

Multiplicity of Membership in Brunei: The Ethnic Chinese as a Collective of Denizens

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ブルネイ社会におけるメンバーシップの多様性
— 中華系ブルネイ人の居留民について —

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Abstract

The uneven aspect of globalisation, nation-state building, and international norms are epitomised in the continued existence of ethnic Chinese denizens of Brunei. Through narrative analysis of the ethnic Chinese who have migrated to Singapore, Canada, and those who remain in Brunei, I illustrate the multiplicity of membership in the small nation-state through utilizing the concept and term 'denizenship', which I argue is experienced by both stateless as well as formal citizens. I conclude my paper by making a case for working within the practices of citizenship, as their narratives reveal a desire and a vision for inclusion and belonging in a state that does not differentiate based on ethnicity.

Key Words : citizenship, denizenship, ethnicity, identity, migration, ethnicity, overseas Chinese, social change, stateless

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1. Introduction

In 2015, a parliament member, Pehin Dato Goh King Chin proposed that provisions be given for stateless individuals aged 60 and above to be granted citizenship and for the Nationality Act be amended at the annual convening of the Legislative Council of Brunei. However, this suggestion was ultimately turned down, the Minister of Home Affairs stating the current nationality laws in place were sufficient, and that stateless persons were given official documents to travel in the place of a passport (Asiaone 2015).

Discussions to address the status of the ethnic Chinese in Brunei are not recent, but date back to the eve of Independence, where two editorials published on that day, either attempting to assuage concerns about citizenship ('Ethnic Chinese residents have nothing to worry about') or highlighting the issue amidst the future challenges for the nation-state ('Brunei's major step forward') (The Singapore Monitor 1983)¹. As of 2013, the government reported that there were 20,524 stateless permanent residents (PRs) in Brunei, noting most were either of Chinese or aboriginal descent (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2019).

The existence of such a community until this day is one of the glaring examples of the hierarchies of membership embedded into the fabric of the nation-state. This paper analyses the narratives of the ethnic Chinese of Brunei, stateless as well as formal citizens, and posits that they are effectively a collective of denizens. The selection of experiences from this ethnographic research presents the intricate ways in which my informants face obstacles when they attempt to access public goods such as education, or land acquisition and transfer, or face detriments to the quality of life, such as inhibitions to travel and lack of career opportunities. Thus, the empirical examples provide a more intimate lens of denizenship as experienced on the ground and how it maps onto ethnicity in this specific case study.

2. Methods

This research was conducted over a period of 3 years (from 2016-2019) and is part of an ongoing project for a doctoral dissertation. I conducted interviews with 30 informants, with the theme of identity construction primarily along ethnic and national lines amongst people who identify as 'Chinese' and 'Bruneian'.

These interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 1-4 hours long, the majority of which were conducted face-to-face where possible, or over internet calls (4 informants), with invitations to conduct face-to-face follow-up interviews. These informants were accessed and reached out through personal networks and snowball sampling.

My informants range from those who currently remain in Brunei, either as stateless or as

citizens, as well as those who have migrated to Canada and Singapore, with one informant migrating to Australia, their ages ranging from 20s to 90s. Including different categories of membership in tandem to the nation-state (citizen, stateless, permanent resident) helped in the analysis of the different layers of their exemption from the nation-state. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with those who are considered 'others'; Malay Muslims, as well as Chinese Muslims, in order to account for their perspectives and experiences.

As a female, ethnic Chinese researcher, I was considered an 'insider', therefore assisting in creating an atmosphere of relative trust and assumed understanding on my part, despite being a citizen myself. Additionally, given my extremely limited use understanding of the Chinese language and the varying degrees of Chinese dialects spoken, my group of informants form a specific proportion of people who are English-speaking (though with varying fluency) and well-educated, therefore indicative of a specific socio-economic background. Where informants were not fluent in English, their kin were made available to explain their narratives.

