CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literary discourse is dominated by western literary theories. In Malaysia, the use of western theories usually involves having to adapt their implicitly Eurocentric philosophical assumptions and cultural values to the non-European experiences and perspectives of local critics and/or the texts they are studying; and the process of adaptation can present theoretical and practical problems (Zawiah Yahya 1994). In the case of traditional Malay literature, the problems are complicated by basic differences between European and Malay concepts of literature, genres, literary categories such as the "text" and the "author", aesthetics, and criteria of evaluation (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1975, 1976, 1996, 2000). Consciousness of these philosophical and cultural incompatibilities has led to the development of literary theories based on indigenous and other Asian thought systems. Since the 1990s, the focus has been on the development of tradition-based reader-oriented theories from which critical approaches to texts may be derived.

The present study was designed originally to develop an approach to texts based on a Zen philosophical framework, primarily for use in the study of Malaysian literature in English. Zen philosophy is particularly suited as an alternative to postmodern theory because its epistemology is phenomenological and its discourse is deconstructive in intent. Since the 1980s, there have been many studies comparing Mahayana-Zen phenomenology, language theory, and methods of deconstruction with their European counterparts; specifically Husserlian phenomenology, Saussurian and Wittgensteinian linguistic theories, and Derridaean Deconstruction.

In the course of my research, however, I realised that the most critical lack in Malaysian literary studies is not another approach to texts launched from another ethno-

religious centre, but an ethnicity-free critical procedure that could be used either on its own or in tandem with existing ethno-religious theories. Further, it seemed to me necessary that the critical procedure should harmonise with the concept of "criticism", not as it is understood by literary critics, but as it is conceptualised in the way most Malaysians are taught to deal with everyday conflicts of opinion, namely with an open-minded willingness to listen to and understand the other party's viewpoint. The aim of my study then became one of using Zen critical methods and tools to systematise this important but hitherto unexplored aspect of the local living critical tradition, and bring this system into operation in contemporary literary studies.

1.2   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the 1980s, a number of literary theories have been developed locally. Currently, most of them are based on the aesthetic, moral, and literary values of traditional Malay and Islamic thought systems.[1] While these theories constitute an important part of Malaysian literary studies, their ethno-religious focus limits the scope of their application in the larger context of literary studies in Malaysia. Their cultural and religious specificities may be too exclusive and too normative to be applied to texts written out of other-ethnic and other-religious experiences and perspectives, for instance, literature written in any of the languages used in Malaysia (e.g. English) from non-Malay or non-Islamic perspectives.

Implicit in any act of communication, such as the writing and reading of literary works, is the belief (or hope) that human beings can use language and creative imagination to make the transition from subjectivity to intersubjective understanding.[2] However, since writers write and readers read from their respective cultural and/or historical standpoints no matter what language they use, the act of reading is nearly always an encounter with a cultural and/or historical "other". Some degree of conflict (i.e. emotional or intellectual discomfort) is likely to be experienced by the reader when his/her values clash with those of the text. In multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-faith Malaysia, this sense of conflict is more likely to be experienced when reading English-language literature because the use of English as a creative medium is not confined to any one ethnic group. An important requirement for the study of Anglophone literature in Malaysia is therefore the ability to appreciate other people's cultures and values, without which the reader may have problems comprehending the issues dealt with in a given text.

Some of the problems arising from a lack of shared cultural knowledge and values between the reader and the text are discussed by Wolfgang Iser in *The act of reading* (1980). Iser's main concern in the book is to explain his phenomenology-based theory of aesthetic response: how readers respond to texts, and how their responses are "conditioned" or controlled by historical and cultural "codes" the writers use.[3] He recognises that there can be a tension, not only between the writer's and the reader's cultural standpoints, but also between the writer's desire to change the reader's viewpoint and the reader's unwillingness to have his viewpoint changed. In discussing this tension, he presents the following scenarios. First, if the reader does not share in the writer's particular, culturally and historically determined "code", he will experience "problems of comprehension" (*ibid*: 152). Secondly, if the reader does not share the writer's norms and values or perspective, he will have to get rid of his prejudices, which, Iser notes, is "no simple task" (*ibid*: 8). Finally, if the reader cannot or will not get rid of his prejudices, he may reject the text (*ibid*: 202):

> …if [the reader] is induced to participate in the events of the text, only to find that he is then supposed to adopt a negative attitude toward values he does not wish to question, the result will often be open rejection of the book and its author.

Iser's theory of aesthetic response is essentially a descriptive, not a prescriptive theory. It is invaluable in making us aware of how prejudices and lack of knowledge about another's culture can be stumbling blocks to the understanding of cross-cultural texts, but it does not provide a methodology for overcoming our prejudices. Elsewhere, however, Iser (Budick & Iser 1996: 302) suggests a solution:

> …a cross-cultural discourse requires a certain amount of self-effacement, perhaps a suspension of one's own stance, at least for a certain time, in order to listen to what the others are trying to say. There is an ethics inherent in cross-cultural discourse to which Emerson alerted us when he asked that we should "rinse" our words.

Iser's suggestion may be familiar to the Asian reader. That one should listen and try to understand the other before one speaks, and then speak courteously, is the way most Asians are taught to handle the views and opinions of those with whom they come into conflict. This approach to conflicting views is so much part of the ethical fabric of Asian life that it may not seem to be an aspect of criticism. Yet, as I shall argue, it can be regarded as a distinct but integral part of traditional Malay critical "theory".

In the *Sejarah Melayu* (Brown, C.C. trans. 1976: 92-94) is a narrative that can be read as a discourse on the art of criticism. It tells of the visit of Tun Bija Wangsa of Melaka to the court of Pasai with a theological problem—whether those who go to heaven (or hell) abide there forever. The question is put to Tun Makhdum Mua, who answers with a definite "yes". When asked if there might be another view, he firmly rules it out, citing as his authority "the text of the Koran". Tun Makhdum's pupil, Tun Hasan, is troubled by the answer but maintains a discreet silence. Later, however, he privately and diplomatically corrects Tun Makhdum, who hears him out and admits his mistake. Tun Hasan then advises his teacher to go to Tun Bija Wangsa with the explanation that his earlier answer was for the benefit of "the whole assembly", and that the correct answer has to be given in private. Tun Makhdum is thus able to put matters right without losing face.

Read from a Zen perspective, this narrative encapsulates five aspects of criticism. The first is the interpretation of texts[4], which is shown to be related not only to language, but also to epistemology and morality. Tun Makhdum is asked not one but two question. The first question relates to language and the interpretation of a Quranic text; the second question relates to epistemology in that it is about the possibility of another view apart from "yes" and "no". And implicit in the epistemological question is a moral one: whether Tun Makhdum is being arrogant in thinking there is only one way (his way) to interpret a text. The second aspect of criticism dealt with in the narrative is the deconstruction of binary logic[5] and stereotype thinking. The paradox of a pupil (Tun Hasan) correcting and counselling his teacher (Tun Makhdum) poses a question about appearance (or conventional concepts of reality) and reality as it is: who is the "teacher" and who the "pupil" in this situation? The third aspect is the delivery of criticism, exemplified by Tun Hasan's critique of Tun Makhdum, which is done in the traditionally preferred manner: non-confrontational, indirect, discreet and courteous.[6] The fourth aspect is the response to criticism, exemplified by Tun Makhdum's receiving of his pupil's criticism with humility (*rendah diri*), a willingness to listen, and a readiness to admit his mistake. The fifth aspect of criticism is the privileging of insight, quickwittedness and inborn wisdom[7] over book learning, the rigidity of binary logic, and religious dogma. This aspect is illustrated by the younger Tun Hasan's superior intellectual acuity and diplomatic skill. I should like now to discuss the fourth and fifth aspects of criticism just identified, the response to criticism and the importance of insight, to explain why and how a Zen framework can help transform this tradition-based approach to interpersonal conflict into a conflict-to-insight approach to discovering a text's discourse.

