

## AN ANALYSIS ON ETHNIC RELATION BETWEEN THE MALAY AND CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA FROM CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION'S EXPERIENCES

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### Abstract

*Stable ethnic relation in a multiethnic country like Malaysia is of paramount importance for the nations' various plans, especially for economic developments to be carried out without glitches. Previous works on this issue were focused mainly on political agenda, social class and economic disparity. Over the years, though, some of the issues have become irrelevant and obsolete, ethnic issue keeps rearing its ugly head. In this research, the problem of ethnic relation is scrutinized from a new angle - the civilizational perspective. The differences in the community's core pillars and core values, which are embedded in each civilization, are found to be the main reasons that perpetuate the conflicts between the Malays and Chinese until today. The civilization factors focused here are the language and education that have been revisited since pre-independent days until recently, with the aim of seeking the underlying reasons that have sustained the conflict. Based on available literature, it can be concluded that the prevailing conflict between the two communities can be attributed to civilizational factors.*

**Keywords:** Civilizational perspective, Malays, Chinese, ethnic conflicts, language and education, Malaysia.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Interactions between the Malay and Chinese civilizations can be traced back to since 3 A.C. However, during the British colonization, especially at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large cohort of Chinese immigrants from the Southern parts of China found its way to Malaya, to be employed as laborers in the burgeoning tin mining and plantation sectors then. Naturally, they brought along their own civilizational values which contrasted with the values embraced by the local populace. Over time, when they began to outnumber the locals especially in urban areas, frictions with the local population began to take place. Tracking the events from the time the decentralization policy by British was introduced until today, most of the significant conflicts between the Malays and Chinese can be classified as civilizational in nature. Civilizational perspective refers to a set of core pillars revered by every community.

For the Malays, it includes the Malay's political supremacy, language and the religion of Islam. For the Chinese, the most protected ones are the Chinese language, education, culture and economy. When past events were analyzed, it was discovered that any effort by the government to introduce any policy which may jeopardize any of these core pillars, was met with stiff resistance. However, the way each community put up resistance depends on the community's core values. For the Malays, their core values are deeply rooted in *budi-Islam*<sup>1</sup> (Zainal Kling, 1995: 15; Zainal Kling, 1993a: 11; Wan Abdul Kadir, 1993: 1-15), which generates values like being respectful of others. Thus, the approach of solving any problem is normally based on the principle of tolerance since the community's ultimate objective is to maintain peace. As for the Chinese, their core values are founded on *filial piety*<sup>2</sup> (Hsieh Yu-we, 1977: 170-186) which then generates values such as Sino-centricity and pragmatism, and their core pillars are protected by their numerous clan-based associations.

### 2.0 CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The human race is responsible in shaping and molding civilization or culture. Therefore, the achievement of a civilization or culture is a reflection of a community's capability (S. Takdir Alisjahbana, 1966: 149; Huntington, S.P. 1962: 41). They are the values upheld by a society that include their norms, institutions, way of thinking and aesthetical values.

<sup>1</sup> Budi plays a significant role in the Malay social system. In short, the word budi could be literally translated as 'being grateful'.

<sup>2</sup> It means as perpetual love and respect towards parent.

The nexus between civilization and culture is very strong since both share similar civilizational values such as religion, custom, language, economy, politics, social and arts (Bozeman, A.B. 1975: 1). When a civilization or culture is viewed through this perspective, it is found to be a continuous cycle as mankind has to keep adapting to the changes in their surrounding environments in order to survive. Culture, in a broader term, refers to the situation - when there is a community, there is bound to be a certain type of culture.

Civilization is perceived to be the highest achievement of a culture (Huntington, S.P. 1962: 41-42), and civilizational perspective refers to a set of core values embedded in every civilization or culture. Its significance is only revealed through the process of interactions with social norms and physical environments. Through social norms, where the core values have been percolated, it is then shaped, which in turn influence the core pillars. In the course of this reciprocating diffusion between core pillars and core values, the image and identity of a community will be exposed. Besides, it also exhibits its distinctive characters when a community interacts with another community that embraces different core values and core pillars. These core values unconsciously serve as the internal guides that shape the actions as well as behaviors of a community in determining whether to forge cooperation or opt for conflict as the means of safeguarding their core pillars.

### **3.0 INTERACTION BETWEEN MALAYS AND CHINESE: THE CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

The position of the Malays as a civilized ethnic can be seen through their achievement in spreading their civilizational values in South East Asia, as their influence has spread far and wide to the African coast and Malagasy in the west, and Taiwan and Japan in the north and Pacific Islands in the east (A. Aziz Deraman, 2000: 13). However, the core area only covers the Malay and Indochina peninsular, the Islands of Philippine, Indonesia and Borneo (*Ensiklopedia Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, 1999: 1643-1646). Various names have been given to this area, such as *Kunlun*, Nusantara, Malay world, *Jawi Land* and Eastern Pearl (Zainal Kling, 1995: 1). Although the lands are separated by mountain ranges and seas, the communities of the region practice similar Malay-Islamic values, which leads to the sharing of identical civilizational values (A. Aziz Deraman, 2000).