3. The Chinese as a Collective of Denizens

3.1 Background

Brunei is a small nation-state located on Borneo island, which also houses the Indonesian state of Kalimantan and the federal Malaysian states, Sarawak and Sabah, the latter two commonly called East Malaysia. Its territorial size is 5,765km², and population stands currently at 423,188, but this also includes categories of expatriates and migrant workers. The official language is Malay and the official state religion is Islam. The official designation of the state's method of governance is 'constitutional monarchy' (similar to the United Kingdom) but, in reality constitutes an absolute monarchy (as of the cabinet reshuffle in 2018, the monarch has maintained his position as Sultan (King), Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Finance as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade). Brunei was previously a British Protectorate since 1888, achieved independence fairly late, in 1984. The national revenues come from the petroleum sector, exporting oil and natural gas, with attempts to diversify the economy from the dependence on this sector though full success has not been achieved (de Vienne 2015).

Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) meaning Malay Muslim Monarchy proves to be one of the tenets of Brunei identity and, by extension, the basis of the state's nationalistic ideology, as one can see from the passage above. The phrase was in official use during the Sultan's independence speech in 1984, free from the British protectorate status. This slogan, according to Talib's observations, was officiated by the Sultan to encourage loyalty to the nation and the political legitimacy of the regime, and upholds Islam as the national religion as well as the rights and privileges of the Malay ethnic community (Talib 2002). However, Brunei is far from ethnically and religiously homogenous. Graham Saunders, one of the few historians on Brunei, notes that the total population (which totaled

around 227,000 at the time the book was published but now has doubled that figure), included Malays, Chinese, indigenous groups such as Dusuns, Ibans, Kedayans, expatriates from Europe, New Zealand, Australia, as well as migrant workers from Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia (Saunders 2002).

Pre-independence, Chinese migration into Southeast Asia was extensive and experienced a series of fluxes over centuries, taking place as early as 1264 AD in Brunei's case (Mead and Lim 2006), reaching a peak in the fifteenth century (Wade 2008). Of great significance in this vast expanse of Chinese migration is modern Chinese migration taking place from 19th to 20th century, particularly with the allowance given to the layman to migrate overseas (McKeown 1999), leading to the emergence of an ethnic community known as the Overseas Chinese, though with varying levels of cultural and linguistic practices and claims to the identity 'Chinese'.

There were shifts in attitudes from China towards the Chinese residing overseas; the fluidity towards Chinese nationals and their children abroad and the allowance for dual nationality in 1929 was subsequently revoked in 1980 Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China. Alongside these shifts were attitudes towards the Chinese residing in Brunei that were not necessarily positive or welcoming. The officer of the Colonial Legal Office of the British government, R. H. Hickling who penned the memorandum for the Brunei Constitution and Practice in 1954, was of the view that a Chinese subject born and living in Brunei was by *jus soli* a natural born subject of the Sultan though by *jus sanguinis* may also be a Chinese subject. Despite this, inclusion and acceptance of ethnic Chinese into the state was resented and visiting Malayan dignitaries to the Brunei court warned against this (Hussainmiya and Tarling 2011). Thus, amidst the emergence of the modern nation-state, notions of nationality and belonging for the Chinese of Brunei were fraught with uncertainty.

3.2 Layers of Membership and Documentation

A report from the Current Issues Brief No. 1, 1984 from the parliament of the commonwealth of Australia, penned by Dr. Michael Leigh, aptly titled 'Brunei – Independence for whom?' not only lays out the rather extraordinary circumstances of the survival of 'Brunei' as a modern nation-state and its economic prosperity on oil and gas leading to the creation of a welfare state, but additionally dedicates an entire section entitled 'The Stateless Chinese'. He lays out a multitude of aspects of the 'stateless' problem that is still endemic until today, namely that a proportion of the ethnic Chinese community would lose their status as British Protected Persons (BPP) and become stateless, with no rights to British citizenship, that almost all Chinese applications for citizenship through a language test were effectively rejected, and under *jus sanguinis* remain non-nationals despite being born and raised in Brunei for generations (Leigh 1984).

Inheritance of citizenship also remains gendered. Prior to the 2002 revisions of the Nationality

Act, children were able to inherit Bruneian citizenship automatically only if their father was a Bruneian citizen. After the revisions, children can now inherit Bruneian citizenship through their mother if their father is a non-national of Brunei, but this process still requires registration and application, and is not an automatic procedure, as highlighted by the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) undertaken by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) in their report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2019). My informants have experienced the myriad of policies as stated, unable to attain citizenship because their father was a non-citizen, or rejected as they had failed a citizenship test.

