Intermarriage in Malaysia

Shyamala NAGARAJ*
University of Malaya

Abstract: Historically, intermarriage has had important consequences on the ethnic fabric of Malaysian society. Despite this, there is a paucity of literature on the subject. This paper aims to fill the void by assessing the extent of intermarriages in Malaysia and how such marriages may have contributed to the development of plurality. The findings are based on a two per cent sample of the 2000 Population Census. It would appear that intermarriage is a function of opportunity as dictated by diversity of the society. Intermarriage rates are higher in ethnically more diverse East Malaysia than in Peninsular Malaysia, implying that social distances between ethnic groups are much shorter in East Malaysia. Age, gender, education, occupation, place of residence, religion, migrant effects and ethnicity all materially affect the probability of intermarriage. There is some evidence, but only among certain ethnic groups and gender, for the status exchange hypothesis that minorities with high socio-economic status who intermarry exchange this with higher social status of the dominant groups, but not for the hypothesis that high socio-economic status is more important than race in intermarriage.

1. Introduction

Historically, intermarriage has had important consequences on the ethnic fabric of Malaysian society. In the eighteenth century, Sino-Malay marriage was not uncommon, producing in Malacca the distinct Baba group which is culturally and linguistically more Malay than Chinese but religion-wise, diverse. Yen (1982) noted that Sino-Malay marriage reduced with the increase in Chinese female immigrants at the turn of the nineteenth century. Vlieland (1934), the Superintendent of the 1931 Census of British Malaya, highlighted geographical location as the main factor that has contributed to the diversity of Malayan society with such varied groups as Arab and Indian traders, Chinese traders and seafarers, Sumatran and Javanese migrants, European administrators and Portuguese adventurers. In describing the plurality of the society in Malaya, Vlieland (1934: 4-5), observed thus:

"The greater part of the Malay Peninsula (i.e., all but the British colony of the Straits Settlements) is, in constitutional theory and political practice as well as in name, the country of the Malay; in actual fact the whole peninsula is a kind of no man's land in which geographic controls have produced, through the medium of migration, a population of unique characteristics and a civilisation that is essentially alien."

Intermarriage in Malaysia appears therefore to have had a recognisable effect on the evolving ethnic structure of society. Yet, studies on intermarriage in Malaya have found the rate to be low (Rabushka 1971; Hirschman 1975). Rabushka (1971) concluded that Malaya remained as "plural and as polarised as before." This contrasts with Chong's (2009)

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* Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
   Email: *shyamala@um.edu.my*

observation of the use of terms like Chindians, Chibans and Sinokadazans to denote the children of intermarriages, a sign that marriages between certain ethnic groups are common enough for society to develop an ordinary usage. Has the rate of intermarriage increased in multi-ethnic Malaysia where even at a high level of aggregation, 18 ethnic groups can be identified (Nagaraj *et al.* 2009), or is this the effect of the incorporation of more ethnically diverse East Malaysia to more polarised Peninsular Malaysia? The paucity of literature on the subject of intermarriage makes it difficult to answer this question. Much of the literature is confined to the study of specific communities. These include the unique *Peranakan* groups (Fujimoto 1988; Tan 1988; Gill 2001; Dhoraisingam 2006) as well investigations on social and community aspects of intermarriages (Sanusi 1981; Tan *et al.* 2008).

This paper seeks to fill the void. It provides information on the extent of intermarriage in Malaysia and evaluates how such marriages may contribute to the development of plurality in the country. The discussion begins with a brief review of the literature on marriage and intermarriage, and includes a review of previous literature on Malaysia in Section 2. Section 3 describes the methodology. This is followed by a discussion of the findings based on a two per cent sample of the 2000 Population Census in Section 4. The paper concludes with a summary and some implications for plurality in Malaysia in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

In *A Theory of Marriage*, Becker (1973; 1974a) explains that, assuming that people marry to maximise their own well-being, benefits from marriage are most efficiently utilised when individuals match up with others of similar traits. In his or her social interactions, an individual seeks to maximise 'social income', which is own income plus the value of his or her social environment (Becker 1974b). Thus, apart from factors such as education and religion, there may be benefits arising from cultural similarities in marriage. Kalmijn (1998) cites three broad potential reasons for endogamy (marriage within the same group): the individual's preference to find a mate similar to him or herself, parental and societal blocks to certain types of marriages and constraints in exposure to those of a different background. Intermarriage between locals and migrants are further complicated by immigration rules and laws (Favero-Karunaratna 2004).