One of the more notable features of Malay literature is that it tends to be critical in content and intent. Scholars have noted the social-critical element in the *Sejarah Melayu* (e.g. Umar Junus 1984: 135), the "discourse of dissent" in the *Hikayat Abdullah* (e.g. Diane Carroll 1999), and the fact that modern Malay writers have "throughout, implicitly or explicitly, regarded themselves as social critics" (Tham 1977: 184). Using the Tun Makhdum story as an analogy, one could say that when writers use literary means to critique contemporary social issues, they are like Tun Hasan, telling us there is always another way to think and to interpret the world. That makes us, their readers and the target of their criticism, like Tun Makhdum. This means that a tradition-based response to texts should be like his: open-minded and inquiring, willing to "hear out" the criticism, and willing to be corrected.

Here we have an overturning of the common notion that the reader is the critic and the text is the object of criticism. Instead, the text is the critic, and the reader is the target of the text's criticism. The text is thus not an aesthetic or linguistic object to which the reader-critic must do something—evaluate, deconstruct, critique or treat like a Rorschach blot from which to spin off wordplays and thought associations. Instead it is a human voice, and the act of reading is a listening to that voice. More important for the present study is Tun Makhdum's response to Tun Hasan's criticism, a response depicted as a dialogue, during which he asks Tun Hasan for his views, weighs them against his own conflicting views, and then allows himself to be corrected. This investigative, self-correcting dialogue represents the true critical process, in which active listening and insight play crucial roles. The process of understanding another's discourse, whether through hearing or reading, may thus be described as a critical process enabling the transition from conflict to insight.

In principle, many of the ideas just mentioned in relation to responding to criticism are also basic to European hermeneutic theory. I have noted Iser's suggestion that one should respond to unfamiliar views and values with self-restraint, careful listening and courteous speech. Gadamer (1989: 21) speaks of hermeneutics in terms of a "partnership of conversation". He also points out that empathetic insight has been regarded as an important hermeneutic factor from the time of Schleiermacher[8], so much so that in the German language, the word for "understanding" (*Verstaendnis*) means not only comprehension but also insight and empathy.[9] And Paul Ricoeur (1976: 73) asserts that empathy or "the transference of ourselves into another's psychic life" is "the principle common to every kind of understanding…."

Despite the importance of insight in reading and interpretation, there is to date no methodology offered in western literary discourse for either its development or its systematic application in the hermeneutic process. On the contrary, insight tends to be regarded as a kind of cognition unique to the individual, non-rational, resistant to methods and rules, somewhat mysterious, and unteachable. E. D. Hirsch (1967: 203) asserts that interpretation begins with a "genial guess", but "there are no methods for making guesses, no rules for generating insight". For Hillis Miller (Budick & Iser 1996: 223), insight is "a glimpse out of the corner of the eye" and "not wholly amenable to conceptualization". This view, that insight has nothing to do with rational thinking, has been challenged by cognitive scientists like the 1978 Nobel Laureate, Herbert A. Simon (Simon & Gilmartin 1973: 33), whose studies have shown that insight or intuitive knowledge is a form of subconscious pattern recognition and, far from being a mystery, is closely associated with experience and analysis. But currently, research on insight in the west remains in the domain of cognitive science (see Leo Trottier 2003); and the idea that insight can be developed is limited to practical problem-solving (e.g. Edward de Bono's Lateral Thinking).

In Zen, too, it is held that insight (Sk. *prajna*, Ch. *wu*, Jap. *satori*) and empathetic compassion (*karuna*) are necessary for understanding discourses. But the Zen view of insight has more in common with that of western cognitive scientists than with that of the literary theorists mentioned above. *Prajna* is not regarded as something mysterious and inexplicable, but as a critical-cognitive faculty innate in everyone and capable of being systematically developed; and its development is of fundamental importance in Zen. The methodology for *prajna* development differs in detail in the various schools of Buddhist thought. But basically, it involves three stages: reading (mainly, but not exclusively, of *sutras*), critical analysis of what has been read, and meditation. Of special interest to the present study are the first two stages of *prajna* development: the reading and critical analysis of texts. However, all three stages focus on the rational analysis and deconstruction of all concepts, perceptions, views and theories about the nature of reality and the self. The basic principle is that the systematic elimination of false views leads eventually to the realisation of the true nature of reality. As K. Venkata Ramanan (1978: 317) explains it, "With the rejection of the falsely imagined nature, the true nature of things comes to light."

If we apply this principle to the reading of novels, it would mean, theoretically, that by focusing on the systematic elimination of the reader's wrong perceptions and interpretations of the novel, the "true" nature of the novel's "discourses" (i.e. the issues the

text is dealing with and its problematisation of these issues) will come to light. This means that a Zen-based reading would not be about interpreting, grasping at or producing meaning from a text; it would be about releasing the text's discourses from the bondage of the reader's interpretations based on preconceived theories and values. It would in fact resemble Tun Makhdum's open-minded and self-correcting response to Tun Hasan's critique. This resemblance is an inducement to bring Zen methodology for developing *prajna* into dialogue with traditional Malay critical practice and contemporary literary criticism.

1.2.1 Summary of the problem

At the current state of the discourse on the development of local, tradition-based literary theory, there is a perceived need for more reader-oriented theories from which critical approaches to texts may be derived. Although a number of tradition-based literary theories have been developed, most of them are derived from either Islamic philosophy or traditional Malay-Muslim literature; and their ethno-religious emphasis limits their applicability in the study of non-Islamic and non-Malay texts.

In any reading situation, differences between the reader's cultural background or values and those of the text can result in non-comprehension, resistance, or even outright rejection of the text. In Malaysia, these types of reader-text conflict are more likely to occur in the reading of literature in English because the use of English as a creative medium is not confined to any one ethnic group. An appreciation of other people's cultures and values is therefore an important requirement for the study of English-language literature in Malaysia.

Both in the west and in Asia, it is recognised that an appreciation of other people's values and viewpoints requires a dialogue—a willingness to listen to the other viewpoint and to have one's original viewpoint corrected. The investigation of viewpoints involved in this dialogue implies a critical process, during which insight and empathy need to come into play to enable understanding of the other. This type of critical investigation may be regarded as a transition from conflict to insight. However, although insight is regarded as an important factor in the critical investigation, understanding and interpretation of texts in the European hermeneutic tradition, there is currently little or no emphasis given to the systematic and detailed study of how insight functions in the interpretive process.

For a study of insight in the hermeneutic process, it is necessary to turn to Zen philosophy[10]. As will be explained in Chapter III, Zen is a "secular" philosophy[11] that aims to bring about universal harmony by guiding the individual along a conflict-to-insight learning curve. Its discourses provide both an epistemological explanation for the experience of insight (*prajna*) and a methodology for its systematic development. Significantly, an important part of this methodology involves the reading and understanding of *sutras*. The present study is based on the hypothesis that relevant aspects of the Zen approach to *sutras* may be adapted for the reading and analysis of modern and contemporary literary texts.

1.3   AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to flesh out the *Sejarah* narrative's brief sketch of the investigative stage of criticism into a trans-ethnic reading procedure for the systematic uncovering and insightful understanding of discourses in works of fiction. The plan is to use the Zen approach to texts in *prajna* development as the theoretical framework, and to convert relevant Zen analytic concepts, guidelines and formulae into critical tools to be used in the proposed reading procedure. The reading strategy of the procedure will be designed along a conflict-to-insight trajectory, in line with the view discussed above, that in understanding another's discourse, the true critical process is an investigative process enabling the hearer/reader to progress from initial non-comprehension of, or resistance to, the "otherness" of the discourse to an understanding and better appreciation of its "otherness". The full name of the reading procedure is the "Zen-based Conflict-to-Insight Reading Procedure". In subsequent discussions in this dissertation, it will be referred to as the "Zen-based Reading Procedure", the "Reading Procedure" or simply the "Procedure".

