

TOWARDS A THEORY OF PERANAKAN CHINESE IDENTITY IN AN OUTPOST OF THAI BUDDHISM

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Not "whither?" but "where?" seems almost a more appropriate question in relation to the peranakan phenomenon in present-day Southeast Asia, after an excursion into some recent literature on Southeast Asian Chinese. Where are the peranakan today? Do they still (if ever they did) exist? Or have the enabling social and political factors now vanished? This paper will suggest that the peculiar conditions of Kelantan State on West Malaysia's northeast coast have produced, and currently maintain in being, a form of Chinese ethnicity which we may properly term "peranakan".¹ But first, by way of essential background, some basic defining propositions; and a few reflections on the phenomenon as it emerges from some recent writing on Indonesia, Malaya and Thailand.

The term "peranakan", denoting a category of Chinese in Indonesia, has been an important concept in the political vocabulary of that country. Its literal meaning is, of course, "local-born", but in social practice it refers to an old-established, and stable, local Chinese community with a culture distinct from that of recent immigrants or their local-born offspring. Peranakan culture is influenced by local models but owing to the exclusivity of Islam, which either repels, or assimilates totally, Islam is

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1. My first period in Kelantan, as a high school history teacher, 1962-65, involved me in no personal contact with peranakan. However, for nearly a year during 1966-67 I did research on the political integration of the Kelantan Thai community, especially at Semerak (Southeast Kelantan). (In this I enjoyed the support of the London-Cornell Project for East and Southeast Asian Studies and thus indirectly of the Nuffield and Carnegie Foundations; as a graduate student of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, I was also funded for three years by a British state studentship.) My initial observations about Kelantan Thai/peranakan relations are recorded in my *The Thais of Kelantan. A Socio-political Study of an Ethnic Outpost*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, London, 1969), especially chapter 2; and in Roger Kershaw, "The Chinese in Kelantan, West Malaysia, as mediators of political integration to the Kelantan Thais", *Nanyang Quarterly*, III, 3-4 (December 1973), 1-10 (of which a more accurate printing appears in *Chinois d'Outre-Mer*, ed., Denys Lombard (Paris, 1976), pp. 83-96). In 1974 I returned to Kelantan for six months, supported by a grant of the Nuffield Foundation, to undertake a more specific, post-doctoral study of Sino-Thai relations. The present paper is not the first fruit of that trip (for instance, I have written about Kelantan politics in the interim) but represents the first concerted mobilization of my 1974 data about the Kelantan Chinese. In view of the long delay, I must express apologies as well as thanks to the Nuffield Foundation.

not generally one of the elements of peranakan culture.² Such a culture may be found in a situation where, although indigenous female ancestry is usually assumed, that source of influence for further, or total assimilation has virtually dried up. But nor are the peranakan dependent on new immigrants for sons-in-law or daughters-in-law, having been settled long enough to have generated their own balance of sexes.³ True peranakans are not transitionals (though no doubt a few individuals may leave and assimilate from time to time) but a stable ethnic group, distinct from mainland, or the local "mainstream" Chinese (whatever form their culture may currently take in the local cities) and from the indigenous population.

By contrast, the "Jawi Peranakan" of Malaya are the offspring of unions between immigrant Muslim males (Indian, Arab, etc.) and indigenous females; thus by virtue of a shared religion succeeding generations move ever closer to Malay identity and are finally absorbed—with the implication that a "Jawi" peranakan community can only continue in being if further male immigrants arrive to renew the process of biological and cultural fusion. While Muslim immigrants are absorbed more or less readily into Malay or Indonesian society—allowance being made for the vestigial and situational ethnic pride of the *sukubangsa*⁴—Islam has tended, as we know, to act as a deterrent to Chinese assimilation at least since the late eighteenth century in Java, after it became a more explicitly politico-ethnic symbol and Javanese females were discouraged from marrying non-Muslims; reciprocally, Chinese farmers felt a greater reluctance to convert. Thus a "true" peranakan community emerges, in the sense that it is no longer transitional. However, not only changes within Islam but the declining political status of the Indonesians under Dutch rule, and the separate status (part inferior, part superior) forced upon the Chinese by the Dutch, played a part in reducing assimilation. In the second half of the twentieth century indigenous nationalism has imposed impediments on the Chinese which have tended, again, to deter any reduction or merger of peranakan identity, at least initially.

2. Cf. The Siau-w Giap, "Religion and overseas Chinese assimilation in South-east Asian countries", *Revue du Sud-est Asiatique*, No. 2 (1965), 69-83.
3. John R. Clammer, *The Ambiguity of Identity. Ethnicity Maintenance and Change among the Straits Chinese Community of Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore, ISEAS Occasional Paper No. 54, 1979), has suggested that the Straits Chinese did, in the nineteenth century, draw on new immigrants of both sexes, but selectively and entirely to their own advantage. However, it seems odd to argue, as Clammer does, from the sex balance of the nineteenth century to a sex balance at *all* earlier times, obviating any need for unions with indigenous females.
4. Cf. Judith A. Nagata, "What is a Malay? Situational selection of ethnic identity in a plural society" *American Ethnologist*, I, 2(1974), 331-350.

In short, social and political changes in the Indonesian (and likewise Peninsular Malay) host society have had a profound effect on the *subjective* orientations of the Chinese towards it (it is not just a matter of indigenous females and their potential assimilatory influence ceasing to be available to the Chinese community). These changes have contributed significantly to consolidation of a peranakan phenomenon. Nevertheless there have been two potent types of pressure, from either side, during this century, to abandon peranakan identity. From the Indonesian side, since Independence, has come national education, and from the Chinese "totok" side and from China, a generation earlier, came Chinese education, with its invitation to "re-Sinicize" (the suspicion of Indonesian nationalists towards all Chinese, peranakan or otherwise, and not least towards their education system, owes a great deal to the prior emergence of *Chinese* nationalism in Southeast Asia). But as all Chinese with Indonesian citizenship were compelled at an early date to take Indonesian education, that influence is likely in the long term to prevail, despite peranakan resentment at discrimination and, no doubt, subjective rejection of assimilation by many.⁵ In the long term, perhaps even in the medium term, there seems little future for an intermediate Chinese category in Indonesia—nor for a "totok" category for that matter. Still, barring mass conversions to Islam (inconceivable under the New Order regime) or extensive intermarriage (which lacks the sociological preconditions at the present), some basis of distinctive identity must surely remain, even if as a sub-category of Indonesian, rather than of Chinese, identity.⁶

5. Already in the late nineteenth century the Malay language provided the basis for the literacy of many peranakan. Cf. Claudine Lombard-Salmon and Denys Lombard, "Les traductions de romans chinois en malais (1880-1930)", *Littératures Contemporaines de l'Asie du Sud-Est*, ed., P.-B. Lafont and D. Lombard (Paris, 1974), pp. 183-201. Nationalist pressure on peranakan in questions of education as well as citizenship is documented by Donald E. Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia 1900-1958* (Ithaca, Cornell University, Monograph Series of the Modern Indonesia Project; Revised Edition, 1961).
6. Where a government adopts a strong line against cultural pluralism, the degree of resistance to assimilation and political integration will be partly a function of the relative size of minority and majority groups, and the capacity of outside protectors to intervene and turn acquiescence into resistance. A recent report seems to suggest that Indonesian leaders are more confident than previously that they can restore relations with the People's Republic of China without adverse effects on the political integration of the Indonesian Chinese (see David Jenkins, "Suharto bites the bullet", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 March 1980, 31-33). No doubt this reflects, in part, changing assessments of the outlook of the PRC, but there must also be a sense that 25 years of firm pressure, not to say repression, have had broadly *positive* effects on Indonesian Chinese integration. For the predicted erosion of peranakan culture by Indonesian influences, see both Maurice Freedman, "The Chinese in Southeast Asia: a longer view", *Man, State and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed., R.O. Tilman (London, 1969), pp. 431-449; and G.W. Skinner, "Change and persistence in Chinese culture overseas", *Journal of the South Seas Society*, XVI, 1-2 (1960), 86-100. On the comparable effects of a firm national policy of assimilation in Thailand, see Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity. The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong, 1960).

For West Malaysia a similar expectation of decline and disappearance seems valid (if such has not already been fulfilled), yet for a different reason, namely that the Peninsular equivalent of Indonesia's totoks—the sinkheh or newcomers—were too numerous and eventually became too powerful to be excluded from citizenship and other political rights by the Malay leadership at Independence. Even their Chinese primary school system has been preserved to this day, not completely unchanged, it is true, but always at the state's expense. Far from association with the “new Chinese” being a political “kiss of death” for the Straits Chinese, such a thing became a highly attractive option both socially and politically, once the balance of wealth and power had shifted decisively from ‘old’ into ‘new’ Chinese hands in the twentieth century, and even more so in the post-Independence era of ethnic incorporation and ethnic competition. But in terms of *identity*, close association with the Chinese mainstream may well prove to have been a death warrant—even if, as with Muslim *sukubangsa*, revised or vestigial manifestations of a “Baba” identity continue to be asserted in particular contexts from time to time.⁷

Thailand stands in great contrast to Indonesia and Malaya on nearly all counts. The literature emphasizes, conventionally but no doubt correctly, the ease and regularity of complete Chinese assimilation to Thai culture and identity since early times. The factors facilitating this process have included the high status of indigenous government officials in a non-colonized kingdom; the traditional readiness of these officials and the royalty to employ talented aliens, even to marry their daughters; and the “compatibility” of Thai and Chinese religion. Stephen Tobias, however, sounds a perceptive warning in the latter respect: in an urban situation of concentrated immigrant population Chinese use and transform the meaning of Thai Buddhism in their own subtle ways. But the process involves adaptation on the part of the Chinese themselves, a redefinition of Chinese-ness in a Thai environment. The most vigorous form of adaptation in Ayuthya, Tobias suggests, is the integration of young Chinese with Thai professionals in a modern, Western-type business and professional club.⁸ This observation will

7. Clammer, *op. cit.* The majority of Straits Chinese had redefined their identity once before, of course, in changing into English-speaking Straits Chinese from Malay-or creole Hokkien-speaking Babas. Unfortunately, some confusion seems to be engendered by the fact that the “Straits Chinese” have often continued to call themselves “Baba”. As I read Clammer he denies the existence of a pre-Straits Chinese (i.e. pre-colonial) type of peranakan culture in Malaya because the “Baba” culture that he knows is so plainly English-speaking. It seems strange that he should emphasize the possibilities of culture change and re-definition of identity for the present and the future, but effectively deny it for the early nineteenth century.
8. Stephen F. Tobias, “Buddhism, belonging and detachment—some paradoxes of Chinese ethnicity in Thailand”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXXVI, 2 (February 1977), 303-325.

