

Migration, Citizenship, and Repatriation: Overseas Chinese In Malaya, 1900-1952

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Received: 21 February 2025 Accepted: 04 July 2025

Abstract

This paper examines the intersection between repatriation, immigration control, and citizenship policies in British Malaya. It seeks to understand how repatriation practices, immigration control, and citizenship legislation defined the distinctions between “citizens” and “aliens” among the Overseas Chinese in Malaya. The discussion is organised into three phases: the economic decline of the 1930s, the aftermath of World War II, and the Malayan Emergency. Repatriation was employed by the British colonial authorities to maintain law and order against undesirable alien Chinese individuals; however, it did not apply to British subjects and federal citizens. The Emergency (Immigration Ordinance) Regulations 1952 further exacerbated the distinction between citizens and aliens by limiting entry rights to British subjects and federal citizens. The State Nationality Enactment of 1952, with its delayed jus soli provisions, symbolised the automatic right of second-generation aliens to federal citizenship. Therefore, these citizens were granted the rights of entry and stay and were excluded from repatriation procedures. The findings suggest that repatriation practices, citizenship liberalisation, and immigration legislation have established the distinctions between “citizens” and “aliens,” thereby influencing the rights to stay and the entry rights of overseas Chinese.

Keywords: Alien; Citizen; Immigration; Overseas Chinese; Repatriation

Introduction

In British Malaya, banishment was implemented as a method of expelling alien individuals who had been convicted of various misdemeanours, including political subversion, disturbances to public order, and membership in secret societies.¹ Since the 19th century, the primary focus of Malaya’s immigration control was the expulsion of Chinese troublemakers, serving as a sole viable resolution to the security issue posed by Chinese criminals, secret society members, and political activists.² One of the strongest deterrents to crime was the possibility of deportation from wealthy Malaya to impoverished China.³ Coercive control measures, such as mass deportation of undesirable aliens, had been implemented under the Emergency Regulation since the declaration of the state of emergency on 16 June 1948. The British counter-insurgency efforts against the rural Chinese, who were purportedly supporting the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), were influenced by deportation, detention, and resettlement. The number of repatriations, which included dependents, was 380 (1948), 10,262 (1949), 2,804 (1950), 8,719 (1951), 5,575 (1952), 2,098 (1953), 915 (1954), and 496 (1955). Overseas Chinese individuals accounted for 92.7% of the total.⁴ The repatriation of overseas Chinese became the primary focus of Malaya’s counter-insurgency strategy during the Cold War in reaction to the communist insurrection. Non-citizen Chinese in Malaya faced obligatory or forced relocation due to

their support for the local communist insurgency.⁵ Tens of thousands of foreign Chinese sympathisers of the MCP were forcibly removed from the colonial area, and the great bulk of political exiles were from Malaya. Their experience teaches us about the deportation of Chinese living abroad who were denied local citizenship. The Malayan Emergency has profoundly altered the Malayan Chinese's destiny. Deportation orders were used to punish non-federal nationals (mostly Chinese) during the Malayan Emergency. The majority of these individuals had resided in Malaya for decades or perhaps centuries. Many of them did not even have family in China, in addition to having no business relations with the country.⁶

The overarching themes of the literature on the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia include citizenship law,⁷ national identity,⁸ diaspora formation,⁹ and transnational connections.¹⁰ This article focusses on the relationship between citizens and aliens, with a particular emphasis on the impact of repatriation and immigration policies on the rights of entry and the rights to stay in Malaya. This paper seeks to answer one research question: How do repatriation practices, immigration control, and citizenship legislation affect the belonging of the Overseas Chinese in Malaya? Three mechanisms—repatriation practices, citizenship liberalisation, and immigration legislation—have defined the distinctions between “citizens” and “aliens,” thereby influencing their political status and the right to remain in Malaya. First, the deportation practices illustrated a clear distinction between citizens and aliens. Repatriation was employed as a weapon by the British colonial authorities to maintain law and order against undesirable alien Chinese individuals who were involved in secret societies, criminal activities, banditry, and communist activities. Unemployed expatriates were also subject to repatriation during the economic depression of the 1930s. The Chinese mining coolies in Malaya were among the Chinese labourers deported during the period of unemployment. Only aliens were subject to mass detention and deportation under Emergency Regulation 17D, and the regulation did not apply to British subjects and federal citizens who were born in the Colony or Federation. Second, the Emergency (Immigration Ordinance) Regulations 1952 further exacerbated the distinction between citizens and aliens by limiting the right of entrance to British subjects and federal citizens. Non-citizen long-term residents in the Federation were obligated to apply for re-entry permits. Third, the State Nationality Enactment 1952 aimed to incorporate children born in the local area into the citizenship system. The delayed *jus soli* provisions of the Enactment symbolised the automatic right of second-generation aliens to federal citizenship. Children born in the Federation were conferred citizenship by operation of law, provided that one of their parents was born in the country. Therefore, these new citizens could be granted entry and excluded from deportation procedures.

