The Influence of Chinese Cultural Practices among Malaysian Indians

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ABSTRACT:

The diplomatic relationship between the Indian and Chinese communities has existed since the beginning of civilization. The Malaysian Chinese and Indian ancestors, who migrated from China and India to Malaya under the encouragement of British colonials at the end of the 18th and 19th centuries to fulfill the labor-power within the nation, stayed in Malaya and became the citizens of the country. As a result, these communities constructed a new life born from constant contact between them. The shared cultural practices had even amalgamated to produce new cultures in both communities, respectively. As both occupied the same geographical space, the influence of each community on another was highly evident in many aspects of their lives, namely in religious beliefs, arts, medical practices, dressing, and food. The current research investigated the influence of the Malaysian Chinese community on the Malaysian Indian community based on two significant questions: what were the influences and how these influences were manifested among Malaysian Indians. Research findings revealed that Chinese religious beliefs and food had dominant influence among Malaysian Indians. This influence mainly stemmed from the similar cultural traits between Chinese and Indians in general, which prompted the Malaysian Indians to accept the Chinese culture and infuse it in their life with ease.

Keywords:

Malaysian Indians, Malaysian Chinese, Culture, Beliefs, Traditional Medicine, Chinese food, Unity in Malaysia.

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Introduction

Malaysia has always been known for its unique blend of multi-ethnic and multiracial populations, which has earned the country the label of "melting-pot of cultures" (Webter, 2010). The Malays, Chinese, and Indians are the three most prominent ethnic groups in Malaysia. Each of them enjoys a different form of tradition, religion, belief, and culture. While the Malay community is considered the pioneer population to occupy Malaya, Chinese and Indian communities began their root in Malaya through migration from China and India during the 18th and 19th centuries (Genetic Map of Asia's Diversity, 2009; Marvelous et al., 2019; Kilic et al., 2019; Iwegbunam & Robinson, 2019). The Chinese came to Malaya in the early 19th century to work as laborers in the tin mines (Ching-hwang Yen, (2013). Meanwhile, a significant number of Indians, mainly Tamil ethnic groups from India and Sri Lanka, were brought to Malaya by the British government at the beginning of the 19th century to meet the demand in the workforce, especially in the rubber industry (Sandu & Mani 2006. Upon independence, both Chinese and Indian ethnic groups emerged with the new identity as citizens of Federation of Malaya (Malaysia), who shared a common patriotic sentiment. They played a major role in the economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of Malaya (Sunil, 2015). Throughout the transformation of the country from Malaya to

Malaysia, both communities have maintained their own beliefs and culture inherited from their forefathers while carving their identities within the constantly-changing nation. However, regular interaction between cultures is unavoidable within a space shared by many ethnic communities; this leads to cultural contact that causes changes in the customs and beliefs of the communities involved (Martinez, 2001). Hence, this paper was tailored to analyse the influences of the Chinese cultural practices among Malaysian Indians.

Culture and Cultural Contact

Culture generally can be defined as aspects of living, which includes knowledge, belief, arts, moral values, law, customs and uniqueness that have been adopted by a person living within his or her society (Taylor, 1958). Culture is also explained as a representation of the complete social heritage which is predominantly passed by one generation to another (Linton, 1936). Generally, culture can be divided into four components based on the functions in society: normative system (which involve an abstract value), belief (which is associated with God, mystic power, and environments), expressive culture (symbols and arts which represent a list of meaning in a person's lives), and materialistic culture (instruments and utensils used by a particular society) (Taylor, 1958). Thus, when a culture is passed from one generation, either some or most of the features of all the divisions of the culture itself are bestowed to the latter generations. Hence, a person, who is a part of a society, receives his or her identity based on the practice of one's culture.

However, culture is not stagnant; when humans change, the cultural practices change too. Van Peursen (1976) echoed this notion by stating that a culture changes based on time, locality, political system, development in science and technology and other contemporary changes. Varnum and Grossmann (2017) further explained that cultural change occurs "due to the diffusion of ideas from one society to another". When people have access to other cultures, it is inevitable for them to choose the favourable features of the culture they come in contact with to make their lives easier; this act of assimilating other cultural practices within one's own has been studied verociously under the field of "cultural contact". Nevertheless, this is not a contemporary occurance. Cultural contact has been a catalyst to many cultural changes around the world since the ancient times, which can be elucidated by highlighting the relationship between Indians and Chinese, the two cultures placed in focus in this research paper.

