

Post-trauma: A Comparison of the Malay and Chinese Psyches in Response to the May 13 Tragedy in Their Literary Works from 1969 to 2019

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I. Introduction

THE memory of the May 13, 1969 tragedy still haunts Malaysian society decades after its occurrence. As the incident marks one of the most severe sectarian violence between the Malay and Chinese thus far, May 13 has unfailingly been used by Malaysia's former ruling government as its trump card to defy opposing powers and any call for change in each national election over the past fifty years. It would be an understatement to see May 13 as an affair that has been sufficiently resolved by Malaysia with no social repercussions today. In fact, the negative impact of the tragedy has developed into a phenomenon of post-trauma that continues to haunt the psyche of the people of Malaysia, especially the Malays and the Chinese. Even in recent years, Chinese Malaysians are still falling victim to socio-political isolation through statements such as "Chinese go back to China,"¹ "Chinese are cheaters,"² "Boycott Chinese businesses,"³ "Chinese are *pendatang*,"⁴ and so forth.

1. The utterance "Cina balik Tongshan (China)" was made by former Baling Statesman Datuk Seri Panglima Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim in Parliament on 4 November 2015. Kinabatangan Statesman Dato' Sri Bung Mokhtar Radin had also made the same statement. It was reiterated by Red Shirt Movement leader-cum-former Sungai Besar Umno Chief Dato' Sri Jamal Md Yunos.

2. "Your race are cheaters" is a quote from a press statement made by Red Shirt Movement Leader Mohd Ali Baharom on 22 December 2015 (www.todayonline.com/world/asia/school-your-cheating-race-ex-soldier-tells-msias-ruling-chinese-party?singlepage=true).

3. A statement made by the then agriculture and agro-based industries minister Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaacob in February 2015 (www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2015/02/02/boycott-chinese-businesses-to-lower-price-of-goods-minister-tells-malays/832557).

4. "Pendatang" means "aliens" or "intruders" in the Malay language, and is a view held by radical Malays towards Chinese Malaysians.

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Studies on May 13 have not agreed as to the cause of the clashes. “The May 13 Tragedy” (1969) report produced by the National Operations Council denotes it as an “engineered tension” closely related to the seditious campaign speeches and victory processions by the opposition party⁵ and also the preceding activities of the Labour Party of Malaya (LPM), which probably associated itself with the Communist Party of Malaya (MCP).⁶ The report supports the perspective of the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, who documented his accounts in his book entitled *13 Mei: Sebelum dan Selepas* (2007; revised in 2012). Former British officer Leon Comber perceived the tragic incident as an outbreak due to “historical circumstances,” namely that the communal riots erupted when “Malay and Chinese emotions rubbed raw and came dangerously close to breaking point” (61). On the other hand, Dr Kua Kia Soong’s *Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* (2007), deriving its data from the declassified reports by the British Public Records Office, suggested that the riots were *not* to be understood as spontaneous acts of communal tensions or due to the subversive Communists but a purposeful bloodshed aimed at orchestrating a “coup d’etat,” namely that a segment of the radical Malays had aimed to discredit the moderate policies of Tunku Abdul Rahman (Kua 3).

While the “truth”s are being debated, this paper is more interested in examining the Malay and Chinese psyches with regard to the May 13 tragedy as reflected in their respective literature. In this study, a total of thirty-two literary works produced by Malay and Chinese writers since 1969 until the current year were examined and listed in Section II of the paper. Of this corpus of works, all nine literary works produced by Malay writers on the topic, without exception, ascribe to a prescriptive approach, while the twenty-three literary works produced by Chinese ethnic are mainly descriptive in nature with only two exceptions, namely Ding Yun’s Chinese short story “A Village Under Siege” (“Wei Xiang,” 1982) and Shirley Geok-Lin Lim’s English novel *Joss and Gold* (2001). “Prescriptive” refers to writings with a clear authorial intent to propagate racial harmony, national unity or a related cause. It’s prescriptive because it’s trying to suggest a “solution” or ideal pathway to track on, like doctors prescribing medication to their patients. On the other hand, “descriptive” relates to writings that dwell on the depiction of grief and agony of the main characters, reflecting some sort of defensiveness and fixation in the post-trauma stage. These different literary responses on the subject matter, namely the prescriptive versus the descriptive, point to the different attitudes and post-trauma responses of the respective ethnic community in their literature related to the May 13 tragedy.

Although a majority of these writers did not witness the incident themselves, the fear and pain that are tied to the event are relived in their works. In fact, even the “belated” grievances that the writers tried to express and what their readers would experience accordingly are as haunting as being placed at the scene. This perhaps, is why literary trauma theory associates trauma with the Freudian notion of “belatedness” (Mahan 94). As if dealing with “what happens upon waking up” (Caruth 64), writers

5. “Victory Marches”; see Majlis 29-30.

