Abstract

One of the main characteristics of a plural society is the industrial and occupational specialization of each ethnic group. Since 1959, Singapore has been engaging in a process of industrialisation which, by 1966, had resulted in a structural change in her economy. Economic development coupled with the implementation of a multi-racialism policy should, in theory, have created certain conditions which are favourable to industrial and occupational mobility of each ethnic group, thereby redressing or rationalising the ethnic differential as manifested in the unbalanced ethnic representation in the industrial and occupational structures which took shape during the colonial era. Thus the purpose of this study is twofold: first, to examine the industrial and occupational changes, if any, of each ethnic group in the period 1957-1966; secondly, to analyse the factors, if any, which are conducive, or serve as obstacles, to such changes.

Although the growth of Singapore's economy had reached a remarkable level by 1966, yet as the analysis in chapter I and II reveals, the participation of each ethnic group was comparatively different either in terms of industrial or occupational categories. In addition, the analysis also explicitly shows that the patterns of participation of each ethnic group have, on the whole, nothing to do with the economic growth and its structural changes. Thus, in the period under study, certain ethnic industrial and occupational specializations have remained unchanged, while some ethnic specializations have intensified.

Factors which tend to shape the patterns of ethnic participation in the national economy are several. Chief among these are: (1) the nature of economic development and
the employment opportunities thus created; (2) the ethnic differentials in level of living, education, attitudes towards work and life, socio-cultural institutions ... etc.; and (3) demographic structure. It is these variables rather than the factor of economic growth that will shape the patterns of ethnic representation in industries and occupations in the years ahead.