



## Re-conceptualising Racial Identity of Subaltern Malaysian Chinese Community in Tash Aw's *We, the Survivors*

Gheeta Chandran & Foong Soon Seng

### Abstract

This paper discusses the dynamics of subaltern identity in Tash Aw's *We, the Survivors* (2019) through a guilt-ridden dialogue between an ex-convict and a journalist. Lee Hock Lye often recalls his past life as a working class and "no money Chinese people". The narration reveals double subjugation and accentuates the subaltern Chinese's exclusion in the society. Therefore, the paper aims to analyse the colonial concepts of identity that operates in Malaysia which leads to an imagination of 'Malaysian-Chinese' as 'outsiders' through Lee Hock Lye or more commonly known as Ah Hock's narration as a member of a subaltern Chinese community. Racial identity is constructed, and reconstructed by individuals in the presence of Others, It is implied, imagined and perceived as real. As the subaltern identity of the marginalised people are constantly homogenised and overlooked in the postcolonial studies, it is imperative to re-conceptualise the subaltern Chinese identity in Aw's *We, the Survivors* (2019) and acknowledge the fact that one's own identity as "fluid and transforming" (Richards, 2010). Colonial constructions of subaltern Chinese identities positioned them as the *Other* in Malaysia and the homogenisation of subaltern identity further reinforces stereotypes and prejudices. Thus, such homogeneity positions them as the victims of exploitation and discrimination in society. This research aims to explore the notion of identity in a postcolonial literature as contemporary postcolonial setting with its emergence of immigrants, hybrid realms and rise of various cultural diversities, identity often surface as an important issue to analyse. Contemporary identity construction endures colonial constructions of race. It is understood that racial identity is derived from the socio-political context of colonialism and postcolonialism. The research thus will argue the ways in which the construction of identity in the postcolonial world are viewed and presented in a subaltern Malaysian Chinese community as an attempt to understand the dilemma and sufferings of these people through Tash Aw's *We, the Survivors* (2019).

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Othering, Racial Identity, 'Malaysian-Chinese'.