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Urbanisation, Development and Socio Cultural Changes in Malaysia*

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970's, the Malaysian economy – and its capital city, Kuala Lumpur – developed at a remarkable rate, causing dramatic socio-cultural changes in the urban areas. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups. The government policy, especially beginning with the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970-1990) was to encourage Malays to enter the modern sectors. This in a sense led to the 'Urbanisation of the Malays' and caused, amongst other effects, the Malay population in Kuala Lumpur to increase significantly. The policies that succeeded the NEP – viz. the National Development Policy (NDP, 1991-2000) and the National Vision Policy (NVP, 2001-2010) – continued this tendency. While there have been recent discussions on the rise of the 'new middle class(es)' in Southeast Asian countries, in the case of Malaysia, it is necessary to include the factors such as ethnicity, gender and nationality in discussions on the socio-cultural situation.

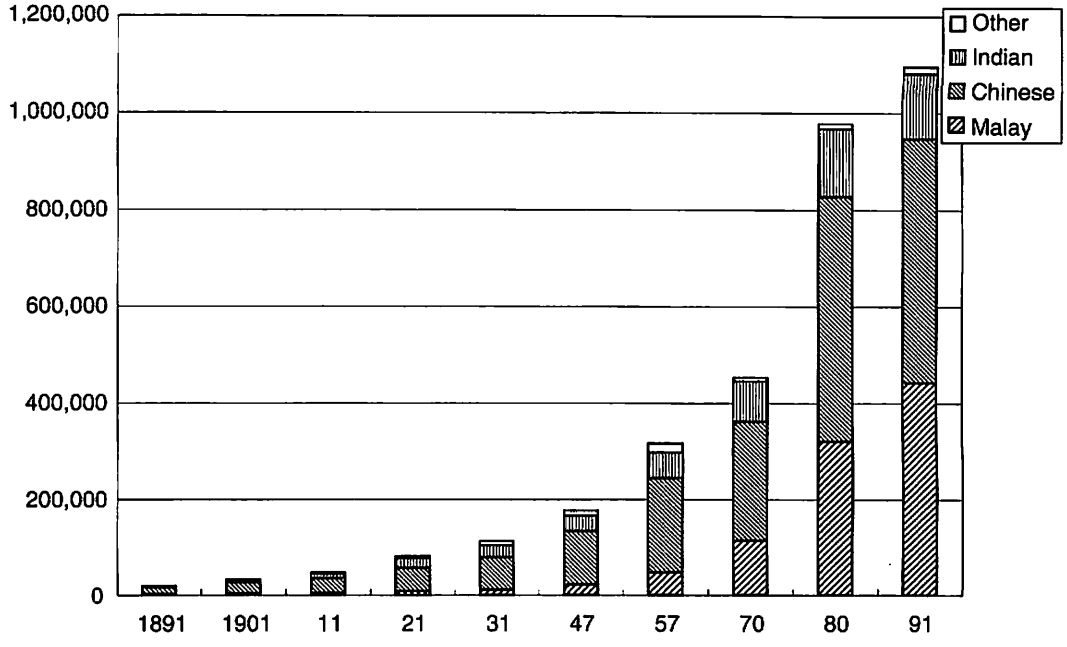
Kuala Lumpur, with a population of 1.37 million (2000 Census) is the administrative and economic centre, as well as the capital city of Malaysia. The city provided ample employment opportunities, and the consequent influx of Malay youths changed its structure of population and employment. As the Malaysian economy developed, it eventually faced a serious labour shortage especially in some specific sectors and those sectors had to depend on foreign workers. Also, local youths began to choose the nature of jobs and working places in the urban areas.

This paper examines the employment and socio-cultural changes in Kuala Lumpur, brought about by the economic growth in Malaysia especially since the 1970s.

2. Urbanisation and Ethnic Population in Kuala Lumpur

Under the British colonial rule, Kuala Lumpur flourished when Raja Abdullah struck a vein of tin in Ampang in 1857[1] . Yap Ah Loy, who was appointed as 'Kapitan China" in 1868, was in charge of the administration of Kuala Lumpur until his death in 1885, after which, it was taken over the British colonial administration. Kuala Lumpur developed into a tin-mining town and commercial centre. The town was mainly populated by the Chinese and the business sector was dominated by this particular ethnic group (Gullick, 1955; Middlebrook, 1951). The first population census in 1891 showed that 73% of population in

*The author would like to thank Dr. Colin Nicholas for kind support and checking. Yet, all remaining errors are mine.



Source : Compiled from Manjit Sigh Sidhu [1970], p.13; Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia [1983]; Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia [1995].

Figure 1 Population by ethnic group in Kuala Lumpur, 1891-1991

Kuala Lumpur was Chinese and until Independence in 1957, the average was above 60% (Figure 1). Kuala Lumpur became the capital city of the Federated Malay States – and the centre of colonial administration in British Malaya – in 1898.

Since 1957, the Malay population has been increasing in Kuala Lumpur. During the British colonial period, it accounted for only 9-12% but increased from 15% in 1957 to 25% in 1970. During the implementation of the New Economic Policy (1971-90) that encouraged Malays to enter the modern sectors, the Malay population in Kuala Lumpur increased from 113,642 in 1970 (25%) to 441,747 in 1991 (40%). In 1991, the Chinese population dropped to 47% – the first time in the history of Kuala Lumpur that it has dropped below 50% (Figure 1).

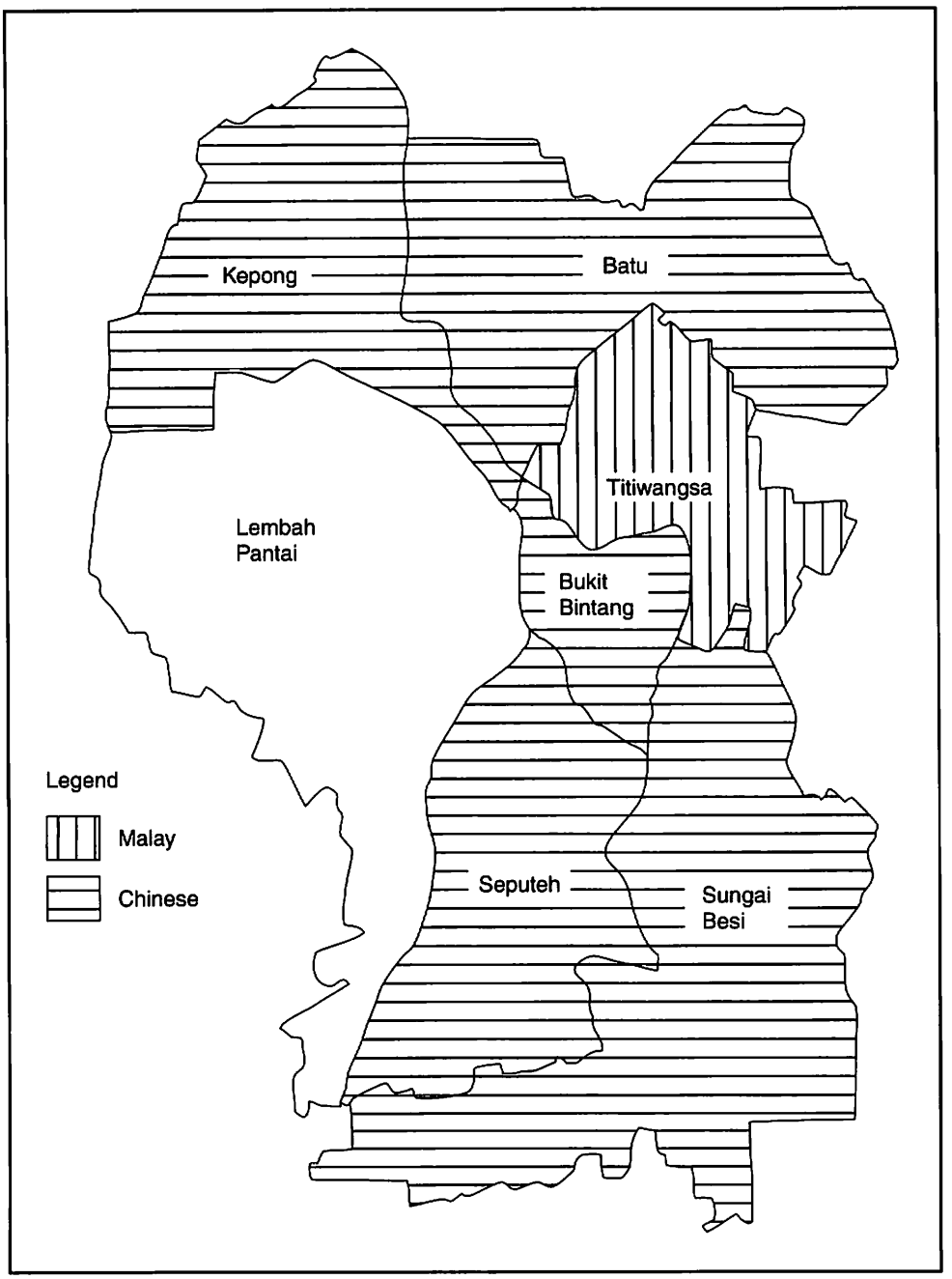
Kuala Lumpur was divided into four areas classified by the colonial administration in accordance with the State Council and New Building Rule 1884: commercial areas, manufacturing areas, residential areas and entertainment/amusement areas (Lim Hen Kow, 1976, p.50). Since then, the residential areas in Kuala Lumpur were segregated by ethnicity by the colonial government (Lee, 1976, p.43; Butcher, 1979, p.116; Horii, 1989, p.249). As such, spatial segregation of ethnic groups in Kuala Lumpur had existed since its founding (Mohd Razali Agus, 1992, p.39).

