

remained in the civil society sector where they believe they can be most effective and find highest personal fulfilment, without moving into mainstream political activism.

Another milestone reached by Malaysian women was the formulation of the National Policy for Women (NPW) adopted by the Malaysian government at the end of 1989. Its policy thrust is to ensure that all women will be able to participate in, and benefit from, national development. Briefly, its primary objectives are

- i. to ensure equal access to resources, information, participation and incentives to both men and women so that women could make meaningful contributions to the country's development and realised their full potentials; and
- ii. To integrate women in all sectors of development in accordance with their ability and qualification.

In order to achieve these objectives, it puts forward specific strategies that focused on strengthening HAWA as the machinery for national development, implementing and monitoring programmes for the integration of women in national development, providing education and training for sensitising government administrators on women's issues, involving non-governmental organisations in programmes concerning women in development, eliminating gender discrimination, promoting and coordinating research on women's issues and ensuring that government agencies concerned adjust their allocations to meet the needs of programmes for women in development (Nagaraj 1995: 14-16). The structural process for the whole national women project climaxed with the formation of the *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita dan Keluarga* (KPWK), that was later renamed and enlarged to be *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga Dan Masyarakat* (KPWKM). Its first minister, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who was also the Deputy Chief of *Gerakan Wanita UMNO*, was appointed in January 2001.<sup>vii</sup>

The impacts of these policies, in terms of both structural and socio-economic dynamics, spilled over into the political arena. For a start, better-educated and more financially independent women begin to enter politics. The 1995, 1999 and 2004 profiles of women election candidates would bear out this claim. Issues of gender parity, 30 percent representation of women at decision-making levels as the acceptable notion of critical mass and demands for more seats for women to contest in the elections became part of the Malaysian political buzzwords. The most active and vocal voices have been the *Wanita UMNO*. They lead the rest of the women in other political parties both within and outside the *Barisan Nasional* coalition. However, much of this development occurs at the leadership level. While there has been a wider reach of awareness about meaningful participatory politics, it is noted that women at the grassroots level continued in traditional supporting role, namely as vote canvassers, voters and pillars of family strength.

Veteran woman politician, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani (1992: 110), identified five reasons for this state of affairs, including her observation that women seemed to be prepared to lead women only. The others are that traditional roles that women continue to play do not give them wide exposure and prevent them from being seriously involved in politics, that most women become members of political parties

in order to strengthen the parties and not to acquire personal gains, that there is a still strong sentiment in rural communities against women's political candidacy, and that women are ineffective at political management at the branch and division levels. Rashila's findings (1997) complemented Aishah's observations that at the end of the last millennium, societal view on women's role in the public domain remained conservative and patriarchal. For example, a woman's natural place is perceived very much to be at home thus women who choose to venture into politics not only need unconditional support from her family, especially her husband, but must also be seen to be able to keep a balanced home and family life. Rashila also found firstly, that there is the persistent religious argument among some quarters, especially with regard to Muslim women, that it is not the place for women to be in leadership positions outside the home; secondly, that there remained the structural constraints within political parties which allow a very narrow passage for women to reach the top. There is a discernable apprehensiveness if not explicit closed attitude towards women's participation as election candidates among political parties in general; thirdly, that the pre-election jockeying for election constituencies within the different parties pretty much sidelines even qualified women as candidates; and fourthly, that in comparison to men, women politicians tended to have scarce financial backing in order to fuel a political career.

Given such persistent trend of conservative view on women in politics, it is important and significant to look at how women at grassroots level see themselves in the national political paradigm. It is important to understand their own sense of political efficacy and what they themselves identify as challenges to their more significant participation. Their empowerment towards more meaningful participatory democratic practices and their contribution towards building a mature democratic political culture must form the necessary foundation for the greater advancement of Malaysian women in national and international politics. Women's political significance from grassroots to the national level is a significant reality and Malaysia has more to gain than to lose by maintaining and strengthening this presence. During the Mahathir years, women's formal political participation, both at the electoral and governmental levels, has risen in numbers. Similar trend can be seen in the professional and private sectors. However, the critical point is women at decision-making levels. It can be argued that a gender bias handicaps women across all ethnic communities at almost all decision-making levels. It would be fair to suggest that not only do political parties, government, and the general public have to seriously evaluate and take positive steps about improving existing perceptions on women's political and electoral participation. There must be conscientious effort in fostering greater involvement of qualified women at decision-making levels.

#### **GERAKAN WANITA AND PUTERI UMNO**

Malaysian women's visible participation in politics began in the nationalist movements during the Japanese occupation period. In particular, they made their major impact in modern politics during the 1946 nation-wide anti Malayan Union movement. This movement later solidified into UMNO. The history of the activism and contribution of the UMNO women to party and nation is well documented both within this book and elsewhere. This tradition has been further strengthened by the formation of *Puteri UMNO* in 2000. Datuk Seri (now Tun) Dr Mahathir Mohamad,

who was then the President of UMNO and *Barisan Nasional*, officially gave his blessing and support. It has attracted educated young Malay women who are eager to contribute to national development, enthusiastic about volunteerism and community work, and sensitive to the idea of being future leaders, to join *Puteri*. Their fresh approach to political activism, "less politicking more social service", found resonance among many contemporary young Malay women. From 2002 to 2004, under the dynamic leadership of Azalina Othman (now YB Datuk Seri and currently the Minister of Youth and Sports), *Puteri UMNO* took the Malaysian political scene by storm. It cut its teeth during the by-elections leading up to the 2004 general election. By 2004 general election, it was a political force to be reckoned with in the ruling party's election machinery. *Puteri UMNO* also made a credible first outing by winning seats allocated to it, chief of which was the parliamentary seat won uncontested by its pioneer leader Azalina in Pengerang, Johor.<sup>viii</sup> It was perceived as a just reward for Azalina's ambitious and successful drive for *Puteri* membership and her forceful dynamic leadership that caught the imagination of thousands of young Malay women in the first year of its existence. Since then, it has proven itself a worthy source of UMNO's political strength: firstly, through its community oriented programmes and youthful idealism; and secondly, through its vigorous participation in a series of by-elections throughout the Abdullah Badawi administration.

## NEW MILLENNIUM NEW POLITICS

There exists a perception that prior to the Asian financial and economic crisis that took place towards the end of the last millennium, Malaysia was on the juggernaut path *vis a vis* globalization, that there was no alternative but to jump on globalisation bandwagon. Nonetheless, with the onset of the crisis, the government then led by Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, reviewed the realities of the country's national interests within the context of the surging new global political and economic milieu. In order to protect its sovereignty and other national interests, it preferred to participate in global transformations in a pro-active mode, to take and modify what is good for the country and even to be an agent of change itself wherever possible (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2000). This perspective influences the country's policy orientations on contemporary issues such as good governance, democratisation, human rights, gender, environment and economic development.

One reflection of this orientation is Malaysia's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. In May 2006, Malaysia's progress in terms of its implementation was submitted to CEDAW's panel of international experts.<sup>ix</sup> All countries that have acceded to CEDAW go through this process every two years. For Malaysia, this was its first time since it acceded to the Convention. Paralleling the government's report, six representatives of NGOs in Malaysia presented their own shadow report to the same panel.<sup>x</sup> Ivy Josiah of the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) said this was the first time that the NGOs were able to state their positions on various issues together as a group to an international body. Zaitun Kasim of Sisters in Islam said that NGOs were not here to find faults but to get to "the kernel of the issues" (Fernandez 2006: 30). Apart from the important fact that developments within our country become subjected to greater international scrutiny, highlighted was the contemporary reality of the need for cooperation between civil society actors, especially the non-governmental

organisations, and government agencies in realising the aims of such international instruments for empowering and bettering women's lives. Driven home was also the global mainstream notion of participatory democracy that eschewed gender bias and gender discrimination. Instead, it upholds gender parity and aims for gender equality. These form new challenges in today's social, economic and political environments.

For the Malaysian women, education has been the major factor that have empowered and promoted women in the professional, public and private sectors. However, despite the hype about globalisation and democratisation in terms of heightening women political participation, especially at leadership and decision-making levels, it is fair to say that in Malaysia it has moved at a pretty slow pace. For example, in the year 1982, which saw the first general election during the Mahathir era, there were only 5.2 percent women representatives in the *Dewan Rakyat*. In 1995, the ratio of men to women candidates was at 12:1 and women parliamentarians only made up 7.8 percent of the nation's parliamentarians. The general impression was that it could not have been due to not enough qualified women around. It was only in 1999, which was the last general election under Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the figure stood at 10.36 percent with a male-female candidate ratio of 9:1. In the 2004 election under Mahathir's successor, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, the ratio and the percentage remained constant. In fact, with the increase in the number of parliamentary constituencies from 193 in 1999 to 219 in 2004 (Table 1) due to re-delineation exercise prior to the election, the ratio and percentage did not mean much gain for the women<sup>xi</sup>. For a start it was below the then Asian countries' average of 14.1% with Vietnam (26%) reportedly having the highest percentage of women MPs in an Asian country. It also certainly did not reflect the total of about 52 percent women voters in the country. However, we are moving in a welcomed direction.

**Table 1: Percentages of women in the Malaysian Parliament, the *Dewan Rakyat***

ELECTION YEAR	TOTAL SEATS	RATIO MEN: WOMEN	%
1955	53	51 : 1	2.00
1959	104	34 : 1	2.90
1964	104	34 : 1	2.90
1969	144	71 : 1	1.38
1974	154	30 : 1	3.25
1978	154	21 : 1	4.54
1982	154	18 : 1	5.19
1986	177	24 : 1	3.95
1990	180	15 : 1	6.11
1995	192	12 : 1	7.80
1999	193	9 : 1	10.4
2004	219	9 : 1	10.5

Sources: Rashila (2005: 217), Khoo B.T. (2005: 44)

The Malaysian *new politics* popular during the 1999 general election saw certain non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their activists crossing the non-partisan divide that traditionally separates civil society and politics. Moved by the 1997-98 Anwar Ibrahim episode, a number of them opted to participate in party and electoral politics in the hope that they could make inroads into policy-making bodies. Specific to women politics, before the 1990 general election, a booklet referred to by its authors as the Women Manifesto, entitled *As Malaysian and As Women: Questions for Our Politicians and a Manifesto for the 90s* was published. It covered the questions of why was there no critical mass of women in the public sphere, lack of legal protection for women not only at work place but even more so in their domestic life, and women's low economic standing in the implementation of development policies. In 1995, Malaysia endorsed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>xii</sup> In 1996, Malaysia was represented by both the public and the civil society sectors at the UN Beijing Conference for women. This official chain of events can be said to have culminated in Malaysia's amendment of Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution by adding the word "gender" for it to read, "Except as expressly authorized by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground of religion, race, descent, place of birth and gender ...", thus constitutionally ensuring the elimination of discrimination against women. Thus, the current concern seems to be more focused on the question of opportunities for women's substantive contribution and participation at decision-making level rather than the issue of "how many women are at the top".

The late 1990s interplay of the dynamics of the Malaysian *new politics* also caused a trend towards the merging of women's political and civil society activism in the country. In May 1999, the Women's Agenda for Change (WAC) was launched. It has a section on "Women and Participatory Democracy" with the central theme of democratic conscientization and empowerment.<sup>xiii</sup> Endorsed by seventy-six other NGOs, WAC targeted three groups: the government and its official agencies, the politicians and the general public. The idea was to influence and ensure policy measures that advance women's rights and interests, heighten advocacy of women's issues and raise awareness of issues affecting women (Lai 2003: 70). Working around the concept of critical mass that was endorsed by the 1995 Beijing Global Platform for Action, WAC called upon all political parties to reserve at least thirty percent of all nominations for women representation in all elections at party, state assembly and parliamentary levels, and the government to set a target of similar percentage for women to be appointed to all decision-making positions in government and statutory bodies. Then in September of the same year, the Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI) was launched. It specifically aimed to promote women candidates in the November 1999 general election. However, this did not involve women who were already in political parties since WCI aimed at fielding women candidates standing on independent platforms advocating gender and environmental issues. It fielded Zaitun Kasim but she lost in the Selayang parliamentary constituency. She stood on a platform of women and non-partisan public interest issues, thus breaking out of the ethnic and party paradigms that have been the hallmark of conventional Malaysian party politics (Saliha 2005: 91-124). Taking WAC and WCI together, Martinez (2003:96) observed that their development and trajectories towards the end of the last millennium did give cause to hope that Malaysian women were renegotiating their conceptions of power and polity within the Malaysian mosaic.

In that Malaysian mosaic, there is yet another thread in the politics of women's political participation in Malaysia. Its genesis can be traced perhaps as far back as the New Economic Policy period of the 1970s and 1980s. This period overlapped with the era of what was known popularly as the era of Islamic resurgence when Malaysia experienced one of the most intense periods of modern Islamic revivalist or resurgent movements. The *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) was one of the key players at this time. Different from some other more conservative Islamic groups, ABIM's progressive approach to Islam as a way of life in the modern world, added to the empowerment of women in Malaysia by fostering a civil society that was more open to female participation. It was committed to a "modernist, progressive, and development oriented" Islam. Through its women affairs unit, the *Unit Hal Ehwal Wanita* (HELWA), it contributed to the empowerment of Malay Muslim women by reinforcing them in their identity and their understanding of the ways in which they can participate in a modernising and developing country, which of course included politics if they so chose to. As such, by the 1990s, this plus other societal and economic dynamics shifted the focus of politicised younger generation of Malaysian Muslim women. It moved dramatically towards questions of finding a balance between contemporary demands and traditional, cultural and religious gender construction, formulating new strategies for more meaningful democratic participation in fast developing Malaysia, and increasing the percentage of women at decision-making levels.

Although they might not have necessarily joined forces in the beginning, there seemed to be simultaneous similar development among Malaysian women of various ethnic groups who are active in civil society and politics. This marked the 1990s Malaysian political scene with the emergence of a new breed of political women players as well as new form of alliances. Younger women professionals, with more contemporary approach to organisations and greater commitment to public service than conventional ideological agenda, became election candidates. They managed under their own steam, confident in their rights and place within a democratic system, display leadership and organisational abilities, and form tactical alliances with other groups for mutual benefits. An example of this was the 'tactical and strategic alliance' experimented by Zaitun Kasim, who stood as an independent candidate during the 1999 general election. Zaitun called it an election "rainbow alliance" (Zaitun 2004:3). Maznah (2001: 125-127) offered an insightful analysis of the women's predicament during this election by capturing the nuances of the 'gender card' as perceived and used by politicians, political parties, candidates, women activists and other interested parties. She saw a marked politicisation and cooptation of women's issues in the run-up to the 1999 election although her conclusion was that the 'gender card' was probably more effective among non-Muslim voters because in her words "women's rights as opposed to women's welfare per se were associated with secular politics, thus acting as a safeguard against both Islamic encroachment and gender discrimination."

The younger breed of women politicians are also comfortable with the idea of using "different political channels aided by technology" that is based on ICT that are synonymous with globalisation and contemporary life style. However, in this country, the combination of internet technology and democracy is still new despite the almost



borderless spaces for freedom of expression and channels for organisation that are offered by it.<sup>xiv</sup> As such, these important contemporary channels for networking and reaching out to grassroots have yet to be used significantly by both men and women in politics. It is also interesting to note that even in the urban constituencies women politicians have not been overly enthusiastic about the significant impact of ICT as communication alternative to reach out to grassroots. The reason for this is the low ICT awareness and access among women not only in the rural but in the urban areas as well. Therefore, apart from heavy usage of the cell phones and the short messaging system for limited networking and organising, the favoured and dominant channels remain face-to-face encounters and the print media.

Currently, there are many outstanding women political role models for the younger activists. Some of the contemporary personalities include the globalisation savvy, intelligent and internationally confident model personified by Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz the Wanita UMNO chief and her deputy, Datuk Shahrizat Jalil, the well-educated younger modern urban professional such as Datuk Seri Azalina Othman, the progressive and feminist persona that is often associated with women politicians whose roots are in civil society activism such as Zaitun Kasim, and others with Islamic politics background such as Dr. Lo'lo' bt Datuk Ghazali and Dr. Mariah bt Mahmud from PAS. The current profile of women in Malaysian politics has certainly undergone a radical change from pre-1990s unobtrusive traditional quiet force standing loyally behind the[ir] men. This development has taken place across the ethnic divide, so that there are now prominent women politicians from the non-Malay parties such as the Deputy Finance Minister and the *Wanita* MCA chief, Datuk Dr. Ng Yen Yen,

The late 1990s also saw the formation of the first national party headed by a woman, the Parti KeADILan Malaysia. Following the Anwar Ibrahim episode, his wife YB Datin Seri Wan Azizah bt Wan Ismail, became its first party president. She led KeADILan into an alliance with PAS, Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) to form the *Barisan Alternatif*. Riding on grassroots' support for her husband, she won the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat in the 1999 fiercely contested election. She retained the seat in the 2004 general election although her party's candidates lost in all other parliamentary constituencies that they stood in. Meanwhile more women made it into their party candidate lists and won seats both at the state and parliamentary levels. Those from *Barisan Nasional* were appointed to a handful of government positions of Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and Senators.<sup>xv</sup> The first woman minister was appointed in 1964 and currently the percentage of women ministers still stands at less than 30%. The percentage for women Deputy Ministers was highest at about 16% in 1982 but now it is at less than 5%. The percentage for women Parliamentary Secretaries was highest at about 22% in 1986 but now is below 19%. Appointments of women senators have almost paralleled the percentage of elected women Members of Parliament and currently stand at about 10%.<sup>xvi</sup> These figures have significant bearing on the conclusion drawn by a KPWK report (2003: 112) that the most important changes in Malaysian women's status and leadership role since independence have come from their increased participation in political parties, elected and appointed offices, women's organisations and legislation. It pointed out that first, there is correlation

between trend toward higher aspirations in politics among women with trend in visible women's participation in the economy, education and health industries. Second, that engendering policies and procedures to enable greater participation by women in decision-making processes require the transformation of existing concepts and institutional framework where gender bias pervades all levels.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to address a broad spectrum of issues, mission, challenges, obstacles and vision relating to women and political development in Malaysia. Much of it hinge upon the core political question of instituting democratic values and practices that would include and accept women equally in the public sphere. In this process, four elements are apparent. These are the need to be sensitive to the closing of any political space and to be alert to any opening of such space, to monitor the trends of political actors, to be open to new ideas or even experiments in electoral systems, and to optimise the use of possible new political channels aided by the ICT revolution.

