2001

Year	Number of Cases Reported
1989	909
1990	472
1991	419
1992	466
1993	298
1994	532
1995	1409
1996	1413

*1997	5799
1998	4791
1999	3806
2000	3468
2001	3107
Total	26889

(Adapted from the “Malaysian Human Rights Report” of 1996)

*The Asian economic crisis hit Southeast Asia in 1997. In time of economic hardships, girls and women seemed to have suffered more abuses than in times of economic prosperity.

Education continues to be a major means for ethnic Chinese youths to move up the social ladder in a society that is attuned to the interests and needs of one ethnic/racial group. With the exception of a very few elite Chinese families who can afford to send their children to expensive private high schools or English-speaking international schools, most ethnic Chinese parents send their children to the affordable national high schools. However, given the ethnic mix of the national high schools, social contact with adolescents from different ethnic/racial and social/class backgrounds is inevitable despite the wishes of ethnic Chinese parents to shield their sons and daughters. As a consequence, some adolescents have lost traditional beliefs about gender roles and gender relations. Many, however, have remained under the control of their parents. The family continues to be the most important site of gender identities construction for ethnic Chinese youths. In the following sections, you will learn how ethnic Chinese parents exercise control over their children and develop their gender identities through the family practices and rites of passage rooted in Confucianism.

8.3. THE FAMILY AS A SITE OF GENDER IDEOLOGIES TRANSMISSION

In current ethnic Chinese Malaysian families, parents still hold significant power over the lives of their children and exercise considerable control through whatever means they deem necessary. *Hao 好*, the Chinese character for “good,” is a picture of a woman next to her child. Chinese mothers are in charge of inculcating self-control in their children at young age. Thus, they clothe their infants so as to bind their arms and legs in order to suppress any restless movement. When their children grow older, Chinese mothers hold them in their arms or tie them to their backs when they do household chores or interact with other family members. Children also sleep in the same room and often on the same bed with their mothers until they begin schooling. As a consequence, their perceptions of the world are dominated by mothers from a young age. In preschool or kindergarten, nursery rhymes and songs aim at developing uniformity and compliance instead of individuality and defiance. Memorization is favored over creative thinking. Uniform behaviors are encouraged over individual expenses. By way of example, left-handed children are coerced to write with their right hands, simply for the sake of class uniformity. Despite the importance placed on self-control and uniformity, however, expectations for boys and girls differ in the traditional Chinese upbringing - at least in the home. In general, Chinese parents expect their daughters to be *Guai*, “well behaved.” A well behaved daughter should be quiet and submissive. In contrast, they expect their sons to be *Tiao Pi*, “mischievous.” In other words, a son should be loud and aggressive.

Since harmony is a virtue central to Confucianism, more educated Chinese parents are reluctant to use harsh words or resort to corporeal punishment to discipline their children. But while more educated Chinese parents seem to be more progressive in their disciplinary practices, they are nonetheless quite controlling. *Fu Gui*’s mother, for example, has sought control over his life by screening his acquaintances and friends and allowing him to attend few social events unless they are organized by the church. Less educated Chinese parents tend to see *Da*, “beat or hit,” as a child rearing necessity. For example, *Sweet Li*’s father, whom you met in Chapter Six,

would *Da Sweet Li* with whatever materials he could find handy. He has also urged the discipline teachers to beat or hit *Sweet Li* whenever she misbehaves.

As they learn to speak, Chinese children do not greet their parents by names, but by their titles: *Ba Ba*, “father,” and *Ma Ma*, “mother.” In ancient China, children had to greet their parents at least three times per day to show their filial reverence. These child-to-parent greetings are still meant to symbolize the greeting a subject toward the emperor. With similar emphasis on respect, children do not greet their siblings by names, but by their titles, which indicate birth order, and more importantly, gender. Thus, every family member has a title by which children can greet that person according to his or her status, just as the social order had been laid out by Confucius in the Book of Rites in 2500 years ago. Children who fail to greet their family members or extended family members by their proper titles are seen as rude. From the national level to the family level, every Chinese is hammered into his or her slot in the social hierarchy, an elaborate kinship system held tightly together by titles and ties. Children not only learn how to greet adults by their titles, but also the meanings behind the titles. They learn to differentiate among the paternal/internal and maternal/external sides of family members, even though they may only encounter these relatives once a year during the Chinese Lunar New Year. For example, as soon as children learn to speak, they have to differentiate *Ah Gong* 阿公 and *Ah Po* 阿婆 “paternal or internal grandparents,” from *Wai Gong* 外公 and *Wai Po* 外婆 “maternal or external grandparents.”

These practices reflect the traditional authoritarianism of Chinese parents. At the same time, they also hint at the mutual obligations and dependence between Chinese parents and their children. Since well-fed, light-skinned children indicate responsible parenting, Chinese parents tend to save the best food and clothes for their children. Then as they grow old, they expect their children to repay them for the efforts and money spent on child-rearing. From a young age, Chinese children learn through the stories of the “Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety” that they have to obey their parents at a young age and attend to their needs when their parents age. A common theme in these stories is that the filial son or daughter tends is rewarded by heavenly figures, while unfilial sons and daughters incur punishment. Rarely do any full-blown characters dare to challenge or refute their parents even when they behave unjustly or immaturely. Chinese children attend to the needs of their parents needs even after they die. Monthly ancestor worships on the first and fifteenth days of each month and yearly ancestor worships in the

seventh month, the “Hungry Ghost Month” of Chinese Lunar Calendar, reflects the filial piety of children toward their deceased parents. Since only men lead the rituals of ancestor worships, most Chinese couples strive to have at least one son. The status of men in ancestor worships ritual both reflects and reinforces patriarchy in Chinese society.

It is fair to say that in general, ethnic Chinese Malaysian parents, regardless of their education level do understand the importance of education and want their children to succeed in schooling. Also, while the lack of education has kept some parents from taking a direct role in academic supervision, even less educated Chinese parents hire tutors of their children if they can afford it. However, the ancient assumption of male superiority is reflected in the Chinese family’s attitudes about education. Common gender stereotypes among ethnic Chinese parents are that boys are active and thus, fare better than girls in mathematics and science. Girls, on the other hand, are passive and perform better in languages and the arts. While parents tend to encourage their sons in sports, they keep their daughters indoors. Most ethnic Chinese parents discourage their sons from going on to become athletes as Confucianism grants athletes a lower social status than intellectuals. Moreover, education is seen as a child’s only upward social path.

The ethnic Chinese child’s experience of growing up is quite different from that of his or her Malay or Indian peers. The adolescent rebellion, described in Salinger’s “The Catcher of the Rye” is not to be found in the lives of these children. As much as they might assert their physical and emotional independence, ethnic Chinese youths are still circumscribed by the parent/child reciprocity. Although Chinese girls go through the adult ceremony to assert their physical maturity, they are expected to maintain strong emotional ties with their parents until they get married. A Chinese boy becomes a man not by rejecting or outgrowing his father’s authority, but by becoming someone like him. Any behavioral patterns or personal traits hinting at adolescent rebellion are counteracted by parents through exerting more control over their children’s lives or through asking for help from the adults revered by their children. As a consequence, many ethnic Chinese youths, as they approach their twenties, do not seem to exhibit the identities problems that American youths do. At the same token, they do not have the mobility that American youths have to transcend the social strata that they are hemmed in. Although by law, everyone is considered an adult by age twenty-one and can already apply for his or her Malaysian identification card, international passport, and driving license, many ethnic Chinese youths do not seem to have developed into independent adults by this age. They are

comfortable with having everything decided for them and do not seem to know how to deal independently with problems and uncertainties in their daily lives.

Overall, ethnic Chinese youths are not expected to separate and individuate from the institutions - family, school, and community - through which they are socialized. No matter how old they grow, they are expected to defer to parents and maintain *Guan Xi*, their “filial ties.” The parent/child relation is foundation upon which all Chinese social networks are built. Male ethnic Chinese youths often rely on their parents’ networks to get desired jobs and female youths have their marriage partners picked out by their parents from a pool of candidates assumed to enhance the family’s social status.

8.4. COMING OF AGE IN A CASCADE OF “SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE”

“At age fifteen, I set my heart on learning. At age thirty, I was firmly established. At age forty, I had no more doubts. At age fifty, I knew the will of heaven. At age sixty, I was ready to listen to it. At age seventy, I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing what was right.”

Confucius

8.4.1. “Rank, not Class” 門當戶對 - The Chinese Attitude towards Marriage

The Chinese expression for the love between a man and a woman, *Lian*, “love,” and *Ai*, “affection,” is a modern linguistic expression created to reflect changing perceptions of marriage. Traditionally, Chinese were not free to pursue romantic relationships. Love came second to parental wishes. Arranged marriages were common among Chinese of all social classes until the early 1900s. Most men and women did not meet until the day they got married. In ancient China, the relation between a man and a woman was a serious business. Marriage marked a

conscious exchange between two families to continue blood lines and to maintain social status. Since marriage was such a serious business, parents were reluctant to leave it to their children. Instead, they turned to the matchmaker to find their son or daughter a spouse of equal social status. Through arranged marriages, daughters of rich families were married into richer families to increase their parents' prosperity. Daughters of poor families were married into rich families as concubines with the hope of bearing sons who would carry on the wealthy family's lines. According to the "Three Obedience," as stated in the Four Books for Women (1600s), "a woman should succumb to her father before she gets married, obey her husband after she gets married, and abide by her son after her husband dies." In a society where the individual had his or her identity grounded in social relations rather than personal interests, arranged marriages thrived.

In current Chinese Malaysian society, parents still regard dating seriously as a path that may lead to marriages. Many parents discourage dating during the school years because it takes away precious time for learning. The high achievers introduced in Chapter Seven were strongly discouraged by their parents from dating, even though in secret, they sometimes defy their parents' wishes. It was not until half way through my fieldwork that *Fu Gui*, a male high achiever, and *Shu Tong*, a female high achiever, told me of their romance. Earlier, each of them had solicited my opinions on dating. Both were amazed when I downplayed dating as just another life event that they would experience sooner or later and considered my opinion "unconventional" compared to those of other adults in their lives. When I asked how they had carried out secret their dates, they explained that their dating took place "in public" through field trips organized by the school or events held by the Chinese club. Dating was forbidden for the female low achievers in Chapter Six because of the danger of sexual exploitation by *Gu Ye Zai*.

8.4.2. “Of the Three Unfilial Acts, the Lack of Progeny is the Greatest of All” 不孝有三無後為大 - The Chinese Attitude towards Sexuality

Mary Douglas (1966) discusses a paradoxical view of women in the Jewish culture as both “pure” and “polluted.” Though less pronounced, this view also can be found in Chinese culture. While menstruation is seen as a pollutant by Chinese women themselves, girls who have reached their puberty are considered as “pure.” A woman who loses her virginity before marriage is denigrated as “fallen”; a woman who keeps her virginity until marriage is glorified as chaste. Although in current Chinese Malaysian society, women do not follow the puritanical regulations found in Christianity or the sexual codes of Islam, they cannot justify sex with love. The ultimate purpose of sex is to produce a son to carry on the male lineage. At the same time, the notion of “immaculate conception” or virgin birth is absent from Chinese culture. Sex, to Chinese women, is not a sinful act, but a duty to carry out until a woman is in her forties. After age forty, Chinese women assume that they can stop sex all together because they have fulfilled their duties, especially those who have had sons. Sex, to Chinese men, is regarded as a natural urge for procreation. Many Chinese men are ignorant about sexuality, however. Due to the lack of sex education at school and home, misconceptions about sex are common. For example, many men believe that “a drop of sperm is equal to ten drops of blood,” and therefore masturbation is detrimental to the health of young men. Also, given the belief that deflowering young women is rejuvenating to the health of older men, some older men patronize local brothels while others go to Thailand for a sex tour.

Although in current Chinese Malaysian society, women are no longer expected to “hold chastity unto death” (the Four Books of Women 1600s), widowed women are discouraged from remarriage. Even so, widows are expected to raise their children, modeling their sons after their late husbands and their daughters after their self-sacrificing selves. Men, on the contrary, are encouraged to fill in the empty slots left behind by their deceased wives as soon as possible in order to “bring order to the family” (Ibid). Even if their wives are alive, some men are known to have mistresses hidden at recreational resort properties. Children of these mistresses often adopt

the family name of their biological fathers even though in the eyes of law, these men have committed bigamy. Men feel justified in this practice when marriage fails to produce a child, especially a son, since failure to produce offspring is considered to be a dishonor to one's family.

Even though these sexual double standards towards are not publicly acknowledged, a blooming sex industry betrays their existence. "Good" women are supposed to be "virtuous wives and good mothers" (the Four Books of Women 1600s); "bad" women in the sex industry are assumed to be polluted and therefore, having no virtue to lose, available for the sexual satisfaction of men. Men in Mainland Chinese society tend to attribute greater sexual prowess to girls and women of ethnic minorities; in Chinese Malaysian society, men attribute such prowess to girls and women of tropical origins. According to a popular Chinese saying, "there is a market, there is a demand," thus, Malaysia has become the center of the trafficking of girls and young women from the less developed countries in Southeast Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam) into the developed countries of Asia. Even with the threat of HIV/AIDS, Chinese men continue to patronize Karaoke bars, massage parlors, and spas, where prostitution is camouflaged amidst other entertainment and recreation.

Though ignorant of many facts about sex itself, ethnic Chinese are not ignorant about the relationship between sex and politics. Awareness of the interconnection between politics and sex is reflected in classic Chinese literature as early as the sixteenth century, most notably in "Golden Lotus," a novel written by an unknown author. Though belittled by western missionaries as pornography, the novel provides significant insight into traditional Chinese sexual attitudes and reveals an historical understanding of the link between sex and politics. Among the hot and spicy details of the affairs between *Xi Men Qin*, a merchant, and his concubines and maids, lies a ruthless critique of the corruption and hypocrisy of the rich and influential: "while there is rotten meat at the doorway of the rich," the author accuses, "there are frozen bodies on the roadsides": thus, the aristocrats stayed full while the commoners were starved to death. In addition to its political implications, the "Golden Lotus" was one of the earliest examples of Chinese literature involving the lives of the lower class characters: works prior to the "Golden Lotus" centered on the lives of the aristocratic upper class. It was also the first Chinese literary portrayal of women as human beings with needs and desires.

References to homosexuality can be found in classic Chinese literature; its presence is implied in the films and TV drama serials imported into Malaysia from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

At least in part, however, ethnic Chinese Malaysians consider homosexuality a product of the corrupting life styles of western societies. Fundamentalists among both Malay Muslims and Chinese Christians regard homosexuality as a sign of fallen morality that could be rectified by rigorous religious education or spiritual training. In their view, gays or lesbians are “abnormal” human beings against whom parents should shield their children from at all costs and HIV/AIDS is believed to be the result of homosexuality. Parents threaten to cut off ties with children who admit to homosexual orientations. Gays and lesbians are rarely heard of in the current Malaysian society, not because homosexuality does not exist, but because men and women who are honest about their homosexuality are thus rejected, stigmatized as “abnormal” and associated with HIV/AIDS. Katherine, the low-achieving Irish Chinese senior who spoke out against the despotism of discipline teachers at *Fan Niu Xiao*, for example, was ridiculed by Malay teachers as a lesbian simply because she received a bouquet of mixed flowers from *Nan Ren Pao*, her best female friend, as a birthday gift.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Ethnic Chinese Malaysians are well aware of the complex relationship between sex and politics. Some have made good use of it to improve family wealth or social status. Some rich parents who have daughters reaching marriage age promise “potential candidates” with “fat” dowries such as properties or automobiles. There have been rumors that the deputy education minister, a ethnic Chinese man, climbed up the social ladder by marrying the daughter of the head of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the largest and most corrupted Chinese political party in Malaysia. At a coffee break during the annual meeting of the Chinese language teachers in the district, *Phoenix*, the subject head of Chinese language, frowned as she looked at the picture of the deputy education minister, shown on the newspaper under the title “the education minister promises that all Chinese students who get six As will get admitted to the national universities.” As a young, female teacher walked by us, she eyed her and whispered “I

don't know how she thinks about it, but I think that she can find someone better. She is young and pretty." It dawned upon me that the young, female Chinese teacher is the mistress of the Chinese education minister.

8.5. “MEN ARE IN CHARGE OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS; WOMEN ARE IN CHARGE OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS”: APPROPRIATE GENDER ROLES AND REGULATE GENDER RELATIONS IN CHINESE FAMILY - 男主內女主外

The “Book of Rites” summarized the roles of men and women in ancient Chinese society thus “a man does not talk about affairs inside, a woman does not talk about affairs outside.” In some ways, Chinese ideograms, an ancient form of Chinese characters reflected the roles assigned to men and women. Whereas *Nan* 男, the character for men, symbolizes the physical strength of men in holding up a piece of farmland; *Ni* 女 the character for women, is a picture of a woman kneeling on the ground, her hands holding a tray at the level of her eyebrows. *Jia* 家, the generic character for family, consists of two components, a roof and a herd of pigs. Its symbolizes that a woman's role is to maintain peace and harmony in the family by taking care of the household - cooking, cleaning, sewing, childrearing, caring for the elders, and tending live stock. A man's role is to maintain peace and harmony in society, not by acquiring practical knowledge and skill, but by memorizing obscure Chinese classics, by passing the century-old imperial exams, and by becoming one of the emperor's mandarins. Once married, a woman in traditional Chinese culture would contribute her labor to her husband's family. Beyond her menial functions, she was hardly valued. “Women are like water-drops spilled out of the bucket,” according to a Chinese proverb: “They are not worthy of investment.” Since women did not bring in income, their position was also economically inferior to men. Ancient Chinese philosophers even generalized the inferiority of women and the superiority of men to the operation of the cosmos

claiming that the universe was made up by two major elements, the *Yin* 阴 and *Yan* 阳. The moon, a symbol of *Yin*, was dark, fragile, and inert, characteristic of women. The sun, a symbol of *Yan*, was bright, robust, and dynamic, characteristic of men.

In current ethnic Chinese Malaysian society, even though there is no one paradigm for the “ideal” men, gender stereotyping of occupations continues: boys are expected to become architects, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, or lawyers. In contrast, girls are expected to become administrators, bookkeepers, hairdressers, petty traders, teachers, or unskilled factory workers. As scholars of the Chinese Diaspora point out (Wang 1988), diasporic Chinese societies in Southeast Asia seem to be more male-centered than Chinese society in mainland China. As a consequence, ethnic Chinese women have to try to meet the conflicting demands of both family and work. These demands seem to be particularly hard on women of the lower classes. *Fu Gui*’s mother, whom we met in Chapter Seven, gave us a window into her struggle as both the primary breadwinner and the housekeeper of the family. As a middle school graduate, *Fu Gui*’s mother could at best become a teaching assistant of a kindergarten in her neighborhood. Before work, she prepared the breakfast and did the laundry. After work, she cooked dinner, cleaned the house, and reviewed her daughter’s take-home assignments. After dinner, she worked for Amway selling various household products through family members or friendship networks. The demands between work and family had taken a toll on *Fu Gui*’s mother. At age forty, she was overweight due to the lack of exercise. Her back arched due to a lack of calcium. “Many people said women age faster than men. It is true. *Fu Gui*’s father looks a lot younger than I do. He wakes up around noon, eats his lunch, and reads the newspaper. At night, he watches TV and reads magazines. Yet, he complains that he can’t fall asleep easily. I just roll over and snore,” *Fu Gui*’s mother sighed.

As the demands of both work and family falls on mothers, they press upon daughters as well. Unlike women in the highly developed Chinese societies of Asia (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore), in rural Malaysia, ethnic Chinese girls and women do the whole family’s laundry in buckets of cold water and dry it piece by piece in the sun. They have no dish-washers or vacuum cleaners. Such appliances, imported from industrial countries, may be available in the urban areas, but are heavily taxed and barely affordable to families with average incomes. In any event, the household work typically falls to women. I suspect that in some cases traditional attitudes rather than poverty have kept girls (rather than boys) employed with

household chores. *Sweet Li* used to complain to me about the different household chores that she had to carry out daily, so that her brothers could concentrate on their studies.

The Chinese character for *Hao* 好, “good,” is a picture of a woman next to her child. Thus the identity of a Chinese woman is one of domesticity and motherhood. However, childcare is another major challenge to ethnic Chinese working mothers in Malaysia. In urban areas, working mothers either send their young children to family-run childcare centers or “kindergartens” for childcare. Both of these institutions have little quality control, partly due to the lack of government regulations concerning childcare and partly due to parents’ lack of awareness that childcare centers should be different from schools. In recent years, some slightly more affluent parents have also used Indonesian maids hired for domestic help to be the nannies for their children. However, because of differences in childcare practices involving language, culture, and religion, allegations of child or maid abuse often occur. Some women call in grandmothers from the villages or send their young children out to their grandparents for childcare. I have known many Chinese women who have given up their jobs to become stay-at-home mothers simply because more than half of their income goes to childcare. In rural areas, there are even fewer childcare options and women end up on their own for care of the household, the children and the general needs of the family.

8.6. THE MASS MEDIA AS AN ARENA OF GENDER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In addition to the imposition of the “national” gender ideology rooted in Malay Islam and the prevalence of diaspora gender ideology stemming from Chinese Confucianism, ethnic Chinese youths are faced with yet more pressures on their gender identity development. One of these forces is the mass media. “Traditional mass media texts,” e.g. newspaper, magazines, films, and television programs, etc., have bombarded ethnic Chinese youths with conflicting images and mixed messages of “modern” as opposed to “traditional” gender roles and gender relations. Local conceptions of male and female behavior and codes for gender relations are

simultaneously contested and reinforced by mass media texts imported from East Asia and from North America. On one hand, these mass media texts seem to celebrate the liberation of women from the private, domestic life into the public and civic arena. On the other hand, however, they continue to glorify the traditional, female gender roles of glamorous companion or subservient housewife. Images of the “ideal” woman who is beautiful, young, and slim are imposed on female ethnic Chinese youths on a daily basis. In order to meet these standards, some ethnic Chinese women whiten their faces, have folds made in their eye-lids in the manner of Caucasians, lift their noses, dye their hair, and starve until they develop eating disorders!

A strong sense of inadequacy was prevalent among female ethnic Chinese youths at *Fan Niu Xiao*, especially among the low achievers. Some girls highlighted or dyed their hair; others exercised or starved themselves to lose weight. Discipline masters were busy hunting female students who have “unnatural” hair. Katherine, an Irish-Chinese senior complained to me that female Malay discipline teachers tended to lump her together with the “hard cores” who dyed their hair. “I told them. My father was an *Ang Mo Nang* – “human being with red hair.” It was in my blood. Of course my hair looked lighter than my classmates! They did not believe me!” *Ang Mo Nang* is a derogatory remark in *Hokkian*, a Southern Chinese dialect referring to Caucasians. Since Malaysia was once a British colony, most Malaysians assume that all foreigners who visit or live in Malaysia are of British origin. Although I did not get to talk with girls who highlighted or dyed their hair, I did ask *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei* about this practice at the school canteen during a class recess. *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei* were two “hard cores” who had reputations for being fashionable.

“Why did you only drink water?” I asked.

“We will not get fat if we just drink water,” *Sweet Li* replied.

Pang Bu Hao Kang! *Wan Ton Mei* continued: “Fat girls are not beautiful!”

“But you look average!” I protested.

So Yi Tien Hao Kang! *Wan Ton Mei* argued: “We will look better if we are thinner!” “We are even bigger than you!” *Sweet Li* echoed.

“I have been underweight all my life,” I explained. “I don’t think you want to look like me, do you?”

“But, you have white skin!” *Wan Ton Mei* exclaimed.

I told them they look healthier with their tans, but they did not seem convinced.

Figure 18 Diet Pill Commerical



(Advertisement clipping from Nanyang Shang Pao, August 13, 2000)

The advertisement as shown above may be one of the popular diet pills used by ethnic Chinese girls and women in Malaysia. Readers may notice that the female model in the advertisement is not an Asian woman. Despite the discrepancy in the image projected in the mass media and the majority of women whom they have encountered in lives, some ethnic Chinese girls and women still believe that by taking the diet pills, they can become slim and therefore, prettier.

Figure 19 News of Murdered Woman with Questionable Life Style



(Newspaper clipping from Nanyang Shang Pao, August 7, 2000)

At one end, girls and women are portrayed as victims of abuse and violence in the newspaper. National and local newspapers are full of sensationalized accounts of girls and women who are raped, abused, battered, or even murdered by families, friends, or strangers. At the same time, these newspapers, like the newspaper clipping shown above, contain the hidden transcripts implying that female victims invite male aggression by their “scant clothing” or “questionable lifestyle.” Ironically, most cases of rapes take place in the three states governed by the Islamic opposition party in northeast and north Malaysia, where girls and women have to follow the dress codes set by the *Sha’ria*, “the religious court.”

Even though American popular culture has made its way to Malaysia, it seems to have had less impact than the popular cultures of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. This trend is partly due to language of course. Ethnic Chinese youths in southern Malaysia tend to speak Mandarin at home, while those in the north tend to speak Cantonese. For other reasons as well, however, it is easier for ethnic Chinese youths to identify with the Diaspora Chinese than with Americans. Popular songs imported from Hong Kong, Singapore, or Taiwan, for example, involve endless love stories and depictions of fast paced, urban life that cater to the dreams of ethnic Chinese youths, who are eager to pursue a life style different from the Malay imagined community. The Malay-centric gender and national identities constructed by the Malay ruling elites are challenged by Diaspora Chinese gender identity models imported from highly developed Chinese societies, and by a transnational identity reflecting the sentiments of overseas Chinese kinship. Contrary to the assumption about identity made by Malay ruling elites that the differences between Eastern and Western cultures completely define cultural differences among the population, Diaspora Chinese culture in East Asia have had a greater impact on the identity formation of ethnic Chinese Malaysians than has American culture. However, along with modernization and cosmopolitanism comes competition. In highly competitive Diaspora Chinese societies, men and women compete ruthlessly against the same or opposite sex economic and social rivals against a background of ferocious capitalism. “Big Fish Eat Little Fish” is a Chinese saying that characterizes this dehumanizing process of competition. Competitive female characters in films or TV drama serials are either stereotyped as arrogant old maids or as sensual creatures. Much to my disappointment, male ethnic Chinese youths, including the high achievers, told me that a competitive woman is good to have as a business partner, but not as a wife. A wife, according to male ethnic Chinese youths, has to be “feminine.” *Jenny* and *Shu Tong*, two of the female high-achieving seniors whom we met in Chapter Seven, however, were able to engage themselves in a cultural critique through a constant comparison of gender ideologies in developing and developed Diaspora Chinese societies in Asia. “Chinese in Malaysia are different from Chinese in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Taiwan,” *Shu Tong* commented.

8.7. PORTRAITURE

By situating human actions within the social world, great storytellers show the range of human experiences. Sections 8.6.1 and 8.6.2 are comprised of two sets of narratives. Narratives, as Holmes (2003) defines, are “a sequence of temporally ordered clauses to recapitulate past experiences” (p. 117). As a novice, I follow the narrative conventions used by creative writers to construct the setting, to create a scene, and to sketch the character. More specifically, through portraiture, a narrative composition technique that shares the tradition and practice of ethnography, I seek to portray the heightened gender consciousnesses of two groups of ethnic Chinese youths (high- and low-achieving). As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains, “portraiture” is “a method of inquiry and documentation in which the researcher seeks to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor” (p. 3). Participating with me in creating these portraits, ethnic Chinese youths become more aware of their own positions within the gender hierarchy. The following seven portraits broaden the base of representation through the integration of identity formation with youth resistance modes.

