

【論 説】

## Sustainable Development of Chinese Education in Malaysia: A SWOT-PEST Analysis of Internal and External Environments

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### Introduction

Chinese education has been prevalent in Malaysia for more than 200 years. After years of development, it has been closely integrated into the national education system, forming a complete, comprehensive, and standardised education system—from preschool to higher education. Mandarin (华语) is the mother tongue and first language of most Chinese people in Malaysia. Therefore, the Chinese education referred to in this study is not only Mandarin courses but also includes all educational and teaching activities conducted in Mandarin as the medium of instruction in 1,301 Chinese primary schools, 62 Chinese secondary schools, and 3 Chinese colleges/universities all over Malaysia<sup>2</sup>.

Owing to the ever-changing global environment, Chinese education is entering a current epoch of rapid transformation with increasing educational innovation demands. Despite developmental progress, Chinese education continues to face numerous disadvantages and challenges, making reform a challenging yet inevitable task in the context of sustainable development.

What strategies are required for sustainable development of Chinese education in Malaysia? To answer this question, this study employs the PEST, SWOT analytical models to investigate the sustainable development of Chinese education. SWOT serves as the primary analytical framework for identifying internal strengths and weaknesses within Chinese education as well as external opportunities and challenges. Subsequently, strategies for the sustainable development of Chinese education were derived from the findings of internal and

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<sup>2</sup> All references to Chinese education in this paper refers to Chinese education in Malaysia unless otherwise stated. Chinese education in other regions, such as Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, are not the subject of this paper. However, the author considers that the experience of Chinese education in Malaysia to be of referential significance in the development of Chinese education in other regions.

external environmental analyses.

This study primarily uses document analysis. The chief analytical documents included the *Malaysian Education Blueprint*, *Blueprint of Independent Chinese Education*, annual work reports of the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (马来西亚华校董事联合会总会: UCSCAM, also known as Dongzong) and United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia (马来西亚华校教师会总会: UCSTAM, also known as Jiaozong), *Chinese Education Bulletin*, as well as relevant literature. Comprehensive interviews were conducted with participants, including both domestic and international scholars, leaders of Chinese educational institutions, and principals of Chinese schools.

## I SWOT-PEST Analysis

SWOT analysis, also known as the Dawes matrix or TOWS analysis, is a comprehensive analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of situational analysis. It is a list of the internal and external conditions of the organisation, the original independent strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the organisation in the form of a matrix arranged in combinations, and a comprehensive analysis of the programme strategies that can be adopted under different conditions.

Internal environment refers to the structure and reality of Chinese education in Malaysia. This study analyses the internal strengths and weaknesses of the four aspects of education.

- (1) Educational Orientation: The development policy of Chinese education includes its attributes, orientation, purpose, and educational path. Along with the evolution of the historical environment, educational orientation has adjusted and been expressed differently during different periods.
- (2) Education System: It includes the system, content, activities, equipment, teachers, students, administration, and other elements of Chinese education. Each element is an independent entity, but is also related to and interacts with each other, constituting an organic whole.
- (3) Educational Resources: These include educational funds, curricula and teaching resources, teaching support systems, and educational and teaching environments. They refer to important explicit or implicit educational elements that serve teaching and learning, and can assist learners in achieving their learning goals.
- (4) Educational Management: Although leadership, planning, organisation, and monitoring of Chinese primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities are under different management units, they remain public utilities collectively operated and managed by the Chinese community.

Educational development is deeply constrained by the general environment, and this study used PEST analysis to explore the external macro-environment of Chinese education.

- (1) Political: This significantly affects the orientation and developmental direction of Chinese education. This positively increases the chances of sustainable development while negatively restricting the development of Chinese education to a greater extent.
- (2) Economic: The economic environment has a direct and specific impact on the scale and structure of Chinese education, the direction and goals of talent training, and the setting and development of disciplines and specialties.
- (3) Social: The social development constrains the development of education, which affects the philosophy of Chinese education, personnel training programmes, and the implementation of curricula and teaching.
- (4) Technological: The development of technology in response to social change has led to a series of reforms in Chinese education in terms of the means of educational management, forms of educational presentation, and means of teaching.

Using the SWOT model, combined with the OSRM and PEST models aforementioned, it is possible to effectively analyse favourable internal strengths and external opportunities as well as unfavourable internal weaknesses and external threats to Chinese education. These models help Chinese education to sort out the conditions that are favourable to them, such as how to make use of their own strengths to strengthen their position and how to make good use of the opportunities that are generated externally and seize them. In addition, Chinese education needs to recognise current problems and risks, such as how to improve its weaknesses to enhance its competitiveness, and how to cope with potential crises that may be brought about by the external environment. These elements play crucial roles in the development of Chinese education.

In the analysis of internal factors, it is important to focus on the advantages and benefits that the relevant factors bring to Chinese education. Simultaneously, internal factors negatively impact Chinese education. As long as Chinese education can take targeted measures for each part and identify programmes that can strengthen its advantages and reverse its disadvantages, it will be beneficial for sustainable development.

However, external factors such as political, economic, social, and technological factors have a significant impact on the operation and development of Chinese education. Chinese education needs to constantly focus on the opportunities and challenges of the external environment, flexibly adjust its strategies and operations and adapt to the changing market environment, and place itself in a favourable competitive position to increase the conditions for sustainable development.