Deportation, as a state practice, offers a critical re-examination of dominant conceptions and conceits regarding the privileges and practices of citizenship, as well as the constitution of state sovereignty itself, through the universal distinction between alien and citizen.¹¹ Removing non-citizens from state territory via deportation acts as a mechanism for exclusion.¹² Citizenship is a politics of national identity and the nature of a state's citizenship law is shaped by the state's understanding of nationhood.¹³ It refers to state membership and is associated with the rights and obligations of people within society.¹⁴ This incorporates elements like the rights, obligations, and opportunities that determine a person's place and conduct in society. These include the ability to vote, be eligible to run for office, serve on a jury, be a member of the military, be qualified for civil service jobs, and have access to government funding, healthcare, and state-sponsored education.¹⁵ Citizenship is classified based on three components: civic, political, and social liberties. Civil rights encompass individual liberties, including the right to own property, negotiate contracts, and access justice, as well as the right to freedom of expression, thought, and religion. Political rights, on the other hand, are established through the exercise of political authority. Finally, social dimension comprises social services, education, security, and economic welfare.¹⁶

“*Huaqiao*” or “overseas Chinese” refers to any Chinese individual residing abroad.¹⁷ Due to their foreign status, the Chinese living abroad were vulnerable to deportation. History witnessed the systematic deportation of many ethnic Chinese in the immediate aftermath of war, as evidenced by the cases of Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma, Siam, and Malaya. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) received 500,000 overseas Chinese migrants between 1949 and 1961.¹⁸ The Chinese Nationality Law gave the British extensive flexibility in expelling undesirable Chinese rebels. The British found that banishment was a practical way to get rid of Chinese people who misbehaved or were a burden (unemployed).¹⁹ The overseas Chinese were granted the right to return as a result of the definition of Chinese nationality based on *jus sanguinis*. The 1909 Qing Nationality Law considered all Chinese to be Chinese citizens regardless of their place of birth. As a result of the *jus sanguinis* policy, Chinese born outside China had dual citizenship, but new immigrants were Chinese citizens.²⁰ The relationship between the state and all Chinese is reflected in the principle of blood lineage. The *jus sanguinis* principle was implemented with two objectives: first, to safeguard its sovereignty during the peak of Western imperialism, and second, to guarantee the complete obedience of all Qing subjects. *Jus sanguinis* was more consistent with the traditional Chinese values of filial piety, lineal continuity, and perpetual allegiance.²¹

This paper investigates the connection between deportation, citizenship, and state sovereignty using the overseas Chinese in British Malaya as a case study. The discussion is structured into three phases: during the economic downturn of the 1930s, in the aftermath of World War II, and during the Malayan Emergency. Without the status of local citizenship, the overseas Chinese were categorised as aliens and subject to banishment practices by the colonial administrator. In the post-World War II period, the door to local citizenship was gradually opened to the local-born Chinese population through the Federation of Malaya (Agreement) 1948 and further liberalised through the State Nationality Enactment 1952. The 1952 citizenship liberalisation took place while the British authorities faced challenges in repatriating the Chinese squatter community to Mainland China. These developments are significant as they define the state membership and belongingness of the overseas Chinese. The analysis of this paper is drawn from four documents: (1) British Foreign Office Files (China, 1949-1980) retrieved from the United Kingdom National Archives (*Archives Direct*), (2) documents from the National Archives of Malaysia, including proceedings of the Legislative Council, council papers, select committee reports, and MCA papers, (3) legislative materials, including the constitution, enactment, and ordinance on citizenship and immigration matters, and (4) online newspapers like *Straits Times*, *Singapore Free Press*, and *Sunday Free Times*.

Chinese Immigration, Aliens Ordinance, and Repatriation in the Pre-war Period

In Peninsular Malaysia (or British Malaya), Chinese immigration occurred in two distinct periods. The first wave began in the early 15th century whereby approximately 60,000 Chinese immigrants predominantly settled in Malacca, Penang, and Pahang, which accounted for 10% of the total population. These early immigrants were predominantly engaged in trade, commerce, and labour.²² The second wave of Chinese immigrants was recruited by the British under the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and the Peking Convention (1860). These treaties were instrumental in the British establishing British Malaya as the world’s foremost producer of tin and rubber as they enabled them to recruit a significant number of Chinese labourers for employment in Malaya’s tin mines and rubber plantations. These Chinese immigrants mainly consisted of impoverished farmers, artisans, and coolies. This wave ended in 1950 following the closed-door policy implemented by the Chinese communists after 1949.²³ This paper covers the period between 1900 and 1952. An open immigration policy was implemented by the Malayan administration, which resulted in the permanent settlement of foreign labourers.²⁴

The influx of foreign labourers was facilitated by the new economic corridors, which extended from southern China and southern India to Southeast Asia. These economic corridors contributed to the demand for migrant labour in the colonies.²⁵ The open-door policy of the British administration had made it easier for Chinese immigrants to arrive in large numbers. There were a few generations of Chinese people born in Malaya as a result of unrestricted entrance till 1933.²⁶

British Malaya consisted of three administrative units: the Straits Settlements (Crown Colony), the Federated Malay States (FMS) (four States under British protection), and five Unfederated Malay States (under British protection). Colonialism in Malaya was greatly complicated by its ethnic divisions. The Chinese formed both trading communities (largely urban) and groups of tin miners. Indian immigration began on a large scale as a result of modern rubber-growing.²⁷ The administration of British Malaya was divided into three British Colonies and nine Malay Protectorates. In Malaya, there were ten sovereignties (one British and nine Malay kings), each claiming the allegiance of their subjects in their respective territories. There was no single citizenship system covering the entire Malaya before 1948. A uniform national identity was difficult to form when Malaya was under different governments and the people held multiple citizenships.²⁸ The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914 was based on the common law doctrine that anyone born in a British Crown dominion was a British citizen. This *jus soli* principle also applied to individuals born to foreigners, even if they were only temporary residents in the country.²⁹ Those born in the Straits Settlements were considered by the British government to be British subjects and had general British citizenship in addition to other citizenships, while those born in the Malay States did not have any common citizenship.³⁰ In the Malay States, the Malay Rulers were sovereign, asserting the loyalty of their people in the absence of a formal state nationality legislation. Although no formal legislation existed on the status of subjects under Malay rulers, it was recognised that the institution of citizenship in the States predated British colonialism. The subjects of the Malay Rulers included the Malays and indigenous people residing in the state.³¹ A Naturalisation Enactment was instituted in 1904 in the Federated Malay States (FMS) to facilitate the naturalisation of individuals who were not natural-born subjects of a Malay Ruler. Any foreign national who had lived in the FMS for a minimum of five years was qualified to apply for naturalisation rights. Upon being granted, the naturalised subject of the Malay Ruler was considered a natural-born subject and received all the rights, advantages, and powers of a natural-born subject within the Malay State.³²

