

Cultural Identity of Malaysian Chinese language education Formed under the Influence of Two-Way Institutional Changes in Contrasting Perspectives, 1950s - 1980s

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Abstract. Malaysia is the Southeast Asian country with the most complete retention of Chinese language education after independence. In the face of the nationalist policies after the Second World War, why is Malaysian Chinese language education unique from other Southeast Asian countries? With such a question, this paper intercepts the development of Chinese language education in Malaysia and the Philippines during the early period of independence of Southeast Asian countries in the 1950s - 1980s, by comparing and combining the theory of two-way institutional change. It is found that there existed a Chinese education organization in Malaysia during this period that was able to compete with the government's nationalistic policy, thus under the two-way game movement of top-down institutional change by the government and bottom-up institutional change by the Chinese education organization, the survival of Chinese schools and national cultural identity became possible. This will serve as a reference for the construction and development of language schools in foreign countries and the maintenance of national cultural identity.

Keywords: Malaysian Chinese language education; cultural identity; two-way institutional change theory.

1. Introduction

In the 1950s, after the end of the Second World War, countries in Southeast Asia moved towards independence and a nationalist fervor. In pursuit of national unity and solidarity within the country, they began to implement a monolingual policy. Chinese language education suffered greatly during this period and struggled to move forward. Chinese language education in Southeast Asian countries began to decay and decline. However, Malaysian Chinese language education stood out in Southeast Asia. Why is this so? What are the reasons behind this?

The reason behind this is that Malaysia is unique in Southeast Asia. It is worthwhile for us to explore further as it is of great significance for the further survival and development of Chinese language education. Therefore, this paper intercepts the 1950s-80s period in Malaysia, an important period in which Chinese language education in Southeast Asia underwent radical changes. It adopts a comparative perspective between the development of Chinese language education in the Philippines and the development of Chinese language education in Malaysia during this period, in order to deeply investigate the reasons behind the development of Chinese language in Malaysia, which is different from that in other Southeast Asian countries.

Through reading the literature and collecting information, we found that Malaysian Chinese schools were able to survive with a Chinese education organization that had the ability to dialogue with the government on an equal footing. This organization was known as the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia and the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia, both of which were established in the 1950s. The establishment of these two organizations laid a solid foundation for the future development of Chinese language education in Malaysia

1.1. Research Review

Studies on Malaysian cultural identity are relatively extensive, mostly focusing on the influence of traditional Chinese culture, language teaching and mass media on its formation and development. Yanni Chen[1] suggests that Malaysian Chinese associations have the role of a cultural bridge to

promote Chinese culture and education, and to enhance the soft power of Chinese culture in China's international communication. Xin Zhang [2] argues that the influence of external factors on the development of Malaysian Chinese language education and Chinese cultural identity should not be ignored, emphasizing the changes in different periods of the construction of Chinese cultural identity and the crisis and dilemma that it currently faces. Tian Xin[3], on the other hand, proposes that the construction of Malaysian Chinese identity should break through from three aspects: national identity, cultural identity, and network communication.

It can be seen from the research status above that the current research on issues related to Chinese language education and cultural identity is not comprehensive enough. Most scholars only focus on the formation and development of Malaysia's cultural identity as a single subject, and most research on this issue is conducted from the evolution of cultural identity, the change of Chinese schools and other historical paths, or the impact of traditional culture and language on the formation of cultural identity. Few studies have been conducted from a comparative perspective, and there is little research on the issue of Chinese language education and cultural identity in Malaysia from a comparative perspective. Therefore, this paper promotes this aspect of research on the basis of previous studies and analyzes the development of Chinese education in Malaysia and its impact on cultural identity by applying the theory of institutional change proposed by Douglas C. North.

1.2. Definition of Concepts

Cultural identity: Cultural identity is the sense of belonging that an individual feels as a result of being influenced by the culture of a particular group. As Huntington suggests, people often seek answers to the question "Who am I?" by identifying with what they consider to be the most significant cultural influences. In this paper, cultural identity refers to the cultural identity of Malaysian Chinese who have been influenced by either the Chinese culture or the Malay-Chinese culture.

