

CHAPTER 6

NEW MALAY MIDDLE CLASS LIFESTYLES AND CULTURE

In Chapter 4, we discussed the making of the new Malay middle class by examining intergenerational mobility based on several objective indicators such as occupation, income and education; we showed that the new Malay middle class is a new or first generation middle class. In Chapter 5, we discussed the new Malay middle class family; we showed that while its members paid emphasis to class reproduction, they continuously reaffirmed their links with their extended kin, and that the new Malay middle class nuclear family existed within a 'modified extended family' framework adapted to urban conditions. This chapter builds on earlier chapters by examining several inter-related issues pertaining to the new Malay middle class lifestyles and culture, such as living conditions (namely housing status and types), asset ownership, consumption patterns (such as shopping and dining) and leisure activities (such as television viewing, reading, and participation in social clubs, travel and tourism). The final part examines the respondents' self-evaluation of their own class positions to see if their subjective evaluations match our objective definition of the new middle class. This chapter aims to show that the new Malay middle class lifestyles and cultural preferences are not homogenous; and that while the more affluent sections of the new Malay middle class have developed distinct high status lifestyles and cultural

preferences, many still have lifestyles and cultural preferences that do not differentiate them as a distinct social category from the lower classes.

Asset-ownership as Lifestyles Indicator

Ownership of various assets such as houses, cars and expensive household gadgets, and various types of financial assets are important indicators of one's wealth and living standards and also one's lifestyle and social standing. It is expected that being relatively more affluent, the middle class has greater access to better-quality housing and other assets than the working class.

Housing

Housing is a basic necessity for human beings since it provides them with ontological security, i.e. security of living and existence. While a few may own houses through inheritance, the overwhelming majority have to acquire them through their own efforts. Being scarce and costly, especially in the Malaysian urban areas today, house-ownership is dependent upon price and also geographical location since property prices vary with area. Financial institutions provide loans, enabling prospective buyers to purchase houses, but such loans are limited by the ability of borrowers to repay.

This study found unequal distribution of house-ownership among members of the new Malay middle class themselves, as well as between the new Malay middle and working classes. As shown in Table 6.1, more than three-fifths (62.7 per cent) of new Malay middle class respondents owned houses, with house-ownership highest

among respondents in the Kelang Valley. Wealth differences can also be seen among middle class respondents in the three urban centres. Among all house-owners, a quarter owned two or more houses, the highest proportion being in the Kelang Valley with 36.1 per cent, compared to 21.9 per cent in Kuala Trengganu and 12.5 per cent in Kota Bharu. Expectedly, a larger proportion of Kelang Valley new middle class respondents were wealthier because many were high-income earners (see Chapter 4). Those with two or more houses could earn additional incomes from rents.

Table 6.1
Housing Status of Respondents

Housing status	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (n=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Own houses	67.6	60.0	59.4	62.7 (n=178)	38.9 (n=52)
• Own two or more houses	36.1	12.5	21.9	24.6 (n=70)	3.8 (n=5)
Rented houses	26.9	27.5	17.7	23.9 (n=68)	36.8 (n=49)
Houses provided by employer	1.9	2.5	9.4	4.6 (n=13)	22.7 (n=30)
Parents' house	3.7	10.0	13.5	8.8 (n=25)	1.6 (n=2)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

However, more than a third did not own houses at the time of the study. They lived in rented houses (23.9 per cent) and in houses provided by their employers (4.6 per cent), while 8.8 per cent – mainly comprising younger and also unmarried respondents -- lived with their parents or close relatives. The latter could be found in greater proportions among respondents in Kuala Trengganu and Kota Bharu.

Table 6.2 shows the types of living quarters of new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley and in the two provincial towns, as well as among Malay workers in the Kelang Valley. There is some difference between the living quarters of Kelang Valley new middle class respondents compared to those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu. While only 29.6 per cent of middle class respondents in the former lived in more spacious single units or semi-detached bungalows, a much bigger proportion (46.3 per cent) lived in similar houses in Kota Bharu, while in Kuala Trengganu, the proportion was smaller (31.2 per cent), but still higher than in the Kelang Valley. Among Kelang Valley Malay new middle class respondents, almost two-thirds (64.9 per cent) lived in double- or single-storey terraced houses (including a few in apartments/flats and above shop-lots), while 5.6 per cent lived in condominiums.

While there is terraced housing and high-rise living in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, these appeared comparatively later and in smaller numbers than in the Kelang Valley. Such types of housing are not that widespread among new Malay middle class respondents either. In Kota Bharu, for example, only a fifth of our respondents lived in terraced houses or apartments/flats, with less than a quarter in Kuala Trengganu. Apart from many respondents living in single unit or semi-detached bungalows, a substantial number lived in semi-concrete single unit wooden houses (known locally as *rumah kampung* or 'village-houses') -- 30.1 per cent in Kota Bharu and 41.6 per cent in Kuala Trengganu. This suggests that respondents in the two provincial towns enjoyed more spacious living environments than their counterparts in the Kelang Valley. This is related to the greater availability of land and less costly

housing in the former as well as to the way of life of their people, who had been more accustomed to living in single units rather than terraced or high-rise houses than in the Kelang Valley.

Table 6.2
Types of Living Quarters of Respondents

Type of houses	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay Workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Single-unit bungalow	17.6	42.5	22.9	26.4	9.9
Semi-detached double-storey bungalow	12.0	3.8	8.3	8.1	
Semi-detached single-storey bungalow	-	3.8	3.1	2.1	
Condominium	5.6	-	-	2.1	-
Double-storey terraced house	41.7	12.5	7.3	21.8	8.4
Single-storey terraced house	10.2	6.3	13.5	10.2	29.1
Apartment/Flat	8.4	1.3	3.1	4.6	41.2**
Other types	4.6	30.1	41.6	24.3*	8.4***
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

* Including single unit semi-concrete wooden houses (known in Malay as 'rumah kampung', found mainly in Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu) and residential units above shop-lots (mainly in the Kelang Valley)

** Including hostels and low-cost houses

*** Including wooden houses in squatter areas

In terms of house-ownership and housing conditions, there are clear differences between our new Malay middle class respondents and the Kelang Valley Malay workers. In terms of house-ownership, less than two-fifths (38.9 per cent) of the workers owned houses and lived in them, with only 3.8 per cent owning more than one house. The majority of the workers had to rent houses or flats, or lived in hostel accommodation provided by their employers. The most common types of housing for

Malay workers were low-cost flats/apartments and low-cost houses (41.2 per cent) as well as single-storey terraced houses (29.1 per cent). A very small proportion (9.9 per cent) lived in rented single units or semi-detached bungalows, and another 8.4 per cent in double-storey terraced houses. At the same time, 8.4 per cent lived in wooden houses in squatter areas.

Other Assets

Apart from house-ownership, ownership of other assets -- such as vehicles (various types of cars and motorcycles), household entertainment units (television, video and hi-fi sets), personal computers and internet facilities, mobile phones and financial assets (shares, insurance, etc.) all reflect modern lifestyles of the middle class. While house-ownership was not universal among our Malay middle class respondents, car-ownership was more widespread. In our sample, 91.2 per cent had one or more cars, while a very small proportion (8.8 per cent) only had motorcycles (Table 6.3). Cars and motorcycles are considered essential means for physical mobility, for work, leisure, and other social activities. Unlike houses, which are normally purchased much later in one's career, owning cars (or at least a motorcycle) becomes a must once a person has secured a job.

