Social Engagement as the Preferred Means to Incarnational Mission in the Context of Malay Hegemony

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SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AS THE PREFERRED MEANS TO INCARNATIONAL MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAY HEGEMONY

Written by

KHEE-VUN LIN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Scott Sunquist

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ABSTRACT

Social Engagement as the Preferred Means to Incarnational Mission in the Context of Malay Hegemony
Khee-Vun Lin
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2018

This dissertation argues that social engagement should be the preferred means for Chinese Christians in Sabah (CCS), Malaysia to fulfill their incarnational mission in the sociopolitical context of Malay hegemony. Due to their history, the CCS have developed a nationalism that is different from the main discourse of the country defined by Malay nationalism. Today, Malay nationalism has evolved into Malay hegemony that inclines to Islamism. Christians are increasingly treated as a functional dhimmitude. Part One describes this ministry context.

Part Two describes the challenges CCS face in nation-building and their mission to the Malays. Lacking understanding of Malay hegemony, CCS have been negotiating nationalism through various means, which are often ineffective and irrelevant. CCS are also ignorant of the missional essence of the Church. Consequently, they lose their incarnational identity. This causes them to neglect their role in nation-building and evangelism to the Malay-Muslim community.

Part Three contends that CCS should restore their missional identity. The theological concept of incarnation is assessed and concluded to be indispensable to CCS’ missional identity. Once restored, incarnation will form the theological basis for CCS to identify themselves as Malaysians, resolving their national identity dilemma. This gives them reason to commit to nation-building and identify with Malays. They also can recover the full meaning of evangelism, resulting in meaningful missional engagement with Malays.

Part Four considers how CCS shall apply the concept of incarnational mission. Social engagement is argued as the proper expression of incarnational mission. Practical options to engage in nation-building and witnessing to Malays are plentiful. Civil negotiation, intellectual dialogues, and evangelism are three common avenues for such purpose. Yet, due to Malay hegemony, social engagement that fosters communal relationship amongst the masses is contended as the preferred option.

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INTRODUCTION

Churches in Malaysia today face aggressive Islamization resulting from Malay hegemony. Malay hegemony is a form of Malay nationalism galvanized by Islamism. Under Malay hegemony, non-Malays, including Chinese Christians in the state of Sabah (CCS), have become functional “dhimmitude.” Meanwhile, CCS have their very own nationalism which is in conflict with Malay hegemony. This clash of nationalisms has detached the CCS from nation building. It also has created much tension between CCS and the Malay Muslims. Taking the missional church perspective, this study argues that incarnational mission should be CCS’ theological and ministry framework in the context of Malay hegemony.

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1 Islamism is defined as “the views of those Muslims who claim that Islam, or more specifically, the Islamic shariah, provides guidance for all areas of human life, individual and social, and who therefore call for an ‘Islamic State’ or an ‘Islamic Order.’ Islamists focus primarily on political matters, but they are also concerned with economic, social, and moral issues.” William E. Shepard, François Burgat, and Armando Salvatore, “Islamism,” The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d., http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0888?hi=0&pos=1 (accessed June 1, 2018); the influence of globalized Islamism in Malaysia originated from the Middle East starting in the 1970s. Mohamed Nawab, Mohamed Osman, and Mohamed, “The Islamic Conservative Turn in Malaysia: Impact and Future Trajectories,” Contemporary Islam; Dordrecht 11:1 (April 2017): 1–20.


3 According to Malaysia constitution, all Malays are Muslims; Muslims in Malaysia are a religious-cultural identity. This work uses “Malay” and “Muslims” interchangeably.

4 The “missional church” in this paper refers to the church envisioned by the missional church movement, most notably recorded in Darrell L. Guder, ed., Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998); other major works on the subject and detailed definition of “missional church” are discussed in Chapter 5, where “incarnational mission” is also defined.
motivations in active nation building and social involvement. It would also guide CCS in their mission to the Malay Muslims. Considering their sociopolitical context, social engagement is then argued as the preferred means to apply CCS’ incarnational mission.

**The Definition of Social Engagement**

Social engagement involves “aiding the disadvantaged and seeking the public good,” and in the process, going beyond transforming individual lives to change social structures if necessary, in order to seek justice. Referring to the above as social responsibility, the Lausanne movement helpfully categorizes Christian social engagement into social service and social action. Examples of social services include the acts of relieving human need, philanthropic activity, and works of mercy, with the aim of ministering to individuals and families. Social action includes the act of removing the cause of human need, political and economic activity, the quest for justice, and seeks to transform the structure of society.

While the term covers a wide range of meanings, this study differentiates social engagement from the forms of public or civil negotiations that are legalistic, political, and public. Here, social engagement focuses on the social aspects of a community. It

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concerns relationships, cultures, and emotions instead of official or formal negotiations, which are based on rules, regulations, or legal positions.

**The Definitions of Nation and State**

In the context of this study, the state is to be understood as the legal-political entity defined according to a set of objective criteria of a country. It is “a tangible phenomenon that can be defined in terms of territory, population, and government.” The nation, on the other hand, is understood as a cultural and subjective entity, a product of ethnogenesis. A nation’s essence is “psychological, a matter of attitude rather than of fact.” Following the above, it is possible for various nations within a state to have their respective nation-of-intent. Nation-of-intent is an intended ethno-nationalism not in exact correspondence to the politically defined state. It is “a more or less precisely defined idea of the form of a nation-state . . . that is its territory, population, language, culture, symbols, and institutions.” It is a nation’s idea of a state.

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10 “Nations exist in the sense that a collective identity has been formed, but do not find institutional expression in the form of the creation of a coterminous state.” Joseph Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 32.

The Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study rests in the unique sociopolitical context of the CCS as a minority and the need for them to respond with a practical theology.\textsuperscript{12} According to the latest census, 65.37 percent of the Sabah population identify themselves as Muslims while 26.62 percent are Christians.\textsuperscript{13} Chinese Christians are only 11.29 percent of the total Christian population in Sabah; hence, they constitute only about 3 percent of the total population.\textsuperscript{14} In contrast, the only Christian majority state in Malaysia, Sarawak, is 42.61 percent Christian in population, compared to 32.22 percent Muslims.\textsuperscript{15} Sarawak, together with Sabah (then “North Borneo”) and Singapore, joined Malaya to form the federation of Malaysia in 1963. Both the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak were promised equal status with Malaya. Although the autonomy of both states has been repressed over the years, Sarawak today retains greater autonomy compared to Sabah and remains a relatively isolated sociopolitical entity. As the following chapters explain, Sabah has experienced much intense Islamization and a drastic shift in demography. Since this study focuses on a Christian minority, Sarawak would be excluded. Only the contexts of Malay Peninsula (formerly Malaya, “Peninsular”) and Sabah are studied.


\textsuperscript{13} Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 2010, Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics (Putrajaya, MY: Department of Statistic, 2011), 92.

\textsuperscript{14} In total, 96,422; Chinese are only 9.22 percent of Sabah’s population, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 93.
CCS are also unique amongst the Chinese population in Malaysia. Animosity between Chinese and Muslims is much less in Sabah compared to the Peninsular. The struggle between the Malays and the “Communist Chinese” has never taken place in Sabah as in the Peninsular. The harmonious relationship with Muslims give CCS an advantage in engaging with Muslims, although this advantage is fast disappearing in recent years due to reasons this study will address.

Meanwhile, CCS share a similar plight with the indigenous and predominantly Christian Kadazandusuns and Muruts (KDM) ethnic groups in various federal-state, cultural, and religious issues. The KDM are the largest indigenous ethnic group in Sabah that has developed a relatively amicable relationship with the Chinese. The KDM, especially non-Muslims, struggle to protect their indigenous rights and identity from being assimilated into the Malay ethnicity. The Chinese share with them this rejection of Malay nationalism. Most of the CCS belong to Christian denominations with large indigenous congregations. As the KDM face the same aggression of Islamization, a practical and theological response to Malay hegemony by CCS will provide some


18 The Kadazandusuns were at first hostile towards the Chinese who dominated the economy of Sabah, but later found Malay Nationalism a greater threat. See the first person account of a prominent Kadazan politician in Herman J. Luping, Sabah’s Dilemma: The Political History of Sabah, 1960-1994 (Ann Arbor, MI: Magnus Books, 1994), 503–570.
insights for their common struggle. Similarly, the CCS might play a significant role amongst fellow Chinese. With nearly one-third (32.61 percent) of the Chinese in Sabah being Christians, CCS can assert a significant influence towards fellow Chinese compared to their counterparts in the Peninsular. CCS’ testimony may play a prophetic role in showing a way for minorities in Malaysia to participate in nation-building.

The reasons above show that CCS are in a unique position. Regrettably, CCS lack an overarching theological and ministry framework that enables them to respond to Malay hegemony, faithfully involve in nation-building, and missionally engage with the Malay Muslims. To rectify this, they need a practical theology.

**The Need for Practical Theology**

Practical theology is defined as a “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.” Practical theology employs ethnography to understand human experiences and discover underlying motives, worldview, social dynamics, and meaning that motivates and animates Church

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19 Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics, 92. The Hakka Christians’ influence can be seen clearly through the Basel Church and the Anglican Church, which started the majority of the schools in the state before the formation of Malaysia; See Delai Zhang, ed., Sabah’s Hakka Story (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2015); Delai Zhang, The Hakkas of Sabah: A Survey of their Impact on the Modernization of the Bornean Malaysian State (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2002).

practices. This is in contrast to systematic theology that interprets doctrine and tradition, and biblical studies, which interpret the Bible. Without neglecting Scripture and tradition, practical theology involves the context in the formulation of theological treaties and related solutions.

**Methodology and Scope**

The overarching methodological framework for this study is practical theology. It directs the methods used in the processes of studying the ministry context, identifying the ministry challenges, formulating theological reflection, and developing practical suggestion. This study focuses on the two main denominations in Sabah. As the denomination with the largest number of Chinese members, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM/Basel Church) has a total of 19,147 in membership for their Chinese and English languages congregations. The Anglican Diocese of Sabah (ADS) has about 7,000 average weekly worshippers in the Chinese and English languages congregations. The total registered members of these ADS congregations may well exceed 14,000. CCS

21 Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 38–40; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Kindle: Introduction, Chapters 1, and Chapter 2. Swinton argues that interpretation of the context is a “missing dimension” of the theological enterprise, which practical theology is rediscovering.

22 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

23 Ibid., Kindle: Introduction, Chapter 1.

24 “Methods” are “specific techniques that are used for data collection and analysis,” while methodology is “an overall approach to a particular field. It implies a family of methods that have in common particular philosophical and epistemological assumptions.” Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 3.

25 The BCCM has a few name-changes in history; for convenience, it is referred to as the “Basel Church” in this study. Thomas Tsen Lip Tet, ed., *History of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (1882-2012)* (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, 2015), 20–21, 620.
can be more distinctly identified within these denominations, as their English-speakers are predominantly ethnic Chinese.\textsuperscript{26} The Chinese in these two denominations also share the same historical root in the Hakka people (56.8 percent of all Chinese in Sabah).\textsuperscript{27}

The number of Chinese believers and their cultural affiliation in the Roman Catholic Church in Sabah (RC) are less obvious.\textsuperscript{28} The RC Kota Kinabalu Archdiocese’s Sacred Heart Cathedral recorded about 2,000 average weekend worshippers who are Chinese-speaking.\textsuperscript{29} This indicates the relatively smaller active number of Chinese RC members compared to the ADS and BCCM.\textsuperscript{30} Considering its complexity, the RC is not the primary focus in this study. The relatively smaller Methodist Chinese congregations are also excluded.\textsuperscript{31}

Instead of a survey, this study relies on documents and available publications from the abovementioned denominations and their contexts. The first two parts of this

\textsuperscript{26} Amongst the churches of CCS, some consist of Chinese-speaking Chinese while others English-speaking Chinese. The English-speaking Chinese are racially Chinese but culturally mixed, with a large proportion of them adopting certain Western-culture. The English-speaking Chinese are included in this study as a part of CCS.

\textsuperscript{27} Zhang, \textit{The Hakkas of Sabah}, 32.

\textsuperscript{28} Diocese of Kota Kinabalu, \textit{Diocesan Organizational Pastoral Plan 1998-2004} (Kota Kinabalu, MY: DOPP Core Group, 1997), 1.


\textsuperscript{30} The Kota Kinabalu Archdiocese is one of the three dioceses in Sabah and the one with many Chinese believers, especially in the urban area where the cathedral is. The other key Chinese congregations are in Sandakan, Tawau, and Kudat; Diocese of Kota Kinabalu, \textit{Diocesan Organizational Pastoral Plan 1998-2004}, 1; the Roman Catholics in Sabah is led by the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu which has two suffragan dioceses—the Diocese of Sandakan and Diocese of Keningau.

\textsuperscript{31} The Methodists recorded 2,185 in membership in 2017, “A Church after God’s Own Heart: Leaflet Introducing the Methodist Church in Malaysia” (The Methodist Church in Malaysia, 2017).
study are based on interpretations or narratives. As this study follows narratives of the cultural groups concerned, data and information gathered are often “fragments and themes that emerge from particular situations and contexts.” The language used is often related to “themes and patterns, rather than systems and universal concepts.” In other words, this study aims to produce rich and thick descriptions rather than theory.

Finally, this study intends to focus on CCS’ sociopolitical role, with minimum discussion on their economic aspect. The Malaysian Chinese’s economic prowess and influence are well documented. In this work, attention will be on the sociopolitical aspects of Sino-Malay relation. For example, when discussing the overseas Chinese migration to Malaysia, their economic motive and later, economic success are acknowledged but the focus would be on their national and cultural identity. Such narrowing of focus is imperative for this religiocultural study.

Ministry Context

The first part of this study is comprised of two chapters. Chapter 1 explains the sociopolitical context of the CCS. It explains the root of Chinese Sabahans’ national identity. It also describes the background of Chinese Sabahans’ skepticism on the

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33 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

34 Ibid.

35 The three criteria of “falsifiable, replicable and generalizable” are not employed to create any theory. Interpretation of the situation produces knowledge that is required for future researches “to explore the possibility of transferability and to find models that describe a situation and that have transferable structures,” Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 2.

36 For this work, much effort is invested to understand the Malays from a Chinese perspective. A
formation of Malaysia and how their reluctance to the formation has since caused them to constantly negotiate for their nation-of-intent. Research on the Chinese in Sabah, particularly on CCS, is scarce. This work relies on Danny Wong’s accounts of Sabahan Chinese, and Delai Zhang’s works on the Hakkas, the earliest and pivotal clan within CCS.  

Chapter 2 explains the origin and development of Malay nationalism and its evolvement to Malay hegemony, specifically, how Islamism emerged as the key tenet and driver for Malay hegemony today. Subsequently, this chapter describes the situation of functional dhimmitude in today’s Malaysia. Rigorous academic works, subjective Malay writers, and some reputable surveys are used. The Malays’ animosity towards the Chinese is also described. The main goal of this chapter is to explain the Malays’ insistence on defining Malaysia according to their cultural nationalism.

Ministry Challenge

Part Two of this study considers the two interrelated missional detachments of CCS. Chapter 3 describes how the clash of nationalisms hinders CCS from developing their Malaysian identity, distancing them from nation-building. Using the case of the Malaysian Chinese as a whole, this chapter explains the CCS’ inclination towards

larger section is dedicated on Malay ethnogenesis compared to Chinese ethnogenesis. As a study, which aims to help the CCS to be missional, this is an obvious choice.

constitutionalism and multiculturalism. The specific ways Malay hegemony invaded Sabah and alienated the CCS is discussed. With this, this chapter presents a gap between the disgruntled CCS and the Muslims, each with their own nation-of-intent and cultural distinction. Then, this chapter examines the various methods Chinese in Malaysia and CCS used to negotiate their nation-of-intent, and the limitations of these methods in the context of Malay hegemony. To this end, the mindset of the *dakwah* revivalists is analyzed and argued to be a hindrance to CCS’ civil negotiation. This chapter concludes that due to differences in nationalism and the pressure from Malay hegemony, the Chinese in Malaysia are indecisive about their Malaysian identity and commitment to the country.

Chapter 4 considers the absence of CCS’ missional engagement with the Malays—the challenge of witnessing and evangelism. It describes how CCS retreated from their missional involvement in the society since the intensification of Malay nationalism. CCS’ withdrawal from the public space and the privatization of their faith affect their witness to the Malay Muslims. With Malay hegemony and additional restrictions, CCS’ evangelism to Malay Muslims faces serious setback. Meanwhile, the effectiveness and relevance of interfaith dialogue is also limited.

38 “Multiculturalism” is comprehensively defined in Chapter 3 when the Chinese’s version of nation-of-intent is discussed.

Theological Reflection

In Chapter 5, the concept of incarnational mission is introduced. It is then argued as theologically imperative to the mission of CCS. The concept of missional church is used to frame the meaning of incarnational mission within a missional ecclesiology. Incarnational mission is contended to be an expression of the mission of God. It continues the presence of Christ, represents the Kingdom, and identifies with the people.

Chapter 6 explores the theological implications of applying incarnational mission in CCS’ nation-building, social responsibility, and witnessing to the Malay Muslims. Firstly, this chapter contends that incarnational mission should become the basis for national identity and nationalism. Then, through incarnational mission, the restoration of the Gospel’s social dimension is made possible. This provides CCS with the theological basis for their political theology and social engagement. Thirdly, this chapter proposes an incarnational and comprehensive theology of witnessing which overcomes the deadlock of evangelism to the Malay Muslims.

Proposed Application

Chapter 7 argues that social engagement is the preferred means to practically apply incarnational mission outlined in Chapter 6. Considering Malay hegemony, social engagement is socio-politically suitable for CCS’ incarnational mission. It is also suitable for CCS to engage in nation-building and witness to the Malay Muslims. Finally, “dialogue of life and action” is proposed as the specific practical means to apply social engagement.
PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
CHAPTER 1
HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHINESE CHRISTIANS IN SABAH

This chapter considers the historical context of the CCS. Arriving in British North Borneo (later Sabah) as immigrants, CCS have developed an affinity with the British crown colony. Consequently, they opposed the formation of Malaysia that signified the end of British rule in North Borneo. This historical background sets the foundation of CCS’ nation-of-intent.

Chinese Christians as Immigrants in North Borneo

CCS were key members of early Chinese settlers in North Borneo. Their early settlement was characterized by their segregated social context and partnership with British and Western missionaries. Their homogenous nature had been largely maintained throughout British rule.

Chinese Immigrants in North Borneo

The early CCS were Chinese of the Hakka dialect group (Hakkas). The first group of Hakka Christians, believed to be fleeing China after the failure of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), arrived in Sandakan, and eventually became members of the
The other group of Christian Hakkas from China arrived in North Borneo under the initiative of the British North Borneo Chartered Company (Company) in 1882. Learning from the mistake of its predecessor, which failed to source sufficient workers, the company took swift initiatives to ensure a supply of manpower to work the land, and decided to bring in, among others, Hakka settlers and laborers from China. Subsequent groups arrived through various schemes, which continued until after the Second World War (WW2).

The agriculturally-oriented Hakka settlers had a higher tendency to stay in North Borneo than the other dialect groups, which were more business-oriented. They also differed from other Chinese, as they were refugees seeking new beginnings.

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1. Among them, the remnant of the Taiping rebels/revolutionists, Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 5–6, 11–13.


4. Ibid., 13–14.

5. Ibid., 19; Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 10. The arrival of more Chinese immigrants was also due to factors such as the Boxer Rebellion in China, Wong, *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society*, 30, 55.


determined to stay for the long-term. Furthermore, the Hakka settlers, especially Christians recruited through the Basel Mission, were given land and incentives and they often came with family. Favored by the British colonists, the Hakkas’ initial migration to Kudat in the late-nineteenth century was a great success.

After Kudat, the Company worked with the Basel Mission and invited more Basel Christians to settle in Sabah, covering more areas along the West Coast. The number of Christians in North Borneo increased rapidly. According to the census report of 1931, the Chinese were the second largest ethnic group in North Borneo, with the Hakkas comprising one-third of the total Chinese population. By 1951, nearly 60 percent of all Chinese in Sabah were Hakkas; about 30 percent of the Hakkas were Christians. The Chinese remained the second largest ethnic group in the 1960 and 1970 censuses.

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13 In 1951, there were 44,505 Hakkas amongst a total of 74,374 Chinese in Sabah, while the total population was 334,141; in 1921, Hakkas were 18,153 amongst 39,256 Chinese, Appendix 4, Wong, *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society*, referring to L.W. Jones, North Borneo Report on the Census of Population 1960 (Kuchen: Government Printing Office, 1962), Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 32.

Chinese in a Segregated Social Context

The Chinese’s activities in North Borneo were mainly restricted to town and specific settler areas. As in other colonies, the British applied “divide-and-rule” tactics. According to the Company Charter, the Company “or its officers as such, shall not in any way interfere with the religion of any class or tribe of the people of Borneo, or of any of the inhabitants thereof.”\(^{15}\) The indigenes had little interaction outside of their habitat and their way of life was preserved. Only Chinese were recruited by the Company.\(^{16}\) As a result, the Chinese in urban and sub-urban areas had little contact with the indigenous people in the rural areas.\(^{17}\)

Apart from the Chinese-indigene segregation, most Christian Hakkas remained detached from other non-Christians. The CCS social circle has had a relatively self-sufficient, enclosed, mono-cultural and mono-religious beginning. The Basel Church, for example, began as a homogenous Hakka church and remained so until the 1970s.\(^{18}\) The Basel Christians normally settled within an area as landowners, with the school and church establishment as their focal point, making their environment homogenous and their identity distinct.\(^{19}\)


\(^{17}\) Rutter, *British North Borneo*, 33–34.

\(^{18}\) Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 45.

In short, ethnogenesis in these early Chinese immigrants happened in a relatively independent and isolated environment.\textsuperscript{20} The parochial attitude of the Chinese in general and CCS has been prevalent from the very beginning of Chinese immigration. Interactions with other ethnicities were exceptions or simply a means to business.

Chinese as Partners to the British Colonists

Referring to the Chinese in 1922, Rutter, a British historian commented, “North Borneo could never have gone a mile along the road of progress has not her doors been opened to the adventurous inhabitants of the Celestial Empire.”\textsuperscript{21} The Chinese were honest, intelligent, and industrious; and they contributed to the development of North Borneo as the partners of the British.\textsuperscript{22} Chinese’s participation in the North Borneo government began in the early days of the Company. From 1931, the Chinese have had representatives in various advisory, legislative and governing organizations.\textsuperscript{23} Participation in these organizations was vital to the Chinese’s well-being. It ensured healthy cooperation between the Chinese and the Company for their common interests.

After WW2, the British needed the Chinese to help reconstruct North Borneo, so they took steps to prevent the Chinese from returning to China. They became involved in

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\textsuperscript{21} Rutter, \textit{British North Borneo}, 81.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} The organizations involved were Clan Associations, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, \textit{Kapitan Cina}, Legislative Council, Chinese Advisory Board and Chinese Consul. The \textit{Kapitans}, representatives in the Legislative Council and the Chinese Advisory Board were community leaders appointed by the government, while the rest were Chinese-initiated. Wong, \textit{The Transformation of an Immigrant Society}, 98.
\end{flushleft}
Chinese education for the first time to “mold the Chinese into permanent residents of the state.” This was part of the efforts to encourage the Chinese to regard themselves as citizens of North Borneo, with all the advantages of citizenship accorded to them.

The Chinese also filled the leadership gap in government. Immediately after the war, the Advisory Council was established to assist the governor to administrate the colony. The Chinese were present since its inauguration and they remained a key component in the years to come, with four-to-five Chinese representatives included in the council from 1947 to 1950. These leaders played a vital role in protecting the interests of the Chinese and were pivotal in rebuilding North Borneo after the war. From 1950 to 1963, The Legislative Council and the Executive Councils replaced the Advisory Council. Again, Chinese presence was strong. To a large extent, the transformation of the Chinese from immigrants to citizens was complete.

The Formation of Malaysia

The formation of Malaysia interrupted CCS’ process of localization as citizens of North Borneo. The Malaysia proposal was not expected by the CCS. Reluctantly, CCS were forced to adapt to their new country.

24 Ibid., 173.
25 Ibid., 177.
26 Ibid., 175–176.
28 Ibid., 241.
The Malaysia Proposal

In 1961, Malaya Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Raman (Tunku) proposed that Malaya, Singapore, and the Bornean states (Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo) would join to form the Federation of Malaysia.\(^{30}\) In order to incorporate Singapore into Malaya, the Borneo states were invited so their indigenous population (especially Muslims) would balance up the number of Chinese in Singapore.\(^{31}\)

Initially skeptical, Bornean leaders were eventually persuaded by the British and the Malayan leaders to change their minds.\(^{32}\) The Muslim-indigenous group in North Borneo, led by Mustapha Harun welcomed the idea of Malaysia as they “supported a strong central government under Federation, Islam as the national religion, and Malay as the national Language.”\(^{33}\) In contrast, North Borneo Chinese did not expect such a move and remained adamant that Malaysia was a poor option to them.

Chinese Opposing the Formation of Malaysia as North Borneans

By the 1960s, the Chinese had made North Borneo their home having politically, socially and economically attached to the land. With 77 percent of them local-born, North Bornean Chinese dominated the non-European economy.\(^{34}\) Many of them had seceded

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\(^{32}\) Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 244.

\(^{33}\) Bradley, “Communal Politics in Malaysian Borneo,” 130.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
their ties with China due to political differences. They were also a part of the ruling class. As the ethnic group that received better education, they occupied key positions in the government. The Chinese’s political strength prior to Sabah’s independence was shown during the first local election in 1962. The Chinese were well represented in all of the town boards and assuming chairmanship in all major towns. The Chinese were concerned that their interests would be affected by Malays with the formation of Malaysia. Their “position . . . in business and society would be undermined, in contrast with the benefits they had derived from maintaining close relations with the colonial regime.”

Bornean Chinese were decidedly cool to the Malaysian proposal. . . . Their principal fear was that the Alliance’s Malay political leaders in Kuala Lumpur would dominate subordinate Borneo and discriminate against the Chinese . . . they opposed Islam as a state religion and wanted English retained as an official language. While they were willing that indigenes be given special educational opportunities due to their backward position, the Chinese opposed constitutional status for such privileges.

