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**“ENGLISHISATION” OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA:
THE FLOW OF OVERSEAS STUDENTS AND THE ROLE OF
CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES¹**

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INTRODUCTION

The English language is expanding its realms in tandem with globalisation. Examples abound in almost every corner of the globe. One might think of the promotion of English usage in the post-national EU, the emphasis on English as a means of overcoming economic backwardness in the post-communist world, and the reaffirmation of the value of English skills in the postcolonial world. In fact, globalization in the form of Englishisation, or the spread of English, will surely continue to mark further gains in the time ahead. It can readily be predicted that English is one of the most important variables in conceiving of any kind of new world order.

The advance of Englishisation is giving rise to significant changes in ways of life in various parts of the world. Indeed, Asia has become one main arena where British, American, Australian and other varieties of English exist side by side, each one of which is closely linked with its cultural industries and public institutions. All of this interaction, fuelled in part by economic motivations, is unleashing intense competitive forces in the region. Because English is intimately involved in education, information, tourist and other key industries, it is an extremely profitable export commodity for any countries which use it as a native or second language. With this in mind, Englishisation provides an excellent vantage point to view and understand some of the developments taking place in and around Asia.

The contemporary phenomenon of “Englishisation” has already attracted much attention among various circles (see Pennycook 2000: 107-19). In particular, a lively debate can be heard concerning the politics of English as the dominant global language. In one particular genre of the debate, this expansion, referred to as linguistic imperialism or English language imperialism, is denounced as “a post-colonial plot on the part of the core English-speaking countries which hoped to maintain their dominance over ‘periphery’ (mostly developing) countries” (Chew 1999: 39). In order to understand social developments brought about by Englishisation, however, it is necessary to go beyond the limits of the ideological denunciations of English. This essay is part of my on-going project, in which I

propose a “sociological” approach to examine the impact of Englishisation on the reorganisation of global social relations and networks. Moreover, while previous literature has tended to focus mostly on the flow of people, goods, money and information on the macro-level of analysis, the study intends to inquire into the ways in which the micro-level experience of individuals is linked with intermediate-level institutions and organisations, thereby creating new spheres of living and activity against the background of global flows.

The aim of the present essay is to report some of my interim findings and to present some thematic considerations. It will look into the market mechanisms driving Englishisation and explore the type of influence Englishisation is exerting on the reorganisation of transnational social relationships and networks as well as flows of people. The focus will be placed on the institution of higher education, where the impact of Englishisation has been extremely acute. Taking up the notion of Malaysia as a regional hub for higher education, the essay explores how the Englishisation of higher education in Malaysia affects the flow of movement of students from the People’s Republic of China as well as other countries and regions of the world to their destinations of study. Attention is drawn to Malaysia’s multiethnicity and the ways in which Malaysia’s multilingual and “multicultural” staff in the education industry serve as transnational cultural intermediaries, for example, between PRC Chinese and Malaysian Chinese. The implications of their role in influencing the flow of overseas students are examined.

ENGLISHISATION AND PRIVATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Let us first take a brief overview of private higher education in Malaysia. As of December 2000, Malaysia has 14 national universities (e.g. University of Malaysia, National University of Malaysia, University of Science Malaysia) and seven private universities (e.g. Multimedia University, Petronas University of Technology).² In addition to these conventional universities, and representing a new trend in higher education, there exist some 632 private colleges, many with partnership programmes with overseas universities, and three local Malaysian campuses of overseas universities.³ Private colleges were first established in the 1980s and expanded rapidly in the 1990s. Many of these colleges have academic tie-ups with universities in Australia, Britain, the United States and other countries. For example, under a programme called “twinning”, a student studies at a Malaysian college for the first two years, acquires the necessary credits and then advances to the partner programme of an overseas university for the final year’s work (“2+1” formula). A student in the end obtains a degree from the Australian or British university. In the late 1990s it became possible to obtain an overseas university degree in Malaysia through a 3+0 programme or at a Malaysian branch campus of a foreign university. Students can now complete a whole course of study and be granted a full degree while in Malaysia. As of December 2000, three foreign universities – Monash University and Curtin University of Technology in Australia and

Nottingham University in Britain – have established branch campuses in Malaysia.⁴

