

KEE'S WORLD: REFLECTIONS OF EVOLVING IDENTITY

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Abstract

Comic strips in newspapers are entertaining in themselves, with their stock of cartoon characters, caricatures and overstatements. What makes *Kee's World* different from other comic strips is that it deals with situations from life, often in a much-exaggerated manner as to evoke instant laughter. C. W. Kee's instances of wit and humour are enlightening in the sense that they not only provide us with food for thought but also make us realize our own follies. In this respect, *Kee's World* opens a window through which we can experience various aspects of the Malaysian way of life. In surfacing the various aspects of social life, by drawing upon bold humorous situations, it seems that Malaysians are learning to laugh at themselves. From an introspective stance, the evolving culture of being able to depict hyperbolic instances of social life, sit back and laugh at them, is significant in etching out an identity, which shows tolerance and forbearance. This paper looks at comic strips from *Kee's World* and humbly attempt to show the portrayal of various aspects of social life through exaggerated situations, wit and humour. In doing so the paper argues that, an evolving identity of endurance and fortitude is the order of the day.

Dunia Kee (Kee's World): Refleksi identiti yang berkembang

Abstrak

"Comic Strips" atau naratif kartun yang bersekuen di akhbar melalui watak, karikatur dan pernyataan merupakan satu hiburan dalam bentuknya yang tersendiri. Apa yang menjadikan Dunia Kee berbeza dari komik yang lain ialah ianya merupakan paparan kehidupan sebenar yang dipersembahkan dalam cara yang agak keterlaluan bagi mengundang tawa. Kebijaksanaan dan jenaka C.W Kee menyedarkan dalam erti kata ia bukan sahaja membuka minda malahan memperingatkan kita akan kekurangan sendiri. C.W.Kee membuka ruang dengan menyajikan pengalaman dari pelbagai cara hidup rakyat Malaysia. Dengan situasi lawak yang berani, agak jelas rakyat Malaysia kini belajar untuk mentertawakan diri sendiri. Berlandaskan pandangan introspektif yang melihat refleksi secara dalaman dan pandangan sendiri, budaya keupayaan menggambarkan hiperbola kehidupan sosial ini kian berkembang dan sangat signifikan dalam mengukir identiti yang menunjukkan toleransi dan kesabaran. Kertas kerja ini melihat "Comic Strips" dari pandangan Kee dan berusaha memaparkan pelbagai aspek

kehidupan sosial melalui situasi yang keterlaluan, bijak serta jenaka. Ia juga menyatakan yang perkembangan identiti bertahan dan cekal merupakan cara dalam kehidupan.

Keywords: comic strip, social, discourse, animation, humor

'Excessive happiness'?

Amusing and satirical as they may be, comics in general are not taken seriously, as they tend to defy the laws of nature, life and civil society. They are commonly perceived as a form of entertainment for the younger generation, which seems to practice the notions of 'excessive happiness'.¹ However, in reality, are all comics funny? Do they all seem ludicrous and treat life and its various situations in nonsensical manners? Can comics be fun, entertaining, thought provoking or even didactic for that matter, at the same time?

The term 'comics' could be confusing in the sense that the conformity between the word 'comic', meaning humour and laughter, and 'comics', as in comic strips and / or comic books, may be narrow. Defining it could prove difficult from a single perspective. Simply, it could be a series of short and mainly humorous drawings or cartoons, which appears in newspapers.² Elaborately, narratives told by a series of drawings arranged in horizontal lines, or strips, or rectangles called panels, and read like text from left to right; the term applies especially to comic strips in newspapers but also to comic books.³ Comics, often but not always humorous, usually chronicle the lives (and situations) of recurring characters, and sometimes humor arises from the reader's familiarity with a particular character.⁴ Often associated with children, the single title that established comics as a proper adult art form was *Maus* (published between 1985 and 1992) by Art Spiegelman, which deals with the horrors of the Holocaust; this book gained international recognition and attracted the attention of numerous critics, scholars and readers alike.⁵

In this age of information and technological advancement, the diversification of the media—print, audio, audio-visual—has led to the assertion of the new media, the Internet, in everyday life. Sometimes symbiotic relationships develop between media, one helping the other to reach out and communicate with the diversified audience. For instance, the adaptations of various art forms and genera within the print media that have been portrayed on the silver screen, like *Spiderman*, *Superman*, *X-men*, *The Hulk*, *The Phantom*, *The Punisher*, *Dare-devil*, *Garfield*, *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Ring*, just to name a few. In the midst of the various developments, changes and transitions, despite the assertion of the new media, the print media, though admittedly a little less, continues to play a significant role in

informing, educating and entertaining us. In this respect, comic strips in newspaper continue their appeal to many.

Kee's World, created by the resident cartoonist C. W. Kee of *The Star*, could appeal to the younger generation at a very elementary level, though most probably not children; generally, it addresses a more mature audience. Though humorous and entertaining in its own right, with its stock of cartoon characters, caricatures and overstatements, what makes *Kee's World* different from other comic strips is that it deals with situations 'from' and 'of' life, rather than individual characters, often in a much-exaggerated manner as to evoke instant laughter. Kee's instances of wit and humour are enlightening in the sense that they not only provide us with food for thought but also make us realize our own follies. In this respect, *Kee's World* opens a window through which we can experience various aspects of the Malaysian way of life.

Underlying implication

Malaysia is a multicultural, multiethnic, pluralistic country. It is a nation which emphasis on the significance of the *Rukunegara* (National Ideology) and its aspiration of becoming a developed country by the year 2020, that is, its objective of fulfilling *Vision 2020*.⁶ In order to do this Malaysia needs to grow and develop not only in the economic sense but "along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally."⁷

C.W. Kee through his wit, humour and exaggeration tries to depict the social reflections of the Malaysian society in the comic strip, *Kee's World*. The reflections not only highlight the themes of everyday life but also the social issues which people need to be made aware of in order to become a more conscious and caring society. This paper intends to analyse selected comic strips from *Kee's World* and humbly attempt to show the portrayal of various aspects of social life from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. Critical discourse analysis focuses on social issues, which people seem to take for granted, and make them more apparent, thus empowering the common people with the knowledge of knowing so that they are in a position to make the appropriate choices in the society.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis may be defined from various perspective, depending on the ideology, the mode of analysis and the topic or subject of focus of the CDA analyst. In general, it may be perceived as an approach, process, system or a method for critically analysing instances of discourse in order to surface and / or expose the hidden

agendas that may be embedded in a society. Since it focuses on social issues by analyzing texts / discourse, its objective is to empower people by making them conscious / aware of the hidden structures that exist in the social make-up or have become part of the social set-up of a community. It does this by establishing a relationship between language (per se, semiotic signs, paralanguage, advertisements, etc.), ideology and power. While CDA has mostly been confined to verbal and 'informative' texts rather than texts that may be classified as 'entertainment', Kress and van Lueewn tend to broaden the field from a social semiotic perspective by including many works of art; they do this because "art can and should be approached from the point of view of social critique ..."⁸

According to Fairclough, CDA is more than just that; it deals with real issues and real problems in the society, like "globalization, social exclusion, shifts in governance, and so forth."⁹ Wodak (1996) tends to think of it as an instrument "whose purpose is precisely to expose veiled power structures: 'CDA aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse'."¹⁰ In other words, it deals with social inequality; and Van Dijk is of the opinion that though this (social inequality) may be approached from many directions CDA analysts focus on "the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance".¹¹

C.W. Kee

Kee began working for *The Star* in 1981 as an Editorial Artist. In 1986, he was given the opportunity to try his hand at script writing; his first script was entitled 'Food for Thought', which appeared daily in the Metro pages, now called StarMetro. The following year, Kee began working on the weekly comic strip *It's a Durian Life*, which appeared in one of the pullout sections of the *Sunday Star*. This generated a positive response and with the potential success of the weekly strip, *Kee's World* was initiated on a daily basis, in a pullout of *The Star*. After almost two decades, the two of the comic strips continue to entertain, inform and educate the public to this day.¹²

Kee had always a fascination for the arts, and his ambition was to make movies. However, the intricacy in making movies (in Malaysia) posed a challenge that diverted his artistic creativity in another direction. His motivation towards cartoons and comic strips was influenced by the fact that here was an art form over which he had relatively complete control. This genre allowed him not only to enhance his artistic and creative skills but also to reflect his moral and ethical ideology.¹³

CDA and C. W. Kee

The prime objective of CDA is to create a consciousness / awareness of the instances of not so apparent issues in the social structure of a society and make them apparent among the common people of a society. In doing so the people become empowered with the knowledge of knowing and can make the right choices for themselves, thus serving the purpose of CDA. CDA tries to balance the state of inequality in a society by exposing the agendas and / or issues of the privileged people in the social structure. From this perspective, it seems that CDA has an agenda of its own; that is to say, in trying to empower the common people it attempts to expose the privileged.