#### **3.1 Budi-Islam as the Malay Core Value**

The core value, *budi*, depicts the intellect of the Malays. The word *budi* is derived from the word *budidaya* or *budaya*. *Budi* refers to the mind and *daya* is the physical movement; and the combination reflects the movement as a result of expression of the Malay mind which has subconsciously been molded by the Malay heritage (Zainal Kling, 1995: 15). The ultimate objective of *budi* is to maintain peace in social relationships. With the arrival of Islam, the Islamic values are absorbed in the mould of *budi* and the core pillars, and as a result, it generates Islamic practices which amplify the 'Malayness' of the Malay people. The diffusions between the core values and core pillars shape the identity of the Malays. The emergence of these core values is enhanced through the practices of Malay customs, rites or *adat*. Besides, the geographical factors of the area that is almost free from natural disasters and the surroundings which are rich with natural resources have positively contributed to the enhancement of these values. The manifestation of the core values is augmented in the ideas, characteristics, building designs and arts, and how the Malays interact with their own community as well as with other communities (Roff, W. 1975: 16; Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000: 20).

One of the pillars of the Malay civilization is its political supremacy (Reid, A. 2004: 3), which reflects the loyalty of the Malays toward their leaders. This trait can be retraced to the concept of *Waad*<sup>3</sup> (Zainal Kling, 1995: 3; Chandra Muzaffar, 1979: 3-4). A leader is obliged to safeguard the welfare of his subordinates, and as a reciprocating act, the masses pledge their loyalty to him. Before the arrival of colonial powers, the loyalty of the Malays was directed towards their Sultan and aristocrats. However, after the independence, the emergence of political parties under a democratic system witnessed the loyalty being shifted to political parties such as United Malay National Organization (UMNO) (Chandra Muzaffar, 1979: 1-20) and *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS). In general, these Malay Islamic values are akin to all cultures in the Southeast Asia region which can be historically traced in the Aceh, Johor-Riau and Brunei governments. The inoculation of Islamic values into the Malay core values occurred as a result of the *Islamization* process that commenced in the 7-11 A.C. Both of these values shaped the Malay's core pillars especially in politics, religion, custom and language. Although many scholars had discussed the Malay-Islamic values, however, they shied away from identifying the values that steer the thinking and behavior of the Malays.

<sup>3</sup> This principle enjoins the ruler to be fair to the subjects and the subjects need to be loyal to the ruler. If the ruler decision is unjust and based on ill will, God (Allah) will destroy his kingdom as what had happened in the past.

Through this Malay-Islamic values, all the core pillars of the Malays are shaped and molded in a reciprocating manner, such that the outlook of all those core pillars reveal the Malay-Islamic identity and image (Lim Kim Hui, 2003: 58).

### **3.2 Filial Piety as The Chinese's Core Value**

The Chinese ethnic's value is centered on *Jēn* or *Rēn* (Lok Chong Hoe, 1998: 1) or humanity which could be understood as good virtues and love for all human beings (Hsieh Yu-we, 1977: 307; Dawson, R. 1964: 372). It may also refer to moral consciousness which is imbued with good characters like love, which is family centered. The emergence of *Ren* can only be seen when it interacts with *filial piety* (Hsieh Yu-we, 1977: 170). *Filial piety* is the root that guides moral life in the aspects of family and human relations (Ben-Ami Scharfstein, 1986: 6; Ikels, 2004: 2-3; Thomas Tsu-wee Tan, 1986: 19). It plays a leading role in actualizing the value of being a superior race, Sino-centric and pragmatic. All these are the result of combining social norms founded upon philosophy, the ideas of kinship and son of heaven, and geographical factors.

The reciprocating diffusion of Chinese core pillars and *filial piety* reveal the identity of the Chinese. Being imbued with Sino-centric values has made them, more often than not, inclined towards the sidelining of non Chinese value systems. However, good relationships with other communities could prevail if they believe that there is something in return for them. Through the pragmatic principle, they subject themselves to accept changes, a strategy to protect their Chinese identities. As a result, the Chinese do not have a prevailing identity as they are willing to endure changes, which depends much on the surrounding environment in China, or the host countries where they are residing. The elements include the attitude of the local population, the strength of the Chinese population and their economy. This particular type of attitude prevails either among traditional Chinese as well as immigrants.

