



Book Review: Chinese Values, Western Values And The Survival of The Chinese Clan As Social Institution

Ulasan Buku: Nilai Cina, Nilai Barat Dan Kelangsungan Pertubuhan Klan Cina Sebagai Institusi Sosial

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ABSTRACT

The fact that Chinese immigrants influxed into the country during British colonization is inseparable from modern Malaysian history. The mass migration of Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asia, especially in Tanah Melayu (literally meaning the Malay Land), has changed the original structure of the local community. Basically, Tanah Melayu in the early days was the land inhabited by the indigenous Malay people, who were the majority with numerical strength. Diverse immigrant populations emerged as a result of this transition. The contributions of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia, brought by these immigrants, included the establishment of Chinese schools, Chinese newspapers, and ethnic-based organizations.

Keywords: Chinese; clan; guanxi; shetuan; huiguan.

ABSTRAK

Fakta kemasukan imigran Cina secara besar-besaran ke negara ini tidak dapat terpisah daripada sejarah Malaysia moden. Penghijrahan imigran Cina yang melibatkan bilangan yang ramai ke Asia Tenggara, terutamanya di Tanah Melayu, telah mengubah struktur asal komuniti tempatan. Pada awalnya Tanah Melayu merupakan kawasan didiami oleh golongan peribumi penduduk Melayu, yang menjadi golongan majoriti dan mempunyai kekuatan dari segi bilangan. Kewujudan populasi golongan imigran yang pelbagai merupakan kesan daripada peralihan ini. Antara sumbangan Masyarakat etnik Cina di Malaysia, yang dibawa masuk oleh imigran suatu ketika dahulu, termasuk penubuhan sekolah Cina, surat khabar Cina, dan pertubuhan Cina.

Kata kunci: Cina; klan; guanxi; shetuan; huiguan.

The fact that Chinese immigrants influxed into the country during British colonization is inseparable from modern Malaysian history. The mass migration of Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asia, especially in Tanah Melayu (literally meaning the Malay Land), has changed the original structure of the local community. Basically, Tanah Melayu in the early days was the land inhabited by the indigenous Malay people, who were the majority with numerical strength. Diverse immigrant populations emerged as a result of this transition. The contributions of the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia, brought by these immigrants, included the establishment of Chinese schools, Chinese newspapers, and ethnic-based organizations.



Rachel Chan Suet Kay is the author of the book “*Chinese Values Western Values And The Survival of The Chinese Clan As Social Institution*”, published by UKM Press in 2022. The book consists of 4 chapters and 105 printed pages in total, with a detailed bibliography at the end. The purpose of references and indexes is to allow other readers or academics to further explore the studies about clan associations in Malaysia. As pointed out by Chan, the main focus of this publication is to examine the relevance of Chinese clan associations among the wide spread of the Chinese diaspora in a modern context. The main objective of this book is to explore the causes for the perpetuation of clan associations in Chinese diasporic societies, contemporary Chinese ethnic majority societies, and the Western world (page 18). Primary mixed-method observations were chosen as the methodology to carry out this study. To investigate the bearing of traditional values, secular-rational values, survival values, and self-expression values, Inglehart and Welzel's World Values Survey (2015) is used (page 19). Besides that, library materials related to Chinese clan associations in the western world and Mainland China were also part of the methodology. To discover the features, comparisons were made between Chinese clan associations in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Vancouver Canada, and Guangdong Province, China.

The establishment of Chinese clan associations in Guangdong province, China. The wave of Chinese migration from Guangdong province to other countries also brought with it a philosophy of life rooted in Confucianism. This aspect can be justified through the practice of ancestor worship. Based on this publication by Chan, the work has reviewed the functions and roles of Chinese clan associations, discussing the dynamics of association members and the influence of clan associations on their daily lives. In short, clan associations play a role as social institutions in today's society, fulfilling the functional imperative championed by Talcott Parsons, which promotes social cohesion (page 9).

In Chapter 1 (page 11), the author outlines the perspectives of scholars who argue that kinship is fundamental to social formation and helps us to understand social order more effectively. In fact, the factors that define kinship are different in Europe and the United States. In ancient times, the Chinese interpreted family and national identity as synonymous and interchangeable. The family has formed the basic unit in all activities of society. Taylor argues that addressing a person as father, mother, grandfather, or grandmother while ignoring their real name is referred to as “tekononymy.” (page 12). Meanwhile, family life in China consists of a father, mother, sons, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. It is evident that Chinese society is rooted in the authority of the father and that Chinese clan associations are influenced by Confucianism, with one of the pure values emphasized being filial piety, alongside responsibility towards family members and the practice of moral values. The complex clan system originated in China and spread after the mass migration of immigrants to other countries, peaking in the 19th century. Although Chinese immigrants have settled in a new country to seek opportunities to change their fortunes, Overseas Chinese have a strong personal and emotional connection to China. On pages 13–14, it narrates that the objective of establishing clan associations is to provide long-term economic, cultural, and social support to their members. Clan associations have upheld the family as the fundamental unit that symbolizes Chinese identity, Chinese dialect groups, and the pure values of Confucianism.