The Chinese also opposed the proposal because their business elite, commonly referred as towkays, preferred British rule which benefited them. They considered the

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35 The Chinese in North Borneo maintain a closer tie with the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party of China) of Taiwan instead of the Communist China.


38 Bradley, “Communal Politics in Malaysian Borneo,” 130.

idea of Malaysia uncertain, risky and unequal.\textsuperscript{40} This is made plain in item 106 of the Cobbold Commission Report, written in 1962:

In North Borneo . . . a major strand in the opposition to Malaysia among the Chinese lies in genuine fear of discrimination . . . affecting their education, language and culture generally, and reducing them to the status of what is popularly known as “second-class citizens” . . . there is fear among the Chinese business community that Malaysia would involve a new and heavier tax structure. At present also, as a racial group, the Chinese enjoy educational, economic and commercial superiority over the indigenous population. They are wary of the prospect that, with Malaysia, they might suffer from competition with Singapore or from discriminatory arrangements made in the process of correcting the present imbalance of economic status between themselves and the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{41}

CCS’ lack of support of the formation of Malaysia can be deduced from their loyalty to the British. At the brink of Indian independence, the Indian Christians “saw everywhere the benefits of missionary enterprise, the founding of churches, the spread of education, the uplift of the depressed classes . . . and believed that if the British left all these projects and achievements would be under threat, if not actually undermined by an unsympathetic Hindu majority.”\textsuperscript{42} The CCS shared similar sentiment towards British rule, and similar concerns on the threats of others.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 243–244.


The Chinese Conceded Defeat

Chinese’s rejection of the Malaysia idea was expressed through their consistent objections to various attempts by the proponents of the proposals in the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee (MSCC). However, the Chinese were constantly frustrated by the Malayan and British through the Cobbold Commission, which was to them, merely “a partisan body in favor of the Malaysia Proposal.”

It was at this juncture that communal politics gained pace in North Borneo, as the Chinese were becoming isolated as the only racial group opposing the Malaysia Proposal. The largest indigenous group, the KDM, eventually accepted the Malaysia Proposal:

For the Kadazan there can be no other guarantee for their future than for North Borneo to obtain independence by joining Malaysia. Self-Government first would mean that the heirs, when the British leave would be the Chinese, owing to their educational and economic superiority. This in turn could lead to domination by Communism. . . . Only through Malaysia, with a happy multi-racial country like Malaysia, supplying proof that Communism can be solved, can the racial problems of the Borneo territories also be solved. The extension of special privileges to the native peoples will give them a chance to catch up with their more advanced Chinese brothers.

Such communalism further distanced the Chinese from the indigenous groups and left the Chinese with few political options. As the Chinese failed to thwart the Malaysia Proposal,


46 Ibid., 252.

they changed their aim to safeguarding Chinese interests, which were mainly on cultural issues such as religious freedom and English as official language. Unfortunately, both were later overwritten after the formation of Malaysia.

**Summary: The Cultural Isolation of the CCS and their Fondness with the British**

This chapter describes the origin of CCS. Having fled from China for better life in Sabah, CCS clearly enjoyed favor from the British. They settled as the citizens of British North Borneo. As they were forced to accept the formation of Malaysia, they began to struggle to protect their version of nationalism, which has its foundation in their historical roots. Their acceptance of British education, detachment from the indigenes and resentment towards the Malays and Muslims would eventually form the basis of their very own nation-of-intent.
CHAPTER 2
THE RISE OF MALAY HEGEMONY

This chapter describes the evolvement of Malay nationalism to Malay hegemony. It traces the emergence of Islam as the main driver for the above. The resulting reality of functional dhimmitude in Malaysia is then described.

**Malay Ethnogenesis, Immigrants’ Threat, and Colonial Struggle**

Ethnogenesis is the process where a group of people forms their ethnic awareness.\(^1\) A commonly held “Malay” consciousness in Southeast Asia emerged in the sixteenth century.\(^2\) It was shared amongst subjects of various sultanates. Their common civilizational style was perceived by outsiders as the marker of an ethnicity.\(^3\) Malays’ consciousness as a united people was a reaction to the threats of colonialism and arrival

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\(^3\) Ibid., 93–94; For further discussion on “Malayness” see Ibid., 242.
of new immigrants in the eighteen century.\textsuperscript{4} Such reaction was the result of economic competition and religious differences.\textsuperscript{5} It evolved into a sense of insecurity that has persisted as a constant theme in Malay ethnogenesis. Future Malays would repeatedly remind themselves to be diligent because otherwise the “name ‘Malay’ might disappear from this world.”\textsuperscript{6} Malays have since rode on a certain “race-based reactionary nationalism” in their pursuit of control and “survival.”\textsuperscript{7} The colonial segregation policy and vernacular education system further perpetuated a future pluralist Malaysia devoid of any concept and motivation for racial integration.\textsuperscript{8}

The People (Bangsa) Movement

The Malays gradually organized themselves into a bangsa (people or nation) movement in the nineteenth century. This movement began by consolidating and actualizing a race-based nation of people with the shared Malay consciousness amongst subjects from various sultanates.\textsuperscript{9} By the dawn of the twentieth century, key Malay


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 131, 110.


\textsuperscript{9} Among them, the determined reformer Munshi Abdullah, the newspaper editor Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, Milner, \textit{The Malays}, 231.
intellectuals began to formulate and articulate the concept of *bangsa*. Much effort was directed “in making the Malays a community and identity independent of . . . the sultanate.”\textsuperscript{10} Attempts were made to transfer the loyalty and ownership of the custom from the rulers to the *bangsa*.\textsuperscript{11} Rulers were to be relegated to mere “symbols” which serve to unite the *bangsa*.\textsuperscript{12} A trans-sultanate “*Bangsa Melayu*” (Malay nationality) became an alternative identity to “subjecthood.” The concept of *bangsa* received wide acceptance as a formidable force against the oppressions of the colonists and immigrants, at the expense of the rulers.

**The Islamic Influence**

Islam has been a key influence in Malay ethnogenesis. Though being in the region for hundreds of years, Islam rose to prominence through the endorsement by the Malay rulers in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{13} By the nineteenth century, the Syariah-minded Islamists gained greater influence in the presence of colonial power, often due to weak monarchy.\textsuperscript{14} By early-twentieth century, Malays were urged to put their confidence in their identity as members of the global Muslim community.\textsuperscript{15} They were taught to become great like the Arabs through the knowledge of Syariah and obedience to *Allah*’s

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 132, 233.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 130, 132, 153.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 130, 153, 233.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 40–42.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 139, “Shari’ah” - Syariah.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 138, 142–143.
laws. The Islamists reminded Muslims of their primary obligation towards the ummah (the Islamic community), instead of the monarchy or bangsa. They condemn un-Islamic cultural beliefs and practices, including the “ritual and beliefs of the royal courts.” The Islamists value system became the alternative for the feudal value system.

From late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, the emphasis for Islam as “the primary bond for community” gained traction amid challenges from those who insisted on bangsa. The similarities between the Syariah-minded and the bangsa-minded were proven to be greater than their differences as they both considered the monarchy, the colonists and the foreigners their common enemies. Both groups rejected the irrational, uncritical acceptance of traditional values and myths. Yet, the Islamists distinguished themselves by using local expressions and Arab language, which were more familiar to the Muslims and “convey to ‘Malay’ readers a convincing tone of piety.” Contrarily, the Western appearances of the bangsa-minded distanced them from the masses.

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16 Ibid., 142–143.

17 Ibid., 138; Ummah is “umat” in Malay; Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapters 6 and 7.


21 Ibid., 142–143.

22 Ibid.

23 Munshi Abdullah, a key figure in the “bangsa” movement was criticized precisely for being perceived as pro-colonist; Maaruf, *Malay Ideas on Development*, 29–30.
The Islamists also sought to initiate social reform based on Islamic principles.\textsuperscript{24} The religious scholars were claimed to be legitimate “heads of religion” that should rule the *ummah*.\textsuperscript{25} The Islamists advocated “Muslim nationalism,” which denotes “the conscious effort on the part of Muslims to organize themselves politically with the stated intention of gaining control of the state apparatus and with the long-term view of building a nation-state that reflects the aims and aspirations of the Muslims of that community.”\textsuperscript{26}

Thereon, Malays were referred to as “the Muslims in Malaya” instead of subjects of a certain sultanate.\textsuperscript{27} Not only did Islamists succeed in lifting the Malay morale by relating them to the global *ummah*, Islam, together with the emergence of the *bangsa* movement, created a “Malay self-consciousness” that relies on “Islam as the unifying factor and philosophical system which gels different Malay sub-groups together.”\textsuperscript{28} As the masses were increasingly convinced by the Islamic interpretation of their identity, the old world of sultanate was being replaced by “new (though competing) concepts of

\textsuperscript{24} Milner, *The Malays*, 138.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 144.

\textsuperscript{26} Muslim nationalism “. . . not necessarily intended to create an Islamic state, which would be a nation-state that is modeled on Islamic understandings of law and power.” Farish A. Noor, “Muslim Nationalism in Southeast Asia,” *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t343/e0042 (accessed September 3, 2014). A Malay-Muslim nationalism would fulfill the definition of “nation” mentioned earlier—emotion, identity, culture, myth and memories, and an intention to implement Islamic laws and customs; Liow calls it “religious nationalism”—“a condition where religious identity and nationalism are blended together, resulting in a situation where religious groups are bent on asserting their presence toward the ends of establishing or defending their own conception of nationhood in religious terms.” See Joseph Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 44–45.


community based on both religion and race.”

Today, modern Malays identify themselves firstly as Muslim, and secondly Malays. This is confirmed by lengthy discourse by different Malay authors and credible surveys. Islam has become “a sufficient portal to Malayness, in the form of ‘masuk Melayu’ (becoming Malay).” The Malay identity has become synonymous with Islam.

**Independence and the Formation of the “Malay Nation-State”**

The *bangsa* and Islamic movements eventually succeeded in pushing for Malaya independence in 1957. The struggle towards independence was however, led by a Western trained aristocrat, a Malay prince, Tunku Abdul Rahman (Tunku). He led the main Malay party, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). UMNO's *raison

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34 “It was the colonial encounter that provided this new generation of Southeast Asian Muslim activist-intellectuals with the vocabulary and ideas that served as the framework for their Muslim nationalist aspirations: They . . . adopted modern concepts like the nation-state, citizenship . . . but with the aim of fighting for independence from colonial rule instead.” Noor, “Muslim Nationalism in Southeast Asia.”
To protect and promote Malay political, sociocultural, religious, and economic interests. Its early goals as a secular political party led by westernized aristocrats were directed to unifying and channeling Malay nationalism and to gaining independence from the British, and later to maintaining political dominance while making compromises necessary in a multiethnic coalition.35

UMNO, leading other communal parties, was the bangsa-minded’s hopeful replacement for the monarchy. Tunku and UMNO succeeded in gaining the support of the masses, while Islam remained the main cultural-religious system. The Western idea of a nation-state was forced to accommodate Malay nationalism as a new constitution was drafted. Two definitions in the new constitution became main points of contention in the future—namely the status and definition of the “state” and “Malay.”

To the non-Malays, the constitution guarantees a “bargain” Malays made with them for Malaysia to retain “important symbols of Malay identity, but was to be democratic, secular, and extended equal rights to all through a common citizenship.”36 Malaya, to the non-Malays, was for “Malayans”—Malayan Nationalism (later Malaysian-Malaysia or “Malaysia for Bangsa Malaysia”).37 The Malays have otherwise claimed that it was a “social contract” that gave “expanded citizenship rights in return for


37 Milner, The Malays, 166. This was already a compromise from the version of “Malayan nationalism,” which was initially planned by the British through the Malayan Union, Boon Kheng Cheah, Malaysia: The Making of a Nation (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 1–47.
unquestioned Malay political dominance.”38 As a result, two nationalisms emerged from different interpretations of the constitution. Malays tend to cling on to a cultural nationalism—an understanding of nationalism not based on legal terms but cultural preference. To them, the new country was the “Malay Nation-State” (later, “Malay-Malaysia”) and the immigrants were fortunate to be given the right to stay.39 Today, only 35 percent of Malays consider themselves Malaysians first, while 52 percent of them identify themselves as Malays first.40

Meanwhile, “Malayness was distilled into constitutional and legal formulae, and . . . ‘remade’ by the Malaysian constitution.”41 According to the constitution, “Malay” means “a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom.”42 This definition effectively sealed the primacy of Islam in Malay ethnogenesis. Tunku’s UMNO intended to establish a secular state but the position of Islam as the religion of the federation was ambiguous.43 Constitutionally, there was no explicit commitment to secularism and was left to be exploited in the

38 Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 22.

39 “The Malay Nation-State” was coined by Cheah, who accurately detects and describes the elements of Malay dominance in the process of independence, Cheah, Malaysia, 3.


41 Nagata, “Boundaries of Malayness.”

42 Article 160(2) of the Malaysia Constitution.

43 Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 20.
future. The non-Muslims in Malaya, and later the Borneans reluctantly accepted the conditions of Islam as official religion and special Malay rights, as they believed Malaya (and later, Malaysia) was a state based on the Western concept of nation where constitutionalism and multiculturalism were honored and maintained.

The conflict of two nation-of-intents, “Malaysian-Malaysia” and “Malay-Malaysia,” came into direct confrontation after the formation of Malaysia. When Singapore’s leader, Lee’s nation-of-intent, the “Malaysian-Malaysia” was seen as a threat to the opposing “Malay-Malaysia” nation-of-intent. Singapore was expelled from the federation in 1965, two years after the formation of Malaysia. Non-Malays in Malaysia continued with their Malaysian-Malaysia nation-of-intent, albeit with much more compromise due to the loss of a large proportion of Chinese population to Singapore.

The Rise of Malay Supremacy

A form of feudalism took the helm of the country from independence to 1971, with Tunku as the key figure. Tunku was feudalistic. He kept ordinary Malay “subjects” from governance. He did not intend to create a capitalist class amongst the Malay. Furthermore, Tunku was perceived as promoting pluralism and “his concessions to the

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44 Liow, Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia, 138.
46 “Traditionalistic nationalism,” according to Maaruf, Malay Ideas on Development, 129–156.
47 Milner, The Malays, 72–73; Maaruf, Malay Ideas on Development, 51–73.
48 Malay rulers in the past actually developed “colonial capitalism” and “non-Malay capitalism” with the colonists and the Chinese but kept their subjects poor to secure their power; Maaruf, Malay Ideas on Development, 62–67, 105–128; Milner, The Malays, 72.
non-Malays seemed to be a betrayal to Malay interest.” The Syariah-minded have also been suspicious to Tunku’s Western outlook. Meanwhile, the Chinese continued to dominate the economy, enjoying the “non-Malay capitalism” just as they did prior to independence. Feudalism and “colonialism” which have been the cause of poverty amongst the colonial time Malays continued to haunt the daily lives of the Malays.

The racial riot on May 13, 1969 was the consequence of Malays’ dissatisfaction towards their economic and political status. In the aftermath of the riot, Tunku was forced to resign and capitalistic nationalism took over as dominant discourse of the Malay race. It was represented by Mahathir Mohamed (Mahathir), whom championed Malay economic empowerment through affirmative action via the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1970). Purportedly, by narrowing the income gap between the Chinese and the Malays, interethnic conflict would be avoided. The National Culture Policy (NCP, 1971) was introduced. It was drafted with Islamic values at heart, believing that these values

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50 Tunku’s interest in horse racing and gambling, and his elitist, aloof appearance further distanced him from the masses, which by this time subscribed to an Islamic nationalism.


52 Ibid., 170–176.


would unite all citizens.\textsuperscript{56} A new focus on Islamic propagation was initiated, with the National Fatwa Committee established in 1970.\textsuperscript{57}

In reality, the UMNO-dominated government utilized the policies to actualize Malay nationalism. NEP was a means to assert the “reactionary race-based nationalism,” and “‘Race’ became the structural basis. . . . Political, economic and social arrangements were organized in terms of ‘race,’ and all types of competition for resources and influence were conceptualized in this way.”\textsuperscript{58} With an agenda to revert fully to Malay-Malaysia, and under the pretext of capitalistic nationalism, the ideology of Malay Supremacy was introduced in 1986.\textsuperscript{59} Monash defines Malay Supremacy (“Ketuanan Melayu”) as

\begin{quote}
The ideological, socio-structural and historical stratification process by which the population of Malay descent has gained and intentionally sustain, to its own best advantage, the dynamic mechanics of upward or downward socially mobility over the non-Malay population, on a national scale, using Malay ethnicity and Islam as the main criteria for allocating resources and making political decisions.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Malay Supremacy enjoyed general acceptance from the Malays. The subsequent years saw even the political and economic driven Malay Supremacy lost its initial characters as it evolved into a certain Malay hegemony, which was driven by Islam. Instead of merely

\textsuperscript{56} Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 141.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 141; Fatwa—“Authoritative legal opinion given by a mufti (legal scholar) in response to a question posed by an individual or a court of law,” “Fatwa - Oxford Islamic Studies Online,” http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e646 (accessed November 10, 2017).

\textsuperscript{58} Milner, \textit{The Malays}, 231.

\textsuperscript{59} Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 50.

\textsuperscript{60} Paul Monash, \textit{Malay Supremacy: A Historical Overview of Malay Political Culture and an Assessment of its Implication for the Non-Malays in Malaysia} (Auckland: Maygen Press, 2003), ix.
a “criterion” in Malay Supremacy, Islam experienced further revival in the years after NEP, which the following section now turns to.

**Islamization as a Political Necessity**

Islamization has become a necessity for post-independence Malaya (and later Malaysia) government to gain support from the Malays. This is the consequence of the sustained Islamic revivalism. It is also due to political rivalry and the government’s intention of becoming the new champion for the Muslims in the country.

**The Emergence of Islamic Revivalism (Dakwah)**

As described earlier, the Islamists have succeeded in consolidating their position in the process of Malay ethnogenesis, making Islam the main unifying and cultural identity of the Malays.61 Thereon, Malays have repeatedly found Islam as their refuge in crisis.62 Time and again, Islamic revivalism emerged and flourished when secular mechanisms failed to resolve their social and economic grievances.63 In between 1975 and 1979, the reviviser group, Malaysian Muslim Youth (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*, ABIM) became a credible political opposition against the allegedly corrupted UMNO.64 ABIM was dominated by university students from the liberal arts. The more radical, less tolerant and conservative Islamic Representative Council (IRC) eventually emerged to

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62 Ibid., 212, 222.


popularity during this period, operating in campuses and attracting mostly science students informed by “sectarian Islamic groups in the Middle East and South Asia.”

Eventually, the more moderate *dakwah* lost ground to this radical version of *dakwah*.

Islam’s position in Malay ethnogenesis was further strengthened through these *dakwah* movements. As the champion of Malay ethnogenesis, UMNO was impelled to increase its attention to Islam and it subsequently adopts its own Islamization strategy.

**UMNO and PAS**

UMNO was also forced to enhance its Islamic outlook due to the provocation from the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). PAS projects itself as the true Malay-Muslim party. Inspired by the 1979 Iranian revolution, PAS adopted a new form of leadership via the *ulamas*. It has also maintained a close relationship with the Muslim

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67 Ibid., 210.


70 Mohamed Osman and Mohamed, “The Islamic Conservative Turn in Malaysia,” 4–5.
Brotherhood. PAS “jettisoned its Malay nationalist orientation in favor of a more universalistic Islamic focus, similar to the one adopted by the IRC group of the student dakwah.” Meanwhile, instigated by the Iranian Shi’ism revival, Saudi Arabia began to financially support Sunni movements throughout the world, including ABIM. Thus, “In the government’s estimation, the combination of the student-based dakwah movement and [PAS] was politically explosive.” In view of this, Mahathir launched a systematic process of Islamization through the federal government and UMNO-controlled states. He even co-opted the key leader of ABIM, Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO, further garnishing and intensifying systematic Islamization through the government machinery. Complying with the populist dakwah movement was necessary because the Islamists and Syariah-minded are more concerned with piety rather than economic development that Mahathir’s capitalist nationalism championed. UMNO and the government were distancing themselves from the grassroots whom were often left out in development and held a revivalist view of Islam. To this group, affirmative actions and

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71 Ibid., 5–6. It must be noted that the Iranian Revolution did not result in much doctrinal influence in Malaysia due to its Shi’ism, and there are significant differences between the Wahabism of the Suadi Arabia and the teaching of the Muslim Brotherhood; yet Malaysian Muslims seemed to have adopted various parts of these teachings for their own benefits.


73 Mohamed Osman and Mohamed, “The Islamic Conservative Turn in Malaysia,” 5.


improvement of the Malay economic status were secondary to the agenda of Muslim nationalism. Meanwhile, the success of NEP in penetrating every sector of the economy also rationalized the need to similarly expand the Syariah Court to cover every aspect of this “modern Malay polity.”

The revivalists have also been arguing that economic equality is not a solution for inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. They dismiss “integration with non-Muslims” as a way forward for unity amongst different races in Malaysia. To them there is no possibility of unity in a country with different faiths. Instead they turn to Islam as the only means for true integration and inter-ethnic unity. Zamani, for example, believes that the racial tension in Indonesia, which led to violence against the Chinese, could have been avoided had the Chinese embraced Islam.

To gain political currency, UMNO has to compete with PAS as the more “Islamic” party. Meanwhile, PAS has always been contended to make UMNO its ideological captive and political hostage by instigating UMNO to implement more conservative

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78 Zamani, The Malay Ideals, 8.


80 Zamani, The Malay Ideals, 9.

81 Ibid., 12.

82 Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 110–119.
Islamic policies. In an attempt to “out-Islam” PAS, Mahathir even declared Malaysia as an Islamic state in September 29, 2001, although the country was not governed based on Syariah. The competition between UMNO and PAS has not only intensified the process of Islamization, but also has resulted in increased conservativism.

Eventually, the government under the leadership of UMNO initiated “the mainstreaming of Islam into all domains of Malaysian social life.” Islam has been positioned to dominate the public domain by being a “civil religion.” Islam, instead of the Malay traditional values, has been highlighted as the “vehicle for moral reform” in Malaysia by the government.

From Islamization to the Emergence of Malay Hegemony

Islamization in Malaysia is a result of ethnogenesis, but Islamic revivalism has since had a life of its own. After intentional Islamization by the government, the revivalist version of Islam was expanded and eventually became the prime mover of the national narrative. Islam has now become a “chief symbol and guiding spirit of a new

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88 Ibid., 160.
form of Malay distinctiveness.” The process of Islamization and *dakwah* has “redefined Malay ethnicity,” further galvanizing the role of Islam as “a pillar” in the sociopolitical life of the Malays. Indeed, in today’s Malay ethnogenesis the *bangsa* and Syariah-minded have merged. Islam has evolved from being an identity marker to the force that directs every aspect of Malay life and Malaysia sociopolitical life.

**The Islamized Public Space**

The outcome of the revivalist movement is most significantly demonstrated by the domineering attitude of the state and its Islamic authority. Yapp succinctly describes, the dominant Muslim party . . . by using State apparatus, assert a form of cultural superiority by providing the fundamental outlook in the form of the sovereignty of Islam (Ketuanan Islam) in the whole of Malaysia society. This ideology—the values and beliefs of the dominant Muslim party—has resulted in the Muslim majority beginning to make claims on and exert control over the other social-religious communities and exert its rulership over social institutions and processes.

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90 Ibid; Shamsul, “Identity Construction, National Formation, and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia,” 207.

91 The more liberal bangsa-minded nationalists that advocated Malaya-Raya (a joint Malay Nation with Indonesia) or those who advocated Malaysian-Malaysia such as UMNO founder Onn Jaafar (and to a certain extent, Tunku) have all lost their influences.

92 Shamsul, “Identity Construction, National Formation, and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia,” 218. Some have questioned the impact of the Syariah-minded *dakwah* in Malay society, arguing that although Malays do identify themselves first as Muslims, they are ambivalent towards the *dakwah* movement and doctrine. However, judging from the election results and the support, which PAS receives, the majority of Malays seem to desire the *dakwah* version of Syariah-oriented society, Milner, *The Malays*, 218.

Muslim nationalism has been asserting itself in the public domain. The federal Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), has since the 1970s, played an important role in radicalizing Muslims and Islamization. To JAKIM, “Non-Muslims must bend to Islamic laws and regulations as they are living in Muslim-majority Malaysia.” The English legal system should be replaced with Syariah law that applies to all Malaysians.

The Malays in general, agree with this position because granting more freedom of expression to the Syariah law is a crucial way to express their religious commitment. In fact, since the status of the Syariah Court was elevated, the Civil Court has lost its jurisdiction in many cases.

The conquest of the *dakwah*-version of Islam is felt at the level of ordinary daily lives of the non-Malays. Consequently,

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims (read: Malay and non-Malay) have become tense and awkward at times because of the influence of strict Islamic codes of behavior promoted by the *dakwah* movement. . . . One example that demonstrates how the *dakwah* ethos has permeated every layer of society and affected everyday forms of social interaction at the grassroots level can be seen in Malay Muslim dietary rules or food taboos. Many Muslims now will not eat food brought by non-Muslim colleagues to social gatherings, be they at the workplace or at the homes of non-Muslim colleagues.

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96 Ibid., 101.


As the *dakwah*-version of Islam took over the public space, having already taken over the government, sociopolitical agencies, and assumed an authoritative position in Malay ethnogenesis, it attempts to further materialize Muslim nationalism. Having now merged with the concept of Malay-Malaysia, this religious force has become an integral part that directs Malay nationalism. The Malays and UMNO’s ideology has transformed from Malay Supremacy to “Islam hegemony” or “Malay hegemony.” Today, young Malays see them as two sides of a coin.

**The Irrepressible Malay Hegemony**

Malay hegemony is the result of Islamization taking “on a life of its own, beyond the control of political institutions and actors.” Liow argues that Islamization became out-of-control in the post-Mahathir era. Mahathir’s Vision 2020 Malaysian society, which depicted a Malaysian-Malaysia

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100 Ibid., 205.