Relationship between Indians and Chinese: From Ancient Civilizations To Contemporary Settings

India and China are two of the oldest civilizations known to have a peaceful co-existence for over two millenniums while enjoying the fame of contributing to the world civilization in many ways. Earlier records showed that the transmission of Buddhism from India to China in the first century began bridging these two civilizations. The great king Ashoka (3rd Century BC) initiated the dissemination of Buddhism systematically. Once Buddhism spread to China from India, the Chinese adopted and modified it according to their culture, which could be treated as one of the earlier proofs of cultural contact between these two civilizations. When Buddhism had cemented its influence strongly in China, the Chinese Buddhist scholars travelled to *Kanjipuram*, a city in South India where the very first university was established, to translate the Buddhist holy texts (*Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, and Abhidamma Pitaka*) and bring them back to China. The infamous Shaolin Kung Fu was born because of the cultural contact between ancient India and China too; the Indian Buddhist Monk, Bodhidharma (Damo) brought this martial art to China around the 5th to 6thcentury (Shi Xinggui, 2008).

Likewise, the cultural contact made ancient India to adopt the practice of using silk in

their cloth-making, which was retrieved from ancient China. The *Silk Road*, a network of trade routes, allowed this osmosis of Chinese cultural practice into Indian culture, which is still being strongly exercised in India as proved by the existence of the city of *Kanjipuram*, the silk capital of South India (Sudhakar Bhat, 1967). In addition to introducing silk, the trade routes were also responsible for introducing Chinese architecture into Indian buildings. The more established trade between China and India around the 7th and 8th centuries during *Pallava* dynasty brought many Chinese delegations to *Chola* court and vice versa. These mutual visits resulted in reflection of the Chinese architecture in *Brihadisvarar* temple in *Tanjavur*, a majestic grandeur of Tamil architecture during Chola dysnasty; the bilateral relationship between these two countries was portrayed by the carving of a Chinese man within this temple.

The modern world sees the cultural influences between these two communities beyond the borders of India and China as globalization has scattered the members from these two ethnic groups around the world. In Malaysia, for example, the cultural contact between Chinese and Indians altered a few aspects of life of Malaysian Indians, most notably in food. The practice of drinking tea among Malaysian Indians was introduced by the Malaysian Chinese and the drink has seen many improvisations that resulted in varieties of teas like *Masala Tea* and *Ginger Tea*, which are featured prominently in menus at any Indian restaurant in Malaysia. Apart from tea, Malaysian Indians were also introduced to *mee*, a noodle dish that gained its popularity as preferable breakfast or supper within the community, which was borrowed from the Chinese community as well (Kuan-Hsing Chen, 2005).

The abovementioned instances of cultural contacts between Indians and Chinese serve as solid evidence that when a culture meets other cultures, adapting and adopting a few practices from those cultures in contact are inevitable. Eventually, these changes mark positive developments within a culture itself, as proved by the ancient Indian and Chinese civilizations as well as the contemporary ones; the changes were introduced within their society harmoniously without compromising the originality of their own culture, which ultimately aided the development of both cultures.

Literature Review

As this paper emphasizes on the influence of Chinese culture among the Malaysian Indians, a deeper understanding of this topic had been essential for the research. Related information had been obtained from various sources and grouped into different sub-topics as detailed below.

I. Chinese Culture

Academic research work like the doctoral thesis by Ian Clarke (1969) on "Malaysian Chinese Religion and Society: Ritual Action and the Creation of Social Identity in Modern Urban Malaysia" had explored the religion and the lifestyle of Malaysian Chinese, which served as the focal reference for this paper. Similarly, Law's (2013) doctoral dissertation entitled "The Influence of Chinese Traditional Philosophy on Malaysian Chinese Corporate Leaders", which discussed the traditional Chinese philosophy that was incorporated into current business world, provided a clear view and an in-depth understanding of the Chinese tradition, culture, and philosophy in relation to the business sense of the community.

A series of books were also used in order to collect information about the Chinese culture: the book by Lee (2000) entitled "The Chinese in Malaysia", the book by Lim and Chia (2004) describing the cultural practices of Chinese Community (originally published as *Adam Resam Masyarakat Cina* in Malay), , and Cartsens' (2005) "Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds". All these books contributed descriptive and analytic facts about the Chinese culture in Malaysia in terms of its history, contruction of identity, political strengths,

economic developments, social expansions, religious practices and performing arts.

Apart from books, academic articles like " Marriage and family among Chinese Society" by Fatimah Abdullah, Mohammad Zain Musa and Farid Mat Zain (2010) and "Chinese Religion In Malaysia" by Tan (1983) also added knowledge about Malaysian Chinese especially in understanding various cultural aspects involved Chinese marriages and religious norms.

II. Adaptation of Chinese Cultural Practices by Non-Chinese Communities

A few sources have highlighted the ways in which non-Chinese communities had adapted the cultural practices of Chinese community, which is the main aim of this paper. An academic paper by Wan Nur Hafizah Wan Mohd Nor (2011) that studied the acceptance of tea-drinking (a custom by Chinese community) among the non-Chinese in Malaysia explained the ways in which other Malaysian communities peacefully adapted the practices of Chinese culture, especially in food, by using tea as an anology. Another academic research by Mohd Riduan Mohd Zain (2013) about the public perception towards the traditional Chinese medicine in Malaysia (originally published as *Persepsi Masyarakat Umum Terhadap Perubatan Tradisional Cina di Malaysia* in Malay) discussed the willingness of Malaysian communities to venture into the traditional medical practice of Chinese community in seeking effective treatments for multiple ailments.

