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MACALESTER FACULTY OBSERVATIONS

Private Philanthropy in Multiethnic Malaysia

Elizabeth Cogswell

Each day the newspapers in Penang and Kuala Lumpur included pictures and stories of charitable events: a luxury hotel sponsoring a Christmas Charity Tree celebration to fund corrective surgery for seven seriously ill children; the Lion's Club providing wheelchairs for the disabled; hotel workers packing clothes and medical supplies for Afghan refugees; Coca-Cola Malaysia donating Harry Potter books to ten children's homes to promote literacy; Samsung Electronics providing microwave ovens to university students; association sponsorship of a charity dinner for Thalassaemia patients; a 10-kilometer run to raise money for kidney dialysis machines; and a prominent political figure handing over a check to a local orphanage at one of the many holiday "Open Houses." Our time in Malaysia spanned the first three weeks of January, that season between Ramadan, Christmas, and the Chinese New Year when Malaysians fulfill most publicly their charitable obligations and demonstrate their caring for all their countrymen and women regardless of religion or ethnic background. Repeatedly, our hosts and hostesses boasted that family- or organization-sponsored open houses, where acquaintances of all ethnicities celebrate together, are an indication of mutual respect and tolerance of difference critical to the unity of Malaysia. Yet, privately, a professor of Chinese origin told me that when her Chinese lineage association hosted its open house to provide holiday contributions to needy Chinese and Malay neighbors, the Malays didn't show up: "They don't like our food, you know."

One of our first seminar presenters, Abdul Rahman Embong, encouraged us to search for those forces that unite societies and those that pull societies apart.¹ I had determined to explore philanthropy in

Malaysia, including the extent to which it either follows the religious or cultural traditions of the major ethnic groups or works as a force to unite these groups, to tackle collaboratively the challenges of rapid change in a globalized economy. The most recent publication surveying private philanthropy in Malaysia alone² (as opposed to overviews of philanthropy in Southeast Asia more generally) organizes its findings by major ethnic group—Chinese, Malay, Indian—and devotes little discussion to cross-cultural initiatives. Thus, I wondered whether, indeed, separatism reflects the face of philanthropy in the country today.

It had been more than thirty years since my first “encounter” with Malaysia. In graduate school, shortly after the infamous Kuala Lumpur inter-ethnic riots of 1969, I had written a paper on the impact of these riots on the ethnic-based political parties of the country and the prospects for a continuation of coalition governance by the prevailing Alliance parties, with the Malay UMNO party at the helm. The Alliance has in fact survived, Malaysia’s economic growth in the intervening decades has been astonishing, and a middle class has developed within each of the three major ethnic groups. Consequently, I was eager to learn the extent to which the philanthropy of Malaysia worked to contribute to cross-ethnic collaboration or to work against it, and how it was responding to the opportunities and transformations spawned by globalization. During January, I learned, to my surprise, that the 1969 riots and the New Economic Policy subsequently adopted to mitigate the underlying conditions that had triggered them still hold sway in the patterns of philanthropy, while outside influences are triggering both conservative and progressive philanthropic responses.

To gain insight, I spent time outside of our seminars interviewing philanthropists, private foundation staff members, charity fund raisers, non-governmental organization executives, professional fundraising staff of international NGOs, and employees in charge of corporate foundation and direct giving programs, in Penang, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, and Kuching (the capital of Sarawak in East Malaysia). I had the great good fortune to share ideas with faculty and staff at the Universiti Sains Malaysia who have organized “The Philanthropy Initiative of Malaysia” to complete a more comprehensive study of private charitable giving throughout the country. The resultant book, to appear later this year, will go far beyond my impressionistic, admit-

tedly rudimentary understanding of this multi-layered and complex phenomenon.³

Though based on only a preliminary review of philanthropy in Malaysia, my tentative observations may be summarized as follows:

1. The full extent and impact of philanthropy in Malaysia is difficult to judge;
2. Despite rhetoric and legal requirements that suggest cross-cultural philanthropy, much if not most remains ethnic specific, often targeted to the religious or cultural preservation of the ethnic group of the donor;
3. Ethnic-specific philanthropy is reinforced by both internal and external political and economic influences;
4. Despite a growing middle class among all major ethnic groups, the outlook for philanthropy in the future is uncertain;
5. Most philanthropy is aimed at symptoms and victims rather than the root causes of social challenges, due both to longstanding traditions and political repression;
6. Greater transparency of grant giving and fundraising, and more opportunities for professionalism and networking in the field, should increase the level of giving, help ensure the greater effectiveness of the philanthropy, and help foster inter-ethnic dialogue on common challenges and needs;
7. Malaysia is blessed with philanthropists and charity leaders who are dedicated, undaunted by political realities, and courageous in their determination to make the country a better place to live.