These arguments explain why most marriages take place between persons from the same ethnic group and/or the same religion. They also explain why in the literature (e.g., Callister *et al.* 2005) marriage between two persons of different ethnic groups is seen as providing information on the degree of closeness between the two ethnic groups. More specifically, intermarriage is taken to be a measure of social distance (Bogardus 1925), the willingness of people to participate in social contacts of varying degrees of contact with members of social groups other than their own. In this regard, intermarriage has been used more often as a measure of assimilation (Lee *et al.* 1974; McCaa 1989; Kalbach 2002; Meng and Gregory 2005, Rodríguez-García 2007), even though intermarriage does not appear to always indicate weak boundaries between groups (Fu 2001). Furthermore, Favero-Karunaratna (2004) argues that as regulations regarding intermarriage may affect basic human rights of the nationals of a country, the 'inter-cultural, inter-religious, multilingual and inter-racial marriages' or 'mixed marriages' reveal the intricacies and complexities of nation-building processes.

Rates of intermarriage differ by ethnic group and gender (Monahan 1976). Merton (1941) sought to explain why more African-American males married whites than African-American females. His exchange thesis is that in the intermarriage, social and economic resources trade off against the social disadvantages of marrying into another ethnicity (Jacob and Labov 2002: 624). Wilson (1978) argued that with the growth of the African-American middle class, African Americans with college education and professional occupations were less likely to encounter overt racism. Jacobs and Labov (2002) explain why in some ethnic groups in the United States like Asian-Americans, more females than males out-marry while in other ethnic groups like African-Americans, more males than females out-marry. Using a one per cent sample of the 1990 US Population Census, they examined the validity of two plausible theses. Based on Merton's exchange thesis, they posited that males are more likely to out-marry in communities where their economic resources are greater than females. To test Wilson's (1978) analysis of race and class, they examined whether gender differentials in intermarriage narrowed among the middle class. They found that the results were more consistent with the prediction derived from Wilson's discussion of class and race in that intermarriage is more likely among the middle class, for whites as well as minorities. However, gender differentials were reduced only for some ethnic groups and not for others. Kalbach (2002) found that in a study of Canadian marriages across time, there was no change in the trend of males being more likely to marry out than females.

Among the factors used in the literature to explain the level of ethnic intermarriage within a country are "attitudes; the relative size of ethnic groups and sex ratios within them; age and education (with higher levels of intermarriage amongst young people and, connected with age, amongst the better educated part of the population); geographic ethnic segregation" (Callister *et al.* 2005: 59). For groups that have migrated into a country, intermarriage rates are higher amongst the second and third generations (Rosenfeld 2002; Giorgas and Jones 2002; Kalmijn and van Tubergen 2006; McCaa *et al.* 2006). Focussing on determinants of intermarriage among immigrants to the US, and using a one per cent sample of the 1980 U.S. Population Census, Chiswick and Houseworth (2008) found that intermarriage is more likely among those with similar educational levels and among those with multiple ancestries. They also found that immigrant women are significantly less likely to intermarry compared to immigrant men. Intermarriage is less likely the greater the availability of potential spouses within the same ethnic group, the closer the individual educational attainment to the group's average educational attainment and the greater the linguistic distance of own language from the English language. However, as immigrant populations grow, intermarriage decreases and social distance increases (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

Education has been cited as an important factor in intermarriage. Furtado (2006) argues that human capital enables easier adaptation to a different culture, greater mixing and assortative matching on education. In a more recent study, Furtado and Theodoropoulos (2008) find further evidence that assortative matching on education differs by age, place of birth and ethnicity. It is relatively more important for the native born rather than the foreign born, for the foreign born that arrived young rather than old, and for Asians rather than Hispanics. Not surprisingly then, Gevrek (2008) finds a substantial wage premium for intermarried immigrants compared to immigrants who married within the same group. However, the premium declines for the second generation.

Turning to culturally diverse Malaysia, we note that studies on marriage have generally focussed on the role of marriage in family formation. Accordingly, age at marriage, remarriage and in recent years, non marriage have been important topics of research (Tan *et al.* 1986; Arshat *et al.* 1988; Tan and Jones 1990; Tey 2006; Tey 2007a). However, in all these studies there is some reference to intermarriage and especially to its low extent. Drawing on the findings for Singapore, and the ethnic composition of Malaysia, Jones (1980: 282) concluded that the rate of intermarriage in Malaysia would have been less than the five per cent recorded in Singapore for marriages registered between 1962 and 1970. Indeed, Rabushka (1971) assessing registered marriages in Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown as well as information from a sample survey of respondents and their parents found that only about one per cent of marriages in 1966 were intermarriages. The 1984/85 Malaysian Population and Family Survey also found that less than one per cent of Malay and Chinese women were married to men of a different ethnicity (Arshat *et al.* 1988: 34). On the other hand, based on a two percent sample of the 2000 Census, Tey (2007a: 258) reported that intermarriage was less than three per cent of all marriages in Malaysia. These findings indicate that Jones' conclusion of uncommon intermarriage is not far off the mark and that over time there has been little change in the rate of intermarriage.