remind us of the concept of "double identity" used to such admirable effect by Coughlin: not in the sense of a "synthesis" or "composite" of cultural traits but in the sense of flexible roles, in which one or the other identity (Chinese or Thai) is invoked without contradiction according to the ethnic context of interaction.⁹

No doubt each individual's culture is now "synthetic", too, in some degree, and not merely in the sense that one set of values is applied in a Chinese context, another in Thai contexts. No doubt, also, the highest degree of cultural syncretism will be found among the offspring of mixed unions. Unfortunately, while Coughlin emphasizes the almost certain social importance of the Thai-Chinese as agents of change for the unassimilated, it is not his concern to explore the *luug-ciin* phenomenon as such in any depth or detail.¹⁰ Boonsanong's sadly tautological study actually excludes all *luug-ciin* pre-emptively from its own scope by defining a Chinese as a child of two Chinese-speaking parents.¹¹ Yet while the literature does not lack its tacit

9. Coughlin, op. cit. It is a pity that the analytical content of the concept which gives the book its title—"double identity"—is really only elaborated and exploited in the last few pages. After fifteen months in Thailand (1977-78) and frequent interaction with Bangkok Chinese I can only remark with enthusiasm on Coughlin's insight and foresight. For a similar approach to dual identity, but stressing *selection* of different segments of a composite identity according to situation (rather than switching of roles according to group association), see Nagata, op. cit. Nagata explicitly, Coughlin implicitly, illustrate the essential "normality" (for the actors), and lack of trauma, in situations of composite identity and alternating group membership respectively.
10. G.W. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand. An Analytical History* (Ithaca, 1957), has several references to *luug-ciin* and their speed of assimilation, and his observation that "a marginal role mid-way between the two societies was unusual", 128, may exclude by implication the notion of a role as agents of non-*luug-ciin* assimilation. (Coughlin too uses "*luug-ciin*" to denote offspring of mixed unions. Tobias, op. cit., refers to any child of an immigrant by this term. It has probably acquired both meanings because the assimilated second generation Chinese are, like the mixed offspring, no longer properly Chinese even in Thai eyes, but nevertheless Chinese by descent. I shall observe Coughlin's usage.)
11. Boonsanong Punyodyana, *Chinese-Thai Differential Assimilation in Bangkok. An exploratory Study* (Ithaca, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 79; 1971). Boonsanong compliments himself in his Evaluation (Chapter 7) on the fact that the respondents picked by reference to this criterion all turned out to be Chinese-speaking themselves and thus were clearly "Chinese" and not "Thai". But if the Chinese language, through socialization in the family, "makes" them Chinese, it could surely be argued that the seed of that conclusion was buried in the definition at the start. More importantly, by manipulating the definition of a Chinese to exclude the family as a possible arena of assimilation, the author inevitably focuses his search for processes of assimilation on public arenas such as government offices or quasi-governmental organisations into which Chinese only enter after two or three generations. It is true and relevant, however, that in Bangkok, for the moment, community endogamy seems to be more strongly the norm than in the past, as a result of the great immigrant influx of the twentieth century.

predispositions about assimilation through intermarriage, Thailand appears in truth to have no significant or stable "phenomenon" of the Indonesian *peranakan* kind. Adept as they may well be as agents of transition for their less assimilated brethren, the *luug-ciin* are themselves creatures of transition par excellence, not members of a stable, syncretic category, in an environment which has been exceptionally conducive to the loss of Chinese identity.

Even in the conditions of modern nationalism the Thai government has generally avoided the pitfall of outright repression of Chinese culture and political rights with concomitant reinforcement of defensive Chinese identity. A fine balance has been struck between discrimination and incentives for integration (plus facilities for it), especially in the field of education—nipping firmly in the bud the anti-assimilative appeal of Chinese education but without creating the impression of a pogrom or leaving the Chinese without any alternative, prestigious source of literacy, learning, qualification and social mobility. In conclusion, the ease and speed of movement towards Thai identity should presuppose the existence of many transitional individuals but Thai culture is so accessible that the transitionals are scarcely recognisable as a "group" of any importance (even of transitional importance!). Observers have seen two dominant ethnic categories in which transitionals enjoy simultaneous membership without contradiction and without the need to elaborate an intermediate universe.

It may be appropriate at this point to summarize some of my own conceptual and theoretical predispositions. I assume that most ethnic groups do in fact in large part define their identity, as they define their boundaries, by reference to cultural characteristics. But I also assume that these defining cultural characteristics may change in the course of the history of an ethnic group; and some of these characteristics may also be "ideal" or essentially ideological, i.e. figments of the ethnic imagination or self-image, rather than objective traits visible to the observer. Moreover, individuals may move flexibly between identities and if necessary operate in two cultures eclectically, provided in general that these are recognised on both sides as compatible.

It is my understanding, also, shared with many other students of ethnic conflict, that cultural assimilation will normally enhance a minority group's willingness to accept the political arrangements of the "host country", i.e. to see themselves as members of that polity or (in other words) to undergo political integration. However, it seems an equally valid general supposition that assimilation imposed by political or theological fiat will be perceived as a threat and produce or perpetuate political alienation as well as resistance to assimilation as such—though such alienation and such resistance may be moderated if incentives for assimilation are also extended, and provided that there are no external disincentives or that the internal pressure itself is not absolute or

ineluctable. It is also possible to conceive notionally of a culturally plural society which is integrated but unassimilated, and integrated by virtue precisely of its complete cultural tolerance and eclecticism. In pre-nationalist Malaya political integration at certain levels of each ethnic hierarchy did occur with only minimal assimilation;¹² indeed the same has been suggested for the first decade after Independence.¹³ But here, for the professional classes, a specialized assimilation to a common, universalistic culture based on English must surely be taken into account, and a recent study has re-emphasized the obstacles to the emergence of "stratification" (in effect, class identity) in a system of institutionalized cultural pluralism and strongly institutionalized ethnic roles and statuses where, not least, the non-indigenous communities are made aware, through folk tradition or the contemporary media, of past and present events in their ancestral countries.¹⁴ Thus to hope for political integration without assimilation may be merely utopian.

Nagata seems reluctant to apply the concept of stratification to ethnic relations themselves,¹⁵ though she makes reference to the concept of "structural pluralism", which she has in fact employed elsewhere.¹⁶ Do I merely betray the decade and political culture in which my own academic socialization took place if I continue to assert the importance of ethnic perceptions of the overall scheme of corporate ranking in a plural society, reflecting unequal political and legal rights, as a barrier to integration and (to a lesser extent) to assimilation too.¹⁷ Perhaps this is indeed the problem to which Nagata is referring, obliquely, where she writes of the lack of a "neutral" or "non-ethnic" role or culture on which a "Malaysian" identity could focus.¹⁸ Alternatively one might put it this way: Malay identity is too tightly bound up with a struggle for ethnic dominance to be either truly tolerant towards non-Islamic culture or to promote large-scale Chinese cultural crossing by some "bending of the rules" (for fear of swamping by the new, nominal bumiputeras). Thus the Chinese are by and large

12. Maurice Freedman, "The growth of a plural society in Malaya", *Pacific Affairs*, XXXIII (1960), 158-168.

13. H.S. Morris, "Some aspects of the concept Plural Society", *Man*, II, 2 (July 1967), 169-184.

14. Judith A. Nagata, "Perceptions of social inequality in Malaysia", *Contributions to Asian Studies*, VII (1975), 113-136.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Nagata 1974, *op. cit.*, 347.

17. Roger Kershaw 1969, *op. cit.* And Roger Kershaw, "Frontiers within frontiers. The persistence of Thai ethnicity in Kelantan, Malaysia" (Review Article), *Journal of the Siam Society* LXVIII, 1 (January 1980), 145-158.

18. Nagata 1974, *loc. cit.*

repelled and the West Malaysian plural society persists, with few signs as yet of emergent class stratification, and little convergence of ethnic identity either—though the existence of a half-hearted, partly coercive, political integration embracing much of the population cannot be denied.¹⁹

In this situation of ethnic polarization, accentuated, if not brought about, by “political development”, it would normally be anticipated that any rural Chinese communities of considerable age would converge, as the Malacca Babas have tended to do, with the more dynamic urban Chinese of more recent origin in Malaya. I have previously argued that the rural Thai community of Kelantan have even experienced *less* political alienation than the conventional theory of the matter would predict because their stereotype of the Malayan Chinese (to whom the former are linked by multiple ties of kinship and clientship) still places them in a relatively high position in the overall ethnic hierarchy, i.e. in the overall scheme of perceived corporate ranking.²⁰ And indeed the urban Chinese have played an effective role as economic patrons in providing urban employment to Thai youth and in improving the amenities of the several Thai wats; they have effectively mitigated the impact of “structural pluralism”.²¹ As for the Kelantan rural Chinese, however, although there is no denying the appeals of “alliance” with urban Chinese through provision of daughters in marriage (far more than the Thais have done), membership of the Malaysian Chinese Association (in some villages), the sending of children to Chinese schools (by some more energetic and ambitious parents, if a Chinese school was somehow accessible to them), and so on, it is not quite the case that for these rural Malaysians “currently no ‘neutral’ or ‘non-ethnic’ role or culture yet exists”²² For as the urban Chinese bestow their protective patronage on the rural Thais (with whom they share a perception of cultural threat and political discrimination, and who provide a range of transcendental supports in return, as it were, for that protection), the ethnic category of “Kelantan Thai” and the institution of the Thai Buddhist religion continue to flourish. This is the human and cultural stock on which the rural Kelantan Hokkiens have drawn in times past—through marriage and cultural borrowing—to create a distinctive peranakan phenomenon. Such borrowing continues today.

19. However, for a less sceptical, short exploration of the possibilities of class consciousness, see Roger Kershaw, “Of race, class and clientship in Malaysia” (Review Article), *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, XIV, 3 (July 1976), 299-303.

20. Kershaw 1973, op. cit., 3; and Kershaw 1980; op. cit., 147-148. The decline implied by the word “relative” is from their high status under colonial rule.

21. Important details of urban Chinese patronage of Thai wats will be found in Louis Golomb, *Brokers of Morality: Thai Ethnic Adaptation in a Rural Malaysia Setting* (Hawaii, 1978). Kershaw 1980, op. cit., reviews this title.

