

**A CASE STUDY ON THE REPRESENTATION OF CHINESE
CHARACTERS IN *29 FEBRUARI* AND *OLA BOLA***

By

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ABSTRACT

A CASE STUDY ON THE REPRESENTATION OF CHINESE CHARACTERS IN *29 FEBRUARI* AND *OLA BOLA*

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This research aimed to achieve two key objectives: 1) Select and review two Malaysian films, and 2) Study the Chinese characters found in the two chosen Malaysian films. A qualitative research using textual analysis was used to read text from the two chosen films which were *29 Februari* and *Ola Bola*. The Constructivist Discourse Analysis view was adopted with Stuart Hall's approach towards media representation serving as a guide to read film text. Hall affirmed that there are no true fixed meaning to a message as representations are constitutive of an event and can change according to its form. *Mise-en-scene* was deployed to collect, analyse, and interpret data from the chosen films. The research focused on the main and selected Chinese characters of the chosen films. These characters were analysed to identify any assigned stereotypes or themes in the chosen films. Several themes were found ranging from the portrayal of wealth disparity among Chinese characters, a focus on a patriarchal Chinese society, Chinese's ability to speak other languages, and also being Chinese portrayed as comedic relief characters. This research further substantiated existing arguments by other researchers that Chinese characters in Malaysian films are subjected to stereotypical portrayals in films. Moreover, interracial differences were used to create conflict in the chosen films. That said,

the representation of Chinese characters in the chosen films suggests the filmmaker's willingness to acknowledge these stereotypes and using them to create future discussions on these stereotypes as the Chinese characters in both films, while being subjected to stereotypical portrays, did end up with positive character growth in the chosen films. Beyond the analysis of Chinese characters, future research should focus on other races in Malaysia in order to provide a holistic view towards the representation of characters in Malaysian films.

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APPROVAL SHEET

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I understand that the University will upload a softcopy of my dissertation in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,



(BEH KAY HIENG)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FINAS National Film Development Corporation Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The cinematic experiences of film do more than entertain the masses. According to Zhou (2007), the political theorist Vladimir Lenin argued the film medium-when used by socialist cultural workers, can be a powerful weapon for educating people. That said, what we watch on the big screen does teach us a thing or two about how we perceive life around us.

Ciecko (2006) suggested that “cinematic reflexive narrative moments where characters actually see themselves on screen can offer an insight into the ways films function culturally or at least the ways movies imagine they do” (p. 1). To a certain extent of her understanding, film acts as a two-way mirror between the audience and characters on screen. What we watch on film can explain how we see ourselves as a part of society. Our mannerisms and actions may be reflected by the portrayal of characters on screen who are essentially, carrying our beliefs and thoughts on screen.

Hollywood blockbusters remain to be a staple in Malaysian cinema, asserting its ideologies in the minds of Malaysians audiences. In terms of ticket sales, one of the highest grossing films to be shown in Malaysian cinemas was

2015's "*Furious 7*"; part of the *Fast and Furious* franchise which managed to gross over RM60 million in ticket sales (Box Office Mojo, 2018). In comparison, the highest grossing Malaysian film to date was 2018's "*Hantu Kak Limah 3*" that managed to gross over RM20.5mil in ticket collection in just 11 days upon its premiere ("*Hantu Kak Limah*' makes history", 2018).

That said, there is certainly no shortage of home-grown films as Asia is regarded as "the most prolific producer of cinematic fictions that have captured audience's attention around the world" (Ciecko, 2006). Malaysian filmmakers do have a say on the national identity and culture as depicted in their work. Hence, their films that end up on the big screen should serve as a reminder of our heritage and history.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Malaysian film industry is widely criticised to churn out films that take on a homogenous, simplistic and shallow view of society.

Van der Heide (2002 as cited in Ciecko, 2006) argued that heterogeneity in Malaysian film is directed at a single ethnic community, namely the Malays. Hence, representation of the Chinese, Indian, Kadazan, and Iban; four other major racial groups in "Malay films" are usually very low. For example, 2018's "*Hantu Kak Limah 3*" featured an exclusively Malay cast and characters despite being produced by Infinitus Entertainment; a Malaysian-based film production

house founded by Hong Kong actor Andy Lau, and Malaysian Datuk Seri Robin Tan (“Andy Lau in high spirits”, 2018); both of whom are of Chinese descent. The horror comedy, also known as the third movie of the “*Hantu Kak Limah*” trilogy follows the misadventures of its titular character *Kak Limah* as her sudden death caused chaos among the people close to her.

In addition, the second highest grossing Malaysian film was 2017’s “*Abang Long Fadil 2*” which managed to achieve over RM18 million in ticket sales (National Film Development Corporation Malaysian, 2018), also featured a homogenous cast and characters of Malays with little or no screen time of characters of other Malaysian races. The 2017 action-comedy film that revolved around the missteps of its titular character Fadil as he manoeuvred through the local crime network. The two films mentioned above suggests the idea that the Malay audience who represent the majority of Malaysian movie-goers are receptive towards films catering to their racial profile.

1.2.1 Homogeneity of Malay films

Looking back at Malaysian film history, films produced following Malaysia’s independence on August 31, 1957 were often used as a voice for “many young Malaysians striving to find new formats to express their dreams and wishes” (Barnard, 2009). According to Mutalib (2007), Malays as defined by the 1957 Constitution are those who follows Malay customs, speaks Malay and professes Islam.

Films by director P. Ramlee from the 1950s to the 1970s were aimed at a predominantly Malay audience featuring a Malay-centric cast (Driskell, 2016) with the exception of the 1968 film “*Gerimis*”, which featured an Indian female lead. His take on film-making did not stray far from the direction of two major film studios in the nation at that time namely Shaw Brothers Malay Film Production and Cathay Keris that started its operations back in the 1950s. Much of the Malay films featuring Malay actors and Malay language during that period were used to showcase local customs and people while doing little to promote a nationalist message (Barnard, 2009). Goffman (1974 as cited in Baran & Davis, 2014) argued that the media can elaborate and reinforce a dominant public culture. In this context, films that consist of an entirely Malay cast could lead audiences to assume that such positioning of culture is one that reflects the existence of only a single dominant race in Malaysia.

Fast forward to the present, many Malaysian films still follow a homogenous take on local film production featuring an all Malay cast. Aside from “*Hantu Kak Limah 3*” and “*Abang Long Fadil 2*”, 2015’s *Polis EVO*, which grossed over RM17 million in ticket sales (National Film Development Corporation Malaysian, 2018); making it the third highest grossing Malaysian film of all time featured an all Malay cast despite having Joel Soh, a Chinese writer and producer on its production team. Baran and Davis (2014) argued that the media could alter how we view ourselves and our relationship to others. In this instance, the perceived reality to a homogenous society could leave little room for racial tolerance if one is to assume everyone in Malaysia is of the same race or creed.

1.2.2 Portrayal of Chinese characters in Malaysian films

Although historically, the racial riots in May 1969 forced national unity to be top priority in nation building, and broadcasting touted to be the nation's unification agent (McDaniel, 1994), the Malaysian film industry continued to produce film according to its racial audiences. Blockbuster films in the 1990s by Malay film makers such as Yusuf Haslam's 1996 film "*Maria Mariana I*" and 1998 sequel "*Maria Mariana II*" featured an all Malays cast.

In retrospective, Malaysian Chinese filmmakers are seen emulating such practices with an all Chinese cast such as Tan Kheng Seong also known as Ah Niu's 2010 comedy "*Ice Kacang Puppy Love*" or Chiu Keng Guan's 2014 film "*The Journey*" that casted a Caucasian male lead among a predominantly Chinese cast.

In most Malay films post-1950s especially those by director P. Ramlee, minorities of other ethnicity such as Chinese and Indians were not present on screen (Kahn, 2001); its non-existence being the basis of little to no stereotype or racialisation of non-Malay characters in films. While it is argued that "national unity and integration has been and continues to be an important agenda in Malaysia because the country is multiracial and race related issues keep on emerging," (Tamam, 2010), efforts to highlight national integration in Malaysian films has been far and few.

Teck Tan's 2000 film "*Spinning Gasing*" is a millennial Malaysian film which is a departure from the traditional homogeneous cast by featuring main actors of different races and speaking in Manglish, a Malaysian speaking style of English which includes the nuances of local dialects (Van der Heide, 2002 as cited in Ciecko, 2006). While the film was not a box-office success, it was argued to be the "most ethnically diverse film" at that point of time (Van der Heide, 2002 as cited in Ciecko, 2006).

Yasmin Ahmad's 2005 romantic comedy "*Sepet*" which pair a Malay female lead with a Chinese male lead got critics such as Loo (2007) to comment that the film "narrates a vision of Malaysia that is missing from the mainstream media and public discourse in Malaysia" as the film made the audience question their views on nationality, ethnicity and ethnic-relations.

The lack of visibility of Chinese characters in Malaysian films highlights two salient approaches of past film-makers that: 1) Chinese characters are token characters which do not impact the film's plot and 2) are based on preconceived notions with little effort to further develop the character.

1.3 Research Background

Films are seen to be a "vehicle of social commentary, analysis and criticism" (Steinberg, 2009) and examining the message disseminated through Malaysian films can provide us an idea of where we stand as a nation on issues

of national unity and integration. Goffman (1974 as cited in Baran & Davis, 2014) argued that media messages could be crafted to be hyper-ritualised representations which are media content constructed to highlight only the most meaningful actions.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018), the Chinese community comprises 23 per cent of the total 32 million population of Malaysia. On that note, close to a quarter of Malaysians are of Chinese ethnicity and is deemed to be one of the larger ethnic groups in the nation as compared to the dominant *Bumiputera* ethnic group which is 69.1 percent of total population of citizens. Although the Chinese community remains to be a non-Malay minority in the societal makeup of Malaysia, their contribution to the growth of the nation is regarded to be equal and on par with those from other races. Former Malaysia Chinese Association president Tan Koon Swan (FMT reporters, 2016) noted that based on economic analysis, the Chinese community is believed to contribute about 70 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product.

Hence, it is crucial to examine the portrayal of Chinese characters in film in order to understand where the community stands in the society. The portrayal of Chinese characters would shed light on how filmmakers perceive the community and also their own take of what it means to be a Malaysian Chinese in this nation.

1.4 Research Objectives

Ciecko (2006) says Asia is culturally diverse in terms of religion, language, cultural practices and political systems. Hence, the suggestion of homogeneity and a monolithic culture is “extremely fraught”. Borrowing from that concept, Malaysian film must be able to reflect the true essence of the nation which is both diverse in culture.

