



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN NEWSPAPER REPORTING:
THE COVERAGE OF VISION SCHOOL BY
THREE MALAYSIAN DAILIES**

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FBMK 2003 5

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By

YANG LAI FONG, NICOLE

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,
Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Master of Science**

April 2003



DEDICATION

This thesis is especially dedicated to Ikeda Sensei, my family and friends who have been giving me lots of support, advice and encouragement in my studies.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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Chairperson: Dr. Narimah Ismail

Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This research was conducted to examine the coverage on Vision School by the different language dailies to better understand their role in promoting social integration. The daily newspaper with the largest circulation was chosen from the three main language streams. The three dailies chosen were Utusan Malaysia, a daily in Bahasa Malaysia or the national language, The Star, an English language daily, and Sin Chew Jit Poh, a Chinese language daily. Content analysis was used in this research. A sub-sample of a "constructed week" was created for an in-depth analysis and a total of 68 news items were qualified for analysis in this study. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social

Science (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were employed in descriptive analysis.

This study discovered that three of the dailies did not play an active role in promoting social integration in their coverage of Vision School. This study found very little evidence that the dailies tried to provide collective representations, which is the social symbols to promote cohesion and solidarity. The coverage by the three dailies also did not increase the degree of consensus or common assent that is necessary to sustain an integrated social system

This study recommended that the Vision School issue should be given equal coverage by all the major language newspapers because it is not an issue of race and ethnicity but of education. All newspapers must provide neutral coverage on the Vision School issue irrespective of the language of the newspapers because the function of the press is to inform and not to judge. This study also recommended that all news articles should aim at promoting social integration, intercultural understanding and tolerance. Newspapers should utilize and develop the specific potentialities of media to offer experiences and stimulate the imagination, thus affording opportunities for empathy, involvement and amusement.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk mendapatkan Ijazah Master Sains.

**INTEGRASI SOSIAL DALAM BERITA SURATKHABAR:
LIPUTAN MENGENAI SEKOLAH WAWASAN OLEH
TIGA AKHBAR HARIAN MALAYSIA**

Oleh

YANG LAI FONG, NICOLE
April 2003

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Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menjelaskan peranan akhbar dalam pemupukan integrasi sosial melalui liputan mereka mengenai Sekolah Wawasan. Kajian ini adalah berdasarkan penelitian laporan akhbar dari tiga sumber bahasa yang berbeza. Analisis kandungan akhbar digunakan dalam kajian ini melalui akhbar yang paling banyak diedarkan, iaitu akhbar berbahasa Melayu, Utusan Malaysia; akhbar berbahasa Inggeris, The Star dan akhbar berbahasa Cina, Sin Chew Jit Poh. Data-data dari “minggu terbina” disediakan sebagai sub sample untuk dianalisis dengan lebih mendalam. Justeru, sebanyak 68 artikel berita yang didapati sesuai dipilih untuk dianalisis sebagai data kajian ini. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Kekerapan dan peratusan digunakan dalam analisis deskriptif.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa laporan ketiga-tiga akhbar tersebut kurang menitikberatkan peranan untuk memupuk integrasi sosial melalui liputan mereka mengenai Sekolah Wawasan. Didapati terlalu sedikit bukti yang dapat menunjukkan akhbar-akhbar tersebut menerapkan symbol sosial yang boleh memupuk perpaduan. Laporan ketiga-tiga akhbar juga kurang menonjolkan peranan untuk meningkatkan persefahaman yang diperlukan untuk mengekalkan system integrasi sosial.

Kajian ini mencadangkan agar laporan tentang isu Sekolah Wawasan perlulah diberi pertimbangan yang sama oleh semua akhbar daripada aliran bahasa utama. Ini disebabkan isu ini bukan isu antara kaum tetapi merupakan isu pendidikan. Semua akhbar perlu bersikap neutral dalam membuat laporan kerana akhbar berfungsi sebagai penyalur maklumat bukan mengadili mana-mana pihak. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan agar semua artikel berita mesti bermatlamatkan pemupukan integrasi sosial, persefahaman di antara kebudayaan yang berbeza dan toleransi antara kaum. Akhbar juga perlulah menggunakan potensi sebagai perantara dengan masyarakat agar mereka dapat berkongsi pengalaman dan menjana minda untuk membentuk persefahaman antara satu sama lain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Life is a journey, not a destination' said a wise man. This saying is most apt in describing the trials, tribulations and joys that I have gone through in the preparation and completion of this thesis. This amazing journey has not only made me a better student but a stronger person.