22. Nagata 1974, loc. cit.

For a few Hokkiens, admittedly, *ciin thai* (Thai-Chinese) culture has been simply a staging post on the way to assimilation to Thai culture—as in Thailand. But as the Kelantan Thai community has had no political power or wealth on which to base a claim to superiority, it has not been a force for the abandonment or submergence of Chinese ethnicity among most rural Chinese.²³ On the other hand, since the indigenous component in this peranakan culture has no connection with an exclusivist religion or oppressive political hegemony, recruitment of indigenous females has not at any time ceased as it did in Indonesia and Malacca in the early modern period. I hypothesize that the continued vitality, in general, of the Thai reference point has also counteracted in some degree the appeals of modern, urban Chinese identity—the “re-Sinicization” option—thus enabling the Kelantan peranakan category to continue to exist in an age in which corporate ethnic competition usually leaves little room for “intermediate” or “marginal” ethnic categories of this kind. In contrast to Clammer in his study of the Baba community²⁴ I have found no evidence in Kelantan that rural Chinese see their culture as actually “more Chinese” than that of the Chinese of more recent origin in Malaya. On the contrary they evince a subjective inferiority about their illiteracy in Chinese, the inadequacy of their vocabulary, and their actual inability to understand, in some cases, the modern urban Hokkiens in Kota Bharu. The latter for their part do not contrive to conceal their amusement or contempt when they meet this creolized version of Hokkien (“Siamese Hokkien” they call it). However, the rural Hokkiens find their dignity and thus part of their identity in their access to Kelantan Thai Theravada Buddhism through command of its rituals, fluency in the Kelantan Thai language and basic Thai literacy, which elude the big-time urban patrons of the wats. Certainly this is a form of Chinese ethnicity, and specifically Chinese religious practices play an important part in the community’s life, but its pride seems to derive no less from ancient residence and participation in the purest source of transcendental power and moral inspiration in the countryside, Thai Buddhism, as well as a certain imagined quality of gentleness or humility, which is contrasted with the thrusting, competitive behaviour of modern urban Chinese.²⁵

23. The Thais’ term *ciin-thai* is accepted by the peranakan without demur when they speak Thai but “Kelantan Chinese” expresses better the way they think of themselves, for they wish to leave no doubt that they are Chinese.

24. Clammer, *op. cit.*, 10.

25. During my six months in Kelantan in 1974 (note 1 above) preoccupation with the recovery of spoken Kelantan Thai and some essential research tasks in the Thai village of Semerak meant that I could only spend three weeks at Balai, close to the coast in Bachok district, where a Thai community and a Chinese, of 57 and 53 households respectively, spatially separate but in most respects a single village, share the same two wats; and three days at riverine Tanoong (5 miles south of Kota Bharu) where a Chinese community has established

The 1970 Census of Malaysia enumerated a total Kelantan population of 686,266, of which 36,668 were Chinese (and 6,937 Thai).²⁶ Of the Chinese, 16,012 were indisputably urban dwellers, being the number recorded for the Town Council area of Kota Bharu. But even if Kota Bharu exhausted the possibilities of urban or semi-urban Chinese residence in Kelantan—and certainly it does not, considering the

a Thai Wat. However, I was no stranger to Balai, where I already had a number of friends, both Thai and Chinese, from 1967; and while at Ban Thai Semerak between May and July 1974 I had surveyed all 26 Chinese households at the nearby market village of Cherang Ruku, with special reference to religious practices, and thus came to Balai with germinating ideas about religious syncretism and what I wanted to test. In the event, I recorded the kinship and ethnic structure of all the households in the village (cf. Appendix B); complete educational and *buad* status of 25 Thai households and 25 Chinese households, including the non-resident offspring of these householders (with some partial data on other families); the place of residence of non-resident offspring of the same 25 Thai and 25 Chinese households; and the funerary arrangements observed by the deceased Chinese parents or spouses of some 40 Chinese adults, male or female, and widowed (female) Thai. Choice of households for the enquiry tended to be dictated by the presence of householders at home on the days when I went to particular sections of the village. (Two other Chinese villages briefly visited, to which reference will be made later, were Kulim, across river from Kota Bharu; and Chiekkha, some 15 miles upstream—i.e. south—from Kota Bharu.) As for language, during the work at Cherang Ruku I had not achieved “takeoff” in Hokkien but my Kelantan Thai was adequate for communication with the bi-lingual communities of Balai and Tanoong. In the pages which follow, the Hokkien terms which I know and have identified in a dictionary are rendered as in Nicholas Cleveland Bodman, *Spoken Amoy Hokkien*, 2 Vols. (Kuala Lumpur, 1955 and 1958), regardless of divergences in Kelantan Hokkien. I follow Bodman in indicating nasalization with a colon, but omit tone marks.

26. R. Chander, *Gulongan Masharakat* (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur, 1972). On the origins of the Kelantan Thais as migrant agriculturalists, see Kershaw 1969, op. cit., 81-94; Golomb, op. cit., 20. Until the appearance of Golomb's book the Kelantan Thais, let alone the Kelantan Chinese, had received short shrift from the English language literature. Stewart Wavell, *The Naga King's Daughter* (London, 1965), treats the Thais dismissively as “Kelantan Buddhists” (cf. my comment in Kershaw 1969, op. cit., 254-255). Colin McDougall, *Buddhism in Malaya* (Singapore, 1956), 49, mentions the flourishing institution of Thai Buddhism in Kedah but ignores Kelantan completely, despite its highly visible 20 Theravada wats (two of these were created by and for Chinese village communities, viz. Tanoong and Kulim; but the latter dates only from the sixties, so the total of wats was 19 when McDougall was writing). *Kelantan. Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State*, ed., William R. Roff (Kuala Lumpur, 1974), passes over the Thais in silence, while an article in that collection, Manning Nash, “Ethnicity, centrality and education in Pasir Mas”, pp. 243-258, sums up Chinese religion as the familial ancestral cult and “various local temples mixing forms of Taoism and Buddhism and spirit mediumship”: see p. 253.

several flourishing district centres, and many large market villages straddling the highways of the State—urban residence is no indicator of cultural attachment (say, attachment to non-peranakan culture). In any urban or semi-urban centre there will be a range of Chinese cultural type, from the strict modern Mahayana Buddhists and Chinese monolinguals to mainly Thai and/or Malay-speaking peranakan syncretists. In other words the scope of the peranakan culture of Kelantan exceeds the physical boundaries of the specifically rural Chinese population among whose ancestors, mainly, that culture first came into existence. Kampong China at the downstream end of Kota Bharu is a particularly important location. (In this suburb of the capital live some of those “urban Chinese” patrons of the Thais, mentioned earlier, who are clearly peranakan, but peranakan close to the centres of power; one such figure is Councillor Wee Sue Hung, the leading MCA link man to the Kelantan Thais). At any rate it would be a long and burdensome task to establish the numbers of Kelantan *ciin-thai* even without the conceptual problems of defining the distinctly permeable boundary between that ethnic category and other Chinese. Still, at a guess—not fully informed but perhaps not unintelligent—at least 10,000 of the Kelantan Chinese even by a conservative definition (emphasizing fluency in Thai or strong manifestation of other Thai cultural traits) may be Kelantan peranakan.²⁷

The origins of the Kelantan Chinese rice farmers and rural traders are variously linked, in popular belief, to the settlement of Chinese salt traders from Patani, or of Chinese long-range traders and fishermen (shipwrecked on the Kelantan shore in some versions, penetrating up the Kelantan River in others.) Gold mining does not seem to figure as a motive for migration in the accounts of down-stream or coastal villages.²⁸

27. One factor bedevilling definition is that not all peranakan admit to Thai ancestry or have an active connection with a wat. In some villages Malay is spoken far better than Thai. Even Thais will sometimes make a distinction between “*ciin-thai*” and “*ciin kalantan*” where they are not certain that a Chinese has a Thai ancestor. Contemporary censuses no longer distinguish Chinese by speech group either (though even if they did it would not help to establish the size of the peranakan category precisely). To pick out the unquestionably rural districts in the census would only give an indication of the numbers of the *rural* peranakan. An informed and well-travelled Chinese of Balai gave me a list of 37 specifically Chinese villages and hamlets in the Kelantan plain—including Kampong China (Kota Bharu) and Balai but excluding the district towns and large market villages which always have a Chinese population (Cherang Ruku—see note 25 above—is a typical example of a “large market village” of Kelantan). I note that my earlier suggestion as to the extent of the rural peranakan population’s geographical scope (Kershaw 1973, op. cit., 4-5) was absurdly restrictive. The densest concentration is along the river banks from Tanoong (left bank) and Salor (right bank) upstream to Tanah Merah.

28. On gold-mining, cf. S.M. Middlebrook, “Pulai: an early Chinese settlement in Kelantan”, *JMBRAS*, XI, 2 (1933), 151-156.

What is striking is that the elderly informants I have met with a Kelantan genealogy stretching back four generations tend to identify their first remembered patrilineal ancestor as China-born; they also frequently locate the establishment of the Chinese community in Kelantan in the period at which their *own* ancestor arrived! The most certain and rational conclusion to be drawn from such accounts would seem to be that immigration to Kelantan was continuous by various routes and for various motives throughout the nineteenth century, as in the twentieth. But it does not follow that there were no Chinese in Kelantan before 1800. We have Hsieh Ching Kao's evidence on that point,²⁹ while one thoughtful informant at Tanoong reckoned the age of his own village at 140 years, the settlers having been forced out of an *earlier* settlement at Kota across the river, by the Malays. Nevertheless it may not be unreasonable to postulate a more substantial influx during the nineteenth century than previously, after tranquillity was restored at the end of the 1838 civil war and when Singapore provided a vital stepping stone for a steady stream of seekers after fortune and livelihood. Unlike the settlers in Malacca—where, if Clammer's hypothesis is to be believed, female migrants were as plentiful as male at all times—these fortune-seekers must have been predominantly male. Extensive intermarriage with the Thai population, albeit admittedly an attractive option because the latter were not Muslim, surely speaks of a fundamental sex imbalance. (As noted earlier in the paper, a sex imbalance can be overcome in a single generation and community endogamy become established; but if male immigration continued throughout the nineteenth century recruitment of Thai females had to continue likewise. Indeed it has continued into the twentieth century to meet part of the needs of the final wave of immigrants of all speech groups in the Kelantan towns.)³⁰ Even where no intermarriage has occurred for a generation or two, peranakans either acquire Theravada Buddhist practice and the Thai language through the family or "re-learn" both in adulthood through contact with the Thais. In one way or another, continuous Thai influence has been assured.

29. Cf. M.W.F. Tweedie, "An early Chinese account of Kelantan", *JMBRAS*, XXVI, 1 (1953), 216-219.

30. With the possible exception of Hailams, the mid-twentieth century immigrants and mixed offspring have been far less amenable to peranakan-ization of their identity and culture than the earlier Hokkiens. This is partly due to urban residence. But a rather characteristic pattern among Cantonese goldsmiths has been to return to China (or die), leaving the family with no means of support. The Thai wife and offspring then have no alternative but to return to the natal village where the children are brought up as Thais. Female issue of such unions are far more likely, however, than pure Thai to marry urban Chinese in the next generation.