The full extent and impact of philanthropy in Malaysia remain difficult to assess, due in part to the fragmentation and opacity of the government bodies that regulate it. Charitable NGOs, grant-making foundations, operating foundations, and corporate-giving entities must all be registered with the national government—either with the Registrar of Societies within the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Registrar of Companies within the Ministry of Finance, or the Department of Public Trustees. No one with whom I spoke could clarify which type of foun-

dation or charitable organization would be registered with one office or another, since for every rule of thumb there seemed to be exceptions. Nevertheless, a rough guide seems to be that NGOs and operating foundations, because they frequently involve memberships, are registered with the Registrar of Societies. Private grant-making foundations (usually founded and run by wealthy business families and still tied to the family companies that generate the wealth) come under the purview of the Registrar of Companies. And charitable trusts are generally regulated by the Department of Public Trustees. This fragmentation makes it difficult for those seeking philanthropic dollars to determine appropriate sources. Although each of these bodies issues a list of registered organizations and grant-making foundations, all of my informants expressed frustration that the lists contain many defunct organizations and out-of-date addresses, nor do they provide additional information about the purposes, activities, grants, or funding interests of the non-profits registered. Each charitable or philanthropic organization must send an annual report to its regulating agency, including the names of donors and amounts conferred, the amounts and recipients of grants, sources and amounts of other revenue, expenditures, and information about directors or trustees. Yet none of the fund raisers with whom I spoke had ever consulted these reports, in contrast to the way we in America would review an IRS-990 filing to learn more about a potential donor. Some presumed that the reports might be available if one went to the Registrar's office and asked to see them, while others believed that the government agencies are under no obligation to make them available. The upshot, of course, is that there is, to my knowledge, no available data on the scope or size of total giving within Malaysia, or the distribution of gifts by focus area. Moreover, the lack of public information about the giving interests of specific philanthropic organizations makes the allocation of gifts and grants to the most productive grantees inefficient if not impossible. The system does, however, provide the government with the means to identify organizations or philanthropic bodies whose missions are potentially threatening to its agenda. Under the terms of the National Security Act, organizations exist at the pleasure of the government, and "national security" takes precedence over other considerations in determining which may continue to function.⁴

For giving by individuals, too, there seems to be no readily available data about aggregate amounts or distribution among recipient types. Preliminary findings of a survey of individual giving conducted in

Penang by the Malaysia Philanthropy Initiative, with a sampling across various income levels and geographic regions within the state, and with a balance of ethnic groups represented, suggests that giving to beggars is the most common form of individual philanthropy, while environment, human rights, and political parties are the least popular targets of giving. The study also suggests that, as in the United States, poorer people donate a higher proportion of their income than do wealthy individuals.⁵ Although charitable gifts to government-approved non-profits are deductible from income for tax purposes with no ceiling, according to my informants, there is no capital gains tax on appreciated stock or on other property, except real estate. Dividend income (although not interest) is pre-taxed before distribution, instead of through income tax. "Planned gifts" using appreciated assets were unknown to my informants, although gifts of real estate or income-generating properties are common. Thus, the wealthy have fewer tax incentives for giving than are available in the United States. Moreover, according to a number of corporate giving officers, corporate gifts matching the individual contributions of employees have not yet reached Malaysia, even in U.S.-based companies, so that leveraging incentive for private donors is also lacking. There appears to be no comprehensive reporting by government tax agencies of aggregate charitable deductions claimed, making it difficult to ascertain the magnitude of individual philanthropy. On the other hand, my colleagues at the Philanthropy Initiative of Malaysia contend that the average Malaysian doesn't really think of himself/herself as a "taxpayer" anyway and is rarely motivated by income tax deductions when considering a charitable gift. "Malaysians are so kind," said one veteran fund raiser, "they'll give to any worthy cause." At the same time, she worried about their gullibility, explaining that "fundraising in Malaysia is rife with corruption." Although National Unity for Social Development regulations specify that fundraising organizations and NGOs must present a proposal before raising moneys, lack of enforcement and outdated registries result in unscrupulous individuals and organizations duping the public with bogus charitable schemes.