Their experiences, informed by the traditional parenting practice of ethnic Chinese parents and the social differences in being a son and a daughter, have contributed to the gender identity development of ethnic Chinese youths. Given the traditional, authoritarian parent and child relation, for any male or female, ethnic Chinese youth to criticize his or her parents is the ultimate symbolic act of rebellion. And yet, there seems to be a restless, uneasy vitality inside these youths. As they strategize their lives within a hierarchical, unequal social order, they seem to have launched on a voyage of self-discovery questioning their niches in the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian society.

There are challenges in weaving lines of stories into the same set of narratives. First, identifying themes that run through the narratives as they converge at some points requires familiarity with data and systematic data analysis. Next, looking for the form of representation that can contain multiple lines of stories requires creativity and vitality. Although challenging, as I tell the stories of youths' growth, I recognize the person³⁵ behind a name. As a result, each portrait is a composite sketch that presents a coherent personality type.

8.7.1. Gender Identities Enactment: Portraits of High-Achieving, Ethnic Chinese Youths

8.7.1.1. *Tze Chiang*: “I Would Rather Marry a Woman with a Body than with a Soul” 不愛靈魂只愛身體

The public food court located on the fourth floor of the town center a few blocks away from *Fan Niu Xiao (FNX)* was inundated by Malay vendors selling *Halal*, “legal Malay Muslim” food. I walked around the food court twice, but I could not make up my mind. *Tze Chiang*, a male high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths from the science class, had just settled down with a plate of *Ais Kacang*, “shredded ice bottomed by sweet corns and chick peas, and topped by concentrated milk and syrup.” To avoid letting him wait long for me, I scurried to the soup stall. *Sup Tulang Kambing-kah? Soup kami mesti sedap!* “Do you want a bowl of lamb bone soup? Our soup is tasty!” The young, Malay woman who ran the soup stall with her mother grinned with her pearl white teeth. Her pouched lips squished together like two bleeding red worms. Her cherubic cheeks rouged like two dyed pink eggs. Whenever the soup stall was not busy, she pulled out the monthly catalog of Avon hidden beneath the counter and leafed through it page-by-page. Avon was just a few feet away, guarding the entrance of the food court. Like those modest, female

³⁵ Readers are referred to Yanow (1996) for discussions about why and how persons are missing from most policy analyses.

Malay teachers at *FNX*, she tucked her hair under a piece of headscarf and hid her body beneath the traditional, long dress. On rare occasions, did I see a few strands of her hair sticking out of her headscarf like some spider legs dangling in the air. I often wondered how Malay women kept their hair tucked firm and tight under a piece of soft headscarf. The canteen owner's wife shared with me her gimmick. To prevent her hair pile up like a messy bird nest, she wrapped her head with a broad, black hair band before putting on her headscarf.

Lamb bone soup with traditional Malay herbs was my comfort food after a long day of fieldwork. *Nak Sambah-kah?* "Would you like some hot chili paste?" The young Malay woman asked. *Tak!* "No!" I shook my head. But, as a routine, I asked for 2 slices of *Roti*, "toasts," to go with my soup. On both wings of the soup stall, there were golden Koranic verses engraved on black velvet and framed by glasses. On the wall facing the center of the food court, a tiny white board, full of the prices of the different kinds of soup available, was hardly intelligible. To the left of the stall, three hot and steamy aluminum pots sat on three gas stoves. To the right, a grease stained cabinet sat on a rectangular table coated with aluminum. Next to the cabinet was a cash register used by the vendors to ring up the bills. Keeping the advice of *Tze Chiang* in mind, that is, most Malay vendors did not know how to deal with big notes, I paid the vendors in the food court with small notes.

小道消息

"Little Road News"

The Quota Policy and the National Culture Policy have both made their way into the allocation of vendor slots and food processing of public food courts in Malaysia. In the cities, half of the vendors have to be Malays selling food processed according to the Muslim food codes. In small towns, vendor slots of public food courts seemed to be allocated to the Malays only as part of the government's efforts to "eradicate poverty" in rural areas. Unable to get their licenses through the proper channel, some ethnic Chinese resorted to their *Guan Xi*, "connection," with Malay friends and obtained their licenses through the back door while others, fumed with anger and jealousy, making snaps such as the Malays do not know how to run small businesses or the Malays do

not know how to count. “Those Malays, they don’t have any brains, do they? They sell the same thing. No matter which vendor you pick, you get the same thing. Unlike Chinese, we know how to complement each other. Each vendor sells only one thing, but he is good at it.” The food court where I stopped by everyday was unfortunately reflective of the snap made by angry, jealous Chinese. Ten out of the twelve vendors sold the same food, with two vendors brought in some Chinese inventions. However, again, with two vendors selling the same food, I tended to pick one of them at random.

“You didn’t get it, did you? *Fu Gui* is very popular among girls from the lower grades. *Big Head* feels inferior compared to him,” *Tze Chiang* smirked before he took another sip of the *Ais Kacang*. Considering the draught that does not end until the monsoon sets in November, it was a treat. *Fu Gui* had an oval face with a fair complexion while *Big Head* had an undefined face tinted with acnes. Both *Fu Gui* and *Big Head* had coarse, curly hair, but their curls looked different. *Fu Gui*’s curls were long and puffy like the wigs worn by plastic models in department stores. Despite his efforts to get rid of his girlish look, including keeping a moustache to look manly, *Fu Gui* looked nerdy behind his turquoise rimmed eyeglasses. *Big Head*’s curls were short and wiry. His short, beefy neck and long, thick earlobes gave him the look of a Buddha statue.

“I don’t even bother to look into the mirror in the morning. Life has become so easy!” *Tze Chiang* used to have a head of long, soft dark brown hair that made him look like a sable brush hanging upside down from the brim of a humble, Chinese calligraphy stand. He confided to me that shaving his head clean was part of his ritual to cleanse the misery of his life. “I am scared of getting married. Look at my parents. Do you call it a marriage? They are two children engaging in a make-believe play. They have been arguing against and fighting with each other as far as I could remember. Last year, my father moved out of the house and moved into a two-storey townhouse in *Kulai* where he lives upstairs and runs his Chinese herbal store downstairs. My mother, younger brother, and I continued to stay here in the rose garden. My maternal grandmother moved in with us from the Chinese new village because my mother didn’t trust the Indonesian maid whom she hired. You know, every year, there are cases in which Indonesian

maids ended up killing the family who hosted her!” As *Tze Chiang* explained, it dawned upon me why he carried a cellular phone to school and checked on his younger brother every hour.

“What does your mother do for living?” I asked. “She massages feet at a holistic treatment center that she set up with some friends in the city. My father has taught her foot-massage therapy over the years. She leaves home around noon and gets home around mid-night. Her business is doing well, but she gets irritated easily. She does not sleep well at night because my younger brother cries and asks for my father. Also, you know, people tend to think that my mother is the one who has problems,” *Tze Chiang* sighed. “Why are you afraid of marriage?” I steered *Tze Chiang* back to the track. “I may not get married. If I do get married, I want to marry a woman who doesn’t have too much soul.” *Tze Chiang* responded. He stirred up my interest in tracing the origin of the dichotomy - a woman who has soul vis-à-vis a woman who has a body - that is prevalent among ethnic Chinese men regardless of their ages. “What do you mean by ‘a woman who has too much soul’?” I implored *Tze Chiang* for an explanation. “A woman who has a soul is a woman like you!” *Tze Chiang* exclaimed. “Me?” I was astonished by his response. “Women who have too much soul, like my mother and you, are being too independent,” *Tze Chiang* continued. “What’s wrong with a woman being independent?” I refuted. *Tze Chiang* lowered his head and murmured “there should mutual dependence between a husband and a wife. I don’t understand why my mother got married with my father in the first place. Some days, they got along so well that they stuck together all day long. Other days, they couldn’t bear the existence of each other for five-minute!” Although *Tze Chiang* did not avoid my question like *Shu Tong* did, he buffered our exchange with his parents’ marriage, a valid example drawn from a real life situation, to avoid confrontation. Whenever I got impatient with him, I switched the topic of our exchange.

“What happened to *Shu Tong* and *Fu Gui*? They stopped asking me questions about dating” (both of whom I had not have time to catch up with their lives). “They both gave up. *Shu Tong*’s parents didn’t like it. *Fu Gui* fell behind his study. Oops! Please don’t tell them that I told you. I haven’t talked with them for a while,” *Tze Chiang* reminded me. There seemed to be some frictions among *Tze Chiang*, *Shu Tong*, and *Jen Ni Hua* with regard to who should lead the Chinese language club. Both girls, according to *Tze Chiang*, had taken over the club, which was traditionally run by male instead of female ethnic Chinese youths.

8.7.1.2. ***Fu Gui:*** “If A Woman Marries a Chicken, She Should Act Like a Chicken. If She Marries a Dog, She Should Act Like a Dog” 嫁雞隨雞嫁狗隨狗

Friday is the best day in the week to talk with non-Malay students, teachers, or parents because the morning session (senior secondary level/high school) ends around noon and the afternoon session (junior secondary level/middle school) does not begin until 2:00pm. School is short on Friday because Malay students, teachers, and administrators have to leave for the mosque in town for their prayers. Friday prayers have brought some problems to the discipline teachers who are on duty. They have to stand under the sun for a few hours in order to jot down the names of a long queue of Malay students who claim that they are late for school because of their prayers. Although *Fu Gui* did not tell me why his mother preferred to meet me at the school canteen than at home, I was happy for the arrangement. I did not notice her presence until she approached the table with *Fu Gui* and had to swallow the *Goreng Pisang*, “deep-fried banana,” in my mouth in order to send her my greeting. “No hurry, I have to get some cold drinks,” *Chi Ku* comforted me. When she came back to her seat, she had two-bottle of Pepsi. As part of her Chinese hospitality, she had bought me an icy cold Pepsi.

“I said ‘*Fu Gui* ah, your job as a student is to study. You can do whatever you want after you finish high school.’ His father is not a responsible man. The burden fell on me. I want *Fu Gui* to become a responsible man, not like his father. I always told *Fu Gui* ‘You are a man. A man has to be responsible for his family.’ Nowadays it is hard to get a decent job without a university degree. Look at his father. He can’t even get a job at the factory with his primary school diploma.” *Fu Gui*’s father, who had been out of job for more than a year, did not wake up until noon. “How did you meet *Fu Gui*’s father?” I asked. “We worked at the same section, men’s clothing section, at the only department store in town. I came from a poor family. I had to quit school when my younger brother began high school. I would have finished high school. I was a good student. I went to *Zong Ling*. It is different from his school. Our teachers knew what they were doing and we all had a goal,” *Chi Ku* looked into the distance. She seemed to

have sunk into a deep thought. *Chi Ku* kept the standard, bowl-cut hair from her *Zong Ling* years. In order to keep her hair in place, she used bobby pins at both sides of her temples.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Zong Ling, an effective conforming school in northern Malaysia, is well known for producing promising journalists for the two major Chinese newspapers in Malaysia – *Nanyang Shang Pao* and *Sin Jiew Jit Poh*. Graduates from *Zong Ling* tend to continue their study in journalism in the two-year college affiliated with the school. Conforming Chinese schools were Chinese secondary schools that were converted into “national” secondary schools in the early 1980s. Dissatisfied with the speed of the conversion, Malay nationalists threatened the government that it would put all the Malay teachers of the national education system on strike. In order to placate Malay nationalists, the government decided to remove Chinese secondary schools from the national education system. The decision triggered backfire from the Chinese community threatening to withdraw their support for the government in the coming national election. Caught between two ethnic groups that made up more than half of the electoral support, the government came to a middle ground. Chinese secondary schools would no longer be part of the national school system, but those which adopted the national curriculum would receive partial support from the government. In desperate need of the financial support from the government, many Chinese secondary schools adopted the curriculum and increased the hours of Malay language per week. Up to the early 1990s, conforming Chinese schools were welcomed by ethnic Chinese parents in the north. In the late 1990s, they lost their popularity to Chinese independent high schools whose graduates were recognized by national universities in Singapore and China.

Fu Gui insisted that his parents should work things out because husband and wife are the basic make-up of a family. When I pushed for divorce, he responded saying the church is against divorce, but under some circumstances, the church will accept it. “Under what circumstances a husband and a wife can get divorce?” I got on his nerve. “If the husband or the wife has some mental problems, but the church has marriage counseling services. The married couple should seek counseling first. My father goes to the counseling service at church. He said it does not work, but I think it takes time. Lacking the support system, that is to say, counseling service or psychiatric treatment, *Fu Gui* turned to the church for guidance and support. As much as the Malaysian government discourages the spread of Christianity through forbidding the construction of churches in the urban areas, missionaries make its way into ethnic Chinese families by providing free counseling services, skills training, and after-school tutoring in their townhouse church. *Fu Gui*’s mother took the full advantage of the various programs available at the Presbyterian church she attended. “They (adolescents) are different from you and me. Many of them lie to their parents. I have to watch *Fu Gui* closely. I only allow him attend church activities,” *Fu Gui*’s mother justified her tight control over *Fu Gui* to a morally degrading youth generation. *Fu Gui* attended church every Sunday and participated in the various activities organized by the youth club at his church, e.g. the Christian youth musical band, the Christian youth counseling camp, the Christian youth bible reading group, etc. For a while, he even persuaded *Tze Chiang* to attend the programs with him. Ironically, behind the scene, *Fu Gui* was secretly engaged in a romantic pursuit with a Chinese girl from a lower grade.

Although *Fu Gui* does not engage himself in public make-believe plays as much as *Shu Tong*, a female high achiever in his friendship cycle does, he has resorted to impersonation to dodge my inquiry about his parents’ marriage. *Fu Gui*’s impersonation takes different disguises, most notably is his pretense as a rich youth who can afford advanced electronic appliances for daily functions and for recreation. He uses a palm pal as his calendar and a portable CD to listen to the pop songs that he has downloaded from the internet. Behind the scene, he has a rich uncle who rewards him for his outstanding performance in the national exams. The psychology behind *Fu Gui*’s impersonation is complex, but I assume that acting out as a wealthy youth has given him the psychic thrill of something he cannot have in real life, especially, wealthy parents who could afford the treats of the electronic age.

“We aren’t talking about extreme situation like rape. People should be responsible for their actions,” *Fu Gui* continued. “But women don’t get to choose what they want in most situations. Some men don’t make enough money to raise the family, but still they want many children. Others, you know, they just want a son,” I challenged *Fu Gui*. “Hmm...,” *Fu Gui* cocked his head like a kitten pondered over something he or she had spotted in the distance, but could not make sense of it. “But men need women to run the family. A family cannot function without a woman,” he said. Although I felt tempted to challenge *Fu Gui* by using his father as an example, I did not do so. I felt unethical to turn against him by using the information that his mother had given me. I assumed that my sensitivity had partly contributed to *Fu Gui*’s prolonged impersonation though I knew by heart that it had taken place before our acquaintance. Though *Fu Gui* did not share with me the status of his romance, I had learned though Tze Chiang that it ended with his surrender to his mother’s pressure. Facing his mother’s uncompromising authority, *Fu Gui* dared not defy her wishes, but complied as she wished.

The other way in which he manifested his impersonation is his indifference towards gender inequity. As much as *Fu Gui* witnessed the problems of his mother’s marriage, he seemed to have abided by the basic “three bonds” prescribed by Confucius. Confucius defined the social relations of Chinese based on the following “three bonds:” the loyalty of subject to ruler, the filial obedience of son to father, and the fidelity of wife to husband. As a consequence, most Chinese, China Chinese or ethnic Chinese, are trapped in an ordered social hierarchy and an elaborated kinship system that gives individuals little social mobility. Each social relation carries with it a corresponding set of roles and functions and rights and duties. As long as one fulfills one’s prescribed role, he or she does not have to worry about what others may do. The pride that *Fu Gui* takes in being a Christian does not seem to help him develop any critical thinking toward the bonds. “In the eyes of God, everyone is equal,” *Fu Gui* said in tone that was impersonal and distant as if he was not part of the Chinese social system. More disturbing to me, however, is his reasoning about how men need women and how he refers to religion whenever I push for his personal opinions about the social inequity between Chinese men and women. Sometimes, he even pulls in Islam saying that all religions discourage divorce, a behavior which I have found not uncommon among the ethnic Chinese Christians in Malaysia.

8.7.1.3. **Shu Tong:** “*Of the Thirty-Six Ways of Dealing with s Social Situation, Running Way is the Best.*” 三十六計走為上計

The Knowledge Pavilion, an octagon hut with a blue-tiled roof, was glistening in the tropical sun like a blue turquoise. The pungent odor emanating from the garbage piling up high next to the dumpster, however, diminished the ideals of the pavilion. As usual, *Jen Ni Hua* and *Shu Tong* had a quick lunch before their Chinese language class. Both girls argued that even though it was inconvenient to stay up after school, Chinese students should support the class for the sake of preserving Chinese language. According to the female Malay assistant principal, there were not enough classrooms for Chinese or Tamil language classes during the regular school hours, so Chinese or Indian students who wanted to take their “mother tongue” (native language) classes had to stay up after school. As *Phoenix*, the Chinese language teacher pointed out, many students dropped out of her class because it was such a hassle for them to go home after class. Although there were public buses available at the bus terminal located in the town center, they went directly to the capital city. Consequently, students would have to go all the way to the city in order to catch their buses home. In addition to the lack of transportation, the lack of school facilities had discouraged students from staying up late after school. Over the course of my fieldwork, during most of the afternoon, the library was closed because there were no students willing to stay up after school to help out at the library and the assembly hall was locked because there were no maintenance fees left to maintain the expensive, acoustics equipments. The canteen, with its high ceiling fans, was the only place available for students to cool off on any of the hot and humid afternoons.

After class, *Shu Tong* tended to walk to the bus terminal and take the public bus home while *Jen Ni Hua* tended to wait for her father at the school canteen. Occasionally, *Shu Tong* would stay up after the Chinese language class and tutor *Jen Ni Hua* for her advanced mathematics, chemistry, or physics. Both girls liked to talk with me during their breaks. I had hence gained more insights into their lives in these natural, spontaneous exchanges than in

artificial, formal set-ups. Of most interesting to me, however, was a variety of strategies that *Jen Ni Hua* and *Shu Tong* used to buffer the discomfort or to diffuse the tensions brought on by my inquiry. By way of example, *Shu Tong* was good at shunning my inquisition by shielding herself within a make-believe play. Through her make-believe play, she had successfully downplayed her inner thoughts and feelings while acted according to the roles appropriated to her. *Shu Tong's* behavior might be a self-defense mechanism toward the "symbolic violence" that was thrust upon her by her parents or an outgrowth of her sensitivity toward the hypocrisy of the adults' world. Although I was frustrated by the public persona put forth by her, I was aware of the power imbalance between us. As Scott (1990) pointed out, the greater the gap between the power and powerless, "the thicker the mask" (p. 3). As we got acquainted, I found out that setting up a scenario, the worst in most cases, to probe for her inner feelings and thoughts was more efficient.

"What do you think?" I pushed *Shu Tong* for her opinions. "C-e-r-t-a-i-n-l-y..." she spelled out her word with hesitation. "But, isn't true that when two people get married, they have to accommodate to each other?" *Shu Tong* lowered her head. "What if the husband abuses his wife?" I challenged *Shu Tong*. "You meant wife battering? That only happens with the Indians!" *Shu Tong* exclaimed. "First, file a police report and second, look for a lawyer and divorce him!" *Jen Ni Hua* was outspoken as usual. As she spoke, her long, slanted eyes tilted up like the slits of a Japanese doll. Unlike *Shu Tong*, who had a pointy chin, *Jen Ni Hua* had a puffy chin.

"What if her life is in danger?" I looked into *Shu Tong's* eyes. "In that case, she has to do what she has to do and ignores what others say," *Shu Tong* replied. She had a pair of big, round eyes with long, curly eye lashes that were more commonly found among the ethnic Indian youths. *Shu Tong's* coffee skin and curly hair suggested to me that they were the heritages of an Indian descendent. Unlike *Kanchana*, a high-achieving, female Chinese Indian youth whom I met in the afternoon session, *Shu Tong* was reluctant to disclose her mixed blood. Her paternal grandmother was a Tamil-speaking Indian who migrated from Southern India to British Malaya to triumph over poverty. *Shu Tong* used to go out with *Yen Dao*, one of the fraternal Indian twins in her class, but the romance lasted only for a few months. In all fairness, *Yen Dao* was a good looking, high-achieving Indian boy admired by the Indian girls in his class and at the same grade level. He had a tall, solid figure, a head of dark, curly hair, and a pair of big, bulgy eyes

with long, curly eye lashes. *Jun*, the female Malay school counselor, was also impressed by his good look and told me that she would be surprised if no Chinese girls had a crush on him. Like many Indian boys at his age, *Yen Dao* kept a moustache to look masculine. As a high achiever, he was recruited into the school prefect board after he began high school. The school prefect board was a highly selective extra-curricular student organization accepting only the top-notch students at each grade level. Although *Shu Tong* tried to keep her romance in a nutshell, her parents found out about it and threatened to withdraw their support for her high education plan. Interethnic marriages were still rare in the Chinese Malaysian society because marriage was a careful, reciprocal arrangement between two families of similar socio-economic status. Most ethnic Chinese parents took dating seriously and saw it as an indication to marriage. Though interethnic marriages between Chinese and Indians were much more common than those between Chinese and Malays, getting married with a man or a woman from a different ethnic background implied the loss of one's ethnic identity. Under such conditions, it should not hard to understand the social pressure experienced by *Shu Tong* and her parents.

“Cock-a-doodle-do!” A rooster was crowing for the whole time I was talking with *Shu Tong* and her parents, which took place at the living-room of a Malay style bungalow in the Chinese new village. In the rectangular living-room, there were a Japanese television set scrunching up the northeast wall, a three-seat couch popped up by a bamboo frame sitting on the southwest floor, and a rectangular fish tank leaning against the northwest wall. Between the couch and fish tank was the hallway leading to the kitchen. At the end of the hallway, two paper kitchen gods guarded the doorway into the kitchen with their crescent-moon shape knives. To the east of the living-room, there was a doorway leading to the front yard. As I walked into the living-room, *Shu Tong's* father rose up from the couch and put on his shirt. Like Malay or Indian men, ethnic Chinese men took off their shirts to dissipate the heat when it got hot. No matter how hard the ceiling fan worked, its propellers sent out hot air at this time of the day. There were four windows in the living-room. Two of them were on the north wall and the other two, on the east wall. All four windows had iron bars on them. Even in rural Malaysia, it was not uncommon to see windows that were guarded by iron bars. While armed robberies tended to take place in the

cities, petty thefts tended to take place in the villages. In contrast to the household which I grew up, which was crowded and clamorous, *Shu Tong*'s household seemed to be empty and quiet. Including *Shu Tong*, the family was made up by only four members. "Would you like 'Saksi' or 'Fanta'?" *Shu Tong* asked. "'Saksi' please," I replied. "Saksi" was the brand name of a local root beer that had been incorporated into the languages of the three ethnic groups. In most ethnic Chinese families, girls have to entertain the guests. As I recalled, *Sweet Li* kept pouring "Fanta" into my glass and piling up my plate with barbeque chicken wings when I visited her and her parents in the suburbs. Like "Saksi," "Fanta" was the brand name of a local orange juice that had been incorporated into the everyday language of the three ethnic groups. "Certainly, *Shu Tong* is a filial daughter," *Shu Tong*'s mother cleared her throat before she continued, "but we are Chinese, aren't we? When we get old, we have to rely on our sons, not our daughters." *Shu Tong* sat on a red-and-white checkered ottoman throughout my visit. I wondered from time to time, what went through *Shu Tong*'s mind when her mother justified her male preference by resorting to the different levels of filial piety that sons and daughters have to fulfill. *Shu Tong*'s father, on the other hand, justified his differential expectation of the academic performance of his children by referring to the intrinsic differences between girls and boys. "I did not need to worry about *Shu Tong* at all. She came home and finished her homework before she played. This one," *Shu Tong*'s father pointed to *Shu Tong*'s younger brother, "I had to keep a close eye on him. You know, boys were active and mischievous. He could not sit still. I thought about sending him to Foon Yew. Teachers there were doing a much better job in disciplining boys. Luckily, he was not too bad." "I sat next to him and went over his assignments with him every night," *Shu Tong*'s mother chimed in.

Field notes, May 25, 2002

8.7.1.4. *Jen Ni Hua*: “Pigs under the Same Roof” 家天下

“I don’t have the time to date. I want to become a doctor because a doctor can go into politics, but a teacher can’t. I want to do something for the Chinese community,” *Jen Ni Hua* said. *Jen Ni Hua* had just had her waist long hair cut to an inch beneath her ear lobes. She parted her hair from the center and hid them behind her ears. Still, in the furnace of June, her forehead was beaded with sweat. My father is just a civil servant. Unless he is willing to take *Ang Pao*, “bribery money wrapped in a red envelope,” he doesn’t make much money. He despises it,” *Jen Ni Hua* took pride in her father’s ethos.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Being a civil servant can be a lucrative job in Malaysia. Although an entry level administrator makes about US\$300.00 to US\$400.00/per month, which is better than a first year school teacher, who makes about US\$250.00/per month, he or she enjoys a lower interest rate in bank loans and in medical insurance. Because of their low wages, civil servants of all ranks are known to skim off the top through different ways. In general, the higher the rank, the more innovative it becomes. Coffee money, for example, wrapped in a red envelope which Chinese called *Ang Pao*, is a form of bribery widely practiced by individuals or groups who wish to successfully navigate through the system. Nurturing *Guan Xi*, “connection or ties,” with civil servants of different sectors and of different ranks regularly through coffee money has proven to be especially helpful to open up the back door for different business opportunities ranging from small business license application to national development project bidding.

“I hate it when our government said that the Malays are poor and they need the New Economic Policy to help them catch up with Chinese. The Malay family who stay across from us has a Mercedes and a Honda. Think about it, they are driving imported cars! My parents are driving Protons. Do you call that poverty?” I saw *Jen Ni Hua*’s father a few times when he pulled into the driveway in front of the main gate. He wore the standard *Ke-me-ja*, “mock suit made up of khaki,” which indicated that he was a civil servant, and drove a *Proton Saga*, the second to the lowest of the national car line.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

In order to create a sustainable domestic market for the national automobile industry, the Malaysian government has imposed upon imported cars heavy taxes in order to discourage its people from purchasing cars made in Japan, in the United States, or in Europe. The heavy taxing, however, does not apply to *Sultan*, the “king” of the eleven Malay states. In general, the Malay royal families seem to be aware that they live off the taxes of Malaysians of the three ethnic groups. Over the course of my fieldwork, however, the prince of the *Johore* state reluctantly canceled his order of a Ferrari after he was criticized for wasting the taxes of his people. The privileges enjoyed by the royal families, the fringe benefits of being civil servants, and the special rights of the Malays evoke resentment from ethnic Chinese and Indians who see themselves as second-class, Malaysian citizens.

Both *Jen Ni Hua*’s parents were highly educated civil servants who swore not to join the opposition parties and who were never involved in anti-government activities. *Jen Ni Hua*’s father had a bachelor’s degree in mathematics while her mother graduated with an honor’s degree in Chinese. Both were school teachers before they became administrators. *Jen Ni Hua*’s parents were among the very few ethnic Chinese who managed to become administrators.