In addition to the academic articles, a Master's thesis from University Malaya (2011) entitled "The Role of Media Broadcasting in Building Self Concept of Malaysia", which studied about telefilms broadcasted on Astro *Vanaavil* (a Tamil channel offered by Astro, a Malaysian satellite television provider), peripherally delivered information about the cultural identity of the Malaysian Indians concerning the adaptation of the Chinese cultural practices within the community. The retrieved information from this thesis was crucial to determine the level of influence of Chinese cultural practices among Malaysian Indian while exhibiting evidence of the occurance of the said phenomenon within the community in focus.

III. Chinese Around The World

While gaining insight to the Malaysian Chinese community had been treated as a crucial step for this research, considering the Chinese communities around the world as well as the sub-ethnic groups descending from Chinese community held equal significance. Books like "Chinese society in nineteenth-century Singapore" by Poh (1978), and "Chinese Overseas: Comparative Cultural Issues" by Tan (2004) examined the issues of cultural changes, identity construction, the relation of Chinese with non-Chinese communities, and economic performance of Chinese in a global context.

Meanwhile, "The Baba of Melaka: culture and identity of a Chinese Peranakan community in Malaysia" (1988) and "Chinese Peranakan Heritage in Malaysia and Singapore" (1997), by the Tan Chee-Beng discussed the culture of the Chinese Peranakan, a localized culture that grew out of long interaction between China and Malaysia. The books highlighted not only the Chinese Peranakan community but also the localized Chinese community of the East-Coast states. Information about these sub-ethnic groups that held Chinese community as their predessors shed light on the extent to which a community can adapt and change their ethnic identities when multiple cultures come in contact with one another.

Research Objectives

This research was guided by three objectives:-

1. To identify the influence of the Chinese Culture (in aspects of figurines, symbols, and beliefs) among Malaysian Indians.
2. To examine Malaysian Indians' grasp on Chinese cultural practices that they have adopted.

3. To critically evaluate the role of the Chinese culture among Malaysian Indians.

Research Methodology

i. Participants

The participants for this research were selected via purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002) since there was a need to ensure that the participants had a prolonged contact with the Chinese community in multiple domains like residential areas and workplace. Thus, sixty Malaysian Indians residing at Indian settlements at *Taman Bukit Teratai* and *Bukit Sentosa* in *Rawang* (a town in *Selangor, Malaysia*), who fit the proposed criteria of participants of this research, were chosen to be included in data collection. Upon identifying the possible participants, each candidate was sought permission to take part in the research on voluntary basis.

ii. Research Instruments

A mixed method of both quantitive and qualitative research methodology was utilized in this research as the method had been proven beneficial when participants' experiences took precedence in achieving results (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013), which was the ultimate goal of this research since it explored the culture, customs, life, and issues that surrounded the influence of Chinese culture among the Indian community.

For qualitative data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted to identify how Chinese culture influenced the participants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a minimum of two (or more if it was required) that ran for more than an hour per session until the information provided reached the point of saturation. Audio-recording and photo-taking were conducted simultaneously with the interviews after gaining the consent of the participants and ascertaining anonymity as well as confidentiality of their input to this research. Credibility, trustworthiness and minimal biasness of the collected data were reiterated by conducting peer checking.

On the other hand, quantitative data was obtained via administration of an 11-part survey to the participants after completing the interview sessions to ensure consistency and reliability between the data collected using both instruments. The survey utilized Likert scale to measure participants' agreement and disagreement regarding Chinese cultural practices that had been adapted by the Malaysian Indians in terms of knowledge about the culture, festivals and rituals, food, clothes and jewellery, astrology and *Feng Shui*, martial arts, traditional medicine, and Chinese language.

Main Findings

The influence of the Chinese culture among Malaysian Indians was greatly evident in the community's adoption of Chinese belief system in worship and rituals, usage of symbols (both Feng Shui related and propitious-warranting), participation in lion dance, choices of food, and preference for traditional Chinese medicine. Based on these main findings, the research gauged the understanding these participants had on the Chinese cultural practices they had adopted and also about managed to evaluate the position of Chinese culture among Malaysian Indians.