In Colonial Malaya, the immigrant population had been subjected to repatriation until 1939. The government was able to maintain peace and order in Malaya by using repatriation, which was mostly utilised against Chinese secret society groups. Because Chinese people could travel freely between Malaya and China, this weapon could be employed efficiently. The Malays accepted the large-scale inflow of Chinese from South China into Malaya because the immigrants were a floating population, whose undesirable members could be returned to China at any time.³³ Banishment was implemented in Colonial Malaya to punish the political undesirables or subversive elements of Chinese society. Sun Yat Sun's Chinese Revolutionary Party was closely associated with Malayan deportees after 1911. In the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, approximately 400 individuals were expelled between 1912 and 1916, in contrast to 200 deportations that occurred in the previous five years. During the 1930s, the Malayan Communist Party's activities contributed to the proliferation of banishment as a fundamental tool of political control. Approximately 1,500 individuals were expelled between 1928 and 1931. Economic depression and political concerns continued to influence the Malayan deportation regime.³⁴

The economic depression of the 1930s increased the government's stance on the expansion of Chinese immigration in Malaya. The government implemented measures to prevent further unemployment by severely restricting immigration during the depression. Despite the Chinese's

vigorous objections, the Aliens Ordinance was passed in the Straits Settlements in 1932 and, later, in the Malay States of the peninsula. The Secretary for Chinese Affairs stated that the Ordinance's objectives were to grant the government the authority to regulate and control alien immigration in terms of both quantity and quality during its introduction into the Legislative Council. Under the mechanism established by the Ordinance, a distinction was made between immigrants who had established Malaya as their permanent residence and aliens who were visiting Malaya for a limited time.³⁵

Control of exile was required for two reasons: economic and security. The government introduced the "Aliens Bill" in the Legislative Council in 1932 as a response to the rampant unemployment among the alien population (and the Malayan-born people) and the necessity for a control mechanism against aliens who propagated subversive political views. A clear distinction between citizens and aliens was made by the Aliens Bill. A. M. Goodman, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, said that a person was considered an alien if they were neither a British subject nor a subject of a Malay ruler.³⁶ The Legislative Council's Chinese members saw the Bill as discriminatory since "nearly every alien in this country is a Chinese." They considered it to be "part of an anti-Chinese policy."³⁷ Despite facing resistance from the Chinese community in the FMS, the Aliens Bill was approved by the Federal Council on 24 January 1933 after a protracted and intense discussion. The Chinese community was the group most impacted by the law since they made up the vast majority of foreigners in Malaya. The Chinese, who were neither British nationals nor British-protected people, were subject to more stringent immigration laws based on the Bill's definition of "alien". Strong resistance was raised against the imposition of further limitations since the FMS Government already had extensive authority to exclude unwanted people from the nation. The government used banishment as a lethal tactic against the Chinese.³⁸

A control mechanism was essential to protect Malaya from becoming a source of discontent and rebellion. Chinese immigrants, especially those from the island of Hainan, were heavily exposed to communist indoctrination. The spread of this propaganda among the unemployed or discharged labourers had been one of the greatest dangers in the last four or five years.³⁹ This subsequently led to the economic rationale for the repatriation programme. Chinese workers, particularly the Chinese mining coolies in Malaya, were repatriated during the period of enormous unemployment. A little more than \$15 per person was spent on the repatriation of 365 Chinese during the first seven months of the tin restriction period, which ran from March to 21 September.⁴⁰ According to a letter published in the *Straits Times*, any Chinese nationals born in China had no right to protest this law. One advantage of the new law was that it did not apply to Chinese who were British nationals or British protected people.⁴¹

The discussion reveals that the Aliens Ordinance acknowledged the presence of "Malayan" Chinese, who were to be shielded from this rule and from political and economic threats. It conferred a unique "Malayan" status for Chinese who were born or lived in Malaya. According to an editorial in the *Straits Times*, the British government in the Colony and the Malay States made a significant advancement with the Aliens Ordinance whereby local born Chinese can now legitimately argue that the government has thought it fair and safe to grant concessions to them in respect of immigration and has for the first time written into a legislation a clear cut demarcation between Malaya-born and China-born Chinese.⁴² The Aliens Ordinance was enacted by the British colonial administration in 1933, which restricted the immigration of Chinese males to the colony. In response, nearly 200,000 Chinese women migrated to Malaya between 1934 and 1938, with a significant number of them establishing homes and starting families in the area.⁴³ The number of Malayan-born Chinese had increased by over twofold since 1921, reaching 534,000 by 1931. The intensity of the kinship bond between the residents and their mother country diminished with each generation. There were sentiments that the locally

born segment of the community should also be conferred a local status to provide them with a sense of belonging.⁴⁴ Based on the 1931 census, the Chinese population in Malaya comprised 1,709,392 individuals out of a total population of 4,385,346. Chinese and Indians collectively constituted over half of the nation's population.⁴⁵ In 1947, the official census data in Peninsular Malaysia recorded an ethnic Chinese population of 1,884,534, which accounted for 38.40% of the total population of 4,908,086.⁴⁶