The Chinese and Indians tended to reside in districts where there were members of their community who spoke similar languages. The Malays, who were mostly government employees, and the Indians, lived in quarters provided for them.

The Chinese predominately resided in four major areas: Chinatown, the New Villages that were incorporated through urban expansion, localities lining the older inter-city routes, and the manufacturing zones (Sidhu, 1978, p.13). The Indians were concentrated in two areas, Sentul (Batu) and Brickfields (Sungai Besi-Seputeh areas). There were railway

workshops in these areas and they became enclaves for large numbers of Indian workers.

Mohd Razali Agus (1992) analysed the spatial segregation in Kuala Lumpur for 1970 and 1990. His study showed that Malays were the majority in only one area, Titiwangsa in 1970, while the Chinese were the majority in all the other areas except for Lembah Pantai – where they were outnumbered by the Malays – although no ethnic group constituted the

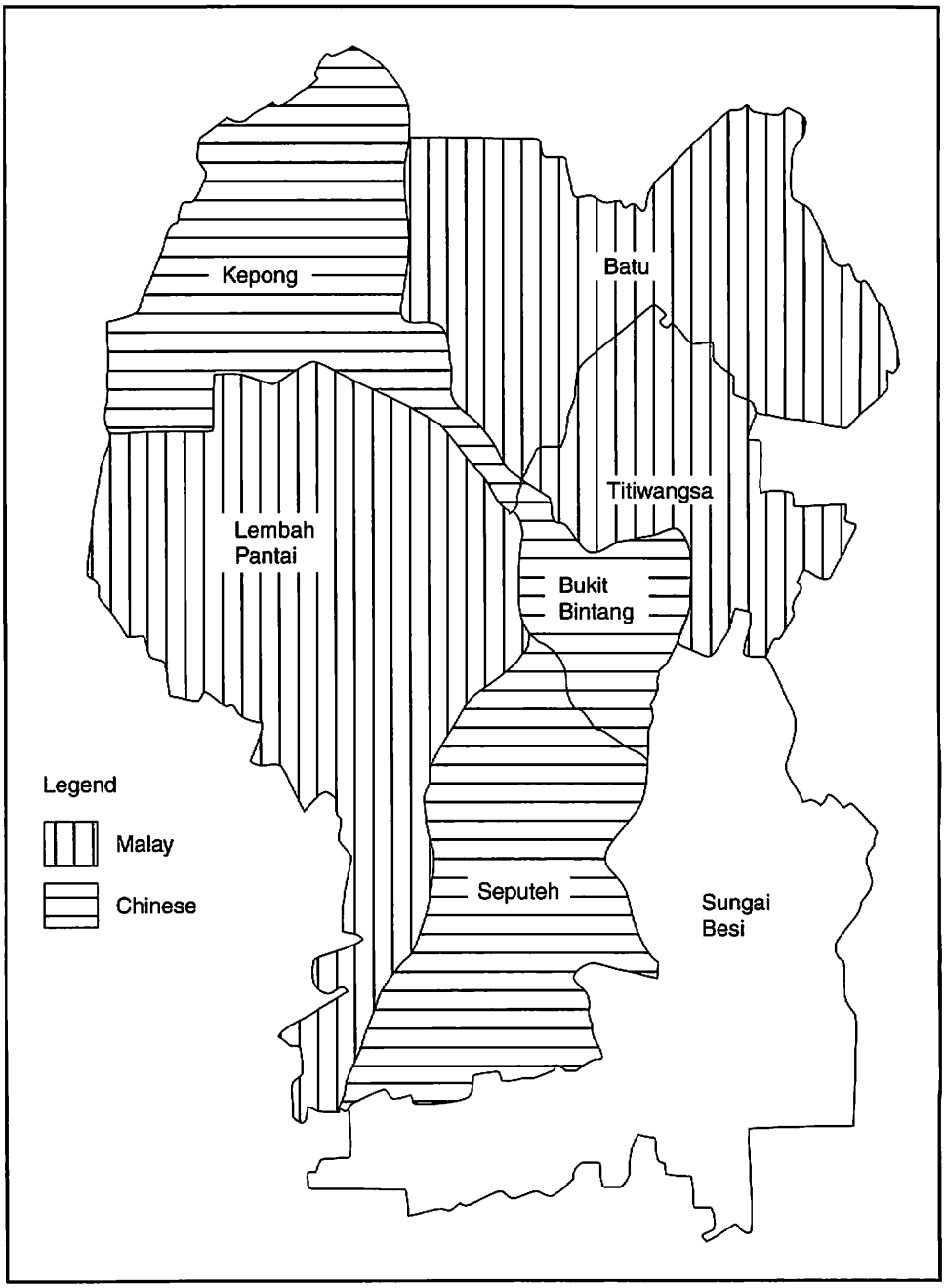


Source: Mohd. Ragali Agus [1992], Map 4&5, pp. 43-44.

Map 1 Majority Ethnic Population in Parliamentary Areas, Kuala Lumpur, 1970

majority here. By 1990, the Malays had become the majority in Batu and Lembah Pantai, in addition to Titiwangsa, whereas the Chinese dominated only three areas: Bukit Bintang, Seputeh and Kepong (Maps 1 and 2).

While it seems that the Malays have taken over large sections of the city, Titiwangsa, Lembah Pantai and Batu are areas where the Malays traditionally inhabited. In 1970, 62%



Source: Mohd. Ragali Agus [1992], Map 4&5, pp. 43-44.