Because of their job nature, they were cautious in actions and words. “You know, my father is surrounded by the Malays. He is reluctant to say anything. As for my mother, even though she is working with Chinese, she can’t fire anyone because Chinese is supposed to help out Chinese,” as *Jen Ni Hua* described the working conditions of her parents, she carried a look of pity as well as abhorrence.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Jen Ni Hua’s mother is not the only ethnic Chinese experiencing the paradox of ethnicity. Phoenix, the subject head of Chinese language at *Fan Niu Xiao*, experienced a similar paradox while she interacted with her son’s homeroom teacher. According to Phoenix, the homeroom teacher, who was also a Chinese language teacher, seemed to be unknowledgeable about Chinese idioms. She ended up tutoring her son after school and decided to file a formal complaint against the low teaching quality of the school during a PTA meeting. The principal, presumably acting as the mediator, saved the face of both sides by attributing the low education quality to the lack of teaching experience and by praising Phoenix’s son as a gifted child. Face, as an outcome of Chinese extreme sensitivity to dignity, has colored all interpersonal relations. In Chinese Malaysian society, the reverence to face has mingled with the larger, national politics at play. Ethnic Chinese have long seen Chinese primary schools as the cradle of Chinese culture. All school personnel, ranging from administrator to janitor, have to be Chinese. The adamant stand taken by the Chinese community in preserving Chinese culture was challenged in the late 1980s when the Ministry of Education, pressured by Malay nationalists, appointed Malays assistant principals to several Chinese primary schools in the northern states. The appointment triggered a massive protest from the Chinese community and ended up with the imprisonment of community leaders and educators through the Sedition Act. *Operation Lalang*, as the government justified, was essential to put out sparks of dissidence that threatened racial/ethnic harmony. The aspiration of Malay nationalist to convert Chinese primary schools resurged in the late 1990s, along with a national school reform project titled the “Vision School.” A Vision primary school

differs from the current national primary schools mainly in its ethnic composition. It has three ethnic groups of students study under the same roof, but through three groups of teachers and under three management bodies. Students of the three ethnic groups share the assembly hall, the library, and the canteen while teachers and administrators share the same administration building and parking lots. The project, as the Minister of Education claimed, would help consolidate resources and facilitate unity. Yet, Malay administrators, teachers, and students continue to receive the largest slice of the budget pie. Each vision school would have a mosque to meet the spiritual needs of Malay administrators, teachers, and students. The school canteen could only serve *Halal* food. Classes would have to run around the clock of the daily prayers of Malay administrators, teachers, and students. The Vision School Project, as expected, encountered strong oppositions from community leaders calling for students and parents to boycott the reform project. The government, like the past, resorted to the Sedition Act to put out any opposition voices.

Jen Ni Hua seems to have a more liberal gender role perception than her mother does. She believes that it takes more than the traditional, Chinese parent-child reciprocity to become a self-sufficient Chinese Cinderella. Her future spouse should be willing to invest in her continuous education as a proof of love. “I am not the type of girls who live off love. I know what is at stake. Besides love, I need bread and I need to know where I can find bread,” *Jen Ni Hua’s* assertion for self-realization may be an outgrowth of her observation of her parents’ marriage. “As you know, my mother is the principal of a Chinese primary school. Besides her work, she does the cooking and laundry. My mother cooks whenever she has time. She leaves the food in the Tupperware. My sister and I get the rice from the rice cooker and heat the dishes in the microwave,” *Jen Ni Hua* said. “My father is a typical Chinese man. He doesn’t cook or do the laundry.” “My mother tends to work at the dining-room and my father, at the living-room. When it is time for dinner, my mother pushes her stuff aside. At the dining table, my mother talks about her school and my father, his office. As for my sister and I, we just listen!” *Jen Ni Hua* shrugged her shoulders as she described the interaction between her parents and among the different family members. Like other “married” Chinese couple, *Jen Ni Hua’s*

parents live under same roof, but each leads a different life. However, since appearance is more important than substance, like other “married” Chinese couples, they are engaged in make-believe plays in order to save face. Divorce does not only reflect personal failures, but also the loss of face of the two families involved.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

On any given days during my fieldwork, if I looked for *Phonenix*, I would have found her behind her desk, which was located in the far end, at the upper left corner of the left wing of the teachers’ office. *Phonenix* was the subject head of the Chinese language. She was stocky, with short, straight hair. The padded red suit she had on for events and functions magnified her bulk. Most notably to me, however, were the pigment of her skin and the freckles on her face. Growing up in a Chinese new village in northern Malaysia, *Phonenix* supplemented her parents’ income as a rubber taper. “I got up around 4:00am and taped the rubber trees before I went to school,” she told me during our conversation about Chinese students who work after school. “Don’t look down on those low achievers,” she said, “they know they aren’t made for school success, but they pick up skills after school. You know our ‘Elvis’, don’t you? He is becoming a chef. He has been working as an apprentice to the chef of ‘Beijing Lou’.” “Beijing Lou” is a branch of the “New Hong Kong restaurant,” a restaurant known for its Cantonese cuisine. *Phonenix* made it to the university despite poverty. Her major was Chinese and her minor was education. She met her husband in college and married him after college. *Phonenix* became a teacher and her husband, an insurance broker. Using her fringe benefits as a civil servant, she bought a bungalow in the suburbs and 2 national cars. *Phonenix* broke the cycle of poverty, but she could not cast the spell of abuse. Despite the success of her career, she was a battered wife. On and off, *Phonenix* came to school with a black eye or a swollen cheek. The battering seemed to have died down for a while, but then, it came back. Still, she wore a jovial mask and engaged in her make-believe play as time went by. One late afternoon, as I was overwhelmed by the heat and leaned against the couch in the teachers’ office like a ginger bread woman scorched by the

heat of an over, I spotted *Phonenix* from the corner of my eyes. As I approached her from the back with a belly of curiosity to her staying up late, I heard her weeping. “I have no one to turn to, not even my mother. I drove all the way to the new village, but my mother couldn’t take me in. She said ‘daughters are spilled water’. I have been looking for a lawyer. My 1st lawyer discouraged me from divorcing my husband,” *Phonenix* pulled a Kleenex out of a Kleenex package from her purse and blew her nose. My jaws dropped as I listened to her. “She was a Christian. She said it is against God’s will to divorce. Plus, I have two children. I should have thought about my children even if I didn’t think about myself. So, I gave up, but it has gotten worse over the years. Lately, he has lifted up the chair and thrown at me. The children can tell. My son’s grades have plunged. My daughter has thrown tantrums every morning before I dropped her off at the kindergarten.” “Is she okay?” I exclaimed. “I thought a female lawyer would be more empathetic than a male one,” *Phonenix* continued. “How long has *it* been going on?” I saw no point in participating in her make-believe play. I broke the ice between *Phonenix* and me, but I had also opened the Pandora box. “It began soon after the birth of my son. I had a c-sect and my belly hurt. He drove like a maniac. The car rocked up and down. I almost passed out! Throughout all these years, I have paid for food and bills. He spent all his money on hi-fi and television. I got home, cooked, and bathed the children. He complained about the floor. It was not clean. I didn’t have the time for it! So, we slept in different rooms. I figured he could have the room as clean as he wanted it to be. He has gained weight over the years, so he played basketball to lose weight. When I asked him to take our son with him, he was mad. He told me it is a woman’s job to take care of the children. I understood he was eager to lose weight, but I couldn’t split myself into two halves. The children aren’t close to him at all.” *Phonenix* told her story. Blood shots crawled over her eye whites. Although she was in her thirties, she looked as if she was in her late forties.

8.7.2. Gender Identities Enactment: Portraits of Low-Achieving, Ethnic Chinese Youths

In my second visit to *Fan Niu Xiao*, which took place six months after my initial fieldwork, I could no longer see *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*, and *Factory Mei* hanging out at the school canteen before or after school. The girls used to lean against the wooden tables like three mocking birds perching at a tree branch and picking on boys from the lower grades who happened to walk by them. As underachievers who had failed their Malay language in the “Primary School Assessment Test,” *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*, and *Factory Mei* were first placed in a remedial program named the “Remove Class” to improve their Malay language competence and then were placed in classes classified as the non-academic track. By the time I got acquainted with *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei* and *Factory Mei*, they had become chronic low achievers failing every single subject including mathematics, a subject which Chinese students had taken much pride in due to their exceptional performance. In addition to being stigmatized as low achievers, *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*, and *Factory Mei* were identified by female Malay discipline teachers as “hard cores” who rebelled against school rules. Shortly after I completed my initial fieldwork, *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*, and *Factory Mei* were transferred to a new, non-premier secondary school as part of the plan of the administrators to get rid of low achievers. Both *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei* dropped out of the new school. To catch up with their lives, I visited them on weekends when they did not work.

Sweet Li confided to me that she had a boyfriend, so did her two buddies, *Wan Ton Mei* and *Factory Mei*. When I asked *Sweet Li* what were the qualities that she and her buddies looked for in their “ideal” boyfriends, she responded saying boys who could *Guan Jiao*, “discipline and teach” them. By way of example, *Wan Ton Mei*, a spoiled brat with little self-control, needed discipline and teaching, thus, her “ideal” boyfriend should be someone who could supervise her work and study. The romances of the girls also seemed to have featured their working-class family backgrounds. All boyfriends, like the girls’ fathers, were high school dropouts working as apprentices at motorcycle repair shops in their neighborhood or as migrant workers working in the different kinds of factories in Singapore. Although none of the girls’ mothers suffered from

any abuses from their spouses, they were submissive to their husbands, who were not only the primary breadwinners of the families, but also the major decision-makers of the lives of their children. Except for *Factory Mei*'s mother, who was a full-time housewife, both *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei*'s mothers had supplemented their husbands' incomes with their part-time jobs as a sales woman and an estate dealer respectively.

While it is still unclear to me if the labor migration of ethnic Chinese Malaysians to Singapore, a developed, Diaspora Chinese society, has contributed to a more liberal parenting practice, an increasing consumption of its cultural commodities (films, TV drama serials, newspaper, magazines) does not seem to have any effects on their parenting practices. In the developed, Diaspora Chinese societies in Asia (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore), parents seem to have provided their children of both sexes with equal resources and support for their schooling. In contrast, ethnic Chinese Malaysian parents still preserve resources for and encourage only their sons to succeed in schooling. The preferential treatment of sons has its roots in Confucianism in which sons, not daughters, are responsible for taking care of their parents at old age. The social differences in being a son and in being a daughter has instilled early on in the minds of female ethnic Chinese youths that they have less social value compared to male ethnic Chinese youths.

8.7.2.1. *Sweet Li*: "An Ignorant Woman is Virtuous" 女子無才便是德

I visited *Sweet Li* and her family late on a Sunday afternoon after the Monsoon had set in and cooled down the furnace of August. Having the luxury of chatting with *Sweet Li* for the whole afternoon, we discussed a variety of topics ranging from her dropping out of high school to her work at the bakery in town (for the purpose of this chapter, I have included only narratives that are relevant to romance, sexuality, and marriage).

Sweet Li and her family lived at a one storey townhouse in a newly developed housing area on the outskirts of the city. Like many ethnic Chinese, *Sweet Li*'s parents chopped down the trees in front of the house, planted by the developer, in order to get more sunshine. As *Sweet*

Li's mother showed me around the house, she bragged about how her connection with the developer had helped her obtain the most ideal townhouse in the area. "To get this house, I had to use my *Guan Xi* with the developer. The house has good *Feng Shui*. It is built against the hill and is showered by the sunlight coming from the East. We will be rich and healthy." In addition to chopping down the trees, *Sweet Li's* parents paved over the lawn with cement, so that the whole front yard became a big, open garage. To the right of the garage, *Guang Gong*, a legendary hero from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), guarded the family's safety with a crescent shape spear in his right hand. To the left, an aluminum fence, about four feet tall, separated the family from their neighbor. *Sweet Li's* father was grilling chicken wings next to *Guang Gong* when I arrived. Despite the heat emanating from the grill, he did not take off his shirt, thereby showing greater respect for me. Taking off one's shirt on a hot and muggy day is a common practice among men of different ethnic groups in Malaysia just like leaving the toilet lid up is a common practice among men of lower- and middle-class in Southeast Asia. *Sweet Li's* father stood up, shook my hands, sat down, and continued to grill the wings. As I followed *Sweet Li's* mother to the back of the house, I noticed that the backyard and fire escape had been turned into a kitchen. Like most ethnic Chinese families who live in townhouses, *Sweet Li's* parents expanded their townhouse to its limit without hiring an architect to revise the blueprints. When I finally had the chance to catch my breath, *Sweet Li's* father, having followed me back into the house, served me the chicken wings he had grilled, urging me to eat the wings got cold. *Sweet Li's* father was a tall, slim man with a tanned skin tone, a head of salt-and-pepper hair, and a wrinkle-free face. A mole at the lower left corner of his chin, below his lips, was as dark as a black bean. His moustache looked like a caterpillar laying across a trench. In contrast, *Sweet Li's* mother was short and plump, not atypical of ethnic Chinese women who normally put on a little weight after their forties. The wrinkles in both corners of her eyes interlaced with each other like the blades on a pair of scissor. Her cheeks, covered with a thick layer of foundation, were full of opened pores.

As I ate my chicken wings, *Sweet Li's* younger sister and second youngest brother were watching a Cantonese movie in the living-room. After we got acquainted, they followed me to every corner of the house and chimed in additional details that *Sweet Li* had forgotten to mention during our exchange. *Sweet Li's* youngest brother didn't join us, staying either in his room or sitting at the computer in the hallway leading to the kitchen. "We all had boy friends even

though our parents didn't like them," *Sweet Li* said, referring to her buddies, *Wan Ton Mei* and *Factory Mei*. Although she had the back of her hair trimmed to an inch below her ear lobes to remove split ends, the bangs at her forehead were crimped like deep-fried Chinese egg noodles. "We were mostly boiling 'telephone porridge', but one late Saturday afternoon, *Ah Beng* stopped by after my parents went to *Foon Yew* to pick up my younger brother's report card. We were listening to Liu's most recent CD, when suddenly I heard the auto-gate open. We panicked! I hid him in my room, but I forgot to take the glasses to the kitchen. My father saw two glasses and asked me 'Who was here?' When I said 'No one,' he grabbed my arms and dragged me through the house, looking in every corner. He found him in my room." As *Sweet Li* described her father, her forehead had beaded with sweat as big as large tapioca pearls. "*Ah Ba* (father) kicked him out of the house and slammed *Jie Jie's* (sister's) head against the wall," said *Mei Mei*, *Sweet Li's* younger sister. She had thick bangs that covered her forehead, a freckled, up-turned nose, and a pair of long, narrow eyes that looked like the slanted eyes of a Japanese doll. "I told my father we were just listening to a CD, but he kept pressuring me to confess the 'Thing' that we did. I told him 'We didn't do anything!'" *Sweet Li's* nostrils shone from the oil of her enlarged pores. Like many adolescent girls, her T-zone was slick-looking and covered with blackheads. Unlike *Wan Ton Mei*, whose eyebrows were plucked clean and then re-painted on with an eyebrow pencil, *Sweet Li* twitched her eyebrows, so they looked arched. In her five-by-three foot, matchbox-like bedroom, she had a twin-size mattress lying on the cement floor, a white bookshelf leaning against the left wall, a swirling fan sitting in the corner to the right of the door, and a florescent light hanging from the ceiling. A free-standing, cheap wooden cupboard to the left of the door served as her dresser. Hanging on the door knob of its right-hand door was a round mirror, which *Sweet Li* picked up and looked into, squeezing the pimples on her forehead, throughout our exchange. *Sweet Li* had a round face and a slightly plump figure. Once, when *Sweet Li* went to the toilet, *Mei Mei* shared with me a family secret: "*Jie Jie* eats very little, but exercises a lot. Each time, after she finishes jumping rope, she asks me 'Mei, do I look thinner?' *Ah Ba* and *Ma Ma* (mother) think *Jie Jie* will kill herself trying to look pretty."

"What does your ex-boy friend do for living?" I asked. "He repairs motorcycle," *Sweet Li* replied. "He even greeted my father with 'Uncle'. I didn't know what my father thought, but we didn't do anything," *Sweet Li* interrupted. "*Ma Ma* begged *Ah Ba* not to beat *Jie Jie*," *Mei Mei* chimed in. "My mother told my father 'You are going to kill her!' So, he stopped," *Sweet Li*

continued. “What did he do this time?” I asked. “As usual, when he started slamming my head against the wall, except for this time, he couldn’t pull my hair because it is short, I ran around the house trying to get away from him.” *Sweet Li* smirked. “Did you see your boyfriend again after that?” Waiting to hear about her courageous act of rebellion, instead, *Sweet Li* replied, “Since my father kicked him out of the house, he has stopped coming to school to see me. He used to take me out for tea.” According to *Encik Sellapan*, the Indian afternoon supervisor who had a moustache that curled up like a genie’s in Arabian folktales, *Sweet Li* and her buddies snuck out of school by cutting a hole in the aluminum fence and jumping over a *Longkang*, “ditch,” at least three feet wide. I assumed that *Sweet Li*’s boyfriend gave her a hand on the other side of the fence because jumping across a ditch while wearing a long, traditional Malay skirt was a daring effort. During my fieldwork, I had seen the discipline masters, at least one a week, mending the aluminum fence that wrapped around the school. *Sweet Li* claimed that she came home right after school since she had stopped seeing her boyfriend. However, *Mei Mei* revealed that it was because *Sweet Li* didn’t get any pocket money from her parents, and because her high achieving brother spied on her and tattled on every single move she made.

Sweet Li’s father had every reason to worry about her safety. As we discussed in Chapter 4, there were *Gu Ye Zai* around “cajoling girls, particularly low achievers or dropouts, into prostitution, and offering to act as their pimps.” Her father’s fear even affected her plans for a summer job. *Sweet Li* had planned to wait tables at a Chinese restaurant in town, but under the threat of her father, she gave up that idea. “My mother had to use her connections with the manager there to get me the job, but my father said no! He even threatened to cut off my schooling if I worked there,” she said. Instead, *Sweet Li* ended up working as a cashier at a bakery in town. Ironically, despite her father’s efforts in shielding her from *Gu Ye Zai*, *Sweet Li* experienced sexual harassment at her workplace. “Sometimes I went to the back of the store and cried, but my supervisor said I had to get used to it. Some men are disgusting! They touched my hands and said ‘Come on, *Mei Mei*, follow me and you won’t have to work here. Pretty girls like you should be dancing at the discothèque’. I felt like smacking their faces with a week old cake, but I couldn’t. I had to pretend like nothing had happened, otherwise, they would complain about the way I wrapped the cake, or they would say the cake that I get for them isn’t fresh. My supervisor just said ‘Endure’. How long I have to endure? A woman asked me if I wanted to learn massage, so I could make a lot of money!?” I knew what she meant,” said *Sweet Li*.

Sweet Li's experience was not uncommon, but more disturbing to me, was the ignorance of her manager. Rarely did ethnic Chinese women know that they were as equally guilty as men for staying silent. Even if *Sweet Li* brought her case to her parents, they might blame her for not behaving properly in public. In either case, *Sweet Li* was in a catch-22 situation in which she had little say in the matter. Would *Sweet Li* "endure" like her manager suggested? I doubt she would. When I last talked with her, she attended church and seemed to get some support from her new acquaintances there. She also claimed that she had found "true love." However, except for sharing her hidden romance with me, *Sweet Li* revealed little about her perceptions on sexuality or marriage. Readers may have gotten some insight into her position on sexuality, a touchy issue, from her response to her father's interrogation. Maintaining the appearance of innocence was especially important in *Sweet Li*'s case, given her status as a "hardcore" at school. I assumed that because of the absence of sex education at school, coupled with the repression of her parents at home, *Sweet Li*, like many ethnic Chinese adolescents, must have turned to popular youth magazines (e.g. the Sisters, the New Trend, and others) for help. What I didn't expect from *Sweet Li* was her display of maturity during the following events.

According to June, the school counselor, one female Malay student who came from a single-parent family frequently had sex at home with a number of male Malay students from her class. Regardless of *Jun*'s reporting of this to school, it was only after one father reported to the police that his son had been missing for a week, did school approach her and other sexually active students. These sexually active Malay students were then required to attend intensive spiritual training at a religious school for two weeks. In another case, a female Indian student was discovered to be pregnant by a male Indian student in the same class. Instead of referring the students to related social agencies where they could get help, the school decided to expel them. The parents of the female Indian student, shamed by their daughter's pregnancy, hid her at home.

When I asked *Sweet Li* what she thought about the Indian students' situation, her response struck me as one that an understanding, well rounded adult might have. "They only had a year to go and they could get their diplomas. School shouldn't have expelled them. With their diplomas, they could get better paying jobs. Raising children requires money. Who will pay for the diapers and milk powder? They will have to ask for help from their parents.

Their parents should let them get married, so they could become a legal couple. Hiding her at home didn't solve the problem," said *Sweet Li*.

8.7.2.2. ***Wan Ton Mei:*** *"It Is Better off for Parents To Marry off Their Full-Fledged Daughter than to Keep Her At Home"* 女大不中留

Townhouses seemed to be the favorite type of dwelling of ethnic Chinese family because they carried the appearance of *Xiao Kang Tze Jia*, "a small, but comfortable home." A townhouse could be one- or two-storey high, but it typically had a fenced in, postage-stamp sized front yard. As a national standard, half of the front yard was lawn and the other half, a car port. The idea behind the design, as most Malaysians could tell, was to encourage each family to mind its own business. The value of the townhouses differed according to their location. The closer a townhouse was to a mosque, the less value it had. The prayers of Malay Muslims coming from the loud speakers of the mosque five times a day, from dawn to dusk, were annoying to ethnic Chinese. Like many ethnic Chinese families, *Wan Ton Mei* and her family stayed in a townhouse development located on the outskirts of the city which was built by a joint venture between the housing unit of the state government and an "approved" estate developer. Like *Sweet Li*'s parents, *Wan Ton Mei*'s parents turned the lawn into a second car port by pouring it over with cement. *Wan Ton Mei*'s father and brother were taking apart a Kawasaki motorcycle when I walked by them. Their tanned torsos were beaded with sweat and their hands were soiled by the lubricant coming out of the various parts of the motorcycle. *Wan Ton Mei*'s father nodded his head, but her brother looked uneasy. A thick, gold necklace hung from his neck making him look like a guard dog on a leash. Next to the motorcycle parts, a street cart with three simplified Chinese characters, "Wan Ton Noodle Soup," written on its overhead sign, leaned against the aluminum fence like an old man who feels useless in his retirement. *Wan Ton Mei* used to help her parents at the night market until midnight, and often dozed off in class. To the right, a few wooden boards, with moss growing on them, were leaning against the aluminum fence. *Wan Ton Mei* had three brothers, but during my visit I met only her youngest brother. Her two elder

brothers were working overtime to make extra money, not atypical of ethnic Chinese Malaysians, who had always felt financially insecure compared to elite Chinese Malaysians. I left my slippers next to the front door before I entered the livingroom. Because of the heat and humidity, most townhouses had marble floors, and ceiling fans to facilitate airing. As a cultural knowledge, visitors removed their shoes before entering the house in order to keep the marble floor clean (*Sweet Li* often complained to me that, as the eldest daughter in the family, she had to sweep and mop the floor everyday while her two younger brothers were spared from any cleaning chore).

Wan Ton Mei's mother stood at the bottom of the stairway and yelled at *Wan Ton Mei*, who was taking a long afternoon nap on the second floor. "Get up *Wan Ton Mei*! Your ...," she turned around and asked for my name. "Miss Kee," I said. Throughout my visit, *Wan Ton Mei*'s mother thought I was the new English teacher at school. "*Wan Ton Mei* needs more sleep. She has been staying up late recently. Let's go upstairs," she suggested. As I eyed my wrist watch: it was quarter to four. *Wan Ton Mei*'s mother was in her early 60s, but her wrinkled forehead and graying hair made her look like she was in her 70s. Her incisors were gone causing her to mumble when she talked. Her tanned skin and freckled face suggested to me that she had to stay outdoors long. The townhouse featured a livingroom, a master bedroom, two regular bedrooms, and a full bath on the second floor. *Wan Ton Mei*, *Sweet Li*, and I sat on the marble floor and talked because it was simply too hot to sit on the couch at this time of day. *Wan Ton Mei*'s mother brought us some Pepsi then headed towards the kitchen. "I had better start cooking. Her brothers may come home at anytime," she said. As mentioned earlier, *Wan Ton Mei* had dropped out of school and became an apprentice secretary at an auto-repair/spare parts shop in the city. *Wan Ton Mei* worked from 9:00am to 5:00pm and went to English language school after work. Like *Sweet Li*, she encountered sexual harassment at her workplace, but the harassment took the shape of obscene phone calls. "I get creepy phone calls from men everyday. They don't sound like they want to order anything. Instead, they asked me about the size of my breasts, my waist, and my buttocks," *Wan Ton Mei* took the phone calls as if they were a matter of fact. "Sometimes I make up the sizes. Other times I just hang up the phone. And sometimes, *Tao Ke Nio*, 'the wife of the store owner,' picks up the phone, but the call is cut off immediately. *Tao Ke Nio* thought it had to do with the telephone company, and asked whether the same number had been sold to another store. The phone number we had was very good. The last three

digits were 8s. They sounded like *Fat-Fat-Fat*, ‘we will prosper.’ We have to answer the phone because most of our customers place their orders over the phone,” *Wan Ton Mei* explained. Obscene phone calls were a more popular form of sexual harassment compared to the lewd public acts of checking out a woman from head to toe, whistling at her when she walked by, or grabbing her buttocks on the public buses. “*Ah Beng* is so worried that he insists on picking me up everyday. I will miss him a lot after I go to *K.L.*, ‘Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia’.” *Wan Ton Mei* yawned and stretched her arms and legs. As I remembered, Mr. Sellapan told me several times that *Wan Ton Mei* skipped class: *Ah Beng* would come to the front gate during recess and pick her up on his motorcycle. “This girl, she will get pregnant if she hangs out any longer with those *Sam-seng*, ‘street gangsters.’ I told her *Tin Hua-lah*, ‘listen to your parents,’ but she never listens to me.” Like *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei* was known as a “hardcore” among teachers and students, who skipped school and slept in class.