At first blush, philanthropy in Malaysia would seem to hold promise for promoting unity among diverse groups, since it is largely aimed at social objectives that impact citizens of all ethnic groups, for example, health care and hospitals, education, and care for the needy and elderly. Yet, in practice, it appears to be distributed essentially along ethnic lines, often through traditional channels. As Chinese

immigrants congregated in the Straits Settlements in the 19th and 20th centuries, the sick, elderly, and needy, as well as relatives back in China, were cared for through the *kongsi*, or associations of immigrant Chinese, organized by lineage (family) groups, geographic region of origin in China, or by professional and trade guilds. Individual gifts by Chinese are still frequently funneled through these associations, with their most public distributions scheduled during Chinese New Year. A graduate student at USM informed me that his uncle, a wealthy businessman within a family that had been in Malaysia for many generations, still gives every year to his ancestors' village in China. The Chinese executive director of an NGO focused on women's issues indicated that her father, like most Chinese businessmen she knows, donates substantial sums for specifically Chinese hospitals because there is insufficient room or resources in government-run hospitals. While Malays and Indians are allowed care in these hospitals, they are primarily run by and for the Chinese population.

In traditional Buddhist thought, gifts in support of monks, temples, and pagodas are more meritorious than gifts for education or the needy.⁶ Nevertheless, while the Buddhist temples that we visited obviously required substantial support for the maintenance of facilities and the sustenance of priests and monks, education and educational access appeared to be much higher, and perennial, priorities for Chinese philanthropy in Malaysia. I was told repeatedly that wealthy Chinese, and even Chinese of more modest means, contribute not just to their own children's schools, but to Chinese private schools at all grade levels for Chinese people of all social and economic classes. Preservation of the Chinese cultural heritage, promotion of the use of Mandarin Chinese and English as the languages of instruction, and a perception that the Malay-dominated public schools are neither sufficiently rigorous nor tolerant were all cited as motivators for Chinese educational philanthropy. I had been surprised to learn that trustees of non-profits and NGOs are not expected to raise funds (nor do they often contribute, according to my informants). Chinese schools, however, were the exception to the rule. For these schools, I was told by several observers that the board members know exactly what needs to be raised, and they divide up the total sum among themselves, giving or raising their share of the total. One of our key seminar speakers in Penang was

playing just such a donor/fund raiser role for a new Chinese private college under development. "Old students groups," or what we would call alumni associations, are important fundraising and donor pools for Chinese private schools, a concept not yet well established for public schools and universities,⁷ where Malays predominate.

The consistent answer to my question about the focus of philanthropy by Malays was that most giving, although certainly not all, is through the mosques. The obligatory taxation of eligible Muslims through the various forms of *zakat* required by Islamic *Sharia* law should probably not be categorized as philanthropy. On the other hand, voluntary contributions should be acknowledged, such as *waqft* (gifts of land or property used for mosques, religious schools, orphanages), in addition to income-producing properties for the support of religious activities or for aid to the needy. Spontaneous charitable gifts, known as *sadaqah*, which can be cash, property, or volunteer service, certainly should be seen as voluntary and not compulsory. In Malaysia, however, most *waqft* properties were given half a century or more ago, and there seems to be no way to evaluate the value of *sadaqah*, since it encompasses nearly any benevolent gift of time or money that would be pleasing to Allah. Lack of accountability for or public record of such charity results, in part, from Malaysian law, which exempts religious organizations from submitting annual reports of income and expenditures and from surprise visits by government officials to examine operations (to which other associations, at least in theory, can be subjected⁸).

Because Malaysia is an Islamic state, Islamic matters, including *zakat* collection and administration, are conducted under the authority of the head of state, or Sultan, in each state of the federation. (Melaka, Pulau Pinang, and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, which do not have sultans, are administered by the federal government. In Kelantan, only *zakat* on rice farmers, *padi*, are collected through official channels, and in Kedah, only two-thirds of *zakat* is collected and distributed by the state Religious Council.) According to the Islamic laws of *Sharia*, *zakat* is to be distributed among eight categories of recipients: the destitute (having no home or income); the poor (having insufficient income or property); new converts to Islam; stranded travelers whose journeys are pleasing to Allah; those who are in debt for reasons pleasing to Allah; slaves; those engaged in religious activities in the cause of Allah; and to the collectors and administrators of the *zakat*. While record keeping on the collection and distribution of *zakat* varies widely

from one state to another, records of *zakat* collection in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur demonstrate that in 2000, about 34 percent of the Malaysian (M)\$45.5 million collected went to the poor and destitute, while 47 percent supported religious activities and new converts. In 1996, prior to the economic crisis that increased poverty, only 12 percent of the M\$48.8 million total *zakat* collected went to the poor and destitute, while 67 percent was targeted for Islamic programs and new converts.⁹