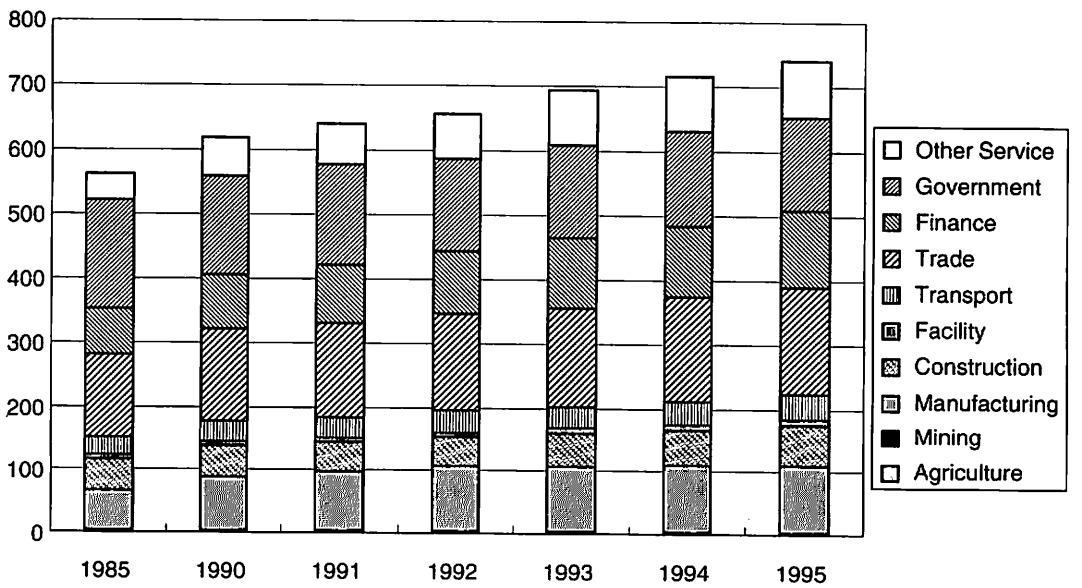
Map 2 Majority Ethnic Population in Parliamentary Areas, Kuala Lumpur, 1990

of Malays in Kuala Lumpur were concentrated in these three areas and this increased to 75 % in 1990. Similarly, in 1970, 60% of the Chinese were concentrated in three areas – Bukit Bintang, Seputeh and Kepong – and it accounted for 62% of them in 1990 (Mohd Razali Agus, 1992, Table 3a, p.41; Map 6, p.45; Map 7, p.46; p.47). While drastic changes have taken place as more Malays moved to Kuala Lumpur, ethnically mixed residences did not take off as expected and the basic patterns remain the same.

3. Structural Changes of Employment in Kuala Lumpur

The structure of employment in Malaysia dramatically changed due to the process of economic development since the 1970s. The main changes in employment are: (1) the traditional ethnic division of labour transformed by the New Economic Policy (1971-90) which encouraged Malays to enter the modern sectors; (2) female labour promoted especially in the labour-oriented manufacturing industries; and (3) the foreign labour utilised in many sectors because of labour shortages (Yoshimura, 1998a). These economic changes in Malaysia also affected changes in employment and social structures in Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 2 shows the employment by sectors in Kuala Lumpur between 1986 and 1995. In 1995, this consisted of agriculture (0.1%), mining (0.3%), manufacturing (14%), construction (9%), transport (6%), trade (22%), finance (16%) and government (20%). The major sectors are trade, government, finance and manufacturing. While employment increased by 30% from 562,000 in 1985 to 750,000 in 1995, employment in the manufacturing sector rose by 70% from 64,000 to 106,000 even though this sector is less important to Kuala Lumpur than in Selangor or Johor. With Kuala Lumpur being the centre for trade and finance for the country, employment in trade sector rose by 30% from 131,000 to 166,000, and the employment in finance sector rose by 60% from 72,000 to 116,000 between 1985 and 1995.



Source: Compiled from unpublished data provided by Economic Plan Unit.

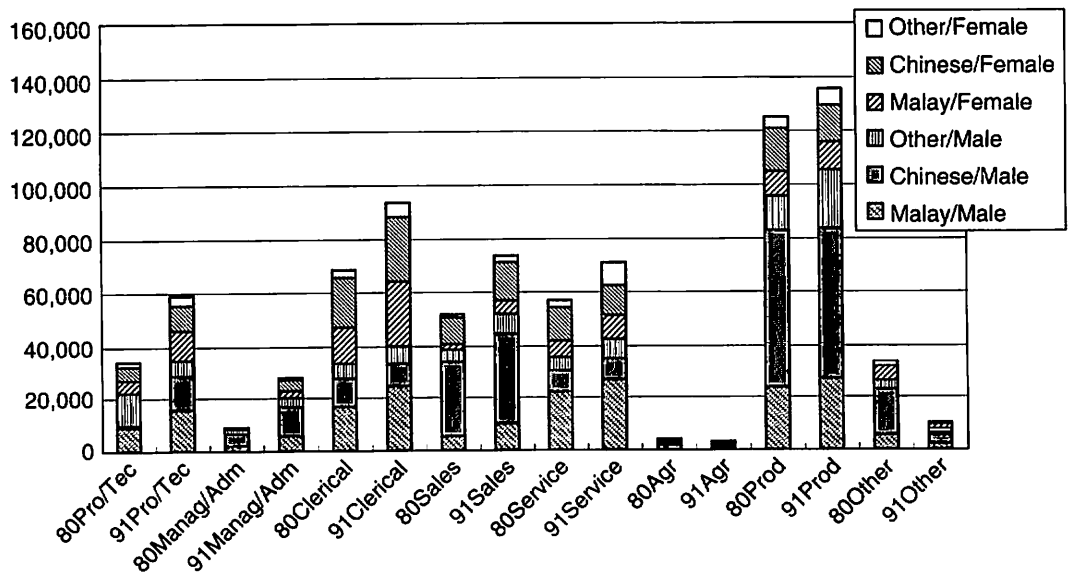
Figure 2 Employment in Kuala Lumpur, 1985-1995

Kuala Lumpur is also the administrative centre in the country. Under the New Economic Policy (1971-90), the 'Malay-isation' of the economy was promoted and employment opportunities increased in the public sector. One in every four new job opportunities for Malays in the tertiary industry was created by the public sector. In Kuala Lumpur, 60-80% of public sector related jobs with the government (i.e. government administration, legal and administration, security service, etc.) were held by Malays. Not surprisingly therefore, the majority of government employees are Malays. However, due to financial deficits and privatisation, the total employment in the government sector decreased from 167,000 in 1985 to 146,000 in 1995, decreasing from 30% to 20%.

Historically, the majority of population in Kuala Lumpur had been Chinese. The ethnic composition of those employed in all the sectors in Kuala Lumpur is Malay (37%), Chinese (46%), and other (17%). However in the 1980s, the ethnic structure of employment in Kuala Lumpur began to change, especially with regard to Malay proportion (Figure 3).

The changes in employment in Kuala Lumpur reflected the position of Kuala Lumpur in the national economy. The decline of primary industries such as the agricultural and forestry sector, for example, is natural for a capital city. The number of Malay management/administrative staff, however, increased in the shrinking sectors, reflecting the 'Malay-isation' of the estate[2] sector in the 1980's. The number of skilled construction workers, including carpenters, decreased while the demand for labour and human resources for the construction sector increased as development projects around Kuala Lumpur were stepped up. This led to a serious shortage of human resources and caused dependence on foreign labour to be deepened.

Occupations dominated by women are those in teaching, the medical, clerical and domestic services, the garments industry and such. The female ratio in professional and technical occupations is amplified by the female-dominated positions such as school teachers and nurses. Men however dominate other categories in the professional and technical



Source: Compiled from Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia 1983 and 1995.

Figure 3 Occupation in Kuala Lumpur, 1980 and 1991

sectors. They also dominate the management and administrative jobs. There is the feminisation of labour in the traditionally female-oriented jobs such as clerical jobs, domestic service, teaching and nursing but it is interesting to note that many Malay men also work in clerical jobs, which are generally considered to be typically female-dominated. In the 1991 census, it was shown that there were more Malay male clerks than Malay female clerks in Kuala Lumpur. This could be due to the greater employment opportunities in the government sector in the city.

The manufacturing sector is less important to the Kuala Lumpur economy, with it constituting only 14% of the city's employed population. While there were more women than men in the electrical and electronics industry in 1980, this ratio was reversed in 1990. The labour-oriented industries such as the electrical and electronics industry and the garment and clothes industry preferred unskilled female labour and many young Malay women were employed under the NEP. The reversal in 1990 occurred not because of the changes in the characteristics of industries, but possibly due to the reduction of labour-oriented production. While big-scale multi-national corporations in the garment and clothes industry generally employed more Malay women, there were more Chinese in the factories including the Chinese small- and medium-scale industries.