A thunderstorm moved in. The lightning cut through the ceiling – zip zap – like a razor blade through the fabric of time. “*Ah Beng* wants me to learn to drive, but I ‘m not 18 yet.” As *Wan Ton Mei* bragged about the attention she got from her boyfriend, dimples surfaced on her rosy cheeks. Unlike *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*’s face was free of acne and blackheads. In addition to giving her a ride home every evening, *Ah Beng* took *Wan Ton Mei* out for a late supper at the night market every other night. *Sweet Li* used to admire the democracy that *Wan Ton Mei* enjoyed at home. However, after she found out that *Ah Beng* stayed over after supper, she changed her mind. “*Wan Ton Mei*’s parents are loose,” she whispered into my ear when *Wan Ton Mei* went to the restroom. “*Factory Mei*’s parents wouldn’t have let her do anything like this. Luckily, I no longer hang out with her. We are still young.” *Sweet Li* eyed *Wan Ton Mei*. “When do you leave for *K.L.*?” I asked *Wan Ton Mei*. “I don’t know, but my mother is worried that no one will protect me like *Ah Beng* does,” she replied. As the youngest child and the only daughter in the family, *Wan Ton Mei*, as *Sweet Li* commented, was “over protected” by her parents and brothers. “Her brothers always asked her if she was bullied by anyone at school. They came to my house and yelled at my father from the front gate. They picked a fight with him after he told them that *Wan Ton Mei* helped hide my school uniform in her room when we skipped school.” *Sweet Li* told me on our way to *Wan Ton Mei*’s place. Spoiled by her parents, *Wan Ton Mei* learned to manipulate their affection to get what she wanted. When she spoke, she looked into her audience’s eyes as if she was looking for assurance. As I could

imagine, it would be hard for her mother to turn down her request to travel to K.L., especially after *Wan Ton Mei* justified her traveling plan with learning English. “*Ah Beng Guan Jiao*, ‘discipline and teach,’ me well. He encourages me to learn English. He doesn’t like it when I go out with other boys. All I have to do is tell my mother that *Ah Beng* is taking me out and she will say ‘okay’! Isn’t it true, Auntie?” *Wan Ton Mei* looked into her mother’s eyes and smiled. Although I didn’t see her boyfriend in person, based on *Wan Ton Mei*’s description of him and my knowledge of the fads of ethnic Chinese youth, I put together this composite sketch of *Ah Beng*.

Ah Beng, Ah Hua, and Ah Seng –
Idols of Popular Chinese Youth Culture

“*Ah Beng*” is an euphemism for male ethnic Chinese youths who belong to the larger youth culture, known as *Xin Xin Ren Re*, the “new human beings” just as “*Ah Hua*” stands for female ethnic Chinese youths who make up the other half of the culture. Briefly, *Ah Beng* and *Ah Hua* are high school dropouts who have regained personal dignity through their success in landing a job, finding a partner, and setting up a family just like the high achievers do. Typically, *Ah Beng* would ride on a Japanese motorcycle, which served as a means of transportation for him to and from work; would work at an auto-repair shop during the day and at night, sell pilot DVDs at a store in the shopping mall or at the night market. In recent years, because of the widening economic gap between Singapore and Malaysia, reflected in the currency exchange rates of the two countries, some *Ah Beng* have crossed the border to work at different factories in Singapore. A bridge, known as the *Johore Coastway*, was the easiest way to enter Singapore, so *Ah Beng* and thousands of other ethnic Chinese had to leave home at dawn hoping that he could get to the other side before the rush hour. However, *Ah Beng*, just like *Ah Hua*, often gets stuck in the heavy traffic on the bridge and doesn’t get home until midnight. *Ah Beng* doesn’t have any medical benefits. He is responsible for his own safety at work and must pay for any work-related injury he may suffer. *Ah Beng* must worry about the renewal of his work permit, which has more

to do with the performance of the global economy than his work performance. However, it's worth the aggravation. His paycheck means that *Ah Beng* can afford the latest hairstyle, clothing, and electronic appliances. He can afford to dye his hair, wear jeans, and carry the trendiest cell phone at his neck or on his belt. As *Ah Beng* gets older, he plans to settle down with the money he has saved. He would like to own a townhouse in the suburbs and buy a cheap car listed in the national car registry. On his "off" days, *Ah Beng* catches up on sleep he has missed. Later, after taking his long nap, he may go to a movie, window shopping at the mall, or grab snack at the night market.

After a careful calculation of the costs and benefits involved, *Ah Hua* figures out that it pays her to cross the border at dawn and return at dusk, despite the traffic congestion and the lack of medical benefits. Unlike *Ah Beng*, *Ah Hua* usually commutes on the public buses. Her keen eyesight might qualify her for a job on the assembly line at an electronics factory. Like *Ah Beng*, *Ah Hua* can afford to pay for the latest hairstyle, clothing, and accessories with the money she makes. She might also have a cell phone, but would carry it in her hand bag. Weekdays, she might wear a uniform, but would change into the latest style, t-shirt and jeans, on weekends. She might go to a movie or sing at a Karaoke lounge on her days off. Like *Ah Seng*, *Ah Hua* would like to get married. However, because of her hectic schedule, *Ah Hua* hardly has any time left for romantic pursuits. She has to carry the stigma of "old maid" until she finds a man. A few romances have sparked up between *Ah Beng* and *Ah Hua* on the public buses while commuting back and forth between Johor Bahru, the tip of the Malay Peninsular, and Woodlands, the gateway into Singapore. But most *Ah Huas* have had to rely on matchmakers or parents' networks to help them find a compatible partner.

If *Ah Beng* works at a local auto-repair shop, he has nothing except high school girls, low achievers in particular, as the targets of his romantic pursuits. Typically, he would begin by asking the girl out for *Yam Cha*, "drinking tea," a euphemism for dining at the night market. As *Ah Beng* gradually gets to know his girl, he will take her out for movies or pick her up after school. *Ah Beng's* romantic pursuits do not go as smoothly as he wants. More often than not, he encounters opposition from the girl's parents, her father in particular, before the romance can develop into a long term relationship. The parents' concerns are reasonable: Some *Ah Bengs* have become *Ah Sengs*. In contrast to *Ah Beng*, *Ah Seng* is hedonistic. He is reluctant to *Chi Ku*, "eat bitterness." Instead, he would rather hang out at places like night clubs or bars, where

drugs, gambling, and prostitution are a normal part of the action. *Ah Seng* starts gambling or using drugs; he develops an insatiable appetite for money. Having learned from the more experienced *Gu Ye Zai* that he can make money by enticing young women into working in the sex industries as escort girls, bar girls, or Karaoke queens, *Ah Seng* concentrates on high school dropouts. In contrast to being *Lau Shi*, “upright and honest,” and *Ke Kao*, “reliable,” two qualities that ethnic Chinese parents look for in their daughters’ spouses, *Ah Seng* greases his tongue with oil and coats his words with sugar. Low achievers or high school dropouts are especially susceptible to *Ah Seng*, who tells them that they are attractive. Physical attraction makes up for the intellectual capacity that they do not have, and personal attention from *Ah Seng* makes up for the attention that they do not receive from their parents, these low achievers and high school dropouts listen to *Ah Seng* with few doubts. Before they realize it, they have been sold into brothels to pay for *Ah Seng*’s gambling or drug debts.

“Taking the Shadow of a Bow in the Wine Cup as a Serpent”

杯弓蛇影

The Monday following the weekend in which *Factory Mei*, along with *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei*, was found to have skipped school, her mother came to the school for a teacher-parent meeting set up by Mr. Sellapan to address the crisis. Unlike *Sweet Li*’s mother, who had freckled cheeks and shined T-zone, *Factory Mei*’s mother had a fair complexion. She wore a t-shirt and a pair of knee-high, baggy shorts, not atypical of ethnic Chinese women who were full time housewives. The casual attire of Chinese housewives has not only earned them the knick-name *Huang Rien Pao*, “women with a yellow face,” a derogatory remark made by Chinese men describing their lack of attention to appearance, but also the stereotype that, compared to the Malays, Chinese women as a whole were unkempt. During the meeting, *Factory Mei*’s mother behaved as though she were offended by Mr. Sellapan. She rarely responded to his questions. When she did, she argued that, as a Malay school, *Fan Niu Xiao* was infamous for its poor student discipline, and that *Factory Mei*’s truancy had nothing to do with her lack of interest in learning.

Although she was a low achiever, *Factory Mei* was inquisitive. She used to hang out with *Sweet Li* and *Wan Ton Mei* at the school canteen. Behind her silver-rimmed eye glasses, *Factory Mei* rolled her eyes and sought for an answer to everything. She once asked me what I would do after graduation. I had to admit that her question was unexpected. *Factory Mei* always looked clean and neat. Her hair was combed into two pig tails and her uniform was starched and ironed. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for *Factory Mei*'s mother to cook, clean, and drive her three children back and forth between home and school without additional domestic help. With a touch of admiration, *Sweet Li* told me that the family had a full-time Indonesian maid. I did not have any opportunities to learn about *Factory Mei*'s perceptions of romance, sexuality, and marriage because she arrived right before classes began and left immediately after school was over. I could not help but believe that it was part of her mother's efforts to shield her from any interactions with boys and with me. According to *Sweet Li*'s mother, she did not trust anyone who was associated with school. Despite my repeated clarification that I was an independent researcher, she declined my request for an interview.

8.7.2.3. **Willow:** "*Of the Three Unfilial Acts, the Lack of Progeny is the Greatest of All*"
不孝有三無後為大

Willow has a head of long, inky hair which had been carefully combed into two braids that reached her waist. She was a senior in the school's vocational/technical track and, after graduation, was planning to continue her studies at a private business school. *Willow*'s parents had nine children. *Willow* was the eldest daughter and was seventeen years older than her youngest sibling. Her father, a fish monger who sold his wares at a wet market in a small town nearby, was the primary breadwinner. Her mother, a seamstress who sewed traditional dresses for Malay women in the village, brought in some money to supplement the family's income. *Willow* had my empathy. Her large-sized family stood in stark contrast to the normally small-sized families of ethnic Chinese, and made her mother a target of public taunting. "When I told

my classmates that I have eight brothers and sisters, their jaws dropped. Whenever my family goes to the shopping mall or the night market, people stare at us first, and then laugh behind our backs. They called my mother a ‘baby machine’, you know.” *Willow*’s creamy oval face blushed with embarrassment. The tickling at the back of my neck hinted that she had noticed my own surprise of this information.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Although the Malaysian government does not impose upon its three races of citizens any compulsory family planning, most ethnic Chinese couples have opted for a smaller family size (2-4) compared to Malays (6-8) and Indians (3-5). Early in my fieldwork at *Fan Niu Xiao*, I was often shocked by the large-sized families (12–14) of Malay students, especially those who came from one fishing village near the school. In the mid-1980s, during a regional economic recession, the Prime Minister proposed a boost of the population from 18 million to 200 million to help increase national labor and stimulate the consumption of national products. Assuming that, compared to the Chinese, the Malays were poor, Malay nationalists pressured the national government to set up a national Islamic fund, to help Malay parents pay for the overall living costs and education of their children. Ethnic Chinese couples, in contrast, had no safety net to fall back on even if they had agreed with the new population policy. The interest in increasing the size of the Malay population had its roots in the early stages of nation building, when the ratio of Chinese to Malays was 45%:55%. Fearful of losing their land to non-Malays, Malay nationalists had long urged for support of an increase in the Malay population. The New Population Policy, like its predecessor, the *Bumiputera*/Quota Policy, had triggered ill will from ethnic Chinese, who made disparaging remarks such as the children of the Malays roamed the streets like wild chickens wandering in the jungle. Like many of these ethnic Chinese, too, I have mixed feelings towards the Malays. On one hand, I feel badly for *Willow*’s mother, who has had one child after another; on the other hand, I feel happy about her large-sized family, which, I assume, will add to the Chinese population.

Willow and I first talked at a humble, tin-roofed hut located at the back of the school canteen. The hut had no walls, but it did have a cement floor, a square stone table, and two stone benches. The surfaces of the table and benches were covered with graffiti carved by students of all three ethnic groups of both school sessions (morning/senior secondary; afternoon/junior secondary) even though discipline masters from each session blamed the vandalism on the students of the other group. Like *Shu Tong* and *Fu Gui*, *Willow* wanted a second opinion about dating. She wasn't sure if she should go out with boys even though she had received love letters and written invitations from Chinese boys of different social classes. "I know I can't go to the university, but I plan to take some courses," *Willow* explained about her plan to continue her study at a private business school later. Her mother, also a high school graduate, married right after graduation, giving up the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills she had acquired at school. *Willow's* father hadn't gone to high school. Instead having come from a large, poor family, he had helped out at his parents' fish stand ever since he had been old enough to stand on a stool. "My father doesn't have much education, so he argues that it's good for a woman to have babies," *Willow* insinuated that her father was ignorant about family planning, at the same time making a backhand statement about control over her mother's say in her reproductive rights. "My mother wanted to take the pill, but my father didn't like it. She visited the clinics many times. The doctor told her that she had already had too many abortions that he couldn't perform them on anymore," *Willow* sighed. "Did your father know that your mother went for abortions?" I asked. "No, he would have gotten upset. I went to the clinic with my mother. Sometimes, the nurse helped walk my mother to the door. The look in her eyes told me how sorry she was for my mother," *Willow* replied. Behind her sullen face there seemed to be a touch of anger.

Although both the public clinics in the villages and the public hospitals in the cities provided free family planning consultation and services, it was not uncommon to hear of ethnic Chinese women having abortions at private clinics. The intrauterine device (I.U.D) was once a popular contraceptive device among ethnic Chinese women. It lost its popularity to sterilization after repeated complaints from women about its inefficiency. Despite the fact that performing vasectomies on men is simpler than performing abortions on women, female sterilization has

outnumbered male sterilization by 2 to 1. The burden of birth control has fallen on the shoulders of women, who have had to resort to abortions when everything else has failed. Under the Malaysian Family Law, abortion is illegal. However, as the Chinese saying goes, “money can make a ghost grind the stone for you,” so the private clinics have provided abortion services for women who could afford them. “He likes children,” *Willow* said of her father. “I took care of my mother when she had babies, you know, *Zho Ye Tze*, ‘the Full Moon Banquet’.” “Didn’t your father hire someone to help your mother after each birth?” I asked. “Whenever he did hire someone, she would quit after two or three days because there were too many mouths to feed and too much laundry to do. It was a lot easier just to divide up the chores between me and my brothers and sisters,” *Willow* said with a touch of pride.

小道消息

“Little Road News”

Zho Ye Tze, “the full moon banquet,” is a month-long recovery plan that helps Chinese women recover from their childbirths. Chinese believe that the health conditions of a woman in the month after she has given birth are crucial to her future health. In order to facilitate the recovery of his wife, a husband, if he can afford to, should hire a maid to perform the daily household chores for that first month. In addition to cooking and cleaning, the maid purchases the herbs prescribed for the new mother by her traditional Chinese herbal doctor. This, too, is part of her recovery. In many cases, the woman’s mother-in-law fills this role. During the time when the husband’s mother held the power in the family, there were differences between the treatment of a daughter-in-law who bore a son and a daughter-in-law who had borne a daughter. Needless to say, the daughter-in-law who had a son received a higher quality treatment. The maid usually retained her position until the newborn was exactly one month old. Then she would help prepare for and distribute to families and friends the “full moon banquet.” If the newborn was a boy, the family and friends would get a piece of roast pork along with some dyed, red eggs and dyed, red rice cake. Wealthy couples also served a traditional eight- to twelve-course banquet at a restaurant to celebrate the birth of their son. Having a son is referred to *Tien Din*, having a

daughter is called *Chien Zin*. *Tien Din* denotes the increase in the labor capacity of the family; *Chien Zin* connotes the additional labor required in raising a daughter, with little expectation of a return.

“Don’t you think it’s too soon for me to have a boyfriend?” *Willow* looked for my assurance of her decision. “I don’t know. What do you think?” I threw the question back to her. “I don’t need a boyfriend now,” she reassured herself. “It’s important that I get a job first. My mother has to sew for the Malays to supplement my father’s income.” Instead of showing *Willow* which path she should take, as she had clearly come to the fork of the road, I acted the part of an egoistical artist who has confronted her with a portrait of her fate. Like most ethnic Chinese students at *Fan Nan Xiao*, *Willow* did not seek any career counseling from the school counselor, nor did she get any guidance from her parents on dating. As a way to gain access to a wider range of students, I volunteered as an assistant to June, the school counselor, at the student counseling center. Despite its large student population (2600 students total), *Fan Niu Xiao* had only one female Malay school counselor. It did not take me long to discover that very few Chinese students stopped by the center. Most students cited language as the key reason why they did not ask for help from the school counselor. Lacking the support system that Malay adolescents took for granted, ethnic Chinese adolescents, especially the low achievers, became alienated from school and distrusted any school personnel. I sent out invitations to Chinese students who attended the morning session/senior secondary level telling them that I would be happy to listen to their problems either in school or at home. Some students came to me with the impression that they would get a yes or no from me in response to their questions, and were disappointed at the lack of a definite answer. Others showed their gratitude for simply having a social space to get something off their chest. The biggest compliment came from a group of male Chinese low achievers who told me that they had never before felt so at ease with anyone in talking about their deepest thoughts, emotions, and feelings.

9. CHAPTER NINE: POLICY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING AND GREATER SOCIAL EQUITY

9.1. INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter, I first recapitulate the four key domains of analyses generated from the multi-level analysis in chapter five (see section 9.1) and second explore the implications of the analyses for resistance theory building (see section 9.2). Third, I capture the characteristics of Malaysian language planning by tracing the origins and trends of the national language policy (see section 9.3.1) and make policy recommendations for school improvement by highlighting the impacts of the policy on the academic challenges and behavioral problems of students (see section 9.3.2). Next, I explore further the effects of the national language and quota system policies on ethnic integration and social equity by situating the two policies in their broader social, economic, and political contexts (see section 9.4). Lastly, I address the contributions and limitations of the study, and identify directions for future research (see section 9.5).

9.2. KEY DOMAINS OF ANALYSES

By examining the relationship between the strategies used by ethnic Chinese youths to deal with academic challenges and mobility barriers and the identities that are formed out of the strategies used, this study extends resistance theory by identifying four domains of analysis: (1) resistance modes and academic performances, (2) capital accumulation and identity formation, (3) gender and class stratification, and (4) ethnicity and ethnic-stereotypes. These domains cut across the effects of the language and quota system policies illustrated in the preceding three chapters (chapters six, seven, and eight) and connect the different subsystems of the Chinese society to the Malay society. As Spradley (1987) suggests, in conducting domain analysis, the qualitative researcher rummages for the different parts of a culture, identifies the relationships among these parts, and connects the parts to the whole. Thus, by linking the strategies used by ethnic Chinese youths to deal with life hurdles with their identity formation, this study opens up ways to relate social actors to the social system and to conceptualize domination and resistance.

9.2.1. Resistance Modes and Academic Performances

In Malaysia, ethnic Chinese children acquire basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills through their mother tongue³⁶ at Chinese primary schools. Upon their graduation from these schools,

³⁶ “The term “mother-tongue” is extremely difficult to define. Literally, it means “the language of one’s mother,” or “the language one speaks with one’s mother.” In reality, one may in fact be a native speaker of a language even

most ethnic Chinese children enter national (Malay) instead of independent (Chinese) secondary schools in order to increase their chances for economic advancement. Having gotten used to the order and discipline, quality instruction, and on-going monitoring and evaluation³⁷ of Chinese primary schools, ethnic Chinese youths face learning through Malay for the first time and a learning environment that is chaotic. Although educators have pointed out the gap in the levels between the Malay language developed and used at national secondary schools and that of Chinese primary schools, Chinese parents continue to rely on the language remedial program at school or tutoring lessons organized by tutoring center to elevate their son and daughters' Malay language competency. As a consequence, some ethnic Chinese students lose interest in learning because they do not have the Malay language competency to comprehend what is taught in the classroom while others disengage from classroom learning because teachers do not enter the classroom. Some students sleep or talk in class while others roam around the school compound, cut class, and skip school during school hours. Having found out that rewards and punishments are not fair, some students talk back to administrators and walk out of school assemblies. Lacking positive teacher models as resulting teacher tardiness and bias, these ethnic Chinese students continue to disrupt classroom teaching and school order. Over time, they become chronic low achievers and eventually drop out of high school.

Although facing the same academic challenges, other ethnic Chinese students use private tutors or tutoring centers to bridge the gap between the discrepancies of the Malay language instruction at Chinese primary and Malay secondary schools. They continue to meet or excel in achievement standards even if teachers are unable to organize intellectually challenging classroom activities. They obey school rules by following the dress and hair codes and stay in the classroom even if teachers do not come to the classroom and teach. Lastly, they attend

though one's mother was not. For example, an individual born to a Tamil-speaking mother in Malaysia will probably learn Straits Malay and/or Straits Chinese on the playground, and *Bahasa Melayu* and English as a second language in the school system. Such an individual may then go abroad to undertake tertiary study in English. She or he may be a "native speaker" of various languages depending on the registers in which the languages are used: for example, for matters of the home and of childhood, Tamil; for matters relating to school subjects or general communication in the community, *Bahasa Melayu*, and for matters of academic specialization, English. Thus, it is impossible to designate that individual's mother-tongue except in the literal sense, and it is not useful to do so. It is not a useful term, but it is, nonetheless, one that is widely used" (Ferguson 1992 as cited in Kaplan, p. 19, 1997).

³⁷ Of the three types of national primary schools (Malay, Chinese, and Tamil), Chinese primary schools have been known to the Malaysia public as the most orderly and disciplined. In fact, some Malay and Indian parents send their children to Chinese primary schools because they believe that their children will become better behaved in a learning environment that emphasizes order and discipline.

school assemblies and participate in school activities even though they feel alienated from Malay Muslim culture. The behaviors and performances of these youths create the impression that they are respectful and diligent students who know how to behave properly despite teacher bias and to learn well despite teacher incompetence. The examples that I gave in chapters six and seven illustrate that resistance modes are related to achievement levels. By relating school behaviors to school performances, I suggest that compliance and reliance are complex outcomes from a combination of teacher bias, incompetence, and tardiness.

9.2.2. Capital Accumulation and Identity Formation

Having internalized the mixed messages sent out by their parents, some ethnic Chinese students distrust school personnel; accumulate Malay and/or English language capital at tutoring centers, and hold on to the slim hope that they can enjoy the economic rewards brought by good academic performance. Although this internalization has helped these students cope with unequal academic challenges and insensitive behavioral norms, as the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education Examination approaches, the pressure to succeed on an unequal basis and the fear of not being able to enter the technical fields of local, public universities cast over the lives of ethnic Chinese students. Some students modify their career plans while others give up their career aspirations.

Unable to deal with the academic challenges resulting from insufficient Malay language capital and having internalized their parents' beliefs that the national education system has few economic rewards, some ethnic Chinese students give up schooling. Instead, they acquire vocational capital at Chinese small businesses and as a consequence, fit into the niches allocated to them in Diaspora Chinese social hierarchy. Although these youths do not seem to be as stressed out as the high-achieving youths do as the national exams approach, they are by no means less complicated. As all these different capital accumulation strategies have important implications for their ethnic identity formation.

Although it may seem arbitrary to the readers to divide the identities formed by ethnic Chinese youths in the following ways, they are the general trends. By acquiring Chinese language capital at Chinese primary schools, Malay language capital at Malay high schools, and English language capital at tutoring centers, ethnic Chinese youths develop tri- or bi-lingual, ethnic identity instead of the mono-lingual, national identity as desired by the ruling elites. These youths may continue to manage their identity by accommodating without resisting, an identity management strategy observed and documented by Southeast Asian experts. By acquiring vocational capital through apprenticeships with Chinese small businesses, these ethnic Chinese youths identify more with Chinese than Malay identity. However, as the next domain (subsection 9.1.3) shows, vocational capital reflects the traditional, Chinese division of labor and perception of gender roles. Thus, by identifying the relationship between capital accumulation strategies and ethnic identity formation, my research adds to the resistance theory by illuminating the effects of parents' internalization of social inequality on the identity formation process of ethnic Chinese youths.

9.2.3. Gender and Class Stratification

Although ethnic Chinese Malaysian parents in general understand the importance of accumulating capital for economic advancement, they tend to invest more in sons and expect less from daughters. In this study, investment is defined as the unequal levels of parental support for the academic performances of sons and daughters and likewise, expectation is defined as the differential expectations of parents toward the career aspirations of their sons and daughters. These social phenomena are especially true for some of the female ethnic Chinese youths in this study as they tend to come from less-educated families where men generate more incomes than women do. Having experienced unequal support and low expectation from parents, some female, ethnic Chinese youths initially become chronic low achievers at school and subsequently become low skilled laborers for Chinese small businesses. Low education level and low pay continue to keep them from moving up the social ladder. Furthermore, by becoming

hairdressers, factory workers, sales girls, and secretaries, these youths engage in occupations that reflect the labor division and gender relations of the Diaspora Chinese society. Thus, this study shows that the existing gender and class hierarchies of the Diaspora Chinese society are reproduced to an extent through the family where parents continue to convert their economic capital into the social capital of sons and through the limited life chances available to female youths in the society.

In order to maintain learning motivations and transcend limited life choices, other female, ethnic Chinese youths suppress their negative feelings toward male preference, explore alternative opportunities for higher education, and adjust their career goals to reduce the effects of unequal support and low expectation from parents. By way of example, *Shu Tong*, a female high achiever in this study, attends workshops and modifies her career goal from becoming a physician to a pharmacist to negotiate for potential parental support for higher education. *Jen Ni Hua*, another female high achiever who initially aspires to become an educator subsequently changes her career goal to be a doctor, a highly desirable occupation for male ethnic Chinese youths, to reflect her self-realization. After taking into consideration the gain and loss, both female youths decide to modify their career goals in order to maintain a creative tension between individual and communal interests. Thus, my research shows that facing two subsystems of internal hegemony, female, high-achieving ethnic Chinese youths exercise their agency to overcome the life challenges imposed by gender inequality and class stratification.

9.2.4. Ethnicity and Ethnic Stereotypes

As a highly-charged, symbolic institution of the Malay nation, *FNX* is an active social agent producing and reproducing a social order that reflects Malay hegemony. Having lost interest in learning, low-achieving, ethnic Chinese students engage in school truancy by roaming around the school compound or by skipping school. They defy school rules by not following the hair or dress codes and by challenging the discipline approaches of teachers. Over time, these behaviors (defiance and truancy) reinforce the negative stereotypes held by Malay teachers that low-

achieving, ethnic Chinese students are rude, lazy, and disrespectful and lead to varying degrees of policing and labeling. As Malay teachers police male, low-achieving Chinese students, they simultaneously label them as street gangsters. When applied to female, low-achieving Chinese students, the policing leads to the marking of them as loose girls who are associated with street gangsters. Thus, all these discipline approaches (policing and labeling) aggravate instead of ameliorate the negative interactions between low-achieving, ethnic Chinese students and Malay teachers. Since the only purpose that low-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths stay at school is to wait for the school leaving letter, so they can negotiate with future employer for better pay, they continue to misbehave in class, defy school rules, and challenge Malay teachers.

High-achieving ethnic Chinese youths meet the achievement standards and obey school rules despite the fact that they face racialized teaching practices and gendered disciplinary approaches. They take part in school and participate in school improvement programs. Schooling to these youths has another purpose, that is, to get recommendation letters from the administrators stating that they cooperate with school personnel and support school improvement when applying for national university admissions. As a consequence, they continue to perform well, behave in school, and reinforce the positive stereotypes that they are gentle, diligent, and respectful. Thus, this study domain adds to the resistance theory by showing that ethnic Chinese youths are actively participating in strengthening the stereotypes held by Malay teachers. This is especially true of high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths who have much to lose if they do not conform to the stereotypical images.

9.3. IMPLICATIONS OF KEY DOMAINS OF ANALYSES: EXTENDING RESISTANCE THEORY

9.3.1. Two Systems of Internal Hegemony

Facing the various life hurdles brought on by the national language and quota system reform policies, ethnic Chinese youths do not respond in a uniform, stereotypical way nor do they exercise their agency in a vacuum. As I have shown throughout this study, resistance may take on the guise of compliance and domination may take place across the various subsystems of the social system. Thus, this study extends existing resistance theory by relating the different subsystems (ethnicity, gender, and class) of hegemony to the whole and by showing that there are in fact two systems of internal hegemony (Malay Islam and Diaspora Chinese) at play.