Most of the earlier studies focussed on Peninsular Malaysia and intermarriage among its three main ethnic groups. Arshat *et al.* (1988) note in their analysis of the 1984/5 Malaysian Population and Family Survey that intermarriage among Malays and Chinese was less than 1 per cent. Based on a two per cent sample of the 1970 Population Census for Peninsular Malaysia, Tan (1989) found that Malays had the lowest, the Indians had the next lowest and the Chinese the highest tendency to out-marry. At the time, Chinese and Indians together constituted close to 50 per cent of the population, with the Malays forming the majority. Among the Malays who intermarried, the highest tendency was with Indians, possibly because of similar religious affiliation. The Chinese who intermarried tended to marry a person from the 'other' category. The more recent studies have considered the greater diversity observable in East Malaysia. The rate of intermarriage varies in different parts of the country and by whether the 'other' group is foreign.[1] Tey (2007b) found that intermarriage is more common in East Malaysia where there is a greater diversity of ethnic groups. He also found gender differentials in out-marriage between Malaysians and foreigners, with males more likely than females to have a foreign spouse.

Given the paucity of similar studies for Malaysia, we draw upon the literature for culturally similar Singapore to further understand intermarriage in the region. Kuo and Hassan (1976) analysed marriage registration data between 1966 and 1969 and found that intermarriage was more likely among those who had been previously married, those who crossed religious lines; and those who come from the lower and upper occupational groups. The average age at marriage was not different between endogamous and exogamous

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[1] In Malaysia, it is generally perceived that intermarriage between locals and foreigners is not viewed positively by the authorities. See, for example, Malaysia Curbs Intermarriage, Tightens Migration Policies, March 18, 2000, *islamOnline.net*, www.islamonline.net. Moreover, foreign spouses who are women face a more cumbersome set of rules compared to those who are men (Ordeal of a foreign spouse, *Aliran Monthly*, August 2008). Foreign spouses also have to renew their visas every year. Migrant workers, who are generally male, are not permitted to bring in their families.

marriages. Muslims and Christians were more likely to cross ethnic boundaries in marriage than were persons from other religions (Hassan 1971), while a higher level of education was found to be not necessary for intermarriage (Hassan and Benjamin 1973). Lee *et al.* (1974) found that in terms of social distance, the largest ethnic group, the Chinese, were the most isolated preferring to marry within their own grouping. Comparing Malay, Indian and Chinese family organisation, Hassan and Benjamin (1973) concluded that family organisation plays a role in determining whether non ethnic factors override ethnic factors in marriage. They also found gender differentials in inter-marriage rates across ethnic groups. They noted that "among Indian/Pakistanis and Malays, nearly one-and-a-half times as many males married out as females; among Chinese, nearly five times as many females married out as males; and among Europeans, nearly five times as many males married out as females" (Hassan and Benjamin 1973: 736).

3. Methodology

The findings in this paper are based on a two per cent sample of the 2000 Housing and Population Census for Malaysia. For each household, the head of household was selected if he or she were married along with the spouse. The sample was confined to those aged 15 and above. This yielded 71,701 marriages. A data file was created that included the attributes of both partners in the marriage on each record. Thus, the husband's characteristics as well as all of his wife's attributes are available for analysis. We believe these matches are as accurate as possible given the data limitations of the census. By this procedure, all marriages where either spouse had died or was widowed were excluded.

A study of intermarriage will have to consider separately the situation for males and for females, since the distribution by ethnicity would be different for each of these two groups. The study of marriage rates among males needs to consider the availability of spouses among females. Gray (1987) describes the marriage market as one where an individual in a society has a propensity (which is a function of a range of social and psychological characteristics) to marry each member of the opposite sex. The probability that a marriage occurs between two persons can then be decomposed as the probability that the two partners will meet (opportunity) and that having met, they will be chosen by the other as the marriage partner (preference). Gray's (1987) index seeks to measure the extent to which an individual prefers to marry someone from his or her ethnic group relative to marrying outside. However, McCaa (1989) shows that Gray's indices are principally based on group size thus indicating opportunity but not preference. Jones (1991) shows that Gray's index obtains the odds of an individual marrying someone from a given ethnic group conditional on being from the same ethnic group, relative to the unconditional odds that a spouse is from the same ethnic group. McCaa (1989) and Jones (1991) suggest the use of the odds ratio of in-marriage to out-marriage. Jones (1991) further emphasises that a table on marriage is merely showing outcomes, and that making inferences about preferences and assimilation is at best an imperfect exercise.

In the following analysis of intermarriage, we first considered the effects of gender and group size relative to the total population (a proxy for opportunity to interact with other groups) and homogamy (marriage between individuals of similar religious, educational and occupational background). This provided insight into the social distances between the

ethnic groups. We then examined the plausibility of the status exchange hypothesis (Merton 1941) that minorities with high socio-economic status who intermarry exchange this with higher status of the dominant groups and of the hypothesis that high socio-economic status is more important than race (Wilson 1978). If Merton's hypothesis is valid, intermarriage is more likely when both spouses have high socio-economic status and the spouses are from different ethnic communities, one dominant and the other non-dominant. If Wilson's hypothesis is valid, intermarriage is more likely when both spouses have high socio-economic status irrespective of the dominance of the ethnic group of either spouse. In evaluating these hypotheses, occupation was used as a measure of socio-economic status. Statistical analyses were carried out using Stata/SE 10.0 for Windows.