Kee on the other hand does not focus so much on the power struggle of inequality, but rather on the issues that seem to concern the wellbeing of the society. He does not dwell on the negative and try to expose the agenda of individuals or the so-called privileged. His view of life and its various situations is more optimistic. Hence, by surfacing the issues, which people may take for granted and tend to escape their common senses, Kee makes them apparent by portraying them time and again in *Kee's World*. Based on the optimistic principle of CDA, that it tries to empower people with the knowledge of knowing by making them more conscious of the environment they live in and the social ills that prevail, Kee could be perceived as a CDA analyst trying to empower people through *Kee's World*.

Theoretical assumptions

Theoretically, this paper is loosely based on the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Among the various principles, those that may be applicable are summarized below:

- i. CDA is concerned with and addresses social problems: It is not concerned with language or language use per se, but with the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures. Accordingly, CDA is essentially interdisciplinary.
- ii. Society and culture are dialectically related to discourse: Society and culture are shaped by discourse, and at the same time constitute discourse. Every single instance of language use reproduces or transforms society and culture, including power relations;
- iii. Discourses are historical and can only be understood in relation to their context: They are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically. Discourses are not only embedded in

a particular culture, ideology or history, but are also connected intertextually to other discourses.¹⁴

Kee's World may be analyzed in terms of the above principles and explained from an ideological stance by applying the notions of van Dijk's multidimensional approach to ideology. Van Dijk essentially perceives ideology in terms of "the 'triangle' of (social) cognition, society and discourse".¹⁵ As the mental properties of ideologies are socially acquired, they are *both* mental and social; socially they are shared and defined by social *groups*. In general, social group ideologies *indirectly* monitor *social practices* through discourse and communication.¹⁶ It is through the employment of ideology that Kee portrays the social perspectives of the Malaysian society in *Kee's World*.

Data

The data was collected over a period of thirty-three months, that is, from September 2001 until May 2004, from *The Star* and the *Sunday Star*. Due to the constraints and the scope of the paper, twelve months of data (June 2003 to May 2004) was considered for analysis. During the analysis, it was found that there are many examples where the social perspectives are reflected in *Kee's World*. However, again due to the scope of the paper, samples of comic strips were limited to one or two and in some cases, three, examples per situation (Appendix).

It should be mentioned that *Kee's World* is published daily in black and white, from Monday to Saturday, in the pullout, 'StarTwo', of *The Star*; while on Sundays it is published, in colour under the title *It's a Durian Life*, in the pullout 'Variety' of the *Sunday Star*. Each comic strip is an original creation with the signature of its creator, C.W. Kee. *Kee's World* is also available on the Internet, in the electronic version of *The Star*, that is, *the star, online*.¹⁷

Analysis of *Kee's World*

This study adopts a non-experimental, qualitative paradigm. It is descriptive in nature and tries to explain the social perspectives of the Malaysian way of life that are reflected in the comic strip *Kee's World*.

From the analysis, it seems that *Kee's World* reflects situations not only 'from' but also 'of' life (Figure 1). In other words, the situations 'from' life are portrayed in the form of 'social reflections' while those 'of' or about life in the form of 'moral implications'. 'Social reflections' from life may be divided into 'social issues' and 'social life'; similarly, 'moral implications' may be divided into 'sarcastic / ironic' and 'didactic' implications. The break down to the

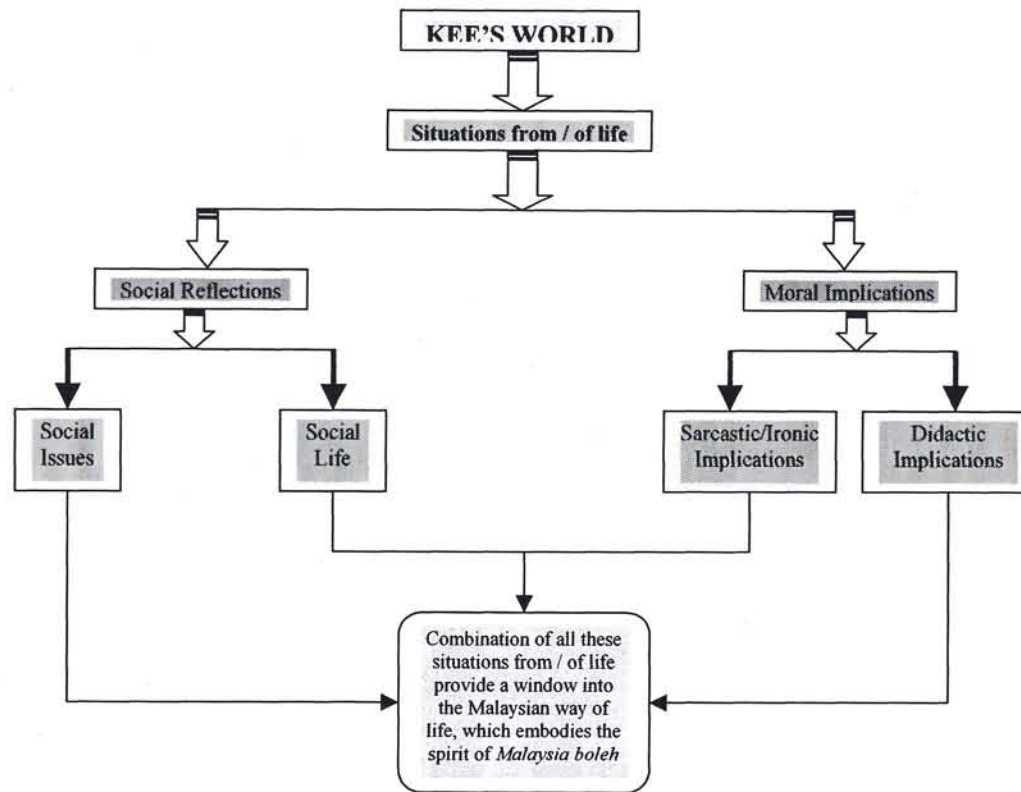


FIGURE 1: Diagrammatic representation of Kee's World in terms of social perspectives

TABLE 1: Breakdown of the 'situations from / of life in Kee's World', with examples

SITUATIONS FROM / OF LIFE IN KEE'S WORLD								
Social Reflections					Moral Implications			
Sl	Social Issues	Example	Social Life	Example	Sarcastic / Ironic Implications	Example	Didactic Implications	Example
1.	Disrespectful road users	24.11.03	Mobile generation / obsession	04.08.03 18.09.03	Practice what you preach	23.03.04 06.12.03	Moral duty to vote	19.03.04
2.	Road fatalities	04.12.03 18.11.03 23.12.03	Extreme sports fever – The Asian X Games	19.02.04 21.02.04	Reluctance to pay toll	13.05.04 01.05.04	Vote and F1	20.03.04
3.	Illegal (motorcycle) racing	14.01.04 15.01.04 12.01.04	F1 fever	23.02.04	Media influence – You become what you see	19.09.03 11.01.04		
4.	Selling of pirated VCDs / DVDs	17.11.03 05.04.04	Vision 2020	27.10.03	Children learn what they see – set a good example	14.09.03 24.01.04		

5.	Tax evasion	27.04.0 4	Malaysian in space	21.10.0 3 20.10.0 3	Typical characteristics (of some people) during the elections: i. making false promises ii. doing a good deed 'only' at election time (in order to win votes) iii. not practicing what one preaches iv. election excuse for speeding	09.03.0 4 06.03.0 4 15.03.0 4 21.03.0 4		
6.	Vandalism	08.05.0 4	Election fever	05.03.0 4 13.03.0 4				
7.	Price hike	04.05.0 4	Food crazy—Malaysians love to eat	25.11.0 3 28.11.0 3				
8.	Illegal street vending	30.12.0 3	Sale / Mega-sale crazy— Malaysians love to shop	27.09.0 3 20.11.0 3				
9.	Truancy	03.05.0 4	Soap opera crazy— Malaysians love drama	26.04.0 4				
10	Gangsterism	02.04.0 4 03.04.0 4 06.04.0 4	Obsession over lottery (4D)	04.11.0 3				
11	Juvenile delinquency	24.04.0 4	That's parenthood— toils, frustrations, cautiousness and rewards	11.11.03; 28.12.03 12.11.03; 07.11.03 09.05.04				
12	Downside of	03.10.0	Love is in the air—Valentine	10.02.0				

	technological development / advancement – internet / electronic games addiction	3 08.09.0 3 02.12.0 3		4 12.02.0 4				
13			Conjugal life – anger management	05.09.0 3				
14			Truly Malaysian – road-side food stalls, <i>tehtarik</i> & <i>roti canai</i> competitions, durian delight	24.03.0 4 21.08.0 3 25.02.0 4 19.08.0 3				
15			Flash floods in KL	17.06.0 3 16.06.0 3				

'situations from / of life in Kee's World', in tabulated form with selected examples, is shown in Table 1.