Domination, in the Malaysian context, refers to the following: linguistic assimilation, ideological imposition, and cultural transmission. As Malay nationalists took over the battle for nation building, Malay as the national language has been legitimized through national development policy and through the national education system. In order to maintain the legitimacy of Malay as the national language, since independence (1957), six education reports have been written to substantiate the need to use the Malay language to create a Malaysian, national identity and three amendment acts have been enacted to strengthen the status of the Malay language to facilitate ethnic harmony. As part of the “accommodation” strategy undertaken by the government to develop a common Malaysian outlook, Malay has become the only language of instruction at national secondary schools and at national universities. As a consequence, non-Malay students, who largely do not possess the language competence to perform according to the linguistic norms privileged by the Malay language, face enormous academic challenges.

In addition to the language of instruction, daily functions or special events at schools have to be carried out through Malay-Islam customs. As a national secondary school, or what ethnic Chinese students and parents refer to as “a Malay high school,” *FNX* imposes upon non-Malay students the national, Malay-Islam ideology as promoted by Malay nationalists in the following ways: (1) the incorporation of Islamic prayer into the opening or closing ceremony of

major school events and display of Koranic verses on the walls of school buildings, (2) the raising of national flag and singing of the national anthem in weekly assemblies, (3) the separation of male and female students in classroom seating arrangements and the imposition of Islamic dietary codes for food served at the school canteen, and finally, through (4) mandatory religious or moral education classes for all students. As a consequence, non-Malay students, who are largely non-Muslims, feel alienated from school and school related activities.

Concurrently, the unequal, parental distribution of economic capital favoring sons rather than daughters has kept female, ethnic Chinese youths from acquiring social capital (higher education and better pay jobs) in order to achieve upward social mobility. As Southeast Asian experts point out, when it comes to preserving Chinese culture, Diaspora Chinese societies in Southeast Asia seem to hold on more to traditional gender ideology than Chinese societies in Northeast Asia do (Wang 1988; Suryadinata 1997). As one of the three pillars of Chinese culture, ethnic Chinese families transmit to sons and daughters gender roles and relations that enhance male domination and reproduce gender hierarchy.

The two groups of ethnic Chinese youths in this study exhibit two dominant types of behaviors (compliance and defiance) that are similar to the cultural politics of the ethnic Chinese community as a whole. In public, both groups comply to accommodate, but in private, they do not assimilate. Unfortunately, by subtly complying to or by openly defying the national Malay-Islam ideology or traditional Chinese gender ideology, they intensify existing social inequalities.

9.3.2. Accommodation as Resistance

In Malaysia, ethnic Chinese identity is more of a product of history and politics than a product of culture. Ethnic identity is a product of the social order of a stratified social system during the British colonial period, and a product of the social order of a divided Malaysian social system. Both social systems encourage accommodation from Chinese who are willing to take the risk of identifying their interests with those of the dominant groups. Thus, historically, “accommodation in public” is a common resistance strategy used by immigrant minorities in

Southeast Asia to negotiate successfully for multiple cultural identities without having to assimilate into the indigenous majority culture. In Malaysia, accommodation and resistance are two sets of interwoven cultural politics undertaken by ethnic Chinese in order to deal with social inequality and internal hegemony.

The theoretical interests raised by the ethnic Chinese Malaysian case do not end with this ethnography. It leads to a few interesting observations. First, the Chinese Malaysian case suggests that ethnic membership derives from specific historical, political, and economic process rather than from ethnic sentiments. Although Barth's definition of ethnicity, as membership which identifies itself and is identified by others, seems to be generalizable, particular instances vary greatly within these general definitions. Second, the concept of race, as exemplified by the Malaysian context, is an important folk model that has been institutionalized and internalized by the government and people to define ethnic group memberships. Thus, both terms "race" and "ethnicity" have strong ideological connotations as well as practical functions. By way of example, ethnicity is a powerful tool for the ruling elites to organize the different groups of Malaysians into a social order that they promoted. Concurrently, it is a powerful vehicle used by Chinese community leaders to unite ethnic Chinese into a cohesive group of people. Third, to avoid being further marginalized and excluded from the evolving political, social, and economic institutions of Malaysia, Chinese community leaders maintain ethnic boundary through language, culture, and religion.

In conclusion, the ethnographic richness that I present in this study is valuable. In addition, my analysis of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia illustrates the complexity of ethnic identity continuity and the role of politics in ethnic group's boundary maintenance.

9.4. TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING

At present, there are two types of language reform programs at the Malaysian national education system: (1) “transitional language programs” (second language classes) at primary schools, and (2) “remedial language programs” (remove classes) at secondary schools (Pakir 1993). At the primary level, “transitional language programs” aim to facilitate the transition of non-Malay students from national-type primary schools, where the language of instruction is either Chinese or Tamil, into national secondary schools, where Malay is the only language of instruction. At the secondary level, “remedial language programs” aim to help non-Malay students who fail the Malay language in their Primary School Assessment Tests develop Malay language competency through a year-long, intensive language learning. Thus, from the perspective of policy makers, the national education system not only provides nine years of free, compulsory education, but also reflects the aspirations of the three ethnic groups in “learning, developing, and using” their languages as stipulated by the Article 152 of the Federal Constitution. From the perspective of policy clients (students, teachers, and parents), however, these language programs are ineffective because of the following problems: (1) the shortage of qualified Malay language teachers in national-type Chinese primary schools, (2) inadequate language textbooks and teaching materials at both primary and secondary schools, and (3) little if no innovative language teaching methods and appropriate teacher training. All these problems have serious implications for improving educational quality and for increasing social equity. By addressing these problems, the government may develop a more effective schooling process or may reduce ethnic sentiments and achieve greater national unity. However, before I examine further the implications of the four key domains of analyses for effective schooling and for social equity, I would like to

characterize language policy history in Malaysia because it helps explain why ethnic Chinese students fail to develop Malay language competency at school.

9.4.1. Characterizing Language Planning in Malaysia

Language planning in Southeast Asian countries³⁸ typically involves the choice of a “national” language and/or the choice of an “official” language. A national language is a language that is spoken by the numerical majority of the population and is granted special political status within a nation state.³⁹ In some cases, it is the only language authorized to be taught through the national education system. An official language is also a language that is specified in the constitution and is mandated to be taught through the national education system. Research also suggests that in developing countries, there are two types of language planning: (1) if the decision makers are government administrators, it belongs to the “language policy approach,” and (2) if the decision makers are language experts, it belongs to the “language cultivation approach.” Furthermore, language cultivation deals with matters of language learning while language policy deals with matters of nation building (Paulston 1974, 1992; Kaplan 1994; Lee 1997).

British Malaya (1787-1950) was characterized by a non-interventionist, colonial language policy. There was separate development of languages with no general thought of future based national planning. The colonial government left language development to the three major ethnic communities. The Malays, depending on their geographic locations, spoke different dialects, but learned to read and write Arabic at *Pondok*, “the Koranic schools.” The Chinese, who were introduced into the colony from Southeastern China as tin miners or railroad workers, spoke Southeastern Chinese dialects (*Hakka*, *Hokkien*, *Teochew*), but learned to read and write Mandarin at Chinese primary schools. Introduced from Southern India into the colony to clear the land or to tap the rubber trees, the Indians spoke Southern Indian dialects and learned to read

³⁸ Southeast Asian countries include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

³⁹ According to Suryadinata (1997), most Southeast Asian countries are actually “state nations,” instead of “nation states.”

and wrote Tamil at Tamil primary schools. In the urban areas, the colonial government provided primary, secondary, and post-secondary education to all three ethnic groups. Since all three levels of schools were located in the urban areas, ethnic Chinese had more access to education than ethnic Tamils or the Malays did. Although the colonial government claimed that it had adopted a *lassie faire*, “non-intervention” language planning approach, English was the language of “high culture” connoting high education, high paid jobs, and high socio-economic status while Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil were the language of “low culture” connoting less education, less desirable jobs, and low socio-economic status (Tan 1988; Kaplan 1994). Having had access to the colonial education system, ethnic Chinese were more highly educated, had better jobs, and enjoyed higher socio-economic status than the Malays.

Language planning in post-colonial Malaysia, if contextualized with the history of nation building, shows a continuous interaction between the “language policy approach” and “language cultivation approach.” From the early 1950s to the late 1970s, six national education reports⁴⁰ suggested, in one way or the other, a bi-lingual language policy in which Malay as the national language unifies the three major ethnic groups and English as the official language facilitates national development. Furthermore, it follows a “top-down” language planning model, that is to say, (1) the prime minister and his cabinet select the national language and the official language, (2) the parliament enact the language policies, and (3) the education ministers and *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP)*, the “National Language and Literary Institute,” plan and implement the languages. More specifically, the institute was in charge of cultivating the Malay language reform while the Ministry of Education was in charge of implementing related reform programs (Kaplan 1994). Although at the time of independence, ethnic Chinese and Indian political leaders sought to have Mandarin and Tamil developed as official languages, Malay ruling elites designated *Bahasa Melayu*, “the language of the Malays,” as the national language and English as the official language for a minimum of ten-year transition period (Andaya and Andaya 2001; Debernardi 2004). In order to participate in the social, political, and economic life, Malaysian citizens need to acquire minimum competencies in both Malay and English. However, the May Thirteenth Racial Riots of 1963 led to the radical implementation of the quota system reform policy in order to ensure that the Malays have equal education access and employment

⁴⁰ The six national education reports are: (1) the Central Advisory Committee on Education Report (1950), (2) the Barnes Report on Malay Education (1951), (3) the Fenn Wu Report on Chinese Education (1951), (4) the Abdul Razak Report (1956), (5) the Rahman Talib Report (1960), and (6) the Cabinet Report (1979).

opportunities. Concurrently, a time frame was set to convert the language of instruction from English into Malay at national secondary schools and national universities by the early 1980s. Thus, an ambitious national education reform was launched, based on the assumption that by upgrading the Malay language into a language of science and technology, the socio-economic status of the Malays would be improved. Although there were questionings about the practicality of the reform, the National Sedition Act of 1970 discouraged further discussions of the subject (Andaya and Andaya 2001; Kaplan 1994).

9.4.2. Policy Insights and Recommendations

The review of the Malaysian language policy history above shows that once a hard-core decision is made, no public opinions are allowed. In practice, is such language planning model viable? Below I would like to make a few policy recommendations based on my observations of the problems facing students, teachers, and administrators at school. The recommendations suggest that successful implementation of the national language policy requires bottom-up engagement.

9.4.2.1. Consider Providing National-Type Chinese Primary Schools with Enough Qualified Malay Language Teachers

In 1983, upon the completion of converting the language of instruction from English into Malay, the Malaysian Ministry of Education began implementing “the New Integrated Primary School Curriculum,” or known to the public as the “Three Rs,” to improve the reading, writing, and arithmetic skills of national (Malay) primary school students. Through the new curriculum, students from both the national and national-type (Chinese or Tamil) primary schools would acquire the same sets of arithmetic, reading, and writing skills. The new curriculum raised some

concerns from the Chinese community because Chinese primary school students were known for their stronger arithmetic skills compared to Malay primary school students. It was not clear if the Ministry of Education ever addressed the concern of the Chinese community, or how the Chinese community dealt with its concerns. Beginning in 1989, however, students from both the national and national-type primary schools are tested for their arithmetic, reading, and writing skills at the end of “Standard Six”⁴¹ through a national exam named *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)*, “the Primary School Assessment Test.” The following table shows the trends of the test results of 2000. An analysis of the achievement trends conducted by the Ministry of Education shows that Malay students continue to outperform Chinese and Indian students in the Malay language while Chinese students continue to outperform Malay and Tamil students in English, mathematics, and science.

Table 25 National Achievement Trends by Subjects and by School Types in the Primary School Assessment Test (*UPSR*), 2000

Achievement Trends	National (Malay) Primary Schools	National-Type (Chinese) Primary Schools	National-Type (Tamil) Primary Schools
Malay (Reading)	89.0%	70.8%	59.3%
Malay (Writing)	85.6%	68.7%	51.7%
English	63.4%	71.7%	59.3%
Mathematics	82.0%	92.6%	81.1%
Science	80.7%	85.9%	74.7%

Source: National Education Development Plan, 2000-2010

⁴¹ In Malaysia, basic education comprises nine years of compulsory education: primary school (six years) and lower secondary school (three years). Standard six is equivalent to the sixth grade in the US.

Although in national-type (Chinese) primary schools, ethnic Chinese students learn Malay language through the tri-lingual “language transitional program,” in general, they do not develop the level of Malay language competency required by the test. There are two reasons behind the failure of Chinese primary schools in developing the basic Malay language competency of their students: (1) low Malay language teaching quality and (2) little linkage between school, family, and community. Although since the early 1980s, the Ministry of Education has prescribed the minimum classroom teaching hours for the national language (Malay), official language (English), and mother tongue (Mandarin or Tamil), the lack of qualified teachers has resulted in the assignment of unqualified teachers to teach Malay language classes. At present, many the teachers of the national education system do not have the content knowledge and teaching approaches required to teach language classes because they are not trained to be language teachers to begin with. Furthermore, regardless of the official time allocated for the learning of the Malay language, the language acquisition order at Chinese primary schools stays in the following order: Chinese [1], English [2], and Malay [3].

Seen by the Chinese community as the cradle of Chinese culture, Chinese primary schools strive to transmit traditional, Chinese norms and values to its students and to unify different speech groups through Mandarin. At home, most Chinese parents speak Mandarin and dialects. In the community, regional clans or associations promote the use of Mandarin through various community events. Thus, despite the weekly classroom teaching hours mandated for the Malay language(see Table 26), linguistic discontinuity resulting from the lack of school-family-community linkage has made the Malay language learning of Chinese students ineffective. Lastly, besides linguistic discontinuity, the traditional “chalk-and-talk” teaching model, with an emphasis on grammar rather than communication has frustrated Chinese students, most of whom are third language learners (i.e. Mandarin as the first language, English as the second language, and Malay as the third language).

Table 26 Weekly Classroom Teaching Hours for the National Language (Malay), Second Language (English), and Mother Tongue (Chinese or Tamil) by Minutes and by Grade Levels at National and National-Type Primary Schools

Grade Subject	Standard One	Standard Two	Standard Three	Standard Four	Standard Five	Standard Six
Malay	300	300	300	300	300	300
English	300	300	300	300	300	300
Chinese or Tamil	120	120	120	120	120	120

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia as cited in Postlethwaite and Thomas, 1980, p. 126

However, in order to meet the Malay language standard required by the national exam, Chinese parents either hire private tutors at home or send their children to tutoring classes. Under such circumstances, Chinese students who come from better off families tend to perform better in the tests than those from less fortunate families. Furthermore, male students tend to do better than female students because Chinese parents tend to invest more in sons than daughters. If an estimate was to be made from the “unofficial” statistics that I collected through the networks established with local educators, each year approximately six- to eight-percent out of the total number of Chinese primary school students fail their Malay language and enter the remove class for one year of Malay language intensive learning. All the “low-achieving” ethnic

Chinese youths in this study spent one-year in the remove class, but none of them ever managed to acquire minimum Malay language competency and to meet the average achievement standards after they completed the class. *Sweet Li*, *Wan Ton Mei*, and *Factory Mei*, the three low-achieving female ethnic Chinese youths in this study, were chronic low achievers who failed every single subject of the school curriculum and eventually dropped out of school and joined the job market.

9.4.2.2. Consider Developing Innovative Teaching Materials and Supplying National Secondary School with Adequate Textbooks

Like other national secondary schools, *FNX* experiences two problems in language teaching and learning: (1) insufficient textbooks for students and (2) inadequate teaching aids for teachers. Except for the “English Language Teaching Kit” developed by the Ministry of Education in the early 1980s, English language teachers do not have any supplemental teaching materials. As a consequence, a common practice among teachers is to bring in reference books and ask students to photocopy page by page. As pointed out by the high-achieving ethnic Chinese youths in chapter seven, it would be more cost-effective for them to buy the reference book as a whole than pasting it chapter by chapter in their note books. In response to the complaints of students and parents, the principal incorporated thirty Malaysian Ringgit⁴² into the tuition fees of every school year as photocopying fees. A second initiative taken by language teachers at *FNX* to deal with the lack of supplemental teaching materials is to produce teaching materials through newspaper clippings and journal articles. Over the course of my fieldwork, the principal proposed for the teaching resource center through the monthly teacher meetings. The subject heads of the three major languages claimed that they were overloaded with work demands and did not accept the proposal. Lastly, although some teachers attempted to create learning opportunities through *Persatuan Bahasa, Sastera dan Budaya*, the “language, literature, and culture clubs,” the memberships of these language clubs reflect the concentration of specific

⁴² One US Dollar equals to four Malaysian Ringgit. Thirty Malaysian Ringgit is equivalent to seven US Dollars.

ethnic groups to particular language club. By way of example, Malay students would participate in the Malay language club, Chinese students would participate in the Chinese (Mandarin) language club, and Indian students would participate in the (Tamil) Indian language club. As a result, students ended up talking with each other in their native languages than in English or Malay.

9.4.2.3. Consider Improving the Educational Quality of National Secondary School through Innovative Teacher Approach and Appropriate Teacher Training

In tandem with the increased use of the Malay language is the declined English language proficiency among Malaysian citizens, which is especially detrimental to the Malays because English is a crucial mean to achieving economic advancement and subsequently, upward social mobility. Historically, English has been the language partner of Malay and there has been frequent “code-switching” between the two languages in legal, commercial, scientific, and technological fields. As the international language of science and technology, banking and business, and laws and management, English has linguistic strengths that the Malay language does not have (Ozog 1993; Kaplan 1994). Unfortunately, in Malaysia, the teaching of second language has largely remained grammar based, with little concern for communicative competence. The day-to-day classroom is the real world of catching up with the deadlines of a highly centralized curriculum and of meeting the national standards of achievement. Although the ministry of education claimed that it had developed the most innovative English language teaching plan and had named it the “Communication Syllabus” (1973), research suggests that to date, students do not have the linguistic competence required to understand English-medium instruction in the classroom and to enable them to read any English-written texts on their own. Furthermore, teachers are unable to identify spellings or grammatical mistakes, and incorrectly used words or expressions (Attan 1982; Technology University of Malaysia 1983). All these problems reflect the lack of innovative teaching methods and appropriate teacher training. They also contradict the purpose of the communication syllabus, which states that the goal of English

language learning at Malaysian schools is “to teach students to speak in such a way that they will be understood not only by Malaysians, but by speakers worldwide” (Ministry of Education Malaysia 1973).

My participant observations at *FNX* are consistent with the research findings described above. Students of the three ethnic groups communicate with each other using “Manglish,” which is a mix of Malay and English, Mandarin and English, or Tamil and English. Although they have spent a great amount of time memorizing grammatical rules for quizzes or exams, they have difficulties reading essays, short stories, or even the newspaper. Over the course of my fieldwork, I also worked with the senior English subject teacher and drafted a grant proposal to apply for additional funding from the State Department of Education to purchase supplemental teaching materials. The proposal, which centers on the “Eight Parts of Speech,” reflects the grammatical approach used by the English teachers at *FNX*.⁴³

9.4.2.4. Consider Reducing Teacher Truancy through Regular Supervision and Substitute Teachers; Reducing Student Truancy through Unbiased Disciplinary Approaches and Multiple Ethnic School Counselors

In chapter three, I gave detailed descriptions of the three major sources of student truancy: (1) teacher tardiness, (2) biased disciplinary approach, and (3) single ethnic school counselor. Although *FNX* followed the guidance of the state department of education in reducing school truants, school truancy was rampant because teachers did not enter and teach to begin with, or no substitute teachers were available for classes which teachers were on maternity leaves. Thus, senior discipline teachers made two suggestions to ameliorate the situations: (1) supervising teachers’ attendance, and (2) planning ahead for substitute teachers. As the “head” of the school, as one female, senior discipline teacher pointed out, the principal could supervise teachers’ attendance by patrolling the school regularly during the school hours and find out teachers who

⁴³ Readers are referred to appendix m for details about the proposal.

are absent from their classroom teaching. As the instructional leader, the assistant principal in charge of academic affairs could survey female teachers at the beginning of the school year and apply for substitute teachers through the state department of education. In addition, senior discipline teachers proposed a full-time discipline teacher because they were overloaded with discipline duties and teaching demands. In consistence with the observations made by ethnic Chinese students, my observations show that ethnically biased and culturally insensitive discipline approaches such as policing and labeling, public humiliation and corporeal punishment had given rise to greater rebellious behaviors among non-Malay students. Furthermore, unable to understand Malay-medium classroom instruction, ethnic Chinese and Indian students took out their frustrations by disrupting classroom teaching and school order (e.g. talking with other students during lecturing, teasing teachers, sneaking out of the classrooms through the back doors, etc). Under such conditions, multiple ethnic school counselors who can communicate with ethnic Chinese and Indian students and help them deal with anger and frustration may be more effective.

9.5. TOWARD GREATER ETHNIC INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL EQUITY

As researchers suggest, to argue whether “performance comes after competence” or “performance means competence”⁴⁴ conceals the nature of language planning as a matter of conflicting group interests (Paulston 1992; Pakir 1993). Thus language planning as exemplified by the Malaysian case is more a matter of ethnic integration and social equity than practical usage. From independence up to the present, the Malaysian government is confronted with the

⁴⁴ Without going into length, language experts who have argued that “performance comes after competence” believe that the acquisition of a language is different from the use that is made of it as a general learning tool. Language experts who have contended that “performance means competence” assume that all examples of language use reflect language learning and development.

nagging issue of language policy in its nation building business. Facing two competitive, regional languages (Malay-Indonesian and Chinese-Mandarin) and one international language (English), can *Bahasa Melayu*, the “language of the Malays,” mold a collective Malaysian nationality? How can language diversity help maintain ethnic integration and facilitate social equity?

9.5.1. Can the National Language Policy Help Ethnic Chinese Youths Form a Malay National Identity?

By mandating Malay as “the language of instruction,” the Malaysian government attempts to achieve two goals: (1) to develop a link between Malay language and Malaysian identity by increasing the knowledge and use of Malay language, and (2) to revive ethnic pride by mandating Malay proficiency as a requirement for higher education and for public employment. However, despite the government’s effort to mold a national identity that is Malaysian in character, student resistance as resulting from forced linguistic and cultural assimilations and little school-home-community linkage have made bi-ethnicity and multi-lingual competency prevalent among non-Malays, making them unintended consequences of the government’s effort.

9.5.1.1. Forced Linguistic and Cultural Assimilations

At national secondary schools, the Malaysian government has put into practice an “ethno-linguistic pedagogy” stressing Malay as the only, official language of instruction (Pakir 1993). Although there are official, weekly classroom teaching hours allocated for Chinese or Tamil language (see Table 27), Malay administrators have frequently excluded mother tongue classes from regular school hours by claiming that there are not enough classrooms for such classes. As a consequence, Chinese or Tamil language classes become “floating classes” without any regular spaces for teacher lecture and for learning activities. Originally developed as a leeway for

administrators to deal with classroom shortage, the strategy is used by biased Malay administrators to exclude mother tongue classes from regular school hours. As a consequence, ethnic Chinese and Indian teachers and students have to decide if they want to hold their native language classes after regular school hours or in any empty spaces that they can find (e.g. school canteen, science lab, etc.) Over the course of my fieldwork, ethnic Chinese students at *FNX* shared with me their frustrations in having to constantly look for spaces to learn their native languages. Although students expressed their concern to the administrators, no actions was taken to ameliorate the situation. In addition to native language classes, extra-curricular activities of the Chinese and Tamil language clubs, especially if they are related to cultural events, are screened by Malay administrators to make sure that they stay subordinate to national events. The high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths in this study complained to me several times that it was difficult to hold any activities because they had to first gain permission from the administrators and second remove any elements of activities that might involve the different Chinese clans or associations as they were known to uphold Chinese language, culture, and religion.

Table 27 Weekly Classroom Teaching Hours for the National Language, Second Language, and Mother Tongue (Native Language) by Minutes and by Grade Levels

Lower Secondary School			
Grades Subjects	Form One	Form Two	Form Three
Malay	240	240	240
English	240	240	240
Chinese or Tamil	120	120	120

Upper Secondary School			
Streams Subjects	Arts	Science	Technical/Vocational
Malay	200	200	200
English	160	160	160
Chinese or Tamil	120	120	120

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia as cited in Postlethwaite and Thomas, 1980, p. 127-128

In short, the ethnic Chinese youths in this study exhibit little sense of a collective Malaysian national identity. Instead, they exhibit a heightened sense of ethnic Chinese identity because ethnic mixing in national secondary schools has made inter-ethnic competition for limited resources more visible. Second, as the following sub-section shows, the disjuncture between national policy and practical usage has resulted in bi-ethnicity among ethnic Chinese youths. While claiming themselves to be Malaysians, these youths had in reality identified more with Chinese language and culture. Thus, to most ethnic Chinese youths, being bi or tri-lingual is more conducive to living in an increasingly integrated world and to competing for the fewer jobs available in the market than being Malay Malaysians.

9.5.1.2. Little School-Home-Community Linkage

Because of little supervision and support from parents, which were largely results of parental ignorance in academic performance and language ability, the low-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths in my study couldn't make instrumental use of the Malay language in classroom learning and in social interactions. In the hallway or at the canteen, ethnic Chinese youths talked with each other through Mandarin or through dialects. Rarely did I see any interactions of these

youths with Malay students. If there were, the interactions were mostly carried out through a mix of English or even Mandarin in Malay. Although high-achieving, ethnic Chinese youths were more efficient in the Malay language and hence have better ability to communicate with Malay students, they however felt alienated and distrustful. Likewise at home, they communicated with their parents in Chinese or in the various dialects brought by their grandparents or great grandparents to British Malaya. In the community, clans or associations carried out rituals associated with cultural events or ethnic festivals in Mandarin, or more often than not, in dialects. Popular culture commodities, including music, movies and TV serials imported from other Diaspora Chinese societies (Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Singapore) were especially appealing to ethnic Chinese youths because they addressed issues of particular concern to youths (employment, love affairs) and resonate their emotions (alienation, rebellion). More importantly, however, job opportunities available to ethnic Chinese youths at the private sector, which comprised either the joint ventures between foreign investors and Diaspora Chinese, or small businesses run by local Chinese, required either English or Chinese competency. Furthermore, higher education institutions overseas or local private universities provided education and training in English, not in Malay.

9.5.2. Are Calls for Language Diversity and Social Equity Calls for Democracy?

Over the course of my fieldwork, despite the calls from non-Malays, ethnic Chinese in particular, to diversify the language of instruction under a globalized economy and to phase out the quota system under an increasing demand for greater equity, the status of Malay as the national language had remained intact and the quota system had been extended to facilitate the economic advancement of the Malays. The calls of ethnic Chinese Malaysians for language diversity and for social equity were summarized in two national reform proposals: (1) the Election Appeals of 1999 and (2) the Malaysian Human Rights Report of 1996. Both reform proposals were submitted to the Prime Minister's Office at the national election of 1999 and were both interpreted by the office as attempts to fuel ethnic tensions. Submerged in the calls of ethnic Chinese for language diversity and for social equity is the democratization of the national

education system because language policy involved issues that have concrete bearing on the lives of the three ethnic groups, most notably, education access and employment opportunities. Democracy, as socio-linguists define, is that a democratic government should allow its ethnic minorities to use their native languages as an expression to their collective identities if the members so desire (Tollefson 1991; Coulmas 1993/1994). Although the Malaysian government claims that it respects the rights of its non-Malay citizens to develop and use their native languages as stipulated in the national constitution, from the non-Malay citizens' perspective, Malaysia has moved away from a multi-lingual, national language policy to a mono-lingual, Malay-centric one as evidenced by the linguistic assimilation taking place in national secondary schools.