To see status differentiation among the new Malay middle class respondents, we examine both the number and types of cars in their possession. Among Kelang Valley respondents, the majority (54 per cent) owned two or more cars -- 38 per cent with two cars, and another 16 per cent with three or four cars -- in their household. More than a third (37 per cent), however, owned only one car, while those only with

motorcycles were small in number (nine per cent). In Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, most had only one car, or at most, two. Those possessing three or more cars were very few -- only 8.3 per cent in Kuala Trengganu and 7.5 per cent in Kota Bharu, while in the Kelang Valley, the percentage was almost double these figures.

Table 6.3
Ownership of Assets by Respondents
Comparison between New Malay Middle Class and Working Class

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Vehicles					
• Cars					
<i>One car</i>	37.0	52.4	40.7	42.6	42.0
<i>Two cars</i>	38.0	30.0	43.8	37.7	-
<i>Three cars</i>	13.0	5.0	7.3	8.8	-
<i>Four cars or more</i>	3.0	2.5	1.0	2.1	-
• Motorcycles only	9.0	10.2	7.2	8.8	36.6
• No vehicles	-	-	-	-	21.4
Television set	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	78.6
Video set	67.6	60.0	54.1	61.3	35.9
Hi-fi set	53.7	41.3	34.4	43.7	30.0
Personal computer	67.6	36.5	42.5	50.0	16.0
• <i>Already using internet</i>	16.7	10.4	8.75	12.3	16.8
• <i>Going to use internet</i>	73.2	41.7	66.3	60.6	54.2
• Mobile phone	63.0	40.6	46.3	50.7	14.5
Antiques, paintings, etc.	12.0	5.2	6.3	8.1	3.1

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Note: Figures (in percentages) only refer to respondents with assets. The 8.8 per cent of Malay middle class respondents living with their parents are assumed to have access to television though they might not personally own their own sets.

Table 6.4
Ownership of Ordinary and Luxury Cars (Local & Imported) Among
New Malay Middle Class Respondents in the Kelang Valley and in Two Provincial Towns

	Malaysian*		Japanese		European		M'cycles		To
	Ordinary	Luxury	Ordinary	Luxury	Ordinary	Luxury	Ordinary	Super bikes	
KELANG VALLEY	41.7	1.9	4.6	17.7	3.7	28.7	-	-	108 (100.0)
<i>Top-level executives/senior managers</i>	25.0	3.8	3.8	17.3	1.9	48.1	-	-	52 (100.0)
<i>Middle managers</i>	55.3	-	5.3	15.8	5.3	13.2		5.3	38 (100.0)
<i>Professionals</i>	61.1	-	5.6	22.2	5.6	5.6		-	18 (100.0)
KOTA BHARU	49.4	-	27.9	6.3	5.1	3.8	7.7	-	80 (100.0)
KUALA TRENGGANU	38.9	2.2	22.2	8.9	4.4	6.8	15.5	1.1	96 (100.0)

Source: Survey data 1996

* Refer to Proton cars produced through joint venture between the Malaysian-owned Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Berhad (Proton) and the Japanese Mitsubishi.

Note: Figures mean that at least one of the cars in possession are of the type stated.

There were clear differences in the types of cars owned by the new Malay middle class respondents. Among those in the Kelang Valley, the proportion using ordinary cars was slightly higher (51.8 per cent) compared to those using luxury cars (48.2 per cent) (Table 6.4). Over 90 per cent of the luxury cars were imported mostly from Europe (such as Mercedes, Volvos and BMWs) while a smaller number came from Japan.¹ In Kota Bharu, however, a large majority (77.3 per cent) used ordinary cars -- 49.4 per cent local (mainly Proton), 27.9 per cent Japanese, and the remaining 5.1 per cent European. A small percentage (10.1 per cent) used luxury cars, mainly

Japanese-made Honda Accord or Toyota Camry. In Kuala Trengganu, the proportion using luxury cars (mainly Japanese-made) among the Malay middle class respondents was 17.9 per cent, i.e. slightly higher than in Kota Bharu, but the majority still used ordinary cars, mainly the Proton.

Besides cars and motorcycles, respondents also had modern household gadgets such as colour television, video and hi-fi sets for family entertainment. Practically all respondents had television sets, while more than three-fifths had video sets, and more than two-fifths had hi-fi sets (Table 6.3). However, antiques and wall paintings are still rather uncommon in new Malay middle class homes, with only 8.1 per cent having them, with the highest proportion (12 per cent) being among new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley.

Many members of the new middle class also possess the latest information technology gadgets. Personal computers (PCs) have become increasingly widespread in Malay middle class homes, with 50 per cent owning PCs -- the highest proportion being in the Kelang Valley with 67.6 per cent, followed by Kuala Trengganu (42.5 per cent), and Kota Bharu (36.5 per cent). A small proportion of respondents (12.3 per cent) used the internet, while another 60.6 per cent intended to use it soon, suggesting that computer-ownership might increase rapidly among new middle class respondents. Mobile phones for easy communications are also quite common, with half of all respondents owning them. The figure was highest in the Kelang Valley,

¹ By profession, most top level executives and senior managers (69.2 per cent) among the new Malay middle class in the Kelang Valley owned luxury cars, while among middle-level managers and professionals, the percentages were much lower, i.e. 29 per cent and 27.8 per cent respectively.

where almost two-thirds of respondents had handsets, while slightly more than two-fifths in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu owned them.

However, car-ownership and ownership of other assets are not confined to the new middle class alone. Workers too aspire to have better material living standards. As shown in Table 6.3, among Malay workers in the Kelang Valley, 42 per cent had cars and 36.6 per cent motorcycles, though 21.4 per cent had neither. Such means of transport are very essential in the city. Most workers also had TV sets, about a third had video and hi-fi sets, while a much smaller proportion owned PCs and mobile phones. However, ownership of these assets was mainly confined to a small proportion, mostly comprising better-paid workers.

One characteristic feature of the new middle class lifestyles is their high exposure to debt. Being salaried, this was to be expected of the new middle class of managers, administrators and professionals. The existence of well-developed financial institutions as loan-providers makes it possible for them to take loans for expensive items such as houses and cars. At the time of the study, almost two-thirds of our new middle class respondents had one or two loans, with the lowest amount being RM10,000 (7.2 per cent) and the highest over RM200,000 (4 per cent) (Table 6.5). Most of them took loans between RM10,000 to RM100,000. The purposes of obtaining the loans were mostly to buy cars and houses, while a few used them to dabble in the stock market or to start businesses (Table 6.6).