The development of private higher education in Malaysia derives from Malaysia's domestic conditions as well as the conditions of university management overseas (especially in Australia and Britain). Both are closely linked. First, let us look at Malaysia's domestic situation, where an ethnic factor is at work in this multiethnic society.⁵ Private higher education has grown under the circumstances created by the *bumiputera* policy. In the 1970s, the Malaysian government implemented the New Economic Policy, while at the same time initiating a system of preferential treatment for *bumiputeras*, both of which aimed to redress the economic imbalance between ethnic groups and to restructure society itself. (*Bumiputera*, literally "son of the soil", mainly refers to Malays as opposed to immigrant-origin Chinese and Indians.) Various measures for preferential treatment for bumi pupils and students were put in place. Because *bumiputera* preferences are applied, among other things, to scholarships, including those for overseas study, non-Malay parents desiring a foreign university education for their children must pay out of their own pockets, incurring a large financial burden. This burden became especially heavy in light of the sharp downturn of the Malaysian economy since 1997. According to my preliminary study conducted among parents of teenage children, the parents' first choice would normally be to send their children to a British or American university, or, where that is not feasible, to send them to a university in Australia, which is less expensive and more convenient in terms of proximity. When even this is economically unfeasible, the parent typically will choose to have their children enrol in one of the private colleges or universities in Malaysia that offer programmes leading to the earning of a foreign degree. The significance, thus, of private higher education in Malaysia is that it provides opportunities to acquire an English-language overseas university education at low cost, in Malaysia. This answers to the demand from that section of society which desires foreign education for their children but which lacks the financial wherewithal for it; it is supported by demand from non-bumi Malaysians whose educational choices are constrained by the policy of preferential treatment of *bumiputeras*. It is indeed worth looking at the ethnic composition of students enrolled at private colleges offering foreign degrees and at the branch campuses of foreign universities. Roughly, eighty per cent of students enrolled at such private colleges are ethnic Chinese.⁶ At branch campuses of foreign universities, 91.4% of students are non-bumis, with most of these being ethnic Chinese (as of December 2000).⁷

A second factor that has enabled the emergence of Malaysia's private higher education system is the role played by private companies, in most cases land developers. They have fostered the development of private higher education as a business in partnership with local government authorities under the banners of community service, improvement of corporate image, and economic benefit. A third important factor is the role played by the national government in support and promotion of such endeavours. From the mid-1990s Malaysia began to face a serious shortage of skilled labour and engineers, especially in the area of science and technology, as the industrial and service sectors of the economy grew

pace and growth of high-tech industry brought about structural changes in the economy. One result was a perceived need for reform of the education system to bring it more in line with structural changes in the economy (Lipp 1997: 19-20; Leigh 1997: 122-3). From around this time the government began to encourage Malaysians to get their university degrees at home in order to prevent a drain both of talented people and foreign currency. Under the 1996 Private Higher Educational Institutions Act the government allowed foreign universities to establish branch campuses in Malaysia and offer courses and degrees as private universities (Study in Malaysia Handbook 2001: 47). There has thus been a convergence of interests on the part of the government, aiming to attract foreign universities as part of a project to make Malaysia a “centre of education excellence”, and private industry seeking a source of commercial gain.

There is a fourth reason for the development of private higher education in Malaysia: the process of “re-Englishisation” (i.e. the reaffirmation of English as a practical tool of communication) now taking place. Along with the *bumiputera* policy of the 1970s, the government implemented the National Culture Policy, intended to promote Malay culture in society and the Malay language in the field of education. The period from the 1970s into the 1980s witnessed a steady advance of Malay and a retreat of English. This may be called the process of “de-Englishisation”.⁸ The result was a steady rise in the number of Malay speakers and a decline of English ability.⁹ High economic growth in the 1990s benefited both Malays and non-Malays and gave rise to the so-called “new middle class”. This helped reduce ethnic tensions characteristic of the 1970s and 80s. While in principle the policy of preferential treatment for *bumiputeras* remained in force, in practice implementation was gradually relaxed. It was in these circumstances that the shift to “re-Englishisation” began to occur. Although the centrality of Malay culture and language in the life of the nation still has broad support from the Malay segment of the population, calls for a remedy of declining English standards have joined forces with the voices promoting globalisation, bringing about widespread demands for more English use. The success of private higher education institutions is eloquent testimony to the strength of the demand for English-language university education.