From the Malay nationalists' perspective, however, the Malay language is more than a marker of ethnic boundary - it is a symbol of ethnic pride. Furthermore, it represents *Umma*, the "Pan-Islamic unity of the peripheral Muslim countries" (Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia). English, as a lasting legacy of western colonialism, is a threat to the integrity of the *Umma*. As for Chinese, although it is not seen as a threat to the *Umma*, it remains a competitive language to the Malay due to its historical dominance in Asia.

9.6. REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Like many other ethnographers and researchers, I spent a good deal of time conducting fieldwork and invested substantial effort interpreting data. Although time consuming and labor intensive, this critical school ethnography provides readers with intimate insights into the relationship between response modes and identity formation. Through its basis in grounded theory methodology, this study strengthens resistance theory building by re-conceptualizing the relationship between structural constraints and social actions. More specifically, this study

contributes to resistance theory building by investigating further how the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and class hierarchies creates a powerful framework within which female ethnic Chinese youths exercise agency to deal with ethnic stereotypes, not atypical to post-colonial societies and to overcome parental preference for sons, a deep-rooted, internal orientation within the Diaspora Chinese Malaysian society. This ethnographic case study gives me the opportunity to generate new hypothesis about and to build theory for student resistance. By focusing on a single case study, I am able to build a solid foundation for future research that involves multiple cases and comparative methodology.

Considering the timeline to meet and resources available in future international education research, it may be more practical for me to prioritize research goals and/or objectives. In consideration of my long-standing interest in critical school ethnography, I may pursue one of the following directions:

- (1) At present, there are two types of secondary school systems in Malaysia: (a) national/public secondary schools, and (b) independent/private secondary schools. Among national secondary schools, there are: (i) boarding schools, (ii) premier schools, and (iii) non-premier schools. Besides the differences in geographic locations, these schools have different ethnic composition and academic ranking. If given the opportunity to extend the study on a sensible comparison basis, that is to say, geographic location, ethnic composition, and academic ranking, it would be interesting to find out if ethnic Chinese students at non-premier, national secondary schools in other provinces respond in similar ways to those of this study and use similar strategies to cope with the academic challenges, behavioral problems, and upward mobility barriers resulting from an unequal reward system.
- (2) It would also be interesting to find out in what ways does the Second Language Amendment Act of 2001 ameliorate or accentuate the academic challenges, behavioral problems, and upward mobility barriers facing ethnic Chinese youths.

Over the course of my fieldwork, the Malaysian national education system⁴⁵ experienced a major shift in its conception of the language of instruction. The government moved away from its long-term commitment to upgrading Malay to the language of science and technology to promoting the use of English for the teaching of mathematics and science subjects of the national education system. Positive stereotyping of ethnic Chinese students as academically successful and economically advanced has contributed to the government's assumption that by replacing the language of instruction from Malay to English for mathematics and science classes, Malay students would become competitive with ethnic Chinese youths. In 2002, the parliament passed the Second Language Amendment Act and mandated English as the language of instruction for mathematics and science subjects. Parents of the three major ethnic groups are pleased with the Act. As little as they know, unless teacher incompetence and tardiness are ameliorated, the educational quality of national secondary schools will not be improved.

- (3) As researchers point out, since the Malaysian government converted the language of instruction of the national education system from English into Malay, ethnic Chinese and Indian parents have learned that unless their sons and daughters acquire Malay language competency, they cannot access higher education and achieve economic advancement (Watson 1994; Kaplan 1994; Debernardi, J. (2004). Thus, in order to expand the life chances of their sons and daughters, ethnic Chinese and Indian parents send them to national secondary schools to acquire Malay language competency and private tutoring centers to acquire English language competency. Under such circumstances, Malay students are especially disadvantaged because ethnic Chinese and Indian students not only accumulate sufficient Malay language capital that enables them to outperform Malay students in national exams, but also sufficient English language capital that enables them to land well-paid jobs in the managerial, scientific, and technical

⁴⁵ In Malaysia, the national education system consists of the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. At the primary level, there are two types of primary schools: (1) "national" (Malay) primary schools and (2) "national-type" (Chinese or Tamil) primary schools. At the secondary level, there are national secondary schools and conforming secondary schools. At the tertiary level, there are only national universities (seven in total).

fields. It would be interesting to find out facing English as the language of instruction for the first time, what academic challenges and behavioral problems Malay students encounter and what strategies they use to deal with the challenges and problems. Over the course of my fieldwork, Malay teachers commonly make the comment “urban Malay students, who typically come from higher income and more educated families, tend to perform at school.” In a national education conference, leading Malay educators pointed out me that “low academic performance is a class based issue that cuts across the lower social classes of Malays.” Thus, it would be interesting to investigate how class hierarchy acts a source of social inequity within the Malay society and how do middle-middle and lower-middle Malays deal with the life challenges resulting from class stratification.

In summary, I look forward not only to extend my research other ethnic groups in Malaysia, but also to expand my research to other Diaspora Chinese community in the Southeast Asian region.

APPENDIX A

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM: STUDENT SURVEYS 1

Your school and I need your help!

Subject Code: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Dear students,

Good morning. Have you heard of effective schools? I am Miss Geok Hwa Kee, a graduate student from the University of Pittsburgh (U.S.A.) You may notice my presence at school or the student counseling center. Please stop by and chat with me. I need your help! Under the recommendation of the State Department of Education, Johore, I am doing my dissertation research at your school. My research focuses on effective schools reform in small town, national secondary schools. Your responses to this survey will me understand the issues facing students in learning. Further, they may help your principal understand the changes that he needs to make in order to improve your school effectiveness. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Any responses that you make will remain anonymous. Thank you very much for your help!

Please check ☒ only one answer.

D1. How old are you?

☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 18+ Please specify _____

D2. What is your gender?

☐ Female ☐ Male

D3. What is your ethnicity?

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L3. | Do your teachers know what they have to teach? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| L4. | Do they know how to teach? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| L5. | Do your teachers have high expectations of you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please check ☐ your answer. You may check more than one answer.

R1. Which characteristics as follows characterize your school as an effective school?

- ☐ Appropriate, well designed curriculum
- ☐ Capable, well trained teachers
- ☐ High expectations of students
- ☐ A safe, well maintained learning environment
- ☐ A valid, reliable examination system
- ☐ Effective principal leadership
- ☐ Strong community support

R2. What are the changes that your school should make to improve its effectiveness?

- ☐ Curriculum
- ☐ Teaching
- ☐ Learning environment
- ☐ Examination system
- ☐ Principal leadership
- ☐ Community support

R3. Who is/are the most important person/persons in making the changes?

- ☐ Principal

☐ Assistant principal

☐ Teachers

☐ Students

☐ Parents

☐ Government

R4. Which following factor(s) plays the most important role in making the changes?

☐ Government mandates

☐ Principal leadership

☐ Teachers' support

☐ Students' support

☐ Parents' support

☐ Money

R5. What kinds of animals you would use to characterize the administrators? Why?

The principal:

Why? _____

Assistant principal 1:

Why? _____

Assistant principal 2:

Why? _____

Please circle O only one number.

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

S1. According to the State Department of Education, your school is becoming an effective school. What do you think?

1 2 3 4 5

S2.	Your school is safe, clean, and ordered.	1	2	3	4	5
S3.	The curriculum is relevant to your needs.	1	2	3	4	5
S4.	Your school emphasizes basic skills acquisition.	1	2	3	4	5
S5.	Your school regularly monitors student progress.	1	2	3	4	5
S6.	Your school provides after-class helps (tutoring classes) for national exams.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle O only one number.

In order to improve your school effectiveness, the principal should:

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

P1.	Emphasize only academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
P2.	Monitor the academic progress of students.	1	2	3	4	5
P3.	Encourage students to take part in extra-curricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
P4.	Emphasize the development of a balanced personality	1	2	3	4	5
P5.	Create a clean, safe, and ordered learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
P6.	Be clear and firm about rewards and punishment	1	2	3	4	5
P7.	Set goals and objectives to increase school effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5
P8.	Create a climate of high expectations	1	2	3	4	5
P9.	Encourage community support (PTA) for school	1	2	3	4	5
P10.	Supervise the teaching of teachers and the work performance of school staff	1	2	3	4	5
P11.	Monitor school expenses	1	2	3	4	5

P12.	Look for financial support for school	1	2	3	4	5
P13.	Encourage students to voice their opinions	1	2	3	4	5
P14.	Be responsive to students' complaints and problems	1	2	3	4	5
P15.	Ensure that students make full use of the welfare facilities at school	1	2	3	4	5
P16.	Encourage teachers to give students more exam drilling	1	2	3	4	5
P17.	Encourage students to take part in the endeavor of school cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
P18.	Encourage educational, disciplinary actions for students who violate school rules	1	2	3	4	5

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

APPENDIX B

REFORMASI SEKOLAH BERKESAN: TINJAUAN PELAJAR 1

Sekolah anda dan saya perlukan bantuan anda!

Kode: _____ Tingkatan: _____ Tarikh: _____

Pelajar-pelajar yang di hormati,

Selamat pagi. Pernahkan anda mendengar mengenai sekolah berkesan? Saya ialah Cik Kee Geok Hwa Kee. Saya seorang pelajar PhD daripada Univesiti of Pittsburgh (America Syarikat). Anda kemungkinan sedar akan kehadiran saya di sekolah anda atau pun kemunculan saya di bilik kaunseling sekolah anda. Jika kita bersua jangan malu untuk berbual dengan saya. Saya perlukan bantuan anda. Dengan kebenaran Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Johor saya sedang menjalani satu kajian untuk thesis saya di sekolah anda. Kajian saya berfokus kepada reformasi sekolah berkesan di bandar kecil di Malaysia. Respon anda terhadap tunjauan ini akan membantu pentadbir sekolah anda (pengetua dan penolong kanan) dan saya memahami apakah perubahan-perubahan yang perlu di buat bagi memperbaiki keberkesanan sekolah anda. Tolong ambil beberapa minit untuk menyiapkan tinjauan ini. Semula respon yang anda beri akan di rahsiahkan. Terima kasih di atas kerjasama yang telah di berikan.

Beri ✓ hanya satu jawapan sahaja.

D1. Berapa wah usia anda?

☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 18+ Tolong nyatakan _____

D2. Jantina?

☐ Perempuan ☐ Lelaki

D3. Apakah ras anda?

☐ Cina ☐ India ☐ Melayu ☐ Lain-lain _____

D4. Termasuk anda beberapakah bilangan adik beradik anda dalam keluarga anda?

- L4. Adakah guru anda tahu bagaimana hendak mengajar?
1 2 3 4 5
- L5. Adakah guru anda mempunyai jangkaan yang tinggi terhadap anda?
1 2 3 4 5

Anda boleh beri \sqrt lebih daripada satu jawapan.

R1. Ciri yang mana di bawah ini menunjukkan sekolah anda sebagai sekolah berkesan?

- ☐ Kurikulum yang tepat dan ideal
- ☐ Guru yang cekap dan terlatih
- ☐ Jangkaan yang tinggi terhadap pelajar
- ☐ Persekitaran yang selamat untuk belajar
- ☐ Kesahan system peperiksaan
- ☐ Kepimpinan pengetua yang berkesan
- ☐ Di bantu oleh komuniti setempat

R2. Apakah perubahan yang perlu di lalui oleh sekolah anda demi memperbaiki keberkesannya?

- ☐ Kurikulum
- ☐ Ko-kurikulum
- ☐ Pengajaran
- ☐ Sistem peperiksaan
- ☐ Kepimpinan pengetua
- ☐ Di sokong oleh komuniti setempat

R3. Siapakah watak utama yang perlu membuat perubahan?

- ☐ Pengetua
- ☐ Penolong pengetua

- ☐ Kerajaan

R4. Faktor yang manakah di bawah ini memainkan peranan utama membuat perubahan?

- Wang

R5. Namakan haiwan yang boleh menggambarkan perwatakan pentadbir anda?

Pengetua:

Kenapa? _____

Penolong kanan:

Kenapa? _____

Penolong Hem:

Kenapa? _____

Tolong bulatkan \bigcirc satu nombor sahaja.

1=tidak setuju sama sekali, 2=kurang setuju, 3=boleh setuju, 4=setuju, 5=sangat setuju

- S2. Sekolah anda adalah selamat, bersih dan berdisiplin.

		1	2	3	4	5
S3.	Kurikulum memenuhi keperluan anda.	1	2	3	4	5
S4.	Menitik beratkan pencapaian kemahiran asas.	1	2	3	4	5
S5.	Memantau kemajuan pelajar secara konsisten.	1	2	3	4	5
S6.	Menganjurkan kelas tambahan untuk pelajar (PMR dan SPM).	1	2	3	4	5

Tolong bulatkan O satu nombor sahaja.

Demi meningkatkan lagi keberkesanan sekolah anda, pengetua sepatutnya:

1=tidak setuju sama sekali, 2=kurang setuju, 3=boleh setuju, 4=setuju, 5=sangat setuju

P1.	Memberi pemekanan kepada pencapaian akademik sahaja.	1	2	3	4	5
P2.	Memantau pencapaian akademik pelajar- pelajar.	1	2	3	4	5
P3.	Menggalakkan pelajar mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti.	1	2	3	4	5
P4.	Menekankan perkembangan personaliti yang seimbang	1	2	3	4	5
P5.	Mengujudkan persekitaran yang bersih, selamat dan disiplin untuk pembelajaran	1	2	3	4	5
P6.	Mestilah jelas dan tegas dalam memberi hadiah insenti dan juga memberi hukuman	1	2	3	4	5
P7.	Perlu ada matlamat dan objectif untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan	1	2	3	4	5
P8.	Perlu lahirkan iklim jangkaan yang tinggi	1	2	3	4	5
P9.	Galakan sokongan komuniti untuk sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
P10.	Memantau PNPguru dan semua staf sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
P11.	Memantau kos sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
P12.	Perlu mendapatkan sokongan dana untuk sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
P13.	Menggalakkan pelajar memberi pendapat	1	2	3	4	5

- | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P14. | Bersikap responsif terhadap aduan dan masalah pelajar | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| P15. | Memastikan pelajar menggunakan kemudahan dan kebajikan sekolah | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| P16. | Menggalakkan guru-guru untuk memberi lebih banyak latihan kepada pelajar | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| P17. | Menggalakkan para pelajar untuk mengambil bahagian dalam usaha untuk menceriakan dan membersihkan kawasan sekolah | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| P18. | Tindakan disiplin yang dikerakan ke atas pelajar yang melanggar peraturan sekolah perlu mengandungi unsure pendidikan | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

BANYAK TERIMA KASIH!

APPENDIX C

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL REFORM: STUDENT SURVEYS 2

Class: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Gender: _____

Parents' education: _____ Parents' income: _____

Identifying Patterns of Discipline Problems

This year, the 3 ethnic groups of students at fnx have fewer problems in:

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

1. Using vulgar language	1	2	3	4	5
2. Bullying and fighting	1	2	3	4	5
3a. Involvement with street gangs	1	2	3	4	5
3b. Exhortation	1	2	3	4	5
4. Skipping classes	1	2	3	4	5
5. Skipping school	1	2	3	4	5
6. Coming late to school	1	2	3	4	5
7. Vandalizing school property	1	2	3	4	5
8. Smoking	1	2	3	4	5
9. Drug abuse	1	2	3	4	5
10. Roaming around school during and between classes	1	2	3	4	5
11. Dress code	1	2	3	4	5
12. Hair code	1	2	3	4	5
13. Compared to your primary school, discipline at <i>FNX</i> is worse	1	2	3	4	5
14. Discipline problems tend to be identical with ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5

15a. What types of discipline problems do the 3 ethnic groups of students tend to be involved in?

Ethnicity	Discipline Problems
a. Malays	
b. Chinese	
c. Indians	

b. Do discipline problems tend to be identical with ethnicity? Why?

16a. This year, what are the three most serious problems in student discipline?

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

b. What grade level of students has the worst discipline in the problems you described?
Please circle only one.

Form 1

Form 2

Form 3

Form 4

Form 5

c. What ethnic groups of students have the worst discipline in the problems you described?
Please circle only one.

Chinese

Malay

Indian

Identifying Reasons behind Poor Student Discipline

In your opinion, student discipline is poor at *FNX* because there is/are:

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

17. A lack of parental supervision at home	1	2	3	4	5
18. Bad influences from friends	1	2	3	4	5
19. Adolescents are immature social emotionally	1	2	3	4	5
20. School rules and regulations are out of date	1	2	3	4	5
21. Teachers tend to humiliate students instead of attending to their problems	1	2	3	4	5
22. A lack of knowledge of teachers of adolescent psychology	1	2	3	4	5
23. A lack of experience of teachers in controlling classroom discipline	1	2	3	4	5
24. An unfair disciplinary system that is too lenient with Malay students	1	2	3	4	5

25. An unfair disciplinary system that is too harsh on Chinese students
1 2 3 4 5
26. An unfair disciplinary system that is too harsh on Indian students
1 2 3 4 5
27. A lack of sensitivity of teachers to the cultural upbringings of non-malay students
1 2 3 4 5
28. Marking of Malay low achievers as bad students 1 2 3 4 5
29. Marking of Chinese low achievers as bad students 1 2 3 4 5
30. Marking of Indian low achievers as bad students 1 2 3 4 5
31. There are no appropriate channels for students to file their complaints against unfair disciplinary actions 1 2 3 4 5
32. No sense of belonging (no “we” feeling) between the three ethnic groups of students, teachers, and school administrators 1 2 3 4 5
33. Opportunities for students who are removed from school to be re-admitted to school
1 2 3 4 5
34. A much less restricted promotion of students from form 3 to form 4
1 2 3 4 5
35. What are the consequences of the following problems?

a. A lack of sensitivity to different cultural upbringings	
b. A lack of understanding of adolescent psychology	
c. An unfair disciplinary system that is biased against certain ethnic groups of students	
d. A lack of sense of belonging (no “we” feeling”)	

36a. Why do students like to skip classes or school? Is there any learning taking place in the classroom?

b. What grade level of students tends to be involved in school truancy the most?

Form 1 Form 2 Form 3 Form 4 Form 5

c. What ethnic groups of students tend to be involved in school truancy the most?

Improving Student Discipline

FNX can improve the discipline of 3 ethnic groups of students by:

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

37. Hiring a full-time discipline master	1	2	3	4	5
38. Canning students during weekly assembly	1	2	3	4	5
39. Canning students in the main office	1	2	3	4	5
40. School detention	1	2	3	4	5
41. Short-term suspense from school	1	2	3	4	5
42. Removing students from school	1	2	3	4	5
43. Fiscal penalty	1	2	3	4	5
44. Counseling	1	2	3	4	5
45. Writing reflection essays	1	2	3	4	5
46. Teacher-parents meeting	1	2	3	4	5
47. Principal-parents meeting	1	2	3	4	5

Who is the most effective person in improving student discipline at school?

48. Principal	1	2	3	4	5
49. Full-time discipline master	1	2	3	4	5
50. School counselor	1	2	3	4	5
51. Class teacher	1	2	3	4	5
52. Peers/friends	1	2	3	4	5

53. If you were the principal, what actions or plans would you take to deal with school truancy?

54a. Will taking pictures and distributing student identity cards help improve school truancy?

55b. In order to successfully implementing the new identity card system, what should the principal do?

55a. Is the poor command of BM one of the major reasons behind the school truancy of Chinese students? Why?

55b. Can you make any suggestions to improve the command of BM of Chinese students?

56a. In general, what is the most effective way in improving student discipline? Please circle only one answer.

A full-time discipline master

A second school counselor A strict principal A new identity card system

b. If you were the student who violated school rules, would you like to be canned? How would you feel?

57a. In what ways do the 16 major values in moral education help improve student discipline?

b. Are the values universal to non-Malay students (Chinese, Indians) at school? Do they reflect the values of non-Malay students?

58a. Some students claim that discipline teachers are unfair in their disciplinary actions: lenient with Malay students and harsh on Chinese and Indian students. Is it true? Can you give me any examples?

b. What do you suggest to the principal to revise the actions of discipline teachers?

Identifying Reasons behind Poor Teaching/Learning Motivation

In your opinion, students at *FNX* are not motivated in learning or getting good results in PMR/SPM because there is/are:

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

59. Students have to work after school to help their parents	1	2	3	4	5
60. A lack of money to buy textbooks or reference books	1	2	3	4	5
61. A lack of parental supervision of learning progress	1	2	3	4	5
62. A lack of parental expectations of good academic performance	1	2	3	4	5
63. A lack of teaching aids	1	2	3	4	5
64. A lack of appropriate facilities and equipment at school	1	2	3	4	5
65. A lack of appropriate exercise related to examinations	1	2	3	4	5
66. Poor teaching skills that entail boredom or loss of interest in learning	1	2	3	4	5
67. A lack of content knowledge of teachers in the subjects they teach	1	2	3	4	5
68. A lack of attention of teachers to the learning styles of non-malay students	1	2	3	4	5
69. A lack of seriousness of teachers in their teaching	1	2	3	4	5
70. A lack of concern of teachers in teaching slow learners	1	2	3	4	5
71. A lack of monitoring/supervision and evaluation of classroom teaching	1	2	3	4	5
72. Bad classroom discipline	1	2	3	4	5
73. A lack of principal leadership in teaching/learning	1	2	3	4	5
74. Reluctance of malay students to improve	1	2	3	4	5
75. Language barriers of chinese students	1	2	3	4	5
76. Language barriers of indian students	1	2	3	4	5
77. A much less restricted system of promotion from form 3 to form 4	1	2	3	4	5
78. Too much emphasis on examinations	1	2	3	4	5
79. A lack of relevance of teaching/learning to the demand of job market	1	2	3	4	5
80. More interests in working and making money than learning	1	2	3	4	5
81. Getting school leaving certificate is more important than doing well in exams	1	2	3	4	5
82. When you were at primary school, you had more interest in learning	1	2	3	4	5
83. You learn very little from school now	1	2	3	4	5
84. You learn a lot more through private tutoring or tuition classes	1	2	3	4	5
85. Teachers discriminate against weak Chinese students	1	2	3	4	5
86. Teachers discriminate against weak Indian students	1	2	3	4	5

Improving Teaching/Learning Quality

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

Who is the most important person in improving the motivation for learning/teaching?

87. Principal	1	2	3	4	5
88. Teachers at school	1	2	3	4	5
89. Teachers at the tuition center	1	2	3	4	5
90. Peers/friends	1	2	3	4	5
91. Parents	1	2	3	4	5
92. Siblings	1	2	3	4	5
92. What is more effective in classroom teaching/learning?					
A. Using Malay as the only language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
B. Using Chinese as the language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5
C. Using Indian as the language of instruction	1	2	3	4	5

The principal has put substantial efforts in improving school discipline and increasing student motivation. In addition to the programs/projects funded by related government agencies, how successful are the following school improvement programs/projects?

1=not successful at all, 5=very successful!

93. The Knowledge Pavilion	1	2	3	4	5
94. The Smart Canteen	1	2	3	4	5
95. "Kata-kata Mutiara"	1	2	3	4	5
96. Classroom Cleanliness Campaign	1	2	3	4	5
97. Teaching Resource Center	1	2	3	4	5
98. Classroom Teaching/Learning Observation	1	2	3	4	5
99. "Tuition Kampung" (Form 3 & 5)	1	2	3	4	5
100. "Tuition Ibnu Sina" (Science students at Form 5)	1	2	3	4	5
101. Workshops on exam skills (Form 3)	1	2	3	4	5
102. "Tuition Kecermelangan PMR"	1	2	3	4	5
103. "Tuition Kecermelangan SPM"	1	2	3	4	5
104. Workshops on exam skills (Form 3 & 5)	1	2	3	4	5
105. "Tenaga Pelajar"	1	2	3	4	5
106. Motivation Camps	1	2	3	4	5
107. "Pekan Bahasa"	1	2	3	4	5
108. Gerak Gempul	1	2	3	4	5

109a. Do you participate in any of the projects/programs?

b. What is the most successful project/program? Why?

c. What is the least successful project/program? Can you make any suggestions to improve the project/program?

110a. Can you use an animal to describe the actions and plans of the principal?

b. Is he a follower or a leader?

c. What is the principal's attitude towards slow learners?

d. What is the principal's attitude towards students who violate school rules and regulations?

e. What are the characteristics or qualities of an effective principal?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____

111a. If you were a Chinese student, what would you do to help facilitate the progress of your transition from a chinese primary school into a learning and cultural environment that is malay in symbolism?

b. What do you see as the representation of malay culture or expressions of islamic teachings at school?

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

c. Why is there a lack of participation of chinese students in school activities, events, and programs/projects?

112a. What is the meaning of education?

112b. What is better: stop schooling and pick up a skill through work or stay at school? Why?

112c. What do you want to become after you graduate? How do you plan to achieve your goal?

112d. Do you work after school? What is your work?

113. What subject areas are the following groups of students especially good at in their learning? Why?

Ethnicity	Subjects	Reasons
a. Malays		
b. Chinese		
c. Indians		

114a. Do you go to tuition classes after school? Why?

114b. What subjects do you learn at your “second school”?

114c. Do you attribute your academic success to your learning at school or at your “second school”? Why?

115a. What are the characteristics or qualities of an effective teacher?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____

115b. If you have any problems in your learning, do you ask your teacher in/after class or do you ask your tuition teacher at the tuition center?

115c. What are the characteristics or qualities of an effective learner?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____

116. If you are an Indian or Malay student,

116a. Please describe 3 characteristics of being a good Chinese student:

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

116b. Please describe 3 characteristics of being a bad Chinese student:

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

116c. Please describe what do you see as Chinese culture at school?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!

APPENDIX D

REFORMASI SEKOLAH BERKESAN: TINJUAN PELAJAR 2

Tingkatan: _____ Jantina: _____ Bangsa: _____ Tingkat Pendidikan Ibubapa: _____
Gaji Ibubapa: _____

Mengenal pasti contoh-contoh masalah disiplin

Tahun ini, pelajar-pelajar smk pg ada sedikit sahaja masalah pada:

1=langsung tidak setuju, 5=sangat bersetuju Sila pilih (○ atau ✓) satu jawapan sahaja!

1. Salah guna bahasa pertutara yang kotor	1	2	3	4	5
2. Buli pelajar	1	2	3	4	5
3. Terlibat dengan samseng	1	2	3	4	5
4. Menegur pelajar	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ponteng kelas	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ponteng sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
7. Datang lewat ke sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
8. Menconteng dan merosakkan harta sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
9. Merokok	1	2	3	4	5
10. Menagih dadah	1	2	3	4	5
11. Merayau-rayau di sekolah pada waktu sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
12. Masalah pakaian	1	2	3	4	5
13. Masalah rambut and kuku	1	2	3	4	5
14. Bergaduh	1	2	3	4	5
15. Masalah disiplin adalah benar-benar serupa dengan bangsa	1	2	3	4	5

16. Sila nyatakan apakah kesalahan disiplin yang biasa bagi 3 bangsa pelajar:

Bangsa Pelajar	Kesalahan Disiplin
a. Pelajar Melayu	
b. Pelajar China	

c. Pelajar India	
------------------	--

17a. Sila bulatkan 1 tingkat yang mempunyai masalah disiplin yang tertinggi: ○

Form 1 Form 2 Form 3 Form 4 Form 5

b. Sila pilihkan 1 bangsa yang mempunyai masalah disiplin yang tertinggi: ○

Pelajar Melayu Pelajar China Pelajar India

18. Apakah masalah disiplin yang “unik” (yang tidak terdapat di sekolah lain, tetapi hanya terdapat di sekolah ini)?

Mengenalpasti sebab-musabab kurangnya disiplin di kalangan pelajar

Pada pandangan anda, kurangnya disiplin di kalangan pelajar SMK PG2 oleh kerana:

1=langsung tidak setuju, 5=sangat bersetuju Sila pilih (○ atau ✓) satu jawapan sahaja!