4. Findings & Discussion

We began first by considering the marriages in the population. Table 1 shows, for each ethnic group, the percentage in the population, the ratio of male to female percentages computed for ages greater than 14, the percentage of marriages by gender and the corresponding ratio of male to female percentages. The percentage of marriages indicates the propensity to marry a member of the opposite sex. For each ethnic group, this is not very different from the population percentage for males or for females. In broad terms, the propensity for marriage is not that different across ethnicity.

However, some differences may be observed between the males and females in certain ethnic groups. The male/female ratio of percentage of marriages is close to 1 for Malays, Chinese and Indians, but nevertheless positive, indicating a slightly higher propensity for males in these groups to marry compared to females. Furthermore, comparing with the corresponding male/female ratio in the population, we see that the difference is much greater for the Malays and Indians. That is, taking into account the opportunity for marriage (the size of the group); males are more likely in these two groups to be married compared to

Table 1: Ethnic distribution of population and marriages by gender, and ratios of male to female percentages by ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Percentage in population[a]	Percentage of marriages[a]		Male/Female ratio of percentage of marriages	Male/Female ratio in population[b]
		Males	Females		
Malays	51.0	51.1	50.8	1.006	0.970
Other *Bumiputera*	10.9	10.0	10.3	0.971	0.990
Chinese	24.4	25.8	25.4	1.016	1.010
Indians	7.2	7.4	7.3	1.014	0.962
Others	1.2	0.9	1.0	0.900	0.960
Non citizens	5.4	4.8	5.2	0.923	1.283
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.000	1.000

a. Computed for age > 14
b. Computed for age > 14, for each ethnic group, as male percentage over female percentage

Table 2: Percentage distribution of males married to females by ethnic groups

Female	Male					
	Malays	Other Bumiputera	Chinese	Indians	Others	Non citizens
Malays	97.4	3.2	0.3	0.6	10.6	9.6
Other Bumiputera	1.0	92.3	1.4	0.2	7.3	2.9
Chinese	0.1	1.5	96.5	1.2	4.0	4.1
Indians	0.1	0.0	0.3	95.8	0.4	1.4
Others	0.2	0.7	0.3	0.1	61.3	3.2
Non citizens	1.2	2.3	1.2	2.1	16.4	78.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Percentage distribution of females married to males by ethnic groups

Male	Female					
	Malays	Other Bumiputera	Chinese	Indians	Others	Non citizens
Malays	98.0	4.8	0.3	0.4	10.0	11.3
Other Bumiputera	0.6	89.5	0.6	0.0	7.0	4.5
Chinese	0.2	3.5	97.9	1.1	8.6	5.8
Indians	0.1	0.1	0.3	97.5	0.9	3.0
Others	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.1	57.5	2.9
Non citizens	0.9	1.4	0.8	0.9	16.0	72.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chinese males. On the other hand, the male/female ratio of percentage of marriages is considerably less than 1 for the Other *Bumiputra*, and especially Others and Non citizens. Females in these groups have a higher propensity to marry compared to males. For the Non citizens, however, the male/female ratio in the population is much greater than 1, indicating that despite a stronger male presence, the propensity to marry is much less.

Tables 2 and 3 provide information on intermarriage by ethnicity. Table 2 relates to the female and Table 3 to the male percentage distribution of marriages by ethnicity. About 4.6 per cent of all the marriages were between persons of different ethnic groups. Once again, there was a distinct difference in patterns between the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups on the one hand, and the Other *Bumiputera*, Others and Non citizens on the other. The diagonal values indicate that for the first grouping, intermarriage is quite rare, whereas for the second, intermarriage is much more common. Irrespective of gender, the intermarriage rates were lowest for the dominant group in the population, the Malays. About 2.5 per cent of male and 2.0 per cent of female spouses had married out of their ethnic group. These rates were higher but nevertheless lower than average for the Chinese (3.5, males; 2.1, females) and the Indians (4.2, males; 3.9, females). In contrast, the rates were higher than average for Other *Bumiputera* (7.7, males; 10.5, females) and Non citizens (21.2, males; 27.5, females)

Table 4: Percentage distribution of intermarriages by gender and ethnicity, and male to female ratios by ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Percentage in population	Percentage distribution of intermarriages		Male/Female ratio of percentage of intermarriages[a]	Male/Female ratio of percentage of marriages[b]
		Males	Females		
Malays	51.0	27.7	21.6	1.300	1.006
Other *Bumiputera*	10.9	16.6	23.2	0.733	0.971
Chinese	24.4	19.4	11.5	1.667	1.016
Indians	7.2	6.7	3.9	1.680	1.014
Others	1.2	7.6	8.9	0.911	0.900
Non-citizens	5.4	21.9	30.8	0.768	0.923
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.000	1.000

a. Computed as column 3/column 4
b. Column 5 of Table 1

and highest for the smallest group, the Others (38.7, males; 42.4, females). Furthermore, intermarriage among those in the first grouping occurred more often with those in the second grouping. In particular, we note that 92.1 per cent of Malay males, 83.0 per cent of Chinese males and 57.3 per cent of Indian males who intermarried, married women from the second grouping. The corresponding figures for females are, respectively, 87.9, 70.1 and 40.8 per cent.