4. Labour Shortages and Foreign Labour

The shortage of labour is acute in the Malaysian economy especially in sectors such as construction, estate, domestic services, and manufacturing. Not surprisingly, these sectors heavily depend on foreign labour. The shortage was structural, as on the other hand there was unemployment from the 1970s to early 1980s. Serious unemployment occurred during the mid-1980s recession, which later recovered gradually. The unemployment rate rapidly decreased to 2.8% in the 1990's until the economic crisis in mid-1997.

Labour shortages became heightened as young people began to avoid work in those sectors because of industrialisation and improved living standards. First, the wages levels are generally low compared to other manufacturing and service sectors. Second, the work is tough and hours are spent in poor working conditions (i.e. under hot sun, with heat and/or dust, dirty places, etc.). Third, skilled or semi-skilled jobs, professional or technical positions are preferred to unskilled work in construction sites, estates, etc. due to rising levels of education. Fourth, there are alternative job opportunities available in other sectors because of the general labour shortage in the country. Fifth, there are negative images of those industries' workers as being "poor", "dirty", "less-educated", and such. Sixth, white-collared jobs and office work is favoured with penetration of a consumption, western and urban culture (Yoshimura, 1997a).

Thus, the youths avoid unskilled manual work because they consider jobs such as manual labour in construction sites, estates and factories, domestic service, etc. as low-paid, low-status, with low career prospects. They prefer working in offices or factories with air-conditioning and with better working conditions in urban areas (Yoshimura 1997a; 1997b). Often, they would even "wait" for better jobs (Malaysia Ministry of Labour, 1987/88 undated, p.2). In these circumstances, it would be difficult to bring youths back to unskilled manual jobs even if the wages and working conditions were to improve, as they believe these are jobs best suited for foreign workers.

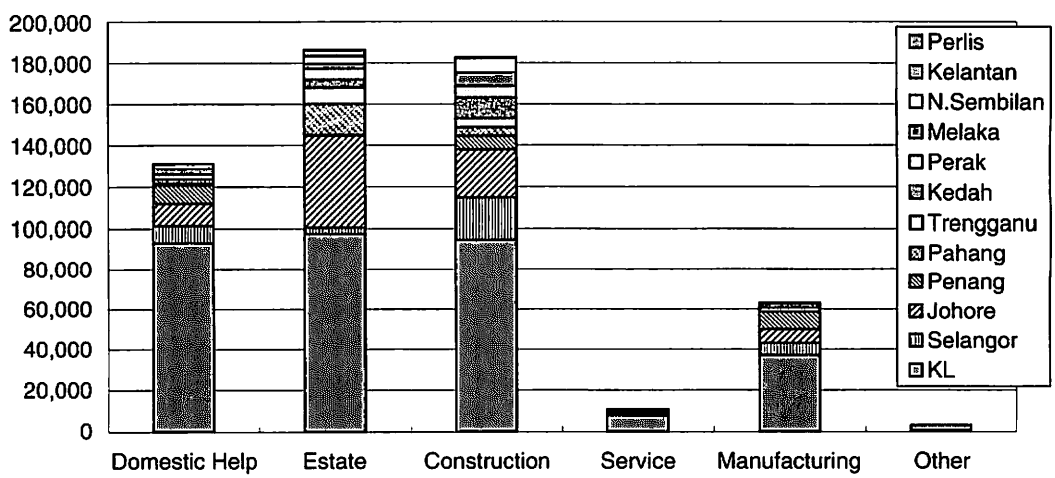
During the economic growth in the 1970s, the number of undocumented ("illegal") foreign workers increased. In the 1980's, however, this became a serious social problem in the country as they became visible. The foreign workers who had worked for estates, FELDA schemes, etc. in forest areas gradually came to work in urban areas as the demand for labour increased with the increase in development projects and small-scale service sector. The Malaysian government directed registration of undocumented workers through the Regularisation Program of Migrant Indonesian Workers without Permits (*Program Pemutihan Pendatang Tanpa Izin Indonesia*) mainly for estate workers and construction workers in 1989, and following this, the Amnesty Program for domestic helpers. In 1991, the government permitted the employment of foreign labour in the manufacturing sector as well[3] .

Information on foreign immigrant flow into Malaysia suffers from a lack of a proper statistical base. Azizah Kassim estimates there are 2 to 2.5 million foreign workers including documented and undocumented workers, while the government estimates this to be 1.7 million. The trade unions, however, put this estimate at 3 million. A figure of 2 million represents 10% of the 20.69 million population in Malaysia, and constitutes 25% of the entire labour force (including foreign workers) of 8.14 million. So, one fourth of the labour force is now foreign and the Malaysian economy depends heavily on foreign labour in most sectors.

Between 1992 and 1995, 650,000 Temporary Employment Passes (TEP) were issued to registered foreign workers. The categories were: construction (31%), estate (31%), domestic help (22%), manufacturing (14%), and services (2%). The major issuance locations are Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Selangor (Figure 4).

More than half (57%) of TEPs were issued in Kuala Lumpur – 71% for domestic helpers, 52% for construction workers, 78% for service workers, and 59% for manufacturing workers. However, it is not always necessary that the issuing locations are their working locations, although it is necessary for them to register near the working places. Agents of domestic helpers and contractors of construction workers usually register their workers near the working places, unlike the big estate companies headquartered in Kuala Lumpur[4] .

The service sector has less than 10,000 registered foreign workers, representing only



Source: Compiled from unpublished data provided by Jabatan Ingresen Malaysia.

Figure 4 Temporary Work Passes Issuance by State in Peninsular Malaysia, 1992-1995

2% of the total registration of TEPs. Most of them work in Kuala Lumpur (80%). It is common to see that most of the service staff in petrol stations are Bangladeshi men. Because of the labour shortage, the service sectors require foreign workers. The hotel industry, in particular, had requested permission from the government to employ 100,000 foreigners during the 1998 Commonwealth Games (*The Star*, 3 May 1997).

As more women entered the labour market – a consequence of the improvement in education levels and diversification of job opportunities for women – the demand for domestic helpers increased. Moreover, lifestyle and values have changed with the increase in income. Furthermore, today women in the urban areas are offered a choice of a variety of job opportunities. So even women with less education, who may have taken jobs such as domestic helpers in the past, now choose other jobs. While it is common for working women to ask family/relatives or neighbours to look after their children in rural areas, it is more difficult in urban areas. Domestic work in Malaysia now depends on foreign workers and these helpers support the urban lifestyle of middle class(es) as well as upper class. Also, it has become 'prestigious' for middle class households to have a foreign helper. When, due to the economic crisis, the government announced the suspension of new registration of foreign domestic helpers in late August 1997, resistance to it was strong. The government was criticised for going against its own policy of encouraging women to work to relieve labour shortages. The government eventually withdrew the suspension.

The issuance of work permits for domestic helpers are mainly in Kuala Lumpur (71%). Among the domestic helpers, Indonesians (60,000 or 67%) are almost double of the second biggest group, Filipinos (30,000 or 29%). Yet, Filipinos domestic helpers have a better reputation as professional helpers due to their professional attitudes, better fluency in English, and better educational background. The registration levy and wages for Filipino helpers are also higher than Indonesian helpers.

The utilisation of foreign labour in the construction sector is related to development projects in Malaysia. The construction industry requires a lot of manual workers and depends on foreign labour in the current labour situation. The construction boom, especially during rapid economic growth in the late 1980s in urban areas such as the Klang Valley, increased the use of undocumented foreign workers. The government allowed the employment of foreigners at construction sites in 1989 because of the industry's requests and social conflicts involving undocumented workers. Yet, even after the government policy of regularisation, many undocumented foreign workers continued to work in construction sites. About half of the foreign workers who work on construction sites in the Klang Valley are undocumented. For example, when in early July 1997, police raided construction sites and the workers' quarters, 192 out of the 347 foreign workers arrested at the construction site for the IOI Shopping Complex in Puchong were undocumented (*Sun*, 2 July 1997). And at the construction site for a shopping complex in Bandar Baru, Bangi, 130 out of the 300 foreigners arrested were undocumented workers (*Malay Mail*, 9 July 1997). The former case shows that 55% of foreign workers were not registered and the latter case shows that 43% were not registered.

