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THE ESSENCE OF CHINESE CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SARAWAK CHINESE**Niew Shong Tong****FOREWORD**

As part of the celebrations in conjunction with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Sarawak's independence within the Federation of Malaysia, the State Government organised the first Sarawak Chinese Culture Seminar. Although issues pertaining to culture have been regularly commented upon, this is the first occasion that a seminar has been organised specifically to discuss the subject of culture. Thus the organisation of this Seminar has special meaning, far reaching significance and reflects the deep concern of the State Government for the cultures of the various ethnic groups in Sarawak. It also suggests that it is timely to review and resolve matters relating to the cultures of the different ethnic groups in the state.

Chinese culture is a very complex subject which cannot be adequately dealt with in an hour. In this paper, therefore, I shall only try to discuss the essence of Chinese culture and pose some questions regarding Chinese culture that I hope will be discussed in greater depth and detail so that ways and means can be found to meet the challenges that face the Chinese community. The paper will also analyse the family system and its effect on the Sarawak Chinese economic structure, social attitudes and political consciousness.

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DEFINITION OF CULTURE

It is not easy to provide a precise definition of culture. Some scholars accept a simplified definition that holds 'culture' to be 'a way of life'. In a broad sense, Chinese culture can be taken to embody the way of life of the Chinese people that includes their traditional values, concept of etiquette, literature and arts, science and technology, religions, customs and habits, all of which may be regarded as the combination of the characteristics of Chinese civilisation.

ESSENCE OF CHINESE CULTURE

A Confucian scholar, Professor Wu Teh Yao, has suggested that Chinese culture and traditions emphasized training of oneself to be a person of high virtue and moulding one's character through education.