To understand the gender dimensions of intermarriage further, we examined the percentage distribution of intermarriages by gender and ethnicity, and the ratio of male to female percentages by ethnicity (Table 4). For both males and females, compared to the percentage in the population, the percentage of intermarriage was lowest among the Malays, the dominant group in the population and highest among the Non citizens. Also shown in Table 4 are the male/female ratios of percentage of marriages. Comparing ratios for marriage to those for intermarriage, we find that males among the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups had a much higher propensity to intermarry, while females among the other groups had a much higher propensity to intermarry. The exception was the Others group where males had a slightly higher propensity to intermarry.

Intermarriage also varies by other aspects. The percentages of intermarriages and marriages by state of residence are shown in Table 5. The percentages of intermarriages were greater than the corresponding percentages of marriages for Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, Sabah and Labuan. Selangor also had a notable percentage of intermarriages. Table 6 shows the percentage distribution of marriages and intermarriages by place of birth. It is clear that a much higher percentage of intermarriages occured among those born outside the country. Table 7 provides information on the intermarriage rate, that is, the percentage of intermarriages among all marriages and homogamy. The intermarriage rate is higher than average for couples who do not share the same religion, where the husband has a higher socio-economic status than the wife and where either spouse is young.

Table 5: Percentage of intermarriages and marriages by state of
            residence

State	Percentage of intermarriages	Percentage of marriages
Johor	8.8	10.7
Kedah	3.0	7.5
Kelantan	3.1	5.4
Melaka	1.8	2.7
Negeri Sembilan	2.9	3.9
Pahang	3.1	5.8
Pulau Pinang	3.7	5.7
Perak	3.6	9.3
Perlis	0.6	1.0
Selangor	13.0	18.9
Terengganu	1.4	3.8
Sabah	32.9	10.2
Sarawak	13.3	8.7
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	7.1	6.1
W.P. Labuan	1.7	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Percentage of intermarriage and marriage by place of birth

Born	Males		Females	
	Percentage of intermarriages	Percentage of marriages	Percentage of intermarriages	Percentage of marriages
In Malaysia	72.0	92.3	65.6	92.1
Outside of Malaysia	28.0	7.7	34.4	7.9
Total	4.6	100.0	4.6	100.0

Table 7: Intermarriage rates for various groups in the population

Total population	4.6
Among couples with different religions	18.0
Among couples where the husband has a higher level of education	5.6
Among couples where the husband has a higher occupational code (single digit)	4.9
Among couples where the husband is aged less than 30	6.1
Among couples where the wife is aged less than 30	6.5

Table 8: Variables in the logistic regression model

Factor	Variable	Description
Intermarriage	Inter	1 if couple are of different ethnicity, dependent variable
Age	AgeM	Age of husband
	Age	Age of wife
Education	EduchighM	1 if husband has more than secondary education
	EduclowM	1 if husband has no education
	Educhigh	1 if wife has more than secondary education
	Educlow	1 if wife has no education
	Educhigher	1 if educational attainment of husband is . different from that of wife
Occupation	OcchighM	1 if husband is in occupation of single digit code 1,2,3
	Occhigh	1 if wife is in occupation of single digit code 1,2,3
Religion	MuslimM	1 if husband's religion is Islam
	Muslim	1 if wife's religion is Islam
	Religdiff	1 if religions of couple are different
Migrant effects	YrM	Years husband has been in Malaysia, 0 if non migrant or migrant in year 2000
	Yr	Years wife has been in Malaysia, 0 if non migrant or migrant in year 2000
Ethnicity	Other *BumiputeraM*	1 if ethnicity of husband is Other *Bumiputera*
	Other *Bumiputera*	1 if ethnicity of wife is Other *Bumiputera*
	ChineseM	1 if husband is Chinese
	Chinese	1 if wife is Chinese
	IndianM	1 if husband is Indian
	Indian	1 if wife is Indian
	OthersM	1 if husband is from Other ethnic groups
	Others	1 if wife is from Other ethnic groups
	Non citizensM	1 if husband is a Non citizen
	Non citizens	1 if wife is a Non citizen
	FirstM	1 if husband's ethnicity is a Malay, Chinese or Indian
	Second	1 if wife's ethnicity is Other *Bumiputera*, Others or Non citizen
Place of residence	Diverse	1 if place of residence is in Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Sarawak or Labuan