Table 6.5
Purpose of Loan Taken by New Malay Middle Class Respondents

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Respondents (N=284)
Buy house only	8.2	23.7	14.6	15.7
Buy car only	28.8	22.5	15.6	21.7
Start business	-	3.7	-	1.2
Buy house & car	27.7	6.2	14.6	14.0
Buy house & start business	-	1.3	2.1	1.2
Buy house, car & start business	-	1.3	8.3	3.6
Buy shares	2.7	1.3	8.3	4.4
Others	6.8	6.2	-	4.0
Did not take loan	31.5	33.8	36.5	34.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Table 6.6
Amount of Loans Obtained and Outstanding Loans
to be Settled by New Malay Middle Class Respondents

Amount	Kelang Valley (n=108)		Kota Bharu (n=80)		Kuala Trengganu (n=96)		All respondents (N=284)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Below RM10,000	8.2	2.7	3.8	10.0	-	10.4	7.2	8.0
RM10,000-50,000	31.5	39.7	32.5	38.7	24.0	24.0	28.9	33.3
RM50,001-100,000	8.2	15.1	6.3	12.5	25.0	8.7	14.1	15.7
RM100,001-150,000	11.0	8.2	5.0	2.5	4.2	4.2	6.4	4.8
RM150,001-200,000	6.8	2.7	6.3	1.3	3.1	3.1	5.2	2.4
RM200,001-250,000	-	-	-	-	3.1	1.0	1.6	0.4
RM250,001-300,000	1.4	-	1.3	1.3	2.1	1.0	1.6	0.8
RM300,001 & above	1.4	-	-	-	2.1	1.0	0.8	0.4
Did not take loan	31.5	31.5	33.8	22.8	36.5	36.5	34.1	34.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996

Notes: 1 = Amount of loan obtained

2 = Amount of outstanding loan to be settled

At the time of the study, slightly more than a third did not take any loan or had already paid up their loans, and thus were not exposed to interest rate volatility,

which could make their financial positions vulnerable. Two-thirds of the respondents, however, were still in debt since they had yet to settle their outstanding loans plus interest (Table 6.5). Of all respondents, 8.8 per cent were quite heavily indebted to banks and finance companies to the tune of more than RM100,000, which would usually take them more than ten years to settle. Those owing between RM50,001 and RM100,000 numbered 15.7 per cent, while those with outstanding debts between RM10,000 and RM50,000 accounted for a third, and those with less than RM10,000 numbered eight per cent. This finding suggests that the majority of our middle class respondents were really not on a secure financial footing.

Financial Assets

In terms of financial assets, members of the new middle class take personal savings seriously, not only because they have excess income over consumption, but they see their savings as available for contingency in times of crisis, as something to fall back upon in their old age, and also to see through their children's education. All respondents had regular savings, but the amount varied significantly, with two-thirds saving below RM500 a month (including 12.3 per cent whose savings were RM100 or less). Nevertheless, 16.2 per cent -- comprising wealthier middle class fractions -- saved over RM1,000 monthly (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7
Amount of Monthly Savings: Comparison between
New Malay Middle Class and Working Class Respondents

Monthly savings	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
No savings	-	-	-	-	8.1
Below RM100	7.4	13.7	16.6	12.3	76.2
RM100-500	54.6	61.3	49.0	54.6	15.7
RM501-1000	16.7	16.3	17.7	16.9	-
RM1001-1500	0.9	6.3	11.5	6.0	-
RM1501-2000	6.5	1.3	3.1	3.9	-
RM2000 & above	13.9	1.3	2.0	6.3	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Besides saving in banks, new Malay middle class respondents also saved in the form of stocks and shares, unit trusts and insurance policies. Nevertheless, despite the relatively developed stock market in Malaysia, respondents generally adopted conservative attitudes and avoided risk taking. Overall, only about a third of new Malay middle class respondents invested in the stock market, while the majority (two-thirds) preferred the more secure state-guaranteed Amanah Saham Bumiputra (ASB) and Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN) unit trust schemes. Besides shares, almost half the respondents purchased insurance policies. By comparison, Kelang Valley new middle class respondents were well ahead of their counterparts in provincial towns in keeping their financial assets in the form of shares, mutual trust units and insurance policies. However, very few respondents -- those in the Kelang Valley included -- kept their assets in foreign currencies (Table 6.8).

Table 6.8
Ownership of Other Financial Assets:
Comparison between New Malay Middle Class and Working Class Respondents

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Stock market shares	43.5	22.9	26.0	31.7	9.2
Unit trust schemes	77.8	50.0	68.8	65.8	40.0
Life insurance	66.7	33.3	43.8	48.9	37.4
Foreign currency	7.4	1.04	-	3.2	0.76

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

There is a clear difference in the propensity to save among new Malay middle class respondents and Kelang Valley Malay workers. Among the latter, the majority (76.2 per cent) only managed to save RM100 or less, with a small proportion (15.7 per cent) being able to save RM100-RM500, but 8.1 per cent with no regular savings. Very few (only 9.2 per cent) bought shares in the stock market. However, a larger proportion (two-fifths) saved in unit trust funds, and almost two-fifths bought insurance policies.

Consumption Levels

Household and Personal Spending

It has been shown by several researchers (for example, Robison & Goodman 1996) that one of the indulgences of the new middle class is their high consumption levels.

An examination of the array of durable consumption goods – from houses to cars and household gadgets – consumed by respondents in our study as discussed above suggests that this observation is also true among a section of the new Malay middle class. However, among a significant proportion of new Malay middle class respondents (especially those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu), their consumption was less extravagant or conspicuous, showing internal differentiation among the new middle class.

Table 6.9
Monthly Household and Personal Expenses Respondents

Monthly expenses	Kelang Valley (n=108)		Kota Bharu (n=80)		Kuala Trengganu (n=96)		All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
RM100-500	54.8	40.7	62.5	42.5	65.3	47.9	61.5	43.7
RM501-1000	34.2	26.8	35.0	42.5	29.2	32.3	32.5	33.1
RM1001-1500	11.0	5.6	2.5	10.0	5.2	10.4	6.0	8.4
RM1501-2000	-	14.8	-	2.5	-	7.3	-	8.8
RM2001 +	-	12.0	-	2.6	-	2.0	-	6.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Credit cards								
• Ordinary	51.9		26.0		42.5		40.5	
• Gold	48.2		6.3		17.5		25.4	

Source: Survey data 1996

1 = Household expenses

2 = Personal expenses

Table 6.9 shows the monthly household and personal expenses of new Malay middle class respondents. Overall, the majority of respondents (61.5 per cent) monthly spent RM500 or less for household expenses (here, it refers only to 'kitchen' expenses), though a small proportion spent more than RM1,000. By comparison, respondents in the Kelang Valley, partly due to higher cost of living, spent more as shown by the fact that 45.2 per cent had to pay more than RM500 a month, including

11 per cent who spent more than RM1,000 a month in household expenses. In Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, where the cost of living is lower, the respondents' household expenses were much less – only 37.5 per cent in Kota Bharu and 34.4 per cent in Kuala Trengganu spent more than RM500 a month, while those who spent more than RM1,000 comprised 2.5 per cent in Kota Bharu and 5.2 per cent in Kuala Trengganu.

However, there is a clear difference between household and personal expenses of new Malay middle class respondents. For example, while overall, only six per cent of respondents spent more than RM1,000 a month on household expenses, almost a quarter (23.2 per cent) spent more than that amount in personal expenses. Their personal expenses -- including expenses for petrol, food, refreshments, recreation and entertainment, reading materials, and other incidentals – also varied between different sections of the middle class. While 43 per cent spent a relatively modest sum of RM500 or less a month, another 33.1 per cent spent between RM501 to RM1000. However, 23.2 per cent can be considered as big spenders, spending more than RM1,000 a month, including 6 per cent who spent over RM2,000. The big spenders were mainly found among new Malay new middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley, among whom about a third (32.4 per cent) spent over RM1,000 a month, while in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, the corresponding figures were very much smaller at 15.1 per cent and 19.7 per cent respectively.