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. Kurang pengawasan ibubapa di rumah | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Pengaruh yang buruk daripada sahabat-handai | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Kaum remaja masih belum matang di aspek emosi social | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Undang-undang dan peraturan sekolah ketinggalan masa | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Guru cenderung mengaibkan pelajar daripada memahami masalah yang mereka hadapi | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Para guru kurang tahu tentang psikologi kaum remaja | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Para guru kurang pengalaman tentang pengawalan disiplin kelas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Sistem disiplin yang kurang adil iaitu terlalu longgar atau ketat kepada sebilangan pelajar | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Para guru yang kurang peka kepada asuhan budaya pelajar bukan Melayu | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Pelajar Melayu yang lembap digolongkan sebagai pelajar buruk | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Pelajar Cina yang lembap digolongkan sebagai pelajar buruk | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Pelajar India yang lembap digolongkan sebagai pelajar buruk | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

31. Pelajar mendapati tiada saluran yang sesuai untuk mengadu tentang tindakan disiplin yang kurang adil
1 2 3 4 5
32. Kurang rasa kekitaan di antara pelajar, guru dan pentadbir yang terdiri daripada tiga bangsa
1 2 3 4 5
33. Peluang untuk pelajar yang dibuang oleh sekolah diterima semula untuk bersekolah melalui Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Johor
1 2 3 4 5
34. Sedikit sekatan untuk kenaikan dari tingkatan tiga ke tingkatan empat
1 2 3 4 5

35. Apakah akibat daripada masalah-masalah berikut?

a. Kurang peka kepada asuhan budaya yang berbeza	
b. Kurang tahu tentang psikologi remaja	
c. Sistem disiplin yang kurang adil	
d. Kurang rasa kekitaan	

36a. Apakah sebab pelajar suka ponteng kelas atau sekolah? Adakah pembelajaran dijalankan dalam bilik darjah?

b. Pelajar tingkatan mana satukah yang paling banyak terlibat dalam ponteng sekolah? Bulatkan jawapan anda.

Tingkatan 1

Tingkatan 2

Tingkatan 3

Tingkatan 4

Tingkatan 5

c. Pelajar bangsa manakah yang paling banyak terlibat dalam ponteng sekolah? Bulatkan jawapan anda.

Pelajar Melayu

Pelajar Cina

Pelajar India

Perbaiki disiplin pelajar

FNX dapat memperbaiki disiplin para pelajar yang terdiri daripada 3 bangsa dengan:

1=langsung tidak setuju, 5=sangat bersetuju Sila pilih (○ atau ✓) satu jawapan sahaja!

37. Mengupah seorang guru kanan disiplin sepenuh masa	1	2	3	4	5
38. Merotan pelajar semasa perjumpaan mingguan	1	2	3	4	5
39. Merotan pelajar di pejabat	1	2	3	4	5
40. Hukuman tinggal di sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
41. Digantung daripada sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
42. Dibuang daripada sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
43. Hukuman denda	1	2	3	4	5
44. Kauseling	1	2	3	4	5
45. Menuliskan karangan menginsafkan diri	1	2	3	4	5
46. Pertemuan antara guru dengan ibubapa	1	2	3	4	5
47. Pertemuan antara pengetua dengan ibubapa	1	2	3	4	5

Siapakah yang paling berkesan untuk memperbaiki disiplin pelajar di sekolah?

48. Pengetua	1	2	3	4	5
49. Guru kanan disiplin sepenuh masa	1	2	3	4	5
50. Guru kauseling bagi 3 bangsa	1	2	3	4	5
51. Guru tingkatan	1	2	3	4	5
52. Rakan sebaya/sahabat-handai	1	2	3	4	5

53. Sekiranya anda adalah pengetua sekolah,

a. Apakah langkah- langkah atau tindakan akan diambil untuk mencegah masalah ponteng kelas/sekolah?

b. Apa yang boleh anda tolong guru-guru disiplin untuk memperbaiki kualiti disiplin di sekolah?

54a. Adakah mengambil gambar dan mengedarkan kad kawalan boleh mengurangkan masalah ponteng?

b. Demi menjayakan sistem kad kawalan, apakah patut dilakukan oleh pengetua?

55a. Adakah kelemahan dalam Bahasa Malaysia bagi pelajar Cina merupakan salah satu faktor utama kepontengan? Kenapa?

b. Bolehkah anda berikan cadangan untuk memperbaiki penguasaan Bahasa Malaysia bagi pelajar Cina?

56. Pada umumnya, mana satukah cara berikut paling berkesan untuk memperbaiki disiplin pelajar?

Sila pilih satu jawapan sahaja: ✓

- ☐a. Mengupah seorang guru kanan disiplin sepenuh masa
- ☐b. Melantik seorang guru kaunseling Cina
- ☐c. Melantik seorang guru kaunseling India
- ☐d. Seorang pengetua yang ketat
- ☐e. Kad kawalan

f. Jika anda adalah pelajar yang melanggar peraturan sekolah, sudikah anda dihukum dengan merotan? Apakah perasaan anda?

57a. Bagaimanakah 16 nilai utama dalam pendidikan moral itu boleh memperbaiki disiplin pelajar Cina/India?

b. Adakah nilai-nilai itu sejagat kepada pelajar-pelajar bukan Melayu (Cina dan India)? Adakah nilai-nilai itu boleh diterima oleh pelajar-pelajar bukan Melayu?

58a. Ada sebilangan pelajar menganggap bahawa guru-guru disiplin tidak berlaku adil ketika mengambil tindakan disiplin. Adakah benar? Bolehkan anda berikan saya contoh.

b. Apakah cadangan anda kepada pengetua untuk mengubah tindakan guru-guru disiplin?

Mengenalpasti sebab-musabab kelemahan dalam pengajaran dan motivasi pembelajaran

Pada pandangan anda, pelajar-pelajar di *FNX* kurang motivasi dalam pembelajaran atau mendapatkan keputusan cemerlang dalam PMR/SPM oleh kerana:

1=langsung tidak setuju, 5=sangat bersetuju Sila pilih (○ atau ✓) satu jawapan sahaja!

59. Pelajar terpaksa membantu ibubapa selepas masa sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
60. Tidak mampu membeli buku-buku teks atau buku rujukan	1	2	3	4	5
61. Kurang pengawasan ibubapa dalam proses pembelajaran	1	2	3	4	5
62. Ibubapa kurang menaruh harapan yang tinggi terhadap pencapaian akademik	1	2	3	4	5
63. Kurang alat-alat pengajaran	1	2	3	4	5
64. Kurang kemudahan dan alat perkakas yang sewajarnya di sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
65. Kurang latihan yang sesuai berkaitan dengan peperiksaan (PMR/SPM)	1	2	3	4	5
66. Pengajaran yang kurang mahir mengakibatkan kebosanan atau kurang minat dalam pembelajaran	1	2	3	4	5
67. Guru-guru kurang penguasaan ilmu dalam mata pelajaran yang diajarkan	1	2	3	4	5
68. Guru-guru kurang perhatian kepada tabiat pelajar-pelajar bukan Melayu	1	2	3	4	5
69. Guru-guru tidak bersikap serius dalam pengajaran	1	2	3	4	5
70. Guru-guru kurang perhatian kepada pelajar-pelajar yang lembap	1	2	3	4	5
71. Kurang pengawasan dan penilaian terhadap pengajaran dalam kelas	1	2	3	4	5
72. Disiplin kelas yang buruk	1	2	3	4	5
73. Pengetua tidak menunjukkan teladan pimpinan dalam pengajaran/pembelajaran	1	2	3	4	5
74. Pelajar Melayu enggan memajukan diri	1	2	3	4	5
75. Halangan bahasa kepada pelajar Cina	1	2	3	4	5
76. Halangan bahasa kepada pelajar India	1	2	3	4	5
77. Sistem kenaikan dari tingkatan 3 ke tingkatan 4 yang amat longgar	1	2	3	4	5
78. Terlalu mengutamakan peperiksaan	1	2	3	4	5
79. Pelajaran kurang kaitan dengan permintaan pasaran pekerjaan	1	2	3	4	5
80. Lebih berminat bekerja serta mencari wang ringgit daripada pelajaran	1	2	3	4	5
81. Mendapatkan surat berhenti sekolah lebih mustahak daripada pencapaian dalam peperiksaan	1	2	3	4	5
82. Semasa di sekolah rendah, anda lebih berminat belajar	1	2	3	4	5
83. Anda belajar sedikit sahaja daripada sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
84. Anda belajar lebih melalui kelas tambahan/tuisyen swasta	1	2	3	4	5
85. Guru-guru bersikap diskriminasi/prasangka terhadap pelajar Melayu yang lemah	1	2	3	4	5

86. Guru-guru bersikap diskriminasi/prasangka terhadap pelajar Cina yang lemah	1	2	3	4	5
87. Guru-guru bersikap diskriminasi/prasangka terhadap pelajar India yang lemah	1	2	3	4	5

Perbaiki kualiti pengajaran/pembelajaran

1=langsung tidak setuju, 5=sangat bersetuju Sila pilih (○ atau ✓) satu jawapan sahaja!

Siapakah yang paling penting untuk memperbaiki motivasi pembelajaran/pengajaran?

88. Pengetua	1	2	3	4	5
89. Guru-guru di sekolah	1	2	3	4	5
90. Guru-guru di pusat tuisyen swasta	1	2	3	4	5
91. Rakan-rakan sebaya/sahabat handai	1	2	3	4	5
92. Ibubapa	1	2	3	4	5
93. Adik-beradik	1	2	3	4	5
94. Apakah yang lebih berkesan dalam pengajaran/pembelajaran dalam kelas?					
a. Menggunakan bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa pengajaran	1	2	3	4	5
b. Menggunakan bahasa Cina sebagai bahasa pengajaran	1	2	3	4	5
c. Menggunakan bahasa India sebagai bahasa pengajaran	1	2	3	4	5

Pengetua telah berusaha memperbaiki disiplin sekolah dan menambahkan motivasi pelajar.
Selain program/projek yang ditaja oleh agensi kerajaan yang berkenaan, sejauh manakah kejayaan program/projek itu?

95. Astaka Ilmia	1	2	3	4	5
96. Smart Kantin	1	2	3	4	5
97. "Kata-kata Mutiara"	1	2	3	4	5
98. Kempen Kebersihan dan Keceriaan Kelas	1	2	3	4	5
99. Bilik Pusat Sumber yang lebih lengkap	1	2	3	4	5
100. Pemantauan dan Penyeliaan Guru	1	2	3	4	5
101. "Tuisyen Kampung" (Tingkatan 3 & 5)	1	2	3	4	5
102. "Tuisyen Ibnu Sina" (Tingkatan 5)	1	2	3	4	5
103. Program "Easy Math" (Tingkatan 5)	1	2	3	4	5
104. "Tuisyen Kecermelangan PMR"	1	2	3	4	5
105. "Tuisyen Kecermelangan SPM"	1	2	3	4	5
106. "Perkampungan"	1	2	3	4	5
107. Latihan Tambahan	1	2	3	4	5

108. Motivasi Camps	1	2	3	4	5
109. “Pekan Bahasa”	1	2	3	4	5
110. Gerak Gumpul	1	2	3	4	5

111a. Adakah anda pernah menyertai mana-mana satu program/projek tersebut?

b. Mana satukah program/projek yang kurang berjaya? Bolehkah anda berikan cadangan untuk memperbaiki program/projek itu?

112a. Bolehkah anda gunakan sejenis binatang untuk melambangkan tindakan dan rancangan yang dilakukan oleh pengetua?

b. Pengetua anda seorang pengikut atau pemimpin?

c. Apakah sikap pengetua terhadap pelajar yang lembap?

d. Apakah sikap pengetua terhadap pelajar yang melanggar peraturan dan undang-undang sekolah?

e. Apakah ciri-ciri atau kualiti seorang pengetua yang berkesan?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____

113a. Apakah perasaan anda terhadap perlambangan budaya Melayu atau pernyataan ajaran Islam di sekolah?

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____

b. Apakah sebab kurang penyertaan pelajar Cina dalam aktiviti, acara dalam program/projek sekolah?

114a. Apakah makna pendidikan?

b. Mana satu kah lebih baik: berhenti sekolah lalu belajar sesuatu kemahiran melalui pekerjaan atau menerusi pelajaran sekolah?

c. Apakah yang anda ingin lakukan selepas tamat sekolah? Bagaimanakah anda merancang untuk mencapai matlamat anda?

d. Adakah anda bekerja sambil selepas masa sekolah? Apakah jenis kerja itu?

115. Apakah mata-pelajaran yang dimahiri oleh golongan pelajar berikut dalam pembelajaran mereka? Apakah sebabnya?

Bangsa	Mata Pelajaran	Sebab-musabab
a. Melayu		
b. China		
c. India		

116a. Adakah anda mengikuti kelas tuisyen swasta selepas sekolah? Kenapa?

b. Apakah mata-pelajaran yang anda ambil di “sekolah kedua” itu?

c. Adakah anda menganggap kejayaan anda dalam akademik disebabkan pembelajaran di sekolah atau melalui “sekolah kedua” itu? Kenapa?

117a. Apakah ciri-ciri atau kualiti seorang guru yang berkesan?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____

b. Jika anda menemui masalah dalam pembelajaran, adakah anda menanya guru dalam kelas/selapas kelas atau anda menanya guru tuisyen di pusat tuisyen swasta?

c. Apakah ciri-ciri atau kualiti seorang pelajar yang berkesan?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____

118.a. Sila gambarkan 3 ciri-ciri seorang pelajar Cina yang baik dan buruk:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____
1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____

e. Apakah yang anda lakukan untuk memudahkan proses peralihan dari sekolah rendah Cina ke persekitaran pembelajaran dan budaya yang bercorak Melayu?

BANYAK TERIMI KASIH!

APPENDIX E

ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENT SURVEYS (SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL)

华族学生问卷

各位同学好，

请尽量回答以下问题，将自己的想法写出来。请不用担心字体不工整或语法不对，谢谢！

1. a. 马来西亚的华人有什么**价值观**和**道德观**和马来人是不一样的？

价值观：_____

道德观：_____

- b. 马来人如何定义华人呢？

- c. 马来西亚的华人和其他地方的华人，例如中国，台湾，香港，新嘉坡，在**政治上**，**经济上**，**文化上**和**教育上**，有何不同？

政治上：_____

经济上：_____

文化上：_____

教育上：_____

- d. 你如何定义**华族文化**？华族文化包括那些东西？你能举例吗？

- e. 你认为能用华语**听，说，读，写**，就算是华人吗？如果不算是华人，要怎么样才算是华人？

- f. 你认为你那一方面**最像**华人？那一方面**最不像**华人？

最像华人：_____

最不像华人： _____
籍贯： _____ 方言： _____ 性别： _____

你的家境如何？ _____ 父亲职业： _____

母亲职业： _____ 父母亲收入： _____ 兄弟姐妹几人？ _____

2. a. 马来老师对华族学生和马来学生的**教学态度**有何不同？

对马来学生：

—

对华族学生：

—

- b. 马来老师会认为华族学生不了解马来语而有明显的**歧视或偏见**吗？
你能举例吗？

- c. 你如和**分别**会歧视和不会歧视华族学生的老师(例:态度, 语言, 行为)？

- d. 能够流利地用马来语听, 说, 读, 写, 会令马来老师对华族学生的教学
态度**改变**吗？ 如果不会, 为什么呢？

- e. 如果你有不了解, 明白的地方, 你会找马来老师问吗？
还是等到补习的时才问补习老师？

3. a. 在你的班上, 华族学生和马来学生在**学习态度**上有何不同？ 那里不同？

华族学生： _____

马来学生： _____

- b. 比较起来, 华族学生还马来学生的学习态度比较**认真**？ 华族学生还马
来学生的学习**动机**比较**强**？

华族学生： _____

马来学生： _____

- c. 为什么华族学生**需要**认真和有强的学习动机？ 马来学生需要吗？

d. 那些科目**华族学生比较强**, 马来学生比较弱?

e. 那些科目**马来学生比较强**, 华族学生比较弱?

f. 下课后, 你有参加**校外补习**吗? 你补什么科目? 你**为什么**需要补这些科目?

4. a. 你认为在学校里只能用马来语来学习和沟通对你的学业成绩表现**公平**吗?
? 为什么呢?

b. 你能顺畅地用马来语来**询问问题和表答你的感受和思想**吗? 你的**马来语程度**如何?

c. 你的成绩如何?

如果在学校里能够用华语来学习和沟通对你的学业发展或成绩表现会有何影响? 为什么呢?

d. 有学生建议学校**以英语来教学**和沟通, 你同意吗?
这对三大种的族学生有什么影响?

e. 这对你的**成绩表现和将来的出路**有什么影响?

g. 你将来想成为一位: _____

h. 你想不想进入本地大学就读? _____

i. 你认为你**有机会**进入本地大学就读吗? 如果没有, 为什么呢?

5. a. 小学你在那一类型学校 (华小, 马来小学, 印度小学) 就读?

a. 你为何选择在国民型, 马来中学求学? 你为何不在独立中学 (宽柔中学) 求学?

a. 在国民型，马来中学求学有什么**好处**和**坏处**(例:老师的教学态度, 学生学习动机, 学校纪律)?

好处:_____

坏处:_____

a. 你让为国中预备班有什么问题?

你有什么建议给校长吗? _____

6. a. 在纪律方面，华族学生和马来学生有何不同?
比较起来，华族学生还是马来学生的纪律比较差?

b. **华族学生**常犯的纪律问题有那些?

c. **马来学生**常犯的纪律问题有那些?

7. a. 你认为华族学生为什么喜欢**旷课, 逃学**? 是学生本身还是老师的问题?

b. 你认为上道德课对改善华族学生纪律有用吗? 上道德课的目的地到底是什么?

c. 你认为发点名卡对改善华族学生**旷课, 逃学**有用吗?

d. 你认为纪律老师在处罚三大种族学生时**公平**吗? 你能举例吗?

a. 若不公平, 你能建议校长如何改善吗?

8. a. 你有上**华文课**吗? 若你没有上华文课, 为什么呢?

b.

你认为华文课没有安排教室, 学生和老师需四处找教室上课**公平**吗? 会造成什么问题?

c. 你认为中四和中五的华文课不能在正常时间上课而必需在下午上课公平吗？会造成什么问题？

d. 你有什么**建议**给校长吗？

9. a. 在你的班上，马来学生对华族学生的态度如何？
马来学生会歧视华族学生吗？相对地，华族学生会歧视马来学生吗？
两者会互相歧视吗？

b. 在学校整体来说呢？马来学生和华族学生会互相歧视吗？

a. 各族学生有给彼此外号吗？

a. 如果你在食堂或走廊用华语和同学交谈会引起马来老师或学生的**异样眼光或猜疑**吗？

10. a. 在学校里，你所看到的**马来文化**有那些？
能举例吗？除了马来文化外，你能看到其他的文化，例如华族和印族文化吗？

b. 你认为这样来表现马来西亚的国情和学校文化**公平**吗？会造成什么问题？

a. 你认为学校是**属于**马来人的还是华人或印度人的？

a. 在学校里，庆典活动和教学改善计划主要是以马来文化为像徵。你会不会觉得无所适从，不想参加学校庆典活动和教学改善计划？你有参加过任何庆典活动和教学改善计划？

a. 除了无所适从以外，你还有什么**感受**？

a. 不参加学校庆典活动和教学改善计划会令马来老师和学生如何想？这样对你和其他华族学生有什么不好的影响？

11. a. 身为华人，校长有**关注**华族学生在学习和纪律方面的问题吗？
他做了什么改善吗？

b. 为什么校长会有这样的表现呢?

c. 你认为校长对成绩不好的华族学生会歧视吗? 还是纪律不好的华族学生?

d. 如果你有任何问题或建议, 你会找校长吗?

APPENDIX F

ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENT SURVEYS (JUNIOR SECONDARY LEVEL)

华族学生问卷

各位同学好，

你已经在国中就讀两年了！

我想听听你在学习和生活上的一些问题。请尽量回答以下问题，将自己的想法写出来。请不用担心字体不工整或语法不对，谢谢！

1. a. 小学你在那一类型学校（华小，马来小学，印度小学）就读？

- b. 你为何选择在国民型，马来中学求学？你为何不在独立中学（宽柔中学）求学？

- c. 跟华小比较, 国民型, 马来中学有什么不同的地方？

老师的教学态度度：_____

学生的学习态度：_____

学校学习风气和纪律：_____

学校设施和环境：_____

- d. 在国民型，马来中学求学有什么好处和坏处？

好处：_____

坏处：_____

- e. 你让为国中预备班有什么问题？你有什么建议给校长吗？

2. a. 马来老师对华族学生和马来学生的教学态度有何不同？

对马来学生:

—

对华族学生:

b. 马来老师会认为华族学生不了解马来语而有明显的**歧视或偏见**吗?
你能举例吗?

c. 你如何**分别**会歧视和有**偏见**的老师(例:态度, 语言, 行为)?

d. 能够流利地用马来语听, 说, 读, 写, 会令马来老师对华族学生的教学
态度**改变**吗? 如果不会, 为什么呢?

e. 如果你有不了解, 明白的地方, 你会找马来老师问吗?
还是等到补习的时才问补习老师?

3. a. 在你的班上, 华族学生和马来学生在学习态度上有何不同? 那里不同?

华族学生: _____

马来学生: _____

b. 比较起来, 华族学生还马来学生的学习态度比较认真? 华族学生还马来学生的学习动机
比较强?

华族学生: _____

马来学生: _____

c. 为什么华族学生需要认真和有强的学习动机? 马来学生需要吗?

d. 那些科目华族学生比较强, 马来学生比较弱?

e. 那些科目马来学生比较强, 华族学生比较弱?

f. 下课后, 你有参加校外补习吗? 你补什么科目? 你为什么需要补这些科目?

g. 你有参加学校的补习吗? 你补什么科目? 你有参加校外补习吗? 你补什么科目?

4. a. 你认为在学校里只能用马来语来学习和沟通对你的学业成绩表现公平吗？为什么呢？

b. 你能顺畅地用马来语来询问问题和表答你的感受和思想吗？你的马来语程度如何？

c. 你的成绩如何？

如果在学校里能够用华语来学习和沟通对你的学业发展或成绩表现会有何影响？为什么呢？

d. 有学生建议学校以英语来教学和沟通,你同意吗？

这对你的成绩表现和将来的出路有什么影响？

e. 你在学习上所遭遇到最大的问题是什么？

5. a. 在纪律方面，华族学生和马来学生有何不同？

比较起来，华族学生还是马来学生的纪律比较差？

b. 华族学生常犯的纪律问题有那些？

c. 马来学生常犯的纪律问题有那些？

6. a. 你认为华族学生为什么喜欢旷课,逃学？是学生本身还是老师的问题？

b. 你认为上道德课对改善华族学生纪律有用吗？上道德课的目的地到底是什么？

c. 你认为发点名卡对改善华族学生旷课,逃学有用吗？

d. 你认为纪律老师在处罚三大种族学生时公平吗？你能举例吗？

e. 若不公平,你能建议校长如何改善吗？

7. a. 身为华人,校长有关注华族学生在学习和纪律方面的问题吗？他做了什么改善吗？

b. 为什么校长会有这样的表现呢？

c. 你认为校长对成绩不好的华族学生会歧视吗？还是纪律不好的华族学生？

d. 如果你有任何问题或建议,你会找校长吗？如果不会为什么呢？

8. a. 在你的班上，马来学生对华族学生的态度如何？

马来学生会歧视华族学生吗？相对地，华族学生会歧视马来学生吗？两者会互相歧视吗？

b. 在学校整体来说呢？马来学生和华族学生会互相歧视吗？

c. 各族学生有给彼此外号吗?

如果你在食堂或走廊用华语和同学交谈会引起马来老师或学生的异样眼光或猜疑吗?

9.a. 在学校里, 你所看到的马来文化有那些? 能举例吗? 除了马来文化外, 你能看到其他的文化, 例如华族和印族文化吗?

b. 你认为这样来表现马来西亚的国情和学校文化公平吗? 会造成什么问题?

c. 你认为学校是属于马来人的还是华人或印度人的?

d. 你有参加过任何学校的节日庆典活动吗? 能举例吗? 你在做什么?

不参加学校的节日庆典活动会令马来老师和学生如何想? 这样对你和其他华族学生有什么不好的影响?

10. a. 你如何定义华族文化? 华族文化包括那些东西? 你能举例吗?

b. 你认为能用华语听, 说, 读, 写, 就算是华人吗? 如果不算是华人, 要怎么样才算是华人?

c. 你有上华文课吗? 若你没有上华文课, 为什么呢?

d. 你认为你那一方面最像华人? 那一方面最不像华人?

最像华人: _____

最不像华人: _____

e. 籍贯: _____ f. 方言: _____ g. 性别: _____

f. 你的家境如何? _____ i. 父亲职业: _____

g. 母亲职业: _____ k. 父母亲收入: _____

h. 兄弟姐妹几人? _____

j. 你将来想成为一位: _____

k. 你想不想进入本地大学就读? _____

l. 你认为你有机会进入本地大学就读吗? 如果没有, 为什么呢?

11. 马来西亚的华人和其他地方的华人, 例如中国, 台湾, 香港, 新嘉坡, 在政治上, 经济上, 文化上和教育上, 有何不同?

a. 政治上: _____

b. 经济上: _____

c. 文化上: _____

d. 教育上: _____

e. 马来人如何定义华人呢? _____

APPENDIX G

TEACHER SURVEYS

Ethnicity: _____ Gender: _____ Years of teaching: _____

Subjects taught: _____ Levels of students taught: _____

1. What are the differences in being a secondary school teacher in the 1970s-1980s and in the 1990s-2000s?

2. In addition to teaching, what do you need to do in order to fulfill your roles and functions as a teacher?

3. What are the issues involved in your classroom teaching that are different from the classroom teaching of teachers in the 1970s-1980s?

4. a. Is school truancy the most serious problem in student discipline this year? If not, what else?

- b. Is school truancy universal to all three ethnic groups of students? What are the characteristics of students who are likely to be involved in school truancy?

- c. Why do students prefer to skip classes or roam around school rather than learning in the classroom?

- d. In general, does the appointment of: (a) a full-time discipline teacher, (b) a second school counselor, or (c) the implementation of the new student identity card system help improve school truancy? Why?

- e. What are the differences that you see in your students as being different from the time when you were a student? Are there any changes in the relationships between students and teachers?

5. The principal has put substantial efforts in improving school discipline and increasing student motivation through a variety of programs/projects. Besides the programs/projects funded by related government agencies, how successful are the following school improvement programs/projects?