Although contractors could register their foreign workers, they use foreigners without registration because: (1) they can keep wages low; (2) they can save on registration costs, EPFs, paperwork, etc.; (3) they do not have to provide proper accommodation as per government guidelines for workers; (4) they can get the required number of workers easily whereas they will have to wait for recruitment and registration if they follow the proper procedures; (5) they cannot control the number of workers easily after the registration as

they have to register workers for three years; and (6) the situation with the workers remain insecure and unstable even after registration (Yoshimura, 1998b, p.47). Points (1) to (3) are to save direct costs and points (4) to (6) are to control volume.

The construction sector is an industry which divides construction work into parts among sub-contractors, and there are sub-sub-contractors who work under the sub-contractors. In the industry's sub-contraction structure, they earn profit with the piecework payments, regardless of their own costs and schedules. So, as long as there is an option to utilise foreigners, including those who are illegal, it will remain a structural problem of the industry. Recently, the industry suffered from shortages of skilled workers and professional technicians such as bricklayers and carpenters as well as unskilled manual workers[5] .

The construction industry saves cost by using undocumented foreign workers. The proportion of labour to total costs is 30-40% in the construction industry. So, if it is possible to decrease wages for workers, it will bring a reduction in costs and as such more profits. The average wage of undocumented foreign workers is approximately 70% of Malaysian workers working in construction sites in and near Kuala Lumpur (Halim Salleh and Abdul Rashid, 1997). Moreover, as often featured in the mass media, there are issues pertaining to bad working conditions and circumstances such as hard work for long hours, poor working conditions and environment, poorly built and unhygienic accommodation without proper toilet and bathrooms, etc. Clearly, therefore, the industry takes advantage of undocumented foreign workers.

Malaysia promotes various development projects. Such development itself creates the structure of foreigners' undocumented labour. If foreigners are registered according to proper procedures, it will take time and expense, affecting schedules and costs of the project. The big projects of the government, such as the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) that opened in June 1998, are dictated by a strict schedule and cost guidelines which could not be allowed to change by delays and/or cost increases. This is also the case with public sector projects such as low cost housing and new township projects and also with private sector projects such as shopping complexes and condominiums in and around Kuala Lumpur. Now that Malaysian youths are not willing to work in construction sites, foreign labour is crucial for development projects.

5. Changes of "Job" Recognition of Malay Villagers near Kuala Lumpur

In the 1970s, the shortages in the manufacturing sector meant a scarcity of trained human resources such as engineers and technicians as well as administrative staff. However, in the 1980s, the shortage of labour became more serious in sectors involving unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The problem became the norm for the manufacturing sector, especially since the unemployment rate decreased when the recession recovered after the mid-1980s.

This situation directly influenced Malay villages (*kampung* in Malay) in a district (*daerah* in Malay) in Petaling, Selangor. Selangor is the most developed state surrounding the capital city, Kuala Lumpur. The Malay villages researched in 1993/94 were located in the northwest of Kuala Lumpur with easy access to Subang Airport and industrial estates such as Shah Alam and Klang. Although the district was between the most developed areas like Kuala Lumpur and the biggest industrial estates, it was not seen as being as devel-

oped an area as another suburban town, Petaling Jaya, and the locations within it were still considered as "villages" (*kampung*)[6] .

There are 11 villages besides several towns in the district. Ten of them are Malay traditional villages formed in the jungle in the 1920s and 30s, and the remaining one is a Chinese "New Village" (*Kampung Baru* in Malay; *Sin Tsun* in Mandarin) formed around 1950/51 like other *kampung baru*, during the period of the Emergency[7] . The villagers who used to work in the agricultural sector (i.e. rubber smallholders) eventually moved to the manufacturing and service sector after the 1970's and commute to Kuala Lumpur and industrial estates in Selangor. Factories in this area have faced labour shortages.

Small- and medium-size local companies and factories in the district are mainly located in Kampong Baru where there are many Chinese. These factories faced labour shortages and started using foreign labour in the 1980s. At first, they hired Indonesians, but later Bangladeshis (sometimes, Myanmars) in the 1990s as the Indonesians moved to the construction sector that offered higher wages. At the first stage, all the foreigners were undocumented (i.e. "illegal"). After 1992, however, factories registered foreign workers with the government. About half of the workers in factories in Kampong Baru were foreigners and it was estimated that there were more than 1,000 in 1993. In the last 10 years, however, local youths in Kampong Baru had gone to work in Japan, Taiwan, the USA and Europe[8] .

There is a Japanese company near the Malay villages surveyed. In the early 1970s when the factory started its operation, there were the jungles and forests nearby and the company was the only employer who offered wage employment in the area. The salary and working conditions were considered good by the villagers. The factory started production with 300 workers and increased to 1,200 workers in the 1990s. Most of workers were from the neighbourhood and 80% of the Malay production workers were from the five Malay villages in the area.

The company recruited staff through advertisements in the English and Malay newspapers (such as the *New Straits Times, The Star, Utusan Malaysia, etc.*) while production workers were recruited through notices outside the factory[9] .

The company could get sufficient labour from the neighbourhood in the 1970s and early 1980s. In the late 1980s, however, the factory began to face difficulties in meeting its labour requirements and had to recognise the problem of labour shortage. Requiring more labour for its new production lines, company recruitment personnel went to other states (including Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia) to hire workers but this was in vain[10] . So, finally, the company employed foreign workers. In 1996, the company employed 2,200 workers of whom 240 were foreigners (140 Bangladeshis and 100 Indonesians) as well as 300-400 Malaysian from other states in Peninsular Malaysia and 60 from East Malaysia. The company administration wanted to prioritise Malaysians in production and management and considered 30% as the ceiling for foreign labour.

The labour shortage was due to: (1) the labour situation changed from unemployment in the recession of mid-1980s to a general labour shortage caused by the economy's recovery in the late 1980s; (2) the company was not the only place of work for those who could commute to Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur; (3) the company's wage rates and benefits were not the best any more; (4) working environment in factories, considered "hot and dusty", were not preferred by young people in general; and (5) the new production line required more labour than what the local labour could supply. The fourth point came with changes in young people's values and lifestyles through social development. This labour shortage was not only for this Japanese company, but also for other companies in the area and the

problem could not be solved despite some improvement in wages and working conditions.

This is also related with Malay villagers' attitudes towards jobs as well as the development in the area[11] . The author surveyed those Malay villagers' preferences on locations and types of companies in which they might wish to work.

Firstly, the location preferences were: "in or near their villages", 66%; Kuala Lumpur, 14%; Shah Alam, 9%; and Other Location, 11%. Those who preferred working near their villages cut across generations, and this preference was stronger among women. Those who were older than 40 years of age predominantly preferred in the villages. Among the younger generation, such as in those in that 20's, less than half preferred villages and the ratio of those who preferred Kuala Lumpur and other locations was more than in the older generation. Those who chose "Other Locations" would commute to any place if they could get good job opportunities with better wages and conditions.

The reasons for choice of locations were multiple: 27 persons said "facilities and buildings"; 22 persons said "wages"; and 19 persons said "Other". The last factor, "other," was mainly raised by those who preferred to work in "near villages" and they emphasised distance and convenience.

Secondly, the preferences for types of companies were: Malay private companies, 52%; Japanese companies, 31%; Malaysian public companies, 3%; and American companies, 3% (3% chose "Other" 3% while 8% gave "No Answer").

The main reasons for their choices were generally "wages". At the same time, they mentioned that they preferred Malaysian companies "because they are Malaysians". Some said that they would like to contribute to the country's development by working in Malaysian companies. On the other hand, Japanese companies were valued since there were many Japanese companies and they were crucial to the Malaysian economy.