Their expenses, especially personal spending, were facilitated by their use of credit facilities provided by banks. Among all new Malay middle class respondents,

about two-thirds had credit cards. Credit card holders were also unevenly distributed among respondents, indicating income differentials, with the highest proportion being in the Kelang Valley, where all respondents possessed them, but in Kuala Trengganu and Kota Bharu, the figures were three-fifths and a third respectively. The proportion of those with gold credit cards was also highest in the Kelang Valley (48.2 per cent) compared to only 6.3 per cent in Kota Bharu and 25.4 per cent in Kuala Trengganu.

Shopping Preferences

Where do members of the new Malay middle class do their shopping for personal items as well as food for their households? Tables 6.8 and 6.9 below provide information regarding their shopping preferences. New Malay middle class respondents looked for both quality and reasonable prices. They mostly did their shopping for personal items (clothes, shoes, toiletries, etc.) mostly at supermarkets or shopping complexes, but would also go to other outlets offering 'cheap' sales. Only a very small proportion (less than five per cent) patronized boutiques (for designer clothes) on a regular basis, though the proportion increased to slightly more than a fifth if both regular and not-so-regular customers are included (Table 6.10). By comparison, there was a higher proportion of boutique patrons among those in the Kelang Valley, compared to those in Kota Bharu or Kuala Trengganu.

Table 6.10
Shopping for Personal Items among Respondents

Shopping outlets	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Supermarket/shopping complex					
• Often	62.0	63.8	52.1	59.1	34.6
• Sometimes	31.5	27.5	34.4	31.3	36.8
• Seldom	6.5	8.8	13.5	9.6	28.6
• Never	-	-	-	-	-
Boutique					
• Often	2.8	-	7.3	3.5	5.3
• Sometimes	25.0	16.3	14.6	19.0	16.5
• Seldom	30.6	16.3	19.8	22.9	27.8
• Never	41.7	67.5	58.3	54.6	50.4
Any outlet Offering 'cheap' sales					
• Often	40.7	41.3	52.1	44.7	52.6
• Sometimes	49.1	45.0	37.5	44.0	33.8
• Seldom	10.2	13.8	10.5	11.4	13.6
• Never	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Note: Figures in percentages by column

The shopping preferences of new Malay middle class respondents and Kelang Valley Malay workers were somewhat different. While the majority of new Malay middle class respondents would often go to shopping complexes or supermarkets to purchase personal items, only about a third of Malay workers would do the same. Since cheaper prices were their main concerns, over half of Malay workers indicated that they would often patronize any outlet offering 'cheap' sales to buy personal items compared to 44.7 per cent of middle class respondents. However, a few (5.3 per cent) of the more fashion conscious among Malay workers did not mind patronizing boutiques, though these would be more costly (Table 6.10).

As for food items, the majority of new Malay middle class respondents patronized wet markets and supermarkets depending on the items they required. For

fresh vegetables, fish and meat, as well as sundries, they would go to wet markets rather than supermarkets because it was more economical in the former, though for other items such as rice, sugar, fruits, etc., they would prefer supermarkets. However, the degree of reliance on wet markets and supermarkets varied between the new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley and in the two provincial towns. While almost half of our Kelang Valley respondents patronized supermarkets for food items, in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, their proportions were much lower – 37.5 per cent and 13.5 per cent respectively (Table 6.11). The respondents in the latter towns depended mostly on wet markets where more than two-thirds would often go for their provisions.

Besides supermarkets and wet markets, night markets² also offer a limited assortment of goods (clothes, kitchen utensils, food, vegetables, etc.) at relatively cheaper prices. At the same time, farmers' markets³ also exist, selling cheaper agricultural products, especially *kampung* vegetables. However, though agricultural products sold at farmers' markets are popular among Malays, farmers' markets are fewer in number, and they are normally held once a week in the morning (often on weekdays), making them less accessible to potential customers. This partially explains why a smaller proportion of new Malay middle class respondents often patronized them -- compared to supermarkets or wet markets, which are easily accessible.

² Night markets were introduced in the early 1980s (initially in the Kelang Valley, and later in other towns) to facilitate busy urbanites, working during the daytime, to purchase vegetables, groceries and other items at cheaper prices. These markets are often located at convenient places in selected residential areas.

³ Farmers' markets were also introduced about the same time as night markets. The aim was to provide outlets to farmers to directly market their agricultural produce in urban centres without having to go

Table 6.11
Shopping Preferences of Food Items among Respondents

Shopping outlets	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Supermarket					
• Often	48.1	37.5	13.5	33.4	24.8
• Sometimes	4.6	12.5	28.1	14.8	40.6
• Seldom	47.2	50.0	58.3	51.7	34.6
• Never	-	-	-	-	-
Wet market					
• Often	46.3	67.5	67.7	59.5	55.6
• Sometimes	13.9	13.8	5.2	10.9	27.1
• Seldom	32.4	16.3	25.0	25.4	17.3
• Never	7.4	2.5	2.1	4.2	-
Night market					
• Often	31.5	17.5	36.5	29.2	51.1
• Sometimes	11.1	21.3	14.6	15.1	30.1
• Seldom	48.1	41.3	42.7	44.4	18.8
• Never	9.2	20.0	6.3	11.3	-
Farmers' market					
• Often	13.0	17.5	28.1	23.6	39.8
• Sometimes	17.6	21.3	19.8	19.7	30.1
• Seldom	47.2	41.3	40.6	40.5	18.8
• Never	22.2	20.0	11.4	16.2	11.3

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Note: Figures are in column percentages.

Unlike new Malay middle class respondents, Kelang Valley Malay workers in our sample, mostly relied on wet markets and night markets to purchase their weekly food supplies. For those who stayed near farmers' markets, they would also normally purchase things there. Only a quarter of Malay workers would regularly go to supermarkets to purchase their provisions.

To some customers, including both new Malay middle class and working class respondents, there is another attraction of wet markets, night markets and farmers' markets. Unlike supermarkets or sundry shops which sell at fixed prices, customers at these markets can bargain with sellers for price discounts for some of through the middlemen.

their goods. To some customers, this is important since they thus enjoy not only relatively cheaper products, but also greater consumer satisfaction.

Leisure Activities

Leisure activities are becoming increasingly important in modern society, especially among the new middle class. With a large proportion of their time spent at work, individuals naturally look forward to their free time to wind down and relax after their daily work hours, as well as during weekends and public holidays. They also take personal leave (including annual leave) to go for vacation. Since members of the middle class have greater purchasing power, their propensity to spend their free hours on leisure activities is relatively stronger than for the working class. This section first examines how our new Malay middle class respondents spend their free time together with their families and children such as by watching television, eating out, and going on holidays and travelling together. (In the discussion, all respondents are considered together irrespective of their marital status since those who were single mostly lived with their parents or relatives and participated together in these activities). Second, it also examines what respondents do on their own for leisure, such as golfing as well as socialising at karaoke joints and coffee house lounges.