With regards to documentation, the stateless do not possess passports, but instead an International Certificate of Identity (ICI). In addition to this, all residents, both short-term and long-term, must possess an Identity Card (IC). The IC is colour-coded; yellow denotes possession of Bruneian citizenship, green denotes long-term residency, and purple denotes permanent residency (though oddly commonly referred to as 'red'). Stateless persons however, are lumped into the same category as PR holders, though there are significant differences within said group as to their citizenship status as well as ties to Brunei (Department of Immigration and Registration Brunei Darussalam). Thus, they constitute a group of people who remain displaced in situ (Belton 2015).

What of citizenship and how is it stratified in Brunei? Membership in Brunei is codified beyond a passport and an Identity Card (IC), splitting into different categories that appear to measure authenticity of belonging. First, through birth and registration, whereby those who were born into citizenship to parents who are citizenship holders are *mutlak undang-undang* (Department of Economic Planning and Statistics), and those who are citizens through *pendaftaran* (registration), the latter subject to their citizenship being revoked in cases of criminal behaviour as laid out in the Nationality Act, section 11 (Brunei Nationality Act 2002). Furthermore, a system similar to the *pribumi* or *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) of Malaysia and Indonesia there is the category of *puak jati* (roughly translates to indigenous groups), more known colloquially as *rakyat jati*, and applies to select groups of Malays (de Vienne 2015). Thus, the Chinese of Brunei do not constitute *puak jati*, and those who are citizens are further split into a hierarchy of those who registered as or were born as citizens to Bruneian parents. Citizenship is often posited as the antithesis to particularism, or politics of difference (Isin and Wood 1999), but as demonstrated, membership can be further split.

This internal multilayered division is hardly unsurprising, as Torpey suggests that the conception of documentation or lack thereof is the implementation of the 'idea' of the nation, primarily carried out in order to categorise, legitimise, control, and surveil citizens of the state, and to identify those who are not and those who do not 'belong' (Torpey 2000). Thus, while there are salient differences between those who hold citizenship and those who remain stateless, even those who have managed to obtain citizenship remain more or less 'second grade citizens' de Vienne observing that the

ethnic Chinese act like economic mercenaries hired by the state (de Vienne 2015), their presence tolerated as subjects in driving economic growth but not given complete rights and access to welfare and benefits. From here I discuss the concept of denizen in citizenship literature.

3.3 Denizenship

The general definition of a denizen is an inhabitant, one who frequents a place, or a person admitted to residence in a foreign country (Merriam-Webster). This definition allows a broad spectrum of interpretation. Hammar identifies the denizen as a foreign citizen with a secure residence status enjoying access to both state and private benefits such as employment, education, social welfare (Hammar 1990). Turner's definition emphasizes the limitations of denizenship, defining it as a person who has a legal right of residence (by virtue of a visa or work permit in a given territory), but who has limited rights to welfare and political participation such as the right to vote (Turner 2016). Furthermore, he recognizes the extremes denizenship encapsulates, observing that 'of course many denizens are actually stateless persons with little or no rights at all. More precisely, denizens as migrants, are often more dependent on human rights and not citizenship for protection' (Turner 2016)

These definitions make it clear that stateless persons fall under the general rubric of the denizen. However, I posit that the term and concept of denizen applies to Chinese citizens in Brunei. The concept of citizenship in an autocratic, oil-producing rentier state differs from that of liberal democratic nation-states, where a key citizenship right, political participation and the right to vote, does not apply at all, as there is no voting mechanism. In these regimes, the relationship is closer to a bargain where the government bribes citizens with extensive social and welfare programmes, causing citizens to lack incentive to bring about social or political change (Beblawi and Luciani 1987). It would be more accurate to state that they are subjects of the state. Rosbrook-Thompson makes a case for the notion of denizenship that includes non-citizens and citizens in a formal sense, through their rejection of belonging of the nation and their responsibilities and duties of what citizenship entails such as voting or tax-paying (Rosbrook-Thompson 2015). Similarly, I make a case for denizenship that includes ethnic Chinese, who are citizens in a formal sense, but whose experiences that are detailed below, demonstrates a lack of inclusion and differential treatment. The status of being a 'denizen' or a non-citizen is described as 'second-class citizenship' (Benton 2014) but denizenship can also be expressed in those who are formally classed as citizens. As Ellermann rightly points out, permanent residents and certain citizens are not exempt from and in fact may experience legal precarity and loss of status (Ellermann 2019).