Social Reflections

From the data analyzed (June 2003 – May 2004), a number of issues have surfaced in *Kee's World*. Malaysia is a country which is developing in leaps and bounds; the rapidity of its growth can be seen, among other things, in the number of roads and highways being built as well as in the increase of vehicles. The downside of all this is that the breaking of road rules is also on the increase. The issue of disrespectful road users (Appendix, Sample 1) is something that is frequently seen on the roads and read in the papers.¹⁸ This issue takes a serious turn during festive occasions like Hari Raya, Christmas, Chinese New Year, when the number of road fatalities (Samples 2-4) raise, despite the government's safety efforts.¹⁸ Showing concern on the problem, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the government is seriously considering taking sterner actions against errant motorist by banning them from driving for up to five years and imposing higher fines to teach such road users a lesson in safe driving.²⁰

Illegal motorcycle racing is a contemporary issue that the government is trying to curb (Sample 5). This type of racing endangers not only the lives of the illegal racers and spectators (Sample 6) but also pedestrians and other law bidding road users. Besides being dangerous and life threatening, such unlawful sport is influencing the entertainment values of the younger generation, who crave the excitement and adrenalin rush of such events (Sample 7).

The selling, distributing and even buying of pirated VCDs and DVDs have been plaguing the government for quite sometime. The authorities have enacted tighter laws and policies as well as given the police force special powers (Sample 8) to take swift actions to stamp out the issue from the Malaysian society. In order to influence people to buy original products, the government is trying to reduce the ceiling price of original VCDs and DVDs. Despite this, some people continue to engage in this illegal profession on the sly (Sample 9).

Tax evasion (Sample 10), vandalism (Sample 11) and illegal street vending (Sample 12) are also issues, which the government is trying to deal with. On the other hand, the public is trying to deal with the issue of price hike, which is affecting the consumer (Sample 13).²¹

There are a number of issues which is of growing concern for the government and well as the general public, especially parents—such as truancy (Sample 14), gangsterism (Samples 15-17) and juvenile delinquency (18). Issues of such nature need to be handled very subtly and tactfully as they mostly involve school students. The situations created by the issues received wide media coverage after two incidents, one in which a student succumbed to the beatings of his seniors at a top religious school and another in which a boy was slashed by his schoolmate.²² Such incidents and the growing problem of truancy have prompted the government of take some instant initiatives like giving police special power to round up errant students and hand them over to their parents, and launching of a hotline, so that the public can report incidents of gangsterism in schools directly to the Education Ministry.²³

Another issue, involving mostly children and teenagers, may be less fatal, though still a worrying concern to parents, is the downside of technological development or advancement—more specifically internet and / or electronic games addiction. It seems ironic that, before parents used to scold their children for watching too much television or playing outside for too long, whereas now they might actually encourage their children to watch television (Sample 19) or even play outside (Samples 20-21), in order to do away with internet or electronic games addiction.

Apart from the various social issues, *Kee's World* also portrays the lighter side of 'social reflections' in the form of 'social life'. The various situations taken from social life not only evoke laughter but also reflect the Malaysian way of life.

The Malaysian society, in its strive to become a developed nation and a global player, has caught up in the rat race. Despite the fast pace of life, people need to communicate—whether professionally or socially; this necessity has ushered in the mobile generation (Sample 22). A human being is not an island, being connected and staying in touch is an integral part of being human, but with some people, it is an obsession (Sample 23).

In its bid to become globally recognized, Malaysia has hosted a number of international events in recent years, such as the Commonwealth Games in February 1998, the World Cup of Golf in November 1999, the World Rugby Seven Series in April 2002 and the Asian X Games in February 2004. Apart from these events Malaysia has also been annually hosting the Malaysian leg of the Formula 1 Championship series, since its inception in 1999. Such events have created a whole lot of excitement and enthusiasm in people; the extreme sports fever (Sample 24-25) and F1 fever (Sample 26) was quite apparent during the X Games and the Formula 1 Championships in Malaysia.

In order to fulfil *Vision 2020*, Malaysia sets itself high goals of becoming a technologically advanced (Sample 27), developed nation. In the process of realizing such an aspiration, among other achievements, it also wants to accomplish the feat of sending a Malaysian in space by the year 2005 (Sample 28). Regarding this the ex-Prime Minister, Y. A. Bhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has said that the first Malaysian astronaut can be anyone, without any age limit (Sample 29)—an ordinary person just like the man in the street, an academician or someone from the military, provided that the person is fit, intelligent and has the right aptitude.²⁴

One of the highlights in the Malaysian political scene, so far this year, was the general elections in March 2004. The election month provided a carnival like atmosphere and election fever (Samples 30-31) was observable throughout the country.

Malaysians, generally gentle and quiet, are passionate about eating, shopping (especially during sales), soap operas and lottery tickets (4D). According to the Guinness Book of Records, Malaysia holds the record for having the most variety of dishes. In order to do justice to so many varieties of food, one of the pass-time of many Malaysians is eating. Irrespective of their diversities, the zealously for eating is apparent during festive occasions and open houses, when all Malaysians indulge in their favourite passion (Samples 32-33). Sales and mega sales unofficially give Malaysians the licence to go on a shopping spree (Samples 34-35), which they (especially the women) love so much. Life without soap operas would be pretty pathetic for many women in this country; this genre is a common favourite among all the ethnic groups and cultures of Malaysia (Sample 36). Malaysians also like to try their luck at winning the lottery, which is another passion of many. Some people are so obsessed with 4D lotteries that they think they might be lucky enough to get a winning number from a potentially dangerous life threatening situation (Sample 37), while a few even perform rituals to summon the dead for lottery numbers.²⁵

Being a parent isn't always easy; sometimes you have to go to great lengths to please your child / children (Sample 38), go through periods of frustration (Sample 39), worry and cautiousness—in play (Sample 40) and in studies (Sample 41). In spite of everything, parenthood has its rewards as well (Sample 42).

During valentines, love is in the air and our hearts flutter in adulation, but all may not go well. Sometimes, it is difficult to fulfil the expectations of the heart of the beloved (Sample 43). When this happens, the tit for tat games begin (Sample 44). One of the secrets for a successful long-term conjugal life or relationship may not always be mutual understanding, but rather anger management; in other words, when you are on the receiving end, instead of getting

all fired up, simply change frequency and enjoy the music (Sample 45).

Malaysia is a fast developing country, with modern infrastructure, steady economic growth, and diversifying towards a knowledge-based economy. Despite all the progress and technological advancement, some things never change; they are what one might call 'truly Malaysian'. A typical feature of Malaysia is its roadside food stalls (Sample 46), selling a variety of items from simple snacks to full course meals. The skills involved in preparing some items like *teh-tarik* (Malaysian style tea) and *roti canai* have evolved into such an art form that actual competitions (Samples 47-48) are held to decide who is the best. In Malaysia, the king of all fruits, the *durian* is best enjoyed, not in ones home, sitting at the table eating off a plate, but squatting near the road side eating from the fruit itself (Sample 49).

A common feature of this country during the monsoon / rainy season is flash floods. Due to sudden swift downpours or incessant rain, certain parts of the country become flooded. Last year persistent rain over a few days caused the river running through Kuala Lumpur to overflow, consequently, certain parts of the city submerged (Samples 50-51); this is usually not a common scenario.

Moral Implications

The fifth principle of the *Rukunegara* as well as the fourth strategic challenge of *Vision 2020* emphasizes on the moral and ethical standards / values and responsibilities of the Malaysian society.²⁶ The situations 'of' or 'about' life in *Kee's World* stress upon such standards and responsibilities through sarcasm / irony and suggestions.

Being judgemental and speaking without thinking should not be one of the prominent criteria of people. In other words, we should practice what we preach (Samples 52-53), and avoid double standards. We should be able to ask ourselves whether we are guilty of the things that we are so ready to accuse others of.

As mentioned already, the rapid development in the country is perceivable in the number of roads and highways being built. Despite the efforts and the optimism of the government, some people feel that the toll rates are overcharged and show their reluctance (Sample 54) or unhappiness (Sample 55) when it comes to paying.

Media plays an important role in our lives, yet it is undeniable that it influences us tremendously in shaping our thoughts and ideologies of the world at large. Media influence sometimes makes us believe that we can become what we see (Sample 56), especially children (Sample 57). In Malaysia the media is somewhat regulated by the government so as to prevent the influx of negative foreign influence. The government has requested private television channels

to tie down on the amount of sex and violence in the broadcasting of their programmes.

Children are vulnerable to not only media influence but also to everything and everyone they see around them. They are particularly influenced by their parents, whom they might perceive to be role model. Thinking of their welfare and wellbeing as well as those of other children, parents should be more conscious of their actions and set good, rather than bad examples (Samples 58-59).

Typical characteristics during the election month raise ethical and moral questions about attitude. During such a period, it is not unusual for electoral candidates to make promises of which they are not sincere about (Sample 60), in order to win votes. Another ploy used by some candidates to gather support, is to do a good deed for the community just before the elections (Sample 61). It is also not uncommon for some people to preach the importance of voting when they themselves fail to do so (Sample 62). Some people even use the elections as an excuse for their own follies (Sample 63).

