

MALAYSIAN CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE ROLE OF CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOL – CASE STUDY OF SJK(C) KEAT HWA(H), ALOR SETAR

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ABSTRACT

Chinese education is an integral part of Malaysian Chinese cultural system, and Chinese primary school has been regarded by the Chinese educationists as the “Last Bastion of Chinese education and culture”. This shows that Chinese primary school has its advantages compared to other Chinese education institutions. The writing of this article not only obtained opinions from Chinese parents through questionnaires, and comparative study between Chinese independent secondary school and Chinese primary school, also investigate the efforts of the Chinese primary school in inheriting and protecting Chinese culture through the academic curriculum, annual activities and other special events. SJK(C) Keat Hwa(H), Alor Setar has been selected as the subject for this research because of its fame and historical background in Chinese education. This study has shown that the role played by Chinese primary school in Malaysian Chinese cultural heritage was built on the mentality of the Chinese parents, who wanted their children to at least learn the Chinese language at the primary school level. Chinese primary school has successfully provided exposure, contact and introduced Malaysian Chinese culture to the ethnic Chinese, especially as a platform for cultural art performance. Due to the current situation of Malaysia, Chinese primary schools could not allow majority of the students to master these cultural subjects. Therefore, cultural values are even harder to be transmitted to the next generations within 6 years of primary school education.

Keywords: Malaysia, Chinese, Education, Culture, Vernacular.

INTRODUCTION:

In the 200 year history of Chinese school development (*Wufu Shuyuan* in Penang in 1819 as a starting point), the role of Chinese schools has experienced a transition from a political front to the bastion of Chinese culture. This paradigm shift witnessed a change in the British education policies as well as in the Malaysian political arena. With support from the Chinese society, Chinese primary schools [SJK(C)] were able to avoid the hassle of changing streams unlike the Chinese secondary schools that had to succumb to this change in the early 1960s. The support of the Chinese also enabled the maintenance of SJK(C) schools as these institutions were the most affordable (financially) by Chinese parents as well as the shaping of these schools as a heritage institute and the propagation of Chinese culture in Malaysia. Although SJK(C) often lacked both financial and teaching resources and experienced problems pertaining to relocation and development of new schools, it has remained as the choice of primary education amongst the Chinese in Malaysia and this was soon accepted by the non-Chinese parents.¹

LITERATURE REVIEW:

After the 1960s, interpretation of Malaysian Chinese traits was influenced by two dominating parties: MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and Dongjiaozong (combination of United Chinese Schools Committees of Malaysia and United Chinese Schools Teachers of Malaysia). According to Lim (1999), MCA's interpretation of "Malaysian Chinese" was more primitively inclined. MCA stressed on skin color and cultural behavior which was driven by political and biological views. Dongjiaozong, on the other hand, stressed not only characteristics suggested by MCA but also included conditions such as conversing in Mandarin or other Chinese dialects as well as embracing the traditions of China. Lim concluded that while the fundamental concepts of both groups were not identical, it was important to note that both concepts were products of racial politics. Moreover, Dongjiaozong's concept of equating a "Chinese person" with the "Chinese language" is exclusive (p. 126-7).² This doctrine placed Mandarin on a pedestal and was believed to aid racial integration. However, it also alienated the non-Mandarin speaking Chinese (e.g. *baba nyonya* and *peranakan Chinese* community). The development of the Chinese clan's culture (e.g. *Hokkien* and *Hakka* clan) was discouraged and efforts were futile. This was observed when the use of Chinese dialects in SJK(C) schools was banned. MCA's concept of a "Chinese person" was better accepted by the public because it was a political decision that fulfilled the needs of the government as well as the people. It was therefore used vastly (e.g. implementation of 'race' columns on various forms). Although Dongjiaozong's focus was on the employment and usage of the Mandarin, "racial equality" was however, the very aim of Chinese education. This act enabled the struggles of Dongjiaozong and the modal (Chinese language = Chinese culture) to be supported by the majority of the Chinese and an imagined community whereby its very core was Chinese education was formed within the Chinese community in Malaysia. Due to constant external pressure (education, economy and government policies), Lim (1998) assumed that a religion or belief whereby Mr. Lim Lian Geok (Pioneer Chinese educationist, the "Soul of Malaysian Chinese") was regarded as a respected ancestor existed amongst the Chinese in Malaysia (p. 136). The author agrees with Lim's opinion. Moreover, this imagined community was rather comprehensive as it had language (Mandarin), festivities (Chinese Education Day), traditions (the worship of Lim Lian Geok), core values (defending Chinese education) as well as its own culture (Malaysian Chinese culture). The leader of this community is Dongjiaozong, the most grand Chinese education board in Malaysia. It is important to understand that although Chinese education was the pillar of this community, the

¹According to Dongjiaozong's statistics (2009), more than 90% of Chinese children obtained an education from SJK(C). In 1999, the enrolment of non Chinese children in SJK(C) reached 65,000 persons or 10% of the total enrolment at SJK(C). *Sinchew Daily* also reported that 97% of Chinese parents chose SJK(C) for their children (8 May 2009).

²Lim KayThong did not clearly explain the concept of "race = culture = language". In the author's opinion, Lim's point of view was based on Dongjiaozong's stand that Mandarin is the very core of the Chinese race. Dongjiaozong often repeated this principle of his at different places. For example, phase 4 of Dongjiaozong's memorandum in 1999: The implementation of vernacular education indicates that the mother tongue is the very core of a race and cultural heritage.