Two-Way Institutional Change: A Theory of Institutional Change[4] believes that the system can be regarded as a kind of public goods produced by individuals or organizations. Due to people's limited rationality and the scarcity of resources, the supply of the system is limited, and with the changes in the external environment or the improvement of their own degree of rationality, people will continue to put forward the demand for a new system in order to realize the expected increase in benefits. When the supply and demand of the system are basically balanced, the system is stable, but when the existing system cannot make people's demand satisfied, the system will change.

In the theory of institutional change, institutional change can be categorized into "bottom-up" and "top-down" institutional change, depending on the economic agents of the first action group. Institutional change refers to the innovation or breaking of an institutional framework. In this paper, the series of Chinese restriction policies issued by the government as the main body adopting the monolingual policy is regarded as the "top-down" institutional change from the multiracial to the mono-ethnic policy. The actions of Chinese education organizations as the main body of action, such as resisting the government's restrictive policies and adopting the Chinese education movement, are regarded as the "bottom-up" institutional change of breaking the government's restrictive policies and establishing the Chinese education system.

1.3. Research Methods

This paper applies the theory of institutional change to analyze why Chinese education organizations were established from both the bottom-up and top-down perspectives by comparing the international situation, social background, government policies, and development of Chinese schools in Malaysia and the Philippines from the 1950s to the 1980s. I will delve into the reasons for the establishment of Chinese education organizations from both perspectives, exploring the relationship between Chinese education organizations and the government. Additionally, I will examine the impact of the Chinese education organizations on the cultural identity of Malaysian Chinese and its influence on the Chinese cultural identity in Malaysia.

2. Difficulties faced by Chinese language education under the government's nationalistic policies in the 1950s-80s

In the 1950s, just after the end of the Second World War, the countries of South-East Asia faced a major turnaround, moving towards national independence to escape the plight of colonization. From the perspective of institutional change, the multi-ethnic policy at this time could no longer satisfy the needs of the Southeast Asian people to seek independence and become the real masters of the country, so the Southeast Asian countries in this period generally pursued the change from multi-ethnic policy to single-ethnic policy, and set off a wave of nationalism. Under the influence of the nationalist policy, the building of Chinese language education was crumbling, and most of the Chinese language education in Southeast Asian countries also fell during this period. Although the Chinese language education in Malaysia was also affected at this time, unlike other Southeast Asian countries, the Chinese language education not only succeeded in surviving the crisis, but also established a complete Chinese language education system, which provided the Malay-Chinese people with opportunities to learn Chinese culture and its influence. The influence of Chinese education continues to this day.

Under the same historical background, influenced by nationalist trends and the significant economic status of Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Philippine government also took action, and Chinese schools entered a period of supervision. [5] After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese schools were stigmatized, and Filipino parliamentarians used the excuse of Communist forces infiltrating Chinese schools and began to conduct strict supervision and comprehensive inspections of them. Since 1956, the Philippine government has adjusted the class hours of Chinese language courses in Chinese schools, with no more than 1000 minutes of Chinese language courses per week, far less than the English and Filipino language courses. In 1965, with Marcos taking office as president, the Philippines began implementing a policy aimed at "assimilating" Chinese in the country and incorporating Chinese language schools into the Philippine national education system. Until now, the "Filipinoization" law has been fully implemented, and Chinese education has long been transformed into Chinese education.

At this time, Malaysian Chinese, who were on the political edge, began to realize the need for an organization that could engage in equal dialogue with UMNO and the government when faced with ethnic policies led by UMNO and the British colonial government representing Philippine interest groups, such as the United Malaya and the Bahn Report. As a result, the Chinese Educational Organization (C.E.O.) finally came into being.