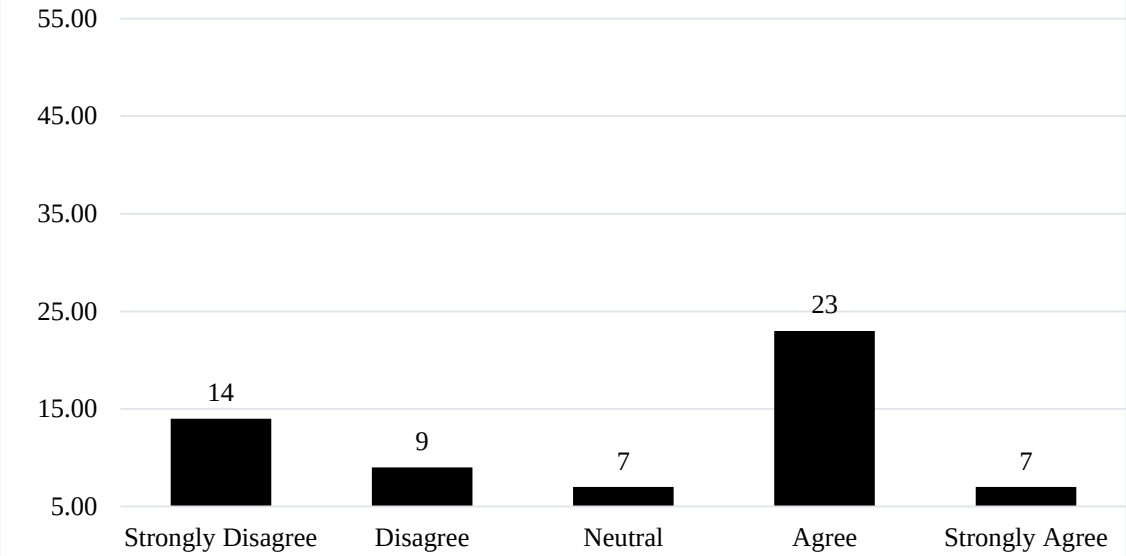
1) Chinese Belief System Practised in Worship and Rituals

The data in Figure 1 indicates that 25 people of the total respondents possessed either a Laughing Buddha statue or a Guan Yin statue (or both) at their homes. According to the respondents, the idol(s) shared the alter with the Hindu idols. The participants also admitted to owning paraphernalia of Chinese worshipping like calligraphy writings, Chinese lotus lamps, and joysticks (which were devoid of any flavoured smell, unlike the Indian joysticks).

Meanwhile, some respondents indicated that they built a separate altar to place the Chinese deities, most notably a local guardian spirit with healing power known as *Datuk Gong*, as these deities were only acknowledged as demi-gods in these participants' point of view. This drew a parallelism with the practice of Indians to place the Indian demi-gods designated for protection, like *Madura Veeran*, *Sanggali Karuppan*, and *Muniandy*, at the perimeter of their residence. These Chinese deities were worshipped in the similar manner of praying to Indian demi-gods, which was to offer food, light oil lamps, and burn joystick with gum Benjamin.

The participants who disagreed to the statement of worshipping Chinese gods and goddesses at home explained that they would not want to offend the gods by conducting the praying rituals without knowing the proper ways of doing so; thus, avoiding the worshipping at home was their best course of action.

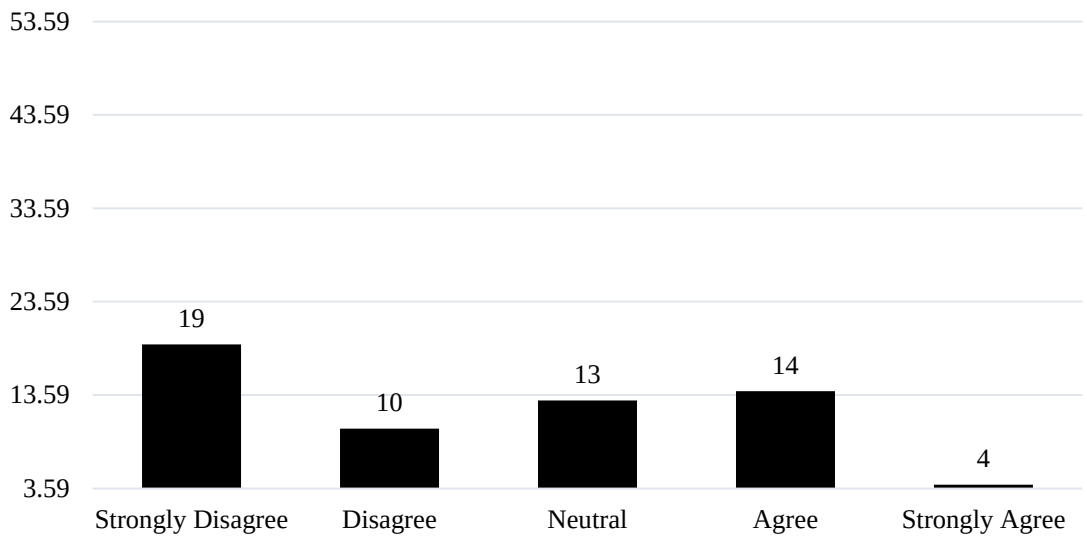
Figure 2: Worshipping at Chinese and Buddhist Temples



It is apparent from Figure 2 that the respondents visited Chinese temples often to perform prayers. A total of 30 respondents agreed that they went to Chinese temples at varying frequencies. Interview sessions revealed that most respondents visited the famous Chinese temples in *Penang* and *Genting Highlands* (an island and a hillside tourist attraction in Malaysia) while they were on vacation, while visiting Buddhist temple was a must on Wesak Day.