It is impossible to judge the extent to which Malays of means feel that their payment of *zakat* fulfills their philanthropic responsibilities, or how much more is given as *sadaqah*, or outside of Islamic channels altogether. My Muslim informants indicated that many Muslims ignore their *zakat* obligations, knowing that penalties are not severe and rarely enforced. Others take it upon themselves to distribute their *zakat* contributions outside of official channels. A survey of *zakat* payers, with 1,514 respondents in eight states of peninsular Malaysia, revealed that only 65 percent paid through official channels, with 17 percent paying entirely through unofficial channels and 18 percent paying through a combination of official and unofficial channels. Sixty percent of those who gave through informal channels reported that they did so because they were more confident in their own efforts to distribute the proceeds than in the efforts of their state Religious Council or Department, and 17 percent did so because they lacked confidence in the administration of the Council/Departments. Of the distribution of *zakat* through unofficial channels, 13.4 percent went to needy relatives, 52 percent to other people known to be in need, and 24.5 percent to "those recognized as having contributed to society's welfare." The balance went to needy neighbors and friends.¹⁰ Unfortunately, I have found no information on the extent to which, if at all, the proceeds of *zakat*, *waqf* income, or *sadaqah* are given to non-Muslims or for nonreligious purposes. Clearly, though, the age-old tradition of giving through these Islamic vehicles, their stable infrastructure for collection, and the ubiquity of local mosques through which additional, more informal, charity can be distributed suggest that a significant proportion of Malay philanthropy works to the benefit of other Malays, rather than across ethnic groups or toward causes of importance to Indian or Chinese citizens. All in our group were struck by the beauty of the new central mosque in Putra Jaya, the new national capital being built between Kuala Lumpur and the international airport, but we were also made uncomfortable by the fact that nowhere in the

new city did we see any tangible symbol of a Chinese or Indian presence in Malaysia. If *zakat*, *waqft* land or income, *sadaqah* gifts, or other gifts from Malays were used toward the construction of this imposing new mosque, then certainly this form of religious-based philanthropy might serve to alienate the other minority groups rather than work toward a unified and shared purpose. Gifts from newly wealthy Malays as well as from Arab Muslims and states had also played a major role in the construction of the Pan-Islamic University in Selangor, with its gleaming white buildings and azure-roofed mosque. Surely the donations that made this modern, conservative university a reality reinforce separatism rather than foster national unity across cultures.

Several of the veteran fund raisers, who attract gifts from all ethnic groups for the ill and the physically or mentally challenged, commented that the Indian population is the most difficult from which to garner funds. "They simply are not wealthy enough," noted one. Yet the Indian executive director of a human rights organization noted that the Indian elite, mostly professionals and business owners, do contribute to scholarships and shelters for Indian orphans and the children of Indian plantation workers. The survival of Indian culture and Hinduism through religious classes and the support of temples and cultural shows are also goals of Indian philanthropy. Ghee and Chang acknowledge the more recent emergence of Indian organizations dominated by professionals who are attempting to address the major social problems of the community: alcoholism, low educational standards, the subordinate status of Indian women, and the break-up of the family.¹¹

The tendency toward ethnic-specific philanthropy seems to prevail despite regulatory encouragement for cross-ethnic charity. I was told that for a foundation to maintain its tax-exempt status, it must give to all ethnic groups and must have all ethnic groups represented on its board. In order to see how this plays out in reality, I visited one of the largest grant-making foundations in the country, headquartered in Kuala Lumpur. According to its literature, it was founded as a response to the inter-ethnic Kuala Lumpur riots of 1969 in the belief that economic disparities are the breeding ground for narrow race-based nationalism and violence. Its primary objective is to provide