However, a major objective mark of the Kelantan *peranakan* and strong component of their identity is their *Chinese* language. Regrettably I am not able to report on the degree of creolization of rural Kelantan Hokkien: whether for instance this has gone beyond Thai and Malay loan words (which one hears all the time) and conceptual borrowing (a strong likelihood) to syntactical convergence and adoption of Thai and Malay phonemes,³¹ or even tonal simplification. But I can report after many conversations on the subject with Kelantan Chinese and observing linguistic practice in Chinese homes that they make a highly self-conscious point of speaking Hokkien to their young children. This is explicitly rationalized thus: "If we don't speak Chinese to them, where else will they ever learn it in Kelantan?"; "I speak Chinese to them so that they'll know they are Chinese". But: "Our Chinese is not complete", or sometimes, "We find our tongues are a bit wooden." So Thai has been spoken with the children increasingly though not exclusively after the age of ten or so, as their need grew for a broader conceptual range.³² Clearly enough, Kelantan Thai is a major component of *peranakan* culture, but Hokkien Chinese rather than Thai is the crucial linguistic identity marker for the *peranakan* themselves and indeed one of the primary markers of any kind. (It is apparent that Kelantan *peranakan* feel a need to mark themselves off from the Thais as well as from other races.)³³

Another primary, subjective identity marker, as asserted by both *peranakan* and Thai (and thus assumed to be objectively valid) is possession of a surname or *sieng*. Not only does the *sieng* mark off, but its use has also helped indirectly to consolidate and preserve, a rural Chinese community, *peranakan* explain, because Chinese only accept daughters-in-law, not sons-in-law, from other ethnic groups, being unwilling to allow their grandchildren to be without a Chinese surname—an eventuality which would arise under a patrilineal rule which they assume to operate in the Thai community as well as their own. In fact the "bilateral" Thais have no surnames at all; instead of a

31. However, one possible example has struck me: *zi*, as in *zi cap* (twenty), is pronounced *yi cap* as if in imitation of Thai *yii sib*.
32. Not all Thai peasants of course have a broad conceptual range! But in the more northerly Thai villages of Kelantan there is some infusion of new linguistic content from Thai communities across the border and indirectly from standard Thai.
33. But if bi-lingualism tilted further towards Thai—or in some villages, Malay—till Hokkien was lost, the *peranakan* would still have a number of other cultural features to mobilize as boundary markers and defining components of ethnicity. Religion provides perhaps the least exhaustible stock of symbols—though it is possible to conceive of a poor rural Chinese feeling increasingly out of place at Chinese temple rites if they were dominated by urban Hokkiens with whom he could not communicate. Some further reflection related to this theme is set down at note 54 below.

sae: (Kelantan Hokkien pronunciation) or *saeng* (Kelantan Thai pronunciation) they have a *baeng*, at least in official documentation (a *baeng*—the Malay word *bin*, Thai-ized—is ego's father's name, carried as a suffix to ego's name during ego's lifetime only). But they do have a kind of patrilineal rule in relation to marriages with Chinese, and on the infrequent occasions when Chinese females have married Thais (normally girls from very poor families, or widows and divorcees, or where the Thai was a person of high status such as a *Nai Ban*) the offspring usually have Thai calling names and no *sieng*. However, it is not unknown for arrangements to be made for such offspring to acquire a *sieng* where the household is established in an urban area among Chinese families, especially if the children attend a Chinese school, and if the father is willing to compromise on his Thai identity. At least Chinese calling names are often given. Chinese orphans may adopt a *sieng* from a husband or foster mother or other close person if they are ignorant of their father's. These examples seem to illustrate the importance of the *sieng* as a subjective, ideal or sentimental component of ethnicity today, without revealing a literal, let alone iron, rule in the matter (though flexibility always seems to work in favour of Chinese identity!).³⁴

Patrilineal principles certainly seem prevalent at Balai village as far as initial marriage residence is concerned. Sons, not daughters, stay at home to take over the family house and altar, eventually, and to care for elderly parents and widowed mothers. One Thai comment is that Chinese like sons because this will "bring in a

34. The thing that belies the vitality of the *sieng* most of all is the fact that in many families in Chinese villages, as I discovered, the surnames of close friends and even Chinese daughters-in-law are sometimes not known. One elderly Chinese at Balai could not even recall his wife's. Calling names, not surnames, are used in all normal social intercourse and even these show a decline from the model of Chinese mainstream culture to a small, standardized selection of Kelantan nicknames, with an extraordinary frequency of "Ah Wang" for males and "Eh Me'", etc., for females. (The Chinese head teacher of a Malay school, who resides at Balai, was able to give the formal name of his mother, born at Kampong China, Kota Bharu, as Gan Siu Huai, but she was commonly known as (Gan) Eh Me'.) Another example of flexibility is provided by Kampong China in the person of taukeh Tan Eh Seng (see note 41 below), whose father hailed from Malacca but whose mother, a Kelantan *peranakan* and only child, had arranged for Eh Seng, also an only child, to take her own *sieng*, on the understanding however that her grandchildren (who are numerous) should divide her *sieng*, Tan, and her late husband's, Eh, equally amongst them. At Balai there is one case of same-surname marriage—though its significance is not clear as it involves the *Nai Ban*, who is only just beginning to revive Chinese identity in his family, after his father had abandoned it. (The old-established surnames at Balai are *Chua*, *Gan*, *Gou*, *Ko*, *Ku*, *Kho*, *Khu*, *Iu* :, *Lim*, *Ong*, *Tae* :, *Teq*, *Ui* :. I render them all by the Bodman method, as heard, except *Tae* : whose open vowel is not found in Bodman. By analogy with *sieng*, which is pronounced *sae* : in Kelantan, one might be tempted to speculate on *Tieng*.)

daughter-in-law"; Thais prefer girls because they like their own daughters to look after them in their old age. There was only one Chinese household at Balai (out of 53 Chinese households) where a daughter and Chinese son-in-law were residing with a widowed mother, "because she (the daughter) had no brothers". In fact, marriageable Chinese daughters would appear to be a considerable *financial* asset—as a historical result, one may surmise, of sex imbalance in the Chinese community, especially its urban part, in times past; and one possible factor for the observable maintenance of virilocal residence in a Chinese village as a statistical and prescriptive norm might be the frequency of marriage of females to urban Chinese. In the nature of the case an urban Chinese does not move to a village and take up agricultural pursuits. Thus many female marriages to outsiders necessarily involve physical departure by such females, not only from the parental household but from the village. Patrilineal ideology and the Chinese component in *peranakan* identity favour such a version of virilocal residence but are also significantly reinforced by it.³⁵

Now in so far as loss of females to urban society creates a sex imbalance in Chinese villages (i.e. transfers the urban imbalance "downwards") it can only be restored by recruitment of Thai females as in times past when the Chinese villages were being augmented by immigrant males. And here, above all, the patrilineal principles reinforced at the rural-urban "frontier" prove particularly relevant (and are thus further strengthened in action) because consciousness of an ethnic boundary is involved, besides protection of the Chinese identity of *all* one's grandchildren, and consciousness of an inter-ethnic hierarchy: viz., it seems un-Chinese, as much as a sign of low status (naturally, since Chinese-ness is an ethnic status and all Thais except priests are peasants), to give wives to Thais rather than take them; and virilocal residence happens to be both a received way of maintaining the patrilineal system generally and the clearest available means of demonstrating the asymmetry of an ethnic relationship in particular cases. Thus the marriage alliances of the better-placed *peranakan* are indirectly functional, by way of the reinforced patrilineal ideology, to ethnic boundary maintenance at the lower end of the economic scale where financial straits might cause a lessening of solidarity. It is the poorer Chinese, in town and countryside, who, unable to afford a Chinese daughter for their sons, are constrained to look for a Thai. *They* ensure that the girl moves in with the Chinese family; but at the lowest level of all there are Chinese families who could not even dispose of their

35. Further dimensions of the patrilineal question are discussed in Appendix A.

daughters except to a Thai. Some in the end do break ranks (and in so doing confirm that the *sieng* had ceased to carry any weight with them; thus by both economic and cultural criteria they had virtually become Thai anyway, and are seen in retrospect, to have been ready for "writing off"!)."36

The occasional Chinese female/Thai male marriages are too few, however, to correct the cumulative sex imbalance among the Thais. The inter-ethnic status-hierarchy, articulating closely with economic rank, perforce operates repercussively at the lowest level of all (or the last but one): that of the poorest, landless Thais, who, faced with a shortage of Thai females, may have no other recourse than circumcision and nominal conversion in order to obtain a wife from the Malay community

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36. One effect, or inherent feature, of the system is that the would-be "wife-giving lineage" (the Thai) is inferior to the wife-takers because (apart from the virilocal factor and the Chinese surname of grandchildren) it has no monopoly of wife-giving but can only give, at an inferior price, to Chinese unable to find—more usually afford—a Chinese wife (although these Chinese may be persons of low status in Chinese terms, they extract psychological advantage from the established high corporate status of the Chinese as a whole). (On a rather different Thai context in which wife-giving has been associated with social inferiority, cf. Jeremy H. Kemp, "Cognatic descent and the generation of social stratification in South-east Asia", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, CXXXIV, 1 (1978), 63-83.) The ability to demand or pay a competitive bride price is an accurate indicator of standing in the Chinese community. A bracket as high as \$2,000–\$3,000 was mentioned to me in 1974 as applicable to eligible brides from well-placed rural families. Other villagers were sceptical and pitched the norm somewhere around \$1,000+, but excluding jewelry and wedding expenses. (It is expected of course that the bride's father will spend at least part—some say all—of the sum received on entertainment at a fitting level and on a trousseau.) At the bottom end of the ethnic hierarchy, a Semerak Thai girl cost only \$300, at least to a Thai, in 1967 probably (inflation would have raised that figure a little by 1974; also the more canny Thai parents may raise the price somewhat to urban Chinese in "compensation" for the loss of their daughter from the village). Besides being cheap, a Thai girl rarely insists on registering the marriage: an advantage, perhaps, if one's son finds her unsatisfactory or develops more ambitious aspirations and potential. N.B. In spite of the low status of the Thai today and the pressures against abandonment of Chinese identity, it must nevertheless be stressed that not all Chinese who became Thai early this century were poverty-stricken or ignorant. In days when transcendental values were more dominant than the values of the market and the monetized economy, albeit urban immigration and sex imbalance were hardly yet established a priestly career combined with intermarriage to lead not infrequently to the adoption of Thai identity (this could apply, that is, even in a situation of relatively limited urban "off-take" of Chinese village females—though of course rural Chinese sex imbalance could also arise from rural settlement of migrant males).