With that in mind, the primary aim of this research is to examine the representation of Chinese in the chosen Malaysian films and whether the characterisation of their roles in the film play a role in influencing the plot through the use of textual analysis. The following two research objectives have been formed:

1. Select and review two Malaysian films, and
2. Study the Chinese characters found in the two chosen Malaysian films

1.5 Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are Chinese characters portrayed in the two chosen Malaysian films?

RQ2: Does the racial background of Chinese characters affect the plot of the two chosen Malaysian films?

1.6 Research Significance

This research aims to shed light and bring new understanding on the evolution of Malaysian cinema towards the representation of Chinese characters in films as opposed to a homogeneous product that caters to a single racial audience namely the Malays. Khan (1997 as cited in Khoo, 2006) argues that sensitive issues such as race and religion, when examined in a positive manner through films, can contribute to national solidarity and integrity.

The representation of Chinese characters in Malaysian films should reflect the current status quo and not based on assumptions of stereotype and bias which could lead to the generalisation of what the Chinese race is assumed to be.

This research is not meant to clip the creative wings of filmmakers or producers on the onus of being culturally sensitive to one another, but to celebrate diversity on the silver screen. Only by recognising our differences are we able to truly grasp the notion of diversity, tolerance, understanding and our shared values.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Specifying the definition of terms used in this research reduces ambiguity and confusion. In order to ensure clarity of the research, the terms used in this research are abided by the following definitions attached:

- **Film:** Films, also known as movies are defined as “a form of entertainment that enacts a story by a sequence of images giving the illusion of continuous movement” (Vassiliou, 2006, p. 2). According to Meena (2015), a film is a motion picture shown in cinemas, derived from the action of projecting a 35mm film in a movie theatre” which started in the 1890s.
- **Character:** Characters in films are actors who act out the story (Vassiliou, 2006). Thamrin and Wargika (2013) defined character as “a construct of a person who appears in a film that is used to influence the audience through its actions, interactions, speeches and observations” (p. 38). Vassiliou (2006) argued that the causal relationship in a film can be based upon the actions of characters in the film which cause events to change. In that sense, any action by the character can result in the change to how the film plays out.
- **Plot:** Plots are events or actions in a film in which are rendered and ordered towards achieving a particular emotional or artistic effect (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Bordwell and Thomson (2016) described the plot as “everything visibly and audibly presented in the film before us” (p. 76).

- **Chinese:** A Malaysian citizen of Chinese descent in which their ancestors immigrated to Malaysia from China during the 19th and 20th century (Carstens, 2005).
- **Portrayal:** Portrayal is a representation of character in a film, often tied to a dramatic connotation (Galician, 2004).
- **Race:** Races are characteristics shared by a group of people based on their ethnic background (Atkin, 2014).

1.8 Research Limitations

This research does have its own fair share of assumptions, limitations and delimitations.

Firstly, only two films are chosen owing to the lack of resources to fully dissect the many Malaysian made films. The two chosen films are 2012's *Februari* directed by Edry Abdul Halim and 2016's *Ola Bola*, directed by Chiu Keng Guan. The reasons for film selection are discussed in section 3.4.

As described in section 3.4, only Malaysian films produced between 2010 and 2016, which are referred to as contemporary films were considered. According to Smith (2009), contemporary art goes beyond the "mindless embrace of the present" but to be "more present than before" while being able to relate one's personal experience or work with those of others and of the current social-political climate. Minissale (2013) also revealed that

contemporary films or those that are reflective of current times can be seen as a form of thought-provoking art that encourages the audience to think in order for feelings, sensations and emotions to emerge. Though other Malaysian films such as 2005's "*Sepet*" and 2006's "*Gubra*" by director Yasmin Ahmad performed well in Malaysia cinemas in terms of ticket sales and publicity, but these two films did not fit the bill as contemporary films that could reflect the current social-political climate (Smith, 2009) since they were produced in the 2000s. In addition, *Sepet* was the focus of many studies (e.g. Beh, 2006; Lee, 2012; Loo, 2007).

Secondly, this research is only limited to the lead Chinese characters in the chosen films, and supporting characters that have explicit roles in the two films. These Chinese characters played respective roles that move the plot of the films. Characters from other racial backgrounds in the chosen films such as Indian and Eurasians would not be studied as this research focused only on the Chinese characters as stated explicitly in the research questions. The research was done in assumption that the chosen films must include a Chinese lead character who was constantly engaging with other characters in the films as the films progresses. Only through such interactions of characters, data and information from the analysis of films based on a developed framework in accordance to the research questions were collected.

Malaysian-made Chinese films were not considered in the research as it is assumed that the character's racial background is already highlighted and noted through the languages used in the films.

1.9 Summary

As the nation strives to improve national unity, characters of non-Malay descent in Malaysian films should be highlighted even further and should not be portrayed in accordance with commonly known biases or stereotypes. The portrayal of Chinese characters in modern Malaysian films allowed us to understand the role Chinese community play in the Malaysian society based on their portrayal in films.

This research should not be viewed as racist or skewed to favour a particular race but as to proudly acknowledge different racial backgrounds found on Malaysian films and what they bring to the film in terms of portrayal and context. The use of textual analysis in this research allows the researcher to form opinions based on existing frameworks and deduce its own conclusions.

1.10 Chapterisation

The entire research work will run into five chapters. In the Chapter 1, the research is introduced with a background of the current state of films in Malaysia and regionally. Chapter 1 is then explored the problems arising in the Malaysian film industry in the context of portrayal of Chinese characters. The background of the research is explored in detail before expanding on the research objectives, questions and significance. Then, the terms used in the research are defined and note the limitations that may occur to the research.

Chapter 2 looks into the history of Malaysian films and sought clarity on the racial representation in films from around the world. A theoretical approach will be discussed and related studies examined.

In Chapter 3, the research will look at relevant methodologies that can be used. Using qualitative analysis, the research instrument and research samples were set. A data collection procedure that encompasses multiple viewings of the chosen films was conducted and data collected was analysed. Findings from the research is discussed in Chapter 4 in terms of the portrayal of Chinese characters in the chosen films. In Chapter 5, accomplishments of the research is discussed while suggestions are provided to help future researchers expand on the topic, followed by References.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter details the review of literature of related concepts and theories related to the research which includes the following topics:

- History of Malaysian films;
- Racial representations in films;
- Theoretical approach; and
- Related studies.

2.2 History of Malaysian Films

A closer look at Malaysia made films is imperative when exploring the representation of Chinese characters in this research. The Malaysian film industry traces its origins back to the 1930s as early films were reminiscent of the *bangsawan* (Malay opera) performances centred around horror, comedy, romance and melodrama (Muthalib, 2013).

Mckay (2011 as cited in Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018) argued that the period between 1950s and late 1960s were often regarded as the “Golden Age

of Malayan films” as films of the era were portrayed with a sense of “optimism in dealing with the challenges that lay ahead for a postcolonial society, tackled the threats posed to traditional values by embracing urbanity”.

Mckay (2011 as cited in Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018) added Malay films during the era that showcased shared cultural identities and interests appealed to those beyond the Malay communities. Films such as P. Ramlee’s 1967 film “*Sesudah Suboh*” depicts the relationship between a married Malay man named Ariffin and a Chinese woman called Alice and her husband, Allan. Part of the appeal for this film was it was narrated through cross-cultural dialogues and negotiations that focused on the character’s ethnic identities; from its opening credits right up to the conclusion of the film (Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018).

Fast forward to the 80s, Malay speaking films did try to push the envelope such as film “*Tsu Feh-Sofia*” directed by Rahim Razali in 1985, which challenged the Malay film norm by telling a story about a Chinese doctor who converted to Islam. Also, Othman Hafsham’s “*Mekanik*”, a film of 1983 featured a racially mixed cast who spoke in their own mother tongues as opposed to films of all Malay dialogue.

The representation of Chinese characters in Malaysian films received higher visibility and were particularly present in independent films (Khoo, 2006). “*Sepet*”, a film directed by the late Yasmin Ahmad in 2003, broke grounds to be an independent film which won many foreign awards such as the Best Asian Film award at the 2005 Tokyo International Film Festival. Yasmin

Ahmad then continued the success of *Sepet*—with a series of films such as “*Gubra*” (2006), “*Mukhsin*” (2007), “*Muallaf*” (2008) and “*Talentine*” (2009); each film focusing on how characters make sense of the world around them and the interactions they have with those of different racial backgrounds.

2.3 Racial Representation in Films

Kulaszewicz (2015) argued that the media provides an understanding of historical context inclusive of influences, patterns and beliefs around the topic presented. In such instances, how people and characters are represented in the media provides an understanding of how race and racism is perpetuated within societies-

The topic of racial representation in films has been repeatedly studied by many researchers (e.g. Debieux, 2014; Drummond & Orbe, 2010; Sharma, 2011) over the years. Racial representation in films is a widely-studied topic especially in Western nations such as the U.S. Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao (2013) noted that the U.S. has developed a general media operational pattern that is wholly consistent to the principle of a “free market enterprise” which traditionally allows for the hegemonic political and economic powers to determine and reinforce social roles of racial and cultural “minorities” for both marketing and socio-economic purposes. Boyd (2015) argued that the culture most frequently depicted in films is those of the majority in any nation. Debieux (2014) noted that mainstream American film industry are generally

inclined producing films that caters towards the predominantly “Caucasian, heterosexual, male middle-class audience”.

Data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018) indicated that the *Bumiputera* (native/ indigene Malay) ethnic group to be the largest ethnic group in Malaysia comprising over 20 million people. That figure suggested that Malays being the predominant ethnic group under the *Bumiputera* cluster to be the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia; leading on to the observation that Malaysian films are likely to feature the dominant ethnic group as opposed to other ethnicities or minorities in the nation.

On that note, a film's content is then geared towards catering to the mass audience as opposed to preoccupying themselves with how it chooses to portray a phenomenon or an individual and how it could affect its public especially if those concerned are minorities (Debrieux, 2014). Hence, the representation of non-dominant race in the media could be based on what economic powers assume to be the norm of the ethnic culture as opposed to a true representation of by the ethnic community.

2.3.1 Representation of minorities in films

What we see on-screen or what is known as media images do have an impact on how we think about ourselves in relation to others. The 2017 Hollywood Diversity Report by the Ralph J. Bunche Centre for African American Studies of the University of California, Los Angeles (Hunt et al.,

2017) articulated non-white minorities made up over 40 per cent of the U.S. population and films with a highly diverse cast tended to perform positively with higher median box office global box office receipts.

While representation of ethnicity is applauded in diversifying cast, portrayal of the ethnic groups should be in line with cultural norms and not to project or exaggerate stereotypes. Visual ironies found in scenes of a film, mentioned in Lykidis (2009) were used to remind viewers of their preconceived notions about minorities. Lykidis added that such mechanisms of identification in film threaten to lead audiences into constructing conclusions based on what they assume to be real on screen.