Kee's World not only raises questions regarding moral responsibilities, but also sometimes makes didactic suggestions as to what ethical norms people should embody. The fact that it is a moral duty for everyone to vote despite difficulties is emphasised (Sample 64). The unseemly coincidence of polling day falling on the same day as the Malaysian leg of the Formula 1 championships caused a dilemma for some fans of F 1. The predicament is debatable; from a moral perspective, it might seem unwise to relinquish ones right to vote in exchange for entertainment, but in reality, the choice is more difficult, as F1 fans had to pay a pretty penny to acquire tickets for race-day.²⁷ Here *Kee's World* makes a suggestion (Sample 65), which though may prove to be difficult for some people, seems to be a strategic solution.

All these situations, printed on the pages of the most widely circulated English daily in Malaysia, may make a difference in making part of the this multicultural population aware and conscious of the social goings-on in the society.

Principles (of CDA) in Perspective

In terms of the principles of CDA, upon analysis of the strips, it is perceivable that *Kee's World* seems to be concerned with and addresses social problems / issues and, to some extent, reflects the dialectical relationship between society and culture through the discourse of visual texts. It is also apparent that the discourse (visual and verbal), though understandable by in its own rights, is best realized when one has the knowledge and / of understanding of the earlier discourse that was produced in context with the Malaysian perspective.

The interdisciplinarity of CDA permits it to go beyond merely analyzing language per se, and deal with discourse in the broader prospect of its sense. In this respect, CDA concerns "itself not only with text analysis, but also with broad trends in public communication."²⁸ Public communication can comprise of a variety of discourse, including the discourse of advertising as well as the discourse or cartoons and comic strips. Comic strips, depending on its social and political goals, can deal with almost anything under the sun. *Kee's World* reflects not only social issues, social life and culture, but also adopts a moralizing tone by sarcastically / ironically humouring society's attitude. Because of its concern for the social wellbeing, sometimes it is even bold enough to assume a sermonizing disposition and suggest what stance should be taken. The social perspectives that are reflected in *Kee's World* seems to be representative of the social and cultural discourse of Malaysia. From this perspective, it may be said that the Malaysian society and culture are shaped by social discourse and at the same time constitute social discourse vice versa; hence, the dialectical relationship between *Kee's World* and society and culture.

Kee's World entertains us through wit, humour, sarcasm and ingenuity, but at the same time it tries to make or establish a point. However, this may not always be understood by those who are not familiar with the contemporary, contextual, social discourse or the discourse that was produced earlier. In order to comprehend *Kee's World* in its entirety, it is necessary to be informed with the cultural, ideological, historical and intertextual knowledge of the social discourse. Since *Kee's World* addresses the Malaysian audience, Kee takes for granted that his readers are familiar with the synchronic and diachronic discourse of the society.

In portraying the themes and issues in *Kee's World*, Kee relies on his ideology to realize the society; his ideology is governed by his cognitive potentials, knowledge of the Malaysian society and the familiarity with the prevalent and past social discourse. Based on his ideology, Kee depicts the social perspectives 'from' and 'of' the Malaysian society in the form of social reflections and moral implications. The themes and issues in *Kee's World* are skilfully portrayed in order to awaken social consciousness, keeping in mind not to politicize any situation.

Social implications

A unique feature of *Kee's World* is its ability to convey a social message or make a point without politicizing any individual, group or situation. Kee's stock of 'nameless' characters have been Malaysianized in the sense that they embody the essence of all that is Malaysian, in their attitude, desire and outlook towards life.

Another unique feature is that the characters do not speak or engage in dialogues very much, they act out situations as if in a pantomime. The panels of the comic strip sometimes comprise of captions, but in most instances, they lack verbal discourse as well as captions.²⁹ Nameless and speechless, the characters may be, the situations that they portray are comprehensible provided that the reader is familiar with the social discourse, which Kee takes for granted. His intention is neither to develop the characters and their personalities on individual basis expressing individualistic ideologies, nor to politicise situations and incidents, but rather to emphasise social perspectives concerning the societal issues and everyday trivialities faced by the common people and at the same time to convey or communicate certain collectivist ideologies. He uses his stock of nameless creations as instruments or tools to make people become more conscious, alert and aware of the environment and goings-on in the contemporary society.

However, in trying to make the public conscious of about the society they live in, Kee's experience and instincts have taught him to avoid such issues which are sensitive to the public interest, even though the issues may be pertinent to public's welfare and safety. For instance, the issue of snatch thefts, which has increased in recent times, is relevant to public interest and needs to be focused upon.³⁰ Nonetheless, the incident of how a 37 year old victim (of snatch theft), Chong Fee Cheng, mother of two, lost her life after failing to regain consciousness from a coma, has made the issue somewhat sensitive.³¹ Kee says that highlighting the issue in *Kee's World* at this time is what one might call 'bad taste' and / or 'untimely'.³² In other words, humour is best appreciated when the time is right, even when trying to make a relevant point on an important issue; when the time was right, he did focus on the issue.

Kee's World has been running on the pages of *The Star's* 'Section 2' for well over a decade, almost two, and has been compiled into two bestselling books. Kee looks at Malaysian life a little bit removed from the hard facts of reality, and finds humour even in the most direct situation.³³ It is possible to trace social annals of Malaysia in the anthology of his comic strip. For instance, during the (1997 / 98) economic crises, Kee best sums up Malaysia's predominant mood of acute frustration in his comic strip.³⁴ Time and again the social issues have been portrayed in *Kee's World*. Millard writes of him and *Kee's World*:

Over recent months Kee's cartoons in the *The Star* have featured disgruntled Malaysians queuing for water or food, "making do" with less money and dwindling resources, or battling road rage. "Cool down!" says the operator of a water tanker to two drivers having a kerb-side fistfight. In another cartoon, a householder runs to catch the water tanker as it drives past. "Got water!" he then informs his

wife. "No power!" she replies. The same mood permeates news and television reports. ... One of Kee's cartoons features a householder dropping a pail down a well in 1968 and into a condo swimming pool in 1998. Another shows a housewife growing vegetables where her husband recently played golf. But the plot line cannot be simply reversed. Modernity has thrown up some curious possibilities: Kee depicts emergency water supplies coming from waterbeds, car washes and even ATMs. ... Reflecting Malaysian public concern, burning forests and pollution have now ominously crept back into Kee's cartoons.³⁵

The issues, the follies and the stupidities of every day life ridiculing certain Malaysian norms, that have been represented in *Kee's World*, through humour, wit and ingenuity, seem to suggest that Malaysians are open minded about their shortcomings and are able to laugh at their own imperfections. The confidence with which they are able to do this reflects the true spirit of *Malaysia Boleh* (Malaysia can); it is this optimistic spirit that has seen them through the many crisis in the past and have helped them to gain the status of the 'Asian tigers'. The positive thinking and the optimistic spirit ingrained in the ideology of *Malaysia Boleh*, has surfaced the true resilient nature of the Malaysian identity.

'That's all folks'

As a developing and aspiring nation, Malaysia has shown its resilience time and again. Its optimistic ideology, ingrained in the *Rukunegara*, is propelled by the desire of achieving *Vision 2020* and becoming a developed nation by the year 2020. Along the way, the country is confronted with various social issues. *Kee's World* does not try to hide the issues, but rather, using wit and humour, portray them to provoke laughter and at the same time acts as a social critic. In surfacing the various aspects of social life, by drawing upon bold humorous situations, it seems that Malaysians are learning to laugh at themselves. From an introspective stance, the evolving culture of being able to depict hyperbolic instances of social life, sit back and laugh at them, is significant in etching out an identity, which shows tolerance and forbearance.

The findings (of the study) seem to suggest that the social discourse of the Malaysian society is (re)produced in *Kee's World*. This discourse reflects the social perspectives of the society on the printed pages of the most circulated and widely read English daily in the country. *Kee's World* is a social critic with a conscience, which does not shy away from portraying situations that threaten to plague the society. Emboldened by its concern for the social welfare, it questions society's attitudes, and sometimes even dares to make suggestion as to what should be done. The anthology of *Kee's World* is an

invaluable social document in the sense that it not only holds the chronicles of the Malaysian life and culture, but also comprises of the issues that need to be overcome, for this nation to advance courageously into the twenty first century.