Turning our attention next to international surroundings, we see that economic interests on the part of Australian, British, American and other overseas universities to export their education has played an important role. These countries regard Malaysia as a major market for education export. Australia has been in the forefront of this enterprise; so let us here take a closer look at Australia’s case. The Colombo Plan adopted in 1950 as part of the country’s overseas assistance programme played an important role in facilitating foreign students’ study in Australia. Under the plan, until 1985 students from Malaysia were in principle scholarship holders. In 1985, however, the federal government of Australia issued a determination advising that henceforward students arriving from abroad should be assessed tuition fees by all higher education institutions. As a result, the number of full-fee paying students from Malaysia recorded a sharp increase.¹⁰ The reason for this shift in policy is to

be found in the government's recognition of the importance of the category of "education exports" in Australia's international balance of trade. Here was a clear assertion by the federal government in 1985 that education was an export industry. In fact, education services ranked as the eighth largest among Australia's export industries in the 1998-99 fiscal year (Davis, Olsen and Bohm 2000: 13-14). Australia is actively seeking to turn to advantage its strategic location in Asia to cultivate markets for education exports. Its sales approach involves the promotion of Australia as the nearest and less expensive "English-speaking country", Australia as a bridge between Asia and the West, and so on. Travel to Australia and costs of studying and living there are indeed cheaper in comparison with Britain and America, while at the same time the country's proximity and relatively low crime rates offer considerable peace of mind to parents of Asian students. The internationalisation of Australian higher education was at first directed to taking foreign students. In the early 1990s it was recognized that an equally important part of the formula was the advance of Australian education overseas (Davis, Olsen and Bohm 2000: 14-15). Currently, Australian universities have various partnership programmes with Malaysian private colleges; some of them franchise their curriculum, while others directly administer their own curriculum on their off-shore campuses. For a long time Australia had played a merely supporting role in the unfolding story of Englishisation, remaining in the shadow of Britain and America. In postcolonial Asia, however, the country's education industry is fast emerging as a major player.

MALAYSIA AS A REGIONAL HUB IN EDUCATION: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE FLOW OF CHINA STUDENTS

As related above, private higher education in Malaysia (more exactly, private colleges partnering with overseas universities and Malaysian branch campuses of overseas universities operating as private universities) came into being and developed in domestic circumstances conducive to their rapid growth. For the next stage of growth and development, the foreign student market is deemed indispensable. In particular, great store is being set on students from China and Indonesia. As conditions in Indonesia have deteriorated since 1998, the outflow of ethnic Chinese has grown to conspicuous proportions. In this section I wish to focus mainly on China students (meaning in this essay students from the PRC, to distinguish them from ethnic Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia).

The percentage of foreign students at private colleges varies according to the college, but the overwhelming majority of foreign students come from China and Indonesia. To give an example, at INTI College, which has been actively cultivating the China market, around 20 per cent of the students are from overseas, with nearly 80 per cent of them coming from China and Indonesia.¹¹ The importance of the overseas market holds true for private universities as well. For example, Curtin University of Technology from Perth, Western Australia is one of the four foreign private universities operating in Malaysia. Because of its proximity to Asia,

the university has been actively seeking to internationalise (meaning Asianise) its operations. In 1999 Curtin opened a branch campus in Miri in Sarawak State, and in the 2002 academic year plans to relocate to a brand new campus there now under construction.¹² The new facilities represent a large-scale joint undertaking of the Sarawak state government, private developers and Curtin University. According to university administrators, they anticipate that very substantial proportion of the entire student enrolment will be overseas students. The majority of them will come from China and Indonesia, and students from Brunei, the Philippines, and other Asian nations are also expected to enrol.

I would now like to focus on the China market, which is becoming increasingly important as a source of in-coming students. With China joining the WTO, there is a perceived need for its students to be trained in many relevant areas to cope with globalisation and to promote international trade. Their aim, however, is not simply to get university degrees, which they can get in China anyway, but to be exposed to Western or international practices.

In Malaysia, there are the options of the 3+0 formula at a private college or a degree from one of the Malaysian branches of a foreign university for those in-coming students who plan to earn a degree but who need to budget. However, many China students show a marked preference for spending the first two years in Malaysia completing the preliminary requirements under the 2+1 formula and then leaving Malaysia to spend the third and final year at the partner-university that will actually grant their degree – in Australia or Britain. The reason for this is that it is difficult to obtain a visa directly for these countries in China, so they make the rational choice of going first to Malaysia and from there eventually, and more easily, on to somewhere else. Malaysia thus functions as a kind of transit point to “the West”.