6. “Engineered Tension”; see Majlis 27-28.

attempt to unpack a traumatic event that was not fully understood or experienced at the time of occurrence in their writings. Among the proponents of the trauma theory, Michael Rothberg applied it to the analysis of the Jewish holocaust literature (Rothberg, 2000). Detailing Rothberg’s analysis, William Mahan names anyone other than the surviving victims as the “bystanders” or the “latecomers.” The bystanders feel “impelled to bear an impossible witness to the extreme from a place of relative safety” and the latecomers inherit the detritus of the traumatic times (Mahan 2). He argues that these groups of people will recount the incident from their post-memory and “post-trauma” or “post-post-trauma” position (1). Stemming from this notion of belated response and the aftermath of the May 13 trauma, this article will expound on the post-tragedy accounts of various Malay and Chinese writers through the decades until current days.

II. Malay and Chinese Literature Written in Response to the May 13 Incident

THE nationwide state of Emergency immediately following May 13 was a significant drawback to the progress of Malaysia, which had just achieved her independence for a decade then. Also, there were strict guidelines and restrictions imposed by the authorities against discussions of May 13 in the public sphere. Nonetheless, the emotional impact of the incident still surfaces in quite a number of literary works produced by Malaysian writers between 1969 and 2019. Arranged in chronological order of publication, I managed to gather thirty-two literary works produced by Malay and Chinese writers in response to the May 13 tragedy. Of this pool of work, the written work by Abdullah Hussain, Ding Yun, Looi Yook Tho and Hanna Alkaf will be given a more in-depth analysis, as they reflect the respective Malay and Chinese ethnic mentalities in four respective eras that this article attempts to examine. Their perspectives on Malay-Chinese clashes relate to the generation they represent. Their propositions regarding racial relations in Malaysia dictate the differences in their writing approach, which will in turn influence their respective readers. First, let us run through my summary chart of thirty-two works in response to May 13 that were produced by Malay and Chinese writers between 1969 and 2019:

Between 1969 and 1979					
Author	Title & Language	Year	Genre	Content	D/P
Usman Awang	“Scapegoat” (Kambing Hitam) (Malay)	May 1969	Poem	Denouncement of the political manipulation that had killed the “scapegoats” in the name of racism, communism, extremism and gangsterism.	P
Said Zahari	“Hidden Hands” (Tangan-tangan yang tersembunyi) (Malay)	May 1969	Poem	Denouncement of the “hidden hands” that had shed the blood of the poor because of “colour, race, religion and language.”	P

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Lai Jingwen	“Catastrophe” (Da Haojie) (Chinese)	July 1969	Poem	<i>Lament</i> on the utter desperation of a “city of death.”	D
Lu Lang (Chen Zhengxin)	“The Wound” (Shangkou) (Chinese)	July 1969	Poem	<i>Lament</i> on one’s sufferings in a “thorny city,” where the flora and even the rain have all turned “thorny.”	D
Qian Qiu (Qiu Ruimao)	“Emotional Journey” (Xinxiang Licheng) (Chinese)	July 1969	Poem	<i>Lament</i> on one’s torturous entrapment under the debris of a fire.	D
Gui Yan (Lin Benfa)	“The Beast without a Tail” (Mei Weiba de Shou) (Chinese)	Nov. 1969	Poem	<i>Lament</i> on the destruction caused by the ravaging selfishness of the “beast.”	D
Shahnon Ahmad	“Greetings to My Family” (Salam Sekeluarga) (Malay)	Feb. 1970	Short story	Projection of undesirable outcome of the national election due to unreadiness of the majority voters.	P
Gui Yan (Lin Benfa)	“That piece of Rotten Meat” (Nakuai Furou) (Chinese)	Mar. 1970	Poem	<i>Lament</i> on an infected skin ulcer as a euphemism for a black spot in history.	D
Shahnon Ahmad	“Al” (Malay)	May 1970	Short story	Denouncement of the indifference of Malaysians abroad towards their home country.	P
Abdullah Hussain *	<i>Interlock</i> (First published in Malay entitled <i>Interlok</i> in 1971. English translation was available in 2010; amended version published in 2012 after the novel was rejected by the Indian community due to its derogatory word use, i.e., “pariah” (outcast) (Malay; English translation)	1971	Novel	Projection of how Malay, Chinese and Indian communities could possibly “interlock” into a cohesive Malaysian society.	P
A. Samad Said	“Seed of Hope” (Benih Harapan) (Malay)	1973	Poem	Exhortation to embrace peace and equality, without which the independence of the country could not be fully appreciated.	P
Ee Tiang Hong	“Kuala Lumpur, May 1969” (English)	1976	Poem	Depiction of a <i>bitter memory</i> of violence associated with the riot, imagery of soldiers in leopard-spot uniform, and the media being controlled by the authorities.	D
Ee Tiang Hong	“Requiem” (English)	1976	Poem	Expression of <i>deep grief and sorrow</i> even as time	D