Table 9: Results of logistic regression

Model 1*		Model 2*		Model 3*	
Variable	Odds ratio	Variable	Odds ratio	Variable	Odds ratio
AgeM	0.997			AgeM	1.018
		Age	1.001	Age	0.976
EduchighM	1.263			EduchighM	1.166
EduclowM	0.703			EduclowM	0.575
		Educhigh	1.543		
		Educlow	0.634		
				Educhigher	1.434
OcchighM	1.392			OcchighM	1.526
		Occhigh	1.186	Occhigh	1.182
MuslimM	2.506			MuslimM	1.763
		Muslim	1.737		
				Religdiff	6.651
YrM	1.025			YrM	1.047
		Yr	1.015	Yr	1.011
Diverse	2.528	Diverse	1.395	Diverse	1.273
Other *BumiputeraM*	3.122	Other *Bumiputera*	8.185		
ChineseM	2.993	Chinese	1.867		
IndianM	4.219	Indian	2.325		
OthersM	22.102	Others	49.076		
Non citizensM	6.751	Non citizens	20.495		
				FirstM	3.085
				Second	21.183
L. R (Chi-sqed)	5072.38	L. R (Chi-sqed)	5784.65	L. R (Chi-sqed)	5724.3
Pseudo-Rsq	0.188	Pseudo-Rsq	0.214	Pseudo-Rsq	0.212
N	71701	N	71701	N	71701

*All statistical tests for coefficients and the likelihood ratio were significant at $p<0.000$

We next examined the net effects of these factors on the odds ratio for intermarriage. Table 8 shows the variables included in the logistic regression model. The dependent variable is Inter which takes on the value 1 if the couple are of different ethnicities. The independent variables take into account whether husband or wife, and describe age, education, occupation, place of residence (same for husband and wife), religion, migrant effects and ethnicity. Table 9 shows the estimated odds ratios for three models. Model 1 is

based on the information for husbands only, Model 2 is based on the information for wives only and Model 3 is based on information for both husbands and wives. The tests on the estimated coefficients and the likelihood ratio tests are all highly significant (p<0.00).

Comparing Models 1 and 2, it can be seen that, other than for age, the odds ratios are in the same direction for males and females. For an increase of a year in age, the odds for intermarriage were slightly greater for females and slightly less for males. The odds for intermarriage were greater if the husband or wife had more than secondary education, was in a higher level of occupation, was Muslim, lived in Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Sarawak or Labuan or had stayed longer in Malaysia. The odds for intermarriage were lesser among those who had no education. The odds for intermarriage were higher for all ethnic groups compared to Malays, and in particular, they were highest for the Others. However there were differences across gender. Chinese males were almost as likely as Other *Bumiputera* males to intermarry, while Indian males were more likely than either of these groups to intermarry. Other males also had the highest odds of intermarriage compared to Malay males. In contrast, Chinese and Indian females were much less likely to intermarry compared to Other *Bumiputera*, while Other females had the highest odds of intermarriage compared to Malay females.

Information on both husband and wife is included in Model 3. This model includes variables that seek to capture husband-wife dynamics. A variable that captures the higher educational attainment of either husband or wife and a variable that captures the situation where the religions of the couple are different are included. The ethnic groups have been collapsed into two groupings, the first for Malay, Chinese or Indian and the second grouping for Other *Bumiputera*, Others or Non citizens. This serves to ensure that cells have enough frequencies as well as highlights the nature of intermarriage between the two groupings.

The odds ratios for husband's and wife's age reverse, showing slightly higher odds for males to intermarry (1.02) for each year's increase in age compared to slightly decreased odds for females (0.98). Education still has a strong effect (husband's higher education increases the odds to 1.17, husband's lack of education decreases the odds to 0.58), but now the positive effect of higher education of one spouse can be observed (1.43). Higher occupation of either spouse (husband, 1.53, higher than for wife, 1.18), being Muslim (1.76) or from a culturally diverse region (1.27) also increases the odds ratio for intermarriage. Different religions of the spouses increase the odds considerably (6.65) compared to couples with a similar religion. For each additional year of stay in the country, the odds are also positive for intermarriage (1.05 for husbands, 1.01 for wives). Most interesting are the results for ethnicity. The odds ratio for intermarriage is high if the husband is from the first grouping (3.09) or the wife is from the second grouping (21.18). Viewed another way, if all the variables are held at their means, the net percentage of intermarriages is 2.5 per cent (recall that gross overall percentage noted above is 4.6 per cent). For husbands educated beyond secondary school, with an occupation that falls within the first three single digit occupational classification codes, wife with a different level of education and religion, and they are either Malay, Chinese or Indian, the percentage of intermarriages increases to 23.7 per cent. By additionally focusing on those in this group who live in Kuala Lumpur, Sabah, Sarawak or Labuan and where the wife is either Other *Bumiputera*, Others or Non citizen, the percentage of intermarriages increases to 85.0 per cent.