Using the above analysis model as a framework, this study analyses the internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities, and challenges of Chinese education, and

combines document analysis and information from interviews to suggest strategies for its sustainable development, as presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Components of SWOT analysis

| Factors  | Positive      | Negative | Indicators and Factors to be measured |                                       |
|----------|---------------|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Internal | Strength      | Weakness | Educational Orientation               | ] of Chinese education<br>in Malaysia |
|          |               |          | Education Systems                     |                                       |
|          |               |          | Educational Resources                 |                                       |
|          |               |          | Education Management                  |                                       |
| External | Opportunities | Threats  | Political factors                     |                                       |
|          |               |          | Economic factors                      |                                       |
|          |               |          | Social factors                        |                                       |
|          |               |          | Technological factors                 |                                       |

Table 2: Types of strategies suggested according to Components of SWOT

| External<br>Circumstances | Internal<br>Circumstances | Strengths                       | Weaknesses                      |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                           |                           | Suggested Strategies            |                                 |
| Opportunities             |                           | S × O: Expansion Strategy       | W × O: Reconfiguration Strategy |
| Threats                   |                           | S × T: Diversification Strategy | W × T: Defensive Strategy       |

## II Analysis of Internal Strengths and Weaknesses of Chinese Education in Malaysia

### 1. Internal Strengths of Chinese Education

#### (1) Educational Orientation: Inheritance and Preservation of Excellent Chinese Culture

Professor Guo Xi (郭熙) of Jinan University, the doctoral supervisor and director of the Overseas Chinese Language Research Centre (Jinan University) of the National Language Commission, indicated that the ethnic pride of Malaysian Chinese people is an indispensable factor for the sustainable development of Chinese education. Furthermore, this sense of identity is primarily derived from cultural identification, which combines Malaysian and Chinese culture that is gradually formed through local practices. He emphasises this as follows:

Chinese culture is a culture of progress, distinguished by its uniqueness and

distinctiveness. It serves as an inspiration to the Chinese community, a group of hardworking people who strive for success wherever they go. This culture shapes our worldview and understanding of the relationship between people and the world. It is important for the next generation to continue on this path and carry on our culture, while recognising the significance of language in preserving it.<sup>3</sup>

The above viewpoint precisely illustrates that inheriting Chinese culture is the core value and educational orientation of Chinese education and that it is the educational philosophy or abstract spiritual existence of Chinese education. Chinese culture has been subconsciously accepted and recognised by the Malaysian Chinese community through the ideological process of daily practice, which has led to the formation of a national culture. This signifies the establishment of a unified mode of beliefs, values, and concepts within the Malaysian-Chinese community. Through the important cultural transmission channel of Chinese education, a group of talents which loves Chinese culture have been nurtured, and cultural exchanges have promoted folk exchanges among diverse ethnic groups, demonstrating the value of *harmony* and *compatibility* in Chinese culture.

## (2) Education System: Possessing a Complete Chinese Education System

In Malaysia, the Chinese education system possesses a complete education system that covers primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. This complete educational system promotes continuous improvements in Chinese schools, curriculum settings, teaching effectiveness, and evaluation systems. This strengthens the formation of a hierarchical and classified education system in Chinese schools and promotes the continuous progress of Chinese education towards a new era.

## (3) Educational Resources: Standardised Curricula and Regulatory Systems

Chinese education in Malaysia benefits from localised and standardised curricula and regulatory systems. This ensures that educational activities in Chinese schools align with national educational goals and objectives, while providing a consistent and high-quality educational experience for students. Chinese primary schools within the national education system, Chinese secondary schools led by UCSCAM, and Chinese higher education institutions regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) have all adopted standardised curricula and textbooks to regulate teacher and student education activities based on national educational goals. The Curriculum Development Division of Malaysia's Ministry of Education (MOE) manages textbooks for Chinese primary schools, whereas the UCSCAM Curriculum Bureau manages curricula for

<sup>3</sup> Interview date: 15 March, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

Chinese secondary schools. Although textbooks for Chinese higher education institutions are not unified, they are monitored by MQA's course evaluation system.

To keep up with the contemporary period, the MOE has attached significant importance to human development, which poses more demanding requirements for talent development in this new era. The MOE aims to develop school curricula which are committed to holistically developing children through intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions, as reflected in the National Education Philosophy. The fundamental objective of any education system is to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills required for success in life (MOE Malaysia, 2013: E-4).

Chinese schools are reforming their curricula in accordance with the Ministry. For example, Chinese secondary schools are reforming their curriculum structure by innovating in a cross-cutting, diversified, and integrated direction, focusing on student choice (UCSCAM, 2018: 54-87).

#### (4) Education Management: The Ethnic Causes in the Chinese Community

According to Guo (2020: 17), overseas Chinese people are supported by three major forces: Chinese community associations, Chinese schools, and the Chinese media. In Malaysia, the sustained development of Chinese education relies heavily on strong support and funding provided by Chinese community associations and enterprises. These organisations and businesses have demonstrated their support for educational activities, which is a crucial factor in the growth of Chinese education.