2.1. Chinese education organizations as a key means of resolving the dilemma

After the end of the Second World War, the Malay-Chinese actively participated in the revitalization of Chinese education. However, these positive times did not last long. With the implementation of Malaysian nationalist policies and the post-war focus of the Chinese community on education construction, they did not have time to consider the radical changes brought about by the independence of Malaysia. As a result, the Chinese community had no voice in the political arena, and Chinese schools once again faced new challenges. At this time, the emergence of two Chinese education organizations helped Chinese education survive. It was precisely these organizations that led Chinese education in Malaysia to a different ending from that of other Southeast Asian countries. The establishment of Chinese education organizations and their defense and dissemination of Chinese culture in Malaysia can be seen as a bottom-up response.

2.1.1 Background of Chinese education organizations

The Chinese education organization did not descend from the sky, and its origins can be traced. In the 1940s, when the Malaysian government was about to usher in independence, the Malays began to worry that their status, rights and standard of living would be affected by other non-Malay ethnic groups. Therefore, under the leadership of UMNO, the Malaysian people carried out a Malay nationalist movement, which strongly opposed the plan for the Federation of Malaya, and put forward the new program of the United Malayan States. In this new programme, it is easy to see that it is

strongly nationalistic, emphasizing the recognition of only English and Malay as official languages, and even proposing targeted nationality laws for non-Malays, restricting the development of non-Malays in the areas of economy, education, and so on.

In response, the Chinese also finally realized the importance of forming an organization that would represent the interests of the Chinese and be able to talk to UMNO and the British colonial government on an equal footing. Thus, in 1949, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), which represented the interests of the Chinese, finally came into being. But it brought another extinction of hope to the Malay-Chinese, and instead of playing the role expected by the people as a bridge between the Chinese and the government to safeguard the interests of the Chinese, its stance wavered from side to side between the British colonial government and the Malay-Chinese. Therefore, in the 1950s, when Chinese language education was once again under attack, Chinese organizations with a sense of defiance and truly representing the interests of the Chinese finally took to the stage of history.

2.1.2 Establishment of the Chinese Education Organization

In the 1950s, the British colonial government carried out a series of reforms to promote the formation of a unified language in Malaysia, and at the same time issued relevant education reports, among which the most influential, the most obvious blow to the Chinese language education, and at the same time became the trigger for the establishment of the Chinese Education Organization was the Barnes Report, which advocated the establishment of a Malaysian national education system using English and Malay as the mediums of education, which undoubtedly completely ignored the needs of the Malay Chinese, and put Chinese language education in jeopardy. The Barnes Report advocated the establishment of a Malaysian national education system through the medium of English and Malay. At the time of crisis, the first Malaysian Chinese education organization came into being, that is the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia, which was established by the President of the Melaka Teachers' Association (MTA), Mr. Shen Muyu, and other people in 1951, and was made up of a number of teachers' associations of different states. At this time, the most important task of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia was to find ways to defend the solid position of Chinese language education in Malaysia. Unlike the MCA, the Teachers' Association played a pivotal role in the development of Chinese language education. In the event that the British colonial government enacted laws and policies that were not conducive to the development of Chinese language education, the Teachers' Association was always firm in its defense of the interests of the Chinese people, and played the role of a bridge between the Chinese community and the British colonial government. It can be said that during the difficult period before the independence, the General Teaching Council had kept the bottom line of the Chinese culture. With the expansion of the government's jurisdiction, in 1952, the Chinese School Salary Recommendation was promulgated, stipulating that the employment of teachers, curriculum and textbooks in schools had to be approved by the Education Department. This regulation, which deprived the Chinese School Directors' Department of its authority, led to the establishment of the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia in 1954, which was formed by the directors' associations of the various states in Malaysia, and was commonly known as the "Committees' Association", which contributed to the synergy and unity of Chinese language education and the development of the curriculum, teachers and other related matters. Since then, Chinese language education in Malaysia has moved towards a new stage of systematization and organization.