102 Ibid.

103 Lee, *Islamization and Activism in Malaysia*, 135.
(Bangsa Malaysia) is but today a rejected idea in the face of Malay hegemony.\textsuperscript{104} Badawi as the successor of Mahathir failed in his attempt to introduce the moderate Islam \textit{Hadhari}.\textsuperscript{105} The government under Badawi’s successor Najib leadership has since succumbed to pressures from conservatives. To remain in power, UMNO has been working closely with “a range of extreme ethnonationalist groups, most notably Perkasa, Pekida and ISMA.”\textsuperscript{106}

The fact that a series of incidents in Malaysia where extremist remarks and actions have gone unpunished certainly point to the possibility that the Muslim majority in the country, has quietly but surely accepted Muslim nationalism and a conservative Islam. Malays have directed their “feudalistic” loyalty towards Islamism, as they seek Islamic approval on every aspect of their lives.\textsuperscript{107} Their concern is how to be a “good Muslim”—according to the conservative \textit{dakwah} version of Islam. From 2009, many acts and threats of violence against non-Muslims have gone unpunished or ignored by authorities. The non-Muslims protested, but few voices from the Muslims were heard. The publication of moderate Muslims, such as the twenty-five prominent Malay leaders and scholars are banned.\textsuperscript{108} Muslim extremists dragged a cow’s head through a street to


\textsuperscript{105} Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 144.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 145.

\textsuperscript{107} Lee, \textit{Islamization and Activism in Malaysia}, 132–133.

protest against Indians, fire-bombed churches, impounded Bibles using the term *Allah*, and threatened to burn all Bibles with the word *Allah*.\textsuperscript{109} Though officially opposing the Islamic State (IS), the Prime Minister Najib has expressed his admiration of IS’ bravery.\textsuperscript{110} In a 2015 survey, the IS received favorable view from 11 percent of Malaysian Muslims surveyed. Malaysia scored the second highest percentage amongst eleven countries with significant Muslims populations. Only 4 percent of Muslims surveyed in neighboring Indonesia supported the IS.\textsuperscript{111} This indicates Malaysian Muslims’ sympathy and identification towards conservative Islam.

Between General Elections (GE)\textsubscript{12} and GE\textsubscript{13}, losing support from non-Muslims, and PAS becoming less threatening, UMNO became radicalized by taking up fully the ideology of Malay hegemony.\textsuperscript{112} The society was divided by Malays differentiating themselves against non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{113} With religious tones, the rhetoric of calling for arms against the “infidels” legitimized. Extremists such as Ibrahim Ali could threaten a holy

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\textsuperscript{112} Kessler, “UMNO, Then, Now and Always?,” 155–156, 162.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 156.
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war against Christians without being prosecuted. The UMNO mouthpiece newspaper *Utusan* even “claimed an opposition conspiracy to establish Christianity as the official religion.” Such allegiance has been repeatedly used to gain popularity. These are only possible when the matters raised would gain political currency from the masses. This shows the popular view and stance of the Muslim majority in the country. Pressure groups that have no political burden, notably Perkasa, Pekida and ISMA, relentlessly and insatiably demanded the government to respond to their Islamic agenda. Associating with these groups, UMNO projects itself as the protector of one race and religion instead of a multiracial and pluralistic nation. UMNO has “capitulated to and made itself a captive of a kind of Islamist radicalism.”

**Functional Dhimmitude in Malaysia Today**

With Malay hegemony, non-Muslims in Malaysia today have become functional dhimmitude. Under Malay hegemony, the status of non-Muslims is interpreted by the Islamic perspective instead of a secular and constitutional perspective. This leads to non-Muslims in Malaysia today being regarded as *dhimmi*.

In 2013, the government under the dominance of UMNO, unreservedly declare that Arabic name of God, *Allah* is only for Muslims, notwithstanding the ruling of the

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114 Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 97; Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 163.

115 Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 97.


117 Ibid., 154–155.

118 Ibid., 162.
High Court which ruled otherwise.\textsuperscript{119} In September, “JAKIM’s weekly sermon called for action in defense of Islam by Muslims over the use of the word ‘\textit{Allah}’ for God by the ‘enemies of Islam.’”\textsuperscript{120} The “position of Islam was being ‘threatened from every corner’ and such defense was a ‘holy struggle.’”\textsuperscript{121} According to one of the state muftis, non-Muslims who objected to this defense committed treason as JAKIM’s sermons were endorsed by the Rulers.\textsuperscript{122}

The Court of Appeal eventually overturned the High Court’s ruling in October, effectively barring the use of \textit{Allah} by non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{123} The basis for the ruling is twofold. Firstly, it was argued that freedom of religion is based on Article 3(1), which stipulates, “Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.” Use of \textit{Allah} by non-Muslims will result in conflict and disharmony, and thus violates the Article.\textsuperscript{124} Secondly, it was ruled that \textit{Allah} is “not integral to Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{125} This ruling has long lasting repercussions. It reinterpreted the meaning and motive of Article 3(1). The Article was meant to guarantee the freedom to practice other religions. However, the “decision made non-Muslim religious practice subject to not offending Muslims, regardless of the nature of this

\textsuperscript{119} Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 112. The “\textit{Allah}” issue is just one dispute amongst others. See Liow, \textit{Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia}, 135–173.

\textsuperscript{120} Funston, “UMNO - From Hidup Melayu to Ketuanan Melayu,” 112–113.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 107–108, 113.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
offence.” Ultimately, in this case, the authority, under the pressure of the Muslim groups, asserts that *Allah* belongs to Muslim exclusively.

Regardless of the complexity of legal technicality of the case, the prevalent sentiment was most revealing. Evidently, political leaders and the majority Malay today consider minority in Malaysia as *dhimmis*. The Christians, according to the Malays, should be grateful, as they were given a privilege to dwell in Malay land. Kessler argues that the interpretation of the constitution and law today is largely based on this mindset when it comes to issues in relation to race and religion. This attitude can be seen through the rhetoric of the minister whose stern warning to the Christians is, “Don’t create trouble, ‘*Allah*’ exclusive to Muslims.” Kessler considers such warning “a diagnostically telling locution. That is how the *dhimmi*, the so-called protected religious minorities, of medieval Islamic society were addressed. That is how they were spoken to and reminded of their place, a subordinated one, and their rights, which were limited and conditional.” Indeed, “Dhimma literally means ‘pledge and guarantee’ . . . the contract for protection that was made with Christians . . . when they agreed to live within the

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126 Ibid. Although technically the ruling applied only to the Catholics publication *Herald*, a “precedent has been set for a much broader application.”

127 Yapp, “The ‘Copyright’ Controversy of ‘Allah,’” 147–156.


130 Kessler, “The Dhimmi and an Old New ‘Rationale.’”
Muslim state.” The basis for peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim, to the Quran, is based on four tenets: human brotherhood, religious tolerance, justice and fair treatment, and loyalty and alliance. Yet, non-Muslims must not be perceived as threatening to fulfill the third tenet, justice and fair treatment. Amicable attitude towards non-Muslims “can change if they become the aggressor, threaten to break a truce, or present an obstacle to the delivery of the message of Islam.”

In the case of the use of Allah, Christians insist on their right to use the term to refer to God. The authority considers this to be a threat to Islam in Malaysia. Christians were deemed by Muslims to have breached the constitution. They are thought to be not practicing religion “in peace in harmony” as stated in the constitution. Based on the definition of dhimmi above, they have become “threatening,” as it was perceived that the use of Allah would confuse Muslims in the country. Kessler argues that it is “that same logic and mind-set that also seem to inform the Court of Appeal’s judgment in this name of Allah matter.” If so, indeed “the Common Law tradition, ‘the discourse of constitutional legality,’ is in a beleaguered and precarious situation.”

Such rhetoric and attitude towards minorities in Malaysia is by no means enough to technically constitute a full dhimmitude. Furthermore, with only slightly more than 60

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132 Ibid., 489–494.

133 Ibid., 492.


135 Kessler, “The Dhimmi and an Old New ‘Rationale.’”
percent of Muslim, dhimmitude in Malaysia is demographically implausible.\textsuperscript{136} Still, as Ng pointed out, with the rationale of Malay hegemony, “Perhaps, non-Muslims are already ‘functional dhimmis’ in Malaysia. Non-Muslims are already subject to Islamic dhimmi policies without bearing the official status of dhimmi.”\textsuperscript{137}

Many other evidences point to the emergence of functional dhimmitude in Malaysia. In 2013, non-Muslims of a school were instructed to have their meals in the toilet during the fasting month.\textsuperscript{138} Again it was the sensitivity of the Muslims, which needed to be protected. The headmaster was not even sanctioned. Instead, parents were intimidated by police and their children had to be transferred to another school. One of the state muftis in Malaysia openly referred to non-Muslims in Malaysia as dhimmi—supposedly to “defend” non-Muslims from being labeled as “kafir harbi” (belligerent infidels).\textsuperscript{139} The change of road names into Islamic names, the islamization of school syllabus, and the insistence on Muslim superiority in all areas of society are reminiscence of historic dhimmitude.\textsuperscript{140}

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136 For further explanation, see Abu-Munshar, “In the Shadow of the ‘Arab Spring,’” 499–500.


138 Chin, “From Ketuanan Melayu to Ketuanan Islam,” 203.


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Summary: From Malay Nationalism to Malay Hegemony

Malay ethnogenesis’ evolution to Malay hegemony is a demonstration of how Islamism might empower a nation or people in their pursuit of self-determination. The Islamists have since the early stage of Malay ethnogenesis, played an important role. Their influence during colonial time was significant. The Islamists thrived together and eventually intertwined with the bangsa movement in their joint cause of Malaya independence. Thereon, Islamism has been playing an increasingly important role, supporting and shaping Malay ethnogenesis and nationalism in every crisis the Malays faced. Ultimately, Islamism became the object and beneficiary of political competition. It gave birth to Malayan hegemony—a version of Malay nationalism, which is primarily directed by conservative Islam.

The Islamic turn to conservativism in Malaysia described in this chapter can be demonstrated through the five indicators outlined by Mohamed Osman. First, the number of Malaysian Muslims who subscribe to the conservative Salafism has increased significantly. The dakwah movement has certainly contributed to this phenomenon. Second, Islam has become the dominant influence in government policy making. The dominance of JAKIM is a clear example. Third, there has been sustained support and push for thorough implementation of Islamic law and promulgation of Islamic state in Malaysia. Fourth, the rise of Islamist NGO and pressure groups and their influence have helped to steer the government and the public towards a more conservative stance. Finally, the rights of religious minorities have been undermined. Furthering Mohamed

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Osman’s last point, this study argues that minorities such as CCS who argue for equal rights and Malaysian Malaysia are ignored because they are considered as *dhimmi*. 
PART TWO

MINISTRY CHALLENGE
CHAPTER 3
THE CLASH OF NATIONALISMS AND SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE SABAH CHINESE CHRISTIANS

This chapter describes the clash between CCS’ nationalism and Malay hegemony, and CCS’ subsequent social withdrawal. Various ways which CCS negotiate their version of nationalism in the public space are discussed. The limitations and ineffectiveness of these negotiations are also explored. This chapter surveys the above problems by first considering the larger context of Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Christians as a whole, before focusing on the context of CCS.

The Clash of National Discourses

The clash of nationalisms in Malaysia is inevitable as both the Malays and the non-Malays have competing nation-of-intent. Malay nationalism has been extensively described in Chapter 2. The following sections describe the Malaysian Chinese’s nation-of-intent, which also represents the nationalism of CCS.
The Cultural Nationalism of Malaysian Chinese

For overseas Chinese, embracing the nation-state identification of their new home outside of China takes time and requires various conditions.¹ For centuries, the Chinese in Malaysia have retained much of their cultural heritage. They see themselves as both Chinese and Malaysian, and these identities are neither mixed nor mutually exclusive.² The Chinese in Malaysia are often called “Malaysian Chinese,” an expression that indicates, “being Malaysian is expressed through being Chinese in the Malaysian context.”³

The Malaysian Malaysia, Multiculturalism, and Constitutionalism

To preserve their cultural identity, the Malaysian Chinese, including the CCS have resorted to multiculturalism.⁴ Multiculturalism holds a multiculturalist position in a pluralist society. It rejects the monoculturalist position where the dominant group dismisses diversity and attempts to assimilate minorities.⁵ As described in Chapter 2, the Malaysian Chinese prefer Malaysian-Malaysia to Malay-Malaysia because the former is


³ Ibid.

⁴ While the use of multiculturalism only became prominent much later, non-Malays in Malaysia, including Lee Kuan Yew who led Singapore, had been subscribing to its principles and concepts in their political struggles.

multiculturalist and the later, monoculturalist. Thus, a nation-of-intent based on multiculturalism is the best option for them to safeguard their cultural identity and prevents assimilation. The Malaysian Chinese mean to champion their nation-of-intent is constitutionalism. They insist Malays have misinterpreted the constitution. They maintain that the constitution guarantees a Malaysian-Malaysia. Malaysian Christians share a similar nation-of-intent with the Chinese’s. Judging from their support of the liberal ideas of democracy, human rights and freedom based on constitutionalism, it is safe to conclude that they too, like the other non-Muslims, advocate Malaysian-Malaysia, with multiculturalism as their core social model.

Political Identity and Multiculturalism in Malaysia

The foundation for multiculturalism within a political domain is a shared political identity by all citizens, but political identity is contested by the different nationalisms in Malaysia. Political identity is a legal identity of all citizens in a state. Its vitally provides

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7 Thock, “Discoursing Nation-building and Civil Society Formation,” 590, quoting Liok Ee Tan, The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya, 1945-1961 (Oxford University Press, 1997), 310. “‘Malayan social contract’ was no explicit or recognized part of the discussions leading to Merdeka in 1957; that it is merely a retrospective ‘construct,’ an idea that was later fashioned, with a partisan political purpose, and then imputed, or ‘read back’, by its inventors into the Federal Constitution—or their revisionist ideas of its provisions and meaning.” Clive Kessler, “Foreword: Where Malaysia Stands Today: A Personal Introduction to a Timely Collection of Essays,” in Misplaced Democracy: Malaysian Politics and People, ed. Sophie Lemiere (Petaling Jaya, MY: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2014), viii.

8 As this study relates “national identity” and nationalism to ethno-nationalism, the term “political identity” is used to refer to the state-related, legal identity often associated with citizenship.
criteria to adjoin all citizens in their commitment to the state. In the case of Malaysia, the definition of political identity has been dominated by the Malays. Since the introduction of NCP, other ethnicities are coerced into accepting the newly reformulated political identity based on Malay and Islamic values. So far, non-Malays have resisted such attempts of assimilation. Specifically, they reject Islam as an integral component in the formulation of national identity. They reacted defensively, distancing themselves further from the Malays. They seek a nation-of-intent that is based on a political identity that recognizes the legitimacy of their culture, protects them, and accepts them. Otherwise, holding onto their Malaysia political identity becomes a challenge. This creates an identity crisis, which has caused many CCS to detach from nation-building.

Malay Hegemony Alienated the Chinese Christians in Sabah

For centuries, the Chinese have been suspicious of Islam. As a complete “way of life,” Islam is a direct challenge to Chinese culture. In fact, “Responding to the reality that they live within a Malay hegemonic state, the Chinese have absorbed cultural

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10 Ibid., 232.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 234.

13 Ibid., 234–235.

elements previously considered as the exclusive preserve of Malays.”

Yet, they have remained extremely unaccommodating towards Islam. They rarely convert to Islam and use Islam as an ethnic boundary marker to differentiate themselves from the Malays. They would also “reject the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia.”

The Malaysian Chinese have a long history of resisting Malay nationalism and Islam. They opposed NCP in the 1970s and state-sponsored Islamization in the 1980s and 1990s, as they were perceived as cultural threats. The Chinese’s uncompromising stance against Islam is “equilibrium to the imposition of Islamic values into the public sphere.”

To the Malays, Islam is a means to unite all ethnicities in Malaysia. Yet, the

15 “Of the three attributes of Malayness . . . Malay rulers, the Malay language, and Islam—only Islam has remained clearly outside the experience of most Chinese.” Pek Koon Heng, “Chinese Responses to Malay Hegemony in Peninsular Malaysia 1957-96,” Southeast Asian Studies 34:3 (December 1996): 521.

16 Ibid. The negative impression of Islam in the eyes of Malaysian Chinese is well documented, even by Muslim scholars. Chuah, for example, lists thirteen reasons why Malaysian Chinese reject Islam, see Osman Abdullah and Hock Leng Chuah, “Methodology of Da’wah to the Non-Muslim Chinese in Malaysia: A Preliminary Observation,” Ulum Islamiyyah, The Malaysian Journal of Islamic Sciences 5:1 (2006): 73–76.


21 Ngeow, “Islamization and Ethnic Identity of the Chinese Minority in Malaysia,” 24, as in the case of Kelantanese society, where “Policies that have profound impacts on the livelihood and lifestyle of the Chinese minority are rejected for fear of loss of such identity.”
Chinese perceive Islam as a threat to their ethnic identity. They react against Malay hegemony by preserving their culture tenaciously, especially through education. This is true throughout Malaysia, including Sabah.

Malaysian Chinese also consider Malay hegemony a threat to constitutionalism and nation-building. The Chinese felt that “their political, economic and social power had been gradually eroded because of the government policy of Islamization.” UMNO and the government, in their efforts to counter PAS, put little emphasis on engaging the Chinese. The Chinese were shocked and felt betrayed by Mahathir’s declaration in 2001 that Malaysia was an Islamic state. Lim described Mahathir’s declaration as “a tectonic shift in Malaysian politics where the undisputed constitutional and nation-building principle for forty-four years of Malaysia as a democratic, secular, and multi-religious

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22 Chuah, “Methodology of Da’wah to the Non-Muslim Chinese in Malaysia,” 68.


27 Ibid., 187.
nation has been abandoned.” Most Malaysian Chinese, like Lim, consider Malaysia a secular state hijacked by Islamism.

Malay Nationalism and Islamization in Sabah

Malay nationalism has always been considered a foreign invasion by the non-Muslims in Sabah. It was formally introduced in Sabah during Mustapha’s term as Chief Minister from 1967. Eager to show the Peninsular his commitment to Malay nationalism, he “wanted Sabah to be Muslim and Sabah’s language to be Malay, in order to bring the state closer to the situation in the Peninsula.” Mustapha’s intention to unify Sabah with “one language, one religion and one culture” was consistent with the NCP. Mustapha’s successor, Harris Salleh continued with the Malay nationalism programs.

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29 Delai Zhang, The Hakkas of Sabah: A Survey of their Impact on the Modernization of the Bornean Malaysian State (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2002), 142. Brunei Muslims have for many year observed Malay customs and used the Malay language, Ranjit Singh, The Making of Sabah, 1865–1941: The Dynamics of Indigenous Society (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Jabatan Ketua Menteri, 2011), 63. Yet, Brunei Malays in Sabah were dispersed and lack a shared ethnic consciousness. Only after the Second World War was the promotion of the Malay bangsa movement recorded, see Anthony Milner, The Malays (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 134.


Islamization in Sabah follows the patterns in the Peninsular. Islam was integrated into Malay nationalism. The concept of “masuk Melayu” or “becoming Malay” through embracing Islam was popularized in Sabah in the 1960s and 1970s as a way for people to be recognized as “Sabahan” and “Malaysian.” Evidently, Islamization in Sabah was an attempt by the Federal and the State governments to unite Sabah under the NCP. In the 1960s and the 1970s, Islamization was intense and systematic. It was executed with coercion, intimidation, deception, and enticement in the name of “nationalism.” The United Sabah Islamic Association (USIA) was established in 1969 for this purpose. It was given “funds to advance Islamic influence and co-ordinate a push towards converting the people to Islam in a series of mass proselytization.”

Islamization in Sabah was threefold. First, it began by weakening the churches through the expulsion of Christian missionaries. Secondly, Islamization in Sabah was carried out by enticing, threatening, and persecuting non-Muslim community leaders into embracing Islam. By co-opting the support of non-Muslim leaders, Mustapha managed to make Islam the official religion of Sabah in 1971. The third step was converting the masses. Threats of “denying job opportunities and economic access were normal.” Those who converted to Islam were given benefits in the forms of “money, promotions..."

33 Zhang, The Hakkas of Sabah, 144.
34 Luping, Sabah’s Dilemma, 535.
36 Zhang, The Hakkas of Sabah, 145.
37 Luping, Sabah’s Dilemma, 562–564.
and timber areas.”

Some Christian activities were also banned in 1974. By 1975, USIA claimed 93,000 conversions.

In 1976, Harris initiated the Sabah Islamic Council (Majlis Ugama Islam Sabah /MUIS). While Mustapha was actively involved in the effort of mass proselytization and took credit of its operation under USIA, Harris and MUIS worked without similar publicity. However, aggressive Islamization continued through proselytization and persecution. To increase the Muslim population, many Muslim foreigners were allowed entry to Sabah, with a large number gaining residency and even citizenship. Sabah experienced a “transformation of the demography as the total Muslim population increased from 40 percent to 50 percent within ten years through mass village conversion and large-scale foreign immigration into Sabah.” Eventually, the increase of population of Sabah between 1970 and 2000 saw a shocking 285 percent growth from 0.64 million


39 Ibid.


41 Ibid.

42 Luping, Sabah’s Dilemma, 567.

43 Ibid.

to 2.4 million, an impossibility in natural circumstances.\(^{45}\) This is due to a “deliberate policy of ‘importing’ Muslim voters from Indonesia and the Southern Philippines.”\(^{46}\) This has been dubbed the “Project IC.”\(^{47}\)

**Malay Hegemony a Betrayal to the Sabah Chinese**

Under Malay hegemony, the fate of Chinese and CCS are interwoven, as they were both betrayed. Having been co-governing with the British, and lacking an anti-colonial nationalism, the Chinese in Sabah naturally favor a secular, multicultural state based on Western liberal democracy where laws and human rights are the foundations.\(^ {48}\) Thus, they found difficulty in adapting to the Malay-Muslim nationalism coming from the federal government, which put ethno-nationalism, Islamic values and anti-West sentiment before fair governance and meritocracy.

Sabah Chinese were appalled to find that Malaysia nationalism, which they accepted with great compromises, was hijacked and turned into Malay nationalism after the 1969 riot. They were not directly involved in the 1969 riot and were reluctant to bear

\(^{45}\) James Chin, “Forced to the Periphery: Recent Chinese Politics in East Malaysia,” in *Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects*, eds. Hock Guan Lee and Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 117. While overall, the Malaysian population grew from 10.4 to 22.2 million, or at 113 percent in the period, Sarawak’s growth was 106 percent, from 0.98 million to 2 million.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 116.

\(^{47}\) For example, foreigners were given identity cards (I.C.), “Project IC,” *Malaysia Today*, http://www.malaysia-today.net/tag/project-ic/ (accessed July 20, 2018).

the consequences of it, which presented itself in Malay Supremacy.\textsuperscript{49} If the concern for the more Westernized Chinese was their rights and justice, the cultural Chinese majority rejected the Malay-Islam nationalism as it infringed their basic aspirations of their economic wellbeing and cultural integrity.

Islamization left a lasting effect on CCS. It produced only a negligible number of Chinese converts. Yet, it changed the demography of Sabah and further impeded Chinese’s indigenization as Malaysian.\textsuperscript{50} Through Project IC, the Muslims “have managed to become an absolute majority in terms of electoral politics.”\textsuperscript{51} Subsequently and unsurprisingly, the Chinese in Sabah suffered a decline in their political weight.

Due to Malay hegemony, Sabah Chinese today suffer similar difficulties faced by Malaysian Chinese in general. The failure of a former Chief Minister of Sabah to build a sea goddess statue at a key Chinese town due to the objection from the State government is an example of Malay hegemony. It was alleged that “the statue could not be built as it was too close to a mosque and that there was a fatwa against the statue.”\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{50} Chin, “Forced to the Periphery,” 117.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 120. Chin alleges that personal conflict might have played a part in the matter but the reasons given by the government were based on a sentiment according to Malay hegemony.
Civil Negotiations by the Chinese Christians

Civil negotiation is a form of negotiation, which is non-violent and operated within the framework of democracy and civil society.\textsuperscript{53} It is a mediation, which aims to mitigate conflicts; hence a limited form of social engagement, as social engagement goes beyond conflict resolution. Civil negotiation may be carried out within the government through the political parties’ internal negotiation, meetings of representatives between groups concerned, or mass civil movements. As a form of negotiation, its premise is essentially the interpretation and protection of the legal rights of the parties involved. Engagement with the masses and building of relationship are secondary.

Chinese’s Civil Negotiation

The Malaysian Chinese have initiated various civil negotiations with the ruling regime to fight for Malaysian-Malaysia. Malaysian Chinese’s civil negotiation is best illustrated through the appeals made by their guilds and associations. The Chinese Guilds and Associations (CGA) are often the preferred choice of representative compared to the Chinese political parties.\textsuperscript{54} In 1985, the CGA launched the “Joint Declaration by Chinese Guilds and Associations of Malaysia” through their Civil Rights Committee.\textsuperscript{55} Instead of

\textsuperscript{53} Civil society is “that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society.” Ernest Gellner, \textit{Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals} (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 5.

\textsuperscript{54} Thock, “Discoursing Nation-building and Civil Society Formation,” 575–577. Most CGA are educationist associations, as Malaysia Chinese consider Chinese education as their vital means to preserve their cultural distinctiveness.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 593.
only focusing on the Chinese community, the declaration appealed for equal rights for all Malaysian citizens. The declaration shows the multicultural nature of the Malaysian Chinese’s nation-of-intent.\textsuperscript{56} It was a response to NCP, increased influence from the dakwah groups, and Islamization. CGA’s civil negotiation is also reflected in the 1999 *Suqiu* (Petition and Appeals), which was endorsed by 2,905 CGA.\textsuperscript{57} Again they appealed for multiculturalism via constitutionalism, seeking equality.\textsuperscript{58} The affirmative policies of the government prioritizing Malays in education and economic development were contested. All CGA’s civil negotiations failed miserably. The Chinese were accused of ungratefulness and were met with hostility from the Malays.