Leading organisations of Chinese education in Malaysia, such as UCSCAM and UCSTAM, play a pivotal role in reinforcing their leadership and defending Chinese education against difficulties and oppression. They spared no effort to fight for more space for the survival and development of Chinese education. During an interview, Bock Tai Hee (莫泰熙), the former Chief Administrative Officer of UCSCAM (1981–2006), highlighted the critical role played by UCSCAM and UCSTAM in the development of Chinese education. He explains this as follows:

Prior to independence, the survival and growth of Chinese schools were largely attributed to the presence of a crucial organisational structure, the board of directors. These boards of directors came together to form the State Board of Directors Association, which eventually evolved into the National Board of Directors Association. Before the establishment of UCSCAM, UCSTAM was formed. Together, these two organisations united the masses and actively advocated for the rights and interests of the nation and education, guiding the direction of Chinese education

development.<sup>4</sup>

The UCSCAM and UCSTAM are actively exploring and developing new directions for the growth of Chinese education. They built upon the foundations of leading Chinese education to determine innovative solutions that would help them continue to thrive. Chinese media also plays an equally important role in the continuous development of Chinese education by innovating and transforming to meet current needs. Chinese education, community organisations, enterprises, and media are closely related and share a common fate. They have played a role in disseminating Chinese education and promoting its development.

All parties involved are attempting their best to gather Chinese community resources, establish and promote the development of Chinese education, and assist in cultivating the talent required by the country. Chinese education has become an ethnic cause jointly operated by the Chinese community.

## 2. Internal Weaknesses of Chinese Education

### (1) Educational Orientation: The Impact of Enrolment and Competition

The decline in the Chinese birthrate and distribution of the Chinese population has led to an imbalance in the development of Chinese schools and the creation of competition for students. Although over 90% of Chinese parents continue to send their children to Chinese primary schools for Chinese education, the decline in the Chinese birth rate is directly reflected in the specific data of the decline in the number of Chinese primary school students. According to statistical data from MOE Malaysia, the number of Chinese primary school students as of February 2021 was 507,177, a decrease by 15.92% compared with 603,192 in 2010 (UCSTAM, 2021c).

Population migration and economic development are related factors, and the imbalanced distribution of the Chinese population in urban and rural areas has resulted in a significant gap in the development of Chinese primary and secondary schools. The students in Chinese secondary schools were primarily from Chinese primary schools. Although the development and scale of Chinese secondary schools in congregated areas and cities are large or medium, the decline in the number of Chinese primary schools also extends to the phenomenon of competition for students, with more competitive schools growing larger and less-developed schools shrinking. When interviewed, Principal Chok Nyuk Chaw (卓玉昭), from Papar Middle School, Papar, indicated the following:

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<sup>4</sup> Interview date: 21 June, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

Population urbanisation and demographic changes, coupled with the increasing prevalence of interracial marriages, have led to a decline in the number of Chinese students attending schools in remote areas, and the development of small Chinese secondary schools has become increasingly difficult.<sup>5</sup>

Principal Ng Jooi Seah (吴维城), Principal of Chung Ling Private High School, Penang, believes the following:

The reduction in the number of Chinese primary schools will result in larger Chinese secondary schools becoming more self-reliant and establishing their own identities to enhance their competitiveness, making it difficult to standardise educational orientation in Chinese secondary schools.<sup>6</sup>

The dwindling number of Chinese primary school students and the emergence of private and international schools have intensified the competition among students. Consequently, Chinese secondary schools should reform their educational orientation and focus on catering to individual needs and circumstances.

## (2) Education System: Shortage of Teaching Staff and Professional Inadequacy

The Malaysian Chinese education system faces long-standing challenges such as insufficient teaching staff and inadequate professionalism.

According to the MOE's February 2020 report, there were 1,125 teacher vacancies in Chinese primary schools nationwide. To address this shortage, the MOE assigned 471 contractual teachers to Chinese primary schools in June 2020. These contractual teachers are set to complete their tenure by February 2022. Although the MOE promised to provide in-service training to temporary teachers to improve their teaching skills, no further training was announced (UCSCAM 2021: 5). Consequently, vacancies remain, and temporary teachers are often hired to fill these gaps.

Moreover, the hidden danger of inadequate professionalism persists among them (Santhiram & Tan, 2015: 20). According to the MOE, of the 35,986 Chinese primary school teachers in 2020, 28,881 had university qualifications, 6,543 did not have university qualifications, and 562 had not received teacher training (UCSCAM, 2021: 6).

Although the shortage of teachers in Chinese secondary schools is not as severe as in Chinese primary schools, they continue to face similar problems with inadequate levels of professionalism among their teachers. Of the 4,885 teachers in Chinese secondary schools

<sup>5</sup> Interview date: 1 March, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

<sup>6</sup> Interview date: 19 February, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.



nationwide, 9.60% had a diploma (in college), 69.15% had a bachelor's degree, 17.96% had a master's degree, and 0.72% had a doctoral degree. Additionally, 57.43% of the teachers had professional qualifications in education, while 42.57% did not (UCSCAM, 2022c: 400-402). This indicates that improving teachers' educational professionalism remains an important prerequisite for the sustained development of Chinese secondary schools. Principal Soh Chin Choon (苏进存), from Hin Hua High School, Klang, emphasised the importance of teachers' understanding of education professionalism:

If frontline educators lack professional theoretical [qualifications], it may lead to insufficient consideration of the laws of educational development, resulting in an inability to grasp the relevant regularities of many educational or teaching developments, and a tendency to fall into the mindset of wanting to *transplant* the experiences of others who have succeeded. This can result in difficulties adapting to new situations or suboptimal outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, teaching quality in Chinese colleges and universities is vital. Teachers' academic research abilities should be valued when improving their research and controlling teaching quality. This could help meet the professional growth requirements.