However, it should be emphasized that the some participants who frequented Chinese temples did not worship Chinese deities at their homes (as mentioned in the explanation of Figure 1) due to their lack of knowledge about the proper ways of conducting prayer rituals for the deities. They found comfort in praying at Chinese temples as these participants were not under constrain of knowing the proper ways to pray to the Chinese deities; besides, guidance was readily available at Chinese temples if the participants required any assistance in praying.

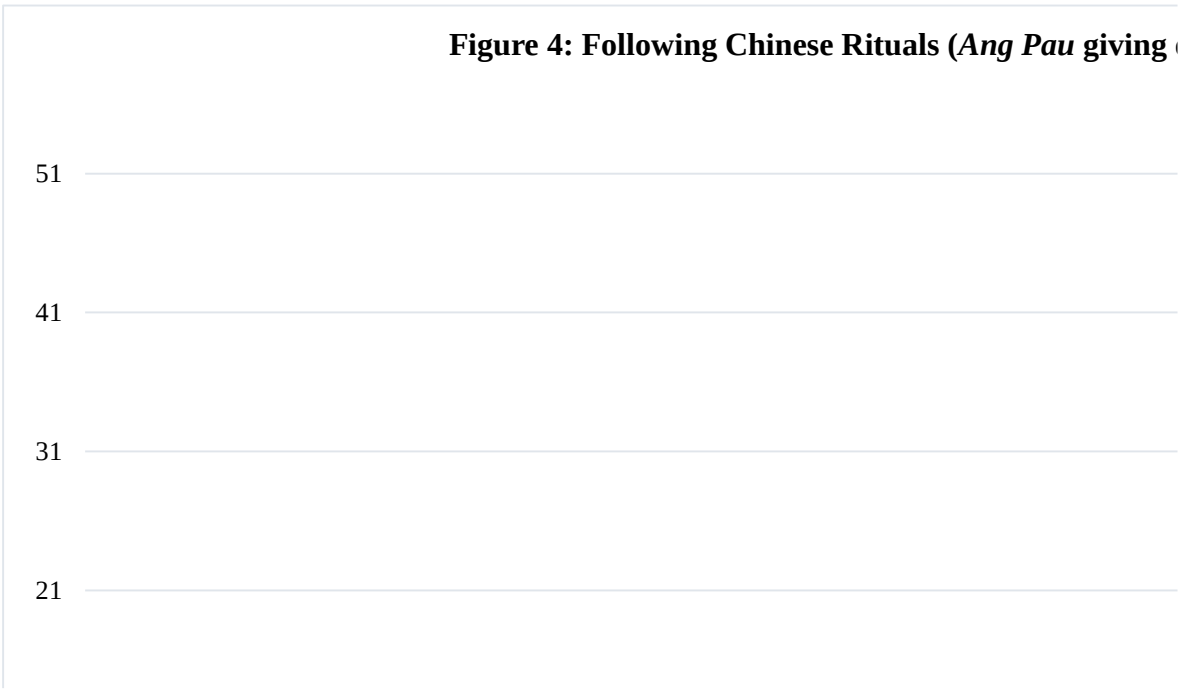
Figure 3: Following Chinese Rituals (in worshipping and seeking protection)



Based on the results from the survey, it is evident that 18 respondents did practice Chinese cultural rituals in their daily lives. During the interviews, the participants further exemplified these rituals: litting Chinese oil lamps instead of the Indian ones (known as *deepam* made of brass and lit with oil or ghee), offering Chinese desserts like sweet glutinous rice known as *Bee Koh* (as opposed to Indian *Pongal* – a dish made of rice with boiled milk and sugar), and presenting fruits like pineapple and mandarin oranges, which were commonly found in Chinese worshipping practices, at the Hindu prayer altar (instead of the usual fruits used by Indians for prayers like banana and mango). A few participants who were in the field of business stated that they kept Chinese shrines at their workplace (shops, offices, garages, etc.) and held annual prayers for prosperity.

Moreover, the interviewees also described their practice of sprinkling holy water given by Chinese *Shaman* (medicine man) around the house to gain protection and to avert negative energy from home. Protective charms were hung on doors to invite good luck and dispel evil spirits. Again, the practice sprinkling holy water and hanging protective charms was extended to workplace by some participants. Meanwhile, the 29 respondents who denied following these rituals reaffirmed that their decision was heavily influenced by their ignorance about the proper ways to perform the task.