Christians’ Civil Negotiation as a Response to Islamization

Malaysian Christians’ civil and political negotiation is triggered by their needs to respond to Islamization.\textsuperscript{59} Specifically, they reacted against government actions such as legal amendments that allowed state intervention into non-Muslim religions, reduced allocation ratios for non-Muslim places of worship (as compared to the building of mosques), the conversion of non-Muslim minors, the legal prohibition of preaching to Muslims, the introduction of hudud laws and many others . . . restrictions on numerous activities like sharing the gospel,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 593–594.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 577.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Lee, “Differing Perspective on Integration and Nation-building in Malaysia,” 94–95.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Joseph Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 156.
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registering as a denomination, meeting as a group, buying land, conducting kindergartens, and recruiting church workers.\textsuperscript{60}

Malaysian Christianity is “a prime example of a minority faith spurred towards political response by pressures from a secular state gradually taking on a non-secular bias in favor of a majority faith.”\textsuperscript{61} In 2005, Riddell lists five responses from the non-Muslims in Malaysia as they face Islamization.\textsuperscript{62} They are lobbying the government, participating in the political process, engaging with Muslims through dialogue, contextualizing the faith to rid its foreign image, and undertaking advocacy and apologetics. Much of the above remain true today. Mostly, the above are performed and represented by Christian umbrella bodies, among them, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), and National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF). Their primary role is to “pressure” the ruling regime through constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{63} Their points of contention are the interpretation of two articles in the constitutions, which concern the freedom of religion, and Islam as the official religion in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{64} Their motive for negotiation is to safeguard the “rights” of Christians in the country. Their


\textsuperscript{61} Lau, “Intimating the Unconscious,” 9.


\textsuperscript{64} These articles in the constitution have been interpreted differently by the advocates of the two nationalisms, as shown in the “\textit{Allah}” case described in Chapter 2.
methods include press statements, representation, educating Christians and attempting the five methods mentioned by Riddell.

However, the acts of lobbying the government and initiating dialogue have largely been ignored.\(^{65}\) Malaysian Christians have been “systematically excluded from discussion and debate on Islamization and its implications.”\(^{66}\) Such purposeful exclusion further proves that non-Muslims are being treated as \textit{dhimmi}. Any criticism or comment on Islamization has been regarded by Muslims as highly offensive, even though policies involved concern the whole Malaysian society.\(^{67}\) Meanwhile, Christians’ Western image has been consolidated through their active participation in various political processes and civil actions. Christians have in recent years taken legal actions against the government, notably, in the cases of Lina Joy’s apostasy and the Allah controversy.\(^{68}\) Yet, though such advocacy is necessary, detachment from Muslims has been perpetuated and worsened.

**Civil Negotiations of the Chinese Christians in Sabah**

The Chinese were largely silent throughout the process of Islamization in Sabah. In the 1970s, CCS did send a letter to oppose the expulsion of missionaries, but they considered the persecution under the Malay nationalism and Islamization a blessing in

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\(^{65}\) Riddell, “Islamization, Civil Society, and Religious Minority in Malaysia,” 173.


\(^{67}\) Ibid.

\(^{68}\) Liow, \textit{Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia}, 135–173.
disguise because it drove away nominalism in the church.\(^6^9\) There seemed to be very little concern about the restriction of evangelism to the Muslims or the difficulties a Muslim apostate might have faced. These concerns only surfaced in recent years. Then, CCS regarded the restraints which they practiced a great virtue, as they sacrificed for “the larger goal of nation building,” believing that a multi-religious society would emerge in a relatively short time.\(^7^0\) Zhang also opines that such diplomatic stances of the church prevented conflicts like that in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and southern Philippines.\(^7^1\) So, CCS “advocated consultations and dialogues and sought compromises to defuse tension.”\(^7^2\) Yet, such passive and reactionary acts reveal the shortsightedness of the church at the time. Islamization was allowed to gain many converts and tilted the political balance between the non-Muslim and Muslim in Sabah. As the CCS retreated from engaging with their socio-political context, Islamization could continue to indoctrinate Malaysian and Sabahan Malays with a sense of Malay superiority and increasingly legitimize Muslim nationalism as the main national discourse.

The CCS may be passive in their reaction as religious body, but they remain steadfast to Malaysian nationalism. In recent years, they resist Malay hegemony through the Sabah Council of Churches (SCC), which stands in solidarity with CFM, CCM and NECF. Indeed, “the collective Christian responses are more or less coordinated and thus


\(^7^0\) Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 147.

\(^7^1\) Ibid.

\(^7^2\) Ibid., 148.
similar” when it comes to their understanding of Christian political activism. The recent SCC’s involvement with various political and civil engagements attests to the stance of CCS, which is based on multiculturalism and constitutionalism.

The Limitations of Civil Negotiations

Civil negotiation is a common means to contend one’s nation-of-intent through the electoral or legal means. Ng, seeing that a functional dhimmi is emerging in Malaysia, believing this prevents an “implicit submission to dhimmitude . . . to explicit submission to dhimmitude.” However, Lee opines that with the discourses fought out in public, support will determine the outcome. Support of a discourse may not mean that the conflicting discourses are given adequate space to be debated. Likewise, election is also risky, as election “may confirm the legitimacy of a bad or corrupt electoral structure.” Undertaking a legal challenge “likewise affirms the courts’ legitimacy and risks creating an unwanted legal precedent which will worsen real prospects for future

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73 Lau, “Intimating the Unconscious,” 7.
77 Lee, Islamization and Activism in Malaysia, 135–136.
78 Ibid., 136.
legal challenges.”\textsuperscript{79} The outcome of the Lina Joy and “Allah” cases are examples. The problem, contends Lee, is the absence of a mechanism, which allows discourses to be properly competed. The media, which is going different directions, with mainstream and social media not converging, is making logical discussion of differing opinions difficult. The conflicting discourses have no space to even converge and “have a good fight.” Ahmad Farouk points out that the lack of ethnic integration and cooperation amongst the civil society organizations and the lack of space for democratization in Malaysia political environment have weakened the role of civil negotiation.\textsuperscript{80} Lim, similarly, bemoans the inability of the state to negotiate secular space for dialogues due to the prominence of the Malay hegemony agenda.\textsuperscript{81} Ramasamy criticizes the Malaysian state for utilizing a “combination of coercive and non-coercive measures” to curtail the effectiveness of the civil society.\textsuperscript{82}

As Islamism is now interwoven with Malay self-determination, Malaysia has lost its original foundation of nation-building that saw different races with different religious background coming together to pursue independence and in agreement of mutual respect.\textsuperscript{83} A selective amnesia today by political figures and Malay extremists on the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Lim, “Islamization and Ethnicity in Sabah, Malaysia,” 178–179.
\item \textsuperscript{82} P Ramasamy, “Civil Society in Malaysia: An Arena of Contestation?,” in \textit{Civil Society in Southeast Asia}, ed. Hock Guan Lee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 214.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Lim, “Islamization and Ethnicity in Sabah, Malaysia,” 178–179; Lee, \textit{Islamization and Activism in Malaysia}, 40.
\end{itemize}
existence of such an agreement gives them an excuse to dismiss the need for dialogues; though most of the time, they do so to gain political currency.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, the subversive changes in the attitude of the majority Malays, which increasingly see the minority as \textit{dhimmi}, not only sync with the ongoing Malay hegemony policies, but also diminish the openness and willingness to discuss and dialogue. Civil negotiations also fail because of the inherit \textit{dakwah} movement’s rigid spirituality and fundamentalist doctrine, the overly Western outlook of the Chinese and Christians in their sociopolitical activism, and cultural differences.

The \textit{Dakwah} Revivalists’ Sentiment towards Civil Negotiation

Muslims in Malaysia are greatly influenced by the \textit{dakwah} revivalists, so understanding the sentiment and mindset of the \textit{dakwah} revivalists helps to explain the ineffectiveness of CCS’ civil negotiations. \textit{Dakwah} means proselytizing of non-Muslims and ensuring faithful adherence to Islamic teaching by the \textit{ummah}. The \textit{dakwah} revivalists strive to “revive” Islam as a way of life for all Muslims through activism.\textsuperscript{85} They see a need to reinvent the image of Malay-Muslim community to attract the non-

\textsuperscript{84} Ng, “The Dhimmi Syndrome.”

\textsuperscript{85} However, Ibrahim opines that their “concerns with addressing larger societal issues remains largely peripheral in comparison to their efforts to ensure fellow Muslims observe religious duties and subscribe to correct thinking based on the ‘Islamic paradigm.’” Azhar Ibrahim, \textit{Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World: Critical Perspectives} (Petaling Jaya, MY: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2014), 36–37.
Muslims to Islam. The revivalists’ activism was carried out through the *ulamas’* teaching that aims to promote and safeguard the right Islamic practices.

Like the early Islamists in Malaysia, the revivalists advocate an overarching Islamic paradigm for every areas of human life. They reject nationalism and secularism. The modern understanding of nationalism is seen as a Western product that deceives Muslims with human-made concepts, a betrayal to Muslim’s idealistic pan-Islamism “golden era of the caliphate.” The revivalists aim to establish Islamic blueprints based on the *Syariah*, which would sustain the *ummah* through the challenge of competing ideologies from the West. They condemn the current Common Law legal system of its Western values. They believe that the independent, modern state of Malaysia is still colonized by the West unless the “man-made law” from the West is replaced by *Syariah*. They demonize Western modern and secular lifestyle and consider the full implementation of the *Syariah* law necessary to restore the glorious past of Malay history. In short, they reject “Westernization,” and aim to assert Islamic values in every

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89 Ibrahim, *Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World*, 74.


91 Ibid.


aspect of human life and to replace all Western elements or institutions. Ultimately, the establishment of an Islamic state or “an Islamic socio-political order in Muslim societies” is preferred.

Today, the revivalists antagonize liberalism and its ideological offsprings, secularism and constitutionalism. Multiculturalism too is claimed to be a subversive ideology, which aims to overthrow Islam in Malaysia. Allegedly, multiculturalism has its root in the “liberal separation of religion from social order,” which is “in direct conflict with the very nature of the worldview of Islam.” Only through a “common religious worldview” of Islam, they claim, that Malaysia can foster national unity.

A Critical Assessment on Christian Civil Negotiation

Generally, Christians’ civil negotiation, much like the Chinese’s, is ineffective in Malaysia. Both the Malaysia Chinese and Christians negotiate based on the premise of multiculturalism and constitutionalism, but the Malay Muslims, on the premise of Malay hegemony. The failure of negotiation is due to the deeply-rooted negative image of

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95 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
Chinese Christians in the eyes of Malay Muslims and the approaches, which Christians have adopted. Civil negotiations by Christians in Malaysia have been blindly based on rationalism and liberalism. In responding to the *Allah* issue, Ng proposes that, “Certain non-negotiable criteria must apply and be accepted by all parties without which dialogue becomes virtually impossible. These axioms include: the freedom of religion, the separation of religion and state, and the belief that dialogue in the interests of democratic pluralism is the best solution.”

Ng even suggests the inclusion of “international political pressure groups” as a means of support for Christians in Malaysia under the threat of Islamization. However, from the *dakwah* revivalists’ perspective these are the very Western liberal elements, which they intend to banish from Malaysia. Such demands would certainly result in heightened antagonism from Muslims. In fact, the Muslims have made it clear that their main responsibility is to protect the use of *Allah* against the Christians who in the name of human rights and freedom of religion threaten the peace of the country by encouraging Muslims apostates. Hence, the liberal ideas of rights and freedom are liabilities in these negotiations.

When supporters of different nation-of-intent presuppose different sets of conditions for discussion, intellectual dialogue collapses. Only the learned that are in

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minority, are the exceptions. Christians’ attempts to rationally discuss issues have fallen onto deaf ears or worse, create a confrontational image for themselves. Unfortunately, most Christians seemed to have persisted on this route. CFM, for example, while rightfully upheld the need for civil negotiation, has limited its efforts to rational approaches. Christians are encouraged to join a political party or civil organization, participating in community work, and civil protest. Yet, their method of advocacy projects a liberalism outlook. Christians’ championing for freedom and rights are legitimate, but as they portray themselves as advocates of Western ideologies, they have worsened instead of resolving the disputes at hand.

In sum, public or civil negotiations of Malaysia Christians, including those of CCS, are problematic. They are incidental and reactionary, serving only to counter issues which infringe their rights. Otherwise CCS would remain private, lack a public presence, and remain segregated. Socially Malaysia Christians, including CCS remain detached from the Muslims. Their engagements are also limited to the five methods outlined by Riddell, which do not include strategy and method to socially engage with the Muslim masses. As CCS are reactionary, their present engagements lack in-depth theologizing, especially in relation to nationalism and ethnogenesis.

**Summary: Unsettled “Malaysian” Identity, Detachment from Nation-building**

The clash of nationalisms has resulted in identity crisis and social withdrawal of CCS. CCS’ nation-of intent based on multiculturalism, conflicts with Malay hegemony.

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Consequently, CCS do not find it compelling to commit to nation-building, nor to concede their national identity to the political identity defined by Malay hegemony. Malay hegemony has also alienated CCS, forcing them to retreat from the public domain. CCS’ civil negotiations remain occasional and produce poor results.

The clash of nationalisms is best demonstrated through the social polarization in the Malaysian society today. In 2006, 97 percent of Chinese in Malaysia surveyed expected all cultures and religions to be given equal rights in the future, while only 38 percent of Malays surveyed think so.\textsuperscript{103} Similarly, a more recent survey reveals “Malays associated ‘Malaysian-ness’ with being Malay.”\textsuperscript{104} They reject an integrated Malaysian national identity comprising characteristics of other ethnicities. The non-Malays aspire otherwise.\textsuperscript{105} Meanwhile, not a single Chinese aspires Malaysia to be a more Islamic country in the future, but 43 percent of Malays surveyed hope so.\textsuperscript{106} Generally, Malaysians expect each ethnic group to maintain their own cultural identity in the future.\textsuperscript{107} A clear sign of polarity is the use of cultural marker to differentiate one from the “other.” On this the Chinese schools are considered “critical to the maintenance of Chinese community and Chineseness,” while “Islam is perceived in the context of the

\textsuperscript{103} Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, \textit{Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations}, 38.

\textsuperscript{104} Ananthi Al Ramiah, Miles Hewstone, and Ralf Wölfer, \textit{Attitudes and Ethnoreligious Integration: Meeting the Challenge and Maximizing the Promise of Multicultural Malaysia} (Kuala Lumpur: CIMB Foundation, January 12, 2017), 74.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, \textit{Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations}, 38.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 39, with the Malays scoring 69 percent and the Chinese 66 percent.
Malay community as the definer of Malayness.”

The researchers opine, “Over time, this asymmetry may push groups further apart and create an anxiety within non-Malays in particular, that calls for Malaysian-ness by the majority-led government are an attempt to assimilate, rather than meaningfully and respectfully integrate all Malaysians.”

Malaysian Chinese’s Weakened Commitment in Nation-building

The clash of nationalisms erodes the commitment to the nation-building of Chinese and CCS. The Chinese’s political identity, which gives them legal right as citizens in the state, has not been able to provide them with a sense of belonging and inspire them with patriotism. The discrimination that Malaysian Chinese suffer has distanced them from the main national discourse, and Malay hegemony has now motivated them to migrate. Had the Chinese been included in the main national discourse, the transfer of their loyalty from their culture to the state might be smoother.

CCS’ Detachment from Nation-building

The clash of nationalisms also disoriented CCS’ Malaysian identity and distanced them from nation-building. There is “an absence of a vision of a shared future for all Malaysians” amongst the Christians in Malaysia. Christians’ tendency to migrate has

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110 “Nearly half of Chinese surveyed have a strong desire to emigrate from Malaysia.” Ibid., 4.
tarnished the reputation of Christians in Malaysia, causing others to question their loyalty. Still, in a recent survey amongst Christians, 52 percent of respondents consider themselves as uncommitted citizens, and only 16 percent rate themselves as very committed citizens. In the same survey only 38 percent said “no” to emigrating to another country given a chance, with 30 percent saying “yes” and 32 percent unsure. The number of Christians emigrating remains higher in proportion compared to others.

For Christians who have awakened from political indifference, their approach of engagement has been reactionary, ineffective and uncritically based on Western liberalism. Their engagement approaches are also limited, aiming only to protect their rights. There is no constructive change in their theology and attitude towards nation-building. They are still detached from nation-building. They lack a clear Malaysian identity, hence their minority mindset, ghettoism, and dhimmitude status perpetuate. They need a serious theological reflection on their political identity and their role in nation-building, which part three of this work investigates.

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115 Ibid., 137.

116 Though the reasons for migration may not be a direct indication of national commitment, their relation is highly probable. See Ibid., 175–177; Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, *Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations*.

117 Ghettoism - “a form of escape within the borders of one’s country that entails a gradual disengagement with wider society and the adoption of a survival mode of existence.” Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker*, 176–177.
CHAPTER 4

ABSENCE OF CHINESE CHRISTIANS IN SABAH’S MISSION ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MALAY MUSLIMS

The CCS’ mission engagement with Muslims has deteriorated since the rise of Malay nationalism. They lost their means to directly engage with Sabah society through education. Under Malay hegemony, CCS withdrew from mission engagement as evangelism became restricted, and interfaith dialogue failed to take place.

Early Mission Engagement in the Immigrant Church

The early settlement of CCS had no mission to non-Chinese. They focused on pastoral covering. Their ministry model was centripetal. It was homogenous, monolingual, and had very little contact with other ethnic groups.

Pastoral Covering

CSS’ mission engagement began with pastoral covering. Early Hakka Christians in Kudat consisted of believers of various denominations. They had converted to

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Christianity in China through the Basel Mission, the Church Missionary Society (CMS, known as ‘The Churchmen’), the Berlin Mission and the Methodist Mission. In 1888, William Henry Elton of the Society of Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) visited Kudat and was requested by Chinese Christians to send a minister. Elton concluded his pastoral visit by promising to send a pastor with the condition that the Chinese from different denominations would congregate as one group. Eventually, Elton built a school and a church in between 1889 and 1890 and sent a minister named Richard Richards to provide pastoral covering. As a result, the various Chinese Christian groups worshiped together in the new St. James’ Anglican Church.

In contrast, although the Basel Church recorded home worship as early as 1882, their pastoral covering was not clergy-oriented. Even when the first Basel Church gathering was recorded in 1886 there had been no minister. Thus, when St. James’ Anglican Church began in 1890, about half of its membership was Basel members.

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4 Boughton, Sabah Anglican Diocese Golden Jubilee History 2012, 27. Catechist, missionary and teacher were often the same person in those days, which is referred to as “minister” or “pastor” here.

5 Ibid., 28.


was only in 1905 that the Basel Mission sent a priest to Kudat. By then many Basel Christians had converted to Anglicanism under the leadership of Fong Hau Kong.

The Centripetal Mission Churches

CCS early missions followed a centripetal model much like the case of St. James’ Church. Throughout North Borneo, Anglican Chinese congregations were started as responses to Chinese believers seeking pastoral covering. When they found an Anglican minister, the minister would gather them, appoint a lay reader, and arrange services. The minister followed up with regular visits if a residential priest was not available. The Basel Church was family and home-based and established specifically Chinese-speaking congregations at places where the believers dwelled. The Basel Church was less clergy-oriented. They relied heavily on lay preachers as they transplanted their lay-led family worship from China to North Borneo. The Basel Church grew by following the development spearheaded by the Company, populating new areas and starting new congregations through lay preachers. The Anglicans, following the parish model, built English churches (Chaplaincy) in major towns with Chinese language services. Their church buildings and mission schools attracted many Chinese believers.

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10 Zhang, *The Hakkas of Sabah*, 46–47.
11 Ibid., 51–53.
The early Chinese Christians in North Borneo had no record of specific evangelistic missions to non-Christians. Their social engagement was education through the mission school.  

13 Outreach remained restricted by the segregated social context. There was no purposeful missionary engagement to other Chinese dialect groups or the indigenes. For the Anglican Chinese, the mode of church was colonial, Western and Anglo-Catholic. Like many mission churches in the age of colonialism, their church life was based on a parish-centered Christendom mindset. Their emphases were on “church” (fellowship), “quality” and “Asian ministry” (indigenization of leadership).

14 The Basel Church mission to other people groups was absent before the 1950s. The Basel Church operated within a self-sufficient homogenous community. It has been a predominantly Chinese-speaking church, with its Malay-speaking and English-speaking General Councils formed only in 2003 and 2009. Thus, the mission engagement of CCS in different denominations was limited by their homogenous and centripetal natures.

Mission Schools

Historically, the RC, Anglicans and the Basel Church were the only education providers in North Borneo until the emergence of a Chinese private school in 1913 and


14 Taylor, “SPG and North Borneo,” 20.


16 Ibid., 24–25.
the first government school in 1915. The Mission Schools were CCS’ key social enterprises and mission outreach in North Borneo. By 1963, there were 121 mission schools, compared to 146 Government schools and 116 Chinese schools. A mission school was almost certain to accompany every establishment of a local church. A majority of students were Chinese as they were attracted by the greater opportunities presented by the mission school education. Although the Chinese had never grown past more than 25 percent of Sabah population, they have become more influential than other ethnic groups because of better education, and mission schools provided that, which was recognized by the British colonial government.

**Chinese Christians in Sabah Losing Mission Engagement**

With the formation of Malaysia, North Borneans eventually lost their mission engagement. They lost control of the mission schools. Their ministry context was also changed by the invasion of Malay nationalism and the formation of Malaysia.

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21 Wong, *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society*, 74; deducing from the report by the Inspector of Schools, the majority of the school pupils in 1922 were Chinese, George, “Historical Development of Education,” 494.

Losing the Mission Schools

Mission schools under the CCS were practically lost due to the 1970 directive, which required the schools to surrender curriculum and administration fully to the control of the federal government.\(^{23}\) Under NCP, mission schools were required to help forge a Malaysian culture based on Malay nationalism. Christian symbols were not allowed to be openly displayed in many places. The curriculum was also redesigned, and the subject of Bible was moved out of regular class time. Worship places for Muslims forced their ways into mission schools’ compounds.\(^{24}\) Foreign Christian teachers had their working permits revoked and their departure weakened the Christian ethos in the schools.\(^{25}\) Christians bemoaned these changes and tried to preserve the Christian ethos in mission schools.\(^{26}\) Through the Malaynization of the education system and with Malay hegemony, more Malay Muslims teachers were sent to teach in Sabah, including in the mission schools. Subsequently, CCS lost their main social contact with the people. Evangelism to Muslim students in the mission schools has since been limited.


A Different Mission Field

After independence, Chinese Christians discovered that there were less “sheep looking for a shepherd.” Meanwhile, the church could not afford to stay within the comfort zone of the segregated social space created by colonists anymore. A Christendom mindset and the centripetal model had become unsustainable for the new era.

Anglicans and the RC started Malay-speaking missions in the 1950s amongst the indigenes. Yet, mission to Muslims had never been in the agenda of CCS. As Malay nationalism entered Sabah, evangelism to Malay Muslims was restricted. CCS’ potential harvest field for conversion was immediately limited to only non-Muslims.

Breakthrough in Evangelism, Absence of Social Engagement

CCS did experience breakthrough in evangelism, albeit in the absence of sustained and deliberate social engagement. Since losing their influence in mission schools, social engagement CCS in the 1980s was via their involvement in charities and welfare organizations.\(^{27}\) Often these were event-based. Others include involvement in Prison Fellowship Malaysia,\(^ {28}\) medical camps, and welfare and disaster relief.\(^ {29}\) However, these were responses to special needs rather than purposeful social engagement for public good. CCS, such as the Anglicans was engaging society to save souls without any consideration to challenge socio-political structure or engage with long-term social issues. There was no formal effort to engage Muslims due to legal restrictions.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 191.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 213.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 263.
Anglican urban churches began to reach out to non-Christian Chinese in the 1970s and 1980s. Local churches such as the Cathedral embarked on various evangelistic programs. Church planting, a service center for health and care, and new social gatherings were initiated for evangelism opportunities. The Chinese Anglicans also involved in various mass evangelistic gatherings. Unfortunately, they adopted an understanding of evangelism, which dichotomizes word and work. Following the theological climate of the day, evangelism was separated from social action. As a result, the salvation of souls became the focus. There was no exploration of mission through social engagement. Even the two lines’ mention of “social missionary work” in the Diocesan Synod Declaration in 1993 was focused on activities, while multiple-page documents were dedicated to strategy for “evangelistic” outreach in the same period.

Similar situations are common among Malaysia Evangelical Christians. Hwa alleges that the negligence of social engagement by Malaysia Evangelicals in general is the result of

30 Ibid., 163–166.

31 Ibid., 191–192.


33 “Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.” “The Lausanne Covenant,” Lausanne Movement, August 1, 1974, https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant (accessed December 20, 2017); Sunquist, Understanding Christian Mission, 320.

modernist-fundamentalist debates in the US.\textsuperscript{35} The Evangelicals distanced themselves from social responsibility, which they associated with the modernist-liberal camp. They focused on proclamation as the means for witnessing the Gospel, reducing evangelism to verbal transmission of propositional truth. While some have reaffirmed sociopolitical responsibility after Lausanne Covenant in 1974, most Malaysian Christians remain ignorant of the holistic nature of the Gospel. Being labeled as practicing a “social gospel” is a real fear amongst the churches.\textsuperscript{36}

Further, Evangelicals in Malaysia “tend to conform to the secularization thesis where religion is placed in the private realm without much public relevance.”\textsuperscript{37} A survey report by NECF in 2001 indicates that a large majority of Evangelicals invest in evangelism programs and “feel at ease talking about their faith to others.”\textsuperscript{38} Yet, Evangelicals “tend to shy away from societal issues such as poverty and religious freedom.”\textsuperscript{39} Only slightly more than a quarter of Evangelical pastors and only about one-tenth of church members “were personally involved in community care, social justice or

\textsuperscript{35} Yung Hwa, \textit{Beyond AD2000: A Call to Evangelical Faithfulness} (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999), 35, referring to George M. Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
nongovernmental organizations." Evangelicals tend to live in a ghetto, gravitating their lives around their church. The same survey reveals that, "36 percent of churches did not organize any activities that involved interaction with non-Christians in their neighborhoods. On the average, churches surveyed spent only 8 percent of budgets on social concern and community involvement." 

In short, Evangelical Christians in Malaysia have privatized their faith. Unlike the Roman Catholics, they withdraw from the public space as they lean towards “a church-government divide where its emphasis is on the spiritual welfare of its members, eschewing political involvement.” Significantly, the survey discovers that “48 percent of evangelicals rarely interact with Muslims,” indicating the social distance between Christians and Muslims.