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				passes after the May 13 tragedy.	
Between 1980 and 1989					
Author	Title & Language	Year	Genre	Content	D/P
Ding Yun *	“A Village Under Siege” (“Wei Xiang,” 1982. Its Malay translation entitled “Terbelenggu di Kampung Halaman” was available in 1988) (Chinese)	1982	Short story	Portrayal of how people would voluntarily help each other in time of need irrespective of skin colour.	P
Poh Seng Titt	“Shock” (Jinghun) (Chinese)	1987	Poem	Expression of <i>anguish</i> over the racial tensions in relation to the Private Adam shooting in 1987, juxtaposing it with the painful memory of May 13 in 1969.	D
<p>Note: The Malay writers were very much concerned about other issues during the 1980s, especially regarding charting new directions for Modern Malay Literature. No literary work related to May 13 tragedy was spotted.</p>					
Between 1990 and 1999					
Author	Title & Language	Year	Genre	Content	D/P
Xiao Hei	<i>On the Eve (Qianxi)</i> (Chinese)	1990	Novel	<i>Denouncement</i> of the intensified conflicts among visionless Chinese leaders via a metaphor of the eruption of boils on a 513 victim who also contracted an eye disease due to the boils on her body.	D
Abdullah Hussain *	“Melissa” (Malay)	1992	Short story	Projection of how forgiveness and mutual acceptance could weather the test of racial extremism.	P
Chuah Guat Eng	<i>Echoes of Silence</i> (English)	1994	Novel	Depiction of a great sense of <i>displacement</i> in a Chinese that resulted in her choosing to migrate and leave Malaysia after the May 1969 incident.	D
Looi Yook Tho *	“Independence Day” (Duli ri) (Chinese)	1999	Poem	A <i>mockery</i> of the practice of “fair distribution” of the economic pie, which was built on an unjust basis, written from the perspective of protectionism of a certain ethnic group.	D

Between 2000 and current					
Author	Title / Language	Year	Genre	Content	D/P
Teo Hsu-Ming	<i>Love and Vertigo</i> (English)	2000	Novel	The May 13 tragedy was depicted as the main <i>entanglement</i> that had caused her family to migrate.	D
Looi Yook Tho *	“Just because I’m wearing a pair of Yellow Socks” (Zhishi Chuanle Yishuang Huang Wazi) (Chinese)	2000	Poem	An <i>emotional outpouring</i> about one’s less privileged position in one’s country merely because of one’s skin colour (“yellow socks”), tracked down to the history of inter-racial aggression on May 13.	D
Shirley Geok-Lin Lim	<i>Joss and Gold</i> (English)	2001	Novel	Casting of a vision of a new nation that is not tied to ethnicity.	P
Ng Kim Chew	“On a Slow Boat to China” (Kai Wang Zhongguo de Man Chuan) (Chinese)	2001	Short story	Depiction of <i>attackers, gun shots and special branch police</i> in the streets and, via an illusion of a character, a metaphoric imagery of a sailor boat filled with <i>dead bodies</i> of the Chinese sailing very slowly towards the Far East.	D
Looi Yook Tho *	“My Account of 513” (Wo de Wuyisan) (Chinese)	2006	Poem	Depiction of decades-old <i>emotional suppression</i> , being “silenced” from mentioning 513, and the unjust sociopolitical “crossbars” imposed on the non-Malays.	D
Ding Yun *	<i>The Horror of the Equator</i> (<i>Chidao Jing Zhe</i>) (Chinese)	2007	Novel	Vivid description of the <i>violent attacks</i> between Malays and Chinese during the May 13 outbreak.	D
Lin Jianwen	“Carving on the Fishbones” (Zai Yuhai Shang Kegou) (Chinese)	2009	Poem	An <i>overly calm</i> depiction of the loss of lives on May 13, the double standard imposed on the citizens wearing “yellow socks” (quoting Looi), and a documentation of such experiences on oracle or fish bones.	D
Li Tianbao	<i>Romance of Malaya</i> (<i>Qiluo Xiang</i>) (Chinese)	2010	Novel	Expression of an attitude when relating the May 13 tragedy: Depiction of a maidservant shutting the doors and windows of the	D

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				house when sensing that major <i>turmoil</i> was happening on the streets.	
Li Zishu	<i>An Era of Farewell (Gaobie de Niandai)</i> (Chinese)	2012	Novel	The story starts from page 513, depicting a lady whose life was altered after she encountered a life-threatening incident on May 13. There is no 'secret' to be discovered in this story, if the readers expect any. As if there was a total loss of memory, the 'missing pages' are indications of <i>deliberate denial</i> of trauma.	D
Ho Sok Fong	"Marsh of Dead" ("Si Ren Zhaoguo") in <i>Maze Carpet (Migong Tanzi)</i> (Chinese)	2014	Short story	Haunting description of the <i>crushed skull, deformed human face and ruptured intestines</i> of a female subject that refused to breathe her last despite being murdered over and over again.	D
Hafizah Iszahanid	<i>We're not Scarecrows (Bukan Orangorang)</i> (Malay)	2015	Novel	The onset of the story was about Malay-Chinese racial conflicts in 1969, relating to the divisive ideologies and political campaigns during the era; exhortation for all to be "humans, not scarecrows."	P
Looi Yook Tho *	"May 1969" (1969 Nian Wuyue) (Chinese)	2018	Poem	<i>Lament</i> of the loss of lives during May 13, and expression of <i>cynicism</i> about those with vested interests, presented in pictorial form.	D
Hanna Alkaf *	<i>The Weight of Our Sky</i> (English)	2019	Novel	Projection of how one's courage to extend kindness to people of different backgrounds and doing "what is right" is desired for the nation to withstand the weight of racial conflicts.	P

* Four authors from the abovementioned, namely Abdullah Hussain, Ding Yun, Looi Yook Tho and Hanna Alkaf, and their respective works are discussed at length in Sections III, IV, V and VI of this article.