Although the immigrants have faced a myriad of disunity issues among themselves due to certain elements such as the differences in immigration period, dialect and their place of origin in China, they were all guided by the same value of *filial piety* which transpired through their Sino-centric and pragmatic attitudes. *Filial piety* naturally compelled them into forming clan-based associations, social clubs and bands which act as protectors to their welfare and core pillars. The role of these associations reveals its true nature when they interact with the Malays with the objective of protecting their core pillars from being sidelined in Malaya and subsequently Malaysia.

## **4.0 THE CLASH BETWEEN MALAY AND CHINESE REGARDING LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION FROM CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **4.1 Pre and Post-Independent's Language and Education Issues**

Language and education are among the most important core pillars, and the two are always intertwined. Through education, an ethnic community can preserve their language, for language is a mean of expressing and reinvigorating their soul (Ismail Hussein, 1990: 2-4). However, in a multiethnic society, in order to create a national identity and to unite the residents, it requires an effective implementation of a national language and education. To the Malays, all the attributes of the national identity should be based on their core pillars since they are the original inhabitants of the land. To the Chinese, their values can only be sustained by nurturing their language; therefore any attempt that can weaken the moves of reinvigorating their language will be faced with stiff resistance.

The conflict between the Malays and the immigrant Chinese on language and education started when the British government was preparing for the independence of Malaya in the 1950s. Two committees were formed to look into the Malay and Chinese education systems. The Barnes report, headed by L. J. Barnes from Oxford University proposed the implementation of a one-type education system. The report also put forth the notion that only Malay and English languages should be used as the medium of instruction in the primary education level in order to enhance unity among the Malaya peoples. Besides, the report also recommended that vernacular schools should be abolished, and replaced with a new type of national school since (Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean, 1971: 24) vernacular schools had failed to unite the people from different ethnics. In fact, at times, the schools' teachings were more inclined towards subversive elements relating to Communist Malaya Party's (CMP) activities (Ho Hui Ling, 2004: 188). Malay nationalists opposed the report because it placed the Malay language at the same level as English language. According to them, it was a humiliation to the integrity of the Malays and may eventually jeopardize the Malay-Islamic values. Based on that, *Party Negara* (PN) proposed for the Malay language to be recognized as the language of the Federation of Malaya.

As for the establishment of a national school system, it was supported by the Federation of Malaya Student Union and endorsed by The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney as it was believed that it could help contain communist influence (Ramlah Adam, 2004: 211).

The report was however lambasted by Chinese immigrants, especially on the abolishment of Chinese schools and the sidelining of the Chinese language. They viewed it as an act of discriminating their core pillars because to the Chinese, it is chagrin if one cannot speak the mother tongue. It was the hope of Chinese parents to have their children complete Chinese education in Mandarin at the primary level, especially since it was considered an integral step in instilling the spirit of pure 'Chineseness' (Purcell, V. 1956: 222). To guard the Chinese education, they formed societies such as 'Jiazong'<sup>4</sup> (1951) and 'Dongzong'<sup>5</sup> (1954), and both criticized the Barnes report.

*'Barnes report declared the abolishment of Chinese education, Education Ordinance 1952 meted death sentence to it and Education White Paper 1954 had dug a grave for it...'* (Kua Kia Song, 1990: 69)

Although Tan Cheng Lock had agreed with Tunku to reduce the demand for 'multi-culturism', he was just being pragmatic, but behind-the-scene, he continued to defend the Chinese language and education. The position of *Jiazong* and *Dongzong* became stronger when Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) leaders attended the congress organized by these societies and gave their endorsement to the Chinese education policy (Sia Keng Yek, 1997: 36-37). The cooperation between MCA and other Chinese associations had resulted in the formation of Malaysian Chinese Association Education Central Committee (MCACECC), or better known as *Sanda Jigou*<sup>6</sup>. The main role was to spearhead the opposition towards the 1952 Education Ordinance that was led by Tan Cheng Lock himself (Thock Ker Pong, 2005: 45).

In order to avoid a possible chaotic situation that may arise due to opposition from the Chinese, Sir Henry Gurney established another committee to reassess the position of the Chinese education. His objective was to instill the spirit of unity in the field of education by putting English and Malay languages as the medium of instruction. The committee was chaired by Dr. William P. Fenn, a member of Chinese higher education trustee board and Dr. Wu Teh Yao, an expert from the United Nation. The *Fenn-Wu* report comprised of three suggestions. First, it defended the status of Chinese education and urged the government to provide financial support, and suggested that the vernacular education contribute towards the establishment of a united Malaya nation and nurtures the spirit of Malayan nationalism. Therefore, the schools should be preserved until the Chinese community feel that it is no longer necessary. Secondly, the Chinese language should not be abandoned since it is one of the most widely used languages in the world and has its own appeal. Third, the Chinese school system should change the syllabus to be more Malaya-oriented and abandon the syllabus from China which is inclined towards mainland politics.