### (3) Educational Resources: Insufficient Funding for Chinese Schools

The government's unbalanced allocation of education funding to different types of schools has led to Chinese primary schools not receiving the same treatment as national schools. Consequently, these schools face perennial funding shortages, and must rely on donations from the Chinese community to survive. This has severely hindered the development of Chinese primary schools. Chinese secondary schools and tertiary institutions rely on support from the Chinese community for funding. The allocation to Chinese primary schools in 2020 dropped to RM50 million from RM100 million in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Although Chinese secondary schools generally do not receive government funding, in 2019 and 2020, RM12 million and RM15 million were allocated to all independent secondary schools nationwide, and RM6 million was allocated annually to three Chinese tertiary institutions, each receiving RM2 million (UCSTAM 2021c: 127).<sup>9</sup>

### (4) Education Management: Internal Conflicts within Chinese Education Organisations

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<sup>7</sup> Interview date: 24 February, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

<sup>8</sup> The allocation to national primary schools in 2020 was RM300 million (UCSTAM, 2021c).

<sup>9</sup> After the coup d'etat in February 2020, the Perikatan Nasional government did not allocate funding for different types of schools in the 2021 budget proposal.

The advancement of Chinese education hinges on two critical leadership bodies: the UCSCAM and UCSTAM. Since their inception, these organisations have collaborated closely to confront discriminatory national education policies and defend the rights of Chinese education, thereby consolidating the unity of the Chinese community and facilitating the robust evolution of Chinese education for several decades.

However, over the past decade, disputes and serious disagreements concerning the approval documentation for *Sekolah Menengah* (high school) *Chong Hwa, Kuantan* have ensued between UCSCAM and UCSTAM. Moreover, various internal contentions within UCSCAM have unavoidably compromised the organisation's leadership and efficacy in guiding Chinese schools, resulting in profoundly adverse effects on the growth of Chinese education. Both the disagreements between UCSCAM and UCSTAM and the internal disputes within UCSCAM have tarnished the images of these two leading Chinese educational organisations and fragmented the forces driving the development of Chinese education.

### III Analysis of External Opportunities and Threats for Chinese Education in Malaysia

#### 1. External Opportunities

##### (1) Political Environment: The Belt and Road Initiative

Since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the *five connections* policy has made China's important connections with countries along the routes of political exchange, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and the humanities, more closely linked. Chinese education is an indispensable part of cultural cooperation and exchange among countries and regions along the route. The Chinese government has rapidly increased funds to support the international dissemination of the Chinese language each year. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and its affiliated Chinese Education Foundation have applied for special funds to support Chinese education. The China Scholarship Council can apply for Chinese government scholarships to support outstanding young Chinese overseas students studying in China (Wu, 2016: 11).

Professor Wu Yinghui (吴应辉), who is also the Executive Vice President of the Institute of Chinese International Education, Beijing Language and Culture University, mentioned the following in an interview :

China's peaceful rise and development have positively impacted Chinese education and enhanced the status of overseas Chinese people. Promoting exchange and cooperation in the field of Chinese education between China and Malaysia can provide

development opportunities for Malaysian Chinese education. Thus, both countries should collaborate to improve the external environment of Chinese education and promote its growth.<sup>10</sup>

Further, Professor Wu indicated that the implementation of the BRI and the establishment of important cooperation platforms, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for infrastructure construction in Southeast Asia, are driving economic trade growth between China and ASEAN. This will increase the demand for Chinese language talent and encourage more Chinese youth to study Chinese, thus providing a broad space for the development of Chinese education (Wu, 2016: 12).

## (2) Economic Environment: The Belt and Road Initiative

According to the Belt and Road Trade Cooperation Big Data Report (2018) released by the Belt and Road Big Data Centre of the China Information Centre, six of the top ten countries along the Belt and Road with the largest trade volume with China are ASEAN countries, with Malaysia ranking third. From the perspective of tourism, information issued by China's Bureau of Statistics reveals that China's outbound travellers steadily rank first worldwide (Liu et al., 2020: 56). China has been a major source of inbound tourism for Malaysia. Tourism drives economic development and increases consumption. To attract more Chinese tourists, it is necessary to learn a language familiar to the source country, which inadvertently promotes motivation to learn Chinese and enhances the opportunities for Chinese schools to promote Chinese language learning. As the construction of the "Belt and Road" continues to advance, the demand for Chinese language talents in the countries along the routes is becoming more and more diversified, such as basic communicative general Chinese language talents, advanced Chinese language talents who are proficient in Chinese language and also understand Chinese culture, and composite Chinese language talents with specialised characteristics, which will further promote the support of the governments of various countries for Chinese language learning in the main nationalities (Wang, 2019: 126).