Previous research examining the media portrayal of minorities namely women, Collins (2011) sought to see how women were presented in the media. The results were less than shocking as she discovered they were portrayed as traditional feminine stereotyped roles such as sexual workers, home makers, wives or parents. In line with the argument, she notes that while minorities nowadays gain more airtime in the media, the manner they are portrayed are critical in order to avoid increasing negative depictions that could be harmful to viewers.

Also, the notable analysis of Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2013) which examined ethnicity on screen and behind the camera across 600 popular films across 2007 to 2013 found that out of 4,506 speaking characters researched, only 29.2 percent were female in the 100 top-grossing films of 2013. In addition,

their research found that out of 1,374 directors, producers and writers credited in the sample, only 15.9 percent of these content creators were women. This highlighted a stark correlation that “creative decisions can and do influence content” (Smith, Choueiti & Pieper, 2013). This suggests when minorities (i.e. women) are less represented in the content creation of films, the portrayal of minority characters are often based upon the assumptions and ideology of a dominant group.

Not surprisingly Smith, Choueiti and Pieper (2013) found that aside from less screen time, females are more likely to be sexualised compared to their male counterparts in film. This leads to the idea that when a character receives less screen time, they too do not enjoy proper character development as compared to lead characters.

2.3.2 Portrayal of Chinese characters in films

Chinese characters in mainstream Hollywood films were often pigeonholed to portray certain characters that were deemed suitable by film producers.

Ma (1993) proclaimed many Asian or Asian-American characters on screen of Chinese descent often fall into the category of characters who were seen as a sign of threat or laughing stock which reaffirms the “irreconcilable differences that define the Anglos as superior physically, spiritually and morally”. These characters were type casted to fit the roles ranging from

‘helpless heathen’, ‘power-hungry despots’, ‘pudgy de-sexed detective’, ‘comical loyal servant’, to ‘sensuous dragon ladies’ bearing an evil scheme.

In line with such findings, Zhu (2013) looked into the masculine image of Chinese lead characters in three Hollywood films namely “*The Tuxedo*” (2002), “*Kiss of the Dragon*” (2001) and “*Dragon: The Bruce Lee story*” (1993), he discovered a shift of the archetypical weak Chinese male stereotype to be flipped and found Chinese male roles to be “powerful objects of romantic attention by white women and as winning heroes” (p. 415). Zhu added that such inversion of themes found in the three film texts revealed how the privileged racial and cultural position of assumed ‘whiteness’ was rationalised through the construct of “romantic encounters between Chinese martial artists and their white partners.”

2.3.3 Portrayal of Chinese characters in Malaysian films

In order to better understand the portrayal of Chinese characters in Malaysian films, one must understand the context for their appearance (or the lack of) in Malaysian films. Zakir (2008) noted the hybridity and diversity of Malaysia and its films were never thoroughly celebrated as the role of Chinese and Indian Malaysians in the film industry, be it in front or behind the camera, was “never positioned as an important part of Malaysian cinema history.”

Mutalib (2007) noted that during the early days of Malaysian cinema, non-Malays such as the Chinese, appeared as comedy relief or as extras. In the

1954 film *Abu Nawas* which focused on the Communist insurgency in Malaya, the Chinese were portrayed as the main antagonist of Malaya Communist insurgents, and the Malays as victims. However, such representation in the film *Abu Nawas* do tether towards historical accuracy as many members of the Malaya Communist Party were Chinese (Loh, 2009).

When a Chinese character do occasionally show up in a Malay film, they are often portrayed on stereotypes based on the Chinese-Malaysian diaspora whom often: (1) speak in broken Malay or Manglish, a Malaysian speaking style of English which includes the nuances of local dialects (Van der Heide, 2002 as cited in Ciecko, 2006); (2) belong to a specific social class—a gangster or part of an underworld organization as seen in films such as Syamsul Yusof's 2011 film “*KL Gangster*” which portrayed a Malaysian Chinese actor Adam Corrie Lee as a gang member called Dragon, and Farid Kamil's 2011 film “*Kongsi*” starring Malaysian-Chinese actor Chew Kim Wah as a triad boss; and (3) living in urban developments such as cities (Carstens, 2005) while being afflicted with social ills such as drunkenness and gambling (Wheeler, 1928 as cited in Kahn, 2001).

Wong, Pillai and Ong (2018) noted that films in the 1960s depicted Chinese characters with racial stereotypes. In the 1961 film “*Ali Baba Bujang Lapok*”, the character of *Apek Tukang Kasut*, or elderly Chinese cobbler was depicted with the Chinese stereotype of an *apek*. “*Apek*” is a term used in Malaysia which refers to an old Chinese man who speaks Malay with a stereotypical Chinese colloquial slang. As a minor role in the film, characters

such as *Apek Tukang Kasut* were depicted as ‘stingy’ and money-minded; a common Chinese stereotype and is dressed in the traditional Chinese costume of *sam foo* to accentuate his heritage (Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018).

The absence of the Chinese characters in the 1990s in Malaysian films can be traced back to the modernist Malay filmmakers represented by the likes of U-Wei Haji Saari, Shuhaimi Baba, Mansur Puteh and Anuar Nor Arai whose efforts focused on “the revival of a Malay-language national film industry through an art cinema discourse” (Zakir, 2008). Their focus at the time was using films to critique the Malay society at that time. Chinese characters, hence, were not part of the critique owing to the attention paid to developing Malay characters by these filmmakers.

Malaysian films in the 2000s such as 2000’s *Spinning Gasing* and 2003’s *Sepet* offered more visibility to Chinese characters on screen. Khoo (as cited in Zakir, 2008) said that many of the representation of Chinese characters in Malaysian films challenged the negative ethnic stereotypes prevalent in the Malay-language mainstream cinema as many of the filmmakers are Malaysian Chinese.

2.4 Theoretical Approach

This section discusses the relevant theoretical approach used in this research.

2.4.1 Representation by Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall's approach towards representation of Chinese characters in films formed an important part of this research. According to Hall (1997), "the nature of representation is constitutive of an event and may not have a true fixed meaning as forms of representation can change" (p. 7). What this suggested was that an event that was represented can be interpreted differently by different parties.

Hall (1997) rejected the notion that the original subject constitutes one single meaning and representation is an afterthought of an event or activity that happened. Grossberg (as cited in Zakir, 2008), supported Hall's approach of representation as he emphasised that interpreting any cultural text must always include the constitution of a context around it.

Such an approach towards media representation moved beyond the question of the accuracy or inaccuracy of specific representations (Evans, 2017) as he encouraged further exploration of the context behind the representation in order to understand its meaning. One such manner to decode what we see on screen was known as the "signifying processes" that occur in the media as Hall

(1997) suggested: “It’s concentrated on the effects and the products of signifying practices, practices with carrying a meaning, and that in our world happen to be widely circulated by the media...” (p.14).

Hall (1997) also revealed that in the event of a media text such as films or television, those absent on-screen means as much as those that are marked and present. The images found in the media can have a range of meanings and how we as the viewer construct our own meaning towards these images can depend on the “engagement - psychic, imaginary engagement - through the look with an investment in the image or involvement in what the image is saying or doing.”

In short, Stuart Hall’s approach towards media representation indicates how our own background and biases influence the way we perceive images and media text, thus shaping different meanings towards these images.

2.4.2 Implications of Representation by Stuart Hall to the research

Stuart Hall’s approach towards media representation opens up the possibility to question what we see in films and take into account the researcher’s point of view towards the interpretation of Chinese characters of the chosen films in the current attempt. These interpretations of media text may or may not be in line with the chosen film’s directors portrayal of Chinese characters but still remain a valid interpretation.

To study the two chosen films in the research, Representation by Stuart Hall was used to help the researcher analysing the data of the research more objectively and accurately, then the *mise-en-scene* was used to help interprets the meaning from figures of the films in order to reveal the representation of Chinese characters in the two chosen Malaysian films. The use of *mise-en-scene* as a research method to help demonstrates Stuart Hall's approach towards representation and media studied where meanings can be found in what is and isn't presented in the media is discussed in section 3.2.2.

2.5 Related Studies

Past studies helped form the base of this research and helped the researcher expand the scope of the study to incorporate relevant information and findings.

2.5.1 Representation of race, gender and class in popular culture and its impact on the society

Past studies by researchers highlighted that film-makers tend to rely on traditional formulas and stock characters which lack any sense of thought-provocation (Debrieux, 2014). Debrieux added the "traditional formula and stock characters" above referred to the social dominance of white Anglo Saxon protestants, who are linked to the notion of whiteness where non-whites are often alienated. Robinson (2007 as cited in Debrieux, 2014) found that in the United States of America, 81.9 percent of lead roles are portrayed by Caucasian

actors, 11.1 percent by African Americans, 1.8 per cent by Asian and 1.2 per cent by Latino actors.”

Other studies which examined how characters of a minority group were portrayed included Painter and Ferrucci’s (2012) study that used textual analysis of female characters on television series *Sports Night* serves as a basis to investigate character portrayal in the media. Their study examines the portrayal of five female characters who work as journalists on the new-reporting themed television series. The study also found that women characters, who were cast as minority groups in the male-dominated sports reporting field, were depicted with negative tones such as “acting unprofessionally, displaying motherly qualities and being differential to men for ethical decisions”.

2.5.2 Articulating images of South Asians in a global community

Meanwhile, stereotypes do affect the treatment received by characters in films. Paek and Shah (2003 as cited in Sharma, 2011, p. 133) found evidence supporting a “model minority” stereotype of Asians as successful workaholics in the media. Post September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, these stereotypes changes as a number of Americans associate South Asian immigrants (i.e. Pakistani, Indian, Sri Lankan, and so forth) with negative stereotypes of Middle Eastern and Muslims (Mitra, 2005 as cited in Sharma, 2011, p. 133).

2.5.3 Stereotypes in the media

Previous research by Ramspott, Bravo, Alsina and Ramos (2014) which centred on the scenes and dialogues of the characters, served as essential elements that structure the representation of the Chinese characters and the resulting outcome to the plot of the series.

The study of Ramspott et al. (2014) on fictional construction on male stereotypes found in the Catalan television series “*Porca Miseria*” in 2004 used textual analysis to analyse the scenes and dialogues of characters. Those were regarded to be “essential elements that structure the representation of the models of masculinity and the resulting types of love relationship in the plot of the series”. Their findings demonstrated that the series steered clear from the stereotypical male chauvinism and are more in tune with the new social truths of masculinity. While the study’s focus was on gender, it demonstrates how textual analysis can be used to extract elements in films which could help determine how, in the instance of this study, a character’s race plays a part in the film’s plot development.