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the great help from several people

First and foremost, I want to offer my gratitude to Dr. Narimah Ismail for her tremendous kindness and undying patience in guiding me through this whole process. It would not have been possible without her

Special thanks also go out to Prof. Madya Dr. Hj. Musa Abu Hassan and En. Ishak Abdul Hamid for their truly valuable advice and tutelage. Learning from them has been an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life.

I also want to say thank you to two special friends who have helped me in the writing of this thesis. Melissa Lee, a kind soul who has selflessly edited my thesis promptly and faultlessly. Kit Yeen, who helped

me as the second coder in this study even when she was experiencing the most difficult times in her career and studies

Lastly, infinite thanks to one person A man who has showered me with love and understanding, who has supported and encouraged me through my times of great pain and who has shared in my joy The completion of this thesis is a testament to his strength This is for you
Wai Mun

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|------------------|------|
| DEDICATION | II |
| ABSTRACT | III |
| ABSTRAK | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | vii |
| APPROVALS | ix |
| DECLARATION FORM | xi |
| LIST OF TABLES | xv |

CHAPTER

| | | |
|----|--|----|
| I | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | Background of the Study | 2 |
| | Statement of Problem | 6 |
| | Objectives of the Study | 8 |
| | Significance of the Study | 8 |
| | Limitations of the Study | 10 |
| II | LITERATURE REVIEW | 12 |
| | Social Integration | 12 |
| | Malaysian Pluralism and Its Implications on Social Integration | 15 |
| | The Malay Society | 16 |
| | The Chinese Society | 18 |
| | The Indian Society | 21 |
| | The Economic System | 24 |
| | Implications of Malaysian Pluralism on Social Integration | 28 |
| | Mass Media Ownership and Control | 30 |
| | State-controlled Media System | 31 |
| | Government-directed or Government-sanctioned Media System | 32 |
| | Independent Media System | 33 |
| | The Role and Responsibilities of Mass Media | 35 |
| | Political Function | 37 |
| | Educational Function | 38 |
| | Utility Function | 39 |
| | Social Function | 40 |
| | The Role of Mass Media in Social Integration | 42 |



| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| | Newspaper in Malaysia | 46 |
| | English Language Newspapers | 47 |
| | Chinese Language Newspapers | 51 |
| | Malay Language Newspapers | 54 |
| | Alternative Newspapers | 57 |
| | Opposition Newspapers | 58 |
| | Online Newspapers | 60 |
| | Education Reporting Before and After Independence | 62 |
| | The Structure of Broadcasting in Malaysia | 67 |
| | Application of Theories of the Press in Malaysia | 71 |
| | Press Policy and Legal Framework in Malaysia | 74 |
| | Press Ownership in Malaysia | 77 |
| | The Use of Mass Media for Social Integration in Malaysia | 79 |
| | Summary for Literature Review | 84 |
| III | METHODOLOGY | 87 |
| | Sampling | 88 |
| | Measurements | 90 |
| | Source of Information | 91 |
| | Categories of Topics | 92 |
| | Direction of the Overall Article Coverage | 93 |
| | Function of the Press | 95 |
| | Coding Instructions | 96 |
| | Inter-coder Reliability | 97 |
| | Data Analysis | 98 |
| IV | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION | 99 |
| | Extent of Coverage | 99 |
| | Number of News Articles | 100 |
| | Types of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 102 |
| | Locations of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 103 |
| | Sizes of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 104 |
| | Relevancy of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 106 |
| | Sources of Information Used in the News Articles by the Three Dailies | 107 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| | Topics Covered in the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 110 |
| | Directions of the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 115 |
| | Functions Played by the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 116 |
| | Summary for Findings and Discussion | 119 |
| V | SUMMARY, CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATION | 122 |
| | Summary of Research | 122 |
| | Summary of Findings | 125 |
| | Conclusion | 128 |
| | Recommendation | 129 |
| | Suggestion for Further Research | 130 |
| | REFERENCES | 133 |
| | APPENDICES | |
| A | List of Media in Malaysia | 147 |
| B | List of News Articles of a "Constructed Week" | 153 |
| C | Code Book | 163 |
| | BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH | 168 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 1 | Percentage of News Articles that Fulfilled the “30%-Relevant” Rule in the “Constructed Week” | 100 |
| 2 | Percentage of Types of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 102 |
| 3 | Distribution of News Articles in the Three Dailies by Location | 103 |
| 4 | Percentage of Sizes of News Articles Coverage in the Three Dailies | 105 |
| 5 | Percentage of Relevancy of News Articles in the Three Dailies | 106 |
| 6 | Percentage of Sources of Information Used in the News Articles by the Three Dailies | 108 |
| 7 | Percentage of Topic Covered in the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 110 |
| 8 | Percentage of Articles According to Directions of the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 115 |
| 9 | Percentage of Articles According to Functions of the News Articles in the Three Dailies | 117 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a fast developing country on the road to become a fully industrialized country. It is a former British colony of 21,793,293 people and is diversified by ethnic origins, languages and religions. According to 2001 population figures, Malaysia is made up of 58% Malays, 26% Chinese, 7% Indians and 9% "others" (Selva, 2001).