(uxorilocally, of course, and with no shadow of doubt about the ethnic identity of their offspring under Shariah Law).³⁷

In exposing myself, however briefly, to the village-of-two-communities, Balai, I had hoped to receive intuitions about the historical relationship between rural Thais and rural Hokkien, the dynamics of the adoption of Theravada Buddhism by the latter, and the original nature of Kelantan *peranakan* identity. It is plain that there is a broadly "patron-client" relationship (certainly as perceived by the Thais) between rural Thais and urban Chinese of today, with the Thais providing girl servants, sometimes wives, votes for the "Chinese political party" (i.e. the Alliance or National Front) and, most important perhaps, religious services, in return for employment, the financing of wat development, and an unspecific psychological security connected with the belief that some kind of protection would be extended in time of distress or danger. It also seems plausible that some Chinese patrons of wats who themselves have Thai ancestry, are "repaying" in a semi-conscious and very Thai way (but across several generations, in a very Chinese way) the merit they received from Thai ancestors who contributed (at several removes) to their existence, gave them (indirectly) access to the Theravada Buddhist religion, and helped their Chinese forbears to settle and found lineages in Malaya.³⁸ This might not too fancifully be called a "diachronic exchange". My Semerak and Balai field notes, read afresh just prior to writing this paper, reassure me that this *is* plausible and I retract a passing thought that the exchange is even more a synchronic one, a living transaction.³⁹ There is, certainly, a living transaction, but this takes the form of the asymmetrical patron-client relationship sketched above.

37. Cf. Roger Kershaw, "Menace and reassurance in Malay circumcision. A note on some attitudes of Kelantan Thais", *Journal of the Siam Society*, LXVII, 2 (July 1979), 116-122. In this section it has not been my intention to infer in a crude sense that ethnic categories are really "classes" in disguise. Yet perhaps I would not go all the way with Nagata (1975, op. cit) and say that ethnicity cuts across economic class and prevents consciousness of it from emerging. In the present case it is as if ethnic groups were seen as quasi-classes (ethnic statuses closely correlated with economic rank)—in the same way as rural Malays broadly stereotype the Malaysian Chinese as "the moneyed class". The element of "economic exploitation" (transfer of sex-imbalance downwards) reinforces the ethnic meaning of these "class" relations by way of the reinforced patrilineal principle. Ethnicity has a certain narcotic function in relation to economic deprivation, but not in the way that a Marxian approach might anticipate: for the deprived do not overlook their deprivation in the process of identifying with the privileged of their own race, but may accept deprivation because it is declared to be their ethnic lot. (And some who do not accept it may try to move to a higher ethnic status.) For further aspects of the inter-ethnic hierarchy, see the discussion at Appendix B.

38. All this in broad confirmation of Kershaw 1973, op. cit.

39. Kershaw 1980, op. cit., 148, note 4.

Only the across-time relationship between living and dead is symmetrical, binding today's well-to-do Chinese with Thai ancestry to Thai priestly teachers and caring mothers of the past—all high statuses in both Thai and Chinese culture—whereas today the Thai priesthood characteristically provides mere religious “services” to the urban Chinese in return for protection.⁴⁰ The modern taukeh rarely sits at the feet of a Thai abbot to listen to a sermon, or takes the yellow robe himself.⁴¹ But now let us try to reconstruct and conceptualize the relationship one hundred or one hundred and fifty years ago as the peranakan identity was evolving. If the illiterate Chinese with their diverse religious beliefs came to the Thais for literacy and a more coherent religion—even a “Great Tradition”, of the kind which the Hokkien traders and fishermen may have felt rather remote from in South China, let alone along the shores of Southeast Asia—did they not, too, acknowledge their debt and provide services in return as befits a client? But no. For anyway, the most obvious gift (daughters) they did not at first have for the giving. On the contrary they established themselves in separate villages, on land reclaimed from swamp and jungle, or perhaps bought from Malays or Thais with the capital accumulated in small-scale trade; and then applied such capital—or the further small surpluses achieved by dint of unremitting labour and ingenuity as agriculturalists—to the purchase of Thai women as wives, who moved in the overwhelming majority of cases into Chinese communities. Thus despite the Thais’ original advantage as monopoly suppliers of women, the virilocal rule and concomitant asymmetry of wife-taking were established (I hypothesize) from the start, both as effect and cause of a resilient patrilineal ideology which operated to ensure the Chinese identity of *all* children’s children. Not only was there no symmetry in the founding relationship: there was not even an exchange—unless we count the meagre bride price paid for Thai wives. Most ironically of all, peranakan Chinese who have been long-time monks may sometimes be heard to claim today an understanding of their ancestors’ adopted religion which eludes the Thais themselves. (This is partly a criticism of Thai “superstition” but the rampant alcoholism among Balai Thais fosters an unfortunate

40. As in Bangkok, many urban Chinese turn to the Theravada Order for funeral services simply because Mahayana monks are scarce and expensive.

41. One case where a middle-aged taukeh of Kampong China, Tan Eh Seng, took the robe in 1974 to fulfil a vow of his deceased mother, seemed particularly suggestive about earlier Sino-Thai relationships, as the elderly *Naa Nong* of Semerak acted as sponsor and played a part reminiscent of the “conscientious godfather” in English Anglican tradition. In earlier days *Naa Nong* had taught the art of classifying and buying *bai caag* (the nipah palm leaves used to roll home-made cigarettes) to Eh Seng’s mother, who as a result became a successful entrepreneur in that trade, and a patroness of wats, personifying the transition from client to patron of Thais in the span of one life-history.

stereotype of their ethnic group—not only among Balai Chinese but local Malays as well.) Some semi-urban *peranakan* women adopt an almost domineering posture at the wats. Such attitudes held by some of the rural *peranakan* parallel closely the asymmetry of urban Chinese/rural Thai relationships at the present time, to which they are a model and precursor. It is as if Thai religion had been coopted, and become part of the *peranakan* repertoire of patronage to Thais instead of vice versa.

It remains, though, that most *peranakan* today—and, by intuitive reconstruction, much more so in the past—have received Theravada religion from the Thais and received it with a dutiful respect. The observation made by the Thais at Balai that “the Chinese come to the wat but we don’t attend their rites” is not without an objective basis in Chinese (and Thai) practice (the exception is Thais who are invited on account of kinship) and there are underlying *peranakan* values which perpetuate this pattern. This has its linguistic counterpart: Thais do not learn Hokkien, unless in town. In the village it is a non-literate language. Do not such patterns illustrate the contrast that Theravadaism is not only part of a Great Tradition (of Thais) but a Great Religion? All that the Chinese can offer is ethnic cults.⁴² It is true that *buad* has never become established as a norm for young Chinese adults and many of those who have been ordained in recent years entered the monastery for only three days to fulfil a vow (*buad bon*).⁴³ But apart from the fact that the Balai Chinese share in the

42. Is it a paradox or strangely consistent (in two ways) that the Balai Chinese with their mediums used to participate in the Thais’ village cult on the seashore, which continued till about 1970? See note 51 on the Balai Chinese cult.

43. There has been a decline of *buad* in the last 20 years, even from the relatively lower Chinese standard of the past. At Balai from 1964-74, the abbot *Than Phud* observed, no Chinese were ordained (apart from *buad bon*), though his three predecessors as abbot were in fact Chinese! (In earlier years there were more Chinese short-term ordinations too.) By contrast, although urban employment possibilities have cut down most Thai short-term ordinations to one year, they have not broken the almost universal Thai custom, in Kelantan, of male ordination at the age of 21 as such. I believe that the contrast between Thais and Chinese in this sphere arises not just because the Chinese are experiencing modernization earlier or faster than the Thais but because *buad* never was considered by *peranakan* Chinese as an ethnic trait of their community. (I was in error in Kershaw 1973, op. cit., 6, note 13, where I suggested that young Chinese ‘normally’ *buad*. At most we may say that *buad bon* is “not uncommon”. I went on to say, with some reason, that “at the very least a Thai-Chinese can say, in answer to a query about his religion, that he does merit at the wats. In contrast, non-assimilated Chinese typically have no strong allegiance to one religious tradition.” Unfortunately the printer omitted most of the first sentence.) In 1974 there were two Chinese abbots in Kelantan: *Than Faa* at Ban Yamu, and *Than Suun* at Ban Yang (both Thai villages). *Than Faa* was born at Chiekkha, *Than Suun* at Kulim. Another eminent son of Chiekkha village is *Mahaa Cuan* who in 1974 had just travelled to California on missionary work after a period of years in training in Bangkok. These three were in fact the only Kelantan Chinese in the Order on any basis other than *buad bon*, according to Thai informants, during 1974.

maintenance of the wat (all Chinese women at the village, for instance, *niraan* or "roster" for preparing the monks' daily food), Chinese at Tanoong in Pasir Mas district established a Thai wat in about 1922 and maintain it today in collaboration with an energetic and well-educated Thai abbot, *Than* Long. In 1964 Ban Kulim further down river, close to Wakaf Bharu (opposite Kota Bharu), also began to build a Thai wat and invited a Thai abbot—*Than* Phum—of similar capacity to *Than* Long, to take responsibility. The Thai concepts of *bun* and *baab*, merit and demerit, are well assimilated into the peranakan world view without apparent transformation. What remains incomplete is the transformation of the Chinese themselves in one important respect: they have not generally taken up a priestly role. But in observing a division of labour on this point, the majority seem reluctant to challenge the pre-eminence of the Thais as guardians and teachers of Theravada belief. Meanwhile the syncretism of peranakan religious observance—comprising Chinese cults alongside Theravada—is characterised as "*thyy sqng faai*": "observing both sides", i.e. both ancestral traditions. Theravada symbolizes the Kelantanese or Malayan "credentials" of the peranakan as much as Chinese religion affirms their Chinese ancestry; not the least of its functions has been to integrate the peranakan to a new, comfortable socio-political identity as Kelantan Malaysans, without the trauma of Islamization or loss of Chinese "birthright".⁴⁴

Of course there is no lack of ambiguity, no lack of a "dialectical" tension between the two traditions as experienced, interpreted and reconciled (or simply not reconciled) by many peranakan. I selected death rites as an area for special enquiry in 1974 because here a clear and contrastive ethnic choice is posed between Chinese burial and Thai cremation. I had surmised that as Chinese females (like Thai) spend more time at the wats than males, and as they spend more time at home with Thai mothers and grandmothers (or peranakan grandmothers who in their younger days were close to Thai mothers or grandmothers), Theravada practice would take precedence at a crucial point of the life cycle—death—about whose rituals the wishes of

44. Hanapi Dollah, op. cit. (see note 35/Appendix A), is not without relevance to national aspirations in its optimistic attention to assimilation to Malay culture, but in the process makes no comment about the significance of Thai culture as a component of peranakan religion. Hanapi admits, without emphasizing, that there has been no assimilation to Islam—with the strange exception of "Hukum Faraidh" (see Appendix A). Regarding two other aspects of Thai orientation, it is worth noting that at Balai today Thai radio broadcasts and portraits of Thai royalty are as commonly heard and seen respectively in Chinese as in Thai households. And in the past, as I pointed out at the bottom of note 36, above, some Chinese who broke the general ethnic rule and adopted the priestly role even redefined their identity and became Thai in the course of a life-time.

the deceased would, I assumed, have been expressed and would be respected, as the last wish of an aged person and parent.⁴⁵ I have to report that peranakan Chinese do indeed express clear wishes to their families regarding the disposal of their corpse. But it is not the case that there is any tendency of females to prefer cremation by Theravada rituals, males burial by Chinese rituals. Burial has been the norm for both sexes (statistically and even more so prescriptively: most peranakan regard this as an important mark of Chinese identity, some even denying that cremation ever happens); married couples at Balai are buried quite commonly side by side at a selected spot in the village, or under a large family mound in the communal cemetery—a piece of waste land near the shore. Perhaps one in five or six among the parents of the present adult generation have expressed a wish for cremation, Thai-style, but this custom does not correlate with sex; it seems to reflect personal differences of attachment to Theravadi piety and of Thai orientation which occur amongst both males and females.