Notes

- 1 Entertaining people with fun and laughter in order to make them feel happy and thereby (hypothetically) improve the quality of life. Patch Adam (during his days as a medical student) was accused of practicing 'excessive happiness' by which he tried to enlighten, entertain and embrace the patients with the joys of happiness and laughter through various comic antics. Some of his peers and professors, who tried to bar him from graduating, thought that such a practice (i.e. excessive happiness) undermined the seriousness and authority of doctors and the medical community at large, in the eyes of their patients.
- 2 Pat Brereton, *Continuum Guide to Media Education*, (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 36.
- 3 "Comics," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99*. © 1993-1998 Microsoft Corporation, CD Rom.
- 4 "Cartoon," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99*. © 1993-1998 Microsoft Corporation, CD Rom.
- 5 Mario Saraceni, *The Language of Comics* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3-4.
- 6 The concept of the *Rukunegara* is based on the five guiding principles:
 - i. *Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan* (Belief in God)
 - ii. *Kesetiaan kepada Raja dan Negara* (Loyalty to King and Country)
 - iii. *Keluhuran Perlembagaan* (Supremacy of the Constitution)
 - iv. *Kedaulatan Undang-undang* (Rule of Law)
 - v. *Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan* (Mutual Respect and Morality)
- 7 Y. A. Bhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, *The Way Forward*. Working Paper presented by His Excellency Y. A. Bhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Malaysian Business Council (28 February 1991). Available at <http://www.jaring.my/isis/mbc/2020.htm> (Accessed on 28.10.2002)
- 8 Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The grammar of visual analysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 13.
- 9 Norman Fairclough, "The Discourse of New Labour: Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephen Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (London: Sage, 2001), p. 229.
- 10 Ruth Wodak, *Discourse of Disorder* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 16.
- 11 Teun A. van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis" (1993), in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephen Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (London: Sage, 2001), p. 300.
- 12 Interview conducted on 16 June 2004, with C. W. Kee.
- 13 *Ibid.* 17 June 2004.

- 14 Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (Translated by Bryan Jenner) (London: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 146.
Ruth Wodak, *Discourse of Disorder* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 17-20.
- 15 Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 313.
- 16 Ibid. pp. 13-17.
- 17 The Internet version of *The Star*, that is, thestar.online is available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/>
The Internet version of *Kee's World* is available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/comics/kee/>
- 18 All the Samples (1-65) are in the Appendix.
- 19 "Fatal Raya rush: Road fatalities rising despite Govt.'s safety advice," *The Star* (24 November 2003), p. 1.
- 20 Derrick Vinesh and K. Kasturi Dewi. "Motorists warned—PM: Govt. will consider five-year ban, higher fines for errant drivers," *The Star* (28 November 2003), p. 1.
- 21 should be mentioned that in Malaysia, during the main festive occasions, city dwellers travel to their villages (*Balik Kampung*) to celebrate with their family and relatives.
- 22 M. Krishnamoorthy "Rise in food prices: consumers concerned over increase in cost of provisions," *The Star* (26 April 2004), p. 1.
- 23 R. S. N. Murali. "Student beaten to death: 14 seniors at top religious school held after brutally attacking boy," *The Star* (30 March 2004), p. 1.
Nelson Benjamin. "Boy, 13, slashed by schoolmate," *The Star* (23 April 2004), p. 3.
- 24 Some of the media coverage on the issues and well as the initiatives taken by the government that were reported are as follows:
Elan Perumal. "Truant-busters: Selangor Govt. asks police to round up errant students," *Sunday Star* (25 April 2004), p. 1.
Gavin Gomez. "Stop school thugs: New Education Minister vows to crack down on gangsterism," *The Star* (31 March 2004), p. 1.
Gavin Gomez. "Ministry opens hotline on gangsterism," *The Star* (02 April 2004), p. 4.
Nelson Benjamin. "Boy, 13, slashed by schoolmate," *The Star* (23 April 2004), p. 3.
- 25 "No age limit to be Malaysian astronaut," *The Star* (08 August 2003), p. 2.
The National Space Agency (NSA) ended its search for the Malaysian astronaut (to be sent into space by 2005) on 31 December 2003. The statistics of the is available at: www.angkasawan.gov.my (Accessed on 12.06.2004).
- 26 "Villagers upset by 4D rituals at cemetery," *The Star* (17 May 2004), p. 28.
- 27 The fifth principle of the *Rukunegara* states:
Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan (Mutual Respect and Morality)
The fourth (of the nine) strategic challenge of *Vision 2020* states:
Establishing a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest ethical standards.

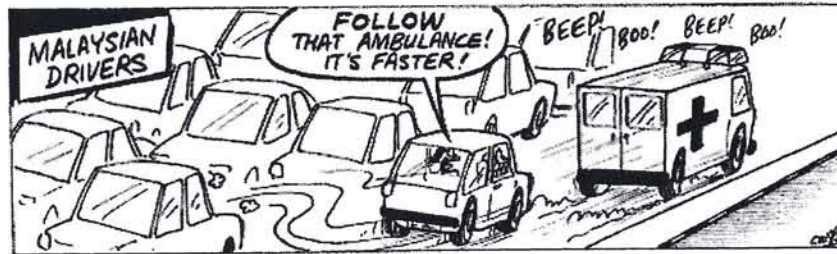
- 28 "Vroom-vroom or vote?" in 'StarWeekend', a pullout of *The Star*, (20 March 2004), p. 1.
 "Making the right choice" in 'StarWeekend', a pullout of *The Star*, (20 March 2004), p. 3.
 "Why on race day?" in 'StarWeekend', a pullout of *The Star*, (20 March 2004), p. 5.
- 29 Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The grammar of visual analysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 13
- 30 A 'panel' is a rectangular frame that contains pictures and, usually, speech balloons depicting a single scene within a narrative in comics or comic strips.
- 31 Snatch thefts have increased in the recent months of May-June 2004.
- 32 Zuhri Azam Ahmad, "Life Snatched: Clerk succumbs to injuries suffered during snatch theft," *The Star* (15 June 2004), p. 1.
- 33 Interview conducted on 17 June 2004, with C. W. Kee.
- 34 *Kee's World*, available at: <http://www.thestar.com.my/comics/kee/> (Accessed on 15.06.2004).
- 35 Theresa Millard, 'Looking For Someone To Blame,' *Asian Analysis: ASEAN Focus Group*, (May 1998), available at: <http://www.aseanfocus.com/asiananalysis/article.cfm?articleID=25> (Accessed on 15.06.2004).
- 36 Ibid.

References

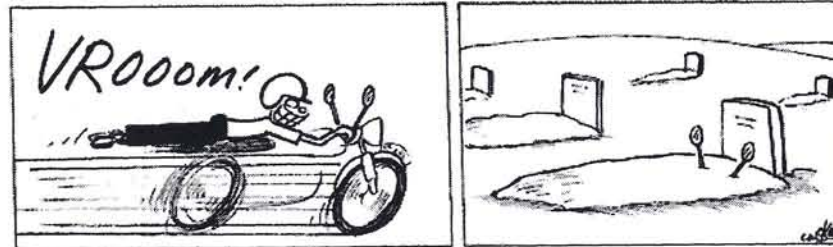
- Brereton, P. (2001). *Continuum guide to media education*. London: Continuum.
- Kress, G. & Leeuwen, T. V. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Norman, F. (2001). The discourse of new labour: Critical discourse analysis. In Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Simeon J. Y. (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*, (p. 229). London: Sage.
- Saraceni, M. (2003). *The language of comics*. London: Routledge.
- Teun, A.V. D. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. In Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Simeon J. Y. (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*, (p. 300). London: Sage.
- Teun, A.V.D. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage Publications.
- Titscher, S., Meyer, M., Wodak, R. & Vetter, E. (2000). *Methods of text and discourse analysis* London: Sage Publications.
- Wodak, R. (1996). *Discourse of disorder*. London: Longman.

APPENDIX
SOCIAL REFLECTIONS
Social Issues

Sample 1: Disrespectful road users (November 24, 2003)



Sample 2: Road fatalities (December 04, 2003)



Sample 3 (November 18, 2003)



Sample 4 (December 23, 2003)



Sample 5: Illegal motorcycle racing (January 14, 2004)



Sample 6 (January 15, 2004)



Sample 7 (January 12, 2004)



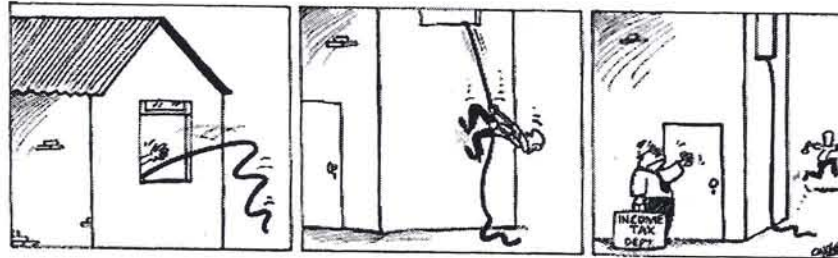
Sample 8: Selling of pirated VCDs / DVDs (April 05, 2004)