educational opportunities to the poor. Given the impetus for its creation, I expected this foundation, created by a wealthy Chinese businessman and his family, to be exemplary in its support of the poor of all ethnicities. But when pressed, its manager told me that 80 percent of its grants go toward scholarships awarded on the basis of both student need and merit, and that, despite having a Malay and an Indian on its board, 90 percent of its scholarships go to Chinese students. Disappointed by the apparent discrepancy between the foundation's mission and its practices, I asked why such a large portion went to one ethnic group. The answer was that the foundation had tried to provide scholarships to Malay students, but parents had refused the money because, in their view, it was not "*halal*." Instead, it was unclean, since some of it derived from interest on investments. Ironically, such a small part of the foundation's income results from interest, with most coming from pre-taxed dividends from the founding family's businesses, that the foundation has given up its tax-exempt status, feeling that the taxes to be saved on interest income are not worth the accompanying government scrutiny. As was the case for nearly all the foundations and charitable organizations that I reviewed, this major grant-making foundation provided its scholarship support to individual students rather than giving it to colleges, schools, or universities for distribution to the worthiest and/or neediest scholars in their student bodies regardless of ethnicity. Such direct grants to students increase the likelihood that the recipients will be of the same ethnicity as the donor, and demonstrate the lack of trust by the donors that the universities will protect the interests of all groups. The support of the sick, the physically or mentally challenged, or the destitute seems to cross ethnic lines, especially when funded through special events and appeals captured in the daily newspapers. In contrast, it appears that when upward economic and social mobility through education are at stake, the ethnic group of the charitable entity is favored.

The affirmative action policies of the NEP, privileging Malays in university admissions and governmental posts, were complemented more recently by favoritism toward Malay entrepreneurs in the privatization of businesses and services previously owned by the government. This undoubtedly heightens Chinese philanthropists' interest in providing scholarships for Chinese students in order to ensure their access to education and upward economic mobility, and in sustaining the tradition of private Chinese schools that meet their educational standards and preserve their language and cultural heritage. The

grandiose mosque at Putra Jaya, the complete lack of symbols in the new capital acknowledging a Chinese or Indian presence in the nation, the obvious emergence of middle-class and wealthy Malays, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the public declarations that Malaysia is, indeed, an Islamic nation, must make the Chinese wonder what their long-term future holds in Malaysia and must encourage Chinese philanthropists to protect their own people.

Hsin-Huang Hsiao has described this effect in his article on Chinese corporate philanthropy in East and Southeast Asia.¹² He posits that the nature of Chinese philanthropy throughout Southeast Asia depends upon the level of unity between the Chinese business sector and the civil society, and the relative autonomy of the business sector vis-à-vis the state. In Malaysia, he notes that Chinese business relationships are alienated from the dominant society and the state, leading Chinese philanthropy to be limited and focused on the ethnic Chinese community and clan group activities. Baron, too, notes that sustained philanthropic activity depends upon secure and stable wealth, and that the Chinese seem to feel insecure, due to the rise in Islamic fundamentalism and the rapid change in the country's socioeconomic landscape (achieved at the expense of the Chinese through the NEP policies¹³). Thus, the dominant pattern of charitable support to one's kinsmen through the clan and lineage associations has been reinforced by contemporary political and economic policies that are perceived to have raised the status of the Malays at the expense of the Chinese, and by social forces that increase the sense of alienation.

The rapid economic and political advancement of the Malays in the past thirty years, resulting partially from participation in the global economy, have reinforced a natural tendency to provide charity, for the most part, to their own ethnic group. Increasingly urbanized since independence, the Malays undoubtedly find in Islam a strong linkage to their roots, and in their mosques and religious schools a supportive network during times of transition. Contributions through their mosques above and beyond the compulsory *zakat* provide both religious rewards and a means for helping their fellow Malays, whether urban or rural, who have not yet prospered from the new economic and social realities.

Malaysia's postcolonial development and participation in a global economy dominated by Western values and culture also encourage ethnic-specific philanthropy, as wealthy individuals and ethnic associations strive to preserve the cultural artifacts of their heritage. One foundation has been created for the sole purpose of preserving the Kadazan language. A trip to Kuching, the capital of Sarawak in northern Borneo, enabled me to visit the Tun Jugah Foundation, a foundation dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Iban culture. By collecting and maintaining the full range of artifacts created by this formerly head-hunting people, the foundation ensures that it can be studied and appreciated in its full development. By teaching contemporary Iban women the art of weaving in traditional materials and designs the colorful cloth for which they are most noted, the artistic expression of the Iban will be less diluted over time. In addition, the women will be able to help support their families through participation in the growing tourist industry without giving up all connection to their rural roots or cultural heritage.