My interviews with China students and their Malaysian teachers confirm that nearly all China students are from wealthy families, their parents being either from the professional classes or owners of businesses. What motivates these young Chinese to go abroad for study? A primary reason is that, although in China English is promoted as one of the keys to success, teaching methods focus mainly on grammar and reading comprehension, with the result that students are unable to speak the language and, furthermore, have no opportunities to use it in everyday life. Another reason for the popularity of overseas study is that while in China the competition for entrance to university is very tough, the gradual liberalization of society together with economic growth and higher incomes have opened an alternative to the traditional academic grind, that is, to study abroad. A third factor is the social prestige that accrues to study abroad, a valuable commodity when it comes time to find a job. Additionally, some students view a sojourn abroad as potentially a stepping-stone to immigration, through such means as employment with a foreign firm, marriage with a foreign national, and so on.

The next question, then, is why the popularity of Malaysia? Many China students say that they have chosen Malaysia because not only is English used in everyday life there,

but because Chinese is also widely understood. And compared to, say, Australia or America, Malaysia is cheaper in terms of tuition fees and cost of living. Such economic considerations are often the most important of all.

Meanwhile, on the receiving side, the Malaysian government has set its sights on making Malaysia a regional education hub. As one result of this policy, study visas are now issued routinely even to Chinese nationals. The Ministry of Education is playing a part in the national policy – the recruitment of foreign students – with its Study in Malaysia Campaign. Private colleges dispatch agents to China for student recruitment purposes. There are about half a dozen “selling points” that Malaysian colleges emphasise when promoting their programs in China. First, students will not be getting a Malaysian degree but an overseas degree from the US, the UK or Australia. Second, Malaysia is not expensive because of relatively lower tuition fees and cost of living. Third, it is easier to get a visa. Fourth, in addition to the wide use of English, Chinese is also widely understood. Fifth, Malaysia is a multicultural society: students can expose themselves to different cultures. Sixth – and this is suggested rather than explicitly stated – Malaysia can be used as a “stepping stone” on the way to “the West”. Recruiters tell students that they can come to Malaysia to study for the first two years, save money, improve their English and experience different cultures, and then do their final year abroad. The more money they save by doing two years in Malaysia, the better their chances for doing a Master’s degree overseas later on. Again, cost-effectiveness is emphasised.

Thematic considerations

Three important themes reveal themselves from the foregoing observations of new currents in private higher education. First, Englishisation is impacting on international flows of Chinese people. Previous studies of students who go abroad for study have assumed a dichotomous relationship between the countries sending the students and the countries receiving them. The dichotomy takes the form of “English-speaking countries” versus “non-English speaking countries”. Establishment of a transit point or a mid-point hub in the flow of students, however, de-territorialises English-mediated higher education. This de-territorialisation is symbolic of the trend in English higher education, and this hub perspective is bound to take on added importance in future thinking and discussions about patterns of flows of students in the postcolonial world. It is vital to recognise the shift of meaning taking place when talking about the receiving of overseas students. The pattern of study abroad is being transformed from one in which students simply go to the country of study and then return to their own, to a newer pattern whereby one departs for a hub which offers the possibility of plural or serial destinations. This new conception holds all manner of possibilities for formerly colonised countries such as Malaysia.

Malaysia’s case provides numerous suggestions for thinking about international flows of students. The contrast with Japan is instructive. Since Japanese universities exist outside the “block” of English-speaking countries, they cannot fulfil the role of hub (transit

point). For this reason, their market is limited, and it would appear that Japanese universities are destined to remain peripheral.

For some Asian students going abroad, Australia is also seen as a transit point on the path to America. Not a few China students have this route in mind: China to Malaysia to Australia to America. And as Australian immigration rules have tightened in recent years, New Zealand has begun to garner some attention as an alternative. For students, the path is fluid and is continually undergoing adjustments. The emergence of Malaysia as a relatively accessible locale of “English-language tertiary education in Asia” offers overseas students a comfortable place of sojourn while making up their minds about their next destination.