In reflection, perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to women's political development in this country is the Malaysian men's own resistance in allowing the women more space for political growth. They have continued to perpetuate the stereotypical notion that women are happiest in the private sphere – the classic female myth of home and family first and “anyway, it's a man's world out there” attitude. Ironically, this also happens with a little help from some women who themselves have been socialised within the patriarchal values and system (Rashila 2003: 129-140; Maria Chin 2001: 66-83). Therefore, the onus of making more significant attempt at serious representation of women's interests and participation at all decision-making levels, which would be a significant measure of political development for them, actually lies also with the men. For a start, they could be more committed to halting common practice of trivializing or marginalising these issues at all decision-making levels.<sup>xvii</sup> Nonetheless, the second hurdle in increasing women's meaningful political participation, especially in electoral politics - the first being the desire and commitment on the part of qualified women themselves to be involved in politics - is the willingness of political party leadership to give them the space. For-example, it is the party leadership that decide to field which candidate and where. This usually depends on internal bargaining between power brokers and rival factions as well as between parties and their electoral allies. In this process, due to influences in their personal socialisation and public conventions, women are often sidelined and final decisions invariably favour the men.

Following a listing of its insightful “gender barriers and issues”, the KPWK 2003 (108-112) report made ten recommendation guidelines: initiate and enforce affirmative action to eliminate discriminatory practices and to conduct “gender-sensitizing” training, ensure a balanced men-women representation in crucial decision-making bodies, increase opportunities to allow women access to policy-making, incorporate gender issues into political agenda, provide gender-friendly environment for equal opportunities, provide a gender-sensitive social and educational environment, take positive actions to build a critical mass of women at key decision-



making levels in the public and private sector, ensure fair practice and create appropriate mechanism to monitor access by women, review all existing concepts or institutional framework, and take steps to ensure that affirmative action in favor of women be implemented in all sectors at all levels. Another published research on the same subject in one by Maria Chin Abdullah (2004: 78-9). It cites factors that affect women's political participation as limited access to financial resources, lack of familiarity with their legal rights and mass media that tends to portray stereotype roles and negative images of women that further reinforce cultural attitudes that inhibit women's political participation, thus failing to focus on women's needs, achievements and concerns.

At this point, if we were to consider all of the existing initiatives, both governmental and non-governmental, there is no lack of ideas and compiled data to assist in the formulation of new policies or review of old ones in the interest of women's political progress in Malaysia. Furthermore there has also been a perceptible attitude change among Malaysian public in general and among the men in particular so that it is now common to hear politically progressive pronouncements that "doing a good job" is more important than whether an official or an elected representative is a male or female. In both urban and rural constituencies, an increasingly liberal public is aware of cultural gender construction and open to accepting the realities of having women political leaders at all levels. Political parties have picked up the trend and have recognized women's political mileage with voters although big steps still need to be taken to affect liberal reforms of party structure to allow wider opportunities for women's advancements in party leadership.

The government, on the other hand, seems to be more pro-active in creating more spaces for women's advancement within its official structure. It has tried to follow up on its commitments by undertaking a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. They include incorporating the principle of equality of men and women in its legal system, actively working towards abolishing all discriminatory laws and adopting appropriate ones that prohibit discrimination against women, planning for the establishment of tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination, making moves towards ensuring the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises, and undertaking the obligation to submit national reports, at least once in every four years to UN CEDAW monitoring agency on measures it has taken to comply with its treaty obligations. Some of these are seen from its appointments and promotions of women to the higher echelon in decision-making levels in both the public and corporate sectors. Very welcomed would be a sufficient dose of political will to promote more gender sensitive and women friendly policies, which would in turn generate a more empowering environment for women keen to serve society and nation *via* the electoral process. In short, given some of these overall positive indications, women whose concerns and interests fall within national political development would do well to take advantage of niches and opportunities that are being created by shifting paradigms and innovative means that characterise our contemporary millennium.

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<sup>i</sup> Maria Chin Abdullah (2004: 73-74) quoted 47.1% of female labour force participation, and women exceed men by a ratio of 80:20 in the tertiary sector. Her research areas covered women in public services and politics, women's leadership of organisation, women's participation in electoral politics and discriminated groups of women.

<sup>ii</sup> It was later renamed and enlarged to be *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga Dan Masyarakat* (KPWK). A report on the progress of Malaysian women since independence by *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita dan Keluarga* (2003: 112) credited the creation of the Ministry for Women and Family Development and the establishment of *Puteri UMNO* as

major steps that will boost efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making and power sharing.

<sup>iii</sup> Khoo (1994:1) cited Penang-born Chan Pek Khuan, who was born in 1888 and educated at the Penang Convent, as the first Malaysian woman to participate modern politics although she was really involved with China politics. She was an adherent to Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement.

<sup>iv</sup> Relating their poignant life stories, Agnes Khoo focuses attention on the role of the Malayan Communist party in providing the liberation of these women from oppressive attitudes and circumstances that circumscribed their lives in the family and society (preface by Prof Sheila Rowbotham in Crisp 2004). The book is dedicated to these women "who have helped shaped our history".

<sup>v</sup> Percentage Distribution of Female Employment By Sector in peninsular Malaysia (1975-2005)

Year	1975	1980	1985	2000	2005
Agriculture	50.3	40.2	28.9	11.9	9.0
Mining	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1
Manufacturing	17.0	20.7	21.9	33.5	31.7
Construction	0.9	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.4
Electricity	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.3
Transportation	0.7	1.0	1.4	1.8	2.4
Services	30.6	36.4	46.2	50.9	55.1

Source: Jamilah Ariffin, 1992 (data 1975-1985) & Malaysian Govt. 2006 (data 2000, 2005)

The above table shows the tremendous shift in employment possibilities for women and female labour force participation. While women's involvement in the agriculture sector has shrunk, women increasingly play a major role in the manufacturing and service sectors.

<sup>vi</sup> The National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) was formed in 1960. It is an umbrella organisation of women's organisations in the country whose members include welfare-oriented, political and professional groups as well as women's sections of national bodies. It was formed in the belief that 'women of Malaya can play a vital part in the life of the country if they will unite themselves' (Nagaraj 1995: 10-11).

<sup>vii</sup> Meanwhile the *Gerakan Wanita UMNO* Chief, YB Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz continues to serve ably as the Minister of International Trade and Industry since her appointment in 1987.

<sup>viii</sup> Pengerang was an UMNO safe seat in Johor and Johor UMNO leader, Menteri Besar YAB Datuk Abd Ghani Othman, was said by a significant Johor UMNO insider to have served that privilege on a silver platter to Azalina.

<sup>ix</sup> *Malaysia. Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (First and Second Report). Prepared by Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2004.

<sup>x</sup> Malaysian Non Governmental Organizations Shadow Report. Reviewing the Government's Implementation of the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Coordinated by The National Council for Women's Organization (NCWO) in collaboration with several Non Governmental Organizations. Prepared by NGO Shadow Report Group, 2005.

<sup>xi</sup> It was circulated that many good men had to be dropped from the candidate lists, especially in the main political parties such as those in *Barisan Nasional* coalition, the *Parti Islam Se Malaysia*, the Democratic Action Party and the *Parti keADILan Nasional*, in order to give

way to the ladies. The women generally acknowledged the political sacrifices and it is significant that the percentage of women representation doubled during Dr. Mahathir's tenure as Prime Minister. This has been interpreted as reflecting the leadership's concern regarding women's continuous political participation especially within the ruling party.

<sup>xii</sup> CEDAW stipulates that states take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of a country, to ensure that women are on equal terms with men in the right to vote in all elections and public referenda, that women are eligible for election to all public decision-making bodies, and that women participate in the formulation as well implementation of government policies.

<sup>xiii</sup> Its other areas of concern are development, culture and religion, law, land, work, health, environment, domestic violence, sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

<sup>xiv</sup> Preliminary studies, such as an attempt by Shamsul Badli (2001), have proposed that democracy and democratic space in Malaysia need to be re-assessed in the light of Internet role that could actually by pass such constraints such as the Publication and Printing Act. New terminologies such as *tele*-democracy, electronic democracy, digital democracy and cyber democracy need to be examined in the context of the Malaysian setting.

<sup>xv</sup> In 2004, it has been documented that the occupation of legislators, senior officials and managers in Malaysia was held by 10.1 % men while women only hold 5.8% (Labour Force Survey report 2004).

<sup>xvi</sup> Percentages based on Figure 5.1, "Percentage of women in elected offices/appointed offices, Malaysia, 1959-2001". Source: Secretariat for the Parliament, Malaysia. Quoted in Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita dan Keluarga (2003), *The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence, 1957-2000*, p.98

<sup>xvii</sup> Such attitudes were displayed during the painful passage of Domestic Violence Act through parliament. In fact, to this day insensitive and disrespectful jokes and remarks continue to be made in the august house and given popular media coverage.

**Paper 4      Harmonizing Personal and Social Perspectives: An Understanding of Women Entrepreneurship in Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to present an alternative theoretical perspective, i.e., the personal-social dynamic perspective to understand women's entrepreneurship, especially in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia. Women's entrepreneurship is, traditionally, understood from the perspective of business start-up, sustenance and growth. This alternative approach serves to complement existing conventional understanding that normally explains women's entrepreneurship from the psychological dimension of personal traits and concentrates on individual level analysis. According to this school of thought, the development of women's entrepreneurial traits occurs in an isolated and particularized manner independently of the wider social domain within which the entrepreneurs are situated in. In simple terms, the role of social actors for example, in birth and development of entrepreneurial traits at the individual level is negligible, if not invisible. The traits are argued as in-born. On the contrary, the alternative model we are suggesting integrates the dynamic component of personal characteristics with the wider social environment, embracing both economic and institutional social processes. This alternative perspective is an outcome of a research conducted on women entrepreneurs in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia. The research findings demonstrate that some women entrepreneurial traits have indeed been developed within the social-institutional context. It was also found that the women's personal characteristics to a certain extent influenced their social context, e.g., social relations. As such, it appears women entrepreneurship is in part formed by a process of harmonizing personal and social domains.

**1. Introduction**

In general, when we talk about entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial traits, in Malaysia or otherwise, the issues that come to our mind are basically about operating a business, being self-employed, taking risks, venturing into an enterprise, and so on. Such similar issues concern women entrepreneurship as well. In fact, the question of how one starts a business, manages and sustains it is usually the concern of entrepreneurship, whether they concern women entrepreneurs or otherwise. A key question that has yet to be resolved is what are the factors or attributes that shape entrepreneurship, particularly women's entrepreneurship?

This paper is a conceptual attempt to understand and explain women entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial traits in Malaysia, namely in unconventional business sectors. A previous study on women entrepreneurship in Malaysia that we conducted have allowed us to develop this framework, for the sake of a better and



nuanced elucidation of women entrepreneurship, especially in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia (see Chan et al. 2006, Noor Rahamah et al. 2007, Bahiyah et. al. 2007). A literature review and critique of existing arguments of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial traits assist in fine tuning our arguments (see amongst others, Aldrich 1990; Chell et al. 1991; Entrialgo et al 2000; Hampson 1984 in Chell et al. 1991; Hofstede 1980; Hisrich 1986; Lynn 1991; McClelland 1961; Razin 2002; Thornton 1999). Thus far, much is not known about and/or understood of women entrepreneurs, especially with regards to their entrepreneurial traits and entrepreneurship in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia, for lack of social scientific research at the conceptual and empirical levels. Therefore, not much is known about the ways and means for women to better empower themselves to venture into unconventional business sectors, to improve their existing businesses or merely to survive in the much male dominated business sectors in Malaysia.

The focus of this paper on entrepreneurship is specifically with regard to how women entrepreneurs build and sustain the unconventional businesses that they have built, owned and managed. In order to do that, an investigation into the presence and development of the nature of their entrepreneurial traits is embarked upon. What are the traits and how are they established or created are the main questions that we address in our conceptual framework. Briefly, our conceptual stand is harmonizing personal and social domains of entrepreneurs to demonstrate a dynamic form of entrepreneurial traits, quite unlike those that argue, on the one hand that these are purely psychological or innate in nature, or on the other hand that they are purely socially, structurally or externally determined. We name this framework the personal-social dynamic perspective. The following sections will elaborate on our stand after we present our critique of the literature.

According to Dabson (2005) in his paper presented in the Entrepreneurship Summit-Expanding Economic Cooperation in Austin, Texas on 29 March 2005, entrepreneurship is the process through which entrepreneurs create and grow enterprise([http://www.ruraleship.org/content/State\\_Pages/TX/DabsonTXSummit.pdf](http://www.ruraleship.org/content/State_Pages/TX/DabsonTXSummit.pdf), 14Oct 2007) For the purpose of this paper, we define a woman entrepreneur as a business innovator who establishes a business entity to offer new or existing product/goods or service into a new or existing market for profitable motivations (see also Chan et al. 2006, Noor Rahamah 2007, Bahiyah et. al. 2007). A woman entrepreneur, like any other entrepreneur, can undertake a business that is independently owned and operated. Hence, these women are also known as women business owner-operators or owner-managers. The venture of these women entrepreneurs can be based on a totally new idea, a new way of doing something, a new location, or attempting something no one else has done before (<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Entrepreneur>). The size and scale of their activity is open, however it is anticipated that women entrepreneurs in small businesses will be the focus in view of their engagement in unconventional business sectors. As for the notion of unconventional business sector, we understand it as the engagement of women entrepreneurs in historically underrepresented or non-dominant female business sectors, often referring to their positioning in male-dominated business sectors. In Malaysia, examples of the sectors are construction, printing, canopy business, IT, insurance and others.

## 2. Common Understanding of Entrepreneurial Traits

A common understanding found in some literature and past studies on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial traits is that to be an entrepreneur or to be engaged in entrepreneurship, one needs to have certain personal characteristics or traits or the will/spirit to start and sustain in business. This common understanding is usually psychologically based. The innate ability in the like of willpower, motivations and intent of being in control, independent and risk taking are some of the personal or psychological attributes that past studies have attributed to entrepreneurial ventures. There is a rich and thriving literature to support this hypothesis; one of the earliest proponents is McClelland (1961). However, in general, the psychological and personal trait explanation seems somewhat asocial (anti social); devoid of the economic function and the wider social context in which the individual is situated in. Thus, there are attempts to seek an alternative understanding utilizing environmental conditions or rates approach, coupled with sociological or market/economic function as well as adaptive cognitive model (Aldrich 1990, Chell et. al. 1991, Thornton 1999, Delmar, 1996). The alternative arguments appear to correct/remedy or complement/reconcile the lopsided view of the personal traits hypothesis. However, this correction appears separatist or dualistic in nature without sufficient attention given to the dynamic interaction between personal traits and social context. A gap between the literature on the "personal" and literature on the "social" is thus evident. Therefore, in light of this limitation, to understand and explain women entrepreneurial traits in the Malaysian context, we conceptualize on how the personal *part* constantly interacts or harmonizes with the social *whole*. Here an attempt is made to reconcile and harmonize the personal and social domains or perspectives, i.e. attempting to highlight a nuanced interaction and dialectics of stability and change of personal traits and social context that eventually leads to an integration of personal and social mechanisms. In doing this, we are also operationalizing the notion of harmony which is a key emphasis in the conference theme.

In our conceptual framework, we take a non-dualistic but holistic perspective integrating personal traits and social context in an interactive, dynamic and relational way. Besides that, by utilizing phenomenological data obtained through qualitative narratives in our previous work (Chan et. al 2006; Noor Rahamah et. al 2007, Bahiyah et al. 2007), we try to get an inductive sense of women entrepreneurship in Malaysia. A recursive deductive and inductive method is our approach to understanding women entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial traits holistically and perhaps realistically. We postulate our model to situate the personal traits ideas in a socially constructed constantly shifting micro-social context, amidst pragmatic strategies, as well as taking into account the role of social and institutional factors in sustaining entrepreneurship. This framework, we hope, has the potential of guiding future research in understanding entrepreneurship amongst women, for the betterment of their efforts in embarking and sustaining their unconventional business sectors in Malaysia.

### 3. Concepts of "Personal" and "Social" in Common Understandings

Before we deliberate on our framework, there are a few qualifiers in terms of common concepts that are used interchangeably to explain or understand entrepreneurship, namely personal traits/characteristics and social context. The literature is flooded with varying terminologies and concepts associated with these two realms. Even though there are some variations between the concepts utilized in the respective realms, we have attempted a reasonable classification based on our understanding of the literature and authors' reflection.

Firstly, the literature on personal traits refers to a whole series of studies that come under the traits theory, traits approach, as well as those that focus on personal characteristics and psychological characteristics, etc. There are known to be two main arguments concerning traits development. One argument postulates that traits are in-born and natural, irrespective of the individual's social surroundings or external environmental (i.e., social) influences. Another argument suggests that traits are socially constructed, i.e., developed within the social situational context within which the individual is situated in. Following this latter argument, traits are meaningful categories for social behavior that are socially significant (Hampson, 1984: 38 in Chell et al 1991: 33). Hence traits are co-occurring behavioral and situational attributes. This socially constructed view suggests that personal traits are based on manifested actions primarily with social meanings embedded. For example, somebody is hard working suggests that not only the person concerned holds certain meanings, motives and values (at the individual level), but that the person manifests that action that is reflective of his or her social or situational surroundings. In other words, social context is said to be primarily determining the nature of individual characteristics, women entrepreneurs included. Briefly, social context is deterministic as far as nature of individual traits is concerned.

Secondly the literature on social construction of traits refers to a further reclassification of the "social" at two levels, namely the micro-social context and the macro-social context. The micro-social context refers to immediate social relations that entail family, friends, work sphere, customers, suppliers, employees, moneylenders, and organizational ties along the notions of social network and social capital. Meanwhile the macro-social context refers to the wider social environment that includes the locality structures, ecological structures (organization, population and community), environmental conditions (social, economic, political), institutions (government policies, political structures, cultural norms) as well as encompassing country-wide social, economic and cultural structures. In other words, aspects of the environment are broadly social, political, economic and ecological ones. Specifically, they include social institutions and their structural features such as organizational, cultural, governmental, population and community. This reclassification we believe provides a somewhat more encompassing and holistic understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial traits compared to the earlier argument of the "social" in some literature. The following sections further elaborate on existing ideas in relation to the above notions of both the "personal" and the "social". Our critique of these notions will eventually enable us to produce a conceptual framework and this ensues in the final section of this paper.