To summarize, most philanthropy follows traditional patterns and networks, routed through mosques, clan, or lineage associations. It is the man on the street responding to the beggar, and the Chinese businessman forming a foundation to channel his wealth into new Chinese schools, scholarships, hospitals, or care for the elderly. Yet I heard concern expressed again and again that these traditions, indeed any tradition, of philanthropy might not survive into the younger generation. I inquired about the patterns of giving of the newly wealthy young Malays who are benefiting from the privatization of government industries and services and from the economic boom of the '80s and early '90s. The response was that fancy cars and houses take precedence over charitable giving. The Chinese Malaysian head of a non-governmental welfare agency explained that the obligation for charity passes from father to oldest son, and her father knows exactly what his responsibilities are and writes out his contributions checks each month. In contrast, her brother, like others of his generation, shows very little interest in picking up this mantle. When I asked a well-heeled young Malay financial advisor about his wealthy contemporaries' charitable inclinations, he responded that charity wasn't really something they thought of because they were too intent upon trying to get their assets out of the country. For those who do give, the act of

giving may have more to do with gaining political clout or returning favors than with concern for the cause or the recipients. A fund raiser with many years of experience told me that the younger generation of businessmen, whether Malay, Chinese, or Indian, often contribute in order to have their pictures in the paper with the political or business leaders heading the campaigns. The proof of their motivation was that they showed no interest whatsoever in how the fund raiser was actually using the money once the gift had been made. They were completely uninterested in any stewardship reports or the impact of their charity on the lives of its recipients.

Much of the philanthropy is participatory and ad hoc—passing the hat at the office for the kidney patient in need of dialysis but not having payroll deductions for the consistent support of a worthy cause. Special event fundraising and direct mail campaigns are the most common form of solicitation used by charities, non-governmental organizations, and operating foundations. Major gift cultivation and solicitation are the exception rather than the rule (except toward the building of Chinese schools) and board members function as policy setters and high-profile endorsers, not donors. Nearly every significant fundraising campaign or charitable organization tries to have a prominent political official on its board to provide legitimacy and visibility to the cause. The Malaysia-based contributions officer of an American-headquartered company operating in Kuala Lumpur told me that their employees adamantly opposed in principle the suggestion that they raise and contribute funds for the victims of HIV/AIDS until it was learned that a member of the prime minister's family was leading the campaign. Then they contributed generously. Having a prominent Malay government official on a foundation board can also provide insulation from close scrutiny by the government registrars who control the very existence of all organizations and associations in which more than a half-dozen people are involved.

The power of the registrars over non-profit and charitable organizations, their ability to cancel the registration of organizations that are deemed a security threat, and the related repression of individuals who work on behalf of human rights tend to reinforce charitable traditions addressing the symptoms and results of social problems rather than their causes. By giving scholarships to individual students or surgical operations to individual patients, a large portion of traditional Malaysian philanthropy does little to create solutions to long-term social and economic challenges. I was told by two courageous women

(one Chinese, one Indian) leading grassroots and domestic (as opposed to international) NGOs that as long as their organizations' work focused on the welfare of individuals and families, donors would contribute and the government would tolerate or even commend their work. As long as the one organization concentrated on providing shelters and counseling for battered women or sexually abused children, her work was supported. But when her organization began to advocate for changes in domestic abuse laws, funding for the shelters was placed at risk as external scrutiny mounted and contributions declined. The second organization focuses on the health concerns of women workers — plantation workers who are mainly Indian, and women factory workers of all ethnic groups in the industrial zones — and provides shelters for migrant workers while their deportation or unemployment cases are being reviewed. When it concentrated on such projects as providing shelter for HIV/AIDS-infected sex workers, or reproductive health education, or raising money to send migrant workers home, it not only received private contributions but government funding as well. When, however, the organization's leader gained newspaper coverage for speaking out about the use of pesticides that were sickening plantation workers, or about torture and starvation in migrant worker detention centers, or about prohibitions against union organizing in free-trade-zone electronics factories, then contributions were withheld and the executive director was repeatedly jailed and continues to face court battles for violation of laws restricting speech and the press. Corporate contributions supported both of these organizations as long as the focus was on women's health and shelter, since battered women come from all classes and women's health is of major importance to companies where 80 to 90 percent of the workers are women. But challenging human rights abuses and advocating for a change in the socioeconomic status quo is too threatening to the existing power structure and too vulnerable to government repression for any but the most daring donors (usually capable of only small gifts) to risk being involved. In such instances, the involvement of multinational NGOs is helpful, not only to provide sustaining contributions from external philanthropists and "cover" for potential domestic donors committed to the cause, but also to call world attention to the situation.