** D/P: Descriptive or Prescriptive?

Between 1969 and 1979: This list contains works produced during the first decade following the May 13 incident, i.e., the decade when memories were still fresh and pains were still felt. Chinese poems such as “Holocaust,” “The Wound” and “Emotional Journey” were all descriptive in nature, describing the grief or horror of the incident. Surprisingly, Malay poems entitled “Scapegoat,” “Hidden Hands,” and “Seed of Hope,” along with short stories such as “Greetings to My Family” and “Al,” as well as the novel *Interlok* were all written in a prescriptive manner, namely with a clear authorial intent to promote unity of the nation, with an emphasis on the common good of all people over ethnic differences. For this era, Abdullah Hussain’s novel *Interlok* (1971; English translation, *Interlock* 2010) will be discussed at length in Section III of the paper.

Between 1980 and 1989: This is the decade following the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP).⁷ Malay writers sought out to incorporate new themes and styles in their writings and worked diligently towards regional recognition. Almost none revisited the topic of May 13. However, that was not the case with Chinese writers, who continued to wrestle on the subject matter until today. During this era, Ding Yun, for example, produced his award-winning and well-received short story entitled “A Village Under Siege” (“Wei Xiang,” 1982). Its unusual prescriptive approach found favour with Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP),⁸ and was thus translated into the Malay language by DBP in 1988 with the title “Terbelenggu di Kampung Halaman.” This work will be discussed at length in Section IV of the paper.

Between 1990 and 1999: During this era of Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad,⁹ the booming economic growth of the country did not wipe out the post-memory of May 13. The subject matter surfaced in the poems produced by Looi Yook Tho, who is often referred to as the prince of Chinese Malaysian poetry writing. Abdullah Hussain wrote specifically on the topic. The literary works of the former were predominantly descriptive in nature, while those of the latter were highly prescriptive. Abdullah Hussain and Looi will be discussed at length in Section III and Section V respectively.

From 2000–current: In the new millennium, Malaysian writers of all languages still published on the topic. Their post-trauma accounts on the bloodshed incident have gained international attention. In fact, the latest novel on May 13 is Hanna Alkaf’s *The Weight of Our Sky*, published by Simon & Schuster in 2019. Hanna Alkaf will be discussed at length in Section VI of the paper.

7. The New Economic Policy (NEP) is a social-reengineering programme implemented by the Malaysian government during 1971-1990 to eradicate poverty and eliminate the identification of race with economic functions. It has always been criticized for its overt favoritism of the Malays to the effect of relegating the non-Malays in the country to second-class citizens.

8. DBP is a statutory body whose functions include the development of language and literature, especially on promotion of the Malay language.

9. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad is the 4th and 7th (2018-2020) Prime Minister of Malaysia. He was successful in creating economic success for Malaysia his first term as Prime Minister (1981-2003), especially during the 1990s, which he boosted Malaysian national pride with a new academic term, namely, “The Malaysian Race (Bangsa Malaysia).”

III. Abdullah Hussain's *Interlok* (1971) and "Melissa" (1992)

MALAYSIAN National Laureate Abdullah Hussain (1920–2014) devoted close attention to the issue of interracial relations in his novel *Interlok* (1971; its English translation entitled *Interlock* was published in 2010) and, concerning the May 13 tragedy, in his short story "Melissa" (1992). Two things are notable about Abdullah Hussain. First, he was enlisted in a three-month training at the *Syonan Koa Kunrenzo* (Japanese Training Institute for Senior Officers) during the Japanese Occupation, resulting in his pro-Japan orientation. In his own words, his "fanatical" nationalist idealism had caused him to believe that in helping the Japanese, the European colonial powers could be overthrown, as how the Dutch fell to the Japanese in Sumatra and Jawa.¹⁰ Second, Abdullah Hussain adhered to the "art for society" motto, which was propagated by the Malay writers' movement known as "Angkatan Sasterawan 50," or ASAS '50, during the era. Besides believing that official use of the Malay language would promote the unity of Malaysia as a nation, Abdullah Hussain, like his other Muslim Malay colleagues, also saw Malay literature as a means to influence readers towards goodness and Allah swt.¹¹

Abdullah Hussain's award-winning historical fiction entitled *Interlok* was published not long after the May 13 incident. *Interlok* does not depict the May 13 incident per se but offers an honest examination of the historical divisive factors that had kept the Indians, Malays and Chinese in Malaysia apart. The novel depicts how the British's "divide and rule" policy succeeded in creating hardliners among the Malays, owing to their less-favoured economic status. In the story, when the Japanese invade Peninsular Malaya, Lazim, one of the Malay leaders, tells the villagers, "We must help the Japanese. If the British pass our village, we must arrest them and turn them over to the Japanese" (Abdullah Hussain 2012: 318-319). He says, "They (referring to the Japanese) are the ones who have chased away the white people. And one day, we will rule our own country" (Abdullah Hussain 2012: 318-319).