Figure 4: Following Chinese Rituals (*Ang Pau* giving

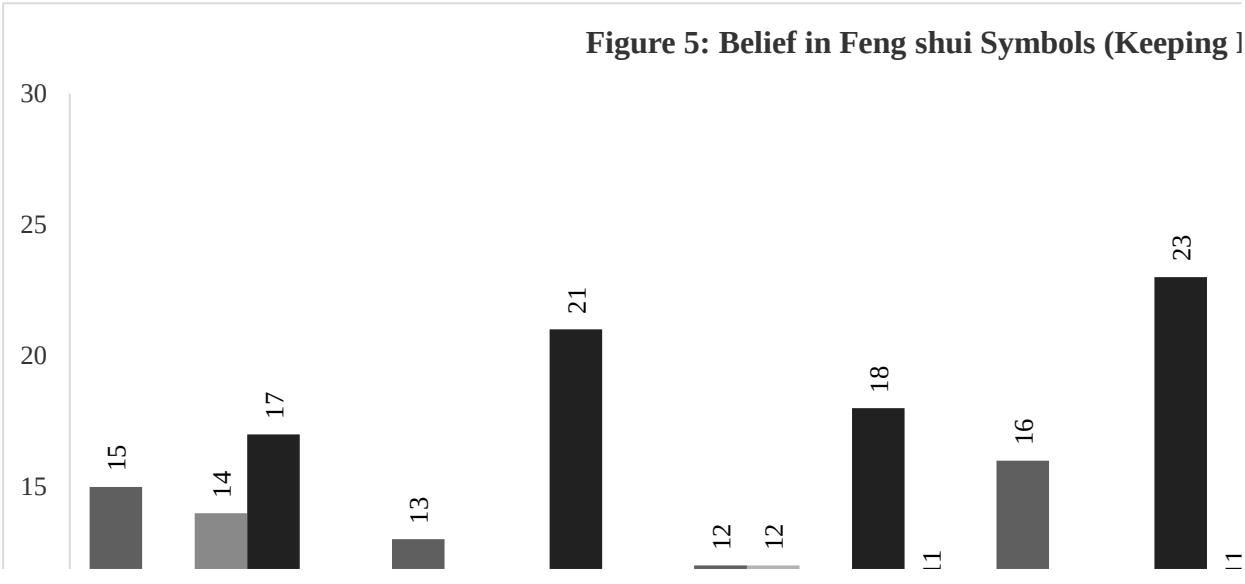


The Chinese cultural practice of giving *Ang Pau* (a red envelope), a monetary gift, on auspicious days is seen as having influenced the Malaysian Indians strongly, as shown by the results of the survey. 44 out of 60 respondents admitted to giving *Ang Pau* to the younger generation on Deepavali, parallel to the Chinese elders giving the monetary gift to the young ones on Chinese New Year. In interviews, the participants divulged that as the younger generation might not be entertained much amidst the preparations for the festival, giving them money would make the young ones happy, and hence, spreading the joy of festivity all around.

On the contrary, the small number of participants (8 out of 60 respondents) who did not practice this well-known gesture explained that their belief was firmly rooted in discouraging the young generation into prioritizing anything monetary to inculcate values that placed humans and relationship above worldy goods, which was represented by *Ang Pau*.