Television Viewing

Television viewing is a favourite pastime within modern homes. Though some television programmes may not be watched together, since parents may have different tastes from their children, this activity is included as family activities since parents are

assumed to be together with their family members at home during these hours. As shown in Table 6.12, almost three-fifths of all our middle class respondents (59.1 per cent) spent between one to two hours daily watching television, another one-fifth spent three hours, and a small proportion (14.4 per cent) spent four hours or more. However, there is some regional variation in television viewing among new Malay middle class respondents, with those in provincial towns spending more time watching television programmes than their Kelang Valley counterparts. While less than two-fifths (38.9 per cent) of Kelang Valley respondents spent three hours or more on average, slightly larger proportions in Kota Bharu (41.2 per cent) and Kuala Trengganu (42.7 per cent) spent the same amount of time watching television daily. Among those who spent less time watching television (i.e. those who, on average, spent about an hour a day), the largest proportion (31.5 per cent) was among respondents in the Kelang Valley.

Table 6.12
Time Spent Viewing Television among Respondents

Average no. of hours daily watching TV	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
One hour	31.5	21.3	18.8	24.3	21.8
Two	29.6	37.5	38.5	34.8	32.3
Three	25.0	30.0	25.0	26.4	26.3
Four & above	13.9	11.2	17.7	14.4	19.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Table 6.13
Television Programmes Watched by Respondents

TV programmes	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
News broadcasts					
• No	-	1.3	-	0.4	5.3
• Every time/often	90.8	92.5	91.7	91.5	72.2
• Sometimes	9.3	6.3	8.3	8.1	22.5
<i>Global</i> (in English)					
• No	44.4	37.5	40.6	41.2	66.9
• Every time/often	15.8	17.6	9.4	14.0	6.0
• Sometimes	39.8	45.0	50.0	44.7	27.1
<i>Minda</i>					
• No	56.5	36.2	32.3	42.6	52.6
• Every time/often	9.3	17.5	17.7	14.5	9.8
• Sometimes	34.3	46.3	50.0	43.0	37.6
<i>Wawancara</i>					
• No	51.9	33.8	36.5	41.5	58.6
• Every time/often	7.4	18.8	17.7	14.1	3.7
• Sometimes	40.7	47.5	45.8	44.4	37.6
<i>Forum Perdana Hal Ehwal Islam</i>					
• No	9.3	3.8	9.4	7.7	22.6
• Every time/often	54.6	75.1	71.9	66.2	49.6
• Sometimes	36.1	21.3	18.8	26.1	27.8
<i>Money Matters</i> (in English)					
• No	14.8	31.2	34.4	26.0	67.7
• Every time/often	37.9	20.0	15.4	25.4	6.8
• Sometimes	47.2	48.8	50.0	48.6	25.6
CNN News					
• No	27.8	32.5	30.2	30.0	57.1
• Every time/often	35.2	25.0	21.9	27.8	16.5
• Sometimes	37.0	42.5	47.9	42.2	26.3
Entertainment programmes					
TV drama/films					
• No	7.4	15.5	14.0	11.6	6.1
• Every time/often	52.2	43.7	39.7	45.4	64.9
• Once a while	40.5	40.8	46.5	43.0	29.0
Music/songs					
• No	35.5	39.2	39.5	29.2	5.0
• Every time/often	10.5	6.9	9.7	9.2	59.6
• Sometimes	54.0	53.9	50.9	61.6	35.4
Local sitcom					
• No	20.5	22.1	22.8	21.8	4.3
• Every time/often	34.5	30.8	33.3	33.1	65.1
• Sometimes	45.0	47.1	43.9	45.1	30.6

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Most television programmes watched by the respondents were news and talk shows, as well as entertainment programmes such as drama, films, sitcoms, and music and songs. The most popular programme is news, which 91.7 per cent watched daily, 8.1 per cent once in a while, while one respondent claimed that he did not watch television news at all (he depended on newspapers for news) (Table 6.13). Besides news items, new Malay middle class respondents also watched local weekly talk shows such as 'Minda', 'Wawancara', 'Forum Perdana Hal Ehwal Islam' and 'Global'. 'Minda', 'Wawancara' and 'Forum Perdana Hal Ehwal Islam' are weekly talk shows in Malay aired over the state-owned Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) Channel One – the first two deal with current national economic, political and social issues, while the third is on Islam. The latter is aired every Thursday night after the Muslim *Isya'* prayers,⁴ considered an appropriate time to welcome Friday, the most favoured day among Muslims. 'Global' on the other hand, is a weekly talk show in English aired over RTM Channel Two, which features discussions on numerous topics ranging from globalization, environment, population, women's rights, consumer affairs, etc.. Among the four talk shows, the one on Islam was the most popular among new Malay middle class respondents, with two-thirds watching it regularly, over a fifth watched it sometimes, while only 7.7 per cent did not watch it. The other three talk shows had fewer regular viewers – about 14 per cent for each of the three.

There is a marked difference between preferences for such programmes between new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley and their

⁴ Muslims have to perform prayers five times daily, beginning with *Subuh* (prayer at dawn), *Zuhur* (afternoon prayer), *Asar* (evening prayer before dusk), *Maghrib* (night prayer immediately after dusk),

counterparts in the two provincial towns. By comparison, higher proportions of the former seemed to prefer local talk shows in Malay on religious issues, while higher proportions of the latter seemed to prefer those in English on secular issues. For example, the proportions of regular viewers for the programme on Islam were high in both Kota Bharu (75.1 per cent) and Kuala Trengganu (71.9 per cent), but comparatively much lower (54.6 per cent) in the Kelang Valley. However, for programmes in English, such as international news on Cable News Network (CNN) and 'Money Matters' (a weekly late-night talk show aired over TV3 featuring business and stock market news and commentaries), though overall, the proportions regularly watching them were very much lower than those watching the one on Islam (27.8 per cent and 25.4 per cent respectively), the proportion of regular viewers among Kelang Valley respondents was very much higher. While over a third (35.2 per cent) watched CNN and almost two-fifths (37.9 per cent) watched 'Money Matters' among the Kelang Valley respondents, very much smaller proportions watched these two programmes in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu.

Though new Malay middle class respondents depended on certain television programmes for entertainment, they were not overly dependent on them. For example, only 45.4 per cent (mostly those in the Kelang Valley) regularly watched television drama series or films, while most of them only watched these programmes once in a while and some did not watch them at all. The proportion who regularly watched local sitcoms such as 'Pi Mai Tang Tu' was much lower (33.3 per cent), while Malay music shows such as the weekly 'Hiburan Minggu Ini' (Entertainment This Week) attracted

the least number of regular viewers (less than 10 per cent overall). This finding suggests that they were critical of the value of such programmes. In fact, when asked what sort of programmes they would like to see less of on television, more than 60 per cent said that television stations should cut down entertainment programmes, and should instead broadcast more educational and religious programmes as well as documentaries.

While the time spent watching television daily did not differ significantly between our new Malay middle class and Kelang Valley working class respondents (Table 6.12), their preferences for the non-entertainment and entertainment programmes discussed above differed significantly. For all non-entertainment programmes, there were smaller proportions among Malay workers who watched them. For example, while only 72.2 per cent among them watched news broadcasts regularly (compared to over 90 per cent among middle class respondents), much smaller proportions (mostly below ten per cent) were regular viewers of other programmes such as 'Global', 'Minda', 'Wawancara', 'Money Matters' or CNN news. Besides news broadcasts, only the programme on Islam attracted more regular viewers (49.6 per cent) among Malay workers, but the proportion was still very much lower than those among new Malay middle class respondents. However, there were higher proportions of Malay workers who watched entertainment programmes regularly (Table 6.13).