2.5.4 Previous research on *Ola Bola*

The film *Ola Bola* has been a topic of research by Maheendran (2017), Maros, Noorizan and Zakaria (2016), and Mohan (2017). All the three researches focused on the portrayals of a multiracial society presented in the film. Details of the film are discussed in section 3.4. The 2016 film “*Ola Bola*”

featured a diverse cast from Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic backgrounds and blended multiple languages into the film's dialogue.

Maheendran (2017) analysed the theme of multiculturalism of "*Ola Bola*" using content analysis. Similar to Maros, Noorizan and Zakaria (2016) findings, themes of interracial-friendship, multilingual dialogues and cross cultural interactions were present in the film. Meanwhile, the study by Maros, Noorizan and Zakaria (2016) examined code switching among the characters of "*Ola Bola*" in their interactions. Their studies discovered a new code switching style which is the language switch based on races. They deduced that code switching in the film depicts the spirit of solidarity, patriotism and unity in a multi-racial society; from Malaysian perspective. Mohan (2017) found "*Ola Bola*" to be absent of interracial and religious tension; a common plot device used in Malaysian films such as 1981's "*Bukit Kepong*", 2011's "*KL Gangster*" and 2011's "*Kongsi*".

While all the three studies found elements of the depiction of a multiracial society in "*Ola Bola*" which led to the marketability of the film, it did not examine how Chinese characters in the film were portrayed nor examine any tension arising from cross cultural interactions in the film.

2.6 Conclusion

Past literature suggested the cultural norms of society tend to be reflective in films, however, so do stereotypes. It is indicated that content created by dominant groups; especially in relation to minority portrayals, are generally based on their ideologies and views as opposed to reflect the reality of the scenario. While stereotypes play a role in helping people frame and identify cultural signifiers, it also creates negative impressions towards those not familiar with the culture.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In order to explore the portrayal of Chinese characters in the chosen Malaysian films, this chapter discusses the methods used to conduct this research. It is followed by a discussion of research instruments, research samples, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.2 Research Method

In research, there are quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Apuke (2017), quantitative research method quantifies and analyses variables in order to obtain outcomes. It utilises numerical data through specific statistical techniques to answer questions such as who, what, when, where and how many. Quantitative research is considered to be of dominant use among researchers as by using a representative sample allows for substantiating a claim while qualitative research only illustrates or highlights the motives and reasoning behind a claim (Flick, 2018). Cicourel (1981 as cited in Flick, 2018) noted that in sociology, quantitative methods are suited to answer macro

questions, while qualitative methods allow for a deeper understanding of micro questions.

Davis (2016) explained qualitative research methods as:

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are interpretive. Qualitative studies work with non-numeric data like texts, images, or cultural artefacts, and attempt to give data a meaning that contributes to our understanding of some local phenomenon. Qualitative methods assume a socially constructed reality rather than a received one, and the data is collected through observation rather than measurement (p. 2).

Moreover, several past studies highlighted the superiority of the qualitative method which include: it is being able to provide scientific explanation of facts (Oevermann, Allert, Konau & Krambeck, 1979 as cited in Borg & Mohler, 1994), it has the ability to stand on its own without the use of quantitative methods (Kleining, 1982), and how qualitative methods lead to relevant results lead when used on socio-political topics owing to its complexity (McKinlay, 1995) and so forth.

The present research aims to examine the way Chinese characters are portrayed in the chosen Malaysian films using a qualitative textual analysis. Through textual analysis, the two samples of films that feature multiracial characters as discussed in section 3.4 were analysed in accordance to the research questions as presented in section 1.5 that complements and supports the objectives of this research.

Van Dijk (1991 as cited in Flener, 2008, p. 13) mentioned that textual analysis emerged between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. This is supported by Bainbridge (2008) who noted that “textual analysis comes out of the work of

theorists known as the French structuralists in the 1960s—particularly the work of Roland Barthes (1915-80)” (p. 224). Bainbridge added that textual analysis is one of the primary tools media researchers use to understand how meaning is made from media texts. McKee (2003) described textual analysis as:

Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology—a data-gathering process—for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live (p. 1).

McKee also highlighted that textual analysis is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, media studies, in mass communication, and in sociology philosophy. According to McKee, the qualitative textual analysis is used to interpret texts (films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on) to gather information and details of “sense-making practices” to understand particular cultures at particular times within a nation. Bainbridge (2008) also indicated that textual analysis is a toolkit for examining the media, applicable to very simple media forms (such as advertisements), up to more complex forms such as news narratives, television series and films.

Smith (2017 as cited in Matthes, Davis & Potter, 2017) stated that textual analysis often uses various theoretical approach that allows for findings to have different interpretations. Smith also claimed that the focus on textual analysis shifts from being an easily replicated research to a research that allows for the meaning behind the text to be “revealed and experienced, with an emphasis on sense-making, description, and detail” (p. 3). Textual analysis often pays close attention to the text of the film in which Ayub, Abdul Razak, Suyurno, Ramlan

and Mansor (2016) explained as a metaphorical plan used to construct a film. The quality of the plan will determine the outcome of the film. Its abstract nature is deconstructed when text is translated into an audio and visual sensory trigger by the credibility and credibility of the director through shots, camera angles and technicality (Nursyazrin, 2012 as cited in Ayub et al., 2016).

3.2.1 Constructivist discourse analysis

The constructivist discourse analysis is rooted in the constructivist view that the subject is the central factor in discourse activities and social relationships (Khairunissa, et al., 2017). In this context, films are organised to create purposeful visual segments. Each segment creates meanings, the act of self-formation and the disclosure of the identity of the character portrayed on screen.

Constructive research by Williamson (2006) investigated the construction or meanings of a variety of topics pertaining to the creation of cultural values. One such approach, he suggests, is to focus on shared meanings that are reflective in social constructs such as the media.

In film studies, what we see on screen is derived from the point of view from the filmmaker. Inspired by Williamson's approach, how we view the characters portrayed in films offer us a glimpse into the filmmaker's world view and his or her take on topics and themes presented.

On the flip side, the constructivist approach emphasises on the importance of the audience constructing their own representations of reality and are not passive recipients of information (Jeong, 2013). In Jeong's defence, the audience are actively constructing knowledge through the information and discourse they come across, be it through the media or through social interactions.

Taking that into consideration, Neubert and Reich (2002) opined that "the constructivist assertion is valid only for those who consider it to be viable as a maxim concerning knowledge criticism - and only as long as they do so." This suggests the validity of the point of view of the filmmaker and audience (in the context of this research, the researcher himself) owing to their own understanding of the subject, supported by the *mise-en-scene* technique in section 3.2.2.

3.2.2 *Mise-en-scene*

Mise-en-scene is a key film analysis tool first applied by Bordwell and Thompson in year 1979 to the practice of stage direction and then applied to film direction (Huang, 2012). *Mise-en-scene* is a French term roughly translated as "what is put into the scene", which signifies "the director's control over what appears in the film frame [so that] the director stages the event for the camera." (Bordwell & Thompson, 1979, p. 75).

Barsam and Monahan (2016) revealed that the visual elements are important to shape the audience's sympathy towards onscreen characters, and for the audience to understand how these characters are shaped. As the audience search for clues and meanings to what is presented in films, they leave after watching the film with a recollection of selected items that was set up by the director as a staged event (Bordwell & Thompson, 1979).

There are four elements to *mise-en-scene* which are setting, costume and makeup, lighting, and staging (movement and acting). It is important to note that each element by itself may or may not carry any meaning, but it is the combination of these elements that tell the story as it is intended by the director (Barsam & Monahan, 2016).

Mise-en-scene was used in this research to decode messages and themes found in the sample films as described in section 4.3.

3.3 Research Instruments

Anney (2014) stated that methods used to collect data from multiple sources are also known as research instruments. Examples of research instruments include focus group discussions, questionnaires and interviews. Sherman and Webb (1988) affirmed that qualitative research requires a "direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt'" (p. 7). This implies that the

researcher is the main research instrument as they would collect, examine and interpret text presented in the chosen films.

In the context of textual analysis, the researcher's own interpretation of text is salient (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009) as a researcher constructs his own "reality" based on "his interpretations of a text provided by the subjects of research" (Schutt, 2018, p. 321). Kirk and Miller (1986) asserted that "asking the wrong questions is the source of most validity errors in qualitative research" (p. 30). Drawing on the work of Hoppen, Rigoni, Klein and Ritter (2016), the researcher constructed the research based on existing definitions from past studies in order to "build, operationalise, and empirically validate" qualitative research instruments.

Other main research instruments in the research are the two chosen films, which are *29 Februari* (see Appendix A for the film synopsis) and *Ola Bola* (see Appendix B for the film synopsis). In addition, one of the research instruments of this research is the coding sheet that was used to decode the text of the two chosen films. The coding sheet as appended in Appendix C was developed based on the research questions as has been presented in section 1.5 and the themes identified in section 2.3.

3.4 Research Samples

The samples of films must feature Chinese and non-Chinese actors, must have plots or screenplays set in Malaysia, and contain at least Malay-Chinese languages background. The selection of samples is limited to Malaysian films produced between 2010 and 2016 as discussed in section 1.8. *29 Februari* and *Ola Bola* are two Malaysian films that have been chosen for different reasons as described in subsequent sections.

Both *29 Februari* and *Ola Bola* feature Malay and Chinese characters that interact among each other throughout the films. Meantime, the language background of these two chosen films took into account not just the Malay language, but also the Mandarin or dialects of the Chinese language (e.g. Cantonese, Hokkien, etc.).

Apart from that, both films were set across a long time period with *29 Februari* spanning from the late 19th century to 2012 while *Ola Bola* spans across 1970s to 2016. Debrieux (2014) stated that the understanding of the depiction of characters of colours and various ethnic groups in films may shed some light in assessing “society’s attitude towards the issue of race, as they give insights into the societal sentiment and social power-structure of the times” (p. 31). The change of times suggests Chinese characters are portrayed differently across the film’s timeline and in accordance to the norms of the moment.

It can be argued that both chosen films are thematically different from one another with *29 Februari* being a love story while *Ola Bola*, a story on patriotism and national unity. The selection criteria for the chosen films were not based on the popularity of the films, nor whether they were similar in genre. As mentioned, the chosen films must feature Chinese and non-Chinese actors, must have plots or screenplays set in Malaysia, and contain at least Malay-Chinese languages background. Only Malaysian films produced between 2010 and 2016 were considered and chosen.

It can be argued that *Ola Bola* is a nationalistic and patriotic film by nature, and making it highly susceptible for the director to portray its characters in a positive and heroic manner. However, it is important to examine the film and the text presented in *Ola Bola* as it can shed light on the development and progression of Chinese characters in Malaysian films.