The two most interesting discoveries are these. On the one hand children are not always bound by their parent's wishes. A parent who wished for cremation may yet be buried if the family consensus insists that Chinese rites should be observed—a thing which may well occur in connection with the urbanization of recent years if several of the children are in process of incipient re-Sinicization. At the other periphery of the peranakan phenomenon, a Chinese who was long settled in the Thai village of Semerak was cremated in 1967 because his children had completely identified themselves as Thai, and maintained that their father had effectively become a Thai as well. In that instance I do not know whether the father had expressed any wish, but the case does illustrate that the children of a deceased person feel fully competent to define the ethnicity of the family and in fact take advantage of the occasion of a death to do so.

On the other hand an apparent exception—which yet may “prove” (by being within, not outside) the “rule” about the symbolization of identity—is the increasingly frequent application of both burial *and* cremation. In Thai Theravada practice burial follows only a “bad” death (e.g. death from accident, or before time); exhumation of the skull, and its cremation, ensue within a few years at a collective rite. But in recent years not a few Chinese have exhumed the skulls of parents buried in Chinese style in order to cremate them Thai-style. At Cherang Ruku, close to Semerak

45. Kershaw 1973, 6, loc. cit. Mr Nagaratnam of Kota Bharu, husband to a peranakan and well-known patron of Thais, went so far as to say, in 1974, that in his observation daughters of Chinese fathers and Thai mothers tend to call themselves Thai, while the sons say they are Chinese.

village, an elderly peranakan declared his intention to arrange a cremation for his mother before his own passing, because that was her wish but it had been overruled at the time by the majority of her children. In many other cases there may be no question of the children having overruled a parental wish but, on the contrary, of respecting it at first (in respect of burial) though latterly asserting an ethnic point by mixing Theravada custom with Chinese. (The same informant at Cherang Ruku, Tae Song Boi, intended also to exhume his father, who had expressed no particular preference; but there are cases, too, of burial-and-cremation being stipulated by the deceased.) It may have some slight significance that cremation is becoming more acceptable to modern, urban Chinese, but I think it right to interpret this syncretism basically in terms of syncretic values, reinforced by some practical, environmental considerations.

The Chinese of Kelantan have always been quite mobile. Not only females have left the village through marriage, but the majority of sons in search of wage labour or a living in commerce. As the peranakan have commonly buried their dead in simple style—sometimes not even with a gravestone—at informal village sites, there may not be much of a tangible grave to maintain at the annual *Chieng-bieng* festival. (Or there may be several graves scattered all over the State.) Even at Balai cemetery the family mounds are simply heaped up higher with sand—in a way rather reminiscent of the Thais carrying sand to the wat as an act of merit, to cleanse and renew its ground, or building sand mountains in the wat on Visaka Day. At least it keeps the burial mounds visible, but it is a far remove from the type of attention paid to ancestral graves by urban Chinese at urban cemeteries. If families fragment or move away, the sites of ancestral graves may be forgotten. In any case, Hokkien religion in Kelantan has always centred primarily on the household altar with its *hiu:lo*, each filled with earth from an ancestral grave and a fragment of the coffin.⁴⁶ Non-peranakans of more recent origin in Malaya note the custom—and ability—of the Kelantan Hokkien of maintaining ancestral *hiu:lo* back to four generations and of listing or recalling, and commemorating, the names and date of death of eight forbears, i.e. four patrilineal male ancestors and their wives (female Thai ancestors are usually given an honorary

46. *hiu:lo* means “incense stove”, because incense sticks are stuck in the earth to burn (the little metal urn, standing on four legs, even looks a little like a stove, to my eyes). Technically an altar is not an altar (*biou*) unless a deity is worshipped there (*biou* means temple and refers also to the public temples).

Chinese status and receive a *hiu:lo* too).⁴⁷ Admittedly family mobility and fragmentation may result in none of the sons being able to maintain an ancestral altar because they have not built a house of their own and become settled; one such informant said that he paid tribute at his father's grave at *Chieng-bieng* because he had no *hiu:lo*. But I was struck by the clear implication that grave and altar may be considered *alternative* foci of ritual attention within the ancestral cult. And in most cases mobility will in fact make for preference being given to the altar, which can be moved, like people, from one house to another, or is easier to locate than a grave, which has no address. (Almost without exception peranakan houses have an altar: if there are no ancestral urns—say, because a brother is looking after them in another house—the altar will have a large porcelain vase embodying the essence of the higher deity, or porcelain images of lesser deities and immortal sages.)⁴⁸

Now it is in this complex context that exhumation becomes convenient and relevant. It obviates the inconvenience of visiting and maintaining several graves, as well as possible guilty feelings caused by not doing so. The cremated skull fragments are given two resting places: one a pagoda in a Thai wat, where they will be permanently commemorated even if the family should die out, and certainly never be overgrown with weeds; the other, by a form of adaptation both simple and ingenious,

47. I believe descendants are allowed to "send back" the contents of *hiu:lo* after four generations—preferably to the grave if the site is still known (but no doubt some compromise location will be found if the site has been forgotten). (Incidentally this could explain why so many Kelantan genealogies seem to reach no further back than four generations.) In Balai one couple buried side by side on family land, with gravestones engraved in Chinese and Thai, consisted of a Chinese, Khoo Ah Boh, and his Thai wife "*Naang Nui*", who had predeceased him by 27 years in 1920; yet despite the *hiu:lo* given to some Thai women (and despite a lack of solid empirical data) I should be surprised if such spouses are not more usually cremated, because, after all, *their* ancestors are Thai. Certainly Chinese families of my acquaintance with a living Thai mother seem to anticipate that cremation will be appropriate in due course.
48. Honouring the ancestors (as well as gods) at the family altars plays a central part in the marriage ritual. It is believed by older folk to unite the couple for ever because the ancestors have accepted and "registered" the pledge. (A tea ceremony is also performed, I am told.) Despite the solemnity of the marriage ritual, informants admit that divorce has not been unknown in recent years.

the parent's *hiu:lo*! In this way is not only convenience served but "Chinese" honour satisfied by exploitation of a Thai cultural asset, and peranakan identity consolidated around an exercise of syncretism.⁴⁹

Other features of Chinese religion—even parts which are not shared with Thais—have undergone adaptation in the Kelantan environment. Besides the special importance of family altars—substituting to some extent ancestral graves (or in China both graves and ancestral halls?)⁵⁰—we meet a village guardian cult in all settled agricultural villages, strongly influenced by Kelantan Thai and Malay models. At Tanoong, to my knowledge, and probably in most other places, a boat is constructed of inflammable materials and burnt amidst ceremony, once a year, in the dry season (on the bank of the Kelantan River in the Tanoong case), to "send away bad fortune" (in Thai villages the boat is usually constructed of bamboo with a view to floating it down the local waterway). The ceremony at Tanoong is attended by the three village goddesses, or *kong* (represented by regal carved, black effigies a little under two feet high). Their names are *Zi Ma*, *Sa:Ma* and *Sian Co*. Their places of residence rotate among members of the village To'Kong committee; while resident in the household of one of these privileged villagers the auspicious effigy stands at the back of the family altar. Actually, a total of seven goddesses attended the celebration at Tanoong in 1974, as villages collaborate in "kongsis" to finance these annual rites (and although the rite is sometimes treated as if it were the "birthday of the goddess", it is presumably at most one goddess in a village on whose "birthday" the rite actually

49. One informant told me that Chinese would only exhumate during a period of days in the *Chieng-bieng* period (*Chieng-bieng* falls on a date in the solar calendar—4 or 5 April—and is thus variable in terms of the lunar calendar, falling sometimes in second, sometimes third month). My notes on Thai practice in 1967 and 1974 indicate the sixth Thai month as the month for cremation of exhumed remains. In 1967 the Thai calendar was two months ahead of the Chinese, in 1974 three months ahead. Perhaps the timing of the Thai ritual is about right for Chinese purposes. Incidentally, the lack of synchronization between the Thai and the Chinese calendars provides another subtle factor for mutual subjective segregation as distinct ethnic categories; but the syncretic use of *hiu:lo* for exhumed-and-cremated bone fragments may have a precursor and quasi-precedent in the giving of *hiu:lo* to Thai mothers—cf. note 47 above.