There are scholarly attempts to reconceptualize people who do not fit the standard of citizenship, such as the theorizing undertaken by Tonkiss and Bloom. They argue for the term 'noncitizenship' in an attempt to decentralize citizenship as well as to debunk assumptions that all paths lead to

citizenship (Tonkiss and Bloom 2015). Indeed, welfare, benefits, belonging, as well as means of living a fulfilling life can occur outside the framework of the nation-state and citizenship. However, given the resilience of the nation-state, as well as the pragmatic desires of my informants for a more inclusive notion of citizenship, this paper will utilize the term denizenship as opposed to noncitizenship.

To supplement theories and concepts of citizenship and denizenship, understanding lived, everyday experiences is crucial. Through empirical studies, a more intimate and grounded perspective is gained with regards to the everyday and long-term constraints people face, crucial to supplement the theoretical aspect within citizenship and stateless studies (Deforges et al 2005; Hall and Williamson 1999). Given the lack of transparency on these issues and at times, difficulty in finding official documentation, these narratives are all the more crucial to understand the points at which they experience denizenship. By gathering a varied cluster of ethnic Chinese of Brunei of various statuses (stateless, Canadian citizens, Brunei citizens, Bruneian PRs, Singaporean PRs), I posit that they exemplify the multiplicity of membership within a nation-state which allocates rights and entitlements on the basis of ethnicity. I track the boundaries they encounter as effective denizens, and the strategies they opt to take when negotiating the structural barriers of the nation-state. They embody the importance for accounting for both agency and structure, exemplifying that they are not simply 'mechanical products of their objective circumstances' (Appadurai 2000, p. 4), but at the same time demonstrate the limits of their agency, having to seek out alternative opportunities and strategies.

The usefulness of the term 'denizenship' and 'denizen' hopefully allows for a closer, focused look at the systemic nature of welfare exemption from the nation-state, not only for migrants and permanent residents, but also those who are formal citizens. The term highlights discrepancies and inequalities within the catch-all label of 'citizen', that might be based on categories of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. This is not to disregard concepts of ethnic or racial discrimination, but to complement them by adding a focused component on, in this paper's case, the tightly wound relationship between ethnicity and formal citizenship.

4. Findings: The Hurdles of Denizenship

4.1 The Stateless

4.1.1 Passport and Travel

Being stateless comes to the fore when excluded from domestic benefits from the state. As well, it is evident when one attempts to traverse national borders. As Turner points out, 'denizens have some degree of freedom of movement internally, but their transition across national borders is normally precarious' (Turner 2016). For those who are stateless, the international passport regime and borders are reminders of their status and lack of recognition as a person with full rights.

When questioned about any episodes of difficulty in crossing national borders, Martin, in his 60s, and currently stateless, shared a harrowing story of potential arrest and deportation, but, worry and fear spurred him to request not to detail his account. Another informant, Jake, in his 20s, currently stateless, was less wary and hence more willing to inform me of his experiences. He had travelled, though not too far out of the Southeast Asian region, the furthest place being Taiwan. I inquired as to whether he had traveled to 'Western' countries, and replied in the negative. He had actively avoided going to 'Western' countries (particularly the United States) given his own understanding of strict border and immigration control and fear that he would ultimately be deported.

We need to apply for visas everywhere except Singapore[...] visas doesn't guarantee entry. A friend [of mine] was sent to Dubai for training and kicked back to Brunei.

He was deported. To deport me back[...] it is such a waste of money. [...] I only traveled around Asia [...] it is just a paranoid feeling [at immigration] because it takes extra long. I travel to Taiwan often, I went 4 times, and the second time when they were inspecting my passport it took 30 minutes. It feels like a magnifying glass, asking questions [it is] the feeling and treatment despite having the ICI.