As reflected in *Interlok*, the Malays had also projected their hatred of the colonial government onto the local Chinese, perceiving them as people of pagan religions who gathered wealth from the Malays via shrewd tricks. At that time, there were cases of Malays losing their mortgaged properties to the white capitalists due to their inability to pay off their accumulated debts. It was a time when the banking and legal systems were not fully understood. In *Interlok*, we learn that Seman's father has mortgaged his house to Cina Panjang, the tall Chinese "*taukeh* [small business owner]." Even though Cina Panjang can produce evidence of the signed documents, what transpired between

10. See Abdullah Hussain (2000: 307). The text was a project paper presented at the National Writers General Dialogue session, known as "Dialog Agung Bersama Sasterawan Negara," at the DBP Seminar Room on 26 February 2000. The session was organized by the Kuala Lumpur Writers Association, known as Persatuan Penulis Kuala Lumpur or KALAM and Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.

11. See Abdullah Hussain (2000: 288). The text was the transcript of Abdullah Hussain's acceptance speech for his National Literary Award at Anugerah Sastera Negara ke-8 in 1996.

the two parties is not entirely convincing, since Seman has never seen it and heard anything related to it from his dad: “Seman began to think about Cina Panjang. Wouldn’t it be good if the Japanese arrested him? Then the paddy lands could be returned to the [original] owners” (Abdullah Hussain 2012: 318).

Eventually, at the end of *Interlok* all three ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Indians and Chinese, learn to accept each other and begin to understand their new roles in the newly formed country named Malaya while ushering in Malayan Independence Day on 31 August 1957. Here, Abdullah Hussain projected a strong desire of all the peoples “to form a single Malayan society, where everybody could live in peace and harmony” (2012: 406). Yew Seng, the second son of Cina Panjang, was portrayed as a prototype of a younger generation of Chinese Malaysians whose love for Malaysia and friendliness towards the Malays were genuine.

Abdullah Hussain’s short story “Melissa” was a work that reflected upon the May 13 tragedy. It is about a Chinese female university student, Melissa, who chooses the May 13 riots as her undergraduate research project. In the story, Abdullah Hussain created two model characters: an unnamed Chinese woman who extends forgiveness to the Malay people who murdered her fiancé during the May 13 outbreak, and Melissa, the protagonist, who also loses her Muslim boyfriend that day. Abdullah Hussain appraised the former as follows:

[...] Such is a true Malaysian woman, a result of this blessed land, for she has not the slightest regret. To her Malay colleague who caused her to lose her fiancé she bears no grudge but continues to remain close-knit like real relatives. She also does not regret the scar on her face that, because it was beyond her will, forced to become a spinster. (1997: 670)¹²

As for Melissa, Abdullah Hussain gave her an interrogative role. Melissa questions, “Why were there riots? Why should people living in a peaceful country suddenly strike and kill each other? Why must the Chinese kill the Malays and Malays kill the Chinese? Why?” (2012: 668)

In “Melissa,” Abdullah Hussain concluded that the seed of interracial rivalry was but the “virus implanted by the colonial government,” which is the “racial polarization virus” (2012: 672). Subsequently, Abdullah Hussain validated the local identity of the Chinese in Malaysia. He wrote, “[Melissa] cannot live in China, even though she speaks Chinese, adheres to Chinese culture and her ancestors were immigrants from Guangdong [...] Their mentalities are different” (2012: 680). Thus, back in 1992, Abdullah Hussain had already offered a counterargument to those who instigated the Chinese Malaysians to “return to China (*balik ke Negeri China*).” To date, Malaysia has been the cherished birthplace and home country for at least four generations of Chinese. All in all, Abdullah Hussain’s writing somehow became the benchmark for Malay writers in adopting the prescriptive approach in resolving interracial conflicts in their literature.

12. The following quotes are my translations from the original texts in the Malay language.

IV. Ding Yun's "A Village Under Siege" (1982) and *The Horror of the Equator* (2007)

DING Yun is the pen name of Chen Chun An. He was one of the first Chinese Malaysian writers who dealt with the May 13 issue in novels and short stories. Contrary to the common misconception that Chinese Malaysians are all well-to-do city folk, Ding Yun was born to an impecunious family in Klang, Selangor. As he could not pay his school fees of RM7.50, he had to quit schooling after completing his primary education. He worked at a wood factory in Hulu Langat. Ding Yun was first recognized for his "estate stories," which had the themes of death, stupidity, ill-treatment by oppressors and so forth. Born in the 1950s, Ding Yun and his contemporaries remembered two major incidents that pricked the ethnic sensitivities of the different races after Malaysia's Independence, namely, May 13 and "Operation Lalang."¹³ Ding Yun himself suffered physical and emotional separation from his mother and eight siblings during the May 13 incident.