As the report proposed to preserve the Chinese values, it was unanimously supported by the community. *Jiazong* criticized the *Barnes Report* and urged the government to accept the *Fenn-Wu Report*. The association also sent a report to the president of the United Nation on the education policy of Malaya which was accused to be discriminatory (Thock Ker Pong, 2005: 44). The urge from *Dongjiazong*<sup>7</sup> was so strong, to the extent that MCA had to hold a meeting with all the Alliance leaders for the purpose of getting the Chinese support for the 1955's general election. However, the demand for the Chinese language to be recognized as a second official language was rejected by Tunku, although he promised to relook into the 1952 and 1954 Education Ordinance (Tan Liok Ee, 1997: 156). The attitude of tolerance was obviously mirrored among the other Malay leaders, such as when Tunku requested Dato Abdul Razak to re-evaluate the policy after the Alliance won in the 1955 general election. It led to the birth of the Razak Report on 7 May 1956.

*'The purpose of education policy in this country is all races will use a single education regulation which using national language as a medium of instruction'* (Penyata Razak Perenggan 12).

<sup>4</sup> Jiazong that represents the vernacular school teachers was formed in 1951.

<sup>5</sup> Dongzong is the main body that represents the Federal Association of Management Board (Donglianhui) that was established in 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Combination of cooperation between Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Chinese associations gave birth to Malaysian Chinese Association Chinese Education Central Committee (MCACECC). It also known as Sanda Jigou, with the aim to spearhead the effort to oppose Ordinance 1952.

<sup>7</sup> Dongjiazong is the abbreviated name that represents the merger of two major Chinese associations, which are United Chinese School Committee Association (UCSCA or Dongzong) and United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA or Jiazong) that was responsible in protecting the interests of Chinese vernacular schools.

However, the unsatisfied attitude prevailed among the immigrant Chinese, when the final objective of the education policy was to have all schools embrace the national language as the medium of instruction as they presumed that the Chinese schools will be abolished sometime in the future.

As a step to defend the existence of Chinese schools, the *Jiazhong* chairman, a *Dongzhong* and MCA representative, requested Tun Razak to drop the phrase 'final objective' from the Report and in order to please the Chinese, he promised to exclude it, which he later did. In the end, Chinese schools were accepted as part of the national education system. Malaya achieved her independence on 31 August 1957, as a new nation (nation-state) with a specific political boundary. However, the building of a new united nation was still far from being successful. The tolerant attitude of UMNO leaders in defending the rights of the Malays as the original inhabitants of the land with her distinct culture and civilization caused the failure to assimilate the Malays' core pillars into the national education system. The failure was echoed by both Dato' Onn and Dr Burhanuddin Helmi. According to Dato' Onn,

*'I appeal to every Malay who passionately love his clan, race and country to think deeply and meticulously so that in future our grand children will not chastise us due to our lack of consciousness in our responsibility today by agreeing and approving changes which in the future will weaken the strength and position of the Malay in the land called Malay peninsula, a country admitted by Alliance itself where Malay was said to be the son of the soil.'* (Ramlah Adam, 2004: 271)

On the Chinese' side, the failure of MCA to make the Chinese language recognized as another national language or official language after the independence had caused an internal rift in the party, to the extent that it threatened their ties with UMNO in the Alliance. The obnoxious attitude of the Chinese was obvious, when they abandoned the consensually agreed terms before the independence, as stipulated in the constitution of Independence. Two weeks after the proclamation of independence, MCACECC requested the government not to give too much emphasis on the issues of converting the status of Chinese secondary schools, and urged for the use of Chinese language in public examinations. However, the requests were plainly rejected by the government. The rejection triggered a number of demonstrations by students from Chinese secondary schools in Penang and Kuala Lumpur, which later spread throughout the country. Nonetheless, these aggressive acts failed to yield any positive outcomes. The weakness of MCA to openly support the struggle to uplift the status of Chinese language and education had made Tan Cheng Lock to become less popular.

Hence, he was the casualty in the MCA supreme meeting in Mac 1958, where he was defeated by a more outspoken leader, Dr. Lim Chong Eu (Tan Liok Ee, 1997: 246). Under Dr. Lim's leadership, Tunku faced a huge pressure from the Chinese community when the MCA president openly requested for the preservation of the Chinese language and Chinese education. As a gesture of his support to the demand of the Chinese associations, Dr. Lim attended a symposium on Chinese education which was organized by MCACECC and threw a strong support to the association's cause. Four resolutions were declared - native language should be used as a medium of instruction, as well as in public examinations for vernacular schools; fairness in the field of education for all races; and that a representative from Chinese associations should be appointed to assist the government to understand the problems related to Chinese education (Thock Ker Pong, 2005: 47).