1.4   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To realise the study aim, four research objectives are set. Figure 1.1 schematises the four research objectives.
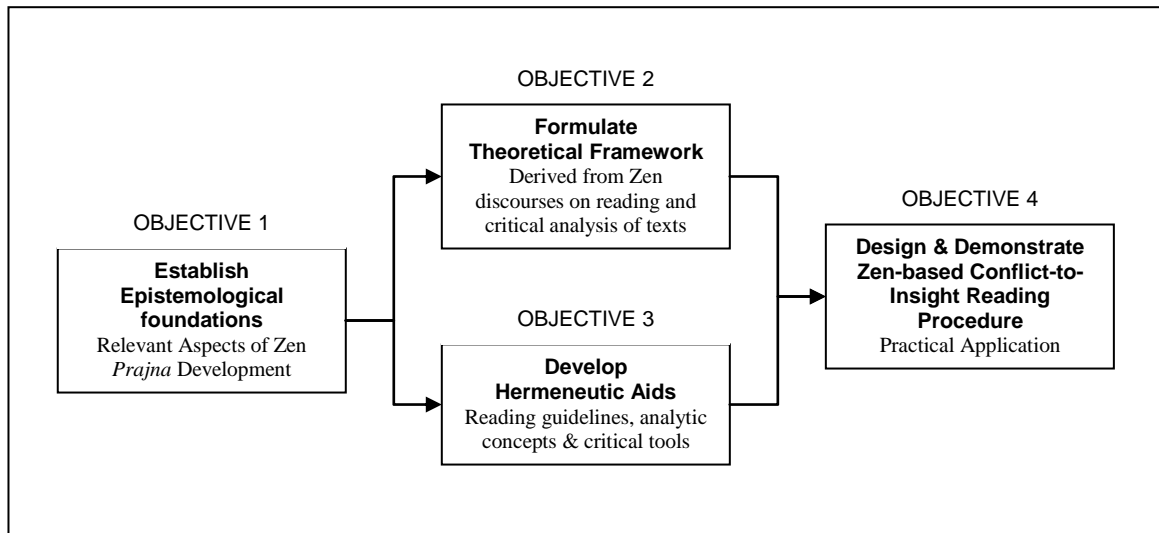
Figure 1.1 Research Objectives

The first and second objectives relate to the theoretical framework of the Procedure. The first objective is to establish the epistemological foundations of the Zen-based Reading Procedure by identifying aspects of Zen philosophy that explain the nature and function of *prajna* (insight) in the cognitive process, and why it is held to be capable of being systematically developed. The second objective is to derive the Procedure's theoretical framework from Zen discourses relating to the reading and critical analysis of texts. The third and fourth objectives relate to the practical design and application of the Procedure. The third objective is to develop a set of hermeneutic aids (e.g. reading guidelines and critical tools) for analysing modern literary works by borrowing and adapting relevant reading guidelines and critical tools used in Zen *prajna* development, and by creating new, supplementary tools. The fourth objective is to design the Zen-based Conflict-to-Insight Reading Procedure and demonstrate its use by applying it in the analysis of two modern works of fiction.

1.4.1   Research questions

The research is guided by the following questions.

1. What are the special circumstances in the study of literature in Malaysia that necessitate a trans-ethnic, conflict-to-insight reading procedure? This question helps to identify key problems the Zen-based Procedure will try to address.

2. Why is the Zen methodology for developing *prajna* crucial to the concept and design of the Zen-based Reading Procedure? This question helps to identify aspects of Zen epistemology and approach to texts that are relevant for the theoretical framework of the Zen-based Reading Procedure.

3. What aspects of traditional Zen critical theory and approach to texts can be adapted for use as hermeneutic aids in the Zen-based Reading Procedure? This question helps to determine the design concepts and identify the most relevant hermeneutic aids for the Zen-based Reading Procedure.

4. Is the Zen-based Reading Procedure trans-ethnically applicable, and will its reading outcomes be more insightful? This question provides the impetus for demonstrating its application to two critically problematic Malaysian novels written in English by authors who are ethnically and philosophically different—one Eurasian and uninfluenced by Zen, the other Chinese and influenced by Zen.

1.5 SCOPE & METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The research objectives and research questions just outlined determine the scope and method of the research. In line with the research objectives, this study has both a theoretical and a practical aspect. The central concern is the practical research. The end-product of this study is neither a new theory of reading nor a new theory of fiction, but a new method of analysing fiction. This study may thus be characterised as pragmatic, problem-solving and design-oriented; and the scope and method of research reflect this emphasis on the practical.

1.5.1 Scope of research

In terms of theoretical research, the main study area is Zen philosophy, with emphasis on the development of *prajna*. However, since the Zen-based Reading Procedure is designed to meet local, contemporary literary-critical requirements, this main study area has to be framed by a study of both local and western critical theory and practice. Thus the scope of the theoretical research covers three broad areas of knowledge: Zen philosophy, literary theory in Malaysia, and western critical practice.

1.5.2   Method of research

The research is divided into four steps. The first three steps constitute the theoretical research, and the fourth step the practical research. The first step is to identify the local need for a reading procedure. The area of research is the Malaysian discourse on the quest for local, tradition-based critical theories. The scope is limited to the discourse on approaches to local texts. The focus is to identify key needs as yet unmet by existing local theories that the Zen-based Reading Procedure can try to address.

The second step involves the exploration of resources. The research area is Zen philosophy. The scope covers discourses related to *prajna* development from four philosophical schools: Early Buddhism, Madhyamika, Yogacara, and Hua Yen. The emphasis is on Zen discourses on *prajna*, critical theory and approach to texts, and the focus is the identification of hermeneutic aids (e.g. reading guidelines, critical concepts and analytic tools) that may be borrowed and/or adapted for the Procedure.

The third step in the research is to ensure that in concept and design, the Zen-based Reading Procedure does not replicate any of the better known and more influential reading theories and procedures in western literary discourse. The scope is limited to theoretical discourses based on epistemological and language theories comparable to Zen theories, for example Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology and Saussurian or Wittgensteinian linguistics. The emphasis is on reading theories and methodologies and the focus is on methodologies for the analysis of fiction.

The fourth step is the design, development and practical application of the Reading Procedure. The area of research is Malaysian fiction in English. The scope is limited to the reading of two Malaysian novels. The emphasis is on demonstrating the use of the Reading Procedure. The focus is on ascertaining the Procedure's functionality and heuristic value. Functionality is measured in terms of whether it has trans-ethnic applicability. To this end, a Zen-influenced text (Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the sky*) and a non-Zen influenced text (Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion orchid*) are selected. Heuristic value is measured in terms of whether the Procedure enables significantly more and fresher insights into the novels' discourses. To this end, the outcomes of the Zen-based readings of the novels are compared with the outcomes of earlier readings by critics using other approaches.