Engaging May 13 as its theme, Ding Yun's "A Village Under Siege" earned him the first prize in the short story category of the Literature Competition jointly organized by the Chinese Malaysian Writers Association and the *Malaysian Thung Pau Daily Newspaper* in 1982. It tells the story of Lin Tuo, who lives with his father and sister in a suburban village with Malays and native tribes as their neighbours. The unpretentious thought processes of Lin Tuo are a good representation of the simple minds of a majority of suburban dwellers who do not see the impending danger to their lives immediately following the 3rd Malaysian General Election:

[...] He doubts what chaotic situation could have taken place in such poor and remote areas like theirs. The Malays, Chinese, or the native people have all tagged along well to earn their living together all this while. Working together, they have small conflicts from time to time. But violence? Killing of each other? That could only happen among sophisticated city people, right? (Ding, 1982)¹⁴

During the outbreak of May 13 in the city, many Chinese families who lived adjacent to the Malays evacuated their villages to avoid any looming sectarian clashes. However, there is an interesting twist to the story of the escape of Lin Tuo's family. Halfway through, they decide to turn back to their home because Lin's father, a man who had always toiled on the soil, insists that he cannot leave his ploughs behind. Lo and behold, there is another twist to the story at the end: Torches show up at their gate, and when it seems altogether impossible for the Lins to run away this time, the "intruders" in the dark present themselves—they are Lin's Malay neighbours Samad

13. "Operation Lalang" was the second largest crackdown by the Royal Police Malaysia since the May 13 disturbance. Political suspects such as NGO activists, opposition politicians and intellectuals were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA). It also involved the revoking of publication licences of two newspapers, *The Star* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, as well as two weeklies, *The Sunday Star* and *Watan*.

14. My English translation from the original Chinese text.

and Mohammad, who have run out of food supplies. Equally afraid of being slain by any armed mob, the two men came over hoping to get a share of any edibles such as tapioca or beans. Ding Yun's writing approach in "A Village Under Siege" was prescriptive in nature. His authorial intent was clear: To safeguard the well-being of everybody, regardless of skin colour and social background, sectarian activities should be curbed while mutual acceptance of each other should be promoted.

Ding Yun's novel, *The Horror of the Equator* [*Chidao jingzhe*], on the other hand, is highly descriptive in nature, which was a common writing approach of Chinese writers in historical accounts. In this novel, Ding Yun described May 13 as a memory of "reds", namely red wired gate, red soil, red well water, heads detached from bodies, and, patches of blood stains of the murdered. He also documented that the May 13 violence began in Kuala Lumpur and impacted Melaka, Penang and other cities swiftly. He reported that the Malay-Chinese clashes had caused houses, shops, schools and cars to be set on fire: "About 300 people lost their lives during the bloodshed that lasted from the 13th to the 18th. Some were killed by gunshots from armed soldiers. The number of arrests easily came up to more than 3,000" (Ding 2007: 73-75). In short, Ding Yun engaged the descriptive approach to recount the grievances related to the Malay-Chinese clashes on May 13, 1969.

V. Looi Yook Tho's "My Account of 513" (2006), "May 1969" (2018) and Related Poems

AS a matter of fact, Chinese Malaysian writers have never shed off their May 13 anxiety in their writings. Even today, poet Looi Yook Tho still writes extensively on the topic. Born in Penang and a software engineer by profession, Looi has won many Chinese literature awards for his poems.¹⁵ Notable for his linguistic recreation and avant-garde writing style, Looi has also written political poems that depict the difficulties Chinese Malaysians experienced under the social-reengineering program implemented by the Malaysian government since the 1970s. The repeated symbolism he employed in this respect included "the yellow socks" and "the high jump crossbars."¹⁶ At least four of Looi's poems depicted the May 13 tragedy graphically. His picture poem entitled "May 1969" (2018), for example, gives an account via three calendars of three respective groups in relation to the tragedy, namely the "winning" side (i.e., the ones who have successfully erased May 13 from the calendar of the year); the families of the May 13 victims (i.e., parents whose memory of the month consists of nothing but May 13); and

15. Looi's literary awards include the Taiwan Times Literature Award, Malaysia Huazong ("Floral Trail") Literature Award, Malaysia Outstanding Young Writers Award, and Malaysia Hai-O ("Seagull") Writers Award. His poetry collections include *In My Wonderful Imaginary Kingdom* (Zai Wo Wanneng de Xiangxiang Guodu, 1999), *An Apology for the Yellow Socks* (Huang Wazi Zibian Shu, 2008), and *Search for a Home* (Xunjia, 2013).

16. The "yellow socks" symbolism has also found influence in poet Lin Jianwen's anthology, *A Cat that lives in a Tropical Jungle* (Mao Zhu Zai Yizuo Redai Yuanshi Senlin, 2009).

the political opportunists who use May 13 as their rhetoric to manipulate the people (i.e., every day thenceforth becomes May 13):

MAY 1969¹⁷
 History Book of the “Winning”

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12		14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Calendar of the Mothers after the Onslaught on their Children
 following the Mother’s Day celebration

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
			□	□	□	□
□	□	□	□	□	□	□
□	13	□	□	□	□	□
□	□	□	□	□	□	□
□	□	□	□	□	□	

Ever-repeated Gimmicks of Those with Vested Interests

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	13	13	13	13	13
13	13	13	13	13	13	13
13	13	13	13	13	13	

Another poem by Looi entitled “My Account of May 13,” which contains 58 lines altogether, provided more poetic imageries of the incident. An abstract of the poem is as follows:

I don’t remember seeing any blood that day
 In my mother’s womb, my dream
 Was shattered
 By a heart hammering louder than fleeing footsteps

17. This poem is yet to be in print. Permission has been obtained from the poet to cite it and translate it into English in this article.