Eating Out

Among our new Malay middle class respondents, eating out was another favourite pastime, partly because they wanted a change of culinary taste and also to lighten the domestic burden of wives. This is especially so since over two-thirds of our respondents comprised those with dual career families, with only 14.1 per cent employing live-in maids. Their favourite eating places included ordinary restaurants, hawker stalls (or food courts), fast food restaurants and hotels. Of these four eating places, ordinary restaurants were the most popular, with almost two-thirds (63.7 per cent) frequenting them regularly, i.e. at least once a week – the highest proportions being in Kuala Trengganu and the Kelang Valley (66.7 per cent and 66.3 per cent respectively) (Table 6.14). The next most popular eating outlet were hawker stalls, with 56.6 per cent of all respondents going there regularly, with the highest proportion being in Kuala Trengganu (65.7 per cent), followed by those in the Kelang Valley (55.5 per cent) and Kota Bharu (47.5 per cent). Fast food restaurants were also quite popular, especially among Kelang Valley respondents. Hotels, being more expensive, were less popular among the majority of the respondents. Nevertheless, slightly more than a fifth (23.2 per cent) – mostly comprising those in the higher income brackets – frequently dined at hotels with their family members once a week on average, especially during weekends. The regular hotel goers were mainly found among Kelang Valley respondents (26.9 per cent), followed by those in Kuala Trengganu (21.9 per cent) and Kota Bharu (20.1 per cent).

Among Kelang Valley Malay workers, eating out was also popular. However, most would patronize stalls (57.1 per cent) and, to a certain extent, ordinary

restaurants (41.4 per cent) and fast food restaurants (37.6 per cent) which were more economical. As expected, there were very few regular hotel-goers among Malay workers, numbering only four persons (three per cent) who patronized eateries at budget hotels.

Table 6.14
Eating Out with Family among Respondents

Eating outlets	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Hotel					
• Very often	10.2	6.3	5.2	7.4	1.5
• Often	16.7	13.8	16.7	15.8	1.5
• Sometimes	46.3	17.5	20.8	29.6	9.8
• Very rarely	26.8	56.2	57.3	45.4	87.2
Restaurant					
• Very often	28.2	23.8	26.1	26.4	24.1
• Often	38.1	35.0	40.6	37.3	17.3
• Sometimes	25.0	22.5	14.6	20.8	23.3
• Very rarely	10.2	18.8	18.8	15.5	35.3
Stall					
• Very often	27.7	22.5	24.0	24.9	42.1
• Often	27.8	25.0	41.7	31.7	15.0
• Sometimes	25.9	12.5	7.3	15.8	7.5
• Very rarely	18.5	40.0	27.1	27.5	35.3
'Fast food' restaurant					
• Very often	30.5	17.5	15.7	21.8	12.8
• Often	25.9	32.5	37.5	31.7	24.8
• Sometimes	26.9	17.5	17.7	21.1	24.8
• Very rarely	16.7	32.5	29.2	25.4	37.6

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Note: Very often = Two to three times a week
Often = Once a week
Sometimes = Once a month
Very rarely = Once or twice a year

Holidays and Travel

Holidays and travel are a middle class activity. While eating out activities may not clearly differentiate members of the new Malay middle class from Malay workers, holidays and travel, especially abroad, show up the differences. The overwhelming

majority (92.3 per cent) of our new Malay middle class respondents indicated that they liked to take vacation and travel somewhere -- either inside the country or abroad -- when they had the opportunity (Table 6.15). By comparison, preference for such activity was most clearly expressed by Kelang Valley respondents (95.4 per cent), followed by those in Kuala Trengganu (91.7 per cent) and Kota Bharu (88.7 per cent).

Table 6.15
Holidays and Travel among Respondents

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Do you like to travel for holiday? • Yes • No	95.4 4.6	88.7 11.3	91.7 8.3	92.3 7.7	87.2 12.8
Did you travel for holiday inside the country in last two years? • Yes • No	89.8 10.2	82.5 17.5	85.4 14.6	86.3 13.7	27.8 72.2
Did you travel abroad for holiday in last two years? • Yes • No	57.4 42.6	50.0 50.0	35.4 64.6	47.9 52.1	23.3 76.7
How many times did you travel abroad in last two years? • None • Once • Twice • Three and more	42.6 34.3 15.0 8.1	50.0 44.2 3.6 2.2	64.6 33.4 1.0 1.0	52.1 36.6 7.0 4.3	76.7 23.3 - -
Do you shop abroad while travelling abroad? (referring only to those who travelled abroad) • Yes • No	84.9 15.1	73.6 26.4	71.8 28.2	77.2 22.8	23.3 76.7

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Such preferences were translated into actual activity, though the travel was mostly inside the country. In this study, we took the period of two years prior to the survey as our cut-off point.⁵ Among our respondents, more than four-fifths (86.3 per cent) took vacations and traveled inside the country in the two years prior to the study. The popular holiday destinations were seaside resorts (such as Port Dickson), island resorts (such as Pulau Langkawi, Pulau Tioman and Pulau Redang), and mountain resorts (such as Genting Highlands and Cameron Highlands).

Besides domestic travel, our respondents also preferred going abroad for vacations. In the two year period prior to the study, almost half of them (47.9 per cent) spent their holidays abroad with their families. However, their foreign destinations were mostly near-by Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, Japan and the Middle East, though quite a number went to Europe and the United States. Most of those who traveled abroad went there only once, though a number went twice or more during those two years. Among those who travelled abroad for vacations, the majority (77.2 per cent) took the opportunity to do their shopping there (Table 6.15).

Again, it was the new Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley who travelled most, compared to their counterparts in Kota Bharu and Kuala

⁵ Some studies (e.g. Tan Poo Chang *et al.* 1996) took the one year period prior to the study as the cut-off point. In this study, we took a two year period because travel and vacations are not necessarily an annual affair. Because of their busy work schedule or for financial reasons, some respondents may not take their families out on vacation this year, but may go in the next. Thus, the period of one year may not fully capture such activity.

Trengganu. For example, 89.8 per cent of the former went on domestic travel, compared to 82.5 per cent from Kota Bharu and 85.4 per cent from Kuala Trengganu. For foreign travel,⁶ the difference was sharper. While 57.4 per cent of the Kelang Valley respondents went abroad for holidays, among those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, the proportions were much lower, i.e. 50 per cent and 35.4 per cent respectively. In this regard, the Kelang Valley new Malay middle class respondents were more cosmopolitan, while those in the two provincial towns were more insular.

Among Malay workers, the overwhelming majority (87.2 per cent) also liked to take holidays and travel (Table 6.15). However, for financial and other reasons, only slightly more than a quarter (27.8 per cent) managed to go on domestic travel to any of the popular holiday destinations. The proportion who went abroad for holidays was much smaller, comprising only 23.3 per cent. Their destinations were mainly neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines.