Finally, I found that everyone with whom I consulted longed for greater transparency and professionalism in the field of philanthropy. Up-to-date directories provided by the various Registrars with information about the giving interests and past grants of foundations and corporations would support a much more efficient distribution of philanthropic dollars. The convening of donors, professional fund raisers, and non-profit organization executives would help avoid duplication of effort and would help prioritize national challenges of importance for all ethnic groups that could be addressed by both non-profits and philanthropists. Setting such priorities collaboratively would help shield any single foundation or NGO from reprisals by the government when systemic change, rather than mere alleviation of symptoms is required. Further, providing professional training for fund raisers would help ensure that philanthropic dollars are directed to institutions that can tackle root causes rather than only to individual victims or students, which would in the long run do little to bring positive change. I recognize the fragility and vulnerability of civil society in such a new nation. Yet I am convinced that combining charitable voices across ethnicities and sharing information about the good work that is being done in Malaysian non-profits would surely help to match donors to causes, move philanthropy from its conservative roots in traditional charity to a more open and powerful component of civil society, address problems of concern across the barriers of class and ethnicity, and build a stronger, more unified nation. ●

Notes

1. Abdul Rahman Embong, "Malaysia as a Multi-Civilizational Society in Southeast Asia," presented at Macalester College Faculty Development International Seminar in Malaysia, January 7, 2002.
2. Lim Teck Ghee and Tan Poo Chang, "Private Philanthropy in Malaysia: Trends and Issues," in *Evolving Patterns of Asia-Pacific Philanthropy* (Seoul: The Institute of East and West Studies, Yonsei University, 1994), pp. 161–181.
3. My sincere thanks go to Mohammad Reevany Bustami, Angeline Cheah, and Josie Fernandez of the Malaysia Philanthropy Initiative, Universiti Sains Malaysia, for their good will, their generosity in sharing some of their preliminary findings, and their energy in connecting me with my interviewees.
4. Lim Teck Ghee, "Nongovernmental Organizations in Malaysia and Regional Networking," in *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community: Nongovernmental Under-*

pinnings of the Emerging Asia Pacific Regional Community, ed. Tadahi Yamamoto (Singapore: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1995), pp. 166–67.

5. The author viewed survey results in a very preliminary stage of analysis, but they appear promising in shedding light on charitable giving tendencies within the state of Penang, with its predominantly Chinese population. One hopes that a similar, more extensive study can be conducted at a later date throughout Malaysia.

6. Roger A. Lohmann, “Buddhist Commons in Asia,” in *Philanthropy and Cultural Context: Western Philanthropy in South, East, and Southeast Asia in the 20th Century*, ed. Hewa, Soma and Hove, Philo (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997), pp. 219–220.

7. At both of our host public universities, USM and UKM, I was told by officials that alumni giving programs, or giving programs for individuals in general, are only now being contemplated. They were eager to learn more about the techniques and processes for such fundraising used in the United States — a potential objective for institutional exchanges or internships between Macalester and Malaysian university administrators.

8. Mary George, “An Overview of Issues in Charity Litigation in Malaysia 2001,” *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 4, no. 1. At www.icnl.org/journal/vol4iss1/georgeprint.htm.

9. Report of the Pusat Pungutan Zakat Wilayah Persekutuan, 2001, located at www.zakat.com.my/ppz_eng/2_info/definisation.htm.

10. Aidit bin Ghazalli, “Zakat Administration in Malaysia,” in *The Islamic Voluntary Sector in Southeast Asia*, ed. Mohamed Ariff (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991).

11. Ghee and Chang, p. 169.

12. Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, “Chinese Corporate Philanthropy in East and Southeast Asia: A Typology,” in *Evolving Patterns of Asia-Pacific Philanthropy*, ed. Ku-Hyun Jung (Seoul: The Institute of East and West Studies, 1994), p. 91.

13. Barnett F. Baron, ed., *Philanthropy and the Dynamics of Change in East and Southeast Asia*, Occasional Papers of the East Asia Institute (New York: Columbia University 1991), p. 7.

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