Due to the increase in the population of Chinese in Malaya and the eligibility of voting, the Chinese spirit grew stronger. The new president promptly requested for equal rights with the Malays. Against this background, Lim put forth the demand for the allocation of 40 parliamentary seats for the coming general election, based on the grounds that the number of Chinese voters had increased to 35.6% compared to 11.2% in the last election. This sudden increase was due to Tunku's move in granting citizenship status based on the principle of *Jus soli*. The aggressiveness of MCA was well exhibited when the information head openly declared the party's demands in a newspaper, without considering the feelings of his Malay counterpart.

*'The MCA will stand absolutely firm on the issue of Chinese education and the allocation of seats for the MCA... As compromise... we are prepared to accept 35 seats-nothing less.'* (Straits Times, 10 July 1959).

The overzealous demands of MCACECC were plainly rejected by Tunku. In fact, the *Rahman Talib Report* which was announced in August 1960 was a slap on the face to the Chinese education, as compared to the Razak Report in 1956. The report outlined that, all the secondary schools that received financial aids from the government were required to use national language as the medium of instruction and failure to do so will result in the schools being abolished or converted to private school status.

Besides, the report also stated that all public examinations were to be conducted either in Malay or English language. The report was approved in the Parliament, and became an education act of 1961. The act was viewed as the starting point of the national education policy, as the status of national schools was further strengthened through the provision of phase 21(2).

*'The Education Minister is empowered to convert any national type school to national school when he thinks it is appropriate'. (Malaya 1961: Para 2, Article 121.)*

However, the government's efforts to spur national unity through the use of the Malay language as national language was hindered by the actions of *Jiazhong* that was always skeptical towards the objectives of the *Rahman Talib Report*. Although the report recognized Chinese primary schools as part of the national education system in Para 122 (a) and it is fully funded by the government, the *Jiazhong* Chairman, Lim Lian Geok was still apprehensive towards the status of the Chinese language. He accused that Para 133 in the *Rahman Talib Report* will fulfill the government's intention of having Malay language as the medium of instruction in primary schools. To add to his claim that the government was marginalizing the vernacular school, he manipulated the report by indicating that Malay language had been used for that purpose (Tan Yao Sua, 2005), and his argument was supported by *Dongjiazhong*.

To deny the use of Malay language in vernacular schools, *Jiazhong* tried to trigger the policy of multilingualism. When the *Jiazhong* chairman was still adamant in opposing the *Rahman Talib Report* and education act of 1961 to the extent that it created tension in ethnic relations, the government acted by revoking his teaching license as well as his citizenship (Thock Ker Pong, 2005: 49). The process of nation building faced a tremendous challenge when there was a clash between the tolerant Malays and Sino-centric and pragmatic Chinese. The recalcitrant attitude of Chinese educationists was obvious through their unwillingness to cooperate with the government, and it was the major source of problems. The disagreement on language and education issues was mirrored in the results of the 1959 general election which showed that the support for the Alliance party had decreased from 81.7 % in 1955 to 51.5 % in 1959. Chinese voters diverted their votes to the People Progressive Party and Socialist Front (SF), since both were supporting the Chinese demands. The failure of UMNO to stand firm on the language issue and national language, coupled with the disagreements on citizenship policy and 1957 constitution among the Malays, swayed the Malays' vote to PAS and *Parti Negara* (Ramlah Adam, 2004: 312-313).

Although the formation of Malaysia was successfully realized in 1963, the language and education issues remained at the fore front. The bitterness and dissatisfaction among the Chinese reinvigorated in 1965 when the government tabled the law on national language and put the Malay language as the sole national language starting in 1967; and the struggle to position the Chinese language at par with the Malay language was unsuccessful. Although the Chinese residents of Malaysia were divided into many parties and associations, however, when it came to the issues that concerned their core pillars, they stood united regardless of whether the parties were government allies or opposition parties. MCA had put a lot effort to ensure that the Chinese language was placed at par with the Malay language, at least on application aspects such as on the road and office signage and government forms. DAP openly urged the government to accept Chinese and Tamil languages to be part of official functions of the government. As for the United Democratic Party (UDP), a splinter group of ex-MCA members led by Lim Chong Eu, although the party supported Malay language as the national language, they opposed any effort by the government to stop Chinese education because such action would hinder the development of the Chinese language. However, the opposition from this party was not so strong because it was a multiracial party (Ongkili, J.1985: 196).