Mr. Tan Tai Kim (陈大锦), Chairman of the UCSCAM, emphasised the following in an interview:

Given the current challenges and uncertainties, adapting to the changing environment is crucial for sustainable development in Chinese education. To overcome parochialism, China must broaden its vision and embrace international integration. Chinese education must keep pace with the times, tackle unknowns with confidence, and forge ahead despite

<sup>10</sup> Interview date: 25 May, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

the obstacles. Collaboration with overseas forces, including Mainland China, is critical for the growth of Chinese education. Through regional cooperation, Chinese education can engage with the global community and move towards internationalisation.<sup>11</sup>

The Belt and Road Initiative has led to exchanges in many fields, and development and cooperation in various fields will inevitably promote the development of the field of education. This inadvertently enriches the connotation of Chinese education, creates a wider range of needs, and is an external opportunity to promote the development of Chinese education.

### (3) Social Environment: Multiculturalism

*Diversity* is a prominent characteristic of Malaysia. Regarding the depth of ethnic history, various ethnic groups have entered the Malay Peninsula in different directions owing to different historical background factors over hundreds of years, except for the indigenous peoples, who constitute a small percentage of the population. They gradually nurtured and developed the culture of the land. *Diversity* is not only a trace of history but also an extremely vivid reality for Chinese education. With the trends of globalisation, internationalisation, and changes in domestic demographics, such as declining birth rates among ethnic Chinese people and changes in population structure, Chinese education faces a more complex multicultural environment.

In 2010, non-Chinese students in Chinese primary schools numbered 71,418, accounting for 11.84% of the total population. By 2020, this number had significantly increased to 100,644, accounting for 19.75% (UCSTAM, 2020: 130). In 2019, there were 1,628 non-Chinese students among the 81,712 students in Chinese secondary schools nationwide, indicating a steady annual increase from 923 in 2009 (UCSCAM 2022b: 394). These data indicate that Chinese education, which is situated in a multicultural environment, must respond to this development and inject a more diverse cultural thinking that respects differences, recognises and resolves conflicts, and coexists in the process of fulfilling its educational functions.

### (4) Technological Environment: Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0)

The information age of science and technology will impact Chinese education, necessitating a shift towards an open educational philosophy, dynamic curricula, and personalised teaching to meet individual needs. These are the foreseeable trends that should be pursued.

At Chinese colleges and universities, it is necessary to promote science and technology research to reproduce new knowledge and technologies. Vocational Chinese

<sup>11</sup> Interview date: 25 February, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

colleges and universities should focus on cultivating talent for technology transfer, production, innovation and management. In Chinese secondary and primary schools, it is also essential to introduce science and technology education with a focus on cultivating comprehensive qualities such as scientific consciousness, scientific literacy, technology management, and innovative thinking. Therefore, optimising the configuration of teaching equipment, strengthening the quality of teachers, and promoting interaction among all educational elements can enable Chinese education to meet the new requirements of IR 4.0, and cultivate the talent needed by the country (Wong, 2019: 43).

## 2 External Threats to Chinese Education

### (1) Political Environment: Unitary National Education Policy

The unitary ideology and thinking of *one country, one nation, one culture, one language* has been the dominant idea behind Malaysia's national policies since its independence. Under this dominant ideology, the multi-stream education system, formed by diverse ethnic groups, inevitably faces significant challenges. Native language education of non-Malay ethnic groups faces significant obstacles in terms of policy and resource allocation. The Chinese community has always been concerned about the transformation of Chinese primary schools. Therefore, governmental educational initiatives have received considerable attention.<sup>12</sup>

The development of Chinese primary schools has had a direct impact on secondary schools. Chinese primary schools were the main source of students in Chinese secondary schools. Under this policy, Chinese secondary schools were excluded from the national education system. The government does not provide any education funding, strictly controls their expansion, or recognises their unified examination, which severely limits the options for Chinese secondary school students to further their education.

Chinese tertiary educational institutions are also affected by unitary educational policies. To survive and develop, they must comply with various academic requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education, including administrative and teaching documents, the language of instruction, and the language for writing graduation theses, which must be in English or Malay. Therefore, a unitary national education policy has always been an external challenge for Chinese education in achieving sustainable development.

### (2) Economic Environment: The Identity of Malaysian Chinese with Chinese Education

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2019, the Ministry of Education decided to introduce a *Jawi* calligraphy art (*Seni Khat*) unit in Malay language for the fourth to sixth grades of Chinese and Tamil Primary schools.

After a long historical process of integration, the Malaysian Chinese people, particularly the younger generation, achieved multicultural integration and acceptance of both Eastern and Western cultures, resulting in the formation of a localised Chinese culture. Consequently, they have developed a cultural consciousness that critically reflects inherited Chinese cultural elements and rationally examines, clarifies, and integrates various cultural factors that exist and play a role in Chinese society (Li & Huang, 2009: 112). Chinese education is no longer considered a means of preserving the national culture. A more critical consideration is whether Chinese education can respond to social development trends and cultivate talent that meets the demands of the new social reality of win-win cooperation between industry and education.

Although there remains a clear urban-rural divide, the tuition fees of Chinese schools, particularly Chinese secondary schools, have been increasing annually. Moreover, the gap between tuition fees of urban Chinese secondary schools and international schools is narrowing. This phenomenon has created the perception that Chinese secondary schools are for the wealthy, which has impacted the new generation of parents who prioritise practical considerations over cultural emotions when selecting schools for their children.

The donation of educational funds by the Chinese community and parents' identification with and choice of Chinese schools are critical economic resources for their development of Chinese schools. Therefore, conscious thinking about the local Chinese culture is an inevitable step towards the development of a national cultural identity. However, it has also had an undeniable impact on the development of Chinese education.