A second theme commanding attention concerns a representation of Malaysia. Malaysia as a transit point has come to represent itself as an English-speaking country (and for China students a bi-lingual country where both English and Chinese are spoken). One of Malaysia’s key strategies with regard to attracting students from other Asian countries is to promote Malaysia as an “English-speaking country”. English is spoken not only in shops and other public places but even in the home as well. In the 1980s much was made of Malay as an important constituent of the national culture, but recently it is the deteriorating standard of English that is a constant topic of discussion and debate in the mass media. Here we are seeing a shift in the representation of national identity. It is noteworthy that a social category of people comprised of linguistic scholars, English educators and others with English expertise are hiring themselves out as Asian English consultants and are engaged in the task, among other things, of providing some theoretical backbone to the local realities of English usage.

A third theme emerges from the developments I have related above. It is no longer tenable, as has been argued by proponents of linguistic imperialism, to posit in a simplistic manner a *dependency relationship* between Australia or the UK as a *central*, “English-speaking country” and Malaysia as a *peripheral*, “sub-English-speaking country. The time is already past when the process of Englishisation can naturally be assumed to be the project of “native speakers” who are “the owners of the language, guardians of its standards, and arbiters of its pedagogic norms” (Jenkins 2000: 5). The Malaysian example represents what may be called a postcolonial pattern of Englishisation. In this example, the collective project of various Malaysian actors, both public and private, to make economic gains out of private higher education is itself promoting the spread of the English language.

CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES AS KEY PLAYERS IN GLOBAL FLOWS

We have seen the internationalisation of student markets for Malaysia’s private colleges and universities. Globalisation of Malaysian private higher education does not end there but is making a further advance. With the opening of China, many Malaysian private colleges are setting up colleges in China in partnership with local Chinese. Malaysia’s private higher education is now regarded as an export item. It is particularly important to note that the

export item here is not Malaysian college diplomas or degrees but rather the expertise to facilitate international programs in China. The Malaysian education-business entrepreneurs involved have already acquired a lot of know-how in this field through their joint-venture experience with Australian and other overseas universities. Ethnic Chinese “middlemen” in particular are well suited to their role since they are bi-lingual and bi-cultural, having received their education in Malaysia both in English and Chinese. (More strictly speaking, they are tri-lingual, knowing Malay as well.) They conduct business with the Chinese in Chinese and negotiate with Australians in English. They are good at this not only because they possess language skills, but also because they are at home with the nuances both of Western (British) institutional culture and Chinese business culture. To borrow the words of one of my informants, the ethnic-Chinese middleman “goes back and forth between the Chinese and Western worlds within his own person”.

The role of ethnic-Chinese Malaysians is not limited to that of economic intermediaries (middlemen). As has already been suggested, they play an important role as cultural intermediaries as well. We should make especial note here of a particular type of intermediaries who specialise in culture. This group is represented, for example, by Malaysian Chinese English-language educators, who are hired as English-language education consultants and commissioned to design English-language study curricula.¹³ Having already won their spurs in Malaysia devising local teaching methods for the Malaysian market, they are regarded as experts in education consulting. Their selling point is that, based on their experience in Malaysia, Asians like themselves (Malaysian Chinese) are in many ways better qualified for the field of English education for Asians (e.g. PRC Chinese and ethnic Chinese). They emphasise the effectiveness of their localised teaching methods which have been freed of many of the constraints of British and American applied linguistics. What is more, Malaysian Chinese educators do not confine themselves, as education entrepreneurs, to marketing education programs. Some in the role of consultants design curricula for the China market, while still others set up as counsellors for China students in Malaysia, and so on. Such cultural intermediaries, engaging in various types of educational activities, are a driving force in Englishisation.

When considering the behaviour of an individual (micro level) seeking to acquire an education in English, it is essential to understand the process by which this individual, making strategic moves on a global playing board, goes about making a life for himself/herself that is mediated through his/her links to various types of organizations and systems (middle level). I mean by this that it is important to pay close attention to social channels that connect the individual to the society. Bourdieu applies the term “new intellectuals” to those in society who act as intermediaries in transmitting ideas and symbols previously monopolized by intellectuals to a wider stratum of the population (Bourdieu 1992: 370-1). Featherstone, taking a hint from Bourdieu, focuses attention on cultural intermediaries who act as “the perfect audience and transmitters, intermediaries for the new intellectual popularisation” (Featherstone 1991: 91). The role of such cultural intermediaries in modern societies, he

says, is steadily gaining in importance. The spheres of activity Featherstone has in mind are symbolic goods and provision of services – for example, marketing, public relations, consulting, and help-giving professions such as social worker or counsellor.