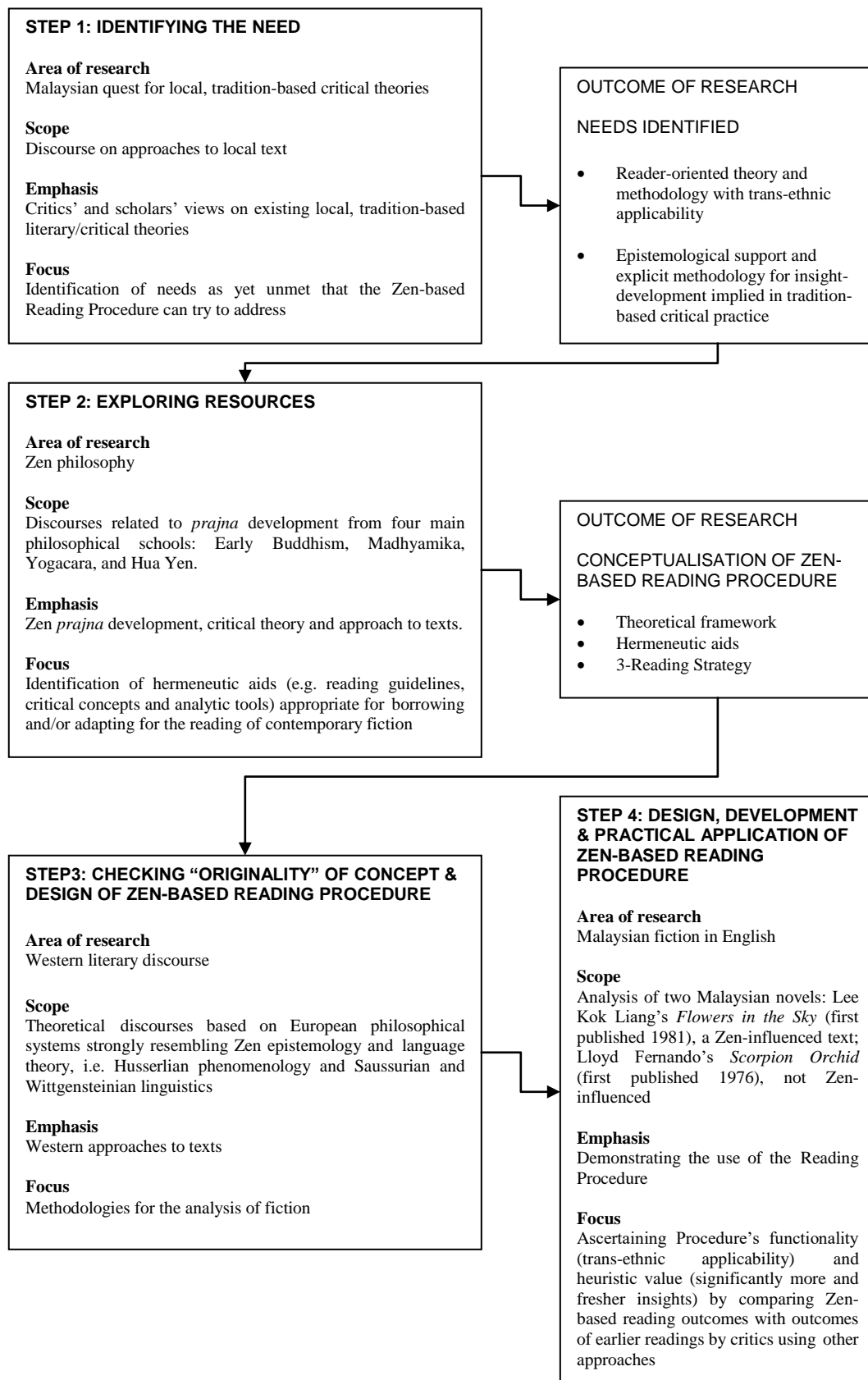Figure 1.2 summarises the scope and method of research.

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Area of research
Malaysian quest for local, tradition-based critical theories

Scope
Discourse on approaches to local text

Emphasis
Critics' and scholars' views on existing local, tradition-based literary/critical theories

Focus
Identification of needs as yet unmet that the Zen-based Reading Procedure can try to address

OUTCOME OF RESEARCH

NEEDS IDENTIFIED

- Reader-oriented theory and methodology with trans-ethnic applicability

- Epistemological support and explicit methodology for insight-development implied in tradition-based critical practice

STEP 2: EXPLORING RESOURCES

Area of research
Zen philosophy

Scope
Discourses related to *prajna* development from four main philosophical schools: Early Buddhism, Madhyamika, Yogacara, and Hua Yen.

Emphasis
Zen *prajna* development, critical theory and approach to texts.

Focus
Identification of hermeneutic aids (e.g. reading guidelines, critical concepts and analytic tools) appropriate for borrowing and/or adapting for the reading of contemporary fiction

OUTCOME OF RESEARCH

CONCEPTUALISATION OF ZEN-BASED READING PROCEDURE

- Theoretical framework
- Hermeneutic aids
- 3-Reading Strategy

STEP3: CHECKING "ORIGINALITY" OF CONCEPT & DESIGN OF ZEN-BASED READING PROCEDURE

Area of research
Western literary discourse

Scope
Theoretical discourses based on European philosophical systems strongly resembling Zen epistemology and language theory, i.e. Husserlian phenomenology and Saussurian and Wittgensteinian linguistics

Emphasis
Western approaches to texts

Focus
Methodologies for the analysis of fiction

STEP 4: DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ZEN-BASED READING PROCEDURE

Area of research
Malaysian fiction in English

Scope
Analysis of two Malaysian novels: Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the Sky* (first published 1981), a Zen-influenced text; Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* (first published 1976), not Zen-influenced

Emphasis
Demonstrating the use of the Reading Procedure

Focus
Ascertaining Procedure's functionality (trans-ethnic applicability) and heuristic value (significantly more and fresher insights) by comparing Zen-based reading outcomes with outcomes of earlier readings by critics using other approaches

Figure 1.2 Scope and method of research

1.5.3   Some notes on my approach to Buddhist/Zen texts in this study

There are three aspects of my approach to Buddhist/Zen texts (i.e. the *sutras* and *shastras*) in this study that need some explanation for the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with the "open" nature of Buddhist/Zen discourse and the reasons for it.

First, the Buddhist/Zen texts used in this study are all in English. That is to say, they are English translations of *sutras* (records of the Buddha's dialogues) and *shastras* (traditional philosophical commentaries on the *sutras*). Readers used to thinking of the *sutras* as "scripture" and who bring to Buddhist studies the values and conventions used in studying the scriptures of other religions, may think of these translations as "secondary" texts and therefore less reliable. It is necessary therefore to point out that the teachings of the Buddha have always been transmitted in the language of the listener, that is, in translation. No scholar knows what language or languages the Buddha originally taught in and no Buddhist cares. It is recorded in the *Aranavibhanga Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya*) that the Buddha expressly wanted his doctrines to be delivered in the language of the listener (Nanananda 1971: 41-44).

Although the Indian Buddhist philosophers of later centuries are presumed to have written their *shastras* in Sanskrit, relatively few of their original texts remain; and modern scholars and philologists depend largely on Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan translations of those texts. Even if I could read the texts in these languages, it does not mean that I would understand or interpret them "correctly". Buddhist philosophers in the past often had to write commentaries explaining not only the commentaries of other philosophers but also their own commentaries (e.g. Vasubandhu's commentary on his own *Vimsatika*, see Ch. IV, 4.3.2). And throughout the history of Buddhism, debates over interpretation of terms have formed a vital part of its discourses. An example of such a debate can be found in Nanananda's discussion (1971: 41-44), where he, a modern scholar, challenges the interpretation of, among others, Buddhaghosa, the fifth-century scholar who, according to Humphreys (1994: 50), first translated Sinhalese commentaries into Pali. To understand a Buddhist/Zen text, it is always necessary to read and compare a number of translations and commentaries. Ultimately, however, one has to think about what one has read and reason things out for oneself. In my research I have tried to do both to the best of my ability within the time-frame available for the completion of the present study.