### (3) Social Environment: Social Changes Resulting in Development Imbalances

Several social changes have threatened the development of Chinese schools and created an imbalance. First, population changes and mobility have caused fluctuations in student enrolment, with populations moving to urban areas, resulting in some Chinese schools having many students. Furthermore, Chinese schools in aging communities and remote areas face student shortages, with a decreasing number of Chinese students and an increasing number of non-Chinese students.

Principal Fung Kok Chau (冯国超) stated the following in an interview :

The changing population structure of the Chinese community has directly affected the development of Chinese education. Large schools with thousands of students coexist with small or micro schools with fewer than 100 or even just over ten students. The development resources of Chinese schools are extremely unequal in terms of both student enrolment and educational resources. This imbalance must be addressed

to develop them more effectively.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the growing gap between urban and rural development has increased the concentration of the Chinese population in emerging cities, resulting in explosive growth or overcrowding of Chinese primary and secondary schools with increasingly strengthened resource and development conditions. However, the development of Chinese schools in remote areas is relatively difficult or even in a state of decline.

Third, competition between international and private schools and foreign university branches has intensified, particularly in primary and secondary education. In recent years, international and private schools have grown rapidly owing to their advantages in terms of educational resources and environment, posing a significant threat to student enrolment in Chinese primary and secondary schools. The establishment of foreign universities in Malaysia has exacerbated the challenges faced by Chinese tertiary educational institutions.

#### (4) Technological Environment: Changes in Educational Dissemination and Technology

In the era of technology and informatisation, schools must urgently improve their technological infrastructure at all levels. In terms of teaching methods, traditional teaching methods, such as listening and computer-assisted teaching, have been surpassed by dual-line education, artificial intelligence-assisted teaching, and the integration of large amounts of technology and equipment with technologies such as big data. The rapid development of information technology has negatively affected concepts, communication methods, educational teaching technologies, and other aspects of the education sector.

First, it has brought about new requirements for communication methods and information technology in Chinese education, including the Internet, cloud technology, big data, and artificial intelligence. The development of various Chinese schools at all levels depends on their own development and communication capabilities as well as their values and operations.

Second, the integration of new technologies directly affects the transformation and reconstruction of teaching methods and orders. '*Internet +*' and hybrid teaching have encouraged more ubiquitous, self-directed, cross-disciplinary, cooperative, and other learning methods that combine modern technology; Chinese education must continuously adapt based on such developments.

## IV Strategies for Sustainable Development of Chinese Education in Malaysia

The analyses of strengths and weaknesses of Chinese education in Malaysia and the

<sup>13</sup> Interview date: 26 February, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

positive and negative external factors surrounding Chinese education in Malaysia were crossed based on a SWOT-PEST analysis; the resulting strategies are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Suggested strategies for sustainable development of Chinese Education in Malaysia

|                        |  | Strengths   | Weaknesses   |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
|                        |  | Internal Ciurumstances  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inheritance and preservation of excellent Chinese culture</li> <li>2. Possessing a complete Chinese education system</li> <li>3. Standardised curricula and regulatory systems</li> <li>4. The ethnic cause in the Chinese community</li> </ol>                                  |
| External Ciurumstances |  | Suggested Strategies  |  |
| Opportunities          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. BRI</li> <li>2. Multiculturalism</li> <li>3. IR 4.0</li> </ol>   | <u>S × O: Expansion Strategy</u><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Achieving organic integration with Chinese international education</li> <li>2. Co-constructing and sharing regional education resources</li> <li>3. Constructing a transformative concept of development</li> </ol>                 | <u>W × O: Reconfiguration Strategy</u><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chinese as a second instruction language</li> <li>2. Strengthening fundraising mechanisms for managing Chinese education</li> <li>3. Symbiosis between Chinese education and multicultural environment</li> </ol>                      |
|                        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unitary national education policy</li> <li>2. The Identity of Malaysian Chinese with Chinese education</li> <li>3. Social changes resulting in development imbalances</li> <li>4. Changes in education dissemination and technology</li> </ol> | <u>S × T: Diversification Strategy</u><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocating for government recognition of Chinese education</li> <li>2. Creating tailored development plans based on local conditions</li> <li>3. Harnessing information technology to explore innovative resources</li> </ol> | <u>W × T: Defensive Strategy</u><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building leadership alliances to guide competition and cooperation</li> <li>2. Continuously enhancing mechanisms for teacher professional development</li> <li>3. Utilising dynamic educational information to foster development</li> </ol> |
| Threats                |  |   |  |



## 1 Expansion Strategy (SO): Internal Strengths × External Opportunities

### (1) Achieving Organic Integration with Chinese International Education

In the context of the BRI, the Chinese government expects to integrate resources for the promotion of Chinese international education and overseas Chinese education to enhance China's soft power. However, the Malaysian government expects that the Chinese teacher-training programme will eventually lead to the replacement of value-oriented Chinese education with instrumental need-oriented Chinese teaching, thus strengthening national and ethnic identity (Wang, 2017: 11). Jia Yimin (2019: 19-20) indicates that China's Ministry of Education has proposed the BRI education programme, and an increasing number of people around the world are learning Chinese; it is necessary to have a community of responsibility to spread Chinese language and culture worldwide. Under the condition of combining the internal advantages of Chinese education in Malaysia with the external opportunities of China's initiatives such as the BRI, the promotion of the organic integration of Chinese education and Chinese international education is an important strategy to capitalise on the development of the situation.