#### **4. The Critique of Common Understandings of the “Personal” and the “Social” Approaches**

Specifically, the bases of our argument in developing our conceptual framework emerge from the following critiques:-

- i. Critique of the personality traits approach as myopic and lop-sided as there are ruptures in its methodology and pragmatic aspects
- ii. Critique of the ecological perspective as macro-social and its inherent methodological weakness
- iii. Integration efforts are without harmony between the “personal” and the “social”; this appear dichotomous and ignore dynamic features

Based on the above critique the next section will elaborate on a personal-social dynamic perspective that would be able to capture the essence of relational, interactional and dynamic features of entrepreneurship that other approaches are unable to do.

##### **4.1 Myopia and Rupture in Personal Traits Approach**

One of the reasons for the prevalence of personal/psychological traits thesis in entrepreneurship can be associated with the popularization of entrepreneurial literature in the United States, where the deeper roots of American individualism is located (Leavitt 1989: 41). This ideological stance has prompted a strong belief in the free will of the individual and it sought to examine the mental process. McClelland's (1961) path breaking personal concept of “need for achievement” provided the boost for utilizing the individual as unit of analysis, applying psychological/personal traits to understand the motivation of entrepreneurs. The flourishing of the personal/psychological traits school saw advancement by other people thereafter in terms of identifying the detail personal and psychological characteristics (see Hisrich 1986 for example). Examples of traits are sociable, energetic, friendly, risk-taking, industrious, etc. The psychological concept of traits proposed by Hisrich (1986) argues that the decision to be an entrepreneur is both shaped by desirability and feasibility of intention which depends on the assessment of personal feelings on control, independence and risk. The psychological motivation from inside suggest a personal ability to control seemingly sustains enough drive and energy to create and manage new enterprise (Hisrich 1986: 5). Similar motivations from a psychological stance are offered for entrepreneurs seeking independence and risk.

One consequence of this runaway literature has been the lop-sided narrow focus, as well as the essentializing and foundational notion of personal determinism. This stance has been criticized for ignoring social context both at the micro-level (Noor Rahamah et. al. 2007; Bahiyah et. al. 2007) and wider macro-level (Aldrich 1990). Also the prevalence of this separatist and dualist notion of personal-social/environment explanation for entrepreneurship has led to a somewhat dubious notion ignoring the co-occurrence and interaction and dynamics that entail between them. This we argue is due to the ideological individualism along the libertarian value that has proliferated in the market place as well as in neoclassical literature. In fact, the Western epistemology has been shaped by Anglo-libertarians like John Locke and

John Stuart Mills. Early classics on the entrepreneurial force like the Weberian individual work ethics has attempted to legitimize religious precepts, while the Schumpeterian notion of competitiveness and innovation are all premised on the individual free will.

A somewhat different from the conventional view of psychological literature is offered by Lynn (1991) who attempts to elevate certain selected individual traits to the level of cultural whole or structure at the country-wide level. Lynn examines the role of psychological factors in a wider cultural sense on economic growth by looking at attitudinal constructs like Weber's work ethics, Schumpeter's competitiveness, McClelland's achievement motivation and Wiener's status of landowners. The above proponents found competitive attitude as an important contributor to economic performance; thus by extension one can postulate its significance to entrepreneurship. However, the consequence of this stance has landed this personal traits approach in a positivist empiricist outlook, it ignores as well, the interactive micro-social realm. Besides that the personal traits approach also has also paid a disservice to the practical sphere, where social learning takes places.

#### 4.2 Ecological derailment

As mentioned earlier, some literature criticize personal traits theory as ignoring the role of the social context within which the entrepreneurs are situated in, in determining entrepreneurial traits. They contend that entrepreneurial traits are developed at the social level. In other words, traits appear as social constructs. They generally reclassify the "social" at two levels: micro-social context and macro-social context.

The ecological school is one of the key critiques of the personality traits theory. This school has appeared under the rubric of rates approach or "environmental conditions" approach (Aldrich 1990) as opposed to mainstream traits approach discussed earlier. The "social" for this school of thought is the environment, i.e., at the macro-social level. However, of late there emerges a cultural approach that can be situated under the ecological framework (Hofstede 1980). Thus, the "social" refers to the cultural context that is closely linked to the ecological context.

Basically the mainstream ecological school focuses on "environment conditions" that generate variations in the entrepreneurial start ups or firm formation. Thus, these entrepreneurial start ups are called "rates" approach. The idea has its roots in the notion of population ecology in a Darwinian sense. Here, the idea is used to refer to the organizational population where a grouping of organizations based on industry or organizational form is examined. Basically, the ecological notion is based on distribution of environmental resources, where it postulates efficient enterprises or organizations that are able to secure environmental resources that are *selected* while those that are not efficient are not *selected*; herein *selected* refers to organizational survival or sustainability in the environment.

The "environmental conditions" approach postulates the environmental social context as a determining force in entrepreneurial activity, and thus, highlights the salience of a population of organizations as the key component of an environment or

of several enterprises. A new entrepreneurial activity of an enterprise is highly dependent upon the experiences of already existing organizations surrounding that enterprise, both in a particular population and in the larger community of populations of organizations within which the enterprise is located. As such, Aldrich (1990) attributes "environmental conditions" of an enterprise to three environmental processes, namely intra-population, inter-population and institutional process. Intra-population processes refers to processes prior to founding, dissolutions, density, and factors associated with density that shapes the environment into which new firms are formed (Aldrich 1990: 7). Meanwhile inter-population processes concern the nature of relations between populations of organizations, whether competing or cooperating, and actions by dominant organizations that influence the distribution of resources in the environment and the terms on which they are available to entrepreneurs (Aldrich 1990: 7). Lastly, institutional factors encompass government policies, political events, cultural norms, and others that characterize the macro-context within which other processes take place (Aldrich 1990: 7).

The difference of this ecological approach with the traits approach is that the former approach takes an organizational, long term view and a macro-social perspective as opposed to the entrepreneurial stance, short-term(ish) view and micro and anti-social perspective of the personal traits approach. This clearly distinguishes a somewhat dichotomous and separatist approach. Despite its contribution to entrepreneurship understanding, the ecological view of the "environment conditions" approach has been criticized on two fronts, i.e., i) at the scale and interactional sense, and ii) at the methodological level. Often, the ecological school has sought the macro-social environment and ignored the micro-social context. Though efforts are made to correct this duality, like the social networks theory, however it operates with a separatist framework ignoring the individual or personal characteristics. As such, the integration or harmonizing feature of the "personal" and the "social" has yet to emerge. Secondly, methodological limitations are seen by aggregate association of the entrepreneurial founding rates with the population or community characteristics (Baum & Haveman 1997 in Thornton 1999). This focus on the universal concepts utilizing positivist methods rather than on the particularized context has been a major drawback of this school, as asserted by Amburgey & Rao (1996 in Thornton 1999).

To reiterate, another group of literature that has developed under the cultural platform, but can be considered as reflective of the ecological school is the cultural approach identified by Hofstede (1980) as contributing to entrepreneurship. Similar to the arguments put forward in the "environmental conditions" ecological school concerning macro-social determinants of new entrepreneurial activity, the cultural approach provides the cultural ecological imprint for new entrepreneurial activity. Hofstede (1980: 172) identifies four critical cultural variables at macro-level (often referring to country wide), namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and individualism. Later Hofstede (1991) introduces two additional cultural variables, namely competitiveness and bureaucracy at country level as attributes that can also shape entrepreneurship. Similar to the rates approach in the ecological perspective, the cultural approach suffers from methodological flaws, emanating from its empiricism logics, based on positivistic macro-level aggregation of entrepreneurial values as determinant of entrepreneurship. This view does not account for the cultural-whole value that shapes individual beliefs and intentions leading to entrepreneurial action. By looking at individual aggregation, it fails to explore the



cultural precepts and the interaction and dynamics at micro-social level that influences entrepreneurship at the individual level.

### **4.3 Integration without Much Harmony**

The dichotomous nature of the previous dualistic explanation of both the personal and the social ecological perspectives of entrepreneurship have witnessed some attempts to reconcile and integrate these somewhat opposing stances. In the literature, we have identified three strands/streams of integration efforts between the “personal” and the “social” (both at the micro-social and macro-social levels), i.e., a) the embedding of the personal in the social, b) The relationship between culture and traits (cultural-traits relations) and, c) the sociological approach. However, in our view, these strands still cannot highlight the dynamic non-dualistic interaction between the personal and social perspectives. Nonetheless, some of the ideas presented previously have helped to articulate our own arguments in the conceptual framework that we have created. However, we need to state at the outset that our critique of this literature is based on a situated eastern world view, holistic stance, permanence and changes in traits and social conditioning, and conscious sense-reflection from our inductive work.

#### **a) Embedding the “Personal” in the “Social”**

For some analysts, the micro-social level is understood as the micro-organizational level. Entrialgo and his colleagues (2000) are such analysts. At the micro-organizational level, Entrialgo et al. postulate the direct role of the strategic process of an organization, and the indirect role of psychological characteristics of the entrepreneur in influencing company performance. In fact, the indirect role of the entrepreneur is envisaged through strategic process and that this process has a direct influence on the company’s success. In a way, this argument supports our evolving hypothesis on the direct role of micro-social context and the indirect role of the personal character in influencing entrepreneurship.

On another front, Razin (2002) identifies social embeddedness of entrepreneurial action amongst migrant entrepreneurs. To elaborate, individual action of entrepreneurs is embedded in structures of social relations, incorporating both the roles of co-ethnic networks and linkages between immigrants and the broader society. Hence, Razin argues for the role of the micro-social level of social relations in determining entrepreneurship. By extending Razin’s idea into the realm of women entrepreneurs, one could envisage variation in entrepreneurial action by incorporating the role of women networks and linkages between women and their wider social relations. This is evident in our previous study where we found women entrepreneurs rely on informal ties with ex-colleagues and friends to enhance their business operations (see Chan et. al. 2006, Noor Rahamah et. al. 2007, Bahiyah et al. 2007). By examining this micro-social context, one can capture the essences that would have structured personal traits or enact certain personal traits amongst the women entrepreneurs that have long been submerged/hidden.

In our previous paper (Noor Rahamah et al. 2007), like Entrialgo et al. and Razin, we have also attempted to highlight the lop-sidedness of the personal traits

literature, where some past studies have tended to favour. Besides that, our findings have indicated some hint of some personal traits being embedded in social context. That inductive study of ours has indicated that some personal traits can be situated in the social context. The findings have enabled us to come up with this conceptual framework. However, in comparison with Entrialgo et al. but in tandem with Razin, the notion of the "social" in our work refers to the micro-social level, i.e., social relations in the form of social networks. Moreover, our work does not demonstrate the "social" domain as predominantly determining all traits of the women entrepreneurs. Unlike Entrialgo et al., we discovered that personal characteristics do play a key active role in shaping the women in the social context, namely their patterns of social networks. The personal perspective is constantly interacting with the social context, in particular times and place.

#### **b) Culture and Traits Relations**

The idea of personal traits embedded in a wider macro-social context is undertaken by some researchers using a country wide notion of culture. Entrepreneurial traits have been extensively studied in the United States and other western countries, but have yet to resolve the core values of entrepreneurship. Moreover, cross-cultural differences (Mueller & Thomas 2001) and variation with women entrepreneurs have been few. Studies to reconcile cultural structures with the personal traits have been undertaken by researchers such as Hofstede (1980; 1994) and Mueller and Thomas, 2001)

Drawing on Hofstede's (1980; 1994) culture study which articulates differences between countries in terms of values, beliefs and work roles, several hypotheses about the relationship between Hofstede's (1980;1994) culture dimensions and psychological traits associated with entrepreneurial potential are offered by Lee-Ross (2007). These are premised on the following variables: (1) an internal locus of control orientation is more prevalent in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures; (2) an innovative orientation is more prevalent in low than in high certainty avoidance cultures; and (3) individuals with both belief in internal locus of control and innovative orientation appear more frequently in highly individualistic and low uncertainty cultures (see earlier ideas about locus of control and personal beliefs by Rotter (1966), Levenson (1973) and Brockhaus (1982)).

The relevance of this macro cultural context provides a key argument for embedding personal traits in wider cultural constructs as there exists a potential variation across different cultures and gender. In our study of personality traits of women entrepreneurs, the traits are subjected to variations in the cultural contexts of a developing country, i.e., Malaysia as well as the potential variation by gender construct. We posit that an even further examination across different ethnic groups might provide potential differences in personal traits and its respective cultural-whole value influences. However, in line with the critique by Chell et al. (1991), we feel that cultural-traits integration is not quite helpful to some extent in understanding the nature of entrepreneurship as it is limited in its scope and methodology. Belief in the locus of control is deemed the only key distinguishing characteristic of entrepreneurs. Methodologically, the locus of control is the key variable in measuring entrepreneurial traits while other mediating effects of other variables including

adverse experiences are neglected in the analysis (Chell et al. 1991: 40). Moreover, it does not tell us the real story with regards to the constant interaction between entrepreneurial traits and social relations.

### c) Sociological Integration

Thornton (1999) attempts to offer an integrative framework by combining the supply-side perspective (herein referred to as the personal perspective) and the demand side perspective (herein referred to as the social perspective). She argues that sociological frameworks using an embeddedness perspective combined with institutional and ecological theory, and multilevel models can be used to integrate the two perspectives. In a wider sense, she discusses the sources of heterogeneity in entrepreneurship according to four different levels of analysis: individual, organizational, market, and environmental. Based on DiPrete & Forristal's (1994) research, Thornton (1999) suggests that multilevel models be used to examine the influence of both these contrasting forces/perspectives. Though her model is attractive, she focuses only on the formal spheres of micro-social *firm/organizational* context and the macro-social *market* context that interact with the entrepreneur's personal traits. For example, she highlights the role or influence of previous employer in starting new ventures, rather than starting out on their own. Similarly, she highlights how venture capital firms in the market affects founding rates of entrepreneurs. She has ignored the role of other informal institutions like family, friends, ex-colleagues and new acquaintances as potential micro-social context influences on entrepreneurship (see Chan et. al. 2006, Noor Rahamah et. al. 2007, Bahiyah et al. 2007).

There is an extensive literature in social network (Kilduff & Tsai 200; Aldrich, 1989) which can substantiate this informal social networks argument. Thus, Thornton's (1999) study is limited in the sense that it assumes a mature market and industry landscape, of which the study attributes by examining the firm and market as engines of growth in generating entrepreneurial activities. In the Malaysian context, it is obviously not a mature market, and as such, the focus on those two spheres of the demand side or social context is somewhat limiting and doubtful. Thus, we can say that the women entrepreneur's social relations with both formal firm/organizations and informal entities like family, friends, ex-colleagues, etc. are important factors to consider in a micro-social context whereby the personal traits/values are enacted and played out interactively, whilst the market component is of lesser significance in a macro-social context. Thus, in our evolving model, the entrepreneur's social relations fall under the direct influence of the micro-social contexts, and the indirect and mediated role of market and other wider institutional considerations can come under the macro-social context. The next section discusses our conceptual framework in detail after presenting our critique of the literature on the importance of either the "personal" or the "social" perspective or even integrative efforts of both perspectives in understanding entrepreneurial traits, including those of women.

## 5. Understanding Women Entrepreneurship in Malaysia: Evolving a Dynamic Framework Harmonizing Personal and Social Perspectives

As argued earlier, the social embeddedness of the entrepreneurial action suggests that personal action is not possible without the facilitating role of the social context which Thornton (1999) calls infrastructure. Timmon's (1985: 153 in Chell et al. 1991: 46-47) *fit concept* between individual traits and social context can be utilized to illustrate how entrepreneurial action, say in finding an opportunity to do business, is situational and contextual, and depending on a mix and match of key players and on how promising the opportunity is, given the entrepreneurs' personal strengths, advantages and weaknesses. This illustrates the situated nature of the personal characteristics (i.e., entrepreneurial traits) to flourish and capitalize on a business opportunity. The situated is meant by coincidental as well as purposeful social relations. Although we have some reservations with Thornton's (1999) model and we have criticized its limitations (i.e., limiting scope), we agree with her idea of integration of supply-side (i.e., personal) and demand-side (i.e., social) to an extent this is able to provide a guide to our current evolving theoretical and conceptual model of women entrepreneurship in Malaysia. In some ways, her argument of social embeddedness of entrepreneurial action is relevant to the context of our previous study and the current conceptual framework that we are proposing in this paper.

With some modifications to Thornton's and Timmon's ideas, we attempt to integrate the personal and social domains of the women entrepreneurs in our previous study in order to demonstrate an interactive and dynamic entrepreneurship process of the women concerned, i.e., a situated nature of entrepreneurial traits. This is done by taking into account our own inductive reflection from our previous study. The integration reflects our effort to harmonize both domains, in effect to demonstrate a dynamic and situated form of entrepreneurial traits which are quite unlike those that are commonly argued, on the one hand as purely psychological or innate in nature, or on the other hand as purely socially, structurally or externally determined. Specifically, the personal *part* (personal domain) harmonizes with the social *whole* (social domain) in the conceptual framework to understand and explain entrepreneurship. Here, an attempt is made to reconcile the personal and social domains, with a nuanced interaction and dialectics of permanence and change between personal characteristics and social context that eventually leads to integration of the two domains. Sociologically, the relationship between the *personal* and the *social* is intimate, without one dominating another or the *personal* and the *social* sitting on opposing ends with no linkage or interplay between themselves at all. Moreover, by modifying Thornton's embeddedness idea, embeddedness of the *social* in our framework is to an extent whereby the *personal* is not entirely subsumed and subordinated by the *social*, but instead plays an active interactive role determining some aspects of the *social*.