Jake's narrative on his travels provide insight on a multitude of levels. There is the pragmatic frustration that travelling would become a wasted expense, as there is no guarantee of entry into the country of destination. Furthermore, there is the fear of 'magnifying glass', the immediate emotive impact on one's psyche of being under the gaze of authority, but also that this fear and Martin's earlier voiced fear of sharing border experiences stem from a similar place. It is here that we see the effects of global governance and power manifesting in the most intimate way within the individual. They are fully cognizant of international norms, aware that their documentation will fall under great scrutiny, and therefore subject to greater surveillance. While still able to travel regionally, my informants who were or are currently stateless conveyed similar sentiments as Jake did. Their status deterred them from going further than Asia, preferring to travel regionally. Even then, they were often made to wait and interrogated, adding to their sense of precarity and reinforcing their fear. The passport regime is still dominant and the binaries of citizen and non-citizen hold fast not simply at physical spaces such as immigration borders and ports of embarkation and disembarkation, but also in the imagination of the person.

4.1.2 Education

As a strong welfare state, various social goods are subsidized for citizens, one of which is education. It is compulsory by law in Brunei for any child, citizen or resident, above the age of six years and not yet of fifteen years to receive compulsory education for nine years (Compulsory Education Act 2007). Primary (Year 1 to Year 6) and secondary (Year 7 to Year 11) schooling are divided into government schools and private schools (The Brunei Education Statistics Book

2018 2019). All my informants who were or are currently stateless had attended private schools throughout their primary and secondary schooling, institutions that included Chinese schools as well as missionary schools. This is hardly surprising, given that schooling is free for citizens if they attend government schools, and non-citizens may apply to government schools if tuition is too costly in private schools, but still have to pay a fee to do so (World Data on Education 2006).

Furthermore, when the issue of higher education was raised, Jake drew from his own experience, lamenting that citizens who went to the national university he himself had attended, the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD), were given regular allowance to encourage schooling while the stateless would have to rely on parents' funding or take on part-time jobs in order to fund their own expenses, of which no waiver was provided, and no schooling allowance given. This has changed since, with Bruneian citizens now paying the same amount of tuition fees as PRs at all levels of higher education. Yet, the stateless remain exempt from scholarships (Universiti Brunei Darussalam). The criteria for scholarships as well as exchange programmes such as the Discovery Year programme that allows students to go to popular destinations such as Korea or the UK, are divided into categories of citizen and foreigner. Jake had taken pains to point out that the stateless do not fall into any category, and therefore could not apply.

The experience of being excluded from opportunities for higher education was similarly articulated by Beth, (60s), whom I interviewed during fieldwork in Canada. In the 1970s, Brunei had yet to establish domestic institutions of higher education beyond secondary level. UBD being the first of its kind, established in 1985. Hence, those who wished to pursue further studies needed to attend universities overseas (The National Education System for the 21st Century 2013, p. 7). Beth informed me that non-citizens were excluded from government funded programmes, and was instead introduced to opportunities for training in nursing, funded by the British Government which she had taken the chance to do. At the time of the interview, Beth was still working part-time as a nurse in Edmonton, and though we agreed on the value and dedication of nurses and careworkers, Beth had smiled ruefully, adding at the end of our discussion, that if she had been a citizen, she might have entertained the idea of becoming a doctor.

Regardless of her occupation, Beth was able to obtain training and a degree in nursing in the United Kingdom, resulting in a relatively seamless migratory path when her family migrated to Canada, and she decided to join them, instead of staying in the UK. Other informants had similar such pathways, finding alternate methods of recourse that allowed them to pursue their education overseas and eventually settle in either Canada or Singapore, as permanent residents or as citizens.

These stories demonstrate the varied experiences that the stateless of Brunei have, utilizing or chancing upon alternate sources from the nation-state and expressing their satisfaction with their

lifestyle and their life choices. As Allerton found in her study of stateless persons in Malaysia, the stateless people of Brunei provide an alternate image of statelessness often being conceived of as a state of being 'forlorn' or 'hopeless' (Allerton 2014). They are able to forge out satisfactory lives and demonstrate agency even with limitation of access to benefits and chances provided by the nation-state. In spite of this, the informants still lament the membership that they are denied, and express wishes that acquisition of citizenship will eventually become more egalitarian, particularly those who remain in Brunei, and who remain stateless.