Finally, the preferences for the ethnic types of Malaysian companies were: Malay 51%; Chinese 6%; Indians 0%; No Difference 30%; and No Answer 13%[12] . The main reasons in choosing "Malay" were: "the same ethnicity (*bangsa* in Malay)", "Same language as well as the culture and custom", etc. The respondents who preferred Chinese companies constituted less than 10%. But some said that management in Chinese companies was rational and practical and that the local companies in the area were predominantly Chinese small- and middle-size companies and offices anyway. The younger generation did not always prefer "Malay companies" unlike the older generation.

Hence, there are differences among generations in considerations and preferences for jobs and working places. The younger generation are more focused on wages, working conditions and environment. They know that closer places are convenient but wages are not as good as in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and Klang. So they do not always prefer working in/near villages like the older generation who believe that working in/near villages is best. And among Malaysian companies, preference for Malay companies is very strong where ethnicity, language, culture and religion are factors. Malays also recognise the Chinese companies have business capabilities and are rational. However, the preference for Malay companies is not fundamental among the younger generation.

Still, the preference for the closer working places and local community is common among Malaysians throughout the country[13] . These preferences illustrate their lifestyles and values as well as the close ties of families and friends, and their identification with hometowns and local communities. Also, it is interesting to point out that their recognition about the distance between living places and working places are quite short in a small area[14] .

6. New Middle Class(es) and "Melayu Baru"

As the economy developed and the employment structure transformed, the emergence of the New Middle Class(es)[15] occurred mainly in the urban areas. The Old Middle Class were, for example, traditional commercial people and lower bureaucrats under the British rule whereas the new middle class appeared during the economic growth in the past three decades. It is a relatively higher income group with common economic, social and cultural behaviour and lifestyles that are different from the lifestyle of the lower income group and the higher income groups.

The new middle class is classified by occupation, income, education (human resource), consumption behaviour pattern, etc[16] . It includes small- and middle-size companies' owners, middle-management staff of big companies; professionals such as lawyers, doctors, accountants, engineers and teachers; semi-professionals such as nurses, librarians, clerks, marketing/ sales/service staff, civil servants (middle- and upper-level), and such. They are mainly those who work in white-collared, professional and technical jobs.

Between 1980 and 1990, the number of professional and technical jobs in Kuala Lumpur doubled while that of management and administrative jobs tripled. This shows the increase in the size of the middle class(es). The ratio of professionals and technicians (20%), and sales and service related jobs (16%) in Kuala Lumpur is also higher than the labour population (8%) in the country (see Figure 3).

The increase in the Malay composition in the middle class is related to the increase of employment in the modern sectors under the NEP. For example, while the professional jobs requiring qualifications increased 13 times for the period 1970-95, the Malay ratio increased from 5% to 33%. In the 1990s, the growth rate (11%) for the Malays was higher than other ethnic group (Jomo, 1997, Table 6). This also mirrors the increase in Malay composition in wage employment. More than half of the Chinese and the Indians were already wage-employed during the British period. In 1970, the Malay wage-employeds comprised 36%. Under the NEP – when job opportunities increased and, with a pro-Malay policy, the self-employed and family-employed in the agricultural sector moved to wage employment – the proportion of Malays in wage-employment increased to 55%. In 1991, it further rose to 73% (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 1995, Table 6.6).

In Kuala Lumpur, the Malay ratio increased in the service sector for 1980-91. In the professional and technical sector, the Malay composition doubled while in the administrative and management sector, the increase was more than four times. In sales and related jobs doubled, Malay participation also doubled. For the period 1980-91, Malays took half of all newly-created jobs, with 70% of them in clerical jobs (including those government sector). Yet, the Malays contributed only one third of the increase in administrative and management jobs, and sales related jobs, which were still held mainly by the Chinese.

The position of the new middle class(es) has to be considered with ethnic relations, economic and political policies, and other factors in Malaysia. The NEP encouraged the Malays to enter the modern sectors and transformed the traditional ethnic division of labour. This helped the emergence of the Malay middle class in urban areas.

The Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, however, does not think that the creation of a Malay middle class has been successful. When asked whether it was still necessary to support Malays as the Malay middle class had increased, he said that the situation was basically the same and the Malay middle class, such as the Malay professionals, did not increase enough. It was because some Malays depended on the government as they

misunderstood the NEP to be just a pro-Malay policy (*New Straits Times*, 1 January 1988). He also mentioned that Malay middle class was not big enough because many still cannot afford to buy 50,000 to 300,000 ringgit houses. As such, he said, the size of the Malay middle class had to be increased (*Business Times*, 5 March 1997; *The Star*, 5 March 1997; *The Sun*, 5 March 1997).

Mahathir presented a new concept, *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) at an UMNO meeting in 1991. This *New Malay* are Malays who clearly recognise their identity, perspectives and their own roles as Malays (Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib, 1996; Chamil Wariya, 1993). These, according to Mahathir, are Malays with confidence who would overcome inferiority and dependency as illustrated in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*. Malays should utilise their fullest potential by trying hard and facing internationalisation and competition with entrepreneurship and a business mindset. This concept appeared together with the remarkable economic growth of Malaysia, its position in the international political scenes, and the changes of self-recognition among the Malays, especially the younger generation who accepted privileges under the NEP.

This concept of the New Malay insists on the urbanisation of the Malays. It is said that the Malays should change attitudes and worldview through urbanisation (Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib 1996, Chapter 3). The traditional Malay world that is represented by the *kampung* (village) has good values such as *gotong royong*, but negative cultures (i.e. negative traditions, unproductive lifestyle, envy, jealousy, gossip, hate, etc.) characterise their lifestyle and way of thinking.

Moving into and/or living in urban areas are not enough for the urbanisation of the Malays. It is not only a matter of capital and capability, but also a matter of motivation that the Malays cannot compete with the Chinese in Kampung Baru. The Malays are said to bring negative cultures even in Subang Jaya in the suburb of Kuala Lumpur where there is a large Malay middle class. It may take several generations before a business culture is instilled. The urbanisation of the Malays changes their attitudes and makes them more competitive. In this process, the Malays are given many opportunities to participate in development. It need not be just about the creation of new job opportunities for Malays, but also the creation of entrepreneurs, industrialists and business people as well as professionals.

Thus, the emergence of a Malay middle class and/or creation of a Malay human resource (such as entrepreneurs and professional and technical jobs) is a political as well as an economic target for the government because of the ethnic structure in the country.

7. Malaysian Youth and Urban Culture

Urbanisation has transformed Malaysia's economic structures and social system and the increase in the new middle class brought on an urban lifestyle and culture.

One major characteristic of this new middle class is that they have a common lifestyle, consumption pattern and culture although their occupations are varied. They create demand with their consumption power, hence the proliferation of shopping complexes[17], fast food shops[18], restaurants, discotheques[19], branded clothes, electrical goods, cars, travel, amusement parks, etc. They have a different consumption culture and constitute a new segment in the consumer market[20].

They do not only buy goods, but are also interested in culture and art, leisure and travel. They prefer the English language, are education-oriented[21] , and are interested in issues concerning environment, women, and the politically correct.

Their interests influence the mass media. Major newspapers transformed and used colour photographs since 1991. English newspapers created new sections to suit the interests of the middle class. For example, Life and Times of the *New Straits Times* and Section 2 of *The Star* feature culture and art, issues on environment and women, leisure and entertainment, etc. Newspapers in Malaysia, however, do not generally include critique and analysis of politics, so the middle class would relegate this role to other media if they are more interested in politics as well as social issues (Loh and Mustafa, 1996, pp.122-123).

Pop culture in Malaysia is mainly shaped in Kuala Lumpur. It is here where new trends are picked by TV and radio programs, films, concerts, newspapers and magazines, etc., despite strong influences from western culture. The stage performances such as plays, dance and classical music concerts are also held in Kuala Lumpur, but the audience is limited in Malaysia.

One of the major characteristics of Malaysian youth pop culture is the existence of sub-cultures based on ethnicity. Songs of US hit charts and Hollywood movies are popular among all youths from all ethnic groups. However Malay pop and Indonesian music and films mainly cater for Malays. Movies and songs from Hong Kong are preferred by the Chinese youths, and the Indians enjoy Tamil (and Hindi) movies and music.