The scale of Chinese internal migration from Malaya's urban and village centres to the countryside increased in the 1940s as a result of the social and economic unrest introduced during the Japanese Occupation, which displaced many of the region's existing Chinese inhabitants and the growing settler population. Approximately 400,000 Chinese colonists resided in the colony by 1945 when the British colonial authority returned to Malaya.⁴⁷ During the period between World Wars I and II, thousands of Chinese individuals who had immigrated from China to work in the tin mines of Malaya were compelled to domicile on the outskirts of the jungle for two primary reasons, both of which were associated with the major economic depression of the era. Initially, the labour market in Malaya experienced a significant decline and some Chinese individuals were on the brink of destitution as a result of the main downturn of the 1930s.⁴⁸

Undesirable Aliens and Repatriation in the Aftermath of the Second World War

In the aftermath of the war, a more efficient banishment order was urged upon the government against undesirable aliens. The new Malayan Union government was facing an unprecedented crime wave, especially in Johore, Selangor, and Perak. The people lived under a constant sense of fear and intimidation as many foreign criminals—thugs, thefts, bandits, gangsters, extortionists, intimidators, criminals, and murderers—were “free to roam” in the countryside. The *Straits Times* editorial in September 1947 criticised the Malayan Union government on the virtual suspension of banishment. Whitehall was held responsible for the “ineffectual way” in dealing with lawlessness. According to the editorial, the police were handicapped by the lack of their pre-war banishment power to deal with undesirable foreign nationals.⁴⁹ The *Malay Mail* editorial further added that the exile statute was not used effectively in the Malayan Union, and if it was, the post-war crime wave would quickly come to a stop. This aligned with the *Straits Times* editorial on the virtual suspension of banishment.⁵⁰ Although there should be hundreds of extortion instances every day, the *Singapore Free Press* reported that the police in Singapore only received around fifty complaints of extortion each month. Because people were intimidated of retaliation, they were afraid to report armed violence to the authorities, thus it continued unchecked. The police often struggled to locate witnesses who could testify in court. If the public was certain that the convicted foreign offenders would be banished, they would be more willing to cooperate.⁵¹

The government's attention was redirected to the regulation of secret societies in the aftermath of World War II, which was preceded by a series of lawless activities and lawlessness.⁵² The most effective tool for addressing criminal cases was banishment legislation as the general climate of intimidation discouraged both victims and witnesses from reporting to the police or providing evidence in court. Consequently, criminals were unable to be convicted and made to pay the penalty for their crimes.⁵³ Sir Edward Gent, the governor of the Malayan Union, was pressured to enforce the Banishment Ordinance in the most brutal way possible.⁵⁴ Expulsion was required since a significant portion of Malaya's criminal population was foreign-born.⁵⁵ People generally agreed that deporting foreign offenders was the best way to combat lawlessness. Since their own governments were far less picky about how they handle and treat these individuals, alien offenders dread exile just as much as they fear no other punishment. The only deterrent significant for them was exile.⁵⁶ Similar discussions

highlighting the urgent need to expedite banishment through administrative and police channels, enforce the current law more strictly, and employ corporal punishment whenever feasible for violent crimes occurred in the Malayan Union Advisory Council. No banishment orders were authorised or conducted prior to 1 January 1947. A total of 127 orders existed, 49 of which were authorised and 19 were executed.⁵⁷

A similar question was raised in the House of Commons in London on the implementation of the Banishment Ordinance in Malaya: did the Malayan Union government effectively use its authority under the Ordinance to curb the current crime wave?⁵⁸ David Rees-Williams, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated his pleasure with the banishment laws in effect in Malaya during the House of Commons discussions in November 1947. Previously, they were employed to prevent robberies and murders.⁵⁹ It was dubious to apply exile to certain groups of people. Apart from upholding law and order, deportation was a political tactic used to expel politically undesirable individuals, including trade unionists and Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) members. There was also disagreement on the number of inmates who had been exonerated of criminal charges before their exile. The question of how many would have been eligible for Federation membership if they had not been exiled was also up for debate. However, the act of deportation was justified as not a punishment but rather a free ticket to the banished person's nation.⁶⁰

Before 1942, numerous Chinese and Indians were temporary residents; however, by 1945, they began to regard Malaya as their future residence. Furthermore, the forces of Malay and Chinese nationalism, which were unleashed by Japanese rule, in conjunction with Britain's post-war self-government guarantee, immediately initiated a conflict between Malays and non-Malays over the future legacy of British power. The issue of who could legitimately claim to be "Malayan" was raised.⁶¹ British officials, through the Malayan Union Plan, acknowledged the immigrants' presence in Malaya for the first time in history and granted them local status with political rights. The post-war Malayan Union citizenship was unable to transpire due to the emergence of Malay nationalism and the intense opposition from the Malay community.⁶² Despite the British intention to restructure the citizenship issue, the non-Malay community responded with a subdued response to the allure of the Malayan Union. The Chinese community's attachment to Malaya was diminished by the extraterritorial politics of China, which explained the community's lukewarm response to the Malayan Union plan.⁶³ The Malayan Union citizenship established a civic concept of citizenship that directly challenged the traditional institution of citizenship of the Malay States based on loyalty to the Malay Rulers.⁶⁴