4.2 Citizens

4.2.1 The Workplace

At a certain point during an interview with Mark, (60s), we began discussing his motivations for having migrated to Canada. He smiled and pointed at me, stating that if he had been like me, a citizen, given full access to benefits and welfare provided by Brunei, he would not have left, as there would be no practical reason to. In spite of building a sense of camaraderie based on our shared understanding that we were of the same ethnic group, some of my stateless informants carried out the same boundary making as Mark, rightly differentiating the experiences between citizen and stateless.

However, ethnic Chinese who possess citizenship are not necessarily given equal treatments as ethnic Malay citizens are and full access to rights. David, retired in his 60s but currently residing in Australia with permanent residency but Bruneian citizenship, had lived through the days of pre-Independence and after. David remarked that he was lucky that his father had been able to obtain citizenship, unlike his neighbours and peers in school who were ultimately unable to inherit the status. Despite retaining his citizenship and ultimately locating his belonging in Brunei as it was the country where he had spent his formative years, he spoke extensively of the discrimination he had experienced at the workplace whereby he was informed by word of mouth by his superiors that recruitment was halted for PRs, while promotions were prioritized for ethnic Malays as opposed to other ethnicities. The frustration at the inability to progress up the career ladder based on his ethnicity demonstrated that while David is technically and nominally a citizen, he was not immune from experiencing another layer of exclusion despite, on paper, being part of the national community.

Thus, ironically, operating in a similar labour market as so-called 'locals' and competing for positions on the same playing field forced David to confront a different set of walls as compared to his co-ethnic counterparts of whom held permanent residency or were stateless and thus from the beginning unable to access the occupation, or even consider the possibility of being promoted. The sense and foreboding of the inability to progress in his career eventually spurred David to migrate out of Brunei, to escape ethnic discrimination in the workplace. When questioned, he had

framed it thus: 'but really I did it for the kids', even detailing how he had taken a family vacation to Australia prior to making the decision to migrate, to gauge the reaction of his children towards the atmosphere of the country. David was determined that his children would obtain permanent residency, and eventually citizenship in Australia, aware that more inclusive modes of denizenship and citizenship are accessible, but framed this as a last resort, lamenting that he had been reluctant to migrate.

4.2.2 Land

Land acquisition, ownership, transfer as well as property ownership in Brunei are issues that are mired in uncertainty and a lack of transparency. While there are rules and regulations set out in black-and-white in the Land Code as well as the Land Code (Strata), demarcating ownership and transfer of land as a right belonging only to citizens, and property ownership rights extended to PRs and foreign property owners, these applications and cases are largely subject to the discretion of the Land Department and, as denoted in the legal code and act, His Majesty in Council.

Struggles over land that adopt a strong cultural slant vis-à-vis the state or a major corporation are not uncommon; territory and national identity are strongly interlinked. De Vienne aptly details how the discovery of oil and gas in Brunei concentrated economic and subsequently cultural power into the hands of the monarch, leading to an 'identity blaze' and promotion of national values which culminated in restricted access to land property, as aforementioned by Leigh. She notes that, "Since 1979, any acquisition (or long term lease) of land, by a Bruneian as by a foreigner, private individual or company has been subjected to the approval of the Sultan. Worse, a maximum of 2 hectares of land was unofficially imposed to Chinese citizens. Even duly approved and paid, they could not and still cannot get their acquisitions registered (de Vienne 2011, p. 37)."