In Malaysian cinemas, American Hollywood movies have Malay subtitles. Hong Kong movies, which use Cantonese, a dialect spoken by many Chinese in Kuala Lumpur, have the Malay subtitles as well as the original subtitles in Chinese and English; the screen is covered with many lines of various languages. Tamil and Hindi movies have English subtitles. Besides Hollywood movies, the audience of each language movie is divided by ethnicity. This is same as in Japan where Hollywood movies (with big-scale budgets) are more popular with the youths than local Japanese movies. Malay movies are not so popular even among Malay youths except the P.Ramlee[22] movies which are considered "classics". In the 1990s, however, a Malay love-story movie, *Sembilu* which featured popular pop singers in the main cast, was a big hit, together with its soundtrack. Sequels, *Sembilu 2* and *Trajedi Oktober* were also very successful. These movies feature popular Malay pop stars and their songs and illustrate a glamorous urban lifestyle with fashionable restaurants, residences and discotheques, branded clothes, cars, big bikes and such. This is similar to the "trendy dramas" which were popular on Japanese TV in the late 1980s when the economy was booming.

Before these Malay "trendy films" emerged, it was thought that the Malay movies were "boring" (the story being predictable and slow) and/or some better movies were "artistic" with limited audience except P.Ramlee's works which are popular across all generations and often featured on TV as classics. So these "trendy films" became the kind of turning point for Malay movies, and will be successful so long as they can attract the young people. This is related with the emergence of the Malay middle class and the penetration of a new consumption culture among the younger generation of Malays. Yet, it is said that these Malay films were rather popular among lower income Malays and income gap among Malays should also be discussed as well.

In the 1990s, new TV stations, MetroVision and NTV7 joined the three existing TV stations – the state-run RTM1 and RTM2, and TV3, a private station. RTM1 and RTM2 have mainly Malay programs including prayers programs for Muslims, and news programs

in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. RTM2 shows many educational programs. TV3 features more entertainment with popular TV dramas from the USA. TV3 announced their starting 24-hour broadcasting in 1997 but it suspended because of the economic turndown.

New TV stations, Metro Vision and NTV7 are entertainment-oriented and the main medium is the English language. Metro Vision, known as TV4 was limited to the urban areas of the Klang Valley as the name of the station suggests. Metro Vision showed many American dramas and also aired a program "*Cities and Towns*" (on air for 1995-96) which introduced the latest trends in town such as fashionable shops, restaurants and events in Kuala Lumpur and its neighbourhoods. But, Metro Vision was closed only after several-year operation. NTV7 is popular with American sitcoms and it also shows Tamil programs and Chinese (mainly, from HK) programs for weekend.

In Malaysia, the private media is also under government control and is scrutinised for politics, Islam, sex, violence, etc. As an Islamic country, all the immoral and decadent culture such as sex and nudity (including kissing), vulgar words etc., on TV and films are censored. Also, the behaviour of artistes (singers, actors/actresses, etc.) is sometimes criticised. For example, a Malay female singer who kissed a dog on TV was criticised as dogs are supposed to be 'dirty' for Muslims. In the 1990s, a Malay male rock star, Amy, had his performance restricted because his long hair was considered to be decadent and he finally had to cut his hair in public. A big TV comedy hit, *Jangan Ketawa,* in the early 1990's aired on TV3 was also criticised because the Malay male comedians wore women's costumes although they insisted that it came from a Malay traditional play. A Malay actress who acted as Blanch on stage of the famous Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*[23] was criticised because of her "excellent" performance of the immoral and scandalous heroine, and she had to state in newspapers that she was a religious Muslim woman.

As the urban culture and trends penetrate the youth culture in Malaysia, there are social changes and conflicts such as drugs[24] , crimes, the sex industry[25] , suicides[26] , etc. that are often considered symptoms of urban immorality and decadence. At the same time, the government and mass media frequently choose to highlight and criticise youth behaviour as being related to social problems.

Negative images of female factory workers in 1970s and 1980s are a typical case. The employment of women increased in the manufacturing sector and Malay women entered factories as unskilled labour under the NEP. However, these factory women are criticised for their lifestyle and behaviour, said to be in conflict with Islamic traditional values. They are criticised for their western clothes, going out shopping and watching movies by themselves, staying alone in towns and near factories, mingling with men, etc. The mass media featured cases of factory workers who became prostitutes after getting into the bad habit of spending money and created some terms such as "*kaki jalan*" (walking feet), "*Minah Karan*" (electric Minah or hot stuff), to describe their immoral behaviour. Politicians and religious leaders also added their criticism of these women's behaviour (Yoshimura, 1998b:141-143; Ong, 1987).

Also, it is common to see young people hanging out ("*lepak*") at shopping complexes and streets in Kuala Lumpur and other towns in Malaysia and newspapers have highlighted this. Politicians have said that it was unproductive and not good for young people who instead should be working hard for development of the nation. This is a development-oriented rationalist view. If they did the same thing at *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) in *kampung* (villages) in rural areas, the youths would not be criticised. The same behaviour, however, once spatially transferred into the urban areas, would be pointed out as a problematic one.

Furthermore, girls' and young women's behaviour such as *lepak*, going to discotheques, going out with strange men (including asking strange men for lifts, dinners, etc.), have been highlighted by the media and it was said that these kinds of action would easily lead them to prostitution and crimes.

Recently, it is often been said that young people do not value family values as before. The government campaign insists that the youths should respect their parents and senior people and should recognise family ties as traditional and universal values. Thus, the ideal model for young people is to be a good religious Muslim who studies hard for higher education, who has motivation for a good career, who respects and loves the family and traditional values, and who contributes to the community and development of the nation.

8. Conclusion

The characteristics of the culture of middle class(es) are western-oriented consumption-based. This western-oriented culture, however, caused cultural conflicts with Islamic traditional values and morals. Moreover, while the middle class(es) prefer western and urban lifestyles, the young middle class(es) in urban areas also choose Islamic political activities and education, and hold stronger ethnic hostility[27] , resulting in a new conservative group. The middle class(es) are motivated and educated, and are interested and aware of social issues and politics. The political structure creates support for this group in dealing with ethnic problems.

The concept of urbanisation of Malays is that the Malays should recognise their ethnic identity and achieve a rational business culture and compete in competitive circumstances. This is not because Malays want to exclude other ethnic groups. All the ethnic groups can respect other ethnic groups as long as they are confident about their identity and ethnicity. This multi-culturalism could be the first step for the concept of a "Bangsa Malaysia" (Malaysian Nationality)[28] with the national identity being that of being seen as Malaysians and not as per each individual ethnic group.

We can also understand that ethnic problems in Malaysia were not cultural problems, but mainly economic and political problems. We can now discuss income distribution and social stratification since the ethnic division of labour, which was established during the British colonial period, has been transformed (Syed Husin Ali, 1984). The increase of Malays in the middle class(es) transforms the traditional forms of ethnic division of labour and power relations. The emergence of new middle class(es) forms new urban cultures and each ethnic culture is influenced by the new urban youth culture. While it is important to see that urban life has become physically rich, at the same time one needs to think about the structures of an urban society with issues on new relations among ethnic groups and cultures (including the positions of urban Malays in society), development and foreign labour, new consumption patterns and traditional values, and such.

Notes

1 The dispute over the identity of the founder of Kuala Lumpur has received considerable attention since 1980. Carstens (1988) notes that high-school textbooks now credit Raja Abdullah of Klang rather than Yap Ah Loy with having founded the City. Adnan Hj.

Nawang, citing sources quoted in *Warta Malaya*, a newspaper in circulation in the 1930's highlights the presence of Malay traders from Sumatra in Kuala Lumpur before 1860, and thus before Yap Ah Loy was said to have contributed to the development of the city (Mohd Razali Agus, 1992, p.33).