2) Usage of Symbols

Figure 5: Belief in Feng shui Symbols (Keeping



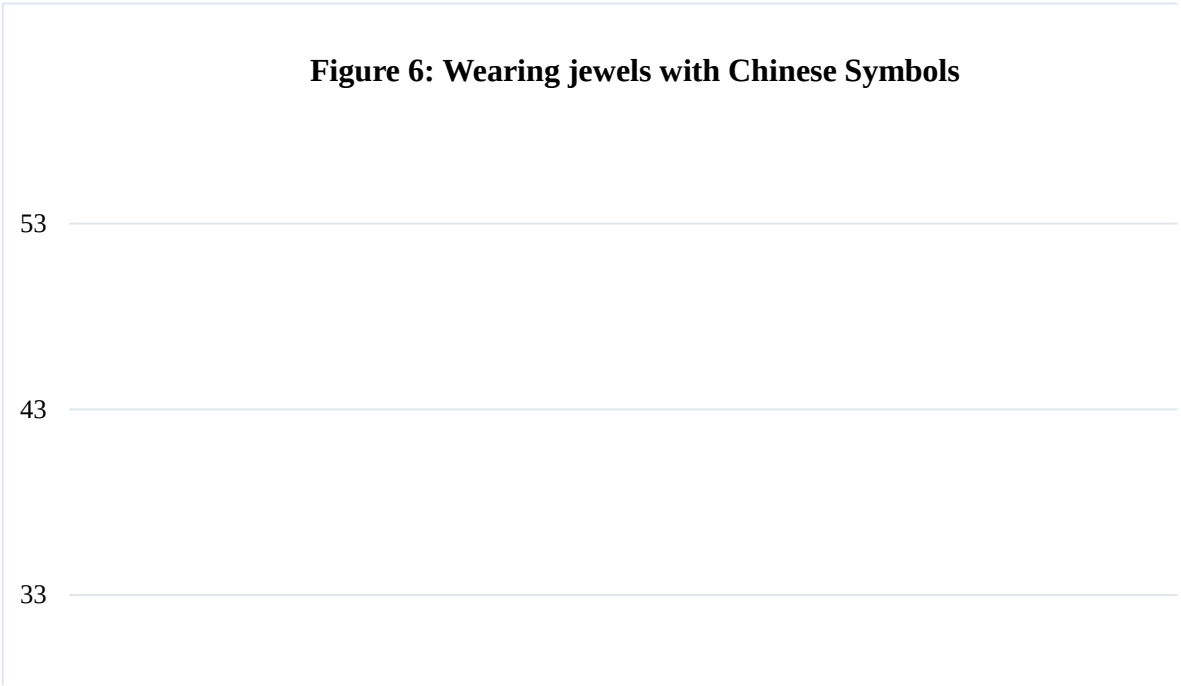
It could be discernible for Figure 5 the respondents had multiple Feng Shui symbols at home as they believed that these symbols would bestow prosperity and luck: 25 respondents hung mirrors at the entrance of their house, 21 respondents had dragon statues and portraits at home, 29 respondents admitted to owning statues of 3-legged frog made of either metal or stone, 34 respondents agreed that they had statues of Laughing Buddha, 44 respondents stated that they had figurines of Chinese lucky cat, 27 answered that they possessed statues of *Guan Yin* (the Goddess of Mercy), and 34 respondents replied that they had horse statues. From the interviewes with these participants, it could be perceived that owning Feng Shui symbols was not a novel practice for them as they also kept auspicious symbols like conches, diamonds, precious stones and gems that could be attributed to attracting prosperity and luck in Indian culture. The familiarity of such practice made it easier for these respondents to adopt the Feng Shui symbols in their daily life.

Nevertheless, adaptation of Feng Shui symbols with ease by the Malaysian Indians could not be credited on their familiarity of Indian practice of owning good luck charms alone. Multiple resources had revealed that the Feng Shui symbols themselves had many similarities with representations of Hindu ideology. To illustrate, Laughing Buddha, who was believed to bring immense wealth among Chinese community, could be compared to Lord *Kubera*, the Hindu lord of prosperity (Devdutt Pattanaik, 2016). Goddess *Guan Yin* could be likened to *Sakti* (Lord Tara), the supreme female Goddess of Hindus (Thomas Farrand, (2009). This nearly indistinguishable similarities could have prompted some participants of this research to worship both deities as they would their Hindhu deities-by applying *Vibhuthi* (holy ashes) and *Kumkum* (vermillion) powder on the forehead of the statues of the Chinese deities.

The dragon itself had an equal manifestation in the form of Lord *Varuna*, the Hindu lord of sea and rain. Admittedly, the Chinese believed that the Dragon Lord held the similar power of controlling weather and sea (John Christopher, 2005). In addition, the Dragon Lord and Lord *Varuna* both had been portrayed as keepers of war weapons in Indian *Mahabharatha* and Chinese *Journey to the West*, which were epics belonging to respective communities. Other instances found in *Mahabharatha* like Lord *Varuna* giving *Kandpa Vil* (bows and arrows) to Lord *Arjuna* (the main protagonist in the epic who was known for his supreme skills as an archer) and *sutarsana chakra* (a spinning disk-like weapon) to Lord *Krishna* (God of Compassion, Tenderness and Love) (Isha Dasgupta, 2020) had near resemblance to the Dragon Lord entrusting a weapon to *Sun Woo Kong* (the Monkey King) in the epic *Journey to the West* (Wu Cheng-en, 2005).

The horse was believed to be a symbol of prosperity among Indians, just as the belief of Chinese community. Hindus referred to the horse as *Asvam*, the divine transportation of many Hindu deities such as Lord *Kubera* (the Lord of Prosperity), Lord *Agni* (God of Fire), Lord *Suriya* (God of Sun), and Lord *Sukira* (God of the Planet Venus) (Heather Elgood, 2000). The dominating depiction of a horse in Indian culture was high to the extent of according many special rituals to be conducted to the statues of the horses erected within Indian temples on auspicious days. Hence, it was not surprising when the participants, especially those who dwelled in business, preferred to have either running horse statues or portraits at their workplace to attract good luck.

Figure 6: Wearing jewels with Chinese Symbols



As can be observed in Figure 6, wearing Chinese symbols like deities, horse, tarot card, abacus, frog, dragon, goldfish, Laughing Buddha and the number 8 as pendants and rings was practised scarcely among Malaysian Indians since only 16 respondents agreed to following this habit. The ones who did confirm to wearing Chinese symbols as part of their jewellery were those involved in the field of business, and via interviews it was found that wearing these Chinese symbols gave the participants the confidence needed in conducting business and attracting profitable income.