50. Rural peranakan are following their urban counterparts in commissioning portraits of elderly parents. The process is based on photography today rather than the skill of the water colour painter.

takes place).⁵¹ The choice of goddess or goddesses to guard the village was made by the ancestors of the oldest families, who brought or ordered the effigies from China, many generations ago; the reason for the choice of particular goddesses is not usually remembered. Nevertheless, the frequent occurrence in the villages of the three sisters *Toa Ma*, *Zi Ma* and *Sa:Ma*—considered patronesses of Chinese fishermen; their enshrinement at the major Chinese temples of Kelantan—likewise in the form of wooden effigies; the dedication of many household altars to them; and their commonly acknowledged status as “the goddesses of the Kelantan Chinese”, all seem to point to something more than random or arbitrary selection: there seems to be an element of affirmation of identity as a special category of Chinese—the Kelantan Hokkiens of sea-faring descent.⁵² At the same time the propitiation of local magical forces is conspicuous not only in the burning of boats but in the performance of the Nora drama by hired Thai troupes, both at the village guardian rites and at the festivals of the goddesses at the temples, and to fulfil personal vows. Local traditional medicine also

51. Most but not all in Kelantan are female deities. The single deity at Balai, identified to me by one informant simply as *Bu Thau Kong* (“Chief Mother Goddess”?) has its “birthday” on *pueq geq cap go*—though in 1974 the day scheduled was announced to me as 29 September, apparently two days in advance of the middle of eighth month. Tanoong was celebrating on 12 July, its *go geq zi sa*: Pulau Gajah on 4 August, *lak geq cap chit*. Chiekkha’s village guardian rite is on *si geq cap sa*:. (I am unsure whether a cooperative or kongsi rite is considered to do service for all cooperating villages for the year, or whether visits are exchanged within the ritual season. Given the precision of the date of each village’s ritual—the ritual always takes its name from the date—it would surely be surprising if a ritual in a different place on a different date was considered an adequate substitute.) It should be noted that the dates of the village rituals vary not only among themselves but from the festivals of the same deities at major shrines (see next two notes).
52. The shrine of *Toa Ma* (the eldest sister) is at the village of Chiekkha (or Kampong To’ Kong to the Malays) on the right bank of the Kelantan River, Ketereh district—though *Sa:Ma* is at her sister’s side at this shrine. *Zi Ma*—the second sister and famed for her virginity and early death—is worshipped mainly at Kota Bharu, also under the name *Ma Co Pou*. She is in fact not a monopoly of the Kelantan Hokkiens but is worshipped by Hokkiens elsewhere as the patroness of seafarers: McDougall, op. cit., 23; J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Reprint, Kuala Lumpur, 1971), 53–54. The third sister, *Sa:Ma*, can now be specially venerated at a *biou* recently opened at Sungai Golok across the Thai border. These are the best-known *biou* of the Kelantan Chinese but there are several others, mainly small, some rather splendid. Although non-peranakan sponsorship and management of these shines today are conspicuous, I was told by one villager at Chiekkha that that *biou* was over one hundred years old. W.A. Graham, *Kelantan. A State of the Malay Peninsular* (Glasgow, 1908), 38, illustrates the Kampong China “joss house” of that period.

has its Chinese practitioners (in Thai, *moo*). On the other hand, both the village and the temple festivals are also the occasion for Chinese mediums to go into trance, be possessed by the spirit of the goddess, and, piercing their tongues, smear paper talismans with blood to be pinned above doorways as a protection against ill fortune.⁵³

Whatever the degree of "Kelantanization" of Chinese religion by convergence with local spirit beliefs, appointment of Kelantan guardian deities, and the adaptation of Theravada Buddhism or its complete adoption alongside Chinese cults, the Kelantan peranakan identity which I have attempted to interpret in these pages is a *Chinese* identity. The culture is syncretic but not the identity. Although Kelantan Thais call the Theravadt peranakan *ciin-thai* (and others who are not fluent in Thai or actively associated with wats, *ciin-kalantan* or *ciin-bog*), the peranakan think of themselves as "Chinese". Certainly in some contexts they stress their fraternal and religious bonds with the Thais and shared ancestry as rural Kelantanese ("we are all of a community"—in Thai, *chaaw kan*) and when a Chinese farmer interacts with Thais, using the Thai language, an observer is not conscious of any behavioural differences. But a Chinese is not a Thai. If he drops his Chinese name and adopts Thai culture completely he is no longer a Chinese—though he ought to be ashamed of it and some might try to persuade him to recross the boundary. Meanwhile, since the ethnic boundary (language; surname and religion) which marks the peranakan off from the Thai is relatively precise and not very frequently crossed, it has seemed correct to classify these Kelantan Chinese as a category which has been stable and not transitional. It has been increased by new male immigrants and Thai females but hardly at all decreased by crossing into the category of "Thai". At the same time, at the Chinese end of a spectrum of (admittedly) many cultural gradations and permutations, the impact of "mainstream" Chinese culture in the towns, so far, has been more that of making peranakan seek refuge in the dignity of their own culture than try to emulate the urban Chinese of Malaya. Physical proximity to Thai culture for those living in villages will provide a constant reference point for renewal of religious syncretism. The very attraction of urban marriage alliances for some peranakan creates a sex imbalance which necessitates further marriage with Thais.⁵⁴

53. For further detail about Chinese religion see Appendix C.

54. Crossing into Thai identity happens only at the point when one has become saturated with Thai culture anyway — the product of a slow process of assimilation to a culture declared compatible under the principle of "observing both sides". But becoming a Thai today may for some be a merciful release from the pressures of economic and status competition. At the Chinese end of peranakan-dom the indefiniteness of the boundary does not necessarily mean that the valued linguistic and material attributes of Chinese urban society are obtainable

But since, as I insist, we are dealing with a Chinese category, whose culture may be "dual" but not its identity (nor do peranakan adopt roles as Thais, associational-ly, as in Bangkok), and since at the high status end of the spectrum where the peranakans' Chinese identity has long received its revitalization, the ethnic boundary is of its nature far more blurred, peranakan identity must in the long term come strongly under pressure to converge with the urban east-coast Chinese, who command some economic power and a little political leverage even in the difficult days of National Front politics and New Economic Policy.⁵⁵ At the other end of the structure, as I have argued, the same inter-ethnic hierarchy, rationalized in terms of the patrilineal imperative but closely integrated and interacting with the values of economic stratification, has long cast the Thais in a "younger brother" status; but such inferiority may become more pronounced as the values of the new urban prosperity, consumerism and modern education—all perceived more or less as *ethnic* assets or at least objectives—drive out other (including transcendental) criteria of evaluation. Thus at the "lower" end of the scale too, the hierarchical values which were once functional to the existence of peranakan ethnicity (by maintaining a clear boundary but simultaneously promoting the accession of Thai females) may today, through increased salience, gradually work to destroy it as a distinct status and identity: that is, although some Thai females may still be recruited, Thai culture will be looked to much less for a paradigm (even some socially mobile Thais are turning from Thai to Chinese culture). Modern education has given young Chinese males a head-start over young Thais in competing for urban

without struggle and much inner tension. Peranakan culture seems almost designed to provide a refuge from that struggle and that tension. Mainstream Chinese culture seems to taunt the peranakan constantly with "are you really a Chinese?". Those who cannot rise to the challenge can concede the point apologetically, confirming urban values on the one hand but finding reassurance in the dignity of rural *ciin-thai* values on the other, by saying "yes, well we are really only the rural Chinese: the Kelantan Chinese, you know—the *Thai* Chinese". In other words, without becoming a Thai — indeed while insisting that he is a Chinese — a peranakan may find Thai attributes a special kind of asset: not a label for overt situational selection but a *psychological* asset for invocation inwardly.

55. A small visual point: since World War II most rural Chinese have married their daughters in the white bridal gowns adopted from the West via the urban Chinese, in place of the former sarong and Chinese-style baju kebaya (and often marry them into urban Chinese families which find them "attractive" because somewhat less expensive than urban daughters-in-law). The long-sleeved and decorative Chinese baju and sarong are still worn by middle-aged peranakan women on public occasions (and after bereavement Balai women are strict about wearing black, or black sarongs with a white blouse). The younger generation women have adopted "Western" styles of dress in the course of employment in town — at least before they marry and settle down in the village.

employment—and the decline of the Thai language and improving fluency in Hokkien due to urban employment among young Chinese is noted by everyone, not only at Tanoong, without a Thai village, but also at Balai. Even as Chinese schools adapt to national trends and incorporate more and more *Malay* into their curricula, rural Chinese who did not have access to a “Chinese school” will find themselves sharing a uniform educational experience with urban Chinese, with no distinction based on literacy or non-literacy in Mandarin. Simultaneously there has been a rapid spread of Malay medium secondary education in the rural areas and many rural Chinese youths have now had access to secular education in Malay up to secondary Form 3. This undermines once and for all the traditional attraction of the Thai wats as sources of literacy. Some Chinese indeed suggest that the Theravada religion of the Chinese is “simply due” (for which read, perhaps, “its continuance is simply due”?) to the proximity of the wats and no deeper sociological reason.⁵⁶

It has been sentimentally suggested by many Malaysian observers, of the west coast Babas, that they “gave an example” or “showed the way” in national integration to the mainstream Chinese. I also recall Malay national politicians in the National Language Months of the 1960s holding up the Kelantan Chinese as a linguistic paradigm for Chinese elsewhere (mainly, I think, because of their fluency in Kelantan Malay, though there were indeed some remarkable performances in standard Malay by Malay-educated rural Chinese in the Kota Bharu Language Month competitions). But the west coast Babas eventually lost their social and political leadership to the newcomers.

56. Some educated Chinese are beginning, under the influence of urban Buddhist revival, to reject the ancestor cult as “un-Buddhist”. One may hear private words of disapproval of the use of meat on funeral tables, and the role of intermediary deities may be played down, or the tendency to venerate the images of deities (rather than the virtues they embody) be deprecated. In fact the last two reservations could be expressed from a Theravada standpoint as well as from revivalist Mahayana tenets. (As we have seen, some peranakan who have been monks reveal a superior attitude towards Thai “superstition”, i.e. the folk elements within Theravada Buddhism. It is not a big step to turning this type of critique against Chinese folk tradition as well.) Chinese Mahayana revival in Kelantan emanates from the Buddhist Association of Malaysia, based in Kota Bharu. Theravada missionary activity in Malaysia is promoted by the Buddhist Missionary Society, under Sinhalese leadership (the Kelantan Sangha, however, has its major appointments confirmed from Bangkok and is not subject to the Sinhalese would-be “Patriarch” of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur). A further current in Chinese revivalism, partially mingling with Mahayanism, is Confucianism, which upholds the ancestor cult — though as one element in an elaborate intellectual system — and condemns cremation.

The latter may have imitated the Babas in accepting English education but Malay education and other recent developments have had to be imposed, they were not adopted under Baba inspiration! In Kelantan the *peranakan* failed to establish a dominant, collective urban presence and political power in advance of the great twentieth century migration;⁵⁷ thus they were hardly in a position to act as agents of assimilation to later arrivals, "Bangkok-style".⁵⁸

Now the very survival of "Kelantan Chinese" as a distinct category seems questionable as a long term prospect. Yet in one respect the Kelantan *peranakan* in the towns *have* shown the way: in introducing "new Chinese" to a crude form, possibly a very "Chinese" form, of merit making through financial patronage of the Thai wats. Whatever the fate of the *peranakan* themselves, the Kelantan Thais seem to have discovered a new symbiosis, much more stratified but also far more profitable than anything they achieved with their nineteenth century rural neighbours.

57. There was, certainly, effective political accommodation between the urban Chinese community and Malay authority in the nineteenth century but Chinese numbers were too small for that accommodation to be anything but docile. See Graham, *op. cit.*, 20; and note the illustration of the Captain China's house, 52.