Lim Lian Geok has also suggested a similar point of view as Dongjiaozong. In an article entitled *Kenapa Saya Kecewa*, he feels that the change of medium is strong enough to ruin the Chinese culture. Thus, he sees the national language (Bahasa Melayu) as a "knife that pierces through the Chinese culture". For more details, please refer to Dongjiaozong (2004), p.1198.

Lim opines that MCA's concept of a "Chinese person" stems from a group of MCA leaders who are English educated or of Bhaba origin. Tun Tan Cheng Lock, the founder of this party is an example of a "Chinese person" who fits MCA's views and concepts: unfamiliar with Mandarin but very much attracted to the Chinese culture. Refer to Lim Lian Geok's *Fengyu Shiba Nian* and Guo's *Bibliography of Tun Tan Cheng Lock* to have a better understanding of him.

As a component of the Barisan Nasional government, MCA did not give any definitive measures or traits to what it means to be a Chinese

main factor that brought the members of this community together was the fight for equal and fair rights for the Chinese community in Malaysia.

Although the Chinese education suffered disappointment following the change of stream of Chinese secondary schools in 1962 and primary schools subject to the 1962 Education Act phase 21(2) and 26A, the implications faced by SJK(C) was less severe as opposed to Chinese secondary schools. The medium in SJK(C) was still Mandarin and these schools, to a certain extent, were able to enjoy government allocations and subsidies. However, after the May 13 1969 tragedy, Malay/Islamic culture was regarded as the “national culture” of Malaysia and this played a pivotal role in implementation of government policies.³ From an educational point of view, the Malay idiom “*bahasa jiwa bangsa*” is equivalent to Dongjiaozong’s concept of “Chineseness”. The government assumed that the official language, Malay had to be made as the sole culture of Malaysians in order to aid the development of a dominant race (Malay). It was not surprising then that the government reinforced national streamed education with Malay language as the sole medium and at the same time abandoned vernacular education.

After emergence of the national culture as the mainstream, SJK(C) schools often faced the crisis of “stream changing”. It was observed that the cause of this dilemma was the attempted changes in medium.⁴ Concern with regards to change in medium is in all actuality closely associated to Dongjiaozong’s concept of a Chinese person. Furthermore, under the leadership of a Chinese Non Government organizations (*Huatuan*) and Chinese entrepreneurs, a process of “invention of tradition” was carried out within the Chinese community in Malaysia.⁵ This process involved selecting healthy traditions from China and eliminating traditions and rituals which were based on superstition as well as bringing brand new meaning and life to these traditions in hopes of cultivating a Chinese culture which was Malaysian oriented. The culture, worries and concerns of the Chinese were factors that united them and these factors were turned into tools to oppose the national culture.

With great external (government) and internal (Chinese community) pressure, SJK(C) took on the responsibility of propagating the Chinese culture. Chinese schools in Malaysia were regarded as the “identity of the Chinese”. Thus a great deal of time and money were spent by the Chinese community in maintaining these schools (Thock, 2009, p. 176). The act of the Chinese in fervently trying to preserve their culture was noble and rightful. Gellner (1963 in Guo) confirmed the pertinence of an education system in propagating a culture. Gellner opined that man’s loyalty to their culture is of utmost importance. A culture that is spread by a school would be able to convince not just an individual but the public as a whole (p. 98). Aside from vernacular education, SJK(C) schools also propagated Chinese culture through co-curricular activities and Chinese cultural competitions within and between schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology used in this study includes both qualitative and quantitative, whereby 4 types of methods were used to gather information. Quantitative methods include questionnaires while qualitative methods include interviews, field studies and gathering of information at libraries.

Respondents for the survey sessions were randomly selected. There were a total of 461 parents (253 males, 203 females and 5 which did not state their gender) from 8 SJK(C) schools located in Alor Setar. The enrollment in these 8 SJK(C) schools (approximately 4000 persons) constitute 15% of the grand total of enrollment in SJK(C) in Kedah which was 26,324 persons (2010 data as given by the Kedah Education Department). Parents were selected

³The national culture of Malaysia was a culture formed based on the culture of the majority, the Malays. The national culture policy was enacted in 1971 at the National Culture Congress. In short, the shaping of a nation in Malaysia was a process to raise the standards of Malay/Islamic culture from culture-religion to culture-nation. Refer to Ho Kok Chung, 2002, p.97-105.

⁴The crisis after 1960s include: 3M curriculum, the national language being used at assemblies in SJK(C) schools, integrated schools and teachers who are not proficient in Mandarin hold high positions in SJK(C) in the 1980s; “Sekolah Wawasan” in the 1990s; Teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) and 2006-2010. Refer to Jiaozong, 2009, p.13-15.

⁵The selecting of traditions was lead by *Huatuan*. They chose traditions that were thought to be of positive value. Later, these traditions were gathered to form a “Malaysian Chinese culture” and propagated by the Chinese to oppose the national culture. Chinese education, performing arts and literature were several of the traditions chosen. Refer to Lim, 1999, p. 150-152.

According to Hobsbawm (1983), a tradition can be invented to enable one to adapt to a new place or environment. One of the invention techniques included giving old traditions a new meaning (p. 5-6). The Chinese New Year festival in China incorporates the 4 seasons element. In the Malaysian context, this four seasons element is not to be found but it is made as an “icon” for the Chinese. Hence, it is natural for the Chinese to celebrate Chinese New Year. This invention of tradition enables the Chinese to distinctly differentiate themselves from other races and also serves as an approach to oppose the “nation”.