Cultural intermediaries are key players in global flows. Appadurai's well-known sentence puts it thus: "The new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of center-periphery models" (Appadurai 1990: 296). It is the role of cultural intermediaries to connect disjunctures at various points of global flows. The following remark by the president of one of the well-established colleges in Malaysia illustrates this point well.

I view it [our role] more as that of "communication conduit". We are lucky because we are part of the Commonwealth, we have been under the British system and all that, so in a way we speak the same academic language as the Australian university. Because their system is quite similar to our system. In fact, it is probably in terms of communication that we are closer to Australian universities than to Japanese universities. Because the structure is different [in Japan]. Because we understand Australian expectations, structure and all that. And then being Asians, we are a bridge. Our Chinese partners who have grown up in a different system altogether don't know how to make the partnership work. Even with the same system, Malaysian and Australian, there was some pain in trying to get the relationship to work well in the beginning. But that is behind us now. So we are passing on our experience to the Chinese.

The foregoing discussion has shown how the Englishisation of higher education in Asia is forging connections between Chinese Malaysians and PRC Chinese nationals (and Indonesian Chinese). We may refer to these links as *transnational ethnicity*. The important point to bear in mind here is that despite the fact that the actors themselves are self-consciously aware of the ethnic link, the relationship is instrumental in nature and not one that derives from mobilisation of a pre-existing clan network. The relationship is grounded in instrumental motivations concerned with demand and supply of "soft technologies" in the field of educational development methods. As we have seen, the development of private higher education in Malaysia, the medium of which is English, has led to stepped-up inflows of students from China. Within this process of Englishisation, we can observe various types of increasing links between PRC Chinese and Malaysian Chinese (for example, in businesses such as travel agencies and apartment-brokers catering to China students). We should avoid any overly-hasty understanding of this development as simply a matter of "the Chinese connection" or as an example of "long-distance nationalism". What in actuality are the effects of the Englishisation process on the mutual relationships between Chinese and Malaysian Chinese and on the organisation of identity among the actors involved? The phenomenon is still at a very early stage, and we would be well advised to spend more time observing the forms, repetitiveness, and durability of these links. They represent a social

trend of great interest and significance for the future.

Malaysia's multiethnicity is a precious resource for the nation. Malaysia is a multiethnic society comprised chiefly of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. We have seen how the ethnicity of Malaysian Chinese is a valuable resource in dealings with PRC Chinese and Indonesian Chinese in the marketplace. The ethnicity factor in the creation of transnational networks between people is not limited to the case of the Malaysian Chinese. Another, very interesting example was seen in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States. Malaysia was quick to announce itself as an alternative destination for Middle Eastern students who had planned to go to the US for study but now found the way blocked. Malaysia's Ministry of Education has organised recruitment of Middle Eastern students to come to Malaysia. In this case, Malaysia sells Malaysia as a Muslim country. The religious aspect of Malay ethnicity is emphasised for Middle Eastern students. And here Malay-Muslims serve as cultural intermediaries. The following remark by the director of one of Malaysia's main private colleges is illustrative of the use of Malaysia's multiethnicity as a resource for a transnational project.

We know how to take advantage of our historical background – English and our multiethnic background. This is where the plural society or the multiethnic society is at an advantage. Even our college has centres headed by Malays. Because, when Middle Eastern students come here, they are more comfortable in centres headed by Malays.

It is becoming gradually apparent that the activities of this group of people are having a very interesting impact on the reorganisation of multi-layered identities and social relations and networks involving Malaysians. This is rather too complex to discuss in any simple manner. Limiting ourselves to formal categories, there are, first, the intra-national dimension of ethnic categories comprised of indigenous Malays, ethnic Chinese, Indians and "others"; second, the dimension of Malaysia's national identity; and third, the dimension of transnational interconnections between Malaysia's domestic ethnicities and the broader categories of people in the world – often called "civilisations". As has been seen in the examples above, Malaysian Chinese ethnicity gets connected with the broader Chinese world, Malay religiosity with the broader Muslim world, and so on. Needless to say, these are constructed categories. Nevertheless, it is a social fact that such formal categories do prescribe the boundaries of people's daily lives and world-view. The process of Englishisation impacts on the organisation of society and of identity in all three dimensions, and in the interfaces and disjunctures between these dimensions and within each dimension.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