As mentioned earlier, we have named this framework the personal-social dynamic perspective. In this perspective, the *personal* is constituted by personal or individual characteristics; hence reference to the term personal domain. Whereas by the *social*, we mean micro-social domain or context, namely in the form of social networks the women entrepreneurs establish with their business partners, suppliers, customers, family members and friends who are former business colleagues. Cultural, institutional and organizational contexts are also other aspects of the micro-social

context. If we follow Timmon's argument, the social context for us then would include coincidental as well as purposeful social relations or social networks. The women entrepreneurs' personal domain refers to individual or personal characteristics of the women entrepreneurs, with identifiable mechanisms for entrepreneurial agency. The following are some examples of the characteristics uncovered from our previous study. They are:-

- 1) ability to discipline oneself
- 2) patience
- 3) honesty
- 4) law-abiding attitude
- 5) passion for work
- 6) reliability
- 7) ability to pay on time (good paymaster)
- 8) good adherence to deadlines
- 9) good adherence to requirements of customers and suppliers
- 10) ability to change vocation for career advancement
- 11) interest in working in groups (teamwork)
- 12) possession of marketing and sales skills
- 13) professionalism
- 14) sense of independence
- 15) sociable
- 16) communication skills
- 17) knowledge ability
- 18) adaptability and risk taking
- 19) perseverance
- 20) hardworking
- 21) ability to control, manage and direct workers/employees
- 22) ability to form and maintain contacts/network with former work colleagues, existing clients and suppliers, friends
- 23) reciprocity with workers, customers and suppliers
- 24) ability to handle and do work usually associated with men (e.g., going to construction sites doing inspection work, climb construction poles, putting up canopy tents, etc.)

(see Chan et. al. 2006, Noor Rahamah et. al. 2007, Bahiyah et al. 2007)

The above characteristics are regarded as entrepreneurial traits as they play a positive contributive role in the women's entrepreneurship. Some of these characteristics are shaped by the women's social context. However, we push our argument further by saying that although personal characteristics (at least some of them) are assumed being of innate substance or are in-born, they may only surface, be enacted (take form or manifest) or be opportune in a conscious way by the micro-social context which directly mediate entrepreneurial action, namely economically viable ones. In other words, the characteristics may be regarded as in-born or innate, but may surface or be enhanced by the women's social context (e.g., social norms, cultural context and/or social networks with family members, former colleagues, clients or suppliers) in necessary times as the women begin their businesses and venture further.

Some of these characteristics may be in-born but eventually they are fully harnessed within the women's social context in the process of their involvement in business activities. In fact, the social context may enable some of those already existing personal characteristics to contribute positively to the development and sustenance of the women's entrepreneurial business activities. For instance, social networks with family members and former work colleagues may provide a medium for moral social support in full development of passion for work and entrepreneurship. The social support may enhance or act as a catalyst for development of their passion and may eventually drive their pursuit of business success. For practical reasons, this paper shall quote some examples of such situation from our previous study. For example, informant Ms.N who is a contractor with an academic background, has had support from friends, former colleagues, and family members to develop/shape her passion for business in the construction sector (see Chan et. al. 2006, Bahiyah et. al 2007). As for the case of another informant, Ms A, multiple traits (a lawyer by qualification with crafts skill as a passion) with social conditioning (friends who are ex-colleagues) can harness her already existing skills in handicraft making and her passion for work in the handicraft business to venture into a successful canopy business (ibid.). Besides that, all the informants in our previous study via face-to-face interviews admit to being reasonable, being a good paymaster, having good self-discipline, possessing a sense of professionalism, having good adherence to deadlines, being reliable, being honest, and having the ability to communicate well with their colleagues, customers and suppliers. Their traits are developed fully with the context of their relationships (business or otherwise) with those people concerned. In fact, information from all informants indicate that good relationships and networking with former work colleagues, workers, customers, suppliers and family members are important factors in the development of the informants' entrepreneurial traits.

To quote some more examples from our previous study, a common stereotypical male and unfeminine-like trait in general Malaysian societal context, i.e., the ability to do hands-on inspection in construction sites, climb construction poles or build canopy tents, is manifested by the informants in their work scenario context. This comes as a surprise to some of their workers as this trait is not noticeable to them at other times. If not in-born, traits can also be something new to the women themselves at the inception of their businesses whereby the traits are created, developed and shaped by the women's social context as entrepreneurship progresses. In the case of Ms. A, she admits that her initially "bad accounting skills" prior to her involvement in her canopy business eventually improving as she progressed into her business with much moral support from family members and company auditor (ibid.). Apart from that, the informants of the study also suggest patience to be cultivated for the betterment of business deals, for securing relationships and for networking. For instance, according to informant Mdm F, in cases of non-payment of customers, one can develop patience in order to acquire payment. Similarly, for traits named earlier such as sociable, knowledgeable, ability to control, manage and direct workers/employees, ability to reciprocate actions with workers, customers and suppliers and ability to entertain in karaoke joints that can be developed within the context of social and business relationships, for example in times of dealing with difficult customers, workers and suppliers, if one does not possess such traits prior to entrepreneurship.



In general, we can see the role of micro-social context in providing the space for the enactment of submerged personal characteristics, whenever necessary and consciously. What we are saying here is that personal/psychological traits do not stand alone or are stable characteristics driving entrepreneurship, but are co-emergent/triggered by micro-social or situational factors which are dynamic. And by implication, we are postulating and predicting that in some instances, these personal characteristics can stay dormant or emergent depending on the circumstance or social conditions which the women entrepreneur choose to respond. Dynamic interaction between micro-social and personal contexts is revealed in this manner. In our previous inductive study, the findings indicate that the informants are sometimes able to consciously enact certain personal traits that cohere with social norms, cultural values or industry/organizational values, such as in instances in dealing or maintaining networks with male actors, be they colleagues, customers or suppliers. In this way, the social context may be seen as determining or constraining to a certain extent the projection of certain personal traits. For instance, social norms or cultural-religious values will sometimes require Ms. E and Ms. N to act in a socially perceived decent feminine-like way with the men (*ibid.*). They do this for the sake of striking business deals and/or maintaining networks with their colleagues, workers, customers or suppliers. Ms N and Mdm F, for example, will participate in entertainment in karaoke with their male colleagues while still adhering to their personal and cultural-religious beliefs and practices. The informants' adaptability to their social contexts (be it cultural-social or social networks with different sets of people) without compromising their personal and cultural beliefs and practices suggests the interplay and integration between social constructs and personal standpoints in a dynamic and situated manner. Moreover, the personal and social domains can be integrated in different contexts, time and space. In short, all the arguments we put forth above generally implies that personal characteristics are enabled by the women's social context. The social context provides the conditions for both the triggering and the constraining of the personal characteristics of the entrepreneurs. The women entrepreneurs' social context, e.g., their networks, provide a fluid arena whereby the social ties with different social realms shape dynamic personal traits, even though they are envisaged as enduring. Moreover, we also argue that the influence of the macro-social context may indirectly shape the micro-social context, which then have a direct bearing on individual/entrepreneurial action.

Dynamism may also be present when the personal characteristics are not just enabled by the social context, but also enabling the context. In other words, personal characteristics also determine the nature of the women's social networks while being developed and determined by the networks. This situation occurs throughout the women's involvement in their business activities, whether dealing with clients, business partners or suppliers. In the cases of the informants such as Ms. F, her personal traits of self-discipline, professionalism, hardworking and perseverance determine and influence the nature of good working relationships with her workers or employees (*ibid.*). Other informants also experience the same situation, especially with their customers and suppliers. Ms. F is able to motivate her workers to contribute to her businesses and have good working relationships with her.

## 6. Conclusion

The framework that we have constructed in this paper attempts to postulate a holistic theoretical and conceptual understanding of women entrepreneurship in Malaysia. Upon examination of existing ideas and arguments of entrepreneurship (men and women) in some literature, we found that the literature is unable to address issues concerning entrepreneurship, namely women entrepreneurial traits, in Malaysian context due to some limitations at the conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical levels. In general, previous personal traits models have been found to be myopic, dichotomous in nature. Some of their attempts to integrate both the *personal* and *social* perspectives have failed to provide an interactive and dynamic relationship between the personal and social perspectives. Entrepreneurial traits are argued and conceptualized as personal or individual traits that are either in-born or psychological in nature or entirely socially and externally determined. Also macro-social ecological framework and formal social context of organizational and market spheres can be challenged on the grounds that it negates the dynamic and interactive sphere.

In this paper, we firstly examine critically the literature and address common notions of the *personal* and the *social* domains in the explanation and understanding of entrepreneurial traits. Following our critique, we present our own arguments in a conceptual framework. Some relevant ideas from the literature are incorporated into our framework with some modifications. We also utilized our previous inductive work through our research study to critically and reflectively propose this framework, or the personal-social dynamic perspective model as we call it, that we feel is suitable in the Malaysian context. This framework integrates both the personal and the social domains in a dynamic way. Specifically, the integration actually reflects our effort to harmonize both domains, in effect to demonstrate a dynamic and situated form of entrepreneurial traits which are quite unlike those that are commonly argued, on the one hand as purely psychological or innate in nature, or on the other hand as purely socially, structurally or externally determined. Specifically, the *personal part* (personal domain) harmonizes with the *social whole* (social domain) in the conceptual framework to better understand and explain entrepreneurship in Malaysian context. We reconcile the personal and social domains, with a nuanced interaction and dialectics of permanence and change between personal characteristics and social context that eventually leads to integration of the two domains. Sociologically, we demonstrate that the relationship between the *personal* and the *social* is intimate, without one dominating another or the *personal* and the *social* sitting on opposing ends with no linkage or interplay between themselves at all. We hope our model will provide a nuanced understanding of women entrepreneurship and traits through emphasis of the structural and agency role of the woman entrepreneur as an individual, with her shifting micro-social contexts playing a critical role. We hope our model is able to yield a holistic framework in understanding women entrepreneurship in Malaysia.

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**Paper 1      The Beliefs in the Medical Treatment according to the Folk Rituals: A Case Study of the Traditional Medical Doctors at the Utong District, Supanburi**

*Wariya Chinwanno*

**Abstract**

The research entitled “The Beliefs in the Medical Treatment According to the Folk Rituals: A Case Study of the Folk Medical Doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi” focuses on two main objectives: 1) to study the beliefs in the medical treatment according to the folk rituals among the folk medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi and 2) to collect the information regarding the folk rituals of the folk medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi which should be considered one of the most valuable Thai heritages.

The research was conducted by means of two major methods. First, the documentary research: the researcher collected books and documents about folk medicine and analyzed them in order to find the relations between the beliefs about folk rituals and folk healing behaviors among the folk medical doctors. Second, the in-dept interview: the researcher interviewed 35 medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi.

Findings from the research reveal that most of them (66%) were massage doctors. About 30% were folk medical doctors who cured patients having diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, influenza, coughing, etc. When asked about their beliefs, 58% said they believed that there were gods or sacred beings who helped them in the performance of their duty. Most of them mentioned the name “Chiwaka Komarapat” the famous Indian medical doctor who treated Lord Buddha in the Buddhist time as their teacher. The rest of them (39%) said they did not believe in any gods or sacred being but thought it was their own treatment ability that enabled the patients to relieve from their illnesses while 3% did not answer this question.

Nowadays, Thai traditional medicine plays a very significant role in the medical treatment of Thailand. This research then, aims at, firstly, studying the beliefs in the medical treatment according to the folk rituals among the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi and secondly, collecting the information regarding the folk rituals of the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi Province.

## Thai Traditional Medicine: Concept and Practice

Like other races in the other areas of the world, The ancient Thais had a way of life that emphasized supernatural beings and spiritual beliefs. Natural phenomena and diseases were explained by the influence of supernatural powers. Consequently, traditional Thai medicine in the earlier period was bound up with supernatural power and spiritual beliefs. Later on, from the practitioners' experience and equipments, the uses of herbs and some kinds of animals were discovered and used in the treatment of patients. (Charan Keranpong, 1982: 18-19)

By the end of the thirteenth century, Thai people were firmly established in the Golden Peninsula. With the establishment of the two kingdoms, Sukhothai (1238-1438) and Ayutthya (1350-1767), the Thais turned to India for their culture, art, religion, and even their writing system. Indian Medicine came to Thailand along with religion and culture. Thus, the old Thai medicine, which has been handed down to this day, is distinctly Indian.

In the last five or six centuries before Christ, the traditional Indian medical system became known as āyurveda meaning "the science of (living to a ripe) age." The first verbal component, āyur, implies that the ancient Indian doctor was concerned not only with curing disease but also with promoting longevity, while the second component veda has religious overtones, being the term used for the most sacred text of Hinduism. (Basham, 1976: 18). Thus, Indian medicine was a system of managing life so as to prolong it and to preserve health and vitality as much as possible.

According to the philosophy of Indian medicine, health was believed to be conditioned by the balance of three primary fluids (dosa, literally "defects") in the body: wind (vāta), gall (pitta), and mucus (kapha). When these vital factors were operating harmoniously, the body, inhabited by the jīva, the vital soul, as distinct from the innermost soul, or ātman, enjoyed health. There was a saying, "Discord is disease; concord is health." (Basham, 1976: 18) Ayurveda had a marked influence in Thailand for almost eight hundred years.

Most of the Indian medical textbooks inherited by Thai medical practitioners belonged to an Indian doctor, Chiwaka Komarapat, who was Lord Buddha's personal physician. A specialist in herbs, he produced several kinds of medicine. He was also a great surgeon for his time having to his credit several cases of brain and bowel surgery. Another remarkable accomplishment of this famous physician was the writing of textbooks on medicine and pharmacology that are still highly regarded as medical treatises (Ministry of Education, 1958: 33-63).

The Thais' acceptance of the Indian medical system was, however, limited only to medicine. It did not include Indian surgery. Basing her argument on the report of Simon de La Loubere, a French minister sent to Thailand by Louis XIV of France in 1687, Ratri Wanichlak concludes that Thai traditional practitioners had no knowledge of surgery, which was rather advanced in India in the seventeenth century. However, Wanichlak thought that, despite their lack of knowledge in the practice of surgery, Thai traditional practitioners must have had some knowledge of anatomy because one method they still employ in treating patients is to step on certain points of their patients' bodies. (Wanichlak, 1978:28)



In addition to the medical knowledge from India, Thai medicine also incorporated practices from traditional Chinese medicine. As Donn V. Hart points out, "*Thai folk medicine, borrowing heavily from the Ayurveda also absorbed Chinese elements, but the latter are difficult to document.*" (Hart, 1974: 13). The reason Thai traditional medicine was influenced by Chinese medicine was that the Chinese formed the oldest and largest foreign community in Thailand. When Thai people moved south to the Gulf of Siam in the thirteenth century and established the Sukhothai Kingdom, the Chinese were already trading in this area.

Consequently, there is a reason to belief that Thai society has been influenced by Chinese culture. The Chinese had their own medical system, and some Thai practitioners studied Chinese medical treatises and Chinese methods of treating patients. Others incorporated the Chinese medical system into their own. (Keranpong, 1955:1819). Because the Chinese medical system exercised a formative influence on Thai traditional medicine, an explanation should be given as to its nature. The popular yin/yang concept and the cycle of the Five Evolution Phases (wu-hsing) has gained significance in the Chinese sciences from their beginnings in the middle of the first millennium B.C.

In his article, "The Intellectual and Social Impulses Behind the Evolution of Traditional Chinese Medicine," Manfred Porkert explained that the terms yin and yang originally meant "the shady and the sunny side of a mountain, or the southern and northern bank of a river, respectively." It was during the second half of the first millennium B.C. that the terms yin and yang were adapted to explain interrelated phenomena. In modern terms, yang indicates "all that is active, expansive, centrifugal, aggressive, competitive, negative." While yin means "all that is structive, substantive, contractive, centripetal, responsive, conservative, positive," (Porkert, 1976: 65). These two comic forces form the material basis of the universe, and order and disorder in the universe depend on the interaction between them.

Moreover, the interaction of yin and yang generates the cycle of the Five Evolutive Phases. They are wood (potential activity), fire (actual activity), metal (potential structivity), water (actual structivity), and earth (neutral). Man's body is composed of these five elements in balanced proportions. If a man is sick, it means that his body has lost the balance among these five phases. (Porkert, 1976: 65-67). The combination of yin and yang and the cycle of the Five Evolutive Phases became part of the foundation of Thai medicine.

Taking basic principles of medicine from the Chinese and the Indians, the Thai believe that disease is caused by the imbalance of four elements. These four elements are slightly different from the Five Evolutive Phases of Chinese medicine. They exclude wood and metal but include wind. They are water, wind, fire, and earth.

According to Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, an American doctor, the Thai "believe also that matter of all kinds without the body (including everything in the mundane system) is constituted in the same way, and that it is continually operating upon the elements within producing health or disease." For example, if the element fire from without enters the body in undue proportions, it will destroy the healthy equilibrium of a person's body, and the person will get sick from many diseases under the division fire: the fevers—intermittent, remittent, and continued—measles, smallpox and so on. (Bradley, 1967: 103).

Disease, however, is not always caused by external elements. Derangement of the body's equilibrium can be caused by elements totally internal. Apoplexy, for instance, is a

disease caused by the internal wind blowing from all parts of the system with such strong force that it harms the body. Another theory of apoplexy is that the wind has made too much of a vacuum in the upper part of the body. In order to cure the disease, the wind must be forced to turn upward. Hence, the best treatment requires that the patient's stomach be filled with food, causing it to bolster up the diaphragm. (Bradley, 1967: 103-104).

For this reason, good health means maintaining a balance in the proportions of the four elements: water, wind, fire, and earth. Disease, on the contrary, is produced "either from the excess or diminution of one or more of the four elements." (Bradley, 1967: 103-104). An interesting comparison of a human body to a house was made by Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, a distinguished Thai scholar. According to the prince, a body is a house with one soul. The bones comprise the posts and the house structure. Skin makes up the walls that cover the whole structure, hair is the grass or thatch roof, and the eyes are the windows. The equipment of the body is made up of blood vessels, the mouth, and so on. The structure of the house is supported by all elements, and if one element is out of order, it should be repaired. The human body is also made up of many organs. When a person gets sick, it means that one element (or sometimes more) should be taken care of. (Damrong Rachanupab, 1923: 1-2).

The Thais have not discarded their age-old spiritual beliefs. On the contrary, such popular ideas have been inextricably bound up with Thai traditional medicine over the years. This is evident from the fact that medicinal herbs must be gathered and medicine prepared on a propitious date. Other practices to be followed include the use of herb sprigs and procedures for boiling the bottom of a pot of medicine and using a piece of cloth over the mouth of the pot and the six-pointed sign at the mouth of the pot. Other occult practices in medical treatment include the floating of offerings in the form of a clay doll together with candle and joss-stick, and such substances as salt, chili, and betel on a river or canal to alleviate illness and raise the morale of all concerned. This rite is called krabaal. (Keranpong, 1982: 19).