Worry was stirred within the Chinese society of fear that they may be assimilated. This crisis brought about an awakening in the Chinese to defend their education system (especially primary schools) to assure the coming generation still had the opportunity to study the Chinese language in Malaysia (Thock, 2009, p. 176-177).

as respondents because they determine the type of education their children receive. The questionnaire was focused on reasons and views of parents who send their children to SJK(C). Frequency was the primary statistical unit in this survey. The distribution of respondents was approximately 10% of the total enrollment in a school.

The interview respondent was the Headmaster of SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H). The purpose of this interview was to gather primary source information. The headmaster was chosen as the respondent because he is familiar with school matters and the Chinese community. More importantly, the Headmaster serves as a middle person between the Ministry of Education and the Chinese society (parents). The Chinese society expresses their concerns to the school (Headmaster) while the Headmaster is responsible to the ministry.

This case study was focused on SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H). Aspects studied include annual activities, the 100th year celebrations and the environment of the school.

The library is the main source of gathering secondary information (previous studies/findings). Most of the previous studies are findings of Chinese researchers. Gathered information includes the history of Chinese education development and Chinese culture.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

CHINESE EDUCATION AS AN INVENTED TRADITION IN PRE-INDEPENDENT MALAYA:

Before the two mainstream Chineseness concepts came into form, we need to keep in mind that even the concept of "Chinese supporting Chinese vernacular education" was a tradition that came into articulation gradually. There were 4 streams of school prior independence (Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English). Ancestors who came from China invested resources to build Chinese schools for their children and they also trained men for their economic activities.⁶ The more capable and practical Chinese (those with better paying jobs and who were affiliated with the English) sent their children to English schools.

In 1901, there were 600 (23%) and 2,000 (77%) Chinese students studying at English and Chinese schools respectively (Philip Loh, 1975). As shown in Table 1, enrolment of Chinese children in English schools in Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang) achieved 1/3 of the total enrolment of Chinese students in 1924. This number decreased year by year until it reached 17.6 percents in 1937. This data shows that the development of the Chinese tradition of "the Chinese should receive vernacular Chinese education" must have taken some time. This proposition is further consolidated by the fact that Malaya was then a country where English was the main language used in conversations, business and administration, in other words, a *lingua franca*.

There are 2 main factors which have contributed to the formation of this tradition. Firstly the cultural factor: The Chinese begun appreciating and taking their culture and education seriously. The 1920 Registration of School Ordinance is an important catalyst. This ordinance caused the first grand Chinese cultural movement and education (Tay, 199a, p. 41).

Table 1: Enrolment of Chinese students in Chinese and English schools in Federated Malay states

Year	English School Enrolment (%)	Chinese School Enrolment (%)	Total Enrolment (Persons)
1924	33.50	66.50	18,312
1925	30.40	69.60	22,141
1926	29.70	70.30	24,018
1927	28.40	71.60	26,432
1928	27.00	73.00	29,262
1929	26.80	73.20	31,958
1930	28.50	71.50	31,221
1932	30.80	69.20	28,676
1933	26.50	73.50	30,316
1935	21.70	78.30	37,697
1937	17.60	82.40	48,196

Source: Philip Loh, 1975, p. 92

⁶According to Lim's research (1999), the actual purpose of Chinese schools was not merely for education per se. The purpose of Chinese schools was a combination of education and to supply human resource for selected Chinese tribes (p. 50-51).

This first Educational law instituted by the English was also viewed as an antagonistic move towards the Chinese which lead to an awakening of a sense of pride and appreciation for their mother tongue as well as to the cultural identity of the Chinese (Yun Yuet Ling in Tan, 1997, p. 27).⁷The Chinese ideology “education to be prioritized over poverty” further motivated the formation of this tradition. On the other hand, economic factors included: elite English schools with exorbitant fees and difficulty of gaining admission, English classes offered by Chinese schools (Ibid), the devastating Chinese economic downfall between the 1920s-1930s⁸.

World War 2 which jeopardized the economic strength of the Chinese, Chinese entrepreneurs who were actively involved in development of schools enabled the number of Chinese schools to increase year by year. The addition of more Chinese schools presented education opportunities to not just affluent Chinese people. Chinese schools eventually became the primary choice for Chinese parents due to factors such as cheaper school fees (free education was also available), enrolment age which did not pose as a limiting factor and a practical curriculum (courtesy of Kang Youwei who carried out a Chinese education revolution in Malaya).⁹The enrolment in Chinese schools in 1950 witnessed a staggering 210,336 students (Tay, 1999b, p. 213). Based on the mentioned facts, it was believed that the “Chinese people received Chinese education” tradition was formed before the 1950s. This tradition subsequently brought about many supporters who drove the Chinese education movement. During the Torch Movement (census and registration of new students) in 1956, Lim Lian Geok, the then president of Jiaozong (United Chinese School Teachers Association of Malaysia) used the slogan “Chinese must study the Chinese language” to enable parents of the Chinese community to register their children in Chinese schools (Tay, 2005, p. 152). On the other hand, Lim (1999) suggested that the active initiative of the Chinese entrepreneurs in Chinese education development was a combination of both an act of contributing to society and personal considerations. These personal interests included promoting credibility and status of the Chinese community (p. 163). This is closely associated to the “Interlocking Leadership” phenomenon observed between board members of Chinese schools. The act of donating to Chinese schools was also made into a tradition or rather an obligation for Chinese entrepreneurs who wanted to succeed or looked highly upon by the public.