Table 10: Calculation of probabilities of intermarriage for selected independent variables*

Description of scenarios	Values of variables				Probability of intermarriage
	OcchighM	Occhigh	FirstM	Second	
1 Both spouses with high SES, husband from first grouping, wife from second grouping	1	1	1	1	0.38
2 Both spouses with high SES, husband from second grouping, wife from first grouping	1	1	0	0	0.01
3 Both spouses with high SES, husband and wife from first grouping	1	1	1	0	0.03
4 Both spouses with high SES, husband and wife from second grouping	1	1	0	1	0.17

* The other variables are held constant at their mean values.

Table 10 provides estimates of probability of intermarriage for different scenarios. To understand the effect of higher socio-economic status, we considered four scenarios where both spouses have high socio-economic status as measured by occupation[2] but ethnicity varies: Scenario 1 (husband only in first grouping), Scenario 2 (wife only in first grouping), Scenario 3 (both spouse in first grouping) and Scenario 4 (both spouses in second grouping). The probability of intermarriage is highest for Scenario 1 (probability of intermarriage =0.38), almost twice as much as for Scenario 4 (probability of intermarriage =0.17) where both spouses are from more ethnically diverse communities. In contrast, the probabilities of intermarriage are very low for Scenarios 2 (probability of intermarriage =0.01) and 3 (probability of intermarriage =0.03).

To summarise, the overall propensity to marry does not differ greatly between the different ethnic groups, but gender differences within ethnic groups are quite apparent. The overall marriage pattern by ethnic groups show a greater similarity between Malays, Chinese and Indians on the one hand, and Other *Bumiputera,* Others and Non citizens on the other. Males in the first grouping were slightly more likely to be married compared to females, while females in the second grouping were more likely to be married compared to males. These two broad groupings of the ethnic communities are also observed for intermarriages. Intermarriages were more common in the ethnic groups that are smaller and/ or more diverse, and where the spouse was more likely from the dominant group. Intermarriages were not just more common among the second grouping of Other *Bumiputera,* Others and Non citizens, about 74.1 per cent of intermarriages were between the two groupings. Furthermore, males in the first grouping had a much higher propensity to intermarry than females, while females in the second grouping had a much higher propensity to intermarry than males. Irrespective of gender, the intermarriage rates were lowest for the

dominant group in the population, the Malays, higher for the Chinese and then for the Indians but for all these three groups, the rate was lower than average. It is pertinent to note that this ranking is different from that observed by Tan (1989) where Chinese had the greatest propensity to out-marry. The intermarriage rates were higher than average for Other *Bumiputera*, Non citizens and highest for Others.

Certain regions also had more mixed marriages. For Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan, the population is by its very structure made up of many small communities each with its own cultural and often social milieu. About 77.8 per cent of Other *Bumiputera,* Others and Non citizens, groupings which comprise many smaller ethnic communities, reside in East Malaysia. In contrast, about 91.8 per cent of Malays, Chinese and Indian reside in Peninsular Malaysia. For Kuala Lumpur and the urban areas of Selangor, the diversity arises from the fact that these are part of the Klang Valley, the major urban growth centre in the country. This also explains in part why intermarriages were more likely among persons with different religions or the young. These findings indicate that social distances between ethnic groups are much shorter in East Malaysia than in Peninsular Malaysia.

We also considered Merton's (1941) and Wilson's (1978) theses for intermarriages. Merton argues that the minority males who are able to attain high social and economic resources/status are able to marry into socially higher status groups because their women are willing to overlook their spouse's ethnicity in return for the high social and economic resources/status that they can obtain by marrying their minority spouses. On the other hand, Wilson's argument is that those from a minority ethnic group who are able to acquire the right education and hence enter into the right occupations, face lower or no overt forms of discrimination through racism and therefore find it easier to marry into an ethnic group with a socially higher status. If Merton's hypothesis is valid, we should find in our data that intermarriage is more likely when both spouses have high socio-economic status and the spouses are from different ethnic communities, one dominant and the other non-dominant. If Wilson's hypothesis is valid, intermarriage is more likely when both spouses have high socio-economic status irrespective of the dominance of the ethnic group of either spouse. The scenario analyses show that there is no evidence for Wilson's hypothesis. There is evidence for Merton's exchange hypothesis but only for males from the dominant group and females from the non-dominant group. We also note that in both ethnic groupings, the percentage of husbands in the higher occupational status (first grouping 24.7 per cent, second grouping 12.5 per cent) was greater than that for the wives (first grouping 11.4 per cent, second grouping 4.3 per cent); so Jacob and Labov's (2002) argument that it is the males' greater resources relative to females in the group that increase the likelihood of intermarriage, does not apply here.