Evangelicals in Malaysia have also succumbed to developmentalism, which is “a discourse that emphasizes individual freedom in the pursuit of economic goods and activities without emphasizing the corresponding pursuit of individual liberty and civil

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.


44 Ibid., 244.
With developmentalism, private economic gains are disjointed from common good. Those who subscribe to developmentalism see no reason to be involved in political activism. They operate with a middle-class mindset and to them “wealth accumulation eclipsed social transformation.” They strive for affluence and political stability, which in turn, is necessary for economic growth, even if “authoritarian policies are employed.” Thus, developmentalism explains “the shortage of reformist zeal in the Malaysian middle class, an essentially materialist and self-centered community.”

Lau contends, “With the rise of middle-class Christians, developmentalism reduced Christian involvement in social activism while personal evangelism is given the main focus.” This scenario is common in the whole of Malaysia, and is prevalent amongst the CCS.

Meanwhile, some Malaysian Christians, especially Evangelicals, are influenced by the Charismatic Movement, and because of their privatization of faith and shunning of social action, concentrate on prayer. This result is a privatized and pietistic spirituality that choose to separate the “sacred” from the “secular.” Chong relates this “spiritual” way to engage civil society to the Malaysia National Prayer Network (MNPN). Launched in 2008, this network aims at “mobilizing all believers . . . to engage in prayer that ‘call

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45 Ibid., 249.

46 Ibid.

47 Alwyn Lau, Intimating the Unconscious: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Theology in Malaysia (PhD, Monash University, 2016), 10–11.

48 Ibid.


50 Ibid.
upon God for revival of the Church and transformation of our nation.”  

Often, prayer is mistaken as an easy shortcut to social transformation.

Christians’ social engagement has also received much criticism and skepticism from the church. According to some, “The focus of the church . . . should be the realm of the sacred, and politics has no right to intrude into the sacred realm.” Some adopt escapism, seeing the world as a “sinking ship” to be abandoned and itself the “life-boat.” As a result, the “on-going divide between private spirituality and public justice” becomes the main reason Malaysian Christians suffer social withdrawal. The privatization of the Gospel and social withdrawal of Malaysian Christians are phenomena confirmed by Rowan’s research and Ng’s observations. There is a prevalent separation of the sacred and the secular, and of the temporal and the spiritual amongst the Malaysian Christians.

The Limitations of Evangelism and Interfaith Dialogue

CCS’ mission engagement with Muslims also suffers much setback because of Malay hegemony. The *dakwah* movement and its sentiment towards Christians are legal

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52 Ibid., 267.


54 Lau, “Intimating the Unconscious,” 20.


obstacles Malaysia Christians face in evangelism to the Malays. Malay hegemony has also contributed to the ineffectiveness of interfaith dialogues.

The Dakwah Revivalists’ Sentiment towards Christians

The limitations of evangelism and interfaith dialogue in CCS’ efforts to engage Muslims are the result of a conservative dakwah revivalist sentiment. The Malaysian conservative Islam is a product of its own context and is interwoven with Malay ethnogenesis. According to Zamani who wrote about his own race, the Malays are not taught to question what is taught to them. This might have contributed to the legalistic, simplistic and judgmental flavor of Islamism amongst the Malays.

The conservative stance of the revivalists can be clearly observed through their insistent to uphold certain Sunni doctrines and their uncompromising yet narrow worldview. According to Shamsul, the dakwah revivalists, often recruited in their youth, employ “the positivistic scientific paradigms of the West” that give them the “analytic tools for the reinterpretation of Islam in a narrow, legalistic way.” With such methodology these revivalists, who are mostly science students, “adopted a narrowly legalistic, black-and-white, conservative position regarding Islam. They see ‘Islamic knowledge’ or theology in terms of rules, formulae, and equations, a way of categorizing


58 Azhar Ibrahim, Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World: Critical Perspectives (Petaling Jaya, MY: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2014), 36.

and perceiving the world they have learned from their study of the natural sciences.”

They adopt a rigid view, judging that “One either practices Islam in a complete way or is an infidel; one either fights for Islam or is irreligious; if a member of an Islamic group, one must be a full-time *dakwah* activist, not merely a sympathizer.”

Nevertheless, these simplistic methods are able to articulate “doctrinal precepts of fundamentalist Islamic ideology,” combining “theory and practice” that help to popularize the *dakwah* movement. Alatas criticized the reviver movement as a populist movement that lacks intellectual and religious rigor. In fact, the revivalists prefer public activism to intellectual engagement. The academia is shunned, as the activism-driven revivalists adopt an anti-intellectualism stance, which downplays serious scholarly work. The revivalists selectively follow traditions, which suit their agendas. They are therefore not “embarrassed by blatant and frequent self-contradictions,” because they are not trained to think critically.

Followers of Abul A’la Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, the revivalists, are “ideologues of the non-dialogue. They do not see any need to engage dialectically with

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60 Ibid., 216, 224–225.
61 Ibid., 216.
62 Ibid., 219.
64 Ibid., 50.
65 Ibid., 51.
66 Ibid., 71.
67 Ibid., 52.
dominant Western thought in open and constructive manner . . . they see the world as a binary of the West versus Islam, where the former is the repository of all negativities.”

Subsequently, in their eagerness to propagate Islam, interreligious dialogues are used not to gain mutual understanding but to rebut and defeat other faiths. Studying of other religions too, is not done with an open, objective, and critical mind but to prepare one to counter other religions. This is especially true in their zeal to counter Christian evangelism. In short, the revivalists are conservative because they are defensive and exclusivist; they are a mass movement where the learned are in the minority.

The revivalists are concerned with Christian evangelism, relating it to apostasy among Muslims. Anti-Western sentiment is their key characteristic. This contributes to their antagonism towards Christianity. Christianity is considered a threat to Malays, as their numbers are perceived to be increasing. Zamani relates such antagonism to the fear of colonists’ proselytism efforts. Zamani’s view is typical amongst the dakwah revivalists—associating Christianity as a “Western” cultural force, which may erode the

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68 Ibid., 58–59.


71 Ibid., 41.

72 Ibid.


74 Ibid., 164.
Malay culture. Some even see Christianity as a subversive Western tool. There is a fear that with more Chinese embracing Christianity, Malaysia in the future will be dominated with two main rival socio-religious groups—the Muslim-Malays and the Christian-Chinese. As Malay hegemony is juxtaposed with a postcolonial anti-West sentiment, the gulf between the two groups deepens.

Evangelism to the Malays

Mission to Muslims has also been hindered by the legal prohibition for Muslim apostasy. From the Muslims’ perspective, legal prohibition for Muslim apostasy is necessary to protect Islam, especially from Christians. Propagating Christian faith to the Muslims is unlawful in some places in Malaysia and generally warned against by the government. Some who were caught doing so were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 1987. Thus, Malaysian Christians have become reluctant to share their faith to Malays. Furthermore, most Malaysian Christians’ understanding of evangelism is limited to verbal proclamation, which leads to a rational response from the hearer in professing the Christian faith. Many non-Christians and even Christian theologians in Malaysia have referred to this method of evangelism as “unethical proselytism,”

especially as it is often accompanied with some sort of denigration of other religions and cultures.\textsuperscript{79} Such methods of evangelism are bound to create ethnic tension. So, Christians, in general, refrain from any form of “mission” to the Malays out of fear.\textsuperscript{80}

Mission to the Muslims has also suffered from Muslim hostility, reflected in Muslims’ attack on evangelism related activities and organizations. The Selangor Islamic Religious Council (Majlis Agama Islam Selangor, or MAIS), in its publication, “Exposing the Christian Agenda,” refers to Christianity as the enemy of Islam and Christian evangelism as an insidious effort to hurt Muslims.\textsuperscript{81} The book is a reaction to evangelism. Christians are described as deceptive and Muslims are warned not to allow Christians to assume leadership over them.\textsuperscript{82} According to the book, the status of Islam in the constitution is unique and higher than other religions, and the protection of Muslims from other “deceptive” religions is clearly provided in the constitution.\textsuperscript{83} The book perceives Christian missionary activities to Muslims as strategically planned to defeat Islam openly and subversively.\textsuperscript{84} Apostasy in Malaysia, which is the most serious offense

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{79} Rowan, \textit{Proclaiming the Peacemaker}, 184.
  \item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 183.
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Majlis Agama Islam Selangor (Selangor Islamic Religious Council), \textit{Pendedahan Agenda Kristian (Exposing the Christian Agenda)}; MAIS is a highly influential Islamic organization in the most affluent state in Malaysia, formed through enactments which endow it with power over all Islamic religious matters except those come under the Sultan or beyond the enactments which allow it.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 17–28.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 34–54.
\end{itemize}
in Islam, is related to Christian evangelism. The language used in the book makes plain the resentment of the Muslims towards Christianity in Malaysia. Christians are alleged to have an agenda to establish a Christian nation in Malaysia at the expense of Islam. The book warns the ummah of the “10/40 Window movement” and other Christian missions which are under the disguise of humanitarian help. Muslims in Malaysia are also aware of Christian missions, which are contextualized. In the book, it is alleged that Christians’ efforts to maintain their use of Allah is for the purpose of contextualizing the term in order to make it friendlier and more familiar to Muslims in Malaysia. According to this theory, this will eventually confuse Muslims into accepting Christianity as a friendly religion. The book also warns Malaysian Muslims on the danger of insider movement—a movement where new Christian converts are staying within their social-religious network. The insider movement is understood as a strategy by Christians to encourage Muslim apostasy because by remaining within their social-religious context, the new converts will experience significantly less pressure and danger, making their conversion easier. The book details in technical terms the different levels of insider movement, from

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85 Interestingly, it reports that Sabah has the most cases of Muslim apostasy amongst all states in Malaysia, comprising of slightly more than one-third of the total number, see Ibid., 32.

86 Ibid., 59.

87 Ibid., 67–72.

88 Ibid., 74–82.

89 Ibid., 81.

90 Ibid., 82.
“C1 to C6,” referring to the movement as cancer in the Islamic society.\(^91\) Even Christians’ efforts to be incarnational is noted—Christians “do not force the Malays to attend church but they bring the church to them.”\(^92\) With these strategies, the book warns that Malay Christians will increase in Malaysia, especially subversively within the social networks of Muslims.\(^93\) In sum, the Christian agenda is described as a planned strategy to subversively convert Muslims through various contextualized and friendly approaches, in order to “control the political arena.”\(^94\)

Christian organizations, which perceived to be related to evangelism, are also targeted. Some Muslims, like Mohd. Amin, mistake the “Evangelicals” as the primary Christian group that emphasizes evangelism, calls for a ban on Evangelicalism.\(^95\) Mohd. Amin, who leads an Islamic NGO, said “the proposal was prompted by the high number of Muslims leaving the faith for Christianity . . . there were some 400 conversion cases before the Syariah courts and if the trend continued, it could have an impact on the

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 84–86.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 89 (author’s translation).

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 97–100.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 107.

country’s security.”\footnote{Asila Jalil, “Azril: Why I Said Christian Evangelicalism Should Be Banned,” \textit{The Malaysian Insight}, last modified June 21, 2017, https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/5665/ (accessed March 25, 2018).} Regardless of his confusion on “Evangelicalism,” Mohd. Amin’s concern on the “security” of the country speaks volume of the Muslims’ perception of Christian evangelism. Clearly, they consider evangelism a “threat” to Islam, one of the pillars for Malayness. It is therefore dangerous because without Islam, the Malay identity will be weakened and eventually, their greatest fear—that the Malays will disappear from the face of the earth—will happen. Christians responded by voicing disapproval.\footnote{“The Unconstitutional Call — National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia,” \textit{Malay Mail Online}, last modified June 16, 2017, http://www.themalaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/the-unconstitutional-call-necf-malaysia (accessed March 25, 2018).} NECF, in its statement, rightfully corrects the misconception, explains the Christian’s position and calls for the government to protect the Christian minority. However, both Amin and NECF have different concerns. One focuses on the survival of the Malays and Islam, and the other on safeguarding their constitutional rights.

With all of the sensitivity and hostility, even for those who truly understand the holistic meaning of “witnessing” and involved in “sensitive evangelism,” their witnessing amongst Malays-Muslims must be in secret due to the sentiments and misunderstanding of the Malay society against Christianity.\footnote{Rowan, \textit{Proclaiming the Peacemaker}, 186.} Worse, every time Christians involve in charity or welfare, Muslims are concerned that there is an evangelistic motive behind. Christianity’s motive and contribution to the nation is doubted. In Sabah, the level of hostility and sensitivity are vastly lower than in the Peninsular. Yet, with the impact of Malay hegemony, and especially with the change of the law, evangelism to Muslims has
never surfaced in the open. Affected by both the legal limitation and Malay hegemony, evangelism to Muslims has become a taboo.

Interfaith Dialogues

Interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Malaysia remains an exception, especially in Sabah. It is extremely rare and mainly limited to those who are intellectuals. There is no lacking of attempts to organize inter-faith dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia. Christians in Malaysia generally recognize the importance of such dialogue, and Roman Catholics have attempted to hold several dialogues. Inter-faith dialogue is also supported by CCM and CFM. Theologians such as Batumalai have argued for interfaith dialogue as a way for Malaysia Christians to engage with Muslims.

However, influenced by the dakwah movement, Muslims in Malaysia are uninterested in actual dialoging with Christians. Muslims in Malaysia avoid dialoguing with Malaysian Christians because such act “confers legitimacy on local Christian Movements.” There has been very little commitment from the government whenever


100 Riddell, “Islamization, Civil Society, and Religious Minority in Malaysia,” 178.

101 Ibid., 179.


such dialogues were proposed.\textsuperscript{104} An Interfaith Commission (IFC) was once proposed but never materialized during Prime Minister Badawi’s time.\textsuperscript{105} Protests were held outside of the conference hall attempting to stop the formation of the IFC that intend to explore the implications of Article 11 of the Constitution (on freedom of religion).\textsuperscript{106} An international Muslim-Christian interfaith seminar was cancelled three weeks to its date in 2007 because of government’s withdrawal of endorsement.\textsuperscript{107} Rowan commented, “Recent events have only served to confirm the suspicions of many, that Islam in Malaysia is not serious about inter-faith dialogue.”\textsuperscript{108} Even Malay intellectuals like Zamani acknowledge the decline of Muslims’ openness to reasoning after it was declared in the twelfth Century the \textit{ijtihad} should be closed and no new interpretation of the Quran can surpass those by the earlier scholars.\textsuperscript{109}

Dialogues have generally been associated with two other limitations. First, it is limited to intellectuals. It has limited effect with the masses, which are often excluded and not trained to dialogue. Moreover, in the case of CCS, not many can dialogue with Muslim. In the end, “Hostility, polemics, and misunderstandings remained common


\textsuperscript{107} Rowan, \textit{Proclaiming the Peacemaker}, 175.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Zamani, \textit{The Malay Ideals}, 123.
among people in the street.”\textsuperscript{110} Secondly, as intellectual dialogue focuses on issue, it seldom emphasizes on the emotive and social aspects of those who are involved.

**Summary: Limited Missional Engagement with the Malays**

CCS has since the beginning been monocultural, albeit Westernized. Although they were aware of the need to evangelize, their mission engagement to Muslims has seen a sharp decline since the intensification of Malay hegemony. Furthermore, mission engagement to Muslims has clearly been limited by legal prohibitions, limitation of evangelism, and ineffective interfaith dialogues. The detachment between Muslims and Christians in Malaysia has reached an alarming state. Islamic revivalism has made the Muslim community “more self-contained where religion became a key consideration for social interaction.”\textsuperscript{111} The non-Muslims react by placing emphasis “on their own religious identity,” resulting in a parallel revivalism amongst the non-Islam religions in Malaysia since the 1980s.\textsuperscript{112} Expectedly, this results in a greater social distance between Muslims and non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{113}


Christians are concerned with “the growing polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims in the country.”\textsuperscript{114} However, given the force of Malay hegemony, they have become passive. Restricted in their proselytization activities, Malaysian Christians focus on their religious activities and avoid government interference. Eventually, Christians accept the “status quo limitations” imposed by the government on them.\textsuperscript{115} Their functional dhimmitude status is further consolidated.


\textsuperscript{115} Chong, “Modernity, State-led Islamisation and the Non-Muslim Response,” 228.
PART THREE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 5

INCARNATIONAL MISSION DEFINED

This chapter defines incarnational mission and its scope.¹ Incarnational mission is defined from the missional church movement perspective. Specifically, continuing the presence of Christ, representing the Kingdom of God (Kingdom), and identifying with people are presented as the definitive attributes of incarnational mission, based on the mission of God (missio Dei).

Incarnation, “The Incarnation” and “Incarnational Mission”

Literally, “incarnation” means “in the flesh,” or a process of embodiment.² “The incarnation,” however, is a theological concept, referring to “the historic act where the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, without ceasing to be God, took upon himself our human nature and become fully human.”³ This definition reflects the


³ Mondithoka, “Incarnation,” 177. Note the Trinitarian involvement in the whole process of incarnation, i.e. the incarnation made possible via the Holy Spirit.
Chalcedon formulation of Christology, which stress the full divinity and humanity of Christ. It is also consistent with the biblical accounts where the meaning of incarnation—“becoming flesh” is synonymous with “becoming human.”

Discussions of the incarnation need not be overwhelmed by speculations about the hypostatic nature of Christ. Ultimately, “The concept of incarnation . . . cannot explain the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ because it is itself an expression of this unity.” Only the result of such unity can be discerned via “Jesus’ historical reality.” Preferably, incarnation is understood through the essence of such historical movement while assuming Christ’s deity and humanity. This allows incarnation to be defined within the context of soteriology and Trinity. Thus, a complete definition of the incarnation includes the motive and effect of Christ’s hypostatic nature.

The Motives and Logic of Incarnation

The motives of the incarnation are God’s revelation and redemption. Widening the scope of incarnation to its soteriological purpose, Langmead defines the incarnation

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6 Ibid., 323. It is worth noting that Panneberg’s idea of incarnation is one which is extended to resurrection, an event which showed that Jesus is God and with God.
as the event where “the supreme divinity fully assuming lowly human flesh in a once-for-all self-revelation for the sake of restoring a broken relationship between humanity and God.” The term “the incarnation” refers not only to Christ’s hypostatic nature but also an event or process when God reaches out to creation through the act of self-revelation. God “overcomes the polarity between the divine and human.” Via the mysterious incarnation, “God’s nature is revealed within the sphere of history in Jesus Christ.”

Through incarnation, redemption is made possible. In the Gospel of John, people are called to believe that Jesus Christ is Messiah and Son of God through whom one could have eternal life. The incarnation is set in a motive of salvation for humankind, made possible only when God becomes human in Christ, “died a human death,” and resurrected. This movement shows that God has decisively and actively initiated salvation by sending Christ into the world.

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11 Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 1.


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 28.

15 Ibid.

The incarnation is Christ’s work “as he steps forth to reveal the Father’s will of love and reconciliation, and to effect it.”\(^{17}\) Jesus Christ is “himself the tabernacle of God among men and women, himself the Word of God enshrined in the flesh, and in him that the glory of God is to be seen.”\(^{18}\) Christ is therefore, “the subject of the incarnation.”\(^{19}\)

“Incarnational” as an Adjective

The term “incarnational” is an adjective and to be used metaphorically.\(^{20}\) Only God can incarnate because only God can cross the gap between divinity and humanity.\(^{21}\) Thus, “The primary use of . . . ‘the incarnation’ in theology is reserved for the action of God.”\(^{22}\) By “becoming flesh,” it does not mean that God compromises His immutability but God is free to move into history.\(^{23}\) These crucial understandings differentiate Christ’s unique incarnation from the Church’s attempt to be incarnational.


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 60.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 60–61.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{23}\) Webster, *Word and Church*, 133–143.
Incarnational Mission and the Missional Church

The missional church embodies incarnational mission. Incarnational mission is the understanding of mission, which is based on Jesus’ incarnation. It resists the temptation to be “focusing primarily on Christology in the missional conversation” as it tends to “lead the church toward a backward-oriented vision.” While emphasizing “imitating what Christ has done in the past,” it is aware of the need to discern God’s move in the present and in the future. Incarnational mission is “the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” Christians are called to be disciples who form apostolic and witnessing community. As God revealed himself through Christ’s incarnation “as the One who is and for his creation,” the Church is sent as “God’s people present in the world, with and for the world.”


26 Ibid.

27 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, xii–xiii.

28 Ibid., 21–29. The missional church’s apostolic nature is often being defined against an attracional approach of outreach by the church or a response to an inward looking, Christendom mindset, as described by Ed Stetzer, Planting Missional Churches (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 165 and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21 Century Church (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 41. Yet an anti-attracional and anti-Christendom mindset definition of “apostolic” is not the focus here. Rather, “apostolic” here refers to the “sentness” nature of the church.

29 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 9.
The concept of “missional church” has its roots in the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), a movement inspired by the works of Lesslie Newbigin.\(^{30}\) The missional church is incarnational because it is an expression of the *missio Dei*, a continuity of Christ’s presence in the world, representative of the Kingdom of God, and Christ’s identification with the world. These characteristics of the missional church are not spelled out explicitly in the work of Newbigin.\(^{31}\) Yet, it is through Newbigin’s thoughts and ideas which most of the incarnational characteristics of the missional church originated. Later proponents of the missional church, such as Guder, utilize the term and concept of “incarnation” more freely and frequently but their essential ecclesiology is inspired by Newbigin. To Guder, “The church bears a marked resemblance to the incarnation of Jesus . . . It is no accident that the church is called the ‘body of Christ.’ It continues as an incarnate expression of the life of God.”\(^{32}\) In other words, the missional church’s existence is a continuity of Christ’s presence, method, and message integrated. Its vocation is incarnational witness—“Jesus Christ as the messenger, the message, and the model for all who follow after him.”\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 9.
The following sections explore the incarnational nature of the missional church via the four areas of its expression. Firstly, it bases its ecclesiology on *missio Dei*. Secondly, it witnesses for Christ by continuing Christ’s presence in the world. Thirdly, it represents the Kingdom, and fourthly, it identifies with people.

**The Missional Church and Missio Dei**

The missional church movement sees the Church as the primary expression of incarnational mission. The missional church bases its entire ecclesiology on the *missio Dei*.\(^{34}\) It understands that mission is God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation.\(^{35}\) Therefore, the Church is not the initiator, forerunner, nor pioneer of mission. Instead, the purpose of its existence is to be “a sent community of people who no longer live for themselves but instead live to participate with [God] in His redemptive purposes.”\(^{36}\) Hence, the Church is generated by the *missio Dei*.\(^{37}\) In other words, the missional church’s identity is found in “the role it plays in God’s mission.”\(^{38}\) Mission is not church activity or a part of the church’s programs. Instead, it forms the essence and

\(^{34}\) Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional, Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 16.

\(^{35}\) Guder, “Missional Church,” 4-5.


\(^{38}\) Goheen, “Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement,” 62.
identity of the Church.\textsuperscript{39} “Missionary activity” is “not so much the work of the church but simply the Church at work.”\textsuperscript{40}

**The Missional Church is Christ’s Continuous Presence in the World**

The missional church considers itself as the continuity of Christ in two aspects. First, it considers its essence as the continuity of Christ’s presence. Secondly, Christ’s presence is demonstrated via His ministry principles.

**The Church as the “Body”**

The missional church is incarnational as it continues Christ’s presence in the world. It carries the effects of the incarnation through the presence and power of Christ. The missional church inherits Newbigin’s understanding that Christians are a continuity of God’s story; they live out Jesus’ story and live in it until it becomes their own.\textsuperscript{41} On this foundation, Newbigin developed a Christocentric *missio Dei* where the Church would continue the Son’s mission in God’s salvific story: “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21).\textsuperscript{42} In fact, the birth of the Church is for the continuity of Christ’s incarnational presence in this world, as both His “body” and the instrument for

\textsuperscript{39} Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 81.

\textsuperscript{40} Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 32.


His continuous mission in the world through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{43} Biblical references, such as John 1:14, are related to the Old Testament concept of tabernacle—the meeting place between God and His people.\textsuperscript{44} Through the incarnation, the true glory of God, manifested in Christ, takes “residence” in humanity.\textsuperscript{45} Like Christ, the Church is to show the world the glory of God. The Church is the continuity of Jesus (God) in the world, a tangible “flesh” which would stay (residence). To Guder, unless the world sees and be engaged with the Word through the Church, incarnation is incomplete.\textsuperscript{46} In other words, in the context of missional church, Christ’s presence is experienced through the Church.

**Imitation and Discipleship as Christ’s Continuous Ministry**

Tangibly, Christ’s presence continues today through the practice of the Church. The Church is understood as the continuity of Jesus’ work in this world, sent for its salvation.\textsuperscript{47} The Church should imitate Christ because imitation of Christ is integral to being incarnational, just as the acts of Christ (words and deeds) are integral to His incarnation. Specifically, the missional church sees itself as a continuity of Jesus’

\textsuperscript{43} A collapse of Christology and ecclesiology must be avoided. The Church needs to be distinctly identified apart from Christ, who is unique and fully divine and holy. The incarnation of Christ must be distinguished from the incarnational nature of the Church.


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 127–128.

\textsuperscript{46} Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 5–6. Guder’s statement is dangerously close to collapsing Christology into ecclesiology, but it does represent the general position of the missional church movement.

preaching, teaching, and healing. The continuity of Jesus’ ministry after His ascension was clearly described as incarnational by Newbigin, followed by the proponents of the missional church such as Hunsburger and Guder. They consider the call of discipleship key to the Church not just as a faithful response to Jesus’ call, but to continue Jesus’ ministry in the world according to the way of Jesus. Those who follow Jesus would integrate word and deed in mission just as Jesus did.

Such continuity of Christ’s presence today via imitation is based on ministry principles. Some missionaries reject this aspect of incarnational mission because they find it impossible to fully imitate Christ. This is because they focus on superficial imitation of Jesus instead of following Jesus’ ministry principles. Jesus’ principle of ministry is rooted in His ethics, demonstrated through His humility and suffering at the cross, summarized by Yoder as “servanthood replaces dominion” and “forgiveness absorbs hostility.” Following Jesus is to follow these ministry principles, not merely the forms of His ministry. Participating in Christ is inseparable with being the Body of Christ


50 Ibid.

51 Langmead, The Word Made Flesh, 49–51.


53 John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 131. True discipleship or Christian ethics, Yoder argued, lies not in the superficial imitation of Christ of the St. Franciscan way, which he stressed was absence “in the apostolic writings,” Ibid., 132.
“because it shares in the sufferings of Christ.” In conclusion, to continue Jesus’ ministry in the world, Christians are to operate according to the ethics of Christ, which emphasizes servanthood and forgiveness. The result of such following goes beyond shallow imitation of Christ, which focuses only on the way He conducted His earthly life.