The constitution of the Malayan Union, which called for granting unconditional citizenship based on *jus soli*, never came to pass. Malay political pressure led to the replacement of the Malayan Union citizenship scheme with a limited version based on the double *jus soli* concept. Birthright citizenship was substituted with double *jus soli* under the Federation of Malaya, a new constitutional arrangement that was implemented on 1 February 1948, whereby any alien child born locally was eligible for Federation citizenship if both of the parents were born and had lived in the Federation for 15 years. Only the second generation of children born in the area were automatically eligible for federal citizenship. After meeting certain residence and linguistic requirements, the first generation was eligible via registration.⁶⁵ *Jus soli* citizenship was exclusively applicable to the subjects of the Malay monarch of any state who had successfully integrated into the Malayan way of life. The Malays, aborigines, and naturalised subjects of the Rulers were classified as Ruler subjects and eligible for automatic citizenship.⁶⁶ British subjects born locally and Malays were granted automatic citizenship, which gave them a privileged position. 3,120,000 people automatically became federal citizens by operation of law when the Federation of Malaya Agreement went into effect on 1 February 1949, constituting 2,500,000 Malays, 350,000 Chinese, and 225,000 Indians, Pakistanis, and Ceylonese.⁶⁷

Being a subject is different from being a citizen of a country. Previously, the prince identified for international purposes with his 'subjects'; now, the state identifies with its 'national'. 'Subject' described an internal relationship between prince and individual which the prince invoked for international purposes as well, while 'national' does not describe an internal relationship but one which the state determines and declares for international purposes only.⁶⁸

In British law, the term "subjects" was used as a synonym for citizens. Before the introduction of the British Nationality Act 1948, the main distinction in national status across most countries was between "subjects" and "aliens". The distinction between citizens and non-citizens later replaced the use of "subjects".⁶⁹ This personal relationship was substituted by political ties linking individuals to a country.⁷⁰ In the context of the Federation of Malaya, the status of subjects of the Malay Rulers was no longer significant after independence. The nationality of the Malay State acquired after independence no longer conferred federal citizenship. The nationality enactments of the Malay States only remained on the statute book.⁷¹ The citizenship provisions of the 1957 Federal Constitution eliminated the traditional citizenship institution of the Malay States and there was no longer any mention of the subject of the Malay Rulers. The oath of allegiance to the Malay Ruler was also not mentioned and replaced by the oath of allegiance to the Federation of Malaya.⁷²

Redefining Belonging and the Malayan Emergency

Non-Citizens, Deportation, and the Right to Stay

Following the proclamation of the Malayan Emergency, the practice of deportation assumed a more hostile form. It was not exclusively employed on delinquent aliens; rather, it was broadly applied to individuals suspected of supporting the MCP. The High Commissioner was granted unprecedented authority to order the mass detention and banishment of aliens suspected of aiding, abetting, consorting, or harbouring communist agitators by Emergency Regulation 17D, which was passed on 10 January 1949. This action was not subject to appeal and all returned deportees would be subject to imprisonment for a maximum of three years. Federal citizens (defined by the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948) and British subjects (defined by the British Nationality Act 1948) born in the Federation or the Colony were not subject to the orders.⁷³ The government was urged to deport the undesirable element as soon as possible during the early stages of the Malayan Emergency.⁷⁴ In November 1948, the British Malayan administration sent out a clear message: any immigrants who gave the Communists money, food, knowledge, or anything else could not expect to stay in the Federation. Those who voluntarily or under duress assisted the Communists in their campaign of lawlessness were to be deported.⁷⁵ The history of mass deportation in Malaya is particularly noteworthy as it represents the coerced removal of tens of thousands of alien Chinese individuals who were suspected of supporting the MCP. Rather than individual deportation, it was imperative to implement large-scale deportation as it would be impractical to maintain communist detainees in detention for numerous months. Malaya endeavoured to repatriate 2,000 individuals monthly since January 1949. Henry Gurney reiterated that the proposition was not banishment but rather repatriation. The government was able to justify the return of individuals who were not members of the Federation by employing the term "repatriation".⁷⁶

As the High Commissioner, Henry Gurney took a strong stand against terrorism and the foreign Chinese squatters who were aiding the communist bandits in December 1948. He said that the only way to solve this issue was to force hazardous foreign elements to leave the Federation. There were several reasons why repatriation was urgently needed: (1) squatters were the insurgents' primary source of food, (2) resettlement in some areas was unfeasible and undesirable as it would only disperse bad elements, (3) the government would abandon its duty to the people if it failed to restore law and order, (4) detentions would put more strain on the effective use of Security Forces, (5) wealthy Chinese

were forced to contribute to bandit funds or face dire consequences, and (6) a protracted terrorist war would be extremely expensive.⁷⁷ Individuals might be subject to detention orders under ER 17 (1), with the option to appeal. The High Commissioner in Council was empowered by ER 17C to deport anybody who was neither a British subject nor a federal citizen born in Malaya. On 22 January 1949, ER 17C was changed to include the deportees' dependents.⁷⁸ A more comprehensive Emergency Regulation that allowed for collective detention and deportation was issued on 10 January 1949. The contentious ER 17D gave the High Commissioner in Council the authority to order the arrest and deportation of any or all local residents who were thought of assisting the bandits. Ramakrishna claims that ER 17D is similar to the idea of "collective responsibility".⁷⁹ Since collective confinement caused significant political, administrative, budgetary, and security challenges, immediate removal was imperative. Approximately 9,000 people (including dependents) were detained in the Federation and Singapore by June 1950 and the amount was estimated to rise by 525 per month. Furthermore, some people's two-year incarceration without trial would bolster their communist beliefs and expose the government to human rights abuses.⁸⁰

Aside from maintaining the incarceration camps, the Federation Government paid \$125 to send each repatriate to their ultimate destinations in China. At Swatow, the repatriates were not stranded. Upon disembarking, each adult earned \$25 in Straits currency, while each youngster received \$10 in pocket money.⁸¹ From an administrative standpoint, approximately 1,500 guards were needed to run the detention centres. Because the British had been importing Chinese colliers into the Malay States from the 18th century, the Malays relied heavily on the government's power to expel unwanted foreigners. The High Commissioner aimed to transfer 2,000 Chinese captives each month to the mainland via Swatow, where mass deportations had been occurring since January 1949.⁸² The Federation deported 106 British citizens and 5,994 foreigners in 1949.⁸³ Under Emergency Regulation 17C, which also subjected dependents of deported individuals to deportation, a total of 8,900 foreign nationals and 202 British residents were deported in 1950.⁸⁴