The data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia shows that there are over 6.6 million Chinese people in Malaysia (page 14). Meanwhile, the Chinese clan associations are extensively distributed all over the country, these associations are divided into regional and



non-regional associations, historical blood organisations, surnames, and same-ancestor organisations. As described on page 16, the majority Chinese immigrants found in Malaysia came from Guangdong and Fujian in South China to make a living across the sea. In the case of Guangdong, ethnic groups, economies, cultures, and languages vary among sub-regions. In terms of daily language usage, the main dialects of Chinese in Malaysia are Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka. In addition to that, a significant number of Chinese speak Teochew, Hainan, Guangxi, and Henghua dialects.

In contrast, in the western world, as outlined by MacPherson (1966), see page 16, Gaelic Scottish clann is one of the kinship-based social structures that still exist in western countries, particularly in Europe. The western clan is based on kinship structure, which means that extended family based primarily on the connection among cousins and their ancestors can be traced back to a few ancestors whose chronicles were rather vague several generations ago.

In the beginning of Chapter 2, the author, Chan, summarizes the history of the establishment and background of the Chan See Shu Yuen Clan Association Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (CSSYKL). The Chan See Shu Yuen Clan Association Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (CSSYKL) is a tourist attraction located in a strategic location in Kuala Lumpur, at the end of Petaling Street. In 1896, influential leaders among Chinese immigrants, namely Chan Sow Lin, Chin Choon, Chan Sin Hee, and Chan Choy Thin, founded the CSSYKL, which plays the role of the clan consanguinity organization. As I have mentioned before, the valuable assets that the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia had brought by these immigrants included the establishment of Chinese schools, Chinese newspapers, and ethnic-based organizations. It is true that even though Chinese immigrants have settled in their countries of emigration, they still have connections with mainland China, so it is not surprising that the establishment of CSSYKL has historical connections with Chen's College, which was built in Xiguan, Guangzhou, China, in 1894 (page 32). In addition to the family temples found in ancient China, Chen's Ancestral Hall serves as an ancestral temple. Today, CSSYKL plays the same role as Chen's Ancestral Hall, to honor and offer deference to ancestors of the same surname and place of origin (*Ibid.*). One of the most fascinating aspects of this publication was the author's hands-on fieldwork. Chan had carried out the fieldwork by “turun padang” to obtain the data and meet the publication's objectives (pages 33–38). This advantage makes the book a scholarly work that attracts readers among researchers and academics.

No individual can resist the waves of change in reality. Humans, instead, must adapt to the waves of change that urge us to evolve so as not to be seen as outdated. The same goes for clan associations. The functions and roles of clan associations today are very different compared to the past. There is a comparison between the initial function and the new function of CSSYKL, as presented by the author in Table 2.1 (page 34). For example, CSSYKL in the past promoted the importance of education, but nowadays CSSYKL organizes visit tours for businessmen and academic researchers. The adaptations to the waves of change have fulfilled the Chinese saying, “The trends of the world are vast and unstoppable; those who follow them will prosper, while those who go against them will perish (天下大勢, 浩浩汤汤, 顺之者昌, 逆之者亡)”.

The recognition of George Town and Malacca as part of the UNESCO World Heritage List also opens up opportunities for the author, Chan, to explore the Chinese clan associations in Penang that serve similar functions and roles as CSSYKL, as shown in Table 2.2: Functions



of the Penang Clan Associations (Kongsi), see pages 39–42. The clan associations in Penang were previously known as Kongsi, but the name was eventually altered to *Huiguan* to maintain its significance. Nowadays, *Huiguan* in Penang plays the roles of clan society, provincial clubs, and a place for worshipping deities.

With the rise of China, its influence is growing. There is a saying among Chinese: “Wherever there is seawater, you will find Chinese people (有海水的地方就有华人)”. The footprints of Chinese are spread all over the world. Regarding the ethnic character of the Chinese, they can survive in any corner of the earth, no matter how challenging the situation. Table 2.3 shows Chinese clan association and society buildings in Vancouver, Canada (pages 43–45). The clan associations in Canada are still standing in the current of development and able to respond to the demands of the great era. The dynamism of those clan associations is the best reflection of the Chinese immigrant character in early times.