The Missional Church Represents the Kingdom of God

Incarnational mission cannot be understood apart from its relationship with the Kingdom. The inauguration and in-breaking of the Kingdom began via the incarnation. The continuous presence of Christ today must be understood as the presence of the king, with the Church as the representative of the Kingdom. Embracing a realized, albeit not yet fully consummated Kingdom is key to demonstrate the Kingdom as an incarnational reality today. Further, the missional church continues the incarnational mission of God by witnessing to the world the nature of a new humanity, which is redeemed and restored. It lives in the world incarnationally with a new life governed by the ethics of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom and New Humanity

The missional church is aware that it is “spawned by the reign of God and directed toward it.” As a community, it models the forthcoming fulfillment of God’s Kingdom. It is “the provisional representation . . . of humanity justified in [Christ],”

54 Barrett, “Missional Witness,” 129.
56 Ibid., 81-82, 100-104.
57 “Missional ecclesiology is also a representational ecclesiology.” Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1, 643, as quoted in Van Gelder and Zscheile, The Missional Church in Perspective, 107.
the “harbinger of the new humanity that lives in genuine community” and “a form of companionship and wholeness that humanity craves.” The world would see a new hope of humanity through a church, which breaks racial and cultural barriers. The Kingdom is neither separated from the Church nor equated to the Church. The Church is a “hermeneutic of the gospel” which having tasted the first fruit of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1), is experiencing the foretaste of the Kingdom and living by the Gospel. It is a subset and definite part of the Kingdom of God. The scope of the Church’s mission is extended to where God’s Reign is, which includes every aspect of humanity and creation. Knowing this scope prevents the Church from confining the Gospel within the private lives of Christians while ignoring the public realm.

Via the incarnation, “Jesus’ humanity reveals what God intends his people to be and to become.” Through Christ humanity, hope is secured, and through the Church, which is constantly undergoing sanctification, the world sees the hope of transformation. Hence, the missional church’s witnessing is incarnational because the process of sanctification it experiences shows God’s intention of sanctifying humanity. In short,

58 Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 100-104.
59 Ibid.
60 Goheen, As the Father has Sent Me, I am Sending You, 175.
62 Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, 107; Goheen, As the Father has Sent Me, I am Sending You, 175–176.
64 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 16.
“The church is to be an imperfect but perfecting social incarnation of God’s inbreaking reign of love and reconciliation, joy and freedom, peace and justice.”65 Thus, the Church demonstrates a “new humanity, fully immersed in creation and human culture, while at the same time undistorted by sin and estrangement.”66 It represents God’s Reign as God’s community, servant, and messenger.67 The missional church is simultaneously participating in both “culture/world and God’s redeeming activity, so that the world can see and experience provisionally but powerfully the new humanity that God is bringing forth through the Spirit.”68

Kingdom Ethics Incarnated

The missional church submits to God’s Reign and subscribes to Kingdom ethics. The Church is a community of believers under a different authority.69 The ethics of the Kingdom is an inseparable part of incarnational mission.70 As representative of the Kingdom, the Church’s submission to the Rule of the Kingdom takes precedence over the rule or patterns of the world. The Church is “to embody the reign of God by living under


66 Van Gelder and Zscheile, The Missional Church in Perspective, 139–140.


68 Van Gelder and Zscheile, The Missional Church in Perspective, 139–140.


70 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 5, 33–46; Langmead, The Word Made Flesh, 49–51.
its authority,” thus showing forth God’s tangible Reign in human and social form.\footnote{Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 103-104.} It is a Holy Nation among the nations.\footnote{Barrett, “Missional Witness,” 117.} Besides, as active agent and instrument, the Church holds the divine Reign’s authority and asserts the authority of the Kingdom in the world as a prophetic voice.\footnote{Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 103-104. For peace and justice as demonstrations of Kingdom ethics see Frost, The Road to Missional, Journey to the Center of the Church, 104–110.}

**The Missional Church Identifies with the People**

One of the key characteristics of the missional church and incarnational mission is the emphasis on identification. Identification means being in solidarity with the people and their situation, while respecting and accepting their cultures. The practice of identification in incarnational mission is governed by a set of practical principles.

**Solidarity with Others and their Situation**

Incarnational engagement with people begins with solidarity. Being “in the flesh,” Christ’s incarnation enables Him to identify with humanity.\footnote{Mondithoka, “Incarnation,” 177.} The unceasingly holy Christ entered the sinful world to redeem it.\footnote{Ibid.} Through incarnation, Christ’s solidarity with humanity is demonstrated, as Torrance described, “in becoming flesh the Word penetrated into hostile territory, into our human alienation and estrangement from God . . . he became all that we are in our opposition to God in our bondage under law—that is the

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\footnote{Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 103-104.}

\footnote{Barrett, “Missional Witness,” 117.}

\footnote{Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 103-104. For peace and justice as demonstrations of Kingdom ethics see Frost, The Road to Missional, Journey to the Center of the Church, 104–110.}

\footnote{Mondithoka, “Incarnation,” 177.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
amazing act of gracious condescension in the incarnation, that God the Son should assume our flesh, should enter a human experience under divine judgment.”

The incarnation “embodies an act of profound identification with the entire human race.”

Following the example of Christ, an incarnational church does not stay remote from sin, tragedy, and suffering of the people but humbles itself to serve them. It considers seriously human condition, which includes all aspects of human sinfulness and wellbeing. Thus, incarnational mission includes entering society and initiating “relational identification” with others. The Church involved is to enter into “concrete acts of solidarity and accompaniment”—“If God loves us in Christ, so that God identifies with us relationally in a posture of humility, then we are to share this same love with our neighbors.” The medium, which is the Church, is “entirely the message.” Through identification, people are reached “in all ways possible without compromising the truth of the gospel itself.”

Identification should be applied to all missions in all contexts because it reflects “that primal act of identification that was an intrinsic part of Christ’s incarnation.” If Jesus was not docetic, having been a genuine part of the organic life in a given

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80 Ibid.


82 Ibid., 38.
community, the Church should also have a “real and abiding incarnational presence” through identification with people who it engages with.\textsuperscript{83} Hence, missional approaches are shaped via “dialogue and engagement with the contexts.”\textsuperscript{84} The Church is to enter the local community and “sit with the people to enter and be shaped by their narratives.”\textsuperscript{85} It should imitate the early church, to “reenter our neighborhoods, to dwell with and to listen to the narratives and stories of the people.”\textsuperscript{86} This shall not be done to attract others to churches but a natural expression of incarnation—“a way of life.”\textsuperscript{87}

Respect and Acceptance of Others’ Culture

Identification includes immersing into people’s culture and situations to empathize and stand in solidarity with them.\textsuperscript{88} Such identification follows Christ’s incarnation, which is “the most spectacular instance of cultural identification in human history.”\textsuperscript{89} The Church must identify with the culture to be relevant to a context. It follows the example of Jesus who incarnated into a particular culture. In fact, a local church “always takes particular form, shaped according to the cultural and historical

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{84} Roxburgh and Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 84.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 85–86.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{88} Guder, “Missional Church,” 13.

context in which it lives.” So the missional church rejects cultural imperialism, where churches impose various cultural forms of their faith unto others. Instead, incarnational mission means “people will get to experience Jesus on the inside of their culture (meaning systems) and their lives because of [the Church’s] embodying the gospel in an incarnationally appropriate way.”

Therefore, it is paramount that the Church be incarnationally involved with the daily lives of the people. While engaging with the people, the Church must be attentive to “the values and meanings that underlie the surface activities of the neighborhood.” Such respect, acceptance, and “sitting with” replicates Christ’s incarnation, where He “came to pitch his tent beside ours” (Jn 1:14). The purpose is not only gaining new knowledge about the culture, but also an opportunity to discern the guidance of the Spirit, seeing the people and their cultures through God’s lenses.

The Practice of Identification

The practice of identification, which includes solidarity with people and acceptance of their culture, is the logic, which governs incarnational mission. The acts of continuing Christ’s ministry and manifesting Kingdom ethics alone do not equal to being

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91 Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 38.
92 Ibid., 40.
93 Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 86, 89.
94 Ibid., 86.
95 Ibid.
incarnational unless they result in meaningful communication of the Gospel. Even the right message and godly messenger do not guarantee an incarnational mission. For witnessing that fails to be relevant fails to incarnate the Gospel in its context. Being relevant here means being able to carry the meaning of the Gospel faithfully while being understood by the people who receive it.

The Church, however, cannot identify with others like Jesus did. Being incarnational is different from being incarnated. Christ’s incarnation remains a unique, hypostatic, historic event. Jesus Christ incarnated into humanity, which He created. Christ condescend Himself to be with those He created and became one of them.  

The Church certainly cannot incarnate like Christ did as it is neither the Creator nor has any status to condescend from. The Church is incarnational simply because it is called to represent Christ and the Kingdom, and for that reason it identifies with others as a redeemed community. The Church must therefore, like Christ, remain “holy” and yet willing to identify with the people.  

However, identification with people does not bring salvation to them; neither can it bring salvation to the Church involved. This is a constant critique directed towards Liberation Theology. Following Jesus’ example of identifying with the poor is undoubtedly incarnational, as it continues Jesus’ ministry for the poor and with the poor.

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The danger is when such imitation of Christ becomes the goal of missions. Often, the means to salvation is juxtaposed with solidarity with the poor. Identifying with the poor and suffering becomes so prominent in some theologies, to the extent that the Christian mission is reduced to mere identification with the oppressed.\(^99\)

Indeed, identification with people by itself is not equal to missions. Solidarity and identification with the marginalized in themselves do not bring salvation, lest it becomes a kind of “salvation by work.” Though the Church may intend to love others genuinely as God loves them, the Church’s love is imperfect. The Church, as imperfect human beings, cannot do what Christ did but they can testify what Christ has done, and what Christ can do for others. The goal for identification is to identify with the people in a context while imitating Christ’s apostolic movement and ministry principles. In other words, the continuity of Christ’s ministry is in the form of witnessing.

So, one does not need to become poor to be with the poor; neither does one can become a member of another ethnicity to identify with the other ethnicity.\(^100\) The Church is incarnational, but it does not and cannot “incarnate.” The Church’s role is only to witness the presence of Christ as the harbinger of the Kingdom while carrying the message verbally and holistically.

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Transformation and Human Flourishing

Any reference to Christ’s incarnation is incomplete without including its purpose, which is transformation. Those who consider the incarnation by only referring to the birth of Jesus Christ often emphasize “creation in the expense of redemption, and incarnation without the cross and resurrection. It implies that the saving purpose of the incarnation is accomplished simply by God becoming human, regardless of what happened next.”

This “incarnational theology” is the belief that salvation rests in the embodiment of God with His creation without an emphasis on repentance and transformation. Referring to James Dunn, Langmead denounces this as unbiblical. Quoting Jean Daniélou, Langmead concludes that “incarnational mission based on ‘getting alongside’ and ‘identifying’ has only taken the first step; it also needs to bring good news, challenge others and lead to transformation.” Thus, incarnation must not be understood as merely Jesus’ birth, life, and teaching, but to include His death and resurrection. It includes repentance and transformation as both its motive and outcome.

Value and Transformation of Humanity

The incarnation of Christ necessary entails the transformation of humanity. The teleological aspect of humanity in the context of eschatology must not be neglected.

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104 Ibid., 19.
Salvation is not just personal but involves the whole of humanity, which has a destination. The destiny of humanity is in turn, related to its purpose of existence. God’s creation is therefore the basis for the teleology of humanity. Salvation is the restoration of God’s design for humanity. The Kingdom of God, which will consummate ultimately, will fully realize such restoration.  

This puts Christ’s incarnation and its relationship with humanity in context.

Through incarnation, Christ “fully identified with us in our humanity . . . to redeem us and transform us into his glory (Heb 2:14). The incarnation is the ultimate expression of the immanence of the transcendent Creator God, who, without ceasing to be holy, entered into the sinful world to make human beings holy and to enable them to participate in his glory.” Further, in His resurrection, “Christ took his transformed humanity with him into eternal glory.” These statements endorse the value, potential, hope, and future of humanity. Surely, even prior to the full consummation of the Kingdom, humanity can be redeemed to its glory, albeit not in its fullest potential.

Related to transformation is the concept of human flourishing, which also plays a vital role in giving necessary credential and rationale for the restoration of the social dimension of the Gospel in incarnational mission. There would be no need to restore the social dimension of the Gospel if human beings and their activities—commonly grouped and coined as their “culture”—are negligible in mission. As a fabric of meanings for a

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105 Webster, *Word and Church*, 265.
107 Ibid.
group of people, culture is vital for ensuring the wellbeing of the community concerned.\textsuperscript{108}

Theologically, the concept of \textit{Shalom} is related to the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{109} The missional church, which represents the Kingdom, today would also bring \textit{Shalom} to the people around it. By embodying and carrying the \textit{Shalom} it means a church brings God’s goodness to its context. This is an act of ensuring human flourishing, which also echoes the nature of the missional church that offers the world hope in humanity and a vision of common good.\textsuperscript{110} It offers, then, not just the “mystical” dimension but the “prophetic.” In Volf’s words,

\textit{As a prophetic religion, Christian faith will be an active faith, engaged in the world in a noncoercive way—offering blessing to our endeavors, effective comfort in our failures, moral guidance in a complex world, and a framework of meaning for our lives and our activities. To be engaged in the world well, Christians will have to keep one thing at the forefront of their attention: the relationship between God and a vision of human flourishing.}\textsuperscript{111}

Volf’s proposals echo those of the incarnational mission. He urges Christians to engage in the world “with their whole being.”\textsuperscript{112} Such engagement must also cover “all

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Culture is not the enemy, sin is. On culture, see Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures} (New York: Basic Books, 2008); on culture-faith relation, see Walls, \textit{The Missionary Movement in Christian History}.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Hope, unlike that of Moltmann, is to be expressed in progress.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Miroslav Volf, \textit{A Public Faith, How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good} (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 54.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 96.
\end{itemize}

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dimensions of a culture.” So ultimately, a proper understanding of humanity, and its need for flourishing and transformation, becomes an integral part of the incarnational mission. For only with such theological bases, incarnational mission finds its eschatological context.

Submission to God in Transformation

Transformation is God’s prerogative. The missional church acknowledges that God is sovereign, active, and leading ahead of His Church. The Church is vital to God’s plan as the representative of the Kingdom, which serves the purpose of God’s Reign. Yet, a church that submits to missio Dei must also be faithful to the Gospel, which is sovereign and has a life of its own. God is understood “to already be present and active in the world, with the church being responsible for discovering what God is doing and then seeking to participate in that.” Hence, mission activities are based on the mission of God in the world, instead of the Church’s effort to extend itself.

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113 Ibid., 98.


115 Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 100.


118 Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 81-82.
Church, is therefore not “the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.”

Subsequently, submission to God’s sovereignty enables the Church to focus on witnessing instead of speculating the outcome of evangelism. The Church is not to expect a mechanistic, causal reaction from its evangelism but submit patiently to God’s transformative work in the people that it evangelizes to. The result of evangelism is not defined by a “bounded set.” A bounded set approach uses some criteria to determine who is “in the Kingdom” and who is not. The missional church is inclined to the centered set, which defines members of the Church as those who focus on Jesus and direct their lives towards being more intimate with Him. Hence, instead of being occupied with delineating the criteria of a bounded set, the missional church aims to focus on pointing others to Jesus and nurturing a new relationship between new believers and God.

**Summary: The Shape of Incarnational Mission**

To conclude, incarnational mission takes the form of a movement by the missional church, is based on the *missio Dei*, and expressed through the Church’s engagement with the world by continuing Christ’s presence, representing the Kingdom, and identifying with people. The sociopolitical and cultural dimensions are included as arenas for witnessing. The value of this holistic nature of mission rests in the recognition

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of the teleology of humanity as God’s worthy creation. Hence, incarnational mission
must result in transformation. Yet, the Church should only concern with its witnessing
because transformation is the work of God. Instead of speculating the outcome of
evangelism, the Church should embrace incarnational mission and faithfully engage with
its surrounding communities and their cultures.
CHAPTER 6

RESTORING INCARNATIONAL MISSION AMONGST THE CHINESE CHRISTIANS IN SABAH

With incarnational mission as a theological framework, CCS can restore their political identity, commitment to nation-building, and mission with Malay Muslims. This chapter explains how incarnational mission should form the basis for CCS’ political identity and nationalism. This chapter also surveys how incarnational mission may restore the missing social dimension of the Gospel amongst the CCS. Lastly, this chapter considers how incarnational mission could become the theological basis for Malaysian Christians and CCS to engage with the Malays faithfully and effectively.

Embracing an Incarnational and Malaysian Identity

Incarnational mission provides the theological means for CCS to resolve their unsettled political identity. CCS’ political identity, much like their understanding of nationalism, is the product of liberal democracy, supported by a few scriptural references. Such deficient political identity can be rectified by incarnational mission.
The Absence of Missional and Incarnational Identity

Official CCS documents and teachings have never acknowledged *missio Dei* as a key tenet of their ecclesiology, signifying the absence of the concept of incarnational mission. CCS retain an older, colonial understanding of “mission.” The official reports of the Anglican Diocese’s mission committee, for example, have consistently referred “mission” to an activity of the church. In the Anglican Church in Sabah, years of sending ordinands to theological studies at Bible colleges and seminaries heavily influenced by American Evangelicalism has resulted in a total annihilation of the concept of incarnational sacrament in its liturgy. This is evident in the absence of the Anglo-Catholic incarnational theology. Other CCS, apart from the Roman Catholics, suffer similar weaknesses. The Basel Church has no explicit teaching on missional ecclesiology,

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1 The lack of theological understanding of an incarnational mission is evident through the review of the various literatures available in the churches studied. The literature review is limited to official documents, especially policy related documents such as general meetings reports and key meeting minutes. Some newsletters and other official church documents are also included. Interview and survey are not conducted. Though the published literatures may not articulate CSS theology directly, their theological concepts can be derived and interpreted accurately from the writings and reports. As official publications or reports, these documents have institutional significance and often direct the theology of the church.


as revealed in their Chinese General Council monthly bulletins from 2010 to 2017 and other publications. Without missio Dei related in their policies and teachings, CCS lack the missional vocation that undergirds the awareness to live incarnationally.

A Critique on Liberalism as the Basis for Christian Identity in Malaysia

The absence of an incarnational identity amongst the CCS has contributed to the uncritical acceptance of liberalism as the nominative basis for their political identity. CCS defend their Chinese and Christian identities by advocating multiculturalism, and they have, in the process, utilized constitutionalism. However, both constitutionalism and multiculturalism are based on liberalism, and must be rejected as the foundation for Christian political theology and identity.

Common criticisms against liberalism amongst political theologians are categorized into four areas. Firstly, political theologians reject liberalism’s ethical orientation, which is devoid of “the ethical telos or the good.” Next, they reject liberalism’s understanding that individuals are autonomous and free. Thirdly, they refuse

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6 Both multiculturalism and constitutionalism are based on constitutional liberalism, Robert Song, Christianity and Liberal Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Kindle: Chapter 2.


8 Ibid.
to accept the individual as the sole basis unit for the government, including the state and civil society. Finally, they are “skeptical of abstract, universal claims and emphasize the importance of particularity and historicity.” The “aspirations of human rights,” for example, may “arise from philosophically dubious perspectives such as individualism and universalism.”

Song summarizes the above into two main problems, with the problem of ethics being one and the other three grouped together. Song attributes the problem of ethics as the problem of the absence of the Transcendent. He calls the second problem the centrality of the will, which to Song, is an expression of self-interest of individuals with the freedom defined by liberalism. Individuals in liberalism, in their fallen state, perceive an incomplete “reality,” allowing freedom of their will to disguise as their chief virtue.

From a slightly different perspective, Stanley Hauerwas’ criticism against liberalism is also divided into two parts. First, liberalism has misplaced “the location of authority in the individual,” and second, “the establishment of self-interest as the foundation of the social order.” Again, the first criticism of Hauerwas is related to the centrality of will. The second criticism of Hauerwas relates the individuality of liberalism with ethics. Like Song, he questions the focus on self-interest, which resulted from the

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9 Ibid.

10 Song, *Christianity and Liberal Society*, Kindle: Chapter 7.

individual “self” succumbed to its own free will. In sum, political theologians have in
general identified the lack of ethical telos and the problem of self-interest as the two main
theological problems. Obviously, these two problems are detrimental to the forming of
Christian political theology, especially an incarnational one.

An Incarnational Political Theology

Incarnational political theology is political theology assessed and constructed
from the perspective of incarnational mission. Political theology analyzes and critiques
political arrangements from God’s perspective. It includes considerations on how God
would want the church to be involved in the arrangement of power in society. Since
incarnational mission is based on missio Dei, an incarnational political theology should
begin with God’s interest rather than self-interest.

The liberal understanding of individual freedom, its autonomous nature, and the
assumption that it is the basic unit of society, resulted in the typical liberal phenomenon
of individualism. Self-interest becomes the natural tendency of individuals in the absence
of values and ethics, and it is expressed via the worship of freedom. This has been the
driving force of the liberal states, spawning capitalism and the free market.

However, self-interest cannot be the foundation for Christian life; neither can it be
the starting point for political theology. For incarnational mission, its main concern is the
“interest of God” because missio Dei sets the agenda for the Church. Since the missonal
church’s vocation is derived from missio Dei, Christians’ political identity too, must

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pledge its first allegiance to the *missio Dei*. Christians should understand that their primary identity in the whole business of how God orders the powers in this world is as the representatives of God who seek God’s interest. Their incarnational identity should direct their political relationships in this world. As they engage with politics, their concerns are no more on their own interests but God’s.

Since the Church is incarnationally representing the Kingdom, it must exhibit Kingdom ethics. Christians should relate to the state as incarnational representatives of the Kingdom. The Church “does not philosophize about a future world; it demonstrates the working of the coming Kingdom within this one. Through the authorization of the Holy Spirit it squares up to civil authority and confronts it.”

Newbigin too advocated a “public faith” which openly challenges the sociopolitical endeavors of the society. On this Yoder offers an understanding of church-state relation, which is based on an ethicist perspective. Much like Hauerwas, Yoder sees the Church’s primary responsibility as to seek full restoration to the standard of the Kingdom instead of “attacking” the power structure of the present world. This means, the ethics of the Kingdom are on display in the eyes of the world, without needing to be actively drafted in any national policy. Instead of Christianizing the society, the Church can effectively testify for Christ through

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its ethics, even as a minority in a pluralist society. Thus, as a minority under Malay hegemony, CCS should continue their refrainment from direct political involvement. Instead of “Christianizing” the government they should focus on their incarnational identity as representatives of the Kingdom and its ethics.

With incarnational mission, CCS shall now find their political identity first in their missional and incarnational identity. When Christians rediscover their incarnational identity, they recover their apostolic nature. Self-interest is replaced with mission. The political identity of Christians is for the world, not self. The Church’s life “as a community ought to be constituted in such a way that it reflects God’s radical gift-giving for the sake of the world.” In true incarnational fashion, the Church is “to become as Christ is: for others—and that means ultimately not for the church but for the world.” Both “God and church are pointed in a single direction with a single purpose: towards the world in fulsome graced blessing.” In sum, by breaking free from liberalism, CSS should refuse to be utilitarian and story-less, but demonstrate their commitment for the country. Instead of accommodation or separation, they may adopt Volf’s political theology that focuses on engagement, based on a positive understanding of incarnation. In Volf’s words, “properly understood Christian identity is not reactive but positive; the center defines the difference, not fear of others, either of their uncomfortable proximity

17 Ibid., 192.
19 Ibid., 330.
20 Ibid.
or their dangerous aggressiveness." They are incarnationally identifying with the local context as Malaysians, while uncompromisingly witnesses for the inaugurated Kingdom and involve in political engagement with a renewed, incarnational identity.

Restoring CCS’ Incarnational Identity as Malaysians

Incarnational mission gives theological reasons for CCS to embrace their Malaysian identity. As a subset of the Chinese community, CCS share the same resentment against Malay hegemony. However, an incarnational identity requires CCS to dissociate themselves from such sentiments and begin to identify with Malays and Malaysia. The struggle to build a “Malaysian Malaysia” needs not be compromised, but the basis and means of achieving it must change. Instead of grounding their political identity on liberal ideas, they should adopt an incarnational identity and commit to nation-building with a purpose of witnessing for Christ. With incarnational identity, CCS would not be directed by a modernist, charismatic ethos that relegates Christians to a group of non-committed citizens whose focus is on self-interest. Instead of adopting a liberal outlook that focuses on championing for their own rights, CCS would embrace an incarnational identity that demonstrates servanthood and forgiveness.

Being incarnational includes the awareness of being the representative of the Kingdom. Hwa stresses the importance of Malaysian Christians to embrace their Kingdom identity both as “Christ’s body” and as local members of their society in

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Malaysia. Hwa suggests that Christians in Malaysia should be aware of their Kingdom identity without discarding their cultural identity. Referring to the Malaysian Christians, Hwa reminds that

Like the incarnate Christ, our present citizenship of God’s Kingdom is lived out within a specific society and culture. All that is good and true within our particular culture is affirmed and accepted by God who created these things in the first place. Hence there is a need for us to recover a clear sense of confidence in them . . . when we truly discover or recover our Christian identity, then the missionary efforts that come from such a discovery will be really effective and fruitful. So long as we are not clear about our own Christian identity, our mission will be less than what it should and could be.

An incarnational identity also allows a church to be a missional presence that identifies with the context. CCS shall commit to Malaysia as citizens—regardless of which nationalism they advocate—and stay on incarnationally to be missionaries. In other words, CCS are truly “local,” being at the same time, the light and salt for Malaysia. While having a different nation-of-intent, they remain in Malaysia not because the context suits their needs or fulfills their requirements. Instead, they choose to remain in a hostile context, and be “at home.” In sum, CCS should embrace their Malaysian identity as an incarnational identity, which will result in incarnational presence, which is genuine, rooted locally, and long-lasting.