My memory fails me
Was it a war drum, or was it my own heartbeat?

The icy corpses of the dead
And the questioning lips of the living
One by one, all are buried under the sanctions of the Statute

Silenced childhood, silenced roads
Silenced army camps, silenced *kopitiams*
Silenced telephone booths, silenced libraries
Silenced badminton courts, silenced journals
Silenced asylums
Silenced mother¹⁸

Towards the end of the poem, Looi complained that: “This city has borne too much historical baggage / Burdened by too many matters of the heart / Unable to put them down / Let’s have a 513 memorial garden, shall we?” The excruciating pain of May 13 also found its way in two other poems by Looi. In “Independence Day” (1999), he wrote, “On a rainy day that followed / Truth contested with spears and *parang* knives / The blood of our father and the Chinese people / Treaded along the edge of the same knife / The red of the hibiscus. The blood on the roads” (Tian, Wang & Looi 238-240).

In “Just because I’m wearing a pair of yellow socks,” Looi portrayed himself as a terrified fetus hidden in his mother’s womb:

I lie hidden in the amniotic fluid of my mother’s womb
Her heartbeats quicken as the Malay *kompang* drums roar
In a rubber estate of deafening silence, she takes shelter
From the *parang* knives of the lying officers
[...]
The shedding of the same blood always repeats on May 13
On the peninsular on the Equator where Truth was twisted
The violent mob with erect penises kicked aside the Law
And ejaculated the sperm of anarchism
Into the womb of a maiden forbidden to use her mother tongue
freely
Just because, her mother was wearing a pair of yellow socks?
A chill wind from the forest of multiculturalism
Throws me back to that year, that day
[...]
when this land flowed with blood (Looi 2008: 42-52)

18. This poem was first published in the 2nd June 2006 issue of the magazine *Jiaofeng*. It was then selected and included in Looi Yook Tho, *Xunjia (Searching for a Home)*, and also in Tian, Wang & Looi: 238-240.

All in all, the intense traumatic expressions relating to the violence of the crime scene have been a fixation in Looi's memory, which altogether represented the wounded psyche of many Chinese Malaysians, even today.

VI. Hanna Alkaf's *The Weight of Our Sky*

A recipient of the D.K. Dutt Award for Literary Excellence, Hanna Alkaf gained attention among literary critics with her youth fiction *The Weight of Our Sky* (2019), which deals with the May 13 tragedy. She is probably the first Malay writer who chose to write in English on the topic. Her novel tells of a Eurasian teenage girl named Melati Ahmad who is traumatized by a djinn that keeps threatening her with the sight of her mother being murdered mercilessly. This djinn plays the role of the devil's advocate to distort Melati's sensibility. It also serves as a literary device to facilitate Hanna's language of magical realism. When grotesque images of people being killed constantly appear in Melati's hallucinations, the cruelty of sectarian mobs and the destruction during the May 13 tragedy can thus be presented liberally.

As the novel was written for youths, Hanna employed the prescriptive approach: She presented two near-flawless model characters, namely Melati's mom and Auntie Bee. Melati never knew Auntie Bee beforehand, but it is under the roof of Auntie Bee that Melati, together with other survivors, finds refuge on that ill-fated day. On the other hand, Melati's mom has to move around with her medical team to attend to patients even as she has no clue of her own daughter's whereabouts. Here, the sacrificial services of both of these ladies are portrayed as the outworking of their faith in God. In the novel, Melati's mom is known for her fervent prayers, symbolized by her beautiful prayer mat. As for Auntie Bee, her devotedness to Jesus Christ is symbolized by the wooden cross on her wall. Hanna's prescriptive approach in showcasing the respect for the faith and religious practices of others was quite commendable. Another thought-provoking pointer in *The Weight of Our Sky* is the question of who was to be blamed for the casualties in the tragedy. The protagonist has a constant struggle with self-blame: "She's (Melati's mom) going to die, and it's your (Melati's) fault" (Hanna 261). This nagging blame game will eventually lead readers to reckon that there is no definite answer to the "whose fault" question but that it is a collective historical burden for every Malaysian.

VII. Conclusion

AFTER a tragic incident, a person will naturally encounter experiences such as denial, anger, constant bargaining of if-onlys, grief and depression. Many may eventually recover if they are able to nurse their feelings and reframe their perspective of the tragedy they suffered personally. However, not everyone can manage to relate to those who have failed their trust. Forgiveness is one aspect; recovery of the inner being is another. In the post-trauma stage, one's denial of the tragedy and isolation from others, for example, may turn into acute pain and long-lasting bitterness. The descriptive language of pain and the defensive tones in Chinese Malaysian writings on the topic of

May 13, to a certain extent, reflect their emotional and psychological fixation on the post-trauma stage. This ‘wounded’ language somewhat became the ingrained DNA of Chinese Malaysian writings. On the other hand, modern-day Malay writers, though continually adhering to the prescriptive formula of promoting humanity above other authorial intents from “Day One,” are not too naïve to neglect the post-traumatic repercussions of May 13. Five decades after the tragedy and even today, it is still a nagging racial harmony issue that Malay writers will not give up hope on engaging.