Golfing and Other Recreational Activities

While shopping, eating out and travel by our new Malay middle class respondents discussed above were family activities, golfing and certain other recreational activities only involved respondents. Golfing is still a highly exclusive activity, involving only very small proportions of the more affluent new middle class. In this study, only 10.5 per cent of our respondents were members of golf clubs and played golf on a regular basis (Table 6.16). Those who were not yet members, but intended to become members comprised another 7.3 per cent. The overwhelming majority (87.5

⁶ Foreign travel and vacation discussed here do not include travel to perform the *Haj* or *Umrah* in

per cent) were neither members nor did they intend to become members. In golfing as well as travel, the cosmopolitan Kelang Valley new Malay middle class respondents were more active than those in the two provincial towns. For example, among Kelang Valley respondents, a fifth were already golfers and another 15.7 per cent wanted to follow suit, thus increasing the proportion to more than a third. In Kota Bharu, however, only 3.8 per cent were golfers and 10 per cent wanted to sign up for membership later. In Kuala Trengganu, the proportion of existing golfers was slightly higher than in Kota Bharu, but it was still very small (5.2 per cent), and those intending to become new golf club members were also few (7.3 per cent).

Table 6.16
Membership of Golf Clubs and Other Recreational Activities among Respondents

	Klang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Are you a golf club member?					
• Yes	20.4	3.8	5.2	10.5	Nil
• Not yet, but intend to be member	15.7	10.0	7.3	11.3	Nil
• No	63.9	86.3	87.5	78.2	100.0
Do you frequent coffee houses?					
• Often	8.3	5.0	7.3	7.0	Nil
• Sometimes	38.9	25.0	21.9	29.2	Nil
• Never	52.8	70.0	70.8	63.7	100.0
Do you frequent karaoke pubs?					
• Often	17.6	2.5	2.1	8.1	Nil
• Sometimes	42.6	11.3	13.5	23.9	5.0
• Never	39.8	86.3	84.3	67.9	95.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

This finding corresponds with findings from some other studies (Norani Othman *et al.* 1996; Tan Poo Chang *et al.* 1996; Rahimah Aziz *et al.* 1998) which show that golfing in Malaysia is confined to a small minority, even among the new middle class of various ethnic groups. However, the situation was very different among the Malay administrative middle class in Nordin's study in the early 1970s (Nordin 1976: 283), among whom three-fifths were golf club members.⁷

Patronizing coffee houses and karaoke pubs -- as a form of recreation and socialising -- are also favourite pastimes among a small section of the new Malay middle class, especially in the Kelang Valley. Overall, only 7 per cent of our respondents were regular patrons of coffee houses, and 8.1 per cent regularly patronized karaoke pubs (Table 6.16). The proportions, however, would increase to 36.2 per cent and 32 per cent respectively if we include the not-so-regular patrons of these joints. By comparison, larger proportions of Kelang Valley respondents participated in these activities compared to their counterparts in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu. For example, while 47.2 per cent of the former were regular and not-so-regular patrons of coffee houses, the corresponding proportions were 30 per cent and 28.9 per cent respectively in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu. Karaoke joints were more popular with Kelang Valley respondents, with slightly over three-fifths patronising them regularly or once in a while. However, in the two provincial towns, they were less popular than coffee houses. In Kota Bharu, for example, the proportion

⁷ Compare the Malaysian situation with South Korea under President Roh Tae-woo, which was dubbed 'the golf republic' though it had a much smaller number of golf courses than Malaysia. In 1991, South Korea had 60 golf courses in operation and another 118 were under construction (half of these golf courses were in the Seoul metropolitan area) (Cotton & Leest 1996: 190). In Malaysia, the metropolitan Kelang Valley alone had over 130 golf courses in the early 1990s managed by exclusive golf clubs,

socialising at karaoke joints was only 13.8 per cent (including 2.5 per cent of regular patrons), while in Kuala Trengganu, the corresponding figure was 15.6 per cent (including 2.1 per cent regular patrons).

As indicated above, golfing and socialising at coffee houses and karaoke pubs were middle class activities, confined mostly to a small section of the new Malay middle class, especially those in the Kelang Valley. Such activities were not found among Malay workers, except for a few who patronized karaoke lounges once in a while (Table 6.16).

Reading Habits and Cultural Preferences

One of the concerns with the growth of the middle class is whether the new middle class serves as a modernizing force, standing at the intellectual or cultural frontier of society. Being the most educated class, members of the new middle class are expected to have developed preferences for intellectual or cultural pursuits such as reading and other forms of high culture.

As discussed earlier, television talk shows that generally have an intellectual and educational bent (such as 'Global', 'Minda' and 'Wawancara') attracted a small minority (about 14 per cent) of all new Malay middle class respondents, though news and current affairs attracted an overwhelming majority. Such preferences can also be corroborated by an examination of their reading habits. As shown in Table 6.17, practically all respondents paid attention to news and current affairs by reading

while there are less than 20 recreational parks for the public with a population of over two million

Table 6.17
Reading of Newspapers and Magazines among Respondents

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
<i>News & current affairs</i>					
Do you read daily papers regularly?					
No	1.8	3.7	2.1	2.0	6.8
Yes	98.2	96.3	97.9	98.0	93.2
No. of newspapers read					
None					
One	1.8	3.7	2.1	2.0	6.8
Two	17.6	47.5	30.2	30.3	66.7
Three or more	41.7	40.0	58.3	46.8	27.1
	39.0	8.8	9.4	20.9	-
Time spent reading newspapers daily					
None	1.8	3.7	2.1	2.5	6.8
One hour or less	62.0	67.5	65.6	64.8	80.4
Two hours or more	36.2	28.8	32.3	32.7	12.8
<i>News & current affairs</i>					
Do you read Malay magazines/periodicals?					
No	51.9	33.8	37.5	41.9	60.9
Once in a while	25.0	22.5	20.8	22.9	27.1
Often	23.1	43.7	41.7	35.2	12.0
<i>News & current affairs</i>					
Do you read English magazines/periodicals?					
No	13.9	50.0	44.8	34.5	87.2
Once in a while	21.3	16.2	21.9	20.1	6.0
Often	64.8	33.7	33.3	45.4	6.8
Percentage who regularly read magazines or periodicals in Malay, English or both	-	-	-	69.7	16.5
<i>Entertainment materials</i>					
Do you read entertainment magazines?					
No	33.3	30.0	21.9	28.5	25.6
Once in a while	55.6	51.2	60.4	56.0	57.1
Often	11.1	18.7	17.7	15.5	17.3
<i>Materials on religion</i>					
Do you read magazines on religion?					
No	33.3	26.3	12.5	24.3	35.3
Once in a while	46.3	25.0	44.8	39.8	40.6
Often	20.4	48.8	42.7	35.9	24.1

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Note: Figures are in column percentages

newspapers on a regular basis, with two-thirds (67.7 per cent) buying two newspapers or more daily. Besides newspapers, they also read magazines and periodicals for news and current affairs, though the proportion of regular readers was much lower than for newspapers (69.7 per cent).

In terms of reading materials on news and current affairs, respondents in the Kelang Valley stood out more prominently, compared to their counterparts in the two provincial towns. For example, 80.7 per cent read two or more newspapers (in both Malay and English) daily, and almost two-thirds (64.8 per cent) regularly read magazines and periodicals in English – the most popular being *Asiaweek* and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, though a small number also read *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Economist*. Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley were more biased towards materials in English as evidenced by the fact that only 23.1 per cent read Malay magazines and periodicals regularly, compared to almost three times that in English. Among respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, their language preferences were for magazines and periodicals in Malay (such as *Dewan Masyarakat*, *Dewan Budaya* and *Massa*) – over two-fifths read Malay magazines and periodicals regularly, compared to less than half reading in English.