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23 Hwa, “Kingdom Identity in Christian Mission.”

24 Ibid., 3.
Restoring the Missing Social Dimension of the Gospel amongst CCS

Incarnational mission would also restore CCS’ social involvement and nation-building. As depicted in Chapter 3, Malay hegemony has distanced CCS from the main national discourse. Civil negotiation of the CCS has experienced limitations. As they resolve their confused Malaysian identity with an incarnational identity, CCS may also restore their social involvement and recommit incarnationally to nation-building.

Eschatological and Soteriological Reductionisms

Social detachment of CCS described in Chapter 4 is the result of eschatological and soteriological reductionisms. Eschatological reductionism is the reduction and distortion of the “eschatological shaping of the gospel.”25 The sense of God’s Kingdom manifested through the Church has been reoriented to “an individualistic emphasis on the second coming” and the resurrection of the body is replaced by the “Hellenistic concept of the immortality of the soul.”26 The focus on the Reign of God has been shifted to the future. Salvation is misunderstood as attaining immortality after death instead of being a part of the Kingdom at present. Human flourishing is neglected.

A related problem is “soteriological reductionism,” which means salvation has been reduced to individual salvation, in particular about maintaining the well-being of individual believers. A church affected by soteriological reductionism loses its missional vocation in the face of the benefit of each individual believer. The church then is


26 Ibid., 119.
“construed as essential for individual blessedness.”27 This has become the basis for developmentalism described in Chapter 4.

Hwa attributes the root of churches’ social detachment in Malaysia to dualism. To Hwa, the ministry of some churches has been divided into the physical and social, outer realm and the private, inner, “spiritual” realm. This is due to the uncritical adaptation of platonic dualism in Christian theology.28 Supposedly, salvation is “not only for the ‘soul’ but also for the whole person.”29 However, a church which is influenced by dualism will only focus on the soul, neglecting the other aspects of humanity. It lacks “adequate understanding of Christian responsibility to human physical and social needs,” and their theology and ethics “tend to be pietistic and personal, emphasizing personal holiness in private lives rather than social righteousness and responsibility in public life.”30

Actually, “Jesus’ message was the inbreaking reign of God, and the early church confessed Him as the one who . . . brings that reign into human reality. He is enthroned and He rules as Savior and Lord, witnessed to by His Church through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.”31 In a typical missional church, Christian vocation is understood as “not merely to individual ‘savedness,’ but to the service of God's mission to bring healing to

27 Ibid., 118.

28 Yung Hwa, Beyond AD2000, 35.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 37.

Christian witness is apostolic. The Church is not a safe enclave “walled off from the world.” Instead, it is intended to be a community that “lives its message publicly, transparently, vulnerably . . . an assembly set apart to do public business in view of the watching world.” No church can claim to be incarnational unless it witnesses for Christ in public through its tangible sociopolitical presence. By public it means the Church shall involve the welfare of the community, engaging with the civil society.

The Diminishing Public Presence of CCS

In general, CCS suffer soteriological reductionism and eschatological reductionism typical of the Modern, Evangelical churches. A survey of all the monthly bulletins of Basel Church Chinese General Council from 2010 to 2017 reveals such a pattern. The emphasis on the salvation of souls is thought to be mutually exclusive of imminent manifestation of the Kingdom through Christians’ involvement in the society. An under-realized eschatology often prevails. The sense of “radical and transforming anticipation, of living hope that profoundly shapes the ‘now’ of the corporate Christian witness” is absent. The eschatological “now,” which gives urgency for a corporate witness has been gradually “reoriented to an individualistic emphasis on the second

32 Ibid., 125–126.
33 Ibid.
coming at the end of time.”

Eschatological reductionism causes CCS to lose their identities as representatives of the imminent Kingdom. Hence, CCS neglect their social responsibility, as their focus is only on the individuals and the future. This betrays the meaning of being missional, which goes beyond individualistic salvation and limited eschatology, but also includes addressing social ills as well as locating God’s Kingdom now, not only in the future. The importance of championing social justice and speaking for the deprived in the present age fades in the shadow of a truncated evangelism. This is evident in CCS’ silence during the rampant Islamization under Mustapha and Harris.

Related to this is the underdeveloped theology of human flourishing. Human flourishing has never been a part of the agenda amongst CCS apart from the Roman Catholics. Church involvement in politics, if any, has always concerned the welfare of the Church. There have been efforts to contribute to society and nation-building, especially through education, with mission schools as the prime example. Yet, human flourishing is seldom considered in CCS’ theological formulation concerning their sociopolitical involvement.

The need for Malaysian churches to move from private faith to public relevance and public theology has long been acknowledged. Goh urges the highly privatized Malaysian Christians to “come out of their shells.”

Their private stance, stresses Goh, is detrimental to their public testimony. The church should “exercise a more caring attitude

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37 Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 119.

to issues of national interest and take its rightful place as salt and light.” Only by developing theological reflection on key national issues, can Malaysian churches project Christian perspectives on national issues, so the nation would know the Christians’ stance. There has been no lacking of Christians’ attempts to be sociopolitical participants in Malaysia. However, if ever the Malaysian churches have had any involvement in politics, their participation has been crippled by shallow theology that causes inconsistent practices.

Hwa suggests two ways which Malaysia Christians can resolve their privatized faith. Firstly, the Church should emulate the model of the early church doing good to all people (Gal 6:10), and loving others as themselves (Mk 12:31). Secondly, Hwa argues that the Church will need to develop a comprehensive theology of social engagement. Hwa is aware of the threat of Muslim nationalism, and is critical of the churches in Malaysia, which he describes as “locked into a Western dualistic theology and unbiblical worldview, dazed and overawed by the changes around . . . yet serenely comfortable in our middle-class existence, Christians have generally withdrawn from the world, like a tortoise into its shell. But could it be that we are lulling ourselves into a sleep of death

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 With experiences as a pastor, principal of a theological seminary and a Bishop of one of the largest denomination in Malaysia, Hwa’s assessment of the Malaysian churches holds great credential.
44 Ibid., 39.
He stresses the importance of developing theology for sociopolitical engagement. Only then, the Church can show that Christ is relevant and only then the Church can make “a significant contribution to the building of a nation that is godly, righteous and just.” However, formulation of a sustainable theological framework dealing with the specific situation of Malay hegemony is still needed. There is very little deliberation on the matter of political identity, meaning of good works, the appropriate ways to meet the challenge of Malay hegemony, and suggestions on a Christian social ethics for the context of Malay hegemony.

Not only has the Church failed to witness to the world the holistic Gospel, which is relevant to all, but, in Malaysia the Church has been misunderstood. It has become parochial and has disengaged with the larger society. The pseudo-evangelical and Charismatic zeal of Christians in Malaysia, which has resulted in some level of revivalism, have been documented by various sources. Yet, what is more alarming is the disparity between church numerical growth and sociopolitical influence.

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46 Ibid., 40–41.


Embracing the Social Dimension of Incarnational Mission

Incarnational mission includes human flourishing. As the continuous presence of Christ in the form of His body and the representatives of the Kingdom, the Church understands the fullness of its theology of salvation and eschatology. Salvation is not limited to the private lives of Christians. The goodness of God’s grace and God’s Reign should shape the society, which CCS belong to. Their representation of the Kingdom will be one that gives hope for the future and asserts transformation at the present. The restoration of the social dimension of the Gospel amongst the CCS will revitalize them to witness to others around them, not just via a pietistic spirituality or rationalistic proclamation of truth but through relationship and the demonstration of Kingdom ethics. There will be no separation of the sacred and the secular. Developmentalism would be rejected as CCS incarnationally coalesce their private faith with their social context.

Identification in Civil Negotiations

Incarnational mission also would reinvigorate CCS’ civil negotiation by either changing their ways of public negotiations or directing them to alternatives of public negotiations. With a renewed, incarnational identity, CCS would approach civil negotiation not as individuals claiming their liberal rights but servants of God who are willing to forgive.49 They identity with the “others” incarnationally and respect their culture. Alternatively, they may avoid unnecessary public negotiations, and turn to other forms of social engagement, which allow them to better express their incarnational

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49 Lau’s argument on unconditional forgiveness as Christians’ singularity, see Lau, “Intimating the Unconscious,” 236–278.
identification and Kingdom ethics. A restored social dimension of CCS mission would form the theological basis for such social engagement.

**Restoring Incarnational Witnessing amongst the Chinese Christians in Sabah**

Restoration of incarnational mission amongst CCS includes establishing a theological basis to witness to Malay Muslims in the context of Malay hegemony. CCS need to be incarnational to engage Malays in a meaningful way. The limited understanding of evangelism and the theologies surround it must be addressed. A more robust theology of witnessing should be reinstated for incarnational mission to take place.

**Limited Evangelism and the Absence of Missional Strategy to the Malays**

The absence of incarnational mission amongst CCS has been manifested through the deficiency in their theology of witnessing and evangelism. Personal evangelism is understood and carried out as communicating the Gospel message through verbal proclamation by targeting individuals, aiming for confessions. Witnessing Christ through other means is neglected.

This deficiency is due to both soteriology and eschatological reductionisms. The objective of evangelism, usually only in the form of proselytism, is to gain more converts and enlist them into the church.⁵⁰ The new converts’ decision to believe is considered as sufficient “requirement” to become a part of the “Kingdom,” which in this case, the “Kingdom” is “going to heaven after their death.” The Kingdom is pushed to the future.

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and its imminence is lost, and salvation is misunderstood as only the salvation of the soul, safeguarded for a future destiny.

Suffering from the dichotomization and the reductionism above, CCS lose the full meaning of evangelism. Evangelism should be the act of “introducing Jesus Christ to others and inviting them to become partakers in his Kingdom.” Yet, with only verbal proclamation and a focus on conversion, the relational aspect of evangelism is often neglected. Instead of introducing Jesus, CCS tend to judge others and call them to repent, focusing only on converting others to a “religion.”

**Incarnational Mission through Witnessing**

As an instrument participating in God’s mission, the missional church’s main job is to introduce the grace of God. Hunsberger reminds that the Church’s primary duty is not to build or extend itself institutionally but to proclaim the grace of God, which allows sinners to “receive” the gift of salvation and “enter” into the Kingdom. As the beneficiary of the grace of salvation, the Church’s responsibility is to invite and welcome others as “co-pilgrims” in the journey of being the community of God.

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53 Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation,” 93, 95.

According to Newbigin, the Church represents those who were already reconciled with God and charged with the responsibility to witness to the rest of the human family.\(^{55}\) Those reconciled are not witnessing due to legalistic obligation, but doing so because they are promised the gift to witness.\(^{56}\) This gift is through the Holy Spirit, the first fruit (Rom 8:23) and the guarantee (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:12). Such deposit or foretaste is also a sign of the Kingdom, witnessing the presence of God’s Kingdom through the presence of the Church. So, whoever is chosen is blessed not with merely being part of the Kingdom, but more importantly, is blessed with the gift to bear witness for the Kingdom.

So, in witnessing, there should not be any categorization of inclusivist, exclusivist or pluralist. These categories are the result of soteriological reductionism which reduces the understanding of salvation to mere personal blessedness, expressed in the strict delineation of “who is in” and “who is out” of the Kingdom based on culturally limited terms and human perceptions.\(^{57}\) How others come to know Jesus is not just God’s prerogative, but also a mystery beyond human categories. The reasoning and “coherent story” of how someone mysteriously came to faith may only come to light afterwards.\(^{58}\) Newbigin breaks from the conventional classification of the above categories. He is inclusive when it comes to the possibility of salvation of non-Christians apart from


\(^{58}\) Sunquist, Understanding Christian Mission, 313, see chapter ten of Sunquist’s book for the clarification of the meanings of evangelism and witnessing.
explicit faith in Christ but rejecting that other religions play a part in it, hence exclusive.\textsuperscript{59} The missional church movement too rejects these categories. It prefers the use of “bounded, fuzzy and centered sets” to illustrate the relation between Christ and those who have come to know Him. The fact remains that witnessing concerns the Church’s faithfulness in holistically and faithfully presenting the Gospel through being the representatives of the Kingdom, rather than speculating who is “saved” merely based on the available doctrinal codes.

As God is the initiator and the completer of His mission and the Church only His instrument, people are saved by God’s grace and the Church’s utmost duty is witnessing. The outcome of evangelism is not the prerogative of the Church. It is God who adds to the Church the people through ways, which often goes beyond verbal proclamation and rational process. The missional church understands that ultimately, it is the “centered set” approach of witnessing which fits into the biblical teaching of God’s sovereignty.

By restoring to a fuller understanding of God’s sovereignty and His grace in His mission, CCS’ perspective on evangelism and mission should undergo fundamental change. Instead of the old church-centric mindset, CCS should embrace incarnational mission. They would focus on identification instead of outcome. This allows the Church to break free from a business-minded, modernist way of doing missions.\textsuperscript{60} The Church’s renewed focus on blessing the community releases it from the unnecessary burden of

\textsuperscript{59} Goheen, “The Significance of Lesslie Newbigin for Mission in the New Millennium,” 92.

producing conversions. Such understanding is vital for CCS in the context of witnessing to Muslims. If CCS are the faithful and gracious witnesses for Jesus, God, in His sovereignty, and not the Church, will convict and convert people. Instead of operating from the old controlling mindset, CCS must be sensitive to God’s leading in its context and seek to participate in what God is doing amongst the Muslims.\textsuperscript{61}

Thus, building a long-term, genuine and meaningful relationship is as important as the acts of evangelizing, discipling or teaching. Referring to evangelism in an honor-shame culture, Georges and Baker describe their mission as “completing people’s honor, socially and spiritually.”\textsuperscript{62} Likewise, CCS should approach the Malays who operate with honor-shame culture by honoring them. In the context of honor-shame culture, the Church administers social honor and at God’s appointed time, the unbelievers will receive “eternal honor,” which is God’s saving grace.\textsuperscript{63} Likewise, by being honoring and authentic companions, CCS can help others to know God and establish an authentic relationship with God.

In conclusion, the ultimate theological solution to the restrictions of evangelism among Malay Muslims is incarnational mission. The incarnation was not merely proclamation. It was a holistic, unreserved outpouring of God to humanity. It produces not a Gospel reduced to proclamation by word and judged by confessions. An incarnational approach introduces Christ through identification. The endeavor of


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
witnessing ends at witnessing itself and not at winning a convert. In CCS’ context, legal prohibitions will not hinder the encounter between Christ and the Muslims. The primary duty for the Church is to be good witnesses that continue the presence of Christ, representing the Kingdom and identifying with Muslims.

**Summary: Incarnational Identification**

Incarnational mission provides CCS an incarnational political identity, which resolves their identity crisis resulted from the clash of nationalisms. By embracing their incarnational identity as representative of the Kingdom, CCS may recover the fullness of incarnational mission by living out the ethics and expressions of the Kingdom at present, effectively eliminating eschatological and soteriological reductionism. The restored social dimension would eradicate CCS’ developmentalism, restore their social responsibility, and motivates CCS to reengage with nation-building. By recovering the fullness of their theology of witnessing, CCS’ incarnational mission would find their expression through identification. However, restoring CCS’ incarnational mission only rectifies their theology. To engage with Malays and the Malaysian sociopolitical context, CCS needs a practical solution, which the following chapter addresses.
PART FOUR

PROPOSED APPLICATION
CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AS A PREFERRED MEANS FOR INCARNATIONAL MISSION

This chapter contends that social engagement is theologically and strategically suitable for CCS to apply incarnational mission in the context of Malay hegemony. The first part of this chapter outlines different approaches of social engagement. It is determined that Samuel Well’s approach of “being with” fits the theological tenets of incarnational mission. The second part of this chapter argues that social engagement is strategically suitable in the Malaysian sociopolitical situation. Finally, this chapter explains how social engagement can be practically applied by CCS.

Christian Social Engagement in Malaysia

Christians in Malaysia and Sabah acknowledge the importance of social engagement but lack a comprehensive theological framework. Social engagement has
been the subject of various theological reflections.\(^1\) However, these reflections are based on a liberal tradition that tends to sustain a Western liberal democracy instead of developing a robust political theology.\(^2\) Indeed, there is “an inadequate theological understanding of social engagement.”\(^3\)

**An Incarnational Approach of Social Engagement**

Social engagement, which, CCS should practice, demonstrates the characteristics of incarnational mission. Various theological approaches are related to social engagement. Yet, not all are based on incarnational mission. Wells’ approaches are exceptions.

**Approaches of Social Engagement**

Wells outlines four approaches or “types” of social engagement, namely the mission of “working for,” “working with,” “being for,” and “being with.” By “working for,” Christians work for those who are in depravity, assuming an authoritative and

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\(^2\) For example, Ng’s suggestions, such as that of applying the concept of “covenant” by Michael Walzer, presuppose a society, which accepts Western liberal tradition where individual right is honored and Hobbs’ idea of social contract is assumed. Ng, “A Christian Social Vision for Nation Building,” 4. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, has the benefit of a range of theologies since Vatican II based on incarnation. The concept of inculturation, evangelization that includes both proclamation and social actions has been the norm in RC. It is unsure, however, if any contextual approach, which considers the Malay culture seriously has been developed.

skilled position. The deprived are defined “by their deficit; if they have capacities, these are seldom noticed or harnessed.”

The “working with” approach focuses on partnership alongside the needy. The helpers engage the needy “in their own redemption, rather than deciding and operating for them.” Like working for, this model does aim to resolve some targeted problems, but its primary goal is to harness a collective effort from the beneficiaries in the process. The result and the skills involved are secondary to long-term partnership. In the “being for” approach, the helper does not encounter the needy at all. There is no active pursuit of the needy person’s interests through “working” or “with.”

The “being with” model is where the helpers and the deprived are “equally involved, and the engagement only proceeds if they both continue to be so.” Its focuses are not on “work” but “on stillness, on disposition, on letting the . . . person take the decisive steps and identify the significant issues.” Problem solving is not the focus. Acknowledging that most problems in life cannot be resolved through the encounter, this model believes the helper should focus on empowering the deprived via accompanying

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
them, while they attempt to resolve their own problem.\textsuperscript{11} The helper would celebrate and enjoy those who are in need. Instead of being judgmental, they recognize the potential of every person.\textsuperscript{12} Vitally, the “being with” approach “seeks to model the goal of all relationships: it sees problem-solving as a means to a perpetually deferred end, and instead tries to live that end—enjoying people for their own sake.”\textsuperscript{13}

All Wells’ approaches for social engagement are incarnational.\textsuperscript{14} He advocates identification by stating that, “We cannot understand, listen to, be taught by, or receive grace from people unless we inhabit their world which we see as valuable for its own sake.”\textsuperscript{15} He endorses the value of cultures, believing that there is much that Christians may learn from them.\textsuperscript{16} Although Well’s manifesto lacks an ecclesiological dimension and bordering to incarnational theology, the “being with” model, which he himself advocates, corresponds to the criteria of incarnational mission outlined in this study.\textsuperscript{17}

Social Engagement as an Outworking of Incarnational Mission

A “being with” social engagement demonstrates the characteristics of incarnational mission through its emphasis on the imminence of God’s presence. Wells


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{14} Wells, \textit{A Nazareth Manifesto}, 27–28.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{16} This is expounded by Wells through the language of grace, Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{17} Wells’ affirmation of the value of culture, at times, sounds overly optimistic; Ibid., 29.
concludes that the “being with” model is “the most faithful form of Christian witness and mission, because being with is both incarnationally faithful to the manifestation of God in Christ and eschatologically anticipatory of the destiny of all things in God.”

Through incarnation, “God is with us” (Mt 1:23) and the Word is living with us (Jn 1:14). The word “with” and “is” describe that God is with us now. While the working-for models focus on solving the problems in the world, being-with approaches are “inclined to perceive creation as a gift to be enjoyed.” The importance of human flourishing is assumed. Indeed, social engagement that adopts the “being with” approach is incarnational. It exhibits the apostolic movement of incarnation, the presence of Christ, the imminence of the Kingdom, and the practice of identification.

**Socio-political Reasons for Social Engagement**

Social engagement is the preferred means to CCS’ incarnational mission as it can operate in the sociopolitical context of Malay hegemony. An incarnational social engagement focusing on “being with” the people can help CCS to identity with Muslims. It is an alternative to civil negotiation and a better way of witnessing.

**Social Engagement a Means to Identify with the Malay Muslims Culture**

Social engagement creates social space for CCS to identify with the Malay culture. Unlike Indian Christians who face Hindu nationalism oppression, CCS must engage Malay nationalism as a different religious and cultural group. CCS do not have the

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18 Ibid., 23–24.
19 Ibid., 3, 7.
20 Ibid., 23–24.
advantage of Indian Christians who share the same culture with Hindu nationalists.\textsuperscript{21} To CCS, an intentional and incarnational effort to understand Malay culture is vital.

The Malays consider themselves the most tolerant people on earth and confess that they would avoid conflict whenever possible.\textsuperscript{22} They also consider an unexpected or sudden move as disrespectful because gracefulness is a virtue.\textsuperscript{23} This is in contrast with the Chinese who are known to be efficient, especially in business. The Malays are also sensitive to others’ perception of themselves.\textsuperscript{24} They are shy and not assertive, thus they are often passive and sometimes lack confidence.\textsuperscript{25} Correspondingly, the Malay way of criticism is indirect and by using various similes, sayings, metaphors, figures of speech, folklore, hyperbole, proverbs, and myth.\textsuperscript{26} This is due to the Malays’ unwillingness in “reprimanding others directly for fear of repercussions and for the reason of not wanting to cause hurt onto others.”\textsuperscript{27} The Malays recognize that they are more emotional than other ethnicities.\textsuperscript{28} Priority is given to the feelings and reputation of those involved when


\textsuperscript{22} Asrul Zamani, \textit{The Malay Ideals} (Kuala Lumpur: Golden Books Centre, 2002), 150–152.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 179.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 182.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 187.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 189.
they are confronted with a problem. Securing one’s reputation or honor (nama) is a means to secure an individual’s rank in Malay society. This cultural trend typical of Malay is still in play today. The pursuit of good name has caused the Malays to value social reputation over financial statuses and progress. This, to the pride of Malays, differentiates them from the Chinese whom they despise as pursuing industry.

By “being with” the Malays, CCS will be able to understand, respect and appreciate, by identifying with the Malay culture. CCS may learn from the approach of Matteo Ricci. One of Ricci’s greatest gifts was a capacity to delight in the company of others. He was able to accomplish so much . . . engage pastorally in theological debates with some of the brightest Buddhists of his day, and joyfully welcome thousands of inquisitive scholars to his home—because of the mutual support and companionship of his friends . . . the vast majority of his friends were Chinese: the scholars, officials and local people he talked with on his travels and in the marketplace. To recall Ricci’s exploits, it is necessary to remember his company of friends.

The core to Ricci’s missiology is the belief that one must first befriend others before one introduces Christ, and the essential way to show one’s friendliness is by the acceptance of

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30 Ibid., 129.

31 Ibid., 239.


others’ culture. It is this attitude which incarnational identification through social engagement looks like, and only with such attitude would CCS be able to meaningfully and successfully engage with the Malays. CCS’ solidarity with the Malays is essential to CCS’ acceptance by Malays, so both the witnessing of CCS and the proclamation of the Gospel may have a social space to take place. Similarly, any political negotiations with the Malays would be made easier with identification, especially when there is established relationship built through social engagement.

A confrontational attitude is to be avoided when relating to Malay Muslims, as Malays value indirectness, humility, being accommodating, and politeness. Repeatedly, Muslims in Malaysia have accused Christians of “challenging their sensitivity.” This phrase can only be understood when one acknowledges that amongst Malays there is no separation of objective discussion and personal feelings. Questioning or interpreting the status of Islam in the constitution, in Malay psyche, is not a legal issue but a personal attack. Likewise, evangelism is not just about propagating of a religion but a challenge or attack to the dignity of the Malays. Yet, with incarnational attitude, one can approach the Malays sensitively and indirectly. With loving motive, humility, respect, honor,

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gentleness, and politeness, CCS may initiate conversations and make contacts. With that, CCS enter the realm of Muslims, just like Christ entering the realm of humanity.

An Alternative to Civil Negotiation in Nation-building

Instead of focusing on justice or “just society” which CGA have been emphasizing in their civil negotiation, CCS may focus on building a collective culture, which could only be achieved through social engagement, particularly one which is incarnational. Chinese civil negotiations fail because they focus on protecting their rights. Not only that, these negotiations are offensive to Malays; they only focus on one dimension in the development of a multicultural society, namely justice and liberal rights. This has further caused Malays to associate Western liberalism with Christianity. Moreover, since they regard Christians as dhimmi, they do not agree with the interpretation of rights according to CCS. Meanwhile, political negotiation concerns power struggles and is often carried out by interest-based and sectarian organizations, hence damaging the interethnic relation. Often, it incorrectly projects the image that the Christians seek to Christianize Malaysia. Instead, social engagement, which includes both social service and social action, would focus on relationship and social ethics, which are crucial for the formation of a collective “Malaysian” culture.

Furthermore, civil negotiations have been ineffective because of the different worldview and culture of Malay Muslims. Civil negotiations, often done in public, risk damaging the reputation of the Malays concerned. Civil negotiations are also often confrontational and project a hostile image of the party that makes the appeals. Social engagement, with its non-confrontational stance, emerges as a preferred means to
narrowing cultural differences. Civil negotiations that aim to champion CCS’ rights are still necessary, but not without the support of social engagement. In the absence of incarnational social engagement, identification will be missing and civil negotiation risks distancing CCS farther from the Malays who do not operate with the same worldview.

 Practically, CCS should not let the debate about constitutionalism and multiculturalism dominates their encounter with Muslims. Law alone cannot guarantee their constitutional right in the context where the constitution has been modified and interpreted according to the ideology of Malay hegemony. Instead, social engagement is a better way to negotiate their position. Since being incarnational requires Christians to see beyond the existing channels and avenues to “enter into the others,” so instead of relying on the political structure for democracy and civil society, CCS may seek to relate directly to the people through social engagement.