58. On the contrary it is the semi-urban *peranakans* who have learned the aspiration for English education from the non-*peranakan* Chinese in the fifties and sixties and have achieved access in some cases to professional or government employment on the west coast or in Singapore. A favourite career for *peranakan* girls is nursing, which has taken some as far away as England or Australia for training – and, not infrequently, marriage to Europeans.

Appendix A. Further note on virilocal residence and inheritance

If there were no urban employment or recruitment to the pioneer land settlements in Thailand, it would certainly be possible to imagine some landless young male Chinese moving to the house of parents-in-law, though this might seem to depend on the operation of equal inheritance by daughters with sons. The big lacuna in my enquiry was the question of inheritance. No one at Balai ever mentioned avoidance of fragmentation as a deliberate means towards the maintenance of the economic power and status of rural Chinese families (within their own community and vis-à-vis Thais), embodied most visibly in their palatial ancestral homes, but I assumed, partly through intuition, partly from information about household composition, that in some way or combination of ways, including probably male inheritance or even a form of ultimogeniture, family holdings were being preserved—along with the wealth needed to purchase wives for sons if in any generation one lacked an equal number of daughters to generate the necessary “cash flow”. (In general, once daughters become an institutionalized financial asset through the downward transfer of sex imbalance, they will have no need of land; and thus patrilineal inheritance, just like virilocal residence, will have been sustained at the level of comfortable rural families by an economic mechanism, though justified ideologically as “correct” because Chinese.) That intuition is no substitute for research is suggested in this case by Hanapi Dollah, *Komuniti Cina Kampong di-Tebing Sungai Kelantan : satu Kajian Cara Hidup Kelompok yang Berassimilasi dengan Masyarakat Melayu* (“The village Chinese community on the banks of the River Kelantan. A study of the way of life of a group assimilating to Malay society”), Unpublished M.A. Dissertation (University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1979), 108, 111. This study maintains that at Kampong Mata Ayer not only is initial marriage residence uxorilocal as often as virilocal, but inheritance has assimilated not merely to the Malay adat pattern (equal bilateral inheritance) but to the Islamic Hukum Faraidh—a system which has not made universal inroads even among the Kelantan Malays themselves : cf. Yoshihiro Tsubouchi, “Galok : a village of small farmers in Kelantan”, *Three Malay Villages : A Sociology of Paddy Growers in West Malaysia*, ed., Masuo Kuchiba et al. (Hawaii, 1979) : 147. However, as Hanapi Dollah does not mention that he carried out any survey into the question, I am not sure whether he is better placed than myself to deliver a definitive judgement. But I admit that at Balai I did come across cases of marriages-out by young males of some families into *other* Chinese villages, and two cases of marriages-in from other villages. Indeed if I posit avoidance of fragmentation, it is implied that families with many sons must give away some of them to families in which a *complete* lack of sons has compelled inheritance to favour a daughter—for not all surplus sons will be able or willing to move into the urban sector or itinerant commerce.

Appendix B. Further note on differential educational status and Thai-Chinese intermarriage

Further to the discussion of inter-ethnic hierarchy : differential ethnic exposure to, and achievement in, education are conspicuous sociological features of Balai. Although the Chinese school at Bachok closed in about 1959, it had in its day attracted a number of Balai Chinese pupils, at least a decade in advance of the opening of a Malay primary school in about 1960, closer to Balai, which began to attract Thais. Today Chinese are more likely than Thais to make the journey to Bachok for Malay Medium secondary education. Judging by some paternalistic, not to say contemptuous, comments of Chinese, the objective differential is already becoming subjectivized as an ethnic boundary marker. Yet as rural peranakan society increasingly approximates the educational standards of urban Chinese society, and seals alliances with urban society through its daughters, the distinctive peranakan category may already have entered on a process of decline. Incidentally, one ironical and anti-hierarchical effect of urban employment, which is available to Thais as well as rural Chinese, is the cautious appearance of free mate selection. At Semerak in 1974 two marriages were "arranged" between Thai boys and Chinese girls whom they had met and courted in town. Meanwhile at Balai in 1974, although some respondents suggested that Chinese women do sometimes break the ethnic rule and marry Thais "because we live close together and people get to know each other", in the basic survey of 57 Thai households (defined as such by the criteria of location combined with culture) I met 5 Thai widows of peranakan (it is not ruled out that there may be more : there were three elderly women living alone whom I was unable to meet); 4 Thai wives of living Chinese—in two cases young wives living uxori-locally with peranakan (one a "new", Hailam peranakan who only spoke Thai), in the other two cases middle-aged wives of ethnic Chinese (a Cantonese and a Hailam) who had moved into the Thai Village in retirement; and only 2 Thai males (including the Nai Ban, i.e. government Penghulu, who is anyway the son of a Chinese Nai Ban who became Thai) with peranakan wives. In the 53 Chinese households were 4 Thai widows of peranakan, 4 Thai wives of living

NOTE "Virilocal" and "uxorilocal" in this Appendix refer to residence in the house of (or formerly of) husband's parents and wife's parents respectively. But since the Chinese and Thai parts of Balai are by and large spatially separate and each house has a publicly recognised ethnic identity, there is invariably an element of moving from one *community* to another when either a woman or a man moves to the household of parents-in-law of a different ethnic identity, and even when a household is established separately from either set of parents. However, as we saw in Appendix A, it may be uxorilocal transfer of Chinese males between *Chinese* villages which can most clearly indicate whether patrilineal principles have weakened.

peranakan, and only 2 Thai husbands of peranakan wives living uxori locally. (N.B. the sex imbalance in Thai society, implied by Thai-peranakan unions, is increased by "direct" marriages into urban Chinese society—though they are less frequent today than a generation ago—short-circuiting, as it were, the intermediate steps in the hierarchy. Either way, Thai society suffers a shortage, which is experienced and expressed, at times, as a crude competition for females which Thais are condemned to lose because "the Chinese have driven up the price of a wife beyond our reach.")

Appendix C. Further note on Kelantan Chinese religious practice

The temple festival dates of which I am certain are those of the Chiekkha temple of *Toa Ma* (this festival is distinct from Chiekkha village's own guardian rites) and the Kota Bharu shrine of *Zi Ma*. Both are held on *sa : geq zi sa* : (third lunar month, 23rd day), in curious, apparent competition with each other. The Kota Bharu festival draws the far greater numbers. The shrines of Kelantan are administered by urban Chinese who organise the collection of subscriptions for their festivals on a State-wide basis. At Kota Bharu another annual event, more familiar to the burgers of all races, is the *cia : geq cap go* (15th day of New Year) when thousands of Chinese converge optimistically on Kampong China to do whatever tradition prescribes to secure prosperity during the year. But for most peranakan this is a family festival, at which the New Year is greeted with dignity and the ancestors, or the gods or both, are honoured (on *cap zi geq sa : cap*) in a special way at home—more special than the twice-monthly homage (on *zit it* and *zit it cap go*) which is recommended throughout the year. (Chinese New Year is a public holiday in Malaysia, and youths employed in town are sent home.) The other major, annual domestic ritual, of specific significance in the ancestor cult, is *chit geq pua* : (middle of seventh month), when the spirits roam. I have not witnessed this festival but am assured that it takes place within the confines of the home. Even in three years at Kota Bharu I never became aware of any public manifestation of the Singapore type (tables of offerings set up on pavements, entertainments in the streets) though Chinese New Year at Kota Bharu is not restrained. One last point germane to peranakan religion is the style of rural house construction : long and massive barn-like structures with a full-length verandah under a downward projection of the main roof. The imposing front doors, placed at the mid point along the verandah, are flanked by small, square-shaped and barred windows—the "eyes" of the house, sometimes substituted by square wooden blocks set in the wall—and by red paper scrolls inscribed with a few Chinese characters; while the doors themselves, which open onto an anteroom containing the altar, may also bear a poster. Such infor-

mation as I picked up from informants indicates that the meaning of these papers is not precisely known to most peranakan but it is variously believed that they "bring well-being to the house", and that "you can't perform rituals in the house unless you have them" (note that red panels flank some of the more imposing household altars, like an altar screen at head height, and likewise bear inscriptions). The Thai term for these scrolls is *phra' ciin* or "Chinese gods" and indeed they seem to be the counterpart of the "God of the House" described by Coughlin, op. cit., 101, except that the positioning of the scrolls at the front door seems to identify them as Gods of the Door. Thais regard these "gods" as a decisive, defining mark of a Chinese household. The Hokkien term is *lian*, which apparently has no other referent (it is not to be found in Bodman, op. cit.).



Figure 1. Councillor Wee Sue Hung of Kampong China, Kota Bharu, a leading peranakan and political patron of Kelantan Thais. 1974.



Figure 2. Tan Kim Leng, peranakan batik merchant of Cherang Ruku and active patroness of wats. 1967



Figure 3. Thais and Chinese at the dedication of a new pavilion at Balai main wat, 14 May 1965. The pavilion was built mainly with Chinese subscriptions.



Figure 4. The shrine of *Toa Ma* at Chiekhha. 1974.



Figure 5. Tanoong. A goddess is borne home on a litter after the village guardian rites, 12 July 1974.



Figure 6. The coffin maker's yard next to the wat at Tanoong. 1974.



Figure 7. Balai. The graves of *Naang Nui* (died 1920) and *Khoo Ah Boh*, her husband (died 1947). 1974.



Figure 8. Balai. The Chinese cemetery. 1974.



Figure 9. Tanoong. House of a substantial farmer, Iu Ching Ki. 1974.



Figure 10. Balai. House of Tae Ah Wang. 1974.



Figure 11. Balai. Rear view of house of Ku Cheng An. 1974.



Figure 12. Semerak. House of Lau Kim Seng, built by Balai carpenters in Balai style. Seated on threshold : Kim Seng's Thai wife, *Kh' Nin*. 1967. Note the portraits of Kim Seng's parents above the barred windows, and of King Bhumiphol and other Chakkri Kings at far right.



Figure 13. Semerak. Lau Kim Seng and Kh' Nin at their front door, with view of the household *biou*. 1967.



Figure 14. Cherang Rudu, 1974. Ritual guidance at the funeral of a Trengganu Hokkien woman is given to the chief mourner (her son) by two Kelantan peranakans : Lau Kim Seng, originally of Tawang (black sarong) and Tae Song Boi, originally of Balai (back to camera). In the background, in black shorts, arms folded, an MCA leader from Pasir Puteh (non-peranakan); and to his left a group of Semerak Thais, the pall-bearers and grave-diggers.



Figure 15. Peranakans at a *lorng kud* wat fair (dedication of a new monks' house) at Ban Khaw Din, 31 May 1974. In foreground, in khaki trousers, Tan Eh Seng of Kampong China; and seated on his right, Naa Nong, of Semerak, Eh Seng's Thai sponsor in his recent *bud bon* ordination.