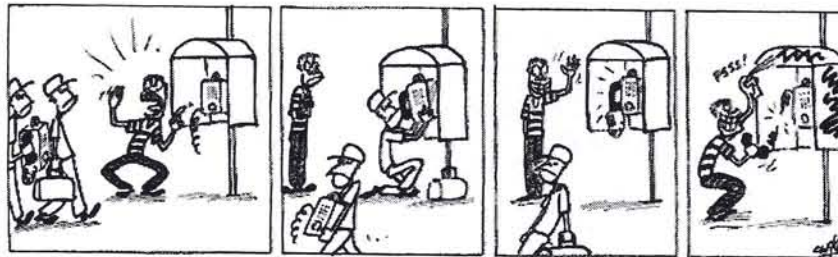
Sample 9 (November 17, 2003)



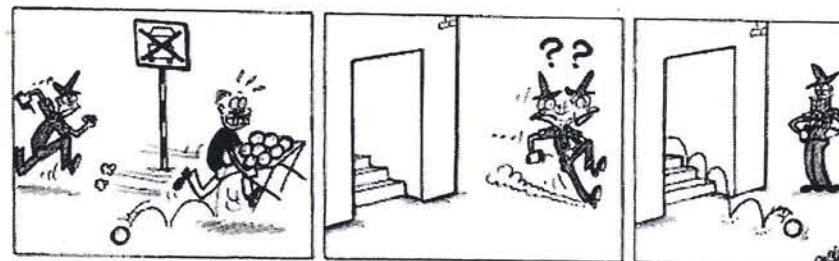
Sample 10: Tax evasion (April 27, 2004)



Sample 11: Vandalism (May 08, 2004)



Sample 12: Illegal street vending (December 30, 2003)



Sample 13: Price hike (May 04, 2004)



Sample 14: Truancy (May 03, 2004)



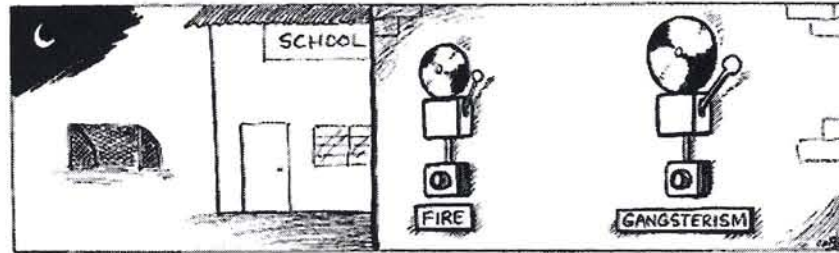
Sample 15: Gangsterism (April 02, 2004)



Sample 16 (April 03, 2004)



Sample 17 (April 06, 2004)



Sample 18: Juvenile delinquency (April 24, 2004)



Sample 19: Downside of technological development / advancement—internet / electronic games addiction (October 03, 2003—internet addiction)



Sample 20 (September 08, 2003— electronic games addiction)

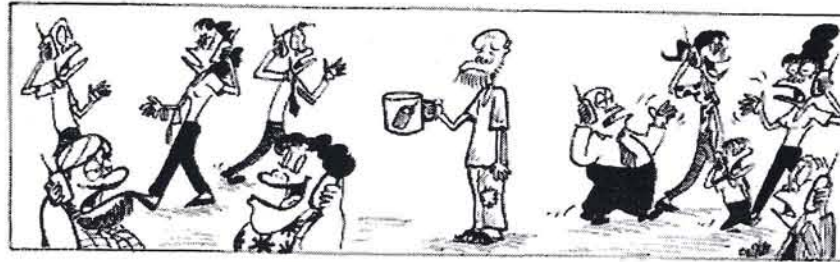


Sample 21 (October 02, 2003)



Social Life

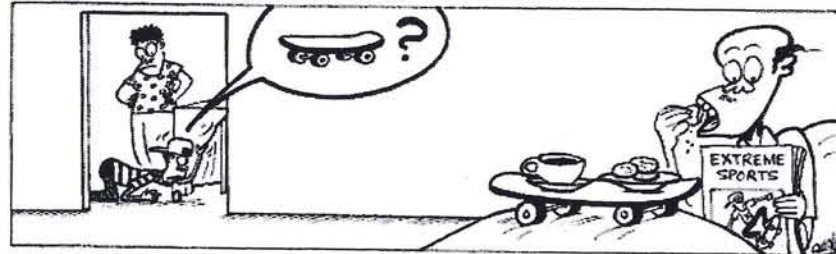
Sample 22: Mobile generation / obsession (August 04, 2003)



Sample 23 (September 18, 2003)



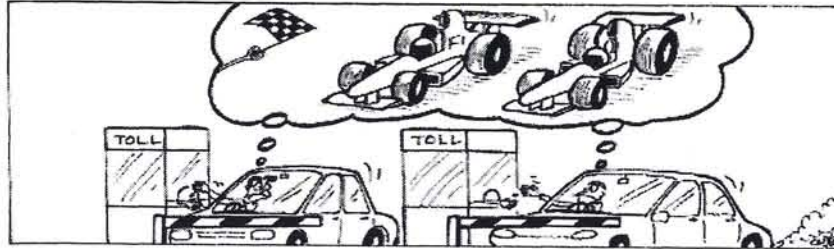
Sample 24: Extreme sports fever—The X Games (February 19, 2004)



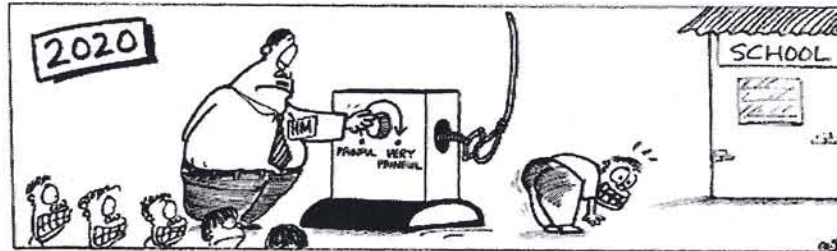
Sample 25 (February 21, 2004)



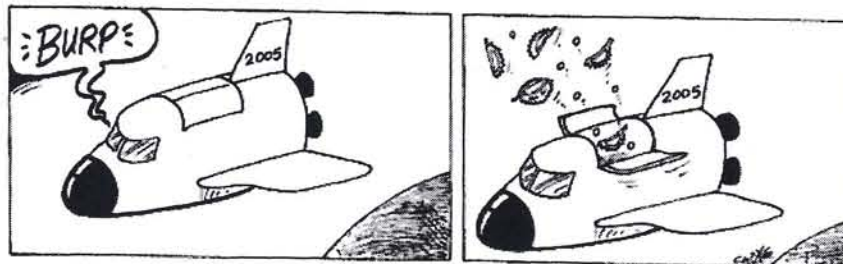
Sample 26: F1 fever (February 23, 2004)



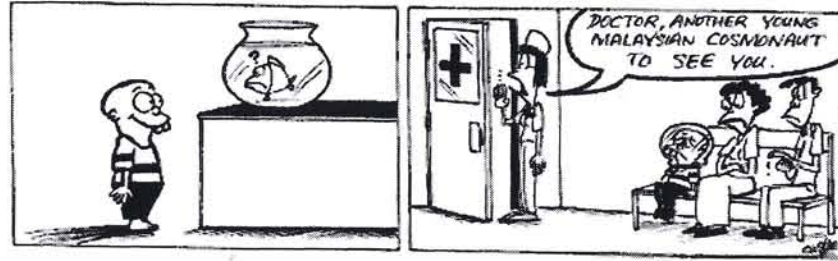
Sample 27: Vision 2020 (October 27, 2003)



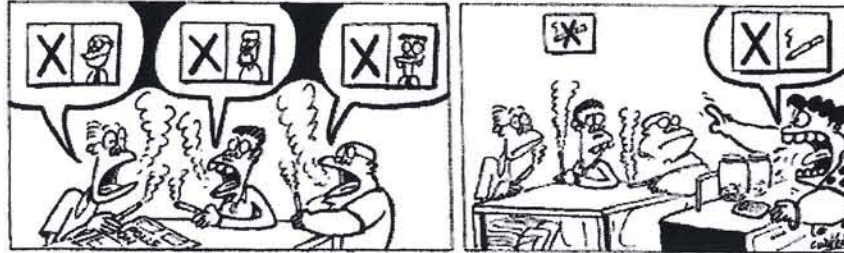
Sample 28: Malaysian in space (October 21, 2003)



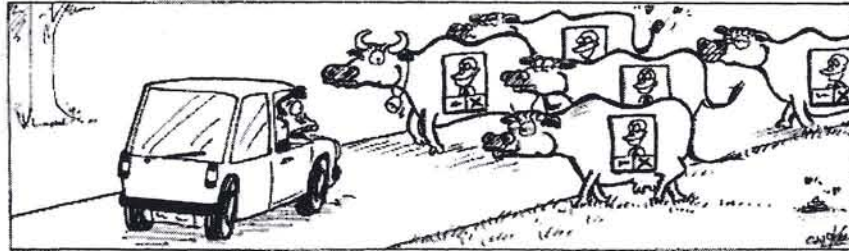
Sample 29 (October 20, 2003)