The foundation of CSSYKL in the past was a clan association, but now the organization responds to the rapidly changing world. The CSSYKL membership is no longer limited to the elderly; it also includes young adults from urban regions. Therefore, CSSYKL provides a platform for young adults to build up social networks while also advancing personal and professional growth. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is gaining importance (pages 50–54).

Chapter 3 outlines the role and function of *huiguan* and *shetuan*, other than clan associations that have been examined by the author in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. In this chapter, Chan distinguishes the role and function between *huiguan*, *shetuan*, and clan associations in order to help readers gain a deep understanding of these kinds of Chinese-based organizations. Table 3.1 shows The activities of *Huiguan*, which cover economic, political/administrative, education and culture, social and entertainment, religious, and philanthropic (page 57). Based on studies, *huiguan* originated in ancient China, which was commonly known as district associations. The objective of *shetuan* was to help and support immigrants who came from the same region. The collected *shetuan* membership fees were intended to support those who migrated to new places and adapted to a new life within a short period of time (pages 56–58). Kuah-Pearce (2006) describes the functions of *shetuan* in modern society. *Shetuan* serves as an intermediary between the Chinese community and the greater society. It offers mutual aid and protection to Chinese in the adopted country, fostering transnational connections and social networks (page 58). Based on the structural-functionalist perspective in sociology, the significant role of social institutions lies in their ability to unite society in order to achieve social cohesion. These social functions determine the continuity of social institutions, which cannot be separated from social order. Table 3.2, which summarizes the typologies of Chinese associations by scholars (pages 59–61), is very helpful for us to quickly understand the different types of Chinese associations. On pages 61–84, interesting tables, figures, and photos are included about the backgrounds and struggles of the founders of the CSSYKL. This section has opened the minds of readers, as the achievements of CSSYKL today were the result of the hard work and dedication of the founders in the past.

If we fail to comprehend the influence of Confucius, we will be unable to engage in a meaningful discussion about the origins of ancestor worship and clan associations. Confucianism has significantly shaped the practice of ancestor worship and played a crucial role in ensuring the survival of clan associations as a value system (pages 90–96). Chapter 4



narrates the secret of the longevity of Chinese clan associations. This final chapter provides readers with a chance to deeply understand the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the author throughout the writing process. Kuah-Pearce (2008) urges the early establishment of clan associations to help Chinese immigrants who have moved to new locations. However, the time flying has rendered clan associations no longer relevant; therefore, in order to remain relevant, a new mission needs to be sought to ensure that clan associations can respond to the demands of the great era (page 86). Meanwhile, Kuah-Pearce & Hu-Dehart (2006) conclude that the scope of assistance from clan associations has been extended to clans, lineages, or places of origin. (*Ibid.*). It cannot be denied that the Chinese community and Chinese organizations enjoy building relationships, known as *guanxi* in Chinese (pages 87), with outsiders so that one can easily obtain help and support in difficulty. The Chinese strongly believe that interpersonal relationships impact daily life. The scholars, Guthrie and Wank (2002), point out that *guanxi* are able to impact the political culture and business practices in China (pages 86–87).

The establishment of Chinese clan associations relates to deontological quality. It reveals a logical action taken out of duty or obligation. Additionally, these associations serve a utility-based function in society by achieving their functional imperatives, based on the Parsonsian sense of AGIL (adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency); see pages 88, 96-98, and Table 4.1 on page 99. Parson, influenced by Durkheim and Weber, developed structural functionalism, considering that every component in society has a function and a role to play. The social system has to keep everything in balance and make sure all its parts are working together to stay alive (page 88).

Finally, this scholarly work is well presented in proper academic English and has made a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in Chinese cultural studies. This book is likely to be reprinted. I suggest that the author may include a glossary of cultural terms related to clan associations and the names of Chinese leaders in Chinese, either in complex Chinese form (繁体字) or simplified Chinese form (简体字), as well as Chinese pinyin (汉语拼音) in each term consistently in the appendix at the end of the reprinted edition, to make the revised edition more extensive. The additional information in the revised edition could provide a way for researchers and academics outside of Malaysia, particularly from Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan, who are interested in the research of Overseas Chinese and Nanyang Studies (海外华人与南洋研究), to cross-reference by accessing the contents of this publication to gain a more comprehensive and balanced perspective in order to carry out their rigorous studies.

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