The establishment of the Committees' Association and the Teachers' Association has placed a solid needle in the hearts of the Malay Chinese and boosted their confidence in the development of Chinese language education in Malaysia. As a result, both of them have received a higher level of appeal and credibility. In this regard, the use of language and writing as symbols for publicity and education, as well as the Chinese education organization as the defender and disseminator of the Chinese culture, have undoubtedly strengthened the sense of identity of the Chinese Malays with the Chinese culture. From the perspective of the theory of institutional change, the Chinese education organization has brought about bottom-up institutional change. Although the vision of making

Chinese one of the official languages of Malaysia has not been realized by the Committees' Association and the Teachers' Association, the Chinese education organization has played a key role in the subsequent confrontation with a series of unfair and threatening policies of the government in authority towards the development of Chinese education.

In 1954, when the British colonial government issued the White Paper on Education, it proposed that English and Malay must be used as the medium of instruction in vernacular schools and that English classes should be offered. The Chinese educational organizations represented by the Teachers' Association reacted immediately, believing that this was an attempt by the government to gradually eliminate the Chinese education, and called for opposition to the introduction of English classes in Chinese schools, and on October 18th, they issued the "Declaration of Opposition to the Conversion of Dialectal Schools into National Schools", which was followed by a series of articles in the major Chinese-language newspapers and magazines denouncing the British colonial government for the suspicion of targeting and aggressively assimilating the Chinese language education. In the end, none of the Chinese schools opened English classes. After this confrontation, the Chinese Education Organization succeeded in reversing the political situation that was not conducive to the development of Chinese language education, and brought new hope for the sustainable development of Chinese language education.

A similar intention was reflected in the 1956 Lhasa Report, which emphasized that Mandarin and Tamil were allowed as mediums of education, but only at the primary level. The report also mentioned that the ultimate goal was to bring together the children of all races under an education system where the Malay language was the main medium of instruction, making it clear that the Government was trying to assimilate all the races. For this reason, the President of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia took the initiative to discuss and propose to the Minister of the Coalition Government to safeguard the development of Chinese language schools and the transmission of Chinese culture. As a result, this objective was removed and the Education Ordinance 1957 was rewritten and reissued. But in fact this decree set the stage for the subsequent difficulties faced by the development of Chinese education.

Especially after Malaysia's independence in 1957, the authority government ignored the demands of the Chinese community, and the subsequent introduction of education ordinances all reflected the national will of the authority government, especially the introduction of the Education Ordinance 1961[6]. The decree stipulated that Malay elementary school were transformed into national elementary school, while other language schools such as English primary schools and Chinese primary schools were transformed into national-type elementary school, and the ministry of education was authorized to transform national-type elementary school into national elementary school at appropriate times. For secondary schools, a subsidy policy has been adopted whereby national secondary schools with Malay as the main medium of instruction and national secondary schools with English as the medium of instruction receive financial assistance from the Government. Independent secondary schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction, on the other hand, could not receive any subsidy and were subject to restrictions under the Education Ordinance. Under the obstacles of the policy, the MCA political party turned its back on the Chinese community and chose to bow to UMNO. The Committees' Association and the Teachers' Association, which stood firm in their determination to develop Chinese language education, launched a large-scale secondary school strike in October 1961 under the belief that "the subsidy could be taken away, but Chinese secondary schools could not be closed down", which became the largest school strike in Malaysian history. However, the efforts of the Teachers' Association came to naught under the lobbying of the Chinese politicians in the government and the government's policy of abolishing the Primary School Entrance Examination in 1965 so that students graduating from Chinese primary schools could be directly promoted to the Preparatory Class of the National Primary Schools, which led to a shortage of students in the Chinese secondary schools, and eventually reduced the number of Chinese secondary schools from the original 69 to the remaining 15, but the efforts and struggles of the Chinese community were not to be ignored.