### **The Thais' Beliefs in Supernatural Beings and Its Relations with the Thai Traditional Medicine**

We can say that human belief is an important part of human nature, one that occurs to every human being. Human belief was originated from the stage when man gradually learned and understood the world in which man lived that there was a secret power which affected his life either positively or negatively. Hence, he began to be afraid of this mysterious power and tried to find an effective way to prevent the negative effect which might occur as a result of the mysterious power and at the same time man also tries to please it in organizing the various folk rituals hoping that he would be rewarded by doing so. Various rituals were held to pay respect to the mysterious power which, later on, became known as god(s). Consequently, belief here means the acceptance that something exists and exercises power over human beings either positively or negatively or both. One significant point is that even though this supernatural belief, or magical belief is something which cannot be proved, its existence has been accepted among people from generations to generations all over the world.

Another point worth mentioning is that belief is one of the most important factors contributing to the traditional medical treatment by means of supernatural or magical practice. There are two reasons for this: first, human beings must have believed in the

efficiency of the magical practice as a means to cure diseases because if they do not, they would not have used it in the treatment of diseases. Second, the belief in the cause of illness is a crucial factor which helps determine their treatment method. An anthropological study regarding the illness and the treatment in underdeveloped societies reveal that there are three major causes of illness (Raymond, 1964: 88 as quoted in Podisita, 1980: 162-163).

### **1. Natural Cause**

This is a common kind of illness which is not complicated and is found in every human society such as stomachache which is believed to be caused by eating decayed or rotten food. Moreover, such an illness as an insect bite of which its symptom can be seen clearly, or some genetic diseases can be diagnosed as resulting from the natural cause. The traditional medical doctor usually prescribes medicinal herbs to cure such diseases.

### **2. Preternatural Cause**

An illness resulted from the preternatural cause is too complicated to be explained by a natural reason. For example, a person feels painful in his stomach. When he feels it, he thinks there is something in it. If the cause is not found, he may think he is attacked (tuk-kong) by his enemy or rival. That is, his enemy may use "black magic" to send some material such as the dry buffalo skin made sacred by a magical doctor into his stomach. That is why he feels so painful in his stomach. Magical science is usually employed to cure such an illness when a magical doctor is usually sent for and a folk ritual is recommended by him in order to relieve the pain and take the material out of the patient's body.

### **3. Supernatural Cause**

Sometimes people believe that an illness, whether it be common or uncommon, is caused by such supernatural power as bad spirit, ancestor spirit, or tribe spirit, etc. It is believed that one of these spirits may cause their illness because the people may not pay proper respect or give proper offerings to the spirits. Proper offerings can come in the forms of giving the spirits food, side dishes, desserts, rice wine, incense sticks, candles, and flowers etc. In some cases, a person may do something against the "taboo" of the community. In this case, a special folk ritual is to be performed in order to beg the spirit to pardon him.

From the reasons mentioned above, we can realize that the medical treatment of people in ancient time was related closely with the belief in the causes of illness. That is, if they believe that the cause of illness is natural, the natural treatment is employed. If, however, the illness is caused by preternatural or supernatural factor, the magical science plays an important role in the treatment. Such a belief and treatment have been handed down from generations to generations of Thai people from the past to the present and in many areas all over Thailand.

## **Thai Traditional Doctors in the Utong District Supanburi**

In March 2007, the researchers conducted interviews with 35 traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi where there is a concentration of traditional medical doctors. The research focused on two major objectives: 1) to study the beliefs in the medical treatment according to the folk rituals among the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi and 2) to collect the information regarding the folk rituals of the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi. This information is very valuable and useful for the traditional medical doctors themselves and to the Ministry of

Public Health. For, the Ministry of Public Health will be able to make use of the information to develop Thai traditional medicine which is now gaining more and more popularity in Thai society, particularly in the area of massage.

### **Personal Background of the Thai Traditional Medical Doctors**

The study reveals that most traditional medical doctors were female (64%) while 36% were male. Most of them were more than sixty years old (33%). They finished the elementary level of education (61%). Only 12% of them received a bachelor's degree. Most of them were farmers who practised traditional medicine as their career (37%). The rest had other jobs: employees (34%), business owners (8.5%), vendors (5.7%), while 14% did not have any other job.

### **The Reasons Why They Became Traditional Medical Doctors**

The major reasons why they became traditional medical doctors were as follows: firstly, their parents or relatives were traditional medical doctors and they had a chance to learn from these people. Secondly, they were ill and seek remedies from the modern medical doctors but found that the modern doctors could not help them. So they turned to the traditional medical treatment which enabled them to be relieved from the illness. That was why they were determined to learn more about the illnesses so as to be able to help other people, as well.

### **Categories of the Traditional Medical Doctors**

Findings from the research revealed that most of them were massage doctors (66%). About 30% were general medical doctors who could cure many diseases such as coughing, influenza, high blood pressure, diabetes, herpes zoster, cancer, etc.

In those days there were no regulations against becoming doctors and thus anyone could establish himself or herself as a traditional doctor after receiving a training from his or her predecessors. Nowadays, however, all traditional medical doctors have to get the licence from the government before they are allowed to practise their career. As mentioned earlier, Most of them have other occupations because they cannot live on the fees they receive from their patients alone as most of the patients are poor.

### **The Traditional Medical Doctors' Thoughts and Beliefs Regarding the Illness**

As mentioned earlier, the traditional medical doctors believe that health is to be conditioned by the balance of four major elements: earth, water, wind, and fire which are considered to be the major hypotheses of illness according to the concept of the Thai traditional medicine. When these factors are operating harmoniously, the body enjoys health. On the contrary, if these four elements are not working harmoniously, the body would be affected by illness. Actually every one of the traditional doctors is supposed to know the four major rules of treatment as follows:

1. To know the kind and symptom of the illness
2. To know the cause of the illness
3. To know the medicine and its quality

4. To know how to prescribe the medicine for each disease.

### **The Traditional Doctor's Treatment: The Employment of Folk Rituals**

The traditional doctor is the one who restores the four elements to a healthful equilibrium. The treatment starts from studying the symptom of the disease first before he is able to diagnose the illness which is similar to the modern medical treatment. The difference, however, lies in the fact that one traditional medical doctor can treat many kinds of diseases which makes him different from the modern medical doctor who is trained to be a specialist treating only one disease.

Thai traditional medicines are prepared from barks, roots, fruits, flowers and leaves found in the forest or in the home garden. They are in various forms: powdered, formed into tablets, boiled or pickled, and stirred medicine (*yaa kuan*). Yoddumnern, 1974: 13). The physician should be the one who knows best which disease demands a strong kind of medicine and which demands a milder one. In order to be able to use the right medicine for the right disease, the physician must examine the patient first. Compared to Western medicines, Thai medicines are usually more difficult to take because of their bitter taste.

The folk rituals are also used in order to cure the patient. When asked about their beliefs, 58% of the traditional doctors said that they believed that there were gods or sacred beings who helped them in the performance of their duty. Most of them mentioned the name "Chiwaka Komorapat" Lord Buddha's doctor, as their principal teacher. They also said that they believed in some gods, but they did not specify the names. Besides, they said that their teachers were the ones they had to pay respect to everyday. That is why the traditional doctors have to provide them with such offerings as rice, side dishes (such as boiled chicken, boiled pork, etc), bananas, incense sticks, candles, rice wine before leaving their homes in the morning. Sprinkling sacred water on the patient's body, praying, and practising meditation are also included in the treatment of most of the diseases.

However, there were some of the traditional medical doctors who said they did not believe in any gods or sacred beings but thought it was their own treatment ability that enabled the patients to relieve from their illnesses while 3% did not answer this question.

### **Conclusion**

Thai Traditional Medicine is the art of healing which has been used to treat patients in Thai society from the past up to the present time despite the arrival of modern medicine in the reign of King Rama III. The opening of the Siriraj Hospital in 1888 saw the increasing acceptance of Western medicine among the Thai public. The status of traditional Thai medicine became more shaky with the launching of the Medical law of 1937 dividing doctors into two categories: registered and non-registered.

The registered doctors are those who pass the examination supervised by the Medical Council and can practise medicine legally. The non-registered doctors either do not take or did not pass the examination and are thus considered illegal by the government, although they are accepted by their patients. It turned out to be that most traditional doctors have become illegal because they could not pass the examination. The status of the traditional medicine and the traditional doctor has declined since then.

Nowadays, traditional medicine, with its three major good qualities: inexpensiveness, subtle remedies and the traditional doctors having good relationship with their patients, has become more popular among the Thai public. More traditional medical schools were established both in Bangkok and the rural areas to teach those interested in becoming traditional doctors. More youngsters receiving more education enter those schools and can pass the Medical Council examination to become traditional medical doctors. The Ministry of Public Health established the Department of Thai Traditional Medicine in the Ministry with its main objective to promote Thai traditional medicine after the realization that Thai traditional medicine is one of the most valuable Thai heritages, which should be handed down from generations to generations of Thai people.

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**MAHIDOL-UKM 3**  
**DEFINING HARMONY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
COMPETING DISCOURSES, CHALLENGES AND  
INTERPRETATIONS**  
**The Third International Malaysia-Thailand Conference  
on Southeast Asian Studies**



29 November – 1 December 2007

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**SESSION 9**  
**TRADITION AND FAMILY**

**SEMINAR ROOM 2**

**Chairperson: Dr. Dale Rorex**

1. The Beliefs in the Medical Treatment According to the Folk Rituals: A Case Study of the Folk Medical Doctors in the Utong District Suphanburi. - *Wariya Chinwanno*
2. What's Hip, What's Hop?: Disharmonized Representations of Gender in Music Videos. - *Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri*
3. Economic Activities in a Matrilineal Culture: A Case Study of the Travelling Merchant in Minangkabau Villages in Indonesia. - *Delvi Wahyuni & Silfia Hanani*
4. Demographic Representation and Thai Family Values. - *Matthew Copeland*

**Paper 1      The Beliefs in the Medical Treatment according to the Folk Rituals: A Case Study of the Traditional Medical Doctors at the Utong District, Supanburi**

*Wariya Chinwanno*

**Abstract**

The research entitled “The Beliefs in the Medical Treatment According to the Folk Rituals: A Case Study of the Folk Medical Doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi” focuses on two main objectives: 1) to study the beliefs in the medical treatment according to the folk rituals among the folk medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi and 2) to collect the information regarding the folk rituals of the folk medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi which should be considered one of the most valuable Thai heritages.

The research was conducted by means of two major methods. First, the documentary research: the researcher collected books and documents about folk medicine and analyzed them in order to find the relations between the beliefs about folk rituals and folk healing behaviors among the folk medical doctors. Second, the in-dept interview: the researcher interviewed 35 medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi.

Findings from the research reveal that most of them (66%) were massage doctors. About 30% were folk medical doctors who cured patients having diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, influenza, coughing, etc. When asked about their beliefs, 58% said they believed that there were gods or sacred beings who helped them in the performance or their duty. Most of them mentioned the name “Chiwaka Komarapat” the famous Indian medical doctor who treated Lord Buddha in the Buddhist time as their teacher. The rest of them (39%) said they did not believe in any gods or sacred being but thought it was their own treatment ability that enabled the patients to relieve from their illnesses while 3% did not answer this question.

Nowadays, Thai traditional medicine plays a very significant role in the medical treatment of Thailand. This research then, aims at, firstly, studying the beliefs in the medical treatment according to the folk rituals among the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi and secondly, collecting the information regarding the folk rituals of the traditional medical doctors in the Utong District, Supanburi Province.

## Thai Traditional Medicine: Concept and Practice

Like other races in the other areas of the world, The ancient Thais had a way of life that emphasized supernatural beings and spiritual beliefs. Natural phenomena and diseases were explained by the influence of supernatural powers. Consequently, traditional Thai medicine in the earlier period was bound up with supernatural power and spiritual beliefs. Later on, from the practitioners' experience and equipments, the uses of herbs and some kinds of animals were discovered and used in the treatment of patients. (Charan Keranpong, 1982: 18-19)

By the end of the thirteenth century, Thai people were firmly established in the Golden Peninsula. With the establishment of the two kingdoms, Sukhothai (1238-1438) and Ayutthya (1350-1767), the Thais turned to India for their culture, art, religion, and even their writing system. Indian Medicine came to Thailand along with religion and culture. Thus, the old Thai medicine, which has been handed down to this day, is distinctly Indian.

In the last five or six centuries before Christ, the traditional Indian medical system became known as āyurveda meaning "the science of (living to a ripe) age." The first verbal component, āyur, implies that the ancient Indian doctor was concerned not only with curing disease but also with promoting longevity, while the second component veda has religious overtones, being the term used for the most sacred text of Hinduism. (Basham, 1976: 18). Thus, Indian medicine was a system of managing life so as to prolong it and to preserve health and vitality as much as possible.

According to the philosophy of Indian medicine, health was believed to be conditioned by the balance of three primary fluids (dosa, literally "defects") in the body: wind (vāta), gall (pitta), and mucus (kapha). When these vital factors were operating harmoniously, the body, inhabited by the jīva, the vital soul, as distinct from the innermost soul, or ātman, enjoyed health. There was a saying, "Discord is disease; concord is health." (Basham, 1976: 18) Ayurveda had a marked influence in Thailand for almost eight hundred years.

Most of the Indian medical textbooks inherited by Thai medical practitioners belonged to an Indian doctor, Chiwaka Komarapat, who was Lord Buddha's personal physician. A specialist in herbs, he produced several kinds of medicine. He was also a great surgeon for his time having to his credit several cases of brain and bowel surgery. Another remarkable accomplishment of this famous physician was the writing of textbooks on medicine and pharmacology that are still highly regarded as medical treatises (Ministry of Education, 1958: 33-63).

The Thais' acceptance of the Indian medical system was, however, limited only to medicine. It did not include Indian surgery. Basing her argument on the report of Simon de La Loubere, a French minister sent to Thailand by Louis XIV of France in 1687, Ratri Wanichlak concludes that Thai traditional practitioners had no knowledge of surgery, which was rather advanced in India in the seventeenth century. However, Wanichlak thought that, despite their lack of knowledge in the practice of surgery, Thai traditional practitioners must have had some knowledge of anatomy because one method they still employ in treating patients is to step on certain points of their patients' bodies. (Wanichlak, 1978:28)

In addition to the medical knowledge from India, Thai medicine also incorporated practices from traditional Chinese medicine. As Donn V. Hart points out, "*Thai folk medicine, borrowing heavily from the Ayurveda also absorbed Chinese elements, but the latter are difficult to document.*" (Hart, 1974: 13). The reason Thai traditional medicine was influenced by Chinese medicine was that the Chinese formed the oldest and largest foreign community in Thailand. When Thai people moved south to the Gulf of Siam in the thirteenth century and established the Sukhothai Kingdom, the Chinese were already trading in this area.

Consequently, there is a reason to believe that Thai society has been influenced by Chinese culture. The Chinese had their own medical system, and some Thai practitioners studied Chinese medical treatises and Chinese methods of treating patients. Others incorporated the Chinese medical system into their own. (Keranpong, 1955:1819). Because the Chinese medical system exercised a formative influence on Thai traditional medicine, an explanation should be given as to its nature. The popular yin/yang concept and the cycle of the Five Evolution Phases (wu-hsing) has gained significance in the Chinese sciences from their beginnings in the middle of the first millennium B.C.

In his article, "The Intellectual and Social Impulses Behind the Evolution of Traditional Chinese Medicine," Manfred Porkert explained that the terms yin and yang originally meant "the shady and the sunny side of a mountain, or the southern and northern bank of a river, respectively." It was during the second half of the first millennium B.C. that the terms yin and yang were adapted to explain interrelated phenomena. In modern terms, yang indicates "all that is active, expansive, centrifugal, aggressive, competitive, negative." While yin means "all that is structive, substantive, contractive, centripetal, responsive, conservative, positive," (Porkert, 1976: 65). These two cosmic forces form the material basis of the universe, and order and disorder in the universe depend on the interaction between them.

Moreover, the interaction of yin and yang generates the cycle of the Five Evolutive Phases. They are wood (potential activity), fire (actual activity), metal (potential structivity), water (actual structivity), and earth (neutral). Man's body is composed of these five elements in balanced proportions. If a man is sick, it means that his body has lost the balance among these five phases. (Porkert, 1976: 65-67). The combination of yin and yang and the cycle of the Five Evolutive Phases became part of the foundation of Thai medicine.

Taking basic principles of medicine from the Chinese and the Indians, the Thai believe that disease is caused by the imbalance of four elements. These four elements are slightly different from the Five Evolutive Phases of Chinese medicine. They exclude wood and metal but include wind. They are water, wind, fire, and earth.

According to Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, an American doctor, the Thai "believe also that matter of all kinds without the body (including everything in the mundane system) is constituted in the same way, and that it is continually operating upon the elements within producing health or disease." For example, if the element fire from without enters the body in undue proportions, it will destroy the healthy equilibrium of a person's body, and the person will get sick from many diseases under the division fire: the fevers—intermittent, remittent, and continued—measles, smallpox and so on. (Bradley, 1967: 103).

Disease, however, is not always caused by external elements. Derangement of the body's equilibrium can be caused by elements totally internal. Apoplexy, for instance, is a

disease caused by the internal wind blowing from all parts of the system with such strong force that it harms the body. Another theory of apoplexy is that the wind has made too much of a vacuum in the upper part of the body. In order to cure the disease, the wind must be forced to turn upward. Hence, the best treatment requires that the patient's stomach be filled with food, causing it to bolster up the diaphragm. (Bradley, 1967: 103-104).

For this reason, good health means maintaining a balance in the proportions of the four elements: water, wind, fire, and earth. Disease, on the contrary, is produced "either from the excess or diminution of one or more of the four elements." (Bradley, 1967: 103-104). An interesting comparison of a human body to a house was made by Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, a distinguished Thai scholar. According to the prince, a body is a house with one soul. The bones comprise the posts and the house structure. Skin makes up the walls that cover the whole structure, hair is the grass or thatch roof, and the eyes are the windows. The equipment of the body is made up of blood vessels, the mouth, and so on. The structure of the house is supported by all elements, and if one element is out of order, it should be repaired. The human body is also made up of many organs. When a person gets sick, it means that one element (or sometimes more) should be taken care of. (Damrong Rachanupab, 1923: 1-2).

The Thais have not discarded their age-old spiritual beliefs. On the contrary, such popular ideas have been inextricably bound up with Thai traditional medicine over the years. This is evident from the fact that medicinal herbs must be gathered and medicine prepared on a propitious date. Other practices to be followed include the use of herb sprigs and procedures for boiling the bottom of a pot of medicine and using a piece of cloth over the mouth of the pot and the six-pointed sign at the mouth of the pot. Other occult practices in medical treatment include the floating of offerings in the form of a clay doll together with candle and joss-stick, and such substances as salt, chili, and betel on a river or canal to alleviate illness and raise the morale of all concerned. This rite is called krabaal. (Keranpong, 1982: 19).