1=not successful at all, 5=very successful!

a. The Knowledge Pavilion	1	2	3	4	5
b. The Smart Canteen	1	2	3	4	5
c. "Kata-kata Mutiara"	1	2	3	4	5
d. Classroom Cleanliness Campaign	1	2	3	4	5

e. Teaching Resource Center	1	2	3	4	5
f. Classroom Teaching/Learning Observation	1	2	3	4	5
g. "Tuition Kampung" (Form 3 & 5)	1	2	3	4	5
h. "Tuition Ibnu Sina" (Science students at Form 5)	1	2	3	4	5
i. Workshops on exam skills (Form 3)	1	2	3	4	5
j. "Tuition Kecermelangan PMR"	1	2	3	4	5
k. Workshops on exam skills (Form 5)	1	2	3	4	5
l. "Tuition Kecermelangan SPM"	1	2	3	4	5
m. "Tenaga Pelajar"	1	2	3	4	5
n. Motivation Camps	1	2	3	4	5
o. "Pekan Bahasa"	1	2	3	4	5

6. a. Are you involved in any of the programs/projects? Can you describe briefly the teamwork between school administrators and teachers in planning for these teaching/learning improvement programs/projects?

- b. Is there any teamwork? Or does the responsibilities of planning and implementation fall solely upon teachers? What are the problems involved?

7. a. Is SSB stopping teachers from voicing their opinions on programs/projects related to improving teaching/learning quality and student discipline? What are the strengths and weaknesses of SSB?

- b. If you were the principal, what would you do to help encourage the voicing of opinions of teachers?

8. The integration of content knowledge and technical skills in teaching/learning, character building (16 values), student-centered teaching/learning, and life-long learning are the 4 major objectives of KBSM. However, a much less restricted promotion of students from Form 3 to Form 4 has generated a fair number of students who are staying at school not for learning, but for school leaving certificate.

a. What are the teaching/learning problems that these students have created?

b. Do you think that it is fair to teachers and students who are interested in learning? Why?

c. Does the current class schedule allow you to adjust your teaching according to individual differences?

d. Is it possible for you to cultivate life-long learning?

9. Beginning 2000, teachers do not have to record the major values (16 in total) that they plan to infuse in their teaching in their teaching records. Based on your teaching experiences,

a. Are the values universal to the three ethnic groups of students (Malays, Chinese, Indians) at school? Whose values are those values?

b. Did you really infuse the values in your teaching? How effective is your teaching?

c. Do you think the values help improve the quality of student discipline?

10. Is the poor command of Malay the major reason behind the school truancy of Chinese students? How is the learning attitude of Chinese students that you teach?

IMPROVING STUDENT DISCIPLINE

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

During this year, students at *FNX* show better behavior in:

1. Weekly assembly (Monday & Friday)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Recess assembly	1	2	3	4	5
3. Class recess	1	2	3	4	5
4. Classroom teaching	1	2	3	4	5
5. Monthly exams	1	2	3	4	5
6. Classroom cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
7. Canteen cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
8. Toilet cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5

This year, students at *FNX* have fewer problems in:

9. Fighting	1	2	3	4	5
10. Involvement with street gangs	1	2	3	4	5
11. Bullying	1	2	3	4	5
12. Skipping classes	1	2	3	4	5

13. Absence from school	1	2	3	4	5
14. Coming late to school	1	2	3	4	5
15. Vandalizing school property	1	2	3	4	5
16. Smoking	1	2	3	4	5
17. Drug abuse	1	2	3	4	5
18. Verbal abuse	1	2	3	4	5
19. Dress code	1	2	3	4	5
20. Hair code	1	2	3	4	5

FNX can improve student discipline by:

21. Canning students during weekly assembly	1	2	3	4	5
22. Canning students in the main office	1	2	3	4	5
23. School detention	1	2	3	4	5
24. Short-term suspense from school	1	2	3	4	5
25. Removing students from school	1	2	3	4	5
26. Fiscal penalty	1	2	3	4	5
27. Counseling	1	2	3	4	5
28. Reflection essays	1	2	3	4	5
29. Teacher-parents meeting	1	2	3	4	5
30. Principal-parents meeting	1	2	3	4	5

IMPROVING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

This year, the principal is being more:

68. Interested in improving student discipline	1	2	3	4	5
69. Responsive to your concerns and suggestions in student discipline	1	2	3	4	5
70. Strictly adhered to standard rules and regulations, uniform procedures, and the meeting of deadlines	1	2	3	4	5
71. Open to different forms of punishment and rewards	1	2	3	4	5
72. Interested in improving the physical environment of <i>FNX</i>	1	2	3	4	5
73. Interested in improving teaching/learning quality	1	2	3	4	5
74. Interested in increasing your motivation to teach	1	2	3	4	5
75. Interested in increasing the motivation of students to learn	1	2	3	4	5
76. Interested in reducing the lack of student textbooks	1	2	3	4	5
77. Interested in seeking your ideas and suggestions of school improvement	1	2	3	4	5
78. Interested in listening to your opinions on improving teaching/learning quality	1	2	3	4	5

79. Interested in increasing the voicing of student opinions on disciplinary actions	1	2	3	4	5
80. Interested in increasing the voicing of student opinions on teaching/learning	1	2	3	4	5
81. Interested in increasing the participation of three groups of students in school improvement projects	1	2	3	4	5
82. Interested in increasing the participation of parents in school improvement projects	1	2	3	4	5
83. Interested in increasing the participation of all teachers in school improvement projects	1	2	3	4	5
84. Interested in facilitating teamwork between principals and teachers in increasing school effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5

The principal is being:

86. Ambitious in overall school improvement of <i>FNX</i>	1	2	3	4	5
87. Able to articulate clearly a realistic, credible, and attractive vision of change/improvement	1	2	3	4	5
88. Confident in his planning, implementation, and monitoring of school improvement projects/programs	1	2	3	4	5
89. Empathetic to your complaints and problems	1	2	3	4	5
90. Honest in financial management	1	2	3	4	5
91. Fair in rewards and punishment	1	2	3	4	5

The principal has:

92. Awareness of his own strengths and limits	1	2	3	4	5
93. Self-motivation	1	2	3	4	5
94. Effective communication and social skills	1	2	3	4	5
95. Job relevant knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
96. Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
97. Clear expectations of students and teachers	1	2	3	4	5

1=not agree at all, 5=strongly agree

As a teacher,

99. You are motivated to improve the teaching/learning at <i>FNX</i>	1	2	3	4	5
100. You are recognized and rewarded for your achievement in teaching	1	2	3	4	5
101. You have an equal opportunity to voice your concerns or suggestions in teaching/learning in faculty meeting	1	2	3	4	5
102. You have an equal opportunity to voice your concerns or suggestions in student discipline in faculty meeting	1	2	3	4	5
103. You feel that the principal appreciates your opinions	1	2	3	4	5
104. You feel that the principal is being honest and fair in his criticism of your work					

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 105. You feel that the principal has clear expectations of your teaching performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 106. You have an equal opportunity to participate in decision making in improvement projects related to student discipline | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 107. You have an equal opportunity to participate in decision making in improvement projects related to teaching/learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 108. You mainly use textbooks to regulate your teaching | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 109. You are eager to participate in faculty meeting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 110. You feel enthusiastic to implement improvement projects/programs related to teaching/learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 111. You feel enthusiastic to implement improvement projects/programs related to student discipline | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 112. You encourage students to help determine teaching/learning activities in the classroom | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 113. You encourage students to help formulate class rules and regulations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 114. In your opinion, what are discouraging teachers from voicing their concerns and opinions? Is anything stopping them? | | | | | |

115. Is the principal a follower or leader? Can you tell me why?

116. Can you list five qualities of an effective school leader in the context of FNX?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | |

In your opinion, students at *FNX* are not motivated in learning because there is/are:

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 121. Family poverty | | | | | |

122. A lack of teaching aids	1	2	3	4	5
123. Broken family	1	2	3	4	5
124. Poor teaching skills that entail boredom or loss of interest in learning	1	2	3	4	5
125. A lack of textbooks	1	2	3	4	5
126. A lack of parental supervision after school	1	2	3	4	5
127. A lack of principal leadership in planning for and implementing improvement projects that meet the needs and values of students of three ethnic groups	1	2	3	4	5
128. A lack of attention of teachers to the values of learning of the three ethnic groups	1	2	3	4	5
129. A lack of relevance of teaching/learning to the demand of job market	1	2	3	4	5
130. A lack of appropriate facilities and equipment	1	2	3	4	5
131. A lack of monitoring/supervision of classroom teaching	1	2	3	4	5
132. Resistance of Malay students to improve/change	1	2	3	4	5
133. Resistance of Indian students to improve/change	1	2	3	4	5
134. Resistance of Chinese students to improve/change	1	2	3	4	5
135. A lack of supplementary exercise related to national examinations	1	2	3	4	5
136. A lack of cooperation of teachers to work with school leaders to improve/change	1	2	3	4	5
137. Opportunities for students to make “easy” money after school, especially in Pasir Gudang	1	2	3	4	5
138. Language problem	1	2	3	4	5
139. Too much emphasis on examinations (teaching/learning as being exam-oriented)	1	2	3	4	5

In your opinion, there is a lack of student discipline at *FNX* because there is/are:

140. A lack of adult role models at home	1	2	3	4	5
141. Peer pressure for bad behaviors	1	2	3	4	5
142. No appropriate adult role models at school	1	2	3	4	5
143. Resistance of Malay students to improve/change because there is lack of sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
144. Resistance of Indian students to improve/change because there is lack of sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
145. Resistance of Chinese students to improve/change because there is lack of sense of belonging	1	2	3	4	5
146. No channels for students to make complaints or voice their opinions	1	2	3	4	5
147. No opportunities for students to explain their mistakes or problems to teachers or teachers in charge of student discipline	1	2	3	4	5

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 148. An unfair disciplinary system that is too lenient with or too harsh on students of a certain ethnic group | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 149. No sense of trust between three groups of students and teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 150. No sense of trust between three groups of students and the principal | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 151. No sense of belonging (no “we” feeling) between three groups of students, teachers, and the principal | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 152. A lack of awareness of teachers of the cultural differences between three groups of students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 153. A lack of experience of teachers, including discipline teachers, in handling discipline problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 154. No sense of respect between students and teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE PRINCIPAL

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Demographics:

- D1. How long have you been a principal of this school? _____
- D2. Each month, how many hours do you approximately spend in the following duties?
- a. Circulars or directives review _____
 - b. Budget and finance _____
 - c. School maintenance _____
 - d. Teacher supervision _____
 - e. Faculty meeting _____
 - f. School staff supervision _____
 - g. Other administrative errands and duties _____
- D3. What did you do before you become the principal of this school? _____
- D4. Did you get any pre-service training for principal leaderships?
- a. ☐ Yes, please describe briefly _____

 - b. ☐ No, please describe briefly _____

D5. What is your education level (please specify your major and/or minor)?

- ☐ PhD/EdD _____
- ☐ M.A./MEd. _____
- ☐ BA/BS _____
- ☐ Diploma _____
- ☐ Other _____

D6. What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Other: _____

D7. How old are you? _____

Leaderships:

L1. Can you describe your overall roles and responsibilities as being a principal of this school?

- a. Administrative leader: _____
- _____
- b. Instructional leader: _____
- _____

L2. What are your strengths and limits in practicing both leaderships?

- a. Strengths: _____
- _____
- b. Limits: _____
- _____

L3. Have you ever discussed any concerns and issues in your school management with the assistant principals, teachers, school staff, and the parent-teacher association?

a. How do they respond to your concerns and issues?

b. Have they made any suggestions to ameliorate the behavioral problems of students?

L4. Have ever discussed any concerns and issues over the school curriculum and classroom instruction with the assistant principals, senior-subject teachers, and teachers?

a. How do they respond to your concerns and issues?

b. Have they made any suggestions to the academic performances of students?

L5. Can you describe your overall relations with the following individuals:

a. Assistant principals _____

b. Teachers _____

c. Malay students _____

d. Chinese students _____

e. Indian students _____

L6. Can you characterize your leadership styles?

Effective School Reform:

ES1. What do effective schools mean to you?

ES2. Is your school an effective school?

a. In what ways is your school effective? Can you describe the characteristics?

b. In what ways is your school ineffective? Can you describe the problems involved?

ES3. What do you see as the changes that *FNX* should make in order to become more effective? How do you achieve the changes?

a. Immediate changes (short-term goals and objectives)

b. Strategies to achieve changes

c. Incremental changes (long-term goals and objectives)

d. Strategies to achieve changes

ES4. Which of the following factors play the most important roles in implementing the national effective school reform at the school level? Why?

a. Government guidance and support

b. Parent and/or community support

c. Teacher support

d. Student support

- e. Your leadership practices (administrative and instructional)

- ES5. You have invested significant efforts into creating a school environment that is clean, safe, and ordered. Why is creating a conducive learning environment your priority in school reform?

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ETHNIC CHINESE STUDENTS

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Demographics:

STUDENT:

DS1. Age: _____ DS2. Class: _____ DS3. Gender: _____

DS4. Number of Siblings: _____ DS5. Academic performance: _____

DS6. Primary school: _____

Parents:

DP7.1 Father's education: _____ DP7.2 Mother's education: _____

DP8.1 Father's occupation: _____ DP8.2 Mother's occupation: _____

DP9.1 Father's income: _____ DP9.2 Mother's income: _____

Identity Creation:

- IC1 What type of person do you want to become?
- IC2. Can you describe the *qualities* of the kind of person you want to become?
- IC3. Can you identify any role models in your life circle?
- IC4. Why do you want to become the person you describe?
- IC5. How do you become the person you want to be?
- IC6. Who can give you *guidance* (mental) and *support* (social or moral)?

- IC7. With whom do you share your problems in life?
- IC8. Who do you seek help for your problems?
- IC9. What does school teach you about adolescent development?
- IC10. How do you introduce yourself to a new acquaintance?
- IC11. What is your career goal?
- IC12. Why do you want to become _____?
- IC13. How do you achieve your career goal?
- IC14. Who can guide and support you?
- IC15. With whom do you share your career goal?
- IC16. Considering your academic performance, can you achieve your career goal? Are you being pragmatic?
- IC17. How does the use of Malay as *the **only** language of instruction* affect your learning?
- IC17.1 What are the problems involved in your learning?
- IC17.2 How do you improve your learning?
- IC 17.3 Is the use of Malay as *the **only** language of instruction* fair to non-Malay (Chinese, Indian) students?
- IC17.4 At home, do you talk about how the use of Malay as *the **only** language of instruction* affect your learning?
- IC17.5 If you can learn by Mandarin, what will happen to your learning?
- IC17.6 In the long run, how does the use of Malay as *the **only** language of instruction* affect the Chinese Malaysian society?
- IC18. How does *the **quota** system* affect your career choice?
- IC18.1 What are the problems involved?
- IC18.2 What can you do to get by the system?
- IC18.3 Is the use of ***quota*** fair to non-Malay students?
- IC18.4 At home, do you talk about *the **quota** system*?
- IC18.5 If there is no ***quota** system*, what will happen to your career choice?
- IC18.6 In the long run, how does *the **quota** system* affect the Chinese Malaysian society?

Identity as Shaped By the Social Structure:

Ethnicity

- SSE1. Compared to Chinese in Southeast Asia, what is the *status* of Chinese in Malaysia?
- SSE1.1 Politically?
- SSE1.2 Socially?
- SSE1.3 Economically?
- SSE1.4 Culturally?
- SSE2. In what ways do you *see* yourself as a Chinese (the most)?
- SSE3. In what ways do you *not see* yourself as a Chinese (the least)?
- SSE4. Will you date or marry someone from a different race if you love him or her to death?
- SSE5. What will your parents, relatives, or friends say about your interracial dating or marriage?
- SSE6. At home, do you talk about the status of Chinese in Malaysia?

Language

- SSL1. How many languages do you speak?
- SSL2. Which language(s) do you *often* speak?
- SSL3. Which language(s) do you want to learn, develop, and use *the most*? Why?
- SSL4. Which language(s) do you want to learn, develop, and use *the least*? Why?
- SSL5. Is it important for a Chinese Malaysian to know how to speak, read, and write in Mandarin?
- SSL5.1 Why is it *important*? OR
- SSL5.2 Why is it *not important*?
- SSL6. Do you consider a person as Chinese if he or she can speak, read, and write in Mandarin?
- SSL7. Is *language* the most important part of a culture?
- SSL8. Is there a *Chinese Malaysian culture*? What does it include?

Identity as Shaped by Social Relations:

Social Group

- SRG1. With whom do you hang out with *most frequently* at, before, or after school?
- SRG1.1 Where do you hang out?
- SRG1.2 What do you do?
- SRG1.3 What don't you do?
- SRG2. With whom do you hang out with *least frequently* at, before, or after school?
- SRG3. With whom do you want to interact with *the most*?
- SRG4. With whom do you want to interact with *the least*?
- SRG5. At home, do you talk about who do your interact with and what do you do?

Social Relations

- SR1. How do you tell an outsider (including parents, siblings, relatives, friends) about your school?
- SR2. How do you characterize the social relations between the three races of students, teachers, and administrators at your school?
- SR3. Do students of three races interact with each other at school? Before or after school?
- SR3.1 Why don't they interact with each other?
- SR3.2 In what ways does *the quota system* affect the interaction of the three races?
- SR4. Are you concerned with the lack of interaction between the three races of students?
- SR5. Is the lack of interaction at school reflective of the social relations between the three races in the society?
- SR6. What is your ideal school? What changes do you hope to see?
- SR7. Do you talk about your school at home?

Social Process

- SP1. Why did you choose national secondary school instead of Chinese independent school?

- SP2. What are the problems involved when three races attend the same school?
- SP3. What do you learn from your textbooks about the three races in Malaysia?
- SP3.1 What are the problems involved in the learning of the three races?
- SP3.2 Are you prepared to interact with other races?
- SP3.3 Do you know what you can or can't do?
- SP3.4 At school, how do you deal with the animosity of other races?
- SP3.5 If there is a conflict, how do you deal with it?
- SP3. At home, do you talk about the interaction between the three races?
- SP4. What do you learn from your textbooks about Malaysia, your home country?
 - SP4.1. How do you tell a foreigner about Malaysia?
 - SP4.2. What are the problems involved in your learning?
 - SP4.3. What do you more likely to identify with: your national identity as a *Malaysian* or your ethnic identity as a *Chinese*?
 - SP4.4 What is your ideal nation?
 - SP4.5 What changes do you want to see in the current Malaysian society?
- SP5. At home, do you talk about "*Malay-sia*"?

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH ETHNIC CHINESE PARENTS

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

1. What do you want your son or daughter to become?
2. What does your son or daughter want to become? Why?
3. What is more important: your aspiration or his or her aspiration? Why?
4. How do you help your son or daughter achieve his or his aspiration?
5. Considering the academic performance of your son or daughter, is he or she being realistic in setting her career goal?
6. How do you help your son or daughter improve his or her academic performance?
7. What does being educated mean to you?
8. In what ways, should school help educate your son or daughter?
9. What do you think about the school of your son or daughter?
 - 9.1 Is the discipline of students good?
 - 9.2 Is the management responsive?
 - 9.3 Are teachers competent?
 - 9.4 What changes do you want to see?
10. What do you think about the use of Malay as *the only language of instruction*?
 - 10.1 In what ways, does the policy affect the learning of your son or daughter?
 - 10.2 Is it important for your son or daughter to know how to read, write, and speak in Mandarin?
 - 10.2.1 Why is it important?

- 10.2.2 Why isn't it important?
- 10.3 What language do you want your son or daughter to learn, develop, and use ***the most?***
- 10.4 What language do you want your son or daughter to learn, develop, and use ***the least?***
11. How do you respond to the complains that your son or daughter make in regard to not understanding his or her learning due to the use of Malay as ***the only language of instruction?***
12. What do you think about ***the quota system?***
- 12.1 In what ways, does the system affect the career development of your son or daughter?
- 12.2 How do you respond to the complaints that your son or daughter make?
- 12.3 In what ways, does the system affect your life path?
- 12.4 What ***changes*** do you hope to see in the system?

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX K

A PROPOSAL FOR ACTION RESEARCH: IDENTIFYING COMMON ERROS IN PARTS OF SPEECH AND IMPROVING THE TEACHING QUALITY OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION WRITING AT THE LOWER SECONDARY LEVEL

Rationale and Significance of Research:

Educational Policy (1979) explicates the importance of the teaching/learning of English as a functional, 2nd language at the lower/junior and higher/senior levels at Malaysian secondary schools: “In keeping with its status as a 2nd language, the objective of the English syllabus are providing basic skills and knowledge for two aims: (1) to enable the students to use Language effectively in their work and in specific activities; (2) for a small group to enable them to increase their skills and knowledge in English so that they can use it for higher educational purposes” (Compendium, 1989). In response to Educational Policy (1979), we propose this action research to identify the patterns of the common errors made by two selected groups of lower/junior secondary level students in Parts of Speech. Considering the lack of related information generated by local researchers, this research will contribute to the understanding of the issues involved in the teaching/learning of English composition writing, an important dimension of KBSM Secondary School English Program, at the classroom level.

Goal of Research:

As a response to the emphasis of the four language skills (*listening, speaking, reading, and writing*) in KBSM Secondary School English Program, this research focuses on the common errors made by three ethnic groups of students (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) in Parts of Speech in

English composition writings. The ultimate goal of this research is to develop a classroom teaching/learning model for teachers who are interested in improving the quality of English composition writing at the lower/junior secondary level in Malaysian secondary schools. We divide the research into the four stages as follows:

Table 1: Stages of Research

Stages	Content	Length of study
1.	Identifying the patterns of common errors made by three ethnic groups of students through two monthly compositions collected from two selected groups of students identified as: (1) the control group and (2) the experimental group.	25/6-25/9/2001
2.	Introducing and incorporating “Process Writing” technique into the teaching/learning of teachers and students in the experimental group.	15/1-25/3/2002
3.	Comparing and evaluating the writing performance of students in both the control and experimental groups in their monthly compositions (2 in total) and monthly exams(2 in total).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mid-February, 2002 • mid-April, 2002
4.	Developing a classroom teaching/learning model to improve the quality of teaching/learning English composition writing at the lower/junior secondary level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mid-April to late-May

Objectives of Research:

The objectives of this research include:

- (a) identifying the patterns of the common errors made by lower/junior secondary level students in Parts of Speech;
- (b) improving the quality of teaching/learning English composition writing at the lower/junior secondary level;
- (c) preparing students currently at the Form 2 level for their English composition writings in PMR 2002;
- (d) increasing the interest of students in learning and improving English composition writings.

Research Procedures (Stage One):

In the initial stage of the research (25/6-25/9/2001), the principal investigator will form a steering committee consists of experienced English teachers at school and group the teachers according to their expertise in identifying common errors in Parts of Speech.

- (i) The principal investigator and her committee will inform and explain to the students and teachers involved of the importance of the research in improving the quality of teaching/learning of English composition writing at school.
- (ii) The committee will help collect English essays/compositions from two selected groups (control and experimental) of students at the Form 2 level.
- (iii) The principal investigator will file the sample essays/compositions collected by the committee at a cabinet in the office.
- (iv) Through Nud*ist (Non-numerical, unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, Theorizing), an effective computer software program in qualitative data analysis, the principal investigator will develop a database based on the demographic characteristics of the students participated in the research.
- (v) The principal investigator and her committee will identify the patterns of the errors made according to the demographic characteristics of students participated in the research. The demographic characteristics of student participants that the principal

investigator and her committee will include in their analyses are: ethnicity, gender, age, hours spent each week in writing English essays, parents' educational level, parents' income, use of English at home.

Sample Populations:

“Average” students from two selected classes at the Form 2 level. We define “average” students as students who obtain 50-60% in their mid-year examinations in English. Since we are interested in identifying the patterns of common errors according to ethnicity, we will select two classes that have the similar size of students from three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian).

Research Design (Stages Two to Four):

In the second stage of our research (January 15 - March 25, 2001), we will divide the students into two groups: control group and experimental group. Students in the control group will not get any treatments whereas students in the experimental group will be provided with the treatment - “Process Writing”. We will also encourage students in the experimental group to compile the writing examples/samples given by their teachers and their own writings into a portfolio, which serves a presentation of their learning outcomes. We will describe the overall design of the research from stage 2 to 4 as follows:

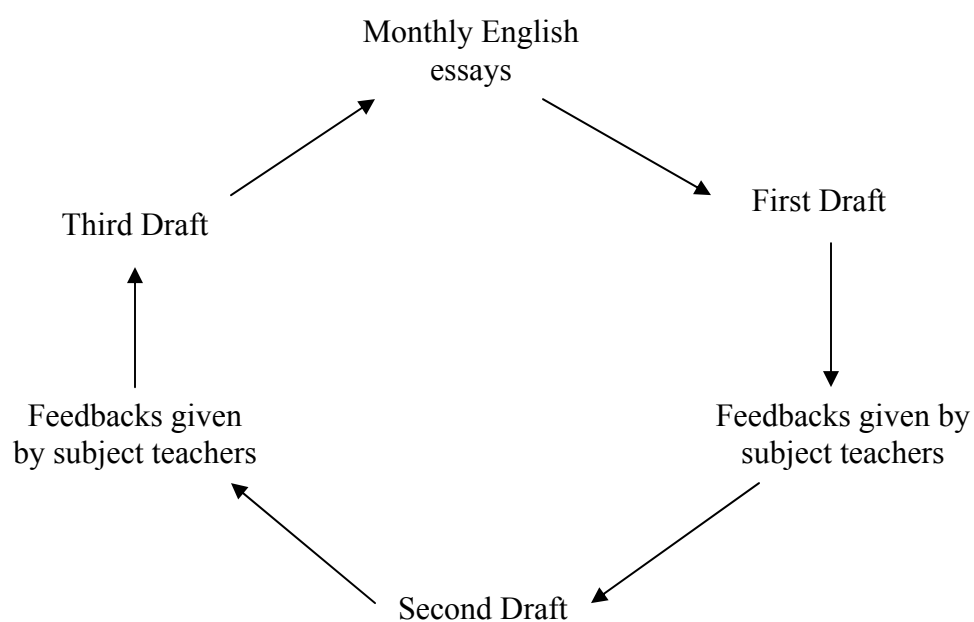
- (i) introduce students and teachers in the experimental group to the technique of “Process Writing” and initiate the technique after the introduction;
- (ii) hold a writing skills class/workshop once a month to familiarize the students and teachers in the experimental group to the formats of selected English composition writings;

- (iii) along with the technique introduced and workshops held, provide students in the experimental group with writing examples/samples selected by the principal investigator and her committee;
- (iv) evaluate the performance of students in both the control and experimental groups based on their two monthly compositions and two monthly exams (post-test); in addition, evaluate the performance of students in the experimental group with the portfolio they create in late-April.

Table 2: Research Design

Sequence of Research		Control Group	Experimental Group
<i>Pre-test:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly essay 1 • Monthly essay 2 	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Treatments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Process Writing” • “Writing skills” class/workshop • Writing samples/examples 	No No No	Yes Yes Yes
<i>Post-test:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly essay 1 • Monthly essay 2 • Monthly exam 1 • Monthly exam 2 • Portfolio 	Yes Yes Yes Yes No	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes

Diagram 1: Writing Process



Contact Information:

If you are interested in learning more about this research, please contact Puan Mahani Binti Mahmud, the principal investigator at: (07) 252-3955 or Kee, Geok Hwa, the co-investigator at: (07) 333-6989.

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