The strongest opposition came from Chinese associations like *Dongjiazhong*, Chinese Chambers of Commerce (CCC), *Huiguan* (dialect associations), and their action was supported by the-then MCA's Deputy Youth Chief. As a result, they formed a committee known as Working Committee of Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia dedicated for the purpose of uplifting the Chinese language as another official language. They sent a memorandum to Tunku and when he did not respond, they launched a campaign to collect signatures to show that their cause was supported by 1201 Chinese associations (Sia Keng Yek, 1997: 48). However, the effort was not successful when the government enforced the National Language Act of 1967. The Act does not only protect the position of Malay language, it is also considered as a sensitive issue which cannot be questioned by any parties starting from 1967. With this Act, the position of English as one of the widely used languages in the country was also affected.

On the education front, the Ministry of Education enforced a rule that starting from December 1967, any student who wants to study abroad must possess either Cambridge School Certificate or Malaysian Certificate of Education. Since many Chinese students had low levels of English language as well as qualifications, the Chinese associations demanded for the setting up of a Chinese University. According to them, the opportunity for Chinese students to enrol in a university was limited when *Nanyang University* was separated from the Chinese vernacular education due to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. Their objective was to have a complete Chinese education system starting from primary school up to tertiary education (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 170), even though it contradicted with the government's policy. However, due to a high spirit of Sino-centric, they did not take regard of the National Education Policy and entrusted *Dongjiazhong* to carry out their ambition. Initially, *Dongjiazhong* planned for a university with Chinese as the medium of instruction and the name suggested for the university was Independent University (*Merdeka* University). When Malay leaders rejected the idea, they tried to be more pragmatic by coining the idea that the proposed university will use several medium of instructions and other languages should be allowed in certain fields (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 170).

The association claimed that the education policy that they were embarking on was parallel with the spirit of the Federal Constitution, which encouraged the growth of languages of non-Malay ethnics. Although the establishment of the university was opposed by the government, *Dongjiazhong* was adamant to carry on. Then, on 8 May 1969, they set up a private company known as *Merdeka* University to coordinate the efforts of establishing the university, following in the footsteps of *Nanyang University*. This effort was supported by more than 199 Chinese associations. The issue of establishing *Merdeka* University was highly politicized by Democratic Action Party (DAP) in order to draw the Chinese voters, and the party was firmly behind *Dongjiazhong*. According to them, the use of certain ethnic languages would not affect the national identity (Vasil, R.K. 1972: 31-32).

DAP's attitude of openly supporting the education agenda of *Dongjiazhong* paid off, when the party managed to garner a strong support from the Chinese community in the 1969 election. As for the MCA, although the struggle to protect the Chinese language and education continued, at the same time, the party had to safeguard its political connection with UMNO. For that reason, the *Merdeka* University issue created a perplexing dilemma to MCA, and the party tried to seek a middle ground to solve the problem. At first, MCA rejected the proposed university for the sake of preserving a good relationship with UMNO. However, because of their stand, the party was lambasted by the Chinese community (Karl Von Vorys, 1975: 205).

As an alternative, MCA offered to establish a pre-university college known as Tunku Abdul Rahman College to soothe the Chinese community in the 1969 election (Vasil, R.K. 1972: 176). To *Dongjiazhong*, MCA's rejection was unforgiveable and since the association's clout among the Chinese was very strong, MCA was unable to pacify the issue. Cornered by the circumstances and desperate for support from the grassroots Chinese community, MCA toned down the stand and cooperated with the organizer of the university to apply for registration. To make things more complicated, before the university's supporters and organizers cooperated with MCA, DAP had upped the ante by imposing two requirements for the government to fulfill. The first condition was that the university must be free from government control, and secondly, it must be unbound from the National Education Policy, like the need to use national language as the medium of instruction, or in nutshell, it will not be *Malayanized* (Bass, J. R. 1973: 44).

For the Malays, their efforts to establish the Malay language as the national as well as the official language had led to the formation of an association known as the National Language Action front which was founded in 1960. The association demanded that the government stand the ground and not yield to the demands of the Chinese community (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 178), because as it was, the Malay language was still not the main stream language in many aspects of government functions. To the leftist nationalists, not only that they rejected the Chinese language, they even demanded that the English language should not be placed at par with the Malay language. This demand was not because they were against the British, but it was an approach to reinvigorate the traditions of the local culture (Ratnam, K.J. 1965: 41). They did not mean to take away the language rights of other communities, but they wanted to assure that the Malay language was accorded its rightful position. Many of their leaders like Syed Nasir Syed Ismail opposed any effort to block the expansion of Chinese language or Tamil language as long as it did not jeopardize the supremacy of the Malay language. Syed Nasir had stressed the need to master the Malay language among the non Malays as an act of loyalty to the new nation. If they were prepared to respect and use the national language, their loyalty to the country was deemed proven (*The Straits Times*, 1960).