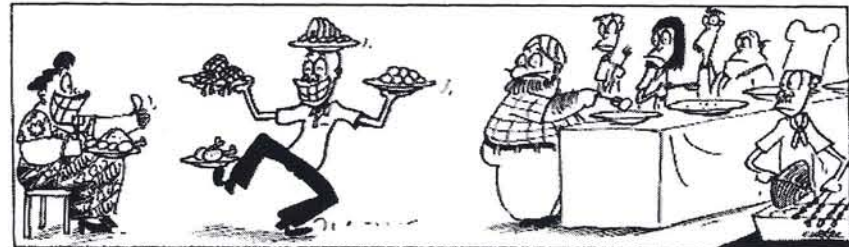
Sample 30: Election fever (March 05, 2004)



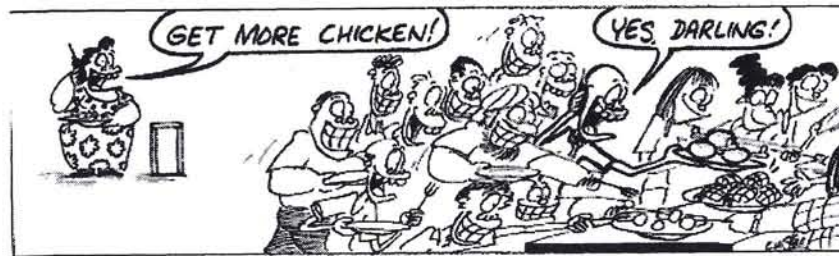
Sample 31 (March 13, 2004)



Sample 32: Food crazy—Malaysians love to eat (November 25, 2003)



Sample 33 (November 28, 2003)



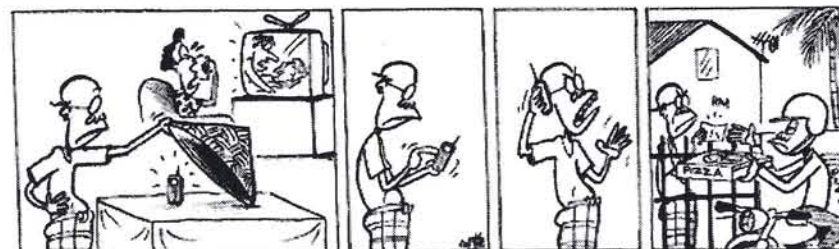
Sample 34: Sale / Mega-sale crazy – Malaysians love to shop (September 27, 2003)



Sample 35 (November 20, 2003)



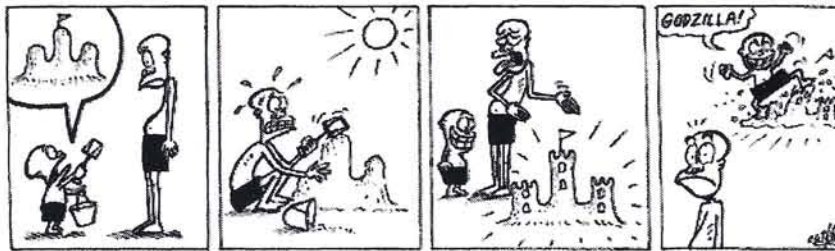
Sample 36: Soap opera crazy – Malaysians love drama (April 26, 2004)



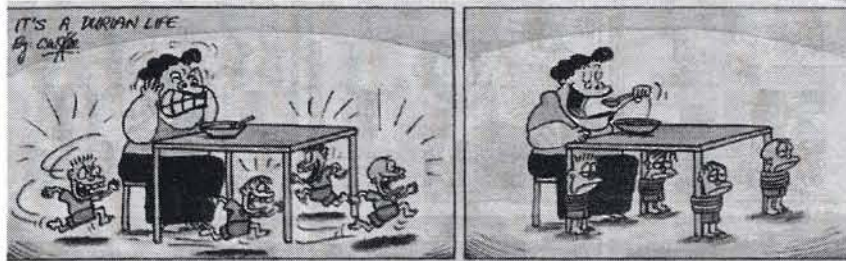
Sample 37: Obsession over 4D lottery (November 04, 2003)



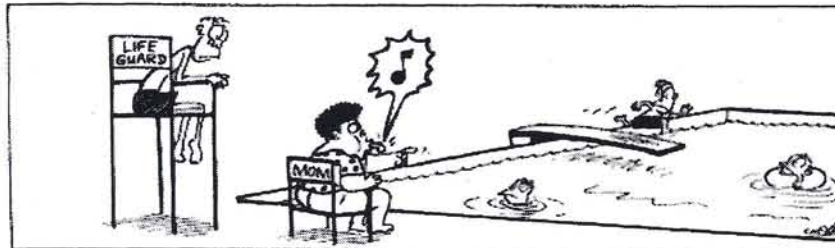
Sample 38: That's parenthood – toils, frustrations, cautiousness & rewards (November 11, 2003)



Sample 39 (Frustration—December 28, 2003)



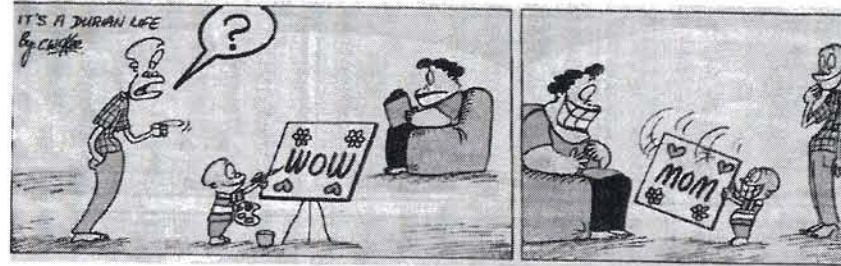
Sample 40 (Overcautious mother – in play—November 12, 2003)



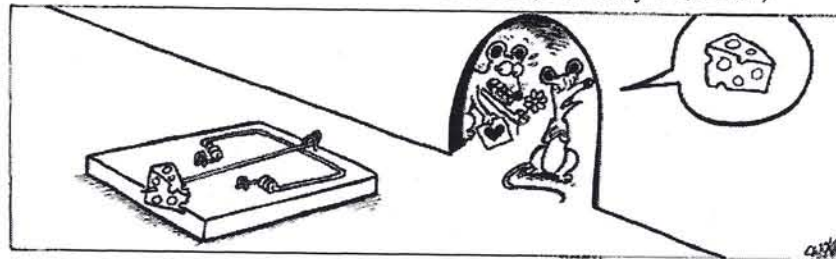
Sample 41 (Overcautious mother—in studies—November 07, 2003)



Sample 42 (Reward—May 09, 2004)



Sample 43: Love is in the air—Valentine (February 10, 2004)



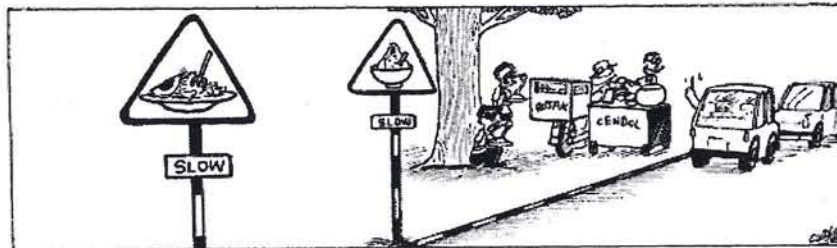
Sample 44 (February 12, 2004)



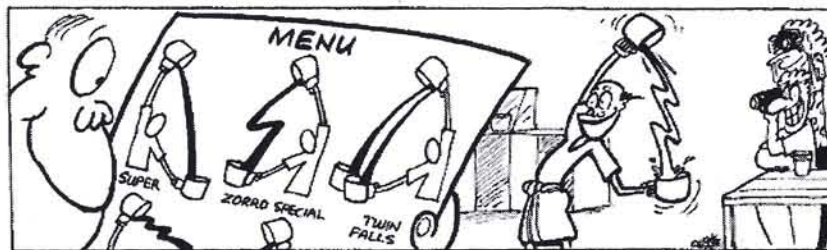
Sample 45: Conjugal life—anger management (September 05, 2003)



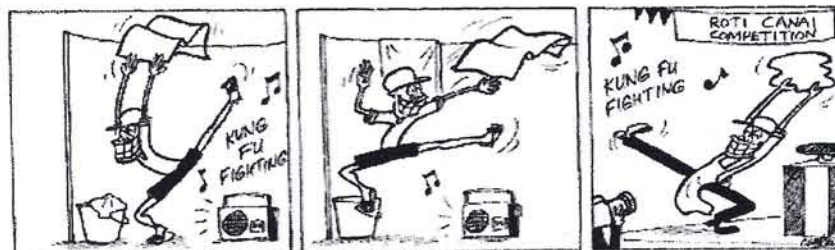
Sample 46: Truly Malaysian (Roadside food stalls—March 24, 2004)



