1. CRITERIA FOR SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

As a stratification system is based on a general system of differentiation, evaluation and reward, a number of stratification systems may be visualised. As Lenski points out, there are a number of criteria or indicators of status, each providing a separate class system. Once it is recognised that power rests on many different foundations and that "these are not always reducible to some single common denominator", one may think in "terms of a series of class hierarchies or class systems". He outlines four such systems—the occupational class system, the property system, and the ethnic system. We may add to this a fifth, the educational system.

Seen as such, status is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, such that an individual's status "instead of being a single position in a unidimensional hierarchy, becomes a series of positions in a series of related vertical hierarchies". Attempts have been made to devise composite indices or scales, taking into account positions of individuals on a number of criteria, for example, Lloyd Warner's Index of Social Status Characteristics. However, practical considerations of measurement compel most researchers to use a single-factor index, such as income, education or occupation. This is by no means the best solution, hardly giving the complete picture of the status of members of a society, but empirical studies have shown that many of these criteria are highly correlated in modern societies. Generalisations about any person from one dimension to the other cannot be made. It can, however, be assumed with some confidence that persons high on one dimension are also high on the others. For instance, those high on the educational scale are also likely to be high on the occupational scale. Kahl and Davis found a high correlation between major indices of social-economic status used by American sociologists. They suggest that this is so "because they all measured but in differing degrees the...

1. This article is an excerpt from a Ph. D. dissertation entitled "Education and Social Mobility in Malaysia: A Case Study of Petaling Jaya", presented to the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Data were collected from a representative sample (813) heads of households in Petaling Jaya.
3. Ibid., p. 80.
same underlying dimensions".6

For the purpose of this study, occupation is used as the basis of identifying strata, on the assumption that in urban Malaysia a person’s occupation most accurately defines his status, because it is highly correlated with both education and income. A.J. Reiss has clearly summed up the close relationship of these three factors:

“Both individual income and education attainment, which are used as measures of socio-economic status are known to be correlated with occupational ranks, and both can be seen as aspects of occupational status, since education is a basis for entry into many occupations, and for most people income is derived from occupation.”7

Occupational differences are not expected to exhaust the meaning of social class differences, for the term ‘social class’ is a much broader term, but they should provide a reasonably good insight into social class differences. It should be possible to view the society in Petaling Jaya as a series of strata with people in each strata enjoying equal prestige on an occupational scale. Because occupation is closely linked with educational attainment and income, when a person’s occupational class is referred to his educational attainment and income levels are also implied.

Like other single-factor indices, an occupational scale is easier to standardize, makes a reliable scale, and can be used economically. It has an additional advantage, in that “it is relatively easy to ascertain a person’s occupation” although his income or the cost of his house may be harder to assess.8 Occupations can be grouped into categories and arranged into a vertical scale. There is now available a large body of literature on the prestige enjoyed by different types of occupations. The most significant finding is the high degree of similarity in prestige ratings between countries, within countries, and even at different times. Inkeles and Rossi, comparing the occupational prestige ratings of the United States, Great Britain, Soviet Union, Japan, New Zealand and Germany, found a correlation coefficient in the region of .90.9 Hodge, Treiman and Rossi have more recently compared the occupational prestige rankings of twenty-four countries, including countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and concluded that the prestige rankings in all these countries are similar to that of the United States.10 There seems to be little difference in how occupations are ranked in developed and developing countries, as studies of prestige rankings in the Philippines and Indonesia have shown.11