English is an extremely important variable in thinking about the restructuring of society in contemporary postcolonial Asia. This is because the language is intimately involved in global flows of people and money, the constitution of powers, the organisation of social and

personal identity, and numerous other areas of human interaction. Previous discussions of the role of English, however, have clung to distinctions predicated upon notions of the “standardness” of English and have thus been unable to free themselves from the limiting framework of a world divided into “English-speaking countries” that form the “centre” and “non-English-speaking countries” (also, “sub-English-speaking countries”) that occupy the “periphery”. In this conventional view, it is the UK, the US, Australia and other “English-speaking countries” that lead the way in spreading English in the world. My argument in this essay has been that this construct is outdated in several aspects – that it overlooks and is not capable of elucidating some of the complex and fascinating phenomena now taking place. A fresh approach is needed which examines the ways in which Englishisation is supporting, promoting, and reorganising global flows as well as influencing processes of identity formation both in national and transnational contexts.

Previous discussions of the expansion of English have, in simplistic fashion, assumed the “native speaker” and the “English-speaking country” to be the fundamental source of Englishisation. As we have seen in this essay, however, in postcolonial Asia the advance of Englishisation is being propelled by the dynamic interactions of a large and varied cast of local actors. How are we to interpret this localised version – with its own theory and practice – of the English-language industry? In the economic sphere, does it represent symbolic autonomy, or does it simply indicate that the Asian education industry has become a mere sub-contractor for Australia or the UK? It is much too early for answers to such questions: the story is still unfolding. Here I will refrain from any hasty conclusions and end with an assertion of my conviction that further, careful research into this fascinating subject will be well rewarded.

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NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this essay was published as "'Eigoka' to posutokoroniaru na ajia: Mareshia no genba kara mieta keiko" ("Englishisation" in postcolonial Asia: An exploration of trends in Malaysia), *Shiso* (Thought), no. 933, January 2002. I would like to thank many individuals engaged in Malaysia's private higher education for providing me with valuable information. I am also grateful to John Bowler for his assistance in writing this text.

² There is also an international university called International Islamic University of Malaysia. IIUM was set up by the Malaysian government but operates under the ownership of a multinational board.

³ In terms of student numbers, national universities have 277,083 students (of which there are 170,607 undergraduates), private universities 20,839, private colleges 209,589, branch campuses of foreign universities 1,641. (This is based on the data provided orally by an officer at the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, August 2001.)

⁴ There is now a fourth one called De Montfort University Campus Malaysia (as of August 2002).

⁵ The ethnic composition of Malaysia (as of 1991) is: Malays 50.7%, other bumiputera 10.6%, Chinese 27.5%, Indians 7.8%, others 3.3% (Department of Statistics Malaysia 1991: 40).

⁶ This is based on the data supplied by many private colleges in 2001 and 2002. Kemp's 1991 survey of Sunway College in Kuala Lumpur also gives the same result (Kemp 1992: 59).

⁷ Data supplied by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2001.

⁸ Bumiputera policies caused a great number of non-bumis to study abroad. The 1980-85 period marked a 35.5 % increase in non-bumis studying abroad. The ethnic backgrounds of the Malaysian students in Australia during the period of July 1987-June 1988 are: 87% Chinese, 6% Malays, 5% Indians, 2% others (Andressen 1993: 88 and 125).

⁹ The policy was implemented for all subjects to be taught in Malay in government schools. Malay became the language of instruction in secondary schools by 1982 and at universities by 1983 (though flexibility was allowed for tertiary education).

¹⁰ Full-fee paying students from Malaysia increased from 198 in 1986 to 10,546 in 1995 (Lipp 1997: 16).

¹¹ Data supplied by INTI College, 23 August 2002.

¹² I have learned from the university's website that the new campus was opened in September 2002 ("2002 Releases", 23 September 2002, <http://announce.curtin.edu.au/release2002/c8202.html>, 18 November 2002).

¹³ Study abroad normally takes the form either of language study or study for a degree. Both types of study require completion of an intensive course of training in English, so English education occupies a prominent place in the plans of students venturing abroad.