POST INDEPENDENT - HERITAGE AND CULTURE PROPAGATION IN CHINESE EDUCATION SYSTEM:

With accordance to Dongjiaozong’s concept of “Malaysian Chinese”, Mandarin is the core to Chinese education and culture. The Chinese culture can only be propagated and inherited only if Mandarin is upheld. The following is a survey with reference to the role played by SJK(C) in the inheritance of Chinese culture in Malaysia. The respondents of this survey were Chinese parents of SJK(C) students.¹⁰

Figure 1 discusses main reasons the respondents sent their children to SJK(C). It was found the 61% of Chinese parents sent their children to SJK(C) because the medium is in their mother tongue which is Chinese. This was followed by 16.7% of parents who were drawn to the excellent academic records of SJK(C), 12.4% who felt that students from SJK(C) are more disciplined and 3.9% of the respondents who had different reasons. Based on the feedback of the respondents who had different reasons, it was found that many agreed that this Chinese culture was their roots. Based on the total of respondents who chose option A (vernacular education), there were therefore 65% or 2/3 of respondents who encouraged their children to be exposed to the Chinese culture. This question was studied by Soh (2011) and it was noted that 90% of Chinese parents in Kuala Lumpur and Pahang chose the option “enabling their children to learn their mother tongue”. Data collated also showed outcomes that was parallel to the objectives of Dongjiaozong’s mission: upholding vernacular education.

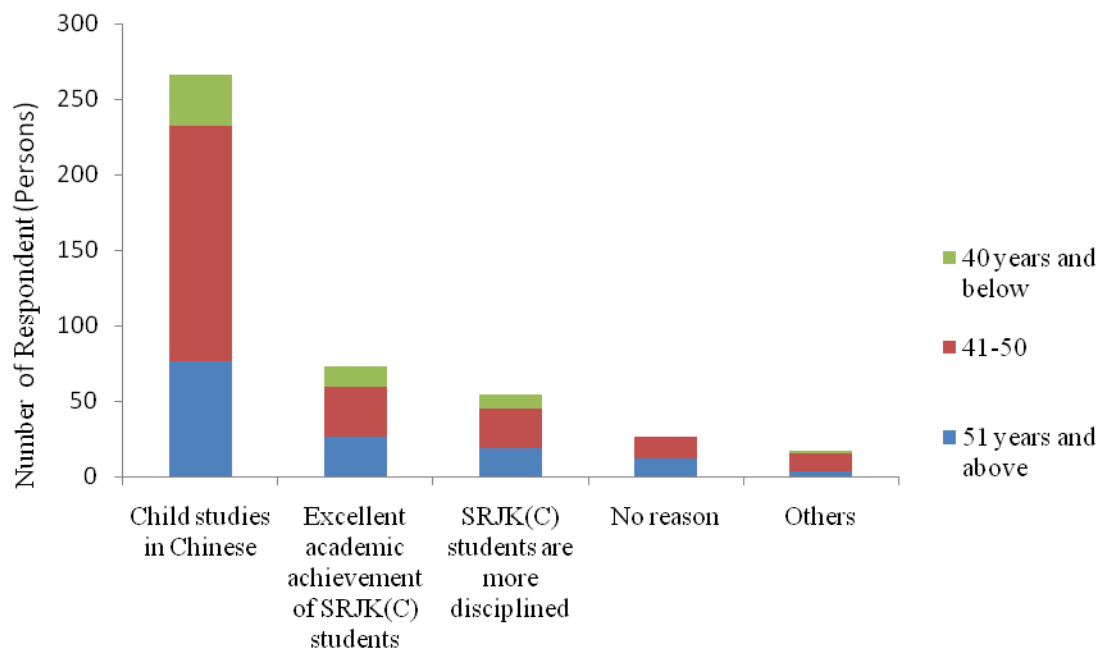
⁷Gellner (1983) believed that in a society where there are many immigrants, animosity between the locals and the foreigners will stimulate a sense of pride towards culture and racial identity. In the Malaya context, it is believed that this pride is also present within the numerous Chinese workers.

⁸In 1911, the Chinese labourers (mining, timber, farmers, woodsmen and others) in the Federated Malay States reached an amount of 252,070 persons. This total was 70% from the total of Chinese occupants at that time. In 1931, the agriculture industry had the greatest number of Chinese labourers. There were 271,580 Chinese male labourers, 41% of the total of Chinese workers. Refer to Lim Chooi Kwa and Loi Cheng Sun, 1984, p. 259-260.

⁹The number of Chinese schools increased from 252 (1920) to 1,015 (1938), experiencing a 400% increment. Refer to Mok Soon Sang, 2000, p. 19 for data on number of students and staffs in Chinese schools.