In line with Hall's notion of representation (1997), the representation of the meaning assigned to Chinese characters are salient and constitutes as the reality constructed in the likes of its directors, hence validating his individual point of view towards the subject.

Ola Bola and *29 Februari* share a similar plot device which involves a certain amount of time travelling, flashback and foreshadowing where actions of the past, impacts the outcome in the future. The timeline of events for both films were based according to the historic moments of Malaysia.

For example, the declaration of Malaysia's independence on 31 August 1957, the racial riots of 13 May 1969 (both events that were depicted in *29 Februari*) and also Malaysia's boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics (as depicted in *Ola Bola*) carried a different meaning to the many Malaysians who lived through those historic events. The on-screen depiction of these events allow the Malaysian audience to reflect upon the progress and sacrifice made by our elders in order for us to truly appreciate what we have today.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

There were some stages that conducted by the researcher in analysing the data (films) as follows:

1. Watching each of the chosen films five times in this case in order to thoroughly identify the multiracial theme portrayed in the movie in order to answer the research questions. The first viewing is a basic viewing where the researcher viewed the chosen films as an ordinary audience. The second viewing onwards gathered and noted down all the scenes, shots, characters, and dialogues in the films under themes such as interracial relationships where characters assigned with stereotypical representations and inversion of stereotypes to create a character's positive imagery. Drawing on the work of McKee (2003 as cited in Painter & Ferrucci, 2017), themes emerged during initial viewings were taken note of and further viewings were done to explore emerging

themes. The researcher tried to make sense of the shots, composition, *mise-en-scene* and each main casts' establishment in the film.

2. The researcher focused on examining Chinese characters in both chosen films. The researcher identified who the Chinese characters were and their interaction with other races throughout the films.
3. After finding and classifying all the data (text) in films, the researcher concluded it as data of the research for further analysis based on research questions.

For increased validity, drawing on the study of Painter and Ferrucci (2017), the researcher examined themes after analysing 25 per cent, 50 per cent and 100 per cent of the samples. In order to increase the research's credibility, the researcher deployed approaches such as low-inference descriptors and reflexivity. Low-inference descriptors, as suggested by Painter and Ferrucci (2017) is the usage of "meticulously phrased" descriptors in researcher's notes. Meanwhile, reflexivity refers to the researcher's use of self-awareness, self-reflection, and understanding of potential biases when analysing data.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative method was used solely in this research to analyse the data, while *mise-en-scene* was applied to extract and interpret the findings.

It is important to note that the interpretation of findings as suggested by Roberts (2000) can vary to be either representationally (used to identify sources' intended meaning) or instrumentally (interpreted with the use of the researcher's chosen theory). A hybrid interpretation of representationally and instrumentally were deployed to fill in any gaps that may occur while analysing text.

Past research such as the study of Debrieux (2014) noted that actors of Middle-Eastern origins almost exclusively portray radical Muslims or terrorists while female characters of colour, they are usually depicted as exotic sexual objects in films. Hence, the direction of this research—was borrowed from Debrieux's observations and took a look at the character development and portrayal of Chinese characters to see if they too are subjected to some form of stereotyping or typecasting towards a specific role based on their race.

The *mise-en-scene* focused on the portrayal of two lead characters in the research: (1) Lily (by Jojo Goh) in “29 Februari”, and (2) *Tauke* (by Chee Jun Cherng) from “*Ola Bola*”, followed by two supporting Chinese characters namely: (3) Mr Ho in *29 Februari*, and (4) Eric Yong of *Ola Bola*.

Out of the four elements to *mise-en-scene* which are setting, costume and makeup, lighting, and staging (movement and acting), this research focused on two of the most visible elements in the film which are setting and staging (movement and acting).

The analysis was done using Google Sheets (an online spreadsheet software similar to Microsoft Excel) as appended in Appendix C and as it allowed for the coding to be systematically arranged and accessed.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter defined the processes and activities involved in conducting this research. Qualitative research method was chosen for this research. Data collection was conducted through numerous viewings of both films and data collected was analysed using *mise-en-scene*. The research methodology explained will lead to the discussion of research findings in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The two films discussed in section 3.4 were analysed using *mise-en-scene* as discussed in section 3.2.2. The findings are presented in this chapter.

4.2 Research Findings from the Analysis of the Two Chosen Films

The following subsections present the findings for the analysis of the two chosen films for this research.

4.2.1 The portrayal of Chinese characters in the two chosen films

The present research determines how the Chinese characters are portrayed in Malaysian films. To answer RQ1, Table 4.1 highlights the list of characters found in the two chosen films.

Table 4.1: List of characters of the two chosen films in the research

Film Title	Year Released	Director	Theme	Chinese Characters	Non-Chinese Characters	Languages
<i>29 Februari</i>	2012	Edry Abdul Halim	Love and romance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lily Ho - Julie Ho (Lily's sister) - Bob Ho (Lily's father) - Lily's mother - Alex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budi - Razak - Arif - Budi's father - Budi's mother - Indian owner of a coffee shop - Encik Salam - Khalid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Malay - Cantonese
<i>Ola Bola</i>	2016	Chiu Keng Guan	Unity and teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chow Kwok Keong - Marianne Tan - Chow Mei Ling - Eric Yong - Tan Siew Lee - Ong Tiam Chai - Security Uncle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ahmad Ali - Muthu Kumar - Mohamad Abu Rahman - Harry Mountain - Sanjeet Singh - Muthu Kumar's father - Muthu Kumar's younger brother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Malay - Cantonese - Mandarin - Hokkien - Tamil - English

Having categorised the characters from both films as seen in Table 4.1, it is visible that there is no lack of representation of Chinese characters in both chosen films. While this research was not a qualitative one that focused on the number of times a Chinese character appears on-screen, this research set the precedence on how Chinese characters are portrayed in both films. There are no less than five Chinese characters in each of the chosen films.

Each of the chosen films had a Chinese lead character namely, i.e. Lily who is the female lead character of Chinese descent in *29 Februari* (see Figure 4.1), while Chow Kwok Keong or *Tauke*, the male lead character of Chinese descent in *Ola Bola* (see Figure 4.2).

As mentioned in section 3.6, the researcher focused on examining the two lead characters in the chosen films: (1) Lily Ho (by Jojo Goh) in “*29 Februari*”, and (2) *Tauke* (by Chee Jun Cherng) from “*Ola Bola*”, followed by two supporting Chinese characters namely: (3) Mr Ho in *29 Februari*, and (4) Eric Yong of *Ola Bola*.

Lily Ho is the female lead character in *29 Februari*. She is the teenage daughter to Mr Ho and elder sister to Julie Ho. Despite being of Chinese descent, she eventually falls in love with Budi, the male lead character in *29 Februari* who is Malay, much to her father’s dismay. Her rebellious streak led her to butt heads with not only Mr Ho but also with Budi on several occasions throughout the movie.

Mr Ho, is a supporting character in *29 Februari*. He is Lily's strict father who keeps a close watch on his two young daughters and already has their future plans lined up. With Lily set to be married off to Alex, Mr Ho was furious when he found out of Budi's existence and the romance he shared with his daughter. The conflict and tension between father and daughter was explored in *29 Februari*.

Meanwhile in *Ola Bola*, Tauke or Chow Kok Keong is the male lead character of Chinese descent. He is the eldest and only son of the Chow family. As the eldest brother, he shoulders on the responsibility to look after his mother and three younger sisters. As the team captain of the Malaysian football team, he feels personally responsible to lead the team towards achieving the goal of qualifying for the 1980 summer Olympics. However, his dreams are not as clear cut as he faces challenges in both his professional and family life, with many of the conflicts due to his headstrong and stubborn personality.

On the other hand, Eric Yong is a supporting character in *Ola Bola*. He is portrayed as the outsider of the team, both owing to his character's background of being brought in to the Malaysian football team from East Malaysia, namely Sabah, and also his supposed wealth as his father was hinted to be a timber tycoon in the film. This notion of a wealthy outsider doesn't jive well with the other team mates as many of them assume that he bought his way into the team, as opposed to earning a spot due to his own capabilities.

Based on the short characters' biography and back-story, it can be said that the directors of both chosen films do use race to create conflict between its characters. In *29 Februari*, Mr Ho heavily objects to Lily and Budi's relationship on the notion that he is Malay. His objection towards the relationship drives the film towards the climax where Lily runs away from home, and Mr Ho confronting Budi as having an influence over his daughter.

The conflict between both men was necessary in the film as it set the precedence for Budi to move on with a new chapter in life and ultimately reuniting with Lily in Penang.

Meanwhile in *Ola Bola*, racial differences did have some minor undertones resulting in conflict namely between Eric Yong and Ahmad Ali. Ahmad Ali shows his dissatisfaction towards Eric Yong throughout the film, owing to Eric Yong not only taking upon the number 10 jersey of the Malaysian football team which once belonged to the famed Samsul Super 10. Having a relatively unknown Chinese player take over such an important position did not sit well with Ahmad Ali, in which resulted to a heated argument in the locker room during 31:44 of the film.

Reflecting on how film imitates real life, the conflict between Eric Yong and Ahmad Ali was manufactured for entertainment purposes. Eric Yong was a character based on James Wong, who was one of the strikers for the 1970-1980 Malaysian football team, while Ahmad Ali based on Hassan Sani was also a fellow striker on the same team. Both James Wong and Hassan Sani hailed from

Sabah and shared a positive bond as teammates (Stanley, 2016). They both went on to assistant managers of the Sabah football team (Bernama, 2016).

These instances of inter-racial conflict on screen can be dangerous as it normalises fights between the Malays and Chinese. Not all Malay or Chinese citizen in Malaysia have friends from other races and owing to limited interaction interactions, their exposure to those from other races may only be through the mass media (Orbe & Harris, 2015).

While conflict is unavoidable in life, how it is represented on screen do require the film makers to take into consideration of how their work have an impact towards the man on the street.

4.2.2 Themes from chosen sample films

To elaborate further in this section, the research identified the following themes from both chosen films. This would help to answer RQ2 in detail.

4.2.2.1 Wealth disparity of Chinese characters

The topic of wealth is visible in both films as it shows Chinese characters on both sides of the spectrum.

In *29 Februari*, the tone of Chinese being wealthy was set early on at 02:54 in the film with Budi's father, En Halim cycling across town upon hearing

the news that his wife is giving birth.



Figure 4.1: Halim rides his bicycle through town

Based on how the scene is set in Figure 4.1, there is plenty of indication of Chinese being wealthy compared to the other races. Along the street, it is visible that there are three shop lots that are run by Chinese people due to the signboard at the front of the shops all bearing Chinese characters.