As mentioned by sociologists (Drake, 1992, Guest and Stamm, 1993, König, 1999), cultural diversity is a major source of social conflict and political debate. This is because a multicultural society lacked the ability to rely on shared values to moderate and regulate the conflicts. Therefore, cultural diversity in Malaysia has led to massive misunderstanding and generated unnecessary tension in the country, such as the May Thirteenth tragedy that occurred on 13th May 1969 and the *Kampung Medan* clashes that occurred in March 2001.

The Malaysian government has continuously tried to implement programmes and ideals that promote racial harmony and the Malaysian identity. This includes "Wawasan 2020". In 1991, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysia Prime Minister, announced *Wawasan 2020*, or Vision 2020.

at the inauguration of the Malaysia Business Council (MBC) He has made it the most important event that encouraged open debate on the question of "national identity" (Karthigesu 1998) The announcement of Vision 2020 was motivated by a number of reasons, one of which is the concern to create a united Malaysian nation Dr Mahathir feels that the political challenge of creating a united nation is greater and more critical compared to the economic challenge of becoming a modern society Hence, he wishes to create a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and in full and fair partnership made up of one *Bangsa Malaysia* or a Malaysia Nation (Zawawi, 1998)

Another programme that has been initiated by the Malaysian government to promote racial harmony and social integration is the Vision School Project However, its implementation has aroused major debate and suspicion of its objective

Background of the Study

The Malaysian government announced the Vision School plan in 2000 Vision School is a concept where national Chinese and Tamil schools are situated close to each other within the same compound and share common facilities like the canteen and school field Under the plan

the integration program was meant to allow schools within the same vicinity to hold activities together. The three schools will regularly take turns to organize curricular and co-curricular activities such as sporting events, debate, education camp and parent-teacher gathering.

The Malaysian government views Vision School as a noble concept. This is because the Vision School will provide an opportunity to nurture the children of all races to live in unity at a young age. It also teaches the children of various races, religions and beliefs to respect one another and live in peace and harmony (Gerald, 2001).

However, The Chinese Education Movement (Dong Jiao Zhong) (the joint United Chinese Schools Committees' Association and the United Chinese School Teachers' Association) had rejected the Vision School concept until clear guidelines in writing were agreed upon. Its rejection was on the ground that it would precipitate the erosion of the language and identity of Chinese vernacular schools. Dong Jiao Zhong also toured around the country to report and exchange views with the Chinese community on the topic "The Crisis of Vision School". The debate was eventually extended beyond the pages of the newspapers as it aroused a lot of controversy and public indignation in the Chinese community. It evokes a heated discussion on sensitive topics such as the

1961 Education Act, government's hidden agenda behind the plan, government's unfair policy and treatment of the Chinese race and its incisive criticism of political leaders

Lok Teng Yu, the Vice-Chairman of United Chinese School Teachers' Association said that they have a very basic reason to object the Vision School. It was because they know that the government intended to change Chinese and Tamil primary school into the national-type primary school, where Bahasa Malaysia is used as the medium of instruction (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 24 October 2000)