While most of my stateless informants had voiced dissatisfaction with the laws on property and land ownership, acquisition, and inheritance, similar concerns were voiced by ethnic Chinese citizens. Hassan, 60s, a Chinese Muslim informant and citizen, had identified as a Muslim even in his childhood, as he grew up in a tight-knit Muslim neighbourhood, that had encouraged his family to visit their local mosque, even prior to the family's conversion, and had eventually married an ethnic Malay Muslim woman. When I asked whether he considered himself Chinese, he had been passionate in his claim over his ethnicity and informed that in official documentation, he is categorized as such. He began pointing out salient incidents where his ethnicity came to the fore. This opened up to a discussion on land inheritance, Hassan expressing concern over unfounded rumours circulating widely that passing on land to next of kin for ethnic Chinese citizens would be restricted and made effectively impossible. He stated that he was not worried for his daughters, whom he assumed would go on to marry ethnic Malays, but for his sons, because on paper, it would be a transfer of land and/or property from an ethnic Chinese father to his ethnic Chinese

son. At the time of writing this paper, the rumours had yet to be substantiated by relevant officials or to be enacted as law, but had taken root within the understanding amongst the ethnic Chinese community.

Hassan's narrative, on the one hand, expressed his anxiety about the property right as an ethnic Chinese. It is also an important piece of empirical evidence showing that he was affirmative of his ethnic identity despite his religious conversion. This observation counters what Sanders observes of Brunei, where he notes that non-Malay converts to Islam in Brunei generally adopt a Malay name and customs. According to him, to convert to Islam is therefore to "masuk Melayu", to effectively become Malay (Saunders 2002). While it is true that one adopts a Malay/Islamic name and is expected to follow religious and cultural customs, Hassan, and another Chinese Muslim informant, had identified not as Malay, but as Chinese, and seemed proud of their heritage. They were also categorized as such in official documentation, demonstrating a recognition of hybrid identities, but one that has conflicting and contradictory elements. As Muslims, they are culturally subsumed into the social life of ethnic Malays, particularly if married to an ethnic Malay. However, they share in the same exclusion and discrimination that the ethnic Chinese face, demonstrating the boundaries that are maintained in order to safeguard the true ideal characteristic of a citizen; to be both Malay and Muslim, *puak jati*.

These two aspects of exclusion, ceilings in career progression and difficulties in land acquisition, are but two examples of the gatekeeping that occurs within the country, often unofficial (as evident in de Vienne's observation and the narratives of the two informants). Thus, it is difficult to substantiate and justify, perhaps even more than the case for statelessness, precisely because they fall under the rubric of being 'citizens' and with it, the bundle of benefits and access to social goods. They are effectively denizens with more access to benefits and ease of travel than their stateless counterparts, but demonstrate the presence of gaps and barriers as they experience deeper integration within society but of being of a different ethnicity. Those who are of stateless status would be unaware of the barriers ethnic Chinese citizens face precisely because they are unable to enter these spaces in the first place.

5. Conclusion

I have demonstrated above how my informants have faced different facets of exclusion. These modes of exclusion fall under the umbrella of ethnic discrimination, and supplementing this with the additional concept of the 'denizen' allows us to see the ways in which ethnicity and citizenship intersect with one another and manifests as policies that impact the life paths and psyche of people. While this paper dealt exclusively with the case of the ethnic Chinese in Brunei, further research could be conducted with other groups that fall under the term denizen such as non-Muslim indigenous groups, Filipino and Indonesian domestic care workers, or migrant workers that are

deemed low-skilled hailing from Thailand, Bangladesh, and India, to map out and juxtapose their trajectories and experiences.

Though citizenship and its acquisition does not necessitate in the complete and entire banishment of inequality, it exists, whether benign or consequential, and so it is of no surprise that the informants thus operate and strategise within the confines of this system. But as human rights are largely unenforceable (Isin and Turner 2002) and the prospect of an overarching international enforcement of human rights seems distant, there is still a need to forward the claim for *meaningful* citizenship. The promise of citizenship has a multitude of positive bearings and meanings; to feel blanketed and secure in membership, liberated from the scrutiny of the gaze of governmentality at borders (Foucault 1982; Walters 2015) and immigration, and no longer conceptualized as 'incomplete' as a person or as a member of a particular nation-state. The discussions of the potentiality of postnational citizenship, regional citizenship, or cosmopolitan citizenship develop, rightfully so, but we need to remember "it is all too easy to ignore the facts on the ground: gaining access to membership status remains crucially important for defining our scope of opportunity, security, and sense of belonging" (Shachar, 2009, p. 29).

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Notes

¹ accessed via microfilm archives of the Singapore National Library/Lee Kong Chian Reference Library)

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