The second aspect of my use of Buddhist/Zen texts is that I read and interpret them from the perspective of a literary student and not that of a Buddhist/Zen scholar. There may be doubts in the minds of some of my readers as to the "legitimacy" of this approach. Here it should be noted that in Buddhism/Zen, the reading and interpretation of texts is not restricted to specialist scholars, and while specialist scholars may disagree with my conclusions, they cannot deny me my right to my approach and understanding. This position is expressed by the Buddhist scholar, Dr. K. N. Jayatilleke, in his Foreword to Dr. W. F. Jayasuriya's *The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism: an introduction to the Abhidhamma* (1976: viii):

> I would disagree with some of the observations and conclusions in this book but it must be acknowledged at the same time that it is pioneering work, which offers scholars much food for thought, even if they do not agree with all that is said.

> It is sometimes held in academic circles that books on Buddhism must be written by specialists in the subject just as much as no one but a specialist can and should write a treatise on medicine. I do not entirely agree with this point of view. Since Buddhism is not an authoritarian creed, what emerges as the living thoughts of Buddha is what is distilled through the minds of thinking Buddhists. This book is, therefore, valuable not only for the information and instruction it gives about Buddhism to thoughtful and patient readers but also because it reveals the impact of both Buddhism and modern science on a keen and inquiring mind.

The third aspect of my use of Buddhist/Zen texts is that I treat Zen philosophy as a system of hermeneutics (the art of interpretation). In doing so, I depart from the usual approach taken by Buddhist/Zen scholars, especially western scholars, who generally treat the *sutras* as scriptural or philosophical texts, the contents of which have to be interpreted by means of another implicit or explicit hermeneutic method (see, for example, Macey 1976). My approach is validated by recent scholarship suggesting that it is the traditional approach. For example, Matthew Kapstein (in Lopez 1993: 149-174) concludes from his study of a 19th-century Tibetan philosopher's theory of interpretation that Buddhism is "fundamentally a hermeneutic endeavour".

My effort to "translate" Zen hermeneutic discourses into the idiom of contemporary literary discourse is also typical of the way Buddhist ideas have been used throughout

history. In advocating that Buddhist discourses on the mind be included in contemporary studies in cognitive science, Richard K. Payne (2002: 2) reviews Buddhism's history of interaction with different knowledge systems:

> If we see Buddhism as a living tradition capable of making a difference in the lives of people today, then the theories and teachings must be brought into dialogue with contemporary thought. The historical development of Buddhist thought has itself been motivated by such interactions. The development of Indian Buddhism was motivated by interactions with Hindu religious traditions, while East Asian developments were in large part motivated by interaction with Daoist and Confucian systems of thought. Additionally, interaction between differing strains of Buddhist thought also contributed to the further refinement and clarification of views.

However, the adoption of a knowledge system does not mean the adoption of its philosophical content. In his comparative study of how Buddhist ideas have been understood and used in ancient China and in the modern West, Kim Jong-in (2002: 22-3) makes the following observation:

> A metaphysical system from a foreign cultural tradition is adopted because of the need of the receiving culture rather than by the uniqueness of the system itself. Thus, *the foreign metaphysical system is adopted not for its philosophical content, but rather for its methodological structure*. In its extreme sense, what really results through this contact between a foreign thought and the native cultural tradition is not the understanding or interpretation of the foreign thought, but that of the native cultural tradition itself through the methodological usage of the foreign system. As it were, *the idea to be expressed via the adoption already exists within the tradition itself, and the incoming philosophical system is utilized for its unique and more efficient interpretation, expansion, or merely its embellishment of the preexisting idea*. (Italics mine)

It is in the context of Payne's and Kim's observations that the present study attempts to bring Zen's living tradition of *prajna* development into dialogue with the Malay/Asian living tradition of dealing with conflicting views, and to systematise the results of the dialogue through the design of the Zen-based Reading Procedure.

1.5.4   Limits of the study

The purpose in this study is not to provide a comprehensive study of Zen philosophy, nor is it to formulate a Zen theory of reading or a Zen theory of fiction. The purpose is to present a reading methodology specifically designed to facilitate the appreciation of cross-cultural texts in a multi-ethnic and largely "plural"[12] society, with emphasis on helping the reader to deal with his/her conflicts arising from non-comprehension of or emotional resistance to the culture and values presented in a given text, so that some insight can be gained into the discourses or issues being problematised in the text. The aspects of Zen philosophy presented in this dissertation are limited to those that have a bearing on the act of reading.

The Zen-based Reading Procedure is designed for the analysis of fiction. This is because the Procedure's theoretical framework is derived from Zen discourses on the development of *prajna*, and these discourses focus on explaining how concepts (or mental fictions) are constructed, why they need to be deconstructed (i.e. broken down), and how they should be deconstructed. To this extent, Zen philosophy may be regarded as a complete treatise on fictions. Therefore the present study makes no attempt to apply the Procedure to the reading of poetry; and makes no claim that it is suitable for poetry appreciation.

Finally, the aim of applying the Reading Procedure to the reading of the novels in Chapters VI and VII is only to demonstrate how the Procedure can be used, and to arrive at a preliminary estimation of its functionality in terms of trans-ethnic applicability and heuristic value. The reading demonstration is based on my personal response to the texts, and should not be misconstrued as an attempt to prove the "truth" of Zen doctrines, the infallibility of the Procedure, or the absolute "correctness" of my understanding of the novels.

1.6   DEFINITION OF TERMS

Some words in this study are used in a special or specific way either for the sake of convenience (e.g. "Zen") or for the sake of precision (e.g. "*prajna*"). The main ones are defined here. Incidental use of words in specific ways will be defined in context.

1.6.1 "Zen" and "Buddhism"

A brief historical background is necessary to explain how the word "Zen" is used in this study. "Zen" is the Japanese form of the Chinese word *Ch'an*, which is derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, meaning "meditation". *Ch'an* is the name given to a school of meditation established in China in the sixth century and later introduced to Japan. It belongs to the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, which is the branch that developed in India and from there spread to China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Tibet. (The other branch of Buddhism is the Theravada, which is traditionally practised in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.) Scholars often refer to the Chinese branch as *Ch'an*, reserving the name *Zen* for the Japanese branch.

The *Ch'an/Zen* school originated as a school purely for the practice of meditation, not as a philosophical school. It distinguishes itself from the other schools of Buddhism in its single-minded focus on *prajna* and its freedom from all "dogmatic and 'religious' encumbrances" (Suzuki, D.T. 1964: 38-9). One of the most famous Zen sayings is the one attributed to the ninth-century Zen Master, Lin Chi (Dumoulin 1994: 11): "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!" What we call "Zen philosophy" is the philosophy of the Hua Yen (Flower Garland) school of thought, which was established in China at about the same time as the *Ch'an* school. It derives its name and inspiration from a Mahayana *sutra* called the *Avatamsaka* ("Flower Garland" or "Flower Ornament"). Hua Yen philosophers regarded this *sutra* as the complete teachings of the Buddha because it integrates the philosophies of three major Indian Buddhist schools of thought: Early Buddhism, Madhyamika, and Yogacara. Zen or Hua Yen philosophy therefore includes the philosophies of the three Indian schools, but adds its own understanding of Buddhist doctrines in terms of a cosmic harmony or a comprehensive, non-discriminatory embracing of universal identity, interdependence, and plurality, sometimes expressed in the Zen slogan "All in One and One in All".

In this study, to avoid taxing my reader's patience with the names of the various Buddhist schools involved, I shall use the name "Zen" to refer to any or all of the philosophies incorporated in Hua Yen philosophy. The word "Zen" thus serves as a convenient label to indicate the scope and focus of this study's research, which is the development of *prajna*. No cultural connotation or reference to any particular practice is intended. The exception to this usage is in the Literature Review (Chapter II), where I have

to comply with the conventions of Buddhist scholarship and refer to the various schools by their proper names.

The term "Buddhism" is used as the umbrella term for all the different schools of Buddhism, including the Theravada and other Mahayana schools.

1.6.2   Words used in the Zen-based Reading Procedure

The following are definitions of key terms used in only the context of the Zen-based Reading Procedure. In other contexts, for example "inter-ethnic conflict" in social discourse, they assume their conventional, context-related meanings.