2 An estate is a big-scale managed plantation with more than 100 acres.

3 See Yoshimura (1997a) for a case study on foreign workers in estates and Yoshimura (1997b) for a case study on a factory.

4 About half of foreign estate workers are registered in Kuala Lumpur although most of estates are not near Kuala Lumpur. This is because headquarters of estate companies do the paperwork for registration of foreign workers in their estates in the country (by interviews with estate management companies).

5 The construction sector in Malaysia faces serious shortages of skilled, and professional and technical staff. The professional/technical staff ratio per one million labour force in the construction sector in Malaysia is 630 (400 professional/technicians per 635,000 workers) while it is 6,200 in Japan, 2,200 in South Korea, and 1,870 in Singapore (*Business Times*, 4 March 1997).

6 The state government announced a 10-year development plan for the district in July 1993. This was the seventh township plan in Selangor and would develop houses, shops and a green lung in a currently undeveloped area. The total area involved 1,600 hectares and the targeted final population is 85,000 residents. The total budget set aside for the development was 1 billion ringgit (*Malay Mail*, 7 July 1993; *The Star*, 7 July 1993 and 20 August 1993; *New Straits Times*, 6 August 1993; and interviews with officers at PKNS).

7 Kampung Baru is a Chinese new village that was created by the government after the announcement of Emergency in 1948 and the aim was to protect "Chinese residents from the communists". Most of the *kampung baru*s were created in 1949-53. Kampung Baru in the district was supposed to be established in 1950/51.

8 From interviews with Kampung Baru village office, factory owners and foreign workers in 1993 and 1994.

9 Factories in industrial estates such as Shah Alam and Klang also recruit workers in the same way. Professional and technical staff, as well as clerical staff, are hired through formal channels (viz. newspaper advertisements) while production workers are hired through informal channels (through friends, relatives, local notices) (Yoshimura, 1998b, Chapter 2).

10 Company recruiters went to the less-developed states and visited 194 locations including those in East Malaysia. But the company could not get enough workers.

11 This survey involved interviews with 101 Malay villagers from 5 five Malay *kampungs* in 1993 and 1994. The language used was Malay. See Yoshimura (1997b).

12 Ethnic problems are sometimes sensitive and political in Malaysia, so the author was afraid that they would not answer. Yet, those who responded "No Answer" was only 14% of the total. Also, only a few answered "No Difference".

13 From interviews with 161 Malaysian workers of Japanese companies in Peninsular Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Klang, Penang, Johor, etc.) (Yoshimura, 1998b, Chapter 2).

14 The average commuting time was 20 minutes in the 1991 and 1992 survey. In the case of Kuala Lumpur, it takes 1-2 hours during the peak hours to go to Shah Alam and Klang by bus or car; at other times, it will take only 10-20 minutes. Yet, people

prefer areas close to their homes even in the city area where there is relatively better public transportation. There were cases where some persons changed jobs because of location. Workers usually use cars, motorbikes, and public bus or factory bus services. It is important for factories in industrial estates to provide transportation. There is a tendency for women workers to prefer closer working locations and they would always check whether factories have factory bus services or not. This is especially so if they have to work shifts, where irregular working hours and safety become important considerations. Cases as in Tokyo where people spend 2 or 3 hours commuting in packed trains are the exception; unlike in other prefectures in Japan. In Malaysia, too, there are various commuting styles. Yet, young Malay villagers, who often go to Kuala Lumpur by motorbikes during the weekends, still prefer working in/near villages although it takes only 20 minutes to go to Kuala Lumpur by motorbike. Probably, their recognition of distance between living places and working places and their consideration about city lifestyle are different from young people in Tokyo who prefer working in the business area in the city. Malaysian youth might have different concepts and settings when they consider the living places and the working places in a space.

15 For a more detailed discussion on the new middle class(es), see Crouch (1985), Syed Husin Ali (1987), Mohd. Nor Nawawi (1991), Saravanamuttu (1989), Kahn (1995, 1996), Jomo (1995, 1997), Abdul Rahman Embong (1997), Rahimah Abdul Aziz (1997).

16 Hughes and Woldekidan (1994) used two criteria, occupations and consumption patterns, to define the middle class. In the Malaysian case, however, it is said that it is difficult to use income levels to define the middle class and to compare this using time series because of price changes and inflation. Jomo (1997) uses occupations and income distribution. He also compares time series data of such variables, including that of ethnicity and gender. Abdul Rahman Embong(1997) used occupation, education and income to identify those who were supposed to be the middle class(es).

17 Many shopping complexes are under construction and some are huge complexes with amusement corners. Shopping complexes often have cinemas, karaoke, and game centres inside. The huge shopping complex (*Pyramid*) in Sunway Resort, which opened in 1997, has an indoor ice skating rink in the building. *Mid-Valley* called Mega-Mall, which was opened in 1999 has cine-plex with 18 screens. Another mega-shopping complex, which started construction in 1996 as a part of the re-development of Bukit Bintang area, plans to have an indoor amusement park as well as an ice skating rink.

18 In Malaysia, McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken use halal meat for the sake of Muslims, as do other fast food shops. A sign to this effect, endorsed by the relevant religious authority, is customarily placed for the consumers' knowledge. McDonald's and KFC are relatively more expensive than local snacks and food, but they are popular among young people.

19 Fashionable discotheques, including the Hard Rock Café, attract both local youths and foreigners, and are the preferred meeting places of upper class' children and celebrities.

20 Kahn (1996, pp.13-14) pointed out that the existence of the new middle class was first noticed in a marketing survey by the advertisement industry as a different category of people with regard to the nation's consumption culture.

21 The middle class is concerned about education and want their children to achieve higher education. The Malaysian society is now becoming an education-oriented society where the academic background defines one's career.

22 P. Ramlee is a national actor who was a film director, composer, and a singer for his films. There is a memorial museum in a street named after him in Kuala Lumpur.

23 A famous stage play by an American writer, Tennessee Williams. The heroine, Blanch, came to stay with her sister and the husband. She always reminisced her memories as a rich family's daughter in the South, but her secret that she prostituted herself was revealed. She eventually went crazy after being raped by her sister's husband.

24 The Malaysian government applies the death penalty for drug smuggling and trafficking because the situation is very serious. It is said that it is dangerous in back streets of Chow Kit and Pudu Raya in Kuala Lumpur. For an anti-drug campaign in February 1997, at a fashionable shopping complex, Lot 10, in Bukit Bintang, the government exhibited samples of drugs and the rack used for whipping those convicted of trafficking. At the same time, newspapers and TV featured that junior high school students were arrested for drug smuggling and usage. RTM2 also featured an educational program with a drama of a young man who spoiled everything because of drugs but recovered with his family's support and love.

25 Although surveys on the sex industry in Malaysia are limited, Shyamala Nagaraj and Siti Rohani Yahya (1995) discusses the sex industry and its related regulations.

26 There were 36 cases of suicides and 1,390 of suicidal behaviour in 1985. In Kuala Lumpur, there were 3.26 suicides per 100,000 population, compared with 1.47 per 100,000 for the whole of Peninsular Malaysia (Ong and Yeoh, 1992, Table 2, p.151 and Table 3, p.153).

27 Judith Nagata (1984) pointed out that the main group involved in the Dakwa movement was young people in city areas with high education.

28 Bangsa Malaysia is a concept presented in *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020) in 1991. Non-Malay parties such as MCA welcomed the concept and insisted that all the ethnic groups unite to remove the ethnic border. Dr. Mahathir and the government used the concept to mobilise non-Malay to achieve the target of Wawasan 2020. In May 1999, however, when the DAP used the concept of Malaysian Malaysia which was a DAP concept for 1969-1995 and originally from Lee Kuan Yew's idea, the ruling Barisan Nasional criticised the DAP saying that the concept would cause communal conflicts. Mahathir likened the "Malaysian Malaysia" concept to globalisation where the rich would benefit and the weak remain poor and marginalised. The DAP was then forced to present its concept of New Malaysia (*Malaysia Baru*). Here, they argued that ethnic identity would be protected as well as the position of the Malays in the institution of government.

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