### (2) Co-construction and Sharing of Regional Education Resources

It is advisable to strengthen cooperation among regions in the field of education, expand overseas cooperation, seize opportunities, and actively participate in regional education exchanges to cultivate international talent in response to the needs of the larger environment. Malaysian-Chinese education should better utilise and grasp opportunities for regional exchange and cooperation between education and academia, which the BRI will bring in the future. In addition to its connections with the ten ASEAN countries, it should also develop more opportunities to share educational resources and collaborate with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.

Professor Shi-Huei Ho (何希慧), the Institute of Educational Administration and Evaluation, University of Taipei, suggested the following in an interview:

We must capitalise on the opportunities presented by China's BRI and the Chinese Education Belt concept, as proposed by Chinese scholars. To ensure the sustainable development of Chinese education in Malaysia, we need to adopt a broader perspective and explore opportunities for collaboration with other regional Chinese education systems. By combining resources and working together, we can maximise the growth potential of Chinese education in Malaysia beyond its borders.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview date: 17 March, 2021. Interview Method: Zoom.

### (3) Constructing a Transformative Development Concept

The role of awareness of change is to urge Chinese education to constantly seek new ideas and changes in response to the development trends of the general environment.

First, we establish a sense of sustainable development. In the new age of information technology, where technological development in various fields is rapidly changing, it is impossible to improve skills and abilities overnight, and it takes time to build skills and abilities.

Principal Chua Lee Lee (蔡莉莉), from Kuen Cheng High School, Kuala Lumpur, mentions sustainable development as follows :

Are we willing to change? What needs to be changed and how can we meet the needs of a rapidly changing external environment? Therefore, we must return to the essence of education, emphasise education, think carefully about where we want to guide children, help them face their future, and have the confidence to move towards it.<sup>15</sup>

Second, we establish the awareness of resource sharing. As the times are changing rapidly and obstacles are numerous and difficult, it is more important for all types of Chinese schools to have an awareness of sharing resources and moving forward manually.

## 2 Reconfiguration Strategy (WO): Internal Weakness × External Opportunities

### (1) Chinese as a Second Instruction Language

The steady increase in the number of non-Chinese students in Chinese schools is undeniable. Chinese teachers play multiple roles. They must provide Chinese education in their native language while teaching Chinese as a second language to non-Chinese students (Qian, 2018: 101). From an educational perspective that requires fair treatment of learners, Chinese schools should offer second-language Chinese education to non-Chinese students and assist them in constructing their use of Chinese language and literature. Using appropriate teaching methods can help these students learn and, based on their language-learning foundations, explore higher cultural realms, and generate more value recognition in Chinese education.

### (2) Strengthening Fundraising Mechanisms for Managing Chinese Education

Raising funds for operating expenses from various sources is a common practice in the development of Chinese education. The Penang Chinese Secondary School Education Foundation (Persatuan Pendidikan Du Zhong Pulau Pinang) is an organisation worth

<sup>15</sup> Interview date: 9 March, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

emulating. The foundation is committed to assisting financially challenged Chinese secondary school students regardless of their ethnicity, awarding scholarships, assisting Chinese secondary school students in continuing their studies, taking care of the welfare of Chinese secondary school teachers, sponsoring Chinese secondary school educational activities, and promoting Chinese secondary school construction and development (PPDUZONG, 2023). Considering that operating funds are insufficient for the five Chinese secondary schools in Penang, the foundation has played an auxiliary role. Chinese educational organisations in various states generally establish independent school-education development funds, however, their benefits vary.

Chinese education should also actively leverage external opportunities to examine and promote the governance and construction of fundraising for operating expenses, to compensate for the shortcomings of the original fundraising methods.

### (3) Symbiosis between Chinese Education and Multicultural Environment

Multiculturalism is not a fundamental reason for the tension between national and ethnic identities. The root cause is a lack of institutional mechanisms to tolerate differences and resolve tensions (Wang, 2017: 15).

In 2018, UCSCAM established a special project on the development of multiculturalism and invited experts from all sectors of society to join the committee to systematically promote multiculturalism in the long term (Jiang, 2019: 17). Through its rootedness in ethnic education, UCSCAM has promoted the development of multicultural education, expanded the educational landscape for the next generation, and achieved the inheritance and dissemination of national and multicultural cultures. Their efforts to bridge value conflicts between mainstream and ethnic cultures have enabled the symbiosis of Chinese education with the multicultural environment.

## 3 Diversification Strategy (ST): Internal Strength × External Threats

### (1) Advocating for Government Recognition of Chinese Education

In response to the government's continued adherence to the policy of a unitary national education system, Mr. Wong Chong Way (王忠伟), former Chinese Language Supervisor, Department of Education, Selangor indicates the following:

The government still honours its commitment to allow the Chinese and Indian communities to retain their mother tongue as a medium of instruction, which allows Chinese and Tamil schools to exist... The willingness of non-Chinese parents to send their children to Chinese schools demonstrates their growing confidence in Chinese

schools, where students achieve excellent academic results and proficiency in multiple languages, such as Malay, English, and Chinese. We must continue to strengthen our academic achievements in mathematics and science, while simultaneously improving language proficiency.<sup>16</sup>

As such, organisations and groups involved in Chinese education must continue to prioritise the interests of Chinese education and actively seek recognition and support from both local and central governments, while leveraging internal strengths to gradually offset external threats.