Conflict
In the Zen-based Reading Procedure, "conflict" refers to the psychological distress and emotional unease experienced when one is confronted with viewpoints, opinions, and values that are incompatible with one's own.

Insight
"Insight" means any kind of unusually penetrating understanding. The Twentieth Century Chambers Dictionary, which has a more comprehensive list of definitions than the Concise Oxford Dictionary, provides the range: power of seeing into and understanding things; imaginative penetration; a view into anything; awareness of one's own mental condition; the apprehension of the principle of a task, puzzle, etc. This wide range is necessary because no guarantee can be given what kind of insight a reader will experience by using the Reading Procedure. The following description of "insight" by Edward de Bono (1979: 140-1) helps one to identify the experience:

> You laugh at a joke because you are suddenly able to switch over and look at things in a different way. Insight involves exactly the same switch-over process as humour. You have been looking at things in a certain way and suddenly you are able to switch over and look at them in a new way. The new way at once makes sense just as the joke is at once funny when you have made the switch-over. In fact if an 'insight' solution is suddenly given for a problem which is not funny people do burst out laughing.

Speaking from my personal experience, I would add that a key feature of insight is that the knowledge is not only sudden and crystal-clear; it involves a focal shift and enables other indeterminacies in the text to "fall into place". Another feature of insight is that one can retrospectively validate and rationalise its "rightness".

Discourse

In this study, the word "discourse" is defined as "a problematisation of an issue or concept" only in the context of the phrase "discovery of the text's discourse". In other contexts, it is used in its conventional, context-related ways. For example, in the term "Feminist discourse", it would mean "a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience" (Tyson 1999: 281). In this dissertation, I shall avoid using the word "discourse" to mean "a connected series of utterances" or "a conversation" (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

1.6.3   Criticism

In this study, the definition of the term "criticism", which includes "literary criticism", is suggested by the following observation made by Sanford Budick in "Crisis of Alterity" (in Budick & Iser, eds. 1996: 6):

> …crisis and criticism (and critique) are not merely cognate words but twinborn phenomena. … A criticism that is worth talking about for any length of time cannot be the product merely of a yen for commentary. Criticism as such is itself the occurrence of a crisis in thinking and writing. What we call serious criticism is occasioned when something formerly considered significant has been lost or cut off in our understanding, so that a separation (or clarification) and decision must be made. … [A]nother element of crisis [is] the split status of both the text and the reader.

Hence:

- **Criticism** is what a reader does when confronted with a text's "otherness".
- The **critical approach** is the way the reader intends to deal with the otherness; it is determined by the reader's position vis-à-vis the text's position (e.g. postcolonial

versus colonialist) and the reader's frame of mind (confrontational, conciliatory or open-minded).

- **Critical aids** are the conceptual structures the reader uses to rationalise the intended critical approach. Critical aids include theoretical frameworks or ideologies (e.g. postcolonialism, feminism), logical structures (e.g. binaries); analytic structures (e.g. the Aristotelian plot structure—exposition, climax, denouement, and resolution), and aesthetic standards (e.g. verisimilitude).

- **Critical tools** are converted from critical aids (e.g. logical and analytic structures as well as aesthetic standards) to analyse, deconstruct, or invalidate concepts, arguments, and fictional representations of life. For example, a reader who decides to take a Derridaean Deconstructionist <u>critical approach</u> may use the binary structure as a <u>critical aid</u>, and in the process of analysis convert the binary structure into a <u>critical tool</u> to identify and then to expose inconsistencies and contradictions in a text's use of polarities in its fictional representation of life.

- The **critical procedure** refers to the series of actions taken to perform the criticism. It includes the critical aids and tools used, and the sequence in which the critical aids and tools are deployed. Critical procedures differ from reader to reader. They may be haphazard or systematic, and may or may not be based on a critical strategy.

- A **critical strategy** is a step-by-step plan of action for critical analysis of a text, with clearly defined intermediate and end objectives.

- **Critical practice** is the result of habitual use of a particular critical procedure among a group of like-minded people or in an institution (e.g. Zen critical practice).

- A **critical tradition** arises when a particular critical practice is accepted and preferred by a community (e.g. a society, an institution, or a school of thought).

1.6.4   Analysis/deconstruction/Deconstruction

A clear distinction is made between the words "analysis", "deconstruction", and "Deconstruction".

- **Analysis** means the breaking down of a phenomenon (a physical object, a concept, or an event) into its component parts to show how the parts are related (or not) to one another. This is the basic investigative method in Zen discourses. This form of analysis gives us the analytic formulae or structures that can be converted into tools for analysis. Thus in Buddhism the moment of cognition is sometimes <u>analysed</u> into

five barely perceptible experiences: contact, feeling, perception, reasoning, and conceptual proliferation (see Chapter III, figure. 3.2).

- **deconstruction** (with lower-case "d") means the use of logic, paradox, or any other narrative method (e.g. role-reversal) to show that conventionally accepted relations are mere concepts.

- **Deconstruction** (with upper-case "D") is used in connection with the methodology of Jacques Derrida.

1.6.5 Western philosophical terms used to designate aspects of Zen philosophy

Unlike the western philosophical system, which is divided into separate disciplines and sub-disciplines, Zen is an integrated thought system; and its fields of investigation flow into one another. This makes the various aspects of Zen philosophy difficult to categorise in western terms. Zen cognitive theory, for example, presupposes an ontological theory (theory of how things come into being) and incorporates a linguistic theory and a phenomenological theory. Its theory of language incorporates logic, a theory of literary production (centred on the *sutras*), and hermeneutics. What has been termed "Buddhist phenomenology" (Lusthaus 2002) includes discourses on the impact of psychological factors (e.g. instinctive drives, emotions, and will) on human behaviour, factors that are generally avoided in European phenomenology[13]. Zen discourses on psychology deal with perception, memory, language, and information processing, topics that in the west come under the discipline of cognitive psychology. And in its discourses on these mental processes, the assumption is that we are not only psycho-physical beings, but also social beings, who must interact with others; so doctrines of individual and social ethics underlie all Zen discourses. In this study, therefore, western philosophical terms and categories signify approximations and not exact correspondences to Zen fields of philosophical investigation.

In presenting Zen philosophical ideas, I have borne in mind that for most of my readers, Zen is unfamiliar territory. I have therefore tried to keep the discussion as uncomplicated and non-technical as possible. I have also tried to minimise the use of Sanskrit terms. However, the depth and detail of Zen investigations of the mind and its workings are such that many concepts have no real equivalent in English. In some cases, such as *upadana*, *prapanca*, and *prajna,* the English equivalents usually used ("clinging", "conceptual proliferation", and "insight" respectively) do not convey their full implications. In other cases, the same English word is conventionally used as the equivalent for different

concepts in Buddhism. An example is the word "perception" to translate *pratyaksa*, *samjna* and *vijnapti*, which actually refer to three significantly distinct aspects of perception. In view of these problems of translation, I have elected not to include a glossary in this dissertation, as it may lead to confusion rather than clarity. Instead, I have adopted the strategy of first explaining the meanings of the terms fully in context, and then in subsequent discussions retaining the Sanskrit terms followed by an English catch-phrase or brief explanation next to it in each case depending on the context, e.g. "*prajna*-insight" or "*prajna*-wisdom".

For consistency, whenever I have used quotations from the Pali Canon, I have changed the Pali to Sanskrit. In order to identify the source, however, I have left the names of the *sutras* in the Pali; thus the word "*Sutta*" (instead of "*Sutra*") would indicate that it belongs to the Pali Canon.