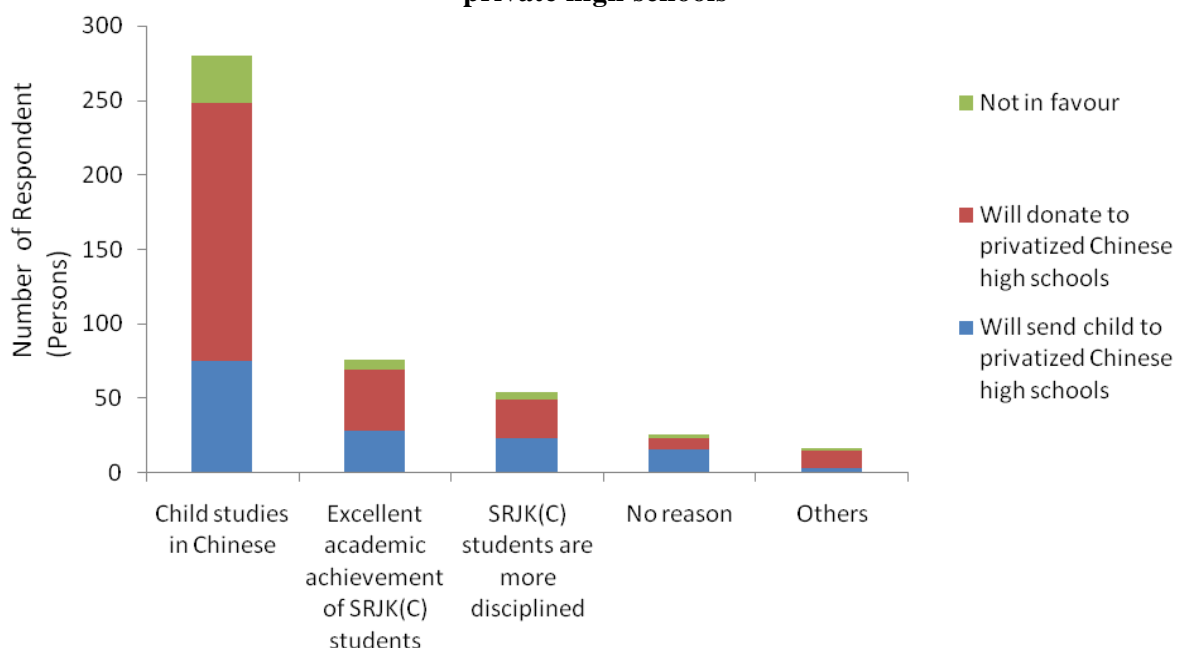
¹⁰Refer to appendices for respondents’ background

Figure 1: Main reasons respondents sent their children to SJK(C)



It was observed that the support of several parents towards vernacular education was only at primary education level. This observation was identical to MCA's concept of "Chineseness". This also portrayed the prominent position held by SJK(C) in maintaining the legacy of Chinese culture. Figure 2 shows that although several respondents had no reason for choosing Chinese elementary education, these few will not send their children to privatized Chinese high schools (SMPC) for secondary education. This trend is clearly shown by respondents who selected the option "children having the opportunity to learn Mandarin". From this group, 30% did not support SMPC (support in terms of enrolment or donations to the school or both). In the group of other respondents, this value stood at 20%. Data collected by researchers were consistent with data in Hua Xia's (1991) research whereby enrolment in SMPC was between 30 to 40% of the total enrolment of Chinese high school students (Tan & Santhiram, 2010).

Figure 2: Reasons respondents sent their children to SJK(C) and their support towards Chinese private high schools



Although the medium in both SJK(C) and SMPC is the same, SJK(C) has a natural advantage over SMPC. SJK(C) is a component in the national education system whilst SMPC and Chinese tertiary education institutes (New Era College) are privatized. For the Chinese, it is meaningful and special for a Chinese educational institution to be part of a national education system. School fees which are far less than privatized institutions is also a significant advantage. The impact of these benefits is highlighted in Table 2. In a survey that was conducted in Alor Setar, there were 32% of Chinese parents with the average age of 44 who would send their children to SMPC. There were 57% of the respondents who would not send their children to SMPC but would donate to these schools while there were 11% who were not in favour of SMPC. It was observed that although respondents in favour of SMPC reached 89%, however only a few would consider sending their children to these type of schools. The observed trend not only shows the new enrolment crisis faced by SMPC but also that these schools do not fit well as Chinese cultural institutes. Economic factors (burdening school fees), educational factors (children not presented with the opportunity to study in three languages), social factors (certificates obtained from SMPC are not recognized by the government and poor job opportunities) as well as personal factors such as feeling ashamed when collecting donations from the public are reasons respondents do not send their children to SMPC according to the survey.

Table 2: Support of respondents towards privatized Chinese high schools

Respondent's age	In favour				Not in favour		Total	
	Sending children to privatized high schools	Percentage	Donating to privatized high schools	Percentage	Number (Persons)	Percentage	Number (Persons)	Percentage
	(Persons)	(%)	(Person)	(%)		(%)		(%)
40 years and below	49	10.52	74	15.88	20	4.29	143	30.69
41-50	83	17.81	155	33.26	23	4.94	261	56.01
≥51	16	3.43	38	8.15	8	1.72	62	13.30
Total	148	31.76	267	57.29	51	10.95	466	100.00

*Exact total number of survey participants was 461 persons. Respondents are 438 persons. There were 28 respondents who chose both “in favour” options.