The Chinese lady in a rickshaw, seen in the foreground, also suggests her coming from a wealthy background and being able to afford transportation services as opposed to cycling or walking.



Figure 4.2: Mr Ho driving a car

Mode of transportation is again used in the film to show the wealth of its Chinese characters. At 18:21, we are introduced to Mr Ho, as seen in Figure 4.2., driving a black car as he pulls up to the main door of Stadium Merdeka to pick up his family. Car ownership in Malaysia, especially during the 1950s, were reserved for those in possession of wealth which could be due to their profession as government officials or businessmen. This reinforces the film's plot of "forbidden love" as not only Budi and Lily's relationship is one that is interracial between Malay and Chinese, it is also a relationship between the poor and affluent. This disparity in the film helps create the necessary tension needed to move the plot forward.

Food and beverage was also used to showcase wealth. In this instance as seen in Figure 4.3., a whole roast suckling pig and bottles of alcohol were seen in the foreground to be part of the buffet spread during the engagement party between Lily and Alex, organised at the Ho residence. Both roast pig and alcohol such as whiskey were considered to be luxury items during the 1960s among the Chinese community and would only be served during special occasions.



Figure 4.3: Engagement party at Ho residence

The conflict between the rich and poor is also used in *Ola Bola* with Eric Yong being portrayed as the rich son of a timber tycoon from Sabah. In the film, Eric is seen to be in possession of electronics such as a camera (at 10:46 and as seen in Figure 4.4) and also a television. Such items, back in the 1970s, were out of reach from many Malaysians.



Figure 4.4: Eric Yong with a camera

At 19:54 (as seen in Figure 4.5. below), Ong Tiam Cai, who is a supporting character in *Ola Bola* and also Eric's roommate, commented on Eric's lifestyle. Despite staying in the dormitory for only a few short months, Eric supposedly brought over a television and camera to keep himself entertained while other teammates relied on magazines to pass time. From this scene, the disparity between rich and poor was again highlighted as Eric's desk had a television, clock and possibly a guitar while another desk beside it, had nothing more than a lamp.



Figure 4.5: Ong Tiam Cai commenting on Eric Yong's possessions

In retrospect, not all Chinese characters in *Ola Bola* are wealthy. Ong Tiam Cai's comment on Eric's wealth suggests Ong to be from a poor

background. Tauke, himself is portrayed in the film to work multiple jobs aside from being the captain of the Malaysian football team to make ends meet.

This was reinforced through scenes in the film where his sisters were portrayed to be working on different jobs such as sewing garments at home after work (at 12:17, as seen in Figure 4.6) or processing rubber sheets (at 35:52, as seen in Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.6: The Chow sisters working on garments at night



Figure 4.7: Tauke and Mei Ling working at a rubber plantation

Whether Chinese characters are wealthy or poor, their financial status is used to create conflict or differential point among its characters in both chosen films. In the chosen films, the conflict was apparent between the wealthy

Chinese (*29 Februari*'s Ho family; *Ola Bola*'s Eric Yong) against the poor Malays (*29 Februari*'s Budi and his adopted family; *Ola Bola*'s Ali).

4.2.2.2 Focus on a patriarchal society

The Chinese's patriarchal culture is visible in both chosen films. These patriarchal traditions, which were institutionalised through the preference of male over females and strict hierarchical interpersonal relationships, set the tone of interpersonal relationships (Li & Lamb, 2015) among the Chinese community.

Drawing on the roles presented in section 2.3.2.1 where Chinese characters in Malaysian films are male, the same could be said for the two chosen films.

Mr Ho of *29 Februari* would often be presented as the dominant character in scenes involving the Ho family. As seen in Figure 4.8 below during 38:04, Mr Ho is given more visual space at the dining table compared to his wife and daughters. Upon closer examination of the placement of dishes during the meal, the more expensive fish dish is placed in front of him with the chicken dish in front of Mrs Ho. Meat dishes during the 1960s in Malaysia were considered to be expensive, as discussed in section 4.2.2.1., and were reserved only for elders or males in the household. This suggests Mr Ho's dominance of the family.



Figure 4.8: Dinner at the Ho residence

Mr Ho's dominance and assertive nature towards other characters such as Budi is also apparent in Figure 4.9 at 48:28 when Budi goes to the Ho family residences to seek Mr Ho's blessing for Lily's hand in marriage.



Figure 4.9: Mr Ho ignoring Budi during their conversation

From the start of this conversation scene, Mr Ho is seen to be paying little attention to Budi as he is distracted reading a book. The back of Budi's head is visible in this shot which signals how insignificant Budi is in the eyes of Mr Ho. In the background, we are able to see seven Chinese deity figurines. This suggests that Mr Ho could embody a sense of superiority as his actions are valid and supported in the eyes of these deities.



Figure 4.10: The Ho women listening from the upper floor

The role of females and daughters in the Chinese household is also shown *29 Februari*. Continuing from Figure 4.9, we see Mrs Ho, Lily and Julie listening in on Budi and Mr Ho's conversation from upstairs; peering and eavesdropping from the railings as seen in Figure 4.10 at 48:45. This evokes the sense of being second in nature, which further reinforces the Chinese patriarchy where men, as heads of the family, attend to matters of external affairs, while the women are tasked to take charge of domestic affairs (Shek, 1998, as cited in Li & Lamb, 2015). Even when it came to affairs of their daughter's future, Mrs Ho is not present beside Mr Ho throughout the conversation with Budi; a strong

signifier that the mother herself in a Chinese family, had little say of what the future holds for their daughters.

Similarly, the patriarchy is also played up in *Ola Bola* namely through Tauke. Without a father figure in the picture as seen during 12:42 in Figure 4.11, we see a picture of a man that hangs on the wall. This suggests that Tauke's father has passed on and he now shoulders on the mantle as the eldest son to care for the Chow family.

That responsibility is not without its privileges. Tauke's mother has informed him that she has prepared chicken essence for Tauke's consumption. She reasoned that tauke juggles with multiple responsibilities and the essence will help with his stamina.



Figure 4.11: Keong praying to his deceased father

However, in 13:28 as seen in Figure 4.12, his younger sister asked if she could have the essence as tauke decides to consume it later. The mother swiftly rejects the idea, further reinforcing the favouritism towards Tauke over his sisters.



Figure 4.12: Mrs Chow reprimanding the youngest daughter

Tauke's ambition to play football for the national team in *Ola Bola* is not without the support of his family members. His mother and sisters, as seen in Figures 4.6 and 4.12, work hard by doing multiple jobs such as sewing garments at night. They are aware that playing football is not a lucrative career option and the only way to supplement income is to pool together their time and effort to work different jobs to put food on the table.



Figure 4.13: Mei Ling reveals her sacrifices

Similarly, the favouritism and inequality between sons and daughters was addressed in 36:18 as seen in Figure 4.13 where Chow Mei Ling, Tauke's second sister confronts Tauke over his moody deposition after he decides to quit

the national football team.

She reckoned that she too has sacrificed for the family by not pursuing her studies despite being a bright student. This subtle jab at the assumed patriarchy in the Chow family suggests that Mei Ling is fed up with the status quo and wants more than sacrificing her dreams for others.

4.2.2.3 The ability to speak other languages

The Chinese characters in the chosen films are able to speak Malay or English.

In *29 Februari*, both Lily and Mr Ho are able to converse with Budi in the Malay language throughout the film. In one of the main interactions between Budi and Lily was during 33.15 as seen in Figure 4.14. Lily sought clarification from Budi on what their relationship status was.

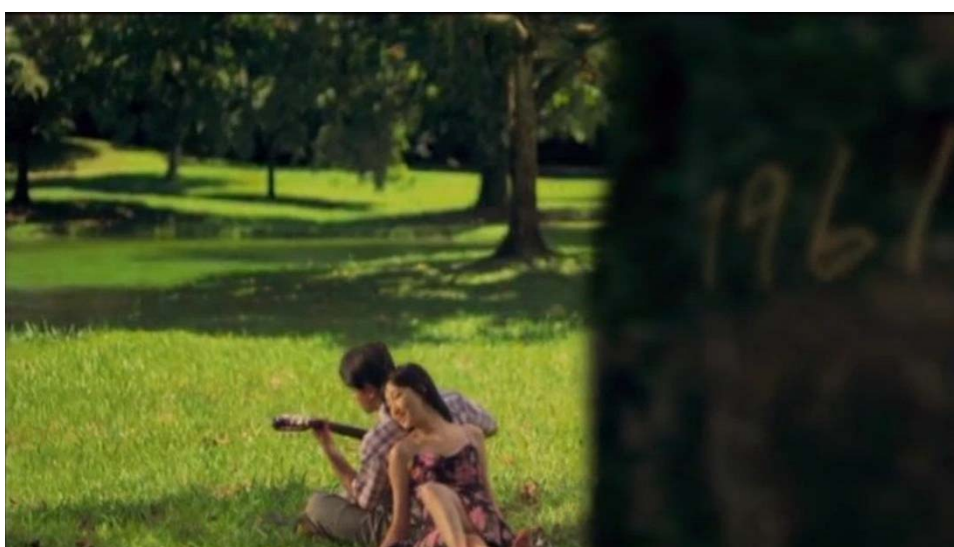


Figure 4.14: Budi and Lily having a conversation in the park

Their conversations are as follow:

- Lily : *Budi... Minggu depan?* (Budi, what about next week?)
- Budi : *Eh, ingatkan dah lupa. Hari jadi minggu depan sambut dekat mana?* (Eh, I thought you had forgotten about it? Where will you be celebrating your birthday?)
- Lily : *Budi... Apakah sebenarnya yang Budi rasa dalam hati Budi, maksud Lily, apakah perasaan Budi terhadap Lily?*
(Budi, what do you feel in your heart, what I mean is, how do you feel about me?)
- Budi : <Silence>
- Lily : *Jujurlah Budi.* (Be honest, Budi).
- Budi : *Budi rasa, rasa suka. Yelah. suka.* (I feel... I like. Yeah, I like you.)
- Lily : *Budi, Budi tak rasa...ci(nta)... Tak apalah. Mungkin kita harus percayai orang yang menyayangi kita. Keluarga kita yang paling tahu.*
(Budi, don't you feel l..(ove)... It's ok. Maybe, we should trust those who love us. Our families know best).

What this scene and dialogue clearly portrays is that Lily is fluent in Malay and had no issues understanding what Budi tried to convey to her when asked about his feelings. There is definitely nothing lost in translation as Budi was hesitant to confess his love to Lily and chose the word *suka* (like) as opposed to *cinta* (love) when professing his feelings to her. Lily understood his hesitation and obliged to continue her engagement with Alex.