During his tour around the country, Wong Sau Kun, the Chairman of United Chinese School Teachers' Association also complained that the Chinese have never received any fair treatment from the government. He complained that the government criticized the Chinese for not trusting the Vision School plan but they have never made any effort to find out the reason for the distrust. Wong said that the total loss of identity when Chinese secondary school changed into national-type secondary school during the 60's has given the Chinese a very painful experience. They have looked into the problem cautiously this time and must defend Chinese mother tongue education (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 8 November 2000)

In response to Dong Jiao Zhong's rejection, Dr Mahathir expressed his disappointment and reminded the movement that the education system in China could not be applied in Malaysia (Utusan Malaysia, 8 November 2000). The Malaysian government also decided to proceed with the Vision School project despite protests from certain quarters. Nine Vision Schools will be built in the country by the middle of 2002, including in Subang Jaya (Selangor), Johor Jaya (Johor) and Lumut (Perak). These Vision Schools, which will begin their first session in 2003, will cater to 8,000 students, most of them starting in Standard One.

Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, the Education Minister felt that there is no point to discuss with the Dong Jiao Zhong as they don't agree with the whole project. The government do not need Dong Jiao Zhong's support to implement the Vision School plan, neither would the government force them to join (Utusan Malaysia, 8 November 2000).

The UMNO Youth also criticized the Dong Jiao Zhong for being chauvinistic. They criticized the movement for obstructing the noble process of social integration, which they claimed, would benefit the whole nation (Utusan Malaysia, 10 November 2000).

Statement of Problem

In an effort towards the integration of the societies, mass communication is often stressed as an important tool. In this regard, the media is expected to function as a change agent, which can help to educate each subgroup and transform the traditionally segmented and divided society into a cohesive and integrated one where differences no longer become sources of conflict (Schramm, 1964). In addition, daily newspapers have also long been considered as one of the best sources for interesting and thorough information on local events (Culbertson, 1997, Gower, 1995, Yu, 1996).

Newspapers in Malaysia are published in different languages to cater for the respective major ethnic groups. The newspapers play a very important role in the ethnic society and their approaches to problems are different. According to Samad (1991), this is because each ethnic has a different living standard, economic development and progress.

Therefore, a study on the coverage of the different language daily newspapers on Vision School seems especially important to determine the role played by these newspapers in promoting social integration. The dailies chosen in this study are Utusan Malaysia, a newspaper in Bahasa

Malaysia or the national language, The Star to represent the English language newspapers and Sin Chew Jit Poh to represent the Chinese language newspapers

Considering the role played by the different language dailies in their respective ethnic groups, the following research questions were raised

- 1 How extensively was the Vision School issue covered by the Malay, English and Chinese language dailies?
- 2 What was the source of information used by the different language dailies in reporting the Vision School issue?
- 3 What were the topics focused by the different language dailies in reporting Vision School?
- 4 What was the content direction of the coverage? Was it supportive, neutral, or critical?
- 5 What was the function performed by the news articles in the three different language dailies? Was it political, educational, utility or social?

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine the coverage on Vision School by the different language dailies to better understand their role in promoting social integration.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the extent of coverage on Vision School by Malay, English and Chinese language dailies;
2. To determine the source of information used by the dailies in reporting the Vision School issue;
3. To determine the topics focused by the dailies in reporting Vision School,
4. To determine the content direction of the coverage of Vision School in Malay, English and Chinese language dailies.
5. To determine the function performed by the news coverage, whether it is political, educational, utility or social

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide useful information about Vision School objectively. The findings in this study contribute to the

better understanding of the government's objective and policy in promoting the Vision School concept. It will also help the government to better understand the reasons behind the objections to the Vision School concept. It is hoped that the findings will give the government an insight on the standpoint and needs of the Chinese community. This study will definitely benefit both the government and Chinese community by improving their strained relationship on the Vision School issue. It is hoped that this will help both parties to achieve mutual understanding and foster the Chinese's awareness of social integration.

Results of this study can also benefit the media practitioners, planners and decision-makers. It may give them an indication as how the race-related or controversial material should be handled to promote goodwill, multiracial cooperation and social integration. This study will recommend some new approaches and strategies that the media need to look into as to meet the ongoing challenge and demand of social integration in this country. Through this study, it is hoped to foster the media's awareness to evaluate, revise and make appropriate changes of their role in promoting social integration.

This study will highlight the different approaches and orientation taken by the different language dailies in reporting the Vision School