### **The Thais' Beliefs in Supernatural Beings and Its Relations with the Thai Traditional Medicine**

We can say that human belief is an important part of human nature, one that occurs to every human being. Human belief was originated from the stage when man gradually learned and understood the world in which man lived that there was a secret power which affected his life either positively or negatively. Hence, he began to be afraid of this mysterious power and tried to find an effective way to prevent the negative effect which might occur as a result of the mysterious power and at the same time man also tries to please it in organizing the various folk rituals hoping that he would be rewarded by doing so. Various rituals were held to pay respect to the mysterious power which, later on, became known as god(s). Consequently, belief here means the acceptance that something exists and exercises power over human beings either positively or negatively or both. One significant point is that even though this supernatural belief, or magical belief is something which cannot be proved, its existence has been accepted among people from generations to generations all over the world.

Another point worth mentioning is that belief is one of the most important factors contributing to the traditional medical treatment by means of supernatural or magical practice. There are two reasons for this: first, human beings must have believed in the

efficiency of the magical practice as a means to cure diseases because if they do not, they would not have used it in the treatment of diseases. Second, the belief in the cause of illness is a crucial factor which helps determine their treatment method. An anthropological study regarding the illness and the treatment in underdeveloped societies reveal that there are three major causes of illness (Raymond, 1964: 88 as quoted in Podisita, 1980: 162-163).

### **1. Natural Cause**

This is a common kind of illness which is not complicated and is found in every human society such as stomachache which is believed to be caused by eating decayed or rotten food. Moreover, such an illness as an insect bite of which its symptom can be seen clearly, or some genetic diseases can be diagnosed as resulting from the natural cause. The traditional medical doctor usually prescribes medicinal herbs to cure such diseases.

### **2. Preternatural Cause**

An illness resulted from the preternatural cause is too complicated to be explained by a natural reason. For example, a person feels painful in his stomach. When he feels it, he thinks there is something in it. If the cause is not found, he may think he is attacked (tuk-kong) by his enemy or rival. That is, his enemy may use "black magic" to send some material such as the dry buffalo skin made sacred by a magical doctor into his stomach. That is why he feels so painful in his stomach. Magical science is usually employed to cure such an illness when a magical doctor is usually sent for and a folk ritual is recommended by him in order to relieve the pain and take the material out of the patient's body.

### **3. Supernatural Cause**

Sometimes people believe that an illness, whether it be common or uncommon, is caused by such supernatural power as bad spirit, ancestor spirit, or tribe spirit, etc. It is believed that one of these spirits may cause their illness because the people may not pay proper respect or give proper offerings to the spirits. Proper offerings can come in the forms of giving the spirits food, side dishes, desserts, rice wine, incense sticks, candles, and flowers etc. In some cases, a person may do something against the "taboo" of the community. In this case, a special folk ritual is to be performed in order to beg the spirit to pardon him.

From the reasons mentioned above, we can realize that the medical treatment of people in ancient time was related closely with the belief in the causes of illness. That is, if they believe that the cause of illness is natural, the natural treatment is employed. If, however, the illness is caused by preternatural or supernatural factor, the magical science plays an important role in the treatment. Such a belief and treatment have been handed down from generations to generations of Thai people from the past to the present and in many areas all over Thailand.

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### **Conclusion**

Thai Traditional Medicine is the art of healing which has been used to treat patients in Thai society from the past up to the present time despite the arrival of modern medicine in the reign of King Rama III. The opening of the Siriraj Hospital in 1888 saw the increasing acceptance of Western medicine among the Thai public. The status of traditional Thai medicine became more shaky with the launching of the Medical law of 1937 dividing doctors into two categories: registered and non-registered.

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## **Paper 2      What's Hip, What's Hop? Disharmonized Representations of Gender in Music Videos**

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### **Abstract**

Media representations of gender have always been an avenue for contestations in feminist media studies. Feminists have been concerned with how preoccupied the media are with women's appearances and bodies whilst at the same time giving focus to what men do with them. More often than not, the media emit a particular cultural message: men are players and master, while women are objects and subject. Such a message is abundant in popular music videos consumed by most young people today, including those in Malaysia. A content analysis study of three hip-hop music videos that had the highest ratings in the MTV chart during the fourth week of January 2007 – *That's That*, *Dangerous*, and *Tell Me* - discovered various oppressed representations of the female, while men are represented as powerful and central to everything. The hip-hop music videos focus on the female bodies ('hip') and how men behave towards them ('hop'). Such representations belittle the increasing effort of Malaysian policy makers to propagate gender harmony in the home, the workplace and society at large. What are the implications of such media consumption on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians? The paper explores this issue based on a focus group discussion of male and female students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

### **Introduction**

Media representations of gender have always been an avenue for contestations in feminist media studies. Feminist media scholars have been concerned with how preoccupied the media are with women's appearances and bodies whilst at the same time giving focus to what men do with them. More often than not, the media emit a particular cultural message: men are players and master while women are objects and subject.

Feminism is a useful analytical tool to look at media content. Generally, feminism is a perspective in the critical theory genre that attempts to decipher meanings based on gender. Feminists are interested to see how dominance and power are divided according to gender in society. They view the world and human experiences as influenced by male dominance, and thus they set out to challenge such order, i.e., male dominance that oppresses women (Littlejohn, 1999). They criticize the situation as unjust because it brings various effects and implications in society. Although they are capable of doing so, opportunities for women to develop themselves as individuals are closed, just because they are women and men traditionally hold the power positions in social institutions. Feminists aim to change the social situation that are in favor of men and seek justice for women. There are many means to achieve this end, and one of them is through the popular mass media.

Unfortunately, the mass media have not been supportive in this stance. In fact, media content is proliferated with gender stereotypes and exploitation. Such a message is abundant in popular music videos consumed by most young people today, including those in Malaysia. With the global media gaining popularity among local audience, there is also an increasing consumption of its array of content. This paper follows from a content analysis study of three hip-hop music videos that had the highest rating in the MTV chart during the fourth week of January 2007 – *That's That*, *Dangerous*, and *Tell Me*. These music videos contained various disharmonies in their representations of gender through the lyrics, narratives, and audio and visual codes. Consuming such representations of gender cumulatively cultivates and consequently sanctions male domination vis-à-vis female subjugation. They can also belittle the increasing effort of Malaysian policy makers to propagate gender harmony in the home, the workplace and society at large, as demonstrated in *Dasar Wanita Negara* (the National Policy on Women). What are the implications of such media consumption on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians? The paper explores this issue based on a focus group discussion of male and female students in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

### **Gender in the media**

Gender is quite a complex concept compared to sex. While sex is classified by biological characteristics, gender is a social, symbolic creation. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft declared that most differences between the sexes are socially constructed, not natural. The meaning of gender grows out of a society's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life and is not based on genetic factors (Wood, 2001).

Thus gender, unlike sex, is learned. From the time we are born into society, we are encouraged to conform to the gender that society prescribes for us. These are socially endorsed views of masculinity and femininity and they are taught to individuals through a variety of cultural means. Indeed individuals are socialized into gender. When socialization is effective in teaching us to adopt the gender society prescribes for our sex, biological males learn to be masculine and biological females become feminine (Wood, 2001). These learned meanings are communicated and further perpetuated through structures and practices of culture.

In our daily lives, we are surrounded by communication that announces social images of gender. We switch on the television and we see the corporate man leading his big company and then calling his wife at home to tell her that he will be back home late for dinner; we open the newspaper and we read a piece of news that a woman has been raped by her boyfriend; we turn on the radio and listen to a female singer crooning for the man she loves who has left her for another woman. We go to a restaurant and the waiter presents the check to the man; we participate in a project and a man is appointed the leader. Such experiences create the illusion that these are normal and natural roles for women and men to assume. In fact, it seems to persuade us to believe that these are proper and correct ways for men and women to behave. In relations to that, the repeated and cumulated similar gender images in the media also give the impression that they are sanctioned by society.

Wood (2001) suggests three ways in which the media interact with cultural images of gender: by mirroring, suggesting, and gatekeeping. In mirroring, media reflect cultural values and ideals about gender. They portray women, men, and women-men relationships in ways that mirror understandings and ideals widely shared in society. In suggesting, media reproduce cultural views of gender in individuals. By portraying women, men, and relationships between the sexes in "normal" ways, media suggest how we should be as women and men. In gatekeeping, media become filters of information and images. To a significant extent, they control what we see and know by deciding what programs to air, what news to feature, how to represent issues and events, and how to portray women and men. This is the selective characteristic of the media. By selectively regulating what we see, media influence how we perceive gender issues, ourselves, and women and men in general. Hence, the media mirror, suggest and filter our images of gender.

Thus the importance of mass media as image carriers should not be underestimated. The media have the potential to portray individuals or group of individuals in a negative or positive light, or in whatever directions they feel fit to describe. According to Faridah Ibrahim and Rahmah Hashim (1996) one cannot deny that opinions are formed in part by gathering pieces of information that have been portrayed through the mass media and comparing them with the images of events or people, which already have been stored in our minds. Negative portrayal of individuals or nations or group of people in the media, might conjure negative perceptions in the minds of the audience.

Faridah Ibrahim and Rahmah Hashim (1996) studied the coverage of women by the mass media during the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. They found that when the print media chose to allocate space for women news, devilish terms such as "burning bras", and "nude women running around the streets of Huairou" were freely printed. These messages would give the reader the impression that women who attended the Conference were radical beings with nothing better to do but to "burn bras." These depictions generally eclipsed the many positive accomplishments at the Conference.

According to Garcellano (1995) women are often times invisible and silenced in economics, politics, religion, science and technology but not so in media and advertising, where women are made to be highly visible yet "powerless". Through the mass media, we can see that the exploitation of women have gone beyond the traditional setting into the more sophisticated modern world where women's so-called natural weaknesses and femininity are being exploited both by men and women for economic gains. Women who are vocal and fight for their cause are being dubbed as hardcore feminists, while those who become commercial symbols, especially in media advertisements and television commercials, are portrayed as superficial and mindless (Fuziah & Faridah, 2004).

Media imagery of the female in movies is also profound. Over the past decades, a great deal of movie messages via Hollywood, Bollywood and even Mallywood (Malaysian movie industry as dubbed by many), has perpetuated the notion of women as property or commodities "available" for sexual and other use (Fuziah & Faridah, 2000). These messages are played over and over again in movies which show images of the female as the gentler sex, passive, weak, needing



protection, subservient, scatter-brained, dependent, comforting, nurturing, caring as well as beautiful (so convenient as a sex-object), while the male images are forceful, strong, capable, aggressive, demanding, independent, successful, as tycoons, heroes, playboys and the stoic macho-men. According to a manual entitled *Confronting Violence* (1992) published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, it is these images that reinforce ideologies of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating that while the male is 'naturally' aggressive, the female is the 'natural' target for aggression.

The mass media not only help to carry the images of women across the masses but also reinforce cultural stereotypes formed in the minds of the masses – that women are basically the inferior ones of the sexes. With constant reminder, inferiority becomes habitual and familiar and even desirable (Faridah, 1989). Hence, for the women, the influence of the mass media can be viewed from two extremes. On one side of the coin, media are seen as powerful to shape behavior and capitalize on the potentials of women that can be used to their advantage, while on the other, media reinforce existing stereotyped attitudes, expectations and values that could hinder their advancement in societies.

In Malaysia, researchers began actively researching media representations of women since the early eighties. Asiah Sarji (1985) content analyzed images of women in five P. Ramlee (a reknown filmmaker in the golden age of the Malay cinema of the 1950s and 60s) movies released at different times, namely *Penarik Beca* (1956), *Ali Baba Bujang Lapok* (1961), *Ibu Mertuaku* (1962), *Madu Tiga* (1964), and *Nasib Do Re Mi* (1966). Her analyses indicated that women were portrayed as emotional, sensitive and tearful. Basically, two types of women were depicted: the rich, materialistic and husband-hunting kind, and the poor, helpless, weak and polygamy-willing kind. In addition, women were most often characterized as widows, mothers, domestic helpers, singers, nurses and clerks.

Similar images are also seen in Jins Shamsuddin's (a reknown 1970s Malay filmmaker) movies of the seventies and early eighties. Soh Geok Choon (1988) content analyzed *Menanti Hari Esok* (released in 1977), *Esok Masih Ada* (1980), and *Esok Untuk Siapa* (1981). In these movies, Soh discovered that women were mainly depicted in a negative light, in that they were peripheralized, dependent on and submissive to men. Generally, they were made to appear as second-class citizens who are trapped in a patriarchal system that degraded their very existence.

Fuziah and Faridah (2005; 2000) looked at eleven Malay movies produced in the 1950s, the golden era of Malay movies. This qualitative-interpretative analysis demonstrated that stereotyped female images dominated the silver screen then. Women were portrayed in two extreme poles --- the good-hearted, demure, submissive, domesticated and "ever-willing-to-sacrifice-everything" female; and the evil, scheming, conniving, home-wrecking, materialistic woman. Such characterizations not only added drama to the narratives, they also rhetorically functioned to propagate the conceptual metaphor of the desirable female as "pure, white and innocent" whereas the most undesirable one is "defiled, black and sinful." It is clear that the filmic rhetoric here is a good woman is one who is willing to sacrifice everything, including her life, for the benefit of others, such as the man she loves, and that she must accept her fate although it means suffering and hardships. More often than not the good woman is sacrificed at the end of the movie, such as

through death, and is eventually exalted. Woman on the opposite end (the bad woman) is extremely bad, but alas she dies a tragic death. Good or bad, the woman usually dies one way or another. It is as if a woman's life is secondary compared to that of a man.

Although much of the empirical literature has focused on women, they are always studied in comparisons with the other gender. Generally, researchers discover several common themes of gender representations in the mass media. These themes include the under-representation of women; stereotypical portrayals of women and men; and the sexploitation and normalized violence of women by men. Such depictions are found in various genres of media content ranging from children's cartoons, news, television serials and music videos to blatant pornography. One thing that is clear in all these depictions is the constant absence of respect between women and men in their daily encounters and relationships. If respect between women and men is a key element that can propagate gender harmony, then what is the media doing to ensure that this is being communicated? Or have they ignored this issue altogether?

### **The research findings**

This section of the paper reports on research findings of a content analysis of the three selected music videos in the study and the qualitative analysis of a focus group of university students discussing their readings of the music videos and the larger implications toward gender harmony. In the study, gender harmony is understood as the presence of mutual respect between women and men in everyday social life such that both sexes recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses as persons, thus enabling each other to play equal, balanced and complimentary roles in the home, the workplace and society in general. In this position, the domination of one sex over another does not occur since complimentary behavior nullifies it.

### **The music videos**

Music videos are a type of short film or video that contained the complete creation of a musical composition. They are produced as a vehicle or advertisement to promote and market a song, and are especially targeted for the young and music-loving audience. In USA alone, the music video industry is a billion-dollar enterprise. Although music videos have been around for quite some time, they became a worldwide phenomenon with the advent of the music television format as a broadcast genre in the 1980s and 1990s. In Malaysia, both MTV and Channel V are popular channels, thus spurring the creation of a local music television channel, Hitz.TV, on Astro, the Malaysian satellite television broadcaster. This local channel does not necessarily air local music videos; in fact, it is heavy on foreign music videos since local artists do not really invest in music videos to market their albums, as they are expensive to produce. Hence, the music television channels show more foreign music videos compared to local ones for local consumption.

Music videos are heavy on the senses as they can manipulate audio and visual codes through camera and editing techniques as well as special effects and multimedia pacing. Among the various music genres that utilize music videos to win global

audiences, the hip-hop genre is most prevalent. Hip-hop is a music genre that is said to have originated from the ghettos of America when African-American youth began singing about their oppression and discrimination by the white majority using their unique style and rhythm to voice their protests, thus establishing a new musical identity different from mainstream white music. The hip-hop genre is sometimes referred to as rap music as they include rapping (mc'ing) and djing (audio mixing and scratching). Interestingly, hip-hop music videos always have a dance choreography that demonstrates traditional African influence, breakdancing, krumping and crotch-grabbing, and other sexy body movements.

In this study, the three hip-hop music videos analyzed are *That's That* by Snoop Dogg featuring R. Kelly, *Dangerous* by the Ying Yang Twins featuring Wyclef Jean, and *Tell Me* by P. Diddy featuring Christina Aguilera. These music videos are media texts, and as media texts, they are polysemic in nature, thus inviting various readings and interpretations. In this analysis, a basic feminist framework is used to look at various semiotic units such as lyrics, narratives, characters and characterizations, camera angles, shots and framings, mise-en-scene, costumes and make-up, facial expressions, as well as dance and body movements. This paper does not account the details of the semiotic analysis conducted, rather it only excerpts the main findings of their gender representations and images as seen comprehensively from their narratives.

*That's That* depicts two rich and heavily-bling-ed (wearing shiny accessories) men driving to an exclusive party where they meet up with heavily made-up and scantily-clad women who performed wild and erotic dance moves for the pleasure of the onlooking men. The dances became more sensuous and sexy when money is thrown all over and around them. The word "shit" is repeated in the lyrics as if to degrade the female dancers who would do anything and everything for money. The use of water in the earlier *mise-en-scene* of the music video is a subliminal play of the oncoming seduction and sexual tone. There are many close-up shots of the woman's body, especially hips and breasts, as she gyrates and moves to the beat and rhythm of the music. The final frames show Dogg and Kelly driving home with satisfied looks as Snoop wipes his lips and winks to the camera.

In *Dangerous*, the Ying Yang Twins tell of their adventure in a fictional place, Twin City, where they seem to be in charge, yet some women try to overpower them wherever they go by using their sexuality and charm. The women are shown in seductive costumes, poses and dances so as to lure and capture the twins for their luxury car and money. In some close-up shots, a woman is shown to have fangs, which immediately emphasizes and foregrounds her evil character and intention. Eventually, the final frames indicate the force behind the women's behavior. In actual fact, the women are being used by Wyclef Jean to deceive the Ying Yang Twins, hence reaffirming the power of men over women and how men can always use women, even in the execution of dangerous and criminal acts.