In Malaya, the question of repatriation extended far beyond political and security concerns. The inmates were born in Malaya but were technically Chinese citizens. The whole topic of citizenship and belonging was raised by the repatriation policy. The fact that the Chinese captives were not citizens served as a justification for their wholesale deportation. Since they were born in Malaya, many of the deportees were unaware of the whereabouts of their home villages. Outsiders considered them to be "natives of Malaya". These Chinese, who were born in Malaya, had never visited China. Families were also broken up as a result of forced repatriation, with many women not knowing the whereabouts of their husbands.⁸⁵ Most people at the Swatow landing site commented that a large number of the deportees were not locals, with some were from Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and Hainan. Forwarding them to faraway communities was a challenge for the local authorities. Furthermore, many deportees were entirely impoverished and without the necessary means to return to their home area.⁸⁶ The captives were seen by the administration as an alien population that had been brainwashed to communism and was attempting to topple the established authority. Henry Gurney said that with the exception of those chosen for the Taiping Rehabilitation Camp, the captives were all Communists, to varied degrees, depending on how long they had unavoidably been indoctrinated in the camps, and they were incapable of reintegrating into Malayan society.⁸⁷

The plight of Malaya's civilian Chinese minority was not understood by the government. The authorities failed to provide the Chinese with sufficient security while anticipating their cooperation in chasing down the criminals. Providing food and protection money to the bandits was punishable by arrest and expulsion. The government believed that the use of punitive and coercive tactics would scare the Chinese and discourage them from joining the rebels.⁸⁸ Although it increased Chinese alienation, the counter-terror strategy was successful in dismantling the guerrilla organisations. Mass

arrests and detentions of rebels had provided much-needed information.⁸⁹ Gurney's coercive and harsh measures prompted humanitarian concerns, such as leaving the initial batches of hundreds of destitute families stranded in war-torn China, who were already facing a significant internal refugee problem and famine, without financial support, dependants, or accommodation. All other factors, including Sino-British diplomatic relations, international criticism, and China's objections, were considered ancillary to the pressing need to eliminate the communist faction. The repatriation policy's failure and the harsh treatment of the Chinese during mass detentions and deportations, which resulted in a significant number of stateless Chinese in Malaya, left a lasting legacy on the country.⁹⁰

In Southeast Asia, the process of nation-building, integration, and citizenship creation was hampered by the Chinese issue of foreign allegiance with the rise of local nationalism. The complicated struggle in defining inclusion and exclusion was brought to light by the state's closing of citizenship. The Chinese minority was seen by the local authorities as a "problem". They were also at risk of deportation because of their unclear political and legal status.⁹¹ The Malays acknowledged the presence of some Malayan-minded Chinese but it was difficult to discern between those who were loyal to both regimes and those who were completely devoted to Malaya.⁹² Since being born in Malaysia did not always entail allegiance to or permanent residency in the country, the requirements for citizenship by operation of law were limited.⁹³ The British intended to implement a unique policy, known as Malayanisation, in relation to the Chinese. It is imperative that the opportunity to become Malaysians be made more appealing to them, if feasible.⁹⁴

Non-Citizens, Immigration Ordinance, and the Right of Re-Entry

Under the Emergency (Immigration Ordinance) Regulations, there was a clear distinction in rights of entry between citizens and aliens. The Emergency (Immigration Ordinance) Regulations 1952 came into effect on 1 August 1953.⁹⁵ It was the first national law to regulate the immigration of both foreign nationals and Commonwealth residents. For two years during the Select Committee sessions, Chinese members of the Federation Legislative Council opposed various limits on the thorny issue of foreign residents' right of entrance.⁹⁶ The Federation Select Committee, which was chaired by the Acting Chief Secretary D. C. Watherston, met four times from December 1950 to May 1951 and five times in conjunction with the Singapore Select Committee from January to June 1951.⁹⁷ During discussions on the Immigration Control Bill in the Federal Legislative Council, it was noted that more immigration restrictions were "inevitable". Since the prospect of Communist infiltration became evident during the Emergency, the government was preoccupied with the issue of immigration. For reasons of public safety, the current state of the nation necessitated stricter travel restrictions.⁹⁸

Two reports (i.e., the Majority Report and the Minority Report) were presented to the Federal Legislative Council following the Select Committee members' inability to agree on the absolute right of entrance for non-citizens. The majority of delegates on the Select Committee agreed that only those who were granted full citizenship status would be allowed access. The Federation would only allow free entrance to federal citizens and British subjects who were born or typically resided in Malaya. The debate raised the whole topic of belongingness in Malaya when deciding which group of people should have unrestricted access.⁹⁹ The Chinese members of the Federal Legislative Council who supported the Minority Report responded negatively to the Majority Report. According to the Minority Report, non-citizens who could prove a legitimate claim to Malayan citizenship were to be granted admission rights. The signatories aimed to mention in their report the two categories of individuals who would be permitted entry into the Federation without a permit: (1) any individual who was born in a Malay state and typically lived in Malaya, and (2) any person who was of good character and had lived in the Federation for 15 to 20 years before re-entering.¹⁰⁰ The minority view holds that if it was not for the

strict language requirements (having an adequate knowledge of the Malay or English language) under the citizenship provisions of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement, permanent residents under the two classes would have been eligible to become federal citizens.¹⁰¹ The Immigration Ordinance should not discriminate between the two groups of people since it was only acceptable to recognise the linguistic barriers that prevented them from seeking for federal citizenship.¹⁰²