In the 1970s and 1980s, with the arrival of the new Prime Minister, Mr. Razak, in the wake of the May 13 incident, the government adopted a series of "Malays First" ethnic policies centered on "supporting the Malays and suppressing the Chinese" in order to reverse the disadvantageous position of the Malays in the economic field, the government adopted a series of "Malay-first" ethnic policies centered on "supporting Malaysia and suppressing China" [7]. In terms of culture and education, the basic principle of national culture was clearly stated in the 1970 National Cultural Congress as "centered on the indigenous Malaysian culture and based on the Islamic culture." This was cited by the Malaysian government as a political propaganda term for "one language, one culture and one nation", which undoubtedly became another obstacle to the development of Chinese language education in the future. This is reflected in the fact that the national universities required a 55% indigenous and 45% non-indigenous ratio for admission of new students, and that it was difficult for non-indigenous students to have access to government scholarships. At the same time, many national schools, from primary to university level, were transformed into national schools, using Malay as the medium of instruction, which contributed to the improvement of the Malay language education system, while the Chinese language education came to a standstill under the policy.

At this point, we can look back at the Filipino Chinese community, even though it had established the Chinese Education Organization as early as 1917, and with the assistance of the Chinese Education Organization in running schools and its educational surcharge, the Filipino Chinese Schools were still in a thriving stage of development prior to World War II. [8]But when World War II ended, Act No. 176 of 1973 was introduced, and Chinese language schools were given a three-year deadline for restructuring, which stipulated that the schools had to be managed by a Filipino citizen, that alien students could not exceed one-third of the student body, and that Chinese language courses could only be offered as electives and limited in curriculum time. This period was a watershed for Chinese language education in the Philippines, as the number of Chinese schools began to decrease, the management system of Chinese schools was put under the responsibility of Filipino citizens and incorporated into the Philippine education system, the teaching concept of Chinese language was changed from a mother tongue to a second language, the textbooks and teachers were changed from the responsibility of Chinese Mainland or Chinese Taiwan to the responsibility of the local community, and the teaching objectives were changed from "The goal of teaching was changed from "to train Chinese citizens with scientific and cultural knowledge who can adapt to the different societies of China, overseas Chinese and the Philippines" to "to train Filipino citizens with Chinese cultural literacy".[9]This leads to the transformation of the nature of Chinese schools, the marginalization of Chinese education, the decline of students' Chinese language proficiency, Chinese cultural literacy, and the decline of their sense of cultural identity, which step by step contributes to the Filipinization of the Chinese people, and the decline of Chinese language education in the Philippines gradually.

3. Conclusion

By comparing the development of Chinese language education in Malaysia and the Philippines in the 1950s and 1980s, it is easy to find that the Chinese education organizations represented by the Committees' Association and the Teachers' Association played an important role in the defense of the development of Chinese language schools and the continuity of Chinese language education. And from the perspective of institutional change, combining the two paths of change, top-down and bottom-up, we find that Chinese language education has formed an irreplaceable cultural identity in the hearts of Malay-Chinese under the confrontation of two forces: the suppression of a series of nationalistic policies issued by the British colonial government on the eve of Malaysia's independence and the all-out efforts to defend the construction of Chinese language education and to resist the aggressive policies after the founding of the Chinese language education organizations.

Since entering the 21st century, the environment faced by Chinese education in Malaysia has undergone a great transformation compared with that of the 1950s and 1980s. Chinese education has

undergone localization reforms and has been developing in the direction of cultural integration, and Chinese education is also facing a new dilemma. On the one hand, the lack of government subsidies has led to the financial burden of Chinese schools, and the salary level is different from that of the national schools, which to a certain extent has led to the shortage of teachers in Chinese schools and put them in a dilemma. On the other hand, as the members of the Chinese education organizations were generally replaced by those who were educated in the western style and had a lower national culture complex, the nature of the Chinese education organizations also began to change, and they tended to be submissive and compromising to the government's nationalistic policies, the teaching of the Chinese language in the Chinese schools, the Chinese language curriculum were restricted, and the function of the Chinese schools' cultural inheritance and dissemination was gradually weakened. Therefore, nowadays we still need to focus on the survival and development of Chinese schools and the construction of Chinese language education.

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