*Tell Me* portrays a relational episode between a man and a woman, whereby each is communicating to the other their wants and needs in the relationship. In the beginning, P. Diddy is presented a remote control by a woman who, upon his instruction, puts on a DVD to be played. Diddy takes the remote control and points to the DVD player. At the touch of a button, Cristina Aguilera appears on a flat screen

television, singing and dancing to a tense and fast tempo. The audience is next transported to a "wind tunnel" where Aguilera is singing and dancing, and then Diddy walks in confidently rapping and singing. Again there are many close up shots of Aguilera gyrating and touching her body seductively. This is interspersed rapidly with close-up shots of another woman's body as she seductively dances, while long and medium shots of Diddy show him walking confidently, unperturbed and in control. A listening of the lyrics indicate a dialogue between Aguilera and Diddy in which she tells him what she wants to do and he responds with repeated "do that" and "I want." Although he says "I don't want to control you but I want to console you," his command of "do that, do that" indicates otherwise. In short, a man has a way of making a woman think she is in control even when she is not.

All the three hip-hop music videos stereotyped and sexploited women in almost similar ways, through the narratives, visual depictions and nonverbal body politics. The music videos show that women are the oppressed gender or second-class citizens whose existence are defined and controlled by men and that they are sexual objects that fulfill the pornographic fantasies of men. In contradistinction, men are represented as powerful, stylish, cool, cunning and central to everything that they are able to use women at their whims and fancies.

The various degrading representations of the female in the music videos vis-à-vis the consistent strong representations of the male is a deliberate effort to construct ambivalent female images, hence the lack of identity, while men are given the dominant and powerful presence, hence the master of all. The props, fancy cars and sophisticated remote control, as well as expensive costumes, dark shades, jewelries and blings, are all symbols of the powerful male, whilst less costume and more flesh, alluring make-up and seductive body movements semiotically explained the objectification of the female. In short, the hip-hop music videos focus on the female bodies ('hip') and how men behave towards them ('hop').

### **The focus group discussion**

Four boys and girls participated in the focus group discussion. They are Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia undergraduates who are studying in the Media Communication program at the second year level (sophomore). This is purposively done to underscore their concerns about gender representations in the music videos given that this is a subject that they are exposed to and thus need to be critical about. In terms of social background, they are quite heterogeneous as they come from urban and rural settings, have parents of different educational and occupational status, hail from big, medium and small-sized families, and have different media habits. Theoretically, such a social background would have equipped them with different cultural tools, yet their academic exposure had more or less neutralized this expectation. Hence, their readings of the gender representations of the music videos and their perceived implications on the gender consciousness and sensitivity of young Malaysians are generally similar.

All the students, both male and female, agree that the hip-hop music videos portray disharmonized gender representations. They echo that all the men in the music videos appear cool, rich, strong, muscular, "so powerful and in control", while the women are "so, so, so low and gets lower and lower" because they have nothing but

their sexuality in order to survive in this social world. The women seem nothing more than objects of sexual desire or "trophy" for men to own and parade around as a token and symbol of their strength and position. One of the female students suggests that women have "sexual power" and that this power can "melt down any man", although the women may not intend to do so. This suggestion invites a male student to respond that women usually use their sexuality for material motives, which most men can provide. He rationalizes that "no cat will turn away if it sees a fish dangling in its face." When asked if this is a typical male response, the boys believe it is so in their culture but do not think it is necessarily unmanly to act otherwise.

Albeit so, all the students do not condone the use of female sexuality for material gain. The girls are concerned that men have such a perception about women. They insist that a woman "pretties herself for her own satisfaction" and are sad that men think that this is done to "seduce them." One of the female students expresses worry that such imbalanced portrayal of men and women in the music videos can propagate the "already popular notion that guys give love to have sex, and gals give sex to have love." The rest of the students agree that this idea is dangerous and can trap any young girl and young boy into superficial relational commitments. They urge the media not to foster such a portrayal for, "in the long run, it is harmful to young and vulnerable audiences, such as my little brother and little sister."

The gender representations may not harm their own gender consciousness because "being media students, we know better that the images are just *merepek* (nonsensical and false)." However, they feel that "younger people who are not thinking" can be "harmfully influenced by the hedonistic portrayal" in the music videos. To make matters worse, hip-hop music and their stars are considered "icon of pornographic music videos" because of the sexual depictions and concentration of the body in their dances. The students posit that the media can "disrupt family socialization, parental role and proper upbringing" because gender images are stereotyped and repeated in the media in both direct and "more subtle ways."

Do music videos like these belittle the effort in Malaysia to achieve gender harmony and equality as espoused in the National Policy on Women (NPW)? NPW, endorsed by the Malaysian government in 1989, "articulates the needs, interests and situations of women and ensures that these concerns are included in mainstream development policy and programs with women participating as full and equal partners at the community and national levels" (Pelan Tindakan Pembangunan Wanita, 1997). The overall objectives of the NPW are:

- To ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information as well as access to opportunities and benefits of development, for both men and women; and
- To integrate women into all sectors of national development in line with their abilities and needs in order to improve the quality of life, eradicate poverty, abolish ignorance and illiteracy and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation.

Besides the effort of the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also galvanized to spearhead the NPW. One such NGO was the National Council of Women's Organizations Malaysia (NCWO), which formed several commissions to work out action plans for the implementation of the Policy.

One of the commissions established was the Commission on Media, whose action plan includes the elimination of negative portrayal of women in the media and sensitizing gender awareness in media programs. It has been almost two decades now since NPW was endorsed, and although discourses remain alive, most of the action plans are "merely documents on paper." With the onslaught of globalization and the global media, it became more and more difficult to realize the NPW's media objectives, since the borderless world means media content is beyond a nation's control. As such, music videos such as these hip-hop ones with disharmonized gender representations can be found abundantly in the content industry.

The students, being aware of NPW, realize that the gender images in the music videos can be detrimental to the country's effort to create gender equality and harmony. However, they also believe that there is no way to stop such media content since banning or jamming is "not the solution to the problem, what more with the new media and its technology." Although the students said that not everyone is gullible to media messages, efforts must be continuous to counter the effects of imbalanced gender representations. "We cannot shut down or hide such programming in the global media from our people, less we will be like *katak di bawah tempurung* (literally, frog under a coconut shell), so we must build resistance within ourselves." One student suggests that the media authority rates music videos in the same manner that movies are rated. This rating will make us more aware of the content of the music videos and so become more cautious and selective in our viewing. It will also help "parents supervise their children's viewing."

To the suggestion of increasing media literacy by introducing it as a curriculum in primary schools, the students think that it is sound and rational. They feel that Malaysians need to be prepared at an earlier age because "an understanding of the process, system, effects and appreciation of the media can help us become critical and discerning users of the mass media." The students expressed their disappointment at some of their campus mates who seem oblivious to gender discourses in the media and therefore are "not fit to be university students." One boy states that everyone should promote gender awareness and that we should not "leave it to the authorities alone to combat" disharmonized gender representations in the media. The students in the focus group conclude that knowing how to resist unwanted images in the media is becoming increasingly important in the era of global media, and that this is a more meaningful action compared to "shutting down our skies and banning foreign content."

## Conclusion

Modern women are already in the public sphere, out of the homes and into organizations in this new era. At a time when women are contributing much towards society's progress, some of the portrayals in the media are irrelevant; they only perpetuate the ideology of male dominance-female submissiveness. From a



communication perspective, the use of this conceptual paradigm in a medium deemed so influential to young minds is culturally detrimental. We need to continuously advocate a change so that we can ultimately practice the humanistic view of gender equality in our daily lives. This can propagate gender respect and gender harmony, and thus can help eliminate crime and violence against women.

The mass media have the potential to be a vehicle of change. The study of gender images and representations in the mass media is an apt starting point to start a dialogue with the folks behind the scene so that they may be gender-sensitive in their work. For now, it is obvious that the content industry of the mass media is dominated by a male perspective and does not reflect the realities of being female. Although the content may circle around a woman's life, the storytelling is very much male. Perhaps this is a consequent of the lack of female players and decision-makers in the industry. Still, increasing the number does not mean the situation can be rectified because in the final analysis, "the crucial question is not who is telling the story, but how the story is told" (Gallagher, 2001).

As Wood points out, the media mirror, suggest and filter images and this influences our constructions. Media content is not limited to be a symbol of reality. More important, it must also be a symbol for reality. This means gender portrayal in the mass media can be used as advocacy materials to change whatever is necessary for the betterment of society. It is time for media producers to view their content from a wider and deeper perspective, specifically as rhetorical tools to gain adherence to gender-sensitive practices (Fuziah, 2005; 2003).

In communication, the media are powerful tools for gender setting (Gallagher, 2001), i.e., a device to help individuals rethink the true meaning of being a woman and a man so as to add dignity to our positions and roles in society. In this manner, proper portrayals of gender relations in the media can educate our women and men about gender roles and responsibilities and along the way promote gender respect and harmony. Clearly, music videos are influential tools for gender advocacy among young people, but it is unfortunate that the producers and performers are not doing enough toward this end. The push for a conscientization process among the industry folks should be included in our gender-setting, whilst at the same time promoting media literacy among the consumers.

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**Paper 3      Economic Activities in a Matrilineal Culture: A Case of the  
Travelling Merchant in Minangkabau Villages in Indonesia**

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**Abstract**

The Minangkabau ethnic group is indigenous to the highlands of West Sumatra, in Indonesia. Their culture is matrilineal. There are two prominent effects of this culture towards Minangkabau women. Firstly, they have privilege as the heir of "*harta pusaka*". (Ancestral property). Secondly, Minangkabau women have economic responsibility for the children who live with them. Ideally, "*harta pusaka*" is fully passed down to women. Recently, there has been a radical change in Minangkabau society with regards to the inheritance system, because that *harta pusaka* have been made private ownership. As a consequence, Minangkabau women have lost their privilege, yet they are still expected to maintain their role as the main staple of family economics. Being a travelling merchant is one alternative for the Minangkabau women to accommodate to this change and at the same time to fulfill their responsibilities. As travelling merchants, they travel from one traditional market to another, both near their domicile and to areas further away. Consequently, this travelling trade has changed the pattern of raising children and the nature of family interactions. Nevertheless, it is proven that by being travelling merchants, the Minangkabau women are able to increase their families' prosperity. Thus, this paper explores the impact of being trading travellers on the harmony of their families.

**INTRODUCTION**

Minangkabau is one of the many ethnics which make up Indonesia. This ethnic resides in the province of West Sumatra. Record shows in 2005 there were 3 747 343 Minangkabau peoples which make up 88.35 % of 4 241 256 of overall of West Sumatra's population. Minangkabau is the majority ethnic in this province and one of its indigenous inhabitants. The table below will explain the composition of overall West Sumatra's population.

Table 1: West Sumatra's population based on ethnicities

Etnik	Jumlah	%
Minangkabau	3 747 343	88.35
Batak	187 656	4.42
Javanese	176 023	4.15
Mentawai	54 419	1.28
Melayu	21 654	0.51
Chinese	15 029	0.35
Sundanese	10 993	0.26
Betawi	672	0.02
Madurese	370	0.01
Others	27 097	0.64
total	4 241 256	100.00

Source: West Sumatra in Numbers 2005

There are three typical characteristics enclosed to this ethnic. First, *merantau* (going overseas/ leaving native places) is seen as a tradition with the perspective of economic interest (Mochtar 1979; Kato 1989; Clamer 2000). Second, Islam is this ethnic official religion (Hamka 1978; Dt. Sangguno 1987; AA navis 1988; Dt. Rajo Penghulu 1997; Mochtar 1999). Third, this ethnic develops matrilineal cultural system (Mansour 1979; Kato 1988; Amir 1999). This paper is an attempt to explain and analyze the involvement of women as economic participants in this matrilineal culture.

This paper focuses on the involvement of Minangkabau women in economic activities in the current context. This paper observes the activities of Minangkabau women who travel from one to other traditional markets as merchants. This activity began to gain popularity as an occupation for Minangkabau women when severe monetary crisis hit Indonesia in 1997.

Sikaladi is the location of this research. In accordance to the governmental system, Sikaladi is a village within Tanah Datar regency, West Sumatra. Record in 2006 shows there were 9.913 people in Sikaladi ([www.tanahdatar.go.id](http://www.tanahdatar.go.id)). This area is famous for its cool climate and fertile soil. Moreover, Sikaladi happens to be in a strategic junction of transportation which enables its population to commute as well as to travel as merchants.

Geographically, Sikaladi is located on a plateau in the foot of Mount Merapi, the highest mount in West Sumatra. In regards with its geographic location, it can be predicted that most of Sikaladi people earn their living by doing agricultural activities.

Historically, Sikaladi is the neighbor of Pariangan which is considered as the oldest *nagari* for the Minangkabau people. According to historians, Pariangan is the initial *nagari* for the Minangkabau people. Due to the increasing of the population, other villages were founded. A group of villages in Minangkabau is called as *nagari*. A village in a *nagari* is called as *orong*. Hence, Sikaladi is a *orong* within the *nagari* of Pariangan (Mansour 1970; Mochtar 1984; Kato 1988; AA Navis 1988; Silfia 2002).

Before 1997, Sikaladi was an agricultural centre for Tanah Datar regency. As the result, Sikaladi was able to drench the demand of vegetable in Batusangkar market as the biggest market in that regency.

In 1997, monetary crisis hit Indonesia which directly affected Sikaladi as an agricultural centre for the price of fertilizer skyrocketed and the government quit subsidizing the prize of the fertilizer for the farmers. As a result, there was a radical change in terms of occupation pattern for most of the women folk of Sikaladi. Formerly, most of them were housewives. Their main activities are attending their land when the season to plant the paddy has come or helping their husbands in their vegetable patches. Currently, most of Silakadi women travel from one to another traditional market as traveling merchants. However, there is no radical change for the men folk for they are traditionally traveling merchants.

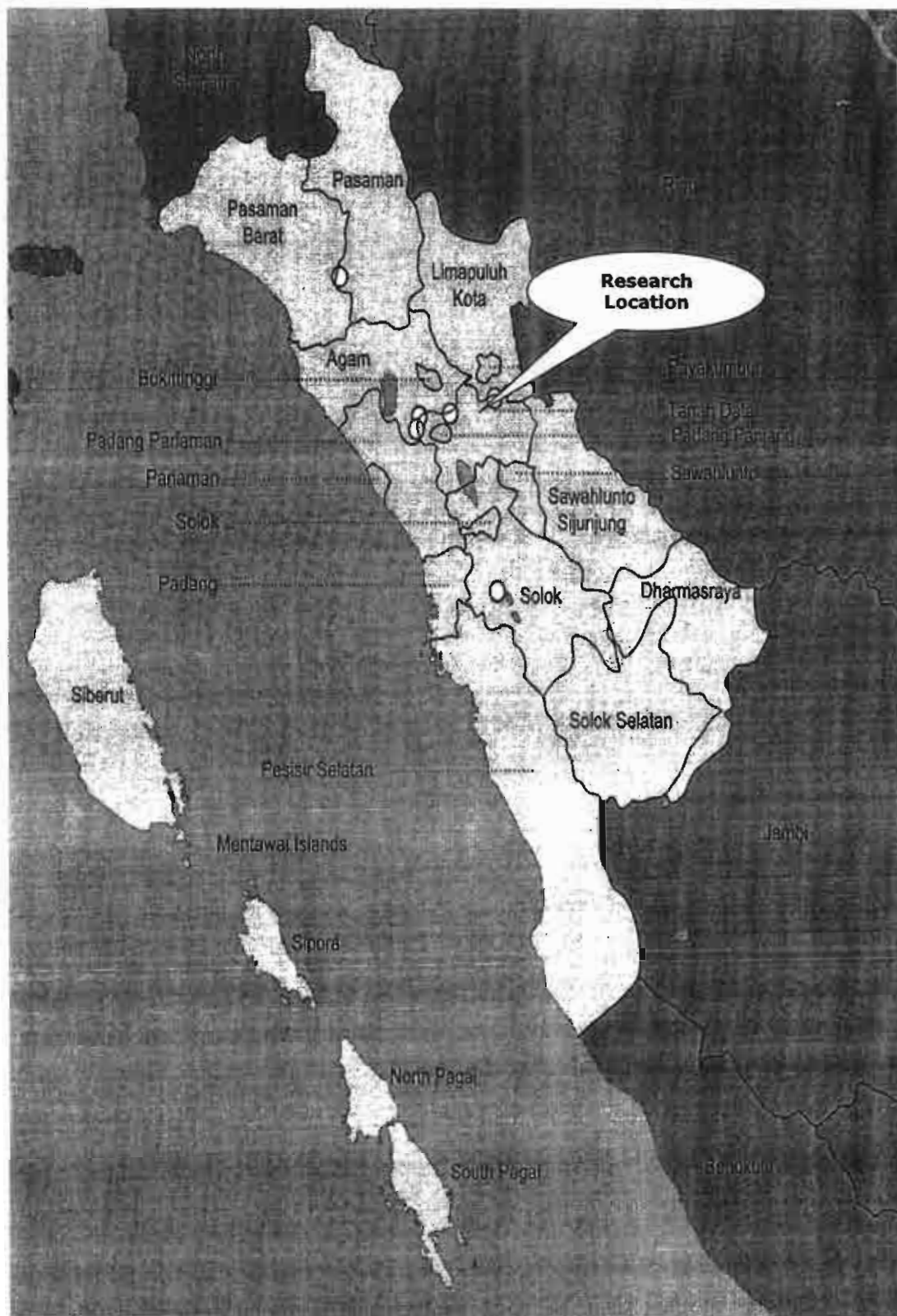
Regarding the *merantau* tradition, traveling as merchants can be seen as the semi-*merantau*-activity. Meaning, the men folk leave their native village for a few days to travel as merchants to various traditional markets. After collecting sufficient amount of money, they travel back to their village. Subsequently, after that amount of money has faded away, the men folk travel again to trade (Mochtar 1987; Kato 1988).

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Map: Province of West Sumatra and Research Location.

## DESCRIPTION

The economic crisis which hit Indonesia in 1997 has resulted in pushing Minangkabau women from domestic domain to public domain, especially in terms of occupation. Moreover, Minangkabau women began to leave agricultural sector to participate in trading sector (Aryunis & Silfia 2002). Now, those women are engaging actively in the economic market. As a consequence, this activity does so much to the economy of the house hold. Thus, the monetary crisis is not a continuing dilemma for those women who work as traveling merchant.