While preference for entertainment magazines was not strong among all respondents, there was far greater preference for materials on religion, especially among respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu; 48.8 per cent of respondents in the former and 42.7 per cent in the latter regularly read such magazines, compared to only 20.4 per cent among those in the Kelang Valley.

Table 6.18
Number of Books & Novels Read Per Year and
Respondents' Self-Assessment of Their Reading Habits

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All Malay new middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
No. of books read per year					
• None	38.9	40.0	39.6	39.4	61.0
• 1-3	28.7	15.0	28.1	24.6	21.8
• 4-6	20.4	21.3	7.3	16.2	9.0
• 7-10	6.5	16.3	8.3	9.8	1.5
• More than 10	5.5	7.5	16.7	9.8	6.8
No. of novels read per year					
None	67.6	67.5	61.4	65.5	63.2
1-3	15.7	16.3	21.9	17.9	25.6
4-6	9.2	11.3	8.3	9.5	6.0
7-10	5.6	2.5	3.1	3.9	2.3
More than 10	1.8	2.5	5.2	3.2	3.0
Self-assessment of reading habit					
• Weak	24.1	18.8	20.8	21.5	37.6
• Moderately strong	64.8	78.8	71.9	71.1	59.4
• Avid reader	11.1	2.5	7.3	7.4	3.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Though newspaper- and magazine-reading was popular among respondents, books and novels were much less popular, and the proportion who regularly read books and novels was small (Table 6.18). While about three-fifths (60.6 per cent) read books and 34.5 per cent read novels, the number who did not read them was relatively large -- about two-fifths did not read books and almost two-thirds did not read novels. Those who did read books and novels, only read a limited number. For example, only a very small proportion (19.6 per cent) read more than six books a year (or one book every two months on average), while for novels, those who read more

than six novels a year (or one novel every two months on average) comprised only 7.1 per cent. In fact, the majority (71.1 per cent) admitted that their reading habit was only 'moderately strong', 21.5 per cent as 'weak', and only 7.4 per cent regarded themselves as 'avid readers' (Table 6.18). Among all respondents, more than a third did not have personal book collections or 'home libraries', while the majority who had 'home libraries' possessed very small collections of less than 100 titles (Table 6.19).

Table 6.19
Respondents' Personal Book Collection

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
No. of books in personal collection					
• No personal collection	38.9	33.7	37.5	37.7	75.9
• 50 & below	39.8	47.5	43.7	42.6	21.0
• 51-100	8.3	6.3	11.4	8.8	2.3
• More than 100	13.0	12.5	7.4	10.9	0.8

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Compared to Malay workers in the Kelang Valley, new Malay middle class respondents had stronger reading habits, bought and read more books, newspapers and magazines (Tables 6.18 and 6.19). This was to be expected since they were highly educated and many were high-income earners. However, their reading preferences were more oriented to less heavy subjects such as news and current affairs and not so much heavy material.

Though Malay is the national and official language of Malaysia, members of the new Malay middle class use both English and Malay in their daily communications. However, Malay middle class respondents in the Kelang Valley were more 'anglicised' as the majority (69.4 per cent) used English more frequently in their daily communications compared to only 30.6 per cent who frequently used Malay. Among respondents in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, the converse prevailed as over four-fifths in both towns frequently used more Malay than English (Table 6.20).

Table 6.20
Languages Used in Daily Communications by Respondents

	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Malay only	1.9	26.3	26.0	16.9	48.9
English only	1.9	-	1.0	1.1	-
Malay & English	88.0	63.8	69.8	75.0	43.6
Malay, English & local dialect	8.3	8.8	3.1	6.7	7.5
Do you use English more than Malay in your daily communications?					
Yes	69.4	17.5	17.7	37.3	10.5
No	30.6	82.5	82.3	62.7	89.5

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Self-evaluation of Class Position

Given the heterogeneous lifestyles of different sections of the new Malay middle class, it would be interesting to examine how members of the new Malay middle class perceived their own class positions. As shown in Table 6.21, they perceived

themselves as stratified into five groupings. A large proportion (48 per cent) of the respondents perceived themselves as 'middle' middle class, but a small minority (5.2 per cent) -- comprising high income earners -- identified themselves as upper class or upper middle class. However, quite a substantial proportion (40.2 per cent) of respondents, especially those in Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, perceived themselves as belonging to the lower middle class, and another 3.6 per cent (mostly those from Kuala Trengganu) perceived themselves as belonging to the lower class. However, eight respondents, or two per cent, regarded themselves as not belonging to any class because according to them, as Muslims, everybody was equal before God.

Table 6.21
Respondents' Self-Evaluation of Their Class Position

Self-evaluation of class position	Kelang Valley (n=108)	Kota Bharu (n=80)	Kuala Trengganu (n=96)	All new Malay middle class respondents (N=284)	Malay workers in Kelang Valley (N=133)
Upper class	-	1.3	-	0.4	-
Upper middle class	8.2	1.3	5.2	4.8	3.0
Middle middle class	56.2	53.8	36.5	48.0	27.8
Lower middle class	30.1	37.5	50.0	40.2	44.4
Lower class	2.7	1.3	6.3	3.6	20.3
Do not belong to any class	2.8	5.1	2.0	2.8	4.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 1996 and 1997

Among Malay workers, the majority perceived themselves as belonging to the lower middle class (41.4 per cent) or the lower class (20.3 per cent), while another 4.6 per cent claimed that they did not belong to any particular class. This finding suggests that only a small proportion (less than 10 per cent) of the new Malay middle class respondents (mostly those from the Kelang Valley and Kuala Trengganu) who identified themselves as upper class and upper middle class, consciously saw

themselves as clearly differentiated from other middle class fractions and from the working class. Curiously, some three per cent of the more affluent Malay workers regarded themselves as 'upper middle class'.

Conclusions

As indicated in Chapter Four, of special interest to scholars of the new middle class is the question of 'middle-classing and lifestyling' -- i.e. to what extent have new middle class lifestyles transformed them from 'a class in itself' to 'a class for itself', with distinct class attributes, such as status symbols, status consciousness, and class solidarity, which differentiate them from other classes, in particular the lower classes (Yang 1994; Chang 1994; Gerke 1995; Robison & Goodman 1996). In this chapter, however, it has been shown that, in the main, two general differentiating tendencies were found to be operating among the new Malay middle class. On the one hand, there is homogenizing among the more affluent sections -- the 'new rich' -- consisting mainly of Western-educated high-income managers and professionals, whose values and lifestyles were very much cosmopolitan in nature. This group of cosmopolitan urbanites -- which constituted a small fraction of the new middle class -- objectively and subjectively differentiated themselves from other middle class fractions, and especially from the lower classes. On the other hand, despite being more affluent, better educated, urbanized and modernized compared to their parents or their country cousins, broad sections of the new Malay middle class indulged in relatively modest lifestyles, in terms of living conditions, consumption, travel and recreation. Their modest lifestyles also correspond with their self-evaluation of their own class positions. With the exception of a small proportion of the 'new rich' who

has distinct lifestyles and cultural preferences, the majority of the new Malay middle class respondents does not appear to constitute a 'class for itself', with distinct social status attributes and consciousness. In this sense, they are very much 'folk urbanites', an issue discussed in Chapter 7.