Mr Ho too is portrayed to be fluent in Malay. As seen in Figure 4.15, Mr Ho sought refuge at a barbershop where Budi was working for during the May 13, 1969 riots, at 1:03:44.



Figure 4.15: Budi and Mr Ho confronting each other during the May 13 riots

The dialogue is as follows:

Mr Ho : *Dah bertahun dah Lily tinggalkan kami. Ini semua salah .
engkau. Kalau engkau tak paksa dia, tak tekan dia, dia tak akan
lari. (It has been years since Lily left us. This is all your fault. If
you didn't force her, she wouldn't have ran.)*

Budi : *Tak sangka pula dia pergi macam itu. (I didn't expect her to
leave that way.)*

Mr Ho : *Budi... masih tinggal di tempat yang sama? (Budi, are you still
staying at the same place?)*

Budi : *Tak. Saya dah duduk sendiri dah sekarang Mr Ho. Yelah.
Sampai masanya beluncas akan jadi kupu-kupu kan, tinggalkan
kepompong. Cari arah hidup sendiri, macam Lily?*

(No, I am staying on my own Mr Ho. Yup. It is time for the caterpillar to be a butterfly by leaving its cocoon. Looking for its own direction in life, just like Lily?)

Mr Ho: *Tapi, engkau rasa Lily belum cukup matang untuk berdikari?*
(But, don't you think Lily is not mature enough to be independant?)

Mr Ho's response reflects his understanding and comprehension of the Malay euphemisms used by Budi on explaining independence by comparing it with a caterpillar emerging from its cocoon as a butterfly.

In *Ola Bola*, Tauke is able to speak English and Malay throughout the film. When conversing with his friend Rahman, who is Malay, Tauke chooses to speak in English.



Figure 4.16: *Tauke* (right) sharing his dissatisfaction with the new national team coach, Harry Mountain, to Rahman

Their conversation as follows at 17:33, highlights the racial differentiation between both characters:

- Tauke* : You tell me, let Eric be a striker. What kind of line-up is that?
- Rahman* : *Takkan tak habis lagi fikir pasal ini?* (Aren't you done thinking about this?). You see ah, Abu, 18 matches in two years. 80% of his goals are from the left. Now, Eric. He broke all the records in the youth tournament.
- Tauke* : I don't care. I don't have time anymore. I have waited for four years. I must win the Olympics this time. If the coach can't lead the team, I have to handle it myself.
- Rahman* : Don't be like that *lah*. He came all the way from England to help you.
- Tauke* : You don't even know whether he is a helper or troublemaker. He has brown hair and blue eyes. He is not same as us.
- Rahman* : *Wah! Nah*, you see. [*Rahman* proceeds to sit next to *Tauke* and compare the skin tone of both their arms]
Different what? But we still brothers *kan?*
- Tauke* : It is different *lah*. They eat steak. But we eat *nasi lemak* (coconut milk rice) together, right?

It is apparent that when *Tauke* speaks to *Rahman*, they converse in a mixture of English and Malay. This is not to say that *Tauke* is not able to speak in Malay as he has addressed his team in Malay early on in the film at 7:55 and also during 21:39 when he shouted instructions to Abu during the game.

The conversation between *Tauke* and *Rahman* in this mixture of English and Malay, also known colloquially as Manglish or Malaysian-style English,

showcases the impact of the British Occupancy in Malaya where both the Malay and Chinese use English as a common language when conversing with each other but with a local twist.

This fluency of communicating in both English and Malay among Chinese characters dispel the notion that Chinese are bad in languages aside from Chinese. This frees up the notion of having miscommunication between inter-racial characters and moves the focus back to who these characters are in the films as opposed to what racial background are they from.

4.2.2.4 Comedy relief

The supporting Chinese characters in the chosen films were portrayed to be comedy relief characters, in line with previous research discussed in section 2.3.2.

Ma (1993 as cited in Zhu, 2013) proclaimed that many Asian or Asian-American characters on screen of Chinese descent often fall into the category of characters who were seen as a sign of threat or laughing stock which reaffirms the “irreconcilable differences that define the Anglos as superior physically, spiritually and morally” (p. 404). Julie Ho of *29 Februari* and *Ola Bola*’s Ong Tiam Cai’s on-screen behaviours are not far off from Ma’s findings.

Julie, Lily’s younger sister is used as a comic relief character (see Figure 4.17), often poking fun at Budi or simply annoying her sister by threatening to

tell their father of Lily's romance with Budi. Her suspicious demeanour is apparent as she does not trust Budi from the moment they met at the beginning of the film and toward the extent of accusing Budi of stealing her picture of R. Azmi in 22:12 that she dropped in an earlier scene. Throughout the film, Julie had little character development; often either serving to annoy Lily or instigate conflict between Lily and Mr Ho.



Figure 4.17: Julie, Lily's younger sister (left), joking with Budi on being a fan of the late Malay singer, R. Azmi

In *Ola Bola*, Ong Tiam Cai, his earlier character development started off as “weak and comical”; often being the butt of jokes by other team members until ultimately given the opportunity to shine at the end of the film.

The dialogues assigned to him were often used to convey comedy such as in 56:33 as seen in Figure 4.18 as he practices late at night, much to the mockery of his teammates in which he replies, “*Walaupun saya hanya satu skru yang kecil, tapi saya juga nak jadi skru yang bermakna!*” (Even if I were a little screw, I should be a useful screw).



Figure 4.18: Ong Tiam Cai's funny moments

His actions too such as seen in 1:06:54 were often comical in nature. As seen in Figure 4.19, Ong Tiam Cai is seen biting the heel of his football boot. This is an Asian myth where the practice of biting the heel of the shoe can help to avoid the shoe from “biting” back and causing blisters (Vivy, 2012).



Figure 4.19: Ong Tiam Cai bites a shoe

The occurrence of Ong Tiam Cai's comedic nature helped provide moments of comical relief towards Ola Bola's serious approach towards patriotism in the film.

4.3 Conclusion

The research focused on the main and selected Chinese characters of the chosen films. These characters have been analysed to identify any assigned stereotypes or themes in the chosen films. Several themes were found ranging from the portrayal of wealth disparity among Chinese characters, a focus on a patriarchal Chinese society, Chinese's ability to speak other languages, and also being Chinese portrayed as comedic relief characters to help move the plots of the films. This research further substantiated existing arguments by other researchers that Chinese characters in Malaysian films are subjected to stereotypical portrayals in films such as being patriarchal, wealthy or focused on materialism, and even weak and comical supporting roles.

Through this research, it was clear that both films approached Malaysia's multiracialism by putting the spotlight on Chinese characters. While "*29 Februari*" explored multiracialism by singling out Chinese characters and created tension between them and characters of other races, "*Ola Bola*" approached the team by highlighting Malaysia's diverse racial background through unity. The research found that interracial differences were used to create conflict in the chosen films.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter wraps up the discussion for this research. It encompasses the following topics:

- i. Overall conclusions from the research findings
- ii. Research contributions
- iii. Future recommendations and suggestions

5.2 Overall Conclusions from the Research Findings

Ma (1993) and Zhou (2007) found that over the years, Chinese characters in Western films shifted from mere supporting cast that are often depicted as weak and comical to lead roles that projected strength and confidence; often at par with their white counterparts.

From this research, it is found that the portrayal of Chinese characters in Malaysian films are still subjected to stereotypes such as being patriarchal, wealthy or focused on materialism and even weak and comical supporting roles, as identified in section 4.2.2.

Not much has changed over the years as stereotypical themes found in Malaysian films in 1950s (*Abu Nawas*, refer section 2.3.3) can still be found in both chosen films. However, it is not to say there are no character development towards Chinese characters beyond these identified stereotypes.

As seen in both *29 Februari* and *Ola Bola* where Chinese characters are able to converse fluently in Malay, it challenges the stereotype that Chinese are cloistered, distant and with little understanding of others races in Malaysia.

In *29 Februari*, the film ended with Arif, the son of Julie from a mixed marriage to an unnamed Malay character and Lily's nephew, inherits Budi's wealth including the family home that was once owned by the British colonisers. The family home was turned into an orphanage in memory of Budi's childhood.

Meanwhile in *Ola Bola*, the film ends with Marianne choosing to remain in Malaysia to expand her sports journalism career similar to her boss, Rahman's decision to stay in Malaysia, despite being offered a job abroad.

These on-screen character development can signify growth among Chinese characters in Malaysian films beyond their stereotypes such as being patriotic (in the case of Marianne) and focus on charitable causes beyond material wealth accumulation (in the case of Arif).

5.2.1 Stereotyping as a signifying practice

It is apparent that much of the racial stereotyping in both chosen films were placed upon supporting characters, and not on the leading characters.

Taking a cue from Hall's notion of stereotyping as a signifying practice (1997), there are two interpretations that can be gathered from the stereotypical of Chinese characters in both films.

The first, is the assumption that the filmmakers tried to downplay the stereotypes by placing it on supporting characters as opposed to lead characters. By keeping stereotypes in the chosen films, it allows to the audience to identify and relate to the character and film through these stereotypes.

By being emotionally or mentally invested in these characters, the film maker is able to incite the intended emotion or reaction among the audience watching the film.

The second, is to acknowledge the existence of stereotypical Chinese characters in both chosen films. This is done not to reinforce existing stereotypes but to change the relationship of the audience to the film by providing further character development to these stereotypical characters.

This signifying practice helps to expose and deconstruct the film where stereotypes are presented; paving the way for the audience to question and challenge the stereotypical imagery presented.

5.2.2 Conflict between Malay and Chinese characters as a plot device

In addition, both chosen films use racial differences to create conflict between its characters such as *29 Februari*'s Budi and Mr Ho, and *Ola Bola*'s Eric Yong and Ahmad Ali.

While interracial conflict in films can be problematic by reinforcing racial biases and differences, the problem is more apparent in *Ola Bola* than in *29 Februari*. The characters in both chosen films are fictional, but the characters in *Ola Bola* are based on real life Malaysian footballers, as discussed in section 4.2.1.

The fictional conflict among on-screen characters that are based on real persons may create a false impression on the audience as they would assume the real life persons involved are actually on each other's bad books.

This can further complicate the audience's interpretation of the film and real life events as they may not be able to differentiate what is fact or fiction.

5.3 What May Lie Ahead

Following the win of *Pakatan Harapan* in 14th Malaysia General Election on 9 May 2018, the change in the government signalled a new approach towards national unity. In terms of economic reforms, the *Pakatan Harapan* through their campaign manifesto promised to set up an Equal Opportunity Commission to bring an end to discriminatory and unfair practices (Pakatan Harapan, 2018). This move to strengthen the economic prowess of the various races of Malaysia is hoped to ensure a fair distribution of wealth to all.

