

The

MALAYSIAN

Way of

LIFE



Edited by
Julian C. H. Lee

09595
THE

...cy-one insightful and sometimes humorous articles that
reveal the deeper aspects of Malaysian culture and politics.



“Lee’s anthology of essays may not completely demystify, but certainly illuminate contemporary Malaysian culture, society and politics. Here, Malaysia’s depths are plumbed and ironies uncovered by a notable and notably international and perspicacious assembly of writers. The essays are engaging and are accompanied by contrapuntal jewels among the commentaries.”

E. Douglas Lewis
Anthropologist, The University of Melbourne

“What passes for Malaysian politics is unfortunately a combination of oft-repeated half-truths (which, because partly true, tends to be believed), facilitated by both the mainstream media and the so-called alternative press of the Internet. Contained in this volume are careful observations and informed opinions of the country, many by scholars and researchers trained to be impartial, that cast another light on the burning issues of our time.”

Jason Tan
Editor, Off The Edge magazine

All articles featured in this book were first published in *Off The Edge* magazine between 2008 and 2009.

Image of the *wau* on the cover is the copyrighted property of 123ROYALTYFREE and is being used with permission under license. This image may not be copied or downloaded without permission from 123ROYALTYFREE.

**© 2010 Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd
(General & Reference Publishing)**

Published by Marshall Cavendish Editions
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Request for permission should be addressed to the Publisher, Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd (General & Reference Publishing) (3024-D), Times Subang, Lot 46, Persiaran Teknologi Subang, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.
Tel: (603) 5628 6888, Fax: (603) 5635 2706. Email: cchong@my.marshallcavendish.com.
Online bookstore: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref.

The Publisher makes no representation or warranties with respect to the contents of this book, and specifically disclaims any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no event be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:

Marshall Cavendish Ltd. 5th Floor, 32/38 Saffron Road, London EC1N 8FH, United Kingdom • Marshall Cavendish Corporation. 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591-9001 • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited. Times Centre, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196

Marshall Cavendish is a trademark of Times Publishing Limited

National Library of Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

The Malaysian way of life / edited by Julian C. H. Lee

ISBN 978-983-3845-22-4

1. Culture--Malaysia. 2. Malaysia--Social life and customs.
 3. Malaysia--Politics and government. I. Lee, Julian C. H.
- 306.09595

Printed in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd, Lot 25, Rawang Integrated Industrial Park, 48000 Rawang, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

306.09595

TUE

The MALAYSIAN Way of LIFE



Edited by
Julian C. H. Lee

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1007762

Marsilia Cavendish
Editions



CONTENTS

Introduction	8
About This Book	9

PART 1: CULTURE

1.1 Where is the Audience? An ‘Anti-audience’ Study of Malay-language Cinema	14
by Gordon Gray	
Comment: On Watching and Teaching Malaysian Cinema	18
by Benjamin McKay	
1.2 Listen to the Sound of the Azan: Independent Malaysian Films Undoing Racialisation	22
by Khoo Gaik Cheng	
Comment: Islam and the Reimagining of Malaysia	26
by Sven Alexander Schottmann	
1.3 On <i>Malaysia Boleh!</i>	28
by Melissa Wong	
Comment: The Insignificant Moment at the Cinema	30
by Michael Billig	
1.4 \$#@% <i>mak!</i>: The Oil in the Multicultural Machine	32
by Yeoh Seng Guan	
Comment: Deep Play with the Forbidden	36
by Gerd Baumann	



	Comment: Don't Take it 'Easy' in Indonesia	37
	by Amir Muhammad	
1.5	How Come-lah?	39
	by Julian C. H. Lee	
	Comment: Slippery Particles	42
	by Lawrence Schourup	
1.6	The Common Wellness	45
	by Thomas Williamson	
	Comment: Health and Globalisation	49
	by Sofia Anthi Vougioukalou	
1.7	United States and Malaysian Students: Encounters in Modernity	53
	by Patricia Sloane-White	
	Comment: When Indonesians Study Overseas	62
	by John Mansford Prior	
1.8	Learning About Orang Asli	65
	by Robert Knox Dentan	
	Comment: Indigenous Peoples in the Popular Consciousness	69
	by Miguel Alexiades	
1.9	Eating One's Way Through Fieldwork: Reflections on Food and (Malaysian) Sociality	73
	by Liana Chua	
	Comment: Feasting with Spirits in Isan	78
	by Richard Sutcliffe	
1.10	We Are What We Eat: Between Pleasure and Ethics	85
	by Khoo Gaik Cheng	
	Comment: Cosmological Pork	91
	by David Butterworth	