SJK(C) KEAT HWA (H) – HERITAGE AND PROPAGATION OF MALAYSIAN CHINESE CULTURE CASE STUDY:

SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H) was built in 1911. This school is one of the prominent primary schools in Alor Setar due to its excellent academic and co-curricular track records. Therefore, Keat Hwa has been at all times, the focus of the local Chinese community as well as the Chinese public in general. In 2007, this school was the first SJK(C) to be known as a “Cluster School” by the Ministry of Education to symbolize the outstanding performance of this school. In 2011, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak attended the 100year celebrations of Keat Hwa. This further reaffirms the contributions of this school while increasing its reputation in the education arena. However, the fatal fall of a teacher due to termite infested wooden floors will be a tragedy that will never be forgotten by the Chinese.

Since the Chinese language is the medium in SJK(C), most subjects are taught in Mandarin. The policy of “Teaching and Learning Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI)” implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) reduced the Chinese language composition in the SJK(C) curriculum. Initially, SJK(C) followed the 2-4-3 formula (2 English periods, 4 periods of Mathematics taught in English and 3 periods of Science taught in English). This later changed to the 4-2-2 formula in 2005. Due to fervent protests from most of the Chinese and Malays, this policy was gradually abolished beginning 2012.

According to the timetable of Primary 4 students of SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H) (shown in Table 3), there were 36 periods (1,080 minutes) of subjects taught in Mandarin from a total of 50 periods (1,500 minutes) in a week, whereby one period lasts for 30 minutes. This total constituted 2/3 of the grand total. Chinese language classes which reached 10 periods (300 minutes) makes up for 1/3 of the total time of subjects taught in Mandarin. In SJK(C), subjects not taught in Mandarin are Bahasa Melayu and English as well as Science and Mathematics which is taught in English.

Table 3: Timetable of Primary 4 students of SJK(C)Keat Hwa (H)

	Subject	No.of periods	Minutes
1	Assembly	1	30
2	Physical Education	2	60
3	Mandarin	10	300
4	English	4	120
5	Bahasa Melayu	6	180
6	Science (Mandarin)	3	90
	Science (English)	2	60
7	Mathematics (Mandarin)	6	180
	Mathematics (English)	2	60
8	Civic	2	60
9	Living Skills	2	60
10	Local Studies	2	60
11	Music	2	60
12	Moral Studies	2	60
13	Computer	2	60
14	Art	2	60
Total		50	1500

Apart from taking part in 3 co-curricular categories (sports, clubs/societies and uniform bodies) which is made compulsory by the MOE, Primary 5 and 6 students are also required to attend additional classes organized by the school in preparation for the Primary School Assessment Test (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah, UPSR). There are 15 societies at SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H). Of these 15 clubs, 5 of the following are related to the Chinese culture: Chinese Language Society, Buddhist Society, *Dizi Gui* Society, Chess and Calligraphy Clubs (Table 4). The following table lists the annual activities of the mentioned 5 societies. Students partake in co-curricular activities for 2 hours a week.

Table 4: Annual Activities of 5 Societies at SJK(C) Keat Hwa (H)

Society	Annual Activity
Chinese	Essay competition
	Public speaking competitions
	Chinese poem recital competition
	Story telling
	Riddles
	Vocabulary exercises
Calligraphy	Calligraphy competition
	“Hard brush” calligraphy competition
	Calligraphy training classes
Chess	Chinese chess competition
Buddhist	Buddhist classes
	Singing of Buddhist songs
	Viewing of moral films
Dizi Gui	Classes on teachings of <i>Dizi gui</i>
	Moral story presentation
	Viewing of moral films
	Education on habits and values

Based on the above list of activities, it can be seen that these societies have inherited and propagated the Chinese culture from various aspects. The Chinese society stresses on literature and performance while both calligraphy and chess introduces the traditional arts to the students. The Buddhist society represents the most important religion of the Chinese and the *Dizi Guis* society focuses on propagating ancestral moral values of the Chinese. In other words, most cultural Chinese activities can be found at SJK(C) (except Chinese music and 24 Festive Drums which are not appropriate as a performance for children). However, for activities such as public speaking and Chinese chess, only those who won in competitions held within the school will be further trained by the school. This approach is limited majority of the students to understand and master a Chinese art/tradition with more depth.

During the 100th year celebrations of Keat Hwa schools: [SJK(C) Keat Hwa H, S and K, SMK Keat Hwa 1 and 2 and SMPC Keat Hwa], Chinese traditions were the focus of their performances. These performances included the Chinese Orchestra performance, 24 Festive Drums, Wushu and 2,500 participants of *tuanyuan* (reunion) dinner were brought onto the stage (Sin Chew Daily, 29th & 30th July 2011)

It was noted which activities were highly looked upon by the Chinese society based on the indoor and outdoor activities of SJK(C). In all actuality, 2 hours per week to study these arts was not sufficient for Chinese students to master Chinese culture in depth. Also, Primary 6 students had to forgo these activities to prepare for the UPSR examinations. Thus, the only advantage for Chinese children after 6 years of primary education is to be proficient in Mandarin. This cycle repeats itself among SJK(C) students: inadequate time to master an art causes the student to express his/her disinterest towards Chinese arts as well as the knack of forgetting what is learnt in Chinese primary schools makes it all the more difficult for Chinese students to fully comprehend their culture and traditions. Apart from minimal exposure time to Chinese traditions, external factors (encouragement from both school and parent) as well as the talent and interest of students influences mastering these skills and arts.