With that in mind, the Malaysian film industry needs to intensify efforts to produce films that cater towards a wider demographic as opposed to films that cater to a single race. The box office success of “*Sepet*”, “*Ola Bola*” and “The Journey” highlights the importance of films where Malaysians are able to see versions of themselves on screen.

New films such as “*Rise: Ini Kalilah*” help push the agenda of national unity towards the general Malaysian audience. The 2018 film by Malaysian director Saw Teong Hin, Nik Amir Mustapha and MS Prem Nath was inspired by the real life events that took place during the 14 General Elections. “*Rise: Ini Kalilah*” took the approach of introducing six characters of different races and how their struggle impacted the results of the 14th General Election. This feel good movie was ultimately picked up by Netflix, a content streaming company (Yeoh, 2018).

Besides, filmmakers need to look at other ways to create a strong antagonist as opposed to relying on racial stereotypes. The portrayals of Chinese characters in Malay films as gang leaders and members of the triad do little towards strengthening interracial relationships among the society. Alternatively, Chinese filmmakers need to be mindful of portrayals of Malay characters in Chinese films as second class citizens, namely in the roles of petty traders, cleaners, and drivers. In addition, Chinese filmmakers should take stock of their work and find new ways to tell stories that are uniquely Malaysian and can be exported for screening in other Chinese speaking markets.

5.4 Research Contributions

This research further substantiated existing arguments by Maheendran (2017), as well as Nurul and Fariza (2018) of the portrayals of race in Malaysian films and can make the discussion of navigating between the different races in Malaysia less taboo (Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018).

The use of Chinese characters in Malaysian films provides the visibility of the Chinese community in the Malaysian film landscape. Such visibility and acknowledgement on film is important in creating a more diverse film industry and telling vibrant narratives of the stories of Malaysia.

Stereotypes can be used in films to highlight a certain aspect of a race; but however, should not be used as a crutch or be too dependent on it to move the film's plot.

Moreover, this research aims to fill up the gap of the lack of research and journals focusing on Malaysian films. This research contributes to the knowledge of multiculturalism and portrayal of Chinese characters in films; two areas that are though celebrated on screen, would need further research and knowledge to the subject area.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This research analysed only the two chosen Malaysian films that feature Chinese characters. The sample covered films released from 2010 to 2016. Future research should explore a wider selection of Malaysian films over the years including Malaysian films mentioned in Chapter 1 such as "*Spinning Gasing*", "*Sepet*", and "*Gubra*". Malaysian films produced beyond 2016 should be researched to provide an understanding on the evolution of Malaysian filmmakers and their take on representation.

Beyond the analysis of Chinese characters, future research should also explore on audience effects in order to expand further on the impact of films on the society. It would be beneficial to gauge audience reception towards Malaysian films and seek insights on how the Malaysian audience digest locally

produced films.

That said, future research should examine the portrayal of other races such as the Malay, Indian, Kadazan and Iban in Malaysian films. This will provide insights on how the different races in Malaysia are portrayed in films and also to find out if they receive sufficient screen time on films to signify their importance in the community.

This research also focuses primarily on qualitative methodologies. Other methodologies such as quantitative surveys can be used in future research to gauge audience perception on a larger scale basis.

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Appendix A

***29 Februari* Film Synopsis**

29 Februari is a Malaysian romance musical film produced by KRU Studios in 2011. It was directed by Edry Abdul Halim and touted as the country's first stereoscopic 3D theatrical release (Mohd Al, 2012). *29 Februari* is a film mainly dealing with love and romance. It explores the theme of an interracial relationship between the hero, Budi (a Malay descent), and the heroin, Lily Ho (a Chinese descent). The film was released in Malaysian cinemas on 30 August 2012.

29 Februari was set during the period from the late 19th century up till 2012. The premise of the film follows Budi, a child born on 29th February during the late 19th century.

As the film progresses, it shows that Budi ages slowly in accordance to his birthday which is celebrated once every four years as 29th February only occurs during leap years. The film chronicles Budi's life journey from a young adolescent to his final demise.

One of the key plot devices in this film took place during the proclamation of Malaya's independence on 15th August 1957. Budi (who is supposedly 61 years old, but is actually in his mid-teens due to leap year) crossed path with Lily at Stadium Merdeka as he managed to snatch a thief from making away with Lily's handbag. That incident paved the way for Budi to actively court and pursue Lily. However, this love affair was not appreciated by Lily's family, especially her father, Mr. Ho.

Their courtship spanned from 1958 till 1965. Lily informed Budi that her parents would like to have an engagement ceremony during her birthday party in 1965, and that she was to be married off to Alex, the son of Mr Ho's friend. Budi intercepted Lily's birthday party and caused a stir between all those who attended. The Ho family fiercely objected to Budi and Lily's relationship as interracial relationships were frowned upon at that time. Due to her family's rejection, Lily ran away from home and was last seen in Penang.

Budi was then looking for Lily but was never successful in those years. As the film progresses, in 2012, when Budi is residing in Penang and running his own business as a florist, he accidentally found Lily through his staff, Arif. Coincidence, Arif is Lily's nephew. Lily, who is in her late 80s is dying of cancer in the hospital. Aware of his delayed aging, Budi tries to spend as much time with Lily before she succumbs to her illness and Budi is killed in an accident.

While both characters died after rekindling their love, the film ends on a positive note that Arif is the sole heir to Budi's property and business as Budi left his estate to Lily. As Lily's only heir, Arif commemorated his aunt's and former employer's love story by turning Budi's parental home into an orphanage.

Appendix B

***Ola Bola* Film Synopsis**

Ola Bola is a football themed film released in 2016 by Astro Shaw productions. Directed by Chiu Keng Guan, *Ola Bola* is a film inspired by the story of the glories of the Malaysia national football team which successfully secured a spot in the 1980 Summer Olympics. The film focuses on three characters in the team, i.e. team captain Chow Kwok Keong (known as *Tauke*), striker Ahmad Ali, and goalkeeper Muthu Kumar. The film was released in Malaysian cinemas on 28 January 2016.

The film starts in the present day of 2016 when a content producer named Marianne is assigned to produce a promotional campaign on the former Malaysia national football team before she migrates to the United Kingdom. Her final assignment brings her to Sabah to interview Eric Yong, the former national football striker who then recalls his experience in the 1970s to Marianne.

The film continues with a flashback to the 1970s introduced characters namely Chow Kwok Keong (or also known as *Tauke*), Ahmad Ali, Muthu Kumar, and Ong Tiam Chai, who are footballers representing the Malaysian national team.

The story begins with the Chinese character of *Tauke* quitting the team owing to the team's poor performance during their previous match. The film also looks at each character's backstory and the struggles they and how football plays an integral part of their lives. *Tauke*, as the team captain, has to lead and motivate his team consisting of various races and backgrounds, and ultimately achieving the same goal.

Tauke is the eldest son to a family of four siblings. *Tauke* juggles between work, football and assisting his mother at her work as a rubber tapper. *Tauke*'s second sister, Chow Mei Ling resents him as she felt that she had to sacrifice her studies in order to support the family while *Tauke* chases his dream.

Other notable Chinese characters in the film include Tan Siew Lee who is *Tauke*'s girlfriend, Eric Yong, a footballer from Sabah trying to prove his worth on the national team despite his privileged background, and Ong Tiam Cai, the national team's substitute player who's looking for his big break on the field.

Apart from that, "*Ola Bola*" also involves two main characters of non-Chinese – striker Ahmad Ali, and goalkeeper Muthu Kumar.

Ahmad Ali is a Malay footballer, who is a driven, passionate and impatient striker in the team, who has dedicated his life to the game of football.

Muthu Kumar is the eldest son of an Indian coconut seller and has to juggle between helping his father and being a role model to three of his younger siblings.

In addition to Ahmad Ali and Muthu Kumar, *Ola Bola* also encompasses supporting casts of non-Chinese such as Mohamad Abu, Sanjeet Singh, coach Harry Mountain, sports commentator Rahman, and so forth.

The film chronicles each of the player's lives and how each player comes together to prepare for the qualifying matches. It then builds up to its climax as the team manages to overcome their differences and train for the 1980 Olympic Games qualification match against South Korea. The final match is marred with controversy as Malaysia plans to boycott that year's Olympic Games. This fact, which *Tauke* kept hidden from his teammates surfaced; leaving the team dejected. *Tauke* managed to convince the team to play their best for national glory and went on to defeat South Korea at 3-2.

The film ends as Marianne, upon completing her assignment, was moved by the spirit of nationalism and patriotism of the team and decided to stay in Malaysia to advance her career.

Though the characters in the film are fictional, they are based on the real-life story of how the Malaysian National Football team overcame the odds to qualify for the 1980 Summer Olympics but ultimately giving up the chance to play in Moscow owing to the Malaysian government decision to boycott the games. The boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics was initiated by the United States of America (USA) in response to objections towards the then Soviet Union (now known as Russia) invasion of Afghanistan (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

Appendix C

Sample of A Coding Sheet

Coding Sheet 29F & OB (BKH Dissertation) ☆ 🔒 ☁

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1	Coding of Ola Bola		29	
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7	Timecode	Scene/Segment	Themes	Remarks
8	0	Opening credits		
9	00:11	Black and white footage of football game		
10	00:26	2016 -Marianne watching the old football footage		
11	01:09	Marianne at work with her colleagues		
12	01:31	Marianne's colleague comment about her effort	Sense of lost patriotism	Marianne's Chinese colleague commented that other reporters are going to Brazil to do a video on Neymar, as opposed to waste time with the national squad as he questioned, who actually watches Malaysian football
13	01:42	Marianne interacts with her boss, Rahman	Sense of lost patriotism	Rahman questions Marianne, she feels she is wasting time in Malaysia and wants to pursue work abroad. She questioned why Rahman gave up an opportunity to work with the BBC. A common predicament of many Malaysian Chinese who feels the grass is greener on the other side (by working abroad).
14	02:48	Marianne goes to Sabah to search for a football personality		
15	03:32	Scenes of Chinese children playing football	Sense of Chinese superiority	After the game, Coach Eric corrects his grandson and insist that he speak in Mandarin as opposed to speaking in English
16	04:49	Marianne sits down with Eric and reminisce of the past	Sense of Chinese superiority	Eric does not respond to Marianne when she spoke to him in English, Eric only replies to her when she spoke to him in Mandarin
17	06:26	1980 - National squad pre-olympic training		
18				Eric is the son of a timber tycoon from Sabah and has a new set of football gear. Ahmad Ali makes it a point to taunt Eric that he is rich and was placed on the team because of his background. Ahmad Ali is doubtful of Eric's skills as a footballer. Muthu

+ ☰ 29F Coding ▾ OB Coding ▾