According to the Minority Report, long-term permanent residents were entitled to their rights of admission. Despite being born in the Federation and planning to remain there forever, permanent residents were considered foreigners. The new Citizenship Ordinance projected that around 30% of the population would not be eligible for citizenship. The minority of delegates believed that these groups should have been granted admission rights. Since they were unsure of their chances of being permitted to return, the foreign residents' trip would be significantly impacted.¹⁰³ The primary issue was evoking the local-born people's current right of residency. A foreigner who had been in the nation for eight years might be awarded an indefinite certificate of residency under the 1933 Aliens Enactment. To address the issue of immigration and prevent undesirables from entering the country, the Minority Report recommended that people who were born in the United States should not be penalised.¹⁰⁴

During the Federal Legislative Council held on 19 November 1952, Tan Cheng Lock urged the Chinese community members to strongly support the Minority Report and speak out against the Majority Report.¹⁰⁵ The Council was reminded by MCA leader, Leong Yew Koh, that everyone born in this nation now had the birthright to leave and return. With their British passport, all non-Malays born in the nation were allowed to enter and exit the country as British Protected Persons. Those who were born in the nation, mostly non-Malays, would lose their freedom of movement if the Majority Report was accepted. To address the current barriers to citizenship, Lee backed the Minority Report as a compromise. The Minority Report suggested issuing certificates of residency to these individuals.¹⁰⁶ In its counter-insurgency effort, the government should foster the cooperation of individuals who had made Malaya their permanent home and object of their allegiance. It was hard to imagine widespread support for the government if natural-born citizens were to be denied the opportunity to return to their birthplace. The basic tenet of a nation's immigration policy, according to a supporter of the Minority Report, is to exclude undesirable foreigners, regulate their admission, and restrict them from settling there permanently. It seldom aims towards those who are already in the nation.¹⁰⁷

In the Minority Report, Attorney General M. J. Hogan denoted that granting non-citizens the same protected rights as citizens would somewhat lessen the benefit of obtaining citizenship. The Federation's central tenet was encouraging non-Malays to obtain federal citizenship through integration. The Minority Report further recommended that non-citizens would only be encouraged to become fence-sitters if residency credentials were granted to them. These fence-sitters should not be granted the same privileges as federal citizens. The Secretary of Chinese Affairs, R. H. Oakley, advised the Chinese to seek citizenship instead of travel permits. This was because non-citizens would have greater rights as federal citizens and Federation citizenship was worth more than a certificate of residency.¹⁰⁸ The Attorney General accepted Oakley's conclusion. It would be more advantageous to register for citizenship and enjoy all the benefits of citizenship rather than to maintain the status of alien residents. He reminded the Council that the Controller of Immigration granted only eight residency certificates between 1948 and 1952, demonstrating the minuscule number of individuals who attempted to obtain such certificates. The Attorney General associated such scenario with the residency certificates' worthlessness. Subsequently, the Federal Legislative Council approved the Immigration Bill (Majority Report) by a vote of 51 to 12 after the discussion.¹⁰⁹

Section 7 of the new Immigration Ordinance specified several classes of people who were allowed to enter the Federation from any location outside of Malaya without a permit: federal citizens, British subjects who were born in Malaya, British subjects who typically resided in Malaya, naturalised British subjects, and their spouses and children.¹¹⁰ To temporarily depart Malaya, any permanent inhabitants who were neither British subjects nor federal citizens had to seek for re-entry permission. If their presence would not jeopardise public safety, a re-entry visa would be granted.¹¹¹

Non-Citizens, State Nationality Enactment, and the Right to Nationality

In addition to enforcing strict laws against Communist bandits, the administration promoted citizenship. The citizenship door must be opened to wean the Chinese away from China. To regain the community's trust, alien Chinese, whose assistance was vital to the success of the anti-insurgency operation, were accepted as local residents. The British were compelled to exert pressure on local community leaders to expand the citizenship door in response to the Chinese-led MCP insurgency. More non-Malays who had embraced their home nation and integrated into the Federation of Malaya's culture might now become citizens as a result of the liberalisation of the federal citizenship requirements.¹¹² In restoring the confidence of the Chinese, the government's task was complicated by internal and external circumstances. Externally, the success of the Chinese Communist Party in China created a stimulus to Chinese national pride. It was necessary to counter this sentiment by giving the Chinese people of Malaya a "constructive and Malayan nationalism".¹¹³ Internally, the government recognised the need to give the Chinese a greater share in the country's political life, which depended on the goodwill of the Malays. Discussions were underway to amend the federal citizenship to include more non-Malays. Under the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement, less than one-third of the local-born Chinese qualified for local citizenship. By widening the citizenship door, it was hoped that the Chinese would be "brought to renounce their political ties with their Chinese homeland and accept undivided loyalty to Malaya."¹¹⁴