It is to be kept in mind that the amount of time allocated for co-curricular is not entirely in the hands of the school. Furthermore, the need of parents to compare their children's test scores which is claimed to be their "pride" with other parents makes the author suspicious as to whether the increase in time slots for Chinese culture and art would receive a good response (this is also the reason why tuition classes are very popular within the Chinese community). Nevertheless, the contributions of SJK(C) in the inheritance and propagation of Chinese culture cannot be dismissed. The significant contributions of SJK(C) enable these schools to be regarded as the bastion of Chinese culture. SJK(C) is a Chinese cultural institution that is most whole as it propagates its values based on both performance and moral aspects. If the Chinese cultural factor is removed from the SJK(C) co-curricular, there is a great possibility that Chinese students will not know and be familiar with Chinese arts such as calligraphy. Also, since the legacy of Chinese culture is at a shallow level, the core values of Chinese culture can only be learned through personal effort and this raises a concern within the Chinese community.

CONCLUSION:

The result of research is echo with Lieberman (1970) findings in his minority studies. The Chinese, who were a minority numerically, built educational and cultural institution through their economic strength instead.¹¹ If the Chinese are able to continue their legacy and propagate their culture, this would indicate that they have been able to adapt to the Malaysian environment.¹² In hopes of defending their education and culture, the politically weak Chinese have invented various traditions to further strengthen solidarity and consciousness of ethnic identity.

In an imagined community which is based on Chinese education, the author believes that the main attraction in this community is not the history of the fight of Chinese educators nor the will to construct a "perfect Chinese education system" but both the cultural and commercial value of "Chinese language (which refer to Mandarin)". Mandarin is the very core of this community. Dongjiaozong's concept of equating Chinese culture with Mandarin was agreed upon by a part of the Chinese community. There are Chinese parents who are satisfied if

¹¹ According to Lieberman, the minority race (numerical) most probably has their own educational and cultural institution if they are economically and/or politically influential. Refer to Lieberman in Berghe, 1972, p. 41.

¹² According to Guo Hongji (1997), a cultural institution is a tool in aiding a race to adapt to a new environment. However, this adaptation is "symbolic". This adaptation process will widen the gap between and within races. If cultural heterogeneity becomes a political choice of a particular race, then oppression and tension within races will surface (p. 94-5). In the Malaysian context, the mainstream voice of the Chinese was to preserve the diverse culture of multiracial community of the country. For this reason, the Chinese reinvented the Chinese culture and propagated it. This caused the majority (Malays) to be unsatisfied and subsequently, the government discouraged the development of Chinese culture. Finally, the Chinese opposed the "nation" concept and the assimilation brought about by this concept.

their children only studies the Chinese language at elementary level and there are also those who believe that their children need not necessarily understand the Chinese language but as long as they can converse in Mandarin, it is enough for them to be identified as a Chinese and to be mindful of their ancestral roots. Although their train of thoughts is not identical to those of Dongjiaozong, however, what is demonstrated to the public is the same: people who converse in Mandarin are Chinese who have embraced the Chinese culture.

The status and role of SJK(C) in propagating the legacy and culture of the Chinese is still deemed to be superior till today. The cultural function, however, is not subject to the school alone but also applicable to parents and at the same time, the board of directors of the schools. It is obvious that the Chinese society was not fully supportive of vernacular education. The support and protest of English education as well as the issue of PPSMI saw the division of the Chinese society into several groups. In the city, in particular the Selangor-Kuala Lumpur area, it is a common scenario where Chinese people do not understand or rarely converse in Mandarin. It is also not unusual to find many who only converse in English or are able to converse in Mandarin but unable to write in Chinese. Previous findings were able to summarize the attitude of the Chinese towards their own culture into 2: 1) Those who have the characteristics of a “Chinese” as proposed by Dongjiaozong and 2) Those who are indifferent towards the Chinese culture.

In fact, the government was not successful in changing the attitude of the Chinese who only prioritized the Chinese and/or English languages and were apathetic towards the national language despite the many policies implemented to reinforce the national language. Based on the above observations, the author feels that if the government was to change the medium to English, it will most probably have a great impact on Chinese education and further dilute the support of the Chinese community towards Chinese education.¹³ If the underdevelopment of the Chinese economy causes the commercial value of the Chinese language to decline, the support of a part of the Chinese towards the Chinese language would also be questionable. The attitude of the Chinese who stresses more on English than their mother tongue is not something new. In fact this behavior has been observed since the early 1960s.¹⁴

Nonetheless, for Lim Lian Geok, vernacular and English educations are not conflicting: the mother tongue is applied for national education while English is applied for higher learning education and used as the medium in academic and research fields (Tay, 2005, p.164). This bilingual concept is practiced in the Malaysian education system today. Unfortunately, Lim’s opinions from an educational point of view were never given much thought by Dongjiaozong (probably because Lim’s opinions were contradictory to those of Dongjiaozong who fought for the complete and comprehensive Chinese education system). Apparently, there were contradictory behaviors of the Chinese towards vernacular education but this was not the case. Most parents prioritize their children’s future, therefore they will allow their children to receive vernacular education. Although their children are not sent to privatized Chinese high schools, they would still generously donate to these schools. This deed of theirs indicates that they are supportive of Chinese education and the learning of Chinese culture.

So far, the Chinese culture propagated by SJK(C) focuses on performing arts. However, this type of art does not cover a broad scope of functions. It serves more as a “symbolic” tool, one that is of great help in shaping the image of the Chinese which is what clearly differentiates them from the other ethnics. Thus, the primary role of SJK(C) is not to teach a Chinese child to master and practice the Chinese culture but rather to help them to be acquainted with a culture that should be practiced by a Chinese. Chances are they will not practice this culture but at the very least they will not forget that this culture is theirs. The “bastion of Chinese culture” can also be interpreted as SJK(C) explaining to Chinese children what their culture is through textbooks and co-curricular activities.