However, the plan backfired, since the Chinese community was steadfast to preserve their language and education. They were reluctant to use signage in the national language, especially in the urban areas. This recalcitrant attitude was well portrayed by the MCA political secretary, Tan Siew Sin when he was so determined to keep all the signage around his office without any translation, until he was forced to translate them into the national language (*The Straits Times*, 1960). The feeling of ‘Chineseness’ through the usage of Chinese characters in many city centers in the country made the Malays, the original inhabitants of the land felt uneasy and alienated in their own backyard.

‘...if a group of Malays go to Petaling Street, they feel as if they are in China’. (Ratnam, K.J. 1965: 134)

The efforts to strengthen the national language were an uphill task as Tunku was very tolerant, for he wanted to maintain peace under the fragile circumstances. Then he introduced the Bill of the national language to allow the translation from the national language into other languages, and that English was allowed to be used until the issue was decided by His Majesty the King (Karl Von Vorys, 1975: 206). The bill drew the Malays to a united front, both UMNO and Pas supporters, and together with university students, they were united in opposing the bill. The-then PAS president, Dato’ Mohamed Asri Haji Muda felt cheated by the government’s concession and perceived that the bill was an act of perfidy (Karl Von Vorys, 1975: 208). As for the Merdeka University’s proposal, Tunku and the Malay community rejected it because it undermined the efforts by the government to create a united society through the national language.

According to Tunku, if he agreed to the formation of the university, there would be perceptions that his supporters were only among the Chinese race and not the Malaysian race (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 172). The Malays opposed it because they found that the government was already very tolerant on the language issue, and it was unfair for a particular ethnic to have their own university at the time that other ethnics did not have any university of their own. If the government accepted the proposal, it was tantamount to the acceptance of the supremacy of Chinese language and culture (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 180), whereas the country was founded on the land originally belonged to the Malays - so the culture of the Malays should be the one promoted.

The struggle on language and education peaked with the outbreak of an ethnic clash between the Malays and Chinese in May 1969. In the aftermath of the outbreak, the government became more firm in strengthening the status of the Malay language as the national language. Through a new education policy, the national language was used as the medium of instruction in English type schools in 1970 (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 172). To the Chinese, again, the change in education policy which emphasized on the national language was seen as a ploy to discriminate the Chinese language and education system. The rejection by the Chinese on the national language issue was based on their perception of being a superior race in terms of language, education and other civilizational values (Ratnam, K.J. 1965: 136).

As previously mentioned, the Education Minister was empowered to change the status of any school. With the introduction of a new education policy, *Dongjiazhong* and Chinese educationalists were worried and requested for an abolishment of the clause (Sia Keng Yek, 2005: 153-154). When the government announced the formation of a committee to study the implementation of education policies in October 1974, *Dongjiazhong* sent a memorandum of protest to the government. They managed to garner support from 3,400 Chinese associations from all over the country. The memorandum requested for the use of mother language as the medium of instruction in vernacular schools and public examinations; for the role of school board to be maintained; and for clause 21(2) of the Education Act 1961 to be abolished to retain the status quo of Chinese schools. When the government was adamant in reducing the power of the school board, DAP and *Dongjiazhong* accused the government of trying to change the status of Chinese schools to national school (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 193).

The conflict brewed again when *Dongjiazhong* reignited the issue of Merdeka University and it was supported by 4,238 Chinese associations and political parties except for MCA and *Gerakan*. The issue was strongly rejected by UMNO because it was not in line with the National Education Policy, as the plan was to only use Chinese language, and thus serving students only from the Chinese stream. The firm stand of the government led the association to look for an alternative, which resulted in the expanding of *Duzhong* (Chinese private secondary schools SMPC) which did not agree to convert their status to national schools. The SMPC certificate was recognized by Chinese companies, universities in Taiwan, Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand (Milne, R.S and Mauzy, D.K. 1986: 92).

In the 1980s, the government introduced the 3M scheme through the integrated primary school curriculum with the aim to overcome the problem of students who cannot read, write and perform arithmetic (Tan Yao Sua, 2005). The scheme put more emphasis on class management and methods of teaching. When the Minister of Education emphasized on the usage of text book in the national language except for the Chinese language, and streamline all the contents for moral education according to national school in Chinese primary schools, it triggered unhappiness among *Dongjiazhong* as it was viewed as disturbances to the development of Chinese culture. The association also insisted on the use of Chinese songs rather than Malay songs. Viewed as a ploy by the government to hinder the development of Chinese culture, they brought up the issue during the 1982 election and it was supported by major Chinese-dominated parties- MCA, *Gerakan* and DAP, and these parties viewed 3M as a distorted scheme. To the Malay leaders, the scheme was in tandem with the Razak Report which required all the curriculums in Malaysian schools to be streamlined in order to achieve national unity (Tan Yao Sua, 2005: 238).