### (2) Creating Tailored Development Plans Based on Local Conditions

Chinese schools should actively expand their educational content and move in diverse directions based on regional development and individual resources. Brother Anthony Tay (鄭文斌), Principal, Sibiu Catholic Secondary School, believes the following:

The focus of education should not be limited to teaching old knowledge but should also be closely related to the needs of reality. Therefore, the positioning of schools should be clear, with different conditions in different regions. Schools should [also] be run with greater inclusiveness and diversity, which will lead to a better future for Chinese education.<sup>17</sup>

### (3) Harnessing Information Technology to Explore Innovative Resources

Based on the 'Malaysian-Chinese Independent School Teaching Platform Resource Station', UCSCAM collects and shares teachers' teaching videos or courseware, assisting teachers in preparing and teaching online more rapidly and effectively through resource sharing (Luo, 2020: 5).

In addition, Chinese schools can make efforts in the following areas: strengthening the integration of industry and education and inter-school cooperation and expanding educational and teaching resources in terms of platforms and technologies to cope with their own shortcomings. Seeking external support in terms of talent, technology, and capital to strengthen the application of online educational resources and improve the quality of talent training. With the development strategy of the Internet platform, it actively conducts the system and resource integration of distance education and creates educational characteristics in accordance with the development of the times while making a breakthrough in demand.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview date: 21 June, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

<sup>17</sup> Interview date: 4 March, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

#### 4 Defensive Strategy (WT): Internal Weakness × External Threats

##### (1) Building Leadership Alliances to Guide Competition and Cooperation

Institutions that have guided Chinese education, such as UCSCAM and UCSTAM, should revitalise organisational leadership and guide schools to integrate and share resources. Although there may be different opinions and voices, if there are negotiations and discussions with the development of Chinese education as the premise, the real leadership and guidance of institutions can be used to create a bright future for Chinese education.

Associate Professor Chi-Hung Wang (王智弘), the Graduate Institute of Education, National Changhua Normal University, proposed competitive and cooperative relationships among schools:

For Chinese education to overcome its difficulties, alliances should be formed and resources should be integrated and shared to generate the concepts of *competition and cooperation*.<sup>18</sup>

##### (2) Continuously Enhancing Mechanisms for Teachers' Professional Development

In the past decade, institutions such as UCSCAM, New Era University College, and Southern University College have cooperated with universities in China and Taiwan to offer courses such as the 'Diploma in Education' and 'Master of Education' to enhance the educational professionalism of Chinese secondary school teachers. Additionally, these teachers can receive training or further education from their schools' academic affairs offices, teacher-training departments, domestic private colleges, and overseas alumni associations. The diversification of teacher-training institutions has led to various professional educational training courses for Chinese secondary-school teachers. Based on the principles of mutual learning and discussion, different types of Chinese secondary school teachers can effectively receive on-the-job training and education based on their respective conditions (Wong, 2015: 72).

##### (3) Utilising Dynamic Educational Information to Foster Development

At different levels and varying degrees, Chinese schools have individual advantages and characteristics that must be leveraged to develop sustainable and competitive educational activities. Therefore, while maintaining stable traditional educational activities, Chinese education should adapt to the development of the information age, expand the promotion of dynamic and informationalised education in various ways, and present the school's educational dynamics to the public to eliminate the school's inherent disadvantages

<sup>18</sup> Interview date: 19 March, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

and threats brought about by external environmental development, show progress and development to society, and gain support. Principal Soh Chin Choon stated the following in an interview:

The future development of Chinese education is a *modernization* issue, which refers not to the modernisation of buildings, but to following the modernisation process of world education development or the needs of our society. Relevant developmental resources should be explored and created in combination with the school development conditions.<sup>19</sup>

New ideas and operational methods will unfold into new areas and development spaces in Chinese education. Different types of Chinese schools, academic units, and even leadership organisations can analyse the demands of the environment, adjust their operating strategies, or improve themselves based on their own advantages and move towards sustainable development.

## Conclusion

In summary, regardless of the rapid social and sustainable development of Chinese education, everything at present is not immutable. Adhering to a narrow mindset may deprive one of the visions of progress and hinder the understanding of and closeness to the trajectory of the new era's giant wheel. Using the SWOT analysis model as a framework, this study explored four strategies for the sustainable development of Chinese education: expansion, restructuring, diversification, and defence. However, owing to the current situation, the strategies proposed in this study continue to face barriers, such as national education policies and racism. Nevertheless, these strategies attempt to enable Chinese education to seize external opportunities and leverage existing advantages, while minimising the negative impact of external challenges and internal weaknesses.

Therefore, these strategies are centred on Chinese education, with the internal and external environments serving as interacting backgrounds and both organically interconnected. Accordingly, Chinese education should adjust its strategies according to changes in the external environment and internal strengths and weaknesses and implement them based on the actual situation. Moreover, combinations of strategies should not be implemented in isolation; rather, they should be adjusted in tandem with the organisational structure and mode of operation. In combination with external opportunities and challenges, the driving force for the sustainable development of Chinese education is the emergence of changes adapted to educational policies, systems, resources, and governance.

<sup>19</sup> Interview date: 24 February, 2021. Interview method: Zoom.

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