1.7   ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter I (this chapter) introduces and summarises the study. Chapter II presents the Literature Review. Chapters III and IV establish the theoretical framework of the Zen-based Reading Procedure. Chapters V, VI and VII present the practical aspect of the study, which consists of a description of the Reading Procedure and the analysis of two selected novels. Chapter VIII concludes the study. The following is a summary of the contents of the chapters.

1.7.1   Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the purpose, general direction, focus, and basic approach of this study. It establishes that the study's project is the development of the Zen-based Conflict-to-Insight Reading Procedure. It explains why Zen discourses on *prajna* development are to be used for the theoretical framework of the Reading Procedure. It identifies the research questions that determine the areas, scope, focus, and emphasis of the study. And finally, it summarises how the research data and the discussion arising from the data are organised in this dissertation.

1.7.2   Chapter II: Literature review

The literature review identifies the literature in the three areas of research identified (Malaysian literary discourse, Zen discourses, and western literary discourse) that have contributed in one way or another to the present study. Included in the chapter is a review of previous readings of the two novels selected for analysis (*Scorpion orchid* and *Flowers in the sky*). Since there are as yet no book-length studies of these two novels, the review is limited to the more important journal articles and chapters in books published from about 1980 onwards.

1.7.3   Chapter III: *Prajna* in Zen philosophy: epistemological foundations

This is the first of two chapters setting out the theoretical framework of the Zen-based Conflict-to-Insight Reading Procedure. This chapter addresses the question as to why the development of *prajna* ("insight" or "wisdom") is emphasised in Zen, and focuses on the epistemology of *prajna* development. The discussion begins by establishing that in Zen, subjectivity is a problematic obstacle to intersubjective understanding and social harmony. Subjectivity is identified as originating in the cognitive process, where the rise of self-consciousness and craving or desire activates an appropriative impulse (*upadana*), which causes the reasoning part of the mind to engage in the proliferation (*prapanca*) of craving-related concepts, which in turn obstruct the clear and undistorted cognition of reality. The Zen solution to the problem is the transformation of the whole cognitive system from one that is infused with subjectivity to one infused with wisdom, by changing cognitive habits. To change cognitive habits, a three-pronged strategy is used, involving ethical behaviour, meditation, and the development of *prajna*. *Prajna* plays a crucial role in changing cognitive habits because, as the "executive arm" of innate, non-discriminating, non-conceptualising wisdom (*jnana*), it cuts through all *upadana*-induced illusions to enable clear, non-discriminating, and non-conceptualising apprehension of reality. This chapter also introduces four doctrines basic to Zen thought that explain why it is held that cognitive habits can be changed.

1.7.4   Chapter IV: *Prajna* and the Zen approach to texts

This chapter discusses how the *upadana*-versus-*prajna* schema for changing cognitive habits applies in situations where the mind is not responding to physical sense-objects, but

to mental objects (e.g. hallucinations, dreams, abstract ideas, and words). The question being addressed here is why the reading of texts is such an important part of *prajna* development. The discussion begins with an examination of how *upadan*ic (appropriative) reader-response is problematised in a narrative in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, and why the root problematic is identified as the subject-object polarity. A fourth-century theory of perception is then presented that explains why and how language and discourse can cause changes in the cognitive system. The impact of this theory on the Zen approach to texts is discussed through an examination of the role and function of the *sutras* in the development of *prajna*. The chapter argues that Zen *sutras* may be regarded as a teaching a system of "reverse" hermeneutics, a system designed to develop *prajna* by engaging the reader in *prajna*-like activity, namely, the critical analysis and deconstruction of his/her *upadana*-induced reaching after meaning and closure. The chapter closes with a description of the main critical concepts and tools in the Zen approach to texts that will be borrowed and adapted for use in the Zen-based Reading Procedure.

1.7.5   Chapter V: The Zen-based Reading Procedure

This and the next two chapters constitute the practical aspect of the research. This chapter presents the Zen-based Reading Procedure in theory, while the next two chapters demonstrate the Procedure's practical application. This chapter first identifies the key findings from the theoretical research that have influenced the design, aim, scope, and limits of the Procedure. It is explained that the Procedure is designed specifically for the analysis of literary fiction. Its aim is to help the reader uncover a text's discourse(s) by releasing the text from the bondage of the reader's appropriative reading habits. Its heuristic value lies in its step-by-step organisation of the investigative process. It is hermeneutic in intent and effect; but its methodology is based on Zen's "reverse" hermeneutics.

The Procedure itself consists of three sets of hermeneutic aids. The first set is the Reading Guidelines. The second set consists of five Critical Tools for close textual investigation: one "Break-in" Tool (Key Conflict or KC), one Diagnostic Tool (KC Discourse Hypothesis), and three Forensic Tools (3-Perceptions or 3P, Principals and Satellites or P&S, and 10-Timeframes or 10T). The Forensic Tools are borrowed from Zen discourses and adapted for contemporary analysis of narrative fiction. The third hermeneutic aid is the 3-Reading Strategy, the Procedure's action plan integrating the Reading Guidelines and the Critical Tools. The 3-Reading Strategy is the Procedure's key feature. It

makes use of the reader's own conflicts with the text (KC) as the "break-in" points for engagement with the text, and then guides the investigative process through a series of steps. The tactic of starting the investigative process with the reader-text conflict has the effect of turning the 3-Reading Strategy into a framework for highly personalised but systematic investigations of texts.

1.7.6 Chapter VI: Discovering the Game-Master in the Text: A Zen-based Reading of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*

In this chapter, the Zen-based Reading Procedure is used to analyse the 1992 edition of Lloyd Fernando's 1976 novel, *Scorpion orchid*. The aims of the analysis are to demonstrate the Procedure's application, and to assess its heuristic value by comparing the reading outcome with those of past readings. The most significant discovery made by the Zen-based Reading is a discourse hidden in the form of a literary game, which challenges the reader to critique and deconstruct dominant ideas and theories in colonial, postcolonial, and post-1969 discourses on Malaysia's inter-ethnic relations and conflicts. The "Catch-22" of the game is that if the reader's mindset does not allow him/her to take a position outside these discourses, the game and its discourses remain hidden. Once the codes are cracked, the text begins to reveal to the reader the extent to which his/her mind has been "colonised" by dominant ideologies and stereotype thinking, even as the reader is deconstructing the text.

1.7.7 Chapter VII: Discovering the Puppeteer in the Text: A Zen-based Reading of Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the Sky*

In this chapter, the Zen Reading Procedure is applied to the analysis of the 1991 edition of Lee Kok Liang's 1981 novel, *Flowers in the sky*. The purpose here is also to demonstrate the practical application of the Zen-based Reading Procedure and its heuristic value. The difference is that the novel is deeply influenced by Zen and I am reading it with some knowledge of Zen. The reading reveals several aspects of Lee's fiction-writing that do not conform to western ideas of form and structure. Where the discourses are concerned, the reading discovers two parallel sets of discourses. One set, which is fairly easy to detect, consists of critical-deconstructive discourses, in which issues are presented in such a way that the reader is able to see both their negative and their positive aspects. To discover the critical-deconstructive discourses, the reader has to solve a puzzle set in the epigraph. The other, more "hidden", set of discourses consists of therapeutic or soteriological discourses. To discover this set of discourses, the reader has to solve a mystery built into the story of Ah Looi. Once this mystery is solved, the interconnectedness of all the seemingly disparate

episodes and discourses in the novel is made apparent, including how the most hidden discourse is built into the novel's structure. A review of past readings shows that these hidden discourses have not been discovered before. Perhaps the most significant finding is that despite my previous knowledge of Zen, I was able to discover the hidden discourses only with the help of the Zen-based Reading Procedure, which suggests that it is the methodology of the Procedure that is directing my perceptions of the text and not the other way around.