To maintain peace, the-then Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir reworked the implementation of the scheme by translating the guide books and resource books into the Chinese language. In 1987, Chinese educationists were not happy when the government appointed Chinese teachers who did not have qualification in the Chinese language to hold administration posts in Chinese vernacular schools. The appointment was opposed by *Dongjiazhong*, other Chinese associations and Chinese political parties including MCA and *Gerakan*. As a result, there was a large demonstration in the capital city that put forth the ultimatum of asking the government to either change the decision, or the community will boycott the schools involved.

However, the-then Minister of Education, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was adamant that he would not retract the decision (Means, G.P. 1991: 209), and after that, sensitive issues were played up by the Chinese as well as Malay tabloids. In the midst of cross arguments, the-then MCA deputy president Dato Lim Kim Sai raised the temperature by questioning article 153 in the Constitution which is related to Malay special privileges. He reiterated what Lee Kuan Yew said in the 1960s that Malays were also immigrants of the country, and it was a perfect recipe to trigger the Malays' anger. As a result, the UMNO youth wing, headed by Dato Najib Tun Razak managed to assemble 15,000 Malay youths demanding for Dato Lim Kim Sai's resignation. The aftermath saw many politicians from both sides being detained and a number of extremists were put behind bars under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Lim Kim Sai's *datukship* was withdrawn by the Sultan of Selangor, and he was allowed to migrate to Australia. In the 1990s, the lukewarm attitude of Chinese educationists toward national language once again came to the fore during the debate of the Education Bill 1990 (*Rang Undang-Undang Pendidikan* 1990, RUUP). The government established Education Act Consultation Council (EACC-*Majlis Perundingan Akta Pendidikan*, MPAP), in order to establish the public's opinion on the issue.

Although *Dongjiazhong* was invited to air their views, the association responded negatively by putting conditions such as the implementation of MPAP to be carried out without official act; that MPAP members will not be subjected to the previous act like the need for Chinese schools to implement the national language policy or give priority to Islam-in-education policy; and that MPAP should be allowed to use any language without any restriction. The demand was lambasted by the Education Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and he even went on to label those behind it as 'cowardice and irresponsible', and derided *Dongjiazhong* as a Chinese extremist association (Sia Keng Yek, 2005: 170-171).

Though *Dongjiazhong* accepts Malay language as the national language, because of the condemnation from the Minister of Education, the association decided to withdraw from taking part in the council. As RUUP was categorized under the Official Secret Act, it was almost impossible for *Dongjiazhong* and Chinese associations to be aware of the content. However, the pragmatic behaviour of council committee members from MCA and *Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* (*Gerakan*), Ting Chew Peh and Lim Keng Yaik, led to the content of the document to fall into the hands of some people from those associations. Therefore, before RUUP was tabled in 1995, the associations were already demanding for several sections of the RUUP to be excluded as they believed that they could curtail the growth of other native languages. The strong feeling of Sino-centric of *Dongjiazhong* made the effort by the government to enforce the use of national language unsuccessful again. The suggestions for the establishment of integration school and vision school were both rejected by *Dongjiazhong* because they felt that the proposed school would enhance the implementation of the national language (Thock Ker Pong, 2005: 108). Until now, the struggle to ward off the intrusion of national language into Chinese schools still continues and there is no indication that it will end any time soon.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The clash due to different civilizational perspectives normally arises if there is a tendency of a dominant civilization to dissolve the core pillars of a weaker civilization. However, it all very much depends on the core values which shape and guide the thinking patterns and actions of a community.

The root cause of conflict between the Malays and Chinese is due to the clash in defending their respective core pillars, which are between the core values of *budi-Islam* which generate the values of being tolerant, respectful towards others, cooperative, considerate, forgiving and patient; against the core values of *filial piety* which is manifested by assuming themselves as the superior community, Sino-centric and pragmatic. Although the Malays are imbued with the above values, there are limits to it, and they should not be transgressed, especially when they are challenged from being recognized as the native inhabitants of the land. For the Chinese, among their main aims are to flourish the Chinese values and culture in their place of migration. This was carried out by setting up Chinese villages (or China towns) with their own education system that often contradicts with the policy set up by local inhabitants, especially when they had been granted citizenship status. Starting from here, the conflict between the Malays and Chinese keeps on brewing because the latter cannot accept the policy set by the government dominated by the Malays.

Before independence, the main aim of the Chinese community was to be accepted as the citizens of Malaya. However, after the independence, the struggle is towards achieving equal rights including the aspects of Chinese language and education and the abolishment of Malay special rights as enshrined in the 1957 constitution through the social contract agreed earlier. However, the policy designed by Malay leaders, in cooperation with certain Chinese communities under Alliance and the national front perpetuates the conflict until the present.

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