 A kind of social engagement that connects people at the ground level is social service. Muslims have high regards of the various charity and welfare works of Christians in Malaysia, considering them as effective and admirable but fear the influence of the Christian faith they represent.37 An example of Christian social service is in the form of “diakoinonia spirituality,” where connections are made and maintained by Christians to a community in distress via “social relief and development efforts.”38 Samuel helpfully outlines six areas and possibilities where Christians can engage the community—

37 Zamani, The Malay Ideals, 61.

empowerment, services, development, prevention, intervention and rehabilitation. Examples that correspond to incarnational mission here are services such as support homes, development such as economic development, intervention such as advocacy and rehabilitation involving care provision and treatment.\textsuperscript{39}

For all these, the preferred approach of social engagement remains one, which is “being with” the people. They should go beyond the “working for” and “working with” model. To Lau, “A better approach . . . is for hostile communities to find solidarity in suffering, in the shared anxiety and pain both parties have experienced, albeit differently.”\textsuperscript{40} This creates amicable social space, a preferred way of engagement compared to civil negotiation that champions one’s rights, and relies on reasoning. Social services are neutral from sectarian politics or religious allegiance because parties involved are handling common issues. It deals with the masses not the elites. Thus, social engagement is the practical way for people who advocate both Muslim nationalism and Chinese nation-of-intent to meet at the ground level, without needing to take sides but to build authentic relationship in the process of engagement.\textsuperscript{41}

Social engagement is also the preferred means for Christians to nurture their sense of belonging in Malaysia. Working out “concrete, compassionate ways within the wider

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 320-321.

\textsuperscript{40} Alwyn Lau, \textit{Intimating the Unconscious: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Theology in Malaysia} (PhD, Monash University, 2016), 27.

community, can serve to strengthen a commitment among Christians to the nation.”

Rowan acknowledges the potential of social engagement at the ground level amongst the masses. “In small ways,” he opines, “local church communities can plant ‘mustard seeds’—acts of social concern in the local community—that contribute to the goal of national unity and bangsa Malaysia.” Furthermore, through social services, Christians endorse human flourishing and incarnationally demonstrate Kingdom ethics. Christians become the “salt and light” that bring Shalom to their society.

A collective culture may also be developed through social engagement, which joins different ethnicities together in social services and social actions. Ownership of this collective culture is shared by all parties as they contribute to it. This is how a country’s shared national identity can be formed. In Parekh’s words, “While cherishing their respective cultural identities, members of different communities also share a common identity not only as citizens but as full and relaxed members of wider society, and form part of a freely negotiated and constantly evolving collective we.” Through the collective culture, members of such society “are likely to feel sufficiently committed to it to live with their differences and not to want to harm its well-being.” With social engagement, CCS will have an avenue to further develop their shared identity even though they may remain deeply rooted in their respective cultures. The process may take

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42 Rowan, Proclaiming the Peacemaker, 178.

43 Ibid.

44 Bhikhu Parekh, Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Pub Ltd, 2000), 238.

45 Ibid.
time and there will be misunderstandings and frictions, but these are necessary for consolidation and formation of a commonly shared culture. The key is to provide a practical framework for the creation of a space for collective culture in a multicultural society to develop its shared national identity.

Social Engagement as Witness to Muslims in Malaysia Legal Context

Social engagement is also the practical expression of incarnational witness to Muslims. Christians in Malaysia are aware of the risks of propagating the Gospel to Muslims. Hence, they knowingly exclude the Malay community from evangelism. Yet, there have been little indication that Christians in Malaysia have developed other alternatives to remain faithful to their mission amid such legal limitation.

With social engagement, evangelism can take place without being limited to verbal proclamation. Rejecting eschatological and soteriological reductionism, the incarnational church expands its theology of witnessing. It takes seriously the imminence of the Kingdom, acknowledging that it is God through the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts people. The Kingdom is also more than personal salvation. So, CCS that adopt such an incarnational stance will go beyond simply propagating their “religion.” Via social engagement, they find an alternative to engage with Malays beyond personal evangelism.

Witnessing incarnationally through social engagement is crucial because of the hostility that Muslims harbor against Christians and their evangelism. It has been discussed earlier that evangelism—whether openly, contextually, or through the insider

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46 Rowan, *Proclaiming the Peacemaker*, 141.
movement, have all been considered offensive to Muslims. They have become more defensive towards Christians. In the case where Evangelicals are accused of attempting to evangelize Muslims in Malaysia, Christians’ response is again based on constitutionalism and multiculturalism. This will only perpetuate the cycle of misunderstanding. Lack of cultural sensitivity would also further distance the disputing groups. Championing the right of evangelism alone will only be counterproductive and should not be the sole strategy for mission in the context of Malay hegemony. Social engagement, on the other hand, does not bring along with it a confrontational manner, which is culturally and religiously offensive to Malay Muslims. Its aim is not to proselytize but to create a social space for Christ to be introduced in person. It submits to God’s leading and does not see conversion as its prerogative or goal because conversion is the act of God, while witnessing is the duty of the Church. Instead of focusing on “work,” by “being with” Muslims, Christians enjoy the relationship and acknowledge God’s goodness in them. Incarnational mission through such social engagement is not subversive like the Insider Movement. The consequence of its witnessing, including legal repercussion and the need to accommodate and assist new converts, will be faithfully accepted according to God’s leading. The Gospel is necessarily “challenging” so opposition is expected. Yet, if social engagement were practiced appropriately and faithfully, even the frictions caused by these conversions would be minimized through trusted and genuine relationships.

Through social engagement, which focuses on “being with” and identification, CCS may incarnationally bring Christ’s presence and the imminence of the Kingdom into

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47 Majlis Agama Islam Selangor (Selangor Islamic Religious Council), *Pendedahan Agenda Kristian (Exposing the Christian Agenda).*
the Malay community. This witnessing does not replace evangelism by words, but it provides first a space for interaction, then the opportunity for the Good News to be “demonstrated and described.” Furthermore, with a clear incarnational Malaysian identity, CCS’ social engagement with Muslims demonstrates a God and His people that love Malaysia and more importantly—love Malay Muslims. Instead of having to constantly defend themselves, with good relationship and testimonies, soon it will be others who would testify for Malaysian Christians.

**Dialogue as the Practice of Social Engagement**

Dialogue is a practical way for incarnational social engagement. Dialogue as a means to mission is incarnational. It does not compromise the Gospel, yet it ensures that the Gospel is presented in God’s humble way. Dialogue is a way to engage with others while discerning the timing for prophetic acts. It nurtures one’s submission to God’s timing of transformation.

To use dialogue as a means for social engagement, CCS may be the providers of social services or social actions. Alternatively, CCS may engage with Malay Muslims through partnership in social services or social actions. Chong, in his attempt to propose

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ways for non-Muslims indigenes to engage with Malay Muslims, advocates partnership in social services and social actions. This is similar to Wells’ proposal where partnership and participation are applied as ways to “being with.”

According to Chong, partners in social engagement can “meet each other on multiple podiums—humanitarian concerns, ethno-cultural identity, religious customs, theology, and legal-political positions.” Humanitarian needs are undoubtedly the “greatest common concern for Malay Muslims and Bumiputera Christians,” and Chong believes that efforts must be made to ensure that their cooperation is carried out objectively, free from the ethno-religious conflicts.

For CCS, a similar approach can be applied. They may partner with Malay Muslims to help the deprived. In the process, they witness for Christ incarnationally. So, social engagement here happens in two places at once. On one hand, CCS engage with deprived Malay Muslims and on the other hand, they engage with their partners who are also Malay Muslims. Either way, they encounter individuals in person by being with

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54 Wells, _Incarnational Mission_, 15.

55 Chong, “Can Allah and Tuhan Not Be One?” 17.

56 Ibid.
them. Meanwhile, Christ is represented not in the context of religion but via the presence of His disciples.\textsuperscript{57}

However, social engagement through partnership may not work naturally between different ethnicities due to past experiences and prejudices. It is well known that mere institutional arrangement, normally through civil organizations, has had little racial integration. For example, civil societies and associations have in general failed to gather different ethnic groups together. Organizations such as Lion’s Club and Rotary Club have experienced limited degree of ethnic integration.\textsuperscript{58} Generally, “more non-Malays than Malays . . . associate with each other in benevolent organizations since people formed some of these social cliques around these bases.”\textsuperscript{59} The Malays, however, prefer Malay organizations, such as Islamic groups and political parties.\textsuperscript{60} A more detailed and robust delineation is needed to determine what actual types of dialogue must be involved.

To this end, Chong stresses the need to categorize dialogues into different groups. Chong bases his categorization on the types of dialogues proposed by Thu. According to Thu, there are four types of dialogues.\textsuperscript{61} The dialogue of life concerns the interaction between people out of necessary interactions in their daily lives. The dialogue of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[57] Wells, \textit{Incarnational Mission}, 97.
\item[59] Ibid., 174.
\item[60] Ibid.
\item[61] En Yu Thu, \textit{Ethnic Identity and Consciousness in Sabah: A Christian Perspective} (Kota Kinabalu, MY: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2010), 198–199, Batumalai has a very similar categorization, see Batumalai, \textit{A Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah}, 114.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
discourse, on the other hand, encourages the parties involved to “probe in-depth knowledge of each other.”62 This kind of dialogue is comparatively professional. It requires “open attitudes and humane approaches.”63 The aim is to “create a community of conversation or a community of heart and mind across religious and racial barriers.”64 The dialogue of spirituality concerns the spiritual. Parties involved would learn each other’s worldview, values, and life experiences as they seek ways to enrich each other.65 The dialogue of action is “an interaction founded on deeds of assistance and concern.”66

Chong then develops three principles for social engagement in the form of dialogue. Firstly, engagement must be carried out specifically, pinpointing sectors of concern.67 Chong develops sectors of concern, which are divided into engagements relating to humanitarian works, ethno-cultural identity, religious customs, theology, and legal-political position. To him, dialogues should be carried out within these sectors. This is to frame the engagement within a manageable objective.

Next, Chong stresses the importance of both the dialogues of life and actions, stating that they “could effectively build up mutual trust and understanding toward meaningful dialogues of discourse and spirituality at a more in-depth stage.”68 Thus,


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Chong, “Can Allah and Tuhan Not Be One?” 18.

68 Ibid.
engagement is better to begin with these dialogues before the engagement progresses into “more sensitive areas.”

Chong argues, “Before dealing with the anxieties of differences in ethno-cultural, religious, and political issues, it is advisable to achieve mutual trust through cooperation in humanitarian and customs which will promote trust and affection. In other words, strengthen relational ties before dealing with difficult issues.”

Chong’s idea is reflected in lives of the common people, as the experience of Egypt tells:

While the old form of dialogue between elite scholars and religious leaders remains, recent events have added something new. Now ordinary Christians and Muslims in the streets of the nation’s cities, towns, and villages have become engaged in a daily dialogue. Having discovered each other, they now eat together, protect each other’s homes, and talk about their faiths. This has helped to foster a more open and secure environment in which people can live and work together while pursuing the common good. This democratization of dialogue tends to focus on practical issues of common concern, and it sometimes results in joint action. If it continues, perhaps it will lead to more intentional daily interaction between Muslim and Christian neighbors.

Similarly, Knitter also advocates the “dialogue of action.” Such dialogue does not replace theological dialogue, but it provides a “more effective place to start, or a more practical arena in which to carry on discussions about beliefs and spirituality.” Hence, a new incarnational and missional engagement is possible. To Knitter such “practical priority . . . is not just ethical—to keep inter-religious dialogue from becoming a tea party;

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69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.


73 Ibid., 133.
it is also methodological or hermeneutical—to enable inter-religious dialogue to deal with the complexities and obstacles in really understanding and empathizing with someone who comes from a totally different world.”74 The “reality of unnecessary suffering” tends to unite followers of different religious communities. Varying in their doctrines and experiences, “They all, in differing ways and to differing degrees, feel the necessity of offering some kind of response to the sufferings that drench the human condition.”75 For CCS, they may join Muslims to participate in social action.76

Concerning the people involved, “engagement should be conducted among the relevant subgroups of particular sector of concern to avoid misconceived generalization that might produce unnecessary distress.”77 Common individuals operate from within their own cultural preferences and are susceptible to ethnocentric and political sentiments. These elements will affect their partnership with others, hampering friendship and goodwill, and damaging their participation.78 So, more technical issues related to complex and sensitive sectors of concern must be carried out by those who are familiar with the sector. Often, experts are the ones required for a certain sector. For example,

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 134.
77 Chong, “Can Allah and Tuhan Not Be One?” 18–19.
78 Ibid.
dialogue under the sector of legal-political position should be carried out by community and political leaders, intellectuals, and professionals.\textsuperscript{79}

Chong also utilizes Burbules’ categorization of virtues and emotions for dialogue. Burbules considers dialogue as essentially a social relation, instead of mere “communicative form of question and answer.” He considers dialogue an engagement, which involves the virtues and emotions of concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope.\textsuperscript{80} In dialogue, one relates with the other and identifies with the other’s emotions. The totality of this combination of commitment, empathy, and identification is called “concern.”\textsuperscript{81} Next, “trust” enables parties involved in dialogue to believe in one another and the good will of the dialogue. For trust to develop, parties involved must learn to trust before demanding trust. Eventually trust will cease to be an issue in the relationship. Parties involved in dialogue would also take risk to allow trust to grow in their relationship, in the process, learn to courageously expose themselves.\textsuperscript{82} Another emotional factor in dialogue is “respect.” Respect sustains a relation because it overcomes all differences and compels one to humbly learn from another regardless of differences in background.\textsuperscript{83} It prevents assertion of authority and exploitation. Another

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 36. Corresponds to Wells’ “presence” and “attention” combined, Wells, \textit{Incarnational Mission}, 14.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 38–39.
factor is “appreciation,” which grows naturally in dialogue. It should be encouraged because appreciation improves connectedness of conversation and quality of dialogue. As dialogue is commonly entered with an expectation, hope inevitably follows. So, it is vital to keep dialogue alive, amid times of difficulty. In sum, Chong incorporates Burbules’ emotional factor for dialogue while referring to Besley and Peters. As an educationist, Chong helpfully integrate dialogue for education to social engagement.

Combining the thoughts of Thu and Burbules, Chong proposes a model of different types of model for dialogues between Malay Muslims and indigene Christians—The Multiple Plenary Model for Interfaith and Intercultural Relations.

84 “Delight” and “enjoyment” in Wells, Incarnational Mission, 14–15.
86 Ibid., 40–41.
88 Chong, “Can Allah and Tuhan Not Be One?” 19.
Table 1. The Multiple Plenary Model for Interfaith and Intercultural Relations

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<td></td>
<td>spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal-political position</td>
<td>Action, discourse</td>
<td>Community and political leaders, intellectuals,</td>
<td>Hope</td>
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<td>professionals</td>
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This table, while originally developed for indigene Christians and Malay Muslims, is applicable to the CCS. With its focus on “being with” and considering its other incarnational attributes, social engagement, which this paper suggests, belongs to the first category—the humanitarian sector of concern. For this sector of concern, the actors are the individuals and local community, which the results would be emotive in nature, involving affection, trust, and concern. These are values, which an incarnational mission, expressed through identification with the people, would pursue.

Apart from that, by “being with” the people and identifying with them through dialogues of life and action, CCS incarnationally created a space for the Gospel to be conveyed through their witness. Social engagement becomes a bridge to evangelism. It eliminates suspicion and prejudice, opens closed doors, and “gain a hearing for the
Unlike tools or methods for evangelism, social engagement is incarnational—a natural expression of the presence of Christ through His Church. It may not begin naturally but it certainly can be developed through action. As the Church involves in social engagement it will become more naturally incarnational.

Dialogue of action is especially relevant in social action. Through social engagement, CCS might engage with Muslims through meaningful partnership and genuine relationships. CCS must avoid the mistake of Indian Christians who stayed indifferent to the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement led by Gandhi. In recent years, many Malaysian Christians have responded to the call to speak out for Clean and Fair Election (Bersih). They have also spoken against corruption and actively involved in ending the sixty-year rule of Barisan Nasional and UMNO through electoral democracy. It is this kind of social action where dialogues happen among the masses. CCS must not miss such strategic opportunities to engage with the Malay majority.

Strategically, by focusing on the “humanitarian” sector, CCS avoid problems related to civil and public negotiation. Civil and public negotiations belong to sectors of concern, which suffer limitations due to Malay hegemony. Civil negotiations are under the “legal-political position” sector. Interfaith dialogue belongs to the “theology” sector. These sectors of concern are important, but they do not result or intend to result in affection, trust and concern. Instead, due to the clash of nationalisms, these encounters have created unnecessary bitterness. They are also limited to experts, professionals, and


intellectuals. While these groups often hold moderate views they do not represent the majority. Their influence in the wider society is also uncertain.

Summary: Incarnational Mission in Practice

Social engagement is the preferred expression of incarnational mission because it encapsulates incarnational identification through its emphasis on relational and emotive aspects. This characteristic is especially obvious when social engagement is practiced through the “being with” approach and via dialogues. As a result, social engagement demonstrates its unique suitability for the Malay hegemony context, being the alternative to stereotype civil negotiations and means to identify with Malay Muslims. Subsequently, it paves the way for CCS to remain faithful in their witnessing to Malay Muslims.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has argued that social engagement is the preferred means for incarnational mission in the context of Malay hegemony. The following sections summarize the arguments presented in this study. Finally, a two-fold conclusion marks the end of this study.

Summary

This paper begins with a description of CCS’ ministry context by highlighting that CCS’ cultural and historical background did not prepare them for Malay hegemony. Arriving as immigrants, CCS had a monocultural beginning. They lacked integration with other cultures. Yet, CCS eventually committed to British North Borneo as their new home. They gradually but effectively relinquished their immigrant identity in the period between the end of Second World War and 1963. British colonists and missionaries from the West enjoyed a corporative and amicable relationship with CCS, as CCS too, had been encouraged by various immigration and governance policies of the British. Settling down as citizens of British North Borneo and with their affinity with the British, their reluctance to participate in the formation of Malaysia is understandable. The formation of Malaysia, and then the intrusion of Malay hegemony, resulted in CCS’ antagonism towards Malay Muslims.

The Malays, on the other hand, experienced a process of ethnogenesis, which saw Islam taking an increasingly important role. Instigated by the foreigners’ presence—especially the Chinese and the British—Malay self-determination eventually leaned towards Islam as the bedrock of their nationalism. This process took place at the expense
of Malay royalties, which by the nineteenth century, had lost much its prestige, respect, and influence. As Islamism joined forces with the bangsa movement, a tension between two forces between Malay-Islam and foreigners (Chinese and British) was formed prior to Malaya independence in 1957.

The independence of Malaya was followed by differences in the interpretation of the country’s constitution, with the Malay interpreting it as supporting Malay nationalism, and non-Malay, Malaya (and later, “Malaysia”) nationalism. With Singapore, which supported Malaysia nationalism expelled, and after the riot of May 13, 1969, Malay nationalism dominated all policies in Malaysia. Under the emergency rule and the powerful force of the Malay fundamentalists, Malay nationalism was legitimized and promoted as the defining philosophy for nation-building. The NEP created Malay Supremacy through economic affirmative action and the Islamic values were incorporated into a deliberately planned national culture policy.

As Malay nationalism became the dominant nationalism, the Chinese attempted to challenge it with Malaysia nationalism. While struggling to integrate into the main Malaysian nation-building process, Malaysian Chinese, including the CCS, refuse to compromise their cultural distinctness. Enculturation to Malay culture and Islam are rejected. They would persist with a religious-cultural identity, which is not only distinct from Malay Muslims, but an antithesis to Islamist ideology. Meanwhile, Christians are the very group that is victimized as the threat of Islam.

As Malay nationalism evolved into Malay hegemony, the clash of nationalisms intensified. Having traditionally shunning Islam, the Chinese’s resentment towards Malay
hegemony increased, causing them to hold onto their version of nationalism more tightly. For CCS, Malay nationalism robbed them of North Borneo where they enjoyed equality and religious freedom. Now they are considered a dhimmitude. Their reluctance to actively participate in nation-building is understandable because Malaysia today is not the one, which they envisioned. The commitment to the country of both Malaysian Chinese and CCS has been shaken, and their “Malaysian” identity too, is unsettled by the clash of nationalisms.

As Malaysian Chinese advocate Malaysia nationalism through political and civil negotiation, CCS too, engage in various civil negotiations. It has been proven, over the years that the effectiveness of their negotiations is limited. Meanwhile, as there is no apparent comprehensive and overarching theological basis for political engagement, the Malaysian Chinese and CCS have been adopting liberalism as their political theory. Their multiculturalism and constitutionalism are all fundamentally expressions of liberalism, albeit often being decorated with ad-hoc Christian ideas and scriptural references.

Meanwhile, CCS’ missional engagement to Muslims has been interrupted, and there is no clear theology or strategy on how CCS may remain faithful in their duty to witness to Muslims. So, the CCS suffer two detachments today. First, they are detached from nation-building, as their citizenship and political identity, devoid of a nationalism, which they envision and hope for, does not give them reason to commit to the country. Secondly, their missional engagement with Muslims is limited by Malay hegemony. These are the ministry challenges that the CCS face in their context.
This study then argues for incarnational mission as a theological framework, which CCS should adopt to resolve their two “detachment” problems. To be incarnational corresponds to being missional. An incarnational mission includes the primacy of *missio Dei*, the continuous presence of Christ in the life of the Church, the Kingdom’s imminence effects of ethics and hope, and identification with people. Application of incarnational mission is explored in Chapter 6. CCS’ reliance on liberalism as the basis for their political identity is critiqued and rejected. An identity based on an incarnational political theology is proposed. Through this renewed identity, CCS would base their struggle on the *missio Dei*, bringing the presence of Christ and the *Shalom* of the new Kingdom with them, as they identify with the very group, which reject their nationalism and treats them as *dhimmi*. As minority, Christians may tend to retreat into their ghettos and cease to engage with the dominant sociopolitical and religious forces, which at times persecuted them. Yet, as they restore their incarnational identity and mission, CCS should confidently engage with their sociopolitical surrounding.

The restoration of incarnational mission in CCS will also equip them with a holistic theology of evangelism, which recognizes the importance of witnessing and God’s prerogative in mission. This allows the CCS to confidently and purposefully engage Malay Muslims with the intention to witness for Christ. All in all, CCS’ sociopolitical and mission engagements should be incarnational because they are operated under the pretext of *missio Dei* and a missional ecclesiology. These theological reflections in Chapter 6 connect incarnational mission with the ministry challenge that CCS face. As the problem of identity and theology of CCS are now resolved, social
engagement is proposed to be the application that carries out CCS’ incarnational mission in practical terms.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study can be described in two interconnected points. Social engagement is the preferred means for incarnational mission in context of Malay hegemony because:

First, social engagement is the preferred practice for incarnational mission as it fulfills the characteristics of incarnational mission, especially in the form of “being with.” Social engagement is also a true character of the missional church with its social dimension restored. Social interaction in a foreign realm is a basic criterion of incarnation. Social engagement encapsulates this motive and effect of incarnational mission as it carries with it the presence of Christ through the life of the Church, Kingdom ethics and hope, and identification with the people—all under the pretext of *missio Dei*.

Incarnational mission is needed because it is the theology, which can restore CCS’ political identity, social responsibility and concept of witnessing. It is incarnational mission that gives CCS a purpose and identity to be “incarnated” in Malaysian society. Via incarnational mission too, CCS find theology to engage with their sociopolitical context with a holistic understanding of the Gospel. Renewed identity and sociopolitical involvement would deliver them from a self-centric spirituality, which is devoid of missional vocation and the ethics of the Kingdom. Moreover, only with incarnational mission, would CCS find impetus to identify and stand in solidarity with people. Only with these characteristics of incarnational mission would a holistic understanding of
evangelism be developed, where the social dimension of evangelism, particularly
witnessing is not neglected.

Specifically, incarnational mission is the antidote for theological reductionism and
an incomplete understanding of the Gospel. Its first contribution to CCS would be the
restoration of a missional ecclesiology based on the *missio Dei*. Much of Malaysian and
Sabah Christians’ concerns are focused on how to survive as institutions of the Christian
religion. This paper suggests that the Church’s identity is missional instead of being
limited to “religious institutions.” The focus is not survival but faithfulness to the *missio
Dei* in this context incarnationally, as Malaysians and as witnesses to Malay Muslims.

Second, social engagement is also the preferred option for mission in the
sociopolitical context of Malay hegemony. As an expression of incarnational mission,
social engagement is the means to identify with Malay Muslims and their culture. It
carries the characteristic of incarnational identification. It opens doors and opportunities
for natural and genuine relationships to flourish. It is also an alternative to participation in
nation-building, considering the various limitations of civil negotiation. Even the
limitations to propagate the Christian faith cannot stop social engagement from
witnessing to Muslims the Gospel of Christ. Social engagement eliminates the “hostile”
image of Christianity in Malaysia, which to the Muslims, is only another religion trying
to convert them. Social engagement, with a holistic understanding of evangelism that
does not compromise the essence of Gospel proclamation, allows a sustained, loving and
genuine relationship to provide a space for Jesus to be introduced through witnessing.
Understanding the logic of *missio Dei*, CCS may submit to God the outcome of such
witnessing. The Gospel, then, is neither reduced to verbal confession, nor restricted to the institutional church; but the focus will be on Christ’s presence and the imminence of the Kingdom in the community. Furthermore, with the poor and deprived around the Church, social engagement is not only an effective way to witness for Christ through identification, but the natural expression of the incarnational mission that concerns those who are in need.

Strategically and practically, social engagement can be carried out through dialogues. This study identifies dialogue of life and dialogue of action as the forms of dialogue that best represent the incarnational, “being with” social engagement. Through common concerns and daily interactions, witnessing becomes a part of life and this also builds a strong relational foundation for effective civil negotiation. Also, equally strategically, CCS might inspire the KDM and other Christians in Peninsular to be incarnationally involved in social engagement. Minority Christian communities that face hegemonic oppression elsewhere might also consider the proposal of this work. Christian mission continues amid hegemonic oppression, for God’s incarnational mission continues through His Church that brings hope. CCS and other minority churches must enter into the various uncertainties they face incarnationally and courageously through social engagement. For “the fear of Caesar” must not obscure “the wonder of God.”

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