Of the corpus of literature related to May 13, Abdullah Hussain and Ding Yun represent two different generations born before Malaysia’s Independence Day. Looi Yook Tho and Hanna Alkaf represent Generation X and Generation Y (a.k.a. the Millennials), respectively, namely two generations born after Independence. As discussed in Section III, Abdullah Hussain represented the generation that adhered to the “art for society” slogan of the ASAS 50 writers’ guild, which subsequently laid the ground for the Malay language and religion of Islam to shape the core identity of Malaysia. His prescriptive approach makes provisions for other ethnic groups to participate in the nation-building process of Malay(si)a, but under those delineated terms. Ding Yun represents the generation born during the decade when Malaysia attained Independence from the British and began her engine of self-governance. This generation witnessed the May 13 tragedy, and was subdued by the State of Emergency as well as tight control over potentially “subversive elements” in published works. As discussed in Section IV, Ding Yun’s “A Village Under Siege” (1982) is probably the only piece of Chinese literature on the topic that employed the prescriptive approach, envisioning open communal interactions between different ethnic groups. Poet Looi Yook Tho represents the generation that first underwent the NEP launched by Tun Abdul Razak. The ethnic Chinese experienced hardship due to stringent quotas under the NEP limiting their enrolment in public universities as well as job placements in the civil service. Since then, the ethnic Chinese could not help but suffer an inferiority complex and see themselves as “second-class citizens” in their own country of birth. This whining mentality was described vividly in all four of Looi’s poems discussed in Section V. Last but not least, as discussed in Section VI, Hanna Alkaf represents the modern educated Malays who want to chart new pathways for dialogue, especially on the issue of ethnic differences and disharmony. Her prescriptive approach in literature, namely to engage principles of humanity when tackling teething issues of racial conflict, is nevertheless benchmarked against those guidelines set by the founding generations of Malay writers.

Looking ahead, so long as Chinese Malaysians still experience unequal opportunities during the application for government jobs or studying at public universities, the descriptive grievances over the May 13 tragedy as exemplified in Looi’s poems will still find an outlet in the contemporary Chinese literary sphere. On the other hand, the prescriptive approach adhered by Malay writers from “Day One” will probably not change, as the confidence of the Malays as the majority ethnic group in the country, with their special privileges as “Bumiputera” or the indigenous people of the land, is firmly secured and protected under the federal constitution. The difference in the political status of the Malay and Chinese languages, and the

perspectives of the Malays and the Chinese regarding the bloodshed on May 13, 1969, has altogether resulted in differing approaches in their respective literary works in the post-May 13 era, even today. The difference between the Malays and Chinese in recounting the tragedy reflects the differing extent of their post-trauma stages. With the ill-memory of May 13 still deep within the psyche of both the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups in Malaysia, it will not be a surprise if the May 13 theme recurs in the newly published books written by young Malaysians.

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ABSTRACT

The post-May 13 era, especially during the decade after 1969, was a trying time for Malaysia. Ethnic relations between the Malays and Chinese were tenuous. While declassified records revealed that the tragedy was politically engineered by some elitist groups to serve their self-interests, the majority of the Malaysian society had no conclusive ideas as to what had actually led to this regrettable bloodshed. This article discusses the literary work of prominent and emerging Malaysian writers of Malay and Chinese ethnic backgrounds respectively, namely Abdullah Hussain, Ding Yun, Looi Yook Tho and Hanna Alkaf. It delineates the generation they represented, their perspectives on the Malay–Chinese clashes, and their attitudes or propositions regarding racial relations in Malaysia. The differences in their prescriptive and descriptive approaches in writing and the magnitude of influence upon their readers will also be discussed.

Keywords: May 13 Tragedy, Malay, Malaysian Chinese, Abdullah Hussain, Ding Yun, Looi Yook Tho, Hanna Alkaf

後創傷：一九六九至二〇一九年間 馬來與馬華作者對五一三事件的回應與其心境

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摘要

後五一三時期，尤其自一九六九年後的十年間，對馬來西亞來說尤其煎熬，馬來人與華人之間的種族關係如履薄冰。當解密文件曝光後，揭露了整個悲劇其實是某些菁英羣體為了滿足私慾而一手操控的政治謀略，而大多數馬來西亞人卻對這場不幸的流血衝突毫無頭緒。本文檢視阿都拉胡先(Abdullah Hussain)、丁雲、呂育陶以及韓娜阿卡芙(Hanna Alkaf)這幾位著名馬來及馬華作家的作品。他們陳述了所處的時代，透過他們的視角探察馬來人與華人的衝突，以及對馬來西亞種族關係的態度與再現。本文同時也探討各個作家如何以不同的觀點，以及寫作上的敘述手法，帶給讀者深遠的影響。

關鍵詞：五一三事件、馬來人、華人、阿都拉胡先、丁雲、呂育陶、韓娜阿卡芙

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