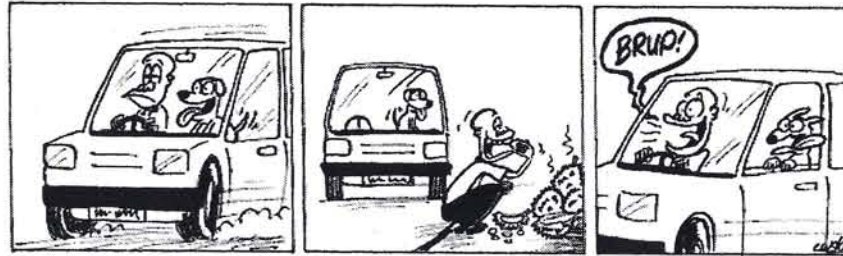
Sample 47 (Teh Tarik—August 19, 2003)



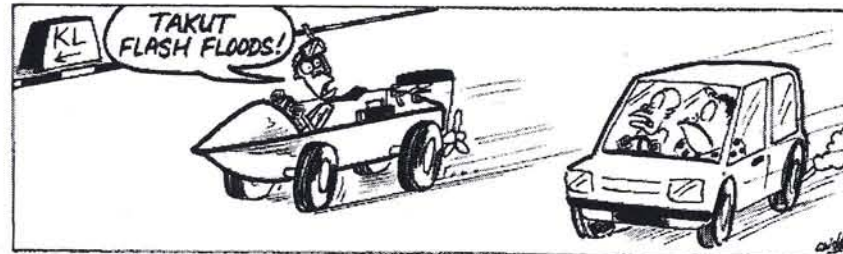
Sample 48 (Roti Canai—February 25, 2004)



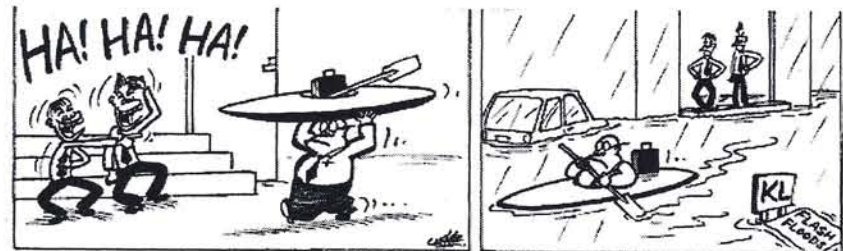
Sample 49 (The only way to enjoy Durian—August 21, 2003)



Sample 50: Flash floods in Kuala Lumpur (June 17, 2003)



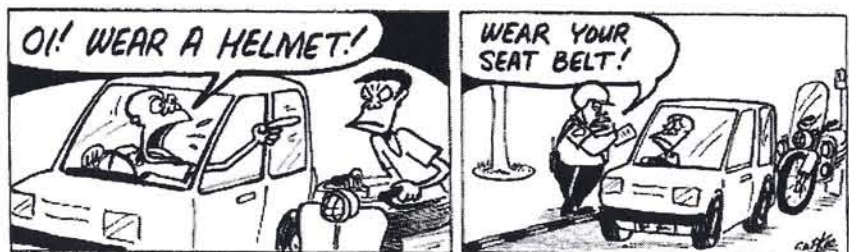
Sample 51 (June 16, 2003)



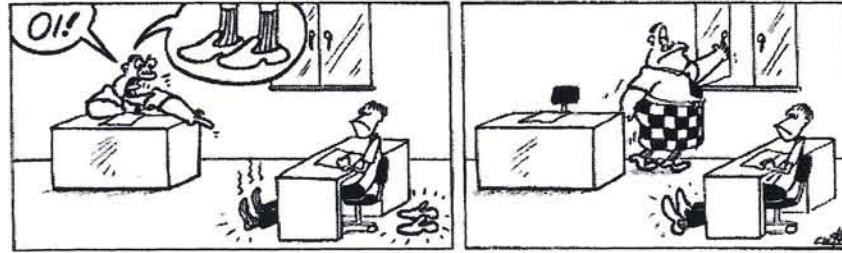
MORAL IMPLICATIONS

Sarcastically / Ironically Implications

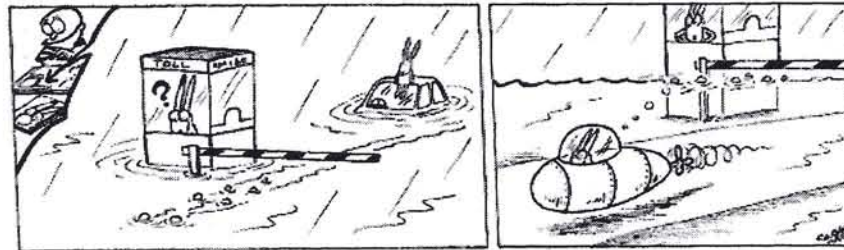
Sample 52: Practice what you preach (March 23, 2004)



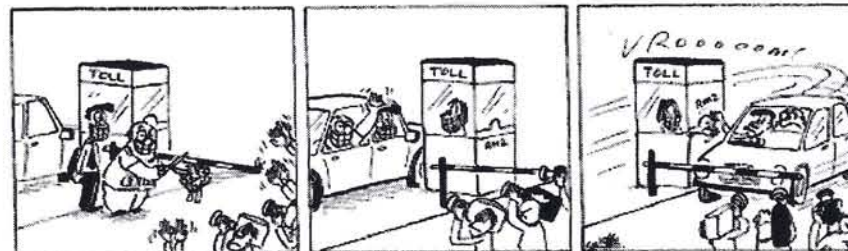
Sample 53 (December 06, 2003)



Sample 54: Reluctance / unhappy to pay toll (May 13, 2004)



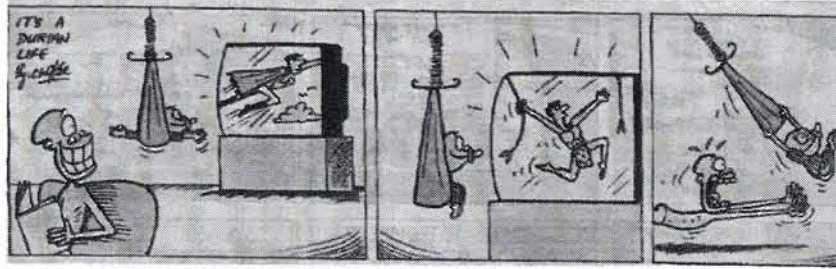
Sample 55 (May 01, 2004)



Sample 56: Media influence—You became what you see (September 19, 2003)



Sample 57 (January 11, 2004)



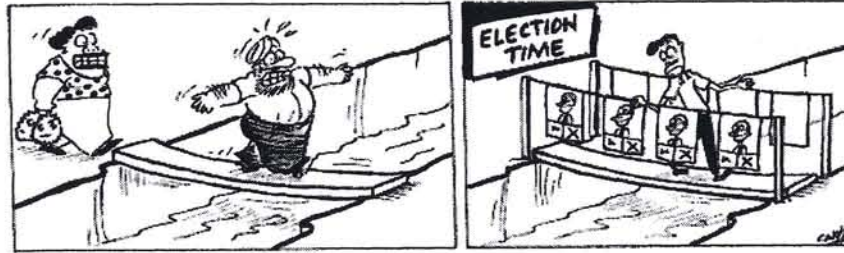
Sample 58: Children learn what they see—set a good example (September 14, 2003)



Sample 59 (January 24, 2004)

Sample 60: Typical characteristics (of some people) during the elections
(Making false promises—March 09, 2004)

Sample 61(Doing a good deed 'only' at election time—March 06, 2004)



Sample 62 (Not practicing what one preaches—March 15, 2004)

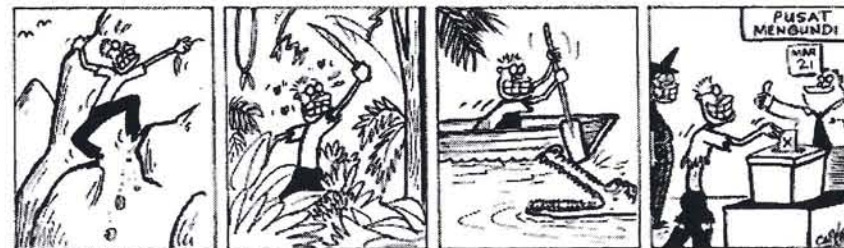


Sample 63 (Election excuse for speeding—21.03.2004)



Didactic Implications

Sample 64: Moral Duty to Vote (March 19, 2004)



Sample 65: Vote and F1(March 20, 2004)

**KEE'S WORLD**

Situations from / of life

Social Reflections

Moral Implications

Social Issues

Social
Life

Sarcastic/Ironic Implications

Didactic Implications

Combination of all these situations from / of life provide a window into the Malaysian way of life, which embodies the spirit of *Malaysia boleh*