1.7.8   Chapter VIII: Conclusion to the Study

This final chapter presents an overview of the main findings of the research, the problems encountered in the course of research, the areas in which further research is required, and an assessment of how the Zen-based Reading Procedure can contribute to the study of literature in Malaysia. The three most significant findings from the practical demonstration of the Zen-based Reading Procedure are: (a) that the Procedure enables the discovery of new and hidden discourses that have not been discovered by critics in the past; (b) that the Procedure is applicable to both Zen-influenced and non-Zen influenced texts, and its application does not require knowledge of Zen philosophy; and (c) that the *prajna*-insights enabled by the Reading Procedure are achieved through the application of logic to the point where logic fails and supra-rational knowing takes over. Based on the observation that the Procedure enables not only the discovery of discourses but also how narrative strategies and structures are used in the novels to launch critical and deconstructive discourses, it is concluded that as an alternative approach to fiction, the Procedure can contribute not only to more insightful understanding of cross-cultural fiction but also to the development of an empiricism-based theory of the local use of narrative fiction for critical purposes.

1.8   SUMMARY

For historical reasons, the discourse on literary theory in Malaysia has focused on Malay-language literature; and the local theories developed so far are based on the aesthetic, moral, and literary values of the Islamic and traditional Malay thought systems. This ethno-religious focus limits the scope of the theories' application in the larger context of literary studies in multi-ethnic Malaysia. The most critical lack in Malaysian literary studies is a reading methodology with trans-ethnic application, and one that harmonises with the way most Asians are taught to deal with everyday conflicts of opinion; that is, with open-minded

"listening" and insightful understanding. This study aims to bring this living critical tradition into operation in contemporary literary studies by borrowing critical methods used in Zen development of insight (*prajna*), converting them into analytic tools, and incorporating them in a Zen-based Reading Procedure for the analysis of fiction. The research is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical.

The theoretical research (Chapters III and IV) explores Zen epistemological discourses in order to understand the relationship between the development of *prajna* and the Zen approach to texts. The findings form the basis of the theoretical framework for the Zen-based Reading Procedure. The practical research (Chapters V, VI and VII) focuses on the design and practical demonstration of the Zen-based Reading Procedure. To assess the Procedure's heuristic and hermeneutic value, as well as its trans-ethnic applicability, it is used to analyse two critically problematic Malaysian novels in English, one of which is a Zen-influenced text and the other is not. The outcomes of the Zen-based readings are then compared with the outcomes of past readings by other critics using other approaches. The findings of the theoretical and practical research suggest that the Zen-based Reading Procedure has the potential to make significant contributions to local critical theory and practice.

[1] Among the Islamic theories are Shahnon Ahmad's *Kesusasteraan dan Etika Islam* (1981); Mohd. Affandi Hassan's *Pendidikan Estetika dari Pendekatan Tauhid*, first published in mimeographed form between 1989 and 1990 (cited in Kassim Ahmad 1992); Shafie Abu Bakar's *Teori Takmilah* (1993); and Hashim Awang's *Teori Pengkaedahan Melayu* (1997). Muhammad Haji Salleh's *Puitika Sastera Melayu* (2000) is the first systematic exposition of the principles and concepts underlying the use of language and imagery in traditional Malay oral and written literature.

[2] This belief or hope is implied in the Malaysian secondary school curriculum for the study of literature in English, which has been a component of the English language syllabus since the year 2000. Among the desired learning outcomes of teaching literature are "explaining the message the writer is trying to convey and discussing how this relate to one's life", and "understanding other people's cultures, traditions, customs and beliefs". Source: *Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia Sukatan Pelajaran Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah Bahasa Inggeris 2000: Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.* See also Ganakumaran Subramaniam, "Muhammad Haji Salleh's literary contributions to Malaysian education: Bridging time and bonding histories", in Zawiah Yahya, ed. 2003: 288-289.

[3] See also Iser, *The Implied Reader* (1978).

[4] In an intertextual approach to a slightly different version of the same episode, Umar Junus (1984, pp.138-41) discusses the topic of interpretation in terms of the power relations between a court-scribe (the author of the *Sejarah*) and his ruler. Specifically, he looks into the scribe's need to interpret the often ambiguously stated wishes of his ruler.

[5] The context of the Tun Makhdum and Tun Hasan story suggests that the text is influenced by Sufism, which has its own deconstructive tradition. See Almond 2003, "The Shackles of Reason: Sufi Deconstructive Opposition to Rational Thought", PEW 53 (1): 22-38.

[6] In Malay culture, the non-confrontational style of criticism is an integral part of the social ideal of *budi* and therefore a living tradition (for its importance in Chinese culture, see K. H. Lim, 2003, pp. 192). The Malay term "*budi*" (from Sanskrit *buddhi*, wisdom) is a personal ideal centring on qualities like humility as well as "kindness, character, common-sense, breeding, good disposition, doing good, gratitude, and social sensitivity" (Tham, 1977, pp. 7).

[7] Another *Sejarah* story with a similar theme tells of how a precocious young boy saves Singapura from an attack by swordfish (Brown, 1976, p. 40).

[8] Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), generally held to be the founder of modern European hermeneutics. For an explanation of his hermeneutic method, see W. Iser, *The range of interpretation*, 2000, pp. 41-55.

[9] This is particularly evident in the phrase *fuer etwas oder jemanden Verstaendnis haben* (to have understanding for something or someone) where *Verstaendnis* is usually understood as a synonym for *Einfuehlungsvermoegen*, or the capability to "feel-into" something.

[10] Zen philosophy is chosen as the theoretical framework because a survey of Sufi literature shows that deriving a theoretical framework from Sufism presents a problem for the non-Sufi. Sufism is neither a "system" nor a "theory"; it is "a living experience and a quest for perfection (Ernst, 1994, p. 1). According to Idries Shah (1987, p. 33), "No Sufi sets up an institution intended to endure. The outer form in which he imparts his ideas is a transient vehicle, designed for local operation"; therefore "the bulk of translations [of Sufi literature] available are unsuitable (*ibid*: 37). However, Zen shares with Islam the soteriological aim of universal non-conflict or peace; and it shares with Sufism the view that the means to that end are "wisdom", "non-attachment to self", and "devotion to truth" (Idries Shah, 1985, p. 06). Other similarities between the two systems include the use of paradox, the transcendence of duality, and the "*coincidentia oppositorum*" (Ernst, *ibid*, pp. 138-9). "*Coincidentia oppositorum*" means the allowance that a proposition can both be and not be; that is, a rejection of the either/or logic usually associated with Aristotle. In Zen, the open-ended "both-yes-and-no" argument is usually referred to as the "tetralemma" (as opposed to the Aristotelian dilemma or binary logic). Also, as my reading of the story of Tun Makhdum and Tun Hasan suggests, in both Zen and Sufism there is a privileging of insight or wisdom over pedantry and rigid dogmatism.

[11] Zen is neither a religion nor an onto-theology, but this does not mean that Buddhists and Zen practitioners categorically deny the existence of God. D. T. Suzuki (1964, p. 39) clarifies: "…neither denial nor affirmation concerns Zen. When a thing is denied, the very denial involves something not denied. The same can be said of affirmation. This is inevitable in logic. Zen wants to rise above logic; Zen wants to find a higher affirmation where there are no antitheses. Therefore, in Zen, God is neither denied nor insisted upon; only there is in Zen no such God as has been conceived by Jewish and Christian minds".

[12] According to Husin S. Ali (1981, p. 110), "A society with multi-ethnic groups living separately but under the same political system, resulting from the history of colonialism, is often referred to as a plural society."

[13] When Edmund Husserl (1917) introduced his concept of "pure phenomenology", the "new fundamental science" developed "within philosophy", he stated: "pure phenomenology is to be separated sharply from psychology at large and, specifically, from the descriptive psychology of the phenomena of consciousness." Source: *http://www3.baylor.edu/~Scott_Moore/Continental.html* [8 November 2002]