	Comment: Eating as a Total Social Fact	92
	by Gillian G. Tan	
1.11	Durian and Wine: Not So Different	95
	by Julian C. H. Lee	
	Comment: Durian and Wine ... and Beer!	99
	by Roger Just	
PART 2: POLITICS		
2.1	Malaysia: A Very Particular Multiculturalism	106
	by Steve Fenton	
	Comment: Policies to Reduce Horizontal Inequalities—What We Learn from the Malaysian Experience	113
	by Frances Stewart	
2.2	Looking Back: From 1969 to 2008	117
	by Clive Kessler	
2.3	Living on the Horizon of the Everlasting Present	126
	by Richard Baxstrom	
	Comment: Infinitising the Present	131
	by Maree Pardy	
2.4	The Politics of Theme Parks	134
	by Gerhard Hoffstaedter	
	Comment: Poking Fun at Malaysians	138
	by Jerome Kugan	
2.5	National Pride and Foreign Influences: The Evolution of Mosque Design in Malaysia and Indonesia	139
	by Kees van Dijk	

Comment: Representations and Aspirations	146
by Julian C. H. Lee	
2.6 'Against the Order of Nature'	149
by Julian C. H. Lee	
Comment: Lessons from Nature?	153
by Roger Lancaster	
Comment: Tracing Intolerance	153
by tan beng hui	

PART 3 : RECOLLECTIONS

3.1 What Does It Mean to be Poor Among the Orang Asli?	158
by Alberto G. Gomes	
3.2 Secularism, Religion and Mysticism in the Malay World	164
by Joel S. Kahn	
3.3 Langkawi Connections	173
by Janet Carsten	
3.4 Protest Demonstrations Then and Now: Malaysia in the Mid-seventies	177
by Bill Watson	
About the Authors	183
Glossary	188
List of Photographs	192

Introduction

There is so much to like about Malaysia and Malaysians. Visitors often remark on the balmy weather, which permits long evenings spent outside at food stalls, eating what is quite possibly the region's tastiest food and drinking *limau ais* (iced lime drink), *kopi-o* (coffee without milk) or the famous *teh tarik* (tea made with condensed milk). And there is also an easy and often playful camaraderie amongst friends and acquaintances who may come from any number of ethnic communities. Indeed, the array of ethnic groups to be found in Malaysia means that the tourism slogan, *Malaysia, Truly Asia*, is not entirely vacuous.

Much of what visitors are charmed by, and what many Malaysians get homesick for when they are overseas, are the smaller aspects of social and cultural life. From the frequent use of the word *lah*, to the jocular mocking of Malaysia's obsession with often quirky world records, much of what is endearing in Malaysian life is often taken for granted by Malaysians themselves. And similarly, when social scientists come to study and describe Malaysia, such aspects are often ignored.

There is, however, one social science that makes a specialty of interrogating the minutiae of everyday life—anthropology. *Anthropos* being Greek for human being, anthropology is the study of humankind. However, it is more commonly described as the study of culture. In the past, anthropologists tended to study small-scale societies outside of their home countries. Nowadays, anthropologists often study communities in urban areas and large cities. But what continues to be the principal demarcation of anthropology from other social sciences such as its cousin, sociology, is the research method of participant-observation.

In short, participant-observation involves prolonged periods of immersion in the day-to-day lives of the community of interest. During this time, the anthropologist simultaneously observes and participates in the community's activities. It can be very challenging at a personal level for the anthropologist for he/she is often separated from his/her family and friends for long periods and has to spend painful hours learning skills that