5. Conclusion

Despite the plurality of the Malaysian population, there have been few studies on intermarriage in Malaysia. In part this is because intermarriage is not common, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia, historically the main region of study in Malaysia. Our study, based on a two per cent sample of the 2000 Census, found that the percentage of intermarriages for Malaysia as a whole was 4.6. However, it was much less, about 3 per cent, for Peninsular Malaysia with its three dominant ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians compared to 11.6 per cent in East Malaysia which is much more diverse, being home to many smaller

ethnic communities. Compared to earlier studies on Malaya or Peninsular Malaysia (Rabushka 1971; Arshat 1988) which found a rate of about one per cent, this study suggest that there has been an increase in the intermarriage rate in this region. This is due in part to the increase in intermarriage rates of the dominant ethnic groupings, but it is also due to the large presence of non dominant groupings (especially Non citizens) resident in Peninsular Malaysia.

The analyses found that age, gender, education, occupation, place of residence, religion, migrant effects and ethnicity all materially affect the probability of intermarriage. These findings conform to those of other studies (Hassan and Benjamin 1973; Monahan 1976; Lee and Fernandez 1998). Rates of intermarriage differed by ethnic group and gender. There was a distinct difference in marriage and intermarriage patterns between the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups on the one hand, and the Other *Bumiputera*, Others and Non citizens on the other. Intermarriage between males in the dominant Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic grouping and females from the second ethnic grouping of Other *Bumiputera*, Others and Non citizens was more common. It would appear that the social distances between the ethnic communities in East Malaysia are much shorter than those between communities in Peninsular Malaysia.

Education, which has been cited as an important factor in intermarriage (Furtado 2006; Furtado and Theodoropoulos 2008) was found to be important. In fact, intermarriage was more likely among couples where the educational attainment was different. Similar to Kuo and Hassan (1976), our findings show that those who come from the upper occupational groups, and those who cross religious lines were more likely to intermarry. Muslims were also more likely to cross ethnic boundaries in marriage than were persons from other religions, a finding also observed by Hassan (1971). There is evidence for Merton's status exchange hypothesis in explaining intermarriage but only for specific gender and ethnic groups, but not for Wilson's 'class more important than race' hypothesis. This status exchange argument has been used in the Malaysian context to explain that intermarriage with Chinese enabled the *Orang Asli* to improve their economic standing (Ibrahim 2000).

Dominant communities may have strong family organisations that create barriers to intermarriage, but these barriers weaken in the culturally diverse environments where the young and better educated seek work or where the availability of a spouse of the same ethnicity is limited. For example, non Malay women may be willing to marry Malay men and convert to Islam as long as the men they are marrying come from wealthy or upper class Malay families. Males who work away from home may then be more prepared to find spouses in the immediate community rather than search for spouses from their ethnic group back home. Being members of a higher status group (in terms of occupation or education) and as long as the local women are able to fit in with their families, either by being more docile or being of equal social standing, there would be little reason not to find a spouse among the local women. It appears that the overwhelming factor affecting the probability of intermarriage would be the opportunity for marriage which in turn is related to the diversity of the community (a function of the sizes of its different ethnicities and gender composition), and availability of spouse within the same ethnic group.

It can be argued that there is greater plurality in Malaysia today, and that it is not just because of more plural East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia today is more plural compared to Rabushka's Malaya. The extent of intermarriage in both Peninsular and East Malaysia

lends credence to Chong's (2009) observation, referred to earlier, of the many terms given to children of mixed marriages. Most of these, like Sinokadazan, refer to communities common in East Malaysia, but terms like Chindian refer to communities common in Peninsular Malaysia. It is also important to note that in mixed marriages with Malays, the family is Muslim, and the children refer to themselves as Malay. Furthermore, with the changing dynamics of fertility and migration, the share in the population of certain ethnic groups (like the Indians) is likely to decrease while that for others (like the Malays) is likely to increase. In these circumstances, we can expect intermarriage to increase between the minority and dominant communities.

Our findings are limited by the use of census data. It is a study, as Jacobs and Labov (2002) note, of prevalence, not of incidence. This does not take into account factors that could affect the actual number of intermarriages such as divorce, remarriage or death, or changes in education and occupation that have occurred since marriage. More importantly, the analysis can only be as reliable as the classification of ethnicity itself. While this issue has been taken up in another paper in this volume, it is clear that measurement of intermarriages based on ethnic classification of the individual is grossly inadequate. Information on the multiple ethnicities in the ancestries of children of mixed marriages is not obtained. The offspring of a mixed marriage have to pick either parent's ethnic group, usually that of the father (Chong 2009). Thus it is not possible to capture the ethnic diversity in a family across generations. For a proper evaluation of the extent of intermarriage and its impact on the plurality of Malaysia, it is important that ethnicity be captured more comprehensively. An individual should be allowed to select more than one ethnic identity. One could even think of additionally measuring family ethnicity (Callister 2008). To truly understand assimilation and ethnic interactions, the current practice of measurement of ethnicity has to be reviewed. Although plurality in Malaysia may not be recognised formally as arising from intermarriage, intermarriage and the children of mixed marriages are nevertheless acknowledged and contribute by their very existence to the increasing plurality of the nation.

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