SJK(C) did not omit the propagation of the values of Chinese culture. However, these efforts were objected by some of the headmasters/mistresses and parents. Also, Chinese organizations failed to give clear definitions to the meaning of the values of Chinese culture (for example; not taking the initiative to change the negative aspects of the Chinese image such as greedy, liars and others) and this makes the shaping of a “cultured and with moral” Chinese at present, difficult. The “Community Chest” issue¹⁵ and the change in name of SJK(C)

¹³Based on Wong Chipchoo’s views, the Chinese education crisis was existent since as early as 1904 (crisis here means the change of streams of Chinese secondary schools. At that time, Chinese parents chose English education for their children to meet the demands of human resource. Today, English is an international language. Refer to <http://www.merdeka.com/pnews/18332.html>

¹⁴According to Ho Kok Chung’s study (2002), most of the Chinese at that time behaved in different ways. These contradicting behaviours stemmed from the need of Chinese parents who wanted to reach a balance between what was ideal (Chinese education) and what was realistic (better job opportunities and a brighter future). However, reality overruled what was ideal. In the 1960s, many parents sent their children to SMJK(C) for the sake of a brighter future causing the decline in enrolment in privatized Chinese high schools and the increase in SMJK(C) year by year. The enrolment in privatized Chinese high schools saw a drop from 34,410 students in 1962 to 18,476 students in 1969. This enrolment problem caused several of these private Chinese high schools to be closed down (p. 82).

¹⁵The chairman of The Community Chest is the chairman of Genting Malaysia, Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay who joined forces with Chinese

Chee Wen¹⁶ revealed unpleasant developments throughout the period of time SJK(C) was low on funding allocations and under the *Interlocking leadership* within the board of directors. In this way, the level of contribution to SJK(C) is all about the amount of donation, regardless any other consideration, such as the source of the money. Furthermore, the level of contribution of Chinese entrepreneurs has been simplified to the post in the board of director and quantified to the amount of donation. However, this statement does not mean we acquired the legitimacy to deny their contribution in Chinese schools.

Last but not least, the main and primary role of SJK(C) in advocating the cultural legacy is to take measures to propagate the values of Malaysian Chinese culture as soon as possible.

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and Indian entrepreneurs (other members included the chairman of Hong Leong Financial Group, Tan Sri Quek Leng Chan, the founder of SP Setia, Tan Sri Lee Lim Thye and others). This fund was established after they bought Pan Malaysia Pools Sdn Bhd. This fund donated RM26.1 million to 61 schools since 26 September 2011. This project brought about controversy whereby supporters of this fund believed that this fund was a great help to Chinese schools but protestors were worried there would be a change in financial allocation to non mainstream schools from the government to the private sector. The government reduced the financial allocation for Chinese schools after the launch of this fund and profit gained from gambling was not appropriate to be used for educational efforts.

¹⁶The board of directors of SJK(C) Chee Wen accepted Lee Hwa Beng's suggestion (a member of the board of directors) to change the school's name to SJK(C) Dato Cheah Hua as recognition for the large contributions made by the father of the chairman of Sunway Group, Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah Fook Ling. This suggestion was accepted by the Ministry of Education but raised protests within the Chinese society. Since the protests were getting stronger, the board of directors reused the school's former name. This was approved by the Ministry of Education.

ANNEXES

1) BACKGROUND OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

The respondents were randomly selected. There were a total of 461 parents (253 males, 203 females and 5 which did not state their gender) from 8 SJK(C) schools located in Alor Setar: Keat Hwa (H), Keat Hwa (S), Sin Min, Peng Min, Boon Hwa, Chee Nan, Cheng Yu and Kee Chee. The average age of respondents was 44 years. From the total of respondents, 93.5% were Buddhists and 93.7% received vernacular education at elementary level or higher. There were 17 persons (3.7%) who did not receive vernacular education.

2) DATA FOR STATISTICS AND TABLES:

Obtained data was analyzed using the SPSS Software (Version 18)

Cross tabulation: Main reasons respondents send their children to SJK(C) *Respondent's Age
Table A: Reasons for sending children to SJK(C)

		Age of Respondent			Total (Persons)
		40 years and below	41-50	51 years and above	
Primary reasons	Child studies in Chinese	76	156	34	266
	Excellent academic achievement of SRJK(C) students	26	33	14	73
	SRJK(C) students are more disciplined	19	26	9	54
	No reason	12	14	0	26
	Others	3	12	2	17
Total (Persons)		136	241	59	436

Cross tabulation: Main reasons respondents send their children to SJK(C) *In favour of privatized Chinese high schools

Table B: Reasons for sending children to SJK(C) and respond towards privatized Chinese high schools

Primary reasons	Respond towards privatized Chinese high schools			Total (Persons)
	In favour		Not in favour	
	Will send child to privatized Chinese high schools	Will donate to privatized Chinese high schools		
Child studies in Chinese	75	173	32	280
Excellent academic achievement of SRJK(C) students	28	41	7	76
SRJK(C) students are more disciplined	23	26	5	54
No reason	16	7	3	26
Others	3	12	2	17
Total (Persons)	145	259	49	453