Interestingly, Minangkabau women who are not able to continue their study choose to engage in trading activities to help their parents who are already traveling merchants themselves. It cannot be denied that the involvement of this productive work force into traveling merchant activities has helped to overcome the problem of unemployment as the direct result of the 1997 economic crisis. Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics has noted in 1997 that there were 4, 18 million of unemployed persons, 6, 03 million (1999), 5, 81 million (2000), 8.005 million (2001), 9, 13 million (2002), 11, 35 million (2003). Then, the statistics show that in 2001 there were 144,033 million people of productive age, 98,182 million work forces, 90,807 million employed population, 8,005 million open unemployed people, 6,010 million semi-forced employed people, 24,422 million semi-voluntarily unemployed people. In 2002 the statistics show 148,730 million people of productive age, 100,779 million work forces, 91,647 million employed population, 9,132 million open unemployed people, 28,869 million semi-forced unemployed people.

The traveling trading activities done by the Minangkabau women is not similar to that of the Minangkabau men in the previous time. Those women leave their village on the basis and return in the same day. They travel to traditional markets in accordance to *hari balai* (market day) of that particular market. Every traditional market in West Sumatra as well as in Indonesia has its own scheduled market days or *hari balai*. Hence, within a week there are seven traditional markets of which those women travel to. This kind of activity is called by *manggaleh kaliliang ka pasa-pasa* (literally: traveling from market to market to trade)

This activity then becomes the Minangkabau women's routine activity. They leave for the market before dawn or before *azan subuh* (a call for prayer at dawn) in groups riding *oto cateran* (public means of transportation such as buses, mini buses, cars). Some of them also use the service of *oto langganan* (they routinely hire someone with a car or a bus to take them to their destination and bring them back home). At dusk, also in group, they travel back to their native village. *Salapeh maghrib* or approximately at 19 pm. is the earliest time for them to get home.

Most of them sell vegetables, fruits, soybean products such as tofu (bean curd) and *tempe* (fermented soybean cake). The traded commodities are derived from the family's farming in the case of vegetables and fruits, or home made productions in the case of tofu and *tempe*, or they just buy them from someone else. The amount of the commodity is not scaled in kilogram but in the amount of the container of the goods be it in the form of bags or sacks. Each woman brings minimally three bags or sacks. They pay the transportation fare based on the amount of the bags or sacks they carry. Averagely, one sack costs 2500 IDR (\$ 0.25) for the transportation fare.

In the market, they have got their own place or post to run their business. That post is commonly called as *tempek manggaleh* of which size is usually 2 meter square. In that place they sit on the floor or on a small stool or squat or *bersimpuh* (sit with knee bent and folded back to one side) while dealing with their costumers.

They recognize several marketing systems. First, they sell their goods based on their weight in kilogram or it is simply called as *kilo*. Second, there is the system of *onggok* (heaps, stacks or piles). Meaning the measurement of their goods as well as the price are based on that *onggok*. The third system is the system of *kabek* or bunch especially for vegetables. These three systems are called generally as *manjua enceran* (retailed selling).

The profit that they get from this commercial activity is heavily depended on two factors. The first factor is the grade of the expensiveness of the price of the commodities that they are selling. Meaning, during *musim harago naik* or the period where the price of the commodities skyrockets, those women will gain major profit. It is the happy time for those women travel traders. The second factor is particular events and periods which enable them to earn more profit than in the usual days like pay day time, few days before the fasting month or Ramadhan, and Islamic holidays such as Id Fitri and Id Adha. The beginning of each month is the prime time for those traders for it is the pay time for both public and private employees. Meanwhile, the profit that they gain in anticipating the Ramadhan, Id Fitri and Id Adha suggests the strong and total Islamic hold over the people of Minangkabau.

At the peak time of *musim harago naik* those women can gain more than 150.000 IDR (\$ 15) per day which enables them to save some of the money. Usually, they use that money to repair or even build a new house and purchase various luxury (sometimes) household equipments. Hence, it becomes a kind of tradition when they get more profit those women will compete with each other in terms of repairing their houses of buying various equipments for their houses. Thus, it is a common view to see permanent and well preserved houses in the *orong* of Sikaladi.

Therefore, it is proven that the change of the women occupation pattern has reduced the degree of poverty in this region. This change has also reduced the number of unemployment among women of productive age in Sikaladi. Currently, it has been noted that there are 69 woman traveling merchants in this *orong* which means 40% of the overall women population of the *orong* are traveling merchants.

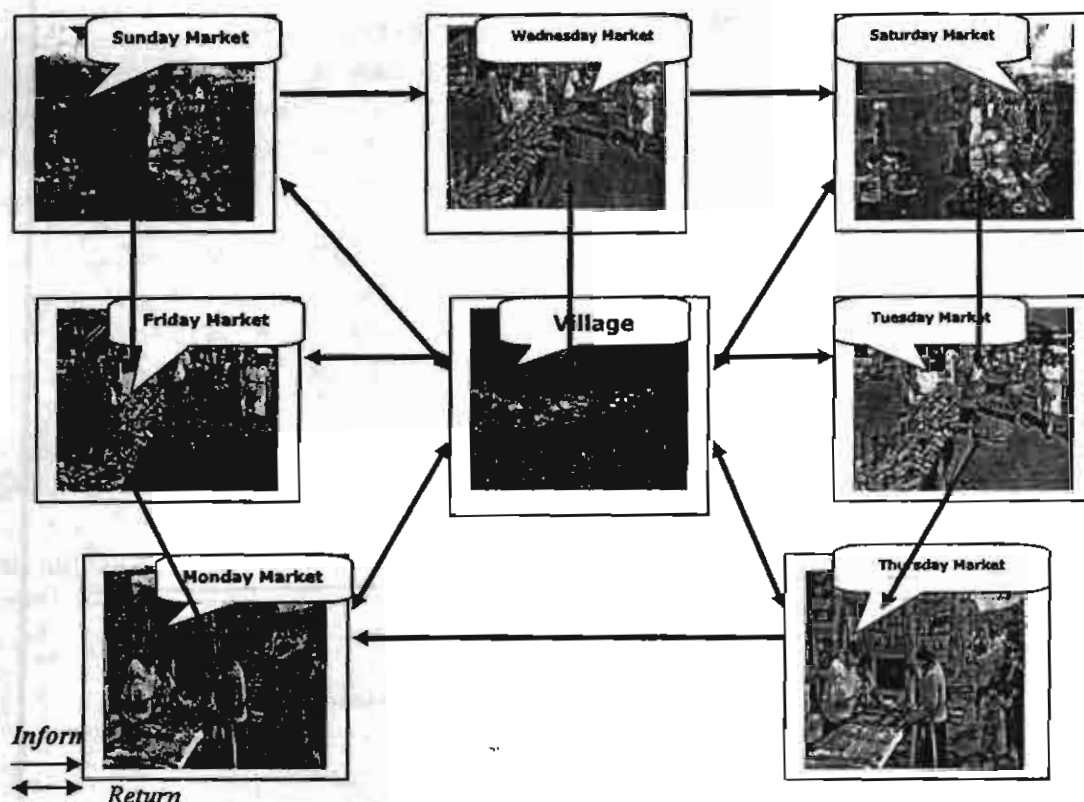


Figura: Berdagang Keliling Market to Market

### Reverse sexually labor division

This new occupation for Sikaladi women has changed the pattern of sexually labor division. Formerly, occupations for women as constituted by both customs and social constructions are bound to domestic sphere. Meanwhile, men are demanded to earn for the family in the public sphere. The shift from extended family to nuclear family which is entailed by the decline of the practice of passing down the *tanah/harta pusako tinggi* (customary property) to Minangkabau women also contributes to the changing of occupation pattern for Minangkabau women.

The extinction of *tanah/harta pusako tinggi* forces Minangkabau women to assist her husbands in their work like helping them in the paddy field. As the result, the household chores are done by the oldest daughter of the family. Meaning, a wife is a partner for her husband in terms of earning the living. At that time, engaging in agricultural activities is the main source of living.

However, totally dependent to agricultural sector in feeding the family is becoming difficult for there is a time when the price of the fertilizer climbs highly into the degree of unaffordable. Worse, at the same time, the price of the agricultural products jumps down as it is not able to cover the cost of the production. As a consequence, the Minangkabau women have to look for another job to make the end meets such as being traveling merchants. Subsequently, household chores are trusted to the oldest daughter of the family if there is any. If the children are too young to do the chores, the husband will take over the responsibility. To put it in another way, the husbands turn to be *urang rumahan* (those who stay at home). This change of occupation pattern suggests the social change where there is a reverse pattern of

appreciation. When women are in the domestic sphere, they become men's 'worshippers'. In other words, the wives should be ready with the best service they have got whenever their husbands return from their work. However, with their current occupation, the husbands are expected to serve the wives when they return from the market.

The change however does not trigger domestic conflicts. It is quite surprising for it has been prescribed socially that the responsibility to take care of the children is given to women and the responsibility in terms of economy is granted to men. In other words, this change which is contradictory to common social constructions does not affect the family's harmony.

In this context, it is proven that Karl Marx's economic determinism is at work. The sufficient earning from the activity of traveling trading which is done by the Minangkabau women does not raise any family conflicts in spite of the changing in terms of occupation pattern which is not in line with the common social constructions.

### **The Changing on the Management of the Family's Economic Asset**

Before traveling trading becomes a kind of trend in this region, the family's economic assets such agricultural land are managed by both husband and wife. Occasionally, they will have someone does particular tasks regarding the land. However, when the wives become fulltime travel trader and the husbands do most of chores at home, the land is subsequently managed by someone hired by the family. Sharing system is also widely recognized. Meaning, the owner of the land shares the profit which is gained from the harvest with those who work the land upon the previously agreed percentage. Therefore, agricultural activities are not popular anymore amongst the family of which women folk work as traveling traders.

In accordance to Minangkabau customary law, the family's asset is managed communally. There are two kinds of family's asset constituted by the customary law. The first one is the *harato kaum* or communal property which is commonly called as *harato pusako tinggi* in the form of land. This land is passed down to the oldest woman of the clan and managed communally. Importantly, the profit gained from the land is used to satisfy that clan's interest. Usually, that land is used for agricultural activities where women are in charge of the land. The customary law has constituted that it is forbidden to sell the land for it has something to do with the clan's prosperity. However, the change of the local governmental system and the passing of the Agrarian Laws in 1988 have caused the disruption to the legacy of the communal land. People begin to divide it as individual property. Worse, for the land has become individual belonging people begin to sell the customary land. The second family asset is the *harato pusako rendah* which is the asset of the nuclear family. In other words, this property is earned together by a couple of husband and wife. This land is used in accordance to the family's interest.

The *harato pusako rendah* or the nuclear family's land is commonly managed by the husband as the bread winner of the family. The wife's role is to assist the husband when it is needed. Most of the time, the wife is at home to raise the children and does household chores. Hence, the labor division in the nuclear family is clear

enough. Yet, since women begin to go to the market as traveling traders, the management of the family's economy is consequently changed as well. The husband is not the dominant manager anymore for the family has hired some one to work for the land.

This change suggests that the family's economy does not depend on the agricultural sectors anymore. Engaging in trading seems to be more promising for them, especially the woman traveling traders, can earn more money than what they earn by cultivating in their land. Thus, the occupation as farmers becomes less popular especially for the women.

Interestingly, for the family which has several adult children, the land is still a prominent source of living. Due to the availability of the men power which comprises of the father and children, that particular family works their own land without relaying to hired workers. The role of the women folk of the family which comprises of the mother or the daughter is to sell the harvest in the market.

It is a common thing for the people in the *orong* of Silakadi to have a successful harvest which results in major profit. Thing becomes better for those who work for their own land for they do not need to spend a particular amount of money to pay the hired workers. Their only expenditure is the cost of fertilizer, pesticide and agricultural equipments highly related to the crops that they cultivate. The success story of these farmers continues when the harvest time coincides with the high price of the particular crops they plant. It is a common practice that they plant a particular crop which has been predicted to have high price at the harvest time. Most importantly, the profit grows bigger for the women folk of the family know how to sell their product directly to the market without interferences from the middle man.

### **The emergence of mechanic solidarity**

In a society where most of its member travels routinely as in the case of the woman traveling merchants in the *orong* of Silakadi found a change in terms of solidarity pattern from organic to mechanic. The first thing that is responsible to this change is the significant length of the time the woman traveling traders leave their family and native village daily (from dawn to dusk) denies those women maximum chance to communicate and interact with their neighbors. Due to traveling daily (seven days a week) it is difficult for those women to keep making many social relationships which consequently responsible to the change from organic to mechanic pattern of social solidarity.

Before being active as traveling merchants, women have enormous time to interact with their society member. Most of the time, they participate in many social functions in their neighborhood. It is apparently supportive to the social dynamic which practices the pattern of organic social solidarity. However, thing changes when those women's time is spent mostly in the market.

The tradition of *batandang* (literally: visiting neighbors' houses) begins to wane as the notion of being traveling merchants hit the trends. *Batangang* facilitates the women to communicate with their neighbors and to acquire information about the



latest news or gossips in the neighborhood. The communication which occurs in the procession of *batandang* is called as *maota* (to have a chat). The topic of the chatting itself has no restraint. Most importantly, *maota* itself is the discussion forum for them.

The tradition of *maota* is not the privilege of the women folk since the men folk also practice it. Usually, the men will visit a *lapau* (a shop) to have a cup of coffee for a while before going to their rice field or farm. At this moment, the tradition of *maota* is a common view. They discuss about many things from family matters until political matters even global issues like wars or world sport events. Uniquely, this kind of gathering in the *lapau* becomes the forum to socialize the government's policy in their region. However, this tradition begins to wane along with their wives' activity as traveling merchants. The husbands now replace the wives' responsibility to take care of the children if the family's children are still young. In the morning, they have to deal with their children who want to go school or feed the toddler children that deny them the opportunity to have a cup of coffee and to have a long winding chat in the *lapau*.

The waning of this kind of communication tradition affects the already established organic social solidarity pattern. According to Durkheim and Tonnies (Johnson 1987) the interaction pattern which is practiced in the society is an important factor to the existence of solidarity in a society. Moreover, communication is a kind of interaction which is responsible to bearing a strong bonding amongst the member of the society. The change in the tradition of communication has a great role in transforming the organic solidarity pattern to the mechanic solidarity pattern as evident is the waning of the tradition of mutual aid within the society.

## THE ADAPTATION OF CITY LIFESTYLE BY THE VILLAGE DWELLERS

Trading brings more prosperity to the economy of the family which enables the family to have a life style. It is evident when the newly emerging 'rich' families begin to build a 'better' house in a sense of wood houses are replaced with stone houses and the adoption of modern and western architecture for their houses. For an instance, formerly, the kitchen and the bathroom are detached from the main building. Currently, those parts have been integrated into one building.

The change of the architecture of the house into a 'modern' one is entailed with the purchasing of more modern house hold equipments as well. Cooking using wood to make fire in a hearth has become obsolete. Kerosene or gas stoves hit the trends. The usage of kitchen cabinet to store the cooking equipments has also become a new trend. A television set is a must in the living room of the family house. As the result, the household equipments advertisements storm into the family's domain which generates the consumerism lifestyle. A refrigerator which is formerly not a necessity has become a new demand for an instance. These new and modern kitchen utensils and household equipments become the kind of barometer for the family's prestige. Consequently, the profit gained from trading is spent carelessly on these stuffs instead of investing it for a better future. Besides, wearing precious jewelries for the women and following the current trend in terms of fashion also suggest the family's prestige. It is noted that people has left the tradition of sitting on the floor while having break fast, lunch or dinner to a favor of a set of modern dining table.

Interestingly, they are also affected by the worldwide campaigned advertisements of being beauty means being slim as the teenagers begin to practice diet. In short, the change of the life style is at work.

In this context it can be understood that there is a significant relationship between the economy of the family with their life style. Their new profession as traveling merchants in fact has prospered that family which is responsible for the change of the life style. In this case, Karl Marx is right when he predicted that economy is the changing agent of tradition. The ownership of economic facilities has brought a new life style for a group of people. The new lifestyle unavoidably brings the culture consumerism. Yet, it uplifts the prestige amongst the society members. As the result, they choose to be consumerist to keep their prestige. Thus, the city lifestyle has been adopted by the village dwellers.

### **THE NEW AWARENESS TOWARD THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION**

Education in Indonesia is a kind luxury enjoyed by those who have strong economic power. It is commonly know that the education cost in this country is comparatively high and for some is unaffordable. During the 1997 economic crisis, girls who cannot continue their study due to economic restriction assist their mothers in the market. Meaning, they are the bread winner of the family as well.

Interestingly, people's perception towards education turns into a more positive mood. Formerly, education is regarded as the government's programs which will only waste money despite the family's ability to send their children to school. This perception is responsible to the practice of children commodification. Meaning, children are measured as economic property for they are assigned to help their parents economically. Yet, the new economic boom as the result of traveling trading activities which is conducted by the women has changed that perception.

In 2000 girls of basic education age stop helping their mother as full time traveling merchants. The newly established family's income enables them to continue their study. Besides, the ability to send the children to attend higher educational institutions like university either public or private one has become the symbol of prosperity and prestige as well as paving the way for the better future for the children. They believe that attending universities will help their children to land in high prestige jobs with generous salary.

This betterment in terms of economy in the *lorong* of Sikaladi is seen as the main factor that accelerates the improvement in the education sector. It is evident as the statistics show that in 2005 there were 12 children who could not continue their study, yet in 2006 the number reduced into 4 children. Thus, it is clear that along with the newly acquired prosperity, the family's quality of education is significantly improved.

## CONCLUSION

The radical change of Minangkabau women's role is the direct effect of the demise of the practice of passing down the *harato pusako tinggi* to the women of the clan. As a result, the Minangkabau women are denied their cultural role as the manager of the communal land. Subsequently, those women and their husbands have to work hard to feed the family. Moreover, the formation of nuclear family is also responsible to the division of labor which is based on sex.

In 1997, Asia was hit by economic crisis and Indonesia was hit most severely which causes this nation was shrouded by poverty. This structural poverty lowers the people's quality of life, especially in villages. It was difficult for farmers at that time to cope with the skyrocketing price of fertilizer and agricultural equipments. Worse, the prices of the agricultural crops jumped down so that they suffered great lose. This circumstance makes women try hard to make the end meets. Hence, being traveling merchants is the best choice of the time to keep the family from the grip of continuous poverty. Most importantly, the involvement of women as traveling merchants is also responsible to other changes in Minangkabau social system.

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