The Malayan Emergency led to the necessity for desinicisation, localisation and Malayanisation, and indigenisation of Chinese politics and identity in Malaya. During the Cold War, the desinicisation of Malayan Chinese national identity was intended to foster support for self-government and the establishment of a Malayan nation. The Federation of Malaya endeavoured to establish a new national identity that was distinct from an ethnicised Chinese identity.¹¹⁵ The British identified citizenship as the main issue preventing the authorities from gaining Chinese support. Both Henry Gurney and Malcolm MacDonald worked to convince the Malays to liberalise the existing citizenship provision. Positive signs of acceptance were evident from the Malay community following the discussions within the multi-ethnic Communities Liaison Committee (CLC).¹¹⁶ The two-year inter-ethnic deliberation in the CLC resulted in the introduction of the principle of delayed *jus soli*, which signified the unqualified right of the second-generation aliens to federal citizenship. Local-born children were granted access to automatic citizenship if one of their parents was born in the Federation. This principle was deemed fair as the second generation could show a higher level of assimilation than the first generation. Automatic citizenship did not apply to the first generation of local-born Chinese because "a non-Malay of the first generation of local birth will not be assimilated to the Federation's way of life."¹¹⁷ It was clear that assimilation was the benchmark of citizenship criteria. Only those who had identified themselves with the Federation's way of life enjoyed the privileged citizenship status. Based on the established benchmark, unconditional *jus soli* was only applicable to the Malays since "it is reasonably certain that these will be readily assimilated to the Federation's way of life."¹¹⁸ Although not every child born in the Federation was eligible for citizenship, the delayed *jus soli* principle would increase the number of those eligible. In the future, all children born in the Federation would eventually be federal citizens

since those obtaining citizenship in 1952 would become parents.¹¹⁹

The significant progress aligned with the British policy to prepare Malaya towards self-government. In February 1952, the new High Commissioner, General Templer, underlined the importance of increasing the Chinese and Malay participation in both politics and war effort. The counter-insurgency war was increasingly projected as “a struggle for independence”.¹²⁰ On 15 September 1952, the Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance 1952 and the State Nationality Bill came into effect.¹²¹ On the midnight of 14 September 1952, 1.1 million Chinese and 180,000 Indians became federal citizens by operation of law, whereas those eligible by registration were queuing at the governments offices nationwide to show their proof of eligibility.¹²²

The institution of a single allegiance was not established until 1952 when the concept of citizenship was linked to the concept of nationality through the implementation of State Nationality Enactments. It was not until 1952 that federal citizenship was linked to state nationality. Across the nine Malay states, state nationality was instituted in the form of State Nationality Enactments and concurrently associated with federal citizenship. Subjects of a Malay monarch were granted federal citizenship following their association with the sovereign. There were two pathways to federal citizenship through the Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance 1952, namely to become either a subject of a Malay sovereign or a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies.¹²³ Allegiance to either the Rulers or the British Crown was the basis for federal citizenship, while absolute allegiance was the foundation of state nationality. An oath of allegiance was required of applicants for registration and naturalisation as subjects of Malay rulers, in which they renounced their foreign nationality and the rights, powers, and privileges that were associated with it.¹²⁴ The state nationality institution distinguished between individuals who desired to establish Malaya as their native country and those who desired to remain as foreigners. Chinese, Indians, and Pakistanis were required to choose between their original nationality and federal citizenship.¹²⁵ After eleven years of communal bargaining, *jus soli* was ultimately implemented in 1957. Non-Malays were eligible for federal citizenship if they were born within the Federation on or after Independence Day.¹²⁶

Conclusion

This paper explores how repatriation practices, immigration control, and citizenship legislation affected the belonging of Overseas Chinese. Three mechanisms—repatriation practices, citizenship liberalisation, and immigration legislation—delineated the differences between “aliens” and “citizens”, thus shaping their political status and the right to stay in Malaya. First, the practice of deportation demonstrated an obvious distinction between citizens and aliens. The repatriation regime of British Malaya was used as a weapon by the British colonial authorities to maintain law and order against undesirable alien Chinese individuals involved in secret societies, criminal activities, banditry, and communist activities. During the economic depression in the 1930s, unemployed aliens were also subject to repatriation. Chinese labourers were deported during the era of unemployment, especially the Chinese mining coolies in Malaya. Mass detention and deportation under the Emergency Regulation 17D were only applicable to aliens. Federal citizens and British subjects born in the Federation or the Colony were not subject to the regulation. Second, the Emergency (Immigration Ordinance) Regulations 1952 further widened the distinction between citizens and aliens, thus restricting the right of entry to federal citizens and British subjects. Without citizenship, long-term residents in the Federation were required to apply for re-entry permits. Third, the State Nationality Enactment 1952 sought to include local-born children into the fold of citizenship. The automatic right of second-generation aliens to federal citizenship was symbolised by the delayed *jus soli* provisions of the

Enactment. On the condition that one of their parents was born in the Federation, children born locally were granted citizenship through operation of law. Under the citizenship amendment in 1952, these new federal citizens could enjoy the right of entry and be excluded from deportation practices

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¹⁷ In recent years, the definition of *Huaqiao* has been restricted to Chinese nationals residing in a foreign country by the People's Republic of China. There are alternative terms for individuals of Chinese descent who are of foreign nationality (*waiji huaren*), *Mianhua* (Burmese Chinese), and *Mahua* (Malaysian Chinese). In contemporary time, the English term "overseas Chinese" (or "the Chinese overseas" or "the Chinese abroad") has been translated back into Chinese as "*haiwai huaren*." This could evade the political and legal connotations of the term *Huaqiao*, and the English term is employed in the ethnic and neutral sense of anyone identifiably Chinese who is outside China. Wang, 1985, p. 81.

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¹²² Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance, 1952, art. 125.

¹²⁴ State of Johore Nationality Enactment, Enactment No. 2 of 1952, art. 5(2) & art. 8(3).

¹²⁵ Carnell, Francis G. 1952. “Malayan Citizenship Legislation,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 1, no. 4, 1952, p. 515.

¹²⁶ Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, 1957, art. 14(1)(b).

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to the Editor-in-Chief of JEBAT and the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable insights and constructive critiques on the earlier version of the paper. Their comments are tremendously helpful in improving the hypothetical inquiry, thematic analysis, research gap, and findings. This research was supported by Universiti Sains Malaysia [Bridging Grant: R501-LR-RND003-0000000915-0000].

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