Participation in Lion Dance

Although this was a component in the survey, the findings yielded no significant data to be reported in non-linear form. However, during the interviews, the respondents did mention that they were not opposed to being the audience for lion dances. They even explained that some youngster in their families were very much interested in learning this art.

Close inspection to Hinduism revealed that adopting lion dance into the lives of Malaysian Indians would not be difficult as the act of dancing while donning a disguise of an animal carries a crucial role in their life, especially during *Thaipusam* (a full-moon festival celebrated either in January or February, which is equivalent to the month of *Thai* according to the Indian calendar). This festival is vastly celebrated with uplifting music and vibrant dances like *pulikali* (tiger dance, in which the dancer paints the pattern of tiger skin on his body) and *mayilattham* (peacock dance, in which the dancer decorates him or herself with peacock feathers) to encourage devotees who observe their penance to Lord Muruga by performing *kavadi attham* (*kavadi* dance, the dance to honour Lord Muruga by carrying decorated canopies) (Babb, 1976). Thus, incorporating lion dance in this festival had not been a challenging task.

Another reason extracted by the researcher from the interviews to explain Malaysian Indians' interest in participating in lion dance was the similarity noted between the lion, the major character in the dance, and *simmam* (lion in Tamil), the *vahana* (mode of transport) of Goddess Shakti. As lion was a positive symbol that had already had a prominent place in Malaysian Indians, it was easier for them to absorb lion dance into their own cultural practice too with the belief that the dance would accord them good prospects in life.

Figure 7: Food Choices- Chinese Cuisine

As indicated by Figure 7, Chinese food had played a dominant role in Malaysian Indians' diet. 37 out of 60 respondents agreed that they included Chinese cuisine in their menu, with a minimal frequency of twice per week, as revealed by the interviews. The participants provided a list of instances in which Chinese food had become a favourable choice: on days when they observed vegetariniasm, during family gatherings and also when the need arose to introduce variety in their weekly cooking menus. Hence, either in eating out or in home-cooking, Chinese cousine had topped the list as the most chosen type among Malaysian Indians.

It should be hightlighted that in the previous sections, the participants were prone to adopt Chinese cultural practices as those resonated with the Indian practices as well. However, Chinese food was a genre that completely contradicted Indian cuisine in both taste and method of preparation. Yet, the cuisine was readily accepted by Malaysian Indians. What began as a curiosity to taste new flavours soon became their favourite that made it their dietary habit.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

This was another component of survey that returned no significant results that could be recorded in non-linear form. However, through the interviews, the participants confirmed that traditional Chinese medicine had been their preferred treatment for illnesses like skin allergies, headaches, muscular pains and bone fractures. Besides being available at reasonable price, the participants also assured that they became too familiar with this practice due to a long-standing relationship with their Chinese neighbours. Furthermore, the way the traditional Chinese doctors used herbs massages to cure the illnesses bore strong resemblance to Indian Ayurvedic practices, which could be credited as another reason for Malaysian Indians to prefer tradition Chinese medicine.

Conclusion

This research had revealed that the Chinese cultural practices had managed to occupy a very important place in the daily life of Malaysian Indians. This is seen as norm in a multicultural society where cultural contact is highly inevitable. Nevertheless, the marks made by the Chinese cultural practices among Malaysian Indians did

not alter the community's firm beliefs instilled by their own culture. They found a harmonious way to introduce the Chinese cultural practices they adopted into their own cultural practices without compromising their respective cultural values.

The life philosophies of Hinduism can be accounted for the ease demonstrated by the Malaysian Indians in adopting the cultural practices of another community. The great Tamil poet Kaniyan Poongunranar once quoted, "*Yathum Ore Yavarum Kelir*" (To us, all towns are one, all men are our kin) (Sangam Literature 300 BC). This quote accurately depicted the openness practised by Indians since ancient times in embracing multiculturalism and imposing the concept of a borderless world, which, in this contemporary time, is commonly known as globalization. Furthermore, the notion of equality in all human races is also intertwined in Indian belief system as portrayed the by quote, "*Ondre Kulam Orevaney Theivam*" (There is only One race and One God for all humans) (Thirumanthiram 5thcentury). Thus, treating the Chinese cultural practices as one of their own was not a conflicting idea for Malaysian Indians.

In conclusion, emphasis should be given to the Indian community in Malaysia who possessed a very positive outlook towards humans and the world in general, which allowed them to adopt the ideologies, philosophies and cultures of others without many questions. The acceptance, however, did not come at the price of their sacrificing their own religious beliefs, culture, philosophies of life, traditions and taboos that they observed; they still upheld their cultures and retained their identities. This community's willingness in espousing the cultures of others enabled them to construct a relationship with the communities around them while maintaining a harmonious existance strong wherever they are.

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